

Awakening and Struggle of Female Consciousness in "Thunderstorm"

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Abstract. In the process of social development, women's consciousness has gradually awakened, and the struggle for women's rights has been carried out in depth. More and more people have realized the importance of women's awakening, and the works of literature and art have described a large number of female characters with rich connotations in this regard. This paper analyzes the three female characters in the work of Thunderstorm, and explores the awakening and resistance of women's consciousness in the work under the background of a specific historical period. These three female characters are different in personality, age, cognition and so on, and the awakening of women's consciousness is also different. This paper analyzes the three female characters, and analyzes the differences in the awakening of women's consciousness under the constraints of historical conditions, social class and age. This is a complex awakening and resistance, which involves multiple levels and perspectives, not a single individual or event. The paper analyzes the awakening and resistance of women's consciousness in the work of Thunderstorm, and puts forward suggestions for the development of women's consciousness in contemporary society.

Keywords: Thunderstorm, female characters, female consciousness, resistance

1. Introduction

Literature and art are effective ways to reflect the characteristics of a certain period of time and convey ideas and opinions. Many literary works have written about the awakening of women's consciousness. Thunderstorm is one of Cao Yu's representative works, which is also a typical work to describe the awakening of women's consciousness. Cao Yu is a well-known tragic writer. He focuses on the portrayal of three female characters, describes their tragic experiences, and deeply analyzes the changes in their emotions, which is conducive to understanding the awakening of women's consciousness in a specific historical period, and also feels the injustice of society and the resistance of women of different ages.

In the process of academic research, the tragedy and artistic characteristics of this work have attracted much attention. Cheng Zhizhong analyzed the artistic techniques and creative methods of the play from the perspective of dramatic conflict [1]. Zou Hong analyzed the artistic techniques and creative methods of the play in depth, and analyzed the author's mental state in the process of creation [2]. Although the awakening of female consciousness is also a key point of analysis, it is only focused on the role of Fanyi. Liao Yangming analyzed the role of Fanyi in the play from the

perspective of female characters [3]. Qian Gurong focused on the analysis of Zhou Puyuan and Fanyi [4]. Undoubtedly, Fanyi is the most awakened female character in the whole play, and she has strong resistance, but we should not ignore the awakening of other female characters. In the process of creation, female consciousness is awakened and resisted, which is a comprehensive description of female consciousness. Through the analysis of the three female characters, the awakening of female consciousness is analyzed from different perspectives, and a more comprehensive and multi-dimensional understanding of female consciousness is formed, so as to feel the difficulties of female awakening in the complex social environment.

Firstly, the social dilemma, background and era characteristics of the story are analyzed. Then, the complex character relationship in the play is analyzed. Finally, the three female characters in the play are analyzed. This paper focuses on the awakening of women from different social strata and backgrounds, and analyzes the female awakening, consciousness and resistance from the three aspects of personality, ideology and life struggle, so as to get new ideas and provide reference for solving the problem of female development.

2. The historical and creative context of *Thunderstorm*

Thunderstorm is a work created in 1933, which is related to the social transformation of China at that time. Although feudal society has been eliminated, feudal ideas have not been completely eliminated. Japan's aggression against China has escalated, and the people of the whole country are in turmoil, both inside and outside, which requires the awakening of the people's consciousness. In the whole society, the national salvation movement is carried out with the support of the cultural circle, and the consciousness of countless writers and playwrights has been awakened. In such a historical background, the *thunderstorm* was born, and the theme of the work was to awaken people's consciousness and enhance their strength.

Thunderstorm is a novel created by Chinese writer Cao Yu, which is set against the backdrop of the 1920s and 1930s, and focuses on the analysis of the social contradictions of semi-colonial countries. At this time, the working class, bureaucratic capitalism, capitalism and feudalism coexisted in China, and the working class was cruelly oppressed by bureaucratic capitalism, and a series of new ideas and cultures were produced in the process of development, which were in sharp conflict with feudal ethics. In this novel, the Zhou family, led by Zhou Puyuan, is the representative of feudal ethics and bureaucratic capitalism, and the working class is severely oppressed by the feudal values and bureaucratic capitalists. In contrast, the Lu family is the representative of the working class, which is oppressed by feudal ethics and suffers from feudal constraints. In the tragic story of the two families, the author criticizes the darkness of feudal society and the decay of feudal families, which is consistent with the social atmosphere of the anti-Japanese salvation movement at that time. The author also uses the awakening of female characters to resist feudal ethics and appeal for ideological liberation. Cao Yu was born into a bureaucratic family, and his father was addicted to drugs, which led to a suffocating family atmosphere, which was similar to the Zhou mansion in *Thunderstorm*. At this time, the work of the Western playwright Ibsen was introduced into China, which had a strong impact on Cao Yu, and the tide of anti-Japanese salvation was rising, which prompted Cao Yu to create *Thunderstorm*. In the postscript to the selected works, he said: "Thunderstorm is my first cry." [5] In the preface, he said: "I was full of passion when I created *Thunderstorm*." [6] It can be seen that *Thunderstorm* is not only a way for Cao Yu to vent his emotions, but also a strong call for ideological awakening.

