

A Comparative Study of Wuthering Heights and Pride and Prejudice from a Feminist Perspective

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Abstract

With the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism, the status of women gradually rose, and a large number of feminist writers emerged at this time. They began to pay attention to the injustice suffered by women and thought about the fate of women from their point of view. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* focus on women's values and desire for freedom and equality during the heyday of British capitalism, and both break the stereotypical settings of women in previous literature, reflecting the awakening and development of women's consciousness. In this paper, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* are selected as the objects of study, comparing and contrasting the reasons for and the specific manifestations of the female consciousness of the main characters, Catherine and Elizabeth.

Keywords

Wuthering Heights; Pride and Prejudice; Feminine consciousness; Comparison.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Feminism" is a social theory and political movement that emerged from the women's liberation movement to fight for women's rights, eliminate gender discrimination and promote equality between men and women. After the mid-19th century, with the awakening of women's consciousness, many women participated in the movement for women's emancipation and equal rights, thus forming a historical trend of women's pursuit of freedom, independence and emancipation that continues to this day. The feminist perspective is based on feminist theories and looks at issues from the perspective of women's psychology, which is valuable in understanding women's spiritual and psychological needs.

Women's literature and women writers have long been the focus of academic attention for their unique social perspectives and emotional portrayals. Britain was the first country in the world to embrace capitalism, and with the powerful social changes brought about by economic development, women became politically and ideologically conscious earlier and more thoroughly than in other European and American countries. From Jane Austen to Mrs. Gaskell and Emily Brontë, the women writers of the 19th century have provided me with a myriad of literary feasts. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* focuses on a group of women who have been kept out of society's spotlight and underground, and is narrated from a female point of view, giving readers a whole new perspective on women. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, on the other hand, depicts three strong female characters - Catherine, Kitty, and Isabella - through two families, revealing a very strong sense of modern femininity and the true status of women in society at the time.

2. REASONS FOR THE AWAKENING OF FEMINIST THOUGHT

(I) Social Influence

Jane Austen and Emily Bronte both lived in the 19th century, from the end of the 18th century, at the beginning of the development of capitalism, the economy and society have undergone radical changes, the industrial revolution has made the division of labor become the greatest advantage of production, the way of women's realization of value is not only parochial, they are more and more dissatisfied with the degree of their own realization of value and the environment, and realize that the law, society and morality of women's injustice and discrimination, and question their rights and status. and question their rights and status. [1]They find that most women were previously unaware of their rights and their rights to defend them in a patriarchal society where all men were recognized as equal and women were held back by the chains of prejudice and injustice. Women began to realize the importance of their spiritual emancipation as independent individuals, and began to think about their own identity and responsibilities, and thus began to seek self-worth. At the same time, the awakening of women's thinking in England prompted the people of that era to begin theoretical research on women's legal rights, and their research results laid the foundation for the pursuit of equality and freedom for future generations of women. It was against this social background that the early awareness of women's awakening was later instilled in Jane Austen's works. From a female perspective, she reconstructed the power and status of women relative to men and fully affirmed equality between men and women.

(ii) Author's personal experience

Charlotte Bronte once wrote, "My sister Amelia loves the moors. The moors were full of flowers more colorful than roses, and the dark valleys were like heaven on earth in her mind. In this desolate solitude, many delights were precious. But what struck her straight to the depths of her heart, what she loved most, was freedom." Emily spoke only of the Howarth moor where she lived, and in her work, "moor," "sky," "dark clouds," "snow." The words "mountain" and "valley" appear with great frequency. And Emilia's sensual, reserved, and untamed personality naturally translates into her favorite images of nature. These images of nature are not unique to Emilia, but few writers have given them such power. For most of the thirty years of her life, except for a brief stint as a teacher in a girls' school and a study trip to Brussels, she lived in her native land. She avoided society and miscommunicated with people.[2] She loved to walk in the Warehouse Desert. The pure and harsh nature symbolizes the unfettered and strong nature of human life. She had a passion for the moors and was a daughter of the Yorkshire moors. In her secluded life, she indulges her imagination and gives vent to her long-held emotions in the form of words. She tapped into the deepest parts of human consciousness, became one with nature, and expressed them in images that bordered on madness.

Jane Austen was born in Steventon, Hampshire, England to a well-to-do family. Although Jane Austen did not attend a formal school, the excellent family conditions and reading environment gave her a good opportunity to be self-taught and developed her interest in writing. [3]Jane Austen spent a quarter of her life in her hometown. However, after her father unexpectedly retired, she had to sell Jane's piano in order to make a living and thus moved to Bath. Jane and her sister Sandra were educated at home most of the time and occasionally went to school, but they received a much higher level of education compared to the women of that era. She began writing at an early age for family entertainment and both her parents were avid readers. Jane's own favorite poet was Cowper. Her first works date back to 1787.

3. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WUTHERING HEIGHTS AND PRIDE AND PREJUDICE FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

(I) Comparative Analysis of Marriage Views

Pride and Prejudice and Wuthering Heights are two works about the love and marriage of Victorian women. In these two works, the writers believe that love and marriage should not depend on men only, women can also boldly pursue their own happiness, and true love will not yield to the world, and will not deteriorate because of external interference. Jane Austen believed that love is important, but the material foundation is also essential, the lack of material protection of love will be a scattered sand. But Emily Bronte holds a different view, she believes that the relationship between men and women in love is equal, their relationship should not be judged by money and social status, really marriage is the heart of the fit. [4] However, Emily Brontë's "utopian" view was constrained by the reality that the class gap and the economic power gap will often cause great obstacles to a relationship, which is also reflected in Emily's novel "Wuthering Heights" in a very specific and obvious.

Jane Austen's Lydia and Wickham's marriage shows readers to a large extent the importance of material conditions for marriage. Young Lydia loves vanity, and before she met Wickham, she always went to observe the bright and shiny civil regiment on the outside, and later fell in love with Wickham, who was good at flowery language. But their shallow fondness is not enough to bring them together in marriage, and it is only after Mr. Darcy helps Wickham find a job and gives him a large sum of money that Wickham agrees to marry Lydia. Then, the roots of the marriage between the two is basically unstable how to talk about the long term, after the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Wickham did not spend money ideas, generous, Wickham's meager income is not enough to support the two too high expectations of life. They quarreled often and their marriage was unhappy. Through their story, Jane Austen cautioned the public that illusory love is not reality and that marriage without a foundation of wealth is fragile. The marriages of Mr. Bingley and Jane, Elizabeth and Darcy not only have enviable love, but also have independent thinking and certain ability, the love between them is to have a certain economic foundation for the report to escort, and ultimately the two pairs of love are very successful. This shows how enviable it is to support their marriage with love and wealth. "Wealth" does not mean an abundance of money, but it is indispensable; a happy marriage does not need great wealth, but enough "bread" for life

Catherine, the protagonist of Emily Bronte's novel Wuthering Heights, on the other hand, is highly autonomous and distinctly feminine. Catherine is of noble status, while Heathcliff is a mere gypsy outcast. Yet their love is not tainted by human hypocrisy and the temptation of gain. Their life in the wilderness is the embodiment of a primitive love, full of wild nature, wild passion, and a high degree of soulfulness.[5] Even after her marriage to Linton, Catherine's only solace in her lonely hours was to sit alone by the window, looking out over the Wyvern Heights rising in silvery mists, listening to the murmur of the streams rising in the valley of Gimmerton, and reminiscing of the happy, carefree hours she had spent there with Heathcliff. Memories of the moors and thoughts of Heathcliff help Catherine to survive the bleak days of loneliness and melancholy. Though in a painted world, Catherine often lets her soul wander into the wild and vibrant wilderness.

(II) Comparative Analysis of Women's Sense of Resistance

Both works show the sense of female resistance that the authors want to express through the practices adopted by the main characters in terms of life and marriage. Both Catherine and Elizabeth despise some stereotypes and dare to pursue their own happiness. However, the treatment of the ending is different. In Pride and Prejudice, Elizabeth's formal resistance and disobedience attracts Darcy's attention, and the two of them finally have a "happy ending"

despite their misunderstanding. Catherine, on the other hand, succumbs to the world, marries Linton and ends up depressed. Some researchers have described Catherine's death as a liberation of the soul in the novel's ending, in which the hero and the heroine finally break free from the bondage of the world and the body, and gain the freedom and liberation of the spirit and the soul.

