

Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory

Editor

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Preface

The mission of this encyclopedia is to map out the vast intellectual territory that has arisen mostly since the 1970s, due to the efforts of feminist literary scholars and critics in the United States and Great Britain. While encyclopedias of literary theory are currently accessible, and while encyclopedias of feminism are also available, this encyclopedia concerns itself uniquely with the crossing of the social, political, and intellectual force that is feminism and the major literary and theoretical movements of our time. Within the covers of a single volume, students, scholars, and the general public will find key words, topics, names, and critical terminology pertinent to the field of feminist literary theory. The encyclopedia offers all readers the opportunity to find, in consolidated form, the precise significance of a given theoretical movement or idea within a feminist literary context, and it also suggests how feminist theory may have affected the development of emerging ideas or intellectual practices.

Undergraduates and general readers using the encyclopedia will find, in quick and convenient form, a precise definition of any number of important terms—such as “Essentialism,” the “Gaze,” “Homosexuality,” or “Sororophobia.” They will also find short entries designed to summarize the salient ideas of critics working in the field. We have aimed to include as many feminist literary critics as possible, with the sole criterion that their work be generally recognized as having made a significant contribution to feminist literary theory. Longer overview entries, on topics ranging from “Pornography” to “Violence,” from “Beauty” to “War,” offer discussions of the major theoretical points relevant to a feminist literary discussion of the topic. In addition, entries organized around literary periods or fields, such as “Medieval Studies,” “Shakespeare,” or “Romanticism,” survey the chief points of intersection between that field and feminist literary theory, suggesting along the way how feminist theory has altered our understanding. Where the period entries seem disproportionate—Victorian Studies yielding more cross-references than Medieval Studies, for example—this reflects the current status of the field; feminist literary theorists have historically gravitated more toward some fields than others, though the situation remains in flux.

Purposefully omitted from the entry list are two terms in particular: “feminism” and “feminist.” Rather than define these terms, we have preferred to let the entries suggest a multiplicity of possibilities. As is often stated, feminism is an idea best spoken of in the plural, as feminisms, while the related term “feminist” is hotly contested even as I write. Nonetheless, feminism can be said to refer to a constellation of social and political ideas, chief among them the recognition that gender inequality continues to be a pressing concern in contemporary society, and that an activist agenda in response to the status quo is necessary. More recently, feminism has concerned itself with class and race oppression, often painfully interrogating its own relationship to both class and racial politics. “Feminist,” as an adjective, functions in relation to “feminism.” It implies an intellectual commitment to achieving gender, class, and racial equality, and it often sees all aspects of culture—especially literature—as contested sites. Feminist literary theory, then, engages with

the political and social goals of feminism, and it concentrates on literary culture and theory as a possible site of struggle and as a means of eventual change.

Each entry in the encyclopedia is accompanied by a bibliography designed both to help in the definition of the term and to lead to further study. Graduate students in particular may find these bibliographies useful as a point of departure for further research. Certainly, however, a key virtue of this encyclopedia is that it accumulates bibliographical references for so many important and often-cited works within a single volume. In this way, instructors will find that it is also a useful tool in the preparation of course materials or syllabi. It is our hope that all readers using the encyclopedia will gain immediate access to the vast territory of feminist literary theory; that they will quickly accumulate useful information on a broad range of subjects; and that they will use the encyclopedia as a point of departure for future work, as the territory continues to expand and develop.

The scope of this encyclopedia is all aspects of feminist theory, with most emphasis on the terminology produced in the United States and Great Britain since the 1970s, though items significant to the history of feminist theory are also featured. The encyclopedia provides reference to some terms from French feminist theory, when such terms have influenced Anglo American theory. Because literary criticism draws heavily upon other disciplines, including sociology, psychology, philosophy, history, anthropology, and law, terms from such disciplines also occasionally appear in the encyclopedia. (See, for example, "Family Systems Theory," "Feminist Jurisprudence," "Separate Spheres," or "Traffic in Women.") Though the terminology of women's studies is often difficult to distinguish from that of feminist literary theory, we have included topics from women's studies when those subjects have also been discussed in a literary and theoretical context. In addition, special efforts have been made to locate salient terms relevant to the critical discourses of African American feminist studies, Chicana studies, other ethnic studies, lesbian and gay studies, and feminist film studies, whenever these discourses have intersected with feminist theory.

It could be said that three major movements in particular have had the greatest impact upon feminist literary theory: psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and Marxism. By now, each of these movements has given rise to a large vocabulary of its own. Here those three movements are amply referred to, either through overview entries that discuss their connections to feminist literary theory (see "Marxism" or "Psychoanalysis"), or through biographical or topical entries that also make important linkages (see, for example, "Hysteria," "Lacan, Jacques," or "Materialist Feminism"). The entry list pays special attention to terminology within these movements—to terms such as "binary opposition," "différance," "other," "phallus"—in order to arrive at the fullest possible understanding.

