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# Feminist Demands in the Victorian Period The Novel “Jessie Phillips” by F. Trollope

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## Abstract

The 1850s marked the beginning of the Feminist Movement. Feminism till that time had been an individual issue and even an indirect protest. After 1850, the Feminist Movement strengthened more and more and was bypassing the grievances expressed from time to time. There were a number of reasons for this: women's suffrage, women's admission to higher education, marriage and property laws, and the demands and prospects of unmarried women. These bold attitudes of this decade manifested themselves through three kinds of writing, controversy, and treatments. The basis of Harriet Taylor's observation was the report published in the New York Tribune on the "Convention on the Rights of Women" which called for equality in education, employment in industry and political rights. This American example of women's rights later influenced the Feminist Movement in England. It is interesting that Taylor's attitude was uncompromising. The novel "Jessie Phillips" is one of the first interesting novels that brings a benevolent story about the fate of stigmatized women, including elements of class consciousness and sexual policy.

**Keywords:** Women, rights, feminism, education, “Jessie Philips”.

## Introduction

The novel “Jessie Phillips” is one of the first interesting novels that bring an interesting story about the fate of stigmatized women, including elements of class consciousness and sexual policy. Having as inspiration and model the novel of Elizabeth Gaskell “Ruth” and George Elliot’s “Adam Bede”, Jessie Phillips tells us the story of a poor, virtuous, and honest girl whom Sir Frederick Dalton dishonors without conscience, and then she gives birth to a child for the murder of which she is later accused.

## Discussion

Besides of the quality of the work style, the differences between Jessie Phillips and her two famous descendants appear in Trollope's feminist protest that includes benevolence to Jessie's tragic fall. Different from Hetty in the novel “Adam Bede” Jessie does not sin for the sake of vanity, but for the sake of love for Dalton. She is not guilty of killing the baby either.

Trollop, on the other hand, does not portray Jessie as a saint, in order to secure understanding for her heroine, as Gaskell does in her novel "Ruth." Jessie dies at the end of the novel, but her death is more common than that of Ruth. Meanwhile, her malefic suffered a tragic death and drowned in the river trying to escape justice. Trollop's novel has a melodramatic subject matter, and its characters are stereotyped; and there are also rare comments about female power, revenge, and kindness. This novel brings a powerful outrage and protest of women, especially working class women, to the conservative system that ruthlessly oppresses women. Here is a detail from a meeting between the victim and the malefic:

*... I came here because of your child. As for me, I would never want to see your eyes, but I came for my baby and for your baby, Frederick Dalton. I ask for your help. "My help?" The thug returned it, laughing. What law are you based on, Jessie Phillips? Get this coin. Get rid of it! Go back to the work house and tell the residents to light a candle... (Jessie Phillips, Ch. 39).*

With the rise of prosperity of the 1850s and the reduction of abuses in industrial society, social protest novels such as "Helen Fleetwood" or "Michael Armstrong" were replaced by Gaskell novels, especially "North and South," which treats the problems of industrial society in a more complex way, with less protest, but rather with a sense of opportunity for a mutually appropriate and appropriate strategy between the middle class and the working class, clerks and workers.

The 1850s marked the beginning of the Feminist Movement. Feminism up to that time had been an individual issue and often an indirect protest, as expressed for example in Ms. Jameson's writings: "Characteristics of Women" and her articles published in the Athenaeum magazine of 1846, or Lady Morgan's "Woman and her Master" (1840) and Ann R. Lamb "Can Women Regenerate Society?" (1844).

Such writings had begun to increase after the 1840s and their main aim was to develop a better and more practical education of women and a greater use of their influence. After 1850, the Feminist Movement began to grow stronger and stronger and was bypassing the grievances expressed from time to time. There were a number of reasons for this: women's suffrage, women's admission to higher education, marriage and property laws, and the demands and prospects of unmarried women. These bold attitudes of this decade manifested themselves through three kinds of writing, controversy, and treatments.

The basis of Harriet Taylor's observation was the report published in the New York Tribune on the "Convention on the Rights of Women" which called for equality in education, employment in industry and political rights. This American example of women's rights later influenced the Feminist Movement in England. It is interesting that Taylor's attitude was uncompromising.

Regarding the concept of the scope of women, she writes that they deny the right of every other part of the human race to decide for another part or for another individual, no matter what is and what is not 'their sphere of interest.' The sphere of interest of all human beings is the highest and greatest sphere they can reach together (p.301). In this way it is emphasized that women have special moral and spiritual demands: "What women want are equal rights, equal treatment for all social privileges, not special or sentimental positions." Equal individualism, and effective commentary on the particular order of social rights also includes women's rights, but always mentioning them in their relations with their children and husbands: "It is neither right nor necessary to impose conditions that women should be only mothers and nothing else; or if they were once mothers, they should not deal with anything else in their whole life. When we ask the question why the existence of half of humanity should be dependent and submissive more than the other half, the only reason that can be given is that this is the decision of men. They prefer the idea that men should live for their own pleasure and women for the pleasure of men" (p.311).

While Harriet Taylor articulated the entire philosophy of women's rights, Barbara Smith (1827-1891) focused on two specific issues: the legitimate position of women in society and their right to work. As the founder and member of the feminist association, Barbara Smith was one of the most active mid-century feminists. Her work "Brief Summary" was written in order to promote the "Law on the Property of Married Women". That book was sold quite cheap and turned into a work of great popularity. This offense attacked the law written under canon law, where the woman and her property belonged to her husband to whom she was subject by law. The other pamphlet "Women and Work" was more contradictory even among feminists, but sought to give women the right to engage in any kind of work and activity she was capable of performing. The 1851 census shows that there were 900,000 redundant women for whom employment opportunities were limited and paid little. They could become governesses in the families of middle-class women, teachers in private female schools (if they had completed female schools); they could become maids, or work in factories. In this period, unemployment and poverty were a real danger for unemployed women. In this context, Barbara Smith came up with her "request" to provide suitable jobs for women writing that "they" robbed us of the work of our ancestors, so we have to find another job. Today in Britain tens of thousands of women are unemployed and living in sluggishness. This work was in accordance with the "Law on Marriage and Divorce" of 1857, which, although it facilitated divorce, at the same time legalized the double standard, which was delayed until the 1870s. Although not of this decade, Charlotte Bronte's "Shirley" (1849) defined the debate between Taylor and Smith and as a novel articulated the antagonism between man and woman and the mistrust in marriage.

Although the controversy ends as a comedy, with a wedding ceremony, its tone was dark, where it also dealt with sex. About these things there are even more

controversial views on morality than in the novels we have mentioned so far on the ability of women to influence the course of social events in an industrial society.

### **Conclusion**

By the end of the nineteenth century, large numbers of middle-class feminists began to discuss the role of women in society and sought to change Victorian society's view of the new implications of women in all spheres of life, whether economic, whether political. In this way, women began to seek independence and freedom from the conventional traditions of the past. Thus in the 1860s first feminist associations were created. Most of the feminist movement was constantly striving to realize the dream of independent and free women. Initially they encouraged women to have confidence in their abilities and not to feel degraded and underestimated before the achievements of men. We see those themes in various Victorian literary novels that represent the reality and the beginning of the opposition to injustices, which we see clearly in Trollope's literary work "Jessie Phillips."

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