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**A Feminist Reading of Dan Brown's *The  
Da Vinci Code***

*An Extended Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for  
a Master's Degree in Anglo-Saxon Literature and Civilisation*

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## DEDICATION

Praise be to Allah who bestowed his mercy upon me in order to complete this humble piece of work.

First and Foremost, I would like to show endless gratitude to my parents who accompanied me on this amazing journey. I hope that this work did justice to all your efforts to put me at ease whenever possible. This humble work is as much mine as yours.

My deepest thanks go to all my relatives especially my maternal aunts Nora, Fairouz and Sihem and my paternal aunt Souad who did not only feed me with toothsome meals, but with love, care, and attention. You are my second mothers. I shall also thank my siblings Kawther, Akram and Doha for being there for me when needed.

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To all those who were there for me, but my memory failed to recall, your presence was appreciated.

To my future wife, I hope that I will treat you fairly, and love you unconditionally because with you, I will be the happiest .

To all the oppressed women of the world, hold on, and never lose hope because your strength is yet to be reckoned. To all men and women fighting for women and men, your fight will come to fruition soon hopefully.

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## Abstract

This work deals with the representation of women in *The Da Vinci Code*. The points tackled within this work are the ways that the writer used to portray women. These women have been presented as characters who are empowered as strong women either being depicted as educated members of society or holding important jobs like keeper of important institutions as a church or an agent of DCPJ, a job where smartness is a prerequisite. There are many symbols like the Mona Lisa that are used in order to convey Brown's idea about women empowerment. The theme of gender equality was also explored as the protagonists were a man and a woman. In the first chapter, the reader will be introduced to a movement often misunderstood, namely Feminism, as well as the different waves of feminism, feminist literary criticism and a brief explanation of Feminist theology. The second chapter is a Feminist analysis of the different elements in *The Da Vinci Code* with particular interest on the empowerment and marginalisation of women.

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# General Introduction

Literature is a field that has allowed humanity to look beyond the obvious matters and try to grasp the underlying meanings that are present in different artistic works. It has also been a means to attack or defend causes that are of one's concern. Literature has also developed to become a field that did not only comprise works of fiction and non-fiction, but also to involve different schools of criticism thanks to which one could read one work from different perspectives.

This research work is about *The Da Vinci Code* which is a contemporary novel written by Dan Brown. It can be categorised under different genres ranging from a thriller to a detective fiction. Dan Brown is an American writer known for his thought-provoking novels like *Digital Fortress* (1996) and *Deception Point* (2001) which revolve around secret governmental organisations or *Angels and Demons* (2000) which explores the eternal struggle between science and religion. His prominent work *The Da Vinci Code* was met with instant success in the United States and reined as a best-seller for seven consecutive weeks in a row. Its popularity was spurred by the controversy that tackles polemics matters like the marriage of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, the role of the church in annihilating the pre-Christian elements like sacred feminine and goddess worship and the existence of a Holy Grail. However the most contentious point about his work is his claim that the recounted historical facts are true.

Some of the observations about the novel are that it has reignited the myth about The Holy Grail, a cup which is supposed to have been used by Jesus. It has also embodied the Holy Grail in the form of person as to suggest that the lineage of Jesus Christ is as sacred as The Holy Grail. The Novel also brought to light another recurrent theme in Brown's writings: Secret organisations. Opus Dei and Priory of Sion are two organisations that act in complete secrecy to sustain their beliefs. Opus Dei is a catholic group that believes that the church has gone too liberal for their taste, and thinks that it should go back to stricter ways. These ways,

if adopted, will be detrimental to what concerns Brown in his novel: the cause of women. The reason lies in the fact that Opus Dei regards women as the reason behind humanity being thrown out of Heaven. On the other hand, Priory of Sion is an organisation that seeks for the continuation of the sacred feminine in order to keep a balance in this world between man and woman. The aforementioned matters have triggered the following questions: Is *The Da Vinci Code* a novel written in defence of women? How did Dan Brown promote women in his novel? What roles did Dan Brown attribute to women?

The possible answers are that *The Da Vinci Code* might be a feminist novel par excellence, and that the ways Dan Brown used (used what??) could seem intricate, but did clearly convey his idea about what treatment should be granted to women. Therefore, feminism and feminist literary criticism will be applied on *the Da Vinci Code* in order to analyse women's roles and positions in this novel.

This work is divided into two chapters, the first one deals with the history of feminism, major figures, and the different waves of this movement. There is also an explanation of literary feminist criticism as well as a definition of feminist theology including some of the prominent categories. All of the information about feminism will pave the way to criticise *The Da Vinci Code* from a strictly feminist perspective.

The second chapter will be devoted to the analysis of the novel on the basis of feminism dealing with women's empowerment as well as the marginalisation of women in *The Da Vinci Code* novel .

Chapter One  
Feminism and  
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**Chapter One: Feminism and Feminist Theories**

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## **1.1. Introduction**

The present chapter deals exclusively with feminism which is a movement by men and women for women, to women. In this first part, an endeavour to introduce one of the most misunderstood movements throughout history will be made. At first, there are many and various definitions of what feminist or a feminist is. Light is shed on some of the most well-known figures of feminism, and some other lesser known personages who have had a certain impact on the rise and evolution of this movement. A broad yet detailed chronological account of the history of feminism is put forward. One also tries to make a short presentation of feminist theology generally speaking, and Christian feminist theology specifically. A brief categorisation of the different branches of Christian feminist theology according to Ron Rhodes is provided. To put it in a nutshell, this chapter attempts to offer an understanding of feminism and one of its sub-branches as an approach to tackle *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown.

## **1.2. Feminism**

Throughout history, many movements have created huge controversies because they dared criticise well-established norms or institutions whether at a social, political or religious scale. Feminism can be thought of as the typical example of an iconoclastic movement that aimed at instigating change. The controversy that surrounds feminism is mainly concerned with the fact that these feminists challenged the oldest rule to have ever existed, namely patriarchal dominion. Putting men at the centre and relegating women to outsiders and even to outcasts in society, is called androcentrism<sup>1</sup>. The latter occurs when we (often unconsciously) treat males and masculinity as the norm and anything else as “other” or different. As the feminist scholars Susan M. Shaw and Janet Lee (2015) explain, androcentrism is the “confusion of maleness with humanity, putting men at the center and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://quizlet.com/11459871/gender-studies-quiz-2-flash-cards/>

relegating women to outsiders in society”. The objective that feminists wanted to reach was the transcendence of traditional notions regarding men as "humans" and women as "others".

Although some people misunderstand feminism, and believe that it is a never-ending fight between "man" and "woman", it is definitely not the case. In her book *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, Gloria Jean Watkins better known by her pen name Bell Hooks (2000) provides a definition related to how Feminism is not a gender struggle:

Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. (...). I liked this definition because it did not imply that men were the enemy. By naming sexism as the problem it went directly to the heart of the matter. Practically, it is a definition which implies that all sexist thinking and action is the problem, whether those who perpetuate it are female or male, child or adult. It is also broad enough to include an understanding of systemic institutionalized sexism. As a definition it is open-ended. To understand feminism it implies one has to necessarily understand sexism (p.1).

