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THE EVOLUTION OF THE FAMILY CHRONICLE GENRE IN THE WORKS OF IRWIN SHAW²⁵

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how the family chronicle genre developed during the twentieth century and how it was transformed in the works of American writer Irwin Shaw, especially in *Rich Man, Poor Man* (1970) and *Beggar man, Thief* (1977). Traditionally, the family chronicle was associated with European authors such as John Galsworthy and Thomas Mann, who used it to show how individuals and society influence each other across several generations. Shaw reinterprets this genre in the moral and social context of post-war America, revealing how capitalist materialism weakens moral values and personal integrity. His novels demonstrate that family relationships reflect the nation's identity and historical awareness. By comparing Shaw's approach with that of European predecessors and placing his work within the broader context of Western realism, moral philosophy, and American social criticism, this study highlights Shaw's unique contribution to the modern family chronicle. Through close textual analysis, historical context, and the theories of Lukács, Bakhtin, and Frye, it argues that Shaw's moral realism transforms the traditional chronicle into a deep exploration of conscience, social pressure, and endurance. Ultimately, Shaw's fiction shows that the family remains a powerful moral and cultural symbol in twentieth-century American life.

KEY WORDS

Family chronicle, Irwin Shaw, *Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggarman, Thief*, American literature, realism, social novel, 20th century fiction.

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**IRVIN SHOU ASARLARIDA OILAVIY XRONIKA JANRI
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ANNOTATSIYA

Ushbu maqola yigirmanchi asrda oilaviy solnoma janrining rivojlanishi va amerikalik yozuvchi Irvin Shou asarlarida, ayniqsa “Boy odam, kambag‘al odam” (1970) hamda “Tilanchi va o‘g‘ri” (1977) romanlarida bu janrning o‘zgarishi haqida so‘z yuritadi. An’anaga ko‘ra, oila solnomasi Jon Golsuorsi va Tomas Mann kabi yevropalik adiblar ijodi bilan bog‘liq bo‘lib, ular bu janrdan shaxslar va jamiyatning bir-biriga bir necha avlodlar davomida ko‘rsatadigan ta’sirini tasvirlash uchun foydalanganlar. Shou mazkur janrni urushdan keyingi Amerika axloqiy va ijtimoiy muhiti doirasida qayta talqin qilib, kapitalistik moddiyatparastlik axloqiy qadriyatlar qanday zaiflashtirganini ochib beradi. Uning romanlari oilaviy munosabatlar millatning o‘zligini va tarixiy ongini aks ettirishini tasvirlab beradi. Shou yondashuvini Yevropadagi o‘tmishdoshlari bilan taqqoslab, uning ijodini G‘arb realizmi, axloq falsafasi va Amerika ijtimoiy tanqidining keng qamrovli kontekstiga joylashtirish orqali, ushbu tadqiqot Shouning zamonaviy oila solnomasiga qo‘shgan noyob hissasini tadqiq etadi. Chuqur matn tahlili asnosida, tarixiy kontekst va Lukach, Baxtin, Fray nazariyalari vositasida Shouning axloqiy realizmi an’anaviy solnomani janrini vijdon, ijtimoiy bosim va matonatning chuqur tadqiqotiga aylantirgani asoslangan. Natijada, Shouning badiiy asarlari oila tushunchasi XX asr Amerika hayotida kuchli axloqiy va madaniy ramz sifatida saqlanganini yaqqol tasvirlab ko‘rsatadi.

KALIT SO‘ZLAR

Oilaviy xronika, Irvin Shou, *Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggarman, Thief*, Amerika adabiyoti, realizm, ijtimoiy roman, XX asr nasri.

ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ ЖАНРА СЕМЕЙНОЙ ХРОНИКИ В ТВОРЧЕСТВЕ ИРВИНА ШОУ

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АННОТАЦИЯ

В данной статье рассматривается развитие жанра семейной хроники в течение XX века и его трансформация в творчестве американского писателя Ирвина Шоу, в том числе в романах «Богач, бедняк» (1970) и «Нищий, вор» (1977). Традиционно семейная хроника ассоциировалась с европейскими авторами, такими как Джон Голсуорси и Томас Манн, которые использовали возможности жанра, чтобы показать, как личности и общество влияют друг на друга на протяжении нескольких поколений. Шоу переосмысливает этот жанр в моральном и социальном контексте послевоенной Америки, раскрывая, как капиталистический материализм нивелирует нравственные ценности и разрушает цельность личности. Его романы служат подтверждением того, что семейные отношения отражают особенности национальной идентичности и исторического самосознания. Сравнивая подход Шоу с подходом его европейских предшественников и включая его творчество в более широкий контекст западного реализма, нравственной философии и американской социальной критики, это исследование определяет уникальный вклад Шоу в современную семейную хронику. На основе глубокого текстового анализа, с опорой на исторический контекст и теории Д. Лукача, М. Бахтина и М. Фрая, в статье делается вывод, что моральный реализм Шоу превращает традиционную хронику в глубокое исследование проблем совести, социального воздействия и стойкости. В конечном итоге, проза Шоу показывает, что семья остается мощным нравственным идеалом и культурным символом в американской жизни XX века.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА

