

*The Theory of Feminism: Definition and Development**

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Introduction

During the last century, critics have felt the impact of feminist criticism which has flourished the field of literature by its combination with every other critical approach. So, this study aims at exploring the revision of the history of female experience with the great imaginative creation of Shakespeare and by female spectators, but before proceeding and as feminism begins with political agenda, it is worthier to cast lights on the development of feminism theoretically and practically so that the depiction can get a conspicuous framework and better understanding.

Simply speaking, the term “feminism” is derived from the word “feminine” which is the opposite of the “masculine” that is, female versus male. Feminism, as a modern phenomenon, sails its way from the school of political reading of 1970s to reach the beach of criticism and to dig up the depths of the self; it can be defined as “the doctrine that favors more rights and activities for women in their economic, social, political and private lives.”(Bernhart, 1978: 784). Thus it is a

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movement for recognition of claims of women for rights. That is to say, rights that establish status for women as for men. Feminism is also defined as a “system of political, economic and social equality between sexes” (Millett, 1970: 74). Chris Weedon shares this idea and defines feminism as “politics directed at changing existing power relations between women and men in a society” (Weedon, 1987). The term “politics” does not mean that narrow and exclusive world of meetings of chairmen and parties, but it refers to the power-structured relationships between both sexes. In this sense, it is a radical transformation of a society towards a reform including specific areas of education and political organizations of women. The term “politics” can also refer to that movement which is concerned with an opportunity in which any community seeks for its civilization regarding education, welfare, rights, equality and the way in which the oppression of patriarchy directed against women. It is a politics against the dominance of man over woman who represents approximately half of man power in the world For feminists, the term “patriarchy” refers to women’s subordination that is, male’s dominance over female and it also refers to the dominance of elder males over the younger.

In her book *Faces Of Feminism*, Olive Banks suggests a simple definition of feminism as a social movement that studies the position of women in their society (Banks, 1980: 1) It is a definition that it is shared in the study of Rosalind Delmar who adopts the same idea saying that feminism is an active desire and a par excellence to change the social status of women. In this sense, the task of a feminist is to take the

responsibility of holding women's suffering of discrimination by their society because of their gender. In addition, they have to look for the needs which made them negated and unsatisfied; therefore, the satisfaction of these needs requires a radical change or even a revolution in the social, economic and political order. Delmar refers to Ray Starchy's *The Cause* in which, she shows the whole extent of feminist ideal. Starchy argues that a feminist is someone whose central concern and preoccupation lies with the position of women and their struggle for emancipation. By someone, certainly she means male and female. She adds that feminists are leaders, organizers and publicists of women's movement (Delmar, 1986: 8-1-16) Simone de Beauvoir in (1972) defines the feminists as:

those women or even men who fight to change the position of women, in liaison with and yet outside the class struggle, without totally subordinating that change to a change of society.

(Mitchell, 1986: 27)

There is an interconnection between feminism as a theory and women's movement. That is why a theory must have been converted into practical ranges. Starchy also says that feminism can exist as an intellectual tendency without a movement thus it has been shaped in various forms since it enables a different perspective to be placed in the movement itself. Thus in her view, Starchy sees feminism as an activity which is directed to a given end. This activity refers to a campaign around issues that tend to underplay the nature of general debates about women and the extent to which feminists are involved in setting up its terms. That is to say to

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be a feminist is to elevate a fight against the debates which confess women's subjugation and then to set the ways by which women are capable of putting an end to this subjugation or oppression.

The Standard Historical Picture of Feminism:

Early Feminism: Towards Equality

Feminism as a concept digs its roots earlier since the beginning of creation when the Creator made male and female the basic components of living. The story of Adam and Eve at Eden is clear evidence that God has created both sexes to be equal human beings.

As a movement, Feminism planted its roots in the eighteenth century when a concern for women's right is dedicated during an intense intellectual activity known as the Age of Enlightenment. Philosophers of this age assumed that women were, by their nature, subordinated to men being the stronger sex. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), for example, says; "women's entire education should be relative to men", and then he adds "woman was yield to man to put up with his injustice." (De Beauvior, 1952: 121). Denis Diderot (1713-1784), another philosopher, finds that women's inferiority is posterred by society. Other philosophers maintain that all inequalities that existed among human beings resulted from the inadequate education at that time. Thus, they argued to implore the educational system among people so that women could have an adequate position in society. Such belief is adopted by another French mathematician and revolutionary

philosopher Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794) who wrote an essay called “The Admission of Women to Full Citizenship” (1790) in which he spoke in favour of women’s emancipation:

The more women have been enslaved by the law, the more dangerous have been their empire... it would decline if it were less to women’s interest to maintain it, if it ceased to be and escaping from aggression.

