

THE THEME OF CHILDHOOD IN JOANNE HARRIS'S NOVEL "FIVE QUARTERS OF THE ORANGE"

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Abstract. The article analyzes the theme of childhood in Joanne Harris's novel *Five Quarters of the Orange*. Childhood is presented as a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses psychological, social, and cultural-historical dimensions. It is considered not only as a stage of the personal development of the protagonist, Framboise, but also as a conceptual foundation for comprehending the collective experience of European society during the Second World War. The aim of the article is to identify the key narrative and psychological mechanisms through which the author represents the world of childhood, as well as to examine the role of symbolism in constructing this image. The methodology of the study includes narratological analysis, elements of psychological criticism, and a conceptual approach. The research shows that the protagonist's childhood is ambivalent: it represents a space of imagination, play, and sensory impressions, while at the same time functioning as a source of trauma, isolation, and alienation. Particular attention is paid to symbols such as the orange, culinary recipes, scents, and the orchard, which embody memory, fears, and the aspirations of the child. The narrative structure of the novel takes the form of the adult Framboise's confession, as she returns to her past in an attempt to reinterpret it through the lens of maturity. The combination of the "child's" and the "adult's" voices creates a multilayered narrative in which personal memories become part of collective historical experience. The study concludes that the theme of childhood in Harris's novel performs not only a narrative but also a conceptual function: it reveals the process of identity formation and highlights the interrelation between personal memory and historical context.

Keywords: childhood, psychological novel, concept, identity, symbolism, narrative, Joanne Harris.

1. INTRODUCTION

The problem of the artistic interpretation of childhood belongs to the key issues of contemporary literary studies. Childhood is regarded not only as a certain biographical period but also as a multifaceted concept that integrates psychological, cultural, and narrative dimensions. The study of childhood experience in a literary text makes it possible to identify the mechanisms of identity formation and to trace the interrelation between personal experiences and collective memory.

In Joanne Harris's novel *"Five Quarters of the Orange"*, childhood emerges as the central theme through which the story of the protagonist Framboise's development unfolds. Her memories reconstruct not only an individual psychological experience but also project the broader historical and cultural

context of the Second World War. Thus, childhood functions in the novel as a space of memory, trauma, and the search for identity.

The theme of childhood in literature has attracted the attention of numerous scholars. Researchers have examined the autobiographical nature of literary narration, narrative models of representing experience, and the conceptual nature of the literary text. Works in psychological criticism demonstrate interest in childhood traumas and memory mechanisms. At the same time, Harris's oeuvre has not yet received comprehensive analysis in Ukrainian literary studies specifically in the context of childhood, which determines the relevance of our research.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The conceptualization of childhood in literature has been shaped by a broad spectrum of theoretical approaches, each of which highlights its multifaceted nature. Scholars such as Norozi, Moen (Norozi and Moen, 2016), Montgomery (Montgomery, 2008), Stevenson, Worthman (Stevenson and Worthman, 2014), Bouchard (2004) emphasize the sociocultural and environmental dimensions of childhood, arguing that it is fundamentally constructed through interaction with social structures, cultural norms, and educational practices. As Norozi and Moen note, childhood is "childhood is considered as the early phase of the human life in all cultures and all societies" (Norozi, Moen, 2016, p. 76). This perspective aligns with anthropological research by Montgomery (Montgomery, 2008), who demonstrates that children's identities are shaped by culturally specific traditions and models of socialization.

The novel as a genre is described by scholars such as Gotsa (Gotsa, 2009) and Munafionika (Munafionika, 2021) as a flexible literary form capable of integrating diverse stylistic and structural elements. Munafionika states that a novel tend to tell some story that inspired from many things, it can be based on true story that usually called as life experience, or by author imagination that not happen in real life. Novel is written in narrative text that usually contains certain conflicts of the main character life stories. And from novel, there are moral value that we can take from its story" (Munafonika, 2021). This genre flexibility is essential for depicting childhood as a complex narrative and psychological category.

Furthermore, conceptology, represented in the thesis by Sakaeva (Sakaeva, 2018), Khairullina (Khairullina, 2018) and Poliuzhyn (Poliuzhyn, 2015) offers tools for understanding how childhood functions as a conceptual structure in literary texts. Sakaeva stresses that a concept unites objective information with "emotionally expressive and culturally marked components" (Sakaeva, 2018, pp. 103-105). This insight is central for analyzing the symbolic system of "Five Quarters of the Orange", where sensory imagery — such as food, smells, and emotionally charged objects—becomes a vehicle for conveying personal memory and identity.

