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Изследване на символизма на пространството в творби на четири афро-американски (черни) писателки – Ан Муди, Алис Уолкър, Хариет Джейкъбс и Тони Морисън

Резюме: Статията се фокусира върху важната роля, която играе пространството в някои романи на Ан Муди („Да пораснеш в Мисисипи“), Алис Уолкър („Третият живот на Грейндж Коплънд“), в робския наратив на Хариет Джейкъбс („Инциденти от живота на едно робско момиче“) и във фундаменталното критическо есе на Тони Морисън („Играйки в тъмното. Белота и литературно въображение“). Авторката счита, че в тези литературни произведения пространството функционира като разделение, като маркер за сегрегация в различни житейски области, които от своя страна отразяват взаимосвързаността между социална класа, раса и пол. Дават се немалко примери, които илюстрират допускането, че тези творби могат да бъдат групирани за целта на изучаване на проблематиката на пространството и неговата както символна, така и социално-политическа натовареност в творбите на тези афро-американски писателки.

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Examining the Symbolism of Space in the Quartet of Black American Women Writers – Anne Moody, Alice Walker, Harriet Jacobs, and Toni Morrison

This article focuses on the important role space plays in some novels of Anne Moody („Coming of Age in Mississippi“), Alice Walker („The Third Life of Grange Copeland“), in the slave narrative of Harriet Jacobs („Incidents of the Life of a Slave Girl“), and in the fundamental critical essay of Toni Morrison („Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and the Literary Imagination“).

I argue that in these literary works space functions as a division, as a segregation marker in different domains that, in fact, interconnect, such as social class, race, and gender. I provide examples to illustrate the assumption that these works could be grouped together for exploring the problematic of space.

How gender, for instance, defines space? Both in Anne Moody’s and in Alice Walker’s novels the way the mother’s figure is portrayed is as one who both works hard and

takes care of the family. Thus, home and work are clearly defined as spaces of the woman's responsibility, while man has recreational right to participate in fun activities – to drink in the bar, to get drunk, then beat and abuse his wife, kids, or more broadly speaking to behave like an Alpha animal in the family space because of his powerlessness in the society. Let's take just one example from Alice Walker – the representation of Grange through the eyes of his son Brownfield who latter on will behave the very same way towards his own wife and kids:

„Late Saturday night Grange would come home lurching drunk, threatening to kill his wife and Brownfield, stumbling and shooting off his shotgun. He threatened Margaret and she ran and hid in the woods with Brownfield huddled at her feet. Then Grange would roll out the door and into the yard, crying like a child in big wrenching sobs and rubbing his whole head in the dirt.” (21)

Continuing with the social class concept it should be noted that in all these novels space is also shaped through the implications of class. A feature that these literary works share, for instance, is the way the space of the family and the house as its metonymical representation is depicted as dysfunctional because of the poverty and lack of responsibility of the father's figure as a provider. This representation is common both for Moody and Walker because it mirrors the reality in the poor black community. Through the first-person narrative of her own life *In Coming of Age in Mississippi* Moody uses as a leitmotif the child obsession with the features of the family house along with the childish dream to live in a better space with modern standards of living. When the family moved in the new house that Raymond as Mama's partner built for them, it was a house with plumbing; Mama's kids experienced a great joy: they basically felt as new born.

Alice Walker's book „*The Third Life of Grange Copeland*“ is also full of images of such deplorable spaces for living that hardly could be named a house. Mem's, the mother's figure in Walker's novel, fights during her entire life to better the unimprovable spaces and to make them bearable for her kids as they move from shack to shack with Brownfield as their unsuccessful breadwinner. Mem even lost her life in this never-ending battle to obtain a real house for her children, when she decided to take a job in a factory, to move to the urban city and to mortgage a modern house. She was punished by her spouse, the old rural-minded Brownfield, who constantly impregnated her. Meme was finally killed by him after they moved back to a shack. This movement back was a sort of an ironic triumph of Brownfield over Mem that symbolically stands for a pitiful victory of the retrograde style of thinking and living over the more progressive one. In fact, it was a fight in which the socio-economic issues of race and predestinated poverty intersect with the gender roles and their traditional distribution that reflects the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion.

How does race and class define space? We can clearly see their interconnectedness in the opening of Anne Moody's novel „*Coming of Age in Mississippi*“ where she utilizes a socially marked striking contrast through the juxtaposition between the master's house and sharecroppers' houses. It is a depiction that could fit in a similar but opposite way of what Morrison defines as “whiteness and the literary imagination” in the white American literature canon. Here we have an example for what I would call, following Morrison, the effect of whiteness in the black literary imagination. This powerfully speaking example I will take from the African-American woman writer Anne Moody who depicts the hierarchical verticality of space, which reflects its disproportions in terms of time of modernity and pre-modernity.

