

## **A Tentative Study in Reasons that British Female Writers Sprung up in 19th Century**

Changmao Dai

School of Liberal Arts, Yangtze University, Hubei 434023, China.

### **Abstract**

**19th century was the most glorious era when a host of writers sprung up promoting the prosperity of British literature. There was an astonishing phenomenon among the batch of writers. That was the rise of female writers. British writers increased gradually in 19th century and created a large number of masterworks praiseworthy for future generations, such as Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights and so on. As far as I am concerned, the emergence of the writers group must be connected closely with society, politics and economy.**

### **Keywords**

**Britain writers in 19th century, female writers.**

### **1. Introduction**

It was not difficult for those who were familiar with the history of British literature to find that British literature in 19th century was glorious and that a large numbers of eminent writers who had great impact on future generations sprung on this era, such as Thackeray, Dickens and Hardy and so on. However, there was a group of writers was making their strength prominent. They were female writers. The number of female writers who had profound effect in 19th century were up to 30 like Charlotte Bronte sisters, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Mrs Gaskell, Browning and so on. Then, why did so many great female writers emerge in 19th century. This paper tries to analyze reasons behind the phenomenon from the perspective of society, writers and readers.

### **2. Social Reasons**

First of all, it was the prosperity of social economy. Britain took the lead in completing the industrial revolution which promoted British economic development extensively. In addition, great changes took place in social classes due to the industrial revolution and the quantity and quality of middle class increased a lot. Thus, women in middle class were liberated from heavy work and the role changed to idle people from labor workers which let them have time and energy to be engaged in creative activities. And women in lower class had another way that women could make a living from literary work. Just as Mary Eagleton mentioned in Feminist Literature Theory, "If a woman has to work, she will immediately lose special identity contained in a word lady given by tradition although she may be a Christian with good manners. So most of them cannot but stay at home." As a result, writing is their better and decent choice. For example, Charlotte Bronte sisters preferred writing rather than being a teacher.

Secondly, it was enlightened political and social environment. Literature in any time could not be separated from political basis. The degree of political enlightenment decided whether literature would be more free. Britain in 19th century was in the era of Victoria when politics was most fair and Queen Victoria advocated freedom, democracy and equality. Because middle class was expanding, the requirements of democracy was increasing gradually and speech was more and more open. People could satirize current politics and express their own opinion by their works. In addition, British parliament enacted a series of formula to protect women. For instance, Women's Law explicitly stipulated that women can work no more than 8 hours in one day. The series of formula enhance female social status immensely and let women have more time, enthusiasm and self-confidence to write.

Lastly, it was tradition of society and culture. As Woolf said that great works could not be created without reasons and were crystals of wisdom and thought over the years. In the development process of British female literature in 19th century, Bain a female writer in 17th century could not be ignored. Woolf complimented that Bain had paved the way for female writers, all people should put flowers at her grave because she struggled the right to express thoughts for female writers. Exactly due to influence of Bain and accumulation of British culture for long time, British female writers sprung up in 19th century.

### 3. The Reasons of Writers

Firstly, it was female independence. Feminist movements were marching vigorously in this era to uphold justice and appeal to independent status even rights equal to male in society for female. More female voice were expressed which urged a series of law and regulation should be enacted in Victorian era. Act of Married Female Property explicitly stipulated that female can have right of independent properties. The act made females to own independent economical status and writers to have vast money to be occupied in the creative work of literature.

Secondly, it was educational equality. Another measure welcomed by people was educational equality in this era. Victoria appealed to reform in education which let education equal and generalized. Many women in lower class had access to good education which let them know how to read, edified by culture and laid the well cultural foundation to write for British female.

Thirdly, it was challenge against common customs. In traditional views, writing was male's occupation and female could not be occupied in writing. When the Bronte Sisters decided to challenge common customs and mailed their poetry anthologies to Southey Romantic poet laureate for advice, Southey told them that literature was not female occupation. The blow made them reflect whether they could be occupied in writing. However, they decided bravely to challenge common customs and used literature to uphold justice for female. As George Eliot mentioned in A Stupid Novel of a Woman Novelist, there was no any artists freely breaking strict rules than novels. Thus, most female writers chose to write novels. Charlotte Bronte shaped Jane Eyre who pursued freedom in mind and independence in personality with rebellious spirit in Jane Eyre. The figure was obvious contrary to current common customs, which was a challenge against common customs by her literature.

### 4. The Reasons of Readers

Firstly, it was increase of readers groups. After the second industrial revolution, traditional manual labor lost their jobs, got rid of heavy labor work and were liberated from manual industry. People had more spare time and extra energy to read books and newspapers. In this era, as the development of industrial revolution, newspaper industry was growing fast. And increase of printability made mass communication spread rapidly so that readers could immediately and correctly get real-time conditions of writers and works could spread at once which also attracted a great deal of readers. The increase of readers doubtlessly contributed to the blossom of literature, which pushed more writers to be occupied in creative writing and meanwhile brought up many female writers.

Secondly, it was increase of readers' level. In order to be accustomed to development of capitalistic economy, British government strived to develop education to raise workers' cultural quality in 19th century. British government built various kinds of schools and let common children have access to education, which also let people's knowledge level higher and allowed writers to be better occupied in creative writing.

### References

- [1] Trevor May: An Economical and Social History of Britain 1760- 1970(London Longman, Britain 1987).
- [2] Asa Briggs: British social history (China renmin university press, China 1991).

- [3] John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, Josephine M. Guy(ed): *The Victorian Age: An Anthology of Sources and Documents* (London and New York: Routledge, Britain 1998).