Short Story Discourse of Chopin’s “The Kiss” and “A Pair of Silk Stockings”:
Imagery Pro Theme

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ABSTRACT
The themes revealing the attitude of women to such facets of life as passion, money, choice, independence, trust and acceptance of the fate have been essential to majority of literary studies, devoted to gender issues in global literature. Different approaches have been given to explore the issues about women’s struggle against gender conformity and social norms that hinder women’s challenges to gain their independent position. The following analysis explores the ways in which different types of imagery interact in structuring both the narration and the construction of meaning(s). This approach has not received the worthwhile attention in literary studies. The present study proposes to address this kind of analysis by offering the author imagery-pro-theme reading of Kate Chopin’s short stories “The Kiss” and “A Pair of Silk Stockings”. The fiction is reviewed as a short story discourse being a complete artistic description of reality which is made by means of its component combination such as theme, characters and action in conflict. The study focuses on the exploration of the author’s imagery in accordance with lexical and phraseological type of classification, which proves to help define the themes of women’s lack of freedom in the patriarchal society of that time. The results of the study are presumed to highlight the relevance of the given method in the analysis and comprehension of fiction literature texts.

Keywords: short story discourse, imagery, theme, gender literature, fiction studies.

1. Introduction
There have an expanding volume of linguistic approaches to literature studies. They encompass such fields of linguistic knowledge as pragmatics, corpus linguistics, computational linguistics, critical discourse analysis, text and discourse, other (Balossi, 2014; Foucault M.,1972; Stepanov,1998; Tcherkniayskaya,2002; Van Dijk, 1993; Wafa Aljuaythin, 2020; Weth, 1999). The theories of the multitude of linguistic fields help achieve a more profound and comprehensive understanding of many issues of literature. The language approaches have been continuously demonstrating its unprecedented value to the analysis and comprehension of literary texts and diversity of the themes being touched, which, among other, include issues of feminism, gender identity and gender roles (Ben Amara & Omar, 2020; Carroll, 2020; Hasan, 2020).

However, the studies of writers’ style as a means of deeper interpretation of themes has not been given due attention in literary studies, despite its unquestionable potency with regard to an author’s handling imagery as a reflection of ideas, problems and, what is more, messages embedded in literary texts. One may argue that the prospects of a fiction-imagery approach has been failing to use its potential within literary studies in general and gender fiction, in particular.
The kind of issues considered in gender texts are in many sides common to different societies and
generations, making a pragmatic focus on consideration of those issues. To address gender studies in literary text in
order to establish similarities and resemblances, the author of this paper presents the imagery analysis of a literary
text written by an American woman writer of the nineteenth century. It is an attempt to study questions about the
fate of a woman, who seeks to establish her self-independent life standing. Chopin’s literary legacy provokes
questions about stereotypical values of that time and helps establish their connection with urgent gender issues of
today.

An author of two novels *At Fault* (1890) and *The Awakening* (1899), Kate Chopin is known for one-hundred-
and-some stories, which made two collections *Bayou Folk* (1894) and *A Night in Acadie* (1897). Chopin’s short stories
show the life of an American woman in various aspects: a girl of a marriageable age (At the Cadian Ball, 1892), a
young mother and wife (Désirée's Baby, 1895), a woman who does not love her husband (The Story of an Hour, 1894),
an autonomous woman longing for maternity (Regret, 1894), a woman longing for intimate pleasures (A Respectable
Woman, 1894), a woman aspiring to knowledge and self-education (Elizabeth Stock's one story, 1963; Athénais, 1895;
An Egyptian cigarette, 1897). Chopin focuses on themes related to issues of understanding feminine sexuality and
such experiences as pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood. A great number of earlier and recent publications
of short story theorists demonstrate that an acute interest to Chopin's art has never ceased (The Kate Chopin
International Society).

The proposed study presents to analyze the writers imagery as a channel of defining gender themes in
classical American literature by focusing on Kate Chopin's short stories “The kiss” and “A Pair of Silk Stockings.”

**Objective**
Taking an attempt to contribute to a consent between theory and practical studies in literature, between
interpretation and comprehension, the given study discusses an approach to the imagery that considers the
discursive and analytic experiences in understanding a literary theme of short stories as a reflection of female
identity of those times. The term theme we commonly refer to a short story concept that is presented by the author
through action and imagery.

