

1968: A Global Perspective

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Roles of Women: The Cross-Influence of Tillie Olsen and Second Wave Feminism

Tillie Olsen's writing is prophetic of the 1968 advent of the Women's Liberation Movement and continues to be relevant. *Tell Me a Riddle*, for example, was first published in 1961, two years before Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique*; Friedan would almost certainly have been cognizant of Olsen's writing and activism.

In 1968, as Women's Liberation groups were forming throughout the US, Tillie Olsen was awarded an NEA fellowship that would help to validate and legitimize second wave feminism on a national level. Olsen's works following the 1968 fellowship, "Requa" (1970-initialized in 1968), *Yonnondio: From the Thirties* (1974), and *Silences* (1978) provided a clear voice for women during the Women's Liberation movement. This voice, however, did not begin in 1968; it was merely a continuation of Olsen's lifelong advocacy of female empowerment within a male dominated society that oppressed women through economic hardship, sexual dominance, or domestic servitude.

Tillie Olsen's importance to the Women's Liberation Movement can be established and defined by examining her publications and in-progress manuscripts from the 1960s and early 1970s. A close analysis of the texts and drafts of *Tell Me a Riddle*, "Requa," and *Yonnondio: From the Thirties* suggests a mutual influence between Tillie Olsen and Second Wave Feminism. Olsen's works certainly reflect the context of the Women's Liberation Movement, just as the Women's Liberation Movement was directly influenced by Olsen's works.