


Feminism in Literature

A Gale Critical Companion

FROM CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY TO MODERN TIMES

 *Feminism in Literature*, the latest offering from the *Gale® Critical Companion Collection*, explores the history of women and feminism throughout literature. Developed to address curriculum standard fulfillment — including critical thinking skills and comprehension of the historical, cultural and political influences of women's literature — *Feminism in Literature* presents 11 topic entries, including: misogyny and women's social roles in ancient civilizations; 16th-century women's devotional literature; 17th- and 18th-century women's captivity narratives; the women's suffrage movement in 19th-century America; women writers of the "Lost Generation," lesbian literature; modern feminist theory, criticism and scholarship; and much more.

A BROAD UNDERSTANDING OF FEMINISM IN LITERATURE

Feminism in Literature provides historical, social and literary context for many well- and little-known authors and their works. Entries found in this six-volume set allow students to evaluate how authors portray culture, social concerns, politics and ethnic/racial issues. The inclusion of both primary and secondary documents aligns with the academic and interdisciplinary approach to the study of literature and the humanities — making *Feminism in Literature* highly useful for history, humanities and literature studies.

FEATURES FOCUS ON THE RESEARCHER

Feminism in Literature delivers:

- 62 entries on literary figures associated with women's/feminist literature
- 11 topic entries that place women's literature in historical context
- A chronology of key events of women's literature, women's history and the feminist movement
- Lists of further readings
- Representative works lists
- Forward written by a noted scholar
- Black-and-white photos
- Primary sources
- Reprinted full-text critical commentary
- Sidebars providing contextual information
- Three indexes — author, title and subject

MARILYN FRENCH

(1929 -)

(Born Marilyn Edwards, has also written under the pseudonym Mara Solovkova) American novelist, critic, essays, memoirist, historian, and nonfiction writer.

Best known for her first novel, the highly popular *The Women's Room* (1977), French is an author of controversial works that provoke both enthusiastic and antagonistic responses from critical audiences. A former homemaker whose academic aspirations led her to Harvard University during the politically turbulent 1960s, French draws upon her experiences with motherhood, divorce, academia, and political activism to evoke the concerns of women who rebel against domesticity, sexual subordination, and discrimination in the workplace. While some critics denounce French's ideological fiction and nonfiction as polemical, her works are widely read and often examined in women's studies courses.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

French was born on November 21, 1929, in New York City to a poor family of Polish descent. She received a bachelor's degree from Hofstra College (now Hofstra University) in Long Island in 1951. Instead of pursuing a graduate degree, French married Robert M. French Jr., with whom she has two children. French returned to Hofstra

to earn her master's degree in 1964, while also teaching English at the college from 1964 to 1968. In 1967 French divorced her husband and enrolled in the English graduate program at Harvard University, receiving her Ph.D. in 1972. French used her personal experiences as the basis for the central character of Mira in *The Women's Room*, who also divorced her husband and enrolled at Harvard in the same year. From 1972 to 1976 French taught English at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. She also served as the Mellon fellow in English at Harvard from 1976 to 1977 and as artist in residence at the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Study in 1972. The critical and commercial success of *The Women's Room* allowed French to pursue writing full-time. Aside from her novels and nonfiction works, French has contributed essays and articles to such journals as *Soundings* and *Ohio Review*, often under the pseudonym Mara Solovkova. In 1992 French was diagnosed with metastasized esophageal cancer. She recovered from the illness and the experience later became the basis for *A Season in Hell: A Memoir* (1998).

MAJOR WORKS

One year after French published her first work—*The Book as World: James Joyce's "Ulysses"* (1976), a critical reexamination of Joyce's novel—she published *The Women's Room*, which is gener-

ally focuses on the experience of being a patient, with French asserting that many doctors, regardless of gender, are insensitive and aloof to the pain experienced by the people under their care. In 2002 French released the first of a three-volume series under the title *From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women*. Bringing together a wealth of scholarly and academic information, the series offers a careful critical examination of issues pertaining to the history of women throughout the world since the dawn of time. The first volume, *Origins* (2002), examines the roles of women from the advent of recorded history to the Middle Ages. The second volume, *The Masculine Mystique* (2002), follows women's history from the feudal era to the French Revolution. The final volume, *Paradises and Infernos* (2003), covers the nineteenth century to the modern era.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critical assessment of French's oeuvre has been sharply divided, inspiring numerous debates over the validity of her fiction and nonfiction. Although many feminist critics have praised French as a groundbreaking pioneer in the field of women's studies, other critics have charged that French's works are halting, arid, and ideologically clumsy. Detractors of *The Women's Room* have criticized French for her sympathetic portrayal of the violently militant Val and have argued that the novel is vapidly anti-male and grim. However, several scholars have noted that the novel's immense popularity confirms its integrity, and they have continued to regard the novel as one of the most important works in the feminist canon. Many reviewers have praised French's candid illustrations of mid-life anxiety and her examination of sexual stereotypes in *The Bleeding Heart*, though some have argued that the novel is overly rhetorical and unconvincing. Critical reaction to the essays in *Judith Power* has been diverse and emphatic, with a number of commentators faulting French's arguments as fallacious and naive, while others have defended the collection as innovative and erudite. Despite some assertions that her work holds a militant and uncompromising bias, French has remained a major figure in modern feminist studies.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

The Book as World: James Joyce's "Ulysses" (criticism) 1976
The Women's Room (novel) 1977

The Bleeding Heart (novel) 1980
Shakespeare's Division of Experience (essays and criticism) 1981

Beyond Paradise: The Women, Men, and Months (essays and criticism) 1985

Her Mother's Daughter (novel) 1987

The War against Women (nonfiction) 1992

Our Father (novel) 1994

My Summer with George (novel) 1996

A Season in Hell: A Memoir (memoir) 1998

From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women, Volume I: Origins (history and criticism) 2002

From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women, Volume II: The Masculine Mystique (history and criticism) 2002

From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women, Volume III: Paradises and Infernos (history and criticism) 2003

GENERAL COMMENTARY

JULIE WHEELWRIGHT (REVIEW DATE: 3 APRIL 1992)

SOURCE: Wheelwright, Julie. "The New Avengers." *New Statesman and Society* 5, no. 196 (3 April 1992): 44-5.

In the following review, Wheelwright compares *The War against Women* with Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undoing of Women*.

To university students across North America, Marilyn French's novel *The Women's Room* was the feminist bible for the 1970s. French's portrait of a housewife who trades a claustrophobic marriage for graduate school was confirmation that our mothers were suffering from a similar malaise. The mad/angry wife, the tortured female intellectual stuck with "shit and string beans" and the parade of selfish males became symbols of what women were fighting against. The personal had, with a vengeance, become political.

Since its publication in 1977, French's novel has sold more than a million copies, and her reputation as a feminist scholar rests largely on this success. Ironically, in the same week that French hits the bestsellers to promote her latest nonfiction offering, *The War against Women*, it is overshadowed by Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undoing of Women*. While both address the campaign waged to discredit feminism in the

Comprehensive introduction provides important details

Entries include introductions, principal works lists and full-text commentary

1-800-877-GALE
www.gale.com

GALE
CENGAGE Learning

COMPREHENSIVE AUTHOR COVERAGE

Feminism in Literature includes detailed studies of prominent women writers, including:

- Anna Akhmatova (1888-1966)
- Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888)
- Isabel Allende (1942-)
- Maya Angelou (1928-)
- Margaret Atwood (1939-)
- Jane Austen (1775-1817)
- Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855)
- Emily Brontë (1818-1848)
- Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-)
- Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861)
- Frances (Fanny) Burney (1752-1840)
- Willa Cather (1873-1947)
- Kate Chopin (1851-1904)
- Sandra Cisneros (1954-)
- Helene Cixous (1937-)
- Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986)
- Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)
- Hilda Doolittle (1886-1961)
- Marguerite Duras (1914-1996)
- Andrea Dworkin (1946-)
- Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849)
- George Eliot (1819-1880)
- Buchi Emecheta (1944-)
- Louise Erdrich (1954-)
- Marilyn French (1929-)
- Margaret Fuller (1810-1850)
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935)
- Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965)
- Bessie Head (1937-1986)
- Lillian Hellman (1906-1984)
- Marietta Holley (1836-1926)
- Zora Neale Hurston (1891?-1960)
- Harriet Jacobs (1813-1897)
- Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909)
- Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz (1651-1695)
- Margery Kempe (1373-1438)
- Maxine Hong Kingston (1940-)
- Doris Lessing (1919-)
- Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950)
- Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762)
- Marianne Moore (1887-1972)
- Toni Morrison (1931-)
- Joyce Carol Oates (1938-)
- Christine de Pizan (1365-1431)
- Sylvia Plath (1932-1963)
- Adrienne Rich (1929-)
- Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)
- George Sand (1804-1876)
- Sappho (c. 620 B.C.-c. 550 B.C.)
- Catharine Maria Sedgwick (1789-1867)
- Anne Sexton (1928-1974)
- Mary Wollstonecraft (Godwin) Shelley (1797-1851)
- Germaine de Staël (1766-1817)
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902)
- Gertrude Stein (1874-1946)
- Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896)
- Amy Tan (1952?-)
- Alice Walker (1944-)
- Edith Wharton (1862-1937)
- Phillis Wheatley (1753?-1784)
- Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)
- Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)

1st Ed. About 3,000 pp. in 6 vols. 2004.

ISBN: 978-0-78-767573-8.

Order #GML28508-187213.

Now available.

eBook ISBN: 978-1-41-440520-9.

Order #GML28508-223215.

Visit www.gale.com/gvrl for eBook pricing.

