

## The Emergence of The Thinking Woman in 19th-Century Literature

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### **Abstract**

A variety of philosophical, scientific, educational, and cultural elements contributed to the formation of "The Thinking Woman" in 19th-century Literature, which is the subject of this study, which investigates the emergence of this literary figure. This article examines the ways in which several literary trends, including Rousseau's Naturalism, American Transcendentalism, Hegelian Idealism, and Realism, affected female authors and their ability to create multifaceted female protagonists. The discussion focuses on significant personalities such as Emily Brontë and Mary Shelley, demonstrating how their characters mirror the intellectual currents of the age via their characters. Additionally, the study investigates the significance of education and socioeconomic status, as well as the profound impact that Indian philosophical philosophy has had on Western literary works. When seen through these lenses, the study sheds light on the significant contributions that women authors of the 19th century made to the literary world, therefore laying the groundwork for the archetype of "The Thinking Woman."

**Keywords:** The Thinking Woman, 19th-century Literature, Women novelists, Rousseau's Naturalism, American Transcendentalism, Hegelian Idealism, Realism, Emily Bronte, Mary Shelley, Education and social class, Indian philosophical thought, Literary archetype.

## Introduction

The profound intellectual and contemplative qualities that are inherent in humans have been symbolically represented for a very long time by Auguste Rodin's bronze sculpture titled "The Thinker" (Le Penseur), which depicts a pensive masculine figure. As a symbol of reflection and contemplation, this famous image has been deeply ingrained in the collective psyche of the world. In a similar vein, the beginning of the nineteenth century brought about a profound shift in the literary landscape of the globe, which was exemplified by the appearance of "The Thinking Woman." The intellectual awakening and profound reflecting powers of female protagonists developed by women authors of the era are symbolized by this notion, which is similar to the sculpture that Rodin sculpted.

Significant shifts occurred throughout the 19th century, which were distinguished by significant philosophical, scientific, educational, and cultural breakthroughs that together shaped the literary landscape. This century was a period of tremendous transformation. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, with his thoughts on naturalism, and the American Transcendentalists, who stressed self-knowledge and inner truth, gave new frameworks for understanding human nature and existence. Additionally, the American Transcendentalists highlighted the importance of internal truth. These concepts pervaded the works of female authors, who started to create characters that embodied these intellectual insights in their writing.

At the same time, the scientific revolution, which was exemplified by individuals such as Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin, posed a challenge to conventional perspectives of the world and the position of humans within it. During this time, there was a growing awareness of the ethical aspects of scientific discovery, in addition to an increasing interest in the promise of scientific discovery. The novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley is a striking illustration of Literature that grapples with these topics. It reflects the scientific curiosity of the time as well as the moral conundrums that it faced because of it.

In addition, education went through a period of substantial development throughout this time; nonetheless, access to education continued to be mostly confined to males who came from wealthy homes. The fact that society places such a strong focus on education, etiquette, and social status had a significant impact on the narratives that women authors wrote. These authors utilized their works to challenge and investigate the restrictions that were imposed by

such inflexible societal systems. They frequently highlighted the transformational effect of education on the female protagonists in their works.

For Western Literature, the introduction of new aspects of thinking was brought about by the translation of Indian philosophical books into English. Not only did the Bhagavad Gita and other texts promote the ideas of spiritual oneness and self-realization, but they also connected with the transcendentalist movement, which further expanded the intellectual atmosphere of the time.

### **Philosophy and The Birth of The Thinking Woman**

#### **Rousseau's Naturalism and Transcendentalism**

In his theory of naturalism, Jean-Jacques Rousseau proposed that the problems that plague society are the result of humanity's departure from its natural condition. A reflection of this idea may be seen in Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights*, namely in the character of Heathcliff, whose unbridled passions and cravings are reminiscent of Rousseau's description of the "primitive savage man." Heathcliff's powerful and unrestrained feelings, as well as his disobedience of societal standards, are examples of the natural and unpolished condition that Rousseau envisioned as the idealized state. It is Rousseau's conviction in the purity and authenticity of man's original condition before it is corrupted by civilization that is illustrated by the fact that Heathcliff's character is motivated by instinct and raw emotion rather than by the norms of society. Brontë's portrayal of Catherine Earnshaw further demonstrates this relationship to naturalism since her vitality and unpredictability are comparable to the natural elements that are all around her. The issue of instincts coming into conflict with societal norms is brought to light by Catherine's fiery personality, her strong connection to the moors, and her troubled relationship with Heathcliff.

