Chapter II

Feminist Reading

I therefore understand by woman that which cannot be represented, that which is not spoken, that which remains outside naming and ideologies.

Julia Kristeva

Feminist Criticism So Far,

No one can decide a clear-cut beginning for feminist criticism. When at the end of the eighteenth century, Mary Wollstonecraft attacked sentimental novels for their role in encouraging women to develop a weak and silly image of themselves, she was criticizing from a feminist perspective. Even before her in seventeen century when Esther Sowernam and Bathsun Makin showed that many classical texts identified powerful deities and muses with women, they were practicing a feminist reading. In the twentieth century, two of the most outstanding feminist readers were Virginia Woolf in her pioneering book A Room of One’s Own and Simone de Beauvoir in her The Second Sex.

In the 1960s, however, feminist criticism surfaced and the politics of gender entered a new phase and since then feminist criticism has been in a state of development, diversification and to some extent chaos. In 1970, three new books were published within few months from each other, Kate Millett’s Sexual Politics, Germaine Greer’s The Female Eunuch, and Eva Figes’s Patriarchal Attitude. They were sharp, persuasive and polemical and they caught and crystallized what was in the air when the challenges of sixties to existing gender politics had given a new
impetus to the feminist emancipation movement. As bestsellers, these books did much to bring about a new, self-conscious phase of feminist reading.

One of the most important differences between these three books and other literary criticism is that these books refuse to discuss literature as just literature. They do not isolate it from the culture. Greer in her *The Female Eunuch* documents images of women in literature and popular culture to provide an ideological analysis of patriarchy in culture and real life. Indeed, the criticism presented in these books represents a striking break from the ideology of New Criticism, which at that time was the dominant discourse within the literary academics. Kate Millett, for instance, was not afraid to openly express her courageous opposition to the New Criticism. She “argued that social and cultural contexts must be studied if literature was to be properly understood” (Moi 24). In this respect, these books were extremely radical in their challenge to traditional literary criticism.

Literature ceased to be a special category, a repository of timeless truths concerning an eternal human nature "(Belsey Catherine, and Jane Moore 3). Indeed, literary works were no longer regarded as just representation of reality, but interpretation of the world. Writing was not just a mere individual phenomenon and the social context of literature was more than just a helpful background.

Another striking aspect of the critical approach presented in these books was the boldness with which their writers read against the grain of literary texts. This is especially true with Kate Millett. She paid no attention to what was in that time a conventional respect for the authority of the author. Her reading put forward a different perspective from the author’s and, in this way, she managed to show how such a conflict between reader and author could expose underlying premises of a literary work. Indeed, her importance as a critic lies in the fact that she rejected the traditional hierarchy of author and reader. She never treated literary texts as sacred and insisted on reader’s right to posit her own viewpoint, rejecting the supremacy of the writer as a god-like authority. Thus, she revolutionized the way readers were reading or indeed misreading literary texts. Kate Millett, was,
therefore, never submissive in her approach and “her approach destroys the prevailing image of the reader/critic as passive/feminine recipient of authoritarian discourse, and as such is exactly suited to feminism’s political purpose” (Moi 25). Since Kate Millett and others like her wanted to advance feminist cause, they used feminist reading as a weapon in their fight against patriarchy. All they wanted was to bring about some sort of change in the patriarchal system.

To trace the change, however, they had to turn to history, because it could provide us with evidence that things can change, and changes in the past could mean that things do not have to remain as they are now. History could also show that patriarchy was not a matter of nature. Nature has long been used by the patriarchy as an important weapon in the battle against change. If patriarchy is natural, then feminism is already a lost cause. In other words, feminism is a futile struggle for nothing if women are helpless, weak, and passive by nature. Obviously, patriarchy is not natural, because “the degree and the effectiveness of patriarchal control seem to have varied from one historical moment to another” (Belsey Catherine, and Jane Moore 3). On the other hand, history can also show some cultures are more vulnerable to patriarchy than others are. All these indicate that male domination can change from one period to another and from one society to the other. As a result, it can be said that gender relations have nothing to do with nature; it is, rather, a matter of custom. In other words, “women have been largely man-made” (Figes 25). In fact, social convention has always tended to operate on behalf of the dominant gender, and cultural norms have only served the interest of male supremacy.

While this approach has given feminism an interesting pragmatic program to have a radical assault on hierarchal modes of reading, it has lost much of its vigor in recent feminist criticism. It tries to find basic, universal explanations for the problem of patriarchy through seeking features of culture standing for women’s subordination and through examining strategies in literature, which perpetuate this subordination. This perspective depends on a static view of patriarchy and reduces
the complex nature of it to sorts of all-encompassing, monolithic ideology. However, “only a concept of ideology as a contradictory construct, marked by gaps, slides and inconsistencies would enable feminism to explain how even the severest ideological pressure will generate their own lacunae” (Moi 26).

Thus, feminist criticism in 1970s focused on exposing what might be called the mechanism of patriarchy, that is, the cultural state of mind in men and women, which helped bring about women subordination. Careful critical attention was given to books in which typical images of women were constructed by men. It was, of course, inevitable for this kind of criticism to be argumentative and polemical. However, it could not, sustain its energy forever. Therefore, in the 1980s, the mood changed.

One of the features of patriarchy which feminist critics of this period were preoccupied with was the ability to use language to naturalize stereotypes of women in literature. Feminist critics had to draw attention to the wide range of abusive words applicable solely to feminine characteristics, while for masculine traits there were many terms implying power. “Feminists were becoming aware that it was only women, who are likely to chatter, gossip, and tittle-tattle, whine, nag or bitch. On the other hand, only men could be virile and potent: there were no female equivalents for these terms of praise” (Belsay, Catherine, and Jane Moore 4). Indeed, in our language, men, but not women, are allowed to be active, assertive or even aggressive and women showing the same behavior are liable to be shrill, strident or even bitchy. The words for women often have negative implications, while the terms used to describe men consistently suggest positive connotations.

In fact, we can see here a kind of binary opposition where one pole is privileged over the other, and this is the most basic premises for an arrangement based on hegemony of one group over another. Hence, language here is not playing an innocent role, it contributes to, or better to say, produces male supremacy. “The
tendency of words to seem transparent, to appear simply to label a pre-existing reality, indicated to feminists the crucial role of language in the construction of a world picture which legitimates the existing patriarchal order” (Belsey, Catherine, and Jane Moore 4). Therefore, language is not just to label things. It is culturally constructed and learned, but it seems to be there by nature, as we learn it so young. In fact, here we see the human tendency to naturalize things, which are culturally constructed.

Feminist critics of early seventies also thought that psychoanalysis reinforces patriarchy. Among these critics, Kate Millett’s account of Freud’s theories is most detailed. All those early years of the 1970s, no critic challenged Millett’s negative account of psychoanalysis. Millett questions Freud’s theory of penis envy. In her analysis, Freud invokes the concept of penis envy to disarm feminist critics. Freud argues that a little girl, glancing at the penis of a little boy, recognizes that she was lacking something. She has to live with this inadequacy and its resulting feeling of inferiority as she matures until she learns to replace the desire for penis with the desire for having a baby. Motherhood is then a substitution for a desire to be a man.

However, psychologically there may be some problems in the little girls’ psychosexual development, which is called fixation. In fact, not all the little girls can easily succeed to mature effectively. If a girl fails to grow up adequately, she continues to attach to masculinity and becomes aggressive, seeks to compete with men, and probably becomes feminist. According to Freud, girls may also be neurotic if their insertion into motherhood fails. In either case, Freud thinks it leads to feelings of insecurity and jealousy. Here, Millett argues that Freud tries to disarm feminism as the manifestation of women’s attachment to penis envy.

