

THE RESEARCH OF INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN M. DRABBLE'S LITERARY WORKS AND NOVELS AT ENGLISH LITERATURE CLASSES

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Abstract

The paper is aimed to research the interconnections between Margaret Drabble's literary works and her novels at English literature classes at Kazan Federal University. The relevance of the investigated problem is caused by the fact that a set of similar images and ideas are used in Drabble's critical articles as well as in her realistic novels. The purpose of the paper is to analyse some of her literary works ("Arnold Bennett. A Biography", "The Genius of Thomas Hardy", "Wordsworth") in parallel with her novels ('The Millstone', "The Waterfall", "The Realms of Gold") to reveal some similarities and interconnections in the course of literary analysis with the students.

In the article the concrete textual study of Drabble's works is carried out on the basis of the comparative-historical method of analysis of her 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 Drabble's novels and her literary works created in a certain period of the author's activity have considerable thematic and imagery coincidences. It allows the students to trace the logic of the development of Drabble's creative thought of a particular period and reveal the main characteristics of her artistic style.

The results of the research could 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 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, M. Drabble, novel, writer, literary critic, A. Bennett, T. Hardy, W. Wordsworth, 'The Millstone', "The Waterfall", "The Realms of Gold".

1 INTRODUCTION

Margaret Drabble, a famous English writer, literary critic and publicist, is the author of a large number of novels, short stories, plays, television scripts and literary works, diverse in character. Among them are monographic studies of the creative heritage of English writers (W. Wordsworth, A. Bennett, A. Wilson), collections of articles on the writers of the 19th and 20th centuries (T. Hardy, Bronte sisters, V. Woolf), problematic works on the history of English literature and others. M. Drabble is one of the compilers and the editor of the latest, most complete version of the monumental reference book on English literature "The Oxford Companion to English Literature" [1].

Drabble appeals to the classical writers as a worthy successor and continuer of the realistic tradition, as well as a professional literary critic, seeking to understand the wealth of her predecessors' artistic experience. Drabble - the critic feels a deep inner connection, a kind of commonality between them and her own creative work. This fact often determines her attitude to the writer she studies. Thus, in Wordsworth's poetry she is attracted by his deep psychological insight and his ability to "capture the sense of a minor" [2]. The biography of Arnold Bennett, who was criticized by his contemporaries and undeservedly forgotten after his death, is a tribute to the great respect for the writer [3].

As Drabble's work is greatly influenced by these writers' novels and poetry, it is important to trace interrelations between her own creative work and her literary criticism dedicated to her predecessors.

The main aim of the paper is to research some of Drabble's literary works ("Arnold Bennett. A Biography", "The Genius of Thomas Hardy", "Wordsworth", "A Writer's Britain. Landscape in Literature", "For Queen and country. Britain in the Victorian age") in parallel with her novels ('The Millstone', "Jerusalem the Golden", "The Realms of Gold") to reveal some similarities and interconnections in the course of literary analysis with the students.

2 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

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

At English literature classes the students are given a list of tasks to implement:

- 1 At first they have to choose one of Drabble's literary works, read it at home and answer some questions on general understanding (When was it written? What was the author's main aim? What is the structure of the work? What main themes does the author study in this work? What images does she use? What is the author's attitude to the writer considered?).
- 2 Afterwards, the learners are to read the selected parts of the critical work for detailed analysis, discuss them at the class, paying attention to different images: artistic details, symbolic images.
- 3 Finally, the students should compare Drabble's literary work and one of her novels to find some similarities and interconnections between them.

3 RESULTS

In "Arnold Bennett. A Biography" Drabble admits that in Bennett's books she had found the material that she had never met in fiction before, but which she constantly faced in her life. The details of life described by Bennett do not seem boring to her. On the contrary, the method of recreating the ordinary life in Bennett's prose is very close to her, she highly appreciates what has long been considered lengthy and uninteresting.

Drabble's remark on this matter reflects not only her own position, but also an important trend of the English novel of the second half of the twentieth century: "Bennett is literally captured by the unusualness of the ordinary. And he talks about it with enthusiasm. The simplest life is not at all monotonous, on the contrary, it is very diverse, if you carefully look into it with a trained eye, and Bennett was able to train his eye perfectly "[4].

M. Drabble's book about Bennett is thoroughly documented, but no less important role is given to his intuition, artistic imagination; the author is primarily concerned with the formation of the character of the considered writer, his dependence on external and internal factors. A. Bennett's biography is close to the genre of Bildungsroman, the novel of education, in a sense. Being both from the northern England, Bennett and Drabble are linked by common way of life, customs, characters, attitudes. Writing his biography was a kind of journey into the family past, to the roots, the act of self-knowledge for the author.

