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G. ELIOT'S TRADITION IN J. FOWLES NOVEL *THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN*



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Abstract

The problem of the postmodernism attitude to tradition is one of the most urgent in modern literary criticism. On the one hand, representatives of radical postmodernism deny any priorities and metanarratives. On the other hand, a particular interest in tradition as a sphere of ready-made texts is revived specifically in the postmodernism's era. Postmodernism throws doubt upon this willingness, ironizes at it and deconstructs it. J. Fowles stands out against the general background of his contemporaries for his special attitude to tradition. The writer's prose is characterized by the "exposure" of intertextual links with works of Victorian literature. Fowles is a "crisis" author, that is why in the Victorian tradition, his attention is attracted by writers, whose works are examples of the "shaking loose" of this tradition. George Eliot is one of these authors who is the most intellectual writer of the 19th century. The author's characterization of George Eliot's work is ambiguous: on the one hand, the concept of an inquiring, doubting and analyzing author are attracted by Fowles, following tradition; he also defends the author's right to be actively present in the text and he speaks about the responsibility of the writer to the reader, unlike many postmodernists. On the other hand, Fowles, as a 20th century writer, criticizes the concept of the "all knowing storyteller" in Eliot's novels. The intertextual connection with the works of the Victorian writer in Fowles' novel "The French Lieutenant's Woman" affects different levels of text: ideological, plot, motivational, figurative.

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Keywords: Victorian tradition, postmodernism, George Eliot, John Fowles, intertextual dialogue



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1. Introduction

A specific feature of English literature in the last third of the 20th century is complex connection with the cultural and historical past. Writers turn to tradition in their works constantly. Thus, they reproduced the classic examples of Victorian prose. The willing to know everything about past time is dictated by the need of English writers to find positive ideals that have been lost in our time. At the same time, the address to tradition is necessitated by the desire to build a conscious, critical distance between the original and new text. According to the point of critics' view, the influence of the Victorian tradition is evident in A. Murdoch, W. Golding, J. Fowles, D. Lodge, A. Bayette, P. Ackroyd, G. Swift, S. Waters and others' novels.

Victorianism is not just a specific historical period with specific feelings and emotions, it is a precedent text (Menyaylo & Chumilkin, 2019). The concept 'Victorian tradition' is mythologized in minds of the modern English writers. Tolstykh (2008) says: 'the Victorian novel becomes a kind of archetype and it is considered already as the totality of everything that has been written about Victorianism' (p. 3). That is why the problem of identifying of all cases of intertextual inclusions from the works of Victorian author is appeared here (Skorokhodko, 2015). The article is about "Victorian text, as a whole, as a reconstruction of the main motives, plots of Victorian literature and culture, references in the work of the realities of the time, historical figures, familiar novels of the Victorian era and a general text orientation towards England of the XIX century" (Tolstykh, 2008, p. 3).

Of course, the 19th century has enriched the culture and the literature of England in the 20th century in many ways. Among the earliest representative example is the novel by J. Fowles (1926 - 2005) "The French Lieutenant's Woman" (1969). This novel illustrates all Victorian situation.

2. Problem Statement

Today, in modern literary criticism, we can identify some works in which the problem of Fowles's attitude to the Victorian tradition is mentioned (A. Dolinin, T.V. Zalite, N.Yu. Zhluktenko, V.V. Ivasheva, T.N. Krasavchenko, S. D. Pavlychko, A.P. Sarukhanyan, O.A. Tolstykh, P. Konradi, S. Lovely, V.J. Palmer, M. Tope, D. Schiller, K. Kaplan) (Skorokhodko, 2016).

However, despite the high degree of study the Fowles' works, there is still no the conceptual approach to studying the problem of "the presence" of Victorian tradition in this author's works. This is due to the fact that researchers often don't make the difference between Fowles's attitude to the Victorian period and Victorian literature. To our point of view, it is especially important and fundamental. The author sees the limitations of Victorianism, but he realizes the Victorian literary tradition as a component of his own creativity. For Fowles, a new style is irrelevant because it is not rooted in tradition and there is no interest. The 20th century writer combines admiration for the Victorian tradition and modern postmodern writing techniques in his work. The strength of tradition for this author is similar to "biological heredity". He understands that experiments at the formal level are not able to cancel the "old" content (Amineva, 2018).

