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CHRONOTOPE, VOICE, SYMBOL: AESTHETIC FUNCTIONS OF THE POST-APOCALYPTIC HERO CONCEPT

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Annotatsiya. Maqolada K.Makkartining “The Road” (2006), K.Uaytxedning “Zone one” (2011) va P.Xellerning “Dog stars” (2012) romanlarida qahramon konsepsiyasini yaratuvchi uch badiiy komponent – xronotop, hikoya ovozi va ramz – hamda ularning badiiy-estetik funksiyalari qiyosiy tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotning nazariy asosini M.Baxtinning xronotop nazariyasi, J.Jenettning hikoya ovozi haqidagi qarashlari, D.Quronovning ramz talqini va Ya.Mukarjovskiyning estetik funksiya konsepsiyasi tashkil etadi, tahlil qiyosiy metod va matnni sinchkov o‘qish usuliga tayanadi. Tahlil natijasida uchala romanda falokatdan keyingi qahramon bir xil vositalar orqali, biroq turlicha estetik maqsadda qurilgani aniqlandi: Makkartida yo‘l xronotopi, minimalistik nutq va olov ramzi o‘quvchida hamdardlik uyg‘otib, axloqiy o‘zakni tasdiqlaydi; Uaytxedda shahar xronotopi, kinoyaviy ovoz va devor ramzi tiklanish mafkurasini fosh etuvchi tanqidiy masofa yaratadi; Xellerda aerodrom va osmon xronotopi, uzuq-yuluq birinchi shaxs hikoyasi va yulduz turkumlari ramzi lirik tasalli va insoniy aloqani tiklash vazifasini bajaradi. Xulosada badiiy shakl qahramon konsepsiyasining shunchaki ifoda vositasi emas, balki uning mazmunini belgilovchi omil ekani asoslanadi va bu post-apokaliptik romanni qiyosiy o‘rganish uchun yangi istiqbol ochadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: post-apokaliptik roman, qahramon konsepsiyasi, xronotop, hikoya ovozi, ramz, estetik funksiya, Makkarti, Uaytxed, Xeller, Amerika adabiyoti.

Аннотация. В статье проводится сравнительный анализ трёх художественных компонентов, формирующих концепцию героя в романах К. Маккарти «Дорога» (2006), К. Уайтхеда «Зона один» (2011) и П. Хеллера «Собачьи звёзды» (2012), – хронотопа, повествовательного голоса и символа, – а также их художественно-эстетических функций. Теоретической основой исследования служат теория хронотопа М. М. Бахтина, концепция повествовательного голоса Ж. Женетта, трактовка символа Д. Куронова и учение Я. Мукаржовского об эстетической функции. Установлено, что во всех трёх романах постапокалиптический герой создаётся сходными средствами, но с различной эстетической целью: у Маккарти хронотоп дороги, минималистская речь и символ огня вызывают у читателя сострадание и утверждают нравственное ядро личности; у Уайтхеда городской хронотоп, ироничный голос и символ стены создают критическую дистанцию, разоблачающую идеологию восстановления; у Хеллера хронотоп аэродрома и неба, фрагментарное повествование от первого лица и символ созвездий выполняют функцию лирического утешения и восстановления человеческой связи. Делается вывод, что художественная форма не просто выражает концепцию героя, но определяет её содержание.

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Ключевые слова: постапокалиптический роман, концепция героя, хронотоп, повествовательный голос, символ, эстетическая функция, Маккарти, Уайтхед, Хеллер, американская литература.

CHRONOTOPE, VOICE, SYMBOL: AESTHETIC FUNCTIONS OF THE POST-APOCALYPTIC HERO CONCEPT

Abstract. The article offers a comparative analysis of three artistic components that construct the hero concept in Cormac McCarthy's The Road (2006), Colson Whitehead's Zone One (2011) and Peter Heller's The Dog Stars (2012): the chronotope, narrative voice and symbol, and their aesthetic functions. The study draws on Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope, Genette's category of voice, Quronov's account of the symbol and Mukařovský's concept of the aesthetic function. The three novels build the post-apocalyptic hero with comparable means but for different aesthetic ends. In McCarthy, the chronotope of the road, minimalist speech and the symbol of fire evoke compassion and affirm an ethical core. In Whitehead, the urban chronotope, an ironic voice and the symbol of the wall create a critical distance that exposes the ideology of reconstruction. In Heller, the airfield and the sky, a fragmented first-person narration and the symbol of the constellations offer lyrical consolation and restore human connection. Artistic form, the article concludes, does not merely express the hero concept but shapes it.

