

Feminism in Harry Potter from the Perspective of Transcendentalism

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Abstract

Based on the previous researches and their relative deficiencies, this paper mainly focuses on the dimension of feminism and equally provides a new method to admire the feminism colors in Harry Potter. To prove it, this paper basically analyzes the two protagonists, Harry Potter and Hermione Granger, and discusses the magical world of equality between men and women portrayed. From the content, this paper provides readers with another perspective to appreciate, helping clear the reason why Harry Potter is well-liked to both young and old, male and female. At the same time, due to the close relationship between transcendentalism and feminism, especially the former's great contribution and influences on the latter, from the perspective of transcendentalism, this essay offers significance to reveal the clues implied in Harry Potter and simultaneously contributes to enrich the influences of transcendentalism on later generations.

Keywords

Feminism; Harry Potter; Transcendentalism.

1. Introduction

A rapid wave of reading rising, with the coming of subsequent works, the magic was unstoppable. What makes people all over the world, men and women, elderly and children discuss "spells"? Harry Potter, written by British female writer J.K. Rowling, since published in 1997, quickly became popular all over the world, occupying the top of the bestselling books, translated into 73 languages, with total sales of more than 450 million copies, eventually attracted the attention of the literary world. In the database of CNKI, 2021 papers relate to Harry Potter, which generally involve the fields of western culture, magic colors, text analysis, translation research, language analysis, racism and so on. Among them, 16 papers related to feminism. What this thesis explores is: firstly, the feminist characteristics in Harry Potter novels through the perspective of transcendentalism, and digs deeper to excavate transcendentalism in it; secondly, due to the lack of a systematic theory, based on the following analysis, this paper hopes provide certain references to enrich the content.

2. Transcendentalism and Feminism

To clear the feminism in Harry Potter from the perspective of transcendentalism, one needs to have a basic idea of transcendentalism, feminism and the relationship between the two. In 19th century, transcendentalism boomed in America and made a great impact on both feminism and literature. Among the delegates, Magrate Fuller is the most important one to promote feminism by exerting transcendentalism.

2.1. Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism, a romantic trend of thought, was started in the 1930s and 1940s of the United States. Its founder, Ralph Waldo Emerson, famously said ---" believe in yourself " [5] and hold that the spirit of man can transcend the limitations of the material world, the perceptual world, the experiential world, and that life is to discover, express and enrich oneself. This humanism spirit and self-reliance proposition have important significance and far-reaching influence on the development of human history.

2.1.1. Connotation of Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism is an important ideological liberation movement in American history. The literary and philosophical movement, led by Waldo Emerson, declared the existence of an ideal spiritual entity, beyond experience and science, to be grasped by direct perception. Its ideas are as follows :(1) Emphasize spirit, or super spirit. Transcendental spirit is tolerate and omnipresent; it's the power of good and evil, the foundation of all things and all things belong to it; it exists in man and nature. (2) Emphasize the importance of the individual. It is believed that the individual is the most important part of the society, and the innovation of the society can only be realized through the cultivation and perfection of the individual. Therefore, people's primary responsibility is self-improvement, and the ideal person is dependent on their own people. (3) To look at nature with a new look and regard it as a symbol of the supernatural or God. The natural connotation of this view is that all things in nature are symbolic, the external world is the embodiment of the spiritual world, and objectively strengthens the symbolism tradition of American literature.

2.1.2. Some Representatives of Transcendentalism

In the preface to *Nature*, Emerson said , " Why can't we also establish a direct relationship with the universe? Why can't there be a religion that directly enlightens us not based on their historical traditions?" [5] He called on people to believe in their "intuition " , not to rely on others or existing knowledge, and to agree with personality development.

