

Femalization of the Genre of Literature; Novel Owners of the Novel

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Abstract

Unfairly female authors have been deprived of the title of “mothers” of English Novel and “fathers” have been taken as the sole male owners of the Novel. While not only the first professional novelist was a woman but the numbers of female novelists exceed that of the males. Female authors indefatigably undertook the process of femalization the genre of literature and the current study conducted through the qualitative research and text-analysis methods together with historical approach tried to put light to the fact that how female novelists contributed to the great genre of literature and strengthen it due to their fairness and their gender as well as their treatment of their subject. Aphra Behn penned *Oroonoko* of 1688 much earlier than Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* of 1719. The purpose of this paper has, by no means, been to convert female writers from the lower novelists to higher ones. However, under the strict social conventions of the seventeenth and eighteenth century England, there had been buried some masterpieces of literary works which need to be delivered again to the world of literature, the negligence of which is a loss and the revival of which is a gain to both consumers and producers of literary works.

Keywords: Femalization, Fair voices, Social conventions, Rehabilitation, Revival

Introduction

The kind of literature generally male poets (the authors of all genres of literature) have used to produce were in the tradition of Homer, Shakespeare and Chaucer, in which Hector fought single battles and slain, and the 'full worthy' knight 'of mortal battles he had fought fifteen'. Among the great names of literary authors from the ancient times such as Geoffrey Chaucer, Sidney, William Shakespeare, John Milton, Dr Jonson, Samuel Johnson, Alexander Pope, John Dryden, Jonathan Swift till Dickens, Wordsworth, there has been rarely a mention of their female counterparts. These giants of literature had spread such a heavy shadow/ These giants of literature had cast such a heavy shadow over the world of novels under which the little glittering of the female poets has gained little attention. Even women should have hidden under the veil of men in order to be allowed into the male-dominated territory, as Call extends the old rule to the present time:

The concept of male pseudonym would appeal to many female writers throughout the 19th and 20th century, including the likes of Mary Ann Evans, better known as George Eliot. This trend even spilled into the late 20th and early 21st century with the author of the famous Harry Potter book series, J.K. Rowling. Rowling was encouraged by her publishers to assume the gender-ambiguous initials "J.K." rather than use her first name, Joanne, as publishers believed male children wouldn't want to read a book with a male protagonist if it was written by a woman (Call, 2022)

Up until recent centuries that Jane Austen, Mary Ann Evans and Bronte sisters tried to reveal their literary talent still anonymously. Aphra Behn's name is rarely referred to even as a novelist. Professor Judith Kegan Gardiner's narration of the negligence of Aphra Behn is of great interest in this regard. In his article, *The First English Novel: Aphra Behn's Love Letter, The Canon, and Women's Tastes*, published in 1989, Gardiner mentions:

A few years ago, I was reading the only work by the pioneering seventeenth-century woman writer Aphra Behn that I had not previously read –her *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister, 1684-87*, which was not published in her six-volume standard edition of her work. Chortling in the rare book room of the Newberry Library, I decided that I was reading the first English novel... In the same year, 1987, Michael McKeon's *Origins of the English Novel* appeared; it argued against the identification of any 'first' novelist. Just as I was seeking to revise the novelistic canon with Behn at the

head of the line, voices arose saying that the canon should be abolished and that there were no individual 'origins' (Kegan Gardiner, 1989).

In his whole argument, he attempted to stake the claim that Behn's *Love Letters* was the first English novel in order to illuminate difficulties with both old and new kinds of literary history, especially with the contested ground of the 'rise of the novel'; at the same time, He recognized that such a claim about origin and priority is necessarily fallacious.

Novel as a Different Genre of Literature

'A novel is a long narrative in literary prose. The genre has historical roots both in the fields of the medieval and early modern romance and in the tradition of the novella', 'an extended fictional work in prose; usually in the form of a story', 'a work of prose fiction, longer than a short story' or 'a long fictional narrative in prose, usually about the experiences of a central character' are the general definitions given to the novel. The starting point of searching for the history of novel should first have its foundation on a more solid, specialized, all-compassing definition of the novel prior to the investigate. It is the method that the renowned novel historians, such as Ian Watt, Walter Reed, Robert Alter and Bakhtin have done.

Ian Watt's theory of the novel has gathered great criticisms and appreciations in the world of literature. Even if about half a century has passed from its publication (1957), his book, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, is referred to by many scholars and researchers of literature. For Watt, the novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects the individualist and innovating reorientation. In his above mentioned book, he emphasizes on the term 'realism, as a defining characteristic which differentiates the work of the early eighteenth-century novelists from previous fiction.' Then, he tries to redefine the term philosophically, associating realism with being critical, anti-traditional and innovation.

The method of realistic presentation should be the study of the particulars of experience by the individual investigator who is free from the body of the past assumptions and traditional beliefs. In modern, realism begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses. Realism of the novel should also abide by these changes in the meaning which can be seen as an attempt to reject universals and disassociate itself from tradition. From this perspective, thus, novel is different from other genres of literature.

