

Medical Case as a Plot-Basing Element of *Sybil* by Flora Rheta Schreiber¹

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the consideration of the features of plot construction in American prose about dissociative identity disorder using the example of F.R. Schreiber Flora Rheta Schreiber "Sibyl" (*Sybil*, 1973). The basis of the plot of the work is the history of mental illness (medical history). Dissociative personality disorder leads to the realization by society of the end of the 20th century of a new psychological state in which a person can be. Such a state, when one consciousness can exist in several states representing different personalities, puts a person on the line between real and fantastic. The artistic interpretation of the disorder carries similar characteristics. The fantasticness of the described is contrary to the scientific component, in this confrontation, the scientific is trying to control the fictional, rationalize it, fit into the real. Psychoanalysis is becoming an indispensable attribute for describing and understanding events. The cause of the disorder is a personal childhood injury, from which a person seeks to fence himself off. Here we see the influence of Z. Freud, whose psychoanalytic practice, including hypnosis, analysis of the events of the past, analysis of dreams, is reflected both in events and in the structural organization of the novel.

Keywords: Narrative; American Prose; Psychoanalysis; Dissociative Personality Disorder; Documentary Prose.

1. Introduction

Consideration of the novel "Sibyl" *Sybil* F. R Schreiber Flora Rheta Schreiber in the contact study of American prose of the XX century is due to the fact that the novel is the first in a number of non-fiction works on dissociative personality disorder. The phenomenon faced by the American public was not previously described in the canons of documentary prose, thus this is a precedent for depicting

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the topic of dissociative disorder in non-fiction literature. Many significant aspects of the plot feature of the novel are not disclosed in scientific literature, which, together with its importance in the history of American literature, allows us to talk about the relevance of the study, filling the gap in the body of literary works.

2. Methods

In this article, we rely on some research on the problem of traumatic experience (Strukova & Karasik, 2015) and on a number of literary methods. This is a narrative analysis of the narrative text (Schmid, 2003; Schmid, 2009; Bal, 1985), structural analysis (Barth, 2000; Genette, 1998; Karasik, 2002). In addition, we focus on a number of literary studies in which either the issues of interest to us are considered (Afanasev et al., 2018; Greaves, 1993), or the work (Jafari, 2013; Sheralieva, 2016). or genres (Sibgatullina et al., 2018) are analyzed. In addition, we took into account some medical studies (Esin et al., 2017; Putri et al., 2019). This approach was chosen in order to most fully reveal the influence of the history of the disease on the organization of the plot, showing both the author's intention (with the degree of certainty with which we can argue about it) and the features of its manifestation in the discourse.

3. Results and Discussion

The novel *Sybil* (*Sybil*, 1973) was written by an American writer and journalist Flora Rita Schreiber Flora Rheta Schreiber based on the story of Shirley Ardell Mason Shirley Ardell Mason (1923 - 1998. Mason Mason is one of the first whose history of psychological disorder is widespread. The novel captures the girl's life, and it is precisely the history of the disease and treatment that becomes the driving force of the story. Cornelia Wilbur Cornelia B. Wilbur acted as the attending physician of Mason; she revealed 16 different personality states in Mason Mason, each of which had its own characteristic features. The novel "Sibyl" *Sybil* was the first fiction to document the history of the use of psychoanalysis to treat multiple personality disorders. This is one of the works devoted to the description of the life of a person suffering from dissociative personality disorder. In this series, we can also mention the "Three Faces of Eve" *The Three Faces of Eve*. The Multiple Minds of Billy Milligan *the Minds of Billy Milligan*.

A number of narrative levels or situations are highlighted in the text (for example, the preface "from the author", the doctor's notes on treatment), which are designed to create the appearance of frankness, reliability, and introduce scientific discourse.

The storytelling events in the novel are divided into several levels. We can distinguish both the main plan of events (the immediate actions and thoughts of the characters that we read about in the novel) and the plan of the story told. The story is

framed by a preface and conclusion from the author, who in the context of the work becomes the main storyteller. The level at which such a narrator is located, J. Zhenet calls extra-diagic, that is, beyond the scope of the events narrated (Genette, 1998). The preface speaks about the reasons for writing this novel, in conclusion - about the events from the lives of heroes that fall out of the story told in the main text. These parts introduce some bibliographic discourse; they can be described as generalizing, historiographic, and frank. Their goal is to create the impression of a life story.

