

The progression of feminism through literature

The issue of gender inequality is one which has been publicly reverberating through society for decades. In order to examine this situation one must get to the root of the problem and understand that sociological factors causes women to have a more difficult time getting the same rights as their male counterparts. As we live in a patriarchy world, it is not surprising that our society reflects biases which exist as a result of male domination. While ostensibly it appears as if there is still a great deal of sexism in our society, in reality, feminism is starting to take heed in people's minds. This essay will inspect the progression of feminism in literature throughout the years by examining the theme of feminism from the famous playwright *Romeo and Juliet* with that of a renowned modern literature novel *Scarlet Letter*.

Everyone in the literary world is familiar to some extent with the tragic tale of two star-crossed lovers in William Shakespeare's playwright, *Romeo and Juliet*. Their love story takes place within a society that is founded upon violence, sexual domination and conquest. Every action taken is an expression to compare oneself to another and the need prove thyself more powerful than others. Though never mentioned in the story, the hatred between the two families was not exclusive to the Capulet, Montague blood line, but transcends all the way down to the servants who worked for each house. The play starts off with a servant of the Capulet boasting about how inferior people from the house Montagues are.

Gregory: That shows thee a weak slave, for the weakest goes to the wall

Sampson: Tis true; and therefore women, being the weaker vessels, are ever thrust to the wall. Therefore I will push Montague's men from the wall, and thrust his maids to the wall.

(Shakespeare 1.1 13-18)

This correspondence reinforces the concept of discrimination against women as it implies that men from the other house will be defeated through duels, while women, being the "weaker vessel" is only good for being "thrust into the wall" and used to sate the sexual desire of the conqueror.

Furthermore women of Verona were considered to be a completely different class in comparison to men. They were thought of as inferior, weaker and as objects to possess. Women were expected to please her parents before their coming of age, then after, please their husband and their ultimate life goal was to bear a child. The idea of women's inferiority were not only common among the poor and lowly but also evident in the high and mighty. Lady Capulet also presses forth the same expectation to honor the women's saying "

Well, think of marriage now. Younger than you
Here in Verona, ladies of esteem
Are made already mothers. By my count,
I was your mother much upon these years
That you are now a maid. Thus then in brief:
The valiant Paris seeks you for his love.

(Shakespeare 1.3. 71-76)

Through Lady Capulet's words we could see how women were expected to be transferred from the house of her parents to the house of her husband at a young age. They were deprive of any chance of independent thought, action or growth.

When the pressure of society begins to weigh down upon the star-crossed lovers, we can see how Romeo, being the dominated masculine character, attempts to fight back and involves himself in a fight to the death in order to defend his murdered friend as well as his honor as a men. While Juliet, being the tender feminine character, becomes submissive to Friar Lawrence's plan and took a potion that would make her seem dead in order to avoid direct conflict caused by her marriage; Juliet surrenders her independent will and succumbs to what others decide for her. She places her trust and fate into someone else's hand and eventually lead to the calamity at the end of the playwright.

The theme of feminism in Nathaniel Hawthorne's famous novel *Scarlet Letter* takes on a completely different form than it did in Shakespeare's master piece. Hawthorne depicts his views on gender through his characterization and attitude towards society. Hawthorne exemplifies women in his novel as strong and independent while most male characters are morally weak.

Hester Prynne is viewed by Hawthorne as one of the strongest characters in the novel; this is revealed through her independent lifestyle and her self-respect regardless of all the hindrances she has had to overcome externally and internally. Hester was a victim of society's wrath and became an outcast of the town. However, instead of being beaten down by the hardship of life, she takes her public humiliation by the reins and regains control of her life. Hawthorne has portrayed Hester as an admirable figure, who has "made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped" (Hawthorne 40). Hester was portrayed as a beautiful victim of her passion who accepted the consequence of her action bravely and embraced her punishment, this action has transcended her over the limits placed upon women in literature.

Through Arthur Dimmesdale, Hawthorne showed that women aren't always the "weaker vessel" and sometimes are able to take the moral high path and accomplish what some men are incapable of. Unlike his mistress, Dimmesdale refused to confess to his act of adultery and as a result his health begins to suffer the consequence as "he was described as emaciated: his voice had a certain melancholy prophecy of decay in it; he was often observed to put his hand over his heart, with first a flush then a paleness indicative of pain" (Hawthorne 113). Hawthorne's demonstrates his view on the role of women through Hester's unquestionable success and content with her life. The success of Hester coupled with the ultimate demise of Dimmesdale portrays Hawthorn's attitude of men as inferior to women. Hawthorne reveal Hester as a feminist icon who serves to show his view towards women in society and how even men with high ranks such as ministers could be weaker and inferior to women.

In regards to the comparison between the characters from *Romeo and Juliet* and those from *Scarlet Letter* the process of how feminism begin to take a metaphoric stand in literature is evident. Females went from being portrayed as weak and dependent to being unfathomed by social pressure and transcends into a character that is even stronger than men who were high in power. As human society progressed from the Elizabethan era to 19th century, people begin to understand "it's never been just about the Benjamins; it's about the Tubmans too" (Obama 2016). In conclusion, feminism is not a radical movement or an embarrassment nor should it be considered a scam for females to live their lives easier. "Feminism is simply acknowledging the fact that patriarchy does exist; it is simply the idea that women are people too and that they deserve the same social and economical opportunities as anyone in the world" (Obama, 2016).