(De Beauvoir, 121-122)

The philosophy of Enlightenment vivid impact on the legal and political status of women, moreover, the French revolution in (1789) had influenced a lot on women’s position especially of the middle class that leads to the emergence of Olympe de Gouges, a feminist demanding in her work *Declaration of the Rights of Women* and its equivalent the *Declaration of the Right of Man* in which she demands to abolishing of masculine privilege. Olympe was one of the forerunners whose declaration strongly influenced other feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) who is one of the pioneers of early feminism. She wrote two equivalent books, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), which combine an appeal on behalf with general social critique that employs key themes from Enlightenment to use them in illustrating women’s positions and needs (Delmar, 1986: 18). Mary’s feminism did not cross class lines, but it emerged in response and challenge of Rousseau and other philosophers’ accepted ideas in which they belittled women’s role in the society by stating that women by nature are the second sex and they existed to please men only. In her argument, Mary says that

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women, like men, are naturally rational but inadequate education made them more emotional. Thus, she proposes that women should receive the same treatment as men in education, work, and politics and be judged by the same standard:

though I consider that women in the common walk of life are called to fulfill the duties of wives and mothers by religion and reason, I cannot help lamenting that women of a superior cast have not a road open which they can pursue more extensive plans usefulness and independence.

(Slaper, 1972: 27)

Mary Wollstonecraft together with Harriet Taylor Mill belong to a radical wing of the intellectual aristocracy and social innovators in England of late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. Mary challenges the prevailing ideology that women's concern in world is domestic.

John Stuart Mill with the help of his wife, Harriet published a pioneering book called, *On the Subjection of Women* (1869) in which he attacks the oppression of women declaring their need for legal and political emancipation in society. He asserts women's power within their families and offers a liberal ideal of marriage for both sexes. (Rendall: 1987, 3) Unfortunately, this book is shelved and did not see light till the liberation movement when it was rediscovered and thereby it is distinguished as one of the most influential texts for feminism and indeed, it is the official text of feminist movement John Stuart Mill and Mary Wollstonecraft were the

early pioneers that opened the path for first-wave feminism to appear on the surface of America and England.

Harriet Mill wrote an essay entitled, *On Enfranchisement of Women* (1851). It is a unique work in recognizing the political side of recent demand for the suffrage* in the United States. This essay shows Harriet's conception towards the personal consequences of women legal and social inferiority. These writings were products of a society that allowed a certain freedom. Within the tradition of Enlightenment, there is clear evidence showing the difference between men and women being shaped by the environment as natural thus; the emphasis folds on the fundamental similarities between both sexes, standing against the view that women are seen like slaves or excluded from their natural rights.

In America, feminism is the first rooted as women's suffrage at the beginning of nineteenth century with the evangelical Christianity movement provoking the religious enthusiasm based on the individual's personal experience of conversion. This experience of salvation brought the idea of changing others and leading then to religious revivalism which inspired the early women's right movement. Indeed it has become its main characteristics. A large number of middle-class women joined evangelical societies which concentrates

* suffrage means one's vote, one's right to vote especially at parliamentary and multiple elections. It comes from Latin suffrage which means the ankle-bone of a house which was used by Romans for balloting with, when the voting table came to be called suffragium. See *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, p.867.

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on religious conversion and on moral and then extended to social reform.

Evangelical movement had its impact on middle class who took such organization as its dynamic model of reform to establish other movements such as the “Anti-slavery Movement” (1820s- 1860s) (Rendall, 1987: 5). The women of this movement campaigned to improve the lives and to save the souls of prostitutes who were dragged to this path as a result of poverty. They called for increasing the wages of the working women and to expand employment opportunities for women. The women of this movement established a journal called Advocate of Moral Reform, which was devoted to write about moral reform, women’s rights and individual conscience. The language is still religious and the aim was to protect the poor from indulgence in prostitution. Women of this movement such as; Elizabeth Blackwell, Lucy Stone, Virginia Woolf and Susan B. Anthony were regarded the first-wave feminists and all gained important organizational and political experience in the temperance movement. Lucretia Mott, a Quaker minister and the head of the American Feminist Association, was greatly influenced by the ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft about women’s rights. In (1840), Mott founded Women Anti slavery Groups Convention. She produced a manifesto of Quaker inspiration saying:

**Man and woman were created equals,
provided by the Creator with in alienable
rights... The government is set up only to
safeguard these right.**

(Beauvior, 1952: 140)

The experience of discrimination inspired women of America to organize the first women's right convention which met in Seneca Falls in (1848) and that is why it is called Seneca Convention which is led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. Meanwhile, this Convention attracted many men and women. At Seneca Falls Conventions, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Mott modeled the "Statement of Sentiments" based upon the "Declaration of Independence". The Convention set forth in a solemn declaration "Resolved, That woman is man's equal was intended to be so by the Creator and the highest good of the race demands that she should be recognized as such." (Beard, 1962: 158). Returning to England, the feminist doctrine of Enlightenment was kept alive by groups of radical thinkers of Unitarians who claimed to give a superior education for girls, such as: Harriet Martineau when in her article, "*On Female Education*" argued the necessity of women's improvement in education. William Fox, another Unitarian also shared in (1832) in an outspoken article included the idea of female suffrage. Another organized feminist movement sprang from a Unitarian background started in Britain (1858). Its ladies such as Barbara Leigh Smith, Bessie Rayner Paker and Mrs. Jameson were known as "Ladies of Longman Place". They founded *Englishwomen's Journal* in which they discussed women's problems. This circle was founded to reform the legal position of married women and it was regarded as a representative of liberal feminism. They assumed the same as John Stuart Mill denoted of the authority of the husband over the wife as one of the domestic tyranny (Rendall, 1987: 112).

