

ESTABLISHING THE SYMBOLIC ASSOCIATIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF *YOUTH* IN THE BRITISH AND AMERICAN LITERARY DISCOURSE OF THE 19th-21st CENTURIES

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Abstract

The article deals with axiologically marked symbolic associations related to the sociocultural phenomenon of *youth*. The research is conducted on the basis of social novels by British and American authors of the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The symbolic meaning of the concept is formed in a textual context and motivated by cultural images, ideas and values. It does not cause an internal semantic change but complements the range of meaning in the process of discourse implementation. The study of the symbolic embodiment of the concept of YOUTH in English literary discourse is not limited to the analysis of individual words but requires conducting an interpretative-textual analysis of the coherent discourse situation, indicating the formation of an associative chain during concept actualization. Chain elements are linked internally into a single unit, forming an associative group. The symbol, carrying the axiological potential of its culture, operates in inseparable unity with the axiological component of the concept under study. The data clarify the relationship between positive and negative axiological representations of the concept.

Keywords: *concept, symbol, association, culture, literary discourse, axiological potential*

1. Introduction

This paper provides the theoretical grounds for establishing the symbolic meaning of the concept of YOUTH and analyses its axiological value in the context of linguistic, cultural and cognitive-discursive approaches. The significance of this research is justified by its contribution to the explication of *youth* as a social and cultural phenomenon in the British and American cultures

of the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The purpose of this paper is to map the way in which symbolic associations of the concept of YOUTH correlate with its semantic and axiological potential. The emphasis has been placed on the symbolic image of *youth* as an object of socialization, i.e., not only does it reproduce its traditional inherent features but it demonstrates the attitude of society to this phenomenon. The study builds on the symbolic embodiment of the concrete and abstract facets of the concept, that is, the phenomenon of *youth* is often portrayed by the image of a *young person*.

Due to practical constraints, this paper cannot provide a comprehensive review of the symbolic representation of the concept under study, thus, it concentrates on the most meaningful issues, restraining the number of literary works and discourse fragments. The research is conducted on the basis of literary works in English having common social subjects. The works of the following writers were selected as illustrative material: *O. Wilde, J. Austen, B. Disraeli, N. Hawthorne, F. Cooper, H. Melville, H. Thoreau, M. Twain, W. S. Maugham, G. Greene, V. Woolf, F.S. Fitzgerald, T. Dreiser, J. London, D. Mitchell, N. Gaiman, N. Sparks, D. Steel, C. Palahniuk, J. Franzen*.

The research approach adopted in this study is textual analysis. This method proves to be effective for solving a number of various problems, aiming to clarify the role and function of the concept of YOUTH in the English-speaking community. The qualitative research design was elaborated to provide descriptive and empirical data that serve to establish unique symbolic associations. They are represented by the chain of events evolving into holistic plot fragments of predominantly axiological marking, where *youth* is a symbol of the situation.

A central issue addressed here is the relationship between *good/evil* reflecting sociocultural or global phenomena, which operate in parallel with *youth* in the British and American literary discourse of the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In this connection, particular importance is being attached to the associative correlations of the concept of YOUTH with sociocultural issues and psycho-emotional states, represented by different universal concepts (for example, TIME, AGEING, LIFE, LOVE, HOPE, HAPPINESS, FREEDOM, DREAM, BEAUTY, MOVEMENT, CRISIS etc.). We assume that the study of this associative network discloses the epistemological aspect of *youth* and promotes an adequate modelling of the content and structure of the concept under study within the defined linguistic and cultural frameworks.

The overall structure of the study includes several parts (literature review, main part, conclusions, works cited) including this introduction.

2. Literature Review

Although a considerable amount of research has been devoted to the study of the phenomenon of *youth* (its physiological and psychological aspects mostly), few attempts have been made to investigate it in a linguistic perspective. In particular, there has been relatively little literature published on the correlation between symbol and concept. In this context, it is worthwhile considering several works on semantics and symbolic language. “Language, written or spoken, is such a symbolism. The mere sound of a word, or its shape on paper, is indifferent. The word is a symbol, and its meaning is constituted by the ideas, images, and emotions, which it raises in the mind of the hearer” (Whitehead 24).

