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СОВРЕМЕННАЯ ШОТЛАНДСКАЯ И ИРЛАНДСКАЯ ЖЕНСКАЯ ПРОЗА: ТРАДИЦИИ И ИННОВАЦИИ

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Аннотация: В работе анализируется развитие современного письма шотландских и ирландских женщин, рассматривается, что объединяет современное письмо шотландских и ирландских женщин с другими типами повествования и что делает его особенным. Теоретической основой и методологией исследования является внимание к вектору развития женской прозы, включая постколониальную литературу и современные феминистские критические теории. Рассматриваются постмодернистские и мета-модернистские теории (включая концепт «ризомы» и принцип «осцилляции»). Современное шотландское женское письмо (на примере Кэрол Энн Даффи) дает представление о развитии образа шотландской писательницы, работы Дженни Фэган позволяющая проследить практики управления современным обществом. Работа Кейт Кленчи раскрывает взаимосвязь между культурами, включенными в социальную проблему миграции. Современная ирландская женская проза характеризуется обращением к проблеме религии и католицизма, а также к концепции дома, которая хорошо раскрывается в произведениях большинства авторов, восстающих против традиции и в то же время ассоциирующих себя с ней.

Ключевые слова: шотландское и ирландское женское письмо, феминистические теории, Кэрол Энн Даффи, Дженни Фэган, Кейт Кленчи, Эмили Грошольц.

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CONTEMPORARY SCOTTISH AND IRISH WOMEN'S WRITING: TRADITION AND INNOVATION

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Abstract: The work examines the development of contemporary Scottish and Irish women's writing and explores what unites contemporary Scottish and Irish woman writing with other types of narrative and what makes it special. The theoretical basis and methodology for the study is the attention to the vector of women's prose development, including postcolonial literature and contemporary feminist critical theories. Postmodernist and meta-modernist theories (including the rhizome concept and "oscillation" principle) are also considered. Contemporary Scottish women's writing (the example of Carol Ann Duffy) provides insights into the development of the Scottish woman writer image; works by Jenny Fagan allow to trace controlling practices of contemporary society. Kate Clanchy's writing reveals the interconnection between cultures incorporated into the social problem of migration. Contemporary Irish women's prose is characterized by addressing the issue of religion and Catholicism as well as the concept of home, which is well revealed in the writings of most authors who are rebelling against the tradition and, at the same time, associate themselves with it.

Keywords: Scottish and Irish women's writing, feminist theories, Carol Ann Duffy, Jenny Fagan, Kate Clanchy, Emily Grosholz.

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I. Introduction

The article aims at showing the vector of development of the Scottish and Irish women's writing that shapes the identity of a contemporary woman (characters as well as the writer herself) and bears certain characteristics.

The 19th century novel, in general, and the British novel, in particular, is restricted to conventions, with a strong emphasis on traditional values. Yet for British literature it is quite important that a female writer (in the face of sisters Bronte, for example) actually appears. Later the shift slides towards modernism and its techniques, with watercolor prose, full of hues and emotions. The "stream of consciousness" as a term is characteristic of the prose by V. Woolf. Yet some time passes, and woman writing has to take a different turn. Feminist movement of the third wave gives way to theoretical works on feminism and produces new writing. Prose by Silvia Platt feels depressing (and the author being depressed), yet talks about the true nature of problems related to a woman's true identity more. In the 60-s woman writing takes a different turn, University figures like Iris Murdoch would establish the identity of a strong woman, opposing herself to a man, struggling not for her own ambitions but, above all, for the idea of liberation and independence. J. Winterson attempts to eliminate the gender opposition making gender fluid, with her prose being treated sometimes as traumatic discourse, sometimes, as most tender and poetic manifestation of oneself. Postcolonial writing in the face of Zadie Smith shows that the return to more traditional values is seen in postmodern tendency to unite tradition and cultural backgrounds. Treating them with kind humor, respect and irony. To sum up, a British woman writer of the present wants from life almost everything, what she can take from tradition, and what she can happily generate from new opportunities.

In what way Scottish and Irish contemporary women's writing is similar to and different from the traditional narrative of the 19th–20th century? Is there a clear difference between English, Scottish and Irish writing? Is there a clear shift from the 20th century narrative to post-millennial writing? All of these questions are worth exploring and discussing in order to identify the most common tendencies.

