

## GENRE AND LINGUOSTYLISTIC PECULIARITIES OF CONTEMPORARY FICTION ROMANCE (A STUDY OF DANIELLE STEEL'S NOVELS)

**Mintsys E. Ye.**

*Senior Lecturer at the English Philology Department,  
Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University  
ella.mintsys@pnu.edu.ua  
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1891-4658  
Scopus Author ID: 56268947800*

**Kryshtopa L. I.**

*Associate Professor at the Department of Philology and Translation,  
National Technical University of Oil and Gas  
liudmyla.kryshtopa@nung.edu.ua  
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5274-0217  
Scopus Author ID: 57193353636*

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The article deals with the analysis of the fiction romance genre as a widespread phenomenon in contemporary mass culture which enjoys no small popularity among readers. Literary critics' controversial views on the genre have been commented on. The article is aimed at highlighting peculiarities of fiction romance on the example of Danielle Steel's novels and the analysis of the main text-forming tendencies of the writer. The empirical material on which the present study is based originates from 14 romance novels by Danielle Steel, one of the best-selling fiction authors. The present research has analyzed the objective of the genre, its structural and plot-related peculiarities. A lot of attention has been paid to the text-making and linguo-poetics of the writer's literary discourse wherein various lexical figures of speech such as similes, hyperboles, epithets, etc., and their combinations play an important role in presenting the protagonists, describing their appearance, character and psychological state. It is notable that the variety of synonyms occurring in the target discourse make the text more varied, help to avoid the monotony of repeating the same words, are used for emphasis and testify to the writer's rich power of words. Of special interest are religious, historical, literary and other allusions which reflect the author's skill and challenge the reader's erudition. Besides, multiple use of the lexeme "eyes" made it possible to single out 10 conceptual metaphors which are useful for deeper understanding complex ideas in simple terms. In D. Steel's plots, the women characters find happiness owing to hope which they sooner or later come across and which introduces changes in their life, improves the situation, helps solve the problems and overcome difficulties. Moreover, some characters are described against the background of historic events, such as the war in Vietnam, the sinking of the Titanic, etc., which makes the narration true-to-life. The present study concludes that fiction romance is not deprived of its stylistic merit and should not be underestimated.

## ЖАНРОВІ ТА ЛІНГВОСТИЛІСТИЧНІ ОСОБЛИВОСТІ СУЧАСНОГО ЖІНОЧОГО РОМАНУ (НА МАТЕРІАЛІ ПРОЗИ ДАНІЕЛИ СТІЛ)

**Мінцис Е. Є.**

*старший викладач кафедри англійської філології,  
Прикарпатський національний університет імені Василя Стефаника  
ella.mintsys@pnu.edu.ua  
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1891-4658  
Scopus Author ID: 56268947800*

**Криштопа Л. І.**

*доцент кафедри філології та перекладу,  
Національний технічний університет нафти і газу  
liudmyla.kryshtopa@nung.edu.ua  
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5274-0217  
Scopus Author ID: 57193353636*

**Ключові слова:** жіночий роман, лінгвостилістичні особливості, масова культура, стилістичні засоби, фігури мови.

У статті проаналізовано особливості сучасного англомовного жіночого роману як літературного жанру, поширеного явища сучасної масової культури, який користується чималою популярністю серед читачів. Розглянуто наявні суперечливі погляди літературознавців щодо цього жанру. У статті окреслено мету жанру любовного роману (роману про кохання) та його сюжетні особливості на прикладі творів Данієли Стіл, а також проаналізовано основні тенденції текстотворення письменниці. Матеріал дослідження охоплює 14 романів Данієли Стіл, які посідають чільне місце серед найпопулярніших і найуспішніших бестселерів художньої літератури сьогодення. Чимала увага приділяється текстотворенню та лінгвопоетиці художнього дискурсу авторки. Для стилю Данієли Стіл характерні такі фігури мови, як художні порівняння, гіперболи, епітети тощо, а також їх комбінації, завдяки яким письменниця зображає головних героїв, змальовуючи їхню зовнішність, риси характеру та психологічний стан. Варто зазначити, що синоніми, які застосовуються у проаналізованому дискурсі, урізноманітнюють мову тексту, допомагають уникнути тавтології, виконують функцію емпізи та свідчать про багатство мови авторки. Цікавими вважаємо релігійні, історичні, літературні та інші алюзії, які майстерно вплетені в текст та розраховані на ерудованого читача. Крім цього, завдяки багаторазовому використанню лексеми “eyes” (очі) ми виділили 10 концептуальних метафор, які є корисними для глибшого проникнення у психологічний стан героїв. У сюжетах Данієли Стіл жінки знаходять щастя завдяки надії, яка врешті-решт з’являється на їхньому шляху та докорінно змінює їхнє життя, допомагає покращити життєву ситуацію, вирішити наявні проблеми та подолати труднощі. Важливим є те, що деякі персонажі зображені на тлі історичних подій, наприклад війни у В’єтнамі, загибелі Титаніка тощо, що наближає художню вигадку до дійсності. Унаслідок аналізу творів Данієли Стіл ми дійшли висновку, що жіночий роман має певну стилістичну цінність, яку не можна недооцінювати.

