

M. V. Borysenko

Oles Honchar Dnipro National University

**THE MOTIF OF AGEING IN THE MODERN CANADIAN LITERATURE:
A FEMININE ASPECT (“THE BEAR CAME OVER THE MOUNTAIN”
BY ALICE MUNRO AND “TORCHING THE DUSTIES”
BY MARGARET ATWOOD)**

Проаналізовано художні особливості зображення мотиву старіння в оповіданнях “The Bear Came over the Mountain” та “Torching the Dusties” двох відомих англо-канадських письменниць Еліс Манро та Маргарет Етвуд. Зроблено спробу виокремити ряд характерних особливостей втілення даного мотиву у сучасному англо-канадському оповіданні через компаративний аналіз сюжетно схожих творів. Мотив старіння, а також ідея дискримінації людей похилого віку (ageism) широко віддзеркалена у сучасному літературному доробку Канади, що відповідає загальній тенденції розвинутих країн до значного збільшення кількості сюжетів

про представників цієї вікової групи. На прикладі обраних оповідань можна стверджувати, що гендерна, а також національна ідентичність яскраво втілені при реалізації мотиву старіння. Головний герой – жінка, що розкриває особливості життя літніх мешканців Канади: проблеми існування у будинку для літніх людей, самотність, втрата родинних зв'язків та необхідність нових соціальних контактів. Глибокий психологізм, розкритий через образи природи, морально сильна, творча постать головної героїні, – характерні риси прояву канадської ідентичності. Особливості жіночого погляду на старіння втілені у сприйнятті себе через призму в'янучої вроди, проблему власного продовження в дітях та самореалізацію, фінансової нестабільності у похилому віці. Ці складові сюжетно-проблемного плану у комплексі вибудовують характерний англо-канадський варіант теми старіння, відображеної через призму жіночого світогляду.

Ключові слова: англо-канадська література, старіння, ейджизм, «nursery home narrative», національна ідентичність, гендерна ідентичність.

Проаналізовані художественні особливості зображення мотиву старіння в розповідях “The Bear Came over the Mountain” і “Touching the Dusties” двох відомих англо-канадських письменниць Еліс Манро і Маргарет Етвуд. Сделана спроба виділити ряд характерних особливостей втілення даного мотиву в сучасному англо-канадському розповіді через компаративний аналіз сюжетно схожих творів. Мотив старіння, а також ідея дискримінації людей пожилого віку (ageism) широко представлені в сучасній літературній спадщині Канади, що відповідає загальній тенденції розвитку країн з високим рівнем життя, збільшенню кількості сюжетів про представників цієї вікової групи. На прикладі обраних розповідей можна утвердити, що гендерна, а також національна ідентичність яскраво втілені при реалізації мотиву старіння. Головний герой – жінка, яка розкриває особливості життя похилої людини Канади: проблеми існування в домі престарілих, самотність, втрата родинних зв'язків і необхідність нових соціальних контактів. Глибокий психологізм, розкритий через образи природи, морально сильна, творча особистість головної героїні, – характерні риси прояву канадської ідентичності. Особливості жіночого погляду на старіння втілені у сприйнятті себе через призму в'янучої природи, проблему власного продовження в дітях і самореалізацію, фінансової нестабільності в похилому віку. Ці складові сюжетно-проблемного плану у комплексі вибудовують характерний англо-канадський варіант теми старіння, відображеної через призму жіночого світогляду.

Ключевые слова: англо-канадская литература, старение, эйджизм, «nursery home narrative», национальная идентичность, гендерная идентичность.

The article focuses on the analysis of artistic peculiarities in terms of the depiction of the motif of ageing in the short stories “The Bear Came over the Mountain” and “Touching the Dusties” written by two outstanding Anglo-Canadian authors Alice Munro and Margaret Atwood. The attempt has been made to reveal the range of representative features, which serve to embody the abovementioned motif in modern Anglo-Canadian short stories, throughout the comparative analysis of works, similar in their plot. The motif of ageing as well as the idea of discrimination against elderly people (ageism) are widely presented in the modern Canadian literary heritage, which corresponds to the general tendency of the considerable increase in number of plots about the representatives of this age group in well-developed countries. Drawing on the example of the chosen short stories, it turns out to be possible to assume that both gender and national identities are vividly embodied in terms of realization of motif of ageing. The protagonist is a woman that reveals the peculiarities of a way of living, typical for elderly Canadian citizens: problems of existence in the nursery home, loneliness, loss of family relations and the necessity of new social contacts. Deep-laid psychologism, revealed through the images of nature, morally strong, creative personality of the main heroine are typical features of Canadian identity manifestation. Peculiarities of woman’s attitude towards ageing are embodied in her self-perception through the lens of fading beauty, problem of self-continuation through children, self-realisation and lack of financial stability in the old age. These components of