2. Methodology and Sources

2.1. Feminist theories: tradition and innovation

The term “women's writing” refers to fiction written by women, but the term is far more informative, as it refers implicitly to the whole history of women's writing establishing itself, that is a woman writer who went through a number of stages in the process of developing her identity. Firstly, attempting to equal men in writing, secondly, competing with men, showing she is different, and finally, developing her own identity, with all its characteristic features.

One of the key works for understanding women's writing in general is the book by S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, prominent representatives of literary feminism and feminist theory. Their work *The Woman Writer and the Literary Imagination* [5] of the 19th century became a milestone for feminism in the 1970s and is considered a key research text for the “second wave” of feminism. In their work, they show that the 19th century limited the ability of writers to depict the female character, the heroines could be the personification of either angels or monsters. This patriarchal point of view has been built up by many generations of male writers. And this is what Camille Paglia writes about, for example, in her work *Sexual Personae. Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (first published 1990) [8]. She explains the phenomenon of repression of the feminine principle in culture giving as a proof the fact that Western culture has sought to curb the natural, “Dionysian” principle both in a man and a woman and neutralize the power of sensuality. On the basis of this intention, a cultural dislike for a woman who allegedly embodies “dark forces” has developed. It was this dichotomy in the portrayal of heroines that Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters, George Eliot, and M. Shelley had to deal with.

Within the framework of feminist criticism, the term “women's writing” is also used in the Derridian sense. The French philosopher introduced the concept of “feminine writing” and applied it to a special type of creativity, which is characterized by a rejection of the mental clichés of logo-centrism

and a fundamental semantic multiplicity. This type of writing can equally attract a male author. For example, Derrida finds it in Nietzsche. This allows to point out that women's writing is not specific always, but there are certain canons and stereotypes. Masculine literary canon means rational language, syntactic and narrative completeness, and semantic certainty. Feminist criticism associates the undermining of the male narrative canon in the works of women writers and substituting it for affective style, semantic ambiguity, and narrative incompleteness. Exploring this type of women's style, S. Gilbert and S. Gubar in *Madwoman in the Attic: a Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979) [8] and E. Showalter *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977) [10] define Victorian women's writing as "the discourse of admitting guilt," while contrasting it with the male "discourse of affirmation." Such conclusions are made under the great influence of the work of Michel Foucault the *History of Sexuality*, according to which in Victorian culture, the feminine principle has always been identified with a sense of guilt and was clearly marked as sinful, irrational.

In her other work, for instance, *Towards a Feminist Poetics* Showalter points out a very important point. She traces the history of women's literature, suggesting that it can be divided into three phases: in the Feminine phase (1840–1880), "women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalized its assumptions about female nature;" the Feminist phase (1880–1920) was characterized by writing that protested against male standards, and advocated women's values. The Female phase (1920–) is one of self-discovery. Showalter says, "women reject both imitation and protest and turn to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature" [10, p. 206]. This allows to define women's writing as having the history of its own with the final stage of self-discover and shaping one's identity regardless of gender.

No less important for understanding the prose of women authors is the position of feminist criticism about what is specific to women's reading. Proponents of this idea argue that women have fundamentally different preferences in relation to the text and their perception is inevitably different. Women are characterized by the idea of constructing their own stories, although, as critics point out, the stereotype of their reading is so strong that a woman reader must learn (by reading works written for her) to consciously disconnect from the stereotypical,

that is, male view of things. An American feminist Judith Fetterley in her analysis of *the Legend of Sleepy Valley* by Irving (in the work *the Resisting Reader: a Feminist Approach to American Literature* (1978)), writes that the author forces a female reader to love a hero who sees a woman as an enemy, thereby putting the reader in the most difficult and unnatural position!

Postmodernist tradition allowed to broaden the scope of the feminist literature and women writing. Intellectual authors like Iris Murdoch who actually competed with men in writing gave way to authors like J. Winterson who developed their own style and technique very similar to poetry writing, its poetics being a good example of syncretic writing, though at times having as a main theme the traumatic experience that the author goes through again and again. Late 20th century also allowed postcolonial writing to flourish.

