

Literature as a Liberating Space for 19th Century Women: A close reading of the selected works of Christina Rossetti, Emily Bronte and Kate Chopin

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing the Bachelor degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

Nusrat Yasmin Esha

Approval

Literature as a Liberating Space for 19th Century Women: A Close Reading of Selected Works of Christina Rossetti, Emily Bronte and Kate Chopin, submitted by Nusrat Yasmin Esha, ID: 13203021 of Fall, 2019 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English and Humanities.

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Abstract

This thesis fundamentally aims to look at the question of the potency of literature as a space through which women can assert their existence. Literature has been used as a force for social reformation and has been used for a variety of noble purposes. This thesis would question and speculate how far literature has been used as a space for women to assert their existence. Women have always been victims of patriarchal norms and ideologies and during the Victorian era women of England and America have been victims of suppression of free expression. The Victorian era has produced some of the most praiseworthy women writers and poets in English literature and the primary aim of this thesis is to understand that how far were they successful in asserting their existence, their inner being, as women amidst patriarchal norms and values, through the exercise of literature. Through looking at their creative expressions, this paper will assess whether literature can be a liberating space for women and how far is literary expression important to carry forth and convey the limitations of women and the need for women to be emancipated from the subtle chains of patriarchy existentially, psychologically and socially. This study will take four poems of Emily Bronte, *I am the only being whose doom, Riches I hold in light esteem, No Coward Soul is mine, To Imagination* and three poem of Christina Rossetti *Goblin Market, In an Artist's Studio* and *Noble Sisters*. Apart from that this thesis will also look at Kate Chopin's short story *The Awakening* to speculate the reality of the middle class American women during the late 19th century and how far they were, along with other women mentioned in the story, became sufferers of patriarchal system of society which dictated human values and relationships. Furthermore, this thesis will access the probable solution the three women literary creators provided through their literature through which the position of women during the Victorian era can be revisited and its significance comprehended in a new light.

Keywords: Feminism, Victorian Women's Literature, Patriarchy, Literary Space.

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	0
Approval.....	1
Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgement.....	3
Chapter 1 Women’s Literature in English and the Victorian Era.....	5
Chapter 2 Emily Bronte and the Dimension of Spiritual Assertion of Women.....	13
Chapter 3 Christina Rossetti and the Significance of Sisterhood in the Victorian Era.....	23
Chapter 4 Interpreting <i>The Awakening</i> as an Announcement of Absolute Self-Assertiveness of the Female Consciousness.....	32
Chapter 5 19th Century Women’s Literature and Creation of a New Female Identity.....	44
Reference List.....	49

Chapter 1

Women's Literature in English and the Victorian Era

The 19th century, when Britain's imperial power saw perhaps its greatest developments across the globe, as well as gradually moved towards industrial and other social reforms, is perhaps one of the most significant epoch in the studies of English Literature. One reason for this is the rise of English novels, other more socially relevant reasons include industrialization, introduction of the Darwinian theory of evolution which took over the then Church and its established religious ideology by storm, and alongside industrialization the rise of the middle class. With the advent of industrialization and Industrial Revolution, capitalism was on the rise in a very rapid rate. This resulted in the creation of a large section of working class people working under the bourgeoisie and men and women gradually witnessed demands for many reforms. Alongside the imperial expansion and industrial development of the British Empire, the position of woman in relation to the patriarchal system was put into question and challenged. Ideas which were imbedded into the human consciousness resulting from events such as the French Revolution and American Revolution were constantly questioning the position of woman, yet during the 19th century the position of women, in real terms, remained downtrodden and degraded. In this context Simon de Beauvoir writes in her seminal work *The Second Sex* about the 19th century women and their condition, "Woman was declared made for the family, not for politics; for domestic cares and not for public functions. Auguste Comte declared that there were radical differences, physical and moral, between male and female which separated them profoundly, especially in the human race. Femininity was a kind of 'prolonged infancy' that set woman aside from 'the ideal of the race' and enfeebled her mind" (Beauvoir 142). With the

French and American Revolution, and with the rise of the working class gradually questioning its position of being deprived by the then bourgeoisie, the position of women and the issue of women's emancipation was questioned by many thinkers. For example, after the French Revolution women revolutionaries and thinkers such as Mme Roland and Lucile Desmoulins fought for women's liberty. It is mentioned in *The Second Sex* that Olympe de Gouges "proposed in 1789 a declaration of the rights of women" (Beauvoir 140) which was rejected by the then intellectuals and was not made to reach out to the public. Olympe de Gouges was punished by death for the publication for this work. However, in 1792 Marry Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication for the Rights of Women* which became popular. This work very intensely revisits the position of women and forces its readers to question and contemplate the agonizing and downtrodden condition women are in. One of the most significant issue which Mary Wollstonecraft brings out in her seminal work is the issue of education for women. She writes that,

Discussing the advantages which a public and private education combined, as I have sketched, might rationally be expected to produce, I have dwelt most on such as are particularly relative to the female world, because I think the female world oppressed; yet the gangrene which the vices, engendered by oppression have produced, is not confined to the morbid part, but pervades society at large; so that when I wish to see my sex become more like moral agents, my heart bounds with the anticipation of the general diffusion of that sublime contentment which only morality can diffuse.(Wollstonecraft 197)

In the 12th chapter of the book, Mary Wollstonecraft has rationally proposed the ways and means through which it would be better for humanity as a whole if women, like men, find availability to

education as through education women can contribute to the development which only men were made to bear in the past ages of history. The importance of Mary Wollstonecraft and her emphasis on education is crucial for this study. Women attempted, through various spheres, to achieve their rights and freedom during the whole of 19th century and as time progressed further. Socially women as activist and wanting to participate in political arenas were blocked by strong patriarchal presence. One very important event which took place in 18th, although to a limited extent, and in 19th century England is the gradual increase in women's education. Women were reading books while doing their domestic works, they were learning and enhancing their own perception as to the place in which they belonged to. Out of readings books wonderful novelists such as Jane Austen and later on Charlotte Bronte and Emily Bronte etc. came. Through a quoted passage of two novels, first is Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* which was first published in 1813, and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, which was published in 1847, the gradual change in women's attitude in relation to herself and the then English society can be seen. In the eight chapter of *Pride and Prejudice* it is written, "A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing and the modern languages...and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expression..." (*Pride and Prejudice* 85) In the aforementioned quote the author stresses upon the need of women for education which, perhaps, then was considered as a social necessity for a middle class woman to assert herself and her existence. However, as time progressed, women, assuming from the importance they laid on education in the beginning of 19th century, reacted against the oppression of patriarchy and which is very much visible in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. In the twelfth chapter of the novel it is written,

It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot....Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags.(*Jane Eyre* 131-132)

As women started to become aware of the narrow mindedness resulting in the promotion of unequal gender roles under the patriarchal system of society, slowly women in Victorian England began to assert their existence being in the society which to a large extent, due to its fundamental nature of patriarchy, dominated and subordinated them. The 19th century provided a dimension for women, or women created a dimension of their own in the 19th century Victorian England, and this dimension resulted in women to express their anger and discontentment of their subordination, and also helped them to assert their identity as a human being, not as the weaker sex compared to man. This dimension occurred through the education of women, and one of the important events which resulted through the creation of this dimension is 19th century women's literature, a creative space for women where they can assert themselves, and create works of prose and poetry for the present and future generation of women writers.

However, in the field of literature women's work created a timeless sphere of influence which not only provided inspiration to women during the 19th century, but also at present the influence of the women writers of the 19th century remains unparalleled. The ideology of

femininity was very strong during the 19th century, yet what was more strong and more importantly timeless in essence, was the writings of women authors who expressed their pain of having to confirm their being with the constructed ideologies of patriarchy. Coventry Patmore, a male English poet of the Victorian era, writes in his poem *Angle in the House*, “Man must be pleased; but to please/ Is woman’s pleasure...”. This was the Victorian attitude of women, and those women who refused to get married were termed as “old maid”. The women who were categorized as “old maids” were infused with a deep sense of uncertainty by the people of not being able to get married and becoming a “maid” of children of other families. Apart from that those women who were responsive and had the attitude to explore their own being and body were termed as “fallen women” and commonly were referred to as prostitute. Finally, those women who confirmed to the categorization and ideologies of patriarchy were known as “angle of the house”. However, there have been many women during the 19th century whom, with an unvoiced cry of immense anguish, defied these patriarchal conformities and imprisoning categorizations. In addition to that these voices, although unheard of, can be said to have existed through a thorough reading of the literature of the 19th century. Women not only expressed their voice of anguish of not being able to break free from the chains imposed upon their being by patriarchy, but there were women poets and writers who have explored, through their literature, various dimensions through which a personal sense of emancipation can be created resulting from which women can always have the prospect towards achieving freedom.

