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Semiosis of textual categories of time and space in short fiction by Breece D’J Pancake

Семіозис текстових категорій часу і простору в коротких оповіданнях Бріса Декстера Пенкейка

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Abstract

The article explores the semiosis of textual categories of time and space in short fiction by Breece D’J Pancake. The methodology of the research is based on the works by M. Bakhtin, Yu. Lotman, G. Genett, P. Ricoeur and U. Eco. It has been proved that the stories by Pancake replicate several Biblical plots: the creation of the world and the original sin (“Trilobites”), a prodigal son (“Time and Again”), the whore of Babylon / Mary Magdalene (“A Room Forever”) and the apocalyptic mark of the beast (“The Mark”). The time is static and is marked by seasonality. The space is segregated into macro-outer world and the inner space of the towns, engulfing people’s destinies and predetermining their down-to-earth existence. The semantic system is represented by the cross-cultural concepts: the light as a sign of hope; a room as an embodiment of a shelter; the hollowness of the night, growing into the hollowness of life; a rabbit embryo, symbolizing the mark of the beast; a snake, serving as a symbol of seduction; a train or a bus as the means of escapism. Three rounds of coffee in “Trilobite”

Анотація

У статті досліджується семіозис текстових категорій часу та простору у короткій прозі Бріса Декстера Пенкейка. Методологія дослідження базується на роботах М. Бахтіна, Ю. Лотмана, Ж. Женетта, П. Рікера та У. Еко. Доведено, що оповідання Пенкейка відтворюють декілька біблійних сюжетів: створення світу та перворідний гріх («Трилобіти»), блудний син («Знову і знов»), Вавилонська блудниця / Марія Магдалена («Кімната назавжди») і апокаліптичний знак звіра («Знак»). Час статичний і відзначений сезонністю. Простір сегрегований і репрезентується зовнішнім макро-світом та внутрішнім простором містечка, що пожирає долі людей, формуючи характер їхнього приземленого існування. Семантична система представлена крос-культурними концептами: світлом як знаком надії; кімнатою як уособленням притулку; порожнечою ночі, що трансформується у порожнечу життя; кролячим ембріоном, що уособлює знак звіра; змією як символом спокуси; поїздом чи

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replicate three circles of Hell in “The Divine Comedy” by Dante.

Keywords: Biblical symbolism, closed reality, explicit seasonality, means of escapism, textual categories.

Introduction

It is the Biblical text that starts measuring the world and the human existence through the language with the word as its initial code and constituent element: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; and without Him nothing was made that has been made. <...> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*” (Catholic Online Logo (n/d), 14). The world gets processed both through the language and the personal-temporal-spatial coordinates. Outside temporal and spatial code there is no existence, no human being, no objective reality or its perception. Time and space are the essential forms of every cognition, which define every cultural phenomenon, every human work, or a literary text in particular. The narration gets modelled through the temporal and spatial system, which forms the skeleton of the literary text, organizes its structure and shapes its artistic sense. According to Bakhtin, “every intrusion into the sphere of senses is committed exclusively through the gates of chronotope” (Bakhtin, 1975, p. 406). Thus, the chronotopic category represents a peculiar meaningful system of signs.

The exploration of the semiotics of time and space, is linked to the analysis of language devices, serving as a key to the unique author’s code (Kubryakova, 2004). The way the human mind processes the objective reality gets reflected in the language and is defined by it. Traditionally the exploration of the chronotopic categories leads to the construction of models, embracing lexico-semantic fields, suggested by Vsevolodova, 2007 and Guk, 1996. There is a strain of works, spotlighting the mechanisms of representation of the chronotopic categories through the language, among which the following aspects dominate: morphological (Vinogradov, 1971, Kubryakova, 2004, Nikolina, 2007); lexico-semantic (Guk, 1996, Denisenko, 2002); syntactic (Myakshева, 2008); conceptual (Naberezhnova, 2008). In the present research the analysis of the categories of time and space will be joined to the detection of the

автобусом як засобом ескапізму. Три раунди кави у «Трилобітах» відтворюють три кола Аду у «Божественній комедії» Данте.

Ключові слова: Біблійний символізм, закрита реальність, виражена сезонність, засоби ескапізму, текстові категорії.

connection between the sign system and the process of semiosis of the chronotopic categories.

