

КЛАСИЧНИЙ ПРИВАТНИЙ УНІВЕРСИТЕТ

МАТЕРІАЛИ
ВСЕУКРАЇНСЬКОЇ НАУКОВО-ПРАКТИЧНОЇ
КОНФЕРЕНЦІЇ

**«СУЧАСНІ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ
ФІЛОЛОГІЧНИХ НАУК:
ПРОБЛЕМИ ТА РІШЕННЯ»**

25–26 серпня 2017 р.

м. Запоріжжя

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С 91 **Сучасні дослідження філологічних наук: проблеми та рішення:** Матеріали всеукраїнської науково-практичної конференції, м. Запоріжжя, 25–26 серпня 2017 р. – Запоріжжя : Класичний приватний університет, 2017. – 124 с.

ISBN 978-966-916-336-3

У збірнику представлено стислий виклад доповідей і повідомлень, поданих на всеукраїнську науково-практичну конференцію «Сучасні дослідження філологічних наук: проблеми та рішення», яка відбулась на базі Класичного приватного університету 25–26 серпня 2017 р.

УДК 80(063)
ББК 8я43

REPRESENTATION OF DESCRIPTIVE COMPONENTS OF THE CONCEPT OF GROWING-UP IN COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH POETRY

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The work aims to analyse the poems by Gabriel Okara and Seamus Justin Heaney depicting growing-up, the associations linked to it, the changes occurring in the child, and contrasting the adults and children while using certain descriptive stylistic devices. Both poets represent the present-day English poetry despite being of extremely different origin – Nigeria and Northern Ireland.

Gabriel Imomotimi Gbaingbain Okara is a contemporary Nigerian poet and novelist who has been extremely successful in apprehending the moods, sights and sounds of Africa. His poems show great compassion, sensitive judgements and a remarkable energy. G. Okara also shows a concern on the topic of the lost innocence of youth. The poem "Once upon a Time" written by Gabriel Okara illustrates the changes throughout the life, which have been influenced by the way society has changed. In the poem, the author compares two worlds, a children's world and an adults' one. The title hints that childhood, contrary to adulthood, is associated with a fairytale, a magical, gone for good world, retaining all the nice things a person can contain, so adults cannot be honest and have to hide behind a "mask" of different feelings. G. Okara criticises the insincerity of adult people who are controlled by rules and conventions while adopting masks for diverse occasions: for lying, cheating and betraying; whereas the poet portrays childhood as a time of sincere laughter, and naturalness.

To illustrate the differences the author uses the contrast "*Once upon a time, son / they used to laugh with their hearts / and laugh with their eyes / but now they only laugh with their teeth*"; "*with their hearts*" and "*without their hearts*", and repetitions "*laugh with their hearts and laugh with*

their eyes". [1] Describing the adult world, the author uses negatively coloured personification "*ice-block-cold-eyes search*", "*left hand search*". Repetition "*I have learned.../ I have learned...*" demonstrates the amount of things to be learned to turn into an adult. However, his explanations to the child are being made with compound words "*homeface, / officeface, streetface, hostface, cocktailface...*" [1], showing that it is difficult for a child to understand the meaning of falseness. The simile "*conforming smiles like a fixed portrait smile*" reveals the truth of artificial smiles, confirming that in the adulthood you are not always straight. He depicts himself using the simile "*the mirror shows only the teeth like a snake's bare fangs*" [1]. Despite the desire "*to unlearn all these muting things*" and "*to relearn*", he realises that there is no way back to childhood where a person can be truthful, with no people judging him or her. All learned lessons of adulthood are not worth a penny, compared to the honesty of a child. That is why; the narrator seeks help from the child. However, by asking for help from the child, the author does not just fancy reliving the wonderful moments of childhood, but he also wishes to warn the child he addresses his words to. The final simile "*when I was like you*" hints that with years the child would become the adult like the narrator is. With the last words, the author pleads the child to save his unspoiled soul and honesty even when the latter becomes a grown-up. At the end of the poem, G. Okara confesses "*I want to be what I used to be*" showing sadness and instant regret at the choices he previously made. This piece of dialogue could suggest that he can only be himself with his son as he recognises his younger self in him, the self that was genuine and true, which had not yet been beaten down by society [1].

While Gabriel Okara realises how difficult it is to remain earnest in the process of growing up, as this is when the entire negative transformations occur in the child's outlook, Seamus Heaney in his "Death of a Naturalist" describes allegorically the process of converting into an adult.

Seamus Justin Heaney was an Irish poet, playwright, translator and lecturer from Northern Ireland. He received the 1995 Nobel Prize in Literature for one of his best-known works *Death of a Naturalist*, published in 1966. "Death of a Naturalist", the collection's second poem, details the exploits of a boy, collecting frogspawn from a flax-dam. The poem represents a first person monologue with the definite dramatic effect. The author

makes extensive use of several stylistic techniques, which encompass onomatopoeia, allegory, personification, simile, metaphor etc. In the title of the poem, the use of the indefinite article makes it clear that the work, as well as the process depicted in it can relate to anyone. The author contrasts childhood as a positive and adventurous period full of wonder with the process of growing up as negative, frightening and full of disgust. The author shows the essence of growing-up using onomatopoeia with assonance “...a coarse croaking”, “...slap and plop” to let the readers feel the sense of horror, to immerse them into the awful sounds to make the terrible picture vivid and complete. The words “a bass chorus” hint on physiological changes, voice timbre in particular. The most horrible things are inevitability and indispensability of growing-up, even some brutality in it. Thus, the author uses military terms, military imagery, combining with simile “sat / poised like mud grenades” to highlight that. All words about growing up have negative colouring “angry”, “invaded”, “obscene threats”, “farting”, “sickened”, “vengeance” [2]. S. Heaney compares the ways of perception of the world around by a child and a grownup person. As a child he admires even “jellied specks” of “warm thick slobber of frogspawn” [2] and sees only positive sides, but having become an adult, a person starts to perceive the world as a hostile place, where “the spawn would clutch” his hands and hurt him. The author masterfully describes growing-up as a metaphorical death of a child, his curiosity and innocence, with the lost of zest for living being the true meaning of the depicted child’s enthusiasm for nature.

Similarity of the two verses lies in the related portrayal of the changes that take place while a child is growing up. They both express feelings of deep concern and regret for the lost innocence and charming of childlike simplicity. Despite the similar atmosphere, poems “Once upon a Time” and “Death of a Naturalist” differ in some aspects. The verse by S. Heaney involves many references to the nature, taking naturalistic observations and descriptions as a background and illustrations of the process of growing up, while G. Okara just reveals the negative changes in personality characteristics. At the end of the poems, the readers can see the differences in the tone and mood. In “Once Upon a Time”, the author cherishes the hope for the better destiny for the next generations if they take into account the previous mistakes and improve their adult life. Contrary to that, “Death of a

Naturalist” expresses the feelings of despair and hopelessness as for the child’s transformation into an adult and leaves no hope, hinting only at the uncertainty and pain of the process of growing up.

References:

1. Gabriel Okara: *Collected Poems* (Ed) (2016). University of Nebraska Press.
2. Heaney S. (2014). *Death of a Naturalist: Poems*. Macmillan: Farrar, Straus and Giroux Publishing.