Postcolonial literature seems to be a remarkable example of post-millennial writing. In his other landmark and striking work, already a classic, *Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism* (1986) Spivak, among other things, analyzes the famous English novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte and writes that it is based on unspoken directly racist ideas. In a brilliant analysis, Spivak recreates how Charlotte Bronte makes up the image of Bertha Mason, the first wife of Mr. Rochester, a native of Jamaica, who comes from a rich family. All the readers, according to Spivak, who inevitably take the author's position (because they sympathize with the main character), get into the position of the colonizer. Few people remember that Mr. Rochester's first wife is mixed-race. The fact that Charlotte Bronte tells the reader about the atrocities of treatment in a private English school, about the death of Jane Eyre's friend, completely forgetting that the fate of the first wife of Mr. Rochester is not clear. What is significant, is the ability of Spivak to see in the novel hidden meanings and in a certain sense "suppressed identity." Spivak rightly notes that the well-known feminist theorists Gulbert and Gubar call Jane Eyre "the story of Jane's life path," see in it only "a simple substitute for the male narrator," who turned into a female narrator, not noticing "the huge difference between sexual reproduction and spiritual pursuits" [12, p. 246–249].

Similarly, Scottish and Irish woman writing will be flourishing on postcolonial tradition, treating it in a broader sense. As was mentioned in the recent research, "Scottish postcolonial consciousness would suggest solidarity between the marginalized in Scotland and Britain's former overseas colonies,

which is evident in the poetry of William Neill who writes in Scots, Gaelic and English” [13, p. 77–94]. This accounts for hybridity of the narrative, mixed or more complex view of identity. I would argue that in many ways, Irish and Scottish woman writing will be developing along the same lines, maintaining a more traditional identity for its characters, and also constituting completely new agendas, story lines, characters.

To sum up, contemporary Scottish and Irish women’s writing will be following the general tradition of women’s writing, with a woman writer establishing her own identity, rather than competing with a man writer or imitating him. At the same time postcolonial literature with its irony and historical hybridity will be also used by women writers. Scottish and Irish writers will tend to maintain their own historical tradition and yet adhere to the general tendencies in the narrative development.

2.2. Postmodern and meta-modern philosophy and hermeneutics

It is highly relevant for our analysis to consider the ideas of Gilles Deleuze, a famous theoretician of postmodernism and poststructuralism in relation to the opposition “difference – repetition.” This opposition (stated explicitly in the book *Difference and Repetition*, 1968) is the notion that challenges the traditional “representation” idea, the traditional philosophical knowledge, which is based on the presence of an object in question, which is not capable of getting the feeling of the world in the constant process of formation [1]. Deleuze puts forward the idea of metaphysics whereby the “multiplicity” replaces “the substance,” “the event” replaces “the essence,” “the virtual” replaces “the actual” [8]. Such interpretation of difference-repetition is realized by Deleuze in other works as well. For instance, he pays attention to the idea of crystal (time as crystal). As pointed out by F. Zurabishvili [16, p. 95], the notion of crystal is the meeting point of all the notions of the philosophy developed by Deleuze [16, p. 100]. The image of membrane has a similar function that puts into question the bi-polar model of the “outer – inner” opposition [5]. The idea of membrane, crystal, mirror corresponds to the general view of rhizomorphic nature of the text, which challenges the traditional view of representation, direct cause effect links, linear time concept. The concept of time is treated as dependent on the point of view of the author, the character and the reader [6]. Some researchers look at the phenomenon of breaking time order in the text in terms of the order, duration and frequency [2]. Others consider

subsystems with different velocity of cycle movements [4, p. 176–178], or talk about the imagined space which possesses the qualities of time outside the text [3]. All of these philosophical notions explain the general tendency of forming postmodern literary tradition (with its open structure, irony, concept of silence instead of the tradition “inclusion”).

Moreover, the state of the art meta-modern tradition is also seen in contemporary women’s writing, with its “oscillation principle,” “general compression principle,” “structure of feeling,” “new sincerity,” “hot and cold” principle, “global quotation without reference principle” [14], all of which form the narrative of many Scottish and Irish women writers.

