

Social Prospects of Concepts on Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf: A Comparative Study

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Abstract: This paper is entitled Social Prospects of concepts on Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf. It is a comparative study between these two prominent female writers of the eighteenth century, Victorian era. It aims at investigating and revealing their similarities and differences in various areas such as life, career, style, irony, satire, realism and the concepts regarding feminism themes, philosophy, claims of society and of the individual. The paper also presents Woolf and Austen`s heroines who reflect their attitudes towards social structure, political hegemony, love, and marital status. Moreover it deals with their fight for women liberty from the tyranny of the world of men`s domination. They reached at universality for their contribution in literature despite Virginia`s tragic end.

Keywords: herionism, feminism, lesbian, subjection, disassociation, masculinity, epistolary, posthumous, boisterous, anarchic.

1. INTRODUCTION

The idea of this study is an attempt to draw a comparative study between two of the foremost writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, who are Virginia Woolf and Jane Austen.

The period when female writers fight for a place among male writers, who have every advantage. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree. Virginia and Austen represent this period when female self consciousness brought female heroism to literature. Women through most of the nineteenth century were barred from the universities, isolated at home, even personally restricted in friendship. All these concepts of society have taken place in the writings of both in a style that reveals satire, parody and profound comedy, and the festive comedy to which feminist comedy belongs. The study takes Jane Austen on the one hand and Virginia Woolf on the other, dealing with their early life conditions, and feminism as a crucial part. The paper includes social life with its controversial aspects and how that has affected their writing. The handling of the paper in an interwoven style to shift among similarities, differences.

The paper also draws upon sociology, literary criticism and the fiction of feminist writers. The Victorian past was filled with fiction and shaped their analyses of society. Woolf traces the rise of women writers emphasizing in particular Austen. She raises the possibility of feminine style but also emphasizes that the greatest writers, among whom she includes Shakespeare and Jane Austen, as androgynous, and able to see the world from the man and a woman`s perspectives as well.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Life and Career:

Out of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries female authors, Adeline Virginia Woolf (25 January 1882-28 March 1941) an English writer and one of the foremost modernists of the twentieth century, and Jane Austen (December 1775 – 18 July 1817) also an English novelist both are chosen for this paper to reflect the role of women writers of the period . Virginia was born at Hyde Park Gate in London, among eight children where she lived her early life. Her father Sir Leslie Stephen`s eminence as editor, critic, and biographer. His connection to William Thackeray helped in raising his children in an environment filled with the influences of Victorian literary society. Supplementing these influences an extremely large library.

Virginia Woolf a significant figure in London literary society and Bloomsbury Group of intellectuals. She began writing professionally in 1900, initially for the Times Literary Supplement with a journalistic piece about Hawthorne. Her first novel, *The Voyage Out* which was published by her brother. Woolf's most famous works include the novels *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and *Orlando* (1928), and the book-length essay *A Room of One's Own*. Jane Austen (December 1775 – 18 July 1817) was an English novelist whose works of romantic fiction, set among the landed gentry, earned her place as one of the most widely read writers in English literature.

From 1811 until 1816, this period witnessed the release of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), and *Emma* (1816), she achieved success as a published writer. She wrote two additional novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, both published posthumously in 1818, and began a third, which was eventually titled *Sanditon*, but died before completing it.

Austen lives her entire life as part of a close-knit family located on the lower fringes of the English landed gentry. She was educated primarily by her father and older brothers as well as through her own reading. The steadfast support of her family was critical to her development as a professional writer. Her artistic apprenticeship lasted since her teenage years up to her thirties. Austen's works critique the novels of sensibility of the second half of the 18th century and part of the transition to 19th-century realism. Her realism, biting irony and social commentary have gained her historical importance among scholars and critics. Life is not easy at all for Virginia Woolf. Her breakdowns and subsequent recurring depressive periods influenced by the sexual abuse to which she and her sister Vanessa were subjected by their half-brother George and Gerald Duckworth reflects the terrible life of hers. Austen enjoyed the closest friendship of her sister, a confidante throughout her life, beside her brother Henry's literary support, among a circle of his friends and acquaintance providing her with a wide view of social worlds. Later Austen acquired the remainder of her education at home making use of her father's library and that of her uncle Warren Hastings.

A sort of similarity appears in Woolf and her sister Vanessa who gained the support out of their father's library and the visitors including James Russell, George Henry Lewes and Margaret Cameron. Unlike other girls, their brothers were formally educated and sent to Cambridge. Neither Virginia nor Austen or any other female got a chance to join a formal education as that was provided for men only which seems a cause of a financial problem. Both families could not afford to send their daughters to school. Austen experimented various literary forms, including the epistolary novel and two additional novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. Both are published posthumously and began a third one which she died before completing it.

