

**FEMALE VOICE IN LITERATURE as seen through Zadie Smith's White Teeth, Mary Beard's Women and Power and Jeanette Winterson's Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit**

**BIAOU Offin Joab**

Doctorant en Littérature Anglaise

**Dr Hergie Alexis SEGUEDEME**

Maître de Conférences des Universités (CAMES) de Littérature Anglaise

Enseignant-Chercheur à l'Université d'Abomey-Calavi, Rép Bénin;

Laboratoire : Groupe de Recherche sur l'Afrique et la Diaspora (GRAD)

**Dr Alidou Ibourahima Razack Boro**

Maître de Conférences (CAMES) de Littérature Anglaise,

Enseignant-Chercheur à Université de Parakou, Rép Bénin ;

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.56293/IJASR.2025.6503>

**IJASR 2025**

**VOLUME 8**

**ISSUE 3 MAY - JUNE**

**ISSN: 2581-7876**

**Abstract:** Women are often at the forefront of change. They speak out against gender inequality and the practices of marginalization and subjugation of the female sex. Indeed, woman writers predominantly focus the issues of female gender faced in society. Moreover, most of the woman writers in English literature try to struggle with male and they accuse the patriarchal society which interrupts their growth. The feminine voice is used to explore issues related to gender, identity, relationships, power, and societal expectations. Women's voices, independence and their participation in all aspects of society are more important than ever.

**Keywords:** Woman, feminism, literature, independence

## **Introduction**

Most of the woman writers in English literature try to struggle with male and they accuse the patriarchal society which interrupts their growth. Woman writers are self-framed to promote their thoughts in writings which completely depict only the man woman relationship. Feminism is a tool they use it every corner of their writings. There are some authors in literature who fixate themselves that they are fit to raise their voice for their origin where they are from. Woman writers predominantly focus the issues of female gender faced in society and family. Most of the woman writers in English literature try to struggle with male and they accuse the patriarchal society which interrupts their growth. Feminism is a term which is actually to extend hand for women to attain equality in private and public context.

Instead of the raising voice for suppressed women in society, there are some woman writers who have the obsession of being against male intentionally. Though there is a reason for opposing patriarchal society, there are so many disasters that happen in society. Both men and women including children and aged people get suffered by the impact of political and social events. Those disastrous things are considered or argued by many of woman writers is highly depressed one. Woman writers are self-framed to promote their thoughts in writings which completely depict only the man woman relationship. Feminism is a tool they use it every corner of their writings.

## **1. Man-Woman Writers Relationship**

Many woman writers like Mary Wollstone Craft, Emily Dickinson, Toni Morrison, Taslima Nasreen, Maya Angelou, Virginia Woolf, Kamini Roy and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni etc. discuss the man-woman relationship. These writers believe that they should concentrate on the issues which must be revolving around the domestic and public problems of women and those discussions are always against male community. There are some authors in literature who fixate themselves that they are fit to raise their voice for their origin where they are from. The writers from any

religion, caste, class, race or identity argue only that not for general issues in society. In the same way, writings of woman writers focus only on women issues instead of portraying other issues in the world.

They are confined themselves as captives in certain movements or progress. Sivakami and Bama are dalit writers and the label dalit is tagged by themselves through the discussion of dalit issues in their writings. They believe that they are only appropriate only for arguing the dalit matter. Likewise, writers like from Islam, their argument is mostly about their community. In general, woman writers can be blindly determined to comment that their writings are based only on feminism and its sub-branches. Some woman writers are exempted from this vision; they are Arundhati Roy, Kamala Das and Jumpa Lahiri. Arundhati is known for protesting marginalized community and raising her voice for injustice, her thoughts beyond the feminism though she is a woman.

Many researchers have argued that Kamala Das was a feminist, but she never agreed the title that she is feminist because her voice is not only female community but even for transgender. She was not just a writer in society but a strong fighter through her principles. Carolyn Ashley Kizer is an American poet who is different from other feminist writers because she is not simply accusing the male community. She has accused women too for the reason why they get suffered because of their irresponsibility. *Pro femina* is a poem evidently exposes her thoughts on man woman relationship.

