



## The Analysis on Charlie's Self-Salvation in *Babylon Revisited*

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### Abstract

Fitzgerald's famous short story *Babylon Revisited* was written in the 1930s. The work has two clues. The obvious one described the protagonist Charlie trying to restore custody of his daughter. The invisible one is about Charlie's self-salvation. It is not only reunion story of a father and daughter but also about a man who used to go astray looking for return. Based on Schopenhauer's three approaches of self-salvation, which are aesthetic contemplation, practice of the virtues and abstinence philosophy, this paper analyzes Charlie's approaches to self-salvation. It explores the reasons why Charlie failed to have a real self-salvation after his bustling and luxury life. It demonstrates the tragedy in Charlie's hope for return.

**Key words:** Fitzgerald; *Babylon Revisited*; Charlie; Self-salvation; Schopenhauer

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### INTRODUCTION

Fitzgerald is one of the most outstanding American writers in the 20th century. In 1925, the publication of *The Great Gatsby* has identified him as the spokesman for the Jazz Age and one of the representative writers of The Lost Generation in the 1920s. In terms of artistic performance, Fitzgerald is good at storytelling. His works are featured

by sensitivity and humor, verbal fluency and the rigorous structure. His writing talent also lies in the nature and verisimilitude dialogues which are full of rich individual characteristics (Li 2011). Apart from *The Great Gatsby*, other representative works of his novels are *This Side of Paradise* and *Tender Is the Night* and others. In terms of the short stories, the representative works are *Flappers and Philosophers*, *Tales of the Jazz Age* and *Babylon Revisited* and so on. There are few comedies among Fitzgerald's works. He pointed out that the contemporary tragedy and the irony style works bear the most profound and vivid personal and social reflection (Burt, 2005). He is a faithful recorder of people's survival plights by his works. He records broken dreams, records the wanton and luxurious lives and records fame temptations. There are also descriptions of characters whose attempts at self-salvations are futile and in vain. *Babylon Revisited* has records of the failed self-salvation of Charlie who is perplexed and lost in the past luxury and dissipation.

Religious ethics are meant to explore the relations between man and god in the world of religion. The tragic spirit hangs over the whole life of human. Whether human beings could get the salvation has become the central issue that is opposed with strong religious sensations and positive ethical values. The religious ethics thought Schopenhauer is the third turn over the western religious ethics thoughts, and it bears the model significance of modern religious ethics. The basic issue of moral self-discipline is not an easy problem in the researches of contemporary ethics and the actual practice of morality. It commands attentions and solutions to the difficulties and gap between the theory and the reality. It is Schopenhauer's religious ethics thought that has provided the resources for reference to this issue. Schopenhauer's religious ethics thought of religion and ethics provides a useful and theoretical reference to the relationship between the religious ethics and the secular

ethics. At the same time, Schopenhauer's religious ethics are also of great value significance as for re-examining the life value. Schopenhauer religious ethics thought is the core of his philosophy thoughts, and the three approaches of Schopenhauer's self-salvation thought are the core issue of Schopenhauer's religious ethics. Human beings who live in the affliction can search for the salvation from one's own intrinsic nature. They cannot believe in that the Noah's ark will be floated from the flood, and the humans can only save them by themselves (Wang, 2009).

Outside the system of his own philosophy thoughts, Schopenhauer has combined the Indian Buddhism doctrine and the early Christian doctrine with his religious ethics. He absorbed the early Christian doctrines, such as the original sin, the individualized principles, the unity of Christ and me and the nirvana. In terms of the three approaches of self-salvation, Schopenhauer has put forward three approaches, which are in different levels and tend to be a deepening process. The first approach of the self-salvation is the temporary relief from aesthetic contemplation by the control of will. The relief from the aesthetic contemplation makes people unaware of himself or herself, as well as the surroundings. The second approach of the self-salvation is the practice of virtue, and by the practice of virtue individualized principle is broken. The third approach of salvation is the sublation of oneself, which is achieved by the will abstinence. Thus, one can realize self-salvation, and the successful self-salvation is featured in belongs. This paper is based on the three approaches of Schopenhauer's self-salvation thought. It has interpreted Charlie's temporary relief result from the aesthetic contemplation; Charlie's absence in the practice of virtue; and Charlie's unfaithful will in terms of abstinence three angles. It has explored the reasons why Charlie failed to complete his self-salvation. It discusses the light of the tragedy in Charlie's hope and desire to return to his true self. Charlie wants to gain custody of his daughter from his sister-in-law Marion, to some extent, is the reflection of his self-salvation, where he wants to go back to his original life.

