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## WORK, BURNOUT, AND EMOTIONAL BALANCE IN WOMEN-CENTRED FICTION

*Work in the analysed texts does not appear as a separate sphere and is not organised independently from other aspects of experience. It is present within routines, communication and interaction and remains connected to the situations in which the character acts. Professional activity is not limited to tasks or career development and does not form an independent line. It unfolds through everyday actions, interruptions and exchanges that structure the character's day and place work alongside other forms of activity.*

*Burnout is not named and is not introduced as a separate theme. It becomes visible in fatigue, in disruption of routine, in changes in communication and in withdrawal. These elements occur within the same fragments and are not separated from each other. They are present together in the situations in which the character acts and interacts and are reconstructed through them rather than defined directly.*

*Emotional balance does not appear as a stable or achieved state. It is present in separate moments and remains limited to the situations in which it occurs. These moments are connected with interaction, with shared space and with specific actions and do not extend beyond them. They do not accumulate and do not repeat in the same form. Changes in communication, in context and in the conditions of action affect them directly.*

*The analysis is based on a corpus of contemporary English- and French-language novels and focuses on fragments in which work, fatigue, communication and emotional states occur together. Attention is given to how these elements are combined within the same passages and remain connected to each other. Work, burnout and emotional balance are considered not as separate categories but as elements that are organised within the same narrative situations.*

**Key words:** *women-centred fiction; work; burnout; emotional balance; everyday routines; interaction; communication; narrative organisation; emotional experience; contemporary prose.*

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## ПРАЦЯ, ПРОФЕСІЙНЕ ВИГОРАННЯ ТА ЕМОЦІЙНИЙ БАЛАНС У ЖІНКОЦЕНТРИЧНІЙ ХУДОЖНІЙ ПРОЗІ

*Праця в проаналізованих текстах не постає як окрема сфера і не організується незалежно від інших аспектів досвіду. Вона присутня в рутині, комунікації та взаємодії й залишається пов'язаною з ситуаціями, у яких діє персонаж. Професійна діяльність не обмежується виконанням завдань або кар'єрним розвитком і не формує окремої лінії. Вона розгортається через повсякденні дії, переривання та обміни, які структурують день персонажа і співіснують з іншими формами діяльності, не відокремлюючись від них.*

*Професійне вигорання не називається і не вводиться як окрема тема. Воно стає помітним у втомі, у порушенні рутин, у змінах комунікації та в униканні. Ці елементи виникають в одних і тих самих фрагментах і не відокремлюються один від одного. Вони присутні разом у ситуаціях, у яких персонаж діє і взаємодіє, і відтворюються через них, а не визначаються безпосередньо, залишаючись пов'язаними з конкретними діями та контекстами.*

*Емоційний баланс не постає як стабільний або досягнутий стан. Він присутній в окремих моментах і залишається обмеженим ситуаціями, у яких виникає. Ці моменти пов'язані з взаємодією, зі спільним простором і з конкретними діями та не виходять за їх межі. Вони не накопичуються і не повторюються в однаковій формі. Зміни в комунікації, контексті та умовах дії безпосередньо впливають на них.*

*Аналіз здійснено на матеріалі корпусу сучасних англомовних і франкомовних романів і зосереджено на фрагментах, у яких праця, втома, комунікація та емоційні стани співіснують. Увагу зосереджено на тому, як ці*

*елементи поєднуються в межах одних і тих самих фрагментів і залишаються пов'язаними між собою. Праця, вигорання та емоційний баланс розглядаються не як окремі категорії, а як елементи, організовані в межах одних і тих самих нарративних ситуацій, що дозволяє простежити їх взаємозв'язок у межах тексту.*

**Ключові слова:** жіноцентрична проза; праця; професійне вигорання; емоційний баланс; повсякденні рутини; взаємодія; комунікація; нарративна організація; емоційний досвід; сучасна проза.

**Introduction.** Work in contemporary contexts tends to appear alongside a range of emotional demands, expectations, and socially shaped patterns of behaviour that accompany everyday activity. These elements do not form a separate layer but are present in the way professional and personal experience is organised and perceived, often emerging in connection with routine actions, communication, and interaction. Contemporary societies place particular emphasis on productivity, self-realisation, and emotional stability, requiring individuals not only to perform their professional roles but also to manage their internal states in line with socially accepted models of balance and resilience. Within this context, the phenomenon of burnout has emerged not merely as a psychological condition but as a broader cultural and social experience connected with the organisation of work, the distribution of emotional labour, and the constant necessity to negotiate between professional responsibilities and personal well-being. These processes are especially visible in relation to women, whose professional trajectories are often accompanied by additional expectations related to care, emotional involvement, and relational responsibility, which extend beyond the boundaries of formal employment and become part of everyday life.