Millett’s reading of Freud remained unchallenged until 1974, when Juliet Mitchell published Psychoanalysis and Feminism. In her book, Mitchell says that Freud’s description of women’s development has nothing to do with universal
human nature; it is just an account of a particular culture. Indeed, “Mitchell has persuasively argued that Freud does not take sexual identity to be an inborn and biological essence, and that Freudian psychoanalysis in fact sees sexual identity as an unstable subject position which is culturally and socially constructed in the process of child’s insertion into human society” (Moi 28). In her reading of psychoanalysis, Mitchell tries to differentiate between the structures psychoanalysis identifies and their content. According to her, only the structures can be regarded universal, not their content. Content, in her analysis, is determined by dominant culture. Therefore, she argues that patriarchal approach of Freud in his analysis of little girl’s insertion into human society should not be taken as Freud’s own position. In other words, it is patriarchal society that determines our psychosexual orientation and Freudian psychoanalysis simply explains how this orientation takes place. “What is radical for feminism in Freud is the theory of undifferentiated infant sexuality: the initial object of desire for little girls as well as boys is the mother. The Oedipus complex represents the entry into a specific culture and thus into gender roles defined by that culture” (Belsey Catherine, and Jane Moore 6).

In addition, the penis in the notion of penis envy should not be taken as simply male physical organ. It can also be interpreted as an emblem of social power. Therefore, the little girl’s desire for possessing male physical organ may also demonstrate a longing for social power without which she cannot succeed in a masculine culture. Even the phrase social castration signifying women’s lack of social power implies symbolic meaning of phallus.

British critic Jacqueline Rose, who has worked with Juliet Mitchell, also defends Freud and tries to rehabilitate Freudian psychoanalysis. Rose argues that feminism cannot ignore psychoanalysis, on the basis that it provides very useful insights. “The argument in favor of Freud is, again, that it shows sexual identity to be a “cultural construct”, gives a detailed series of “insiders” accounts of how the construction takes place, and shows examples of this conditioning being resisted”
Another point that Millett was negligent of is the concept of unconsciousness and its importance in Freudian psychoanalysis. “What is radical in Freud is the concept of unconscious, that, “other scene,” as Lacan calls it, which challenges and resists the cultural norms imposed on it, the unconscious refuses to submit to what Lacan calls the symbolic order, the discipline of language and culture” (Belsey, Catherine, and Jane Moore 6). Millett's negligence of unconscious also leads to sorts of reductionism. She thinks that patriarchy is a conscious, well-organized, male conspiracy, but the fact is that it is more complicated. In fact, it is mostly an unconscious process. Even women themselves automatically internalize sexist mind-set.

Therefore, there is a disagreement within feminism about Freud and the true meaning of his texts. Indeed, Freud’s texts do not have fixed meanings, and this, of course, adds to his credit. Due to the plurality in his texts, different perspectives in their reading produce different meanings. In other words, the difference between Millett, on one hand, and Mitchell and Rose, on the other, is because of the fact that they ask different questions about psychoanalysis. Millett studies psychoanalysis to find mechanism of victimization of women by patriarchy, while Mitchell examines psychoanalysis to see if she can make use of it against patriarchy.

As mentioned before, in the 1980s the mood changed and another current of feminist literary criticism grew up. This new current “switched its focus from attacking male versions of the world to exploring the nature of the female world and outlook, and reconstructing the lost and suppressed record of female experience” (Barry 122). Indeed, in this period, feminist literary criticism turned its attention from androtexs (men’s writing) to gynotexs (women’s writing). Gynocritics, coined by Showalter is, simply, the study of gynotexs, but gynocricism has as its “subject the study of the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution or laws of a female literary tradition” (Barry 123).
The most influential book in this field is Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own*, published in 1977. In this book, she examines the history of women’s writings and makes a distinction between three separate but overlapping phases:

First, there is a prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standard of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of protest against these standards and values, and advocacy of minority rights and values; including a demand for autonomy. Finally there is a phase of self discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. An appropriate terminology for women writers is to call these stages feminine, feminist and female. (13)

Apart from Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own*, two other major studies appeared on women writers: Ellen Morse's *Literary Women* (1976) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Mad Women in the Attic*. (1979) What all these three books attempt to do is to identify a distinctively female tradition in literature. “Competent and committed, illuminating and inspiring, these works immediately found a deservedly large and enthusiastic audience of women scholars and students. Today it is clear that the works of Moers, Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar have already taken their places among the modern classics of feminist criticism” (Moi 50).

Though similar in their basic approach toward orientation of feminist criticism, these three leading books differ in a number of ways. *Literary Women* received wide approval, because, for the first time, it looked at a relatively unknown territory. As a contribution to cultural history, it examines “the way that the exclusion of women from so many aspects of social and political life was precisely what propelled them into a form of utterance requiring no formal professional training and no especial equipment” (Belsey, Catherine, and Jane
Motallab Zadeh and Moore 8). The Mad woman in the Attic tries hard to show that in nineteenth century the dominant patriarchy sees artistic creativity as a fundamentally male attribute. As a result, in reaction to this, Gilbert and Gubar’s enquiry shows in women’s writings traces of anxiety, self-doubt, denial and even anger against the patriarchal society, which denies artistic creativity to women.

There has been a sort of competition between these two different currents of feminism, denunciation of patriarchy in men’s writings on one hand, and gynocriticism on the other, each competing to be more efficient in fighting against patriarchal ideology. Though each of them has its own merits, they both have their own limitations too. The first approach, the early denunciation of patriarchy, was inclined to insist that the patriarchal story of life is based on a falsification of reality about women. Of course, this has been the case in many instances, but it is not easy to explain patriarchy as a political practice just by resorting to the distortion of reality of women in culture. The early feminist readers, critics such as Millett, Greer and Figes did a great job with their break with the myth of a known nature for women. By doing this, they undermined the political system, which invoked this myth for its own defense. However, the capacity of this current of feminism cannot go beyond this and, naturally, it has to stop after it exposed the patriarchy in cultural life. In the meantime, the tendency toward a form of writing, which is radically different from men’s, leads to separatism. This may carry things back where they already were. Indeed any emphasis on the difference, any identity seeking positions, may confine women in a separate sphere, which is what patriarchy has always favored.

Thus, theoretically, feminist criticism had reached its ending by this time. If it was to continue to develop, it had to change and become more eclectic. It had to draw upon the implications of recent, especially French, theories of language and culture. “These theories enable us to analyze the injustices of patriarchy and women’s resistance to them, while at the same time identifying specific pressure points for change” (Belsey, Catherine, and Jane Moore 10). So appropriation of
recent radical theories in language and culture was suggested as a way of giving momentum to feminist criticism.

One of the theories, which were able to push feminist criticism onward, was post-structuralism. It emerged in France in the late 1960s. Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida are the two figures most closely associated with this theory. In this theory, the main goal is to challenge, subvert, and even eliminate common concepts blindly accepted before post-Structuralist movement. The root of this radical attitude toward traditional concepts can be traced in structuralism:

One of the structuralism’s characteristic views is the notion that language does not just reflect or record the world: rather, it shapes it, so that how we see is what we see. The poststructuralist maintains that the consequences of this belief are that we enter a universe of radical uncertainty, since we can have no access to any fixed landmark, which is beyond linguistic processing, and we have no certain standard by which to measure anything. Without a fixed point of reference against which to measure movement you cannot tell whether or not you are moving at all. (Barry 61)

The implication of this is that meanings are unsettled, sliding and plural. Indeed, meanings are cultural. There is no solid truth outside culture to be invoked as a basis for us to challenge what we think as wrong. Culture itself is not a solid entity. It carries contradictions; it is, in fact, the site of subjugation and, at the same time, liberation. Culture is, therefore, a subject of analysis in some of post structuralist works. In Female Desire, a post structuralist book, Rosalind Coward exposes a contradiction between a set of needs and desires that are produced, but not fulfilled in patriarchal society. Indeed Rosalind Coward in her book “consistently and cleverly uncovers the gap between what patriarchy claims women enjoy and what women actually enjoy or don’t” (Belsey, Catherine, and Jane Moore 11).
Post structuralism is, however, much more radical than this. It does not just analyze cultural patterns shaping women’s understanding of themselves and the world. It tries to go deeper into the language and show how meanings are created and destabilized at the same time. To do this, post-structuralist critics measure a text against itself. They seek to locate those uncertainties and ambiguities and, above all, inconsistencies, which may be sharply opposite to what the text tries to convey. In fact, they try to explore what might be called as a textual subconscious to demonstrate what a text desperately tries to keep silent.

