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FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM

Abstract

Feminist literary criticism arose thirty years ago, and became widespread in Western Europe and the United States. Today, there is practically no large American university where there would be no courses on female / feminist literature and criticism, as well as gender aspects of literary work. In this study the general concept of criticism over literature by feminism outlined.

Keywords: literature and feminism, feminist criticism, western literature

Introduction: the concept of feminist literary criticism

The main goal of feminist literary criticism is to reassess the classic canon of "large" literary texts in terms of 1) female authorship, 2) female reading, and 3) so-called female writing styles. In general, feminist literary criticism can be philosophically-theoretically oriented differently, but one thing remains common to all its varieties - this is the recognition of the special way of female life in the world and the corresponding female representative strategies. Hence the main requirement of feminist literary criticism about the need for a feminist revision of traditional views on literature and the practice of writing, as well as the thesis about the need to create a social history of women's literature.

Following Elizabeth Grosz, feminist literary criticism can be divided into the following main components: (*Elizabeth Grosz, 1995 pp. 9-24*)

- 1) female literature - emphasis is placed on the floor of the author;
- 2) female reading - the emphasis is on the perception of the reader;
- 3) female writing - emphasis is placed on the style of the text;
- 4) female autobiography - the emphasis is on the content of the text.

In accordance with this, Grosz also distinguishes between three main types of texts:

- 1) "female texts" - written by female authors;
- 2) "feminine texts" - written in a style culturally designated as "female";
- 3) "feminist texts" - consciously challenging the methods, goals and objectives of the dominant phallic-centric / patriarchal literary canon.

The most famous methodological works on the theory of "female literature" include the works of Mary Ellmann (*Think of Women, 1968*); Ellen Moers (*Literary Woman, 1976*); Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (*Crazy in the Attic: Woman Writer and Literary Imaginary in the 19th Century, 1979*); Rachel DuPlessis (*Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers, 1985*); Elaine Showalter (*Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing, 1977*); collections of New feminist criticism. *Essays on women, literature and theory (1985)*,

These modern women: autobiographical essays of the 20s (1978) and *Daughters of decadence. Women Writers at the Turn of the Century* (1984) edited by Elaine Showalter. The works on the methodology of “female reading” and “female writing” include the works of Toril Moi (*Sexual / textual policy: feminist literary theory*, 1985); Mary Jacobus (*Reading Woman. An Essay on Feminist Criticism*, 1986), as well as a book edited by her, *Women’s Letter and Letter on Women*, 1979; Shoshana Felman (*What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference*, 1993), Alice Jardine (*Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*, 1985); book edited by Nancy Miller (*Poetics of Gender*, 1986); as well as the works of French theorists Julia Kristeva, Lucy Yrigare and Helen Sixu. As for the criterion of autobiography, it is equally characteristic of both the concepts of “female literature” and the concepts of “female reading” and “female writing”.

The concept of female literature

Theoretical approaches: the concept of "gynocriticism"

In 1985, the United States edited by Elaine Showalter published the book *New Feminist Criticism*, which collected classic works on the poetics of feminism by authors such as Annette Kolodny, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Bonnie Zimmerman, Rachel DuPlessis, Alicia Ostriker, Nancy Miller, Rosalind Coward and others. The main task of "women's literature" - the study of topics and genres of literature created by women; the study of new subjects - such as the psychodynamics of female creativity, linguistics and the problem of the female language, the trajectories of individual or collective female authorship, the history of female literature and the study of individual writers and their works. In her famous article “On the issue of feminist poetics” Elaine Showalter, «Towards a Feminist Poetics», in (*Elaine Showalter, ed., 1985, pp. 125-143*), Elaine Showalter substantiates two main methods of analyzing “female literature”:

- 1) “feminine criticism” - the female is reduced to patriarchal sexual codes and gender stereotypes of male-designed literary history, which is based on the exploitation and manipulation of traditional female stereotypes;
- 2) “Gynocriticism” - builds new types of female discourse regardless of male and refuses to simply adapt male / patriarchal literary theories and models. A woman in this type of discourse is the author of the text and the producer of textual meanings, expressing new

models of literary discourse that are based on the actual female experience and experience. Gynocriticism, according to Showalter, begins when we free ourselves from linear and absolute male literary history, stop entering a woman into the gaps between the lines of male literature, and instead focus on the new visible world of female culture itself.

