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Literature and Visual Art Interaction in the Novels “The Waves” and “To the Lighthouse” by Virginia Woolf

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Abstract

The article is focused on the analysis of the aspects of intermediality in the novels “The Waves” and “To the Lighthouse” by Virginia Woolf within the context of the aesthetics of Impressionism. The interaction between two arts – literature and painting – is seen at micro- and macro levels of the texts that is the aim of the current scientific research. Macro-level expresses worldviews, paradigms, and philosophical approaches and concepts in the interpretation of the phenomena of the surrounding reality both of the characters and the author as the artists in narrow and wide meanings of this word. Micro-level is revealed by the using of painting techniques and pictorial markers while designing visual images, as well as the using of allusions of art movements. The author pays attention to the meaning of colors, light and shadow effects which create an additional semantic layer in the novel and have a symbolic meaning. Thus, the micro-semantics connections are realized in the creation of the literary texts in accordance to the semantic dominant of the impressionistic aesthetics (painting themes and forms expressed with words, moreover with poetical tools). At the same time the interaction can be seen at the level of genre (landscapes and portrait made in the style of impressionists in the novel “The Waves” or cubists in the novel “To the Lighthouse”). The writer uses a lot of pictorial markers (canvas, touches, brushstrokes, names of colors etc.) that helps the reader to recognize the world of another art and is the material for thoroughly studying of literature criticism.

Keywords: Intermediality, Interaction between literature and painting, Impressionism, Painting techniques, Pictorial markers.

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Introduction

Works by Virginia Woolf has always attracted the attention of readers and critics. Her works were explored in various aspects: from the point of view of the fundamental concepts of modernism (G. Batyuk, J. Goldman, J. Lehmann, O. Kolotov, N. Mikalsky, G. Yanovskaya, etc.), the specifics of the literary biography (O. Andrievsky, Q. Bell, E. Genieva), feminist critique (H. Bloom, R. Bowlby, H. Lee, J. Goldman), gender characteristics (N. Bazin, I. Denisova, L.S. Limanta, M. Khaseeva), poetics of postmodernism (N. Morzhenkova) and the theory of intermediality (G. Batyuk, Y. Kovryzhina, N. Lyubarets, W. Wolf, C. Olk). However, most of the works, related to our topic, characterize the novels "The Waves" and "To the Lighthouse" rather fragmentary. So there was a need for a comprehensive analysis of the novel in the context of the theory of intermediality, which most fully reveals the ideological and creative potential of the English writer. In this case, the text is a material basis for a dynamic understanding of culture that goes far beyond conventional notions of literature. Of course, literature in itself is an art form. Carefully chosen words paint visuals, but through the relations between literature and painting we can understand the author's ideas deeply.

Methods

Literary exploration of the image of the painter and the picture art techniques and pictorial markers in novels of Virginia Woolf in the aspect of the theory of interaction of arts requires the elucidation of the methodological basis of analysis. First of all, such researches are based on the use of approaches of cultural and historical analysis, semiotics, structuralism and intermediality to the literary text reading.

Liliane Louvel, the researcher of Virginia Woolf's works, wrote that: "Woolf had, what painters call "an eye", and a gaze I would add, a fact which imparts her texts with a very visual quality" (Louvel, 2008). This is not surprising at all because the acquaintance of the writer with the world of painting began with family visits to the London National Gallery, the Royal Academy of Arts and numerous art exhibitions. The influence of a cousin grandmother, a well-known Julia Margaret Cameron, who admired photography professionally, should also be taken into account. In addition, Virginia's sister Vanessa studied painting and got a classical education at a school at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts. Among her mentors we can mention a well-known portraitist John Singer Sargent and a famous British painter of the Pre-Raphaelite school "Val" Prinsep (Valentine Cameron "Val" Prinsep).