The preoccupation of post structuralist theory with language raised new question about the role of language in gender politics. Now, it was no longer possible to treat language as a neutral tool for communication. As Dale Spender states in *Man Made Language*:

> The English language has been literally man made and it is still primary under male control. This monopoly over language is one of the means by which males have ensured their own primacy, and consequently have ensured the invisibility or other nature of females, and this primacy is perpetuated while women continue to use, unchanged, the language which we have inherited. (12)

The questions raised implicitly in Dale Spender’s *Man Made Language* came to the notice of French feminist critics and inspired them to think over a specifically feminine discourse:

> Extending the Lacanian psychoanalytic concept of a symbolic phallocentric order of language, from which women are excluded on account of their lack of a penis, Irigaray and Cixous have suggested that one of the ways in which women are able to challenge the effects of a patriarchal symbolic order is by writing a language of their own. Luce Irigaray argues for the liberating effects
Helen Cixous tries to initiate a new feminine language that undermines patriarchal binary system where the feminine side is always seen as negative or passive. Indeed, she wants to break the linear logic that is imposed on discourse by the patriarchal structure. Her whole project is to go against the ideological notion of women as passive. She tries to proclaim women as the source of life, power and imagination. To bring power back to women’s writing, Cixous suggests that women should return to the body which patriarchy has long confiscated from them. She believes that in *ecriture feminine*—a discourse she suggests—women are able to write themselves. Luce Irigaray also connects *womanspeak* to women’s libido. She sees *womanspeak* fundamentally different from men’s, because she sees a fundamental difference between man and woman’s libido. Therefore, in the theories of both of these critics, women’s sexuality plays a key role. Indeed, they closely link language to sexuality. As Cixous says, “almost everything is yet to be written by women about femininity: about their sexuality, that is, its infinite and mobile complexity, a woman’s body, with its thousand and one threshold of ardor will make the old single grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language” (251).

Indeed, Cixous thinks that woman’s language must be diverse and this is based on her assumption that man’s linear and structured writing adheres to Lacan’s belief in the phallus as primary *Symbolic* and since women’s writing does not come from this primary *Symbolic*, their writing must be different. On the other hand, women have their own primary *Symbolic* that is far more diverse. Therefore, *ecriture feminine* resulting from female primary *Symbolic* must be diverse as well.

Both Cixous and Irigaray drew on psychoanalysis and specially Lacanian theory of *Symbolic* order, but they do not do so without some reworking. Irigaray, arguing that female desire and sexuality are constituted not by lack, but by their
total otherness to male sexuality, modifies Lacan’s theory of desire in language. This modification of Lacanian theory makes it possible for feminists to appropriate psychoanalysis for a positive mode of female desire. While other feminists seek to demonstrate that forms of female desire constructed under patriarchy help the status quo, Irigaray argues that female desire, inscribed in writing, has the potentiality to challenge the patriarchal symbolic order. In short, Cixous reformulates a psychoanalysis theory in the light of deconstructive approach to present a positive account of femininity.

Yet Womanspeak and ecriture feminine are theories of language based on sex. It is, therefore, difficult to ignore their separatist implications. Indeed, there is some sort of essentialism in the way Cixous and Irigaray attempt to affirm a positive mode of femininity. As Moi puts it, “all efforts toward a definition of ‘women’ are destined to be essentialist” (148), and correspondingly cannot provide feminism with a theory of social change. “It looks as if feminist theory might thrive better if it abandoned the minefield of femininity and femaleness for a while and approached the questions of oppression and emancipation from a different direction. This, to great extent, is what Julia Kristeva has tried to do” (Moi 148).

Julia Kristeva has an ambiguous relation to feminism. Strictly speaking, many people do not consider her as a purely feminist critic. Unlike Cixous’s and Irigaray’s evocative lyricism in their works, Kristeva’s readers are usually confounded with a wide range of theoretical terminology and frequent references to other philosophers and critics. Kristeva does not agree with Cixous and Irigaray who seek a uniquely feminine language, which she thinks is impossible. Moreover, she rejects the idea that language and culture are essentially patriarchal and must be, in some way, discarded. On the contrary, she insists that language and culture are the realms more apt to women who are primarily speaking beings. Kristeva seeks to reconceive of identity, difference, and their relationship. She approves what she identifies as the third phase of feminism, which explores multiple
Feminist Criticism: Diverse Paradigms

Feminist criticism has undergone such a self-transformation over the past several decades that it is now difficult to describe it in terms of the language used to define it before. This self-transformation stems from its engagement with both critiques from within and without. In fact, Feminist’s encounter with outside disciplines such as Marxism, psychoanalysis, post structuralism, post-colonial theory, ethnic study have caused such an increase in the variety of feminist study that is really difficult to give an encompassing description of it. At present, the variety in feminism has centered on the following conflicts:

Equality versus difference, cultural feminism versus Post-Structuralist feminism, essentialism versus social constructionism.
Feminism and gender theory? Feminism or gender theory?
Feminism with ethnic specificity or with other crossings? Feminism national or international? (Rivkin, Julie, and Michael Ryan 257)

The proliferation of feminism, though, has led to a frustration of losing the solidarity of its early days, is beneficial as it brings a much needed sophistication and diversity into it. Indeed, feminism in its crude form, without this diversity simply ignores race, class, nationality, and other cultural issues, and assumes a white, middle class heterosexual woman as its subject of study. In practice, this kind of feminism, like patriarchy, which takes male dominance as natural and universal, takes dominant for universal.

Thus, for early feminist criticism in the 1960s and early 1970s, the main question was women’s experience under patriarchy. Critics attempted to show the
literary representation of women’s life under the male rule, which distorted their lives by excluding them from true life. Discussing engagingly literature and popular culture, feminists such as Kate Millett, in her *Sexual Politics*, Germaine Geer in her *The Female Eunuch*, provided a school of feminist literary criticism that attempts to formulate a systematic account of patriarchy as a political and cultural institution. This critical approach tires to trace the oppression of women back into the history. On the other hand, early literary critics examine what was taught as literature in schools in the 1960s. In those years, to be a female student in those schools was to learn literature only from male points of view, some of them heavily charged with remarkably misogynist content. This literature "insisted on its universality at the same that it defines that universality in specifically male terms" (Fetterly xx).

The question, then, is why except Gorge Eliot and Jane Austen, there were no women writers in the canon taught in schools in those years. To react to this issue, Elaine Showalter took up the task of reconstructing a history of women writers. In her *A Literature of Their Own*, she gives an excellently documented account of women’s writing within overwhelmingly patriarchal culture.

Judith Fetterly focused on how women are represented in great American literature. In *Resisting Reader*, Fetterly convincingly exposes the misogyny in seemingly great fiction of American literature. In *The Madwomen in The Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar attempt to examine the question of women’s struggle to seek entry to a tradition controlled desperately by men. They “present women’s resistance to social and literary restraint in terms of a theory of anxiety of patriarchal influence” (Belsey, Catherine, and Jane Moore 8).

