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ON THE SCARLETT'S FAILURE AS A REBEL AGAINST PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Gone with the Wind is a novel written by American author Margaret Mitchell. It was published in 1936, and caused a certain sensation in the society at that time. In this work, Mitchell portrays a savage but brave woman Scarlett, who leaves a deep impression on countless readers. This character becomes a very classic female image in American and British Literature. Many critics think that Scarlett's rebellion reflects her awakening of female consciousness and her resistance to the patriarchal society. However, the author believes that although Scarlett shows some rebellious spirit different from traditional women, she is still deep influenced by patriarchal ideology and is physically and mentally obedient to men, which can be reflected in her excessive concern for appearance, her passivity in relationships and her compromise on marriage. Scarlett is an incomplete and even failed rebel in a patriarchal society.

Keywords: Feminism; Female's Resistance; Patriarchal Society; *Gone with the Wind*

Introduction

Gone with the wind is a novel written by the American author Margaret Mitchell. This novel was published in 1936 and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1937. Its publication has caused a certain sensation in the society at that time. The novel takes Atlanta and a nearby plantation as the story scene, and takes the life of the main character Scarlett O'Hara, a headstrong Southern Belle's experience as the clue to describe and depict the life of the American southerners before and after the Civil war. Scarlett, the protagonist of the story, grows up in a wealthy plantation family. She receives a good education since childhood. The love of her parents and the people around her makes her a self-indulgent lady. Before the civil war breaks out, she is a proud young lady who thinks about dressing up for the dance and dreams of a beautiful love affair with Ashley all day long. Later, the war breaks out and becomes more and more serious, and situation and life of the South is much worse than before. Scarlett has to face the changes in the life and the death of her relatives, looking for opportunities to make a living. During this period, she experiences three marriages in total, each of which ends in failure. Among them, the author portrays her most emotional dispute with Rhett. But in the end Rhett still chooses to end their marriage and leave Scarlett alone.

When talking the character of Scarlett, most critics think that she embodies a new women' characteristics, that is, dare to hate and love bravely, and she has a certain rebellious spirit to resist something she is unwilling to do. Scarlett's rebellious spirit is reflected in her breakthrough in traditional gender prejudice,

traditional moral views and women's way of life(Han 65), and her actions and behaviors are different from other gentle and obedient women depicted in this book. However, the characterization of Scarlett, that is, whether she is really a successful female rebel and a challenger to the patriarchal society, is still debatable. At least in this book, although she initially shows the edge of her female consciousness, but on the whole, she is still permeated by the ideology of the patriarchal society. To some extent, her obedience is greater than her rebellion.

Scarlett--A Beautiful Woman under Male Gaze

There is no doubt that Scarlett in Margaret Mitchell's works is full of charm, and she easily makes the men around her fall in love with her. In the first chapter, Mitchell mentions that although Scarlett is not beautiful in the traditional way, she is still charming in the eyes of men. Her pale green eyes, sharp chin and white skin combined with her flexible character form an indescribable beauty and attraction(Mitchell 3).

"...she made a pretty picture. Her new green flowered-muslin dress spread its twelve yards of billowing material over her hoops and exactly matched the flat-heeled green morocco slippers her father had recently brought her from Atlanta....(4)"

When Scarlett first appears, she is depicted as a beautiful picture. Scarlett certainly knows how to fully display her beauty so that others can't move their eyes. She is well dressed and gorgeous. Her dress sets off her slim but plump figure, which is full of attraction to men. At sixteen Scarlett has learned to use the attribute of womanhood to advance what Mitchell describes as her "predatory" designs: the manipulation and seduction of men (Faust 8).

Susan Sontag pointed out in her *A Woman's Beauty ---Put Down or Power Source* that the process that women are led to beauty actually fosters narcissism and strengthens their sense of dependence and childishness (3).And such a quality is vividly displayed by Scarlett.

"...she could never long endure any conversation of which she was not the chief subject .But she smiled when she spoke consciously deepening her dimple and fluttering her bristly black lashes as swiftly as butterflies' wings. The boys were enchanted, as she had intended them to be, and they hastened to apologize for boring her.(11)"

Scarlett is a naive, innocent and beautiful lady of a rich family. She knows how to use her beauty and charm as her own capital and weapon to win men's preference and favor. Beauty is a kind of power, which is also the sad side of women, because it is "the only power that women are encouraged to seek". But for Scarlett, it is obvious that she still wants to use her beauty rather than other excellence as a bargaining chip for her pursuit of a better life and love. Before attending the barbecue party, Scarlett changes countless sets of dresses. She thinks about what kind of dress she would wear to make Ashley more fascinated, in exchange for Ashley's change of heart and let Ashley fall in love with her.

Mary Wollstonecraft shows her opinion in her work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman : With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* that people's view of beauty actually contains gender bias. Women are led astray by male bias and believe that beauty is a sign of a woman's perfection. Women need to gain some power through their beauty and showing weakness to men. However, in any case, beauty is a passive force, which is based on the examination of men (106).