Additionally, American transcendentalism, which emphasized self-knowledge and the truth that lies within, had a significant impact on women authors of the 19th century. This intellectual movement, which was championed by thinkers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, argued that genuine knowledge originates from the inside and that individuals should trust their intuition and the moral compass that is located within them. Through Jane's search for identity, autonomy, and a feeling of belonging, Charlotte Brontë's

novel Jane Eyre brilliantly demonstrates the transcendental values that are at the heart of society. The path that Jane has taken is characterized by her unwavering dedication to her ideals and her internal sense of justice, even when she is confronted with expectations from the outside world to comply. Her transcendental conviction in personal purity and moral clarity is shown in her refusal to conform to the rules of society, such as when she turned down Mr. Rochester's proposal after learning that he was already married. It is the transcendentalist focus on self-reliance and personal integrity that is exemplified by Jane's internal struggle and final achievement in finding a balance between her desires and her ethical principles.

The transcendentalist path toward self-actualization and Enlightenment is mirrored throughout the novel by Jane's spiritual and emotional development, which occurs during the course of the story. Moor House, Thornfield Hall, and Lowood School are all stages in her journey toward self-discovery and satisfaction. Her experiences at each of these places symbolize a different stage. This voyage highlights the transcendental notion that genuine wisdom and power originate from within and that individuals must search within in order to discover their actual selves and their position in the world that is rightfully theirs.

### **Hegelian Idealism and Realism**

Both Hegelian Idealism and Realism were prominent intellectual philosophies that had a substantial impact on the literary works of the 19th century. According to Hegel's idealism, the limited universe is a mirror of the rational mind, which implies that the concepts and structures of human thinking are responsible for shaping reality. The significance of the abstract, the universal, and the rational in gaining knowledge of the universe was stressed by considering this topic. On the other side, the Realist movement intended to reflect daily life by emphasizing the mundane, the concrete, and the material aspects of existence. The objective of realism was to provide an authentic and truthful portrayal of reality, frequently focusing on the lives of ordinary people and the socioeconomic situations that prevailed during that era.

A rich tapestry of theme investigation was created in Literature as a result of the frequent intersection of various intellectual currents. As an example, the characters in Emily Brontë's novel "Wuthering Heights" are a perfect example of a combination of Hegelian idealism and

realism together. Through the course of their evolution and interactions, characters such as Hareton Earnshaw exemplify this merging of elements. Throughout his journey, Hareton has maintained a healthy equilibrium between the effect of his natural inclinations and the influence of logical thought and education. After being portrayed as wild and unrefined at the beginning of the story, Hareton develops during the course of the story, demonstrating progress in both his emotional and intellectual capabilities.

As a microcosm of the larger philosophical conversation between idealism and realism, this progression might be regarded as a microcosm of that conversation. The conflicts and development of the characters are a reflection of the Hegelian dialectic process, which suggests that concepts that conflict with one another may be reconciled via synthesis, resulting in a more profound comprehension. At the same time, the novel is grounded in the Realist tradition because of the comprehensive representation of their day-to-day existence and the terrible realities that they are forced to face. To illustrate how the intellectual underpinnings of her period impacted her narrative, Brontë tackles themes of redemption, metamorphosis, and the interplay between nature and nurture via the characters of Hareton and other characters in her works.

Because of this, "Wuthering Heights" by Emily Brontë not only represents the intellectual atmosphere of the 19th century, but it also displays how Literature may serve as a bridge between the abstract philosophical principles and the concrete reality of human experience.

### **Scientific Advancements and Revolution in Consciousness**

The novel Frankenstein by Mary Shelley is a prime example of the convergence of scientific advancement and literary expression. It provides a profound reflection on the transformational potential of science as well as the ethical consequences that it may have. The novel written by Shelley embodies the ethos of the early 19th century, which was characterized by an intense curiosity about the natural world and the ability to alter it. Shelley's work was written in an era of fast scientific discoveries. Not only do the experiments that Victor Frankenstein conducted with the creation of life provide light on the era's preoccupation with galvanism and the limitations of life and death, but they also shed light on the ethical difficulties that occur when humankind seeks to go beyond its natural bounds.

It is a profound investigation of the repercussions of scientific excess that the creature's agony and subsequent turmoil serve as the focal point of the story. A number of themes, including solitude, responsibility, and the search for purpose, are explored throughout the novel as the creation of Frankenstein struggles to come to terms with its existence and identity. The anguish that the creature endures and the destruction that it causes highlight the perils of unbridled ambition as well as the ethical obligations that creators have for the things that they have created.