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Thus, in “Seneca Falls” in America and in “Longman Place Circle” in England, there was a revolution in female members and feminism breathed freely as an independent movement with its political, social, radical and economic principles dealing with women’s issues to advocate their rights in society in late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This stage can be seen as a prototypic of feminist movement. Those two feminist groups promoted a bill of rights setting forth the inferiority and injustice in the position of women, demanding a redress of wrongs and out of this they grew the movement of suffrage in 1920s (Britannica, 1980: 911). First-wave feminism insisted on that the sexual identity as inessential or secondary to humanity. Feminists of this wave stressed on equality, rights and liberation.

Feminism: Towards A Deconstruction

Since feminism reached its main aim, the chroniclers of the movement see it is unnecessary to explore the details of subsequence in feminist organizations especially in the years between (1920s) to (1960s) where there was an intermission. If early feminism sought strict equality and second- wave feminism stressed on the difference between sex and gender in the respect that sex is a biological and a natural being whereas gender is the social interpretation of sex, they stressed on the sexual difference of women, modern feminists focused on how the difference between men and women is constructed and performed. They looked for deconstructing and dismantling the sexual difference. They see that the supposed ‘opposition’

between masculinity and femininity depends on some prior assumed and repressed system of values.

Patriarchal thought views the world in terms of binary oppositions and in the necessity of proving that one side of the binary is always elevated above the other side, These divisions of the world posits male against female, human against non-human and self against the other. Emerging from these general binaries, more specific binaries exist like real/imaginary, sane/mad, science/myth and speech/silence. The terms female, non-human and the other are always restricted and connected with the imaginary, madness, myth and silence (Bertens, 2003: 65). Thus, most feminists of the third wave unite with the main idea that disrupt and refuse to confess any system that justifies binary oppositions. As a main task, feminists of this wave try to expose, deconstruct this division. They were inspired by the idea of the theory of “Deconstruction” which is originated by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida who set a method of reading and a theory of language to dismantle and deconstruct any notion that a text or a signifying system has any boundaries or margins. It concentrates on words and concepts more than the content of a text. The theory of “Deconstruction” can offer in deciding which is to construct and which to replace or in finding substitutes for the latter. In his theory Derrida argues that any word or concept cannot be understood unless it is related to its opposite, or by its difference from other words. Derrida calls it “differánce” in which meaning is produced by the ‘dual strategies of difference and deferral, Derrida adds that all criticism is in need of the philosophical percepts, that is to sa hierarchal

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oppositions such as man! woman or nature! culture, in which one term depends on the other keeping with the structure of what Derrida calls, “logocentrism”. Consequently, for feminists as Chris Weedon remarks that “Deconstruction” enables them to dismantle and subvert logocentric assumptions of male discourse which underpins gender, race and class oppression (Weedon, 1987: 164-165).

Accordingly, deconstruction has been set as a tool which modern feminists can use to deconstruct the system of thought in which they live. They reject how the binary opposition of male versus female, how literary texts, for example, produce and destabilize sexual roles, how Shakespeare’s plays for instance, play on the dramatic and performed nature of sex roles.

Dimensions of Feminism:

Women, like other participants, must be highly motivated to improve their situation and the quality of their life is the key factor for success of their eternal development. To achieve such success, women need to cope with every direction of life so that feminism can bloom to some extent as an independent movement. From this belief, men and women should be politically, economically and socially equal for individual own reasons and to hold his/her own ideas pertaining how to make it happen. This Freedom, ultimately leads to the diversity of feminism.

Chris Weedon remarks that feminism is shaped in four ranges, political, liberal, social and radical, Beginning with

political feminism, this range has its root in the movement that is Women's Liberation Movement (Weedon, 1987: 1-4).

In this sense, feminist criticism established its principles where in *The Resisting Reader*, Judith Fetterly treats feminist criticism as a "political act whose aim is not simply to interpret the world, but to change it by changing the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read" (Beauvoir, 1952: 137). Patricia Stubbs regards feminism as a significant political movement that has already begun to re-examine and if necessary, rewrite the political and cultural history. In this conception, she focuses on literature as it is a mirror of human life. Patricia tries to reflect political conception of women by representing women as leading female characters because the majority of readers interact with a representation of such noble-minded and virtuous characters, she adds saying:

women recognized the realities of their new situations and the century wore on the problem stemming from economic dependence became the focus of an emergent feminist movement.

