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ON «MATERNITY» AS ONE OF THE BASIC CONCEPTS
IN FEMALE FICTION BY E. GILBERT

A. I. Dzyubenko

*Candidate of Philological Sciences,
assistant professor,*

E. S. Seredina

*4th year student,
Southern Federal University,
Rostov-on-Don, Russia*

Summary. The article deals with the ways the concept of maternity is treated and interpreted in the modern American fiction created by the woman writer of the present, by E. Gilbert in particular. At times it tends to create intertextuality ties with fictional discourse by classical Russian writers (L. Tolstoy in particular) but is far from being deprived of specific features representing itself alongside such concepts as family and marriage.

Keywords: concept; pragmatics; perspective; interpretation.

In the beginning of the 21st century humanity tends to consider family issue as one of the most essential in its social structure. While Asian and African countries suffer from overpopulation of their territories, the European nations with the decades passed seem to be getting closer to the verge of extinction. These facts make the family and maternity issues the core ones not only in the social and political paradigm studied through psychological, biological and humanitarian perspectives, but also in the fictional discourse contributing to the representation of the above-mentioned concepts in their ontogenesis. This topic has also entered the minds of a lot of outstanding writers, whose ideas concerning the concept of maternity have been reflected in the myriads of works of literature. No doubt they do show the subjective authors' view point on this notion, as gender, age, social influences the writers themselves undergo can hardly be separated in full, but still fictional discourse

presents us the most intricately interpreted concept of maternity.

In the course of time the concepts of maternity and family underwent a lot of changes on the semantic layers of theirs, however preserving almost the same number of the core components for their verbalization. One of the proofs for such an opinion is found in the fiction by E. Gilbert, a modern American female writer who conducted a profound research of the development of the concept «maternity» from the historical, sociological, psychological and historical angles. In the book «Eat, Pray, Love» she creates a portrait of a modern, educated, progressive, loving life and job, self-made woman who tends to analyze her environs and metaphysical points of her psyche through inner monologues, and the concept of maternity ranks one of the basic issues. Despite emancipation and self-confidence, a woman of present becomes a social-opinion victim – even the psychologically strongest and the most



determined of females break down under the socially widespread opinion of a woman's happiness being connected with the family itself, the family with babies in particular, thus maternity turns into a bounding power of a happy, well functioning family: «But I was supposed to want to have a baby. I was thirty-one years old. My husband and I who had been together for eight years, married for six-had built our entire life around the common expectation that, after passing the doddering old age of thirty, I would want to settle down and have children. By then, we mutually anticipated, I would have grown weary of traveling and would be happy to live in a big, busy household full of children and homemade quilts, with a garden in the backyard and a cozy stew bubbling on the stovetop» [1, p. 13]. It seems that the analyzed concept is always the reason for provoking the public's opinion, the society is never neutral towards this issue. Even if some of females choose childless life and are happy with this decision, the majority tends to have a baby to the detriment of their career, private life, interest and sometimes health.

According to E. Gilbert, the concept of sacrifices is one of the integral components in the semantic structure of «maternity» concept. Representing the motherhood essence diachronically the writer compares two diverse epochs – the Great Depression span and the present: «Let me remind you. They had nothing. Maude was a virtual house slave for three grown men (gruff Swedish farmers, no less, who were usually irritated by each other and she was forced to cram her babies and their sodden cloth diapers into one cold and badly lit room. She became progressively wicker and sicker with each pregnancy. The Depression raged outside their door» [2, p. 164]. It leads us to the idea that being a mother in any period of the history implies the idea of eternal sacrifices and care about the close people, the idea of mercy and blessing found in hardships and troubles she overcomes while rearing her family.

On the semantic layer this concept alongside with the concept of marriage is associated with a building being at the same time a metaphorical paragon of true friendship, of the institutionalized companionship: «We had also learned that marriage is an estate that is very much easier to enter than it is to exit. Unfenced by law, the unmarried lover can quit a bad relationship at any time. But you – the legally married person who wants to escape doomed love – may soon discover that a significant portion of your marriage contract belongs to the State, and that it sometimes takes a very long while for the State to grant you your leave» [2, p. 5]. This drives us to the idea of the matrimony being equal something hard, stable, profound and the same time inspiring, solid and difficult to be moved or shaken. For example: «We often say that marriage is «hard work». Life is hard work, of course, and *work* is very hard work – I'm quite certain they would agree with those statements – but how does marriage become hard work? Here's how: Marriage becomes hard work once you have poured the entirety of your life's expectations for happiness into the hands of one mere person. Keeping that going is hard work» [2, p. 48–49].

Sometimes it seems that Gilbert has intertextuality aspects in her fiction introducing a kind of Leo Tolstoy's female protagonist: «I was happy because I had a family of my own. I had a husband. I had children. I had never dared to be allowed to have any of those things in my life» [2, p. 164]. It seems that a female can be joyful just with having a husband and children, not caring about social or material self-sufficiency. The vital feature of those women was the ability to take the most dreadful and unbearable conditions for granted. That period wives and mothers were not only hyper enduring, but also too obedient to their destiny and were not trying to change it for an inch.

The course of time and the change of epochs had a great influence on the family



concept. The end of the 20th century and the turn of the 21st revealed the crucial role of the high living standard to be a determinant factor for the maternity and a family institution: «My mother made a choice that week. She quitted her job and decided to stay at home with my sister and me. It wasn't like she would never work outside the home again, but what about her career? That was finished. As she explained to me later, she came to feel she had a choice: She would either have a family or she could have a calling, but she wouldn't figure how to do both without support and encouragement of her husband. So she quitted» [2, p. 181]. It is obvious that the concept of maternity includes in itself the idea of «New English Cemetery Syndrome», the quintessence of all the hardships New England women faced. To bridge over all their difficulties, they had nothing to do, but adjust, adapt, glide and accept. The present-day life conditions create an elusive freedom of women development as an individual, domestic goddess, professional, but all this roles are impossible to fulfill without the «syndrome».

In fact, being, undoubtedly, subjective and gender determined in treating the concept and in mapping its structure, the female writers as the addressers of information can much be trusted in terms of authenticity and of purely female interpretation the concept of maternity through «twice»-female perspective: the discourse is done by a woman-author and is narrated by female protagonist [3, p. 33]. Both

fictional and mundane reality present women torn by indecision and dilemma of having to choose between realization of personal potential in profession and career vs. home, between their financial independence and public success vs. hearth and female happiness with children and husband at their side. In the end the majority of women choose the family and maternity on the basis of their ancestral memory that the latter concept preserves in itself.

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