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THE BOUNDARIES OF GOOD AND EVIL: TWO BOOKS BY JANE HAMILTON

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 labour 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 andshut up in the asylum. Ruth is grieving for him (not for her mother), but at the end she tries to reestimate 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. 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 herresult 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 dissaprove 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 analysed 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 barrs Evil's way into the heart of a person. So simple, so universal.