(Fetterly, 1978: vii)

On the thematic level, the task of a feminist critic is to become and create a resisting rather than assenting reader to reject stereotypes and examine the female as a theme in literary work. Ideologically, the reader will learn first not to accept the male-dominated perspective and secondly, to refuse to be imprisoned by gender-based criticism. Thus, a resisting reader is a strategy which a female reader can adopt when reading male-authored texts because they address them as male. In this respect, feminist criticism represents the

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discovery and recovery of women's voice. It arouses a unique powerful feminine voice. A voice that is capable of canceling out those other voice that speak about and to females but they never speaks for them. A voice that increases self-awareness and at the same time it is related to authenticity, identity and self-expression.

Social feminism is another sphere that springs from the idea that women are seen as a centre of private emotional world and are almost defined exclusively. For Chris Weedon, social feminism lies in regarding the family as the main component of society and it cannot be seen in isolation from the boarder social relations of work and public life. Social feminism sees the elimination of sexual division of labour and believes in full participation of both sexes in both aspects of life. Weedon adds that social feminism regards patriarchy as not monolithic but a social system that varies historically and ties with class and racial oppressions of the social system (Stubbs, 1979: 1-4). This means to stress the needs and not to take an account of biology but to see its meaning as historical. It is also to stress the social construction of feminist, history and change. Here, it might make a fallacy if men are considered the same as women according to the fundamental pa system hence there is a distinction in biological system between men and women; for instance, for men to play the role of childcare is too much unfitted and socially unacceptable. In this case the task of this study should not be drawn to the problem of equal or different but to scrutinize women's position and function in a society in order to fulfill their right and not to be regarded as subindividual beings but

as social institutions that have their roles in public as well as in private spheres of life.

In this sense, there must be a distinction between feminism as a movement and as a theory. Feminism as a movement is a social historical phenomenon that aims at forming tendencies to adhere in movements, activities and rational practices to see themselves as a force against social pressure trying to change it.

On the other hand, feminism as a theory is a collective of several connotations, assumptions and analyses which characterize women's situations. At the same time, it produces points of view concerning of how these situations can be improved or changed. Thus, feminists try to connect feminist theory with other theories, Anyhow feminism as a movement or as a theory, both flow in the same concept that women should flourish their life and their liberation.

Chris Weedon incarnates her work on studying feminism as a politics and a part of this, she lumps her creative energy in studying of feminist poststructuralism which demands social, historical and cultural privacy and to practice literary criticism in order to produce readings of literary texts in a process of a representation of women in standard literary works of male and female writers and the interaction between the reader (male and female) and the texts. This demands psychological and biological assumptions, in addition to important political implications for how to understand gender and further possibilities to change (Weedon, 1987: 12). Weedon chooses literature in her study because it is the best way of acquiring true knowledge about human life and society

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which is the central point of liberal-human criticism. For this reason, feminist literary criticism penetrates the study of characterization of women to show psychoanalysis of women's struggle. Ibsen's Nora in *A Doll House* is a clear evidence of such view when Nora makes up her mind that before she can be a wife and a mother she must be first a complete person.

Simone de Beauvoir argues that family or home is not an interior part which contains its couple but it is part of a microcosm. It is the essential of women's part to direct their social life. Nevertheless, home with its commitments to social life is not enough for women to establish their identity as social members, but they need company to make new contacts. Marriage is not but it takes the girl away from her family and friends at youth. Even her family whether mother or sister could not establish that true intimacy friendship, thus, she needs company of her womenfolk to establish feminine friendship usually called "counter-universe" in which as Simone remarks:

Women find strength to shake off their chain; they negate the sexual domination of the males by admitting their frigidity to one another, while dividing the men's desires or their clumsiness; and they question ironically the moral and intellectual superiority of their husbands and of men in general.

(Beauvoir, 1952: 588)

This kind of "counter-universe" or "feminine friendship" is used before in Shakespeare's technique in presenting his plays such as the feminine friendship between

Desdemona and Emilia in *Othello* or between Cleopatra and her women in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

In socialist feminism, there is also a prevalent category which is “women’s writing”. Feminist poststructuralism suggests that:

textual strategies employed in women’s writings are determined by constraints and possibilities of class and racially societies within which writers and their access to aesthetic discourse are located.

(Beauvoir, 1952: 604)

This is true when women’s attempts appeared in diverse ways, some are devoted to show women’s inferiority and oppression. Such studies of female authorship which aiming at identifying the language and female aesthetic literature of women are set by feminists classics, in particular, Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwomen in the Attic* (1979).

Within the exploration of social feminism, E. A. Ross, a sociologist focused his study on the concept of social control. In one of his essays in (1901), he refers to a widest range of the influence and regulation imposed by society upon the individual. Ross argues that social control is inevitable and in more specific sense it is active, deliberate and expert guidance for human life not only as the source of past human progress but even as a means to acquire experience and social individual impulse. One of the complex views of social control is to look more closely at women struggle against the manifestation of female domination in order not to be

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victimized and not to lose their status as political. (Weedon, 1987: 156).

Liberal feminism is another dimension which aims at achieving equality of opportunity to all. That is changing the criteria of femininity and masculinity according to sexual divisions of labour only. So, this mainstream feminism pours its energy into changing institutional and governmental levels. Feminists of this range like Betty Friedan finds a necessity to reform the existing domestic and sexual lives of women and to secure an equal pay, preoccupation and labour opportunities for women as for men. It encourages to integrate women more thoroughly into the power structure and to give women equal access to positions that men had traditionally dominated.

