

## FEMINISM IN ENGLISH LITERATURE OF THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

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### **Abstract:**

*As the centuries, the style of writing changed, and the need to talk about new things like sexuality, homosexuality, and the value of liberty became more clear. During the nineteenth century, writers began to talk about how important it was for women to be free and to be recognised. Because, for example, when women were finally able to vote and become more respected in society, writers wrote more openly about new issues. This is also one of the big changes in the evolution of literature. Some of the topics in twentieth-century literature would have been considered taboo in the 1800s, like the rejection of religion, homosexuality, and sexuality in general, as well as the rejection of religion.*

**Keywords:** *Feminist, literature, centuries, feminism, women.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, women in the United Kingdom have been fighting for their rights and independence, with the goal of having the same opportunities for education, work, and life as men. As a group of people, we call this the "first feminist wave." It happened from about 1800 until the end of World War I in about 1940. Wave: The goal of legal equality for women was a big part of it. Education and the right to work for a living were two of the main things that people talked about. From 1890 to 1920, there was a first feminist wave that focused on women's political rights. Women's suffrage was the peak of this first wave. "Women should stay at home, stay still, keep house, bear and raise children," Martin Luther said. Women are supposed to be friendly, courteous, and merry companions in life, the honour and ornament of the house, and inclined to tenderness, because they were made for that very reason. They are also supposed to be the pleasure, joy, and solace of their husbands. It looks at the strong connections that formed between new feminist ideas in China and the writing of "modern" women between the end of the last imperial dynasty and the start of the People's Republic in 1949. Both well-known and less well-known literary voices are looked at in this course. They were both involved in the heated gender debates of their time and used formal strategies to imagine stories of female experience and potential that were different from the ones that were popular at the time. This study looks at two broad questions: how did the rise of enlightened views of gender relations and sexuality affect the literary practises of the "new women" who made their debuts in the cultural public sphere at the time? This includes not only the content of their stories but also how they were written, who they were trying to reach, and how they were published. Because feminism isn't just about women, one of the authors is a man. This paper will show and look into the differences between male and female writing on the subject of feminism. Different perspectives on sexuality, as well as homosexuality, will be discussed.

## 2. THE PROGRESS OF FEMINISM

Feminism is defined as "the conviction that women should be granted the same rights, authority, and opportunities as men and treated in the same manner, or the set of activities aiming to reach this situation," according to the Cambridge online dictionary. The feminists are people who want men and women to have the same rights. This is called feminism. However, the words "feminism" and "feminist" didn't become popular until the 1970s, when they were used more often in public discourse. The feminist movement is a group of social and political views that deal with issues about gender inequality. Hundreds of years ago, British women began to fight against oppression. The movement has been going on for a long time, and the first feminists started talking about their ideas about inequality and the first suffragette movement started up. Before, women have been working for the same rights and jobs as men. The feminist framework also tells you how to deal with problems and what questions to ask about them. According to a definition in Jane L. Parpart et al's book *Theoretical Perspectives on Gender and Development*, a person is a person when they are a person, inequality arises from "the need to establish unequal incentives to motivate the most talented people to do the most important jobs in society efficiently." Another definition from the same book claims that inequality arises from "the practise of providing differential rewards to keep a less powerful working class fragmented by gender and race."