Nonetheless, Millicent Fawcett, née Garrett<sup>2</sup> concedes that “feminism has as its goal to give every woman the opportunity of becoming the best that her natural faculties make her capable of” (Fawcett, 1878, p.357); the message that Millicent Garrett Fawcett tries to convey to women is that the only person that a woman ought to outdo is herself and try to achieve what her capacities allow her to as a normal human being. Whereas, Rebecca

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<sup>2</sup> ( 1847-1927) A British lady who led the suffrage movement in England for more than 50 years

West's definition of feminism in *The Clarion*<sup>3</sup> is humorous (1913): "I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or a prostitute...". In her statement, Rebecca West implies that people who misunderstand feminism think that whenever a woman who tries to distinguish herself from her fellow women and humans is a feminism while it is her basic right to be whatever she wants to because a woman can act as freely as any man.

Feminism as a movement is the fight for women rights but as a concept it is far wider than that, feminism is seeking to restore balance to the world, a world run by self-centred egoistic men for when God created the first woman from man's rib, God meant for her to have an important part in life, but men denied her that role, leading the world to a horrid state and said state will never be fixed unless women are restored to their role as partners with men neither less nor more. Feminism is a multi-faceted movement aimed at establishing gender equality for women at political, social, and economic scales. To put it in a nutshell, feminists aim to put an end to any forms of gender-specific discrimination against women.

### **1.2.1. Feminist Figures**

One of the first figures to rise for women was Plato (380 BC), the famous Greek philosopher who wrote in *The Republic*:

I said: Are dogs divided into hes and shes, or do they both share equally in hunting and in keeping watch and in the other duties of dogs? Or do we entrust to the males the entire and exclusive care of the flocks, while

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<sup>3</sup> The Clarion is a British weekly newspaper

we leave the females at home, under the idea that the bearing and suckling their puppies is labour enough for them? (p. 307).

In the aforementioned quote Plato tries to use his wit to display to those who that equality between both sexes are equal, and that a woman is capable of doing marvels besides staying at home and rearing children.

Christine De Pizan (also spelled De Pisan), born in 14th-century in Italy but raised in France, has been described as the first Western woman to live by her pen and “take up her pen in defence of her sex” (de Beauvoir, 1949, p105). Well educated by her father, she began writing aged 25, after her husband died, earning enough to support three children, a niece, and her own mother. Her most famous book, *The City of Ladies* (1404), criticizes learned books that spread ‘so many wicked insults about women and their behaviour’; three allegorical women – Reason, Rectitude, and Justice – discuss the roots of misogyny. ‘The man or the woman in whom resides greater virtue is the higher’, she argued; ‘neither the loftiness nor the lowliness of a person lies in the body according to the sex, but in the perfection of conduct and virtues.’ she was a court writer who worked for aristocratic families. She broke with the traditional roles assigned to women in several ways during a time when women had no legal rights and were considered a man's property (Lloyd, 2005).

Being one of the fewest women of her time to have had an education; she began to address the debate about women that was happening during her life through works like *Letters to the God of Love* (1399), *The Take of the Rose* (1402), and *Letters on the Debate of the Romance of the Rose* (1401-1403). *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1404) is considered to be the first feminist text written by a Western woman.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/cityladies/context.html>

De Pizan profiled leading female figures from history and was one of the forerunners of gender equality. She continued to defend the rights of women in *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* (1405) which lauds upon the virtues of women and how they are just as good as men when given an opportunity (Lloyd, 2005). The works of Christine de Pizan, "*The City of Ladies*" and "*The Treasure of the City of Ladies*" were consequential in implementing the seeds for later generation's movements of feminism.<sup>5</sup>

The illustrious fight for the rights of women was not exclusively the preoccupation of the female sex; an early prominent advocate of the cause of women was the 15th-16th century German writer Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim's powerful treatise *Declamation on the Pre-eminence and Nobility of the Female Sex*, in which he complements women. The treatise proves his genuine influence in a very early wave of what one may call feminism, which had emerged in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

It is an agreed-upon truth that the early roots of feminism were all connected to religious practice; as discusses Margaret Walters (2005) "Some of the first European women to speak out for themselves, and for their sex, did so within a religious framework, and in religious terms" (p.6).

Julian of Norwich was an English anchoress who is famed for being a Christian mystic. She is also known for having written *Revelations of Divine Love* that was acknowledged as the first book to be written by a woman in the English language (Flood,2016). On the other hand, Margery Kempe is regarded as the first person to dictate an autobiography, namely *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Flood, 2016).

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<sup>5</sup> <http://webpage.pace.edu/nreagin/tempmotherhood/spring02g/paper%202.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/agrippa-nettesheim/>

The well-deserved title of New World Poet that Anne Bradstreet grabbed head and shoulders earned her the recognition of her peers. Anne Bradstreet née Dudley never had a formal education at school, but her teaching was the feat of her father who was himself a very well-read person. In her poem “The prologue” She tried to defend herself against the patriarchy of Puritans who believed that a woman should only be confined to house caring and children upbringing at best. She stood for her basic right to be a writer, and more importantly. Her literary style was the best proof to her detractors.<sup>7</sup>

One of the illustrious women to have ever had an impressive set of ideas that women which can still recognize and respond to was Mary Astell; born in Newcastle upon Tyne on 12 November 1666. Little is known about her life but the rare letters she addressed to important aristocrats throughout her life. After undergoing a miserable period of time mourning upon her life as a woman who could not amount to what a man could, she decided to take her fate into her own hands and head to London with only little money, and the addresses of a few relatives who would not be of much help to her. Her main achievements consist in *Her Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (2 parts, 1694–97) where a scheme for a women's college was offered, an idea far in advance of the time. The project was not completed, and her ideas were satirized in the *Tatler*; a British literary and society journal by Richard Steele in 1709 and published for two years, by Jonathan Swift. However, Daniel Defoe, most famous for his novel *Robinson Crusoe*, supported the idea adamantly. Mary Astell wrote in her book *Some Reflections upon Marriage*: "If all Men are born free, how is it that all Women are born Slaves?" She also urged women to think for themselves, to judge clearly and sensibly, rather than waste all their time in acquiring graceful social skills and accomplishments. Astell also argued that women were just as capable as men; all they lacked was a rigorous training that would ‘cultivate and improve

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<sup>7</sup> <http://world.intellectualprops.com/summaries/feminist-themes-in-the-works-of-anne-bradstreet/>

them'. She generously supported other women as it was the case for Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the wife of the ambassador of Britain to Turkey at that time, writer of *Turkish Letters*<sup>8</sup>. Walters (2005) explains:

Astell's negative stance towards men and marriage did not find much appeal with women of her generation. But her great contribution to feminism was the way she prompted women to take themselves in a serious matter, to believe in their own instinct, to make their own life choices by developing their talents and educating themselves (p.29).