Under the full male gaze, Scarlett pursues her external beauty and regards it as a kind of power. This is undoubtedly the bondage of the patriarchal society to women, which makes them misunderstand the meaning of beauty. People can read in the book that when Scarlett wants to get something or achieve a certain goal, she will dress up and then attract others, especially men, with her beauty and charm.

When Scarlett is deeply in the tax crisis of Tara manor, she thinks of Rhett and thinks that the man who likes her might lend her a sum of money to tide over the crisis. She pulls down the velvet curtains to make a new dress, and dresses up before going to visit Rhett in prison to get his help. However, she is snubbed by Rhett, and all her tricks and performances are still seen through by Rhett in the end.

"You'd have stood a much better chance of getting it, for if there's one virtue I value in women it's frankness. But no, you had to come jingling your earbobs and pouting and frisking like a prostitute with a prospective client.(425)"

This time, Scarlett's beauty and dress does not work. The weapon she uses to make men surrender loses its effectiveness, and even is insulted and abused by Rhett. Under the gaze of men, Scarlett takes her beauty as a means to realize her wishes. She thinks that she can win the favor of men through her beauty, which is essentially a submission to the patriarchal society, that is, to a great extent, she enjoys all the advantages that men provide for her. Beauty is her tool to achieve desire and satisfaction. However, the worship of appearance is illusory, it is a superficial way of expression, and cannot reflect the moral or rational advantages of women. Women who pursue beauty with this purpose under the gaze of men actually live in the oppression of a patriarchal society, and Scarlett is also a typical example.

Scarlett's Passivity in Relationships

Scarlett's love for Ashley is persistent and fanatical, and even reaches the point of blindness. Scarlett's passivity to love is also reflected in that Ashley almost dominates the emotion between them. After she is rejected by Ashley, she still keeps thinking about him. She could not even refuse all Ashley's requests.

Women in literature have always been passive to love, and Scarlett is no exception. Her passionate love for Ashley also put her in a passive position. Ashley is gentle, knowledgeable and reasonable. He is a typical southern gentleman. Scarlett still loves him in the face of many suitors, which implies that Scarlett has always been dependent on the culture of the South and has not given up this dependence in the worst situation (Chen 231). Scarlett's love for Ashley also shows her admiration for the ideal Southern gentleman in her heart. This kind of gentleman will bring her a richer and better romantic life. Therefore, she unremittently pursues Ashley and still expresses her love for him even he gets married.

Like the women in other literary works, Scarlett has always been at a disadvantage in the relationship between the male and female, that is, almost the relationship and the mode of getting along with each other are dominated by the man. Scarlett's love for Ashley is sacred and sincere. Her love for Ashley runs through almost the whole book, and this fanatical emotion is even unexplainable to her. She loves Ashley deeply, but Ashley doesn't have the same emotion with her, which makes Scarlett always in a passive position.

Scarlett's love for Ashley even makes this self-willed lady full of the spirit of self-sacrifice. *"She had started to say : 'I'd cut up my heart for you to wear if you wanted it,' but she finished , 'I'd do anything for you!'(200)"* Although Ashley and Melanie are married and have their child, Scarlett makes no secret of her love for him. However, Ashley keeps a subtle attitude and just asks her to take good care of his wife.

Scarlett's behavior is straightforward and thoughtless, but she has not kept sober and rational in this relationship, that is, she is still in a state dominated by men. Scarlett's inferior position in this relationship also exactly reflects the position women are in when facing gender relations in a patriarchal society.

If Ashley has some control over Scarlett, it is mainly manifested in the spiritual aspect, that is, Scarlett has been unable to control her deep love for this man. The novel also shows the male control over Scarlett's body, which is mainly shown by Rhett's marital rape of Scarlett. In this book Rhett uses sex as a means of power over his wife. He is jealous to see Scarlett being with Ashley in an intimate manner, and it prompts Rhett to assert his dominance through the use of sexual violence (Afsous 4).

Mitchell amplifies the rape by creating a dramatic moment in the story. She establishes the setting of Rhett's aggression in the intimacy of Scarlett's bedroom, at the point when she stands naked in front of her angry husband. By illustrating the scene as such, Mitchell conveys the unequal distribution of power in the situation from the beginning (Afsous 4). Rhett decides what Scarlett will wear: *"Wear that,' he said, tossing it on the bed and coming toward her. 'No modesty, matronly dove grays and lilacs tonight'"* (862). In this process, he humiliates Scarlett through a series of words and behaviors to maintain his dominance as a man, which brings Scarlett not only physical control, but also mental anxiety.

“He was like death, carrying her away in arms that hurt. She screamed, stifled against him and he stopped suddenly on the landing and, turning her swiftly in his arms, bent over and kissed her with a savagery and completeness that wiped everything from her mind but the dark into which she was sinking” (871).

