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## **Feminist Ideology and Translated Literature**

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*Chapter 1***FEMINISM IN CULTURAL AND LITERARY STUDIES**

*I took my power in my  
hand / And went against the  
world; / 'Twas not so much as  
David had, /  
But I was twice as bold.*  
(Dickinson)

**1. Introduction**

This introductory chapter deals with a succinct overview of feminism from its incipit, with the three waves and main promoters, the underlying tenets, and ideological considerations. Subsequently, a presentation of the evolution of feminist discourse follows, as the chapter goes over earlier proponents, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer, Joan Kelly, Susan Lydon or Sheila Rowbotham, as well as gender differences and concepts as postulated by linguists Deborah Tannen (1990) and Robin Lakoff (1973), before moving on to contemporary theorists like Florence Given (2021), Caroline Criado-Perez (2019), Gina Rippon (2019) and Natasha Walter (2011), and popular culture references, particularly with the advent and rise of the feminist movements as presented on the silver screen and in books. Naturally, it is not only the Anglo-Saxon space that is brought to the forefront, but also the French and Romanian ones, along with the main proponents and their notions. The chapter concludes with a closer look at the tandem of feminism and literature, showcasing some of the well-known tropes when it comes to the depiction of women in literature over the years, as seen through the so-called ‘male-gaze’, as well as with a presentation of the prevalent themes in feminist literature.

**2. History of feminism – a brief overview**

Nowadays it feels as if, upon uttering the word *feminist* or *feminism* (or any variation), images of angry, bare-faced, hirsute, masculine women burning their bras or waving their arms about in protest are instantly conjured up in the minds of our interlocutors, be they men or women. The term is “heavy with baggage, negative baggage: you hate men, you hate bras, [...], you think women

should always be in charge, you don't wear make-up, you don't shave, you're always angry, you don't have a sense of humour, you don't use deodorant" (Adichie 8-9). There seems to exist a divide in the collective mind as regards the tandem feminist – femininity, as though the two terms were mutually exclusive. Therefore, for some, one cannot possibly wear heels, make-up, relish the thought of cooking, and other such pleasures if one also adheres to feminist principles. Dare we even venture into the world of female sexuality and pleasure, that of fetishes or the endless debate surrounding women's bodies and choices - the author mentions that there really is no debate when it comes to a woman's own body, as it is solely her choice and hers alone.

That being said, it is worth going back to the very definition of the term *feminism* as featured on *Encyclopedia Britannica*: "the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes." ("Feminism"). This perfectly encompasses what women (not just feminists) have always wanted and fought hard to obtain: equality. In our contemporary setting, the resurgence of feminism was sparked in the wake of the #metoo movement, as well as that of *Time's Up* – focusing on equality of opportunities and of pay in the workplace, combating sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination – highly publicized due to the involvement of countless celebrities and politicized during awards ceremonies such as the Academy Awards, the Golden Globes or during protests like "The Women's March". After Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's famous essay titled "We Should All be Feminists" came out<sup>1</sup>, the creed seemed to have permeated the media and it went on to be featured in a Beyoncé song and even printed on Dior t-shirts. In her eye-opening essay she details her experiences as a girl at a tender age and then as a woman – and a feminist and female writer – having been told not to come across as too angry in her writing: "Of course it was angry. Gender as it functions today is a grave injustice. I am angry. We should all be angry. Anger has a long history of bringing about positive change" (Adichie 14). This anger that women – not just feminists – have pent up over the centuries stems from a culture of silencing them that has thrived over time, be it in the workplace, at home, or at school, and has made the scenario in which the male voices drown out 'the noise' the rule, with the exception being the instances when women raise their voices, and are perceived as 'aggressive' or 'hysterical'.

