



The Harmonious Fusion of Literary Spirit and Religious Feelings of *Jane Eyre*

ZENG Lijuan^{[a],*}

^[a]Associate professor. College of Human Sciences, Northeast Petroleum University, Daqing, China.

*Corresponding author.

Received 13 December 2013; accepted 9 February 2014

Published online 16 April 2014

Abstract

Charlotte Bronte is an author who has deep religious feelings. *Jane Eyre*, Rochester, Helen, most characters she shaped in her novels all contain Christian ethics thought—Charity is the bond of perfectness. And also express the salvation feelings of humanistic restoration and her concept of love—unite soul and body, be equal and loyal. She reasonable judged the religious behavior of characters in that era from humanistic and harmonious perspective. Bronte paid attention to perplexity and confusion in reality, fused endurance, toleration and forgiveness of love into the mind activity of characters, she was humanism and amicable. The harmonious fusion of literary spirit and religious feelings makes *Jane Eyre* have a unique aesthetic power.

Key words: Bronte; *Jane Eyre*; Rochester; Literary spirit; Religious feelings

ZENG Lijuan (2014). The Harmonious Fusion of Literary Spirit and Religious Feelings of *Jane Eyre*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 8(2), 6-10. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/4213>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/4213>

INTRODUCTION

Literature shows the spirit world of people by shaping typical characters in typical conditions. In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte put characters under a background with strong religious atmosphere—Victorian era, and used thick and heavy in colors to draw the outline of

love and forgiveness. Characters in Charlotte Bronte’s novels, no matter is the self-respecting *Jane Eyre*, or is the uncompromising Rochester, even is St. John who has a steadfast religious volition, they all have humanistic persistence and personal emotions that concerned by literature spirit. Though the main thought of novels are emotions, gather and departure, she fused equality, intellect, endurance, toleration and forgiveness of love into the mind activity of characters, thereby, and the pursuit of literature spirit’s beauty becomes the main thought of novels. All above intertwines with the religious feelings of author and make novels have a unique artistic appeal on purifying mind and sublimating soul.

PART I

Benevolence is the essence of Chinese traditional culture; it is also an important connotation of literary aesthetic ideal. For Confucians, benevolence is regarded as the fundamental and fountainhead of virtue on the ethical level and is the impetus of moral life. Benevolence of Confucianist emphasizes that the law of nature interacts with humanity, “the virtue of human is according to the rules of heaven”, “human accept missions from heaven, acquire love from heaven and to be a merciful man (Zhuang K. , 2009, p.85)”, Confucians established a ethics contains kindness ethics, kindheartedness, benevolence and merciful deeds based on the law and rules of nature. For western literature, the ethics of Christianity—Charity is the bond of perfectness - penetrates in every literary works, but it more emphasis on the dependent relationship between moral and faith, also emphasis on the faith, hope, and love to God, as well as warm words, righteous deed and humanity that brought by it. Love is the core of Christian ethics, love is showed by humanity, compassion, forgiveness, patience, self-control and so on, *Jane Eyre*, Helen burns and Miss Temple totally showed the “Charity is the bond of perfectness” thought.

Jane Eyre was abandoned, scorned and insulted in her aunt's home, her young heart was hurt, consequently, she hated aunt's family, even tried to use an intense way to beat them back, she indeed claimed that her aunt "has not been my friend: she has been my foe (*Jane Eyre*)". However, in the boarding school Lowood, Jane gradually faded her hate out as she saw the power of love and forgiveness from her girlfriend, Helen Burns. Helen seemed like a lofty holy light, she led Jane step off the maze of pagan spirit and move towards the holy spiritual hometown. Helen told Jane that

It is not violence that best overcomes hate – nor vengeance that most certainly heals injury, love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you and despitefully use you, and distinguish between the criminal and his crime; I can so sincerely forgive the first while abhor the last (Liu, p.4).

Jane was nearly going to be hysterical angry when Mr. Brocklehurst humiliated her in public as a "liar", Helen encouraged and comforted Jane with a smile. That smile

was the effluence of fine intellect, of true courage; it lit up her marked lineaments, her thin face, her sunken gray eye, like a reflection from the aspect of an angel (*Jane Eyre*).

After that, Jane felt that "something in her own unique mind had roused her powers within her". Helen is the real teacher who had helped Jane on spiritual growth, Jane got over the humiliation in public from Mr. Brocklehurst under the influence of Helen's enduring and tolerant personality, and it supported her throughout the dusty and lengthy days in Lowood, even became the invisible power to make Jane forgive her aunt.

