

Exploration of philosophical connotation behind the Religious allusion in The Student

Fangfang Liao

School of literature, Capital Normal University, Beijing 100089, China

liaofangfang@126.com

Abstract. The biblical story of Jesus' crucifixion in Chekhov's short story *The Student* can be said to be a punctuation point, alluding to the main theme of the whole text and having a profound philosophical meaning. For Chekhov, the reference to this religious allusion is both accidental and inevitable. Through an in-depth analysis of the seminary student's thought process, which is triggered by his remembrance of the crucifixion of Jesus in the Bible, his chain of thoughts on the past, present, and future is revealed, revealing Chekhov's aspirations for the new generation of Russian intellectuals: positive energy of youth, health, optimism, and aspirations for a mysterious and mysterious future life. It is also a reflection of Chekhov's optimistic outlook on the future of Russia, as he expresses a dialectical understanding of the underlying ideology of truth and beauty, harmony and discord.

Keywords: *The Student*; religious allusion; contingency and inevitability; truth and beauty; harmony and disharmony.

1. Introduction

A.P. Chekhov (1860–1904) was the last great Russian classic writer of critical realism in the nineteenth century. He is known as one of the world's three great masters of the short story, together with Maupassant of France and O. Henry of the United States. Chekhov's short stories are mostly based on trivial events in life, and they are characterized by the ability to see the big picture in a small way, reflecting all aspects of Russian social life. The biblical story of the crucifixion of Jesus in *The Student* can be described as a punctuation mark, an allusion to the main theme of the text, and a profound philosophical meaning, but for Chekhov, the reference to this religious allusion has its own contingency and inevitability. This paper takes the religious allusion in the novel as an entry point to decipher the basic philosophical connotations and deeper meanings of truth and beauty, harmony and discord, and to explain the role of the allusion in the whole text, so as to gain a deeper understanding of Chekhov's creative thought.

2. Aesthetic contingency and necessity

The Student is a short story written by Chekhov in 1894. It differs significantly from his other works, such as *The Teacher Literature*, *House with a Mezzanine*, *The Grasshopper*, and *Ward No. 6*, in that it is one of the few short stories in Chekhov's oeuvre to focus on a religious theme. It is one of the few short stories in Chekhov's oeuvre to focus on a religious theme. Chekhov is known to have differed from classic religious writers such as Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky in that he was not a devout Christian and sometimes showed indifference to religion, which is somewhat related to his own grey childhood. In his childhood, Chekhov was a small boy in his father's grocery shop, and from an early age he had to learn to count accounts, to entertain customers, and even to "fake weighing," "fake buckets," and various "little tricks" of business. The most unbearable thing for young Chekhov was the religious education his father forced him to receive, such as singing hymns and doing morning prayers. The three Chekhov brothers, who sang hymns in the religious choir organized by their father for almost ten years, Chekhov later recalled: "My two brothers and I sang a trio of scenes, singing 'Repent!' or 'The Voice of Arkhangelsk', and people looked at us with great emotion. They all envied our father, and all three of us felt like little hard-labor prisoners at that moment." [1] In addition to this, Chekhov's father used religious matters to hijack the wonderful

childhood of their youngest three brothers, as Chekhov once said: "There was no childhood for me." [2], "In our childhood, there is only pain"[3]. It is easy to see from this that his harsh, cold father overloaded him with a series of religious activities from an early age, which had a negative impact on his young mind, so that Chekhov grew up with a rejection of religion. Why, then, does the writer use the biblical allusion to 'the crucifixion of Jesus and the suffering of Peter' to highlight the main theme of the novel *The Student*? This is something we need to interpret and explore.

