

A Comparison Between the Female Consciousness of Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* and of Jane Eyre in *Jane Eyre*

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ABSTRACT

This paper compares the female consciousness carried by the two characters Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* and Jane Eyre in *Jane Eyre*. Elizabeth and Jane are both representative female images in Victorian literature. The article compares the growth experience, marriage and love concept and social class of the two people, so as to better understand the female position and value orientation conveyed by the two works. Elizabeth, with her unique wisdom and resilience, persists in being true to herself and pursuing true love and equality in a patriarchal society. Meanwhile, Jane Eyre, with her unwavering spirit of independence, bravely challenges traditional social norms, fighting for the dignity and rights of women. While they face different social environments, both characters demonstrate a strong sense of feminism, exerting a profound influence on future generations.

Keywords: Female consciousness, Comparison, Elizabeth Bennet, Jane Eyre.

1. INTRODUCTION

The core content of this article is to compare the female consciousness presented in Elizabeth Bennet and Jane Eyre. The purpose of writing the article is to help readers understand the specific expression of women's consciousness in literary works, focusing on the context of British society in the 19th century - at that time, social norms and the division of labor between men and women were very strictly defined. By comparing the two novels, this article completely sorts out how female characters can strive for their own independence, independent choice and dignity under the constraints of the times.

Based on the existing relevant research, this article conducts a comparative analysis of the female consciousness of the two heroines. This research can add a new analytical perspective for the academic community to continue to discuss gender, power and resistance issues in literature. It can also provide interpretation ideas for subsequent creators and readers, and promote everyone to

continue to explore the relevant content of female consciousness in literary texts.

Existing research on these two literary icons has focused on their female consciousnesses. For instance, Elizabeth Bennet has been praised for her wit, intelligence, and independence, while Jane Eyre has been celebrated for her unwavering commitment to personal dignity and freedom. Ali Albashir Mohammed Al-Haj in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (2014) pointed out that Jane Austen was not a social reformer but a keen social observer, reminding people of their own deficiencies. Bai Yang's *Towards a Better Vision of Feminism Together* (2022) discussed how the female protagonists in *Jane Eyre* and *The God of the Sexless* encounter similar feminine issues caused by the patriarchal chain of social systems, laws, and ideologies. These studies have contributed significantly to our understanding of how female consciousness can manifest in literature and have influenced subsequent discussions on gender and power.

However, there is still room for expansion in the existing research. Most literatures only analyze the female consciousness of Elizabeth or Jane Eyre alone, and there is not much to compare the two under the same framework. This article fills in this research gap, conducts a comparative analysis of the female consciousness of the two heroines, and sorts out the commonalities and uniquenesses of the two female concepts.

This article relies on the existing research results to complete the comparative analysis, supplementing the discussion perspective on the topics of gender, power and female resistance in literature, providing new interpretation ideas for researchers and ordinary readers in related fields, and also providing reference for subsequent literary creators and literary enthusiasts to analyze women's themes.

2. THE TWO AUTHORS AND THEIR WORKS

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* tells a story of love and growth, exploring the complexities of female identity and agency within the social constraints of 19th-century England. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* presents a powerful narrative of female self-discovery and assertion, highlighting the importance of female agency and the quest for equality.

2.1 Jane Austen and *Pride and Prejudice*

Jane Austen (1775-1817) was an English novelist and playwright, widely regarded as one of the most important and influential writers of the Regency era. Her novels, including *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), and *Persuasion* (1818), are known for their commentary on the social and moral issues of her time, as well as their intricate character portrayals and insights into the complexities of human behavior and relationships.

Pride and Prejudice is Austen's second novel and the most popular novel. The protagonist of the story, Elizabeth Bennet, lives in a rural village. She is smart and lively. When she met Darcy for the first time, the other party was arrogant and indifferent, and all the qualities on her body disgusted Elizabeth. As the two came into contact more, Elizabeth slowly saw Darcy's inner character,

and Darcy also put down his arrogance and prejudice. The novel uses Elizabeth to pursue the main line of happiness, and explores love, marriage, class differences, and the survival situation of women in society at that time.

