

Comparing Elizabeth Bennett and Jane Eyre' s View of Love from the Feminist Perspective

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Abstract

In the early nineteenth century, feminism began to appear in women' s minds. Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte are both representative feminist writers of the nineteenth century, calling for freedom and equality. They expressed their views of love which have similarities and differences through two characters, Elizabeth and Jane, respectively, and advocated women to be masters of their own love.

Keywords

Elizabeth Bennett; Jane Eyre; View of love; Equality; Dignity.

1. Introduction

Through a comparative analysis of Elizabeth's and Jane Eyre' s views on love from the perspective of feminism by using a parallel research method, it is found that Elizabeth's and Jane Eyre' s pursuit of love is freedom and equality beyond the gap between the rich and the poor and beyond the difference of each other' s social status. However, by contrasting the two heroines, it is found that the differences of their views on love. It will also be learned that the similarities and differences between Jane Eyre and Elizabeth's views on love are mainly caused by the different social backgrounds and personality characteristics of the two writers.

2. Brief Introduction to Jane Eyre' s View of Love

Jane Eyre is a girl living in a poor family. Although she has been though great suffers, she has long been eager to be loved. The marriage of her friend Miss Tan Boer has awakened her soul that longed for freedom and love. She has said that if no one else loves her, she would rather die(Bronte, Charlotte,1996)[3]. Love for Jane Eyre is as important as other girls who expected to be loved, but before meeting her ideal man, she would rather stay single. She has a clear, advanced view of love beyond the age she lived.

Jane is sensible about love. When Jane learns that there is a mad woman in the attic who is Rochester's wife, she is not willing to be a mistress, so she resolutely left Rochester without regret. Jane has never overwhelmed by wealth. When Rochester wants to give her jewellery as a dowry, Jane rejected it. She clearly understands that wealth was meaningless to their love.

Jane Eyre treat love with dignity. The love she pursues not only should be based on spiritual equality but also should be based on principles, that is, mutual affection on the basis of equality between men and women. Jane has never felt that she is inferior to him, when she as a servant has a good feeling to her master- Rochester. Instead, she openly accepts the love that Rochester has for her, because she loves him too. She deeply believes that they were equal for love don't only lie in a high social class.

Jane Eyre treat love with perseverance. After she leaving Rochester, Jane Eyre' s cousin St. John helps her and asks her to marry him. But she rejects St. John and decides to see Rochester again. However when she returns to Thorn Field Manor, the house is in ruins for the mad woman. When Rochester rescues her, he gets injured and becomes the blind and disabled. At that moment, Jane does not give up on him, she says: As long as he did not lose his ideals and courage

of life, he is not a disabled person." (Charlotte Bronte, 1996) [3] Even if Rochester becomes poor, Jane Eyre still accepts him, marry him, takes care of him, and lives an ideal life. Thanks to her unwavering loyalty to her loved one, Jane Eyre finally has the chance to enjoy happiness with dignity.

3. Brief Introduction to Elizabeth Bennett's View of Love

Elizabeth is the second daughter of Bennett's family. Although she does not have the same beauty as her sister Jane, she has a smart and lively character and a valuable quality. She calls for sexual self-esteem that is her attitude towards life and love which reflects her independence and spirit of rebellion. Jane Austen uses Elizabeth to express her own views on love and marriage from the perspectives of women, namely: independence, pursuit of equality, and rationality.

Elizabeth's ideal love is based on equality which has little constraints about family status. Generally she opposes that love is based on the status and wealth but Elizabeth is also ambivalent about this point. In the British social environment at that time, prejudice is the expression of the social status and hierarchy. In the face of love, Elizabeth realizes that self-reflection is very important. She believes that people should not stay in the past life completely, but learn from experiences in life to make themselves more conscious.