The categories of time and space represent “some hierarchical structure of subordinate senses” in every literary text (Toporov, 1983, p. 242), transforming from the geometric and physical categories into semiotic ones, becoming “a language, capable to express various meaningful notions” (Lotman, 1997), which enables us to speak of semiotic and lingvopoetic character of the categories of time and space in fiction.

The contemporary linguistic paradigm tends to be anthropocentric, exploring the language and culture, the human beings and the sign systems, generated by them, including the genuine constants like time and space, participating in conceptualization of the fictional world. The topicality of the exploration is conditioned by the fact that the new contexts, created in Modern, Postmodern and Metamodern literature, make different emphasis in the temporal and local categories.

The works by Breece D’J Pancake, which are in focus of the current research, get often compared to those by Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Flannery O’Connoi and other twentieth-century giants and represent a picture of West Virginian world of the second half of the XXth century, processed through the unique perception of a remarkably promising young author with suicidal inclinations. “Chekhovian in impetus, but closer to poetry than prose, these stories often feature a lonely young man in a dreary small community, hiding his dreams and thoughts from the world. This character is surrounded by rough, often violent, working men – miners, labourers, boxers – ageing, failing parents and women: despised or desired, but never granted a soul. This vision of reality, one senses, is Pancake’s own in both life and work”, says Karen Altenberg (Altenberg, 2017). Despite their literary value and high critical acclaim, the text by Pancake, and their chronotopic fame in particular, have never been

the object to a literary research. Meanwhile, the analysis of the chronotopic structure and its determiners allows to detect numerous semantic layers coded by the author.

The objective of the article is to provide a comprehensive analysis of textual categories of time and space and the mechanisms of their representation as specific components of semiotic act in the in short fiction by Breece D’J Pancake.

Theoretical Framework

The research is based on the works by M. Bakhtin, Yu. Lotman, G. Genett and P. Ricoeur, devoted to the exploration of the categories of time and space in the literary text. According to Bakhtin, “the temporal features tend to disclose in space, and the space gets comprehended and measured by time” (Bakhtin, 1975, p. 235). Lotman proves that the artistic space represents “a world model of some particular author, expressed in language of his/her spatial concepts” (Lotman, 1988, pp. 252-253). Lotman suggests a range of dominant spatial forms: open – close space; linear (directed) – undirected (static) space; real (living) – magical (imaginary) space; own – alien space; and pointed – restricted space.

French philologist Gerard Genett focuses on the discrepancy on the sequence of the events in the storyline and the type of narration, calling it anachronism. Anachronism is inherent to every text and can be represented in two forms: *prolepsis* (a narrative approach when the story anticipates the events to be); *analepsis* (telling a story, which took place before the time of the reader). He also singles out three types of *ellipsis* (the gaps in time): a) explicit, when the lost event is pointed out; b) implicit, when the lost event is not manifested directly but gets reconstructed by the reader out of chronological gaps and narrative disruptions); c) hypothetical, which can’t be localized and gets detected post factum in some analepsis (Genett, 1998, p. 138). Genett proves that the contemporary literary mind expresses itself exclusively within the textual categories, which form the figures of “par excellence”, where the language becomes space, and the space turning into a language speaks for itself (Genett, 1998, p. 132).

Paul Ricoeur suggests to explore temporality on the basis of *mimesis*. Ricoeur uses the notion of *mimesis* in Aristotle’s sense (excluding Plato’s ideas), notably as an artistic imitation of reality, and not its passive copying. Ricoeur extends it up

to three components: *mimesis I* (anticipation), *mimesis II* (morphogenesis), *mimesis III* (transformation). Thus, *mimesis I* is based on actual reality, life as an aggregation of facts and events, deprived of cause-and-effect relations. *Mimesis II* is the composition of fiction and *mimesis III* is the act of its perception, the ideas and senses the literary work generates. Thus, every stage of *mimesis* is linked to a particular temporal experience, which ranges the time of the story according to the following scheme: *mimesis I* (the real time of the world) > *mimesis II* (the configured time of the artistic world depicted by the author) > *mimesis III* (assumed experience of the time) (Ricoeur, 1998, p. 82).

