FAMILY LONELINESS AND THE ORPHAN MOTIF IN THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH PROSE

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Abstract. Drawing on the novels of Charles Dickens (Oliver Twist, David Copperfield), Charlotte Brontë (Jane Eyre), Lewis Carroll's fairy-tale novella Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, and Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island, the article examines family loneliness as one of the forms of childhood loneliness and orphanhood as a motif that organises the plot, the system of characters, and the narrative perspective. Three types of orphanhood are identified (factual, secondary, functional), the role of "false" and "true" parent substitutes is shown, and a link is traced between the type of narration and the way the hero makes sense of the loss of a family.

Keywords: family loneliness, orphan motif, narrative structure, parent substitute, narrative, children's literature, Victorian prose.

Аннотация. В статье на материале романов Ч. Диккенса («Приключения Оливера Твиста», «Дэвид Копперфилд»), Ш. Бронте («Джейн Эйр»), сказочной повести Л. Кэрролла («Приключения Алисы в Стране чудес») и романа Р. Л. Стивенсона («Остров сокровищ») семейное одиночество рассматривается как одна из форм детского одиночества, а сиротство как мотив, организующий сюжет, систему персонажей и нарративную перспективу. Выделены три типа сиротства (фактическое, вторичное, функциональное), показана роль «ложных» и «истинных» заместителей родителя и прослежена связь типа повествования с тем, как герой осмысляет утрату семьи.

Ключевые слова: семейное одиночество, мотив сиротства, повествовательная структура, заместитель родителя, нарратив, детская литература, викторианская проза.

Annotatsiya. Maqolada Ch. Dikkensning («Oliver Tvistning sarguzashtlari», «Devid Kopperfild»), Sh. Brontening («Jeyn Eyr»), L. Kerrollning «Alisaning mo"jizalar mamlakatidagi sarguzashtlari» ertak-qissasi va R. L. Stivensonning («Xazina oroli») romanlari materialida oilaviy yolg'izlik bolalik yolg'izligining shakllaridan biri sifatida, yetimlik esa syujetni, qahramonlar tizimini va hikoya qilish nuqtai nazarini tashkil etuvchi motiv sifatida ko'rib chiqiladi. Yetimlikning uch turi (faktik, ikkilamchi, funksional) ajratilgan, ota-ona o'rnini bosuvchi «soxta» va «haqiqiy» shaxslarning roli ko'rsatilgan hamda hikoya turi bilan qahramonning oilani yo'qotishni anglash usuli o'rtasidagi bog'liqlik aniqlangan.

Kalit so'zlar: oilaviy yolg'izlik, yetimlik motivi, hikoyaviy tuzilma, ota-ona o'rnini bosuvchi shaxs, naratsiya, bolalar adabiyoti, Viktoriya davri nasri.

1. Introduction

Orphanhood is, perhaps, the most recognisable motif of nineteenth-century British prose about childhood. Opening a novel by Dickens or Brontë, the reader almost knows in advance that the hero faces a loss: of parents, of home, of an accustomed position. For that very reason the loss is often perceived as a condition of the game, as something that goes without saying, and it rarely becomes the subject of a separate discussion.

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Meanwhile, research has examined childhood in Victorian writing in detail [13; 16], the Bildungsroman has been described as a genre [10; 18], and a good deal has been written about nineteenth-century English children's literature as a tradition in its own right [20; 21]. Orphanhood, however, is more often mentioned as a biographical or social fact (child labour, workhouses, the position of the governess). We find it important to look at it from within the narrative: how the absence of a family is built into the text, and what it does to the plot, to the circle of characters, and to the narrator's voice.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Concepts

By family loneliness we understand a form of childhood loneliness connected with the loss or insufficiency of a family: the death of parents, the hostility of guardians, the position of the "superfluous" child in someone else's house. It differs from institutional loneliness (the workhouse, the school) and from existential loneliness, which does not depend on circumstances, but in living texts these forms are almost always intertwined.

The psychological basis for this understanding is provided by John Bowlby's attachment theory: the loss of a parental figure in childhood destroys the basic security from which later relations with the world are built [2]. Erik Erikson shows that the formation of identity requires support from family and social roles, and without them the crisis of youth is especially severe [7].

