

## FEMINIST WRITERS OF VICTORIAN LITERATURE

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### ANNOTATION

In this article, we will focus on the works of the Victorian Age, which is considered one of the most productive periods of English literature, and the works of feminist writers who lived and contributed in this period, including Bronte sisters especially Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot.

**Keywords:** representative of feminist writers, Victorian literature, women writers, feminine genre, literary imagination, societal pressures, emotionalism of poetry, anonymously

### INTRODUCTION

Literature is the part of our life and it has different periods in the history and English literature is no exception. If we look at the history of English literature, we can see that it has experienced a number of important periods of literature. One of them is The Victorian Age. Victoria became queen of Great Britain in 1837. Her reign, the longest in English history, lasted until 1901. This period is called Victorian Age. The Victorian Age was characterized by sharp contradictions. In many ways it was an age of progress. In this article it will be discussed the works of feminist writers who lived and contributed in this period, including Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot

### MAIN BODY

Nineteenth-century England became the first modern, industrialized nation. It ruled the most widespread empire in world history, embracing all of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, and many smaller countries in Asia, and the Caribbean. But internally England was not stable. There was too much poverty, too much injustice and fierce exploitation of man by man. Many prominent writers became aware of the social injustice around them and tried to picture them in their works. The greatest novelists of the age were Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot. These writers used the novel as a tool to protest against the evils in contemporary social and economic life and to picture the world in a realistic way. They expressed deep sympathy for the working people; described the unbearable conditions of their life and work. The contribution of the feminist writers belonging to the trend of realism in world of English literature is enormous. They created a broad picture of social life, exposed and attacked the vices of the contemporary society, sided with the common people in their passionate protest against unbearable exploitation, and expressed their hopes for a better future. Bronte sisters can be as an example of the above mentioned.

In many ways, however, the qualities of Romantic verse could be absorbed, rather than simply superseded, by the Victorian novel. This is suggested clearly by the work of the Brontë sisters. Growing up in a remote but cultivated vicarage in Yorkshire, they, as children, invented the imaginary kingdoms of Angria and Gondal. These inventions supplied the context for many of the poems in their first, and pseudonymous, publication, *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell* (1846). Their Gothic plots and Byronic passions also informed the novels that began to be published in the following year. Anne Brontë wrote of the painful reality of disagreeable experience, although both her novels have cheerful romantic endings. *Agnes Grey* (1847) is a stark account of the working life of a governess,

and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) paints a grim picture of the heroine's marriage to an abusive husband. Charlotte Brontë, like her sisters, appears at first sight to have been writing a literal fiction of provincial life.

Brontë's father, Patrick Brontë was a poor Irishman who became a clergyman in the small, isolated town of Haworth, Yorkshire. Their mother died in 1821, when the children were very young and their aunt, mother's sister, brought up the family conscientiously, but with little affection or understanding. Together with her two younger sisters, Emily and Anne, Charlotte went to several boarding schools where they received a better education than was usual for girls at that time, but in harsh atmosphere. At that time few jobs were available for women, and the Brontë sisters, except for occasional jobs as governesses or schoolteachers, lived their entire lives at home. The sisters were poor, shy, lonely, and occupied themselves with drawing, music, reading and writing. Their isolation led to the early development of their imaginations. In 1846, under the masculine pen-names of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, the sisters published a joint volume of poems. Soon after all three sisters published their first novels.

Charlotte Brontë's famous novel "*Jane Eyre*" was published in 1847 under her pen-name Currer Bell. It is a novel of social criticism. In this novel particular attention is given to the system of education of which Charlotte Brontë had a thorough knowledge, being a schoolteacher herself. Like Dickens, she believed that education was the key to all social problems, and that by the improvement of the school system and teaching, most of the evils could be removed. This novel is autobiographical. Through the heroine, the author relived the hated boarding school life and her experiences as a governess in a large house. Rochester, the hero of the book and the master of the house described in it, is fictional. "*Jane Eyre*" was enormously successful. Charlotte Brontë wrote three other novels. The first of them, "*The Professor*", was published after her death, in 1857. The second one, "*Shirley*" was published in 1849. The most popular of these three novels, "*Villette*" was published in 1853. It is based on Charlotte's unhappy experiences as a governess in Brussels, with the far richer and more romantic experiences which she had imagined. Thus her work is grounded in realism, but goes beyond into a wish-fulfillment. She had the courage to explore human life with greater fidelity than was common in her age, though the reticence of her period prevents her from following her themes to their logical conclusion.

