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ARTISTIC RETHINKING OF FEMALE EXPERIENCE AND FIN-DE-SIECLE GENDER ROLES IN KATE CHOPIN'S SHORT STORIES

The article deals with Kate Chopin's artistic rethinking of women's experience at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The study employs the analysis of the main tendencies in the social and political life of the country which influenced the stereotypes of communities' perception of a woman and her image, behavior, and role in a society and in a family. The author of the article defines that Kate Chopin's literary legacy, a classic of American literature, has only recently gained attention due to her challenging creative fate and literary heritage. It is stated that The New Woman, a prominent cultural phenomenon in late Victorian literature, became a cultural phenomenon at fin-de siècle and that despite her status as an iconic feminist figure in American literature, Chopin characterizes contemporary "new woman" writings as a general fascination with the hysterical morbid and false pictures of life that certain English women have brought into vogue in fiction. The author of the article takes into consideration that the turn of the nineteenth century coincided with the ideological movement for women's equality, which resulted in a shift in the notion of femininity that in its turn also made a great impact on writer's fiction. It's stated that Chopin's heroines are unsatisfied with the standard paradigm of feminine conduct. The article defines that the major themes of Chopin's short prose such as love, passion, and woman's creativity are inextricably linked with a heroine's search for her place and purpose, the accomplishment of inner freedom and spiritual independence. In the article, the author proves that Kate Chopin promotes women's internal liberation from old preconceptions and social pressure. Because society is patriarchal, Chopin defines liberation as fighting against or going beyond society. Rejecting a patriarchal culture entails stepping beyond social limits. Thus, the heroines of K. Chopin's compositions must choose between following their own nature (that is, their own aspirations, dreams, and opinions) and conforming to society's standards. The heroines either express their own identity or fight against the influence of traditional norms that deny a woman's ability to change her position in general.

Key words: femininity, New Woman, women's issue, woman's experience, fate, emancipation, self-awareness, self-confidence, anti-feminism, the problem of muteness, female sexuality.

Statement of the problem. Kate Chopin's (1851–1904) fiction, today considered a classic of American literature, only lately drew the attention of literary experts – in the 1970s. This belated interest emerges from the writer's challenging creative fate and literary heritage. The "rediscovery" of Kate Chopin occurred in 1969, when, in response to feminist critique, the Norwegian professor of American literature Per Seyersted published the writer's complete works. According to Newsweek, "In story after story and in all her novels, Kate Chopin's oracular feminism and prophetic psychology almost outweigh her estimable literary talents". Her resurgence is both intriguing and relevant [1].

The scandal surrounding the release of her novel *The Awakening* (*The Awakening*, 1899) is clearly

linked to the lengthy obscurity of one of the most outstanding American writers of the nineteenth century. Kate Chopin was accused of immorality, and the publishing house's reviewers, fearful of the avalanche, refused to work with her anymore. Although *The Awakening* was not banned, the extremely negative critical response caused Chopin to almost cease writing. As Sandra M. Gilbert stated, "From the first both her short stories and her novel(s) were studies of "emancipation" and often specifically of female emancipation" [2].

K. Chopin's name has now been returned to the canon of American literature, and historical justice has been restored. Nonetheless, as American literary scholar Lazar Ziff observes, "her tortured silence as the new century arrived was a loss to American letters

on the order of Crane and Norris's untimely deaths". She was alive when the twentieth century began, but she had been rendered speechless by a society terrified of an uncertain dawn" [3].

The turn of the nineteenth century coincided with the ideological movement for women's equality, which resulted in a shift in the notion of *femininity*, which inevitably required its own reflection. The *New Woman* became a prominent cultural phenomenon in late Victorian literature, over a hundred novels were written about the "new woman" between 1883 and 1900. Despite her status as an iconic feminist figure in American literature, Kate Chopin characterizes contemporary "new woman" writings in her diary entries as a general fascination with "the craze for the hysterical morbid and false pictures of life which certain English women have brought into vogue in fiction" [4].

The research is relevant since there is a need for a systematic analysis of K. Chopin's narratives from the perspective of artistic rethinking of the female experience, the image of a woman in society at the turn of the 19th–20th century, as well as reflecting changes in gender roles in society during this period. In many respects, this investigation will be crucial in clarifying not just the idiosyncrasies of women's literary fiction, but also the peculiarities of a woman's vision of the world around her and her role in it.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The poetry and prose legacy of Kate Chopin is being explored in several works published overseas (Rankin Danlal S., Eble Kenneth, Seyersted Per, Toth Emily, Le Marquand), and her name is recognized in the US literary canon. Literary critics investigate her prose mainly from a feminist perspective. In Ukraine, the feminist problems of K. Chopin's prose were studied by L. P. Yevtushenko (dissertation work "Problemat-ics and artistic specificity of Kate Chopin's feminist prose", 1996). Chopin's individual stories were considered from a gender perspective by M. Koreneva, in the context of regional literature by I. Morozova, and from a stylistic perspective by O. Yemets.

