

## The Influence of Christianity on Bernard Shaw's Drama Creation Thought

WANG Wenjing<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>School of Foreign Languages, Inner Mongolia University for the Nationalities, Tongliao, China.

\*Corresponding author.

Received 18 April 2015; accepted 26 June 2015  
Published online 26 August 2015

### Abstract

The European traditional literature, music and painting bred and developed in Christianity environment. So all the traditional arts are connected with religion including people's customs, habits and thoughts. The literature value of the Bible is highly valued by the world, whose writing style is often borrowed by the European writers, among whom Bernard Shaw is a quite successful model in borrowing U-type narrative style, literary quotation and characters from the Bible.

**Key words:** Christianity; Religious color; Creation style; Influence; Drama creation

Wang, W. J. (2015). The Influence of Christianity on Bernard Shaw's Drama Creation Thought. *Canadian Social Science*, 11(2), 38-41. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/7294> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7294>

### INTRODUCTION

When mentioning the greatest British dramatists, people first recommend Shakespeare who is followed by Bernard Shaw closely. In the long process of artistic creation of more than seventy years Bernard Shaw devoted a large number of works to the world, including seven novels, fifty-two dramas, fifteen thesis papers and other collections of letters.

When readers face a large quantities of works of Bernard Shaw chewing and digesting, they will find a pretty obvious phenomena which is Christian pastors and believers or Catholic priests and believers appear in everybody's sight in most of his dramas and novels. The

emergence of these roles makes his works be alive with some special flavor.

Since the birth of Christianity it spread through the width and length of Europe with its strong life, from peddlers, countrymen, women up to the king and noblemen in the palace. The Christianity ideas play a dominant role, embodied in every aspect of diet, language communication, behaviors and manners, customs and habits to literature, music, painting, architecture, philosophy, law and thoughts and so on. As a result when all types of European arts are studied, they all derive from the idea of Christianity. At the same time the Christianity ideas have profoundly affected Europe and the Western world for more than two thousands years. From the point of the view of literature and art it should be more emphasized positively. As a European Bernard Shaw was doomed to breathe Christian air when he was born in a declining family with a slightly noble origin. The so-called soil and water to keep a party of people. According to the tradition Europeans were basically universal religious believers in the past. Bernard Shaw's father was a Christian (also known as protestants, to distinguish it from Catholic believers). Bernard Shaw's mother Bessie was naturally a noble woman with a formal religious education. After he was born, the traditional habit sent him a godfather in order to give him a tutor character in his religious way. According to Frank•Harris' description about Bernard Shaw's life of his childhood, we can know that the young Shaw was forced to go to Anglican church in Ireland and went through an hour's Sunday study with the traditional serious requirement.

Sunday school is organized by church for the young children to specially learn some simple Bible knowledge education. This teaching way with spoonfeed forced children to recite some common knowledge about Bible. It is a little like enlightenment education in ancient China, first to recite then to understand. The young Bernard Shaw was strictly restrained in the choice of playmates. His father did not allow him to play with the peddler's son, nor did he play with the Catholic families' children.

These banning orders made younger Shaw full of questions and conflicts.

The first literature works of Bernard Shaw were his own creation of a three-paragraph prayer. He did not like to find an old one to use from the public prayer book. He was much satisfied with his prayer works of three movement, with which he could display before God. He didn't ask for anything from God, only just by the thunder, and he remembered to cling to the lightning rod rewarded by God—the Lord's prayer. "Each time when there was a big thunderstorm he would rely on the lord's prayer as his lightening rod." (*The Biography of Bernard Shaw*)

After Bernard Shaw went in for the drama commenting work, he expressed his own particular view about the actual function of the reviewer. The function of the contemporary theaters in our era was the same with the function of the Christian church in middle ages. He believed that the role of commentators was exciting and inspired people to think more. He compared his commenting work to the traditional apostles within the Christian church, the authority of which was bestowed by God. He would lead the critics to go into an ideal state. In the church the more and the better you smile, you could eliminate evil because only laugh was not malicious.