As researchers have repeatedly pointed out (J. Winston, Diana F. Gillespie, Jane Dunn, N. Lyubarets), the congeniality of the creative search of sisters was not concluded by the fact that Vanessa created the design of almost every Virginia's book, while Virginia wrote introductory words to the catalogs of art exhibitions of the sister. Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell painted, wrote and collaborated with each other out of a rich sense of both rivalry and love. They not only appreciated the artistic works of each other, but also carefully analyzed them. The mutual influence of the creativity of the sisters scientists see in the fact that Virginia's child memories about her mother transformed into the lyrical prose "To the Lighthouse" (1927) and later this inspired Vanessa to create the painting "Children's Room" (1930-1932). At the same time in the novel "To the Lighthouse", Woolf revealed her perception of Vanessa's works as an artist to the reader, incorporating Clive Bell's view about her "obsessiveness in form and color" and the use of vertical lines by Virginia's sister.

In her own works, with the help of painting techniques and "pictorial markers" (Liliane Louvel) Woolf experimented with narrative forms and tried to find a way to write her texts as a painter would paint. Virginia believed that painting could be poetic, and poetry or lyrical prose could be picturesque and she implemented these painting techniques into literary practice. The pictorial vocabulary is one of the markers of the overt references to the "arts and crafts" of painting that appear in Woolf's text.

Results and Discussions

Virginia Woolf was interested in the artistic life of other cultures and knew the works of the painters of absolutely different art movements, who worked in different epochs and in different countries (note, it is a woman who got a home education in Victorian traditions). Due to this in the works of the English writer you can find allusions to specific paintings or popular motives to which artists of certain epochs, art movements and schools used.

Thus, the novel *"The Waves"* is naturally filled with the philosophy of impressionism. Critics began to emphasize this peculiarity of Virginia Woolf's heritage while she was alive. As British researcher Jane Goldman noticed, Virginia Woolf was named as "an innovator of experimental form, impressionism, and a stream of consciousness" (Goldman, 2006: 127).

According to her own aesthetic principles, the English author abandoned the characters in the sense in which realists imagined them. Her books in general, and the novel *"The Waves"* in itself is a creative experiment. They are deprived of the plot and intrigue that binds the story and disintegrate into separate, made in an impressionistic manner, the sketches of the internal states of mind of different people and they are the manifestation of the flow of their thoughts.

The author's interests and internal aesthetics, which are clearly reflected in her theoretical work, contributed to the formation of such an unconventional approach to the creation of literary text. "Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being 'like this'. Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there..." (McNeille, 1984: 160).

"The chronicle of instant impression" (M. Ford), which creates the illusion of reality, is the basis of the aesthetics of impressionism, because the main idea of this art movement is to outline the transient moments of life with the help of colors, sounds, smells and details. Impressionists got their name thanks to Claude Monet's work *"Impression, Sunrise"* (1874) first shown at what would become known as the Exhibition of the Impressionists' in Paris in April, 1874. The painting of the artist seems to have been created from numerous strokes of the painting brush. Only from a certain distance you can recognize the sunrise above the water in an orange spot in the grey and blue haze, while the fishing boats can be recognized in the dark blue smears. The recipient can realize what the artist painted in the picture clearly only being from afar, but to feel and explore the image she/he examines every detail on the picture. In this way, the researchers study the paintings by famous impressionists, and in that manner, from our point of view, we should read and interpret the pictures of the texts by Virginia Woolf.

In the novel *"The Waves"* we are not interested in the features of the narrative or in the specifics of the deployment of events, but the picturesque word, the skillful mastering of the author's technique of another kind of art (visual art), which became the source of the renewal of literary techniques. Virginia Woolf used the achievements of famous painters and her carefully chosen words transformed visual image into the picture of the text. We emphasize that the writer appeals to the aesthetics of impressionism precisely in the context of the intermedial interaction between literature and painting.

As in painting, Virginia Woolf recurs to strong framing effects. Every chapter of the novel *"The Waves"* starts with picturesque interlude in the style of the impressionistic landscape: "The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it. Gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky and the grey cloth became barred with thick strokes moving, one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually" (Woolf, 2005: 639).

All picturesque interludes are highlighted in italics and are located separately. It seems that the author organized an exhibition of impressionistic paintings within the text. The novel reveals a really deep potential for research in the aspect of intermedial interaction and the enrichment of the semiotic field of the dominant art at the expense of other types of arts.

