

POETICS OF THE SENTIMENTAL GIFT

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Abstract: In this article, sentimental (in sentimentalism, emotion is interpreted as the main standard that defines good and bad, determines the value of a person) gift poetics is revealed in the artistic analysis of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" by Beecher Stowe.

Key word: exchange of gifts, slaves, characters, a sentimental gift, cultural memory.

In the age of market relations, which has reached the highest level of abstraction and alienation from humanitarian and Christian values, Beecher Stowe contrasts relations between neighbors built on the basis of sympathy; the product in the novel is contrasted with a pure, selfless gift. The exchange of gifts, which is very important, occurs outside the market, within the domestic sphere or domestic economy: the ideal givers in Uncle Tom's Cabin are women, children and slaves. The gifts in the novel, in turn, can be roughly divided into "morally good" and "morally bad", using James Carrier's terminology to describe the modern gift. Thus, the gifts of the virtuous characters in the story, both white and black, are selfless and come from the heart. Aunt Chloe treats young George Shelby to dinner. George gives Tom a dollar. Tom makes various trinkets for the children and gives them to Eva. Dying Eve gives him a lock of her hair. Eliza gives her husband, George Harris, a dog, Carlo, which his cruel owner kills (In Russian literature, I. S. Turgenev's story "Mu-Mu" was written on this plot). The Byrd family and Quakers help the Harrises. Tom shares the collected cotton with a sick slave, Cassie brings water to the wounded Tom, etc.

On the contrary, the negative characters of the novel - slave owners and slave traders - are not able to understand what a selfless gift is; gifts for them are bribes. Legree promises Emmeline earrings in exchange for her favor. Slave trader Hailey is sincerely convinced that for a watch, ostrich feathers and other trinkets Mrs. Shelby will part with Eliza [1], and Eliza herself will easily be comforted from the loss of her only son if the mistress "gives her earrings, or a new dress, or some other little thing" [2]. Legree and Gailey understand the exchange of gifts as nothing more than a mutually beneficial transaction; they are sincerely convinced that things are of value and interest in themselves, not only for the "savages" who are greedy for trinkets, but also for their white owners (in Hailey's words about Mrs. Shelby one can see outright disrespect for the lady - the conviction that a woman ready to sacrifice moral principles for a watch or ostrich feathers).

Unlike a product or a false gift (bribe, tip, etc.), a sentimental gift, as we know, is directly related to the donor, being part of him. So, Mrs. Bird gives Eliza what constitutes her most valuable property (of course, not in a commercial, but in a sentimental sense) - the things of her deceased child. These are not just things, Beecher Stowe emphasizes: "The mother who reads this book! Karen Sanchez-Eppler compares the closet-grave to an open wound: to open a grave is literally to open a wound that has not yet healed (or rather, a wound that will never heal)¹. Little Henry's clothes and toys are a metonymy of maternal grief, its ultimate expression. By giving them to Eliza for another Henry/Harry (the doubling of names, generally characteristic of The Shack, is deeply symbolic in this case), Mrs. Bird parts with the most precious part of herself. At the same time, Mrs. Bird's gift produces a revolution in the mind of her hapless senator husband, who passed the Fugitive Slave Law, protecting the sacred right of property:

But behind those letters that make up the word "fugitive", there was nothing for him - except a small newspaper picture depicting a man with a walking stick and a bundle of things, and below - the signature: "Run away from the owner." But the power of the impact of true grief, which is expressed in a pleading look, in a trembling thin human hand, in a voice full of despair and

¹ Sanchez-Eppler K. Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetoric of Feminism and Abolition // Culture of Sentiment. Op. cit. P. 92-114.

torment - he did not have to experience this on himself. He had never even thought that the fugitive could be either an unfortunate mother or a defenseless child, like, for example, the one who was given the late Henry's cap - such a familiar little cap! [4].

