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EXISTENTIALISM IN IRISH POETRY (WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS)

Abstract. The origin of the Existential philosophical trend was laid in Germany in the first half of the 20th century, from where it spread to other countries of the world. And the peak of development was reached in France. Existentialism (philosophy of existence) - the term comes from the Latin word "existencia" and means existence. Existentialism's starting point is people's feelings - what they feel about the world, they believe that people are driven by subjective thinking, they try to find a way to get the human race, in general, and each individual, in particular, out of the moral crisis in which humanity seems to be destined. In the early 20th century, the influence of existential philosophy in Anglo-Irish literature can be seen in the Irish poet and playwright William Butler Yeats's poem "Sailing to Byzantium". Philosophers of the 20th century, who were named as followers of existentialist philosophy, are: French writer and philosopher Albert Camus), one of the founders of 20th century existentialism, German philosopher-Martin Heidegger) and French writer, existentialist philosopher-Simone de Beauvoir. Freedom, free will is suppressed by the weight of the world and circumstances. It is with such moral points of view that the artistic narrative of the Irish writer William Trevor and even more his stories are imbued. In fact, it can even be said that Trevor's fiction echoes de Beauvoir's literary theoretical approach, and what the philosopher developed with his existential thoughts, the Irish writer proved in literature.

Keywords: Existentialism; "Celtic Twilight"; Irish Poetry; "Sailing to Byzantium".

Introduction

Existentialism is particularly interesting among the literary currents that gained an important place in the Western European literature of the 20th century. The mentioned current was one of the echoes of the Second World War, and in fact it can be said that the existential ideas arose on the basis of the disappointments of the post-war period, since the existing Conflicts and tensions intensified the feeling of aggression and alienation among people, which affected people of all classes and ages, and left a mark on all areas. The Second World War caused confrontation and many divisions between nations and countries, which had a special reflection on the post-war world. Although the end of the war was a great relief, the consequences and traces left by this war were tragic and severe.

The origin of the mentioned philosophical trend was laid in Germany in the first half of the 20th century, from where it spread to other countries of the world. And the peak of development was reached in France. It was a trend that influenced not only philosophy but also theology, art, literature and psychology. The main issues of this modern philosophical direction are the loss or acquisition of the meaning of life by people, faith or disbelief and all the topics that determine and guide the fate of a person in the modern world, all of this is the starting point of the theory of existentialism. Human as an independent individual with thought, action, existence and feelings is the main concept of existential philosophy. “Existentialism is a form of philosophical inquiry that explores the problem of human existence and centers on the subjective experience of thinking, feeling, and acting”. ... shared the belief that philosophical thinking begins with the human subject – not merely the thinking subject, but the acting, feeling, living human individual”¹.

¹ Macquarie John. *Existentialism, An Introduction, Guide*, Penguin Books, L-N.-Y, 1972.– P. 18–21.

Existentialism (philosophy of existence) – the term comes from the Latin word “*existentia*” and means existence. Although Søren Kierkegaard is considered the first existentialist philosopher from the 19th century, he never used this term, and he was the first to use this term to define a philosophical current and to use it. The 20th century French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre conveyed his worldview. Based on the above, Jean-Paul Sartre became a key figure of existential philosophy, and in his own opinion, which became the main concept of the current “all existentialists are united by one fundamental doctrine, existence precedes being” (Copleston, F. C. 2009: 19–37) *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (1943), written during Sartre’s early period in France during the Fascist occupation, is considered his most important work. In this work, Sartre’s existential philosophical opinion “existence precedes essence” even became a kind of slogan of this philosophical movement.

Since the starting point for followers of existentialism is human feelings and how they feel about the world, they believe that people are still driven by subjective thinking. They are trying to find a solution to bring the “race” of people, and in particular, each individual, out of the moral crisis in which humanity seems to have found itself thanks to the inevitability of fate. And, the way out of this crisis is not found by existentialists in the transformation of the principles of the social or public order already created and established, but in the ability of the individual, the person, to destroy the false, unreal, disguised “I” embedded in his consciousness and find his own, tiny existence – the source of human existence, which Thanks to him, he is a unique person; He will determine his own meaning in life and will strongly feel independence and the right to choose. A person should be able to take responsibility for himself. After all, existentialist writers in their works described such stories in which

the heroes are immersed in a vortex of loneliness. They experience indifference towards life and their fears, the feeling of alienation deprive them of the ability to perceive values and the meaning of life. However, along with all this, existential philosophical works imbue its characters with feelings of responsibility and freedom. Philosophers of the 20th century, who were named as followers of existentialist philosophy, are: French writer and philosopher Albert Camus), one of the founders of 20th century existentialism, German philosopher-Martin Heidegger) and French writer, existentialist philosopher-Simone de Beauvoir.

In the early 20th century, the influence of existential philosophy in Anglo-Irish literature can be seen in the Irish poet and playwright William Butler Yeats's poem "Sailing to Byzantium" (written in the autumn of 1926, around September 26), where he goes beyond the world with his mind and heart, and thus the reader Pushes towards spirituality which is the path to immortality. The writer argues that man is more than just a physical body and has much more potential to be unique and great and that it only takes hard work and a little effort on the part of man. He believes that people are governed by their own lives, and people themselves are less interested in matters that will help them to lead their own lives, with their own minds. In the poem, the issue of human existence and existence is discussed: from life to death; From youth to old age. Yeats tries to prove how careless old people can become from the opening lines of his poetic creation "Sailing to Byzantium". Similarly, if we include the issues of everyday life, it leads to the neglect of existential and spiritual issues: "That is no country for old men. The young

In one another's arms, birds in the trees
Those dying generations – at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long

Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.

