

A Man's World? Gender in Film Criticism

Vaida's talk drew on her BA thesis which carefully examined the differences between the writing styles of male and female film critics, especially with regard to the evaluative features found in reviews. To put it otherwise, does the critic's belonging to either gender reflect on his or her textual voice? The results of Vaida's study, which examined a large sample of reviews (amounting to about 40,000 running words), coding them according to specific conceptual categories, answer in the positive: male critics do tend to be more evaluative and assertive towards their readers, sometimes expressing their criticisms quite bluntly; female critics, by contrast, tend to be more descriptive, to build solidarity with the reader and express their reservations more tactfully (e.g. through humorous similes). Although this may look like a niche field against the backdrop of more blatant cases of inequalities between the two genders (e.g. pay gap, career opportunities, perception of social standing, up to verbal discrimination and physical abuse...), it is still telling that even professional discourse is not insulated from reputedly 'male' (e.g. assertiveness, aggressiveness) or 'female' (e.g. collaboration, tact) attitudes. During the debate, it was discussed whether these subtle linguistic differences – alongside the much higher number of officially recognized male critics – contribute to an effective marginalisation of the female critics' voices, and what steps may be taken to empower them. Some encouraging figures from recent studies were also cited, meaning that the direction undertaken is the right one, set on the path of equality and towards a pluralism of views that will truly reflect the varied sociological composition and tastes of the general public. All in all, a fresh and rigorous take on a topic whose implications extend far beyond mere linguistic analysis, making it relevant to us all.

Talk by Vaida Matijoškaitė, 31st October 2019

Report by Davide Castiglione, 5th December 2019