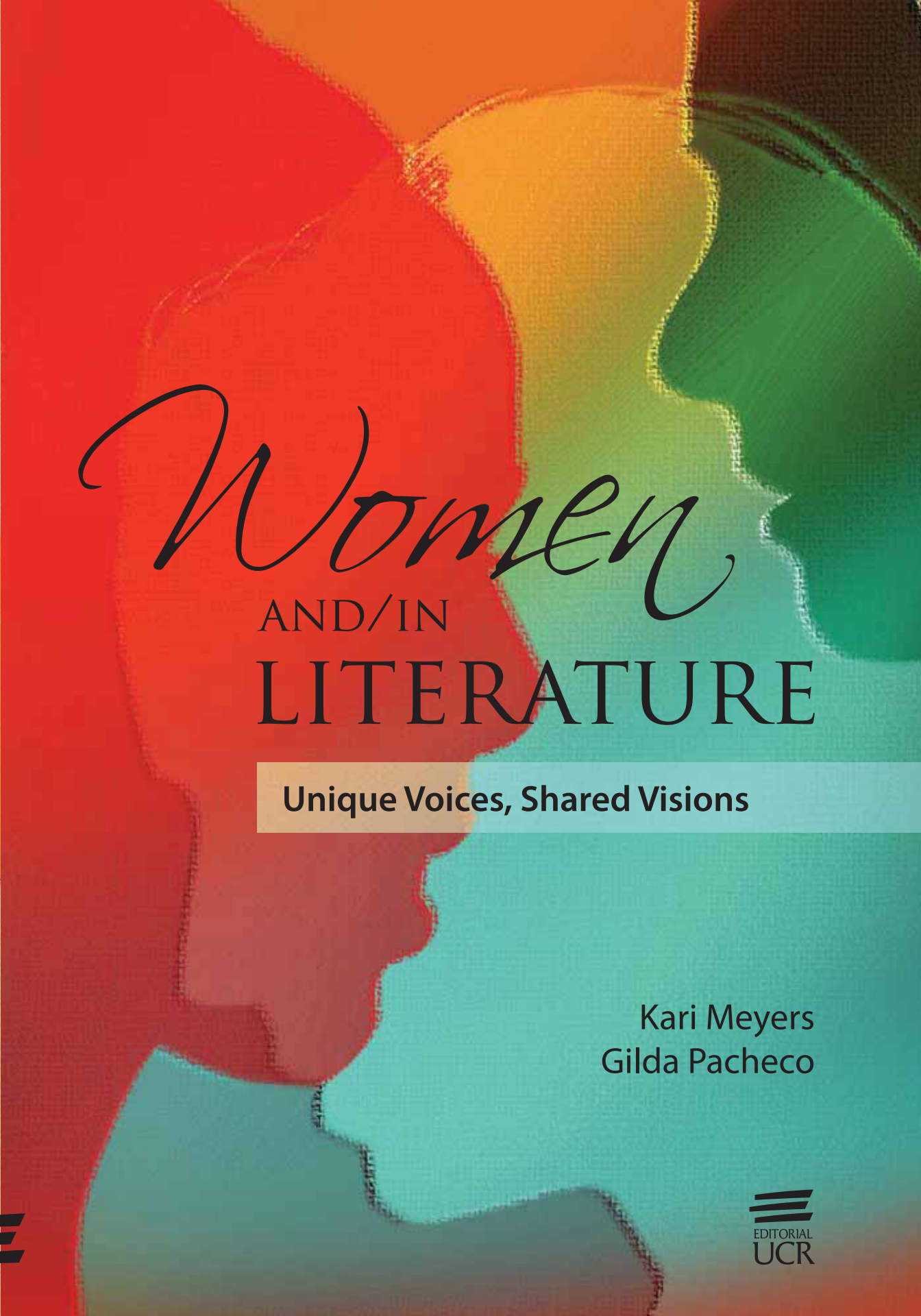
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2011

809.892.87
M613w Meyers Skredsvig, Kari, 1947-
Women and / in literature : unique voices, shared visions / Kari Meyers, Gilda Pacheco. – 1. ed. – Costa Rica : Edit. UCR, 2011.
xiv, 207 p.

ISBN 978-9968-46-254-9

1. CRÍTICA LITERARIA FEMINISTA. 2. MUJERES EN LA LITERATURA. 3. FEMINISMO Y LITERATURA. I. Pacheco Acuña, Gilda, coautora. II. Título.

CIP/2211
CC/SIBDI.UCR

Edición aprobada por la Comisión Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica
Primera edición: 2011

La EUCR es miembro del Sistema de Editoriales Universitarias de Centroamérica (SEDUCA), perteneciente al Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano (CSUCA).

Corrección filológica y revisión de pruebas: *Gilda Pacheco y Kari Meyers* • Diseño y diagramación: *Karla Alfaro y Nicole Riquelme* • Diseño de portada: *Priscila Coto* • Control de calidad: *Alejandra Ruiz.*

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Chapter One

Introduction: Women and/in Literature

"Feminist literary theories, then, are the theories of feminists struggling against masculinism and among themselves over the meanings of literature, reading, and feminism. While it is not possible to define the essence of feminist literary theory, there are a range of (competing yet characteristic) practices that emerge in the course of these struggles."

Ellen Rooney ("Introduction," *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory 1)*

Women and Literature:
A Quick Look at the Politics of Literature

Women and literature? What are the crucial connections between the two that justify a text revolving around them? Are there really any differences between male and female relationships to literature, and if so, are they significant? What does it mean to focus on gender relationships to and within literature, and why do those relationships matter? These are questions that consistently elicit multiple responses from people in the field of literature, whether publishers, editors, authors, literary critics or ordinary readers. In this book, we will examine the relationships between women and literature in a variety of ways designed to elucidate the issues inscribed in those initial questions so that the readers of this text can arrive at their own conclusions and answers. For happily, as contemporary literary criticism is eager to remind us, there is never simply a single, "right" response to literature. It is up to each individual reader to sift through and savor the potential of literary texts on the journey towards actively developing (not passively finding) his/her own answers while establishing and affirming personal positions.

