



Change of Value Paradigm in Women's Prose (On The Example of the Novels of British and American Women Writers of Late 20th /Early 21st Centuries)

Gayane Viul Yeghiazaryan^{1*}, Ruzan Levon Museyan²

¹ Doctor of Sciences (Philology), Professor, Head of Chair of English, Brusov State University, Armenia

² PhD, Lecturer, Chair of English, Brusov State University, Armenia

Abstract

Our study focuses on gender issues from the perspective of “women’s literature”, gives a brief overview of female writers’ works from ancient times to the beginning of the 21st century, and explores how gender stereotypes have affected the texts created by women and about women. The point of view that literature is not gendered, and that there is simply good or bad literature which cannot be called either “masculine” or “feminine”, is the starting point of our research, but with one caveat: women bring to literature their own, unique female experience, bio-philosophy, their own hierarchy of values. The aim of our research is to conduct a mapping of existing literature on how “women’s issue” and value paradigm are represented in women’s prose, and, using gender and axiological approaches of analysis, to confirm the belief that the “issue of woman”, gender dominants, as well as thematic and symbolic structures, character and value systems in women’s writings have undergone abrupt changes in historical and cultural context. On the example of the works of British and American women writers of late 20th and early 21st centuries, we can conclude that contemporary female writers build their literary activity on the paradigm of individual's psychological problems, thanks to which their works are identified by emotional and value-specific measurements presented in a new aesthetic and artistic fashion.

Keywords: feminine, gender, prose, stereotype, value

1. Introduction

In the current era of globalization, where diverse cultures with their distinct value systems meet, the preservation of spiritual and moral-ethical constants becomes an irrefutable priority. Literature plays a crucial role in shaping these value systems, undertaking the responsibility of preserving them while offering perspectives that enrich the global dialogue on human values and aspirations.

Throughout the history of world literature, literary works have primarily articulated values from a male point of view, reflecting the worldview of male writers. In previous centuries, the depiction of the world through a female lens was the initiative of only a few brave women, who were often discredited by society for their courage and “dishonorable” literary endeavors. The term “women's literature” was typically viewed negatively, often serving as a pejorative or ironic label. This situation began to change in the 19th and 20th centuries, with the early victories of feminist and suffragist movements. The myth of women's emancipation and equal social status with men gradually gave way to the actual liberation of women and their ascendance in social, political, and cultural spheres. The female theme, traditionally explored by men for nearly two centuries, began to be reclaimed by women, serving as a foundation for the emergence of prominent female authors and contributing to a new creative direction that has been increasingly recognized in recent years (Ferguson, 1985).

Today, the concept of “women's literature” in the academic paradigm is no longer an unquestioned fact. It is natural for women to bring their unique experiences, biophilosophies, and original hierarchies of values into literature.

Consequently, our study aims to provide insights into two fundamental issues: values and women, exploring women's prose through the lens of these significant phenomena. Although often overlooked in public discourse, these topics are crucial not only within the realm of literary analysis but also for nurturing a deeper appreciation of human existence. The objectives of the study are:

1. To conduct a mapping of existing literature by outlining the historical periods that have influenced women's prose, highlighting how sociopolitical movements and gender discussions have shaped their narratives, and how each era has influenced the themes and issues addressed by women writers.
2. To investigate the shifting values portrayed in women's prose. By analyzing character development and how these characters embody or resist societal expectations, we will use gender and axiological approaches to provide specific examples from the works of British and American women writers of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, illustrating the diversity and evolution of value paradigms within women's writing in historical and cultural contexts.

2. Methods

In our research, we use not only classical methods of literary analysis rooted in literary criticism—such as semantic, historical-comparative, typological, and hermeneutic approaches—but also introduce new approaches to reading the author's text, particularly gender and axiological approaches.

Using a gender analysis approach, we identify gender dominants in women's prose across different eras. Gender dominants are essential elements of an author's worldview and correlate with concepts such as gender stereotypes, gender-oriented vocabulary, and the phenomena of dominance and power. Feminist criticism, or gender studies, focuses on the role of women (or gender) in literary texts. According to Bressler (2007, p. 168), “central to the diverse aims and methods of feminist criticism is its focus on patriarchy, the rule of society and culture by men. Feminist criticism is useful for analyzing how gender itself is socially constructed for both men and women. Gender studies also consider how literature upholds or challenges those constructions, offering a unique way to approach literature.”

