

# Ly Lan – Vietnamese Novelist With Work “Novel For Women” – Some Feminist Issues In Vietnam And Western Countries

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## Abstract

Ly Lan is a typical female writer specializing in writing novels in Vietnamese literature. She is also a journalist, screenwriter, critic and translator with the famous Harry Potter translation. During her literary career, Ly Lan has had over 20 published works in all genres of short stories, novels and the most famous of which is the book "women's novel". The writer has a new perspective and concept of women, boldly speaking out to fight for justice for Vietnamese women and women around the world. Through the article, the author wants to bring to readers the issue of feminism in Vietnam and in Western countries, all aiming at the common goal of expressing the needs, aspirations, rights to life, rights to happiness, rights to freedom and personality of women must be compared to men, without discrimination in social, cultural and political relationships.

**Keywords:** Ly Lan, feminism, Vietnamese novels, Vietnam and Western countries.

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Date of Submission: 20-09-2024

Date of Acceptance: 30-09-2024

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## I. Introduction

Ly Lan is a writer of narrative novels who is quite alert, knowledgeable about literary techniques and has bold artistic innovations, especially in terms of tone and language. Ly Lan is considered an impressive writer and has made significant contributions to modern Vietnamese literature. At the same time, the writer is a strong inheritor and promoter of Feminist literature, full of courage, creativity, real writing, real stories.

Statistical table of typical works of writer Ly Lan, period 1986 - 1996:

Serial number	Title of work	Year of publication
1	Peaceful Place Where Birds Sing	1986
2	A Little Romance in the Rain	1987
3	Lantern Festival	1991
4	Dreaming of Mountains	1991
5	Adults	1992
6	Dragonfly Rain	1993
7	Chinese Archduke	1994
8	My Secret and the Black Lizard	1996

Statistical table of typical works of writer Ly Lan, period 1998 - 2008:

Serial number	Title of work	Year of publication
1	Saigon Cho Lon Roaming	1998
2	When the Writer Weeps	1999
3	Different Dreams	2000
4	A Corner of Chinatown	2001
5	Three People and Three Animals	2002
6	It's Me	2005
7	The Storyteller	2006
8	Random Essays	2007
9	Women's Novels]	2008

The novel Women consists of 17 chapters. The main character in the work is a female writer named Thoa and she has had seven books published, giving her the “title of a writer” but not “satisfying her creative desire”. The novel Women begins when she is writing the next book. But her writing is interrupted by the ringing of the phone, the choking cry of a young woman across the ocean and the startled cry “Mom! Where are you?”. The hauntings and memories also continuously rushed in and out of her mind, while her body kept flashing the signal “stop, it’s reached the limit of tolerance.” The woman kept writing. Is one more women’s

novel too much or not enough? And it was a true war. Thoa's war against the hauntings of a war-torn past that has long since receded. The memories of the war seem to haunt her like a terrifying obsession, making her restless and anxious in her soul. Or that is Lieu's fight against the harshness of the world to protect her child. Khong Be's fight against the patriarchy and harshness of the man called "husband" and that is Ted... And that is Den, also an unfortunate woman, she got pregnant with a soldier and had a child, the world had to call it a mixed-race child. And there are many other women's fates that are not mentioned by name. Women who are miserable and unhappy, but are women who do not give up. As Thoa advised her niece Khong Be: "You have to decide for yourself, even though fate or this force always imposes or distorts the path of life you choose". Not a teenage girl who paints life in rosy colors, Ly Lan writes "Women's Novel" with the "gentleness" of an experienced woman, a married woman. Therefore, readers not only find in the book the identities of women and their vibrant lives, but also philosophies of life, exalting and honoring the spiritual values of women..

## **II. Aim Of The Study**

We focused on examining the novel *Women* by writer Ly Lan, to see that the writer has a new perspective, a new concept of women in Vietnam and women in Western countries. Through the work, we see the value, the personality of women, having all the freedoms, especially the freedom to be happy, not being oppressed, or having their personality trampled. And in Vietnam, the discrimination between genders and women no longer exists, women in Vietnam are able to participate in the management and political apparatus and they are talented people.

