

Gynocriticism

The diagram illustrates the relationship between Gynocriticism and Feminist Literary Criticism. At the top, 'Gynocriticism' is shown in a red box, branching into 'Feminist Literary Criticism' (green box) and a portrait of Jane Austen with her book 'Pride and Prejudice'. 'Feminist Literary Criticism' further branches into three categories: 'Feminine' (equality), 'Feminist' (protest), and 'Female' (self-discovery). 'Feminine' leads to 'Toward a Feminist Poetics' (pink box), which then branches into 'Feminist Critique' (woman as a reader) and 'Gynocriticism' (woman as a writer). 'Feminist Critique' is associated with Elaine Showalter's portrait. 'Gynocriticism' is associated with portraits of Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Nancy F. Cott, Ann Douglas, and Nina Auerbach.

Introduction

Gynocriticism emerged in the late 1970s as part of the broader feminist movement within literary studies. It was a response to the predominance of male-centric literary criticism, which often ignored or marginalized the voices and experiences of women writers. Scholars like Elaine Showalter sought to rectify this imbalance by developing analytical frameworks that centered on women's literature and explored its significance within the context of gender and society. Gynocriticism aimed to uncover the unique contributions of women writers, highlight their themes, styles,

and concerns, and challenge traditional literary canons that overlooked or devalued their work.

Male-Centric Literary Criticism:

Prior to the emergence of gynocriticism, literary criticism was predominantly male-centric. Almost all prominent literary critics such as Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Roland Barthes, Stuart Hall, Northrop Frye, Harold Bloom, Stuart Hall, etc. were men. Feminist theory and criticism were extremely isolated and misunderstood. Female authors were frequently overlooked, and their works were subjected to interpretations that reflected male perspectives and priorities.

Feminist critique and gynocriticism

In Elaine Showalter's essay "Toward a Feminist Poetics," she divides feminist literary theory into two main categories: feminist critique and gynocriticism. Here's the differences between feminist critique and gynocriticism according to Elaine Showalter:

1. Feminist Critique:

- Focuses on how women are depicted in literary texts written by men. In the feminist critique, **woman acts as a reader.**

- Analyzes women's characters, conditions, and experiences as portrayed by male authors.
- Highlights traditional misconceptions, misogyny, and marginalization of women present explicitly or implicitly in literature.
- Examines the representation of women in literature through a critical lens, aiming to expose and challenge patriarchal norms and ideologies.
- Often seeks to uncover the ways in which male authors reinforce gender stereotypes, perpetuate power imbalances, or silence women's voices in their works.

2. Gynocriticism:

- Focuses on literature written by women. **Woman no longer is a reader but becomes a writer.**
- explores how women writers express their experiences, perspectives, and challenges.
- Analyzes women's literature from a feminist perspective, examining themes, styles, and concerns unique to women writers.
- Seeks to establish a distinct tradition of women's writing and highlight the significance of women's voices within literary studies.
- Emphasizes the contributions of women writers to literary history and challenges traditional literary canons that overlook or marginalize their work.

- Recognizes the importance of studying literature from a female perspective and promotes a deeper understanding of women's creativity and literary achievements.

Significant American Gynocritics

Showalter also mentions four significant American feminist scholars who have attempted to explore new ways to study and understand 19th century female culture through literature. Out of the four gynocritics, three are social historians.

1. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg:

She's recognized for her groundbreaking work in women's gender and history in the United States. Her article "The Female World of Love and Ritual" (1975) is particularly notable for its exploration of society and emotions through archived letters between women. Smith-Rosenberg's research sheds light on the intimate relationships and cultural dynamics among women in the 19th century.

2. Nancy Falik Cott:

Her book "The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England (1780-1835)" focuses on the solidarity and sisterhood that emerged among women in New England

during the early 19th century. Cott examines how women navigated their roles within a patriarchal society, emphasizing the bonds formed through shared experiences of exploitation and cultural constraints.

3. Ann Douglas:

Douglas is known for her work “The Feminization of American Culture,” where she traces the development of American mass culture through women’s sentimental literature and clergy writings. Her analysis highlights the ways in which cultural norms and values were shaped by and reflected in women’s writing during the 19th century.

4. Nina Auerbach:

Auerbach’s book “Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction” (1978) explores the bonds among women as depicted in the fiction of various authors, including Louisa May Alcott, Elizabeth Gaskell, Muriel Spark, Sylvia Plath, and Dorothy Sayers. Through her analysis of these literary works, Auerbach illuminates the themes of female solidarity, support, and community across different contexts and time periods.

Gynocriticism of Pride and Prejudice

'Pride and Prejudice' by Jane Austen is one of the most popular English novels of the 18th century.

Feminist reading

In the feminist reading, we look at how the novel shows that women in that time period had limited options for financial security. The Bennet family, for example, has five unmarried daughters who are trying to attract a wealthy bachelor like Mr. Bingley.

Gynocritical Reading

In the gynocritical reading, we focus on the relationships between the Bennet sisters and their personal experiences. Instead of just looking at the women's desperate need to get married, we consider how they interact with each other. We also explore how the novel fits into a larger tradition of women's literature.

Gynocriticism

Gynocriticism, as conceptualized by Elaine Showalter, represents a transformative approach in literary criticism that centers on the study of women's writing from a distinctly feminist perspective. By prioritizing the experiences, voices, and creativity of women

writers, gynocriticism challenges the male-dominated literary canon and offers a more inclusive understanding of literary history. This framework not only highlights the unique contributions of women to literature but also deepens our comprehension of gender dynamics and cultural contexts.