**Feminist Criticism**

Feminist literary criticism was launched in the twentieth century with Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), in which the author examines why there was no female Shakespeare by highlighting the social and political conditions that made writing for women difficult or impossible. In 1969, Kate Millett examined, in *Sexual Politics*, how men represent women in famous texts. Since then, in conjunction with Feminist theory itself, Feminist literary critics have also examined:

1. how women write their own experiences
2. how women read about themselves
3. how to make feminist readings visible to readers
4. how women writers fared in given eras
5. how traditional texts by women are subversive of the social order

Strengths of this theory:

For centuries, women in literature, the roles of both men and women and how they were represented were not a focus of literary criticism. This theory finally examines how women and men are represented and deals with the importance of women in literature.

Weaknesses of this theory:

If this theory is the only one applied to a text, it can be rather limiting. It only examines one element of the text.

Feminist – Questions to ask for Literary Criticism:

1. What is the protagonist’s attitude to male and female characters? How is this evident? How does this affect your response to the characters?
2. How are women represented in the text?
3. What roles do men and women play within family, work situation, etc. (hero, breadwinner, helper, cook, sex object)?
4. What were the social and historical conditions for women in this period that might help us understand their roles in the text?
5. How do women exercise their power in the text?
6. If you were to rewrite the text’s ending, what would happen to the female protagonist? The male protagonist?
7. How and to what degree are the women’s lives limited or restricted in this text?

*Boys & Girls* by Alice Munro

*Viewpoints 11* (p. 44)

1. Describe fully the **setting** of the story.
2. Why does the narrator prefer to work with her father than with her mother?
3. Illustrate that there were rigid expectations for girls at the time in which the story was set.
4. Explain the significance of the exchange with the salesman on page 49.
NOTE: one word is key
5. Why does the narrator say, “My mother, I felt, was not to be trusted” (50)?
6. Suggest why Alice Munro interrupts her story to say, “I have forgotten to say what the foxes were fed” (51).
7. Examine the narrator’s dreams at the beginning of the story (47) and compare them with those at the end (58).
How have they changed?
What does the change illustrate about the narrator?
8. Explain thoroughly the **symbolism** of the incident with Flora.
9. Explain the significance of the line at the end:
“Never mind,” my father said. He spoke with resignation, even with good humour, the words which absolved and dismissed me for good. “She’s only a girl,” he said (59).
10. Alice Munro wrote, “So taking on these roles, whichever you get, is a hard and damaging thing.”
Explain her statement.
Illustrate that the short story, “Boys and Girls”, demonstrates this point of view.
11. Examining Munro’s style:
12. Identify three different types of **conflict** in the story.
13. Identify the **climax** of the story. Justify your choice.
14. State the **theme** of the story.
15. What **narrative point of view** has Munro chosen? What is its effect?
16. Give several examples of **figurative language** in paragraphs 1-5 of the story.