



## Literary Women

*Ellen Moers*

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## **Literary Women** Ellen Moers

One of the pioneering works of feminist criticism, *Literary Women* separates women from the mainstream of literary history and examines how the fact that they were women influenced both their lives and their writing. Included are discussions of Jane Austen, George Sand, Colette, Simone Weil, and Virginia Woolf.

## **Literary Women Details**

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Author : Ellen Moers

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## Rita says

How had I missed knowing about this book all these years since 1978??

Wide-ranging study in terms of books and authors covered, as well as themes discussed. Highly readable! not at all dry and boring.

What books were 19th century authors reading before they started writing their famous novels? for example Madame de Stael [Corinne 1807], Fanny Burney and others I had not heard of before.

I read this book off and on for a year, before getting it all read. It would bear re-reading for sure! Wish I had read the chapter on Corinne before editing Tomoko's dissertation!

Moers gives so much context for the various writers and novels, and deals with how women could afford to write, whether they could make a living from it, how society looked upon them.

Moers jolted me by suggesting that the novel would not have to be such a popular literary form/genre. It's in a way a fluke that it has been so, the past 100 - 150 years. But before that it had been plays. And we know in Turkey it is or was always poetry. I never questioned the dominance of the novel before! Just took it for granted. Well, it seems gradually to be changing today -- memoirs have gained in popularity.

I struggle to understand her [invented] term Heroinism, very important in her book. "Loving heroinism -- the challenge to tell the woman's side of the love story in her own words" p 244. And the letter was the first form used to express the woman's experience of love, long before the novel came into fashion.

Then there is her term "performing heroinism", for which I cannot now locate a definition. Mme de Stael and her novel play a prominent role in this chapter. "Corinne stand alone in Mme de Stael's oeuvre, in its silliness as in its enormous influence upon literary women. For them, the myth of Corinne persisted as both inspiration and warning: it is the fantasy of the performing heroine." And she goes on to quote several later authors praising the novel Corinne and how much it meant to them.

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## Sheila says

I first read Literary Women in college back in 1987 when it was assigned for a women's literature class. I refer to my copy regularly to re-read for pleasure or in looking up information about the framework of women's literature in history (and for my own writing efforts).

The book is divided into two parts:

I. History and Tradition (The Literary Life, the Epic Age; Women's Literary Traditions and the Individual Talent; Money, the Job, and Little Women: Female Realism; and Female Gothic)

II. Heroinism - the role of woman as hero/role model (Traveling heroinism; Loving heroinism; Performing heroism; Educating heroinism; and Metaphors)

What I take from this book is basically a brief history of (mostly early) women authors and their

determination to tell the story of women on "their own terms"; why they did it, put in the context of the times and cultures in which they did it, and what (and who) they managed to create when they put pen to paper.

As a layperson/casual observer to the world of (women's) literature, I found the book both easy to read and extremely entertaining.

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### **fee says**

i swear if I read anything more about Anne Radcliffe then I might cry

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### **Nandakishore Varma says**

I read it more than two decades ago. I remember checking it out of the library many times to read over and over - it was that good.

I have tried to locate this book since, but to no avail. I think it may be out of print.

I never steal books from the library. But in this case, I believe I should have made an exception!

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### **Paulyne says**

I found it an illuminating book, and I loved the style she used to write it. Anyone interested in the topic should absolutely read it!

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### **Ann says**

Found on the shelves at SUNY Geneseo's Milne Library when I was somehow able to borrow books from there. Cracked my mind open. Made me read, and re-read, \_Jane Eyre\_. It's probably time to revisit it.

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### **Natashaketel says**

Ellen Moers was an engaging, talented, witty writer who managed to tackle such a HUGE subject with ease. I loved her discussion on Mme de Stael, Jane Austen and Elizabeth Barrett Browning the most and am now desperate to pick up a copy of Aurora Leigh. I feel incredibly informed and enlightened yet the book wasn't too dense or overwhelming at all.

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### **Susan says**

This book was a thorough review of women's literature from the multiple points of view of literary criticism, history and feminism.

Ellen Moers includes all the "usual suspects" in sections of Austen, de Stael, Eliot, the Bronte sisters, Sand, Woolf, etc. Some of the analysis seems a bit dated and her comments on Jane Austen are too much in the Bronte mode, but in general it's a masterly account of the varied literature by women.

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### **Margaret says**

This groundbreaking 1976 work of feminist literary criticism is exactly the kind of book I like: erudite, wide-ranging, well written, and frequently very witty. Moers examines English, American, and French women writers from the eighteenth century (plus seventeenth century Anne Bradstreet) to the present day, seeking to answer the questions of how their gender influenced their work and whether "women's literature" is truly distinct from men's. Along the way, she delves knowledgeably into the work of writers ranging from Jane Austen, the Brontes, and George Eliot to Willa Cather, Colette, and George Sand, showing thematic connections and drawing fascinating conclusions which make me wish I had worlds enough and time to read or reread every book she mentions. (Well, except Mrs. Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, which might cause me to die of boredom if I ever had to reread it; happily, Moers's summary of it is much, much more amusing and instructive.) *Literary Women* is deservedly a classic of feminist literary criticism; even 30 years after it was published, it's full of learning, energy, and wit.

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### **Catherine says**

Brilliant book. I still find myself talking about it, recommending it and quoting from years after I read it.

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