A woman’s woman – Feminist aspect in Jojo Moyes' books

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# Introduction

## 1.1 Brief background of Jojo Moyes

Noteworthy author without a doubt is Jojo Moyes, known for writing about strong, brave, and entirely relatable women. After attending college, she took a job at The Independent, one of the well-established newspapers in the UK. Her journey into novel writing began when she left her nearly decade-long journalism career. Interestingly, her rise to fame didn't happen overnight. She had already penned eight books before striking gold with "Me Before You". Beyond writing, Moyes showcases her compassionate nature with impactful social projects. Recognizing the need for safe transportation for marginalized women in Kenya to access education, she funded minibuses. Hence, she is not only an acclaimed author but also a generous philanthropist.

## 1.2 Overview of Moyes' significance in contemporary literature

Jojo Moyes holds a significant position in contemporary literature. Her contributions, punctuated by her vivid storytelling in the genre of romance, have reached a global audience. The success of her novels underscores her ability to blend emotion and genuine character development, thereby leaving an indelible mark on the literary realm. Her novels not only entertain but also initiate conversations around typically avoided subjects, illustrating her effectiveness in using literature as a platform for social dialogue.

## 1.3 Emancipation of women

Throughout her novels, with the aim of bringing support and awareness to women and society around the world, she discusses many topics such as emancipation. It refers to the pursuit of equal rights for women, shedding societal constraints and norms that limit their freedom or opportunities. This involves advocating for gender equality in all aspects of life, including politics, law, education, and careers. Women's emancipation promotes the idea that women should have full autonomy over their lives, decisions, bodies, and future. It's a never-ending struggle globally for fairness, respect, and freedom from discrimination.

## 1.4 Explanation of thesis statement and purpose of the research project

The aim of the thesis is to explore Jojo Moyes' books to understand her portrayal of women and feminism - an exploration that justifies Moyes as a “woman of women.” The study aims to unravel portrayals of women's strengths, independence, struggles and victories in Moyes' narratives. The goal is to discover how the representation of feminism in Moyes' works can potentially shape readers' perceptions of women's roles in contemporary society.

# Chapter 1-Jojo Moyes as a woman’s woman

During one interview, Jojo Moyes called herself a “woman of women” It is also the opinion she has among many people due to her compelling portrayal of female characters in her novels. She doesn't shy away from presenting her characters as real, flawed individuals. Her protagonists are often women who find themselves dealing with relatable life situations, such as love, loss, and transformation. Beyond her writing, Moyes has also made a direct impact on women's lives through her charity work. She set up a project to provide minibuses for women in Africa to safely reach educational facilities. And as a book enthusiast, she saved the Quick Reads program from closure by securing funding. The Quick Reads initiative offers a selection of short books designed to encourage adults who have difficulty reading or are not in the habit of reading.

## 1.1 Jojo Moyes and Her Literary Journey

Jojo Moyes began her literary journey after a significant phase working as a journalist for "The Independent". The transition from reporter to novelist enhanced her storytelling skills and influenced her writing style. She emerged as a notable author with the release of "Me Before You", which firmly established her in the realms of contemporary literature. Her introspective and sensitive portrayal of relationships sets her apart in her literary journey.

## 1.2 Achievements and awards

In recognition of her talent, Jojo Moyes has received multiple awards and nominations. She won the Romantic Novel of the Year Award from the Romantic Novelists' Association twice; for "Foreign Fruit" in 2004 and "The Last Letter from Your Lover" in 2011. "Me Before You" was also nominated for the 'Book of the Year' at the UK Galaxy Book Awards, furthering her reputation as a significant contributor to contemporary literature.

# **Chapter 2** - Women's Emancipation

Women's Emancipation in the UK has been a gradual, ongoing process that significantly gathered momentum in the 19th and 20th century. This movement sought equality regarding legal rights, economics, and access to education and employment opportunities. Key milestones include the establishment of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1897, the implementation of equal voting rights in 1928, and the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975. The movement continues today as gender parity in many areas still remain unachieved.

