

## THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND ART ON THE GENDER IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract:** This research aims to establish the main directions of the development of gender identity as a cultural and artistic phenomenon in contemporary Ukrainian literary works; to identify the main dominant transformations of gender identities represented in artistic images. The study uses a comprehensive approach to the methodology of interdisciplinary research: synthesis and analysis, interpretative, descriptive, and structural methods. The main hypothesis in the work is the statement that in postmodern thinking the subject is reduced to the image, so the image becomes an important formant of gender identity, gradually transforming it under the demands of society and public ideology.

**Keywords:** gender, contemporary culture.

### 1 Introduction

Gender identity in the postmodern world consists of the assumption of a certain social role and the construction for such a role, image, stereotype, ideal, and the like. Such identity focuses on external characteristics, their internal conformity and leads to the creation of a recognizable image (Ortiz-Walters, 2010; Aheyeva, 2003). In modern society gender identity is significantly dependent on the imaging system of feminine and masculine content provided mainly by mass culture, it is from there that the ideal for modeling personal identity is offered. However, postmodern identity becomes a presentation of the self, it can constantly change, gives the choice to present oneself in different images, roles, characters, activities. This leaves a lot of room for change, for formation and transformation. Thus, there are changes in the conceptual apparatus related to the problems of gender, gender identity, and gender culture.

According to some specialists, the concept of "gender culture" can be represented by the main periods of evolution of characteristics and content: the period of theoretical conflict regarding the position of women in society, the active desire of women for equality (early XV century - mid-XIX century); the period of women's struggle for the right to be elected (XIX century - XX century) the period of raising the problem of discrimination of women at the level of theory, highlighting the reasons of differences in the position of women and men in society (second quarter of XX century) the period of disclosure of sexuality phenomenon, the differentiation of concepts (beginning of the 21st century) (Aheyeva, 2003, p. 82).

In modern Ukrainian literature, there is a constant reconstruction of gender identity: it turns out more changeable, flexible, dispersed. Art literature offers gender identity as a statement, a search, a form for imitation (Bashkistrova, 2019). Exactly this is what makes the issue of finding gender identity in art and culture a relevant problem.

The postmodern discourse questions the concept of identity itself, since it appears as a myth and an illusion. According to Jean Baudrillard, the autonomous subject is falling apart and disappears (Kellner, 2001, p.278). A dismembered and discontinuous type of experience represents the fundamental characteristic of the postmodern culture, and can be found in personal experiences, as well as in the media texts.

The postmodern identity consists of constructing an image and assuming a social role. The postmodern identity is centered around leisure time, appearance, image, consumerism and is based on producing an image. The postmodern identity tends to be constructed mainly of images of entertainment and consumerism, therefore it is unstable and always subject to change. However, there is a positive aspect suggesting that the individuals can change their lives at anytime, that the identity can be reconstructed and that the human being can be changed and modeled according to personal choice. Identity becomes a game, a theatrical presentation of the self, allowing the individuals to present themselves to the others in a variety of postures, roles, images and activities. The post-modern self becomes a multiple one and is more open to changes. In the contemporary society, identity is strongly mediated by images provided by the mass culture, offering ideals for modeling one's personal identity. For instance, advertising, fashion or television constantly reconstruct the identity, producing a more fluid and changing one (Kellner, 2001, p. 305). In the postmodern culture of image, the scenes, the stories and the cultural texts provided by the media are meant to offer the individuals a variety of attitudes that can shape their personality. These images provide social role models, appropriate and inappropriate patterns of behavior, style and fashion and a subtle impulse. The postmodern discourse questions the concept of identity itself, since it appears as a myth and an illusion. According to Jean Baudrillard, the autonomous subject is falling apart and disappears (Kellner, 2001, p.278). A dismembered and discontinuous type of experience represents the fundamental characteristic of the postmodern culture, and can be found in personal experiences, as well as in the media texts.

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**Aims.** The establishment of the main directions of development of image transformations of gender identity in the Ukrainian cultural tradition involves the performance of several research tasks:

- to establish the concept of gender identity and the main aspects of the formation of gender identity in the context of the formation and formation of artistic tradition in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries;
- to identify a system of images in the works of contemporary Ukrainian authors that form the concept of gender identity in contemporary Ukrainian literature.

