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Кардаш Розалія

здобувач другого рівня вищої освіти,

Тернопільський національний педагогічний університет імені Володимира Гнатюка

Науковий керівник: Довбуш О. І., кандидат філологічних наук,

доцент кафедри англійської філології та методики навчання англійської мови

THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN LITERARY WORKS

1. Introduction

"Gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" [1, p. 171], says Judith Butler in her *Gender Trouble*. We strongly believe in this notion. Gender is not what one is, but what one does. It is a ritualized repetition of acts, gestures, and desires that produces the illusion of what one is. Given that, in the 21st century, the question of gender is on the rise, we find it imperative to track the portrayal of gender in literary works and how fluidly they are shifting nowadays. The gender perspective in literature is not solely about how men and women are portrayed. It exposes how power, voice, and value are distributed within narrative structures themselves, showcasing similar tendencies in the author's respective cultures. For centuries, literary works have been, and still are, shaped primarily by male authors. We agree with Jane Austen's musing in *Persuasion*: "Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands" [2, p. 117]. This has left a decisive imprint on both the canon and the construction of female characters. Women appear as aesthetic objects, rather than subjects or actors. They are moral symbols, or convenient narrative tools, precisely as they've been treated in the societies of the past and, unfortunately, of the present.

From Helen of Troy in *The Iliad* to Snow White, female characters have been and are repeatedly constructed through beauty, passivity, and desirability. We do not need to know their character, inner thoughts or world for them to be valuable to the plot. Quite on the contrary, their worth was defined by their function and usefulness in a male-driven plot. Yet later works, featuring characters like Elizabeth Bennet or

Daenerys Targaryen, demonstrate a gradual and meaningful shift toward agency and complexity. The thread of shifting gender perspective is not straight, but it is traceable.

In this paper, we set out to analyse how literary characters function as vessels of cultural gender bias, how patriarchal structures fundamentally shape their portrayal, and how modern literature increasingly, though unevenly, challenges and subverts these calcified roles.

2. Characters as Vessels of Gender Bias

Literary characters are not neutral constructs. They always represent the reality of gender biases of the culture that produced them. Female characters, in particular, are persistently shaped by expectations of beauty, purity, and passivity – not because these traits define women as they are, but because the narratives were built to require them and because the societies were led to believe this to be normal, desirable, the appropriate way for a woman to conduct herself. This is perfectly summarized by a quote by Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex*: “Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth” [3, p. 162].

Let us consider Ophelia from *Hamlet*. She is defined almost entirely through her relationships with male characters, such as her father Polonius, her brother Laertes, and Hamlet himself. If we do see her think or speak, it is of Hamlet. As Virginia Woolf said: “As long as she thinks of a man, nobody objects to a woman thinking” [4, p. 94]. Ophelia’s emotional breakdown is aestheticized. We do not stop to consider her inner turmoil; she is a beautiful symbol of tragedy. Her famous lines about rosemary and rue: “There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance. Pray you, love, remember” [5, p. 110] reflect no agency, no will, no stance, apart from the one driven by her heartbreak and tragic, not raging, as was customary for female grief, as the weaker, emotional, hysterical sex.

Similarly, Pamela in Richardson’s *Pamela* is constructed as a model of feminine virtue whose entire value lies in preserving her purity. Even her resistance to Mr B is framed in moral rather than autonomous terms. She is rewarded not for independence, but for successfully performing socially sanctioned femininity.

Fairy tale figures push this pattern to its extreme. Snow White is introduced simply and prosaically as, “the fairest of them all,” and her identity never meaningfully expands beyond it. She does not act; she is acted upon – poisoned, displayed in a glass coffin. We find it important to underline the fact of it being a glass coffin, which further emphasizes the aesthetic appeal of the deceased female form, underscoring a disturbing romanticization of female helplessness and physical perfection in death. In the end, Snow White gets revived by a stranger, who, with no consent, stole a kiss and married a teenage girl. Consequently, this formed a plethora of girls with botched ideas of marriage, love, value and consent. These characters function less as psychological entities and more as carriers of cultural expectation, placeholders in narratives that were never really about them.

3. Patriarchal Bias and Power Dynamics

Patriarchal doctrine in literature determines not only who acts, but who is worth watching. Male characters are granted agency as a default. Women, however, are trophies in their eyes. They seem to believe that saying “I’ll start a war over you” is somehow empowering to a woman who is socially and economically chained to a man, with no real say in anything.

Helen of Troy is the starkest illustration of this dynamic. Her beauty is godlike by the description. It launched a thousand ships, yet she exercises almost no narrative control. The Trojan War unfolds because of her, but never through her. She is a cause without being an agent, a prize whose own perspective is largely absent from the story her existence set off.

Irene Adler in Conan Doyle’s *A Scandal in Bohemia* appears, at first glance, to disrupt this pattern. She is intelligent and strategic, and, ultimately, outsmarts the Sherlock Holmes himself. We are surprised that such an oddity was even allowed. Holmes himself elevates her above all others, referring to her simply as “the woman.” Yet even this recognition is revealing: she is remarkable because she deviates from the norm. She is special because she is man-like, Sherlock in a woman’s body. Simone de Beauvoir reflects this by saying that “...man is defined as a human being and a woman as a female – whenever she behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male” [3, p. 77]. Patriarchal bias, then, operates not only by limiting women but by isolating capable female characters as anomalies, exceptional enough to be noted, contained enough to leave the rule intact.

