



# **TRINITY COLLEGE FOR WOMEN NAMAKKAL**

## **Department of English**

**WOMEN'S WRITING**

**19PEN11 - ODD Semester**

**Presented by**

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# WOMEN'S WRITING

The academic discipline of **women's writing** as a discrete area of literary studies which is based on the notion that the experience of women, historically, has been shaped by their sex, and so women writers by definition are a group worthy of separate study: "Their texts emerge from and intervene in conditions usually very different from those which produced most writing by men.

"It is not a question of the subject matter or political stance of a particular author, but of her sex *i.e.* her position as a woman within the literary world. Women's writing, as a discrete area of literary studies and practice, is recognized explicitly by the numbers of dedicated journals, organizations, awards, and conferences which focus mainly or exclusively on texts produced by women. Women's writing as an area of study has been developing since the 1970s.

- ❖ Women's literature has often been defined by publishers as a category of writing done by women. Though obviously this is true, many scholars find such a definition reductive. What makes the history of women's writing so interesting is that in many ways it is a new area of study. The tradition of women writing has been much ignored due to the inferior position women have held in male-dominated societies. It is still not unheard of to see literature classes or anthologies in which women are greatly outnumbered by male writers or even entirely absent.
- ❖ Before the introduction of women's literary history colleges into academia and the renewed efforts of scholars to explore, recover, and preserve the literary tradition, women themselves were often the only champions of themselves, their contemporaries, and their predecessors. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication on the Rights of Women* (1792) is a landmark treatise that paved the way for many women after her to not only publish their works but also to engage in the overall critical discourse surrounding the issue of women in literature.

□ **Mary Wollstonecraft:** The first feminist writer

- ❖ While many aspects of feminist theory date back to ancient times, the person widely acknowledged as the first feminist philosopher and author is Mary Wollstonecraft, a former governess and lady's maid (and the mother of fellow author Mary Shelley) who became an innovative political and social writer in England during the late 18th century.
- ❖ One of the first women to openly publish under her own name, Wollstonecraft is most famous for 1792's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, a philosophical text advocating for the education of women. The 24 other writers- both classic and current- on this list admirably continued the work started by Wollstonecraft, cementing feminist literature as a genre not only significant, but essential.

## □ Anais Nin

While French-American (with Cuban heritage) author Anais Nin didn't personally identify with the rise of the feminist movement in the 20th century during her lifetime, her erotic novels contain undeniably feminist themes.

When she began publishing her work, erotica written by women (or, at least, openly written by women) was rare, and Nin's story collections like *Delta of Venus* and *Little Birds* have since been lauded as early and excellent examples of sex-positive feminist fiction.

## □ Jane Austen

Probably the most famous female English novelist of all time (except maybe J.K. Rowling), Jane Austen published her celebrated sextet of novels (*Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion*) in the early 19th century, although her name never appeared on any of her books during her lifetime; *Sense and Sensibility* was credited to “A Lady”, and all of her subsequent novels were attributed to “The Author of *Sense and Sensibility*”.

Nevertheless, Austen’s identity became public knowledge a decade following her death, and her name could finally be attached to the iconic heroines she created, from *Sense and Sensibility*’s Elinor Dash wood to *Pride and Prejudice*’s Elizabeth Bennet to *Emma*’s Emma Woodhouse.



## ❑ **Alice Walker**

Rather than identifying as a “feminist”, novelist Alice Walker (author of *The Color Purple*) calls herself a “womanist”. “Womanist’ is to ‘feminist’ as ‘purple’ is to ‘lavender’,” Walker explains, meaning that ‘womanist’ takes a more inclusive approach to women’s rights, rather than perpetuating only the model of feminism advocated by white women during the 20th century and beyond. Walker embodies this ethos both in her own life and through the sharply-drawn and profoundly moving female characters she creates.

## ❑ **George Eliot**

Born Mary Anne Evans, George Eliot wrote under her pseudonym during the Victorian era in England, penning seven highly-acclaimed novels and also dabbling in poetry, journalism, and translation. Her most famous novel *Middlemarch* remains a staple of literary education, and its heroine, the clever and enterprising orphan Dorothea Brooke, is still celebrated as one of the best-developed female characters in the canon.

## □ **Toni Morrison**

Like Alice Walker, author Toni Morrison seeks to bring “Black feminism” to the forefront through her speeches, essays, and novels. In books like her acclaimed *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison features black female protagonists with complicated relationships to their own identities and determinations to assert their own power.

## □ **Louisa May Alcott**

Louisa May Alcott penned one of the most classic childhood novels ever written: *Little Women*. When the book went to press in the late 19th century, a character like Jo March- youthful, wilful, determined to chart her own course, but still devoted to her sisters and the very notion of sisterhood- was wholly unprecedented. There’s a reason why so many 20th and 21st-century girls fell in love with *Little Women* as pre-teens; Jo and her sisters reveal deep and profound truths about familial and platonic relationships between young girls, and it’s a feminist triumph for that very reason.



## □ Virginia Woolf

The legendary Virginia Woolf became a staple of the early 20th century arts scene in London thanks to her well-received novels and essays like *Orlando*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and "A Room of One's Own."

During the feminist movement of the 1970s, Woolf's complex and multi-layered female characters became critical touchstones, credited with launching proto-feminism. While much of Woolf's modern-day fame comes from her struggles with mental health and her suicide by drowning, her excellently-crafted works—particularly the call-to-arms that is *A Room of One's Own*—admirably demand equal consideration and esteem for female writers.

# THANK YOU

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