

Analysis of Feminist Consciousness in the Jane Eyre

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Abstract

Feminism refers to the social theory and political movement created and launched to end sexism, sexual exploitation, sexual discrimination and sexual oppression. In literature, feminist criticism mainly focuses on how gender influences the creation and interpretation of literary works, and its topics include discrimination, stereotype, objectification, body, oppression and patriarchy. In this paper, using Feminist Theory and Text Analysis to explore the heroine Jane Eyre, who has the emotional entanglement with Rochester. Jane Eyre dare to pursue love, fighting against unfair rules, presenting the real image of women, who is the classic symbol of western awakening feminist consciousness, gradually women start to fight, to pursue their own rights and interests. In a word, the purpose of this study is to improve the status of women today, promote the full play and all-round development of women's, and at the same time help change the inequality situation between men and women, promote people to live in harmony and stable society.

Key words: Jane Eyre, Robert Rochester, Feminist consciousness.

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INTRODUCTION

Jane Eyre is a great novel written by Charlotte Brontë. It tells a love story between Jane Eyre and Robert Rochester in the 19th century. Jane Eyre is such a great novel that it holds an important position in the history of British literature. It has been translated into various languages and adapted for movie, dazzling generations of readers all through the world.

It is mainly about an orphan girl, Jane Eyre, who was adopted at her uncle's home when she was a child. Her uncle hated her very much. After her uncle died, she was sent to a church school, where she suffered many torments. A few years later, at about eighteen, she left the purgatory school and went to a manor as a governess. Then she fell in love with Mr. Rochester, the man who owned the manor. And just as they were getting married, she learned that the man had a wife, a madman. So she left sadly and was saved by St. Johns. However, she found a secret that they were cousins and inherited a large legacy. One day, Jane Eyre had a dream, in which Rochester was calling her. Then Jane was back to Thornfield Hall, who was injured and blind and the castle was ruined by a fire

accident. At last they live together and they all got the happiness.

Jane Eyre is a distinguished female character in this novel. Jane Eyre is neither a very beautiful woman, nor rich, and the soul of the Jane Eyre is to fight against unfair rules, presenting the real image of women. But she is an independent woman, who takes a positive and progressive attitude toward love, life, society and religions and who dares to fight for the liberty and equality.

Feminist Theories and Methodology

In the past century, there are many women movements bursting in many places of world. The first wave of women's movement emerged in the late 19th century and early 20th century. In this period, the high tide was bursting for having right of voting. After sixty years, the second wave was coming; sweeping many countries. It shows the traits of wilder and deeper than the first women's movement. It appeared in most fields including politic, economy, culture, employment, welfare and many others fields. It mainly focused on the women situation and the sense of existent. Just in

this environment, the Feminist Criticism started and being.

2.1. Feminist Critical Theories

In the developing process of Feminist Critical theory in literature, different researchers tried to give the definition of this term. However, from different angle, they give different definitions.

From Elaine Showalter, one of the leading feminist critics in the United States, he thinks the feminine developing has three phases. The first period is in the 1840s-1880s. During this period, writers tried to imitate the traditional regulate which rules that society. The second phase is in the 1880-1920, in which they try to pay attention to the minority rights and protested for the rights which must be used it from birth. The last phase that is from the 1920s to present. In the third time, the feminist is not trying to find someone who hates the women character in the male texts, and they turn their attention to the women writer, to find the deep meaning in their text and attempt to explain in many ways from the point view of feminist.

As for me, I think the Feminist Critical theory tries to explain the how power imbalance due to gender in the literary texts. That is to say, the fixed unfair realistic environment reflects in the literary texts, and from this literary text, we attempt to analyze the unfair situation between man and women. Just in this process, they paid more attention to the group of women in the patriarchal society, which was filled with the patriarchal culture that the man is better than women in doing every things.