To sum up, the ideas that are incorporated in the concept of the “difference and repetition” expressed by Deleuze, isomorphic connections, the break of the tradition time and space notions, including the co-existence of different time and space subsystems, all serve to explain new tendencies including works by 21st century Scottish and Irish women writers. Meta-modern tradition with “constant citation without reference,” “oscillation and compression principle” will also serve to explain latest literary works. It is highly important to realize that women’s writing in general, and Irish and Scottish writing, in particular, is a rebel against everything which is a convention, and at the same time an attempt to build its own world modelled upon the previous one, being a strong contradiction to it.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Scottish woman writing and the Feminine Gospels (example of Carol Ann Duffy)

It is not a straightforward task to ascribe certain stereotypical roles to Scottish and Irish postmodern women’s writing, yet some of the tendencies are well seen. Broadly speaking, a Scottish woman writer is far more professional and serious than her predecessor of the 20th century.

Carol Ann Duffy’s work offers a stark contrast to Sylvia Plath’s writing [15, p. 64]. Being from a far less privileged background, she came of age in a markedly different time and place. She was very much empowered by the feminism of the 70-s and played far more distinctive public and private roles. When you consider the novel *Feminine Gospels* (2002), you do see reminiscences of Jane Eyre in Duffy’s direct and harsh criticism of the school realities, yet one could feel her remote, almost withdrawn role from the narrative. She is not the one

who experiences, yet the one who observes. Another interesting aspect of Carol Ann Duffy's work is that her novels and poetry are not limited to any particular audience. *The Laughter at Stafford Girls' High* is a good example of this. While being an obvious feminist, she doesn't confine herself to certain subjects, making the topics universal. The fact of addressing the idea of "gospels" makes the novel universal and allows to play with time and space subsystems, making time and space locations more diverse and interchangeable. This gives a narrative not only the touch of a postmodern writing which it is, but makes up a text that establishes rules anew, not just playing with the tradition. In one of her poems, *Caf Royal* she tells the story of Oscar Wilde, who was saved from his trial, thus allowing the difference-repetition concept by Deleuze to be at its best, revealing the power of a remake, revisiting the motive. This tendency of Duffy to be more a universal poet and writer, than a merely Scottish is also proved by her zest to prove and establish a more radical identity [15, p. 67].

This collection of facts does in a way positions Duffy as a Scottish woman writer of the 21st century in a similar fashion it is determined for Zadie Smith as a postcolonial writer. Carol Ann Duffy as if incorporates all the contemporary tendencies and hues of the past in her identity as well as in her work giving it a new touch.

It is also quite evident that Scottish woman writing is not completely isolated from the past and its conventions. Even more so as woman writers in a way unite together to strengthen their new identity against the past one. As it is well known, Virginia Woolf concluded *A Room of One's Own* by returning to the subject of the place to write. In the final chapter of her book Woolf insists that "intellectual freedom depends on material things" and "women have always been poor" [15, p. 67]. In a similar way, all the inconsistencies that society could bring about could result in women being denied their roles and not being able to fulfill themselves to the full. One of the examples is a failure of Carol Ann Duffy to be a laureate due to her radical feminism [15, p. 110].

To conclude, the writing by Carol Ann Duffy allows to shape a new woman's identity that establishes herself against tradition, yet some of the qualities she manifests are symbolic, allowing the reader to see recent tendencies and aspects of cultural change, including gender issues, which are quite universal for western women.

3.2. Scottish woman writing and the oscillation principle (example of Jenny Fagan)

Another stream of Scottish writing is in the attempt of a woman writer to create her own very specific identity related to Scotland and Scottish variety of the English language. Jenny Fagan is a good example of such an attempt.

Firstly, the novel is very symbolic in its content. The opposition of the global and the local is well shown here as the novel is philosophical (being global in its ability to cover general issues) and it is very culture-oriented in describing Scotland (being local in terms of showing the specifics of the local dialect and specifically Scottish atmosphere). It details burgeoning friendships and loves of a fifteen-year old Anais born in a psychiatric clinic within the sinister old building, *The Panopticon* is the title of this building. It is quite tempting to associate Fagan with E. Welsh as part of a Scottish tradition, that, is the author writing about the poor and the deprived with the use of specific Scottish dialect of the English language. At the same time *The Panopticon* describes the problems of the working class in a general, almost metaphorical way. That is why critics compare the novel with Camus and Michael Foucault. The mood of Fagan's narrative is reminiscent of early Camus. Also this is a novel with things to say about surveillance culture, the author's references to works by Michel Foucault suggest her critical theory background. Anais, the main character of the book says: "I dinnae get people, like they all want to be watched, to be seen, like all the time!" [19, p. 2–3]. This phrase allows to see that a story of a 15-year old gets a scope of the institution discourse observed in the works by Michael Foucault, which allows to place the novel on a higher philosophical plane.

