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TRAUMA AS A CATALYST FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL GROWTH IN THE CHILD CHARACTERS OF SUSAN HILL'S FICTION

Abstract: This article examines the role of trauma as a central force in the psychological development of child characters in Susan Hill's works. Drawing on her novel *I'm the King of the Castle* and short stories such as *The Boy Who Taught the Beekeeper to Read*, *Punishment*, *Sand*, *Elizabeth*, and *The Brooch*, the study demonstrates how experiences of fear, loss, and vulnerability act as transformative stages in children's mental maturation. Using a literary-psychological approach, the research shows that while trauma initially produces isolation, anger, or despair, it ultimately generates resilience, responsibility, and empathy. The analysis highlights how Hill's narrative strategies emphasize the interplay between environment, inner conflict, and human relationships in shaping children's moral and emotional growth.

Keywords: Susan Hill; child characters; trauma; psychological growth; resilience; literary psychologism.

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ТРАВМА КАК КАТАЛИЗАТОР ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКОГО РОСТА В ДЕТСКИХ ПЕРСОНАЖАХ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЙ СЬЮЗАН ХИЛЛ

Аннотация: В данной статье рассматривается роль травмы как центрального фактора в психологическом развитии детских персонажей в произведениях Сюзан Хилл. На материале её романа *Я – король замка* и рассказов *Мальчик, который научил пчеловода читать*, *Наказание*, *Песок*, *Элизабет* и *Брошь* показано, что опыт страха, утраты и уязвимости становится трансформирующим этапом в процессе умственного взросления детей. С опорой на литературно-психологический подход исследование демонстрирует, что, несмотря на то что травма первоначально вызывает изоляцию, гнев или отчаяние, в конечном счёте она формирует стойкость, ответственность и эмпатию. В анализе подчеркивается, как нарративные стратегии Хилл акцентируют взаимосвязь между средой, внутренним конфликтом и человеческими отношениями в формировании морального и эмоционального роста детей.

Ключевые слова: Сюзан Хилл; детские персонажи; травма; психологический рост; устойчивость; литературный психологизм.

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O'zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universiteti doktoranti

SYUZAN HILL ASARLARIDAGI BOLA QAHRAMONLAR RUHIY O'SISHIDA TRAVMANING KATALIZATOR SIFATIDAGI ROLI

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada travmaning Susan Hill asarlaridagi bolalar qahramonlari psixologik rivojida markaziy omil sifatidagi roli tahlil qilinadi. Uning *I'm the King of the Castle* romani hamda *The Boy Who Taught the Beekeeper to Read*, *Punishment*, *Sand*, *Elizabeth* va *The Brooch* kabi hikoyalardan olingan misollar asosida qo'rquv, yo'qotish va zaiflik tajribalari bolalarning ruhiy yetuklik bosqichlarida o'ziga xos o'zgarishlarga olib kelishi ko'rsatilgan. Adabiy-psixologik yondashuv orqali olib borilgan tadqiqot travma dastlab izolyatsiya, g'azab yoki tushkunlikni keltirib chiqarsa-da, oxir-oqibat chidamlilik, mas'uliyat va empatiya kabi sifatlarini shakllantirishini ochib beradi. Tahlilda Hillning narrativ strategiyalari muhit, ichki ziddiyat va insoniy munosabatlarning bolalar ma'naviy-axloqiy hamda emotsional rivojidagi o'zaro ta'sirini yoritib beradi.

Kalit so'zlar: Susan Hill; bolalar qahramonlari; travma; psixologik o'sish; chidamlilik; adabiy psixologizm.

Introduction.

In contemporary literary studies, trauma has emerged as a powerful lens through which to explore the psychological development of fictional characters, particularly children. Cathy Caruth emphasizes that trauma “is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known, and therefore it cannot be fully owned” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 1996, p. 4). Similarly, Judith Herman highlights that trauma is not merely a private wound but a disruption of meaning and trust that reshapes identity (Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1992, pp. 33–34). Within English literature, depictions of childhood trauma often illustrate the paradox of vulnerability and resilience, echoing Freud’s theories of repression and William James’s explorations of consciousness.

Susan Hill’s fiction, with its nuanced portrayals of children facing psychological trials, offers a rich field for examining trauma as a catalyst for growth. Scholars such as Eriksson note that Hill often juxtaposes innocence with experiences of fear and loss, producing narratives where “childhood becomes both fragile and formative” (Eriksson, *Evil and Innocence*, 2014, p. 67). This study investigates how Hill’s child characters confront traumatic situations and how these experiences stimulate their inner development.

Literature review.

In the novel *I’m the King of the Castle*, the psychological growth of Kingshaw is vividly expressed through his experiences in the forest. At Hang Wood, amid fear and anxiety, he develops strength, responsibility, and compassion he had never realized before. The forest becomes a testing ground for both boys, where Hooper, for the first time, reveals his inner vulnerability... At this moment, Hooper, as a defenseless child, looks to Kingshaw for rescue. Here, Kingshaw undergoes a turning point in his psychological growth, developing a sense of responsibility and care... Through these episodes, the author shows Kingshaw’s advancement not only through emotions but also through conscious actions: he now acts as a person who, rather than being overwhelmed by fear, takes responsibility for another’s survival.

