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(Literature and feminism

# The personal and the political

- Features - Sexual politics -

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**It is no longer possible to ignore that voice, to dismiss the desperation of so many American women. This is not what being a woman means, no matter what the experts say. For human suffering there is a reason; perhaps the reason has not been found because the right questions have not been asked, or pressed far enough. . . . The women who suffer this problem have a hunger that food cannot fill. . . . We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: "I want something more than my husband and my children and my home."**

âEuros" **Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 1963 .**

The year 2013 marked the fiftieth anniversary of one of the most important foundational texts of second-wave feminism: Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which brought to national attention the "problem with no name" plaguing millions of American women, exposing it as a collective problem, not an individual one. *The Feminine Mystique* itself is firmly rooted in the experiences and concerns of comparatively privileged white suburban housewives who had greater access to education than most women. Working-class women and women of color, the majority of whom by necessity already worked outside of the home (often in the homes of other women) are entirely absent from Friedan's work. [2] Nonetheless, while it focused on a limited group of women, white suburban housewives, the ideological effect was much broader as it destroyed the myth of the domestic bliss of the happy housewife. It almost instantly became a bestseller and propelled Friedan into the leadership of one wing of the women's liberation movement as president of the National Organization of Women formed in 1966.

The year 2013 also marked the fiftieth anniversary of Sylvia Plath's tragic death and the publication of her autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar*. The same year saw the publication of Adrienne Rich's "Snapshots of a Daughter-In-Law" in the United States, forging new ground in feminist poetry. Last year also marked the death of another giant of the feminist literary world, Doris Lessing, whose groundbreaking novel *The Golden Notebook* celebrated its fiftieth anniversary one year earlier.

All of these works gave expression to the political aspirations and rebellion of a generation of women who found their voice in the women's liberation movement. While many of the early writers who found a mass readership among movement women did not identify themselves as feminists or even as "political," they expressed the same hunger for something more that gave birth to the second wave of feminism. Indeed, neither Plath nor Lessing ever considered themselves feminists (Lessing vociferously rejected the label). Nonetheless, their works became popular because they were widely read by women within and without the movement and they helped to inspire later writers who consciously identified as "feminist," even if the meaning of the term itself was often contested.

In *Literature and Revolution*, Trotsky famously wrote about art, "A work of art should, in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is, by the law of art. But Marxism alone can explain why and how a given tendency in art has originated in a given period of history; in other words, who it was who made a demand for such an artistic form and not for another, and why." [3]

That all the works cited above came out before there was an overt women's liberation movement says something about the period and the material roots of the women's liberation movement. While the suburban housewife smiled on the cover of magazines, the reality was far different, as women increasingly entered the workplace in large numbers. Just as the suffrage movement had its roots in abolitionism, second wave feminism had its roots in the civil rights movement as well as in movements in support of national liberation struggles. Women played leading roles in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, gaining a sense of agency, confidence, and political education and experience at the same time as they confronted sexism within the movement. Discussions of women's liberation within the movement ultimately led to the creation of explicitly "feminist" groups. The concerns of women of color

were, however, too often neglected or completely ignored in the predominately white, middle-class groups associated with both liberal and radical feminism. Inspired by the Black Power movement and building on a long tradition of organizing against sexual violence and oppression, Black feminists increasingly organized their own groups, which emphasized the ways in which multiple systems of oppression—race, class, gender, sexuality—intersect to create systematic inequality. The early years of the New Left radicalized women of the period, both showing them what was possible at the same time as they were forced to recognize the sexism present in many of the most radical of movements. [4] In discussing the interconnectedness between these movements, Toni Morrison notes, "One liberation movement leads to another—always has. Abolition led to the suffragettes; civil rights to women's lib, which led to a black women's movement. Groups say, 'what about me?'" [5]

Friedan—despite portraying herself as just another unhappy housewife—was politically influenced by her experience as a labor activist and writer among labor militants and the revolutionary Left. [6] Adrienne Rich was active in the civil rights movement. Doris Lessing had been radicalized in her youth in Rhodesia fighting against racist colonial rule. While Sylvia Plath was less political, she too was influenced by the 1953 execution of "atomic spies" Ethel and Julius Rosenberg and the protest movement against it, in addition to her own experiences as a woman writer in a field dominated by men.

Their individual experiences were mirrored by millions of other women creating the conditions for the emergence of a mass movement for women's liberation, but, the early literature associated with the feminist movement played a crucial role in bringing the concerns of millions of women out of the private realm and into the public. In doing so, the personal was made political.

As writer Marge Piercy, an activist in SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and in the women's liberation movement, explains in discussing her own "feminist" consciousness in the late fifties:

It feels nutty when it's only you. You're regarded as insane. It isn't until there exists some kind of framework in which to hold onto the insights that it makes any sense. To be concerned with these things by yourself was, in the 1950s, to be a little crazy. It was only when other people became concerned with them that, suddenly, I wasn't crazy anymore. [7]

It was for this reason that the slogan made famous by second-wave feminism, "the personal is political" had such resonance.

## "The personal is political"

This slogan has become one of the movement's most ubiquitous legacies despite its contested meanings. It encapsulated political tensions between two tendencies within the movement: one that emphasizes the intensely personal nature of women's oppression precisely in order to demolish the idea that female subjugation is an individual fault; another that used those words as an injunction to emancipate oneself through purely personal, everyday gestures.

At its best, this insistence on the idea that the "personal is political" transformed consciousness by insisting on the need to understand the social, economic, cultural, and political oppression of women as the basis for all "personal" problems that afflicted individual women. At its most extreme, however, it could also lead to a rigid understanding of feminism that insisted that no person could fight a form of oppression he or she did not personally experience. In its later years, as the feminist movement itself collapsed amid myriad internal divisions, increasingly "the personal is political" came to represent an ideology that consciously advocated for individual or personal change as a solution to

collective problems. Thus, whether one shaved one's legs, wore makeup, or spelled women with a "y" was political and determined one's relationship to feminism. This caricatured understanding of feminism's legacy is part of the reason that subsequent generations have distanced themselves from second-wave feminism, becoming what is sometimes characterized as the "I'm not a feminist but..." generation.

The texts of the women's liberation movement, for the most part, provide a very different interpretation and use of the slogan. The 1970 essay by Carol Hanisch entitled "The Personal is Political" which helped to popularize the slogan was, in fact, an argument about the impossibility of solving the problem of women's oppression by individual means. Written as a response to critiques of consciousness-raising groups, the essay focuses on their importance as a means of politicizing women and engaging them in collective political action.

Consciousness-raising groups were central to the movement and provided women with the space to develop a political understanding of their own oppression. Many women were radicalized as a result of these group discussions in which every aspect of one's personal experience as a woman was discussed, analyzed, and theorized. Nonetheless, there were contradictions within the idea of consciousness-raising. For some, it was a strategy in the fight for women's liberation: politicizing women and bringing them into collective action and struggle. But there was also a tendency to see them as an end in and of themselves.

