

THE SOURCES OF FEMINISM IN THE WORKS OF VICTORIAN WRITERS

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INTRODUCTION

For the European people, living in the 21st century, it is almost impossible to imagine the lack of women's rights in the Victorian age. A great number of those, living today, think, feminism dates back to the 20th century. Yet, it happened to be a controversial issue.

The 19th century witnessed radical advances in the theorization of the study of literature. One, that came to prominence in the 19th century, was "feminism". Critics paid their attention to lots of problems: the portrayal of the Victorian family, different social classes and the conditions under which Victorians lived. As the century progressed, women became increasingly unhappy and started to challenge the ideals that kept them limited and controlled culminating in the campaign to gain votes for women, driven by the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies founded in 1897.

The degraded conditions of women led some of those, who aimed to improve their conditions, to rise against the social institutions and denounce all those who contributed to that state. They constructed the 'feminist movement' that was first started by a group of women to ask for their rights and later to include women all over the world to organize themselves into movements and associations to react against men whom they accused of being the oppressors and the cause of their misery.

Thus, the Victorian period was a transitional period in the history of English literature. It dealt with the contemporary issues and problems of the day including social economic, religious and intellectual subjects, troubles surrounding the industrial revolution, in addition to that, changes in the role of women who were not expected to have interest in literature or any other field, which had limited their status in Victorian society.

All of these cases informed Victorian literature with its emphasis on a realistic portrayal of social life, focusing on education, women's employment as well as poverty. The Victorian writers dealt with many themes and subjects, such as the subjection of 'women' and issues related to them.

Furthermore, the nineteenth century novel represents Victorian conditions in the stories of its characters. It sought to engage with the

contemporary circumstances, and debate about social representation of women dealing with controversies about the nature and the role of women.

This study intends to focus on the fictional representations of the conditions of women, which were an inspiration for several Victorian writers, such as Charlotte and Emily Bronte, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, who attempted to depict a real picture of their society and focus on women at that time through many of their works. They provide a deep understanding of the role of women in Victorian England during the industrial revolution.

So, the aim of the study is to investigate the ideas of women's independence in the novels "Daniel Deronda", "Shirley", "Tess of the d'Urbervilles", and "Wuthering Height". The aim of the research can be achieved by fulfilling the following objectives:

- to analyze the historical background of the Victorian period in England and to find out the peculiarities of women's life and the struggle for their rights in the related time and relatively, define new tendencies in the Victorian literature;

- to study the specific features of "New Woman" representation in the novels by George Eliot, Emily Bronte, Charlotte Bronte and Thomas Hardy.

1. Women's fight for independence and new tendencies in Victorian literature

To begin with, it should be pointed out, that before studying the subject of our research, it is necessary to make an investigation of the period and society, in which its people lived, their way of life, traditions and laws in order to pave the way for a study of the Victorian writers' works.

So, in this chapter the historical, social and economic backgrounds of the Victorian age will be reviewed, so that to analyze the ways in which these might have influenced the content of literary works of this time.

According to Blackwell the reign of Queen Victoria, after whom the period between 1837 to 1901 has been referred to the Victorian Era, was a landmark period in the history of Great Britain¹.

This era was marked by country's acquiring new social functions, which were caused by new industrial conditions and rapid population growth. As for personal development, it was built on self-discipline and self-confidence, supported by Wesleyan and Evangelical movements².

¹ Blackwell, Wiley. A new companion to Victorian literature and culture, edited by Herbert F. Tucker, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2014. P.3

² Blackwell, Wiley. A new companion to Victorian literature and culture, edited by Herbert F. Tucker, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2014. P.5

It is a well-known fact that the English society in the 19th century consisted of hierarchical structure containing the upper class, the middle class and the working class. This difference in social classes could be distinguished by inequalities in wealth, education, working and living conditions.

The Victorian society believed that men and women were naturally different in capacity, and so ought to play distinct social roles. Anatomy determined destiny, and men were destined to be on top. Men were meaner and tougher, so their place was the outside world facing the harsh realities of the difficult worlds of business and politics; those areas according to these ideas were no place for woman. Morgan admits, that the woman's place was at home, carrying out a domestic role, such as: looking after children or supervising maidens. According to the Victorians, a true woman at that time was virtuous, pious, pure and submissive spending her day looking for ways to please her husband and creating a happy and healthy family from within the home³.