Inspired by *Madwomen in The Attic*, African American feminist critics leapt across ethnic and gender borders to examine the patterns of submission and resistance to conventional narrative forms in the fiction of black women writers. Black feminist scholars like Barbara Smith and Mary Helen Washington
investigated the use of experimental literary devices in the fiction of black writers and the ethical question they raise about race, gender and class. Other critics tried to explore the hidden tradition of other minority groups of women, not usually included within heterosexist world.

There were two major distinct efforts in early years of feminist literary criticism. One concerned with images of women in male literature, the other dedicated to the recovery of a lost history of women’s writings. One of the reasons that caused women’s writings to be excluded from literary history is that women writers had to find refuge in the literary forms—diaries and letters and sentimental letters, which were despised by men. These writings were not considered for inclusion in the canon by outwardly disinterested aesthetic criteria in the academy. In short, a shift from focus on men’s writing to women’s writing produced two different stages with distinct agenda.

On the other hand, since 1970s, there has been a disagreement between liberal and radical feminists about the direction feminist criticism should take. This disagreement has centered on whether feminism should identify with a female essence or recognizes the role of patriarchy in shaping women into what they are. Out of this basic difference, two perspectives began to emerge, one constructionists—the opinion that gender is constructed by culture in history—the other essentialists—the idea that gender arises from a natural difference between men and women. Each of these two outlooks has its own theoretical arguments and derived supporters from feminist critics and scholars.

In the mid-1980s, another great change in feminist criticism took place when French feminism, mainly the works of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Helene Cixous, began to inspire feminist criticism. They created a new perspective by focusing on gender not as an unproblematic concept but a construct of culture, something written by language into psyche:
In contrast to the American (if not, as we have just argued, to the British) the work of French feminism is more overtly theoretical, taking as its starting point—the insights of major post-structuralists, especially Lacan, Foucault and Derrida. For those feminists’ critics, the literary text is never primarily a representation of reality or a reproduction of a personal voice expressing the minutiae of personal experience. Indeed, the French theorists often deal with concerns other than literature: they write about language, representation and psychology as such and often travel through detailed treatments of major philosophical issues of this kind before coming to the literary text itself. (Barry 125)

Among French Post-Structuralist feminists Luce Irigaray in her *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which is Not One* argues that women’s natural physical qualities such as birthing, lactation, and menstruation make them essentially different from men. Irigaray sees a difference between blood and sham, between the material natures of women’s bodies which connects them directly to nature and escape from this natural world which is found in male abstraction and its seeking to go beyond the nature in civilization. The key word for Irigaray to argue for an essentialist perspective of feminism is *matter* which she sees etymologically related to matrix and maternity. She does not see male western conceptuality capable enough to absorb *matter*. *Matter*, Irigaray thinks, is out there and capable of everything, yet impossible for male reason to understand it. Indeed, *matter* is an essence which makes women women, something apart from male power and understanding, an identity for women alone and forever. This definition of matter leads to the belief that there are inborn qualities in women, which makes them essentially different from men:

Women, essentialists argued, are innately capable of offering a different ethics from men, one more attuned to persevering the earth from destruction by weapons devised by men. Men must abstract
themselves from the material world as they separate from mothers in order to acquire a license to enter the patriarchate, and they consequently adopt a violent and aggressively posture toward the world left behind, which is now construed as an “object”. The primary matter they must separate from is the mother, who for them represents the tie to nature that must be overcome by the cut into abstraction that inaugurate civilization as men understand it (a set of abstract rules for assigning identities, appropriate social roles and the like that favor male power over women). Women, on the other hand, are not required to separate from mother as they acquire a gender identity; they simply identify with the closest person to them as they grow up, their own mother. No cut is required, no separation that launches a precarious journey toward a fragile identity predicated on separation that simply denies its links to the physical world. Essentialist feminists argued that men think in terms of rights when confronted with ethical issues, while women think in terms of responsibilities to others. Women are more caring because their psychological and physical ties to physical being remain unbroken. (Rivkin, Julie, and Michael Ryan 529 - 530)

As we see in the above quotation, the main idea in the argument of essentialists is the female essence or matter or body separation from which makes it possible for men to acquire an identity, totally different from that of women. In fact, men leave body to enter abstract world, a move necessary for them to acquire new identity.

This identity seeking essentialist feminism is not the only strand finding a footing in post-structuralism around the concept of matter or body. Post-structuralism is also invoked to by another essentialist strand to reject all sorts of identity. This strand of essentialism sees matter as a realm of fluidity where things flow into one another and make no distinction possible. Indeed, the realm of matter is a realm of nonidentity, a realm of namelessness, which is out of the scope of
male reason. For male reason everything should be put in categories and anything outside of this categorical analysis, this violent cut of identification, is precisely what it despises as illogicality, contradiction, nonrationality and nonidentity. Nevertheless, this nonidentity is what Helene Cixous seeks in her suggested writing, *écriture feminine* or feminine writing:

It is impossible to define a feminist practice of writing, and this is impossibility, which will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded [. . .] it will always surpass the discourse that regulate the phallocentric [male-dominated] system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate. (252)

This kind of writing seems to go beyond logic. “For Cixous (though not for theorists) this kind of writing is somehow uniquely the product of female physiology” (Barry 127). Cixous thinks that women should delight in their bodies through writing:

Woman must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word ‘silence’ [. . .]. Such is the strength of women that, sweeping away syntax, breaking that famous thread (just a tiny little thread, they say) which acts for men as surrogate umbilical cord. (252)

On the other hand, constructionist view of feminism draws on the Althusser’s theory about social construction of individual subjectivity and the Post-Structuralist assumption that language is not a mere transparent medium through
which our identities are transmitted. Rather, language creates our identities. From this perspective gender identity is as much a construction of patriarchal culture as the idea of male superiority. Both of them are the product of long periods of conditioning under patriarchy. Indeed, the identity of women that essentialists think as different from that of men is a social construction. Thus, all the attributes we consider for women such as caring, emotional, relational, and maternal that makes women seem different from men are all the result of social conditioning under a culture that attributes these qualities to women and not to men. In this view, what essentialists take as a cause is an effect in reality. In fact, essentialists justify the subordination of women as women’s nature and in doing so they legitimate patriarchy. Constructionists think that what the essentialists think of as the indication of a praiseworthy female nature is precisely the attributes assigned to women in a capitalist patriarchal culture to make them more subjugated, and more domestic. Unsurprisingly, the constructivist paradigm goes to embrace the idea that women can also be as much masculine as men.

One of the radical feminist critics defending constructionist position is Judith Butler who in her well-known book Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity (1990) argues that sex, gender and sexuality, in their seemingly coherent and natural manner, are simply constructions of culture. She tries to prove that our gender and even our heterosexual desire are culturally constructed through the recurrence of stylized acts in time, and it is through the repetition of these bodily performative patterns in time that an essential, ontological core gender is gradually fabricated. Thus, from Butler’s perspective all gender, sex and sexuality are merely performative in nature, an imitation of a code that refers to no natural substance. In short, the core of Butler’s argument is the concept of performativity, which extends beyond its simple definition and becomes central in her theorizing of gender and sexuality. This concept is theoretically central again even when she shifts her focus in her recent books from gender to other matters.
Another development in feminist paradigms comes from the encounter with psychoanalysis. Early feminist fiercely attacked psychoanalysis and Freud’s theories about women as a major source of patriarchy. Betty Friedan sees “the feminine mystique, elevated by Freudian theory into a scientific religion, sounded a single overprotective, life-restricting, future denying note for women” (125). Kate Millett, however, is much fiercer in her criticism of Freud:

By irony nearly tragic, the discoveries of a great pioneer, whose theories of unconscious and of infant sexuality were major contribution to human understanding, were in time invoked to sponsor a point of view essentially conservative. And as regards the sexual revolution’s goal of liberating female humanity from its traditional subordination, the Freudian position came to be pressed into the service of strongly counterrevolutionary attitude. Although the most unfortunate effects of vulgar Freudianism far exceeded the intentions of Freud himself, its anti-feminism was not without foundation in Freud’s own work. (178)