The notion of symbol is one of the most complicated and contradictory notions because of the plurality of definitions that sometimes contradict each other. It is traditionally interpreted as an object, thing, phenomenon (natural or social processes, mythical beings), which is perceived sensorially and serves as a substitute for another object. The symbol is associated with the idea of a certain content, which, in fact, serves as a plane of expression for another, usually culturally more valuable or meaningful (Lotman 11).

It is important to note that every word is a complex symbol that can mean much more than its dictionary definitions. Symbols represent deep concepts and ideas, though they function differently in various contexts depending on communicative intentions (Burke, 75). Symbology is considered to be at the heart of all communication. Concise symbols carry complex meanings in the process of conveying information (Ullmann 31). “The process by means of which human beings can arbitrarily make certain things stand for other things may be called the symbolic process. Whenever two or more human beings can communicate with each other, they can, by agreement, make anything stand for anything” (Hayakawa 50).

In linguistics, the study of symbols is done from the standpoint of semantics, semiotics, linguocultural studies, and linguistic psychology. In some dictionaries, the notion of a *symbol* is generally defined in terms of *sign* or *image*. In the context of the proposed study, among many definitions of the symbol, the most relevant is the semiotic one, as semiotics is viewed as a general scientific discipline that gives definition to any sign concept.

While a variety of definitions have been suggested, this paper uses the definition proposed by Jung who saw the symbol as a complex linguistic sign consisting of two equal elements: a specific meaning representing the figurative side of the symbol (the so-called *symbol agent*), as well as the abstract meaning that is primary-archetypal, cultural-stereotypical, or individually subjective (the so-called *symbol referent*) (Jung 28).

At the linguistic level, symbols are considered structural components of the unconscious that exist as a universal set of rules and organize an individual

vocabulary, enabling its transformation into a conscious language (Lévi-Strauss 53). From the point of view of speech and discourse, symbols appear as a phenomenological expression of language polysemy, provided that the context “does not reduce the potential of its significance to unambiguous use”, but realizes polysemy, “creating the interaction between several points of the significate” (Ricoeur 72)

The process of the symbolic image formation of the concept implies “the splitting of the referent to the subject and idea” (Alefirenko 148). Against the background of establishing typical features and characteristics of the subject area, there appears an associative network of ideas, values and situations that arise in the individual's conscious when referring to the sociocultural phenomenon of *youth* embodied in the abstract (actual phenomenon) and concrete (*young person*) entities.

The inclusion of symbolic motivation in the semantics of the concept is the result of a long path of symbolization of speech on the basis of associative relationships because of its regular use in the standard environment. The concept, which once meant symbolic action/situation, functions as a symbol of the situation, as “a conglomeration of the meaning, its history of existence, contemporary values and associations” (Stepanov 40).

Relying on the above theoretical research, we suggest that symbolization, taking part in information processing, greatly facilitates the operation of cognitive structures that arise in the interaction of an individual with the surrounding reality. The symbol leaves the mental “trace” of an object or a sign, which embraces all the scope of knowledge and experience gained in the process of cognition.

3. Analysis

In general, the proposed analysis allows the identification of associative chains, which demonstrate the symbolic embodiment of the concept of YOUTH. A closer look at the data indicates that they are reflected both in a subjective (the perception of *youth* by a young person; his/her life experience, associated with this age stage), as well as an objective perspective (the perception of *youth* by society). The data also clarify the relationship between the concept of YOUTH and other universal concepts that embrace various sociocultural and emotional issues. That is, under the influence of a special contextual environment, symbolic associations change their semantic and axiological vectors, revealing either the positive or negative aspect of this age category. Let us consider the peculiarities of its symbolic meaning both at the cultural and diachronic levels.

Youth is traditionally perceived not only as a symbol of love, health and beauty but it also fluctuates between good and evil, as a symbol of temptation. The history of mankind gives examples of many attempts to find “*the elixir of*

eternal youth". In ancient Greek mythology, there is a myth about the sorceress Medea, who had the power to turn young people back to the elderly. Medieval astrologers, alchemists and philosophers were looking for a "*philosopher's stone*" that could give a man youth which presupposed immediate wealth and strength. The motive of rejuvenation is a favourite tale plot of different nations around the world. Often, heroes of many literary works are not able to realize that the main advantage of *youth* is its transience. They suffer an immense pain from the loss of *youth*, trying to restore it or keep it as long as possible.