After the release, the novel was criticized and attacked by the public. The main causes of disagreement: excessive frankness (description of unnecessarily heavy scenes of violence), as well as distrust (dissociative personality disorder, like other mental illnesses, is difficult to external verification). The introduction of a bibliographic discourse, which is generalizing and frank, addresses the problems above, creating a situation in which the narrator seems to be trying to convey the story in more detail and plausibly.

The scientific side of the medical history in the work is revealed through the eyes of Dr. Wilbur. In this story, the doctor investigates, puts forward theories about the nature and causes of the disease, conducts psychotherapy sessions for the patient, and keeps diaries of the disease. All components of these parts of history contain a certain component of scientific discourse, thereby creating the impression of authenticity. You can also find a vivid example of medical discourse here: episodes with a doctor can be described as sacred, ethical, medical.

Similar to the introduction and conclusion from the author, we see the second situation of comprehension and communication of events, namely the notes and thoughts of Dr. Cornelia Wilbur. In most episodes, the text is a diary that records the patient's condition, where the doctor makes possible diagnoses. In these passages we can note a clear medical discourse. Firstly, the content of the described events is sacred. For the reader, these are doctor's diary notes about the patient. The doctor makes these notes for himself, registering the treatment process in them. Therefore, the reader seems to be able to spy on what is happening in the office of the attending physician. Secondly, we can talk about ethics. Ethics is felt in the limited spaces in which history is enclosed. These are again diaries, also almost all meetings between the doctor and the patient are held in offices, the door of which is locked from outsiders. Interestingly, in the work we see 2 different situations of communication with the doctor. In one of them, the young Sibyl comes to the reception with her mother, then she does not have the opportunity to talk about her problems, since sacredness and ethics are not respected - an outsider can hear the story (in the girl's childhood, the mother was an outsider). In another, there are no strangers, only a doctor and a patient meet. In this situation, the girl manages to reveal herself, which will lead to recovery. Third, medical discourse is created using medical terminology. Dr. Wilbur studies the history of dissociative disorders, goes through books on this

topic, tries to compare the patient with a case (for example, an episode in the library, doctor's diaries).

Thus, it can be argued that one of the central elements in the construction of the plot and narrative is the medical discourse, which is based on Dr. Wilbur.

The doctor becomes the center of two spaces - a library and an office for conducting sessions. When staying from these spaces, the heroes must observe medical rituals. Therefore, we can talk about the medical discourse included in the fabric of the work when creating these spaces.

When we see a doctor in the library, the following characteristic features of the story can be noted: solitude (the doctor comes to the library when no one is already there), medical informational content (the doctor gets acquainted with scientific works in psychology). Thus, the doctor performs the ritual of knowledge. During the sessions, the door always closes in his office, the patient lays down on the couch, the doctor records the patient's speech on the recorder, gives the patient medication. We can talk about these rituals as indispensable parts of the medical discourse based on the medical history that permeates the novel.

It is impossible to deny the influence of psychoanalysis on the plot, it manifests itself in the novel both at the structural level (the narration is regularly interrupted by exposure, creating a kind of ring system), and on the content (the history of the treatment itself, the role of dreams in the text).

Structurally, the piece is atemporal. The narrative constantly makes circular motions, rotating between the present and the past. Two time layers are intended to create an overall picture, complementing each other. The development of each of its own is connected with the other, they go in parallel. On the one hand, the present (history of treatment) is presented, on the other - the past (medical history). In the case of the history of the disease, we see a history that opens in the opposite direction. The purpose of this story is to find the underlying cause. Development in it is the gradual disappearance of gaps. If at the beginning of the novel the memories are quite inaccurate, there are many white spots in them, then with the course of treatment the memories become more detailed. The second layer is the history of treatment. The purpose of this story is to restore the patient's identity. The development in this story is the disappearance of additional personalities. If at the beginning of the novel we see the heroine in the guise of other characters and speaking on her behalf, occupying her consciousness, then by the end they disappear, only Sibyl remains.

