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ECOCRITICISM WITHIN POST-COLONIAL STUDIES: CANADIAN VISION

The specificity of the notion «ecocriticism» functioning in the context of contemporary postcolonial studies is under research with regard to Anglophone Canadian literature in the period of its formation. The emphasis is laid on the key concept notions, which distinguish the premises of forming the ecocritical vision of Anglophone Canadian narration in the aspect of postcolonial studies. The great attention is paid to the leading experts' opinions concerning the peculiarities of «ecocriticism» within the Anglophone Canadian narration context.

Key words: «ecocriticism», postcolonial literatures, Anglophone Canadian narration context.

As the study of the relationship between literature and the environment, ecocriticism takes the nature-centered approach to the literary studies which cause the appearance of some essential aspects such as Nature Writing, Environmental Literature, Literature of Wilderness. Ecocriticism as a aspect of environment studies can be considered to be less nationalistic than any other fields researching Nature-Nation relations, dealing with the national specificity and sometimes coming to the deterministic approaches and racist theories. And even more – the current global environmental problems prevent us from speaking about any national borders. But nevertheless, it is possible as well as necessary to speak about nature's influence on the nations (regarding nations as «imagined communities») as well as the national identity (shaping the «Nation-as-Narration» principles). And it is the nation that affects its nature by its policies and laws while shaping the national landscape.

The contemporary Canadian literary scholars Michael Moore, Partick D. Murphy, Pamela Banting as well as others claim that environmental and ecological concerns may feature more prominently in the public and social life in Canada today than in other countries, because environmental awareness and green politics have a strong presence in the Canadian consciousness and a long and rich history in the Canadian cultural context which is determined as the product of a tradition in which the idealisation of natural environment and the critiques of the technocratic society have played a key part since the formation stage of the Canadian national consciousness.

P. Banting points out that the term «ecocriticism» has not been picked up to the same extent in Canada as it seems to have been the case in the US. However, there has always been a considerable amount of literary criticism devoted to the discussion of the relationship between the place, land, landscape, or nature and literature [4].

Canadian literary scholars notice that the feeling of the Environment in the Canadian context is much stronger than the feeling of the Time, that can be traced to the 19-th century's period when the regionalism and post-colonial experience started to distinguish the specificity of the Canadian being and the Canadian life perception. [11, p. 116].

Due to the ideas, proposed by scholars Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in their *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). [1, p. 175], Canadian ecofeminism can be characterized as one that gets some critical reconsideration in regard to postcolonial theoretical principles by pointing out that Canadian writers mostly tend to reveal «an analogy between the relationships of men and women and those of the imperial power and the colony» [7, p. 99].

In this aspect studying the specificity of Canadian ecofeminism, represented in the Canadian narrative tradition, deals with the comprehension that the role of «nature can be understood in the framework of national politics, of Canada's conception of its own victimhood» [14, p. 34]. This vision can distinguish the specificity of the Canadian identity that is influenced by its colonial past experience. In the Canadian context, identity issues almost inevitably become closely related to

perceptions and conceptions of the natural physical environment, which have always played a prominent role in the Canadian literary and cultural imagination. Since the earliest beginnings in Canada's native oral literatures to the establishment of a settler culture. Due to the alienating experience of 'the old culture meeting a new environment' arising from nature's «unassimilability to the structures – social and linguistic – of colonial culture» [14, p. 35]. European settlers perceived the immensity of the Canadian landscape as a physical and psychological challenge, and this notion of nature as a threatening force shaped Frye's «garrison mentality» [6, p. 225] as the characteristic concept of Canadian national consciousness.

While putting no special emphasis on the investigation of the role of the category «postcolonial» (generally, the study of the interactions between European nations and the societies they colonized in the modern period) [3] in shaping the Canadian national identity, it is necessary to stress that the content of «environment» and «environmental issues» can not be fully comprehended in the Canadian context without «the oppressive dualism» by which «nature» and «native» are subordinated [15, p. XI].

Although the definition of the term «postcolonial» is under study nowadays and its content in the Canadian context is under academic debate, Canada itself is sometimes omitted from the category «postcolonial» because of its relatively short struggle for independence, its loyalist tendencies toward the mother country (Britain, in this case) which colonized it, and the absence of problems of racism. Nevertheless surprisingly little has been said about racism in Canadian postcolonialism. In Moss's opinion, Canada is not a postcolonial society because «its literature is dominated by European immigrants, and is therefore a literature of privilege rather than of protest. According to the usual postcolonial paradigm only literature written by native peoples in Canada would truly qualify» [8, p. XXIII].

