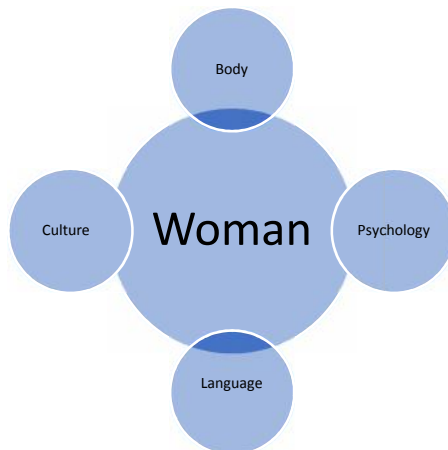


“Feminist Criticism in Wilderness” - Elaine Showalter

Elaine Showalter is an American feminist critic who has advocated the cause of women writing and criticism in her writings. In the essay “Feminist Criticism in Wilderness” she differentiates between Feminist Criticism and Gynocriticism, where in the former the woman functions as reader while in the latter woman is also the writer of the text.

She then discusses the four aspects that inform the formation of “womanhood.”



She discusses the problem of “Women’s Writing and Women’s Language” in the fourth section of her essay and begins the discussion with the poignant question- whether the gender defines the usage of language?

She then bats for a language that is specific to a woman’s needs and experiences. She gives the example of the lack of word which would describe the process of criticism undertaken by feminist of the texts written by women. She then took the French term- ‘la gynocritique’ and modified it into ‘gynocriticism’. She says more such coinages are required.

She says that most of the modern languages are marked by their patriarchal origins and so a language with distinct linguistic, grammatical and syntactical features is needed for women to convey their side of the story.

She gives the instance that some Native American tribes have different languages for men and women of the tribe but laments the fact that the women’s languages even there is kept hidden.

She cites Mary Jacobus who proposes “a woman’s writing that works within ‘male’ discourse but works ‘ceaselessly to deconstruct it; to write what cannot be written, and according to Shoshana Felman. ‘the challenge facing the woman today is nothing less than to ‘reinvent’ language,... to speak not only against, but outside of the specular phallogocentric structure, to establish the status of which would no longer be defined by the phallacy of masculine meaning”

Showalter writes, “The appropriate task for feminist criticism is to concentrate on women’s access to language, on the available lexical range from which words can be selected, on the ideological and cultural determinants of expression. The problem is not

that language is insufficient to express women's consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism, or circumlocution".

She concludes by stressing the fact that women need to be provided greater access to the language to be able to clearly express themselves- this should be the major task of feminist criticism.

Women need to close the gaps that still exist in the lexical terms and be able to express their mind and body vividly by taking the writings by women into account and understanding not just the what is said but more of what has been left unsaid.