The index is designed to facilitate reference between and among entries. A reader might move logically from an overview entry, to a shorter definition; or the consultation of a short definition might lead her to an overview description. In either case, use of the index will ensure maximum coverage of a topic. Needless to say, the index can also help locate terms, names, or topics not appearing in the entry list.

As this project comes to a close, it is clear that the business of collecting materials relevant to feminist literary theory could easily take us into the next century. Nonetheless, this encyclopedia has its "resting"—if not its "end" point—in work largely produced by 1994, and the bibliographies are inclusive through that moment. It is now almost impossible to think back to the time before feminist literary theory was an identifiable subject in the Modern Language Association bibliography, back to the day—a scant twenty-five years ago—when the very idea of a seminar in feminist literary theory would have been outrageous. To bring this project to closure is, then, to acknowledge with gratitude the struggle of all those who worked to establish legitimacy for the field. A work like this, however massive in its proportion, can never do full justice to their accomplishment.

On the day-to-day level, many individuals facilitated the completion of this encyclopedia. First, the contributors are to be commended for responding professionally and for attending so promptly to deadlines. Several research assistants participated in day-to-day operations: Dagmara Dobzynski, Michael Enos, and Sandra Schneible. Boston College generously awarded several Research Expense Grants to help with the preparation of the manuscript. James D. Wallace provided invaluable technological assistance. In the early days of the project, Paula Ladenberg was a major source of guidance and support. The editorial board—Rosalind Ballaster, Lois Brown, Helena Michie, Frances Restuccia, Kristina Straub, and Robyn Warhol—supplied counsel and wisdom. Lastly, Sara Quay was much more than an assistant. Participating in this project since its very first moment, she performed feats both small and big, from the most mundane correspondence, to acting as an emissary for the encyclopedia, to writing entries, to speaking at MLA about our project. This encyclopedia is dedicated to her and to her future as a feminist literary critic of the first order.

Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace

male and female persons are socially constructed and maintained, and simultaneously enacts the blurring of such distinctions. The person who cross-dresses can thus be seen as embodying the "third term" that disrupts the binary logic of gender.

Historically and cross-culturally, transvestite behaviors have a very wide range of motives and meanings; for example, male-to-female cross-dressing often has a different cultural significance than the reverse. While it may be licensed in certain restricted situations—such as theatrical performance or shamanistic ritual—more generally, a man who cross-dresses is often perceived as perverse or ridiculous. Conversely, a woman who dresses as a man may either be seen as demonstrating commendable ambition and impatience with the restrictions imposed on her by her gender; or as transgressing improperly on the rights and privileges that men prefer to keep for themselves. Cross-dressing thus exposes the power differentials at stake in gender arrangements.

Although the two phenomena are by no means equivalent, in many cultures there is a long and complex association of cross-dressing with homosexuality, revealing the extent to which gendered and sexual identities are constructed with reference to each other. For example, lesbian butch-femme sexualities have recently provoked intense interest among feminist theorists, while canonical texts of lesbian fiction, such as Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) and Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), explore the relations between cross-dressing and sexual identities.

Cross-dressing is obviously of great interest to feminists who wish to theorize relations of gender and sexuality and the conditions under which they are represented. But it also offers a powerful explanatory metaphor for other cultural phenomena. Thus Marjorie Garber argues in *Vested Interests* that it is no coincidence that the same term—"passing"—is used to describe women who disguise themselves as men, and light-skinned black people who pretend to be white. This is not to collapse together diverse social experiences of racial and sexual difference, but to show that the analysis of cross-dressing in relation to other liminal social practices can be mutually illuminating.

In a literary context, interest in cross-dressing has centered on the early modern period, when the transvestite theater of Shakespeare's England, and the Restoration theater's taste for

"breeches parts" (women disguised as men) coincided with an apparent proliferation of "real-life" cross-dressing; and the period from the late nineteenth century to the present, when the emergence of feminist movements and sub-cultural homosexual identities focused attention on the construction and destabilization of categories of gender and sexual identity.

Kate Chedzoy

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Cultural Studies

As a scholarly enterprise whose intellectual history draws from a range of academic disciplines both in the United States and in Britain, including traditional humanities disciplines such as literary studies, English studies, and philosophy, and those in the social sciences such as sociology, anthropology, and political science, and more recently institutionalized "disciplines" such as media and film studies, cultural studies is now and has been historically a thoroughly interdisciplinary invention. The term was first used at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in En-

gland in the 1960s and early 1970s. The intellectual project was defined, from early on, as an attempt to integrate the textual focus and interpretive methods of literary studies (borrowing also an understanding of the formal qualities of modes of cultural expression) with the analytical frameworks of sociology and critical theory and the field methods of anthropology, in the service of producing critical analyses of contemporary culture. In that it sought to combine the interpretive frameworks of textual studies with a political critique of the material conditions of the production and reception of cultural texts, cultural studies has been informed by the work of scholars trained in literary studies who were also attendant to the cultural context of the literature they studied.

