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Sonia Maria Melchiorre

GENIUS PREVAILS AND WITS  
BEGIN TO SHINE  
FORGOTTEN BRITISH WOMEN WRITERS  
OF THE PAST



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Via Mazzini 87  
01100 Viterbo  
tel 0761 304967  
fax 0761 1760202

[info@settecitta.eu](mailto:info@settecitta.eu)  
[www.settecitta.eu](http://www.settecitta.eu)

INTRODUCTION	11
CHAPTER ONE <i>THE BLUESTOCKINGS</i>	
1.1 The History of the Term “Bluestocking”	25
1.2 Critical works About The Bluestockings	27
1.3 The Bluestocking Ladies as Social Reformers	35
1.4 The (He)art of Conversation	38
1.5 The Literary Salon	42
CHAPTER TWO <i>ELIZABETH ROBINSON MONTAGU “THE QUEEN”</i>	
2.1 The Queen of the Bluestockings	47
2.2 <i>Dialogues of The Dead</i>	54
2.3 Women and Shakespeare	58
2.4 <i>Essay on Shakespeare</i>	64
Chronology and Works	83
CHAPTER THREE <i>HESTER MULSO CHAPONE</i>	
3.1 Vindicating the Rights of Women	87
3.2 Letters on the Improvement of the Mind (1773)	93
3.3 Chapone and Richardson	98
Chronology and Works	102
CHAPTER FOUR <i>CATHERINE TALBOT</i>	
4.1. The Domesticated Woman	105
4.2 Conduct Manuals	108
4.3 A More Rational Education for Women	112
4.4 Catherine Talbot The Pious Woman Writer	118
4.5 Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week (1770)	125
Chronology and Works	130
CHAPTER FIVE <i>SARAH ROBINSON SCOTT</i>	
5.1 Provincial Bluestockingism: Sarah Scott and Lady Miller	133
5.2 Sarah Robinson Scott’s Early Works	138

5.3 <i>Millenium Hall</i> and Utopian Communities	141
5.4 <i>Millenium Hall</i> and the Reworking of Literary Models	146
5.5 <i>Millenium Hall</i> and the Multi-Perspective Spectator Chronology and Works	151 164
CHAPTER SIX CHARLOTTE RAMSAY LENNOX	
6.1 A Mother of the Novel	167
6.2 <i>Harriot Stuart</i>	173
6.3 <i>The Female Quixote</i>	184
6.4 <i>Shakespear Illustrated</i>	195
6.5 <i>The Lady's Museum</i> Chronology and Works	206 210
CONCLUSIONS	215
CHRONOLOGY 1700-1800	217
BIBLIOGRAPHY	229

*Everyone would magnanimously pretend that nothing had happened, so long as you never seemed to be having a goodtime or developing too high an opinion of yourself – from now on you could count yourself lucky if they let you learn shorthand and typing.*

*“To the Devil a Daughter”, from Bad Blood, Lorna Sage (2000)*

*IN MEMORY OF MIRELLA BILLI  
(1937-2019)*





My thanks go to all those who have made all this possible: my parents Antonio and Giovina, my sister Mara and her family.



## INTRODUCTION

Criticism involves the selection, restoration, and evaluation of works retrieved from the past and the assessment, however tentatively offered, of works produced in the present. No doubt some societies can settle these tasks by an appeal to precedent, but where cultural production increases and audiences become less homogeneous – certainly the conditions that applied in Europe between 1660 and 1800 – more complex arrangements will become necessary for the estimation of cultural value and the provisional of rational plausible criteria of evaluation. In accomplishing both these tasks, a canon of some kind will prove useful.

(J. Gorak, “*Canons and Canon Formation*”, 1997)

### TRADITION AND CANON FORMATION

Poststructuralist perspectives have brought about a major shift in our ways of thinking about culture at large. They have demonstrated that criticism can no longer be considered a neutral activity and have helped to understand the dominant representational modes at work in our society. Feminist scholars, in particular, have been protesting against the idea of a “useful” literary canon and its “systematic neglect” of women’s writing, and have demonstrated that the erasure of women writers from the Western literary tradition is not due to “an immutable process of natural selection.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See some of the most representative texts of “First Wave” and “Second Wave” feminist criticism: M. Ellmann, *Thinking about Women* (1968); K. Millett, *Sexual Politics* (1970); E. Figs, *Patriarchal Attitudes* (1970); G. Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (1971); J. Goulianos, ed., *By A Woman Writt: Literature from Six Centuries by and About Women* (1973); L. Bernikow, ed. and intr., *The World Split Open: Four Centuries of Women Poets in England and America, 1552-1950* (1974); M. Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* (1974); P. Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (1975); E. Moers, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (1976); E. Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977); M. R. Mahl and H.