As far as radical feminism is concerned, it faces a new social order in which women will not be subordinated to men and femininity and femaleness will not be debated and devalued. It means to free women of male oppression by reshaping society and restructure its institutions. That is to say admitting a space for women to set out their voice and experience in social tradition.

This new radical movement, though it has a little political involvement, spread widely and its main principle was to exclude men from its membership. It is a way of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted in individual's mind in other words, it is not a feminist but female movement. Pioneers of radical feminism do much zeal to search for the source of men's power over women. For radical feminists, man is the exploiter and the woman is the most oppressed class.

Radical feminism is unlike Equal Rights feminism, it concentrates on the traditional female concerns of love, sex, family, marriage and children and relationship with parents. In this respect, radical feminism legalized the divorce thus there is an increase in single-parent families, which has mainly been the consequence of a rapid rise in divorce in recent years. Radical feminism also attacks the political level. For radical feminists, it is important to recognize that the relationship of women and men is not of other opposing groups in society since both marriage and motherhood involve a level of emotional inter-dependence. Concerning marriage, radical feminists opposed the marriage laws which denied women's legal rights and the economic system which forced women into loveless marriages because such marriage makes men control both women's reproduction and her person. They even criticized the romantic love seeing it as a way of trapping women into accepting their own oppression. Radical feminists had a deep concern with the issue of female sexuality. They have criticized the way in which women have been made victims of men's lust within and outside the marriage. Radical feminists, strongly concentrates on male violence towards women expressed in such case like rape and to get rid of this, feminists thinking reached to a conclusion by considering women not only as innocent victims but also 'good' whereas men are seen not only as oppressors but also as bad', it is a view of recalling the idea of fem superiority (Whelehan, 1995: 1-3).

Seemingly, radical feminism greatly served feminist criticism in rethinking and then made a revisionism of textual

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strategies of male tradition in the light of its treatment of gender relation. It is possible to say that radical feminist movement seeks for the destruction of male but logically, it is not a solution because one can imagine how a society could be built without depending on the role of men.

Marriage is one of the institutions that conclude legal existence of the women as individuals despite the fact that the celibate life is strictly moral. Protestantism does not alter the basic asceticism of Christianity, but its rejection of celibacy paved the way for a change in the status of women by the value that was increasingly placed on marriage and family life. Marriage allowed developing an ideal love which allowed women to be considered as pure even as wife and mother, In this doctrine, it is necessary to distinguish between love and lust whether inside or outside marriage because lust could exist within marriage.

The Emergence of Feminist Literary Criticism:

Feminism officially entered the field of literature in (1970s) with the publication of a multitude of works such as; Kate MilieU's *Sexual Politics* (1970). This book gives us an analysis of the system of sex- role and the oppression of women under the patriarchal social organization (Banks, 1980: 72). Since then, this book has become the starting point for feminist criticism to float on the surface of literary criticism, relying on, through Women's Liberation Movement, female writers whereby to draw connection between their own work as well as exploring heroines' roles, female writers or female scholars. Such studies also pay attention, particularly,

American writers to concentrate on the 'image' of women represented in cultural forms such as literature, though this concentration is implicit and then accepted as failure by later feminists like Cora Kaplan and others for the inadequate analysis of the relationship between ideology and representation. For this reason, these feminists assert that such analysis needs to affirm the universalism and subjectivism of traditional liberal-humanist criticism (Rice, 1989: 215).

Feminist criticism moved into three directions, the earliest feminist criticism dealt with the misogyny of literary practice like, the stereotyped representation of women in literature which confined women either by angels or monsters, the literary abuse or textual harassment of women in classic and popular male literature and the exclusion of women from literary history. In short, they assert equality, rights, liberation and emancipation by connecting the literary and social mistreatment of women. The second direction of feminist critics moved towards the discovery of women's literature and to set a tradition for female writers experienced their historical and thematic coherence as well as their aesthetic importance and style which had been impeded by the hegemony of the male values. This women's tradition is composed of rereading, recovering and reclaiming literature by women from all nations and historical periods.

This sphere of feminist criticism emerged in the mid of the seventies, when liberal, social and radical feminists centre their attention on exploring the literary texts by women as opposed to the exploration of the representation of women in male texts. Such study is originated by Elaine Showalter in her

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book, *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) as an attempt to construct an alternative women's tradition basically, focusing on women's experience as writers and readers (Showalter, 1985: 6).

