

PLACE OF WOMEN IN ENGLISH LITERATURE WITH REFERENCE TO CHARLOTTE BRONTE'S JANE EYRE AND CHRISTINA ROSSETTI'S GOBLIN MARKET

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Abstract: In the earliest recorded history, the images of women figure as well as the role played by female writers in writing any particular history, in making poetry and fiction about human experiences, is still abstruse. Many factors are responsible for the perceived silence of women and the place assigned to them in the social hierarchy. As literacy became more pervasive in recent centuries, women used pen as a tool to spread their stories. The place of women in English literature as they create and influence literature will be explored. In this research paper several reasons such as the social, political and psychological elements encouraged many women writers will be covered. Women in literature can be seen through two different ways. Firstly, through a woman writer and secondly through female characters created by the female authors. Literary works by female writers such as *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte and *Goblin Market*, a poem by Christina Rossetti will be referred to in this research paper throwing a light on the place of women as a writer and character in English literature. The journey of female writers and female protagonists depicts the society offering her a subordinate position. Many women writers in order to publish their works wrote under the male pseudonym, one such writer was Mary Anne Evans from the Victorian Era popularly known by her male pseudonym name George Eliot. Thus, this research paper aims to throw light on the situations those were prevalent in the past for a woman writer to sustain in the society.

Keywords: Goblin Market, history, Jane Eyre, literacy, subordination, women in literature

Introduction: *The advent of female literature promises woman's view of life, woman's experience: in other words, a new element. Make what distinctions you please in the social world, it still remains true that men and women have different organizations, consequently different experiences [...] but hitherto [...] the literature of women has fallen short of its functions owing to a very natural and very explicable weakness-it has been too much a literature of imitation. To write as men write is the aim and besetting sin of women; to write as women is the real task they have to perform.*

G.H. Lewes, 'The Lady Novelists'

In the English literature it can be said that English women writers have never suffered from the lack of a reading audience or from the attention of scholars and critics. John Stuart Mill in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) writes about female creativity and argued that women would have a hard struggle to overcome the influence of male literary tradition. According, to Mill 'If women lived in a different country from men and never read any of their writings, they would have a literature of their own'. He also reasoned that they would always be imitators and never innovators. He wouldn't have raised such a point had women not already claimed a very important literary place.

Nineteenth century seemed as the Age of the Female Novelist. With such stellar examples as Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot, women's aptitude for fiction which was questioned had been answered. Women in the nineteenth century were characterized by gender inequality and were expected to remain subservient to their father or husband. Changes in

culture, politics, economy and social norms influenced English society. Thus, the Victorian period was a transitional period and an important one of English literature which was marked as a period of progress as well as reform.

Like many female writers, Charlotte Bronte is one of the prominent literary figures of the literary world. Her novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) represents women a mirrored sample of English society and English literature of that time. It can be considered as a novel written by a woman, about woman and for woman. In fact Charlotte Bronte comes from a society which was known by its subjugation of women and *Jane Eyre* is one of the greatest heroines of literature created by Bronte, which truly reflects Victorian England. Bronte attempts to depict a complete female identity by an extraordinary range of narrative devices. Jane uses language to express her desires restricted by social norms. Having little access to people, Jane can be seen longing for more practical experience. Her rebellion is not against the class structure but against her alienation from the family. The red room scene is a symbol of threat; darkness associated with the taboo of woman's sexual body and symbolizes punishment for Jane as well. [P-6]

The sexual experiences of the female body are expressed through the recurring images of rooms and houses. Lowood School, where Jane was sent by her aunt, represents repression and sexual diminishment. Here, Jane undergoes a prolonged sensual discipline and girls were systematically 'starved' as well as deprived of all sensory gratification. The 'animal' aspects of womanhood repressed during Jane's stay at

Lowood, reasserts when she goes to Thornfield Hall as a governess. Bertha Mason, who is captured in the third story of Thornfield is the incarnation of the flesh and of female sexuality in its most terrifying form. She could represent the horror of Victorian marriage. As she is mad and the way Rochester imprisoned her could be an opposite relation of cause and effect, in which years of isolation made her violently insane. Bertha Mason represents the repressive aspects of Victorian wifedom, which suggests that the lack of freedom and autonomy in marriage suffocated women. This in result threatens their mental and emotional health. Bertha can be considered as the embodiment of Jane's repressed anger and fear, in regard to her oppression and her specific situation. Bertha's behavior can be attributed to 'moral madness' which can be alluded to the latest developments in Victorian psychiatric theory. Sexual appetite could be considered as one of the chief symptoms of moral insanity in women. Madness explicitly associates with female sexual passion, body and fiery emotions as well. It turns out to be inevitable that Bertha's death must proceed with a successful union between Rochester and Jane. When they finally marry, they have become equals, as Jane in order to destroy the dark passion of her own psyche, has become her 'own mistress'. Through Jane Eyre, Bronte represents a true figure of the Victorian time and throws a light on the lives of women. These women lived in a misogynist world and under male dominance. They were also deprived of many rights granted to men and therefore had a very low status in society. The only profession opened to Jane was of a governess, which raised her from her low standing. In fact, this was the role which society created to middle- class women of being a governess. Also, other women tried to write in order to live against the social hardship, as Charlotte Bronte did. Literature wasn't considered enough to be the business of a women's life, very few female writers could actually succeed in this business. Therefore, Charlotte Bronte can be seen as one of the successful writers in the Victorian era.

