

TYOLOGY OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN ELEANOR PORTER'S NOVEL "THE ROAD TO UNDERSTANDING"

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Summary

The article analyses the plot and imagery of Eleanor Porter's novel "The Road to Understanding". Using elements of the phenomenological approach to text analysis, comparative and contrastive analysis, and the methodology of cultural research, the author demonstrates the evolution of the main character's image and comprehends the typology of women's images in historical and social contexts. The authors outline the main features of the aesthetics, creative style and outlook of Eleanor Porter. The article proves that the author used irony, artistic detail, psychological narration, contraposition, portrait and speech characteristics of her heroes to reveal their female characters. The author analyses the correlation between the characters in the storyline, defines the importance of the role of minor characters in the main heroine's character development. The special features of the concept "daughter" are shown as an embodiment of mental notions of spiritual beauty and family happiness. The value of the image-symbol of mother, its role in the composition and the artistic space of the work is revealed. Besides the comparative characteristic of characters in the work is given. In the process of work a search for new ways of analysis of artistic images in the artwork on the basis of interpretation and reader reception was carried out, as well as tradition and innovation in the work of the writer was revealed. The article proves artistic and moral value of Eleanor Porter's heritage.

Key words: archetype, concept, artistic space, artistic image, imagery, speech characteristic, gender stereotypes.

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1. Introduction

The American writer Eleanor Porter's creative legacy consists of short stories and novels, the best known of which are "Miss Billy" (1911), "Pollyanna" (1913), "Just David" (1916), "Mary Marie" (1920). These works aroused considerable interest among the readers; representatives of literary criticism emphasised the artistic value of the bestseller "Pollyanna", which influenced the development of cinema, theatre art and psychology. Eleanor Porter's novels and short stories present a wide panorama of life in various segments of the population of New England in the early twentieth century: they depict vivid and direct characters, the intellectual life of Boston, provincial mores, the life of farmers, and the majestic nature and landscapes of New Hampshire in the United States. It should be noted that an impressive proportion of Eleanor Porter's work remains unexplored. There are no literary studies of the individual manner of the author, the imagery of her works, their relationship to the history and cultural life of the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century is not determined.

The novelty of this work lies in the fact that the text of Eleanor Porter's novel "The Road to Understanding" (1917) is firstly studied as an object of philological analysis. Despite the existing achievements in the study of the specificity of women's images in US literature, which are reflected in the articles and monographs of S. B. Weir, M. Ferguson, J. Carr, Y. Lysanets,

O. Nahachevska, H. Stashko and others, the work of Eleanor Porter was not included in the complex of such studies. The relevance of this work is related to the search for new ways of analysing artistic images in art, which will give more opportunities for interpretation and analysis of the artistic text. The aim of this study is to determine the typology of female characters in Eleanor Porter's novel "The Road to Understanding". To achieve the goal, it is necessary to perform the following tasks: to trace the dynamics of images, to determine the main artistic ways of revealing female characters, to identify traditions and innovations in the creative manner of the author. In order to compare the characters of the novel and to identify the individual creative style of the writer we used the comparative and contrastive analyses; culturological research methodology helped us to understand the typology of female characters in the historical and social context. Elements of the phenomenological approach to text analysis were used to determine the author's worldview.

2. The plot and imagery in the novel "The Road to Understanding"

"The Road to Understanding" (1917) was published during one of the best periods in American literature. The writer belonged to a generation of contemporaries O. Henry, Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, whose work anticipated the appearance of outstanding novels by E. Hemingway, F. S. Fitzgerald, S. Lewis, W. Faulkner and others. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that against the background of the work of these masters of fiction, sentimental women's prose could enter the literature textbooks of this period. At the same time, however, Eleanor Porter's novel has attracted a readership by revealing important social and psychological issues, its ironic treatment of gender stereotypes, its relaxed style, and its topical subject matter.

The story takes place in the early twentieth century in the small town of Dalton, New Hampshire, and then moves on to Boston. The image of provincial Dalton is blessed with the romance of night walks and cosy cottages, Boston is filled with expression and a vibrant intellectual life. However, the "spatial and temporal coordinates of the literary text" (*Korkishko*: 388) are not limited to America. The characters of the novel travel through Europe, then return to Dalton again. "The Road to Understanding" is a melodramatic story of an unequal marriage between spouses of different estates. A young couple, Burke Denby and Helen Barnet make the hasty decision to marry against the wishes of Burke's father, John Denby, a wealthy businessman, intellectual and collector. The young man's father, who has lost his wife early on, resolutely refuses to accept a beautiful but insufficiently well-mannered and poorly educated daughter-in-law into his home. He creates difficult financial conditions for the young family, which suggest that Burke Denby will have no maintenance other than what he earns from his father's factory. The author realistically depicts the everyday life of a young family and all the hardships the two of them have to endure before the birth of a child. Eleanor Porter describes without condescension Burke Denby's selfishness and Helen's vulgar habits, her slang, her blatant manner of dressing, her meagre intellect and the total lack of what was then called "woman's wisdom" in her diplomatic skills in relationships. The young people, who are not without their positive traits, try to come to an agreement as equals, but, as if in a mirror, see their own shortcomings reflected in each other: "She was willful and fretful, and she certainly did not know how to give a fellow a decent meal or a comfortable place to stay. For his part, he did not think a girl had any right to marry until she knew something about running a simple home" (*Porter*). Tender feelings were not lost in the couple, but they did not succeed in keeping the marriage alive. The delicate but insistent intervention of a father who missed his son, some snobbery and a loss of responsibility led to Helen taking her daughter and leaving home. The reason for this decision was a husband and father-in-law trip to Alaska, before which