The exploration of the semiotic system of the text is grounded on the poststructural concept of a sign, suggested by Ch. Pierce and U. Eco. According to Eco, the signified enters into the semasiological relationships with the signifier due to the code, which means that the code is a particular function, the initial zeroth-order meaning, fixed in the language in a particular moment of history (Eco, 2007, p. 66). It constitutes the first stage of semiosis. The second stage deals with the interpretation of a sign. The key notion here is the notion of the interpretant or the “action of the sign”, the sign, which is created in the mind of the reader, who senses it and enriches its meaning, either creating a more developed sign, or, on the contrary, reducing its meaning (Nyot, 2001, p. 14). Thus, the content of the sign, created by the author, and the content of the sign, comprehended by the reader, may differ. Eco says, that the interpreter defines the meaning of the sign in this very context, namely distinguishing its connotation. The third stage of semiosis by U. Eco dwells on the idea that potentially limitless semiosis is anyway determined somehow, and it is the dynamic objects that plays the restrictive role: “this object, the sign of which is the sign”, “some particular state of the outer world” (Eco, 2007, p. 323), “reality that sends this sign to its representation” (Usmanova, 2000, p. 128). The dynamic object is something that reduces senses or, vice versa, creates a bigger frame for the interpretation of the sign. According to Eco, in the text of fiction the semiosis is already restricted by the text itself, notable by the lexico-grammatical language devices.

Methodology

Methods and techniques of the research are determined by the tasks: to describe the structure and the functions of the categories of time and space in short fiction by Pancake and determine

their philosophic, artistic and linguistic dimensions, to retrace their semiotic potential; to disclose the nature of semiosis of the categories of time and space in the author's prose; to detect the set of the linguistic devices participating in the semiosis of the categories of time and space and structuring the artistic text in the selected prose. Among the research methods are the following: the method of semantic analysis, the method of oppositions, the method of contextual analysis, the method of chronotopic analysis.

Results and Discussion

The term "semiosis" was first applied by a Greek doctor Galen from Pergamum (Pergamon) (139-199) in relation to the symptoms of illness. However, it is only in the XXth century when the term "semiosis" gets exploited within the theory of signs and the sign systems. The new approach to the definition of the term dates back to F. de Saussure and is based on the interpretation of the sign as the dual entity, representing the signifier and the signified. Hereby within the semiotic tradition by Saussure, semiosis is defined as an operation, which determines the relation between the form of expression and the form of content. On the other hand, Ch. Peirce suggests the triadic scheme "the object – the sign – the interpretant", where the "interpretant" is the way the sign is exploited by the man. According to Peirce "every cognition of an object is possible only through the exploration of the signs generated by it" (Pierce, 2009, p. 89).

The fictional space, represented in the stories by Breece D'J Pancake, is densely coded. The peculiar locus of West Virginia, embodied in the author's writings, shapes peoples' destinies, creating the formula of "place over people" (Gower, 2017). The space of existence by Pancake bears the down-to-earth philosophy and produces people of particular class, chronotopically restricted by their background: truckdrivers, unemployed miners, tramps, paroled convicts, runaways, farmers, fatherless sons, hardened men, and harder women. Pancake's protagonist is a chronotopic abnormality, an error in the code, a lonely person, "full of a hard-spirited *otherness*" (Gower, 2017).

Pancake's fiction represents several circles of reality: the old times, prior to the mimesis II, the fictional reality or mimesis II, and the inner world of the protagonist, formed by experience, mimesis III. The short fiction, which is supposed to be what Genett calls analepsis is only theoretically such. The time, which gets

