

THE GASTRONOMIC DISCOURSE IN TINA HOWE'S COMEDY

«*THE ART OF DINING*»

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The article tackles a gastronomic discourse in fiction and suggests its definitions and elements. The author analyzes the functions of the gastronomic discourse in drama, singles out the central message of Tina Howe's comedy in its framework and classifies the markers of the discourse in question.

Key words: *cooking; food; gastronomic discourse; Tina Howe; comedy; characters.*

Introduction. Inasmuch food plays a significant role in the routine of humankind the gastronomic discourse has become a popular focus of attention among writers, readers and critics alike. The essential part of human life is related to the preparation and consumption of food and drinks. The need for food is the basic level of a person's physiological needs that is also reflected in fictional texts. Humanity cannot live without food, but each person has their own taste preferences. Tastes reveal a person's individuality and show one's temper. The scholars claim that the research of the gastronomic discourse is relevant because food is an integral part of everyone's life [2, p. 122]. It is specifically applicable as Wenying Xu compares culinary art with a performed play: "Food in literature is a stage upon ... and through which human dramas act out, and literary human dramas always aim at imparting lessons" [9, p. 4]. The US woman playwright Tina Howe interprets meals and cooking in her comedies in the most rhapsodic way. An ardent admirer of the theatre of absurd Howe inspects appetites and eating habits of her compatriots from various angles.

Thus **the purpose** of this article is to explore the representations of the gastronomic discourse in the comedy «*The Art of the Dining*» by Tina Howe. To accomplish the purposes, the following **objectives** are set: to define the gastronomic

discourse; to categorize the elements of the gastronomical discourse in Howe's text; and analyze lexical units as semantic markers of the gastronomical discourse.

Theoretical background. Discourse is used in spoken and written language. We use language in different contexts and our discourse can vary and have own purpose. This term is broad and when we study a discourse in fiction, we mean the discourse in a research paper relates to a specific subject [6].

The gastronomic discourse is directly related to food and indirectly to identity. A group of scholars (Fatkullina G., Sulejmanova A., Khayrullina R., Davletbayeva A., Morozkina Ye., Fefelova G.) consider the gastronomic discourse “a multi-level construct reflecting the views of different ethnic groups (in a wide linguistic and cultural, social and philosophical aspect)” [8, p. 4]. Therefore, it can reflect the cultural features of its representatives.

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin presents the first book on gastronomy. This French politician defines gastronomy as knowledge and understanding of everything linked to food. Gastronomy aims at securing the survival of the mankind due to the tastiest and appropriate alimentation [5].

In her article «Food and Literature», Joan Fitzpatrick claims that food is directly related to our bodies. The scholar describes the development of literary criticism/studies on food based on texts, genres, and focusing on their criticism from the historical perspective [2].

K. W. Tompkins and M. T. Yiu study food representations in fiction in the context of ethnic identities. Kyla Tompkins, a former restaurant critic, also develops the correlation between food and corporeality. In addition, Tompkins draws parallels between food and communication. The scholar writes: “... food consistently disrupts written text as a sign of embodied existence, as a mark of the outer limits of language, and as a trope for written language's inability to fully represent the life of the body” [7, p. 244]. This article is popular among scholars and students that proves once again that the topic of food is relevant [7]. In her master thesis, Man Ting Yiu argues that such components of the gastronomic discourse as cooking and eating

identify the national features in fiction [9, p. 4]. In addition, contemporary scholars teach fiction from the perspective of the gastronomic discourse [1;7].

Research methods. The utterance "Nothing is quite what it seems" becomes a motto of Tina Howe's comedy [3, p. 59]. In her text, US woman playwright subverts the stereotype of American love of fast food chains. «*The Art of Dining*» is about a couple who opened their own restaurant. Ellen, the wife, is a chef extraordinaire, Cal, the husband, is a supple headwaiter. The action unfolds in «*The Golden Carousel*», a posh restaurant where menus are changed on a daily basis.

