

THE RESEARCH OF SOCIOCULTURAL COMPONENTS OF FAMILY AND MARRIAGE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR EFFECTIVE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AT UNIVERSITY IN RUSSIA

A. Blagoveshchenskaya, I. Ainoutdinova

Kazan Federal University (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Abstract

The article highlights the theme of research of such sociocultural components as family and marriage in modern English literature for further effective language teaching at university level in Russia. The research has been conducted based on such novels of a well-known British writer Margaret Drabble as "A summer bird-cage", "The Garrick Year", "The Millstone", "Jerusalem the Golden", "The Waterfall" and "The Realms of Gold". The study of the topics concerning matrimonial matters in English literature seem to be important for English language and literature classes since such authentic knowledge allows English language teachers to deeply acquaint their students with the socio-cultural and historical features of society of the target language country. Besides, through the family theme the author of the literary work shows some important though hidden processes taking place in the modern society, as well as she may express her own attitude towards them.

The textual study of Drabble's novels has been carried out based on the comparative-historical method of analysis of her creative works and the literary process in Britain as a whole. This theoretical approach is combined with the literary-historical and literary-critical methods. The analysis proves that the study of the theme related to family and marriage in English literature is an important socio-cultural component of teaching foreign languages at university. Thus, through the study of literature, students will not only acquire knowledge about the society, everyday life, history and culture of people living in the target language country, but also may have opportunity to comprehend critically and thoughtfully what has been read so as to compare and analyse the social processes taking place in the UK with the similar processes currently occurring in Russia and in other parts of the world.

The results of the study prove the effectiveness of integration of various topics of the day relating to the socio-cultural and historical legacy of the target language country for better language acquisition among the university students. Our findings could be used by researchers, educators and teachers in both scientific and practical teaching contexts. The proposed methods and analysis techniques can be employed for instructional design of seminars on Drabble's and other English writers' works, and while reading special courses on contemporary English literature at university.

Keywords: Research, education, foreign language, student, socio-cultural component, English literature, M. Drabble, family, marriage.

1 INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of the paper is to research such sociocultural components as family and marriage in English literature for further effective language teaching at university level in Russia. The research has been conducted based on the novels of a famous British writer Margaret Drabble. We consider her early novels written in the 1960s: "A summer bird-cage", "The Garrick Year", "The Millstone", "Jerusalem the Golden", as well as Drabble's works created in the 1970s: "The Waterfall" and "The Realms of Gold". In her novels, the writer explores the themes of marriage and divorce, motherhood and unmarried mothers, the problems of relationships between parents and children, brothers and sisters.

According to Margaret Drabble, family and relations between family members are an important basis for further development of any person's character, therefore, speaking about the personal development of the characters of her novels, she tells in detail about their childhood, parents, relationships in the family. It is deeply symbolic that the relations between children and parents in all families are far from perfect: there is no mutual understanding, warmth and trust between generations.

The study of the topics concerning matrimonial matters in English literature seem to be important for English language and literature classes since such authentic knowledge allows English language teachers to deeply acquaint their students with the socio-cultural and historical features of society of

the target language country. Besides, through the family theme the author of the literary work shows some important though hidden processes taking place in the modern society, as well as she may express her own attitude towards them.

2 METHODOLOGY

The textual study of Drabble's novels has been carried out based on the comparative-historical method of analysis of her creative works and the literary process in Britain as a whole. This theoretical approach is combined with the literary-historical and literary-critical methods.

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

- 1 At first, they have to read one of the offered novels at home and answer some questions on general understanding (When and where does the story take place? Name and give a short description of the main characters. What are relationships between them? What is the main conflict of the novel? What themes does the author consider?).
- 2 Afterwards, the learners are to read the selected parts of the novels for detailed analysis, discuss them at the class, paying attention to different matrimonial themes.
- 3 Finally, the students have to make a report on the research of sociocultural components of family and marriage in M. Drabble's works.

3 RESULTS

The early novels of the writer largely reflect her life's path: these are the different stages and conditions of a woman of her age from marriage and divorce to new lovers and a new marriage. After graduating from Cambridge in 1960, Drabble married an actor Clive Swift. The couple spent a year in Stratford-upon-Avon, playing at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. Due to various family and domestic circumstances, Margaret could not find work and began to engage in writing activities. Her experience and impressions of that time, Drabble reflected in the novel "The Garrick Year" (1964) [1]. Her heroine is a young housewife Emma Evans, who is married to an actor and has two little children. She lives in a provincial town during the preparation for the theatrical season. Emma is depressed about the household problems and the constant absence of her husband.