Shelley's work is relevant to modern philosophical and scientific discussions because it raises concerns about the moral and ethical implications of scientific progress. The novel's capacity to prompt meditation on the ramifications of our desire for knowledge and the possible dangers of breaking boundaries that were previously assumed to be inviolable is the source of the novel's ongoing significance. As a result, Frankenstein not only reflects the scientific and philosophical concerns of Shelley's day but it also continues to engage contemporary audiences in conversations about the function of science in society and the characteristics of human inventiveness.

### **Education and Social Class**

In the 19th century, education was a privilege that was mostly reserved for men who came from affluent families. This privilege had a significant impact on the social hierarchy and the dynamics of marriage between couples. During that era, education was not only a means of determining one's social position but also a weapon for gaining economic and political power. This exclusivity served to cement the social stratification that existed at the time. The novel *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë eloquently depicts the essential role that education plays in determining social and economic stability through the striking difference between the educated Edgar Linton and the ignorant Heathcliff. Edgar's formal education bestows upon him the refinement and prestige that make him an acceptable match for Catherine in the eyes of society. On the other hand, Heathcliff's lack of education causes him to be ostracized and rejected despite the fact that he possesses innate qualities and powerful emotions.

The more significant subject of education as a transformational force in women's Literature of the period is highlighted by this inequality, which highlights the importance of education. The tales that were produced by authors such as Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë delved

into the ways in which education, or the lack thereof, influenced the lives and destinies of their characters, particularly women. In their works, education functions as a prism through which concerns pertaining to gender, social class, and human agency are taken into consideration and evaluated.

In the novel *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine Earnshaw demonstrates a profound comprehension of the ramifications of education and social position via her realistic evaluation of her feelings for Edgar Linton and Heathcliff. Despite the fact that she has a strong emotional connection to Heathcliff, she is aware that Edgar's education and social status provide a level of stability and respectability that Heathcliff is unable to supply. In the novel, the investigation of what constitutes a genuine education is centered on the conflict that exists between reason and emotion, as well as between socioeconomic factors and personal wants. A deeper reflection on the importance of striking a balance between one's heart and head, as well as one's passion and the demands of society, is reflected in Catherine's predicament.

These topics were constantly tackled by women authors of the time, such as Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and others. They created characters that traversed the difficulties of social status and education with depth and intelligence. Their works challenge the restrictive systems that exist within their communities and argue for an approach to teaching that is more egalitarian and inclusive. This approach acknowledges the possibilities for personal growth and social mobility regardless of gender or socioeconomic status. These authors, via their writing, bring attention to the transformational potential of education and its ability to reimagine both the norms of society and the destiny of individuals.

### **The Impact of Indian Thought**

It was during the 19th century when Indian sacred writings, such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, were translated into English. This translation had a significant influence on the literary and philosophical thought of Westerners. During this period, there was a spike in interest in Eastern ideas. Among the American Transcendentalists, prominent personalities such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were strongly inspired by Indian philosophy. The intellectual landscape of the time was substantially reshaped as a result of

their incorporation of ideas like spiritual oneness, self-realization, and the interdependence of all life into their writings.

Emerson, for example, discovered that the concept of the Over-Soul, which is analogous to the Hindu concept of Brahman and reflects a universal spirit that is shared by all beings, resonated with him. In his landmark book "Walden," Thoreau examined themes of simplicity, self-reliance, and the fundamental link between nature and the human soul. These themes are reminiscent of the lessons that are contained in the Bhagavad Gita.

The effect of this cross-cultural interchange stretched beyond the realm of philosophy and extended to women authors of the 19th century as well. Authors such as Louisa May Alcott and Margaret Fuller, who were working at the same time as the Transcendentalists, discovered that Indian ideas expanded their intellectual and artistic landscapes. By incorporating themes of inner strength, spiritual depth, and the pursuit of personal Enlightenment into their narratives, they contributed to the development of a literary canon that is more expansive and inclusive.

The incorporation of Indian philosophical ideas into Western thinking not only enlarged the horizons of individual philosophers and authors but also created a better awareness of the spiritual traditions that are practiced all over the world. This blending of Eastern and Western concepts created the framework for future cross-cultural discussions, which in turn influenced later generations of writers, philosophers, and people who were looking for spirituality.

