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FEMALE CHARACTERS OF RICHARD YATES'S NOVEL “REVOLUTIONARY ROAD” AS AN ARTISTIC PROJECTION OF TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

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Abstract. The article analyzes the female characters in American writer Richard Yates's debut novel “Revolutionary Road” as an artistic projection of transgenerational trauma, which involves clarifying the mother's impact on her adult child's romantic relationship and family life. The work depicts the exhausting relationship of a young couple who lives in the suburbs of New York in the 1950s, goes through a deep relationship crisis, and experiences a fatal tragedy, falling into the trap of illusions. R. Yates focuses not only on the unfolding of the family drama but also suggests possible reasons for the characters' actions rooted in the previous generation, thereby prompting the choice of the interpretative strategy. The article aims to characterize the female characters in the novel “Revolutionary Road” as an artistic projection of transgenerational trauma and determine the specifics of the author's psychologization strategy. The methodological foundation of the study is M. Wolynn's work “It Didn't Start with You: How Inherited Family Trauma Shapes Who We are and How to End the Cycle”, which identifies inherited family patterns and substantiates the transgenerational nature of traumatic experience. This interpretative strategy made it possible to outline the artistic projection of family trauma patterns in R. Yates's novel “Revolutionary Road” and allowed us to identify the role of the main character's family history in shaping her behavioral models. In particular, April Wheeler's early disconnection with her mother, the lack of parental attention, and her being raised by several caregivers caused a fear of losing intimacy, emotional instability, inability to love Frank truly, desire to terminate two pregnancies, and the decision to commit suicide. The unresolved internal conflicts and unawareness of the inherited trauma deprived the main female character of the opportunity to improve her family life, which led to the tragedy. Though Frank's upbringing in a two-parent family and acceptance of his parents contributed to his emotional stability, it was not enough to build a happy family and save his wife from death. Visualizing the main character's relationship with her parents allowed the author to create convincing fictional images and achieve a high level of psychologization.

Key words: family history, inherited family patterns, psychologism, behavioral model, gender role.

ЖІНОЧІ ПЕРСОНАЖІ РОМАНУ РІЧАРДА ЄЙТСА «ЖИТТЯ СПОЧАТКУ» ЯК ХУДОЖНЯ ПРОЄКЦІЯ ТРАНСПОКОЛІННЄВОЇ ТРАВМИ

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Анотація. Стаття пропонує аналіз жіночих персонажів дебютного роману американського письменника Річарда Єйтса «Життя спочатку» як літературної проєкції транспоколіннєвої травми, що передбачає з'ясування впливу матері на особисте життя її дорослої дитини. У творі зображено виснажливі стосунки молодого подружжя, що мешкає в околицях Нью-Йорка в 50-х роках XX сто-

ліття, переживає глибоку кризу стосунків і зазнає фатального досвіду, потрапивши в пастку ілюзій. Р. Єйтс не лише фокусує увагу на розгортанні родинної драми, а й підказує можливі причини вчинків персонажів, закорінені в попередньому поколінні, зорієнтовуючи в такий спосіб у виборі інтерпретаційної стратегії. Мета статті – схарактеризувати жіночі персонажі роману «Життя спочатку» як літературну проєкцію транспоколінневої травми й визначити специфіку авторської стратегії психологізації. Методологічною основою дослідження обрано працю М. Волінна «Це почалося не з тебе. Як успадкована родинна травма формує нас і як розірвати це коло», що ідентифікує успадковані родинні патерни й обґрунтовує транспоколінневу природу травматичного досвіду. Ця інтерпретаційна стратегія уможливила окреслення художньої проєкції патернів родинної травми в романі Р. Єйтса «Життя спочатку» й дала змогу з'ясувати роль сімейного анамнезу головної героїні у формуванні її поведінкових моделей. Зокрема, ранній розрив Ейпріл Віллер із матір'ю, нестача батьківської турботи й виховання кількома опікунками спричинили розвиток страху втрати близькості, емоційну нестабільність, нездатність по-справжньому любити Френка, бажання перервати дві вагітності й рішення вчинити самогубство. Нерозв'язані внутрішні конфлікти й неусвідомленість успадкованої родинної травми позбавили головну героїню можливості налагодити життя і призвели до трагедії. Хоча виховання Френка в повній родині й прийняття батьків сприяли його емоційній стабільності, цього виявилось замало, щоб побудувати щасливу родину й урятувати дружину від загибелі. Візуалізація зв'язків між головною героїнею твору та її батьками дала авторові змогу створити переконливі художні образи-персонажі й досягти високого рівня психологізму.