The novel opens with the story of Ivan Velikopolsky (Иван Великопольский), the seminary student, returning home from a hunting trip in the dark of the night, seeing only the light in the widow's garden by the river. The next time the widow Vasilisa shivered, she immediately recognized who it was and said, "I didn't recognize you just now. "God willing, you are going to be rich." [4] The darkness, the cold and the light reminded him of the story of Jesus' crucifixion thousands of years ago, so he told the widow and her daughter the story as he remembered it: more than 1,900 years ago at the Supper, Jesus, foreseeing his own misfortune, told Peter, who was faithful to him, that he would not recognise him three times before the rooster crowed today, in order that he might be spared. At that point, Peter did not know the reason, and Jesus endured the ordeal alone, and was later betrayed by the Jews and arrested, at which point Peter was terrified and expected misfortune. At the public trial of Jesus, three men recognized Peter as one of his disciples and said that they wanted Peter to be tried with them, but Peter denied that he knew Jesus three times out of fear. Then, when the rooster crowed and Peter remembered Jesus' words at supper, he came to his senses and was distressed. The three characters' encounter is full of coincidences, and it is not inevitable that the student remembers the story of Jesus' crucifixion.

It is clear from the above analysis that the author has a commonplace and generalized feeling towards religion, i.e., Chekhov doesn't make his protagonists finally understand the true meaning of religion and the meaning of life only after they have gone through many trials and tribulations, unlike Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. For example, in Tolstoy's *Resurrection* for the student, religious morality serves as a vane for the spiritual entry and exit of the protagonists, Nechlyudov and Maslova, throughout the novel, and the spiritual resurrection of the protagonists is the concrete embodiment of the noble religious mission of resurrection, the ultimate interpretation of Tolstoyism, so that the religious complex in his writing is serious and it is the essence of all noble emotions, so inaccessible that one can only look up to it and see it as a creed of life. Dostoevsky's religious complex is similar in nature to that of Tolstoy. *The Brothers Karamazov*, for example, is interspersed with a section entitled "The Religious Chancellor", in which the dialogue between the Chancellor and Jesus becomes a battleground for the writer's conflicting ideas, reflecting his many religious, philosophical, social, and moral intentions. It also shows the obvious necessity of Thohom's attitude towards religion and the interpolation of the "religious chancellor". It is clear from this comparison that the religious complexes of Thohom and Thohom carry a spiritual resurrection and a polemic of ideas, and that they use their characters to test their religious morality, which is primary and the characters secondary. The characters have a first nature, and the religious emotions have a second. The stories of the crucifixion are close and familiar to the student, akin to memories, and he tells them because he was in the same situation as Peter, as if recalling something he experienced in the same context; it is part of the student's memory bank. It seems that the student would not have gone into the vegetable garden to talk to the widowed mother and daughter, nor would he have made the allusion to the crucifixion of Jesus, nor would he have come up with the story of *The Student*, without seeing the bright light in the vegetable garden on his way home. In 1902, in a letter to a friend, he wrote: "Modern culture is only the beginning of a great future, and the devotion to religion is only a vestige of a phenomenon that is almost the last trace of something that no longer exists or will soon cease to exist." [5] The Russian people are, however, at the heart of most of them.

Yet, in the hearts of most Russians, these "residual phenomena" and "last traces" of precipitation have always stirred a desire for truth and beauty. In this way, Chekhov was able to convey the truth and beauty of religious conviction, even if he had a somewhat casual attitude towards religion. He

was perfectly capable of understanding the strong religious attachment of the Russian people and of appreciating the close relationship between religion and their lives, thoughts, and beliefs, which were firmly embedded in the marrow of the Russian people, and in this way, Chekhov was able to convey the truth and beauty of religious conviction. In this respect, the reference to religious allusions is again inevitable. On the other hand, the main character, Ivan, is the seminary student, educated in theology, and he is a Russian with a strong religious attachment. The fact that the day of the hunt coincides with Good Friday, the feast of the crucifixion of Jesus, makes it logical to associate the story of the crucifixion with Good Friday, which is inherently inevitable in relation to his identity. The inevitability of Chekhov's references to religious allusions can be understood on three levels: firstly, on the external level, i.e., Chekhov was able to fully understand the strong religious complex of the Russian people, so he was able to naturally make religious allusions a vehicle of truth and beauty; secondly, on the central level, i.e., the influence of the festive atmosphere of Good Friday; and thirdly, on the internal level, i.e., the theological education was deeply rooted in the heart of the student, so it was only necessary for external conditions to touch his nerves. When these conditions touch his nerves, he instinctively associates himself with the story of the crucifixion of Jesus. Throughout the text, it is clear that the internal level of necessity is transferred to the seminary student, that the central level is closely connected to the internal and external levels, and that the three levels of necessity, external and internal, are interlocked and in an increasing relationship.

