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### **Personages' gender identity in the postmodern British literary discourse (based on the novel "Passion" by J. Winterson)**

#### **Гендерна ідентифікація персонажів у постмодерному британському художньому дискурсі (на матеріалі роману Дж. Уінтерсон «Пристрасть»)**

**Summary.** *The article focuses on the textual realization of the characters' gender identity in the postmodern novel "Passion" by J. Winterson. In the study offered gender is regarded not as a binary category in its traditional sense, represented by femininity and masculinity as types of one's gender identity but as a non-binary phenomenon, which includes androgyny and other varieties of gender. Therefore, gender identity is defined as a set of one's ideas, behavioral patterns, values that determine one's awareness as a representative of a certain gender. Characters' gender identity may not necessarily be related to a binary model of gender or gender stereotypes but is predetermined by their personal or individual characteristics which attain linguistic or textual realization. The novel "Passion" by J. Winterson is an illuminating example of postmodern British literature which brings into special focus textual representation of gender identity of two main character-androgynes Villanelle and Henry. In the story under the analysis the notion "androgynous" turns to be interpreted in both physiological or anatomical and psycho-social aspects. Being a part of the modern trend of magic realism with its innate mythological motives, the novel incorporates the ideas which transform the archetypical images of a female gender identity to the utmost. The setting and the very background of the novel provide felicity conditions*

for revealing of a picarescular type of an androgynous woman-rebellion that is endowed with monstrous, zoomorphic features. Her gender dualism, which underlies androgyny, expands this character's potential for self-realization to the maximum. What makes the novel under the analyses really unique is that the dual nature of androgyny as a phenomenon is represented. By depicting Villanelle as the image of a woman with mainly masculine characteristics, J. Winterson also creates a mirror opposite image of a man with mainly feminine features. If the female androgynous character Villanelle acquires masculine characteristics, realized through the features of zoomorphism and monstrosity as well as travesty inherent in the image of a bisexual being, the male androgynous personage Henry is represented as the ordinary soldier of the Napoleonic army, who is characterized by femininity, manifested in his appearance and psycho-emotional features.

**Key words:** gender identity, gender stereotypes, gender roles, femininity, masculinity, androgyny, postmodern literary discourse.

**Анотація.** У статті йдеться про текстову реалізацію гендерної ідентичності персонажів у постмодерному романі Дж. Уінтерсон «Пристрасть». У запропонованій роботі поняття гендеру потрактовуємо не як бінарну категорію у її традиційному розумінні, а як небінарний феномен, що передбачає андрогінність та інші гендерні варіації. Відповідно, гендерна ідентичність розуміється нами як сукупність ідей, певних поведінкових моделей, цінностей, які визначають усвідомлення особою власної гендерної ідентичності. Гендерна ідентичність художніх персонажів не обов'язково співвідносна із бінарною гендерною моделлю або гендерними стереотипами, а зумовлюється особистісними властивостями, які реалізуються на лінгвістичному і текстовому рівнях. Роман «Пристрасть» Дж. Уінтерсон є яскравим прикладом постмодерної британської літератури, який репрезентує на текстовому рівні гендерну ідентичність двох головних персонажів-андрогінів Віланель і Анрі. У досліджуваному романі поняття анрогінності проінтерпретоване у фізіологічному або анатомічному та психо-емоційному аспектах. Оскільки роман належить до сучасного літературного тренду магічного реалізму із його міфологічними мотивами, у ньому втілюються ідеї, які суттєво трансформують архетипові образи жіночої гендерної ідентичності. Місце дії роману створює сприятливі умови для розкриття пікарескного типу андрогінної жінки-бунтарки, наділеної монструозними, зооморфічними рисами. Гендерний дуалізм, що є підґрунтям її андрогінності, розкриває її потенціал до самореалізації на повну. Що робить досліджуваний роман дійсно унікальним, так це те, що у ньому репрезентована дуальна природа андрогінності як феномену. Представивши Віланель як жінку із, здебільшого, маскулінними характеристиками, Дж. Уінтерсон створює її дзеркально протилежний образ чоловіка із превалюючими фемінінними рисами. Якщо жіночий андрогінний персонаж Віланель набуває маскулінних характеристик, втілених у зооморфізмі, монструозності та травесті як властивості бісексуальності, то чоловічий андрогінний персонаж Анрі представлений як звичайний солдат наполеонівської армії і наділений фемінінністю, яка виявляється у його зовнішності та психо-емоційних особливостях.

