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THE PURITY OF GENRE AND «A SECRET HISTORY» BY DONNA TARTT

The purpose of this article is an attempt to categorize a literary work by Donna Tartt under the title «A Secret History». Current investigation aims at considering the literary work by Donna Tartt «A Secret History» from the point of view of postmodern aesthetics. Having analyzed a number of scientific works of distinguished scholars in the field of literary studies the authors come to the conclusion that it is impossible to place any postmodern literary work in the frame of one genre. The number of topics and issues a postmodern writer touches in his or her work may be infinite, thus genre characteristic features or attributes of a literary work are as well: under postmodernism the text itself is omnipotent and cannot be restricted to one genre, thus we support Mikhail Bakhtin's and other scientists thought regarding the nonexistence of the purity of genre and point out characteristic features of different genres presented in one literary text, i.e. «A Secret History» novel by Donna Tartt.

Key words: *the inverted detective story, academic prose, campus novel, philosophical novel, genre, genre characteristics and attributes.*

Introduction. Specificity of postmodern aesthetics is connected with neoclassical interpretation of classical traditions. Distant from classical aesthetics, postmodernism does not enter into conflict with it, does not seek to involve it in its orbit on a theoretical basis. The aesthetics of postmodernism differed significantly from the classical antique-winekelmanian Western European aesthetics [1], and advanced a number of new principal positions; has established a pluralistic aesthetic paradigm, which leads to the loosening and internal transformation of the categorical system and the conceptual apparatus of classical aesthetics. Postmodern experiments also stimulated the blurring of the boundaries between traditional types and directions of art, the development of synesthesia tendencies questioned the originality of creativity, the «purity» of art as of an individual act of creation, led to its designization [2]. The purpose of this piece is an attempt to categorize a literary work by Donna Tartt under the title «A Secret History», having analyzed literary features that this work possesses and support M. M. Bakhtin's and other scientists thought regarding the nonexistence of the purity of genre.

Methodology. In literary studies the term «genre» has many definitions. Genre forms are mobile and easily transformed depending on the changes in the external sociocultural context. The genre is always conditioned by such circumstances as the environment

and the objective qualities of the described or analyzed object, phenomenon, process; ideological, moral, ethical, aesthetic, professional and individual psychological features of the author. Genre, as a rule, is always historical, has typological characteristics, predetermined epistemological nature, and contains axiological accents. In the literary aspect, the genre is defined as a historically developing type of a literary work, where the characteristic features of a more or less extensive group of texts are generalized. Any genre is an exact unity of special properties of a form in its basic moments – a peculiar composition, imagery, speech, rhythm [3, p 106–107].

A famous researcher of postmodernism and author of umpteen scientific pieces N. B. Mankovskaya points out the existence of the following stylistic modifications of postmodern prose: 1) narrative postmodernism; lyrical postmodernism; post philosophical postmodernism; psychoanalytical postmodernism; melancholic postmodernism. [1, p. 95]. According to M. M. Bakhtin not a single historical aspect can stand a principle in its pure form, but it is characterized by the predominance of one or another principle of a character embodiment [4]. Similar point of view regarding the purity of the genre has P. T. Gromov who points out that every stage of life of a genre absorbs attributes, characteristics and features of the epoch along with the elements pertinent to already established genres [5]. In Bausch's opinion novel is the most capacious and the widest among all types of poetry, and it allows a great number of variations and derivations as far as it may include poetry of all types and kinds. [6] Rymar does not contradict the previous statement and adds that on the basis of the novel there is synthesis of dramatic and lyric tendencies with epic structure [7].

In this piece we will support the ideas of M. M. Bakhtin and other scientists, that under all circumstances and tendencies of evolution and development of genre system, the purity of genre is impossible. The methods such as comparison and analysis will be used.

Research and Discussion. With the development and popularization of fiction it is becoming more and more difficult for the reader and the literary critics to categorize literary works.