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## 1. THE TEMPORARY RELIEF, THE UNWARENESS OF SELF AND SURROUNDINGS IN THE AESTHETIC CONTEMPLATION

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Within a decade from the 1920s to the 1930s, the United States went through an unprecedented economic boom and falling into the abyss of the economic depression. The economic upheaval has a huge influence on people's psychology and behavior. As a consequence, social ethics value system is also affected by it. When the heat of the economic high fever is not retreated, it finds that chasing

money is the only goal in life and this goal makes people lost in ecstasy. The value which takes money as the center spreads in the society like the virus. The traditional morals collapse. After the great depression, Americans are gradually aware of the alienation between people. They find the money has established a wall between the most precious things and people. Because of the crazy chasing of money, people have ignored the really valuable things around for a long time. They have gone too far away from the real and meaningful life. As a result, more and more people convert to embrace the seeking for ethics of truth, beauty and kindness. The reflecting of values centered by money becomes a fashion. Most of people start the trip of soul returning. Fitzgerald has experienced the value changes by himself. He was profoundly affected by these experiences. With his clear and acute writing style, he recorded his meditation in the *Babylon Revisited*, which expressed his intensive and deep feelings over the changing value and pursuit in different times. In 1935, he completed this short story collection. The *Babylon Revisited* exhibited the corrosion hearts, souls, values, ideas and conceptions by money, along with material impact on the social ethics. This work truly conveys the soul and true self salvations, it advocates the returning to the traditional ethical values.

After the First World War, the United States has accumulated abundant of money from military and other fields. It became the richest countries in the world in a short period. At that time, the American spirit of the Crazy Time came into being. The unprecedented economic boom tempts people to pursue the dream of wealth. The luxurious and wasteful life style prevailed around the corner of America. The spiritual life of Americans has become impetuous and vulgar. Wealth and power lead to affluence and luxury. Affluence and luxury lead to decadence, corruption and decline. In order to cater to the evil that spends money like water, tides with the parties regardless day and night, there are herds of male prostitutes buzzing, exaggerated and scantily clad prostitutes wandering. The same with the most population, the couple of Charlie who had made a fortune on the stock is involved in the material pleasure seeking and enjoyment. Charlie takes revelry and delights in splurging money at the bar day and night. He is immersed in the material and sensuality indulging. However, behind the extravagant and dissipated endless life, there is sense of loss and emptiness which Charlie finds unable to get rid of.

In the aesthetic contemplation, the subject will go through the changing situation where the subject is lost in an illusion of loss in the object (Schopenhauer, 1982). The subject is integrated in the views. When the subject is devoted to the viewing, all the worries, pains and distress clam down in a moment. The subject is released and he or she is in a temporary state when he or she is unaware of self and surroundings in the aesthetic contemplation.

After the dinner with Marien, together with her keen and coldness attitude conversation, Charlie did not go back to the hotel immediately. He was curious to see Paris by night with clearer and more judicious eyes than those of other days. He bought a strapontin for the Casino and watched Josephine Baker go through her chocolate arabesques (Chen, Wang, & Kong, 2013). In the beautiful night of Praise and the wonderful performance of ballet, Charlie is immersed in the temporary relief. There is no more any sense of guilt. He is no more the chronic drunkard. He is no more the spenders who spend money like water. And he is more the one who has stolen the butcher's tricycle in the night (Ibid.). He used to be an irresponsible man. When he woke upon a fine fall day – a football weather, the depression of yesterday was gone and he liked the people on the streets (Ibid.). In he was lost in the relaxed and harmony scene, what went away was only last night's depression, but also the lost and confused Charlie in the past life. Surrounded by the fine weather and the satisfying scene, Charlie was totally free. He has obtained the temporary self-salvation owing to the peaceful and tender night. When Charlie painfully argued with Marien on the death of Helen, he gradually felt the decreasing hate tone of Marine, and he felt that it is possible that he could obtain the custody of his daughter. His shivering body regained peace and calm when the street of Bonaparte stretched to the dock was presented in front of him.