**Ключові слова:** гендерна ідентичність, гендерні стереотипи, гендерні ролі, фемінінність, маскулінність, андрогінність, постмодерний художній дискурс.

**Introduction.** The category of gender is one of the most popular and relevant objects of research in numerous sciences – sociology, psychology, anthropology, feminist research, as well as linguistics. Gender is considered to be the key constituent of self-identification of personality and its perception by the society, thus it is a socially and culturally conditioned, artificially constructed system of values that relies on the society's comprehension of gender, role-performing modes of behavior and characteristics attributed to representatives of different genders [1]. Gender is a binary category in its traditional sense – similarly to female and male, femininity and masculinity are distinguished as types of gender identity. However, contemporary society and science are gradually moving away from the perception of gender only in this limited binary format as it grows popular to specify it as androgyny and other varieties and variations of gender identity.

The framework of contemporary gender linguistic studies is broadened efficiently by the scientific endeavors of T. Kosmeda, N. Karpenko, T. Osipova who dwelled upon the theoretical cornerstones and discursive practices of gender linguistics in Ukraine [3], N. Grigoriv who focused on linguocognitive peculiarities of gender stereotypes [2]. The key concepts of gender studies were determined by J. Pilcher and I. Whelehan [10]; gender identities in a technological age were specified by E. Shapiro [12]; gender roles in sociological perspective were analysed by Linda L. Lindsey [8] and L. Rudman, P. Glick [11]; the biology of gender race and class was studied by Ch. Murray [9]; the psychology of sex and gender was the key object of J. Bosson, J. Vandello and C. Buckner's research work [4]. Gender in its language representation in different types of institutional discourses was the subject-matter of J. Holmes and M. Meyerhoff investigation [6]. However, despite the significant interest of modern linguistics in gender research, the issue of language and textual representation of different types of gender identity in contemporary English literary discourse remains insufficiently developed what accounts for the actuality and relevance of our study. Thus, the aim of the article is to reveal the textual peculiarities of the personages' gender identity realization in the British literary discourse. The novel "Passion" by J. Winterson as an illuminating example of postmodern British literature sets sufficient grounds for gender identity in-depth analysis providing a feministic viewpoint on the issue of androgyny.

**Methodology/Methods.** The methodology of the study predetermined the following methods to be applied: contextual-interpretative method to define the language means which verbalize the images of the main characters in the context of the novel to reconstruct their gender identity; descriptive method to classify and qualitatively analyze the language means which depict the main characters' gender identity realization in the novel; the method of thematic classification to distribute the language means which nominate the main characters of the novel into thematic groups according to their denotation; semantic-stylistic analysis to reveal connotative meanings of the lexemes which describe the main characters'

physiological and psycho-emotional peculiarities to reconstruct their gender identity in the novel.

**Results and Discussion.** The lexeme androgyny stems from the ancient Greek words *άνδρας* – “man” and *γυνή* – “woman”, and means one’s simultaneous possession of the stereotypical for a given society signs of man and woman (not necessarily equally). What is more, androgyny implies the supreme level of masculinity and femininity combined as it presupposes the ability to effectively apply modes of behavior of both males and females. Androgynes have innate better adaptive characteristics as they are more flexible, independent and possess much stronger stamina than those who demonstrate a traditional feminine or masculine behavior. Thus, the notion “androgynous” turns to be interpreted in more psycho-social rather than physiological or anatomical aspects, whereas in the past the term “androgyny” used to be synonymous with “hermaphrodite” and was understood as the presence of male and female signs in one organism [1, p. 251].

The interpretation of androgyny is demonstrated in a particularly special way in postmodern literature which questions the hallmarks of widely spread gender stereotypes and traditional binary gender model of the society. Contemporary interpretation of androgyny as an instrument to construct one’s own gender identity or one of its varieties is offered in the novel “Passion” by J. Winterson who transforms the archetypical images of a female gender identity to the utmost.

Being a part of the modern trend of magic realism with its innate mythological and fairy-tales motives, the novel under the analysis is immersed in the “made-up historical context” of Napoleon wars effectively and sufficiently “flavoured” with authenticity details related to dates, locations and even personalia what brings into the special light the issue of gender identity. This very background provides felicity conditions for revealing of a picaresque type of a woman-rebellion that is endowed with monstrous, zoomorphic features.