The British literary discourse of the nineteenth century comprises the motives of *youth* restoration and depicts the eternal search for "*the elixir of youth*" as the way of preserving vital forces. The central theme of Oscar Wilde's *Portrait of Dorian Gray* serves as a perfect illustration of this. In the following sentence, the hero shares the secret of *youth*, which is seen in the abandonment of emotional life:

The secret of *remaining young* is never to have an emotion that is unbecoming. (O. Wilde)

Youth is a great wealth: its value is perceived by the individual over time. (O. Wilde)

You have the most *marvellous youth*, and youth is *the one thing worth having!* (O. Wilde)

The confrontation of the concepts of YOUTH and AGEING in the most vivid way is represented in the following textual fragments. The data point to the predominance of the negative attitude towards the younger generation by the older one on grounds of immaturity and lack of experience on the part of young people. *Youth* is also associated in the minds of Britons and Americans with the concept SIN. *Youth* is innocent and physically beautiful. *Youth* exceeds old age by several parameters: physical strength, vigor, carelessness, good focus, the advantages of the young mind over the old, etc.

In the following excerpt, *youth* appears to be a vivid confirmation of the disadvantages of old age:

The older a person grows, Harriet, the more important it is that their manners should not be bad; the more glaring and disgusting any loudness, or coarseness, or awkwardness becomes. *What is passable in youth is detestable in later age.* Mr. Martin is now awkward and abrupt; what will he be at Mr. Weston's time of life? (J. Austen)

Close relationships are observed between the concepts of YOUTH and HOPE. Young people are associated with the best ideas of the future social order of the world; adult life is considered a prerequisite for the future happiness of

children. *Youth* as a social group always carries a “bright” tomorrow and cloudless hope. For instance:

There were moments when he *wished himself neither experienced nor a philosopher*; moments when he looked back to the *lost paradise of his innocent youth*, those glorious hours when the *unruffled river of his Life* mirrored the cloudless *heaven of his Hope!* (B. Disraeli)

A fairly similar theme is traced in the works that belong to the American literary discourse of the nineteenth century. The instances comparing the advantages and disadvantages of *youth* and *old age* are of particular significance. Most examples have a positive axiological charge, which directs the attention of the reader to the concept of GOOD. To the hero of the next except, the restoring of *youth* means the restoring of the meaning of life, external attractiveness, the ease of being. The world always opens up its opportunities before *youth*:

Not that I should ever visit its site again! For the more does the joy, the *lightsome freshness*, the *heart-leap*, the *intellectual dance*, the *youth*, in short, – yes, *my youth, my youth!* – the more does it come back to me. No longer ago than this morning, I was old. It was too soon! I *could not bear it!* *Age had no right to come!* *I had not lived!* But now do I look old? If so, my aspect belies me strangely; for I feel in the very *heyday of my youth*, with the world and my *best days before me!* (N. Hawthorne)

Life experience is a powerful thread that connects past and future. From generation to generation elders teach juniors. Unfortunately, gained experience is not always used properly. The following context confirms the associative connection with the concept of LIFE against the background of the symbolic comparison of *youth* and old age: *Advice* is not a gift, but a *debt that the old owe to the young*. (F. Cooper)

In the struggle between *old age* and *youth*, the concept of LOVE holds a special position: being on the side of youth, it once again points to its significant advantages. In the following example, it is stated that it is in youth that the sense of love is the purest. Being devoid of fuss, anxiety and uneasiness, *youth* opens wide horizons to real feelings that are not tied to earthly realities but create the premises for seeing miracles:

The man oppressed with cares, he *can not love*; the man of gloom finds not the god. So, *as youth*, for the most part, *has no cares*, and *knows no gloom*, therefore, ever since time did begin, *youth belongs to love*. Love may end in grief and age, and pain and need, and all other modes of human mournfulness; but *love begins in joy*. *Youth* is this world's great *redeemer and reformer*; and as all beautiful women are

her selected emissaries, so hath Love gifted them with a magnetic persuasiveness, *that no youth can possibly repel*. (H. Melville)

A clear symbolism also appears in the associative interaction of the concepts of YOUTH and TIME as two opponents who fight within the human soul. Despite the lack of life experience and knowledge, *youth* still does not compromise, and deliberately continues to pursue its goal alone. The inexorable desire of an individual to preserve *youth* for a long time once again appears in a symbolic halo and is actualized in discourse by means of the lexical environment: *perpetual* (infinite, eternal) and *perennial* (permanent). Next, symbolism is hidden in the reproduction of the colour range and natural phenomena (flames, roses, grass, sun rays, etc.), which implicitly appear in line with *youth*:

The grass *flames up* on the hillsides like a *spring fire* as if the earth sent forth an inward heat to greet the returning sun; not *yellow but green is the color of its flame*; – the *symbol of perpetual youth*, the *grass-blade*, like a long green ribbon, streams from the sod into the summer, checked indeed by the frost, but pushing on again, lifting its *spear of last year's hay with the fresh life below*. (H. Thoreau)

Youth (an age category) and *youth* (a social group) often symbolize the engines of progress. In particular, the context provides that the hero's hopes are to survive until the time when young people create their own civilization, full of new technological solutions when they are able to actively work for the benefit of American society in the direction of overall industrialization:

No place offered equal facilities for experiments in mining, engineering. He expected to live to see the day, when *the youth of America would resort to its mines, its workshops, its laboratories, its furnaces and factories for practical instruction in all the great industrial pursuits*. (M. Twain)

The concepts of YOUTH and FREEDOM often correlate within the discursive frame. This phenomenon is explained by the fact that it is in youth that man is given the opportunity to choose his own path:

To the *young American the paths to fortune are innumerable* and all open; there is *invitation in the air and success* in all his wide horizon. He is embarrassed which to choose, and is *not unlikely to waste years* in dallying with his chances, before giving himself to the serious tug and strain of a single object. (M. Twain)

A peculiar feature of the American literature of the nineteenth century is an associative bond between the concepts of YOUTH and CRISIS. The following fragment confirms that in youth, in addition to youthful joys and easiness, an individual experiences suffering. For the first time facing a harsh reality, one is aware of one's own misery and the inability to change what is wrong, despite good education and unlimited opportunities. Society breaks all expectations. The crisis of traditions emerges: what was learned from older generation turns out to be ineffective. Thus, it is of crucial importance to build up new social principles:

There are many *young men* like him in *American society*, of his age, *opportunities, education and abilities*, who have really been *educated for nothing* and have let themselves drift, and by some sudden turn of good luck, the golden road to fortune. He had energy and a disposition to carve his own way. But he *was born into a time when all young men* of his age caught the *fever of speculation*, and expected to get on in the world by the *omission* of some of the regular processes which have been appointed from of old. (M. Twain)

Despite the modernization of British society in the twentieth century, the theme of search for perpetual youth continues in the literature of that period. A striking example is W. S. Maugham's *The Theater*, where the main heroine desperately strives to retain *youth* in order to feel the taste of life, to have a career, and to be able to enjoy the relationship with young people:

She knew that *this young boy had fallen in love with her* some time before he knew it himself. She found it rather comic. In those days Julia did not think it necessary to go to bed in the afternoons, she was *as strong as a horse and never tired*, so he used often to take her for walks in the Park. She felt that he wanted her to be *a child of nature*. That suited her very well. It was no effort for her to be *ingenuous, frank and girlishly delighted* with everything. (W. S. Maugham)

The concept of YOUTH is closely linked to the concept of TIME. In the following contextual excerpt, we note this symbolic connection. The awareness of many important aspects of life comes only at maturity. To young people it seems that there are still plenty of chances ahead to correct their mistakes, to test new emotions and feelings. However, time is unswerving: it takes the most valuable things in life:

This is how it ought to be: I am *too old for emotion*. I am *too old to be a cheat*. *Lies are for the young*. They have a *lifetime of truth to recover in*. When I was young, I had thought *love* had something to do with

understanding, but with age I knew that no human being understood another. (G. Greene)

The association of the concept of YOUTH with the opposing one OLD AGE is quite extensive for the British literature of this century. Such correlation is embodied in the symbolism of the eternal human efforts to preserve, restore and renew *youth* in order not to surrender to the mercy of old age, which takes away the beauty, joy, pleasure and carelessness. The eternal *youth* of the human soul serves as a striking example in this perspective. The confirmation that only the young person is happy and able to fully experience the benefits of earthly existence is found in the contextual illustration below:

When you're *my age* you'll see that *the world is crammed with delightful things*. I think *young people make such a mistake about that* – not letting themselves be *happy*. I sometimes think *that happiness is the only thing that counts*. I should guess you might be a little inclined to – when *one's young and attractive* – I'm going to say it! – *everything's at one's feet*. (V. Woolf)