4. Female Portrayal by Male Authors

Male-authored literary works construct female characters through several recurring lenses that, taken together, consistently subordinate the inner world to the demands of function.

The first is beauty as the primary value. A woman’s worth is repeatedly tied to her appearance. Helen of Troy is the archetype of this tendency, and this pattern persists across genres and centuries. Beauty is what sets plots in motion and determines outcomes, even when the woman herself has little say in either.

The second is emotional framing. Characters like Ophelia are defined by emotional instability; her madness poeticized and aestheticized rather than understood. This reinforces a persistent cultural stereotype: that female feeling is a spectacle, a funny little hysteria. A female is nothing more than a damsel in distress, who needs saving, comforting, and a strong hand to be controlled by.

The third is relational identity. Pamela exists almost entirely in relation to Mr B. Her story is structured around male desire and approval, and her ultimate reward is marriage. She gets almost suffocated in the domestic, and never expands beyond it. Even if the author includes female complexity, we still perceive it through male gaze. Despite being intelligent and strategically cunning, Irene Adler is still framed through Holmes’s admiring gaze. Her identity is nothing more than a fragment idealized by many men she lured, seduced and manipulated, the cunning, yet feeling-led woman.

It is fair to conclude that the female characters in these texts are not subjects with full inner lives but reflections and functions of male-centred narratives.

5. Gender Shift and Emerging Agency

The shift begins with Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth is introduced not through beauty but through wit and intellect, and she spends the novel actively contesting social norms. She rejects Mr Collins outright, refuses Darcy's first proposal, and ultimately chooses her own terms. Her declaration that she is "only resolved to act in that manner which will constitute my happiness" [6, p. 495] is a brave proclamation of self-agency that heroines before could not simply utter without being cast in the role of a defective, shrewd, or villainous woman. Unlike her predecessors, Elizabeth defines her own values and acts on them, even at social cost.

We can trace this tendency, though unevenly, in modern literature. For instance, Daenerys Targaryen in *A Song of Ice and Fire* begins as a passive figure, as to be expected in a medieval fantasy world. She is bartered and displaced, yet evolves into a formidable political and military leader. Regardless, her portrayal remains partially anchored to beauty and charisma, a reminder that the transition from object to subject is rarely complete and often contested even within the same text.

Further along this arc, characters like Ead, a strong warrior of a priory, and Sabran, the matriarch in a so-called Queendom, in Samantha Shannon's *The Priory of the Orange Tree* operate within systems of religious, political and military power without being reduced to aesthetic roles or male validation. Their identities are constructed from the inside out, not defined by how they appear to others. Furthermore, nowadays, traditional tropes of "damsel in distress" are actively being replaced by "sir in distress", as so happens in Daindreth's *Assassin*, where Amira is a female assassin and then rescuer of Daindreth, a prince. This shift inverts the foundational gender logic of countless earlier narratives. The implication is clear as day. If a woman can occupy the role of savior as convincingly as a man, the original division was never inherent. It was imposed.

6. Conclusion

The evolution of female characters in literature traces a broader cultural shift in attitudes toward gender that is still ongoing. Early texts reduce women to beauty, virtue, and passivity, positioning them as objects within male-driven narratives; Helen of Troy, Ophelia, and Snow White are among the clearest examples of this pattern. Later works introduce complexity, interiority, and agency: Elizabeth Bennet asserts intellectual autonomy; Daenerys Targaryen commands armies; Ead and Sabran spearhead political powerhouses of their world on their own terms.

Ultimately, the gender perspective in literature is not simply a question of representation of whether women appear, or how many. It is a question of power: who speaks, who acts, who is seen, and on whose terms. The gradual movement from object to subject does not merely diversify storytelling. It reveals the limitations embedded in earlier narratives and directly challenges the assumption that those narratives were ever neutral to begin with.

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Кобрин Ельвіра

*здобувач першого рівня вищої освіти,
ДВНЗ «Ужгородський національний університет»
Науковий керівник: Кішко О.В.,
старший викладач кафедри англійської філології*

**INTERPRETING PHILOSOPHICAL THEMES IN RAY BRADBURY'S
“FAHRENHEIT 451” THROUGH INTERACTIVE STRATEGIES**

The novel “Fahrenheit 451” is one of the first major works of the American writer Ray Douglas Bradbury. Published in 1953, it brought its author widespread acclaim. Currently, the vast majority of literary critics consider it a world classic of science fiction and one of the most significant examples of the dystopian genre with profound philosophical depth. This literary work raises fundamental questions of freedom, memory, identity and responsibility; its detailed analysis provides an opportunity to explore these themes through the lens of modern critical theory and interactive learning strategies.

The relevance of the study is due to the fact that Bradbury's novel serves as a critique of contemporary issues such as information overload, the crisis of literacy, and media manipulation. In this sense, the work is ripe for interpretation within the hermeneutic, cultural, anthropocentric and media-critical paradigms. At the same time, its study requires both substantive depth and effective methodological tools, as complex philosophical meanings are most fully revealed through dialogical, problem-oriented, and generally interactive engagement with the text.

The purpose of this research is to examine the philosophical themes of Ray Bradbury's novel “Fahrenheit 451” and outline the possibilities of their interpretation using interactive strategies in the context of current approaches and intercultural dialogue.

The novel “Fahrenheit 451” is traditionally regarded as a seminal example of dystopian literature. As G. Udovichenko notes, the very title of the work references the ignition temperature of paper, thereby centring the theme of the destruction of the