Emily Bronte’s poems remains spiritually infused with profound existential meanings through which a great psychological and existential freedom is made available for her readers. As a woman who was constantly locked in her house, Emily Bronte used her literary consciousness, rather than following the existing orthodox religion, to achieve union with the

creator. This union with God can be said to be a spiritual freedom carrying with it a vast dimension of metaphysics and for some women who were forced to stay behind doors, Emily Bronte's poems can become a pathway which can lead to a metaphysical and spiritual freedom. In addition to Emily Bronte, Christina Rossetti has written various poems which shows the downtrodden and tormenting position of women highlighting the internal distress women experienced during the 19th century and its patriarchal domination. Finally, Rossetti in her seminal poem *Goblin Market* talks about the danger of being a woman in the 19th century, yet in the poem she also shows that through a sense of sisterhood and common solidarity women can, at least in their experience of being a woman, consolidate. Through consolidation and empathy women can help each other in their times of distress through which a sense of psychological freedom can be achieved by women. Furthermore, during the late 19th century in America the position of middle class and upper class married women has been discussed by many short stories of Kate Chopin. Her literature explores the limited extent to which women are free in a society which has industrially developed in a remarkable manner and through being a realist in her depiction, Kate Chopin's works are seminal in exposing the structures of patriarchy and its inhumanity to women who pursue to become individuals. Yet Kate Chopin's works not only consist of the limitations of women in the late Victorian society, her works are considered to be literary works because they have within them an inspiration for women to relentlessly attempt and struggle for freedom and individuation. All the three literary creators belong to the Victorian era, Emily Bronte and Christina Rossetti belonged to the early and middle Victorian era and Chopin to the late Victorian era, yet each author's reality of experience is different. With each reality of experience these poets and writers have provided a different space of emancipation through which women can affirm their existence and transcend the barriers of patriarchy which

have been superimposed upon the beings of women. Betty Friedan in her work *The Feminine Mystique* has written that,

The feminine mystique, elevated by Freudian theory into a scientific religion, sounded a single, over-protective, life-restricting, future-deriving note for women. Girls who grew up playing baseball, baby-sitting, mastering geometry almost independent enough, almost resourceful enough, to meet the problems of the fission-fusion era – were told by the most advanced thinkers of our time to go back and live their lives as if they were Nora's, restricted to the doll's house by Victorian prejudice. (Friedan 56)

In her work Andy Blunden talks about women who, despite having genius at different spheres of work, were told by famous thinkers, Blunden in her book talks of Sigmund Freud and his male chauvinistic ideas, to become restricted to domestic activities. While forcefully remaining within these domestic activities Emily Bronte, Christina Rossetti and Kate Chopin has converted the domestic space into a creative force through which an expression of the message of personal emancipation of women can be conveyed forth as a possibility. This thesis will attempt to analyze and contemplate this element of possibility and potentiality, which has always persisted within women's literature, of the creative spaces of emancipation and self-assertion in the works of Emily Bronte, Christina Rossetti and Kate Chopin from an existential, psychological and social perspective. This thesis will claim, through its research analysis and arguments, that the creative force existing within the literature of the three aforementioned women is directly relational with three distinct dimensions by which women can experience a sense of liberating self-assertion. Furthermore, this thesis will closely read and interpret the moments in the selected literary works of the three aforementioned women writers to show how these writers, belonging in the Victorian era where patriarchal domination was at a zenith point, struggled and

overpowered their existing conditions in order to produce literary expressions which carries within them a voice and a space which potentially can offer and inspire women to affirm her own sense of being and existence in relation to themselves and the society they belong to. Through this line of analysis this study will aim to revisit the significance which women's literature during the Victorian era held and its importance and relevance for our present time.

Chapter 2

Emily Bronte and the Dimension of Spiritual Assertion of Women

Emily Bronte was born in the year 1818 in England. During that era literature was dominated by writers like William Makepeace Thackeray and Charles Dickens. They were writers who attempted to expose the scandals of higher class people and express the decadence involved in the lives of such people. One of the common traits of the Victorian literature was to moralize upon the “evils of mankind” (Burns 814), however in this process the voice and the pain of women was absolutely ignored. Women were almost like subalterns in the early Victorian era, being confined to domestic spaces. Yet women during the early Victorian era also had voices within them which got expressed in a number of ways, and this thesis will explore various aspects of some spaces which were created by women to express themselves during the Victorian era. This chapter will particularly explore the literary and aesthetic space produced by Emily Bronte in such a time when patriarchy dominated almost every aspect of the Victorian English human society. One significant element which Emily Bronte, like many women artist of her era experienced is loneliness. Often time’s loneliness was, and still is, defined as a negative experience. Yet as Janet Gezari has stated in her book *Last Things: Emily Bronte’s Poems*,

As a writer, Emily Brontë didn’t suffer from either an anxiety of influence or an anxiety of authorship. In her poems, she succeeded in authorizing herself as the subject of her own experience, apparently without wondering whether that experience was eccentric and trivial or, contrarily, profoundly relevant to others...The poems are at once personal and impersonal...Their deep personality has to do with their faithfulness to Emily Brontë’s own experience of anguish and intoxication, but their deep impersonality is

connected to her motive for writing them. 'The impulse which urged her to create was not her own suffering or her own injuries,' Woolf writes, contrasting her with Charlotte Brontë, but the 'gigantic ambition' to say something about relations between 'the whole human race' and 'the eternal powers'....Brontë's daily life, the life of the poems and her novel, was not a life of doing with others but a life of watching alone. What she did, apparently with great pleasure, was the repetitive, inconclusive work required in a household: brushing the carpets, kneading the bread, feeding the dogs. Anne Carson gives the most concise account I know of what she watched in 'The Glass Essay', Carson's extraordinary poem about Brontë and the denuding lacerations of love...Brontë's usual spelling of 'watch' as 'whach,' which suggests that Brontë pronounced the word, often in contexts where inspiration is being sought, by breathing into it: She whached God and humans and moor wind and open night. She whatched eyes, stars, inside, outside, actual weather. She watched the bars of time, which broke. She watched the poor core of the world, wide open. Kierkegaard located the core of romanticism in 'absolute loneliness, where not a breath of wind stirs, where no distant baying of hounds can be heard—and yet the trees incline to one another and repeat their childhood memories about when the nymphs lived in them, and imagination gorges itself in supreme enjoyment. Supreme enjoyment—an unqualified affirmation of the joy of being alive—is the core of Brontë's poems and is entirely compatible wither intimate knowledge of despair and her unflinching recognition of our human capacity for cruelty and ingratitude. (Gezari 1-3)

As can be seen in the two quoted passages, Emily Bronte used loneliness as a means for internal aesthetic exploration. One can assume, reading from the aforementioned passages, it was Emily