Kizers depicts that the inferiority complex of the women is the one which makes women to compete with men. It is the major reasons women want to grab the attention of men towards them. They are always wearing mask which hides their originality and showing the fake appearance towards the society. The message of the paper seems irony to the ideologies of feminism but actually this paper attempts to convey that women empowerment is significant to uplift the society and it should not affect the relationship of man and woman, socially, politically and economically make them equal partners for the welfare of society.

Literature has long been a platform for marginalized voices to be heard, and throughout history feminist writers have used the pen as a powerful tool for gender equality and empowerment. From novels to poetry, feminist literature has explored complex issues of gender, identity and power dynamics, leaving a profound impact on readers and society as a whole. Virginia Woolf is recognized for her groundbreaking essays and novels that challenge traditional notions of gender and identity. In her works such as *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf eloquently defended women's access to education and autonomy, encouraging women to find their place in a male-dominated world. Her stream-of-consciousness writing style and dogged exploration of female consciousness made her an important figure in feminist literature.

It is hard to deny that in *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf ironically asks her readers whether it is worse for women writers to be locked out of literary tradition. In *A Room of Her Own* and her extensive critical production, Virginia Woolf clearly emphasizes and foresee show the relationship between women and the literary tradition, writing and female identity, has always been contested, ambiguous and sometimes even dangerous. The "voice" of women writers in the development of literary studies, or as Tilly Olsen symbolically suggested in one of the most important manifestos of second wave feminism the silencing of women remains central questions for women. and gender studies today. It is only in the last two decades and mostly thanks to lively dialogue between second and third-wave feminism (s) that women's and gender studies traced and explored women's genealogies and contexts.

This review process is needed today more than ever. It helps reveal how literary representations continuously reproduced and perpetuated patriarchal assumptions that placed women in an inferior position in society. It also helps to explore how women tried to resist the symbolic order across time and space and to consider alternative contours for newforms of (female) identity and subjectivity. In other words, how women created processes of female subjects and self-deconstruction, recycling versions of language, nature and nurture, private and public spheres, and the body, and especially the female body.

## 2. Women and gender

Women's and gender studies teach people that even as we engage with women's genealogies and literature, we risk creating a totalizing narrative that favors theorization, abstraction and colonization that would silence women the

differences between them and also their differences from us today. Using an intersectional methodology where the use of gender interacts with other interpretive paradigms such as class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, national origin and age, they showed how subject and self are dynamically interpreted at the intersection of different and sometimes opposing cultural formations (Susan Stanford Friedman 1996).

Thus, as complex questions have been addressed such as the relationship between writing and identity, and as we look back to "our garden," to borrow the title of Alice Walker's seminal essay, we must not only question the social conditions in which women acted or behaved as subjects, and also how, when and where this happened. The practice of homogenizing the experiences of different groups of women leads to the erasure of their experiences and differences. In this regard, the 'voices' and 'genealogies' appearing in the title of our volume aim to remind us of the particularity of each story and experience in various places and times; hence the multiplicity of discourses that have characterized and continue to characterize women's writing, literary criticism and feminism - even contradictory ones.

Women do not differentiate our differences; it is the refusal to acknowledge those differences and the distortions that come from misnaming them and their impact on people's behavior and expectations. Audre Lorde reminds us of this in a seminal speech delivered in 1980 in response to the emerging white mainstream feminism that focused on women's oppression and ignored women's inherent differences (1984, p.115). Indeed, distinctions that are unimportant to most contemporary critics and feminists may have caused serious and polemical concern in the past or in certain geopolitical contexts of the same past as the present. As Anne Rosalind Jones argues, looking at the conscious process at the core of both second-wave feminism and the birth of feminist literary criticism, feminist critics failed to consider that women's identity itself was composite and dynamic. category.

