

Week 08
The Feminist Theory
Session Plan

Warmup Quotations and Anecdotes:

- “Frailty, thy name is woman” (*Hamlet*)
- “Women are meant to be loved, not to be understood” (Oscar Wilde)
- “Wo man” (Thomas More)
- Allan Pease’s book *All Men Need to Know about Women*
- Writings criticizing women outnumber writings criticizing men, because they were all produced by men. It’s a man’s world.
- The story of the QWERT keyboard
- Helen as the cause of the The Trojan Wars
- The female roles in Renaissance drama were played by males

Definition:

- The Feminist Literary Theory is the application of the principles of Feminism to literary texts.
- Feminism is the social and political ideology that seeks to establish the social, political, economic and individual equality of women.
- As a literary theory, Feminism started in the 1960s
- Gender Studies is concerned with how sexual identity influences the production and reception of literary works. It does not focus on women. It is concerned with men and women.

Causes and Consequences:

- The main cause for the rise of Feminism is gender inequality in favor of men.
- Marginalization of women
- This inequality was caused by patriarchy which has dominated societies throughout history.
- Documents from history, biography, folklore, literature, science and art teem with criticism of women. All these were written by men.
- Women have always been viewed as subordinate or inferior to men.
- Who made history and documented? Men or women? History is therefore written from whose point of view?
- Women adopted pseudonyms in order to be able to publish their works. George Eliot was the pseudonym of Mary Ann Evans. J. K. Rowling.

- These documents, speeches and sermons have hammered this idea of women’s inferiority to man into women’s minds for ages. One of the tactics used in brainwashing is repetition.
- Postfeminism is a term used to describe a societal perception that many or all of the goals of feminism have already been achieved, thereby making further iterations and expansions of the movement obsolete.
- From Feminism to Postfeminism to Antifeminism to Masculinism
- A Feminist could be a male or a female.
- The difference between the popular meaning and the real meaning of a “Feminist”
 - In popular culture, it tends to mean someone who is biased towards women. This attitude would best be described as “extreme Feminism”.
 - The true sense of the term is someone who believes in gender equality. True Feminism is bias-free and does not state that women are better than men.
- Virginia Woolf’s “Shakespeare’s Sister” in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929)
 - The purpose of this story
- Imbalance of power
 - Reflected at the cultural, social, political, educational, artistic, economic and literary levels.
- American critic Elaine Showalter wrote *Toward a Feminist Poetics* (1979)
 - The Feminine Phase (beginning to the end of the nineteenth century): women are submissive, inferior, weak and deprived of their rights.
 - The Feminist Phases (first three quarters of the twentieth century): women fought for their rights and demanded equality with men. Women imitated men in everything: jobs, clothing, hairstyle, etc.
 - The Female Phase (from the last quarter of the twentieth century to the present): this phase rose from the feeling that women started losing and submerging their identity. In this phase, women are equal to men but they preserve their identity as women. Women in this phase moved away from imitation and protest.
- Showalter says these three phases are reflected at four levels: biological, linguistic, psychological and cultural.
 - Linguistic level: “his or her” / “Tom and Susan” / “Every man and woman” / “boys and girls”
- Analyzing a text from a Feminist point of view
 - The text:
 - Keep in mind Showalter’s phases
 - Misrepresentation or misrepresentation of the image of women in the text: weak, shrewish, a heart-breaker, seductive, dishonest, immoral, rash, unfaithful, etc.

- The effect of the environment on the female characters: oppression, a victim, limitations, inhibition, abuse, etc.
- The author:
 - If the author is a woman, you can also discuss the author's point of view.
- The reader:
 - From a female reader's point of view
- Drawbacks of Feminism:
 - Bias towards women
 - Bias against men
 - Exaggeration
 - Extremity
- The application of the Feminist Theory to Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott"