



Sexual / Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory

Toril Moi

Download now

Read Online ➔

Sexual / Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory

Toril Moi

Sexual / Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory Toril Moi

What are the political implications of a feminist critical practice? How do the problems of the literary text relate to the priorities and perspectives of feminist politics as a whole?

Sexual/Textual Politics addresses these fundamental questions and examines the strengths and limitations of the two main strands in feminist criticism, the Anglo-American and the French, paying particular attention to the works of Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva. In the years since publication this book has rightly attained the status of a classic. Written for readers with little knowledge of the subject, *Sexual/Textual Politics* nevertheless makes its own intervention into key debates, arguing provocatively for a committedly political and theoretical criticism as against merely textual or apolitical approaches.

With a new afterword in this edition, **Sexual/Textual Politics** is a must-read for all those interested in feminist literary theory.

Sexual / Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory Details

Date : Published 2002 by Routledge (first published 1985)

ISBN : 9780415280129

Author : Toril Moi

Format : Paperback 248 pages

Genre : Feminism, Nonfiction, Philosophy, Theory, Criticism, Literary Criticism

 [Download Sexual / Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Sexual / Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Sexual / Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory Toril Moi

From Reader Review Sexual / Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory for online ebook

Alexandra says

This was a great companion for my Gender and Text graduate classes. I wish I hadn't rented it from Chegg so I could have highlighted and written notes in the margins! If you are looking for a good companion to feminist texts or an overview of the big ideas and names in regard to feminist literature, this is your one stop shop!

Yskrings says

This is a great introductory text on the history of feminist literary theory. She summarizes important feminist works, provides helpful criticism, and writes in a manner that is enjoyable and not at all boring. I picked up this text mainly to read her section on Kristeva, because it is surprisingly difficult to find criticism of Kristeva (a lot of the literary analysis that I come across just use her psychoanalytic theories but don't seem to engage with it in any way). I ended up reading the whole book and found it particularly helpful that she shows you how to critically engage with these theories (sort of a walk-you-through-it, not a here's-the-criticism-with-no-further-explanation). The one chapter that I didn't like all that much was the chapter on Helene Cixous, mostly because I could not really understand it, but I think that's more a statement on the complicated and contradictory nature of Cixous' feminist theory rather than a statement on Moi's explanatory ability.

Alex says

Moi is a very fine writer who manages to achieve the near impossible by writing a primer on feminist theory that not only provides an invaluable overview of the main ideas and writers in the field in a well presented, clear manner, but also manages to provide an abundance of thoughtful criticism as she goes. It's an easier task in the Anglo-American section which is less theoretical, psychonalytic and linguistic and more focussed on new and inventive readings of texts. Moi's elucidation and discussion is almost spot on here and I finished the first half of the book feeling that I'd learned something and new areas of study to pursue had opened up. French theory is endlessly complex and fascinating, and Moi struggles to fit everything in, her writing becoming more dense and the ideas less opaque, and it helps to read this as a starting point to introduce ideas that you're never going to grasp adequately first time round. I got a sense that there's more than enough depth to Kristeva's work, in particular, that I'm keen to read on, but Cixous and Irigaray also seem to be provocative and fascinating writers.

This isn't really an entry level text and wouldn't be suitable for someone unfamiliar with dense, philosophical writing. I liked that Moi didn't dumb down her subject and by taking it seriously she makes feminist literary criticism seem as important and rewarding a topic as it is and reading 30 years on the ideas presented in the book are still alive and challenging. Don't start here if you're new to feminism and theory, but definitely jump on here if you're keen to get digging in.

Adam says

Moi is totally brilliant. This book remains really valuable, and is really one of the most interesting of the common lit crit texts. Let's face it, lit crit is very often complete and utter twaddle.

I'm not being very coherent, so I'll end with the claim that this book is indispensable, and the clarification that this book is about a lot of things I haven't mentioned here.

