

NEO-GOTHIC TREND IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN TEENAGE LITERATURE (JOHN AUGUST'S ARLO FINCH TRILOGY)

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Abstract. The article analyzes the novels by a famous American screenwriter John August “Arlo Finch in the Valley of Fire” (2018), “Arlo Finch in the Lake of the Moon” (2019) and “Arlo Finch in the Kingdom of Shadows” (2020). The trilogy of Arlo Finch is the author’s literary debut. It is demonstrated that the author makes extensive use of literary allusions and reminiscences, images and motifs of mythology, and materials of European medieval legends. Written in praise of the scouts, reminding of fortitude, endurance, perseverance and group solidarity, the novel is filled with intense drama, as teenagers during a sports game fall into the world of the Long Woods, the world of death, understood as a transgressive transition to another world. The magical world serves as a means of testing the protagonist and his initiation. In contrast to a widespread theme of suicide in contemporary American literature for teenagers, John August’s trilogy is filled with optimism, since it inspires the reader with confidence in the world and man. Despite the game setting, the book is open to the latest spiritual trends. John August places the novel in the genre system of fantasy, however, in our opinion, the genre specificity of a fairy tale and Neo-Gothic novel are clearly visible here. It is proved that the interference of the unknown supernatural forces in the characters’ fates is interpreted as hidden, not yet known.

Keywords: American literature; American writers; literary creative activity; literary genres; literary plots; literature for teenagers; fantasy; neo-gothic novels; supernatural; European folklore; American folklore; mythological motifs; reminiscences

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НЕОГОТИКА В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ США ДЛЯ ПОДРОСТКОВ (ТРИЛОГИЯ ДЖОНА ОГАСТА ОБ АРЛО ФИНЧЕ)

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Аннотация. В статье анализируются романы известного американского сценариста Джона Огаста «Арло Финч. Долина Огня» (2018), «Арло Финч. Озеро Луны» (2019), «Арло Финч. Королевство Теней» (2020). Трилогия об Арло Финче – литературный дебют писателя. Показано, что автор широко использует литературные аллюзии и реминисценции, образы и мотивы мифологии, материалы европейских средневековых легенд. Написанный во славу скаутов, напоминающий о силе духа, выдержке, стойкости и взаимовыручке, роман наполнен напряженным драматизмом, поскольку подростки во время спортивной игры попадают в мир Долгого леса, мир смерти, понимаемый в качестве трансгрессивного перехода в иной мир. Волшебный мир служит средством испытания главного героя и его инициации. В отличие от широко распространенной в современной американской литературе для подростков темы суицида, трилогия Джона Огаста наполнена оптимизмом, поскольку она внушает читателю доверие к миру и человеку. Несмотря на игровую установку, книга открыта новейшим духовным веяниям. Джон Огаст помещает роман в жанровую систему фэнтези, однако, на наш взгляд, здесь явно просматривается жанровая специфика волшебной сказки и неоготического романа. Доказывается, что вмешательство в судьбу персонажей неведомых сверхъестественных сил трактуется как сокрытое, еще не познанное.

Ключевые слова: американская литература; американские писатели; литературное творчество; литературные жанры; литературные сюжеты; литература для подростков; фэнтези; неоготические романы;

сверхъестественное; европейский фольклор; американский фольклор; мифологические мотивы; реминисценции

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The appearance of the Arlo Finch trilogy by an eminent American screenwriter John August can be considered a notable phenomenon in the literary process of the USA. It includes “Arlo Finch in the Valley of Fire” (2018), “Arlo Finch in the Lake of the Moon” (2019) and “Arlo Finch in the Kingdom of Shadows” (2020). Published in the USA in 2018–2020, these books have been translated into thirteen foreign languages, including Russian. A fairy tale and a Neo-Gothic novel can be regarded as two principal genres of the trilogy, genetically interrelated in this context. In one respect, there are elements of a fairy tale: will-o'-the-wisps chasing a man, witches turning into trees, jackalopes; in other respect, there are particular elements of the Gothic: an old house, like an old estate, carrying a mystery in itself; the ghosts of a deceased dog and a girl lost in the forest. Interference of supernatural forces in the characters' fates is interpreted as hidden, not yet known.

