Gynocritics and the Traversals of Women's Writing

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Intersections of Diverse Critical Essays

Edited by

Hemant Verma, Ajit Kumar and Rafseena M.

Foreword by Prof. Gabriela Vargas-Cetina

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FOREWORD

This book gives a unique view of the writing of women living in different epochs and in different countries. Its unifying theme is that of writing and challenge. Writing can be challenging if you live in a totalitarian state. It could also be challenging if it questions pre-existing social norms. It could point to dangers existing and to those yet unseen. Especially, this book shows how challenge has been and continues to be particularly acute for women in most contemporary societies. It reminds us how through writing women have exposed and questioned oppression at their own peril, but also how sometimes they have surrendered knowingly because they became tired of fighting, or because they chose to privilege others and not themselves. Judith Butler (1990, 1993) and Julia Kristeva (1982) are invoked by some authors to support their analyses; however, more than an examination of women's writing from theoretical viewpoints, here we have essays reflecting on the works and the appreciation of the writers' work given their milieu and their intended behind-the-lines messages.

Through the book we learn about the work of women who have been vocal, in prose and rhyme, about totalitarianism in Bulgaria and Romania; we are walked through an analysis of a film based on Edith Warton's 1905 novel *House of Mirth* (Warton 2022); we learn about novels and poems that have not been translated into English or, if they have, did not become the classics they should be by now; we are reminded of the themes of love and friendship in Carson McCuller's *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, originally pubished in 1951 (McCuller 2005), and are invited to think about this piece of fiction in allegorical terms; we learn about Romania's pastoral imaginaries; and we read analyses of texts having to do with slavery and race as seen from the far-away gaze of scholars in other places of the world looking into literature produced across different time periods in the United States of America.

As an anthropologist who has done field research in Canada, Italy, Mexico, and Spain, I was already familiar with some of the themes of the

book. The surveillance and punishments to dissenters in former communist countries (Brier 2013), the dangers of mountaineering (Ortner 1999), the "male virgins" of Albania (Young 2000), the commerce of slaves and the plantations in Africa, the Greater Caribbean and the United States, and their gender connotations (Lal, Brij V. et al. 1993, Oliveira 2021), the devastating personal effects of ethnic difference (Tamai 2020, Watson 1970), and the relevance of Victorian British morals to the restriction in the lives of women past and present (Himmelfarb 2021), have all been described and examined by anthropologists and historians through careful documentation and archival research. Looking at these through fiction and sometimes through poetry, however, we are reminded of how everyday life brings together the past and the present at every step and moment, and how present and future can be re-imagined following fictional characters who are shown questioning the norms of their social, cultural, and political milieus.

Celia Lisset Alvarez proposes in one of the chapters that ethnographical fictions could illuminate academic ethnography. To this I can answer that they already do: Today, precisely because of the controversies of the late 1980s and 1990s Alvarez cites, most careful ethnographies take into account local pieces of fiction. These help us anthropologists see how a collective "us," which is both imagined and experienced by all members of a given social environment, becomes part of the single "I" of individual subjects. A similar reflexive aim animates this volume. The resulting experience of being in the world at localized places in particular times, thus living under the many dangers associated with transgression, is a recurring and important topic of this collection. Because of this, the writers whose works are the subjects of each book chapter can at the same time be considered both trespassers and bridge-builders: Their writings transport us to imagined scenarios that spark our imagination and can help us thing of better—or at least very different—tomorrows in those societies where their stories take place. The scholars writing here about the female authors and their works are acutely aware of these transgressions and connections.

