

# THE RESEARCH OF STYLISTIC PECULIARITIES OF A.S. BYATT'S AND M. DRABBLE'S NOVELS AT ENGLISH LITERATURE CLASSES

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## Abstract

The paper considers the literary works of two well-known English writers Antonia Susan Byatt and Margaret Drabble and describes the course of stylistic analysis with university students at English literature classes. The purpose of the article is to research the stylistic peculiarities of A.S. Byatt's and M. Drabble's novels, particularly "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" and "The Realms of Gold", to reveal some similarities and differences in these authors' styles.

In the paper the concrete textual study of Byatt's and Drabble's works is carried out on the basis of the comparative-historical method of analysis of their creative work and the literary process of Britain as a whole. This theoretical approach is combined with literary-historical and literary-critical angles. The analysis proves that Byatt's and Drabble's novels have considerable thematic and imagery coincidences. The images of their main characters are very similar: their lifestyles, fates, professional activity. To create them the writers use similar images, epithets, literary reminiscences, but various narrative techniques. Drabble's novels are more realistic, psychological, while Byatt immerses the reader in a fantastic environment, where it is sometimes difficult to distinguish reality from fiction.

The results of the research can be applied by educators and teachers to master their teaching practice. The basic methods and analysis techniques can be used in the preparation of seminars on Byatt's and Drabble's works, for reading special courses on contemporary literature, in the study of other authors' artistic styles.

Keywords: research, university student, education, English literature, A.S. Byatt, M. Drabble, novel, writer, "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye", "The Realms of Gold".

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The English writers Antonia Susan Byatt and Margaret Drabble began their way in literature in the 1960s and have been creating novels, short stories, plays, television scripts and literary works for more than five decades. The sisters were born in Sheffield, in the north of England, Antonia - in 1936, Margaret - three years later, and then their younger sister and brother were born. M. Drabble notes that their family is the same size and composition as the Bronte family, and like Bronte, they are all interested in literature, and in their childhood they even made up stories together. This imaginary children's world was recreated by A. Byatt in her novel "The Game" (1967) [1], a book about two sisters, Cassandra and Julia Corbett, whose prototypes were Byatt and Drabble themselves.

In the works of both sisters, the most interesting are difficult relationships between two women - sisters, cousins, friends - relationships that have grown out of the lives of the real sisters. In Drabble's first novel "A summer-bird cage" Sarah Bennet tries to escape from the influence of her older sister Louise, but at the same time she wants to understand her and find something common with her [2]. Jane Gray in the novel "The Waterfall" says that her cousin Lucy "was my sister, my destiny, my example: her influence on me was enormous" [3]. However, Jane does not only copy her cousin's life, but also has an affair with her husband.

In Byatt's novel "The Game" the sisters confront each other, because they realize that they are mutually projected. A younger sister Julia is not free because she understands that she is Cassandra's reflection, and then she tries to take revenge through literature. She writes a novel "A Sense of Glory", in which Cassandra becomes the prototype. The latter refuses to live in literature, as in a trap. Finally, she finds a way out of this impasse – a suicide, which Byatt also presents as a possible acquisition of freedom and an experiment on one's consciousness.

Although the parallels are obvious, both writers claim that the images of their characters have quite different prototypes. The sisters are reluctant to talk about their relationship and get angry about being so often associated with each other. This is not surprising, because their life and professional paths

are strikingly similar. At first, they studied at The Mount School, then at Cambridge, they are both excellent specialists in English literature. They both married, have children, divorced and remarried. Margaret and Antony are famous novelists, critics, literary figures. They even write on close topics, for example, about the relationships in the family, about the painful search and fate of women in modern society.

Their characters are graduates from universities, young, ambitious, creative personalities. Byatt's first novel "The Shadow of the Sun" (1964) [4] narrates about the dreams and hopes of an impressionable young writer, determined to make her own way in life. The style of Byatt's writing in this novel is marked by the strong influence of M. Proust. The heroine of the first Drabble's novel "A summer-bird cage" (1963) also dreams of writing her first book, as witty as "Lucky Jim" by K. Amis.

The purpose of the article is to research the stylistic peculiarities of A.S. Byatt's and M. Drabble's novels, particularly "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" and "The Realms of Gold", to reveal potential similarities and differences in these authors' styles in the course of literary analysis and case-studies with the students. The relevance of the problem is caused by the fact that a set of similar images and ideas being used in Drabble's and Byatt's works may as well foster analytical and critical thinking among the students [5].

