



A Transitory Study in Feminism in Literature

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Abstract

Feminist writers belong to the majority of those whose work is centered on, or in significant relation to the major themes of the social theories, political movements, and moral philosophies. Feminist literature is fiction and nonfiction as well, which supports the feminist goals of defining, establishing and defending equal civil, political, economic and social rights for women. The beginning of mainstream feminist literary criticism is typically considered during second-wave feminism, there are multiple texts prior to that era that contributed greatly to the field. Modern feminist literary criticism finds most of its roots in the 1960s second-wave feminist movements. Feminist criticism is concerned with "...the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women" (Tyson). The extent of inequality and oppressiveness has varied greatly. All known societies have been patriarchal. We need not have to study literature in order to know about feminism. In some way or the other, the term feminism is over-rated. People who speak or write about women are blindly considered to be feminists. However, feminism is not a new term. To be back to the history, feminism movement started in the late 1500 to the early 1600 century. This commencement of feminism kick started to the women's right, like right to education, employment and also politics. Interestingly, many women writers emerged and wrote many literature works regarding the plight of women. Many feminist women writers who have contributed literature to the society wrote chivalric novels. Most of their novels had women protagonist and were based on the glory of women in the world. Feminist women writers still strive to uphold the rights of women through their works like poems and novels.

Key Words: Feminism, Feminist writers, Feminism Movement, Feminist criticism

The Three Waves of Feminism

While the roots of feminism are buried in ancient Greece, most recognize the movement by the three waves of feminism. The third being the movement in which we are currently residing. Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical, fictional, or philosophical discourse. It aims to understand the nature of gender inequality.

First, let's define feminism in general. The global idea of feminism refers to the belief that men and women deserve equality in all opportunities, treatment, respect and social rights. In general, feminists are people who try to acknowledge social inequality based on gender and stop it from continuing.

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general, feminists are people who try to acknowledge social inequality based on gender and stop it from continuing. Feminists point out that in most cultures throughout history men have received more opportunities than women have.

While this basic idea of feminism seems simple enough, many people misunderstand the goal of feminism. Some people imagine that all feminists are angry, bitter women who only want to subjugate men! Of course, this stereotype offends actual feminists. Why is there such a big difference between stereotype and reality when it comes to feminists? One of the reasons for this discrepancy might be because there are, in fact, many different, specific types of feminism. Let us cover four of those types now - radical feminism, socialist feminism, cultural feminism, and liberal feminism. Maybe you are a feminist, and you did not even know it!

Radical Feminism

Radical feminism believes in eliminating the concept of gender entirely from the society. Perhaps the stereotype of feminists that we discussed before is most closely associated with our first type of feminism, called radical feminism. Radical feminism is a movement that believes sexism is so deeply rooted in society that the only cure is to eliminate the concept of gender.

Radical feminists suggest changes, such as finding technology that will allow babies to be grown outside of a woman's body, to promote more equality between men and women. This will allow women to avoid missing work for maternity leave, which radical feminists argue is one reason women aren't promoted as quickly as men. In fact, radical feminists would argue that the entire traditional family system is sexist. Men are expected to work outside the home while women are expected to care for children and clean the house. Radical feminists note that this traditional dichotomy maintains men as economically in power over women, and therefore, the traditional family structure should be rejected.

Socialist Feminism

The second type of feminism, called socialist feminism, is slightly less extreme but still calls for major social change. Socialist feminism is a movement that calls for an end to capitalism through a socialist reformation of our economy. Basically, socialist feminism argues that capitalism strengthens and supports the sexist status quo because men are the ones who currently have power and money. Those men are more willing to share their power and money with other men, which means that women are continually given fewer opportunities and resources. This keeps women under the control of men.

In short, socialist feminism focuses on economics and politics. They might point out the fact that in the United States women are typically paid only \$0.70 for the exact same job that a man would be paid a dollar for. Why are women paid less than men for the same work? Socialist feminists point out that this difference is based on a capitalist system.