2. Literature Review
The diversity of linguistic approaches to the studies of fiction texts has had a new impulse lately, a great
number of questions include such linguistic categories as text and discourse. Discourse is a poly-semantic term
belonging to a number of humanities, which involve the study of the language operating systems – Linguistics and
Literary studies being among those (Lezhneva & Nikolayeva, 2019). It is universally believed that such concepts as
“text” and “discourse” are inextricably linked with each other.

A text is considered to be one of the basic components of a discourse, so a text is a formal comprehensive
structure which appears as a result of communicatively-cognitive process, discourse. (Tcherniavskaya, 2002). The
latter presents a set of spoken and written texts that people produce in a variety of daily practices that define its
genres (Skorikova, Orlov, Romanova & Pinevich, 2019; Zabrovskaya & Rubleva, 2019). Thus, studies of fiction
discourse can be a resourceful media for constructing a picture of human identities (Nurieva, Borisova & Kulikova,
2018).

K. R. Novozhilova calls a literary text a discourse as it is a communicative event, which includes both the text
itself and extra linguistic parameters (opinions, intentions, knowledge about the world, etc.) that affect the creation
and understanding of the text (Novozhilova, 2013). Being part of fiction type of narratives we define a short story
discourse as one of the mobile literature genres. It is characterized by depth of thought, clarity of design and its
implementation, completeness and perfection of form with brevity of narration. A short story discourse is a
complete artistic description of reality which is made by means of its component combination such as theme,
characters and action in conflict. It is a very short form with limited number of characters within a certain setting.
Thus, these attributes make masters-of-pen to introduce a concentrated form of imagery application in the
structure and composition of the story text (Yazgi, 2020).

Kate Chopin’s literary heritage have always been attracting the interest of researchers in terms of studying
female gender categories among other social manifestations. It is worth noting that in the latest century the
research on gender in literary works is acquiring a new focus, which is based on the unity of various dimensions of
the characters and events of the literary work. Those dimensions include social class, sociocultural and ethnic
background, age, level of education, socioeconomic status, emotions and the specific power dynamics of the
literary works under the study (Daca, 2017; Ostman, 2015). Such focus allows researchers of Chopin’s art to deeper
guess the hidden and concealed, mysterious and obscure meanings. These meaning might be the effects of
oppression and suppression under a system of powerful patriarchy over the woman’s existence (Ahmetspahic &
3. Method

Narrative fiction as a discourse requires additional input from the reader such as knowledge of the norms of behavior in a particular culture, common situation, everyday objects and social relations. Readers of narratives should accumulate knowledge that is specific to the fictional world, such as facts about particular characters and the situations they are placed in. The author’s language and imagery is the way to gain this knowledge as “the words on the page are like dots in a gestalt figure or a child’s drawing book – the connections are often obvious, but they still need to be made” (Emmot, 1997, 3).

Imagery can be regarded as the crucial component of the fiction discourse analysis both in cognitive sense of activating the minds of the readers and in the literary sense as a structural and compositional device. Understanding of cultural stereotypes in a writer’s prose is not only due to the original interpretation of the plot, but also through certain artistic techniques used in its design. Imagery becomes an important component that gives new dimensions to transfer the theme through the representation of characters and their actions described in the text.

In terms of the Russian approach to analyze imagery the article dwells on the stylistic analysis of female theme in a short story discourse. Russian linguist I. V. Arnold calls “Stylistics” a branch of Linguistics that studies the principles and effect of choosing lexical, grammatical, phonetic, and generally linguistic means to convey thoughts and emotions in different communicative environments (Arnold, 2009).

The subject and content of “Stylistics” has not been precisely defined so far. This concept may have different approaches. Linguistic Stylistics deals with the following concepts:

a) aesthetic functions of the language;
b) expressive means of the language;
c) synonymous ways of expressing thoughts;
d) emotional coloring of speech;
e) stylistic techniques;
f) stratification of literary language into separate systems (speech styles);
g) individual manner of using the national language (individual artistic style of the writer) (Galperin, 2012).

The method of analyzing stories “The Kiss” and “A Pair of Silk Stockings” is based on the classification of stylistic use of various types of lexical meanings by the Russian Linguist, I. R. Galperin (Galperin, 2012). This brings to a speculation about the emphasis of what is usually referred to as ‘writers’ motive’ in defining “the meaning” from a conventional viewpoint. This issue will be addressed in this paper. One of the reader’s expectations is the presupposition that the stories are going to be meaningful. This expectation functions in different manners, one being imagery the analysis of which helps the reader find prompts to retrieve meaning from the elements he/she finds in the text (Troshina & Kharitonova).

