

# RESILIENCE AND LIBERATION: ANALYZING WOMEN'S RESISTANCE IN *NO FOURTH RIVER* THROUGH THE LENS OF LIBERAL FEMINISM

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## Abstract

This study is aimed at analyzing the gender issues presented in a literary work by Christine Clayfield. This study explores the manifestations and impacts of women's resistance in the novel *No Fourth River* through the lens of liberal feminism, primarily drawing on Naomi Wolf's concept of power feminism. The analysis is centered on the main character, Christine, and her relentless struggle against patriarchal oppression. Critical forms of resistance, including desire, courage, independence, firmness, and hard work, are identified and explored in detail. Christine's journey reveals how these attributes enable her to confront and overcome systemic injustices. The findings underscore the importance of resilience and agency in women's liberation, empowering us to understand that these are the keys to significant personal and social changes, such as increased self-confidence, elevated social status, financial independence, and the fulfillment of love. This study contributes to the broader discourse on gender equality in literary studies, offering valuable insights into the ongoing struggle for women's rights and empowerment. By contextualizing Christine's resistance within the framework of liberal feminism, the research motivates us to continue the fight for gender equality, empowering us with the knowledge of the keys to personal and social changes.

**Keywords:** *Women's Resistance, Liberal Feminism, Patriarchal Oppression, Power Feminism, Gender Equality, Transformative Empowerment, No Fourth River*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Analyzing women's resistance in literature often reveals the profound struggles and inspiring triumphs of female characters within patriarchal societies (Fitri & Hartono, 2023). This study examines the novel *No Fourth River* and addresses research questions concerning the portrayal of women's resistance through the character of Christine. By employing the theoretical framework of liberal feminism, particularly Naomi Wolf's concept of power feminism, the analysis aims to uncover the various forms of Christine's resistance and their underlying causes.

These research questions and the theoretical framework serve as the guiding lights in our investigation, outlining the critical attributes that define Christine's journey toward liberation.

Christine's resistance against the entrenched inequality and oppression she faces is a central theme in *No Fourth River*. Her journey is marked by a determined effort to escape the cycle of abuse and assert her autonomy. This chapter delves into the multifaceted nature of her struggle, providing a comprehensive understanding of Christine's character and her fight

against patriarchal power. Key aspects such as desire, courage, independence, firmness, and hard work are explored in detail, enhancing our knowledge of Christine's character and her fight against patriarchal power (Bogdana et al., 2023).

Desire emerges as a pivotal force driving Christine's resistance. Wolf's assertion that human desire underpins all actions is evident in Christine's fantasies and aspirations, which fuel her determination to overcome adversity. Her longing to escape her abusive environment and create a better life for herself is a testament to the power of desire in shaping her actions and decisions. (Martina, 2024).

Courage and independence are also crucial elements of Christine's resistance. Her bold decision to leave her abusive home and navigate life in her terms exemplifies her bravery and self-reliance. This analysis highlights Christine's journey toward self-sufficiency and her refusal to succumb to the constraints imposed by a patriarchal society. Her resilience and determination to succeed independently are explored through her various endeavors and achievements, showcasing her growth and development. (Michael et al., 2021).

Finally, the impact of Christine's resistance on her personal and social life is examined. Her triumphs lead to significant changes, including enhanced self-confidence, elevated social status, financial independence, and the fulfillment of love. By achieving success in her career and personal life, Christine transforms her circumstances, challenges societal norms, and contributes to the broader pursuit of gender equality. This chapter underscores the transformative power of resistance and women's potential to redefine societal roles.

The study of women's resistance in literature has evolved significantly, reflecting broader social movements and the shifting landscape of feminist theory. Early feminist literary criticism often centered on the depiction of women as victims within patriarchal narratives, emphasizing their oppression and marginalization. However, more contemporary analyses have shifted towards exploring the agency and resilience of female characters, particularly in their resistance to patriarchal structures. Scholars such as Fitri and Hartono (2023) have highlighted the importance of examining these struggles as both profound and inspiring, contributing to a deeper understanding of gender dynamics in literary texts. This evolution in feminist literary studies underscores the increasing focus on female empowerment and how women characters navigate and resist the constraints imposed by patriarchal societies.

In the context of *No Fourth River*, the application of liberal feminism and Naomi Wolf's concept of power feminism represents a nuanced approach to analyzing female resistance. This framework allows for a detailed exploration of how desire, courage, independence, firmness, and hard work are not merely reactions to oppression but are active strategies of resistance employed by the protagonist, Christine. Recent scholarship, including works by Bogdana et al. (2023), emphasizes the importance of examining these traits as integral to understanding the character's journey toward liberation. This approach aligns with a broader trend in literary studies that seeks to highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of women's resistance, moving beyond simplistic portrayals of victimhood to

celebrate female characters' strategic and often subversive actions.