Ironically, this has not always been the case. Traditionally, at least in the literary canon of the Western world, particularly the English-speaking part of it which is of greatest concern to us in this text, literary critics and editors have been the self-proclaimed—and unchallenged—experts. Their job has been to "illuminate" the reading public in such areas as the fundamental characteristics of different kinds of literary texts, the standards for judging the literary quality and value of each text, the types of reading considered "appropriate" for different reading publics, and even the form and content of literary publications.

This paradigm dates as far back as the ancient Greek scholars who formulated the origins of literary criticism. Plato (427/8-347/8 B.C.) was the first to develop literary theory and criticism in the Western hemisphere. He expounded on the roles of poets and poetry and believed that even though poets were divinely inspired, their poetry should be used for didactic purposes only. It is important to keep in mind that Plato used the term poetry less in the sense of the written

text we associate with it today than in reference to rhetorical performances, which included comedy, tragedy, epic and lyric recitations. In formulating his principles of beauty, truth, goodness and morality, this Greek philosopher condemned poets for being “imitators of shadows” who relied on intuition rather than reason. However, since they sang “the victories of lofty men” in their epics, Plato recognized their value in leading people to good, so he included poets in his design for a model republic.

The change from a moralistic to a more formalistic view of literature was seen in Plato’s pupil, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.). In his *Poetics*, Aristotle elaborated on the characteristics he believed necessary for “proper” theater, which he conceived of as poetry. He insisted that authors must write clearly while elevating their language use through stylistic techniques; he also introduced concepts such as unity of plot, unity of structure, and unity of theme. In *Poetics*, Aristotle offered a definition of tragedy that has been considered one of the bases of Western literary criticism. According to the Greek philosopher, art consists of well-structured form, so a tragedy, a good tragedy, must have a beginning, middle and end. In short, the literary work is seen as a whole with all its parts interrelated. So successfully did he establish these fundamental principles that the very term “poetics” has come to be understood as the aesthetic principles governing any given literary form. Both Plato and Aristotle considered creative writing a means to an end, not an end in itself.

For centuries, the writings of these early philosophers dominated ideas about literary production and criticism. The mimetic (imitative) quality of literature they envisioned is also seen in Roman critics. Horace (65-8 B.C.), for instance, believed that poets must imitate other poets, that a good writer should write about traditional subjects in original ways, and that literature should teach and delight simultaneously. Longinus (first century A.D.), in his famous work *On the Sublime*, concentrated on the textual elements able to provoke an emotional and intellectual response in the reader, a state of ecstasy which would prompt the reader’s identification with the text and would be the ultimate tribute for a writer.

Further formulations of literature and theory took place in later periods. One of the leading figures of the Middle Ages, Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), declared that the language spoken by the common people was the most appropriate

language for literature. Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), an important critic of the Renaissance, affirmed that poetry embodied truth and that a tragedy must have unity of action, time and space. Clearly, the notions of form and unity in the literary work, as well as the didactical and moral functions of literature, were recurrent concerns of early critics. It is not mere chance that the men mentioned before constitute our earliest literary theorists. They are powerful, ancient examples of how not only the arts, as we now call them, but education, social sciences, politics and philosophy, among others, have traditionally been exclusively male territory. There have been exceptions, of course, even as long ago as Sappho, one of the very earliest well-known woman authors, whose lyric writings date back to the 7th-6th century B.C. However, as has been amply documented in myriads of books dealing with an even greater number of topics (including such broad areas as religion, science, philosophy, history, and so forth), so-called human history has essentially really been the history of mankind, that is, of men. Little acknowledgement, and even less importance, has been given to contemplation of the roles and significance of women in that historical development. It goes without saying that this has led to a distorted, incomplete understanding of human development.

We can only speculate how this situation came to be. Many theorists believe that it is the result of early gendered role definitions going back as far as the earliest human groups, where biology dictated that men take on the roles of hunters and warriors while women were in charge of children and the home, although frequently women were also responsible for the gathering of foodstuffs not related to hunting. This early, biologically-determined division of roles fomented the development of what is commonly called gendered spheres, where men's place in the complex world of human activity was the public areas, while women's sphere was designated as private and essentially limited to the home. This division eventually expanded into a polarization not only of physical space, but also of ascribed characteristics and gendered roles, which will be explored in detail later. It is probably also the beginning of the perennial debate, often called the "nature versus nurture" debate, revolving around the question of which characteristics are biologically ordained versus which traits are socially determined.

Centuries, even millenniums, of analysis and theorization, enough to fill entire libraries, attest to people's attempts to define the origins of human characteristics.

Aristotle, for example, believed that men were unilaterally responsible for the creation of more human beings, since their "seed" provided the essence of humanity, while women served merely as vessels for its growth. Moreover, Aristotle believed that only men, not women, had souls and were capable of logical thinking, thus making it possible for men to achieve elevated states of morality. In the epistles of Peter included in the New Testament of the Christian Bible, another well-known text, women are instructed not only to be obedient to men, but also to be silent. Such ideas, to name only a couple of outstanding examples, unquestionably contributed to fomenting social theories and relationships in which males were perceived as superior to females not only intellectually, but also spiritually and ethically. This, in turn, became the basis for patriarchal societies and mindsets in which men have been perceived as superior, which then makes it "appropriate" and "right" for them to wield power both publicly and privately.