Keywords: post-apocalyptic novel, hero concept, chronotope, narrative voice, symbol, aesthetic function, McCarthy, Whitehead, Heller, American literature.

INTRODUCTION

In the first decades of the twenty-first century the post-apocalyptic novel moved from the margins of genre fiction to the centre of literary culture. Heather J. Hicks links the appearance of a series of post-apocalyptic novels by well-known anglophone authors to a set of historical transformations: the globalised economy that intensified after the Cold War, the recognition of anthropogenic global warming, the attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror [7, p. 2]. John Hay goes further and observes that it has become common to suggest that "we are no longer expecting but actually inhabiting the apocalypse" [5, p. 9]. In such a cultural situation the question of what remains of the human being after the end of the world becomes one of the central questions of contemporary fiction, and the hero of the post-apocalyptic novel becomes the main instrument through which writers answer it.

Criticism has paid considerable attention to the ideas embodied in these heroes. Hicks reads The Road as a revision of Robinson Crusoe in which the values of the son are balanced against the father's heroic mission to "carry the fire" of Western civilisation [7, p. 79], and interprets Zone One through the interplay of kitsch and the apocalyptic sublime [7, pp. 105–106]. O. F. Zhilevich treats The Road as a philosophical allegory of the apocalypse in which loneliness, memory and survival come to the fore [12]. The Dog Stars, despite its popularity, has received almost no scholarly attention. What these studies share is a focus on what the hero means; far less attention has been paid to how the hero is made, that is, to the artistic means through which the writer's view of the human being is turned into a living image.

This study proceeds from the understanding of the literary hero formulated by Lidiya Ginzburg, for whom the writer, through the hero, "models the human being" on the basis of features selected from a particular point of view [4, p. 5]. The hero concept is therefore understood here as the writer's artistic view of the human being expressed through the image of the hero. If the hero is a model, the means of its

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construction are not neutral: they determine which features of the human are made visible and how the reader responds to them.

The aim of the article is to identify the artistic components that construct the hero concept in three American post-apocalyptic novels and to determine their aesthetic functions. The study addresses two questions: (1) through which artistic means is the post-apocalyptic hero constructed in The Road, Zone One and The Dog Stars? (2) what effect do these means produce on the reader, and how does this effect shape the hero concept of each novel?

METHODS

The material of the study consists of three novels: Cormac McCarthy's The Road (2006), Colson Whitehead's Zone One (2011) and Peter Heller's The Dog Stars (2012). The three works were written within the same decade, belong to the same national literature and share the situation of a lone survivor in a ruined America, which makes differences between them attributable to authorial strategy rather than to period or tradition. Quotations are given from the electronic editions listed in the references, and page numbers refer to these editions.

Of the many artistic components through which a hero is built, three were selected because each corresponds to a distinct dimension of the hero concept. The chronotope reveals the hero's place in the world; narrative voice reveals the hero's inner world and the author's attitude towards him; the symbol condenses the hero's values and his relation to the lost past. Each component is approached through an established theoretical framework.

The chronotope is understood after Mikhail Bakhtin as "the essential interconnection of temporal and spatial relations artistically mastered in literature" [1, p. 121; translation ours]. Bakhtin attributes to the chronotope a plot-forming significance, since chronotopes are "the organising centres of the main plot events of the novel", and a representational one, since in them time "acquires a sensuously visible character" [1, p. 282; translation ours]. Of particular relevance are his descriptions of the chronotope of the road, where "time, as it were, flows into space and runs along it" [1, p. 276], and of the threshold, the chronotope of crisis and of a turning point in life [1, p. 280].

Narrative voice is analysed after Gérard Genette, who distinguishes the question "who sees?" from the question "who speaks?" [3, p. 186] and treats voice as the relation of the narrating instance to the story [3, p. 213]. His distinction between the heterodiegetic narrator, absent from the story he tells, the homodiegetic narrator, present as a character, and the autodiegetic narrator, who is the hero of his own story [3, pp. 244–245], serves as the basic typology of the analysis.

The symbol is understood after Dilmurod Quronov, for whom the symbol differs from allegory in that, within a given context, it is used both in its literal and in its figurative meaning [10, p. 288]. This understanding is productive for post-apocalyptic fiction, where objects of everyday life acquire symbolic weight without losing their material function.