## 2 METHODOLOGY

In the article the concrete textual study of Byatt's and Drabble's novels is carried out on the basis of the comparative-historical method of analysis of their works and the literary process of Britain as a whole. This theoretical approach is combined with literary-historical and literary-critical angles.

The works of Antonia Byatt and Margaret Drabble have been widely discussed by critics of England and the United States for several decades. Some monographic studies have been published (works written by V. Myer [6], E.C. Rose [7], S. Roxman [8], J. Creighton [9], J. Campbell [10], K.C. Kelly [11]); numerous research papers, newspaper and magazine articles have appeared. Among the Russian researches who studied these British authors are S. Dubovik [12], A. Blagoveshchenskaya [13], Y. Grebenchuk [14], V. Livshits [15], Y. Muratova [16].

However, the comparative analysis of stylistic peculiarities in Byatt's and Drabble's works have not been implemented properly so far. Thus, it is necessary to do it at English literature class with the students who are given a list of tasks to implement:

- 1 They have to read two stories: "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" written by A.S. Byatt and "The Realms of Gold" written by M. Drabble. The learners discuss some questions on general understanding of the literary works in the class (When and where does the story take place? Name and give a short description of the main characters. What is the structure of the work? What narrative types are used in the text? What was the author's main aim? What main themes does the author reveal in this work? What images does she use?).
- 2 The students must compare the images of the main characters of the stories: their appearance, inner characteristics, family lives, careers and so on.
- 3 Then they are given the task to read some selected parts of the novels for detailed analysis (the scenes of bathing in Adra in Drabble's novel and Ankara in Byatt's story, some dialogues, etc.), to discuss them in small groups, paying attention to different epithets, symbolic details, literary reminiscences and narrative techniques.
- 4 Finally, the students have to make a report on the research of stylistic peculiarities in A.S. Byatt's and M. Drabble's works.

## 3 RESULTS

In the course of literary analysis, we have considered the stylistic peculiarities of M. Drabble's novel "The Realms of Gold" (1975) and A.S. Byatt's story "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" (1991). The main characters of these works are Frances Wingate and Gillian Perholt: they are middle-aged women who succeeded in professional activities (Frances is an archeologist, Gillian is a narratologist), but were abandoned by their husbands and almost unnecessary to their children. Their life consists of constant flights, business trips, meetings, participation in international conferences: Frances goes to a conference in Adra in Africa, Gillian flies to Ankara, and then to Toronto. The scenes in Adra and

Ankara are very similar: an oasis in the desert, a luxury hotel, a swimming pool and especially the scenes of the heroines' bathing:

"Oh, what blessing," said Gillian, pulling the weary body in the green shimmering water and feeling it becomes weightless, as blood and nerves begin to emanate pure energy, and swam, raising ripples like a snake. <...>. The nerves, which turned into a painful knot, relaxed, the heart and lungs calmed down and earned as it should, the body revived and filled with happiness" [17].

"The water was a perfect temperature: warm, soft, quivering blue, very mildly refreshing. She lay on her back, her hair drifting like weed, her ears full of water, gazing upwards at the white monument of the hotel, and the fairylights, orange and white and green" [18].

The epithets characterized the water "green shimmering" (Byatt) and "quivering blue", "very mildly refreshing" (Drabble) and multi-coloured "fairylights" reflected in it create the atmosphere of a fabulous Arabian night. "It was a scene from nowhere, a modern Arabian Night" [18].

It is noteworthy that the heroines feel themselves in the water freely, as well as in the air, they float or fly "freely", so it can be noticed that water and air are their favorite elements. "Floating redundant" she said to herself, sipping champagne, nibbling salted almonds, whilst all round her spread the fields of heaven, white and rippling, glistening and gleaming, rosy and blue in the shadows, touched by the sun with steady brightness. 'Floating redundant', she murmured blissfully as the vessel banked and turned and a disembodied male voice spoke in the cabin, announcing that there was a veil of water vapour over France but that that would burn off, and then they would see the Alps, when the time came. Burn off was a powerful term, she thought, rhetorically interesting, for water does not burn and yet the sun's heat reduces this water to nothing; I am in the midst of fierce forces. I am nearer the sun than any woman of my kind, any ancestress of mine, can ever have dreamed of being, I can look in his direction and stay steadily here, floating redundant" [17]. Here there is one more element - the element of fire in the form of one of its hypostases - the sun, which is present in almost all the works of Byatt.

