I. Re-writing the “Classics”

Vigilant efforts to theorize the intersectionality of gender, race, and sexuality to reinstate hitherto marginalized positions resulted in a series of changes within feminism in the eighties and early nineties. This diversification of feminism is sometimes referred to as “Third Wave feminism.”\(^1\) Feminism was thus supplemented and even supplanted with feminisms, which again, at least partly, gave way to gender studies. These changes are often met with skeptical questions regarding the viability or necessity of feminist theory and feminist literary criticism as academic disciplines. However, I share the belief expressed by Susan Gubar, Janet Jakobsen, and many others, that the often presumed failure or stagnation of feminism today attests to its success, too. The diversification within feminist discourses and gender studies, it should be remembered, took place in tandem with the general permeation of feminist ideals and methodologies into various

\(^1\) See, for instance, Astrid Henry’s discussion of the diversification of feminist theories and positions in Third Wave feminism.
academic disciplines and arenas of cultural practice. If feminism, or women’s studies, as an independent discipline seems to have shrunk from the frontline of academic production, its influence today is more widespread than ever before—so much so that its extensive presence across areas of intellectual and cultural activities is almost taken for granted. Accordingly, its operation today should, and does, take routes that are different from before.

One particular arena of cultural practice that enables us to dispute the alleged desuetude of feminism is women’s literary production today. As Sharon Marcus astutely notes, “while feminist criticism may be on the wane in the academy, it is flourishing in literature” (1726). The overall impact of feminism on the field of literary production is quite prominent. We see it in the ever-increasing number of successful women writers and the proliferation of gender-conscious works in the literary sphere. In the midst of “the hybridization of feminist criticism” (Gubar 1712), this is one important sector of culture where feminist criticism should continuously invest its expository energy. Although a large part of feminist thinking has become almost common sense in critical thinking, feminism has still a long way to go, and it is necessary to examine and explain why gender remains such an issue in literary production and why women writers keep seeking to expand the horizon of women’s stories. If the contemporary literary marketplace attests to the success of feminism on the one hand, continuous creative efforts of women writers reveal the yet-to-be-hoped-for state of feminist ideals on the other.

It is in this context that an interesting new category of

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2 Marcus, however, poignantly observes that this success still does not let us deny the tendency that “when women write female comedy or tragedy, their works are swaddled between pink covers and dismissed as ‘chick lit,’ as ephemeral satire or sentimental trash, while equivalent works by men, far from being reduced to ‘dick lit,’ are hailed as heartbreaking works of staggering genius” (1726).