Carol Hanisch explains the dilemma at the heart of consciousness-raising as a political strategy. She argues,

these analytic sessions are a form of political action. I do not go to these sessions because I need or want to talk about my "personal problems". . . . As a movement woman, I've been pressured to be strong, selfless, other-oriented, sacrificing, and in general pretty much in control of my life. . . . So I want to be a strong woman, in movement terms, and not admit I have any real problems that I can't find a personal solution to (except those directly related to the capitalist system). It is at this point a political action to tell it like it is, to say what I believe about my life instead of what I've always been told to say. [8]

On the other hand, Hanisch is clear that consciousness-raising alone is incapable of ending the oppression of women in their personal lives. As she writes: "There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution." [9] For Hanisch, consciousness-raising groups could not solve nor provide alternatives to women's oppression, nor were they intended to do so; rather they were a gateway to collective political struggle.

As many feminists learned, consciousness-raising groups could also lead to internal struggles within movement groups, which, at times, limited their liberatory potential. As bell hooks argues, "the ability to see and describe one's own reality is a significant step in the long process of self-recovery; but it is only a beginning." [10]

Feminist literature's most important political contribution to the movement was that it provided this first step for millions of women.

The emergence of a new feminist canon

Literature's theory as well as fiction and poetry was crucial to consciousness-raising. Thus, many of the most famous works associated with the women's liberation movement were read and discussed in these groups and played a role in radicalizing and politicizing a new generation of activists. [11]

The texts of the women's liberation movement emphasized the intensely personal nature of women's oppression precisely to demolish the idea that female subjugation is an individual problem, instead exposing it as a collective problem in need of a collective solution. For a generation of women raised on the belief that the oppression they felt was all in their heads—an individual failing, not a social one—the insistence that women's personal problems were not, in fact, just personal was radical and transformative.

To fully understand the profound impact these works had, it is important to situate these novels historically and understand the conditions that imbued them with such power. Millions of women entered the work force during World War II as the female labor force increased 60 percent from 1941 to 1945. [12] With the war over, however, women were driven back into the home and encouraged to believe that there was no greater glory to aspire to than the life of the suburban housewife. Between 1945 and 1947, three million women were laid off from wartime jobs. [13] The repressive atmosphere of the 1950s was intensified by McCarthyism, which eradicated the space for any left-wing critiques of oppression.

Women were routinely fired from jobs for being pregnant or getting married. The "Help Wanted" section was divided into male and female jobs with the female section littered with requests for "pretty receptionists." [14]14 Seventeen states restricted access to contraceptives. In Massachusetts, it was still a misdemeanor for anyone, married or not, to use birth control. [15]15 Abortion was illegal everywhereâEuros"except to save a woman's life. Violence against women was not only tolerated but officially sanctioned. Rape was legal within a marriage. As historian Stephanie Coontz notes, "Until 1981, Pennsylvania still had a law against a husband beating his wife after 10 p.m. or on Sunday, implying that the rest of the time she was fair game." [16] One of the most egregious and nauseating examples of the institutionalized violence against women was a 1964 article in the Archives of General Psychiatry, which published a study of thirty-seven women whose husbands had abused them. The report for the most part blamed the problems in such marriages on the wives whom they described as "aggressive, efficient, masculine, and sexually frigid." [17]

These examples give a small glimpse into the daily lives of women for whom feminist literature was potentially life saving. The latter example is a particularly horrific example of the insidious effects of individualizing women's oppression. Not surprisingly, women's treatment by "medical professionals" particularly in the field of mental health was a central concern of the women's liberation movement. As Phyllis Chesler, a pioneer of the feminist critique of psychiatry argues,

Female unhappiness is viewed and "treated" as a problem of individual pathology, no matter how many other female patients (or non-patients) are similarly unhappyâEuros"and this by men who have studiously bypassed the objective fact of female oppression. Women's inability to adjust to or to be contented by feminine roles has been considered as a deviation from "natural" female psychology rather than as a criticism of such roles. . . . Each woman as a patient thinks these symptoms are unique and are her own fault. She is neurotic, rather than oppressed. [18]

## Sylvia Plath

Perhaps no writer most exemplified the incredibly destructive effects of women's oppression on the individual psyche than Sylvia Plath. After her death by suicide at the age of thirty on February 11, 1963, Plath posthumously became an icon for the feminist movement as she gave voice to the long suppressed anger, grievances, and hopes of the incipient feminist movement.

By the time of her death, Plath was living in London during one of the coldest winters in 100 years. Recently separated from her husband, the (at the time more famous) poet Ted Hughes, she lived alone with her two young children ages one and three. It was in these conditions, writing early in the morning before her children woke up, that she feverishly wrote the poems that would assure her fame.

For many of her readers, particularly women, Plath's life and death became a symbolic narrative of the oppression of women. In her tragedy, many women saw their own. The impact is almost unimaginable today. The misogyny apparent in critical responses to her work only helped politicize her work. The infamous literary critic Harold Bloom, for example, calls Plath "an absurdly bad and hysterical verse writer." [19] Describing some of her poems as a "tantrum," he ascribes her fame primarily to the growing "School of Resentment,"(i.e., feminism). [20]

In *Ariel*, readers and writers of the 1960s found a powerful expression of the rage at women's subjugation in society and in literature. It was a groundbreaking work both in content and style, and solidified Plath's status as one of the most important American poets. From the moment it appeared in print, it was a media sensation.

The intensity and anger of the poems written between 1962 and 1963 was both shocking and refreshing for many of her later readers, particularly women. The formal innovations and experimentations in her poetry allowed this voice to break through conventional poetic modes and inspire millions. Her last poem, "The Edge," written days before her suicide, is haunting, describing the body of a dead woman as "perfected."

"Daddy" one of the angriest and most famous of her poems is a powerful expression of rage that is both personal and political. While it is ostensibly about her relationship with her father and Hughes, for a new feminist movement breaking out of the chains of women's oppression, the last line of the poem read like a declaration of independence that had much wider political resonance. The poem concludes:

So daddy, I'm finally through.  
The black telephone's off at the root,  
The voices just can't worm through.  
If I've killed one man, I've killed twoâ€Euros"  
The vampire who said he was you  
And drank my blood for a year,  
Seven years, if you want to know.  
Daddy, you can lie back now.  
There's a stake in your fat black heart  
And the villagers never liked you.  
They are dancing and stamping on you.  
They always knew it was you.  
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through [\[21\]](#)<sup>2</sup>

It is hard to imagine the impact this poem had when it was published on the pages of *Time* magazine. Plath's life and work became, for many, a concrete expression of the slogan that the "personal" is "political."