The axiological approach unveils value constants in female writings. Value dominants are embodied in writers' prose and reflect the worldview characteristic of a certain era. Axiology

(from Greek *axios*, “worthy”; *logos*, “science”), also known as the theory of value, is the philosophical study of goodness and examines the category of “value,” as well as the structure and hierarchy of the world of values (Britannica, 2015). For our study, we adopt Bakhtin’s (1979, p.169) assertion that “the artistic style works not with words, but with values. The fictional world of a literary work is aimed at presenting a certain system of values on a certain scale of the author's evaluations. The value-oriented approach to the literary world is determined according to the author's value orientations, placing the reader within a framework of ‘value position,’ prompting them to express a certain attitude and assessment.”

Thus, the purpose of our research is to study the opposition of “male - female” and the hierarchy of values in the prose of women writers across different eras. By examining parameters such as the regularity of representation of gender concepts, methods of updating gender dominants, and value orientations as inseparable components of the author’s gender identity and part of their poetics and aesthetics, we conducted a mapping of the changes in women’s prose through the ages.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical-methodological foundation for this study is an integrated approach that synthesizes the fundamental ideas of philosophers (Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Nietzsche, Machiavelli, etc.), psychoanalysts (O. Weininger, J. Lacan, etc.), anthropologists (M. Mead, K. Fox, etc.), gender theory scholars (J. Todd, D. Tannen, etc.), and feminist literary critics (M. Wollstonecraft, H. Cixous, S. de Beauvoir, etc.).

The selected academic writings were analyzed for their methodologies, methods, and findings. The core of the research involves theoretical, historical, cultural, and axiological analyses of focal questions: feminist theory, value theory, gender stereotypes, the status of women, and the emergence of women's literature. We navigate from extracting predominant principles to interpreting the subtle nuances of specific texts, illustrating the intricate connections within these domains.

To contextualize the birth and development of women's literature within the changing paradigms of values and gender stereotypes, we conducted a mapping of existing literature that reveals the role of women in the socio-historical context, the characteristics of women's speech in previous eras, and the chronological developments of women's prose. We focused on case examples from the works of British and American women writers of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

We applied gender theory to examine the power dynamics in women’s writing. By briefly discussing significant socio-historical and cultural events, as well as the foundations of feminist theory that have influenced women’s narratives, we illustrate how female characters navigate patriarchal structures and how these dynamics have evolved over time, offering greater complexity to female characters compared to earlier literature.

Value theory is used to highlight the shifts in value paradigms recurring in contemporary women’s writing. We identify common themes across different time periods and analyze symbols that recur in women’s writing—such as the house, the body, and identity—exploring how their meanings shift over time, reflecting broader societal changes and shaping a new value system.

The findings of our research helped us identify three key themes: (1) in literary texts, both explicit and implicit, the gender dominants of the author can be reliably established; (2) the main components of values are present in women’s writings of all ages, though with varying

gradations; and (3) women's roles, in the context of which women's literature, its themes, aesthetics, and value paradigms, have undergone changes in historical and cultural contexts.

To understand how women's literature emerged and evolved alongside shifting values and stereotypes related to gender, it is essential to briefly discuss each of these aspects.

3.1. Value Theory

Research on ancient cultures indicates: "There were two Dikas, two truths, two fates, two Eros, two Eridas. One of them was good, the other was bad. Ethics could not allow the identification of good and evil; it separated and contrasted them" (Frejdenberg, 1998, p. 322). Throughout human history, "Good" and "Evil," "Right" and "Wrong," and various values have been among the most significant issues of human interest, leading to numerous approaches regarding values, their types, and their absolute and relative nature.

Famous thinkers of the Renaissance emphasized that human freedom is the core of anthropology. Descartes believed that individuals must understand the true "price" of good and evil and be able to distinguish between them. According to Heidegger, "a value is a value as long as it is accepted and valued" (Novaja filosofskaja jenciklopedija, 2009; Kinnier et al., 2011).

At the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, during a period of civilizational transitions when the value-based foundations of human existence were shaken, one of the most crucial prerequisites for an individual's existence is not only the search for new fundamental values but also the preservation of traditional values.

