The Issue Of Feminism Through The Ideas Of Virginia Woolf And Jane Austen: A Room Of One’s Own And Jane Eyre

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The paper analyses feminism in Virginia Woolf’s essay A Room of One’s Own and Charlotte Brontë’s novel Jane Eyre. As Encyclopedia Britannica states, “Feminism, in general, is a term that is used to describe political, cultural and economic equal rights”. The main purpose is to establish more rights and legal protection for women. Both works are turning points in feminist literature. Although they correspond to different historical backgrounds, they deal with the same topic. During my analysis, I am going to focus on different aspects, such as financial and intellectual freedom, how is sexism is shown, the figure of men, financial independence, etc.

Firstly, in A Room of One’s Own is explored the idea that “the conditions under which men and women produce literature are materially different” (Woolf 103). As the essay expresses, at that time women were submissive to their male counterparts. This shows the dependency on them because they did not own money and did not have their work either. Virginia Woolf states in chapter 1 “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (Woolf 1). This quote expresses the importance of a room and money to be able to write like men. The room is just a symbol, the author explains that symbolism by saying that “taking possession of a physical room and space is a metaphor of taking possession of the rooms and space in the mind of the author, providing them with the lightness of writing and impersonating” (Raty?ska 27). To be able to write, women had to cross many obstacles like money, education, private space, etc. Moreover, Virginia Woolf is criticizing the patriarchy that invades England, as she states in “that England is under the rule of a patriarchy. Nobody in their senses could fail to detect the dominance of the professor. His was the power and the money and the influence. was the Foreign Secretary (….) Except for the fog he seemed to control Everything.” (Woolf 20). In this fragment she is writing in a very direct style and “she hyperbolizes this idea saying that all things and all people in the world are dominated by men” (Pernas 24). Woolf uses several rhetorical devices to prove her point about why women needed money for writing fiction. The author illustrates this point when she states, “For genius like Shakespeare's is not born among labouring, uneducated, servile people. It was not born in England among the Saxons and the Britons. It is not born to-day among the working classes. How, then, could it have been born among women?” (Woolf 41). She is talking to middle-upper class women and is referring to money as a gender issue and not as a distinctive class issue. Women have never been permitted to have money, it was their spouses who were the owners of the land and the cash. Moreover, throughout A Room of One’s Own, “the narrator emphasized on the fact that women are treated unequally in her society and for this reason, they produced less impressive works of writing than men” (Islam 16). To represent her point, the narrator invented a woman named Judith Shakespeare, the fanciful twin sister of William Shakespeare. In fact, “Judith was just as talented as her brother William. But William always got recognition and support by their family and society because of his talent” (Islam 16). As a result, Judith was underestimated like all the women during that historical moment and due to that she was ashamed to express her talent. She was not able to attend school because of the discrimination regarding women. That is why

Woolf creates the figure of Judith “as a tool to clarify the position of women endowed with Shakespeare’s genius but lacking the material and social conditions” (Alimam 44). Furthermore, she was forced to get married and she denied it. Therefore, “she cried out that marriage was hateful to her, and for that, she was severely beaten by her father.” (Woolf 29). Woolf in her essay speaks through a depersonalized gendered narrator: “‘I’ is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being (...) call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please-it is not a matter of any importance' (Woolf 4-5). The narrator performs an important role throughout the essay, as it is shown when she expresses the difficulties of earning money in “No force in the world can take from me my five hundred pounds. Food, house, and clothing are mine forever. Therefore, not merely do effort and labor cease, but also hatred and bitterness” (Woolf 35). By using an anecdotical storyteller, Woolf encourages women to explore “the true nature of women and the true nature of fiction' (Woolf 3). Besides, the narrator emphasizes that men earning the predominant position in society are in continuous fear of losing their control and force. She also notices how women for centuries have taken the position of “looking -glasses possessing the magic . . . power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size' (Woolf 26). In other words, “Using the words of Mary, Woolf explains that men assigned the lower status to women, not because of women’s weakness and defectiveness, but because their self-confidence is not strong enough to treat women as equals” (Raty?ska 29). Through this passage, it is expressed the idea that men make use of ladies to accept that men's own an honorable perfect representation. It is much the same as a mother and baby circumstance.