Anthropology, philosophy, and world literature often coincide in their questions, themes, and approaches. Gender, and particularly women and

their place in society, has been one of those questions and themes explored by academics and writers alike from multiple points of view. Anthropology has, at least since *Coming of Age in Samoa* by Margaret Mead, originally published in 1928, pointed at the fluidity of personal identity across the life cycle and across generations, in different cultures of the world (Mead 1928). Mead's fellow anthropologist Zora Neal Hurston, who was also a writer of essays and novels, explored the meanings of race and gender in different power contexts in the United States, the Caribbean, and in past contexts in Africa (Green 2023, Hurston 2018, Marshall 2023). From the 1920s through the 1970s, Mead and other anthropologists of her generation questioned the direct relation of women and men with specific activities and roles as universal, showing the great variability of tasks, roles, marriage arrangements, living arrangements, sexual conducts and social expectations associated with gender in cultures around the world. At the time of Mead's and Hurston's early publications (Hurston 1930, 1931, 1990 [1935]; Mead 1928a, 1928b, 1930, 1930), Virginia Woolf had already been exploring related themes through her novels *Mrs. Dalloway* (Woolf 1925), *To the Lighthouse* (Woolf 1927) and *Orlando* (Woolf 1928). Her 1929 essay *A Room of One's Own* (Woolf 1929) and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, originally published in 1949 (Beauvoir 2011), are read today in anthropology classrooms alongside the texts by Mead and her colleagues because they are seen as sharing related questions surrounding the cultural aspects of gender.

The feminist movement demanded freedom, and especially sexual freedom, for women. Sexuality became an open subject. The Kinsey Reports, detailing the findings of Alfred Kinsey and his team regarding human sexuality, became widely available in the 1950s. Literary authors like Anaïs Nin wrote diaries and novels where the protagonists were sexually uninhibited women. Anthropologists created the school of thought known as "culture and personality", which featured prominently the cultural study of gender roles and sex (Wallace 1961). In 1974 Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louis Lamphere published *Woman, Culture and Society*, a collection of writings by anthropologists pointing at the general problem already posed by de Beauvoir's and others: That women in many societies are seen as second-class humans. They called on

social scientists to change their ways of writing to feature women as full subjects of their own lives and societies, something that writers like Doris Lessing (1962), Ursula K. Le Guin (1995), Marylyn French (1977), Anaïs Nin (2020 [1936]), Rosario Castellanos (1957) and others were already doing in literature.

During the second half of the twentieth century, philosophers Michel Foucault (1978, 1985, 1986, 2001), Donna Haraway (1991) and Judith Butler 1990, 1993) deconstructed the culturally accepted unity between genitalia, gender, and sex, and helped envision new directions for gender studies and gender-related activism. They could use the anthropological record, which had already documented the many cultural variations, and a large body of creative writing works was already developing these ideas; this partly explains why their theories were so favorably received. In the twenty-first century, philosophers, including Donna Haraway (2003, 2016) and Rosi Braidotti (2013), are questioning the borders of human-centered thought, to place people as one of the types of creatures that define the landscapes of life on earth. This time, philosophers are relying on biology and the environmental sciences to advance their thought. Again, many anthropologists and primatologists have been working on the interconnectedness between humans, animals, plants, and soils. Ethnography, again, is rich with examples. And again, the philosophers are reading women writers, including Octavia Butler, who seems to have anticipated many of the themes relevant during the first half of the 21st Century (Butler 1976, 1977, 1978, 1980, 1984, 1993), and Margaret Atwood, who seems to be one step ahead when it comes to imagining the immediate future (Atwood 2003, 2009, 2013).

The category of "woman" as a specific type of human, and the category of "human" as a particular type of creature, have greatly changed in the world of theory in the last three centuries, but they continue to be two main embodied concepts through which people experience everyday life in most cultures to date. This is a timely volume that reminds us of that. Debates currently taking place in many countries around the rights of women include, at least, our rights to choose our gender, to safe contraception, to safe abortion, to attend non-religious schools, to have public daycare facilities, to be free from sexual harassment, to marry for

love, to own property, to control our own bodies and be free from sexual exploitation, to occupy visible places in the public space, to protest upholding our rights, and also to be left alone when we need it. We see these themes as treated by the authors whose works are discussed here, and find that the dangers of being a woman, compounded by the danger of being a woman who writes, are far from coming to an end any time soon.