The expression "floating redundant", which goes as a refrain through the entire narrative, is used to describe the freedom of flight in the story. This phrase is borrowed from John Milton's "Paradise Lost" [19], where it depicts the primeval beauty of the snake-tempter's rings in the Garden of Eden. One of the meanings of the word "redundant" is "superfluous, unnecessary", like a man who was fired from his job, and another meaning is "free" (in Milton's sense). "And although she was now redundant as a woman, being neither wife, mother nor mistress, she was by no means redundant as a narratologist but on the contrary, in demand everywhere. For this was a time when women were privileged, when female narratologists had skills greatly revered, when there were pythonesses, abbesses and sibyls in the world of narratology, who revealed mysteries and kept watch at the boundaries of correctness" [17]. Here we can agree with V. Livshits who confirms that "in this game of values embedded in the polysemantic word "redundant", a combination of uselessness and voluntariness is based, that is, freedom and lack of freedom at one point" [15].

Frances Wingate is looking for the remains of ancient civilizations in different parts of the globe. She has an outwardly prosperous and attractive life, a successful career, an interesting job, full of travel and new acquaintances, four children and a good house in London. However, like many other Drabble's characters Frances is unhappy: she is separated from her beloved man and is looking for a way to reunite with him. Her love to Karel Schmidt is so touching that she carries his torn tooth with her as a memory of the years of love. The tooth is an exact symbolic detail, which speaks of a strong spiritual connection between separated lovers. In separation and illness, Frances recalls the golden time of love with Karel. She wants to find "golden worlds" in the past - both in the historical past of other peoples and in her own family's past. "We seek a Utopia in the past, a possible if not an ideal society. We seek golden worlds from which we are banished" [18]. The motive of exile from the golden worlds (from paradise) also causes associations with Milton's "Paradise Lost", as in the story of Byatt.

In the novel "The Realms of Gold" there are three elements in which the characters exist: the earth, fire and water. Each of the elements is associated with a certain aspect of time and dominates in one of the novel's parts. For example, in the first part the element or image of the earth that corresponds to the aspect of the past is dominant. Probably, therefore, most of the artistic details here symbolize death. They are stones, bones, usually remains, the teeth of living people, skulls and horns of animals, ancient burials and modern cemeteries. S. Roxman says that the images of bones and teeth are metonymical, as they are physical remains of dead people and animals. "Loose bones and teeth may be physical remains of dead human beings and animals" [8]. Paradoxically, as symbols of death, bones and teeth can symbolize survival and life in some cases. We can remember the tooth of Karel, which Frances always carries with her, or the story of the tragic death of Karel's family in a fascist

concentration camp: "Most of his family had perished in concentration camps. He alone of his generation had escaped. Teeth and bones. Profanely she cherished his fragments" [18].

The existence of heroines in the above-mentioned elements is not accidental: these women are primarily children of nature, despite the scientific and technological progress and all its innovations and advantages, they are inextricably linked with the past, their roots, the "old women- ancestresses", with whom they constantly compare themselves. Dr. Perholt understood that she was lucky. "Her ancestresses, about whom she thought increasingly often, would probably have been dead by the age she had reached. Dead in childbed, dead of influenza, or tuberculosis, or puerperal fever, or simple exhaustion, dead, as she travelled back in time, from worn-out unavailing teeth, from cracked kneecaps, from hunger, from lions, tigers, sabre-toothed tigers, invading aliens, floods, fires, religious persecution, human sacrifice, why not? Certain female narratologists talked with pleasurable awe about wise crones but she was no crone, she was an unprecedented being, a woman with porcelain-crowned teeth, laser-corrected vision, her own store of money, her own life and field of power, who flew, who slept in luxurious sheets around the world, who gazed out at the white fields under the sun by day and the brightly turning stars by night as she floated redundant" [17]. In this passage the author ironically describes the achievements of the twentieth century, which are actively used by modern women. The repetition of the adjective "own" also occurs in the description of the independent Rosamund, the heroine of Drabble's novel "The Millstone": "Emancipated woman - that was me: gin bottle in hand, opening my own door with my own latch key" [20]. Consequently, these characters are the heroines of their time, they are social beings, emancipated women.

