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THE PECULIARITIES OF IRIS MURDOCH'S ARTISTIC METHOD (BASED ON HER NOVEL "THE BLACK PRINCE")

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Abstract. For the purpose of defining Iris Murdoch's artistic method a complex investigation of the problems and style of her famous novel "The Black Prince" was made. Special attention was given to the philosophical problems of Good and Evil, Contingency and Necessity in human life, absurdity, choice, aloofness, to the philosophical aspect of the novel, which is revealed with the help of the flash-back technique. The problems raised in the novel, its sensitive main character absorbed in psychoanalysis and looking for the sense of existence, naturalistic details & the postscripts, revealing different subjective points of view on the same events, prove that the novel should be regarded as existentialist.

Keywords: problem, existence, absurdity, choice, necessity, contingency, psychoanalysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Artistic method is a complex unity of ideas and cognition principles the way of apprehending reality and rendering it in the works of art. Methods are not static forms. They co-exist, interface and leave an impact on one another. That's why the question of method used by this or that author is often controversial. We come across the same problem investigating the works by Iris Murdoch, laureate of highly prestigious British literary awards, novelist, poet, playwright, publicist, literary critic and philosopher.

Not only Western (P. Conradi, E. Bowen, A. Bayatt, M. Antonaccio, W. O'Connor, A. Culley, D. Gill, F. Marvin, M. Nussbaum), but also domestic and Russian literary critics (S. Pavlychko, V. Ivashova, N. Demurova, M. Urnov, S. Tolkachev, M. Matyichak) studied Murdoch's works. Despite a large amount of scientific research the critics haven't agreed about Iris Murdoch's artistic method. Some literary critics relate her works to existentialism (J. Sanders, A. Bayatt), others – to realism (I. Levydova, N. Kustarev). Moreover, there are literary critics, who believe that Murdoch succeeded in combining several methods, such as romanticism, surrealism and existentialism (F. Bendals). Divergences are observed in the literary criticism of practically all Murdoch's novels. The same goes for "The Black Prince" which is extremely popular but insufficiently explored.

2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

"The Black Prince" - is a remarkable intellectual thriller with a superbly involuted plot and meditation on the nature of art and love and the Deity who rules over both.

Bradley Pearson, its narrator and hero, is an elderly writer, aloof and absorbed in art. Encompassed by predatory friends and relatives – his ex-wife, her delinquent brother and a younger, deplorably successful writer, Arnold Baffin, together with Baffin's restless wife and young daughter – Bradley attempts escape. His failure and its aftermath lead to a violent climax; and to a coda which casts a shifting perspective on all that has gone before.

The author uses a flash-back technique. So, we see the events from Bradley Pearson's point of view & have to agree with his interpretation. But at the end of the novel five postscripts by other people are offered (by Christian, by Francis, by Rachel, by Julian and by the Editor) who interpret the events differently. So, the reader gets several subjective views on the same events and gets the freedom to agree or disagree, to make his choice and to take somebody's side.

One of the most important is the philosophical aspect of the novel which deals with the problem of Good and Evil and with the problem of contingency and necessity in human life. The problem of Good and Evil is closely connected in the novel with the subject of art.

The hero states: "Only art explains, and that cannot itself be explained. We and art are made for each other, and where that bond fails human life fails. Only this analogy holds, only this mirror shows a just image" [3, p. 15-16]. For him art: "...is imagination. Imagination changes, fuses. Without imagination you have stupid details on one side and empty dreams on the other" [3, p. 32]. No wonder that Pearson's life goal is to create a masterpiece. Bradley tries hard to make his next novel perfect. Therefore he re-writes it several times. The hero realizes that true art is thankless, but keeps on serving it. The polar opposite of Bradley Pearson is Arnold Baffin, his friend and a writer. Baffin thinks that art is subsistence allowance. That is the reason why Arnold spends so much time in the library and publishes a novel a year. The themes of his novels as well as the plots are unsophisticated. However, the readers like his novels. Baffin is considered to be a successful writer. He is admired, while Bradley Pearson is far from being well-known. Addressing Pearson, Christian says: "We had a literary chap from England at our Women Writers' Guild, I asked about you but he hadn't heard of you..." [1, p. 52]. This fact provides ground for absurd accusation made against Bradley Pearson – attempt at murdering Arnold Baffin because of jealousy according to the court. In prison Bradley Pearson creates his masterpiece. Suffering and hard work made it possible. So Murdoch makes the reader realize that crafts is evil for a writer and a real devotion to creative activity without taking any benefit into consideration is good.