After the religiously soaked pieces of writings that rose during the 16th and 17th centuries, many women writers started releasing themselves from the pressure of religious discomfort and came into prominence during the 18th century. It was only towards the end of the 18th century that other women would speak out forcefully for themselves, or put forward a powerful feminist programme (Ibid, p.30).

Through the 18th century, the situation of women was changing. In a growing bourgeois society, not many women were working alongside their husbands in family businesses. At the same time, an increasing number of members of the soft sex were being educated, at least to read and write. There were also more women who were also writing and publishing, and in many different genres; they were numerous enough to annoy Samuel Johnson, who devoted some time to mock the new 'Amazons'<sup>9</sup> of the pen' (Walters, 2005, p.30). Samuel Johnson, out of contempt for women who had the guts of defending themselves in the most peaceful way possible, namely, writing, satirises them

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Mary\\_Astell.aspx](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Mary_Astell.aspx)

<sup>9</sup> Amazon is defined as "A member of a legendary race of female warriors believed by the ancient Greeks to exist in Scythia or elsewhere on the edge of the known world." Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 8th edition

and treats them as ‘Amazons’ to imply that they are yahoos who are not meant to have an education because they do not need it (Ibid).

The greatest of these feminist ‘Amazons’ was Mary Wollstonecraft. Her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was published in 1792, and still speaks directly to us. But she was by no means alone. Catherine Macaulay was one of the women figures of the 18th century. She is well-known for her multi-volume *History of England*. In 1790, she wrote *Letters on Education*, arguing, as Wollstonecraft would do a little later, that women’s weaknesses were utterly abnormal and unnatural, but were yielded by the bad quality of education that women were subject to. Macaulay was also a ferocious opponent to the sexual double standard, insisting that a one single sexual experience does not turn a virgin into a wanton. She adamantly discarded the notion that women were ‘the mere property of men’, with no right to behave as one craved<sup>10</sup>.

She was a great supporter of the equality between both sexes. She also spurred women to think of themselves as more than objects of physical desire, as she asserted "my pride and my prejudices lead me to regard my sex in a higher light than as the mere objects of sense" (Cited in Macaulay, 1790, 62). Indeed, she believed that both sexes ought to seek for virtue, which, since it involves understanding and acting on moral principles grasped by reason<sup>11</sup>.

Mary Wollstonecraft was born in 1759 to a middle-class family; she was born in a time where education was scarcely available for women. The most fortunate ones were taught either by their mothers or governesses who lacked proper training. The late 18th century witnessed the flourishing of private schools from girls coming from the middle class, but many had one common goal: prepare them for marriage. Wollstonecraft was

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<sup>10</sup><http://copyrightland.net/feminism/the-18th-century-amazons-of-the-pen.htm>

<sup>11</sup><http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/catharine-macaulay/>

essentially self-educated. To her fortune, Priests from a neighbouring church helped her by providing books which she read them religiously (Walters, 2005, p.31).

After a seemingly endless series of menial jobs as a companion to an old lady, needle working or governess to an aristocratic family, her life drastically changed when she was offered a job by Joseph Johnson as a translator and reviewer. She was now able of improving her reading and writing skills. She published *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, in 1787; it is a call for girls to be given the chance to develop the abilities that God granted them with. Her magnum opus, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, followed in 1792 where she sets out to speak ‘for my sex, not for myself’, though she admits that ‘most of the struggles of an eventful life have been occasioned by the oppressed state of my sex’ (p.214).

She takes the simple but crucial step of casting the rights of *man*, on *woman* because she believed they were equal. Despite her belief that a better education for women is pivotal, Wollstonecraft also accepted that, though better education for women is all-important, it cannot change everything: ‘Men and women must be educated in a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in’ (Walters, 2005, p.33).

Mary Wollstonecraft was one of the first English women to write with eloquence, and at times with anger, about the rights of women – and the struggle they are often faced with in life. Her writings are of ever-lasting fashion, and a great deal of many modern women has responded joyfully, and gratefully, to her work (Walters, 2005, p.37)

By the 19th century, little changed for women since home-schooling by incompetent governesses was still popular, and women were still regarded as properties rather than companions. The most notable work championing women rights was *A Plea for Women* by Marion Reid, a Scotswoman, which proposed a Western agenda for women's

rights, including voting rights for women. Her work has been described as the most thorough and effective statement by a woman since Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* (Walters, 2005, 41)

The two best-known 19th-century arguments for women's rights were written by men; though in both cases, the authors – William Thompson and John Stuart Mill – confessed being influenced and inspired by their wives. In 1825 the Irish-born William Thompson published his *Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women, against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Restrain them in Political and thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery*. The Appeal was in part couched as an answer to James Mill's *Essay on Government*, well known at the time, which argued that women need no political rights as they are adequately represented by their fathers or husbands. In 1853, Harriet Taylor married John Stuart Mill, and provided him with much of the subject material for *The Subjection of Women*. However, what is intriguing is that those two women never spoke out for themselves. Their silence can be interpreted as a tactical recognition that a man's arguments might be taken more seriously (Rowbotham, 1973)

The demands of 19th century feminists were not different from those of their predecessors. The great difference, in addition to asking for the improvement of the conditions of education for women, lies in the fact that women were requiring enfranchisement (Jackie Cavedon)<sup>12</sup>

The first united movement of women was Ladies of Langham Place, a group of women who met regularly to discuss the united women's voice necessary for achieving reform. They founded *English Woman's Journal* which was a periodical published monthly between 1858 and 1864. Their main concern was talking over female employment and

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<sup>12</sup> <http://blogs.bu.edu/guidedhistory/moderneurope/ipek-bilici/>

equality issues concerning employment opportunities, and the reform of laws regarding both sexes (Wojtczak, 2009).

Efforts by women to get an education were finally fruitful. Emily Davies, who has played a critical role in changing the educational landscape for women, published *The Higher Education of Women* in 1866. Emily Davies and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon erected the first higher educational institution for women and enrolled five students (ibid).

### **1.2.2. The Waves of Feminism**

Feminism has undergone three waves of activity. First-wave feminism (1830's – early 1900's) alludes to a developed time of women's movement amid the nineteenth century and mid twentieth century in the United Kingdom and the United States. Initially it concentrated on the promotion of equal contract and property rights for women and by the end of the nineteenth century, action shifted primarily on conquering the political ground, particularly the right of women's suffrage (Rampton, 2015).

