

# Feminism



- A short view of feminism:
  - One of the most important movements of the past two centuries- **politics** and **thought**.
  - The relationship between the sexes is one of **inequality** or **oppression**.
  - **Socialist feminism** explain the **inequality** of the sexes in terms of the **social relations**.
  - It is customary to divide the history of feminism into '**First**', '**Second**' and '**Third wave**'
    - Each period signalling a different era in the struggle to attain **equality** between sexes.
  - its origins in the **late eighteenth century**.
  - It is primarily a **social movement** for the **emancipation** of women.

- The term **feminism**:
  - The first recorded use of the **French *feminisme*** dates from the **1830s**,
  - The term is usually agreed to have been coined by the **utopian socialist Charles Fourier (1772-1837)**.
    - **Fourier**: the degree of **women's emancipation** was the **measure** of the **emancipation of society** as a whole.
  - **Feminism** was use in English by **1851**,
    - But became much more widely used in the 1890s when it becomes synonyms with **'advocacy of women's rights'**

- **Emergence of feminism:**
  - **Christine de Pisan's *Book of the City of Ladies*** (14<sup>th</sup> century) is an early example of feminist thought.
  - Most historians would agree that **modern feminism** first emerges in the wake of the **American and French Revolution** of the late **18<sup>th</sup>** century.
  - Olympe de Gouges published a ***Declaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*** (**Declaration of the rights of woman and the female citizen**) - **1791**.
  - Mary Wollstonecraft's ***Vindication of the Rights of Women*** – **1792**
    - Wollstonecraft argued that **women were slaves of men**
    - Married women are described as birds '**confined to their cages**'
    - Also first describe **marriage** as a form of **legal prostitution**.

- Emergence of **feminism**:
  - Mary Wollstonecraft's ***Vindication of the Rights of Women*** – **1792**
    - It was written at the height of the **French Revolution**.
    - She criticises '**Patriarchal Society**'
      - Limits women's rights
      - Opportunity for education
      - Self-expression
      - Economic independence
    - Wollstonecraft's solution was **better education** for young women.

- **Modern feminism:**

- Since 1960s, modern feminism is distinguished from its precursors by having been forged in stable notions of **gender, sexuality**, and even the category of **‘woman’**.
- Connections of **gender** with **class** and **race, power structures, the semiotic codes** and **construction of subjectivity**.

- **Modern feminism:**
  - Notable Works of Feminism:
    - *The Feminine Mystique*
    - *Thinking About Woman*
    - *Sexual Politics*
    - *The Female Eunuch*
    - *The Dialectic of Sex*
    - *The Female Imagination*
    - *Literary Women*
    - *The Madwoman in the Attic*
    - *A Literature of their own*
    - *In search of Our Mother's Gardens*
    - *Toward a Black Feminist Criticism*

- **Modern feminism:**
  - Notable Works of Feminism:
    - ***Women: The Longest Revolution***
    - ***Women's Estate***
    - ***Psychoanalysis and Feminism***
    - ***Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis***
    - ***Feminist Criticism and Social Change***
    - ***Revolution in Poetic Language***
    - ***The Laugh of the Medusa***

- The 'women's movement' of the 1960s was **not** the start of feminism.
  - It was **renewal** of an tradition of thought and action already possessing its classic books which had diagnosed the problem of **women's inequality** in society.
  - ***A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792)*** – Mary Wollstonecraft
    - it discusses male writers like **Milton, Pope and Rousseau.**
  - ***A Room of One's Own (1929)*** – Virginia Woolf
    - It vividly portrays the **unequal** treatment given to women seeking education and alternatives to marriage and motherhood.
  - ***Women and Labour (1911)*** – Olive Schreiner

- ***The Second Sex (1949)*** – Simon De Beauvoir
  - It has **portrayal of women** in the novels of **D.H. Lawrence**.
- **John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women (1869)***
- **Friedrich Engels's *The Origin of the Family (1884)***

- **‘Feminist’, ‘Female’ and ‘Feminine’:**
  - **Toril Moi** explains,
    - The first is **‘a political position’**
    - The second **‘a matter of biology’**
    - The third **‘a set of culturally defined characteristics’**
  - The distinction between the **second** and the **third** of these lies much of the force of feminism.
  - Set of distinctions: **‘conditioning’** and **‘socialisation’**
  - **Moi’s** essay ***The Feminist Reader***
    - Ed. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore

- The representation of women in literature, was felt to be one of most important forms of **socialisation**,
  - **Since**, it provided the role models which indicated to women.
  - It constituted acceptable versions of the '**feminine**' and legitimate feminine **goals and aspirations**.
  - The focus of interest is on the heroine's choice of **marriage partner**.
    - Which will decide her ultimate social position and determine **happiness** and **fulfilment** in life.

