

Feminist Critique And Psychodynamic Concepts With Special Reference To Elaine Showalter's 'Towards A Feminist Poetics': A Preview

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ABSTRACT:

Elaine Showalter is a popular American feminist, social activist and literary critic, who is one of the founders of feminist literary criticism in United States Academia. She splits feminist criticism mainly into two categories- 'Woman as reader' and 'Woman as writer'. She advocates that in woman as reader — woman is treated as the consumer of male-produced literature. This is with the way in which the hypothesis of a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of its sexual codes. This kind of analysis may be called as the feminist critique. Like other kinds of critique, it is a historically grounded inquiry to probe the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena. Its subjects include the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male-constructed literary history.

According to Showalter, the second type of feminist criticism is concerned with woman as writer to consider woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women. An attempt is made in this paper to include the subjects of psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of a female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective female literary career; literary history and the studies of particular writers and their works. So to say, no term exists in English for such a specialized discourse. This paper is also concerned with the exploitation and manipulation of the female audience with the analysis of woman-as-sign in semiotic systems in the criticism of Elaine Showalter.

KEYWORDS: Elaine Showalter, critic, hydrodynamics, feminine, feminist, female, poetics, woman, reader, writer, gynocritic.

INTRODUCTION:

Elaine Showalter (1941-) is considered as one the leading feminist writers of the 20th century. Elaine Showalter is one of the American literary critics, feminists and writers on cultural and social issues. She has played a pivotal role for the foundation of feminist literary criticism in United States Academia in developing the concept and practice of gynocritics. It is special term used to describe the study of "women as writers". Showalter has written and edited many number of books and articles. They focused on a variety of subjects beginning from feminist literary criticism to fashion, sometimes sparking widespread controversy, especially with her work on illnesses.

However, Showalter has even got the prestigious Truman Capote Award for Literary Criticism. She chaired of the judges in 2007 for the prestigious British literary award, the 'Man Booker International Prize'. Showalter is a specialist in Victorian Literature. She was also the president of the MLA (Modern Language Association) Handbook, which is considered as a guide and notes for research activities. She has contributed important works of literary criticism such as 'Towards a Feminist Poetics (1979)', 'The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture (1830–1980) (1985)', 'Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siecle (1990)', 'Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media (1997)', and 'Inventing Herself: Claiming a Feminist Intellectual Heritage (2001)'.

If we look at the history, the waves of Feminism can be seen at three stages. They are 1. Men's 'The treatment of Women', 2. Gynocriticism, and 3. Category of women

1. Men's 'The treatment of Women':

In this early stage of feminist criticism, critics usually considered male novelists' demeaning treatment or marginalization of female characters. First wave feminist criticism includes books like Marry Ellman's *Thinking About Women* (1968), Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969), and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970). An example of first wave feminist literary analysis would be a critique of William Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* for Petruchio's abuse of Katherina.

2. Gynocriticism:

No doubt, Showalter has pioneered gynocriticism with her book 'A Literature of Their Own (1977)'. In an essay, Elaine puts forth the concepts of feminist critique and psychodynamics for the meanings of feminine, feminist, and female. Her

Gynocriticism covers three major aspects. The first is the examination of female writers and their place in literary history. The second is the consideration of the treatment of female characters in books by both male and female writers. The third is the most important aspect that is gynocriticism, which is the discovery and exploration of a canon of literature written by women. Here, Showalter seeks gynocriticism to appropriate a female literary tradition. These are discussed in detail in the later parts of the paper. She proposes in the book three phases of women's writing and also mentioned in the essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics"

3. Categories of Women

In the third wave of Feminism, there is a respond to the "category of women" which debates of the late years of 1980s and early 1990s. It began with a critique of the second- wave contention that women share something in common as women. It is a common gender identity and set of experiences. Much of its impetus derives from the writings of women of colour. Naomi Wolf's *Fire with Fire* (1993) in many ways fits the third wave particularly in her dismissal of 'victim feminism'. In this, women are supposedly encouraged to see themselves rendered passive by oppression within a second wave formulation.

If we take the essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics" by Showalter for detail discussion, it shows as a separate and autonomous model of literary theory by rejecting the inevitability of male models and theories and recalling women's literary tradition to the present. She divides feminist criticism into two distinct modes.

Woman as reader — This is also called as "feminist critique," In this, woman is considered as the consumer of male-produced literature, and with the way in which the hypothesis of a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of its sexual codes." It is also called the feminist critique which is "a historically grounded inquiry which probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena." Its subjects are images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male-constructed literary history. It is concerned with the exploitation and manipulation of the female audience, especially in popular culture and film. The analysis of women is a sign in semiotic systems'.