We believe the problem of the gradation of values is highly relevant today. Despite the upheavals of various new geopolitical and cultural trends, concepts such as goodness, truth, beauty, freedom, dignity, and the potential for personal self-development remain key values. The realization of these concepts has been discussed by philosophers and cultural critics for millennia, and their appreciation allows literature to preserve the best traditions of storytelling.

One of the missions of fiction is to present itself as a "space" where artistic concepts and values—cognitive, aesthetic, philosophical, moral, and others—fuse. The main components of values are represented in literature across all ages, albeit in different ways. In this paradigm, the role of the writer, as the bearer of aesthetic views and value orientations, is significant, as these are conveyed through characters, narrative, language, and style.

Turning to the value analysis of fiction, we focus on the perspectives of women writers, for whom upholding gender equality and empowering women is a moral imperative.

3.2. Traditional Perceptions of Women's Rights

Across different centuries and civilizations, the nature of the "man-woman" model has been defined in various ways. Although the concept of "woman" has always been placed alongside that of "man," the appeals and relationships between them have differed. Women have consistently fought for equal rights and status with men, though this struggle has not always been successful. Nevertheless, it is an undeniable fact that women have played a significant role in epoch-making events, as well as in contributing to the endless stream of world literature (Todd, 1980; Fox, 2004).

Even in ancient philosophical and cultural texts, traces of gender stereotypes can be found, distinguishing the binary oppositions attributed to men and women. For many thinkers and theorists, the male principle was identified with creation, initiative, and action, while the

female principle was associated with reception and perception (Gilbert, 1965, pp. 156-171; Johnson, 2017).

Plato considered women to be inferior beings, and love for a woman to be an animal emotion dictated solely by the need for procreation. Aristotle (1940) argued that there is only one type of man—male: "We must see in woman a being suffering from natural inferiority." German philosopher Hegel (2024) stated, "A man is powerful and active, while a woman is passive and subordinate." Nietzsche (1990, p. 893) equated women with slaves, asserting that "Women want to serve and find their happiness in it." According to Otto Weininger (1992, pp. 211-215), "... woman has no value in herself; she lacks individual self-esteem. <...> Woman lacks soul; woman is immoral, false, without moral ideas; she is jealous, ambitious, a completely non-social being, lacking her 'self' and willpower, convictions, and principles." However, "The Independent" (2011) states that while writings about the political debates of women writers from the 1970s and 1980s may have lost their readership today, political and social changes in the 18th century paved the way for women activists to assert their rights, challenging societal norms and expectations of the time.

Literature captures these processes, perhaps because the feminine theme, traditionally developed by men for almost two centuries, gradually shifted into the hands of women. This transition became an artistic foundation for the emergence of prominent female authors and has likely elevated the probability of a certain creative direction emerging over the years. Women began to gain the right to express themselves in various spheres of human existence, including art and literature, thereby securing their place in world literature.

3.2.1. The Birth of Feminine Prose

The foundations of feminist literary theory were laid by Anglo-American and French schools and literary critics such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), Juliet Mitchell (1940-), Abigail Smith Adams (1744-1818), Margaret Mead (1901-1978), Betty Friedan (1921-2006), Sandra M. Gilbert (1936-), Luce Irigaray (1930-), Hélène Cixous (1937-), and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986).

Mary Wollstonecraft asserted: "Women are to be considered either as moral beings, or so weak that they must be entirely subjected to the superior faculties of men. ...What nonsense! When will a great man arise with sufficient strength of mind to puff away the fumes which pride and sensuality have thus spread over the subject! If women are by nature inferior to men, their virtues must be the same in quality, if not in degree; consequently, their conduct should be founded on the same principles and have the same aim" (Wollstonecraft, 2002, pp. 12-26).

According to Luce Irigaray (1985), "If women allow themselves to be caught in the trap of power, in the game of authority, if they allow themselves to be contaminated by the 'paranoid' operations of masculine politics, they have nothing more to say or do as women."

Reiterating the significance of women's status, it is worth noting the famous quote by Simone de Beauvoir: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Bauer, 2001).