Caught in that sensual music all neglect

Monuments of unageing intellect". He states that the natural reminders of joy and happiness, such as the chirping of birds, are no longer of interest to older people. Life turns into death; Youth in old age and in this, in these changes, he sees the cruelty of the laws of nature. Hence, Yeats attempts to create a new way of life by traveling and leaving his current abode in search of spiritual rebirth: "An aged man is but a paltry thing,

A tattered coat upon a stick, unless

Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing

For every tatter in its mortal dress,

Nor is there singing school but studying

Monuments of its own magnificence;

And therefore I have sailed the seas and come

To the holy city of Byzantium." He wants to do something to stop the changes caused by the laws of nature, and the first step to achieve this goal is to reach Byzantium by sea. He believes that spiritual transformation and purification lead to eternal physical health as well. However, it does not rule out that, like all speaking or non-speaking spiritual beings, it will die sooner or later, and here it reflects the probability of its transformation into some speaking piece of art after death: "O sages standing in God's holy fire

As in the gold mosaic of a wall,

Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,

And be the singing-masters of my soul.

Consume my heart away; sick with desire

And fastened to a dying animal

It knows not what it is; and gather me

Into the artifice of eternity." It clearly shows the boundless, unconditional obedience to religion, to one's faith and to the divine

forces, and that growing old is not the end of a person's mental development, and the old man's departure to Byzantium is a sign of the search for new opportunities, and even if death overtakes him, his soul is realized in art and there it finds eternity and achieves eternal immortality. Yeats says that he read somewhere that in Byzantium, in the palace of the emperors, there was a tree – made of gold and silver, on which artificial birds sat and sang. Yeats asserts that man has the potential to be more than just a being trapped in a physical body, and it takes at least a little work and effort to make it manifest:

“Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.”

Yeats said that he was trying to express his situation with this poem. “Byzantium was the center of European civilization and the source of a spiritual philosophy that embodies the search for spiritual life through a journey to that city” (from a lecture given at the BBC, September 1921.) (“Celtic Twilight” 2010: 255).

At that time, Irish literature, as well as Ireland itself, was under the pressure of English colonization, and therefore the English language dominated. From this time, new nationalist traditions appeared in Ireland, which reflected both faith and lifestyle. In fact, it was defined as a period of change in Irish literature and the country's history. A group of Irish writers made a decision to protect their language and nation from British domination at the cost of all resistance and great efforts. It was during this difficult period that a number of works carrying Irish traditions and national values were

created, and one of the best, most visible representatives of this literary renaissance is William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), who, from the end of the 19th century, created a new type of modern Irish literature. in English. For his achievements, Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923 “for his consistently exciting poetry, which expresses the national spirit through the most difficult artistic techniques”¹.

Existentialism was a certain attitude that was especially relevant in modern mass society, where existentialists have a common concern and personal responsibility in the socio-cultural sphere. The existentialism of the 20th century was also greatly influenced by Martin Heidegger, whose guiding thought was the clarification of the sense of being and the ontological problem. According to the philosopher, modern ontology did not understand this problem. According to his view, the horizon of understanding the sense of existence is existential time – temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*), as the past-present future (*Gewesend-gegenwärtigende Zukunft*). It is based on the caring life of man, his historicity and history, world-time in general, as “vulgar” time. The transcendental structure of temporality is the ontological sense of the “care” of existence. Thus, according to Heidegger, the mission of clarifying the true sense of being should be fulfilled by a “fundamental ontology”, a transcendental ontology based on the existential or phenomenological analysis of human being (*Dasein*). It was under the influence of his philosophical opinion that Jean-Paul Sartre and the French writer and also the existentialist philosopher – Simon de Beauvoir.

However, existence is not an abstract concept, and it is through this process that it is possible to determine that each individual has his own specific, individual circumstances in which he exists and

¹ Union List of Artist Names, 2008.

the belief that each unacceptable circumstance can be overcome by him. Simone de Beauvoir, as a follower of existentialism, throughout his life and work tried to find the meaning of life in an absurd world in which a person is born independently of his own will. He asserts the same in his outstanding work "The Second Sex" that they are not born as women, they become women later. Its most important concepts are associated with: "freedom", "responsibility" and "authenticity", which are crucial terms in de Beauvoir's thinking. In fact, it is the recognition of these concepts by this French philosopher woman that reveals her distinctive style of thinking on the ethical consequences of existentialism and establishes her position as one of the outstanding representatives of this specific philosophical movement.

Simone de Beauvoir goes far beyond Sartre in terms of philosophical considerations, since he also addresses the issue of oppression in his work, which can be seen especially in the concept of his early work, "The Ethics of Ambiguity" (1947), in which he particularly focuses on human situations and emphasizes their tragic condition; Freedom, free will is suppressed by the weight of the world and circumstances. It is with such moral points of view that the artistic narrative of the Irish writer William Trevor and even more his stories are imbued. In fact, it can even be said that Trevor's fiction echoes de Beauvoir's literary theoretical approach, and what the philosopher developed with his existential thoughts, the Irish writer proved in literature.

Conclusion

Existentialism's starting point is people's feelings – what they feel about the world, they believe that people are driven by subjective thinking, they try to find a way to get the human race, in general, and each individual, in particular, out of the moral crisis in which humanity seems to be destined. It turned out thanks to inevitability.

Existentialists look for a way out of the crisis not in the transformation of the principles of the already created and established socio-societal structure, but in the ability of the individual, the person, to destroy the false, inauthentic, disguised “Me” embedded in the consciousness and find his own, true existence.

References:

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4. *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (1989)*. Yeats William Butler, *Sailing to Byzantium*.