Miss Temple and Helen reflected each other, showed the other side of Christian ethical spirit—Love, righteousness and integrity. Although Miss Temple was the director of Lowood and was employed by Mr. Brocklehurst, she tried her best to secretly remedy the loophole of Lowood and brought comfort to orphans, even spared no effort to help Jane be cleared of ingratitude. Jane learned lots of religious knowledge, knew how to restrain herself and be encouraged: I am determining to be devoted to my duty and obey orders. I keep quiet because I believe I am happy. The lenient heart of Miss Temple made Jane think "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith (*Holy Bible*)", even started to change her personality to patience and modest. Forgiveness and self-abnegation, integrity and patience, which fused in souls of Helen, Miss Temple and Jane Eyre, are the eternal theme of literature, have an impressive power.

PART II

Literature also study on humanity. It can clearly discern the dilemma of survival; it can deeply see through the gloomy human nature; it is the devout belief and overlook of the shore that leads to the life ideal. Lu Hsun used

to say that literature "can convey your wishes, express your inspiration, edify sentiment by beauty, enrich your thought" in his book *The Influence of Romantic Poem*, thus literature gives an extraordinary catalytic power to humanity. Literature is a kind of whoop about the return of humanity, it is the duty of literature that to give humanized prompt and deep feeling of care to those people who is confused and gloomy, to help them out of the shadows, clean their soul and to build a wonderful personality of life, ultimately to achieve their transcendence on spirit of reality. The thought of the humanistic return always goes with the theme of redemption, it is distinguished from the introspective and redemptive concept that is focusing on the return of humanity by reflecting on morality and repenting, because the redemption of Christian is through the power of God. It is said by Christian that there are two keys for the redemption of soul: one is to know your sins, people only can build a new relationship with God by knowing their limitation; another is to accept the grace from God. Charlotte Bronte as an author with deep feeling of the Christian faith, she expressed her religious redemption feelings by literary narration, especially on Rochester, he was like a prodigal went back to his father's house in biblical metaphor (Wang, 2011, p.88).

According to the Bible, Jesus compared the story of a prodigal to the principle that sinners repented and reconciled to God. Rochester is similar to the prodigal: prodigal used to own a large wealth, but he got far away from home and to be licentious as possible as he could, Rochester got rich since he inherited a legacy and received his wife's dowry, but he wandered everywhere as his marriage defeated; when the prodigal returned to hometown he had nothing, Rochester was also declining and gaunt while he moved into the manor of Fern dean; while the prodigal returned home shamefacedly, his father still was kindness, gave him new dress and put him a ring [which is the symbol of honorable son] and feasted for him, Rochester got back the lost love after he "began to experience remorse, repentance; the wish for reconciliation to my Maker", Fern dean became his paradise of life. Bronte expressed the confessional mood of prodigal by Rochester's monologue of heart, in his monologue, we can see the humanistic return of Rochester is not reflection and repentance in the aspect of moral but a help from an extrinsic power—a trans-natural power. when he had experienced many vicissitudes of life and felt lonely, he realized that "He (God) sees not as man sees, but far clearer: judges not as man judges, but far more wisely", "Divine justice pursued its course; disasters came thick on me: I was forced to pass through the valley of the shadow of death. His chastisements are mighty; and one smote me which has humbled me forever. You know I was proud of my strength: but what is it now, when I must give it over to foreign guidance, as a child does its weakness? Of late, Jane-only-of late – I began to see and acknowledge the hand of God in

my doom". Rochester met his proud and strength through God intervenes in his destiny, but he was hopeful, so that he exclaimed "Jane! Jane! Jane!", this mysterious shout took Jane Eyre back, since Jane heard the voice from a distance—miserable but anxious—she replied "I am coming: wait for me". All of these were let by the indescribable power of faith. When everything was satisfactory, Rochester expressed his blessings to God, consequently, the salvation sublimate into the highest state, "I thank my Maker, that, in the midst of judgment, he has remembered mercy. I humbly entreat my Redeemer to give me strength to lead henceforth a purer life than I have done hitherto". Charlotte Bronte expressed words from Rochester's heart in Christian concept of redemption: chastisements are God's merciful discipline, compassion and salvation are the essence of God, the ultimate freedom of human is to have a pure life in the care of God.

In the novel, in stark contrast to Rochester is the dissolute John Reed, Bronte used the Christian view of salvation again to judge John's life: "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace (Holy Bible)". The "carnally minded" means corrupt and with selfish humanity. John Reed was sottish and gluttonous, he didn't give family affection and got away from home staying with villains in London, he ruined his body and property, eventually committed suicide. The criticism of Bronte to this kind of person is brief but sharp: Those people who are selfish, blinkered and debauched will never be saved. It is a warning and counsel for living.