“Victorian men ruled the world. Even in the home, women's power was primarily confined to social spaces such as the drawing room, a formal place for the important business of receiving callers and impressing them with status symbols – the hostess fern collection, for example of her piano”⁴. In addition, a girl would marry and therefore she had no need of a formal education. It was believed that women were not able to learn in the way men did, that their brain was smaller than men's and that it would do damage to their health if they spent long hours studying. So, the roles of the women in the Victorian society were legitimized.

Morgan states, that the social role of women in the mid-nineteenth century was surrounded by ambiguity and uncertainty; an ambivalence increasingly acknowledged by historians who have long since abandoned the simplistic notion of the Victorian “Angel in the House”⁵. Divorce in this epoch entailed to loss of property and wealth. As a matter of fact, the only reason to obtain divorce was to prove the adultery.

Walters points out, that all over the nineteenth century, women had no political rights despite the fact that there had been some movements to advance and ask for the rights of women. In the middle of the 1800s, there was a fashionable circle of women intellectuals known as the “Bluestockings” in London, led by Mrs. Montagu. At the end of the century.

³ Morgan, Rosemarie. *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*. London: Routledge, 1988.

⁴ Gallagher, W. *A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England* The Wilson Quarterly, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2004. P. 78.

⁵ Morgan, R. *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*. London : Routledge, 1988.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) made her well-known appeal for women's education, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), a right not recognized until the State Education Acts of 1870 and 1902⁶.

Later on, women's conditions began to change. That happened when acts and laws on their favor were passed. Among the acts, one can mention the Infants and Child Custody Act, which was passed in 1839. This act gave women more rights to take care of their children in case of divorce. It is stated that if parents were separated (divorced), children under the age of seven should stay with their mothers.

In her book "Feminism" Walters admits, that in 1843, a married woman, Marion Reid, had published in Edinburgh *A Plea for Women*, which has been described, rightly, as the most thorough and effective statement by a woman since Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*. She asks, "if woman's rights are not the same as those of man, what are they?" In one sense, she admits, "woman was made for man, yet in another and higher she was also made for herself". Innocence, she argues, is not the same thing as virtue⁷.

It was not until the second half of the 19th century that anything like a true women's "movement" began to emerge in England. This movement converged particularly around Barbara Leigh Smith (later known as Bodichon) and the group of friends, who had become known as "the Ladies of Langham Place". The group initiated more organized campaigns around issues that had already been clearly defined: women's urgent need for better education and for increased possibilities of employment, as well as the improvement of the legal position of married women.

Everything, mentioned above, proves, that nineteenth-century Britain – a world of progress and reform, discovery and innovation, industrialization and social upheaval – saw intense debate about the position of women in society. It was the century of change that heard controversies about a wife's right to own property, staged arguments about a mother's right to custody of her children and ownership of her body, and witnessed the birth of the movement for women's suffrage.

It should be pointed out, that during the nineteenth century English literature was at its highest because of the growth of literacy in the Victorian era. The novel genre in particular witnessed rapid development in authorship and readership because of its potential to treat a wide range of issues.

The term "novel" arose in the end of the eighteenth century it was the ideal form to describe contemporary life and the basis for much of earlier

⁶ Walters, M. *Feminism. A very short introduction*, Oxford, New York; Oxford University Press. 2005. P. 69.

⁷ Walters, M. *Feminism. A very short introduction*, Oxford, New York; Oxford University Press. 2005. P. 48.

Victorian fiction and the form of literature, which mostly reflects the individualist with its society. This type of literary work flourished since there was an increase literacy as well as the increase in the position of the middle class. Thus, the novel in the nineteenth century was a tool which writers used to deliver social criticism.

Significant Victorian novelists and poets include: Matthew Arnold, the Bronte sisters, Christina Rossetti, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Joseph Conrad, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, William Thackeray, Benjamin Disraeli, Thomas Carlyle, Oscar Wilde, Lewis Carroll and Elizabeth Gaskell. They created legacy works which become ubiquitous with continuing appeal⁸.

Victorian literature forms a link between the writing of the romantic period and the very different modern literature of the 20th century.

So, realism, a narrative technique in Victorian literature, attempts to describe life without idealization of romantic subjects.

For instance, the conditions of women were one of the major concerns of Charles Dickens. He presents women influenced by the Victorian ideology surrounding the role of women in society. He depicts the fallen women, the women who forced to endure exploitation and oppression and their quest for survival in an industrialized society.

