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American realia – 11/22/63 by Stephen King

Американські реалії у романі Стівені Кінга «11/22/63»

Annotation: Current research is aimed at investigating of representation of American realia in modern literature. In the course of research it is stated that realia originate in popular culture and are natural to plenty of texts and genres. The conclusion is that realia are represented with a number of literary tropes, which help to create authentic atmosphere of the late 50s America.

Key words: American literature, realia, literary tropes, cultural realia, types of realia.

Анотація: Дана наукова розвідка має на меті дослідити репрезентацію американських реалій у сучасній художній літературі. В ході дослідження увага акцентується на тому, що поняття бере початок у масовій культурі та є характерним для багатьох текстів та жанрів. Автор приходить до висновку, що репрезентація реалій відбувається за рахунок використання ряду літературних тропів, які допомагають створити автентичну атмосферу Америки кінця 50-х років ХХ сторіччя.

Ключові слова: американська література, реалії, літературні тропи, культурні реалії, типи реалій.

11/22/63 – is probably the date that every American knows. In fact, knowing this date is not geographically restricted to the United States of America, though it is undoubtedly accepted as a date/event/realia connected with the USA and the US history.

Realia are words and expressions for culture-specific items. Realia are born in popular culture, and are increasingly found in great many kinds of texts and genres. One of its main purposes is to convey an exotic touch (fiction). It is traditionally believed that realia as objects of material and spiritual culture reflect the lifestyle and the way of thinking of a particular society and have no analogues in other cultures. When conveying the cultural realia, there are some obstacles which arise due to different linguistic worldviews. Those obstacles are caused by the differences in the conditions and the ways of life of different nationalities, and by the differences between civilizations and their inherent systems of values.

Realia are of three types:

Geography:

- physical geography – pampa, fjord, mistral, steppe, tornado, tsunami;
- geographic objects tied to man's activity – polder;
- endemic species – kiwi, koala, sequoia.

Ethnography:

- everyday life – paprika, spaghetti, empanada, sauna, kimono, etc.;
- work – carabinieri, concierge, machete, trade unions, etc.;
- art and culture – tarantella, banjo, gong, commedia, allegro, Santa Claus, vampire, murals, launeddas, etc.;
- ethnic characterizations – cockney, gringo, yankee;
- measures and money – mile, kilometer, lira, peseta, talent, etc.

Politics and society:

- administrative divisions – region, province, county, department, state, bidonville, arrondissement, souk, promenade, etc;
- organs and functions – agora, forum, дума, senate, chancellor, czar, pharaoh, ayatollah, etc;
- political and social life – peronist, Ku Klux Klan, partigiani, lobbying, lord, untouchables, samurai, etc;
- military – cohort, phalanx, marines. [1]

It is extremely difficult to picture a fictional literary work, or not fictional for that matter, without realia of the country, where the author lives and works. While writing a novel, for example, it is only natural to use the country's realia to create the appropriate atmosphere for narration.

In January, 2009, 38 years after first getting the idea, Stephen King, one of the most notable American writers of the 20th and the 21st centuries, began typing the beginning of what would become 11/22/63 – his biggest bestseller in over a decade. This novel is an attempt to picture life how it could be if one of the most horrible events in the American history didn't take place – what would the world and the US look like, hadn't President Kennedy been assassinated.

This novel is about time travel, and gives a reader the opportunity to see what America was like in the late 50s, allows him to feel the atmosphere that reigned back then:

“Cocked back on his head was a filthy fedora that looked straight out of a 1950s film noir, the kind where all the women have big bazonkas and all the men talk fast around the cigarettes stuck in the corners of their mouths. And yep, poking up from the fedora's hatband, like an old-fashioned reporter's press pass, was a yellow card. Once it had probably been a bright yellow, but much handling by grimy fingers had turned it bleary.”[2]

There are some specific rules of the time travel, so the main hero cannot simply get to the place of assassination 15 minutes before the fatal shot and change the history. He has to spend some time in the 50s, feel it, blend in and manage to survive

for five long years – he has to taste real America of the 50s. He travels from Maine to Dallas, passing several states and trying to blend in, beholding the American realia of that time:

