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Philological Readings

“NEW WOMAN” IN LATE VICTORIAN FICTION

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Abstract

With the purpose of clarification of a role of a female character in the novels of end XIX-beginning XX century we are providing a set of characteristic features of a new woman. This article describes the elements of a Victorian woman image as depicted in fiction and analyses two novels in which the central female characters show themselves bearing the characteristics of a new woman. H. R. Haggard's and B. Stoker's heroines show a mixture of classical Victorian women and new features that enable us to attribute them to new women. These features include the ability to make their own decisions, plan their future, be different from surrounding women, fight for the truth and be able even to save a life of a man. They are characterized by a possibility to find a place in the society (for B. Stoker's novel) or lack of possibility to survive due to the background circumstances (for H. R. Haggard's novel).

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1. Introduction

Female characters are an integral part of late Victorian fiction. This article examines the works of H. R. Haggard and B. Stoker from the point of view of the contribution they have made to the creation of the “female myth”. English literature in the second half of the XIX century is full of attempts to discuss the questions posed by life: J. Eliot, J. Moore, T. Hardy showed the drama of women's fate, the dependence of a woman on the power of men, her lack of rights in the society of social contrasts. These writers, asserting the idea of literature as the possibility of a person's self-understanding in the outside world, sought to broaden the scope of social reality with its inherent contradictions. The truth of life, the re-creation of reality in its social contradictions, the desire to clarify the patterns of relationships between a person and the society surrounding him - all this pervaded a realistic novel.

Pre-Raphaelites, impressionists, aesthetes rushed away from naturalism and everyday writing, and delved into the realm of "eternal femininity". For the Pre-Raphaelites, who opposed ideological and aesthetic conservatism, the ideal of beauty was associated with the Italian Middle Ages and the early Renaissance. Pre-Raphaelites hoped to comprehend the mysteries of life, the depths of the human spirit. For them, a woman as a defenseless barefoot red-haired beauty, submissively immersed in a world of dreams, became decisive (Gavin, 2016).

Tormented by the thirst for Beauty, O. Wilde in the portrayal of Salome and the Sphinx preferred heroines marked by painful beauty and disastrous charm. The tendency to a paradoxical reading of the traditional motive of the “madness of passion” determines the features of the plot construction of the one-act play “Salome” (1891), Salome kills Iokanaan because she loves him! The tragic paradox of this situation embodies, according to Wilde, the eternal secret of love. Love is a chaotic primordial element. It, breaking to the surface, destroys the obstacles standing in its way. The motif of the madness of passion, correlated with the "will" of A. Schopenhauer and the "Dionysianism" of F. Nietzsche, is fully embodied in the fate of Salome. In the poem "The Sphinx" (1894), Wilde's idea of the mystery and mystery of the world of the female soul was reflected.

2. Problem Statement

Numerous studies (John, 2016; Murphy, 2017; Sadomskaya, 2006) on adventure novels of XIX-XX century have given a wide range of descriptions of female characters. They can be roughly subdivided into traditional English women and “new women”, judging by their origin, portrait, traits of character, behavior and actions. Still, “new women” create a special type of “female myth” while bears a set number of features which are of current interest.

3. Research Questions

We are interested in the distinctive features of female characters in late Victorian fiction of H. R. Haggard and B. Stoker related to the “new woman”. Another problem that demands our special consideration is the characteristics of the “new woman” which became most productive for fiction writers.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine the set of characteristics which give an account of social and psychological status of Haggard's and Stoker's female characters.

5. Research Methods

The most suitable research methods are systematic and historical-theoretical approaches which help to consider fiction as an integral set of elements in unity with the connections and relations between them. Historical-theoretical approach allows us to study the works of H. R. Haggard and B. Stoker in the context of the English fiction traditions of the late Victorian era. In this work, the data obtained in the analysis of fiction and literary texts are analyzed.

