

Brief Analysis of Feminist Literary Criticism

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Abstract. Feminist literary criticism knows as the critical analysis of literary works based on the feminist perspective. In other words, feminist literary criticism is a kind of literary criticism on the basis of feminist theory or the politics of feminism more precisely. In particular, it also can be explained as using ideological discourses and feminist rules to study language, structure and being of literature. "This school of thought seeks to describe and analyze the ways in which literature portrays the narrative of male domination in regard to female bodies by exploring the economic, social, political, and psychological forces embedded within literature."

Keywords: Feminist Literary; Criticism; literary works.

1. Introduction

Feminist literary criticism has almost gone through two centuries up to now. This literary criticism based on the reflection of women's situation by themselves in a long term and achievement of their specific and practical action. Thus, feminism is the source of feminist literary criticism. Feminism has experienced two waves. The First Wave, also called liberal feminism, usually refers to the social movement that women fought for their legal vote right and the basic civil rights in American and Britain from 1890 to 1920. In the First Wave, women had successfully strived for their civil rights and the opportunity of attending higher education and finding jobs in the specific industry areas. The more important was that this wave was a perquisite for the deeper and subtle social works by feminists later. The Second Wave also knows as the Women's Liberation Movement, which focused on the differences between female and male and discussed the origin and operation of gender discrimination in ideology, culture and society. Owing to this ideology of the feminists, the early development of the feminist literary criticism tried to seek a chance and approach to change mechanism of literature between personal and political.

2. The Development of Feminist Literary Criticism

The modern feminist movement origins from *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." Over these years, the concept of being equal with male has developed into different stages and various feminist schools have come into being: radical feminism, liberal feminism, socialist feminism, black feminism, post-modern feminism and psycho-analytical feminism.

According to the schools of ideologies and thoughts, feminism can be mainly divided into four groups: Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, socialist feminism and Marxist feminism. Because of differences of historical and cultural inheritance, western feminist literary criticism mainly consists of American school, Britain school and French school. These schools were not totally isolated, instead they were communicated, affected and promoted each other. No matter what kind of schools, they all made great contribution to the development and maturity of feminist literary criticism. According to Lisa Tuttle, the final goal of feminist criticism is "to develop and uncover a female tradition of writing," "to analyze women writers and their writings from a female perspective", "to rediscover old texts", "to interpret symbolism of women's writing so that it will not be lost or ignored by the male point of view" "to resist sexism in literature and to increase awareness of the sexual politics of language and style". (Lisa Tuttle: 1986, 184)

3. The Key Terms of Feminist Literary Criticism

There are many classic and far-reaching feminist works created by those rather wise, serious and important feminists. Such as *The Second Sex* (Simone de Beauvoir), *Sexual Politics* (Kate Millet), *Thinking About Women* (Mary Ellman), *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory* (Elaine Showalter) and other feminist classics created by other feminist pioneers all made great contribution to the development and maturity of feminist literary criticism. Concerning the critical theory of feminism, there are some significant key terms: the patriarchy, the other and the second sex will be discussed in details below.

3.1 The Basic Introduction to the Patriarchy

Patriarchy is one of the key terms in feminist literary criticism. Feminists consider that it is a social system in which men are the principal authority figures who are the central to social organization, control of property, occupy leading roles of moral authority, political leadership and where male family members hold authority over women and children in household. Historically, patriarchy has made itself in the political, social, economic and legal organization of a series of different cultures. It also refers the institutions of male rule and female subordination. The patriarchal societies are also patrilineal which means that title and property can only be inherited by the male lineage.

Patriarchy refers to the role of males in the society in which men take the chief responsibility over the community welfare by and large. The word "patriarch" derived from two Greek words: "patira," and "archy" which means family and rule respectively. "Traditionally, patriarchy granted the father nearly total ownership over wife or wives and children" "classically, as head of the family the father is both begetter and owner in a system in which kinship is property". (Millet, 1970:67) In a word, males are the absolute authority while females are subordinate and inferior to males wherever in the family and society. According to Eisenstein, Patriarchy ideology hammer at "destroy woman's consciousness about her potential power, which derives from the necessity of society to reproduce itself (Eisenstein, 1981:14)

The patriarchal ideology also can be called masculinist or androcentric which is prevailing in most great classical literary writings that were mainly created by male for male up to now. In these works, male writers usually describe female characters, neglecting female their own characteristics but using the male values and ways of thinking, emotion and action. Hence, the female readers always act as an alien or outsider and are unable to understand and appreciated the heroes who were described by the male writer and even female may generate anti-emotions against the works. Sandra Gilbert, Elaine Showalter and Susan Gubar these feminists have also intended to study this phenomenon and collaborated on their works *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979), *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977).

