

THE STYLE OF WRITING OF MARK TWAIN AND BRET HARTE: DIFFERENT BUT SIMILAR

The research contributes as well to the understanding of the culture and way of living of American people in the given period of time to which Harte and Twain refer in their works.

Key words: writing style, language of writing, comparative analysis.

Исследование включает в себя понимание культуры и образа жизни американского народа в определенный период времени, к которому Гарт и Твен ссылаются в своих работах.

Ключевые слова: стиль письма, язык написания, сравнительный анализ.

It is a well known statement that two people can look at the same thing but both see it in two different ways. The logic of the statement can be applied towards two prominent writers in American literature, in particular Mark Twain and Bret Harte. To note, in spite of different views and styles that can be even described as opposite Twain and Harte were friends with each other. Each of them possessed different style of expression in their works that added the uniqueness. Even though there are similarities the style of writing and language of both writers is not similar. Both writers exposed the nature of human beings and disadvantages of society but through different style and language of writing. This essay will review the similarities and differences of the style of writing through the comparative analysis of the early work of Mark Twain “The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” and

“Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” and the work of Bret Harte “Outcasts of Poker Flat”. The comparative analysis contributes as well to the understanding of the culture and way of living of American people in the given period of time to which Harte and Twain refer. The comparison will be made by looking at the different style of writing and language that both writers used to describe the way of living of American people.

The comparison of the style of Twain and Harte reveals the period of time in which both writers produced their works. The works of Mark Twain and Bret Harte chosen for the comparison in this essay brought both writers the success. Two works of Twain are compared to one work of Bret Harte because the focus of the style of Twain in those works varied while Harte’s style remained in general unchanged. Mark Twain in his works “The Notorious Jumping Frog of

Calaveras County” and “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” as well as Bret Harte in the work “Outcasts of Poker Flat” did not write about aristocracy. The unifying subject of both writers related to people who came from the lower levels of society. However writers made different emphasis while describing those people through different style including the way on how major heroes were introduced first in the stories.

It can be viewed that Mark Twain in his works depicted people as they are with all of their problems in comparison with Bret Harte who tried to idealize common people. For instance, in “The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” Twain describes Jim Smiley saying “if there was a dog-fight, he’d bet on it; if there was a cat-fight he’d bet on it; if there was two birds setting on a fence, he would bet which one would fly first”. Twain displays the characteristics of his hero through his actions at once without any intended omission so that readers can imagine the vivid picture of hero’s life. On the other side Bret Harte in “Outcasts of Poker Flat” did not provide the straight description of the type for each of the character in the novel. Thus, it can be seen that Mr. Oakhurst was “calm, handsome face”. However, that description does not allow understanding completely the inner world of the character. Later in the novel it is stated that “though of deserting his weaker companions never perhaps occurred to him” that describes the character as living according to the certain moral principles. Harte describes his character through the subtle implications that draw the whole nature of person through reading the novel from the beginning till the end.

Another technique that Harte uses in “Outcasts of Poker Flat” is a personification of nature through which he describes his heroes. For instance, Harte treats wind as an alive personage “who” “feared to waken them (outcasts)” as well as the sun “who” “saw the outcasts”. Bret Harte calls snow in the end of the story as “white-winged birds” that “settled about them (outcasts) as they slept”. Thus, the indirect indication at the change that occurred inside of the souls of outcasts, demonstrates, namely, their purification. On the contrary the “The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” does not mention nature as an alive character. Twain does not pay attention to the nature because people are the main heroes in Mark Twain’s story. Twain calls frog as “modest and straightforward” that makes him to be similar

to Harte’s style of personification with the only difference in subjects. However, later Twain adds the description of nature in “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn”. For instance, in the Chapter XV Finn describes the fog that separated Jim and Huck. In my opinion, through the fog Twain wanted to symbolize the social gap between Finn and Jim. Even though Finn spend his time with Jim he still did not overcome the prejudices towards Jim as a former slave, telling sometimes such things as “humble myself to a nigger” or “can’t learn a nigger to argue”. I think, Twain used the fog as a technique to say that even though it’s hard to see through the fog, to overcome it one can appeal only to the inside feelings but not to the eyes. Therefore the description of nature is used by both writers to provide better understanding of the essence of their works, but Twain compared to Harte does not resort constantly to this technique.

