

## Impact Factor:

ISRA (India) = 6.317  
ISI (Dubai, UAE) = 1.582  
GIF (Australia) = 0.564  
JIF = 1.500

SIS (USA) = 0.912  
ПИИИ (Russia) = 3.939  
ESJI (KZ) = 9.035  
SJIF (Morocco) = 7.184

ICV (Poland) = 6.630  
PIF (India) = 1.940  
IBI (India) = 4.260  
OAJI (USA) = 0.350

SOI: [1.1/TAS](#) DOI: [10.15863/TAS](#)

### International Scientific Journal Theoretical & Applied Science

p-ISSN: 2308-4944 (print) e-ISSN: 2409-0085 (online)

Year: 2021 Issue: 11 Volume: 103

Published: 30.11.2021 <http://T-Science.org>

QR – Issue



QR – Article



Manzila Nuriddinovna Habibova  
BSMI

teacher of English language department

Tel: 97 852-55-05

[khabibovamanzils@gmail.com](mailto:khabibovamanzils@gmail.com)

## THE THEME FEMINISM IN THE EPISTOLARY NOVELS IN MODERN TIMES

**Abstract:** The article explains the ideas close to modern feminism, literary analysis that emerges in terms of feminist literary criticism, feminism, feminist theory, and feminist politics. At the same time, feminist literature, the character of women, postmodernism, and the relationship of gender and social roles are interpreted.

**Key words:** feminism, female, movement, gender, women's role, female voice, epistolary novel, letter.

**Language:** English

**Citation:** Habibova, M. N. (2021). The theme feminism in the epistolary novels in modern times. *ISJ Theoretical & Applied Science*, 11 (103), 1101-1105.

**Soi:** <http://s-o-i.org/1.1/TAS-11-103-124> **Doi:**  <https://dx.doi.org/10.15863/TAS.2021.11.103.124>

**Scopus ASCC:** 1200.

### Introduction

The issue of feminism in literature is not new but due to patriarchal society, it has been suppressed and overlooked. The existence of inequalities between men and women are not natural but social taboo. Women must be treated equally because they have to play a crucial and vital role in society especially bringing up children.

A series of memorandums on the epistolary novel as established in the 1700s and its development in the modern age with the inclusion of electronic communications. Grown from a tradition of males imitating females, epistolary novels in modern times subvert gender expectations and stratification. Rather than a male chasing a woman, these modern novels give women the opportunity to participate as equal participants in their relationship. In relation to literature, the feminism movement has focused on the role played by literature to bring out gender discrimination, domestic violence, and inequality on the forefront.

With the exodus of men fighting the two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century, American and English women entered the workforce in record numbers to occupy positions other than that of the traditional nurse, teacher, or secretary. As women's roles in the world changed, so did the

characterizations of women in novels. Female writers began to connect their work and their lives. They discovered a number of disparities between their own ambitions, ingenuity, and creativity on one hand and the limited, often secondary, roles assumed by the majority of traditional female fictional characters on the other hand. This reality was easily explained, as the majority of novelists were white men. By the mid-twentieth century, a plethora of long fiction by women began to appear, with realistic female characters. Women's fiction transformed from products of imitation of a male aesthetic to protests against that aesthetic, eventually becoming self-defining works of literature.

### Methodology and literature review.

The epistolary novel is one in which the author conveys the story through documents. In the most traditional understanding, epistolary novels are series of letters. Some authors expand their novels to include newspaper clippings, diary entries, and articles. For the purposes of this memo and all others relating to this topic, we include novels which use documents other than letters, but borrow Janet Altman's clarification that the "letter's formal properties..."

## Impact Factor:

ISRA (India) = 6.317  
ISI (Dubai, UAE) = 1.582  
GIF (Australia) = 0.564  
JIF = 1.500

SIS (USA) = 0.912  
PIIHQ (Russia) = 3.939  
ESJI (KZ) = 9.035  
SJIF (Morocco) = 7.184

ICV (Poland) = 6.630  
PIF (India) = 1.940  
IBI (India) = 4.260  
OAJI (USA) = 0.350

create meaning”<sup>1</sup>. Altman also states that letters addressed to confidants of the writer are “the fundamental vehicles of epistolary narrative”<sup>2</sup>. Letters that advance the story or plot must be included for the novel to be considered epistolary.