Bennett's influence can be seen in Drabble's novel "Jerusalem the Golden" (1967). The main character of Bennett's novel "A Man from the North" (1898) [5] Richard Larch likes trains, hotels, travelling, he is obsessed with the idea of running away from home, like Drabble's heroine Clara Maugham. Besides, Clara has much in common with another Bennett's heroine Hilda Lessways [6]: they are united, for example, by the passion for adventure and a bright, disorderly life. At the first visit of unfamiliar houses Bennett's and Drabble's characters are blinded by the interior, so unlike their own homes. For example, Clara was astonished by the abundance of glitter and gold in Denham's living room: "a gilt-framed armchair", "a gold mirror", "the golden eagle", "a goldfish bowl" [7] - every detail speaks about exclusivity and uniqueness of its inhabitants. Like Hilda, Clara comes to a dying mother, and a sense of guilt came over her. However, unlike Hilda, who comes when her mother is already dead, Clara finds her mother alive. We believe that, departing from the plot of the prototype, Drabble offers her character a happy ending, which Bennett rejected. Clara is freed from the "iron grip of fate" and the guilt towards her mother, as if taking advantage of the opportunity given her by the writer.

In the work "The Genius of Thomas Hardy" (1976) Drabble examines the reasons that has determined the unique place of T. Hardy in the history of English literature. Among them, the critic highlights Hardy's ability to give a specific description of the region, without becoming a regional writer. "Perhaps the greatest mystery of T. Hardy lies in the way in which he achieves universality in his works through adherence to the particular; stopping at the perishable, he achieves the eternal "[8].

Drabble turns to Hardy in her novels as well: particularly, in the novel "The Millstone" (1965) [9] she develops the theme of an unmarried mother, considered by Hardy in "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" [10]. However, unlike Hardy's heroine, whose tragedy was determined by the social environment and her prejudices, Drabble's heroine breaks down the moral norms, as a result of a painful inner struggle, and

thereby wins the right to raise her child on her own, without anyone's help and, what is more importantly, without public censure.

In the study "A Writer's Britain. Landscape in Literature" (1979) [11] Drabble continues the theme started in her works on Wordsworth and Hardy - it is the theme of the nature, to which the writer pays much attention in her novels. "A Writer's Britain" is an attempt to show "the English essence" through the attitude of the British to the nature throughout the centuries-old history of the country, the specific artistic reflection of the nature in writers' works. The book is permeated by a nostalgic mood of the author, who comes to a familiar place and immerses in childhood memories. Travelling around the region is connected with time travel. Drabble believes that the writers' sense of the landscape is extremely significant, because through their words we can see the disappeared past, through which it is easier to understand the present. The author's longing for the past, forever gone into the history of the English nature, relates this study with the novel "The Realms of Gold" by Drabble (1975) [12].

In the historical-literary research "For Queen and the country. Britain in the Victorian age" (1978), the author analyzes the influence of the Queen Victoria's personality and her era on the views, the norms of social behavior, attitude to literature and art, etc. The most interesting for us is the chapter dedicated to the Victorian novel (The Novel). According to Drabble, the novels of that age are distinguished by extraordinary length, the presence of a variety of storylines and an abundance of characters representing people from all walks of life. "As Victorian cities, they are overcrowded, often poorly planned, representing a strange mixture of beauty and poverty, ups and downs, the top and bottom of the society" [13].

Since the novel in the Victorian age was not perceived as a serious genre of literature (it could be entertaining, descriptive, moralizing or it combined all these features), there were no formal rules for writing it. This led to the fact that numerous storylines were often lost, melodramatic endings or impossible solutions were offered in the finale, questions remained unanswered, as in life itself. Another feature of the novel was not always justifiable conglomeration of details. Despite the highly critical analysis of the Victorian novel, it is easy to find some of the stylistic devices that Drabble uses in her own artistic work. Among them, we note the method of contrast, the abundant use of details, a lot of plot lines (especially in later novels) and the openness of the finale.

Many of the themes and key images that occur on the pages of Drabble's novels are explored in parallel from literary positions. Thus, studying the most important aspects of English society in the era of Queen Victoria, she pays much attention to the life of the middle class: its lifestyle, Victorian houses, interior, views, etc. The description of the interior of the Victorian living-room ("colorful, luxurious, comfortable, crowded with objects, a paradise for the curious" [14]) resembles the image of the living room in the house of the Denhams" in "Jerusalem the Golden".

