

Little Roles Great Souls

The Analysis of the Secondary Characters in Jane Austen's Emma

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Abstract—In this paper, the functions and positions of the secondary characters in the novel have been analyzed. The secondary characters play the key roles in rendering the heroine, pushing the development of the details and enhancing the mood of the novel. In Jane Austen's Emma, there are a series of the secondary characters that are helpful for readers to understand the heroine Emma's thoughts, behavior, personality and fate. This paper reveals that these secondary characters are closely linked to not only the protagonist, but also themes of the creations.

Keywords—the secondary characters; the protagonist; indispensable; role

I. INTRODUCTION

The renowned British novelist, Jane Austin, published six novels in her whole life. Though living in the countryside, and having no access to a formal school education, she received a good family education. That is why her novels are all about the love, life, and marriage of those gentlemen and ladies in her world instead of focusing on intense conflicts. In the twentieth century, Jane Austin's works received the highest appraisal, and she was almost on par with William Shakespeare. Modern writers and critics all speak very highly of Jane Austin. Of course, this has a lot to do with the change in literary taste and concept, but more of the quality and charm of Jane Austin's works. Works of Jane Austin have a unique style and show super skills, which has almost become a consensus in literary history. Her works are restrained, subtle, yet the stories are presented to us in a quiet but full of wit and humor. Emma is a full reflection of Jane Austin's mastery of language, ability to shape characters, and her exploration of literary skills. Even now, readers are still amazed by her accurate portrait of the human nature, her keen observations of the Regency period of British society, and the super mastery of art.

One of the most essential elements of a novel is the characters which can be divided into main characters and secondary characters. When readers read a novel, they are used to concerning themselves with the language, behavior, personality and fate of the main characters, but pay little attention to the secondary characters and even know nothing about them. Although the main characters which are portrayed emphatically by writers play a very important role in the novel, the secondary characters shown little attention make an

important contribution to the novel. These characters are always around the main characters, push forward the development of the plot, heighten the story atmosphere, highlight the main character, and sublimate the theme of the novel. Therefore, when readers appreciate the novel, understanding the secondary characters will be helpful for understanding the work. This paper focuses on the secondary characters in Jane Austen's Emma in order to analyze the secondary characters' important function in the novel.

II. THE SECONDARY CHARACTERS PLAY KEY ROLES IN RENDERING THE HEROINE AND FURTHER DEVELOPING THE PLOT

In the novel, the protagonist's image, thought and activity is always expressed by the secondary characters. Through the description of the secondary characters, the hero can be highlighted so that their characteristics and fates can be more vivid. There is a Chinese saying: "The flowers need greenery foils." The hero is the flower, and the secondary characters are green leaves. The novel can receive success through the contrast between them. In Emma, Harriet Smith, Jane Fairfax and Mrs. Weston are this kind of characters. As Arnold Kettle said, it was incomplete to regard Emma as the novel about marriage, and similarly, it was incomplete to regard it as Emma's story. [1] Emma is more of the girl Emma and her life experience. The main purpose and significance are presented by a series of characters, such as Harriet Smith, Jane Fairfax and Mrs. Weston who have non-ignorable value.

A. Harriet's characteristic and her value

Harriet Smith is a very pretty girl in the novel. Though she is foolish, has no will of her own, cannot distinguish the essence of things and has no will of her own, these cannot cover her gentleness, kindness, humility and sincerity. Harriet is kind and meek so that she refused Robert Martin's propose in Emma's misleading, and loved Mr. Elton and then Mr. Knightley under Emma's influence. Harriet's mistake, so to speak, is caused by Emma. At the end of the novel, when Harriet is going to marry Martin, Emma visits her with a sense of self-blame, but Harriet neither receives her, nor shows any dislike. She doesn't hate Emma either since Emma will marry Mr. Knightley, or since she is misled by Emma. She is as honest as ever, and often sees Emma as her most valuable friend and good guide. Harriet is very frank and open so she still values Emma's opinions and is willing to reveal her own feelings

before Emma, which is commendable for a person who has experienced much unhappiness and even humility. Harriet hasn't enough wit to distinguish between right and wrong, but she quite understands her own fault, and tries to compensate for this with trusting and depending on Emma. She admires Emma so that she regards Emma as a leader of her life and spirit. Harriet has never pretended to have the insight, but to look up to her clever "protector" humbly, and Emma considers herself as it.

