

English Literature and Working Women after Suffrage:
The Genealogy of Postsuffragism/ Postfeminism

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This dissertation investigates the genealogy of feminist discourse by studying twentieth and twenty-first century British literary texts, with a focus on anti-feminist sentiment known as postfeminism.

Postfeminist studies gained popularity in the late 1990s and the early 2000. It is often understood as a negative emotion, in which the goals of feminism have already been achieved; thus, the concept of feminism is no longer required. In and around the 2010s, these studies gained even more prominence, especially in the context of neoliberalism and globalisation. Many critics agree that it emerged alongside neoliberalism, as discussed in Angela McRobbie's *The Aftermath of Feminism* (2008). Her work combines the study of popular culture and media studies, analysing a wide range of cultural forms and practices, including films, television dramas, music videos, advertising, and social media.

Following the discussion of postfeminist studies, but not from the media studies, this dissertation studies literary works such as Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* (1923), Evadne Price's *Not So Quiet...* (1930), *Life as We Have Known It* (1931), published by the Women's Co-operative Guild, Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933), Virginia Woolf's 'Leaning Tower' (1940) and Selina Todd's *The People* (2014). By reading these (anti)feminist texts, this dissertation discusses whether postfeminist phenomena appear exclusively in the 1990s and twenty-first centuries. By expanding postfeminist studies in temporal and vertical directions, it includes a more feminist perspective and examines the ways in which feminism intersects with different contexts.

The introductory chapter focuses on the concept of postfeminism and emphasises its importance within the research on feminist cultural analysis and literary studies. Following a discussion of its theoretical and historical perspectives, I establish how it is used analytically within media studies and cultural/popular studies; however, there are several reasons why we should be cautious when using the term in literary studies. First, although McRobbie's influential theorisation provides an insightful description of postfeminism, there are still debates around what it is and how it should be referred to. Second, most critics associate neoliberalism with social, cultural, and political issues, and they believe that postfeminism emerged in the 1990s. Critics of neoliberalism, such as Michael J. Bouin, understand it as a reaction to the emergence of fascism in the early 20th century. If the emerging period of neoliberalism is debatable, so is that of postfeminism. Third, the current discussion on postfeminism focuses on contemporary cultural issues; therefore, the relationship between postfeminism and high culture and the intellectual elite is less analysed. Fourth, intellectual history remains primarily in masculine culture.

Criticism, such as Stephan Collini's *Nostalgic Imagination* (2017), is a good example. He includes early 20th century intellectuals, such as F. R. Leavis and William Empson, but not Virginia Woolf, who wrote *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. His intellectual history appears devoid of feminist intellectuals. Finally, in the postfeminist discussion, there is not much literary dialogue. On this basis, this dissertation reconsiders postfeminist periodisation, hoping to find a new way of thinking about literature in relation to (post)feminist studies. In so doing, it argues that postfeminism is always a part of feminism.

Part I starts off with an overview of the postsuffragist era by focusing on feminist (dis)continuity in English feminist literary texts. Chapter 1 considers several literary texts, showing how the idea of discontinuity appears in feminist texts such as *Life as We Have Known It*, Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), and Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996). Chapter 2 focuses on George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*, a feminist icon for contemporary suffragettes and suffragists. Reading Shaw's feminist text, it can be seen that it explores why the feminist protagonist became a solitary fighter, despite her desire for collective achievement.

Part II analyses two working female figures in interwar middlebrow novels: Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* and Evadne Price's *Not So Quiet....* Brittain was a first-generation university graduate who served as a Volunteer Aid Detachment nurse during the First World War. *The Testament of Youth* is her collection of war memories, whereas Price had no experience in war service. Although the two novels have long been considered to be 'war novels' or 'middlebrow fiction' in English literature, I read them as a forerunner of what is known as 'chick lit' in postfeminism studies.

Part III aims to illuminate why feminist reading requires a multidimensional approach. It relates to two women's intellectual writings: Virginia Woolf's essay 'Leaning Tower' and Selina Todd's *The People*. Chapter 6 discusses the controversy between Virginia Woolf and male intellectuals during the 1930s. By analysing Woolf's arguments, I demonstrate that intellectuals held different assumptions about working-class and mass utopian dreams, but that their dreams intersected over objects and infrastructures. The same chapter further argues that mass Utopia cannot be realised in either scheme. Chapter 7 takes up Todd's history book to examine why a feminist historian writer dreams of Utopia, but then her aspirations end in catastrophe.

From the discussion in this dissertation, a trace of postfeminism—which is said to have originated during the second half of the twentieth century—can be found in the early twentieth century. To consider the phenomenon of feminism, one must consider the formation process and tensions of literary discourse, as well as the society, politics, economy, and industry that surrounds it over time and across disciplines; one should also analyse literary works, rather than limiting it to popular culture and media culture alone.