The main character of the novel is the Venetian Villanelle, who has got mermaids-like feet to enable her to walk on the surface of water. Being the daughter of a boatman, Villanelle has got webbed feet from birth, that immediately puts her on the borderline of gender, because according to the legend, only male boatmen could inherit them. The androgynous features innate to her reveal the variability of her gender identity. Gender dualism, which underlies androgyny, expands the character’s potential for self-realization.

*“There never was a girl whose feet were webbed in the entire history of the boatmen”* [13, p. 51].

*“I stepped out and, in the morning, they say a beggar was running round the Rialto talking about a young man who’d walked across the canal like it was solid”* [13, p. 98].

In these examples, the author does not only indicate the character’s amazing abilities, but reveals the fact that other people confused her with a male man as in the excerpt offered the phrase “*a young man*” to nominate

Villanelle is used. Some more physiological features of the main character added much to her incorrect perception as a male.

*“My breasts are small, so there’s no cleavage to give me away, and I’m tall for a girl, especially a Venetian”*. [13, p. 56].

Small breasts and high height, in this case, do not correspond to the typical stereotypes about the appearance of a woman and are distinct features of men, thus emphasizing androgynous nature of the main character.

Moreover, Villanelle specifically imitates her male nature through turning to travesty. Thus, the ethnographer G. Bauman, exploring the traditions and rituals of African tribes, found out that the image of a bisexual being is based on the ritual practice of “sex change”, which aims to increase one’s magical potential [7]. A kind of a “change of gender” is practiced by the main character in the scenes with dressing up in men’s clothing. Working in a casino, Villanelle used to dress in a young man to provoke greater interest in clients:

*“I dressed as a boy because that’s what the visitors liked to see. It was part of the game, trying to decide which sex was hidden behind tight breeches and extravagant face-paste...”* [13, p. 54].

In the excerpt offered there is a direct indication to the main character’s intentional desire to look like a man – *“I dressed as a boy”*. To intensify the effect, she applied special make up – *“extravagant face-paste”*. The extra elements of her androgynous image were *“a pirate’s shirt that concealed my breasts”* and *“the moustache”*.

*“I wore my yellow Casino breeches with the stripe down each side of the leg and a pirate’s shirt that concealed my breasts. This was required, but the moustache I added was for my own amusement. And perhaps for my own protection. There are too many dark alleys and too many drunken hands on festival nights”* [13, p. 55].

One more significant element of Villanelle’s androgynous image was a *“codpiece”*.

*“I catch him staring at my crotch and now and again I wear a cod-piece to taunt him”* [13, p. 56].

Cambridge Advanced Dictionary and Thesaurus offers the following definition of the lexeme *“codpiece”*: *“a small piece of clothing like a bag that was used in the past to cover the opening at the front of men’s clothes for the lower body”* [5]. Thus, it is obvious that the item is a purely male accessory deliberately used to highlight the main character’s androgynous nature and to mislead the clients of the casino she worked in.

To make the appearance-related androgynous image of the main character complete, it is crucial to dwell upon her major female feature revealed in the novel under the analyses – her red hair.

*“My red hair is a great attraction”* [13, p. 148].

It is the red hair that Villanelle exploits to seduce men. As there is no mentioning of the hair color of hers at the beginning of the novel but only at its end, we can imply that only at the end of the story, Villanelle is revealed as a woman, her femininity blooms.

There is also a psycho-emotional aspect of Villanelle's personality which reveals her androgynous nature to the full. In the novel she is depicted as absolutely indifferent to the opposite sex embodied in the story by Henry. Villanelle feels that she cannot love Henry differently than "*in a brotherly incestuous way*", her heart is closed for the man. Such sexual indifference can be extrapolated to the zoomorphic features of the main character as she attained the amphibian characteristics which contain mythological symbolism. Despite many cultures' interpretations of a reptile or fish as a symbol of fertility and abundance, this image is also regarded as the embodiment of indifference and coldness [7]. Thus, emotionally in relation to Henry Villanelle can literary be compared to "a cold fish" what deepens the understanding of androgyny as it is.

*"He loves me, I know that, and I love him, but in a brotherly incestuous way. He touches my heart, but he does not send it shattering through my body. He could never steal it"* [13, p. 146].

However, the emotional coldness of the main character is manifested only in her relationship with men. At the same time, she falls in love with another woman – a mysterious guest who once plays with her in cards in a casino where Villanelle works. The passion for a person of her own sex and indifference or even disgust in case with her husband to the opposite one make the androgynous image of the main character more complete.