The pictures of the sea landscape, which varies depending on the sunlight from dawn to sunset, are presented to the reader. N. Morzhenkova (2010) rightly traces the connection between the experiment of Virginia Woolf and the works of the famous French impressionist Claude Monet, who created a series of paintings depicting the Rouen Cathedral at different parts of the day in order to recreate "the moment" and the slightest nuances of illumination. The same is true for the novel of the English writer; however there is a deep link between the change of the visual pattern and heroes' life in the literary work. All nine parts of the novel "The Waves" begin with the description of the seashore from early morning to night and correspond to the basic stages of human life. And as the dawn changes by noon, and the day changes by evening dusk, the seasons changing happens as well. Thus, the childhood of heroes is connected with spring, and their youth is summer, etc. This change shows the movement of time – from the morning of life to the night, that is, to death.

Verbalized landscape interludes reproduce the moments of dawn, morning, noon, etc. and reflect changes occurring every minute. Virginia Woolf adopts the genre features of painting, often in combination with its compositional features and purely painting technique. "The sun struck upon the house, making the white walls glare between the dark windows. Their panes, woven thickly with green branches, held circles of impenetrable darkness" (Woolf, 2005: 708). A vivid image is enhanced by the play of not only colors, but also light and shadow. Under the influence of sunrays the pattern is constantly changing, the colors become lighter or darker, or shades change: "I have been in the dark (...) I rise into this dim light..." (Woolf, 2005: 653). "Gradually the dark bar on the horizon became clear as if the sediment in an old wine-bottle had sunk and left the glass green. Behind it, too, the sky cleared as if the white sediment there had sunk..." (Woolf, 2005: 639). The change of colors and general illumination determines the movement of the rising sun: impenetrable darkness gradually becomes clearer, black color changes to grey, then white, yellow and green stripes and feathers appear, and, at last, the fire is flaming up, the sea flares with gold, the sky is pouring with blue. The surrounding world wakes up, gets sharp shapes, a shadow – an indispensable companion of light – appears.

In the interludes with the help of light the whole world is filled with colors as soon as the sun appears on the horizon: the sea, which is compared with the grey canvas, is covered with "thick strokes, moving one after another" (Woolf, 2005: 639). The sea and the sky have got structure and color, become real and alive: "The surface of the sea slowly became transparent and lay rippling and sparkling until the dark stripes were almost rubbed out" (Woolf, 2005: 639).

Even in creating portraits the English writer is similar to the impressionist painters. With the help of color associations, language of flowers, several strokes and light dabs that express the mood, the image of the character, as the author and other heroes see it, is created. So, the image of Susan comes through the mirage of thoughts and associations: "I think sometimes (I'm not twenty yet) I am not a woman, but the light that falls on this gate, on this ground. I am the seasons, I think sometimes, January, May, November; the mud, the mist, the dawn." (Woolf, 2005: 683). It is impossible to illustrate it with one quotation. For the complete picture it is necessary to read the whole novel, because the image of each hero consists of the associations, his/her own feelings and thoughts, as the impressionistic picture consists of a large number of individual dabs that only together create a holistic voluminous image.

With the help of painting techniques and pictorial markers Virginia Woolf succeeded in describing of life "here and now" (Woolf, 2005: 653) that is repeatedly emphasized in the novel. The English novelist wrote in her diaries about the desire to reproduce the essence of the fleeting in "The Waves". According to Woolf,

the ability to see and express the poetry of up-to-the-minute is the main task of the artist, since the aspiration to the linear narrative and the desire to construct events “from breakfast to dinner” make the work sound false (Woolf, 2009).

The English writer sought to reproduce, to verbalize the visual effects, fleeting impressions, the finest nuances of the game of light and shadow, barely perceptible shades of human emotions. Virginia Woolf was able to convey a changing and barely perceptible with the help of artistic detail and the use of hints, instead of a detailed description of things, feelings and characters.

