

On the Position Changing of *Jane·Eyre* in British Literature History

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Abstract

Making a general survey of *Jane·Eyre* status changing process from its publication to the end of the last century, it is certain that the novel is a dynamic classic after its publication because of its own and outside factors. However, between the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the society and commentators transferred their focus from Charlotte and his works, causing *Jane·Eyre* to be stative classic. Since the middle period of the last century the dynamic classic position of *Jane·Eyre* was again raised.

Key words: Classic position; Changing; British literature history

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INTRODUCTION

Although Charlotte lived in a limited scope, he still paid attention to the political situation of that time by the means of the newspaper. In this way, he could reveal the hateful deeds of the bourgeois and focused on the humble governess in the novel *Jane·Eyre*.

When an ill-conceived movement was suppressed unwisely, it was the time to check the reason of their protest to make a concession based on justice and humanity. If the government can do this it will get rid of malice greatly but the mutual kindness.

These are the remarks of a letter from Charlotte to Williams after he knew the failure of charter movement.

On October 16th 1847 *Jane·Eyre* was published in Britain. Soon owing to the appearance of its own productivity in a short period it becomes a classic, a dynamic classic. When *Jane·Eyre* was first published, it was the time that the critical realism literature became the mainstream of British literature. Most writers were born in bourgeoisie families and they revealed and criticized that society profoundly showing their improved ideas of the bourgeoisie. While Charlotte's ideas expressed in the novel suited the main stream of poetics thoughts at that time. In addition the female literature also developed and boomed in the Victorian era. All of this became the focus of the comment and writers soon after its publication. This is also the inducement factor of *Jane·Eyre* becoming a classic in a short time. Thackeray once expressed, "*Jane·Eyre* made me very excited and love it too much. Please represent me to show my thanks and gratitude. Her novel was the first English novel that had taken me many days to read."

1. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CLASSIC POSITION OF *JANE·EYRE* BEFORE ITS PUBLICATION

The thriving of critical realism caused a great many reviewers to comment *Jane·Eyre* in the realism angle at that times. Although the first scene of the novel (referring to the paragraph from *Jane·Eyre*'s coming to Lowood school to the ending her school) was written trivially and gloomily, it is the realist part in the whole book, especially about the scene of charity school which is reality, the deep and significant reality, a character of the novel. This is an autobiography, which perhaps has an unmodified fact and environment, however, an autobiography describing the real sufferings and experience.

Though at that time *Jane Eyre* was considered as the classic by a lot of people, just because of the writer's real description and expose to the current situation of the society which threatened the benefit of the ruling class. After *Jane Eyre* was published within not one month, the magazine *Onlookers* criticized the novel that

as far as it is concerned in essence, *Jane Eyre*, an autobiography, was similar to the sculpture of the middle ages pointing that the abilities in the skills and thought are often wasted in the non-existent theme. There is one mistake that other artists have none—overaffectation.

It is unfair for its author to say that *Jane Eyre* is absolutely immoral or anti-Christian. ... However, its appearance is quite questionable. If only she could believe the fact that human nature is good more and find less about the evil in human nature. In that way she would not lose the fiery taste.

Anyway, before the sound of high praise such criticism words seem rather weak. It can be said that by the means of realism writing style in *Jane Eyre* Charlotte not only gained honor for herself but also made the novel become a dynamic classic in a short period. After I read the adventures of the lady *Jane Eyre*, I felt the book was written much more wisely than the books written by Austin and Edgeworth in their prime times. Several months later *Jane Eyre* was adapted to a stage play although Charlotte showed her worry and helplessness. The stage play is also a good way to make the novel widely known. At the same time the comments of the foreign countries reached to Britain like *on Charlotte Bronte* of Marx (1954) published in New York Daily Tribune. Hence it is much faster to speed up its classic process. After the first publication only for two months, *Jane Eyre* was published again.

In addition to the above factor, as one of the patrons the publishing press is another necessary factor to build *Jane Eyre* as a classic. Before and after the publication of *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte made a contact with the publisher Smith by the letter, "he was the first person to find that Charlotte was a genius and later he became the best friend with Charlotte in the literature business. Charlotte wrote more than one hundred letters to him." Besides, Charlotte communicated with other critics and writers by the letter. About other people's comments, she often showed her own opinions in the letters. In reply to the letter of George-Henry Louis, Charlotte wrote that

the letter had been received yesterday. Please allow me to make sure that I understand your ideas about your letter. I am very grateful for your valuable and inspiring commendation and advice. ... I mention these things to you not only preventing blame but remind you of the root of certain literature abuses.

The communication way by the letter for the author as well as the sponsors and professionals is a special way to maintain the works as the classics. At the same time the author identity has already been turned into an invisible professional. Her attitude and response directly affected reviewers and readers.