6. Findings

Henry Rider Haggard (1856-1925) and Bram Stoker (1847-1912) in their fiction have created memorable female images. In many of their works female characters are at the centre of the plot: "Dracula", "The Snake's Pass" (for Stoker's novels). Sometimes even the titles say: "She", "Aisha", "Nada the Lily", "Jess", "Beatrice" (Haggard's novels). The images of the "new women" created by Haggard (2006) in the novel about the modern age - "Jess" and Stoker's (2006) "The Snake's Pass" are discussed in this study. "Jess" exhibits strong autobiographical influence, as R. Reeve discusses in his book (Reeve, 2018). H. R. Haggard shows a woman in the novel who is able to make her own choice in a complex socio-political conflict. South Africa is the location of the novel shortly before the start of the First Boer War. Old Croft, an Englishman, who lives in South Africa in his estate Mooifontein, brings up two girls, his nieces - Jess and Bessie. It is Jess in Haggard's novel that embodies the idea of a new type of woman who can make her independent choice, declare the right to her independent vision of what is happening (Sadomskaya, 2014). Outwardly calm, silent, she is endowed with rich inner life. At first, she is not much different from traditional Victorian female characters (Guy, 2017). Jess plays the piano, sings beautifully, and, moreover, in German! But in her singing you can hear deep passion, hidden hope; every sound is filled with love.

The listener considered her voice beautiful, though he knew that she had not studied singing anywhere. She sang to entertain the guests. He appreciated that it was a German song, that language was strange for him, but he did not need the translation, he felt the music of her voice which was filled with strong emotions. The girl's singing was desperate in search of love. The melody was rising and falling and John Neil's heart followed the voice.

Jess' property is a large bookcase with novels of eminent writers, this is what John Neil saw when he entered her room. The place turned out to be not African at all, because the furniture consisted mainly of European-style objects. He paid special attention to the piano in one corner and a bookcase in another one. The girls, Jess and Bessie, were different so their belongings varied as well.

But Captain Niel, who gives the account of the female character, perceives the girl as an extraordinary and even mysterious person. The desire to solve this riddle is driven by the interest of the captain. One of the central episodes that clarifies the inner essence of the heroine is the scene of the

meeting of Jess and Captain Neal at the bottom of the Lion's Kloof (Chapters V, VI). Haggard shows a passionate heroine. A short conversation convinces the captain that in front of him is the girl endowed with the ability to love, following the dictates of her heart. The sensuality inherent in Jess is emphasized by the details in the description of the plants surrounding the sleeping girl. These were crimson anemones. In many cultures, the anemone symbolizes the transience of life, fragility, sadness, grief, virginity. Crimson is the symbol of the blood shed by Christ.

The events in both novels take place in the natural background. In «Jess» we see South Africa, in «The Snake's Pass» we read about rural Ireland. Detailed pictures of these countries complement the action. As for Jess, the reader follows the opinion of John Niel, who sees her in the Lion's Kloof. Stiebel (2001) considers this place full of stunning implacability, comparing it with «paradise lost» when Jess meets John Niel her calm peaceful life turns into agony to fight against her love. At the same time in Lion's Kloof Jess is admired secretly, because she is sleeping.

John Neil walked quietly on the grass and moss when he noticed Jess. She did not hear his steps, because she was asleep. The man saw that she sat bareheaded, because the shade of the bush protected her head from the sun. Her posture was natural, she sat leaning on her hand. Her brown hair was lit by sunrays and even more sun reflected on her face, wrist and hand. This detailed description proves that John Neil admired the natural beauty of the girl. He felt that he disclosed some secret.

He stared at her secretly, failing to understand that he fell in love with her. She represents paradise Eve in her divine beauty. Still she looks outstanding – at least in comparison with her sister Bessie:

From the first sight he managed to have an impression and study her thoroughly. He remarked that she had very pale complexion, she was thin and her hair was curling brown. It is puzzling to know about a very straightforward reaction and confession – John Neil did not consider Jess lovely or beautiful, he thought her extraordinary. It was both her face that one would never forget as well as the personality that struck John Neil. The girl who lived far from European civilization turned out to possess many characteristics of a European woman. Still, Jess proves to be very passionate and this strikes John more than his first impression.

The reader perceives Norah Joyce personality and look following the opinion of Arthur Severn, the protagonist of the novel. Arthur immediately realizes that Norah does not bear traits of a rough peasant breed. He compares her with Spanish beauties, recalls legends saying that "along the coast of Ireland you can find traces of Spanish blood", and concludes that Norah is even more beautiful than the Spaniards, because her beauty is "softened by the northern calmness" (Stoker, 2006). He sees her for the first time at the top of the mountain when Nora enjoys solitude and sits embracing her knees. Her unity with the nature, hills, ocean is unbelievable, she looks like a goddess of this far-away land. Moreover, it is Nora who finds a treasure – a golden crown. Norah living between hills and bogs in an Irish village is a kind of treasure (Lashtabova, 2010). During the conversation between Phelim and Arthur about Norah's upcoming marriage, it turns out that Arthur considers her a true treasure of Knockcalltecore.

