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THE TRADITION OF BILDUNGSROMAN IN NOVELS OF J.IRVING OF THE END XX's CENTURY

Abstract: The article considers three novels of a modern American writer J.Irving («The World according to Garp», «The Cider House Rules», «A Prayer for Owen Meany») that continue traditions of European Bildungsroman, which is based on the artistic representation of the main character`s soul in motion, development, in his changing one conviction to another. The main accent is done on subjective factor of the protagonist`s formation, that is, influence of surrounding people on him which is introduced for readers in peculiar situations.

Keywords: Bildungsroman, modern American literature, John Irving.

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ТРАДИЦИЯ РОМАНА ВОСПИТАНИЯ В ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЯХ ДЖ.ИРВИНГА КОНЦА XX ВЕКА

Аннотация: Проанализированы три романа современного американского писателя Дж. Ирвинга («Мир глазами Гарпа», «Правила Дома сидра», «Молитва об Оуэне Мини»), продолжающие традиции европейского романа воспитания, художественной основой которого является изображение души героя в движении, развитии, в переходе от одних убеждений к другим. Основной акцент делается на субъективном факторе формирования героя, а именно: влиянии на него окружающих людей, представленное читателю в особых ситуациях.

Ключевые слова: роман воспитания, современная американская литература, Джон Ирвинг

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XX ASR SO'NGIDA J. IRVING ASARLARIDA TARBIYAVIY

ROMANLAR AN'ANASI

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada zamonaviy Amerika yozuvchisi Jon Irvingning 3 asari misolida (“Garp dunyosi”, “Sidr uyi qonunlari”, “Ouen Miniga atalgan duolar”) XX asr so'ngida Yevropa tarbiyaviy an'alarining davomi sifatida qahramonlarning qalb tasvirlari, voqealar rivoji va ketma-ketligi asosida ochilgan badiiy an'analari haqida so'z boradi. Bunda asosiy urg'u qahramon shakllanishing subyektiv taraflariga, ya'ni unga atrofidagi insonlar ta'siri o'quvchi nigohida alohida ko'rsatish uchun beriladi.

Kalit so'zlar: tarbiyaviy romanlar, zamonaviy amerika adabiyoti, Jon Irving.

Introduction

The Bildungsroman (novel of education/formation) has remained relevant because it focuses on a fundamental humanistic question: how an individual

becomes a person within a changing world. In genre terms, the center of such a novel is the gradual formation and self-determination of the hero through experience, conflict and ethical choice [6] . Late twentieth-century American fiction often re-reads this classical model through postmodern aesthetics [8]. John Irving is a revealing case because his best-known novels of the 1970s–1980s repeatedly return to the trajectory of growing up, learning, and acquiring a “working philosophy” of life [7] .

The aim of this article is to systematize the Bildungsroman tradition in three Irving novels — *The World According to Garp*, *The Cider House Rules*, and *A Prayer for Owen Meany* — and to show how the author preserves the genre matrix while transforming it via satire, grotesque, and “black humor”.

Literature Analysis (Theoretical Framework)

For the purposes of this study, the theoretical framework combines: (1) the Bakhtinian view of the novel of formation as an image of “man in the process of becoming”, where time enters the hero’s image and determines the meaning of his destiny; and (2) the Anglo-American tradition of describing Bildungsroman plot markers such as the loss/absence of a father figure, the move from provincial space to “the larger society”, tests by love and vocation, and the search for a personal philosophy [1;6].

Recent scholarship also emphasizes the flexibility and modern viability of the Bildungsroman as a genre that can be modified and refunctionalized in contemporary contexts, including American literature (e.g., the discussion of genre variations and their cultural relevance).

Within Irving studies, researchers have repeatedly noted that many of his novels can be read through the Bildungsroman frame, especially because of the recurring motifs of missing parents, early trauma, mentorship, and the long temporal scope that follows protagonists from childhood into maturity.

In ‘*The World According to Garp*’, Irving presents the life story of T.S. Garp, from his unusual birth to his tragic death. The novel combines elements of family saga, satire, and grotesque with the classical structure of the Bildungsroman.

Garp's childhood, education, professional formation, and family life represent stages of spiritual growth. Despite the presence of comic elements, the novel preserves the core principle of the genre – the depiction of personal maturation through experience [2].

In 'The Cider House Rules', the protagonist Homer Wells undergoes a tripartite development: life in the orphanage of St. Cloud, confrontation with the external world, and eventual return to his point of origin. The orphan motif, the mentor figure of Dr. Larch, and the moral trials of love and responsibility correspond to classical Bildungsroman patterns. The spatial symbolism of the novel reflects stages of maturation and self-discovery [2].