Woolf created a voluminous color picture by verbal means of speech, that gives the reader an idea of the form (flat strips, leaves in the shape of heart, long-legged glass), the color (red mushrooms, white and yellow flowers, green cloth, green spaces, white-white ships, silver balls), the texture (rough sprout, smooth pebbles), the light effects (islands of light, burning lights from the window, sharp stripes of shadow, glare, twilight, firelight, the light is fitful, “the water colored jewels with sparks of fire in them” (Woolf, 2005: 671)), the sounds (the bell rings, pigeon beats the air, car roaring, maids shambled and snickered), the direction of movement (chaotic cycle, wonderful crowding, everything stopped, “the whole world flowing and curving” (Woolf, 2005: 654)), the mood (jetting with gold from head to toe), and even the personal emotional perception (sparkling green, pink and pearly women, black and white men, moon face clock) of the objects that are depicted.

The deep meaning is hidden behind the color palette, which creates an additional semantic level in the novel. Colors often change, split into many shades, have their symbolic meaning and reflect the mood and feelings of heroes: “Now the black window glass is green again” (Woolf, 2005: 666). Red, green, white, yellow, gold, black, lilac, grey and pink prevail among the color names. On the one hand, red combines a series of typical associations of this color: red wine, excitement, anger, pain; “...rotten oaks apples, red with age” (Woolf, 2005: 644), red faces, light, fire, red flowers, red petals of roses and geraniums. On the other hand, there are completely new ones dictated by the subjective perception of the author of the meaning. That’s why purple and red could be symbols of life, warmth and nobility. Therefore, Jinny wishes for winter “...a thin dress shot with red threads that would gleam in the firelight. Then when the lamps were lit, I should put on my red dress and it would be thin as a veil...” (Woolf, 2005: 652-653).

Reading the novel, it is easy to notice that the semantic field of green also includes different aspects. On the one hand, its meaning is traditional. It is associated with nature, the essence of man, with naivety and the movement of life (green darkness, green as yew, green like a snail’s eyes, etc.). On the other hand, this color reflects the English conservatism and traditions (green baize table (Woolf, 2005: 674)). Impression from green is intensified by frequentative repetitions. This color is found in Woolf’s work so often that it seems that the greenery of wild herbs, leaves, darkness, among which flowers flash one by one, is the personification of human life whose fluidity is emphasized by the motion of the sun.

White color (white ships, white house lying among the trees (Woolf, 2005: 643), white words, white stockings and socks, white pebbles, white ties, white faces, white pages of the prayer book, white dresses, white ribbons, drops of white light etc.) is a symbol of innocence, purity and joy. It is neutral; it contains the magical power of the daylight of the sun, and the affinity with the Divine power. If school days are clearly associated by heroes with grey color (grey pants, grey puddles), then out-of-school life is traditionally white. Immediately after the lessons, children dress white socks, white dresses, and white ribbons.

Gold and silver colors (a golden cross, gold threads, golden warmth golden gilt chair, golden rays, gold cracks) have fairly similar semantics meaning in the novel “The Waves” and mean noble origin, welfare, glory and recognizing, Divine light and joy. The course of life under the streams of sunlight which darkens when bad things come. “Oh, to crumple this telegram in my fingers – to let the light of the world flood back (...) He died where he fell” (Woolf, 2005: 709).

Blue color often symbolizes unattainable ideal ("I shall be like my mother, silent a blue apron locking up the cupboards" (Woolf, 2005: 683)), sacred often inaccessible desire, faith (blue Holly mother), but yellow color (yellow stripes, flowers, yellow cracks) symbolizes joy. We should mention that green and blue, the colors of water and of nature and they figure in the texts in innumerable instances.

The meaning of black is stereotypical (black wings, a black book, black wings of dreams, black pointlets), however, it may occur very often, but it is getting gradually lighter and turns into another one. It seems the author hints that life would never stop and the black stripe is always changed if not into the white stripe then a lighter one.

Purple color (purple waves, purple stripe, purple light) is ambiguous and is used by the writer to compare with the sea. The course of life from Virginia Woolf's point of view means water-waves and we constantly feel their splashes or roar.

Pink is the symbol of youth and naivety (a pink dress of a little heroine, pink women etc.). It is associated with babies, little girls, femininity and softness. A combination of red and white, pink contains the features of both colors. The passion and power of red softened with the purity, openness and completeness of white. The deeper the pink, the more passion and energy it exhibits.

The novel "To the Lighthouse" is seen in a different context. The number-one is the character of the painter or more precisely paintress which one can see oftentimes in the novels by Virginia Woolf, but the sea is also very important in this text like in "the Waves" because it becomes a symbolical element that unites the past and the present.