The conflict between the spouses is escalated when Emma finds out about her husband's infidelity and she starts an affair herself, but her affair is presented as a farce, as a poor performance, because the heroine is going to betray rather out of boredom, and also to annoy her husband. Having, in her words, "a warm feeling of defeat" [2], after all the events that have occurred, she comes to an important conclusion: for the sake of the family and children, one must learn to tolerate and turn a blind eye to many things. At the end of the novel, there appeared the image of a snake, twisted by a ringlet and adherent to a sheep's stomach, as a symbol of danger lurking in paradise booths. The heroine, having seen the snake, said nothing and passed by. "You just need to gather the courage and for the sake of children to pass by without noticing. Or just sit at home" [3]. The biblical allusion (the snake killing a sheep) reminds the heroine not only of her failed marriage, but also of the tragedy of the whole world.

It is significant that almost all couples in Drabble's novels are unhappy. This is partly due to her sceptical attitude towards the institution of marriage. "I do not know why some people get married" [4] - she said in an interview. In addition, the commitment to a realistic method requires the faithful representation of human relations by the writer. If we sometimes find happy marriages in her novels, they are drawn schematically and even caricatured, as, for example, the "ideal" couple Michael and Stephanie in "A Summer bird-cage" (1963) [5]. They stroke the main character Sarah by informing the news of their unborn child, as if they were telling about the upcoming vacation. Another example is the marriage of Mary Scott's parents in the novel "The Garrick Year" which is far from being an example to follow, when the writer reveals the true essence of the Scott, their falsity and hypocrisy with the help of a successfully found symbol (the bottom drawer of the wardrobe full of old dirty rubbish) [1].

Perhaps the only happy couple in Drabble's novels is the Denhams from "Jerusalem the golden", but it is rather a symbol of a family, an unattainable ideal. The Denhams are inseparable from their golden interior, their magnificent house; they are only a part of the world of Golden Jerusalem [6].

In the novels "A summer bird-cage", "Jerusalem the golden", "The Waterfall" Drabble explores the theme of marriage of convenience, "marriage as a cage". For example, in "A summer bird-cage"

Louise Bennet, the main heroine's sister, marries the wealthy but the hated man, cheats on him, but later she suffers herself from the situation. Drabble debunks and rejects the marriage of convenience. She depicts not only the meanness and defectiveness of the traditional marriage deal, but also convinces the reader of the principal impossibility for a modern educated and self-respecting woman to live in such an alliance [5].

A special place in Drabble's works is occupied by the theme of motherhood, which is also due to the facts of her biography. After the divorce from Clive Swift in 1975, Drabble raised her three children alone, that is, she experienced all the hardships and joys of motherhood herself. This theme appears in many of her novels ("The Garrick Year", "The Millstone", "The Waterfall"), reflecting its various stages: pregnancy, childbirth, feeding, mother care, upbringing. It is interesting to note that not all characters are initially happy to accept motherhood, which for many of them seem to be an ordeal. They are torn between the desire to regain former independence and maternal feelings, and only much later, they realize the importance and joy of motherhood.

Such an ambiguous attitude to motherhood can be seen in the already mentioned novel "The Garrick Year", but much more deeply and dramatically this theme is revealed in another novel - "The Millstone" (1965) [7]. This is the story of a young unmarried mother Rosamund Stessy, who decides to raise a child alone, by virtue of her convictions, without telling his father about it. Overcoming various difficulties, the heroine discovers a completely different world, which she had never suspected before. After her daughter's birth, she learns true love, a burden of responsibility and a fear for her child's health. She has to go through a serious illness of her daughter, through the indifference of other people and at the end of the novel - a meeting with her daughter's father, which she was so afraid of. As if through a millstone, the heroine's former ideals and ideas, fears and complexes are "grinding" and changing.

Despite the fact that the writer was sometimes sceptical about marriage, she was always very positive about motherhood: "I consider the relationship of a mother and a child a great salvation, a way of unselfish love, which is very difficult, if not impossible, to find in adult relationships" [4]. Maternity makes it possible to understand other people better. The model of mother's love was for Margaret her mother-in-law Mrs. Swift, who created the atmosphere of love and understanding in her family, which was very different from Drabble's parental hearth with its prohibitions and stiffness.