In *The Boy Who Taught the Beekeeper to Read*, the relationship between young James and the beekeeper Mart May leads to significant psychological growth for both characters. Their connection is built on interdependence... James’s addressing Mart as a student shows his psychological maturation and his social and emotional growth through the pedagogical role. By teaching Mart to spell his name, James not only imparts literacy but also initiates a process of self-awareness and self-worth. These lessons strengthen Mart’s self-confidence, while James discovers patience, the joy of teaching, and the true value of friendship. The act of teaching in the story emerges as a

reciprocal process of mutual benefit and psychological growth.

In the story *Punishment*, the protagonist Mick, against the background of youthful recklessness, experiences childlike grief, guilt, and rebellion. The death of Mick’s younger brother Charlie becomes the driving force for change in his personality... His inner conflict reveals his moral growth and illustrates how childhood trauma can leave a profound mark on the human psyche. Mick’s unresolved emotions lead him down destructive paths, while Dino embodies adolescent impulsiveness. Mick’s hesitation displays his moral qualities, and in the end, although the group acts together, Mick takes on the greatest psychological responsibility and, as a result, faces a lifelong sentence. The fact that punishment never arrives brings not relief but embeds fear deep into Mick’s inner world.

In *Sand*, the sisters Lizzie and Clara live with a cold, detached mother. A sudden change—a stranger child and their mother’s unexpected kindness towards him—triggers a “great leap” in their psyche... This moment awakens in them a hope to replace family coldness with warmth and broadens their limited outlook. Yet this psychological shift soon brings pain and strain... This episode shows a crucial stage in their psychological development—the struggle between imagination and reality. The sparks of hope do not last long... As a result, they realize that warmth and affection are only fleeting illusions. Thus, their psychological growth occurs not through love, but through loss and acceptance of reality; though deprived of childhood joy, they gain a broader perspective and inner resilience.

In *Elizabeth*, the girl undergoes psychological maturation through life’s trials. As a sister, she assumes not only the role of caregiver but also of protector... Her concern for her parents’ condition shows that she understands more than expected for her age. In the bean-picking episode with her mother, she develops empathy... By realizing financial and social realities, she comes to understand the gap between dreams and reality. During the journey, she reflects more deeply on her mother’s life... Although their mother’s death is a psychological shock to both Elizabeth and Milo, it brings them closer together. As a result, Elizabeth emerges not just as a sister, but as a mature girl who feels love, anxiety, and responsibility.

Research methodology.

The study employs a qualitative literary-psychological method, combining close textual analysis of Susan Hill’s works with theoretical perspectives on trauma and child psychology.

Results and Discussion.

In *The Brooch*, Rima passes through important stages of self-awareness and moral-psychological growth during her ordinary walks with her disabled uncle. At first, trying to understand his blindness, she learns through

walks by the sea and visits to cafés how important patience and attentiveness are in life. Her uncle's independence, confidence, and scholarly literacy impress Rima. She begins to feel the responsibility of concealing his blindness from others... This command splits Rima's heart into two poles: preserving family pride and acknowledging the truth. Her realization of the pain caused by her involuntary word "Look" becomes an artistic expression of psychological growth... Rima's development becomes even more evident when her uncle loses his job... This event broadens Rima's worldview; she begins to understand work, dignity, and human values. Thus, she transforms from a child with a simple outlook into a conscious individual who understands the complex laws of life and is prepared for change, loss, and injustice.

Hill's portrayal of child characters resonates with trauma theory by illustrating how painful experiences can generate psychological transformation. As Caruth argues, trauma is not simply destructive but also a force that demands re-narration and reinterpretation (Caruth, 1995, p. 153). In *I'm the King of the Castle*, Kingshaw's confrontation with fear in Hang Wood results in a heightened sense of responsibility and compassion, aligning with Herman's assertion that recovery involves reconnecting with human relationships (Herman, 1992, p. 133).

In *The Boy Who Taught the Beekeeper to Read*, James's pedagogical role underscores Vygotsky's notion that development occurs within social interaction, with

teaching and learning fostering mutual growth. Meanwhile, stories such as *Punishment* and *Sand* highlight the long-lasting imprint of unresolved grief and familial coldness, illustrating Freud's theory of the return of the repressed.

Moreover, Hill's narratives reflect what developmental psychologists identify as "post-traumatic growth," where individuals find new strength and meaning in the aftermath of crisis (Tedeschi & Calhoun, *Posttraumatic Growth*, 2004, p. 5). Her child characters do not emerge unscathed but achieve a deeper understanding of responsibility, empathy, and mortality. In this sense, Hill's work contributes to the literary tradition of psychologism by dramatizing how trauma catalyzes moral and emotional maturity.

Conclusion.

Susan Hill's fiction demonstrates that trauma, while destabilizing, can serve as a vital catalyst for the psychological growth of child characters. Through moments of fear, grief, and vulnerability, children such as Kingshaw, James, Mick, Lizzie, Clara, Elizabeth, and Rima undergo transformative processes that deepen their resilience and moral awareness. Hill's artistic psychologism reveals how trauma reshapes not only individual consciousness but also relationships and values. Her works remind us that childhood, though marked by fragility, also carries within it the capacity for profound strength and renewal.

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