Arlo Finch turned twelve. He is forced to move with his mother and a fifteen-year-old sister Jaycee to the town of Pine Mountain, lost in the mountains of Colorado, which “...had one bus stop, one traffic light and one school – all at the same intersection” [August 2018]. Built above a mining camp, demolished in the nineteenth century by a flash flood, the town was located in the middle of an enormous forest.

Arlo soon finds out that this forest is called the Long Woods and there are plenty of mysterious and enigmatic things hidden there, and that the location of Pine Mountain itself is abnormal, since the town is situated between two worlds: the profane and the irrational. Near the old house where Uncle Wade, the brother of Arlo's mother, lives on his own, wanders a soundlessly barking dog Cooper, who turned out to be the ghost of a long-deceased dog that once belonged to the family. On the second day of Arlo's stay in Pine Mountain a girl of about his age appears in the window of his room. She talks to him, and then literally dissipates into the moonlit night. As it turns out, this is the ghost of the girl who got lost in the Long Woods at the age of six. Late in the evening, Arlo,

peering into the darkness of the forest, watches will-o'-the-wisps jumping and bouncing merrily, as if luring him to the wilderness. Schoolmates tell him of harmless jackalopes (horned hares), of “faerie beetles”, as well as of witches inhabiting the forest.

Pine Mountain is the hometown of Arlo's mother Celeste. Her childhood and youth were spent here. After Arlo Finch's father was forced to flee to China because of the FBI's persecution (fighting for the truth, he had hacked the secret codes of this organization with a computer), the family has come under suspicion and was considered unreliable. After leaving the prosperous world of Philadelphia, they were forced to wander around the USA for three years, moving from state to state, until finally the mother had got a temporary job at a small insurance company in Chicago. One day she discovered that her colleagues had left having locked the doors without a thought for her. So she had to throw a chair through the window to get out of the office. Obviously, she had lost her job. Formerly, Celeste Finch considered Pine Mountain “...was the last place I thought I'd end up” [August 2018]. But after a long ordeal, when she returned to her father's house, she felt quite happy, especially since she has managed to get a job as a waitress in a diner, and as a low-income family they were entitled to a small grocery set.

At first glance, the novel depicts the real world of a provincial town in Colorado. Uncle Wade earns his living by so-called taxidermy, crafting stuffed animals of dead ones. But this real world is constantly invaded by the irrational. Uncle Wade, as well as Arlo, can see the ghost of the deceased dog Cooper. One day, on the way to school the mother's car, for unknown reasons, drove off the main road and flew into a deep cliff, which had not been there before. Barely getting out of the car, Arlo goes to school, which is only about half a mile away, but the road suddenly vanishes and a strange woman starts to chase him trying to lead Arlo into the Long Woods. The uncle explained to him that “...things are different in the mountains. Not bad, not good, just different” [August 2018]. He added,

referring to the Long Woods: “It’s just dangerous if you’re not ready” [August 2018].

Judgments of the otherness and dangers of the forest have existed in human consciousness since the early Middle Ages. They take root over the ages. The forest landscape was present in the popular consciousness and folklore: «он отпугивал призрачными и таинственными существами и оборотнями, какими населяла мир старинных легенд и суеверий человеческая фантазия» [Гуревич 1894: 302].

Following the traditions of Gothic prose, the author adopts forest as the open space topos, along with the closed topos of the house. In the opinion of Arlo Finch, on whose behalf the story is being told, the house in which they were to live was not at all like an ordinary house. It looked as if everything that ordinary dwellings consist of was present there: wooden tiles, windows, doors. But “...the building slumped against the wooded hillside like a pile of debris left over from proper homes. ... a door hung six feet off the ground, no stairs beneath it. ... The front door was hidden in the shadows of a sagging porch” [August 2018]. Moreover, the house was located on the sidelines, away from other town buildings. It is in such a house that mysterious and incredible things happen, such as the raid of a huge black horse, with horns like a ram’s, with tongues of flame from its nostrils and jaws sharp as a razor.