narrative and problematic aspect establish the typical Anglo-Canadian variant of ageing theme, reflected through the lens of feminine outlook.

Key words: Anglo-Canadian literature, ageing, ageism, nursery home narrative, national identity, gender identity.

Considering modern social and economic situation worldwide, it is becoming more and more visible that ageing of population takes its place as one of the acute global problems, which touches upon a number of spheres of people's life: health care, social protection, housing and employment. According to the report "World Population Ageing 2015" of the United Nations from 2015: "The number of the older persons in the world has increased substantially in recent years and the growth is projected to accelerate in the coming decades" [18, c. 9]. Of course, in the developed countries as the USA or Canada this figure is not predicted to grow as dramatically as in the developing ones but still "the number of people aged 80 years or over in Northern America is projected to accelerate" [18, c. 12-13]. As literature tends to reflect the current tendencies of society, it has reacted to this problem, creating what U. Kribernegg called a "nursing home narrative" [9, c. 46].

Two bright examples of such narrative are short stories, analyzed in this article: "The Bear Came over the Mountain" written by Alice Munro and "Torching the Dusties" by Margaret Atwood. Both of them, created by outstanding Anglo-Canadian authors, represent Canada-oriented feminine point of view onto the problem.

Alice Munro – Nobel prize-winner of 2013, "the master of the contemporary short story" [5] firstly published her work "The Bear Came over the Mountain" in "The New Yorker" magazine 27. 12. 1999 and 03.01.2000 and then included into the collection "Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage" in 2001. The story represents a certain climax of the collection and was even screened by S. Polley in 2006 under the title "Away from Her".

Margaret Atwood – a prominent Canadian author of novels, short-stories and poetry as well as a literary critic, a winner of the Man Booker Prize, the Arthur C. Clarke Award, Prince of Asturias Award for Literature, a finalist for the Governor General's Award 10 times and a winner 2 times, firstly published her story collection "Stone Mattress: Nine Tales" in 2014 and the short story "Torching the Dusties" is the last but not least in it.

Although there is a certain number of literary critical works dedicated to the above mentioned short-stories (works about imagery in "The Bear Came over the Mountain": "The Skald and the Goddess: Reading "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" X. Ventura [17], "Reading the Spaces of Age in Alice Munro's "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" S. Jamieson [7], "Family Bond and Traumatic Pathology in Alice Munro's "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" M.S.I. Chowdhury [4]; works on gerontology, ageing and gender in "Torching the Dusties": "Time to go. Fast not slow": geronticide and the burden narrative of old age in Margaret Atwood's "Torching the Dusties" U. Kribernegg [9], "Facing our Future: An Examination of Age and Gender in Margaret Atwood's "The Stone Mattress" M. Krause [8], "Dystopia, Gerontology and the Writing of Margaret Atwood" H. Snaith [15]), one can hardly notice any targets at the comparative analysis of them within the framework of feminine attitude to ageing. However, such thorough analysis can reveal specific aspects of age perception as well as the ways of their expression in modern women's Anglo-Canadian short fiction.

So the most striking similarity between the both short stories is that they centre around the personalities of women, which is, according to M. Atwood's own words, a typical feature of modern Anglo-Canadian fiction. Moreover, an idea of building a story about problems of old age around a female personality can be based upon scientific grounds. In particular, according to the materials of "Mars and Venus: Does Gender Matter in Ageing?" conference: "Gender is an important factor in shaping people's

experiences of ageing. For instance, it is commonly recognised that women live longer than men, on average, and that they have more chronic illness and greater use of health services.” [11] Heroine of M. Atwood’s short story supports this idea: “in this age group the women outnumber the men four to one” [1]. In addition to this, women are potentially more vulnerable as they age, both in psychological aspect (fading beauty and stereotypes about attractiveness) and in socio-economic one (low income security caused by interruptions in the career (maternity leave and childcare) or unemployment (for housewives)), they tend to be widowed and have to appeal to nursery services.