However, the relationship between Canada and the USA can often be regarded as «the margin» to «the center» which helps to understand the understanding of postcolonialism in the Canadian context.

Guiding Canadian literature issues, Atwood «constructed» Canadian literature as a site where the remnants of the old colonial relationship with Britain and the new colonial relationship with the United States could be resisted and subverted, [2, p. 48] and under such circumstances the Canadian national identity could be established. What Atwood and others fought for is now considered by some critics as a «postcolonial» struggle aimed at decolonisation.

Ashcroft and other claim, that «the development of national literatures and criticism is fundamental to the whole enterprise of post-colonial studies. Without such developments at the national level, no discourse of the post-colonial could have emerged» [1, p. XI]. This situation explains why it is of difficulty to distinguish «a common national identity» which Canadian literature should express. The lack of a vivid «postcolonial struggle» as well as the absence of discrimination between postcolonial settlers and postcolonial aboriginals and racialized minorities transformed «postcolonialism» as a notion in the Canadian context [5].

At the same time the impact of the US colonization on Canadian history, economy, science, and culture, the cultural productions of the colonized Canadian society, the assignment of «dominant» to the USA, the formation of hierarchies of power based on political, economical and social factors, led to oppression represented in the Canadian narration.

In this view, the issues about the gender roles and environmental degradation are closely connected with aspects of socio-political, economic and cultural imperialism, and the narrations reveal a «type of oppressions» in which dichotomies such as self/other, male/ female, the US/ Canada, AngloCanadian/FrancoCanadian are correlated with the nature/culture paradigm [7, p. 99].

The categories of «masculine», «America», «technology» in the Canadian context are closely connected with the ongoing violence towards everything that is natural or of the environment which is one of the central leitmotives of Canadian narration. Due to *Heller* «the concept 'American' takes on a more universal significance», independent of national identity and gender differences, when the narrator observes that both Americans and Canadians as well as both men and women contribute to the violation of nonhuman nature [10, p. 234].

An ecocritical analysis of the contemporary Canadian narrative tradition gives a chance to realize how the ecocriticism, feminism and postcolonial issues encouraged the urgent insights

into close cooperation of social, cultural and ecological matters with their influence on national, ethnic, gender identities. This vision of Canadian reality made Atwood, who is regarded as a person who initiated Canadian ecofemimism, developed the concept «*Survival*» as a key term for the Canadian literary tradition [2, p. 32].

The concept «*Survival*» functions along with two other concepts such as «*Isolation*» (by J. Moss) [11, p. 116] and «*National Identity*» (by D. Johns) – together all these concepts create the national Canadian cultural discourse [16, p. 10].

In a variety of senses the main idea of the concept «*survival*» is to save life within the environment. This idea of survival in the new environment excludes the idea of adventures (characterizing the American motif of «*frontier*») and the idea of certainty and safety (characterizing the British «*house*»). The Canadian narration created a tradition of depicting its characters in the situation of danger, hazard, leading their lives under risk. Canadian survivors are not proud of this victory or triumph, but are delighted of the fact of the common survival on their way through the northern environment, and they are happy for letting them to be alive. In this aspect of environmental issues' urgency, the traditional Canadian image of Nature as «*an overwhelming hostile Force*», that can threaten human beings, their lives, their society and their culture, gradually transforms into «*a more balanced perception of human civilisation as posing an equally or even more destructive power towards the natural world*», as Atwood once mentioned [2, p. 60].

Thus, the idea that the themes of «*survival*», «*victim*», «*victimization*» can be considered as a key subject of the Canadian literature gets its full expression in the Canadian fiction works as well as comes to stay in the Canadian narration tradition. Taking into consideration all this information about the variants of Atwood's «*victim*» concept, these can be applied either to a victimised country, minority group or individual, and her provocative statement about «*the change-over from a British cultural colony to an American cultural colony*» alludes to Canada as a «*collective victim*» [7, p. 99]. This vision explains the situation that in the 1960–70-s several Canadian authors (Alice Munro, Mavis Gallant, John Metcalf etc) depicted their female characters in the victim position as a woman in a male dominated society (and her representation in the capacity as a Canadian being victimised by the US imperialism) with the victimisation of nonhuman nature by western anthropocentrism.

