

I'm not a bot





Feminist literary criticism has profoundly impacted the study of literature since its emergence in the academic sphere over three decades ago. This comprehensive history delves into the evolution of feminist thought, tracing its roots from medieval periods to contemporary times. The book offers a meticulous exploration of protofeminist ideas and analyses the work of pioneering figures such as Wollstonecraft and Woolf. The feminist movement has led to a phenomenon known as "amnesia," where women forget their debt to critical projects that challenged patriarchal norms. This amnesia is reflected in contemporary criticism, with some journalists and commentators claiming that feminism's influence has passed, when in fact it continues to evolve. The book aims to rectify this misunderstanding by tracing the history of feminist literary criticism from its medieval roots to the present day. Consideration of patriarchal critique plays a significant role in Heather Love's analysis of queer bodies, which underpins all chapters in this book. The concept of woman as subject has undergone numerous reconfigurations throughout history, necessitating a continuous reinterpretation. In the space of the text, woman can be both defamed and defended, offering possibilities for imagining the future of the female subject. To uncover the roots of protofeminism is to delve into a rich tapestry of texts, voices, and lives that shaped feminist ideas long before they were defined. Medieval women may not have called themselves feminists, but they were acutely aware of the impact of literary works on their daily lives, as Carolyn Dinshaw notes in her essay (15). The history of women's engagement with texts goes far beyond the confines of second-wave feminism and is crucial to understanding contemporary feminist practices. This book explores this complex heritage through a combination of overview and example, acknowledging that the representation of women in literature requires a vast library of texts. The first two chapters by Carolyn Dinshaw and Helen Wilcox set the stage for pre-Enlightenment female subjectivity, revealing a site of intense literary and critical activity centered on the feminine as symbol. These debates often anticipated contemporary feminist concerns but ultimately did not straightforwardly constitute protofeminism. Despite this, historical continuities between gender and textuality are crucial to understanding medieval literature and culture. By the early modern period, women's relationship with textual culture underwent a significant shift. Helen Wilcox argues that it is possible to describe women as feminists, even if they were not explicitly termed so, due to their decision to write. This period saw an outburst of writing by women, who became active participants in literary culture, from pamphlets and poetry to devotional literature and advice books. However, their position was contested, with dominant debates circulating around their character, writing, society, and relationship to Eve's legacy. Unlicensed exploration of reading and writing practices by Dinshaw and Wilcox provides a vital mapping of women's textual encounters. Their work highlights the historical roots of literary criticism. Part I chapters then shift focus to women writers and activists from the 18th-20th centuries who challenged patriarchal norms and questioned gender prescriptions. Figures like Mary Shelley, Maria Edgeworth, and Charlotte Brontë produced unconventional texts that foreshadowed feminist concerns. Similarly, activists like Frances Power Cobbe and Millicent Garrett Fawcett created groundbreaking journalism. The symbiotic relationship between feminist politics and textual practice is exemplified through the works of Jane Austen, who defended women's education and literary forms in "Northanger Abbey." Fiction was a means for women to engage with politics in the 18th-19th centuries, as seen in American novels by Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott, and Margaret Fuller. The influence of pioneers like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Olive Schreiner, and Winifred Holtby on feminist literary criticism is significant. Mary Wollstonecraft's work, analyzed in depth by Susan Manly, anticipated second-wave feminism and attacked the authority of patriarchal figures Edmund Burke, John Milton, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Given article text here The works of Mary Wollstonecraft exposed the sentimentalisation of beauty by Burke, the idealised woman constructed by Rousseau, and the misogynistic portrayal of Eve in Milton's work. Through her detailed analysis of these texts, Wollstonecraft demonstrated a keen understanding of feminist critique. However, her influence extends beyond this; she also challenged the notion of gendered subjectivity by highlighting the fictionality of both femininity and masculinity. Her argument for the constructed nature of gender was strategic: if writing could transcend the body, then women's exclusion from public life would be unjustifiable. Wollstonecraft's portrayal of the woman writer as rational, ethical, and humane contradicts the concept of 'false sensibility'. This idea has had a lasting impact, with her work being hailed as 'the bible of the women's movement in Great Britain' over a century later. The legacy of Wollstonecraft can be seen in writers such as Maria Edgeworth and George Eliot, who were influenced by her ideas. In contrast, Virginia Woolf's groundbreaking essay A Room of One's Own has had an immense impact on feminist literary criticism, providing a modern primer for the field. Her influence extends beyond her writing to her own subjectivity, which was the subject of critical enquiry in second-wave feminism. Woolf's work offers provocative concepts such as 'thinking back through our mothers' and 'the woman's sentence'. Finally, Simone de Beauvoir's legacy is examined in this book, with her concept that 'one is not born a woman' receiving explicit articulation in her work The Second Sex. De Beauvoir's concept of gendered subjectivities has been a central focus in feminist literary criticism, challenging traditional humanist notions of identity, nature, and progress. Inspired by Beauvoir, critics such as Judith Butler have expanded on her ideas. Elizabeth Fallaize's work revises the limited understanding of Beauvoir's monumental work, exploring her analysis of myth and its impact on feminine archetypes. Fallaize examines Beauvoir's concept of myth, arguing that it was used to persuade women of their natural fate. She traces this examination across various authors, from Stendhal to Sade, revealing an ecumenical methodology that foreshadows later literary-critical movements. The Second Sex sets the stage for A History of Feminist Literary Criticism, and Beauvoir's influence can be seen throughout its pages. Bibliography: - Humm, M. (Ed.). (1992). Feminisms: A Reader. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf. - Irigaray, L. (1985). Speculum of the Other Woman. Translated by G. G. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. - Kristeva, J. (1980). Revolution in Poetic Language. Translated by M. Waller. New York: Columbia University Press. - Lorde, A. (1984). Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press. - Millett, K. 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London: Pandora. - Todd, J. (1988). Feminist Literary History. Cambridge: Polity Press. - Vogel, L. (1983). Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press. - Walker, A. (1984). In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens. London: The Women's Press. - Weedon, C. (1999). Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference. Oxford: Blackwell. References cited in the text include notable feminist scholars such as Weedon's work on feminist practice and poststructuralist theory, Wollstonecraft's influential treatise A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, and Woolf's groundbreaking texts A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas. Additionally, Zimmerman's essay 'What Has Never Been' is mentioned alongside other scholarly works featured in Greene and Kahn's collection Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism.

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