



Retroversion Of Self To Other: An Overview Of Austen's *Pride And Prejudice* *Prejudice* And Morrison's *Beloved*

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Abstract:

The paper explores the retroversion of 'self' to 'other' in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* out of feminist philosophy. The feminist philosopher advocates the 'self' of woman, practised in reality out of the definition of the 'subject,' man. The woman self as an independent and rational being is denied in reality, but some feminist philosophers endeavour to establish women with 'self' identity though some argue this view. They highlight the fact of women as 'other' that Simone de Beauvoir addresses. Moreover, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Beloved* are radical literary texts of two female writers which can be analyzed in multi-layered ways. In these two novels, Austen in *Pride and Prejudice* views Elizabeth as the equivocal voice of a woman having the intelligence and understanding power to create a place in society. Besides, Morrison in *Beloved* presents Sethe holding the capacity of being independent in her life, who has to be turned into a woman of inferior identity. However, this study probes whether Elizabeth as 'self' retroverts to Sethe as 'other' based on the feminist concept of 'self' and 'other'.

Keywords: Self, Other, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Beloved*, Simone de Beauvoir

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'Self' and 'Other' are two diverse and binary entities of our social encounter. These two binary senses become the central topic for exploring woman's position in society by feminist philosophers. They want to fix woman's status as 'self' or 'other' in the community. Someone accepts a woman's position as 'self,' but most regard a woman as 'other'. In this paper, I have looked into the self-representation of the woman in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and the 'other' representation in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The corpus of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Beloved* covers various broad themes. The reader has numerous options to think of these two novels from a multidimensional point of view regarding many issues. These two novels deal with many themes and sub-themes that are not disconnected. But the stories of Elizabeth, Linda, Jane, and Charlotte in *Pride and prejudice* and *Beloved*, Sethe and Denver in *Beloved* are interlinked in the socio-cultural

atmosphere of 'self' and 'other' representation of women in these two novels. Elizabeth, by all means, in *Pride and Prejudice* is continuously trying to represent herself in her society. Conversely, Sethe in *Beloved* constantly struggles to breathe independently in her community. So, in this paper, I have focused on the transmogrification of the 'self' representation of Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* to the 'other' representation of Sethe in *Beloved* and have seen how two writers make these views a thought-provoking concern to the readers. The concepts of 'self' and 'other' through feminist philosophy have been employed as the theoretical framework in this paper. I have taken these two concepts as they are binary concepts in a social science context.

Since the paper explores the distinctive features of the 'self' representation of Elizabeth in *Pride* since the paper explores the distinctive features of

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the 'self' representation of Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* and the 'other' representation of Sethe in *Beloved*, the theory of 'self' and 'other' through feminist philosophy plays a pivotal role in this paper. The concept of 'self' in feminist philosophy has emerged when Simone de Beauvoir has addressed 'she' as 'other'. This address gives importance to the 'self' for feminism. Systematically and historically, a woman's self is denied and recognized as an 'inferior other' by the 'subject' man. In this regard, the feminist redefines the concept of 'self' in a multi-layered relational context. Out of the multi-layered context of self, I have taken the modern philosophical view, "the self is a free, rational chooser and actor—an autonomous agent... The modern philosophical construct of the rational Subject projects a self that is not prey to ambivalence, anxiety and depression, obsession, prejudice, hatred, or violence" (Sanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). But some feminist philosophers argue this dominant view of 'self' since 'self' as an independent and rational identity is misleading. They point out that this view wants to confine a woman to the domestic domain as a supportive wife, nurturing mother, and obedient sexual partner making her voice into virtue.

On the other hand, otherness is a pioneering concept of Simone de Beauvoir, which explores how the identity of minority and majority regarding man and woman in society is formed. In her book, *The Second Sex*, she clears the concept of 'other'. To her, the otherness sense prevails in society because a woman is dealt with as an 'other' entity. So, her voice becomes silenced. Women are defined by men as not-men, as things, as a negative part not having maleness, and as an auxiliary part of humanity. Otherwise, man as a general human being defies the woman's contribution, which creates a sense of otherness, giving prominence to male sensitivity and ignoring the female part of humanity. This sense makes women as invisible, eccentric, and negligible entities in society. This phallogocentric consideration of women is engrained in societal norms and becomes true. The prevailing difference between man and woman is "Benda...in his Rapport d'Uriel:...Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man" (Beauvoir xxii). Beauvoir reveals that to men "she is sex – absolute sex, no less.