However, Emily's *Wuthering Heights* published in the same year did not attract the reviewers' or the sponsors' interests in the beginning. People criticized a lot about it. This is in sharp contrast with the classic position of *Jane Eyre*. Charlotte also agreed other people's criticism in the preface of republication of *Wuthering Heights*, "as for the smell of the village in *Wuthering Heights*, I admit that this criticism is correct. For I feel its nature. From the begging to the ending it is full of the agrestic breath. After the death of Charlotte, the unique books about *Jane Eyre* and its author push the earlier research to the climax. This is also beneficial for the novel to consolidate its classic position such as the *Biography of Charlotte Bronte* written by Madam Gaskell. Margaret Alliefort pointed in one article of *the Big and Small Novelists in the Modern Times* that "Charlotte Bronte burst in our orderly world and broke its borders challenging its principles—with the invasion of *Jane Eyre*, a most thrilling and extraordinary revolution has been raised." At the same time Queen Victoria mentioned her love for this novel in her own unpublished diary in 1858. Queen is the symbol of the mainstream ideology discourse.

Her choice about the novel *Jane Eyre* shows her affirmation to its classics. It is no doubt that her praising and promoting remarks are the important factor to maintain the novel's classic position: on March 7th after reading one of Austin's admiring novels, *Northanger Abbey*, I began to read *Jane Eyre* for my dear Albert. On March 21st I read that gloomy and interesting book *Jane Eyre* for Albert. On May 13th we had supper alone talking and reading to continue to read that intensely interesting novel *Jane Eyre* until after eleven o'clock. ... On August 4th in the ship of Victoria and Albert at ten o'clock we went off and soon finished reading that most interesting book *Jane Eyre*. That was a peaceful and pleasant night.

In Great Britain the supporting of the mainstream ideology is a sufficient condition to build the classic status of *Jane Eyre*. With the propelling of publishers, reviewers and sponsors, the structure feature of *Jane Eyre* and the theme factor are the necessary condition to ensure the novel to go into the dynamic classic status.

2. TO MAINTAIN AND CONSOLIDATE THE DYNAMIC STATUS OF JANE EYRE IN 1870'S

About from 1870's although Charlotte continued to possess the former position of famous person, compared with her younger sister Emily, her brilliance was a little dim.

At least at the end of the middle of 1975, the main part of the modern review was about Emily. Only until after that time people began to make unremitting efforts to try to restore the leading position of Charlotte for the three sisters.

Miriam·Allot said that in the preface part in the commenting collections *Jane·Eyre and Villette* adapted by him. During that period people gradually gave up Charlotte's simple and clear thoughts, turning to Amily's confused puzzles. All this was reflected in the two articles which were *Two Great British Women* written by Peter·Babywin in 1881 and *Amily·Bronte* written by Mary·Robinson in 1883. This situation was connected with the literature development at that time. In the 1870's and 1880's the decadent literature advocating the bourgeoisie's individualism and pessimism rose and gradually became the mainstream of British poetic. The writers of this genre were mad about the mysterious beauty advocating aestheticism. In fact this feature was obvious in pre-Raphaelite brotherhood in earlier stage. The representatives of this genre were Rossetti, Arnold, Shi Wenpeng. There was no doubt that their praising words for Amily's poems would trigger people to pay attention to Amily and her only works *Wuthering Heights*. They agreed that her intelligence was higher than Charlotte's. "All the works of the older sister were full of the artistic conception, emotion and details of the poetry. But the younger sister's works was a poem in nature which was the fullest and most certain." From that we can see in Britain the poetic form in the literature system plays an important role in building the classic status of a works, which can push the works suffered from coldness to the classic range just like Amily's *Wuthering Heights*. "...in the two sisters, Amily's genius is much higher." With the degrade of the heated study about Charlotte, *Jane·Eyre* was almost at the edge of the dynamic classics, which was struggling in the dividing line between the dynamic and static classics because of its own realism factors.

In the latter 30 years of the 19th century, critical realism still occupied a certain position in the literature system. Before the 20th century it had new development gradually in the thoughts and arts. It reached to the higher point of ideas than any other critical realism literature. In art they still followed the creation principles of reproducing life according to the nature of the true life. In the comment of *Jane·Eyre* most words were about realism, "the whole layout was perhaps plain and the notion maybe was not profound but the book was unique and novel. ...a passionate realism striking frequently like a hammer."

In 1893 Bronte Association was founded. In 1895 Bronte Memorial was open in Ortega town. All these measures push Bronte family to appear in literature research. People began to focus on Bronte family's life experience and other aspects. Some scholars even explore the relationship between it and the creation of Bronte. In the preface of *Jane·Eyre* Mary·Worde attributed the characters of bravery, freedom and agitation of this novel to the feature of Charlotte·Bronte embodied by the Celtic People. This greatly influenced Amily and her works *Wuthering Heights* to form the classic status and at the same time played a certain function to sustain the classic

status of *Jane·Eyre* which was at the edge of dynamic classics at that time.

