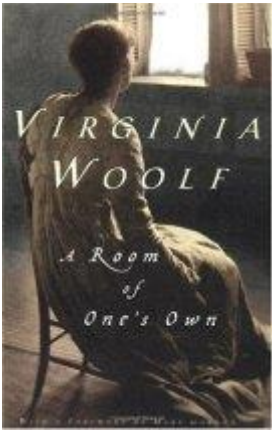


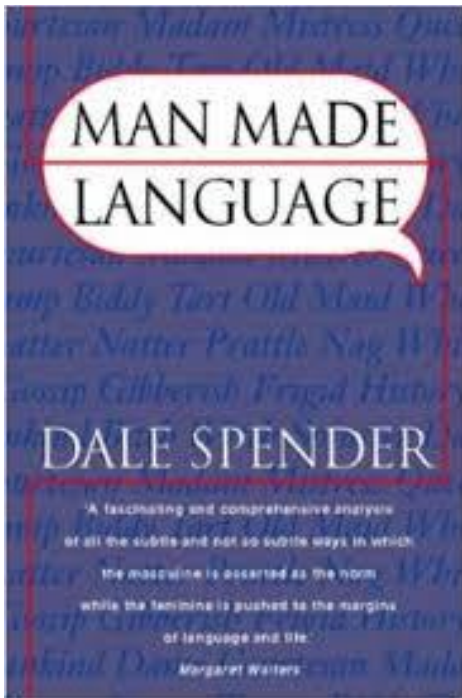
Feminism as a movement gained potential in the twentieth century, marking the culmination of two centuries' struggle for cultural roles and socio-political rights — a struggle which first found its expression in [Mary Wollstonecraft's](#) *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). The movement gained increasing prominence across three phases/waves — the first wave (political), the second wave (cultural) and the third wave (academic). Incidentally [Toril Moi](#) also classifies the feminist movement into three phases — the female (biological), the feminist (political) and the feminine (cultural).





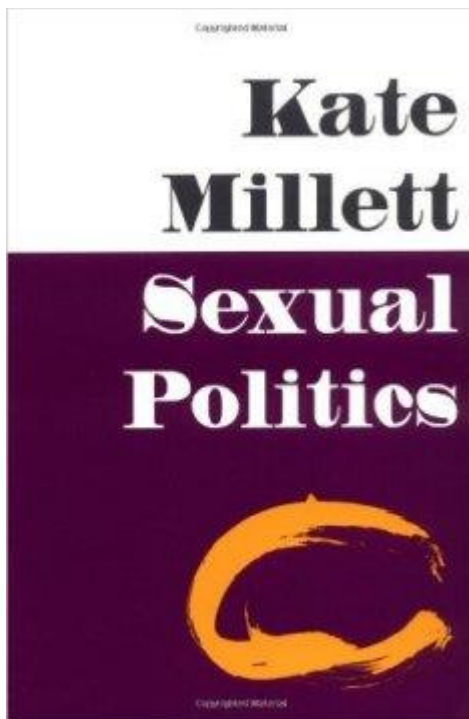
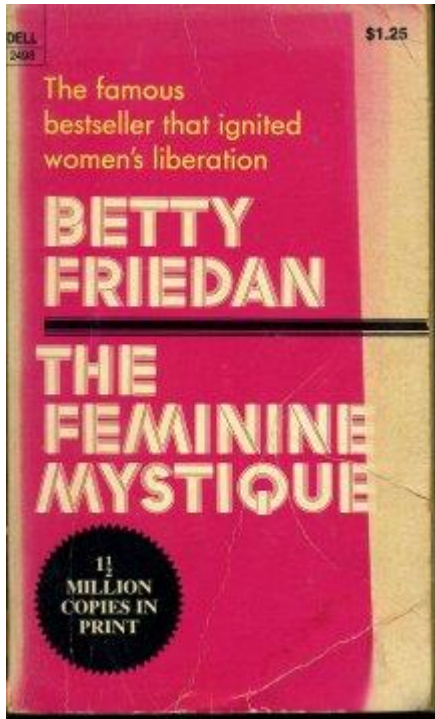
The first wave of feminism, in the 19th and 20th centuries, began in the US and the UK as a struggle for equality and property rights for women, by suffrage groups and activist organisations. These feminists fought against [chattel marriages](#) and for political and economic equality. An important text of the first wave is [Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own](#) (1929), which asserted the importance of woman's independence, and through the character [Judith](#) (Shakespeare's fictional sister), explicated how the patriarchal society prevented women from realising their creative potential. Woolf also inaugurated the debate of language being gendered — an issue which was later dealt by [Dale Spender](#) who wrote [Man Made Language](#) (1981), [Helene Cixous](#), who introduced [écriture féminine](#) (in [The Laugh of the Medusa](#)) and [Julia Kristeva](#), who distinguished between the symbolic and the semiotic language.







