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SPECIFICITY OF THE REPRESENTATION OF YOUTH PROBLEM IN JOHN GREEN'S PROSE

СПЕЦИФІКА РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦІЇ МОЛОДІЖНОЇ ПРОБЛЕМИ У ПРОЗІ ДЖОНА ГРІНА

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The article examines the complex socio-psychological and ontological features of youth in the novels of John Green, one of the most influential writers of young adult literature. The focus is on how the writer changed the traditional genre, exploring the deep philosophical layers of human nature in the story of youth.

The relevance of the article is conditioned by a reconsideration of modern youth prose. The psychological pressure and identity searches faced by young people are put forward as the idea-content of J. Green's novels. J. Green presents young people as individuals experiencing an extremely intense and meaningful existential experience "here and now".

The novelty of the investigation lies in determining the relationship between the everyday problems of young people and the classical categories – stoicism, understanding the "Other" and existential crisis. J. Green deconstructs the traditional image of ideal youth, replacing it with a developing, but emotionally and physically extremely vulnerable character.

The analysis of the material shows that the main conflict in J. Green's prose is the clash of youthful idealism with the chaos and injustice of the world. In the novel "Looking for Alaska", the protagonist, Miles Halter, goes through a painful journey from the objectification and idealization of Alaska Young to the recognition of his sovereignty. He understands the "Other" not as a puzzle to be solved for his own development, but as a different, traumatized individual whose behavior remains incomprehensible. In the novel "The Fault in Our Stars", the difficulties of youth pass into the stage of existential stoicism. The main characters, Hazel and August, who are faced with illness, struggle with the questions that a person faces at the end of life. J. Green's youth shows that he is able to accept the tragedy of existence. Instead of the intention to leave a trace on life, young people put forward the value of existence within a limited time and the deep moral-spiritual connection in human relationships.

Key words: J. Green, "Looking for Alaska", "The Fault in Our Stars", Representation, Youth problem, "Other", Stoicism.

У статті розглядаються складні соціально-психологічні та онтологічні особливості молоді в романах Джона Гріна, одного з найвпливовіших письменників юнацької літератури. Основна увага приділяється тому, як письменник змінив традиційний жанр, досліджуючи глибокі філософські шари людської природи в історії молоді.

Актуальність статті зумовлена переосмисленням сучасної молодіжної прози. Психологічний тиск та пошуки ідентичності, з якими стикається молодь, висувуються як ідейний зміст романів Дж. Гріна. Дж. Грін представляє молодих людей як особистостей, які переживають надзвичайно інтенсивний та змістовний екзистенційний досвід «тут і зараз».

Новизна дослідження полягає у визначенні взаємозв'язку між повсякденними проблемами молоді та класичними категоріями – стоїцизмом, розумінням «Іншого» та екзистенційною кризою. Дж. Грін деконструє традиційний образ ідеальної молоді, замінюючи його персонажем, що розвивається, але емоційно та фізично надзвичайно вразливим.

Аналіз матеріалу показує, що основним конфліктом у прозі Дж. Гріна є зіткнення юнацького іdealізму з хаосом та несправедливістю світу. У романі «У пошуках Аляски» головний герой, Майлз Голтер, проходить болісний шлях від об'єктивації та ідеалізації Аляски Янга до визнання його суверенітету. Він розуміє «Іншого» не як головоломку, яку потрібно розв'язати для власного розвитку, а як іншу, травмовану особистість, поведінка якої залишається незрозумілою. У романі «Провина зірок» труднощі юності переходять у стадію екзистенційного стоїцизму. Головні герої, Хейзел та Огаст, які зіткнулися з хворобою, борються з питаннями, з якими людина стикається наприкінці життя. Юність Дж. Гріна показує, що він здатний прийняти трагедію існування. Замість наміру залишити слід у житті, молоді люди висувують цінність існування в обмеженому часі та глибокий морально-духовний зв'язок у людських стосунках.

Ключові слова: Дж. Грін, «У пошуках Аляски», «Провина зірок», репрезентація, проблеми молоді, «Інший», стоїцизм.

