

# Feminism of today with influences from the heptameron

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The examination of the *Heptameron* written by Marguerite de Navarre gives an insight into the subjectivity of women during the Renaissance. In several short stories in *Heptameron*, we see that women have a way of avoiding love and show different perspectives into their reasons why. The *Heptameron* was one of the first compilations of short stories that shows different perspectives on the issues of men dominating women. With different women sharing their opinions within the *Heptameron*, could we say that this was the beginning of feminism and one of the first outlets for women sharing their insights? This form of art was able to inspire women to analyze their positions within a male dominated world and could be compared to the first wave feminist movement which included magazines like *Kitchen Table* and *The Feminist Voice*. Whether or not the Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron* still has influences today we could still trace back the impact it had upon the feminism we see today, the understanding of what it means to be a human in standing up for oneself, and always striving for equality.

To begin, the first day is a collection of little figures played by women on men and by men on women. In the novella ten of the first day, *La Dame Floride*, after the death of her husband, resists virtuously an advance of Amadour who seeks to defile his honor and withdraws to religious life. She decides that it is better to follow the love for God than to follow the love for a man even if she feels love for Amadour " And began the love, to show its great strength so much that she, believing her wrong, was incessantly summoning Amadour, begging him to return "(*Heptameron*, 56). She was trying to find a middle ground between sex and marriage. She could not lose her honor by going to sleep without being married. So, she tried to find

somewhere in the middle. The themes are honor, chivalry, rape, religion, virtue and desire from a woman's point of view. When the Heptameron was written, women had to have a relationship with God and a relationship with a man. There were several rules a woman must follow before she could get married. Thus, we can see the reason she does not act on the "great love" in this story, because love for God is greater than love for a man.

After we have the second day, on which any form of thought is discussed, to the delight of the storytellers. Day two, novella 14 the Lord of Bonnivet seeks revenge for a cruelty of a Milanese lady. The Lord de Bonnivet meets an Italian gentleman to whom the Milanese lady is in love. By becoming close friends, the Italian told his plan to go and see the lady in her room at Lord Bonnivet who has the great idea of taking the place of the gentleman and winning the lady for himself. The themes are secrecy, trickery, rape, chastity and desire from the point of view of a man. We see that she was swindled by this man, raped and in the end she feels bad but she returns to the man who raped her. The reason the woman was already "worn out" so she could not try to see another man when she was no longer "pure". She is convinced that she can no longer look for love because a man has already taken her, even if it was without her will.

On the fourth day of the Heptameron, the characters choose as subjects of fairy tales the virtuous patience and the ladies who try to seduce their husbands. The novella 40, Count de Jossebelin had many sisters and one who was much more beautiful than the others. She was his favorite, so he did not want to let her get married. She falls in love with the servant of the

Count. Then, when the brother discovers that his sister is in love with the servant and they are married, he orders him to be killed. The sister is put in a sort of prison. Some time after, he sought, for the satisfaction of his conscience, to reconquer her, and spoke to her of marriage; but she sent him the word that he had “ given her such a bad breakfast, that she would not eat any more meat, and that she would hope to live so that it would not be worth the homicide of the second husband; because she would hardly think that he forgave another. “(Heptameron, 211). In the end, very weak and helpless for revenge, she places her hopes in the one who is the true judge, God. This shows another role for women where they have to do what their guardians approve. We can say that in the end she finds it better not to seek love because she can not have a happy ending. In a sense we can think of the fact that arranged marriages are bad as well as marriages that are only for love. There must be a happy medium. The most important thing is to love God together.

All of these stories are issues that women still face today. By analysing the stories from the Heptameron we see the struggles that women have faced and what happened to all of the women in the end. The commentary in the book also shows the same commentary that we find in *The Kitchen Table* and in *The Feminist Voice*. Following the journey through time we can see the evolution of humanity has not changed. As humans, we fight for our rights to equality and never back down by analyzing what we have been through over time. Looking at *The Feminist Voice* we see the issue of rape that also comes up in the Heptameron as a big issue. Women being violated and being told

that it is because “ they are dirty” (A Press of Our Own, 31). As we see in the novella 14 of the Heptameron where the Milanese lady makes herself sick thinking that it is her fault for being raped and ending up being with the man instead of leaving because she is no longer “ pure”. Stories of today show a large disparity in just who is authoring the stories about these sexual attacks, and what kinds of voices and perspectives are appearing in articles as a result. “ A substantive look at how print media is covering rape and sexualized violence on campuses examines the gender of reporters, the gender of sources, and the topic focus” (Writing Rape, 14). Which means women are still being victimized and the stories being told are glorifying men and putting women to shame.

In other news, we also have The Kitchen Table which reports on the issue of gender and religion. Many women face issues that stem from religious values as we saw in the Heptameron. When looking at the history of the United States we have to remember the oppression, victimization, psychological and physical abuse of several women specifically women of color (Significant differences: Feminism in psychology, 120) and several of them looked towards different religions to become their true divine self. A few of these religions include the Nation of Islam, Ethiopian Hebrews, Christianity and several other religions. Within several of these religions women are the lesser of the sexes and being pure and untouched is something that is highly regarded. Even though several religious communities have accepted the fact that being being a woman is not something that makes a person lesser, several of these communities have not come to terms and still allow hate

and discrimination in their place of faith. It is undoubtedly certain that women are supposed to be married as they were before and not only contain a relationship with a man but also with God.

All in all, many studies from the 20th century to the present day have been made to establish “ sociological, anthropological, historical or linguistic findings with the stance of women in civilization and sexual difference between women and men” (Voices of Subjection, 120). But beyond these simple evaluations, the theoretical point of view to get women out of the sexist stereotypes by societies patriarchal world is not very common. Since the feminist struggles of the 16th century, France has remained moderate because of the acquisition of social rights more than in the United States. Its analytical gaps are illustrated by the insufficiency of works on the question of the woman and the theories. The biological traits where the woman is seen as inferiors to the man is a main point that we see in contemporary media through feminin blogs on the internet or magazines. All of these works of art confirm the sexual roles that are necessary to the preservation of social harmony. The idea that the women is linked to a privatized life of domestic family values and religious values is found within media as well, but is ever changing. Indeed, the majority writings that deal with these issues are designed in the United States, but we can say started long ago in France with the Heptameron. The ideals of moving forward to create equality between the sexes is a human component that makes humanity in its whole an advancement.