The overall structure and thought process of the religious allusions, where everything seems natural and unpretentious, where the contingent contains the inevitable and the inevitable is embedded in the contingent, reflects Chekhov's aesthetic idea of quoting allusions and is more in line with his attitude towards religion. Tolstoy once noted that "Chekhov, like the other Impressionists, has a special style. At first glance, it seems as if the painter had painted at random, and the strokes seem unconnected; but step back a few steps and look at it from a distance, and you find a painting of such vivid color that you cannot help loving it." [6] With regard to Chekhov's references to religious allusions, it is only by stepping back a few steps and looking at them from a distance that one can see the subtlety of the allusions and appreciate the writer's intentions.

3. Truth and beauty

The above is an analysis of allusions, but Chekhov was an expert on questions, and he could not have stopped at the level of thinking about allusions. He always observed life from a certain point of view and with a certain idea in mind, the so-called "problem perspective," which is fully reflected in a few of his creative notes. For example, "When you stay quietly at home, you feel that life is ordinary, but once you go out into the street and start observing and asking questions, for example, about women, then life becomes extremely difficult." "Asking, for example, about women, then life becomes extremely scary. If you want to be an optimist and know how to live, you don't believe what people say in books written by other people, but observe and examine for yourself. When you give a picture of what a person is like, he will become better." [7]

These similar notes exemplify the artist Chekhov as a man of combined analytical and synthesizing talents, as well as congealing the writer's personal passions and reflections. The revolutionary movement of the late 19th century gave Chekhov a vague sense of the approaching storm, which inevitably caused him to think deeply and react acutely to reality, and the student, in a way, is a reflection of the writer's thinking and reaction to reality. Chekhov's right to tell stories It is no coincidence that Chekhov gives the student the right to tell stories and the ability to think about the subtle relationship between the content of the story and the listener, for Chekhov has an affinity for intellectuals and places his hopes in them, if not in Russian intellectuals. The student is more proactive and optimistic than Chekhov's previous intellectuals, no longer a "spiritual aristocrat" who is bored, dissatisfied with reality and without a way out[8]. For example, in A Deary Story, the old professor Sjepanovich, who lacks lofty ideals and a clear worldview, and in A Nervous Breakdown,

the student Vasiliev, who is unable to find the root of the problem in the face of the ugly prostitution system, so that he becomes insane and finally has to sedate and anesthetize himself with potassium bromide and morphine. Vassiliev, the student,