Problem statement. It is unlikely that there is an author in modern young adult literature who has described the problems of youth as accurately as John Green. His novels “Looking for Alaska”, “Paper Towns”, “The Fault in Our Stars” provide a deep description of the collision of the fragile inner world of young people with a ruthless world.

The main problem of youth in J. Green’s works is the tragic gap between maturity and emotional sensitivity. The author puts his characters in a state of “double pressure”. So, on the one hand, they are able to understand existential questions – death, the meaning of suffering, the injustice of the world, but do not have enough strength to protect themselves from the answers to these questions. J. Green’s characters often don’t look for “themselves” in this gap, but, on the contrary, try to understand who they are in the face of another person – an idealized, mysterious and, as a result, inaccessible person. The author shows that young people turn living people into metaphors, which is why they are disappointed and painfully face reality.

The relevance of studying John Green’s creativity today is determined by several factors. First of all, in the context of the problems of modern youth, the author openly speaks about depression and anxiety, illness, and shows that these conditions are a fact of life for young people. On the other hand, he destroys the “successful image” of young people, demonstrating that they are faced with complex, awkward and deep sadness. J. Green’s characters are smart, quote classics and seek “Great Perhaps”. Despite the fact that his characters use smartphones and computers, their problems remain eternal. The hero of “The Fault in Our Stars” wants to somehow leave a mark in the world and not be forgotten. This desire is an eternal theme and makes today’s young people think more acutely than ever. Young people discuss their fears and the inevitability of being forgotten, Augustus Waters talks about his desire to leave a trace in the world, and Hazel Lancaster states that the value of life is not in the scale, but in the depth of the moment experienced, saying that the world “is not a wish-granting factory” [10, p. 14], “I believe that we are more than the sum of our parts. That feelings – even the bad ones – are what make us human” [10, p. 14]. This idea is also emphasized in “Looking for Alaska”. Miles Halter knows that he and Alaska Young are immortal: “We need never be hopeless, because we can never be irreparably broken. We think that we are invincible because we are. We cannot be born, and we cannot die. Like all energy, we can only change shapes and sizes and manifestations” [9, p. 268]. J. Green elaborates on this idea in his essay collection “The Anthropocene Reviewed”

writing that the ability of young people, even with incurable diseases, to feel life more acutely than adults is their distinguishing features [8]. J. Green doesn’t offer easy solutions to the problem. His “youth” is not just a temporary period to endure, but a time when every choice has meaning. For J. Green, young people feel everything excessively, which is their feature. The novel “The Fault in Our Stars” explains why the experiences of youth are so important and inevitable: “That’s the thing about pain... it demands to be felt” [10, p. 28]. J. Green shows in the person of Hazel Lancaster and Augustus Waters that it is wrong to try to “silence” feelings in order to escape suffering, that such an approach deprives a person of life. He understands youth as a defenseless period, which is why any event seems like a mess.

J. Green’s heroes are caught between image and reality. The author reveals the problem of objectification of the Other. The hero of “Looking for Alaska” Miles Halter falls in love not with the real Alaska Young, but with a mysterious image of her own creation. The problem of youth here is the difficulty of realizing that another person is as complex and real as himself. Apparently, this indicates the transition from an egocentric perception of the world to the recognition of the existence of the Other. For J. Green, youth is not a period of carefreeness, but a search for a way out of the “labyrinth of suffering”: “How will we ever get out of this labyrinth of suffering” [9, p. 8].

J. Green’s heroes are very intellectual. They speak in quotes, know famous sayings, and build complex theories. J. Green’s young people use literature, history, poetry, and music as a means to explain their feelings. If Miles Halter in “Looking for Alaska” is looking for François Rabelais’ “Great Perhaps”, Alaska Young wants to get out of Simon Bolivar’s “labyrinth of suffering”. This is a desire to find meaning in a world that seems “colorless” and meaningless.

