

Feminist Criticism: Feminist literary criticism helps us look at literature in a different light. It applies the philosophies and perspectives of feminism to the literature we read. There are many different kinds of feminist literary theory. Some theorists examine the language and symbols that are used and how that language and use of symbols is “gendered.” Others remind us that men and women write differently and analyze at how the gender of the author affects how literature is written. Many feminist critics look at how the characters, especially the female characters, are portrayed and ask us to consider how the portrayal of female characters “reinforces or undermines sexual stereotypes” (Lynn). Feminist literary theory also suggests that the gender of the reader often affects our response to a text. For example, feminist critics may claim that certain male writers address their readers as if they were all men and exclude the female reader.

Like feminism itself, feminist literary theory asks us to consider the relationships between men and women and their relative roles in society. Much feminist literary theory reminds us that the relationship between men and women in society is often unequal and reflects a particular patriarchal ideology. Those unequal relationships may appear in a variety of ways in the production of literature and within literary texts. Feminist theorists invite us to pay particular attention to the patterns of thought, behavior, values, and power in those relationships.

Feminist literary critics remind us that literary values, conventions, and even the production of literature, have themselves been historically shaped by men. They invite us to consider writings by women, both new and forgotten, and also ask us to consider viewing familiar literature through a feminist perspective.

We apply it by closely examining the portrayal of the characters, both female and male, the language of the text, the attitude of the author, and the relationship between the characters. We also consider the comments the author seems to be making about society as a whole.

-taken from: http://apps.carleton.edu/people/appleman/talksworkshops/workshop_handouts/rose_colored/

“. . . feminist criticism is a heterogeneous grouping of scholars, writers, linguistics, philosophers, scientists, anthropologists, psychologists, educators, and peoples from all professions and walks of life who believe that women and men are equal. As a social movement, feminist criticism highlights the various ways women, in particular, have been oppressed, suppressed, and repressed. It asks new questions of old texts. It develops and uncovers a female tradition in writing. It analyzes women writers and their works from female perspectives” (Copeland 184-186).

Gender Criticism: This approach "examines how sexual identity influences the creation and reception of literary works." Originally an offshoot of feminist movements, gender criticism today includes a number of approaches, including the so-called "masculinist" approach recently advocated by poet Robert Bly. It also takes in lesbian and gay criticism. The bulk of gender criticism, however, is feminist and takes as a central precept that the patriarchal attitudes that have dominated western thought have resulted, consciously or unconsciously, in literature "full of examined 'male-produced' assumptions." Feminist criticism attempts to correct this imbalance by analyzing and combatting such attitudes-by questioning, for example, why none of the characters in Shakespeare's play *Othello* ever challenge the right of a husband to murder a wife accused of adultery. Other goals of feminist critics include "analyzing how sexual identity influences the reader of a text" and "examin[ing] how the images of men and women in imaginative literature reflect or reject the social forces that have historically kept the sexes from achieving total equality." From a feminist vantage point you might assume that because the experiences of the sexes differ, their values and ideas differ, and therefore the way men write and read texts and the way women write and read texts also differs.

- Taken from: <http://www.charlesyoung.com/english12honors/criticalapproachestoliterature.html>

Questions to Consider

Feminist Lens:

- Is the author male or female?
- Is the text narrated by a male or female?
- What types of roles do women have in the text?
- Are the female characters the protagonists or secondary and minor characters?
- Do any stereotypical characterizations of women appear?
- What are the attitudes toward women held by the male characters?
- What is the author's attitude toward women in society?
- How does the author's culture influence his/her attitude?
- Is feminine imagery used? If so, what is the significance of such imagery?
- Do the female characters speak differently than the male characters? In your investigation, compare the frequency of speech for the male character to the frequency of speech for the female characters.

“The connections between and among women are the most feared, the most problematic, and the most potentially transforming force on the planet.” –Adrienne Rich, poet