- In **1970s**
  - The major effort went into exposing what might be called the **mechanisms of patriarchy**.
    - It is the cultural '**mind-set**' in men and women which perpetuated sexes inequality.
    - Women were constructed.

- **Androtexts to Gynotexts**

- **Elaine Showalter** described the change in the late 1970s as a shift of attention from **androtexts** to **gynotexts**.
- **She** coined the term '**gynocritics**'
  - Meaning **the study of gynotexts**
  - **Gynocriticism** is a broad and varied field, it should be treated with caution.

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**Androtexts – Books by men**  
**Gynotexts – Books by women**  
**Gynocritics – The study of gynotexts**

- **Androtexts to Gynotexts**

- **The subjects of gynocriticism:**

- History
- Styles
- Themes
- Genres
- Structures of writing by women
- The psychodynamics of female creativity
- The **trajectory** of the individual or collective female career
- The evolution or laws of female literary tradition

- **Feminine Phase – Feminist Phase – Female Phase**

- **Elaine Showalter** detects phases in the **history of women's writings** .

Feminine Phase (1840-80) - Women writers **imitated** dominant **male artistic** norms and **aesthetic** standards.

Feminist Phase (1880-1920) - radical and **separatist** positions are maintained.

Female Phase (1920 onwards) – looked particularly at **female writing** and **female experience**.

- **1980s**

- In the 1980s, in **feminism** as in other critical approaches, the **mood** changed.

### 1. **Eclectic**

- Feminist criticism became much more **eclectic**.
- It began to draw upon the findings and approaches of other kinds of criticism – **Structuralism, Marxism** and linguistics, and so on.

### 2. **Male versions to female world**

- It switched its **focus from** attacking **male** versions of the world to exploring the nature of female world and outlook.
- **Reconstructing** the lost or suppressed records of **female experience**.

- **1980s**

- 3. New canon of Women's writing**

- Attention was switched to the **need** to construct a new canon of **women's writing** by re-writing the history of **novel** and of **poetry**
    - Neglected women writers were given new **prominence**.

- Feminist criticism since the **1970s** has been remarkable for the **wide of range of position** that exist within it.
  - **Debates** and **disagreements** have centred on **three** particular areas.
    1. The Role of theory
    2. The nature of language
    3. The value or otherwise of psychoanalysis.

## 1. Feminist Criticism and The Role of theory

- **'Anglo-American'** version of feminism has tended to be more **sceptical** about recent critical theory.
- **than** have the **'French feminists'**
  - **French feminists** have adopted and adapted a great deal of **post-structuralist and psychoanalytic criticism**.
- **'Anglo-Americans'** maintain a major interests in **traditional concepts** like **theme, motif, and characterisation**.
- **Anglo-Americans** seem to **accept** the conventions of literary realism and treat **literature as** a series of **representations of women's lives** and experience.
- **They** see the **close reading** and **explication** of individual literary texts as the major **business of feminist criticism**.

## 1. Feminist Criticism and The Role of theory

- **English feminist criticism** is often distinctly different from American.
- It tends to be '**socialist feminist**' in orientation, aligned with cultural materialism and Marxism.
- Popular books summarising feminist criticism
- **R.K. Ruthven's** *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction*.
- **Toril Moi's** *Sexual/Textual Politics*.
- **Terry Lovell's** *Consuming Fiction*.
- **Julia Swindells's** *Victorian Writing and Working Women*.
- **Cora Kaplan's** *Sea Changes: Culture and Feminism*.

### Cora Kaplan:

- An American who worked in Britain for many years.
- Member of the Marxist Feminist Literature Collective

## 1. Feminist Criticism and The Role of theory

- **Literature Teaching Politics Collective**

- A series of conferences
- An associated Journal
- Important figure:

- **Catherine Belsey**

- *The Subject of Tragedy – (1985)*
- *John Milton: Language, Gender, Power (1988)*

These are part of this same **socialist feminist British tradition.**

## 1. Feminist Criticism and The Role of theory

- **French** feminism is more overtly **theoretical**.
  - Its starting point the insights of major **post-structuralists**, especially **Lacan, Foucault and Derrida**.
  - For these feminist critics, the literary text is **never** primarily a **representation of reality**, or a **reproduction of a personal voice** expressing the minutiae of personal experience.
  - They often deal with concerns other than literature:
    - They write about **language, representation** and **psychology**.
    - Often travel through detailed treatments of major **philosophical issues**.