Previous literary forms had reflected the general tendency of their culture to make conformity to traditional practice the major test of truth: the plots of classical and renaissance epic, for example, were based on past history or fable, and the merits of the author's treatment were judged largely according to a view of literary decorum derived from the accepted models in the genre. This literary traditionalism was first and most fully challenged by the novel, whose primary criterion was truth to individual experience –individual experience which is always unique and therefore new. This novel is thus logical literary vehicle of a culture which, in the last few centuries, has set and unprecedented value on originality, on the novel; and it is therefore well named (Watt, 1957: 13).

Watt believes in the full-detachment of the novel from the past and evaluates it as a privilege for the innovators of the new genre. The pioneers of the new genre must have their story taken place in a unique environment with new realistic and individualistic experiences. From every angle that Watt examines the boundaries and initiations of the genre, his nominees become the perfect example of it. Novel should reject the traditional plot and it ultimately lacks in the formal conventions of other genres for which Defoe and Richardson are admired and highly praised even above the Shakespeare and Milton:

Defoe and Richardson are the first great writers in our literature who did not take their plots from mythology, history, legend or previous literature. In this, they differ from Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton, for instance, who, like the writers of Greece and Rome, habitually used traditional plots. (Watt, 1957:11)

Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister* published in 1683 dealt with the theme of betrayed love which turned into prostitution, without any traditional plot, narrated through letters appeared much earlier to Daniel Defoe's *Robison Crusoe* (1719) or *Moll Flanders* (1722), Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749). However, Silvia of Behn in her *Love Letters*, in spite of her very real social problem that because of social follies a pure lover from the highest estimation of love falls to the level of prostitution has been neglected and singled out from the club of the fictitious characters named by Watt:

...the 'realism' of the novels of Defoe, Richardson and Fielding is closely associated with the fact that Moll Flanders is a thief, Pamela a hypocrite, and Tom Jones a fornicator. (Watt, 1957:11)

James Cruise one of the advocators of Watt's approach to the history of the novel seeks the origin of the novel in England. He, like his precursor, emphasises on the enormity of Watt's findings and believes that the issue of 'the origin of the novel' should be settled once and for all. But unlike Ian Watt, he believes that the possibility that the novel could have a history in ancient time can also be taken into consideration. He defines novel as:

There are, nevertheless, advantages in thinking of the novel as a variety of storytelling at least as old as prose fiction itself. But the burdens of history, including our own, labour against this notion. Instead, we might settle on a compromise position, one that defines the novel as a form of prose fiction in its printed form; this way it continues as an amalgam of features, a way of telling a story, while also maturing into a writing practice that is authored, time-bound, and proprietary, if not in fact, then in principle. (Cruise, 1999:18)

In doing so, he just tries to push back the emergence of the genre a little back to seventeenth century so that the date can encompass Aphra Behn. Cruise's attempt to widen the scope of the definition and time-limit of the search for the origin of the novel is of significance. He believes that for many centuries critics have been disinclined to trust anything amorphous, because so much of modern culture has invested heavily in the divisions of knowledge and classification systems within those divisions to help organize and arrange what they know. It has become a habit to believe that the novel, unlike poetry or drama, is in fact historically new, with a history that only authority in competition with writing practices adequately defines. Cruise tries to sidestep the traditional method by holding the novel up to a non-literary model.

And because of my view of the novel as a textual property, I cannot accept that, come 1719 or 1740, it is a new genre with a distinctive prehistory and traceable origin. It is, quite simply, a different kind of property, but one no more real than what had preceded it. (Cruise, 1999:19)

In his theory of the recognition of the initial and primitive forms of the novel, Cruise comes closer to the theory of the interdependence between the genres of literature and how one form gets its primary shape and later grows into a fully-shaped one. A form cannot be emerged all of a sudden. The predecessor and their early contributions should logically be considered in the emergence, formation and the development of the genre. Those who were nominated as the founders of the novel by Ian Watt in his book '*The Rise of the Novel*' and even those whose names have

flourished out of the novel should be standing on the shoulders of their predecessors whose rights should duly be observed in any appreciation of the recent ones.

...the recognized property holdings of seventeenth and eighteenth century novelists go well beyond Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding; Burney, Radcliffe, and Inchbald wrote novels too, but so did Behn, Manley, and Haywood. The mothers and fathers of the novel have come together in such a way that only most determined among us would hold that parthenogenesis explains the birth of the novel. (Cruise, 1999: 25)

Walter Reed defines the novel as ‘a long prose fiction which opposes the form of everyday life, sexual and psychological, to the conventional forms of literature, classical or popular, inherited from the past (Mancing, 2004:605). For him, the novel is a type of literature suspicious of its own literariness; it is inherently anti-traditional in its literary code.’ Reed believed that the temporal search for the origin of the novel should be limited to the period after the invention of printing. As a concept dependent on the printed book, by definition of the novel cannot exist as a genre before the Renaissance. For Reed, the novel as genre, has ‘risers’ more than once in European history, that is born over and over again at different times in European history. Thus, in spirit but with difference emphases, Reed’s concept of the novel is much like that of M Bakhtin.

Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Russian philosopher and literary theorist of the twentieth century, argues that ‘romance’ has its origins in antiquity and it is best seen in the sophistic, or adventure, romance of ancient Greece. The romance is, according to Bakhtin, a characteristically authoritarian and monologic genre, one in which there is a single voice and single consciousness. Like other traditional genres (epic, lyric and dramatic), it originated in an ancient oral culture and over the centuries developed relatively rigid generic characteristics. When it comes to the novel, Bakhtin defines it as a ‘something else entirely’:

Above all, the novel is characterized by heteroglossia and dialogism, multiple languages and multiple consciousnesses in open-ended dialogue. Novelistic discourse existed in ancient and medieval times, especially in such ‘serio-comical’ genres as the Socratic dialogue and the Menippean satire... Everything that is truly great must include an element of laughter. Otherwise, it becomes threatening, terrible, or pompous; in any case it is limited. Laughter lifts the barrier and clears the path. (Mancing, 2004:54-55)

If elements crucial to the novel have always existed, the novel has not, and it could not come into being until a number of specific historical developments took place.

The conditions that in Bakhtin's view make the novel possible all come together for the first time in the one occurrence in human history were available just after the Renaissance. And when, by the invention of printing, the publication of book became possible, every condition for the birth of the novel was at hand:

And there arrived on the scene, at last, the great Renaissance novel –the novels of Rabelias and Cervantes. It is precisely in these two works that the novelistic word... revealed its full potential and began to play such titanic role in the formulation of a new literary and linguistic consciousness... before our very eyes: the birth and development of the novel as a genre takes place in the full light of the historical day... younger than writing and the book: it alone is organically receptive to new forms of mute perception, that is, to reading. (Mancing, 2004:55)

Historical Background of the Novel

If the search for a definition of the novel is to be performed on the basis of the 'theory of the novel' proposed by Bakhtin and Reed, it can also be done in relation with the most important cultural and literary events of the then era, Renaissance, the invention of printing and the availability of the means of the publication of book. The requirements of the age should also be taken into consideration; otherwise, the result will be unrealistic. T S Eliot's warning about 'the search for novelty' seems applicable to the search of the novel.

One error, in fact, of eccentricity in poetry is to seek for new human emotions to express; and in this search for novelty in the wrong place it discovers the perverse. (Eliot, 1986:325)

Reading Public

Eighteenth century is believed to be one of the remarkable and increasing popular interests in reading. The reading public was large by comparison with previous periods, but far from the reading public of the present day.

The only contemporary estimate of the size of the reading public was made very late in the century, Bruke estimated it at 80,000 at in the nineties. This is small indeed, out of a population of at least six millions.,, Such is certainly the implication of the most reliable evidence available on the circulation of newspapers and periodicals: one figure, that of 43,800 copies sold weekly in 1704, implies less than one newspaper buyer per hundred person per week; and another later figure, of 23,673 copies sold daily in 1753, suggests that

although the newspaper-buying public tripled in the first half of the century, it remained a very small percentage of the total population (Watt, 1957:36).

The shift of attention from the education of the courtiers to the literacy of the public should be searched back in early 1700. During the reign of Queen Anne, education was determined to be spread among laymen. The form of education was limited to the religious teachings. Oxford Journals refers to this era in this way that the eighteenth century began well; the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, founded in 1699, proceeded energetically to set up charity schools for the instruction in reading, writing and the Church catechism of boys and girls from seven to twelve years old. Queen Anne took considerable interest in them, and during her reign and that of George I, they increased and flourished.ⁱ The increase in the scale of the demand for reading and the explosion of print culture brought about a rare opportunity which was called the Age of Enlightenment.

Women's Contribution to Literature

No country has ever had so many poetesses at once. Indeed, when one remembers that the Greeks had only nine muses, one is sometimes apt to fancy that we have too many. And yet the work done by women in the sphere of poetry is really of a very high standard of excellence (Wilde, 2006).

Oscar Wilde, in an article principally dealt with Elizabeth Barrett Browning, one of the most prominent poetesses of the Victorian Era, elaborates on the value and the significance of English poetesses. The quotation above refers to women's role in the production of literature, even in the myth of muses. In Greek mythology, goddesses have been given great important roles. "Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy!"ⁱⁱⁱ below Zeus, the supreme God, the counterpart of Roman Jupiter, the rest of the posts have been judiciously distributed among women and men alike. In addition to prominent goddesses like Dione, the female version of Zeus, Aphrodite, the goddess of Love and Beauty, Ananke, the goddess of Fate and Necessity and Gaia, the Mother Earth, invocation made by male poets is all for female Muses. The Muses were nine daughters of Zeus:

- Erato, the Muse of Lyrics
- Euterpe, the Muse of Music
- Thalia, the Muse of Comedy
- Melpomene, the Muse of Tragedy
- Terpsichore, the Muse of Dance and Choral Song
- Urania, the Muse of Astronomy
- Clio, the Muse of Historical and Heroic Poetry

- Polyhymnia, the Muse of Hymns
- Calliope, the Muse of Epics

Wilde believes that the contribution of English poetesses to literature is more than that of Greek's. English poetesses have been actively engaged in the production of literature from very early times in the history of literature even during the reign of Saxons and Normans. The works of these poetesses should now be read by glossaries. Wilde in his article refers to one the earliest poetesses in the fifteenth century, Abbess Juliana Berners, whose *Book of St. Albans* starts with these sentences:

