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## Feminist Voice Across Boundaries: A Comparative Study Between Charlotte Bronte And Margaret Atwood

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### Abstract

This paper does the comparative analysis on the feministic vision of Charlotte Bronte and Margaret Atwood, authors known for their thought- provoking portrayals of women's experiences. This study highlights the shared concerns and distinct approaches of these two literary giants. Through the close reading of their works, this study demonstrates the enduring relevance of Bronte and Atwood's works offering insights into the ongoing struggle and triumphs of women across historical and cultural contexts.

A comparative study is a method of evaluating and analysing of two or more subjects and items. This phenomenon is to identify the similarities and dissimilarities, also determine the effectiveness of an approach. In literature, comparative study across different periods, languages, genres and others brings out the relationship between literature and other arts. Susan Bassnett rightly remarked:

The term Comparative Literature appeared in an age of transition. In Europe, as nations struggled for independence from the Ottomen Empire from the Austro- Hungarian Empire from France, from Russia and new nation states came into being, National identity (whatever that was) was inextricably bound up with national culture ( however that was defined). ( Bassnett20)

Therefore, this research paper exemplifies the comparative study between British woman writer Charlotte Bronte of Nineteenth century and the Canadian woman writer Margaret Atwood of Twentieth century, whose works continues to be in Twenty first century as well. In this aspect, the research paper aims to exemplify the female voice across boundaries at two different centuries. This research paper attempts to analyses the feministic vision voiced over the centuries by two different female writers.

Women in Victorian age faced significant societal constraints and expectations. Women were expected to fulfill domestic roles, such as wife, mother and homemaker. Women were restricted in education; opportunities for intellectual pursuits were limited. They are relied on men for financial support and employment opportunities. Despite these challenges, many women during the Victorian era made significant contributions to literature, social reform and other fields like industrial revolution. Some notable women are Jane Austen known for novels of manners and social commentary, Elizabeth Barrett Browning well known for her poem about romantic and social justice, Florence Nightingale for pioneer in nursing and social reform. Emmeline Pankhurst, a suffragette leader fought for women's right to vote. These women among others paved the good way for future generations of women to pursue greater equality and opportunities. Women in Victorian era includes women were expected to marry young and prioritize family duties. Women experience varied depending on their social class with upper class women have more privileges, few women like Elizabeth Garrett Anderson fought for women right includes education, employment and suffrage.

The Bronte siblings, like many prominent Victorian writers, matured during a period of rapid industrialisation, when mass production dramatically increased the availability of everyday commodities. Attuned to these sweeping changes, the Bronte sisters, along with their contemporaries, regarded the relationship between individuals and culture as central to the realist literary project. In recent years, Charlotte Bronte's fiction has been re-examined through the diverse lens.

Charlotte Bronte was born on 21 April 1816 and lived till 31 March 1855. Bronte is notably known as English novelist, poet, and her pseudonym is Currer Bell. The main theme of Bronte's novels finds to be isolation and internal conflicts suppresses of individual desire. Charlotte Bronte's view on feminism is complex and nuanced. While she is often regarded as a precursor to modern feminist thought, she did not explicitly identify as a feminist in the way the term is understood today. She was progressive for her time in advocating for women's intellectual freedom, independence, and moral strength. Her novels, especially *Jane Eyre*, center on women's struggles for equality, self-respect, and autonomy in a patriarchal society that limited their roles primarily to domestic spheres. Charlotte criticised societal expectations that confined women, and through her characters, she explored themes of female agency, resistance to oppression, and the pursuit of meaningful lives beyond mere social convention or economic dependence. Susan Ostrov Weisser in an article titled "Thornfield and 'The Dream to Repose on': Jane Eyre" remarked:

Charlotte attempted to forge a heroine of the negative materials of this estrangement of the so-called 'real' self from social recognition or power. Emptied of definition, the female outsider will successively try on all the roles available to women: the willful Lady, the Moral Feminine who renounces her own will, child/mother, pupil/teacher, slave/mistress/wife. Her novels rise above these sentimental models because they evolve into the means through which to re-evaluate social definitions of womanhood by imagining a strong female selfhood capable of uniting desire, power and morality. (Weisser 80)

In *Jane Eyre*, for example, the protagonist exemplifies feminist ideals by seeking an independent life, maintaining moral integrity, and refusing to compromise her principles despite social pressures. Jane's quest for equality extends to demanding marriage on equal terms rather than submission. Charlotte also addressed the limitations imposed on women by roles such as governesses, saw these as forms of bondage, and advocated respect and intellectual freedom for women. Charlotte Bronte's feminism was expressed more through her literary work and characters than public activism, reflecting her lived experiences and resistance to the era's restrictions on women's rights and identities.

