

REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE ARTISTIC IMAGES IN "THE LITTLE FRIEND" BY DANNA TARTT

РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦІЯ ЖІНОЧИХ ХУДОЖНІХ ОБРАЗІВ У РОМАНІ ДОННИ ТАРТ «МАЛЕНЬКИЙ ДРУГ»

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The purpose of this piece is an attempt to analyze female artistic images in the novel "The Little Friend" by a modern American writer Donna Tartt. Current article aims to investigate two main female characters of the novel "The Little Friend" in the line of main themes of postmodern aesthetics. Having analyzed a number of scientific works by distinguished scholars the authors of the current investigation have reached the agreement that artistic images play an extremely important part in the implementation of the topical themes and ideas of any literary work: the artistic images have an ability to produce new ideas and relay those ideas to the readership to be perceived and interpreted, thus playing a great role in practical reception.

Key words: novel, literary work, artistic image, literary character, perception.

Метою статті є спроба проаналізувати жіночі художні образи в романі «Маленький друг» сучасної американської письменниці Донни Тарт. Відповідна стаття має на меті дослідити два головні жіночі персонажі роману «Маленький друг» з погляду основних тем постмодерної естетики. Проаналізувавши ряд наукових праць видатних учених, автори даного дослідження дійшли висновку, що художні образи відіграють надзвичайно важливу роль у реалізації актуальних тем й ідей будь-якого літературного твору: художні образи мають здатність продукувати нові ідеї та передавати ці ідеї читачській аудиторії, щоб читачі могли інтерпретувати їх відповідно до культурного бекграунду. Таким чином, можна говорити, що художні образи відіграють значну роль у творчій рецепції.

Ключові слова: роман, літературний твір, художній образ, літературний персонаж, рецепція.

Целью статьи является попытка проанализировать женские художественные образы в романе «Маленький друг» современной американской писательницы Донны Тартт. Данная статья имеет целью исследовать два главных женских персонажа романа «Маленький друг» с точки зрения основных тем постмодернистской эстетики. Проанализировав ряд научных трудов выдающихся ученых, авторы данного исследования пришли к выводу, что художественные образы играют чрезвычайно важную роль в реализации актуальных тем и идей любого литературного произведения: художественные образы обладают способностью продуцировать новые идеи и передавать эти идеи читательской аудитории, чтобы читатели могли интерпретировать их в соответствии с культурным бэкграундом. Таким образом, можно говорить, что художественные образы играют значительную роль в творческой рецепции.

Ключевые слова: роман, литературное произведение, художественный образ, литературный персонаж, рецепция.

Introduction. There were times when the understanding of an image was a rather narrow one: an image was simply an object, and regardless of the fact that this object had a meaning (sometimes even crucial for one's well-being and life, like in the eighth century Byzantium [16, p. 503]) it was still merely an object. However, in the course of time and under influence of numerous institutional discourses the perception of the image widened considerably. The basic subcategories of the image are: graphic (pictures, statues, and designs), optical (mirrors, projections), perceptual (senses, appearances), mental (dreams, memories, ideas), and verbal (metaphors, descriptions, and writings) [16, p. 505]. Currently the studies of image are being conducted in a number of spheres such as computer science, psychol-

ogy, linguistics, philosophy and of course literature, where the interdisciplinary approach is applied as a method to study this category. Wide and extensive imagery is also an integral part of a hypertext and thus postmodernism. Literary works that may be attributed to postmodernism contain a great number of paperwork instances, historical proofs of various historical facts, political events allusions, reminiscences to different epochs and social issues pertinent to those, etc. The text or rather the hypertext becomes the supreme entity of postmodernism, a creation which trumps all odds. In our opinion the reign of the text inevitably leads to the reign of artistic images, as far as characters of a postmodern literary work play one of the most important roles, if not the most, in revealing the ideas of the author,

the characters and their thoughts and actions are key elements of the mighty ruling hypertext.