These tendencies find a particularly clear representation in contemporary women-centred fiction, where work, emotional exhaustion, and the search for balance are not presented as isolated themes but are embedded in the structure of narrative situations and character interactions. Professional life in these texts is not limited to descriptions of tasks or career development, to tasks or career trajectories. It is shown through routines, interruptions, and interactions that form the character's daily experience of work. Burnout is not introduced as an explicit theme and is not named directly. Burnout is not named and is not introduced as a separate theme. It becomes noticeable in fatigue, in broken routines, in changes in communication, and in the way situations are perceived. These elements are present within the same fragments of the text and are not separated from each other. Emotional balance is not stable and does not appear as something achieved. It is tied to particular situations and depends on how the character acts and responds. It emerges in specific situations and remains dependent on the circumstances in

which the character acts and interacts. In this way, women-centred prose provides material for analysing how professional life and emotional experience are interconnected and how literary representation reflects broader transformations in the understanding of work and well-being.

Literature review. The problem of burnout and emotional experience in relation to work has been extensively addressed in psychological and sociological research, where it is approached through the concepts of emotional labour, stress and professional exhaustion. The early works by H. J. Freudenberger [7] and later studies by C. Maslach and S. Jackson [15] as well as C. Maslach, W. B. Schaufeli and M. P. Leiter [16] define burnout as a state associated with emotional depletion, reduced involvement and changes in professional functioning. Burnout in these studies appears as a condition that can be identified and measured. The notion of emotional labour refers to regulation of internal states in connection with professional roles. A. R. Hochschild [12] introduces this concept as a form of work embedded in social interaction, while A. A. Grandey [9] and C. M. Brotheridge and R. T. Lee [5] describe it as a process involving continuous management of emotions in professional contexts. The connection between emotional labour and burnout is further supported in later studies, where emotional demands are shown to function as one of the key factors contributing to professional exhaustion [14].

Emotional experience is considered in relation to cultural expectations and social norms that are present in how it is organised and interpreted. E. Illouz [13] analyses the interrelation between emotional life and economic structures, showing how personal experience is organised through cultural models of work, relationships and self-realisation. S. Ahmed [1] considers emotional states in connection with ideas of happiness and well-being. S. Banet-Weiser [4] examines models of femininity in popular culture. R. Gill and S. Orgad [8] focus on expectations of resilience and emotional stability in women's experience. These studies make it possible to consider burnout and emotional balance not only as psychological phenomena but as experiences shaped within specific cultural and discursive conditions.

Despite the substantial body of research on emotional labour and burnout, literary representations

of these phenomena remain less systematically addressed. The texts that form the material of the present study [2; 3; 6; 10; 11; 17] depict work and emotional experience not through abstract categories but through everyday situations, routines and interactions in which professional activity is embedded. In these narratives, burnout is not introduced as a defined state and is not named directly. It is reflected in the organisation of narrative fragments, in changes in behaviour, communication and perception. Emotional balance is likewise not presented as a stable condition but appears within particular situations and remains dependent on the circumstances of action and interaction. This indicates the need to consider how the experience of work and emotional states are represented in women-centred fiction at the level of narrative organisation, which remains insufficiently explored in existing research.

**The aim of the article** is to examine how work, burnout and emotional balance are represented in women-centred fiction through everyday routines, interactions and narrative contexts in which these experiences become visible without being named directly.

**Methodology.** The analysis is based on a corpus of contemporary English- and French-language novels, including *Everything I Know About Love* [2], *Ghosts* [3], *Beach Read* [11], *Une belle vie* [10], *La vie rêvée des chaussettes orphelines* [17] and *Les femmes du bout du monde* [6]. The selection is limited to texts organised around a female focalising character and centred on everyday experience.

The methods include close reading of selected fragments, contextual and interpretative analysis of narrative situations, and a comparative approach across English- and French-language texts. The analysis focuses on fragments in which work, fatigue, communication and emotional states are present together and remain connected within the same passages. These elements are considered in relation to the situations in which they occur and are not treated as separate categories.

The comparison across the texts makes it possible to trace recurring patterns and to identify similarities in the organisation of work-related experience and emotional states. The analysis remains at the level of narrative organisation, with attention to repetition, interruption and variation in action, speech and perception.

**Results and Discussion.** Work as part of everyday organisation of experience. Work in the analysed texts is not presented as a separate or clearly bounded sphere. It appears within everyday routines and is embedded in actions that structure the character's

day. In *Everything I Know About Love*, lists, messages and small tasks form a continuous sequence of activity, where work is not separated from daily life. The presence of routine is explicit in fragments such as “Weekly Shopping List” and short task-based entries [2, p. 63–65], where professional and non-professional actions follow the same pattern and are not distinguished structurally.

In *Ghosts*, work is shown through communication that accompanies and interrupts it. In *Ghosts*, communication is present in the same fragments as other actions. The opening scenes are built around short sequences of messages and replies: “I checked my phone... My best friend... WhatsApped me... My friend... sent a gif” [3, p. 8–9]. These exchanges follow one another without separation and occur within the same sequence of everyday actions. Work does not appear independently from them and is not isolated from this flow.

In *Beach Read*, writing as work unfolds through repetition and interruption. It is not presented as a continuous process but as something that happens between other actions. The narrator explicitly frames experience through writing routines, where “I like to think we all do” and builds narrative through fragments rather than completed tasks [11, p. 10]. Work here is not separated from reflection, memory or interaction and remains dependent on them.

In *Les femmes du bout du monde*, activity connected with work appears within movement and changing situations. In *Les femmes du bout du monde*, action is presented through movement and through interaction that accompany it from the very beginning of the text. The opening statement “J’irai au bout du monde” [6, p. 5] is followed by scenes in which the character is already in motion, and this movement continues through subsequent fragments together with *speech, reactions and presence of others*. These elements are not separated and do not form distinct layers. They appear within the same sequences, where action develops step by step and remains connected with the situations in which it takes place.

In *Une belle vie*, the organisation of scenes is built around interaction between characters. In *Une belle vie*, “elles ont grandi l’une contre l’autre” (Grimaldi, 2023, p. 5). The text moves through scenes in which the sisters remain together, speak to each other, return to the same moments. Conversation, shared space, memory – these appear in the same fragments and continue across them. The same situations reoccur, with small changes, but without separation into different layers. Work does not form a separate layer but remains part of the same situations in which characters interact and respond to each other.

Across the texts, work is consistently combined with communication and care. It is carried out through interaction and through responding to others, and is therefore not isolated from everyday experience. Routines, interruptions and communication do not accompany work from the outside but form the contexts in which it appears.

Burnout without naming: how it becomes visible. Burnout is not named in the analysed texts and does not appear as a separate category. It is not introduced through definition or direct description and does not form an independent line of narration. It becomes noticeable within fragments in which several elements are present at once and remain connected to each other.

In *Ghosts*, “I was so tired” [3, p. 62]. The phrase stands within dialogue and is followed by further lines. “I absolutely hate my job, but I don’t know what else I want to do” [3, p. 63] appears in the same exchange. The conversation continues, but the responses become shorter, with pauses between them. These elements are not separated. Fatigue, uncertainty and work-related tension are present within the same sequence and remain tied to interaction.

In *Everything I Know About Love*, the same combination can be observed in fragments where action is interrupted and redirected. The character continues to act but avoids direct engagement with what is happening: “I buried problems in a chaotic rubble of distractions” [2, p. 212]. This statement does not close the situation. It is followed by further action, which shifts attention without resolving it. In another fragment, writing is combined with interruption: “I was writing at my kitchen table when Farly called” [2, p. 215]. The activity does not stop but changes direction. Work, communication and emotional involvement occur together.

In *Beach Read*, the same pattern is visible in the organisation of work. The process does not move towards completion but returns to the same point. “I ripped it up and stored the pieces in separate files” [11, p. 187]. The text is broken, rearranged and rewritten. The action continues, but the result remains unstable. Work is carried out through repetition, interruption and modification, and these elements remain within the same fragments.