The impact of Christine's resistance, as analyzed through the theoretical lens of power feminism, also resonates with contemporary discussions on the social and personal transformations that can result from such resistance. Studies like those by Michael et al. (2021) and Martina (2024) have shown that depicting women's resistance in literature often mirrors real-world struggles for gender equality, providing both inspiration and a blueprint for challenging societal norms. The analysis of Christine's character in *No Fourth River* contributes to this ongoing discourse by illustrating how personal empowerment can lead to broader social change. By documenting Christine's journey from oppression to autonomy, the study reinforces the notion that literary representations of resistance are not only reflective of feminist ideals but are also crucial in shaping and advancing those ideals in both scholarly and societal contexts.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist literary criticism has focused on analyzing women's resistance in literature, providing deep insights into how female characters navigate and confront patriarchal structures (Nadia & Nehemia, 2024). This literature review examines the theoretical underpinnings and practical manifestations of women's resistance, drawing on liberal feminism and Naomi Wolf's concept of power feminism. The findings and discussion from the novel *No Fourth River* offer a rich case study for exploring these themes.

Liberal feminism, as a branch of feminist theory, emphasizes the importance of individual autonomy, equal opportunities, and the dismantling of legal and social barriers that impede

women's progress. Naomi Wolf's concept of power feminism expands on these ideas, advocating for women's empowerment through self-assertion and the rejection of victimhood. Wolf (1994) argues that women must harness their inner strength and capabilities to overcome systemic injustices, a perspective that aligns with Christine's journey in *No Fourth River* (Rosemary & Arianto, 2023).

Wolf's (1994) notion of power feminism underscores the significance of desire, courage, independence, firmness, and hard work in women's resistance. Desire, as the foundation of human action, drives individuals to pursue their aspirations despite obstacles (Alison, 1992; Yulianti, 2020). In literature, this desire often manifests in characters' quests for freedom and self-fulfillment. Christine's character in *No Fourth River* embodies this drive, as her fantasies and ambitions propel her to resist the oppressive forces in her life.

Desire plays a crucial role in motivating female characters to resist patriarchal constraints. According to Yulianti (2020), human desire is the basis of all action, and in literature, it often fuels characters' resistance against oppression (Yulianti, 2020). Wolf (1994) posits that when nurtured, women's childhood wishes for happiness and power can lead to significant resistance efforts in adulthood. Christine's longing to escape her abusive environment and build a better life exemplifies this dynamic. Her desires, rooted in a deep-seated need for change, catalyze her resistance against the systemic oppression she faces (Atiyat et al., 2022; Maghfiroh & Zawawi, 2020).

Courage and independence are essential traits for women navigating patriarchal societies. Wolf (1994) emphasizes that women must be free to make their own choices and act

courageously in the face of adversity. Maghfiroh and Zawawi (2020) further highlight that women's courage involves taking responsibility for their gender roles and making bold decisions (Maghfiroh & Zawawi, 2020). Christine's decision to leave her abusive home and her journey towards self-reliance illustrate these principles. Her bravery in escaping a toxic environment and subsequent efforts to build an independent life reflect the core tenets of liberal feminism.

Firmness and hard work are critical components of women's resistance and empowerment (Sarah, E., 2020). Wolf (1994) asserts that women must be relentless in their beliefs and willing to work tirelessly to achieve their goals. Christine's character demonstrates this through her steadfast refusal to succumb to alcoholism and her relentless pursuit of career success. Her determination to overcome personal and professional challenges underscores the transformative power of resilience and hard work.

The impact of women's resistance extends beyond individual transformation, contributing to broader societal changes. (Anand, 2019; Nadia & Nehemia, 2024; Wajiran, 2024). Christine's achievements in *No Fourth River* led to increased self-confidence, elevated social status, financial independence, and the fulfillment of love. These outcomes highlight the multifaceted nature of resistance and its potential to redefine gender roles and challenge societal norms. As Christine's story illustrates, women's resistance can inspire others and foster a more equitable society.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

The primary data for this research is derived from the novel *No Fourth River* by Christine Clayfield (2017). This text

serves as the central source for analyzing the various forms of women's resistance exhibited by the main character, Christine. Key passages and quotes from the novel are meticulously examined to identify and understand the manifestations of resistance against patriarchal oppression. Specific focus is given to the sections that illustrate Christine's desire, courage, independence, firmness, and hard work as forms of resistance (Sarah & Chloe, 2023).

