

THE IMAGE OF A MILITARY SURGEON IN “MASH: A NOVEL ABOUT THREE ARMY DOCTORS” BY RICHARD HOOKER

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Abstract. The article analyzes the narrative mechanisms of representing the military surgeon's image in the literary and medical discourse of the 20th century U.S. literature as exemplified by “MASH: A Novel About Three Army Doctors” (1968) by Richard Hooker. The study of doctors' fictional representation will improve the content of training courses in the world literature and form a methodological basis for the development of special courses, theme-based seminars and academic syllabi.

Keywords: military surgeon, literary and medical discourse, the 20th century U.S. literature

INTRODUCTION. “MASH: A Novel About Three Army Doctors” (1968) by Richard Hooker is set in a fictional U.S. Mobile Army Surgical Hospital in Korea during the Korean War. The author himself was drafted into the Korean War and assigned to the 8055 Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (M.A.S.H.) after graduating from Cornell University Medical School. The study of the author's personal experience, embodied in the fictional narrative framework, enables us to disclose the artistic intentions on the literary and medical discourse, which renders the present research relevant.

METHODS AND RESEARCH MATERIAL. We applied the method of narratological analysis, which made it possible to discover the dimensions of the physician's literary identity in the U.S. prose. The material of the research is “MASH: A Novel About Three Army Doctors” (1968) by Richard Hooker.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH. “M.A.S.H.” is a vivid anti-war novel, which extensively applies satire in order to demonstrate the natural human reaction to extremely stressful conditions of warfare. In the foreword to the novel, the author writes: “The surgeons in the M.A.S.H. hospitals were exposed to extremes of hard work, leisure, tension, boredom, heat, cold, satisfaction and frustration that most of them had never faced before. Their reaction, individually and collectively, was to cope with the situation and get the job done. The various stresses, however,

produced behavior in many of them that, superficially, at least, seemed inconsistent with their earlier, civilian behavior patterns” (Hooker, 2009: 5). The plot focuses on arrival of three new surgeons, Captains Duke Forrest, Hawkeye Pierce and John McIntyre, at 4077th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital. Both surgeons display outward dislike of authority and inclination to mischievousness. However, at the same time they exhibit exceptional surgical skills and high level of commitment while at the operating room. The three new surgeons occupy the Bachelor Officers Quarters tent, known as “the Swamp”, and they are referred to as “the Swampmen”.

The story is presented by heterodiegetic narrator in extradiegetic situation, that is, there is an external focus on the described events. The narrative is excessively episodic in nature, covering a lengthy period of surgeons’ service at the 4077th. The author’s primary intention was to show how the main heroes’ humor and pranks prevent them from losing their hearts and keep saving soldiers’ lives every day. For instance, throughout the novel the Swampmen keep giving nicknames to the surrounding people – some of them are tragi-comical and even sexist (such as “Hot Lips” for Nurse Margaret Houlihan). The novel is also remarkable for the use of medical terminology. The author, as a retired surgeon, provides vivid details of surgeries, conducted by the heroes, thus ensuring the genuine suspense of the story: “They opened the pleura, put in the rib spreader, and aspirated the blood from the chest cavity. Ho-Jon’s pulse and blood pressure held steady. Trapper reached down toward the inferior vena cava where it empties into the right atrium of the heart. He felt the missile” (Hooker, 2009: 11).

CONCLUSIONS. Thus, the anti-war novel “M.A.S.H.” represents the image of a military surgeon, who possesses outstanding professional skills and displays the inexhaustible sense of humor, which helps him to cope with extremely stressful conditions of warfare. Further research is needed to investigate other dimensions of the physician’s literary identity in the U.S. anti-war prose.

REFERENCES

1. Hooker, R. (2009). *Mash: A Novel About Three Army Doctors*. New York: Harper Collins.