«A Secret History», by Donna Tartt was her debut novel published in 1992 [8] Categorization of this literary work was not easy and researchers' opinions vary: «A Secret History» was categorized as an inverted detective story [11], campus or university novel [9], a thriller or murder mystery [10], etc. The actions of the story take part in a fictive liberal arts college in Vermont. In our opinion it is also worth adding that the story may, to some extent, have some autobiographical characteristics, as far as Tartt herself studied in a liberal arts college in Vermont, so this window should remain open for further analysis. The plot is focused on a cluster of initially five and then six students inspired by a teacher of ancient Greek. The group has air of intrigue, mystery and even mystique around them, which alludes the reader to the characteristics of the Gothic novel.

There is a first-person narrator in «A Secret History» who happens to be, at least at the first glance, a protagonist of the story, the boy, the sixth member of the cluster, who, in fact, never became the real part of the group, thus circumstantially proving Julian's idea that the number of students should be five. Richard Papen is a poor Californian boy, from a typical dysfunctional American family, who comes to East, hoping not to make a difference, but to get a better life for him. When he is coming to Hampden he makes his first attempt to escape: from boredom, from poverty, from depressing society, this is his first big escape, this time it is physical, yet it is just the beginning. The theme of escape is not a minor one in the novel. Every one of the main characters, including Julian Marrow at some point follows the escape route, and Henry takes the most radical and final one.

The Greek group leads posh life of well-off teenage escapists: they contemplate Greek philosophy, read ancient Greek texts, go to common dinners, talk about art during the week and for the weekend they make a getaway to the countryside, where Francis's family has a house and they have secluded weekends of reading, drinking, experimenting and Bacchanal. Being students of ancient Greek, they as well as their teacher become interested with Dionysus, the God who did not live on Olympus, but among wine and sexual pleasure. To honor the God and to perceive his essence, four of them – Henry, Francis, Charles and Camilla make umpteen attempts to reach trance during Bacchanals they organized. Finally they succeed and their last Bacchanal ends with the murder of a farmer, which they claim they do not remember. Later Henry tells this story to Richard. Richard is shocked, but believes that the four have no recollection of the murder and are also shocked and sad because of what happened. The reader sides with Richard and thus sides with the four. However, it should be taken into account that in the times of Ancient Greece Bacchanals always hosted enormous brutality, which could be seen in sparagmos, that is laceration, mutilation and disembodiment of a domestic animal or a living person, which was the final point of Bacchanal. Thus the question presents itself: could talented students not know about the way a Bacchanal ends and was the murder of a farmer an accident?

Inverted Detective Story attributes. The 20th and 21st centuries are the time of globalization, integration and mass culture reign. The peculiarities and specific features of national cultures are becoming thinner, and mass literature is easier for the reader to perceive. Michelle Foucault believed that mass culture memory was created artificially, erasing national memory and instilling typical international images, easily readable by everyone [12]. Postmodernism in the second half of the 20th century claimed its superiority and called for unification, under Postmodernism the line between mass and elitist literature thinned grandly. Postmodern-writers freely and efficiently combined discourses of many literary works in their fiction. They managed to intrigue the reader, filling the easy recognizable form of a thriller or a detective story with philosophical or psychological meaning. The previous genre structure was outdated and the experiment of genre contaminating reached a new level.

One of the most popular genres of mass literature today is a detective story. Currently there are up to forty types and subgenres of this genre, such as: amateur detective, prehistoric (i.e. pre-Poe), espionage, hardboiled, heist, impossible crimes, legal mystery, noir, whodunit and howdunnit (inverted) and many others. As it was mentioned above, «A Secret History» by Donna Tartt may be classified as an inverted detective story. This subgenre became popular with the famous American TV show «Columbo». The inverted detective story is also known under the names «whydunnit» and «howcatchhim», its peculiarity, among others, is that the murder is committed in the very beginning of the narration, and the reader, unlike the detective, knows who the murderer is, thus being in an advantageous position comparing to the detective.