Burke, who had been staying at his father's house more and more often in the evenings, sent his wife a letter and ten thousand dollars with the help of a courier. Burke expressed his desire for a break from each other, to have a good time, so that he could resume the relationship later. The young woman's emotions heated up when the marital problems were discovered by the newspapers saleswoman living next door, Mrs. Cobb, who made rude comments about the young couple's marital relationship. The author of the piece stresses the inevitability of what has happened: "However near two roads may be at the start, if they diverge ever so slightly and keep straight ahead, there is bound to be in time all the world between them" (*Porter*). The couple were not ready for a serious relationship, their love was vulnerable to their selfishness and their unwillingness to understand each other: "In the case of Burke and Helen, their roads never started together at all: they merely crossed; and at the crossing came the wedding. They were miles apart at the start - miles apart in tastes, traditions, and environment. In one respect only were they alike: undisciplined self-indulgence" (*Porter*).

"The system of images in a work of fiction consists of the heroes of the work, characters, images of the author and narrator, images of nature (landscape), interior details, image-symbols" (*Halych: 142*). The text of the novel is saturated with contrasting images, which represent different strata of the population with their inherent behaviour and speech characteristics. An important role is played by archetypal images embodying the collective unconscious: home, family, father and mother. Contemporary scientific research confirms that "archetypal images are inherently infinitely variable, as their internal structure is conditioned by universal invariants" (*Hots: 54*). John Denby's home is inaccessible to Helen because it is the realm of his late wife. The image of the mother takes hold of Burke's thoughts particularly acutely when he feels discomfort in family life. He is eager to get to his family home as soon as possible and receives an invitation almost a year after a quarrel with his father, but the state of tranquillity during the family dinner is shattered by Helen, who has shown not the best qualities of her character, naively wishing Burke's father to like her. However, after the separation from his wife and daughter, the house has become uncomfortable for Burke, this is evident on the Christmas Eve, when father and son look for opportunities to travel, for archaeological excavations instead of spending time with relatives. After Helen leaves, the symbolic image of Burke's mother seems to leave this house following her. Since then, the luxurious mansion has become a lonely repository of dead museum antiquities for many years. The image of the house in the work is dichotomous, for Burke has never liked the vulgar interior of his tawdry flat, and the aristocratic John Denby house has remained a stranger to Helen. But did the father feel happy in this house when he saw his son suffering? The author emphasises the idea that the relationship in the young family was largely dependent on the couple, as the father never openly imposed his own decisions on his son. The image of a complete family in the classical sense of the word is absent in the development of the novel's action: father and son feel lonely, Helen is forced to spend a long time telling her daughter about the fine qualities of her conventionally deceased father, and there is the lonely doctor Frank Gleason, living in Boston, who helped Helen during her forced wanderings. It is with the image of the failed family and the search for family happiness that the novel's title, "The Road to Understanding", is linked.

3. Specificity of female characters in the novel

In contemporary literary studies there are several ambiguous definitions of the category "artistic image", which are not mutually exclusive. "Artistic image is a complex and polysemantic concept associated with the notion of the relation of art to reality, reflection and