## Introduction

It was in early 20<sup>th</sup> century that mass culture emerged. The term “mass culture” implies availability, prevalence of artistic and cultural values, ease of perception requiring no special aesthetic taste. Although the genre of romance is rather popular in contemporary mass culture, its perception in society is not homogeneous. On the one hand, there exists an assumption that “romance novels form a cornerstone of popular culture” (Kirtley & Kirtley, 2021: 1). A number of literary critics support the idea that “the study of popular romance is significant because romance genres encourage female empowerment, examine and comment on social, political, and economic themes within modern culture, and provide a space for escape, imagination, and reflection” (Choyke, 2019: 3). On the other hand, Lauren Cameron’s analysis of this literary phenomenon concludes that although romance fiction is one of the most popular fiction genres in the United Kingdom and the United States, “romance, as a genre, has been ridiculed by larger society since its advent” and “still receives little to no respect” (Cameron, 2020: 1–3) as some part of society sees romance fiction as “trashy” (Chelton, 2018), “fluffy”, “smut” (Reid, 2019), empty of serious content, predictable, “low-brow” (Mintsys, 2014); and there exist certain stereotypes related to it. E.g., V. Hrechenko, I. Chorni, V. Kushneruk and V. Rezhko claim that women’s novels are stories of romantic love, which bring the reader into the world of illusion full of beautiful women and strong men, pseudo conflicts which are resolved at the end of the literary work (Греченко та ін., 2006: 252). Ya. Chaikivska considers that the essence of idealized love does not focus on sexuality, it is a woman’s attempt to enter a man’s world by means of sharing power through wedlock (Чайківська, 2005). She does not aim at having power over the man, she yearns to reach another aim, inaccessible for her sphere of life, instead. Whereas sexuality puts at stake the identity of a woman’s “I”, in which she is just an object and cannot wish for anything except being liked. However, according to H. Uliura, central to romance is a desire “to convey a woman’s peculiar worldview and female practices” (Улюра, 2008). The object of this genre, as Oksana Zabuzhko puts it, is “a woman as she is”.

Despite the controversy that the genre of romance triggered in the literary world and traditionally received little respect from critics, there is no denying that it has a numerous readership and is not deprived of its merits. Among the most prolific writers of the genre in question is Danielle Steel, one of the best-selling fiction authors. This fact should be enough to elevate the genre (Cameron, 2020). The author has written 179 books, which have been translated into 43 languages. Twenty-two of them

have been adapted for television, and two of those adaptations have received Golden Globe nominations. D. Steel releases seven new novels *a year*. In 1989 she was listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for having a book on the *New York Times* best-seller list for 381 weeks in a row (Leach, 2019).

Thus, due to the popularity of contemporary fiction romance, on the one hand, and its controversial interpretation by literary critics, on the other one, the **objective** of the present research is highlighting peculiarities of this literary genre on the example of Danielle Steel’s novels and the analysis of the main text-forming tendencies of the writer. The **topicality** of the article results from the necessity of defining peculiarities of women’s literary style and lack of researches focusing on the linguo-stylistic analysis of fiction romance.

## Materials and methods

The empirical material on which the present study is based originates from 14 romance novels written by Danielle Steel. The total number of pages of the excerpted texts is more than five thousand. The methods used in the present study are as follows: 1) the method of stylistic analysis which helped to define the correlation between language means employed for expressive conveyance of intellectual, emotional or aesthetic content of the text; 2) the method of conceptual study (Болдырев, 2000) combined with the method of systematization of conceptual metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) helped in singling out metaphoric concepts; 3) a descriptive analysis of the figures of speech used in the romance novels in question; 4) quantitative analysis which contributed to singling out conceptual metaphors.

The corpus comprises lexical means and figures of speech occurring in Danielle Steel’s literary works. The examples are selected by means of manual selection procedure. The choice of the literary works which constitute the empirical material of the article results from the fact that Danielle Steel is the world famous author of the genre of romance, the fourth best-selling writer of all time. Some critics state that her name and the term “literary romance” are synonyms (Афоніна, 2020: 8).