In this regard «A Secret History» may be considered the inverted detective story. The narration starts with the murder of Bunny Corcoran presented to the reader. The murder was committed by five of his fellow students and friends, for the reasons so far unknown and the task for the reader is to understand why the murder was committed and to side with one of the parties.

«It is difficult to believe that Henry's modest plan could have worked so well despite these unforeseen events. We hadn't intended to hide the body where it couldn't be found» [17].

The author introduces the reader to the murder from the first pages of the novel and continues with the retrospect story told by the main character Richard Papen, who joined

the initial group of five a bit later in the term and was somewhat an outsider who desperately wanted to fit in an unfitted cluster.

The inverted detective for the most part poses the question of not «who?», but «why?». Tartt meticulously leads the reader to come to the conclusion that the murder was the only way possible and the implication is such that the reader should side with the culprits, as far as Bunny's behavior left them no choice –Tartt outlines two main reasons for Bunny's murder: first, he didn't want and couldn't continue silence, and keep secret:

«Things aren't marvelous», said Henry, «but they could certainly be worse. The big problem now is Bunny.» [17].

As for the second reason, Bunny's blackmail became intolerable, it reached its peak and Bunny Corcoran didn't want either to stop or limit his demands:

«Really, it is nothing», said Henry mildly. «I can't tell you how much that trip to Italy cost me. And my parents are generous, but they're not that generous.» [17].

It is doubtless that «A Secret History» by Donna Tartt has a number of features pertinent to the inverted detective story subgenre, however, in our opinion, the main feature, because of which it cannot be one is that there is no presence of a real detective who solves the crime and what is more the crime is not solved at all, two crimes for that matter, which does not fit the cannon. After Bunny's disappearance the biggest manhunt in the history of Vermont was launched and the law enforcement even managed to recover the body, but according to the literary canon of any detective story, the mystery or the murder should be solved by the detective and justice should be served to the culprits, while the reader should have satisfaction from the case being solved. The investigation of a homicide is the main story-line for a detective story of any subgenre and in «A Secret History» there is no such story-line, thus validity of statement that «A Secret History» is an inverted detective story is questionable and requires further research.

Campus or academic novel attributes. Campus, academic or university novel is relatively new genre and dates back to the second half of the 20th century. Elaine Showalter, the researcher of the academic novel in the piece «Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents» argues that «The Masters» by C. P. Snow (1951) was one of the first academic novels with academic setting and characteristics, though it is widely quoted that «The Groves of Academe» by Mary McCarthy (1952) is the earliest example of campus prose [13, 14]. The academic novel is rather popular genre of mass literature, especially because it is extremely easy for the reader to see themselves in the characters of such novels. College setting is both intriguing and familiar. Among more recent academic novels one can name «On Beauty» by Zadie Smith, «The Human Stain» by Philipp Roth, and the Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling among many others.

The themes of the academic novel may vary, though the characteristic are relatively distinct, as this genre requires closed environment of university, college or school, they also normally require confrontation between different groups in terms of socio-cultural dynamics. Among the topical problems of the academic novel quite often one may encounter analyzing social attitudes, investigation of psychological reactions, etc. There is also a point of view, according to which the academic novel has a subgenre – campus murder mystery – where the closed college environment substitutes for the country setting of Golden Age detective novels («Gaudy Night» by Dorothy Sayers, «The Silent World of Nicholas Quinn» by Colin Dexter and others) [14]. These characteristics of the campus prose are found in «A Secret History» by Donna Tartt. Hampden College in Vermont is a typical American college, where students stand against the locals, thus forming their own closed community. They are different from the locals: young, educated, rich and what is more important they are not from Vermont. They are lodgers, who live on this territory, but they do not care about what is going

on behind the campus walls and thus in completely another world, which has nothing to do with them.

«Imagine how it would look», Henry said. «We're all young, well educated, reasonably well off; perhaps most importantly, not Vermonters.» [17].

