

контексте позднего сентиментализма, однако спектр поднимаемых проблем, мировосприятие лирического героя и художественное своеобразие произведения указывают на преобладание эстетики предромантизма.

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The article discusses the elegy "Clifton" by Thomas Chatterton. The analysis dwells upon the observations and feelings of the persona who takes a walk around the once thriving town. The thematic and artistic features of the poem are in focus. A detailed textual analysis allows to draw the conclusion about the plot and thematic connection of the poem with late sentimentalism, but with obvious predominance of preromantic ideas.

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## WOMEN WRITING LIKE MEN GENDER-REVERSED FICTIONAL DISCOURSE

Статья ставит перед собой цель определить причины явления смены гендера в художественных произведениях. Рассматривается многосторонность проблемы женского письма и его противопоставления престижу мужского стиля письма. Доминирующее влияние мужчин-писателей на стандарт литературного стиля демонстрируется на примере творчества таких писательниц, как А. Мёрдок и Д. Тартт.

Fiction allows for a wide variety of forms and genres and covers a great range of issues akin to almost every historical period of societal development. Many controversial and stigmatized subjects were put forward and closely investigated

under the auspices of fiction and, as a result, the literary text has consistently promoted that development. Yet, the issue that is currently being studied is that of language, and what makes a woman's and a man's fiction distinguishable from each other, and whether that difference exists as such. The question was put forward in R. Lakoff's debatable but pivotal work *Language and Woman's Place* (1972). Still another particularity of that issue is women writing like men.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century reader is a satiated one, with a set of standards in the treatment of a fictional work. However, the stumbling block at this point is the following: is the so-called golden standard appropriate and adequately proportionate to representing both genders? It is reasonable to explore several relevant perspectives on the current situation.

From the historical perspective, it is feasible to look into women's writing in two ways: as a steady development and fortification of women in the canon, and the other being its evolution impeded by social factors. The history of women's writing and publications was predetermined by women's social standing: up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century women were limited to functioning as homemakers who were unable to engage in any outdoor activity unattended by men. What one can classify as "purely feminine" publications were not taken seriously by fellow writers. Getting published must have been hard enough for Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters; it was, nevertheless, the critical reception that, at first, downsized their writing. Such reaction to women's writing would gradually diminish, but not without obstacles.

In 1852, R. W. Griswold included 5 female authors in his anthology of prose writers [1, p. 1–2]. After Griswold, many male critics continued "justifying" the exclusion of women writers [1, p. 4]. The systematic exclusion led to a situation where only men authors' work had survived [1, p. 5]. "We have seen how it came to be that women were "scribblers" and men serious writers" [1, p. 14].

The asymmetry of gender distribution in classical literature today is conspicuously represented in certified newspaper lists of classics and school and university curriculum. *The Guardian* top 100 best novels list includes 16 women-writers as opposed to the 84 male counterparts [2]. The Pennsylvania University list of Twentieth Century American literature counts 16 women and 30 men of the total 46 positions. Penn's Twentieth Century British and Irish List supplies 9 women and 16 men out of the 25 articles [3]. The previously mentioned issue around the Anthology of American literature leads to the discussion of the "canon" [4, p. 17]. M. P. Hiatt states that the canon-makers are the writers, critics, and publishers in power and that they frequently happen to be male [1, p. 1]. We underline that "the problem of the canon is the problem of syllabus and curriculum" and the problem of mass media [4, p. 17].

The American canon seems to many international scholars to have been changing in the direction toward inclusivity. More females and minorities join the canon. Yet the authors of one article on the American canon question the canon's accuracy to represent all American writers, that is why "the canon is worthless and nonexistent to those against whom the canon doors have been kept shut" [5, p. 54]. Therefore, may we suppose that the side effect of being well read

is being gender-biased in terms of accepting variety in written discourse? Did the “dead white European males” (DWEM) phenomenon eradicate an alternative mode of fiction that could have been well developed by now?

The problem of literary critics and the evaluating system is climactic. It is once again based on male classics – the cornerstones of fiction. The publishing industry has long been accused of gender bias. According to the VIDA Count organization, books by women made up less than 20 % of books reviewed in the *New York Review of Books*, 30 % in *Harper’s*, 29 % in the *Atlantic*, and 22 % in the *London Review of Books* (2015) [6].

A lot of the bias in reviews reflects a bias in publishing. In 2011, Ruth Franklin at the *New Republic* did a small-scale analysis of the upcoming catalogs of 13 publishing houses. Franklin found that 11 of the 13 publishers, including Harper, Norton, Little Brown, Knopf and FSG, had heavily male biased catalogs – around 30 % or less of their books were written by women. The *Huffington Post* followed her study in 2012 with similar findings of widespread gender bias [6]. The outcome of these policies leads to female readers being sold the idea that female authors somehow mean less than male authors. “One of the often heard arguments in defense of that point is that women often choose to write about feelings. A great number of established writers including D. H. Lawrence, Thomas Hardy and Henry James all wrote about feelings. What one can comprehend from such comparison is that feelings did not matter at all when talking about the human experience” [7].