Yet, later feminists were in favour of psychoanalysis, arguing that feminism should not look for an entire rejection of Freudian theories. Juliet Mitchell’s *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* is the first feminist text, which fully explores the theories of Freud. In this book, she argues that the important thing in Freud is his theory of engendering and, gender is not biologically determined, but socially constructed. Of course, it is true that Freud’s own account is patriarchal, but other accounts are quite possible. Thus, to give a new account, which is different from Freud’s Oedipal interpretation, feminists insist that the greater attention should be given to the pre-Oedipal period, a period molded by mother’s relationship with child before any sexual development. This shift in attention is very important, because it undermines the whole theoretical structure on which patriarchal culture rests. In fact, by shifting from Oedipal stage to pre-Oedipal stage, feminists attempt to challenge the central place of *father*, and replace it with that of *mother*. 
In short, what Juliet Mitchell or Jacqueline Rose tries to do is to employ the general framework of Freudian interpretation to forward feminism. From their perspective, it is quite possible to keep the overall structure of Freudian theories and empty their Oedipal content. Indeed, the patriarchal content of Freudian theories are culturally constructed, and culture is bound to change through time and place.

Psychoanalysis has also been important in feminist agenda for its contribution to language exploration from a feminist point of view. Some feminists tried to trace psychic relation between mothers and daughters as represented in language. This is specifically important in feminine writing, where emphasis is placed on the voice. Second, psychoanalysis throws in doubt the whole question of power of authors or the possession of texts by the writers by redefining the relations between texts and writers. The difference between these contributions of psychoanalysis and its earlier role is that here the problem of language in literature is addressed.

Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous, Mary Daly, and Monique Wittig explore feminine as rooted in language. Julia Kristeva thinks of language as a dynamic system with two different aspects, one symbolic and another semiotic:

The symbolic aspect is associated with authority, order, fathers repression, and control (the family, normalcy, normative classico-psychological-tending discourse, all of which are just so many characteristic of fascist ideology). This symbolic facet of language maintain the fiction that the self is fixed and unified (what she describes as a language with a foreclosed subject or with a transcendental subject-ago). By contrast, the semiotics aspect of discourse is characterized not by logic and order, but by displacement, slippage, condensation, which suggest, again, a much
looser, more randomized way of making connections, one which increases the available range of possibilities. (Barry 128)

In any given text, one can find these two aspects of language interacting. They may be compared to different aspects of mind, conscious and unconscious. The conscious or symbolic aspect of language is the realm of orderly and precise distinctions, or the Saussurean network of differences through which language works. But the unconscious or semiotics is a realm of floating signifiers, random associations, accidents and free games -things that characterize a post-structuralist view of language. This unconscious or semiotic realm of language in a text is very inventive and prolific. Indeed, the main job of a deconstructive approach toward a text is to examine the ways unconscious of a text comes up to disrupt the conscious, symbolic or logical meaning.

Psychosexually viewed, the semiotics is closely related to the stage of pre-mirror in the development of the infantile. Indeed, Kristeva owes to Jacques Lacan for her notion of basic opposition between the realms of semiotics and symbolic. Lacan distinguishes between two realms, the imaginary and the symbolic. The realm of imaginary is that of infantile at the pre-linguistic, pre-Oedipal stage where the self is not yet separated from what is other than the self. This is a stage where young child is closest to the pure materiality of existence or what Lacan calls the real. Here, the infantile is merely controlled by its drives. This stage is Eden-like for infantile who knows no desire or deprivations.

Cixous and Irigaray favour a feminist criticism that supports writers and readers who are developing a feminine language very different from the language, as we know it. Indeed, they support developing a language that makes it possible for semiotic to erupt into the symbolic and increase the range of possibilities. This practice of bringing semiotic to the surface of language creates new spaces for the feminine to get rid of the most meticulous, and painfully deliberate symbolic. Thus, feminine imprinted in language should be given a chance to come up and
break through the tough shell of the symbolic realm of language. Clearly, language as a dynamic system, owes to Kristeva’s realm of semiotics for its vitality and force. Indeed, new theories about language add weight to the role of language in feminist agenda:

If all language carries worlds within in, assumptions and values that lie embedded in the simplest of utterances, then how can women take up such languages, the language of patriarchy, and hope to use it to forge a better world for women? Or is language neutral, an indifferent instrument that can be wielded in any number of socially constructive ways? And what does it mean here to speak “a better world for woman”? Is that not to nominate into an indifferent identity a splintered multiplicity of women’s lives around the world and around any one community or society? And if feminism, in its inspiration, is about painful particularities of any one person’s experience, their right to be heard despite centuries of deafness and deliberate, systematic muting, then how can it especially name into silence voices that know no language with which to speak? (Rivkin, Julie, and Michael Ryan 531)

Indeed, women need to speak but they are denied a language with which to speak. Under conditioning for thousands of years, women have been denied the right to express themselves. Now, should they adopt the language of rights, the one created by men? What about the problem of other groups of women? What language should be adopted to speak with women who are marginalized and have problems very different from that of the middle class literate women of developed countries.

**Women’s Image Criticism**

Within the overall frame of feminist criticism, there are many approaches to the study of literature. One of these approaches takes the question of how women are represented in literature. This approach attempts to show that women’s
images in literature constitute an important part of patriarchal culture under which women began to shape their own self-image. Indeed, the images of women affect the literature and are also affected by it. This reciprocal relation between women and their images in literature has been one of the most important preoccupations of feminist critics from the earliest feminist critical thinking. Feminists like De Beauvoir, Kate Millett, Germaine Greer, Mary Ellman and Judith Fetterly turned to literature to show how the images of women in literary texts affect the consciousness of women.

Historically viewed, the canon has always been overwhelmingly male dominant, aside from George Eliot, Jane Austen and Emily Dickinson, there have not been noteworthy women writers. As a result, there have not been enough spaces for women to disrupt the deep-rooted, systematic falsification of women’s images in literature. These images did much violence to women. So feminist critics found it imperative to study the literary history and explore the women’s images in the male dominant canon. Feminist critics, therefore, took up the question of the women’s image in the literature of different periods of history as one of their main investigations. This provided feminism with authentic and valuable facts about the status of women in different historical periods. It was also helpful to trace the patriarchy’s various strategies to subjugate women. For example, courtly love as a code of behavior is considered as:

A game the master group plays in elevating its subject to a pedestal level. As the sociologist Hugo Beigel has observed, both the courtly and the romantic versions of love are grants, which the male concedes out of his total powers. Both have the effect of obscuring the patriarchal character of Western culture and in their general tendency to attribute impossible virtue to women. (Millett 37)

Women’s image approach is a very fertile branch of feminist criticism. It has generated hundreds of books and articles under this heading. In early 1970s,
the great majority of writings on women in literature concentrated on the study of female stereotypical images in male-authored fiction. In 1972, *Images of Women in Fiction* was published in response to a deeply felt need among academics and students to have a source book for their classes of women’s study. This book was reprinted several times due to rapidly expanding academic market.