The epistolary novel has existed in various forms and understandings since the Roman poet Ovid first used epistles in his writings, but it truly began in its traditional form in the 1600s and hit peak popularity in the eighteenth century. Male critics of the genre believe that the epistolary genre is “particularly suited for the female voice”<sup>3</sup>, a belief informed by the historical context of its rise. Originally, males imitating the “female voice” produced epistolary writing. In the eighteenth century, the epistolary form was “the favored mode of moral instruction for women”<sup>4</sup>. As women began to receive education, they were taught to write letters as a form of exercising their newfound knowledge. “Newly educated women could easily learn to write letters, and, as epistolary theory became more adapted to worldly culture, women’s letters began to be considered the best models of the genre”<sup>5</sup>. When the epistolary novel began enjoying a market in the eighteenth century, even more male writers, including Rousseau and Richardson, began perfecting the technique of imitating female writing seen in previous publications. “Female letters traditionally focused on domestic life or on love; they spoke in the private voice appropriate to women whose roles were increasingly circumscribed within the constraints of bourgeois ideology”<sup>6</sup>. We therefore see most epistolary fiction focus on these topics.

The results. Part of the reason that epistolary fiction is likely a good format for the expression of female voices, especially in earlier novels, is due to women’s role in letter-writing culture. In periods where public spaces were considerably dominated by men (such as largely for the centuries preceding the 20th century), women were not able to express their experiences or thoughts with the same freedom as their male counterparts. While it is important to note that elements of this public space domination by men still exist, women’s place in the public sphere was even more constrained in earlier centuries. And, in light of these public constraints and social taboos, personal interactions were often the space where

women could express their personal sentiments. By this, in the Queen of the Desert letters served as a forum for Gertrude Bell to communicate her perspective to friends or relatives, without breaking the social norms that regularly kept her from the public arena. Therefore, feminism in this epistolary novel is logical, as she was better able to act as independent and dynamic characters in this format in spite of her marginalized social position.

Feminism is something complex, I keep thinking what a horrifying world it would be if it didn’t have women. It would be worthless to live if there were no women around. That’s my part of feminism. The life of a man is always a struggle as well. So I wouldn’t reserve the concept of struggle for women alone. But of course, this biographic novel is set at a time when women could not even vote. And at Oxford University, the young female students had to turn their face towards a wall so that the male students wouldn’t be distracted. That’s what happened, and that’s the basis upon which Gertrude Bell evolved and expanded into a female figure that we have not seen in centuries.

Analysis. Feminism, both in the form of subtle undertones as well as in the form of the principal theme, is a theme regularly included in epistolary novels. Of the 92 novels analyzed, approximately 20% from across time included elements of feminism. This theme is complex in that the concept of feminism is relatively new (within the last 100 years or so). However, prior to its official establishment, many of the epistolary novels included in this research include elements of it. For example, in many of the novels dating to the 18th or 19th centuries, simply having a dynamic female character was progressive. For this reason, such novels have been included as abiding by the feminist theme. An example, in the Queen of the Desert strong-willed female character, Gertrude Bell, whose opinions on society and social norms makes this novel stand apart as an early feminist piece.

Perhaps Georgina Howell wrote the original novels based her imitations upon real Gertruda Bell’s letters, there is a tradition of including non-fictional elements in epistolary novels, more so than most other fictional genres. According to Linda Kauffman, epistolary novelists commonly blur “the lines between fiction and reality by including morsels of information that seem to be about [their] ‘real [lives]’”<sup>7</sup>. Howell

<sup>1</sup> Keskinen, Mikko. “E-pistolary and E-loquence: Sylvia Brownrigg’s *The Metaphysical Touch* as a Novel of Letters and Voices in the Age of E-Mail Communication.” *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*. 45.4 (2004): 383- 405. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Altman, Janet Gurkin. *Epistolary, Approaches To A Form*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982. - p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> Goldsmith, Elizabeth C. *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*. Ed. Eli C. Goldsmith. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1989

<sup>4</sup> Gilroy, Amanda, and W. M. Verhoeven. Introduction. *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture*. Ed. Amanda Gilroy and W. M.