In order to see how obvious gender inequality is, one need look no further than societal conditioning and how it is ingrained in us as children through assigned gender roles such as 'the hall monitor', who should be a boy rather than a girl (Adichie 8), and this is tied to the very origins of society, where roles such as hunter-gatherer were assigned to the strongest of the tribe – usually the men. However, what was once the case no longer stands, as strength is not – nor should it be – a sign of who deserves to be in a position of leadership, but rather

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a 2012 TED Talk she gave in Euston, UK.

competence, skills, and knowledge in that specific field (Adichie 12). Similarly, femininity and beauty are tied to certain attributes society deems desirable and attractive, thus a mold is created: those who fit in – either by conditioning from an early age to look and behave a certain way or by actively striving to adhere to certain standards – enjoy the fruits of their ‘labor’, while those who do not are left on the outskirts; in this respect, feminists point out categories such as women of color, transgender women, LGBTQ+, plus-size etc. As such, feminists encourage those who wish to effect some measure of change to ‘re-brainwash’ themselves and “remember that real change doesn’t start until the people in the margins of our society are liberated and able to make the same decisions (without discrimination) that thin, non-disabled, cisgender, white people can already make” (Given 40).

Tracing the movement as a whole back to its roots, it can be described as having manifested in three waves. In Europe, before Simone de Beauvoir’s famous work *The Second Sex* in France (the French version in 1949, the first English translation came out in 1953) and the suffragettes in the UK (1903-1914), English writer and philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft, mother of famous Mary Shelley, the creator of *Frankenstein*, wrote a politically charged piece of feminist writing titled *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792) wherein she pleads “not for myself, but for my sex” (Wollstonecraft 21). She ardently advocates for the importance of women’s education and equality to men as regards morality. In Chapter III she states that women are taught from a young age to rely on their beauty, rather than their wit: “Women, deluded by these sentiments, sometimes boast of their weakness, cunningly obtaining power by playing on the weakness of men; [...] but virtue is sacrificed to temporary gratifications, and the respectability of life to the triumph of an hour” (Wollstonecraft 66).

Much in the same vein as Wollstonecraft, a year before (1791), social reformer Olympe de Gouges published a manifesto in France in response to the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the [Male] Citizen*, naturally substituting *man* and *male* for *woman* and *female*, stating the rights of the “sex that is superior in beauty as in courage, needed in maternal sufferings” (de Gouges 125) as being equal to those ascribed to men in society. As such, in Article 11, she emphasizes that “The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of women” (126) and goes on to (scandalously at the time) state that women should be granted the right to have the father of their child publicly named to ensure that he recognizes the child as his own (128). Vocabulary-wise, the pamphlet also makes heavy use of gender-inclusive term “citizeness,” meaning the female citizen, as employed during the French Revolution (“citoyenne”). Thus, in synthesizing the first wave of the feminist movement, it is worth noting that it was quite political in nature. In the US and Great Britain it was centered on women’s suffrage, with organizations being

founded in order to help women obtain the right to vote (Humm 705). One such organization was NUWSS (National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in Britain), and chief among their 'Fourteen Reasons for Supporting Women's Suffrage' were these two powerful claims: "Because public-spirited mothers make public-spirited sons" and "Because the objections raised against their having the franchise are based on sentiment, not on reason" (Various 1).

The second wave brought the emancipation – or liberation – of women to the fore in the 1960s and continued to gain momentum through the 1970s. The focus was on freeing women from subordination and patriarchal domination (Kelly *et al.* 12). It was more radical in nature and decried reproductive issues and the monopoly of the patriarchy. This was a time of grand gestures meant to raise awareness; what has become one of the main 'scandalous' situations associated with the movement took place in the US in 1968, where the famous bra-burning incident took place at the "Miss America" beauty pageant. The motto adopted in those days was "The personal is political", as it centered on matters such as: abortion and the woman's choice when it comes to her body, lesbian activism, as well as equal pay – this was the case with the women's strike against Ford Motors in Britain in 1968 (Humm 706).

