fantastic literature: 276.

fantasy: 323.

farce: 50; *52.*

feminine ending: 197.

feminine rhyme: 317.

feminist criticism: As a distinctive and concerted approach to literature, feminist criticism was not inaugurated until late in the 1960s. Behind it, however, lie two centuries of struggle for the recognition of women's cultural roles and achievements, and for women's social and political rights, marked by such books as Mary Wollstonecraft's A *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869), and the American Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). Much of feminist literary criticism continues in our time to be interrelated with the movement by political **feminists** for social, legal, and cultural freedom and equality.

An important precursor in feminist criticism was Virginia Woolf, who, in addition to her fiction, wrote *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and numerous other essays on women authors and on the cultural, economic, and educational disabilities within what she called a "patriarchal" society, dominated by men, that have hindered or prevented women from realizing their productive and creative possibilities. (See the collection of her essays, *Women and Writing*, ed. M. Barrett, 1979.) A much more radical critical mode, sometimes called "second-wave feminism," was launched in France by Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), a wide-ranging critique of the cultural identification of women as merely the negative object, or "Other," to man as the dominating "Subject" who is assumed to represent humanity in general; the book dealt also with "the great collective myths" of women in the works of many male writers.

In America, modern feminist criticism was inaugurated by Mary Ellmann's deft and witty discussion, in *Thinking about Women* (1968), about the derogatory stereotypes of women in literature written by men, and also about alternative and subversive representations that occur in some writings by women. Even more influential was Kate Millett's hard-hitting *Sexual Politics*, published the following year. By "politics" Millett signifies the mechanisms that express and enforce the relationships of power in society; she analyzes many Western social arrangements and institutions as covert ways of manipulating power so as to establish and perpetuate the dominance of men and the subordination of women. In her book she attacks the male bias in Freud's *psychoanalytic* theory and also analyzes selected passages by D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer, and Jean Genet as revealing the ways in which the authors, in their fictional fantasies, aggrandize their aggressive phallic selves and degrade women as submissive sexual objects.

Since 1969 there has been an explosion of feminist writings without parallel in previous critical innovations, in a movement that in its earlier stages, as Elaine Showalter remarked, displayed the urgency and excitement of a religious awakening. Current feminist criticism in America, England, France, and other countries is

not a unitary theory or procedure. It manifests, among those who practice it, a great variety of critical vantage points and procedures, including adaptations of *psychoanalytic, Marxist,* and diverse *poststructuralist* theories, and its vitality is signalized by the vigor (sometimes even rancor) of the debates within the ranks of professed feminists themselves. The various feminisms, however, share certain assumptions and concepts that underlie the diverse ways that individual critics explore the factor of sexual difference and privilege in the production, the form and content, the reception, and the critical analysis and evaluation of works of literature:

1. The basic view is that Western civilization is pervasively **patriarchal** (ruled by the father)—that is, it is male-centered and controlled, and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal, and artistic. From the Hebrew Bible and Greek philosophic writings to the present, the female tends to be defined by negative reference to the male as the human norm, hence as an Other, or kind of non-man, by her lack of the identifying male organ, of male capabilities, and of the male character traits that are presumed, in the patriarchal view, to have achieved the most important scientific and technical inventions and the major works of civilization and culture. Women themselves are taught, in the process of being socialized, to internalize the reigning patriarchal *ideology* (that is, the conscious and unconscious presuppositions about male superiority), and so are conditioned to derogate their own sex and to cooperate in their own subordination.
2. It is widely held that while one's sex as a man or woman is determined by anatomy, the prevailing concepts of **gender**—of the traits that are conceived to constitute what is masculine and what is feminine in temperament and behavior—are largely, if not entirely, *social constructs* that were generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of our civilization. As Simone de Beauvoir put it, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. . . . It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature . . . which is described as feminine." By this cultural process, the masculine in our culture has come to be widely identified as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, creative; the feminine, by systematic opposition to such traits, has come to be identified as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional, and conventional. (See *gender criticism.*)
3. The further claim is that this patriarchal (or "masculinist," or "androcentric") ideology pervades those writings which have been traditionally considered great literature, and which until recently have been written mainly by men for men. Typically, the most highly regarded literary works focus on male protagonists—Oedipus, Ulysses, Hamlet, Tom Jones, Faust, the Three Musketeers, Captain Ahab, Huck Finn, Leopold Bloom—who embody masculine traits and ways of feeling and pursue masculine interests in masculine fields of action. To these males, the female characters, when they play a role, are marginal and subordinate, and are represented either as complementary and subservient to, or in opposition to, masculine desires and enterprises. Such works, lacking autonomous female role models, and implicitly addressed to male readers, either leave

the woman reader an alien outsider or else solicit her to "identify against herself" by taking up the position of the male subject and so assuming male values and ways of perceiving, feeling, and acting. It is often held, in addition, that the traditional categories and criteria for analyzing and appraising literary works, although represented in standard critical theory as objective, disinterested, and universal, are in fact infused with masculine assumptions, interests, and ways of reasoning, so that the standard selection and rankings, the prevailing *canon*, and the critical treatments of literary works have in fact been tacitly but thoroughly gender-biased.

