

## **Feminist Poetics in Isabella Whitney's "Lamentation": A Cultural Perspective**

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**Abstract:** The English poetess Isabella Whitney composed her poetic elegy “*Lamentation upon the Death of William Gruffith*,” proving herself as a committed feminist spokesperson in a male-dominated society during the Renaissance age with regard to its overall cultural scene. Whitney’s vigorous poetic feminist discourse proves to be influential, and it draws readers’ attention to her poetic legacy. This paper tries to explore a number of cognitive and poetic allusions to her conscious challenges against the dominant traditions; political, social, gender, and cultural rules which control and organize male-female (man–woman) relationships in society. Also, it tries to trace how Whitney proves her expressive and rhetorical poetic capability to address a wide range of audience and to affect their attitudes. Whitney was considered a spokesperson of her gender in general, and of female writers in particular. She used to bear her gender’s concerns and interests in competition with male writers in public and private. She proved to be able to break the dominant barriers of female silence and silencing, a thing that makes her poetry be revisited and reviewed in our modern time, as people still look at women as weak-willed and inferior, with few qualities to compete with men in human societies. Accordingly, this paper also strives to shed lights on Whitney’s powerful feminist discourse in “*Lamentation*.”

**Keywords:** feminist discourse, gender conflict, societal traditions, cultural-gender rules, feminist poetics.

**المخلص:** نظمت الشاعرة الإنكليزية إيزابيلا مرثيتها الشعرية "مرثية في وفاة ويليام قروفيث"، حيث أثبتت نفسها كشاعرة نسوية ملتزمة في مجتمع ذكوري السيادة خلال عصر النهضة فيما يتعلق المشهد الثقافي العام. يثبت الخطاب النسوي الشعري القوي لوبيتي أنه مؤثر ويلفت انتباه القراء إلى إرثها الشعري. تحاول هذه الدراسة استكشاف عدد من التلميحات المعرفية والشعرية لتحديات الشاعرة الواعية حول التقاليد السائدة؛ السياسية والاجتماعية والجنسية والقواعد الثقافية التي تحكم وتنظم العلاقات بين الذكور والإناث (الرجل والمرأة) في المجتمع. كما تحاول الدراسة

تتبع كيف تبرهن الشاعرة على قدرتها التعبيرية الشعرية والبلاغية في مخاطبة عدد كبير من جمهور القراء وتؤثر في مواقفهم. واعتبرت الشاعرة المتحدث باسم جنسها بشكل عام، والكاتبات على وجه الخصوص. اعتادت الشاعرة أن تحمل اهتمامات جنسها ومصالحه في مناقشة الكتاب الذكور في المستويين العام والخاص. كما أنها أثبتت قدرتها على كسر الحواجز السائدة التي تتسبب في صمت أنثى وإسكاتهما، الأمر الذي يجعل شعرها مجال اعتبار وإعادة نظر في عصرنا الحديث، لأن الناس لا تزال تنتظر للمرأة بوصفها ضعيفة الإرادة وتحتل مرتبة أدنى، ولها صفات محدودة للتنافس مع الرجال في المجتمعات الإنسانية. وبناء عليه، فإن هذه الدراسة تسعى أيضا لتسليط الأضواء على الخطاب النسوي القوي لوييتي في قصيدة "مرثية".

## **Introduction**

Renaissance Literature in England includes powerful texts of well-known women writers, such as Isabella Whitney among others, that have been reappraised or analyzed in the light of different modern ideologies related to social and gender issues. Women writings in this period have commonalities in representations of alternative cultural and gender attitudes that compete with the dominant patriarchal, masculine culture. This sort of male-dominant culture, through its social conventions, has challenged renaissance women writers to freely and publicly participate in the political, religious, and cultural discussions, discourses and debates (Stevenson, 2001: xl). Consequently, such women seek to find different and innovative ways to intervene and debate so that they can express their implicit and explicit thoughts and feelings.

Definitely, Isabella Whitney comes first and offers a striking example of these women writers who write a variety of poems in which they construct their own feminist discourse as a means of expressing concerns for women's lack of social and economic power and empowerment. Isabella adopts a strong feminist poetic discourse in all her poems, in which she tries to show women's perseverance against their social and political challenges and difficulties, overcoming them and getting salvation. This feminist discourse entails a number of assumptions. First, there must be a critical perception of and reaction to patriarchy, often articulated through the struggle of a victim or rebel who must face a patriarchal institution. Second, it has a sort of sensitivity to the inequities of sexism allied with an acceptance of women and understanding of the choices open to them. Third, there should be "a metamorphosis leading to female victory in feminist

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utopia," or a stasis, signifying the failure to eliminate sexism. Last, it should include a style spiced with the "acrimony" of feminist discourse (Phillips, 2007:233). Accordingly, Isabella tries to refute the absolute superiority of men over women. She challenges the patriarchal position that has been used to justify and maintain "the male monopoly" of economic, political, and social powers and to keep women powerless and male-subjugated (Tyson, 1999:84).