Julyans, or Juliana, Barnes, otherwise Berners, who has been generally designated as the authoress of the present volume, is supposed to have been born, towards the latter end of the **fourteenth century**, at Roding-Berners (Long, 1843:310)

Berners' work was enthusiastically about hawking and the art of hunting. Anne Askew's poems appear much later in sixteenth century. She lived a life of a heroin. She was imprisoned, tortured and executed for her belief. Her ballad which she composed and sang when she was in Newgate much resembles her personal life:

Like as the armed knight/ Appointed to the field/ with this world will I fight/
And Faith shall be my shield/... More enemies now I have/ than hairs upon
my head. / Let them not me deprave/ But fight thou in my stead (Braden,
2005:78).

Oscar Wilde then refers to Mary Herbert, Sidney's sister, the Countess of Pembroke, who was also known as Mary Sidney and admired as poetess in her day. Her translation of *The Triumph of Death* from Italian into English poems is of great significance. It reveals her mastery over two languages and the music of the target one.

The gallant lady, gloriously bright, / The stately pillar once of worthiness,/
And now a little dust, a naked sprite,/ Turn'd from her wars joyful conquerers,
/ Her wars, where she had foil'd the mighty foe/ Whose wily stratagems the
world distress,/ And foil'd him not with sword, with spear, or bow,/ But with
chaste heart, fair visage, upright thought,/ Wise speech, which did with
honour linked go (Sidney Herbert, 1600).

In the form, content and wit as well as strength, her poetic competence seems comparable to those of Chaucer's description of the character of the knight and Pope's *Rape of the Lock*.

One of the main factors for these poetesses in enabling them to publish their works and make a name was their acquaintance with political or poetical figures. There could have been many other female writers who could not have been able to get their voices heard. The known ones stood on the shoulders of unknown ones to get to the height required to be seen by the world. In the history of early English authoresses, one of the female dramatists, born in 1500, namely Elizabeth Carew whose attachment to Henry VIII of England, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, through her husband made her work is admired. Her husband was a friend of the king and her parents held offices in the court. *The Tragedy of Mariam* was published in 1613. Alexander Dyce printed selected parts of her work in his book entitled *Specimens of British Poetesses: Selected and Chronologically Arranged*. There are many splendid examples of witty advices given in the published work which equates her with other thinkers and poets of her age. On the praise and advantage of pious and virtuous life she says:

‘Tis not enough for one that is a wife/ To keep her spotless from an act of ill;/ But from suspicion she should free her life, / And bare herself of power as well as will./ ‘Tis not so glorious for her to be free,/ As by her proper self restrain’d to be./ When she hath spacious ground to walk upon,/ Why on the ridge should she desire to go? (Dyce, 1825:28-29)

In private life, her poem is very much appreciated and it shows her insight in family issues. Loyalty of a married couple is fundamental and they should avoid any ambiguity in their matrimonial relationship. Such views about marriage and adherence to married tradition are acceptable to be heard from a fair voice, but matters of gross importance at state level are also scattered over their works. In the following poem she advocates the fallaciousness of revenge and the greatness of ruling the hearts. The essence of the poem goes in line with her contemporary thinker and philosopher Francis Bacon’s essay ‘Of Revenge’. In his essay, Bacon says that revenge is a kind of ‘wild justice’ which the more man’s nature runs to. It is the glory of a man to pass by an offence and we are recommended to forgive our enemies but you never read that we are recommended to forgive our friends. Similarly, but more musically, Elizabeth Carew recommends to forgive not to take revenge, while her husband falls victim to revenge and beheaded.

The fairest action of our human life/ Is scorning to revenge and injury;/ For who forgives without a further strife, / His adversary’s heart to him doth tie./ And ‘tis a firmer conquest truly said,/ To win the heart, than overthrow the head./ (Dyce, 1825:30)

These names constitute a strong stand for lady poets who could claim the vacant but more deserved position of ‘Mothers of English poetry’, then, the highly valued professors of literature would be able to give a more perfect experience and image of literary works to their students. The day has come to let the single parent of literary family find and bring back its motherly voices back in order to give the warmth and wealth expected from her to its readers. The way that lady poets view the world and respond to follies and glories of mankind can be taken as the other side of the story without which the picture is neither complete nor pleasurable. Few decades after Elizabeth Carew, Diana Primrose publishes in 1630 *A Chain of Pearls, Or a Memorial of the Peerless Graces* in which the twelve elements necessary for a just ruler are likened to the pearls in a necklace wore by a queen to make her perfect ruler.

A Chain of Pearl... London, 1630, -is a tract of twelve pages. The Pearls which form the Chain are, the Religion, Chastity, Prudence, Temperance, Clemency, Justice, Fortitude, Science, Patience, and Bounty of her majesty. (Dyce, 1825: 45)

Oscar Wilde in his article adds Mary Morpeth, an early 17th Scottish poetess and Lady May Worth, to whom Ben Jonson dedicated *The Alchemist* to the list of early poetesses whose contributions to English literature were immense.

