
Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*: Feminism Issues in Early Victorian English Novels

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Abstract

This paper discusses a study that investigates the feminism issues in early Victorian English novel. Here, the discussion focuses to two works authored by two famous women author Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre" and Emily Bronte's "Wuthering Heights". Objective of this study is to investigate gender issues and feminist views contained in these two novels. Some analyses are conducted to some texts contained in those two novels. That is done in purpose to seek such reflections that refer to feminism view claimed by Charlotte and Emily Bronte in their work. Therefore, it is expected that the study conducted on the two novels as a representation of women writers' works in early Victorian era can describe gender issues or feminism that occurred in that era.

Key Words: *Early Victorian Era, feminism, gender Issue, Victorian English Novel.*

Introduction

During the long reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), the progress in the development of the realm of literature, especially prose looks very significant. During that age, novel was purposed as an effective means to present issues and ideas of the author of the current conditions (Samekto, 1998: 78). Moreover, Samekto also stated that one of essential characteristics of the literature during the Victorian era is to boost the moral of the society. Therefore, the novels are not only used to present a picture of life as it is, but also presents the life frame of what should and should not be happened in the middle of society.

Among the circuits of many issues raised by the authors in the Victorian era, one of the important issues taken is issue about fundamental right of the woman's life or when entering the modern period is called as a feminist issue. The issue of women's basic rights triggered by the position and status of women has begun to be recognized in the social life of the period. Besides due to the holder of the throne at the time was a woman, it certainly can not be separated from the role of women writers who helped fight for the rights and lift women degree at that time.

Talking about the intellectual history of feminism in Victorian period, attention will never be detached from the role of Mary Wollstonecraft during late 18th century in England, which expressly calls for the objection of the position and status of women in social life that is dominated by men at the time (Ferguson, 1999: 427). Parallel with Ferguson, Rosemarie Putnam Tong (2006: 18) explains that Wollstonecraft was rated as one of the brave pioneers of feminism movement and firmly opposed to social paradigms that are less favorable according to the position and status of women in the social and economic life. In the end, her thinking is regarded as a pioneer of thought "Liberal Feminism", which in Tong (2006: 17), Susan Wendell stated that one of the basic goals of modern politics that is closest to liberal feminism is equality of opportunity (for men and women). In this case, the common goal of liberal feminism is to form a pattern of a society that cares for the fair and also provide a free place to thrive. That kind of social conditions is the ideal situation expected by the liberal feminist thinkers to provide equality and equal opportunities for men and women to freely move and thrive in the social life.

According to Rosemarie Putnam Tong (2006: 22), what is desired by Wollstonecraft for woman existence was a woman as a whole person (personhood). For Wollstonecraft, woman is not just a tool used to happiness or perfection of others. Women are human reasoning whose pride is in the ability to determine their own destiny, so if a person treats another person as a means, then he has not treated the person as a human being. Therefore, if a person or a society treats women like that, then they has treated women not as a human being. Moreover, if a woman wanted to be treated like that means she has allowed herself to be treated not as a whole human being (human with no reason). Wollstonecraft insists that no woman should ever let such bad things done to them.

With a variety of inspiring and monumental writings of her life time, Mary Wollstonecraft considered to be very bright in developing her ideas in the papers that had been provided a bridge between radicalism, Romanticism and feminism that were vitally important for the development of feminist writings on her era and

even for the next eras, including Victorian era or specifically early Victorian era (1837-1850). That issue is proven by the discovery of such feminist novels written by women writers of the period. Based on Adams (2009: 9), from roughly the early 1840s, the feminism movement pioneered by Harriet Martineau had pursued to re-gain women a dignity long denied them. The traditional view that claimed women as creatures of undisciplined desire who lured men into temptation was started to be destructed until women might be exalted as paragons. Historically, there are some women fiction writers who lived during early Victorian era. Names like, Charlotte Bronte and Emily Bronte are two figures in which they were considered as the most famous and influential of their age. Their feminist works are considered as the important monumental and influential to the development of feminist literature of the early Victorian era.

In accordance, this paper is intended to discuss some issues that are contained by feminist novels in the early Victorian era. The novels studied in this paper including Charlotte Bronte's "*Jane Eyre*" (1847) and Emily Bronte's "*Wuthering Heights*" (1847). Objective of the study is to investigate gender issues and feminist views contained in these two novels. Therefore, it is expected that the study conducted on the two novels (as a representation of women writers' works in early Victorian era) can describe gender issues or feminism that occurred in that era.

Method

Since it a library research, this research is done by using descriptive qualitative method in which the data analyzed are in a form of texts (narrations and dialogues) in two primary data sources, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. Besides, some other references are also used to support the analyses as secondary data sources. The data gotten are processed and analyzed based on feminism approach in order to reveal the feminism issues in the early Victorian period delineated in both primary data sources.

Discussion

Feminism Issue in Charlotte Bronte's "*Jane Eyre*"

Among the few names of popular women writers in the early Victorian era, the presence of Charlotte Bronte can be regarded as a phenomenon that was quite controversial. According Samekto (1998: 88), Charlotte's works such as "*Jane Eyre*" (1847) was based on her experiences in Yorkshire where she was raised and also Brussel where she and her sister learned language study during two years. However, her works are still synchronized with her imagination, in order for making the works more romantic and complex.