One of the seminal works that catalyzed this second stage of feminist thought in the US was American author Betty Friedan's 1974 *The Feminine Mystique* (second edition), wherein she argued that, due to the expectations imposed by the patriarchal society as regards women's duties (giving birth and raising children, being housewives, with no real interest in pursuing a career, let alone a higher education and deriving their sense of accomplishment solely from a domestic existence) (*Britannica*), women lose their very identity. When Friedan wrote about 'the problem that has no name', it spoke to countless women in America – and not only – on a deep level. Through writings such as hers, the stigma of stating "I want something more than my husband and my children and my home" (Friedan 27) began to be gradually dispelled. Certainly, this 'mystique' referred to undermining a woman's sense of self, leaving her unable to define herself other than by in conjunction to an attributed role as wife or mother (Friedan 70). This new feminism was also concerned with the matter of 'motherhood', whether it had to do with women having to juggle work and childrearing or stay-at-home mothers, who felt isolated from the outside world. Initially – and this is precisely what earned many radical feminists the reputation of being firmly against motherhood – the focus was on discussing and understanding "the way in which beliefs about motherhood and the family were oppressive to women, in conditioning and constraining the views women held about themselves and their lives" (Richardson 115). However, other feminist writers and authors, such as Erica Jong, advocated not for discouraging women from idolizing motherhood, but rather stressed the fact that "The bearing and rearing of the next generation is a communal effort. It is not a luxury by and for women. True, many women have

a strong biological urge to have children (often, although not always, initially stronger than that of men)” (Jong, “The Post-feminist Woman” / “Femeia post-feministă” 169).

As regards the second wave, a distinction must be operated between the Anglo-American and French schools of thought, with the former focusing on issues of gender identity or sexual politics, rather than on a more theoretical approach. After the Second World War, numerous women’s organizations were formed especially as feminist concepts and women’s studies courses had begun to be integrated in university curricula; they tackled matters such as abortion and divorce and challenged social conventions (Bassnett 814-815). The 1970s and 1980s saw the movement flourish on a large scale, as women began to demand reforms in matters such as family law, as well as contraceptive and abortion rights. Feminist groups comprised women from various backgrounds and walks of life and sought to bring these matters to the fore by means of large-scale protests (815). The notion of women’s liberation from male oppression was intensely circulated in the 1960s and 1970s. Then, in the 1980s, feminist thought veered away from the term ‘movement’ toward a more personal and intimate approach, closer to the notions that are prevalent nowadays in feminist discourse: equality, a stronger voice and presence in society (818).

Something that occupied the writings and minds of numerous authors and theoreticians during the second wave was also a concept dubbed by Naomi Wolf ‘the beauty myth’: “Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. This embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual, and evolutionary” (12). This blend of femininity, beauty and sexuality is something that is conditioned and ingrained into the minds of young girls at tender ages, in spite of the fact that it originated out of the 1970s and 1980s efforts to make sure that the stigma of enjoying sex was removed, as well as the antiquated notion that meant women were torn between seen as chaste or promiscuous (Walter 5). Needless to say, pornography has played a vital part in the sexualization of women and young girls, as well as in the manner in which they are perceived in society. Part of the power men wield over women is due to this, as “men cannot see women outside a pornographic frame of reference. Men simultaneously sexualize women and dominate them” (Walby 119).

In the U.S., such movements were ignited in the big cities (Boston, NY, Washington D.C.), where young women came together to defend their voices, their bodies, and their choices. These ‘sisters’ collaborated to produce manifestos such as *Women and Their Bodies* (1970), by the “Boston Women’s Health Collective”, tackling issues centered on female sexuality and pleasure, myths about women, venereal diseases, birth control, abortion, prepared childbirth and postpartum depression, among other things. This work ignited a revolution, as women realized they were not alone in their struggles, that other women went

through the same experiences and were subjected to the same objectification (“Alienation is also what makes it hard for us to talk about sex. Our sexual experience is so privatized that we never find out that other women have the same problems we do.”) (Boston Women’s Health Collective 8). Therefore, toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, feminists were optimistic that, having gained some power, women would be able to effect change; therefore, “The fact that women can now be sexually active and experienced without being condemned is a direct result of second-wave feminism” (Walter 5).

The third wave of feminism, that began in the 1990s, sought to cater to the shortcomings that surfaced in the wake of the second wave, that was accused of only bringing the experiences and inequities faced by white middle-class women to the fore. In so doing, it was deemed as not inclusive of those that were in between or on the outside, racially-wise or in terms of sexual orientation (the matter of LGBTQ representation), not to mention those living in highly religious or fundamentalist regimes. Therefore, regardless of whether we belong to the same gender, it is our experiences and walks of life that shape us; thus, several sub-branches can be identified, such as black feminist thought, with iconic representatives Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison or Alice Walker, Jewish feminism, Asian and Latina feminism (attempting to erase the image of the obedient and dutiful woman) and Native American-Indian feminism (Kelly *et al.* 13). However, this issue of queer representation is not as prevalent as it is in Canada, where prominent writers such as Nicole Brossard or Anne-Marie Alonzo left their mark and brought lesbian experiences and thought to the public.