The 19th century has known the emergence of many female writing in England. Female writing contributed to the growth of the novel and the promotion of the position of women, as in the case of Charlotte Bronte and her sisters, who did much to change the way in which women were viewed and represented. While some Victorian women writers published their works using their real names as a mark of authorship, others preferred to use male pseudonyms to sign their work because it was very difficult for women from lower and middle class to enter the male dominant literary world⁹.

So, women issues are important for women authors as a reflection of inner self, expressing views and evaluation toward certain objects related to women, as a result of their suffering through years and live incident, in which they have been neglected from social life, as well as, a matter of pride and victory.

One of the best example is Jane Eyre, the protagonist of Charlotte Bronte's novel "Jane Eyre", and Elizabeth Bennet, the protagonist of Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice", who are presented as real characters with ideal qualities.

⁸ Carter, R.McRae, J. The Routledge History of Literature in English Britain and Ireland. London : Routledge. 1997.

⁹ Carter, R.McRae, J. The Routledge History of Literature in English Britain and Ireland. London : Routledge. 1997.

It should be pointed out, that the main feminist trend in Victorian literature whether written by men or women, be it a play, a novel, an essay or poetry, was the representation of the “New-Woman”.

The word “New-Woman” was coined by the novelist Sarah Grand during the Victorian period in 1894. The word “feminist” was invented by a French Socialist Charles Fourier who imagined a “New-Woman” who would transform her society and also was transformed by that society. The two expressions are synonyms as they were used in the nineteenth century. The differences are that the word “feminist” was used in the early nineteenth century by a French writer and the “New-Woman” was used in the late nineteenth century by the English writer. We don’t insist here that the word “feminist” did not exist in English. It did. Actually, it was first used in Britain in 1895, that is one year after the use of the word “New-Woman” in 1894. This was in the journal “The Athenaeum” and it meant at that time what we mean by it today. The two words are therefore synonyms created at the same time.

In “*Approaching Literature: Literature and Gender*” by Lizbeth Goodman she postulates on what might have inspired this concept. She says the concept might have come up because of the performance of Ibsen’s “A Doll’s House”. As we have said earlier, the word was coined by a novelist, which means that originally the word was linked only to literature especially the novel, later to drama and poetry. The history of the word “New-Woman” shows that it was used to describe the plays and novels of the Victorian period.

The expression “New-Woman” should not only be linked to literature. If we look at the political, economic and religious conditions of the Victorian period, we may see why the word had to be used. When we talk about a “New-Woman”, it means that there must have been an old woman or the woman of the past just like in history they talked about the New World and the Old World referring to America and Europe respectively. We can only compare a “New-Woman” to the woman of the past and not the woman of the future. This is a literal but logical way of reasoning. Therefore the reasons for the use of the word cannot only be literary. Political, economic and religious reasons can also be advanced which warranted the use of the word “New-Woman”.

2. Main feminist trends in Victorian literature

As it has already been mentioned above, the novel “Daniel Deronda” by George Eliot, “Shirley” by Charlotte Bronte, the work by Thomas Hardy “Tess of the D’Urbervilles”, and the novel of Emily Bronte “Wuthering Heights” are chosen to prove the existence of feminist ideas in Victorian literature.

George Eliot's "Daniel Deronda" was delivered into an English society that was defined by its position of worldwide supremacy, but was also beginning to show signs of cracking in the ways outlined above. Traditionally, feminist critics have condemned Eliot for refusing to allow her women to shape their lives and for refusing them the opportunity to do better things, either for themselves or for the society in which they live. Nonetheless, Eliot is far from refusing her women the chance to shape their lives or do better things. Eliot actually intends her women to epitomize the power and potential of women in society, even while she acknowledges, in her novels, the constraints and limitations that they encounter because of their gender and their social contexts.

As for Gwendolen Harleth, the main character of *Daniel Deronda*, she is arguably the most developed and the most complex of Eliot's women, which, perhaps, explains why she sometimes seems to act so at odds with expectations. Her development as character depends on such a variety of aspects that we almost have to be overly conscious as readers to gauge the various allusions, Eliot makes and the connections she builds internally and externally for this character.

Gwendolen is widely considered George Eliot's most brilliant heroine. She is the pivotal character of the "English part" of the novel, and attracts the readers by her story of a painful, almost ascetic road to personal redemption.