Task statement. The purpose of the article is to investigate the artistic embodiment of women's issues in Kate Chopin's prose, to explore the features of women's social, ethical, and psychological status in American society at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to identify the artistic evolution of female images in Chopin's novelistic cycles and to analyze her short stories in which women's issues find the most complete and artistically perfect embodiment, revealing the writer's innovation in interpreting the "women's theme" in the American and European literary contexts (collections of short stories "Bayou

Folk (1894)", "A Night in Acadia (1897)", "A Voca-tion and a Voice").

Biographical, historical-comparative, sociocul-tural, typological, and contextual **research methods** were used as part of the research. The theoretical basis of the investigation contains works dedicated to theoretical issues (Michel Foucault), issues on wom-en's literature – works by Virginia Woolf, Hélène Cix-ous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Annette Collodney, Elaine Showalter, as well as works on the socio-his-torical basis of the women's issue – John Stuart Mill, Sara Evans, O. Banks.

Outline of the main material of the study. The movement for women's equality was one of the par-ticularly significant tendencies in American social life in the second half of the 19th century. Mary Woll-stonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects" (1792), Judith Murray's "Essay: On the Equality of the Sexes" (1790), and Margaret Fuller's "Woman in the Nineteenth Century (1845)" are among the crucial turning points in the history of the women's move-ment in England and the USA during the 19th century.

The angel in the house, an angelic, asexual lady whose primary responsibility was to serve the family and manage the household, was considered the most acceptable example of female behavior at the time. The concept of female softness and grace was related to a woman's fragility and body weakness.

The literary exchange between English writer Ouida (Maria Louisa Ramé), a popular antifeminist novelist in the *North American Review* in 1894, and Irish New Woman novelist Sarah Grand (1854–1943), made the New Woman into a cultural phenomenon. As a result, the idea of the "new woman" appeared in the literary culture of the second half of the 19th century. As a direct consequence of this disagree-ment, the term "a new woman" has been frequently employed in literature and historical context, and the New Woman became the symbol of feminism. In his novella "Daisy Miller" (serialized 1878) and "Portrait of a Lady" (serialized 1880–81) the British-American author Henry James used it additionally to represent the rise of feminist, educated, independent career women in Europe and the United States [5].

Independence was not just a mental state; it also entailed physical changes in activity and attire, since hobbies like biking increased women's capacity to participate in a broader, more active environment [6].

Sports (tennis, croquet, cricket) were, therefore, an essential starting point in changing the social status of women in the middle of the 19th century. In interaction with the mid-1890s national obses-

sion with cycling, the question of practical women's clothes became an urgent public topic. The demands of representatives of the women's movement, which seemed to many members of the public to be bold and insane, contributed to the emergence of an opposing point of view on the "women's issue", which might be dubbed anti-feminism. Psychiatrists focused their study on the unusual, in their opinion, woman's need for satisfaction outside the home, such as the work of Harvard University professor, Dr. Edward H. Clark "Sex in Education, or, A fair chance for the Girls" (1872) and Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing's book "Psychopathia Sexualis, with Especial Reference to the Antipathetic Sexual Instinct: A Medico-forensic Study", published in Germany in 1882 and appeared in translated in the United States in 1886.

According to a number of scholars, there are two categories of works regarding the "new woman", namely "polemical" and "commercial" or "popular". "Polemical novels" (such as those by Sarah Grand and George Egerton) presented the picture of a rebellious woman openly defying the social order. These works were heavily political and did not have a lengthy life.

For a brief time, the depiction of the "new woman" in "popular novels" undergoes a profound transformation. The protagonist transforms from a ludicrous "blue stocking" preoccupied with her struggle for equality into a stunning, intelligent young woman who enjoys tennis and cycling. The heroine's agreement to marry in the final chapter or her failure in the competition for the man of her choice with a more feminine rival utterly eliminated the public-critical tragedy of such works. The "new woman" suffers from loneliness and the difficulties of experiencing personal satisfaction as a result of her yearning for independence and revolt against the restrictive framework of her existence in society.