Before Showalter, there were two earlier books, Patricia Meyer Spacks's *The Female Imagination* (1975) and Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (1976). Both works also define women writings in feminist terms. They examines the female literary tradition to discover how great women writers across the ages have felt and perceived themselves and imagined reality. Another important book was Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) which offered a full account of the situation of nineteenth century female writers. These works shed light on the women-writers' struggle to self-definition. This connection in women's writing generates female aesthetics as the black aesthetic in (1970s) which celebrated a black consciousness in literature that is supported by feminists who spoke about the abundant of women's culture which had to be revitalized by a "women language". Feminist aesthetic is also identified by the political separatism to form consciousness as an identity of women culture such as Adrienne Rich's *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976) and Nancy Chodorow 's psychological study *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1979). These works did not only explore the connection between women and men but they also dealt with the relationship between daughter and mother, children and the relationship of the infant to the female parent to be as key factors in the construction of gender identity. The third phase

or direction of feminist criticism marched towards not only a recognition of women's writing but it is also "a radical rethinking of conceptual grounds of literary study, a revision of the accepted theoretical assumption about reading and writing that have been based entirely on male literary experience" (Rice, 1989: 116).

Essentially, Contemporary feminist writings are inspired and influenced by the gender-conscious essays of two English pioneers, Virginia Woolf and by Simone de Beauvoir. Their criticism guided feminists towards two ways of distinctive analysis, first towards a feminist social critique and secondly, towards a feminist aesthetic. In Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1924), she expresses in an outburst the restrictions that are placed before women's creative imagination thus she suggests that a woman must have a room (though metaphorically) of her own to write her fiction, to reveal her creativity and polarization in a female discourse which had been choked by the tyranny of male culture (Showalter, 1985: 6).

Woolf took an example in her essay by returning back to the Elizabethans and imagines how a female of the same prowess of Shakespeare could write within an atmosphere dominated by male world, she says; "It would have been impossible, completely for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in an age of Shakespeare." (Davis, 1986: 161). Thus, she imagines Judith to be Shakespeare's sister, in an attempt to explain the absence of feminine creativity from early modern history and it is a way to express the predicament of Judith and other women who love theatre and poetry but

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would be given the opportunities to write because of the social restrictions of that era.

Similarly, the French thinker Simone de Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex* (1949) a book-length plea against the second-class treatment of women in which feminist criticism inspires its discourse to explore issues relevant to women as authors and readers. It also raises controversial questions of the possible existence of distinctly female writing, recognizably different in the character of its language from discourse shaped by male patterns. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir tackles what she sees as the marginalization of women within the misogynist practice of patriarchal culture. She is inclined to Mai in identifying a base of political and economic sexist literature. She strictly criticized the stereotypical depiction of women, which aroused by male culture and their definition of women to be the “other”. Her analysis has become a forerunner of Elaine Showalter’s exploration of modern feminist critique.

Towards a Feminist Critique:

Feminist critique is the first type of feminist criticism that is forged to concentrate on women as readers, It focuses on women as consumers of male- produced literature. This analysis correlates with a Reader Response Theory, that how female-reader can’ change the apprehension of a given text by re reading, scrutinizing and by setting hypotheses of her own. It offers a feminist reading of texts. It is a way of how to treat gender codes in a feminist point of view. Showalter defines feminist critique as follows:

I shall call this kind of analysis the feminist critique, and like other kinds of critique it is a historically grounded inquiry which probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena. Its subjects include the image and stereotypes of women in literature, the omission of and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male-constructed literary history. It is also concerned with the exploitation and manipulation of the female audience, especially in popular culture and film; and with the analysis of women-as-sign in semiotic system.

(Davis, 1986: 182)

Showalter took an example from Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and she shows how the wood covering of wife and daughter auction in nineteenth century England shows an example of the patriarchal society which gives males the authority and political power over women.

Showalter's analysis later on inspired feminist critics to gaze on different genres like the drama of Renaissance and Shakespeare in particular. Feminists vie with studying Shakespeare's plays being profitable for this purpose. For instance, examining one situation of Shakespeare's *King Lear* when Lear entering the stage with a map in his hand. He declares a reward will circulated and distributed among his three daughters in return of declaring their love for him. This test of "love bizarre" in feminist point of view is a kind of auction. So, Lear is here like Hardy's Henchard when he sells his wife and daughter. Lear frankly says to France to take Cordelia as dowerless away from him "Thou has her, France. Let her be thine, for we/ Have no such daughter, not shall ever

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see”. In such situation, feminist critics have not responded to Shakespeare’s establishment of the loyalty of dutiful daughter but as it will be shown later on in this study, feminists have criticized a question. They challenged Lear’s position as a patriarch. Showalter describes feminist critique as an ‘intellectual act’ proposing in Adrienne Rich’s words

A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name...and therefore live...afresh.

(Showalter, 1985: 129)

Gynocritics and Female Culture:

The second distinctive analysis which is originated by Showalter is what she calls “gynocritic” that deals with “women as writers”, to treat women as producers of textual meaning with the history of themes, genres and structures of literature. Showalter suggests a development of new models based on the study of female experience and hypotheses of “female subculture including not only the ascribed status and the internalized constructs of femininity but also occupations, interactions and consciousness of women.” (Showalter, 1985: 129)

The aim of this criticism is to adopt female models and to establish a way that manifests their ‘difference’ from male

models and tradition. Showalter ascribes “Gynocriticism” to describe what she sees as “women- centred criticism” that focuses on the recovery and re-evaluation of women’s writing. She defines the project of gynocritic as:

To construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adopt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus on the newly visible world of female culture.