## 3. A SHORT HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Women in the United Kingdom and France were among the first to struggle for their rights, education, and, above all, respect. "The first time we saw a woman take up her pen in defence of her sex was when Christine de Pizan published *Epitre au Dieud 'Amour* (Epistle to the God of Love) in the 15th century," according to Simone de Beauvoir. Mary Wollstonecraft, author of the powerful *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, earned the lion's share of attention when women began to make improvements in society in the early nineteenth century. Wollstonecraft was a woman who "spoke up, quite loudly, for what had been a mostly silent segment of the human race," It says this in Arianne Chernock's book, *Men and the Making of Modern British Feminism*. There are still people who think of Mary Wollstonecraft as the person who started feminism in Britain. Her book, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, is seen as the first clear feminism text. Florence Nightingale, who thought that women had "all the potential of men but none of the opportunities,"<sup>8</sup> started nursing schools and fought for more education for women. She was also one of the most important social reformers of the early 1800s. Nonetheless, not only did feminist women work to make sure both sexes had the same opportunities, but feminist men also helped women have more freedom, even though they did so in small numbers. John Stuart Mill was one of them. He was an English philosopher, political economist, and feminist who was influenced by his wife, Harriet Taylor Mill, a women's rights campaigner. "The principle that regulates the existing social relations between the sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one hand, nor disability

on the other," Mill once said. Mill was also It was the first time a British Member of Parliament came up with a way to let women vote. Feminists and academics have broken down the movement into three stages, each of which has a different goal for the cause. Wave one is when women were trying to get the right to vote. This is when they were trying to get the right for women to vote in the United Kingdom and the United States in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Women's rights and property rights were at the top of the agenda for the first wave. They also opposed chattel marriage and husbands owning married women and their children. She says in her book *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction* that for married women, their home turns into a prison. The husband owns the house and everything in it, and his breeding machine, the wife, is the most despicable of all the fixtures. Married women are enslaved, and their status is no better than that of West Indian slaves." Women were treated similarly to servants during the time, with few rights and possessions. "If women's rights are not the same as those of men, what are they?" writes Marion Reid in her article *A Plea for Women*, which has been called "the most detailed and effective argument by a woman since Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*." "Woman was designed for man in one sense, but she was also made for herself in another and higher one," she confesses. Reid emphasises on reasons why women should not be confined solely by domesticity, and that caring for the home and children should be in both the wife's and husbands best interests. Many female writers and feminists claimed that acknowledgement of what women need to fulfil their potential and their individual natures, not just equality, was what they required. In one of *A Room of One's Own's* most famous passages, Virginia Woolf makes a point on how women's skills have been wasted. "She contemplates a number of greatly talented women from the past, from the Duchess of Newcastle to George Eliot and Charlotte Bront – who were deprived of experience, intercourse, and travel, and this is why they never wrote quite as powerfully and generously as they might have," Walters says of Woolf's argument. Woolf also believed that in order to be able to write, a woman has money and her own space.

#### **4. PERCEPTION OF FEMINISM TODAY**

If you call it "postfeminism," it started in the 1990s. It's still going on today, even though it was called "postfeminism" at the time. Postfeminism refers to the second wave of feminism's perceived flaws, and it still fights for the same things as the first wave. However, the movement's focus has changed a little. It now places more emphasis on the individual rather than government processes and rules. Feminists are also more diverse now. The first and second waves of feminists were mostly Westerners, middle-class white women. The third wave feminists are women from many different countries, cultures, religions, and backgrounds. Women have become more important in society in the 1990s, not just in the United Kingdom but also in other countries around the world. Women in the United Kingdom can go to the same schools and work in the same jobs as men, and their ideas and opinions are valued and taken into account. Women have been able to stand up for themselves and be recognised thanks to the feminist movement for a long time. When it comes to today's feminism, it isn't as easy to describe. Some women don't want to be associated with it because they still see it as a strict and old-fashioned group. But in

September 2014, the United Nations started a new campaign with British actress Emma Watson as its Women Global Goodwill Ambassador. HeForShe was started by the United Nations in September 2014. Her name is well-known, but she is also very active in the campaign, and her talks at conferences have drawn a lot of attention because they are so interesting. It's not just a women's issue, but also a human rights issue, which is why the HeForShe campaign is important. "How can we make the world a better place when only half of it is invited or feels welcome to join in the conversation?" Watson asked this question at one of the HeForShe events. To help men and boys, not just women, fight for their own rights is one of the campaign's goals feminist because the campaign wants males to feel comfortable calling themselves feminists as well. Even though the campaign has been criticised for being conducted solely by women, the attention that has been drawn to the feminist issue has been slow, which is a good indication; there has yet to be a place in the world where women are treated equally to men.