In the British literary discourse of the twentieth century, we often encounter an associative image of *youth* that symbolizes protest. In general, sociologists find the reason of youth rebellion, which took place after the Second World War, in excessive infantilism, the reluctance to grow older and, therefore, to take on any obligations. The latter is seen as a characteristic feature of the young people that belonged to the so-called *lost generation*. The young rebels were reluctant to work hard. The representatives of this movement thought that physical labour would replace the freedom of creativity. The rebellious nature of adolescence had many ways of expression: from external attributes – to a sharp confrontation while communicating with family and peers. The confirmation of this idea is found in the following excerpt:

It had better be said now that he was on the *verge of an adolescence* so conscience-driven, *agonised, accusatory of his own world*, passionately admiring of anything not Britain, so devoted to every kind of good cause, so *angry with his mother*, who in some way he saw as embodying all the forces of reaction, so *sick to death with his father*, who represented frivolity and indifference. 'Your bloody *adolescence*, my God, it's *shortened my life* by twenty years. (W. S. Maugham)

The correlation between the concepts of YOUTH and OLD AGE is also reflected in the American literature of the twentieth century. The most vivid illustration of the symbolic embodiment of *youth* in literary discourse is F. S. Fitzgerald's *The Mysterious History of Benjamin Button*. This is a story of a man

who during his life does not age, but on the contrary, grows younger. Demonstrating age regression, the author depicts the uniqueness of such a phenomenon, along with the personal tragedy of the protagonist, who falls behind his social environment:

Benjamin discovered that he was becoming *more and more attracted* by the *gay side of life*. It was typical of his growing *enthusiasm for pleasure* that he was the *first man* in the city to own and run an *automobile*. Meeting him on the street, his *contemporaries would stare enviously* at the picture he made of *health and vitality*. [...] *He seems to grow younger every year*. (F.S. Fitzgerald)

The leitmotif of the following example is a sharp rejection of old age, which is expressed by pain and a bitter awareness of one's own unattractiveness and uselessness. The tragedy is the inability to have fun, to rejoice in life and the trivialities that make it – all the drawbacks brought by old age:

She recalled, with more subtle emotions, that he did not look at her now with any of the *old light of satisfaction* or approval in his eye. Evidently, along with other things, *he was taking her to be getting old and uninteresting*. He saw *her wrinkles*, perhaps. *She was fading*, while *he was still preening himself in his elegance and youth*. He was still *an interested factor in the merry-makings* of the world, while she – but she did not pursue the thought. She only found the whole *situation bitter*, and *hated him for it* thoroughly. (T. Dreiser)

Youth is often portrayed as a symbol of progress, a movement forward when the main tasks and the greatest responsibility for the future lie on the shoulders of the young generations who are ready to work and fulfil their duties, as in the following example:

You are an *old man*. You have done your work in the world, and a great work. *Leave the present battle to youth and strength*. We young fellows have *our work yet to do*. Avis will stand by my side in what is to come. She will be your representative in the battle-front. (J. London)

An interesting feature of the twenty-first century British literature is the symbolic reflection of people's immense desire to retain *youth*. This serves as a confirmation to the correlation between the concepts of YOUTH and TIME. The following excerpt shows the attempt to deliberately preserve the external signs of *youth* for the proper performance of the identified social roles. This phenomenon is currently observed in almost all spheres of society: politicians want to remain young in order to feel the power of influence, actors – in order to

look good on the screen, celebrities – for a decent display of themselves when taking part in various social events. The modern media reproduce the cult of youth, where the main postulate is finding the secret of *youth continuation*. Fashion, cosmetology, pharmacology, plastic surgery, and many other activities are aimed at the continuous reproduction of *youth* as an object of worship. Being young is fashionable; the young person is a divine sign of the true “unbroken” image of a heavenly citizen:

This is certainly a most *elegant assembly*, madam. I do not know when I last saw so many *handsome faces and graceful figures* gathered together in one place. And every one of them *in the utmost bloom of youth*. I confess that I am surprized to see *no older people* in the room. Have these ladies and gentlemen no mothers and fathers? No aunts or uncles?"

