Широкова Г.А.

Психологическая характеристика Хетти Соррел в романе Джордж Элиот «Адам Бид» (глава XLV «В тюрьме»)

*Пермский государственный национальный исследовательский университет
(Россия, Пермь)*

doi: 10.18411/lj-09-2020-127

ids: lj-09-2020-127

Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются основные проблемы, связанные с интерпретацией художественного текста. Статья представляет собой аналитический обзор главы романа Дж. Элиот «Адам Бид» с особым акцентом на характер Хетти Соррел, что способствует дальнейшему пониманию того, как используются изобразительно-выразительные средства и стилистические приемы в характеристике литературных героев. Среди них выделяются повторения, сравнения, метафорические эпитеты и образы природы. Выразительные языковые инструменты являются неотъемлемыми элементами литературного анализа, поскольку они кодируют творческое намерение и послание автора и тем самым обуславливают восприятие литературного текста. На основе данного анализа может быть проведено дальнейшее исследование с целью установить, как с Хетти Соррел взаимодействуют другие персонажи. Есть основания полагать, что данный материал послужит полезным началом для подобных исследований.

Ключевые слова: «Адам Бид», Хетти Соррел, психологическая характеристика, стилистические приемы, библейские мотивы.

Abstract

The article is concerned with major problems associated with the interpretation of a literary text. Its analytical reading of a chapter in Eliot's novel Adam Bede with a particular focus on the character of Hetty Sorrel contributes further insight into the way expressive means and stylistic devices are employed in literary characterization. Here included are repetitions, similes, expressive epithets and nature images. Expressive language tools are indispensable elements of the literary analysis as they encode the author's creative intention and message, and thereby condition the way a literary text is perceived. Further work needs to be carried out to establish the way other characters interact with Hetty Sorrel. We hope that the present research will provide a helpful start for such undertakings.

Keywords: Adam Bede, Hetty Sorrel, psychological characterization, stylistic devices, Bible motifs.

Introduction

The present article dwells on the psychological characterization of Hetty Sorrel in Eliot's novel through interpretation of the literary text. As it was pointed out by Akkuzova, A., Mankeyev, Z., Akkuzov, A., Kaiyrbekova, U., & Baiymbetova, R. (2018), "the interpretation of a literary text defines as mastering ideological and aesthetic, substantial and emotional information of literary work by restoration of the author's point of view and outlook" [Akkuzova et al, 2018, p. 22].

Adam Bede is a historical novel. As Marshall G. (2020) points out, "it begins in 1799, and tells the story of Adam, an aspiring young carpenter in the Derbyshire village of Hayslope who embodies enterprise and dedication to work, which is for him a moral undertaking, and his love for Hetty, the niece of a much-respected local farming family, the Poysers" [Marshall, 2020, p. 34]. Adam Bede is also a novel that employs psychological portrayal as a means of character construction at a time when social setting represented the predominant concern and Hetty is one of the central characters, whose psychological representation through conversation and confession is one of the organizing structural aspects of the book.

Hers is a deep character, and as it was pointed out by Livesey R. (2019), “Hetty, the shallow plant, might indeed seek a deeper-rooted assemblage of life by planting her offspring in the woods, but that is never presented as anything other than as a tragedy” [Livesey, 2019, p. 144].

The chapter “In Prison”, which will be subject to analysis in this paper, can be approached as its emotional gravity centre.

Being one of the major narrative tools Eliot employs, psychological characterization can be described as the process by which the writer reveals the personality of a character. The author frequently resorts to indirect means of characterization and with the help of numerous epithets, vivid metaphors, similes, repetitions, and the use of nature images, she reveals Hetty’s inner world.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the role of the expressive and stylistic devices employed to elaborate the repertoire of images in the literary work: “stylistic devices play the greatest role in analysis of any kind language used. They make literary and non-literary works to be more interesting and lively. They help to get and keep reader’s/listener’s attention.” [Safitri, 2018, p. 465].

Abubakre (2012) states that “stylistics is not only explaining features of a text, but also enhancing interpretation of a text. Identifying features of a text and their function, they facilitate for a better appreciation of a text” [Cit. ex: Safitri, 2018, p. 465-466]. According to Monakhova E. (2019), “the use of stylistic devices triggers exploratory, emotional and evaluative activity on the part of the reader, makes the impression of an increased informative content of the text” [Monakhova, 2019, p. 48].

The present study will focus on the description of Hetty’s wild nature which is conveyed through her comparison to an animal.