Bronte's loneliness which acted as an alchemical factor to transform her anguish and intoxication into an ambition to express the "whole human race and the eternal powers". It is this profound spiritual humanistic expression which can be traced in Bronte's poems and this had within itself the potential for Emily Bronte to discover the satisfaction she sought living in the domestic spaces. Very similar to the Romantic poets, Emily Bronte used her poetic ability to pave the way for spirituality; her poems bear the single fact, one can say as a testament, that Emily Bronte has asserted her existence through her own sense of God, and this can be said to be one of the quintessential paths of the Romantic poets. "As mentioned in the quote, Supreme enjoyment— an unqualified affirmation of the joy of being alive—is the core of Bronte's poems and is entirely compatible with her intimate knowledge of despair and her unflinching recognition of our human capacity for cruelty and ingratitude", and it is this transcending power of Emily Bronte's poems to recognize within herself, the cruelty and ingratitude of existence and turn it into the gratitude and joy of being alive and affirm one's sense of being. Although Emily Bronte's poems do not provide any collective solution for the confinement of women, and such was not even her motif, although it depends whether one reads Emily Bronte's poems from the perspective of Charlotte Bronte or Virginia Woolf, yet what can be sensed reading Emily Bronte's poems is her uncompromising sense of independence despite being inside a domestic space. Bronte watched everything, and in this silent observation Emily Bronte broke the "bars of time"; in other words, she overpowered the sense of time and space through a profound aesthetic contemplation and created her own space where she can assert her existence through her own genuine individual manner. One can say that Emily Bronte chose not to go out of her domestic space as she could use that space where women of the Victorian era were confined to, to create her own aesthetic space, and these issues will be illustrated by this study in the following

paragraphs. As a result, it can be seen that Emily Bronte used her own literary consciousness, rather than following the existing orthodox religion, which is patriarchal in its nature of manifesting as an institution. Therefore, one can say, although in an unusual way, Emily Bronte rejected the patriarchal shackles upon women during the Victorian era but in a different way than other writers like Charlotte Bronte. Emily Bronte's rebellion was to turn inwards and reject all that has been superimposed upon women by patriarchy, Emily Bronte's poems vividly show her struggle and success to cast off all the patriarchal Victorian conditionings, the very first of which was the exercise of patriarchy through Christianity

Emily Bronte, till today, remains a very unique and genuine poet in the history of English Literature who has brilliantly voiced her feelings and internal experiences in a manner which is aesthetically magnificent and poetically authentic. Her words conjoin into creating a glorious being who attempted, through poetry, to fully assert herself and her existence. To begin with, in the poem *I am the only being whose doom* Emily Bronte invites the readers to look into their own selves as she gathers up the courage to have an insight of who she is and what is inside her, the emotions, pleasures and pains etc. She begins this poem by stating that no human being would inquire or take an interest in the speaker of the poem's being, and from her birth she has been lonely. As the poem progresses the speaker of the poem states that once in her childhood she longed for someone to love her and diminish her loneliness, a loneliness in which the speaker of the poem takes a personal pride. Finally, the speaker tells that life is ever transient, and it lacks permanence to which one would like to hold on to, and furthermore like the many mirages of life which passes on very quickly, the speaker's own mind, which she trusted as her companion, also had "the same corruption there" which perhaps might mean the inability to provide life

something permanent. This poem is a very honest poem of Emily Bronte where she admits, despite having an inner pride, that she is a human with folly and also a human who enjoys, at the same time feels pain, to be alone. For an artist to be vast is normal, and in a vast internal sphere where the artists dwells there is bound to be contradictions and an attempt to harmonize all the discordances of life. Through this poem a woman has expressed herself honestly and fully, not by using imagination as she did in *Wuthering Heights* but directly, as a human being, by making her own creative space. It is this creative space which made Emily Bronte explore and express herself in the way she wanted to which is significant to take into consideration, particularly if feminist criticism wants to have “The Authority of Experience”, as mentioned by Elaine Showalter in her essay “Towards a Feminist Poetics”. If women are to assert themselves fully as a part of a long tradition which had long years of suppression, agony, and voice which are locked up in the attic, they must turn what Showalter has termed as Feminine and Feminist phase into the definition of Female phase, women today must convert the experience of the women writers into their own artistic inspiration which would help them to manifest a broader creative space for women.

In addition to the previous poem Emily Bronte has another poem which carries with it immense significance. The name of the poem is *Riches I hold in light esteem*. In this poem Emily Bronte’s spiritual expression can be vividly noticed as she presents a spiritual longing for freedom which she has realized by being ¹alone, and here she expresses to God to give her courage so she can have “the courage to endure” the journey of life and death and ultimately be free in the realm of God. Here Emily Bronte directly expresses, in the first stanza of the poem, that unlike worldly men she is not at all interested in the human affairs of the world, “lust of Fame which was but a dream...” she acknowledges the fact that fame is a dream and real freedom lies in being free by

¹“Alone” here indicates alone with herself, in self-contemplation.

the grace of God. There are many male metaphysical poets such as John Donne and Henry Vaughn who wrote poems expressing their desire and prayer to be unified with God using many intellectual devices which has its own merit, however this poem of Emily Bronte, subject and content wise, is a poem which is unique and at the same time a poem which is of similar stature where she directly and boldly expressed her desire to be one with God, and as a result this poem also must be inserted in the front line of metaphysical literary creations. Showalter in her aforementioned essay has mentioned that there exists a split in women, and the result of this split is in existence because women are “daughters of the male traditions...”, which has made women suffer from an internal split. If “The task of feminist critics is to find a new language, a new way of reading that can integrate our intelligence and our experience, our reason and our suffering, our skepticism and our vision...” then poets such as Emily Bronte who has written poems regarding self-contemplation and metaphysics has to be taken into the front line. If, for example, a woman emerges with sufficient poetic talent and finds it convenient to express her views which poetic convention renders thematically metaphysical, it would be easy for her, perhaps, to connect with Emily Bronte than with George Herbert or John Donne, who are not direct in their expression like Emily Bronte. As a result, it is very important for critics to bring into light poets such as Emily Bronte, their unique talents manifested through their literary creations, and the creative space they have constructed to express their own reality with full assertiveness and with a woman’s true and genuine dignity. The approach of gynocriticism, it can be said, is very efficient and important as far as making women’s literature is concerned, and through this attempt woman’s voice, as is presented to the present era through literature, can be integrated and consolidated. Without a consolidated vision woman’s literature will be, to a large extent, separate creations of literature of women which depicted their pain and anguish. However, if one

is to look give a gynocritical reading to the poems of Emily Bronte, rather than merely finding some lines which conveys a woman's pain and suffering from solitude and her believe in God, one can discover an aesthetically awe-inspiring creation of poetry where a woman is writing to describe her interiority, with all its pain, anguish and confrontation, and also a woman artist who is capable to present her spiritual views brilliantly in a poetically refined and direct manner. The final poem of this study is *No Coward Soul is mine*, where Emily Bronte's ability to express her inner voice into poetic brilliance can be seen very clearly. This poem equals in its assertion of God through the human soul with poems William Blake and William Butler Yeats. In this poem the speaker asserts directly that her soul is not that of a coward, and her belief and certainty of receiving God's grace is strong ready to face any fear of the world. "O God within my breast/ Life, that in me hast rest/ As I undying Life, have power in Thee", these lines are tremendously spiritual and these lines shows that Emily Bronte was not just a woman who shut herself from the world being crushed in the darkness of solitude, these lines on the contrary show that through aloneness and with authentic self-contemplation the realization of the existence of God within one's self can be achieved, and this is of tremendous spiritual import. The speaker of the poem then goes on to transcend death, as well as uniting herself with the whole of existence, by stating these lines, "Though Earth and moon were gone/ And suns and universes ceased to be/ And Thou wert left alone/ Every Existence would exist in thee" and through these verses Emily Bronte attempted to exhaust the limits of her being a human. Through her inner creative force, the speaker of this poem has made her body a temple, "O God within my breasts/ Almighty ever present Deity...", and she has reached a point of realization where she states that "There is no room for Death.../Since thou art Being and Breath/ And What thou art may never be destroyed". This is the ultimate point of assertion for any artists, the realization of being conscious of the

presence of godliness in oneself, and seeing oneself as a larger part of creation, as a part of the larger whole. As a result, author Lawrence J Starzyk in his journal titled "The Faith of Emily Bronte's Immortal Creed" writes, "The only verifiable intimation afforded man regarding the divine being is its vitality or life. Since God is eternal life, and since the narrator possesses this energy in his being, he is therefore assured of "undying Life," of immortality." (Starzyk 289). As there is a long and fine tradition of literature of men, there is also a long and enhanced tradition of literature created by women, and women must start to see the tradition of women's literature with an individual consolidated way to dig out the hidden inspiration. Feminist critics must not stop throw away the male tradition of literature while asserting the women's tradition of literature, as there are bound to be many issues and factors common within them. However as there are many elements which can provide aesthetic inspiration in the women's tradition of literature to women of present and future generation, and as these elements of inspiration are unfortunately now dormant, the tradition of literature created by women, the creative space women had created for their expressions in all eras, must be separated, it is in fact too large not to be separated just like men's lineage of literature, and only then could women today can find the brilliance, the realization of the beauties of these aesthetic creation and poetic insight of existence and human nature. The poems of Emily Bronte in this study has been taken as an example to illustrate how women in the 19th century, being filled with patriarchal conventions, still could gather up the courage and create her own separate artistic space where she can assert what she believes and knows to be true to her life and existence. If looked at separately, this fact might be significant and limited to Emily Bronte as an artist, however if looked at from a larger perspective and a part of women's tradition of literature, the place of Emily Bronte is vastly significant as a 19th century women writer who has remained isolated, went within her interior

