



Writing as woman in the 18th and 19th Century

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Abstract

For a long time, women writers have fought for their space in the literal world. This was met by discrimination and male dominance where women writers were not allowed to write or publish books in their own title. The following essay analyzes the issue of feminism by looking at female writers and how they fought for their space. It also looks at the feminist approach to changing women's perception, fights for equal opportunities how feminist writers contributed to this course. In doing so the paper will analyze four feminist writers by looking at their literal approach to fight for women's rights and how their writing has influenced the woman's place in today's society.

Keywords: female writers, feminism, women's rights

1. Introduction

Since the rise of female writers in the world of authorship and article or story writing, they have always faced a lot of challenges for coming in second in the literary world. They have often been required to prove their worthiness and the relevance of their work. In most cases, the woman writing has often been categorized as being less relevant in comparison to that of male writers. This has often been a subject of unethical remarks. The struggle among female writers is not only found in third world countries, but in the highly developed continents like Europe and the United States where the literary art is still thought to be a practice of men (Mathews). The following paper analyzes the challenges faced by female writers as they seek representation of feminism in literary art. The paper will also compare and contrast literary work from different authors including Jane Austen, Louis May Alcott, Bronte sister and Virginia Wolf.

2. The development of female writers

2.1 The Bronte sisters

It can be said that the Bronte sisters represent the pioneer movement of feminism using the literary work. The three sisters who came from a humble beginning tell a story of struggle, frustration, discrimination and triumph through their different literary works. Even though more women are now coming in the enjoy the freedom of writing, most of their struggles are still the same as the ones of the 19th-century female writers. Writers like the Bronte sisters were British novelists who wrote issues on the rights of women or societal aspects that focus on the equal treatment of women (Brontë, Brontë, and Brontë). The Bronte sisters were among the most renowned female writers of their time. The works of the Bronte sisters marked a new stage in the development of feminist writers. They looked at the treatment of different social relations and conditions which were realistic and from the point of view in this time, they have always been viewed as the first women representative in the realism of female

writers in Britain. However, these sisters were also able to establish the romantic, emotional and passionate quality of their novels (Donovan).

To the present day, England has established an institution known as the Bronte Society that has established members all over the world. Each year, several issues in the society have incorporated the teachings or writings from the Bronte sisters. One of the areas that these sisters looked at is on the issue of equal representation and recognition for female writers in the British literary map. This is because, like many female writers, these sisters live in an era that superiority of men was still worshipped and women were forbidden in the hierarchy. This was a turbulent period for women (Woolf and Guerrero, Virginia Woolf on Jane Austen, The Bronte Sisters, and George Eliot). The issue of capitalism was all over the United Kingdom and this led to a lot of drawbacks in terms of the development of female writers. Under this historical background, these sisters were able to rise as three essayists through a normal clergyman family. As growing female writers, these sisters suffered a lot of sexual harassment and torture including some felicity.

One of the things that tortured them the most was the loss of their mother when they were young. However, this was also a blessing as they were lucky to find a knowledgeable and intellectual father Patrick Bronte. Compared with the talent of their creative and imaginative mother, the children quickly grew up to become the most creative writers of their time. Throughout their younger years, the sisters roamed through different seas while tasting various literature of the world. Here, the sisters found inspiration that the most important part of life is to reverse that man would rule everything, including women, whom to men were accessories (Woolf and Guerrero, Virginia Woolf on Jane Austen, The Bronte Sisters, and George Eliot). This situation had to be changed, thus Bronte sisters fought for the idea that women need to have their own dignities and statuses that independently identifies their own social position. Such writers promoted feminism in their

writing as it formed the initial disillusionment of the sisters' consciousness with the idea of feminism.

At this, they also made an effort to fight for their own rights by writing books which gave women a strong position in the society. As can be seen from their lives and interactions, the Bronte sisters were able to find their consciousness of feminism, which became so influential and reasonable through their writings. The background of their literacy, their social situation and their interest in local and foreign literature contributed to their inspiration in writing about female independence and promoting feminism. This was very much expressed in most of their literary work. Such included the historical value of most of their novels, which still provide one of the most excellent works of literary art through the ages. The Bronte sisters who, when by the names Agnes Grey, Jane Eyre and Catherine provided a state of consciousness for women in their days and the modern female writers, an independence of their own (Brontë, Brontë, and Brontë). Their combination of true love, spirit of the traditional rules and desire of freedom brought a combination of women who were focused on bringing about female independence in Britain in all aspects of their lives apart from literature. This was expressed in most of their characteristics which gave consciousness of women to realize that they can think on their own, make decisions without having to consult men and be proud of their personality and dignity.