2.2 Charlotte Brontë and *Jane Eyre*

Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) was an English novelist and poet, best known for her novel *Jane Eyre* (1847), which is considered a classic of English literature. Born into a poor family, Brontë experienced much hardship and struggled with her identity and place in society.(Zhang Xinran, 2016) These experiences are reflected in her writing, which often deals with themes of social class, poverty, female empowerment, and the search for self and love.

3. EMBODIMENT OF FEMALE CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE TWO NOVELS

Female consciousness is a core issue that cannot be ignored in literary creation. It breaks the traditional gender stereotype and allows readers to understand the real situation of women's existence more completely and three-dimensionally. Literary works shape characters with feminine consciousness, which can not only create a more real and immersive female image, but also enrich the narrative perspective and balance the long-term male-dominated literary narrative logic. Writers write about women's unique dilemmas and demands, which can provide a set of interpretation dimensions that distinguish them from the male perspective and supplement the shortcomings of existing literary narratives.

3.1 Female Consciousness

The essence of women's consciousness is a comprehensive embodiment of women's self-identity, value judgment and unique perspective on the world. It is not just a set of fixed concepts, but a concept intertwined with multiple connotations, including the whole process of women's self-awareness, the way women get along with the outside world, and women's struggle for their own right to speak. For a long time, social rules, traditional culture and gender division of labor have constantly suppressed women's consciousness, and

women's self-expression has been on the margins for a long time.

With the development of society and the rise of feminism, women's consciousness has gradually been recognized. Women began to take the initiative to fight for public space, boldly express their personal ideas, and persist in pursuing their ideals. This change of concept has changed all aspects of social life in all aspects.

At the social level, women's consciousness constantly dispels the solidified gender label. Women break down various industry barriers, participate in public management, innovate and create, promote the renewal of social rules, and redefine the way of survival of modern women.

At the cultural level, women's consciousness broadens the cognitive boundaries of diversity and inclusiveness. Women's unique observation perspective enriches the level of human narrative and builds a more complete and inclusive worldview. Literature, music, art and other works created by women can impress readers across gender circles and promote public sympathy and in-depth thinking.

To sum up, women's consciousness has the power to change society, culture and individual life. It represents women's self-identity, represents women's continuous struggle for independent rights, and can also promote society towards equality and tolerance. In the future, we should continue to pay attention to and cultivate women's consciousness, so that relevant ideas can continue to develop.

3.2 Elizabeth's Female Consciousness in Pride and Prejudice

Many details of Elizabeth Bennet's body can reflect a distinct sense of women. She has the ability to make independent decisions. Even if she is bound by the times, she can take the initiative to plan her own life path. She will not be bound by the expectations of others. The external comments related to marriage and love and class cannot define her.

Elizabeth loves to think, is inventive, and dares to challenge the traditional gender division of labor. She insisted on studying and was willing to discuss with others about politics, philosophy and other topics that were generally designated as exclusive to men at that time. With her intelligence and keen speech, she can talk to men on an equal footing, which directly highlights her female autonomy. She

is willing to face her own shortcomings, take the initiative to correct prejudices, constantly improve herself, and apologize frankly after making mistakes. Her self-awareness and emotional maturity far exceed that of women of her time. This constant self-reflection and continuous growth is a key component of her female consciousness, supporting her to continue to complete self-transmutation.

Elizabeth's independent personality and self-worth cognition are also intuitively reflected in the choice of marriage and love. She will not accept a marriage without true feelings for wealth and social status, and she is unwilling to sacrifice personal happiness for material security. She and Darcy came together, completely based on their true feelings and judgment of each other's character, and put personal inner happiness first. This choice proves that she has a complete sense of autonomy. In the era when women lack the right to choose, it is a typical example of women taking the initiative in life.