Семейная хроника, Ирвин Шоу, *Rich Man, Poor Man* («Богач, бедняк»), *Beggarman, Thief* («Нищий, вор»), американская литература, реализм, социальный роман, проза XX века.

INTRODUCTION

Irwin Shaw's novels of the 1950s and 1960s were largely mere copies- "reproductions" that could not compare to his brilliant debut. Yet they were eagerly read by the public. The turning point in the writer's career came in 1970, with the publication of the novel "*Rich Man, Poor Man*", which became a kind of prologue to what was perhaps the most fruitful stage of Shaw's creative life.

The foundation of this novel lies in a simple analogy: society is a family chronicle, and the family is society in miniature. The fates of the Jordache family members are arranged in such a way that they appear typically American, while the novel's chronology - beginning in 1945 and moving toward the present - shows the author's desire to present a panoramic picture of historically specific America. For Shaw, the typical American is a person without roots. He has left his former homeland to seek happiness elsewhere. Such is Axel Jordache, the founder of the Jordache clan, who came to America from Germany in the 1920s.

The typical American, in Shaw's view, is an optimist who never loses heart, no matter the circumstances. Axel worked tirelessly in his bakery, never straightening his back, but he achieved neither material success nor the simple happiness of everyday family life. Having begun with hope, he ends with hatred. The family chronicle is one of the most enduring forms of Western prose fiction. Its strength lies in its ability to connect two worlds: the private experiences of individuals and the broader movements of history. As Lukács observed, the realist novel "*mediates between the private and the historical*" (Lukács, 1971, 33). In this sense, the family chronicle provides both a panoramic and an intimate perspective on change across generations.

In the twentieth century, the genre evolved to reflect new historical realities - industrial growth, world wars, urbanization, and shifting moral values. European writers such as John Galsworthy in "*The Forsyte Saga*" and Thomas Mann in "*Buddenbrooks*" established the modern form of the family chronicle. Their works trace the rise and fall of families whose fortunes and moral standards mirror the

development of their societies (Apenko, 2001, 63). The family becomes a miniature version of the nation, a stage on which broader cultural and moral conflicts are played out.

In the United States, this tradition found new expression in the works of Irwin Shaw, who adapted the genre to the social and moral landscape of post-war America. In “*Rich Man, Poor Man*” and “*Beggarmen, Thief*” Shaw creates a realistic yet morally questioning portrait of American life. He explores the conflict between personal ambition and ethical responsibility, revealing how the pursuit of the American Dream can lead to both success and spiritual loss.

MAIN PART

The family chronicle has long served as both a literary form and a moral framework. According to Bakhtin, the novel’s “*chronotopic*” dimension - *the way it represents time and space - shows how private lives are intertwined with historical events* (Bakhtin, 1981, 84). Because the chronicle usually spans several generations, it allows readers to see how values, customs, and social roles evolve over time.

In European realism, the family becomes a powerful symbol of society itself. Galsworthy’s *Forsytes* embody the selfishness and materialism of the bourgeois class, while Mann’s “*Buddenbrooks*” portrays the moral decline of an aristocratic family as a reflection of broader cultural decay. Both authors use the family’s collapse to explore the crisis of modern civilization. As Frye noted, such narratives combine mythic structure with social realism, allowing readers to understand history as a meaningful story rather than a collection of random events (Frye, 1957, 39).

When the family chronicle moved to American literature, it changed to fit new cultural values. American writers focused more on mobility, self-determination, and material achievement. The European sense of inherited destiny gave way to the American belief that individuals can shape their own future. Yet this optimism also brought moral uncertainty. As Trilling (1950) argued, post-war American fiction was deeply concerned with “moral realism” - an effort to represent not only social conditions but also the ethical choices and inner struggles of modern life.

American writers focused less on inherited destiny and more on self-made success and independence. Yet they also showed the cost of this freedom—the loneliness, competition, and loss of moral direction in modern life. Irwin Shaw's "*Rich Man, Poor Man*" (1970) is a good example. It presents society as a kind of family story, and the family as a miniature version of society. Through the lives of the Jordache family, Shaw gives a broad picture of American history and character, showing both hope and disillusionment. In all its forms, the family chronicle helps readers understand how history and personal life are connected. It remains an important way to explore identity, morality, and the passage of time.

