

Feminism and jane austen



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Jane Austen is one of the most prominent women of her time who had tremendous influence on how the women were perceived in the 19th century. During that time, women were considered to be unequal to men and often were oppressed in the social, political and economic sense. Even feminist Austen chose to remain anonymous when publishing her books because of the status of women in that period. Her books were not popular by then, but the situation changed dramatically after her death. This essay sets to analyze how some of Austen's concepts used in her last novel *Persuasion* can be applied and approved in the contemporary feminist context.

Feminism can be described as a movement that focuses on defending, establishing and outlining the social, political and economic rights of women (Dziedzic and Nancy 12). It aims for equality in gender by which every person receives equal treatment without any form of bias that is affiliated to gender. It can also be described as the desire for liberty for a woman such that she is able to make decisions for herself. The feminist theory emanated from the movements that put emphasis on equality in terms of gender and sex. The feminist movements have immensely advocated for the rights of women such as suffrage, marriage, labor among the others (Dziedzic and Nancy 56).

In her works, Austen portrayed daily routine of women and showed their self-awareness and self-independence. Austen discovered that women had been denied equal opportunities for long time.

For example, Anne Elliott in the novel *Persuasion*, presents the concept of feminism that Austen is viewed to have highly regarded. Anne is among the daughters of Walter Elliot who is a baronet from a well-known family. Austen presents Anne as practical and clever despite being laid-back and quite. Anne looks down on her father's imprudence in his luxurious spending. In turn, her father often looks down on her because she is not as beautiful as her sisters. Despite her yearning to experience love, she highly considers her position in the society and the caution required in getting a suitable match. When compared to her sisters, she is the most thoughtful, humble and level-headed young lady.

Anne symbolizes feminism in various ways. She is perceived to be the oldest character among the female characters in Austen's novels. She is also considered to be the most independent and mature in terms of thought. Austen can be viewed to be free in analyzing female independence by using a heroine who is quite mature. Also, it can be perceived that Anne's level of thought was as a result of the evolving society where women were gaining the courage to express their thoughts.

Anne remains firm in her belief that women tend to be more sensitive when it comes to emotions when compared to men. But Austen presents Anne as an independent thinker such that she is not swayed by emotions or what other people think of her. A good example is her turning down of the marriage proposal from Charles Musgrove due to the absence of passion. From Austen's perspective, a passion that lacks reasoning is detrimental. Furthermore, she puts into view the idea of marriage being equal for both men and women such that women also have a say when it comes to the

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partner they want to be get knotted with. Anne's firmness in her decision for breaking the engagement can be attributed to the social status of women and not necessarily her innate nature.

When compared to the modern feminism, feminism during the 1900s exhibited certain similar features in regards to Austen's depiction of Anne. The modern feminist views women as having the ability to express their thoughts freely, engage in the relationships that they deem fit in addition to being firm in their decisions regardless of the opposition. The empowerment explains why the modern women are not easily swayed into the institution of marriage with the view that women are supposed to be under men but rather a woman has a choice when it comes to the person that she wants to marry. The modern feminist voices the need for equality and the view that men are not superior to women.

Therefore, the modern feminist may agree with Austen's representation of feminism that women are independent thinkers when it comes to the issues of marriage. The aspect is illustrated with Anne's refusal to marry Charles Musgrove with the view that there lacked passion between them. Anne remains firm in her decision and is not easily swayed by Musgrove's persistence in wanting to marry her **(Strange and Austen 89)**

Another aspect that the modern feminist may agree with is the fact that feminism is attributed with gentleness and humility. Anne portrayed to be humble when expressing her thoughts such that she is led by reason and not emotions. She finds it important to maintain her reputation and position in the society despite the

status of women in her era who are expected to follow orders and walk under men (Strange and Austen 123).

As stated earlier, the focus of the analysis was to identify the aspects of Austen's *Persuasion* that contemporary feminists would approve of. Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* is considered to be a feminist character due to her maturity, age, and thoughts. She expresses certain aspects in women such as being independent when it comes to making decisions regarding marriages and not being carried away by emotions just because other people think differently from her. Summing up, we can draw up conclusion that during Austen's time the feminist ideas were only in the butt but they served as a solid bases for further fight for women's rights.

Works cited

Dziedzic, Nancy G. *Feminism*. Detroit, Greenhaven Press, 2012,.

Strange, Derek, and Jane Austen. *Persuasion*. Harlow, England, Pearson Education Limited, 2008,.