3. A brief introduction and analysis of character relationships in thunderstorm

Thunderstorm is a typical tragedy. In the process of creating this work, the author carefully combs the relationship between characters, which is inevitably related to the occurrence of conflicts. All characters are interrelated and inevitably encounter personal tragedies in the same historical background. Although they are from different social strata and age groups, they have different ideas and personalities, but they are all tragic in this era.

In the play "Thunderstorm", there are many characters, among whom Zhou Puyuan is the most prominent. He is the owner of Zhou Mansion, a typical feudal capitalist, the father of Zhou Ping and Zhou Chong, the husband of Fanyi and the former lover of Shiping. He is the main source of feudal oppression in the play. Lu Gui is a servant in Zhou's mansion, the father of Sifeng and the husband of Shiping. He is a person with strong opportunism, who bullies the weak and fears the strong, and is the source of oppression for Shiping and Sifeng. Zhou Ping is the eldest son of the Zhou family. He is a key node in the complicated conflict of the play. He is the son of Zhou Puyuan and Shiping, and has a twisted relationship with his stepmother Fanyi. He does not know that he is related by blood, and he is infatuated with his half-sister Sifeng. Although he wants to resist, he is cowardly. Zhou Chong is the second son of the Zhou family. He is the son of Zhou Puyuan and Fanyi, and he is the most innocent and idealistic character in the play. He is also infatuated with Sifeng. Lu Dahai is a coal miner. He is the son abandoned by Zhou Puyuan and grew up with his mother Shiping. He is the representative of the working class in the play. He dares to resist and has no fear of authority, but he also has a strong feudal traditional color. Fanyi is the wife of Zhou Puyuan and the mother of Zhou Chong. She is an educated woman of the upper class, who dares to challenge ethics and pursue her stepson Zhou Ping. Unlike capitalists, she has a strong sense of possession and is emotional. Shiping is the mother of Zhou Ping and Sifeng, and the wife of Lu Gui. She is the former lover of Zhou Puyuan and a typical image of Chinese working women. She is kind-hearted, upright, and can endure humiliation and oppression. Sifeng is the daughter of Lu Gui and Shiping. She is kind-hearted and innocent, full of vitality, and longs for love. She doesn't know that she is in love with her half-brother Zhou Ping.

4. Analysis of female characters and research on the awakening of female consciousness in thunderstorm

4.1. Fanyi

Fanyi is a woman who has been deeply oppressed by feudal ethics. Although she is an educated woman, she can not get rid of the shackles of feudal ethics, which shows that the oppression of women by feudal ethics is not related to social status, even if women have been educated, they can not get rid of the shackles of feudal ethics. In the process of forcing Fanyi to take medicine, Zhou Puyuan tried to control her mind and soul, which is enough to show that they are in the same social class, but Fanyi has been deeply oppressed by Zhou Puyuan.

In the Communist Manifesto, Marx clearly pointed out: "All people are free to develop, which is the premise for the development of each person [7]". This view emphasizes the importance of women's liberation and awakening. Marx also pointed out that the key to the liberation of women is to get rid of the shackles of class oppression [7]. Fan Yi and Zhou Puyuan are in the same class, but Fan Yi has been oppressed by feudal ethics for a long time, which shows that gender inequality is serious in the whole society, which is caused by thousands of years of social history, and Zhou Puyuan plays the role of a dominator in the Zhou family. This is consistent with Simone de

Beauvoir's views in *The Second Sex*, especially her understanding of "the Other". Beauvoir pointed out that women have been regarded as "the Other" in social development, while men are regarded as "the Self" [8]. Although Fan Yi is in a high position in society, she is regarded as "the Other" in her relationship with Zhou Puyuan. She resists in this way, which is enough to reflect the reality. In the social context of China in the early 20th century, women were regarded as dependent on men, which was a common perception in society, and the social status of women had little impact on this.