While *The Bell Jar*, Plath's autobiographical novel, was published one month prior to her death in England under a pseudonym, its republication under her own name in the United States in 1971 served to coalesce Plath's status as an icon of the feminist movement. An immediate bestseller, it lasted seven weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list, outsold her poetry, and became for many the ultimate feminist coming-of-age story. In the midst of the burgeoning US feminist movement, it quickly became a staple of consciousness-raising groups. It has sold well over 3 million copies since 1972â€Euros"a testament to its enduring legacy.

Loosely based on her own experiences in New York City in 1953, the first half of the novel traces Esther Greenwood's growing awareness of the contradictions between what, as a woman, she is "supposed" to want and her increasing dissatisfaction with the options available to her. Seeking sexual fulfillment, Esther instead finds violence, objectification, or the fear of a lifetime of domestic imprisonment.

Esther's first step toward freedom after her suicide attempt occurs when Doctor Nolan, the female psychiatrist who is crucial to her recovery, refers her to a clinic to buy a diaphragm. This is crucial to her control over her own sexuality, her body, and thus her life. By the time the novel was written and published, the pill had become legal; in the 1950s, however, when Esther gets fitted for a diaphragm, it was not. The fact that Esther must break the law to gain control of her own body resonated with later feminists reading the novel in the early 1970s as stories of illegal abortions were publicized at mass speak-outs and consciousness-raising sessions.

Crucial to the novel is Esther's own breakdown, suicide attempt, and recovery. Her frank discussion of mental illness,



her own depression and suicide attempt was, on its own, radical for the period. But Plath makes clear that mental illness is never only a personal problem. In *The Bell Jar*, it is not just Esther who is ill—it is the entire world of 1950s America. As Jeannette Winterson notes in reflecting on Plath's legacy, "Why wouldn't a woman go mad in a world like this? Why wouldn't a woman as gifted as Plath become terminally depressed and end in suicide? Pills don't change the world. Feminism did. *The Bell Jar* was a call to action because it is a diary of despair." [22]

Plath's work, along with the work of Doris Lessing, Adrienne Rich, and other early feminist writers, was indeed a call to action that had immense appeal to women who had been radicalized by their own experiences in the social movements of the 1950s and early 1960s.

## Doris Lessing

Doris Lessing is one of the most important writers of the twentieth century, whose novel *The Golden Notebook* was incredibly influential in the women's movement. She was introduced to radical politics through her participation in antiracist struggles in colonial Rhodesia, where she first joined the Communist Party. After her move to England, Lessing continued to be politically active as a member of the Communist Party, but became increasingly disillusioned by the party's Stalinism. In particular, she objected to the sexism she found within the party, as well as the attempt to dictate forms of "political art." The breaking point for Lessing came in 1956 when, after the death of dictator Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev delivered his famous "secret speech," outlining the crimes and horrors of Stalin's regime. The Soviet invasion of Hungary came in the same year, leading to the death of 30,000 Hungarians.

*The Golden Notebook* is both a product of an incipient feminism, and of the political crisis of 1956. The novel was radical in its depiction of Anna Wulf, a woman writer, struggling to make sense of her life and the world in four notebooks representing fragmented parts of herself.

Despite her impact on the feminist movement, though, Lessing consciously distanced herself from the movement. In a famous interview in 1969 in the United States, she declared, "I'm impatient with people who emphasize the sexual revolution. I say we should all go to bed, shut up about sexual liberation, and go on with the important matters." [23] The irony, of course, is that this comment directly contradicts the narrative impulse of her work. In *The Golden Notebook*, far from "shutting up" about sexual liberation, Lessing puts it at center stage—making female sexuality and the struggle to achieve any kind of sexual liberation extremely public. As a narrative about "free women," issues of sexuality and relationships figure prominently—and far from diminishing the narrative to a tract about the "sex war," as she would later argue, add to its complexity.

This distancing reflects Lessing's more general rejection of politics after *The Golden Notebook*. The novel itself represents a move away from organized politics into the personal. It is dismissive of, if not outright condescending toward, the New Left. If for many feminists the personal was a site of radicalization that opened the door to collective political action, for Lessing it was a way out. Unable to imagine any liberation in the real world, Lessing increasingly turns toward the fantastical, or to science fiction.

*The Children of Violence* series reflects a broader political trajectory from her earlier activism, disillusionment with Communism—and then, all political struggle—into an apocalyptic vision of the world and into mysticism. Like Lessing, the series' protagonist Martha Quest grows up in colonial Africa, marries and bears children, becomes politically active and eventually moves to England, where she becomes increasingly disillusioned. The last novel, in particular, paints a bleak picture of a dystopic world, torn apart by war and violence, and veering toward destruction.

## Toward 1970: Feminism, consciousness-raising, literature

Despite Lessing's rejection of the feminist movement, her work had a huge impact precisely because it resonated with experiences in the New Left. Lessing's disillusionment with sexism even in the midst of a radical milieu spoke to women's own disillusionment with the sexism they experienced within the movements of the New Left. This contradiction became evident at the 1967 SDS convention, when women who proposed that SDS take up the demand for women's liberation were jeered at, although the resolution was ultimately passed.

Both inspired by and provoked by the New Left, feminist activists brought the revolutionary impulses of "the movement" into the realm of the personal by challenging the subjugation of women through campaigns for equal pay, child-ins demanding daycare, and the fight for abortion rights and battered women's shelters. In 1968 alone, as the broader movement of the New Left peaked and began its long decline into oblivion, radical women in New York protested the Miss America Pageant, the first national conference on women's liberation was held in Chicago, and both the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) and the National Welfare Rights Organization were formed.

In 1969, WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) "launched its national attack on domesticity" by "storm[ing] a Madison Square Garden bridal fair" chanting "Always a Bride, Never a Person!" [24] Another feminist group called for "wages for housework." Meanwhile in 1970, several hundred women staged a sit-in at the Ladies Home Journal for eleven hours demanding that the magazine establish an on-site childcare center for its employees, and forcing it to publish an eight-page insert with a housewives' bill of rights demanding paid maternity leave, paid vacation, free twenty-four-hour child care centers, and social security benefits. [25] They also "suggested retitling the magazine's famous monthly column, 'Can This Marriage Be Saved?' to 'Can This Marriage.'" [26] The same year saw the persecution and arrest of Angela Davis by the FBI, the nationally organized Women's Strike for Equality, and the zap action by the Lavender Menace at the Second Congress to Unite Women. [27]

By 1970, women's liberation had become a dominant story in the media. The year saw the publication of Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, which Life magazine referred to as the Das Kapital of the women's movement, [28] and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, which were widely read both inside and outside academia. Other works published in 1970 included Robin Morgan's anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful*, Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, and Toni Cade's *The Black Woman*. In poetry and fiction, 1970 saw the publication of Audre Lorde's *Cables to Rage*, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, and Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, to name a few.

