

MEMORY OF THE ROARING 1960s IN ALICE RANDALL'S NOVEL "REBEL YELL"

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The paper discusses the novel "Rebel Yell" by the popular African American writer Alice Randall, in which she goes back to recent American history trying to understand the tendencies in the attitudes of Afro-Americans that were determined by the turbulent events of the 1960s–70s on the example of the novel's protagonist Abel Jones. Memory, which is present in the reminiscences of Randall's characters, helps to reveal the gap between the reality and people's expectations that explains human traumas and accounts for the split in people's psyche. The novel delves into the problems of a person who is torn between two communities – black and white, trying to adapt to the norms of the white middle class, which results in a disaster. Key themes of the novel are discussed, and an outline of central events that contributed to the transformation of the protagonist's character is given. A link between the recent US past and the complex present is drawn.

Keywords: contemporary African American novel, the roaring 1960s, the Civil Rights movement, race relations.

Introduction. The novel "Rebel Yell" (2009) by Alice Randall, the famous African American writer, prize winner of a number of prestigious literary prizes, addresses the present and the recent past and deals with the social and political life in the USA since the time of the Civil Rights movement to the election of the first Black President Barack Obama.

Randall has already made her name starting with the scandalous novel "The Wind Done Gone" (2001) when she was accused of plagiarism by the Margaret Mitchell Fund. It was considered that the writer made use of situations and motives of the most popular American novel. After tough negotiations a compromise was reached, and the novel was published under the subtitle "the unauthorized parody". The author also agreed to make a considerable donation to Morehouse College in Atlanta. However, the novel deals with the situations of "Gone with the Wind" from the point of view of a black woman slave, a biracial half-sister of Mitchell's protagonist who has an unusual strong will and power of observation. In spite of Against all odds she manages to become an independent person who chooses to go her own way and finds acquires her own place in the changing world. "The Wind Done Gone" gives an insight into the mores of the South during the period that transformed the South – before, during and after the Civil War. While the book reiterates what has been known about the period from a huge number of books, it offers a fresh and intriguing account of the dramatic events in the form of a popular novel.

Her next novel "Pushkin and the Queen of Spades" (2004) also aroused violent emotions as its protagonist Windsor Armstrong, professor of Russian Literature at Vanderbilt University,

is trying to acknowledge her identity in view of her clash with her son who cannot accept her attitude to the question of race and African American past. He is called Pushkin after the great Russian poet, and like Pushkin he is a non-conformist who does not want to forget about his ancestry and chooses the career of a footballer – like thousands of the dark-skinned who display their sports talents. In addition, he wants to marry the Russian lap dancer Tatiana who came to the USA from Leningrad and who has the inborn memory of the great poet and is a kind of challenge for the high-brow professor. The dramatic circumstances of Alexander Pushkin's life are used by Windsor for her rap version of the poet's unfinished novel "The Blackamoor of Peter the Great", which she wants to give as a wedding present to her son who did not invite her to the ceremony. She revisits her life trying to answer the most topical questions of identity, sexuality and the tragic history of her people and her own dramatic life.

In 2012 she published the novel "Ada's Rules", which is a different kind of read altogether dealing with a woman changing her lifestyle and body – losing weight and coming to accept herself.

She is also known as a popular songwriter and the co-author of the cookery book "Soul Food Love" written with her daughter Caroline Randall Williams. She is a writer-in-residence at Vanderbilt University where she teaches creative writing and which is the setting of a number of scenes in "Rebel Yell" during the Civil Rights movement.

Analysis of the recent publications. Alice Randall's work has been analyzed in a number of papers (E. Apenko, N. Vysotska, Yu. Stulov, James A. Miller, Lovalerie King, Thomas F. Haddox, Cameron Leader-Picone, etc.), but the critics' attention concerns mostly the scandalous "Gone with the Wind" and, to a lesser degree, "Pushkin and the Queen of Spades". The critics emphasize the writer's talent and her ability to create a captivating plot, her interest in depicting accurate details of everyday life that help to create the atmosphere. Nevertheless, nearly all of them point out Randall's orientation towards the "popular" novel with its clichés and melodramatic turns. She tries to be "trendy" addressing the "topical" issues (the black – white relations, positive image of the black minority, African American iconic figures, tortures in Abu-Ghraib, problem of overweight, etc.) and impressing the readership with her craft and knowledgeability.