She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is Absolute – she is the Other" (Beauvoir, xxii). The subsiding point of women's perspective is sex, because woman is thought, signified and represented as sex, not as a part of humanity. She exposes, "...woman is defined exclusively in her relation to man...the truth that for women man is sex and carnality has never been proclaimed because there is no one to proclaim it" (Beauvoir, 143). Out of all reinforcing factors of defining 'other', the dominant factor is perception. The subjective definition accepted and practiced as truth formulates the concept of 'other'. The fiction is the source of perception of 'other' ignoring a chance of explanation and exploration regarding a woman. I argue that the fictional representation of women is an epistemological issue that is derived from a historical and restricted traditional point of view. Nevertheless, Feminist concept of 'other' contrasting with active 'subject' and 'self' provides keen insight into this arena for the textual analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Beloved*.

The novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, starts with unconventional presentation of its heroine, Elizabeth, with improvement personality of a woman and represents her as 'self' possessing all qualities to hold herself in her society, "she must possess...and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading" (35). Austen not following the popular trend emphasizes on her heroine's intelligence and wit to hold any situation rather than on her physical beauty. Elizabeth's walking in every step shows that she is an individual self, not a submissive woman. With the depth of character, the reader has to think of her deeply with positive outlook. "This is also part of the fact that Austen's artistic choices emphasis Elizabeth's intelligence and humour [...] rather than her physical appearance ... thus making the heroine a character with more depth" (Nilsson, 2012). "She acts polite and ladylike, but she is still her individual and does not want to be submissive as women are supposed to be in her society" (Muji, 2010). She is cautious of her sister Lydia's "unguarded and imprudent manner" (189) and her decision to visit

Brighton. With her quick intelligence, she solves the problem arising from Lydia's elopement and becomes a reliable guardian of Lydia after all. Moreover, her concern for her elder sister, Jane's worry about being detached from Bingley, heightens her position as 'self' in her family. Austen presents her heroine as a real human being in a situation when Darcy's interference in her sister's happiness is exposed. She becomes indignant. "Mr. Darcy's shameful boast of what misery he had been able to inflict gave her a keener sense of her sister's sufferings" (156).

Otherwise, another heroine, Sethe in *Beloved*, becomes a topic of 'other' for holding herself as an independent self. She is considered "a woman of remarkable stillness, suggesting that she was calm and deliberate in difficult situations, as well as suggesting that she had cultivated the kind of practical rationality that would allow her to survive in a hostile culture" (Mayfield, 2012). She wants to practise her individuality and shows her courage to establish her identity in society. She is bold enough to run away from Sweet Home, when she comprehends the Schoolmaster's inscription of the animal characteristics of Sethe in the notebook and understands her independent self. "Sethe, whose behavior demonstrated her will to succeed... continued to define herself as an individual, ... but also as a woman who looked toward a future with her husband and her children" (Mayfield, 2012). It is irony of fate that her male-dominated society changes her independent self into 'other'. Thus, she becomes the "subjects of rape, enforced childbirth, and natal alienation from their children" (Grewal, 1998:100).

