

# The history of miss betsy thoughtless

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



As both theories of Feminism and Historicism are deemed to be essential parts of this paper, they should be explained. Elaine Showalter argues that women's writing was underestimated by the male commentators. She separated feminist criticism into two particular assortments. The first is entitled 'women as reader' or 'Feminist Critique.' Feminist Critique concentrates on women as a peruser who is using up the male-delivered literature. It is a method for excoriating in which a female peruser changes the given content, arousing it to the noteworthiness of sexual codes. They are worried about the photographs and stereotypes of women in writing, the exclusion of as well as misguided judgments about women in criticism and also the control of the female viewers. The second is called 'woman as writer' which stands for women as the maker of printed meaning. However, Feminist Critique is male-oriented. We eventually learn only what men thought the opposite sex was experiencing and feeling. Showalter's Gynocriticism came to build a female concept for the study of women's literature hinge on female circumstance instead of readjusting male theories. She argues that women have their own personal style of writing. (see Showalter 216-7)

In her book, *A Literature of their Own*, Showalter states three phases of female writing namely "Feminine," "Feminist" and "Female" phases. "Feminine" occurs from 1840 to 1880. She announces that this stage is portrayed by women in an exertion so as to achieve highbrow equality with the manly culture. It applied an unpredictable weight on the story, tone, style, structure, and portrayal. The second stage is called "Feminist." It occurs from 1880 to 1920. Women won the vote and utilized writing in order

to exhibit the agony of wronged womanhood. The last stage is “ Female” stage which started in 1920. In this stage, women abnegated “ imitation” and “ protest” which are two sorts of reliance. (see Showalter 217-8) It is imperative to see this literary tradition in connection to the advancement of women’s mindfulness and the battle to vanquish their place in a male commanded world. The errand of feminist critics is to locate a new dialect, a new method of reading which can incorporate their knowledge, experience, rationality, cleverness, perception, and affliction. I argue that Haywood’s novel fits into the feminine stage. Haywood defends and supports women’s own independent perspective. She demonstrates the role and the maltreatment of women of that time. Showalter’s feminist criticism was able to influence the principle of British literature. It brought a new perspective to female writers who, during this period, used to write under a male name.

It is prominent to consider the historical context of the novel as the eighteenth century eyewitnessed crucial changes in the institution of marriage. Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* demonstrates how women are depicted socially, sexually, and economically especially with the dominance of men in the social system. She argues that the social restrictions on women have to be removed in order to bring equality of both sexes in the public as well as in the private life. Haywood shaped her characters and plot so as to demonstrate her attitudes towards women’s treatment and her empathy with other women. She raises awareness of the demerits society laid on women of that time. Haywood uses authorial narration in her novel. The narrator knows about all the characters’ motives, conscious and unconscious thoughts. To put it differently, the narrator has a

wider knowledge of the story and is in a position of authority which enables her/him to know all about the events, beyond those described in the novel, as well as the characters. The narrator uses retrospection and does not merely focus on the consciousness of one character. Haywood's use of epistolary discourse throughout the entire novel not only pushes the story forward but also enhances the reader's comprehension. Epistles are used as a mean of communication between lovers and siblings. Letters provide the reader with the characters' motives and make the reader feel connected to the characters. Equally important, the historical background is imperative in order to comprehend the marriage perspective in *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*. The novel was written in the eighteenth century when perspectives towards matrimony switched. Haywood presents the eighteenth century world through women's eyes and gives expression to women's experiences. In her work, she demonstrates the characters' conflict between their obligations to members of their families and their own desires.

Once a woman enters into the institution of marriage, she is submissive and a servant to her husband. In the eighteenth century, women's life turned around the domestic sphere. (Browne 30) Married women were deprived of property and the husband has full authority in the household. The wife's duty is to obey the husband and fulfill all his needs as well as her children's: "[...] the married woman or femme covert continued to be the sole property of her husband once the marriage contract was signed [...] and occasional access to divorce under exceptional circumstances in England" (Roulston 21)

Women's voice was unheard and once married they were manipulated by the husband. The position of married women legally and economically, in the

eighteenth century, was in the possession of their husband. The law gives the husband full control and rights allowing him to be dominant over his wife. Married women who stayed at home felt different and lonely because their husbands went out to work. In other words, the housewives who sat at home every day knew that they were unhappy living an unfulfilled life. Additionally, women felt incomplete and relatively worthless. They were truly unhappy with their role in society.