Irwin Shaw's novels stand at the crossroads of realism, social observation, and moral philosophy. His famous Jordache saga – "*Rich Man, Poor Man*" (1970) and "*Beggarman, Thief*" (1977) - keeps the structure of the traditional family chronicle but reshapes its moral and social focus for the modern American context. In "*Rich Man, Poor Man*", Shaw follows three siblings - Rudolph, Tom, and Gretchen Jordache - whose contrasting lives reflect the divisions of American society in the post-war period. Rudolph represents ambition and respectability, striving for success and recognition. Tom, the rebellious brother, expresses anger and frustration against social inequality. Gretchen, caught between personal desire and social expectation, struggles to find independence in a male-dominated world. Their stories intertwine in moral disillusionment, symbolizing the decay of the American Dream (Shaw, 2008).

Money becomes the novel's central moral symbol. What once stood for freedom and progress now represents greed and corruption. Gretchen's compromises in her relationships and Tom's involvement in blackmail show how capitalism turns morality into a form of exchange. Gretchen meant to "get laid" for eight hundred dollars. In the relationship with Theodore Boylan, she has cynical approach and thinks that she "paid him well" for his special treatment. Shaw compares the desire for wealth to kleptomania - an uncontrollable urge that spreads through society and poisons personal integrity (Shaw, 2008). Even topic of love and

sex is capitalized and shown in a cynical light. Rudolph thought that his father was “dead wrong” about relationship with women and the first sex experience. He recommended his son not focusing on one woman and have more sexual partners; however, Rudolph was in no hurry to lose his virginity. He was shocked by his father hitting a woman he admired, but he did not stand for her and just accepted his help when he had a problem with his French teacher.

In “*Beggarman, Thief*” (1977), Shaw continues the saga into the next generation. Wesley Jordache and Billy Abbott, the sons of the previous protagonists, repeat the same cycle of ambition and disappointment. Billy’s belief in “not bucking the tide” reflects passive conformity, while Wesley, the so-called “beggarman, thief,” represents moral resistance. Yet even rebellion loses its strength in a cynical world where ideals have faded. Through their conflicts, Shaw portrays the moral uncertainty and social fragmentation of 1970s America.

Shaw’s main innovation is his focus on moral inheritance rather than just bloodline. His characters pass down not only wealth or poverty but also guilt, habits, and moral weaknesses. This theme supports *Lukács’s idea that realism reveals “the historical conditioning of individual fate”* (Lukács, 1971, 42). Shaw turns the family chronicle into a story about how history shapes moral choices, and how personal responsibility can be inherited like property.

As in the first “family chronicle”, in the novel “*Beggarman, Thief*” the narrative again center son two fraternal opposites (this time, cousins). One of them is Billy Abbott, who immediately shares his personal philosophy of life - “*to go with the flow*”: “*I am worthless, Monika says... I believe in not bucking the tide, I told her. If there’s a parade going down the street I fall in line and keep step, waving to the populace, friend and foe alike*” (Shaw, 2011, 10).

He tells Monika, who considers him “a nobody”: “*I believe that you should only go with the flow. And therefore, if a procession is going down the street, I hurry to fall in line, and, marching in step with the others, greet the crowd regardless of whether they are friends or enemies*” (Shaw, 2005, 5).

The second is the restless, tormented Wesley Jordache, who rejects the rules and conventions of the lifestyle to which he is bound. He is, in fact, the “beggarman, thief” in the eyes of those who hold these conventions sacred: “*He hadn’t shaved since his arrest and the blondish thick stubble gave him an unkempt and wolfish look, at home among criminals*” (Shaw, 2011, 86).

“*Since his arrest, Wesley hadn’t shaved; he grew a thick light stubble and looked like a wolf, fitting in perfectly among criminals*” (Shaw, 2005, 38).

As in the “*family chronicle*”, “*Rich Man, Poor Man*” treats the theme of money as one of its central elements. Again, its power is ambiguous: money can buy much -freedom for Wesley, who at the beginning of the novel almost ends up behind bars for a long time after a foolish quarrel in a bar; vengeance for Rudolph, who becomes seriously interested in the services of a “professional killer” to protect himself from the same Wesley, who dreams of personally dealing with his father’s murderer.

The example of Billy Abbott, drawn into the activities of an ultraleft group, shows how destructive the desire to “go with the flow” can be. The members of the organization are simply indifferent to the meaning and consequences of terrorist acts.

Comparing the novels about the Jordaches, American critics prefer the first one -considering it sharper and more dramatic - and note the “fading” of such characters as Gretchen and Rudolph in “*Beggarman, Thief*”. However, there is hardly any reason to separate these books from each other: they are parts of a single whole, each with its own function in creating the overall picture.