If overconfidence leads to arrogance and over-powering causes insolence, obedience, humility, and innocence will lead to ignorance. Like papyrus, Harriet's intelligence, mind, will, and even survival depend on the strong and firm of others. However, Austen hasn't shaped Harriet into an exaggerated and funny cartoon character to match Emma, but to give this character a full image by exquisite words. Harriet's personality, as a control for Emma's, has been shown in the novel. Harriet's self-knowledge reflects Emma's conceit and assertiveness. In personality and personal charisma, the farmer Martin and Mr. Knightley, who are chosen by Harriet Smith herself, are far better than Mr. Elton and Mr. Frank Churchill, who are chosen by Emma for her. Though Austen arranges that Harriet loves both of them only for the development of the story, the fact shows some deeper meaning. Harriet is not clever and has no will of her own, but she is so lucky that she falls in love with the better man in quality and character with some indescribable instinct or her pure character. On the point of deliberating on the object to love, she chooses a morally upright man more wisely than intellect Emma. This time Emma has outsmarted herself. Through Harriet's love, Emma had not realized her own mind until Harriet told her she loved Mr. Knightley. It is because of the satirical contrast that we see Harriet's character and partly recognize the heroine Emma more clearly. If we rightly understand the contrast relations between roles and figures of speech used to describe Harriet in the novel, we can offer an objective appraisal to her. Her experiences are sympathetic to people, her virtues are obvious and her shortcomings can be accepted.

B. Jane's characteristics and values

Jane Fairfax was an orphan since a very young age. She was adopted by her father's old friend, Colonel Campbell and nurtured into a well-educated, versatile, and sweet-tempered girl. Different from what Emma perceived her to be, an arrogant, cold-hearted and irritating person, Jane Fairfax is, on the contrary, filled with inner passion. She is both an energetic and enthusiastic person. Jane Fairfax is well aware of the situation she is in: marrying Churchill is not impossible but will be extremely hard. Though to change her situation is not the reason she married Churchill, undeniably, this is the only chance to do so. She hopes to stay with the one she loves, not out of superficial considerations of fortune and status. The disparity between Churchill and herself on wealth and status, however, aggravates her grief, and exacerbates the gap between them, becomes an obstacle in their relationship. She is more than what Emma claimed to be an indifferent, distant and cool-headed person. From the author's detailed description, readers can see that she is sentimental and thoughtful. She rashly rushed into a secret engagement. She has been tortured by those emotional entanglements, and the one she loves is not

a decent and responsible man. In other words, she is far from being the girl in Emma's eyes. Emma is the one that has overrated herself, and the one that is indifferent--- Jane's appearance in the novel is a symbolic reflection of Emma's flawed emotions. [2] Just like what Mark Shella said, Jane's function in the novel couldn't be underestimated. It is mentioned in the former part that the whole novel was narrated from the point view of Emma. While this versatile lady, Jane Fairfax, aroused jealousy in Emma and was excluded from Emma's attention due to the praise she received from Mr. Knightley and the public. Therefore, readers didn't see a fair comment on Jane until the end of the novel, when Emma realized her own character flaws. There is a trace of jealousy and prying in Emma's thoughts. She is dishonest with Jane and disgusted by her aunt's nagging, and always worrying about Mr. Knightley marrying to Jane. Emma unreasonably speculated that Jane Fairfax was in love with her good friend's husband, and even told this to Frank Churchill....Emma's behavior is inappropriate and her explanation to Jane's action is also absurd. When readers are informed about the truth, thinking of her smug ideas and those actions she feels proud of, the effect of irony is showing up. All of Emma's conceited thoughts and actions are funny, she also feels humiliated and embarrassed by them, which prompted her to make up for the damage she has done. In addition, Jane Fairfax's inner world, the meaning of her behavior are covered and cannot be demonstrated and expressed. All of this sets up a series of suspenseful moments in the novel. Jane Fairfax and Harriet are the important ways of laying suspense for the book. Everything related with Jane and Churchill's engagement has become a mystery: who gave Jane a piano? Why was she upset about this? Why did Emma and Churchill's word puzzle game offend Jane and make her angry? Jane Fairfax went to the post office to get a letter in the rain; whose letter is so important? Despite of Emma's genuine apology to Miss Bates for the offence, why did Jane still avoid her many times and decline her kindness and sincerity? All of this is because of Jane's secret marriage and what the author cannot disclose to the readers for the effect of narration. Readers should know that the approach to Jane Fairfax in the novel is totally necessary.