In the process of resisting Zhou Puyuan's coercion, Fanyi's resistance consciousness has been awakened, which is the first peak of her growth. This attempt at resistance has not achieved the desired results, but it shows that she has a strong resistance consciousness. The oppressor requires absolute obedience, and the most direct way of resistance is to refuse to obey, which is fully reflected in the four conflicts between the two people:

Act I: Zhou Puyuan forces Fanyi to take medicine, which is the first stage of her awakening. She clearly opposes it, but she still drinks it angrily, which is a breakthrough.

Act II: Zhou Puyuan repeatedly sent his servants to urge Fanyi to see a doctor, but she refused to comply. When Zhou Puyuan personally intervened, he tried to exert his authority, but Fanyi did not give in, claiming that she did not know Dr. Ke. As the plot unfolded, her resistance became stronger and stronger.

Act IV: Fanyi returned from the Lu family and met Zhou Puyuan, who was gazing at a photo of Shiping, lost in thought. Fanyi was pale and wet, ignored Zhou Puyuan's questions, took the photo from his hand, and shouted at him, which was a strong resistance.

The end of the fourth act: Fan Yi plays the role of a judge, publicly tearing Zhou Puyuan's mask.

Looking back on the whole play, it is not difficult to see that Fanyi's resistance has been increasing in strength and intensity, which is enough to show that her consciousness has awakened, and she has developed a strong spirit of resistance, but she is full of despair. In Qian Guorong's view: "Fanyi's strength is increasing, but it is not because she has more confidence, but because she has nothing to lose." [4]

Fanyi said: "Women who are desperate can do anything." Under the oppression of feudalism, this is a typical case of hysteria, but it is more a manifestation of the awakening of female consciousness, which is full of indignation and tragedy, and is a strong struggle. This is also the basis for her to make the firm statement to Zhou Ping: "I have never regretted anything I have done, and I will not regret it in the future." It can be seen that she has the firm will of an awakened person, and she has the courage to resist Zhou Puyuan and feudal ethics, but we should realize that she is a member of the bourgeoisie, and she has a strong prejudice against Sifeng, calling her "lower class". The reason why she opposes is because she has suffered from male oppression and feudal tradition, and Qian Guren pointed out that Fanyi's resistance is only aimed at herself, and she does not have lofty ideological motives and higher demands [4]. It can be seen that although Fanyi's awakening is strong and her resistance is tenacious, it is still limited, and her consciousness is not at the social level, but only at the personal level.

Generally speaking, the heroine's awakening and resistance are the most intense in this play. She has experienced a process of evolution, and finally broke out under the pressure, but there are obvious shortcomings in her awakening, and her resistance is also partial, not raising the level of struggle to the social level, but only focusing on her own plight. Although there are many shortcomings in this character, she is a typical example of women's resistance, and her story can inspire more women to awaken.

