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THE IDEA OF “NEW WOMAN” IN THE NOVELS OF ENGLISH VICTORIAN AGE WRITERS

The article deals with the problem of striving of main women characters for the changes in their social role and status in the novels of English writers of the Victorian age. The analysis is based on modern investigations of the problem, done by English critics, scholars and scientists. It is stated, that the social status and the position of women in the 19th century was not equal to men's. Nevertheless, a new trend was growing in the society. The term “New woman” symbolized a new personality, who, unlike her predecessors, had different understanding of woman's place in the society. It is also grounded, that a lot of English novelists of the time devoted their works to the depiction of such women and their protest against the traditional norms and social injustice. The research reveals that the theme is best reflected in the novels of Emily and Charlotte Brontë, Thomas Hardy, George Eliot. It is also pointed out, that the novels of the writers were analyzed from the feminism viewpoint, which differs much from the traditional approach. Such approach gives the possibility to look upon the value of the novels in the perspective of their impact on the further development of women's fight for their rights and position in the society.

Key words: *Victorian Age, the idea of “New Woman”, feminism.*

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ІДЕЯ «НОВОЇ ЖІНКИ» У РОМАНАХ АНГЛІЙСЬКИХ ПИСЬМЕННИКІВ ВІКТОРІАНСЬКОЇ ДОБИ

Статтю присвячено проблемі прагнення головних персонажей-жінок до зміни їх соціальної ролі та статусу в романах англійських письменників Вікторіанської доби. Проаналізовано особливості економічного та соціального розвитку Англії у 19-му столітті, місця та ролі жінки у цей період, специфіки її виховання, освіти та очікуваної поведінки у шлюбі, можливості для саморозвитку. На прикладі Вікторіанських романів, особливостей характерів, динаміки сюжету доведено, що ідея «Нової жінки» знайшла своє втілення у багатьох відомих творах доби та сприяла подальшому розвитку феміністичних ідей в Англії.

Ключові слова: *Вікторіанська доба, ідея «Нової Жінки», фемінізм.*

For the European people, living in the XXIst century, it is almost impossible to imagine the lack of women's rights in the Victorian age. A great number of those, living today, think, feminism dates back to the 20th century. Yet, the time of Queen Victoria reign was the stepping stone for emergence of feminism movements, which resulted in the modern status, rights and position of a woman in the Western world. No doubt, Victorian age literature was a response to historical and social events and mostly depicted social injustice. A lot of respectful researchers associate the time with the works of Charles Dickens, William Thackeray but very few have considered the impact of other prominent authors, who dared to write about women's inequality. Thus, the relevance of our research is based on the non-investigated sources as the foundation for the future change in the minds of all literary people, who lived then, and who are still curious about the details of the issue.

It should be pointed out, that this research will not consider the works of post-Soviet investigators (with all possible respect to the authors). It will analyze the approaches to the problem from the viewpoint of the British critics, scholars and scientists to avoid possible arguments.

In particular, new investigations have been made by Patrick Bratlinger and William B. Thesing providing new perspectives and positions on contexts and on canonical and post-canonical texts. In his book “A Victorian Woman's Place” Simon Morgan has contributed a lot of new facts, taken from archives and libraries, on the social role of women in Victorian age. Margaret Walters has analyzed the emergence of feminism roots in England in the 19th century. Heather Glen, Stevie Davis, Rick Rylance, Kate Flint

have compiled a series of original essays, contributors explore the roots of the Brontë sisters' achievement in early 19th century, the childhood 'plays' they developed; they have shown how each sister engages with some of the central issues of their time.

Nonetheless, the problem of the independence of women reflected in the Victorian novels still needs some detailed analysis. Thus, the **aim** of this research is to look in the novels of Victorian period writers, so that to study the peculiarities of depicting women's independence in them. The aim has defined the following tasks:

- to give a brief outline of the Victorian age and the position and status of women at that time;
- to analyze the peculiarities of women's personal development as independent personalities in the novels of Victorian writers.

The reign of Queen Victoria, after whom the period between 1837 to 1901 has been referred to the Victorian Era, was a landmark period in the history of Great Britain. Apparently, the discoveries that were made in Britain at this time were important not only for the country, but also for the humanity as a whole. In Britain the appearance of several prominent representatives of art and, first of all, of fiction, influenced the development of world art.

The development of scientific thought in the Victorian era was crucial, because the significance of Darwinism and the wave of new scientific discoveries changed the general understanding of the mankind's evolution. The Victorian era was marked by country's acquiring new social functions, which were caused by new industrial conditions and rapid population growth. As for personal development, it was built on self-discipline and self-confidence, supported by Wesleyan and Evangelical movements [4].

