

An Interpretation of Jane Eyre's Feeling of Inferiority in Lowood in Jane Eyre

Yanmei Zhao

Guangzhou Institute of Science and Technology, Guangzhou, 510000, China

Keywords: Jane Eyre, individual psychology, feeling of inferiority

Abstract: Jane Eyre is a masterpiece of Charlotte Bronte and is also an autobiographical novel. In the novel, as an orphan, living in unfavorable situations, Jane Eyre has gone through various challenges and frustrations in her road to fight for her freedom, equality, independence and self-realization, which deeply impresses and inspires people in different times in the world. However, this thesis studies Jane Eyre's feeling of inferiority in Lowood from the perspective of Alfred Adler's individual psychology, trying to explore the invisible side of Jane Eyre. In Lowood, a charity school, Jane Eyre meets many people who have different influence on Jane Eyre and make Jane Eyre experience some different religious life. These experiences are the recurrence of Jane Eyre's memories at Gateshead, which deepens her feeling of inferiority.

1. Introduction

In view of Individual Psychology, education, whether carried on in the home or at school, is an attempt to bring out and direct the personalities of individuals. Principle of education is that it must be consistent with the later life that individuals will be called upon to face. This indicates that it must be consistent with the ideals of the nation. The ideals of a nation may change so that the educator should keep in mind a very broad ideal. It should be an ideal that will always have its place, and will teach individuals to adjust themselves properly to changing circumstances. The connection of education with social ideals is influenced by its connection with the rule of government, and it is in the government's interest that national ideals should be reflected in the school system [1]. Lowood where is a place for Jane Eyre to accept education gives Jane Eyre a great influence upon her life. In this essay, it will study on Jane Eyre's feeling of inferiority based on her life experience in Lowood.

2. God's Exclusion

In Victorian period, the industrial revolution makes England become the "workshop of the world" in the direction of the rapid development of economy. There is a growing gulf between rich and poor. The upper class and the governments consider that it is necessary to comfort the poor, maintain social order and advocate humanity care. In this case, religious education plays an essential part in people's daily life and their school education [2]. In view of Individual Psychology, teachers play an important part to train students' social interest, which is useful for students to correct some mistakes in their prototype and overcome their feeling of inferiority. With regard to these two aspects, the purpose of

religious education in Lowood is to train students' religious virtue through giving universal fraternity. From Jane Eyre's experience at Gateshead, it can be concluded that pursuing equal attention and treatment is her goal in her childhood. It is unavoidable for her to pursue equality in her religious world in association to his prototype; unfortunately, Jane Eyre suffered from unfair treatment by Mr. Brocklehurst.

Firstly, he regards money as a standard to judge people's morality, which is against the doctrine of Bible. His first opinion towards Jane Eyre is based on Mrs. Reed's description rather than on Jane Eyre's explanation. He views that the poor are more likely to be a liar and don't hold gratitude for their benefactor, which is his moral judgment between the rich and the poor. Therefore, he punishes Jane Eyre based on his moral standard and he hurts her deeply. Severe and unequal punishment is an unfavorable memory in Jane Eyre's heart and it makes her feeling of inferiority. In view of Individual Psychology, this recurrence only results in feeling of inferiority [1].

Secondly, he regards money as a standard to enjoy life. With regard to the standard to the rich, it is reasonable and right to enjoy their secular life without any doubt, which can be shown by his family members. They are Mrs. and the Misses Brocklehurst whose wearing are fashionable, luxurious and magnificent, which is opposite to Mr. Brocklehurst doctrine of religion. With regard to the standard to the poor, they have no right to enjoy their secular life without any doubt which can be shown by their maltreatment made by Mr. Brocklehurst in Lowood. The foods and clothes are severely insufficient for the girls of Lowood to protect themselves from starving and coldness and illness so that some of them die earlier, which is the will of God executed by Mr. Brocklehurst. About the spoiling of breakfast, he shows his view to Miss Temple.