3. Research Questions

In the Victorian tradition, Fowles was most attracted by a special type of novel. This type is associated with intellectual and psychological analysis, which reproduce the processes of the hero's inner life in its relationship with the surrounding reality. These novels are introspective, because they reveal the inner contradictions of the hero, his "microcosm". It was this model of the Victorian novel, which was introduced in the work of George Eliot (1819 - 1880). Fowles will continue this tradition. The writer developed the traditions of the intellectual and psychological Victorian novel, sought to reveal and describe the internal contradictions of the Victorian nature. Naptsov (1997) fairly calls Eliot "the first English writer who anticipated the psychologism and intellectuality of modern prose and touched upon the problems the 20th century is concerned about" (p. 4-5).

It is easy to find phenomena in the novel "The Woman of the French Lieutenant", which are genetically determined by the images, narrative techniques and principles of the poetics of the Victorian writer. The question about how the novelist tradition of the writer was refracted in the writer's work of the postmodern era is discussed in this article. To our point of view, this problem is worth particular attention because the situation Fowles-author for the second part of the XX century is a kind of "third way" both in relation to the classical tradition and in relation to the avant-garde versions of non-classical literature (Primakorac, 2015).

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the article is to reveal the originality of the interpretation of the Victorian novel tradition by George Eliot in John Fowles' novel "The French Lieutenant's Woman", as well as to determine the nature of the intertextual dialogue in the work of a postmodern writer with the novels of an English writer of the 19th century.

5. Research Methods

The methodological basis of the research is a combination of historical-biographical, comparative-historical (the method of historical poetics) and structural-typological research methods.

6. Findings

We can see in our research that Eliot is a crisis author, who could embody in her creativity aspirations and intentions, searches and delusions that were inherent in the 20th century. Gorbunova (2010) believe that we can consider Victorian writer as "a mouthpiece" of endless doubt, which inherent in the Victorian era. She continues: "The writer thinks about different well-known everyday little things and doubts in everything <...>. George Eliot's creativity we can study as apology for doubt (Gorbunova, 2010, p. 115).

The descriptions of "painful doubts and hesitations, situations of decisive choice, when in the future several paths open at once, primarily for a complex internal conflict" attracts Fowles in the novels of the writer (Gorbunova, 2010).

The writer of the 20th century uses elements of Eliot's texts, which function at the plot level, in the system of images, and influence the concept of the writer's worldview.

The writer created a gallery of female images which "break out" from the environment, where Maggie Talliver presents ("Mill on Floss", 1860). Sarah Woodruff's storyline is full of analogies and associations with the hero Eliot. Maggie and Sarah are presented as "superfluous" who do not fit into the standards of Victorian society (and this is emphasized already in the portrait of the heroes).

In the classic English novel, a canon was formed for describing a true Victorian woman. In the portrait of this woman the whiteness of the skin (a sign of aristocracy, breed), languid pallor (a sign of fragility) and blond wavy hair (a symbol of moral purity) were emphasized.

Eliot and Fowles deliberately break tradition by giving their hero an atypical, non-Victorian appearance. Swarthy skin tone and dark hair indicate the lower class and ignoble origin of the hero. Victorian writers viewed the beauty as the main principle in upbringing and preferred outer beauty to inner beauty. Therefore, unattractive hero often are opposed to blue-eyed and blonde beauties in a Victorian novel.

Maggie and Sarah show urge to the "forbidden" because Victorian society does not give them the opportunity to fulfill themselves. The inner strength and intelligence of the hero Eliot, like the hero of Fowles, are faced with the limitations of society, unable to find a worthy use for their talents. Passionate natures, who live a rich inner life, with an inquisitive mind and a warm heart, do not fit into the framework of the social roles which society imposes on them. Using the life of their hero as an example, Eliot and Fowles reveal the conflict between the predetermined life of a Victorian woman and the free manifestation of female desires.

Both heroines have an instinctive insightful depth, they are able to intuitively feel people (however, Fowles turns this feature of Sarah into a superpower, which already emphasizes the difference between her heroine and many Victorian heroines, whose inner nature is limited). Fowles writes about this ability of Sarah: "... it was some kind of supernatural ability; supernatural for a woman who had never been to London and never moved in the world - to determine the true value of other people, to understand them in the full sense of the word.

She possessed a kind of psychological equivalent of instinct <...> Inborn intuition was the first curse of her life; the second curse was education" (Fowles, 2003).

Maggie Talliver and Sarah Woodruff find themselves in a similar situation: society sees them as "fallen" women, although in fact both are victims of circumstance. Because of them, young aristocrats Stephen Guest and Charles Smithson refuse their engagement to Lucy Dean and Ernestina Freeman, respectively.

