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THE THEME OF SURROGACY IN CONTEMPORARY NOVEL

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Abstract. Although surrogacy is a relatively recent phenomenon, it is rapidly becoming a significant topic in social and cultural discussions. This article explores Russian and English-language novels addressing surrogacy, written between 2010 and 2023. The study takes an interdisciplinary approach, combining ethical and legal research on surrogacy with historical and literary analysis, particularly focusing on how the scientific and technological revolution is depicted in literature. The urgency of the article can be attributed to the need to comprehend scientific achievements in contemporary fiction, and it is the first Russian study to focus on surrogacy in modern novels. The topic appears in the works by popular authors like T. Ustinova, A. and S. Litvinovs, and T. Carver, in the so-called external action novels such as detective novels, thrillers, and melodramas, as well as in novels written in the genre of courtroom drama. In addition to the sensational elements, these works also serve an educational purpose, providing legal information on surrogacy, including quotations from laws and references to real medical and judicial cases. The study examines in more detail S. Spindler's "Surrogate Mother" (2021) as a psychological novel about a modern woman's life and priorities and J. Ramos's "The Farm" (2019), a dystopian novel, depicting surrogacy as a widespread, legal, and profitable business. Ramos connects the issue of surrogacy with contemporary concerns like gender, social, and racial inequality, turning parts of the novel into a sharp social critique. The publication of the novel became a salient literary and socio-cultural event. The undertaken analysis shows that surrogacy is gaining increasing attention in modern fiction, featured in both popular novels and more complex works across different genres. This theme holds considerable artistic potential and is likely to be further explored in the future.

Keywords: reproductive technologies; surrogacy; scientific and technological revolution in literature; modern novel; genre

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ТЕМА СУРРОГАТНОГО МАТЕРИНСТВА В СОВРЕМЕННОМ РОМАНЕ

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Аннотация. Тема суррогатного материнства как явления, появившегося в жизни человечества относительно недавно, активно входит в социальное и культурное пространства. В статье исследуются отечественные и англоязычные романы, посвященные суррогатному материнству, написанные в период с 2010 по 2023 гг. Статья носит междисциплинарный характер, поскольку авторы опираются, с одной стороны, на этико-правовые исследования в области суррогатного материнства, с другой – на историко-литературные материалы, в частности на работы, посвященные отображению НТР в литературе. Актуальность исследования обусловлена необходимостью осмысления новейших научных достижений в литературе, новизна – тем фактом, что впервые в отечественной науке проводится анализ романов, посвященных теме суррогатного материнства. Показано, что тема широко используется популярными авторами (Т. Устинова, А. и С. Литвиновы, Т. Карвер и др.) так называемых романов внешнего действия (детективы, триллеры, мелодрамы), а также в романе, написанном в жанре судебной драмы. Несмотря на элемент сенсационности, все произведения обладают просветительской функцией, поскольку включают в себя информацию о законодательстве в области суррогатного материнства, о реальной медицинской и судебной практике, в ряде случаев цитируют статьи законов. Отдельно рассматривается произведение британской писательницы С. Спиндлер «Суррогатная мать» (2021) – психологический роман о жизни современной женщины и ее предназначении. Роман американской писательницы филиппинского происхождения Дж. Рамос «Ферма» (2019) – антиутопия, в мире которой суррогатное материнство рассматривается как массовый, легальный и прибыльный бизнес. Проблемы суррогатного материнства рассматриваются автором в комплексе с рядом острых проблем современности, таких как гендерное, социальное, расовое неравенство, и в некоторых своих частях роман становится острым социально-

критическим повествованием. Выход романа стал заметным литературным и социокультурным явлением. Проведенный анализ показал, что тематика и проблематика суррогатного материнства все чаще находит отражение в современной литературе, как правило, в романах популярных жанров, но также в сложных с жанровой точки зрения произведениях. Полагаем, что потенциал, заложенный в художественном воплощении темы, будет полнее раскрыт в дальнейшем.