## 1. Feminist Criticism and The Role of theory

- The major figures on this **French** side.
- **Julia Kristeva** –
  - actually **Bulgarian**, though regarded abroad – as she has ruefully said – as a kind of embodiment of **French Intellectualism**.
- **Helene Cixous**
  - **Algerian** born
- **Luce Irigaray**

## 1. Feminist Criticism and The Role of theory

- The major figures on this **French** side.
- **Julia Kristeva**
- **Helene Cixous**
- **Luce Irigaray**

- All the three are best encountered.
- Kristeva's 1974 interview '**Woman can never be defined**'.
  - It is in ***New French Feminisms*** (Marks and De Courtivron)
- Helene Cixous's ***The Laugh of the Medusa***
- Luce Irigaray's ***The Sex Which is not One***
- Extracts from the same **Cixous** and **Irigaray** pieces are also in ***Feminisms: A Reader*** (Maggie Humm)

## 1. Feminist Criticism and The Role of theory

- The differences between ‘**Anglo-American**’ and ‘**French**’ feminisms is Toril Moi’s ***Sexual / Textual Politics***.
- Chapter ‘Imaginary gardens with real frogs in them: feminist euphoria and the Franco-American divide, 1976-1988’ by **Ann Rosalind Jones** in ***Changing Subjects: The Making of Feminist Literary Criticism*** (Greene and Kahn).

French feminists are particularly concerned with **language and psychology**.

## 2. Feminist Criticism and Language

- Virginia Woolf's *A Room of one's own* (in sections **four** and **five**) suggests that **language is gendered**.
  - When a women turns to novel writing she finds that there is '**no common sentence ready for her use**'
  - The great male novelists have written '**a natural prose, swift but not slovenly, expressive but not precious, talking their own tint without ceasing to be common property**'
- She quotes an example and says, '**That is a man's sentence**'
  - Example seems to be characterised by carefully balanced and patterned rhetorical sequences.
  - But it was a sentence **unsuited for a women's use**.

## 2. Feminist Criticism and Language

- Women writers trying to use it (**Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot**) fared badly.
- **Jane Austen rejected** it and instead ‘devised a perfectly natural, **shapely sentence proper for her own use**’.
- Though, the characteristic of a ‘**women’s sentence**’ are that the clauses are linked in loosed sequences, **rather than** carefully balanced and patterned **as in male prose**.
- The **female** writer is seen as **suffering** the **handicap** of having to use a medium (**prose** writing).
- The language is ‘**masculine**’ in this sense is developed by **Dale Spender** in the early 1980s in **her** book ***Man Made Language (1981)***.
  - It argues that language is **not a neutral medium**.

## 2. Feminist Criticism and Language

- The language is **man made** is challenged form within feminism by **Sandra Gilbert** and **Susan Guber** in the essay '**Sexual Linguistics: Gender, Language, Sexuality**', reprinted in ***The Feminist Reader***.

### ***Ecriture feminine***

***Ecriture*** = Writing

- The term is that of **French Theorist Helene Cixous** from her essay '**The Laugh of Medusa**'.
- The term is **associated** with the **feminine**, and facilitating the free play of meanings within the framework of loosened **grammatical structures**.

## 2. Feminist Criticism and Language

- Cixous essay explains:

It is impossible to define a **feminine practice** of **writing**, and this is an impossibility which will remain, for this practice can **never** be **theorized, enclosed, coded**..... It will always surpass the discourse that regulates the **phallogentric (male dominated)** system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to **philosophic- theoretical domination**. It will be conceived of by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate.

(Marks and de Courtivron, *New French Feminisms*, 1981)

## 2. Feminist Criticism and Language

- The user of **écriture féminine** seems to exist in a realm **beyond logic**.
- The user of such language is seen as a kind of perennial **freedom-fighter** in an anarchic realm of perpetual **opposition**.
- For **Cixous** this kind of **writing** is somehow uniquely the **product of female physiology**, which women must celebrate in their writing:

## 2. Feminist Criticism and Language

Women must write through their **bodies**, they must invent the **impregnable language** that will wreck partitions, **classes**, and **rhetoric, regulations** and **codes**, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word '**silence**' ..... Such is the strength of women that, sweeping away **syntax, breaking that famous thread** which acts for men as **surrogate umbilical cord**.