She is introduced to us as a spoiled girl, a depiction, which requires no powers of interpretation, since Eliot gave Book One the unambiguous title, "The Spoiled Child". Gwendolen's depiction, as over-indulged, living in a narrow, self-centered universe begins in the following lines: "Having always been the pet and pride of the household, waited on by mother, sisters, governess and maids, as if she had been a princess in exile, she naturally found it difficult to think her own pleasure less important than others made it, and when it was positively thwarted, felt an astonished resentment"¹⁰.

When her family's fortune is ruined, and her uncle does not immediately "fix things" to her satisfaction, Gwendolen consults a wonderfully subjective universe according to whose logic the whole situation is most unjust. Perfectly in keeping with the imperial mentality of intrinsic superiority, Gwendolen never questions the justice of the order of things, which gave her family the initial position of idle luxury from which it has fallen, nor does she consider that such a position might be dependent on the existence of very different levels of injustice, than the kind she believes herself to be suffering: "*Don't be unreasonable, dear child. What could he have done?*" – "*That was for him to find out. It seems to me a very extraordinary*

¹⁰ Eliot, G. *Daniel Deronda*. London : Penguin Books, 2003. P. 53.

world if people in our position must sink in this way all at once”, said Gwendolen, the other worlds with which she was conversant being constructed with a sense of fitness that arranged her own future agreeably”¹¹.

But Gwendolen is not only a porcelain product of the right birth and breeding, and in her vanity, selfishness and desire for power and luxury an unappealing example of its faults; she is also a victim of the class norms she was born into. Gwendolen refuses to think that marriage is the only way, through which she can be happy and tries to take care of herself and her family after they lose all their money. She works as a governess for a while, and even tries to start a career in acting, but it is unsuccessful.

Gwendolen’s marriage to Grandcourt was without the expectation of love on either sides; the subsequent, increasing agony of her soul in what is referred to as her “*painted gilded prison*”¹² is even more acute. Gwendolen is unhappy in her marriage but she finds support in Daniel Deronda. Although the novel is named after Daniel Deronda, a big portion of it contains Gwendolen’s story and the challenges she faces.

Daniel and Gwendolen’s mutual attraction comes across as strong, although it remains painfully under-expressed in the novel. But they belong to different worlds. Gwendolen achieves redemption and writes to Daniel on his wedding day: “*Do not think of me sorrowfully on your wedding day...I have remembered your words – that I may live to be one of the best of women, who make others glad that they were born...If it ever comes true, it will be because you helped me. I only thought of myself and I made you grieve. It hurts me now to think of your grief. You must not grieve any more for me. It is better – it shall be better with me because I have known you*”¹³.

Gwendolin’s characteristic energy represents a dichotomy in itself, a division seemingly in her very nature, between the pleasure that she takes in certain things, and the pleasure she also takes in renouncing the things she wants for herself. Only when Gwendolin realizes the limitations placed upon her, when she becomes truly conscious of them, does she modify her idealism and embrace what, in the context of Eliot’s attitudes towards social change, is a truly positive opportunity to actually achieve a positive influence on society.

“We are brought up like flowers, to look as pretty as we can, and be dull without complaining”¹⁴.

¹¹ Eliot, G. Daniel Deronda. London : Penguin Books, 2003. P. 310.

¹² Eliot, G. Daniel Deronda. London : Penguin Books, 2003. P. 651.

¹³ Eliot, G. Daniel Deronda. London : Penguin Books, 2003. P. 82.

¹⁴ Eliot, G. Daniel Deronda. London : Penguin Books, 2003. P. 135.

By considering Eliot's heroine Gwendolen Harleth in relation to the larger group, to which she belongs, it is possible to come to more substantial conclusions about George Eliot and her notions of women, gender, and the importance of social structures, including the family. Although feminist criticism has come a long way from simply rejecting Eliot's treatment of women, a collective view of her heroines still can bring us closer to understanding exactly how George Eliot appreciated and celebrated strong female characters in her fiction.

Charlotte Brontë's "Shirley" stands out from the work of Charlotte Brontë especially due to its differences from her other novels – it differs significantly in the structure, narrative style, setting, characters and general tone. It is also the only novel explicitly touching upon the political issues of the times and is therefore often categorized as a social novel.

The pain the author, transformed into the novel, is most evident in chapter "Valley of the Shadow of Death" in the second half of the novel. In this part of the book, readers can also notice the author shifts her focus to the character of Shirley Keeldar, who was in fact based on Emily Brontë.