One of the very first feminists to stand out between first-wave feminists is Florence Nightingale. A British lady who was very passionate about nursing, and wanted to help others very wholeheartedly, but she could never have training in Britain since it was simply unavailable. She had the brilliant idea of moving to Germany to follow her passion. Upon graduation, she went back to London to work in a hospital. Her wizardesque efforts to “formalize nursing education led her to establish the first scientifically based nursing school—the Nightingale School of Nursing, at St. Thomas' Hospital in London”<sup>13</sup> She also took part to the Crimean war where she nursed British soldiers in Turkey. Her most prolific accomplishment is being the first woman to receive the Order of Merit (Selanders, 2014)

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Florence-Nightingale>

In Britain, the Suffragettes contended for women's vote. The Representation of the People Act 1918 was passed granting the vote to women who were more than thirty years old, and owned houses. In 1928 this was extended to all women over twenty-one.<sup>14</sup>

In the United States, leaders of this movement included Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony, who fought for the abolition of slavery prior to championing women's right to vote; all were strongly inspired by the thought of Quakers. American first-wave feminism involved a great deal of different women. Some, such as For instance, Frances Willard was a conservative Christian who belonged to Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Another example is Matilda Joslyn Gage who was more radical, and expressed herself within the National Woman Suffrage Association or individually. American first-wave feminism turned to an end when the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (1919) was passed, granting women the right to vote in all states (Conger)<sup>15</sup>.

Second-wave feminism alludes to the time of action in the mid 1960s and lasting through the late 1980s. The researcher Imelda Whelehan argues that the second wave was a continuation of the prior period of women's liberation including the suffragettes in the UK and USA. Second-wave feminism has kept on existing since that time and exists together with what is termed third-wave women's liberation. The researcher Estelle Freedman analyses first and second-wave feminism saying that the first wave concentrated on rights such as, suffrage, while the second wave was to a great extent concerned with different issues of equality such as ending sexual segregation. The slogan "The Personal is Political" coined by Carol Hanisch is reckoned as the motto of the second wave of feminism (Napikoski, 2015).

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<sup>14</sup><http://www.parliament.uk/about/livingheritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/overview/theyvote/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://people.howstuffworks.com/feminism2.htm>

Third-wave feminism started in the mid 1990s, emerging as a reaction to perceived disappointments of the second wave, and also as a reaction to the backlash against action and movements made by the second wave. Third-wave feminism tries to challenge or shun what it considers the second wave's essentialist determinations of femininity, which sheds too much light on the experiences of upper middle-class white women (Jacob).<sup>16</sup>

Feminism has had other shades of colour. Beginning with Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech to American feminists symbolises the very start of feminism led by women of colour. Another movement Womanism or Womanist is a term coined by Alice Walker, famed for her prize-snatching book *The Colour Purple*, in her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden: Womanist Prose*. She defines a womanist as:

Womanish, the opposite of girlish...Being grown up...A Black Feminist or Feminist of Colour...A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non-sexually (1983, p.6).

The American Heritage Dictionary defines womanism/womanist as “Having or expressing a belief in or respect for women and their talents and abilities beyond the boundaries of race and class; exhibiting feminism that is inclusive especially of Black American Culture”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.feministzine.com/feminist/historical/Third-Wave-Feminism.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=womanism>

As observed, feminism is a movement with a plethora of shades and a myriad of colours. Feminists are not only interested in the present or future of woman in life, but have also shed light on the representation and absence of women in literary works

### **1.3. Feminist Literary Criticism**

The nub of feminist interest is discourse analysis. A great deal of light was shed on what women have produced. For a long span of time, men monopolised the literary milieu, and barely left any room for women to express themselves (Mouro, 2014, p.53).

Therefore, feminist literary criticism accentuates the position of women in literary texts written by both sexes, putting forward the fact that women had a literature proper to them, as expounds John Stuart Mill who once said that ‘if women lived in a different continent from men, and had never read any of their writings, they would have a literature of their own’ (Cited in Mouro, 2014, 54). Code Lorraine (2000) adds that these ‘feminist critics have been engaged in a massive project of recovering ‘lost’ women writers; re-reading and re-evaluating their writing; and re-constructing the literary, cultural, economic and political contexts in which they wrote’ (ibid).

Michelle Lazar (2007) delineates that the objective of feminist critical discourse analysis is ‘to create critical awareness and develop feminist strategies for resistance and change’ (p. 145). Feminist literary criticism can be split into two waves (Mouro, 2014, p.54).

According to Elaine Showalter (1998) ‘the first wave of feminist literary criticism...focused on re-discovery’, when women’s writing was ‘bitextual... it is a double-voiced discourse influenced by both the dominant masculine literary tradition and the muted feminine one’ (p. 402). She concedes that it is through ‘contact with a female

tradition and a female culture' that these women writers were inspired to 'take strength in their independence to act in the world' (p. 411). Showalter (1998) believes that this feminist literary criticism is the outcome of dialogues with 'the Victorian patriarchs (Mill, Carlyle, Arnold, Marx, Freud) and with a textual preference for Victorian women's novels' (p. 406), because of the period's 'interdisciplinarity, its acceptance of women writers, and its friendliness towards women scholars and critics' (Showalter cited in Mouro, 2014, p. 54).

This first wave of feminist literary criticism under the leading voice of Virginia Woolf sought to find out the reasons why women of genius did not find room in the literary canon forced upon them by male writers. Lorraine (2000) sums up Woolf's idea in: '...no woman with Shakespeare's genius would have emerged during the Renaissance, because genius is the product of an education and life experience that was denied to women' (p. 496). This idea joins the one of marginalized and oppressed social class presented by Kristeva. Pamela Bromberg (1990) interprets Woolf's idea as an attempt to urge 'women to write a new fiction, to break the sentence and the sequence in order to tell the truth of women's lives' (p. 6) because the situation of women in the twentieth century differed from that of women in the nineteenth century. The second wave of feminist criticism shifts its interest to recover, historicise, interpret and re-evaluate women's writing (Lorraine, 2000, p. 496), and the result was the term "gynocriticism" coined by Elaine Showalter in order 'to describe the study of women's writing, which she advocated as the core of feminist literary criticism' (Lorraine, 2000, p. 497), to establish a female literary canon. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar focus, on the other hand, on the relationship of these women writers with the patriarchal culture (Cited in Mouro, 2014, p.55)

Thanks to the unbreakable solidarity that women showed with one another, they could start a well-organised movement called feminism. This movement extended from being a social or political movement to the study of literary texts because women writers are concerned with their status as accomplished artists (Mouro, 2014)

#### **1.4. Feminist Theology**

Feminism is the umbrella term that includes many other sub-movements that tackle feminism from their own angle. One of these groups deals with feminism from a theological perspective.

The word theology is constituted of two words: theos "god" and "logos" which stands of "treating of"<sup>18</sup>. So a possible definition for theology is "the field of study and analysis that treats of God and of God's attributes and relations to the universe; the study of divine things or religious truth..."<sup>19</sup>. According to Lynn Japinga (1999)

Feminist theologians believe that the meaning of theology is broader than reflection about God, or even the traditional stress on the rational, objective character of religious thinking. They realize that theology can be shaped by economic status, job security, childhood experience, gender, and race. Therefore, feminist theology begins with the assumption that "women are fully human, made in God's image and loved and valued by God" (Abdekhodaie, 2008, p.13).