Nevertheless, the basic assumption of women’s image approach is open to discussion. The assumption is that because literary works choose and shape their materials based on their ideologically distorted vision, they distort the real picture of women. This view of literary works as ideologically distorting the reality of women arises the old question of realism in literature:

> Literary works can and should of course be criticized for having selected and shaped their fictional universe according to oppressive and objectionable assumptions, but that should not be confused with failing to be ‘true to life’ or with not presenting ‘an authentic expression of real experience’. Such an insistent demand for authenticity not only reduces all literature to rather simplistic forms of autobiography; it also finds itself ruling the greater part of literature out of bounds. What those critics fail to perceive is the fact that though Shakespeare probably never in his life found himself mad and naked on a heath, King Lear nevertheless reads ‘authentically’ enough for most people. (Moi 45)

In this way, the women’s images approach in its extreme version clashes with modernist approach to literature. The modernist is accused of taking refuge in extreme formalism and neglecting women issues as irrelevant. Indeed modernism forces the work of art, the artist, the critic, and the audience outside of history:

> Modernism denies us the possibility of understanding ourselves as agents in the material world, for all has been removed to an abstract world of ideas, where interactions can be minimized or emptied of
meaning and real consequences. Less than ever are we able to interpret the world—much less change it. (Middleton 298)

**Resisting Reading**

Judith Fetterly is one of the well-known American feminist critics. As one of the women’s image critics, she took up the issue of how women are represented in great American literature. However, her emphasis on reading as a process that absorbs the reader into its logic makes her a different critic from earlier feminists in this field. Indeed, her argument is not just revolving around the images of women in a text, but also around the ways we read a text. Her main argument is that the way women are taught to read a text leads to their identification with male system of values. In other words, not only the text, but the way of reading it also contributes to the reader’s passive self-image. According to her, female readers are usually taught to unconsciously forget their femininity and to read as if they were men to enjoy works of literature, which presumed their readers to be male.

This self-elimination of women in their reading is the only way of participating in male-authored texts and enjoying them. Indeed, this kind of text does not provide women with enough spaces to enter to the text with their own true selves. As a result, Fetterly thinks, women who have freed their understanding of literature from sexism will not delight in male-authored fiction, which is sexist in its essence. What should, then, women do in order to participate in the discourse of literature. Can she participate in an experience in a text from which she is practically excluded? Indeed, female readers face a dilemma when they see great male-authored literary works, as they have to either involve themselves in the game in which they have to be just spectators or deprive themselves of enjoying literary experiences of male-authored literary works.
Judith Fetterly concentrates on American great literature. She examines the major works of American literature to show how this so-called great literature affects the consciousness of female readers in delicate ways. She observes that literature does not influence the female consciousness directly. “The major works of American fiction constitute a series of designs on the female reader, all the more potent in their effect because they are impalpable” (Fetterly xx). Fetterly goes on to explain the mechanism of this impalpability:

One of the main things that keeps the design of our literature unavailable, and hence impalpable, is the very posture of apolitical, the pretence that literature speaks universal truths through forms from which all the merely personal, the purely subjective, has been burned away or at least transformed through the medium of art into the representative. When only one reality is encouraged, legitimized, and transmitted and when that limited vision endlessly insists on its comprehensiveness, then we have the conditions necessary for the confusion of consciousness in which impalpability flourishes. (Fetterly xx)

Indeed, Fetterly wants to shed light on how attitudes towards women shape the form and content of American fiction and in light of this, she tries to change our understanding of these fictions. In other words, Fetterly tries to make palpable the impalpable designs of American literature. It is to lay bare contrivances, which these fictions employ to manipulate their female readers. Fetterly encourages another vision, another reality and brings in a different consciousness to bear on the dominant voice and the prevailing vision of these fictions. Indeed, Fetterly teaches us no to give in the restrictions of patriarchy on our literature, and our mentality also. She demonstrates that feminist criticism can be equipped with a liberating power to deal with male-authored texts. This liberating power is needed not only for women, but also for every one who recognize the impalpable designs which patriarchy in literature and any form of cultural products.
Judith Fetterly, through example of American fiction, attempts to examine gender as it is represented in American literature, exposing instances of misogyny and sexist attitude toward women, but she does not stop here and goes on to show what happens to female readers while reading these fictions. She demonstrates how women readers, in order to participate in the discourse of literature undergo self-denial and are led to identify with a point of view that is not their own.

Therefore, Fetterly emphasizes the reader’s rights to maintain his or her own subjectivity and not to dissolve into the text’s manipulating strategies. From her perspective, act of reading is not to be seen as neutral; it is embedded in culture and ideology and has the potentials to subjugate readers. In her critical approach, hierarchical mode of reading, which regards author as a godlike authority to be humbly listened to, can be challenged with a self-conscious mode of reading in which the reader measures the text against her own experience. In fact, in this mode of reading, the reader does not follow the author blindly and enters into an act of reading which moves beyond the dominant cultural beliefs, and prevailing views. That is, reading a text in a way that was not meant by its author, a reading against itself.

Literature has its own form of domination, but it also provides some spaces for resistance at the same time. Indeed, it is an oversimplification to suggest that a literary text is a monolithic, one-dimensional hegemonic construct intended only to subjugate readers. Rather, it is a scene of struggle and conflict between multiple, contradictory ideologies which are attempting to control the whole text. On the other hand, in this process, a text also tries to determine a position for the reader, from which he or she is to read it. In fact, every reader is in a way manipulated to know how she or he has to read the text. The manipulation of the readers takes an awful shape, when it gradually disarms the reader and dictates her how to understand the whole story. In practice, the text usually manages to bring the reader under its control, because the reader is usually asked to embrace an experience from which she is excluded, and, as a result, has little understanding.
As readers, women are usually asked to identify with masculine experiences, and this require them to deny their own values and history and allow themselves to co-opted into an activity which promises deceptively to admit them to an equal status in society, while there are innumerable evidences which show that society ultimately excludes them from full participation. Indeed, Fetterly sees literature as capable of deceptively absorbing women in an experience, in which they are not allowed to fully participate. This problematic position of women stems from their desire for participation on one hand and their exclusion from participation on the other. As Fetterly observes American, “literature neither leaves women alone nor allows them to participate” (xx).

Consequently, she insists that women readers should be resisting rather than assenting readers. The concept of resistance suggests the *endeavor*, one has to make in processes of reading so as not to be manipulated by the text. Within new theoretical contexts, resistance is not regarded as innate, developmental or biological. It is, rather, an inescapable result of power relations, or more specifically, it is the result of political and ideological nature of knowledge. Resistance, if becomes conscious, is an essential part of the process of subverting oppressive ideologies. If we view resistance in this way, we may find a new perspective in reading literature.

Fetterly herself looks at American fiction from this new perspective. She is not intimidated by so-called greatness of American classics and shows persuasively how the canon of what currently considered as American literature manipulate its female readers to identify with male values. For example in her reading of Mailer’s *An American Dreams*, she shows how Mailer sacrifices her women readers in fictional ritual of scapegoating in which woman/wife is killed to make the husband/ male survive:

In Mailer’s *An American Dream*, the fantasy of eliminating all one’s ills through the ritual of scapegoating is equally male: the
sacrificial scapegoat is the women/wife and the cleansed survivor is the husband/male. In such fiction the female reader is co-opted into the participation in an experience from which she is explicitly excluded; she is asked to identify with a selfhood that defines itself in opposition to her; she is required to identify against herself. (Fetterly xxi)

An American Dream represents a violent power struggle between man and woman. Mailer is thoroughly obsessed with the power available to a male person through sex. It seems that Mailer’s projection of violence into his novel arises from his belief that violence, as an inborn psychological trait in the male, is inevitable to maintain men as men. In other words, for Mailer American man is in danger of losing his manhood. Since, he has a sharp nose for the social fashions of his time, titles as The Feminization of American Male, The Disappearing Sexes, and Womanization of America make him worried. He deprecates the state of affairs where women are becoming more narcissistic, more insatiable, more hateful, more power-hungry, less compassionate, and less romantic. To prevent this, Mailer invokes sex as a site where man can show women who has the real power. Indeed, “Mailer’s An American Dream, is a rallying cry for a sexual politics in which diplomacy has failed and war is the last political resort of a ruling caste that feels its position in deadly perils”(Millett 16). Fetterly also sees this novel as a battle ground in which male protagonist is devoted to keep male high handedness:

It is impossible to imagine a more frenzied commitment to the maintenance of male power than Mailer’s. In An American Dream, all content has been reduced to the enactment of men’s power over women, and to the development and legitimization of that act Mailer brings every strategy he can muster, not the least of which is an extended elaboration of the mythology of female power. In Mailer’s work the effort to obscure the issue, disguises reality, and confuse consciousness is so frantic that the antitheses he provides to
protect his thesis become in fact his message and his confusions 
shed a lurid illumination. (xxx)

In Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, Fetterley sees America’s failure to live 
up to the expectations of male hero as Daisy’s failure of Gatsby. Indeed, 
experience of Americans failed by America, is equated with the betrayal of male 
by female. “America is female; to be American is male; and the quintessential 
American experience is betrayal by women” (Fetterly ii). In this way, women 
readers are led to turn against themselves as betrayers and identify with those nice 
and good men who are always deceived by disloyal women.