Ключевые слова: репродуктивные технологии; суррогатное материнство; НТР в литературе; современный роман; жанр

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The development of surrogacy, on the one hand, brings the joy of parenthood to many, but on the other, it raises a number of ethical, legal, psychological, and social issues. The process of becoming parents involving third parties is a deeply personal, delicate, and complex matter. Both surrogate mothers and recipients face difficult moral and ethical decisions – not only when deciding to participate in such programs, but throughout the following phases of pregnancy, birth, and the determination of parental rights.

Surrogacy, a relatively recent phenomenon in human life, is increasingly entering social, cultural, and literary spaces. Research has examined surrogacy from various perspectives, including ethical [Piersanti et al. 2021; Ellenbogen et al. 2021], anthropological, and legal [Ghodrati 2023] viewpoints. In this article, we analyze how surrogacy is portrayed in contemporary fiction. Our interdisciplinary approach draws on recent studies, official data from the Russian Association for Human Reproduction (RAHR), and historical and literary materials. We believe it is both possible and necessary to incorporate information about the legal framework and practical implementation of surrogacy, as public understanding of the subject remains limited despite its significant societal impact.

For this study, we looked at novels by contemporary Russian and English-speaking authors, choosing well-known writers whose works have been reviewed in the media. All novels were written between 2009 and 2021. The relevance of this research stems from the fact that surrogacy is a new reproductive technology whose status in public consciousness remains unclear. To date, no studies have focused on surrogacy in literature, making this research particularly novel.

In fiction, interest in scientific and technological progress surged in the 19th and early 20th centuries, led by authors like Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Karel Čapek. Mid-20th century literature expanded on this theme, while literary studies of the late Soviet period provided a more in-depth analysis of these developments. For instance, in 1974, the influential journal *Voprosy literatury* (“Issues of Literature”) conducted a roundtable discussion titled “The Scientific and Technological Revolution and Literature,” which opened with the following statement: “Our era is the age of the scientific and technological revolution, a monumental leap toward humanity’s true dominance over nature. In this context, new relationships between humans and the world inevitably come to the forefront. These relationships are far from simple or unambiguous. Even Goethe, in ‘The Sorcerer’s Apprentice’, grasped the dialectic of this process, already pointing out that the development of science not only promises humani-

ty growth and triumph but also brings certain threats to the human spirit. Our time confirms the accuracy of this poetic prediction” [Fekete, Csoóri et al. 1974: 81–82].

There is no doubt that the principles discussed remain relevant in the 21st century. In 1979, the prominent Soviet literary scholar V. V. Ivasheva, in her monograph “On the Threshold of the 21st Century: The Scientific and Technological Revolution in Literature”, identified three key trends in the literature of that period: a shift toward documentary realism among many diverse writers, an increased focus on scientific progress across various genres (especially in science fiction), and a greater interest in philosophical reflection, resulting in more philosophical prose, drama, and poetry [Ivasheva 1979: 21–22]. Ivasheva also pointed out the following: “The revolution in biology that brought about the new theory of genes in the mid-20th century could not fail to capture the attention of writers worldwide” [Ivasheva 1979: 161]. By analyzing novels from different authors, she demonstrates how advancements in genetics and medicine have been used by writers across genres – whether in sensational, social, philosophical, science fiction, or even detective novels.

In 1982, P. Ulyashev, in his article “‘Electric People,’ or Unity Without Struggle (Some Problems of the Scientific and Technological Revolution in Literature and the Movement of Conflict),” examines novels by prominent Soviet authors that explore the themes of the scientific and technological revolution through the lens of their genres: “These are not novels of character. These are **novels of ideas** (*emphasis in the original*), wrapped in contemporary debates on morality. These works are filled with scientific hypotheses, woven into the fabric of artistic narrative. This, in itself, is a phenomenon of the era of the scientific and technological revolution. The production novel was followed by the **science popularization novel**” [Ulyashev 1982: 135]. Additionally, the article also analyzes novels that the critic classifies as **educational**: “Their authors, like the writers of the 1920s, are driven by the idea of a ‘world revolution,’ but now it is the scientific and technological revolution” [Ulyashev 1982: 135]. We believe that this strategy of genre analysis can be successfully applied to the study of contemporary novels.