The impact of the feminist movement shook American society to its core, fundamentally challenging the exclusion of the "personal" from the realm of political discourse, action, and struggle. A 1970 cover story from Time magazine provided an unenthusiastic testament to the movement's reach, with an opening line that ominously declared:

These are the times that try men's souls, and they are likely to get much worse before they get better. It was not so long ago that the battle of the sexes was fought in gentle, rolling Thurber country. Now the din is in earnest, echoing from the streets where pickets gather, the bars where women once were barred, and even connubial beds, where ideology can intrude at the unconscious drop of a male chauvinist epithet. [29]

The movement's encroachment on the previously off-limits personal space of the bedroom was indeed one of its greatest threats: feminism challenged not only women's exclusion from the public realm, but also the political foundations of the home, the family, and women's subjugation within them.

Literature played an important role in this regard. Women writers of the period totally redefined what aspects of the



"personal" were deemed literary. They wrote about depression and suicide attempts. They wrote with candor about sex and the lack of sexual satisfaction experienced by most women. They described real experiences of childbirth and the alienation women experienced in medical institutions where they were treated as if they didn't know their own bodies. They wrote about rape, menstruation, vibrators, and a whole host of previously off-limit topics in "the literary canon."

Poetry played a crucial early role in the expression of the women's fight for liberation. In addition to Sylvia Plath, Ann Sexton and Adrienne Rich were widely read. For literary historian Elaine Showalter, the 1971 publication of Rich's *The Will to Change* marked a broader shift in consciousness as women increasingly asserted their political will. [\[30\]](#)

Poetry also flourished among women involved in the civil rights and Black Power movements. Gwendolyn Brooks "who in 1950 became the first African American to win a Pulitzer prize" was one of many writers for whom the 1960s was transformative, as her work took on a new political power after being introduced to the Black Arts Movement and becoming an activist. Nikki Giovanni and Audre Lorde emerged as two of the most eloquent voices of the 1960s spirit of protest and radicalization. As Alice Walker, who taught poetry to activists in the civil rights movement, argues, "Poetry comes naturally from that wellspring of resistance, passion, courage, dedication, belief in a future." [\[31\]](#)

A new genre of feminist fiction arose in this period which demolished the romantic ideal of the nuclear family, beginning with Sue Kaufman's *Diary of a Mad Housewife* (1967) and Alix Kates Shulman's *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen* (1969), which inspired a rapid succession of works, including Marge Piercy's *Small Changes* (1972), Dorothy Bryant's *Ella Price's Journal* (1972), Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973), Lisa Alther's *Kinflicks* (1973), Erica Jong's *The Fear of Flying*, Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* (1977), and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, to name a few.

*Kinflicks* by Lisa Alther employs a picaresque and at times comic narrative to trace the development of Ginny Babcock, the daughter of a munitions supplier, as she begins life in a small-town America. She wants to play football but is forced to quit once she hits puberty and to cheer from the sidelines instead, while dating Joe Bob, the high school football star. The narrative traces her development as she adopts and ultimately discards a variety of identities as she learns to forge her own, independent of both her mother and the men and women who attempt to fashion her in their own images. She describes with candor and humor her evolving sexuality, from losing her virginity in her parents' bomb shelter, to a range of unsatisfying sexual experiences with men, before her first relationship with a woman which leads her to leave college, ending her brief stint as an apolitical academic philosopher to live on a radical commune in the woods of Vermont. After a tragic accident involving a snowmobile, she returns to a more traditional domestic life of marriage, motherhood, and Tupperware parties with a husband so intent on her sexual pleasure that he insists, "I don't care what you want. I want to make you happy." [\[32\]](#) This relationship also comes to a dramatic end when she is discovered having tantric sex with a Vietnam vet and war resister, and is chased out of her house at gunpoint, forever severing her relationship with her daughter. At the end of the novel, we find her taking off on another journey with her mother's clock wrapped in a "Sisterhood is Powerful" t-shirt.

*Kinflicks* is notable because it reflects a massive shift in popular consciousness. It was (and continues to be) read because it broke new ground in terms of what could be written and talked about. Within this work and other feminist narratives that emerged from this period, critiques of marriage and the family were prominent as women began to recognize their personal misery as a reflection of oppression, not an individual failing. This was crucial in challenging not only the subject matter of what is "literary" but also the formal conventions of literature "and particularly the genre of the novel.

Two of the earliest novels in the English language written by Samuel Richardson "Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded" (1740) and *Clarissa: Or, the History of a Young Lady* (1748) "exemplify the limited possibilities

available for women in this literary form. To summarize one of the longest novels in the English language: Clarissa disobeys her parents, refuses to marry the man to whom she has been promised, and runs away. As a result she is raped and dies. Pamela is persistently sexually harassed by her employer but virtuously resists, despite abduction and attempted rape. As a result, she earns the novel's ultimate reward: marriage. These two novels are emblematic of the limited possibilities available to female protagonists in literature: marriage or death.

Feminism turned the courtship plot on its head. The newly radicalizing housewife of the feminist novel almost inevitably must escape from her marriage in her quest for freedom and selfhood. In Ella Price's *Journal* by Dorothy Bryant, for example, the novel ends with the protagonist, who has recently left her husband, waiting on a table for her abortion to end on Christmas day, as she is symbolically reborn through her right to choose. As in Plath's *Bell Jar*, reproductive freedom is central. As Lisa Marie Hogeland points out, "by 1972, abortion had become such a commonplace of women's and feminist fiction that one reviewer referred to the 'obligatory abortion episode,' highlighting the proliferation of abortion narratives and their importance to the struggle for reproductive freedom." [33]

In both content and form, the period saw a radicalization in literature that was intimately tied to protest movements. In theater, poetry, and fiction, traditional forms were thrown out and new forms created to participate in the revolutionary counterculture. All of these literary works participated in a democratization of literature that left an indelible mark on publishing, literary studies, and the "canon."

Many feminist literary pioneers were themselves major players in the movement. Alice Walker, a student of radical historian Howard Zinn, was radicalized by the civil rights movement; Marge Piercy was an early activist in SDS; Alix Kates Shulman was an important activist in the radical wing of the feminist movement in NYC who helped to organize the 1968 Miss America protest; Kate Millett's political activism is well documented in her memoirs, most notably 1974's *Flying*; Rita Mae Brown not only wrote the movement's first lesbian coming-of-age narrative but, as a veteran of SDS and NOW, also led the charge against NOW for its exclusion of lesbians and, ultimately, formed the *Furies Collective*; Barbara Smith, a prominent political and literary theorist and founder of the *Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press* was also a member of the *Combahee River Collective*, a radical group of Black lesbian feminists named after an 1863 action led by Harriet Tubman at the Combahee River which freed 750 slaves.