On the basis of the methodology of “gynocriticism”, Elaine Showalter identifies three main methods of writing in the development of female literature: 1) representation of the “feminine” - imitation of the canons of the dominant / patriarchal literary tradition and the internalization of traditional gender standards of art and social roles; 2) the representation of “feminist” - a protest against the dominant / patriarchal standards and values of culture and language, the protection of minority rights and values, including the requirement of women's autonomy; 3) the representation of “female” - as a specific female identity, different from the male canon of representation and writing. (*Elaine Showalter, 1985, pp. 137-139*)

Feminine-centered literature: “the time of innocence”

The female-centered tradition in literature is the tradition of studying female authors, female heroines and “female” writing genres (verse, short story, autobiography, memoirs, diaries); the basic concept is the concept of female authorship, determined by the principle of gender, and the basic theoretical construct is the idea of female emancipation in literature.

Ellen Moers, *Literary Woman* (1978) (*Ellen Moers, 1978*) is a pioneering attempt to describe the history of female literature separately from men's: the literary tradition is considered here from the point of view of the continuity of female authorship and the mutual influence of women writers on each other, as well as female literary and emotional text communication and interactions. Moers insists on various conditions for the formation of gender authorship in classical Anglo-American literature: if male authorship was formed in the public space of the university, male friendships and public literary discussions (Moers gives the example of Coleridge and Wordsworth who graduated from Cambridge), then the woman is deprived of “the possibility of education and participation in public life, isolated in the space of the house, limited in travel, painfully limited in friendship, ”is formed as an author in a private, intimate simple family and intimate reading (Moers refers in this case to Jane Austen, a contemporary of Coleridge and Wordsworth).

In this situation of female socialization in private space, the most influential women authors, according to Moers, are other female authors who precede them, not male authors, because only through female authorship can they draw analogies with their own feelings and experiences, usually unfixed men. It can be argued, Moers believes, that as a result, the female literary tradition “replaces” the male one for female authors - regardless of the historical period, national context, or social conditions of women who write. In general, the book can serve as an excellent initial introduction to the topic of female literature and feminist literary criticism.

“Women's Experience” and “Female Literature”: Extra-Literary Criteria in the Literature

The main goal of this theoretical direction is to search for specific “female” means of literary expression to reflect specific female subjectivity in literature. One of the main points of this approach is the thesis of the importance of empiricism and extra-literary parameters for the study of female literature - in other words, the thesis of “female experience” that is different from men's. One of the constructs of “female experience” in the theory of literature is the construct of “secondary authorship,” since it is implicitly assumed that famous (that is, women-writers included in the literary canon) share gender and language norms and stereotypes that are dominant for this stage of culture, interpreting and internalizing patriarchal aesthetic and social values (otherwise they would not have been included in the canon). This approach is most fully implemented in the books of Elaine Showalter: *Their own literature: British women writers from Bronte to Lessing* (1977), *Women's Madness. Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (1985), *Sexual Anarchy. Gender and culture at the turn of the century* (1990) and others.

Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists From Brontë to Lessing* (1977) (*Elaine Showalter, 1977*)- examines the work of women writers who are considered secondary in terms of “large” literary discourse, representing the marginal subjectivity and marginal practices of language expressiveness that there is a certain (affective) topology of female subjectivity.

Showalter proves that the peculiarity of the marginal / secondary topology of the female in 19th century literature was determined by the fact that women writers were primarily interpreted by the culture according to the biological criterion - as women (with