The author makes extensive use of literary allusions and reminiscences, materials of European medieval legends, images and motifs of mythology. This episode features the so-called spirit of Gitrash, a folklore image known to the inhabitants of Northern England. It usually appears in the form of a horse, or a mule, or a huge dog running along a deserted road, ruining travelers. But since we are facing the world of artistic fantasy, in this context the horse is called “a Night Mare”, and the explanation is provided by a fictional book “The Culman’s Bestiary”, which is owned by Uncle Wade. There is also a description of the horse and the means of getting rid of the monster. Arlo throws salt at the horse, thus making a symbolic gesture, a kind of punitive action, from which the monster turns into a handful of ashes. In the Old Testament, salt had two opposite meanings. On the one hand, as a treat with an eternal commitment to peace and brotherhood, on the other hand, the salt carried a purely negative connotation. For example,

the destruction of Shechem by Abimelech says: “And beat down the city, and sowed it with salt” [Judges 9: 45]. The Jews knew that nothing grows on the salines and considered them places affected by God’s curse. Thus, salt is an ancient and very ambiguous cultural symbol.

In our opinion, the story line of the novel corresponds to the four-phase model of the Gothic text plot development proposed by V. Тюпа: the phase of detachment, which includes the characterization of the protagonist, the phrase partnership – a test of a new life behavior, which turns into a series of mystical trials for him, the phase of collision with death, which precedes the final phase of the protagonist’s transformation in a new life quality [Тюпа 2008].

In the first phase – the phase of detachment, attention is paid to a distinctive appearance of the boy: his eyes are of different colors – one is brown and the other is emerald green. He is exceptionally honest and considerate. Aware of financial difficulties of the family, he tries not to bother his mother for a small matter. As a child, he used to hear voices that seemed to take him to another world. School psychologists wondered why he was constantly imagining something incredible: like a tidal wave on Lake Michigan or a sudden change in the gravity direction. He was always preparing for unforeseen incidents and surprises. And now, finding himself in a new environment, in his room, he immediately started to prepare a rope of sheets so that he could safely jump out of the window if the house collapsed or a fire started.

To the surprise of Arlo, who has changed several schools over the past three years, both the teacher and the classmates at his new school treated him kindly and immediately offered him to join the ranger group. John August’s book is dedicated to the Scouts, but since this is not a realistic novel, but, according to the author, a fantasy, it is worth recalling that «„фэнтези“ – вид литературы фантастической (или литературы о необычайном), использующей вторичную художественную условность, основанную на сюжетной посылке (допущении) иррационального характера. Это допущение не имеет „логической“ мотивации в тексте, предполагает существование фактов и явлений, не поддающихся рациональному объяснению» [Гопман 2012: 16].

In the second phase of the plot organization, the partnership, the classmates’ emerging friend-

ship is depicted. Moreover, not scouts, but rangers are presented to a reader, though their behavior is very similar to the scout movement. The ranger uniform itself partly resembles the scout uniform: shirts with patches, colored neckerchiefs, short (above the knees) trousers, patrols, names of animals and birds that are assigned to ranger groups.

The motto of the English Scouts was: "faith in God, devotion to the king and the motherland". The oath of the Rangers is different: "Loyal, brave, kind and true – keeper of the old and new – I guard the wild, defend the weak, mark the path, and virtue seek. Forest spirits hear me now as I speak my ranger's vow" [August 2018]. In the rangers' cheer there is no oath to the king and the motherland, but the whole behavior of most rangers testifies to their selflessness, decency, a sense of duty and honor, support for the near and mutual assistance.

In his book "Homo Ludens", in the chapter on the history of culture Johann Huizinga noted that «состязание в ловкости, силе и выносливости, издавна занимали важное место во всякой культуре» [Хёйзинга 1997: 186].

After studying the rangers' guide – a "Field Book", with a description of multiple essential knowledge related to constellations, topographic maps, as well as instructions on how to provide first aid, light fires, distinguish edible plants, Arlo has learned that rangers are divided into five ranks: squirrels, owls, wolves, rams and bears. The younger ones were squirrels, the eighth graders were owls, and the older kids were wolves and rams. In order to get, for example, the rank of a ram, it was necessary to master the stone art. It was also necessary to master the art of producing thunderclaps and snaplights. These qualities were considered extraordinary; they couldn't be photographed or filmed. But all these skills existed only on the border with the Long Woods or inside it. The moment one moved away from its borders, all the thunderclaps and snaplights vanish like a dream.

During the Alpine Derby Arlo had to spend the night in the Long Woods for the first time. He noticed how carefully their senior patrolman Connor methodically fenced off the camp with stones. Thus, he was, as it were, cutting the earth. The author resorts to the early historical basis of fairy-tale plots and symbols. The symbol of a magical circle, where a solitary man escapes from evil forces, we can find in numerous fairy tales. It is

associated with the idea of a medieval man that the evil spirit won't dare to cross the border of this circle. This part of the space is, as it were, singled out, cut out of the elemental spirits' sphere. «Круг земли отчуждает человека от природы, особенно ночью, он становится неподвластным демоническим силам» [Назирова 2010: 213].