In accordance, Charlotte always created the figure of the female characters who are not perfect either physical or property, in which the heroine struggles can make her survive and gain happiness at the end of the story, as example is a female character in *Jane Eyre*. Here, Charlotte wanted to explain that perfection is not a measure for a woman to reach happiness. In *Jane Eyre*, in addition to describe the struggle of women, this novel also wanted to make people aware that it is not just a figure of a man or a husband who can advocate for and support a woman's life as a wife, but the woman can do the same thing when it is realized. In this case, the condition is portrayed through the figure of Jane that is able to regain happiness in Rochester's life that has been powerless because of fire incident:

..... '*Jane Eyre!*—*Jane Eyre,*' was all he said.
'*My dear master,*' I answered, '*I am Jane Eyre: I have found you out—I am come back to you.*'

..... '*But as you are rich, Jane, you have now, no doubt, friends who will look after you, and not suffer you to devote yourself to a blind lameter like me?*'
'*I told you I am independent, sir, as well as rich: I am my own mistress.*'
'*And you will stay with me?*'
'*Certainly—unless you object. I will be your neighbor, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely: I will be your companion—to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you. Cease to look so melancholy, my dear master; you shall not be left desolate, so long as I live.*' (Charlotte Bronte : 662-664)

Based on that quotation, it seems that *Jane Eyre* tried to resist the view that women always depended on the figure of a man at that time, especially for the wife to her husband. It seems that Charlotte Bronte wanted to

convey that women can be the potential human resource that able to support family life, either publically or domestically. Here, men's domination that usually depicted in literary works or even seen in daily life is reversed by showing that women also have the same capacity as proportional as men.

This is of course reminiscent of what had been done by Wollstonecraft previously. She spread her thought to make people aware of the status and position of women that were always considered lower than men. Assumption that what can be done by man will not be able to be done by women contested by Wollstonecraft by saying that women can do the same thing when the opportunity was given. Conformable with this thinking, the same thing was raised by Charlotte with Jane figure that eventually became a figure who becomes a rational person that is able to support the lives of Rochester who has been disabled and lost hope. Through her novels, Charlotte seems to have managed to provide a decent ideal for the society to be taken into consideration of women presence in social life, either in public life or domestic life (household), if the chances are equally given between men and women, the society would realized how potential women are.

Feminism Issue in Emily Bronte's "Wuthering Heights"

On another concern, Emily Bronte contributed with the only one work in her entire career entitled "*Wuthering Height*" in 1847 (Thornley and Robert, 1984: 125). Here, Emily tells a story of Heathcliff figure who falls in love with the woman named Catherine Earnshaw, but in the midst of such great desire to Catherine, he heard the words of Catherine that she would never marry a low-caste, which makes Heathcliff with disappointment left his life at that time. Several years later, Heathcliff returns and he finds the fact that Catherine has married Edgar Linton, the figure that is described as a weak man. As if he does not accept that fact, with jealousy and disappointment Heathcliff finally turned into violent and vindictive. After Catherine died and Heathcliff also has married Edgar's sister (Isabella), this is where there is a fact that Heathcliff wreak revenge on women he married, the sister of the man who married a woman he loves:

'He's not a human being,' she retorted; 'and he has no claim on my charity. I gave him my heart, and he took and pinched it to death, and flung it back to me..... And here Isabella began to cry; but, immediately dashing the water from her lashes, He was worked up to forget the fiendish prudence he boasted of, and proceeded to murderous violence..... and if ever I come into his hands again he is welcome to a signal revenge. (Emily Bronte: 220)

Based on that quotation, it depicts a fear felt by Isabella as Heathcliff's wife. It seems that something terrible and painful has happened to her, and considering her fear is pointed to Heathcliff, it can be understood that there must be such a painful thing has given to her by Heathcliff. Based on this novel, Emily seems wanted to depict a different impression in an attempt to describe the position and status of women in domestic life. Here, the novel contains a satire toward the case of violence in household life that still became a general issue in Victorian life. Emily seems wanted to show the fact that when a man is being clouded by passion and emotion that are not controlled, then the view of the man who is considered as rational human kind is crushed. In addition, she also points out that the bad-treatment suffered by a wife for her husband is an irrational form of the mind of man who can not control his emotions and desires.

In this case, Emily seems wanted to claim that view or notion believed by people at the time that idealized men as rational being and women as irrational being could not be taken for granted. It depends on whether or not the person can control the desire and emotion. If returned to Wollstonecraft thought, of course it is related to the background of someone who thinks both men and women will still have the same rationality and reason if it is supported by the provision of treatment and equal opportunity. Meanwhile, if someone kept suppressed inferiority, both men and women will still have the same emotional instability, as happened to the character Heathcliff in Emily Bronte masterpiece *Wuthering Heights*.

Conclusion

Based on the explanations that have been described above, there are some important things that can be inferred and understood. Here, it can be seen how feminist issues are raised in the works or the fictions of women writers in the early Victorian era. In the works of Charlotte Bronte and Emily Bronte, an important issue that needs to be concerned on is their effort in claiming equality of considering the position of men and women in public and domestic life. In this case, fiction became one of the means for them to express their idea of the gender

issues that was developed in early Victorian era, in which those authors showed resistance to ideas that are not so appropriate (humiliate) for women in their social life at that time.

In *Jane Eyre* novel, Charlotte Bronte tries to show that women are also potential figure that have capacity to support domestic and public life of the family. This is illustrated by the Jane character capacity that can sustain the life of a disabled man she eventually married. Meanwhile, in *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Bronte tries to break society's view that humiliates women in which they believe in the sense that men are identically rational human being, while women are identically irrational human being. Here, Emily Bronte shows that men and women are born with the same capacity. There are certain factors that cause people to become irrational, and it can happen to men and women.

Therefore, based on this study, it can be concluded that the feminist issue contained in those two novels is a claim for equality between men and women. How women are shown to have the potential similarities like the men, and how bad claims that was usually directed to women in early Victorian era is tried to be destructed in this case. This is of course a sense to show how the ideas of feminism were glorified during early Victorian era.

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