being, suffered from the anguishes of solitude and finally could assert the presence of God in her being, as the three poems mentioned in this paper talks about. Emily Bronte did not succumb to the orthodox institutionalized Christianity. As a result, the God which Emily Bronte refers to is not the God of the patriarchal religion which dominated England during the Victorian era; on the other hand the God of Bronte is a personal and liberating God. This God which Emily Bronte has realized through her aesthetic sensibility and consciousness has acted upon her being as a liberating force, liberating her from all material conditions and given her a space of profound spiritual solace and freedom. In a society which was bounded by laws of patriarchy, and as a woman who fought with her passions never gave in to the human limitations until she has realized God in her being, the poems of Emily Bronte can provide new hope and inspiration to millions of women artists who are struggling due to patriarchal customs at present and take encouragement from Emily Bronte's poems and her spiritual experiences which are symbolically expressed through her poems. Women's literature must consist of an art which not only imitates life in all its possibility, but also as a light which inspires other women transcending time from generation to generation. As Virginia Woolf has stated in her *A Room of One's Own* "Jane Austen should have a laid upon the grave of Fanny Burney, and George Eliot done homage to the robust shade of Eliza Carter..." (*A Room of One's Own* 65), similarly the readers and feminist critics should also built a homage, by putting Emily Bronte in such a place where her inner essence as an artists and as a woman can be accessible to thousands of aspiring women artists, because the dignity which Emily Bronte holds as an artist is immensely valuable for all women artists, as Virginia Woolf has shown in her aforementioned book, "But how impossible it must have been for them not to budge either to the right or to the left. What genius, what integrity it must have required in face of all that criticism, in the midst of that purely patriarchal society, to

hold fast to the thing as they saw it without shrinking. Only Jane Austen did it and Emily Bronte.” (*A Room of One’s Own* 74). As a result, the significance of Emily Bronte in the field of literature, and significantly in the sphere of women’s literature, cannot be intellectually estimated as its proportion is vast and her poetic import, timeless.

Chapter 3

Christina Rossetti and the Significance of Sisterhood in the Victorian Era

Christina Rossetti was born in 1830 and her literature influenced a wide range of significant women writers such as Virginia Woolf, Edith Sitwell, Gerald Manley Hopkins etc. Very much like Emily Bronte, Rossetti was a poet who lived her life in solitary pious life with a lot of struggle; struggle which involves her dealing with both physical sickness as well as struggle regarding her literary career. Christina Rossetti's poems consist of subject matter regarding aesthetics rich with religious allusions. However, what makes her poems significant regarding the context of this study is the degree to which her poems reflect her struggle being a woman artist living in the Victorian era. As mentioned before, the Victorian era was an age which is distinguished by historians for its patriarchal exercise and norms, and within all these struggles and hardships the women writers who belonged to the Victorian era had to experience immense struggle and hardships. Author Anthony H. Harrison in his journal article titled "Christina Rossetti: The Poetic Vocation" has written,

Christina Rossetti became an ascetic aesthete whose spheres of experience, both secular and religious, were largely internal and imaginative. Both modes of experience were grounded, however, in external- socially and historically "real"- institutions, those of artistic tradition and the church. Her creative impulse oscillates between two ideal passions, whose respective objects are man and God. Both passions are intense and involve suffering, but the experience of them made her always accessible to exquisite, ethereal sensations of the spirit and emotions, sensations akin to the "wakeful anguish of the soul" memorialized by Keats. For her, only thralldom to art and thralldom to religion

could generate ideal experiences of this sort which subsume, transform, and transcend experience in the "reed" world (Harrison 241)

Similar to Emily Bronte, Christina Rossetti also became an ascetic. This word is significant for this study as the word ascetic also implies a sense of detachment from the ongoing activities. As a woman, it can be assumed, that for Christina Rossetti it was important to detach herself from the world in order to explore her own imaginative world and use her poetic ability to translate the experience of her life. Her meditation upon God and human beings was in a relation of suffering rather than redemption (as will be explained with her selected poems for this study), and her wakeful internal anguish of the soul was an important constituent of her poems. However, what is most significant to notice from the aforementioned quote is Christina Rossetti's intention to transcend, through her art, the experience of the "reed world". Again, one can assume that the experience of the "world", both in its psychological and social context, during the Victorian era for a woman, must be filled with hardships and suffering of unimaginable proportion, and for a woman artist to not only suffer but to depict that suffering into poetic diction is something which requires intense courage and inner aesthetic contemplation. However, what is important to notice in Rossetti's works is her compromise with her spontaneity as an artist in order to avoid being marginalized being a women poet in the Victorian era. Author Sharon Smulders in her journal article "Woman's Enfranchisement in Christina Rossetti's Poetry" has stated that

The emptiness of women's lives Rossetti recurs to in "From the Antique" and "An 'Immurata' Sister." The speaker of "From the Antique" laments the "Doubly blank" (Complete Poems, 3:231, line 2) lot of woman. The speaker of "An 'Immurata' Sister" attributes this "Doubly blank" existence to the difference between the sexes: "Men work and think, but women feel" (Complete Poems, 2:120, line 5)...According to Mrs. Ellis,

woman's life "is one of feeling, rather than action," her "highest duty ... so often to suffer, and be still," and her "experience, if unanticipated, ... a total blank."¹⁸ In effect, the heroine of "The Lowest Room" mounts an insurrection against the cult of true womanhood as promulgated in feminine prescriptive literature...Because Rossetti's speakers are not men, they cannot make their actions suit their words; nor can they, because they are women, find words commensurate to their feeling without committing an impropriety. By nature, they assume, in accordance with the Mrs. Ellis doctrine, a secondary or marginal position within society. This determinism the heroine rejects, at least initially. However, the heresy she thus espouses is not merely cultural, but religious. Ultimately, she must recant (Smulders 571)

The important thing to contemplate from the above mentioned quote is the Victorian patriarchal dichotomy of men working and women feeling. The poem which this study will attempt to undertake contains the aesthetic struggle of Rossetti to move towards action from feeling. In her poems such as *Dead before Death*, *Eve*, *Symbols* and *Shut Out* the poetic voice contemplates the torments experienced by a woman rather than taking an action. These poems are concerned with the dimension of feeling and internal contemplation through which, as can be assumed, the poetic voice is confined to the dimension of feeling. As Rossetti's speakers are not men, their words are not met by their action and women were confined within the marginal position in society. As women could not act and were only confined within the dimension of feeling, they could not redeem themselves from the suffering and internal torments. However, what is significant in Rossetti's works is her poem *The Goblin Market* where one-woman protagonist acts and saves her sister from the poison of the Goblins. It is this action which acted as a redemptive force for women to overpower the patriarchal superimposition of the Victorian era,

and compared to the other poems of Rossetti, in *Goblin Market* she asserts her existence as a woman through Lizzie and Laura. Furthermore, in the process of this action, Christina Rossetti provided, through her poetry, a space where women could act and help and provide each other psychological support to lessen the extent of suffering from patriarchal conditionings and norms. In the poem *Dead before Death* Christina Rossetti has expressed a profound sadness; such a profound sadness that it has been expressed to be synonymous with being in the state of death. Rossetti writes in the third line of the poem “Changed, yet the same; much knowing, little wise” which refers to a tone of self-evaluation. Rossetti further writes from the sixth line, “Grown rigid in the sham if lifelong lies:/ We hoped for better things as years would rise,/ But it is over as a tale once told.” (Lines 6-8) All these elements in this particular poem are, as mentioned before, concerned with the dimension of feeling and contemplation. Rossetti’s self-contemplation results in her to be in a state of hopelessness and seeing that her life is nothing but external knowledge with little wisdom, and a life filled with lies. This poem expresses the immense internal anguish of a being a woman and suffering from the patriarchal imposition. For example, this poem does not indicate to any particular problem, yet what it does is it expresses that dimension of a woman artist during the Victorian era who was in a continuous state of suffering from which there was no possibility of redemption. It is this lack of possibility and hopelessness which women during the Victorian era suffered from which makes her life dead before the physical death. Similarly, in another poem titled *Song* Rossetti, through the poetic voice, can be seen to be confined to be in a position of feeling, and due to the inability to act she again talks of the morbid aspect of a woman’s existence and compares the living days of life to death. The ‘I’ in the poem says that she does not want to be remembered after her death, and whether anyone remembers the poet’s existence is of no important matter. Then the poetic persona writes in a self-contemplative tone,