Forced to leave the tent in the middle of the night by natural necessity, Arlo was attracted by a myriad of will-o'-the-wisps bouncing around him, sparkling merrily and seeking to carry him into the forest. And if not for Connor, the leader of the group, who ran out of the tent and drove away the evil spirits in the form of will-o'-the-wisps with a powerful thunderclap, Arlo would have died in a death trap – a deep pit filled with wooden stakes sticking out from below like spears. In Europe, will-o'-the-wisps are considered the souls of drowned people, children and people who died a violent death, and are now stuck between worlds to lure living people into a quagmire or ruin them in other ways. In the UK, and especially in Wales, will-o'-the-wisps were perceived as harbingers of death.

At first glance, John August has created a novel in praise of the Scouts, reminiscent of fortitude, endurance and perseverance. However, the final of the novel "Arlo Finch in the Valley of Fire" compels us to appeal to some key concepts, such as transgression. Transgression captures the crossing of an impassable boundary between the possible and the impossible. Teenagers during a sports game enter another world, the world of death, understood as a transgressive transition to another world. The narrative ends with an open ending, since the linear matrices of the world comprehension turn out to be untenable. The author managed to create a mysterious atmosphere of a fictional world and fill every scene with intense drama. The magical world serves as a means of testing the protagonist, and his initiation, which takes place in psychological terms.

N. S. Zelizinskaya in her recent article "Dialogues with Teenagers. Jay Asher" indicated that in the United States during the last period books concerning vital teenage problems have been coming to the top of ratings, moreover, regarding the problems generally hushed up. Adults, according to the critic, often consider certain topics to be childish, although many children, in fact, live in them: drugs, incurable diseases, domestic violence, suicide.

Zelezinskaya believes that in adult literature, these taboos have been removed already in the XX century, «но в подростковой, увы, лишь в последние десятилетия, когда многие писатели стали откровенно говорить с детьми, в том числе и на тему смерти» [Зелезинская 2008: 127]. The researcher lists the titles of numerous novels that have appeared in the second decade of the XXI century. They speak for themselves: “Suicide” by E. Levé (2008), “The History a Suicide: My Sister’s Unfinished Life” by J. Bialoski (2011), “Thirteen Reasons Why” by Jay Asher. In Asher’s novel Hannah, the protagonist, has lost touch with the outside world, she believes that no one needs her, that the world is shattered, and her life has no meaning. On the contrary, John August’s trilogy of Arlo Finch is filled with optimism; it inspires the reader with confidence in the world and man.

M. V. Markova in her article “And they lived happily ever after? A fairy tale in contemporary American literature” is discussing modern “re-tellings” of European fairy tales in the USA; the author remarks: «Европейский сказочный материал особенно интересует американского читателя потому, что аутентичных аналогов в США нет» [Маркова 2017: 156].

It seems like in the novels of Arlo Finch John August, operating with the images and symbols of medieval and biblical legends, of European folklore, creates a Gothic coloring, and introduces an American teenager into the sphere of world artistic culture, focusing on the education of humanity, graciousness, kindness and mutual understanding. Books like the trilogy of Arlo Finch reveal the attention of society to the problems of childhood and the interest of writers in personal education.

The children in John August’s novel comprehend the world in all its complexity during the game. With all the originality of plot situations and collisions, fantastic images and motives, the novel touches on the serious theme of man’s place in the universe: what a person should do and what to hope for, what is good and evil. Cognitive and holistic attitudes, ways of man’s terrestrial orientation are expressed in situations of the characters’ ordeal (and, first of all, Arlo Finch’s), in which their personalities are revealed and tested.

They help each other get out of the Long Woods. Connor managed, with an incredible effort of will, to cut the net that had captured ranger Jonas, which could not be unraveled, since it was

being restored by itself. Arlo Finch puts his shoulders to help Julia, a girl from their group, slip out of the sharp wooden stakes that grow like dragon teeth in their path. Flaming, but not burning down pines become an obstacle for them on their way home, and only the ingenuity and endurance of the group makes it possible to overcome the obstacles. “Spirit wasn’t just cheering for yourself. It was rooting for Good” – explained the rangers from Arlo Finch’s group when they were presented with awards for the championship [August 2018].

