

# Applying feminist theory to literature

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Applying Feminist Theory to Literature Schweickhart's essay is the basis for what I think is the most important issue in academic, literary feminism: finding and becoming a strong feminist reader. Granted, academia is an extremely specific subset of feminism, but if I incorporate her theme of praxis it can be applied to other areas of feminist thought and action. Schweickhart presents the idea of "feminist readings of male texts and... feminist readings of female texts" (39). It's vital to critically examine the books of the "androcentric canon" through a feminist lens. Similarly, when reading female authors it is also crucial to approach the texts with a healthy dose of skepticism; Jane Austen buys into the same gender roles and expectations that a male writer like D. H. Lawrence does. Gendering the texts by the sex of their author is not the point. Rather, it is to draw from the traditional literary canon while being aware of the need to find female texts that, by default, have been excluded from that canon. I found it crucial that Schweickhart acknowledges that we can love a book that we ourselves as a feminist condemn as sexist. If I, as a feminist reader, allow myself to enjoy novels by Hemingway, Lawrence and Fitzgerald, as I should, I also must accept the responsibility of being a "resisting reader" (42). Schweickhart almost gives me permission to enjoy the aesthetics and universal truths of what are truly great novels without feeling that I am complicit. By the fact that I am aware of the "patriarchal trappings", I maintain my role as feminist reader and critic of literature. This issue of what makes a strong feminist reader is crucial and it is not someone who rejects misogynistic texts, male or female, but someone who reads and enjoys this literature while resisting the misogyny and patriarchal themes through close feminist interpretation

and criticism. Because being an intelligent and informed feminist reader is so important to me, I would like to hone my skills with both the texts that I must resist and those that are already feminist. I want to do this by closing the gap between the very theoretical articles we've been reading and the literature itself. I think it's important to acknowledge that the true merit of theory is in its applications to real life, in this case literature. Applying feminist theory to actual novels makes it relevant for me and gives me an opportunity to practice my feminist reading. Theory becomes irrelevant and frustrating when left in the abstract. This project would entail addressing the feminist theory that is based or directly related to texts like Spivak, the feminist theory concerning female authorship like Cixous, and the theory about feminism in general. I would use the theory we've read already as well as other articles (Gilbert and Gubar, Showalter, Kate Millet, Woolf, Heilbrun, Beauvoir, Greer, Wollstonecraft etc.) and apply them to a few different novels. One would be a text that requires a resisting reader (Hemingway, Lawrence, James etc.) and one that is already considered feminist (Bronte, Lessing, Parker etc.). I would be able to improve my feminist readership and at the same time put very conceptual theory into practice.