“Sing on, as if in pain” (Line 12), which suggests the song of life for Christina Rossetti is one where there are no possibilities except for pain and suffering. The poem *Shut Out* is one of Christina Rossetti’s deep emotional poems where she profoundly laments women’s inability to act. This poem has been written after Rossetti met with some women prisoners during the Victorian era. This poem begins with the line, “The door was shut. I looked between./ Its iron bars; and saw it lie...” (Lines 1-2), and the words suggest the poetic persona is being banned from entering a place which she desires. The iron bar is further symbolic as it highlights the fact that women were banned from going out of their domestic spaces, and this deep internal desire for women to go out and act, and them being imposed to household confinement, related to being limited to the dimension of feeling, is something which women artists during the Victorian era expressed. As the poem progresses the poetic persona writes that there is a figure, “a shadow less spirit” who did not give her any flower to cast of her cheerless state, which again indicates a sense of imposition from which it was tough for women to be free during the Victorian era. Furthermore, the silent answering spirit built another home for the narrator, one which did not have any loop through which the poetic persona might stare outside. At the end part of the poem the poet is expressing that as her home has been shifted from a door to a wall, and she is blinded by tears of immense internal agony and torments, “For naught is left worth looking at/ Since my delightful land is gone” (Line 23-24), which suggests that there is no more hope for the speaker regarding seeing and enjoying life and creation as her life is blanked, which again echoes Rossetti’s statement of blank existence of women. At the last stanza of the poem the poetic persona seems to accept her position being condemned to her fate which suggests to the surrendering of her poetic expression to the inevitable position of women during the Victorian era. In another one of her poems *In an Artist’s Studio* Rossetti’s poetic tone is more questioning

than the other two poems and her voice more assertive regarding women being victims of patriarchy and in particular, the male gaze. In this poem Rossetti expresses the various categorization by which women are perceived, such as “saint”, “queen” or the common woman. However, what is significant in this poem is that internally no one asks the consent of women regarding their state of being which is one burdened with patriarchal conditionings. In lines 5-8 Rossetti writes, “A queen in opal or in ruby dress, / A nameless girl in freshest summer-greens, / A saint, an angle- every canvas means/ The same one meaning, neither more nor less” and furthermore Rossetti writes in between line 9 and 14, “She feeds upon her face by day and night, /...not as she is, but as she fills his dream”. All these suggests that the poetic persona is painfully aware that she has no voice to express herself; and she can only be represented by her male counterpart confirming to the laws and norms of patriarchy which has been categorizing women as “an angle” and keeping her confined in the domestic space.

However as mentioned before, the main aim of this thesis is to show how Victorian women artists created, through their works of literary art, a medium through which the then patriarchal superimposition upon women could be transcended. For Emily Bronte it was seclusion within one’s own being and self-contemplation which had the potential to liberate a woman from its surrounding conditionings resulting in a metaphysical freedom. For Christina Rossetti, on the contrary, freedom for women was in companionship and action rather than women being trapped inside dimension of feeling, and in her poem *Goblin Market* Christina Rossetti showed that when women can act for each other with a heart full of empathy and solidarity, then women together can overcome, although to a relative extent as it was in the Victorian era, patriarchal obligations and burdens caused by patriarchy. *Goblin Market* is an allegorical poem which narrates the story of two sisters, Laura and Lizzie. Laura gives a lock of her golden hair in exchange to taste the

forbidden fruit which was shown to her in a desirous manner by the goblins. Laura then consumes the fruit resulting in a pleasure. After this Laura's desire for the forbidden fruit increases but the goblin refuses Laura to give any more fruits. This results in Laura to succumb to despair and sadness and she stops working and eating. After this Lizzie goes to the goblin market in attempt to buy the fruit for Lizzie. The goblin man likewise also attempt to make Lizzie eat the forbidden fruit and assaults her physically. Lizzie remains committed not to consume the fruit and the goblins leaves Lizzie in a battered position. Lizzie then comes home and tells Laura to kiss the juice of the forbidden fruit from her face. The next day Laura wakes up healthy, and the poem ends by the sisters, Laura and Lizzie, narrating this story to their children. At the end of the poem it is stated that there is no friend like a sister. From this condensed synopsis of the poem it can be deduced this poem has advocated for the notion of feminine sisterhood during the Victorian era. The forbidden fruit has many layers of interpretation; one common interpretation is that this forbidden fruit is the sexual pleasure which women were deprived of during the Victorian era. However, in the context of this study what is more significant is not the ambiguous portions of the poem, but the action which Lizzie takes in order to save her sister Laura from the goblins, which represents the patriarchal dominance of the Victorian era. In a book *Christina Rossetti's Feminist Theology* written by Lynda Palazzo, it has been stated that

Grace Jantzen notes the way the 'sisterhood' of the convent strips women of their womanhood, and isolates them from their sisters: For a woman to develop in spirituality, she must put off womanliness, work against the grain of her gender rather than with it. And it is important to note that to whatever extent she was able to succeed in this male-defined spiritual enterprise, to that extent she also cut herself off from the community of

women, becoming 'manly' and thus other than women rather than continuing in solidarity with them. We see the tormented sister, grey-haired and in decline, wander through Rossetti's poetry of this time, finding salvation at last only in the positive female spirituality of *Goblin Market*. (Palazzo 7)

Womanhood and its very notion is a patriarchal construct. Definition of a woman is usually based on her gender rather than her sex, or even more remote is to define a human being by her individuality. What is important to notice in this poem is Rossetti's treatment of Lizzie; unlike Rossetti's other poems Lizzie does not succumb into thinking when her sister was in a profound state of distress and agony. Lizzie acted, and in undertaking action she broke the bounds of patriarchal definition of being a "woman". As mentioned in the aforementioned quote, Lizzie became separated from being a "woman" and in this separation from detaching herself from the patriarchal definition, Lizzie could establish a solidarity with her sister. This is what is expressed in the quote as "positive female spirituality", which is establishing a notion of sisterhood. Furthermore, Lizzie's action signifies a deep sacrifice for her sister. From a religious perspective the action of Lizzie in *Goblin Market* is synonymous with the sacrifice of Christ. As mentioned in the essay titled "Like a Beacon Left Alone: The Position of Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*", "'The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat' (Genesis 3: 13) to 'Take, eat; this is my body' (Matthew 26: 26), so that Rossetti is seen to have constructed her poem around one "fallenfeast," as Rosenblum terms it, at which Laura is Eve and one "paradisaal feast" at which Lizzie is Christ." (Merchant 71-72). What remains important to understand is Rossetti's replacement of Jesus Christ with Lizzie; it is no doubt that women during the Victorian era were in a downtrodden and crestfallen position. As a result of this Laura, like many other women, as in the poem there is mention of another woman who also became victim of the Goblins like other

women. However, the construction of Lizzie is synonymous with Christ which suggests women have the potential to overcome the patriarchal boundaries and help out other fellow women. In the poem the goblins have been referred to as little men which clearly suggests Rossetti implying men and the patriarchal system by the goblins, and the goblins beating up and physically assaulting Lizzie shows the extent to which women had to sacrifice in order to reach out to the pains and agonies of their fellow sisters. There have been many scholarly works on this poem regarding what does the forbidden fruit stands for, or what does the allegorical representation of the setting of *Goblin Market* refers to. However, what is significant to understand in this poem is Lizzie's sacrifice to make Laura feel well again both physically as well as mentally. From a feminist viewpoint and from the perspective of the notion of feminine sisterhood, it is crucial to see Lizzie acting, within the Victorian context, which is equivalent to the allegorical representation of goblins and their evil eerie presence throughout the poem. Patriarchy existed within every sphere of the human society and lives during the Victorian era, and in such an era for a woman to act was something important to take into account. As a result, Rossetti, through the character of Lizzie, has portrayed an important message which is a woman must sacrifice her own position for the well-being of other women. Whereas Emily Bronte's literary work consists of a space, Rossetti's literary work bears within it an attitude through which women, during the Victorian era, could affirm their own existence. As the dominance of patriarchy has yet to be ceased to exist, it is important to revisit such women poets who have courageously expressed that through physical and psychological support women can support each other and save each other from distress and torments caused by the patriarchal rules and norms which are mixed within the very vessels of modern society.