The writer notes that the topic of a person's relationship with his brothers or sisters and parents makes her want to write about it again and again. One of the central conflicts of many of her novels is the conflict between a mother and a daughter. The figure of the father, on the contrary, is less important for Drabble and is often in the shadows. Probably, it reflects the relationship between Margaret and her parents. Her father was constantly busy and somewhat removed from raising children, although the writer notes that he loved and supported the family. Her relationship with her mother was more complex and tense. Despite this, she believes that she was her mother's "favourite child", and her mother's expectations and hopes influenced her success. They often met until Mrs. Drabble's death in 1984.

Her mother's sad example led Margaret to the idea that "adult life seems incredibly suppressing" [8], and throughout her life, she sought a trusting, warm relationship with other women, as if trying to find her ideal. The first example was her elder sister Antonia Susan, now a well-known writer and critic, the professor of English and American literature A.S. Byatt.

In the works of both sisters, the most interesting are difficult relationships between two women - sisters, cousins, and 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 elder sister Louise, but at the same time she wants to understand her and find something common with her [5]. Jane Grey in the novel "The Waterfall" says that her cousin Lucy "was my sister, my destiny, my example: her influence on me was enormous" [9]. 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 Cassandra and Julia, whose prototypes were Byatt and Drabble themselves, confront each other, as 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 [10].

Along with autobiographical motives, Drabble's novels reflect the processes of exclusion and separation between parents and children, sisters and brothers, which is typical for English middle-class families of the 1960s and 1970s, and a change in attitudes toward the institution of marriage in society. The motive of escape from home, the loss of family values also appear in her novels. The

main characters of "A Summer bird-cage" and "The Millstone" do not get in touch with their parents. Clara Maugham ("Jerusalem the Golden") breaks with her mother and her family past [6]. However, after leaving her family house and native town Clara does not feel free: she is haunted by a feeling of guilt towards her mother, from which it is not easy to free herself. These links "must be tolerated, because they stretch to the death" [6], - she says. The finale of the novel is symbolic: leaving her mother dying in the hospital, Clara gives "the dead to bury their dead". Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether she becomes free from the sense of guilt and the previous ties that pursued her. In the novel "The Realms of Gold" (1975) [11] Drabble reconsiders her views expressed in her early novels and portrays an archaeologist Frances Wingate, who is looking for her family past, trying to return to the roots. The position of Frances is closer to the writer, rather than the position of her early characters.

The characters of "The Realms of Gold" 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 adjust 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". Therefore, through the family themes, Drabble shows the important processes taking place in modern society, and her attitude towards them.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The analysis proves that the research of the theme related to family and marriage in English literature is an important socio-cultural component of teaching foreign languages at university. On the example of Margaret Drabble's novels, students explore the themes of marriage and divorce, motherhood and unmarried mothers, the problems of relationships between spouses, parents and children, brothers and sisters.

Thus, through the study of literature, students will not only acquire knowledge about the society, everyday life, history and culture of people living in the target language country, but also may have opportunity to comprehend critically and thoughtfully what has been read [12] so as to compare and analyse the social processes taking place in the UK with the similar processes currently occurring in Russia and in other parts of the world.

The results of the study prove the effectiveness of integration of various topics of the day relating to the socio-cultural and historical legacy of the target language country for better language acquisition among the university students. Our findings could be used by researchers, educators and teachers in both scientific and practical teaching contexts. The proposed methods and analysis techniques can be employed for instructional design of seminars on Drabble's and other English writers' works, and while reading special courses on contemporary English literature at university.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University.

REFERENCES

- [1] M. Drabble, "The Garrick Year", Weidenfeld and Nicolson; First Edition, 1964.
- [2] Ibid, p. 175.
- [3] Ibid, p. 177.
- [4] J.V. Creighton, Margaret Drabble. N.Y.: Methuen, 1985.
- [5] M. Drabble, A Summer Bird-Cage. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977.
- [6] M. Drabble, Jerusalem the Golden. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975.
- [7] M. Drabble, The Millstone. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1965.

- [8] E.C. Rose, *The Novels of Margaret Drabble: Equivocal figures*. London: Macmillan, 1980.
- [9] M. Drabble, *The Waterfall*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972.
- [10] A.S. Byatt, *The Game*. London: Vintage, 1992.
- [11] M. Drabble, *The Realms of Gold*. London: Penguin book, 1975.
- [12] A.A. Gilmanova, S.E. Nikitina, L.N. Yuzmukhametova, "English literature class as a way to develop critical reading" // *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods*. Vol. 7, Issue 9, September, 2017, pp. 155-160, 2017.