## 2. Feminist Criticism and Language

- ***Écriture féminine*** is by its nature transgressive, rule-transcending, intoxicated.
- It is clear that the notion as put forward by **Cixous** raises many problems.
  - The realm of the body is seen as somehow **immune** (impregnable) to **social** and gender conditioning (**rhetorics, regulations, codes**).
  - **If femininity socially constructed** that it must follow that it **differs** from one **culture** to another.

## 2. Feminist Criticism and Language

- Further expression of the notion of the ***écriture féminine*** is found in the writing of **Julia Kristeva**.
- **Kristeva** uses the terms ***symbolic*** and ***semiotic*** to designate two different **aspects of language**.
- Her essay, **‘The System and the Speaking Subject’**
  - The ***symbolic*** aspect is associated with
    - **Authority**
    - **Order**
    - **Fathers**
    - **Repression**
    - **Control**

All are so many characteristics of **fascist ideology**.

## 2. Feminist Criticism and Language

- The **symbolic** facet of **language** maintains the **fiction** that the **self** is **fixed** and **unified**.
  - A **language** with a foreclosed subject or with a **transcendental subject-ego**.
- By contrast, **semiotic** aspect of discourse is **characterized not** by **logic** and **order**.
  - Displacement
  - Slippage
  - Condensation

Much looser, more randomized way of making connections.

## 2. Feminist Criticism and Language

- **Kristeva** sees the *semiotic* as the language of poetry as opposed to prose, and examines its **operation** in the work of **specific poets**.
- Though it is linked conceptually with **feminine**, the poet who use it are not all female.
- In fact, **Kristeva's** major exemplars are male writers.

## 2. Feminist Criticism and Language

- **The symbolic** and **the semiotic** are **not** the **two** different **kinds** of language.
- They are **two** different aspects.
- The **model** is that of the **unconscious** and **conscious**.
- **Lacanian** are re-use of these notions.
- The **symbolic** is the orderly surface realm of strict distinctions and laid down **structures** through which **language works**.
- This **aspect of language** is the side **stressed** by the **structuralists**, the **Saussurean** 'network of difference'

## 2. Feminist Criticism and Language

- *Imaginary* and *Symbolic* – two realms
- The *Imaginary* realm is that of the young **child** at the **pre-linguistic, pre-Oedipal stage**.

### Important Books

- The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the politics of literary criticism
- French Feminist Theory: An introduction (2006)
- Feminist Literary Criticism (1991)
- Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader (1995)
- French Feminist Thought: A Reader (1987)

## Important Books

- No Man's Land
- The Mad Woman in the Attic
- A Literature of their Own
- The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Woman, Literature, and Thoery

### 3. Feminist Criticism and Psychoanalysis

- **Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*** in 1969 which condemns **Freud**.
  - Prime source of the **patriarchal** attitudes against which **feminists** must **fight**.
- **Julliet Mitchel's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*** in 1974.
  - This book defends **Freud**, using Millet's own terms and concepts, especially the distinction, so crucial to feminism, between **sex and gender**, the **former** being a matter of **biology**, the **latter** a **construct**, something learned **rather than 'natural'**.
  - **'One is not born a woman, rather, one becomes a woman'**
    - First sentence in Part two of ***The second Sex*** by **Simone de Beauvoir**.

### 3. Feminist Criticism and Psychoanalysis

- **Mitchell's** defence of **Freud** is to argue that Freud **doesn't present** the feminine as something simply '**given and natural**'.
- **Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality***.
  - Freud shows the **process of its** being **produced** and **constructed**.
  - Female sexuality **isn't** just there '**naturally**' from the start, but is formed by early **experiences** and **adjustments**.

Envy

### 3. Feminist Criticism and Psychoanalysis

- **Sandra Gilbert** and **Susan Gubar** use the idea of ‘**Social castration**’
  - This term signifies **women’s lack of social power**.
- **Jane Gallop’s *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1982)** continues the **rehabilitation of psychoanalysis**.
  - Switch to the **Freudian to Lacanian** variety.
  - What is often **implicit** in Freud is **explicit** in **Lacan’s** systems.
    - **Phallus** is **not** the physical **biological object** but a **symbol of the powers** which goes with it.
    - **Lacan’s** writings men better advantaged **than** women.
    - **Fulness of signification**, which the **phallus** also represents in **Lacan’s work**.