The paper is organized as follows. The first paragraph is introductory. The second paragraph presents an analysis of specific expressive means and stylistic devices. The third and fourth paragraphs focus on the wild nature of the main heroine, and the rest of the paper is devoted to the interpretation of Hetty’s intensive emotional experience during her confession. The last paragraph concludes this train of thoughts.

The Main Part

At the beginning of the novel, Hetty is likewise introduced as a strikingly beautiful woman. Again, to underscore her beauty, Eliot refers to natural forms, often associated with flowers and animals. For instance, she is described as having “a beauty like that of kittens, or very small downy ducks making gentle rippling noises with their soft bills, or babies just beginning to toddle and to engage in conscious mischief” [Eliot, 1980, p. 145]; “Hetty’s was a springtide beauty; it was the beauty of young frisking things” [Eliot, 1980, p. 92]; a beauty that turns “the heads not only of men, but of all intelligent mammals, even of women” [Eliot, 1980, p. 90]. Hetty is further referred to as a “kitten-like maiden” and compared to a kitten numerous times throughout the novel. She is also described as a woman that needs to be protected or taken care of. Moreover, Arthur Donnithorne, one of Hetty’s suitors, constantly refers to her as a “pet” whenever she pouts or cries for his attention. In one instance, in a gesture of lovingkindness, he calls her a bird, “You little frightened bird! Little tearful rose! Silly pet! You won’t cry again, now I’m with you, will you?” [Eliot, 1980, p. 199].

Eliot deliberately unfolds the character of the main heroine with the help of these images. They ambiguously suggest not only her beauty, but also innate wild nature. Thus, before committing the crime, the heroine is trying to escape in the woods without a trace: “But I went on to the wood, and I walked about, but there was no water...” [Eliot, 1980, p. 595]; “And I went right on, till I came to a village, a long way off from the wood, and I was very sick, and faint, and hungry” [Eliot, 1980, p. 595]; “I saw nothing but that place in the wood where I’d buried the baby...I see it now. Oh Dinah! shall I always see it?” [Eliot, 1980, p. 595].

Moreover, the narrator pays special attention to her movements. Before the confession, all her actions are slow. Only when she sees Dinah for the first time she startles because of the

unexpected encounter: “[there] was a slight startled movement through Hetty’s frame” [Eliot, 1980, p. 596]. Nevertheless, she does not raise her head and does not look into the woman's eyes as she is ashamed of her deeds: “...and without uncovering her face, she raised her head a little, as if listening” [Eliot, 1980, p. 593]. After a while, Hetty manages to raise her eyes and lifts her head. One more time she does it 'slowly' and “timidly”. Then she cannot shift her gaze: “Hetty kept her eyes fixed on Dinah’s face” [Eliot, 1980, p. 595]. She is seeking for emotional support and is afraid of staying alone in the dark hostile prison-cell. That is why she “sat in the same dull despair, only clutching the hand that held hers and leaning her cheek against Dinah’s” [Eliot, 1980, p. 594]. Hetty does not want to let Dinah go. The readers come across the word “slowly” again when Hetty is speaking “in a frightened whisper”, “slowly” as if trying to buy time.

Nevertheless, when she finally gathers herself up, she begins speaking “hurriedly in a louder, pleading tone” [Eliot, 1980, p. 595]. Her movements become sudden and quick: “Hetty sobbed out, throwing her arms round Dinah’s neck” [1/595]. She is trembling convulsively because of fear, but when she pours out her heart to Dinah, her behaviour changes once more: “Hetty was silent, but she shuddered again, as if there was still something behind; and Dinah waited, for her heart was so full that tears must come before words” [Eliot, 1980, p. 593]. At last, Hetty bursts out with a sob, “Dinah, do you think God will take away that crying and the place in the wood, now I’ve told everything?” [Eliot, 1980, p. 596].

In the confession scene, Eliot diligently constructs the character of Hetty Sorrel by comparing her contrastively to Dinah. It is significant that structurally, the comparison precedes the tragic events thus foregrounding Dinah's influence on Hetty. It should be noted that earlier in the novel, she tries to prepare Hetty for the possibility of suffering pain in her life. However, the latter appears to be spiritually implacable and deaf to Dinah's warnings.