In the novel “The Fault in Our Stars”, the issues of confrontation with physical limitations come to the fore. Youth is usually associated with the best and most carefree period of life, but J. Green describes young people suffering from illness and finding themselves in a hopeless situation. The author raises the issue of moral and spiritual freedom. He asks the question of how a person can remain a person in the face of a fatal illness.

In J. Green’s prose, the problem of youth is associated with an epistemological crisis. The characters try to understand the world from the point of view of high culture, but they are faced with the impossibility of turning a real person into a literary symbol. J. Green shows that reality is the acceptance of the unwritten laws and chaotic events of life.

Analysis of recent research and publications.

Researchers analyze how J. Green first creates an “idealized” image of a woman and then deconstructs it. Mary Jo Tewes Cramb, writing for the Los Angeles Review of Books, explains in detail the deconstruction of this image in “Looking for Alaska”. She explains the hero’s acceptance of his friend as a means for his own development as a danger of objectification [5]. Emma Dunder notes that this image affects the protagonist, who is first idolized, then described as mysterious [6]. Jennifer Gouck examines the image of “Manic Pixie Dream Girls” in the context of American young adult literature [11; 12]. C. Newberg examines the character of Alaska in the novel “Looking for Alaska” and shows that she exists to help her friend, teaching him an important life lesson [16]. Dini Idriani examines the problem of figurative languages in the novel “The Fault in Our Stars”, suggesting that each word has its own meaning and that the author conveys different messages [13]. M. Jebaselvi and M. Sivakumar analyzes both the psychological difficulties caused by the disease and the characters’ fears of life and death in “The Fault in Our Stars” [20]. N. Pangestu and D. Sunardi analyze this novel with Z. Freud’s psychoanalytic theory and conclude that the character’s self-defense mechanisms stem from the main problem – the disease [18]. J. Valencia examines “The Fault in Our Stars” novel in terms of the metaphor problem [22]. According to R. Syme, he analyzes the novel as a love story [19].

Task statement. The **purpose** of this study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the features of the representation of the youth crisis in J. Green’s novels, as well as to determine how the author deconstructs traditional stereotypes of young adult literature. To achieve this goal, it is intended to solve a number of specific **tasks**:

1. To reveal the content of the concept of youth in the author’s artistic system, to determine the boundaries between the age characteristics of the heroes and their existential essence;
2. To investigate the mechanism of deconstruction of the idealized “Other” using the main characters to show the transition from egocentric perception to the acceptance of the complexity of reality;
3. To determine the descriptive features of psychological borderline situations of young people, such as fear of illness and death;
4. To classify the methods of overcoming the “labyrinth of suffering” proposed by the author and to assess their ethical significance for youth prose.

Based on the above issues, this article also aims to answer the question: How does J. Green change

the young adult genre and turn it into a serious philosophical discussion? To achieve this goal, we aim to analyze how J. Green’s characters cope with the existential crisis and how they behave when faced with the physical end of existence.

Outline of the main material of the study. In Green’s novel, the problem of youth manifests itself through intellectual searches. Miles Halter, obsessed with the words of adults on their deathbed, sets off to boarding school in search of “I go to seek a Great Perhaps” [9, p. 14]. However, the conflict in the novel is more about the encounter with the mysterious Alaska Young than the search for meaning. Miles makes a typical mistake that young people make: he does not see Alaska as a real person who has undergone deep and psychological trauma, but perceives her as a “riddle” to be solved and himself as an “Other” to find his identity. That is why the question of Simon Bolivar’s “labyrinth of suffering” becomes the center of the novel. Jennifer Gouck, who analyzes “Looking for Alaska”, emphasizes this important point, writing that Alaska is an image that will change Miles and that it is she who “deserves spiritual fulfillment, growth, and the future promised to them; girls only exist to facilitate their access to it” [12, p. 527].

Alaska immediately looks for a way out, and Miles eventually understands that the way out is forgiveness. J. Green clearly shows that one can’t live by accepting the “Other” as incomprehensible, mysterious, and without answers to fundamental questions. Miles arrives at Halter boarding school only by referring to the words of others who are dying. That is why for him Alaska Young is not an individual, but a text to be read, a puzzle to be solved.

