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BIBLICAL ALLUSION AS A PSYCHOSEMANTIC PHENOMENON

(based on Peyton's monologue from the novel *Lie down in Darkness* by W. Styron)

У статті розглянуто емотивну функцію біблійної алюзії у монолозі Пейтон Лофтис, головної героїні роману «Лягай у темряву» У. Стайрона. А також доведено, що біблійна алюзія відноситься до психосемантичних феноменів, оскільки як важливий елемент вертикального контексту вона спирається не на поверхневі властивості предметів чи понять, що дозволяють порівняти їх, а на ґрунтовні відомості та знання.

Ключові слова: біблійна алюзія, психосемантичний феномен, вертикальний контекст.

В статье рассматривается эмотивная функция библейской аллюзии в монологе Пейтон Лофтис, главной героини романа «Ложись во мрак» У. Стайрона. А также доказано, что библейская аллюзия относится к психосемантическим явлениям поскольку она является важным элементом вертикального контекста, суть которого состоит в том, что она предусматривает не поверхностные качества предметов или понятий, позволяющие сравнить их, а глубокие знания, которые находятся в памяти человека.

Ключевые слова: библейская аллюзия, психосемантический феномен, вертикальный контекст.

The aim of this article is to elucidate the emotive function of biblical allusions used for revealing human psychology and to support the statement that the biblical allusion as well as any other kind of allusion is a psychosemantic phenomenon.

A.G. Mamayeva considers allusion to be a device of the intended usage of certain words (word combinations, sentences) in the literary text. These words refer

to well-known facts of culture [1]. The peculiarity of allusion as a special means of rendering additional information presupposes the complexity of its semantic structure. Being under the semantic and stylistic influence of allusion, the context makes this device an important, meaningful and structural element of the belles-lettres work [1].

Many philologists (I.R. Galperin., N.F. Katinene, L.V. Polubychenko, A.G. Mamayeva, L.O. Mashkova) agree on the idea that allusion is a reference to a certain literary work, to the name of a personage or an episode. L.O. Mashkova extends the definition of allusion by emphasizing the fact that this stylistic device is a 'bridge' connecting two literary worlds, two epochs. The profound knowledge of a source-text helps us understand the work written later. The allusion enriches the plot of the literary work by forming new parallels, adding new connotations and contrasts [2: 11].

L.O. Mashkova states that the elements of philological vertical context cause a complex and multiple interaction between belles-lettres works. Here we talk about the allusive process. Understanding the allusion cannot be narrowed to the revealing of the allusive fact. The origin of a range of additional ties, parallels, contrasts, antitheses embellishes the plot of a literary text [2: 22–24].

On the basis of the general definition of allusion we formulate the explanation of the term 'biblical allusion'. The latter is a stylistic device that is an indirect reference to a certain biblical fact, subject, person, myth by means of a word, word combination, sentence from the Bible (a quotation). The background knowledge of a reader about certain biblical facts, subjects, and persons should be taken for granted as it evokes associations in his/her mind [3: 187–189].

According to A.S. Yevseyev [4], biblical allusion expressed by a nominative or communicative unit can be recognized and revealed through intensive mental activity aimed at decoding hidden information on which the associative ties are based. Biblical allusion does not merely involve the superficial knowledge of subjects or notions allowing either to compare or contrast them but entails retrieving profound

background knowledge from human memory. Only such knowledge allows the reader's recognizing and understanding of biblical allusions. Thus referring to A.S.Yevseyev we consider allusion as a psychosemantic phenomenon.

In his novel *Lie down in Darkness* W. Styron concentrates on the moral disorder which is characteristic of the post-war American society. Accentuating the fact that his personages cannot love and forgive their neighbours, the writer reveals their indispensable need for moral rescue and their refusal to expiate their sins. The use of biblical allusions helps readers conceive the motives of the protagonist of the novel, Peyton Loftis, for committing suicide and the reasons for her spiritual degradation.

Lie down in Darkness (1951) is a novel about a family tragedy. Juxtaposing the past and the present, Styron uses flashbacks, interior monologues, and, in Peyton's final fifty-page monologue, a 'stream of consciousness' technique to illuminate the family decay. The events described in the novel begin in August, 1945, immediately after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. With the background of the world crisis we observe a catastrophic accident that has just occurred in the family of Milton Loftis. The novel opens with a train carrying his elder and favourite daughter's coffin home to Port Warwick, Virginia, where her parents await its arrival.