#### Whitney's "Lamentation" and the Feminist Discourse

Examining Isabella's poem "Lamentation" (1578) from a feminist perspective allows a greater insight into the complexities of Whitney's psyche and a greater appreciation for the independence of her gender spirit. Feminist discourse entails describing female experiences diachronically and maintains different "understanding of and renegotiation with the various cultural and economic forces that shape and limit women's experience". (Chakravarty, 2007:98). In this age, as women and men continue to redefine the standards of moral and proper behavior for both genders, J. L. Bartlett points out that

"the will is a peculiar genre for Renaissance women.  
Legacy prose is a strangely performative and self-  
constituting gesture dependent upon the erasure of the  
subject....written in the present tense, imagined as  
being enacted in the future and authorized by a past  
voice...[both] are strangely present and absent"  
(Bartlett, 2000:web)

This means that women writers strive to prove themselves as a unique voice in male-dominant societies by writing poems and prose that bear their own thoughts, visions and matters.

In fact, Whitney explores different volatile issues of social and political morality and gender equality, while protesting against society's devaluation of her own non-marital friendship with William Gruffith in "Lamentation" (1578). In this poem, we read Whitney's creative resistance to the hostility and unfair constraints that she encounters in mourning her close friend's death. In this regard, Randall Martin points out that Whitney – like many other Elizabethan women- suffer from "various social constraints" that confine and frustrate women as human figures in societies (Martin, 1997:1). This dilemma that women suffer from diachronically is familiar to

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Whitney's, who knows the nature of real "domestic chores," where her writings display familiarity with the "boisterous commercial" and material life (Gregerson, 2007:205). I think Whitney publicizes her views poetically to prove her feminine human self in man-dominated milieu. She expresses her own natural beliefs regarding women's right of thinking and expression as human beings not as commodities or sources of joy and pleasure.

Whitney's feminist discourse is outstanding and influential in the way she shapes her gender self as an independent and free-thinking female writer by establishing her gender identity through authorship and readership. Constance Jordan refers to feminist voice as a way for female writers tended to expose the "wretched condition of women as the consequences of the moral perversion of men" (Jordan, 1990:9). This is implied in Whitney's "*Lamentation*":

You ladies all, that pass not for no pain  
But have your lovers lodged in your laps

.....

Perhaps yourselves shall feel such careful claps.

(*Lamentation*, L.25-28)

These lines show how women in Whitney's time suffered the strokes of misfortune and pains of the imposed social rules and constraints. Gregerson asserts that Whitney writes in "the syntax of human affairs as natively as in poetic lines." This task signifies her own social and gender consciousness about "the complexities of common cultural references and private divides," the process by which the self discovers its own nature (Gregerson, 2007:216). The poetess identifies with the classical women whom she mentions and shows her awareness of the passivity expected of women and of the double standard that disadvantages women. Laurie Ellinghuasen bases Whitney's "*Lamentation*" on a dynamic tense conflict between the poverty of the single life and the confusing comforts of domesticity. Laurie adds that Whitney frames her writing as pure necessity to deploy "cultural discourses and locating oneself in the spaces in between" (Ellinghuasen, 2005:1).

Furthermore, while "*Lamentation*" identifies with Heroids's typical representation of single "bereft women", Whitney adapts it to the death of her close friend and lover, Gruffith. (Jones, 1986:78). Here,

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woman is victimized not only by the personal treachery of one man but by death itself. This death is a universal subject matter where female writers compete with male writers in depicting their internal feelings and emotions in public, Whitney says, "Each man doth moan when faithful friends be dead/And paint them as well as wits do serve" (L. 7-8).

