



Section 4. Philology

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DIFFERENCES IN THE APPROACH TO FEMALE IMAGES BY FRENCH AND AZERBAIJANI AUTHORS

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Abstract

French prose focuses on **individual existential autonomy**, using female characters to explore psychological depth and critique social constraints. Conversely, Azerbaijani prose focuses on **socio-historical transition**, portraying women as central figures in the nation's shift from traditional patriarchal structures to modern, professional roles. In short: the French approach is **psychologically introspective**, while the Azerbaijani approach is **sociologically transformative**.

Keywords: *individuality, Female Imagery, French and Azerbaijani prose, historical transition, psychological depth*

The differences in the approach to female images in French and Azerbaijani prose are not only literary and aesthetic, but also have deep historical, cultural and ideological roots. These differences stem from the position of women in society, their status in family relationships, and the concepts of individual freedom and subjectivity.

1. Difference in historical and social context in France, since the first half of the 20th century, the struggle of women for rights and freedom (the right to vote – since 1944), feminist literary and philosophical movements (Simone de Beauvoir, 1949), created

an opportunity for women to express themselves as individuals. As a result, in French prose, women are depicted with their sexual desires, social anger and psychological complexities.

In Azerbaijani literature, the image of women has long been presented as the support of the family, a symbol of loyalty and a bearer of moral strength. Although the enlightenment movement and Soviet modernization of the early 20th century encouraged women's education and integration into society, traditional family values prevented their individualism.

2. Differences in Literary Representation French prose writers such as Annie Ernaux, Marguerite Duras, Simone de Beauvoir, and Christine Angot bring to literature the identities that women construct through their bodies, language, and experiences. These images often confront the father figure, the family, and the patriarchal structure. In Ernaux's *Une femme*, the mother, although "a silent woman in domesticity," is reconstructed through the language of her daughter:

"Elle a vécu dans la répétition. Une vie de devoirs, de silences, de fatigue."

"She lived in repetitions – a life of debts, silence and fatigue." (*Une femme*, p. 23)

Here, the image of women becomes visible through writing and memory.

Azerbaijani prose writers such as Anar, Elchin and A. Aylisli present women mainly in the context of family and relationships. For example, in Anar's work *Ağ liman*, a woman is a silent, waiting being, but one who carries emotional strength within. That passivity actually turns into psychological resistance:

"Qadın baxdı, amma danışmadı. O baxışda qırılan nə isə vardı."

"The woman looked, but did not speak. There was something broken in that look." (*Ağ liman*, p. 59)

This difference shows that while French writers present the woman as an active subject of internal experience, Azerbaijani writers keep her as a "reacting" figure within the framework of social relations.

3. Presentation of the body and desire In French literature, the woman's body and desire are described as one of the main aspects of her existence. In Marguerite Duras's *L'Amant*, the image of a girl "comes into being" through her love and desire:

"Je suis née avec lui." – "I was born with him." (*L'Amant*, p. 16)

In Azerbaijani literature, however, the female body is a more symbolic and restricted area. A woman's desire is often not expressed or is isolated. Although the works of female writers – for example, Mehriban Vezir – began to speak out against this isolation, the literary tradition was late in opening up to such presentations:

"Mən qadınam. Sadəcə ana deyil, hiss edən, yaşamaq istəyən bir qadın."

"I am a woman. Not just a mother, but a woman who feels and wants to live." (Mehriban Vezir, "Daughters of the Sun", p. 83)

4. Enrichment with Existing Gender Statistics France- Women's participation in the workforce 70.2%, women's share in management ~37% (2023)

Azerbaijan- Women's participation in the workforce ~62%, women's share in management ~20% (2023).

Representative statistics show that the legal and cultural struggle for gender equality has been more active in France. This is clearly visible in the presentation of female images in literature as active agents, choice-makers and bearers of emotional-spiritual depth.

The influence of social context and ideological systems:

Soviet reality and French existentialism Literature is not only a field of artistic creation, but also an important cultural field in which the ideological and social strata of society are expressed. Especially in the 20th century, the strong ideological control of political systems had a profound impact on the subject matter, image system, and means of aesthetic expression of literature. Socialist realism, the dominant ideological direction in the Soviet Union, demanded from writers loyalty to collective values, class relations, and images of "positive heroes." In contrast, existentialism, which emerged in post-war France, was based on the existence, freedom, and moral responsibility of the individual. These ideological differences also left serious traces in the presentation of images of women and men.

The influence of Soviet reality on Azerbaijani literature During the Soviet period, writers, within the framework of ideological censorship, modeled the images of women and men in accordance with the needs of society. Women – workers, mothers, educators – were presented as "positive heroes" who fulfilled their duties and played a role in socialist construction. Individual desires, internal conflicts, and the search for freedom were either weakened in these images or expressed through hidden symbolism.

For example, in Mir Jalal's "Manifesto of a Young Man," the character of Sona is an educated, thoughtful woman, but her image is mainly presented as a stage in the spiritual

maturation of the male hero. The main emphasis is not on the woman's own inner life, but on her conformity to society.

“O, məndən fərqli idi. Daha sakit, daha müaliəli, daha uyğun...”