their affects, sensitivity and emotions), and only secondarily by professional - as a writer. As a result, women's creativity was interpreted not as a technological result of writing, but as a result of a woman's natural creativity and psychological characteristics, her special intense (bodily, affective) unique states, that is, as a result of a "demonic female genius" (by analogy with a male bodily "romantic genius" "In the philosophy of romantics). In other words, the design of female subjectivity was determined through the design of deviation and the corresponding sense of guilt in relation to "normative" / male subjectivity. Hence the corresponding female affective expressiveness ("language of insanity") in female literature of the 19th century as the main form of manifestation of female subjectivity. And only at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, in the work of women writers, according to Showalter, does the refusal to mark one's own subjectivity as deviant, marginal and affected.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) (*Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 1979*) is a classic study of female literature in feminist literary criticism. Unlike Showalter, the authors explore the work of not minor, but well-known female writers such as Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, George Eliot and Emily Dickinson, although they also find in their work a patriarchal interpretation of female literature as pathology and madness, as well as a steady female binarism in traditional culture: a woman is either a monster and a witch, or an angelic saint. The authors argue that women writers in patriarchal culture inevitably fall into its discursive traps, since in any case they are forced to dramatize the ambivalent division between two possible images of the female: the traditional patriarchal image and the simultaneous resistance to it. This "gap", according to the authors, forms the ambivalent structure of female authorship as a structure of "madness". Another symbol of the "crazy" identity of women writers, which Gilbert and Gubar also use in their research, is the symbol of the mirror, which expresses the female dramatic state of the gap: the desire to comply with the male normative concepts of women and the simultaneous desire to reject these norms and ideas.

Thus, Gilbert and Gubar not only consistently explore the tradition of women's literature, but also problematize it, while avoiding the markings of "innocent historicism."

Problems and searches for new theoretical foundations: criticism of the concepts of “female authorship” and “female experience” in literature

Already at the end of the 80s, such a productive design in the 70s as the “woman as the author of the text” design caused several philosophical problems. According to Toril Moi, the main methodological problem of “female literature” is the goal of creating a special, female literary canon in its difference from the male one. But the new canon can be no less repressive than the old one, following Foucault warns Moi, recalling that in the theory of marginal practices Foucault, the goal was to avoid any dominant dominant canon, and not to build a new one. (*Toril Moi, 1985, p. 78*)

In addition, after the “death of the author” proclaimed by Bart in 1977 (the text is not an expression of individual subjectivity or a simple representation of external sociality, but is an act of writing, material manipulation of signs, discursive structure, textual elements) it is impossible to talk about author's authenticity in general, which means, it is not possible to establish the coding of authorship as female authorship. Female authors can produce male-style texts, and female anti-feminists can produce feminist texts. Therefore, the concepts of “female reading” and “female writing” are replacing the concepts of “female literature” in feminist literary criticism, using the concept of “female” not on the basis of biological gender authorship, but on the criterion of various sexual styles of textual practices.

The concept of “female reading”

The main provisions of the theory of "female reading"

The Bartian thesis about changing literary policies from the production of texts to their perception (the death of the author meant the birth of the reader) turned out to be very fruitful for feminist literary criticism: since the perception procedure reveals the multiplicity and ambivalence of text structures, it means that it also allows the identification of specifically gender / female text reception , which was considered "secondary" in the history of the "big" / male literature and criticism. Thus, it was found that from now on, any text can be analyzed from a feminine / feminist point of view and that a special topology of specifically female subjectivity is associated with the structure of perception, in contrast to male subjectivity.

The characteristics of sexuality and desire, which are understood very widely as the dominant of sensuality in the structure of traditional subjectivity, are becoming one of the leaders in the structure of female perception: if traditional cultural stereotypes of male perception are built on the model of a rigid and rational "I" -identity, then the "female reading" of texts is based on plural and multiple psychological and social female bodily experience. The concept of reading as a female desire in feminist criticism is expressed in various literary concepts of "female reading", such as "ethics of reading" by Alice Jardine; "Frivolous reading" by Elizabeth Berg; reading as a "trans-position" by Catherine Stimpson; reading as "gender labeling" Monique Wittig; "Over reading" by Nancy Miller (as "reading between the lines", "deciphering silence", "filling in the gaps of repressed expression"); "Restorative reading" by Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert (that is, the discovery of secondary female authors, a representation of anonymous female experiences and experiences); Judith Fetterley's "Ecstatic Reading" ("A woman's reading of female texts may be erotic reading").

From this, the task of female criticism becomes clear - it consists in teaching a woman to "read like a woman." What does it mean?