## **III. Subjects And Methods**

### **Study Design**

Comparative and contrastive method: The author applies this method, comparing with some typical authors in Vietnam and Western countries, to see the common points in the process of creating literary works.

Statistical and classification method: The author collects documents about the artistic creation process of writer Ly Lan, to see that the writer is a talented person through the years that the author has created and associated with the works.

Analytical and synthetic method: The author applies this method to analyze and synthesize the content that the work wants to aim for, to help readers understand the work such as the main character, supporting characters, analyze the strengths, weaknesses, and character conflicts shown in the work..

**Subject and Sampling:** Writer Ly Lan, Vietnamese novels, feminism in Vietnam and Western countries

## **IV. Research Content**

### **General introduction to Feminism**

Feminism or feminism is a set of movements and ideologies that aim to define, establish, and defend equal political, economic, cultural, and social rights for women. A feminist is someone who advocates or supports women's rights and equality. Issues commonly associated with the concept of women's rights include, but are not limited to: bodily integrity and autonomy; the right to education and employment; equal pay; the right to own property; to enter into legal contracts, to organize public offices; the right to vote; the right to marry freely, to equality in the family, and to freedom of religion. Feminists advocate for women's rights - such as in contract law, property, voting, and also promote bodily integrity, autonomy, and reproductive rights for women. Feminism has transformed society, especially in the West, by achieving women's suffrage, gender neutrality in the English language, equal pay for women, reproductive rights for women (including contraception and abortion), and the right to enter into private contracts and property. Feminists have worked to protect women and girls from domestic violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. They have also advocated for workplace rights, including maternity leave, and against all forms of discrimination against women.

### **Basic Features of Feminist Literature**

When writing, writers always take women as the center. From there, they establish a writing style with a female style, changing the male-dominated discourse into a feminist discourse system, using the first person or second person.

When holding a pen, women must write for themselves, discovering what their bodies feel - expressing it through language. The structure of language itself will change when women talk and write about their bodies. The views and movements fighting for women's rights and the characteristics that culture assigns to women.

### **Writer Ly Lan's awareness and conception of feminism**

In Vietnamese literature, there are many writers who have boldly spoken out to fight for the rights and status of women. But they only express their feelings of lamenting their own miserable and small lives. They do not inherit what they have, including the right to live, the right to freely love, the right to desire "physiological needs" that are normal to women's instincts. But in the modern literary period, Ly Lan has been very bold, brave, and brave, using her calm, sharp, and tactful pen to speak out to fight for justice for women. Ly Lan has a new perspective on the issue of feminism, which is common to the whole society because it is associated with a political and social movement that aims to link the issue of femininity with human rights.

In Ly Lan's works, the issue of feminism is the central issue and is favored by her. With a sharp writing style that hit the psychology of social life as an important and breakthrough revolution for women. Reading Women's Novels, we can feel the writer's intention. Sometimes it is expressed gently and subtly, sometimes it is a strong climax of women. The fierce and fierce struggle has broken the patriarchy of the husband in the typical work of Khong Be's husband. Khong Be is also a woman who endures, sacrifices for her husband and wholeheartedly serves her mother-in-law. But it is the harsh treatment of her mother-in-law and the patriarchy of the man that has pushed Khong Be to be known as a woman who had to leave her husband and family and was condemned by society. Writing Women's Novels, writer Ly Lan constantly pondered for her characters. Because those are the feelings that need to be expressed about sexual needs, or that is the common fate of women in the same generation of the family. From the poor old grandmother who had to struggle with food and clothing to raise nearly ten daughters. Her children grew up in material and emotional deprivation and each had to leave their hometown and live in separate places. Or that was the life of the three sisters Lieu, Den and Thoa. They were women who had to endure the utmost suffering and were not satisfied with their cruel fate and a life full of worries and concerns.