All in all, Patriarchy can be understood as male-dominated, male supreme over female and androcentric in the society. It is known to us all, in the patriarchy society, men are the absolutely dominators in every social aspect. Since the emergence of the feminism, feminists have done their best to lead all women to fight against the male-dominators. Even though they have got great success, the root of the patriarchy hasn't been removed. Females still suffer in the male-dominated society. More precisely, it means the female subordination and female inferiority. Moreover, patriarchy has already shaped by both female and male, for which male are the rulers while female are the ruled. Overall, Patriarchy idea prevailing in all social areas and rejecting patriarchy is the key step to the liberation of the female.

3.2 The Basic Introduction to the Other

The other is another important key term in feminist literary criticism. It refers to those alienated human being who hasn't or has lost the self-awareness, is under control of other people or surroundings, acts as an object position and loses subject personalities. It is a tradition that men decide themselves to be the subject, perform the male domination in all social aspects and defines human beings by their will. No wonder that female regards the androphany as the positive or standard but

treats feminine as the unimportant or negative. Thus, because of being lack of initiative and their inherited weakness—passivity, women are the other of man in the patriarchy society unshakable.

In 1949, De Beauvoir Published the *Second Sex* which regarded as the Bible of feminism and classic of feminism theory. In this book, Simone de Beauvoir used the existentialism to analyze and study female issues. Meanwhile, she explored Freudian, Marxist, Hegelian and other classical critical theories to expose the inherit qualities of female to be the other. Beauvoir also bitterly pointed out that the western society was totally male-dominated, and female in this society are “the second sex”, the “other” of men: “She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. he is the subject, he is eh Absolute—she is the Other.” (De Beauvoir, 1968 :59) Kate Millet, a famous feminist, had also declared the similar sense of the other in her classic work—*Sexual Politics*. She announced “patriarchy has already been established and the male has already set themselves as the human form, the subject and referent to which is the female is ‘other’ or alien” (Millet, 1970: 25)

3.3 The Basic Introduction to the Second Sex

The second sex this key term origins from the famous work *The Second Sex* published in French in 1949 by Simon de Beauvoir. This term is the replacement of the “female” or “woman”. She pointed out that women always define themselves “I am a woman” while men never bother but position them as the representative of human beings, which indicates that “men” and “women” are definitely not the symmetrical terms. She noticed that the lawyers, priests, philosophies, writers and scientists kept trying to show that female’s attachment state was formed by fate and contributed to well-being of humanity—“One is not born, but rather becomes, women”. In other words, because of the inferior nature of women, equalities between sexes will be a mirage forever.

Concerning about the discussion of gender differences, exactly as Beauvoir had once said “ woman is just a uterus”. That is to say, female’s fate was decided on this anatomy and when facing this Nature Order, all the efforts which attempt to challenge the female’ unfair treatment of gender discrimination melt into thin air. Furthermore, talking about discourse, female discourse has been suppressed by male’s ruling language fundamentally. If Michel Foucault’ s so called “ truth” (*Subjectivité et Vérité*, 1980-1981) which depends on who controls the propositional utterance is acceptable, there is reason to believe men’s control power is a trap to induce women fall into men’ s “truth”. Thus, female writers should resist men’s control of discourse but retreat into a harbor for female discourse passively and negatively.

4. Conclusion

All in all, a serious of conception about women: delicacy, vulnerable, sensitiveness, tolerance and considerateness, etc. are the products of society and culture, are formed by male based on their needs but not the results of female’s specific physical structure. As a result, Simon De Beauvoir suggested to use “the second sex” this term to substitute for the term “female”. She believed that this substitution may probably weaken various prejudice and discrimination which are forced on women by traditional ideology and finally achieve the goal of gender equality.

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