Chekhov, as a responsible writer, naturally ponders the future of the nation and cares about the plight of the people. He wanted to use the truth and beauty invoked in this engine-like religious allusion to guide Russia towards a better society, for truth and beauty know no party, no borders, no times and correspond to the beautiful emotions common to all human beings; they subtly connect people of the past, present and future on an inner level and bring them together in their hearts and minds, making the hearts "equal. They connect people from the past, the present, and the future on an inner level and bring them together, making the heart "equal". The main character, Ivan Veripolsky, is the embodiment of the writer's hope; an intellectual figure who is awakening and continues to do so; and his telling of the story of the crucifixion of Jesus causes deep emotions in the widow Vasilisa and her daughter Lucretia; the former crying, the latter looking at the narrator with a red face and a nervous expression. The love of Jesus for Peter and the guilt of Peter for Jesus, a guilt made deeper and more thought-provoking by the love of Jesus, the student thought: "Since the old woman wept, it was not because he was good at telling the story in a moving way, but because she felt that Peter was dear to her, because she cared with all her heart for what was happening in his soul" [9], and this "something" is truth and beauty, which convey the most beautiful emotions on earth. Truth and beauty guide people like the bright light that the student sees in the vegetable garden, making them feel light in the darkness, warmth in the cold, and hope in the despair. "This transformation from hopeless to hopeful is not someone's fantasy or ideal, but an inevitability that is rooted in the objective processes of life, in truth and beauty. It is the total, objective value that unites complex, chaotic inner opposites. " [10] The underlying creative tendencies of Chekhov can be found in his approach to truth and beauty: opposition to the Tsarist dictatorship, sympathy and love for the lower classes, and a passionate desire for a bright future for Russia. But Chekhov's independence and lack of inclination in the face of the complex political parties and schools of thought of the late nineteenth century is a testament to one of Chekhov's own confessions: "Since all the political groups or 'parties' I know are thin-skinned and hold false inclinations, I might as well go beyond all groups and parties, beyond all political tendencies... My duty is to portray Russian life truthfully, honestly, independently and objectively, in accordance with the realities of life, not in accordance with Populist religiosity or liberal 'talkers' with all their made-up, formulaic, narrowly group-biased ideas about life." [11] The truth and beauty of religious tropes are precious gems that Chekhov extracted from the reality of life; for him, they are objective facts, and he sought to reflect life truthfully, without any interference from subjective elements, and to present them to the world as a hope for a better life. The above description reflects the combination of tendentiousness and tendencylessness in Chekhov's work.

In this short novel, Chekhov makes sense of the student's change of mood from melancholy to cheerfulness. The author also cleverly inlays the wild natural landscape into the long river of history, making the student's mind secretly think: "Whether in the time of Rurik, or in the time of Ivan the Terrible, or in the time of Peter, such a wind Whether in the time of Rurik, or in the time of Ivan the Terrible, or in the time of Peter, such a wind blew," [12] and finally in It is the truth and beauty of the biblical allusions that awaken the student to positive and optimistic thinking about the future, making them energetic intellectuals, which Chekhov hoped would lead the Russian people to light. The two hostesses of the vegetable garden, representatives of the Russian people who suffered under the Tsarist dictatorship, are deeply moved by Peter's story, in which truth and beauty, like the light and heat emanating from the bonfire in the vegetable garden, illuminate and warm the student and the two hostesses, reaching the depths of their hearts and convincing them that truth and beauty, as the most beautiful emotions in the world, can overcome falsehood and ugliness, darkness and evil. It is because it is beauty that triumphs over evil in Peter's heart that he is so grief-stricken; a perfect illustration of the power of truth and beauty to touch the heart of man and their positive energy. Chekhov believed in the power of intellectuals, in the power of truth and beauty, and looked

forward to the future of Russia. Chekhov himself favoured *The Student* because it illustrates the author's own spiritual nature—passionate and hopeful beneath a melancholy exterior. Chekhov once said, "What kind of melancholy man am I? What kind of "cold-blooded" man am I? That's what the critics call me. What kind of "pessimist" am I? You know, my favourite short story in my own work is "The Student." [13]