“She was different from me. More calm, more studious, more appropriate...” (Mir Jalal, p. 101) This presentation is a typical effect of Soviet ideology, which measured a woman's individuality not by the principles of conformity and usefulness.

French existentialism and individual subjectivity Existentialist literature (Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, etc.) that emerged in France in the 1940s and 1950s was based on the understanding, choice, and responsibility of human existence in a meaningless world. Here, images do not serve any ideological system; on the contrary, they seek the meaning of existence in the absence of a system. This approach is also based on the principles of equality and inner freedom in relations between women and men. Simone de Beauvoir applied existentialist philosophy to gender issues and

showed how women are constructed as “others.”

The phrase **“On ne naît pas femme, on le devient”** – “One is not born a woman, one becomes a woman” (Le Deuxième Sexe, 1949) – forms the core of this approach. In works written on this principle, women are no longer subject to social roles, but are presented as subjects who question and try to reconstruct these roles.

In Albert Camus's *The Stranger*, Meursault's relationship with women, especially with Marie, is observed with existential coldness and a lack of emotional responsibility:

“Elle m’a demandé si je l’aimais. J’ai répondu que cela ne voulait rien dire, mais que je ne pensais pas.”

“She asked me, ‘Do you love me?’ I replied that it didn't mean anything, but I didn't think about it.” (L'Étranger, p. 56)

In this expression, love and relationships lose their meaning in an existential vacuum. This is in sharp contrast to the idealized love of Soviet literature.

Table 1.

Aspect	Soviet reality (Azerbaijan)	French existentialism
Female role	Mother, worker, educator, member of the collective	Free individual, psychological-subjective being
Ideological function	A model promoting conformity to society	Resisting the system, searching for one's own self
Concept of freedom	«Orderly freedom» in accordance with socialist values	Inner freedom given by choice and responsibility
Love/relationship	In the context of social welfare and family	Individual responsibility and the clash with meaninglessness

1. The role of women in Soviet reality (Azerbaijan): Soviet ideology aimed to remove women from traditional roles and turn them into active participants in public life. However, although this approach gave the appearance of “freedom”, in reality it reduced women to the model of “useful citizens” rather than individual subjects. Women remained workers at work, and at home, they remained childminders and family breadwinners. This dual burden turned women into both “idealized” and “controlled” figures.

French existentialism: Here, women are no longer the bearers of roles assigned by the social system. They are subjects seeking the meaning of their existence, trying to identify themselves with their feelings, desires and choices. Simone de Beauvoir laid the philosophical foundation for this concept, presenting women not only as biological sex, but also as social constructs. Images of women are powerful beings seeking their freedom and coming into conflict with the existing system.

2. Ideological function Soviet reality: Literature was a means of education and propaganda for Soviet ideology. The image of women was built here in accordance with idealized types – the hero of labor, the devoted mother, the enlightened teacher. Female images with individual internal dilemmas were either changed in the face of censorship or presented symbolically (for example, the silent women in Anar's works).

French existentialism: This direction valued literature as a platform for the expression of free thought and spiritual transformation. Writers had no ideological obligations. Female images were also presented as individuals who did not "serve" society, but resisted it, questioned themselves, and sometimes remained outside the system altogether (Duras, Ernaux, Angot).

3. The concept of freedom Soviet reality: The idea of freedom here was presented mainly through the prism of collective success, "equality" and "service to society". Women's freedom – to work, to study, to participate in political activity – formally existed, but this freedom was within the framework allowed by the centralized system. Individual choice and emotional freedom were almost non-existent or kept in the background.

French existentialism: Here, freedom is the main essence of human existence. Jean-Paul Sartre's idea "Man is doomed to be free" clearly expresses this. Women must accept this freedom and be responsible for its consequences. Choosing, feeling, giving up and starting over – existentialism values a woman's life precisely through these acts of behavior.

4. Presentation of love and relationships Soviet reality: Love and family relationships in literature were based more on social bene-

fit and family stability. Intra-family conflicts and emotional breakdowns were either softened or "educated". Women were shown as support and support, not as partners of men. Romantic and sexual desires were usually evaluated as "harmful bourgeois remnants".

French existentialism: Here, love and relationships are at the center of the spiritual, and sometimes existential, experience of the individual. Love can both give freedom and destroy. Female characters in these relationships are not passive objects, but individuals who make or do not make emotional choices and are responsible for the relationship. In Duras's *L'Amant*, this conflict is presented in an explicit form.

Conclusion

In conclusion:

The image of women in French prose has a dynamic and multilayered structure, built on individual freedom, identity and position against society. In Azerbaijani prose, the image of women is presented more as a being that reacts to social relations, is formed within a moral and family framework. These differences once again show that literature has not only an aesthetic, but also an ideological and social construction function.

This table and comments show that the Soviet and French ideological systems assigned women different functional roles. In Soviet literature, women are the protectors of morality and society, while in French existentialist literature, women are people who think about their existence and freedom.

These differences are of great scientific importance not only in terms of aesthetic, but also in terms of cultural-historical evaluation and strengthen the main ideological structure of your work.

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