Thus, Charlotte Bronte was deeply interested in the female mindset and the broader role of women in society, shaped in part by her own desire to transcend the constraints of her time. In doing so, she initiated a quiet literary revolution, addressing subjects that had rarely been explored with such depth or openness and that were often controversial or misunderstood in her era.

Similarly, Dystopian era refers to the period of where the society a role played by the sufferings, oppression, lack of freedom, deception, it is opposite of a utopian world. Societal decay are dystopian eras feature significant degradation in environmental. Women in dystopian fiction often find themselves and survival in patriarchal societies that seek to oppress and control them. Dystopian women are oppression and control, limited freedom and autonomy, resistance and survival, fight for rights and empowerment, violence and exploitation, resilience and solidarity.

Margaret Atwood is a prolific Canadian writer and famous for speculative novels. She was born on 1939 in Ottawa, Canada. Margaret Atwood is widely recognised for her feminist perspective, although she has been cautious about labeling herself strictly as a feminist. She defines feminism broadly as a belief in women's rights but has expressed discomfort with some specific feminist stances that she views as exclusionary or dogmatic. Atwood's works consistently explore women's struggles against patriarchy, especially focusing on themes of oppression, autonomy, and identity. Atwood takes her part in a cultural web of reference across which popular ideas pass. Atwood on nationalism and feminism responded: "I see the two issues as similar. In fact, I see feminism as part of a larger issue: human dignity. That's what Canadian nationalism is about, what feminism is about, and what black power is about. They're all part of the same vision" (qutd in Hammond 102).

Through the novels like *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Edible Woman*, Atwood critiques societal control over women's bodies and roles, exposing how women are economically, politically, and socially marginalized. Atwood emphasises the importance of women's self awareness and resistance to imposed silence and subjugation, portraying her female characters as complex, resilient individuals striving for empowerment and agency. Her feminism is intertwined with broader themes of social justice, human rights, and survival, often illustrating how women navigate and contest power structures in both dystopian and contemporary settings. This nuanced approach has made Atwood a prominent figure in feminist literature, respected for her incisive critique of gender inequalities without simplistic affiliations to any one feminist ideology.

Charlotte Bronte and Margaret Atwood are similar in creating strong female protagonists, women featuring independence and determined women navigating societal constraints. The characters like Jane Eyre and Offred are good examples. Bronte and Atwood critique the social norms of their time, highlighting issues like patriarchy, oppression and individual freedom. Gothic and symbolic elements in their works create atmospheric and thought-provoking narratives. Their writing often explores feminist themes, women struggle for identity, autonomy and equality.

Though Bronte writings are all about romantic and gothic elements, Atwood's work often incorporates speculative fiction and dystopian themes. In the historical context, Bronte wrote in 19<sup>th</sup> century, reflecting the societal norms of Victorian England, however Atwood works on women in futuristic societies. Narrative voice of Bronte tends to be more introspective and romantic whereas Atwood often tends about darker and more satirical tone. Bronte explored theme of identity, family and personal relationships and Atwood explores broader societal and political issues.

The comparative study between Charlotte Bronte and Margaret Atwood lives show that the women's inner lives and emotions are explored through their characters, revealing complex emotions, motivations and thoughts. On the other hand, psychological turmoil is yet another theme to depict their characters grappling with mental health, trauma and the physical health. Both the writers deal with class dynamics, power dynamics, personal responsibility, love and relationship, atmospheric settings, they both used symbolism and metaphor. Exploring these themes and studies readers can gain deeper understanding of the works of both Charlotte Bronte and Margaret Atwood beyond feminism.

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