FROM "THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE" TO "THE NEW WOMAN": THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE FEMALE IMAGE IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

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Abstract. The article examines the evolution of the female image in the English novel of the Victorian era (1837–1901). It traces the movement from the domestic ideal of the "Angel in the House", popularised by Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name, to the figure of the "New Woman" that emerged in the fiction of the 1880s and 1890s. On the material of novels by Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, George Gissing and Sarah Grand, the study identifies the main stages of this transformation and shows how changes in law, education and public debate on the "Woman Question" were reflected in characterisation, narrative voice and plot structure. It is argued that the Victorian heroine developed from a static moral symbol into a psychologically complex, self-reflecting subject.

Keywords: Victorian novel, female image, "Angel in the House", "New Woman", Woman Question, gender, characterisation, fallen woman, sensation novel.

"UYDAGI FARISHTA"DAN "YANGI AYOL"GACHA: VIKTORIYA DAVRI ROMANLARIDA AYOL OBRAZINING TRANSFORMATSIYASI

Annotatsiya. Maqolada Viktoriya davri (1837–1901) ingliz romanida ayol obrazining evolyutsiyasi tadqiq etiladi. Koventri Patmorning shu nomdagi she'ri orqali ommalashgan "Uy farishtasi" maishiy idealidan XIX asrning 80–90-yillari nasrida paydo bo'lgan "Yangi ayol" obraziga qadar bo'lgan yo'l kuzatiladi. Sh. Bronte, Ch. Dikkens, U. M. Tekkerey, E. Gaskell, J. Eliot, T. Xardi, J. Gissing va S. Grand romanlari misolida ushbu transformatsiyaning asosiy bosqichlari aniqlanadi hamda huquq, ta'lim va "ayollar masalasi" bo'yicha jamoatchilik bahslaridagi o'zgarishlarning obraz yaratish, hikoya qiluvchi ovozi va syujet tuzilishida aks etishi ko'rsatib beriladi.

Kalit so'zlar: Viktoriya davri romani, ayol obrazi, "Uy farishtasi", "Yangi ayol", ayollar masalasi, gender, obraz yaratish, "yiqilgan ayol", sensatsion roman.

ОТ «АНГЕЛА В ДОМЕ» К «НОВОЙ ЖЕНЩИНЕ»: ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ ЖЕНСКОГО ОБРАЗА В ВИКТОРИАНСКОМ РОМАНЕ

Аннотация. В статье исследуется эволюция женского образа в английском романе викторианской эпохи (1837–1901). Прослеживается путь от домашнего идеала «Ангела в доме», популяризированного одноимённой поэмой Ковентри Патмора, до образа «Новой женщины», возникшего в прозе 1880–1890-х годов. На материале романов Ш. Бронте, Ч. Диккенса, У. М. Теккерея, Э. Гаскелл, Дж. Элиот, Т. Харди, Дж. Гиссинга и С. Гранд выделяются основные этапы этой трансформации и показывается, как изменения в праве, образовании и общественной дискуссии о «женском вопросе» отразились в создании образа, повествовательном голосе и структуре сюжета.

Ключевые слова: викторианский роман, женский образ, «Ангел в доме», «Новая женщина», женский вопрос, гендер, создание образа, «падшая женщина», сенсационный роман.

Introduction. The Victorian period was a time of rapid industrial, scientific and social change, and the novel became its dominant literary form. Few aspects of Victorian life were discussed in fiction as intensely as the position of women. The so-called "Woman Question" – the debate about women's nature, education, legal status, work and right to vote – ran through the whole century and shaped the way novelists imagined their heroines [6; 15]. Consequently, the female character in the Victorian novel is not only an aesthetic construct but also a sensitive indicator of changing social norms.

At the beginning of the period the dominant cultural model was the ideal of the self-sacrificing wife and mother whose sphere was the home. This model received its most famous name from Coventry Patmore's long poem The Angel in the House (1854–1862), which celebrated the gentle, obedient and morally pure wife. By the end of the century a contrasting figure had appeared: the "New Woman", educated, economically independent and critical of marriage as the only possible destiny. The term itself was popularised in 1894 in the debate between the novelist Sarah Grand and the writer Ouida in the North

American Review [9; 12].

The aim of this article is to describe the main stages of the transformation of the female image in the Victorian novel and to show how the shift from the "Angel" to the "New Woman" was realised in characterisation, narrative perspective and plot. The objectives are: (1) to outline the ideological background of the domestic ideal; (2) to analyse heroines who conform to, question or openly resist this ideal; (3) to characterise the New Woman fiction of the fin de siècle; and (4) to identify the linguistic and narrative means through which the female image is constructed.