1. This reading is outside the traditional theoretical discursive schemes of classical literary theory, author-reader-genre-historical era, resisting the generally accepted literary codification, scientism of the literary theory and the foregoing parameters of the androcentric critical tradition. (*Judith Fetterley, 1978, p. viii*)
2. This is a connection between textuality and sexuality, genre and gender, psychosexual identity and cultural authority. (*Sandra M. Gilbert, 1985, pp. 29-45*)
3. The process of sexual differentiation in the reading procedure should be considered primarily as a textual one - that is, as a process of producing meanings. Constituting a woman as an object at the time of our reading, we not only "gender" read the text, but also produce ourselves as women through the efficiency of the identification process.
4. This reading is like "feminine desire", (*Mary Jacobus, 1986*) that is, reading private, detailed, sensual, based on the principle of "part instead of the whole", which becomes a kind of autobiography and is ultimately indistinguishable from the act of writing.

At the same time, feminist criticism postulates the need for the concept of “female reading” of not only a stylistic, but ideological and political argument: “reading like a woman”, according to Judith Fetterley, means releasing new meanings of the text a) from the point of view of female experience, and b) the right to choose what is most significant in the text for women. This thesis is complemented by Nancy Miller’s famous thesis that feminist reading should not be “the poetics of impartiality”, but rather a constant reminder that there is nothing impartial in culture and that feminist criticism is not afraid to represent bias against female values of being.

The most systematic principles of understanding “female reading” in feminist literary criticism were expressed by Annette Kolodny in the article “Map for Enumeration: Gender and Interpretation of Literary Texts” in the book *New Feminist Criticism* (1985). The article was written with the aim of polemicizing the theses of the famous work of Harold Bloom “Map of incorrect reading” (1975), which, according to Annette Kolodny, in her thesis “we are what we read” proceeds from the position of a gender-neutral reader, at that time as a female reader reads differently than a man. (*Annette Kolodny, 1985, pp. 46-62*)

Firstly, female reading is less abstract than male reading: a woman always reads her own real life experiment in the text. Female reading is deciphering and discovering the symbolization of the usually repressed and inaccessible female reality and then “inscribing” it into your daily life.

Secondly, in the reading procedure, a woman usually feels the situation of suppressing her feelings and resists this suppression by the power of her own affect.

Thirdly, in women's reading, special attention is paid to female images and female situations, which are deciphered by men as secondary and insignificant.

Annette Kolodny compares how the concept of “reading as a revision” is used differently by Harold Bloom and the feminist theorist Adrienne Rich: while for “Bloom”, “revision” is a textual experiment with the goal of constructing another possible universally significant literary history, then for Rich the main goal of female reading is “Revision” is not a universally valid, but a personal unique story, the main thing in which

is the possibility of transforming not a text, but your own life as a history of suppression.
(*Adrienne Rich, 1979, p. 24*)

Criticism of theories of "female reading"

At the end of the 1980s, the concept of “female reading” was also subjected to philosophical problems: according to Derrida, the letter functions in a situation of a radical absence of any empirically determined recipient of the text, the text never reaches its destination, and the reader is dead just like the author . Therefore, in modern feminist literary criticism, not only the concept of “female authorship” is problematic, but also the concept of a “female reader”, as well as a specific “female reading”.

The concept of "female letters"

The main provisions of the theory of "female writing"

The concept of “female writing” arises under the influence of the Derrida concept of writing (which he contrasted with the concept of speech) - as a search for new forms of discursive / philosophical expressiveness. According to Derrida, speech embodies phallic truth, while for the actual practice of writing, the concept of truth is always something insignificant and secondary, since the main thing in writing is the experience of writing, the production of graphic compositions, and not how graphic the experience of writing corresponds to mental truth. As a result, “writing”, as well as literature, are declared to be a feminine phenomenon, that is, the ability to avoid the male dominants of logo-centrism.