There are numerous cases of women-writers hiding behind male pseudonyms. One of these examples is Catherine Nichols who “tried to sell her novel under her own name” and was “ignored by all the agents she contacted”. Once she made use of a male pseudonym, she “received mostly positive responses”. Others encompass Laura Albert, George Sand, the Brontë sisters, Karen Blixen and J. K. Rowling who “became widely popular by omitting her full name” [7].

On the other hand, the author (male or female) may intentionally switch gender in the text through the protagonist, which is termed as Hornby’s “narrative sex change”: the author uses a narrator whose sex is not the same as his or hers. J. Mullan lists several examples of its ample use [8]: J. M. Coetzee’s *Age of Iron* (1990), Alan Warner’s *Morvern Callar* (1995), Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005) – male authors, female narrators; Donna Tartt’s *The Secret History* (1992), Rose Tremain’s *Restoration* (1989), Beryl Bainbridge’s *Master Georgie* (1998) – female authors, male narrators. Another example that is worth mentioning is Salley Vickers’s *The Other Side of You* (2005): the author is a woman who employs a male narrator, a psychoanalyst, in order to explore the possibilities of regeneration through another person’s vision and understanding.

The next point is the psychological aspect of women’s writing, their motivation for writing and the underlying problems. Any work of fiction can be looked upon as a result of sublimation. Sublimation is one of the healthy defense mechanisms that in itself hides a person's trauma or complex. It often shows the latent content, or one’s drives, desires, fears, perversions and other problems the

human psyche is undergoing. What interests us here is the way, or manner, in which writing is conducted, and why that particular manner is used in the first place. If in this case Freud's theory of psychoanalysis is to be applicable, we are looking into what he termed as "penis envy" [9]. A woman-author writes like her male counterparts as a means of reaching the same status, envious of their success. On the other hand, we have C. Jung's notions of animus and anima, i.e., animus as the presence of the unconscious masculine side of a woman, and anima as the unconscious feminine side of a man [10]. This way, a woman's reversing of her mode of writing can simply signalize the presence or dominance of animus.

The feminist viewpoint on the issue of women writing like men is quite confusing and carries no universal agreement. J. Derrida first coined the term "phallogocentrism", which is used to refer to the privileging of the masculine in the construction of meaning while the feminine remains minor, or marginal [11]. H. Cixous in her famous essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976) then puts the term in operation and makes the following two key statements: "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing"; "Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement" [12]. A great number of feminists adhere to her reflections.

L. Irigaray asserts that the future must no longer be determined by the past. From the way she sees it, a direct feminine challenge to this condition is "to postulate a relation to the intelligible that would maintain sexual indifference". A woman has the ability to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse [13, p. 76]. Its function would thus be to cast phallogocentrism, phallogocritism, loose from its moorings in order to return the masculine to its own language, "leaving open the possibility of a different language". Which means that the masculine would 'no longer be "everything"' [13, p. 80].

T. Moi presents a well-formed in-depth analysis of the issue of women writers. Moi highlights some of the inconsistencies made by V. Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*: "It is fatal for any one who writes to think of their sex....It is fatal... in any way to speak consciously as a woman"; "she wrote as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman" [14, p. 91]. Moi also points out that J. Butler, a prominent philosopher of the third-wave feminism, has created an intellectual climate in which the words *woman* and *man* are not suitable for human beings that do not fit into conventional, stereotypical categories of femininity and masculinity. Another idea that Moi accentuates is that gender is performative, i.e. we create our gender by doing gendered things. Thus, one may conclude that, according to Butler, a writing style cannot be taken down to conventional stereotypical features dictated by social norms of male and female. Moi shares her own position on women's writing saying "she has to be willing to say what she sees...to write is to risk rejection and misunderstanding". She ends her essay affirming that literature is the archive of a culture and it "holds out the hope of overcoming skepticism and isolation" [15].

One more aspect to be covered is the linguistic side of the case. The arguments concerning the existence of a "feminine" writing style and a

“masculine” writing style are the ones of the most radically bipolar in the academic field. One simplistic hypothesis is that men are more “active” and women are perceptively observant of men, but it does not arise from differentiation of style [1, p. 16]. But M. P. Hiatt is positive that finding stylistic differences between women’s and men’s writing may be a necessary segment of literary theory and criticism. She conducted an experiment based on a random sample of contemporary American prose and it revealed that, “when thousands of words by women and men writers are examined, striking differences do exist” [1, p. 19–20].

When studying the languages of men and women, A. Weatherall suggests taking into account the social identity theory. The theory is constructed around the idea that people are motivated to view themselves in a favourable way, which requires making social comparisons. That is why in order to overcome any sense of inferiority one (as in the case with women) can resort to social creativity and social competition. It is a tactic of redefining the negative characteristics associated with the group positively. Other identity maintenance strategies may be to compare your group to inferior groups or to create new dimensions for comparison [16, p. 126–127].