Henry David Thoreau, another transcendentalist, hoped for a simple life. Thoreau said , " The reason I walked into the woods was not to live cheaper or more expensive, but to do what I wanted to do with the least trouble. "[9]

Because of the limitation of social traditional culture to women, Margaret Fuller did not get the same status as Emerson and Thoreau. She believed that "Women are also given a sacred mission by God and are the communicators of truth and true love ". [2] Everyone can communicate directly with God and understand God in his own way without any medium. But as a great thinker and an outstanding representative of transcendentalism in the 19th century, Margaret Fuller greatly promoted the development of feminist movement. Thanks to her, feminism has been infused with the following ideas: men and women are children of God, having the same noble soul, with no advantages and disadvantages; women should promote self-improvement, self-understanding, self-reliance; women can not rely on external factors, through self-improvement, promote social harmony and stability.

2.2. Feminism

According to Wiki, feminism, also known as women's liberation, gender equality (equality between men and women), refers to the social theory and political movement created and launched to end sexism, sexual exploitation, sexual discrimination and sexual oppression and promote the equality of the sexual class. Besides criticism, it also focuses on the analysis of gender inequality and the promotion of rights, interests and issues at the bottom of sex.

In the letter to Ludwig Kugman, Marx said : "Everyone who is accessible to a little history knows that there can be no great social change without women's enzymes. Social progress can be accurately measured by the social status of women, including ugly ones ." [10] During the

Revolution of 1911, Chinese revolutionaries found that women in strong countries had higher social and family status, and their educational level and ideological quality were much higher than that of domestic women.

3. Feminism in Harry Potter from the perspective of Transcendentalism

Most people who read Harry Potter for its mythic plots, heroic images and supernatural features. Some, however, discovered the feminism colors in female characters, settings as well as certain hints of dialogues. J.K.Rowling, the author of Harry Potter, is a feminist admittedly. When interviewed, she claimed that, "I'm a female writer. And what's interesting about the wizarding world is when you take physical strength out of the equation, a woman can fight just the same as a man can fight." Therefore, feminism is actually exemplified everywhere in this work. To understand this novel as well as the author much deeper shows importance by analyzing feminism within this work.

3.1. Brief Introduction to Harry Potter

Harry Potter is a series of novels written by British writer J.K.Rowling in 1997. The first six of them take Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry as the main stage, describing the protagonist--young wizard student Harry Potter's six years of study and adventure; the seventh book describes Harry Potter's search for Horcruxes and the elimination of Voldemort in the second World War of Magic.

The plot is about the dark man who ruled the world of witches because of a mistake, the spell that was supposed to kill the little boy bounced back to him. Seriously injured, he disappeared from then on. The dying boy Harry Potter became the protagonist of the book, the only one who could compete with the black devil. Harry Potter grew up and was sent to Hogwarts School. The Dark Lord, in the next few years, gradually regained his power, eager to rule the world.

The whole Harry Potter series is a story of a protagonist in distress and with the help of his companions, so in the last series---Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, he did not fight Voldemort one-on-one in the arena. Thousands of people stood behind him. Good wizards, giants, horsemen who have always been timid but full of wisdom, house elves, and even college stone piers, armor, ghosts, all struggle with the black devil and his followers to form a majestic battle scene.

3.2. Androgyny in Harry Potter---the Spirit of Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism believes that everyone can communicate directly with God and understand God in their own way without any medium. God is the father of all things and the creator of all life. Therefore, both men and women are the children of God. They are brothers and sisters, not masters and servants. Fuller said, "women are also given a sacred mission by God, the communicator of truth and true love." [2]

Androgyny is an important feminist theory put forward by Margaret Fuller based on transcendentalism. Both men and women have two kinds of temperament in both men and women . "Every individual's growth includes two aspects: masculinity and femininity." [3]

There are no essential advantages and disadvantages of the two temperament, but each has its own strengths, the unique intuition and insight of femininity makes the individual endowed with "sacred power ". However, in the process of women's growth, social traditions and secular ideas deny the existence of masculinity in their bodies and limit the development of their femininity. Fuller advocates that women should develop masculinity and balance gender temperament while developing femininity. "Similarly, Fuller believes that men's growth also includes masculinity and feminine beauty, combining strength and harmony, power and beauty, wisdom and sensibility.