C. The similarity of Jane Fairfax and Mrs. Weston

There is a similarity in the depiction of Mrs. Weston and Jane Fairfax in the novel. They are not just similar in appearance: they both are beautiful, well-educated, intelligent, but also have no fortune; the father and the son they married, Mr. Weston and his son, Frank Churchill, have the same kind of "optimistic" character; they all rise to the upper class in Highbury region, from family governess (Mrs. Weston used to be a governess, Jane almost becomes one herself). Moreover, there is a deeper level of similarity and relevance in them, and their functions in the novel are also similar. Jane Fairfax and Mrs. Weston have the same merits: well-educated, prudent, decent, versatile, which are typical of a fair lady. They can be patient with themselves, be submissive to others, and for those who offend them or those they do not like, they can still get along with them in an appropriate and harmonious way. Their behavior is beyond reproach except that Jane got secretly engaged. Nevertheless, Jane Fairfax and Mrs. Weston also have similar shortcomings, that is, they are not straightforward. They hide their thoughts and preserve their opinions when it is

time to make a fair judgment. This formed a big contrast between them and Emma. Though there are not many words in the novel about these two characters, every character, every scene, every piece of gossip and conversation has their own significance. Jane Fairfax and Mrs. Weston can be extremely patient with themselves and be subjective to others' wills. For instance, Mrs. Weston is not a good governess, she formed the habit of being submissive to others when she was in Heartfeld. To borrow the words of Mr. Knightley, she has been preparing for being a good wife. As a matter of fact, considering her ability, she is able to provide a perfect education for Emma, but she did not. On the contrary, Emma taught her a good lesson, which is to suppress your own feelings after marriage and to follow others' instructions. Jane Fairfax restrains her own feelings, too. Even when her fiancé is flirting with other ladies, she can still hold her emotions and remain silent. They always hide their attitudes, even necessary judgments. If being patient with themselves and being submissive to others is a kind of merit, then keeping views to themselves in an unduly way, and preserving their opinions when they should give unequivocally judgments is a practice of self-preservation. As Arnold Kettle said, any part of the story could not be apart from the other parts. Those plots had a more important purpose, that was, of revealing character or without declaring it deliberately. [3]

Their merits and shortcomings are in a big contrast with Emma's. Emma's merit is in her straightforwardness, and outspokenness. She is open to take a side and does not hide her opinions. When she realized her arrogance, she can make fair judgments just as Mr. Knightley does. As Harriet Smith, Jane Fairfax and Mrs. Weston's merits can reflect Emma's shortcomings, their own shortcomings can also perfectly reflect the lovely aspect of Emma's character. Thanks to the author's skillful arrangement and detailed description about these three minor characters, readers see a distinctive and charming heroine, Emma. Therefore, secondary characters like Harriet Smith, Jane Fairfax and Mrs. Weston's significance to the novel cannot be underestimated.

III. THE CARTOON CHARACTERS PLAY A KEY ROLE IN ENHANCING THE MOOD OF THE NOVEL

The secondary characters can enhance the mood of the novel even though they make few appearances. The cartoon characters in Emma are these kinds of figures.

