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FEMINISM IN LITERATURE OF GREAT BRITAIN (THE END OF THE 20TH — THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY)

The article aims at disclosing the aspects of Britain's literary processes, particularly the movement of feminism and its influence on literature of Great Britain. First, the notion "feminism" is given definitions. Secondly, some glimpses on the history on the of issue of rights for women were given. The focus of the author's interest lies within the events of the second wave feminism as it was the source of a literary movement of the period under analysis. Many British women writers emerged (or were already established) in the late 1960s and 1970s who were keen to engage with feminist issues such as A. S. Byatt, Angela Carter, Margaret Drabble, Janice Galloway, Doris Lessing, Emma Tennant and Fay Weldon.

Having thrown some light on the literary activity of Margaret Drabble, the author of the article concludes, that the question is far from being revealed as the feminist movement in Great Britain is of a huge power nowadays and its research is of a great potential.

Key words: *feminism, novel, freedom, literature of Great Britain, social factors.*

Стаття піднімає питання впливу феміністичної течії на літературу Великої Британії, висвітлюються основні події та літературні твори її представників. Автор порушує питання історичних подій, що призвели до виникнення літературної феміністичної течії у Великій Британії наприкінці 19 сторіччя, потім, розкриває принципи "другої хвилі" фемінізму — течії, що виникла у 1960-ті ХХ століття.

Предметом наукового інтересу автора в розкритті данної теми є літературна спадщина А. С. Бьятт, Анжели Картер, Маргарет Дреббл, Дженіс Геллоуей, Доріс Лессінг, Емми Теннант та Фей Уелдон, де проголошуються цінності цієї течії. Автор статті робить висновок, що проблема є не повністю освітленою, оскільки феміністична літературна течія Великої Британії знаходиться у розквіті та представляє великий інтерес до подальшого дослідження.

Ключові слова: *фемінізм, роман, свобода, література Великої Британії.*

В статье рассматривается вопрос о влиянии феминистического движения на литературу Великобритании, освещаются основные события, способствующие этому влиянию и приводятся примеры литературных произведений, представляющих данное течение. Автор приводит определения данного понятия. Затем, автор поднимает историю вопроса, где освещаются события первых феминистических движений во время Французской и Американской революции конца 18 столетия, событий, которые отразились в жизни социума Великобритании в конце 19 века и повлекли за собой значительные политические перемены. Автор также раскрывает принципы “второй волны” феминизма, течения, возникшего в 1960-е и его отображения в английской литературе, в частности, в работах Бэтти Фридан и Жермен Грир.

Предметом интереса автора в исследовании данной темы как раз и является этот период; в литературном наследии А. С. Бьятт, Анжели Картер, Маргарэт Дрэбл, Дженис Гэллоуэй, Дорис Лессинг, Эммы Тэннант и Фэй Уэлдон выдвигаются ценности, провозглашаемые данным течением. Автор статьи заключает вывод, что проблема не освещена, поскольку феминистическое литературное движение Великобритании находится в расцвете и представляет огромный потенциал для дальнейшего исследования.

Ключевые слова: феминизм, роман, свобода, литература Великобритании.

The article aims at disclosing the aspects of Britain's literary processes, particularly the movement of feminism and its influence on literature of Great Britain.

Initially, the term itself should be given a special attention. The notion “feminism” is given such a definition in Oxford dictionary: “the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes [1].

Encyclopedia Britannica gives more than one definition of the notion:

1) the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities;

2) organized activity in support of women's rights and interests [2].

The issue of rights for women first became prominent during the French and American revolutions in the late 18th century. In Britain it was not until the emergence of the suffragette movement in the late 19th century that there was significant political change. A 'second wave' of feminism arose in the 1960s, with an emphasis on unity and sisterhood; seminal figures included Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer.

The focus of our interest lies within the events of the second wave feminism as it was the source of a literary movement of the period under analysis.

In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir published “*The Second Sex*”, a text which can be identified as a founding moment of second wave feminism. One of the central theses of the book was summed up by the line, ‘I am not born a woman I become one’. This position recognized that although individuals are born as male or female, the development of masculinity and femininity is not determined at birth, but is learned through the process of socialization.