Irving’s *Rip Van Winkle* is another story in which the writer has created a 
woman from whom men must escape. Fetterley observes that the story tries to 
manipulate the readers to see the woman in this story as somebody who does not 
let her husband enjoy his life, because she is too hard working, too serious and too 
authoritative:

> While the desire to avoid work, escape authority and sleep through 
> the major decisions of one’s life is obviously applicable to both men 
> and women, in Irving’s story this universal desire is made 
> specifically male. Work authority and decision making are 
> symbolized by Dame Van Winkle, and the longing for flight is 
> defined against her. She is what one must escape from, and the one 
> is necessarily male. (Fetterly xx)

Judith Fetterly, like Kate Millett emphasizes on political nature of 
literature. For her, power is a key word, and “the term politics refers to power- 
structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group is controlled by another” 
(Millett 23). Therefore, Fetterly measures literature in terms of power:

> Power is the issue in the politics of literature, as it is in the politics 
> of anything else. To be excluded from literature that claims to
define one’s identity is to experience a peculiar form of powerlessness- not simply the powerlessness which derives from not seeing one’s experience articulated, clarified, and legitimized in art, but more significantly the powerlessness which results from the endless division of self against self, the consequence of the invocation to identify as male while being reminded that to be male – to be universal, to be American – is to be not female. Not only does powerlessness characterize woman’s experience of reading, it also describes the content of what is read. (Fetterly xxi)

Fetterly locates the roots of women’s powerlessness both in literature and in the way it is read. She observes that women’s images in literature on one hand, and the way female readers see these images, on the other, lead these readers to turn against themselves. Indeed, this division of selfhood in female readership strips them from their power. In other words, “powerlessness is the subject and the experience” (Fetterly ii). To exemplify this; Fetterly in her The Resisting Readers chooses works, which constitute impalpable designs to manipulate female readers to see themselves as the male writers wish. In this way, women surrender themselves and become subdued and powerless. This powerlessness of women in literature is not usually explicit. In fact, male writers disguise the drama of power. They even give the impression of female powerfulness. Fetterly observes that in Rip Van Winkle, Rip “poses as powerless, the hen-pecked husband cowering before his termagant Dame. Yet, when Rip returns from the mountains armed by the drama of female disposition witnessed there, to discover that his wife is dead and he is free to enjoy what he has always wanted, 'the Shucks, M ‘am’ I don’t mean no harm' posture dissolves” (xxi).

In a passive reading of Rip Van Winkle, the text itself poses as powerless as Rip. But since a text can not be monolithically constructed, a resisting reader can find some ruptures to dismantle the whole text to expose the real drama of power, and by doing this one can see how the text itself uses its power to affect the
readers and makes them powerless. Fetterly also reads Sherwood Anderson’s *I Want to Know Why* to expose the real power drama in it. According to her:

In *I Want to Know Why*, the issue of power is refracted through the trauma of a young boy’s discovery of what it means to be male in a culture that gives white men power over women, horses, and niggers. More sympathetic and honest than *Rip*, Anderson’s story nevertheless exposes both the imaginative limits of our literature and the reasons for those limits. Storytelling and art can do no more than lament the inevitable—boys must grow up to be men; it can provide no alternative vision of being male. Bathed in nostalgia, *I Want to Know Why* is infused with the perspective it abhors, because finally to disavow that perspective would be to relinquish power. The lament is self-indulgent; it offers the luxury of feeling bad without the responsibility of change. And it is completely male-centered, registering the tragedy of sexism through its cost to men. (xxii)

Fetterly’s reading of Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* is also remarkable. In this story, however, Fetterly sees the issue of power disguised in romantic love. The world fails the decent, the beautiful and the brave, and the passive readers are led by the text to see these qualities in male protagonist only, good Frederic Henry. Yet the person who is actually broken by the world is not Frederic but Catherine. She dies and Frederic is alive and free to enjoy his freedom. Indeed, he survives everything, years of war, severe injuries, and the dangers of being a run away soldier. Yet Catherine dies in her first pregnancy. Therefore, her biology is seen as the source of her death, signifying her natural powerlessness.

*A Farewell to Arms* reads as a tragedy in a passive reading. Readers, either men or women, usually sympathize with Frederic for his suffering in a world, which breaks him. However, in a resisting reading, we can see that his suffering is
almost nothing compared to that of Catherine’s. She quits her job to escape with him for the sake of a romantic love, but she becomes pregnant and dies in delivery. The child is also dead. Nevertheless, in hospital Catherine apologizes to Fredric for all the troubles he suffered for the sake of her. A resisting reader should care for the lot of Catherine in the text. Indeed, she does not live for her own sake. She is in the story to provide the male protagonist with romantic love and sex, and she dies when she is going to be a burden with giving birth to her child. In other words, Catherine is alive to fulfill Fredric’s masculine demands on one hand, and the story’s imaginative needs to create a captivating protagonist, on the other. Catherine’s demise has also its function. She dies in order to add to the Fredric’s tragic vision of himself. She dies to leave behind a heroic Fredric. She dies to persuade the readers that Fredric is a victim, a victim of cosmic antagonism. “For Frederic to survive, free of intolerable burdens of marriage, family, and fatherhood, yet with his vision of cosmic antagonism intact, Catherine must die; Frederic’s necessities determine Catherine’s fate. He is, indeed, the agent of her death” (Fetterly xxiii).

In Faulkner’s "A Rose for Emily", Fetterly sees grotesque as a disguise for power drama. In “A Rose for Emily", the father has the absolute control over Emily’s life. Indeed, he shapes her life. This absolute control of her by his father makes her react in a violent way. Emily’s murder of her caller, Homer Barron is a violent reaction to a system that kills her not physically but spiritually. Faulkner’s story is to demonstrate how men’s attitude toward women backlashes against men themselves; it is an illustration of the idea that it is impossible to oppress without paying for it. It is impossible to victimize and get away with it forever:

A Rose for Emily is a story not of a conflict between the South and the North or between the old order and the new; it is a story of the patriarchy North and South, new and old, and of the sexual conflict within it. As Faulkner himself has implied. It is a story a woman victimized and betrayed by the system of sexual politics, who
nevertheless has discovered within the structure that victimize her, source of power for herself. If the Birthmark is the story of how murder your wife and get away with it. A rose for Emily is the story of how to murder a gentleman caller and get away with it. (Fetterly xxxi)

But retaliation of Emily can not threaten the whole system of patriarchy. “The elimination of Homer Barron is not a real threat to the system Judge Stevenson represents. Indeed, a few day laborers may have to be sacrificed here and there to keep that system going” (Fetterly xxii). Indeed, in directing the revenge toward a northern day laborer, rather than Judge Stevenson who is standing for the values of patriarchy, Faulkner indicates how far he is willing to go imaginatively against patriarchy as a system.