The purpose of the current piece is an attempt to analyze female artistic images' representation in the novel "The Little Friend" by Donna Tartt in terms of postmodern aesthetics.

Methodology. The system of artistic images is a set of artistic images, which exist in certain type of relationships and relations with each other thus forming the integral unity of a literary work. The system of artistic images plays a crucial role in the implementation of the topical issues and ideas of any literary work [10].

As Tymofiyev points out, since a person (or a literary character) does not exist in isolation but happens to live in close connection with the world of nature, the world of animals, the actual material world, to create and to reveal a literary character realistically for the readership, the writer is obliged to disclose these connections: to deliver a literary character with/at/in all his or her interactions, thus to construct and bring out a system of artistic images [11].

To a large extent, the investigation and research of this issue was carried out by scientists in the second half of the nineteenth century as well as during the twentieth century. The problem of the artistic image study attracted the attention of Bart [1], Bakhtyn [2], Boriev [4], Vygotsky [5], Potebnya [8; p. 38], Franko [12; p. 52] and others. The created artistic image, according to the above-mentioned scholars, extrapolates the aesthetic-artistic and symbolic experience of the writer, embodies the author's own experiences and the specifics of perception.

Research and Discussion. In the process of creating an artistic image the decisive role is played by the writer's ideology, his or her point of view and moral principles that is, the way of the writer's understanding of life matters, the depth of the questions he or she rises in the literary work, his or her life experience, knowledge of life and, in addition, artistic imagination, a fiction that allows the writer to portray a picture of life truthfully, convincingly, correctly, not paying great attention to irrelevant and emphasizing the relevant, and typical [3].

If we select as a starting point a certain criterion in the approach to the definition of the artistic image, then one can outline some differentiation. In particular, one can see the gradation, certain levels in a figurative system, for example, the sequence in the derivation from a particular meaning to an abstract and generalized one. In this case, you can find three degrees of ascent: the indicator image (use of the literal, direct meaning of the word); the trope image (figurative meaning); the symbol image (generalized

meaning based on particular ones) [13, p. 13]. In the vast majority of scientific investigations at that time, this problem was raised in the context of the perception and interpretation of Potebnya's scientific thinking as well as of the ideas of Russian formalists.

In any form of art, the artistic image also has its structure, conditioned, on the one hand, by the peculiarities of the spiritual content embodied in it, on the other hand, by a number of means through which this content is embodied. As Boriev noted, "the artistic image is a meaningful form of art, a form of thinking in art. It is a metaphorical thought that reveals one phenomenon through another" [4, p. 195]. He claimed that the artistic image offers new information about the world, it give birth to new knowledge about the world. With the help of the artistic image it becomes possible to compare and reveal two separate phenomena. In his opinion, this is exactly the essence of any artistic thought, which should not be imposed by externally, however is organically derived from a result of comparison and analyzing of actual phenomena, events and actions: the artistic image is a result of interconnection and interactions of external realities. The uniqueness of the image, Boriev believes, lies in combination of, at first glance, unbound matters – in the disclosure of previously unknown features and relations, in the connections of real phenomena. The basis of this phenomenon is associative thinking of people. Boriev also points out that the greater is the "conceptual distance" between the associative images, the greater is the type of productive thinking of the author [4, p. 196–197].

The study of artistic image as a symbolic structure is based on the latest research on the symbol and symbolic foundations of culture in the works by Losev [6], Rubtsov [9], Mamardashvili [7], and others. In Ukrainian aesthetic thought, the concept by Shevchenko is still the only concept that works exactly with the symbolic level of artistic meaning of images; the concept is based on the reception and rethinking of the ideas of hermeneutic aesthetics. In particular, the researcher interprets the general cultural function of the artistic image as the ability of the artistic image to produce new ideas [14, p. 98]. The researcher points out that the recipient undergoes forced influence of the figurative and symbolic system of the literary work, gets under its influence, which forces the recipient to experience such life situations, which he or she does not experience in his or her daily life. Thus, there is a transformation in reader's self-perception and identification, as well as reconsidering of different spheres of reality. In the final result the transformation of the reader's personal attitude to the world takes place [14, p. 99].