The aesthetic function is approached through Jan Mukařovský, for whom a fact of art, such as the actor's gesture, is one "whose dominant function is aesthetic" [9, p. 291]. Most important for this study is his claim that "it is the tension between a work's non-aesthetic values and a community's system of values that alone enables the work to have an effect on the relationship between man and reality, an effect that is the most fundamental purpose of art" [9, p. 302]. The aesthetic function of each component is therefore identified through the kind of tension it creates for the reader. The comparative method and close reading are used throughout.

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RESULTS

Chronotope. In The Road the hero exists in the chronotope of the road, but in a form that inverts its classical meaning. For Bakhtin the road is the place of chance encounters where people of all ranks and destinies cross paths [1, p. 276]. In McCarthy's ash-covered America the road has lost this social diversity: almost every encounter is a threat, and the road leads south only because "there'd be no surviving another winter here" [8, p. 11]. Historical time has been abolished along with society. The man "thought the month was October but he wasnt sure. He hadnt kept a calendar for years" [8, p. 11]. The only precisely dated moment is the catastrophe itself: "The clocks stopped at 1:17" [8, p. 38]. This moment functions as a frozen threshold in Bakhtin's sense, a crisis that does not pass into a new life but extends indefinitely. The landscape is reduced to three words: "Barren, silent, godless" [8, p. 11]. The traces of the vanished world survive only in abandoned interiors. In one of them the man sits "by a gray window in the gray light in an abandoned house in the late afternoon and read old newspapers while the boy slept", and the narrator draws the conclusion that the catastrophe has made visible: "The frailty of everything revealed at last" [8, p. 25]. Space in The Road preserves the past only as ruins, and time no longer connects this past with any future. The hero of The Road is thus placed in a world without a future and without a destination, where movement itself becomes the only form of existence.

Zone One shifts the action from the open road to the enclosed space of Manhattan and compresses it into three days, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The city is not a neutral setting but a chronotope of memory. The novel opens with the hero's childhood dream: "He always wanted to live in New York" [11, p. 8]. From the fifteenth floor the towers appear as "a collection of figments and notions of things" [11, p. 12]. Time in the zone is the time of bureaucratic reconstruction, as soldiers and sweepers clear the city block by block for the future "American Phoenix" [11, p. 54]. The present of the novel is constantly interrupted by memories of the catastrophe, which the survivors call "Last Night", and by images of the pre-catastrophic routine. In an office the sweepers clear, the chairs are still tucked under the desks, as they were left by the cleaners "on their last night of work, the last sane evening in the world" [11, p. 12]. The past is thus present in the city as a museum of interrupted lives. The wall that separates the cleared zone from the dead becomes the boundary of this chronotope, and its collapse at the end of the novel completes it: "When the wall fell, it fell quickly, as if it had been waiting for this moment, as if it had been created for the very instant of its failure" [11, p. 181]. The hero of Zone One is placed in a world that pretends to have a future, but whose future proves to be an illusion.

The Dog Stars constructs a third type of chronotope, at once horizontal and vertical. On the ground it is a closed circle around an abandoned country airfield: "Eight miles of open ground to the mountain front, the first trees. That is our perimeter. Our safety zone" [6, p. 12]. Time here is counted precisely: "we are nine years out" [6, p. 14]. In the air the hero's small plane opens a vertical dimension, and from above the land reveals the slow return of nature: "How fast it turns back to grass and ground" [6, p. 28]. The plot of the novel is set in motion by a meeting that takes place not on a road but in the air: a broken radio transmission from Grand Junction, "the voice older, kind, concerned, like a grandparent calling up a steep flight of stairs" [6, p. 36]. Bakhtin notes that the chronotope of meeting often performs a compositional function and serves as the beginning, culmination or ending of a plot [1, p. 134]. In The Dog Stars the voice of another human being becomes such a beginning: it draws the hero out of his perimeter and starts the journey that ends in a new community. Unlike McCarthy's road and Whitehead's wall, the airfield is a home, and flight makes it possible to leave it and come back. The hero of The Dog Stars lives in a world where time has resumed its course and space can still be explored.

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Voice. The three novels differ most sharply in their narrative voice. The Road is told by a heterodiegetic narrator, but the narration is internally focalised through the man, so that the question "who sees?" is answered by the father while "who speaks?" is answered by an impersonal voice. Dialogue is stripped of quotation marks and reduced to a minimum. The characters' speech often consists of a single word, as in the bedtime exchange that ends: "Okay what? / Nothing. Just okay" [8, p. 15]. At the moral centre of the novel the boy asks: "Are we still the good guys?" and the father answers: "Yes. We're still the good guys" [8, p. 52]. The narrator himself registers the erosion of language: "The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion", until "the sacred idiom" is left "shorn of its referents and so of its reality" [8, p. 59]. The sparse voice thus imitates the condition of the world it describes.