Color and plant symbols bring traditional romantic features to the image of Jess. She lies on the bank of a stream strewn with soft and tender moss. The girl is surrounded by dense shrubs that hide her from prying eyes. Hence the associations with the biblical Eve living in Paradise, which appears many times in the text. The vulture symbolically looks like a soaring plane in the sky above the sprawling Jess,

the river, a sudden thunderstorm, a lightning strike that destroyed a centuries-old rock, a sudden rain, and it all seemed to predict her future fate.

Jess sacrifices her love for the happiness of the weaker and defenseless sister Bessie. But by running away from her love to Pretoria, she condemns herself to a new choice. The life with her lover in a war-ridden city, where the heroes chose a small house, is described by Haggard as happy time. A cosy house surrounded by a vineyard, rose bushes are perceived by Jess and John as paradise. Looking after the wounded John Niel, Jess realizes that in the days of trials and fear, they are like eternity. Haggard's heroine passes through a series of tests: together with John they sail along the river in a broken wagon, are captured by the Boers, she manages to reach the estate of her uncle and kill the detestable Frank Muller; and always she gets help not only from the ability to stay in the saddle, but, above all, her strong will, self-control and patience. Haggard emphasizes in his heroine the indissoluble unity of sensuality, dreaminess - on the one hand, and self-control, courage - on the other. These features in Jess can be attributed to the type of "new woman", which is formed in Haggard's fiction.

Steere (2010) discusses Jess in her book and concludes that she is an embodiment of a strong woman who loves her man in the meaning of possession. She is ungrateful towards Jantje, whom she treats, being a colonizer, as an obedient servant.

The period of time discussed in Stoker's (2006) "The Snake's Pass" is the second half of XIX century when the Irish question was really vital (Saint-Amour, 2015). The novel discusses the problem of property of land and despotism of moneylenders. One of them «Black Murdock» is the villain of the novel. Norah is indirectly involved in the conflict between her father and Murdock, she does not communicate her view being aside of the conflict. Thus the involvement of the woman-character in the political context is not the dominating feature in «The Snake's Pass» and it is reflected implicitly (Tichelaar, 2019).

Speaking about the distinctive features of the characters, their names should be noted. Name «Jess» (variants Jessie, Jessy, Jessica etc.) is first mentioned in «The Merchant of Venice» by W. Shakespeare. A Hebrew name Yiskāh meaning «foresight» or ability to see the potential of the future. People with this name are said to be rich, obtaining great power and wealth. The novel «Jess» proves the meaning of the name. The girl has enormous spiritual power; she is able to fulfill the promise given to her dying mother to protect her sister Bessie even to the cost of her own happiness and life. Jess is sure that Bessie is much weaker than she and won't be able to put up with separation with her beloved man even for the sake of her sister's happiness. As for the name «Norah», it comes from the English names «Honora», «Elenor», which mean «honor, valour», and the heroine fully justifies the meaning of her name as all the inhabitants of the village respect her. Thus, the names of the characters in both novels reflect the personality of their owners.

As for political context and the women-characters, it should be noted that the events in «Jess» take place during the Anglo-Boer war of 1899-1902. Jess stays in a besieged city and escapes it with an exit permit. Though she lived in Africa nearly all her life, she still treats the natives as a colonizer, feeling little pity to the servant Jantie (whose dinner she eats leaving no food to him) and kills Frank Muller who is mixed English-Boer. Still Hultgren (2014) argues that the historical events in «Jess» are fictional and detailed discussions of English politics and historical circumstances are little to do with the plot of «Jess».

It is Norah who finds the lost Irish crown after the rain. For several centuries, the crown was hidden from prying eyes in a cave, then, when the whole company reached it, the girl is the person who found it and took it in her hands. But when the crown was brought to the light, it lost its golden glitter. Norah transforms as well: after two years of studying on the continent, she had changed and was no longer a simple Irish girl. When Arthur sees her in the church during their wedding, he notices that natural beauty and dignity manifested with a new force: Norah became very feminine, she became the personification of good manners and high culture (Stoker, 2006).