In contemporary literature, the effects of technological advancements are more frequently represented in dystopian novels that concentrate on the dramatic and often catastrophic consequences of progress. British literature scholar F. Tolan links this shift in literary focus not only to the threats posed by the unpredictable advancement of scientific knowledge but also to other factors, particularly humanity’s longstanding fear of the arrival of a new century, in this case, a new

millennium, which began with the tragic events of September 11, 2001. As a result, Tolan notes, there has been a proliferation of “post-millennial dystopias” in literature: “there has been a recent rash of futuristic fictions... they display a similarly post-millennial sense of displacement, threat and dislocation” [Tolan 2010: 231]. Among the authors and works that Tolan analyzes are novels featuring clones, beings created through asexual reproduction – specifically, Kazuo Ishiguro’s “Never Let Me Go” (2005) and David Mitchell’s “Cloud Atlas” (2004). In the former, clones are created and raised to later harvest their organs for sick humans, while in the latter, they are used as obedient service personnel. Both writers are prominent figures in contemporary British literature, and their books have been translated into many languages worldwide.

Advancements in biology and medicine have led to the development of several assisted reproductive technologies, including surrogacy.

Surrogacy is the most complex aspect of assisted reproductive technologies (ART) because it requires not only the involvement of third parties in the parental project but also long-term interactions among all parties. According to the Russian Association of Human Reproduction (RAHR), surrogate mothers in Russia give birth to between 700 and 800 infants each year¹. However, media reports suggest that the number of infants born to surrogate mothers in Russia reaches 20,000 to 22,000 annually². Given that participation in the RAHR’s ART Registry Report is voluntary for medical organizations, and not all ART centers in Russia provide information to the registry, there is an evident lack of reliable data on this issue.

Even though media reports suggest that the surrogacy process involves only a small number of people, the discussion around surrogacy issues and prospects generates significant public interest because it relates to fundamental values of human life, such as parenthood, motherhood, genetic transmission, kinship, and identity.

The world’s first surrogacy agency was established in 1976 in the USA. The programs used the oocytes of surrogate mothers, fertilized by the sperm of the biological father. Over the 12 years of the agency’s operation, 302 babies were born. The first surrogacy program was officially launched and successfully implemented in 1980, also in the USA, with the assistance of the company *Surrogate Parenting Associates, Inc.* in Louisville. The pregnancy occurred on the first attempt and resulted in the birth of a healthy boy. The process of legal document approval took around 9 months. Five days after the birth, the surrogate mother relinquished her rights to the child in favor of the biological father in a local court [Ivaeva 2009]. In April 1986, a girl was born as a result of *in vitro* conception using the sperm and egg of her biological parents. This was the first child born through a gestational, or

full, surrogacy program, where the surrogate mother carries the embryo of the biological parents. The IVF procedure took place at the Mount Sinai Medical Center in Cleveland, led by Dr. Wolf Utian. The 37-year-old biological mother had her uterus removed and asked her 22-year-old friend, who had successfully given birth twice before, to carry her daughter.

In Russia, the first surrogacy program was implemented in 1995 at the IVF Center at the D. O. Ott Research Institute of Obstetrics and Gynecology of the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences in Saint Petersburg [Trifonova et al. 2015]. There is no global consensus on the legal regulation of surrogacy. Lawmakers’ opinions on surrogacy vary widely, from a complete ban in countries like France, Germany, Spain, Italy, and Portugal [Ellenbogen et al. 2021], to full permission in places like Greece, the United Kingdom, and Iran, where all forms of surrogacy (gestational, commercial, and international) are allowed, with regulations tailored to each country’s context. Yet another approach, which can be described as intermediate, is found in countries like the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, and the Czech Republic, where only altruistic surrogacy is permitted [Ghodrati 2023].