### 2 Literature review

The problem of gender identity has been considered in Ukrainian culture in recent years extremely actively. Gender is

multidimensional, and studies of this direction are characterized by a wide range of problems discussed, such as the mutual influence of women's identity and acute social problems, global politics and its impact on women's drug addiction (Brennan, A. et al, 2020); national cultures and ways of expressing gender (Ginbar, 2017) axiological foundations of contemporary pedagogy, leadership, choice, and gender (Bolman, Deal, 2008; Cojocariu, 2014) dimensions of intercultural contexts in other cultures (Fritz et al, 2002; Leontiev, 2003; Čuhlová, 2019) psychological manifestations of gender, connections between emotions, social information and aggression (Smeijers, 2020; Prince et al., 2020); the problem of leadership in the context of gender politics (Priola, 2004). The gendered culture of specialists in the social sphere is investigated. Under the concept "gender culture of specialists in the social sphere" we understand a special system of implementation of professional skills and abilities, manifested through a set of developed relevant intellectual, value-semantic, motivational, and behavioral characteristics based on knowledge of the basics of gender theory, development of spiritual needs, assimilation of values, norms and rules of gender-role behavior, which corresponds to the principles of gender parity and democracy (Byeloliptseva, 2021).

Modern Ukrainian literature as a kind of culture also forms new semantic and attitudinal components of gender identity (Osnovy teorii genderu, 2004). Several scientists are studying the embodiment of gender identity, considering the correlation of female reader and female author in post-socialist literature (Aheyeva, 2003; Andrukhoivych, 2015) formation of feminism through the prism of gender literature and criticism in a historical perspective (Osnovy teorii genderu, 2004); analyze gender models in Ukrainian women's prose by the example of novels by Oksana Zabuzhko (Burovyts'ka, 2020) determine the problems of correlation of gender, discourse and genre organization of the work in Ukrainian mass literature (Filonenko, 2011). Damean (2006) considers media discourse as a creator of female identity, where the focus is on middle-class women, on whom the models of femininity offered by media discourse significantly derive. It turns out that the ability to define one's own identity and to choose from a variety of models is narrowed. All of this is limited and induced by media discourse. If we accept the standards of femininity from the mass culture, the choice of models to follow is quite predictable. In contemporary Ukrainian literature, there is a way out of this vicious circle, artistic images of Ukrainian prose and poetry of our time provide different perspectives for expanding the circle of choice, and thus a deeper and more socially harmonized choice of gender identity as well. It is in this vein that the research work should be continued.

### 3 Materials and research methods

To fully understand the results and answer the questions addressed in the study, the research team resorted to many methodological developments and theoretical studies.

The study of gender identity in the artistic and cultural paradigm of modernity, the disclosure of the theme of gender within a literary work should be based on a comprehensive approach, which could take into account the multidimensional nature of fiction, the correlation of traditional, emotional and axiological, national principles in determining gender identity. A systematic approach (analysis and synthesis), deductive and inductive methods were used to work with theoretical material. Also, the method of interdisciplinary research, taken to determine the specific characteristics of the theme of gender, which manifested itself at different levels of knowledge (history of literature, theory of genres and stylistics, philosophy of literature, cultural studies) was applied in the work. The possibilities of the interpretative method, which was used for the analysis of artistic images as complex synthetic structures, were also taken into account. The study presents descriptive and structural methods to describe a literary work as an integrated functional unit, where the components correlate with each other, forming a compositional and ideological unity.

### 4 Results

The issue of gender identity as an artistic, literary, philosophical and cultural problem is actively raised, there is a constant internal discussion even dialogue between different hypostasis, types, and forms of gender identity, which offers and develops modern Ukrainian society. Therefore, the gender issue is directly or indirectly original and brightly presented in modern Ukrainian literature, in the works of such artists as Oksana Zabuzhko, Maria Matios, Liubko Deresh, Serhiy Zhadan, Max Kidruk, Eugene Polozhyi, and Sofia Andrukhoivych.

The concept of "gender identity" is directly based on social and cultural representations of femininity and masculinity. Gender images in art and culture constantly function and are considered in the context of social roles, significance, sexuality. Fiction is no exception.

The problem of gender identity is presented openly, brightly, and aggressively in the works of O. Zabuzhko. In the beginning, it was certain destruction of stereotypes and ideas about gender, which was formed in the early '90s of the XX century in Ukrainian society. In the novel "Polioivi doslidzhennia z ukrainskoho seksu" the author all the time heatedly polemicalizes with the audience, aims to refute the outdated provisions of patriarchal morality. The whole work is a construction and defense of her feminine universe, where aggressiveness, scandal, and outrage are, above all, an attempt to single out feminist issues, to make them visible and autonomous part of the contemporary Ukrainian cultural and artistic space.