### **The role of the female character as an independent subject**

Writer Ly Lan is very conscious of the status of women in the issue of Feminism. Because she has affirmed the independent personal ego of women. The issue of feminism is openly and transparently disclosed. Ly Lan also raised issues about the role of women as an independent subject. They do not accept the arrangements of men, they do not submit to the restrictive frameworks set for them. They want to assert their own abilities and talents in all relationships and participate in a political organization and stand in important key positions. Ly Lan wrote Women's Novels not as a lament, a blame but as an expression of anger and rage through the main character Thoa. Because Thoa is now a writer. The young girl is full of pride and chooses the revolutionary path as her own direction. In the first few times she was assigned the task of shooting an unknown person. Thoa considered it absurd, an arrangement. She did not want anyone to arrange her work and even her married life. For those reasons, she did not agree and ended up being exiled to Con Dao. During her detention, she met people who were in similar situations to her. She listened to songs with beautiful melodies that encouraged her to stand up, but sometimes made her young soul collapse before the hidden forces.

Thoa was always worried, always nostalgic about the war. The anxiety became a terrible obsession that prevented her from escaping the vicious cycle. Thoa was brave and bold in fighting for Lieu. As a strong woman, when witnessing her mother-in-law being constrained by old prejudices, Thoa slapped Lieu's mother-in-law and unintentionally led to the end of Lieu having to separate from her husband. Thoa did not agree to impose the name Bé on her grandchild. Her voice was cold and resolute, "I'm not a child, I don't cry, I'm not afraid,... that was the meaning of protest against the imposition of family and social prejudice. Lieu is also a pitiful character and deserves sympathy and sharing. Having broken up in marriage, Lieu rebuilt her life when she met a kind woman who was willing to help her overcome the incident. Here we see that Ly Lan was very talented in arranging the character of the woman who took care of Lieu. That is sympathy and pity for the fate of women in the same situation. And Khong Be's fate was also miserable and ups and downs when she grew up struggling with life. Khong Be also could not accept life when she discovered her husband was having an affair. The boredom in Khong Be's soul led to the conscious decision to leave her husband to find her lost mother. She was condemned by her husband's family as a woman who abandoned her husband and did not take care of her husband's family life. But it can also be seen that Khong Be's rising consciousness is always determined in the face of difficulties and pain to find his roots, which is truly admirable.

At the end of the work, Ly Lan shows a humane spirit that makes readers moved by the scene where Thoa, thanks to the relics left by her uncle, accidentally discovers that the woman she was assigned to shoot years ago is her older sister, Den. Not knowing where Den is now, Den made a mistake and as a result, she had a child that people call "a mixed-race child" and was criticized and condemned by people and society in humiliation. Each character is a separate tragedy about the life that Ly Lan wants to talk about. At the end of the story, Khong Be meets her mother, Lieu, in moments of thinking, Khong Be is sad and returns to America with her husband in an unusual mood. Thoa is determined to find her older sister, Den, who has been with her throughout a painful and deprived childhood. Writer Ly Lan described that it seemed that in the hearts of those

women there was always a lack of men. They were born as a prophecy of misfortune for life. Without a man to support them, they still lived by their will and walked on their unusually strong hands. They did not have the sharing and sympathy from men. Author Ly Lan always defended and fought fiercely for her characters with her heart and admirable humanity. All of this created a novel about women that was truly unique in both content and art. Ly Lan used simple, common language to expose daily life and evoke love, the story of the bedroom, husband and wife, very ordinary men and women, very women, one could say very women.