4.2. Sifeng

Sifeng has been living in a patriarchal society since she was born, and her behavior has been restricted by men. The three most important men in her life have been trying to control her, and her father is the most typical. Lu Gui arranged for her to work in the Zhou family, and the surface reason was to find her a job, but the real reason was to use her salary to pay off his gambling debts. Later, when he learned that she had a relationship with Zhou Ping, he encouraged her to maintain contact with Zhou Ping, saying that only her father cared about her, but in fact, he did not really care about her happiness, but used her to gain favor with the Zhou family. Although he knew that Zhou Ping had an improper relationship with Fanyi, he encouraged Sifeng to get closer to Zhou Ping, but his so-called "paternal love" was just an illusion, and the tragedy of Sifeng's life had already occurred.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir said: "True love must be based on mutual understanding and respect between the two sides, and both sides should have freedom." [8] Zhou Ping regards Sifeng as an emotional crutch and uses it as an excuse to escape from his stepmother Fanyi. Although he claims to love Sifeng, he does not take her with him when he plans to escape. Sifeng's brother, Lu Dahai, represents the working class in the play, but he looks down on his sister for serving the Zhou family. He repeatedly emphasizes that Sifeng should not indulge in the illusion of a better future and should marry a poor man to fulfill her family duties. In his conversation with Zhou Chong, he clearly pointed out that Sifeng was born poor and should not indulge in the illusion of a better future. Beauvoir pointed out that "women are not born, but become women." [9] She pointed out that women are constructed as "others" in social, economic and cultural aspects, and that patriarchal systems restrict women to domestic roles through institutional structures and ideologies, depriving them of subjectivity [10]. This is reflected in Sifeng's experience. Beauvoir pointed out that men regard women as "others", giving them a series of identities, depriving them of their independence, making them dependent on men, and becoming a "second sex" [11,12]. Although Sifeng's brother is a member of the working class, he also believes that poor girls have no right to education, self-improvement, and pursue their own future. Beauvoir pointed out: "Women are not born, but become women." [9] She pointed out that women are constructed as "others" in social, economic and cultural aspects, and that patriarchal systems restrict women to domestic roles through institutional structures and ideologies, depriving them of subjectivity [10]. This is reflected in Sifeng's experience. Beauvoir pointed out that men regard women as "others", giving them a series of identities, depriving them of their independence, making them dependent on men, and becoming a "second sex" [11,12]. Although Sifeng's brother is a member of the working class, he also believes that poor girls have no right to education, self-improvement, and pursue their own future. Beauvoir pointed out that men regard women as "others", giving them a series of identities, depriving them of their independence, making them dependent on men, and becoming a "second sex" [11,12]. Although Sifeng's brother is a member of the working class, he also believes that poor girls have no right to education, self-improvement, and pursue their own future. Sifeng's female consciousness is not strong enough, and she is oppressed by men everywhere. Sifeng's relationship with Zhou Ping is a typical example. Sifeng dares to get involved with Zhou Ping, which is a challenge to feudal ethics, and she has a strong awareness of autonomy and desire. In order to pursue love, she broke the class boundaries, which was the same as her mother's experience. Both of them fell in love with a young master from an upper-class family and became pregnant. However, Sifeng is unaware that this seemingly hopeful beginning will lead to the same tragic end. Shiping, unable to reveal her story to others, urged her daughter to leave the Zhou family and did not guide her properly. Sifeng is young and innocent and does not have a strong sense of self-reliance. She relies too much on others. She

entrusts her whole life to Zhou Ping and declares that she will give her heart to Zhou Ping first and will never betray Zhou Ping. She pins her hopes on love and wants to change her fate. Sifeng is different from Fanyi and Shiping, who have been abandoned by men and know that others are unreliable. Sifeng is naive and inexperienced and believes in romantic salvation. Shiping was abandoned by Zhou Puyuan in her youth and tried to commit suicide with her child. She no longer believes in love. Fanyi also tried to hold Zhou Ping, but she was rejected. Sifeng grew up in a traditional ethical environment. Her poverty, narrow experience, timid nature and so on made her not have the courage of Fanyi and not see through the hypocrisy of society like Shiping. Although her tragedy is caused by love, it is different from her mother's. Shiping is strong and survives the tragedy, but Sifeng is too young and has a heavy psychological burden. She is under pressure from many aspects, including her father's exploitation and ghost stories, anxiety about her relationship with Zhou Ping, panic about Zhou Chong's pursuit, and the mental pain of being forced by her mother to swear an oath in the thunderstorm [13]. When she learned that Zhou Ping was her half-brother, her last hope was shattered and she ran away in despair. She died in a tragic accident.

Looking back, the most tragic person in this novel is Sifeng. If she can be independent like Fanyi and Shiping, she will have a better ending. She is young and has unlimited potential, but she lacks the courage to struggle, and she is timid, which is completely different from Fanyi's passion and Shiping's resilience. She has not awakened her female consciousness and has been oppressed by feudal ethics for a long time, so she is not strong enough to resist.

4.3. Shiping

Shiping is a typical image of a working woman in traditional Chinese society. She is kind-hearted, strong-willed and vulnerable. Zhou Puyuan is the main cause of her tragedy. Simone de Beauvoir said in *The Second Sex*: "When two people meet, they will pursue each other and pursue each other. The person who has privileges will dominate the other [14]." Zhou Puyuan is the master of Zhou's family. He naturally imposes his will on his family members, especially Shiping, with whom he has an intimate relationship. He treats her according to his own desires and interests. Shiping was Zhou Puyuan's maid, who was seduced by Zhou Puyuan, cohabited with him and had children. When Zhou Puyuan needed to marry a rich woman in order to make his social status higher, he abandoned Shiping, and she committed suicide by throwing herself into the river when holding her second child on the eve of the Spring Festival. After Shiping's death, Zhou Puyuan changed her memory into that of a virtuous mother, a noble young lady, a deceased wife, in order to build his own image. Although he cherished her memory, he was afraid of being blackmailed when he saw her again, and tried to buy her off with money. As a dominant figure, Zhou Puyuan pursued his own interests. Shiping's role was assigned according to his needs. When he needed care, she was a loyal servant; when he needed to satisfy his desires, she was an object of desire; when he needed to marry for profit, she was a disposable item; when he needed to uphold his image in front of his family, she was a virtuous mother. What Shiping is to Zhou Puyuan is not important, but what he needs her to represent.

