



Feminism and feminist writers

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Abstract

Austen's novels contain feminist ideals that empower women to find their own unique paths. This thesis has a large female following and the messages created and shared by women hold importance because they highlight salient values and ideas. The quotes collected were analyzed and whether the women were empowered outside the private sphere and encouraged to engage in independent thought guided the analysis. Women can engage in independent thought and exist outside the home as long as they follow socially prescribed rules. Women have been constantly fighting discourses reinforcing feminine roles. In the early stages of the feminist movement, fighting for equality, survival outside the home and impacting the world around them prompted women into action.

Keywords

Feminism, feminist, strong hold, obstacle, falseness, credibility, femininity, social structure.

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1. Introduction

Women began to find their voice and began to break down educational, political and some marital strongholds. Although women have moved mountains and shattered the proverbial glass ceiling with the feminist movement, inequality survives. It is important to critically assess the messages women receive in order. It is important to ascertain how far we have come. Happy endings that result in marriage produced mixed opinions from feminists because of their need to define women as independent outside of marriage.

Austen, in her own ironic way, saw the falseness in this and her endings, although happy, give no indication of a life without obstacles. Austen's stories needed no exaggeration because the truth was so absurd and ridiculous it rivaled any fictional story. Austen's talent as a female denied her credibility because the novels focus on the female experience while completely ignoring the masculine. Garrote ignored the idea

that Austen was not writing to highlight the intricacies of manhood, she wrote for women.

Elizabeth's character is imbued with a spirit that we can't help but admire as she makes her way through interactions with haughty members of the upper class and conversations about marrying for love instead of position. Her independence from the opinions of others is refreshing.

Austen functioned within a society where there was social problem with the subtle beginnings of a feminist movement. It is easy to look backward and see Austen's contribution as limited but, placed within context, she found her own unique voice before women had any agency or ability to fight on their own behalf.

Austen highlighted feminine truth rather than inflating the importance of male characters. Austen does not promise "happily ever after" simply because her heroines marry; her novels are meant to communicate more. Women have unique experiences and should not be bound by gendered social structures. Austen contrasted hegemonic masculinity and femininity in order to advocate a unique personal path. By empowering the private sphere, Austen empowered women within the home and this, in my opinion, is not a "cowardly" approach to feminism.

2. Women's Strength

Problems arose for female abolitionists when they moved from the private (speaking in homes with other women) to the public. One of the faults society found with women abolitionist speakers was their addressing of audiences (an audience

of both men and women). It was acceptable for women to address other women but not men. This criticism had force because it drew from stereotypes about women's proper role in politics.

If female speakers could persuade men they had political power, which gave them power in the public sphere. Women who agreed with the promiscuous audience label avoided speaking publicly and looked down on women who did.

Other women simply avoided speaking to mixed crowds because they believed it unwise to challenge the bible. Pioneering women during this time used arguments of morality rather than natural rights or laws.

They stood on the premise that it was their right to engage in that was based on morals. The idea that woman is morally superior to man reinforced feminine stereotypes and tainted the efforts of many women's rights activists.

These women were working within the boundaries placed on them and although their arguments were valid they began to drift away from women's equality to women's moral superiority and duty to protect the home.

The old feminist movement was more humanistic in nature and called for the destruction of molds that advocated a woman's place.

It wanted women to be recognized as individuals who were capable and responsible for their own actions. Changes to this agenda occurred when a strong concern for women's political rights arose. Austen's unique blend of narrative realism and traditional romance is a new method for discussing current social problems. Austen concluded that the theme of this novel is the struggle of woman, who gets difficulties and opposition by people around her holding her principle. She has a courage to resist what she thinks is wrong, and always to believe her heart.

3. Women's Equality

Women faced obstacles finding a position of authority and persuasion because of their cultural role within society. These obstacles created a unique style that has been identified as feminine although it works for any powerless group. Although female rhetors did possess a unique style, I agree with Bruner's (1996) approach of examining how identification limits feminist studies.

If women could vote they could widen their sphere and employment opportunities as well as combat social and moral problems such as drunkenness. Conrad noted that the debates about divorce and marriage at the 1860 convention were a deciding factor in the direction of feminism.

Three of the debates argued for the humanness of both the husband and the wife, while others looked at the end goal of feminism as getting women to the ballot box. This began the shift from independence of women to their right to vote. The right to vote transformed into the right to protect the feminine sphere rather than creating new space for the equality of women.

First women had to move beyond social and religious construction preventing their ability to address men. After passing this milestone, a slow and subtle movement began shifting women's messages away from equality to that of a moral right to protect their homes.

