

Anna Rogozhnikova (Kazakhstan)

I've never been faced with the problem of gender, even in the embryonic period of my existence. When my mum learned that she was pregnant, she thought: "Well, here *she* is." At least, she says so. And I don't have any apparent reason not to trust her. It's a common truth: everything mum says is right. So, without doubts, I'm a woman—with all the ensuing consequences. And I am very grateful to my karyotype for both of my X's. Thanks to God for activating the right hemisphere of my brain, not the left one. Thanks to Chinese religion, according to which I'm yin and my colour is elegant black. And thanks to society for taking me not just as a human being, but as a woman. Thanks to everyone.

Now let's pass on to literature. To classify literature is a fascinating and gratifying thing. People love to love something for something, and classifications generously give them such opportunity. Some of us love the Japanese literature of the Heian era for its contemplativeness. Others persistently admire the complexity of the literature of stream-of-consciousness, or respect the classics for their monumentality. I even know a guy who has chosen socialist realism as his favorite reading matter—for its exoticism! But I've never met anybody who would confess to loving female literature. Female literature seems to be an even greater oxymoron than female boxing. Everyone denies its right of existence. Female writers say they don't want to be united on the basis of their sexual characteristics (it seems to me, that actually, they all as women prefer to be surrounded by men, even in poetic anthologies). And prudent critics assure us, that there is no female or male literature, there is only bad or good literature. I think that in this case political correctness is not required at all. It's a bit difficult to divide literature into bad and good—even God doesn't dare to mark us with pluses and minuses—though it is impossible to divide literature into male and female also. Male literature is a tautology, like the American Internet or English postage stamps. But I believe that female literature can be singled out.

It is not the number of books written by women (that slighting division made on a sexual basis). *Karlsson-on-the-Roof* by Astrid Lindgren, for instance, is hardly a female text. Texts about women are not female literature either. Otherwise 90% of world literature would be female. I don't think everyone would accept those statistics. And of course, female literature is not books for women. Men read a lot; they read even knitting manuals and *Cosmopolitan* (once I saw a sentimental pile of women's magazines in the very masculine bathroom of my very masculine male friend).

Female literature is a special way of investigating life. Hedonistically-inclined ladies not burdened by feministic views look at the world in a languorous way. We look around absent-mindedly and unhurriedly until we notice our reflection and—here we go. Creative comprehension of the world begins. We study the world, chasing that reflection of ours. The most talented and keen of us sometimes go so far away that they can touch the Lord's beard or—if they've chosen another direction—catch the devil's tail. We don't make abstractions, we don't analyze life impartially as men do. We act very subjectively. Our prime interest is everything that quotes us. Therefore, in our own texts, we first of all quote ourselves. All the love stories we write about—each of them could happen to us. Compliments given by our heroes to their beloveds are our hidden compliments to ourselves. Every death, every sigh, every shame, every mistake, every insight—all these could be ours. Our texts are our quite-possible worlds. We feel in literature as if we are in a fitting room. We create the lives which we could live ourselves with great pleasure (sometimes with masochistic pleasure). But often the price happens to be too high, and we only admire ourselves in the looking-glass, then return the clothes and continue to live within our means. Narcissism and self-reflection—female literature is extremely egocentric. We perceive reality as a continuation of ourselves, as scenery for our performance. We do not write about the man, we write about our love for him. Even if we write about the man whom we are not in love with and will never be, we do it to show how impartial and objective we are sometimes. Briefly, although the man plays the leading role in our show, he is not more than a visual aid for the demonstration of all the amplitude of women's feelings. Look. I can

forgive anything, I can understand anything, I can understand nothing and never forgive you—I can do everything. I even can turn myself inside out, and all this so-called wonderful world will roll up in my belly. More precisely—in the text. We'll never cease to sublimate our maternal instinct in literature. I've recently read that a Russian writer, Elena Guro, admitted once: "Sometimes it seems to me: I am a mother to everything." Sometimes it seems the same to me too. And also sometimes it seems to me that I'm everyone's wife. Or forty thousand brothers' sister. Not at the same time, of course—my poor heart is not able to hold so much. It means just that anybody has a chance to take part in my performance. Absolutely everyone. Certainly, while I write.

In conclusion I'd like to give some more thanks. To men. I consider them to be martyrs. Devotees who kindly took the responsibility for the world's destiny. Someone should have done it. So this is the man's world, and it's easier for women to live here. And to write. Men always must be responsible for their words. We don't have to be. The female nature allows us to change our mind at any moment we need. And who will dare to reproach us? If I was a man, and somebody asked me what I had written all my rubbish for, I would go silently to shoot myself, not knowing how to answer this eternal question. But being a female writer I could say: "Well, you know, the sky was too grey, the wind—too southeast, I broke a heel and become disillusioned with the idea of endless love that very day. It was absolutely impossible to write anything worthy, as you can see." And they would be sure to understand me.