And further, the Ukrainian literature of the XXI century is open to the question of dialogue between different gender mentalities, there is an active movement toward the harmonization of the world and relations between the sexes. All the transformations of gender roles associated with changes in the economic and political status of modern women, emancipation destroys the traditional notions of masculinity. In contrast to the established gender parity in Soviet literature, where the masculine always dominates, the world of contemporary Ukrainian literature promotes the deconstruction of such parties. It is the establishment and acceptance of the social independence of women, the theme of a strong woman and a weak man appears. According to Serhiy Zhadan, there are certain transformations of such a psychological collision, defenselessness, weakness - the love of the husband for the "businesswoman". In the XXth century in the artistic tradition and literature there is a blurring of gender boundaries, the vectors of identification of "masculinity" and "femininity" are changing. Ukrainian writers, regardless of gender, strive to find new answers to the questions of gender identity, the definition of the authenticity of men and women.

In the works of Serhiy Zhadan, gender identity is part of the worldview that emerges at the turn of 1990-2000. It is postmodern transitivity, uncertainty, a sense of catastrophe, and loss of reference points. Viewing traditions and standards, generates and viewing social roles and cultural stereotypes, all moving well through irony, a certain cynicism, and pain of acceptance. Such are the prose works, such as the short story "Kassa spravok ne daet" and poetry, such as "Slovari na sluzhbe tserkvi" "Paprika," and others. The woman in such works is independent, strong, such that she makes decisions and does not belong to herself. The characteristic of S. Zhadan's work is a combination of "flaccid radicalism", the spirit of consumerism, and irony with the ideas of all-around goodness, the strength of personality, the ordinary acceptance of man himself in the new world woven into the fabric of emotions. These little realized changes have been buried by critics under a pile of acute social, attitudinal, historical, axiological problems. However, no less significant changes manifested in Ukrainian literature and directly related to changes in the positioning of the gender theme. A similar trend can be observed in the fiction prose of M. Kidruk, that along with the techno-thriller "Bot" and several novels presents the gender context, which is an integral part of that natural, mysterious and interesting world of people, presented in the works of the author. His immersion in the world

of man, his state of mind, detailed descriptions create a new identification of women. All the more so that the focus on the mass reader assumes a mass-cultural version of the social issues and psychological depth of the author's interesting.

S. Andrukhovych's novel "Feliks Avstriya" is also characterized by immersion in the inner world of man, his consciousness, and the changes that occur to the characters in a particular socio-cultural environment. This is a postmodern novel that takes the "daily" and the marginalized image of the simple maid Stepha the Black. The novel is full of mythology (Stepha is fire, Adele is water) towards Stepha and she dies in the fire. The apocalyptic mood of the novel is a constant leitmotif through the work: Steph's parents and Dr. Unger's wife die in the fire, and pictures of a worldwide flood are constantly mentioned. But the search of the heroines of the novel for themselves, for their own identity, among the presented alternatives and opportunities to choose their path, to realize themselves as individuals, is also a search for gender identity. The discovery of one's role in a complex world, the understanding of the destination, and the vision of life's path dies with the heroine. The presence of artistic constants (fire, water, mother), associated with the universality of the feminine, form the concept of a woman-universe, a separate individuality, and personality. Through such artistic constants consists of the concept of woman as a separate world.

The melodramatic character of Maria Matios' novels in the broad sense of the term is represented in the depiction of love relationships between men and women, but this melodramatic character in the genre of "social melodrama" is closely intertwined with those social problems and acute social problems that disturb public opinion.

The story of Maria Matios, "Uchora nemale nide" along with diagnosing the social malaise of society, emerges against the background of the classic melodrama plot "the minister is a journalist," where the priority becomes emotion, sensitivity, not reason, but the heart determines the behavior of the characters. Based on the codes and models inherent in mass literature, Maria Matios forms a complex set of philosophical, psychological, and social problems. The composition and stylistic solution complicate the simple formula of Cinderella, make the artistic understanding of the state and problematic issues of Ukrainian society and the changing roles of men and women in the course of civilizational changes productive.

