



Analysis of Female Consciousness and Female Image in British and American Literature

Lanlan Cai

Quanzhou Normal University, Quanzhou 362000, Fujian, China

DOI: 10.32629/jher.v3i2.738

Abstract: Feminism has always played an important role in British and American literature. Like issues such as racial discrimination, the civil rights movement, and the transgender movement, writers will not forget to show the protagonist's female awareness in their works. In recent years, led by celebrities and various feminist organizations, a new wave of feminism has been making waves around the world. The popularity of women's topics continues unabated, and feminist literary works are increasingly presented to the public. This paper starts from the feminism in British and American literature, analyzes the female images in some classic British and American literature, and expounds the influence of the embodiment of female consciousness on British and American literature.

Keywords: British and American literature, female image, female consciousness

1. The rise of women's literature in British and American literature

Women's literature originated in the 1940s and 1950s. It is a literary form with women as the subject of creation and speech. Women's literature is the result of the development of the feminist movement in the West. Women begin to break the shackles of patriarchy, and no longer serve as the object and aesthetic object of male desire, but write their own real and unique life experience. Women's literature is closely related to British and American literature. In the splendid British and American literary works of the twentieth century, women's literature and the feminist movement sweeping the world complement each other, adding a new color to the literary world. After two phases of imitation and advocacy for minority rights and protests by female writers, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the third phase of women's literature, British and American writers and critics began to rediscover women the text and women put themselves in the shoes of women to think about women's mastery of fate, showing the awakening consciousness of women's subjects.

2. Female images in British and American literature

2.1 The image of women in the early traditional British and American literature

The awakening of female consciousness in British and American literature is long and tortuous. The images of women in literary works of different eras and stages are not the same, and the characters show the unique cultural imprint of the times. For example, in early medieval literature, under the description of male writers, women were mostly discriminated against or degraded, showing a mean, secular, conservative, and canon-abiding image. In some of the literary works of the Middle World, the author exerts the imagination of women to the extreme. Women are both the carrier of virtue and the source of happiness, gentle and considerate, waiting for romantic love with the knight. The image of women depends on the attitude of male writers. The poet Walter von Del Foggweed tried his best to praise the lady he loved in his poems, but when there was no response, he dealt with the lady in indifferent attitude: "If I stop singing, her honor will also vanish." This attitude actually treats women as vassals of men who have no independent personality, and the description of women is one-sided and superficial. Women need to abide by the laws of patriarchal society unconditionally, and men usually have absolute dominance over women, which was the common creative view of women by male writers and poets at that time.

2.2 Female image and female consciousness in British and American female literature

In the Renaissance period, the whole of Europe experienced a mighty ideological revolution, and the spirit of humanism began to appear on the stage. Under the "people-centered" initiative, literary works also advocated the liberation of human personality and actively pursued the happiness of real life against the shackles of religious theocracy. The West ushered in a period of ideological emancipation, and the feminist consciousness was about to emerge. For example, in Boccaccio's Decameron, women not only had beautiful appearance, but also had the brave spirit of independent resistance. They were kind, pure, and dared to pursue their own freedom and love. After the Industrial Revolution, women's literature in British and American literature showed a new situation of prosperity and development, and gradually matured in the 20th century.

Technological innovation has not only brought about changes in the economic base, but also made people's thinking gradually jump out of the patriarchal framework. More and more women were aware that they were under the oppression of patriarchy, while men had historically enjoyed a privileged position over women. Women in this period began to seek their own career development, to fight for women's political rights, and to fight for freedom. Therefore, in British and American literary works, the shaping of female images has also changed. More and more female writers began to be active in literary creation. They advocated equality between men and women. Women broke free from the shackles of tradition and bravely pursued love and career. Women presented images of bravery, independence and rebellious spirit in their writings. Perhaps the status of women writers in the eighteenth century was not so respected by society, but after the civil rights movement and the feminist movement in the nineteenth century, women's literature began to spring up in British and American literature. The most representative works of Jane Austen, George Eliot and the Bronte sisters, such as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, as well as *Divergent*, *Little Women*, *Island* and other typical excellent works about the awakening of women's consciousness.