Bernard Shaw remains in people's memory with his bright style of critical realism. He is the greatest dramatist and writer in the modern Britain, an excellent critic too, who has influenced a lot about the modern British drama comment. Bernard Shaw is versatile. In music he is good at opera and symphony, playing the piano wonderfully, without a musician teaching him, acting as the music commentator of *The Journal of the World*. In the painting he has a higher appreciation and acts as the painting comment journalist of *The Journal of the World*. He is a tireless public speaker with the sharp thought to introduce all varieties of advanced ideas and theories to the society of that time, including the socialist propaganda for a dozen years. When Bernard Shaw visited China in 1933, he was welcomed as a socialist writer by Luxun, the representative of Chinese progressive writers. In 1925 the Royal Swedish Institute awarded Bernard Shaw the Nobel Prize for Literature for his performance of idealism and fraternity in *Joan of Arc* to promote people to ponder of irony and the novelty full of poetic beauty.

The works of Bernard Shaw spread widely with strong vitality which few people can reach. The western countries began a systematic study about his works since 1950s; the Learning Community of Bernard Shaw was established in Canada and Japan. There are some publications like *The Research Yearbook of Bernard Shaw* and *Independent Bernard Shaw* in the United States; some college courses to study Bernard Shaw are set up in Europe and America. In China the domestic study about Bernard Shaw mainly linger in the category of realism and creation art. In the process of Shaw's drama creation, the social background of the western

religious culture has a deep influence on his ideas and creation arts. The following is about the Christianity of the Bible reappearing in the Bernard Shaw's works.

## 1. THE BORROWING OF WRITING TECHNIQUES FROM BIBLE

Bible, which is consisted of two parts—*The Old Testament and the New Testament*, is the central classics of Christianity. The books of *the Old Testament* conclude 39 volumes, spanning from the 12th BC to the first century, written by the Hebrew languages. It includes the myths and legends of generations of Israeli nation's communication with God for ages, prophetic predictions, national history, legal system, poem and so on. The books of *the New Testament* was compiled by the letters of Jesus Christ's apostles and disciples, written by Greek and formed mainly between the first century and the second century, altogether 27 volumes including Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; the acts of apostles, letters as well as Revelation the four main parts.

The literature value of *The Bible* is world-famous, its influence on European literature being deep and immense. The contents of the Books of the *Old Testament* are rich, using the metaphor, personification and fables and other writing techniques, providing a rich mining samples for the posterity. Mr Zhiqing Zhang remarked in the book *European and American Literature History* compiled by him that Canadian scholar Fry thinks that the Bible should be treated as a whole, representing the U-shaped narrative structure. The first chapter Genesis talks about the first man Adam was kicked out of the garden of Eden, humans losing their lives, trees together with water (people began to fall.). And eventually in the last chapter Revelation humans are going to retrieve all this just because Jesus Christ will save humanity and the human beings will regain the paradise going back to the level before the disaster. Between the two ends a series of disastrous history about Israels were described. Mr Zhiqing Zhang also mentions that when it comes to the writing techniques adopted in the romantic literature and non-romantic literature, the prototype is derived from the U-shaped structure in the Bible.

Naturally Bernard Shaw would not give up this very effective writing ways offered by the Bible in the process of his drama creation. In the drama *Candida* when You Jing Mabenk appeared before Candida, the development of the story began to slip on the hillside accompanied with the emotional fluctuations of Candida. When Morrell, Candida and Yo Jing these three people together have a showdown, the development of the plot has been next to the bottom of the valley. When Candida was determined to commit the one of the two men, who was relatively weaker, as the husband Morrell misunderstood her intention. Morrell burst out a loud cry, "Candida" from his bitter heart with his choked voice. The plot of the story reaches to the bottom of the valley. The plot begins

to rebound with Yu Jing knowing the true intention of Candida; later after Candida's deep-loving life review, the readers' hearts at last climb up to the cliff with the climax of Morrell's merry remarks to Candida, "you are my mother, my wife, and my younger sister too."