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INTRODUCTION

HEMANT VERMA, AJIT KUMAR
AND RAFSEENA M.

I

Narratives, literary or non-literary, have always sought to narrate the varying degrees of human experience in diverse ways. Taking cue from the historical evidences, narratives have essentially been centered on the masculine version of the human kind, with 'his'tories being created, circulated and passed onto many generations. 'His'tory has rather diplomatised the invisibility and the absence of the fe'male' voice under the garb of societal representation amply justified by the supremacy of the stronger sex over the weaker sex. The socially sanctioned hegemonic male supremacy continued for a long period, thereby widening the gap between the sexes and the female voices subdued socially, psychologically and economically.

The struggle of the weaker sex (symbolically identified as inferior to men) to free themselves from the manacles of the social order provided the world the first ever resistance movement from the marginalized. Writing back against their masters, the slave narratives which opened the space for recording disagreement and discontent, also registered some of the earliest chronicles of exploitation and suffering of the slave community. The unsung narratives of social and sexual differential treatment meted out by the woman, which remained silenced, however, broke the confinement of domestic and sexual slavery and began to articulate its lived-in experience with all its unpleasant moments and harshness thereby providing a 'her'-story narrative to the world to learn about. To construct a self-defined space in the existing patriarchal order necessarily evinces the struggles and the hardships which women writers would have had to live through in their journey to register their voices of dissent and dissonance.

Critiquing the male power and the male ideology, the gynocritical approach sought to vehemently expose the hypocrisy in the distinction established between the private space occupied by the women and the public space occupied by the men. Discussions centering on the gendered difference between the male and the female subjects, which forms the crux of Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, also exposed the sexist nature of the patriarchal structure and openly critiqued the male strategy of 'othering' the woman by constructing a cultural identity for the woman as someone who is bound to the patriarchal order.

"Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies […] Woman must put herself into the text-as into the world and into history-by her own involvement" (Cixous, 875). While Cixous' in "The Laugh of the Medusa" made a call for an l'ecriture feminine, which significantly gestured the inevitable shift against the phallocentric practice in the male dominated literary field, it essentially aimed at exposing the politics of marginalization which the female writers experienced in the field of literature. Gynocriticism thus sought to deconstruct the social constructs on gender by emphasizing the necessity of a detour to the female scripted narratives and voices. The literary contributions by Virginia Woolf, Patricia Hill Collins, Elaine Showalter, Julia Kristeva, Toril Moi, Kate Millet, bell hooks, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Judith Butler and so on stand a testimony to those moments in history which necessitated the establishment of l'ecriture feminine.

The notions of hegemonic masculinity and passive femininity, which evolved around the dichotomy of the private space versus the public space equation, had aggravated the gendered inequality in all the realms of human activity. While the hegemonic narratives evidently portray the difference between the sexes in unequivocal terms, the absence of strong identifiable women characters in the male dominant narratives triggered the female writers to address the 'absent' female by centering them as the subjects in their narrative. The shift in perspective was overwhelming for a few but the world was already in its path to shift its gear to a different voice to be heard.

A new, alternative version of narrative documenting the panacea of a highly misogynist social structure and its agents unfurled the obnoxiousness of the vicious circle of patriarchy. Denominating such narratives to be identified as feminist writings in the initial phase of its evolution, the female centered narratives explored issues which essentially echoed the evil hold of patriarchy over the lives of the women across class, race and culture. Interrogating the long existent process of the objectification and subordination of women, many female writers came forward, speaking for their rights and demanding for a female space. Equally supported by feminist activists and theorists, l'ecriture feminine began to shape a future which the patriarchal world found challenging their status quo.

Gaining momentum with feminist movements globally and locally, moving from the political to the cultural to the academic, the narratives on experiences of women of different identities and origin brought in a paradigm shift in the established patterns of narrative, fuelling serious critical interventions and analyses of the hegemonic masculine narratives (written as well as visual). Articulating the unrecorded lived-in experiences of womenfolk not only dismantled the stereotypes which had for decades depicted female identity in terms of her inferior status, it also inaugurated the space for the female voices to be strongly registered as well as provide an alternate gaze to 'read' and 'analyse' the female subject.