Although Catherine was born in a feudal society, she stood out for her desire for freedom and passion. She rejects the life of an upper-class lady and ignores religious rituals. Her rebellion against the stereotypes around her shows the awakening of the female consciousness in her. While girls her age loved to play with dolls, she loved to ride horses. Catherine lived in a time of darkness, uncertainty and hope for women, where women were unable to speak out, to justify their rights and to make their claims. They projected their anger and injustice into their actions and behaviors. In the face of the overwhelming social environment and dire situation, Catherine struggles to free herself from depression and anxiety, hoping to be free from the constraints and oppression of external forces, and to be with the one she loves for the rest of her life. Eventually, due to the pressure of Linton and the frustration of Heathcliff, she loses the courage to go on with her life. After the premature birth of little Catherine, her body, mind and soul are emptied and she becomes unbearable. Unable to cope with the pain and depression and what had happened, she ended her life. Death takes her soul out of her body and takes her back into the wilderness where she belongs. It becomes a symbol of the freedom of the soul that the characters yearn for. The wilderness is Catherine's home and paradise where she frees her soul and finally accomplishes the restoration of her perfect self-expression.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, the author expresses his contempt for the world of her time through the heroine Elizabeth, who dares to say no to worldly manners. For example, she braves the rain to travel through the countryside to visit her sick sister, and she arrives at the party in a manner that is contrary to the world, whereas it is inappropriate for a lady, who is supposed to stay at home, to attend the party in a dignified manner in this era. On the other hand, talents such as playing the piano were also an important yardstick for judging whether a woman conformed to the prevailing social attitudes of the time, and when Mrs. Lucas inquired about Jane's specialties, she responded perfunctorily, as she thought that these talents were not worth mentioning, but were just backward attitudes and prejudices of the society. When she realizes that the social tendency of the time is to base marriages on wealth and social status, she does not lose herself and chooses to bravely pursue her love. It is this perseverance that leads to the twists and turns of her marriage with Darcy, but it is also Elizabeth's perseverance that leads Darcy to pay more attention to her, to understand her better, and to be willing to go further with her. Through the portrayal of Elizabeth, Jane Austen wanted to convey to her readers her resistance and disdain for the traditional worldly manners that oppressed women in society at the time. This was still a leap in feminist thinking at that time.

(III) Comparative Analysis of Creative Perspectives

Jane Austen describes the narrative of *Pride and Prejudice* from the female perspective. This form of creation is completely different from the mainstream male narrative perspective in literature at that time, and it breaks through to let women become the protagonists of the novel, expresses the reality of social life at that time from the point of view of ordinary women, and lets women make their strongest voice of freedom for the first time. *Pride and Prejudice* is written in the third person, which not only allows the protagonist to express her thoughts freely and equally without the limitations of time and space, but also highlights the protagonist's distinctive personality and character traits and encourages readers to think about the protagonist's marital experience.

Emily Bronte externalizes the legitimacy of the narrative in *Wuthering Heights* by using Lockwood and Nelly as the narrative point of view and constructing a "female voice"

traditionally owned or defined by the authority of the educated white male narrator. This is an important prerequisite for her self-authorization within the socio-historical conditions of her time. However, it is clear that the ultimate purpose of Emily's writing is not to support and validate, or even submit to, this male-dominated fictional authority. As Susan Lanzer puts it, "The authority of the narrator succumbs to some internal overarching narrative voice, with the result that it becomes haphazardly disorganized. This all-encompassing narrative voice is in fact a logical and rigorous narrative technique. In the novel, there is not only the self-monologue and narration of the experienced and respected narrator, but also the global overview from God's point of view, which makes the characters of the novel be portrayed in a fuller and more three-dimensional way. This construction itself is for better deconstruction, and the narrative authority constructed by the narrative voices of Lockwood and Nelly is ultimately deconstructed by the hidden senior narrative voice, the personalized female narrative authority belonging to Emily, who is fictionalized in this hidden narrative voice.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a comparative study of *Wuthering Heights* and *Pride and Prejudice* from a feminist perspective highlights the differences in the portrayal of women in the two novels. While both novels were written during the same time period, they present vastly different perspectives on women's roles and capabilities. *Pride and Prejudice* presents a more traditional view of women, where marriage and family are the ultimate goals. The female characters in the novel are portrayed as delicate, beautiful, and in need of protection and guidance from men. However, the novel also highlights the importance of intelligence, wit, and character in a woman, and how these qualities can lead to a successful and happy marriage. On the other hand, *Wuthering Heights* challenges traditional gender roles and presents a more complex and nuanced view of women. The female characters in the novel are strong, independent, and unafraid to challenge societal norms and expectations. They are portrayed as complex and flawed individuals, capable of making their own decisions and taking control of their own lives. Overall, a feminist perspective on these two novels reveals the limitations and stereotypes imposed on women during the time period. While *Pride and Prejudice* presents a more traditional view of women, *Wuthering Heights* challenges these norms and presents a more complex and realistic portrayal of female characters. Through the lens of feminism, we can gain a deeper understanding of the roles and expectations imposed on women during this time period, and how these expectations have evolved over time.

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