The second wave of feminism in the 1960s and '70s, was characterized by a critique of patriarchy in constructing the cultural identity of woman. [Simone de Beauvoir](#) in *The Second Sex* (1949) famously stated, “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” – a statement that highlights the fact that women have always been defined as the “Other”, the lacking, the negative, on whom Freud attributed “[penis-envy](#).” A prominent motto of this phase, “The Personal is the political” was the result of the awareness .of the false distinction between women’s domestic and men’s public spheres. Transcending their domestic and personal spaces, women began to venture into the hitherto male dominated terrains of career and public life. Marking its entry into the academic realm, the presence of feminism was reflected in journals, publishing houses and academic disciplines.



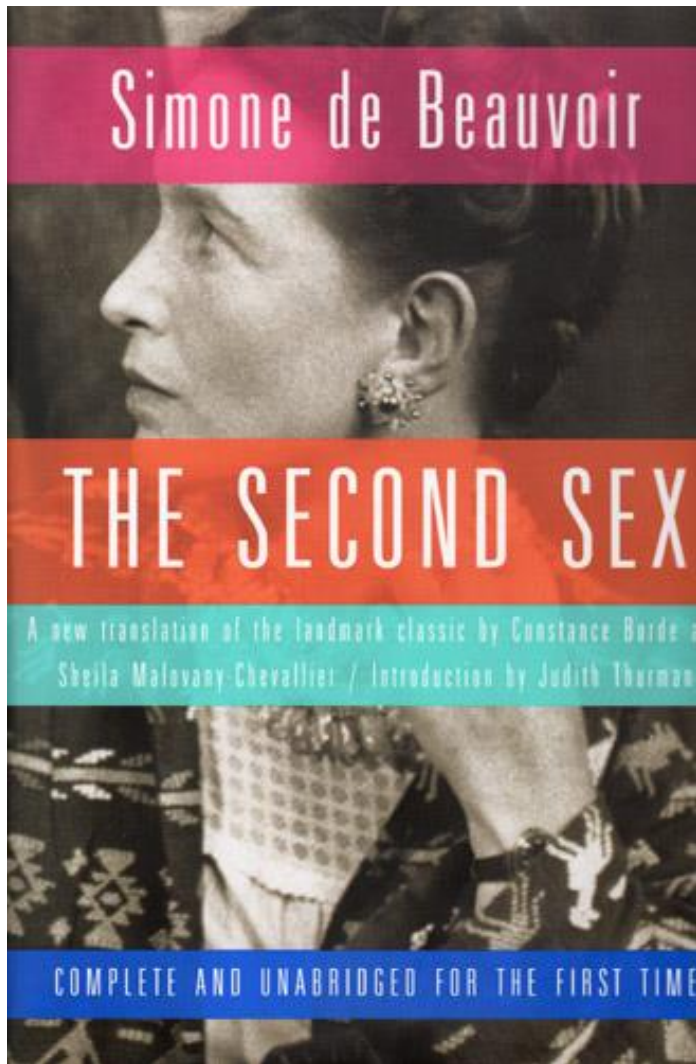


THINKING ABOUT WOMEN

An original,
often startling,
genuinely funny,
and deeply serious
investigation of our
conceptions of femininity
as revealed by
writers from
Jane Austen to
Mary McCarthy and
Norman Mailer