Hélène Cixous offers intriguing insights regarding the place and role of women, along with her reflections on women's prose: "It is time to liberate the New Woman from the Old by coming to know her—by loving her for getting by, for getting beyond the Old without delay, by going out ahead of what the New Woman will be, as an arrow quits the bow with a movement that gathers and separates the vibrations musically, in order to be more than her self. By writing her self, woman will return to the body that has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display—the ailing or dead

figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth” (Cixous, 1976, pp. 875-893).

Cixous' idea—that a woman's personal history intertwines with the history of all women, as well as national and universal history—can be observed in the works of many women writers. One characteristic of women's prose is the prevalence of autobiographical novels and the desire to convey personal experiences and emotions through storytelling. Cixous believes that the song that resonates within a reader's soul never fades in a woman's voice, and that a woman writer often presents the image of the mother as a source of goodness. In women's writing, there exists an element that resonates profoundly, retaining the power to move us; this element is the song—first music from the first voice of love alive in every woman. "The Laugh of the Medusa" is an exhortation and call for a "feminine mode" of writing that Cixous refers to as "white ink" and *écriture féminine* (Cixous, 1976, pp. 875-893).

These observations are crucial for understanding the typology of women's prose and the value systems of women writers, who emphasize goodness, beauty, harmony, and love. They may also serve as one of the answers to the question about the differences between male and female authorship.

The discussion of women's issues is also a well-established reality in Armenian literature. Armenian women writers such as Srбуhi Tyusab (1840-1901), Sipil (1863-1934), and Zapel Yesayan (1888-1943) were pioneers in advocating for women's rights within Armenian society and played a crucial role in the foundation of Armenian feminism by addressing gender equality and women's rights in their writings, thus enhancing the respect and recognition of Armenian women (Rowe, 2009).

These authors explored issues of female identity, representation in public and private life, and the struggle for women's rights, examining the philosophical, theoretical, and artistic aspects of women's and men's consciousness, as well as the unreliable nature of gender identity constructs dictated by culture.

Thus, over several centuries, a rich body of women's literature was created. Initially, it addressed religious themes, followed by worldly concerns, and eventually explored issues of representation concerning both women's and men's rights and social status. Women rejected traditional perceptions of their subordinate roles, “armed themselves” with high levels of professional, educational, and intellectual activity, and confidently sought to write original, self-defined prose. In doing so, they formulated a multitude of moral and ethical values that would later become integral to women's literature as part of the tradition.

3.2.2. Role Models of Women

Feminine stereotypes have long been as constant in literature as the limitations ascribed to women in real life. From the most ancient texts to classical literature, female characters were primarily portrayed as objects of love and passion—often ending in betrayal or tragedy. Sacrifice and self-sacrifice were integral to the female image. When female characters deviated from accepted norms, their narratives often emphasized the importance of purity, innocence, and morality (Lewis, 2017).

The social structure of 16th-century Europe expected women to focus on domestic chores that would promote the well-being of their families, particularly their husbands. Education was largely discouraged, as it was considered harmful to traditional feminine values of innocence and morality. In the 17th century, women continued to be unrecognized in economic and political structures, relegated to primary roles within their families. However,

many women found ways to publicize their views under the guise of religious writings. Those who challenged societal norms risked their lives; for example, Mary Dyer was hanged for denouncing the laws of Massachusetts.

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, male characters in literary works were predominantly presented as bearers of positive qualities such as determination, persistence, ambition, strength, ingenuity, creativity, and courage. In contrast, women were depicted primarily as dependent, timid, and submissive beings, often condescending to men's shortcomings and living solely to please them. The perception of a woman's identity and the importance of the "I" were largely absent (Wheathill, 1584).

In the 19th century, the women's movement in Western Europe gave rise to what was termed "women's literature." Theorists argue that it was during this time that gender consciousness was first pushed to the forefront of scholarly thought, and that the 19th century saw more female authors than previous centuries combined (Ferguson, 1985).

Frances Burney's *Evelina* emphasized values such as a woman's innocence, modesty, naivety, intelligence, silent submission to men's insults, and the charm of unrequited love. Jane Austen's rational and emotional characters, such as Jane and Elizabeth, and the works of Charlotte Brontë, particularly *Jane Eyre*, featured independent, intelligent women who, while free-loving, were still bound by societal expectations. Kate Chopin's *Edna* chose to "suffer rather than be deceived by illusions all her life," embracing passion as a serious and "legitimate" value in literature. Margaret Mitchell's *Scarlett O'Hara* epitomized strength, self-sufficiency, bravery, resourcefulness, and a free spirit.