What is more, the Victorian era was marked by the strengthening of the position of the middle class, which led to the dominance of its main values in the society. Sobriety, punctuality, hard work, thrift were in honor. These qualities soon became the norm, since their usefulness in the new industrial world was undoubted. Strange as it may seem, not all the features of the middle class were an example to follow. Among the negative ones, so often ridiculed on the pages of the English literature of that period, are the philistine confidence that prosperity is a reward for virtue, so extreme puritanism in family life gave rise to hypocrisy and guilt [5].

Surprisingly, the Queen had very little to do with the best productions of her times. In an age that abounded in great literature and music, her own preferences were for second-rate authors and composers, whose works are already forgotten. The term "Victorian" itself is often used in a fashion that is, misleading. Popularly it constitutes not very good tastes and moral priggishness. However, they are certainly not to be found among the ideas and beliefs of Arnold, Meredith, Dickens, Rossetti, Brontë, to mention only a few.

The Victorian society believed that "men and women were naturally different in capacity, and so ought to play distinct social roles. Anatomy determined destiny, and men were destined to be on top" [8]. The woman's place was at home, carrying out a domestic role such as looking after children or supervising maidens [5]. According to the Victorians, a true woman at that time was virtuous, pure and submissive spending her day looking for ways to please her husband and creating a happy and healthy family from within the home [5].

It was thought to be inappropriate for a woman to go out in public by herself. If she had to go out, she should be accompanied by a man, preferably her husband, her father or her brother because the outside world was so harsh and the woman should be protected. In addition, a girl would marry and therefore she had no need of formal education. It was believed that women were not able to learn in the way men did, that their brain was smaller than men's, and that it would do damage to their health if they spent long hours studying. Some of them went to schools for girls that only offered to teach them some "accomplishments" like singing, drawing, playing the piano and flower-arranging were all important. Even when Oxbridge (Oxford and Cambridge Universities) started to accept applications from women via UCAS (The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) some parents did not let their daughters enter because women that were educated could not get married easily [9].

Divorce in this epoch entailed to loss of property and wealth. As a matter of fact, the only reason to obtain divorce was to prove the adultery. In case a woman wanted to gain a divorce for the reason of adultery, she had to prove that her husband had indulged in bigamy; she had also to confirm that her husband had committed incest, cruelty or desertion [9].

All over the nineteenth century, women had no political rights despite the fact that there had been some movements to advance and ask for the rights of women. It was not until the second half of the 19th century that something like a true women's 'movement' began to emerge in England. And the female consciousness began to change [10].

In Victorian time, a lot of novelists showed their concern about feminism in their works. Feminist criticism is deeply concerned with the ways in which the experience of being male or female in a particular society is reflected through the literary imagination. The main feminist trend in Victorian literature whether written by men or women, be it a play, a novel, an essay or poetry, was the representation of "New-Woman". The word "New-Woman" was coined by the novelist Sarah Grand during the Victorian period in 1894. It soon became a popular catch-phrase in newspapers and books [7].

Among the writers of the 19th century there were those, who are considered to be the most preoccupied with the women's rights and freedom. In particular, Emily Brontë did not directly call for free life and equal marriage. She showed her consent on feminist attitude through actions of the protagonists and the development of the plot. In 1847, she published her only novel, "Wuthering Heights". Although it received mixed reviews when it first came out, the book subsequently became an English classic.

Many readers were attracted by Catherine, the wild, hatless, savage instead of a gentle, graceful, and kind lady like Isabella who was dainty and elegant. Catherine's fairly hard rebellion against her father can find its best expression in three aspects: the offense against her father, the negligence of her father's power, and the replacement of him by others.

After the death of their father, Hindley, Catherine's brother, inherited everything from old Mr. Earnshaw. Hindley degrades Heathcliff, whom Catherine loves, to a servant. Thus, under such an adverse situation, both Catherine and Heathcliff show strong desire to be together. Despite her brother's objections, Catherine still refuses to give it up; what's more, she joins her hands with Heathcliff to rebel against Hindley, for the reason that he deprives her of the exclusive privilege to enjoy the freedom to be herself.

Catherine, thus, goes a different way. Strictly confined by the family and somewhat deprived of the freedom to love, Catherine tries her best to resist the authority of a patriarchal institution and to surpass it. She resists against her father, her brother and her husband. She feels indignant with them, not because she does so irrationally, but because dominance over her infringes on her right to enjoy freedom and diminishes her individuality. Thus, her denial of the patriarchy stems from her strong sense of protecting her self-awareness. Catherine's persistent, daring struggle for the true love is a symbol of the awakening of women consciousness in love and in marriage.

