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## **The Traditions of the English Novel of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and Modern American Women's Novel**

### Summary

European literature, and English literature in particular has always been the matrix of a kind for American women's literature. It's shown in the article how the American women's novel adopted and reinterpreted the plots and characters of English literature ("The Private Life" by J. Smiley), reconstructed classic folklore and literary plots using parody for well-known titles ("The Robberbride" by M. Atwood), quotes Dickens and Oscar Wilde in "The Book of Ruth" by J. Hamilton.

**Key words:** reception, european literary discourse, feminist problematic, psychological trauma, self-realization, independence, inferiority complex.

The main theme of J. Smiley's novels - the fate of a woman, her way to self-identification is revealed in this novel historically, that is, the action of the novel takes place at the end of the 19th—the first half of the 20th century. The first part of the novel is a parody at J. Austen's novels. Margaret, the main character of "Private Life", reminds of the heroines of J. Austen- a clever, well-read, intellectual person. According to the traditi0n of J. Austen's novels she gets her prize at the end of this part-a rich and handsome young man as the husband. The story of her married life is the denunciation of the institution of marriage as Smiley sees it, as is shown in the article. This historical novel is devoted to the first manifestation of feminism at the end of the 19th- the beginning of the 20th century and tells about different strategies women took to it.

Feminist problematic is dealt with in many novels by M. Atwood: "The Handmaid's Tale", "The Robberbride", "A Cat's Eye". In "The Robberbride" three heroines of the novel oppose one devilish heroine, Zenia, the embodiment of Evil, who destroyed their lives by tempting and taking away their husbands or a beloved. All three heroines were kind to her and helped her in her assumably desperate situation. All three proved armless against her and hated her, but at the end of the novel are proud of her. Zenia showed them the limitations of their own lives which they spent hiding from reality, and they come to the understanding that she alone realized her life potential in spite of amorality of her ways and goals. The end of the novel expresses the expectation of the appearance of a new woman who will be equal to Man in life struggle.

Jane Hamilton is at present the most prominent inheritor of puritan tradition in US literature, following Hawthorne and Henry James in their close analysis of human soul and its mysteries and their interest to moral problems. What is Good and

Evil, how does Evil get into the human soul- these are the main issues she works out in her first book "The Book of Ruth".

The main character of the book, Ruth, a farmer's daughter, is unhappy since childhood. When she was ten her father abandoned his wife and two children driven to despair by his wife's stinging tongue. His wife, May, Ruth's mother, is an unhappy woman herself. Since early childhood she knew nothing but hard labor being the eldest daughter in a big farmer's family. She married the young man she loved but he was soon killed in World War II. She is angry at all the world and at the people surrounding her, and tries to compensate her misfortune by hurting everybody with her sharp tongue. There's no understanding between her and Ruth, she has only sharp remarks and slaps for her daughter. That, and the loss of the father, the only person who was kind to her, and poverty coming to the family as a result of the loss of the bread-winner combined with her slow comprehension result in Ruth's loneliness in the family. She becomes the victim of the class because of the peculiarities of her mind, she is called moron by her classmates and brother. All these factors determine her very low self-esteem and the absence of the sense of responsibility at the same time. She becomes jealous of everybody else's success, she hates her classmates and teachers but those who are kind and attentive to her. Having grown up she falls in love with the only man who paid attention to her and who, socially and psychologically, is a misfit and a loser at the beginning. She marries him, brings him home against her mother's will and life soon becomes a hell for the three of them. Ruth's husband, Ruby, doesn't work most of the time, but drinks, uses drugs, gets into trouble and hates Ruth's mother who gives him what he deserves with her tongue. The culmination of this hell or a life is predictable. One day psychically unstable Ruby in a fit of rage kills Ruth's mother, tries to kill Ruth but stops at the last moment. He is arrested and shut up in the asylum. Ruth is grieving for him (not for her mother), but at the end she tries to re-estimate her life and hopes to start a new life, independent and on her own. The reader understands she has coped up with the task: he reads the book she wrote about herself-"The Book of Ruth".

J. Hamilton's book is prominent for the minute and very precise psychological analysis of the heroine's personality and her inner world. The author analyses all the social and psychological factors that formed the character and the personality of her heroine, among which the limitations of a small town's life play a very important role. Gifted with love and understanding of literature Ruth, under the conditions of life in a small town can realize herself only working at the dry-cleaner's. Neglect of her inner life and ruthlessness to her result in her hatred and jealousy of others. She feels pity only to misfits and losers like herself; she is always on the side of those whom other people disapprove or hate.

It's noteworthy to point out how masterfully the heroine (or, rather, the writer who created her) recreates Dickens's style, his irony in Ruth's descriptions of her husband.

"The Book of Ruth" is a novel of upbringing. The vices of upbringing are analyzed in the book on the example of three characters: Ruth, Ruby and Matt. The writer answers in her book the question posed on the first page: how does Evil get

into the soul of a person? What should be done to avoid its appearance there? The "Book of Ruth" contains the answer on this question, and Hamilton's next book, "When Madeline Was Young" is itself an extended answer to it: love and mutual understanding in the family bars Evil's way into the heart of a person. So simple, so universal.

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