Chapter 4

Interpreting *The Awakening* as an Announcement of Absolute Self-Assertiveness of the Female Consciousness

It is evident that the 19th century Europe experienced various modes of changes, such as industrialization, expansion of its empire in search of new markets and undertaking imperial projects etc. In addition to all these changes happening in 19th century Europe America also was in an equal footing with the Europeans as America was on the path of becoming the greatest industrial nation of the world. As all these changes were taking place the women's issue was also something people of Europe and America in the 19th century were concerned about. It can be asserted that the actual history of the woman's movement constitutes the whole of nineteenth century and every social change is relevant when analyzing the gradual movement of women towards an attempt to assert themselves in various spheres. Therefore, with all the changes, be it social, economic, political or cultural influenced the position of women to a large degree during the 19th century and onwards. A woman's life was idealized by many male authors and poets as a house wife, an angle of the house. This perhaps might have a connection with the fact that in Europe and America at that time the presence of God disappeared with the Darwinian theory of evolution and perhaps patriarchy sought to substitute God by putting an "Angle", which was women, in the house. A woman either can become a lady, which was her confirming to the patriarchal social dogmas of that time, or she can become a "fallen women" which was prostitute. Women in the lower class were often termed as prostitute, and educated women who choose not to marry often had to take the job of governess, or if not educated enough, maid, and spend all their lives in a limited manner. As the society developed so did the chains of patriarchy

with which women were being subordinated and dominated. The reality of female life was very harsh, no matter what class status they belong to or what race they belong to. Patriarchy was, during the late Victorian era, as the subtlest and the most effective form of domination in the civilized human society. As a slave in the American South was considered to be a property of his/her master during the era before the Civil War in America, so women as a whole was considered to be a product of the men. Perhaps only in the sphere of literature did women could find a space during the 19th century to express their agonies and sufferings. Poets and writers like the Bronte sisters, Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Barrette Browning, and later on during the late 19th century Emily Dickinson and Kate Chopin criticized the patriarchal system and the agony and pain women had to go through in order to assert themselves and their humanity. *The Awakening* of Kate Chopin remains as a seminal piece of art which shows how it is impossible for a woman belonging to a modern society which held the Victorian social values as the highest, to assert herself and give her existence a meaning of her own. The protagonist of the novel, Edna Pontellier, constantly faced obstacles in order to pursue the possibility of her existence which she experienced from her awakening, and she kept on suffering until the realization dawned upon her that with the body of a women, with the identity with which she has been forced upon as a woman, she cannot response to her own awakening, and due to this realization her final awakening results in her agonizing death. Yet through this story Kate Chopin has also forced its readers to see how painful and agonizing the lives of women were during the Victorian era, and to an extent writer like Kate Chopin were reasons due to which the discipline of feminism saw new light in the 20th century. This paper will first attempt to illustrate the patriarchal structure of the society, as presented in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, in order to highlight how women are confined within certain defined boundaries already imposed upon them by the patriarchal system

and the struggle women have to go through in order to assert their individuality. In order to show the defined boundaries which are imbedded within a patriarchal society's structure, some structures which Kate Millett talks about in her book *Sexual Politics* will be used to show the struggle of the awakening of Edna Pontellier, and its inevitable failure which bears a testament that social roles which are imposed upon women are one of the many tools of women's subordination and domination. Then this paper will attempt to show the significance Chopin's *The Awakening* had through which later on, during the 20th century, women could question their socially constructed role and fight against the forces of patriarchy. To a large extent, in the field of literature the name of Kate Chopin must be mentioned when it comes to understanding the position of women during the late Victorian era and how it influenced women of the 20th century developing feminist discourses and as an era where more and more feminist text were being produced questioning the role of patriarchy in women's lives.

Firstly, it has to be understood that what Kate Millet exposed in her seminal book *Sexual Politics* was not new to the 20th century. The patriarchal structure she exposed was already there during the Victorian era. With the advent of modernization and bureaucratic institutions, patriarchy and its means of governance and subordination of women also became more sophisticated. Therefore what Kate Millet talked about in her book was very much present in Kate Chopin's time and by studying the structures of patriarchy it can be understood why Edna Pontellier failed to assert her existence and had to die in order to respond to her awakening. The very first structure which Millet talks about is the ideological structure. While elaborating upon this structure Millett talks about a number of fundamental issues regarding female domination, and the foremost important point she exposes is that women are provided with some ideological framework within which they are controlled from the very beginning when they start to become a part of the society. An

example would be, as quoted in *Sexual Politics*, women are ignorant, docile, passive and male are intelligent, aggression etc. This determines the sex roles of men and women where male are attributed with ambition and human achievement and female are attributed with domestic service. In *The Awakening* this is vividly seen as Edna's awakening results in her being ambitious to become an artist, to have the experience which life has to offer. However, she struggles due to her being a female and her experiences become arrested within her biological identity, which in turn is constructed by her cultural identity, as a woman. In *The Awakening* it is Edna's sense of being a mother, which Edna does not deeply connect with, and it can be assumed that the society enforced upon her this sense of motherhood, chains her to a past which works as the first barrier of her pursuing the life of an artist. While Mr. Pontellier could do his business work, Edna was bound to take care of her children. When Edna left her children to her mother to take care of them, and rented a flat where she lived alone it was incomprehensible for everyone around her, perhaps except for Mademoiselle Reiz, who herself was an artist and has been shown as a woman artist. A male artist was referred to as an artist, however for a woman being an artist she was called by a woman artist and was looked upon as socially "abnormal". This very categorization of being "abnormal" for a woman came into existence due to the ideological structure which was enforced upon men and women. Women are ignorant, docile, passive and are meant to do housework while men are made to pursue the activities of the world, which included having the ability to pursue the life of an artist. If a woman like Edna wanted to pursue the life of an artist it was not possible without immense agony and hardship, and all her actions following the voice of her awakening would be rendered as abnormal. "“You are too lenient, too lenient by far, Leonce” asserted the Colonel. “Authority, coercion is what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife. Take my word for it” ” (*The*

Awakening 77). Edna's actions are incomprehensible to her husband and to men like the Colonel as well as the doctor which Edna's husband takes consultation from, primarily because Edna has been outside the ideological framework given by patriarchal system. Edna was enforced to be passive and docile, traits which were against her nature, and Edna could not respond to her repressed feeling as she had to care of her children and doing the housework while her husband earns money. She also wanted to affirm a life lived by her own awakening, and asserting her individuality she became an object upon whom coercive actions should be taken. It is important to mention here any human being, the moment they assert their individuality, the moment they affirm that they want to walk for themselves rather than being led by the society and its various ideologies, regardless of being a man or woman, these individuals becomes enemy of the society which only demands confirmation. However, being a woman and asserting her individuality, she has to face more difficulties, more obstacles as there ensues more forces to subordinate women. The cause of this exists in another patriarchal structure which Millet mentions, which is the biological structure. In this structure also women, by their very identity, are meant to be perceived by others as well as by themselves, as weaker sex. Following the socially constructed lines of masculine and feminine qualities human beings who are categorized as the female sex, women are psycho-sexually rendered as weak and are made to confirm to various ideologies mentioned above. Millet argues in the modern society this biological difference has been made to put women in the subordinate position as the biological difference has been used to establish another kind of difference which is socially constructed, the difference of gender. Sex is purely biological; however, the problem with this is that using this biological difference patriarchy has made the difference of gender and has made both men and women objects of its control. Using this male and female divide, human beings are defined by masculine and feminine traits and

women are defined by feminine traits regardless of the fact whether a woman, as an individual, possess those traits or not. A woman like Edna does not possess the feminine trait, and using the language provided by patriarchy Edna as a woman is more masculine than feminine, in the sense that she is more assertive, more life affirming as she responds to her body's sexual desire despite being a wife and being chained to the system of patriarchy, despite being forced to believe upon that she is doing an immoral act by not taking care of her children and living a life of her own as an artist, she still hopes to love Robert and explore into her being through her spiritual awakening. The Cartesian duality of body and soul is very much present in the journey of Edna's awakening, from being a woman and living a life of conformity, having a husband, children, she responds to the desires of her body as well as the call of her soul. Neither of these things are in reciprocity with patriarchal system which demands control rather than responding to life and its passions. It is primarily due to this that Edna's life progressed towards death, she could not, being a part of her society, follow the life of an independent artist and also she faced rejection, due to her identity of Mrs. Pontellier, from her lover Robert.