Supporting data is gathered from secondary sources, including scholarly articles, books, and theoretical frameworks on liberal and power feminism. Notable works include Naomi Wolf's *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century* (1994), which provides the theoretical foundation for the analysis (Wolf, 1994; Yulia, 2009). Additional secondary sources include articles by feminist scholars such as Andrea Dworkin and contemporary analyses on gender studies, which offer contextual and theoretical support to the primary data.

The data collection involves a close reading and textual analysis of *No Fourth River*. Key passages illustrating Christine's resistance to patriarchal oppression are identified and extracted for detailed examination. Concurrently, relevant secondary sources are reviewed to contextualize and support the primary data analysis. These secondary sources are selected based on their relevance to the themes of liberal feminism, power feminism, and women's resistance.

The analysis uses a qualitative approach, focusing on thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes related to women's resistance in the novel. The process involves several steps:

- 1) **Identification of Themes:** Initial readings of *No Fourth River* help identify significant themes related to Christine's resistance, such as desire, courage, independence, firmness, and hard work.
- 2) **Textual Analysis:** Select detailed passages to understand how these themes are portrayed. Christine's language, actions, and character development are examined to uncover the various forms of resistance she exhibits.
- 3) **Theoretical Application:** The identified themes are then analyzed through the lens of liberal feminism and power feminism, using Naomi Wolf's theoretical framework. This step involves correlating Christine's actions and attributes with the principles of desire, courage, independence, firmness, and hard work, as described by Wolf.
- 4) **Synthesis of Findings:** The findings from the textual analysis are synthesized to form a comprehensive understanding of Christine's resistance. This synthesis includes discussing the causes and impacts of her resistance and how it aligns with or diverges from the theoretical perspectives.
- 5) **Contextual Analysis:** Supporting data from secondary sources are used to contextualize the primary findings. This involves comparing Christine's resistance with broader feminist theories and real-world examples of women's struggles against patriarchal oppression.
- 6) **Conclusion Drawing:** Finally, conclusions are drawn based on the synthesized findings, highlighting the significance of Christine's resistance in the context of feminist literary studies and the broader discourse on gender equality.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

To analyze women's resistance to the main character of the novel *No Fourth River*. The first step is to find forms of women's struggle that are based on inequality and women's oppression from patriarchal power. From every form of women's resistance that exists in the main character of the novel *No Fourth River* that be found, each has a cause as a background that leads to acts of resistance.

##### *Resistance of The Main Character*

The problems faced by the main character regarding inequality and the oppression of women from patriarchal power are reflected in the novel *No Fourth River*. In this context, the main character deals with her problems by fighting against those who put pressure on her and issues in her life. Christine carried out this resistance based on a desire to change her way of life to get out of the cycle of oppression of women she experienced. Christine shows some of her resistance actions in the form of positive characteristics that she has—using the concept of resistance in liberal feminism from Naomi Wolf about power feminism, which aims to liberate women from injustice. Christine's resistance has several forms: desire, courage, independence, firmness, and hard work.

##### a) Desire

Wolf said that every woman's childhood wish for happiness and power was captured in her fantasies. The often-created fantasies will bring out the wishes of big hopes and dreams for women. Few can survive and fight because a wish must come true. Human desire is the basis of all human action (Yulianti N, 2020). According to critics such as Andrea Dworkin, the goal of eros is mutuality. However, what do we do when we discover that, even after all that

heightened awareness, there will be a desire, not for revenge but to reach out and possess desire (Wolf, 1994)? This can be seen in Christine's character, who often has desires and fantasies about what she wants to achieve amidst her difficulties.

My sadness, which had always been a deep anger festering beneath the surface, started to ripen into rage. I found myself unwilling to follow the rules any longer. I wanted nothing more than to run away from my life and everything. (Clayfield, 2017: 55)

In the paragraph above, it can be seen that Christine began to realize that the things happening in her life were wrong. Christine decided she did not want to follow the rules anymore, both in medicine and in her household, because it only made her condition worse and more stressful. Christine's desire to escape from the life she is currently living is the most significant factor due to her father's unrelenting mental abuse. Physical violence and insults are always received every day. Her father always says the nickname of a stupid child who is never beneficial. A life full of torment and pressure made Christine a strong character. Even so, she grew up to be a very loving child; she wanted love and wanted to share her passion with others.