A major interest of feminist critics in English-speaking countries has been to reconstitute the ways we deal with literature in order to do justice to female points of view, concerns, and values. One emphasis has been to alter the way a woman reads the literature of the past so as to make her not an acquiescent, but (in the title of Judith Fetterley's book published in 1978) *The Resisting Reader*; that is, one who resists the author's intentions and design in order, by a "revisionary rereading," to bring to light and to counter the covert sexual biases written into a literary work. Another prominent procedure has been to identify recurrent and distorting "images of women," especially in novels and poems written by men. These images are often represented as tending to fall into two antithetic patterns. On the one side we find idealized projections of men's desires (the Madonna, the Muses of the arts, Dante's Beatrice, the pure and innocent virgin, the "Angel in the House" that was represented in the writings of the Victorian poet Coventry Patmore). On the other side are demonic projections of men's sexual resentments and terrors (Eve and Pandora as the sources of all evil, destructive sensual temptresses such as Delilah and Circe, the malign witch, the castrating mother). While many feminist critics have decried the literature written by men for its depiction of women as marginal, docile, and subservient to men's interests and emotional needs and fears, some of them have also identified male writers who, in their view, have managed to rise above the sexual prejudices of their time sufficiently to understand and represent the cultural pressures that have shaped the characters of women and forced upon them their negative or subsidiary social roles. The latter class is said to include, in selected works, such authors as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Samuel Richardson, Henrik Ibsen, and George Bernard Shaw.

A number of feminists have concentrated [illegible]

the "anxiety of authorship," resulting from the stereotype that literary creativity is an exclusively male prerogative, effected in women writers a psychological duplicity that projected a monstrous counterfigure to the idealized heroine, typified by Bertha Rochester, the madwoman in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*; such a figure is "usually in some sense the *author's* double, an image of her own anxiety and rage." (Refer to *influence and the anxiety of influence*.)

One concern of gynocritics is to identify distinctively feminine subject matters in literature written by women—the world of domesticity, for example, or the special experiences of gestation, giving birth, and nurturing, or mother-daughter and woman-woman relations—in which personal and affectional issues, and not external activism, are the primary interest. Another concern is to uncover in literary history a female tradition, incorporated in subcommunities of women writers who were aware of, emulated, and found support in earlier women writers, and who in turn provide models and emotional support to their own readers and successors. A third undertaking is to show that there is a distinctive feminine mode of experience, or "subjectivity," in thinking, feeling, valuing, and perceiving oneself and the outer world. Related to this is the attempt (thus far, without much agreement about details) to specify the traits of a "woman's language," or distinctively feminine *style* of speech and writing, in sentence structure, types of relations between the elements of a discourse, and characteristic figures of speech and imagery. Some feminists have turned their critical attention to the great number of women's domestic and "sentimental" novels, which are noted perfunctorily and in derogatory fashion in standard literary histories, yet which dominated the market for fiction in the nineteenth century and produced most of the best sellers of the time; instances of this last critical enterprise are Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) on British writers, and Nina Baym's *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820–1870* (1978). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have described the later history of women's writings in *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (2 vols., 1988–89).

The often-asserted goal of feminist critics has been to enlarge and reorder, or in radical instances entirely to displace, the literary canon—that is, the set of works which, by a cumulative consensus, have come to be considered "major" and to serve as the chief subjects of literary history, criticism, scholarship, and teaching (see *canon of literature*). Feminist studies have succeeded in raising the status of many female authors hitherto more or less scanted by scholars and critics (including Anne Finch, George Sand, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Elizabeth Gaskell, Christina Rossetti, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette) and to bring into purview other authors who have been largely or entirely overlooked as subjects for serious consideration (among them Margaret Cavendish, Aphra Behn, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Joanna Baillie, Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and a number of African-American writers such as Zora Neale Hurston). Some feminists have devoted their critical attention especially to the literature written by lesbian writers, or that deals with lesbian relationships in a heterosexual culture. (See *queer theory*.)

American and English critics have for the most part engaged in empirical and thematic studies of writings by and about women. The most prominent feminist