These heroines represent the fusion of old and new systems, showcasing the adoption of new value constants and the struggle for these values. The female characters and value systems created by women writers during these centuries set the stage for future women novelists to be recognized as worthy authors.

4. Findings: Representation of Gender Roles and Value Dominants in Writings of Female Writers of Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries

In this section, we aim to illustrate the shift in the value paradigm and the change in the representation of female characters in women's prose of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. After a brief textual analysis of the works of notable British writers A. S. Byatt and A. Carter, as well as American authors D. Brown, E. Gilbert, J. Picoult, and D. Tartt, we will present a discussion and interpretation of the results of this analysis.

During this period of transition between centuries and millennia, the aspiration to achieve a creative improvement in life and a reasonable existence often draws on the experiences of classical creation, representing the harmony of the human soul and existence. These open searches for a valuable image of the world, the quest for one's own identity, and the desire to connect with the good traditions of the past are evident in the works of Western authors. In the writings of women authors from the late 20th and early 21st centuries, themes such as individual value systems, changing evaluations of values by female characters, and the search for new values become central. A new type of character emerges, where different value orientations interact and may contradict the lifestyles and value systems of those around them.

The works of notable British writers A. S. Byatt and A. Carter, alongside American authors D. Brown, E. Gilbert, J. Picoult, and D. Tartt, serve as compelling case studies for examining the challenges to traditional gender roles and values. These writers were selected for their

recognition as some of the best authors of the century, their various academic qualifications and awards, and their engagement with socially impactful issues. The primary factor uniting these authors is their gender, their creative output during the same period, and their unequivocal attempts to imagine value orientations. The differences in their social, artistic, and psychological backgrounds provide an opportunity to appreciate the unique contributions each of them brings to the modern literary landscape, enriching it with new ideological and aesthetic trends.

Angela Carter raises many important issues in her novels *Love* and *Nights at the Circus*. Her value system is manifested in several layers: love, jealousy, selfishness, home, and family. Female characters are presented in various styles and modes: loving woman, victim, indifferent woman, jealous woman, mysterious woman, and dictator. Ultimately, the choice between love and hate is resolved in favor of the former.

A. S. Byatt's novel *Angels and Insects* tackles the problem of universal values, analyzing various systems of relationships between husband and wife, family dynamics, public morality, and inner morality within the Victorian family. The main conflict lies in the clash between true and false values: love versus perversion, straightforward versus fraudulent family relationships, and the coercion of false piety versus innocence. Byatt criticizes societal dictates that limit women's personal freedom and emotional expression, highlighting the roles of women and men through the lens of equality, as well as the importance of family, love, and friendship.

Contemporary American women authors write about universal values such as good and evil, justice, truth, and freedom, often depicting the bitter lives of female migrants, housewives, and their daughters, while representing the wisdom and culture of their communities, the beauty of their islands, and the experiences of immigration and exile (Perkins & Perkins, 1999).

The central conflict in Diana Brown's novel *The Hand of a Woman*, dedicated to her Armenian grandmother, is the struggle of a thoughtful and feeling woman for her place and role in a heartless, masculine society. The author reveals a world filled with cynicism, falsehood, and the complete devaluation of the individual. Within the context of her relationship with the world, the psychological experience of the heroine is explored as she establishes herself as a doctor in a cruel world dominated by men and navigates the complexities of being a woman in a similarly harsh environment. Issues of marriage, love, family, and human relationships are examined through the lens of moral values.

In Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love*, the author's value paradigm undergoes significant change. The protagonist, raised with American values of freedom and independence, travels for a year to explore various cultures, gaining appreciation for values beyond her own. Through this journey, she reevaluates her own value system, integrating "strange" values and behavioral models that are important to others into her new worldview, ultimately accepting values that promote happiness, health, and balance.