The feminist qualities that Morrison advocates through Sethe's portrayal are the traditional beauty, strength, resistance and integrity of black woman... In her interview with Rosemarie K. Lester, Morrison expresses her views ... black woman have always been both mother and labourer, mother and worker, and have worked in the fields along with man....Black woman both ship and safe harbor. (Banumathi, 2012)

Sethe nourishes her 'self' identity and wants to establish it in reality. It is evident that Sethe's crawling with pregnancy to reach Ohio presents her as a strong self, "Sethe's miraculous escape

despite this profound suffering and this murderous assault on her body was a testament to the stillness of her soul and strength" (Mayfield, 2013). To hold her 'self' in society is evident when she wants to name her children since her patriarchal society considers women as the lowest being in society. But the practice of the 'other', as Beauvoir exposes, appears when Baby Sugg announces her daughter-in-law's arrival, "her friends and neighbors were angry at her because she had overstepped, given too much, and offended them by excess" (138). Her claiming of herself does not become successful for her non-compliant society. She falls into the male-controlled hole and is forced to live at 124 Bluestone Road, Ohio. Her sense of independent self is shattered by ten minutes of infanticide memory and "palsied by the baby's fury at having its throat cut" (5). She has to realize that "freeing yourself was, one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (95). Even her two sons treat a woman as an inferior other in the house. "Burglar and Howard grew furious at the company of the woman in the house, and spent in sullen reproach any time they had away from their odd work in town carrying water and feed at the stables" (104). Out of this situation, she makes herself subordinate to a man. She leads a life of "a woman who lit up for nobody in particular, who just did it as a general announcement" (65) and a "witless colored woman" (66).

Besides, Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* dignifies her 'self' when she reacts to Lady Catherine's overbearing attitude towards her. During their conversation, when it comes to Elizabeth's family, she remains polite against Catherine's insulting question. At her age, the rejection to give a direct answer shows her 'self' identity, "you can now have nothing farther to say... You have insulted me, in every possible method. I must beg to return to the house" (288). Even she exposes her equality with Darcy, "in marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal" (287). She is bold enough to expose her identity to the person who may demolish her golden opportunity to be solvent financially since Lady Catherine is Darcy's aunt. Her rejection not to attach with Darcy reflects her intelligence and liveliness to manage any situation.

Otherwise, Sethe's effort to manage her 'self' is shattered when "a gang of whites invade her daughter's private parts, spoiled her daughter's thighs and threw her daughter out of the wagon" (251). "Sethe wants her children to be free. She refuses to accept the 'silent second class status'" (Primlyn, 2012). As Beauvoir exposes, a woman is considered as sex for a man; Sethe also is a victim of sexual harassment in Sweet Home, where "two mossy-toothed boys" (70) take Sethe down to suck her breast. Besides, her wish "to get to a place where you could love anything you chose- not to need permission for desire-well now, that was freedom" (162). To protect her family and do her responsibility towards her children is "to keep them away from what I know is terrible" (165). This relieves her that "they ain't at Sweet Home. School teacher ain't got'em" (165). "Foolishly she considers herself to be a human being and mother but her euphoria lasts for a brief period" (Adhikari, 2002). This wish makes her an 'other' or outcast of the society and "inaugurate her life in the world as a woman" (248). Her claim to be subject in the community turns it to the topic of 'other' as she "knows that the circle she was making around the room, him, the Subject would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn't get right off-she could never explain" (163). She has to isolate herself from the human community for two years forcing Denver to stop schooling. Even she cannot give her daughter Denver a woman's self. "Now [Denver] cries because she has no self" (123). "Sethe is no longer competent and able to take care of multiple people; she cannot even take care of herself" (Dueker, 2007). So, Denver leads her life as "lonesome. Very lonesome" (55) and "a girl who had lived all her life in a house peopled by living activity of the dead" (29).

Otherwise, Elizabeth's view on love and marriage gives dignity to 'self' as she disagrees with the exposure of love to a man at a first chance; it is a matter of a man searching out woman's feelings. To her, love develops out of understanding. In another way, she is not willing to compromise the happiness in marriage with a matter of chance. Her refusal to marry Mr. Collins establishes her 'self' to society, "I am very sensible of the honour of