Thus, the theoretical background integrates genre theory, psychological poetics, cognitive conceptology, and sociocultural approaches, enabling a comprehensive analysis of childhood as a narrative, symbolic, and conceptual phenomenon within modern fiction.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE, METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The objective of this study is to investigate how childhood is represented as a central conceptual, symbolic, and psychological structure in Joanne Harris's "*Five Quarters of the Orange*". The research aims to determine how childhood memories, trauma, and sensory experience shape the protagonist's identity

and how these elements function within the conventions of the psychological novel. As stated in the thesis, the central purpose is to identify the artistic specificity of the representation of childhood and determine its role in shaping the character's psychological image and the structure of the work.

The methodological framework is informed by several theoretical traditions. The use of conceptual analysis draws on insights from Sakaeva (Sakaeva, 2018), Khairullina (Khairullina, 2018) and Poliuzhyn (Poliuzhyn, 2015), who emphasize the cognitive, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of concepts. Genre and typological analysis is based on theoretical principles articulated by Gotsa (Gotsa, 2009), Munafionika (Munafionika, 2021) and Schlegel (Schlegel, 2013), who describe the novel as a genre capable of deep psychological and social representation.

The psychological component of the methodology relies on theories by Panova (Panova, 2011) and Muvvafaq (Muvvafaq, 2012), who examine how internal experiences, memory, and trauma shape personality. In the thesis, Panova's view is summarized as follows: "psychologism reflects the inner world of the individual and serves as a tool for revealing emotional and mental states" (Panova, 2011, p. 315). This principle is essential for analyzing the protagonist Framboise, whose narrative is structured around recollection and emotional processing.

Additionally, contextual and interpretative methods are applied to identify the functions of symbolic motifs such as oranges, food, and smells—elements that, as the thesis states, acquire metaphorical functions, shaping the emotional tone of the text and serving as keys to understanding the characters' identities. Cognitive analysis, inspired by Levshina's work on conceptual variation, helps reveal how childhood symbols operate as mental and narrative constructs (Levshina, 2021).

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The narrative in *"Five Quarters of the Orange"* is not presented as a linear reproduction of events but as a deeply personal return to the origins of traumatic experience. The narrator's voice is not that of a child but of a mature woman who consciously chooses to revisit her past. This type of narration provides psychological depth: the reader constantly perceives childhood through a dual lens—seeing it both through the child's eyes and through the adult's reflective perspective. This duality allows not only for the reconstruction of events but also for tracing the protagonist's internal evolution. This dual perspective is explicitly revealed when Framboise comments on the gaps between perception and understanding: "Of course I didn't know all that then" (Harris, 2002, p. 54). The quotation underscores the cognitive dissonance between past and present selves: the child perceives merely the immediate sensory or emotional surface of events, whereas the adult narrator retrospectively decodes motives, causal links, and moral implications. The phrase "I didn't know all that then" becomes a meta-narrative marker that highlights the process of reinterpretation—memory is not neutral retrieval but an active reconstruction shaped by later knowledge and guilt. Thus, the narrative is not simply mnemonic but hermeneutic.

The activation of childhood memories occurs through memory mechanisms that are fragmentary and selective. Framboise admits: "It has taken me fifty-five years to begin. At least let me do it in my own way" (Harris, 2002, p. 7). These words emphasize that childhood memories were repressed for decades and return only under internal pressure. Childhood is interpreted as a traumatic experience that cannot be forgotten, yet is difficult to articulate. Returning to childhood becomes an attempt to reconcile with the past and with herself. In this statement, the time marker—*fifty-five years*—functions as an index

of prolonged emotional suppression. The insistence on telling the story “in my own way” points to the narrator’s need for agency: trauma deprived her of narrative control in childhood, while adulthood restores the capacity to shape meaning through storytelling. The personal tone of this opening confession signals that recounting the past is not merely an autobiographical act but a therapeutic intervention.

Framboise’s memories have a sensory dimension. They do not appear as abstract images but as bodily sensations—smells, tastes, colors. This experience has not disappeared from memory; it remains at the level of physical perception, demonstrating that childhood is not a stage that has passed but a part of the protagonist that continues to live within her. She notes: “My memories are flavored with their scents, their colors, their names” (Harris, 2002, p. 7). Thus, recalling the past is not only a mental but an almost physiological process that encompasses all levels of the self. The phrase “flavored with their scents” metaphorically positions memory as something ingested, suggesting that childhood has been internalized so deeply that it shapes the protagonist’s sensory apparatus itself. This metaphoric synesthesia implies that memory functions as embodied knowledge: trauma leaves traces not only in psychological structures but in the body’s sensory mapping. The inclusion of “names” alongside scents and colors also highlights the linguistic dimension of memory—language becomes inseparable from sensory experience, and recollection becomes a process of reactivating both bodily and semiotic layers of the past.