When he was crossing the river Seine, the bright light above the dock is very fresh, which brought him much pleasure. "A walk down the Rue Bonaparte to quais set him up, and as he crossed the Seine, fresh and new by the quais lamps, he felt exultant." (Ibid.) On the one hand, his emotion is closely linked with the attitude of Marine, with her criticism, her blame and the later ease and candid tone. He was in a state of ups and downs. On the other hand, the bright night comforted him and he was peaceful in mind. He was dreaming. He was awaking. He imagined his affectionate dialogue with Helen. He imagined Helen where she said that Charlie was perfectly right about Honoria and that she wanted Honoria to be with him (Ibid.). The expressions above are the embodiment when Charlie realized temporary relief in the view of tender night aesthetic contemplation. However, after the tender night, in the next day, there will be more difficulties and problems that Charlie has to face up to. In order to achieve the true salvation, Charlie will be ought to put more efforts and pay higher price.

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## 2. THE ABSENCE IN THE PRACTICE OF VIRTUE

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The temporary relief and the unawareness of self and surroundings in the aesthetic contemplation cannot stand

long. When the subject wants to achieve self-salvation, he or she has to break some of his or her personal principles and completes the practice of virtue. A wishful and successful principle of self-salvation is not easy to find. The salvation principle may be expressed by people's honesty, charity and even nobility. It will break through all the cycles of rebirth and bring in inspiration and liberation for all the new births. (Schopenhauer, 2004)The root of all virtue is sympathy, and the essence of all virtue is benevolence (Odell, 2001). In order to realize self-salvation, the subject has to practice virtue. The subject must spend efforts on sympathy and benevolence. On the one hand, Charlie himself paid no sympathy and benevolence to his old friends. On the other hand, Charlie's expectation to show his benevolence and affection to his daughter Honoria was impeded by his sister-in law Marine. As a result, the self-salvation way of Charlie was obstacle by the absence of virtue practice. His ignorance of sympathy and benevolence to his friends, and his sister-in-law Marine's interference in his sympathy and benevolence gave rise to the failure of his self-salvation. The self-salvation of human beings is very limited. Self-salvation cannot be separated from the rescue of others. Every salvation is the result of the combined efforts of self and the help of others. Otherwise, the self-salvation may be impossible. The self-salvation should be up to the recognition others, or the salvation road will be endless without the help of others' guidelines (Yu, 2005).

As for Charlie, the benevolence and kindness in his simple humanity started to awaken. The sense of responsibility that used to fade out gradually emerges. He knew stocks rise and fall, people loaf or work, but they go on forever. His life was recovered from disorders. His sense of responsibility grew in his mind. He was longing for family and for love. He was a totally fresh man. The recoveries and eagerness inspires him to go back to Babylon, Paris, where Charlie used to be defeated by life, where he had abandoned his expectations and lost his hope in life. He wanted the custody of his daughter. There were no more important things that could compare with his wish for his daughter. He was no more a young man. He could no more be as selfish as he used to be. When Charlie met his old friends Roland and Duncan, his immediate reaction was to avoid any connection with them. In spite of the fact that Roland and Duncan had spent a crazy and luxurious time with him, he thought them as intruders who caused him growing annoyance. He imagined as if he forced them backward down the corridor. When Charlie was to almost succeed in winning the recognition of Marine that she could rest assured in turn custody of Honoria to him, the sudden visit of Roland and Duncan ruined all his past efforts. When Roland and Duncan saw Charlie at the door of Marine's house, Duncan wagged his finger rougishly at Charlie "Ah-h-h". (Chen, Wang, & Kong,



2013) Roland even mentioned the past behaviors when Charlie was irresponsible and dissipated in front of all the Marine family with evil. She shouted: "I remember once when you hammered on my door at four A.M. I was enough of a sport to give you a drink." (Ibid.)