On the contrary, decisions are made and selections are obtained by historians and critics on the basis of certain criteria of aesthetic value which, until recently, have largely excluded women's material. Obviously, moral considerations are part of the web of ideas underlying such assessment of literary worth, and have been used by some historians to support their rejection of women's fiction - particularly their early eighteenth-century fiction - on the grounds that it is lubricious. Moreover, sustained disapproval or indifference to women's writing, for aesthetic or moral reasons, have contributed to a high level of ignorance about the scope and scale of women's involvement in the literature market which embraces all genres, and which applies particularly to their pre-nineteenth-century material, as demonstrated by Cheryl Turner.<sup>2</sup>

Once thought timeless and universal, this canon has been undermined by the combined forces of feminism, multiculturalism, popular culture and relativistic literary theories which have developed since the 1960s.<sup>3</sup>

The word canon originally indicated a set of sacred books

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Koon, eds., *The Female Spectator: English Women Writers before 1800* (1977); J. Fetterley *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (1978); N. Auerbach, *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction* (1979); S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, eds., *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979); J. Todd, *Women's Friendship in Literature* (1980); L. Bernikow, *Among Women* (1980); E. Showalter, ed., *New Feminist Criticism* (1985); D. Spender, *Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen* (1986); J. Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: from Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (1986); J. Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing, and Fiction, 1660-1800* (1989). Many more have been produced in the last decades and are now considered the product of the so called "Third Wave" Feminism.

<sup>2</sup> C. Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writer in the Eighteenth Century*, Routledge, London and New York, 1992, pp. 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> See R. Von Hallberg, *Canons*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1984, p. 1.

or a body of great works whose value seemed unquestionable. Though never codified, as it happened for its religious namesake, the canon is often considered a “pragmatic instrument” rather than “a powerful abstraction”, whose elements are introjected by scholars and critics in the normal course of graduate education. Poststructuralists maintain, otherwise, that it operates as an instrument of “systematic exclusion” and “reinforces ethnic and sexual assumptions” solely reflecting the ideology of a restricted group of people.<sup>4</sup> The canon perpetuates an established set of values and because a canon is exclusive, rather than inclusive, it resists modification by new sets of values that might be brought to it by non-canonical literature.”<sup>5</sup>

It is necessary to distinguish two different critical positions emerged in the late XX century within the contemporary canon debate: the conservative approach attempts “to justify the continuing importance of the Western canon on the grounds of its permanent greatness and the edification that its study would yield, either to individuals or to society at large. Critics perceived the argument that alternative texts had been undeservedly neglected, as symptomatic of the loss of academic standards and the collapse of aesthetic judgment in the face of extrinsic political pressures. Conversely, liberal critics maintained that the canon should be more representative of the true diversity of society and the wide span of its cultural heritage, that it should include writers previously excluded from literary history and the educational institution of the dominant culture. According to them, the reverence accorded to the Western canon was only indicative of elitism, patriarchy and ethnocentrism, each of which is anti-

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<sup>4</sup> See E. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987.

<sup>5</sup> P. Hyland, “Introduction”, *Discharging the Canon: Cross-cultural Readings in Literature*, Singapore University Press, 1986, pp. 1-9, p. 1. See also L. Robinson, “Treason Our Text: Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon”. In R. Con Davis and R. Schleifer, eds., *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Longman, London and New York, 1989, pp. 616-28.

thetical to the egalitarian ideals of democratic societies.<sup>6</sup>

In his most famous work Harold Bloom indicated the Western canon as a corpus of “valued secular works” comprising the literary classics of our tradition.<sup>7</sup> He labelled liberal literary critics “the School of Resentment” and proposed a personal canon of twenty-six novelists and poets, with Shakespeare as its centre. In his interpretation the function of the Western canon should “impose limits, to set a standard of measurement that is anything but political and moral.”<sup>8</sup> His perspective, though, didn’t take into account the important contribution of those poststructuralist theories, such as New Historicism and Marxism, which considered the various factors involved in the process of canon formation. Therefore if, on one hand, Harold Bloom’s interpretation of the Western canon tended to isolate the arts from their socioeconomic context, and treated literature as the product of a historical vacuum, on the other, Frank Kermode recognised that what was to become canonical needed to be interpreted and observed. Furthermore, this latter also maintained that “interpretation does not occur in a social vacuum as a solitary, individualistic enterprise.”<sup>9</sup> Kermode’s “canon of interpretation”, as it is now defined, was an attempt to liberate the traditional canon of valued texts from its associations of monolithic, immovable authority, even if this liberation would finally weaken our sense of the stability of understanding that normally clings to canonical texts.”<sup>10</sup> The same opinion was expressed by Kolbas who saw