After the Restoration women applied themselves with still greater ardour to the study of literature and the practice of poetry. Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, was a true woman of letters, and some of her verses are extremely pretty and graceful. **Mrs. Aphra Behn** was the first Englishwoman who adopted literature as a regular profession (Wilde, 2006:94).

From the recent century onward, the names of the pioneers of female poets and authors keep appearing in critical articles and literary histories. Theorists of literature and historiographers have deviated to the taboo of maleness in their text and nowadays they freely mention the role of women in the grand view of literary experiences. However, it is not what literature should be about and it is not the ultimate goal which is expected from literary figures.

For many critics, however, sympathy is not so much a source of pleasure as a moral demand well met by literature: as George Eliot put it in her ‘The Natural History of German Life’, The greatest belief we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist is the extension of our sympathies ’ because ‘Art is the nearest thing to life, it is a mode of amplifying experience

and extending our contact with our fellow men beyond the bounds of our personal lot.’(Butler, 2005:40)

Women Novelists

The discussions of ‘the definition of the novel’ or the recognition of the ‘initiators of the genre’, as reviewed above, should be left to the non-literary theories and non-literary texts and criticisms. It is very much obvious that there should have been some foundations upon which the temple of new genre has been erected. According to a Buddhist proverb, “every viewer appreciates the temple but none the foundation.” Whenever the issue of women novelist is debated, the prime attention gathers around giant authors such as Jane Austen, George Eliot, Bronte sisters or Virginia Woolf. Nevertheless, the least and due recognition is never given to those lesser-known works which anticipated the well-known ones, ‘without which they could not consist, and on which they so depend.’

Certainly, women as writers of fiction had not yet fully established themselves, despite the interesting and important early efforts of novelists such as Jane Barker, Eliza Haywood, Charlotte Lennox, Sara Scott, Frances Sheridan, Frances Brook and Sara Fielding. (Epstein, 1989:5)

These names and reputed authors should not be taken as the whole of literature. In our schools and universities, the major novels of the major women novelists, Austen, Bronte, Eliot and Woolf are habitually taught, read and assessed, but the similar works of their ‘sister novelists’ are left untouched in the shelves. Those novels should be included in any literary circular. Professors of literature as well as their students should be aware of the fact that these names do not represent the whole of literature. Eliot suggests such a solution to his fellow poets:

The poet must be very conscious of the main current, which does not at all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations. He must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same (Eliot, 1986).

After the English Renaissance in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century and after ‘the death of epic’, when the last copies of the *Paradise Lost* were being sold in 1670s, when the printed books could be also affordable to middle class laymen and when ordinary people could write and become the subject of works of fiction in the openness gifted by Restoration a new genre was getting its shape. The newness then became its name, novel.

Aphra Behn was born in 1640 and wrote in 1670 was the closest author to this era in which the above mentioned historical coincidences were taking place. Behn, imprisoned for her debts, was released from the prison and started her career as the first woman who wrote for living. As a poet, playwright and then novelist she produced many works among which her *Oroonoko* and *Love Letters* are the concern of this thesis which will be discussed in detail in the relevant chapter.

Jane Barker was born in 1652 and published her first novel, *Exilius; Or, The Banished Roman* in 1715. She was an English poet who in her 60s became a novelist and wrote three novels. Her last novel, *The Lining of the Patch Work Screen* was published when she was 74. Her novels are valued for their transitional literary taste from that of court to ordinary public. The story of her last novel is narrated through multiple voices, plural first person and female third person in a didactic manner. Her language is very much fluid and the element of suspension is quite well-observed.

When the Blossom of Youth is shed, do we bring forth the Fruits of good Works? Do we relieve the Poor, any way within our Power? Do we instruct the Ignorant, comfort the Afflicted, strengthen the Doubtful, or assist the Feeble, with other Works of Mercy corporal and spiritual? She was thus ruminating, when a Gentleman entered the Room, the Door being a jar (Barker, 2016:5).

Mary (Delarivier) Manley was born in 1663 and wrote her first fictional work, *Letters Written by Mrs Manley* in 1696. The novel could not be accessed but it is so noted that the story is about a lively and naturalistic account of a group of travellers as they journey by stagecoach through southwest England. Manley has the title of the first English female journalist. She had a political life as well as literary one. Her satirical work received the attention of the nation in a high degree. The role that Manley played in the participation of women in the serious profession of writing much resembles that of Aphra Behn,

Scholars of this period often regarded Haywood as a pioneer of feminist protest literature, in which capacity she was often grouped with a trio of female writers, whom one author of the 1720s had called 'the fair triumvirate of wit' –Aphra Behn, Delariviere Manley, and Haywood (Haywood, 2004:20).

Eliza Haywood was born in 1693 and wrote her first novel, *Love in Excess or The Fatal Enquiry* in 1719. She was a prolific English authoress, actor and publisher. The years in which she wrote her poems/novels, etc were very crucial in terms of publication and its economics. Ian Watt alludes to the era as the age of the rising of

the novel. Publication of the novels had reached its highest possible rate. The year of the publication of Haywood's first novel coincided with the publication of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and her second novel *Idalia; or The Unfortunate Mistress* (1723) was published one year after Defoe's *Moll Flanders*.