From above narration, it is obvious that the religious education conducted by Mr. Brocklehurst can not provide universal fraternity to students and can not reach the purpose of religious education in that society. Consequently, his religious education is a recurrence of Jane Eyre's maltreatment in her childhood, which results in her feeling of inferiority. In a word, his behavior and education is to emphasize the original sin of the poor and exclude the poor from the God's love.

3. Losing God's Comfort and Protection

In view of Individual Psychology, each mind forms a conception of a goal or ideal, a means to get beyond the present state and to overcome present deficiencies or difficulties by formulating a particular aim for the future. By means of this particular aim or goal, individuals can think and feel themselves superior to present difficulties because they have future success in mind. Without this sense of a goal, individual activity would be meaningless. To have a goal is to aspire to be like God. But to be like God is of course the ultimate goal. Children substitute a more concrete and immediate goal and look for the strongest person around them to make into their model or the embodiment of their goal [1]. In Lowood, Helen Burns is not only the first and intimate friend of Jane Eyre but also an initiator of Jane Eyre's religion. Jane Eyre regards Helen Burns as an embodiment of God, noting Helen Burns's insistent on pursuing truth, goodness and beauty. Her influence upon Jane Eyre can be embodied in three aspects.

Firstly, Helen shows great sympathy on Jane Eyre and helps Jane Eyre with her kindness. Jane Eyre is a new comer and younger than the other girls in Lowood, which makes her weaker and need more care than the others. Suffering from Mr. Brocklehurst's defamation of her character, Jane Eyre receives special support and love from Helen. Helen's encouragement gives Jane Eyre enough courage to live through the hardship in Lowood. Secondly, Helen shows untiring pursuit of knowledge and thoughts, which sets a good example for Jane Eyre to follow. Rich knowledge helps her to lay a solid foundation for her future survival. Helen is only fourteen years old while she knows the importance of study and spends a lot of time on study. Her spiritual affluence surprises Jane Eyre.

Jane Eyre uses a very brief sentence to summarize her spirit: “her spirit seemed hastening to live within a very brief span as much as many live during a protracted existence.”[3]. Simultaneously, Helen has great insight in the hardship that people suffer in the reality and has marvelous judgment on what wrong is and what right is. Helen is maturer than Jane Eyre to face the troubles and carefully protect herself from hurt in the society. Thirdly, Helen shows untiring pursuit of self-improvement and self-control based on strict observation of Bible, which has great influence on shaping Jane Eyre’s characters. Helen who is a fervent religious believer suffers a lot of scold and beatings in Lowood, but she bears all the sufferings without any complaint. Her attitude towards unfair treatment and punishment teaches Jane Eyre a good lesson.

From the above description, Helen is a perfect image of traditional Christian who is of great quality of human being required by Bible. She devotes all of her owning to the pursuit of the truth, goodness and beauty in the world, including her great endurance, sympathy, kindness, forgiveness and life. To follow in Helen’s footsteps is the goal of Jane Eyre. Unfortunately, the bad survival condition in Lowood makes Helen ill and later die, which spurs Jane Eyre to ponder life and death again. At Gateshead, Mr. Reed’s death makes Jane Eyre lose protection and love, which is the beginning of her miserable life. Helen’s sudden death is a recurrence of her prototype, which undoubtedly makes Jane Eyre feel feeling of inferiority.

4. Losing God’s Support

In view of Individual Psychology, every human being has three main ties; and it is of these ties that he must take account. They make up reality for him. All the problems which confront him are in the direction of these ties. He must always answer this problem because they are always questioning him; and the answers will show us his individual conception of the meaning of life. These three ties are also regarded as three “life attitudes”, which are individual’s general reactions to society, to work and to love[4]. The feeling of inferiority is always manifested in a sense of fear or uncertainty in the presence of society. The attitude towards work is closely dependent upon this self-security in society. The attitude to love determines the course of the erotic life [4]. In lowood, Maria Temple is a special person who witnesses Jane Eyre’s most life experience and keeps a close relationship with Jane Eyre. She sets a good example for Jane Eyre to cope with three “life attitude”. She is mainly responsible for training Jane Eyre’s social interest in Lowood. Undoubtedly, she gives so great influence on Jane Eyre that she is spiritual support of Jane Eyre.