At this point, readers may be asking themselves where this discussion is going and, more to the point, what this radically reduced historical summary has to do with literature. The answer is: everything. In an early feminist publication called *The Resisting Reader*, Judith Fetterley sums it up very succinctly in her affirmation that "Literature is political" (6). The politics of literature are quite simply those of the society in question; the issues, power struggles, attitudes, values and belief systems found in the society in which any given text is produced mark that text with traces of those politics. They also determine, to a great extent, what texts are published and how they are received by the literary establishment and by the reading public in general. "Politics," in its broadest sense, refers to the relationships among the members and institutions of any given society, and these relationships are inevitably power relationships since the participants are never truly equal. In other words, in this book, "political" is not used in the traditional, limited sense of a political party as defined by its official ideological position; rather, it is used in the more flexible sense of fluctuating power relationships in a given society at any given time. From this perspective, virtually every societal relationship is political. Literature is political, too, because it derives from, manifests and contributes to social relationships.

Literature is also political in the sense that it is governed by myriads of rules and regulations. Many of these are articulated in texts and courses on how to write literature and how to read (that is, analyze, evaluate, and understand) literature. Other rules, significantly, go unarticulated, but are none the less important because of it. For example, at the most basic level, unless one is dealing with the very earliest literature, which is generally accepted as being the epic poems orally transmitted by tribal scops, literature requires literacy. The ability to read and write is such a basic assumption in most contemplations of literature that it is not even mentioned. And the process by which people acquire those skills, which seems so transparent, also involves politically charged priorities, such as “finding meaning,” summarizing, categorizing, and “reading beyond the lines,” among others.

In producing literature, not only are there grammar rules to be followed and words to be chosen, but also literary conventions either to honor or to breach. Teachers, editors, and society in general determine linguistic conventions, that is, the guidelines for acceptable language use in social interaction. Literary critics are the ones charged with determining the “rules” for literary production, at times with input from the authors themselves. Walt Whitman, for example, set forth his poetic principles in the introduction to *Leaves of Grass*, a tribute to lyricism, while Edgar Allen Poe affirmed his personal aesthetic theory in “The Philosophy of Composition” at the same time that he was (re-)inventing modes of narrative such as the psychological mystery. But it is the literary critics and editors who generally establish the criteria for evaluating literary merit and value; the role of the reading public has traditionally been limited to that of learning to respond “appropriately” (that is, in accordance with the dictates of the literary theorists and critics) to those literary works deemed worthy of public perusal.

Traditional Literary Criticism: It's a Man's World

As suggested earlier, literary criticism has a very long history, as well as a very masculine one. It is important to have at least a general idea of traditional types of literary criticism and their history, since they constitute the foundation for all subsequent criticism and enhance our understanding of contemporary criticism and its import. As with most fields of knowledge, each new layer of literary criticism draws upon, responds to, and/or evolves from what has come before. In the case of feminist criticism, which is so closely intertwined with social history, it is especially productive to keep in mind the critical predecessors which contributed to its development. This is so partly because all of them have been appropriated by feminist literary critics in one way or another and also because, as pillars in the field, they are stepping stones to feminist criticism today.

Literary criticism began in classical times, with Plato's inclusion of poets in his ideal republic and Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotle set the foundations for a traditional type of literary criticism called formalism. It is one of the oldest types of criticism and one which has strong adherents even today. The basis of formalistic criticism is the premise that literary and aesthetic merit rests upon achieved form. Form is the result of carefully crafted, carefully manipulated elements which are joined to create an integral whole. Formalism purports to be objective, even scientific, asserting that form is achieved through skillful employment of literary techniques and devices. This renders content subservient to form, so the author is perceived more as an artisan than a creator.

The same concerns manifested by classical critics were seen in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the neoclassical period (the Age of Reason, also called the Enlightenment). John Dryden (1631-1700) and Alexander Pope (1688-1744) are key representatives. Dryden saw clarity, elegance, wit and decorum as fundamental literary traits, while Pope reaffirmed classical literary tendencies by proposing mimetic and rhetorical patterns in his theoretical views. Important changes took place in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century with the emergence of Romanticism. Many theoretical views were reformulated, leaving reason and order behind in exchange for intuition, feelings and imagination.

In *Lyrical Ballads*, William Wordsworth (1770-1850) proclaimed that common people and everyday speech should be the traits of literature because the poet was simply "a man speaking to men." And since, according to Wordsworth, poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," the poet and the reader could share these feelings. The literary work was seen as an organic whole deriving from the author's emotion. By favoring intuition, individuality and imagination, Wordsworth and the other Romantic writers expanded the scope of theoretical and critical views in the literary field. (Ironically, it was the "personal, emotional" nature of much of women's early writing which kept it from being considered "literary," as will be discussed.)

However, although Romanticism had a radical impact on literary criticism and production, critical preoccupation with form and structure remained relatively constant. With the theory of "the single effect," a major American critic and writer, Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), supported the view of the literary work as a whole whose parts were interrelated, all of them working together to develop a unified tone and to create a specific effect on the reader. Well-known English critic and poet Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) reaffirmed classical views by asserting that poetry, rather than history or science, provided the necessary truths and values to judge society. Later in the nineteenth century, in "The Art of Fiction," American novelist and critic Henry James (1843-1916) presents his view of the novel as life in action in the form of a coherent whole where all its elements are connected. Formalist criticism has extended into the present century as well, as will be discussed in greater detail, and includes New Criticism, the so-called Russian Formalism of the early twentieth century, and their heirs, the structuralists. In all of these critical theories, there is an emphasis on form or structure as the overriding principle governing the literary text and on the text as an autonomous object.

Moral-philosophical criticism, another type of traditional criticism also dating back to the classics, developed in a loosely parallel manner to more formalistic tendencies. As its name suggests, its principal concern is didactic. It focuses on message or theme, on identifying the message to be gleaned from the literary text, preferably one which will enhance the reader's sense of what is right or wrong, good or bad, in other words, ethically proper and correct. The basic assumption of this type of criticism is that all "good" literature has a moral message

to convey, and merit is determined by the strength, clarity, and appropriateness of that message. Not surprisingly, hegemonic issues of power and authority come into play here in terms of whose morality is privileged and who decides (once again placing women in a marginalized position).

