



Global Conference on Gender Studies

07 - 09 December 2023

Berlin, Germany

Feminine Self-Discovery: Depiction of Girlhood in Contemporary Latvian Prose Fiction

Sandra Meškova

Daugavpils University, Latvia

Abstract

Inspired by the current ideas of feminist theories and women's activism, the tradition of women's literature has undergone rapid growth and diversification since the mid-twentieth century. One of its intrinsic traditions is that of feminine self-discovery or 'awakening' initiated by the American writer Kate Chopin at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and developed by numerous women writers including Katherine Mansfield, Doris Lessing, Erica Jong, Sylvia Plath, etc. A specific version of this tradition appears in works by women writers who focus on the age of adolescence and choose a teen-aged girl as a protagonist and focalizer in texts of autobiographical character. In Latvian literature, women writers have produced depictions of teen-aged girls' experiences concerning their growing up, discovering their femininity, developing attitude towards women's roles and socio-cultural positionings since the early decades of the twentieth century, starting with major literary classics Aspazija and Anna Brigadere. The present paper investigates the diversification of the tradition of feminine self-discovery in contemporary Latvian literature represented by Anita Liepa, Vizma Belševica, Māra Zālīte, and Gundega Repše. The aim of the paper is to analyze depictions of girlhood in these authors' works referring to the theoretical and methodological frameworks of gynocritics and girlhood studies. The analysis is focused on the depiction of protagonists' growing up in diverse familial and cultural conditions, socializing in school, among peers, and in local community, discovering femininity in terms of their experience and as related to the surrounding socio-cultural environment.

Keywords: adolescence, autobiography, gynocritics, subjectivity in text, women's writing