From being a lowly maid to becoming a desirable woman in her youth, and then being discarded by Zhou Puyuan, she was only willing to accept the identity of a virtuous woman after her death, and the change of her identity was related to Zhou Puyuan [15]. The image and fate of Shiping were arbitrarily determined by male power, which was criticized by Zhang Kaiyan: "In this world, men's words are more powerful, and women's true history has been erased and hidden. In order to meet their own needs, men have fabricated the history of women and created a false image for them [15]." Shiping was exploited by men for a long time, and her female consciousness gradually awakened. Zhou Puyuan's betrayal made her deeply aware of the status of women in the eyes of

upper-class men, and she was unwilling to see Sifeng get close to Zhou Ping and Zhou Chong. In order to cultivate a strong sense of self-respect in the face of hardship, she went north after her suicide attempt [15]. She entrusted her life to others, but she was abandoned, and she realized that she could only save herself from despair and rely on herself. In the face of men, she had a strong sense of dependence. When she reappeared in Zhou's mansion, she was calm, independent, dignified and composed, which was the real Shiping. She realized the source of her tragedy, and struggled against male oppression and feudal ethics. She did not allow Lu Gui to send Sifeng to work as a maid. When she learned that Sifeng had worked in Zhou's mansion, she decisively took her daughter to Jinan. When she met Zhou Puyuan again, Shiping's consciousness had awakened, and she no longer accepted the identity of "virtuous young lady" fabricated by Zhou Puyuan to make up for his past. She exposed his hypocrisy: "She was not a young lady, but the daughter of Mother Mei, a servant in the Zhou mansion of Wuxi, whose name was Shiping." At this time, her female consciousness was fully awakened, and she no longer allowed her identity to be manipulated, and rejected this false history. She firmly refused Zhou's 4000 dollars, unwilling to be insulted by him again. However, although Shiping's consciousness has awakened, her resistance is limited. Unlike Fanyi, she has no courage to confront Zhou Puyuan and feudal traditions directly. She can only flee with her daughter. She wants to resist, but she is powerless. Her tragedy reflects the pain and helplessness of women at the bottom of society.

Generally speaking, after being abandoned by Zhou Puyuan, Shiping has a deeper understanding of the nature of men. After experiencing hardship and displacement, she deeply feels the injustice of the society and gradually awakens her female consciousness. In this process, she goes to the Zhou mansion again, resists Zhou Puyuan, but she is too weak and can only escape. Although she has awakened, she is not strong enough to resist, and she is also oppressed by the society.

5. Conclusion

Fanyi's consciousness has been awakened, which is the most prominent female character in the novel, and her resistance is the most fierce, but she has not experienced a long-term oppression, and she has enough courage to resist. However, she also has shortcomings, her resistance is not enough, only confined to her personal life, can not form a certain scale. Sifeng's consciousness has also been awakened, and she dares to pursue Zhou Ping, but she has not experienced much of life, and she is bound by feudal ethics, and she is oppressed by men, so she wants to rely on others to survive. After knowing the truth, she was mentally devastated and died tragically, which was caused by class oppression, but also because of her own naivety and incomplete awakening. After being abandoned by Zhou Puyuan, Shiping realized the nature of men, and after experiencing hardships, she realized the injustice of society, and gradually awakened her female consciousness. When she came back to Zhou's mansion, she tried to resist Zhou Puyuan, but she did not have enough strength, so she chose to escape. Although her awakening is firm, she can not rebel decisively because of the oppression of society and her kindness.

Generally speaking, the three female characters in this novel have achieved the awakening of female consciousness and have taken action to resist. However, due to personality differences, age and class differences, the degree of awakening and the strength of resistance are different, which can reflect the diversity of female consciousness awakening.

In this study, the causes of female resistance and the process of awakening of female consciousness are analyzed and summarized, and the shortcomings and limitations of female struggle are analyzed and pointed out. The purpose is to further analyze the awakening of female consciousness in Shiping and Sifeng, and to attract more scholars to analyze and explore the

characters in the work of *Thunderstorm*. In this study, the awakening of female consciousness and the resistance of female characters are analyzed, which is conducive to solving the current female dilemma and promoting the development of feminism.

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