Feminism movement argued for a resistance to the way in which society had conventionally demarcated roles for men and women. Since the 1960s it has, arguably, exploded like no other movement, and now impacts on all areas of literary criticism and concepts of the ‘literary canon’; the literature taught in schools and universities now includes writers such as Mary Sidney, Aemilia Lanyer, Aphra Behn and Christina Rossetti. Notably, in recent years the term ‘post-feminist’ has been evoked to suggest that feminism is itself passé, or overly reductive in its definition of female identity and concerns. Many of the essays in this collection engage implicitly with the idea of post-feminism, arguing that the female writers at issue are ‘not *only* feminist’ or are ‘feminist in a unique kind of way’.

It was far from a monolithic movement. In America, Betty Friedan, one of those involved in the development of the new wave, advocated a form of feminism based on equal rights for women and a sharing of the roles that society currently divided between the genders. In her important 1963 book “*The Feminine Mystique*” she challenged the way in which women had been designated certain roles which kept them subjugated, and advocated the development of a society where women could enter into public and professional life on an equal footing with men.

Its publisher did not expect the occasionally dense analysis of women’s condition to do so well; only 3000 copies were produced in the first printing. But the book quickly climbed toward the top of the bestseller list and provoked widespread discussion.

Ironically, Friedan had intended to write a book challenging the widespread belief that a college education soured women on lives of domesticity. But when she interviewed former classmates at Smith College in preparation, she discovered something entirely different: they were vaguely, often apologetically, dissatisfied with their lives. Many of them enjoyed reasonable prosperity, healthy children, and caring husbands, but they felt “empty,” “incomplete,” or chronically “tired.” They were talented and well educated but they felt profound discontent.

Friedan labeled this discontent the “problem that has no name” and she linked it largely to the pressures women faced to conform to an idealized vision of femininity. Many young women attained first-rate educations, and many launched successful careers. But they felt obliged to abandon their academic or career plans upon marriage. Unable to pursue their own ambitions, they were forced to construct identities through their husbands and to find meaning in their roles as housewives and mothers. When many did not, they felt guilty and inadequate.

This form of feminism, however, tended to focus on women in middle-class and upper-class environments and developed into ideas that came to be referred to as liberal feminism.

In Britain, feminist writers and activists were often closely associated with socialist political movements and tended to see women’s rights as part of a wider social agenda that included class.

In the British context there was also a strong literary element to the Women’s Liberation Movement including notable figures such as playwright Michelene Wandor and literary critic Germaine Greer.

The influence of feminism on British fiction has been profound, to the extent that today, contemporary women novelists are just as likely to gain major literary awards and to be included on contemporary fiction syllabuses as men. This is certainly not the case if you look at any other period of British literature (with the possible exception of the Victorian novel). Many British women writers emerged (or were already established) in the late 1960s and 1970s who were keen to engage with feminist issues such as A. S. Byatt, Angela Carter, Margaret Drabble, Janice Galloway, Doris Lessing, Emma Tennant and Fay Weldon.

Alongside the Anglo-American tradition in feminist literary criticism, certain British novelists have been more influenced by the French feminists: Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. This body of work tended to engage more with poststructuralist theories of language. Hélène Cixous, for example, argues that the whole basis of Western language and philosophy has been based on ‘dual, hierarchical systems’ such as Activity/Passivity, Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature and Man/Woman that place the female in either a position of inferiority or invisibility: ‘Either woman is passive or she does not exist’. Her own writing seeks to rectify this imbalance by creating a new type of writing that combines literary creation with criticism in an attempt to represent female experience through the use of language and syn-

tax. This experiment with writing and language, labelled *écriture féminine*, identifies gender difference in the very understanding of, and relationship between, words. This was not entirely new in a British context, as Virginia Woolf had speculated some years earlier on the way in which sentence structure could be gendered. In 'To Cambridge Women' she identifies what she calls a 'man's sentence' as 'unsuited for a woman's use', and implicitly advocates that women should try to develop a style of writing that distanced itself from the male tradition.¹⁸ Contemporary British writers such as Jeanette Winterson and Janice Galloway have experimented with language in a way that evokes this kind of gendered writing.