Feminist literature was inextricably connected to the larger movement and a revolutionary period that transformed art. As students participated in civil rights struggles and antiwar protests, they ran up against the failure of mass media, popular art, and the academy to give voice to the real experiences of oppressed people in the United States and abroad. Sixties radicals thus sought to highlight the testimonies and narratives of the victims and eyewitnesses of the horrors they struggled against. From the Berkeley Free Speech Movement to the Winter Soldier hearings to speak-outs against abortion laws, they used testimonial narratives to "speak truth to power" and give voice to the real experiences of ordinary people.

There are also limits to the liberatory potential of these novels, as many of the protagonists come to realize at the culmination of their quest for personal liberation. Without a fundamental transformation of the material conditions that produce women's oppression, there are objective and literary limits to the outcomes of such a quest. The bildungsroman, a literary manifestation of bourgeois individualism and the triumph of the self, is a formal limitation that can give voice to a transformation in consciousness—but not to the kind of radical social transformation that eludes the confines of realist fiction.

These material limitations to personal liberation are all the more apparent in the work of African American women writers of the period struggling against both racism and sexism. Describing the experience of being a Black woman poet in the 1960s, Audre Lorde explains, "It meant being invisible. It meant being really invisible. It meant being doubly invisible as a Black feminist woman and it meant being triply invisible as a Black lesbian and feminist." [34]

The early 1970s saw an outpouring of writing by African American women who had been inspired by the radical

movements of which they had been a part and sought to claim a voice in the literary canon from which they had all too often been excluded. As Toni Morrison explains about the origins of her writing, "There was an attitude and a gaze that I wanted to read through. So, since I wanted it so desperately, I created it." [35]

Along with Audre Lorde and Alice Walker, Toni Morrison is one of the most important writers to emerge from the period. The Nobel Prize-winning author was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorain, Ohio, and later attended Howard University. After earning an M.A. at Cornell University, Morrison returned to Howard as a teacher, where among her students were many civil rights leaders, including Stokely Carmichael. Before becoming a published writer herself, Morrison worked as an editor for Random House, where she played a vital role in publishing and editing the works of Black writers, including Toni Cade Bambara, June Jordan, Angela Davis, Gayl Jones, Muhammad Ali (whose autobiography she edited), George Jackson, and Huey Newton. She also edited *The Black Book* (1974), a landmark work that was an unvarnished scrapbook of African American history. [36]

Toni Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, was published in 1970. The novel begins with a passage from the "Dick-and-Jane" primer, repeated three times as the words increasingly run together to become a meaningless mockery of the suburban family ideal, and a reminder of its racist underpinnings. Telling the story of the Breedlove family, *The Bluest Eye* provides a stark narrative of the brutal oppression of families of color who are systematically denied entrance into the suburban elite, despite working in their homes. At the same time it demonstrates the devastating impact of the ideal of the suburban nuclear family. Morrison engages in a project of undermining and resisting the ideological construction of the nuclear family while making it clear that the violence of American domesticity was never equally felt but was always intertwined with race and class divisions. This distinction was all the more important after the 1965 publication of the "Moynihan Report," which with cataclysmic rhetoric called for "national action" to address the large number of female-dominated households in African American communities that failed to conform to the 1950's ideal of the nuclear family. In language that was widely condemned for its "blame the victim" rhetoric and for pathologizing African Americans, Moynihan's report crystallized the gap between "the feminine mystique" and the political concerns and priorities of African American feminists, who challenged the racism and sexism of Moynihan's report and sought to reframe the debate while raising larger issues of institutionalized racism and inequality.

Alice Walker's first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, also published in 1970, powerfully exposes the way in which institutionalized racism destroys lives and distorts relationships. The daughter of sharecroppers and an active participant in the civil rights movement, Walker draws on her experiences in the pre-civil rights South for this moving depiction of the life of a black tenant farmer from Georgia.

Notably both *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *The Bluest Eye* focus on the roots of domestic violence—portraying it as a systemic problem, not an individual one. In these novels, violence is rooted in oppression, inequality, and the dehumanization of people by racism, sexism, and exploitation. At the end of *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison reveals this through the symbol of the marigolds which come to symbolize stunted human potential, as Claudia, from whose point of view much of the novel is told, realizes that it is not her fault that the marigolds she planted have failed to grow. She says,

I even think now that the land of the entire country was hostile to marigolds that year. This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live. We are wrong, of course, but it doesn't matter. It's too late. At least on the edge of my town, among the garbage and the sunflowers of my town, it's much, much, much too late. [37]38

Literature by African American feminists of the 1960s and '70s went hand in hand with theoretical inquiry that anticipated and fostered discussions of intersectionality as a way of understanding the way multiple oppressions are experienced. It is notable that most of the prominent writers of this period were also theorists: Alice Walker is well

known for her collection of essays *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* in which she coined the term "womanism" to describe a political ideology that is opposed not only to gender inequality but also race- and class-based oppressions. In addition to her poetry, Audre Lorde is well known for her essays, particularly the influential "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." Meanwhile, Toni Morrison is the author of *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* in which she analyzes the role of race and the effects of living in a racialized society on the development of American literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## The limits of the personal

Despite its radicalism, the feminist movement was born at the end of a period of mass political struggle and, as the broader struggle subsided, the movement went into steep decline. Within the women's liberation movement, consciousness-raising groups increasingly fragmented on the basis of identity. The emphasis on identity politics was, in large part, a reaction to the biases of liberal mainstream feminism, which focused primarily on upper-class white women to the exclusion of women of color, working-class women, and particularly lesbian women, whom Betty Friedan famously depicted as a "lavender menace" to the movement. Liberal feminism's failure to take up the struggles of marginalized women within the movement exacerbated the sense that only the victims of oppression could organize to fight their own oppression.

Responding to both the racism and sexism within and without the movement, many of the most radical women of color began organizing their own groups, forming the Third World Women's Alliance in 1968, the National Black Feminist Organization in 1973, and the Combahee River Collective in 1974. Marginalized by feminist groups who failed to address racial and class differences and to actively fight against all forms of oppression, groups like the Combahee River Collective sought to develop a more inclusive political framework aimed at fighting institutionalized oppression and the capitalist political and economic system that produced it. [38] The 1981 publication of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa with a foreword by Toni Cade Bambara, was influential in giving expression to the diverse voices of Third World Feminism that emerged in this period.