3. Analysis of the significance of embodying feminist consciousness in British and American literature

3.1 Helping women to awaken their consciousness and realize self-development

The essence of literature is anthropology. To care about literature is to care about "people" themselves. Literary works represent social culture and have a very profound impact on people. British and American literary works have long been concerned and loved by the world, and to a certain extent represent the world's mainstream thoughts and interests. Therefore, the embodiment of female consciousness in British and American literature will help more female compatriots to see how the women in the works use their wisdom and courage to fight against the oppression and exploitation of the patriarchal society, and how to overthrow the unreasonable rule and disintegrate male hegemony, thereby awakening women's subjectivity in real life, getting rid of the "other" position, combining the principles of feminism with their own unique life experience in practice, and sending out the true voice of women to the world. At the same time, it also inspired the growth of more female writers. For a long time women were banned from writing, and writing was a right reserved for men with cultural capital in the bourgeoisie. Even after the emergence of female writers, their works were often ignored and despised by society and male writers. Regarding the work of *Jane Eyre*, many critics even bluntly expressed their own sexist remarks, "If this book is written by a man, it is a masterpiece, if it is written by a woman, it is shocking and shocking disgust." Therefore, female literature in British and American literature encourages more female authors to create. For example, Joe in *Little Women* earned the first pot of gold in his life by writing serial novels for newspapers and magazines, and was able to subsidize his family. The embodiment of female consciousness in British and American literature is a resistance to the suppression of female writing.

3.2 Attacking the patriarchal society and deconstructing the patriarchal order

The feminist movement in the nineteenth century has a strong impact on the order of the male-dominated society. Feminist literature in British and American literature continued to emerge, further declaring the collapse of the traditional patriarchal and male hegemonic order. In *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine couldn't bear to let go of her wealthy mountain life, and at the same time developed a love with Heathcliff that went against the moral principles of the society at that time. Her conflicting desire for love makes it difficult for her to escape the tragic fate of death. The presentation of women's tragic images in British and American literary works strongly attacked the moral and ethical views of the patriarchal society, and accused the male order of suppressing women's subjectivity. From a historical perspective, the reason why women's literature was born and developed in a modern liberal and democratic society is due to the introduction of the modern value dimension of "subjectivity": people are born with self-consciousness and free will, so they also have innate control over themselves: rights and decisions. Although the rise of the feminist movement itself indicates the deconstruction of the patriarchal order, the shaping of female images in British and American literature and the embodiment of the awakening of female consciousness have allowed the ideological and spiritual core of feminism to further eliminate the social situation of male hegemony. Feminist literature in British and American literature breaks the veil of male discourse, allowing women to write and record real female experiences. Women are no longer the aestheticized objects in the patriarchal order, but the subjects with self-awareness and creativity. After experiencing the brutal Civil War, *Scarlett* in *Gone with the Wind* no longer blindly ignores the country and politics, but relies on the wisdom of her own hands to rebuild her life. *Scarlett's* transformation process not only reflects the awakening of women's independent consciousness, but also shows people's pursuit of self-worth.

4. Conclusion

The independence, self-awareness and rebellious spirit presented by the female characters portrayed in British and American literary works represent the current mainstream culture of British and American society and have distinct characteristics of the times. Its subjectivity construction in literary works reflects the awakening of women's consciousness in British and American society, and is also the result of the improvement of women's social status. In recent years, female characters in British and American literary works have become more intellectual, intelligent, strong, and have a strong spirit of resistance, which reflects the respect for women's human rights and the release of human nature in British and American societies. It has aroused strong attention in the world literature circle. Therefore, the successful shaping of female characters has become a major feature of British and American literature, and it is an important way for us to understand British and American literary works today. Women's issues are still a hot spot of social concern, and feminism has developed into the post-epidemic era, showing its unique characteristics. Feminist literature will appear richer in content and form.

References

- [1] Wu Yaqi, Guo Xinxin. The development of British and American literature from the perspective of women [J]. *Young Writers*, 2020(14).
- [2] Wang Ying. Discussion on the dignity of female images and realistic tragedy in British and American literature [J]. *Young Writers*, 2020(30).
- [3] Yu Dan. Feminism in British and American Literature and Its Influence [J]. *Art Science and Technology*, 2017(1).
- [4] Liu Ying, Yao Haiyan. Eugenics and Feminism: Reinterpretation of British and American Feminist Literature Classics [J]. *Journal of Tianjin University (Social Science Edition)*, 2019(6).