"What an odd remark!" she replied. "Why should he invite *aged and unsightly persons to his ball? Who would want to look at them?* Besides we *are not so young as you suppose*. (N. Gaiman)

The tragedy of losing youth again confirms its urgency. Times and means have changed, but the idea remains unshakable. In the following example it becomes clear that, despite all the achieved peaks on the life path, at the end of the way, people realize that it is impossible to return the most important thing – lost years. Time leaves its imprints not only in the form of wrinkles on a face but also in the soul, settling somewhere deep down with bitter pain because of the loss of youth power:

The man of *finance*, the man of *accounts*, the man of *law*, we all nodded at him over the polished table that like a still sheet of brown water reflected our *faces, lined, wrinkled*; our faces *marked by toil, by deceptions, by success, by love*. Our *weary eyes* looking *still*, looking *anxiously for something out of life*, that while *it is expected is already gone* – has *passed unseen, in a sigh, in a flash* – together *with the youth, with the strength, with the romance of illusions*. (D. Mitchell)

The following excerpt extends the symbolic correlation with the concepts of TIME and AGEING and also shows the associative connection of the concept of YOUTH with the concept of DREAM. The tragedy of the situation is revealed in the loss of *youth* that leads to unrealized dreams and plans. It is in old age that an individual completely understands the potential of *youth*. But, unfortunately, time machines do not exist, and despite the relentless desire to change the world itself, despite the accumulated knowledge of the years, there is not enough power:

I am *getting old*... Things inanimate have always been more difficult to change than things animate. *Their souls are older and stupider and harder* to persuade. *If I but had my true youth again*..., in the dawn of the world I *could transform mountains into seas and clouds into palaces*. I could *populate cities* with the pebbles on the shingle. *If I were young again ...* (N. Gaiman)

The confrontation of *youth* and *old age* acquires a symbolic colouring and takes a central place in the American literature of the twenty-first century. In particular, the following excerpt shows an alternative way of preserving the “*fountain of youth*” by adhering to the rules of healthy eating on the basis of special diets:

Gray hair prickled up on the sides of his head; whereas my *father, at forty-eight*, despite the coffee stains beneath his eyes, was *still the possessor of an unlined olive complexion and a rich, glossy, black head of hair*. They didn’t call it Grecian Formula for nothing. It was in *our food!* A veritable *fountain of youth* in our dolmades and taramasalata and even in our baklava, which didn’t commit the sin of containing *refined sugar* but had *only honey*. (N. Sparks)

In the twenty-first century the most popular “*elixir of youth*” is plastics. The following fragment of the discourse explicitly demonstrates this phenomenon in the context of the American society and points out all its “beneficial” properties in terms of both the physical (*a smooth, youthful neckline, rested and fresh, good skin*) and professional frameworks:

Valerie did everything she could to confuse them. She had *had her eyes done* for the first time when she *turned forty* and then *again fifteen years later*. The results were *excellent*. She looked *rested and fresh*, as though she had been on a *terrific vacation*. She had had the *surgery done* in L.A. during a summer hiatus. She had also had her *neck done* when she was *fifty*, giving her *a smooth, youthful neckline* with no sag anywhere, and her *plastic surgeon* agreed that she didn’t need a full face-lift. She had great bones, *good skin*, and the eye and neck work had given her the effect she wanted. *Botox shots four times a year* added to her *youthful looks*. (D. Steel)

The pace of modern society transforms our lives into a solid pursuit the goal of which is modified under the pressure of the sociocultural and economic environment. Most people are lost at such a crossroads. The cult of youth is a special trend of a modern civilization, a unique panacea for all sorts of frustrations and fears. It can overcome both external and internal “demons”. In the context below, the competition for the title “the youngest” is depicted. For

the heroine, her career depends on how young one looks. Youth becomes an obsession, a final destination on the way to a perfect life:

Jack and Valerie were *in an industry that prized youth*. They had that in common, the fact that they were both *struggling to accept how old they were* and what it meant in their current lives. And both of them *worked and lived in a culture based on youth*. It wasn't easy getting older *surrounded by people half their age* who were itching to step into their shoes, and waiting for them to slip in some way. Valerie was *constantly aware of it in her work*, and Jack was too. They had more similar experiences. Barbara Walters has always been my role model," Valerie said to him. "She has *stayed on top for her entire career*, and never slipped for a minute. She had to *compete with men, her peers, younger women*, and she's still *the best and the biggest* in the business". (D. Steel)

In such a perspective the correlation between the concepts of YOUTH and SUCCESS is obvious and fully motivated. The next excerpt proves that it is at the present stage of the development of civilization that the ability to remain competitive is vital. It depends directly on the level of individual success. *Youth* is always symbolically perceived as a guarantee of success. To remain young means to be competitive both on the labour market and in terms of personal development:

They looked it, and *both of them seemed youthful* and looked at things in similar ways. They had even made some of the same mistakes, in their *desperation to get ahead* and establish *who they were when they were younger*. And without even really meaning to, they had become superstars when just *being successful and good* at what they did would have been enough. *Success was a faucet that was hard to limit or turn off, and so was fame*. (D. Steel)

Many modern writers portray *youth* as a key to human existence. This factor directly indicates the close interaction of the concepts of YOUTH and LIFE. In the example below, there is a reflection of the hero who misses the years gone by. Life loses its meaning if one does not use the given youthful power effectively and in a proper time:

Everything is about looks and beauty and youth. There's nothing harder than *getting old alone in gay life*. If you're *not young and beautiful*, it's *all over*. I was back out in the dating world for two years after my last relationship, and I *hated every minute* of it. And I was *only thirty*, and I already felt then *as though it was all over* for me. (D. Steel)

The dreams we cultivate in youth are broken up into a bitter reality and only rarely do they become achievements. In this perspective, the correlation between the concepts of YOUTH and DREAM acquires a negative colouring:

If you're reading this, welcome *back to reality*. This is where all that *glorious, unlimited potential of your youth has led*. All that *unfulfilled promise*. Here's what you've done with your life. (C. Palahniuk)

The crisis of traditions in the following excerpt concerns the issue of gender and age solidarity: in the twenty-first century, young women are allowed to perform unusual social roles, which were considered to be inappropriate in the previous century:

Myriad were the things that Walter hated about *modernity in general*, but the *confidence of young women drivers*, the autonomy they'd achieved in the last hundred years, was among them. *Gender equality*, as expressed in the pressure of Lalitha's neat foot on the gas pedal, made him glad *to be alive in the twenty-first century*. (J. Franzen)

As a final remark with respect to the analysed literary examples, it should be noted that through centuries, for the British and American cultures, there are unchanged common aspects that reveal the symbolic meaning of the concept of YOUTH. Among them we distinguish the theme of eternal *youth* of the soul – despite biological ageing; the irresistible desire of humankind to restore and to preserve *youth* and the feelings associated with this age category. Therefore, the tragedy and the pain triggered by the loss of *youth* take priority in the disclosure of its symbolic representation. *Youth* is always an excuse for envy and is seen as an object of worship.

4. Conclusion

It is possible to conclude that the concept of YOUTH serves as the basis for several layers of associations that adapt and remorph for different subjects of discourse, depending on a number of sociocultural and purely individual characteristics (from social, status, education, profession, upbringing – to the sphere of interests and tastes). The results are significant in terms of reflecting the real state of affairs in the British and American linguistic and cultural space.

The analysed fragments of literary discourse implicitly disclose two associative chains, which in the text are actualized by the nominative lexemes *youth / young* and their derivatives. Reflecting different symbolic potentials, they ultimately lead to the concepts of GOOD and EVIL. For example: YOUTH → unlimited opportunities → a guarantee of success → personal development

→ competitiveness → enjoyment → incarnation of dreams → romance → pure unbreakable love → constant motion forward → a progress engine → hope for a better future → a desire for freedom → a belief in yourself → GOOD; YOUTH → hard life trials → personality crisis → mental suffering → internal struggle with one's own fears → external struggle under the pressure of society → first disappointments and failures → rebellious mood → crisis of traditions → conflict of generations → denial and protest to the old age → EVIL.

The aforementioned aspects confirm a close associative connection of the studied sociocultural phenomenon with many spheres of human existence (both positive and negative), schematically reflected by the correlation between the concept of YOUTH and such universal concepts as LOVE, HOPE, FUTURE, SUCCESS, DREAM, TIME, LIFE, OPPORTUNITY, PROTEST, ENVY, LOSS etc. However, the findings described are fairly general, they contribute to our understanding of *youth* as an age category and reveal the axiological potential of the linguocultural concept of YOUTH, making it possible to conclude on the level of its significance for the English-speaking community.

The prospect of this research is seen in the coverage of gender specificities of the concept of YOUTH in English and American cultures, concentrating on its symbolic and metaphoric representation. Further investigations are needed in order to establish the place and role of this sociocultural phenomenon in the framework of the whole age paradigm.

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