In other words, feminist theologians believe that a person's relationship with her creator is not confined to her prayers only, but rather about what happens in the environment the woman lives in and how she is present in that environment.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=theology>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/theology>

Despite the variation in their forms, Feminist theologians believe that traditional theology is patriarchal, because it has been written by men in a culture of patriarchy. Patriarchy is the domination of men over women because of their sex. Consequently, theology is about men and when it talks specifically about women, it is about them in “negative ways” (Young, 1990, p.15), not as part of the larger human category. Second, due to patriarchal dispositions, traditional theology has ignored or caricatured women and women’s experiences. Third, the patriarchal nature of theology is harmful for women, because it inevitably deprives women of their rights. The solution, therefore, is that women need to reconstruct a theology of their own.

Ron Rhodes, in his article, *The Debate over Feminist Theology: Which View is Biblical?*<sup>20</sup> Classifies feminists as secular feminists, New Age feminists, liberal Christian feminists, and evangelical feminists. The reason for proposing these categories is to see how various feminists have responded to the issue of the relationship between faith and women’s liberation, a brief description of each of these types follows:

a) **Secular Feminists:** Secular feminists believe that Abrahamic religions are patriarchal and promote binary gender roles<sup>21</sup>. They also think that religion is behind the unjust treatment women were subject to throughout history. They also believe that the Bible is the source of chauvinistic ideas and that it is an out-of-date text when dealing with the current debate about the position of women in modern society.

b) **New Age Feminists:** These feminists are devoted to the worship of a feminine deity or goddess (ibid).

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<sup>20</sup> <http://home.earthlink.net/~ronrhodes/Feminism.html>

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-elerick/what-is-the-state-of-feminism\\_b\\_8896620.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-elerick/what-is-the-state-of-feminism_b_8896620.html)

c) Liberal Christian Feminists: These feminists believe that the Bible is a male-related work written by men . Liberal Christian Feminists are Christians who interpret the Bible with a hermeneutic of suspicion that tests every single word of the Bible to see whether or not it encourages women's liberation (ibid).

d) Evangelical Feminists: These feminists accept that the Bible is the inspired word of God, but they also think that every single word of the Bible can be used to achieve the liberation of women (ibid).

Lynn Japinga (1999) asserts in her *Feminism and Christianity: An Essential Guide* that:

Feminist theologians engage in these tasks of critique, recovery, and revisioning because they hope to empower women and men to live as whole people with thoughts and feeling, bodies and minds, autonomy and relationships, and confidence that they are valuable human beings (p.22)

Thus, feminism did not only influence secular thought, but also extended its impact to the religious one as well.

## **1.5. Conclusion**

As of now, any reader will have a clearer understanding of what feminism is truly about. As we saw in this chapter, we may concede that one is able of clearing those misconceptions about women willing to put an end to the existence of men in order to replace them as leaders in society. We can also know about the history and the evolution of feminism. We will also be acquainted with men who fought for the cause of oppressed women. One now knows what feminist theology stands for, and what the basics of feminist theology are. One other important point discussed in this chapter is the definition of Christian feminist theology.

Chapter Two  
Feminist  
Analysis of  
The Da Vinci  
Code

**Chapter Two : Feminist Analysis of The Da Vinci Code**

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### **2.1. Introduction**

In the second chapter, a short biography of the author as well as a summary of his piece of work will be displayed. More importantly, this chapter provides an analysis of the different representations of women in the *Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown. A link will be made between Dan Brown and the feminist aspects that he made use of in order to defend the cause of women. There is also an analysis of the in-between meaning behind the use of names, symbols, or even the artistic works like the Mona Lisa by renowned artist Leonardo Da Vinci. The reader will know about the reason that prompted Dan Brown to portray women as such in order to reinforce the idea of gender equality between men and women. One will also be acquainted with many of the historical facts that Dan Brown recounted in his novel in order to strengthen his standpoint about the position of women in today's world through stories from the past.

### **2.2. Biography of the Author**

Dan Brown was born on June 22, 1964 in Exeter, New Hampshire. His mother was a professional sacred musician and his father was a math professor. The background he grew up in as a child influenced him tremendously to delve into the eternal opposition between religion and science. He started his professional career as an English teacher at Phillips Exeter Academy.

Brown's interest in fiction writing began after he read Sidney Sheldon's *Doomsday Conspiracy*, which he read after graduating from Amherst College (Kachka, 2009) , Massachusetts. The reading of this thriller changed his life altogether, and he decided that wanted to work in the same genre. The other sources of influence on Brown's work include

Robert Ludlum for his capacity to scheme plot large-scale, international thrillers; John Steinbeck, for his skills of delineation; and Shakespeare, for his witty use of words<sup>1</sup>

two of Brown's early novels *Digital Fortress* (1998) and *Deception point* (2001) revolve round secret governmental organisations while another one of his novels *Angels and Demons* (2000) is an exploration of the never-ending battle between science and religion. However, it was *The Da Vinci Code* that put Brown on the readers' map (ibid).

The idea of *The Da Vinci Code* crossed his mind while studying history of art at The University of Seville in Spain<sup>2</sup>. Before writing *The Da Vinci Code*, Brown spent a whole year examining the hidden symbols in Da Vinci's work, and reading widely about cryptography and symbology . He went to the Louvre, where he examined many of Da Vinci's paintings. He also interviewed many members from Opus Dei, a controversial organization within the Catholic Church that he studied thoroughly (ibid).

Brown states that the issues that are at the centre of *The Da Vinci Code* are very important to him as a Christian. He claims that *The Da Vinci Code* is a book meant to shed further light on the role of the church , not to criticise it. Brown also claims that everything the characters discuss is not the absolute truth. His novel has met a myriad of books written by angry Christians and Catholics, disapproving on how Brown has reimagined different portions of Christian history according to his own imagination. However, There were people who lauded him for the his work that opened room for discussion not only about Christianity, but every other religion . On the other hand, Brown received tremendous support from nuns who thanked him for raising their concern about how women in the church were overlooked in spite of the fact that they devoted their lives to serve God (ibid).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/davincicode/context.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/dan-brown-1124.php>

After the tremendous success of his novels, Brown gave up teaching and now decided to take writing as his full-time job<sup>3</sup>

### **2.3. Plot Summary**

Sophie Neveu, an agent of the department of cryptology who works in DCPJ, the Judicial Police of France. She is grown up by her grandfather because her parents have passed away in a car accident when she was a child. She arrives at the crime scene at the Louvre, and tells Langdon and warns him that he is on the verge of being arrested by Agent Fache. She tells him to meet in the bathroom.

In the bathroom, Sophie informs Langdon that he is observed by Fache and that he must lure them. She manages to lure the police into thinking that Langdon jumped out of the bathroom's window by throwing the device out of the window.

Sophie informs Langdon that the last line in the secret message, "P.S. Find Robert Langdon," was her grandfather's way of meant to her: P.S. are the initials of her grandfather's nickname for her, Princesse<sup>4</sup> Sophie:

She shook her head. "P.S. are my initials."

"But your name is Sophie Neveu."

She looked away. "P.S. is the nickname he called me when I lived with him." She blushed. "It stood for Princesse Sophie"

Langdon had no response.