Zone One also uses a heterodiegetic narrator focalised through one character, but its voice is the opposite of McCarthy's. It is ironic, digressive and saturated with the language of bureaucracy and advertising. Even the hero is known only by a nickname: "They called him Mark Spitz nowadays" [11, p. 12]. Survivors suffer from "PASD", a post-apocalyptic stress disorder, and the narrator remarks that, as before the catastrophe, a person's own symptoms were "a mark of one's individuality" [11, p. 29]. The authorities rename refugee camps and survivors with optimistic labels, so that a "traumatized herd" becomes the "American Phoenix" [11, p. 69]. The voice keeps the hero and the reader at a distance from the official discourse of recovery and exposes its emptiness.

The Dog Stars is told by an autodiegetic narrator in Genette's sense, the hero speaking about himself in the first person. His voice is fragmented and associative from its very first lines: "I keep the Beast running, I keep the 100 low lead on tap, I foresee attacks. I am young enough, I am old enough" [6, p. 9]. The narrator himself explains the brokenness of his speech: after "two straight weeks of fever", he says, "I know it cooked my brains" [6, p. 13]. The broken syntax is therefore not only a stylistic feature but a trace of trauma, and the reader receives the world through the consciousness of a wounded person. Dialogue, like thought, is rendered without quotation marks, so that the speech of others is absorbed into the hero's own voice. When his only neighbour, Bangley, threatens to shoot the dog, the hero recalls: "I said You shoot the dog we all die" [6, p. 18]. The world of the novel exists only as it passes through the speech of the narrator, and this closeness produces a strong sense of intimacy between the hero and the reader.

Symbol. In each novel one central symbol condenses the hero's values and his relation to the past. In The Road this symbol is fire. The phrase "we're carrying the fire" is repeated by father and son as a formula of identity [8, p. 55]. Fire is literally the means of warmth and survival and at the same time the figurative sign of the human core that must be preserved. Before his death the father tells the son: "You have to carry the fire", and when the boy asks where it is, he answers: "It's inside you. It was always there" [8, p. 170]. In Quronov's terms, fire remains an object and becomes a value at once. The novel ends with another image of a lost world, the brook trout whose backs bore "maps of the world in its becoming" [8, p. 175].

In Zone One the central symbols are the dust and the wall. The first part of the novel bears an epigraph from Walter Benjamin: "The gray layer of dust covering things has become their best part" [11, p. 7]. The zombies who remain frozen in the places of their former lives, the "stragglers", turn the city into "an army of mannequins" [11, p. 44]. The wall literally protects the zone and figuratively stands for the fragile façade of a society that believes in its own restoration. Its fall is followed by the hero's last decision: "He opened the door and walked into the sea of the dead" [11, p. 210].

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In The Dog Stars the central symbol is the starry sky. The hero once had a book on the stars but lost it, so he made up his own constellations: "I made some for the animals that once were", and one for his dead wife, Melissa [6, p. 16]. In the final pages he names the winter constellations together with Cima, the woman he has found, and adds a new one: "I name one for a scrappy, fish loving dog. I still dream Jasper is alive" [6, p. 273]. The constellations are literally stars and figuratively a map of memory on which the lost world is preserved. The trout, which also appears in McCarthy's final paragraph, plays a related role here: the hero admits that he "didn't cry until the last trout swam upriver" [6, p. 9].

The results of the analysis are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Artistic components of the hero concept in the three novels

Component	The Road	Zone One	The Dog Stars
Chronotope	Road without destination; frozen threshold (1:17)	Manhattan behind the wall; three days of reconstruction	Airfield perimeter and sky; time counted again
Voice	Heterodiegetic, internally focalised; minimalist speech	Heterodiegetic, ironic and digressive	Autodiegetic, fragmented first person
Symbol	Fire	Dust and the wall	Constellations
Aesthetic effect	Compassion; affirmation of an ethical core	Critical distance; exposure of illusion	Lyrical consolation; restored connection

DISCUSSION

The results show that the three novels construct their heroes with comparable means: each places the hero in a distinctive chronotope, gives him a particular voice and condenses his values in a central symbol. The aesthetic effect of these means, however, differs radically, and it is this effect that determines the hero concept of each novel. Mukařovský's idea that the effect of art arises from the tension between the values of the work and those of the community [9, p. 302] helps to explain the difference.