Despite the fact, that outwardly the heroines are free, not burdened by any ties and obligations, move freely around the world, they are nevertheless limited by internal fears and complexes: for example, the fear of their own aging bodies and the approaching death, the fear of loneliness. They find themselves imprisoned in the confined space of hotels, planes, caves, like djinns in a bottle. After a divorce from her husband, Gillian "felt like a bird confined in a box, like a gas confined in a bottle, that found an opening, and rushed out. She felt herself expand in the space of her own life. No more waiting for meals. No more grumbling and jousting, no more exhausted anticipation of alien feelings, no more snoring, no more fans, no more trace of stubble in the washbasin" [17]. It is noteworthy that the metaphors "a bird in a cage", "djinn in a bottle" accompany the characters of both authors.

On receiving the fax in which her husband announced about divorce, "Gillian Perholt stood in the empty study and imagined herself grieving over betrayal, the loss of love, the loss of companionship perhaps, of respect in the world, maybe, as an aging woman rejected for one more youthful. It was a sunny day in Primrose Hill, and the walls of the study were a cheerful golden colour, and she saw the room fill up with golden light and felt full of lightness, happiness and purpose. She felt, she poetically put it to herself, like a prisoner bursting chains and coming blinking out of a dungeon" [17]. The liberation from her husband is depicted ironically again. Speaking about the heroine's inner state, the author uses the words "a cheerful golden colour, golden light, lightness, happiness".

In "The Realms of Gold" we meet the same epithets very often, even in the novel's title. The scene in the cemetery is created by varying the epithets "yellow" and "golden": "The church was built of a golden stone, peculiar to a small locality of the county: it crumbled and deepened in the dark afternoon air, yellow gold, soft, old" [18]. When Frances's aunt Constance died, this tragic event seems to unite the heroes, because, despite the internal vices, disunity and misunderstanding, in the final of the novel the members of the Ollerenshaw family gather together at Connie's funeral. Everything brings harmony here: peacefully grazing cows, black and white, like on a pastoral of the 18th century, and the grave of Constance made of yellow clay, and a wide flat river, and a soft autumn light. Looking at this landscape, "as though in another century", the "golden age," Karel Schmidt "reflected on his own passion for the rural England he saw so rarely, his heaven, his place of exile, his unknown land: and on Frances, who came from this land" [18].

If Drabble's main character finally comes to finding freedom through the acquisition of the past, her own roots, then in Byatt's story, gaining freedom from one's own fears and complexes is realized only in the plot, on the external level. Releasing the genie from the bottle, Gillian becomes dependent on him. We can say that the heroine is free and not free at the same time. Thus, the theme of "freedom – lack of freedom" is embodied in different ways in the works of Byatt and Drabble.

A characteristic feature of Byatt's style is the narrative within the narrative. Being a specialist in British mythology and a literary fairy tale, the writer engenders strange, disturbing, magical stories (the story of Patient Griselda, the tales of Scheherazade), which helps the author to create different worlds, makes the reader take part in them and think about some important philosophical questions.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

The analysis proves that Byatt's and Drabble's novels have considerable thematic and imagery coincidences. The images of their main characters are very similar: their lifestyles, fates, professional activity. To create them the writers use similar images, epithets, literary reminiscences, but various narrative techniques. Drabble's novels are more realistic, psychological, while Byatt immerses the reader in a fantastic environment, where it is sometimes difficult to distinguish reality from fiction.

The theme "freedom – lack of freedom" is revealed differently in the authors' works: Drabble's characters acquire freedom through adopting their past, while Byatt's characters in searching freedom can commit suicide, like Cassandra in "The Game", or become dependent, like Gillian in "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye".

Drabble's characters are looking for their "golden worlds" in the past, in the golden age of love, in turning to their roots, the unity with the family. The whole logic of the narrative of the novel and its images leads to the conclusion that a person eventually returns to his origins, that the present and the future of people are conditioned and closely connected with the past, with the life of other generations, but not completely predetermined. A person can and must deal with all the destructive, pernicious and dark that was in the past, to make adjustments to one's own life and the life of one's family. In their moral and philosophical search, the novel's characters and M. Drabble herself, return to rural England as the source, as the bearer of the traditions and moral values of the "golden age".

The results of the study could be applied by educators and teachers in both research and practical teaching contexts. The proposed methods and analysis techniques can be used for instruction design of seminars on Byatt's and Drabble's works, for reading special courses on contemporary literature, in the study of other authors' artistic styles, etc. The materials of the paper may be included in the course of lectures on the history of world literature of the twentieth century for students of humanities [21].

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