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SALLY MORGAN'S «MY PLACE»: CRITICAL OVERVIEW OF FOREIGN SCHOLLARS

The analysis of critical thought devoted to the novel «My Place» written by Australian author Sally Morgan was conducted in the article. In the critical overview the basic themes of the novel, the main reasons of the schollars' attention to the literary work, its social message, strong and weak points were outlined. The critical analysis allows the author of the article to continue the research of the novel from the view-point of its place in Postcolonial literature.

Kew words: Identity, Aboriginal Author, Critics, Aboriginality, Autobiographical Novel.

In the late decades of the 20th century the postmodern image of the world tended to be overspread as a basis of the narrative methodology of the prosaic form. The analysis of postmodern image is directed to outline the global and aesthetic dominant point of the current period. It must be noted that postmodernism as any other literary phenomena is being under study from the critical, philosophical and aesthetic point of view. Such philosophers as R. Barthes, J. Derrida, M. Foucault, G. Deleuze, F. Guattari made great contribution in researching its genesis. Among Ukrainian and Russian scholars we cannot but mention the works of D. Zatonsky, L. Batkin, T. Denisova, T. Gundorova, V. Strada and others. The latter have made great attempt in describing postmodern realm and interpreting the prolific authors of the time. For example, D. Zatonsky in his work «Postmodernism: Genesis Hypotheses» revealed the roots of postmodernism in Ecclesiastes' ideas and Western philosophers from Hegel up to Derrida and Peter Sloterdijk. In his interpretation of «The Dogs of Paradise» by Abel Posse, «The Last World» by Christoph Ransmayr Zatonsky substantiates his vision of postmodernism with bright images of literary works. So he asserts, «Postmodernism spreads neither fear nor anger or even effective frustration, but sense of life which can be defined in exact way as resignation» [2, p. 13]. The works of L. Batkin should be also taken into account because he concentrated his activity in the issue of what postmodernist is as a central figure of post-apocalyptic world which is in complete and mystical disorder [1, p. 4]. The principles of Postmodern image of the world are in the centre of scientific inquiry of Ukraine. The theoretical works are being translated into Ukrainian. Scientific inquiry concerning the phenomenon of postmodernism is being conducted nowadays. Current researchers take an attempt to analyse the works of foreign postmodern authors. The great attention is paid to European and American ones. Among them we should highlight such names as J.S. Barth, U. Eco, K. Vonnegut, Jr., C. Ransmayr, P.B. Auster, J.R. Fowles, A. Posse. Moreover, the list is being constantly enlarged.

Nowadays, the authors of Australia, China, Japan, India, Egypt are gaining the international success. Undoubtedly, they participate in the process of developing postmodern literary discourse making it more complex with the help of national and indigenous features. One of the important

features of the authors is that the greater part prefers English as an international language of their literary activity demonstrating the influence of the English belletristic tradition on them. As to Ukrainian critical realm the authors have been researched much less than ones of European and the US area. For instance, the profound analysis of postmodern activity of Australasian authors has not been made yet. So our attempt to attract the attention of investigators to the legacy of Australian author Sally Morgan can be characterised as topical one. The goal of the article could be formulated as to sketch out the background of the author and her novel, and to argue the idea that Sally Morgan being a graphic example of postnational basis in Australian literature is a postmodern author as well.

Sally Morgan is recognised as one of Australia's best known Aboriginal writers. Being the eldest of five children in a family of a mixed origin she found school difficult because of the questions from other students about her complexion and family background. This experience of her hidden origin, and subsequent quest for identity was the stimulus for her first book «My Place» published in 1987. It tells the story of her self-discovery through reconnection with her Aboriginal roots and community. The book was an immediate success and has since sold over half a million copies in Australia. It has also been published in the United States, Europe and Asia.

As to social, cultural basis of the novel Sally Morgan is described as a part of «Stolen Generations» by many critics. A.O. Neville, one of the architects of what are now generally known as the Stolen Generations, explained a three-step approach to racial policy. It included the forced removal of «half-caste» children from their mothers, the control of marriage among «half-castes», and the encouragement of intermarriage with the white community. These measures have led to a situation in which it would be possible to forget that there had ever been any Aborigines in Australia at all [5, p. 48]. Without any hesitation such policy was disastrous for aboriginal culture and community in itself. The stolen Generations being in the peripheral part of Australian culture have become central at the edge of 20th and 21st centuries. John Frow designated the situation in terms of «the clash between an assimilationist project that assumes the inevitable absorption or extinction of the indigenous population, and the resistant survival of a dispossessed and disoriented people living on stolen time» [10, p. 360]. A proliferating number of diverse Stolen Generation narratives – books, plays, films, exhibitions, TV programmes, newspaper articles, magazine stories – in which the merging of written and oral, documentary and (auto)biographical sources confirms the crucial role of the trend in reanalysing the historical past.