Verhoeven. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2000. 1-25. Print.

<sup>5</sup> Goldsmith, Elizabeth C. *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*. Ed. Eli C. Goldsmith. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1989

<sup>6</sup> Gilroy, Amanda, and W. M. Verhoeven. Introduction. *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture*. Ed. Amanda Gilroy and W. M. Verhoeven. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2000. 1-25. Print.

<sup>7</sup> Kauffman, Linda. *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*. Ed. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1989. 221-44. Print.

## Impact Factor:

ISRA (India)	= 6.317	SIS (USA)	= 0.912	ICV (Poland)	= 6.630
ISI (Dubai, UAE)	= 1.582	PIHII (Russia)	= 3.939	PIF (India)	= 1.940
GIF (Australia)	= 0.564	ESJI (KZ)	= 9.035	IBI (India)	= 4.260
JIF	= 1.500	SJIF (Morocco)	= 7.184	OAJI (USA)	= 0.350

used incidents from her real life in the plot. The epistolary form entails a type of fracturing of the story. The reader of the novel knows more than the letter writer and the letter reader, because “the reader of the epistolary novel is aware that within its boundaries there is another reader”.<sup>8</sup> The novel reader, however, cannot know more than the characters tell.

Nowadays to survive, epistolary novels in current times experiment with the traditional form, and authors use blogs, emails, instant messaging (IM), memos, and other electronic forms of communication to tell their stories. Current novels also include telegraph notes, replicate signs or menus, and include drawings or images. Ester Milne states, “the epistolary body of email is a figure for thinking through the relations between new and old media”.

Just as Kauffman notes about epistolary novelists, the Queen of the Desert includes elements of Gertruda Bell’s personal life.

### Discussion.

By emphasizing that her books are based on her real life experiences, Howell makes the challenges and accomplishments of her characters more real. The Queen of the Desert is not stories of male understandings of female life, but a woman’s reflection on her own life and experiences. In the following memos we discuss how Gertruda Bell uses the traditional elements of epistolary novels in her own writings, but modifies them to fit the modern woman and, therefore, to question the male construction of the female genre.

Epistolary novels are a contradiction. They are considered the female genre because they are for women and presented in the feminine style of writing. The epistolary novel as a genre arose because women began to receive an education, and though it was still not completely acceptable, the most acceptable form of writing for a female was that of letters. It should, therefore, be a genre in which females can question the domination of males and assert their own independence. Many literary experts, however, believe that the epistolary novel is better qualified as “a history of restrictions or failed interactions”.<sup>9</sup>

Even as women become more successful and freer, the cultural history of being voiceless and powerless remains always. Epistolary novels offer a form in which women can finally speak - but only as established by men.

Most epistolary novels are love stories, emphasizing distance, confidentiality, and secrecy.

These topics will be discussed in later memos. Some of them are characteristics of the letters themselves, but others are a direct result of male restriction.

With greater social freedom and the true ability to publish, women can write epistolary novels without (as much) male interference. Elizabeth Campbell argues that epistolary novels can be used to “subvert the language and values of the dominant culture”<sup>10</sup> because they break away from traditional narrative form. Campbell twists “feminine” writing from its accepted definition to writing, which reflects females’ marginalization. “Women today are doing consciously what women writers have always done... writing in the feminine--that is, writing themselves in a way which reflects their experience as the “other” in a culture in which they have been traditionally voiceless and thus powerless”.<sup>11</sup> Modern female authors are using epistolary novels to expose their history as the suppressed gender; they use the characteristics established by males and warp them so they become critics of male dominated society.

Do word choices, use of emoticons, and message length give enough clues as to the writer’s gender? Males in the 1700s recognized that women’s writing had a fundamentally different style. By fundamental, we do not mean inherent in that it cannot be changed. Women may be taught a specific stylized writing or, more likely, their writing reflects the social lessons learned from birth. Women are taught to express emotions, whereas males learn to suppress them as “not masculine.” Consequently, women’s writing is more likely to demonstrate emotion. The absence of physical cues in electronic communication does not eliminate all characteristics of gender. Electronic communication allows individuals to more easily misrepresent their gender, but until males and females are trained to adopt the same stylistic choices, readers are likely to associate certain attributes to one gender or the other.