Meanwhile, remnants of earlier consciousness-raising groups increasingly focused on fighting biases within the women's movement itself. In other groups, particularly in the radical feminist milieu, there developed a deep suspicion of all leaders, and organization. This led to a phenomenon known as "trashing" in some circles as leaders of the women's movement increasingly came under fire, with many expelled from groups they helped to create. [39]

As the historian Alice Echols argues, "More than ever, how one lived one's life, not one's commitment to political struggle, became the salient factor . . . the focus shifted from building a mass movement to sustaining an alternative women's culture and community." [40] These political shifts ultimately reinforced individualism and often encouraged endless self-analysis, internal debate, and fragmentation. One critic notes, "feminism itself thus became individualized, psychologized, and apoliticized." [41] By the 1970s and '80s, the "personal is political" increasingly referred to a politics in which personal experiences, actions, and lifestyle choices substituted for collective political struggle. By the 1990s, with the feminist movement all but dead, the idea that the "personal is political" had been distorted beyond recognition, living on in "power feminism" and self-help in which the accumulation of wealth and self-realization become the only means of liberation. This shift is perhaps nowhere more obvious than in Gloria Steinem's preface to *Revolution from Within: A Book of Self-Esteem*, whose title alone gives expression to the profound retreat from the radical politics of the earlier feminist movement. In the preface, Steinem argues that it is time "turn the feminist adage around," from "The personal is political" to "The political is personal." [42]

The political unraveling of the feminist movement went hand in hand with a broader political crisis, a decline in struggle, and the beginning of a massive backlash. Nonetheless, some of the tensions that emerged in the later

years of the feminist movement were reflected from the beginning in feminist literature, particularly works geared toward a primarily white, upper- and/or middle-class audience. Erica Jong's 1973 bestseller is a reflection both of the mass radicalization of the period and its limitations. Loosely based on Erica Jong's own life, it tells the story of writer Isadora Wing, as she travels through Europe in pursuit of independence and sexual liberation. It deserves recognition as an explicitly "feminist" narrative that became a mass bestseller—it has sold 15 million copies worldwide, bringing feminism and the sexual revolution into mainstream America and into the homes of millions of women who were not activists. At the same time, it is a narrative which privileges the personal to the extreme, paving the way for a feminism in which lifestyle choices are substitutes for political activism, struggle, or even political awareness. Ultimately, Jong's critique of marriage, the nuclear family, and women's subordination translates into a choice of men, and a choice of psychiatrists. Since Isadora's lovers are also her psychiatrists, the choice is ultimately one and the same. By the sequel, Jong's move from political and/or sexual revolution to personal revolution is complete. In *How to Save Your Own Life*, as the title itself suggests, feminism has become entirely individualized while the collective has been left behind.

As the movement in the streets declined, feminist writers who were also activists increasingly turned toward fiction as their primary—and sometimes only—means of enacting political change. While the early movement had consciously rejected the possibility of personal solutions to collective problems, as collective struggle declined a generation of newly radicalized women found themselves with a raised consciousness in a world that was still sexist to its core.

Marge Piercy is a noteworthy writer and activist whose work in many ways mirrors the broader trajectory of feminism. Born in Detroit, she was an important activist in SDS, the New Left, and the women's liberation movement. Her first novel, *Small Changes* (1974), shows both the potential and limitations of radical politics. It traces the lives of two women, one of whom begins in a traditional marriage, runs away, discovers her love of women, and lives in various women's communes. The other, more radical at the beginning, living in open relationships, ultimately ends up confined by a stale marriage and motherhood—a shadow of the woman she once was. The novel reflects the limitations of the movement but also some of its radicalizing potential. In *Vida* (1979), the title character lives underground, still dedicated to the remnants of radical movements of the 1960s, yet trapped in an increasingly anachronistic lifestyle to avoid criminal prosecution for her actions as a member of Piercy's fictionalized depiction of the Weather Underground. Unable to relive the vibrant days of the radical Left, she is also incapable of reentering a present in which those movements have been demolished. Her own political commitment to an unfulfilled vision of revolutionary change requires her to live the life of a constant fugitive. While Piercy maintains some hope for a future renewal of the revolutionary fervor of her generation, in *Vida* she provides a stark depiction of the cost of failure for individual revolutionaries who devoted themselves to a revolutionary perspective that failed to be realized.

In *Three Women* (1999), she tells the story of three generations of women: Beverly, an activist and union organizer, symbol of the struggles of women in the 1930s; her daughter Suzanne, an activist lawyer and symbol of the women's liberation movement; and her daughter, Elena, who as a symbol of the post-feminist generation, seems lost for most of the novel. At the end, she may go back to school, but her future is uncertain—as is, notably, the future of feminism. Suzanne, however, like Piercy, keeps up the fight and vows to "go on teaching and seeking justice, no matter how flawed and partial." [\[43\]](#)

In search of liberation, Piercy increasingly turns towards the past, with *City of Darkness, City of Light* (1996) about the French Revolution or *Sex Wars* (2006), about first-wave feminists in post-Civil War New York. But, her most interesting novel is *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), which draws on a feminist utopian tradition to imagine genuine human liberation. The novel tells the story of Connie, a woman confined to a mental hospital after defending a woman from a forced, illegal, and life-threatening abortion. While institutionalized, she is visited by representatives of Mattapoisett, a future utopian world where gender differences have been all but eliminated (they use gender-neutral pronouns, person and per), free love abounds, and children are raised collectively. It is a fascinating novel, which shows an attempt of radicals to imagine a world beyond capitalism in which people collectively run their



own society in their own interests.

Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* published in 1977 is, in contrast, a tragic narrative about the demise of feminism. The protagonist, Mira, escapes an oppressive marriage, and goes to Harvard where she discovers radical politics. The character Val functions as a symbol of both the promise and the failures of the radical feminist movement. She is a role model for Mira and functions as a teacher and a guide in the world of Harvard's radical student politics. A feminist and an antiwar activist who disavows capitalism and devotes herself to the "Movement," she has also lived in communes and raises her daughter outside the confines of the nuclear family. She is the ultimate symbol of the sexual revolution in the novel.

Val's political optimism and revolutionary zeal cannot, however, survive the rape of her daughter. From this point on, Val devotes herself entirely to the cause of radical feminism and an underground women's movement to combat violence against women. Not only does she reject the politics of nonviolence, she also rejects the possibility of interracial solidarity and political alliances between men and women. The radical possibilities promised by the political movements of the 1960s die with her daughter's rape, as Val comes to the conclusion that all men are inherently violent and sexist. The most often-cited passage from the novel is Val's political conclusion that: "Whatever they may be in public life, whatever their relations with men, in their relations with women, all men are rapists, and that's all they are." [44]

Val's political transformation is made all the more dramatic by her discovery that her daughter's rapist was an African American male, which challenges her earlier antiracist politics. Despite her initial sympathy with the Black men she sees in custody leading up to her daughter's trial and her recognition of the racism of the criminal justice system, she nonetheless concludes that the political dividing line is gender and that all men "no matter their race or the oppression they themselves face" are "the enemy." In "Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist," Angela Davis takes Susan Brownmiller to task for a "discussion on rape and race" in *Against Our Will*, which "evinces an unthinking partisanship which borders on racism." [45] She continues by arguing, "Her failure to alert white women about the urgency of combining a fierce challenge to racism with the necessary battle against sexism is an important plus for the forces of racism today." [46] The same is true of French's novel.