In *Laughter of the Medusa (1972)* (*Helene Cixous, 1976, pp. 875-899*) the French philosopher and feminist theorist Helene Cixous first introduced the notorious concept of “female writing” (“écriture feminine”), which is designed to free a woman from the masculine type of language, striving for a single truth, as well as from the restraining paths of logic and pressure of self-awareness, the burden of which is inevitably present in any actual moment of a speech situation. The purpose of female language or female writing is to decentrate the system of traditional textual meanings. In this context, another well-known French philosopher and feminist theorist Lucy Yrigaret, instead of the traditional "phallic symbolism" in the practice of writing, proposes to use the opposing technology of "vaginal symbolism". The so-called phallic language, according to Yrigare, is based on the semantic effect of the verb opposition to have / not have its endless repetition, while

opposing the phallic “vaginal symbolism” is able to produce not repetitions, but differences both in the structure of meaning and in syntactic structure. Against the symbolic structure of the phallus as the structure of “one”, the symbolic structure of the vagina puts forward neither “one” or “two”, but “two in one” - that is, plurality, decentration, diffusion, instead of identifying relationships, embodying relationships of duration, the mechanism of action of which does not obey the logical law of consistency (in particular, a woman can never give an unambiguous and consistent answer to a question, preferring to endlessly supplement it, endlessly move in refinements, returning again and again to the beginning of your thoughts, etc.).

At the same time, the feminist concepts of “female writing” are different from the derrida concept of writing. The main difference is that feminist theories of writing are not limited by the theoretical interest or the textual level of working with the language, as is the case in the theory of the feminine Derrida, but express in the language the painful experience of female repression in culture. Hence, the feminist deconstruction of traditional types of discourse (and text) has not so much a theoretical as a practical goal: not just the release of new textual / symbolic meanings, but the desire to express the forbidden - repressed - female / asymmetrical experience, carried out outside the discourse of meaning in traditional culture. Feminist authors, following Jean-Jacques Rousseau, prefer to separate the two main types of linguistic use: rational language and expressive language. Female types of language and writing relate to strategies of expressive language - one that escapes beyond the language matrices of established meanings. Restore this expressive femininity and seek feminist authors. In an interview with “Language, Persephone and Sacrifice” (1985), Irigaray uses the mythological image of Persephone, which Demeter's mother seeks and cannot find: only the echo of the disappeared femininity responds to her. Irigaray calls the search for femininity the search for a language that “speaks to speech” - a kind of utopian language that says “outside and beyond words”, the meaning of which is not fixed in articulated speech.

Criticism of the concepts of "women's writing"

Modern criticism of the concepts of “female writing” is associated with a general criticism of essentialism in the interpretation of female subjectivity - reducing the structure of female subjectivity to an a priori and unchanging “female essence.” Therefore, in

modern feminist literary criticism, the analysis of “female writing” is carried out using the conceptual apparatus and methodology of gender theory, which can discursively reflect the diversity and complexity of performative, non-unique female “essence” gender identifications in modern literature.

Conclusion: the importance of feminist literary criticism for the theory of literature

The effect of feminist literary criticism in literary theory and culture at the end of the 20th century is truly stunning: many texts of female authors (including secondary and forgotten) were discovered and studied, not only in the traditions of the world's leading literatures, but also in the literary traditions of different countries; a significant number of male and female authors of classical literature underwent feminist analysis, from ancient times to the present; many new interpretations of the classical literary tradition have been proposed; a new apparatus of literary theory was created, enriched by the apparatus of feminist literary criticism, new strategies for analyzing literary texts were introduced and used. It can be said that today there is no practice of reading a literary or philosophical text that does not take into account its possible gender or feminist interpretation. And most importantly, a new, vast academic discipline has been created: feminist literary criticism, within which texts related to female writing, female style or the female way of being are produced.

As already noted, in contrast to the logic of essentialism (essentialist concepts of “female literature”, “female reading” and “female writing”), feminist theory of the late 20th century puts forward non-essentialist projects of female subjectivation in culture based on postmodern concepts of a decentralized subject (in particular, performative gender identification in the literature). We can say that feminist literary criticism is at the intersection of these two methodological approaches today, theorizing female authorship and female literary creativity in the context of this methodological problematization. And it is precisely in its mainstream in contemporary gender discourse that there is a conceptual meeting of two main strategies for interpreting female subjectivity in the culture of the late 20th century - feminism and post-feminism, and further retheoretization of the problem of female subjectivity in literary theory depends on their possible interaction and mutual influence.

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