

Brief history of feminism (~~Lesson 1 part 3~~):

What is feminism?

- Feminism is the doctrine and the political movement based on it. Women wanted to have the same economic, social and political rights as men do.
- In literature, feminist writers examine ways in which women are treated in a patriarchal society. Patriarchal society means a society controlled by men solely.
- Through literature, readers can examine the oppression of women in a patriarchal society. Often, in 18th and some 19th novels, women are depicted as passive and vulnerable beings especially in the eyes of the male character that represents his patriarchal society. An example that will help you understand this better can be seen in the dialogue below between Jane and Mr Rochester from Charlotte Brontë's canonical work *Jane Eyre* (1847):

“Shall I travel?—and with you, sir?”

“you shall sojourn at Paris, Rome, and Naples; at Florence, Venice, and Vienna: all the ground I have wandered over shall be re-trodden by you: whenever I stamped my hoof, your sylph's foot shall step also. Ten years since, I flew through Europe half mad; with disgust, hate, and rage, as my companions: [now I shall revisit it healed and cleansed, with a very angel as my comforter.](#)”

I laughed at him as he said this. “I am not an angel,” I asserted; “and I will not be one till I die” (160)

The first passage shows how Mr Rochester regards Jane. He regards her as an “Angel”. In the Victorian society an “angel in the house” is a woman who is passive, weak and submissive who only dedicates her life for serving her husband and children and does not do anything beyond the home.

In the following line, Jane challenges Mr Rochester's statement by saying “I am not an Angel”. This means that she challenges this Victorian image of the Angel in the house. She rejects the ideal image of the submissive and vulnerable woman that a Victorian woman should possess.

- According to traditional gender roles, men are depicted as rational, strong, protective and decisive whereas women are shown as emotional, weak, nurturing and submissive.
- Women started the first feminist movement that is known as the first wave of feminism by mid nineteenth century and became more active and

threatening by the end of the 19th century. This movement aimed at getting women involved in the workplace and getting them the right to vote.

- In 1900, women got the right to vote and started to take part in different domains such as Health care, education, politics and literature. Their involvement in these fields became more prominent during the First World War (1914-1918).
- The first World War provided women with new work opportunities; so they worked as nurses, ambulance drivers, telephone operators and also worked in munitions factories.