Christina Rossetti another Victorian women writer /poet have never disappeared from the view. Her most famous poem, *Goblin Market* (1862) represents the temptations of pleasure and self-indulgence through the fruits. It also aims to demonstrate the Gothic mode of writing, religious and social themes-particularly that of the "fallen woman" in Victorian England. The motifs of sisterhood, the market, narrative and discourse are seen throughout the poem. Rossetti alludes to the discourse of forbidden fruit and the biblical account of the fall in order to challenge the decidedly patriarchal perception of women within Victorian culture. It deals in terms of sexuality, education and the market place. The cries

of the Goblins, the only male characters in the poem are enticing and lure the sisters out of the safety of their homes. The market can be seen as the male-domain that stands apart from the feminine space, the home. As Laura and Lizzie, the female characters in the poem stands for the sisterhood, similarly the Goblins form a brotherhood. Women in the market are exploited as commodities and the body of woman is treated as the object of exchange in the market place. Rossetti makes little moral distinction between the two sisters. Lizzie's sacrifice can be understood in terms of goblin market, as she sets to buy the fruits with the penny in her pocket. She understands the laws of the market but also in control of its demands. She buys fruits on her terms and returns home both body and soul intact. Laura on the other hand becomes the "fallen woman" as she buys the Goblin fruit in return with a lock of her hair i.e. paying with her body. Thus, Laura's sexuality can be cast in terms of trade and male ownership -as well as her actual desire, which she half realizes but cannot communicate clearly. Thus, in *Goblin Market* the sisters are put in danger by male goblins and Laura is rescued through the strength of her sister Lizzie and the danger that men pose as sexual predators is not equalized by female solidarity. The Goblin market symbolically describes a struggle within oneself to navigate the social order by choosing self destruction through one's impulse or by denying forbidden fruit. Laura's moment of most intense happiness is the moment when she returns to normal society in her own sphere with her sister from the poisoning caused to her due to the fruits. Lizzie on one hand represents Victorian womanhood whereas Laura represents the "adventurous and non-confirming self" on the other. The living situation is peculiar for the two girls in the poem as they live alone, it is when they leave their natural world to enter the supernatural and thus come across many problems. The place where Goblins live is undefined, which exists only during twilight and they resemble various real animals. They exist in a trade based economy which centers on the selling of the unnecessary. This poem compares the market to Victorian courtship and discusses the idea of economy independence. As, Laura is tempted which leads her to leave her home and face the dangerous masculine world of Goblins. Lizzie can be seen free to navigate the realm because of her economic autonomy. It is interesting to see that Laura approaches the goblins hearing their voices which were "full of love". She can be seen as naïve at this point and easily to be duped by the possibility of romance. The poem comments on women's matriarchal roles as patient protector and works as a cautionary tale. Rossetti as an extremely spiritual and catholic writer understands her social currency lies within the parameters assigned to a woman and

stepping outside the bounds would delegitimize her opinions. Therefore, both Laura and Lizzie were forced to go through violent persecution in the poem. The market can be seen as a violent place of seduction and ill will even for those who adhere to the rules.

Thus many of the consistent themes and images of the feminine-novel, from the mysterious images of Gothic romance to the self-fulfillment and the balancing of duty in domestic fiction, can be traced back to the eighteenth century. For others work meant labor but for women it referred to self-development which was in direct conflict with the subordination and repression in the feminine ideal. Many of the imaginations of feminine novels were related to money, mobility and power. Although, many feminine novelists dealt with the personal ambition of their heroines and punished their highly assertive attitude, they also projected the ideology of success in relation to the male characters, whose initiative as well as the perseverance came from the experience of a female writer. The woman's novel moved into a feminist phase with the death of George Eliot and a new generation of writers appeared. Many of the restrictions on women's self-expression were challenged by the feminists. They also denounced the gospel of self-sacrifice and attacked patriarchal religion. A theoretical model of female oppression was constructed but the feminist's need for self-justification which resulted in the anger of feminist writers with society often led them away from

realism, emotionalism and fantasy. Thus, in talking about the situation of the feminine novelists, who began writing during the Victorian age, these generation of writers saw the will to write as a mission in direct conflict with their status as women. Christina Rossetti and Charlotte Bronte cultivate a public persona and a certain kind of authorial image that is strikingly similar to the repressive personae in their works. Both the female writers are important figures of the nineteenth-century because they renegotiate the place of the feminine in a wise discourse. Rossetti and Bronte tries to counteract the gender hierarchy embedded in any tradition. They also expose and dismantle the limiting roles occupied by women in traditional poetic or novelistic discourse and try to establish new possibilities of voice but also the relationship within female communities as well as a female writer and reader.

Therefore, as Lewes tried to define the difference between books that have been written by women, and a female literature, which basically concerns itself with the articulation of women's experience, and which guides itself by its own impulses to autonomous self expression. Female writers have always been self-conscious but rarely self defining. While they have been deeply aware of their individual identities and experiences, female writers hardly considered that these personal and local experiences might be considered a collective form of art and reveal the history of their literature in future.

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