In Russia, surrogacy is regulated by the Family Code of the Russian Federation³: Article 51 of the Family Code grants the surrogate mother the priority in determining parental rights: genetic parents can only receive the child with her consent. It is further defined in Article 55 of Federal Law No. 323-FZ “On the Basics of Health Protection of Citizens in the Russian Federation”⁴. According to Part 9 of Article 55, “surrogacy represents the carrying and birth of a child (including premature delivery) under a contract concluded between the surrogate mother (a woman who carries the fetus after the transfer of a donor embryo) and the intended parents, whose gametes were used for fertilization, or a single woman for whom carrying and giving birth to a child is impossible due to medical reasons.” Specifics of the surrogacy process are outlined in the Decree of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation dated July 31, 2020, No. 803n “On the Procedure for the Use of Assisted Reproductive Technologies, Contraindications, and Limitations for Their Application”⁵.

In December 2022, Federal Law No. 538-FZ of December 19, 2022, “On Amending Certain Legislative

³ “Family Code of the Russian Federation” dated December 29, 1995, No. 223-FZ (as amended on July 31, 2023). URL: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_8982/062dc2e007c56e8d7bef623d85e867a4boe99a1d/ (mode of access: 26.06.2024).

⁴ Federal Law No. 323-FZ dated November 21, 2011, “On the Fundamentals of Health Protection of Citizens in the Russian Federation”. URL: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_121895/ (mode of access: 26.06.2024).

⁵ Decree of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation No. 803n dated July 31, 2020, “On the Procedure for the Use of Assisted Reproductive Technologies, Contraindications, and Limitations on Their Application” (Registered on October 19, 2020, No. 60457). URL: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202010190041> (mode of access: 26.06.2024).

¹ https://www.rahr.ru/surrogatnoe_materinstvo_rahr.php (mode of access: 26.06.2024).

² <https://tg.ru/2020/02/19/40-let-nazad-rodilsia-pervyj-rebenok-ot-surrogatnoj-materi.html>; <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3674788> (mode of access: 26.06.2024).

Acts of the Russian Federation”⁶, was adopted. Under this law, surrogacy services remain accessible to Russian citizens who are married, including cases where only one of the prospective parents is a Russian citizen, as well as to single women holding Russian citizenship. It is stipulated that only a woman with Russian citizenship can act as a surrogate mother. Additionally, it is established that a child born in Russia to a surrogate mother acquires Russian citizenship by birth.

Moreover, on May 31, 2023, the Russian government issued Decree No. 882, which establishes potential parents as the genetic mother and genetic father and recognizes a single woman as the genetic mother. This decree came into effect on September 1, 2023⁷. The law emphasizes that it is possible for parents to resort to surrogacy only if both of them are biologically related to the future child.

In fiction, the topic of surrogacy began to be actively explored in works of various genres in the 21st century. For instance, it becomes one of the central themes in the novel “God’s Gift” (2010) by T. Ustinova and P. Astakhov, which opens a series of books under the general title “Legal Affairs”. Both the title of the series and the presence of Pavel Astakhov – Doctor of Law, lawyer, and Actual State Counselor of the Russian Federation, 1st Class – among the authors contribute to creating a sense of documentary authenticity in the text. Moreover, since the protagonist of the book and the entire series is Judge Elena Kuznetsova, the novels contain numerous descriptions of judicial practice, court proceedings, their participants, their details and nuances. According to the authors themselves, the cases that Judge Kuznetsova handles are socially significant and invariably address issues that attract public attention (e.g., surrogacy, real estate fraud, transplantation, etc.). In “God’s Gift”, Judge Kuznetsova presides over several cases involving the fates of children, one of which concerns surrogacy.