Ключові слова: родинний анамнез, успадковані родинні патерни, психологізм, поведінкова модель, гендерна роль.

Problem statement. In world culture, the woman-mother's image is mostly associated with the sacred cult of giving birth to a new life and such spiritual characteristics as care, tenderness, guardianship, wisdom, tolerance, benevolence, protection, and security. In fiction and other art forms, the woman-mother is mainly portrayed as a keeper of the home, a guardian of the family, a symbol of life, the center of the Universe for her descendants, and an educator of her children who ensures the continuity of family values. Poets and prose writers, artists and sculptors, musicians and film directors have created the woman-mother's images that contribute to consolidating the qualities which mythological consciousness attributed to it and which are inherent in archetypal notions of it. However, studies of the representatives of the psychoanalytical school contribute to focusing on those characteristics of the woman-mother, which negatively affect her adult children's lives, causing complexes and trauma. Fiction has also contributed to such an interpretation of the woman-mother's image. In their works, many writers depicted mothers whose behavior led to the formation of mental disorders and life dramas of their offspring. For instance, in his novel "Revolutionary Road", the American writer Richard Yates depicts the draining relationships of a young couple who lives in the suburbs of New York in the 1950s and experiences a terrible tragedy staying in the trap of their illusions. The author not only focuses

on the dynamics of the family drama but also prompts the reader to possible preconditions for the characters' behavior rooted in the previous generation, suggesting the choice of interpretative strategy.

R. Yates's debut novel "Revolutionary Road" was published in 1961, but it enjoyed the greatest popularity among the general public after its adaptation by the film director S. Mendes in 2008. Since the publication, the novel has evoked a keen interest among literary critics, who mainly study it in terms of personal identity, gender dimensions, and value orientations of the post-war generation. In particular, in their research, M.T. Castilho and R. Pacheco [1] paid attention to the characters of the novel as representatives of the lost generation, which experiences the conflict between ambitions and conformism. Using Yu. Kristeva's concept, M.S. Razavi and J.F. Dehkordi [4] examined the main characters' attempts to identify themselves through opposition to their surroundings. Researchers F. Fenny and L. Soelistyo [2] clarified the discrepancies in the system of the characters' values through the prism of the gender role theory. F. Vavotici [5] outlined the impact of social space on the formation of gender norms and personal identity in the novel "Revolutionary road". L. Matek [3] characterized the characters' conflicts as an unsuccessful attempt to adapt to the world of the Other. However, the thematic diversity of these studies does not exhaust the interpretative potential of the novel "Revolutionary Road".

tionary Road". The attempt to analyze the female characters of R. Yates's debut novel as an artistic projection of transgenerational trauma makes the topic of our study relevant.

The research **aims to** characterize the female characters of R. Yates's novel "Revolutionary Road" as an artistic projection of transgenerational trauma and identify the specificity of the author's psychologization strategies. The methodological foundation of the study is American psychologist M. Wolynn's work "It Didn't Start with You: How Inherited Family Trauma Shapes Who We are and How to End the Cycle" [6], which substantiates the transgenerational nature of traumatic experience and focuses on identifying inherited family patterns. To achieve the aim of the research, the following problems should be solved: 1) to define the meaning of the concept of "transgenerational trauma" and mechanisms for diagnosing it; 2) to analyze the paradigms of the female characters' behavior in "Revolutionary road"; 3) to identify the specificity of an artistic projection of transgenerational trauma; 4) to outline the peculiarities of the writer's psychologization strategies.

The research **object** is R. Yates's debut novel "Revolutionary Road", and the **subject** of our study is an artistic reflection of transgenerational trauma in its female characters.

Research materials. At the beginning of R. Yates's novel, the reader learns that the main characters, the young couple of April and Frank Wheelers, regularly have quarrels accompanied by humiliating insults, formal apologies, and temporary reconciliations. Arguments between the husband and the wife happen so often that they become commonplace for them "as an unbecoming, comfortable old coat" [7, p. 34]. The chronological narrative about the couple's everyday life and their interaction with the social environment is interspersed with flashbacks from the main characters' family histories, revealing the influence of the past on their lives. The information about April's parents, which the reader learns from the novels, is enough to understand the role of family history in her behavior. This prompted us to choose M. Wolynn's study "It Didn't Start with You: How Inherited Family Trauma Shapes Who We are and How to End the Cycle" as a methodological foundation of the research. In particular, the key tenet we rely on in analyzing the female characters of the novel "Revolutionary Road" is

that "the effects of trauma can pass from one generation to the next" [6, p. 9]. To diagnose transgenerational trauma, M. Wolynn uses bridging questions "that can connect a persistent symptom <...> to a core trauma or to a family member who struggled similarly", core complaints and descriptions which are rooted in "fragments of traumatic experience and expressed in core language" [6, p. 206].