Brontë shifts her attention from general to more specific and eventually, she manages to put these two approaches in context when the historical and social points supplement the personal stories of the characters whose actions are thus made more understandable.

In "Shirley", Brontë portrayed love stories in an entirely unromantic environment. This may have been Brontë's intention from the very beginning and the introduction may only serve as a satirical standing point of the narrator.

Although the novel is not considered to be her best book, it is, anyway, the one in which the author expresses more of her character: her conviction that women might be as well qualified as men to practice a profession (which sets her apart from most of her own contemporaries); her contempt for the market of marriage; her experience as a governess; her longing for a better past.

The main character of the novel Caroline longs for employment and to feel useful and occupied but is denied to do so as the society does not allow it to financially secure middle-class women who have no existential need to look for employment. In the course of the book, Caroline interacts with other single women of different ages and thus readers are presented with what was it like to be an unmarried woman at the beginning of the 19th century. For these women, there was no opportunity of self-fulfillment leading to denial of both self and emotional needs and passions.

Shirley's character is a picture of female strength and independence, Brontë states that even such free characters are, of course, also in need of friendship and love. Shirley keeps her governess near her despite her age and

is delighted by the presence of Caroline whose company gives her life more cheerful side.

Nevertheless, the characters from these two separate worlds try to break these boundaries, be it intentionally or internally – Shirley as a rich investor penetrates the male world to which she brings her compassion, and she tries to come up with a compromise. Bronte thus shows that the balance may be achieved only if these worlds are brought together and the emotions are combined with reason as happiness for both sides cannot be fully achieved while keeping these separate.

Charlotte Bronte ends the story with the following:

“The story is told. I think I now see the judicious reader putting on his spectacles to look for the moral. It would be an insult to his sagacity to offer directions. I only say, God speed him in the quest!”¹⁵.

Despite the obvious irony of the above-mentioned passage– in its reference to a male reader in particular, there is a 'moral' in Charlotte Bronte's “Shirley”, especially for the woman reader. The 'moral' would seem to be the contemporary society depicted in the novel does not yet allow women to be full liberated and the social equals of men.

Another prominent writer of the Victorian Age Thomas Hardy is not considered to be a prominent producer of theory about fiction. Yet, we can admit, that the literary works of Thomas Hardy note the evolution of the New Woman. When in 1891 Thomas Hardy published “Tess of the d’Urbervilles” he shocked Victorian readers with the novel’s sexual themes and pessimistic outlook.

While Victorians would have considered Tess immoral and whorish, Hardy paints her as a pure and innocent victim of selfish men and snobbish society.

Tess is endowed with noble and upright characteristics, which make it nearly impossible for readers to dislike her. She possesses a strong feminine beauty that attracts the notice of many. Robert B. Heilman even claims, “Hardy goes out of his way to establish the beauty and womanliness of Tess.

Although Tess has been used and abandoned by men, is completely poor, and must now work in a wretched business, she sees her pain as minimal when compared to the suffering of other creatures. When Marian questions the awkward situation of their marriage, Tess faithfully defends her husband’s actions as “quite fair.” She tells her: “*Wives are unhappy sometimes; from no fault of their husbands – from their own*”. She further tells Marian: “*remember – nothing about him, if I get the place. I don’t wish to bring his name down to the dirt*”¹⁶.

¹⁵ Bronte, Ch. Shirley. London : Penguin. 2006. P. 646

¹⁶ Hardy, Th. Tess of the d’Urbervilles. New York : Bantam, 1984. P. 278.

These redeeming qualities endear her to the reader and earn her the status of a heroine.

Another positive aspect of Tess's character is her strong sense of self-respect, as she refuses to succumb to despair and fosters an enduring spirit despite her hardships. As Jekel explains, "*Tess still believes in herself and takes joy from her life without using others, no matter what her scrape*"¹⁷.

After the birth and death of her child, Hardy describes Tess's strength of character:

*"She became what would have been called a fine creature; her aspect was fair and arresting; her soul that of a woman whom the turbulent experiences of the last year or two had quite failed to demoralize"*¹⁸.

This strong sense of self and integrity is another positive aspect that persuades the reader to adore the heroine. Morgan unites these images of Tess as the confident and independent woman.

Hardy criticizes the prudishness of society in regard to sexual acts, revealing Tess's thoughts as she works in the fields:

*"Alone in a desert island would she have been wretched at what had happened to her? Not greatly. If she could have been but just created, to discover herself as a spouseless mother, with no experience of life except as the parent of a nameless child, would the position have caused her to despair? No, she would have taken it calmly, and found pleasures therein. Most of the misery had been generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate sensations"*¹⁹.