Scholars of the early to mid-twentieth century tended to consider Haywood (when they considered her at all) as an ill-formed precursor to mature talents such as Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne. The feminist recovery effort of the 1970s, however, initiated the revival of interest in Haywood (Haywood, 2004: 28).

Elizabeth Inchbald was born in 1753 and wrote in 1789 whose name in importance usually comes after Aphra Behn, who, like Behn, found renown as a playwright, actress and novelist. Inchbald, having retired from acting, tried her hand in earning her living solely by writing. She published her novel, *Simple Story* in 1791 and *Nature and Art* in 1800.

Charlotte Lennox was born in 1730 and wrote her first novel, *The Life of Harriot Stuart* in 1751, but she became very much famous for her second work *The Female Quixote* published 1752, one and half a century after the original *Don Quixote* (1605). She was associated with the great literary figures of her age such as Samuel Richardson and Samuel Johnson to whom Frances Burney was also attached:

Samuel Johnson, who thought Lennox 'a great genius' and pronounced her superior even to Elizabeth Carter, Hannah More, Frances Burney, and Elizabeth Montague, encouraged and helped her in her literary career so long as he lived (Lennox, 2008:78).

The list is too long to be incorporated in the body of this paper. The early novelists have been shown as the peak of the iceberg of the women's contributions to English literature. These centuries-old names, their early fictitious prose works and their professional association with the literary male counterparts of the age established a new genre in literary history and filled the gap created by the end of the epic. In spite of the rock-solid historical facts for women's rightful fight to claim their superiority in both imagination and narration, the literary discrimination still seems to find no end as Johnson approves of it:

The struggles of female authors from the past are still evident in the present. Male writers are still more widely recognized for their work compared to that of their "fairer sexes". The stereotypes of the 1800s greatly affected every aspect of day to day life and work for talented female writers, forcing

many of them, despite their extraordinary talents, to pursue their dreams under the guise of a male name. And this silent-sexism continues to affect women of today as well- in every field. And given that the writings of 21st century women are still not taken seriously or, simply, cannot reach that, “wider audience” because they are in fact women. Women are still forced to prove their worth, and their equality to men. But no matter how hard they try; female authors are often deluded into the watered down, an excruciating and seldom acknowledged truth which all women writers must bear (Johnson, 2022).

Negligence to Which Female Novelists Were Subject

The whole issue revolves around the circumstances and the manner by which women literary works were underestimated and their artistic attempts were suppressed. One should not blame only men for the unwelcomed domination over the women’s artistic creations but sometimes women welcomed such a domination according to recent critics:

The widespread misconception that scholarly work was the exclusive preserve of men resulted in many women publishing their work under male pseudonyms. Bradely wrote a letter to their friend and mentor Robert Browning in which she asked him not to reveal their identity, ‘the report of lady-authorship will dwarf and enfeeble our work. We have many things to say the world will not tolerate from a woman’s lips’ (Thain and Parejo, 2009:311).

However, the day has come to remove the overshadowing non-literary elements which have been hovering over their names and fames for hundreds of years as the black cloud of undeserved degradation and abjection.

In fact, despite pervasive rhetoric against women’s writing –and to a lesser extent against women’s reading –there is little indication that women took part in text-based activities as expressions of female insurrection against male-dominated social forces. ...it served male-dominated social hierarchies, especially the patriarchal structured medieval family (Krug, 2002:4).

Women have been the residence of non-female society in which laws of the game were proposed, planned and executed by males and women were subject to mere obedience of what they were dictated.

For centuries, women have had to hide their identity, use pen names, or have had their work misallocated to prominent and renowned men. From poetry

to novels, the literary world has remarkably benefitted from the pen of a woman, but more often than not, they were never credited during their time. In fact, none of Austen's novels revealed her name until after her death in 1817. Her motives for masking her identity lie in the universal acknowledgment that women working for money during that era was simply not deemed respectable (Khan, 2021:108).

Serious works of arts were traditionally male-made in which minor or passive roles were given to women. Hector, Achilles, Agamemnon, Nestor and Odysseus of Homer, Othello, Hamlet and Lear of Shakespeare, Crusoe of Defoe and Gulliver of Swift in great works of literature have rubbed the chance of women to take an active role in the construction of literary world. Women's role in these giant works is supportive and they submerge in the progress of the plot. Milton religiously blamed Eve for the fall of Adam; Homer makes Helen seen as a scapegoat for the fall of Troy and the tragic death of Paris and Hector; Shakespeare scorned the arrogance of Goneril, the avarice of Regan and the negligence of Cordelia which brought the mighty kind on his knees. A new universe should be created in which the roles and circumstances of women would be highlighted, converted and portrayed.

Cecilia (1782) and *Camilla* (1796) were novels by Fanny Burney, and *Belinda* (1801) was a novel by Maria Edgeworth,... Not only were they *by* women, they were all *about* women in contemporary English society (Walder, 1995:23).