#### **b) Courage**

Wolf emphasized that women have complete freedom over their way of life and do not need permission to achieve gender equality. Women should have potential, act aggressively, and be brave in facing all challenges (Maghfiroh & Zawawi, 2020). Similar to the actions taken by Christine, after years of living with threats of violence, she dared to take action to leave her home to go through

all the pressure, mental abuse, and physical violence that came from her father. This was a courageous decision made by Christine because she left aimlessly. Even though, in the end, Christine was stuck with her decision, at least she was free and could live away from her father's violence. This is shown in the paragraph below:

“I am leaving. Moreover, I’m never coming back!” I declared frantically, taking three stairs at a time. I could hear him coming after me, but I was faster. I descended the stairs quickly, then burst out of the front door.

“Where are you going?” my father asked me from the front door.

“Anywhere is better than where you live!” I shouted back to him, seething. It was the final straw for me.

After 18 years of living with his random moods and under the constant threat of violence, I was done with it (Clayfield, 2017: 73).

All decisions will always have consequences, and the most important thing is being accountable for the decisions that have been made. Women's courage does not mean that women do everything they can to become superior; women's courage means they can take full responsibility for their gender roles (Maghfiroh & Zawawi, 2020). In her life, Christine has always faced many difficult choices.

#### **c) Independence**

Wolf asserts that women have masculine ideas about independence (Wolf, 1994). Women's independence is formed due to many factors, including their life experiences. Christine has gone through many challenging things in her life. Christine's self-strength to endure

all the difficulties in her life has shaped her to become a woman who is independent in all things. As illustrated in the paragraph below:

I had to get my life together alone, without any financial help from anyone. I stepped out into the world like a child, bright-eyed and nervous on their first day of school. My self-esteem was low, and I worried a lot about my appearance.

I started working for Kane in his diamond company, just across from my mum's house. (Clayfield, 2017: 105)

The paragraph above explains that Christine is ready to take responsibility for her own life without the help of her family, including without financial assistance from anyone. Christine started working at the diamond company owned by her brother Kane; she got a position as a secretary and was in charge of managing all employee salaries. The job was just a transition for Christine to stand independently and start planning her own business. Having experience winning triathlon trophies taught Christine to apply what she does to achieve victory. She tries to apply the principles she used to achieve victory in sports to his business; she will work hard until he succeeds.

#### **d) Firmness**

Naomi Wolf emphasized that women must be strong and opinionated to prove themselves with free will and break away from male hegemony. Women have strong potential and resilience in facing all challenges (Maghfiroh & Zawawi, 2020).

That was the end of my heavy drinking. I never drank whisky, vodka, or spirits again. I learned that day that those kinds of drinks can

mess with your brain, give you blackouts, and make you lose control. (Clayfield, 2017: 95)

In the quote above, Christine shows firmness towards herself. She said that there would never again be liquor on her. Christine realized that drinking would only make her brain more chaotic and make her lose control of herself. Moreover, from then on, she convinced herself never to get drunk again and to hate herself when she was out of control.

#### **e) Hard Work**

Christine has no diploma in accounting and has a criminal record. However, she knows accounting and is learning computer programming through night school. Christine wants to work harder, find a more-paying job, and avoid her husband to keep her safe. This can be shown in the following paragraphs:

I never got my diploma in accountancy. Instead, I had a criminal record for stealing a binder. At least I had the accountancy knowledge. I returned to evening school to study something new: computer programming. I had to find a way to earn more money, and more importantly, I had to stay out of Harry's way for my safety. (Clayfield, 2017: 90)

Wolf says that you learn to lose and get back up to work hard. You have to develop a definite work ethic because that is fair. The playing field is leveled by talent and hard work. It will make a win (Wolf, 1994). When Christine decided to participate in a triathlon, she was initially unsatisfied with her performance. Christine was 32nd out of 200 people in the triathlon. However, she had the determination and belief that she

could do better. Two months later, Christine achieved her goal and won a triathlon. Christine felt very proud and happy to be a winner. She felt great, winning first place on the podium and receiving a gold cup. Christine felt unstoppable and continued to win and win honors in the races that followed.

### **The Impact of Women's Resistance on The Main Character**

The resistance carried out by women certainly has a definite purpose, like the resistance put on by the main character in the novel *No Fourth River*, Christine. Christine's success in fighting can bring significant social changes to her life. From this, Christine can help change people's perceptions of women's roles and abilities and fight for gender equality in various aspects of life. The impact of resistance received by Christine includes self-confidence, social status, money, and love.