It is a well-known fact that it is Atwood's *Surfacing*, Gallant's *The Moslem Wife*, Rule's *Lilian*, that are the fictional works that came out at the time when the feminist as well as the ecological movements gained their high popularity and obviously reflected the concerns of those days. They covered the issues dealing with both feminism and environmentalism and can be regarded as representative literary examples of ecological feminism in Canada. Murphy states that they can be regarded as «*the first ones of the current generation of ecofeminist narration in the Canadian context*» [13, p. 26]. In this aspect, the ecofeminist theme of *Atwood's Surfacing*, with its association of women's victimisation with nature's violation, as represented within the Canadian cultural context to which the notion of the Canadian nation's imperial victim status is added in the Canadian narration traditions. In his ecofeminist oriented literary analysis, Heller identifies the dominating issue of *Atwood's Surfacing* stressing that «*the victimization of women in a patriarchal society becomes a metaphor of the violation of nature through civilization*» [7, p. 98].

In *Surfacing* Atwood's view of the concept of «*Survival*» includes the sophisticated relations of «*neighbouring*» North American identities, in which Canada can be regarded as a female victim with her wild «*female*» nature while the USA is depicted as a male with his advancing civilization. Atwood's female characters are represented not only under social pressure but also under certain kind of totalitarianism, describing a female as well as Canada itself as a victim of political, social, economical, cultural and informational influence of the US, which encourages to reconsider the Canadian ethnocultural code. As Atwood's female character says: «*I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place, Canadian in itself*» which is a bright representation of the specific consciousness of the Canadians in Canadian narration tradition.

Thus, the common critique of ecofeminists proceeds from the assumption that there are connections between the oppression of women in a patriarchal society and the exploitation

of nonhuman nature in the western anthropocentric worldview. In ecofeminist thought, the domination and degradation of the nonhuman environment is regarded as a feminist issue while, conversely, sexism and various other forms of social oppression and discrimination are seen as inseparable from the environmental debate. Furthermore, most ecofeminist theories are founded upon the recognition that sexism and naturism (i.e. the domination of nonhuman nature) are interconnected with other mutually reinforcing systems of oppression such as racism, classism, speciesism, (neo)colonialism and imperialism, forming oppressions [9, p. 20], that can be characterised by value-hierarchical dualisms.

In conclusion, the specificity of ecocritical studies in the Canadian literary studies deals not only with the development of ecocritical ideas in the whole North American context, but also with all those premises, deeply-rooted in the Canadian narration tradition, that enable ecofeminism theories and principles to be applied on narration studies. This specific vision on narration makes ecofeminism a significant and growing branch of ecocritical studies in the Canadian context. The specific Canadian variant of ecofeminism, shaped under the influence of the postcolonial tradition, can be regarded as an amalgamation of ecological and feminist literary criticism and philosophical viewpoints which enable literary critics and scholars to find out and research how nature is depicted in the narration and the ways in which embodiments of nature are metaphorically and conceptually linked with representations of gender, posed by ecocritical reconsiderations that the national consciousness and national identity – the Canadian one in our situation – can be comprehended as one that is closely connected with the environment.

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У статті розглянуто особливості функціонування поняття «екокрітика» у контексті сучасних постколоніальних досліджень на прикладі англоканадської літератури періоду її становлення. Увага акцентується на ключових концептах, які і окреслюють передумови формування екокрітичної візії англомовного канадського нарративу в аспекті досліджень постколоніальних літератур. Наведено думки провідних дослідників екокрітики, які окреслюють сферу функціонування «екокрітики» в англоканадському контексті.

Ключові слова: «екокрітика», постколоніальні літератури, англомовний канадський нарратив.

В статье исследуются особенности функционирования понятия «экокрітика» в контексте современных постколониальных исследований на примере англоканадской литературы периода ее становления. Внимание акцентируется на ключевых концептах, которые определяют предпосылки формирования экокритического исследования англоязычного канадского нарратива в аспекте изучения постколониальных литератур. Приведены взгляды ведущих исследователей экокритики, очерчивающие сферу функционирования «экокрітики» в англоканадском контексте.

Ключевые слова: «экокрітика», постколониальные литературы, англоязычный канадский нарратив.

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