Emphasizing Maggie's emancipation and otherness (Clarke, 2018), Eliot creates in her person the type of a reading hero. Fowles borrows this motive, also emphasize, that reading has shaped Sarah as a person in many ways. The literary education of the hero developed and strengthened her ability to feel people, while reading was one of the reasons that Sarah, like Maggie, turns into a rejected, "outsider" in Victorian society. Both heroes love to read Walter Scott, thus Eliot and Fowles emphasize a craving for the unusual i, a desire to rise above the vulgar and gray reality n Maggie and Sarah. Also, Maggie and Sarah behave more freely and uninhibitedly in relationships with men with whom they feel "on equal terms".

At the same time, we can identify a number of fundamental differences between the heroes of Eliot and Fowles. The Victorian writer explains Maggie's character, first, by heredity. Fowles interprets the character of his hero through an appeal to the main category of existentialism - the category of freedom. In Sarah's person, the author creates a type of existential hero, "who able to choose herself" (Fowles's expression). Unlike Maggie Tulliver, Sarah Woodruff "voluntarily embraced the reputation of a 'whore', moreover, she supported it. This choice gives her the opportunity to keep her 'I', to gain freedom, to become a person", as the hero believes (Pesterev, 1996, p. 14).

Sarah is connected with the fundamental theme for Fowles' novel - the theme of authorship: the author creates a hero who is the author of her own destiny, which in principle cannot be in a classic novel. N. Yu. Zhuktenko (1987) rightly notes that "the persecuted, despised, 'fallen'" governess in Fowles's novel did not want to take the role of a victim, humiliated and insulted, figuratively speaking" (p. 382).

Fowles creates the image of the victorious hero; while Maggie embodies the type of hero "the sufferer for the whole world" (it is no coincidence that Eliot compares his hero with Thomas of Kempis, who preached humility and the ability to sacrifice). Creating the image of Maggie Talliver, Eliot makes it clear that the tragic ending of the hero's life is natural. Passion and unbridled emotionality, and, on the other hand, the moral foundations that the hero tries to follow, come into tragic conflict.

Eliot creates a gallery of images based on the existing typology of heroes in the Victorian literary tradition. The hero of the 19th century is always typified, that means, it belongs to a specific type, for example, social, psychological. Emphasizing Maggie's sensuality, the writer "kills" her hero, thereby cutting off possible prospects for her future fate. Eliot and her characters live within the constraining Victorian morality.

Fowles creates a hero who cannot be defined within the framework of one typology. The 20th century writer has a new complexity of the image: Fowles puts the existential component in the first place when he creates the Sarah's image. His hero carries the author away, she is beyond criticism, while Charles is in the focus of the writer's critical attention.

Maggie is a victim of the notions of duty she instilled (Nord, 2018). These notions ruin her life. She is an extraordinary person, but she is not able to withstand the test of rejection, unlike Sarah. At a particular period in her life, Maggie tries to fight with herself, seeks to subordinate her inner impulses to her mind, but Sarah follows her unconscious "I", she is the embodiment of freedom. She becomes the magician of her own destiny, admitting the existence of the unknowable, the intuitive.

The plot scheme of "Mills on Flosse" is clearly visible in the novel "The French Lieutenant's Woman". Carrie McSweeney notes in her monograph "Four Contemporary Novelists: Angus Wilson, Brian Moore, John Fowles, US Naipaul": «In fact, if a person were so disposed, it would not be difficult to argue that a source for the basic situation of Fowles's novel (the triangle of the pretty, conventional Ernestina, the privileged Charles, the deracine, unstable Sarah) is the third final part of Eliot's The Mill on the Floss...» (McSweeney, 1983).

However, Fowles rethinks, "turns" the story, which were told by the Victorian writer: Maggie's moral dilemmas are embodied in Fowles in the person of Charles, whom the free Sarah is trying to turn into an existential person. On the other hand, Stephen Guest turns out to be freer in the Eliot's novel. He tries to convince Maggie that the feeling, which attracts them to each other is great (natural), that it is useless

to fight it. The hero repeats many times that "natural law is insurmountable", "that it will sweep away all obstacles from all the way" (Eliot, 1963). In turn, Maggie declares: "If you were right, there would be no other law on earth than the instant whims of passion ..." (Eliot, 1963, p. 507). Later, the heroine Eliot says with all confidence: 'I never gave in to feeling with all my heart. There are memories, and attachments, and striving for real good ...' (Eliot, 1963). So, the inner torment associated with the idea of duty, responsibility and life purpose, the heroine Eliot turns out to be close in Fowles' novel to Charles Smithson