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<sup>6</sup> D.E. Kolbas, *Critical Theory and The Literary Canon*, Westview, Boulder (CO), 2001, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> H. Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, Harcourt Brace & Co., New York, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 35.

<sup>9</sup> Frank Kermode’s most detailed account about the idea of canon formation is to be found in *Forms of Attention*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1985.

<sup>10</sup> J. Gorak, *The Making of the Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a*

in the academic institutions “the final arbiter of canonical status” and maintained that it is within it that “the reputation of artists and books [...] initially made according to a confluence of judgments of ‘mere opinion’ [...] becomes institutionally validated as *knowledge*.”<sup>11</sup> Finally, in Kermode’s opinion “canons” are only useful because they enable academic professionals “to handle otherwise unmanageable historical deposits.”<sup>12</sup>

#### FEMINIST THEORIES SINCE THE 1960S

By the end of the 1960s feminist critics demonstrated that the search for a female literary tradition constituted an important political challenge to the establishment, and that only through a revision of the Western culture women writers could acquire more importance in the eyes of what Charlotte Perkins-Gillman had previously referred to as “androcentric” culture.<sup>13</sup>

Some years later, Adrienne Rich would define “re-vision” as “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction”, and observed that the very act of revision of the canon represents, for women, not only a chapter in cultural history, but also, and mainly, an act of survival.<sup>14</sup> The next step, Kate Millet’s groundbreaking study *Sexu-*

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*Literary Idea*, Athlone, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey and London, 1991, p. 156.

<sup>11</sup> E.D. Kolbas, *Critical Theory and The Literary Canon*, *ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> F. Kermode, “Canon and Period” in *History and Value*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988, p. 115.

<sup>13</sup> See C.H. Whitmore, *Women’s Work in English Fiction from the Restoration to the Mid-Victorian Period* (1910); M. Reynolds, *The Learned Lady in England: 1650-1730* (1920, 1964); J.M. Horner, “The English Women Novelists and Their Connection with the Feminist Movement (1688-1797)”, in *Smith College Studies in Modern Language* 11, Northampton, 1929-30; J.E. Gagen, *The New Woman: The Emergence in English Drama, 1600-1730* (1954).

<sup>14</sup> A. Rich “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision” (1971), in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*, W.W. Norton

*al Politics*,<sup>15</sup> was a work that “established the feminist approach to literature as a critical force to be reckoned with” becoming the foremother of later feminist works of the Anglo-American tradition. Within Feminism we usually distinguish between two main approaches to literature: the Anglo-American approach, conceived within the Women’s Liberation Movement, which takes into consideration the historical experience of women in general, and the French or “Continental Feminist Criticism”, conceived instead within the theoretical premises of poststructuralism and heavily indebted to authors such as Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous.

Millett’s text, today a keystone in the history of feminist criticism, represented “a striking break with the ideology of American New Criticism”<sup>16</sup>. This critical trend was mainly concerned with the formal aspects of literary works and totally ignored the historical and socio-cultural *milieux* in which they had been produced. Millett demonstrated that literature, especially women’s literature, had to be studied within a larger cultural context to be properly understood and assessed.

Though published before Millett’s work Mary Ellmann’s *Thinking About Women*<sup>17</sup> never became so influential but the two texts together originated an approach in literary feminism defined “Images of Woman Criticism”, focusing on the stereotypes of women in works by “canonical” male writers.<sup>18</sup> In the early

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& Co., New York and London, 1979, pp. 33-49.

<sup>15</sup> Sexual politics is defined as “the process whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the subordinate sex.” K. Millett, *Sexual Politics*, (1969), Virago, London, 1977, p. 26.

<sup>16</sup> T. Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Routledge, London and New York, 1985, p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> M. Ellmann, *Thinking About Women*, Harcourt, New York, 1968.