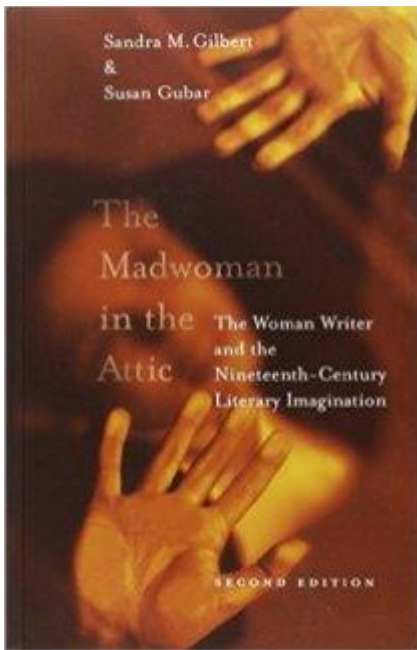
**Mary
Ellmann**

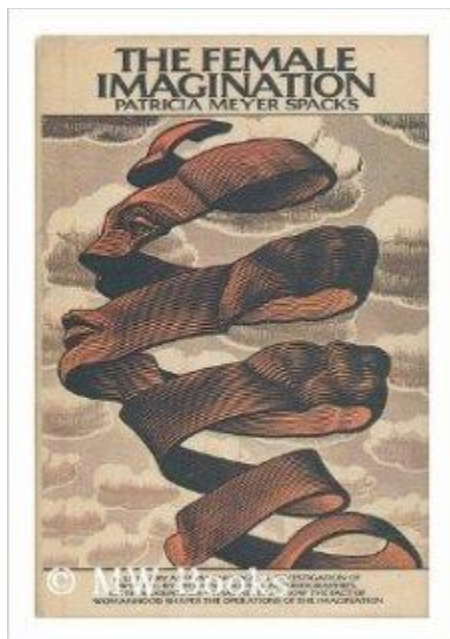
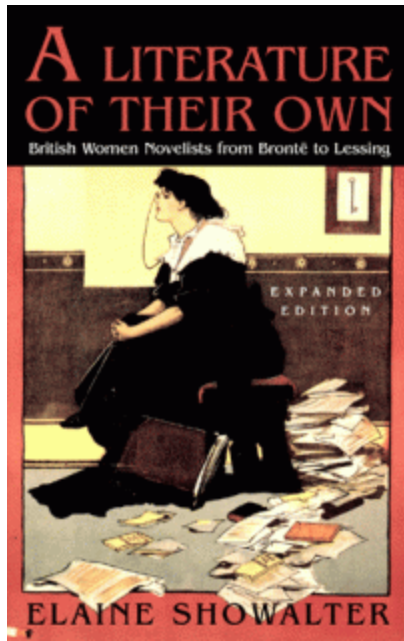
A Harvest Book



[Mary Ellmann](#)'s *Thinking about Women* (1968), [Kate Millett](#)'s *Sexual Politics* (1969), [Betty Friedan](#)'s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and so on mark the major works of the phase. Millett's work specifically depicts how western social institutions work as covert ways of manipulating power, and how this permeates into literature, philosophy etc. She undertakes a thorough critical understanding of the portrayal of women in the works of male authors like DH Lawrence, Norman Mailer, Henry Miller and Jean Genet.

In the third wave (post 1980), Feminism has been actively involved in academics with its interdisciplinary associations with [Marxism](#), [Psychoanalysis](#) and [Poststructuralism](#), dealing with issues such as language, writing, sexuality, representation etc. It also has associations with alternate sexualities, [postcolonialism](#) ([Linda Hutcheon](#) and [Spivak](#)) and [Ecological Studies](#)([Vandana Shiva](#))







[Elaine Showalter](#), in her “[Towards a Feminist Poetics](#)” introduces the concept of [gynocriticism](#), a criticism of gynotexts, by women who are not passive consumers but active producers of meaning. The gynocritics construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, and focus on female subjectivity, language and literary career. [Patricia Spacks’ The Female Imagination](#), Showalter’s [A Literature of their Own](#), [Sandra Gilbert](#) and [Susan Gubar’s The Mad Woman in the Attic](#) are major gynocritical texts.

The present day feminism in its diverse and various forms, such as liberal feminism, cultural/ radical feminism, black feminism/womanism, materialist/neo-marxist feminism, continues its struggle for a better world for women. Beyond literature and literary theory, Feminism also found radical expression in arts, painting ([Kiki Smith](#), [Barbara Kruger](#)), architecture([Sophia Hayden](#) the architect of [Woman’s Building](#)) and sculpture (Kate Millett’s Naked Lady).