Moreover, the content of the novel permits to cast a feminist view over it. This view is not isolated from the historical past and its conventions. Even more so, as Fagan in a way unites herself with other women writers to strengthen her new identity against the past ones. As it is well known, Virginia Woolf, a classic representative of women's writing, concluded *A Room of One's Own* by returning to the subject of famous women of the past who were never given a chance to write. Woolf insists that "intellectual freedom depends on material things" and "women have always been poor" [15, p. 67]. In a similar way *The Panopticon* allows to bring forward another important issue: what is the actual place of a woman writer where she can compose her work. The answer to this question is that it is a place where she is observed, checked, denied and not given enough space and freedom. This is how she is restricted [15, p. 110].

The book also focuses on Scottish aspects of life. Particular details related only to Scotland are shown, most places are recognized as Scottish, the author refers to a Scottish prison rather than just a prison, specifically Scottish vocabulary used, as in the example: "I'm so tired. Lie down and stare up, my eyes are getting heavy. 'Is it alright tae go tae sleep?' I ask Teresa. 'Aye. Just give intae it. Dinnae fight it. Just let go, Anais.' Her teeth are gone" [18, p. 53]. Most vividly the novel reveals itself as Scottish in its form (which will be discussed later, when we talk about meta-modernist dimension of the novel).

Secondly, there are a lot of postmodern techniques that are used in the novel, the substitution of "presence" for "absence;" "the open form" becoming a more common pattern than that of the "closed form;" "silence" substituting "speech;" the "rhizome" concept, "intertextuality" being more evident than "genre." The novel starts with two quotations ("sometimes I feel like a motherless child") [18, p. 2], this is the quote taken from a traditional US folk song of the 70-s, thus from the Civil War times. And the other quotation is taken from Oscar Wilde, and sounds as follows: "when liberty comes with hands dabbled in blood it is hard to shake hands with her" [18, p. 2]. Both quotations allow to unite different historical planes and spaces. Civil War times in the US and contemporary Scotland are united by means of the reference to another historical era and a different continent. This is a clearly postmodern technique and serves as a good example to combine the historical past and present, romantic tradition of the Civil War and the cynicism of the present, its post-apocalyptic narrative manner.

The beginning of the book also reveals an acute ability of the author "to listen to the world," "see and feel" its hues. This is realized through repetitions (the verb "watch" is repeated) that provide scope for eco-effects, make the narrative more rhetorical (in the text: I'm an experiment. I always have been. It's a given, a liberty, a fact) [18, p. 1-2]. The narrative reminds us of the musical score which is observed, for example, in the sentence "when I fight, and fuck and wank" [18, p. 2-3], verbs of different register are repeated (neutral, slang). Making the narrative close to that of poetry is another postmodern tendency.

Thirdly, it is important to speak about the form of the novel as related to its meta-modernist dimension. A recent trend in the development of literary texts is coined as a meta-modernist. Main principles guiding meta-modernism adhere to a contemporary paradigm observed in music that includes "shimmering effect

of sounds,” “compression of sound,” “global intertextuality without reference” [14]. The idea behind Fagan’s work is to think “metonymically,” that is completely change the rules of the narrative construction. Fagan’s novel shows that the language itself, the metaphors and metonymies that are used in the text allow to portray reality in a different, more symbolic way:

Kids begin to step out of their rooms and look down. I count them out of the corner of my vision — one, two, three, four, five. A boy with curly hair and glasses begins to kick the Perspex balcony outside his door. I dinnae look up. There will be time for all the nice fucking hello-and-how-do-you-dos later.

Right in the middle of the C shape, as high as the top floor, is the watchtower.

<...>

This place has experiment written all over it.

The polis come tae a halt outside the office door, and the Officer in Charge goes in. I scan the ground floor, and tap my feet, and clink my cuffs together until the policewoman leans over and says: Stop [18, p. 3].