2.2 Style:

Virginia is considered a major innovator in the English Language. In her works she experimented the stream of consciousness and the underlying psychological as well as emotional of motives of characters. Her peculiarities as a novelist has tended to obscure her central strength. And became the major lyric novelist in the English language. Her novels are highly experimental; a narrative, frequently uneventful and commonplace, is refracted, and dissolved in the character's receptive consciousness. Her intense lyricism and stylistic virtuosity fuse to create a world overabundant with auditory and visual impressions. Concerning Austen, scholars argued that she was a subversive writer. These views, together with F.R. Leavis's and Ian Watt's pronouncement that Austen was one of the great writers of English fiction, did much to cement her reputation amongst academics, who agreed that she combined qualities interiority, irony, realism and satire to form a superior author in both. Sequels, prequels, and adaptations of almost every sort have been based on the novels of Jane Austen, from soft-core pornography to fantasy.

Austen's works critique the novels of sensibility of the second half of the 18th century and part of the transition to the 19th century realism. Her plots, though fundamentally comic, highlight the dependence of women on marriage to secure social standing and economic security. While Woolf concepts in *A Room of One's Own* with its famous dictum, A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction. Both call for women independence and liberty.

2.3 Irony, Parody, and Satire:

When we speak of Jane Austen. We speak of her irony. To Jane Austen irony does not mean a moral detachment or the tone of superiority that goes with moral detachment. Upon irony so conceived she has made her own judgment in the figure of Mr. Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), whose irony of moral detachment is shown to be the cause of his becoming a moral nonentity. Her irony perceives the world through an awareness of its contradictions, paradoxes, and anomalies.

What one may call Jane Austin's basic irony is the recognition of the fact that spirit is not free, that it is conditioned, that it is limited by circumstances. Her next and consequent irony has reference to the fact that only by reason of this anomaly does spirit have virtue and meaning. When we respond to Jane Austin with pleasure, we are likely to do so in part because we recognize in her work an analogue with the malice of the experienced universe, with the irony of circumstance, which is always disclosing more than we bargained for.

Lionel Trilling assumes that there is one novel of Jane Austin's, *Mansfield Park* (pub.1814), in which the characteristic irony seems not to be at work. Indeed, one might say of this novel that it undertakes to discredit irony and to affirm literalness, that it demonstrates that there are no two ways about anything. And *Mansfield Park* is for this reason held by many to be the novel that is least representative of Jane Austin's peculiar attractiveness. For those who admire her it is likely to make an occasion for embarrassment. By the same token, it is the novel which the depreciators of Jane Austin may cite most tellingly in justification of their antagonism.

Moreover, Mark Twain says that Jane Austin that she inspired in him an animal repugnance. The personal intensity of both parties to the dispute will serve to suggest how momentous, how elemental, is the issue that Jane Austen presents. Mark Twain's repugnance is probably to be taken as the male's revulsion from a society in which women seem to be at the centre of interest and power. Man's panic fear at a fictional world in which the masculine principle, although represented as admirable and necessary, is prescribed and controlled by a female mind.

In Virginia Woolf's case, the issue becomes crystallized in a specific moment: why was the family physician called in to treat the thirteen – years –old Virginia Stephen after her mother died ? That moment marks a break with Victorian mourning ritual, and makes vivid the transition from social grief practices to medical and psychological therapies. Her own writings, both autobiographical and fictional, offer a critique of this transition and describe a post –Freudian form of grief work. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf tells a cautionary tale of the fatal results of the feminization and medicalization of grief, but offers no viable alternative. In *To the Lighthouse*, she removes mourning from the realms of femininity and medicine, and provides a positive model for grief work. Yet, Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, is a great novel. Its greatness being commensurate with its power to offend. *Mansfield Park* was published in 1814, only one year after the publication of *Pride and Prejudice*. And no small part of its interest derives from the fact that it seems to controvert everything that its predecessors tell us about life. One of the striking things about *Pride and Prejudice* is that it achieves a quality of transcendence through comedy. The comic mode typically insists upon the fact of humans' limitation, even of human littleness; but *Pride and Prejudice* makes comedy reverse itself and yield the implication of a divine enlargement. The novel reveals the traits of spiritedness, vivacity and lightness, and associates them with happiness and virtue. Judy Little develops a critical apparatus for identifying feminist comedy in recent fiction, especially the radical political and psychological implications of this comedy. And then she applies and tests her theory by examining the novels of Virginia Woolf and Muriel Spark. Despite recent scholarly attention to Woolf, the profound comedy of her work has been largely overlooked, and the comic fiction of Spark has seldom had the responsible and attractive criticism that it deserves. Little distinguishes between, on the one hand, several varieties of traditional comedy and satire and on the other, the festive or luminal comedy to which feminist comedy belongs. Both Woolf and Spark mock centuries – old mythic patterns and behaviors deriving from basic social norms, as well as the values emerging from these norms.

