

Feminist

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



* Feminist criticism defines a literary theory showing how women were portrayed as less valuable than men in literature throughout history. Usually called feminist literary criticism, it studies how early writings condoned the oppression of women because men dominated society. Feminist criticism also explores how women writers were taken less seriously than male authors from a historical A criticism advocating equal rights for women in a political, economic, social, psychological, personal, and aesthetic sense. Feminist Criticism is the interpretation of text as it is directed towards women or feminine characteristics. Feminist critics analyze how the literary work is influenced by a patriarchal or male dominated society. Criticism of this sort often comments upon how women are described as sub-human and thus inferior to the man. Other aspects of feminist criticism may include the analysis of how non-feminine objects or characters are described as resembling females in order to belittle them. Early Feminism * One of the earliest feminist writings is Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) in which she criticizes stereotypes of women as emotional and instinctive and argues that women should aspire to the same rationality prized by men. Wollstonecraft believed that women should enjoy social, legal, and intellectual equality with men. * John Stuart Mill's essay on the *Subjection of Women* (1869) is a defense of gender equality in which he attacks the idea that women are naturally incapable of doing things that men can do, and should, therefore, be forbidden from doing them. * First-wave feminism started in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century in the U. K and US. It focused on the promotion of equal rights for women. By the end of the nineteenth century, the focus was more on political rights,

particularly the right of women's suffrage. * The Second-wave feminism is a movement that began in the early 1960s and continues to the present. The French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir discussed many of the questions of feminism and feminists' sense of injustice in her groundbreaking book *Le Deuxi me Sexe* (The Second Sex), published in 1949. The second wave feminism is largely concerned with social and economic equality and with ending discrimination and the inequality of laws. * Feminist literary criticism is a product of the feminist movement of the 1960s. Feminist criticism of the 1960s and 1970s concerned itself with the representation of women in literature as an expression of the social norms about women and their social roles and as a means of socialization. It focused on the images of women in books by male writers to expose the patriarchal ideology and how women characters are portrayed. They try to show how male writings emphasize masculine dominance and superiority. In the 1980s, it switched its focus from attacking male representation of the women to discovering forgotten and neglected works by women. * While the French' feminists have adopted and adapted a great deal of post-structuralist and psychoanalytic criticism as the basis of much of their work, Anglo-American feminists has tended to be more skeptical about recent critical theory, and more cautious in using it. * Anglo-American feminist critics treat literature as a series of representations of women's lives and experience which can be measured and evaluated against reality. They see the close reading and explication of individual literary texts as the major business of feminist criticism. Some place emphasis on the use of historical data and non-literary material (such as diaries, memoirs, social and medical history) in understanding the literary

text. * The American critic Elaine Showalter is usually taken as the major representative of this approach, but other exemplars would be Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and Patricia Meyer Spacks.