Traditionally, of course, it was believed that there was only one "correct" morality; it was the author's job to illuminate and instruct and the reader's job to understand. Values were thus perceived as absolute. In contrast, contemporary perspectives on morality and ethics tend to be more flexible. While the latter do not question the existence of values, most or all of these values are perceived as relative to the time and place under scrutiny, or even to the individual. For example, traditional morality perceives stealing as an absolute wrong, while contemporary moralists might consider contingencies to be mitigating factors, such as stealing out of desperation in order to feed one's children. It should be noted that these newer perspectives have not, by any means, totally replaced more traditional views on ethics.

One obvious challenge to a moralistic approach to literature in today's world is precisely the question of absolute versus relative values. More formalistic critics contend that careful, close reading of a literary text leads to a single, unequivocal message or theme, leaving no opportunity for variables within or extrinsic to the text. Other critics believe in more ample parameters for establishing message, depending on a series of factors external to the text; reader-response theories, for example, give readers full responsibility for determining meaning and message. Feminist readers and critics, ever sensitive to patriarchal claims of "universal" perspective, tend to be less dogmatic and more flexible in terms of accepting multiple possibilities concerning theme or message.

Another topic which is frequently debated within the philosophical-moralistic approach is the author's intention. Occasionally a message or lesson is literally articulated by the author, which was frequently the case in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (and even into the nineteenth century). This was especially prevalent when literature itself was questioned as a worthwhile pursuit and moral teaching was sometimes employed to "justify" it. Clearly that kind of situation leaves little room for discussion on what lesson the author intended to give his/

her readers, although there may still be some discussion on whether the reader agrees with the author or not. In many instances, however, especially in more modern literature, it is considered up to the reader to “discover,” “decide,” or even construct (depending on the approach being utilized) the message the author might be sending. In any case, message is crucial to a moralistic approach.

Two other traditional approaches to literary criticism, the historical and the biographical, developed significantly in the nineteenth century. In the Victorian era, great concern with the environment was manifested in relation to the scientific views proposed by Charles Darwin. By exploring the origin of the human race, his theories helped develop doctrines of historical and scientific determinism, and these theories in turn moved critics see literature from different perspectives. French critic Hippoloyte Adolphe Taine (1828-1893) affirmed that the author´s milieu and period should be examined to clarify and analyze the literary work, for the text was the result of its history. Taine is truly a precursor of the historical-biographical and moral-philosophical approaches employed at the end of the nineteenth century, when the literary work was viewed as a reflection of the author’s time and life, and critics were concerned with social values and beliefs and how they were portrayed in the literary work. Historical and biographical types of criticism approach literature through focusing on those aspects respectively.

A historical approach tends to examine the literary text less from an aesthetic point of view, like that of formalists, than from a social one. It is concerned with characterizing the time period and place—in other words, the setting—of a given text: identifying operative beliefs and value systems, social issues, historical events and characters or character types, to name a few key aspects. Sometimes, as in the case of naturalism, the particular circumstances of a time and place are perceived as deterministic, so powerful that they override the individual’s freedom of choice, as in Theodore Dreiser’s novel *Carrie* or George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*. According to the logic operative in these critical views, the environment and external elements were needed because the text did not really exist by itself; it was written by someone who belonged to a given society, and those aspects should be taken into account in a literary analysis.

A biographical approach starts with the author's life and times and then searches for correlations in the literary text, either to use the biography to illuminate the content of the literary text or to employ the literary text to further knowledge and understanding of the author. Because it is an extrinsic approach which concentrates heavily on elements outside the text, much less importance is given to the form. Thus, there is a distinct danger here of forcing connections between the text and the biography for the stated purposes of this approach, but it certainly has earned a place in the annals of literary criticism. Feminist critics sometimes apply variations of this approach in their efforts to "rescue" and reconsider the works of women writers, and certain psychological approaches employed today can, in some sense, be seen as evolving from traditional biographical approaches, as will be discussed later.

Much historical criticism aims at analyzing the portrayal of the chronological period or a given location (whether specific or general), either for descriptive purposes or to prove or disprove a given historical theory or convention concerning an event or place. Thus, this type of criticism tends to focus on social phenomena. Traditionally, however, it also tends to see history as objective and linear, as "the truth," an official, unquestioned (and unquestionable) version of historical reality. This contrasts with more contemporary historical approaches which see any history as one of many, even infinite, possible versions of historical "reality," whether individual or shared. It should also be pointed out that traditional historical criticism did not really take the reader's or critic's own perspective or position into account; historical and social observations were perceived as factual and objective, so reader/critic input was considered insignificant or nonexistent. Variations of this historical perspective are frequently employed by feminist critics today, especially in conjunction with New Historicism. However, there is a major difference: contemporary critics see literature as a dynamic manifestation of the society rather than as simply a passive reflection of that society.

Although the previous discussion provides only a cursory look at traditional approaches, it gives an idea of the history of literary criticism from its beginnings (which, as we have seen, precede recognition of literature as we know it, as a field of study, by centuries) until the early twentieth century. Until the past century, literary criticism has been dominated by the traditional approaches presented

above, approaches which continue to be used even today. Each concentrates on literature from its own perspective; each approach prompts a specific set of questions and concerns which, of course, influences responses as well. The choice of a critical approach conditions both the inquiries and the answers for the critic; depending on the approach used, different critical conclusions will be drawn.

Traditionally, however, no matter what approach has been employed, the authors, editors, and critics—at least those who were published and did the publishing, that is, those whose voices were heard—were almost always male. Moreover, characteristically they were white males as well, which, needless to say, created serious limitations to both literature and literary criticism. Thus, not surprisingly, like most marginalized groups, until less than a century ago, women's voices were muted. Although there were forerunners to feminism and feminist criticism through the centuries, essentially both took shape in the twentieth century, as we will see.

