



# Feminist Translation Theory and Creative Treason: A Case Study of Translations of *Wuthering Heights*

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**How to cite this paper:** Yuxuan Jin. (2025) Feminist Translation Theory and Creative Treason: A Case Study of Translations of *Wuthering Heights*. *Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Science*, 9(3), 615-620.  
DOI: 10.26855/jhass.2025.03.031

**Received:** February 20, 2025

**Accepted:** March 17, 2025

**Published:** April 15, 2025

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## Abstract

As a classic British literary work imbued with intense female emotional undertones, the translation study of *Wuthering Heights* has long been a significant topic in translation studies. This thesis employs text analysis and other methods to examine the translations of *Wuthering Heights* by Yang Yi and Fang Ping. The research finds that in dealing with vulgar language and rhetorical devices, female translators tend to emphasize the independence and emotional depth of female characters. They more frequently utilize feminist translation theory, thereby rendering the portrayal of female characters fuller and more vivid. However, this does not imply that male translators completely disregard these theories. Fang Ping, for example, integrates the theory of creative treason in his translation, showcasing both the translator's subjectivity and loyalty to the original work through nuanced handling of certain details. This study aims to analyze the shortcomings of feminist translation theory in practice and propose solutions that retain its merits by incorporating the method of creative treason.

## Keywords

Feminist translation theory; creative treason; literary translation; *Wuthering Heights*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Feminist Translation Theory

Feminist translation theory emerged in the 1980s as a combination of translation studies and the feminist movement. Simon, a representative figure of Western feminist translation theory, suggests that feminist translation theory essentially acts as a cultural intervention, challenging the authority of traditional translation paradigms.

### 1.2 Reasons for Choosing *Wuthering Heights*

*Wuthering Heights*, written by Emily Brontë, is an enduring classic work set in the early 19th century during the Victorian era in Britain (1837-1901). This period was marked by the Industrial Revolution and significant societal changes, with prominent class divisions and fixed gender roles. Women were often expected to play the roles of housewives and mothers, lacking independent economic rights and social status. This study focuses on *Wuthering Heights* for three main reasons.

First, although there is extensive research on feminist translation theory in China, a comprehensive theoretical framework has yet to be established. The feminist elements in *Wuthering Heights* make it an ideal subject for feminist translation theory research, allowing deeper insights into the significance of feminist perspectives in literary

translation.

Second, while most domestic research concentrates on the translations of *Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre*, *Emily Brontë*, the most reclusive and unique of the Brontë sisters, is known for her rebellious spirit and inner passion. Her individuality reflects her desire for freedom, independence, and a close connection with nature, making her work distinctly rebellious from a feminist perspective. Translating the unique female qualities in *Wuthering Heights* poses a significant challenge.

### 1.3 Application and Current Research of Feminist Translation Theory and Creative Treason in *Wuthering Heights*

Feminist translation theory has garnered considerable attention in the translation of *Wuthering Heights*, focusing primarily on issues of gender, power, and identity during the translation process. According to Mao Yansheng and Qiao Junpeng (2015), a translator's gender can influence the translation from lexical, syntactical, and dialogical perspectives. Corpus-based studies indicate significant differences in handling vulgar language related to women between male and female translators. For instance, male translators tend to be direct, while female translators prefer more euphemistic approaches (Wang Zhanlian, 2016). Feminist translation theory emphasizes the gender roles and power relations in translation (Tan Feifei, 2014), treating euphemistic language as a representation of femininity and formal language as a marker of male authority (Mao Yansheng, 2015). Therefore, a translator's gender may affect their approach to dealing with gender-related issues in the original text (Liu Jia, 2010).

With the development of cross-cultural communication, some scholars have begun to explore the intersection of translation theory with other theories, such as creative treason. From the perspective of Espiègle, creative treason represents an objective deviation from the original text to approach and recreate the female consciousness in *Wuthering Heights* (Gao Chaqing, 2019). Feminist translation theory, developed through the process of interpreting female voices in translation, shares a deep connection with creative treason (Jiang Zhiyun & Jiang Yimin, 2016).

## 2. Manifestations and Limitations of Feminist Translation Theory in Different Versions of *Wuthering Heights*

### 2.1 Case Analysis

#### 2.1.1 Comparative Analysis of Vulgar Language

Harwood's survey on gender differences in language demonstrates that "men are characterized by frequent swearing" and "often use vulgar language, including hostile words towards women, whereas women tend to use adjectives like beautiful and lovely." Female translators instinctively avoid vulgar language, opting for indirect and implicit expressions.

In the translations examined, male translators used 12 types of vulgar language related to women, with a total occurrence of 69 words, whereas female translators used only six types of vulgar language, totaling 23 words. This significant difference indicates varying attitudes towards women held by male and female translators during the translation process. Female translators deliberately mitigate derogatory terms related to women.

Original Text: "And that minx Catherine Linton, or Earnshaw, or however she was called--she must have been a changeling--wicked little soul!"