### **Struggle for Feminism to find the self, happiness, freedom and personality of women**

Ly Lan has conceived of the ego. The ego is a general term, including women. The ego of women in Ly Lan's view is not the ego that follows men, that is, taking men as the standard to determine women. The female essence is what belongs to their gender, separate from the theory of masculinity as a product of creation. On the basis of affirming the separate subjectivity of the female ego, as a necessity, Ly Lan has pushed her conception to the level of affirmation. That is the ego. Women are allowed to find and hold their own happiness, affirming the freedom and personality of women. Women live according to what belongs to them as individuals, their own. They have the freedom to choose a career, freedom of speech, freedom to express their attitude towards life, freedom according to their preferences. In the Novel of Women, the characters Thoa, Lieu, Khong Be... all searched for the ego, happiness, freedom and personality of women. Character Thoa: does not perform tasks that she does not know well; shows love for the man she loves; writes sexually charged words, expressing the wishes and desires of ordinary people. Character Lieu: is willing to end an unhappy marriage to preserve her own personality, does not accept the trampling of her husband's family. Lieu has strongly sought freedom for her life. Character Khong Be: She has strongly pursued her education, followed her husband to a strange land, accepted life in a foreign land for love and also bravely left her husband to return home to find her mother. Willing to speak up to express her own views and thoughts on issues in married life... It can be said that through all the characters and details in the novel, Ly Lan has fought for feminism in all aspects to seek the ego, happiness, freedom and personality of women.

### **Some Feminist Issues in Vietnam and the West**

Vietnamese-Western cultural exchanges have existed since the 17th century, especially developing during the French invasion of our country from the end of the 19th century, then the American empire and from 1986 to the present through peaceful and voluntary ways. Normally, the South is always the land that receives the first external influences. Western culture in contrast to Eastern culture was formed in ancient times. Western people have long been accustomed to a nomadic life, influenced and dependent on nature, so the role of the individual is respected. Throughout its long history, Western culture has shown humanity its difference, which is to respect the individual. The individual is the root of Western culture, different from the East. Western culture is not as harmonious as Eastern culture, but it is willing to accept all differences and considers pluralism as a principle on the path to truth.

Critic Tran Thien Khanh, in “Resisting the loss of voice” pointed out: “Only when women appear as a subject of language, an aesthetic subject, an experiential subject, a subject who creates literary values, then there will be women’s literature. And only when women write as a subject - an agent against the diffusion of masculinity, the male determination and construction of femininity; denying the fake, assigned and biased discourse “women are...”, openly opposing the manipulation of the image of women in men’s civilization; demanding that men be made a problem that needs to be re-perceived and re-interpreted... then there will be feminist literature...”

Feminist writing (Écriture Féminine). From Hélène Cixous: encouraging women to reap joy in their bodies and in their writing, so that joy can be clearly revealed in their work. Writing is the confident expression of "femininity" in language and the ability to express oneself: exploring women's needs, desires, experiences... The Second Sex by Simone de Beauvoir. Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) is a French writer, existentialist philosopher, feminist theorist and active participant in political and social movements, especially the feminist movement. Beauvoir acknowledged the fact that women are weaker than men in many ways. The problem is to find out the real cause of this weakness in order to overcome it. Beauvoir rejected all religious and philosophical myths about this cause. Beauvoir also affirmed that this weakness is not mainly caused by the biological structure of the body, by the difference in the role of the two sexes in reproduction, by the difference in sexuality, or by economic causes. These factors also play an important role that needs to be considered. but not the fundamental cause.

Ly Lan was really strongly influenced by Western culture and perhaps because she was born and raised in a land with many Western influences, learned the language and lived for about ten years. The outstanding characteristics are respect for the individual, valuing freedom and being very active. Feminism originated in the West, following many other previous theories. Ly Lan absorbed feminism very intentionally. On the one hand, she learned about its origins, identified the stages of development, and learned how to reflect. On the other

hand, she realized that feminism in Vietnam was still very rudimentary and she chose writing as a way to influence, speak up, and promote feminism, because before that, the issue of feminism in Vietnam, especially in literature, was expressed very little and only a small part, only hinting at the fate of women.