In a word, Elizabeth's female consciousness is concentrated in the levels of independent decision-making ability, knowledge-seeking thinking, continuous self-improvement, and personality independence. This character also intuitively proves that women have the right to choose independently so that they can control their own life direction.

3.3 Jane Eyre's Female Consciousness in Jane Eyre

First of all, Jane Eyre values self-independence and individual uniqueness, and will not adjust herself according to the stereotyped requirements of the times for women. Even if she loves Rochester deeply and learns that the other party has a legal wife, she still chooses to leave. Dignity and freedom will always come first in her heart, and she will not give up the principle of being a human being for emotional and material conditions.

Secondly, Jane Eyre has a clear self-worth recognition and the right to choose independently. She took the initiative to learn knowledge and touched the academic field exclusive to men in the traditional sense, so as to challenge the inherent gender norms of society. She continues to polish her mind, enrich the spiritual world, and strive to become a complete and independent individual. She will not be forced to marry casually under economic pressure and the needs of class promotion. Only when Rochester truly treats and cherishes her

equally will she be willing to return to the other person. Unwillingness to lower her self-standards and refusal to compromise and make concessions is the most direct manifestation of her female sense of autonomy.

To sum up, Jane Eyre's female consciousness is manifested in the three aspects of insisting on self-independence, recognizing her own value, and never compromising. This character also reminds readers that women have the right to choose independently in order to truly master life and reap their own happiness.

4. COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE TWO FEMALE CHARACTERS

The portrayal of female consciousness in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre* is completely different. Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* has the ability to choose her life independently. She relies on quick-witted speech and firm will to break the inherent social prejudices and codes of conduct. She is a female representative who values her own thinking, talent and independent personality. In contrast, Jane has a tough personality and always puts self-worth and personal freedom first. She does not want to be bound by social oppression and the shackles of marriage and love, and always adheres to personal growth and equal and sincere feelings. Both books are about the awakening and growth of women's consciousness, but *Pride and Prejudice* revolves more around the real dilemmas encountered by women in the social circle, while *Jane Eyre* focuses on the adherence of individual personality freedom and dignity. Combined with reading, it can be seen that women's consciousness has different development trajectories in different eras.

4.1 Similarities in Female Characters

The two novels have a lot in common in shaping women's consciousness. The heroines of both of them are independent and strong in heart, and dare to break free from the established expectations and shackles of society (Yang Yilan, 2023). Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* is unwilling to marry for the social status, and always believes that feelings and personal values are the core of marriage and love. The heroine of *Jane Eyre* resists the restrictions brought about by gender identity and takes the initiative to strive for the right to live equally and maintain dignity. Both stories

highlight the power of women's independent choice, and also point out the important role of self-growth and recognition of self-value to women.

4.1.1 Similarities in Personalities

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* are both classics of British literature. The heroines created by the two books have a strong sense of autonomy, a tenacious heart and fighting power. There are obvious differences in the publication time and social environment of the two books, but there are many personality similarities worth analyzing in Elizabeth Bennet and Jane Eyre.

Elizabeth and Jane both value their self-worth and maintain distinctive personal qualities. Elizabeth is intelligent and lively, sharp-talking, and has a clear idea of right and wrong. She will not give up the bottom line she adheres to in order to cater to others and get married smoothly. After determining her own value, she can independently decide the direction of her relationship. Jane Eyre is also strong-willed and relies on herself in everything. Even in adversity, she will not lose her dignity. She will not accept a marriage without feelings, nor will she give up her principles for money; she has determined her own value in her heart before she walks out of her own life path.

Both of them are good at observation and analysis, and can accurately see through the true nature of the people around them. Elizabeth is quick-witted and observant. She can see through the appearance disguised by the suitor and figure out the true thoughts of the other party. Jane Eyre has a keen intuition and is also good at observation. She realized early that her employer Rochester had a secret and made choices about her future based on these judgments.