Seemingly, Whitney's friend's death forces her to manage the depth of her emotional reliance on him and the "loss of his validation of her inner life" (Wall, 1991:39). Revolting against the established social institutions and powers, Whitney publicly and overtly expresses her obsessive internalized sadness and grief, "For why my heart contains as many woes/As ever Hector did amongst his foes" (L. 5-6). Here Whitney evokes a mythical figure, Hector who is a reliable persona of her now-dead friend and who is tricked by Minerva and whose "extremity and pathos," of suffering confirmed his heroism (Martin, 1997:303). By comparison, Whitney suggests that despite the liability of her gender, she seeks fame and courage from the same kind of self-empowering passion on different occasions. This is a cultural and religious matter where women look differently to their positions in communities. Some societies grant women larger space of practicing and having roles on various levels, to reshape their female identity "within the terms of her own cultural context" (Chakravarty, 2007:103).

Throughout "*Lamentation*," Whitney tries to release her pains and legitimize her position as a female writer with loud poetic feminist voice,

"And drinke vp all my sorrow secretly,  
And as I can, I will abide the rest.  
And sith I dare not mourne to open showe,  
With secret sighes and teares my hart shall flow. (L. 23-25)

Here, Whitney publicly expresses her internalized sorrows and frustration out of her sense of dignity and chastity. In this respect, Elaine V. Beiu views Whitney's realistically poetic journey as an "insistent coupling of women's learning with feminine virtues" which include chastity, obedience, and silence, and which was partly an attempt to control educated women's involvement in the public sphere (Beiu, 1990:249).

Furthermore, Whitney uses the poem to publicize her feelings, and thereby to emphasize her social and gender identity. Whitney seems to fall victim of her society's engendered traditional gender norms and roles, yet she does not submit to these conformist criteria. She develops her own poetic discourse and paves the way for women writers to engage in publicizing their feelings, thoughts and visions. Bartlett views Whitney's feminist discourse in her poetics as "contemporary patriarchal opinion concerning the proper end of women's education." Yet, the poetess considers her poetic discourse as "a fall into poetry" that allows readers to "reconstitute the power of her poetic voice" (Bartlett, 2000:web). Whitney depicts the social customs which deny women's right of showing their intense public grief for men who are neither their husbands nor family relatives:

Yet hurtful eyes do bid me cast away  
In open show this careful black attire  
Because it would my secret love bewray  
And pay my pite with hatred for my hire (L. 19-22)

Clearly, the speaker here feels that if she is married to her lover, her love and grief will be taken more seriously by others. Yet, Whitney tries to break the traditional gender stereotypes that are relatively hegemonic in human societies. Women writers have to challenge the dominant social constraints and rules that forbid them from expressing themselves by legitimate, natural, and divine laws, "the feminists who defended women in the earlier half of the sixteenth century had initially to engage and refute those authorities who by invoking absolute truths maintained that woman was not fully a human being-not, a fully human as man" (Jordan, 1990:132). This internalized view is still valid in most societies where people are severely stuck to various traditional and religious principles and attitudes. Nevertheless, nowadays societies are able to recognize women's rights and roles in establishing their people's national, cultural and societal identities. Thus, Whitney takes the initiative and publicizes her own beliefs and feelings; she announces herself as competent to male writers. She also represents a universal female experience and raises her gender identity as "inseparable from religion, nationality, class and ethnicity" (Chakravarty, 2007:144).

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However, Whitney in "*Lamentation*" seems determined to defend her right to grieve for and honor her friend, Gruffith. This devotion took Whitney to another domain which inspires introducing several "conciliatory gestures" to lessen the resistance of male readers towards a female author (Jones, 1986:79). Whitney says in the opening lines of "*Lamentation*,"

With poets Pen I do not press to write,  
Minerva's mate I do not boast to be,  
Parnassus mount (I speak it for no spite)  
Can cure my cursed cares. (L. 1-4)

Here, Whitney seems hopeless, depressed, weak and frustrated as a result of her tense fears of fragmentation and isolation in society. These lines also signify "self-disabling gestures" and "denial of artistic ambition" associated with the "modesty topos". These gestures are employed by both male and female writers, but for women modesty is never merely a "dispensable convention" (Martin, 1997:303). As a result, these self-disabling hints, I think, serve to construct a sense of traditional gender system and discourse that still dominate the life style of a number of societies all over the world where extremist views prevail. In this way, the poetess explores "the limits and possibilities of women's identity." (Chakravarty, 2007:111). Then, Whitney shifts her discourse that seems feminist; from a male audience to a female one:

You ladies all, that pass not for no pain  
But have your lovers lodged in your laps,  
I crave your aids to help me mourn amain. (L. 25-27)

In this feminist discourse, Whitney distinguishes her voice in a masculine-dominant milieu, emphasizing her feminist identity and sincerity through publicizing her beliefs and ideas.