Fang Ping: See Appendix-(1)

Yang Yi: See Appendix-(1)

For the term "minx," Fang Ping uses "little elf," while Yang Yi uses "mad girl." According to the Oxford Dictionary, "minx" refers to "a girl or young woman who is clever at getting what she wants and does not show respect," indicating a sly and coquettish girl (or young woman). Fang Ping's "xiaoyaojing" subtly implies misconduct, while Yang Yi's "fengyatou" downplays Catherine's insolence, reflecting a feminist perspective that respects women.

#### 2.1.2 Comparative Analysis of Rhetorical Devices

Metaphor and Symbolism: Female translators tend to delve deeper into the emotional connotations of metaphors and symbols, whereas male translators prefer literal accuracy.

Original Text 1: "He's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same."

Fang Ping: See Appendix-(2)

Yang Yi: See Appendix-(2)

In this example, the male translator adheres to a more literal translation, focusing on the sentence's logic and structure. The female translator conveys a deeper emotional attachment, emphasizing the female protagonist's subjectivity and emotional depth.

## 2.2 Limitations in Practical Application

Although feminist translation theory has positively impacted translation practices by addressing gender issues, promoting gender equality, amplifying women's voices, and enriching texts, several limitations remain. Overemphasis on the theory can lead to excessive rewriting, compromising the translation's fidelity and artistic value. The singular focus on gender issues may also overlook other critical social and cultural factors such as race, class, ethnicity, and religion, potentially leading to a one-sided interpretation of the text. Lastly, some researchers may overemphasize the advantages of feminist translation theory and critique different translations excessively, which could affect the assessment of excellent translations and hinder the theory's development.

## 3. Creative Treason

### 3.1 Background of Creative Treason

The concept of creative treason was first proposed by the renowned French theorist Robert Escarpit (1918-2000). Escarpit argued that blindly reproducing the linguistic form of the source text represents a dead-end for literary translation. Considering factors such as the original work, language, cultural context, authorial individuality, target language, cultural context of the target language, and audience, creative treason in literary translation is objectively inevitable. Creative treason represents a divergent way of thinking and acting from traditional norms or authorities, not merely violating existing rules or authority but attempting to solve problems or achieve goals through new methods. In literary translation, it reflects the translator's innovative interpretation and recreation of the original text, challenging traditional translating norms and authority. Additionally, creative treason aids in character portrayal, allowing translators to rediscover and reshape characters, highlighting their individuality and complexity, thus challenging traditional gender stereotypes and social norms. It transcends gender norms, emphasizing female themes and experiences, showcasing female strength, autonomy, and rebellion.

### 3.2 Analysis of Creative Treason in Fang Ping's Translation of *Wuthering Heights*

Much of *Wuthering Heights* is narrated by the maid Nelly in a storytelling manner with simple, natural language. Fang Ping's translation, utilizing this narrative style, crafts a grounded and authentic translation through secondary creation.

#### (1) Adding Modal Particles to Convey Naturalism and Warmth

Original Text: "Why canst thou not always be a good lass, Cathy?" And she turned her face up to his and laughed and answered --"Why cannot you always be a good man, father?"

Fang Ping: See Appendix-(3)

This dialogue occurs as Mr. Earnshaw approaches death, displaying his deep love for Catherine. Fang Ping adds the modal particle "aye" to Mr. Earnshaw's question, vividly expressing his infinite love and longing for his daughter. Similarly, in Catherine's reply, adding "daddy" and "aye" highlights her playful and clever nature. Without these particles, the conversation would lack the sense of life.

#### (2) Carefully Chosen Chinese Vocabulary for Authentic and Expressive Language

Original Text: "...you will escape from a disorderly, comfortless home into a wealthy, respectable one; and you love Edgar, and Edgar loves you. All seems smooth and easy—where is the obstacle?"

Fang Ping: See Appendix-(3)

In this example, Fang Ping follows the Chinese preference for four-character idioms, making the translation more fluent and expressive. Yang Yi's translation lacks the use of four-character idioms. Her translation of "comfortless" does not capture the same essence as "no fun." This shows that mere loyalty to the original text is insufficient; Fang Ping's translation aligns with creative treason, achieving both innovative translation and fidelity to the original's spirit.

### (3) Flexible Sentence Structure for Clarity

Original Text: "One day, I had the misfortune, when she had provoked me exceedingly, to lay the blame of his disappearance on her (where indeed it belonged, as she well knew)."

Fang Ping: See Appendix-(3)

In this example, Fang Ping transforms the affirmative "where indeed it belonged" into a rhetorical question. His treatment adds clarity and vividly conveys Nelly's indignation, presenting her usual tone. Conversely, Yang Yi's translation lacks this vividness. This creative approach not only ensures accuracy but also vividly depicts the character.