2.2 Jane Austen

For most scholars, Jane Austen has always been viewed as a conservative novelist. Her view of feminism has been critically seen as not being what initial feminist movements had in mind. Unlike Bronte or Alcott, Austen does not discern a woman's place in the society; however, she insists that the efforts of this woman should be recognized. When reading through most of her novels, the author highlighted most aspects of women discrimination that existed in her time. The writer who lived almost 200 years ago has been widely praised for her work to the point that the Bank of England declared to have her Portrait on the 10-pound note. But her feminist approach was quite different in her writing that some did not think of her as a feminist at all. However, when one reads her critically acclaimed novel, 'pride and prejudice', it delineates some issues of women and equity where she highlighted on the social issues that touched women in different spheres (Austen).

For some readers, Austen characters may not really fit the idea of feminist and the women of the 21st century. During her time, however, Austen was aware of the norms and expectations of women. In most cases, they were expected to marry and bear children. In most cases, their lives depended solely on men or their male relatives. Reading through her books, Austen seems to support the Bronte sisters on the issue of female empowerment as she herself lived a conventional life to the extent that her brother noted that her life as not a life of the event (Bilger).

Feminism is also highlighted in most of her novels where Austen gives women strong female leads. For some critics, her writing did not challenge the normal social norms of the time only that her idea of empowering women was to have them treated equally in each scenario. This is so evident in most of

her stories. When looking at her characters, Austen would accept the universal truth which dictated that they should marry and that the lives of women were always limited with a particular boundary. This boundary was widely accepted as it brought order in the society. To her, women's roles ensured that things ran well in the society and that this did not make them lesser people, but that they had a responsibility to serve in the society which men were unable to do. Her characters were ones that pushed a lot of boundaries where what a woman was allowed to do were limited (Austen). However, the idea of feminism here looks at the dynamic theory by which one exists in several centuries and has changed over time.

During Austen's time in the late 1800s and the 1900s, feminism was all about looking at a woman as having the power to do and take over male responsibilities, including the power to vote. However, after the WWII, feminism meant a lot of things. For example, it pushed for the idea that women should be allowed to work outside their homes whether they had children or not. At this time, Austen's writing going through to the extent of being published was viewed by many as a feminist act in a more radical than accepted manner. This was expressed in some of her books like *sense and sensibility* and *pride and Prejudice* (Austen). Austen also lived a time when women were not allowed to write novels, meaning that they were also not allowed to publish. For female novelists of the time, they were still taken as indiscreet and lude where most of them would hide under male names so that their work would pass through to publishing.

Austen went against this norm of writing and decided to write on her own and publish her novels. In addition, when reading her stories, they were mostly centered on a woman with resolve. This means that most of her main characters were shaped in a way that they count in any circumstance and find their way through. At this, her female characters were made in a way they showed independence and heroism by fighting their way through happiness and the right to choose.

Even though her characters did not exhibit any form of over the feminist desire to go against or challenge the social norm, in fact, she was able to achieve this. She chose not to marry, but kept on writing novels as a way of challenging the notion that unmarried women were not able to support themselves. Through her novels, Austen showed a sense of realm which women were not allowed to cross before, like opening up to the public through her works? Her first nouvelle piece of work was "sense and sensibility" which was not authored under her name but a pen name "A Lady", shows how much she was ready to open the gates for more women to write their own books and be published in their own name (Austen).

Before the first novel, most female characters were written by men, including the shaping of the plot. In this manner, the female desire to express their own point of view and own experiences which were expressed through the perception of women and their experience. In consideration of feminism definition and the issue of equality, the writer presented this in a more focused and less radical way. Even when looking at the modern idea of feminism, sexes, and equality, it can be said that Austen's representation of equality is the main root of feminism. When comparing the modern day and Austen's time, women during her time did not have many avenues that

allowed them to seek their position with women's voices. Even if her intentions were feminist or not, this was a great step towards equality of women and it was well represented in the form of fiction. It can be agreed that the writer held various feminist views in her writing and used her novels to express her thoughts about women and women's issues. In her novel "Pride and Prejudice" (Austen). Austen was able to share her feelings about the perfect lady, the relationship between sexes and marriages. Her plot, the characters were all biased to express her thought about women. The importance that she put into marriage is also introduced with the initial like about her novel where she supported the philosophy that is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife (Austen).