Women's writings, as an academic discipline, began to address the exclusionary practice (socially, economically, politically and ideologically) which victimized the women irrespective of their class, race or other identities. Debates on whether all women writings are feminist in its approach and essence is rather too reductive and an immature call to put forth since all women's writings need not essentially be feminist in its approach. However, a feminist interpretation of the existent narratives could reflect how historically woman have been negated their rights and position and how their absence was never a concern in the male centered narratives. What women's writings encompass is a consciousness which allows one to formulate a consciousness on the differential treatment which exists between the two sexes (premised on the established notions on gender and sexuality).

Dialogues on what exactly formulates the identity of women's narrative directs one to look at the interdisciplinary nature it adopts in addressing the issues related to women across all walks of life as well as across all platforms of representation. Set into motion since the twentieth century, narratives centering on women have portrayed some of the strongest female characters to speak of. These narratives, essentially identified as the marginalized ones, have seriously addressed and challenged the homogeneous identity of male narratives. Thinking, speaking and writing as women was breaking the status quo of the narrative field. Mulvey's path breaking insightful observation in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" on how the male gaze been instrumental in objectifying the female subjects stands per say as a historical moment since the paradigm shift it heralded illuminates on the emergence of a distinct female gaze as deviant from the patriarchal expectations.

Breaking the stereotypical ideologies woven around the constructs of the absent women figure in the male dominant narratives, female centered narratives moved out of the comfort zone of family, exploring her identity according to her vision. The shift towards a new world order, with women actively engaging themselves in the socio-cultural politics of the patriarchal system not only signalled their motion of moving away from the domestic chores, but it also echoed the process of making themselves heard amidst the wilderness. With the changing social scenario at the background acting as the catalyst, female oriented narratives offered alternative readings dealing with issues pertaining to the social, cultural, political, economic and moral realms. Women's Writings, thus enlarged the scope of making the social space an inclusive one with discussions strongly reverberating the need for strong female voices to emerge.

II

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "talking back," that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice (hooks *Talking Back*, 9).

Talking back is an act of asserting one's existence in a world divided along the binaries of class, race, gender and economy. To come forth with a pronounced voice of one's own empowers women for a greater cause. Transcending different fields and domains of exposure, women centered narratives reflect a sincere urge to ascertain their undivided and devoted role to hearken a future which guarantees the social space to be inclusive.

Much discussion is generated on the fictional tendencies of ethnography produced by the challenges inherent in accommodating the conflicting subjectivities of observer/informant. We fear, at the very least, that ethnography imposes a narrative unity which obscures what James Clifford calls "the hum of unmarked, impersonal existence" (106) of day-to-day life. Aihwa Ong criticizes Clifford by claiming that "the multivocal ethnographic texts he would have anthropologists produce must also disclose a riot of social meanings" (88). Her argument, essentially much the same as Clifford's, is that "we need to take into account the changing world community, and recognize the limits of our own traditions and explanations" (90). She also recognizes, nevertheless, that it is "doubtful that we can achieve more than partial understandings" (88). Metaphorically speaking, it is thus that Clifford and Ong leave us between a rock and a hard place, Clifford building a hierarchical Tower of Babel and Ong tearing it down.

This methodological discussion, however, is only marginally concerned with the cultural work of fiction writers: those who are not ethnographers, but who, rather, are interested in representing cultural experience as literature. Clifford acknowledges a correspondence between the discourse of the ethnographer and that of the fiction writer in his brief discussion of George Eliot, whose novels, he explains, reproduce the "situation of participant-observation" of the ethnographer (114). Celia Lisset Alvarez proposes in "Bridges to Babylon: Ethnography, Representation, and Indeterminacy in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*", however, that this correspondence is much more significant to our understanding of cultural difference and the project of ethnography than is usually acknowledged, and that it merits a more reciprocal study. Simply, if we are to read ethnography, to varying degrees, as fiction, then it follows that some fiction is to be read as ethnography, with all of its complications and

manifestations of representational ambivalence. The study of these ethnographical fictions may then in turn illuminate the aforementioned discussion of scientific ethnography.

Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* is a text that plays with as well as tries to avoid the dangers of ethnographic misrepresentation. The isolated island community of Willow Springs, whose only connection to the United States mainland is a single bridge, has learned "that anything coming from beyond the bridge gotta be viewed real, real careful" (7). The relative freedom of fiction allows Naylor to address the pitfalls of traditional ethnography represented by Reema's son, the Willow Springs boy who ventures "beyond the bridge" to return as a college-educated ethnographer of his own people, and fails miserably. Thus, the multivocal nature of this text allows for Clifford's allegories of meaning to take place at the level of both ethnographer and subject; the indeterminacy that Henry Louis Gates posits in his construction of African-American subjectivity helps to eliminate the hierarchical structure of the polyvocal discourses of ethnography that Clifford is only able to recognize; and finally tense shifts in the narratives and the futuristic location of the communal voice displace representation from Clifford's "ethnographic pastoral" onto a progressive, constructive (rather than reductive) view of community.

The French author and film-maker Marguerite Duras is arguably one of the most important figures in 20th-century culture. She is probably best known for the film adaptation of her novel *The Lover*—which she subsequently disowned—but it is her earlier experiments with storytelling that most convincingly locate her as a writer who took the conventions of modernism and pushed them into entirely new directions. Her novels *The Square*, *Moderato Cantabile, Destroy She Said* and, towards the ends of her career, *Blue Eyes Black Hair, Summer Rain* and *The North China Lover* not only offer a unique perspective on how we live now, but also push at the conventions of the novel itself. Philips' paper titled 'Marguerite Duras' Modernist Tradition and Conventional Approaches' considers where Duras' work sits within the late modernist tradition and how it continues to offer an alternative to more conventional approaches to narrative.

"Sweat," which has been considered by critics to be Hurston's best short story was published in the only issue of *Fire*!! magazine, the magazine that seemed to have come out of Langston Hughes's unapologetic statement that the younger writers of the Harlem Renaissance would portray black life without apology either to the black middle class, who wanted them to write about the best of the race or to white readers who wanted the young writers to populate their writing with stereotypes and primitives. Of the group, Hughes and Hurston embraced a style of writing that could called be a blues aesthetic, writing that is characterized by the daily struggles of the black working class, use of dialect, simple but poetic language that mimics the repetitious and ironic language of the blues. With Hurston, in addition to these elements, varying degrees of the folk life from which the blues sprang are also an ever-present feature. The imaginative world she creates is almost always a world in transition, from the rural, folklife and folkways to a modernity that appears to be just beyond the horizon. While the folk in this world appear to have a measure of separation from the outside world and its racism and black dehumanization, they are not wholly free from that world as the very existence of their world is a testament to the racism of the wider society and because its inhabitants have to sally to and from the wider society. Hurston's heroine, Delia, is an example of one who lives in both worlds to eke out a living. Delia's struggles to make a way in an already difficult world as a washer woman is made more difficult by her husband Sykes, who creates a "blues world" for her with constant abuse, forcing her to stand up for herself and to step out of the role of the blues victim, who finds a way to smile and keep from crying in spite of her problems. Goodhead's paper thus attempts to map the agency and the notion of Blues Aesthetics in Zora Neale Hurston's "Sweat".

"I almost believed my body had no restrictions… I was limitless," Morgan Jerkins writes in *This Will Be My Undoing*, before her childhood self realized she would have to keep trying for validation. It wasn't just white people who let Jerkins down, who pushed her out of spaces she wished to occupy. She made her way by stepping voluntarily into a world of honors classes and Dooney & Burke. She looked down on black girls who acted out, who refused to toe the line. She experienced a divided loyalty. Miles'

paper "Path back to wholeness, to the self: Morgan Jerkins' *This Will Be My Undoing*" attempts to explore Jerkins struggles and her journey back to wholeness, to the self.