Orphanhood in literature must also be considered from an anthropological perspective. As Victor Turner observed, a person at the threshold, in the liminal state, has lost his former status and stands outside the structure [6]; in this sense the orphan is a liminal figure from the very beginning of the plot rather than becoming one in the course of trials. This brings the literary orphan close to the hero of the wondertale, as Vladimir Propp pointed out: the hero of the tale often finds himself outside the family or expelled from it [5]. Van Gennep described the rite of passage as a sequence of separation, threshold, and incorporation [3], and it is by this scheme, as we shall see, that the Victorian orphans' movement toward a "home attained" is built.

Factual orphanhood: the parents have died or are unknown, and the hero is deprived of a family from the outset.

Secondary orphanhood: one or both parents are present, but the family falls apart, a parent dies later, and authority passes to a hostile guardian.

Functional orphanhood: the parents are physically present or are not named, but are removed from the narrative, and the hero acts as if they did not exist.

3. Functions of the Orphan Motif in the Narrative Structure

Before analysing the texts, we consider it necessary to single out four functions that the motif performs in the works under discussion.

Initiating. The loss of the family sets the plot in motion: the hero loses his home and is compelled to set out to meet events.

Compositional. Orphanhood sets a three-part scheme: the space of isolation (the guardian's house, the workhouse, the boarding school), the space of trial (the road, the island, another world), and the space of a home attained. The final home is thereby not returned to but created anew.

Character-forming. The absence of parents generates a system of substitutes: "false" ones (those who occupy the parent's place but do not fulfil the parent's role) and "true" ones (those who genuinely take the hero in). The hero finds himself between them and makes a choice.

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Narrative. The type of orphanhood affects the manner of telling. An omniscient narrator may look at the orphan from outside and with irony, while an orphan-narrator acquires the right to speak in the first person and to assess his own loss from a distance.

4. Analysis of the Works

4.1. Oliver Twist: Orphanhood as a Social Sentence

Oliver is a case of factual orphanhood in its pure form. His mother dies in childbirth, his father is unknown, and the name is chosen for him by the workhouse official [15]. From the very beginning Dickens stresses that the loneliness here is not a personal tragedy but a condition created by the system: the child finds himself in a position where the parish replaces the family.

The system of substitutes is built by Dickens almost symmetrically. The "false" fathers are the parish beadle Mr. Bumble, the undertaker, and then Fagin, who in a sympathetic tone offers the boy shelter and food. Fagin is especially revealing: he copies family gestures (care, supper, affection) and uses them as bait. The "true" substitute is Mr. Brownlow, whose help proves disinterested [15]. Brownlow's house and Mrs. Maylie's cottage become for Oliver two spaces of a home attained, and the final attainment comes through recognition: it is revealed who his parents were, and thereby the hero's identity turns out to be bestowed on him from outside.

The narration is conducted in the third person, with a noticeable ironic distance. The narrator does not grant Oliver a voice with which to reflect on his own loss: the boy hardly reflects at all, and Dickens speaks about him, not in his words. For a social novel such a position is understandable: orphanhood here is an argument in a public dispute [19].

4.2. David Copperfield: Orphanhood as Material for Memory

David is a case of secondary orphanhood. His father dies before the boy is born, but his mother is alive, and the first years at home pass in warm union with her and with Peggotty. Loneliness comes later, when Murdstone appears in the house and then the mother dies. It is precisely in this gradualness, in our view, that the strength of Dickens's solution lies: the child loses his family not at once but before his eyes, and therefore remembers every step [14].

The novel opens with a question about whether the narrator will turn out to be the hero of his own life [14], and this at once turns orphanhood into a problem of authorship. The story is told by the adult David, and the retrospective position allows him to make sense of the loss and not merely to live through it. The "false" parent substitute is Murdstone, whose "firmness" is presented as a method of upbringing; the "true" ones are Betsey Trotwood, who takes in the boy after his flight from London, and Peggotty. The flight to Dover, the chronotope of the road, separates the space of isolation from the space of a home attained [14].