In this process, Scarlett has been in a state of extreme fear and helplessness, but she has to endure her husband's beast like behavior, although she is dissatisfied with it and has no way to resist. But the next day, when Scarlett remembers this sex, she thinks *“He had humbled her, hurt her, used her brutally through a wild mad night and she had gloried in it” (871).* She feels gloried, and actually defend her husband's behavior. Mitchell's language in reporting Scarlett's feelings the morning after conveys no sense of anger, fear, or regret (Afsous 9). From this part it shows a complete male sexual domination.

It is obvious that when facing Ashley and Rhett, Scarlett is still in a passive inferior position, that is, her body and spirit are controlled by these two men to varying degrees. Scarlett does not realize this clearly, but defends men's irresponsible and even violent language and behavior.

Scarlett's Compromise on Marriage

Many scholars believe that Scarlett's rebellious spirit can be reflected in the fact that she has a different view on marriage from other traditional women, who dreams of becoming a good wife, and Scarlett makes a free choice for marriage with her own will. But does Scarlett really keep sober about her marriage and make a free choice? The answer is No. Scarlett only takes marriage as a means to achieve some purpose, so her husband will meet some of her wishes and help her in life. It can be said that Scarlett is still a traditional woman who relies on men. Taking marriage as a bargaining chip, she also shows a woman's disadvantage in the marital relationship, that is, she must rely on men, and her voice in this relationship is still weak.

Simon Beauvoir's view of gender construction holds that *“human gender is inextricably linked with the construction of social culture. Society places women in the 'other' position relative to men. Therefore, women's discourse has always been in a marginal or repressed position relative to the mainstream discourse.(162)”* Although Scarlett in this book shows her brave and strong qualities, she is still a woman deeply influenced by male chauvinism. She fails to get rid of the context of male discourse center and exists in the patriarchal society as an *“other”*. In her three failed weddings, people can see her lack of voice as a woman and her compromise to men.

Scarlett has been married three times, but not once according to her own wishes. Her marriage to Charles even can be called a farce. After she is rejected by Ashley, in order to stimulate the man, she accepts Charlie's love with a vengeful heart and decides to marry him. However, Charlie dies of pneumonia in the hospital bed, so Scarlett becomes a widow.

During the war, in order to pay off the taxes, she tries her best to cheat her sister's fiance Frank Kennedy into a flash marriage, and pays off the taxes on Tara manor with his money. Money makes her unscrupulous, makes her violate morality and rob her sister's lover. But her second husband soon died of an accident after marriage.

And Scarlett's marriage to Rhett is not out of her will to love. To some extent, the relationship between the two of them is more like taking advantage of each other's needs. During this period, she still keeps thinking about Ashley, and it leads to a scandal later, then Rhett also abandons her.

These three failed marriages all originates from her blindness, utilitarianism and vanity, and ends in the failure, which symbolizes that she could not get rid of the context of male discourse center. As an ontology, she has always lacked the right to speak, and always exists as the *“other”* present (Peng 27). Marriage is just her chip, used to achieve some of her satisfaction and comfort. She gets everything she wants at the cost of marriage, but in fact, she still relies on men to cope with some changes in life through them.

Conclusion

Gone with the Wind is set in a society that places a 'low premium on feminine naturalness'. In this book the author tries to show the many restrictions on women in its setting and how women are regarded as inferior to menfolk (Osuji 3). This limitation can be fully reflected to the heroine Scarlett.

Scarlett is a woman who grows up through experiences, but it should be noted that the external environment makes her have to make some changes. The war destroyed people's homes and lives. Scarlett bravely faces the reality, makes positive changes, and shoulders the burden of supporting her family. There is no doubt that she is the outstanding woman of that era, and she tries her best to survive in the troubled times. However, Scarlett's moral concept is still vague. Her rebellion against reality often stems from her inner desire and drive. She works with her intuition and instinct rather than relying on reason.

Undoubtedly, Michel created a brave and strong woman in this book, who actively faced many changes in life. However, in the whole patriarchal society her resistance is still tragic, and her resistance spirit is insignificant. Scarlett does not become a total female rebel against the patriarchal society with clear female consciousness which full of rationality. Her consciousness is also deeply influenced by the patriarchal society, which also lead to the failure of her rebellion.

Many American female writers in the 20th century described the awakening of female consciousness and women's pursuit of freedom in their works, and Michel is undoubtedly a very important one among them. Scarlett in her works shows us the brave and strong side of women. However, through careful observation of the text, people can still find the profound impact of the patriarchal society on this female character. Therefore, by reading this book from this perspective, people can find the penetrating oppression and control of the patriarchal society which is deep-rooted on the whole female group. Such oppression is profound and even affects the consciousness of the female group even some female writers themselves. And it does imply that for all the women, to achieve the freedom and liberation, is still a long way to go.

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