The biblical allusions to the deluge and rainbow assist in one's better understanding of the universal disaster and family degradation. We observe an explicit correlation between the rainbow and the function of art; which is to inspire the revival of nature and bear the marvel of resurrection, especially music: "A rainbow of juke-box colour enveloped the restaurant, a lovely spectrum endlessly shifting, a man with a deep, sad voice sang: 'Take me back and try me one more time'" [5: 40]. W. Styron's rainbow appears after the deluge which consists in both the universal and personal tragedy of the personage's moral destruction. It symbolizes human longing for renewal, a chance to start all over (like Noah's).

According to the Bible, God punished people for violence and misdemeanour by the deluge during which only righteous Noah and his family managed to survive.

Following the Lord's instructions Noah made an ark of cypress wood, took his wife, sons, and his sons' wives along with him and a pair of every living thing. The great flood continued for forty days on the earth. When Noah came out of the ark, God made a covenant with him that he would never again cut off the flesh by the waters of a flood. The rainbow became a sign of God's reconciliation with people: "I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth... When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth" (Genesis, 6 – 9:16).

For Peyton it was "a rainbow of decay" [5: 301]. For Milton Loftis, Peyton's father, who plunged into the world of alcoholic intoxication, a rainbow was a perspective of an illusory promise. At Peyton and Harry's wedding-party Milton watched a young couple through a champagne glass as if through iridescent rainbow strings: "... above the remote whine of the strings, as through the sphere of his glass, iridescent as a rainbow... he saw their lips touch" [5: 28]. This rainbow perspective transforms Milton Loftis' morbid alcoholic reality into serenity. His wife became alienated to him and Peyton abandoned her home.

The atomic explosion in Hiroshima resembles the Great Deluge aimed at destroying humanity in a post-war period. The dispersion of atoms is like a modern-day Noah's flood. It is mentioned in the novel that Peyton listened to the news about the universal tragedy over the radio when she was sinking in the flood of despair. All her thoughts and worries are reflected in the monologue. Peyton identified her troubles with the deluge. The heroine is compared with a drowning person. In a letter to her father Peyton explained her state of mind as if she had been at sea without "any distinctness or real point of reference" [5: 349]. She felt "adrift as if drowning out in the dark space somewhere" [5: 349–350].

The girl's monologue starts with the epigraph taken from the Book of Job, 19:23–26: "Oh that my words were now written, oh that they were printed in a book. That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever. For I know that

my redeemer liveth and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth and though worms destroy this body yet in my flesh shall I. Shall I. Oh my flesh! (Strong is your hold) O mortal flesh, strong is your hold O love” [5: 319] (Job, 19:23–26). The biblical words are interwoven with Peyton’s reflections. Job said: “... in my flesh shall I see God...” (Job, 19:26). The girl was not sure if she would see God. She was deep in depression but hoped for redemption and forgiveness. The passage alludes to religious traditions of redemption from sins.

The facts given in Peyton’s monologue testify that she was obsessed with the idea of searching for her appeasement with Harry who broke with her because of her adultery. This search is transformed into her spiritual pilgrimage caused by the strong feeling of guilt.

Till the very moment of suicide the girl carried on a struggle between her belief and despair. Returning to the fragments of the conversation about God’s existence, Peyton recollected the words of her acquaintance Albert Berger: “...There was no God... Save Him in the spirit of the creatively evolved, in the electrons of a radar screen or in the molecules of DDT” [5: 323]. To such an exposure of scientific pantheism Harry responded: “God is life force, love, whatever you will, but not death” [5: 323]. Peyton comforted the boys declaring: “For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep” [5: 324] (I Corinthians, 15:20). The heroine was convinced in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Later the young lady thought of her death appealing to God: “Oh God! I must die today, but will I not rise again at another time and stand on the earth clean and incorruptible?” [5: 341]. Her words are connected with lines 52, 53 of the 15th chapter of the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians: “We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality” (I Corinthians, 15:52, 53).

Peyton decided that she had to die in order to be born again clean and incorruptible. She cherished the illusion that she and Harry would sail over the waves of the deluge inside the floating arklike clock. The young lady who always felt adrift because of her strong addiction to alcohol found security in her attachment to the clock she purchased on the last day of her life. Symbolizing her desire for an escape into an earlier, seemingly more rational time, the clock becomes for Peyton a womb or an ark of security, resembling Noah's ark once again. The description of Peyton's gradual plunging into the waters refers reader to Psalm 69:

Save me, O God!

For the waters have come up to my neck.

I sink in the deep mire,

Where there is no foothold;

I have come into the deep waters,

And the flood sweeps over me.