### **The Thinking Woman in Literature**

Women authors of the 19th century produced characters who exemplify the synthesis of diverse intellectual currents. These characters illustrate the intricate interaction that exists between personal autonomy and the demands of society. As an example, Rosie, a character in R.K. Narayan's novel *The Guide*, is comparable to Catherine Earnshaw, a character in Brontë's novel, in her pursuit of self-fulfillment and her fluctuating allegiance. These two protagonists negotiate a landscape that is characterized by significant inner turmoil and external forces, which is a reflection of the Realist and Transcendentalist influences that were prevalent during that era.



Through her love of dancing, Rosie, an artist who is enslaved by her marriage, strives to break free from her restrictive situation. Her voyage is a metaphor for the struggle to express oneself completely, and they want to break free from the constraints of traditional roles. Similarly, Catherine Earnshaw does the same thing in *Wuthering Heights*. She is caught between her love for Heathcliff and the demands of her social class, and she struggles with her powerful emotions and the limits that society places on her. The high cost of breaking society's standards is shown by the fact that both of the protagonists ultimately encounter devastating repercussions as a result of their search for autonomy and individuality during the story.

The Realist movement has influenced these narratives because of the very detailed and honest depiction of the lives and tribulations of the protagonists. The portrayal of Rosie and Catherine has a psychological depth that is able to represent the inner anguish that they experience as well as the harsh reality that they face in their worlds. At the same time, the elements of transcendentalism emphasize the importance of individual intuition and conscience, as well as their pursuit of spiritual Enlightenment.

These literary personalities serve as powerful representations of the thinking woman, encapsulating the intellectual and emotional complexities of women's lives during the 19th century. They are a representation of the thinking woman." Their narratives resonate with the themes of self-discovery and the ongoing tension between individual ambitions and societal standards, and they provide insights into the human condition that is ageless. Women writers of the 19th century not only reflected their present circumstances via the characters they created, such as Rosie and Catherine, but they also prompted readers to reconsider the roles that women play in society and the potential that they possess.

### **Conclusion**

There was a convergence of philosophical, scientific, educational, and cultural movements that led to the creation of "The Thinking Woman" in the Literature of the 19th century. This period was characterized by substantial shifts in the way that society viewed the roles that women played and the intellectual capacities that they possessed. The principles of the Enlightenment, which advocated for reason and individualism, the development of scientific

discoveries that posed a challenge to conventional worldviews, and the slow but significant increase of educational possibilities for women all had a role in these transformations.

In their literary works, women authors like Mary Shelley, the Brontë sisters, and Jane Austen played crucial roles in bringing the concept of the "Thinking Woman" to reality. They were able to develop characters that traversed the complexity of their times via the pioneering works that they produced. These characters embodied attributes such as assertiveness, empathy, passion, and reason. It is important to note that these characters were not only passive figures; instead, they were active players in their respective storylines, which challenged the rules of society and explored new levels of female agency and intelligence.

Through characters such as Victor Frankenstein and his creation, who struggled with deep concerns about human nature and responsibility, Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" exposed readers to a world in which philosophical and scientific inquiry intertwined with ethical considerations. This universe was brought to readers through the characters in the novel. Similarly, the Brontë sisters, including Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, were creative authors who wrote books that explored the inner lives and moral conundrums of their heroes. "Jane Eyre" and "Wuthering Heights" are two examples of works that highlight women who are passionate and contemplative, negotiating love, independence, and the demands of society.

With wit and sarcasm, Jane Austen, on the other hand, was able to analyze the societal systems that were prevalent throughout her historical period. Her protagonists, such as Elizabeth Bennet in "Pride and Prejudice" and Emma Woodhouse in "Emma," had a strong sense of self-awareness and intellect. Her works encompassed a wide range of literary works. They sought personal progress and fulfillment, frequently by striking a balance between intellect and emotion, and they resisted the traditional gender roles that were expected of them.

A new literary archetype was established as a result of the contributions made by these writers, and this archetype continues to reverberate in current Literature and thinking. Not only did the "Thinking Woman" in their works present readers with personas that they could relate to and aspire to be like, but it also contributed to the formation of the discourse on the relationship between gender and intelligence. The evolution of this archetype over time has

had an impact on contemporary narratives that further investigate and broaden the roles that women play in Literature as well as the depictions of women.

To summarize, the "Thinking Woman" in the Literature of the 19th century represents a momentous transition in the cultural and intellectual history of the world. The characters that Mary Shelley, the Brontë sisters, and Jane Austen crafted are a reflection of the more significant shifts that occurred throughout their respective eras. These characters continue to inspire and challenge readers even in the present day. Their legacy lives on, serving as a constant reminder of the everlasting power of writing to mold and reflect the human experience.

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