<sup>18</sup> See S. Koppelman Cornillon, ed., *Images of Women in Fiction Feminist Perspectives*, Bowling Green University Popular Press, Bowling Green (OH) 1972.



1970s, in fact, the majority of courses in literature centred on the analysis of female stereotypes in male writing. It was only later, from mid 1970s, that this approach was replaced by the so-called “Gynocritics”, the theoretical perspective exclusively focused on works by women writers. This was the definition of the term given by Maggie Humm in her *Dictionary of Feminist Theory*:

This is the study of women writers and of the history, styles, themes, genres and structures of writing by women. Gynocritics includes the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career and the evolution and rules of female literary tradition. Feminist approach to literary criticism which concentrates on texts written by women. The ‘first wave’ feminist critics, known as resisting readers, analysed the misogyny of books written by men.<sup>19</sup>

Three major studies, produced by the end of the 1970s, represented this new woman-centred perspective: Ellen Moers’s *Literary Women* (1976), Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), and Sandra Gilbert-Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979).

Ellen Moers’s *Literary Women* was an early attempt of describing the history of women’s writing as a “rapid and powerful undercurrent”<sup>20</sup> within the existing literary canon and provided, for the first time, the map of the “unknown territory of women’s writing”. Lorna Sage, some thirty years later, would define it the “undiscovered country” located “just off the map [and] from off the beaten track [...] lost earlier writers, whose work helped create our world, can become once again part of the living record. We have no ready-made mythic connection with them [...]but

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<sup>19</sup> M. Humm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York and London, 1989, pp. 91-2.

<sup>20</sup> “To be a woman writer” Moers writes, “long meant, may still mean, belonging to a literary movement apart from but hardly subordinate to the mainstream: an undercurrent, rapid and powerful.” E. Moers, *Literary Women*, The Women’s Press, London, 1978. p. 42

they are there to be rediscovered, re-read, reprinted.”<sup>21</sup>

Moers interpreted women’s literature as “an international movement” begun in the late eighteenth century, that produced some of the greatest literary works of English Literature.<sup>22</sup> The subtitle Moers chose for her book, “The Great Writers”, aimed on one hand at undermining the very concept of “greatness”, which had been used against the inclusion of women in the literary canon and, on the other, at elevating women writers to the status of “major” authors<sup>23</sup>.

Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) represented a major contribution to literary history in general. In it she rediscovered forgotten or neglected women authors and demonstrated why discussions about women as writers had been so “inaccurate, fragmented, and partisan.”<sup>24</sup>

Many feminist critics by the end of the 1970s began, in fact, to agree that looking at women as a group, and not as individuals, could lead to recognise “an imaginative continuum, the recurrence of certain patterns, themes problems, and images from generation to generation.”<sup>25</sup> The erasure of women writers from

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<sup>21</sup> L. Sage, ed., *The Cambridge Guide to Women’s Writing in English*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. vii.

<sup>22</sup> E. Moers, “Women’s Literary Profession and Tradition”, in *Columbia Forum* 1, Fall 1972, p.27.

<sup>23</sup> F.R. Leavis the propagator of the idea of “literary excellence”, in his work *The Great Tradition* analysed a group of novelists including George Eliot, Henry Miller, Joseph Conrad. Only some years later, in the re-edition of his work, he decided to include in his “Great Tradition” the previously neglected Charles Dickens. Nothing had obviously changed in Dickens. What had changed was Leavis’s perception of his “greatness”. F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad*, Chatto & Windus Ltd., London, 1948 (1960).

<sup>24</sup> E. Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: from Charlotte Bronte to Doris Lessing* (1977), Virago, London, 1978.

<sup>25</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks defined this continuum as “female self-aware-

the literary tradition had instead created in their followers the impression that “there were [no women writers] and each generation of women believe[d] itself to be faced with the burden of doing everything for the first time.” By consequence, in the absence of formal education women writers tended to turn, in fact, to other women authors for guidance, and finding none the “personal give-and-take of the literary life was closed to them.”<sup>26</sup> Each feminist work had always tended to be received as if it emerged from nowhere as if each of them had lived, thought, and worked without any historical past of contextual present. According to Adrienne Rich, therefore, this is one of the ways in which women’s work and thinking has been made to seem sporadic, errant, orphaned of any tradition of its own.<sup>27</sup>

Twenty years later, in the “Introduction” to the 1998 reprint of her work, Showalter observed that when in 1965 she had begun to do research for her Ph.D. dissertation on Victorian women writers, feminist criticism did not exist, and

scholars still called Elizabeth Gaskell “Mrs.” and Frances Burney “Fanny”. No one edited women’s studies journals or compiled bibliographies of women’s writing.