Feminist critique, which examines concerns of female subjectivity and the particulars of female language and thought, is no longer able to be considered in relation to the work of women writers and its artistic aspects. However, applying modern assumptions to a 19th-century work is not always acceptable. Luce Irigaray's arguments on the logical oppositions based on male and female dichotomy explicitly related to language ("parler femme" or space of the "other") and the playful nature of feminist discourse is fruitful for the study of women's texts of the nineteenth century and, in particular, Kate Chopin's texts.

The problem of *muteness or silence*, which is strongly tied to feminist literary criticism, appears to be especially crucial for the understanding of a literary work. In 1975, Edwin Ardener and Shirley

Ardener introduced the "Muted group theory (MGT)" based on Michel Foucault's concepts. Women (one of the "muted groups"), according to this idea, either keep silent or speak, but remain "mute" since their worldview cannot be fulfilled and communicated in words in the dominant masculine society. This creates semantic gaps in the literary text and emphasizes the need for nonverbal communication methods.

The traditional model of female behavior does not satisfy Chopin's heroines. The writer raises the urgent issue of a woman's search for her place and purpose, the acquisition of inner freedom and spiritual independence, while the main content of the short stories is devoted to love.

Kate Chopin emphasizes the internal emancipation of women from traditional prejudices and social pressure. Since society is patriarchal, for Chopin emancipation consists of rebelling or going beyond society. The rejection of a patriarchal society means going beyond the boundaries of society. Thus, the heroines of K. Chopin's works face a choice: to follow their own nature (that is, according to their own desires, dreams, to their own views) or conform to social conventions.

Chopin's works also incorporated American literary national traditions. The author shared Emerson's pantheistic worldview as well as the American philosopher's theory of "self-confidence", which affirmed the independence of judgment, and the boldness of thought, and action. The impact of Henry James' narrative style (the method of "point of view") dictates the direction of the writer's artistic quest to some extent. Kate Chopin's prose and Walt Whitman's poetry share a unique perspective of corporeality.

The first collection of stories "Bayou Folk" (1894) explores the features of the writer's interpretation of the female themes like love and desire, marriage and freedom, independence and restrictions. "Free! Free! Free!" is the cry of Louise Mallard in "The Story of an Hour" when she realizes the implications of her husband's sudden death. Her friends have tried to tell her gently because she has heart trouble, but alone in her room she looks to a future in which she will be "free – body and soul" [7].

The themes and imagery expressed in "Bayou Folk" will be developed further in Chopin's writings. The picture of Calixta from the short story "At the Cadian Ball" (1892)" appears along with the heroines who were typical for American literature at the time, such as Euphrasie from "A No-Account Creole" and Lalie from "Love on the Bon-Dieu" [8].

This peculiar emphasis on female sexuality may also be found in the story titled "La Belle Zoraïde". It

is worth noting that Chopin originally entrusts the fulfillment of his physical nature to heroines from lower levels of the social hierarchy: Zoraïde is a slave, and Calixta originates from a poor farmer's family. Chopin, while really fond of the South, avoids idealizing its history.

In the short stories "Desiree's Baby" (1893) and "La Belle Zoraïde" a merciless verdict on slavery and racial prejudice sounds. It is significant that a man is a master and owner not only of his slaves but also of his household. This position means the dictate of his will, defenselessness before his wrath. The tragedy of both Zoraïde and Desiree lies in the fact that, although they belong to different strata of society, they are equally powerless.

The community imposes women into a subordinate position (which in the 19th century was clearly reflected in the marginal status of women in the legal field). Such subordination is also associated with the special role of paralinguistic components of communication. A woman is denied her own voice because of her dependent status under patriarchal cultural conventions. Only when the scenario deviates from typical she gets the opportunity to express herself. Self-expression, on the other hand, is a complicated spiritual process involved with transcending imposed cultural stereotypes inside one's consciousness.

As a result, when confronted with a scenario requiring self-expression, Chopin's heroine fails to adequately articulate herself. She is either mute/silent, transmitting all of her feelings through intonations and facial gestures (as Desiree is), or she talks, but her words have not yet become totally her own, not filled with her intention (like Madame Celestin from the short story "Madame Célestin's Divorce").

Chopin's collection of short stories "At Fault", privately printed and soon forgotten, had taken on the issue of divorce directly and, while being married by melodrama and a contrived finale, indirectly pleaded for the truth of the end of love and the folly of interfering in the life decisions of others. Chopin attests to such involvement and manipulation as in "La Belle Zoraïde," which may destroy its objects.