Firstly, Miss Temple sets a good example to understand and perform the equality of human being. When Jane Eyre suffers Mr. Brocklehurst’s defamation, Miss Temple cares Jane Eyre and listens to her story with great patience and trust, which is greatly unlike Mrs. Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst. Jane Eyre expresses her concern about her future, noting “Because I have been wrongly accused; and you, ma’ma, and everybody else, will now think me wicked.”[3]. Miss Temple comforts Jane Eyre and encourages her and has confidence in Jane Eyre, asserting that “We shall think you what you prove yourself to be, my child. Continue to act as a good girl, and you will satisfy us.” [3]

From Miss Temple’s statement, Miss Temple is a generous person with a great mind, who holds the thought that giving a chance to forgive people is a nature of human being. And later, Miss Temple asks Jane Eyre to tell her story to her and helps her to prove her innocence. This is Miss Temple’s understanding of equality according to God’s will, which is that everyone is equal in the front of God. Even though Jane Eyre is poor, she still has equal right to defend herself.

Secondly, Miss Temple helps Jane Eyre to understand the inner meaning of sisterhood and friendship. A single man without a friend will be regarded as a misfortunate of life. Women’s sisterhood and friendship has not been emphasized in the patriarchal society in the view of the public in the Victorian period. People view that friendship between women is far from being trivial and

unstable. However, the friendship between Miss Temple, schoolgirls and Jane Eyre is against this traditional idea. Their friendship is filled with trust, love and encouragement, which can be seen from the affair of burnt porridge. About the burnt porridge, the schoolgirls and teachers feel it is so disgusting, but they do nothing except for complaint, rather, Miss Temple is so brave enough to step forward for protecting them. She states “You had this morning a breakfast which you could not eat; you must be hungry:--I have ordered that a lunch of bread and cheese shall be served to all” and “It is to be done on my responsibility.”[3]. Her words and behavior are just like a Christian martyr who can devote all of his own to saving people’s life. Miss Temple offers her intimacy both in physical and emotional fields in view of Jane Eyre. Through Miss Temple’s sisterhood and friendship, Jane Eyre can go through the hardship in Lowood and gain confidence to her future life. Thus, Miss Temple is an image of “God” who can save them from people’s sufferings, which gives Jane Eyre more confidence towards life and future. Then Jane Eyre follows her steps to study hard and to train good qualities as human being.

Finally, Jane Eyre grows up and becomes a teacher at Lowood, which is a new life for Jane Eyre. Jane Eyre’s success in Lowood proves that Miss Temple’s education to her is successful. Miss Temple is successful to correct some mistakes of Jane Eyre’s prototype so that Jane Eyre can feel safety and love in her life. Therefore, Jane Eyre regards Lowood as her home. Moreover, Miss Temple helps Jane Eyre to obtain enough occupational education so that Jane Eyre can be able to support herself as a teacher in Lowood. Occupational education also meets the purpose of national education in that society. In the view of upper class and rulers, the occupational education is useful to decrease the number of the poor in the direction to maintain social order. In view of Individual Psychology, Miss Temple’s education and treatment is useful to train Jane Eyre’s social interest and help her to cope with the two ties in her life. With social interest, Jane Eyre can be social adjustment, which is functioning compensation for Jane Eyre’s feeling of inferiority. However, Miss Temple chooses to leave for her own happiness, abandoning her duty of the “God”. In eight years, Miss Temple is the spiritual guidance and pillar for Jane Eyre and she can comfort and help Jane Eyre. In Jane Eyre’s view, Miss Temple is her “God” who can point out a direction for Jane Eyre. Therefore, Miss Temple’s leaving makes Jane Eyre lose her ‘God” and lose her way of life. It is the voice from Jane Eyre’s heart and Jane Eyre is doomed to live in her prototype. Miss Temple’s leaving is a recurrence of her prototype, which undoubtedly makes Jane Eyre feel feeling of inferiority.