In The Road the tension arises between a world dominated by violence and cannibalism and a father and son who refuse to become "bad guys". The minimalist voice leaves gaps that the reader must fill, and the reader fills them with compassion. The symbol of fire turns this compassion into an ethical statement: the human being is defined not by the world around him but by what he carries inside. The aesthetic function of McCarthy's means is thus to affirm the possibility of an ethical choice where all external grounds for it have disappeared. This explains why the existential reading of the father as a figure who creates meaning in a meaningless world is so persuasive.

In Zone One the tension arises between the official discourse of recovery and the reality of a dead city. Whitehead's ironic voice and the symbol of the wall do not invite compassion; they invite suspicion. The reader is placed at a distance from the hero and from the society he serves and is led to see that the "American Phoenix" repeats the illusions of the pre-catastrophic world. Hicks's observation that the novel is structured by an interaction of kitsch and the apocalyptic sublime [7, p. 106] can be specified here: kitsch is the language of the reconstruction, and the sublime breaks through when the wall falls. The

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aesthetic function of Whitehead's means is critical and demystifying, and the hero who walks into "the sea of the dead" embodies a traumatised consciousness that can no longer believe in restoration.

In The Dog Stars the tension arises between the loneliness of the survivor and his need for others. The fragmented voice conveys the wound, and the constellations transform the wound into memory and then into a new bond, as the hero names the stars together with Cima. The aesthetic function here is lyrical and consolatory: Heller's means lead the reader from isolation towards connection. James Berger's observation that in apocalyptic texts "the end is never the end" [2, p. 5] is most fully realised in this novel, where the end of the old world becomes the beginning of a new human community.

The central symbols point in the same direction. McCarthy's fire is directed inward: it is located "inside" the hero and must be passed on from father to son, so that the value of the human being is preserved within the smallest possible community of two. Whitehead's wall is directed outward: it marks the boundary between the living and the dead and between the official future and the actual present, and its fall reveals that this boundary was never secure. Heller's constellations are directed upward and outward at once: they project memory onto the sky and then become a shared language with a new companion. The movement from fire to wall to stars thus reproduces, at the level of the symbol, the movement from preserving the self, through the collapse of social illusions, to the reconstruction of human bonds. It is significant that two of the novels, The Road and The Dog Stars, return to the same image of the trout as a sign of the lost natural world. In McCarthy the trout belongs to a world that "could not be put back" [8, p. 175], while in Heller the hero still goes to "the creeks where I always pray to see a trout" [6, p. 12], which shows how a shared motif acquires opposite aesthetic functions within different artistic systems.

The comparison of the three voices also clarifies the reader's position. The impersonal but internally focalised narration of The Road places the reader beside the father, close enough to share his fear and far enough to judge his actions. The ironic narration of Zone One places the reader above the hero and the society that surrounds him. The autodiegetic narration of The Dog Stars places the reader inside the hero's consciousness. Proximity, distance and intimacy are therefore not neutral narrative choices: they determine whether the reader experiences the post-apocalyptic world as an ethical trial, as a social satire or as a personal recovery. In each case the tension that Mukařovský describes is produced not only by what the hero does but by the position from which the reader is made to see him.

These findings complement existing scholarship. Previous studies have shown what the post-apocalyptic hero signifies in relation to modernity, ethics or national myth. The present analysis shows that this meaning is inseparable from the artistic means of its construction: the same situation of a lone survivor yields an ethical, a critical and a humanist hero concept depending on how the chronotope, voice and symbol are organised. The three effects identified in the study also correspond to three types of hero that can be distinguished in the post-apocalyptic novel, the existential, the traumatic and the humanist, which suggests that the typology of heroes may be grounded in poetics rather than in theme alone. The study has limitations: it considers three components out of many and three novels from a single national literature. Further research could extend the analysis to plot and composition, to the system of characters and to post-apocalyptic novels of other literatures.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of The Road, Zone One and The Dog Stars leads to three conclusions. First, in all three novels the post-apocalyptic hero is constructed through the interaction of chronotope, narrative voice and symbol, and these components correspond to the hero's place in the world, his inner world and his values.

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Second, the same components perform different aesthetic functions: in McCarthy they evoke compassion and affirm an ethical core, in Whitehead they create critical distance and expose the illusion of reconstruction, and in Heller they offer lyrical consolation and restore human connection. Third, the hero concept of each novel cannot be separated from its artistic form: the writer's view of the human being after the end of the world is not merely expressed through the chronotope, voice and symbol but is shaped by them. The study of the artistic means of hero construction thus opens a productive path for the comparative analysis of the post-apocalyptic novel.

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