We can note that woman-as-sign is a semiotic construct, which is developed by feminist scholars who try to explain the ways in which women's status in patriarchal society is understood, communicated, and also acted on through institutional practices. For example, Film scholar Laura Mulvey's application of psychoanalysis to film theory was foundational to the construct's development. Mulvey proposed that woman stands in patriarchal culture "as signifier for the male other" within a symbolic system in which men are permitted to live out their fantasies of domination both linguistically and through images they create.

A Feminist anthropologist, Elizabeth Cowie coined the term "woman as sign" on the basis of her work with kinship systems that featured the exchange of women. To site this it is possible to say that a bride leaves her father's house to live in the house of her husband.

2. Woman as writer —This is also called as "gynocritics". In this, woman is considered as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women. Its subjects are psychodynamics of female creativity, linguistics and the problem of a female language, the trajectory of the individual or collective female literary career, literary history, and studies of particular writers and their works. No term exists in English for such a specialized discourse, and so she adapts the French term gynocritique or 'gynocritics'.

To note this, we say that Psychodynamic feminism has its philosophical roots in the second and third waves of feminism in the United States and in psycho-analysis. It seeks to articulate the unique experiences of an individual while at the same time contextualizing those experiences within a socio-political, cultural, and economic framework. Not simply a treatment for women, it has evolved since its inception in the late 1960s as a theoretical and clinical approach. It addresses sexism, hetero sexism, racism, classism, and other injustices based on power differentials.

For supporting to these discussions, Elaine Showalter traces the history of women's literature in her essay 'Towards a Feminist Poetics', suggesting that it can be divided into three phases:

1. Feminine: The Feminine phase covers from 1840 to 1880. In this, women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalized its assumptions about female nature. She had shown intellectual versions the intellectual achievements of the male culture. Women wrote in the names of masculine writers. What Showalter sees the first phases taking place from roughly 1840 to 1880, she calls this "the Feminine phase" and declares that it is characterized by "women writing in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture. The distinguishing sign of this period is the male pseudonym which exerts an irregular pressure on the narrative, affecting tone, diction, structure, and characterization."

2. Feminist: The Feminist phase starts from the year and 1880 and extends up to 1920. It was characterized by women's protest against male standards and values in her writing. It advocated rights and values of women including a demand for autonomy. As a result she got voting power. This second Feminist phase, women are historically enabled to

reject the accommodating postures of femininity and to use literature to dramatize the ordeals of wronged womanhood. This phase is characterized by "Amazon Utopias," visions of perfect, female-led societies of the future

3. Female: The Female phase continued after 1920, which is one of self-discoveries. Showalter says that women reject both imitation and protest in two forms of dependency—and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature. Showalter advocated approaching feminist criticism from a cultural perspective in the current Female phase by rejecting both imitation and protest. It was from perspectives that traditionally come from an androcentric perspective like psychoanalytic and biological theories, for example. In the past days, Feminists had worked within these traditions by revising and criticizing female representations, or lack thereof, in the male traditions. What Showalter posits finally is the third and at least covers up to 1979. Significantly, Showalter does not offer a characteristic sign or figure for the Female phase, suggesting a welcome diversity of experience that is too broad to be encompassed in a single image. But, Elaine Showalter notes excerpts from feminist historians and sociologists.

Then, Showalter moves on to an engaging discussion of the experiences of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, sister of Robert Browning and other female authors to show the need for "completeness" in discussing women authors' works. It is necessary to leave oneself room to deal with other things besides women writers' work, so much has that work been influenced by conditions that have nothing whatever to do with art. From these experiences, Showalter puts a rough sketch of some of the elements which are characterized women's writing like awakening, suffering, and unhappiness among others. She concludes with her classification of women's writing into three phases to establish the continuity of the female tradition from decade to decade, rather than from Great Woman to Great Woman. This is noteworthy to see the representation of women in the field of literary history. Throughout the history of English literature, woman is not treated what actually woman is. At the same time, woman is also not protested against the real treatment of women by various writers in their literary works. This is what worries a lot to Elaine Showalter about women.

CONCLUSION:

Showalter says that difficulties of redefining. She acknowledges the difficulty of defining the unique difference of women's writing. So, she says that it is "a slippery and demanding task" in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness". She also asserts that gynocritics may never succeed in understanding the special differences of women's writing or may not realize a distinct female literary tradition. But, Showalter looks with grounding in theory and historical research at gynocriticism as a way to "learn and relearn something solid, enduring, and real about the relation of women to literary culture. She stresses heavily the need to free ourselves from the lineal absolute of male literary history. That is going to be the point where gynocritics make a beginning and delineate women in a distinct way.

To conclude on the whole, it is tried in this paper as it is an intelligent, largely devoid of rhetorical extremities, and confidently provocative. Showalter speaks very calmly with convincing authority as one who firmly believes in the verity of what she is saying. It is sure that she is both urgent in that to see a great change to occur immediately. She also expects that given time enough, the wisdom and truth of her cause will prevail later or sooner.

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