However, the novel "Rebel Yell" has not received enough scholarly attention, though it raises quite a number of important questions concerning the 1960s and their effect on the modern-day USA. The book was mildly received by the critics, and many would agree with Reginald Harris who writes, "Randall's satire doesn't bite hard enough or range wide enough to skewer such a ripe target as black neo-cons. She hints and gives suggestions about what Abel and others were up to, but leaves perhaps too much to the reader's imagination. Despite its title, Rebel Yell is not the full-throated cry characters like these deserve" [4]. In his review of the novel in US leading newspaper "The Washington Post", James A. Miller, one of the most influential scholars of African American literature, aptly summarizes the pros and cons of the novel: "«Rebel Yell» is chock-full of such possible lines of development, but often they spin off into cul-de-sacs. Part detective story, part love story, "Rebel Yell" is a novel deeply suffused with nostalgia and mourning" [5]. The book is little known in our part of the world, but taking into account A. Randall's stature as a major contemporary African American author, it deserves a proper study as it illuminates the direction in which the work

of the modern generation of African American writers develops. Her flaws and spin-offs are as important as her artistic achievements not only in the context of her writing career.

Methodology of research. The novel presents a mosaic of scenes that refer to the present and are interpolated with the characters' reminiscences concerning their younger years, especially the 1960s, which determined the protagonist's life. The writer plays with time and space giving a broad panorama of life in the United States for a period of over 50 years. Part of the secret of the novel's attraction to the reader is the depth of representation of the characters' inner world, which allows to use close reading as the main tool of reading into the text.

Results of the research and their substantiation. The novel "Rebel Yell" deals with the life of the protagonist Abel Jones, Jr., a controversial person who is involved in a series of secret actions and dies at the beginning of the novel leaving a lot of secrets that his wife would like to untie to understand how the son of Civil Rights activist could turn into a neo-conservatist working for the Bush Administration. His family and friends come to remember various scenes from his life that allows to evaluate the transformations in his views and actions that had happened. He managed to "make it" and achieved a prominent position in society and material success. But the price turned out to be too high: he had lost his identity and moral principles in his attempt to adapt to the "norms" of the white middle class.

The protagonist's name comes from the Old Testament, but its meaning is not clear. According to some interpretations, it derives from the verb "to act emptily or become vain", and examining the life of Abel III one may conclude that both meanings can be applied. Other interpretations say that it means "lamentation". Abel's offering to God was made "by faith", and he became the first martyr killed by his brother Cain. Biblical references are to be taken into account in the analysis of Randall's novel.

From his childhood the boy Abel seems to have been drawn in the Civil Rights movement with all its sufferings, violence and bitterness as his father was one of the staunch followers of Martin Luther King, Jr. who "blessed" the child during his visit to Vanderbilt University. Randall ironically describes the boy's meeting with M.L. King, Jr. when the apostle of non-violence pats him on the head and gives him a candy bar saying of the importance of the day: "You don't know now, but one day you will. And I predict when that day comes it will be as true for you as it was for that lady. If it's not, don't you eat my candy bar." ...As soon as Dr. King closed the door, Abel unwrapped the candy bar and gobbled it down quick" [7, p. 118]. A passage later the irony becomes even more pronounced: "Big Abel's son, Abel, had been kissed by Dr. King after Abel had quoted, correctly and without prompting, from «Letter from Birmingham Jail»" [7, p. 118]. As it is known, the letter was a major landmark in raising the awareness of Americans of the injustice and horror of the race relations in the USA, but the boy did not really understand its message as he grew among the black elite professionals and did not understand the price of blackness.

But the meeting on campus was also the moment that made him apprehensive of what the white power could do as he became a witness of the police brutality aimed at unarmed people who came to demonstrate their protest against race discrimination that made their lives miserable and pathetic. Martin Luther King's stand on using non-violence was challenged by Stokely Carmichael, co-author of the book "Black Power", who insisted on black separatism

and radicalism in self-defense at the time of the Black Revolution. The skirmish between the protesters and the police resulted in a student's death and general chaos on the campus and unrest in the town. The boy makes an unusual choice trying to become part of the "white" middle class so much so because there was only a tint of color in his appearance and he could pass for a Southern European. It also meant that he had to give up his ancestry and cultural roots actually becoming an opponent of the civil rights activists. It is no surprise that he has a fatal asthma attack at the Rebel Yell, "the dinner theater with horses, war songs, and Confederate battle reenactors" [7, p. 12], a place popular with white Southerners where there is no entry to people of color. But Abel made a spectacular career and became an aid at the White House who is responsible for the tortures and prisoner abuse in Abu Ghraib and other notorious places and who has betrayed the memory of his father. He cannot but lose his wife Hope who "has started her life as a more expected kind of black person" [7, p. 170], and she, unlike him, is not ashamed of the "touch of the tar brush". She becomes one of the most important witnesses for and against Abel trying to understand what lay behind her controversial husband's actions.

