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CULTURAL-AETHETIC FUNCTION OF INTERTEXTUAL DEVICES IN “THE MOOR’S ACCOUNT” BY LAYLA LALAMI

Abstract: The article explores the postmodernist approach to biofiction through the analysis of biographical novel “The Moor’s Account” (2015) by Layla Lalami. The theoretical framework of the essay provides a synthesis of relevant ideas on the subject: it touches on Madeleine Danova (2011), Mirjana M. Knežević (2013) Michael Lackey’s (2022), observations on postmodern biofiction, as well as Valentin Khalizev (2011) and Dilmurod Quronov’s (2013) views on intertextuality. It also discusses the cultural-aesthetic functions of intertextual figures. The essay concludes by highlighting the fact that, in spite of cosmopolitanism and globalization in the world process, postmodern biofiction allows writers to rewrite the existing literary work from another perspective embellishing the historical fact with national color and traditions by paremias and quotes.

Key words: postmodernism, intertextuality, paremias and quotes.

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Introduction

Contemporary postmodern biofiction is regarded as “hybrid” (Danova M., 2011), “ventriloquistic” (Mirjana M. Knežević, 2013) literary form which “counters the determinism and fatalism of the historical novel” (Lakey M., 2022). So, the intrinsic research of the genre, and demonstration of the liberties of the author-biographer to incorporate personal viewpoints and national values into the eclectic tissue of the biographical text can be considered as one of the aspects of the multifaceted, synthetic natured biographical novel which stands independently parallel to historical novel.

“Intertext”, “intertextual”, “intertextuality” – while these terms nowadays are widely used in modern linguistics and literature, thorough analysis of them is one of the current problems in the field of literature, which helps to understand versatile language of contemporary prose. It is known that in the work of art, such devices as allusions, paremiological sets (proverbs), quotations, aphorisms, reminiscences can serve as intertextual rhetorical

devices giving the text mosaic structure (Khalizev, 2011 (P. 275); D. Quronov, 2013 (P. 220)).

The study of “The Moor’s Account”, a biographical novel written by American writer Layla Lalami, indicated several elements of postmodern literature. In other words, fragments from religious books or folklore, taken from samples of various texts, are inserted into verbal space of the biographical novel, intertextualizing the book. In this article, we aim to focus on the analysis and interpretation of proverbs and a quote commonly found in Arabic literature and culture. The plot of Lalami’s novel depicts the major historical events of the sixteenth century and the life of the real historical figure involved in the maelstrom of these events. The present scholars advocate the freedom of biographers to choose historical facts and biographical data, and stress the problems of society rather than scrupulous investigation and focus on personality of the biographee. The biographers are free to alter the facts and reimagine episodes to prove the central idea of the work, which focuses on the problems society.

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Michael Lackey theorizes this phenomenon stating the following:

“...authors of biofiction are more interested in contemporary social critique than accurate representation of the historical past, they alter biographical past, they alter biographical facts in order to illustrate how lives of people from the past can be used to illuminate cultural sickness in the present.” (Lakey M., 2022 (P.84)).

If we look at the problem from this perspective, Layla Lalami used Spanish explorer Cabeza de Vaca’s account (1542) as a historical fact and reimagined events from the perspective of the African-American protagonist embellishing the narrative with Moroccan cultural and aesthetic values. This way she attempts to unfold slavery and race-discrimination problems of the past, skillfully indicating to the present reconsidering and evaluation of the diversity of cultures and world outlooks in contemporary American society.

The names of the personages and biographical data was invented by the author. Because there were only some records about the historical prototype of Estebanico. This was the name given by Spanish when he was re-baptized. Lalami used the name Mustafa for the protagonist, his father’s name Muhammad the Lame, sister’s name Zaynab, twin brothers: Yahya and Yusuf, uncle Abdullah. All these names are commonly used in the Muslim World.

In “The Moor’s Account”, Mustafa al-Zamori tells his own story of his life, based on a number of historical and biographical materials related to the prototype. This fact is vividly marked in the introductory paragraph of the biographical novel by Layla Lalami.

“This book is the humble work of Mustafa ibn Muhammad ibn Abdussalam al-Zamori, being a true account of his life and travels from the city of Azemmur to the Land of the Indians, where he arrived as a slave and, in his attempt to return to freedom, was

shipwrecked and lost for many years.” (Lalami L., 2015 (P.2))

The protagonist of this “humble book”, described by Mustafa al-Zamori, does not claim greatness or prestige, but introduces himself to the reader as a slave free from the arrogance of the European colonialists.