Furthermore, Whitney begins to challenge the dominant customs of the contemporary gender discourse and to promote herself as the "authentic custodian" of Gruffith's memory (Martin, 1997:5). It means that Whitney breaks the barriers and invades the arena of male-dominant discourse without fears or worries. Similarly, M. L. Stapleton reads Whitney as a poetess who offers "an example of thinking, feeling, emoting woman" and shows how a poetical woman's voice sounds to readers of different social and intellectual

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classes. Whitney's brave style and poetic method grant her a prominent position in the renaissance period and makes her a pioneer feminist voice that other women writers follow thereafter (Stapleton, 2008:491). Also, women writers such as Whitney have succeeded to reshape themselves with words raising a passionate, female voice that is never controlled by a male masculine power. It seems that she does so by relying on her distinguished wit and overt intellectual power, and on her high self-confidence:

And paint them out as well as wits do serve  
But I, a maid, am forced to use my head

.....

Wits wants to will; no skill I have (L. 8-11)

Clearly, Whitney recognizes and tries courageously to face the patriarchal forces that "undermine women's self-confidence and assertiveness", and she uses her wit and intellect to change her audience's belief that women were "naturally self-effecting and submissive" (Tyson, 1999:85). It seems that wit and education grant women an advantage that men used to enjoy, thus, women should strengthen their social and gender rank in society by having both qualities of wit and education. Thus, Whitney refuses the stereotypical views that show "the process of being defined and controlled by external forces." (Chakravarty, 2007:62). This is manifested in Whitney's poetic discourse when she feels superior competence in speaking for Gruffith and asserts the value of her own feeling and judgment,

Wherfore I doo attempt so much the more  
By this good hope to shew my slender arte,  
And mourne I must,  
What fretting force doo holde eche heauy hart;  
But now I see that *Gruffithes* greedy graue  
Doth make mee feeble the fits which louers haue.(l.67-72).

These lines suggest that "*Lamentation*" is a "protest by an inspiring female author" against the privileged male-dominant authorship (Wall, 1991:48). Also, Whitney presents another example of her challenge to the dominant patriarchal decorum in Renaissance Literature. For example, she plays with the language and sings of colors in "*Lamentation*":

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For William white, for Gruffith green, I wore,  
And red long since did serve to please my mind;  
Now black, I wear, of me not used before;  
In lieu of love, alas, this loss I find.  
Now must I leave both white and green and red,  
And wail my friend who is but lately dead. (L. 13-17)

Thus, Whitney evokes codes of colors; each signifies a meaning and association. For example, white signifies devotion, innocence, chastity, and purity, and green signifies love, joy, rebirth, and life. Assimilated together, both colors suggest youthfulness, virtue, and vivacity. Similarly, red color signifies courage, passion, and love, but black refers to mourning, grief, and constancy. This set of poetic color images and codes enables Whitney to express her themes of gender equality and female position in human societies. Further, Peter Stallybrass interprets the poetess's use of such colors as a maneuver functioning as "a blazon" that evokes the poetic devices in "heraldic color-symbolism-modesty" as in the patriarchal model (Stallybrass, 1986:127). It is then Whitney's poetic method of using realistic motifs and images to build her own poetic feminist discourse that challenges male voice. This realistic poetic method grants Whitney control over a stronger tone which appeals to readers of different genders in different societies (Gregerson, 2007:209).

In fact, women writers perceive the problems inherent in joining public discourse and devote considerable attention to the subject of women writing poetry about political, historical, and social ideas. By the same token, Whitney refuses to be a male subject or commodity,

My mournful Muse, good Ladies, take in worth,  
And spare to speak the worst, but judge the best;  
For this is all that I dare publish forth;  
The rest recorded is within my breast, (L. 73-76)

According to these lines, Whitney defies the powers of the male and calls women to challenge such powers by any means, even by writing and expression. Therefore, she maintains her feminine discourse and poetic voice in competition with male poetic discourse. Furthermore, such an impression strikingly distinguishes the poetess as "a proto-feminist single girl, pursuing an exciting bohemian life through verse" (Bartlett, 2000:web). In the following stanza, Whitney

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expresses her gender sufferings and complaints of such social restrictions and rules that forbid females from wearing mourning clothes if the dead is not a close relative:

Yet hurtful eyes bid me cast away  
In open show this careful black attire  
Because it would my secret love bewray  
And pay my pate with hatred for my hire  
Though outwardly I dare not wear the same. (L. 19-23)

Here, the implication of this social standard is that "deep male-female love" has no legitimacy outside the patriarchal governed marriage or kinship ties (Wall, 1991:56). This set of imagery colors signifies a mix of passion, devotion, and chastity. Representing her gender and age, Whitney invents this symbolic value so that she can defy and avoid the society's intended suppression of her independent display of desire and inner feelings as a feminist voice (Stallybrass, 1986:131).