For Abel memory is the feeling of fear/terror which pursued him all his life, but this is the memory of the eye – his experience of seeing the burning Ku-Klux-Klan cross in front of his house on his birthday, of attending the funeral of the girls who were blown up in the church in Montgomery, of the harsh treatment by the police of the protesters in Vanderbilt University. But the memory of the eye affects the memory of the heart, and he made a choice that ensured safety and gave some kind of more defensible position, which saved him from the risks and problems that civil rights activists had in the 1960s. After all, "he was raised in a time and place of terror, a place of bombings and shootings, a place of funerals and wakes, a place of police dogs and fire hoses turned toward children, a land red with blood of the recently slaughtered, a place where wedding bells didn't ring" [7, p. 52]. Through Hope's meditations over Abel's life the writer reflects on the tragedy of a person who had to live with the feeling of inferiority and mental impairment from his young years, which inevitably developed all kinds of complexes in him. When Hope saw in her mind's eye certain scenes from their past (their meetings in Harvard, his diplomatic service in Manila during the dictatorial rule of President Marcos and his wife and their flight from the Philippines, etc.), she began to analyze the circumstances that turned her beloved husband into a spy, FBI agent and came to the conclusion: "People who have been tortured by the state make ideal just-inside-the-law torturers, just as people who have been tortured by people they love make excellent executioners" [7, p. 94].

Abel is different in the reminiscences of the main characters of the novel, and only if we go deeply into the mosaic of their relationships can we draw conclusions about how the 1960s were reflected in the lives of African Americans. Though the writer emphasizes the fictional nature of her characters and the goings-on in the novel, it can be understood only in the context of time and the most important events in the political life of the USA. Randall acknowledges, "A high price was paid for freedom. Lives were lost and private cultural practices were lost. But I believe freedom is to be purchased at whatever price" [3].

Hope and Nicholas Gordon, Abel's old-time friend who has known both of them for years, try to get a clearer idea of what kind of person Abel was, how his transformation into

a neo-con could take place. The title of the book, which relates to the “high-pitch yell, often shouted by Confederate soldiers during the American Civil War. Was known to terrify the enemy” [6], the name of the theater where the protagonist is about to die, i.e. a geographical name in the US South, and his very name may be read as a powerful metaphor characterizing the mental state of the country in the recent decades. No less important is the name of his first wife Hope Jones Blackshear who is the narrator discussing Abel and his past with various people that were connected with him at different stages. Practically the whole novel is her memories of him (note her speaking name – Hope!) from their first meeting to his death. She shares her ideas with Abel’s friend Nicolas who helps Hope to reveal some of the numerous mysteries, lies and vague omissions that were the result of his collaboration with the secret services and explained the problems with his self-identification, which is a key point in the black community. Even his wife Hope is used to mythologize his identity. One cannot fail to see the effect of stylistic gradation in his understanding of himself that shows his self-centeredness: “No one knew him. He was an authority unto himself. No one understood him; but for once it was not a bruising thing. His government required it. He was happy to be of service, to the nation, to his woman, to himself” [7, p. 179]. But it was detrimental to his integrity as the price for the transformation was too high: “He treasured all his masks, but each of the masks that served him best had been formed on his face just after some part of him had died” [Ibid].

With the help of chronotope (Hope and Nicholas move across the United States, in their reminiscences they go back to the time in the East, etc.; the time span covers the period from the early 1960s to the election of President Obama), meetings with people who had known Abel and elements of psychoanalysis they manage to find out his weaknesses and understand his true self.