The nature and varieties of artistic images, of course, differ in various forms of art. However, the principle of their creation is the same everywhere, and everywhere it is a more complex form of the very mechanism of symbolization. In literature the additional artistic and symbolic content acquires already non-artistic expressive means and elements that have independent artistic content. Here they become elements of the integrity of the artistic image.

In this investigation we will try at an attempt to analyze some Donna Tartt's artistic images. Primarily we will be interested in two female characters, one of which is a female protagonist of the novel "The Little Friend". This novel is the second significant work by Tartt after "A Secret History" novel, which was a loud debut of a young American writer. The categorization of "The Little Friend" in terms of genre is rather complex, as it was the matter with "A Secret History", where a number of attributes of different genres (an inverted detective story, a campus novel, a philosophical novel, etc.) were present, thus making it difficult to place the novel into a single category: "A Secret History" novel was looked at an inverted detective story in terms of structure, an academic novel in terms of setting and philosophical novel in terms of meaning [17, p.122]. The same problems in terms of categorization one may encounter with "The Little Friend":

"People in the town still discussed the death. Usually they referred to it as "the accident," though the facts (as discussed at bridge luncheons, at the barber's, in bait shacks and doctors' waiting rooms and in the main dining room of the Country Club) tended to suggest otherwise. Certainly it was difficult to imagine a nine-year-old managing to hang himself through mischance or bad luck" [15, p. 8].

From the first pages it promises a murder, mystery and punishment, which does not happen, there is the murder of young boy, or rather a tragic and mysterious death of a young boy, which affected the whole family and led to dire consequences, however there is no punishment and even no identification of the culprit or culprits, the motif is unclear and the way the "if-murder" was committed is not revealed either.

The young Robin whose tragic demise left his family devastated and to some extent dysfunctional had two younger sisters. One of the girls, Alison, was about four years old at the time of his death and another, Harriet was just a baby. Tartt builds up her narration in the way that implies that Alison might have seen or heard something relevant to Robin's death, however the writer does not fall through with this line and at some point leaves Alison's character out of the main storyline:

"Immediately after, she had been questioned rigorously by both family and police. Was somebody in the yard, a grown-up, a man, maybe? But Allison – though she had begun, inexplicably, to wet her bed, and to wake screaming in the night with ferocious terrors – refused to say yes or no" [15, p. 8].

Following Shevchenko's idea that the main function of the artistic image is to reveal or create new ideas Alison's character brings up an intriguing point of sleeping/waking opposition. The matter of dreams has been extensively researched by Sigmund Freud and other psychologists as well as it was brought up in literature in many instances, Gustav Meyrink's "The Golem" being one of the most famous. It is obvious that Donna Tartt's characters are not as thorough as Meyrink's, on the other hand the task for her characters is significantly different. The idea for Tartt's characters is to direct the reader into a line of thinking, outline an idea for him or her to contemplate. Tartt hints that Alison is much closer to understanding a mystery than other members of the family, especially her sister Harriet. Alison is portrayed as an ethereal being, hovering on the Earth but belonging to another realm, She can more easily find solace in Robin's old cat than in her mother, grandmother or sister. She sees things, she dreams things and she lives in her own special world:

"In family photographs or familiar paintings, mysterious background figures that she'd never noticed before. Frightening reflections in a parlor mirror behind the sweet family scene. A hand waving from an open window. Why no, her mother or Ida would say when Allison pointed out these things. Don't be ridiculous. It's always been that way. What way? She didn't know. Sleeping or waking, the world was a slippery game: fluid stage sets, drift and echo, reflected light. And all of it sifting like salt between her numbed fingers." [15, p. 31]

