

PSYCHOANALYZING FEMINISM: A CRITIQUE OF *SONS AND LOVERS*

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ABSTRACT

The relation between feminism and psychoanalysis began with Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* which critiques Freud for his conviction in the inequality of sexes, his practice of sexualizing human relationships and his style of explaining aberrations in terms of complexes and envies. The feminist critique of Freud is continued in *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar who locate the concept of social castration in the novels of nineteenth century women writers. By social castration, they mean lack of social power for women. They argue that these female writers identified themselves with the characters they detest. A combination of feminism and psychoanalysis is explored in Jacqueline Rose's work *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*. Feminist exploration of Lacanian psychoanalysis began with *Feminine Sexuality* co-edited by Juliette Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose. They argue that subjectivity is assigned to a child at the moment of symbolic castration, the division between the Self and the other. It follows therefore that gendered subjectivity is constituted through castration with the phallus as the transcendental signifier, enabling the division. Mitchell and Rose argue that psychoanalysis offers feminism a theory of gendered subjectivity: a concept of the subject's resistance to rigid gender identities. In *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, Rose emphasizes the unstable nature of gender identity and argues that femininity is neither simply achieved nor is ever complete. Both Mitchell and Rose focus on Lacanian re-reading of Freud where penis envy is referred not to the male sex organ, but to its symbolic and cultural meaning: the authority and power associated with the masculine. Lacan's term phallus symbolizes the privileges, power and authority entitled by the male in a patriarchal society.

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