She had shown that women could control their own space rather than exist only in the role allotted to them by society. Her second speech exuded masculine dominance and demanded equality. Woman's impeccable moral compass enabled her to fight because men had the potential to be immoral without female guidance.

Although women were participants in the fight against slavery, they found themselves in same position after the slaves were freed. Emphasis on morality and the home made the victories women won, such as abolition, less satisfying they found themselves in the same area of the social hierarchy. She argued that women and girls were forced into unnatural, artificial. Austen's lectures were educational and she addressed the audience as a concerned, nurturing, and loving mother. She redefined beauty as "intelligence, energy, taste, and ambition". These things would come naturally to girls when they were freed from artificial concepts of gender.

Women in politics struggle with the possibility of losing their messages due to repackaging, having to constantly prove competence, simultaneously appearing masculine and feminine. Although this example cites one particular political campaign, the necessity of evaluating women in public positions in power holds great merit.

These women face many of the same barriers early feminists and female rhetors worked to overcome. Female politicians have the disadvantage of constant comparison to male counterparts. How this affects their style and construction of messages holds importance for feminist rhetorical scholars and comments on how far we have progressed.

Feminist theory also seeks to understand how gender is socially constructed and manipulated to either empower or limit both men and women. It is necessary for all women to constantly examine and reexamine their own behaviors and the world around them to ensure they are not contributing to their own bondage.

I was excited in finding Austen because many film representations ignore or simply do not have time to include her knowledge, wit, and irony.

I hoped to see witty statements about the pros and cons of marriage, inspiring words about education and making my own way in life as well as Austen's statements on society. As I began to find and arrange Austen quotes I enjoyed, contradictory notions began to emerge from the featured quotes. The main focus is restricted to the text and how it constructs gender roles and ideal feminine characteristics.

Once women identified their own barriers and began to work to tear them down, their character came under fire. Women who wanted more freedom for themselves were considered selfish and in opposition to the important roles of mother, daughter and sister.



4. Women in society

Set in the late 1700s, Austen's novel takes place in a world where there are limited roles and opportunities for women in society. Austen's female characters do not inherit property and cannot have careers. Their futures and fortunes depend almost exclusively on the men they marry and they are expected to be dutiful, upstanding ladies of society. But, Austen depicts her female characters as thoughtful, clever, ambitious, and sometimes scheming women. Even while living within a male-dominated world, characters like Lucy, Fanny, and Mrs. Ferrars are able to exert some power and agency. Lucy persistently and tenaciously chases after what she wants, even speaking of "conquests" of men, and eventually does find herself with a suitably wealthy husband in Robert Ferrars. Fanny, meanwhile, practically controls her husband, persuading him not to give any money to his half-sisters at the beginning of the novel and not to invite them to stay with them in London. And Mrs. Ferrars holds power insofar as she determines whether her sons inherit their family fortune and tries (mostly unsuccessfully) to determine their courses of action. Admittedly, these are not the novel's most admirable characters, but they do illustrate how women can find some power and agency even within a sexist society that boxes women into limited gender roles. Other female characters, like Mrs. Jennings, also find ways of attaining some power, through orchestrating important social interactions like dances, dinners, and parties. Austen's feminism is more subtle, but she was still one of the first authors to suggest that women should marry for love, and not increased social standing or money. She gave her female characters the right to be happy too – a right we now take for granted, but certainly was not a given in Regency England. Persuasion, her last finished novel, is so bold as to suggest that happiness lies in a woman's courage to act upon her passion. She also highlighted that women couldn't inherit wealth – leaving many destitute on their husbands' deaths. It's a very dark subject, and one which many female novelists of the time shied away from. And her female characters are always reading, always educated, always well-versed in literature. But despite these examples, women of the novel are often at the mercy of the male-dominated society in which they live. Eliza and her daughter (also named Eliza), who is abandoned by Willoughby, exemplify this. Without husbands, they are left in desperate situations. Elinor and Marianne are constantly confronting the threat of this kind of fate, should they be unable to find a husband. As Elinor tells Marianne, she should be thankful that her time with Willoughby did not leave her like Eliza. Only by marrying eligible men can both sisters get a guarantee of a stable, comfortable life. Austen's novel thus presents the dangers and limited possibilities for women in a rigidly patriarchal society, while also showing how some women in such a society can still find ways of exercising certain forms of power and influence. If *Pride and Prejudice* is Jane Austen's most popular novel, much of the credit belongs to Elizabeth. Smart, funny, by turns

passionate and sensible, irreverent and feisty, the second of Mr Bennet's five daughters embodies virtues that appeal to both sexes. How many female readers have imagined themselves to be just like Mr Darcy's beloved, and how many male readers have become infatuated with her spirit and her wit?

Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine in *Pride and Prejudice*, is one Austen's most popular characters. The romance between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy generally becomes the focus of readers and adaptations of the novel. Although Elizabeth is viewed as a witty and intelligent character, she is often left connected to the romance rather than being viewed as her own independent person.

Elizabeth embodied feminine morality but noted characteristics about herself that are distinctly masculine: "There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others.

This portrays a very selfish reason not to marry because it was a woman's job to make sure the man had a happy home not the other way around. Elizabeth showed women that they did not need to conform to the will of others in order to be happy. True happiness could be attained by defending one's own happiness against the will of others.

Austen is clearly at the height of her story with reader's expectations with the delicious social satire and suspenseful plotting that keep us coming back for more. As a result her themes revolve around changes, the battle between good and evil, character, dependency, and independence.

5. Women's Education

All Jane Austen's novels engage with the debate over women's education by exploring the intellectual and moral distance between the show of mere accomplishments and the deeper understanding that signals self-knowledge. Often the distance between show and substance is what separates her heroines from other women in their society. For Austen one route to such inward knowledge is reading. At the same time, all her heroines are keenly aware of their deficiencies in education. Questioned by the insufferably rude Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Elizabeth Bennet admits to having few accomplishments: she cannot draw and plays the piano only 'a little'; but rather than feeling her education 'neglected', she counters that 'We were always encouraged to read' (*Pride and Prejudice*, ch. 29).

Her heroines have an appreciation of music, though some have more skill in playing than others. Austen's copy was handed down through the family, inscribed 'Jane Anna Elizabeth Austen 1801', 'the gift of her Aunt Jane'. Jane Austen's novels synthesize and regenerate the positive elements of female characters.

6. Education of women in England



Whereas men from upper-middle and aristocratic circles were educated at private prestigious schools like Eton and then received academic education at universities, women hardly ever had such an opportunity because it was considered to be a waste of time and money. Moreover it was considered to be harmful for their health (Teachman 109-110). The doctors were afraid that “too much thinking and studying would overstrain their [women’s] brains, and it would almost certainly render them infertile (Wojtczak 9)”. A woman could not be a lawyer, a doctor or a clergywoman. Even though she would have the knowledge and degree, the men never allowed her perform such an occupation in the 19th century. A woman was not equal to a man. “Besides all this, an educated woman with opinions was a fearsome prospect for most men and her matrimonial prospects were negligible (Wojtczak 9)”. In other words, men were afraid that a learned woman would not properly do her duties as wife, mother and housekeeper. As the education of women concerns, women from middle classes and aristocracy usually could “read and do basic sums” (Teachman 110).

Women were educated very differently from men with regard that they were supposed to get married one day. Because “their ‘trade’ was marriage” (Wojtczak 8). There were only two options, marriage and spinsterhood, and the second one was miserable. Hence, young ladies were taught “how to attract a marriage proposal from a man with a title, wealth or, at very least good prospects” (Wojtczak 9). According to Debra Teachman, there were two possible ways of how to educate a girl for marriage. The first one was to teach her how to attract a man through various ornamental accomplishments, the second one how to be a good housekeeper (Teachman 110). The first one was reserved for daughters from wealthy upper-middle class and aristocracy, whereas the second one for those of lower gentry.

“The overt intention was that they would make pleasing and useful companions to men and graceful ornaments in society generally” (Wojtczak 8). A universally accomplished woman could play the piano, sing, dance, embroider, draw or paint (Teachman 110). Those skills could directly attract a suitor, or at least help her to socialize with others, and make friends among influential people who could introduce her to potential suitors and compliment her by them. This woman did not usually know anything about housekeeping or cooking. It was of no importance to burden her with such education because she was supposed to marry a man who would be wealthy enough to keep enough servants, so that she did not have to work.

7. Conclusion

On the other hand, daughters of lower gentry because had to allow the possibility of marrying not so well-off husbands and would have to supervise the servants once, or perform housekeeping activities, or even become servants if they did not get married.

Nevertheless, a woman might have sing as beautifully as she could, or be an exquisite cook, the decisive factor has always something to do with the amount of her dowry which was dependent on the financial means of her father. Since only a very rich man could afford to ignore how much money he would gain by getting married.

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