“... whereas I, who is neither beholden to Castilian men of power, nor bound by the rules of a society to which I do not belong, feel free to recount the true story of what happened to my companions and me.” (Lalami L., 2015 (P. 2))

As a free person, who is not oppressed by the Spanish power and the rules of society, the protagonist introduces the real narrative of the real story to the reader. In this way, Lalami was able to express the memories of not only Europeans, but also other ethnic groups such as Arabs, Jewish on the basis of literary, emotional and historical principles, emphasizing that everyone has a voice and personality to reconsider history from contemporary mindset.

In fact, as the author of the work used first person narrative technique to create the main character, she was able to show that African-American people have their own point of view, that they have their own perspective and attitude to the Narvaez expedition, described in the novel. The biographical novel also reflects the mentality of the Muslim world, the national and cultural characteristics of the Moroccan Arabs - Berbers. Moreover, the work created an intertextual text in the biographical novel by interweaving quotes from various religious books or incorporating proverbs, sayings taken from different sources, Moroccan national literature among them, into the modern literary text.

Discussion. The following intertextual devices can be found in the text of the novel “The Moor’s Account”.

Table 1.

Intertextual devices based on the structure <i>The elders teach us:.. in the novel “The Moor’s Account” by Layla Lalami</i>		
1.	The elders teach us: if you are a peg, endure the knocking, but if you are a mallet, proceed with the strike. (Lalami, Laila “The Moor’s Account”, P. 15)	Paremia
2.	The elders teach us: when the cow is down, the knives come out. (Lalami, Laila “The Moor’s Account”, P. 43)	Paremia
3.	The elders teach us: we all belong to God, and to Him we return. (Lalami, Laila “The Moor’s Account”, P. 76)	Quotation

The intertextual devices found in the work are based on a universal structure, each of which begins with a repetitive introductory sentence, “*The elders teach us:....*” The paremias and quotations that follow the structure are introduced with purpose to indicate a strong ideological point of view underlying in each of them. Every proverb summarizes the cause and

consequences of the events as well as evaluates the Moroccan people, the Arab mentality and the worldview of different nations. They contain cultural and aesthetic values and traditions.

“*The elders teach us: if you are a peg, endure the knocking, but if you are a mallet, proceed with the strike*”. This example of Moroccan folklore is

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used by the author to figuratively implicate a deep social-cultural implication. This intertextual device was used in the third chapter of the novel, **“The Story of My Birth”**, where Mustafa’s father is mentioned. It is worth to note that many of the characters in the novel are textured and portrayed in accordance with common “types” specific to the Moroccan nation. Mustafa’s father, Muhammad the Lame is a middle-class notary, educated in a madrasah. Although Muhammad was a highly educated man, he was physically weak and unhealthy. He was very ill from a young age and lost his hand in an unpleasant incident. This was when he meets Europeans who were occupying Morocco. The father of Mustafa endured severe physical and mental pain throughout his life and had to secretly seek medical care. Meanwhile, his son Mustafa had little interest in education from a young age and used to skip classes and wander in the markets. One day, again after escaping from the classes in madrasah, young boy entered an unknown tent in the bazaar. The unexpected thing he witnessed was that a doctor and other several elderly people gathered around a disabled person were treating him with prayers. And young Mustafa was startled when he realized that the disabled man was his own father. At this point, the doctor began the treatment with “peg/mallet” saying. If the saying is interpreted from the doctor’s perspective, one may identify such meaning: “Do not endure the pain, learn to treat it”. However, such interpretation of the proverb would be incomplete. As the following words of the doctor:

“Today I will show you that you don’t have to be a peg. I will begin by preparing this man for treatment” (Lalami L., 2015 (P.15))

If we pay attention to the content of the proverb, then it becomes clear that deep meaning is hidden. Indeed, Mustafa’s helpless, crippled father, as other enslaved indigenous of Africa, sold to the Europeans and the Americans, is seen as a symbol of obedience of Africans who have surrendered to “whites”.

According to the novel, in the early sixteenth century, the cities of West Africa (Melilla), which belonged to Muslim Arab countries, were occupied by the Kingdom of Castile in Spain.

“So when the news reached my father that the town of Melilla - less than three days away by horse - had fallen to the Crown of Castile, his first thought was that there would be even more refugees in the city and even less work.” (Lalami L., 2015 (P. 12))

This historic event also left its mark on the fate of Morocco: the social status of African worsened, and people were enslaved. Whites beat ordinary people like a peg and paved the way for mass enslavement. Therefore, the proverb in the language of a doctor introduces the call: If you choose slavery, stand still; if you strike like a hammer, never stop beating, never stop fighting the disease (slavery). This interpretation of the saying corresponds with the idea of the work

and serves to reveal the panorama of social life in Morocco during that historical period. Hence, Lalami was able to illuminate through paremia that in the sixteenth century the process of colonization of Africans was gradually beginning.