The language by which Twain and Harte wrote their stories, in my opinion, is the key element to understand the style of writers. Twain is known for “his mastery at distilling the rhythms and metaphors of oral speech into written prose”. The use of colloquial speech helps Twain to recreate the life of common people making them lively and full of energy. Thus in “The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” Twain denies the use of literary language calling Smiley as a “dangdest feller” who “cal’lated to educate” frog. In “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” Twain’s personages cut the words and pronounce them in their own manner saying “govment” instead of “government”, “I am rotten glad”, “if I’d a knowed”, thus speaking not according to the grammar rules. Such a way of writing allow to imagine those people as not being invented but as people who exist in reality. In comparison with Twain, Bret Harte uses lofty language and a lot of metaphors. Thus, in “Outcasts of Poker Flat” the word “curse” is replaced by such phrases as “Partheian volley of expletives” or “vituperative attempt...invested with a certain degree of sublimity”. Harte does not mention the word “death” replacing it with “passed quietly away” or “slept”. Harte uses such phrases as “a Sabbath lull in the air” or “Poker Flat was ‘after somebody’” to indicate the hostile mood of dwellers of Poker Flat. If Twain name all things as they are Bret Harte conceals the rude expressions and phrases widely spread among common people by euphemisms.

Furthermore through the language Harte and Twain depicted a certain kind of humor. Therefore Twain's work about frog is saturated with humor of people from the lower class. For instance, the major hero Smiley called his dog and frog by the names of well-known people, Daniel Webster and Andrew Jackson. Another example is an unceremonious way in which the narrator was met by Wheeler who just "blockaded him with his chair" and started his "monotonous narrative". According to some critics Twain used "the dry humor" that was "greedily consumed by his readers". However by age Twain gradually changed his style of narration and his latest work "The Letters from the Earth" reflects different style of writing of Twain related not to his "dry humor" but to satire. On the contrary, Bret Harte uses a subtle humor with delicate hints that is similar to irony. For instance, "Duchess.. declared her intention of going no further, and the party halted". Harte displays his character in this part as an aristocratic and capricious whom the Duchess was not in reality. The humor of Harte differed from Twain's in a way that it would combine "a sense of the absurdity with some sense of the sublimity and pathos of the theme".

While Twain's language is distinguished by its simplicity, Harte's language vice versa is too complicated. However this contrasting difference makes writers to be similar to each other. The "Outcasts of Poker Flat" as well as "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" and "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" is difficult to read and translate. For instance, in the beginning of "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" "a number of dialects" used in the book are enumerated by author. For instance, throughout the book it is hard to understand Jim who does not pronounce the whole words saying, "Den I reck'n'd I'd invest.." or "I warn't afeared; bekase I knowed ole missus en de wider..". Finn also pronounces some words in his own way of speaking, saying "afeard" instead of "afraid" or "le's" for "let's". The use of vernacular language and an attempt to depict the dialects by Mark Twain in his prose not only complicates the reading but also makes it almost impossible to provide proper translation. There is no use of dialects in "Outcasts of Poker Flat" but literary phrases and words that are not used in daily life. For instance, Harte uses such old English words as

"remonstrances", "ominous", "equanimity" as well as complicated phrases such as "haply the time was beguiled by an accordion". Therefore both Harte's language of writing and Mark Twain's language impede the reading and translation.

Also the style of narration of both writers differed from each other's as well. Harte uses the combination of a third person narration with the first side narration of a person who took part in the described events. For instance, in the beginning of the story Harte describes Oakhurst as an author but later uses the pronoun "I" therefore implying towards his involvement in the described events. Twain, conversely, uses the first person narration in both of his works "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" and "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" where the narrators are participants who describe their feelings themselves, not through the author's vision.

To conclude, Harte and Twain through their works demonstrated the uniqueness of each style of writing. Even though the works of Harte and Twain denied the very principles of writing techniques of each other, both writers contributed to the diversity of American literature. Both Harte and Twain managed to achieve their objectives of recreation of the peculiar sides of American culture and American history through the distinctive language and style of expression. Bookish language of Harte helps to be imbued with the atmosphere of harsh West and see it in a romantic way. Such a representation, in my opinion, helps to make history of that period still remembered by modern people. The colloquial language of Twain on the other hand helps to reproduce the daily life of people with all of their difficulties and ridiculous situations. To accomplish these objectives, each of the writers had to write in their own original manner. The stories "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" and "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" as well as Bret Harte's "Outcasts of Poker Flat" would lose their essence if writers tried to apply and imitate the manner of writing of each other. Me, personally, I would always laugh remembering the frog "full of quail shot" and Huckleberry Finn's statement to "take no stock in dead people" as well as feel sorrow reminiscing the "white-winged birds" flying over the outcasts of Poker Flat.

ВЕСТНИК МЕЖДУНАРОДНОГО УНИВЕРСИТЕТА КЫРГЫЗСТАНА

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