In the space of this article we will consider a few Chopin’s artistic means in accordance with lexical and phraseological type of classification which includes:

1. imagery based on the interaction of vocabulary and contextual subject-logistical meanings (a metaphor, a metonymy, an irony);
2. imagery based on the interaction of subject-logistical and emotional meanings (an epithet and an interjection);
3. imagery used for the description of a multitude of phenomena and objects (a simile).

4. Results and Discussion
4.1. Story “The Kiss” (1894)

The title of the story raises intriguing questions and evokes a series of expectations in the reader’s mind. Kiss is the key word, expressing the fundamental content and composition of what follows. We expect to read about “Who are someone who exchange the kiss?”, “Are they children and parents, husbands and wives, close relatives or lovers?” These expectations come from the obvious traditional format of a title, indicating the subject-matter.

The story presents the female character of a young lady, Natalie, who was “very handsome with a certain fine, rich coloring that belongs to the healthy brune type”. She is confident of her sexual appeal to Brantain, her future husband, “a frank, blustering fellow without guile enough to conceal his feelings, and no desire to do so”. There is another young man, “a friend of long standing’, who is in love with Natalie too. Natalie faces the necessity to choose between the two men, Brantain, who symbolizes wealth and Harvey, with whom Natalie connects passion. The series of epithets gives a vivid understanding of personal features and social standings of the characters and their relations with each other.

Borrowed from the writing style of Gustav Flaubert, an important technique characteristic of Chopin’s artistic skill is the opening phrase, which precedes the reader to a deep understanding of the plot and theme of the fiction work (Michalski 2019; Shmeleva, 2007). The story begins with a description of the room where the young people,
Natalie and Brantain are located. “It was still quite light out of doors, but inside with the curtains drawn and the smoldering fire sending out a dim, uncertain glow, the room was full of deep shadows” (Chopin, 2020, 225). A set of metaphorical epithets (smoldering fire; a dim, uncertain glow; deep shadows) symbolizes the author’s hint that Brantain still does not know much about the girl he has chosen for a life partner.

However, Brantain adores Natalie, which is expressed by the metaphor in the following sentence. “The obscurity lent him courage to keep his eyes fastened as ardent as he liked upon the girl who sat in the firelight” (Chopin, 2020, 225). The reader’s attention is attracted by the verb fastened, which is a part of the participle function. In this verb, we can observe the relation of two meanings. One meaning expresses the tie between the subject and logic; the second meaning is contextual. Imagery is created by the interaction of subject-logical meaning of the given verb – firmly fixed together - with its contextual meaning – drawing someone’s love, thus expressing a strong attraction of a young man (Brantain) to a girl (Natalie).

In describing characters, the author applies to epithets. The epithet, as an expressive means, is designed in the form of attribute words that have an emotional coloring. It can be considered as the main means of asserting an individual, subjective-evaluative attitude to the described phenomenon. “She was quite composed, as she idly stroked the satiny coat of the cat that lay curled in her lap, and she occasionally sent a slow glance into the shadow where her companion sat” (Chopin, 2020, 225). The epithets of the sentence produce an effective impression about the girl’s nature, which means that she is full of self-assurance (composed; idly stroked; a slow glance) and that luxury is a matter of importance for her (satiny coat of a cat). But her companion, “the rather insignificant and unattractive Brantain was enormously rich”, is characterized by the interaction of subject-logical and contextual meanings based on the relation of the opposite between the unattractiveness of her future spouse and his wealth. This accentuates the girl’s pragmatic choices rather than emotional when thinking of marriage.

But one episode upsets Natalie and interferes with her intentions. “During one of the pauses between their talk… the door opened and a young man entered… The girl turned her face toward him. A stride or two brought him to her side… he pressed an ardent, lingering kiss upon her lips” (Chopin, 2020, 226). That was Mr. Harvey, her brother’s associate and their mutual friend. The epithet “ardent, lingering kiss” expresses the passion between them.