Before her confession, Hetty likewise refuses to talk to anyone because she considers everyone her enemy. Her reaction reveals her self-centered attitudes as she withdraws from all human contact. Still, Dinah manages to break Hetty's resistance down by loving affection. Although the latter hesitates before giving in, she accepts Dinah's help and takes responsibility for her own acts. Hetty starts begging God for pardon. This confession changes her completely until she is no longer alone and selfish. Dinah makes Hetty feel that God cares for her through sympathy, sincerity and concern.

Hetty's ordeal represents a major structural element in the narrative logic of the novel as it makes her self-enclosure and subsequent transformation visible towards the end of the story. The author shows the main character's self-centred stance and suggests that this is one of the reasons why she abandons her child. Hetty's self-sufficiency brings disaster upon her and pain upon others. In this sense, her actual imprisonment symbolically implies the inward confinement she experiences, haunted by traumatic memories. On the other hand, it will be incorrect to conclude that her guilt consists only in her individual choice. Hetty's decision to abandon her child is largely conditioned by her anticipation of social censorship. Dinah, being profoundly religious, acts as a mediator between Hetty's accumulated personal guilt and the attitudes of a conservative, compassionless society.

In the chapter “In Prison”, Hetty is compared to an animal again, but now she is powerless and suffering from pain. Jennifer Gribble argues that “[m]ost recent critics have seen George Eliot as 'sacrificing' Hetty, and would see her apparent marginalization in the narrative as evidence that she becomes for Eliot and for the Hayslope community, a 'scapegoat’” [Gribble, 1996-1997, p. 103]. Another author, Deborah Anna Logan in her book “Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing” adds that “Both a symbol of cultural destabilization and an omen for an uncertain future, Hetty Sorrel becomes a convenient scapegoat for societal displacement expressed through blaming the victim” [Logan, 1998, p. 97].

These critical perspectives are certainly right to cast Hetty in a sacrificial role. I would further suggest that the protagonist's capital punishment and the subsequently mitigated

sentence bear subtle and more discernible references to biblical motifs of sacrificial offering. The practice of scapegoating dates back to Hebrew times when it was practised as part of the ritual of Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement. The scape-goat was the animal released in the wilderness to ensure that an annually accumulated collective sin would be taken away. In this sense, scapegoating symbolizes the relief of those who have transferred their guilt onto a substitute for themselves. Hetty's initial innocence seems to operate in much a similar way with her later transformation into a figure whose inward self-sufficiency reflects and absorbs communal guilt. Thus, Hetty is not given the chance to save her child, but is allowed the opportunity to put right her selfish ways and mature morally. She likewise appears to serve to secure the future of her counterparts, as her story eventually gives way to the marriage of Adam Bede and Dinah Morris.

Conclusion

In conclusion, aiming to contribute to current critical debates on Eliot's novel, this research paper attempted to read the stylistic devices and expressive means employed in the psychological characterization of the novel's protagonist Hetty Sorrel. Eliot's novel is a literary undertaking that demonstrates a wide-reaching historical and cultural awareness of past and contemporary contexts. An adequate interpretation of its dense, multi-layered narrative should also consider the complex interaction between historical fact, psychological characterization and Biblical mythology. This threefold frame of reference opens promising pathways for further investigation of Eliot's specific narrative technique.

1. Akkuzova, A. et al. "Some features of the meaning "literary text" in the pragmalinguistic aspect." *Opción*, vol. 34, No. 85-2, 2018, pp. 20-34.
2. Eliot, George. *Adam Bede*, Penguin Classics, 1980. 680 p.
3. Gribble, J. "The Hidden Shame: Telling Hetty Sorrel's Story." *Sydney Studies in English*, vol. 22, 1996-1997, pp. 102-119. Web. <http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=200604829;res=IELAPA> (access date 13.04.2020).
4. Livesey, R. "Arboreal Thinking: George Eliot and the Matter of Life in Adam Bede." *Anticipatory Materialisms in Literature and Philosophy, 1790–1930*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019, pp. 131-151.
5. Logan, Deborah A., *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, Or Do Worse*, University of Missouri Press, 1998. 236 p.
6. Marshall, G. "Adam Bede, realism, the past, and readers in 1859." *English Literature*, 6.1, 2020, pp. 33-48.
7. Monakhova, E. (2019). "Cognitive and pragmatic approach to using stylistic devices in English literary discourse." *Training, Language and Culture*, 3 (1), 2019, pp. 37-52.
8. Safitri, R., Rosa, R. N. "Analysis of Syntactical Stylistic Devices on Poems in Hello Magazine." *English Language and Literature*, vol. 7, No. 4, 2018, pp. 462-472.