In Abel’s case, memory raises the question of identity in the spirit of John Locke for whom memory was part of personal identity. Khaim Shapira who gives his interpretation of Locke’s concept proves that “memory is important in defining my personal “I” [2]. Abel tries to erase from his memory everything that tells of the Black Americans’ tragic past and to acquire a new identity. It looks as if he managed to achieve it. He marries a white Southern woman, has children born of her, lives in a prestigious neighborhood – everything seems to be O. K. Nothing reminds of the roaring 1960s. However, his house is deprived of human warmth and peace; his second wife can never understand what tortures him, and his real heir is not one of her children but the boy Ajay born of Hope. The ending of his life destroys his illusions, and, in fact, his death is a suicide because his choice was wrong, and he “wanted to die,” as his friend Mo says, because “his choices were hard on Ajay. Maybe too hard on Ajay” [7, p. 242]. He is responsible for lots of things, which should never be known to his son, and the worst thing he ever did was to pretend he could be an integral part of the white world. He cannot pass for a white man, even though he will be buried in a white cemetery, to the dismay and irritation of Hope, his grandmother and other black relatives. He had been trying to put on various masks, but his “chameleon face” [7, p. 240] could deceive no one. The white paramedics who arrived to take him to hospital understood at once that “The fool at their feet was the biggest fool in the world, a nigger with no more sense than to eat his dinner in a Confederate horse barn. It was hard to believe God would make any creature,

even a nigger, as dumb as that. ...<> The paramedics wrote "black" so many times over the receiving papers that when the funeral home employees got the paperwork they sucked their feet in dismay" [7, p. 31]. And it was not his white wife and their children but Hope, his aunts and grandmother who paid their last respects to him with their traditional hams, casseroles and pies, just the way it was done in black families, so that after his death Abel was taken back to his roots.

His son Ajay or Abel IV learns a critical lesson because Hope's second husband Waycross who "wasn't the only daddy Ajay had but he was his best daddy" [7, p. 109] drives the boy to the places which were dear to his father in order "to mourn his daddy" [Ibid]. Waycross is wise enough to understand how important the links between the generations are. With his care, the boy goes through a painful period of initiation into adult life, grows into a man, and this means that Abel's story was not for nothing. Ruminating over him, the novel's characters draw serious conclusions concerning the future.

The list of books, films and icons of US culture mentioned in the text of the novel "Rebel Yell" contains about 50 titles and names with special reference to the novel and film "39 Steps", an astounding example of a detective and adventure story that focuses on the so-called "man-on-the-run", giving an insight into the character of the novel's protagonist who has a problem with self-identification, which should not happen with his son. The psychological riddle that his ex-wife and friend yearn to solve makes the reader aware of the complexity of the attitudes of today's generation of African Americans. In her interview to Maria Browning the writer says, "It is my experience that terrified people and terrified nations must hold tight to their courage, to their humanity, to their very willingness to die before they would do something wrong" [3]. Randall makes her protagonist commit suicide because looking back at his life before his death he acknowledges that he betrayed not only the principles for which long generations of African Americans had been fighting but also that his son should have a future being an integral man, not torn by conflicting identities.

Conclusions. Randall gives her verdict to her protagonist in the hope that memory must teach people to keep their humanity and dignity against all odds. She shows how the memory of the eye affects the memory of the heart and explains the double nature of her protagonist by the extreme tension in the white-black relations that imbued him with the feeling of terror that accounted for all his actions as a grown man. Step by step the writer deconstructs the world in which he lived and analyzes the fears that determined his attitudes and psychological complexes connected with them using elements of psychoanalysis in a novel, which is a mix of genre characteristics (thriller, psychological novel, novel of initiation).

Memory is a creative act, and by going back to the American past that covers not only the last 50 years but also the tragic history of race relations the book's characters emphasize that the future is made not only of the present but rests on the past which cannot be ignored. D. Likhachev said, "Memory holds out against the destructive power of time" [1], and this is Alice Randall's most important message.

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ПАМ'ЯТЬ ПРО ЧОРНУ РЕВОЛЮЦІЮ 1960-х рр. У РОМАНІ ЕЛІС РЕНДАЛ "БУНТАРСЬКИЙ КРИК"

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Проаналізовано роман відомої афро-американської письменниці Еліс Рендал "Rebel Yell", у якому вона спирається на недавно американську історію, намагаючись зрозуміти тенденції у ставленні афро-американців до подій 1960–1970-х рр. на прикладі головного героя роману Абея Джонса. Досліджено, що пам'ять, наявна в спогадах персонажів Рендал, допомагає виявити розрив між реальністю та очікуваннями людей, що пояснює їхні психологічні травми і розкол у психіці. Роман ілюструє проблеми людини, розірваної між двома громадами – чорною та білою, яка намагається пристосуватися до норм білого середнього класу, що призводить до катастрофи. Наведено опис основних подій, які сприяли перетворенню характеру головного героя. Визначено зв'язок між недавнім минулим США та непростю сучасністю.

Ключові слова: сучасний американський роман, неспокійні 1960-ті рр., рух за громадянські права, расові відносини.