"Silly, I know," she said. "But it was years ago. When I was a little girl."

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/da\\_vinci\\_code/dan\\_brown\\_biography.html](http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/da_vinci_code/dan_brown_biography.html)

<sup>4</sup> French for Princess

"You knew him when you were a little girl?"

"Quite well," she said, her eyes welling now with emotion. "Jacques Saunière was my grandfather. (p.60)

Langdon deciphers the second and third lines in Saunière's message: "Leonardo Da Vinci! The Mona Lisa!" Langdon looked up at Sophie, locking eyes with her now. "Your grandfather's meaning was right in front of us all along, and he left us more than enough clues to see it."

Without another word, Langdon pulled a pen from his jacket pocket and rearranged the letters in each line.

O, Draconian devil! Oh, lame saint!

was a perfect anagram of...

Leonardo da Vinci! The Mona Lisa!

Sophie returns to the paintings looking for another clue. The police come back to The Louvre too, and arrest Langdon. Sophie finds a key behind the Madonna of the Rocks. She used the painting as a hostage to leave the museum on their way towards the Swiss bank identified on the back of the key, Langdon delivers an explanatory account of the history of the Priory of Sion and their armed force, the Knights Templar :

Sophie glanced up with a surprised look of recognition. Langdon had lectured often enough on the Knights Templar to know that almost everyone on earth had heard of them, at least abstractedly. For academics, the Templars' history was a precarious world where fact, lore, and misinformation had become so intertwined that extracting a pristine truth was almost impossible. Nowadays,

Langdon hesitated even to mention the Knights Templar while lecturing because it invariably led to a barrage of convoluted inquiries into assorted conspiracy theories. He shares with her that the Priory role is to protect secret documents known as the Sangreal a.k.a the Holy Grail. Langdon's latest manuscript is about this very subject (p.132)

At the bank, André Vernet, the manager of the bank's and a friend of Saunière's, recognizes Sophie and helps her and Langdon escape. Sophie and Langdon use the number left near Saunière's body to open the vault. When they open the vault they find a cryptex, a message delivery device designed by Da Vinci and crafted by Saunière. The cryptex can only be opened with a password

"Yes. It's called a cryptex. According to my grandfather, the blueprints come from one of Da Vinci's secret diaries."

"What is it for?"

Considering tonight's events, Sophie knew the answer might have some interesting implications. "It's a vault," she said. "For storing secret information." (p.166)

Vernet helps Sophie and Langdon escape, but then turns his back on them, because he wants the cryptex, which is the Priory keystone.

Langdon and Sophie go to the house of the British Royal historian Sir Leigh Teabing to ask for his help opening the box. Teabing tells them the legend of the Grail, and gives them the that the Bible was not God's word. He also mentions that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, who was of royal blood, and had children with her. Teabing explains to them the hidden symbols in The Last Supper and the painted representation of

the Magdalene. He tells them that the Holy Grail is actually Mary Magdalene's body and the documents that prove Mary's blood line is related to Jesus. He says he thinks Saunière and the others may have been killed because the Church suspected that the Priory was about to lift the veil off this secret.

"Who is she?" Sophie asked.

"That, my dear," Teabing replied, "is Mary Magdalene."

Sophie turned. "The prostitute?"

Teabing drew a short breath, as if the word had injured him personally.

"Magdalene was no such thing. That unfortunate misconception is the legacy of a smear campaign launched by the early Church. The Church needed to defame Mary Magdalene in order to cover up her dangerous secret—her role as the Holy Grail."

"Her role?"

"As I mentioned," Teabing clarified, "the early Church needed to convince the world that the mortal prophet Jesus was a divine being. Therefore, any gospels that described earthly aspects of Jesus' life had to be omitted from the Bible. Unfortunately for the early editors, one particularly troubling earthly theme kept recurring in the gospels. Mary Magdalene." He paused.

"More specifically, her marriage to Jesus Christ." (p.203)

As Langdon is showing off the cryptex, Silas appears out of the blue and hits him over the head. Sophie and Teabing are held at gunpoint by Silas who demands for the keystone, but Teabing attacks Silas, hitting him on the thigh where his belt of punishment is located, and Sophie exacerbates his pain by kicking him in the face. They tie Silas up .

Sophie, Langdon, the Silas, Teabing, and Rémy escape, and fly to England on Teabing's private plane. Sophie thinks that the writing on the cryptex is decodable if viewed in a mirror.

Sophie smiled inwardly to see that Robert understood her meaning. "I can read the first few words," she said. "It's English." Teabing was still sputtering. "What's going on?" "Reverse text," Langdon said. "We need a mirror." "No we don't," Sophie said. "I bet this veneer is thin enough." She lifted the rosewood box up to a canister light on the wall and began examining the underside of the lid. Her grandfather couldn't actually write in reverse, so he always cheated by writing normally and then flipping the paper over and tracing the reversed impression. Sophie's guess was that he had wood-burned normal text into a block of wood and then run the back of the block through a sander until the wood was paper thin and the wood-burning could be seen through the wood. Then he'd simply flipped the piece over, and laid it in. As Sophie moved the lid closer to the light, she saw she was right. The bright beam sifted through the thin layer of wood, and the script appeared in reverse on the underside of the lid. Instantly legible. "English," Teabing croaked, hanging his head in shame. "My native tongue." (p.252)

They come to understand the poem, which refers to "a headstone praised by Templars" and the "Atbash cipher," which will help them arrive at the password. Langdon remembers that the Knights Templar worshipped the god Baphomet, who is sometimes represented by a large stone head. The word on the Atbash Cipher is Sofia. When they open the cryptex which reveals another cryptex, this one comes with a clue about a tomb where a knight was buried by a pope. They must find the orb that should have been on the knight's tomb

Rémy frees Silas and tell him that he is a follower of the Teacher as well. Silas goes to the church to get the keystone, but when he tries to force Langdon to give it up, Langdon threatens to break it. Rémy intervenes, taking Teabing hostage and thus forcing Langdon to give the cryptex up

Meanwhile, Collet and his men look through Teabing's house and become suspicious when they find that he has been monitoring Saunière. Over the phone, the Teacher instructs Silas to let Rémy deliver the cryptex. The Teacher meets Rémy in the park and kills him. The Teacher calls the police and turns Silas in to the authorities. As Silas tries to escape, he is shot, and he shoots his idol, Bishop Aringarosa (ibid).

Silas takes Bishop Aringarosa to the hospital and goes to a close park, where he succumbs to his wounds. In the hospital the next day, Aringarosa concedes that he heped Teabing because the latter promised he would help the Opus Dei regain favor with the Church.

After meticulous research, Sophie and Langdon discover that Sir Isaac Newton is the knight they are looking for, the one buried by a Pope, because they learn he was buried by Alexander Pope, the poet. They go to Westminster Abbey, where Newton is buried. There, the Teacher dupes them to the garden with a note saying he has Teabing. They go there only to find out that Teabing himself is the Teacher. Teabing suspected that Saunière had decided not to release the secret of the Priory of Sion, because he was under the menace of having Sophie killed if he ever revealed it. Wanting the secret to be public knowledge, he had decided to find the Grail himself.