In “The Bear Came Over the Mountain” the protagonist is Fiona, who suffers from Alzheimer’s disease and has to move to a nursery home, where she starts a love-affair with one of the patients Aubrey while her husband, understanding that she had forgotten him completely, still tried to bring her memories back and then to ease her depression, organizing a meeting with Aubrey, after he had been taken home by his wife.

As for “Torching the Dusties”, here the main heroine is Wilma, who decided to move to a nursery home since her husband had died and her children lived too far from her. Besides, she was losing her eyesight due to Charles Bonnet’s syndrome and couldn’t take care of herself completely. At the nursery home she made friends with Tobias, another tenant, and together they tried to escape from the establishment, set on fire by “Our Turn” international movement, whose aim was to kill the elderly people, burning them in their nursing homes.

Therefore, the choice of the protagonist is typically Canadian: a morally strong woman, who doesn’t lose her inner power although the physical powers are declining. The tradition of presenting a strong central feminine figure roots back to the times of folklore, made up by the first settlers in Canada [16]. According to M. Atwood: “Canadian oral folklore is still full of tales of our grandmothers’ generation, when women ran farms, chased off bears, delivered their own babies in remote locations and bit off the umbilical cords.” [2; p. 92] In both stories heroines correspond to that image: they make a decision of moving to the nursery homes themselves in order not to burden their nearest and dearest (children – for Wilma “That’s the deal, she signed it; it was the price of entry, the price of comfort, the price of safety. The price of not being a burden” [1]; Grant, husband, – for Fiona “You know what you’re going to have to do with me, don’t you? You’re going to have to put me in that place. Shallowlake?” [13]) and don’t show their inner disturbance about that, they try to take care of themselves as much as they can (as for Fiona, it lasted on the early stages of the disease).

However, M. Atwood’s Wilma is more similar to be a hero of feministic literature than A. Munro’s Fiona, which corresponds to the views of the author, who is considered to be a liberal feminist and she confirms it with her views (“So, if we mean, should women as citizens have equal rights, I’m all for it and a number of advances have been made in my lifetime regarding property rights and divorce and custody of children and all of those things... But do we mean, are women always right? Give me a break! I’m sorry, but no!” [14]), although she has never stated directly the type of feminism she can be referred and even argued the fact that she could be called a feminist writer in general: “The author has argued the feminist label can only be given to writers who wilfully and consciously work within the context of the movement” [14]). So the heroine of “Torching the Dusties” on the one hand, is more independent even in her illness, she tries to do as much as she can herself, doesn’t rely fully upon her friend Tobias and, what is more, she struggles with the signs of her illness, hallucinations, but on the other hand, Wilma accepts that she was only a “lurker” all her life, dedicating it to routine businesses and family (“... she’d have lurker written on her tombstone. Because hadn’t she spent most of her life just watching? It feels like that now, though it didn’t at the time, because she’d been so busy with this and that” [1]), even her degree was received just while she was waiting to get married (“Her degree had been in History – a safe-enough thing to study while waiting to get married” [1]).

Therefore, in the old age Wilma suffers from lack of self-realisation as an individuality, not only a mother or a wife.

Nevertheless, both protagonists are shown in the stories in a typically Canadian way: they serve as litmus test paper that highlights the problems, revealed by the authors. Alice Munro narrates about family issues, marriage on different stages of its existence, deep traces, which may be left by adulteries and ageing as a process of slow and steady fading, regression and loss of identity. Margaret Atwood, in her turn, stays adhere to speculative dystopian fiction (term proposed by E. Gottlieb [6; p. 34]), which the author herself defines as stories set on Earth or in circumstances that really can happen and include elements that already exist in some form, as "...advanced space travel, time travel, the discovery of green monsters on other planets or galaxies, or that certain various technologies we have not yet developed." [3; p. 92] According to this type of narrative, the problems represented in the work are a mix of social and personal psychological concerns, as the main heroine not only suffers through the problems of ageing (like loss of physiological abilities, visual and sexual attractiveness) but also faces ageism – "prejudice or discrimination against a particular age-group and especially the elderly" according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary [12]. As U. Kribernegg states, M. Atwood's tale "problematizes the way in which old age is 'othered', stigmatised as useless, inefficient and burdensome in a society that is based on production and consumption – and the solution portrayed in the story is radical" [9].