Dark Slayer says

Virginia Woolf has received different criticism from Anglo-American feminists. Firstly, the writing of the former has been viewed negatively by Elaine Showalter. The utilization of “androgyny” and other techniques of writing is what she later believes to be a failure for feminism. Showalter assumes that any text has to reflect the writer’s experience, which is not the case with Woolf who belonged to the upper-class and who lacked harsh experience to be a good feminist writer. On the contrary, there are some critics who support Woolf’s writing. For instance, according to Julia Kristeva, the modern poem, with its various writing techniques, is a piece of writing that has succeeded in breaking through the rigid convention of social meaning which parallels a radical social revolution. Virginia Woolf grasped that the aim of the feminist struggle must precisely be to deconstruct the death-dealing binary opposition of masculinity and femininity. The first part shows some contributions of two feminist classics. On the one hand, Kate Millett’s PhD thesis, *Sexual Politics*, indicates the nature of power relationships among male and female. Her work deals only with male authors, and hence she attacks writers such as Henry Miller and others, who exhibit an offensive interest in male degradations of female sexuality. On the other hand, Mary Ellmann’s contribution, *Thinking About Women*, has more interest in the image of women. The reproductive capacity of the latter has become useless and old-fashioned. She adds that male writers are traditionally equipped to write in an authoritative way whereas women are confined to the language of sensibility. This book is giving the reader a holistic idea about the effects of thinking by sexual analogy. The ideas are shown implicitly with a sense of rage. The second chapter encircles the idea of the image of women in male’s writing. It is said that no criticism is value-free, and thus women will be written about according to social conventions. From the beginning of Women’s studies, many feminists have started to concentrate on the works of women writers. The latter now have become the dominant trend within Anglo-American feminist criticism. Feminists, Beer states, can catch their true reality through the novels they are analyzing. Annette Kolodny, Elaine Showalter and Myra Jehlen are feminist critics that fairly represent theoretical work. The first one is interested in the abiding commitment to discover what makes women’s writing different from men’s. Showalter distinguishes two types of feminist criticism, which are (1) woman as reader and (2) woman as writer (gynocriticism.) The last critic, Jehlen, states in her work the contradiction between ‘appreciative and political readings’. She implicitly says the central paradox of feminism is when there is no space outside patriarchy from which women can speak.

Concerning the second part, the light is now shed on French feminists. Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* is based on Sartre’s existentialism rather than on traditional Marxist theory. And when adding the latter to feminism, it gives birth to Marxist feminism. Jacques Lacan is best known for the symbolic and imaginary order theory. He illustrates the latter with the child that starts utilizing a language and that distinguishes “I” from “You”, concluding that the child has taken up his place in the symbolic order. Hélène Cixous does not

take into consideration both theory and analysis. She deems feminism to be politically marring the women's movement. Luce Irigaray's thesis, *Speculum of other woman*, strives to enact a speculum like structure by initiating with Freud and concluding with Plato. She adds that the mystic experience permits femininity to discover itself via the deepest acceptance of patriarchy subjection which seems surprising to many feminists. Julia Kristeva spends a lot of time discussing the problem of language; she sees the ideological and philosophical basics for modern linguistics as prominently authoritarian and oppressive. Women, she claims, cannot be someone, but can only exist negatively. Kristeva's work constitutes an extensive attempt to define displaces Lacan's distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic order into a distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic. Finally, the interaction between the terms, therefore, constitutes the signifying process.

Emm says

This text serves as a good introduction to anglo-american and french feminisms. Moi astutely and succinctly summarizes the arguments and styles of few feminists she chooses to discuss. I have used this book to play catch-up and educate myself about all the feminism I have never been taught in my studies and it has served me well in this regard. It has also been helpful (although not necessary) to read before I approach the texts written by the feminist themselves.

That said, I would also recommend taking Moi's critiques of the feminists about whom she writes with a grain of salt. While I do think it is important to be critical and to discuss the flaws that in turn produce further advances within feminism, I also think that Moi's tone verges too often on the side of unproductive belittlement. Nor do I think that her criticisms are entirely accurate (particularly in the case of Irigaray). Moi seems eager to critique her fellow feminists, but does little to offer anything constructive in return. Though this may not have been her aim in writing *Sexual/Textual Politics*, her tone, far from being neutral, draws attention to the lack of balance between acknowledgment or praise and critique.

Take a hint from Moi and approach this text with the same skeptical eye with which she treats the feminists she discusses.