A central figure in the novel is the mother, whose image permeates the narrative. She appears strict, harsh, at times despotic. Her severity shapes Framboise’s character, her resilience and independence. The mother is not only a real figure but also a symbol of authority, restriction, and trauma that defines the protagonist’s entire childhood. This symbolic resonance is visible in subtle narrative moments where the mother’s silence or prohibitions become forms of emotional governance. Although she rarely articulates affection, her actions establish a framework of discipline that shapes the children’s emotional landscapes. In this sense, the mother’s harshness becomes a structuring force: her emotional distance fosters both rebellion and resilience, embedding ambivalence in the children’s experience of love and authority.

Equally significant in the symbolic dimension are fruits, trees, and character names. All of these elements function as markers of childhood space—natural, yet controlled by maternal authority. The mother assigns fruit-related names to the children, and the orchard becomes a living text: “She named each one of us, on a seeming whim, after a fruit and a recipe ... And the trees all had names. Belle Yvonne, Rose d’Aquitaine, Beurre du Roi Henry” (Harris, 2002, p. 7–8). This reveals the mother’s attempt to impose order on a chaotic world through rituals and symbols. The naming ritual simultaneously domesticates and codifies nature. By giving each tree and each child a name, the mother transforms the orchard into an extension of herself—a space where identity is regulated and where every element is inscribed with meaning. This symbolic ordering illustrates her psychological need for control: in a wartime environment marked by unpredictability, naming becomes a compensatory gesture that stabilizes her internal world.

The orange occupies a central place among sensory symbols. It embodies the duality of childhood experience by combining sweetness and bitterness, attraction and prohibition. The orange becomes a symbol of both joy and pain, associated with the mother’s severity and with children’s games. The protagonist recalls: “My mother had a passion for all fruit except oranges, which she refused to allow in

the house" (Harris, 2002, p. 7) and "She hated oranges more than anything" (Harris, 2002, p. 25). Thus, the orange functions as a forbidden symbol structuring the space of childhood and creating an atmosphere of subconscious fear and taboo. The orange's complete prohibition heightens its symbolic density. Its absence is paradoxically formative: what is forbidden becomes psychologically omnipresent. The mother's irrational hatred of oranges creates a space of secrecy around the fruit, transforming it into an object of both fascination and terror. The prohibition also mirrors the dynamics of trauma—silenced, disavowed, yet exerting constant pressure on the family psyche.

Another important motif is cooking as a family language. The mother's recipe book becomes a kind of "code of memory." Each dish is associated with certain emotions or events, and cooking becomes a way of recreating the atmosphere of childhood. The recipe book thus becomes an almost sacred object that preserves family secrets and unspoken tensions. The symbolic potency of the recipe book lies in its hybridity: it is both practical and confessional. Embedded between the lines of culinary instructions are encrypted emotional messages and traces of the mother's inner life. The children decode these messages retrospectively, discovering that the book was not only a domestic tool but a psychological diary embedded in material form.

A defining feature of the artistic representation of childhood is the emphasis on traumatic experience. Framboise's childhood is marked by her mother's harshness, alienation from peers, and the tragic events associated with war. The most significant factor is the sense of guilt haunting the protagonist throughout her life. She realizes that her childhood decisions had catastrophic consequences for the village. This retrospective guilt amplifies the emotional stakes of memory. The adult narrator oscillates between remorse and the desire for self-exoneration, creating a tension that permeates the narrative's moral structure. Childhood becomes a site of ethical ambiguity rather than innocence.

The presence of war is felt not through battle scenes but as an invisible backdrop affecting every event. The child's perception of war is characterized by naivety and painful accuracy: the world is divided into "ours" and "theirs," and even small details acquire threatening connotations. This childlike binary division reveals the cognitive simplification typical of early perception. Yet the threat remains real, demonstrating that children absorb the atmospheric intensity of conflict even when shielded from its direct manifestations.

Childhood memories intertwine with the protagonist's present life. She attempts to structure her memory and fill the gaps in a biography she had long fabricated. She confesses: "To satisfy the curious, I invented a childhood on a Breton farm" (Harris, 2002, p. 9). This illustrates an attempt to create a socially acceptable version of herself—one less traumatic than reality. Fabrication becomes a survival strategy: the fictional Breton childhood reflects the protagonist's need for emotional refuge. In this sense, the lie functions as an alternative identity construct—an imaginative space where trauma is absent and where the self can be reassembled.

Her memory is not chaotic. It lives through practices: recipes, domestic routines, the architecture of the home. Every action resonates with childhood—sometimes consciously, sometimes subconsciously. These embodied practices demonstrate how trauma is sedimented into motor memory. The protagonist's cooking, walking patterns, and daily rituals unconsciously replicate her mother's actions, illustrating how familial trauma persists through intergenerational transmission of habits.

