

J. Austen's Heroes in Discourse of Modern Feminine Writing
(Literary Analysis of C. Schine's Novel "The Three Weissmanns of Westport")

Women's writing as a cultural phenomenon, a specific way of perception and reflection of a general picture of the world has been a matter of numerous discussions. In other words, *de facto* there are many literary works written by women, but *de jure* they are not individuated as a unique literary group, sharing a well-known idea of 'quality' and 'low-quality' literature. Consequently, an essential problem of women's writing is based on two different approaches, which are as follows: "... first - there is no women's writing as a specific literary aesthetic phenomenon alongside with a "women's style". Hence, works of women -writers have to be studied individually, in the context of their own literary creation" [1, 1].

Another approach can be considered as more appropriate and well – grounded in terms proposed by T.A. Rovenkova: "... women's writing exists as a scope of personality, who creates her own cultural tradition and its multiplicity exists as a form of aesthetic value" [3, 1].

It should be borne in mind, there is no a general definition of the term "feminine writing" in specialised reference literature. But as The Dictionary of Gender Terms states: "... women's (feminine) writing in essence is a phenomenon designed by women, taking into account nuances of feminine perception... Women's writing is a specific section of feminine critics, which main task is to study themes and genres of literary works, created by women, studies of new subjects as psychoanalysis of feminine creativity, linguistics and problems of women's speech, individual or collective female creation, history of women's writing, biographical studies of a single writer and her works"[8].

First a term "*Écriture féminine*" (women's writing) was applied in *Helene Cixous's* essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975) [6]. Among researches who study women's (feminine) literature there are Monique Witting, Luce Irigaray, Julia

Kristeva, Elaine Showalter, Peter Berry, Rosemarie Tong, Brasha Ettinger and many others.

For example, Cheryl L. Brown and Karen Olson in their works study several aspects of methodology of feminine critics in general combining with analysis of an authentic creative method of English – speaking women –writers of the 19th century such as E. Dickinson and S. Platt.

In our opinion, a Ukrainian researcher G. Uliura proposes a rather complete and comprehensive definition: “Women’s writing is literary works created by women. Women’s writing consists of diverse styles, genres, types, levels of talent and influence on literary process texts, united in the only aspect of an author’s gender” [5].

Hence, the main goal of our research is to analyze development and creative reformation of a female English – speaking novel in the context of the modern literary discourse. Object of our investigation are novels, written by Jane Austen (“Sense and Sensibility”) and Cathleen Schine (“The Three Weissmanns of Westport”).

It is a well – known fact, that historical social, political factors and processes are always reflected in artistic literature. In this connection, we would to underline for a long period of time women’s writing was the only source, which could properly express genuine reality of women's social state within absolutely miscellaneous periods of human history.

For example, social context in J. Austen’s novels is either bright background for exposition of inner world of her characters has a strong influence on their relationships. The same aspects can be discovered in C. Schine’s text.

We do not intend to retell a plot of a well-known book “Sense and Sensibility” however it might be pertinent to mention some definite episodes in order to reach a better understanding of C. Schine’s novel.

The main characters of the “Sense and Sensibility” (1811-1812) - sisters Elinor and Marianne, whose mental outlooks are diametrically opposite. Elinor is low - profile and prudent, Marianne is romantic and passionate. They meet with many obstacles in their adult life, manifesting themselves differently under similar circumstances. J. Austen often applies an inner speech (monologue) in order to depict their temper alongside with brilliant sparkles of humor.

Now we would like to recur to C. Schine’s novel “The Three Weissmanns of Westport” (2010).

In the context of our investigation, it would be relevant to cite C. Schine’s interview: “I of course read all of Dickens after that and started on Trollope who taught me invaluable lesson that character is fate, and that fate is not always a neat narrative arc. Nevertheless, I always hesitate to claim the influence of any author: it seems presumptuous. I want to be influenced by Dickens and Trollope. I long to be influenced by Jane Austen, too, and Barbara Pym and Alice Munro. I aspire to be influenced by Randall Jarrell’s brilliant novel, *Pictures From An Institution*. And I read Muriel Spark when I feel myself becoming soft and sentimental, as a kind of tonic” (*Barnes and Nobles interview*, 2005) [12].

The New York Review of Books claims : “Schine has been favored in so many ways by the muse of comedy ...*The Three Weissmanns of Westport* is full of invention, wit, and wisdom that can bear comparison to Austen’s own” [7].

With her inimitable humors the author points to the direct connection of her work with a famous novel of the 19th century, when Annie is retreating ‘to the library’s attic... she did discover a discolored letter from George Washington in a frame with crackled glass, as the first volume of the two-volume first American edition of *Sense and Sensibility*’[11, 222].

Definite similarities might be outlined in the novels. For example, a humiliating exile from luxurious apartment in the heart of Manhattan can be

compared with an episode from “Sense and Sensibility”: after the death of Mrs Dashwood’s husband, mother and daughters are forced to leave their sweet house.

Similar to J. Austen’s novel, the main characters of C. Schine are sisters Miranda (Marianne) - an impulsive, passionate, brave and well-educated woman but ‘gifted’ with an ability to get into unpleasant situations and Annie (Elinor), a pragmatic director of the library. The only difference between them - Weissmann sisters are older (about fifty), involved in a complicated whirlpool of financial and private matters and they have to overcome all of them with dignity.

Unfortunately, within the frame of our investigation we cannot concentrate on a deep text analysis, alternatively we would like to mention briefly few psychological landscape nuances. For example, water as a symbol of purification and rebirth plays a significant role in both novels: Maryanne (“Sense and Sensibility”) goes for a walk in inappropriate moment, when the rain starts. She slips down, falls and meets with Willoughby. Miranda (“The Three Weissmanns of Westport”) being captured with financial and private problems, sails and overturns managing with a kayak. At the very moment a young actor, Kit helps her and they fell in love.

Taking into consideration all studied above we can conclude, women’s (feminine) writing is a real cultural phenomenon and its classical examples are an outstanding source, encouraging modern women writers to create brand-new works about women and to enhance well-rounded research of a general picture of the world through the prism of feminine perception.

Literature

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