4. Aesthetic harmony and disharmony

The novel tells us that Ivan went out early in the morning to hunt; that he was hungry and tired from a day of wandering alone in the woods; that it was Good Friday and that his mother had not cooked dinner in order to observe the holiday; and that the spring weather was unseasonably cold, with a layer of ice needles spreading on the floating surface of the puddle; and that "he felt that this sudden cold disrupted the order and harmony of all things" [14]. All these (loneliness, evening, dimness, exhaustion, hunger, cold, Good Friday) discordant elements made Ivan feel very depressed and frustrated. When he remembered that his mother was sitting barefoot on the floor of the front room polishing the samovar and his father was sitting on the stove coughing, he felt that there was nowhere to release the discordant feelings in his heart. It is these internal and external disharmonies that remind Ivan of the times of Rurik, Ivan the Terrible, and Peter, and the immediate disharmonies of cold, hunger, and darkness that have always been and will always be there, "the thought of which made him not want to go home". [15] The ubiquitous discord leaves Ivan without a sense of belonging, and he ends up in the widow's vegetable garden for warmth, remembering: "It was precisely on such a cold night as this that Peter the Apostle was roasting by the campfire" [16]. Gilshman argues that the novel's two references to darkness falling and Ivan's frozen hands reflect the repetitive nature of everyday life in a short period of time; people in the past and present alike. The fact that people in the past suffered as much as those in the present and that Peter wept for his defection as much as those in the present exemplifies the repetition, the constancy, of the long history, two repetitions that are manifestations of the activation of the connection between generations. [17] It is possible to find that the inner and outer disharmony of generational life doesn't exist in isolation but is linked in a chain-like manner, with connectedness, repetition, and inductivity.

The three protagonists are immersed in Peter's story and share a common feeling and experience of truth and beauty, which gives rise to an emotional resonance and inner harmony, what V.I. Tyupa calls "the inner unity of the mysteries of personality." [18] This harmony is what we call "horizontal harmony." Although the student doesn't know why the widow and her daughter are up and down, they are at least motivated by a beautiful sentiment and a deep sense of truth and beauty. For example, in *The New Villa*, the peasants and intellectuals are generally at odds with each other, and the reasons for this are unknown; for example, *The New Villa* explores the irreconcilable conflict between peasants and intellectuals. The Kucherovs, led by an engineer, are typical intellectuals who are understanding, modest, and tolerant, willing to approach and integrate with the peasants and help them. The peasants in the village are kind and reasonable, but both sides end up breaking up as if they were enemies, without knowing why. In contrast, there is no conflict between the intellectuals and the peasants in *The Student*, who are in harmony with each other and who feel and aspire to truth and beauty together. Truth and beauty are not limited by class, literacy, or even time, but are like a chain that links generations of characters, so that the novel also implies a "vertical harmony," which is expressed in the chain-like telepathy between the three protagonists and Peter. As the student implies, the past and the present are linked by an unbroken chain. He seems to see the two ends of the chain, and if he touches one end, the other will tremble.

There are two main lines of opposition and unity running through *The Student*, namely harmony and disharmony in aesthetics. The novel shows that the chain-like connection of the historical vertical is not only expressed in the discordant emotions of hardship and grief, but also in the harmonious emotions of positive and optimistic yearning for truth and beauty. Although the three

main characters in the novel are in different times and have different status from Peter and Jesus, there is a chain of inner cohesion between them, which reflects "the harmony and unity within personalities, and the external separation due to time, space, and social status." [19] Peter's story shows that although people's lives are full of conflicts and contradictions on the surface, the deepest, most hidden, and most stable inner aspects of life are chained together in harmony; that truth and beauty are always flowing in the deepest parts of life, embodying the essential aspects of life; and that they are like the sun in the sky, always present, illuminating and warming people. The vagaries of the weather do not obliterate its presence. Harmony in people's lives exists in an eternal, stable form and promotes a positive outlook on the future, while disharmony exists in an eternal, changing form and makes people look back negatively. The student begins to struggle with the discord in his life and ends up believing in the harmony in his life, in the eternity of truth and beauty, which reveals Chekhov's own optimism.