Cultural Feminism

The third type of feminism we are going to discuss is cultural feminism that points out how modern society is hurt by encouraging masculine behavior, but society would benefit by encouraging feminine behavior instead. Cultural feminism believes in encouraging feminine behavior rather than masculine behavior, but society would benefit by encouraging feminine behavior instead.

Feminist literature is fiction and nonfiction as well, which supports the feminist goals of defining, establishing and defending equal civil, political, economic and social rights for women. While the beginning of more mainstream feminist literary criticism is typically considered during second-wave feminism, there are multiple texts prior to that era that contributed greatly to the field. ... Modern feminist literary criticism finds most of its roots in the 1960s second-wave feminist movements. Feminist criticism is concerned with “...the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women” (Tyson). Basic Principles of Feminist Theory, The extent of inequality and oppressiveness has varied greatly. All known societies have been patriarchal. Patriarchy is a system in which males dominate females. All major social institutions have been characterized by male dominance. Feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social equality of sexes. This includes seeking to establish educational and professional opportunities for women that are equal to those for men. Postmodern feminism is an approach to feminist theory that incorporates postmodern and post-structuralist theory, seeing itself as moving beyond the modernist polarities of liberal feminism and radical feminism. Socialist feminism rose in the 1960s and 1970s as an offshoot of the feminist movement and New Left that focuses upon the interconnectivity of the patriarchy and capitalism. Socialist feminists argue that liberation can only be achieved by working to end both the economic and cultural sources of women’s oppression.

Wilhelmina Drucker (1847–1925) was a politician, a prolific writer and a peace activist, who fought for the vote and equal rights through political and feminist organisations she founded. In 1917–1919 her goal of women's suffrage was reached.

From Feminist Goddess Supreme (and UN Women Goodwill Ambassador) Emma Watson: “For the record, feminism by definition is: “The belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. It is the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes.”

Difference feminism was developed by feminists in the 1980s, in part as a reaction to popular liberal feminism (also known as ‘equality feminism’), which emphasized the similarities between women and men in order to argue for equal treatment for women.



The term post-feminism (alternatively rendered as post-feminism) is used to describe reactions against contradictions and absences in feminism, especially second-wave feminism and third-wave feminism.

Black feminism is a school of thought stating that sexism, class oppression, gender identity and racism are inextricably bound together. The way these concepts relate to each other is called intersectionality, a term first coined by legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989.

Cultural feminism is the ideology of a 'female nature' or 'female essence' that attempts to revalidate what they consider undervalued female attributes. It emphasizes the difference between women and men but considers that difference to be psychological, and to be culturally constructed rather than biologically innate. Cultural feminism is the view that there is a 'female nature' or 'female essence' or related attempts to revalidate attributes ascribed to femaleness. It is also used to describe theories that commend innate differences between women and men.

Commodity feminism refers to the way feminist ideas and icons are appropriated for commercial purposes, emptied of their political significance and offered back to the public in a commodified form – usually in advertising.

African feminism is a type of feminism innovated by African women that specifically addresses the conditions and needs of continental African women (African women who reside on the African continent).

The feminist movement (also known as the women's movement, or simply feminism) refers to a series of political campaigns for reforms on issues such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, equal pay, women's suffrage, sexual harassment, and sexual violence, all of which fall under the label of feminism.

Transcript of Modern v/s Traditional Feminism. ... Traditional feminism developed in the late 1800s through the early 1900s. It was a movement that sought for women to be treated as equal to men. Such political issues included women's suffrage, equal pay, equal employment opportunities, etc.

Social Perspectives of Feminist sociology is a conflict theory and theoretical perspective, which observes gender in its relation to power, both at the level of face-to-face interaction and reflexivity within a social structure at large. Focuses include sexual orientation, race, economic status, and nationality.

This is an incomplete list, which may never be able to satisfy certain standards for completeness.