Paradoxical New Directions: The Simultaneous Rise of Individualism and Plurality

The twentieth century brought significant changes to literary criticism. Notions of literary unity and structure dominant since classical times were compiled and systematized in new critical tendencies. Russian formalism was one of the first schools that developed in the early decades of the twentieth century. These theorists adopted Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic notions of "langue" (language) and "parole" (word) and concentrated on verbal strategies and devices; they saw language, and hence literature, as a system and the literary work as simply a part within that system. Vladimir Propp, Roman Jakobson, and Victor Shklovsky reoriented literary studies in terms of form and technique; they analyzed structures according to their sequence of appearance. Their contributions to the literary field included notions of estrangement and defamiliarization, as well as reformulation of the concepts of story, plot, actions and functions of language.

Following similar concepts, the school of New Criticism developed in the United States (where it flourished from the 1930s until the 1960s). American critics such as Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks and John Crowe Ransom looked for precision in literary works. They saw the text as the exclusive source of meaning and believed that no external information was needed to analyze a literary work; the work itself, by means of its form and content, was enough. Close reading was the main tool for this kind of analysis, which was considered objective. (This created serious problems for female readers and critics who were expected to share the dominant male perspective of literature and literary criticism, a perspective which was projected as "objective" and "universal.") The literary texts were seen as purely aesthetic objects; accordingly, literary texture, structural elements, tension, paradox, ambiguity, and irony were studied intensely. However, after the mid-twentieth century, the limitations of New Criticism, such as its overlooking of emotions and its detachment of the work from society, were increasingly perceived as problematic. New Criticism's obsessive absorption with form led to the development of different theoretical perspectives.

Along with linguistic criticism, the emergence of different social sciences, especially psychology and social anthropology, contributed to expanding the field of literature. The appearance of modern anthropology at the end of the nineteenth century was an important influence in fomenting mythic and archetypal critical approaches in the twentieth century. Based on the idea that archetypes—universal symbols—are part of life and hence literature, a group of scholars studied the rites, beliefs and celebrations of different communities and societies of different times. They examined the links between ancient tribes and mythology. Thus, the individual's hopes and fears were seen as manifestations of the shared heritage of the human race. The unified whole studied by the New Critics was no longer isolated; rather, it became part of a worldwide tapestry of universal transcendence and meanings which flourished in myth criticism.

Myth criticism tends to look for patterns and archetypes as a tool for understanding not just literature, but humans' place in the world in general. The great heroes of classic mythologies, especially Greek and Roman, provide models for life lessons and situations to which people of all times can relate. The timelessness and universality of myth are precisely what attract readers and

critics alike in their search for understanding of the human condition. Critics using a mythic approach to literature look beyond the particular surface realities to those deeper realities embedded in the human psyche, drawing clues from the symbolic significance of archetypal personas, motifs and images. Joseph Campbell's research in world mythologies contributed significantly to understanding how a communal mythology—a set of beliefs and values which serve as the foundation for a given group's secular ideology—is always in essence a concrete example of universal themes, concerns, and truths.

Paradoxically, another trend in myth criticism in the mid-twentieth century evolved in exactly the opposite direction, personalizing myth in ways which highlight the individual and emphasize the personal over the communal, while still drawing upon the latter. In part this developed as a result of psychologist Carl Jung's theories (discussed below) on the relationships between psychology and myth; psychology studies the individual psyche, while myth concentrates on human universals, what Jung called the "collective unconscious." Joseph Campbell put a different twist on this relationship with his concept of "individual myth," in which each individual's personal life journey is seen as a variation of the classical hero's quest. Both types of heroes have strong correlations with U.S. society, where the myth called "the American Dream" is projected onto the perennial concern with individualism and the eternal search for fulfillment, which constitute the two most constant themes in U.S. literature. Every nation has a communal mythology, and every individual a personal version of it, all of which correlates to human universals, according to myth criticism. Feminist myth critics have researched mythology extensively in innovative efforts to discover early threads of female experience, representation and history.

The juxtaposition of the individual and the collective in the twentieth century is evident thematically and theoretically. In the nineteenth century, the main subject of many literary works tended to be society and its rules, flaws and vices; since the twentieth century, the focus of attention has been on the individual. In the field of literary criticism, this tendency was influenced by the theories of Sigmund Freud, the famous Austrian psychologist. Freud explored the unconscious aspects of the human psyche, proclaiming that most mental processes were unconscious, that all human behavior was motivated by sexual energy, and that most of an individual's desires were repressed. Freud is considered the "father"

of modern psychology; his distinction between the conscious and the unconscious, in combination with his premises relating to the basic stages of human psychological development and their repercussions, are rich tools for literary analysis. His theories, some of which are still controversial today, provoked a great deal of dissent in his time. (Many women have been especially outraged that Freud chose to define women in terms of men.)

Even some of Freud's own disciples disagreed with their master's views; foremost among them was Carl Jung. Jung thought that Freud's theoretical premises were limited and negative and that his scope was too narrow. Jung expanded that scope to a collective level by proposing theories of racial memory or collective unconscious, individuation as the psychological process of self-recognition and development, and a tripartite archetypal division of the psychic predispositions and instincts of the human mind. Thus, while Freudian psychology centers on the individual, Jungian psychology deals with human psychology at both individual and collective levels. Their views resulted in important contributions to fields such as sociology, anthropology and literature, among others. Freud's and Jung's ideas and the emergence of modern anthropology contributed significantly to new approaches in the last half of the twentieth century, including feminism. From these early founders of the field of psychology have arisen a considerable number of theories both supporting and challenging their ideas, all of which can be used to approach literature.

The radical social changes of the twentieth century which began with World War I and culminated in the 1960s prompted a myriad of changes in all aspects of U.S. society. The 1920s are often perceived as a decade of social rebellion, prompted at least in part by the trauma of World War I, often characterized by the bobbed hair, public smoking, extravagant accessories and short chemise dresses of the "flappers" and their "risqué" lifestyle. Wartime drew women out into public spaces, where they were needed to fill jobs vacated by soldiers, and women's roles were never again as contained as they had been in previous centuries. In the United States, the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression of the 1930s caused more upheaval, both financial and social, exacerbated by U.S. participation in World War II. In Europe, experiments in socialism, communism, and fascism all contributed to the tumult of World War II and decades of political and social unrest.