The stage is divided in half: one half is a working kitchen, the other the dining area. While Ellen cooks and Cal waits the tables the restaurant's patrons arrive to have dinner. Dinner is the main meal in today's English speaking countries. It shows the art of food and its aesthetic side. This play demonstrates the characters at work. Ellen experiments with ingredients for meals of her own taste to make the dishes more delicious. Each character has their own story and food preferences: for example, a married couple of the Cults is hungry and can't choose what they want to eat; Elizabeth Colt is extremely shy and fears to eat anything. The most interesting is a trio of women who are completely different in their food preferences: Herrick loves food, Nessa is mentally disturbed to food and Tony is always on a diet. The action ends with a banquet of all characters with delicious desserts. Such an ending makes it possible to understand that food unites people. Here is how Tina Howe explains it: "Food is a necessity and a blessing, but it's also a civilizing influence, perhaps the civilizing influence. We socialize and give thanks by breaking bread together. When we gather at a table or in a circle under the stars, we share not only our food but our dreams as well" [3, p. 75]. Thus the gastronomic discourse becomes an important tool in human relations, because "food consumption acts as one of the types of communication activities" [8, p. 7].

The title of the play “*The Art of Dining*” is connected with aesthetic consumption of food. Some character’s cook, and they love to cook, and thus cooking becomes a form of art. Other characters eat. Culinary art consists of certain categories. Some of them are interactions of cooks, guests, products, stages of cooking, ways of consummation products and tasting. The taste makes us feel all the intricacies of a culinary masterpiece. I assume these elements constitute the gastronomic discourse.

The comedy has a variety of nouns, verbs and adjectives which build the gastronomic discourse in «*The Art of Dining*». The first group is formed by ingredients many of which belong to haute cuisine – shrimps, cinnamon, almond, nutmeg, ginger, watercress, truffles, mussels, bass, duckling, grapes, curry and others. Here belongs a wide selection of drinks: Scotch, French wines (Pinot Chardonnay, Chateau Belgrave, Corton-Charlemagne, Montrachet-Romane), vodka gimlet.

The second group is formed by extraordinary dishes in *The Golden Carousel Restaurant*. The names of dishes are word combinations consisting of toponyms, anthroponyms, barbarisms or even romantic implications: Belgian Oxtail Soup [3, p.63], Tartak steak [3, p.70], Sole Veronique [3, p.71], Crepes Suzettes [3, p.125], Floating Island [3, p.63], Pears and Cointreau with Frozen Cream [3, p.59], Poulet Farci [3, p. 72], Sole Bonne Femme [3, p. 72], Veal Prince Orloff [3, p. 79], sauce Veloute with Gruyere cheese [3, p. 79], Billi Bi [3, p. 79], Chicken Kiev [3, p. 105], Crepes Carousels [3, p. 125]. Tompkins infers that the gastronomic discourse reflects “cross-border cultural movement: the transnational economic and cultural relationships organized around food change “domestic” languages by importing new vocabularies along with new cuisines” [7, p. 245].

The third group is formed by the ways of food consumption. Here dominate verbs: melt in mouth, savors, lick one’s lips, exhale with pleasure, take a cautious second taste, take a rapid-fire taste, take an apprehensive taste, take a swift taste, take a slow loving taste, take a heaping mouthful, gobble up, slurp, croon, savor, scrape the sides of the glass.

The fourth group is formed from adjectives describing the taste of dishes and characters: irresistible [3, p.62], unbelievable [3, p.70], incredible [3, p.70], amazing [3, p.71], superb [3, p.114].

Genetically and culturally the food consumption reveals leading features by which the mental characteristics of a nation can be identified. Overeating or keeping diet are elements of the gastronomic discourse based on the specific vocabulary which has key material in fiction to identify a character [8, p.2].

Conclusions. The gastronomic discourse suggests that food demonstrates the inner world of dramatis personae, reveals the temper of a character, their tastes and preferences in food. Cooking is a culinary art when food is processed creatively. Culinary art consists of certain categories. Some of them are interactions of cooks, guests, products, stages of cooking, ways of consuming products and tasting. The taste makes us feel all the intricacies of a culinary masterpiece. I assume these elements constitute the gastronomic discourse in which characters reveal their identities and dietary habits via food choice or food consumption. Tina Howe creates a rich food culture in «*The Art of Dining*» to undermine the myth about America as “a hamburger nation”.

Further studies on gastronomic discourse are promising, as the food studies is an up-to-date and relatively new discipline. The relevance of this topic collects together researchers from various fields of science to further study the gastronomic discourse.

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