In the second novel, Shaw does not limit himself to stating social dysfunction; he is profoundly concerned with the question of how a person can find stable, positive foundations for existence. Perhaps this is why some characters in “*Beggarman, Thief*” lose their bright melodramatic aura, and why the theme of outsider hood - so popular in American art, with its proud, stubborn defiance - also recedes. Wesley Jordache gathers information about his father with increasing

persistence: it is vitally important for him to fully understand this man, who became close and dear to him far too late. To understand him - and through him, himself.

In this novel many characters seem to abandon their familiar, theatrically effective “types” and begin moving toward “living life.” This is precisely what happens with Rudolph and Gretchen, who come to certain realizations and attempt to rebuild their relationships with the world of others, whom they begin to see not only as rivals, competitors, or business partners, but as human beings with whom relationships are possible that are not mediated by the idea of profit. And although Shaw at times rushes toward solutions - hence the inevitable simplifications and appeals to the reader’s emotions - the very fact that he set himself such a task deserves recognition.

In the novel the author reproduces essential features of postwar American life and depicts the process of the degradation of a personality that has submitted to the spirit of commercialism. Thus, the “*family chronicle*” in Irwin Shaw’s work acquires new features and qualities.

The strength of Shaw’s novels lies in how they combine moral inquiry with social critique. The Jordache family reflects the contradictions of post-war America: a nation that achieved material wealth but lost a sense of spiritual direction. Shaw joins the tradition of moral realists such as Theodore Dreiser and John Steinbeck, yet his tone is more psychological and restrained. He avoids moral preaching, allowing his characters’ experiences to speak for themselves.

As Watt (1957) explained, realism depends on the believable presentation of individual experience within a social world. Shaw achieves this through a cinematic writing style, vivid dialogue, and emotional honesty. His shifting points of view mirror the fragmented nature of modern life, where individuals often struggle to find stability or meaning.

One of Shaw’s main themes is the breakdown of moral order and the possibility of its renewal. In “*Rich Man, Poor Man*”, the pursuit of money and power leads to destruction. In “*Beggarmen, Thief*”, understanding and self-reflection offer

a path toward redemption. Wesley's attempt to understand his father's life represents a search for moral continuity in a society that has forgotten its values. This gradual movement from collapse to awareness suggests that conscience, though weakened, can still survive in a materialistic world (Apenko, 2001).

Bakhtin's concept of "dialogism" helps explain Shaw's narrative technique. His characters are engaged in constant moral dialogue with each other, their voices representing opposing worldviews (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 92). Because the family chronicle covers several generations, these dialogues continue across time, turning personal conflicts into a broader historical conversation.

What makes Shaw's approach deeply human is his compassion. Even his flawed characters - Tom with his violence, Gretchen with her compromises, Wesley with his anger - are portrayed with empathy rather than condemnation. Unlike many of his cynical contemporaries, Shaw insists that moral understanding is still possible. His belief in empathy and forgiveness gives his novels a quiet sense of hope.

The family in Shaw's novels serves as a microcosm of capitalist society. The authority of the father mirrors social hierarchies; sibling rivalry reflects economic competition. Yet Shaw also emphasizes the potential for reconciliation and personal growth. As Trilling (1950) reminds us, "*the moral life is not a system but a process of perpetual self-discovery.*" Shaw's characters undergo this process, and through them, the reader witnesses the moral development of America itself.

CONCLUSION

Irwin Shaw's contribution to the family chronicle lies in his ability to merge the European social epic with the American moral novel. His works extend the panoramic realism of Galsworthy and Mann into a democratic, capitalist society where success is measured by wealth and personal ambition. Yet Shaw exposes how ambition without moral purpose leads to isolation and despair.

The Jordache saga becomes more than a story about one family - it becomes a reflection of an entire era, capturing America's transition from post-war optimism to moral fatigue. Through "*Rich Man, Poor Man*" and "*Beggarmen, Thief*", Shaw

reinterprets the family as a symbol of national identity, moral conflict, and the search for meaning. His novels show that when the American Dream loses its ethical foundation, it becomes an illusion that traps rather than frees.

By blending social realism with psychological depth, Shaw demonstrates that literature remains a moral act. As Lukács observed, “*the great realist reveals the totality of life by portraying the destiny of the individual*” (Lukács, 1971, 47). Shaw achieves exactly that - he exposes the spiritual cost of modern civilization while affirming the strength of human endurance.

In Shaw’s hands, the family chronicle becomes both a historical record and a moral parable - a testimony to the power of fiction to mirror, question, and ultimately renew our understanding of the human condition.

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