What makes the novel under the analyses really unique is that the dual nature of androgyny as a phenomenon is represented. By depicting Villanelle as the image of a woman with mainly masculine characteristics, J. Winterson also creates a mirror opposite image of a man with mainly feminine features – Henry.

Henry's appearance is depicted fragmentally and miscellaneously. First of all, it is mentioned that he is low in height, what, in fact, appealed to Napoleon:

*"He liked me because I am short"* [13, p. 30].

Henry's built-up is thin and slim:

*"We had to break down the wood where it had splintered and because I am still skinny, I was the one bundled face first into a snowdrift banked taller than a man"* [13, p. 100].

Henry can't boast with physical strength which was regarded in his time as an absolute benefit:

*"The recruiting officer gave me a walnut and asked if I could crack it between finger and thumb. I could not and he laughed and said a drummer must have strong hands"* [13, p. 5].

Thus, Henry's appearance does not have traditionally masculine features, which usually include physical strength, strong muscles, high height, etc. In the novel there is no direct reference to his clothing, however, being a soldier in Napoleon's army, he is mostly dressed in soldier's uniform, which symbolizes the male beginning but is exploited by Henry as a disguise:

*"In my soldier's uniform I was treated with kindness, fed and cared for, given the pick of the harvest"* [13, p. 30].

*"I take off my socks once a week to cut my toe-nails and the others call me a dandy"* [13, p. 4-5].

In the context of the novel, lexeme "dandy" demonstrates the attitude to Henry of the other men – typical representatives of the patriarchal model of society from the Napoleon surrounding and acquires a negative ironic connotation.

*"He lifted his foot and, as I scrambled up, kicked me hard and still looking straight ahead said, "Firm buttocks, that's something". I heard of his reputation soon enough but he never bothered me"* [13, p. 6].

The word-combination "firm buttocks", used in relation to Henry by one of the officers, characterizes him as an object of ambiguous interest from the men, thus putting him on a row with women.

Henry's psycho-emotional features turn to be much more in the focus of the novel. The young man is dreamy, compassionate. He does not participate in hostilities and throughout his stay in Napoleon's army does not kill a single person, but mainly helps the wounded. An important indicator of Henry's inner world is his thoughts about home, mother, admiration for nature and peaceful rural life:

*"I was homesick from the start I missed my mother. I missed the trill where the sun slants across the valley"* [13, p. 6].

Unlike other soldiers depicted in the novel as rude, cruel and heartless, Henry is highly sensitive to everything that happens around him. Softness and compassion, responsiveness and emotionality are considered to be typically feminine. Henry falls in love with Villanelle, he loves his mother and respects women who embody the qualities of Virgin Mary as well as those who are labelled "Vivandière" and are respected by no one. "Vivandière" – the French name of women who were fixed under the military regiments for the treatment and care of the wounded, providing soldiers with food and wine, household items, and maintaining the moral spirit of the army. Although Vivandière's activities are still not well studied by historians, the idea is that often under their appearance the army was accompanied by prostitutes.

*"I love you," I said. – "You're my brother" she said and we rowed away"* [13, p. 117].

*"Mother. Father. I love you"* [13, p. 31].

At the end of the novel both images which constitute two facets of one and the same concept of androgyny acquire accumulative power, being embodied in the image of Villanelle and Henry's daughter who inherited her mom's red hair and ordinary feet from her dad:

*"Not me nor the baby who is a girl with a mass of hair like the early sun and feet like his"* [13, p. 150].

**Conclusions.** Summing up, it is worthwhile to highlight that in the novel under the analysis the concept of "female" is interspersed with the concept of "androgyny" as the main character being androgynous represents the "female" world of Venice. This suggests that the concept of "androgyny" in the interpretation of J. Winterson is one of the constituents of the author's perception of the female essence and the theme of

androgyny in the novel is the means of embodiment of the traditional concept of female self-identification, who feels her otherness, dissimilarity to others, when the accomplishment of self-wholeness requires the human dual nature cognition. The modern interpretation of the concept of “male” in relation to “androgyny” implies the ability to be free from traditional gender models and stereotypes, to express one’s personality with the disregard to any frameworks. The female androgynous character Villanelle acquires masculine characteristics, realized through the features of zoomorphism and monstrosity as well as travesty inherent in the image of a bisexual being in numerous cultures. At the same time, male androgynous character Henry is represented as the ordinary soldier of the Napoleonic army, who is characterized by femininity, manifested in his appearance (small height, thinness, fragility) and psycho-emotional features (emotionality and sensuality, softness, empathy).

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