Moving from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of My Own* and Judith Shakespeare's *The Symbolic Character*, Alice Walker argues that the black women's tradition must be traced through different interpretive parameters, first considering: *What it meant for a black woman to be an artist at the time of our grandmothers? It is a question that has an answer brutal enough to stop blood.* (1994, 402). Feminism (s) for each new generation, this group of essays also explores the concept and performance of gender. Analysis method (Raffaella Baccolini) in our era, that is, in our era, where gender seems to no longer matter, the essays have the same goal of questioning the influence of theories, models and assumptions in fields such as literature, cultural studies, and philosophy, suggesting methods that expose European and American interactions and connections between feminism and feminism of non-Western connections.

Audre Lorde is a poet, essayist, and activist whose writings explored the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. In collections like *The Black Unicorn* and *Sister Outsider*, Lorde chronicled the experiences of black women and challenged the limits of mainstream feminism. Her poetry and prose are characterized by fierce honesty and an unrepentant exploration of identity, inspiring generations of readers to embrace their differences and fight for justice. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian author known for her moving novels and essays on feminism, identity and colonialism. In works such as *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *We Should All Be Feminists*, Adichie sharply criticizes patriarchy and advocates for gender equality both in Africa and around the world.

Her writing is characterized by lyrical prose and empathetic portrayal of complex characters in social and political upheavals. bell hooks: bell hooks is a feminist theorist and author whose work has helped challenge conventional understandings of feminism and intersectionality. In books like *Ain't I a Woman* and *Feminism for Everyone*, Hooks questions the power dynamics of race, class and gender and advocates for a more inclusive and holistic approach to feminism. Her accessible writing style and commitment to social justice have made her a leading voice in contemporary feminist discourse. Margaret Atwood is a prolific Canadian author known for her dystopian novels and speculative fiction that explore gender oppression and environmental degradation. In works such as *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Alias Grace*, Atwood offers chilling glimpses into patriarchal societies and women's resilience in the face of oppression.

Her ability to create vivid and thought-provoking worlds cemented her status as one of the most influential feminist writers of our time. The power of women's voices in literature cannot be overstated. Through their words, feminist writers have challenged social norms, expanded our understanding of gender and identity, and inspired countless people to see a fairer and more just world. Women is celebrated History Month, honor the lasting legacy of these writers, and continue to strengthen women's voices in literature and beyond.

A writer cannot be considered a representative of homogeneous group of women, but rather a representative of those women who have the same access to knowledge and privilege, other class, nationality or barriers. to the community or nation to which he belongs. Moving on from this theoretical premise, the third volume of the book, *Female Writing and Writing About Women: Critical Debates and Recent Interpretations*, also shows the need to approach women's progress towards self-determination and emancipation. multi-level discourses and multiple practices.

These discourses and practices are further revealed through gender performativity in early modern drama and theater (Josmary Santoro) or female slave narratives in nineteenth-century British literature (Valeria. Morabito) in the dominant colonial ideology and its cultural representations. The contested relationship between center and margin, individual and community becomes crucial in women's poetry in exile, where the tropes of marginalization and isolation are functional to participate in public debate on political issues, gender. issues and power relations (Waimarie Rosado Peréz). Tracing women's voices and genealogical means revealing relationships between different generations, often talking about mother-daughter relationships.

Women must not only "rethink through our mothers," as Virginia Woolf famously argued (2015, p. 56), they must also think critically about their "mothers" to get ahead. as independent subjects (Cristina Gamberi). The existence of female genealogy has long been a kind of utopia quest, giving birth to visions of alternative worlds and communities. Not coincidentally, the genre of science fiction has often engaged in such metadiscourse, experimenting and challenging the spatial construction and control of gender and "racial" identity (Eleanor Drage). Women's Voices and Genealogy in Literary Studies in English concludes with an appendix that is not just a tribute to the "mother" of all women's studies scholar Mary Wollstonecraft, as well as valuable contributions to her life and work from one of the most prominent exponents of the field and pioneer of women's critical genealogy Janet Todd.

Then speaking to another immediately becomes something more than just talking, speaking to another becomes seeing differently. As Levinas says in his enlightening pages about the iconicity of the face, word and consciousness of the other, speech and face, are anchored to each other. Responding becomes responsibility, and responsibility becomes responding. In this sense, and only in this sense, speaking becomes dialogue (Levinas, 1969). Women emphasize not only the importance of humility when they approach each other, but also the will they need to understand another. This is how women emphasize the importance of a new way of relating to another, where feelings and affection are valued.