With the appearance of modernism literature it is the same that in the beginning of the 20th century the reviewers also reviewed Charlotte and *Jane·Eyre* possessing the feature of modernism. In this way the dynamic status of this novel was consolidated again. In 1934 David·Cecil pointed, Charlotte·Bronte was the first British writer who regarded the novel as the tool of disclosure of personal heart. She was our first novelist about subjectivism, who was the founder of individual consciousness historians besides Proust, James·Joe and other persons.

Although Cecil also thought, Charlotte was doomed to constantly and forever wander between the ranks of man and letters and writers, sometimes beginning, sometimes ending joining those groups of unplaceable persons with extraordinary talents and wizards. While in the Victoria novels *Wuthering Heights* was the only novel (even partly) which was not covered brilliance by time. But this kind of method close to the poetic interpretation could make people at that time see Charlotte and value of her works to look for each other's resonance. Scholars interpreted Charlotte's works by using the features of modernist literature. The purpose was mainly to restore her leading role in the three sisters. For that Libejija·West following she also cried out in her own voice. There was an opinion which got the upper hand. In other words suspecting Charlotte·Bronte was not an artist only a second-class artist who did not share experience but frequently made use of the arms which was well experienced by the second-class artists—the sentimental description to frame up the scene. Charlotte·Bronte's tendency to favorite sentimental description was not out of the inner poor incompetence in her works creation but from the pressure of the outside environment. She was eagerly forced to take part in the activity which was not related with the real arts business but affected people's emotion. This is the root of bad habits which we call sentimentalism. In the late 20th century the postmodernism was just risen which did not hinder the advancing impetus of modernism literature. A lot of articles to interpret *Jane·Eyre* from the point of modernism literature frequently appeared highlighting the productivity of this novel in the modernism literature. In 1966 David·Lodge analyzed the image of fire about the novel *Jane·Eyre* in the book *The Language of the Novel*. Fire is the resource of heat and light. Fire is often used to be compared to sexual passion especially sexual desire, which gives people warm and comfort and at the same time destroys everything. Religion especially Christianity the concept of spiritual purification and eternal punishment is often described by fire.

In addition, the scholars also take advantage of the literature features from post-modernism to interpret Charlotte's works, such as *the Death World of Charlotte·Bronte* of Robert·Keeve and *Charlotte·Bronte: self-expression* of Helen·Mogren. Meanwhile the attention

to the novel was also given expression to the whole feature of British critics in the 20th century. That is “paying attention to the writers and works; focusing on whether the critics who commented have the required skills.”

With time going on from more angles the interpretation ways of professionals were more and more. The free interpretation remarks show that there are varieties of productivity hidden in the novel *Jane Eyre*. Although the classic status of *Jane Eyre* was established firmly at that time, it was necessary to interpret its mode which was productivity, otherwise it was possible for it to become a static classic or deserted by society. Compared with the process of building the classic status in the former period, the productivity here or the function of the text mode was hidden. Harriet Byork summed up that Charlotte Bronte paid more attention to the women's questions and she made effort to balance all kinds of schools of thought and moral thought from her letters. Pat Lisa Tomson analyzed Charlotte's inheritance and development from George Sang in the angle of comparative literary through the letters of Charlotte and her experience in France, “in my opinion George Sang left the special gift for Charlotte Bronte which was her unswerving belief about the truth of emotional impetus. She also did not firmly believe to get a satisfied chance from the regular marriage. ... While the romantic atmosphere and passion of Charlotte Bronte's works were not similar with George Sang's works, which was always coordinated.

Although in former times to some reviewers also realized the similarities between them they did not analyze in detail. It is no doubt that Bee York's commenting angle is a mode for the following researchers. At the same time with the development of media technology *Jane Eyre* was made into a film. So the interpretation for its film mode was also an important point in that period. In 1975 Michael Riley compared the films directed by Robert Stevenson and Dell Herbert in the article Gothic Melodrama and Spiritual Romance: Version and Fidelity in Two Versions of Jane Eyre.

CONCLUSION

All in all in the process of building, sustaining and consolidating of Charlotte and her works the professional reviewers and the publishing houses as sponsors played the vital role. They made it not only fit the poetic characteristics but also have the legal publishing right and transmission right.

As for the works *Jane Eyre* the building of its classic status in its own country was not complicated. It may be said that from its birth it had been the focus of the reviewers. Under the drive of numerous critics and the support of mainstream poetics in a short time it leaped to the rank of classics and became a productive dynamic classics. The mainstream of poetic form has a direct link with the classic status of the works. It either controls the development form of literature or influences the classics formation in different periods. The simultaneous use of Multiple writing techniques in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte, which maybe were so-called the features of modernism and post-modernism and these features were not realized by Charlotte but they were the important factors to form and establish the classic status, made the novel fit for the mainstream poetics features in different periods and therefore made the novel have different producing abilities in different periods. Compared with the situation of *Jane Eyre* in our country in last century ideological influence on its classic status in the domestic building was extremely weak.

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