The Long Woods itself is located in unimaginable spatial coordinates: it is anywhere and everywhere, from California to China, it is boundless. The time coordinate of the chronotope becomes flexible, subject to discontinuities and inversions. Arlo’s tragical dreams keep him captive in the Long Woods. While in the Long Woods, Arlo Finch’s group sees rangers on the opposite bank, similar to them, but in a different dimension and with different names. The linearity of the time is categorically denied. The world becomes an object of invasion of forces and principles, supernatural, inexplicable in a broad sense. A shapeshifter fox, either in the form of an adult, or a teenager Thomas, would pursue Arlo; he embodies the forces of evil, which are hard to recognize, but which should be resisted. Arlo Finch experimentally finds the best ways to behave in a variety of circumstances and contexts, always remaining honest and fair.

John August’s book, despite a game setup, is open to the latest spiritual trends. Realistic accuracy of description, symbolism, folklore motifs and images do not just coexist, but subtly flow into each other. Metaphysical, mythological and mystical assumptions and models become equal actors in the author’s artistic system in John August’s book.

The second part of the novel “Arlo Finch in the Lake of the Moon” represents Arlo’s journey through time and space. The school year has come to an end. Arlo and his friends Indra and Henry Wu are in anticipation of a long-awaited vacation. They go to Camp Redfeather, where they learn pinnerreading, pathfinding and canoeing. However, the forces slumbering on the shores of the Lake of the Moon are mysterious, unpredictable and extremely dangerous. They take a special interest in Arlo. In addition, Arlo and his friends have to face the world of spirits: forest, water, air, fire. The mysterious magic of the Wonder world was

felt even in the first moments of staying in the camp. Once in the forest, they found that “the world around them seemed to swing”, “the sun slid across the sky”, and “the stream was suddenly much more substantial – and ice cold” [August 2019]. Coming up to the canyon, a deep gap in the middle of the Long Woods, they were surprised to find their reflection as if in a giant mirror on the opposite bank. They were standing in the same poses in the uniform of the Blue Patrol. Their duplicates nodded to greet them. Arlo suggested that there is a parallel universe. Both sides of the canyon were identical: “matching towers, matching cliffs, matching stones” [August 2019]. Moreover, their duplicates asked Arlo and his companions to lift a heavy old stone and find something hidden there in the depth, and throw it over the canyon. This “something” turned out to be an old rusty metal flashlight, inside which a magical knife was hidden.

Since there is a significant element of a fairy tale in the novel, bizarre transformations of time perception for the characters completely coincide with similar folklore plots. In fiction events are generally characterized by a certain length of time: duration, discontinuity or continuity. In a fairy tale a certain stage of a character's life is usually covered. A fairy-tale character cannot do without the help of miraculous assistants, which in this context are represented by Arlo's friends. In the forest and by the Lake of the Moon Arlo and his friends experience a number of significant events. They are trying to tame the spirits, especially the wind spirit called Big Breezy. Moreover, if the gifts prepared by some rangers were accepted: the wind spirit enjoyed playing with hanging bells, ribbons, or flower petals, then Arlo's offering in the form of an old bicycle wheel, was rejected. After a while, Arlo made another try, and suddenly a gust of strong wind lifted him in the air. He rose up and flew over the valley, over the tree-tops, over the swamp, over the pier, but suddenly the wind died down and Arlo was literally thrown into the water. With enormous difficulty, he managed to swim out and get to the island called the Giant's Fist, where his friend Henry Wu found him. Arlo said, “The three of us are always in danger. That's sort of our thing” [August 2019]. When this story became known to Indra, she assumed that Arlo was saved by another Henry Wu from a parallel world.