This incident and Val's repudiation of her earlier politics mark the ultimate defeat of the revolutionary potential of the political period. Shortly after Val's turn to militant feminism, she attempts to liberate an African American woman who has been convicted of murder for defending herself against a rapist. In the resulting police *melée*, Val is murdered (along with five women who participated in the action) and her body explodes through the force of her own unused grenade. Written after the demise of the New Left and the feminist movement, the novel reflects the failure of those movements to enact the social and political changes necessary for liberation as well as the devastating consequences of the failure of mainstream and radical feminist groups to make antiracism central to their project and to build genuine solidarity with all oppressed groups. Mira, like many other protagonists of these later novels, ends up with a radicalized consciousness and nowhere to go.

## After the backlash

Forty-five years later the picture is all the more bleak. In a 2013 *New Yorker* article written after the death of Shulamith Firestone "the radical feminist activist and author of *The Dialectic of Sex: the Case for Feminist Revolution*" Susan Faludi eloquently describes the devastating toll of the backlash of the 1980s and '90s on activists of the radical women's movement. By the time Firestone's body was found in the studio apartment on a fifth-floor tenement walkup in the East Village, she had been dead for several days. She was sixty-seven years old, living on public assistance, and had spent decades battling schizophrenia. Faludi describes her funeral as a radical-feminist revival. She describes Kate Millett reading from Firestone's *Airless Spaces* (1998), in which Firestone



wrote of herself in the third person: "She could not read. She could not write. . . She sometimes recognized on the faces of others joy and ambition and other emotions she could recall having had once, long ago. But her life was ruined, and she had no salvage plan." [47] Faludi notes:

Clearly, something terrible had happened to Firestone, but it was not her despair alone that led Millett to choose this passage. When she finished reading she said, "I think we should remember Shulie, because we are in the same place now." It was hard to say which moment the mourners were there to mark: the passing of Firestone or that of a whole generation of feminists who had been unable to thrive in the world they had done so much to create. [48]

Nonetheless, the legacy of feminism is crucial. It opened up a space for women writers that had not existed before—and it continues to inspire readers today. Furthermore, many of the writers of the period continue to be political activists, committed to social justice and transforming the world. Alice Walker, for example, remains one of the most important writers and activists in the United States. After her first novel in 1970, she wrote *Meridian*, a novel of the civil rights movement which like other works of the period reflects on some of the failures of the movement, but also maintains a clear commitment to keeping up the fight. Her most famous work *The Color Purple* is a trailblazing work of American literature—and one which provides an optimistic vision, even if the resolutions she imagines push the boundaries of realism. Like Marge Piercy, she also continues to be an activist. In 2003, she was arrested in protest of the war in Iraq along with author Maxine Hong Kingston of *The Woman Warrior*. She has also actively supported Chelsea Manning and the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement.

While the demise of the women's movement was profoundly demoralizing to many women, it forced others to reevaluate the limits of personal politics and come to revolutionary conclusions. Adrienne Rich is an important example in this regard.

Adrienne Rich was a successful poet before the eruption of the women's liberation movement, but it was the birth of that movement that gave force and vibrancy to the formal ingenuity and aesthetic brilliance of her verse. In 1976, Adrienne Rich came out as a lesbian with the publication of "Twenty-one Love Poems," which celebrated her sexuality and love for women.

It was in this time period that Rich also began to give voice to her radicalizing political consciousness through more theoretical political essays which drew both on her personal experience and her experience in the women's liberation movement. The result was *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, published in 1976, and perhaps her most influential essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence," published in 1980. Like many other feminist theorists of the time, Rich's political understanding of women's oppression was firmly rooted in patriarchy theory and identity politics. For example, she ends *Of Women Born* by declaring:

The repossession by women of our own bodies will bring far more essential change to human society than the seizing of the means of production by workers. . . . We need to imagine a world in which every woman is the presiding genius of her own body. In such a world women will truly create new life, bringing forth not only children (if and as we choose) but the visions, and the thinking, necessary to sustain, console and alter human existence—a new relationship to the universe. [49]

In this passage, Rich echoes many ideas of the radical feminist movement, counterposing the struggle for women's liberation to workers' struggles for economic justice, despite the fact that, as she later acknowledges, the vast majority of women are workers. The passage also reflects the dominance of identity politics in this period and, in particular, the idea that since the "personal" was "political," one needed only to change one's personal life to bring about broader political change.

The demise of the women's liberation movement and the subsequent backlash against women compelled Adrienne Rich to question the movement's political underpinnings, and her own political conclusions. One major influence in Rich's changing political consciousness was her introduction to Marx. In the 1986 reprint of *Of Women Born*, Rich included a new introduction in which she writes that she would no longer end the book with the passage quoted above. While she continued to be a tireless advocate for women's reproductive freedom and control of their own bodies, she saw this fight as a catalyst for broader social transformation, which she argues

can only happen hand in hand with, neither before nor after, other claims which women and certain men have been denied for centuries: the claim to personhood, the claim to share justly in the products of our labor, not to be used merely as an instrument, a role, a womb, a pair of hands or a back or a set of fingers; to participate fully in the decisions of our workplace, our community; to speak for ourselves, in our own right. [\[50\]](#)

Rich remained an activist until her death, protesting the first Gulf war, NATO's intervention in Kosovo, and against the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and, like Walker, supported the boycott of Israel. When she was awarded the National Book Award for Poetry (along with Allen Ginsberg), she refused to accept it on her own. Instead, she accepted it alongside Audre Lorde and Alice Walker. Together, they accepted the award on behalf of all women. She also lent her voice to the movement against the prison injustice system, against the war on the poor, and for the oppressed and the disenfranchised. Her 2009 poem, "Ballade of the Poverties," is a moving tribute to the myriad poverties that afflict working people around the world. She writes,

There's the poverty of the cockroach kingdom and the  
rusted toilet bowl  
The poverty of to steal food for the first time  
The poverty of to mouth a penis for a paycheck  
The poverty of sweet charity ladling  
Soup for the poor who must always be there for that  
There's poverty of theory poverty of swollen belly shamed  
Poverty of the diploma or ballot that goes nowhere [\[51\]](#)

The poem concludes with an indictment of (and warning to) the 1% "who travel by private jet like a housefly/Buzzing with the other flies of plundered poverties." [\[52\]](#)

Rich, like many feminist writers, remained committed to a poetry from below—a poetry which could be the literary expression of a revolutionary consciousness, of the struggles and aspirations of millions, as well as the love and passion which make life worth living. As she wrote in "Dreamwood," "poetry/ isn't revolution but a way of knowing/ why it must come." [\[53\]](#)

By giving voice to the personal and political struggles and aspirations of the movement, feminist writers transformed the consciousness of millions of women, and fundamentally transformed the world of literature. The triumph of the women's liberation movement, in particular in its artistic expression, was to fundamentally challenge the separation of personal and political concerns. It transformed our understanding of what could be deemed "literary" and opened the "canon" to many who had been marginalized and/or excluded. Without fail, writers and activists of the feminist movement made the personal very public, challenging the world to recognize the insidious nature of women's oppression, demanding a public voice, and refusing to be swept back under the rugs of domesticity from whence they had escaped. As Kate Millett explains in her reply to critics who sought to demolish her work and herd her words back into the safe confines of the private or personal spheres:

I think it's too late for all that. We've started and we're getting up speed. . . . No more silence. Gay or straight, women aren't there any more. We refuse. We refused quite a long while ago and we will not be cowed back into line. The

shame is over. [\[54\]](#)

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[\[1\]](#) Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1974), 21-27.

