

UDC: 81'42:821.111.09

[https://doi.org/10.20235/lc.2013\(2\).10](https://doi.org/10.20235/lc.2013(2).10) | [Essay Citations](#)

ON SOME BASIC CONCEPTS THROUGH FEMALE PERSPECTIVE: PRAGMALINGUISTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE MODERN BRITISH FICTION

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Abstract

The essay deals with the ways women interpret the basic concepts of marriage, friendship, divorce, job, etc. from the emotional load perspective.

Keywords: *pragmalinguistic interpretation, modern British fiction, perspective*

Rezumat

Eseul tratează modul în care femeile interpretează conceptele de bază ale căsătoriei, prieteniei, divorțului, locului de muncă etc. din perspectiva încărcăturii emoționale.

Cuvinte-cheie: *interpretare pragmalingvistică, ficțiune britanică modernă, perspectivă*

In the rapidly changing economies, political systems, with the swiftly springing up and developing cultural undercurrents and tendencies people of both sexes often find it difficult to reshuffle the structure of their minds, the ways their cognition works for getting adapted to the processes around. The females, as it was scrutinized and inferred by the psychologists and psycholinguists, sociologists and sociolinguists, prove to be more flexible in the matters of psychological and physical survival. Gender determined interpretation of the ambience the females live and work in influenced the way the latter are mapping the world in terms of basic concepts that constitute their cognitive space. Among them are the concepts of family (parents, wedlock, children, divorce), friendship, personal freedom, responsibility to the close people, positive emotional feedback at work. We ventured to investigate the most uncommon and sometimes even striking ways of interpreting the abovementioned concepts by the female characters of the modern British fiction created by the women-authors. Such an approach let us pinpoint the evolution the concepts undergo in the mental framework of contemporary English women, thus through fictional narration we are given a chance to penetrate into the psyche and mentality of the average British woman who might have become a prototype of the fictional female characters.

It is universally accepted and believed in many cultures that the true and devoted friendship among females is hard to find, even if one manages to do it, he is doomed to failure as this phenomenon is rather short-lived with the

representatives of the fair sex. But the female fiction in English (C. Ahern¹, K. Swan², C. Alliott³) challenges this stereotype: "They might all live in different countries and be products of different cultures, but it seemed as though 'sophistication' was an international language that linked her glamorous, urbane friend together. It wasn't as if their day-to-day lives overlapped: Kelly had her own fashion PR consultancy in Manhattan, Suzy was a high-octane wedding planner in London and Anouk was a sought-after jewellery designer in Paris, who refused to sell through boutiques and would only accept new customers if they had contacts with at least three of her existing clients"⁴. Friendship for the female characters becomes an all-consuming business where trust and willingness to ease the life of each other prevail. Though being opposites in every way they tend to be capable of giving all possible support and help in times of greatest troubles caused, for instance, by the cheating of the husband of one of them and, consequently, by the divorce. In fact, it is friends who take the whole burden of responsibility by making a fateful and rash decision of taking the cheated-on member of their befriended circle out of her ambience and thanks to it rescue her from emotional devastation at finding out the truth of her lawful husband (Gil) having a second family: "Were they the second family – or the first? Was she just the appendage? After all, they had had a child together. They had a blood tie. She just had a gold ring and a legal document. Then again, she'd been married to him first... She tried to debate the dilemma rationally, but six back-to-back gin and tonics made it difficult. Aha! Wait! Her legal document had also been sworn before God. She had God on her side... And the girls"⁵. The mentioning of the latter in the immediate context with omniscient Christ hints at the idea of astonishingly blind trust the protagonist has in her friends as she with all reliance possible lets them change her life drastically: "In the frigid aftermath of her discovery, Gil and Wiz had just watched as Suzy, Kelly and Anouk had sprung into action – whisking her upstairs, pulling her dress over her head and packing a bag for her, finding her passport, pushing her feet into the muck boots by the door, bundling her into the car, even doing up her seat belt for her as she sat shell-shocked, too fractured to pull herself together and fight back, just waiting to be spirited away to her next life"⁶.