Feminist literature is fiction or nonfiction, which supports the feminist goals of defining, establishing and defending equal civil, political, economic and social rights for women. It often identifies women's roles as unequal to those of men – particularly as regards status, privilege and power – and generally portrays the consequences to women, men, families, communities and societies as undesirable. We need not have to study literature in order to



know about feminism. In some way or the other, the term feminism is over-rated. People who speak or write about women are blindly considered to be feminists. However, feminism is not a new term. To be back to the history, feminism movement started in the late 1500 to the early 1600 century. This commencement of feminism kick started to the women's right, like right to education, employment and also politics. Interestingly, many women writers emerged and wrote many literature works regarding the plight of women. Many feminist women writers who have contributed literature to the society wrote chivalric novels. Most of their novels had women protagonist and were based on the glory of women in the world. Feminist women writers still strive to uphold the rights of women through their works like poems and novels.

Some of the Famous Women Feminist Authors and Writers

Mary Wollstonecraft Mary Wollstonecraft is known to be the 'Grandmom' of modern feminist writers. She is considered to be the first feminist in England which was an extremely patriotic society. Her works on feminism include; 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' published in 1792. It was a great feminist work where she stressed that 'intellect will always govern and sought'.

Emily Dickinson The famous poems by Emily Dickinson, 'Success is Counted Sweetest' and 'The bustle in a house', is said to be too strong and have a common theme of the role of women and their role in the society. Most of her work portrayed that the female perspective is of little consequence to most in a modern, patriarchal society, and traditionally the roles of women are secondary to those of men.

George Eliot George Eliot is known famously in the Victorian Era as a liberated woman. She is also considered as the role model for many women during her period. Her literary work 'Middlemarch' has a strong plea for feminist rights.

Jane Austen Who has not read Jane Austen or watched any of the movies based on her work. This female novelist has brought out strong-headed female protagonists in her novels. Be it the 'Pride and Prejudice' or 'Sense and Sensibility', she always made her female protagonist a rational thinker.

Toni Morrison In 2001, she was named one of the '30 Most Powerful Women in America' by Ladies Home Journal. Toni Morrison is an American author who wrote extensively about giving freedom to the African women. Her novel 'The Beloved' talks about the beauty of African women and the patriarchal attitude towards women.

Taslima Nasreen a former doctor, a poet, writer and a female activist, is known far and wide for her controversial works. Her book 'Lajja' fetched her fame and also fatwa. This secular woman is still on her way to fight for the rights of women in a patriarchal Bangladeshi society. **Maya Angelou** If you want to know the art of writing then you have to read Maya Angelou's 'Phenomenal Women'. This American poet has written many poems and essays on women and is also extensively known for her works related to issues like racism, identity and family. **Virginia Woolf** Whoever has read 'A Room Of One's Own', will surely get an



answer about what exactly the feminist writer tries to say in her works. Virginia Woolf, always stressed on women's freedom and also argued that women's experience, particularly in the women's movement, could be the basis for transformative social change.

When we try to discuss feminism, we study the following great contributors in the field of feminism likes of the following writers: Jane Austen, AphraBehn, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, D. H. Lawrence, Mary Leapor, Thomas Middleton, Katherine Mansfield, Olive Schreiner, William Shakespeare, John Webster, Virginia Woolf.

The article offers a very basic introduction to feminist literary theory, and a compendium of Great Writers' inspires resources that can be approached from a feminist perspective. It provides suggestions for how material on the Great Writers Inspire site can be used as a starting point for exploration of or classroom discussion about feminist approaches to literature.

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First Wave Feminism: Men's Treatment of Women

In this early stage of feminist criticism, critics consider male novelists' demeaning treatment or marginalisation of female characters. First wave feminist criticism includes books like Marry Ellman's *Thinking About Women* (1968) Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969), and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970). An example of first wave feminist literary analysis would be a critique of William Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* for Petruchio's abuse of Katherina.

Second Wave Feminism: Gyno-criticism

Elaine Showalter pioneered gyno-criticism with her book 'A Literature of Their Own' (1977). Gyno-criticism involves three major aspects. The first is the examination of female writers and their place in literary history.