[\[2\]](#) See Stephanie Coontz's *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York: Basic Books, 2011) for a full history and analysis of the significance and impact of the Feminine Mystique. The chapter, "African-American Women, Working-Class Women, and the Feminine Mystique," is particularly important.

[\[3\]](#) Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, ed., William Keach (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005), 150.

[\[4\]](#) See Sarah Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and The New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979)

[\[5\]](#) Cited in "Solving the Riddle," *Guardian*, November 14, 2003.

[\[6\]](#) See Joanne Boucher, "Betty Friedan and the Radical Past of Liberal Feminism," *New Politics*, vol. 9, no. 3 (new series), whole no. 35 (Summer 2003).

[\[7\]](#) Marge Piercy in an interview by John Rodden, "A Harsh Day's Light: An Interview with Marge Piercy," *The Kenyon Review* 20, new series, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 137

[\[8\]](#) Carol Hanisch, "The Personal is Political," in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 113

[\[9\]](#) *Ibid.*, 114.

[\[10\]](#) bell hooks cited in Mary Louise Adams, "There's No Place Like Home: On the Place of Identity in Feminist Politics," *Feminist Review*, no. 31 (Spring 1989): 26

[\[11\]](#) Cheri Register in "American Feminist Literary Criticism: A Bibliographic Introduction," cites the prevalence of works by Plath and Lessing and their association with a developing women's liberation movement, a new feminist literary criticism, and a "feminist grapevine" which provided the "impetus" to read, in *Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Josephine Donovan (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1975), 1

[\[12\]](#) Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, 47

[\[13\]](#) *Ibid.*, 50.

[\[14\]](#) *Ibid.*, 8-9

[\[15\]](#) *Ibid.*, 11.

[\[16\]](#) *Ibid.*, 13

[\[17\]](#) *Ibid.*} Thus, Coontz explains, many psychiatrists argued that such violent episodes were "periodic corrections to the unhealthy family role reversal, allowing the wife âEurosŰto be punished for her castrating activity' and the husband âEurosŰto re-establish his masculine identity.'"[[*Ibid*

- [18] Phyllis Chesler, "Women as Psychiatric and Psychotherapeutic Patients," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 33, no. 4 Special double issue, Violence and the Family and Sexism in Family Studies (1971):746-52.
- [19] Harold Bloom in an interview with Ellen Spierer, "Candidates for Survival: A Talk with Harold Bloom," *Boston Review* (February 1989).
- [20] Harold Bloom, *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Sylvia Plath* (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2007), 3
- [21] Sylvia Plath, "Daddy," in *Collected Poems*, ed. Ted Hughes (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), 224
- [22] Jeannette Winterson, in "Sylvia Plath: reflections on her legacy," *Guardian*, February 8, 2013.
- [23] Doris Lessing, cited in Ellen Morgan, "Alienation of the Women Writer in âEurosÜThe Golden Notebook," *Contemporary Fiction* 14., no.4, Special Number on Doris Lessing (Autumn 1973): 471
- [24] Deborah Siegel, *Sisterhood Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrrls Gone Wild* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 2
- [25] Susan J. Douglas & and Meredith W. Michaels, *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How it has Undermined all Women* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 38
- [26] Deborah Siegel, *Sisterhood Interrupted*, 2
- [27] Victoria Hesford, *Feeling Women's Liberation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 3
- [28] *Ibid.*, 4
- [29] "Who's Come a Long Way Baby?" *Time*, August 31, 1970, <http://content.time.com/time/magazi...>
- [30] Cited in Elaine Showalter, *A Jury of her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx* (New York: Knopf, 2009), 441
- [31] Alice Walker, "Pursuing Civil Rights" The Biography Channel website, <http://www.biography.com/people/alice-walker-9521939> (accessed Feb 03, 2014)
- [32] Lisa Alther, *Kinflicks* (New York: Plume, 1996), 380
- [33] Lisa Maria Hogeland, *Feminism and its Fictions: The Consciousness-Raising Novel and the Women's Liberation Movement*(Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 62
- [34] Quoted in "Audre Lorde" by Ada Gay Griffin and Michelle Parkerson in *BOMB*, no. 56 (Summer 1996). <http://bombsite.com/issues/56/articles/1961> (Accessed on February 4, 2013).
- [35] Cited in Elaine Showalter, *A Jury of her Peers*, 446
- [36] "Solving the Riddle," *Guardian*, November 14, 2003
- [37] Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1970), 160
- [38] See Sharon Smith, "Black Feminism and Intersectionality," *International Socialist Review*, 91 (Winter 2013-14).

[39] See Susan Faludi, "Death of a Revolutionary," *The New Yorker*, April 15, 2013

[40] Alice Echols, *Daring to Be BAD: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 240-1

[41] Lisa Maria Hogeland, "âEurosÜMen Can't Be That Bad': Realism and Feminist Fiction in the 1970s," *American Literary History* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 294

[42] Gloria Steinem, *Revolution from Within: A Book of Self-Esteem* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), 16-17 (emphasis in original).

[43] Marge Piercy, *Three Women* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 309

[44] Marilyn French, *The Women's Room* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 427

[45] Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 199

[46] Ibid

[47] Susan Faludi, "Death of a Revolutionary," *The New Yorker*, April 15, 2013

[48] Ibid

[49] Adrienne Rich, *Of Women Born: Motherhood, Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1995), 285-86

[50] Ibid., xvii-xviii

[51] Adrienne Rich, "Ballade of the Poverties," *Tonight No Poetry will Serve* (New York: Norton, 2011), 56.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Adrienne Rich, "Dreamwood," *The Fact of a Doorframe: Selected Poems, 1950-2001* (New York: Norton, 2002), 225.

[54] Kate Millett, cited in Margaret Gillet, "Self-Disclosure and the Women's Movement." *Canadian Journal of Education/ Revue Canadienne de L'education* 1, no. 3 (1976): 71