It is one thing that the author points out, to find manners amusing, to scourge vices, or to mock the follies of lovers; it is a much more drastic act of the imagination to mock the very norms against which comedy has traditionally judged vices, follies, and eccentricities. While the comedy of Woolf has some precedent in festive or luminal celebrations, during which even basic values and behavior are abandoned, feminist comedy displays its radical nature by implying that there is no resolution to the inverted overturned world. The world in revolutionary transition.

Woolf writes extensively on the problem of women's access to the learned professions, such as academia, the church, the law, and medicine, a problem that was exacerbated by women's exclusion from Oxford and Cambridge. Woolf herself never went to university, and she resented the fact that her brothers and male friends had had an opportunity that was denied to her. Even in the realm of literature Woolf found, women in literary families like her own were expected to write memoir of her father, Leslie Stephen. After his death, but she later wrote that if he had not died when she was relatively young, she never would have become a writer.

Woolf was concerned herself with the question of women's equality with men in marriage, and she brilliantly evoked the inequality of her parent's marriage in her novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927). She based Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay on her

parents. Vanessa Bell immediately decoded the novel, discovering that Mrs. Ramsay was based on their mother, Julia Duckworth Stephen. Vanessa felt that it was almost painful to have her so raised from the dead. Woolf's mother was always eager to fulfill the Victorian ideal that Woolf later described, in a figure borrowed from a pious Victorian poem, as that of the Angel in the House. Woolf spoke of her partly successful attempts to kill off the Angel of the House, and to describe the possibilities for emancipated women independently of her mother's sense of the proprieties. The disparity Woolf saw in her parents' marriage made her determined that the man she married would be as worthy of her as she of him. They were to be equal parents. Despite numerous marriage proposals throughout her young adulthood, including offers by Lytton Strachey and Sydney Waterlow, Virginia only hesitated with Leonard Woolf.

Virginia wavered, partly due to her fear of marriage and the emotional and sexual involvement the partnership requires. She wrote to Leonard: As I told you brutally the other day, I feel no physical attention in you. There are moments – when you kissed me the other day was one when I feel no more than a rock. And yet your caring for me as you do almost overwhelms me. It is so real and so strange. She married Leonard but Virginia's unstable mental condition led them to follow the medical advice and did not have children.

Related to the unequal status of marriage was the sexual double standard that treated lack of chastity in a woman as a serious social offense. Virginia herself was almost certainly the victim of sexual abuse by the hands of one of her half-brothers, as narrated in her memoir *Moments of Being*. More broadly she was highly conscious of the ways that men had access to and knowledge of sex, whereas women of the middle and upper classes were expected to remain ignorant of it. She often puzzled about the possibility of a literature that would treat sexuality and especially the sexual life of women frankly, but her own works discuss sex rather indirectly.

If much of Woolf's feminist writing concerns with the problem of equality of access to goods that have traditionally been monopolized by men. Her literary criticism prefigures two other concerns of later feminism: the reclaiming of a female tradition of writing and the deconstruction of gender difference. On *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf imagines the fate of Shakespeare's equally brilliant sister Judith. Unable to gain access to the all-male stage of Elizabethan England, or to obtain any formal education. Judith would have been forced to marry and abandon her literary gifts or, if she had chosen to run away from home, would have been driven to prostitution. Woolf traces the rise of women writers, emphasizing in particular Jane Austen, the Brontës, and George Eliot, but alluding too, to Sappho, one of the first lyric poets. Woolf says that the great female authors wrote as women write, not as men write. She thus rises the possibility of feminine style, but at the same time she emphasizes that the greatest writers, among whom she includes Shakespeare, Jane Austen, and Marcel Proust, are androgynous, able to see the world equally from a man's and a woman's perspective.

Jane Austen distinctive literary style relies on a combination of parody, irony, burlesque, free indirect speech, and a degree of realism. She uses parody and burlesque for comic effect and to critique the portrayal of women in 18th-century sentimental and gothic novels. Austen extends her critique by highlighting social hypocrisy through irony; she often creates an ironic tone through free indirect speech in which the thoughts and words of the characters mix with the voice of the narrator. The degree to which critics believe Austen's characters have psychological depth informs their views regarding her realism.