4. Research on the Similarities and Differences between Their Love Views

4.1. Similarities

4.1.1. Independence and Equality

Jane Eyre and Elizabeth have strong self-esteem, and they are women who pursue spiritual independence. In the age when men dominated almost all social fields, it is very commendable to have such qualities. These qualities make them not humble and arrogant in front of love. Love is not one side totally attached to the other side, but mutual understanding and mutual respect. True love is equal, free, and without the gap between the high and the low social status. As Jane Eyre said, "love is a game. We must always be equal with each other, so that we can be dependent on each other for a long time, because too strong opponents make people tired, too weak opponents make people tired." (Charlotte Bronte, 1996) [3]

4.1.2. Right and Freedom

In the age when women's consciousness has not been awakened, free love seems to be words on paper, but Jane Eyre and Elizabeth succeeds in doing it and encouraging women to pursue the right of making decisions independently. In their mind they are absolutely not a toll without any emotion.

4.1.3. Without Worldly Views

At first, Elizabeth is not attracted by Darcy, but falls in love with Darcy after Darcy slowly tearing off his arrogant clothes and slowly revealing his kindness, responsibility and other charming personalities. Similarly, in Jane Eyre's and Rochester's eyes, they are not each other's "right person" with gorgeous appearance, but what attracts Jane Eyre is Rochester's sincere heart of kindness and consideration for others under his indifferent and proud appearance. Jane says: as long as he does not lose the courage to live, he is not a disabled person. (Charlotte Bronte, 1996) [3] People at 19th century can't understand Jane Eyre not only for the poor situation Rochester is in but also he is older than Jane almost 20 years old. But what does it matter? Age, money and other issues are not enough to resist Jane Eyre's passionate love. Every woman even the most poor one, still has the right to catch the happiness that should belong to her.

4.2. The differences between Their Love views

Although they are both women at the forefront of the times, pursuing the love of spiritual equality and freedom, they show differences in the views on love to some extent.

4.2.1. Rational Choice VS Spiritual Supremacy.

Compared with Jane Eyre, Elizabeth pays more attention to the economic basis and is more realistic. Under the atmosphere of her family she believes that a happy marriage should have a certain material basis. According her feelings to Wickham, it's not hard to see it. As a woman, Elizabeth is a weak group in the traditional patriarchal culture. In such an era, when people treat love as a toll to make profits, the marriage of material and love is a perfect choice for her. Different from Elizabeth, Jane Eyre is more interested in spiritual equality, which is a view of love with spiritual supremacy. She doesn't care whether Rochester is rich or not, handsome or not, healthy or not, because in Jane's mind, love is not measured by a pretty appearance and an enormous sum of money. Even if Rochester is poor, Jane doesn't think that she makes a sacrifice. What Jane Eyre shows us is a kind of love that returns to nature, turns complexity into simplicity and ignores gains and losses. It also tells us that people should have freedom, dignity and equality in the process of pursuing love.

4.2.2. Initiative VS Passive

Elizabeth is more dependent on men than Jane Eyre. Although Elizabeth begins loving Darcy, she is still ashamed to express her real feelings to him. What's more, even if Elizabeth learns that she misunderstood Darcy, she doesn't apologize to Darcy, what she did is only feeling guilty about Darcy. She is passive in love lacking courage to move forward to express her true feelings about the one she deeply loves. Jane Eyre is the opposite of Elizabeth in this aspect. When realizes that she has fallen in love with Rochester, who has a huge gap with her status and identity, she doesn't not hide her feelings, nor care about worldly views of others. She actively and boldly pursues the beloved, showing her mind that she loves Rochester deeply. In this love story Jane Eyre is the active one to follow her inner thoughts. Faced with happiness is not waiting in shame, but bravely taking the peace of pursuing true love. If Elizabeth like a cat, it would be better to say that Jane Eyre like a tiger; one is tame the other is courageous.