Miles behaves with intellectual appropriation. He sees Alaska as a “Dream Girl” and a “Muse” and doesn’t hear her pleas for help, her cries. For him, Alaska is the embodiment of the “Great Perhaps”. J. Green seriously attempts to show that the tragedy of youth is often the inability to see the pain of the other behind the bright facade. In literary studies, Alaska is usually presented as a deconstruction of the “Manic Pixie Dream Girls” type, which exists in the work only to restore the identity and self-confidence of the main character. J. Green deliberately creates Alaska as a self-destructive character in order to show the collapse of these illusions. Miles tries to relive Alaska’s last days in order to find answers to his confusing questions, but he falls into the labyrinth from which Alaska wants to get out. Miles understands that Alaska is not a means to change him. Alaska is the starting point of his development. The deconstruction of the “Other” results in the idea that Alaska’s never-known secret belongs only to her.

If Miles sees the world as a library, Alaska imagines it as a labyrinth. Here the problem of youth manifests itself as the incompatibility of metaphysical systems. For Miles, the labyrinth is an intellectual puzzle. For Alaska, it is more of a “torment” and unbearable-ness. Their attitude to the concept of “other” reaches different levels: Miles is in love with Alaska’s mentality and thoughts, while she drowns in her real suffering. For J. Green, true intimacy is impossible without going beyond one’s own point of view. Miles’s personality is incomplete, it only emerges when he encounters the “Other”. For J. Green, the problem of youth is always the search for the “Other”. Miles, on the other hand, exists only in an internal dialogue with Alaska. But, unfortunately, this dialogue is only within him.

J. Green gives his characters their own “voices”, which indicates the loss of the author’s position in the story. If we approach the issue with M. Bakhtin’s principle of analysis, we will see that the truth in J. Green’s novels is not given ready-made. It is more likely to emerge as a result of dialogues about life and death between Hazel and August. Or it manifests itself in the lack of dialogue between Miles and Alaska. Dialogue in these two novels is not just the conversations of the characters, but rather their way of being. As M. Bakhtin also claims, “To be means to communicate dialogically” [1, p. 252].

On the other hand, it can be seen that J. Green shows that the maturation of the characters occurs through “Co-being” – the recognition of another personality. The concept of “Co-being” is considered one of the ideas of existential philosophy as a moment of joint existence and unique encounter. In addition to M. Bakhtin, one can also refer to the thoughts of M. Buber for the analysis of recognizing the “other” personality in J. Green’s novels. In his work “I And Thou”, he divides human relationships into the types of “I – It” and “I – Thou”. When he says “I – It” he means the relationship to another as an object, thing or means, and we see this in how Miles idealizes Alaska at the beginning of the work. When he says “I – Thou”, M. Buber notes that true “Co-being” occurs when one person recognizes that he is alive, sovereign and deep in another [3]. In the novel “Looking for Alaska” one can see the painful transition of Miles’s “I – It” object relationships to a real dialogue, that is, “I – Thou”.

But we should also note that E. Levinas also developed the concept of dialogue and focused on the idea of ethical responsibility. In his work “Totality and Infinity” he puts forward the idea of “face-to-face” [14] and this answers the question of the “Other” in J. Green’s novel. Encountering the “Face”

of the other gives the “I” an obligation. The other is “Infinity”, which can’t be fully understood and comprehended. When Miles realizes that he did not know the real Alaska, according to M. Levinas, he encounters exactly that “Face”. This reality can’t be subordinated to his imagination. In this sense, love and death in J. Green’s novels are not “problems” to be solved, but rather require solidarity and spiritual connection. “Co-being” in the true sense of the word is more a desire to be “availability” in front of the Other.

Thus, it can be seen that in the novel “Looking for Alaska” the evolution of the concept of “Other” goes through several stages. First, Alaska is a mysterious and idealized image, the goal of Miles’ journey. Then she is a part of a series of incomprehensible facts, Miles’ confusion. And at the end of the novel, Alaska is a person who loves and leaves life. Only then Miles perceives her as a whole person.