Jodi Picoult's novels critically question when moral choice becomes a moral imperative, and where the line lies between justice and punishment, forgiveness and mercy. Her characters embody the validation of suffering and hope, indifference and empathy. Through their actions, thoughts, failures, and achievements, the author presents a complex system of human relationships, discussing themes of human feelings and emotions. In *My Sister's Keeper* and *The Storyteller*, the notion of sin awakens the characters from spiritual lethargy and indifference, leading to remorse and forgiveness.

Donna Tartt's novels *The Little Friend* and *The Goldfinch* explore the changing times of the American South, the outdated Victorian value system, the secrets of Mississippi, racial discrimination, ignorance, the absence or ineffectiveness of parents, and the complexities of broken families, misery, and love. Throughout her narratives, love and beauty persist as central themes. Ultimately, it is women who depict and paint the world, determining whether that world will be good or bad.

5. Discussion

Women's role, in the context of which women's prose, its themes, aesthetics and value paradigm have undergone changes in historical and cultural context. The following gender dominants and value orientations have been revealed through the analysis of works by contemporary women writers:

- The main components of values are present in women's writings, with each author presenting her own value system. The primary conflict in contemporary women writers' works is the clash between true and false values. When virtue and benevolence are replaced by false piety and a "surrogate" of innocence, it can lead to the deterioration of human relationships, as seen in A. S. Byatt's *Angels and Insects*. Attempts to establish justice in a ruined and hopelessly unjust society are doomed to failure in the presence of enduring impulses of the human soul, such as envy, betrayal, lust, and a thirst for revenge, as illustrated in D. Brown's *The Hand of a Woman*.
- Love is one of the most important values, but it is presented from different perspectives. This noble feeling is often disrupted by the cruelties and shallowness of everyday life, where love is replaced by petty passions, intelligence becomes a prisoner of these passions, and jealousy becomes uncontrollable, as depicted in A. Carter's novel *Love*. Love often manifests as distorted, unrequited feelings or as pure carnal pleasure, as seen in A. S. Byatt's *Angels and Insects*. In a possessive and unjust society, love ultimately leads to the heroines' infatuation, as explored in D. Brown's *The Hand of a Woman*. Female characters must decide which type of love to embrace: love as a noble feeling, love as passion, love as suffering, or love as a destructive force.
- In the scale of value systems, the idea of freedom occupies a key position, particularly women's freedom to act and behave as they choose. Women must endure various sufferings to achieve freedom, and the path to spiritual exaltation serves as personal salvation (D. Brown). For A. Carter, freedom is defined as freedom from morality and indulgence, highlighting a moral crisis faced by a highly degraded individual. Freedom, in the works of A. S. Byatt and D. Brown, is portrayed as a constant struggle against social norms. For E. Gilbert, women's freedom and independence are fundamental concepts in American culture.
- Gender dominants are established by modern women writers both explicitly and implicitly. The female characters created by these authors tend to be more mature, "material," and "physical." The literary female character is sometimes constructed outside of a ready-made value system and acts as a morally independent entity, in opposition to general patterns.
- In the literary-aesthetic systems of contemporary women writers from different cultures, both similarities and differences emerge. Although these writers may not share similar literary views or operate within the same genres and styles, they are united in their arguments and representations of value orientations in their texts. Together, they form a cohesive picture of heritage and a unified value system for female writers of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

- Victorian values remain significant for British women writers. By presenting themes of moral decline, the devaluation of family values, human self-centeredness, and changes in love and freedom, A. Carter and A. S. Byatt successfully defend traditional cultural values, such as strong family bonds and the enduring power of love.
- American women writers emphasize fundamental American values—freedom, tolerance, and independence. These authors provide their characters with necessary settings that allow noble and strong feelings to be freely expressed, in alignment with the limitless possibilities for spiritual and moral development.
- There are notable similarities in the works of modern female writers: 1. a desire to present their own experiences and feelings, exploring the hidden layers of personal life and emotional experiences through autobiographical narratives; 2. the depiction of personal and emotional traumas of literary characters, often contextualized within global events such as the Second World War, the Holocaust, plagues, terrorist acts, and other painful episodes; 3. the emergence of a new character who embodies the values of the past and the present, achieving a subconscious reconciliation with a more perfect value system.