The relevance of the topic is determined by the continuing interest of modern literary studies, gender studies and linguistics in the representation of women in literature, as well as by the importance of Victorian fiction in the teaching of English literature at universities of Uzbekistan.

The study of women in Victorian fiction gained momentum with second-wave feminist criticism. Elaine Showalter in A Literature of Their Own (1977) described the history of British women novelists as a succession of "feminine", "feminist" and "female" phases, connecting literary development with women's changing self-awareness [16]. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in The Madwoman in the Attic (1979) argued that nineteenth-century women writers were confined between two male-created stereotypes – the angel and the monster – and that the "madwoman" often expressed the author's own suppressed anger [7]. Virginia Woolf had already anticipated this line of thought in her lecture "Professions for Women" (1931), where she declared that "killing the Angel in the House" was part of the occupation of a woman writer [17].

Later research shifted attention from the opposition of angel and monster to the variety of female types and to the material conditions of women's lives. Ann Ardis and Sally Ledger studied the New Woman as a literary and journalistic phenomenon of the 1890s [2; 11], while Lyn Pykett analysed the sensation novel and New Woman writing as two forms of the "improper feminine" [14]. In Russian and Uzbek scholarship, the Victorian novel has traditionally been studied within the general history of English literature, with attention to its social and realistic tendencies [1].

The methodological basis of the article combines the historical-literary method (relating texts to the social and legal context), the comparative method (contrasting heroines of different decades), elements of gender analysis and narratological analysis (focalisation, narrative voice), as well as linguo-stylistic observation of the language used to describe and to give voice to female characters.

1. The ideological background: the domestic ideal.

The ideal of the "Angel in the House" rested on the doctrine of separate spheres: the public world of work and politics belonged to men, while the private world of the home belonged to women. Conduct books such as Sarah Stickney Ellis's The Women of England (1839) taught that woman's influence was moral rather than political and should be exercised through self-denial [5]. John Ruskin, in the lecture "Of Queens' Gardens" (1865), presented the home as a sacred place and the woman as its guardian, whose power was meant for order and guidance rather than for struggle [15]. Patmore's poem expressed the same model in compact form: "Man must be pleased; but him to please / Is woman's pleasure" [13].

This ideal had a firm legal basis. Under the principle of coverture, a married woman's legal identity was absorbed into her husband's; until the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 she could not independently own most property. Divorce became available through civil courts only after the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, and even then on unequal terms. Literature both reproduced and questioned these conditions.

2. The early Victorian heroine: the angel as moral centre.

In the novels of the 1840s–1850s the angelic heroine is often the moral centre of the narrative. Charles Dickens offers the clearest examples. Agnes Wickfield in David Copperfield (1850) is repeatedly associated with light, calm and religious imagery; at the end of the novel David describes her as pointing upward, which turns her into a guide to spiritual salvation rather than an active agent. Esther Summerson in Bleak House (1853) embodies duty, modesty and housekeeping skills; it is significant that her housekeeping keys become a recurring symbol of her role. Little Nell in The Old Curiosity Shop (1841) represents innocence so complete that it can only be preserved through death.

Linguistically, such heroines are constructed through a stable set of evaluative epithets – gentle, quiet, patient, good, dear – and through light imagery and diminutives. Their speech tends to be brief, consoling and directed at the needs of others. The angel is defined by her function in the lives of men rather than by her own desires, and her inner world is rarely explored in detail.

Yet even in this period the ideal was presented with irony. In Vanity Fair (1848) W. M. Thackeray juxtaposes the passive, sentimental Amelia Sedley and the clever, ambitious Becky Sharp. Amelia fits the angelic model, but the narrator treats her devotion with gentle mockery, while Becky, morally dubious as she is, demonstrates intelligence, wit and an understanding that a poor woman must fight for her place in society. The double heroine structure already shows that the angelic model is insufficient to describe real women's experience.

3. The rebellious heroine: Jane Eyre and the voice of the female subject.

Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre (1847) marks a turning point. The novel is told in the first person by a poor, plain governess, and this narrative choice gives the heroine full control over the representation of her own inner life. Jane claims emotional and moral equality with men: in a famous passage she insists that "women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties" [3]. Addressing Rochester, she declares: "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will" [3].