And the inner harmony embodied in this novel is different from the unified, harmonious nature that pervades *The Black Monk*, *The Man in the Case*, and *Ionich*. The harmony and unity in *The Student* are real, natural, uplifting, and life-affirming. The harmony in *The Black Monk* and the other three works is hypocritical, negative, vulgar, uninspiring, and even stifling of new things. In *The Black Monk*, Cofrin lives a vibrant, idealistic life and tries to break free from this "stagnant pool", only to become a patient who behaves strangely in the eyes of others and is sent to the hospital. Belikov in *The Man in the Case* is the embodiment of the cloak of harmony that has consumed him and is eating away at others. Staltsev, the doctor in *Ionich*, is a young man with ideals and aspirations who comes into a vulgar environment and ends up being vulgarised, pursuing only materialism and self-interest. The above shows that there is a difference between true harmony and false harmony, and that true harmony is a pool of clear water, while false harmony is a pool of stagnant water because it lacks truth and beauty as its mainstay. From initially believing that all terrible phenomena would always be there and that nothing would ever change, to finally feeling from his heart the call of mysterious and mysterious happiness and the cry of a wonderful and noble life, and this positive and optimistic attitude of his mind shows that "the indefatigable pursuit of truth by mankind is itself proof that "true truth" must exist, and that future men will surely enjoy the eternal truth that soothes all present suffering." [20] The student sees the eternal firm and unchanging, true harmony in the river of history, and he believes in the power of truth and beauty and that a better life lies in the future.

5. Summary

A reading of the religious allusions in the novel reveals, in general terms, Chekhov's attitude towards religion, his ability to deeply appreciate the religious complex of the Russian people, and therefore, his ability to demonstrate the writer's exquisite artistic skill in the quotation of religious allusions, showing the aesthetic relationship between the accidental and the inevitable. The truth and beauty conveyed by the allusions infect Ivan Veripolsky, the student, and the two hostesses of the vegetable garden, who, having realised that life is full of harmony and disharmony, are convinced that harmony will always be the same, and that truth and beauty will always guide people in their lives. He embodies the image of the Russian intelligentsia of the 1990s—from confusion, bitterness, and uncertainty to optimism, hope for the future, and anticipation of the revolution. It can be seen that Chekhov's quotation and elaboration of allusions fully reflects the aesthetic ideas of symmetry and naturalness, while his deep concern and aspiration for the Russian intelligentsia and his premonition of the imminent outbreak of the revolution show us another side of him, one that is not, as Shestov says, "Chekhov is a desperate singer. Chekhov, in his almost twenty-five-year literary career, did only one thing in a tedious and monotonous way: he did not hesitate to kill human hope in any way, "[21] but rather a Chekhov who gives hope and is optimistic.

References.

- [1] Turkov A.M.. *A. P. Chekhov and his time*. translated by Zhu Yishen, Chinese Social Science Press, 1984:3-4.
- [2][3] Ermilov V.V.. *Chekhov A. P.*. translated by Zhang Shoushin, People's Literature Publishing House, 1960: 10,8.
- [4][9][12][13][14][15][16] Tong Daoming. *An Appreciation of Chekhov's Masterpieces*. China Peace Press, 1995: 175, 177, 175, 179, 174, 175, 176.
- [5] [6] Mark Slonim. *Modern Russian Literature*. translated by Tang Xinfang, People's Literature Publishing House, 2001:70, 76.
- [7] Quoted in [Soviet] Melachmailah V.S.. *The process of creativity and artistic perception*. translated by Cheng Zhengmin et al., Huanghe Wenyi Publishing House, 1989:177.
- [8] Yang Xiaoyan. *The Image of Intellectuals in Chekhov's Novels*. Journal of Jingzhou Teachers' College (Philosophy and Social Science Edition), 1988(2):55.
- [10][17] M.M. Girshman. *literary work: theory and practice of analysis*. M.: Higher School, 1991:142, 140-141.
- [11] Chekhov. *Chekhov on Literature*. translated by Rulong, People's Literature Press, 1959:26.
- [18][19] V.I.Tyupa. *The Artistry of Chekhov's Short Story*. Higher School, 1989: 113-119.
- [20] Yang Le. *A Study of the Problem of Instability in Chekhov's Creation*, PhD thesis, Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 2009:113.
- [21] Shestov L. I.. *Beginnings and ends*. translated by Fang Shan, Yunnan People's Publishing House, 1998:8.