“Each July, Lisbon Falls hosts the Maine Moxie Festival. There are bands, fireworks, and a parade featuring—I swear this is true—Moxie floats and local beauty queens dressed in Moxie-colored tank bathing suits, which means an orange so bright it can cause retinal burns. The parade marshal is always dressed as the Moxie Doc, which means a white coat, a stethoscope, and one of those funky mirrors on a headband. Two years ago the marshal was LHS principal Stella Langley, and she’ll never live it down.” [2]

The main hero, at least in the beginning is excited to see his country, what it was like in the past. It is a mixture of something new and at the same time well known, of something that you always knew about and finally got to see it:

“I tried to smile, but I’m not sure I made it. The briefcase felt very heavy, as if it were filled with rocks instead of money and bogus ID. I thought I might faint. And yet, God help me, part of me still wanted to go. Couldn’t wait to go. I wanted to see the USA in my Chevrolet; America was asking me to call.” [2]

Stephen King is a famous Maine lover, most of his novels, if not all, take place in Maine, it is his home state, he knows it as a palm of his hand, knows its cultural events and activities, he loves it dearly and shares the information about it with his readers.

We can say that in this novel apart from obvious speculating he dwells on comparison as well; sometimes it is a direct one, sometimes implicit. He offers the reader to compare both Americas – the 21st century America and America of the 1950s – America with fedora men, who smoke on the streets in southern states, when their drawl is too obvious, when life is slow, he lets his reader to feel dampness of Maine and heat of Texas:

“Did I want to spend years in the past? No. But I did want to go back. If only to hear how Little Richard sounded when he was still top of the pops. Or get on a Trans World Airlines plane without having to take off my shoes, submit to a full-body scan, and go through a metal detector. And I wanted another root beer.” [2]

He talks about time, when everything was real: food, feeling, etc. He points out to the reader that once America was careless and unconcerned – there was no terrorist threat, eminent crisis and GMO food. It was a good time, which passed.

“Just plugging Tugga Dunning and Derry into my favorite search engine probably would have done the trick; hit enter and let Google, that twenty-first-century Big Brother, take care of the rest.

In the Derry of 1958, the most up-to-date computers were the size of small housing developments, and the local paper was no help. What did that leave? I remembered a sociology prof I’d had in college—a sarcastic old bastard—who used to say, When all else fails, give up and go to the library.

I went there.” [2]

The novel deals with politics on so many levels. One can say that the Americans are a politically aware and concerned nation. We can even argue that regardless of political affiliations, when one hears about a Republican or a Democratic Party, one would invariably think of the United States. The reasons for these are irrelevant, it is just a fact, and should be accepted as one. A modern literary work, especially today, and especially a mass literature work, must be written about or with the help of images, scenes or characters, which are clear, recognizable and understandable for the reader. Politics and political realia are one of those things:

“It would have been hard to get lost in the shopping district; it was only a block long. Three of four storefronts up from the Kennebec Fruit, I came to Baumer’s Barber Shop. A red-and-white barber pole twirled in the window. Next to it was a political poster featuring Edmund Muskie. I remembered him as a tired, slope-shouldered old man, but this version of

him looked almost too young to vote, let alone get elected to anything. The poster read, SEND ED MUSKIE TO THE U.S. SENATE, VOTE DEMOCRAT! Someone had put a bright white band around the bottom. Hand-printed on it was THEY SAID IT COULDN'T BE DONE IN MAINE BUT WE DID IT! NEXT UP: HUMPHREY IN 1960!" [2]

This book is full of typical American realia, specific to the country on the whole and to Stephen King's home state Maine in particular, as far as substantial part of the events takes place in that state. The realia the author addresses are of different types: the reader has the opportunity to come across geographical realia, cultural, social and of course political. The realia are represented with a number of literary tropes, which help to create authentic atmosphere of the late 50s America.

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