The image of the bird and the net is one of the key metaphors of Victorian women's writing: confinement – in the red-room, in Lowood school, in the attic – is opposed to the desire for freedom. Gilbert and Gubar interpret Bertha Mason,

the “madwoman” locked in Thornfield’s attic, as Jane’s dark double, the embodiment of the anger that the respectable heroine must suppress [7]. Jane, however, achieves a balance between passion and principle: she refuses to become Rochester’s mistress and later refuses a loveless marriage to St John Rivers, and she returns to Rochester only when she has her own inheritance and can choose freely. In this sense Jane Eyre anticipates the economic independence that later becomes a central theme of New Woman fiction.

4. Social realism and the “fallen woman”.

The mid-Victorian novel also turned to women who failed to meet the standard of sexual purity. Elizabeth Gaskell’s Ruth (1853) tells the story of a seduced seamstress and asks whether a “fallen woman” can be redeemed through motherhood and work. The novel caused a scandal, but it challenged the assumption that such a woman was beyond moral recovery. In North and South (1855) Gaskell created Margaret Hale, a heroine who intervenes in an industrial conflict and moves confidently in the public sphere, thereby crossing the boundary between home and society.

In the 1860s the sensation novel brought further disruption. Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s Lady Audley’s Secret (1862) shocked readers because its criminal is a beautiful, childlike blonde woman who outwardly corresponds to the angelic ideal. Wilkie Collins’s The Woman in White (1859–1860) presents Marian Halcombe, an intelligent and resolute woman whose diary drives much of the investigation. The sensation novel thus revealed that the angelic surface could conceal energy, ambition and even violence, and it made the domestic sphere a place of secrets rather than peace [14].

5. George Eliot: the frustrated aspirations of the intellectual woman.

George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) deepened the psychological analysis of the heroine. Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss (1860) is a passionate, intelligent girl whose hunger for knowledge is denied, while her brother Tom receives the education she desires. Maggie’s tragedy demonstrates how the narrow possibilities offered to women produce inner conflict and self-destruction.

In Middlemarch (1871–1872) Dorothea Brooke longs for a life of great purpose but, lacking education and opportunities, mistakes marriage to the dry scholar Casaubon for a path to intellectual achievement. In the Prelude, Eliot compares such women to Saint Theresa born in the wrong age, who become “foundress of nothing” [4]. The novel’s Finale, however, offers a quiet reassessment: the “growing good of the world” depends partly on “unhistoric acts” [4]. Eliot neither idealises nor rejects the domestic role; she shows it as limited, while recognising the moral value of women’s ordinary lives. Her omniscient narrator, with its analytic and generalising commentary, gives the heroine’s consciousness a depth unknown to the earlier angelic type.

6. The fin de siècle and the “New Woman”.

From the 1880s, social changes accelerated. Women’s colleges were founded – Girton College at Cambridge in 1869, for example – and women entered offices, teaching and journalism. Campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts and for suffrage made women visible in public life. The New Woman became a frequent figure in novels, plays and the periodical press, and in Punch she was often caricatured as a cigarette-smoking, bicycle-riding intellectual [11].

Olive Schreiner’s The Story of an African Farm (1883) introduced Lyndall, a heroine who criticises the education of girls and refuses to marry the father of her child because marriage would mean subjection. Sarah Grand’s The Heavenly Twins (1893), a best-seller, attacked the double sexual standard and the hereditary dangers of marrying a dissolute man. George Gissing’s The Odd Women (1893) dealt with the so-called “surplus women” who could not find husbands; Rhoda Nunn trains young women for office work and treats economic self-sufficiency as the basis of dignity [8]. Grant Allen’s The Woman Who Did (1895) depicted a heroine who chooses a free union on principle.

Thomas Hardy’s late novels occupy a special place. Tess of the d’Urbervilles (1891) bears the provocative subtitle “A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented”, which directly challenges the Victorian equation of purity with sexual innocence [10]. Tess, a seduced and later murderous woman, is presented as morally pure, while the society that condemns her is shown as hypocritical. In Jude the Obscure (1895) Sue Bridehead is intellectual, sceptical of religion and marriage, and nervous of sexuality; her final collapse into conventional piety reveals the high psychological cost of rebellion in a society not ready for it. Hardy’s New Woman is thus not a triumphant figure but a tragic one.

7. Women writers and the problem of authorship.

The transformation of the female image cannot be separated from the position of the woman writer herself. Many Victorian women published under male or neutral pseudonyms: the Brontë sisters first appeared as Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell, and Mary Ann Evans chose the name George Eliot. Charlotte Brontë later explained that the sisters wished to avoid the prejudice with which critics treated “authoresses”. This fact is significant: in order to write freely about women’s passions and intellectual ambitions, women authors had to hide their own gender, which itself testifies to the strength of the domestic ideal.