6. Concluding Remarks

The philosophical and psychological peculiarities of the issue of "woman and society" serve as the foundational basis for analyzing "women's prose." The sociocultural phenomenon of "women's prose" has emerged as a result of the evolving role of women in society, with its distinction in literature conditioned by several factors: the author being a woman, the main character being a woman, and the issues often relating to a woman's destiny.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, women writers began to describe the lives and sufferings of women confined in family "prisons." They introduced not only new topics, distinct from those presented in earlier female writings, but also new models of behavior that protect women's rights to self-identity.

Female authors' novels exhibit a historically determined typology that emphasizes the central role of female characters. Over the years, these characters have often been depicted as either virtuous or immoral. Today, women writers strive to break these stereotypes, which have often reflected masculine desires in the texts of male authors. They revisit familiar plots and motifs, dismantling existing myths about femininity and masculinity.

Prominent British writers such as A. S. Byatt and A. Carter, along with American authors like D. Brown, E. Gilbert, J. Picoult, and D. Tartt, have significantly influenced the development of women's prose and made substantial contributions to the literature of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. They address not only pressing issues for women of their time but also present their interpretations of universal values. While these writers do not create a philosophical system of values in a classical sense, they inevitably introduce value-laden content in their novels, emphasizing that an individual's value system is based on freedom and responsibility, faith and mistrust, love and hatred, compassion and tolerance, and the complexities of good and evil.

Contemporary female characters are more mature and "materialistic." They are aware of moral norms; at times, their character and morality align with these norms, while at other times, moral requirements serve merely as personal aspirations. Many of these characters deliberately reject moral dictates, and often these dogmas do not play a decisive role in their lives.

According to the types of female literary characters, three main chronological stages can be defined: heroines as victims, heroines searching for their identity, and heroines acquiring qualities of leadership—even dictatorship.

The main components of values are represented in every literature but in different ways, making the identity of the author crucial in presenting value orientations. The paradigm of good and evil, truth and falsehood, beauty and ugliness, righteousness and destruction, is one of the most important factors in the perception of female writers' works.

Contemporary women writers modify existing value paradigms: family piety and marital fidelity are not always prioritized. Although their female characters are aware of moral norms, they sometimes deliberately reject them.

Importantly, modern female writers assert that a woman's life is an undeniable value, encompassing its "dosage" of suffering, its right to healing, and its privilege of happiness. These qualities distinctly differentiate modern women writers from their predecessors.

The significance of these findings in relation to the broader field of women's literary studies lies in the assertion that gender and axiological approaches to literary analysis are reliable tools for revealing the worldview of modern women writers. This emphasizes the central role of female characters and the shift in value paradigms according to the author's perspective. We propose that modern female writers create a "universal female discourse," addressing not only important issues facing women today but also challenging gender stereotypes and offering unique interpretations of universal values. These writers do not construct a philosophical system of values in a classical sense, but rather introduce value content, stressing that a woman is an absolute value in an ontological-cognitive sense, analyzing freedom and responsibility, faith and distrust, and good and evil as central issues in the meaning of a woman's life.

While highlighting the modes of representation of value paradigms and the roles of women across historical and sociocultural contexts, we do not aim to present a comprehensive picture of the entire artistic system of literature, even within women's literary discourse, nor do we suggest a common definition or interpretation of female writings. The data obtained from our analysis could inspire further debates in women's literature and beyond.

In summary, understanding how women's issues and value paradigms have evolved in literature enriches our comprehension of these issues and contributes to a more nuanced discourse. By emphasizing literature's role as a mirror to society and a vehicle for change, this analysis will not only contribute to literary studies but also foster greater awareness of the cultural narratives that shape women's lives today.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to Brusov State University, Armenia, for assistance and support received throughout the completion of this research paper.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