Elizabeth and Jane both have a strong sense of independence, have their own opinions, and will not be easily influenced by the opinions of others and the expectations of the outside world. In the era of Elizabeth's life, society generally regarded marriage as the ultimate destination of women, but she refused to compromise and only chose a partner according to her inner feelings and her own standards. Jane Eyre grew up in a strict orphanage since she was a child. Later, she became a tutor. Even in a difficult situation, she always maintained her dignity. She did not want to be treated as a servant, and refused the loveless marriage proposed by her brother Rochester.

In addition, both heroines adhere to the moral bottom line and are upright. Elizabeth knows that marrying a rich man can gain material advantages, but she will not abandon her own moral standards for a good life. No matter what kind of difficulties Jane Eyre encounters, she will not shake her inner moral standards, which is also the core characteristic of her character. She rejected Rochester's original marriage proposal because there was no real equality and mutual respect between the two.

Finally, Elizabeth and Jane Eyre refuse to lower their standards in relationship and marriage, and will not force themselves to accept a relationship that is not worthy of themselves. The two put independent personality, personal intelligence and moral bottom line first, and never compromise on convenience and money. It is this unwilling attitude that allows them to finally meet a partner who knows how to respect and recognize their own value, and reap true love and happiness.

In summary, the personalities of the two heroines overlap in many places: attach importance to self-worth, personality independence, have the right to choose independently, distinguish right from wrong, good at observation, and tenacity in heart. These qualities make them a reference model for the female community, proving that only when people are loyal to their hearts and do not compromise easily can they get rid of the shackles of secular standards and achieve true satisfaction and happiness.

4.1.2 Similarities in Vision of Love

Elizabeth and Jane Eyre's views on marriage and love are very similar, clearly showing their understanding of the core of love. Both heroines believe that a healthy relationship must be based on mutual respect, equal status and sincere treatment.

First, both of them believe that love is inseparable from mutual respect and understanding. Elizabeth was initially prejudiced against Darcy. Only after getting along with him deeply did she see the inner character of the other party and recognize his personality; Jane Eyre was willing to love Rochester deeply, provided that the other party saw and respected her thoughts and independent personality. Neither of them is willing to maintain feelings of lack of respect and understanding, and they believe that this kind of relationship is difficult to last.

Second, both of them pursue equal status in their feelings. Elizabeth did not follow the mainstream ideas of the times and refused to marry for money and class. Even if Darcy was arrogant in the early days, she dared to face the other party. When Jane Eyre learned that she could only be Rochester's mistress, she decisively refused to propose marriage. This relationship was not equal. Both of them reject unbalanced and oppressive intimate relationships, and are only willing to accompany people who can treat them equally.

Third, the two people value the sincerity in their feelings. Elizabeth will not be affected by Darcy's initial cold attitude and negative comments on him by others, and slowly discover his true inner self. After knowing all the past secrets of Rochester, Jane Eyre is still willing to love each other deeply. What she values is the real appearance of the other party without disguise. Both of them believe that feelings should rely on true feelings and spiritual resonance, not on appearance and social identity.

In a word, Elizabeth and Jane Eyre's views on marriage and love are highly similar, and both value respect, equality, sincerity, long-term companionship and personal happiness in intimate relationships. The two heroines provide a model for women to choose their feelings independently, which also proves that sincere love requires both parties to work together, tolerate each other and respect each other.

4.1.3 Similarities in Female Consciousness

The right to choose independently and the right to dominate personality. Elizabeth Bennet and Jane Eyre both firmly dominate their own lives. Elizabeth was born in the Bennett family. She was intelligent and lively and refused to be defined by the social rules at that time. She breaks the gender framework that restricts women's development and compresses the choice space, and prioritizes her own happiness and life pursuit. She dared to question the class division, mocked the society's blind pursuit of wealth status, and insisted on choosing her own partner. Even if Collins has a good family background and a considerable social status, she still refuses to propose marriage, which is enough to prove that she is unwilling to lower her own standards.

