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DESCRIPTION OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN “CANNERY ROW” BY JOHN STEINBECK

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ABSTRACT

John Steinbeck is the prominent literary representative who greatly contributed to the development of American literature. His works reflect the psyche of the period to which they belong, the contradictions of society, different characters and destinies, changes, disagreements or imbalances between society and man. In the following article some literary peculiarities of the work “Cannery Row” by John Steinbeck are discussed. In the novel the author shows the fate and feelings of people belonging to different classes in the society, besides he expresses the problems of the time, too. The novelist created his works at a time when the spiritual, moral and social situation in the country was complicated.

KEYWORDS: *John Steinbeck, Short Novel, Style, Language, Narration, Character, Setting, Society, Person, Relationship, Protagonist, Identity, Peculiarity, Writer.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Social factors play a key role in human development. It is undoubted that in maturity of the person the ideology in the family, society, and time is crucial and in order to increase a sense of identity education, upbringing, knowledge, and life experience greatly matter. The role of literary works in the acquisition of knowledge and in drawing the necessary conclusions in the various stages of life is invaluable. “Cannery Row” by John Steinbeck is the work that is of great value in this aspect. A. Ulugov states, “Good works are always created on the basis of writer’s emotions or the experiences that bother him” []. John Steinbeck wrote about the serious issues, life stories and people around them and expressed their views on the events in depth.

John Steinbeck's best short novels include "Tortilla Flat", "Of Mice and Men", "The Pearl", and "Cannery Row". Though there is a similarity between the themes of "Tortilla Flat" and "Cannery Row", the latter reveals the images more deeply than "Tortilla Flat", characters' sufferings and feelings are described in detail and the relationship between character and society is vividly depicted. S. Baturin notes that small community represented in the work can embody impression about American society []. Although the work is based on the relationship between the protagonist Doc and Mack with his friends, the reader will have a full impression of the people living in the area where the canneries are located, their occupations, and their lifestyles.

II. Main part

"Cannery Row" was written at the end of World War II and published in 1945.

For a nation who was exhausted with the war, the work was at first glance a social comedy and a light satire, while a closer look reveals the dominance of death and deep sorrow in society. The story takes place in Monterey, California, on what is now called "Cannery Row" in honor of the book. Each building and the unique world of the people living in it are depicted with Steinbeck's pathos. Commenting on his work, the author described it as a 'nostalgic' work designed to lift the mood after the emotional turmoil of his career as a reporter in the war. [] In fact, the story is dedicated to a real street in the town where he lived for several years and a close friend Ed Ricketts (a prototype of the protagonist Doc, so readers recognized him as soon as the book was published). Although the author begins the work with *"The people, places and events in this book are, of course, fictitious and fabrications"*, several real people, places, and events in the book are embodied in the work. []

The story of Cannery Row illuminates Doc's relationship with the people around him, in which various professions are described, who live in the street near the beach in Monterey. While getting acquainted closely with the life of such characters as the biologist Doc, a grocer Lee Chong, *"Mack and Hazel, a young man of great strength, Eddie who filled in as a bartender at La Ida, Hughie and Jones who occasionally collected frogs and cats for Western Biological, were currently living in those large rusty pipes in the lot next to Lee Chong's. That is, they lived in the pipes when it was damp but in fine weather they lived in the shadow of the black cypress tree at the top of the lot. The limbs folded down and made a canopy under which a man could lie and look at the flow and vitality of Cannery Row"*. [] The protagonist of the story is Doc, a biologist, owner and manager of a Western Biological Laboratory, collects water animals from the shores of California and studies them. He is engaged in sending many living things he has collected to the Universities of the country, laboratories and museums. Throughout the story the author describes that Doc is ready to help the people around him. Therefore, Mack and his friends also want to cheer him up in order to thank in return. *"It is said that he has helped many a girl out of one trouble and into another, Doc has the hands of a brain surgeon, and a cool warm mind. Doc tips his hat to dogs as he drives by and the dogs look up and smile at him"*. [] The protagonist is a person who stretches out his hand of help to the people around him, able to make friendly compromises with everyone. Although his profession is a biologist, but people who know him are helped by him as a person aware of any field. But Doc is also a person with some lacks in his character, *"when passionate anger comes on him he can be very fierce.....He can kill anything for need but he could not even hurt a feeling for pleasure"*. [] The writer describes his protagonist as a person who, if he is angry, cannot behave, can bring anything to hurt if there

