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WOMEN LITERATURE AND WOMEN WRITERS- A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the trials that women writers encountered in the nineteenth and twentieth century as well as women in broad-spectrum and how female social roles have transformed significantly. Therefore, the notion of gender roles is looked at, along with the limitations that women faced. In addition, the concept of separate spheres that were governing in this period is briefly outlined to illustrate the male-dominated society that these women lived in. However, the main subject focused on is how women writers were able to speak out in contradiction of this patriarchal society and the traditional gender roles that women were exposed to. Women progressively expressed their individualism and claimed more equal partnerships in marriage, public life, law, and politics with men. Undeniably, by becoming professional writers, they defied the notion of the domestic sphere and the notion that women were mostly supposed to be wives and mothers. As a result, women writers had the capacity to empower other women and influence the progress of history. To be specific, Charlotte Bronte and Virginia Woolf will be discussed to demonstrate women writers that braved the patriarchal society of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Through their novels and their heroines addressed matters that their society faced and they did this in their own matchless ways. Charlotte and Virginia Woolf worried themselves mainly with problems such as gender roles and equality between the sexes. Nonetheless, they were also involved with the education of women and issues concerning the domestic sphere. The novels discussed are *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte and *A Room of One's Own* and *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf. Their characters had to play both the role of a working woman and a wife but some quitted the job for marriage like Jane in *Jane Eyre*. The novels in question can be considered as feminist novels.

Key Words - Women, Literature, Feminist, Gender equality and Economic Independence

1. Introduction

This paper examines women literature, their social life and awareness amid the male dominated world through Charlotte Bronte in nineteenth century and Virginia Woolf in twentieth century to present. Nineteenth century society, known as the Victorian period (1837-1901), considered men as the superior sex and women as inferior. In this century, men dominated the world of literature. Therefore women did not have the same rights or the same opportunities that were accessible to men. As a result, women's activities were restricted and their prospects in society were restricted as well. Women literature gained widespread prominence by the end of the 19th century. Feminist causes and the expansion of education for women led to many more female writers than any preceding century (Bomarito & Hunter, 2005). That is why it is often referred to as the age of the female novelist (Showalter 1972). The reason being, that it is branded by great women writers such as Jane Austen, George Eliot and the Bronte sisters but they were not fully welcomed by the society. Hence, in order to stride on the male-dominated literary platform and stand along with the men, female authors had to use male pseudonyms to avoid the arrogant judgments of critics and outflow the boundaries that were placed on them. That is why Charlotte Bronte's novel, *Jane Eyre*, was published under the male pseudonym Curer Bell. (Rowbotham 21).

2. Social Life

Before and at the commencement of nineteenth century, a model of femininity was the 'perfect lady,' which was adopted as a Victorian ideal of woman. Family and morality were the base of Victorian society, and girls were all taught to submit to the authority and matrimony (Vicinus 1972). The concept of 'The Angel in the House,' which was denoted to the epitome of Victorian women, triumphed in the Victorian society. As a result, women in Victorian Age were viewed as unsuited and excluded in many professions. Showalter (1999) points out that the first professional activities of Victorian women are either in the home or in womanhood.

However, by the struggles of individuals and feminists, the obstacles to the entry into professions for women, whose exclusion and incompatibility in work had been debated, were removed in the beginning of twentieth century (Swindells 1989) From the nineteenth century, the notion of morality and family was powerfully suspected by the critics and feminists, who claim that there is no 'The Angel in the House.' Therefore, the popularity of education credited to a rise of the number of women who have professions since Victorian age.

2.1 Women Awareness

2.1.1 Charlotte Bronte

More work prospects available for women were the effects of female's awareness of the significance of economic independence. Therefore, independent heroines could be seen in Charlotte Bronte's literary work in Victorian age (Vicinus 1972) Jane in *Jane Eyre*, the tactful main female protagonist is the symbol of women independence. Jane will not surrender to her chase for knowledge and love in womanhood as could be seen from her determination in childhood. Jane is not contented with the feeling of captivity: "Then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I desired more of practical experience more of intercourse with my kind"(Bronte 1977:140). All Jane wants is freedom. According to Showalter, Jane's running away from Rochester is her self-preservation. She tells herself, "I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unstained I am, the more I will respect myself" (Bronte 1977:344). For her, action is continually the way to individuality. All a woman wanted was her place as a woman in the literary world.

However, even though the Victorians led the way to give the liberation of women, they barely reject the domestic marriage in Bronte's fiction. Women were still affected by the belief that marriage is the last goal for women. Jane ends up by marrying after being independent and free for a time, and that she gives up the task of a tutor and enjoys the moral satisfaction. Jane shows that Victorian married women in working-class were still lesser.

2.1.2 Virginia Woolf

On the other hand, *Virginia Woolf* (1945:112) stated in *A Room of One's Own*, that women must be economically independent to develop their professions. She mainly points out the problems that women as professional writers have met. She says "the imaginary heroine, the talented Shakespeare's sister, is neglected and rejected by the society. If she has the room of her own, her creativity would be valued". In, Woolf portrays Lily, a female painter, who enthusiastically wants to show her ability to Charles Tansey, who claims that women cannot paint and write. She symbolizes the women of independence and female's wish of surpassing the gender boundary.

3. Conclusion

Many women in nineteenth and twentieth century had their economic independence; however, Victorian women still could neglect it for marriage. Besides, it was learnt that while home life had been respected in both Victorian and modern age, people slowly had found the defect of the subordination of wives. Women had gained more freedom in modern age and Virginia Woolf strongly supported the idea of gender equality and was hopeful towards the future of women position in a society.

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