presented in its common forms (the present, the past and the future), stays static as nothing changes, life doesn't change. West Virginia is, relatively speaking, a swamp, absorbing everybody, belonging to its rural static space. The "world outside" exists, however, is never reached physically. "*Trilobites*" is a story built in circles, where the large circle is the dimension of a big history, having started million years ago and going on, and the smaller one is the current temporality of the locus described. Trilobites serve as a symbol of eternity, of something greater than the actual reality, piercing the layers of time: "*Look at Company Hill again, all sort of worn down and round. A long time ago it was real craggy and stood like an island in the Teas River. It took over a million years to make that smooth little hill, and I've looked all over it for trilobites. I think how it has always been there and always will be, at least for as long as it matters*" (Pancake, 1983, p. 21). According to *the Encyclopedia Britannica*, trilobite is "any member of a group of extinct fossil arthropods easily recognized by their distinctive three-lobed, three-segmented form. Trilobites, exclusively marine animals, first appeared at the beginning of Cambrian Period, about 542 million years ago, when they dominated the seas" (Britannica, 2023). The protagonist is looking for trilobites as if trying to link to something bigger than the actual locality: "*I still can't find a trilobite, I say*" (Pancake, 1983, p. 22). The personal story of the protagonist, his feelings and thoughts gets partially told between the three rounds of coffee in the café, where Tinker Reilly's little sister works. It is between the pots of coffee his initially embryonic desire grows towards the new object. Ginny, who manages to cross the chronotopic parameters of Michigan, stays behind the local secularity. The primitive sexual desire, visible for the reader, is still unnoticeable for the character-narrator, who yet refuses to acknowledge his emotional transition, the dominance of the closed reality over the borderless bigger circle of entity: "*She goes to the counter end and scoffs down the rest of her sundae. I smile at her, but she's jailbait. Jailbait and black snakes are two things I won't touch with a window pole*" (Pancake, 1983, p. 22). Basically, the coffee rounds symbolize the spiritual degradation, the triumph of baser self over the higher feelings: "*Tinker Reilly's little sister pours my coffee. She has good hips. They are kind of like Ginny's and they slope in nice curves to her legs*"; "*The girl brings Jim's coffee in his cup, and we watch her pump back to the kitchen. Good hips*"; "*Tinker's sister comes up with her coffeepot to make us for a tip. I ask her for an aspirin and see she's got a*

pimple on her collarbone. I don't remember seeing pictures of China. I watch little sister's hips" (Pancake, 1983, pp. 22-23). At the same time, the "*pictures of China*" make a separate symbol as the postcards themselves. The postcards are sent by Ginny, the postcards are shown by the protagonist's friend, serving as the sign of existence of a bigger world outside Michigan, outside the States: "*She sends me postcards with alligator wrestlers and flamingos on the front*" (Pancake, 1983, p. 21). And his "*I don't remember seeing pictures of China*" point out the protagonist's concentration on locality, on the "*giggle*" of Tinker Reilly's sister in the café's kitchen. There comes a paradox: on the one hand, the outside locus gets neglected, ignored in favor of Michigan unpretentious topos, something carnal, something here and now, on the other hand, a big historical space, eternal dimension is the destination the character-narrator craves for and ultimately reaches: "*I feel my fear moving away in rings through time for a million years*" (Pancake, 1983, p. 37).

It is the locality that provokes changes inside the characters. According to Lotman, the characters' behavior is shaped by the space they are in, and the lapse of the space boosts the transformation according to the laws of the new space (Lotman, 2022, p. 264). Time and space transform them, reshaping the nature of the relationships inside the couple, separated by spaces. During the last date with Ginny love changes for sex: "*I don't wait. She isn't making love, she's getting laid. All right, I think, all right. Get laid*" (Pancake, 1983, p. 35). At the same time, the lower feelings are localized and tied to a particular element of the local toponymy, the girl from the café: "*I pull her pants around her ankles, rut her. I think of Tinker's sister. Ginny isn't here. Tinker's sister is under me*" (Pancake, 1983, p. 35). Here comes another spatial symbol, the symbol of a snake, as a Biblical sign of sin, the sign of a broken personal rule, a betrayal of personal principles: "*I open my eyes to the floor, smell that tang of rain-wet wood. Black snakes. It was the only time he had to whip me*" (Pancake, 1983, p. 35). The snake is "one of the most complicated and unsolved figures of both the world folklore and world religion", characterized by snake fighting (Propp, 1986, p. 216). The snake symbolism sobers up the protagonist, boosting his reverse transformation, which ends up in a spiritual escapism from the corrupt reality. The perception of Ginny changes, the circle of the actual reality intervenes with the eternal dimension: "*I look a long time at the hollow shadows hiding her eyes. She is somebody I*

met a long time ago. I can't remember her name for a minute, then it comes back to me" (Pancake, 1983, p. 35). The protagonist understands that it is the locality which is responsible for degradation of the whole generations: "*I picture my father – a young hobo with the Michigan sunset making him squint, the lake behind him. His face is hard from all the days and places he fought to live in, and of a sudden, I know his mistake was coming back here to set that locust-tree post on the knob*" (Pancake, 1983, 36). At the end of the story there appears an approaching train as a symbol of escapism, its device. The protagonist gets ready to cross the border; he won't stay: "*I get up. I'll spend tonight at home. I've got eyes to shut in Michigan – maybe even Germany or China, I don't know yet. I walk, but I'm not scared*" (Pancake, 1983, p. 37).