The novel, like others in the series, belongs to the genre of courtroom or legal drama – a title that refers to the American tradition of creating plays and television series where “the narrative is built on the interaction of lawyers, their clients, prosecutors, witnesses, jurors, and judges, and the courtroom plot is based on legal practice and the justice system as a whole” [Shitenburg 2005]. It should be noted that courtroom drama can be combined with other genres. In the American tradition, many courtroom dramas are adaptations of literary works (for example, Harper Lee’s “To Kill a Mockingbird” [1960], adapted into the film of the same name by R. Mulligan in 1962), which provides grounds to consider courtroom drama as a subgenre

⁶ Federal Law No. 538-FZ dated December 19, 2022, “On Amending Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation”. URL: <https://sozd.duma.gov.ru/bill/41630-8> (mode of access: 26.06.2024).

⁷ Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 882 dated May 31, 2023, “On Establishing Potential Parents as the Genetic Mother and Genetic Father, as well as a Single Woman as the Genetic Mother”. URL: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202306010072> (mode of access: 26.06.2024).

of the novel⁸. “God’s Gift” by T. Ustinova and P. Astakhov belongs precisely to this genre form; in addition to descriptions of judicial practice, the authors include in the text a comparative description of two legal systems, Russian and American, in relation to surrogacy, and even directly quote certain articles of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

“Mister Arakhem (*a legal advisor at the US Embassy*) took out the Family Code of the Russian Federation in English from his desk, found the relevant page, and began to read aloud in a well-modulated voice:

– According to Paragraph 4 of Article 51 of the Family Code of the Russian Federation, ‘married couples who have given their written consent for the implantation of another woman’s embryo for the purpose of carrying it may be recorded as the child’s parents only with the consent of the woman who gave birth to the child (the surrogate mother).’ Only with her consent! Without her consent – no! Do you understand? You can go to court, but you will lose. In America, you and the surrogate mother would have approximately equal chances of winning... Here, the chances of winning such a case are zero” [Ustinova, Astakhov 2023: 47].

Among the various plots related to the fates of children, the novel describes the story of a childless American couple who, after many years of trying to have a baby and undergoing expensive treatments using various reproductive technologies, seek the services of a surrogate mother while in Russia. However, after giving birth to a son, the surrogate decides to keep him. The authors (especially T. Ustinova, who handles the “domestic life of the characters”⁹ and the psychological motivations behind their actions) shape this legal conflict into a compelling psychological narrative. The blend of courtroom drama and psychological prose makes it an engaging read. T. Ustinova, an experienced author of popular prose, concludes the novel with a melodramatic happy ending: the surrogate mother, having grown attached to the baby she carried, keeps him, while the American couple adopts a child from an orphanage, cheerfully forgoing compensation for their expenses.

The conflict of the surrogate mother refusing to hand over the newborn to the biological parents is a common theme in detective fiction. For example, it underpins the storylines of the two novels written by the Litvinov brothers, “Madonna without a Baby” (2013) and “Family Curse” (2015). “In our country, the laws are quite interesting. They completely favor the surrogate mother. Until she signs the agreement to give her child to the genetic parents, the baby belongs to her. And there’s nothing you can do about it,” laments Vera, the genetic mother of the child born to her friend in the novel [Litvinovy 2023: 283]. However, the author’s perspective is unequivocal: Vera Borodulina, a businesswoman and ruthless manipulator, does

⁸ Elements of courtroom drama are often used in Russian literature, for example, in “The Karamazov Brothers” by F. M. Dostoevsky and “Resurrection” by L. N. Tolstoy.

⁹ Kudryashova M. “God’s Gift” for Two // Vecherniy Chelyabinsk. 19.03.2010. URL: <https://archive.vecherka.su/articles/society/36911/> (mode of access: 25.10.2024).

not deserve sympathy because she only begins to care about her daughter after the biological father dies, which brings up inheritance issues. In contrast, Alla is depicted as a wholly positive character: not only did she refuse to give Vera the baby, but she also returned the money after selling her apartment in Moscow. Moreover, in the novel's finale, it is revealed that Alla is the child's biological mother – the reproductive doctor used her egg: “She thought: why work with Borodulina's unviable eggs? There's another option! And it's the simplest!.. She grew Alla's fertilized egg to the blastocyst stage and implanted it into the surrogate mother” [Litvinov 2023: 309–310]. The plot concerning surrogacy is intertwined with detective elements – blackmail, murder, attempted poisoning, and more. The accumulation of incredible manipulations, coincidences, strange events, and poorly substantiated psychological motivations brings the novel down to the level of mass literature, but it is precisely the conflict related to surrogacy that serves as a core element driving the narrative.