Although influenced by the West, because she has Vietnamese blood, grew up and lived in Vietnam for a long time, she has a harmonious reception. Ly Lan does not deny Vietnamese culture, the Vietnamese way of life. In the way of presentation, there is harmony, composure, coherent presentation, simple language, rich in reality. Ly Lan always tries to find her own way with personal identity and containing the half-tone of her community and people.

From the reality in Vietnam, in the previous period, the awareness of women's issues was more or less mentioned by writers and poets. Ho Xuan Huong is considered a phenomenon of Vietnamese medieval literature. Although society at that time did not value women's equality, she herself had a deep awareness of the role of women, which is clearly shown through the way the author calls her name: Small areca nut, stinky betel leaf/This is Xuan Huong's work, already smeared. In the Tale of Kieu by writer Nguyen Du, women's rights are also viewed from the perspective of men, which is Nguyen Du's timeless view (letting Thuy Kieu actively seek out Kim Trong to swear an engagement). That was a time but at that stage the issue of feminism was not clearly expressed in poetry and literature. Coming to the modern Vietnamese literature, female poet Xuan Quynh is bold and determined in love. She has a new concept of love that we rarely see in the previous period. That is, being ready to give up selfishness and inappropriateness to find a noble love, full of altruism, sincere in love: Fierce and gentle/Noisy and quiet/The river does not understand itself/The waves find their way to the ocean. Or it is also the subtle desires in love but it is still the subtlety in love, without physical desires: Just the thing of living together/The joy with you is the greatest/The little heart lies in the chest/Every moment the heart beats for you.

Mid-20th century to the 60s, 70s. The expression of feminism is towards personal freedom, physical freedom,... From 1980 to now, the demand of feminists has the right to speak. In Ly Lan's works, the issue of feminism is clearly expressed through each aspiration and desire of women in marital relationships, in love. She clearly expresses the will, freedom, and right to live according to the wishes of individual women (Lieu divorces her husband; Thoa acts according to her will, does not listen to orders to shoot people she does not know, chooses her own life; Khong Be decides to buy a house, buy a car, is ready to leave her husband to return to Vietnam to find her mother...). She has let women speak up about their wishes and carry out those wishes proactively, without being constrained. As a writer standing in the middle of modern times, Ly Lan has seen reality through the eyes of women. A pair of feminist eyes, understanding, sympathetic. In that reality, there are also aspirations, physiological needs, worldly desires that were not present in literature of the previous period. The language in the work is simple, plain, close; realistically and vividly depicting the scene of marital life: “Ted’s arms tightened gradually, the long, suffocating kiss made Khong Be’s body tense, she stood on her tiptoes, leaned forward, her two hands reached up to grab her husband’s neck, and kissed back. Ted’s two hands lifted his wife’s buttocks. Khong Be curled her legs around her husband’s hips. Their lips continued to lick and suck each other while Ted carried his wife to bed”... Khong Be crawled back and forth on her husband’s stomach, her two knees tightly clamped on both sides of his hips. Each dialogue acts as a rhythm for each crawl, each thrust... Ted jumped up and pushed his wife back, pulled her legs up to his neck, and leaned forward to slowly sip”... In short, the issue of feminism in Vietnam and in Western countries both aim at the common goal of expressing the needs, aspirations, rights to life, happiness, freedom and personality of women. However, in Vietnam this is expressed in a more reserved way, only a few authors express this issue truthfully and clearly. In the West, feminism is expressed as an obvious thing, women and men are the same.

## V. Conclusion

In Ly Lan's works, the issue of Feminism is the central issue and is favored by her. With a sharp writing style, it seems to hit the psychology of social life as an important and breakthrough revolution for women. Reading Women's Novels, we can feel the writer's intention. Sometimes expressing the gentle and subtle, sometimes the strong climax of women, she also speaks up to affirm the rights of women to be equal, to be loved, and always respected. Ly Lan's Women's Novels seem to fight for feminism to seek the ego, happiness, freedom and personality of women as an independent subject worthy of respect in Vietnam in particular and Western countries in general.

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