2.2 Feminist Critical Methods

Feminist consider the different result from the gender. Now even everyone knows the sentence "Man is equal with woman", but in reality, it is not so accordingly. In fact, it exists various inequalities in the world. For example, in China, nearly every woman is persuaded by the belief that you must server your family, and if necessary, you must give up your job after having the kids and return to the family life because your husband has the obligation to earn money to support the family. The task of women is to take care of the baby, the grandparents and to keep the clearness of the home in every minute. In the large extent, women are not equal with men. In some ways we had the fixed impression of women, who must take the burden of taking care of the family members. If a woman takes good care of their family, then we will think she is a good wife and a good mother. But if a woman does not abide by these rules and choose to work even after having the baby, in some extent, we do not think she is a qualified wife and mother. The impression of "good women" and the "bad women" is the stereotype of the other males to build in the hundred and thousand patriarchy history. Now with the developing of economy, the cultural environment is changing and the

opinion about women is gradually becoming more objectively under the harder working by the Feminist. In this process. With the women's living situation becoming larger, the female feel more relaxed, but the most important is that in the female's heart and soul, women are really equal with men.

In the western society, where exist complex situation. The feminist movement, not only fights for the political right, but know you absolutely. From the inner world the outer world. The white women struggle for their vote right through many ways and have the same freedom to live and work as same as the male. Comparing the feminist movement with the white women, the female coloured race meets the large troubles in fighting for their rights. For instance, the black women were not only oppressed by the male, but they were still suppressed by the discrimination between the white race and other races. Therefore, the black women are lower than their black male, white male and even the white women. Thus, when considered the black feminism movement, we must take the discrimination into the account. However, in literature, many black writer aims to reveal the tough environment that circles the black women except for the discrimination. As the development of the economy, this culture starts changing, but this consciousness carving in the people's minds whoever a man and a woman, it is not a moment that we can change from root. In a word, the black and other race female is still the center of Feminist Critical theory in literature.

Feminist critical theory in literature hopes to find how it has functions through the text to strength the patriarchal system in the fixed society. In the developing process of Feminist Critical theory, it suffers many troubles. Therefore, the feminists tried to borrow theory from other Critical theory. Many Feminists seek the available ways from the Psychological approach and the Marxist critical theory and other critical theory. For example, many Feminists are willing to research the Freud theory and intend to find some rules to help feminism study. They consider the psychological theory can help us to analyze the psychological reason of patriarchy consciousness which exist in the mind of nearly most men and women. Additionally the Marxist theory can help us to answer the question about why the economic power is constrained by the law and custom of patriarchy system. And make the group of women become oppressed in terms of economy, culture, and politics. For instance, in the *Great Gatsby*, written by F. Scott Fitzgerald, we will find many texts can be explained from the point of Feminist Critical theory. As for me, the author thinks the Feminist Critical literature will not fade its color because they can borrow the methods from other literature theory.

Feminist consciousness embodied in *The Jane Eyre*

3.1. The pursuit of equality in love

The stage of childhood is very important because it affects a person's attitude towards life. But little Jane was not so lucky. In her aunt's house, she was regarded as a "bad animal" and was humiliated everywhere. When Jane grows up, the feminist consciousness start awakening. Then, she starts to fight against unfair rules, to pursue true love and equality in love.

On the way back to Thornfield after sending an email, Jane sees her owner for the first time. Hearing the sound of a horse sliding, Jane stepped forward to help, but was rejected. This aroused her interest. In their first relatively long conversation, they talked about appearance, superiority, inferiority and even talked about Mr. Rochester's past. Both of them were very sincere and straightforward in telling the truth. Jane began to be important to Rochester, and she began to realize that Rochester was also important to her. Then, they fall in love. However, even she is in love with Rochester, Jane still keeps a clear mind of rationalizing herself and keeping her integrity. She tries to be equal with him. Even when she meets Miss Ingram who is a beautiful, elegant and rich lady, she not feels inferior, and she still think she is the best girl for Rochester as a wife. Jane, an ordinary girl, transcends secular traditional concepts. She claimed that marriage is not equal to a trade contract, but a free union of hearts. She believes that even though she may encounter many painful things, her personality can be maintained. In the process of pursuing love and happiness, Jane Eyre has never stopped striving for freedom, equality and human dignity. According to Jane, apart from money and social experience, she is spiritually equal to her master. Of course, in front of him, she did not feel depressed and discriminatory. In Jane's view, a person will never lose a person's value and human dignity. Otherwise, he would not have the meaning of being a man. For this reason, she would rather give up everything, strive for equality and defend dignity. So, in their wedding ceremony, when Jane finds that Rochester had a wife, the madwoman in the attic. She determines to leave him resolutely and immediately. she does not behave like the common girls would, she does not cry, nor have a quarrel with Rochester. She does nothing but accept the fact. Lately , On hearing Rochester's calling, Jane hurries to leave. Jane comes back to Thornfield Hall, only to find it in ruins. When Rochester really appeared before her eyes, she was full of a mixture of sadness and joy, Knowing that Rochester's wife was killed in the fire, the once unshakable barrier disappeared. Therefore, Jane decides to marry Rochester, who is bland and no fortune. His misfortune cannot eliminate Jane's love, because their love is not based on appearance, money or social status. When he loss that, they achieve a balance and equality in the soul. The love story proves that Jane Eyre is not

