

THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE AMERICAN BIOGRAPHICAL NOVEL

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ABSTRACT:

The biographical novel, being a phenomenon of the XX century, has already gained its own fame among the readers and the canons of its creations have been worked out by many American writers and critics. Once as the description of the lives of religious figures in the form of hagiographies, the modern biographical novel is a piece of writing about strong individuals whose deeds changed the society and course of history. As biography is greatly connected with history, the genre – biographical novel in American literature emerged as the consequence of great changes in American history of XIX century. Many political figures, leaders of opposition and abolitionists became the subjects of the biography. At the same time, the first feministic approach to the novels can be also observed within this period. This work aims to demonstrate the diachronic observation of the development of the biographical novel as a genre, and to provide the overview of the most outstanding biographers of the United States and their works.

Keywords: biography, biographical novel, biographee, hagiography, historical background, authenticity, abolitionism, feminism.

INTRODUCTION:

Biography as an independent genre became the subject of literary research during

the end of XIX up to now, the beginning of XXI centuries. One of the reasons of scientist's deep interest in the biography is its peculiar characteristics, which allow wide range of topics to be discussed. Political, religious, personal, social and historical issues can be widely depicted by writer and simultaneously create an authentic story for the readers.

Biographical novel as an independent literary genre appeared only in the early XIX century. The growth of American republic which led to the increasing authority of presidents and political figures served as great basement for writers as biographers. This episode in the history of American literature became a turning point, since from that time biography was not only about the portrayal of religious figures, but also it became a new approach in literature.

What was the development of the "Biographical Novel" in American Literature? And how does postmodernism influence on its further transformation?

The beginning of the XX century gave birth to a great number of biographical novels. Irving Stone, an ardent supporter truthful biographical novel created more than twenty works about historical figures from different time and space. He followed his principles of authentic facts and objectivism and chronological unfold of events. Yet the "developments in postmodernism made it possible to fuse biography and novel" [2, 2]. Writers got freedom to invent and on the bases of biographical facts they created a complex work of imagination with idiosyncratic stylistic

features. Novelists used variety of techniques to express themselves and make biography readable. In his turn, the addressee feels the boundaries of fact and fiction, moreover tries to think about the biographee and consider and the small amount of facts evoke reader's interest to the untold information. This way the writers of a biographical novel conquer the audience.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The rise and development of biography and biofiction has been researched by such scholars as Carl Rollyson in his books "Biography: An Annotated Bibliography" (2007), "Biography: A User's Guide" (2008) and Michael Lackey in his works "Truthful Fictions. Conversations with American Biographical Novelists" (2014), "Conversations with Jay Parini" (2014), "The American Biographical Novel" (2016).

Carl Rollyson diachronically highlighted the history of biography worldwide in his essential research tool "Biography. An Annotated Bibliography" and in his "Biography: A User's Guide" the scholar gives the thorough definition to the terms connected with the concept of "Biography" and myriad of examples to biographical works are surveyed. In the notable section "American Biography" Rollyson diachronically investigates the brief history of American Biography. The scholar traces the history of the biographical genre and asserts that the rise of the biography in American literature starts with Cotton Mather's "Magnalia Christi Americana" (1702). It is considered to be partly hagiographical work which describes the religious development of the US state Massachusetts and other nearby colonies in New England. The work narrates about Hannah Dustan, Puritan mother of nine children who was taken captive by Native Americans. Moreover, the book presents complete information about the founding of

Harvard College and its graduates. Some biographical features of the book make it the founding stone of the Biographical genre in American Literature. Later "An Account of the Life of the Late Reverend David Brainerd" (1749) by evangelical theologian Jonathan Edwards became the next more modified biographical work in American Literature of the XVIII century. In this work Edwards portrays internal growth of his biographee, accenting its living style.

Further, Rollyson introduces three figures as biographers. He highlights the following: "Although American critics praised Boswell's biography of Johnson, in practice biographers did not take "warts and all" approach to their subjects. Instead biographies were written as patriotic paeans to greatness. Few important American literary figures essayed biography. Exceptions are Washington Irving's multi-volume life of Washington and Nathaniel Hawthorne's campaign biography of his friend, Franklin Pierce. Neither of these biographies, however, made an important contribution to the national literature or the development of biography.

By the time Lincoln ran for office, campaign biographies had become quite common. William Dean Howells, for example, wrote a campaign biography for Lincoln, but, like other efforts in this genre, he made little attempt to do original research or present a balanced picture of the subject. The obvious aim of the book was to get a man elected to office" [5, 6].

Rollyson mentions the names of Horace Traubel and Alfred Bigelow Paine in his rubric of the "American Biography". Traubel created volumes of biographical works on Whitman's life and philosophy. Paine was the author of a number of books devoted to Mark Twain's biography. Their works emulate the James Boswell's works in terms of representing details into biography.