The thought of how the eyes force the eyes to widen, forces constant and thorough re-evaluation. The idea of "how" forces us to remember forgotten thoughts and promotes both sanctions and misunderstandings of everyday thoughts and actions. In this perspective, the idea of "how" is not only about knowing things, but also about perceiving and feeling them, practicing them with love. Feminist critics emphasize that in dialogue with women from other cultures it is not enough to know them, instead they emphasize the importance of a new ethic. That is indeed an innovative aspect, because the new ethics means not to focus on oneself, but to be ready to listen to the other, not to impose one's thinking, but to understand it.

In fact, the concept of intimacy is based on emotions, which are the main components of the construction of this new dialogue between different feminisms. Martha Nussbaum in her introduction to "Women and Human Development, Capability Approach to International Feminism" notes that it is important to find a "common ground" of values between women who belong to different geographical. regions and cultural contexts (Nussbaum, 2000). The basis of this international feminism is not relativistic, but a pluralist vision. She argues that it is possible to describe a feminist philosophical practice that strongly adheres to a universalist framework committed to respect intercultural norms of justice, the rule of law and equality while being sensitive to the local. idiosyncrasies and many models where circumstances change not only choices but also beliefs and preferences.

A core concept of Nussbaum's thought is the concept of 'human capabilities', what people can do and being, based on the idea of living a dignified life. The term 'individual capacity' is based on the principle of the individual as a goal, because in the past and still today, in many countries, women were not treated as "ends» like people Because they have inherent dignity, which is protected by laws and institutions worthy of the respect of others, they are seen and treated only as a means to other ends, be nurturers, guardians, sexual objects, brokers of general good. -being family.



Thus, the space, a place where a writer can isolate to achieve a creative dimension, becomes for centuries a symbol and a metaphor for the condition of women: one's room symbolizes and the womb where works of art are born. and the economic liberation of women. While in the past feminist critics used the concept of "situated knowledge" in dialogue with other feminisms, nowadays more attention is given to ethics and the field of love. In this sense, the characteristics of creating and learning feminist thought are re-examined, or better re-examined: knowing or reading is not enough.

But as Levinas emphasizes, one must always insist on a correct reading of a new form of being that no longer focuses on itself, but is ready to open to the other, to the appearance of other thoughts, other voices, to something different from its own. Reading must actually bring the world of others into my own. Only in this way can the assumption that the world is one be undermined, and only in this way can reading not be limited to an external and functional relationship. Françoise Lionnet and Shumei Shih, in their book *Small Transnationalism*, show the concepts we tried to expose. In their introduction, they emphasize that to study what they define as "small transnationalism", it is necessary to leave the vertical perspective where the group was placed in a hierarchically superior position and find a transversal one.

We should not think in binary opposition centers versus periphery, but rather emphasize the relationship between small transnationalism's (Lionnet and Shih 2005, p.8). That is why the rhizome model is useful to understand the new geography that Azade Seyhan defines as the "third space" (Azade 2000, p.3). Jury encourages lateral "networking" between minority groups. The new planetary geography is not based on a hierarchy, a vertical structure that requires a smaller community to join a larger community to gain citizenship or recognition.

The message of Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2000) is also important in this matter, when he describes the life paths Fujiyama and Vacanti, two Indian women who live in different geographical contexts but belong to different religions. and social status both show the same persistent desire to develop some of their talents. They want to be independent, financially self-sufficient, especially competent, in charge and in control of their lives. Two women who tried to understand and develop their inner abilities but develop them in relation to their social context when they interact with the latter. Feminist theorists fail to consider the specific details of everyday life and the dynamics of poverty, which instead are essential to understanding women's quality of life. (Franceschi, 2018).