The second is the consideration of the treatment of female characters in books by both male and female writers. The third and most important aspect of gyno-criticism is the discovery and exploration of a canon of literature written by women; gyno-criticism seeks to appropriate a female literary tradition. In Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own*, she proposes the following three phases of women's writing:

The 'Feminine Phase' - in the feminine phase, female writers tried to adhere to male values, writing as men, and usually did not enter into debate regarding women's place in society. Female writers often employed male pseudonyms during this period. The 'Feminist Phase' - in the feminist phase, the central theme of works by female writers was the criticism of the role of women in society and the oppression of women.

The 'Female Phase' - during the 'female phase', women writers were no longer trying to prove the legitimacy of a woman's perspective. Rather, it was assumed that the works of a



women writer were authentic and valid. The female phase lacked the anger and combative consciousness of the feminist phase.

The Madwoman Thesis

Made famous by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), the eponymous madwoman is Bertha Jenkins of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Rochester's mad wife hidden away in the attic of Thornfield Hall. Gilbert and Gubar's thesis suggests that because society forbade women from expressing themselves through creative outlets, their creative powers were channelled into psychologically self-destructive behaviour and subversive actions. A great example of the mad woman thesis in action is in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

French Feminism

French Feminism, led by critics such as Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous, and Luce Irigaray, relies heavily on Freudian psychology and the theory of penis envy (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penis_envy). French feminists postulate the existence of a separate language belonging to women that consists of loose, digressive sentences written without use of the ego.

Depictions of Women by Men

We could begin approaching *Great Writers Inspired*, by considering the range of women depicted in early English literature: from Chaucer's bawdy 'Wife of Bath' in *The Canterbury Tales* to Spenser's interminably pure Una in 'The Faerie Queene'.

How might the reign of Queen Elizabeth have dictated the way Elizabethan writers were permitted to present women? How did each male poet handle the challenge of depicting women?

By 1610, Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker's *The Roaring Girl* presented at *The Fortune* a play based on the life of Mary Frith. The heroine was a man playing a woman dressed as a man. In Dr. Emma Smith's podcast on *The Roaring Girl*, Smith breaks down both the gender issues of the play and of the real life accusations against Mary Frith.

In Dr. Emma Smith's podcast on John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, a frequent A-level set text, Smith discusses Webster's treatment of female autonomy. Placing Middleton or Webster's female characters against those of Shakespeare could be brought to bear on A-level Paper 4 on Drama or Paper 5 on Shakespeare and other pre-20th Century Texts. We can compare the works of Charlotte and Emily Bronte or Jane Austen with, for example, Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* or D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* or *Women in Love*.

Rise of the Woman Writer

With the movement from Renaissance to Restoration theatre, the depiction of women on stage changed dramatically, in no small part because women could portray women for the



first time. Dr. Abigail Williams' adapted lecture, Behn and the Restoration Theatre, discusses Behn's use and abuse of the woman on stage.

The essay 'Who is AphraBehn?', addresses the transformation of Behn into a feminist icon by later writers, especially Bloomsbury Group member Virginia Woolf in her novella/essay A Room of One's Own. Behn created an obstacle for later women writers in that her scandalous life did little to undermine the perception that women writing for money were little better than whores.

The perception of women and the literary vogue for female heroines impacted to a great extent by Samuel Richardson's Pamela. While examining a passage from Pamela and evaluate Richardson's success and failures, and look for his influence in novels with which they are more familiar, like those of Austen or the Bronte sisters. Catherine Brown's podcast on Eliot's Reception History, Dr. Brown discusses feminist criticism of Eliot's novels. In the podcast Genre and Justice, she discusses Eliot's use of women as scapegoats to illustrate the injustice of the distribution of happiness in Victorian England.

We can examine Professor Sir Richard Evans' Gresham College lecture, The Victorians: Gender and Sexuality can provide crucial background for any study of women in Victorian literature.

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