In *Les femmes du bout du monde*, withdrawal appears in connection with movement and silence. The refusal to speak is stated directly: “Ne pas entamer de conversation tout court” [6, p. 12]. At the same time, movement continues, and the scene develops through description of space and objects. Communication is reduced, but action does not stop. Silence, movement and attention to surroundings are present within the same sequence.

In *Une belle vie*, changes in communication are connected with repetition and emotional strain. In *Une belle vie*, the reduction of contact is verbalized directly through the character’s own self-definitions: “celle qu’on appelle de moins en moins”, “celle qui use, accable, fatigue” [10, p. 142]. The passage does not isolate one state or one reaction. It gathers together several formulations that refer to the same experience and keep returning to it from slightly different angles. What is expressed here is not a single moment of conflict but something repeated, prolonged and already familiar to the character herself. She names the position into which she has been moved, the one who exhausts others, the one who is gradually called less often, the one who remains somewhere at the edge of other people’s lives. The text does not divide these meanings into separate stages. They are concentrated within the same stretch of narration, where fatigue, reduced communication and withdrawal are present at once.

Across the analysed texts, fatigue, disrupted routines, avoidance and changes in communication do not function as independent markers. They occur together within the same fragments and remain connected to the situations in which the character acts and interacts. Burnout is not presented as a single state but becomes visible in these combinations.

Emotional balance as situational and unstable. Emotional balance in the analysed texts does not extend beyond the situations in which it appears and does not form a continuous line. It is present in separate moments and remains tied to interaction, to place, to the specific actions the character is engaged in. These moments are not introduced as a state and do not remain in the subsequent development. They occur within particular episodes and do not continue once the situation changes. What is stabilised in one fragment does not remain in the next, and the text does not return to it in the same form.

In *Ghosts*, such moments are connected with short exchanges that temporarily remove uncertainty. “He replied straight away” [3, p. 74]. The exchange continues within the same moment. Messages follow one another. The situation holds while the replies come. In the next fragments, the phone is checked again. Waiting returns. The replies are no longer immediate. Pauses appear between messages. The same action repeats, but under different conditions, and the state does not remain the same. It changes together with the situation and is not sustained outside it.

In *Everything I Know About Love*, balance is connected with shared space and everyday presence. “We lay on the sofa and watched television” [2, p. 131]. The scene is built through co-presence, through rou-

tine action that does not require decision or effort. It remains within this moment. The following fragments move to other situations in which work, communication and emotional strain are present together. Attention shifts, interaction changes, and the stability of the previous scene is not continued. The same characters remain, but the conditions in which they interact are different, and the state does not persist.

In *Beach Read*, moments of balance are connected with writing that proceeds without interruption. “The words came easily for once” [11, p. 154]. This formulation is tied to a specific moment in the process. It does not extend beyond it and is not repeated in the same form. The line stands within a moment in which writing continues without interruption. The work goes on, sentences follow one another, the text moves forward. This does not last. In the following pages, the same process breaks again, the text is rewritten, fragments are changed, the same passages are returned to. The movement continues, but not in the same way, and not under the same conditions.

In *Les femmes du bout du monde*, “Respirer. Juste respirer” [6, p. 96]. The line holds within this moment. It is followed by further movement, by change of place, by new situations in which the character continues to act. The same state does not return in the same form. The line holds for this moment. Movement continues. Other situations follow.

In *Une belle vie*, “Elles sont ensemble, enfin” [10, p. 88]. The characters are together, speak to each

other, remain in the same space. In the following fragments, they are no longer in the same position. Contact changes. Distance returns. The moment does not continue outside this situation.

Conclusions. Work in the analysed texts does not appear separately. It is present in routines, in communication, in interaction and remains within the same situations in which the character acts. Lists, messages, short exchanges, repeated actions occur together and are not divided into different layers. Professional activity does not stand on its own and does not form an independent line. It remains part of everyday experience. Burnout is not named. It is present in fatigue, in disrupted routines, in changes in communication and in withdrawal. These elements occur within the same fragments and do not appear separately.

Emotional balance does not remain across the narrative. It is present in particular moments and does not continue beyond them. It is connected with interaction, with shared space, with specific situations in which the character is involved. These moments do not repeat in the same form and do not accumulate. They change together with the situation. Work, burnout and emotional balance are present within the same contexts and remain connected to each other.

Further research may extend the analysis to a broader corpus of women-centred fiction and examine how these patterns vary across texts and contexts.

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