Jane Eyre is an orphan. She has been fostered in her aunt's house since she was a child, and she also took the initiative to grasp the direction of her life.

She resisted the identity bondages input on women by the times, and put self-improvement and inner satisfaction first. Even if you love Rochester deeply, you don't want to be an accessory to the other party. After discovering that the other party already had a wife, she left decisively, insisting that the partnership must be based on equality and never give up. Later, she chose to be a teacher and earn money to support herself by her own labor, which is also a strong manifestation of her sense of autonomy.

Jane Eyre also resists the established gender division of labor in society. At that time, it was generally assumed that women should obey men, but she took the initiative to become a teacher, demanding equal treatment and respect in intimate relationships. The public generally believes that the value of women is only reflected in marriage, but she values personal growth and inner fulfillment more. Even if she loves Rochester deeply, she refuses to be the mistress of the other party. This choice intuitively reflects her attitude of breaking free from the shackles of the times and upholding human dignity.

Elizabeth and Jane rely on their own actions to show a highly similar female consciousness. Both of them take the initiative to master the right to choose life. They do not want to be trapped by the rules and regulations of society. Compared with secular vision, they care more about inner pleasure and self-realization. The strong sense of autonomy and resistance to the bondage of the times constitute the core of their female consciousness. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth's resistance to external pressure and self-choice is the core of her female consciousness; in *Jane Eyre*, Jane breaks free from gender shackles and pursues self-growth, which also reflects the distinct awakening of women. The two similar settings can show that no matter what era and class they are in, the core of autonomy and resistance always exists in women's consciousness.

In a word, the common female consciousness of Elizabeth and Jane is not accidental. Literary works have long been writing about themes such as women's autonomy, control of life, and resistance to external bondage. The choice of the two characters in the book can still inspire women to stick to self-awareness and plan their life according to their inner standards.

4.2 Differences in Female Characters

Several sisters of the Benett family in *Pride and Prejudice*, especially Elizabeth, have strong female self-esteem and sense of autonomy. They rely on people's speech and brains to cope with all kinds of social restrictions, and seek inner satisfaction in feelings and marriage. Although this group of women will use marriage to improve their material and class situation, they will not lose their independent personality and dignity throughout the whole process.

4.2.1 Differences in Personalities

The female protagonists of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre* exhibit distinct differences in their personalities, reflecting the unique societal backgrounds and literary contexts of their respective novels.

Elizabeth Benett is a very distinctive female image who dares to resist the social norms of the times. She is quick-thinking, articulate, and has a sense of humor. She can calmly cope with the complex social occasions of King George's era. She is good at observing people and things, and believes that sincerity and integrity cannot be discarded. She has her own bottom line in her actions, and it is difficult to shake her by the evaluation of others and the expectations of the outside world. When Darcy proposed to her for the first time, even if the other party's wealth and status were far beyond ordinary people, she would directly refuse, just because the other party's attitude was arrogant and ignored, and this self-esteem and pride permeated all her choices. She is strong-hearted and will not compromise on marriage for money and class advantages. She is determined to find a partner who respects each other and communicates with each other.

On the other hand, Jane, the protagonist of *Jane Eyre*, embodies a completely different female independent trait. Jane's growth was accompanied by self-awareness and transformation, and she struggled to survive in the severe Lowwood Orphanage and Thornfield Manor. All her behavior revolves around self-worth and dignity. Even if she is in financial distress, she is not willing to be just Rochester's companion and housekeeper. Her feminine consciousness is rooted in herself. She will not give up her principles easily and dare to question authority and pursue equality. She resisted the image of obeying women as stipulated by the

times and took the initiative to fight for her own happiness and complete life.