Later in the same century, important political and even literary figures become the main subject of biographers, however still little interest of critics was seen in these works. Only by the second half of XX century, biography was able to gain its own audience and its own culture due to Justin Kaplan, Richard Ellmann, Leon Edel and Silverman. "Scholarly biographies of American literary and political figures become prevalent by the mid-twentieth century, but until the advent of biographers such as Justin Kaplan, Richard Ellmann, and Leon Edel, biography as a genre received little attention from critics (...) Kenneth Silverman's literary activity can be considered as the great example of the growing status of biography. "Silverman's career-ranging from a Pulitzer prize-winning biography of Cotton Mather to a well-received biography of Edgar Allan Poe to a ground-breaking biography of Harry Houdini – illustrates the growth of the genre, which now crosses the line between readers of popular and scholarly books." [5.7]

Thus, Carl Rollyson's exposition of the history of American Biography shows that biographical works as a literary stream is getting its fast development and transforming its shape and themes.

Michael Lackey in his book "The American Biographical Novel" investigates the history of the biographical novels worldwide in the 20th century and the following:

"The biographical novel's complicated journey to legitimization began in the 1930s, which is when the aesthetic form had – paradoxically – become popular and was roundly condemned. In 1937, George Lukas acknowledged "the popularity of the biographical form in the present-day historical novel". Works from the decade that immediately come to mind include Leonard Ehrlich's "God's Angry Man"(1932), Lion Feuchtwanger's Josephus Flavius novels (the first of which was published in 1932), Thomas

Mann's Joseph novels (the first of which was published in 1933), Robert Grave's Claudius novels (the first of which was published in 1934), Irving Stone's "Lust for Life" (1934), Bruno Frank's "A Man Called Cervantes" (1934), Heinrich Mann's King Henry IV novels (the first of which was published in 1935), Arna Bontemps' "Black Thunder" (1936), Graves' "Count Belisarius"(1938), Stone's "Jack London", "Sailor on Horseback"(1938), Zora Neale Hurston's "Moses", "Man of the Mountain" (1939), and Thomas Mann's "Lotte in Weimar"(1939).

RESULTS:

As it can be seen the history of development of biographical novel started early in XVIII century started with Cotton Mather's quazi hagiographical work "Magnalia Christi Americana" and in the next century it developed into an independent literary genre. Critics and biographers conducted a considerable research in the field and the first attempts to distinguish biography in literature appeared at the beginning of the XIX century. However, only in the XX century biographical novel as a separate genre got its "rise and legitimization". From the scrupulous trace of the complicated journey of American Biography, it can be noted that biographical genre step by step is transforming its form and firmly standing in the complex world of literature.

DISCUSSION:

In this section of our article we try to elicit notable American writers of biographical novel from European and concentrate the study on the mid-twenties up to contemporary American biographical novel. The research shows that the mid-twenties gave birth to the prominent figures whose theoretical views and practices created substantial number of

biographical works and nowadays developing it to a promising literary trend.

To start the chronological study of writers who did a valuable contribution to the development of biographical novel, it should be mentioned the name of Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960), who was an American novelist, anthropologist and filmmaker. She was born in Notasulga, Alabama, but later moved to Eatonville, which was mostly used as the setting to her publications. Being a black woman, most of her works concern African-Americans, their long way towards freedom and the struggles of African-American women.

Her biographical novel "Moses, Man of the Mountain" (1939) is about prophet Moses. The novel rewrites the story of the "Book of Exodus" of Moses and the Israelites from an Afro-American perspective. The novel implements a number of different motifs and themes commonly addressed in African-American culture, changing the religious story.

Arnaud "Arna" Wendell Bontemps (1902-1973) was born in Alexandria, Louisiana in a Creole family. In 1923, he graduated Pacific Union College in Angwin, California, majoring in English. The writer is known as a poet, novelist, librarian and honored member of Harlem Renaissance.

In 1936, Bontemps published his biographical novel "Black Thunder" about the life of XIX century slave revolutionist Gabriel Prosser and the rebellion he led in Richmond, Virginia. Bontemps contribution to the development of biography as a genre was his precise delivery of slave community and their dialect.

Irving Stone (1903-1989), who is considered as the pioneering biographer in American literature. He is mostly known for his lecture "The Biographical Novel", presented at The Library of Congress and about thirty biographical novels of noted artists and politicians. The most interesting feature of each of his works is the subtitle "biographical novel".

For example, "Jack London", "Sailor on Horseback: A Biographical Novel" (1938); "Immortal Wife: The Biographical Novel of Jessie Benton Fremont" (1944); "The Agony and the Ecstasy: A Biographical Novel of Michelangelo" (1961); "Those Who Love: A Biographical Novel of Abigail and John Adams" (1965); "The Greek Treasure: he A Biographical Novel of Henry and Sophia Schliemann" (1975); "The Origin: A Biographical Novel of Charles Darwin" (1980); and "Depths of Glory: A Biographical Novel of Camille Pissarro" (1985).

Russell Banks (1940) is American writer and novelist. He was born on March 28, 1940 in Newton, Massachusetts. He received a scholarship to study at Colgate University, but dropped out six years later. In 1964 he returned to New England and then to North Carolina, where he attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, founded by the family of his second wife, Mary Gunts. In Chapel Hill, Banks participated in the Students for Democratic Society and Civil Rights protests. In 1976 he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship. Banks now lives in Keene, upstate New York, although he spends winters in Miami. He was a New York State Writer from 2004-2006. He is also a Visiting Artist at the University of Maryland. He taught writing at Princeton University.