## **5. COMPARISON OF MALE AND FEMALE WRITERS ON THE TOPIC OF FEMINISM**

During the 19th and 20th centuries, female and male writers wrote about feminism and women's perspectives in different ways. They were writing under a pseudonym because they didn't want to write under their real names. Charlotte Bront used the pen name Currer Bell. In the early 1800s, women were afraid to write about their social problems because men's opinions were more widely accepted and because they didn't want to be influenced by social prejudice against female writers. As a result, they used male names. Feminism was not talked about openly at the time. Instead, it was passed down through literature. As people travelled around the world, literature could go with them. This made it one of the ways people could share ideas and opinions about this topic. The European Enlightenment, which was a big part of it, made it easier for people to have more sexual freedom. also impacted writers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, because sexuality has received so little attention, it's impossible to say how far its values have spread in other countries; however, it's clear that this has happened gradually since the middle Ages. Furthermore, the nineteenth century, specifically the Victorian era, from the 1840s to 1900, was a time of two motifs: sexuality and servitude. Women's subjugation is linked to their lack of power and political ignorance. To counter this, feminists began to develop their own ideology, a new way of thinking about relationships, sexuality, and masculine authority. Women's education, the right to vote, marriage, and Sexuality and society's views on women changed a lot during the Victorian era, as did the way people thought about them. In the second half of the 1800s, the role of women in society changed dramatically. This was the most important and far-reaching development of all. In a male-dominated world, the number of opportunities for women increased, there were new advancements in education and jobs for women, and marriage and motherhood were no longer seen as the only way to make money. According to Greg Buzwell's essay *Daughters of Decadence*, "She was free-spirited and independent, well-educated, and not interested in marriage or having children. She was also free-spirited and educated." New Woman became a big deal. In real life, she was a feminist who wanted women to be able to vote, and in

literature, she was a woman who focused on herself goals while simultaneously serving as a mirror for contemporary society. She was defined as a classy lady who does not have to subject to a man, rather than a loving wife who is loyal to her spouse. Female characters were sometimes portrayed as "sexual predators or oversensitive females who cannot accept their nature as a sexual being," according to Buzwell. Modernism was a new literary style that evolved towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, literature became more lifelike, and authors were given more leeway in expressing sexual themes. However, it was not until after World War II those ideas around sexuality and gender began to evolve. The sexual revolution began in the 1960s and lasted into the 1980s, and the impact of this movement was significant. The revolution altered traditional attitudes toward sexuality and relationships in general. Because of sexual liberty, not only heterosexual but also homosexual and polygamous relationships were accepted. There was also a rise in public nudity, pornography, and abortion and contraceptive legalisation. Many important There were more women who wrote during the sexual revolution than at any other time in history, which led to a lot of literary works being written at that time. As a result, most academic work has at least looked at gender and sexuality, which came from the women's movement and the civil rights movement. The literature of the time, which was mostly about middle-class white women, was fueled by feminist ideas. Women's activism was a common theme in the essays, and they tried to bring back a lost literary tradition of women's literature. Early literature also focused on "reading women writers' resistance to patriarchy and on the representation of female characters," says Pamela K. Gilbert in her book *Gender*, which is about gender. In general, this was a time when people were interested in sexual exploration and gay culture, like *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* reflect.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The second wave of feminism was thought to be the same as the first. It was more focused on women's freedom and social equality for women. Women at the time wanted equal access to education, equal pay, contraception, and abortion. There were ways to show that society was better off. There is also a lot about modern feminism in the first chapter, which is called the third wave. This has been going on since the 1990s, and it is often called that. The movement is now reacting to what it sees as the flaws of the second wave of feminism and equal rights all over the world, not just in the United States United Kingdom.

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