Not the least important characteristic of the academic novel is the outsider character. The academic prose is mostly about admittance – to college, to group, to society and then working the group dynamic. In Tartt's novel already closed college community contains even more closed Greek cluster and thus the outsider and the narrator has two challenges at once: to be admitted to Hampden and to be admitted to Julian Morrow's Greek class. In accordance with a mass literature canon protagonist should be a paragon of goodness, moral mark, should know what's right and wrong, should be a role model. He should suffer in the beginning and reach his goal in the end by being good and doing good and just deeds, making right decisions. Richard Papen is everyone, he has same problems and worries as everyone, he dreams about what everyone does, that's why the reader believes that he will make the difference and he will do the right thing. However, Richard is not a classical protagonist of an academic novel; Richard Papen is not Harry Potter. Richard lies not for the greater good, but for his possible success, he deceives people who treat him well and pretends to be a person he is not. To become a part of the Greek class he lies about his family and his allowance.

Initiation is significant for unfolding an academic novel and in Tartt's novel it takes place, when Julian breaks his rule of five students and accepts Richard in the class. Then again, even after starting as a Greek student, it was difficult to say that Richard became a member of that cluster. The real imitation happened when he became a part of Bunny's murder, though by chance.

Overall, we may say that the setting of the campus novel is present in «A Secret History», there is some confrontation between groups, closed society, reclusiveness of the main characters and psychological group dynamics. On the other hand, foundational rule of fiction writing is not followed as far as Richard Papen, though he is the main character, is hardly a protagonist in the generic meaning of the mass literature canon. In any event, with the presence of campus fiction features, in our opinion it is too superfluous to place this literary work within the only genre of the academic novel.

Philosophical novel attributes. As it was earlier implied the purity of genre is hardly possible in the 21st century and trying to impose it literary science is to fail dramatically. The next set of attributes clearly visible in «A Secret History» by Donna Tartt is related to a postmodern philosophical novel. The genre of the philosophical novel is interesting and intriguing for literary studies. Among the researchers of this genre we may mention Agensov, Rickman, Ross, and many others. However, regardless of a number of the scientific works devoted to this topic there is still no general definition of this genre. In the «Encyclopedia of the Novel» (2011) Cunningham states that any attempt to give an exact definition to the philosophical novel would be to no avail and he also stresses that as a genre a philosophical novel is marked with extreme flexibility [15, p. 607]. According to Lukov the main heroes of a philosophical novel are not characters, but ideas [16]. Philosophical ideas and oppositions of good / evil, right / wrong, truth / deception, mediocre / sublime are present in «A Secret History». The implication of secret which is still not unveiled in concealed in the name of the novel itself.

An extensive part of philosophical load of the novel is connected with the Ancient Greece and its philosophy with allusions, being a postmodern novel, to another «modern age Greek novel» «Unicorn» by Iris Murdoch, whose heroes pondered on neoplatonism in secluded environment. College setting, Francis's country house and the Lyceum, where

only the chosen are allowed to, are also secluded environment. Among the ideas that dominate the novel are the loss of self and the matter of control, exploration of which essentially led to Bacchanal and sequence of crime. However, if we extend the implication we may suppose that Bacchanal could be not reason, but mere a pretext for the murder. From the customs of Ancient Greece it is known that Dionysus is associated with irrational, with total madness and Bacchanals usually resulted in either animal or human sacrifice, when body was torn into pieces. Thus, there is a question whether college students who majored in Greek couldn't know about the basic prerequisite of Bacchanal.

Youngsters taught and guided by Julian Morrow, who is the embodiment of a mystique in the novel, decide to lose their selves, to step away from the Apollonian objectification and into Dionysian identification:

«Well, it's not called a mystery for nothing», said Henry sourly. «Take my word for it. But one mustn't underestimate the primal appeal – to lose one's self, lose it utterly. And in losing it be born to the principle of continuous life, outside the prison of mortality and time.» [17].

The idea of control is nonetheless important. Control means order and order means control – it is an opposition of irrational, and also it is the basic philosophical opposition: Apollo / Dionysus. However, it should be stated that the philosophic ideas are presented in the novel in a rather superfluous manner. The reader receives an impulse, an idea, though author does not give elaborated analysis of this idea or concept, and though the novel contains a great number of philosophic issues, allusions and reminiscences they are not augmented by the author.