Showalter describes the first, “feminine” phase of women’s writing (approximately 1840–1880) as a period of imitation of the dominant male tradition and internalisation of its standards, and the following “feminist” phase (approximately 1880–1920) as a period of protest and of advocacy of minority rights [16]. The New Woman novel belongs precisely to this second phase. Its authors – Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, George Egerton, Olive Schreiner – openly discussed marriage, sexuality and the economic dependence of women, and often presented their novels as contributions to public debate rather than purely aesthetic works.

At the same time, male novelists played an important role in the transformation. Dickens, Thackeray, Collins, Hardy and Gissing each created heroines who either confirmed or undermined the angelic ideal. A comparison of male and female authors shows that the shift in the female image was not only the result of women’s self-expression but a general tendency

of the Victorian novel, reflecting the growing awareness of the whole society that the traditional model no longer corresponded to reality.

8. The reception of the New Woman and the reaction against her.

The appearance of the New Woman provoked strong resistance. Critics accused New Woman fiction of immorality, of an unhealthy interest in sexual questions and of undermining the family. Hardy's Jude the Obscure was attacked so violently on publication that it was nicknamed "Jude the Obscene", and Hardy afterwards turned away from novel-writing to poetry. Ouida's reply to Sarah Grand ridiculed the New Woman as an absurd and unattractive creature, and comic journals presented her as a masculine figure who neglected her home [12].

This reaction is itself an important indicator of the transformation. The very intensity of the debate shows that the female image had ceased to be a stable symbol and had become a field of ideological struggle. In this struggle the novel acted both as a mirror of public opinion and as an instrument for changing it: by allowing readers to enter the consciousness of heroines such as Dorothea, Tess or Rhoda Nunn, fiction encouraged sympathy for women whose desires did not fit the accepted norms. As Kate Flint has shown, the female reader herself was at the centre of anxieties about the influence of novels in this period [6].

Moreover, the figure of the New Woman was internally contradictory. Some writers associated her with sexual freedom, others – like Sarah Grand – with a higher standard of purity for both sexes. Some New Woman heroines reject motherhood, others idealise it as a social mission. This variety shows that the New Woman was not a single fixed type but a range of attempts to imagine a woman who defines her own life.

9. Linguistic and narrative means of the transformation.

The comparison of these texts makes it possible to identify several tendencies in the language and structure of the female image:

– from external description to inner voice: the angelic heroine is mostly described by others, whereas Jane Eyre, Marian Halcombe and Rhoda Nunn speak, write diaries or argue for themselves; first-person narration and free indirect discourse grant women interiority;

– from evaluative epithets to analytical vocabulary: words such as gentle, pure, angelic give way to terms of intellect, work and rights – independence, education, will, freedom;

– from static symbols to dynamic metaphors: the angel is linked with light and the hearth, while the rebellious and new heroines are linked with images of cages, birds, journeys and open spaces;

– from closed to open endings: early novels typically end in marriage or death, while late Victorian fiction often leaves the heroine's fate unresolved or tragic, reflecting the absence of a socially acceptable place for the new type of woman.

It should also be noted that the transformation was not linear. Angelic heroines appear late in the century, and rebellious heroines appear early. Rather than one type replacing the other, the period shows a gradual widening of the range of possible female identities in fiction.

The study shows that the female image in the Victorian novel underwent a significant transformation, which can be divided into several stages: (1) the domestic angel of the early Victorian period, functioning as the moral centre of the novel; (2) the rebellious heroine of the 1840s, who claims equality of feeling and an independent will; (3) the socially and psychologically complex heroines of Gaskell, the sensation novel and George Eliot, who reveal the limits and contradictions of the domestic ideal; and (4) the New Woman of the fin de siècle, who openly questions marriage, the double standard and economic dependence.

These changes were closely connected with legal reforms, the expansion of women's education and the public debate on the Woman Question. In literary terms, the transformation was realised through the growth of female narrative voice and interiority, a shift in evaluative vocabulary, new systems of imagery and more open or tragic plot resolutions. The Victorian novel therefore prepared the ground for the modernist representation of women in the twentieth century, when Virginia Woolf would explicitly call for "killing" the Angel in the House.

The results of the research can be used in university courses on the history of English literature, in special courses on gender aspects of literary texts and in further linguo-stylistic studies of the means of characterisation in English fiction.

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