

Fe-male Literature

Reading 1

A

Toronto literature professor and Giller prize-longlisted author David Gilmour has found himself at the eye of a literary storm after declaiming in an interview that he does not teach books written by women or Chinese authors, because he is only interested in "serious heterosexual guys". Eyeing the rows of books in his office, Gilmour said: "I'm not interested in teaching books by women. _____ is the only writer that interests me as a woman writer, so I do teach one of her short stories. When I was given this job I said I would only teach the people that I truly, truly love. Unfortunately, none of those happen to be Chinese, or women." He went on: "What I teach is guys. Serious heterosexual guys. _____, Chekhov, Tolstoy. Real guy-guys. _____. Philip Roth."

B

Following this week's revelation that _____ penned a crime thriller under the pseudonym Robert Galbraith, the author has joined a long line of women who have written novels under a cloak of masculinity. "Sometimes it's easier to be taken seriously as a man, and _____ is in a difficult position as her reputation means that her work can't be judged on merit alone," says Carmela Ciuraru, author of "Nom de plume: A (secret) history of pseudonyms".she adds.

C

In an interview at the Royal Geographic Society, during which VS Naipaul provoked fury by suggesting that women writers are „sentimental“ and „unequal to me“, he also claimed that 'I read a piece of writing and within a paragraph or two I know whether it is by a woman or not.' Do you?

Discussion

Who are the authors mentioned in the first text?

Which female writers do you find interesting?

Are there some typical features of literature written by women?

Why do authors use pseudonyms?

Do you know within a paragraph or two whether the text is by a woman or not?

Reading 2

Scan the texts and try to guess whether the author is male or female:

1. "At once, though it was night and the way was lonely, **she** left the hut and walked to the next village, where there was a hedge of **cactus**. She brought back leaves of cactus, **cut** them into strips and hung a strip over every door, every window, every aperture through which an evil spirit might enter the hut. But the **midwife** said, 'whatever you do, this boy will eat up his own **mother and father**.'" Male Female

2. “Mungo drove with verve and dash. They had spent the night in an hotel by the Helford river. He had feared, when Alison insisted on stopping at a chemist in Truro, that she was planning one of her fucking headaches (to be exact a non-fucking headache) but this fear had been groundless. After dinner with Rory, who entertained them during the meal with a description of his life as a milliner, he had, elevated by circumspect consumption of wine, gone up to their room to find that she had bought not, as he supposed, soluble aspirin, but a choice of contraceptives. ‘Which do you prefer?’ Alison presented her offerings. ‘Arousal? Elite? Fiesta?’”
Male Female

3. “Why had she married him? – For solace, for children. But at first the insomnia coating her brain got in the way of her first aim; and children don’t always come at once. So Amina had found herself dreaming about an undreamable poet’s face and waking with an unspeakable name on her lips. You ask: what did she do about it? I answer: she gritted her teeth and set about putting herself straight. This is what she told herself: ‘You big ungrateful goof, can’t you see who is your husband now? Don’t you know what a husband deserves?’ To avoid fruitless controversy about the correct answers to these questions, let me say that, in my mother’s opinion, a husband deserved unquestioning loyalty, and unreserved, full-hearted love.”
Male Female

Reading 2 Key

Female: *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, *Harnessing Peacocks* by Mary Wesley
Male: *A House for Mr Biswas* by VS Naipaul, *Atonement* by Ian McEwan, *Midnight’s Children* by Salman Rushdie

Adapted from <http://www.theguardian.com/books/quiz/2011/jun/02/naipaul-test-author-s-sex-quiz>

Reading 3: Meet the _____ writers who hide their gender to attract _____ readers

George Eliot, née Mary Ann Evans, chose a male pseudonym because she thought readers preferred male authors. Male authors now report having to hide their own gender. Sean Thomas explains: „As I was going to write from a female perspective, I didn’t want to put off any readers who might presume that a male writer could not carry a female voice. So I shifted sex. I became a gender neutral author.”

We often say that someone has “a face for radio”, meaning that the subject thrives on a medium that obscures their looks. And for a long time, in literature, there has been “a gender for fiction”, and that gender was male. At least since Charlotte Brontë called herself Currer Bell, and Mary Ann Evans settled on George Eliot, women have taken male pen names in hopes that they will be taken more seriously by the reading public. In more recent times, the trend has been for successful authors to go genderless. Two of the world’s top-earning authors happen to be women and both go by their initials: JK Rowling and EL James.

“We have no way of knowing if Rowling would have done as well writing as ‘Joanne’,” says Suzie Dooré, editorial director of fiction at Hodder and Stoughton & Sceptre. “Still, we thought young boys were less likely to read it under her full name.”

Historical novelist Christopher Gortner sometimes goes by CW Gortner. “I write in a female voice in my novels about famous women, but I also write from a male perspective in my Tudor mysteries, so I’ve been straddling gender. It wasn’t until my first historical novel was published that I realised some people might question my veracity because of my gender,” he says.

A Goodreads survey from 2014 suggests the instinct to mask his gender is a right one. It found, for example, that women are predominantly read by women – 80% of a new female author’s audience is likely to be female. Thomas says he enjoys working in a female-dominated arena. “If men have decided they want to watch HBO instead of read, so be it,” he says. “Does it help to be identified as a woman, or to have no gender at all?” asks Thomas. “No one can say for sure, but it is certainly arguable. And given that every ‘debut’ novelist wants to give themselves every possible chance, why take the modest risk that using a male name might bring? Why not just use initials? Get rid of gender altogether?”

It is a suggestion of which even George Eliot herself might have approved.

Adapted from: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/31/male-writers-hide-gender-sell-more-books>

Language Analysis

*Read the following excerpt from „politically correct bedtime stories“ and identify words and phrases that would not appear in a traditional fairy tale and think of their more traditional equivalents, e.g. **a young person** – a little girl*

There once was a **young person** named Red Riding Hood who lived with her mother on the edge of a large wood. One day her mother asked her to take a basket of fresh fruit and mineral water to her grandmother’s house—not because this was womyn’s work, mind you, but because the deed was generous and helped engender a feeling of community. Furthermore, her grandmother was not sick, but rather was in full physical and mental health and was fully capable of taking care of herself as a mature adult.

So Red Riding Hood set off with her basket through the woods. Many people believed that the forest was a foreboding and dangerous place and never set foot in it. Red Riding Hood, however, was confident enough in her own budding sexuality that such obvious Freudian imagery did not intimidate her.

On the way to Grandma’s house, Red Riding Hood was accosted by a wolf, who asked her what was in her basket. She replied, “Some healthful snacks for my grandmother, who is certainly capable of taking care of herself as a mature adult.” The wolf said, “You know, my dear, it isn’t safe for a little girl to walk through these woods alone.” Red Riding Hood said, “I find your sexist remark offensive in the extreme, but I will ignore it because of your traditional status as an outcast from society, the stress of which has caused you to develop your own, entirely valid, worldview. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I must be on my way.”

Red Riding Hood walked on along the main path. But, because his status outside society had freed him from slavish adherence to linear, Western-style thought, the wolf knew a quicker route to Grandma’s house.....

Adapted from <http://web.mit.edu/humor/www/Incoming/pc.red.riding.hood>