

Критическое эссе по произведению Джона Джулиуса Норвича “The Twelve Days of Christmas (Correspondence)”

Of course, everyone knows such religious holiday as Christmas. Annually people commemorate the Nativity of Jesus Christ on 25th December. But is Christmas only about secular traditions? For majority it is time to sing carols, exchange greeting cards and presents. John Julius Norwich in his short story “The Twelve Days of Christmas (Correspondence)” overlooks this religious holiday not in a stereotyped way but integrating a humorous and playful approach.

The plot of the story appears to be straightforward. In the first letter Emily expresses her admiration of a partridge in a pear tree. In the following three days she receives turtle doves, French hens and calling birds that trouble Emily and her Mummy. Then the lady thanks Edward for gold rings, which impress her much more than squawking birds. In further letters, Emily expresses her embarrassment about such gifts as geese, swans and strange people in her garden. In the last letter, a solicitor-at-law threatens Edward to take all the presents back.

The title adapted from an old Christmas carol suggests its structure and plot. The text has a form of correspondence that includes twelve brief thank-you letters. They include date, greeting, message and appropriate closing that proves its conformance to the required norms. The successive letters show the emotional change of the sender. Norwich capitalizes some words in Emily’s letters (“*Please, please, STOP*”, “*What am I to do with eight milkmaids – AND their cows?*”) to add emphasis and transmit her embarrassment.

Correspondence presupposes a first-person narration that involves authenticity of the events described. Being a character-narrator, Emily is believable and persuasive. To enhance this image the author makes use of epithets “*enchanting*” and “*poetic*” in reference to “*present*” to underline a romantic nature of a lady at the beginning of the story. The use of polysyndeton “... *before the geese and the swans and the cows got at it*” conveys the idea that she is fed up with numerous gifts by the end of the holiday.

Unlike Emily, who is a round character, Edward is a flat one. J.J. Norwich reveals the image of an unseen man indirectly, through gifts. He uses biblical allusions while introducing a number of things. Symbolically presented on the first day of Christmas, “*one partridge*” is an allusion to *Jesus Christ*. Such details aim at demonstrating two natures of Christmas - divine and material.

The author shows the development of the fictional characters through a conflict between them. Emily and Edward represent themselves a dual opposition of a protagonist and an antagonist. The reader observes the establishment of a conflict when Edward sends strange presents the woman does not like. She appeals to her admirer saying, “*I don’t find it very amusing*”, “*let’s call a halt, shall we?*”, “... *kindly stop this ridiculous behavior at once*”. The conflict achieves its climax when Emily’s mother gets sick because of stress caused by Edward’s “*ridiculous behavior*”. She applies to the court saying “*this is the last straw*”. This situation proves the fact that Emily values family more than love affairs. A solicitor-at-law resolves their conflict by informing Edward about “*the return of much assorted livestock*”.

Epiphany appears in the climax of the story demonstrating a dramatic change of Emily's character. The woman constantly justifies Edward and his repulsive actions for the sake of love ("*Anyway, I'm grateful – of course I am*", "*I know you meant well, but ...*"). Suddenly, the woman realizes that she does not have to put up with it any longer. J.J. Norwich introduces epiphany as a divine providence that symbolically takes place on Epiphany Eve.

The internal conflict also sets the plot of the story in motion. Hilarious presents annoy Emily and cause emotional instability. Through the stylistic device of climax, Norwich illustrates the style change from informal to curt. The successive greeting words ("*My dearest darling*", "*My darling Edward*", "*Dearest Edward*", "*Dear Edward*", "*Edward*", "-") demonstrate the love-hate switch. Closes also vary throughout the story ("*Your deeply loving Emily*", "*Your loving Emily*", "*Love, Emily*", "*Your Emily*", "*Emily*", "-"). The climax aims at turning the atmosphere from light into tense. Such formalisms as "*Sir*", "*client*", "*instruct*", "*importune*", "*Yours faithfully*" used in the solicitor's letter enhance this effect.

The letter dated 29 December illustrates a pun. Emily's mother jokes that "*she wants to use the rings to 'wring' their necks*" in reference to four calling birds that disturb their sleep at night. The author plays with the words '*ring*' and '*wring*' that have different meanings but sound the same. The reader observes irony when Emily clarifies it saying, "*she's only joking, I think; though I know what she means*".

In the text Norwich employs devices reinforcing a dramatic effect. The author makes use of a simile "*The place has now become something between a menagerie and a madhouse...*" to intensify the idea of Emily's despair caused by the collapse of her private life and household with hilarious gifts. Moreover, the young lady asks a rhetorical question "*Is this some kind of a joke?*" not to get a response but to emphasize a point that she doesn't find the situation funny. Norwich resorts to the use of high invective in Emily's speech ("*shameless hussies with nothing on but their lipstick cavorting round the green*"). This stylistic device results in the conveyance of her annoyance demonstrating a different side of her personality.

The story reflects the duality of Christmas. Due to its complex character, the holiday implies religious observance as well as the materialism associated with the gifts given. In the broader context, material things express affection and sentiments in a personal relationship. The festive spirit fills hearts with true love for God and neighbours at Christmas time.

© Ососкова Анна

студентка II курса Факультета иностранных языков направления подготовки

45.04.02 Лингвистика специальности "Лингвистика и межкультурная

коммуникация (английский язык))