The novel "To the Lighthouse" is autobiographical to a large extent as the scene takes place in the Ramsays' summer home in the Hebrides, on the Isle of Skye in Scotland, where Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, their children and numerous guests spend the summer. The prototype of Ramsays' house was the house of the Stevens called Talland-house on the St. Ibec Island. Virginia Woolf used to come to this house every summer with her parents, brothers and sisters before mother's death in 1895. Characters in the novel are near the sea or remember about their visits to the lighthouse. The main heroine Lily while looking for the right place to start the painting, she is also looking out towards the sea, seeing the waves. The process of painting in the novel by Virginia Woolf becomes similar to swimming: "While painting, she looks again at the sea, seeing wave following upon wave, just as each stroke she makes creates the need for another one" (Larsson, 2005).

It's interesting to note that Woolf's memoirs reveal the work on the novel "To the Lighthouse" – from the conception to the book publication. The purpose of the novel's appearance is determined by the authoress as follows: "to create a detailed portrait of the father, mother, St. Ibec Island, my childhood and all things without which my novels can't be – life and death..." (Woolf, 2009: 239). This helped the authoress to state define the main themes of the novel: irretrievable march of time, indifference of nature to the man's fate, desperate fight for survival, physical and spiritual memory and art as the way of reaching immortality.

Virginia Woolf like her main heroine – paintress Lily Briscoe writes about people who are dead. In the novel and throughout the pages of her diary the writer problematizes the destiny of the artist and more specifically a woman who dedicated her life to art. In the world of men a woman is not allowed for art mental development. Thus, Mr. Tansley (one of the representatives of masculine intellectual elite) states: "Woman can't paint, woman can't write" (Woolf, 2005: 287). Although Lily repeating his words decides to follow her own way, to have her heart set on painting. The authoress conveys us her own emotions with the help of Lily as a woman-painter who lives in times of men's rights only to be appreciated in different professional fields. Both Virginia Woolf and her heroine feel humiliated: "She looked at the canvas, lightly scored with running lines. It would be hung in the servants' bedrooms. It would be rolled up and stuffed under the sofa. What was the good of doing it then..." (Woolf, 2005: 359). But this doesn't matter. Creative process is her everything. The number one are the moments of eureka which occur when creative efforts help to catch the rhythm of existence, lift the veil on, covering up secrets and mysteries. All of that is Lily's

life. To have her own way she had to abdicate the woman's role to be a wife and mother. On the one hand this abdication causes some inferiority, personality change, caused by social disparity a narrow-mindedness. Lily doesn't find herself a woman, but a spinster with atrophied empathy which is in woman's nature, like Mrs. Ramsay. On the other hand, an important idea of Virginia Woolf's androgynous mind, liberality, freedom from gender discrimination which in due the person with the artistic sight and the capacity for creative work.

Throughout the novel Lily Briscoe is working on a portrait of Mrs. Ramsay. In the context of intermediality it is important to show a creative process of the paintress, her personal style and her inner experiences. Virginia Woolf interested in art and reveals the process Lily works on the picture in details. She conveys her way of thinking, the specific traits of her artistic worldview, her impressions from the painting theme and their realization with the help of lines, form and color in the picture: "...she began precariously dipping among the blues and umbers, moving her brush hither and thither, but it was now heavier and went slower, as if it had fallen in with in with some rhythm which was dictated to her (she kept looking at the hedge, at the canvas) by what she saw, so that while her hand quivered with life, this rhythm was strong enough to bear her along with it on its current. Certainly, she was losing consciousness of outer things" (Woolf, 2005: 359).

Working on the painting Lily is trying to decide what is more important – truthiness, accuracy in depicting and vivid individualization or identifying common patterns of the invariant, something that remains constant, that represents the life. It's interesting to see Lily's efforts to explain Mr. Bankes the sense of her painting: "But she had made no attempt at likeness, she said. (...) But the picture was not of them, she said. Or, not in this sense. There were other senses, too, in which one might reverence them. By a shadow here and the light there, for instance" (Woolf, 2005: 290).