Thus, trilobites serve as a guide to the beginning of the world, the creation of lasting things, like the hills around, which had seen the millions of years of human civilization. The common pinpoint locality, represented by the house, a concrete patch in the street, the café, the car, the tractor, the cane, the old mountain, is opposed to eternal borderless, unlimited macro-objects, like the sky, the clouds, or the temporal dimension "long before" and the spatial dimension "outside" Michigan. As a result, the reader deals with so-called "splitting of the space", and the local objects of two types of locality fulfill the role of "indexes" that "point at the shift of the spatial zones and signals, marking the place" (Chertov, 1999, pp. 140-155). The "splitting" characterizes the emotional level, the state of mind, as the physical space of secular life is in-built into the macro-space of eternity.

The time in the short fiction by Pancake is marked by explicit seasonality: "*the black joints of river are frosted by this foggy rain*"; "*the bowling alley is closed for New Year's*" ("*A Room Forever*") (Pancake, 1983, p. 53), "*the passing of an autumn night*" ("*Fox Hunters*") (Pancake, 1983, p. 61), with love and the years counted by summers: "*many summers ago he touched <...>*"; "*the March wind spraying dust into little clouds*" ("*Hollow*") (Pancake, 1983, p. 39); "*The air is smoky with summertime*" ("*Trilobites*") (Pancake, 1983, p. 21).

The topos in "*Hollow*" is subdivided into two spatial layers – the mine and the world above opposed to each other: "*Buddy was lost in the rhythm of the truck mine's relay; the glitter of coal and sandstone in his cap light, the setting and lifting and pouring*"; "*heard the pulley*

squeak in the circle of blue above" (Pancake, 1983, p. 39). Mine is a closed space, "a world of twenty yards" (Pancake, 1983, p. 42), which the protagonist's life is linked to in the same way he is linked to the locality around it. He gets stuck in the "deep tunnels" feeding him and shaping the mode of living of people around (Pancake, 1983, p. 39) The dark colour of the mine dominates, being represented in the dust sprayed by wind (Pancake, 1983, 39), "the sweet tobacco juice" (Pancake, 1983, p. 40), "the raw dirty faces" (Pancake, 1983, p. 41), "coal splinters" in the air (Pancake, 1983, 41), "the coal face" (Pancake, 1983, p. 41), "the dust in up-down streams" (Pancake, 1983, 42), the cold air, "sealing the dirt to his skin" (Pancake, 1983, p. 42), the hollow of the night (Pancake, 1983, p. 43). Thus, the darkness transforms into the hollowness, physical and emotional. The semiotic circles of the dark restricted space extend to the hollowness of the place, left by the girl the protagonist loves, Sally. Thus, the filled-with-objects-space develops into an empty, hollow one, which can be defined as *atopy* (Palaguta, 2008, p. 2) or *non-site* (Ozhe, 2017, p. 136). The vehicle in the story is viewed not as an escapist device like it is in "Trilobites", but as a tool of restoration the past, called to return the lost elements and people back into their native topographic parameters: "'Sal's gone, yes, she is. Yes, she is. Couple of months, an' we'll show her, yes we will.'" He saw himself in Charleston, in the Club, then taking Sally home in his new car" (Pancake, 1983, p. 50).

The protagonist of "Hollow" is a person of reversed perception. Lotman associates the closed space with darkness, whereas sunshine and light are linked to freedom. Pancake's character relates to darkness and coal dust. His mode of life, inherited from his father, links him to the dust of the mine, making it a constant part of his personal space. The sunlight and the "new shoes", on the contrary, get associated with funerals (Pancake, 1983, p. 45), the killing of a deer (Pancake, 1983, p. 51), a blood-thirsty cat and a dog at home (Pancake, 1983, p. 52). According to Lotman, "memories" is a reconstruction of the semiotic entity by its particles (Lotman, 1992, p. 18). The story rests on retrospection ("Musta been sixty years ago" (Pancake, 1983, p. 40)) and the present locality, which the main character wants to preserve.