Even as cultural studies emerged as a situated "invention" of a new form of academic work, it was also designed to be an "intervention" into the institutional dynamics of discipline formation. The organization of work at the center was structured around collaborative groups; one of the more interventionist working groups was the Women's Studies Group, whose early focus on the material conditions of women's access to literary culture and of women's writing inaugurated a multifaceted and multibranching program of research on the material conditions of women's lives under late capitalism. The book *Women Take Issue* (1978), the first edited collection of work by the Women's Studies Group, includes chapters on the various projects of group members: for example, Dorothy Hobson on the isolation and oppression of housewives and Janice Winship on the ideology of femininity. In the introduction to the book, the editorial group comments explicitly on the dynamics of doing feminist intellectual work at the center. Seeking to make visible women's invisibility in the work going on at the center at the time, these scholars outline a series of commitments that serve as the foundation for the development of a feminist politics of academic work. The importance of this book, in addition to the specific historical and institutional intervention it enacted, is that it lays the groundwork for the development of a specifically feminist framework of cultural analysis: namely the work that is now identified as feminist cultural studies.

The development of feminist cultural studies in the 1980s was influenced by a range of work by feminist scholars who theorize reading and writing as fundamentally cultural practices;

these will include those projects explicitly designed to examine what it means to "read" and "write" culture as a black feminist, a woman of color, a lesbian feminist, a workingclass woman, or sometimes as a white feminist. These projects include as well the feminist cultural criticism produced in the context of literary and film studies. For some the distinction between feminist literary criticism and feminist cultural studies may seem like a rather arbitrary demarcation, since many feminist literary critics (such as Balsamo, Ebert, and hooks) not only engage a broader cultural context in their discussion of literary works, but explicitly identify their work as making a contribution to the development of feminist cultural theory. Indeed as Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore describe in their introduction to *The Feminist Reader*, from the early 1970s whenever feminist writers discussed literature "they refused to isolate it from the cultural of which it forms a part" and in this sense offered an extremely radical critique of traditional literary criticism. Feminist cultural studies expands this critique to address the broader questions about the social and cultural determinations of reading practices and the material conditions of reading contexts. Nevertheless, feminist literary criticism and feminist cultural studies share a set of guiding commitments that could be specified in the following way: that writing be denaturalized as a solitary (individualist) act, that literature be understood as culturally and historically determined, and that art cannot be a retreat from politics. One of the consequences of the close connection between feminist literary criticism and feminist cultural studies is that by the late 1980s feminist literary critics are well advanced beyond their more androcentric colleagues in their apprehension of the expressly political aims of cultural studies more generally.

The affiliation between feminist literary criticism and feminist cultural studies is especially suggestive in the work that addresses the relationship between literary theory and feminist politics. Given that they share a critical focus on the relation between literature and the culture within which it is produced or consumed, feminist literary studies and feminist cultural studies are equally preoccupied with the discursive construction of identity and subjectivity, and what might be called the politics of representation. They diverge from one another in the amount of attention given to the circuit of production, exchange, and consump-

tion of cultural products. This focus suggests certain questions for feminist cultural studies, not only about the cultural conditions of the production of given texts or other cultural forms, that is, music, body practices, geography, but also about the specific conditions of reading or consumption, which often requires the investigation of the everyday situations of lived cultures.

In these ways, the critical agenda of feminist cultural studies extends beyond the by-now familiar arguments for canon revision. It is probably fair to say that feminist cultural studies subsumes the study of literature under the broader study of culture, where textuality may be the medium of analysis, but the study of structures, institutions, and relations of power are the horizon of feminist scholarship. The struggle over the canon is understood to be a struggle about the politics of representation and the relations of power that organize knowledge. This not only concerns representation in books or films but more broadly in the university curriculum, social movements, and global economic relations (among other things). The point, of course, is to win the struggle for inclusion not only with respect to the list of required reading but, more important, in the social and political struggles outside of academe. For this reason, feminist cultural studies relies heavily on the analytical frameworks of contemporary feminist social and political theory. The divergence then between feminist literary criticism and feminist cultural studies can be identified by the notion of the "text" that grounds feminist criticism, the degree to which literature remains the privileged object of cultural criticism, and the extent to which each approach accounts for the network of relations (embodied and semiotic) within which any text makes sense.

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Cyborg Feminism

A notion acquired from twentieth-century scientific discourse, the cyborg is a symbiotic being resulting from an interface between the cybernetic and the organic. The development of cybernetics—the science of self-regulating control processes in electronic, mechanical, and biological systems—was military-based, the paradigm of the post-World War II era. Cybernetic systems can include a wide array of machines and apparatuses, mechanisms that comprise systems described by Bill Nichols as having a "dynamic, even if limited" quotient of intelligence. And cybernetic organisms, in their "confusing" of mechanical and organic, the inner and outer realms, simulation and reality, have been considered by some contemporary feminists to hold tremendous potential for alternative subjectivities. Instead of the rigidity of subject positions structured by the stabilizing discourses of science and rationality, Oedipal subjectivity, or binary oppositions, cyborg subjectivity provides for multiple perspectives and the ongoing reinvention of positionings.

Donna Haraway is the feminist scholar who has most extensively developed ideas