## Discussion

It is natural that love is in the focus of Danielle Steel’s novels whose plots are at first sight trivial, similar to each other and predictable. But in fact every romance has its own conflicts, intrigues, unexpected twists, happy and tragic moments. The author herself claims that her works are about human characters rather than love. She perceives love which constitutes a part of life as a category, but in fact she writes about situations in which we find ourselves: losses, war, illnesses, work, career, good and bad things, crimes, anything (Flood, 2010). Her novels help her give

people hope as we cannot live without it (Kennedy, 2008). It is true that all her women characters find happiness owing to hope which sooner or later appears on their way and helps them change their life dramatically, improve the situation, solve the problems, overcome difficulties and rise like Phoenix from the ashes. It is symbolic that the writer gives her main characters telling names (e.g. *Hope, Faith*).

In some novels, the relationships between protagonists are depicted against the background of historic events. E.g.: *No Greater Love* (1991) – the sinking of the Titanic, *Message from Nam* (1990) – assassination of John Kennedy and war in Vietnam, *Zoya* (1988) – Russian revolution of 1917 and slaughter of the Tzar family, *Crossings* (1982) – World War II, etc. It adds dramatic flavour to the description of the characters, whose “rebirth” is perceived by the reader as real stories of real people who participated in or witnessed those events.

As far as the language of Danielle Steel’s novels is concerned, it is emotionally charged, picturesque and colourful, and at the same time simple and comprehensible. With great skill, the author employs various language means and figures of speech in describing life situations, dramatic episodes, characters and nature. While reading her novels, one cannot but notice that one of the peculiarities of the writer’s style is the use of the lexeme *eyes* in portraying the protagonists’ appearance, character, mood, behavior, etc. In the fourteen analyzed novels the word *eyes* occurs more than three hundred times. Thus, introducing her personages, first of all, the author draws the reader’s attention to their eyes as “eyes are mirrors of the soul”: *Marjorie was an angelic-looking blonde with blue eyes, and looked like a Madonna in an Italian painting* (Steel, 2006: 3). *She had brilliant blue eyes that seemed to examine every inch of him as he stood there* (Steel, 1997: 54). *The only startling thing about her was her deep violet eyes* (Steel, 2009: 4). *She was very pale and had big green eyes that looked anything but happy* (Steel, 2006: 48). Describing eyes, D. Steel’s expresses various shades of feelings and emotions of the characters: *Alex’s eyes were serious when she saw her father. She looked at him with heartbroken eyes. She saw something ominous in his eyes. She had seen the look of panic in his eyes. He had laughing eyes. There was worry in her eyes, and concern, and admiration and affection. Teddy came running into her room with terrified eyes. She asked, with a flash of jealousy in her eyes as he laughed. And then she looked at him with ravaged eyes. She looked like a child with huge frightened eyes filled with sorrow.*

Multiple use of the lexeme *eyes* in different contexts made it possible to single out such conceptual metaphors:

– “EYES – CONTAINERS”: *Tears filled her eyes. Her eyes were full of questions. His eyes were full of sorrow. There was something deep and sad in Faith’s eyes. Her eyes were two deep pools of pain. Audrey looked at her with empty eyes.*

– “EYES – WEAPON”: *Her eyes shot bullets into his. She shouted back at him, her green eyes blazing into his like M-16 rifles. And then she looked at Ophillie with huge eyes that pierced her mother’s like knives.*

– “EYES – TOOLS”: *Her eyes bored into his like drills, as though asking a thousand questions. His eyes bored into hers as though he had something to say to her.*

– “EYES – DANCERS”: *“That must be very exciting,” she said as her eyes danced. Her eyes were dancing with anticipation. Her eyes dancing with delight.*

– “EYES – SPEAKERS”: *Her eyes said she didn’t mean it. Something in her eyes told him she’s seen hard times. Faith said quietly, looking at him with imploring eyes. Her eyes were speaking volumes.*

– “EYES – LIGHT, FIRE”: *Tana’s eyes flashed, and her tongue was too quick to control. Her mother’s eyes had blazed black fire. Faith had white heat in her eyes. His eyes filled with light as he said her name. Bill had bright blue eyes that shone with a kind expression. Isabelle asked, with dangerously glittering eyes. Her eyes lit up like the Fourth of July.*

– “EYES – TRAITORS”: *Everything about him resisted her, but his eyes gave him away.*

– “EYES – GHOSTS”: *He sat down and looked into the blue eyes that had haunted him for so long.*

– “EYES – METAL”: *His eyes were as cold as steel as he looked them over.*

– “EYES – SKY”: *His eyes clouded as he said her name.*

Another peculiar feature of D. Steel’s style is the use of various lexical, phraseological stylistic devices. It testifies to the author’s great linguistic taste and skill. Among the most frequently used figures or speech are similes, epithets, metaphors, hyperboles, allusions, etc.

