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The Representation of Race and Gender in Victorian Literature

Abstract:

Victorian literature, a product of the British Empire's height, reflects the complex interplay of race and gender during that era. This dissertation explores how Victorian authors portrayed race and gender, analyzing both the perpetuation of dominant ideologies and potential subversions. Through close readings of key texts and historical context, it examines how these representations were shaped by colonialism, social norms, and emerging feminist movements.

Chapter 1: Introduction

- Briefly introduce Victorian literature and the historical context of the British Empire.
- Highlight the evolving concepts of race and gender in the 19th century.
- State the research question: How did Victorian literature represent race and gender, and how do these representations reflect and challenge the social norms of the time?
- Outline the dissertation structure.



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Chapter 2: Literature Review

- Review existing scholarship on race in Victorian literature, including Orientalism, the trope of the "noble savage," and representations of slavery and colonialism.
- Analyze the development of feminist thought in Victorian literature, focusing on the "domestic angel" ideal, the "New Woman," and the limitations placed on women.
- Discuss how scholars have explored the intersection of race and gender, examining concepts like "white femininity" and the experiences of women in colonized spaces.
- Identify gaps in the existing research and how this dissertation aims to contribute.

Chapter 3: Methodology

- Explain the chosen approach (e.g., thematic analysis, historical materialism, feminist critique) and its suitability for the research question.
- Select a range of Victorian texts representing diverse genres and perspectives (e.g., novels, poems, travelogues).
- Detail the close reading process, focusing on textual analysis of character portrayals, narrative structures, and language use.
- Consider incorporating secondary sources from historical and cultural studies to contextualize the literary representations.

Chapter 4: Representing Race

- Analyze how specific Victorian texts portray race, focusing on dominant ideologies and potential challenges.



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- Examine the treatment of colonized people, the construction of racial hierarchies, and the anxieties surrounding "miscegenation."
- Explore representations of British identity in relation to race and empire, considering concepts of national superiority and civilizing missions.

Chapter 5: Representing Gender

- Analyze how Victorian literature portrays gender roles and expectations for women and men.
- Examine the domestic sphere and the "cult of true womanhood," exploring limitations placed on female agency and expression.
- Discuss the emergence of the "New Woman" figure and how it challenged traditional gender norms.
- Consider the experiences of women of color within the broader Victorian framework of gender representation.

Chapter 6: Intersectionality

- Analyze how race and gender intersect in Victorian literature, creating complex experiences for characters.
- Explore how the limitations placed on women were often compounded by their race or social class.
- Discuss potential subversions of dominant ideologies by Victorian authors who challenged the status quo.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

- Summarize the key findings on the representation of race and gender in Victorian literature.



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- Discuss the ongoing relevance of this topic for understanding power dynamics, colonialism, and feminist thought.
- Offer suggestions for future research that explores this topic further or delves into specific under-represented voices.

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