(Showalter, 1985: 245)

Showalter divides gynocritical theories into four models of differences: biological, linguistic, psychological and cultural, Each one, as she sees a development from the one before. Each one also represents an energy or a school of gynocritic feminist criticism with its own favourite texts, style and methods, By these four models, Showalter assumes of creating “female images body”, “women language” and “women psyche” to be interpreted from the one before. By these models Showalter puts feminism in relation to social context in which they occur. Showalter presents a notion of ‘wild zone’ derived from the male’s occupation of female experience which falls outside the male dominant structure as ‘wild’ This ‘wild zone’ is specialized to women’s culture. It represents:

the true arena for an examination of women’s d It is here that she locates the essence of humanity. A cultural model of

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**feminist criticism and women's difference
establishes the female tradition as a
positive source of strength and solidarity.**

(Showalter, 1985: 131)

Showalter identifies the development of feminist criticism in three stages: 'feminine, feminist and female'. It is a comprehensive overview of women's writing. The feminine stage is dated from (1840-1880). It is characterized by stylistic constraint self-imposed by writers chartered by restrictive education and intensive in the traditional female virtues. It is a stage where women writers imitate masculine tradition. The feminist stage is a protesting one which is dated from (1880-1920), the winning of vote, women are historically able to refuse female suffering literary commodity. In female stage is the female perspective stage which is dated from (1929), women substituting female experience as autonomous art instead of imitation and protest extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature. (Weedon, 1987: 155).

The Madwoman in the Attic (1979) is much more ambitious book, a voluminous product of two collaborators working within a single theoretical framework. Gilbert and Gubar concentrate on Showalter's feminine stage. They set up a pattern for women writers from the angle that how writing is defined as a male activity and the effect of this on women's attempt to articulate a distinctive female voice. The word "madness" represents a form of resistance to patriarchy through which an authentic female voice can assert itself. This book shows how patriarchal society posits women in dualism

as angels or monsters. Gubar and Gilbert refers to the 'image' of women in male- authored texts as follows:

The ideal woman that male authors dream of generating is always angel. In the middle Ages, mankind's great teacher of purity was Virgin Mary, a mother goddess who perfectly fitted the female role.

(Mills, 1985: 94)

Feminism and Critical Approaches:

Diversity is not only restricted in the body of feminism as a movement but it also includes feminist criticism which exerts its power to legitimate itself within the critical field through its combination and interrelation with other critical approaches. Its aim is to advocate equal rights for women in social, political, economic, psychological and aesthetic sense. To this account, feminist critics can be new critics, psychoanalytic critics, historical critics, Marxist critics and so on. This diversity in feminist criticism belongs to its loss of a single seminal figure and to the core of theoretical text that basic assumptions and methodology derive. Thus feminists could be male and female, scholarly whether political, practical or theoretical (Showalter, 1985: 150). Hence, feminist theorists aim at one thing to understand the nature of inequality and focus on gender politics, power relations and sexuality. Furthermore, the feminist reader has to identify with female characters and analysis of patriarchal visions or ideologies inscribed in a literature that is male-centered or male-dominated. In this way, feminist criticism enriches its arguments to see its critique of feminist issues and women

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oppression if it is coupled with other critical theories. In consequence, the task that may face a feminist is how to utilize the tools of other critical theories so as to assist feminism in its struggle against anti-feminist arguments and at the same time, it opens a ground for maneuvering with different and multiple positions that feminism need to occupy.

Beginning with post-structuralist feminism which demands to tend attention to social, cultural and historical specification and breaking the hierarchal oppositions between man and woman by transforming of patriarchy, by rereading truth and reconstructing consciousness through history and by the difference which dominates masculine tradition.

Chris Weedon sees poststructuralism a method for feminists to analyze the relationship between language and society she remarks to the connection between poststructuralism and feminism as follows:

I would argue to appropriateness of poststructuralism to feminist concerns, not as the answer to all feminist questions as a way of conceptualizing the relationship between language, social institutions and individual consciousness which focuses on how power is exercised and on the possibilities of change.

(Weedon, 1987: 153)

Feminists are working on the disruption of any system that accredits patriarchal thought from different works of literature that attempt to depict a world outside the privileged male system. This could be done through theoretical approaches which hypothesizes a thoughtful system that decenters division of the world in term of binary oppositions.

Weedon argues that when male-centered system is presented as a “natural” way of things or “common-sense”, is exposed because eventually we come up with an understanding of the sides of the hierarchal oppositions are not separated but they are rather interconnected:

Common-sense knowledge is not a monolithic, fixed body of knowledge. It is often contradictory and subject to change. It is not always necessarily conservative in its implications. Its political effects depend on the particular context in which it is articulated. However, its power already comes from its claim to be natural, obvious and therefore true. It looks to ‘human nature’ to guarantee its version of reality As common sense changes, ‘human nature’ has to undergo redefinition and gender is a particularly active site of such change.