In 'A Prayer for Owen Meany', Irving further develops the theme of spiritual formation. The interaction between the protagonist and the external world, along with the influence of key personalities, highlights the subjective factors shaping identity. The novel integrates religious, historical, and social dimensions into the Bildungsroman structure [2].

Research Methods

The research is based on comparative-historical, structural, and genre analysis methods. The study relies on theoretical works devoted to the Bildungsroman tradition [1; 3; 6] and applies textual analysis to identify structural components of the novel of education in Irving's prose. Special attention is given to autobiographical elements, narrative strategies, and the influence of secondary characters on the protagonist's development.

Results and its analyses

1. The World According to Garp: Formation Through Grotesque and Tragedy

The World According to Garp (1978) is genre-synthetic: it is simultaneously a fictional biography of a writer, a family novel, and a satire with grotesque elements. Yet its dominant axis remains a novel of formation: the narrative covers Garp's life from origin and childhood through youth, artistic self-definition, family experience, and death.

A typical Bildungsroman feature is the hero's problematic origin. Irving ironically dramatizes the conception of Garp: he is raised by a single mother and is separated from his father even before birth. The absence of a traditional family becomes a structural condition of the hero's self-search and also a means of critiquing social myths about "normality" [7].

Another genre marker is the hero's passage through educational and social "schools": boarding school, wrestling training, friendship and love, travel to Vienna, and confrontations with sexuality, social violence, and death. Love and family are not a final "harmony" but a painful ordeal; the family tragedy (loss of a child) functions as a radical "sobering" experience that redefines the hero's worldview.

Irving modernizes the Bildungsroman by reducing the pathos of "formation" through satire, parody, and black humor, and by making ideological conflicts (including extreme versions of feminism and anti-feminism) part of the protagonist's formation environment.

2. The Cider House Rules: The Mentor Model and Ethical Self-Determination

The Cider House Rules (1985) presents an orphan protagonist, Homer Wells, whose development is structured as a sequence of spatially marked phases: the orphanage St. Cloud as a protected, "spiritual" space; the external world (including the Worthington orchard community) as a field of hypocrisy, desire, and moral conflict; and the return to St. Cloud as an attempt to redefine "home" and responsibility.

The novel foregrounds the subjective factor of formation: the mentor figure Dr. Wilbur Larch. Larch not only educates Homer professionally but also programs his social identity (documents, biography, planned vocation). Homer's Bildung therefore becomes a struggle between externally imposed destiny and self-chosen ethics.

A key Bildungsroman test is "ordeal by love": Homer's relationship with Candy is inseparable from wartime trauma and the moral cost of loyalty. Another central test is ethical choice: the abortion debate is translated into a personal

responsibility dilemma. Homer's eventual return to the orphanage does not mean simple reconciliation with authority; it signifies a mature acceptance of duty under conditions of moral ambiguity.

3. A Prayer for Owen Meany: Retrospective Bildung and the Formation of Meaning

A Prayer for Owen Meany (1989) complicates the Bildungsroman model through retrospective narration. The protagonist-narrator (John Wheelwright) reconstructs his formation through memory and interpretation, which turns Bildung into an act of meaning-making rather than a linear "youth-to-adulthood" chronicle.

The formative power in this novel is strongly interpersonal: Owen Meany becomes both a friend and a quasi-prophetic figure who shapes John's moral imagination, faith and political sensitivity. The Bildungsroman structure is therefore "distributed" between two figures: John's maturation depends on Owen's actions and self-sacrifice, and the "vocation" of the narrator is linked to testimony and remembrance [5].

The late-twentieth-century context (Cold War anxieties, the Vietnam era, the crisis of authority and belief) enters the Bildungsroman not as background but as a force that reshapes the protagonist's identity. The "result" of Bildung is not social integration in a stable order, but an ethically charged position of exile, critique and responsibility [8].

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that Irving consistently relies on the Bildungsroman matrix in his major late-twentieth-century novels. He retains classical markers: a protagonist marked by family rupture (often fatherlessness), a sequence of initiatory experiences, mentorship, tests by love and loss, and a long temporal arc that makes "becoming" the core narrative event.

At the same time, Irving transforms the tradition: grotesque and black humor reduce didactic pathos, while modern social debates (gender politics, abortion, war memory) are integrated into the hero's formative environment. The result is a

modern Bildungsroman that preserves the genre's ethical focus but refracts it through postmodern narrative strategies.

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