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### Women Novelists of the 19th Century

The first chapter in the development of women novelists practically begins with Fanny Burney and ends with Jane Austen. Jane Austen was an expert in the writing of the domestic novel. She is well-known for her novels *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*.

The Bronte Sisters made a remarkable contribution to the art of Victorian fiction. Charlotte Bronte was the earliest of the Victorian women novelists in the popular sense of the term. Her talent was more diffuse than that of her sister, Emily Bronte. But she made her mark through a number of novels: *Jane Eyre* (1847); *Shirley* (1849), *Villette* (1853) and *The Professor* (1857). *Jane Eyre* is the story of a governess. The governess, Jane, goes to the house of Mr. Rochester, with whom she falls in love. She discovers a mysterious figure in Rochester, with a suggestion of the sinister. Rochester is her fantasy of what the male as an instrument of sexual passion might be. The air of mystery which can be felt by the reader in every fibre of his being is created in Rochester house. Charlotte Bronte could create an atmosphere of terror without departing from a middle-class setting.

Emily Bronte, Charlotte's younger sister, was both a novelist and a poetess. Emily was definitely more talented than Charlotte. *Wuthering Heights*, the single novel written by Emily Bronte, is a highly unique creation. It is conceived on the highest poetic level. Its narrative technique is highly original. It is a love story conceived on the spiritual level. Heathcliff and Catherine are inamortal-lovers.

The story has a wild and cruel reality, and is original beyond any other novel in the century. It is a novel without predecessors and successors. F. R. Leavis has described it as a biological sport. The Bronte sisters have been described as the stormy sisterhood.

George Eliot (1814-1880) is the pen-name of Mary Ann Evans. She brought to the novel rare intellectual quality. She was highly educated. In her first novel - Scenes from Clerical Life (1857) she used her pen-name, George Eliot, for the first time. She is well-known for her novels - Adam Bede (1858), The Mill on the Floss (1860), Silas Marner (1861), Romola (1863) and Middlemarch (1871). She nearly married Herbert Spencer the philosopher and he found her morbidly intellectual. The problem for George Eliot as a novelist was whether her intuitions or her intellect would ultimately gain control. Ultimately her intellect won and she failed as a novelist because of her intellectuality. However, George Eliot is at her best when she writes about her personal life in Adam Bede and The Mill on the Floss. The portrait of her father appears in Adam Bede. She reproduced her own girlhood relations with her brother Isaac in the relations of Tom and Maggie Gulliver in her novel, The Mill on the Floss. Her chief contribution to the development of English novel is the psychological analysis of human motives and desires; she could depict the psychology of a character in growth.

Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865) is well known for her novels, Mary Barton (1848) and North and South (1855). These novels deal with the life of the working-class in an industrial town. Mrs. Gaskell had no political theory of affiliation like Disraeli. She dramatises forcefully some of the basic problems of working class life. She contrasts industrial England with rural England.

Thus the Victorian age offers us some interesting and powerful women novelists.

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