Faulkner uses grotesque in "A Rose for Emily". His protagonist is an eccentric rather than central. This use of grotesque, although, it disguises the drama of power in the story and carries it to the realms of bizarreness, is structurally meaningful. In Fetterley’s view grotesque is created when our natural expectations of gender is reversed. If we see an action or a behavior from a person, whose gender does not justify it, the circumstance will be grotesque. Thus in a “Rose for Emily”; we are shocked when we see a woman, and not a man, turn out to be a necrophiliac and a murderer. Indeed, the grotesque in “A Rose for Emily” is the result of disregarding the expectations of the sexual politics in a conservative town. A town, which knows no limits in violating the privacy of Emily and crashing her either by her father who does not let her marry or by the people, who regard her as a subject of public gossip. It is in this context that Emily becomes eccentric, and the more she becomes eccentric, the more she becomes the subject of the town’s obsession:

Though she shuts herself up in a house, which she rarely leaves, and no one enters, her furious isolation is in direct proportion to the
town’s obsession with her. She is the object of incessant attention; her every act is immediately consumed by the town for gossip and seized on to justify their interference in her affairs. Her private life becomes a public document. (Fetterly 271)

As we see in these examples of resisting reading, our understanding of literature changes, as we shift from succumbing passively to the text’s dominant strategies to the kind of reading in which the text has to reveal what it is hiding. Indeed, in a resisting reading the main characteristic is a drive to resist, revise, and reappropriate certain aspects of texts and meanings, which confirm the dominant sexual politics. In other words, in every resisting reading “the question of who profits, and how, are crucial because the attempt to answer them leads us directly to an understanding of the function of literary sexual politics” (Fetterly xx). If we understand the functions of literary politics, we will see how delicately and complicatedly these ideas about women are conveyed to the mind of readers. To counter this, we should bring our own consciousness into the text in order to open up the text’s closed system:

Consciousness is power. To create a new understanding of our literature is to make possible a new effect of that literature on us. And to make possible a new effect is in turn to provide the conditions of changing the culture the literature reflects. To expose and question that complex of ideas and mythologies about women and men which exist in our society and are confirmed in our literature is to make a system of power embodied in the literature open not only to discussion but even to change. (Fetterly xxi)

The resisting reader detects the ways in which the text’s constructions of its world reflect assumptions about gender, sex, marriage, family, reproduction and many other things, which contribute to a power-structured relationship,
arrangement whereby women are subjugated. Of course detecting patriarchal assumption is not always easy, as many texts' subtle and sophisticated rendering of gender issues disguises the real sexual politics within it. But, as Fetterly insists, if we attempt to answer the question of who profits, we may understand the real politics behind the text’s innocent and sometimes seemingly sympathetic gestures. Fetterly herself provides a good example of what she calls **resisting reading** when she approaches American literature. In fact, through her resistant reading, Fetterly tries, as Adrienne Rich urged, to re-read American literature and to tear down the dominant discourse from without, from the viewpoint of the women who has been forced out of her own literary heritage, thereby empowering the female reader and opening up the system for change. Fetterly does not propose that we abandon male literature in favor of all things feminine: instead, she recommends that women readers approach these works with the tools to “name of the reality they do reflect and so change literary criticism from a closed conversation to an active dialogue” (Fetterly xxiii). In the past, she stresses that, women have been taught to think and read as men; they must now learn to read, and criticize, as women.

Fetterly does not want to get rid of male literature, she believes that our canon is a good source for critics to seek literary sexual politics, delicately incorporated and disguised. What she wants is to revise the way we, as readers, approach the literary texts. Indeed a reader should not take the text for granted. She should be able to bring her identity from without into the text in order to disturb the shaky balance of patriarchal order of the text or literary sexual politics.

**Emasculation or Immasculation?**

Judith Fetterly views *castrating bitch* one of the recurring literary female stereotypes, as a good example to show the function of sexual politics in literature. She makes the function of this stereotype upside down:
Though one of the most persistent of literary stereotypes is castrating bitch, the cultural reality is not the emasculation of men by women but the immasculation of women by men. As readers, teachers, and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principals is misogyny. (xxi-xxii)

Before Fetterly this phenomenon of immasculation was referred to by Elaine Showalter in her “Women and the Literary Curriculum”. Showalter supported his argument about the phenomenon of immasculation by examining an imaginary literary curriculum the ordinary young women confronts when she enters a college. Indeed, she tries to show that how this curriculum immasculate female student by teaching her to think like men:

Thus she might be assigned any one of the texts which have recently been advertised for Freshman English: an anthology of essays, perhaps such The Responsible Man, for the student who wants literature relevant to the world in which he lives or Condition of Men or Men in Crisis: Perspectives on Individual and His world or again, Representative Men: Cult Heroes of Our Time in which thirty three men represent such categories of heroism as the writer, the poet, the dramatist, the artist and the guru, and the only two women included are the actress Elizabeth Taylor and The Existential Heroine Jacqueline Onasis ..... by the end of her freshman year, a woman student would have learned something about intellectual neutrality; she would be learning, in fact, how to think like a man. (Showalter 855)
Fetterly believes that this long process of apprenticeship leads to serious damages on the self image and the self-confidence of female students. As Mary Ellmann in her *Thinking About Women* observes:

> Women are estranged from their own experience and unable to perceive its shape and authenticity [. . .] they are expected to identify as readers with a masculine experience and perspective, which is presented as the human one [. . .] Since they have no faith in the validity of their own perceptions and experiences, rarely seeing them confirmed in literature, or accepted in criticism can we wonder that women students are so often timid, cautious, and insecure when we exhort them to think for themselves.(149- 150)

Indeed, when reading, women do not find any spaces in male literature. These literary texts prestructure the literary experience based on the gender of the readers. While male readers find in the text what they expect, the same text affects a woman reader differently. She has to ratify the experiences within the work as the only possible form of human experiences. In this way, as Fetterly gives the dynamics of the women’s readers’ encounter with male texts, women are taught to identify with male experiences and learn to validate the equation of these male experiences with universal humanity.

However, this process of constant identification with male values or immasculcation, as Fetterly puts it, does not make women readers masculine. Rather, it enhances her oppression. “It leads to endless division of self against self, the consequence of the invocation to identify as male while being reminded that to be male- to be universal-[…] is to be not female”(xxi). Thus, male literature is capable of affecting sexual politics through forcing women readers into a process that uses her against herself. Indeed, it does not provide any space for women to seek refuge in her differences, in her feminity. On the country, she is drawn into experiences, which are misogynous in nature. “A woman reading Joyce’s novel of
artistic awakening, [...] will like her male counterpart, be invited to identify with Stephan and therefore to ratify the equation of maleness with the universal” (Schweickart 426).

Therefore, the goal of resisting reading is to disrupt this process of immasculation and to expose it to the readers. In other words, resisting readers attempt to deconstruct the constructs, which inculcates a male point of view, and male values in women readers. Then, “to begin the process of exorcising the male mind that has been implanted in us” (Fetterly xxiii), is what a feminist reader should do. By doing this, women readers will be capable of “looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (Rich 34). In this way, books will not be able to hold women readers in their grip and shape their mind through various impalpable designs. Indeed, in making available to women this revolutionary critical approach, feminist criticism liberates a great deal of marginalized meanings.

Nevertheless, resisting reading, in spite of all its merits, leaves certain questions unanswered. As Schweickart asks, “Where does the text get its power to draw us into its designs? Why do some (not all) demonstrably sexist texts remain appealing even after they have been subjected to thorough feminist critique (431). On the other hand, as I previously talked about Millett’s reductionism of patriarchy, it seems Fetterly also conceives of patriarchy as a unified and malignant ideology contaminating innocent and virtuous female consciousness. Such an assertion undermines Fetterley’s otherwise powerful and persuasive argument with the same kind of essentialism that we encountered in the works of Irigaray. Indeed, as soon as differences are highlighted, there seems to be a temptation to polarize, and to put forward some ideas, which uphold essence behind and beyond history and culture, and this is the very danger, which feminist criticism should always be aware of.