The structures of patriarchy controls women and makes sure they are fit into the system of conformity. After Ideological and Biological structure, another important structure which controls women is the Sociological structure. In this structure Millet focuses upon the issue of family and states that family is "a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole" (Millet 14). Family imposes upon the women a sense of conformity, and fixes upon them certain duties. Within the family each individual is provided with a fix role and they serve this roles being a part of a larger structure, which is the patriarchal social structure. Edna attempts to get out of this structure by attempting to assert her individuality which is the essential part of her awakening. She liberates from her role of motherhood but her love life becomes a failure. Her love life primarily turns into

a failure due to the social position of her husband holding power and as a potential threat for Edna's lover. Edna's lover leaves her due to the social position of her husband, and in spite of this she aims to pursue the life of an artist but with that she also has to struggle due to her being a mother. For a woman, leaving her children causes a guilt, and perhaps this guilt was internalized within Edna's mind. All these forces were acting against Edna's artistic awakening, and these deep internal conditionings were something which Edna, throughout *The Awakening*, was constantly attempting to overcome. This shows how women are bound within the roles they are provided by their families. Women, as Millett states, are controlled by their families which are a control mechanism of the state, as according to her study there remains a direct relation between the family, the micro unit, and the society or state, the macro or the whole. Patriarchy takes over total control over a woman by giving her family roles within which they become morally bound, and as seen in *The Awakening*, those women who attempt to break free from this predisposed structure inevitably fails to survive. Either a woman has to serve her given roles, or else she has to die in order to assert her independence as Edna Pontellier does. Here perhaps the two characters representing two positions of women in a patriarchal society has to be mentioned. These two characters are Mademoiselle Reisz and Adele Ratignolle. Mademoiselle Reisz is an unconventional and unpopular older woman who serves as an inspiration to Edna throughout her gradual awakening whereas a foil for Mademoiselle Reisz, Adèle is a devoted wife and mother, the epitome of nineteenth-century womanhood. Adèle spends her days caring for her children, performing her domestic duties, and ensuring the happiness of her husband. Ironically, while Adèle is comfortable and happy with her simple, conformist existence, she unintentionally criticizes Edna's movement away from such a lifestyle with her manner of speech. These women clearly illustrate patriarchy's device to control women and Edna, although she dislikes Adele,

finds Reiz's lifestyle disagreeable and difficult. Edna remains in between, in a limbo state, struggles to find her authentic place responding to her awakening, but she sees that Reiz remains as an individual with lot of sacrifices, whereas Adele remains an ideal woman for a society with patriarchal values. Edna wants to enjoy life as well as asserting her individuality. Her authentic being demands both, both these things are part of her awakening but due to the society's inherent patriarchal structure, she fails to have either of them and she dies rather than compromise the experiences she had from her awakening. In each level of action Edna takes in order to assert her independence and respond to her awakening, she meets with obstacles. Economically, sociologically, biologically as an individual Edna could not find a support from her society and instead of support all she found was obstacles of responding to her awakening. *The Awakening* perhaps seem to echo that it is impossible for women to become artists and live life responding to her inner artistic voice, her spiritual awakening. Women are static being who either are labeled as "fallen women" or live a life full of sacrifices like Reiz, or they embrace the conformism of patriarchy and live a dull life like Adele. However, for a woman like Edna, who wants to affirm her individuality to the fullest, there is no place for her except to embrace death. Men as artists does have the potential to transcend their social condition by being within the social condition and pursue the life of an artist. As stated in an article named "Kate Chopin-Hauer: Or Can Metaphysics Be Feminized?" by Gregg Camfield, it is written that, "Among other things, Schopenhauer's works argue that art has consoling power in that, in depicting ideal suffering, it removes the artist and his or her audience from egotistical involvement in particular experiences of pain. Thus, in contemplating the brutality of life, one transcends it." (Camfield 5)

What is written in the article is applicable for men, however in *The Awakening* such a thing is not possible for Edna, to transcend her social condition and express her suffering through art,

primarily because an artist, more or less, depends upon his/her society for survival. For a woman in a Victorian society, if she is to survive, must follow the structures of patriarchy and either be a housewife or a “fallen woman”. She cannot transcend her social condition because like Edna, she would have to embrace death. A woman is not born, she is made, as Simon de Beauvoir stated in her seminal work *The Second Sex* and once an individual is made into a woman, she has to sacrifice her being in order to remain alive in the society which is designed in a way that she fails, in case a woman like Edna tries, to transcend it. Edna realizes this at the end of the novel with her final awakening, and that awakening makes her realize that the prospects of her life are like a dream, an illusion which can never become real. “...The years that are gone seem like dreams- if one might go on sleeping and dreaming-but to wake up and find-oh! well! Perhaps it is better to wake up after all...rather than remain a dupe to illusion all one’s life” (*The Awakening* 120). Edna realizes that she cannot respond to her inner awakening, she cannot respond through her conditioned body to the call of her soul, her inner being, and she dies at that moment; Edna dies spiritually to all that she has been conditioned with before she commits suicide. Edna’s inner being which made her awakening possible dies before her body commits suicide, she becomes lifeless after realizing the truth that she cannot assert her independence due to various barriers constructed by the patriarchal system. As mentioned in the novel, “Edna walked on down to the beach rather mechanically...” (*The Awakening* 123). *The Awakening* questions, from a larger perspective, whether there are any prospect of women having the space to assert their freedom, independence, creativity and being. The human experience which Edna felt through her heart clashed with the biological experience which a woman must have in a patriarchal society, and her death bears a tragic tale of humanity as a whole where women are being confined all their lives bearing impositions of patriarchy.

It can be questioned that in comparison to the other two poets this thesis analyzed and contemplated, who are Emily Bronte and Christina Rossetti, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* appears to provide no prospect for women to assert their existence through her literary creations. However, to decide whether such is the case or not depends on interpretation of reading *The Awakening*. On one level, Kate Chopin can be read as an uncompromising realist who showed the struggles of women and made her readers realize there is no particular direction for women to point to by which they can assert their existence. On another level of interpretation, texts like *The Awakening* can be read as a stepping stone through which future feminists and writers like Marylyn French, Doris Lessing, Kate Millet etc. took inspiration and forced the patriarchal structures of the society to question on what genuine humanitarian ground did women like Edna, which portrays the unexpressed agonies of many women, suffer and experienced a painful death. From the perspective of the second level of interpretation, it can be said that Kate Chopin, like Emily Bronte and Christina Rossetti, also helped women to assert their existence by forcing women to question their patriarchal conditionings and their social reality and show that an epistemic break is required for women in order to assert her existence. Kate Chopin died in 1905, the beginning of the 20th century. In this century the world experienced a lot of significant events, the two world wars, development in literature and philosophical inquiry and advancement in various humanistic pursuits which changed the way human beings perceived themselves. Institutions were being questioned and the traditional Western values, which people firmly believed, were also rejected by people after the two world wars. Within this era woman found new means to assert their existence and individuality; and for women writers of the 20th century the literary creations of their past sisters and mothers became quite significant. In a journal

article “The place of female writers in American Literature: The case of Kate Chopin” author Gabrielle Baldwin writes,