The plot of "A Room Forever" is based on the balance between the stability of the universe around the protagonist-narrator and an eight-dollar room on New Year, embodying the temporal toponymy built by the man: "I see the

river in patches between buildings, and the black joints of river are frosted by this foggy rain. But on the river it's always the same. Tomorrow starts another month on the river, then a month on land-only the tales we tell will change, wrap around other times and other names" (Pancake, 1983, p. 53). Thus, the space is linked to time, which reflects the thesis by Toporov, who believes that "the center of the space is the center of time. <...> every full-fledged description of space presupposes the definition "here – now", and not just "here" (as well as the definition of time is not only focused on "now", but on "now – here")" (Toporov, 1983, p. 223). If the natural space equals the eternity, the man-constructed world is marked by finitude. The personal stories are numerous and alike, coming in succession against the background, bigger than them.

The parameters of the town in the story, represented by the streets, the *Delmar*, the bar on First Avenue, the smoke of the lobby, the row of crowded taverns with hardened people's destinies inside shrink to the protagonist's room "with a kid playing a whore" (Pancake, 1983, p. 58). The girl is viewed as an alien for the town element, which is traced in the details of her portrait: "I can tell right off she is not a chippy. Her front is more like a kid who had a home once - jeans, a real raincoat, a plastic scarf on her head. And she is way too young for this town - the law won't put up with fresh chicken in this place" (Pancake, 1983, p. 55). The girl doesn't belong to the place or the profession of a hooker: "You aren't cut out for this" (Pancake, 1983, p. 57). The room as a locus for New Year entertainment could transform into a topos able to save one destiny: "No, it's just I need a place. I got to stop moving around, you know?" (Pancake, 1983, p. 57). This room is a sort of a place inside a bigger space, a town, which is, in turn, inside of the huge eternal topography. The room forms a special shelter for two perfect strangers, creating a *heterotopia*, "a peculiar space inside of the common social spaces" familiar to the protagonist, but not to the girl (Palaguta, 2008).

The mirror serves as a symbol of meeting, as the holder of the story shared only by two. The absence of the girl in the mirror at the end of "A Room Forever" celebrates her escapism, unnoticeable for the others: "I look for her in the mirror but she is gone. I would have seen her going out the front, so I head for the back door to look for her. She is sitting against a building in the rain, passed out cold. When I shake her, I see that she has cut both wrists down to the leaders, but the cold rain has clotted the

blood so that only a little ooze out when I move her. I go back inside” (Pancake, 1983, p. 59). Here comes the symbol of shit washed away by the river together with the town secrets. In the same way the blood of the girl gets washed by the rain: “I walk along the avenue thinking how shit always sinks, and how all these towns dump their shit for the river to push it down to the delta. Then I think about that girl sitting in the alley, sitting in her own slough, and I shake my head. I have not gotten that low” (Pancake, 1983, pp. 59-60). Water washes away the dirt of the local civilization. The wasted lives turn into water, which is eternal and will stay when the people are gone. According to Pellegrino, a rural space “is a collective space of a village”, whereas “the urban space is centered” and is represented “by the individual space of the subject” (Pellegrino, 1989). The topography of “*A Room Forever*” is a town, which generates some ambiguity of the space. On the one hand, the plot of the story spotlights two individual fates intervened at some particular moment. On the other, these fates are similar to all the others in this very locality. The people portrayed characterize the town society in the whole. Even though the protagonist is aware of the dimension of eternity, something bigger than the lives around, he ultimately returns into his native imperfect space.

The attempt of the girl to commit suicide equals to the attempt of people to run away from the town on the busses. There is no escapism, as the place is a part of you and will always be: “I stop in front of the bus station, look in on the waiting people, and think about all the places they are going. But I know they can't run away from it or drink their way out of it or die to get rid of it” (Pancake, 1983, p. 60). The inner topography of the story is a hierarchical zoning of the closed levels of space, controlled by “the cops and the pimps” (Pancake, 1983, p. 56).