[T]he New Criticism, F.R. Leavis, Northrop Frye, and seven types of ambiguity marked the boundaries of my critical sophistication.<sup>28</sup>

Showalter imagined *A Literature of Their Own* as a book that would challenge the traditional canon, showing that women writers were a much greater number, and “wanted to demysti-

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ness” in *The Female Imagination*, Alfred A. Knopf, New Haven, 1975; London, 1976, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> J. Russ, *How to Suppress Women’s Writing*, The Women’s Press, London, 1984, p. 93.

<sup>27</sup> A. Rich, “When We Dead Awaken”, *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> E. Showalter, “Introduction: Twenty Years On Revisited”, Virago, London, 1998, pp. xi-xxxii, xi.

fy the process by which some women writers had been granted “greatness” and reveal the material contents and circumstances in which women’s writing was imagined, published, disseminated, and reviewed.”<sup>29</sup> Showalter was willingly writing a new history of women’s writing and thought that women’s history had suffered from an extreme form of what John Gross, some years earlier, had defined “residual Great Traditionalism”<sup>30</sup>, which had “reduced and condensed the extraordinary range and diversity of English women novelists to a tiny band of the ‘great’, and derived all theories for them.”<sup>31</sup>

If Showalter’s had tried to fill in the gaps between Austen and Lessing, so to understand the way women authors related to each other, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their fundamental study on nineteenth-century women writers, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979),

set out a compelling theory of female literary history as a dialogue between women writers and a patriarchal tradition. Their own theory was a revision of Harold Bloom’s “anxiety of influence”, presenting the battle between the sexes as a linguistic and literary struggle that generated new genres and forms.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> E. Showalter, “Introduction: Twenty Years On Revisited A Literature of Their Own”, *ibid.*, p. xxi.

<sup>30</sup> J. Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters*, London, 1969.

<sup>31</sup> E. Showalter, “Introduction: Twenty Years On Revisited”, *ibid.*, 1978, p. 7. This phenomenon was defined by Michell Cliff “the phenomenon of interruption” on women’s culture. See M. Cliff, “The Resonance of Interruption”, in *Chrysalis: A Magazine of Women’s Culture*, no. 8, Summer 1979, pp. 29-37.

<sup>32</sup> As observed by Schofield and Macheski, Showalter’s book is expression of “the growing market for scholarly but readable books on women writers. No work has focused exclusively on the earlier novelists – the antecedents of Jane Austen. Most books like Showalter’s, dedicate an early background chapter to acknowledging the existence of eighteenth-century women, but immediately move into the better known texts of Austen, Bronte, Gaskell, and later

Different positions emerged among feminists during the 1980s, when Showalter in particular was accused of *naiveté* and American pragmatism by the new generation of critics.<sup>33</sup> Janet Todd, in particular, in *Feminist Literary History* argued against Showalter's opinion that "there was no such concept as a woman of letters" before 1800.

Showalter can declare that women did not think of themselves as professional writers before 1800, when there are in fact hosts of professional novelists in the eighteenth century. [...] In this concentration on the Victorian period and on the mode of domestic realism, as well as in its ignoring of the problem of aesthetic judgment and language, *A Literature of Their Own* was typical of the early phase of feminist criticism on women.

[I]ts omissions skewed the understanding of the female past and encouraged premature generalisation that did duty for specific history.<sup>34</sup>

But the most substantial attack came from Toril Moi who used Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar and other 1970s critics' arguments to demonstrate the "inadequacies" of Anglo-American feminist criticism, proposing the French feminist approach as more "sophisticated"<sup>35</sup>. Toril Moi, it must be observed, didn't consider

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authors", M.A. Schofield and C. Macheski, *Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists, 1670-1815*, Ohio University Press, Athens and London, 1986, p. xv.

<sup>33</sup> See G. Green and C. Kahn, *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* (1985); T. Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985); P. Waugh, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (1989).

<sup>34</sup> J. Todd, *Feminist Literary History: A Defence*, Polity Press, Oxford, 1988, p. 27. See also M. Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1988); M.J. Ezell, "Re-visioning the Restoration: Or How to Stop Obscuring Early Women Writers", in J.N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds, eds., *New Historical Study: Essay on Reproducing Texts, Representing History* (1993).