What makes this episode meta-modernist? Above all, it is the “oscillation” and the “compression” principle, as well as the “hot and cold principle” [14]. The kids that appear in this episode (realized in the text as: kids, one, two, three) are reduced just to their outlines, the number actually stand for the person. This “compression” principle is taken further to describe the shape of the building. Part of it is C shape. A letter used to describe something is a meta-modern technique of reducing a word to a symbol. That is when one letter stands for the whole passage. The letter itself bears a lot of meaning. As a symbol it incorporates numerous meanings that are contradictory to one other. By choosing the letter C to describe the shape of the building, Fagan attaches maximum importance to the form, suggesting different connotations (including “half-circle,” “semi-spiral,” etc.). “The shimmering effect” reveals itself in indirect meanings. When you consider different connotations of the words “shell” and “C-shape,” you come back to the original understanding of the book: it is a prison and the prison is described in the most detailed way. Similarly, one could consider a fragment when the police at the end of the passage come into the room and say “Stop.” “Stop” is, firstly, a command, secondly, it could be interpreted as a “full stop.” This is a possible meta-modern and meta-textual way of referring to a “full stop” as the end of the

text. In a way, kids in the book are letters (or numbers) themselves, almost card like creatures. This makes the novel compressed and symbolic.

Another meta-modernist principle used in the novel is the “quotation without reference” principle, the idea of a “remake.” Abbreviations and the use of the Scottish variety of the English language implicitly refer to other works by Scottish writers who explored dialects and the language potential. A famous example is the work by a Scottish writer Adair who translated *A Void*, the French novel, with its famously “missing letter,” an example of the “compression” technique. Scottish and Irish writers made a number of other attempts to address the phenomenon of language and its dialects, exploring Celtic origins and Old English references. In this way, the novel by Fagan is a similar kind of exploration. Her short sentences, eco-elements, homogenous subjects and predicates, the use of letters instead of words allow to reveal meaning through the language itself, and at the same time manifest a Scottish tradition of doing it.

To conclude, Fagan’s writing provides a good example of postmodern and meta-modern writing, with Scottish tradition being incorporated in it. Fagan’s novel provides a good scope for studying social issues as well as the history of language and its potential.

3.3. Scottish woman writing and the “global sisterhood” (example of Kate Clanchy)

Writings by Kate Clanchy allow to see even better the interconnection of the old and the new in Scottish woman writing. Kate Clanchy’s new book *What Is She Doing Here?* can be described as a story of her relationship with a Kosovan refugee, Antigona. The bond between two women allow to identify the contradiction between a stereotypical bond of an employer and employee, a friend and an acquaintance and its realization in a real life situation. Antigona’s voice is meant to irritate the main character, to educate her and the narrator. Marina Benjamin (2008) in *The Telegraph* wrote: “Clanchy has done a marvelous thing. By giving voice to a refugee and telling a story that would otherwise have gone unheard, she reminds us both of the solidarity that exists between women, and of how far feminism – not just as an ideology, but as a system governing economic transaction – has yet to go” [17, p. 10].

The story explores (explicitly and implicitly) a strong bond women have, and the fact that “global sisterhood,” as Spivak once coined it, not necessarily

could unite women. In *Imperialism and Sexual Difference* Spivak tried to situate feminist criticism as it is practiced within the context of middle-class academic life in the West, placing some modes of feminist practice within the context of post-structuralist view: “we perform a lie of constituting a truth of global sisterhood” [14, p. 243–261]. In other words, the fact that a writer is a woman does not necessarily mean that she would have a lot of common features with other women writers. This brings the issue of social identity to a different level, allowing to see a complicated nature of one’s identity better. Thus, Scottish characters or characters in a novel written by a Scottish woman, are constituted not just of identities borrowed from the old classics (like Robert Burns or Walter Scott), the novel would have a lot of contemporary touch and descriptions of contemporary problems (for instance, immigration, migration, mixed identity).