The discursive turn has brought about a radical transformation in the ways gender and its relationship to language can be understood. Language turned out to reflect society’s beliefs and values about women and men, which indicates the social construction of gender. Weatherall formulates the current goal as “to understand the social practices that create and maintain current norms of gender, so that we can work towards a post-patriarchal society” [16, p. 156]. In case such a goal is achieved, the question of male and female writing would naturally diffuse.

S. Vorobyeva singles out male and female writing and differentiates three levels of written discourse: the stylistics of text, characters and the picture of the world. She makes a couple of specific discoveries in terms of feminine writing. One of them is “a unique kind of irony and self-irony...linked to a marked suspicion towards pathos and preaching”. She motivates her discovery this way: “A woman-writer is entering a culture and a text created by the patriarchal mind, which constricts the image of women in set standards and she, who is daunting enough to manifest herself with a voice, a new text of her own, cannot but feel the vulnerability of her creative experience that is being made with little to no basis or any prior tradition” [17].

Vorobyeva notes that a woman’s mind works to a great degree towards the objectivization of her self through the prism of reality. Another peculiarity is being open to dialogue and not rushing to conclusive statements. Besides that, a woman-writer aims at deconstructing the system and displaying the inner contradictions of the world where she is not a subject but an object. Another feature is secondary reflection – a tendency to avoid direct self-description. Lastly, she stresses M. Foucault’s words about finding a new possibility of writing texts [18]. She believes a woman-writer’s ultimate goal might be creating that endless possibility of texts.

Now that we have looked into the historical, psychological, philosophical, social and linguistic aspects of the matter, let us have a look at the writing of two successful women-writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries respectively: Iris Murdoch (1919–1999) and Donna Tartt (b. 1963). They have entered the literary world without their writing being labeled ‘not serious’. Both Murdoch and Tartt are famous connoisseurs of classical literature, which has in one way or another affected their writing. The most obvious literary influencers on Murdoch are cited to be F. Dostoyevsky, L. Tolstoy, G. Eliot, M. Proust and W. Shakespeare. In case of D. Tartt, the following authors are mentioned regularly: F. Dostoyevsky, C. Dickens, R. L. Stevenson, E. Waugh, R. Kipling, E. A. Poe, G. Eliot, Dante and W. Shakespeare.

If one was to compare these two writers’ literary influencers and preferences, it becomes clear that the only woman-writer that they share (individually and overall) is George Eliot (ironically enough, the name is male). The other thing that unites the two belletrists is the extensive utilization of allusions to Greek myths and legends in their prose. These generally carry strong ideas of sophistication and manhood. The other classics on the lists of Murdoch’s and Tartt’s are W. Shakespeare and F. Dostoevsky. Shakespeare was a renowned master of grandiloquence who unfailingly appears on everyone’s reading list. Dostoevsky, a fundamental Russian writer, is renowned for the deep psychological quality of his works and for belonging to the literary realism and naturalism movements.

Murdoch’s novels generally have intricate plots with a canvas of characters representing different philosophical views. Her prose boasts of the macabre and the wildly comic, existential stoicism and baroque symbolism, the gothic and the neogothic [19, p. 148; 20, p. 89]. Tartt’s triad of novels is filled with quotations and literary and philosophical allusions. Her novels never fail to supply the reader with an abundance of Greek and Latin aphorisms. Tartt’s works contain themes characteristic of American fiction (such as selectivity and escapism), as well as ideas of aesthetics and Decadence [21, p. 24]. Overall, these writers managed to secure themselves a spot in the canon for their stylistically developed prose and writing “seriously”. Their story is that of success, but the level of male intertextuality puts forward a question of the authors’ originality and individuality.

The phenomenon of reversed discourse brings up an ambiguous complex problem that has no consensus in any interconnected discipline. It is nevertheless clear that the problem of gender (or, to be more particular, of the notions of women’s and men’s writing styles) in literature still requires some time to be settled and to gain more understanding from the scholars. Yet, it is, undeniably, neither a positive nor a negative occurrence.

What can be asserted based on the data we have can be summarized in a couple of statements. The field of gender-markers is problematic for a range of reasons: the terms of gender-markers research and its intentions are unreliable. A number of writers declare there are no gender differences in terms of writing style. The markers are vaguely defined and may turn out to be stereotyped labels and cause confusion in discourse analysis. The prestige of men’s writing in the

publishing business presents a dangerous force to the experimental literature of women. An urgent change for the standard must be called for, in which case the introduction of several standards or the deconstruction of the standard as a whole could be implored. The literary canon should eradicate literary separatism. The history of women's writing cannot be changed but an attempt to replenish it from the archives is needed to change readers' perception of "good fiction". The development of literature requires finding a balance between the unique qualities of each sex and having no limits or prescribed norms of fiction making. The practices of anthologists and critics demand cardinal reorganization for a non-biased and non-conformist writing climate.

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The dominance of men's writing in the literary canon is destructive to the individual development of women's writing and requires revising the literary norms and the evaluation system of fictional works overall.

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