The same desire to experience different lives is found in an essay by feminist critic Stanford Friedman, where the author hopes that women not only find new international theories and methods but also open their own archives: "I ask that we expand the archive from which we theorize a story, i.e. move outside our comfort zone, engage with stories and narrative theories from different parts of the world" (Friedman 2011, 24). The relationship with others returns in even more complex terms, because migratory flows are layered and complex notions of nation, race and citizenship: "...the fluidity and complexity of our international moment, where migration, travels, and diaspora can no longer be clearly distinguished from intention and duration rather than from national citizenship and possession" (Shih 2005, p.74).

### 3. Women and Independence

Feminists refer to the thought of Levinas because the other is never reduced to a mere object of knowledge and subjectivity is defined by the heteronomy present in the other. They emphasize the importance of dialogue which considers the history of colonization and imperialism and the political and social spaces in which it takes place. Only this way can we think about transnational politics based on interaction, communication and representation. Nussbaum also emphasizes the concept in his books, which, although he is a philosopher, prefers interdisciplinary research and emphasizes the heuristic value of literature, especially the great Greek tragedies, to understand the dynamics of literature. emotions and dignity (Nussbaum, 2000; Bauman and Mazzeo 2017).

The importance of ethical principles in the behavior we should expect of others can make women aware that one of the limits of this dialogue and exchange is the adoption of a "monistic narrow discipline". Women offer a transversal and trans positional politics where ethics can reposition others and many others beyond the binary logic of first world hegemony and third world nationalism. This policy is supported by the idea that the Third World should play a dominant role in world political, social and cultural change.

The success of women writers is important not only as a step towards greater gender equality and representation, but also because it allows for the inclusion of all nationalities and backgrounds. This in turn gives readers new perspectives that can ideally lead to better understanding. For example, most of us would never understand what life was like for a black girl growing up in Jim Crow Era Arkansas if Maya Angelou hadn't written her famous early autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Moreover, Maya Angelou's autobiographical works provide a poignant exploration of race, identity, and resilience. Her prose and poetry illuminate the complexities of being a woman of color in America.

Women's Voices in Literature and women's roles evolved from mere housewives to passionate activists who fought for their rights to be part of the American dream. The main goal of the women who participated in the match was to get the right vote. In order to earn more for their cause, in addition to organized protests, women also used literature to speak out. Written in this period, "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Little Things" are works that portray women as passive, timid beings who should listen to their colleagues. These two songs were created to reveal the horrible way women were kept. The lack of self-expression makes a woman dominate the male character in her life because she cannot think for herself.

In "Undone", Adie loses her identity when her boyfriend Samuel tries to force her to carry the pregnancy. Adie expresses his thoughts: "I just don't want that... I want to be me, just me" (Treglia). He felt this alien being inside him robbing him of his sense of individuality. As a teenager, Adie has yet to explore her independence and develop an identity for herself. By having a child, she would never have the opportunity to create an identity. History has shown through the strong will of men that women face many obstacles to create their own identity. The contrast between the earlier works and today is the societal acceptance of the idea that a woman can create her own identity.

## Conclusion

Writers and women in general still face an uphill struggle in the world liberalized societies for their freedom of movement within society, access to education and cultural opportunities, and for their stronger roots and acceptance to the labor market. Readers must open their minds and hearts to the unique way their plight and message is expressed to truly appreciate the effort required to create fiction and the innovation represented by the works of certain women writers. Some understanding of the sociological context in which Spanish women writers had to work is a necessary condition to understand their concerns, their underlying messages, and the hermeneutics of their fiction.

The literary world is enriched by its diverse voices, and women writers bring a perspective that deserves recognition. Celebrating these voices is an acknowledgment of their talents and an exploration of the multifaceted stories that shape our understanding of the world. The power of literature lies in its ability to empower and inspire. Women writers empower readers through their work by addressing social norms, challenging stereotypes, and offering stories that resonate with women's experiences.

## References

1. Anderson, L. R. (2001). *Autobiography*. London: Routledge.
2. Batchelor, J. B. (1968). Feminism in Virginia Woolf. *English*, 17(97), 17.
3. Sparknotes, <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/casterbridge/>, (2025/03/23)
4. Woolf, V. (1980). The Letters of Virginia Woolf. eds. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann. Vol. 6, 1936-1941. *New-York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich*, 87, 4-5.