I am weary with my crying,

My throat is parched.

My eyes grow dim

With waiting for my God (Psalms, 69:1–3)

The young lady's throat like David's got dry and she thought about any drop of liquid: "I put my head into my hands, thinking of thirst, thinking of gallons of water to drink and cool dew somewhere... One drop of anything would save the life of poor damned Peyton" [5: 340]. This allusion emphasizes the vital importance for the girl to atone for her guilt.

Peyton had no control over herself: "Only thought of that part of me over which I have no authority: my guilt" [5: 362]. The heroine was not able to set herself free from the webs of sin, and that is why she was always looking for protection from the people surrounding her.

Anxiety caused by the impending sin, forgiveness, hope for rebirth imbues Peyton's monologue. In five different cases the young lady refers to the lines from

Psalm 89: “How long, Lord, wilt Thou hide Thyself forever: shall Thy wrath burn like fire? Remember how short my time is” [5: 360]. These words render Peyton’s feeling of God’s absence and her stagnation in the flow of time. She appealed to the Lord asking for redemption and hesitated if she had been able to atone for her sins during her lifetime. The girl’s uncertainty echoes in her words addressed to Lenny, Harry’s friend, to whom she was trying to expound the motives of her behaviour: “Lennie, behold, I tell you a *misery*. Today I am trying to exorcise my guilt” [5: 352]. Peyton substituted *misery* for *mystery*. This reference is connected with the lines from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, where he said about the resurrection of those who believe in God: “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet” (I Corinthians, 15:52–53).

During the last day of Peyton’s life she is pressed by the obsessive feeling of guilt. The sins and inability to get an excuse from Harry and understanding on the part of her relatives, deprive the young lady of self-confidence and push her to commit suicide: “... undivorced from guilt, I must divorce myself from life, in this setting part of time” [5: 364]. The heroine ascended the steps of a multi-storied Harlem building to dive into the darkness. Many of her symptoms are similar to those of post-traumatic stress disorder – a psychologically distressing event that produces recurrent and intrusive recollections of a traumatic incident along with intense fear, terror, and helplessness. Peyton’s flashbacks and distressing recollections of the past, her emotional anesthesia, feelings of detachment and estrangement from others and her sense of impending death are all characteristic of this disorder [5: 73]. Besides, Peyton experiences the presence of an inner observer watching her every action: “Did I have a companion? I felt that someone was watching me, myself perhaps; at least I was not alone” [5: 367].

Climbing the staircase of the Harlem building the young lady was thinking over the obvious contradiction in her life: “Only guilt could deliver me into this ultimate paradox: that all souls must go down before ascending upward: only we most egregious sinners, to shed our sin in self-destruction, must go upward before the

last descent” [5: 367]. This quotation contains an allusion to the biblical proverb: “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs, 16:18). Peyton’s behaviour resulted in her self-destruction. The paradox in the girl’s lips reminds the reader of T. Brown’s words and the title of the novel *Lie down in Darkness*. The soul should plunge into the darkness in order to reach the eternal light again.

Having found herself in predicament, Peyton made a radical decision: to atone for her guilt by committing suicide. She lacks the self-confidence of the Prophet Micah when he spoke about the resurrection: “When I fall, I shall rise; then I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light to me” (Micah, 7:8). Nevertheless, the young lady hoped that she would be born again. She could not find another way out of the situation she was in. Being a part of the cruel world where people stopped loving each other because of hard-heartedness and indifference to the sufferings of their neighbours, Peyton passed away. The young lady’s suicide in its lyrical and dramatic intensity and haunting birdlike imagery reminds of Septimus Warren Smith’s Icarian plunge to his death in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*.

The escape from the harsh reality of life through addiction to alcohol and the emergence of Styron’s rainbow depend on the sorrow resulting from the endless frustration of hopes and longings. The biblical allusions help the reader penetrate into Peyton’s psyche, understand the source of her utmost despair and moral degradation that lead the girl to the continuous search for God-Father, the Saviour of the poor in spirit. Having found no sympathy on the part of her parents and friends, the heroine’s spiritual pilgrimage ended in her physical death and the hope for the spiritual ascension.

Thus we come to the conclusion that biblical allusion involves readers’ profound background knowledge and can be recognized and understood only through their intensive mental activity which entails the decoding of the referred information. As a result, the associations are formed, assisting in the description of the personage’s psyche. Such recollections can be made only through retrieving the already existing

knowledge of Biblical facts from the reader's memory. That is why we refer biblical allusion to psychosemantic phenomena.

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