### 3. Feminist Criticism and Psychoanalysis

- **Lacan's** way of writing –abstruse, playful, punning, and '**paralogical**' (beyond or above logic.)
- **His** writing seems to embody the '**feminine**' or '**semiotic**' aspect of language, **rather than** the '**masculine**' or '**symbolic**' aspect.

### 3. Feminist Criticism and Psychoanalysis

- Another rehabilitation of **Freud** is the **British** critic **Jacqueline Rose**
  - ***The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*** is an example of an applied **feminist-psychoanalytic approach**.
- Rose's project is to combine the insights of **feminism, psychoanalysis and politics**.
- **She** is joint **editor**, with **Juliet Mitchell**, of ***Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*** (1982).
- The defence of **Freud and Lacan** has been more favourably received by **French and British** feminists **than by Americans**.

### 3. Feminist Criticism and Psychoanalysis

- Elain Showalter's essay about **Ophelia** is dismissive of Lacan.
- **Jerry Aline Flieger** (an American) contributor to ***Changing Subjects: The Making of Feminist Literary Criticism*** (Greene and Khan)
  - She sounds a note of scepticism when she writes:

I was fascinated and troubled by Lacan's characterization of the **phallus** as signifier of signifiers, as well as by his infamous statements '**There is no sexual relation**', '**Woman does not exist**'. Thus I was relieved and grateful when feminists such as **Jacqueline Rose** and **Jane Gallop**, in the late seventies and early eighties, performed ingenious and persuasive readings of Lacan as critic of **phallocracy**, rather than advocate.

## Wuthering Heights

- Example of feminist criticism
- ***The Madwoman in the Attic*** by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar
- ***Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontes*** by Terry Eagleton
- **Gilbert and Gubar's** strategy with **Bronte's** novel is to see it as a **female version of the male form** known as the ***Bildungsroman***

## Bildungsroman and Erziehungsroman

- These are **German terms**.
- Signifying ‘**novel of formation**’ and ‘**novel of education**’
- The subject of these novels is **the development of the protagonist’s mind and character** in the passage from **childhood** through varied experiences.
- Often through a spiritual crisis into **maturity**.
  - This process usually involves **recognition** of one’s **identity and role in the world**.
- It began in **Germany** with K.P. Moritz’s *Anton Reiser* and **Goethe’s** *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*

## Bildungsroman and Erziehungsroman



Example of other works:

- ***Jane Eyre*** by Charlotte Bronte
- ***The Mill on the Floss*** by George Eliot
- ***Great Expectations*** by Charles Dickens
- ***Of Human Bondage*** by Somerset Maughan
- ***The Magic Mountain*** by Thomas Mann

- An important subtype of the Bildungsroman is the **Kunstlerroman (artist-novel)**
- It represents the development of a **novelist** or **other artist** from **childhood** into the stage of **maturity**.
- Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*
- Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*
- James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*
- Thomas Mann's *Tonio Kroger*
- Andre Gide's *The Counterfeiters*

## Wuthering Heights



- **Gilbert and Gubar's** strategy with **Bronte's** novel is to see it as a **female version of the male form** known as the *Bildungsroman*
  - The hero's growth to **manhood** is traced, as a process of 'triumphant self-discovery'
- **Gilbert and Gubar say that** 'What Catherine, or any other girl, must learn is that she does not know her own name and therefore cannot know either who she is or whom she is destined to be'
- The process of denial involved they describe as '**social castration**'
- **Catherine** has to leave behind all her instinctive preferences, by the **Heights**, and take on an alien attitude, signified by **Thrushcross Grange**.

## Wuthering Heights



- The **Grange** is the home of '**concealment and doubleness**'.
- Gilbert and Gubar say, she must learn 'to process her own impulses, must griddle her own energies with the iron stays of 'reason'.
- Fragmentation of **her** personality.
- In this spirit of **self-denial** she agrees to marry **Edgar**.
- A complex of psycho neurotic symptoms – is almost classically associated with female **feelings of powerlessness**.

- **Lady Chatterley's Lover** by D.H. Lawrence
- **Anna Karenina** by Leo Tolstoy
- **Madame Bovary** by Gustve Flaubert
- **Fear of Flying** by Erica Jong
- **Woman on the Edge of Time** by Marge Poercy
- **The Woman's Room** by Marilyn French
- **Jane Eyre** by Charlotte Bronte
- **Wide Sargasso Sea** by Jean Rhys
- **In Search of Our Mother's Garden** by Alice Walker
- **Herland** by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