The frivolous and grandiose behavior of Roland reminded people's impression on Charlie when he was indifferent and of no morals. The fears and disgust that kind of life would make back caused Marine's withdraw of turning over Honoria's custody. In the end, Marion was totally disappointed at Charlie. All the efforts that Charlie had paid to win good impression from Marine were destroyed by the unexpected visit. To a further look on the issue, Charlie paid little sympathy for Roland when she was under the distress of economic and helpless. Moreover, he showed no kindness to the old friends but made every attempt to keep distance from them. In fact, Roland and Duncan liked Charlie. They like him because he was functioning, because he was serious; they wanted to see him, because he was stronger than they were now, because they wanted to draw a certain substance from his strength (Ibid.). It is possible that Roland and Duncan were also seeking for self-salvation. They were eager to get support and help from Charlie, even the mental support after some sincere conversations, who seemed to have started a new promising life. However, it turned out that Charlie was trying to avoid them and cut off any possible connections from them. He rudely rejected all possible way of getting in touch with them. As for friends, Charlie refused to offer any support or help. As for Charlie, Marine refused to give him second chance to start his new life with his daughter, or in other word, no faith in his salvation with sympathy and benevolence. In the face of Marine's cold and vicious blame, Charlie could no longer hold his emotions. A great wave of protectiveness went over him. He could do anything to strive for the custody of his daughter Honoria. He thought his daughter Honoria as if she were something no more conscious than a flower. He was eager to protect her. In the past, Charlie was strict and indifferent to his families. But now, he became tolerant and gentle. He tried to reset his new life filled with love and laugh. He was sympathy and tender to his daughter. He expected to compensate his daughter Honoria benevolence and paternal love that had been long absent in Honoria's life. Regardless of all the efforts made by Charlie, it seemed that Marine forgot that Charlie had worked hard for ten years, until he got lucky in the market. She did not lay any trust and faith in Charlie. Charlie's wish of reunion with his daughter was interrupted again and again. He had no chance to exhibit his sympathy and benevolence to his daughter, which means that he could not achieve his self-salvation. His could not reform from his past sin. The two ways hve led to the failure of Charlie's self-salvation. It is also the reason why Charlie still had no idea of his belongings.

### 3. THE UNFAITHFUL WILL IN TERMS OF ABSTINENCE

As the economy in the United States had witnessed the prime and flourishing time to the slack and recession situations, Charlie went through the lusts and confusions. His life was endangered. He was even trapped in mental destruction. For the rebirth, he gradually started his road to seek moral salvation and spiritual returning. After the dreams of chasing money and material pleasures bankrupt, people will be aware of the significance of rebuilding the value systems and living orders. More and more people have a brand new outlook on life and values. The establishment of a new ethical morality system has become the common wishes. Charlie started the attempts at abstinence. He tried to restore body and seriously set up his new business in Prague. At the same time, he began to spend time on reflecting on his life. He was no longer the walking corpse and running flesh as he used to be. He regarded money as useless material like bubbles in the illusory dream. He came to agree that the present was the thing-work to do and someone to love (Ibid.). It was in Praise where they ever led a debauchery and prodigal life. Charlie had witnessed the flourishing times came and disappeared, just like the shooting star across the sky. He also the witness of notorious characteristics, the misdeeds and the bankruptcy of the traditional values left by the after seeing the carnival indulgence in the debauchery and prodigal life. All the reflections made Charlie more ever aware of the importance to return to the true self, the importance of self-salvation. The revisit to Babylon means a lot to Charlie. He atoned for his sins that the misdeeds he had caused with the returning in spite of any other considerations. It was not only a trip of self-salvation but also the reflection of human nature, the pursuit of moral perfection. Moreover, it was the evidence that people began to abandon and clear the money-centered social values. It was negation of selfish human relationships. It was the confirmation that returning to self is the ultimate life goal.

Virtue practice is not the goal, but a means of salvation. When the differences between self and others, the individual principles are broken, there will be the emergency of selfless love. The selfless love is not under the control and limitation of time and space. It may be consciously to deny the effect of will implement. As a result of the will implement denying, the transition from virtue practice to the abstinence is achieved (Ibid.). Abstinence is way to be resistant to the control from the will so that the subject can be released from all kinds of pain and distress. In the end, the subject is likely to the ultimate self-salvation. The abstinence performance of Charlie was expressed in his efforts to quit alcohol and overcome its lust. In the material abundance and sensual pleasures temptations, it is easy for the subject