3.4. Irish women’s writing, concepts of religion and home

In *Confessions of a Reluctant Catholic*, an Irish-American novelist Alice McDermott describes the genesis of her narrative style and focus: “Gradually, as the pattern of my own work began to come clear, I began to understand that this repetition of what might be called Catholic themes, Catholic language” [20, p. 12–16]. McDermott is not alone in her views. Despite the United States reputation for being a secular country, “Catholic themes, Catholic language” pervade the works of contemporary Irish-American women writers. Running throughout their novels are themes of guilt and repression, suffering, transcendence and redemption, prayer and forgiveness, fatalism and free will. Most Irish woman writers (living in Ireland or elsewhere, for instance, in the US) have certain common features of discussions, and that is religion and home. James Joyce and his *Dubliners* established a platform for the sorrow about losing a home, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, constructed the image of a real city, collecting images and moments from different experiences, thus put into practice different techniques that modernist writing were inventing. The motive of home is very similar to the idea of religion in woman’s writing. It is a part of one’s basic needs, most desirable concepts. Home and religion was the main topic in the famous E. Waugh’s novel *Brideshead Revisited* which notoriously was aimed by the author as a novel “against Catholicism” yet proved to be one of the best possible example of advertising for Catholicism. Similar tendencies are seen in

Irish women writing. The topic of home is explored in an earlier novel by Leland Bardwell *the House* (1984) and in *Girl on a Bicycle* (1977), which is about being a Protestant in Ireland.

It is important to mention that woman writers who come from Catholic families (like J. Winterson or I. Murdoch), did their best to show the impact of religion on human's life with a very negative predominant force. Some of them succeeded, some of them didn't. One of very famous examples (and a recent trend of taking real life experiences for screen versions and making it into a book) was a book *Lost child of Philomena Lee* by Marin Sixsmith (2009) made into a film with Judy Dench, with a main character being a real person. The book is a good illustration of the tendency to mix the real world and the virtual world, past and present thus observing the general postmodern tradition that women writers follow and explore, yet their emotional contribution is normally far more intense.

An interesting example of the fight for the human dimension (thus advocating religion) is the book by Sarah Maria Griffin *Spare and Found Parts* in which the author describes the life of humans after the epidemic. Each person in this novel is associated with a human body, and the main character is one's heart. This metonymical transfer allows to make the story meta-modern in its form and at the same time explore the opposition of the technological and the human, in other words reflect on what is going to win over the battle in the contemporary world.

Related to the concept of home being explored by Irish writers (as if "following the path of James Joyce") is the tendency of trans-national identity that appears in contemporary women writing, which allows "Irish" topics to be used by woman writers of mixed nationality, as it is in the case of an American writer Emily Grosholz who in her Itaka poem (2002) clearly hints not only at James Joyce's Ulysses but at the whole idea of a constant journey and "paradise regained" in the face of home and its attainment [18, p. 108]:

Penelope held off her ravenous suitors
By promising, tomorrow and tomorrow
She'd finish lost Ulysses' winding sheet
The Greek text says that she composed in light [19, p. 81].

This poem reveals one more feature of Irish woman writing, its symbolic nature, as it addresses the meta-textual aspect of writing: composed in light,

analyzed in darkness; compares writing to craft: woven figures unraveled. In postmodern manner Grosholz changes past and future and introduces “eternal” time and space subsystems (by promising, tomorrow and tomorrow). All if this is closely connected to the symbolic as well as iconic view of the language, which allows the writer to explore tradition not only on the level of the plot or as story behind a poem, but also on the language level. Irish woman writing becomes a good example of the following motives being explored: “uniqueness,” “tradition,” “history,” “magic,” “symbols,” all combined together.

4. Conclusion

Contemporary Scottish and Irish woman writing is characterized by general postmodern and meta-modern tendencies of incorporating the actual and the virtual, mixing agenda and playing with the traditional motives. The “compression of the narrative”, hidden and open meanings (as a sign of meta-modern techniques) are also important in the novels by women writers. A Scottish woman writer could position herself as a strong professional, free to choose her sexual preferences, strong and well-established. She could also be a proponent of contemporary tendencies, explore the notions of suppression, and position herself not only within the UK but also identifying herself in a more global context, associating herself with contemporary values as well as with the old tradition. Contemporary Irish woman writing will explore issues of religion, Catholicism, home, in other words relating to the past history and fundamental values, opposing them, at the same time. Both Scottish and Irish women writers will tend to incorporate the idea of playing with the identity, or a mixed identity. We see it as a sign of profound writing which makes use of the topics, motives, cultural background, thus being symbolic. The overall tendency of women’s writing is for the author to form her own identity (different from a male one, but not opposing it in any way, as it used to be in the 19th century).

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