Austen's burlesque is characterized by its mocking imitation and its exaggerated, displaced emphasis. For example, in *Northanger Abbey*, she ridicules the plot improbabilities and rigid conventions of the Gothic novel. However, Austen does not categorically reject the Gothic. As Austen scholar Claudia Johnson argues, Austen pokes fun at the stock gothic machinery – storms, cabinets, curtains, manuscripts – with blithe amusement, "but she takes the tyrannical father seriously. Austen uses parody and burlesque not only for comedic effect, but also, according to feminist critics, to reveal how both sentimental and gothic novels warped the lives of women who attempted to live out the roles depicted in them. Irony, on the other hand, is one of Austen's most characteristic and most discussed literary techniques. She contrasts the plain meaning of a statement with the comic, undermining the meaning of the original to create ironic disjunctions. In her juvenile works, she relies upon satire, parody, and irony based on incongruity. Her mature novels employ irony to foreground social hypocrisy. In particular Austen uses irony to critique marriage market. Perhaps the most famous example of irony in Austen is the opening line of *Pride and Prejudice*: It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. At first glance, the sentence is straightforward and plausible, but the plot of the novel contradicts it: it is women without fortunes who need husbands and seek them out. By the end of the novel, the truth of the statement is acknowledged only by a single character, Mrs. Bennet, a mother seeking

husbands for her daughters, rather than the entire world. Austen's irony illuminates the foibles of individual characters and her society. In her later novels, she turns her irony against the errors of law, manners and customs, in failing to recognize women as the accountable beings they are, or ought to be.

In Austen's novels, as Page notes, there is a conspicuous absence of words referring to physical perception, the world of shape and colour and sensuous response. Austen's prose also repeatedly contains a relatively small number of frequently used words, mainly epithets and abstract nouns indicating personal qualities. This allows readers to feel as if they know the characters. Jane Todd writes that Austen creates an illusion of realism in her texts, partly through reader identification with the characters and partly through rounded characters, who have a history and a memory. However, as Austen scholar William Galperin has argued, Austen could not have participated in nineteenth century realism; the realism with which she later associated, because it had not yet been fully defined. He argues Austen's novels were part of the beginning phases of realism. Her attention to detail, probability, and opposition, lead to call her the historian of everyday.

The majority of her close friends, young men who shared an intellectual interests, and her brother Thoby met at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1899, including Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf, and Clive Bell. This group Bloomsbury Group, started meeting for Thursday Evenings, at Gordon Square, London in 1906, which was soon followed by Vanessa Bell's Friday Club, to discuss the arts. With the emergence of these two literary and artistic circles, the unofficial Bloomsbury Group came to existence.

Woolf was alluding to social and political changes that overtook England soon after the death of Edward VII in May, 1910, symbolized by the changing patterns of deference and class and gender relations implicit in the transformation of the Victorian cook. In 1924, during the heyday of literary modernism, Virginia Woolf tried to account for what was new about modern fiction. She wrote that while all fiction tried to express human character in a new way because on or about December 1910, human character changed. Her main example of this change in human character was the character of one's cook. whereas the Victorian cook lived like a leviathan in the lower depth, modern cooks were forever coming out of the kitchen to borrow the Daily Herald and ask advice about a hat.

Though Woolf's mental illness was periodic and recurrent, as Lee explained, she was a sane woman who had an illness with. Her madness was provoked by life-altering events, notably family death, her marriage, or the publication of a novel. According to Lee, Woolf's symptoms conform to the profile of a manic depressive scrupulousness. Men have had every advantage of women in telling their own stories, as Jane Austen says, and education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. Now women seized the pen and female self-consciousness brought heroism to literature. As literary women have always been grateful to say, it all went back to the first heroine of letters, Samuel Richardson's Pamela, not because of her virtue but because as she says, I have got such a knack of writing, that when I am by myself, I can not sit without a pen in my hand.

Women through most of the nineteenth century were barred from universities, isolated at their own homes, chaperoned in travel, painfully restricted in friendship relations. Jane Austen and her contemporaries Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey. They went to university, had university friends. Meanwhile Jane Austen, almost exactly of the same age and from a similar social milieu; had she been a man, she would probably had gone to university. Jane stayed home with mother at Steventon, Bath, and Chawton. She visited a brother's family now and then, wrote letters to sisters and nieces, and read Sarah Harriet Buurney, Mrs. Jane West, Anna Maria Williams, and the rest of the women writers of her day.

Austen criticizes the morally harmful equation of female virtue with passivity, masculinity with aggression. She rejects stories in which women simply defend their virtue against male sexual advances, because she realizes that writers like Richardson and Byron have truthfully represented the power struggle between the sexes. In each of her novels, a seduced and abandoned plot is embedded in the form of an interpolated tale told to the heroine as a monitory image of her own problematic story.

3. CONCLUSION

This paper has come to conclude after a keen criticism, evaluation and analysis from various perspectives, that both Austen and Virginia have dedication to their careers, education burdens and opportunities, remarkable feminist concepts, political pressures, and financial problems. The illnesses they have both suffered led to their death.

They differ in marital status, yet both are unlucky in love affairs. Morality characterized by manners, duty to society, and religious seriousness. In social circles they also differ when defined by sexual behavior.

Throughout their texts, there are many instances where it is obvious that both writers exude a unique writing style. And that both feminist writers remain two of the greatest universal novelists whose contribution stays unquestionable.

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