Before the nineteenth century, it was the male novelists who wrote about women. They saw women in a very different way, the way that they like them to be. Henry Fielding was dealing with adventure of Mrs Shamela, Daniel Defoe with Mrs Moll Flanders, Alexander Pope with Mrs Belinda: However, by the emergence of female novelists the equation was converted. Women dealt with their own gender differently. Aphra Behn shows Imoinda, and even Oroonoko, the male character, and Silvia through a woman narration. Diverse women characters of Frances Burney such as Evelina, Cecilia and Camilla become the heroin of their own womanly world, not manly one. Maria Edgeworth shows how poor Isabella or the pretty Judy is chosen to be married by a toss of a coin. Ann Radcliffe sends her young Emily to Udolpho. Austen's floor apportionment is distributed among her densely populated female characters in all her novels. Charlotte's Jane and Emily's Catherine become immortal in their works. George Eliot dispatches Maggie to save Tom's life and dies tragically on the mission. In all, their fictitious world is different from the male ones not in degree but in kind. The then increasing female community of readership was happy about such a depiction of their gender in the works of their co-gender novelists

which sent a right signal to the authoresses and encouraged them in their adherence to newly created literary profession. The reaction of the male writers as well as readers was of different kind. They tried to create a culture of contempt firstly about the genre itself and secondly about the propagators of the novel, women novelists. Writing novel should be seen as an infamous profession and their authoresses as scandalous ones. Their literary voices should be dampened if not possible at least made faint. In the meantime, the readers did not heed the gender confrontation. The market was demanding and the profit was tempting. Resultantly, male could not help not competing for their share of the literary world, its reputation and its prosperity. Now that they have also engaged in the job, gradually, they tried to amend the loss and to show the profession a prestigious one.

Before 1840 the British cultural elite accorded little prestige to the writing of novels, and most English novelists were women. By the turn of the twentieth century “men of letters” acclaimed novels as a form of great literature, and most critically successful novelists were men. These two transitions –in the prestige of novel writing and the gender distribution of lauded novelists –were related processes, constituting complementary elements in a classic confrontation between men and women in the same white-collar occupation (Tuchman, 1989:1).

The shift in attitude towards writing novel encouraged feminists to acclaim the female version of the origin of the genre. In doing so, the long-neglected names and works of female novelists were sought, reprinted, read and become popular again.

In the revival of the works of the early novelists, feminism played an important role. Feminists such as Elaine Showalter, a pioneering Anglo-American critic, who is renowned for feminist studies boldly tried to stand for the rightful endeavours of female poets and novelists. She focuses on Victorian women novelists, arguing that;

The enforced production of “feminine” work (novels internalising the patriarchal conventions of the time) paradoxically created innovative and compelling texts... cultural pressures, like the need for male pseudonyms, the critical double standard, and the tension between womanhood and authorship, stimulated Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot to write intense, symbolic novels (Hawkins, 1996: 869).

Showalter proposed a new way of criticism of the works of women, known as gynocriticism. Unlike traditional literary criticism, gynocriticism deals with the works of authoresses on the bases of female experiences. In this method, the traditional male interpretive theories and models are replaced with womanly

approach to the writings of the women novelists. Showalter argued for the recognition of a separate female literary canon. She is one of the first literary scholars to identify a separate tradition of women's fiction in England (Burt, 2004: 617).

Putting her theories into practice, Showalter tried to let the women authors to have 'an anthology of their own', known as *Anthology of Women's Liberation and Literature* in 1971. In this anthology, many works of female authors have been published, while major literary historians do not mention either their names or their works and many well-known literary anthologies have been unwilling to include the contribution of the female authoresses in their bulky volumes. Anthologists may have applied the historical approach to the rights and wills of the fair gender.

Even in the so-called "enlightened" society of ancient Greece, where the concept of democracy supposedly originated; women had no property or political rights, and were forbidden to leave their homes after dark. Similarly, in ancient Rome women were unable to take part in any social event and were only allowed to leave their homes with their husbands or male relative. Still in many parts of this cosmos the male oppression continues. The poetess protests against the domination of the male and the conquest dwarfing of the female. The woman is expected to play certain conventional roles, and her own wishes and aspiration are not taken into account (Akhter, 2020).

The *Pelican Guide to English Literature* edited by David Ford in many volumes exploring many literary works of just the male writers, as the subtitle of each volume indicates: 'The Age of Chaucer', 'The Age of Shakespeare', 'From Donne to Marvell', 'From Dryden to Johnson' and 'From Blake to Byron'... The history of English literature seems to have been more selective than being inclusive and comprehensive. The intention of the editors of such anthologies might have had a gender-wise sifting of the works. Or, the editors might have omitted the works of authoresses due to their inferior literary materials. In seventeenth century, education went bare with women in its true sense. Behn's era is, by no means, comparable to twentieth century of Woolf. Historians forget even mentioning their little contribution. Or, public may not have appreciated such works, while the reality had shown the opposite.

Ten years before the publication of *Jane Eyre* (1847) Charlotte Bronte sent a selection of her poems to the poet Laureate Robert Southey for comment. Southey's reply was far from encouraging. In his letter to Charlotte of 12 March 1837, he advised against the notion of women pursuing a career in literature, commenting 'literature cannot be the business of a woman's life

and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it even as an accomplishment and a recreation' (Buzwell, 2020: 46-48).