Addendum:

The second edition includes an afterword, written in 2002 when this latest edition was first published. It addresses many of the concerns I had while reading this text and self-consciously situates *Sexual/Textual Politics* in the milieu of its production. The afterword is great. I'm curious to read Moi's 1999 "What is a Woman?".

Pointed statement from the afterword:

"Feminist theory needs to understand why we are all driven to melodrama from time to time, but it also needs to know how to find its way back to the ordinary and the everyday, where our political battles are actually fought. The melodrama of poststructuralist theory is an inescapable part of our feminist heritage; it should not be our only heritage."

Noelia says

Imprescindible.

Alain says

Se me ha escapado muchísimo de lo que explica por mi falta de conocimiento sobre el tema. Aun así, lo he disfrutado bastante. Habrá que revisitarlo en unos años.

Jorge Villarruel says

Interesante revisión del pensamiento feminista en las últimas décadas, aunque algunas partes son complejas y no queda claro lo que la autora plantea, en especial cuando habla de autores y autoras francesas.

Kirsty says

Not read in full due to only being able to source this as a four-hour library loan. Still, an interesting tome. More thoughts to follow.

Georgie says

Only read parts for my gender essay but highly thought-provoking!

Tea says

This book offers an incredible insight into Anglo-American and French feminist theory. It's a great guide for people who are just beginning to learn about feminism, sexism and similar -isms. The language is not overly complicated, it is suitable for students and everything is nicely explained. Furthermore, the author offered a short introduction to Lacan and Derrida to make it easier for new readers to understand the postulates of French feminist criticism. This book thoroughly changed my view on what it means to be a woman, it made me want to do more research on the Anglo-American criticalists and was, finally, of great help in writing my final thesis which relies heavily on Anglo-American feminist legacy.

Eulalie says

Este es mi primer encuentro (de lectura íntegra) tanto con la teoría literaria como con los estudios feministas y debo decir que me está resultando muy interesante y pedagógico a pesar de que se mueva en un terreno que se acaba tornando un tanto inestable por la crítica profunda que lleva a cabo y de las contradicciones inherentes e inevitables del discurso feminista.

Lo mejor es que no hace falta ser un entendido o un declarado amante de la literatura (en mi caso ninguna de ambas opciones) para entenderlo, disfrutarlo y aprender infinidad de nuevas cuestiones.

Tracy Beth says

I enjoyed reading Moi's views on other feminist theorists. Very interesting discussion points and analysis.

Shinynickel says

Off this review:

It's very interesting to me as a writer because it's an extremely acute dissection of the way women's artistic output is either belittled and written out of history, or analysed in a specifically misogynist way. There are two examples: one of an 18th-century painting whose creatorship was left anonymous – the painting was lauded, shown in all the major galleries, analysed by experts, praised, shown to art students as a model for their own technique and auctioned at extremely high prices.

When the painting was discovered to have been by a woman, an extraordinary thing happened: auction prices immediately dropped, and the critical appreciation of it turned 180 degrees. Suddenly the painting was flawed, minor, petty, the kind of thing only a woman – a flawed, minor, petty creature – could make. With amazing transparency the critics, who at the time were all men, could not see beyond their own misogynistic ideas about what a woman is.

That is terribly depressing. I always find it odd that 'chick lit' automatically means lightweight and is openly denigrated when the male equivalent, the Nick Hornby-ish 'bloke lit' is taken very seriously as amusing social observation.

Exactly. Moi's second example is of a Scandinavian woman poet who happened to have an androgynous name (like Claude in French or some such). When her collection was published it was deemed to have been by a man, and praised to the skies for its rugged depiction of landscape, grand emotions, human destiny and so forth. When the error was corrected and Claude Whoever pointed out her femaleness, the reviews changed. They were just as positive, but the language about them was different. The same poems were now praised for their small epiphanies, their domestic interiors, their private emotions – the language literally became belittling, diminished... Claude was made into a minor poet, simply because of her sex. Moi quotes the critics Thorne and Henley: 'In short, the significance of gestures changes when they are used by men or women; no matter what women do, their behaviour may be taken to symbolise inferiority.'