to get lost and be misguided in his or her life. After the determination of thoroughly reforming himself, Charlie tried to avoid the striking up conversation and flirting eyes of the women in the bars with reasonable and artful tricks in spite of the facts that he could still feel the charms of Marine were targeting at him. He had a clear and fresh mind that his own rhythm was different now (Ibid.). In face of the mounting aggression and anger of Marine, Charlie kept in mind that he must keep clamoring and be patient. He endured all the complaints from the Marine. In face of all the blame, he tried to modulate his inevitable resentment to the chastened attitude of the reformed sinner. He constantly comforted himself that he might win the custody of his daughter. When Marine took it a mistake that he locked his wife Helen on purpose, he did not argue for the truth. He told himself to keep calm. He does not want justified. He wanted Honoria. In spite of the fact that he found it was more difficult to endure than he expected, he stuck on it. He had a strict control on his drinking. When the bartender Alexander admired his capacity for liquor, he responded that he would stick to it all right (Ibid.). On the surface, Charlie's abstinence on drinking is decisive and determined. But when he ordered the vegetables and meat, he could not resist the temptation from Alexander and asked a bottle of alcohol. When he was refused by the nightclub because it was too crowded inside, he thought to himself he had to be damn drunk. (Ibid.). He wanted to pour out his dissatisfaction on endless alcohol. In most of the time, alcohol was still his hopes in his real life or in his illusions. His imagined that he was absolutely sure Helen would not have wanted him to be son alone. When Marine asked him how long he could keep himself off from alcohol in doubts, Charlie responded her with a weak 'forever'. He was even not positive or confidence in his abstinence on drinking. As for Charlie, there was still a lack of courage and perseverance on alcohol. He was unfaithful in his will be to abstinence. The unfaithful will was also the illustration and symbol of his failing self-salvation. As the past the prosperities went away, he failed to achieve his self-salvation. He was unable to find his belongings.

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## CONCLUSION

*Babylon Revisited* was Charlie's road to his self-salvation, which is behind clues of Charlie's strive and struggle to win over the custody of his daughter. However, he still was in the temporary relief from the aesthetic contemplation. He was stuck at the primary stage of self-salvation. His self-salvation was stopped on the surface. When the virtue practice was absent, and the abstinence will be shaking. Charlie was doomed to failure on the halfway of his self-salvation. The process of Charlie's self-salvation was broken. It would not come true for him to gain the custody of his daughter, nor was it possible for

him to start a brand new family life he had constructed in his mind. After all the luxurious life and confusion struggles, Charlie was still in the stray. Charlie's self-salvation was in the phase of narcissism. He did not pay enough attention to the salvation of others. He also ignored that the force of others might make a big difference. Moreover, he was aware of the significance of will, but he thought light of the consequence of shaking will. On the way to self-salvation and return to the true self, the individual principles should be broken. The will and determination should be confirmed. Only when the three approaches are completed can be a new self and new life is presented.

The *Babylon Revisited* for Charlie's is a moral belief returning for Fitzgerald himself. The relationship maintaining among people which is centered by money and merely relies on mutual economic interests will inevitably lead to depression and self-lost. Only by returning, self-discipline, rationality and responsibility can one lead a fresh and pure life. More importance should be attached to the goodness and love between people. The life purpose should set as the pursuit of the moral perfection of the subject. These are all the avocations that Fitzgerald tried to convey when he shaped Charlie's revisiting to *Babylon*. The spiritual pursuit of Charlie behind his striving for his daughter's custody is the advocated values Fitzgerald expressed. In 1939, when Fitzgerald wrote to his daughter, he said: "I feel I am a moralist in essence. I sincerely explore ways appealing to people. I spare no effort to figure out ways that are acceptable to people and try to expostulate with people rather than please them (Phillips, 1985). It is the representative writers like Fitzgerald that explore the self-lost. The explorations helped Americans acknowledge the depressions and confusions. It contributed to the awareness of Americans to keep the true self under the shadows of The Great Depression. As time went by, America gradually restored its national spirit. The normal and standard social relations were newly established. The pursuit of life value, the salvation of the soul of the subject and the returning of the traditional morality and ethics are the inspirations for Fitzgerald's writings for a long time, as well as the necessity for the construction of healthy personality. Looking back on Fitzgerald's contemplation to maintain true self and pursue perfect human nature, it will be the alert to prevent the ethical and moral decay. As a result, the direction of China's construction of spiritual civilization can be rationally selected and maintained.

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