In Cabot’s Boy series, the evidence of female versus male communication is clear, even if signatures were excluded. Her writing suggests that even in the absences of the letter writer, her gender and that of her characters cannot disappear.

As mentioned in pervious memos (“What is the epistolary novel”, “Women fight back”), epistolary fiction arose from the male understanding of the “female voice.” Authors established a link between femininity, epistolary, and emotion. It was a link hard to overcome and resulted in a specific narrative in epistolary novels. Men believed “if a woman writes

<sup>8</sup> Campbell, Elizabeth. “Re-Visions, Re-Flections, Re-Creations: Epistolarity in Novels in Contemporary Women.” Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal. 41.3 (1995): 332-48. Print.

<sup>9</sup> Goldsmith, Elizabeth C. Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature. Ed. Eli C. Goldsmith. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1989

<sup>10</sup> Campbell, Elizabeth. “Re-Visions, Re-Flections, Re-Creations: Epistolarity in Novels in Contemporary Women.” Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal. 41.3 (1995): 332-48. Print.

<sup>11</sup> Campbell, Elizabeth. “Re-Visions, Re-Flections, Re-Creations: Epistolarity in Novels in Contemporary Women.” Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal. 41.3 (1995): 332-48. Print.

## Impact Factor:

ISRA (India) = 6.317  
ISI (Dubai, UAE) = 1.582  
GIF (Australia) = 0.564  
JIF = 1.500

SIS (USA) = 0.912  
PIHII (Russia) = 3.939  
ESJI (KZ) = 9.035  
SJIF (Morocco) = 7.184

ICV (Poland) = 6.630  
PIF (India) = 1.940  
IBI (India) = 4.260  
OAJI (USA) = 0.350

through emotion, then the logical consequence is that she will also write about it, that is, about love".<sup>12</sup> Traditional novels in the genre, therefore, are love stories, reflecting this belief. Furthermore, Altman argues "the letter form seems tailored for the love plot, with its emphasis on separation and reunion".<sup>13</sup> She contends that letters easily become "tool[s] for seduction"

In historical epistolary novels we see this emphasis on seduction. Traditionally, the novels feature a male pursuing a woman who does not reciprocate his sexual feelings, and the male employs letters as away to make her a conquest. Often, however, when reading or discussing these novels an important fact is overlooked: the letters are based on the writings of real women. "For love letters in particular, the female voice was perceived as the superior vehicle of expression, even when it was not from a female author".<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, the epistolary novel as a romance makes both the seducer and the seduced more active in perpetuating the affair. Since letters demand action as a way to continue communication, it "forces the seduced as well as the seducer to play a more aggressive role".<sup>15</sup> The seduced must respond to a letter for the seducer to continue the relationship. Women become "willing and writing victims, of unreciprocated desire".<sup>16</sup> In this universe, "men are masters of amorous relations"

Altman's assertion that letters are useful tools of seduction means that they are used for males to force their sexual advantage upon resisting females. Becoming active participants, on the other hand, allows women to fight against male domination. As the genre expanded and publishers began to market to the women whose letters men imitate, the stories became not just about the male triumphing over the female. By responding to the letters, the female can

open the seducer to falling in love, not just conquering, because she offers part of herself and demands a response and reciprocation. In her research, Altman gives several examples in which the man, intent on forcing the woman into a relationship, instead falls in love himself. In this manner, the epistolary romance allows women authors to fight subtly against their gender's repression by making the male seducer succumb to his own plan.

### Conclusion.

In modern times, we see this shift develop further. Authors pen female characters that better represent the place women hold in the social structure.

With a freer capacity to express their voice, women reveal more about themselves and males are less able to distance - both physically and emotionally - themselves from the objects of their affection. The Boy series may focus on women who gossip, love shoes, dream of love, and plan weddings, but they are also independent females striving to be independently successful.