References

- Aristotel', (1940). *O vznikhovnenii zhivotnyh*, Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR. <http://publ.lib.ru/ARCHIVES/A/ARISTOTEL'/Aristotel'.html>
- Bahtin, M. (1979). *Jestetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* / S. G. Bocharov, Iskusstvo. <http://teatr-lib.ru/Library/Bahtin/esthetic/>
- Bauer, N. (2001). *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy and Feminism*, Columbia University Press.
- Bressler, Ch. (2007). *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. 4th ed. Pearson. Upper Saddle River.
- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia (2015, June 10). *Axiology*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/axiology>
- Brontë, Ch. (2009). *Jane Eyre*. Random House Inc.
- Brown, D. (1985). *The Hand of a Woman*. St. Martin's Press.
- Burney, F. (1931). *Evelina*. London, Toronto, New York.
- Byatt, A.S. (1994). *Angels and Insects*. Vintage, Reprint edition.
- Carter, A. (1985). *Nights at the Circus*. Picador.
- Carter, A. *Love*. <https://writestitchup.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/love-angela-carter.jpg>
- Cixous, H., Cohen, K., Cohen, P. (1976). *The Laugh of the Medusa*. *Signs*, 1(4) Summer, 875-893. https://artandobjecthood.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/cixous_the_laugh_of_the_medusa.pdf
- Feminism in Literature (2005, 18 July 2024) - Anne Wheathill (1584). *Feminism in Literature, I*, edited by J. Bomarito, J. W. Hunter, G. Cengage. <https://www.enotes.com/topics/feminism/critical-essays/women-16th-17th-18th-centuries#critical-essays-women-16th-17th-18th-centuries-primary-sources-anne-wheathill-essay-date-1584>
- Ferguson, M. (1985). *First Feminists: British Women Writers (1578-1799)*. Indiana University Press.
- Fox, K. (2004). *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour*. Hodder & Stoughton.
- Frejdenberg, O. (1998). *Mif i literatura drevnosti*. (Issledovanija po fol'kloru i mifologii Vostoka).
- Gilbert, F. (1965). *Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Politics and History in 16 Century*. Florence.
- Gilbert, E. (2007). *Eat, Pray, Love*. Penguin Books International Edition.
- Hegel, G. (2024). *The Philosophy of Right*. Transl. by T. M. Knox. 3rd Part. Ethical Life. Oxford University Press.
- Irigaray, L. (1985). *The Sex Which is Not One*, Ithaka.
- Is feminism relevant to 21st-century fiction? (2011, 12 May, 23:00 BST.). *Independent*. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/is-feminism-relevant-to-21st-century-fiction-2283009.html>

- Johnson, L. J. (2024, June 25). *Women Writers of the Ancient World*. <https://www.thoughtco.com/ancient-women-writers-3530818>
- Kinnier, R., Kernes J., Dautheribes, T. (2011). *A Short List of Universal Values*. http://personal.tcu.edu/pwitt/univ_ersal%20values.
- Lacan, J. (1977). *Ecrits: A Selection*, W.W. Norton & Co.
- Lewis, J. J. (2017, March 08). *Women Writers of the Ancient World: Sumeria, Rome, Greece, Alexandria*.
- Mead, M., *The Great Anthropologists*. <http://thephilosophersmail.com/perspective/the-great-anthropologists-margaret-mead/>
- Mitchell, M. (1974). *Gone With the Wind*. Tan Books in Association with Macmillan with London.
- Nicshe, F. (1990). *Sochinenija*, 2(1).
- Novaja filosofskaja jenciklopedija*. (2009). 4. / In-t filosofii RAN. Mysl'.
- Perkins, G., Perkins, B. (1999). *The American Tradition in Literature*. 9th edition. McGraw-Hill College.
- Picoult, J. *My Sister's Keeper*. <http://jodipicoult.com/my-sisters-keeper.html#more>
- Picoult, J. *The Storyteller*. <http://jodipicoult.com/the-storyteller.html#more>
- Platon. (2007). *Sochinenija*, 3(1), 250-255.
- Rowe, V. (2009). *History of Armenian Women's Writing, 1880-1922*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Seyersted, P. (1969, (2006)). *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*, Louisiana State University Press.
- Tannen, D. (1998). *Gender and Discourse*. 7-13. Oxford University Press.
- Tartt, D. (2002). *The Little Friend*. <https://www.amazon.com/Little-Friend-Novel-Vintage-Contemporaries-ebook/dp/B005PRJJOQ/ref>
- Tartt, D. (2013). *The Goldfinch*. Little, Brown and Company.
- Todd, J. (1980). *Gender and Literary Voice (Women and Literature; New Ser., 1)* Holmes a. Meier Publishers.
- Vejninger, O. (1992). *Pol i karakter*, 211-215, Terra-Terra.
- Wollstonecraft, M. (1792). *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/wollstonecraft-mary/1792/vindication-rights-woman/index.htm>