<sup>35</sup> It was Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron's *New French Fem-*

that *A Literature of Their Own* and other similar works derived from a different approach to literature, reality, gender, and canon. Whereas, in fact, her most important theoretical questions were philosophical – “What is interpretation? What does it mean to read? What is a text?” – Showalter’s were historical and cultural. In the same years, many works by forgotten women writers were reprinted, thanks to the establishment of women’s publishing houses and presses, such as Virago and The Women’s Press.<sup>36</sup>

The end of the 1980s witnessed also the appearance in print of important critical works such as Janet Todd’s *Dictionary* (1987), Roger Lonsdale’s Oxford anthologies on women’s poetry (1989) and Dale Spender’s *Mothers of the Novel* (1986), which made possible the return of many forgotten novels in paperback. These scholarly works, by consequence, encouraged an important recovery and re-evaluation of eighteenth-century women’s lives and writings. The 1980s were, in fact, the years when literary criticism gained attention and institutional legitimacy, and these achievements consolidated over the decade.<sup>37</sup> Other fundamental studies followed in the 1990s: Susan Stave’s *Married Women’s Separate Property* (1990), Sylvia Harckstark Myers’s *The Blue-stocking Circle* (1990), Catherine Gallagher’s *Nobody’s Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (1994).

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*inisms* that introduced American scholars to French feminism. E. Marks and I. De Courtivron, eds., *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1980.

<sup>36</sup> Virago Press was the first publishing house in Britain set up in 1973 which began to focus on non-fiction, biography and social history. It went on to develop the Virago Modern Classics series, put into wide circulation works by many neglected nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women writers and helped to restore a female literary tradition. The Women’s Press was then set up in 1978. These publishing houses also provided some room for writings by lesbian, black and Asian women writers.

<sup>37</sup> S. Wolfson, *British Literature: Discipline Analysis*, National Center for Curriculum Transformation Resources on Women, Baltimore, 1997, pp. 12-13.

By the mid-1990s then women's writing became "increasingly available by force of new anthologies and reprints of long-out-of-print writing by women, and by the emergence of on-line texts and editions of women's writing, accessible on the internet".<sup>38</sup> According to some scholars anthologies, etymologically "a flower gathering" constitute a major culprit in our cultural forgetting of women's writing.<sup>39</sup>

The anthology is a substantial agent of cultural definition, often an educational tool; as a popular literature form it flourished during the eighteenth century, both fostering and responding to a growing sense of national literary heritage. [...] Anthologies are both the creators and barometers of public reading taste.<sup>40</sup>

Some critics have recently demonstrated how anthologies and histories of literature have largely contributed to the erasure of women writers from the canon. As tradition is reassessed, and the canon debated and redrawn, a reconsideration of the importance of those texts as the channels of tradition seems more than necessary.

The compilation of anthologies or any other reference text implies that editors look back at their predecessors in search of a basis for their work. Therefore, the lack of information about women's writing has always represented an obstacle in this sense.

The universally accepted way of making a reference book is to consult other reference books. This we have done when possible,

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<sup>38</sup> S. Wolfson, *British Literature*, *ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>39</sup> E. Eger, "Fashioning a Female Canon: Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and the Politics of the Anthology", in I. Armstrong and V. Blain, eds., *Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon, 1730-1820*, Macmillan Press Ltd., London, 1999, pp. 201-20, p. 204. See also G. Greer, "Changing Fashions in Anthologies of Women's Poetry", in *TLS*, June 30, 1995, pp. 7-8.

<sup>40</sup> E. Eger, *Fashioning e Female Canon*, *ibid.*, p. 202.

but it has not been hard for us to avoid over-reliance on them, since for us they were often silent. We are writing here about knowledge and power and history, and against omission and exclusion: most of our women are not represented in the ‘standard’ reference books in the field.<sup>41</sup>

It is this existent vacuum that exhorted feminist critics to repair the apparently “irrevocable disappearance” from the record of eighteenth-century women writers.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> V. Blain, P. Clements, I. Grundy, eds., *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Batsford, London, 1990, p. viii. See also A. and J. Schlueter, eds., *An Encyclopedia of British Women Writers* (revised and expanded edn.), Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick and London, 1998, p. x.

<sup>42</sup> See Gualtieri, Gillian, “Canonized Women and Women Canonizers: Gender Dynamics in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature’s* Eight Editions”, *Gender Issues*, Vol. 28, 2011, pp. 94-109.