expression of feelings, thoughts and aspirations of the author" (*Ozharivska*: 218). "This term is one of the most common in criticism, and one of the most variable in meaning..." (*Abrams*: 121). The female characters in Eleanor Porter's novel are characterised by dynamics, ambiguous characters and a desire for autonomy. The exception is John Denby's sister, Mrs. Allen, who lives up to the strong traditions of aristocratic life. The arrogant attitude towards the servants and the capricious demands underline the narrow-mindedness and emotional coldness of Mrs. Allen. Helen looks sincere and straightforward in comparison to Mrs. Allen. A special place in the novel is given to the so-called friends of Helen, who are characterised by their tactless behaviour and ignorance. Their speech characterisation reflects not only their social status, but also their unwillingness to become better, they smugly see themselves for what they are. This is above all Mrs. Cobb and Mrs. Jones, Helen's next-door neighbour. The author's evaluation of these characters is emphasised by the portrait details, descriptions of clothing, movements. For example, Mrs. Cobb has an unpleasant wart on her face, she speaks too loudly, makes abrupt aggressive movements (she "grabs" her hand and "turns person's face towards herself" when meeting someone). She has an unpleasant piercing look and a rude manner of speaking. Mrs. Jones likes flamboyant dresses and prefers to idle time and going to the movies. The wife's interactions with new acquaintances make a depressing impression on her husband, and their slang infuriates the refined Burke Denby. These characters contrast with the image of Dr. Frank Gleason's sister, a friend of Denby's family. Mrs. Ellery Thayer shatters gender stereotypes, the usual image of an early twentieth-century respectable woman: instead of sanctimonious indignation over her runaway wife, she takes decisive action. It is she, not her intellectual brother, who becomes the "Pygmalion" for the new "Galatea". Professor Higgins, in Bernard Shaw's play, conducts a linguistic experiment that results in Eliza Doolittle's sense of self-worth. In Eleanor Porter's novel, it is the wounded pride that makes the heroine decide to leave her husband and begin to improve herself. Helen chooses the difficult path as she feels the oppressive fear of exposure and the loss of her daughter. The doctor's sister, Mrs. Ellery Thayer, shows absolute feminine solidarity in Helen's process of spiritual formation. They are passionate about literature and history and visit exhibitions. Helen has made it her goal to raise an independent, educated and successful daughter, which is exactly what she spends her husband's money sent to the bank on. The angry realisation that her husband is ashamed of her inspires the heroine. She is not satisfied with a career as a pampered aristocratic lady, Helen desires the education that makes a woman independent. The protagonist's character develops rapidly, she feels a deep sense of responsibility for her daughter, but this does not make her a possessive mother. Helen, clearly aware of the detrimental influence of the possessive father on her husband, strives to raise an independent personality. Over time, Helen's mannerisms and speech change, her outward beauty subtly combining with her spiritual appearance, which takes the reader back to Burke's description of his first impression of Helen: "...With the marvellous light on her face, and the crimson velvet draperies behind her, she looked not unlike a pictured Madonna" (*Porter*).

The concept of "daughter" is important in the text of the work as "an ordered totality of mental units, an embodiment of a person's experience and knowledge of life" (*Fisak*: 74). Elizabeth embodies the mother's dream and Helen's notions of true beauty. It is not a hedonistic admiration, not an egoistic pride, but a spiritualised communion filled with love and meaning. The concept "daughter" with all its mental attributes is perceived in the text of the novel as part of the universal picture of the world. The lonely father constantly felt a sense of guilt towards Elizabeth, because he felt an unbreakable bond with his daughter from the moment she was born. Elizabeth, who combines the traits of mother and father, restores the bond between the parents and finds the strength to understand and forgive Burke. The symbolic image of Burke's dead mother returns again in the climax of the novel. Burke Denby finds the diaries of

Mabel, whose image symbolises the past and feelings of guilt and remorse towards loved ones. The ghost of his mother materialises in the diaries that Burke found after his father's death. Mabel's writings reveal not only the elegant sophistication of her nature, but also the complexities of her relationship with her husband. The mother, through her diaries, gives her son one last admonition: "Know how to forgive those you love".

4. Conclusions

Based on the conducted research, it can be stated that the female characters in Eleanor Porter's novel "The Road to Understanding" are realistic and have contrasting characters, as the author has introduced readers to representatives of different estates of their time. Eleanor Porter has used written description (portraiture), artistic detail and speech characteristics of the characters, which are revealed in dialogues. In the imagery of the novel, the vivid female characters, the concept of "daughter" and the symbolic image of the mother stand out. The concept of "daughter" carries an additional semantic load and reflects the author's idea of the harmony of human relationships. The author's image interacts with the reader at the receptive level, transmitting ideas and creating opportunities for an independent interpretation of the content of the work and its imagery. The symbolic image of mother is an important element in the composition of the work, which develops and culminates in the single artistic space of Dalton town. The image of the main character in the novel has a dynamic development, reflects the American mentality with its optimism, determination, faith in the dream realization, the ability to learn from its own mistakes. Based on our study we can conclude that the creative style of the author is based on the American literary traditions of the late XIX – early XX centuries. The realistic picture of the world in the novel differs expressive-emotional colouring; the manner of narration is characterized by psychologism and irony. The author combines traditional methods in her works with creating brand new images of a woman mother, wife, sister and daughter in the US literature. These images are characterized not only by the desire for justice and independence, but also by the mood of the new era, when the attitude of the female population to self-development, education, creativity, their constitutional rights and responsibilities began to change rapidly.

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