Toni Morrison's pen had always registered voices of strong dissent on issues of racism, oppression, sexual abuse and the effects of colonialism. Morrison's last novel *God Help the Child* which invariably deals with a child's traumatic childhood experience provides a haunting insight into the unaddressed terrains of the pain and revolt of Bride, the black protagonist. Rafseena's paper "The Dynamics of Polyphony in Vocalizing the Trauma in *God Help the Child*" attempts to focus on how the traumatic incident resulted in Bride's transformation from a meek, rejected child to a bold and an independent black woman with a strong identity. The novel which allows polyphonic narrative by different characters also opens up the possibility of identifying Bride's narrative to have echoes of PTSD against which she fights to emerge as an optimistic black mother. The paper would also attempt to trace the importance of the polyphonic narrative of Bride which can function as the space from which Bride starts her journey to attain her true identity. The above focus would be developed using trauma theory and the notions of toxic motherhood as well as how PTSD narratives can help the trauma victim to come to terms with the reality so as to enable themselves to come out of their past.

The imaginary of the Romanian village in contemporary literature employs a rich inventory of historical and political nature. Marta Petreu's *At Home, on the Field of Armageddon*, [*Acasă, pe Cîmpia Armaghedonului*] is one of the most important rural novels of Romanian contemporary literature and its take on the history of rural Transylvania in the 20th and early 21st century is completely unprecedented, given the fact that its genre is prone to ideological manipulation. The goal of Pop's paper "The Historico-Political Imaginary in Marta Petreu's Rural Novel" is to highlight the uniqueness of Marta Petreu's 2011 text in the context of Romanian Literature by analyzing the historical and political imaginary of the novel.

The spring and summer months of 2020 have been "lonesome, sad, and like a place that is far off and estranged from all other places in the world."

(McCuller) Moreover, as we near the final quarter of this contagious, quarantined, and economically unmoored year, the abrupt disconnection from our previous lives has left us feeling ghosted, haunted by our former selves and the way we were. Strangers in our own skin, we are experiencing seasons of isolation, heartbreak, and mourning, looking inward with the "secret gaze of grief" that introduces readers to Miss Amelia in Carson McCuller's "The Ballad of the Sad Café." Though written nearly 70 years ago, McCuller's long short story presciently addresses the profound inner calamities a pandemic and global economic collapse can bring with them, which forms the focus in Willardson's paper "'Ghosted: Re-reading Carson McCullers' The Ballad of the Sad Café During A Pandemic Summer".

In his comprehensive mapping of the 19th century American slave narrative, James Olney offers a number of salient literary tropes that serve as the diegetic foundation for most works within this specific literary genre. According to Olney, "the slave narrative is most often a non-memorial description fitted to a pre-formed mold, a mold with regular depressions here and equally regular prominences there—virtually obligatory figures, scenes, turns of phrase, observances and authentications" (46-73). The narrative of capture, the journey across the wide expanse of the Atlantic, scenes, often horrific, from life on the plantation, the dangerous acquisition of the slave's first words, the hunger for further education, the moment of confrontation, and the slave's eventual freedom all serve as hallmarks within the majority of 19th century American slave narratives. Olney goes on to suggest that these similar narratalogical building blocks tend to "carry over from narrative to narrative and give to them as a group the species character that we designate by the phrase 'slave narrative'" (49).