But Natalie is a tricky girl. She invites Brantain to a frank conversation to explain about her relationship with Harvey, whom she calls just “a family friend”. She conceals her passion towards Harvey, which is evidenced by a set of interjections in her speech. They show that the girl is not confident herself in what she is saying, and that unveils the fact of her cheating. ‘Perhaps I should not have sought this interview, Mr. Brantain: but–but, oh, I have been very uncomfortable, …― “Of course, I know it is nothing to you, but for my own sake I do want you to understand that Mr. Harvey is an intimate friend of long standing, Why, we have always been like cousins—like brother and sister, I may say. He is my brother’s most intimate associate and often fancies that he is entitled to the same privileges as the family. Oh, I know it is absurd, uncalled for, to tell you this; undignified even” (Chopin, 2020, 227).

The final part of the story presents the wedding of Natalie and Brantain. But “she felt like a chess player who, by the clever handling of his pieces, sees the game taking the course intended” (Chopin, 2020, 228). The sentence includes simile (like a chess player) to show the girls’ ambition to control Harvey. “Her eyes were bright and tender with a smile … and her lips looked hungry for the kiss which they invited”. But Harvey denies Natalie saying, “… I’ve stopped kissing women; it’s dangerous” (Chopin, 2020, 228).

Metonymy in one of the final sentences “She had Brantain and his million left” shows that the relationship between the subject-logical and contextual values of million is based on identifying a specific relationship between objects, namely, a million as a state for which a girl exchanges her beloved and financial security in the expectation of a profitable marriage with Brantain.

Another fundamental device in the story is the use of irony. There is a variety of instances of verbal irony and significant manifestations of situational irony as well. “A person can’t have everything in this world, and it was a little unreasonable of her to expect it” (Chopin, 2020, 228). Irony is created by the juxtaposition of have everything and a little unreasonable. But the final phrase is not attached to the story as a “moral”, but, prepared for all its development, naturally follows from it.

What is the author’s attitude to her heroine? Presumably, Chopin neither sympathizes, nor condemns her. The imagery leads a reader to a theme touched by the author. It is the crucial influence of financial position to the choices a woman must make at the beginning of the marital life. A young girl is led by the reasons of suitable and ensured future destiny relying on the prosperity of her husband. The social theme of females’ dependence on males is being transferred by the author. The society doesn’t provide the females with possibilities of pursuing a professional career and making their living. This short fiction is a trace of the impact of oppression and suppression under the rule of powerful patriarchy over the woman’s world, in which it denies perspectives for women for self-development and destroys moral conduct of woman towards the system of marriage.
4.2. Story “A Pair of Silk Stockings” (1896)

The plot of the story is set in an unnamed city—a city large enough to have a department store, a fashionable restaurant, a theatre, and a cable car—probably in the early 1890s. The main character, “Little Mrs. Sommers”, a married woman is experiencing an impulse of spending the windfall in the domain of luxury. Once in a blue moon she “found herself the unexpected possessor of fifteen dollars”. But that must have happened at the hard times for her family. “A vision of the future like some dim, gaunt monster sometimes appalled her, but luckily tomorrow never comes” (Chopin, 2020, 263). Surely enough extra money gave her “a feeling of importance”. A mother of four children “walked about apparently in a dreamy state, but really absorbed in speculation and calculation” about reasonable spending the money for her children’s wear. She was the one “who knew the value of bargains; who could stand for hours making her way inch by inch toward the desired object that was selling below cost” (Chopin, 2020, 263).

This time Mrs. Sommers couldn’t help but take “a rest from that laborious and fatiguing function and to have abandoned herself to some mechanical impulse that directed her actions and freed her of responsibility”. And she spends that property very unreasonably for a woman who feels financially insecure. She spends that money to make a few hours of her life a lavish affair with magnificent things and experiences. Those things are silk stockings, suitable shoes and fitting gloves. Those experiences are the supply of glorious food in a fashionable restaurant, a visit to opera and a ride by a cable car.