The little cap of a dead child, which a grief-stricken mother gave to the son of another unfortunate mother, makes the abstract letter of the law concrete and visible, gives an indistinguishable picture from a newspaper recognizable and precious features. Mrs. Bird's gift is invested with rhetorical, performative powers of persuasion; the cap outweighs all the serious reasons and compelling arguments that motivated the senator to pass the unjust law.

The sentimental gift par excellence in the novel is little Eve's golden locks, which she distributes on her deathbed to her white relatives and black slaves, thereby equalizing both races in the face of death. As already mentioned, the curl is the perfect synecdoche gift. Unlike material things, it has no value other than symbolic. The only purpose of a curl is to preserve the memory of who it belonged to. An incorruptible part of the body and therefore a symbol of immortality, the lock become a universal fetish, and Beecher Stowe exploits its sentimental potential to the fullest, making Eve's locks both a gift and a memento mori.

...Accept a small gift from me, and let it remind you of me. I want to give each of you a strand of my hair, and, looking at them, do not forget that I loved you, that I went to heaven and want to meet you there.

Is it possible to describe how the blacks, with tears and sobs, crowded around the bed and accepted from the girl's hands the last sign of her love for them! They knelt down, sobbed and said words of prayer, kissed the hem of her clothes. How many tender words, along with prayers and blessings, she received from the sympathetic fathers and children of the African tribe![5]

The scene is reminiscent of religious worship of the saint: the simple-minded and sympathetic blacks, receiving a priceless gift from Eve, kneel before her and kiss the hem of her clothes. At the same time, despite the hierarchy of the episode, with pronounced racial overtones (black admirers and a white saint, whose worship borders on idolatry), it allows for the reciprocity of interracial exchange: the blacks give Eve their love in return, pouring out tender words on her.

The pseudo-religious nature of the fetish curl is revealed in the course of the further narrative. Having bought Tom, Legree takes away his treasures, George Shelby's dollar and Eva's lock of hair.

At that moment the door opened slightly and Sambo appeared on the threshold. He stepped forward and with a bow handed Legree some kind of paper parcel.

- What do you have there, dog? asked Simon.

- Talisman (token), owner.

- What?

"It's the kind of thing that niggas get from witches." She takes away the pain when they are spanked. And Tom wore it around his neck, on a black cord[6].

Illiterate and superstitious blacks, whose cultural memory refers to the shamanism and witchcraft of the archaic community, see witchcraft in Uncle Tom's talismans. Lynn Wardley, analyzing the fetishism of Beecher Stowe's novel, shows through the example of Eve's lock of hair how "sentimental things are endowed with the qualities of sacred relics," combining "the new Protestant religion of sentimentalism and domesticity with Catholic and African rituals."² The lock of hair in Uncle Tom's Cabin is a spectacular example of how an archaic archetype shines through the image of a sentimental gift: just as a ceremonial gift contains the "how" of the giver, a talisman of love and friendship contains a piece of the immortal soul of the one whose memory it is invoked keep. Magical animism in Beecher Stowe's novel is expressed in metaphor: "From there [from the bundle] fell a silver dollar and a long golden lock of hair; she, as if alive, wrapped herself around Legree's finger" [6].

² Berlant, L. Poor Eliza / L. Berlant // American Literature. – 1998. – Vol. 70. – P. 635-668.

The ideology of the sentimental gift that Beecher Stowe preaches in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has its shadow side. The image of a disinterested, altruistic, pure gift appears at least problematic in those episodes where the slaves themselves act as gifts. Of course, in the eyes of the abolitionist, this was as scandalous, immoral and ungodly a practice as buying, selling or other transactions carried out with human "goods". In the words of abolitionist author Edmund Quincy, such practices are "unquestionable, unimpeachable evidence of the true nature of slavery."³ If the gift exchange was thought by the sentimentalist as the basis of ideal and truly humanistic relations between people, then the gift of "man" could only be a perversion and distortion of the very foundations of sentimental ethics. In Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, however, we encounter ethically ambiguous scenes: the transactions it describes are depicted to a certain extent as "humane" in relation to their objects - slaves act as both gifts and subjects which turns out to be a benefit.

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