George Eliot is the pen-name of Mary Ann Evans, one of the most distinguished English novelists of the Victorian period. Mary Ann Evans was born in Warwickshire in 1819. She received an excellent education in private schools and from tutors. After her father's death in 1849, she traveled in Europe and settled in London. There she wrote for important journals. British intellectuals regarded her as one of the leading thinkers of her day. Before she wrote fiction she had translated several philosophical works from German into English. When Mary Ann Evans began to publish fiction in 1858, she took the pen name George Eliot; this change was an emblem of the seriousness with which she addressed her new career. There were many successful women novelists in Victorian England who wrote under their own names, but there existed a general assumption that they wrote "women's novels". When Evans began to publish her novels under an assumed name she was implicitly asserting her intention to rival the greatest novelists of her day. Of all the women novelists of the nineteenth century, she was the most learned and, in her creative achievement, the most adult. Much of her fiction reflects the middle-class rural background of her childhood and youth. George Eliot wrote with sympathy, wisdom and realism about English country people and small towns. She wrote seriously about moral and social problems. Her first novel "*Adam Bede*", published in 1859, is a tragic love

story. Her works "The Mill on the Floss" (1860) and "Silas Marner" are set against country background. Her "Ramola" is a historical novel set in Renaissance Florence. George Eliot's only political novel is "Felix Holt, Radical" written in 1866 is considered one of her poorer works. George Eliot's masterpiece "Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life" (1871-1872) is a long story of many complex characters, and their influence on and reaction to each other. Her last novel "Daniel Deronda" (1876) displays the author's knowledge of and sensitivity to Jewish culture. Her intellect was sufficiently employed in the difficult problem of structure not to impede her imagination. She had achieved the nearest approach in English to Balzac. In George Eliot's work, one is aware of her desire to enlarge the possibilities of the novel as a form of expression: she wishes to include new themes, to penetrate more deeply into character.

Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell often referred to as Mrs Gaskell, was an English novelist, biographer and short story writer. Her novels offer a detailed portrait of the lives of many strata of Victorian society, including the very poor. Her work is of interest to social historians as well as readers of literature. Her first novel "Mary Barton" was published in 1848. Gaskell's "The Life of Charlotte Brontë" published in 1857, was the first biography of Charlotte Brontë. In this biography, she wrote only of the moral, sophisticated things in Brontë's life. The best-known of her remaining novels are Cranford (1853), North and South (1854), and Wives and Daughters (1865). She became popular for her writing, especially her ghost stories, aided by Charles Dickens, who published her work in his magazine Household Words. Her ghost stories are in the "Gothic" vein, making them quite distinct from her "industrial" fiction. Even though her writing conforms to Victorian conventions, including the use of the name "Mrs. Gaskell", she usually framed her stories as critiques of contemporary attitudes. Her early works were highly influenced by the social analysis of Thomas Carlyle and focused on factory work in the Midlands. She usually emphasized the role of women, with complex narratives and realistic female characters. Gaskell said she was influenced by the writings of Jane Austen. She then felt qualified to write a book on one of the greatest authors of all time, smoothing over patches in her life that were too rough for the sophisticated society woman. Her treatment of class continues to interest social historians as well as fiction lovers.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it should be noted that feminist writers of Victorian Age who lived and wrote their novels and poetries in this period of literature tried to describe the life of that time and expanded their subject matter, moving beyond highlighting the lives and hardships suffered by women locked in domestic prisons. Instead, they increasingly expressed their individualism and demanded more equal partnerships with men in marriage, public life, law, and politics.

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