Despite the fact that Stoker uses many standard formulas to create the image of Norah Joyce, he removes her from the category of weak Victorian women, giving the traits of heroics and independence (Margree & Marsh, 2018).

Jess is a very strong and independent woman, who makes her own decisions. When she realizes that she is in love with John Niel, but her confession would destroy her sister's life, she escapes the problem by leaving the place. Her actions show that she considers the men weaker than her: she takes care of the wounded John Niel, fights to save her life in the river-stream during the night escape and finally kills the detestable Frank Muller when he sleeps.

Jess was determined to kill Frank Muller, as it was the force of despair that was leading her. Her sister's happiness and even life were threatened. When she got into the tent where the villain was sleeping she regretted that it was too early for her cruel action, but she did not change her decision. She simply waited for some seconds to let her eyes get accustomed to the darkness inside the tent. The secrecy of the night helped her. If Frank Muller woke up suddenly he would be astonished to see the woman who he thought to be dead. She looked like a ghost from the hell with her wounded hands and dripping hair. The flaring eyes resembled those of a spirit. She embodied vengeance which she performed with her knife.

She is sometimes more a man than men are: she hisses into Jantie's ear «be a man» when she concluded that killing Frank Muller is the only way out to save her sister's life, but he fails to do it.. While committing the murder she doesn't think of her own safety, but her sister's name «For Bessie's sake» is pronounced, so it is a sacrifice for her sister's sake. Rich (1984) described Jess as a thinking woman in African colonial surroundings with the only place where she is at home is in Lion's Kloof.

As for Nora Joyce, she is strong and independent as well. In «The Snake's Pass» she fights for the truth against the money-lender who by fraud took possession of her father's property. She is courageous enough to search for Arthur when he is lost in the mountains during the storm:

“She leaped to her feet, and in an instant seemed to realize my danger, and rushed to me <...> her feet began to sink <...> but she did not falter a moment <...> Oh, that she had a rope and I might be saved! Alas! <...> But Nora had, with her woman's quick instinct, seen a way to help me. In an instant she had torn off her red petticoat of heavy homespun cloth and thrown one end to me <...> I felt that if we could both hold out long enough I was saved <...> in an instant more I lay on the rock safe and in her arms” (Stoker, 2006). So, she saves his life. The men erect a stone to mark her courage.

She is determined to become a good match for Arthur Severn and makes her own decision to study.

Norah Joyce in Stoker's novel «The Snake's Pass» shows the features of a “new woman” as well. She is a young amazingly beautiful girl, graceful and intelligent. She studied at school but cannot

continue her education due to her socio-economic status. The name “Norah” comes from the English names “Honora”, “Elenor”, which mean “honor, valour”, and the heroine fully justifies the meaning of her name.

The reader perceives her personality following the opinion of Arthur Severn, the protagonist of the novel. Arthur immediately realizes that Norah does not bear traits of a rough peasant breed. He compares her with Spanish beauties, recalls legends saying that along the coast of Ireland you can find traces of Spanish blood", and concludes that Norah is even more beautiful than the Spaniards, because her beauty is “softened by the northern calmness (Stoker, 2006).

Norah does not wear any hat, revealing her thick black raven-like hair, the hair pinned at the back of her head, and her shoulders are covered with a homespun shawl.

They talk about the beauty of the surrounding nature, but Norah wants to learn more about London. Talking with Arthur about the life of London, Norah, an ordinary peasant, confirms her uniqueness, although her judgments are simple and unsophisticated.

Norah makes decisions connected with her future on her own: she decides to go to Europe to study in order to become a “gentleman’s proper wife”, although Arthur really does not want to part with her. The correspondence between Nora and Arthur shows a lot. Her letters are not love letters, but detailed reports that tell about everything that happens. The reader is unable to appreciate these letters, as they exist only in the memory of the narrator, but it is clear that Arthur treasured them, and they were for a long time the only means of communication with his beloved.

Nora’s speech is important to be noted. Despite the fact that she lives in the Irish outback, her speech is normative, neutral vocabulary prevails in it, there are no Irish words: and this is despite the fact that her father’s speech is replete with errors. The same things are pronounced differently by Phelim Joyce and Nora.

“It was *by* accident we met” (Norah)

“Always *be* accident?” (Phelim)

“Ye think pretty well of *yerself*, young sir, *whin* ye consider it a sacrifice for *me* daughter to *shtaywid* the father, who loves her, and who she loves” (Stoker, 2006).

