

Social or cultural issues in early contemporary literature



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of Feminism as a Social Issue Dealt in Early Contemporary Literature

Feminism became one of the most critical issues in literature during the early twentieth century. Writers and poets from all over the world expressed their concerns about discrimination towards women as a prevalent social and cultural norm at home and workplace. As the world was changing mainly due to industrialization, the traditional roles of men and women were also being redefined. Women were gradually stepping out of their traditional roles as mothers, wives and home makers. Consequently, they had to face various forms of discrimination on the basis of their gender. This issue was dealt in early contemporary literature in a profound way. Feminism also became the focal point of early contemporary literature because a strong need was felt to transform the society, so as to make it possible for all groups to contribute its development. Virginia Woolf, an American writer was very vocal in bringing to light this issue. America was undergoing a huge transformation and she felt that it was imperative for women to be a part of the mainstream life. The nature of Woolf's feminism is crucial to assessment of her writing, especially in *Three Guineas*... By contrast, Woolf presents a deeply radical sort of feminism. Her feminism was original, yet firmly rooted in the women's movement of her time. Incorporating a vision of a completely changed society, *Three Guineas* is more radical than most of us recognize... In this book, war is not Woolf's main target... For her, war is only one of the products, admittedly one of the worst products, of a system of power and domination that has its root in gender hierarchy. That hierarchy, and all others, are the targets of her feminism. (Black, 7) Feminism is in most cases misunderstood and misinterpreted by readers of early contemporary literature. Feminism was not the sole emancipation of women from the

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chains of male dominant society and to gain equality as men; it was a deeper struggle of women to redefine their roles according to the ever changing world. It called for achieving balance in life and bringing an end to all sorts of discrimination based on gender. During this era, writers also found it difficult to write about female characters. Portrayal of women as heroines or protagonist was rather difficult because the minds of the readers were not yet ready to accept that women could also have strong and worth mentioning roles in reality and fiction. James Joyce's work, for instance, "... provides important opportunity for reflecting on the difficulties of representing women as examples... and while Joyce's representations of the figures of woman do not necessarily liberate her from the chains of her stereotypic exemplarity, they do offer important insights into how that exemplarity gains its purchase, even within feminism." (Barbeito, 44)

Feminism theories are based on liberation of women from patriarchal norms and traditions; and the right to have their voice and the freedom of expression. In France, " French feminist thought flourished in the twentieth century in different forms. First, under the shadow of two World Wars, it was shaped by basic activism militancy, and to a lesser degree, a creative desire. In the second phase, profiting from some of the early gains, feminism took command in the intellectual and artistic domains." (Kritzman, Reilly & DeBevoise, 47) Work Cited Barbeito, Manuel. *Feminism, Aesthetics, and Subjectivity: Essays on Women and Culture in Early Twentieth Century British Literature*. Santiago: Univ Santiago de Compostela, 2001. Black, Naomi. *Virginia Woolf as Feminist*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2004. Kritzman, Lawrence., Reilly, Brian., & Malcolm DeBevoise. (ed) *The Columbia*

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