## 4. Feminist Translation Theory and Creative Treason

### 4.1 Relationship Between the Two Theories

Feminist translation theory and creative treason share the common goal of challenging and reshaping traditional and authoritative norms. Creative treason provides feminist translation with specific methods and tools, enabling translators to actively inject gender consciousness into the translation process, breaking linguistic and cultural constraints. This relationship underlines feminist translation theory's role in reflecting and improving translation practices and challenging and transforming societal gender structures. Creative treason, emphasizing innovative adaptation while remaining faithful to the original text, can help mitigate potential excesses in feminist translation theory. By creatively handling details, translators can retain the core spirit of the original work while fully expressing the female perspective. Creative treason integrates multiple cultures and ideas, allowing translations to reflect feminist viewpoints and other critical cultural and social elements, offering a multidimensional interpretation.

### 4.2 Integration of the Two Theories

#### 4.2.1 Creative Handling

When dealing with gender-related language, translators can employ creative use of target language vocabulary, sentence structures, and rhetorical devices to retain the feminist perspective while ensuring natural fluency. For example, terms with gender-discriminatory connotations in the original text can be replaced with neutral or positive terms to convey new gender concepts. As mentioned earlier, translating "minx" into "fengyatou" is more appropriate than "qingtiaonvzi" (hussy). Using "daodangui" (troublemaker) would further avoid gender bias.

#### 4.2.2 Scene Reconstruction

Scene reconstruction involves creatively reconstructing key scenes in the original text to align with feminist ideals and resonate with target readers. This method includes dialogue adjustments and detail additions to make female characters fuller and more powerful, presenting a richer and more dynamic portrayal. For instance, Fang Ping's addition of modal particles like "na" and "ya" during translation is a typical example of scene reconstruction. This approach aligns with feminist translation theory's emphasis on female subjectivity and embodies the spirit of creative treason, showcasing the translator's subjectivity. By such handling, the translation not only conveys the original meaning but also resonates emotionally with readers, making characters more vivid and realistic. This flexible and creative adaptation of the original work enhances the literary value of the translation and further promotes the practical application of feminist translation theory.

## 5. Conclusion

Firstly, this study provides an in-depth analysis of the application of feminist translation theory in the translations of *Wuthering Heights* by both male and female translators. It highlights how female translators mitigate derogatory language and enhance emotional expression to emphasize the independence and depth of female characters. Additionally, it demonstrates the theory's notable effects and limitations in practical use. Secondly, addressing issues such as over-rewriting and single perspectives in feminist translation theory, this study proposes incorporating creative treason to balance fidelity and innovation in translations. The study further explores the relationship and complementary nature between feminist translation theory and creative treason, emphasizing the necessity and feasibility of their integration. Lastly, the study suggests that through creative handling and scene reconstruction, translations can retain feminist perspectives while achieving natural fluency and engaging readers emotionally, providing a more comprehensive and multidimensional translation method.

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## Appendix

### Examples of Original Texts and Translations

#### (1) Comparative Analysis of Vulgar Language

**Original Text:**

"And that minx Catherine Linton, or Earnshaw, or however she was called—she must have been a changeling—wicked little soul!"

**Fang Ping:**

还有那个小妖精，凯瑟琳·林顿或是欧肖，或者管她叫什么名字，她一定是个换过的孩子——坏透的小妖精。

**Yang Yi:**

还有那个疯丫头，凯瑟琳·林惊，或是恩萧，不管她姓什么吧-----她一定是一个容易变心的-----恶毒的小灵魂！

#### (2) Comparative Analysis of Rhetorical Devices

**Original Text 1:**

"He's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same."

**Fang Ping:**

他比我更像我自己。无论我们的灵魂是什么构成的，他的和我的都是一样的。

**Yang Yi:**

他比我更是我的一部分。无论我们的灵魂由什么构成，他和我的完全相同的。

**Original Text 2:**

"Why canst thou not always be a good lass, Cathy?"  
And she turned her face up to his and laughed and answered –  
"Why cannot you always be a good man, father?"

**Fang Ping:**

"卡茜，你为什么不能永远做一个好姑娘呀？"  
她就把头抬起来直看着他，一边笑，一边回答：  
"爸爸，那你为什么不能永远做一个好男人呀？"

#### (3) Creative Treason in Vocabulary and Sentence Structure

**Original Text 1**

"...you will escape from a disorderly, comfortless home into a wealthy respectable one."

**Fang Ping:**

你可以脱离一个乌七八糟、没有乐趣的家，来到一个富裕体面的家庭里。

**Yang Yi:**

你将从一个乱糟糟的、不舒服的家庭逃脱，走进一个富裕的体面人家。

**Original Text 2**

"One day, I had the misfortune, when she had provoked me exceedingly, to lay the blame of his disappearance on her (where indeed it belonged, as she well knew)."

**Fang Ping:**

有一天，活该倒霉，她惹得我发急了，我就把他失踪的责任怪在她头上-----说实话，不怪她又怪哪一个呢？这一点她自个儿也很明白。

**Yang Yi:**

的确这责任是该她负，她自己也很明白。