5. Jane Eyre’s Escapism

In the view of Individual Psychology, “the individual’s interpretation of the meaning of life is not a trivial matter, for it is ultimately the plumb-line of his thinking, feeling, and acting. The task of instruction, education, and healing is to bridge the distance between the real meaning of life and the erroneous action of the individual. The gift of divination, namely intuition, is the most universal to Haman being”[5]. This intuition can be regarded as a knowledge acquired by an individual from her own experience unconsciously. Jane Eyre can feel her goal of life and make her choice in her life with this intuition. In Lowood, Jane Eyre experiences her religious life and forms her goal of being a devotee of God in the hope of earning protection, love and support from God. However, Helen and Miss Temple leave her, which proves that Jane Eyre is a loser in face of God. Facing the fact, Jane Eyre feels her intuition to consider and examine her living environment in Lowood.

From Jane Eyre’s intuition, the outside world is more attractive for her and she is tired of life in Lowood because of its dullness. This intuition that is inspired by Miss Temple’s leaving is the nature of Jane Eyre. Jane Eyre goes back to the prototype at Gateshead who is eager to escape from unfriendly and unsafe environment. Miss Temple’s leaving also teaches Jane Eyre a good lesson that human being has right to pursue his happiness. Under the influence of Miss Temple, Jane Eyre

continuously ponders over something about religion, forming her religious values. On one hand, she views that religion should be based on respect for human nature and understanding human nature. Jane Eyre's interpretation of religion emphasizes on eliminating class gap, advocating human being's right to burden some sufferings as well as to pursue their happiness. In another word, everyone is his own "God" who can make and choose the directions of life, which is the reward of their endurance of sufferings. On the other hand, in front of God, people should keep the fear of God and continue to pursue truth, goodness and beauty under the guidance of God. It is the way for people to close to God, communicate with God and finally they can earn the tolerance, love and protection of God. In Jane Eyre's view, people like Helen should be loved and protected by God instead of being far from God's love. Thus, Jane Eyre's religion pays more attention to combination between human nature and divinity of God, which is a new viewpoint of religion in that society. This is Jane Eyre's understanding of the meaning of life in connection with the three ties of human being and the devotion to God, which is against people's common sense of religion. Therefore, her viewpoint is social maladjustment and thus it makes Jane Eyre feel feeling of inferiority. Undoubtedly, Jane Eyre' goes back to the prototype at Gateshead and leaving is one way for her to escape from her feeling of inferiority.

6. Conclusion

Relating to the religious background of 18th century, it is easy to find out the close relationship between Jane Eyre's religious views and Charlotte Bronte's religious views. England went through a social transition and had a number of serious problems in the 18th century. The Industrial Revolution was in bud, Enclosure Movement occurred and the whole society was undergoing disturbance and restlessness with the result that a series of social problems were in urgent to resolve. The majority of the common people's life was full of bitterness and unrest, which caused the great spiritual needs of religion. The Church of England was approaching the decadence of its former power and influence along with its serious corruption, neglecting the spiritual needs of the people. As a result, it is unable to undertake the important mission of spiritual supervision and moral education to the lower-class people. Under his influence, Charlotte Bronte forms her special understanding of religion and God in her life and shows her views in Jane Eyre, which is reflected by Jane Eyre. At the same time, Charlotte Bronte's religious views are unavoidably to be criticized and accused by a lot of theologians in that society, which makes her feel inferiority. So does Jane Eyre, the embodiment of Charlotte Bronte.

References

- [1] Adler, Alfred. *Understanding Life*. England: Oneworld Publications, 1997.
- [2] Shi Yihui. *The Ragged School Movement of UKin Victorian Era [J]*. *Journal of Huaiyin Normal University*, 2005,27 (1): 82-84.
- [3] Bronte, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Dalian: Dalian University of Technology Press, 2014.
- [4] Adler, Alfred. *The Science of Living*. London: George Allen Unwin Ltd., 1929.
- [5] Adler, Alfred. *Social Interest::A Challenge to Mankind*. London: Martino Publishing, 2011.