PART III

Love is a timeless theme in literature, is also the timeless charm of literature. In general, at all times and in all over the world, lovers either can't be together or experienced the frustrations but married finally. In the exceedingly sentimental love stories, writers devote their understanding and blessing, meanwhile, reflect the specific social environment and social mentality in that era. Although Bronte lived in Victorian era and her understanding of love and life-style was affected by religion, she touched more humanity side about the characters' entanglement and end result when she analyzed the carnal love and spiritual love; her style was exquisite very much.

In Victorian era, Christian said that the meaning of marriage is: firstly, lovers should revere God, obey god's will and arrangements, and confirm by the sacred ceremony; secondly, the male and the female should stay together, they cannot relieve marriage at liberty. In the middle ages of Western Europe, though there were some famous theologians and priest advocated asceticism, people reacquaint the essence of marriage after the authoritative Ocr'd Decretum Gratiani [around 1104 AD] was enacted. In the marital part of Ocr'd Decretum Gratiani, the clause No.36 mentioned, "the combination

of husband and wife make a complete marriage. Because Ambrosius said, 'In all marriages, the combination is understood as spiritual, it is confirmed and finished by the combination of the flesh'". This point of view is agreed by most Christian thinkers, theologians and jurists, occupying the mainstream position. Christian theological thinks the combination of spirit and flesh is sacred and legal, thus marriage has a more noble purpose: not only for giving birth, but lovers become partner with the blessing from God, especially they own the spiritual equal relationship. Quenbert De Tournai had a representative words, he thought love should be pure, couples got married was not for secular interests, beautiful appearance or sexual desire, but for living together merrily and decently, so that they could worship God, and the marriage would get a result by the care of God. On account of equality, their life would be harmonious, instead, if they married for dowry or interests, they would quarrel with each other endlessly. Therefore, you should marry with a person who is equal with you. The truth emerged when the marital theory of Quenbert De Tournai casts on the marriage of Rochester .

The conditions of Rochester to accept the marriage with Bertha Mason: Thirty thousand pounds and her beautiful appearance. But Rochester saw the unveiled Bertha soon: she was vulgar, obscene, blinkered and indulgent, even she was lunatic, Rochester felt like falling into the abyss. Rochester also said "I never loved, I never esteemed, I did not even know her", this marriage was not happy or harmonious but miserable and shameful, even was desperate. This parted marriage did not get the care of God—it was ruined by an angry and judgmental fire. The "lunatic" of Bertha mason was really pitiful, there are many literary critics redress an injustice for her from the feminist perspective recent years, they think Bertha was a "deserted wife" under the patriarchal system, was "a person in captivity", and under the "lunatic" mask, she used energy of whole life to revolt patriarchy. For the essence of marriage, although Rochester and Bertha were confirmed by the sacrament, their love was not loyal and holy. Augustine, the important representative of patristic philosophy, thought that "love" was desire of human to something or someone, and they would get delight in possession. However, love and desire are not as happy as people used to think. At honing the soul of human, making marriage release from the happiness of worldly love, loyally worshipping the timeless God so that to get salvation, this is the meaning of marriage, this is the delight of God. The marriage of Rochester and Bertha Mason was a deformed result of interests, sensual and lies, they did not worship God to atone themselves, they just had worldly desires. The theologian Emile Brule thought love was the best introduction of marriage, but there was a decaying seed in it if the marriage was no love. The reason of the failing marriage between Rochester and Bertha Mason was they were not equal, in love, loyal or pure, they did not feel grateful or moderate,

hence Bronte wrote a reborn fire, it meant trial and baptism of the holy fire, it eliminated the muddy love of lust and selfishness.

Back to the experience of Rochester and Jane Eyre, Rochester twisted his leg when he met Jane, it was Jane helped him to back to the homeward journey, it indicated Rochester needed the weak but tough arm of Jane to save himself. After that, every crisis was solved by the brave Jane. Rochester felt that “it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame”. It has a religious meaning—God created the couple, they are fusing together so intimately and perfectly. Fromm said that human understand world from mental and emotion through the love and logos. Rochester realized his grimness through Jane’s benevolence; realized his hypocrisy and greed through Jane’s independent and self-esteem; realized his lowliness through Jane’s tough. Bronte showed her principle of marriage by giving Rochester and Jane a happy ending: the pure motive and the equal relationship can make the worldly love sublimate by saving souls. This kind of love was harmonious and lofty, it can receive a result of the true love—pass the stormy days but still stay together and enjoy the delight of life.

PART IV

Literary creation is a special and complex spiritual production activity, writers can concentrate and refine the things they used to experience and discover, so that they can shape unique characters and show their views of life. Therefore, literature can reveal the emotional mental state of the writer, express the views about right and wrong, good and bad, this is the nucleus of literature spirit that to concern about reality, sublimate humanity and to make human back to the rational track. In *Jane Eyre*, Bronte described the special life state of the person who lived in the Victoria era—under the religious background, the life-style and the choices of value, instead of the rigid preaching of religious doctrine. She focused on the harmonious state of humanity in real life, introspected from the view of pacifying and the fate of human.