your proposals, but I can't do otherwise than decline them" (90). "I am not one of those young ladies... who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal- You could not make me happy" (90). "Elizabeth's wit and her unconventional and liberal talks signal the clues about the exposition of female identity...confident in conversations and sure of her opinions, Elizabeth does not hesitate to convey either her certainty or her views" (Tanrivermis, 2013). "... Elizabeth's independence as: Elizabeth's views on marriage, on society, and her own position in society reflect her independent spirit and her critical intelligence...."(Tanrivermis,2013). She maintains woman 'self' as she exercises that a woman "shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity nor endeavour to persuade yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and insensibility of danger, security for happiness" (115). Her "a lively, playful disposition" (13) and "sweetness and archness in her manner" (46) bewitch Darcy. She holds her independent self, saying, "I never ridicule what is wise or good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies do divert me" (50). She feels irritated by Darcy's exposure to love her at first. It is an insult and against his reason. "Why with so evident a design of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character?"(158).

As activists as Elizabeth and Darcy are, Austen indicates that they will practice establishing an equal relationship...Cognition and courtship (in other words, reason and love)- turn out to be central to her maturation. It is in her dealings with eligible men that Elizabeth is tripped up by and finally fights herself free from the cognitive constraints of her community, and it is through her love for one of those men that she belongs to establish a new and better community. (Hirota, 2013)

Conversely, Sethe has no other thing as "being alive was the hard part" (7) for her. She has remained only "a tree on my back and a haunt in my house, and nothing in between but the daughter I am holding in my arms. No more running- from nothing. I will never run from another thing on this earth" (15). She becomes an object of sex and a centre of childbirth to Paul



D, another person of Sweet Home but not as a symbol of love. Yearning for freedom snatches her independent self and falls her into the subjugation of man as 'other'. "Sethe remembers that her husband Halle treated her in a brotherly way, but she reflects on the fact that love necessarily implies being able to make demands, has expectations, and lay claim to the other" (Miquel-Baldellou,2012). She suffers from eighteen years of solitary and isolated life as a punishment for claiming freedom and infanticide. This punishment erases her sense of freedom, even though she does not hold control over her mind as she utters, "I don't have no plans. No plans at all" (272). She is entangled with only the past and has to surrender herself into the definition of 'other'. 'Self' sense is vanished from her life as nothing is left to stand up and she becomes the doll of Paul D, "... the search in Sethe's mind for her origins causes Sethe to contemplate her existence, and this search for origins prepares Sethe for her attempts to accept the 'Other' in her life – the white folks who have little concern about her origins but who wish to plan her future for their own good" (Mayfield, 2012).

Though these two novels have different textual and social contexts, the two female writers portray woman's position fictionally through a unique point of view of their character presentation. The character of Elizabeth and Sethe represents two sides of a woman in society. So, I have taken two protagonists' characters, Elizabeth and Sethe, in this paper though these two novels reveal many women characters. Through the retrospective way, it is seen that Elizabeth retains her 'self' at the end of the novel though other women characters in this novel have the limitation of holding 'self'. In the narration of the story, Elizabeth's lively involvement in every action reminds us of the feminist philosophical sense of 'self' to recognize woman's real identity in life. When it comes to Sethe's participation in the narration of the novel, it is a reminder of woman's inferior and man-defined 'other' entity, which feminist philosophers advocate to show actual practice in society with a woman. Even Sethe's 'self' identity has to be submerged into 'other'. The better life as an individual self that Sethe tries to implement does not face success for the attitude of her society towards women as 'other' though her slavery situation inflicts

more to demolish her 'self'. But for willing and holding life as 'self', the dominant society makes her 'other' and forces her to accept her otherness entity in the community.

After analyzing these two novels from a feminist perspective, the concept of 'self' and 'other' are very relevant topics of these two novels. Jane Austen portrays Elizabeth as a heroine holding 'self' according to the feminist perspective. In another way, Sethe has to demolish her 'self' and becomes an 'other', as Simone de Beauvoir has said. Though the context and background of two literary texts are different, these novels represent two facets of women in reality. The two women in two masterpieces of literary texts, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Beloved*, have been interpreted from diverse perspectives. The retroversion of 'self' representation in *Pride and Prejudice* to 'other' representation in *Beloved* opens up a new view of literature by revealing the actual condition of women in society.

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