Despite the dominant cultural male-biased conditions and in response to the prohibitions on women's public discourse, Whitney includes elaborate "self-justifications and creates a personae," designed to mediate the conflict between her roles in the domestic and public spheres (Beiun, 1990:251). Similarly, in her poetics, Whitney reshapes her "feminine self," in which she "holds a sword, never a pen, and no paper graces her mysterious lap" to depict the battle where she defeats her rival male writers and frees and publicizes her gender self among them (Stapleton, 2008:509). Accordingly, to neutralize the social prejudices against authorship and possession, Whitney invents other personas to express her relationship with Gruffith. This impression indicates that Whitney employs mythical allusions to talk about her gender matters,

My phrase doth serve but rudely to recite  
How lover's loss doth pinch me all this while,  
Who was as pressed to die for Gruffith's sake  
As Damon did for Pythias undertake. (L. 32-36)

Whitney compares herself to both Damon and Pythias in terms of intimate friendship, love and altruism. She also summarizes her fears of publicizing her emotions, sentiments and concerns in her own feminist poetics. This technique enables the female-feminist voice to

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feel free to express her deep emotions and affection towards Gruffith. In other words, Whitney employs Damon and Pythias to refer to her intimate friendship and integrity not in a masculine tone, but in a feminist tone, projecting the true devotion and loyalty of both mythical Greek lovers on her poetics. Damon and Pythias are lovers of "truth and integrity" and in all the city of Syracuse they can find no one who upholds these values so well as each other (Asimov, 1969:77). This knowledge adds power to Whitney in her poetic feminist discourse. Mythical allusions create an intertextuality that allows the poetess to sustain and publicize her feminist perspective and to engender her feminist discourse in a dominant patriarchal culture. Whitney's "Lamentation" is a crucible where she interprets her friend's death as "a kind of social death." (Gregerson, 2007:210). Thus, the poetess aspires to foreground her poetic feminist discourse in a public sense so that readers would identify with her and show sympathy to her thematic case.

Clearly, Whitney's "Lamentation" grants considerable space which readers can recognize as "belonging to the soul," with elaborate meditations on mortality, lost love, lost chances, and regret, where she engenders a female poetic legacy (Gregerson, 2007:205). Putting in mind Whitney's striking poetic legacy, Roxanne Harde says that Whitney is able to examine how women have tried to "reframe their personal experiences into new and meaningful patterns," through allowing insight into a broad range of women's experience and their distinct ways of seeing and interpreting the world (Harde, 2006:64). In this light, Whitney sustains a female subjective discourse that shows women experiences in human societies.

Furthermore, Whitney seems to identify with her gender selves and seeks self-authorizing passion as a female writer with a powerful feminist tone:

So live I shall, when death hath spit her spite  
And lady fame will spread my praise, I know  
And Cupid's knights will never cease to write  
And cause my name through Europe for to flow  
And they that know what Cupid can prevail  
Will bless the ship that floats with such a sail. (L,85-90)

Projecting herself into these lines, Whitney strikingly announces her feminine identity as a unique stereotype in the current modern age.

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In this way, Whitney seems to bypass the cultural barriers that prevent her successful determination to publish and cast her feelings. This rebel will "validate her emblemized self-display" in terms of classical heroes known for similar acts of suffering and resistance (Martin, 1997:8). In her poetic method, Whitney insists on displaying her feminist self or womanist self on any occasion that seems suitable to utter her feeling and ideas of any sort.

Needless to say, Whitney records her challenge to traditional gender roles, intertextualizing her poem with the story of Admetus and Alcest where Alcest is told by an oracle that her husband can only be saved if someone will take his place (Asimov, 1969:82). Although, Alcest killed herself to save her husband, Admetus asked Hercules to bring her back from the underworld,

As once they did for god Admetus' sake;  
Or change him else into flower to wear,  
As erst they did transform Narcissus fair.  
So should they possess my former friend,  
Restored to life, as Alcest was from hell. (L. 106-110)