At first sight, it seems to be no more than a sheer that Bradley appears in a court room. But in this way the philosophical problem of contingency and necessity in human life appears in "The Black Prince". Something prevents Pearson from leaving London though he longs for leaving it to "... feel closer to the hidden treasure" [6, p. 17]. In other words, to write a novel. Unexpected things happen one by one. At first, Arnold calls and announces that he has murdered his wife, then Francis Marloe comes and says that Christian (Francis' sister and Bradley's ex-wife) has come back from America and then arrives Priscilla (Pearson's sister), who has broken relations with her husband. Finally, these accidental delays lead to tragedy: Bradley Pearson is accused of Arnold Baffin's murder. The following evidences are provided: the testimony of Baffin's bemused wife Rachel, fingerprints, the victim's blood on Bradley's clothes, the torn collection of Baffin's works, one-way tickets abroad and the envy of the victim's success. The evidences look convincing, but in fact they are absurd. The real murderer is Arnold's wife. Trying to help Rachel avoid punishment, Pearson destroys the murder weapon – a poker. Looking for the reason why Rachel framed him Bradley states: "What did surprise me was the strength of Rachel's feeling for myself. There must have been to create such hate, a very considerable degree of love. I had simply not *noticed* that Rachel loved me. She must have cared deeply to be able, in order to destroy me, to lie so hugely and so consistently. I ought to have been moved to reverence. Later perhaps I was. No, I do not exactly 'blame', though neither do I 'condone'...So perhaps I do

indeed forgive" [3, p. 198]. So, what seemed to have happened by chance gets reasoning after Bradley's pondering – jealousy, hatred, selfish desires, unfriendly feelings and wickedness of other people which, together with Bradley's hesitation on the one hand and making snap decisions on the other hand, form inevitable circumstances – necessity, something Bradley cannot avoid – imprisoning. The reader is left to wonder whether it was Pearson's Destiny, whether it was to happen to create the circumstances under which Pearson did write his masterpiece, so, what seemed absurdity starts acquiring sense. It looks as if in the author's opinion Pearson had to experience love and his friends' betrayal, disappointment and loneliness, had to suffer in prison to become capable of psychological insight into the human nature and creating a masterpiece. Pearson's editor in his foreword concentrates the reader's attention on love theme, pointing out: "Every artist is an unhappy lover. And unhappy lovers want to tell their story" [3, p. 13]. In the novel love takes form of dark passion. Bradley Pearson is a fifty-eight-year-old man, who falls in love with a twenty-year-old daughter of his friend. Bradley has known Julian since childhood. He has always been a welcome visitor at the Baffins'. His passion is unexpected both for the Baffins and for himself. The reader is acquainted with Julian in the scene of her "performing ritual": she is tearing the letters of her ex-boyfriend on the bridge. Tiny pieces of the letters fall under car wheels. Julian asks Pearson to help her become a writer like him, not like her father. Bradley ponders upon "the child's suggestion" [6, p. 36]. Finally, Pearson makes up a recommended literature list for her, starts giving private lessons to her. At the lessons they discuss "Hamlet" by Shakespeare. Julian turns out to have played the title role at school. After one of the lesson Bradley figures out that he has fallen in love with the girl. He bursts out with emotions: "And it was a blow, I was felled by it physically. I felt as if my stomach had been shot away, leaving a gaping hole. My knees dissolved, I could not stand up, I shuddered and trembled all over, my teeth chattered. My face felt as if it had become waxen and some huge strange weirdly smiling mask had been imprinted upon it, I had become some sort of god. I lay there with my nose stuck into the black wool of the rug..." [6, p. 111].