5. Reasons for the Similarities and Differences Between Elizabeth and Jane Eyre's View of Love

5.1. The Reasons for Similarities

From the perspective of women, both Jane Eyre and Elizabeth pursue equal and independent love, which as a result of the social and economic development that brought people ideological progress. Economic development promotes social progress, and social progress prompts more and more women to receive education. Along with the improvement of education level, feminism is slowly emerging. Women gradually have the right to make a choice which is largely due to the development of feminism. Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte become awake to save the women who lived in the world without any rights. So, the two women writers create these two distinctive characters to call for equality.

5.2. The Reasons for Differences

The differences between Jane Eyre and Elizabeth's view of love is mainly due to the differences of social background, life experience and personality between Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte.

5.2.1. Different Backgrounds of the Writers

Elizabeth's view of love can be said to be a miniature of Austin. Women's status was very low in the age of Jane Austen. It had become a normal situation that education was regarded as a catalyst of marriage market. This concept makes it difficult for women to make a living

independently. Most educated single women would do the job of tutoring with low salary which could not change their living conditions. Women did not have the right to inherit property, so many women would choose to change their fate through marriage. Based on this situation, how to find a rich husband for their daughters had become a hot topic in these upper and middle-level societies. This kind of social background has a great influence on Austin. She regards money as an important point in her marriage and views on love with her heroine.

Charlotte lived in the hard working class. Her father knew that he could not find a good son-in-law for his daughters, so he sent them to school for education and skills to make a living. This objectively shapes Charlotte's independent spiritual character. In the 1920s and 1930s, Charlotte experienced a famous protest--Charter Movement. The theme of the movement is to be equal to the nobility. She is influenced by its theme. In her opinion, not only the workers should be equal to the nobles, but also the women should have equal rights as the men. It is not hard for us to find that the theme of Jane Eyre is equality, and that is also required in love, especially at the spiritual level.

5.2.2. Differences in the Characters of Austin and Charlotte

Different characters of Austin and Charlotte make their heroines differ in personality, philosophy of life, values and views of love. Austin is more realistic and sensitive to money than Charlotte. It's not hard to find that Austin's idea permeates into her novels. Money is always mentioned at the beginning of her novels. Charlotte is different from Austin in that she is more responsible. Because her mother died when she was young, she had to face the hardships of life and support her brother and sister's life with her small hands. She is a hard-working and responsible person. She also has the spirit of dedication and sacrifice, which has a profound impact on her marriage concepts. They are not only Jane Eyre's principle of love, but also Charlotte's own view of love. It is totally different from Austin that she only considers paying for noting in love. At the same time, Charlotte also gave Jane Eyre such an idea that work was not only a means of making a living, but also an independent spiritual pillar. What Jane Eyre performed was a perfect confirmation of Charlotte's view.

6. The Inspiration for Modern People about Views of Love

The Inspiration of Elizabeth and Jane Eyre's love view to all girls is that as a woman, if you don't have Elizabeth's good luck, you should move closer to Jane Eyre's independent spiritual realm. Especially in the 21st century, women should have the ability to support themselves. Do not be slaves to money, to men, and be brave to pursue dignified love.

Secondly, love is not an ornamental thing. The most important thing is that two people who love each other show affection and appreciation. Passion is important in a relationship, but don't forget to keep a clear mind at all times to avoid becoming the marriage between Lydia and Wickham. Polish eyes and keep head clear.

Moreover, courage is particularly necessary in love. When love comes, you should bravely take the steps of pursuing love. Dare to be the master of our love, and refuse what parents call "the right person". Remember that the real door-to-door person does not mean the match in money, but in spirit.

7. Conclusion

Through the analysis and research it is not hard to found their love views' similarities and differences. They all pursue true love with dignity, and dare to break up the traditional love views. Better education makes women be brave to pursue the rights of themselves. However different social backgrounds and characters between Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte makes the love concepts of Elizabeth and Jane Eyre different. On the one hand, Elizabeth pays more

attention to money while Jane Eyre lays stress on spiritual equality. On the other hand, Elizabeth waits for love while Jane actively pursues love.

It is helpful for women to form a right views of love by this research. A woman should not only be financial independent but also learn to do her marriage owner.

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