When it comes to the novel “The Fault in Our Stars”, it can be seen that J. Green transforms the problem of youth into a philosophical anthropological plane. Hazel Lancaster’s and Augustus Waters’s illness doesn’t act as a medical diagnosis, but as a matter where existential fears become prominent. For Augustus Waters, the tragedy of youth is the fear of “being ordinary” and not being heroic. In this novel, the problem of youth lies in the conflict between the hero’s ambition and reality. Hazel Grace seeks answers in the novel “An Imperial Affliction”, trying to understand what the world will be like after the disappearance of human being. J. Green emphasizes the intellectual views of his characters. They experience their “misfortunes” through texts. M. Nussbaum sees man as a cognitive judgment of emotions [17]. J. Green’s young heroes also see “the Therapy of Desire” in reading books and expressing different opinions. If we refer to M. Nussbaum, we will see that the intellectuality of J. Green’s heroes is a form of aristocratic psychotherapy. It is through him that acting logically and reading books gives meaning to the lives of the heroes. Thus, it can be seen that J. Green takes young adult novels to a new level. The love of Hazel Lancaster and Augustus Waters is not an escape from reality, but a search for a common meaning of young people in an environment where time is limited.

As we have noted, Augustus Waters struggles with the fear of being forgotten. For him, youth is a period in which heroism is realized. Apparently, this is why, when asked what he fears most, he answers: “I fear oblivion,” he said without a moment’s pause. “I fear it like the proverbial blind man who’s afraid of the dark” [10, p. 12]. August measures the meaning of life with traditional male views and for this reason

desires fame and heroism. However, illness deprives him of this opportunity. J. Green offers stoicism. Influenced by Hazel Grace, August comes to the conclusion that the moment is more important than eternity. As if like the stoics, he suggests turning to the soul itself, to life itself, as it is, and to govern oneself wisely: "... we will not survive forever. There was time before organisms experienced consciousness, and there will be time after. And if the inevitability of human oblivion worries you, I encourage you to ignore it" [10, p. 13]. In the artistic world of J. Green, true heroism is not to save humanity, but to maintain clarity of thought when the human body becomes a "side effect" of a biological error. The author refutes the myth of "spiritual purification" through illness. Hazel emphasizes that cancer is not a "battlefield" won by willpower. That is why, during a dinner in Amsterdam, Green's hero August, realizing the limitations of his capabilities, says, like Hazel, "the world, is not a wish-granting factory" [10, p. 291]. August and Hazel, like the stoics, reject illusions. They don't seek ultimate meaning in pain, but rather, they try to create meaning in spite of it. The understanding of the absurd is an indication of the collision between seriousness and the scale of the universe. T. Nagel proposes irony, not hopelessness, as a way of life: "the collision between the seriousness with which we take our lives and the perpetual possibility of regarding everything about which we are serious as arbitrary, or open to doubt" [15, p. 718]. Hazel and August embody T. Nagel's irony. Stoicism is the ability to joke with one's own tragedy, to recognize its scale, but to refuse to surrender to it.

Hazel thinks about her parents even though she doesn't think about herself. She is not worried about her own death, but about the ontological void that she will leave in her parents' lives. "I'm a grenade, Mom. I'm a grenade and at some point, I'm going to blow up and I would like to minimize the casualties, okay?" [10, p. 36]. As it turns out, this approach is the highest manifestation of the stoics' concern for the "Other". Youth manifests itself here as responsibility. The thoughts of the heroes are an attempt to find a rational structure in biological injustice. On the other hand, the stoicism of both Hazel and August lies in the ability to appreciate the "small infinity". They don't complain about the scarcity of the moment, but rather pay attention to its fullness. This is a new look at the problem of youth. Youth is not a preparation for the future, but is valuable as a self-sufficient "now".