Two narrative levels coexist: one where she relives memories and painfully analyzes her reactions, and another where the adult woman tries to control the narrative. She admits: "Of course I didn't know

all that then" (Harris, 2002, p. 54). This statement is not an excuse but the result of deep reflection. The repetition of this admission reinforces the temporal duality: the child experiences, the adult interprets. The adult consciousness acts as an ethical filter, revisiting the childhood self with both compassion and judgment. The cyclical return to this phrase underscores that memory is never final—it is a continuous renegotiation of meaning.

A key motif is the discourse of silence. Framboise does not voice her feelings because she lacks an interlocutor capable of receiving them: "I never told Cassis or Reine what I felt. I didn't even have the words for it" (Harris, 2002, p. 88). Silence becomes not a symptom of apathy but a survival strategy. Her loneliness is further emphasized by her childhood longing to escape her life: "I remember sitting behind the barn, eating an apple, and wishing I was someone else's child" (Harris, 2002, p. 94). This moment of despair reveals both her lack of acceptance within her family and her desire to construct new forms of relationships. The apple motif here operates as a counter-symbol to the forbidden orange: whereas the orange signifies taboo and fear, the apple becomes associated with escapist fantasy and the desire for emotional belonging. The contrast between the two fruits deepens the symbolic architecture of childhood memory, with each representing opposing emotional registers.

Retrospection reveals a dual temporality: the child perceives events superficially, while the adult narrator uncovers their deeper meanings. It is precisely the contrast between the child's "then" and the adult's "now" that outlines the trajectory of the protagonist's development. This oscillation between temporal layers becomes the structural engine of the narrative, allowing the novel to explore how trauma evolves over time and how interpretation reshapes lived experience.

Thus, the interaction between the child and adult worlds is constructed as coexistence: past experiences shape identity, and adult reflection organizes chaotic memories. Childhood emerges not as a completed stage but as a living layer of experience that leaves an indelible mark on adult life and demands not forgetting but comprehension.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of Joanne Harris's *Five Quarters of the Orange* demonstrates that the theme of childhood functions not only as an important plot element but also as a conceptual foundation of the text. Childhood appears as a space of memory and trauma, combining sensory imagery, symbolic objects, psychological experiences, and narrative strategies. It does not merely represent a biographical stage but acts as a universal category shaping the protagonist's identity and revealing the cultural and historical context of the era.

A dual narrative perspective—the child's and the adult's—creates a multilayered image of childhood experience. Sensory symbols, particularly the orange, serve as ambivalent signs of joy and pain. Childhood is understood through the prism of trauma: war, maternal severity, alienation, and guilt shape Framboise's character and adult identity.

The study shows that childhood in Harris's novel functions as an artistic mechanism for reconstructing memory, understanding traumatic experience, and seeking inner wholeness. It reflects both the protagonist's individual journey and the universal human experience preserved in cultural memory.

Future research may focus on broader comparative analysis with other texts where childhood and memory hold conceptual significance. Notably, comparing Harris's work with novels by contemporary

European and Ukrainian writers could deepen the understanding of Harris's individual poetics and reveal wider trends in modern literature.

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У статті проаналізовано тему дитинства в романі Джоан Гарріс "П'ять четвертинок апельсина". Дитинство постає як багатовимірне явище, що охоплює психологічний, соціальний і культурно-історичний виміри. Воно розглядається не лише як етап особистісного становлення головної героїні Фрамбуази, а й як концептуальна основа осмислення колективного досвіду європейського суспільства періоду Другої світової війни. Метою статті є виявлення ключових нарративних і психологічних

механізмів, за допомогою яких авторка репрезентує світ дитинства, а також аналіз ролі символіки у формуванні цього образу. Методологія дослідження ґрунтується на наратологічному аналізі, елементах психологічної критики та концептуальному підході. У результаті дослідження встановлено, що дитинство головної героїні має амбівалентний характер: воно постає простором уяви, гри та чуттєвих вражень і водночас функціонує як джерело травми, ізоляції та відчуження. Особливу увагу приділено таким символам, як апельсин, кулінарні рецепти, запахи та сад, які втілюють пам'ять, страхи й прагнення дитини. Наративна структура роману набуває форми сповіді дорослої Фрамбуази, яка повертається до власного минулого з метою його переосмислення крізь призму зрілості. Поєднання "дитячого" та "дорослого" голосів створює багатопланову оповідь, у якій особисті спогади стають складником колективного історичного досвіду. Зроблено висновок, що тема дитинства в романі Гарріс виконує не лише наративну, а й концептуальну функцію, розкриваючи процес формування ідентичності та підкреслюючи взаємозв'язок між особистою пам'яттю й історичним контекстом.

Ключові слова: дитинство, психологічний роман, концепт, ідентичність, символізм, наратив, Джоан Гарріс.