only an ordinary girl; she is a remarkable woman who have thoughtful thoughts and know what is she really want to do.

3.2 The pursuit of economic independence in love

Jane Eyre has a miserable childhood and was send to Lowwood School. During the eight years at there, despite the terrible food, poor clothing, strict doctrine, and poor living environment, she worked hard to learn everything the school taught. After graduating from there, she posted an advertisement, found a job as a tutor in a private home and finally got a job. This is a very important turning point in Jane's life. Because when she was a child, she was looked down upon because of relying on Mrs. Reid, so finding a job was of great significance to her. Although the tutor is of low status, Jane can support herself by herself and become a financially independent woman. This job does not only give her a fair salary, but also enables her to meet the most important person in her life--- Mr. Rochester. Spiritual similarities and mutual trust make the two falls in love with each other in spite of their difference in social status and wealth. Jane loves Rochester, not because of his wealth, nor because of his social status, but because of his sincerity and spiritual equality with her.

When Jane got a large inheritance, she proudly said: "I am an independent woman now"; "I am my own master". Economic independence eventually makes her completely independent. Jane has said that if God had gifted her with some beauty and much wealth, she should have made it as hard for Rochester to leave her as it was for her to leave him. What she has said becomes true, they are united, and Jane realizes her great ambition. Jane firmly grasped her financial independence, which further ensured her spiritual freedom. She has never wavered in her steps towards ultimate freedom, whether materially or spiritually. Generally speaking, economic status is a necessary way to obtain spiritual freedom.

In a word, Jane Eyre tries her best to pursue economic independence and she achieves the targets. At the Victorian Age, women were refined only in home. They have no right to do many things, like finding a job or writing a book. They must rely on a man, so they can live a better life in this world. They must obey the identity, which constructed by the whole society dominated by man. It is seldom to see an independent heroine in literature, which totally shows the awakening of feminist consciousness at that era.

CONCLUSION

Jane Eyre written by Charlotte Brontë. It is a typical, classic and interesting book in British literature history, which tells a Bildungsroman Story of Jane Eyre. It describes the whole growth adventure from an orphan child to a beautiful, sensible girl.

Many people think that *Jane Eyre* is an autobiography, which reflects the true life of Charlotte Brontë. So this book can be regarded as the awakening of feminist consciousness of her. May be this feminist consciousness generates in her experiences. Charlotte Brontë's life spanned the gap between the old and new feminist periods. As Brontë sisters suffer a lot in their life: the early death of their mothers and sisters, the failure of trying to make her own living, the isolation from the society, so they form a very strong character even influencing her attitude toward the social role of a woman. Therefore, she clearly expounded her views on the social class and the status of women in the Victorian era. In *Jane Eyre*, in which she describes Jane's eagerness for freedom and free love, for equality with Mr. Rochester, attracted many feminist readers.

Learning *Jane Eyre's* spirit of pursuing equality and economic independence in love helps us to have clear awareness of that society, and to build a comprehensive picture for their country and to learn the inspiring ideas to support Modern Feminist Movement. Therefore, through the study of this paper, the author hopes to improve the self-consciousness of contemporary women, promote the self-awakening of women's knowledge, and pursue the life they want with independence and courage.

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