„That evening we sat on the porch waiting as we did every evening, for Mama to come up the hill. The electric lights were coming on in Mr. Carter's big white house as all

the Negro shacks down in the bottom began to fade with the darkness. Once it was completely dark, the lights in Mr. Carter's house looked even brighter, like a big lighted castle. It seemed like the only house on the whole plantation. Most evenings, after the Negroes had come from the fields, washed and eaten, they would sit on their porches, look up toward Mr. Carter's house and talk. Sometimes as we sat on our porch Mama told me stories about what was going on in that big white house. She would point out all the brightly lit rooms, saying that Old Lady Carter was baking a cake in the kitchen, Mrs. Carter was reading in the living room, the children were studying upstairs, and Mr. Carter sitting up counting all the money he made off Negroes." (5)

The dreamt from the perspective of the poor sharecropper child house represents obviously the American dream, a dream that could be achieved in terms of decent life and well-functioning family just by some (in fact the exploiters) in a segregated by race and social class. It could also be evoked here the so called "time lag" (Hommi Bhabha) in terms of progress, a time lag usually established between the oppressor and the oppressed. We have seen in the example just quoted by Anne Moody how she conveyed all of that by using the symbolism of space: the rich are on the hill, in a castle full of light, and the poor and exploited - they are down and in the dark.

This expressive image is also a reminder that the slave heritage in the imaginary and in the real social construction of the American society continues in the 1920s and 1930s as well. Actually, the new version of this divided society is the ghettoization - a social positioning through isolation in space, a procedure through which to the space is ascribed lack of wealth and prestige along to the supposedly related with them so called moral values. Sadly enough, the ghettoization is still in vigor not only in the period of time Moody depicts but also in nowadays as some of bell hooks' (Where We Stand: Class Matters) lines remind us. These lines of hooks establish a bold parallel between the ghettoization of the poor black communities in the 1990s with the Nazi concentration camps:

„By the early nineties the black power and underclass were fast becoming isolated segregated communities. [...] The black middle and upper class in no way protest these modern-day concentration camps. Historical amnesia sets in and they conveniently forget that the fascist who engineered the Nazi holocaust did not begin with gas chambers but rather began their genocidal agenda by hoarding people together and depriving them of the basic necessities of life – adequate food, shelter, health care, etc.”(93)

Finally, I would like to note that all these representations of space I talked about so far reflect the foundational division that made up the American nation, which is the well-known division between North and South.

This is particularly well illustrated by Alice Walker – through such images as the alienation that Grange faced after moving from the South to New York. In this respect the scene in the Central park, depicting how a desperate young white woman prefers to drown herself into the lake instead of accepting a helping hand from Grange, only because he is a black poor man. Another exemplary depiction of this both symbolic and visible/tangible division is the fascination at the beginning of Walker's novel when the protagonist Brownfield is portrayed as a child from the rural Georgia. In the opening scene he is almost seduced by a new 1920 Buick, by the car of his uncle who came from Philadelphia to visit Brownfield's family. The little boy even feels embarrassed by his rural surrounding: “about the bad road and the damage it did to his uncle car” (9). Brownfield is also overwhelmed

while listens to the stories of his cousins about their way of living in the big city in the North, full of industrial urban miracles:

„He showed them how to milk the cow, how to feed pigs, how to find chicken’s eggs; but the next day they had bombarded him with talk about automobiles and street lights and paved walks and trash collectors and about something they had ridden in once in a department store that went up, up, up from one floor to the next without anybody walking a step.” (10)

Historically speaking, as we know, the North and South were not only markers between industrialization and rural way of life, but they were also considered pillars of freedom vs. slavery. Significantly enough even this clear division was disputed from the very beginning of the black women literature. For instance, in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs the narrator permanently asks if this country, meaning the US, is civilized. How free is New York if the Fugitive Slave Law can be enforced there and the blacks cannot freely walk on the streets or enjoy the fresh air (pp.147-148)? In Jacobs’ narrative we see the desperate attempt to obtain freedom and how in fact, metaphorically speaking, there is no outside of slavery institution – she still been chased even as an escapee in the North, in the so called land of freedom because of the Fugitive Slave Law as an extension of the institution of slavery that allows it to stretch and impose its limitation to the North.

It seems pertinent in this context to be noted that Toni Morrison’s interpretation of space symbolic difference between the Old World and the New World that constitutes the emerging of the American nation of immigrants could be in a smaller scale applied to the symbolism of space division between South and North as political markers within the US. In the above respects Morrison has pointed out:

„Thru flight from the Old world to New is generally seen to be a flight from oppression and limitation to freedom and possibility.[...] All the Old World offered these immigrants was poverty, prison, social ostracism, and, not infrequently, death.[...] Whatever the reasons, the attraction was of the “clean state” variety, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity not only to be born again in new clothes, as it were. The new setting would provide new raiment of self” (34)

Through all these different representations of space, however, one predominant characteristic emerges. The space for those who are triple marked as black, poor and women are, by definition, segregated from the world of the White Male Supremacist. However, this space as a hidden counterpart always, as Morrison showed convincingly, fascinated and still fascinates the imagination of the very same supremacist agency. The multifaceted representation of this symbolic space along with the connotations of pain, humiliation, and suffering that it carries along are without any doubts the bold merits of the black women literature. It must be underscored at the end that without the efforts of the black women literature to locate these hidden spaces, the hypocritical “innocence” of the white literature canon would have continued to obscure them.

Thanks to authors such as Harriet Jacobs, Anne Moody, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and many others it is no longer possible.

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