In Catherine's opinion, equality between men and women does not only refer to equal position and equal rights in the society, it also means the spiritual equality and soul similarity in heaven. Thus, keeping self-integrity is of utmost importance to Catherine. As some feminists have pointed out, Catherine resembles the turning-point of the era [12].

Decades before Sarah Grand coined the phrase "New Woman," Thomas Hardy had already been writing about strong, independent women determined to live on their own terms.

The tragic fates of most of his fictional heroines have led many to accuse Thomas Hardy of being misogynist, harshly punishing women for their open rebel against Victorian social expectations. However, Hardy challenged his readers to consider the destructive power caused by hypocrisy and double standards, making many to consider him to be among the first feminists.

From Cytherea Graye to Sue Bridehead, the heroines of Thomas Hardy demonstrate women's personalities as independent, thinking individuals. Through his fiction, Hardy offered his women a voice reflecting the anxiety and ambiguity of their changing role in society. One of his most successful heroines, Bathsheba Everdene, best articulates women's difficulty in expressing themselves. In her effort to dissuade Farmer Boldwood from his marriage proposal as a business transaction in "Far From the Madding Crowd" (1874), Bathsheba exclaims: "It is difficult for a woman to define her feelings in a language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs" [1].

In 1896 Thomas Hardy wrote "Jude the Obscure". This is Hardy's late Victorian novel which contributed to the breakdown of the puritan code in literature. The "New-Woman" in this novel as we have already said is Sue Bridehead who is the heroine and when she resolves to leave her husband, she just justified her action by citing a passage from J. S. Mill's "On Liberty". This means she is leaving the husband because she wants to have her freedom.

A feminist reading of Thomas Hardy's major and minor fiction has produced results quite different from the ones we have been accustomed to in traditional criticism. The difference consists in the centrality of female characters, their status, roles and functions in society. Feminist criticism usually reveals the search for autonomy and selfhood of the female protagonist. Although traditional criticism generally sees Hardy's women as passive victims of both man and circumstances.

Among other Victorian writers George Eliot stands out for her final novel "Daniel Deronda", the story about the woman, who rebels against the circumstances. Deronda decides that universal humanism, with its general concern for equality and justice, cannot be compared to a specific national identity, that is firmly rooted in its own traditions. The protagonist Gwendolen Harleth can be considered a proto-feminist heroine. Her struggle for personal autonomy within Victorian constraints recalls Gustave Flaubert's Emma Bovary and points forward to the anguished heroines of Henry James and Edith Wharton [10].

Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" is the most feminist of all Victorian novels in which the "New-Woman" is well depicted. It has even been described as a declaration of women's rights. The novel both in its own time and ours seemed to express woman's rebellion against the limitation of her lot. Margaret Oliphant called it "a wild declaration of the "Rights"" [1]. This declaration is true when we look at Chapter Twelve of the novel. In this chapter, the author says that nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses.

Jane, who is the heroine and the "New-Woman" in the novel, protests against the above injustices as far as women are concerned. She longs for wider experience, more excitement and travelling. Some critics think that Charlotte Brontë gave up this idea by having Jane marry and settle to domesticity [11]. Others think that she did not, because the message of "Jane Eyre" is the search for independence and choice. Jane is an example of a woman who thinks for herself when facing a decision. She chooses to follow the course that will maintain her self-respect, however difficult it may be. In practical terms, it was difficult for a woman of her time to achieve true independence. A woman of middle class who did not have money of her own would have to choose between being financially dependent on a husband, living as a dependent governess or the drudgery of teaching in a school. By illustrating this in Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë demonstrated a protest that choices were so limited.

In this novel Brontë uses the first person narration. Despite the fact that "Jane Eyre" focuses on the moral growth and maturation of both Jane and Rochester, the feeling remains that of Jane alone, and everything is told solely from her point of view. As R. B. Martin explains: "One sees all the action and characters through her eyes. Even when she is apparently the passive recipient of information from other characters, we never forget what Jane is feeling. One message we get from this novel is that "love is the pairing of equals" [11].

All things considered, everything mentioned above gives us an opportunity to accept the fact, that feminism in Victorian novels was one of the central themes and each writer contributed something of his own. Undoubtedly, such approach have made a great impact on the further development of this problem in the works of authors, coming onward.

The perspectives of this research lie in further more detailed analysis of each separate work of Victorian age from the viewpoint of feminism.

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