These are not stories of the male seducer forcing himself on the weak woman. Rather, the lovers meet by chance and establish a mutual attraction. It is only in the end after the male makes a mistake that he pursues the female character. Once the chase starts, it is not a game of seduction, but repentance. The power of continuing the relationship resides with the women because they have the option of forgiving - or not. One inherent trait of epistolary novels that was not imposed by male design is the physical distance between the characters exchanging letters. Letters are sent between two or more characters separated by location. The characters use letters to communicate across this distance. Letters both emphasize and bridge distance; they can reflect both the absence and the presence of the writer/receiver.

## References:

1. Keskinen, M. (2004). "E-pistolary and Eloquence: Sylvia Brownrigg's *The Metaphysical Touch* as a Novel of Letters and Voices in the Age of E-Mail Communication." *Critique:*

*Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 45.4 (2004): 383- 405.

2. Altman, J. G. (1982). *Epistolary, Approaches To A Form*. (p.48). Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Jensen, Katharine A. "Male Models of Feminine Epistolary." *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*. Ed. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1989.

<sup>13</sup> Altman, Janet Gurkin. *Epistolary, Approaches To A Form*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982. 13-86. Print.

<sup>14</sup> Goldsmith, Elizabeth C. *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*. Ed. Eli C. Goldsmith. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1989

<sup>15</sup> Altman, Janet Gurkin. *Epistolary, Approaches To A Form*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982. 13-86. Print.

<sup>16</sup> Jensen, Katharine A. "Male Models of Feminine Epistolary." *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*. Ed. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1989.



**Impact Factor:**

**ISRA (India) = 6.317**  
**ISI (Dubai, UAE) = 1.582**  
**GIF (Australia) = 0.564**  
**JIF = 1.500**

**SIS (USA) = 0.912**  
**PIHII (Russia) = 3.939**  
**ESJI (KZ) = 9.035**  
**SJIF (Morocco) = 7.184**

**ICV (Poland) = 6.630**  
**PIF (India) = 1.940**  
**IBI (India) = 4.260**  
**OAJI (USA) = 0.350**

---

3. Goldsmith, E.C. (1989). *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*. Ed. Eli C. Goldsmith. Boston: Northeastern UP.
4. Gilroy, A., & Verhoeven, W. M. (2000). *Introduction. Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture*. Ed. Amanda Gilroy and W. M. Verhoeven. (pp.1-25). Charlottesville: University of Virginia.
5. Goldsmith, E. C. (1989). *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*. Ed. Eli C. Goldsmith. Boston: Northeastern UP.
6. Gilroy, A., & Verhoeven, W. M. (2000). *Introduction. Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture*. Ed. Amanda Gilroy and W. M. Verhoeven. (pp.1-25). Charlottesville: University of Virginia.
7. Kauffman, L. (1989). *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*. Ed. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith. (pp.221-244). Boston: Northeastern.
8. Campbell, E. (1995). "Re-Visions, Re-Flections, Re-Creations: Epistolarity in Novels in Contemporary Women." *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal*, 41.3 (1995): 332-348.
9. Goldsmith, E.C. (1989). *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*. Ed. Eli C. Goldsmith. Boston: Northeastern UP.
10. Campbell, E. (1995). "Re-Visions, Re-Flections, Re-Creations: Epistolarity in Novels in Contemporary Women." *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal*, 41.3 (1995): 332-348.
11. Campbell, E. (1995). "Re-Visions, Re-Flections, Re-Creations: Epistolarity in Novels in Contemporary Women." *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal*, 41.3 (1995): 332-48.
12. Jensen, K. A. (1989). "Male Models of Feminine Epistolarity." *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*. Ed. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith. Boston: Northeastern UP.
13. Altman, J. G. (1982). *Epistolarity, Approaches To A Form*. (pp.13-86). Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
14. Goldsmith, E. C. (1989). *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*. Ed. Eli C. Goldsmith. Boston: Northeastern UP.
15. Altman, J. G. (1982). *Epistolarity, Approaches To A Form*. (pp.13-86). Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
16. Jensen, K. A. (1989). "Male Models of Feminine Epistolarity." *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*. Ed. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith. Boston: Northeastern UP.