Jay Parini (1948) was born in Pittston, Pennsylvania, and brought up in Scranton, Pennsylvania. He graduated from Lafayette College in 1970 and was awarded a doctorate by the University of St. Andrews in 1975. He is considered as an American biographical novel writer and academic who contributed greatly into the development of biofiction. He is famous not only for his biographical novels, but also for poetry and criticism. Having published novels about Leo Tolstoy, Walter Benjamin, and Herman Melville, Jay Parini became one of the outstanding figure in the sphere of biographical

fiction. Parini's other biographical novels include "Benjamin's Crossing" (1996), "The Passages of H.M." (2011), "The Damascus Road: A Novel of Saint Paul" (2019), "Borges and Me: An Encounter" (2020) memoir.

Julia Alvarez (1950) is American poet and writer. She was born in 1950 in New York City, but spent almost ten years of her early life in Dominican Republic, where her parents came from. In 1967 she got enrolled in Connecticut College. In 1975, she received her master's degree and took a position of a writer-in-residence in Kentucky Arts Commission. Currently, she works at Middlebury College. She is considered to be one of the most successful writers of her time, whose literary activity resulted in five novels, three poetry collections, children's literature as well as adolescent fiction. Another notable feature of her works is reflection of Dominican culture, representing women of both United States and Dominican Republic and revealing common stereotypes. Her novels "How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents" (1991), novel mainly discusses problems and struggles of post-colonial Dominican Republic, and its sequel, "Yo!" (1997), the children's book "The Secret Footprints" (2001), "In the Name of Salome" (2000) tells the story of two women who dedicated their lives to politics, established Julia Alvarez as the writer of talent and enabled her won several awards.

Michael Cunningham (1952) was born in Ohio, and grew up in Pasadena, California. He studied English literature at Stanford University, where he earned his degree. Later, at the University of Iowa, he received a Michener Fellowship and was awarded a Master of Fine Arts degree from the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

In 1993, Cunningham received a Guggenheim Fellowship and in 1988 a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. In 1995 he was awarded a Whiting Award. His writing

career include "Golden States" (1984), "A Home at the End of the World" (1990), "Flesh and Blood" (1995), "The Hours" (1998), "Specimen Days" (2005), "By Nightfall" (2010), "The Snow Queen" (2014); collections of shorts stories, non-fiction and screeplays..

Madison Smartt Bell is an American novelist, born in 1957 in Nashville, Tennessee. After graduating Montgomery Bell Academy, he entered Princeton University, where he became the winner of Ward Mathis Prize and the Francis Leymoyne Page award. From 1998 to 2004, Bell was Director of the Creative Writing Program in Goucher College. His writing activity includes reviews and essays for "Harper's", "The New York Review of Books", and the "New York Times Book Review".

California. She grew up in northern Philadelphia, and attended the University of the Pacific. "In 1997 she teamed up with journalist Camille Peri to found "Salon.com's" popular daily website "Mothers Who Think", which in turn inspired the nationally bestselling, American Book Award-winning anthology "Mothers Who Think: Tales of Real-Life Parenthood" (Villard 1999, Washington Square Press 2000) and "Because I Said So: 33 Mothers Write About Children, Sex, Men, Aging, Faith, Race & Themselves" (HarperCollins 2005, 2006). In 2003, her first novel, "Wintering: A Novel of Sylvia Plath" (St. Martin's Press, Anchor Books 2003) was published to international acclaim. Translated into fifteen languages, Wintering received the Janet Heidinger Kafka Prize and a Prix des Lectrices de Elle in France. Her latest book is "Cakewalk, A Memoir" (The Dial Press, 2010), the result of a lifelong love of sugar and stories. Cakewalk was a finalist for the 2011 Bay Area Book Reviewers Award for Creative Nonfiction"[9].

CONCLUSIONS:

One of the most intrinsic purposes of literature is to reflect and show a reaction to the historical process undergoing within society. Each literary trend and genre also appeared and adjusted in accordance with the history and historical background of the particular period. XIX century, when the biographical novel appeared as an independent genre, can be defined as the time of great changes from political, social, and cultural aspects. Such terms as “abolitionism”, “fight for independence”, “racial equality” and “feminism” were of high importance and topicality.

In the XVIII century, the works, which demonstrated biographical features, were mainly hagiographies. Later, the life and activity of political figures, as well as celebrities, became the staple part of biographies. However, only in the XX century, as the analysis of the long and exacting fight of Americans towards independence and freedom, biography emerged as a genre. Highly interrelated with historical background, this period was ensued by many works, which biographees were great abolitionists, leaders of rebellions, and oppositionists of dictatorship regime.

Thus, it can be concluded that despite being of the youngest genres in literature, which will continue to develop further, the American biographical novel is to the promising genre.

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book “Biography. A User’s Guide” and “Biography: An Annotated Bibliography”. This article is based on them researches and continues the study of American Biographical Novel beyond the boundaries of the United States, in Uzbekistan, the Central Asia.

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