In the U.S., the post-war years of the 1950s were characterized by a nostalgic attempt to return to domesticity and "normalcy," an understandable reaction to all the turmoil. (The continued popularity of New Criticism after WWII has sometimes been perceived as a desire to remain in a simpler, "safer" past.) However, even then, further social rebellion was brewing, evident in the literature of the so-called Beat Generation and novels such as *The Catcher in the Rye*. Meanwhile, in France, existentialist philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre undermined the moral and intellectual bearings of society. In the U.S., the 1960s brought about very radical, public, social changes, characterized by phenomena such as the hippie movement, Women's Liberation, widespread experimentation with social drug use, new methods of birth control, the civil rights movement, and the problematic beginnings of U.S. intervention in the Vietnam War, to name a few prominent aspects of the time.

Literary criticism in the U.S. also took a turn around that time. Although New Criticism continued to dominate as a critical approach, literary historians began to see it as a futile attempt to posit literature as apolitical and ahistorical. Meanwhile, other types of criticism were being explored. Part of the anti-establishmentarianism, frequently underground in the '50s but very open in the '60s, was a rebellion against organized religions in general, which opened space for explorations of other kinds of spiritual considerations and truths. It was a time of great interest in traditional Eastern religions and attempts to forge new spiritual foundations which were less denominational and less structured in nature. This social reality both influenced the content of many literary texts and renewed critical interest in mythologies as a means of approaching literary works. The literature of that period frequently manifested strong social criticism, while also offering a variety of utopian visions for a different kind of society. Perhaps there is a correlation between this desire for social change and the renewed interest in myth at that time.

The continuous polarization of the individual and the collective has had other repercussions in Western literature. One effect has been to liberate and legitimize voices previously unarticulated, unheard, or silenced by the authority invested in traditional voices, which, again, tended to be both male and white. In U.S. literature, this meant that so-called minority authors—African Americans, Asian Americans, "people of color," Native Americans, and within all those categories, women—began to make a place for themselves in literary publications and even

within the literary canon, which expanded to make room for them. In literary criticism, it fomented the development of a wide gamut of reader-response tendencies.

While there are many subcategories of reader-response approaches to literature, they share an insistence on individual interpretations of meaning in a literary text and go even further in their affirmation that literary texts are actually constructed by their readers to a certain extent (the degree varies depending on the particular reader-response theory being used). A precursor of this approach was critic Louise Rosenblatt. Based on I.A. Richards' studies, Rosenblatt formulated her theory of transactional experience in which she concluded that the text and the reader had to work together to create meaning. The literary work did not have meaning by itself; rather, meaning had to be generated by the reader and negotiated with the text in an interactive process.

Reader-response critics claimed that the text was devoid of meaning in itself: it was the reader, the conscious mind, the subject, who generated meaning by reading the text. Among these critics, Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss used phenomenology in their views of implied reader and horizons of expectations. There were also representatives of subjective criticism, such as Norman Holland, David Bleich and Stanley Fish, for whom the text was an extension of the human psyche.

Reader-Response criticism has made crucial literary contributions: it manifested the importance of the reader (until then generally ignored by literary criticism), broke the supremacy of the text in literary analysis proposed by New Criticism, and developed notions of plurality and dynamism that would be exploited by later critical tendencies that shared its concern with meaning production. Feminist literary criticism has heartily embraced reader-response premises because they respect multiple perspectives and validate personal responses.

Structuralism also gained importance as a major movement in the English-speaking world in the mid-twentieth century from the influence of a group of French scholars who used Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theories as basis for a system of meanings to explore social and cultural manifestations in the 1950s and 1960s. The goal of these theorists was to examine whatever structures operated in the text in order to understand the underlying system(s). According

to this approach, the reader was seen as the site of codes and as the agent of meaning, while the text was seen as a system of signs and relationships. In this approach, the description of any element without consideration of its place in the system became meaningless. This structuralism was very closely linked to semiotics (the study of signs). It was anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss who tightened the bonds between these two sciences with his study of myths in cross-cultural analysis and his theory of embedded structures brought to light through binary oppositions.

Structuralism led to increasingly complex approaches. In the 1960s, the members of the so-called "School of Paris," Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, proposed a branch of French structuralism in which the text was the message, the language was the code, and the reader was the one who had to decipher the code to arrive at "the" message. Following Saussure's terminology, the code is "la langue" (language) and the message "la parole" (word). Other more contemporary notions of structuralism are found in critics such as Jonathan Culler, with his concept of discourse and his views on structuralist poetics, reading procedures, and literary competence. In contributions concerning the structures and systems of literature, structuralism has proven to be a precursor of cultural studies.

Post-structuralism built upon that foundation in affirming the impossibility of describing a stable signifying system, given that systems were always changing. The main representatives of this approach were critics who found structuralism too limiting. Post-structuralism was, and still is, usually identified as deconstruction, and Jacques Derrida became its main exponent. Deconstruction finds disorder and contradictions in the text, which is seen as being in such a state of constant change that it provides only provisional meanings. Texts are seen as open-ended constructs that embrace contradiction and tension instead of order. In this scenario, stable meaning is untenable because language is incapable of both producing and sustaining fixed meaning in and of itself. In like manner, deconstruction undermines all forms of institutional authority or power systems; this adds to the plurality and dynamism of the approach and prepares the ground for the feminist approaches which would demand change, the abolition of patriarchal power structures, and unhindered diversity.