The intention is inexplicable and falls outside the scope of this research; , however, the signs of neglecting early authoresses and a comparative negligence of their contributions can be clearly seen in the quotation above and these voluminous selections of literary works, alike, because of which they have just been left as names and dates rather than pleasure and experience.

David Daiches in the second volume of *A Critical History of English Literature* dedicates a section to 'Prose in the sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries'. Daiches shows that, he was aware of the gaining importance of prose works. He was aware of the fact that the intellectual conflicts and shifting tides of opinion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are more directly shown in the prose of the period than in its poetry. He first restricts the prose works of the age to pamphlets, polemical religious argument, political, educational and literary theorizing. Then he refers to the beginning of the novel:

Besides this large quantity of Miscellaneous prose writing, there are devotional works, sermon, translations of many different kinds, histories, biographies, accounts of contemporary events, and prose fictions (both translation of Italian Novelle and original work). Two forces are seen at work in most of this varied prose writing: first, the breakthrough of colloquial speech, with its vigour and raciness, into the written word, and secondly, the attempt to mould a consciously artistic English prose style (Daiches, 2005: 458).

In the third volume of his *Critical History of English Literature* which covers The Restoration to 1800, he mentions Aphra Behn in this way:

Among **minor** Restoration dramatists who employed the Restoration mode of comedy in greater or **less** degree might be mentioned Sir Charles Sedley, Thomas Shadwell, John Crowne, Thomas D'Urfey, and the **impressible Mrs Aphra Behn**, some of whose plays combine the **influence of Spanish** comedy of intrigue with pure **farce** (Daiches, 2005: 549).

A selective narration of the history cannot give a just account of the events. A portion of truth cannot be true. Truth is a whole. Fortunately, the unjust selection has not been pervasive. Oxford and Cambridge version of *The History of English Literature* has been less discriminative in their method of narration of the contributions of the

early women or writers, but it is not still persuasive. Janet M Todd, a researcher of Aphra Behn believes that although Charles Mish in *English Short Fiction in the seventeenth Century* published in 1969 regards Behn's work as overshadowing all others in quantity and quality, not many of his contemporaries working on the history of fiction shared his opinion.

Clearly the most influential of those who did not was Ian Watt, whose *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), simply ignores Behn while heaping praise on Defoe and Fielding. Perhaps she was lucky to be ignored, since, when she was treated in the "definitive" surveys, she tended to get short shrift. In the *Oxford History of English Literature*, in the volume *English Literature of the Late Seventeenth Century* (1969), James Sutherland simply dismisses all of Behn's fiction, long and short, except for *Oroonoko* (Todd, 1998:73).

Todd further states that less harsh but no more willing to encounter all Behn's fictional writings were the later critics as Lennard Davis, in *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (1983) and Michael McKeon in *The Origins of the English Novel* (1987). Davis argues that the novel is a form of discourse that suspend readers between belief and disbelief and while ignoring much of Behn's fiction, he notes that the plot of *Oroonoko* hinges on truth and deception.

Jane Austen should have laid a wreath upon the grave of Fanny Burney,...(Woolf, 1998: 85).

All women together, ought to let flowers fall upon the grave of Aphra Behn... for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds (Todd, 1998: 64).

Conclusion

Literature is just for pleasure and the pleasure cannot yield itself to its readers till the literary text, i.e. poetry, novel, drama or epic, is directly put in front of the students in academic institutions and they are required to challenge with the text with all its commentaries regardless of the gender of its composer. This has also been the whole intention of this paper to enlarge the scope of literature which emphasises the sole pleasure-giving aspect of it. Those which can yield itself to its readers can stay, otherwise they should leave the realm. The female novelists, the number and the contribution of who have been immense, should be given the chance to be heard not as names but as experiences. On the one hand, these women artists tried, consciously and professionally, to give pleasure to the readers of their own age and quench their thirst of the community of readership for literary material and, on the other hand,

unconsciously, anticipated the next generations of female novelists who would be able to exercise their talent on the genre without the restrictions they faced.

It should also be taken into consideration that literature is a continuum and the novelists of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who acted as precursors for the nineteenth ones, also stand on the shoulders of both their predecessors and contemporaries. The legendary phoenix may find its equivalent in the life-long path of possessing literary career of the generations of female novelists as Call believes:

Throughout history, many female writers were able to define themselves in a direct and active way. The result led to a myriad of narratives based on women rising from the patriarchal ashes, of finding their voice in a male dominated world. Female writers rose from the restrictive ashes by creating narratives about strong women who are lost and have to find ways to identify themselves through difficult circumstances. These narratives take an introspective look at the development of the female consciousness from repressed to free. (Call, 2022)

Novel provided women with the opportunity of conversion of the rules of the game, **a novel world in the novel by and about women**. Had *Lover-Letters* and *Oroonoko* of Aphra Behn not been written by the first professional woman novelist, had *Evelina* not been produced by prudent authoress, the fate of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Mill on the Floss* could have been different.

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