Another detective story where surrogacy plays a significant role is M. Zhukova-Gladkova's novel “Titles Are Written in the Heavens” (2021). The protagonist, Vasilisa, agrees to become a surrogate mother for a wealthy family to pay for her son's expensive treatment at a foreign clinic. However, this conflict is only one of the twists in the plot, which includes several murders, kidnapping, pursuit of inheritance, and more. Again, as in the previous novel, the reader is offered a story focused on external action, with almost no plausible motivations and a collection of curious but irrelevant comments to the central plot, marking it as yet another work of mass literature.

Modern international prose also addresses this compelling topic: a good example is the novel titled “The Surrogate” (2009) by Tania Carver. Tania Carver is a collective pseudonym for Martyn and Linda Waites, British authors known for their popular crime thriller novels, which are widely regarded by literary scholars as part of mass literature and culture [Nikolyukin 2001]. In the novel, investigator Philip Brennan faces a series of crimes that seem horrific even to him, a person who knows well what evil is: a criminal kills women in late stages of pregnancy, cuts out and steals their infants. The novel, which features rivers of blood on its pages, closely follows the recipe of another thriller author, J. Patterson, who believed that the key feature of the books in this genre is “the intensity of emotions they create... By definition, if a thriller doesn't not thrill, it's not doing its job” [Patterson 2011: iii]. The phrase “surrogate mother” in this case serves as both a metaphor and a peculiar advertising slogan, capturing the reader's attention. The authors intended to use the topic of surrogacy to heighten emotional tension and create a stronger impact on the reader.

A novel that genuinely explores surrogacy and its associated issues was written by British author Susan Spindler. Spindler is a well-known journalist and documentary filmmaker who worked for the BBC for many years. She is the author of two popular science books, “The Tomorrow's World Book of Food” and “Doctors To Be.” The novel on surrogacy marked her

debut in literary fiction. In 2021, the novel was released in hardcover under the title “Surrogate,” with subsequent paperback editions published under the title “Another Mother” (in Russian, it was translated by A. Kuprina and released in 2022 under the title “*Surrogatnaya mat'*” – “Surrogate Mother”). The novel received generally favorable reviews from critics, with reviews appearing in several leading English-language periodicals. The reviewer from *The Guardian* notes: “Surrogacy stirs up a complex swirl of ethics and emotions, easily lending itself to sensationalism. It's a trap that Spindler's intimate, equitable debut novel dodges... Instead, this is a book that's overly burdened by its mission to educate, meaning that, despite deft structuring, the early chapters tend to get bogged down in meticulous probing of moral and biological boundaries, often via some pretty clunky dialogue. As the plot quickens, however, the prose improves; when it comes to describing a crisis, of which there are plenty, it soars” [Anderson 2021]. There's no arguing that some descriptions in the first part of the novel are overly detailed, especially when it comes to medical procedures and technologies, which reflects the author's background in popular science writing. However, the main focus of the novel is on personal and family psychology. This shift is likely the reason for the change in the book's title: instead of the more sensational and faceless “Surrogate” (which is translated in dictionaries as “substitute, replacement, trusted person, substitutive subject”), we see the title “Another Mother,” which emphasizes the family aspect.