“The elders teach us: when the cow is down, the knives come out” (Lalami L., 2015 (P.432))

The proverb was used appropriately to show the cause and the consequences of the events described in the seventh chapter of the work, **“The Story of the Apache”**, and to reflect people’s critical attitudes. The meaning of this proverb, which is expressed in Arabic as “En weqet el baqarah, tektar sakakinah,” is as follows:

“A fallen cow must be slaughtered immediately on the spot so that it can be eaten.” So everyone who sees this situation runs home and hurries to bring the knife. As a result, more knives are collected than necessary. While this proverb applies more to politicians, it also applies to those who deserve criticism. The proverb is used in the sense of criticizing the person who came out of the situation with the intention of pitying and condemning the victim.” (Taymour A., 1986)

This Arabic proverb from the language of Mustafa in the novel is exposed in the following situation. The leader of the expedition, Narvaez, tries to go to the Appalachian Mountains in search of gold, but when he gets there, he can’t find any. Then the members of the expedition start shouting, claiming that the leader was lost and misguided them. The slave Estebanico, who observes this situation from the sidelines, sees the intolerance among whites, and his attitude, formed on the basis of his own national thinking and views, is expressed by this proverb. According to the proverb, the fallen cow is Narvaez, and the ones carrying the knife are such nobles as Senor Castillo and Don Panfilo from the same social status. They felt for the first time that the dream of finding gold and returning to Spain with wealth and glory could become a mirage. But the golden fever has not yet completely left the members of the expedition. In this way, Estebanico, as a narrator, analyzes each situation and gives a unique interpretation of situation through the Arabic mentality using proverb.

The author was able to express the changing nature of people, different behaviors and attitudes depending on the situation, using a single proverb. The role of the proverb as a literary and aesthetic tool is reflected in the skillful depiction of the subtle aspects of the human psychology. Accordingly, proverbs are found to be an important tool in determining Lalami’s creative style.

In the eleventh chapter of the work, entitled **“The Story of the Rafts”**, Lalami uses the quote, *“The elders teach us: we all belong to God, and to Him we return.”* (Lalami L., 2015 (P.76))

This quote is taken from The Qur’an and used as an intertextual tool to explain the powerful dramatic

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event described in the book. This quote, the original source of which is The Qur'an, is based on the English translation of Sura al-Baqara, verse 156:

"Those who, when a calamity afflicts them, say, 'To God we belong, and to Him we will return'" (The Qur'an (P.8))

In Arabic: "Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un". Usually, this verse is recited by Muslims when they hear the unfortunate news that a fellow believer has died. The true meaning of the quote provokes people not to go against the will of Allah, but to acknowledge the destiny He has bestowed on them, and to be patient with other Muslims who have lost their relatives or loved ones.

In the work, this Islamic phrase is used to describe in a horrific event – when a member of a food distribution of the crew fills a flask with seawater after a long drought and drinks it at once and dies of severe tremors within an hour. Meanwhile, the slave Estebanico recalls that the man who gave up his life was very arrogant and greedy from the very beginning of the journey. As when he was alive, Estebanico asked for permission to get water, but the man demanded the knife Estebanico received from the locals in return. However, after death, this knife in the corpse's waist could neither resurrect him nor bring any benefit. Nothing is eternal and nobody can take anything with him to the Other World. We came from Allah and return to Him. This philosophical teaching is the important aspect of Islam. The main idea of the work is humanity, in which belief in Allah, acceptance

of destiny, the transience of the world are expressed in this episode and in the deep philosophical sense written in the concluding verse of The Qur'an. It should be noted that the Islamic phrase chosen by the writer and its proper application convinces the reader that it is a divine destiny that a man is a guest in the transient world and his final destination is to reach the Lord through trials and perseverance.

Conclusion.

The analysis of the intertextual tools in Layla Lalami's biographical novel "The Moor's Account" – paremias taken from the Arabic folklore and a quotation from Islamic Holy Book The Qur'an – reveals national cultural-aesthetic values of the Moroccan verbal heritage, and shows the idiosyncrasy of the style of the biographer. It also provides molecular connection and cohesion between texts, generating a complex kaleidoscope of fragments from different sources. Moreover, it also shows that the recipient should possess a rich life experience, artistic-philosophical observation, and logical thinking to capture and understand them from Moroccan viewpoint. Also, the investigation shows that postmodern biographical novel gives freedom to the writer to invent fictional personages and events on the scope of general national "types" of persons, "prototypes" of events and artistically veil them with traditional literary excerpts and sketch the characteristic features of the nation.

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