Conclusion. Having studied the debut novel by Donna Tartt «A Secret History» and having made the attempt to analyze it from the point of view genre classification we have reached the conclusion that it is highly difficult to define its genre. Unfortunately, we cannot agree with the esteemed scientists who classify this literary work solely as an inverted detective story, academic novel, philosophical novel or others. In our opinion it is impossible to put any postmodern literary work in the frame of one genre. The number of topics and issues a postmodern writer touches in his or her work may be infinite, thus genre characteristic features or attributes of a literary work are as well: under postmodernism the text itself is omnipotent and cannot be restricted to one genre.

«A Secret History» novel is an inverted detective story in terms of structure, an academic novel in terms of setting and philosophical novel in terms of meaning: however, this literary text is not limited only with this characteristic and deeper analysis of the structural and meaningful elements is required.

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ЧИСТОТА ЖАНРУ У РОМАНІ ДОННИ ТАРТТ «ТАЄМНА ІСТОРІЯ»

Метою даного літературного дослідження є спроба класифікувати літературний роман Донни Тартт, який має назву «Таємна історія» – дебютний роман авторки, який побачив світ у 1992 р. Завдання, яке поставили перед собою автори статті мало на меті вивчення літературного роману Донни Тартт «Таємна історія» з точки зору постмодерністської естетики.

У літературознавстві термін «жанр» має багато визначень. На думку багатьох дослідників, жанрові форми є переважно рухливими та можуть легко трансформуються в залежності від змін зовнішнього соціокультурного контексту. Жанр завжди зумовлений такими обставинами, як навколишнє середовище та об'єктивні якості описаного або проаналізованого об'єкта, явища, процесу; ідеологічні, моральні, етичні, естетичні, професійні та індивідуальні психологічні особливості автора. Жанр, як правило, завжди історичний, має типологічні характеристики, зумовлені ґносеологічною природою та містить аксіологічні акценти.

У літературному аспекті жанр визначається як тип літературного твору, який історично розвивається та в якому узагальнюються характерні риси більш-менш розгалуженої групи текстів. Постмодернізм у другій половині ХХ століття затвердив свою перевагу в літературному процесі, та саме в рамках постмодернізму стало можливе об'єднання та запозичення з різних жанрових форм попередніх течій. За постмодернізму лінія між масовою та елітарною літературами великою мірою розмилася, стала набагато тоншою.

Постмодерністи вільно та ефективно об'єднують дискурси багатьох літературних текстів у своїх творах. Їм вдається інтригувати читача при використанні легкої впізнаваної форми трилера або детективної історії з філософським або психологічним навантаженням. Попередня жанрова структура застаріла, а експеримент зараження, або, за словами деяких вчених, забруднення жанру досяг нового рівня. Проаналізувавши низку наукових праць відомих вчених в галузі теорії літератури, порівняльного літературознавства тощо, автори дійшли висновку, що неможливо віднести жоден постмодерністський літературний текст виключно до того чи іншого жанру.

Постмодерністський літературний текст неможливо помістити в рамки лише одного жанру. Число тем та проблем, яких постмодерністський письменник, або письменниця торкається у своїй творчості, може бути нескінченним, отже

і характерні жанрові риси чи атрибути літературного твору також будуть нескінченними. За постмодернізму власне сам текст стає всемогутнім та всеосяжним, і він не може бути обмежений характеристиками одного жанру, тому ми погоджуємось і підтримуємо думку Михайла Бахтіна та інших вчених, яка полягає в тому, що не існує чистоти жанру, і відзначаємо характерні риси різних жанрів, які властиві одному літературному тексту, тобто тексту роману «Таємна історія» Донни Тартт.

Ключові слова: *перевернутий детектив, університетський роман, академічна проза, філософський роман, жанр, жанрові характеристики*

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