When compared to the first cycle, the writer's deeper development of the "women's issue" may be followed in the short stories in Kate Chopin's second book "A Night in Acadia" (1897). Chopin concentrates on the feminine psyche and her current condition, as determined by physiology, psychology, and societal conventions and standards. She focuses her study mostly on the internal struggle between responsibility and a woman's innate yearning for independence.

Chopin is not afraid to open the secrets of the female personality, which were still hidden for the greatest American writers. The issue of female sexuality, which was forbidden in American writing at the time, is developed in greater depth than in the previous volume. The premise of the short tale "A Respectable Woman" is based on the heroine's understanding of her sexual nature, and it orchestrates the aesthetic universe of the work. In the short story "Athènaïse" less textual space is given to this subject, yet it does not lose significance. It is worth noting that in the collection "Bayou Folk", sexuality as an intrinsic aspect of female identity was only examined in regard to lower-class representations (Zoraïde, Calixta), to whom a certain indulgence was permissible, then in "A Night in Acadia" such emotions are experienced by women of the privileged class (Athènaïse, Mrs. Baroda).

In the third collection of short stories, "Vocation and Voice", the writer challenges gender stereotypes in society at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, rethinking the "female experience" and the "women's theme". Written at different times and published in different magazines, in 1898 the short stories were collected by Kate Chopin into a cycle. Herbert S. Stone, after the scandal with the novel "Awakening", canceled her contract for "A Vocation and a Voice" and the collection was published by Penguin Classics in 1991. In 1902 "A Vocation and a Voice," the title story of Chopin's proposed volume, was published in the *St. Louis Mirror*.

In the short story "Two Portraits" (1895), Chopin presents two equal versions of the heroine's fate, depicting life as a kind of "experiment", development, and outcome, which is determined by the environment. Comparison of two versions of the fate of the heroine (who appears as a whore and a nun) within the same work deprives the image of unambiguity and embeds it in a polemic with social attitudes. Love appears as the highest vocation of a woman, however, in both described variants of the evolution of the image, the social structure distorts and does not allow a woman to realize what is inherent in her nature.

Interest in the underlying mechanisms of the psyche can be traced in the short stories "A Mental Suggestion" (1896) and "An Egyptian Cigarette" (1897). The subconscious of the heroine of the last novel, the "new woman", activated during a dream hallucination, reveals to her those inner complexes, that genetically inherited memory of a woman's fate, for which there are no national and temporal boundaries.

A significant part of the writer's artistic works is her short stories and novels about "new women", about their formation through making their own choices and

self-realization. Kate Chopin's "New Woman" always follows her own nature, contrary to traditional societal ideas. K. Chopin's anti-patriarchal project finds self-realization in the creation of a new social image of a woman who opposes the patriarchal society (openly or secretly, sometimes with a fatal ending).

In this aspect, it is worth contrasting two stories by Kate Chopin – "The Story of an Hour" and "A Respectable Woman". The first is about a woman who felt free only after the news of her husband's death. Although she was not satisfied with the marriage in which she felt unhappy, she did not take active steps to change this situation.

In the second, "A Respectable Woman", we meet a typical 'real woman' whose behavior is determined by social and traditional norms. She resolves the conflict between nature and society in favor of society by renouncing her own nature and her own desires. In the attitude of the writer, the desire to affirm and poeticize the desire of a woman for spiritual independence and the ironic awareness of the initial doom of this attempt merged into one.

In the short story "Elizabeth Stock's One Story" (1898), Chopin first refers to the theme of female creativity. Here an important role is played by the assertion of her own "I" by the heroine, who is portrayed as a woman with creative ambitions, that is, claiming traditionally male forms of searching for her "I" and self-expression.

If the heroines of the first cycle of "Bayou Folk" at times experience dissatisfaction with their dependent, subordinate position in the family and society, however, their actions are guided by the logic of the "feminine woman" (the term of Simone de Beauvoir), the essence of which is passivity and self-denial, then in the next two cycles "A Night in Acadia" and "A Vocation and a Voice" can be divided into three types of heroines embodying the concept of a new idea of a woman. Firstly, these are caricatures of women-emancipee. They have a number of recognizable features, openly declaring their belonging to the women's movement (for example, Miss Georgie McEnders from the novel of the same name and the images of the Tennis Player and the Golfer from the novel "A Mental Suggestion").