This fiction attracts attention of short story theorists who express different opinions concerning its theme. One of them would be a manipulation of women’s eagerness by male-controlled monopolist culture. This control is presumed as an effort to support an inexhaustible market for goods and services, specifically for luxury items (Arner, 2009; Giorgelli, 2006; Stein, 2004). We would fully agree with this opinion but with the focus of expanding on the idea of the female aspiration for affluence and richness, enjoyment and extravagance. The story imagery appears in the multiple instances of epithets, similes and metaphors which make an extensive gradation in expressing the theme. The art devices reflect Mrs. Sommers’ feelings about the new possibilities and desire for experiencing a life of a lady, which is expressed by the multitude of above-mentioned imagery. Silk stockings is “a tiara of diamonds”, so that Mrs. Sommers “went on feeling the soft, shiny luxurious things—with both hands now, holding them up to see them glister, and to feel them glide serpent-like through her fingers”. Her stockings, new boots and well fitting gloves “had worked marvels in her bearing—had given her a feeling of assurance, a sense of belonging to the well-dressed multitude”. She is bearing an air of a lady when in the restaurant. “She did not want a profusion; she craved a nice and tasty bite—a half dozen blue-points, a plump chop with cress, a something sweet—a crème-frappée, for instance; a glass of Rhine wine, and after all a small cup of black coffee (Chopin, 2020, 266). The use of terms for French dishes in the menu is a hint to creating a sense of belonging to a class of French aristocracy (Michalski, 2019). Mrs. Sommers keeps the feeling of dignity and stays true to the role of a lady, the role she invented for her personal performance. The price of meals in the restaurant made no difference. “She counted the money out to the waiter and left an extra coin on his tray, whereupon he bowed before her as before a princess of royal blood” (Chopin, 2020, 266).

In the theatre “there were vacant seats here and there, and into one of them she was ushered, between brilliantly dressed women who had gone there to kill time and eat candy and display their gaudy attire”. The epithets (brilliantly dressed women, gaudy attire), trite metaphor (to kill time), high-flown words (display, attire) impressively describe the habits of aristocracy who lead an imposing way of life characterized by the appearance that looks important and general behavior that causes admiration. The feeling of belonging to the party of luxury and grandness liberated Mrs. Sommers for a minute or two from miseries of her emotions concerning constraints of her social position. The introduction of a male character at the end of the story is not a mere chance. Epithets describing the stranger (keen eyes, study of her pale face, wizard enough) and verb metaphors (to puzzle, to decipher, to detect) vividly wind up the reader’s impression on the outlined theme. It looks to be intensified by the expanded metaphor of a final phrase. “In truth, he saw nothing - unless he were wizard enough to detect a poignant wish, a powerful longing that the cable car would never stop anywhere, but go on and on with her forever” (Chopin, 2020, 267). The epithets (poignant wish, powerful longing, forever) highlight illusory hopes of the heroine.

Evidently Chopin doesn’t perceive the marital status of a heroine as the matter of importance to the theme of the story. The focus is given to Mrs. Sommers’ activity around the downtown of a city within a few hours of a certain day. This story may seem to be about the lack of motherhood responsibility or being a vulnerable victim of customer relationship management. But it looks like a narrative of a woman who adventures spending the unexpected money on a short period of self-care that she deserved and was long overdue for. In the first part of the story the author shows her initial self-struggle with the guilt of doing anything for herself with the money instead of spending it on her children. This description supports the idea of women suffering pressure to become martyrs to their families and relatives. So many women put themselves last and don’t practice any self-attention.
5. Conclusion

Kate Chopin, an acknowledged master of short fiction, is known for the brilliant description of the fate of her contemporaries, women of different ages and classes. The influential writer forms an overall image of the female representatives of American society in the second half of the XIX century, namely, women - characters, who consciously abandon the accepted stereotype of female behavior in the creep of a new more meaningful life.

The two stories “The Kiss” and “Pair of Silk Stockings” present a fair matter for doing a research on gender. They are similar in the fact that the main characters belong to stratum of people whose level is determined by the financial boundaries. Each heroine is aware of power of finance which could provide a chance to step up higher in a social position, no matter real or imaginary. These concepts are based on the traditions and social practices of the society of that time as well as on the study of imagery (metaphors, metonymies, epithets, interjections, irony) patterns. The paper depicts how women face and confront inappropriate social conventions. The stories show the writer’s assumption about the conflict between opportunity and social conformity that is crucial in establishing women’s identity. It may be concluded that the linguistic approach in analyzing the imagery of the art fiction has been useful in understanding the representation of the Chopin’s message about the importance of woman’ freedom and other personal possessions. It is expected that the results of this study will show new directions for researchers in both literary and linguistic studies to give focus to writers’ art language as a means in interpretation of fiction literature texts.

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