The protagonist of the novel, Ruth Furnival, who appears much younger than her 54 years, is a successful woman in every respect: she is a well-known television producer, a happy wife, and the mother of two adult daughters. Alex, Ruth's eldest daughter, lives in the USA and is passionately building her career, while the younger daughter, Lauren, lives with her husband in London. For several years, she has been unsuccessfully trying to conceive and give birth to a child, but after her sixth miscarriage, it becomes clear that she will not achieve a pregnancy on her own. Lauren's health and mental state are seriously undermined, and the financial resources have been spent on treatments and numerous IVF procedures. The family wants to help: Alex is willing to become a surrogate mother for Lauren and her husband's child, but due to certain aspects of the legislation in the USA and UK, she cannot do so. Moved by sympathy for Lauren, Ruth becomes a surrogate mother for her own daughter, and the main part of the text focuses on describing the preparations (hormonal therapy), the embryo transfer process, pregnancy, and the heroine's childbirth. While the first part, as noted by *The Guardian*, is dominated by naturalistic descriptions (or, as literary critic K. Milchin aptly called it, a “gynecological detective” [Milchin 2023]), the focus then shifts to family and psychological issues. Ruth's relationship with her daughter has always been complicated – she is a dominant, controlling mother, while her daughter tries to maintain her independence – and it continues to evolve, pulsating and changing. The relationship with her loving husband, Adam, a devout Catholic who re-

jects the very idea of surrogacy, is also at risk. Ruth's successful career collapses as she is forced to neglect her work responsibilities. The novel's ending is also ambiguous: the heroine gives birth to a child for her daughter, but during the delivery, her life is in danger, and afterward, she has to recover for a long time in intensive care. At a certain point, the family are depicted wondering "What have we done?": "They sat slumped in silence, struggling to control their terror" [Spindler 2023: 454].

The ending of the novel cannot be considered entirely happy, as the protagonist and her loved ones endure intense physical and psychological trials, leaving their full recovery uncertain. This inevitably leads us to the next question: was it worth the risk of surrogate motherhood? Thus, the work becomes a reflection on the role and life of women in the modern world, what their priorities are, and how far they are willing to go to achieve their goals. In this paradigm, surrogate motherhood simultaneously acts as a trigger and a means to achieve a goal. Departing from the genre of action-driven novels characteristic of the previously analyzed works, Spindler creates, first and foremost, a psychological novel in which external factors – such as the specifics of legislation, detailed descriptions of medical procedures, and social details – are subordinated to the complex psychological experiences of individuals and families.

The novel by Joanne Ramos, titled "The Farm," was published in the U.S. in 2019. The action of "The Farm" unfolds in contemporary America – or, as the author states [see Evans 2019], in the very near future – which allows critics to write about the dystopian traits of the work and compare it to Margaret Atwood's classical novel "The Handmaid's Tale" (1985) [see Phelan 2019]. The central image of the work, around which the plot revolves, is the existence of a gestational retreat called Golden Oaks (referred to as the Farm), where surrogate mothers live under medical supervision in excellent conditions while carrying children for wealthy families. The reputation of the enterprise is high, and at the end, its organizer, Mae, plans to expand the business and establish another Farm called Red Cedars.

Joanne Ramos, the author, was born in the Philippines, moved to the U.S. with her family at the age of six, graduated from Princeton University, and worked as a banking analyst and journalist. "The Farm" is her debut work in the field of fiction. The book became a bestseller, made it to the list of the top American debut novels of 2019, and was named one of the best books by several publications; reviews of the novel were published in leading American and British outlets. In the afterword to her novel, Ramos writes: "I grew up in two worlds: our old one (*i.e.*, *the Filipino*), preserved in clamorous weekend gatherings..., and our new one, where my little sister and I were two of only four Asian kids in our elementary school" [Ramos 2020: 471]. In many respects, the book continues the tradition of multicultural novels in which "new Americans" (rather, American women) contemplate the coexistence of two cultures and traditions in their own lives and the lives of their loved ones: Maxine Hong Kingston,

Amy Tan – American writers of Chinese descent, Firuze Dumas – an Iranian-American writer, and others. Each writer uses their own narrative strategies, but all of them tell stories about the lives of women in the modern multicultural world of the U.S. In Ramos's novel, there are no central male characters; the chapters of the work are named after the heroines who come into focus: "Jane," "Ate," "Mae," "Reagan," and so on.

