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PHILOLOGICAL SCIENCES

THE BUTTERFLY GARDEN: A MODERN VARIATION OF THE BACHELOR SHOW

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Introductions. Socio-cultural literature of the late twentieth – early twenty first centuries posed for literary criticism the problem of understanding literature as multilevel, multilayered, and addressed to the widest range of readers. Mass literature established in America and Europe in the twentieth century and created in accordance with the reader's requests, has dramatically changed the structure of the book market, the status of the writer, the attitude to the text and book; with mass literature the book is no longer the “textbook of life”, but primarily a commodity.

Aim. The authors aim to address to the number of topics and techniques pertinent to a mass literature literary work. It is also our intention to dwell on the specific features and characteristics of mass literature in general and peculiarities of the novel *The Butterfly Garden* by Dot Hutchison in particular.

Materials and methods. Globalization which has covered all spheres of modern life and the spread of information exchange have helped to synchronize some socio-cultural processes, which in the post-Soviet space were somewhat different due to particular development of literature. Any phenomenon known in Western mass culture becomes significant in post-Soviet bloc countries, operates under the common laws of mass distribution of the world and at the same time, in somewhat different conditions that have certain national specifics. The success of the popular singer

(Madonna) or his death (M. Jackson, W. Houston), the world premiere of the film, the release of the book, which attracted the attention of Western readers and viewers are of great interest in all parts of the world. It is especially true if the mass product is associated with scandal, sharp controversy, discussion on TV shows, in speeches of religious figures, politicians, etc.

In the time when we are approaching the first quarter of the 21st century the derogatory connotation of the term “mass literature” is no longer a definite and straightforward association with literary works of the genre. It is still a rather controversial affirmation that a literary piece belonging to mass literature should undoubtedly be of low quality. In our opinion mass literature is not so much about the quality (*the opposition is not mass (low quality) literature vs. elite (high quality) literature*) but rather about the number of printed copies. On the other hand we are going to support opinion that the mass literature pieces are most commonly fall into the definite (formula) text structure and are easily recognized by the readership of a definite genre. Some researchers believe that “mass literature is a flexible concept which registers the lowest level of literature” [1], and includes the pieces that are not highly rated by contemporary criticism. It may have been true in the beginning, yet at present date this statement requires reconsideration, However, we would like to dwell on another aspect of mass literature, namely on the aspect of replication or replaying real life. In one of her scientific works Chernyak states that characters in mass literature can be easily recognized and identified by the readership. Those characters act in familiar for the readership situations; the settings of the action are similar to the real world and thus close to the reader [2].

Results and discussion. We have previously stated that modern literature is the reflection of real life and at some point the real life turned into a reality show. Reality shows received great popularity in the past few decades or so, and for now manage to maintain the level of their popularity. Among umpteen talent and survival reality shows there is one which appeals to romantic side of humanity – The Bachelor – the American reality TV series that debuted on March, 25, 2002 on ABC. It is a franchise show, which has a number of spin-offs and is aired in many

countries. The main idea of the show is the search for love with a fixed amount of hand-picked participants who live in an enclosed location. The Bachelor chooses his ladies to spend time with and to get to know them and eventually chooses the one he wants to spend the rest of the life with. The rest of the ladies go home. The idea is simple and known to majority of people who have access to television or the Internet, and it is this simplicity that pushed the idea of the show from the screen and to the book – *The Butterfly Garden* by Dot Hutchison.

The Butterfly Garden is a perverted version of *The Bachelor*. Without any doubt this novel is a sample of mass literature. Despite the fact that this novel is not structured in accordance with the “formula”, all other merits of a mass literature works, such as recognizable characters, identification, suspense, identity crisis etc, are present. It is a story of a man who calls himself Gardener and who sees himself as the Bachelor, with the difference that he does not set his butterflies free, instead he kills them on their 21st birthday. He deprives them of their identity – of their names, memories, lives. They live in an enclosed premises with can be accessed by very few people. He tattoos them as he pleases, gives them new names and rapes them in the name of love and beauty:

“The level of detail was stunning and I wondered how much the intricacy suffered when it came time to refresh the brightness of the ink. Something kept me from asking, though. A good tattoo took years to fade enough that it needed to be touched up; I didn’t want to think about what it would mean to be in the Garden for that long. Or worse, what it could mean if I wasn’t.”[3]

As in *The Bachelor* show the Gardener walks in his Garden contemplating his butterflies and selecting them for a new episode. Stripping the girls of their identities is of vital importance. People who do not know who they are can be controlled easily and will play into fantasy:

“Some can’t stop talking about their families. Afraid they’ll forget, I guess. No names, though. Ravenna said her mother was a senator. That was all we knew.”[3]

It is natural to cling to who you are and wish for escape, however there are exceptions to everything. Not all the Butterflies wanted to leave the Garden, even

though leaving was not an option there was an exception to that as well. There is the rule in the Garden according to which the girls who are truly in love with the Gardener and wish to please him receive a set of wings not on their backs but on their faces, however they are not allowed to leave the Garden either. The exception was Lorraine, who actually was set free, but preferred staying and serving the Gardener:

“He sent her to nursing school and to cooking classes on the side, and she was so broken by submission to his interests, so absolutely in love with him, that she never tried to run away, never tried to tell anyone about the Garden or the dead Butterflies or the living ones who still could have had some hope. She went to her classes, and when she came back into the Garden she studied and practiced, and on her twenty-first birthday, he took away all those backless, pretty black dresses and gave her a plain grey uniform that covered her entirely, and she became the cook and nurse for the Garden.”[3]

This character leads us to another peculiar point where it is getting clear that the artistic characters of this novel are not as unambivalent and clear-cut as the mass literature piece’s characters should be. Apart from the resemblance to *The Bachelor* show, there is another allusion in *The Butterfly Garden*, namely to *The Collector* by John Fowles. The Gardener is quite reminiscent of Caliban, who held Miranda captive and eventually killed her. An attempt to compare these two male characters would surprise the readership with the differences between the two. Caliban was plain, uneducated, mentally retarded and physically repulsive character. He provokes feelings of repulsion and disgust; however Gardener’s character is a completely different story. For one the Gardener was absolutely competent socially. He had a wife (who had no idea about her husband’s real nature) and two sons (who both knew about their father’s real nature), he was educated, eloquent and intelligent. He was a master manipulator as there were girls who wished to stay in the Garden and truly lived him. He managed to create the Garden – a place within a place; a world within a world. Gardener’s family, especially his wife belongs to the outside world; his butterflies, on the other hand, belong to the inner world – his domain. Modern narrative does not represent a villain as physically repulsive. Gardener is not a

protagonist anti-hero, on the other hand he is portrayed as a villain who can be charming and someone should be understood or figured out.

Conclusions. Being a sample of mass literature *The Butterfly Garden*'s main task is to get readers' attention; to involve the readership in the process of co-creating a narrative. The readers should solve the mystery, analyze the setting, go through suspense and feel the characters; they should play a game where a villain plays against his victim and take sides; they should empathize with the characters and realize that the actions of the novel are very realistic and probable. Mass literature and mass culture are connected with each other and with real life. Literature is the reflection of a society and thus a literary work may only be written in the framework of the period of time in question; and literary text is written under the impact of current events within a society.

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