One more striking Canadian realia connected to ageing process lies in the depiction of nursery-homes as a background for both stories. It is a reflection of a modern trend in developed countries, where the pace of life doesn't give much opportunity for young generation to take care of their elderly parents. As a result, such establishments are gaining more and more popularity. In the stories they have idyllic names – Ambrosia Manor ("Torching the Dusties") and Meadow Lake ("The Bear Came over the Mountain"), which hide dark irony behind and increases the contrast between them and the reality inside their walls. In both texts nursery-homes function as a limited space, where inhabitants are deprived of contacts with real world: in "The Bear Came over the Mountain" they can't communicate to relatives for the first month of living there, in "Torching the Dusties" "pre-pubescent children" [1] are not allowed to possess their own PCs and ones in the Activity Centre have access control set up. Moreover, all tenants understand that good enough service that they receive is rather expensive and lasts as long as their finances aren't over or their relatives are willing to pay. Because of financial reasons Aubrey was taken home by his wife in "The Bear Came over the Mountain" and Wilma knows that her daughter Alyson "keeps an eye" [1] on her savings and "Ambrosia Manor hasn't kicked Wilma out onto the street, so the bills must be getting paid" [1]. Due to such state of things formerly close people estrange: Wilma's annual talks to her daughter and grandchildren become a burden for all and Fiona just forgets Grant at all. In order to emphasize the contrast between the coverage of such places and real psychological state of their inhabitants a certain landscape description appears (one more characteristic of modern Canadian narrative). Alice Munro appeals to nature as a reflection of inner state of her heroine: to winter images when she is on her way to the nursing-home and while she is suffering from the absence of memory there ("a swampy hollow now completely frozen over"; "the dazzling hard landscape pocked heaps under a gray sky looked like refuse in the fields" [13]) and spring signs appear together with the certain remission of illness ("a heady, warm blast of lilacs in bloom and the spring manure spread over the fields" [13]). M. Atwood, on the contrary, restrains herself of using natural landscape and describes a man-made architectural view of the building, increasing the oppressive feeling of the establishment (derivate from the Canadian idea of aggressive urban areas conquering the pristine and virgin nature). Everything inside and around the building carries the touch of a burden: "two ostentations, depressed-looking stone lions" [1], "the high brick wall" [1], "replica of a famous Belgian statue, a naked angel-face boy urinating into a stone basin" [1].

Process of ageing is inseparable from the loss of memory, but this idea appears in both analysed stories not just to emphasize that fact. The significant point is that it symbolizes the decay of protagonist's identity and the topic of identity (personal or national) is traditional for Canadian feminine literature. Fiona forgets the right forms of irregular verbs ("Just driven away without a care in the world and forsook me. Forsooken me. Forsaken" [13]), which is a sign of a massive memory loss and Wilma – the right name of her disease and names of historical personalities, although she has specialized in history ("It's a syndrome. Charles Bonnard...No, Bonnet: Bonnard was a painter, she's almost sure of that. Or is it Bonnivert?"; "Three political leaders who died having sex, that's about it. Genghis Khan, Clemenceau, and what's-his-name." [1]). This process represents for the slow but inevitable decay of her personality, which ageing brings.

Important for both authors is also the type of reality they offer to readers. Speculative fiction of M. Atwood with its imagined events on the background of real-life settings as well as a subverted reality of A. Munro, "as we are looking into the mirror" according to A. Kustec [10], enable the writers to create extremely realistic world in which the reader has to follow a number of paths, moving back and forward in the conscience of heroines, living and ageing together with them and undergoing the same crucial change.

To sum up, realization of motif of ageing in both stories is embodied through typically Canadian realia and from feminine perspective, revealing both national and gender identities, which can definitely be recognized as one of the striking features of modern Anglo-Canadian literature.

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