Y. Kovrizhina compares the painting of Lily Briscoe depicting Mrs. Ramsay and James as a purple triangle with the works of cubists who represented modernist movement of painting. As noted by the researcher it is the cubists who used notional geometric figures. Moreover, in the novel the problems which are closely related to the philosophical ideas of cubism are discussed, since its followers tried to understand the nature of painting, threw called into question the possibility of depicting real essence of life, they claimed that there is a need for the research of abstract essence of the universe. The esthetic of cubism (M. Lifshitz) is a particular modeling of cognitive process when the artist refuses to rely on visual perception of the objective world.

But not only Woolf's heroine has "the eye of the painter". It seems the writer depicts the image of Mrs. Ramsay in which one can see mysterious spiritual power. Lily watches Mrs. Ramsay and James with a passion and the paintings reminded her of the works depicting Madonna with Christ child. Mrs. Ramsay like Mother of God is the vision of feminine beauty, self-giving love and maternity mystery. But these characteristics are not individual, they compose stereotypical image which women have to meet as the society demands. But we can't get the essence of the person under this mask of the angel. This makes the problem of creating women image character in painting when they don't have personality traits. Lily is trying to see the essence of Mrs. Ramsay, understand her feelings to Mrs. Ramsay and raise her memories.

Creating a literary work Virginia Woolf uses rich palette of colors: "The sun (...) was bright enough, the grass still a soft deep green, the house starred in its greenery with purple passion flowers, and rooks dropping cool cries from the high blue" (Woolf, 2005: 269). In addition, the writer mentions the name of imaginary artist Mr. Ponsfurt who influenced on local painters. All these facts the integration of painting into everyday reality. The descriptions of the nature remind picturesque scenery and marine etude. The main character is portraying. There is also the example of verbal description of still-life in the novel. It's the description of the vase with fruit which Mrs. Ramsay examined blankly being deep in thought: "No, she said, she did not want a pear. Indeed, she had been keeping guard over the dish of fruit (without realizing it) jealously, hoping

that nobody would touch it. Her eyes had been going in and out among the curves and shadows of the fruit, among the rich purples of the lowland grapes" (Woolf, 2005: 324). The writer like the artist is trying to reveal the specific of the shape and form and color with the help of verbal means in order the reader has a realistic perspective.

The interaction between literature and visual art can be seen on all levels of the novel "To the Lighthouse": on genre level, name level, subject matter, as well as in adopting painting techniques in literature. As to name level, it includes, first of all, pictorial markers: brush, canvas, color, shape, prospect, easel, paints, lines etc.

As to the subject matter it is connected with the painting theme of Lily's work. She portraits Mrs. Ramsay who is reading a book to her little son James.

As to the form of the work, it comes out of the authoress imitation of the compositional features of certain art genre. In this way the writer often represents Mrs. Ramsay with James who sit at the window and the window serves as the frame of the painting: "...Mrs. Ramsay sitting with James in the window and the cloud moving and the tree bending..." (Woolf, 2005: 286).

Conclusion

As a result, the peculiarities of intermedial interaction between art and literature in the novels "To the Lighthouse" and "The Waves" is carried out at micro and macro levels. Macro-level means worldviews, paradigms, and philosophical approaches, conceptions of life understanding and interpretation of the events of the real world, the laws of objective world through the world of subjective experience.

Micro-level means the using of painting techniques and pictorial markers while designing visual images, using allusions of art movements. The interaction can be seen at the level of genre (landscape, portrait, made in the style of impressionists in the novel "The Waves" or cubists in the novel "To the Lighthouse"). The writer uses a lot of pictorial markers (canvas, touches, brushstrokes, names of colors etc.) and so helps the reader to recognize the world of another art.

Cohabitation of art and literature in Virginia Woolf's novel on the one hand reveals the specifics of artistic thinking of the writer which is based on the understanding of art as the source of oeuvre; on the other hand, it points to the shape and content of artistic dialogue as the result of the meeting of cultures. The colors and the effects of light and shadows make the atmosphere and internal mood of the work and are the means of creating heroine's characteristics as well as they are spiritualized. The use of painting techniques and pictorial markers helps the writer to show the course of life and depicts the shape and tactile properties of items so the reader sees a volume picture.

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