The heroine of the novel, Jane, is a Filipina single mother of a young daughter. She initially works as a caregiver in a nursing home, then as a nanny for a wealthy family. She agrees to become a surrogate mother and moves to the Farm, leaving her six-month-old daughter Amalia in the care of her elderly relative, Ate. Among the surrogate mothers at the Farm are women of different nationalities and races, with various, sometimes opposing, motivations. For Jane, the sole motivation is the generous financial reward, while her roommate Reagan signs the contract for different reasons. Reagan, the daughter of a very wealthy family and a graduate of a prestigious university, seeks to separate from her dictatorial father and fulfill her dream of doing something good – giving birth to a child for a childless couple. Overall, however, the author implies that surrogate motherhood and the surrogate mother themselves are commodities for which the wealthy pay good money, but at the same time, they enslave the woman, placing her on the Farm and forcing her to live under strict, often harsh limitations. Ramos examines the phenomenon of surrogate motherhood in conjunction with a complex array of other pressing topics and issues characteristic of the modern world: social, racial, and gender inequality. The prevailing perspective on the structure of society in the novel is that of the "new American" women, although the author gives voice to other heroines as well. In some chapters, the author rises to critique modern society, but the ending sounds conciliatory: Jane, who gives birth to a son for Mae, the Farm's director, stays at the Farm as the child's nanny, while her daughter Amalia lives with her. Ramos describes her novel as the "culmination of a running dialogue I had with myself for the past twenty-five years – about just deserts and luck, assimilation and otherness, class and family and sacrifice" [Ramos 2020: 472–473]. In the fictional world of the novel, luck and just rewards for the immigrant heroines come in the form of opportunities to secure prestigious, well-paying jobs (as nannies for wealthy families or as surrogate mothers) or even to open their own small catering businesses with the money earned, allowing them to send money back to families left behind in their homeland.

Another important factor worth noting is that in the reviews of the novel, the literary text serves as a starting point for discussions about the status and role of surrogate motherhood in society. Writer J. MacDonald begins her review the following way: "Commercial surrogacy – the birthing of another woman's baby in exchange for cash – is an act of benevolence, or of exploitation. It celebrates life. It commodifies life. It's a moral outrage. A blessing, a gift. It pays women fairly for their hard work and altruism. It reduces women to vessels, turning their bodies, and ba-

bies, into merchandise” [MacDonald 2019]. The author of yet another review, H. Phelan, discusses not only the novel’s text but also the findings from sociological research on childbirth and child-rearing in the United States: “In late capitalist America, who gets to be a good mother? Or rather, who can afford it? According to recent research, parenting behaviors within the United States continue to stratify across class lines.” [Phelan 2019]. Phelan successfully captures the novel’s central theme, with the review referencing relevant studies to support the argument. Thus, it can be confidently asserted that Ramos has touched on the pain points of modernity in her book, and the publication of the novel has become not only a literary event but also a notable sociocultural phenomenon.

Our analysis of novels and the context of their emergence has shown that the theme of surrogate motherhood is actively used by contemporary writers from various countries to create works of different genres and styles. The novelty of the surrogacy phenomenon and the associated technologies undoubtedly provoke authors to produce sensational works,

which explains the active use of the surrogacy theme in action-oriented novels (detectives, thrillers, melodramas, etc.) that attract mass readers. Paradoxically, in some cases, these novels possess a certain educational function, providing readers with information about legislation, specific medical technologies, and more. It should also be noted that this is not the first time in literary history that the achievements of scientific and technological progress have been interpreted in this way – first by authors of “light” genres and later by serious prose (social-psychological, historical, and philosophical novels). Such was the path of photography as a new invention in literature – from detective prose of the late 19th to the 20th century to serious, profound literature of the late 20th to early 21st century [see Poluektova 2023]. At the contemporary stage, the phenomenon of surrogacy is beginning to be interpreted by authors of psychological prose (Spindler) and social novels (Ramos). However, we believe that these are only the initial steps in its artistic exploration in literature. The potential embedded in this theme is far from exhausted and is likely to manifest vividly in the future.

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