Long before the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's book "The Second Sex" (1949), Kate Chopin,

in her short stories "Lilacs" and "Two Portraits", expresses thoughts that Beauvoir outlined in the chapter "The God Seeker". Chopin criticizes the prevalent set of attitudes that denigrate the "feminine" even inside the walls of a monastery when a woman renounces her corporality, which is regarded as evil. Furthermore, in the picture of Chopin, the nuns perceive God not intellectually, but emotionally; also, women who become Christ's brides combine the image of a man and God.

Conclusions. In Chopin's short stories, the author reinterprets women's experience through the contemporary trend of a "new woman", reflecting the women's experience of different ages and classes, thus the image of a representative of American society of the second half of the 19th century is gradually formed. The problem of woman's self-expression in a literary text is also connected with the position of a woman in society and her worldview.

The original understanding of many components of the "women's theme" reflected the desire to break social preconceptions. The famed mystique of the female spirit (feminine mystique, as Simone de Beauvoir, would later describe it) gets a sarcastic voice in the novel "A Lady of Bayou St. John" from the first collection. Chopin plays on social stereotypes, according to which a woman's infantilism is cultivated and immaturity of thought is perceived as a kind of piquancy (it is worth noting that the well-known representative of feminist literary criticism Betty Friedan will devote a separate work "The Feminine Mystique" to this problem in 1963).

The individualistic orientation of Kate Chopin's work is expressed in her desire for the emancipation of the "inner" woman. After all, during her lifetime, she was not considered a feminist, because of the feminism of the end of the 19th century. in the USA – a socio-political phenomenon that was expressed in the activities of such movements as suffragism and abolitionism. The questions that Kate Chopin's heroines face are the choice between following one's own nature or social norms. The heroines either express their own identity or fight against the influence of traditional norms that deny a woman's ability to change her position in general. Perhaps the most important thing for a writer is to show the inner process of a woman's liberation.

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Нагачевська О. О. ХУДОЖНЄ ПЕРЕОСМИСЛЕННЯ ЖІНОЧОГО ДОСВІДУ ТА ГЕНДЕРНИХ РОЛЕЙ НА МЕЖІ ХІХ–ХХ СТОЛІТЬ В ОПОВІДАННЯХ КЕЙТ ШОПІН

Стаття присвячена художньому переосмисленню американською письменницею Кейт Шопен образу жінки і жіночого досвіду на зламі ХІХ–ХХ століть. У дослідженні аналізуються основні тенденції суспільно-політичного життя країни, які вплинули на формування стереотипів сприйняття соціумом жінки, її поведінки та ролі в суспільстві та сім'ї. Автор статті визначає, що літературна спадщина Кейт Шопен лише нещодавно привернула увагу через її складну творчу долю та літературну спадщину. Зазначається, що «Нова жінка», явище в пізньовікторіанській літературі, стала культурним феноменом на межі століть, і що, незважаючи на її статус культової феміністської фігури в американській літературі, Шопен не схвалює цього образу і характеризує сучасні їй твори про «нову жінку» як загальне захоплення істеричними хворобливими та фальшивими картинами життя, які деякі англійки ввели в моду в художній літературі. Автор статті бере до уваги, що період порубіжжя ХІХ–ХХ століть збігся з ідеологічним рухом за рівноправність жінок, який призвів до зміни уявлення про жіночність, що, у свою чергу, надзвичайно вплинуло на творчість письменниці. Стверджується, що героїнь Шопена не влаштовує загальноновизнана парадигма жіночої поведінки. У статті визначено, що головні теми малої прози Шопена, такі як кохання, пристрасть, жіноча творчість, нерозривно пов'язані з пошуком героїнею свого місця та призначення, досягненням внутрішньої свободи та духовної незалежності. У статті автор доводить, що Кейт Шопен сприяє внутрішньому звільненню жінки від старих упереджень і соціального тиску. Оскільки суспільство є патріархальним, Шопен визначає звільнення як боротьбу проти суспільства або вихід за нього. Відмова від патріархальної культури означає вихід за соціальні межі. Отже, героїні творів К. Шопена змушені вибирати між наслідуванням власної природи (тобто власних прагнень, мрій, поглядів) і відповідністю стандартам суспільства. Героїні або виражають власну ідентичність, борються з впливом традиційних норм, які взагалі заперечують здатність жінки змінити своє становище.

Ключові слова: жіночий досвід, жіночність, нова жінка, жіноче питання, жіночий досвід, доля, емансипація, самосвідомість, самовпевненість, антифемінізм, проблема мовчання, жіноча сексуальність.