

The awakening of ethnic consciousness and features of the artistic structure of Julie Otsuka's when the emperor was divine

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Abstract

The paper deals with ethnic consciousness manifestations as well with characteristic features of "self" and "non-self" in Julie Otsuka's novel *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2012). The ethnic consciousness of a person living in a multinational environment is a relevant issue. The author determines the term "ethnic consciousness" as a scope of beliefs, ideas and concepts which manifest themselves in the language of the ethnic group, in its customs and traditions as well as in the legends, myths. The aim of the paper is to see how the artistic structure of the novel reflects the process of ethnic identification and adjusting of the subjective reality of a person. Julie Otsuka belongs to the third generation of Japanese immigrants who got used to identifying themselves as belonging to the American nation. In the novel, Julie Otsuka tells the story of her mother thus trying to realize that she belongs to the Japanese ethnic community. However, this fact implies that she has to oppose herself to the other ethnic groups. The title helps to analyze the novel putting forward the archetypical characters which give rise to the archetypical mentality of the nation. The paper shows that the plot of the novel *When the Emperor Was Divine* is based on the cosmogonical myths about the doomsday which is followed by the rebirth of the world from chaos. The mythological motives: farewell to life, descent to hell, resurrection, are developed in the structure of the novel. The author reveals the cyclic nature of the events. The idea of the cycle (life - death - rebirth) is reflected in the chapter titles. The paper shows that the mythological code of the novel is closely connected with its psychological plot. The narrative strategy of the novel reveals the processes going on in the characters' minds. The author proves that in the text there is a "narrative I" as well as some kinds of a "narrated I". Each chapter has a narrator's point of view which combines the attitude of "another": the point of view of the woman, then her daughter's, her son's and, finally, her husband's, who returns from an internment prison. The author demonstrates that the mentality of each character, their individual values combine both Japanese and American features in their interaction. This narrative form is used to show all the changes that are developing in the "narrated I". The paper focuses on two major psychological plot lines of the novel. One of them, connected with the story of mother and her children, emphasizes the moment of the rebirth of the characters. The rebirth resulted from the awakening of the ethnic identification. The other one, connected with the story of father, puts forward the tragedy of depersonalization due to the loss of identity. The psychological lines are paralleled by two corresponding myths. The first describes the creation of the "self" world while the other one presents the acceptance of the "non-self" mentality.

Keywords

Ethnic consciousness, Identity, Julie otsuka, Mythological plot, Narrative strategy, Psychological plot, Subjective reality