On the other hand through Alison Tartt portrays such features as compassion, gentleness and affection, femininity and tolerance. Alison is a very popular girl, she is beautiful, and if she followed the societal rules she could be happy in a traditional way. A traditional way of happiness Tartt implies is getting married and starting a family. According to the writer Alison has all the prerequisites for doing it, however it feels like being married is not a priority for Alison. For that matter it is extremely difficult to discern what Alison's priorities are; her character may be perceived as a loner not bothered with what is going on in the real world:

"She only shrugged. Pem was intrigued. There was an ... offness to Allison, he didn't know how else to describe it, she dragged her feet when she walked

and her hair was different from the other girls' and her clothes were slightly wrong (like the flowery dress she had on, something an old lady would wear) yet there was a hazy, floaty air about her clumsiness that drove him crazy" [15, p. 142].

The main character of the novel is Alison's sister Harriet, who is Alison's absolute counterpart. If there is "offness" to Alison, Harriet is an extremely down-to-earth girl; if Alison is dreamy, Harriet is reasonable; if Alison is hesitant, Harriet is decisive:

"Unlike Allison – whom other children accepted vaguely, without quite knowing why – Harriet was a bossy little girl, not particularly liked. The friends she did have were not lukewarm or casual, like Allison's" [15, p. 54].

On the one hand Tartt portrays Harriet as someone reminiscent to Joan of Arc in rural Mississippi, on the other hand she implies that Harriet became rude and intolerant because of lack of love and affection and, which is also very important, she was not popular and party even jealous of her sister who was liked by people, Harriet was compensating because of lack of good looks.

"Harriet, the baby, was neither pretty nor sweet. She was smart" [15, p. 52].

Through Harriet Tartt brings up such topics as religion and magic. She points out that both religion and magic are the forms of deceit. Religion is a drug, which is directed primarily at ignorant people. One of the religious images is Serpent and it was desiccated a number of times in the novel: starting from the disrespect the children showed, chasing it to the weapon of retribution to the way they handled it. Harriet did not believe in something, she had logical questions and if those were not answered she claimed fraud. Another issue that Harriet's character brings up is escape. The escape thing is one of the most frequent in the literary works of postmodernism: everyone has something he or she wants to escape from: environment, circumstances, reality, et cetera. Harriet was not an exception. She was looking to escape from society she lived in, from society where she could not be herself eventually; from family that did not understand her and wanted her to live according to

its rules; from reality where she could not reconcile gender inequalities, racism, discrimination, self-development and many other aspects. Because of those she was looking for the way of escaping and for an idol who managed to do that:

"Then there was Harry Houdini. He was a master of the impossible; more importantly, for Harriet, he was a master of escape. No prison in the world could hold him: he escaped from straitjackets, from locked trunks dropped in fast rivers and from coffins buried six feet underground" [15, p. 178].

The Houdini theme is ubiquitous in the novel, however there are many other topical issues, apart from "escape matter" in "The Little Friend". In our humble opinion Tartt may have chosen her characters to be children, as far as children are more open, direct and credible, there is no hidden meaning behind children's worlds: if a child says that he or she like something, than he or she likes something – it is as simple as that. If a child says that the Federal Government education system is not fair than it is something to be considered. Children have no ulterior motifs.

Conclusion. As it has already been mentioned artistic images play the vital role in actualization of problematic matters of any literary work. With the help of characters a writer relays his or her ideas to the readership; readers in their turn practically perceive the ideas of the literary work and consider them in their cultural framework.

Donna Tartt was born in Mississippi, one of the southern states, where issues of gender, racism and discrimination are still an issue, let alone for the time when the actions of the novel took place. The sisters' characters are not solely transmitters of the socio-political ideas, but also deep psychologically traumatized heroes: they suffer and try and explain the reasons for their sufferings; they fight and try and reason their fight; they struggle and try and justify their struggle. All the characters are intertwined and interconnected in "The Little Friend" and altogether they tell the story of de facto segregated rural Mississippi on the background with personal stagnation and dysfunctionality on the front.

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