In the novel, there is an occasional mention of April's parents. However, the information available for the reader is enough to understand the destructive impact of her childhood on her relationship with her husband. Listening to his wife's stories, Frank imagined her parents as incomprehensible "as anything in the novels of Evelyn Waugh" – the carefree and cruel Playboy and Flapper: they "divorced within a year of the birth of their only child" [7, p. 39]. April's mother gave her to the girl's aunt Mary immediately after her birth, then the child was raised by other foster parents before she ended up with her aunt Claire. However, none of the women caring for the girl gave her the feeling of love and security. This sad fact is important in the context of the study by M. Wolynn, who emphasizes that "the impact of an early break in the mother-child bond <...> can be devastating for the infant" [6, p. 45] and have dramatic consequences in their future life. April was almost completely deprived of the attention of her parents, who rarely came to visit her and disappeared afterwards. According to M. Wolynn, "a disconnection from our mother or father underlies three of the four unconscious themes, and is the first place to consider when we are struggling" [6, p. 65]. Given this, we can assume that the reasons for adult April's internal conflicts and problems in her relationship with her husband lie in the early disconnection with her parents. The need for contact with her family manifested itself in a special "fetishistic" attitude towards the things that reminded her of the meetings with them. April cherished trifles from the past associated with her parents: "snapshots of herself at various ages, on various lawns, standing with one or the other parent; a miniature painting of her mother's pretty head; a yellowed, leather-framed photograph showing both parents" [7, p. 40]. In this way, the author highlights the character's longing for unrequited love and care.

M. Wolynn believes that disconnection with our mother has a powerful impact on romantic

relationships: “In response, we either cling to our partner, as we may have clung to our mother, or we push our partner away in anticipation that intimacy will be lost” [6, p. 154]. Both types of behavior in the same relationship lead to a situation in which “our partner can feel as though he or she is trapped on an emotional roll-coaster ride that never ends” [6, p. 154]. This was April’s attitude towards her husband: when quarreling, she humiliated and insulted him, openly demonstrating hatred and contempt, and after a while she reconciled with him and confessed her love. Polar changes in emotions provoked tension in their relationships and exhausted both partners. April’s early separation from her mother undermined the stability of her relationship with her husband. M. Wolynn argues that, “if our partner does not satisfy our unmet needs, we can feel betrayed or neglected” [6, p. 154]. April always felt dissatisfied with her family life: she did not like their social surroundings, her husband’s job, and how he treated her. M. Wolynn’s statement explains the female character’s behavior and feelings since April’s wrong expectations caused her disappointment.

Frank did not like the words April said before their marriage: “I love you when you’re nice” [7, p. 49]. He understood that one could love someone only wholly, not just the part of the personality that was beneficial and attractive. When Frank asked April who had given her the feeling of love, she replied that her parents had evoked it. The man realized that what she felt could hardly be called love but his wife insisted that, as a child, she had loved only her father and mother. Frank assumed that April’s parents might have seemed “romantic”, “dazzling and glamorous and that all” to her, but that could not be a reason for true love. The woman explained that she “loved their clothes”, “loved the way they talked”, “loved to hear them tell about their lives” [7, p. 41]. April had a false idea of love, and what she put into the meaning of this word was rather a fascination with an attractive surface. April could not give her husband what she had not received from her parents as a child because, according to M. Wolynn, complicated relationships with our parents “can be projected onto our partners” [6, p. 96].

The story of April’s parents ended tragically: her father committed suicide in a Boston hotel, and her mother died a few years later after

a long rehabilitation in a center for alcoholics. She could not recall anything good about her caregivers except for her hatred of Aunt Claire. Such a severe experience of family trauma could not but affect April’s behavior. On the list of questions offered by M. Wolynn for identifying inherited trauma patterns, there are questions about family members who committed suicide or gave up a child for adoption. Both of them can be associated with April’s parents, which suggests that she had inherited trauma patterns. Frank realized that “one big thing went wrong right away” [7, p. 50] in their relationship. April was upset about her first pregnancy, which occurred seven years earlier than she had planned. She withdrew from her father, though it was their “first authentic involvement” [7, p. 51]. April wanted to get rid of the child and told her husband about the experience of a girl she knew who had done it easily at home. Frank was outraged by his wife’s decision hence they quarreled all night, and she allowed him to convince her in the morning. Giving birth to two children and a measured family life did not make April happy, so she clung to the illusion that moving to France would solve all their family problems and allow Frank to find a job, which would enable him to fulfil himself.