Thus, the simile *And now Faith felt like a monster if she didn’t agree* (Steel, 2003: 136) renders the main character’s psychological state. It is with great precision that the epic simile reflects the woman’s happiness caused by the rebirth of her old love: *I’m glad we found each other again, Fred. You’re like a gift to my life. You suddenly make it all worthwhile. It’s like a gold coin you thought you lost years ago, and find in the back of a drawer, and not only is it as beautiful as it once was, but you discover it’s become even more valuable than it used to be* (Steel, 2003: 155).

The texts of the novels are abundant in different types of allusions (religious, geographical, historical,

etc.): *Watching all her married friends leave with each other made her feel like the only single species on Noah's ark* (Steel, 2006: 73); *The house is leaking like a sieve, and I've got Niagara Falls in my kitchen* (Steel, 2006: 46); *"I think you remind me of <...> Joan of Arc, I think you call her Jeanne d'Arc, she believed in all the same things you do. The truth, the power of the sword in the name of God, and freedom"* (Steel, 1990: 199).

Moreover, emotionally charged epithets usually used in chains also contribute a lot to the language of the novels, making it rich and colourful: *Beatrice Andrews was dutiful, loyal, organized, well-dressed, pleasant, polite, perfectly bred* (Steel, 1990: 8); *She was gentle, sensitive, cautious, thoughtful, generous of spirit, and nurturing in every possible way* (Steel, 2003: 198). We also find examples of inverted epithets: *He was a huge teddy bear of a man* (Steel, 2007: 14).

In many cases stylistic devices are poly-functional, occurring in various combinations: *The whole disaster was moving with the speed of sound, and if nothing else, she wanted to slow it down* (Steel, 2003: 265) – metaphor+hyperbole; *She looked like a volcano about to erupt when her older sister intervened* (Steel, 2003: 98) – simile+hyperbole, etc. It is notable that in most cases one of the components of such combinations is hyperbole which is a characteristic feature of women's discourse. In D. Steel's novels hyperboles have different "colours" – from deeply dramatic to humorously ironic: *"We'll have you over to dinner sometime," Peter said cheerfully, "after we get a bulldozer in to clear out the kitchen. I think we still have pizza in the oven from last year but I'm afraid to look"* (Steel, 1990: 55); *Allison was fourteen years older than Faith, and at sixty-one, she seemed a thousand years old to her* (Steel, 2003: 19); *And in his own life, he had Mount Everest to climb now* (Steel, 2001: 289).

Being a mother of many children herself, Danielle Steel writes about kids with tenderness, sympathy, love and deep sorrow (in case of losing a child). These feelings are conveyed by various figures of speech: allusion+epithets – *He looked like the Little Prince in Saint Exupery's book, as he sat cross-legged on his bed, with his silky hair in soft curls around his face* (Steel, 1996: 262); metaphor+simile – *That was the trouble with children <...> They crept right into your soul, like a splinter under a fingernail, and then it hurt like hell when you removed them* (Steel, 2003: 9); sustained metaphor – *Even as a small child, Pip had become the little fairy who flew above it all, touching each of them gently, and trying to make peace between them* (Steel, 2003: 28).

Another typical feature and evidence of the richness of the texts created by Danielle Steel is the use of ideographic and contextual synonyms

which help to specify feelings and emotions, highlight a certain idea or avoid tautology and introduce variety of expression: *Olympia was a fantastic woman, a great mother to all her children, a terrific attorney, and a wonderful wife* (Steel, 2007: 14); *The flames of disappointment and grief and anguish were fanned into outrage* (Steel, 2006: 9); *It was hard to believe it had all come to an end. Ten years in London gone, finished, closed and suddenly behind him* (Steel, 1996: 1); *Left there, unwanted, unloved, unadmired, forgotten* (Steel, 1979: 215); *Maybe she had no other choice. She felt cornered, beaten, and trapped* (Steel, 2009: 338).

### Results

Thus, the present study enables us to make a conclusion that in terms of the plot, Danielle Steel's novels belong to the genre of a typical fiction romance. However, at the same time they have peculiarities which contradict the existing stereotypes related to this genre. Her novels are not only about love. Almost all Danielle Steel's female characters are smart, self-reliant, strong, motivated and determined women whose spirit cannot be broken by betrayal or a close person's death. They never lose hope and strive for changes. Besides, in some of her novels the relationships between the characters are disclosed against the background of some famous historic events. Danielle Steel's romances are characterized by the richness and variety of lingvo-poetics. Owing to the stylistic devices such as epithets, similes, metaphors, similes and others, the author with great precision and expressiveness depicts thoughts, shades of feelings, emotional and psychological state of the characters and relations between them. All the above-mentioned facts make these novels easy to understand and interesting to read. Moreover, they make the reader think about the problems touched upon in them. The results of the present study can be used in teaching the courses of literary criticism and stylistics. In further research it is needed to look into the role of syntactic devices in Danielle Steel's text-making, as syntax is a conductor of strong emotions.

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