In *Jane Eyre*, there are two characters appearance formally in religious status, one is Mr. Brocklehurst, another is the elder cousin Jane met later—St. John. For the former, people always think Jane Eyre is irreligious, since Mr. Brocklehurst only be tough and strict but humane. He seemed to hate sins, he used hell, liar’s on fire to threaten Jane—a only eight-year-old girl who had not known the true meaning of Bible. He also subjectively defined her as a heart of steel. In Lowood, the half-charity school he supervised, he still insist on hurting Jane by sharp words—how can a girl become a servant and a spokesperson of evil. He seemed to especially emphasize

that kids should endure hardship, be patient and control themselves, even these were needless and luxurious when kids brought one more needle, changed two more clean neckwear or ate twice more bread. He thought “you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little think how you starve their immortal souls”, but his wife and daughter were well-dressed. Bronte expressed her disgust to this character through Jane’s mouth; she said he was cold, arrogant, presuming and loquacious. Bronte expressed the meaning of shaping this character in A PREFACE of the republished *Jane Eyre*,

Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last. To pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee is not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns (Yang, 1983).

Pharisee was a influential sect in Jesus’ era, it was the authority of the biblical interpretation and had the religious ruling power and the legislative power, it regarded abiding by the religious rites as devout, but was short of the Christian spirit “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”, therefore, Jesus rebuked them “self-righteousness and iniquity” in harsh tone. Bronte had no good feeling to the “Pharisee” Brocklehurst, because the behavior and words of Mr. Brocklehurst did not bring harmonious love to Jane, he did not water the seed of love in the young and sensitive heart, but gave her allergy and fear. By contrast, Miss Temple, Helen, Jane’s two cousins even the servant Bessie gave Jane care and love to make her return to the quiet and calm her sad, they were missed and loved by Jane. Bronte showed her high praise to people who had mercy on the weak among the words and between the lines.

St. John is a character with religious zeal, Jane only could dream of his dedication for religion. St. John is a typical representative personage of puritan; he had asceticism and the spirit of assiduity. Puritans diligently work with the power of determined will, industriously build wealth, but they do this was not for squandering. On the contrary, they always be regarded as the person who lives a life of self-denial and mortification ascetic monk. They are diligent, hardworking, frugal and abstinent, there is a kind of worldly asceticism permeates their soul and life. St. John has a strong restraint, on the choice of partner, he “as a resolute rider would curb a rearing steed”, he suppressed his passion to Miss Oliver, but he insisted Jane on becoming the wife of missionary because Jane could help him work in India instead of he loved Jane. St. John has a strong religious zeal and devoted himself to inherit the work of evangelizing, he tirelessly gave sermons, prayed and visited, Jane revered his “crystal conscience” but could not close to him. Charlotte did not reject St. John, otherwise, she violated her deep-rooted position of religious belief. The theme of her work was to build a ideal life of love based on knowing and consonance, she thought love was a humanistic chase that

accorded with the will of God. The love of St. John was pure and positive, it was the calling of divine purpose made him abandon his own desires – to be an artist, a writer or a elocutionist, but chose to be a poor missionary. Faith had become the whole meaning of his life, anything that can bother him—love, money, beauty and comfort—would be abandoned. Because of his unshakable faith, St. John would not incline his emotion. Jane had a strong respect to him, but she also found his defect, he like a marble, obstinate and arbitrary, but he still was a warrior that dedicated to the faith career. Bronte evaluated him through Jane’s mouth, “He is a good and a great man; but he forgets, pitilessly, the feelings and claims of little people, in pursuing his own large views”. Thus, St. John had unique zeal that Jane could not follow him, he was the person” who are called, and chosen, and faithful”. However, it only was religious caritas between Jane and St. John, but impressive love like the emotion between Jane and Rochester, therefore, the emotional result of Jane still pointed to Rochester. Bronte scanned John’s behavior in religious sense, sought the balance of reality from the return of humanity, these two intertwined feelings make the novel has a deep and complicated thought.

Talking about Bronte’s feeling of characters in her novel, we can know that she concerned with the confusion in reality of everyone, no matter it is a struggle in deep heart or a conflict with outside, no matter it is a distress reality or a ideal prospect. She pursued a dignified and happy life—female would not use their beauty or status to make living. The love that Bronte

expressed, was not only the erotic love, but including the expansive love like mercy, tolerance and forgiveness, she rose the love on a redemptive level. Bronte’s works full of humanistic and friendly feelings, the harmonious fusion of her literary spirit and religious feelings deepens the connotation and weight of her works, and endows them an unique aesthetic power.

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