As Jekel relates, "*He (Hardy) creates a powerful sympathy and reader identification with Tess and her situation and thereby questions social morality and her fate at the hands of that morality*"²⁰.

Hardy demonstrates how society forms such images of women and reveals, through his novel, his strong motivation to change the society's opinion of women. Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles proves author's growing frustration with his contemporaries and his desire to improve the condition and status of women in his time.

When mentioning the literature in 19th century, nobody can avoid "Wuthering Heights", which laid the foundation of Emily Bronte's significant role in literature in the world. When first issued in 1847, it was not warmly accepted, instead, it was heavily attacked. It took decades for the novel and its author to win world recognition. In the 20th century, however,

¹⁷ Jekel, P.L. Thomas Hardy's Heroines: A Chorus of Priorities. Troy, NY : Whitson, 1986. P. 161.

¹⁸ Hardy, Th. Tess of the d'Urbervilles. New York : Bantam, 1984. P. 97.

¹⁹ Hardy, Th. Tess of the d'Urbervilles. New York : Bantam, 1984. P. 89-90

²⁰ Jekel, P.L. Thomas Hardy's Heroines: A Chorus of Priorities. Troy, New York : Whitson, 1986. P. 158

“Wuthering Heights” was regarded as a masterpiece, and Emily Bronte as one of the greatest authors.

The reason why we expound this literary work from the perspective of female consciousness is about the special social background of this book and the influence to the world’s literature and the development of feminism. In her novel, Emily Bronte did not directly call for free live and equal marriage like the contemporary female novelists. Emily showed her consent on feminist attitude through actions of the protagonists and the development of the plot.

As a novelist in early 19th century, Emily expressed her vague feministic thoughts via her only novel. Is women’s image only thin and weak? No, Emily has given us another answer in this novel. All of us are attracted by Catherine, the wild, hatless, arrogant savage instead of a gentle, graceful, and kind lady like Isabella who is dainty and elegant.

In Catherine’s case, marriage is not the answer to the problem of her life, the resolver of all contradictions, as it usually is in domestic and romantic fiction. On the contrary, marriage compounds the problems of Catherine’s case, marriage does not compound the problems of Catherine’s life and exposes its contradictions.

Catherine’s fairly hard rebellion against her father can find its best expression in three aspects: the offense against her father, the negligence of her father’s power, and the replacement of him by others. When her father lives, she loses favor with him. Here’s an example:

“His peevish reproofs wakened in her a naughty to provoke him; she was never so happy as when we were all scolding her at once, and she defying us with her bold, saucy look, and her ready works; turning Joseph’s religious curses into ridicule, baiting me, and doing just what her father hated most, showing how her pretended insolence, which he thought real, had more power over Heathcliff than his kindness. How the boy would do her bidding in anything, and his only when it suited his own inclination. After behaving as badly as possible all day, she sometimes came fondling to make it up at night. “Nay, Cathy”, the old man would say, “I cannot love thee; thou’rt worse than thy brother. Go, say thy prayers, child, and ask God’s pardon. I doubt thy mother and I must rue that we ever reared thee!” That made her cry, at first; and then, being repulsed continually hardened her, and she laughed if I told her to say she was sorry for faults, and beg to be forgiven”²¹.

Catherine’s eternal love to Heathcliff is the strongest opposition against her husband. In her eyes, everything related to Linton is superficial,

²¹ Bronte, E. Wuthering Heights. 1847. London : John Murray, 1910. P. 89.

unimportant to her; and her real, underlying life is permanently stuck to Heathcliff's.

She resists against her father, her brother and her husband. She feels indignant with them, not that she does so irrationally, but that dominance over her infringes on her right to enjoy freedom and diminish her individuality.

Thus her denial of the patriarchy stems from her strong sense of protecting her self-awareness.

Catherine's story does not only show the limits of female power but also explores its problematic nature. Catherine's final illness is, in effect, a withdrawal from both the world and the self. Like so many women in Victorian fiction, Catherine dies in Child-birth. Nevertheless, Cathy is not made to pay the usual price for her feminine influence. She also resumes control of her own life and defines herself a new. Cathy reconstructs both herself and Hareton. Whereas she is destroyed by her inability to reconcile conflicting images of herself and the contradictory definitions of the feminine which confront her, Cathy negotiates them and ultimately constructs a new role for herself.