There is a constant rethinking and reorientation to new gender identities. Thus, initiation models are transformed in Ukrainian modern literature, consistently presenting the motif of confrontation of "fathers", where the mythological roles of God and power are given through the generation. Such an initiation model of the return of the lost ancestral memory is presented in the work of Liubko Deresh "Namir!". The main character Petro reveals his singularity and the similarity of that singularity with his grandfather - such an artistic model at its center contains the idea of initiation, we can say a peculiar form of finding one's own gender identity. The protagonist undergoes initiation, thus crossing the border, sacralizing himself to receive a new hypostasis of being - "enlightenment". Once again, we have the realization of the semiotic opposition of fellow - strangers, where the isolation is indicative of a small group of "fellow" enlightened men and "stranger" women. This distribution is also conveyed through the image of space. The space for the insiders is the grandfather's study, the country house. The misunderstanding of their own and the strangers are also in the sphere of emotional and behavioral. Symmetrical is the behavior of uninitiated women in "fellow": both Baba and Gotsa Drala, Petro's beloved despite all their differences, prevent the men from going outside the ordinary world. Baba does not allow his grandfather to travel, and the girl refuses to go beyond reality with Peter. And this vividly demonstrates the commonality of the gender positions of Baba and the beloved, although one is a peasant and the other an artist. It is a deeply hidden, but vivid idea that the gender of the time cannot be determined only by occupation and social status, it is a multidirectional position. The gender inverse artistic model used in the novel "Namir!" by

Liubko Deresh is deeply mythological but completely modern. Outlined in line with Jungian theory, the idea of expanding individual consciousness, following the hereditary line (Demetra-Cora), is embodied in the positive images of the male lineage, where the female line appears as a world of strangers and provokes the hero to personal rebellion against purely biological ties, not sufficient to enter the circle of "fellows".

The modeling of the female view of the world is presented in Eugene Polozhy's work "Dyadechko na im'ya Bog" (Uncle on the Name of God). It is primarily a demonstration of the Ukrainian mentality, traumatized by centuries of discord and suffering, the formation of the gender image of the "captive woman," the mother, enslaved and condemned to suffering. Abused Mother-Ukraine remains in contemporary Ukrainian literature, it is a permanent constant of Ukrainian mental consciousness and is embodied in the themes of earnings, slavery, and domestic violence. It is the theme of domestic violence and the tragic fate of Mother Ukrainian that is presented in this novel by Eugene Polozhy.

The formation of new boundaries of gender identity is associated with the marginalization of heroines: prostitute emigrant offended single woman. This is primarily a transformation of the image of a girl-prisoner, who suffers dissent and must go to a foreign land in search of peace and a better life. Similar motifs can also be found in the poems of Serhiy Zhadan (poem "Slovnik na sluzhbi tserkvy"). The inability to realize one's own identity is a theme that opens up deformations of gender mentality, threats to one's own national identity, unfavorable social and political conditions for realization, colonial trauma, and the like. A peculiar reflection of such pain is also conveyed through the portrayal of physical suffering, childbirth, is an exclusively female experience. Thus, the novel "Dyadechko na im'ya Bog" depicts a "hellish" maternity hospital and an expensive European clinic. And in the maelstrom of wanderings in the note's literate creates a gallery of images of women, presenting a picture of the modern gender identity of the mother - a young monk who is preparing to become a mother; a good mother and a good wife, who was previously a prostitute; a mother suffering from domestic violence.

Along with repetitions of the traditional for the Ukrainian mentality image of the mother is built the image of a woman, must choose her destiny and be realized. Deconstruction of the myth of sanctity and devotion to motherhood is destroyed, determined by aggressive accusations and outrage, for example, in the novel by O. Zabuzhko "Musei pokynutyh secretiv", where readers are thrust into the image's corps of lazy, infantile, self-serving, and evil mothers. In the works of O. Zabuzhko child-free is presented in the context of feminist intensions - the right to own realization, freedom of choice, freedom from supervised gender roles, and independence in the formation of life priorities. The destruction of the mythologem of holy motherhood occurs consistently and is an important part of the plot. In general, the structure of gender identity, manifested in contemporary Ukrainian literature, can be presented as several components (Figure 1).