Reflections on debt are included by Fowles in the text and these reflections are conceptually significant for understanding the idea of the novel. So, in chapter 8, when the author refers to the characterization of Charles, he writes: "... we again face a dispute between two centuries: are we obliged to follow the dictates of duty or not?" (Fowles, 2003, p. 46). And then he makes a reference where he demonstrates an ironic attitude to this problem: I can give the famous phrase about George Eliot as the proof that mid-Victorian agnosticism and atheism (unlike modern ones) were connected with theological dogma: «God is incomprehensible, immortality is implausible, duty is indisputable and absolute." (Fowles, 2003, p. 47).

Unlike Fowles, who opposes various dogmas and stereotypes, Eliot's work should be viewed through the prism of the dominant idea of duty, in Victorian literature, where a person must follow, without thinking about failures and defeats. B.M. Proskurnin refers to the point of view of A. Mints and notes, that 'the influence of Protestantism and Puritanism is obvious in this understanding of duty which emphasized the individual responsibility of a person for his activities 'here and now'. This happens because duty (vocation) is a 'gift from above', and its fulfillment is a 'sacred activity' of a person <...> for Eliot it is Duty is the highest deity, often he even acts instead of God ...' (Proskurnin & Yashenkina, 2006, p. 310).

Entering into an intertextual dialogue with Eliot, Fowles develops the theme of vocation, self-determination and self-realization in his novel. At the same time, he illuminates the problem of choice and responsibility for it in a new way. There is no freedom in Eliot's world; people cannot choose their destiny, which is determined by a chain of different events.

Each novel creates a collective image of a provincial town (St. Aug. and Lyme Regis), which turn out to be similar to each other (Eliot and Fowles continue the Austen tradition to some extent here). The expanded to the boundaries of a provincial town everyday chronotope plays the role of a negative background in Austen's novels, which helps to emphasize the originality of the heroines. Eliot, on the other hand, tries to show the "fit" of characters into the social background by synthesizing the psychological and the social. A generalized social-group characteristic of the morals and customs of provincial society in her novels is given in order to reveal the mechanisms of interaction between the environment and the psychology of the individual. In Fowles's novel the satirical description of the mores of Lyme Regis helps to set off the mysteriousness and dissimilarity of Sarah Woodruff, to show the conditioning of the characters (primarily, of Charles Smithson) by the environment. The everyday chronotope in the author's novel is transformed into an existential (existential) one: the writer seeks to show the eternal in the ordinary on the other hand.

At first sight, Eliot and Fowles continue the Austen tradition. Eliot creates examples of an English socio-psychological novel about the province. At the same time, the moral and philosophical aspect is enhanced in their novels. All philosophical categories (determinism and freedom, duty and feeling, faith

and unbelief, moral responsibility) are important components of the novels of Eliot and Fowles. It should be noted that Fowles makes a significant emphasis on philosophical issues in his novel, paying special attention to the characters' creation of the existentialism philosophy and the method of psychoanalysis.

In comparison with Austen, Eliot and Fowles' novels are characterized by a greater degree of psychological analyticism: we can compare: 'The writer (Eliot - EA) very rarely turned to such a reproduction of the inner world, which would not allow explaining everything (or almost everything)' (Proskurnin & Yashenkina, 1994). The same situation with Fowles, with one exception: Eliot's characters, like the characters in the Victorian novel in general, are "internally open", while Fowles, in the person of Sarah and creates an "internally closed" model of behavior even for the author.

7. Conclusion

We can say, that Eliot's text carries an important semantic meaning in 'The French Lieutenant's Woman'.

Eliot and her heroes strive to become freer, developing many of the Austen traditions. But the writer lives in a deterministic world, like her heroes, while the concept of freedom is postulated in the artistic world of Fowles. This concept applies to the author, reader and heroes. On the one hand, Fowles develops certain ideas of Eliot. On the other hand, he gets into an intertextual dispute with the Victorian writer. Fowles' work expressed a sense of tradition, which includes both the desire to follow it and the intention to push off from it.

Fowles is a unravel author, so he is attracted to heroes who hesitate and doubt the general accepted rules. Such are the George Eliot's heroes, who touched upon moral problems in her novels, presented the "story of the soul" of her heroes, created characters which are self-absorbed and studying themselves.

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