The women tend to interpret the state of being left alone after the divorce (K. Swan "Christmas at Tiffany's") or the tragic and untimely death of the beloved spouse (C. Alliott "A Married Man") not as the period given for grief and self-pity, but, on the contrary, as the time of awakening the strongest motivation to keep on living for the sake of children, or of savouring freedom after the disastrous marriage. For the modern woman the notion of being free equals with the reinventing herself becoming even happier, braver and luckier notwithstanding all the misfortunes and adverse life circumstances: "This is absurd, I thought, a few minutes later as I headed down the road to Safeway's, to do the proper shopping. I hadn't behaved like this for years, not since I was

about sixteen. And not with Ned, certainly, because he'd chased me. All around Oxford, in fact. So had I ever – I thought back... no, I decided. Never. Never chased a man in my life. So this was what it felt like, eh? I savoured it, rolled it around in my head reflectively. Predatory – definitely. Controlling and powerful, yes, because no one knew. He certainly didn't, and I hadn't told anyone, so no one could belittle it. No one could pour scorn, mock it, spoil it. I was the only one"⁷. Endeavoring to do what used to be tantalizingly alien to them before the women reshuffle the furniture of their minds transforming themselves into the independent, self-reliable and ready to jeopardize all the chances that are presented to them by life. The females are deprived of any fright to suffer that much once again, they are staunchly determined to face the troubles squarely and, finally, to be prosperous and lucrative in all they do: "She had no idea what she could add to these walls to bring a smile to the children's little faces when they walked in feeling nervous and upset at being taken from their parents. She knew about chaise longues, plasma screens, marble floors and wood of every kind. She could do chic, funky, sophisticated and rooms of splendour and grandeur. But none of these things would excite a child, and she knew she could do better than a few buildings blocks, jigsaw puzzles and beanbags. She knew it would be perfectly within her rights to hire a muralist, ask the on-site painters to do the job or even ask Poppy for some guidance, but Elizabeth liked to be hands-on. She liked to get lost in her work and she didn't want to have to ask for help. Handing the brush over to someone else would be a sign of defeat in her eyes"⁸.

The females seem to be following the principle worded by C. Ahern - 'The mind is the most powerful thing in the body, you know; whatever the mind believes, the body can achieve' – and having his motto in their minds the women are fearless while downshifting in the broad sense of this word: they attempt to change the residence from metropolitan cities to the rural areas (C. Alliot "A Married Man"), from the Scottish Borders to world capitals (K. Swan "Christmas at Tiffany's"); they alter the way of life from extraordinarily independent and powerful to self-sacrificing (C. Ahern "If You Could See Me Now") or from being too family-conscious to restoring some status-obsession and at times even getting power-crazed (K. Swan "Christmas at Tiffany's"). In other words, the females get not a downshifting in their lives, but an upshifting, which is not a pun, as they reach the highest point of independence from the other people's opinions that are no more forced on them, they indulge themselves in the desire to look better, to feel better and, as a result, giving a more positive feedback to the people around, finally, they have new positive emotions provoked and new selfhoods of theirs discovered. By changing the lifestyles females are rightfully critical about their appearance and the role they had in the household: "Then again, she thought, as her body wheezed and ached after the few paltry minutes of exercise, it wasn't as if she was a paragon of physical beauty. Sure, she was slim, but she had no muscles, and what she did have was soft and untuned.

She'd nearly fallen over when Kelly had padded round the apartment in her underwear, showing a stomach that was so defined Cassie would have been able to do brass rubbings on it. Absently, Cassie prodded her own tummy. It yielded without resistance. It wasn't fat, just spongy. Neglected. Unloved. Unworked"⁹. Doubtless, the whole marriage life of the protagonist was in the alike way neglected, deprived of any emotional sparkle (except rarely organized black-tie code receptions). The ambience and the place of residence can change the person's self-esteem, but the clothes can certainly do much more with that: "Two weeks ago she had been in Laura Ashley velvet and Hunter wellies. Now she looked like a rock princess. She guessed it was progress of sorts"¹⁰.

So, the investigation of the modern British fictional discourse created by women-authors and realized through the female protagonists showed that going through obvious changes (outlook, apparel style, place of dwelling, workplace and even profession changing) the women get a new track of their lives deeply believing that they are capable of fulfilling any task and responding to any challenge the life sets them, and this, consequently, empowers them to interpret the universally accepted concepts through their own independent perspective, at times overloading them with emotional coloring.

Notes

¹Ahern, 2006.

²Swan, 2011.

³Alliott, 2002.

⁴Swan, 2011, pp. 8-9.

⁵Swan, 2011, p. 24.

⁶Swan, 2011, p. 25.

⁷Alliott, 2002, pp. 56-57.

⁸Ahern, 2006, pp. 268-269.

⁹Swan, 2011, p. 38.

¹⁰Swan, 2011, p. 95.

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Swan, K. (2011). *Christmas at Tiffany's*. Pan Books.