

MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS IN THE COLLECTION OF POEMS "UNDER THE TREE"

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The article analyzes the motifs and symbols in the collection of poems "Under the Tree" by E.M. Roberts. The author of the article shows that the key symbol is the symbol of the tree, which is associated with home and family.

Elizabeth Madox Roberts (1881-1941) is an American poet and novelist, who is famous for her short stories and tales. She started her literary career as a poet. She used the realistic method in her works. According to Earl H. Rovit: 'Miss Roberts was committed to realism as the only mode to communicate successfully' [1, p. 11]. E. M. Roberts sought to reveal the nature of the characters. As Frederick P. W. McDowell writes: 'Miss Roberts was fascinated by the inner lives of her heroines, sometimes, indeed, at the expense of their reality as social beings; she was interested in securing effects of psychological immediacy and in revealing the exact nuances of mental life' [2, p. 12]. The basis of her revealing was self-awareness of characters. Frederick P. W. McDowell notes: 'Miss Roberts emphasized the need for her characters to attain self-awareness and to go beyond such awareness to the definition and creation of a vital identity' [2, p. 12].

The collection *Under the tree*, published in 1922, is the second collection of her poems. She wrote the first poems from the collection when she was a student at the university. The collection consists of 52 poems. The collection's theme is the author's childhood and her own view of the world. Her poems are full of vivid and significant details, that are often overlooked. The lyric character is a little girl, who transmits her world outlook not only through visual images, but also through sounds, smells, and tactile sensations.

In many poems the author focuses on the details of her native town, describing its residents, local flora and fauna, her house and family. The poem 'On the hill' allows us to see the town from a bird's-eye view. The main part is all about the author's house and family. She is writing:

...and over and over I tried to see

Some of us walking under the tree... ('On the hill', 1922) [3, p. 24]

Writing 'us' the author implies her siblings, remembering how they spent time under this tree. Obviously, the tree mentioned in the collection's title is the most memorable moment and a peculiar symbol of her childhood. You can often find the phrase 'our tree' in the poems, for example, in 'People going by', 'Three Dominican nuns', this indicating that the author considers this tree to be part of her own soul, part of her home.

...I can feel them almost speak to me,

When they pass by our tree... (People going by', 1922) [3, p. 35]

...and as they passed before our trees,

Their shawls blew out in curves like threes... ('Three Dominican nuns' 1922) [3, p. 84]

In this case, the image of the tree should be interpreted. It is well known that the tree is a symbol of growth, life, it is often seen as the center of the world. The tree is also associated with our human race, let us recall that we traditionally represent family history with the help of family trees. So, we can interpret the image of the tree as the family of the author, and her position under the tree may indicate that she is under the protection of her family. The image of the tree is often repeated from poem to poem. It can be called a spatial image.

...I climbed a little crooked tree.

And I could look down on the field

And see the corn and how it grows... ('The Cornfield', 1922) [3, p. 3]

...two different boys they have to be,

For Dick can play in Mother's room

When Will is climbing in a tree... ('Dick and Will', 1922) [3, p. 16]

E. M. Roberts uses epithets when she describes the tree. In the poem 'Numbers' the tree is silver-leaf:

...and I'll count the leaves on the silver-leaf tree...('Numbers', 1922) [3, p. 59]

Silver-leaved plants add contrast and bring a cool elegance to gardens. The epithet 'white' is used in the poems 'Autumn Fields' and 'The Sun and a birch tree'.

...then I looked in the woods to see

The limbs of the white birch tree... ('Autumn Fields', 1922) [3, p. 72]

...he'd rested under a white oak tree... ('The Sun and a birch tree') [1922, 3, p. 70]

White color is associated with light, goodness, innocence and purity. White means safety and cleanliness. That is why the tree is considered to be a shelter. White color as an element of something bright and naive can also be thought of when we think about childhood. Due to the lack of knowledge a child's life can be imagined as a white blank sheet.

The poems are for children, so they are dynamic, and one action in them is immediately replaced by another. The depicted world has life-like features, in which any known physical, psychological and other laws are not broken. The world is as it is. It may indicate that the collection *Under the tree* contains features of realism. In the poems there are not a lot of psychological details, as the author concentrates on the image of the town and its nature in order to capture what her native land was and which features it possessed. The poems are written in simple language, therefore, children understand them easily.

E. M. Roberts shows herself being a small girl surrounded by the nature of her town, we see her exploring this world. The emotional mood of the collection is optimistic, cheerful, the poems have some philosophical orientation, supported by rhetorical questions and naive children's conclusions. The image of the tree is a key image. The author describes the tree as something powerful and pure.

REFERENCES

1. Rovit, Earl H. *Herald to Chaos: The Novels of Elizabeth Madox Roberts*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1960
2. McDowell, Frederick P. W. *Elizabeth Madox Roberts*. New York, Twayne Publishers, Inc. 1963
3. Roberts, Elizabeth Madox. *Under the tree*. New York, B. W. Huebsch, Inc. 1922