The image of Catherine is congruent by its nature, that is the protagonist of the novel demonstrates the result of the behavior, to which the reader is already prepared.

Nonetheless, the way in which Emily wrote, challenged both society and male writers. In her novel, women are neither angels nor monsters. They are not doomed to be one or the other. Women can be kind and generous, while also capable of expressing anger and passion.

Catherine possesses traits that society would consider as both male and female traits. So, her image is androgenic. She is able to show compassion and love; however, she also has desires and she is not afraid to express anger or passion towards characters in the novel. Indeed, *Wuthering Heights* is a story that is filled with passion, darkness and destructive force. Therefore, characters in the novel, especially Heathcliff and Catherine, are very passionate and not afraid to express their desires.

It was not usual for a woman to write in this dark, passionate and powerful way and, what is more, women were not supposed to write in this manner and therefore Emily was subjected to harsh criticism. However, Emily was not afraid to use coarse language and express various emotions through her writing.

"*Wuthering Heights*" makes difference comparing with any other novel of Victorian literature, because it stands outside the social traditions of its time. Emily Bronte describes the society from a completely individual point of view for the first time. While many of the great Victorian of the early to middle period deal more explicitly with moral and social concern than she

does, Emily expresses more of the primitive and spiritual side of the human spirit in the novel, which is excessively concealed in this period of time.

Equality is a very important foundation for happiness in love and marriage. The equality between men and women is the sublimation of personal independence and freedom. In Catherine's opinion, equality between men and women does not only refer to equal position and equal rights in the society, it also means the spiritual equality and soul similarity in heaven. Thus, keeping self-integrity is of utmost importance to Catherine. This is really a bold voice in 19th century England. As some feminists have pointed out, Catherine marks the turning-point of the era.

CONCLUSIONS

Having analyzed the above issues the following conclusions can be made.

The reign of Queen Victoria, after whom the period between 1837 to 1901 has been referred to the Victorian Era, was a landmark period in the history of Great Britain, considering the Victorian era in the global context. The nineteenth-century Britain, a world of progress and reform, discovery and innovation, industrialization and social upheaval, saw intense debate about the position of women in society, though the roles of the women in the Victorian society were legitimized. It was the century, that heard controversies about a wife's right to own property, staged arguments about a mother's right to custody of her children and ownership of her body, and witnessed the birth of the movement for women's suffrage. The word "feminist" appeared in the 19th century along with the idea of a New Woman.

Victorian literature forms a link between the writing of the romantic period and the very different modern literature of the 20th century. The novel in the nineteenth century was a tool, which the writers used to deliver social criticism. The 19th century was marked by the emergence of many female writings in England. Female writings contributed to the growth of the novel and the promotion of the position of women.

The major themes that are discussed in women's works are closest to reality of the time and relate to the topics: women's oppression, existentialism, women's hardships, the theme of women's success, freedom in oppressed society and gender identity. It should be pointed out, that the main feminist trend in Victorian literature, whether written by men or women, was the representation of the "New-Woman". The term was coined in 1894, though a lot of writers started the related themes much earlier.

It also should be pointed out, that comparing the characters of the novels under discussion, the women-writers portrayed them as much stronger in character, demonstrating more protest in behavior and determination to act,

in other words, the images are androgenic in many ways. In this respect, we could single out the characters, created by Brontë sisters. The writers made an attempt to emphasize personages' identification.

SUMMARY

The research deals with the problem of depiction of women's independence and the sources of feminism in the novels of Victorian writers. The aim of the work is to conduct a close study of Victorian period, new tendencies in literature in Great Britain and novels by George Eliot, Emily and Charlotte Bronte, Thomas Hardy and their different presentation of women in the Victorian society. The results of the research contain generalized idea, which can be formulated as following: the Victorian Era, was a landmark period in the history of Great Britain and was marked for a significant number of changes in the society, which found their reflection in literature of the time. The concept of feminism appeared at this very period. The problem of women's independence is one of the central issues in the books of many novelists, as the authors made attempts to create the image of a New Woman of the Victorian society. Nonetheless, by comparing the protagonists of the books under discussion, it can be concluded, that the women-writers portrayed them as much stronger in character, demonstrating more protest in behavior and determination to act. The images are androgenic in many ways. In this respect, characters, created by Bronte sisters, appeared to be the most representative.

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