Numerous researchers consider *My Place* one of the brightest examples of a Stolen Generation narrative. Nevertheless it was not seen as a Stolen Generation narrative from the very beginning but rather as an Aboriginal life-story, a 'dialogically generated' form which usually combines the traditional techniques of collective Aboriginal storytelling with autobiographical individualism and white editorial expertise. Attwood points out that it was not originally seen as one by its first critics and reviewers although, co-opted since through the process of «narrative accrual», it is much more likely to be seen as one today [4, p. 204]. In this sphere Morgan's *My Place* is compared with Kim Scott's «Benang», sometimes loosely seen as a «sequel» to *My Place*, is, for all its extensive use of sources, clearly a work of fiction: a novel [13, p. 99].

My Place and *Benang* are both attempts to sort an Aboriginal inheritance out of the broken elements of memory. This attempt is held back in Morgan's text by shame, the need or desire to keep Aboriginal identity hidden; in Scott's, shame is redirected, hurled back in white faces as a means of confronting them with their own disgrace. Both texts are concerned to reclaim the history that has been discarded by others, literally in some cases in the way of the unwanted «half-caste», rejected by a white father unable or unwilling to take responsibility for what he has done. Thus, while *My Place* insists on the need for Aboriginal people to claim a right place in history, *Benang* goes further, setting itself aggressively against the white man's history, and reversing the processes of genealogical barbarism by which Aboriginal histories have been systematically superseded or suppressed [6, p. 140].

Morgan's *My Place* plays an important role in the development of Australian literature because it was the first time when non-aboriginal reader discovered the life of indigenous people not from the historical and ethnographic point of view but being based on multicultural, postnational attitude. It has also become popular worldwide. Sally Morgan published *My Place* in

1987. It became a best-seller and Fremantle Arts Centre Press reprinted it three times that year [8, p. 35]. From the beginning, the book enjoyed wide success and its popularity has increased in the following years. The book is sold 110,000 copies in Australia in about a year and a half from publication [22, p. 755]. By 1999 a total of more than 500,000 copies had been sold in that country and abroad [3]. The book brought the author the 1987 Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission Award for Literature, the 1988 Braille Book of the Year Award and the 1989 Western Australian Citizen of the Year Award for Arts, Literature and Culture. Thus, according to the modern literary criticism works, Sally Morgan has firmly established herself as a voice for indigenous people in the world.

As to critical appreciation *My Place* was welcomed by the majority of literary researchers. Adam Shoemaker supported the view that she universalised her personal family story and opened up a window into previously hidden Australian history for non-Aboriginal readers. «*My Place* will in fact be the first taste of indigenous writing for many who would otherwise not be exposed to it all and who will be encouraged to read further as a result» [20, p. 343]. Bain Attwood sees the reason of her stunning success in the fact that she is in a better position than a non-Aboriginal to draw information from full/part-Aboriginal people as her mother tongue is English and she was able to relate her story and the part-Aboriginal point of view in words and concepts that the general English-speaking world could understand [4, p. 317].

Regretfully the favourable comprehension of the novel was not unanimous. Attwood who has positive vision of the works emphasized that using English can be seen as one of the weaknesses of the work. J. Huggins is a strong supporter of the idea declaring «that *My Place*'s greatest weakness is requiring little translation (to a white audience)» [12, p. 460]. Huggins also suggests that Aboriginal writers should «keep indigenous languages, styles and methodologies» [12, p. 460]. Though H. Sonoda defends Morgan's attempt to express aboriginality in English, «... it is possible for Aboriginal writers to retain their indigenous essence and to make their stories understood by their tribal readers. However, non-Aboriginal people cannot read books written in tribal languages and thus would miss the chance to learn about tribespeople» [21, p. 165]. Critics also debate the level of Aboriginality revealing in the text. Lizzy Finn in her critical works writes «the text does not put forward any single definition of Aboriginality» [9, p. 20]. It is also agreed by Attwood and Huggins. But if Aboriginality is defined as the nature of nomadic indigenous people who inhabited Australia before the white colonisation, it is not applicable to any contemporary part-Aboriginal people who live in urban white society. So Hughes remarks that it is dangerous to narrow the definition of tribal identity too much, implying that it is inappropriate to criticise Sally's Aboriginality because it does not fit some limited definition [14, p. 27]. Besides, Sally Morgan is not purely Aboriginal. According to A. Reed «Sally's achievement as an individual comes in acknowledging and integrating the two racial streams that flow together and comprise her identity» [18, p. 639].