Teabing hands Langdon the cryptex and asks for their help to open it. Langdon figures out that the password is apple. He opens the cryptex and secretly takes out the papyrus. Then he throws the empty cryptex in the air, causing Teabing to drop his pistol as

he attempts to catch it and prevent the map inside from being destroyed. Suddenly, Fache bursts into the room and arrests Teabing.

The papyrus inside the second cryptex directs Sophie and Langdon to Scotland, where Sophie finds her brother and her grandmother. During the reunion, she discovers that her family is of the bloodline of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Sophie and Langdon part, promising to meet in Florence in a month. Back in Paris, Langdon comprehends the poem, which leads him to the small pyramid built into the ground in the Louvre, where he is sure the Grail must be hidden.

#### **2.4. Women Empowerment**

Among the various female characters or representations in *the Da Vinci Code*, ranging from Sister Sandrine Bieil to The Mona Lisa painting or Sophie Neveu, Dan Brown starts his journey of portrayal in the novel with a brief description about the rules followed inside Opus Dei regarding both men and women:

Men enter the building through the main doors on Lexington Avenue. Women enter through a side street and are "acoustically and visually separated" from the men at all times within the building. Women enter through a side street and are "acoustically and visually separated" from the men at all times within the building (p.24)

In the quote above, Brown implies that the Ultra-conservative organisation uses different standard for men and women. Since Opus Dei believes that women are inferior to men, they are not allowed to go inside the building of the organisation through the main door because they do not deserve this prestige, and are believed to be second-class human beings.

Brown also attacks extremism within Opus Dei when talking about it before he passes on to Sister Sandrine Bieil's<sup>5</sup> view of the organisation when she is asked to help Silas have access to the Church of Saint Sulpice:

She had been shocked to learn that female numeraries?? were forced to clean the men's residence halls for no pay while the men were at mass; women slept on hardwood floors, while the men had straw mats; and women were forced to endure additional requirements of corporal mortification... all as added penance for original sin. It seemed Eve's bite from the apple of knowledge was a debt women were doomed to pay for eternity. Sadly, while most of the Catholic Church was gradually moving in the right direction with respect to women's rights, Opus Dei threatened to reverse the progress (p.36)

In the quote above, Brown conveys his concern about the unjust, yet horrific practices within the organisation of Opus Dei. He wages war against the inhumane actions meant against women for the following reason: Because they are women, and it is their fault if humanity is paying for the original mistake of Eve. He also slams the backward mindset of the organisation and their ideas that belong to "the stone age". Through the last sentence in the aforementioned passage, one can discern Brown's positive attitude towards the improvement of women's rights starting from the church.

Another proof of Brown's inclination to reckon women as leaders is the nickname he grants to Sophie Neveu.

Yes. And the letters P.S.

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<sup>5</sup> Nun and keeper of the Church of Saint-Sulpice.

Post Script?

She shook her head. "P.S. are my initials."

But your name is Sophie Neveu.

She looked away. "P.S. is the nickname he called me when I lived with him." She blushed. "It stood for Princesse Sophie" (p.60)

The use of the term "princesse" which is the French word for the "princess" is flattering for the cause of women's rights. A princess is defined as "a female member of a royal family who is not a queen, especially the daughter or granddaughter of the king or queen"<sup>6</sup>. Making usage of that particular term of endearment for Sophie Neveu is an indication of somebody who is a very important figure in any country whether she is a ruler or not. Throughout the novel, one will find out that having been described as a princess is not a hyperbolic attempt made by the author to exaggerate the virtues of Sophie Neveu.

Another remarkable particularity of Sophie Neveu is the meaning behind her name which was brilliantly attributed to Sophie Neveu; according to Dan Burnstein (2004) "Sofia, in Greek, means wisdom. Her last name, Neveu, is a homonym of the French word nouveau, or new. Combined, the full name adds up to New Wisdom. At the centre of the name Neveu is the word Eve (p.7). This unique choice of name is another hint at the author's inclination toward promoting the status of women because Brown believes that Sophie Neveu in *The Da Vinci Code* represents new wisdom which the world needs. Brown has drawn an image of this woman who made her way into a "chauvinistic" world. Sophie Neveu is the epitome of what a self-made woman is. She works at the DCPJ<sup>7</sup>, but Neveu has the qualities that would allow her to impose herself in this profession that is

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<sup>6</sup> Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 8th Edition

<sup>7</sup> Direction Centrale Police Judiciaire is French for "Central Directorate of the Judicial Police"

usually a job where the number of women is scarce. It is because the use of character's name by the author sometimes hides a secret message to the readers.

The story itself is blended with Neveu's struggles to find her family's secret. It is really interesting to know and understand Neveu's struggles to survive in a situation where the dominion of men exists as an obstacle in finding her family's secret.

Equality is a very important part of human life and women have been struggling to obtain this sought-after innate human right which was taken away from them because of many factors. The writer analyzes the data in *The Da Vinci Code* according to those aspects above.

One of the objectives that feminists have always fought for is the right to have a proper education. The equality in education has been struggled for by women such as the likes of Wollstonecraft or Christine de Pisan or men like Defoe since the dawn of time. Unfortunately, many people worldwide believe that education is only for men. However, some knowledgeable parents put the fate of their daughters between their hands with minimum control over their lives because they realise the importance that educated women bear in any given society.

The equality of education in *The Da Vinci Code* is portrayed in Neveu's education background. As a modern, free-spirited woman, Neveu had access to higher education because her grandfather, Jacques Saunière, believed that women have the right to pursue their studies as long as they wished to. The example can be seen when Brown describes Neveu's education in college. In the novel, it is said that Neveu comes home from university because she wants to surprise her grandfather by coming earlier before the schedule of her holiday; "Sophie looked out the window." "I was on spring break from university. I came home a few days early" (p. 307).

From the example above, the word university is the hint to education. University is the highest educational level that anyone can achieve in the world. The fact of having an educated woman as a leading character is very empowering to women throughout the world.

After Neveu goes back home, she is witness of a scene where her grandfather is performing a sex ritual that leaves her flabbergasted. Having been traumatised and depressed by what she saw, she decided to sever ties with her grandfather, and start a new life on her own. Nevertheless, Neveu takes the informed decision of pursuing her studies rather than giving up; grieving about this separation or even a worse scenario where she would commit suicide i.e. her decision shows how smart she is, and how tough her character is as a woman.

Neveu's decision to continue her education opens the doors for her to get a coveted job as an agent in DCPJ department. Not only did Brown represent Neveu as a well-endowed person in terms of knowledge, but she has also graduated from Royal Holloway, University of London, as a cryptographer. Cryptography is a very intricate field that requires a great deal of knowledge, both secular and religious, about all sorts of subjects in order to be able to decode, break, and unlock codes. As a matter a fact, not anyone can pride with the fact of being a cryptographer. Dan Brown has casted all this great amount of knowledge upon Sophie Neveu in order to depict her as this woman who knows much about religion even though she is not a nun or a priestess. A typical example is when Teabing and Langdon left out Sophie, and did not take her ideas seriously. However, after one glance at the puzzling matter, which was the five-petal rose, she could understand what that symbol was.