In this statement, it is open that Austen expressed women as very important in the society and it was fair that they are recognized from the vital part they play in the lives of men and the society. To her, a woman that was able to achieve all was the perfect lady. She was the representative of all time, however, to Austen; the perfection that was expressed in the society regarding women was quite different from what she envisaged. To her, perfection was categorized and made women live under a particular person where they were forced to conform to the norms of the society (Donovan). Women were taught to have a thorough knowledge of things like dancing, drawing, music, and modern language if they were to fit the world. Women were required to dress in a particular manner or walk in a certain style. Their voice was supposed to express a feeling where the world would be but half deserved. In her view, women did not have free will and lived a life of conformity all through. Austen criticized and changed this through the strong character she gave women in her novel, including the mood of the stories she wrote.

2.3 Louisa May Alcott

The feminism in most of Louisa May Alcott was so much detailed in her novels, which reflected her personal beliefs while at the same time it represented to the existence of sexual politics, which in one way or the other indicated the pressure that the author received from the society. In most of the work that the author presented during the 19th century, it represented a female writer and a feminist whose work mostly constituted the facets of what became to be her achievement in the literal world (Alcott and Stern). In most of her writing, she has been able to demonstrate her feminism in different manners, but has also in other ways defined her place as a woman who had talent and creativity that was mostly not appreciated by male dominance in the late 1800s. The writer's novels about Josephine March, for example, are still very popular for many young female readers of the modern times. This is because most of her writing discussed family and celebrated relationships. In part one of *the few women*, which was written in 1868, her focus was in the lives and relationships among young girls (Mathews).

Alcott was able to construct most of her work in a manner that clearly defined the world of men and women. Most of the time this was a female-centered world that Alcott would look at. In her books, she was able to come up with an atmosphere that allowed girls to express their inner desires without fear. For

example, while reading through her novels, she discusses how women were isolated in most of the important social, political or economic activities of the country. This was the true nature of things in the 1860s when women's rights movement was growing (Donovan). For many critics, the writer's cathartic release of sexual tensions between men and women came in the way of creativity and she could not write good fictions due to her feminist nature. In most of her thriller novels, one will also realize that her feminist nature would come in between as she tried to indicate stories of women triumph (Mathews). This seemed to be her own triumph in the social world that she grew more than become a writer of imagination.

Apart from writing for the love of it, she also did it to feed her family who she supported. However, looking at the difference and her knowledge when it comes to fiction writing one can realize that her focus was on bonding men and women as equal human beings, however, she also expressed anger and frustrations against the community customs that saw women as lesser people, and not allowing her to grow in writing. Perhaps some of the most renowned works of the feminist writer included "*Behind the mask or, a woman's power*" which was one of his best-known thrillers (Alcott and Stern).

This shows that the writer was actually a feminist that used her fiction as a platform to which she would address the place of the women in the society. The issue of the rights of women played a lot in what she wrote, including the plot in most of her thrillers and short stories. It is the one thing that inspired her literal world and works of fiction. She was able to come up with different interpretations about the place of the woman. Through her fiction, Alcott was an advocate of domestic feminism. She often believed that women are able to lead a very satisfying life without having to sacrifice their lives being mothers or home keepers. In most cases during her career, one can say that she never liked the issue of domesticating women, given her background as a child and as a provider for the family. She often challenged the value of women in the society through her works and action. Her March novels also looked at other possibilities that women had outside as the preserve the noble existence of girls like Daisy, Meg, and Beth as depicted in her novels (Alcott and Stern).

Her other adult novel *Work* looks at the same pattern even though it looks at different arguments regarding women who work and are still required to sacrifice the order of domesticity to become self-independent. In it, she described her life as a breadwinner of the family through her writing. Her view of fiction was all about her boldest view on the empowerment of women. In her novels, for example, she discusses women that were still able to engage in sexual warfare against a system that discriminated against the voice of strong and ambitious women where male dominance would always silence their voice. Among her most critically acclaimed feminist works, since it was so secretive, her stories were able to provide, the modern and upcoming female readers and writers an insight into the oppressive world of 19th-century feminist writers. Through creating a fictional character, Alcott was able to release her rage, voice and her concerns regarding the oppressive era by looking at the reality which women of her time was led to live by default. Alcott expresses this with a lot of anger as she seeks liberation in different forms of dialogue, voice, and authority (Alcott and Stern).

In this, it is agreed that her literal reputation was neglected for the first time, just like that of Bronte sisters or Jane Austen despite their contribution to feminist literature. In most cases, her works were constantly debunked in the surrounding mythology of childhood and feminist growth. Alcott was able to present different aspects of mischievous children like Dan and Josie from the *March* novel. She also discusses what she called, 'the cult of romantic love' in her works about marriage life at *work* and *little women*. (Alcott and Stern) It is however important to note that as a feminist, Alcott was able to work through the doctrine of various definitions of women to the point that they were able to enter the public sphere. In her books, she was able to create a world of working women that refused to sacrifice their dreams, talents, and desires by remaining domesticated.