Similarly, the characteristic of the English society of the nineteenth century is based on the oppositions "mobile - static", "urban - peasant", i.e. on the method of contrast, typical for Drabble's style. "Society had become mobile rather than static, urban rather than peasant; some may have looked back with nostalgia to the golden age of cottage industry, but more rejoiced at new prospects" [15]. In this passage Drabble uses the image "golden age", which becomes symbolic in the novel "The Realms of Gold", written in the same period (in the 1970s) as "For Queen and the country".

The thematic coincidences can be seen in Drabble's novel "Millstone" (1965) and her monograph "Wordsworth" (1966). K. Butler believes that the basis of both books is the concept of "ordinariness" (ordinary). This is explained by the fact that the heroine of the novel Rosamund and Wordsworth are creative people, but quite earthly. The books describe the meetings of the main characters with ordinary people. We can agree with Butler's opinion only partially. The fact is that, while recognizing nonequivalence of early and late Wordsworth's works, Drabble calls him an original and even a revolutionary poet: "He was in every sense a rebel and a revolutionary. In politics, in literature, in his emotional life he reacted against the conventions of his age; he made his own way» [16]. Similarly, but in her own way, the main character of "The Millstone" struggles with the conventions and prejudices of her time.

In the monograph on Wordsworth Drabble examines the poet's formation and literary tradition, on which he developed as an artist and which he surpassed. The critic tries to answer the question: what distinguishes Wordsworth's "Lyrical Ballads" from everything that had existed in the English poetry before 1798? Analyzing, for example, the pastoral poems of the "smaller" poets "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1750) by T. Gray and the "The Deserted Village" (1770) by O. Goldsmith, Drabble notes "the lack of energy, softness, original and strong feelings" [17] in them. Both poems, written in the pastoral tradition, contain descriptions of nature and villagers, they moralize about the

burdens of the innocent villagers' lives and praise a simple village life as opposed to a city life full of vices. Despite this, the critic believes that the rural life depicted by the poets "is not quite real and convincing, it is too poetic, too beautiful and perfect"; the characters appear "not real people, but bizarre cute figures on the background of an artificial landscape" [18]. In Wordsworth's poems on the same subject, we find ourselves in the real world of people living and suffering, building real farms, grazing real sheep and burying corpses in real cemeteries.

Drabble believes that Wordsworth was the first to show the significance and depth of ordinary people's feelings. "He says that even the most modest and unenlightened person can have a real sense of the depth and meaning of life, and that the feelings of ordinary people are just as important as the feelings of the famous and the rich" [19]. An analysis of the criticism of Wordsworth's work fills the notion of "ordinariness" with a completely different content: it is not just "ordinary", but it is the beauty and the depth in the ordinary. Similarly, the main character of "The Millstone" finds the greatest joy and the meaning of life in such a simple phenomenon as the birth of her child.

Literary works brought M. Drabble the deserved authority of a connoisseur of English literature. The works we have examined are closely related to the writer's novels, which makes it possible to trace the logic of the development of Drabble's creative thought of one or another period.

4 DISCUSSIONS

The work of Margaret Drabble has been widely discussed by critics of England and the United States for several decades. Some monographic studies have been published (works by V. Myer [20], E.C. Rose [21], S. Roxman [22], J. Creighton [23]), numerous research papers, newspaper and magazine articles have appeared. However, Drabble's literary works have not been studied so thoroughly. Sometimes researches give them negative characteristics. For instance, I. Vlodavskaya says in her article about "the drawbacks of the biographical method" in Drabble's monograph, dedicated to Arnold Bennett. She criticizes the "biased" attitude of the author to Bennett, whose figure "appears in some self-important significance, out of the context of time". "The personality of the writer is portrayed more harmonious and integral than it was in reality" [24]. Nevertheless, Vlodavskaya admits that the researcher has managed to show Bennett's strength as a writer and literary critic.

It is necessary to mention that the interconnections between Drabble's literary works and her novels have not been analyzed properly.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis proves that Drabble's novels and her literary works, created in a certain period of the author's activity, have considerable thematic and imagery coincidences: the theme of an unmarried mother, of ordinary people, of the nature and so on. Among images typical for Drabble's style is the image of golden age, which becomes symbolic. The research allows the students to trace the logic of the development of Drabble's creative thought of a particular period and reveal the main characteristics of her artistic style.

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. They can be used in the preparation of seminars on Drabble's novels, on the style of English prose of the twentieth century as well as reading special courses on critical reading on the material of English literature [25]. The basic methods and analysis techniques can be applied in the study of other foreign authors' artistic styles.

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