In the play of *The Widower's Real Estate*, as a fiance Doctor Qulanqi came to the house of Bailangqi and came across to hear the future father-in-law Sartoris rebuking his employee Li Keji. Since Li Keji complained to Qulanqi and revealed the truth of the real source of Sartoris' properties, the development of the story began to fall down to the abyss. Because of his own noble taste about life education of ethics, Qulanqi thought that he could not tolerate his father-in-law's disgusting behavior to become rich by extracting the poor. The plot of the story developed to the bottom of the abyss. The story develops to the lowest bottom of the abyss when Doctor Qulanqi and his fiancée Bailangqi quarreled about the sources of the marital assets and even broke off their engagement. Then Sartoris got involved in them and clearly explained to Qulanqi that the property source of the holy Qulanqi was almost the same with the property source of the old Sartoris. The development of the story rebound from the bottom of the abyss to the top. The story rose to the top until Doctor Qulanqi agreed to cooperate with his father-in-law Sartoris. The story ended up with the whole family's mutual understanding. Mr Wang ying also introduces Bernard Shaw's writing techniques, explaining with the example of *Maid of Orleans* and *The Devil's Disciples*. As far as the drama-writing lovers are concerned, Bernard Shaw generously introduced some regular creation techniques to them such as the writing technique of the U-shaped structure.

## 2. THE BORROWING OF ALLUSIONS AND CHARACTERS FROM BIBLE

In Bernard Shaw's dramas he would like to employ some allusions, remarks and even some characters about Christianity much. When you read and study Bernard Shaw's drama works, all various roles of clergies, priests and believers will walk into your vision, among whom some are positive priests and believers, such as priest Morrell in *Candida* and priest Anderson in *The Devil's Disciples* and so on; while the image of more pastors and believers is ugly such as the pastor Samuel in *Mrs Warren's Profession* and Christian Mrs Zither in *The Devil's Disciples*. Most of the woman images created by Bernard Shaw lack mystery, not enchanting, slightly rigid, very conceptual. Such as Bailangqi in *The Widower's Real Estate*; Warren in *Mrs Warren's Profession*; Barbara in *Major Barbara* and so on. These characters under the pen of Bernard Shaw clearly express his thought under the influence of religion and religious emotion. In *the Devil's Disciples* facing up with the British troop's noose, Richard said calmly, "You shall not kill." This sentence comes from the sixth sentence of the old testament of The

Ten Commandments. The ten commandments was the convention set by God with the people of Israel at Mount Sinal. Violating any one commandment is going against God's decree. That is to say it is contrary to the Christian spirits. So when the British troops would sentence Richard to death and pretended to send the priest to prey for him, Richard used the original sentence from the Bible with the same tone of Bible undoubtedly to expose the pretension nature of the British troops showing his great contempt to the enemy and his heroic spirits.

When Bernard Shaw designed and wrote these characters he displayed them in front of the world in a realistic attitude with the complex feelings and emotions. Why is Bernard Shaw passionate about writing the characters of Christianity? This is the result of a religious complex in his heart.

In Genesis of the Bible, God named the first man Adam created by Him and put Adam in the Eden garden. Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Bernard Shaw's understanding about marriage is also based on the principles of *The Bible*. When he talked about his marriage with his wife Charlotte. Pan Danxin, he said, "we fell that each other is necessary." In Ephesians of the new Testament of *The Bible*, in Chapter 5 verse 22 to 33, it says,

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

In fact Bernard Shaw executed the demand of the Bible carefully and had his own appreciation. He clearly expressed the feelings of men and women about marriage through the drama *Candida*, in which Bernard Shaw deliberately arranged the male protagonist's career as a priest. Bernard Shaw didn't arrange other professions for Morreel but this intriguing profession design reflects his special feelings towards Christianity. Through *Candida's* husband Morreel, Bernard Shaw made his own declaration that "I will use own strength to protect your life, my loyalty to ensure life, my authority and position to maintain your dignity."