While the previous discussion barely outlines some of the key stages and considerations in traditional and transitional literary criticism, hopefully it provides enough of a background to understand the general historical development of critical trends. The earliest and most traditional—and therefore those frequently considered the most authoritative and valid—approaches to literature include the moral, philosophical, historical, biographical and formalistic. Mythic and psychological approaches in a sense constitute a transitional stage by being the first critical theories to differ significantly from those traditional approaches. They, in turn, have permitted the growth of contemporary critical approaches to literature. These changes will be discussed in terms of one of the most profound developments in the field of literature and literary criticism: the evolution of women's place and space within them. For feminists have appropriated these early approaches for their own purposes, redirecting both theory and application in the process of creating their own unique contributions.

Women's Voices and Visions: Changing Places, Changing Spaces

One of the greatest changes to emerge from the social and political turmoil of the 1960s has been the permanent transformation of women's space from private to public. Of course, this did not come about in merely one decade, but in literary criticism, the '60s were an opportune time for women to give voice to their own perspectives in many areas and in many ways. It was the unofficial beginning of what came to be called feminism, both as a social phenomenon and as an approach to literature. As a social phenomenon, it came about through extensive grass-roots movements which galvanized and organized women around the world. It was the time when women refused to remain outside of public spaces, looking in at the male-dominated sphere of action and authority, and insisted on being seen, felt, and heard outside of their private spheres. The effervescence of the 1960s, Women's Liberation and the recurrent fights for rights in those times proved to be fertile ground for female authors and critics to articulate their voices and to manifest their views of life, society and literature. They challenged the views of male critics, subverting the patriarchal voice of authority and looking for

a plurality of voices to represent women's experience and express women's ideas and concerns.

Until relatively recently, in most societies, regardless of location and historical period, women have been subjugated to men and marginalized in a multitude of ways. In ancient times women struggled to be considered equal to men in terms of intellectual, spiritual and moral capacities, in other words, to be acknowledged as "equally human." Women also have had to struggle to be able to exercise the same legal rights as men, for example, to own property, to have their own money and to be able to keep the money and goods they inherit, to have rights to their children, and to sign contracts and other legal documents, to name just a few. They have had to fight for political and social rights as well: the right to vote, the right to hold public office, the right to education, the right to freedom of movement. They have even had to fight for control of their own bodies. For centuries, in many cultures a woman "belonged" to her tribe or her father and could be traded, given away, or sold; once married, she was subordinated to her husband's will in all things, which in some cultures meant the husband was within his rights to physically punish or even kill his wife if she disobeyed or displeased him. This remains so even today in some cultures. Beyond the obvious problems caused by the legalities of women's traditional place in the world, social customs and cultural conditioning have imposed even greater restraints on their lives. It goes without saying that for centuries women have resisted gender discrimination and stereotyping with varying results, in literature as in all other aspects of daily life.

The relegation of women to a subordinate position and concomitant restrictions have made it difficult not only for women to produce literature, but also for them to share their writing and make it public. One of the first challenges for those in search of women's literary history is the daunting task of literally encountering writing by women. According to editor Claire Buck in her introduction to *The Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature*, finding and identifying women's writing is difficult for diverse reasons. First of all, women's access to education has frequently been a huge issue, and literacy is clearly a factor in the producing of most literature. Second, the term "literature" has not had the same meaning across all periods and places, so much of the writing women have produced has not necessarily been perceived as or treated as literature (for example, diaries

and letters). Cultural and gender biases related to what is considered an "appropriate" topic and "valuable" writing have further hampered women's participation in the field of literature. None of this, however, has stopped women from writing. Thus, one of the earliest and still relevant endeavors of feminist literary criticism has been to rediscover and disseminate writing by women because for centuries it has been belittled, undervalued, unheeded, and even discarded.

The repercussions of patriarchal domination in the field of literature, which of course parallel women's secondary social position, go far beyond the issue of how much writing was produced by women. As stated earlier, because men traditionally held all public positions, it was their criteria, as editors and publishers, which determined what was considered not only "good literature," but also "literature" at all. Women's diaries, journals, letters, testimonials, elegies, religious prose and poetry, and instruction books, which constitute much of the early writing by women, were not generally considered literary and therefore were not considered worth publishing. It was not really until the nineteenth century that women authors, at least in Western literature, became more commonplace and more public, at times even surpassing their male counterparts, as Nathaniel Hawthorne's infamous reference in 1855 to "that damned mob of scribbling women" attests.

Feminist readers and critics have come a long way in rescuing early writing by women, fomenting reconsideration of what is considered literary to expand and redefine subcategories, and broadening critical horizons by developing new perspectives and positions from which to analyze literature. At every stage, developments in the field of literature have paralleled those in the society in general. The words feminist and feminism were initially associated with the so-called "second wave" of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. While there is no agreement on exactly what feminism means and how it should be employed, it is generally agreed that it is related to the social, political, and philosophical struggles to eliminate sexism and injustice as they relate to women. The earliest proponents of this struggle, such as Julian of Norwich (mid-fourteenth century), Mary Wollstonecraft (late eighteenth century), and Sojourner Truth (mid-nineteenth century), to name a few, tended to be rather isolated in their attempts to protest

and bring about change, in the sense that they did not have the advantage of any organized support from others.

Feminism as a movement has gone through different stages. Early feminist activists, the "first wave" of feminism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, were mostly concerned with social and political issues, especially the right to vote. They insisted on being included in decision-making processes, both socially and politically, claiming their right to have a voice. "Second wave" feminism was a somewhat more radical movement, usually associated with the Women's Liberation Movement which began in the 1960s. This movement was initially launched under the slogan "The personal is political," which drove home the connection between everyday lives at home and at work and the injustices, inequalities, and repercussions found there. Its main objective was to create awareness of the ways in which women were systematically treated as second-class citizens and of the restrictive roles assigned to them by the patriarchal powers that controlled society, and then to remedy those problems.

However, much feminist thinking and writing of that time was hampered by the assumption that the women in question were homogeneous, that all women received the same treatment and responded in similar fashion, which of course, was not the case, especially since white, middle-class women were taken as the norm. "Third wave" feminism built upon that foundation by conscientiously creating greater awareness and acceptance of diversity, both within and beyond the feminist movement. Just as women themselves are constituted differently according to a huge gamut of variables—economic, ethnic, cultural, religious, philosophical, and so forth—so feminism has expanded in its attempts to be more open-minded, more representative, and more respectful of the myriad of individual and shared positions within its ranks.