In “*Time and Again*” there is again a conflict between the limited topicality and the outer world, which takes the nearest and dearest. The burning light in the kitchen serves as a symbol of hope for the son to return: “I left the kitchen light burning. This is an empty old house since the old lady died. When Mr. Weeks doesn't call, I write everybody I know about my boy. Some of my letters always come back, and the folks who write back say nobody knows where he got off to. I can't help but think he might come home at night when I am gone, so I let the kitchen light bum and go on out the door” (Pancake, 1983, p. 83). On the other hand, the grunting of the hogs not only characterizes the static nature of the space depicted, the routine nature of life of the old man,

but also works as a symbol of the futility of hoping, in the down-to-earth reality miracles don't take place: “I pull up beside my house. My hogs run from their shelter in the backyard and grunt at me. I stand by my plow and look at the first rims of light around Sewel Mountain through the snowy limbs of the trees. Cars hiss by on the clean road. The kitchen light still bums, and I know the house is empty. My hogs stare at me, snort beside their trough. They are waiting for me to feed them, and I walk to their pen” (Pancake, 1983, p. 88). The cold of the morning stands for the frozen status of the reality, which took place after the death of wife and the running away of the son. “*Time and again, I try to count and can't*”, says the protagonist (Pancake, 1983, p. 88). This “*time and again*” embodies the whole nature of his life, which had stopped. There a movement of actions which don't lead to the actual development in life. “*I try to count and can't*” show the emotional condition of the protagonist, stand for his inability to concentrate, to reconcile with the actual state of things, arranged after the death of his wife.

The Biblical symbolism gets the most powerful in the story “*The Mark*”. The child conceived in sin with the protagonist's brother is viewed as a beast, a rabbit: “She felt the spot where the baby should be, closed her eyes, and tried to imagine her blood in the rabbit's veins” (Pancake, 1983, p. 90). The idea of the beast is repeated on the several levels – in connection to her brother and within a story inside the story: “She remembered her brother Clinton holding a litter of baby rabbits close to his naked chest while the mowing machine droned behind him in a dead hum. Was that the summer she began to want him?” (Pancake, 1983, 90); ““That baby was born lookin' just like a monkey,” Carlene said, bending herself to talk between Reva and the cage. “Momma swears it's the mark of the beast”” (Pancake, 1983, p. 97).

Conclusions

Thus, the stories by Breece D'J Pancake replicate several Biblical plots: the creation of the world and the original sin (“*Trilobites*”), a prodigal son (“*Time and Again*”), the whore of Babylon / Mary Magdalene (“*A Room Forever*”) and the apocalyptic mark of the beast (“*The Mark*”). The macro-space of West Virginia is an enclosed structure, “a glass ball”, which doesn't let the protagonists out; they are tied to their space, which always a genetic part of them. The spatial code is inbuilt in the main characters, predetermining their behavior and predestining their life path.

The time in the texts is static, echoing the idea that nothing changes in the locus described. The calendar time is represented by four seasons – summer, autumn, winter and spring, mirroring the mood of the characters, their state of mind.

Spatially the fictional topography Pancake includes two macro-layers: the eternal “big” natural world around and the actual locus of a town, native to the characters. The town, embracing the space of buildings (hotels, cafes, houses) serves as a sort of a restricted structure with seemingly transparent borders, which the protagonists fail to cross. Despite the regular characters, the mass, the protagonists are able to notice the world’s eternity, comprehend its limitless nature. However, the protagonists are observers, thinkers, but not doers.

The semantic system of the author’s texts is marked by a range of significant symbols, expressed by the Bible-generated nouns or cross-cultural concepts: the light as a sign of hope; the trilobites as markers of the world creation, something bigger than the town described, greater than the actual protagonist’s space; a room as an embodiment of a shelter; the hollowness of the night, growing into the hollowness of life; a rabbit, symbolizing the mark of the beast and a deadly sin; a snake, serving as a symbol of seduction; a train and a bus “working” as the means of escapism, never used by the protagonists. The characters “see” the way out, but don’t believe that the change of topicality can lead to spiritual transformation. Three rounds of coffee in “*Trilobite*” replicate three circles of Hell in “*The Divine Comedy*” by Dante. At the same time, the sky as an opposition to down-to-earth everyday reality, is present in the majority of stories, linking the protagonist to the universe, making him its part.

In Pancake’s works space dominates over time. Space predetermines the lives, which are the same as the succession of lives before them, because within the depicted locus the trilobite hills are eternal and they matter, and people just change, substitute each other against the eternal landscape around their town, being unable to leave the maintained circle of things.

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