In the declaration Bernard Shaw stated clearly about husband's duty and obligation as the head of a family. Then according to Candida's affectionate memories, Bernard Shaw told the roles of wives in the real life "Ask those vendors who often came to disturb James and forestall him from making a wonderful speech, who on earth sent them out? He gave money when he had; when refusing to accept money, I personally declined. I built a peaceful and loving fortress for him and often guarded at the door without letting a little mundane chores disturb his heart. I made him the host here." Through this paragraph of vindication we can see the maternal love as a wife who intensively takes care of and helps her husband. All this help was done inadvertently and quietly. Bernard Shaw explained the intention of marriage and the duties and responsibilities between husband and wife which were set up by God. Both husband and wife have the power to enjoy the other side's caring love. This is the ideal marriage status of Bernard Shaw and also is his religious complex regression. Bernard Shaw always warned women of having the guarantee of the marriage otherwise do not do something for the men. The improper relationship between men and women even was not to occur, to stick to the identity of the married women. Conserving chastity and opposing fornication are clear attitude and principle of the Bible. As a protestant Bernard Shaw was very clear of it. At the same time in his works he also commented to Wilde "He ended up his life with a drunkard and a cheat." which expressed his hatred to the drunkard. All this stemmed from the principles of *the Bible* in opposition to pleasure-making and drinking. Bernard Shaw adhered to vegetarianism for his whole life, which also shows his awe to the God.

Another example is *Major Barbara*, in the second scene, the lady Beisisi accepted Andexiefu's check of five thousand pounds and was very thankful to him "the Salvation Army had been saved by him." So the lady invited him to take part in the Salvation Army's parade enthusiastically and thousands-of-people meeting. Anderxiefu took the long horn saying that it was almost the Jew's advancing horn. The so-called Jew's advancing triumph is from Joshua in the Old Testament, the sixth chapter. When Joshua commanded the people of Israel to attack the city of Jericho, he asked the priests to blow the seven trumpets, all the people shall shout with a great shout and the wall of the city will fall down flat, the city of Jericho fell down. This is the first battle of the people of Israel out of Egypt across the Jordan. On the surface this sentence refers to the Holy salvation army were marching. It is just like the people of Israel to walk on the road of building their country led by the God. But if to read between the lines according to the context, the careful readers can appreciate the profound meaning of the sentence. This sentence embodies the spiritual victory of Andersherf to his daughter.

Still in the drama *Major Barbara*, when Barbara eventually understood that it was the king Whisky and

munitions merchants that controlled the Salvation Army, her belief went bankrupt. Barbara was so disappointed that she took off the Salvation Army's collar badge and put it on the collar of Andersherf. When the Salvation Army blew the horn and beats the drum passing her, she felt depressed. Abusing alcohol and slaughter. "Lord, lord, why do you abandon me?" This remark was said by Jesus Christ on the cross before he died from Matthew of the New Testament. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachtani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. Barbara thoroughly recognized the reality of the world. The Holy Salvation Army was so faint in her heart that she was completely disappointed because it could survive only with the implementation of Whisky King and the arms declares.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the creation process of Bernard Shaw, the content associated with the religious theme is one that he would like to adopt most willingly. So the author of *the Biography of Bernard Shaw*, Frank• Harris said frankly in the book that in addition to socialism religion is perhaps the main topic written by Bernard Shaw.

Bernard Shaw vividly displayed the enlightenment of the heavenly kingdom to the people in real life with the popular language and images, implying that he believed that the world today can accept these revelations. For he supposed that it was very necessary and easy for the modern people to possess a kind of belief that is supreme power. He acknowledged that in the modern society Jesus Christ is still an active and vigorous power. Today the number of people who believe that Jesus Christ is the only hope in the world is much larger than ever before. Therefore Bernard Shaw is firm about the doctrine of Christianity having deep feelings for Jesus Christ. He is in practice of the understanding of Christianity doctrine with his whole life's behavior and creation.

To sum up, it is obvious that Christianity affects Bernard Shaw's creation thought and writing skills, which is also the important way to go into his inner world.

## REFERENCES

- Chen, Y. H. (2012). A brief analysis on the art of Bernard Shaw's drama creation. *Literature Education*, 12.
- Harris, F. (2006). *The biography of Bernard Shaw*. In J. D. Huang (Trans.). United Press.
- Wang, Y. (2005). *On the Christian origin of Bernard Shaw's drama creation* (Master thesis). Henan University.
- Zhang, Q. Z. (2002). *The literature history of Europe and the United States* (p.10). Science Press.