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MidAssessment

BA English

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Literary Theories

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Definition of Feminism:-

Feminism is the belief in social, economic and political equality of the sexes. Although largely originating in the west, feminism is manifested world wide and is represented by various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women's rights and interests.

Throughout most of western history, women were confined to the domestic sphere, while public life was reserved for men. In medieval Europe, women were denied the right to own property, to study, or to participate in public life. At the end of the day In 19th Century in France, they were still compelled to cover their heads in public and in parts of Germany, a husband still ^{had} have the right to sell his wife.

Even as late as the early 20th century, women could neither vote nor hold elective office in Europe and in most of the ~~universe~~ united States. Women were prevented prevented from conducting business without a male representative, be it father, brother, husband, legal agent, or even son. Married women could not exercise control over their own children without the permission of their husbands. Moreover, women had little or no access to education and were barred from most professions. In some parts of the world, such restrictions on women continue today.

Quite simply, feminism is about all genders having equal rights and opportunities. It's about respecting diverse women's experience, identities, knowledge and strength and striving to empower all women to realise their full rights.

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There are many focus on studying gender inequality and promoting women's rights, interests, and issues. Feminist theory aims to understand the nature of gender inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality. Feminism is also based on experience of gender roles and relation.

Traditionally feminism is often divided into three main traditions, sometimes known as the "big three" schools of feminist thoughts.

- * Liberal/mainstream feminism
- * Radical feminism
- * Social or marxist feminism.

The cleaved, raised fist combined with a venus symbol represents feminism. It is an iconic symbol of the women's liberation movement.

Feminist elements in the poem "My Last Duchess":

In my Last Duchess, the theme of woman discrimination are depicted clearly. From the poem's summary it is clear how Browning tries to represent how admiration, jealousy and self-esteem are united in one man and make him happy and disappointed, weak and strong, courageous and cowardly at the same time.

There are a number of points we could make at reading this poem from a feminist viewpoint. Here are some of them:-

* Women are objectified in the poem - use of possessive pronoun 'my' at the start and the objectification of the count's daughter as the duke's object at the end.

* The duchess is portrayed as the stereotype of an "Immoral and dangerous seductress" - she 'thanked men' and 'her looks went everywhere'. In this sense, she holds a real power over the duke: she is able to incite fear of emasculation through infidelity.

* Within this society, there is no place for women to hold this type of power the duchess is prevented from maintaining such a position by the duke's abuse of his position of power - "all smiles stopped".

* The duke is unable and unwilling to upset the status quo by asking the duchess to change her behavior. This, he says, would be 'some stooping'. His pride as the alpha male results in his abuse of power when he

has her 'stopped' instead.

* The language he uses is indicative of the balance of power between them. If she let/herself be lessened so, suggests his authority over her as does his 'imagined' dialogue: 'just this/or that in you disgusts me; here you miss/or there exceed the mark'.

* The setting is important - as a painting, the duchess has become assimilated into the duke's display of wealth. She now exists to bolster his pride. Furthermore, as a work of art, she fulfills the stereotype of the woman as beautiful, to be admired. She is a clear example of how the 'male gaze' reduce 'femininity' to 'beauty'.

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* The curtain acts as a metaphor for the Duke's control. He now is able to prevent other men from usurping his position as ruler, because he controls the curtain - "None puts by / the curtain I have drawn for you, but I..."

* Women are defined by their relationship to men - "my last duchess" and "his fair daughter" - neither are given their own name or identity.

women are often looked as the less stronger gender, weaker in nature, physically or mentally. This mentality has existed since the Romantic era where literature began showing it's light and gained more attention.

during the Victorian era where we can see a lot of writers, mostly coming from the opposite gender. This literary theory is called feminism, where it is a reflected concern with the silencing and marginalization of women in patriarchal culture where it is organized in the favor of men there were quite a few of writers writing in favor to feminism, such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, Oscar Wilde and etc. Hence, this essay will be discussing Robert Browning "My Last Duchess" and further analysis the feminist literary criticism involved.

"My Last Duchess" is a dramatic monologue monologue poem written by Robert Browning in the early 16th century

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and set during the Italian Renaissance. From this poem, the author is trying to portray the point of view of a wealthy nobleman whose daughter the narrator is getting married to and he is showing a painting of his wife, which is only known as "my last Duchess" throughout the poem. Through his description, we can see how the narrator who is the Duke of Ferrara is making the woman abide or conform to the feminist viewpoint and his dominance in the duchess life.

From the feminist approach, we can see the ~~pro~~ portrayal of the duchess as a reflection of women conforming to the ideals of Victorian era were supposed to be attractive to others so the people like he

Also the image of the duchess being able to blush easily is considered as part of her innocent and woman at that time needed to blush in order to ~~brush~~ prove their innocent. Women need to abide their judgement as they all are based on the eyes of men that are higher in the patriarchal order to gender.

Moreover, getting approved by the men means you have successfully become a woman, however if you go against this made up femininity, the women shall be mocked by her female society.

So, in the poem, we can see how the duchess is trying to prove that her husband is an ideal husband because this can be seen as being successful in

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marriage. Having an ideal husband and marriage also mean she needs to conform and devote to him, which is being submissive in the marriage. For instance, The Duke of Ferrara warns her to not accept the gratefulness from other men as well as being pleased with other services offered to her as the duchess is solely the Duke's property. Other than that, feminist also viewed the portrait of the duchess as the sign of male dominance on her.

This is because, the Duke is the one who can describe the portrait remains hidden from the sight of others behind the curtains is implying that the Duke has complete control over of his late wife

his which is also addressing that other women also if the property of the men.

The duchess now can be seen as a doll rather than a human being for the duke. Therefore, we can see that women in the poem and in that particular era needs to conform to the rules or else, they would be considered as shameful to the society. In conclusion, the poem "My Last Duchess" had analysed through the feminist approach where the female character in that poem is considered the correct portrayal of how a woman should be during the Victorian era. All these portrayal of femininity is based on the judgement of the men and women has to abide it.

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