Through Langdon and Teabing, Brown speaks recurrently; brings up stories from pre-Christian History, and more exactly about pagan tradition and goddess worship. One can deduce that Brown does not attack Christianity as a religion, but he tries to tell about the vile practices of early Christians to demonise the early pagan symbols. Brown pinpoints the fact that during pagan times women and men were equal. Another discernible point is that Brown talked repeatedly about female deity out of a longing for an improvement the situation of women nowadays through feminine worship in the past in order to instil parity between both sexes: "the Priory's tradition of perpetuating goddess worship is based on a belief that powerful men in the early Christian church 'conned' the world by propagating lies that devalued the female and tipped the scales in favor of the masculine" (p.103).

One could also identify with the hints to "New Age Feminists" through Jacques Saunière who strongly believes in the sacred feminine: "the identities of living Priory members are kept extremely secret," Langdon said, "but the P.S. and fleur-de-lis that you saw as a child are proof. It could only have been related to the Priory" (p.95).

All in all, Brown pictures Neveu as a woman who is educated, yet intelligent. Her character is strong, yet she has very feminine traits. The use of Neveu as one of the two main characters in the story is to challenge the idea of Opus Dei and other people like Bezu Fache who refers to her as a "female cryptologist" who believe that a woman should still pay for Eve's original sin, and bear the consequences by remaining ignorant women who should only pray to God without delving into scientific investigation. Sophie Neveu breaks that demeaning stereotype by participating actively in the quest for the Holy grail either through her knowledge or the many times she saves Robert Langdon from perishing.

The point that Dan Brown raised which is of paramount importance in his novel is the dichotomy between man and woman. Throughout his whole work, one constantly perceives that female and male characters are either complementary or completely different. The first duo is Robert Langdon and Sophie Neveu. Neveu's apparent qualities like her agility and skilful use of physical strength is balanced with Langdon's immense knowledge. They always help each other and their presence is reassuring to each other. Another example is Sister Sandrine Bieil and the mischievous Silas; both Sister Sandrine and Silas are immersed into religion, but each of them interprets religion in his own way. Sister Sandrine's behaviour is welcoming unlike Silas' which is fearsome. Sister Sandrine's demise is a small price to pay in order to achieve his deceitful objective while Sister Sandrine did not sin at all even when her life was in danger. Dan Brown's defence of the idea stating that Mary Magdalene did exist is his way to slam those religious people who changed the principles of Christianity in order to make of it an almost misogynistic scripture: "the Priory's tradition of perpetuating goddess worship is based on a belief that powerful men in the early Christian church 'conned' the world by propagating lies that devalued the female and tipped the scales in favor of the masculine" (p.103)

Thus, conveying the message that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married and contributed to each other's happiness.

Another element that might have been behind Brown's stance for women might be urged by his unconditional love for his wife "Blythe" to whom he dedicated his book, and thanks to whom he published his first less-known book *187 Men to Avoid: A Survival Guide for the Romantically Frustrated Woman* ( Kachka, 2009)

## **2.5. The Marginalisation of Women**

The most marking event that might be construed as against women is the death of Sister Sandrine Bieil. Sister Sandrine Bieil is the nun in charge of keeping the church of Saint-Suplice and is a proponent of tightening the firm of the stand of the church towards women. She regards some of the beliefs of Opus Dei regarding women as very deranging and upsetting:

Opus Dei had always made her uneasy. Beyond the prelature's adherence to the arcane ritual of corporal mortification, their views on women were medieval at best. She had been shocked to learn that female numeraries were forced to clean the men's residence halls for no pay while the men were at mass; women slept on hardwood floors, while the men had straw mats; and women were forced to endure additional requirements of corporal mortification... all as added penance for original sin. It seemed Eve's bite from the apple of knowledge was a debt women were doomed to pay for eternity (p.36)

The murderer of Sister Sandrine is Silas, an albino who is a member of Opus Dei, and a personal servant of the mysterious teacher. Silas has a glamorous history with violence conduct against women. When he was young, his mother was repeatedly the victim of his father's embarrassment because she gave birth to a son with a hard-to-miss skin condition. After fleeing home, he lived on the street and had a fight with a girl whom he almost killed: "over time, he grew strong. When he was twelve, another drifter—a girl twice his age—mocked him on the streets and attempted to steal his food. The girl found herself pummeled to within inches of her life" (p.47).

Sister Sandrine Bieil is believed to have been killed by Silas for she is a woman and believing that women are inferior to men goes hand in hand with the tenets of the Catholic organisation he supports. The death of Sister Sandrine symbolises both sexism and animosity towards women who look forward to a world where a better treatment of women takes place.

## 2.6. Conclusion

One may conclude that Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* is a proof of his genuine portrayal of women through many yet distinct techniques; these techniques were thoroughly thought-out in order to voice his concern about the education of women, or their position in the church. Dan Brown's belief in a better world is embodied in his use of the different characters who are combined together or solely in order to fight ideas like extremism and sexism. Brown has also created characters who vie wholeheartedly for achieving what they wanted, and are fully dedicated to the task at hand. One can also say that Dan Brown's feminist inclinations are present through this novel.

# General Conclusion

Literature as a discipline is a gift to humanity for a better understanding of others. Not only did literature give voice to the voiceless, but it has also allowed people to get to criticize well-established institutions in order to bring them to the court of discussion.

One might say that *The Da Vinci Code* is a feminist novel thanks to the tremendous amount of hints to the empowerment of women. This process was carried out via the different female characters, but also thanks to the portrayal of male characters who were depicted as vile towards women such as Silas, or men who are in favour of a better treatment of women such as Jacques Saunière or Robert Langdon. Brown promoted women through many symbols and ideas.

The very first symbol is the painting of the Mona Lisa that was used as the cover of the novel as well as the depiction of different women from different periods of history in a positive light. They were also characterised as having traits like both mental and physical strength. For example, Neveu knocked off Silas in order to escape the chateau before the police arrived. She did not give in to depression and melancholy, but instead decided to carry on her studies.

The roles attributed to women throughout the novel are quite positive and give a great image of women. For instance, Sophie Neveu works as a Cryptographer in the DCPJ which is a job that requires a very high I.Q, and cannot be performed by anyone. Sister Sandrine Bieil is responsible of the church of Saint-Sulpice which is like a holy place in Paris.

The link with the title consists in the fact that this work is exclusively about feminism and a feminist analysis of *The Da Vinci Code* according to the tenets of feminist literary criticism. Dan Brown's *the Da Vinci Code* is an enigmatic novel that is written from a

## General Conclusion

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feminist point of view where the writer gave an enormous importance to female characters as well as power to his heroine. This novel is an archetype of a feminist novel.

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