Alcott proved that women did not need to be defined by their husband, which is clearly expressed in her life and her novels. In her work, she insisted that women can be judged independently and can be responsible for her own misfortunes and a creator of her own success as an independent human being. She teaches women not to worry about their limitations, but concentrate on what the dreams and desire would want them to become. Her thoughts are similarly the thoughts of Jane Austen, who, though respected women and men position in the society, called for a chance for women to be recognized for their hidden talents and importance in the society (Donovan).

2.4 Virginia Wolfe

Virginia Woolf represented a new age of women sexuality and feminism. Just like the Bronte sisters, Jane Austen and Louis May Alcott, Woolf lived at a time when feminism was still rising. This was before the Second World War in the second wave of feminism. To her, the experiences those women when through to find social change could not go unrecognized. In particular, Woolf focused on the women's movement. Her feminist belief in the modern world looked at different aspects of women empowerment, including sexuality. In *Naomi Black*, she reclaimed various feminist documents. This was not a book about World War II as a reader would have thought, but it was on the representation of women. Her changing representation of feminism when hand in hand with her highlights of suffrages, and rise, of the working class women co-operative guild. In *Naomi Black* Woolf guides readers through the connections of feminists in the literal works that also incorporated her public letter from the 1920s (Woolf and Guerrero, Virginia Woolf on Jane Austen, The Bronte Sisters, and George Eliot). Other writings include "A society" and "A room of one's own" and the introductory letter to life as we know it. In all her literal works, Woolf looks at the development of the three guineas from the 1931 lecture in manners in which various illustration and forms have been able to serve the subversion of male scholarship.

In most of her life as a feminist, Woolf was also interested in bisexuality, which was not as it is today where people of the same sex would have relations with other as they did with the opposite sex but bisexuality in the intellectual manner which looked at the possibility that female and male identity would be fused to a single individual. This is because Woolf was a writer and a feminist.

Her arguments are however almost like those of Austen where women were not actually fighting to be better than men, but that they should be recognized as being equally necessary. According to Woolf, this was the only way to reconcile the feminine and masculine parts as this was the most creative of actions. At this, the most comfortable or normal state of being was related to when people of two genders lived in harmony or were able to operate with due respect (Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*).

In this regard, both the male and the female roles were equally important according to the writer. Meaning that the women part of her brain should have the same effect as that of the male. Meaning that the issue of intercourse looks at the fact that the man and the woman were supposed to be together to complete the cycle. In "A Room of one's own" the author writes, "it is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create any more than a mind that is purely feminine" (Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 9). These ideas are well explored in her other novels like "Orlando" which talks about a young man who wakes up half way and suddenly discovers he is now a woman. Apart from writing, Woolf also gave several lectures at Cambridge University, which included talks about women and art.

As a person, Woolf was denied university education due to her gender and that was why she insisted on the issue of intellectual freedom in her feminist writings. To her, women have always been poor since they were denied a chance to be educated; they did not have intellectual freedom as was for their male counterparts. It can be said that Woolf represents the fair aspects of feminism through most writers like Alcott would rather have it in a more radical manner.

While comparing Woolf to the Bronte Sisters and Austen, it can be agreed that the three writers understood what feminism was all about and fought to ensure that women were given a chance in literature as they were given in the social and economic women (Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*). A clear representation of women to these writers was not to fight men, but to ensure that women were not denied their chance to dream and live the same dream.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, it will be fair to add that when the above writers wrote about the need to empower women through their fictional characters and letters, they were looking at women who would push the feminist agenda forward. They looked at women that have the power to change the world, had the talents to dream, and were able to think, act and take on leadership and responsibility roles while the society denied them the chance. The four feminist writers represent the freedom and power that modern women enjoy in the present time. Since their time, more women writers have risen, including female philosophers, ideologists who works have changed the social, political and economic perspectives of the world.

Modern feminists thus need to come up with a broader way of addressing women empowerment platforms that what Woolf, Austen, the Bronte Sisters or Alcott had to offer them. This is because, in the past, these writers were disdainful of the working class women even when they knew these women

were still expected by the societal norms to run their homes. According to the four novelists, a woman's place is in her dreams and that women are required to exercise this dream without fear, pride or prejudice. This is what has been observed in the modern times where women are able to rise above male or female ego and are contributing the various agendas in the literary works of art as well as in their family. The importance of the women in the society has not been diminished as they are still mothers, wives, and breadwinners in their homes

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