is a need, but for fun he does not anything or anyone. Thanks to his spiritual support, the fate of many people changes to the positive side. The author points out that even a single person can spread positive features as mutual respect, kindness, generosity and exaltation in society and change the social environment towards goodness.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

All the characters in “Cannery Row” try to please Doc, with the hope to respond his goodness. The same goal unites all the people in the work. The fate of Frankie is poignant. Being dismissed from school for mental problem, the boy is alone in the street without any shelter. His mother gives up him as she thinks that he is a burden for her. Frankie finds warmth in relations with Doc and a 10-year-old boy steals a bronze statuette clock to please Doc in the party being organized by Mack and his friends. His mother, who has given up the responsibility of motherhood, blames Doc in this situation. With this episode the author describes human love, which is shown to a child who does not even have a relation in the society to anyone at all. It is clearly reflected that Doc is sincere and kind person to totally strange one. *“Frankie,” he said, “why did you take it?” Frankie looked a long time at him. “I love you,” he said*. [] The sentence “I love you” and a glance reflect real human features. The fate of this child, who has not yet reached adulthood, has not developed mentally, but is waiting for salvation in the face of cruelty of life, while having a living mother who cares for him, shakes each soul. In a society built on interests, the power that actually unites people, leading them to kindness is described in bright colors by the author through the episode about human kindness. The relationship of people living on the small street is opposed to the image of people who live in a big city.

In novel not only Doc’s characteristic features in uniting people around him, but also his inner world is reflected. Although those around him feel themselves indebted to, Doc feels very lonely. When he goes to the beach to collect marine animals, he spends his hours there. He listens to the soul of all characters and does not spare advice, support. But there is not any person who Doc can share his problems with. Because in this small team, both in terms of knowledge and in terms of life experience, only Doc has an advantage. However, he is not ventilated from this and therefore all people around him do not avoid from him. As he behaves the way that the others accept, it makes him become the person who unites together all people in Cannery Row. By describing Doc’s relation with the surrounding simple and sincere people, Steinbeck criticizes the people of his own time who are interested in wealth and do not help others at all.

One of the noticeable female characters is Dora. She also lives in Cannery Row, though her behavior is always under discussion in this small society, but she follows the rules strictly. As the owner of the Bear Flag restaurant she does not sell any alcohol drinks, or she controls the costs of the services and tries to do them affordable for the indigenous people of the street. Beside she always keeps under control not to use any vulgar words in the restaurant. She is treated well by mostly men in the street, because women hate her. But she helps to all people who are in difficult situation not paying attention whether this is a man or woman. During economic crisis in the country she made great charities, paid some peoples’ debts, brought up some children herself, supported the families where men could not provide the members. As a result of it she nearly went bankrupt. *“Dora who, madam and girl for fifty years, has through the exercise of special gifts of tact and honesty, charity and a certain realism, made herself respected by the intelligent, the learned, the kind”*. [] Dora is one of the complex characters in the novel. Steinbeck points out

that each person living in the world has his or her own responsibilities. She is also the woman who is not only mother but also nurturer to the men of the street. She always helps the men who could not cope with their responsibilities spiritually and materially in their life.

IV. CONCLUSION

John Steinbeck described characters and their relations towards each other in Cannery Row. Doc is depicted as a person who unites Lee Chong, Mack and his friends, Dora and her girls, Frankie and others. The author reiterates that only personal features as kindness, generosity, sincerity can lead the members of any society towards goodness. In “Cannery Row” through the characters’ relationship the writer proves this truth.

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