At the very core of the narrative is the certainty that these are the experiences that are neither fabricated nor manipulated by memory. The author reveals how the institution of slavery has attempted to negate the very identity of the creator of the narrative and, in turn, that this very act of creation is a negation of slavery's victory over that attempted erasure. According to Olney, the act of writing, of taking command of how one's life will be perceived by an audience of potential readers, "is literally a

part of the narrative, becoming an important thematic element in the retelling of the life wherein literacy, identity and a sense of freedom are all acquired simultaneously" (54). If one were to take, for example, the complete title of Frederick Douglass's autobiography, one cannot gloss over the fact that "Written by Himself" supports the entire literary endeavor and acts as an assertion of the narrative's verifiable authorship. These are Douglass's experiences and first-hand accounts of life within the institution of slavery; however, these are also Douglass's perceptions, realizations, and interpretations and it would be nearly impossible to sever these from the narrative itself. In short, this narrative, as well as many others, is not a portrait of the institution of slavery. It is an account of one slave embedded within that institution reclaiming humanity and a voice denied by that institution.

Unlike Douglass, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* the primary text to be dissected in Montes' paper, aims to explore how the institution of slavery is undeniably a patriarchal font of sexual terrorism that impacts all women, regardless of race. Commencing from Jacobs's oft-quoted lines, "Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own," this paper offers a gendered analysis of this particular slave narrative. Jacobs's multi-focal and multi-racial perspective takes into consideration the limited lives of white and black women on the plantation and, in turn, unveils the carnal savagery of American slavery. Attempting to reveal the obvious repercussions of unchecked patriarchy, Jacobs incorporates white female oppression into what is an ostensibly African-American narrative. It is this maneuver that wholly distinguishes this particular text from all others within the genre.

It would be worthwhile to comprehend Alice Childress's writings. Through the play *Wedding Band*, she pictures the grim world of the black people and whites and the existing simmering chord of tension. Her characters spell out physical space and the psychological distance among them. This play unambiguously outlines everything that adds to black suffering and their dilemma in the midst of the dangerous white firmament. Childress has championed the cause of the black people through the portrayal of Julia,

Lula and Mattie. Her explications of the black suffering and more particularly the sufferings of the feminine gender would definitely be a classic stamp for the black theatre as a distinct genre. Raju's paper attempts to provide a critical reading of Alice Childress's *Wedding Band*: *A Love/Hate Story in Black and White*.

Brazil and United States of America were countries plagued by slavery of their black people. During the 19th Century, Anti-Slave movements were founded or strengthened, which ultimately led to the end of Slavery in both nations. Among the several efforts carried out during this period, the work of female black intellectuals stands out, since the fight against sexism was another social burden along with freedom and literacy. Lima and Zacarias' paper "The Aesthetic Heritage of Black Female Writers in the Nineteenth Century" aims to analyze the works of two contemporary female black writers from the time mentioned, Brazilian Maria Firmina dos Reis' *The Slave* (1887) and North-American Frances Harper´s *Sketches of Southern Life* (1872). The paper will grasp the aesthetic solutions employed by the authors to depict the life of female black slaves during the 19h Century in their respective home countries.

Ann Petry, the writer of American novels, short stories and non-fiction, presents the lives and struggles of Afro-Americans. With so many experiences and stories to tell with right-hand information, she recreates characters with many dimensions presenting racial and gender related issues knowledgeable only to the subaltern community. As a writer capturing social realism, Ann Petry voices out the hostility encountered by the black people in the White dominated world on the grounds of race, identity, gender and economy. Devaki's paper "Racial Inequality and Gender Concern in Ann Petry's *Like A Winding Sheet*" deals with how social exploitation and its eventual depression bring turmoil in the otherwise intimate life of Johnson and Mae and also how women become the victim of both racial and gender discrimination.

With the growing of the tradition of adapting literary works in the American movie industry in Hollywood, it becomes important to consider the artistic value and quality of these ready-made narratives. The 2000 release of *The House of Mirth,* an adaptation of an early twentieth century

novel by Edith Wharton, marks an exceptional and unique case of study for being filmed by a male movie-maker, while it is written by a woman, giving therefore rise to the legitimate question of how much is retained from the original story and authorial implications. To what extent is Terence Davies' successful in translating the written world through the vividness of the filmed image? Worth of further consideration is the interest of feminist criticism in Davies' adaptation of such complex work that reveals to be about more than the vanity of old moneyed New York society. Actually, a feminist criticism delves beyond the analysis of the film to deal with the representation of gender and power dynamics reported on screen when translating the tragic downfall of the female protagonist Lily Bart. Kortas' paper "Sentimental Claustrophobia of Feminist Sensibilities: A Feminist Reading of *Maud Martha* and *House of* Mirth" seeks therefore to explore the gains and losses of the filmic adaptation of the *House of Mirth*. It also intends at assessing the adaptation from a feminist perspective.