4.3. Jane Eyre: Orphanhood in Someone Else's House

In Brontë, orphanhood is combined with social humiliation: Jane lives in her aunt's house as a "superfluous" person, and her position at Gateshead is determined by another's charity. This is a familiar feeling for an orphan in a foreign family: formally she has a home, but there is no place for her in it [9]. Loneliness here is therefore familial in the most exact sense: it is born inside the family, not outside it.

The system of substitutes is built on a familiar principle. The "false" figures are Mrs. Reed, her children, and Mr. Brocklehurst, who hypocritically cloaks cruelty with concern for the child's soul. The "true" ones are Miss Temple at Lowood, who gives Jane a model of calm dignity, and, much later, the Rivers family, who turn out to be her real kin [9]. It is important that Jane creates her home not at

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once and not from a single point: first Moor House, then Ferndean, to which she returns as an equal [9].

The narration is confessional, in the first person, and therefore orphanhood in the novel is at once an event and a way of seeing. The famous formula of the finale ("Reader, I married him") shows that the heroine herself controls her story and speaks of it on equal terms with the reader [9]. Jane's identity is asserted: she accepts neither a dependent position nor a marriage without love imposed on her. On the heroine's autonomy and "inner life," see Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar [16] and Helene Moglen [17].

4.4. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland: The Functional Absence of the Family

Alice is not an orphan in the literal sense, but her parents do not appear in the text, and at the beginning of the tale only her sister is beside her. The family space is thereby removed from the frame of the story, and the heroine finds herself in a world where home and shelter are replaced by absurd rules. We call such a situation functional orphanhood: the family is absent not because it has been destroyed but because the narrative does not admit it [12].

It is telling that the family in Wonderland appears only in parodic form. The Duchess in the kitchen scene handles the baby roughly and carelessly, and then the baby turns out to be a pig; the Queen of Hearts is a tyrannical version of adult power that knows neither justice nor care [12]. None of these are "false" substitutes in the Dickensian sense; they are grotesque ones: they show how a world is arranged in which the parental role has been turned into arbitrariness.

The narrative is in the third person but with a palpable child's perspective, and the return to the sister in the finale closes the circle: the dream ends where it began, and the "home attained" proves to be an ordinary place to which the heroine has returned changed. Alice's identity is tested by the encounter with the absurd, and it is precisely the absence of family support that gives this test its sharpness [8].

4.5. Treasure Island: Partial Orphanhood and the Search for a Father

Jim Hawkins loses his father at the very beginning of the novel, but his mother is alive, and this makes his case special: the orphanhood here is partial. The home (the Admiral Benbow inn) remains, but there is no longer a masculine support in it, and Jim finds himself between his mother, whom he must protect, and the world of adventure, which draws him [22].

Stevenson's system of substitutes is perhaps the most explicit. Long John Silver is the "false" father: he is charming and attentive, makes Jim almost a favourite, but uses him in his own game. The "true" figures are Dr. Livesey and Squire Trelawney, whose care is free of self-interest. The choice between them becomes the moral core of the novel: Jim chooses not out of advantage but out of conscience [22].

The story is told by Jim himself, and it matters that he writes at the request of the adult members of the expedition, so that the narrative is enclosed in a frame in which the loss and the return have already been lived through. The island, as a closed chronotope, becomes the space of trial, while the final "home" is practically not shown in the text: the dreams of the island and of Silver remain an unclosed end [22].

5. Conclusions

In the works under consideration, family loneliness appears as a distinct form of childhood loneliness, expressed in the plot through the orphan motif. Depending on its type (factual, secondary, or functional), the loss and the hero's subsequent trials unfold differently. An important role is also played by the system of "false" and "true" parent substitutes, the choice between which shapes the

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moral content of the plot. The hero's movement from isolation through trial to a home attained corresponds to the logic of the rite of passage, although the final home, as a rule, is created anew; the exception is Treasure Island, where the space of home is hardly represented. At the same time, the type of narration determines the ways in which the loss is made sense of: from external irony in Oliver Twist to confessional intimacy in Jane Eyre and retrospective reflection in David Copperfield.

A promising direction is a comparison of this model with the traditions of depicting orphanhood in the folklore of other cultures, as well as its use in teaching foreign literature at university and school.

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