Here, Whitney uses a mythical-feminist persona so that she could identify with the "self-sacrificing Alcest," salvaging Gruffith's reputation and maintaining their intimacy, thus, rescuing herself and Gruffith from "cultural and literary oblivion" (Martin, 1997:309). Such intertextuality also proves Whitney's devotion and love to Gruffith despite that they were close friends and not husband and wife. In this manner, Whitney establishes an early fresh feminist discourse to challenge the male-dominant one. Beiun states that Whitney's poem copes with the problems of female public discourses not by assuming any voice, genre, or position in competition with any male precursor, rather, their "multivocal personae" seem to be familiar and unfamiliar, "repetitive and revisionary, and supportive and critical of male texts" (Beiun, 1990:267). It means that Whitney keeps bringing her knowledge into the realm of social or political action despite the dominant male/masculine culture,

And Lady *Fame* will spread my prays, I know,  
And *Cupids* Knights will never cease to write  
And cause my name through *Europe* for to flow:  
And they that know what *Cupid* can prevail. (L. 86-89)

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These lines indicate that women writers are forced to define themselves within that available male-dominant culture as they lack the supportive environment of either an underground network or a feminist movement that takes the initiative to defend women's rights and freedoms. Critics comment on such women writers endeavors to publicize their rights and fight for them by means of authorship and expression. In this regard, Harde points out that female writers' wide awareness of the problems of "essentialist thought" strengthens women's claims about both the essence of woman in society and the universality of women's experiences, adding that feminist discourse includes women's creative writing both to represent the power women gain from enriched experiences and to reflect women's experience of suffering and challenging (Harde, 2006:60). In such a way, Whitney portrays her ideas to publicize her feminist and gender self despite the harsh and tyrant masculine institutions that deprive women of their rights of expression and thinking,

You Ladies all, that pass not for no pain,  
But have your lovers lodged in your laps,  
I crave your aids to help me mourn amine;  
Perhaps your selves shall feel such careful claps,  
Which God forbid that any Lady taste,  
Who shall by me but only learn to waste (L.25-30).

However, as most women were not solely obvious, they found their connections with other male writers, and their literary educations arose from their relationships with their lovers. Harde also argues that feminist discourse is well written with careful and deliberate rhetorical strategies, adding that this feminist discourse is both a response to its call and part of their rhetoric (Harde, 2006:66). Just as Whitney continually records her physical and spiritual dilemma, out of her sense of social and intellectual exclusion and sin, she develops both her experience of frustration and purgation. Describing her earliest phase of ignorance, Whitney articulates a thoroughly humanist idea of what an education might do to correct her merely self-referential knowledge and to expand the limits of reason and imagination,

Wherefore I do attempt so much the more  
By this good hope to show my slender arte,  
And mourn I must (who, never marked before),

What fretting force do hold each heavy hart (L.67-70).

It seems that early women's literature, Whitney's for example, has enriched feminist thought and discourse, paving the way for more female writers to express their thoughts and visions freely and providing more interpretive chances for public audience.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, Whitney succeeds in establishing her own feminist discourse by breaking the social barriers and the masculine rules and publicizing her own thoughts. She lets audience, both genders, read about her protest against society's devaluation of her non-marital friendship with Gruffith. She also creatively resists the public hostility she encounters in mourning his death. Throughout "*Lamentation*," Whitney maintains a powerful and distinguished women voice and feminist discourse to express herself and raise the many questions about female's position not only in the Renaissance England society of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century literature, but also all over the world in nowadays societies. As a woman feminist, Whitney seems to play a submissive role, as the opening lines of the poem suggest, "With Poets pen I do not preach to write,/ *Minerva's* mate I do not boast to bee, For why my hart contains as many woes/As ever *Hector* did amongst his foes" (1-6). However, she is resolved not to devaluate either her own creative disposition or the emotional and perhaps spiritual dimensions of her friendship with Gruffith. Whitney writes "*Lamentation*" to "negotiate prevailing social rules and economic limits in order to arrive at some kind of self-realization and determination" (Chakravarty, 2007:164). In this light, Whitney challenges the masculine rules and domination and publicizes her female feelings and words. She is the representative of her gender and age –and may be nowadays' age- in leading women to express themselves without fears and to publicize their views and feelings on different occasions and ceremonials. She paved the poetic path for more female voices and pens to have their own collective self in the world of masculinity and patriarchy. It also seems that women writers will not stop publicizing their rights and freedoms in the current modern age, where social and political rules and institutions are changing promptly and as long as there are feelings of injustices, oppression, frustration and being marginalized.

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N.B. All verse quotations from Isabella's "*Lamentation*" are taken from Randall Martin's book: *Women Writers in Renaissance England*.