By shaping Harry Potter's androgynous temperament, Rowling shows her ideal gender concept. Harry Potter was born to be a hero because he was a symbol of defeating evil. His masculinity made him a courageous boy, and feminine qualities made him a sympathetic loving wizard. These two forces inside him made him invincible. By creating the perfect image of Harry Potter, Rowling reflects the feminist worldview of gender equality, balance and harmony.

3.3. Independence and Self-Reliance in Hermione Granger---the Stem of Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism emphasizes the ability of the individual and advocates the concept of self-improvement. Margaret Fuller first suggested that women find ways to solve the problem of women from their own internal aspects, through self-awareness, self-reliance, self-improvement to achieve the perfect promotion of women themselves. She then affirmed the usefulness of a good external environment in addressing women's issues. However, Fuller did not see the current adverse external environment as a major obstacle to solving women's problems. She emphasizes the decisive role of internal factors in the development of things, and believes that women's self-improvement can be achieved in any environment. In the following analysis, we choose three typical female characters to prove the topic.

Hermione was almost a self-image of Rowling when she was a child. Hermione was born in a Muggle family (an ordinary man who can't magic) and despised by the noble "pure" wizard because she was not recognized, and the pressure prompted her to get ahead. From this we can see that the idea of equality and success in women's hearts is universal. Just as Rowling relies on her own efforts and sweat to become a writer, which makes her famous in the field of literary. The heroine Hermione studied hard on her own and proved herself with much more than ordinary people's efforts, and solved many problems with her wisdom. She was always the first to raise her hand, the first to answer questions, and all the answers were correct. She borrowed time converters and took many courses to enrich her knowledge. She could remember many difficult spells. Hermione soon became the smartest student in the whole grade. Even Sirius once boasted of her, "You are the smartest witch I have ever seen." [11] She not only knows the answers to each question, but also remembers the contents of each book she has read, and is willing to tell others about her knowledge.

Hermione's independent female consciousness also shows that she is not dependent on men, able to solve problems on her own. She used her intelligence to help friends in trouble, and sometimes her male friends needed to rely on her to get out of crisis. In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, on the way to get the Sorcerer's Stone, the three were trapped in the Devil's net, When she discovered the Devil's net---a plant that disliked the sun, she cast a glowing spell to save Ron. And in the search for holy objects, Hermione used careful observation and extensive knowledge to help Harry find clues again and again. Hermione is no match for Harry's wisdom.

In the classic children's literature, the female protagonist, though the protagonist of the story, does not show strength, and the power is more exerted on her by the hero. However, Rowling let the heroine gain strength and become her own hero. Hermione distinguished herself from other typical images of teenage girls, unlike the old silence, passivity, and attachment. In Rowling's works, by describing Hermione from Muggle origin and working with young magicians such as Harry against Voldemort, it fundamentally reflects the author's feminist thought: that is, women are independent personality and women want to be equal.

3.4. Social Improvement in Magic World---the Goal of Transcendentalism

From the early days of the founding of the United States to the first half of the nineteenth century, literary thought was closely linked with national consciousness and nationalism. Transcendentalism also tries to analyze how to achieve the state of social perfection. In

Margaret Fuller's view, social perfection is the common goal and the highest ideal of all mankind, and the female problem is the key problem in the process of social perfection. If the female problem can not be solved, the social perfection will not be realized.

In the magical world, wizards and witches are given the same rights and obligations. That is to say, men and women are completely equal. Equal rights to education, participation in various social activities and the same social responsibilities and obligations in society. In this magical world, gender awareness is completely forgotten. On the contrary, it is the ability to decide everything.

