

**DEPICTION OF THE CULT OF TRUE WOMANHOOD IN WOMEN
AMERICAN LITERATURE OF THE XIX CENTURY**

A characteristic feature of the last quarter of the XIX century is that the woman in the family sphere in the United States was still being exploited, and in addition she was also involved into professional work that doubled her workload, as that time the norms existing in family and at work place were based on patriarchal system.

Key words: women's value, equal right, function of women in the society.

Характерной особенностью последней четверти XIX века в Соединенных Штатах было то, что женщина эксплуатировалась в семейной сфере, и кроме того, она участвовала в профессиональной деятельности, что в два раза увеличивало ее нагрузку. В то время нормы существующие в семье и на работе были основаны на патриархальной системе.

Ключевые слова: ценность женщин, равноправие, функции женщин в обществе.

"Women issue" takes an important place in the literary works of American writers. As one of the dominant themes of American literature of the late XIX - early XX centuries, it gives a clue to the understanding of women place in the society, their role in the development of social development.

American writers, taking much interest in the fate of the American woman, exploring peculiarities of femininity, women view of the world, women's values, studying the role of women in different areas of society, wanted to depict the real American women life, the problem of women's emancipation and the feminist movement, as well as show the development of new priorities and societal values. This enables to consider their literary works as a kind of a

response to the changes in the morality of the time.

A characteristic feature of the last quarter of the XIX century is that the woman in the family sphere in the United States was still being exploited, and in addition she was also involved into professional work that doubled her workload, as that time the norms existing in family and at work place were based on patriarchal system. Gradually, the most advanced and matured American women became determined to achieve equal rights with men to education, freedom of professional sphere, the right to manage the property, to bring up children, to freedom of divorce, right to vote.

The problem of women's place in society, and above all the issues of their rights and freedoms, is

clearly seen in the literature of many women writers. We are going to focus on the creative works of a well-known American writer Kate Chopin (1851-1904). Under the influence of the time (the struggle for equal rights with men, participation in strikes, women trade union activities, the organization of various kinds of associations and clubs), the main content of the works of the writer was a realistic depiction of life, acute vital problems related to women's issue. The author as well as other many writers expressed her position not only regretting the lack of rights of their heroines, but, for the most part, shows the ways to overcome narrow sociological opinion about women.

We are considering the time when there emerged the notion of a "New Woman" in the literature and history of which L. Wittmann, in particular, wrote: "this is a woman with unlimited individuality who tends to drop all restrictions imposed on her by society, and is in constant search of new opportunities. This took place somewhere between 1890 and 1918, and in all spheres of life - social, political, economic and scientific" (Wittmann, 49).

A considerable amount of works written in 1870-1910 's, suggests that American writers felt the need to show the process of becoming a "new woman", the evolution of her life position. They depict the way of life of heroines, focusing on the changing roles and functions of women in American society at the end of XIX - early XX centuries, because in this period we see the most clear manifestation of changes in different spheres of society: at cultural (changing norms and values associated with the image of women and her behavior), institutional (in family, work, education), interpersonal (in the field of male-female relationships) levels.

A special approach to literary interpretation of "women's issues" by women writers is that they are simpler and more natural than the male ones wrote what surrounded them in everyday life and in the family. As home life was for them the main are of habitation, and therefore their works contribute-directly or indirectly – to rethinking of values in favor of the private sphere of women and the changing role of women and functions primarily within the family.

In the works of Kate Chopin there are different types of heroines protesting against the enslavement of women both in the family and in society. All the stories showed different sides of

this protest, but they all have in common one thing - a woman should be asserted as a personality, as a representative of sex, be equal in rights with men, to play a significant role in the social, cultural and political life of the society.

From the first literary works Kate Chopin is questioned about the fate of a woman trying to find her place in life, to reconsider traditional values. Chopin presents the life of the American woman of the XIX century in her various guises: marriageable girl, young wife, spinster who met belated love, anemone, a wife not loving her husband, a woman who devoted her life to literature, a nun. Heroines in Kate Chopin's works, despite their differences, share one thing - more or less clear awareness of their own desires and needs. In her works, Chopin was not intended to justify the equality of rights of women or seeks to represent men as the main culprits of all the misfortunes of women, so she is unlikely to be considered as the conscious supporter of feminism. Rather, she truly represents public institutions and foundations that prevent women to find themselves, to find mental independence.

One of the controversial issues in Chopin's novel "Awakening" is the concept of motherhood that quite differed from the traditional understanding of the role of mother in the family. The protagonist Edna Pontellier rejects her role as a mother and wife. Edna's attitude to children is rather ambiguous. She sometimes plays with her kids with enthusiasm, and sometimes forgets about them. As her husband Leonce Pontellier says "she is not mother-woman". (Chopin) Once Edna while talking with Adele Ratignolle, who is, unlike Edna, very proud of her status of mother, and one might say motherhood is what she is fated for, says that she will never sacrifice herself for the sake of her children: «I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself» (Chopin). Edna feels pity for Adele, and she is sure that she does not suit for the status of mother-woman the society of the time demands. "It was not a condition of life which fitted her, and she could see in it but an appalling and hopeless ennui. She was moved by a kind of commiseration for Madame Ratignolle" (Chopin). Adele represents all four attributes of True Womanhood as defined by the Cult of Domesticity. The "four cardinal virtues [were] piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Put them

together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife—woman” (Papke, 11).

“The Cult of Domesticity or Cult of True Womanhood was a prevailing value system among the upper and middle classes during the nineteenth century in the United States and Great Britain. This value system emphasized new ideas of femininity, the woman's role within the home and the dynamics of work and family. "True women" were supposed to possess four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness. The women and men who most actively promoted these standards were generally white, Protestant, and lived in New England and the Northeastern United States. The cult of domesticity revolved around the women being the center of the family; they were considered "The light of the home".

Although all women were supposed to emulate this ideal of femininity, black, working class, and immigrant women did not fit the definition of "true women" because of social prejudice.

The Cult of Domesticity was designed for the wives and daughters of the men who made up the white upper class power structure in the United

States and Britain.” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cult_of_Domesticity)

A woman's major job is to bring up her children, and this in turn will make the life of a woman significant in the society. But the protagonist does not want to live that way because that would mean that she rejects herself. “The children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days” (Chopin). Edna is not willing to have that natural and societal status – to bring up children, to do household duties, to love her husband, to look pretty for her husband. That is why she commits suicide to get freedom, to escape her subservience to her husband and her children. That was probably the way of her self-assertion, her protest against societal and natural requirements. Edna was affected by the laws of the environment in which she lived. Heroine admits that her "awakening" has brought her not only a sense of the fullness of life, but also suffering: “Perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life” (Chopin).

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