A. Isolation method

Jane Austin adopts the "isolation method" to depict the cartoon character. The effect of this method is to expose the speaker by her own talking, instead of talking with others. Judging from the content of the talking, they are in group talks, but the others' words are omitted, the author makes the talks into a "monologue". [4] The first time when Mrs. Elton visited Heartfeld is a true reflection of this. She began endless talking from the moment she stepped into the room. The maple trees in her brother-in-law's residence, their big garden, fancy carriage, frequent social activities, luxury traveling, fashionable friends, her own self-cultivation and demeanor, future plans.....and so on and so forth. When Mrs. Elton was indulging in exaggerations, Emma either remained silent or gave a short reply. When the writer tries to comicalize the

characters, the listeners will not talk with them as equals. [5] Emma undoubtedly has the upper hand when it comes to staying with Mrs. Elton, for she can easily see through Mrs. Elton's complacency, vanity, rudeness, presumption and ignorance. Emma's brief courtesy is a mockery in itself. This approach isolates Mrs. Elton, making her showing off a stupid individual performance. Mrs. Elton was displayed in front of the readers as a clown in the show window. In the following the Dunwell garden party, the author took this step further, which pushed her excellent performance to the limit and intensified the ironic effect. At the party, it seems that Mrs. Elton is in conversations with others, but other people's words are completely omitted, the author's exaggeration method manifests Mrs. Elton's ignorance and pride. This constant "monologue" indicates that she took up the whole conversation and scene....

The same method also applies to Mrs. Bates, who even beats up Mrs. Elton. That was before the start of the ball, Mrs. Elton moved towards Mrs. Bates, didn't expect that her words were drowned in Miss Bates' endless talking. In the two pages of Miss Bates' talking, the part of the one she is talking with was omitted. In other words, the public's chorus was nothing compared to Miss Bates' solo. The only thing left was constant nagging and nonsense.

It is not difficult to see that there is an exaggeration in Mrs. Elton and Miss Bates's shortcomings. As long as Mrs. Elton shows up, we can see her showing off and bragging about. When Miss Bates appears, we have to endure her nagging about her gratitude to others and her report about what is going on with her life recently. Generally speaking, cartoon characters are created by extremely highlighting some features. Some character is a cartoon character, and then readers will be prepared for writer's handle. Readers will pay attention to characters' a few features or some aspect of their character, but not to search for something true.

B. The place of cartoon characters in the novel

Cartoon characters don't take a large part in the novel and are not the focus of the plot, but Mrs. Elton and Miss Bates are not simply here to make people laugh and add some comedian flavor to the book, on the contrary, they make the novel much more vivid and fascinating. Their manners are exaggerated, and their personalities are presented in a simple way. Although they are all secondary characters, there is a significant difference between characters like Harriet Smith, Jane Fairfax and character like Mrs. Elton. The former is a complete and vivid portrait, while the latter is an extremely exaggerated cartoon. The way the author handles the cartoon characters shows her excellent skills: while setting up each comic scene, there is a symbolic contrast going on, engaging people in ethical thinking, and naturally lead people to the philosophy that the author tries to present. Therefore, the "cartoon characters" play an irreplaceable role in helping readers understand the main characters and the theme of the novel.

In Emma, readers see the heroine Emma's complacency, smartness, self-reflection, mistakes guilt, and deep remorse through the secondary characters' activities and thoughts. The secondary characters make Emma's ideas changed from conceit and self-deception to repentance and reflect. Above all,

the secondary characters make up a small part of the novel, but they have attained great achievements in the work. They are closely linked to not only the protagonist, but also themes of the creations, which means the setting of the secondary characters works for the hero and the themes of the novel. If the hero leaves the secondary characters, she will become dry and lose her luster. The writer seems to portray the secondary characters commonly, but there is a huge power in it, which enhances the artistic appeal and plays a role in refining.

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- [3] Arnold Kettle, Jane Austen: Emma, Study on Austen, Zhu Hong ed. Beijing: China Federation of Literary and Art Circles Press, 247-248.
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