First, in Hogwarts, men and women have equal rights and freedoms to study. In the magical world built by Rowling, both men and women have the opportunity to accept the invitation of the school of magic and the right to education. The only criterion for selecting students is their talents. Harry's mother, Lily, lives with Aunt Petunia in a Muggle family (the family of ordinary people who are not magic families). However, only Lily received an invitation to go to the school of magic, and the unqualified Penny did not get the chance. So she resented the wizard world and often laughed at Lily for being crazy. As the protagonist of the book, Hermione, born in the Muggle family, shows her outstanding strength and the opportunity to learn at Hogwarts. After entering Hogwarts, Hermione won the first place in the whole grade through her own efforts, proving herself. It also proves that women are no worse than men. Through hard work, they can achieve more than men.

Second, in Rowling's magical world, men and women can participate equally in school activities, such as a traditional sporting event—the quidditch competition. Each university team consists of seven members. The only criterion for selecting members is their ability. In the Gryffindor team of seven players, there are three female members who are Angelina Johnson, Aria Spinette and Katie Bell. They helped Gryffindor's team win the first place with superb skills. Not only that, women can even become captains and management teams. When Harry was in fifth grade, Angelina was chosen as captain of the Gryffindor Quidditch team. When Harry was punished by Umbridge, Ginny replaced Harry. Witches can be captain and compete, which is recognition of their outstanding performance.

Finally, they have equal rights to work. In this novel, witches can independently choose their own works and do all kinds of work with their talents and hobbies. Fifth graders must take the "O.W.Ls exam", namely the "General Wizard Grade Test". With exam results, students will be free to choose their jobs in the future. That is, through their own efforts, witches can do the work they like. They do not need to be restricted by gender, and it is their achievements that determine the ultimate direction of work.

In conclusion, whether as a student, a teacher, or as a social manager, women can reach or even exceed the level of men. Their achievements also stem from full equality between men and women.

4. Enlightenment to the Future Literature

Compared with other feminist literature, the female characters are actually more natural and well-rounded. Just as what Rowling said when she was interviewed, "she is just what she is. She does not need to pretend to be what people suppose her to be." And that is why this novel and these female figures are such well-liked by most people.

Although transcendentalism has not formed a complete ideological system, we can find out from the works of its creators and admirers that transcendentalism's view of nature and outlook on life are the two major ideological cores. It is these two ideological cores that burst out of the independent ideological sparks for centuries has inspired people to think and explore. Harry Potter is a overwhelming success in different areas, and it also shows its great in delivering transcendentalism thinking.

5. Conclusion

Besides admiring the magic favor, we can also see how show its feminism from the perspective of transcendentalism Harry Potter .

In this work, transcendentalism mainly exemplifies in three aspects. Firstly, androgyny in Potter. Courageous, strong and caring, Harry is a perfect hero in general people eyes. This is largely due to Rowling's portrayal of his androgyny. Male temperament makes him strong and fearless, and female temperament makes him kind and careful. Both men and women are the kids of God's. Secondly, self-independence and self-reliance in female characters. Transcendentalism also emphasizes self-dependence and self-improvement, which is vividly and classically reflected in Hermione. She proved the so-called "impossible" and "inferior" to everyone as a Muggle and a little girl, becoming Hogwarts' best student and helping her male companions escape again and again. The last but not least one is the equality between men and women in settings. J.K.Rowling depicts an ideal society for girls and boys---the magical world. There men and women are treated exactly the same way and are available to all basic rights and opportunities, which is a common argument for the great role of women's status in social improvement.

As a woman writer of children's literature, under the patriarchal hierarchy, the intricate relationship between gender, race, class and so on, Rowling realized that women were hurt by repression, and the independent consciousness. We can also see that men and women can enjoy equal and free study and work. The negative point is that the magical world in Harry Potter is a beautiful and desirable utopia, which carries the human pursuit of the beautiful spiritual world. The female characteristics contained in the magical world reflect the great positive influence of women on the development of society. In order to solve the problem of women's status and rights as well as the further improvement of society is what our later literature should continue to expound.

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