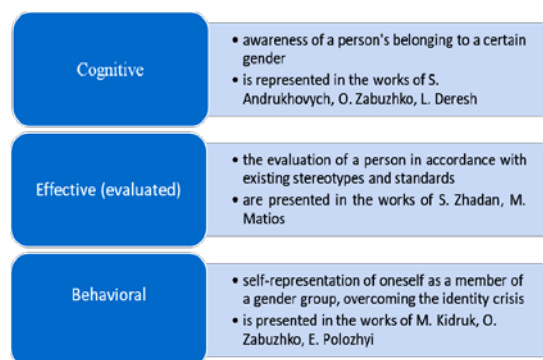


Figure 1 – Components of gender identity as clearly presented in Ukrainian contemporary literature (author's development) (author's note)

Ukrainian worldview positions, sensitivity to changes in gender identity, political, cultural, social, and general worldview realities are fully represented in modern Ukrainian literature. Non-acceptance and alienation is another characteristic of gender identity, which is presented in the Ukrainian contemporary literature and becomes more and more frequent with time. It is also important to keep in mind that gender identity from this position is not connected with family ties, it is a phenomenon of another higher-level (psychological, emotional, and mental).

## 5 Discussion

V. Aheyeva (2003, 2011, 2015) notes three stages in the development of feminist literary criticism in her study of the foundations of gender theory. The first stage is the era of European modernism, where the works of W. Woolf and S. de Beauvoir stand out, which defined many problems that are still relevant today. In our opinion, the social conditioning of gender identity remains one of the main components and problematic issues of contemporary art. At the second stage, the researcher (V. Aheyeva, 2003) associates with the era of socialist realism in Ukrainian literature, where gender issues were not prominent, pressed by the weight of collectivism, social and asexual. At the third stage, at the turn of the cultural epochs of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there was a revision of traditional definitions of civilization, approaches to the conceptual foundations of socio-cultural order proper, where the traditional was subject to substantial revision. In the maelstrom of questions of the relationship between the feminine and the muscular, the accents began to change steadily, so the question of gender identity, sexuality/creativity, sexuality/neuroticism came up so sharply. In our opinion, these questions in the literary creativity and culture of Ukraine are becoming urgent and vital, because they not only define the need to keep high standards of European culture, ultimately to get away from the policy of "race" in the formation of ideological image priorities. But they also determine the way to return to the roots of the Ukrainian mentality, which for many centuries were buried under the patriarchal imperial-Soviet pressure.

The concept of gender identity is presented as variable, under the main approaches adopted in the modern humanitarian paradigm, three main lines are highlighted (Il'yina, 2018; Popovich, 2016). These are the transhumanistic approach, where there is a denial of the social nature of intelligence, and preference is given to cybernetic intelligence; the second - the denial of any correction of gender identity; the intermediate approach, where the coexistence of biological nature and technology is accepted, work on the development of effective mechanisms of coexistence of man, technology and mechanisms of adaptation to the reality of modern society (Yanykina, 2015). In our opinion, the role of art and cultural mediation of fiction is also a significant social factor, should influence gender identity. The combination of man with his personality traits, value orientations, and the technology of the modern world should be humanized and labeled through artistic and cultural pursuits. Modern civilization must seek consensus in the construction of gender identity, relying on the core of culture, technology, and personal values.

## 6 Conclusion

In the modern Ukrainian artistic paradigm, there is a constant rethinking and reorientation to new gender identities, which is associated with sharp ideological, technological, and worldview changes of civilizational vectors.

The preservation of Ukrainian worldview positions, sensitivity to changes in gender identity, bear modernity, political, cultural, social, and in general worldview realities are well represented in the modern Ukrainian literature.

Under the concept of "gender identity," we understand the culturally and socially conditioned dimension of masculine and feminine, human and female principles. Gender images in art and culture are the result of comprehension of sexuality and social identity.

Rejection and alienation are some of the characteristics of gender identity, which is represented in Ukrainian contemporary literature, and over time is becoming a more and more noticeable trend. It is also important to consider that gender identity from this position is not tied exclusively to the family lineage, it is a phenomenon of another higher-level – psychological, emotional, mental.

The main images in the works of modern Ukrainian authors, forming the concept of gender identity in the modern Ukrainian literature are oppositions, indirectly from a full of contradictions and at the same time variable identity. This is the cultivation of the image of a woman-mother and manifestation of her antagonistic image of a child-free. Depiction of traumatized Ukrainian mentality through the images of a woman-prisoner, immigrant, victim of violence and proclamation of life stability and independence of a businesswoman and modern Cinderella-journalist, images of initiation in the honey of opposition "fellow-stranger", where more deeply there is an opposition in the relationship of feminine and masculine.

Further analysis of the problems of transformation of gender identity under the influence of cultural and artistic studies is relevant for modern literary, philosophical, cultural, and art studies in particular.

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**Primary Paper Section: A**

**Secondary Paper Section: AO**