Similarly, Jess Croft speaks good English, though she lives far away in Africa. Moreover, she has a collection of classical literature, she plays the piano and can sing in German. Her singing was so unique and full of emotions that John Niel knew that she was a passionate woman.

During the rain, when the actions of the characters threaten their lives, or when all of them, fighting against Murdoch who is the evil in the novel, protect each other, their behavior can be called heroic. In the Victorian novel, women are not given such rights, there a woman is protected by a courageous man, she is completely defenseless in the face of threat (Sadomskaya, 2014). Norah, on the contrary, does not faint at the sight of danger, does not cry, does not wring her hands, but tries to encourage her friends. She alone faces the danger, when her father disappears, defies emotion, but only complains about the injustice of life and the necessity to fight for the achievement of goals. She does not focus on any heroic ideal, since she did not read the corresponding books and lives a simple life. The author does not just compare her with the Victorian heroine, but takes a step forward, giving Norah Joyce such features as independence in decision making, heroism, and ability in choosing her own life path.

Nora Joyce rescues Arthur, who has just pulled her out of the bog. After all the adventures, the men put a memorial stone with carved words praising her (Lashtabova, 2010).

The theme of marriage is related to the heroine in the B. Stoker's novel. Norah, an Irish woman, wants to see herself as a worthy Englishman's wife, an educated woman who her husband will not be ashamed of. For her, marriage is not just a way to leave the province, but truly a new life. It is unpleasant for her to think that her husband may in time regret having chosen the woman who is not from his circle. She speaks openly about this to Arthur, who respects her point of view and agrees that she should go to study in Europe.

As for the female characters' lives outside the novels the authors offer two different ways. H. R. Haggard cannot find a proper place for Jess and make her happy, so she dies, being thought of as extraordinary - She even is the first to declare her love to John Niel.

Steere (2010) concludes that such women rarely find a place in the world.

H. R. Haggard does not attempt to make his heroine life-time happy while B. Stoker finds a way to arrange the character's life. Norah Joyce transforms from a peasant girl to become a well-educated lady who is a good match for a gentleman. The love story in the novel is romantic, but not extreme: Arthur and Nora do not have to fight for their love, they do not have any obstacles – all external circumstances prove contribute to final happy end.

Norah living between hills and bogs in an Irish village is a kind of treasure. During the conversation between Phelim and Arthur about Norah's upcoming marriage, it turns out that Arthur considers her a true treasure of Knockcalltecore. It is Norah who finds the lost Irish crown after the rain. For several centuries, the crown was hidden from prying eyes in a cave, then when the whole company reached it, the girl is the person who found it and took it in her hands. But when the crown was brought to the light, it lost its golden glitter. Norah transforms as well: after two years of studying on the continent, she had changed and was no longer a simple Irish girl. When Arthur sees her in the church during their wedding, he notices that natural beauty and dignity manifested with a new force: Norah became very feminine, she became the personification of good manners and high culture (Stoker, 2006).

Despite the fact that Stoker uses many standard formulas to create the image of Norah Joyce, he removes her from the category of weak Victorian women, giving the traits of heroics and independence.

7. Conclusion

H. R. Haggard and B. Stoker emphasize in their heroines the indissoluble unity of sensuality, dreaminess, on the one hand, and self-control, courage, and independence, on the other. These features in the image of Jess Croft and Norah Joyce make it possible to attribute them to the type of "new woman" that develops in late Victorian fiction. Particularly noteworthy is the embodiment of a love theme. The passion and depth of feeling inherent in the heroines do not destroy, but lead to rational decisions: Jess sacrifices himself for her sister, kills Frank Muller, freeing his uncle old Croft from captivity. Norah, having fallen in love with Arthur, is striving for self-improvement, she intends to become worth him. Both characters show self-control in fatal situations when men fail to make decisions or even save lives. Their decisiveness is a peculiar feature, that makes them equals to male characters of the novels under

study. Men respect them; their families discuss their choice and respect their decisions no matter if they cause inconveniences or troubles to the relatives.

The authors do not go far in the involvement of the female characters in the political matters, they do not sound their view on political situations, but they share the position of their families and friends. Both Norah Joyce and Jess Croft are vivid representatives of Victorian epoch when the power of Great Britain was strong in any part of the world. Still, becoming an educated lady, Norah Joyce leaves her native Ireland flourishing, though it is not her merit.

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