During treatment, the doctor uses methods related to the practice of psychoanalysis. They include hypnosis, dream analysis, the use of psychotropic drugs to introduce the patient to the desired state. In the novel we can see such sessions and their results (a doctor writing down what he heard in his diary). The entire narrative of the patient's past is visions that she observes during the sessions. Also a turning point for the development of the character is a dream in which she saves kittens. In this dream, Sibyl finds a kitten and his headless mother cat. Sibyl decides to throw

her mother into the river, having done this, she scolds herself that she has not thrown far enough. Sibyl discovers that the kitten is not alone - there are six of them. In a dream, she decides to find someone who would show her how to care for kittens. The parallels with the main story are quite understandable (the cat is the mother of Sibyl, the first kitten is Sibyl, the rest of the kittens are her identities, the sheet the kittens are wrapped in is the need for treatment, the person who needs help is the doctor). In throwing a cat into the river, we can see the direct execution of the Oedipus complex, only the girl has the need to fight her mother and defeat her in order to overcome the difficulties of sexual development.

Thus, psychoanalysis is an important part of the plot, influencing both the structure of the novel, creating two time layers connected with each other, and the content, introducing a dream motive into the text, which allows directing the character's development.

Another of the effects of psychoanalysis on romance is the theme of sexuality. In Sibyl, the main character's sexuality goes through three stages: sexual abuse in childhood, abandonment of one's gender identity in adulthood, and the return of femininity as a metaphor for healing. That is, the attitude of the main character to herself in the context of her interaction with the opposite sex.

The cause of the development of a dissociative personality disorder in the heroine is a too early encounter with sexuality. She sees her parents in bed in childhood, after - the mother carries out acts of violence against her daughter. Such a childhood leads the heroine to reject sexuality. This can be seen in two aspects of her life. First, we see the destructiveness of Sibyl in the context of her relationship with the opposite sex. The girl intentionally destroys the relationship, fearing to succumb to her femininity. Secondly, we see the rejection of femininity in what kind of identity Sibyl tries on instead of the one that she has. Often these are female images, but Sibyl can become a male person. Among her personalities are Mike and Sid. These are masculine images that are copied from a single masculine example, familiar to Sibyl - her father. Sibyl becomes Mike or Sid when she needs to solve a problem related to home improvement (for example, fasten a shelf). Thus, we can say that the personality of Sibyl is gender. She is more role-playing - Sibyl tends to "put on" a personality that can solve a particular problem. The fact that an example of a solution to this role is the identity of the other sex does not stop Sibyl. The symbolic murder of the mother is a way to be cured, and an indicator of willingness to do this is reconciliation with the father, the opportunity to see him outside his gender. We can talk about the implementation of the Oedipus complex (or Electra complex). Reconciliation with the father occurs when Sibyl is already recovering, she realizes herself as a woman, breaks out of a childhood state that does not allow her to realize her sexuality. The symbolic murder of the mother (the mother dies long before the start of treatment, but Sibyl cannot accept her death and continues to feel her tyranny), occurs in two moments. Firstly, this is a dream about a cat, described earlier, in which the heroine

gets rid of her dead mother. Secondly, this is her cry: *“I hate her. I hate that bitch. I want to kill my mother. Even if she is my mother. I want her dead! I hate her, do you hear? I HATE HER!”* (Schreiber, 1973). The cry in this case becomes more real than the real murder and leads Sybil to a cure. The importance of this moment is also indicated by the fact that we see a change in the character in the nature of his speech. Sibyl in the novel always seems restrained and quiet. Screaming for her is an unimaginable way of expressing herself. We can talk about complete healing when we find out that Sibyl has a permanent partner and she is ready to start a family.

The study of sexuality is one of the basic principles of psychoanalysis, so we can talk about the impact of psychoanalysis on the plot of the disease, in which one of the main driving forces is finding your identity (both general psychological and gender).

4. Summary

Thus, the medical history becomes the basis of the novel about dissociative personality disorder. Features of the disease affect both the structure of the plot and the immediate content.

It is necessary to note the bibliographic and medical discourses arising in the novel. Each of them is associated with certain tasks that the text solves. Bibliography creates the character of authenticity and frankness, embeds the novel in the framework of the non-fiction genre. Medical discourse creates a touch of scientificness, making the content reliable. It also makes the story more intimate and intriguing, giving the events the character of a riddle that needs to be solved.

A significant part of the story is the influence of psychoanalysis on the treatment of the disease. It introduces the context of sexuality. The solution to the problems posed in the novel largely comes down to finding one's gender identity.

5. Conclusions

The prospect of this study is the study of the influence of the history of the disease in the context of a larger body of work of 20th century American literature on dissociative personality disorder.

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