To understand stoicism more deeply, it is worth remembering Sisyphus, the absurd hero of A. Camus. Sisyphus, knowing the meaninglessness of his work, but continuing it, seems to be superior to his fate:

"Tomorrow, he was longing for tomorrow, whereas everything in him ought to reject it. That revolt of the flesh is the absurd" [4, p. 14]. The heroes of "The Fault in Our Stars" know that their struggle with illness will not end in victory, but they repeat Sisyphus by continuing to love and think. This is a rebellion against the absurdity of death.

V. Frankl's "Defiant power" and freedom of choice are attitudes towards circumstances. Therefore, even in conditions of extreme restriction of freedom, a person retains the last freedom to choose his position. More precisely, the main purpose of man is to search for what we consider meaningful. The meaning of life is hidden in every moment of our lives [7]. J. Green's heroes seek meaning in pain, not the absence of pain. If we approach it from the idea of V. Frankl, we can see why heroes attach so much importance to the search for meaning. Because this is their survival mechanism.

P. Tillich's idea of "The Courage to Be" also plays its role in the analysis of the novel "The Fault in Our Stars". Thus, with "The Courage to Be", he means accepting one's limitations and nothingness without despair, and affirming one's existence despite everything that opposes one [21]. In J. Green's heroes, this is "Ontological Courage". P. Tillich explains how people find the strength to live when their biological or social worlds collapse. In this sense, the novel "The Fault in Our Stars" is an artistic example of stoicism. From J. Green's novel, we can conclude that the world is neither fair nor meaningful. It simply exists. Human death is inevitable. The only way out of this end for a person is to understand the situation and share the pain.

L. Becker's ideas are also interesting. He notes that in order to live, we must accept the world as it is [2]. The behavior of J. Green's heroes can be justified by L. Becker's position. It is possible to live a life of moral "courage" based on a rational understanding of the laws of nature.

Finally, let us also note that in the novel, the problem of youth becomes a problem of human choice. Should young people accept themselves as victims of circumstances, or should they add meaning to their lives in the short time allotted to them? J. Green shows that ironic ability is the highest form of stoic resistance. That is why heroes gain courage and ethical orientations thanks to reason and human solidarity, and look at serious problems with irony.

Conclusions. Summarizing the study of the specifics of the representation of the problem of youth in John Green's prose, we can conclude that the author significantly changes young adult literature, transferring it from didactic and entertaining literature to the field of philosophical anthropology.

The analysis of the novels “Looking for Alaska” and “The Fault in Our Stars” gives us the basis to put forward these ideas. First of all, in the artistic world of J. Green, youth is no longer just a physiological stage of maturation. It is, above all, a state of youthful honesty. J. Green’s characters use literature, philosophy, and metaphorical thinking to bring order to chaotic reality. In this context, being complete demonstrates the transition to creating one’s own meanings rather than blindly following the texts of others.

One of the main issues identified in the investigation is to study the image of Alaska in the novel “Looking for Alaska” on a new level. Looking at this image, we see that the tragedy of youth often stems from an attempt to turn the Other into a symbol or instrument of self-awareness. J. Green convincingly shows that we need to accept the sovereignty and complexity of the “Other”, who does not have to conform to our expectations, to understand it as it is. In “Looking for Alaska”, the relationship between young people is not a matter of unrequited love, but a problem of egocentrism. J. Green shows that this

happens when young people stop using Others for their own ambitions and accept that the “Other” is incomprehensible, as it is, or mortal.

The analysis of “The Fault in Our Stars” shows that J. Green offers a new ethical issue to young adult literature – stoicism in the face of the inevitable end of existence. The author does not romanticize suffering, emphasizes the biological existence of pain, and at the same time elevates the human spirit with irony, love, and the ability to make conscious choices. The problem of youth is reinterpreted here as the search for a “quality” life against the background of the incurable illness of both characters. The author presents existential stoicism as an ethical strategy.

In conclusion, it should be noted that J. Green presents the deep spiritual crisis of young people and the difficulties they face due to their experiences as part of life. In his novels, young people do not perceive life as it is, but rather as they experience it, often accepting it as it is. The value of the characters’ life experiences lies in how bravely they face the “labyrinth of suffering” while maintaining their ability to seek truth.

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