One of the problems associated with this line of thinking, however, is that the kinds of sentence that are designated as female tend to be loose, rambling, resist making a firm point and value expression over logic. This, of course, could be construed as reproducing the very characteristics that had traditionally been associated with femininity in a patriarchal discourse. A different approach was the taking over by women of those characteristics normally associated with masculinity and a figure that we have already encountered looms large here. Margaret Thatcher has in many ways become an unlikely icon of this kind of feminism, unlikely because she openly disagreed with the main arguments put forward by feminists in the 1970s and 80s. She was, however, a visible example of the way in which women could achieve top positions of power in the 1980s. To do so, however, often involved her taking on what many regarded as masculine characteristics. This fact in itself, though, suggested that gender signification was independent of biological sex. To cite Thatcher as a feminist icon is misleading in many ways, as the make-up of parliament in the 1980s was overwhelmingly male, as was the demographic of the leading figures in British industry and public services. Nevertheless, a certain amount of the success of the arguments put forward by feminism in the 1980s and into the 1990s can be attributed to the fact that Britain had, for the first time in its history, a female Prime Minister.

The success that feminism achieved in the 1970s and 1980s in changing cultural perceptions of the accepted roles for men and women in society began to be more noticeable in the 1990s, to the extent that some cultural commentators and theorists began to talk of a *post-feminist* situation. The concept of post-feminism can be understood in two senses. Firstly, it can refer to the fact that most of the main aims of second wave feminism from

the 1960s to the 1980s had been achieved and consequently were no longer relevant in the 1990s. Secondly, and in contradiction to this argument, post-feminism could refer to the sense that although successes had been achieved in equal rights, the most powerful and highly paid positions in Britain were still predominately occupied by men. This form of post-feminism recognized that the original objectives of the Women's Liberation Movement were still legitimate areas for political campaigning despite the successes that had already been achieved. Associated with the idea of post-feminism, the 1990s saw the rise of significant popular cultural movements and trends. One of these was the so-called 'ladette' culture, a form of social behaviour that advocated the pleasures and codes of practice that had previously been the enclave of young men, such as heavy drinking, clubbing, and active pursuance of sexual partners. This popular movement was led by phenomena such as the success of the Spice Girls, who presented themselves as a kind of post-feminist gang, who used sexuality on their own terms. The main spokesperson of the band, Geri Halliwell, a fan of Mrs Thatcher, advocated a culture where young women had the confidence to tell you what they 'really, really want', and were able to get it.

Another Margaret that deserves a special attention is Margaret Drabble, whose literary activity is devoted to the problems of a woman's overcoming men's prejudices.

Margaret Drabble, the author of prize-winning fiction, has received most of her popularity and critical acclaim through her novels. Due to this, her short fiction, written over the span of almost forty years and presently amounting to fourteen short stories, has suffered the lack of due attention. Importantly enough, it is namely through her short stories that the changing social circumstances in the British women's lives are to be traced so easily. Drabble's short fiction, which has for the first time been located in a single collection and entitled "A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman: Complete Short Stories" is valuable, among other things, in that it shows the dynamically changing lifestyles over the second half of the twentieth century. A Day in the Life carries the reader through the turbulence of the 1960s, the booming social lives and women's careers of the 1970s, to peaceful get-aways in pre-retirement years of the late 1990s. The characteristic themes of Drabble's novels, which include feminism, class conflicts, women's social standing, self-imposed loneliness and many others, appear in almost all short stories in the collection. The story, written in 1973 tells the reader

about Jenny Jamieson, a famous and successful TV presenter, a wife and a mother of three. Jenny has an outburst of anger after being mentally abused by her husband, and after that she becomes “a different woman”. The next day she for the first time becomes aware of the cynicism of her work colleagues, the futility of her TV show, the limitations of the people she meets. She begins to understand that “some little mechanism in [her] has broken” [3; 123], for she no longer seems to be able to smile and ignore the shortcomings of the system of nepotism which she believes rules the system at work. Having been diagnosed with a gynaecological tumor and in need of operation, Jenny starts thinking she will die. During the train journey from the hospital and to the official reception at a comprehensive school, Jenny contemplates on whether her children would remember her after her death. She rethinks her attitude to God and blames him for his “weakness”. For the twenty minutes of delivering a speech at school, Jenny bleeds profusely from the earlier examination. In the meanwhile, she understands that she will not die because in her mind she has already faced what she feared most in death — the inability to fulfill her obligations to her children. The story’s end implicitly suggests that Jenny has not died.

All the factors, mentioned above give us a way to further research due to a great potential of the problem under study.

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