## 2.1 Powerful women: The most important figures of women's emancipation

### 2.1.1 Millicent Fawcett - Dame of the British Empire

### 2.1.2 Emmeline Pankhurst

### 2.1.3 Maud Arncliffe Sennett

### 2.1.4. Emily Wilding Davison

### 2.1.5 Christabel Pankhurst

### 2.1.6 Dora Thewlis

## 2.2 From Page to Power: Exploring portrayals of women's emancipation in British literature

British literature has consistently been a mirror reflecting societal changes and attitudes, including the progression and struggles of women's emancipation. Jojo Moyes' empowering female characters have helped demonstrate literature as a platform to explore and challenge traditional notions of women's roles. These portrayals have not only illustrated women's fight for freedom and equality but also influenced perception and furthered dialogues on gender advocates in society.

## 2.3 The impact of literature on real changes in gender equality

The impact of literature on real changes in gender equality has been substantial. Fictional representations of strong, independent women and narratives challenging gender bias have been instrumental in shaping attitudes towards gender norms and equality. Literature can highlight inequality, initiate dialogue, and inspire change by reflecting on societal issues. Authors like Jojo Moyes create characters that influence readers' perceptions, encouraging them to challenge prevailing stereotypes. These literary contributions, therefore, play an essential role in promoting and effecting real change in societal attitudes towards gender equality.

# **Chapter 3** - Forbidden but desired - *Foreign Fruit*

*Foreign Fruit* by Jojo Moyes is set in the sleepy seaside town of Merham, with the story spanning two time periods - the 1950s and the present day. In the past, we follow an unconventional group of individuals who move into Arcadia, an Art Deco house by the sea, which shakes the conservative residents of Merham. One local girl, Lottie, is drawn to their charm and freedom. In the present day, the Arcadia house is bought by a designer who wants to restore it to its former glory, and this brings Londoner Daisy Parsons to the town. The novel explores how almost five decades later, these characters must face the echoes of the past.

## *3.1* Feminist Aspects in *Foreign Fruit*

The feminist aspects in 'Foreign Fruit' are seen in the portrayal of its female characters who contest the societal expectations of their time. The women in the book question traditional norms, pursuing freedom and independence. The character of Lottie, who is enticed by a bohemian lifestyle, portrays a woman not confined by societal expectations but one who seeks and treasures her autonomy. Daisy, in the present day narrative, is professionally ambitious and independent, another example of Moyes' feminist portrayal.

## 3.2 Analysing Female Characters in *Foreign Fruit*

Analysing the female characters in 'Foreign Fruit', it's evident that Moyes portrays them as complex, multifaceted individuals with their unique strengths and struggles. Lottie's longing for freedom from conventional lifestyles of the 1950s and Daisy's endeavor to establish herself professionally show these women grappling with societal norms. Moyes demonstrates through these characters how women, though hindered by societal assumptions and restrictions, navigate toward their dreams and independence.

# **Chapter 4** - Two women's story - *The Last Letter From Your Lover*

*The Last Letter From Your Lover* by Jojo Moyes is a dual-timeline love story. In 1960, Jennifer wakes up in a hospital, suffering from amnesia. Through a series of hidden letters, she soon discovers that she was involved in a passionate affair with a man who wasn't her husband. In 2003, ambitious journalist Ellie stumbles across one of these letters, becoming fascinated by Jennifer's story and seeking to reunite the lovers.

## 4.1 Feminist Issues in The Last Letter From Your Lover

The novel, *The Last Letter From Your Lover,* addresses feminist issues through its portrayals of love, marriage, adultery, and women's societal roles. Jennifer struggles with marital dissatisfaction and societal constraints, seeking liberation through her affair. In contrast, Ellie symbolizes modern, career-oriented women who enjoy independence but also grapple with their complicated love lives. The book explores the changing landscape of women's rights, and freedom over decades.