#### **a) Self-Confidence**

The mental abuse that Christine experienced in the past made her feel insecure, so she felt worthless and useless to anyone. However, her desire to prove and fight against that statement was answered by her achievements. This is illustrated in the quote below:

Winning the triathlon and swimming taught me that I could win at anything with enough effort. I was ready to move on. (Clayfield, 2017: 107)

The quote above shows Christine, who won the triathlon with her persistence in continuing to practice and develop her abilities with complete determination, and she will be the best in everything she does. As Wolf said,

athletics is one of the best things that can happen to women. You learn that it is okay to win and to compete. You are competing against yourself. You see results when you work for it. From there, you develop a new enthusiasm for taking on challenges because you have overcome so much (Wolf, 1994).

#### **b) Social Status**

Christine's success in the cause she is engaged in also earns her more significant influence in society and the workplace. Christine can become an influential leader and decision-maker and have a more heard voice on women's voices, rights, and other issues they care about. Christine wants all of Belgium to know about Acer; she has relations with the directors of the biggest companies in Belgium and Luxembourg. It made her a huge hit; everyone talked about her in the computer industry. Christine was suddenly all over the media. Everywhere, everyone could see her. This is due to the achievement of sales of millions of computers, which is known as a phenomenon in the computer industry where a woman beats her male competitors. This can be shown in the following quote:

The following headlines were seen all over magazines and newspapers:  
Hard lady—soft solutions!  
A phenomenon in the computer business!  
This woman makes millions in sales!  
Being a computer company's managing director is emancipation for you! - Dynamic Lady is the managing director of a computer company!  
The manager is a woman!  
This lady reached the top of the male world!

Only 1% of girls reach the top! Few women in Belgium had ever achieved what I did, and none in the computer industry, which was male-dominated. The risk I took with the exhibition paid off and my income increased. (Clayfield, 2017: 136)

The paragraph above shows Christine's extraordinary achievement. Christine reached the peak of her success in business; no woman in Belgium has ever achieved what she has done in the computer industry. Therefore, Christine has the strength and experience that can inspire many people about her extraordinary struggle in life.

#### c) Money

Christine's resistance eventually brought her to the point of success she wanted. She officially became a successful businesswoman in England. This success proves that she is valuable. Christine became a successful businesswoman in England, proving she was not useless or worthless. This is illustrated in the quote below:

I have achieved more than the average woman: through sheer hard work and dedication, I am one of the top income earners in the UK. (Clayfield, 2017: 176)

Wolf points out that for the first time, many women know that their money seems essential and that it can make them stronger as women rather than tear them down (Wolf, 1994).

#### d) Love

Christine realized that she did not need material things to be happy. They do not last, but memories last forever.

She does not collect things. Instead, she collects happy moments. Nobody can buy love, no matter how much money you have. Money can come and go so fast, but love will last forever. All this time, Christine wanted to have loving love; she wanted to be loved and to love, and in the end, she found Richard, who loved her. This can be shown in the following paragraph.

Richard's gentle touch, reassuring smile, endless devotion, and sweet love have been a source of strength throughout the years. Every day, I feel loved and forever grateful for Richard, just for being Richard. (Clayfield, 2017: 178)

As Wolf said, after experiencing one long and tiring moment, one wants to be a fighter for justice, and part of what the world wants most is love.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The analysis of women's resistance in *No Fourth River* through the lens of liberal feminism and Naomi Wolf's power feminism reveals the intricate dynamics of gender oppression and the empowering journey of the main character, Christine. Christine's resistance is manifested through her desire, courage, independence, firmness, and hard work, each playing a critical role in her fight against patriarchal power. Her journey from a life of abuse and oppression to one of self-reliance and success exemplifies the transformative potential of women's resistance.

Christine's desire for a better life drives her to challenge the oppressive forces around her. Her courage to leave her abusive home, despite the uncertainties, marks a significant step towards reclaiming her autonomy. Her

determination to build a self-sufficient life free from external support showcases her independence. Christine's firmness in her beliefs and refusal to succumb to detrimental behaviors illustrate her strength and resilience. Her hard work and dedication culminate in significant personal and professional achievements, demonstrating the power of perseverance.

The impact of Christine's resistance extends beyond her transformation. Her increased self-confidence, elevated social status, financial independence, and the fulfillment of love underscore the broader societal changes that can result from women's empowerment. Christine's story challenges traditional gender roles and contributes to the ongoing discourse on gender equality, inspiring others to pursue their journeys of resistance and liberation.

This study highlights the importance of resilience and agency in the struggle for women's rights. Contextualizing Christine's experiences within the framework of liberal feminism provides valuable insights into the ongoing fight against gender oppression. The findings emphasize that women's resistance, grounded in personal strength and determination, has the potential to drive significant social change and foster a more equitable society.

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