

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. “But was it really like that? As painful as I remember? Only mildly. Or rather, it was a productive and fructifying pain. Love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup, eased up into that cracked window. I could smell it – taste it – sweet, musty, with an edge of wintergreen in its base – everywhere in that house. It stuck, along with my tongue, to the frosted windowpanes. It coated my chest, along with the salve, and when the flannel came undone in my sleep, the clear, sharp curves of air outlines its presence on my throat. And in the night, when my couching was dry and tough, feet padded into the room, hands repinned the flannel, readjusted the quilt, and rested a moment on my forehead. So when I think of autumn, I think of someone with hands who does not want me to die.” 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

4. “PS in answer to your ‘polite query’, yes, I am still one ... despite your evident contempt I’m feeling quite fine about it, thanks ... twenty is really not that late among young people these days, especially if they’ve decided to make their fellowship with Christ. It was weird that you asked, because I did walk through Hyde Park yesterday and thought of you losing yours to someone you had never met before and never would again. And no. I wasn’t tempted to repeat the incident...” Male Female

5. “I have vascular dementia, the doctor told me, and there was some comfort to be had. There’s the slowness of the undoing, which he must have mentioned a dozen times. Also, it’s not as bad as Alzheimer’s, with its mood swings and aggression. If I’m lucky, it might turn out to be somewhat benign. I might not be unhappy – just a dim old biddy in a chair, knowing nothing, expecting nothing. I had asked him to be frank, so I could not complain. Now he was hurrying me out. There were twelve people in his waiting room wanting their turn. In summary, as he helped me into my coat, he gave me the route map: loss of memory, short-and long-term, the disappearance of single words – simple nouns might be the first to go – then language itself, along with balance, and soon after, all motor control, and finally the autonomous nervous system. Bon Voyage!” Male Female

Reading 2 Key

Female: *On Beauty* by Zadie Smith, *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison

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>

Language Analysis

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

*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. He burst into the house and ate Grandma, an entirely valid course of action for a carnivore such as himself. Then, unhampered by rigid, traditionalist notions of what was masculine or feminine, he put on Grandma’s nightclothes and crawled into bed...

Sources:

Reading 1:

A. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/sep/27/author-david-gilmour-female-writers>

B. <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/07/16/showbiz/not-just-jk-rowling-monikers/>

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