## 4.2 Exploring the Women

The women in *The Last Letter from Your Lover* are finely etched yet diverse characters reflecting different times and attitudes. Jennifer, a character from the 1960s, is caught in an unhappy marriage and is expected to fit into societal norms. Her pursuit of love and independence despite these constraints showcases her resilience. On the other hand, Ellie's character, set in the new millennium, enjoys professional freedom but yearns for a meaningful connection. She is determined and ambitious yet vulnerable, and her journey to find love adds another layer to her nuanced characterization.

# **Chapter 5** - The transformation of Louisa Clark - *Me Before You*

The touching novel *Me Before You* by Jojo Moyes is a story about two extremely different personalities and how they change each other's lives. It's about Louisa Clark, a small-town girl with simple aspirations, and Will Traynor, a young and successful man who becomes paralyzed following an accident. Their chance meeting leads to an unexpected and profound emotional journey for both of them.

## 5.1 Me Before You as a Women's Novel

*Me Before You* can be seen as a women's novel owing to its intimate exploration of a young woman's transformation. With Louisa Clark as the protagonist, the story delves into her fears, dreams, and potential while dealing with themes like love, self-identity, and personal growth. The novel touches on the multi-faceted aspects of a woman's experience within the contemporary socio-cultural context, thereby appealing primarily to female readers.

## 5.2 The feminist power of Louisa Clark

Louisa Clark, the female protagonist of *Me Before You*, embodies feminist power in many ways. Initially portrayed as a modest, narrow-minded young woman, Louisa experiences immense personal growth throughout the novel, discovering independence, self-worth, and the courage to step beyond her comfort zone. Her character highlights the idea that a woman can learn to assert her wishes, elevate her life goals, and broaden her worldview. The journey she undertakes underscores how women can depart from societal expectations and discover their personal and emotional freedom.

# Chapter 6 - Traveling librarians - *The Giver of Stars*

*The Giver of Stars* by Jojo Moyes is a heartfelt tale set in Depression-era America. The novel focuses on the lives of five women who become part of a traveling library, known as the Packhorse Librarians of Kentucky. They face numerous challenges, but their dedication helps spread the love for reading in their remote community.

## 6.1 Packhorse Librarians - The story of five unique women

The story of the Packhorse Librarians in *The Giver of Stars* isn't just about carrying books—it is the story of five different women coming together, growing, and finding their place in a world that is often dismissive of their potential. There’s Alice, a British woman seeking her own identity; Margery, a free-spirited woman who isn't afraid of anything; and three other women, each grappling with personal issues but determined to be part of the transformational project.

## 6.2 The emancipation of women in The Giver of Stars

The emancipation of women in *The Giver of Stars* is depicted in their continuous struggle to break free from the confinements of their social roles. Moyes carefully weaves each woman’s personal growth with their collective force as a team. Alice, ripe with disappointment in her marriage, finds purpose and independence in her role as a librarian. Margery, though unconventional, effectively challenges societal norms. Each woman embarks on a journey of self-discovery, understanding their worth outside of traditional feminine roles. The novel championing women's resilience and independence serves as a reminder of the collective power they hold to instigate change.

# Conclusion

From exploring the profound narratives woven by Jojo Moyes, we can gain appreciation for her storytelling and her significant influence on contemporary literature. Her nuanced depiction of female characters and her exploration of their journeys, in both personal growth and in confronting societal norms, underscores her standing as a 'woman's woman' in literature. Her books illustrate unique aspects of women’s struggles and their paths to emancipation.

In analysing the role of women’s emancipation within the context of British literature, one can’t overlook how Moyes, like many before her, uses the realm of fiction to spark conversations, challenge societal norms, and inspire changes towards gender equality. Her works demonstrate the enduring and influential power of literature in shaping societal attitudes and norms. Summarily, Moyes' contribution to literature presents a rich study of strong female characters, their personal journeys of discovery, and the challenges they overcome in a changing world.

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