Objects and people of the real world in the novel penetrate into the fairy-tale world. There is no impassable barrier between them. The real space turns into a fabulous, unreal one. A shapeshifter fox appears in various guises: he is a middle-aged man who drops by the diner where Arlo's mother works, and after a mysterious conversation with Arlo suddenly disappears from view, then he is a thirteen-year-old ranger named Thomas from Texas who occurs at their camp. In the final of the novel “Arlo Finch in the Lake of the Moon”, he again assumes the image of an adult man. He explains to Arlo that the inhabitants of the mysterious kingdom of the Eldritch used to hunt for the ancient spirits of water, air and fire to support their cities. It seemed to the Eldritch that they had captured the most powerful spirit, not realizing that their prisoner was not one spirit, but two: “Twin serpents, coiled together. Ekafos and Mirnos. Time and Space” [August 2019]. Before the eyes of the Eldritch the twins split, the bridge over which they were transported, exploded, the Long Woods emerged from the wreckage, and the bridge became “timeless”. From now on, events from different time periods can occur there at the same time. And just like Alice in Wonderland, the Fox asks: “Am I literally a fox?” “Yes and no”, – he replies to himself [August 2019]. It reminds us of an episode of “Alice's Adventures in Wonderland” by Lewis Carroll when she says: “Was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, Who in the world am I?” [Carroll 1998: 19]. The poetics of nonsense is felt here. In another episode, Arlo complains to the Fox: “Did I faint?” – “You're faint, all right”, – the Fox replies [August 2019].

The novel also operates the dream motif as a special form the fairy-tale world organization. The dream seems to “turn on” and “turn off” the fairy-tale reality. For space-time relations a complex balance of the dream world and reality are of fundamental importance. In one of Arlo's four dreams time goes back thirty years. Thirteen-year-old Uncle Wade, his classmate Mitch, as well as Arlo's future mother Celeste, who was only nine at the time, appear next to him in the Long Woods. Arlo finds himself in another time.

In this world of the Wonder during the sleep real time is physically “turned off” from his biographical line, but psychologically correlates with

Arlo's real stay in Camp Redfeather. In his dream he participates in a curious episode when young Wade, Mitch and Celeste watch Arlo lay a flashlight with a magic knife under the stone, which thirty years later he will give to the Blue Patrol.

Arlo's friends, Indra and Wu, tell him that in this enchanted forest the concepts of "Then" and "Now" exist: "That's Then. This is Now", – Indra states. Henry Wu adds: "That's ours now, and his ten days ago", – referring to Arlo. "We're now us. We need then us" [August 2019]. The reminiscences from Lewis Carroll's books are evident here again. August, just like Carroll, touches on the problem of experiencing psychological or subjective time. Immanuel Kant believed that the concept of time is not in objects, but in subjects. Arlo's friends remark that "the past is set. Whatever happened, happened. But this moment, the one we're in right now, this isn't the past". "It sort of is, though", – Wu objects. "You and I saw what happened. To us, this is part of the past. We're going to end up doing the exact same things", – says Indra. "There's nothing forcing us to. We still have free will", – she notes. But one of the boys named Jonas firmly states: "I don't want to break the universe. I just want to make things right" [August 2019].

Analyzing the categories of space and time in Carroll's books, S. Gellerstein remarked: «Взрослый читатель, приобщенный к науке и времени, невольно ассоциирует парадоксы Кэрролла с современными представлениями о зыбкости и относительности таких привычных понятий, как настоящее, прошлое, будущее, вчера, завтра, давно, одновременно, раньше, позже, и так далее» [Геллерштейн 1991: 259]. Lewis Carroll, of course, was aware of time transformations occurring to the characters of folklore rich in such plots. We believe that bizarre transformations of the time perception were certainly borrowed by August both from numerous folklore sources, as well as, probably, from Carroll's books. It is also worth noting modern developments in the field of quantum physics. The Long Woods, the Lake of the Moon become the space where August models folklore scenes with witches, trolls, a giant lake snake, will-o'-the-wisps, and so on.

In August's trilogy the variants of the adventurous chronotope are reinterpreted according to the concept. Arlo is the ideal of a teenager and the person, subjected to trials and coming out of them with honor. With his magical knife, he cuts

the bonds and frees a wind spirit, Big Breezy, and Cooper, the ghost dog, tied to an invisible stump, heals ranger Russell suffering from the gris attached to his body, and so on. There are such commandments in the oath of the Rangers: "Loyal, brave, kind and true – keeper of the old and new – I guard the wild, defend the weak, mark the path, and virtue seek" [August 2019]. The rangers and the fox surrounding Arlo consider him to be **the chosen one**, to which Arlo responds: "I wasn't chosen. I chose." [August 2019].

Yuri Kagarlitsky, discussing Carroll's work, pointed out that the author paved the way for European neo-humanism: «отмеченному в Англии именами Уэллса и Шоу с их вниманием одновременно к человеку и к науке, с их стремлением снова соединить разобщенные интеллектуальную и эмоциональную сферы» [Кагарлицкий 1983: 10]. It seems that August's trilogy can also be placed in the sphere of new humanism.