A descendant from the Harlem Renaissance, Gwendolyn Brooks carried the struggle for equality through the Black Arts movement years by bringing the spirit and goals to the new Mecca, Chicago. Mainly known for her protest poems whose primary focus is the lives and struggles of African Americans in the context of the evolving social, cultural, and political upheavals in the 1960s America, Brooks explored other genres, most importantly fiction and non-fiction writings which attest of her adeptful mélange of politics and poetics. It grounds her art in mid twentieth century social turmoil, political transformation and art's potential to engage with the complexity and richness of the black experience. *Maud Martha*, her only novel, is accredited such quality, yet it has never gained the same acclaim as her poetry. A novel that traces the development of its female protagonist into womanhood, *Maud Martha* heightens beauty despite alchemy and wretchedness and unveils the struggles, doubts, and the triumphs of its characters, exposing the shallowness of the white prejudiced culture through the private confessions of a young woman who strived to prove her worth regardless of her skin-color. The black-skinned Maud parades into human feelings, experiences, and sufferings, and travels from one sphere to another through the power of imagination and art. Such travel permits the author to blur the distinction between prose and poetry, folk and

high art, and blackness and whiteness. The interest of Kortas' paper is to trace how the novel transcends the poetic to reach the political dimension of the work as call to undo with previous racial and gender prejudices, proving the importance of the work as a primary text setting the ground for Brooks' contribution to Black aesthetics set by the Black Arts movement. The text will be explored from a French feminist standpoint through Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject.

Traditionally, mainstream critical attitude has been to associate black women's literature with homeplace and domesticity. This is partly due to the women's urge to treat themes related only to family life and, partly, to the constant critical tendency of relegating black female writers as well as their works to the background. However, the last three decades have witnessed a profound transformation in the literary creativity of the black female writers: a newfound consciousness has welled up and the women are now investing in radical political themes and styles. Ibrahim's paper "Politico-Historical Issues in Modern Black Fiction by Women: A Study in Canonicity" sets out to analyse the ways by which Alice Walker (African American) and Calixthe Beyala (African) have tackled politico-historical topics in their works. Based on Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, the paper reveals that resistance writing in both women's works has opened them up to new ways/spaces of representation, and hence to canon-formation. On the whole, the paper concludes that the canonization of black women's literature is the consequence of its coming of age thanks to their commitment to the survival, general welfare and spiritual wholeness of entire communities.

Even though Indian science fiction, both Anglophone and vernacular, has a history that dates back to the late nineteenth century it's only recently that its terrain has got the searchlight it deserves from the critics. One reason for this could be that this genre has long been thought to be derivative of European SF. Like other postcolonial nations in their decolonizing process Indian nation-building efforts responded to such an objection against the dependence on European scientific models and this expectedly varied over times. If in the Nehruvian era India tried to forge its identity by investing in western scientific research over the last few decades the attitude has shifted

towards incorporating precritical mythological framework to explain away scientific phenomena.

This terrain has also long been a stronghold of male writes. But this apparently exclusive ownership has been challenged by Indian women writers who are bringing into its arc questions of gender and other marginalization. The list of such writers is long and a comprehensive historical appraisal lies beyond the scope of this paper. Sarkar's paper attempts to contextualize science fiction written by Anglophone Indian writers against the backdrop of global science fiction writing with a closer look at the science fiction written by Anglophone Indian women writers. The paper would focus on the fiction of Vandana Singh and situate her as a major writer of this genre and examine how, through her fiction, Singh is unearthing hitherto unheard concerns and, in the process, transforming the map of Indian SF.

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