Some theorists today feel that the terms "feminist literary criticism" and "feminism" have outlived their usefulness and/or have been politicized to the point that they create more divisions than alliances. They suggest using broader, more inclusive terms like "gender studies" for social sciences and literary criticism. The term feminist has also frequently been problematic because it has been misconstrued as synonymous to "man-hater." This misunderstanding is complicated because it

is the result of misinformation, lack of information, and/or the deliberate misuse of the term to undermine feminist concerns (and reinforce patriarchal positions). While feminism, like all ideologies, does include fringe groups which take more radical stands than the vast majority of its practitioners, it is both inaccurate and counterproductive to propagate use of the term feminist to further polarize gender issues: feminists, as stated earlier, are those individuals who acknowledge gender as a socio-political issue and strive to resolve gender inequalities.

In the field of literary criticism, feminism became more structured as an approach precisely during the 1960s. This does not mean, of course, that there were no feminist voices before that time; however, those who did speak out and act out against patriarchal patterns, such as Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), did so in strictly individual fashion. Early feminist critics concentrated on recuperating literary texts, as discussed earlier, and on creating awareness of patriarchal oppression in society in general and the field of literature in particular. Their tone tended to be a combination of anger and determination, and their focus was on voicing what they considered to be sexist, problematic social realities as portrayed through literature. For example, they were highly concerned about the stereotypical ways in which women were represented through female characters (by both male and female authors) and the oppression which victimized them. In general, it is fair to say that early feminism and feminist criticism tended to emphasize the social and political aspects of women's lives in a patriarchy.

Although these early critics clearly made very important contributions to feminist approaches to literature, feminist criticism began to move in different directions. Those belonging to "minority" groups began to claim their right to present their own perspectives, needs, and positions. Aside from sharing the biological status of women, these women—African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, lesbians, working class women, women from the Third World, and so forth— did not share or identify with the realities of mainstream feminists. Their insistence on making their voices heard helped feminist criticism mature. In the process, they also contributed to a more personal, introspective focus which emphasized individual situations and personal growth, rather than essentially reacting to an external reality, as earlier feminists did. Thus, much of later feminist

criticism dwells more on inner realities and aims at fomenting personal fulfillment, even though the social framework is always implicit. It needs to be said that all feminist critics share certain assumptions, which will be discussed in greater detail later, but it is impossible to group them into a single mindset, lifestyle, or life situation, just like the multitude of women they represent.

Because feminist literary criticism, like feminism in general, derives from cultural realities while at the same time personalizing them, feminism is frequently combined with other critical approaches. For example, those critics interested in women's representation are likely to combine feminism with mythic approaches. Feminist linguists can use their academic background to analyze literary characters' speech patterns as manifestations of larger cultural patterns, just as feminist historians can use literature to identify and characterize women's roles in a given time and place through examination of the setting of a literary text. Feminists who concentrate on post-colonial situations can analyze an entire gamut of social and political issues—particularly those of ethnicity, class, and identity—by applying principles of New Historicism, post-colonialism, or cultural studies, among others. Those more interested in inner realities can apply psychological approaches to literary texts, and gender studies provide rich soil for examining the interrelationships of sex and identity. Feminism thus provides a solid foundation for investigating a myriad of aspects of both literary texts and social realities.

To write implies the articulation of a voice, the author's, who hopes to change, enlarge or reinforce the reader's vision with his/her own views. To write can also be the search for a voice, the reader's, which can respond to the author's statement by understanding, without necessarily accepting the author's vision. In this virtual dialogue, the writer and reader, consciously or unconsciously, converge in need of communication. But they are not alone; speakers, narrators and characters, sometimes but not always sharing their views, are also part of their conversation. Literature is a field of voices and visions. But when voices have been silenced and visions have been limited, tension is generated. The presence of women in literature as characters, writers, readers and critics has been subjected to that silence and those limitations. Exploration of the relationships between women and/in literature, a plethora of voices as well as a myriad of visions, is a challenging task well worth the rewards.

Through literature and literary criticism, women have found outlets for expression and developed strategies for changing themselves, their societies, and their worlds. Through literature, women have found ways to voice their own realities and project their own visions. In the chapters that follow, we will examine those voices and visions more closely. As Ellen Rooney stated in her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, “Feminist literary theories are the collective conversations—often contradictory, sometimes heated—of feminist readers concerning the meaning and practice of reading, the intersections of subject formations such as race, class, sexuality, and gender, and the work of literature” (1). Feminist literary theory evolved from feminism as an ideology and as lived experience. It is that very wealth of individual and shared perspectives and experiences which supplies the profusion of feminist voices and the multiple intersections in their lives and in their literatures.

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Women and/in Literature: Unique Voices, Shared Visions introduces readers to the field of feminist literary criticism and demonstrates how women's voices and visions have forged, solidified, and transformed their presence within and beyond the literary canon. It examines the multiple intersections of women and literature through a chronological presentation of developments in feminisms and feminist literary criticism. This book provides readers with basic feminist theoretical views and exemplifies how they relate to literary texts, authors, readers, and critics by exploring essential questions such as: What is a feminist? What are the foundations of feminist theory? How does the choice of a critical perspective influence issues and conclusions? What are the crucial connections between feminism and literature? How does gender influence writing and reading?

This text leads readers through a discussion of feminist critical theory by examining its history, articulating fundamental principles and directions, introducing key vocabulary and concepts, and providing illustrations of how feminist theory can elucidate literary texts. It encourages readers to examine the myriad of interactions between life and literature, to develop their own unique voices, and to formulate their own visions of how feminist theory enriches literature and life in significant ways.

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ISBN 978-9968-46-254-9
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