Activities

(a) Apply the ‘How to practise a feminist analysis . . . ’ method to a text by a woman and a relatable text by a man (e.g., texts which treat similar topics or belong to the same period but different genres). Compare your analyses with other people’s and consider how far you can or cannot achieve consensus on matters of women and men, writing and reading. (Suggestions from Part Five: Milton and Agbabi (5.1.1); Pope and Hands (5.1.3); Behn and Defoe or Coetzee (5.2.2); William and Dorothy Wordsworth (5.4.1); Carter (5.2.1) and McDonagh (5.3.3).

(b) Compare the dialogue in Hollinghurst’s The Swimming Pool Library (5.3.4 c) with that in Rich’s ‘Dialogue’ (both in 5.3.4). Consider in what ways your own sexuality is put on the line by reading these texts. Alternatively, compare the representations of (non-) human sexuality in the science fiction of Dick and Le Guin (5.2.4).

(c) Looking or looked at? Doing or done to? Speaking, spoken to or spoken about? Put these questions to the representation of women and men in any text which interests (and perhaps irritates) you. Go on to consider how you might rewrite part of it so as to challenge and change the roles and perspectives it offers. (Texts commonly chosen in Part Five include: Shakespeare (5.1.2); Rhys (5.2.3) and Beckett (5.3.3).

Discussion

Support your arguments, where possible, with references to specific authors, texts, periods, genres and movements.

(i) notions of ‘women’s’ or ‘feminine’ language just aid and abet anti-feminist thinking.


(ii) when we look at women writers collectively we can see an imaginative continuum, the recurrence of certain patterns, themes, problems and images from generation to generation.

Elaine Showalter, A Literature of their Own (1977: 10)

(iii) revision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.

Adrienne Rich, ‘When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision’


(iv) the inquiry into both homosexuality and gender will need to cede the priority of
both terms in the service of a more complex mapping of power that interrogates the formation of each in specified racial regimes and geopolitical spatializations.


(v) men should take seriously at last the ‘hetero’ in heterosexuality, which means the heterogeneity in us, on us, and . . . give up . . . that oppressive representation of the sexual as act, complementarity, two sexes, coupling.


♦ Consider the assumptions and concerns expressed in summaries of dominant Western feminisms in relation to non-Western texts you have read and non-Western ways of life you are aware of. In what ways do Western feminisms cohere with, neglect, diminish or disapprove of any ways of life of women of particular classes, ethnicities, religions, and nations? What may be the major clashes with non-Western women’s ways of life? Can there be such a thing as transnational feminism, and, if so, what would it look like?

♦ Compare the constructs of women and of men in the following popular magazines, available online:

  ‘Elle’ @ www.elle.com, ‘Take a Break’ @ www.takeabreak.com,

  ‘Cosmopolitan’ @ www.cosmopolitan.com,

  ‘Glamour’ @ www.glamourmagazine.co.uk,

  ‘Woman & Home’ @ www.womanandhome.com, and

  ‘The Lady’ @ www.lady.co.uk.

Here are some web-sites relevant to the present theories and approaches:

‘Feminist Literary Criticism’, by Dr. Kristin Switala (2009)
http://www.cddc.vt.edu/feminism/lit.html


http://womenst.library.wisc.edu/philos.htm