(Neely, 1987: 15)

On account of this, the deconstruction of this common sense or human nature is implemented by feminist and poststructuralist argument.

Psychoanalytic feminism is based upon a response to what Jacques Lacan, the founder of the French Psychoanalytic Theory, had written on the notion of the subject. Lacan concentrates on language, consolidating his theory on Freud in the light of the ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist played a crucial role in the recent transformation of literary theory through his book, *Course in General Linguistics*.

In his discussion, Ferdinand de Saussure suggested that meaning was to be found within the structure of a whole

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language rather than in the analysis of individual words; moreover, he adds that different languages and different discourses within the same language divide up the world and give it meaning in different ways which cannot be reduced to one another through reflecting a fixed reality, for instance, the meaning of “femininity” and “masculinity” vary from one culture into another (Weedon, 1987: 77). Lacan expanded the theory of Freud of the development of the subject. He argues that what has been believed to be a fixed subject is fragmented and thus one may depend on the notion of lack which is felt when a child wants to adjust a phallogocentric world, he! she to repress his! her desire for the mother. Thus, Lacan defines the subject as lack and through this he stresses on the linguistic structure of the unconsciousness as a site of repressed meanings and what is so-called ‘imaginary’ structure of subjectivity acquired. He states that the term ‘imaginary’ is used by Freud to describe the pre-Oedipal identification of the infant with mirror image. In this stage, the child is neither masculine nor feminine and he! she yet, to require a language (Rice, 1989: 148). Such concepts of “lacking” and the “unconscious subject” developed the Freudian 1 of the feminist thinking about language, sexuality and subjectivity. Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis stimulates French feminism represented by Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray all, to see the ‘feminine’ in forms and aspects of language marginalized or suppressed male-centered thinking.

Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray go further in bringing a deconstruction of Derrida’s notion of “logocentrism” and “phallogocentrism”, focusing on the relationship between libido

and feminine writing which are both repressed and threatened by the phallocentrism and logocentrism of patriarchal system (Weedon, 1987: 22). Julia Kristeva do in common in arguing that as a result of this binary system, those who regarded as the “Other” will try to speak in order to disrupt this system and then to acknowledge their worth by using those same attributes that were used to locate them the “Other”, a term is used by Lacan to mean the “difference”. Those women try to show that the features that make them the “Other” can actually be those same once which liberate them, “to the extent that the female body is seen as a direct source of female writing, a powerful alternative discourse seems possible to write from the body is to re-create the world” (Weedon, 1987: 55).

Julia Kristéva contributes in the field by feminism for investigating important elements. She tries to bring the body back into discourses in the human science. The body, in general, has been associated with the feminine, in other words, female or woman who is denigrated as a weak and immoral. Through her writing, she theorizes a connection between body and mind, culture and nature. Kristeva is also known for the distinction between what she calls ‘semiotic’ and ‘symbolic’ in which she develops in her work of poetic language”. From “One Identity” to the “Other”, she maintains that all signification is imposed of these two elements. The semiotic is the bodily derive as it is discharged in signification. It is associated the rhythms, tones and movement of signifying practices. It is also associated with the maternal body, the first source of rhythms, tone and movements for every human being since we all have resided in that body. The semiotic is

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consequently closely associated with femininity. Kristeva looks to this language of semiotic as a means of undermining the symbolic order which is an element of signification and is associated with grammar and structure. (Eagleton, 1983: 188). Kristeva's feminism insists on creating new discourse of maternity other than reduced maternal function in patriarchal mind. She also rejects that phase of feminism which demands universal equality and overlooks sexual differences including a uniquely feminine language. Moreover, Kristeva does not agree with that phase of feminism that maintains language and culture are essentially patriarchal and should be abandoned. On the contrary, she insists that both culture and language are the domain of speaking being including certainly women. She agrees with the third phase of feminists who maintains breaking the binary opposition of male! female. This phase of feminism is usually rejects to choose identity over sexual difference, instead it explores multiple identities. For Kristeva and Lacan, "female sexuality is revolutionary, subversive and heterogeneous identities." (Weedon, 1987: 66).

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نظرية النقد النسوي: تعريفه وتطوره

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المستخلص

يتناول البحث تعريف وتحليل مبادئ النقد النسوي في الأدب الإنجليزي متطرقاً إلى جذوره التاريخية وأهم كتّابه من الرجال والنساء. فضلاً عن ربط هذا الاتجاه النقدي النسوي بالتفكيكية والنظريات النقدية الأخرى. يؤكد البحث على أن النقد النسوي يضم كلا الجنسين من الكتاب وكلا الجنسين من النقاد، بعبارة أخرى يدحض البحث الآراء التي تربط النقد النسوي بالكتابات حصراً أو النقادات حصراً. هنالك كثير من الكتاب الذكور ممن أسهموا في اغناء هذه الحركة في جانبها النقدي. وأخيراً، يتطرق البحث إلى أنماط النقد النسوي في الأدب الإنجليزي محلاً ميزات كل نمطٍ وأهدافه الفنية والاجتماعية والأدبية.

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