Relying on folklore and Gothic traditions August creates profoundly original images and situations that are not just reproductions of folklore stereotypes. The inclusion of traditional archetypes, elements of various cultures and beliefs allows the author to endow the text with multi-layered content, involving underlying cultural memory.

There are universal artistic techniques of the Gothic novel. Generally, such a novel is based on a rapid change of events, often within a short period of time. John August follows this tradition, portraying Arlo's life in a number of significant episodes during one school year (the Alpine Derby, holidays at the Lake of the Moon, a visit to China, mysterious world of the Kingdom of Shadows).

The mainstay of the "Gothic" novel is always a mystery, the presence of some riddle that causes alarm to the protagonist. It is no coincidence that, as soon as he finds himself in a new environment in Colorado, Arlo makes mental notes "of all the dangers he saw" [August 2018]. A yellow ranger patrol uniform belonging to Uncle Wade with a piece of a yellow tie becomes a riddle to him; an ancient compass with an eternal arrow to the north, supernatural world of the Long Forest and the Kingdom of Shadows.

"Gothic authors" often rely on material dreams, peculiar premonitions and omissions, vague predictions. For example, Uncle Wade immediately warned Arlo that in the world of Pine Mountain

everything is “dangerous if you’re not ready” [August 2018]. Arlo is seized with fear because of tremendous dangers that he is unable to foresee. John August’s spatio-temporal organization of the text is partially subordinated to the Gothic tradition. For example, in Gothic literature the image of a house carries a special functional load. Gothic authors put a castle or a monastery in the center, that’s where the events take place. In the Nineteenth-Century Literature the role of a castle can be performed by a house, for example, in Dickens [Черномазова 2010: 10].

In August, the characteristics of the house are presented from Arlo’s point of view; he was surprised to find that “It didn’t look like a house at all. ... the building slumped against the wooded hillside like a pile of debris left over from proper homes” [August 2018]. The exterior bore traces of neglect and decrepitude, but it was possible to settle in comfortably enough in the house itself, there was a sufficient number of bedrooms on the second floor. The only horrible event – the raid of the Night Mare – ended well. In fact, Arlo’s family (his mother, sister and Uncle Wade) could feel safe in the house. As for the temporal organization of the narrative, it is subject to both the Gothic tradition and a contemporary scientific theory of relativity and quantum physics. Arlo’s father explains to his son and his friends the wonders of overcoming several thousand kilometers in a few hours from the Long Forest to China and back by the laws of quantum physics, where the past can exist in the present and the future, and there are no cause-effect relationships. In August’s Neo-Gothic novels the worlds of a Gothic fairy tale and fantasy coexist. Mythopoetic natural images dating back to the tradition of Gothic literature are “light” and “darkness”. In August’s novels, many of the events

take place at night: at night Katie appears in the reflection of the window, at night will-o’-the-wisps shine invitingly in the Long Forest. Natural images of the elements are also regarded in the Gothic context. The air element, an intelligent wind, appears as a living being helping Arlo in his quest to free the spirits from the cells in which they were imprisoned by the mystical inhabitants of the other world. In her work “The Tradition of the Gothic novel in English literature of the XIX and XX centuries”, E. V. Skobeleva rightly assumes that “основным направлением развития ‘готики’ является психологическое” [Скобелева 2008: 3]. In her opinion, at the turn of the XIX–XX centuries, Gothic motifs become a reflection of subconscious and unconscious drives that overcome a person. In the researcher’s opinion, in the XX century authors employ formal techniques of the “novel of mysteries and horrors” as details of the constructor, consciously opting them to create a general charged atmosphere.

In John August’s trilogy the reader is offered an original interpretation of “gothic conventions”. Basing on the material of a child’s and an adolescent’s existence, when a teenager realizes «Я-концепцию, осознанное когнитивное восприятие и оценку индивидуумом самого себя» [Райс, Долджин 2014: 311]. Thus, the author’s novels raise questions of the boundaries of reality, of the mysterious, not yet known, of the presence of evil in numerous guises and in human souls. John August’s books are written for both teenagers and adults. It is possible to agree with the opinion of E. V. Skobeleva that «для писателей XIX и XX веков готика стала средством изучения человеческой души – во всем ее многообразии» [Скобелева 2008: 16].

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