The difference in personality between the two people is rooted in the difference in the period of writing and the difference in social environment. *Pride and Prejudice* was created in the transition stage of British society. The enlightenment thought slowly impacted the traditional rules. What Elizabeth carried was the budding female sense of autonomy at this stage - she questioned the restrictions brought by gender and took the initiative to control her life direction. *Jane Eyre* was written in the middle of the 19th century, just as industrialization was advancing and the wave of social reform was rising. Jane's image reflected the radical change in women's consciousness at that time, and women began to take the initiative to compete for the social status and survival space of equality with men.

To sum up, the two heroines have their own characteristics, behind which are the different times and literary contexts of the two books. Elizabeth represents the initial awakening of women in the era of King George. She is intelligent and eloquent and never gives up her own principles. Jane reflects the more radical female thought in the mid-nineteenth century and makes every effort to protect self-worth, human dignity and gender equality. However, both of them have a clear sense of self and autonomy, dare to break the rules of the times and take the initiative to control life.

4.2.2 Differences in Female Consciousness

In the classic novels *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, the female protagonists, Elizabeth Bennet and Jane Eyre, respectively, exhibit distinct female consciousnesses that reflect the social and historical contexts of their respective times. While both novels deal with themes of love, marriage, and female agency, the female consciousnesses of these characters differ in significant ways.

Elizabeth Bennet lived during the regent period, when social class barriers were clear and the division of labor between men and women was strict. Even if she is in multiple constraints, she still has a clear sense of autonomy. She will not lose her principles and thinking ability for marriage. She is only willing to combine with people who love and respect each other. Her female consciousness relies on her own intelligence and thinking, and always

values personal growth. The core of her feminine concept is to reject all kinds of restrictions imposed by society and insist on independent life planning.

Jane's life background is completely different. Industrialization is developing rapidly, class contradictions are prominent, and there is extreme inequality between men and women. Jane has experienced poverty, being under the fence and being bullied since she was a child. These experiences have shaped her tenacity and strength. No matter what kind of reality and emotional blow she encounters, she will not give up her human dignity. The core of her concept of women is to recognize her own value and reject all forms of oppression and unfair treatment.

The difference in the female consciousness of the two people comes from the unique social and historical environment of their respective eras. Elizabeth's female thought, influenced by the gradually changing social atmosphere during the regent period, focuses on women's talent and independent choice; Jane's concept was born from all kinds of survival difficulties brought about by industrialization, and emphasized that women should uphold dignity and strive for independent survival space.

The two books have a profound impact on future readers and creators. *Pride and Prejudice* focuses on women's independent thinking and independent choice, and encourages women to take the initiative to fight for education and work-related rights; *Jane Eyre* focuses on portraying human dignity and gender equality, and promoting the sustainable development of women's liberation-related trends. Two different female consciousnesses show the different survival problems faced by women at different historical stages, and can also make it clear that women want to live an equal and successful life, and autonomy and human dignity are indispensable.

5. CONCLUSION

This article compares the female consciousness carried by the two heroines Elizabeth of *Pride and Prejudice* and Jane Eyre, and sorts out the different paths of the two female characters to strive for independence, autonomy and gender equality.

The first chapter of the study first introduces the creative background of the two novels, as well as the portrayal method of female characters and

female social identity in the book, so as to lay the foundation of the times for the later analysis of women's consciousness.

The following article is based on the characterization, growth experience and psychological changes of the two heroines, and discusses how they can find their own place in the patriarchal system and pursue inner satisfaction.

The article further disassembles the different manifestations of women's consciousness and the ideological growth trajectory of the two heroines. It points out that although Elizabeth and Jane Eyre encounter different difficulties, they both have the characteristics of modern women: independence, autonomy and the pursuit of equality. At the same time, the article analyzes the breakthroughs made by the two people in terms of marriage and personal career.

The comprehensive comparison of the full text can be seen that classic literature can help readers understand the diverse connotation of women's consciousness. By comparing the experiences of the two heroines, we can clearly understand the various obstacles faced by women in striving for independence and establishing their self-identity, as well as the different ways in which they pursue equality and inner perfection. This kind of comparative research can also provide new ideas for the current discussion on gender, power and social norms.

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