In order to see the social reasons which urged Morgan to create *My Place* the state of aboriginal people in Australia in the 2nd part of the 20th century must be taken into consideration. Australian authorities have gradually created the image of marginal community which is really closed and is not worth studying in current conditions. When asking modern «Ausie» about Aborigines they display great unwillingness to communicate, to connect with or to identify themselves as an indivisible unique society with Indigenous people. Such a situation is a result of absence of information. In an interview with Mary Wright, Sally Morgan says when she was researching her book government files about indigenous people were under the control of the police and not open to the public [23, p. 10]. To overcome this difficulty Sally Morgan employed the oral history approach which, as Paula Hamilton points out, emerged during the 1960s and 1970s as an effective method to reveal the hidden life history of oppressed people [11, p. 482]. Sally Morgan succeeded in creating objective story based on the mentioned approach. In spite of her emotional resentment of injustice concerning Aboriginal people she endeavoured to make objective and bright picture of everyday life of unknown Australia. The book highlights a number of humorous, everyday episodes which help counteract any inclination towards bitterness. Macleod admits that the tragic history of her people is lightened by happy events along the way such as the account of Sally's wedding and her mother's success in the flower business. Furthermore, characters in the book have their own ways of dealing with unhappiness [16, p. 34].

For example, Sally's mother has her own philosophy which is to «laugh over difficult situations» [18, p. 32]. As a result *My Place* became successful not only in her national group but through all layers of Australian society

Being the first writer of indigenous origin who became accepted among different national groups Sally Morgan outlined the new frame of identity which combines Aboriginal roots and white people relationships of present day. Many literary critics consider identity as one of the main themes of the novel. Anne Brewster points out that identity is variable and susceptible to societal mores when she states that «identity is a shifting, changing and relational thing; it is contingent and constructed according to historical circumstance and political strategy» [7, p. 15]. Although Sally has Aboriginal blood, she is told by her grandmother and mother that she is Indian, obviously to protect her from being sent to mission school under the assimilation policy. Lizzy Finn writes that «there is no one place where identity is rooted» [9, p. 23], implying that the source of «identity» is complex. According to her book, Sally follows a white way of life and lives as an Australian in the city of Perth, even as she is recognised by indigenous people as a member of an Aboriginal group called Burungu in Pilbara, the northern section of Western Australia. Her personal experience shows the reader the opportunity to construct new connections with another national circle both for white population and aboriginal people so to build up a new postnational identity.

The pioneering attitude in describing aboriginal identity is seen as one of the main reasons of stunning success by many critics. Brewster insists that «it gave many Australians their first meaningful picture of contemporary urban Aborigines» [7, p. 7]. In the story, Sally's grandmother is brought up to feel ashamed that she is indigenous owing to the discriminatory ideas fostered by the assimilation policy. Although in her younger years she dreams of becoming white, as a grandmother she thinks this is shameful. She tells Sally about her experience of being torn between a white identity and a black identity because she is part-Aboriginal: «There I was, stuck in the middle. Too black for the whites and too white for the blacks» [18, p. 336]. It indicates how difficult it is to define the part-Aboriginal identity, and how complicated the concept of Aboriginality is. The following researchers give novice approaches to the issue. Rowse considers the book to be «a challenge to historical understanding of the changing apprehensions of «Aboriginality» within Australia's settler colonial culture» [19, p. 468]. Susan Lever states that *My Place* helps the reader to recognise that «Aboriginal problems are not «long ago and far away» but part of the present» [15, p. 115]. Thus, the book deals with current problems rooted in the past which contemporary urban indigenous people face.

My Place remains the most influential work of Sally Morgan, not only because of its extremely wide popularity but also because it provided a new model for other writers, particularly those of indigenous background. There is a strong persuasion among literary critics that *My Place* is autobiographical novel which is non-fiction in its structure. Memorisation as a method of ideas' presentation gave the author an opportunity to encourage her counterparts in showing the world a new image of literature, a new soul of country of a mixed postnational shape. As a final point of critical analysis of the novel position among other works of Australian authors it can be noted that Sally Morgan's voice is one which many people by different cultural and national descent will be able to comprehend. Sally Morgan shows how Australian people have been impoverished by their inability to come to terms with what they have done to the original settlers, the Aboriginal people. One can say that a book is only dormant, not yet fully alive, unless a readership is won. They occupied not only the land but also the minds, the ready ones for it. *My Place* was fortunate in this regard.

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У статті зроблено аналіз критичних праць, присвячених роману австралійської письменниці Саллі Морган «*My Place*» («Мoje місце»). У ході дослідження було виявлено основні теми роману, загальні причини пильної уваги вчених, його соціальне послання, сильні та слабкі сторони. Критичний

огляд дозволяє автору статті продовжити розгляд роману с точки зору його місця в постколоніальній літературі.

Ключові слова: ідентичність, аборигенна письменниця, критики, аборигенність, автобіографічний роман.

В статье сделан анализ критических работ, посвященных роману австралийской писательницы Салли Морган «My Place» («Моё место»). В ходе критического обзора были выявлены основные темы романа, общие причины пристального внимания ученых к роману, его социальное послание, сильные и слабые стороны. Критический обзор позволяет автору статьи продолжить рассмотрение романа с точки зрения его места в постколониальной литературе.

Ключевые слова: идентичность, аборигенный автор, критики, аборигенность, автобиографичный роман.

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