Whereas, in Jane Eyre is a novel narrated in 1st person narration. Jane Eyre is a character that is presented as having an internal quality that allows her the capacity to outlive and fulfill independence. Similarly to A Room of One’s Own, in Jane Eyre ‘‘women were not expected to express opinions of their own outside a very limited range of subjects, and certainly not be on a quest for their own identity and aim to become independent such as the protagonist in Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre’’ (Andersson 2). From the opening scene of the novel, Jane appeared to be maltreated by her aunt Mrs. Reed. She did not treat her as her children. Her aunt was undoubtedly sure Jane would not be acknowledged in society. Likewise, in A Room of One’s Own, in Jane Eyre appear different symbols that mean the quest for independence. An example of this occurs when Jane’s cousin, John, attempted to abuse her since he thought he was the male of the house and the dominant individual, she guarded herself and she did not acknowledge to be over his control. During that scene, it is expressed the image that Virginia Woolf portrays in her essay, “Jane is not that beautiful woman who has a high social class, she needs to prove herself and gain her independence and stands alone without depending on any wealthy man” (Wahiba 31). Also, in that scene, Jane denies being treated as a second choice and at last talks out against discriminations to her with a smart and cold tone. When Mrs. Reed rebukes Jane for telling a lie, Jane protects herself unreasonably, as stated in “I’m not deceitful. If I were, I should say I loved you, but I declare, I do not love you. I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John Reed, and this book about the liar, you may give to your girl, Georgiana, for it is she who tells lies, and not I” (Brontë 63). Jane refuses to be an object for him and emphasizes it by saying “How dare I, Mrs. Reed? How dare I? Because it is the truth. You think I had no feelings (…) I shall remember how you push me back-roughly and violently pushed me back into the red room and locked me up there-to my dying day. Though I was in pain, though I cried out” (Brontë 64). In short, “Jane’s rebellion against Mrs. Reed and John represents her feminist consciousness in getting esteem from other people as a decent and respectable person” (Gao 4).

However, in contrast with A Room of One's Own, Charlotte Brontë creates a male character that oppresses women in the story, Mr. Brocklehurst. He educates the young ladies that their places in society are restricted; "he pressed them in order to control them, but Jane did not accept that abuse, she is not the type of girls who follow the norms of the patriarchal society, she is also a person who has strong desire to keep her own personality and prove herself; this is a symbol of the quest of independence" (Bouchiba 31). A key episode is a night in the red room, which "causes her growing up overnight and having experienced true fear. She is no longer afraid of standing up for herself against the patriarchal society" (Awaliah 116). In the end, she leaves him because if she stays with him, she would be a slave for him. By doing that, Brontë expresses that "she is a rebellious woman who wishes to lead a different life and escape from the Victorian norms which are not acceptable in society" (Andersson 5-6). In comparison with him, we have the character Mr. Rochester with whom Jane wants to find the wished equality. Moreover, "the theme of marriage in the novel is based entirely on Brontë's view of marriage" (Bouchiba 16). Actually, "Although she loves him and they are both intellectually equal, she cannot completely feel happy because she knows that they are from different social classes, which is an important manner in the Victorian Age" (Bouchiba 22-23). However, another moment where Jane expresses her search for equality is when she finds out that Rochester has had a lawful spouse (Bertha). Therefore, Jane feels awful on this news and refused to be his mistress, "and chose to leave him and follow the path that could lead her to realize her equality. Then, she inherits from her uncle and becomes equal to Rochester, now she can go back to her love and decides to marry him" (Bouchiba 33-34). This excerpt shows how Jane Eyre, she represents a feminist woman during the Victorian period, that is searching for the quest for self-esteem that comes when she marries Rochester.

In conclusion, both texts express the ideals of the feminist movement, which are the importance of financial independence to be able to acquire freedom, how women must find equality to men and the idea of a strong woman whose main goal is to found self-esteem and to fight against any type of discrimination. It is pointed out that what causes discrimination in the presence of patriarchy is the institutions and society. Virginia Woolf's and Charlotte Brontë's want to acquire the right to be able to be part of the intellectual life of society.

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