However, fire that stoked its embers and preceded the first wave of feminism was the underground “Riot Grrrl” punk movement. Even the spelling with three ‘r’s is meant to get across the idea of rebellion, of women making their voices and presence known to the world (iconic Riot girl Kathleen Hanna is said to have coined the term) (Rosenberg and Garofalo 809). According to some supporters, this women-fronted movement was one of the factors that contributed to ushering in and popularizing the rise of feminism in the 1990s. What first started as a rebellion against male-fronted bands transposing their experiences and male bravado into music quickly took on far deeper and more meaningful roots, as ‘girlbands’ comprised of activists such as *Bikini Kill*’s Kathleen Hanna or *Love Child*’s Rebecca Odes gained traction. What started as an underground punk movement soon grew to signify much more, as chapters were opened across the country and an entire community was formed. For instance, they held workshops centered on themes such as rape, self-mutilation, abuse, etc., focusing on the individual, rather than on the political side (Rosenberg and Garofalo 810). This was their poetry, their struggles expressed through music, speaking to girls everywhere, assuring them that they were not alone.

This third wave and its resurgence are heavily felt nowadays, particularly in the arts, with more and more female and feminist writers, whose works are

intensely circulated by means of translation. For instance, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's essay was translated into Romanian in 2016 by Anca Dumitrescu as "Feminist(ă), feminiști" for Black Button publishing house and gained somewhat of a momentum due to the rise of Time's Up and #metoo movements. As Romanian professor and feminist militant Mihaela Miroiu writes in her 2004 book *Drumul către autonomie (The Road Towards Autonomy)*, the third wave is mainly centered on the notion of power ("power feminism") and it is more accessible in nature (Miroiu 81). Contemporary feminism approaches subjects such as the position of women in the family and at the workplace, as well as sexual harassment, rape, and domestic violence. As stated before, the focus is currently on including all categories and walks of life, "broadening and deepening the scope of feminist analysis" (Kelly *et al.* 13). 'The rise of raunch', as it has been called during the 2000s, sees women enjoying the fruits of the labor of feminists past and present. However, unless they are activists or involved and interested in feminist tenets per se, most girls and women do not truly think in this paradigm, as these generations have grown up with social media, dating websites and sexual intercourse without the judgment that came decades ago. "Another reason for the rise of raunch is that women are rediscovering the joy of being loved for their bodies, not just their minds. [...] Instead of desperately longing for the right to be seen as human beings, today's girls are playing with the old-fashioned notion of being seen as sex objects" (Taylor, "Today's Ultimate Feminists" / "Cele mai mari feministe de astăzi"). If we are to look at today's entrepreneurial and sexually positive culture, this certainly rings true. Whether influencer culture, plastic surgery, and beauty-boosting supplements, 'hustle culture' and the impossible standards of beauty promoted can be seen as proof of 'female empowerment' and 'women taking their bodies and sexuality into their own hands'... that is a debate for another time and a lengthier piece of research. Suffice it to say that, indeed, the notion of what beauty and perfection means in today's 'influencer' society sees women associate it with sexual allure; moreover, the line between female sexuality and the sex industry seems to have become gradually more blurred (Walter 3).

In Romania, for instance, feminist thought has not had a significant impact on policies and legislation, save for several initiatives on the part of female politicians, such as a draft bill by USR deputy Oana Bîzgan (2018), laying down penalties for harassment both in private, as well as in public (this includes street harassment) as, until this bill, such acts were not subject to a sanctioning framework (Roșca, "Hărțuirea stradală"). As per the Romanian Institute for Human Rights (IRDO), other laws protecting women against domestic violence and ensuring gender equality include: Government Decision No 365 of 24 May 2018 for the approval of the National Strategy on promoting gender equality and equal opportunities and preventing and fighting against domestic violence for the 2018-2021 period and the "Operational plan for implementing the National