April’s third pregnancy interfered with the couple’s plans to move to Europe in autumn. Frank was afraid that his wife would try to get rid of the child, considering it a crime against them both. April regarded it as something commonplace: “It was a thing women did every day in perfect safety” [7, p. 230], not caring about the ethical side of this act. Frank guessed that the reasons for her behavior could be related to the past. Trying to understand the motives for his wife’s actions, he asked her a “bridging” question: “Isn’t it possible there are forces at work here that you’re not entirely aware of? That you’re not recognizing?” [7, p. 237]. The man tried to explain to April what he meant: “I mean things within yourself, things that have their origin in your own childhood – your own upbringing and so on. Emotional things” [7, p. 237]. Frank assumed that his wife’s disconnection with her parents could be a reason for her desire to terminate the pregnancy: “Wasn’t it likely, after all, that a girl who’d known nothing but parental rejection from the time of her birth might develop an abiding reluctance to bear chil-

dren?” [7, p. 237]. The man guessed intuitively that April’s childhood without parents could not but affect her attitude towards motherhood. Frank thought that his wife spoke about having children as an atonement that had to be achieved. The fact that she wanted to get rid of two out of three pregnancies testified to her problems with fulfilling this gendered role of the woman. Frank believed that the lack of communication with April’s mother deprived her of the opportunity to learn from the positive experience of motherhood: “that whole side of life, that whole dimension of experience was denied by her from the start” [7, p. 245]. M. Wolynn argues that a woman who maintains harmonious relationships with her mother usually has no problems with femininity [6, p. 226]. The case of April looks like a transgenerational family trauma: the child of a mother who abandoned her immediately after birth repeats the inherited pattern, trying to terminate the pregnancy, which is not associated with anything good. The unresolved core trauma prevented her from living a happy family life and being a good mother and wife.

Amid another conflict, offended by the fact that his wife “loathed the sight of him”, Frank called her “an empty, hollow fucking shell of a woman” [7, p. 306]. He reproached her for not getting rid of the child and admitted that he really wanted her to do that. This was the most devastating quarrel in their life, followed by an unexpectedly easy reconciliation. After that, April decided to terminate the pregnancy, realizing that it could cause her death. In her last hours, she reflected on the lack of true love in her relationship with Frank, which was actually a dependence on each other’s weaknesses. April recalled the scenes from her childhood when she boasted about presents from her mother – “beautiful blue cashmere sweater, for school, and socks that match” [7, p. 322]. Trying to catch her friends’ attention to that stuff, the girl wanted to prove that she was loved and cared for. Furthermore, she recalled the meeting with her father, who visited his child for a while. April went into detail while describing her “marvelous” daddy’s appearance: “His slim ankles, beneath trouser cuffs that had been raised to just the right height, were clad in taut socks of fluted black wool; his dark brown shoes were so shapely and so grace-

fully arranged on the carpet. <...> But her gaze kept straying upward to his princely knees, to his close-fitting vest with its fine little drape of watch chain, to the way he held himself in his chair and to his white-cuffed wrists and hands, one holding a highball glass and the other making slow, easy gestures in the air, and to his brilliant face” [7, p. 324]. Nothing was mentioned about his love and care. The girl took admiration for her parents’ appearance for love because she had never received it from them. Depicting these memories from April’s childhood, R. Yates emphasizes her suffering caused by the broken relationships with her parents. Her father’s suicide, her mother’s alcoholism, and her upbringing outside the family are facts from her family history, which cannot be ignored when identifying reasons for April’s fatal act.

Conclusions and prospects for further research. Using M. Wolynn’s study as a methodological foundation of our research made it possible to characterize the female characters of R. Yates’s novel “Revolutionary Road” as an artistic projection of transgenerational trauma. The chosen behavioral strategy allowed us to identify the role of the characters’ family history in the formation of their behavioral patterns. In particular, April Wheeler’s early disconnection with her mother and the lack of parental care led to the development of her fear of losing intimacy, emotional instability, inability to truly love Frank, desire to terminate two pregnancies, and the decision to commit suicide. The unresolved internal conflicts and unawareness of the inherited trauma deprived the main female character of the opportunity to improve her family life, which led to the tragedy. Though Frank’s upbringing in a two-parent family and acceptance of his parents contributed to his emotional stability, it was not enough to build a happy family and save his wife from death. Visualizing the main character’s relationship with her parents allowed the author to create convincing fictional images and achieve a high level of psychologization. Identifying the main characters’ behavioral patterns in the context of transactional analysis using E. Berne’s works is considered a prospect for further research of R. Yates’ novel “Revolutionary Road”.

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