

WOMEN WRITERS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Abstract: *5 Famous Female Writers in History Throughout history, some of the most influential women have been writers, poets, and essayists; breaking social barriers, challenging the status quo, and questioning the rules through the art of their writing. Their literary contributions have not only enriched cultural landscapes but also sparked important conversations about gender, identity, and societal norms. At Oxford Summer Courses where we offer writing courses led by expert tutors, we delve into the lives and works of these pioneering female authors, exploring their profound impact on literature and beyond.*

From the pioneering voices of the late 18th and early 19th Century through to modern day feminist contemporaries in the literary sphere, women have long shaped the landscape of literature, of cultures around the world, and of history with their ingenious creative writing talents. Here is just a small selection of the most pioneering female writers in history.

Keywords: *Female Writers in History, Mary Shelley, Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, Louisa May Alcott, Charlotte Bronte*

Jane Austen (1775 - 1817)

Jane Austen was one of the earliest female writers to produce works that critiqued and commented on the British landed gentry, Austen was a writer who focused on plots which explored the dependence of women on marriage, or women who were in the pursuit of economic security.

As such, many of Austen's works were published anonymously, meaning that

she enjoyed little fame during her life.

It was after her death that she gained far more status as a writer, with her six full-length novels rarely having been out of print. There have also been several film adaptations of her works, with a number of critical essays and anthologies accompanying them.

Some of Jane Austen's famous works:

Sense and Sensibility (1811) - First published anonymously by "A Lady," it tells the story of the Dashwood sisters, Elinor and Marianne as they come of age and are forced to move with their widowed mother from the estate on which they grew up.

Pride and Prejudice (1813) - A novel following the character Elizabeth Bennet, who learns about the repercussions of hasty decision-making and the difference between superficial goodness and actual goodness.

Emma (1815) - A comedy of manners, depicting the concerns of genteel women living in Georgian-Regency England, focusing on issues of marriage, sex, age and social status.

2. Mary Shelley (1797 - 1851)

Second on our list of famous female writers in history is famous Gothic fiction writer, Mary Shelley.

Recognised as one of the early creators of science fiction, she was also a prominent editor, working mainly on the works of her husband, the Romantic poet and philosopher, Robert Bysshe Shelley.

Born to political philosopher William Godwin and feminist activist, Mary Wollstonecraft, Shelley was raised solely by her father after her mother's premature death.

Having been provided a rich yet informal education, with her father promoting a lifestyle of anarchism, Shelley married early and pursued a life predominantly dedicated to promoting her husband's works but also towards writing fiction.

Some of Mary Shelley's famous works

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus (1818) - Written when Shelley

was just 18 years old, the story follows young scientist Victor Frankenstein who accidentally creates a sapient creature during an unorthodox experiment.

Rambles in Germany and Italy (1844) - A travel narrative published in two volumes that describes two European trips Shelley took with her son, Percy, and several of his university friends.

3. Emily Bronte (1818 - 1848)

Emily Bronte was another famous female writer of the Victorian era who is best known for her only novel, *Wuthering Heights*. Publishing her work under the pen name, Ellis Bell, Bronte was also a prolific poet, with her writing at the time and still today regarded as 'genius.' Her most famous collection of works, *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell*, was a collection of pieces published with her sisters Charlotte and Anne under their pseudo-names.

Emily Bronte's famous works

Poems by Currer Ellis, and Acton Bell (1846) - A volume of poetry published jointly by the three Bronte sisters, Charlotte, Emily and Anne. It was their first work to ever go to print.

Wuthering Heights (1847) - A prime influence of Romantic and Gothic fiction which concerns two families of the landed gentry living on the West Yorkshire moors - the Earnshaws and the Lintons - the book follows their turbulent relationships with Earnshaw's adopted son, Heathcliff.

4. Charlotte Bronte (1816 - 1855)

Charlotte Bronte sister to Emily, is best known for her novels, including *Jane Eyre* (1847). Although her first novel, *The Professor*, was initially rejected by publishers, it was her second novel, *Jane Eyre* which was well-received by critics and has gone on to become a capsule piece in the history of British literature.

Charlotte Bronte's famous works

Jane Eyre (1847) - This coming-of-age novel follows the journey of its eponymous heroine, including her love for Mr Rochester and his home at Thornfield Hall.

Shirley (1849) - Set in Yorkshire during the industrial depression of the early

19th Century, the story follows characters during the Luddite uprisings in the Yorkshire textile industry.

5. Louisa May Alcott (1832 - 1888)

American novelist, short story writer and poet, Louisa May Alcott, may be best known as the author of *Little Women*, but has made a much larger literary contribution than you may have first thought.

Raised in New England by her parents and Abigail and Amos, Alcott was one of four daughters in the family.

Just like the four sisters in her famous novel do, Alcott worked hard to support her family's struggling financial situation, using writing as an outlet when she had the time.

Published in 1868, *Little Women* was her first major literary success, after having written for the *Atlantic Monthly* from 1860.

In the early 1860s, she also published a number of lurid short stories for adults under her pen name, A. M. Barnard, in an attempt to break onto the literary scene.

Once a popular household name with her debut novel, Alcott became an active member of various abolitionist and feminist reform movements, including working towards women's suffrage, which she continued to support throughout her life until her passing in 1888.

Louisa May Alcott's famous works:

Moods (1864) - Alcott's first novel which tells the story of passionate tomboy, Sylvia Yule, who embarks on a camping trip with her brother and his two friends, both of whom fall in love with her.

Little Women (1868) - Coming-of-age novel following the lives of four sisters and their journey through genteel poverty as children into womanhood.

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