Yet, within this form, Chopin gives us a startlingly direct and probing account of a woman's attempt to assert herself and her rights against the demands of her family and society. Her attraction to a charming young man is the catalyst for her 'awakening', and the sexual dimension of that process is the most obvious aspect of the changes in her life which the novel traces. However, of more importance to a modern, feminist reader is the growth of Edna's awareness of herself as a person, an individual with a compelling need to express herself in emotional, sensuous and artistic terms. The dangers of forcing the work into the service of a current ideology are obvious, but I believe a close reading of the text justifies this emphasis. I have a strong impression that Kate Chopin is not very interested in the conventionally romantic elements in her plot. The somewhat reluctant lover, Robert Lebrun, remains an insubstantial figure and the 'love' scenes are brief, perfunctory and, in my opinion, deliberately disappointing. It is not that sexuality is unimportant in the novel - far from it. But Chopin shows Edna's sexuality as part of a much wider pattern of complex sensuous awareness. Her awakening involves a heightened sensitivity to many different sensory experience... (Baldwin 53)

From the quote one important thing which becomes vivid in relation to the interpretation of *The Awakening* is Edna's sexual pursuits, and even her artistic pursuits, points towards a larger dimension of self-awareness through which an individual awakening of a woman was attempting to announce itself. The constant discontent of Edna and her inevitable death caused by the inability for a woman to respond to her “heightened sensitivity” does have the potential to make other women aware of their own individual “heightened sensitivity” and help them to seek out

their authentic self. Furthermore, *The Awakening* portrays a genuine concern for individuality of women rather than blindly rebelling against the derogatory conditions of women, both existentially, socially as well as psychologically, like Reiz, nor blindly accepting the chains of patriarchy and be content with a superimposed sense of motherhood. *The Awakening* is one of the few rare texts of the Victorian era which focused on individuality and at the same time it also expressed the collective experience of torments which women faced. As a result, in this light it can be said that Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* also is a text which has within it spaces through which women could assert their own existence by questioning their social circumstances and reject all the conditionings superimposed upon them by patriarchy in order to discover their potential and heightened sensitivity. As a result, through this it can be claimed that Kate Chopin had a significant level of influence upon women writers and artists of the 20th century.

Chapter 5

19th Century Women's Literature and Creation of a New Female Identity

The history of women's literature shares a significant part of its development in the Victorian era where women had to struggle in order to express their reality into words which would transform itself into what is generally known today as great works of literature. From the novels of the Bronte sisters to the great poetic voice of Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, women during the Victorian era were constantly in search of literary expressions through which they could create a space of communication. However, this communication which women artists and writers wanted to establish during the Victorian era is immensely significant because not only does this communicative space which was established through literature used to depict the conditions of women and the voices of women during an era of intense patriarchal exercise, these spaces remains at present as potential mediums of influence through which women writers of today as well as in the future can derive significant influence. One of the aims of this paper was to show how the literary creations of Emily Bronte and Christina Rossetti contain within them a potential space through which women, at any age, be it present or future, can discover various dimensions of influence. From the historical and literary perspective Emily Bronte's poems are infused with rich metaphysical and spiritual elements which is authentic and unique in Western literature, and the aesthetic exploration of Christina Rossetti shows how she attempted, within the framework of patriarchal boundaries and limitations, to carve out a psychological space for women so that they can find consolation from each other's presence and overcome the patriarchal superimpositions. However, this thesis has chosen Kate Chopin as its third women writer for analysis. The time gap between Chopin and Emily Bronte and Christina

Rossetti is of around forty years. However, the prime reason this thesis has selected Kate Chopin is because Kate Chopin is considered as the forerunner of 20th century literature, and hence Kate Chopin can be perceived as the connecting ground, in the sphere of women's literature, between Victorian era and era of modernism. Chopin did not provide a redemptive space for women to find consolation in like Emily Bronte or Christina Rossetti. What Kate Chopin did was announce to the world that women must respond to their awakenings and has shown through her literature how the patriarchal society does not contain within itself any space for women to experience her internal awakening. Neither metaphysical satisfaction nor psychological consolation could help Edna to come into terms with her ongoing internal awakening, and Kate Chopin rejects to categorize what was the awakening of Edna precisely because all categorization is posterior to patriarchal conditions. As a result, Chopin can be said to be different from the other two women poets which this study has chosen in the light of the current analysis. However, there is a common ground between the three women literary figures selected by this study. The space which Kate Chopin created with her seminal work *The Awakening* was to announce to the world that women's consciousness needs sufficient space for its evolution which will manifest through the "New Woman". In a journal article titled "The Bird that Came out of the Cage: A Foucauldian Feminist Approach to Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*" authored by Zoila Clark it is written, "She enters the sea naked, "like some new-born creature...and the open ending leaves the reader to imagine her death either as a liberation or as rebirth from the womb of the nurturing sea in a modern time." (Clark 345). As can be seen in the quote, Chopin was announcing the awakening of female consciousness which formerly evolved through literature of women like Bronte sisters and Christina Rossetti, and which needed more space to evolve. Edna's death is the symbolic proclamation of feminism taking a new leap, the manifestation of this leap was seen

in women's literature which manifested in literary creations like *White Sargasso Sea* and *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Thus in each of these three literary figures there are separate individual spaces through which women can find spaces for self-assertion and literary inspiration. These spaces which are offered through literature are dimensions through which women can metaphysically psychologically and socially assert themselves as first person subjects, 'I' and break the patriarchal dichotomy of considering the men as the Self and women as the Other. Feminism has come a long way, but it initially began with the stress on education which was possible due to authors like Mary Wollstonecraft. It was education that made women have access to the dimension of literature, and it was creation of literature which helped to preserve and perpetuate the rich internal dimension of women through literature, and in particular at tough times like the Victorian era where patriarchal situations were dominant. Not only metaphysically and from the perspective of in depth spiritual experiences like Emily Bronte, women during the 19th century were also exploring the lesbian relationship and other dimensions of female sexuality. In a poem like *The Goblin Market* Lizzie and Laura were not only psychologically supporting each other, they were also helping each other to explore deeper dimensions of female sexuality which the patriarchal society attempted to repress. In the deep recesses of Victorian women literature, gender became a genre which underwent immense exploration. However, it would be a mistake if anyone considers that any of these categories, metaphysical and spiritual or psychological and sexual, defined the rich and varied sensibility of individual women poets and writers. The immensity which the female consciousness can hold, and the inability of the patriarchal society to contain that, has been shown by Kate Chopin in her story *The Awakening* where she not only shows the sexual and artistic side of Edna, but a side of her existence which contains a deep unknown call. *The Awakening* invited women of the coming 20th century to

respond to this call, to break limitations and criticize patriarchal conditions so that the female consciousness can find its place within human societies. Furthermore, Kate Chopin reflected the term “New Women” in her novel because during that time women have control over their own life and they have unique space for self-assertion.

This study essentially explored poems and writings of three women artist who belonged to various phase of the 19th century Britain and America, and it only looked at the middle class women artists. Although many would perceive this as a limitation, but as stated in the first chapter of this study, the main aim of this thesis was to explore how literary dimensions contains within them a space where individual women, depending on their nature and philosophy of life, can derive inspiration from women’s literature and revisit the significance of this fact. Furthermore, this thesis attempted to deeply explore how women of the 19th century, where patriarchal practices and ideologies dominated human conscience, created literature where they have to condemn themselves as “woman” from patriarchal standards, and rise from that definition to become a woman in her own rights through her artistic contemplation, psychologically as well as spiritually, and explore into uncharted territories risking her own life. Such was the sacrifices which women made, and history was unable to record these small sacrifices. These sacrifices, and providence of spaces where women can, through countless ages, find various inspiration mediums to assert themselves and their existence is symbolically preserved through women’s literature, and this study has attempted to show some aspects of women’s literature of the English Victorian era with modest and sincere effort. Emily Bronte, Christina Rossetti and Kate Chopin has challenged the patriarchal notion that women are dependent on the things given to them by the patriarchal society, and their literature remains as

testimony that through conquest, be it metaphysical psychological or deeply socio-existentially, women can conquer and assert what is important to them and the identity they want to create for themselves.

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