



*A Literature of
Their Own: British
Women Novelists*

1977

from Brontë to Lessing

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Elaine Showalter

When published in 1977, *A Literature of Their Own* quickly set the stage for the creative burgeoning of feminist literary studies that transformed the field throughout the 1980s and beyond. One of the founders of feminist criticism in the

United States, Showalter pioneered a criticism that focused on literary works written by women, which she termed “gynocriticism.” Such criticism challenged the traditionally male-dominated literary canon by retrieving and reassessing neglected or forgotten literary works by women.

In *A Literature of Their Own*, Showalter showed how, by examining the plethora of women writers beyond George Eliot and Jane Austen, readers and scholars could discover a lost female literary tradition. This female tradition of literature, she argued, had been rendered invisible by patriarchal definitions of what was important. The book established a canon of works by women that reflected an evolving female consciousness, and it explored the ways in which women writers created “a literature of their own.” Launching a major new area for literary investigation, and reshaping the canon of English literature, *A Literature of Their Own* helped to create an explosion of intellectual ferment throughout the humanities that sought to establish “gender” as a category of analysis.

A classic of feminist criticism, the book remains influential today even if the fruits of its revolutionary spadework now enjoy the luxury of being taken for granted.