There are few romantic moments in "The Black Prince". We may state that Iris Murdoch does not speak of love relation between an elderly man and a young girl in a way that makes them seem more attractive than they really are. In other words the writer does not try to make their love look romantic. For instance, the first physical desire arises earlier in the episode, when the elderly man is choosing purple high boots for Julian. The odour of his socks, which the girl has put on to try on the boots, excites Bradley: "The experience which I had sought in vain when I was holding Rachel naked in my arms came to me suddenly with a pang and a flurry: physical desire with its absurd, alarming, unmistakable symptoms, the anti-gravitational aspiration of the male organ, one of the oddest and most unnerving things in nature. I felt an embarrassment so intense that it transcended the concept altogether. I also felt a ridiculous un-classifiable sort of glee" [6, p. 90]. These naturalistic details prove that the works of Jean Paul Sartre had a significant impact on forming Murdoch's artistic method. Jean Paul Sartre is known for avoiding romantic and accenting naturalistic details in love-making scenes. There are other naturalistic details in the novel, for example, we may smell the odour of sweat during the literature lessons; see that Pearson is vomiting up food after he has left the theatre because of strong feelings for Julian. Bradley is a sensitive character, inclined to reflection and sometimes unexpected reactions and psychological associations. In the above-mentioned scene his desire for Julian revives in his memory the scenes of his love-making to her mother. Z. Freud's influence is easily observed in the psychological aspect of the novel. Bradley's associations render sensory experiences of the protagonist and draw the reader deeper and deeper into the whirl of the protagonist's sensations.

The image of "The Black Prince" is associated with Hamlet and raises his dilemma: to be or not to be. Pearson realizes: no matter what choice he makes he won't be happy. He faces the problem of choice not only in his ill-fated love affair. He makes his choice when postpones his departure for others' sake not once and it draws the violent climax nearer. He makes his choice when intends to publish a bad review of Baffin's new book and he makes his fatal choice when he decides to help Rachel. The people from his environment don't understand him and his works but they use him for their own ends. Bradley feels lonely no matter who is by him. He is absorbed in his sensations.

Actually, each of the heroes is afraid of loneliness and still is lonely. Priscilla is lonely too. She leaves Roger, because she cannot live with him any longer, but soon decides to return to him. The reason is simple. She just cannot stay alone. She knows well that staying with Roger she will feel lonely all the same time. Pearson does not listen to his sister's advice and leaves London. When Pearson is told of his sister committing suicide, he stays in Patara and spends the night with Julian instead of attending the funeral. The characters' loneliness is often caused by the absurdity of their tangled relations: Christian loves Bradley Pearson, but Pearson loves Julian, Arnold Baffin is married to Rachel, but loves Christian, Rachel loves Pearson, Priscilla loves her husband Roger but Roger has a lover and they expect a baby. The untying of the plot accents the idea of absurdity – the writer, imprisoned for the crime he didn't commit, dies after creating his long dreamed about masterpiece.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The idea of absurdity, the plot is weaved around, the problems of contingency and necessity, the problems of choice and aloofness, the tangled psychological aspect of the novel, the different subjective points of view on the same events, presented to the reader's judgement, a sensitive, intellectual involved in psychoanalysis and looking for the sense of existence protagonist, naturalistic details, the moods of despair and perplexity typical of the characters of the novel make us state that the novel should be regarded as existentialist.

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Телегіна Н.І., Буцяк Т.О. Особливості творчого методу Айріс Мердок на матеріалі роману “Чорний принц”. *Журнал Прикарпатського університету імені Василя Стефаника*, 3 (4) (2016), 90–94.

З метою визначення художнього методу Айріс Мердок проведено комплексне дослідження проблем і стилю її відомого роману “Чорний принц”. Особлива увага була приділена філософським проблемам добра і зла, випадковості і необхідності в житті людини, ідеї абсурду, проблемам вибору і відчуження, психологічному аспекту роману, який розкривається за допомогою ретроспекції.

Проблеми, підняті в романі, рефлектуючий головний герой, заглиблений в психоаналіз і пошуки сенсу буття, натуралістичні деталі і наявність післямов, в яких подані різні суб’єктивні точки зору на ті самі події, доводять, що роман слід розглядати як екзистенціалістський.

Ключові слова: проблема, існування, абсурд, вибір, необхідність, випадковість, психоаналіз.