

THE MOTIF OF MADNESS IN CONTEMPORARY POETRY

МОТИВ БОЖЕВІЛЛЯ В СУЧАСНІЙ ПОЕЗІЇ

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The article deals with the problem of the motif of madness in contemporary poetry. Still, it must be stated that madness, in fact, can be the topic of literary text, an important feature of the character, it may help to create a twist in the plot or show abnormal state of mind. All of that, of course, enriches literary texts in senses, gives additional meanings, creates quite a complicated construction of a text. Currently, in humanities the majority of studies in philosophy and art / literary studies on the issue of madness are based on the scientific works by Michel Foucault, that is why his ideas are presented in the actual article as pivotal ones. The concept of madness is frequently associated with mortality and mystery, illness, delusion, tragic and even comic features. This short research explores the way the concept of madness influenced literature: classic and contemporary. The attention was paid to the traditional representations of features of madness in the characters created by William Shakespeare and Edgar Allan Poe. Evidently, one of the most important points here is the correlation between madness and Thanatos (so-called Death Drive) as they both mean changing the reality (life) and as a result the end of it. But mostly the article is dedicated to the motif of madness in contemporary poetry with the reference to the literary texts written by Charly Cox, Olivia Gatwood and one of the most popular poets of contemporary literature – Atticus. Obviously, the motif of madness in literature / poetry nowadays is the mixture of traditional features and new ones, that makes it a unique one. The article represents the way the motif of madness is implemented into the poetic texts, which codes it contains and, furthermore, what interpretations may be found out while working on the analysis of the literary texts which involve the motif of madness.

Key words: motif, contemporary literature, poetry, code, image, interpretation, text, concept, madness, art.

У статті йдеться про проблему мотиву божевілля в сучасній поезії. Ба більше, слід зазначити, що божевілля насправді може бути темою літературного тексту, важливою особливістю персонажа, мотив божевілля може допомогти створити сюжетну ситуацію або показати (не)нормальний стан душі персонажа. Все це, звичайно, збагачує зміст літературних текстів, надає додаткових відтінків та значень, створює досить складну конструкцію тексту. Сьогодні в гуманітарних науках більшість досліджень з філософії та мистецтвознавства / літературознавчих досліджень з питань теми божевілля ґрунтуються на наукових роботах Мішеля Фуко, тому його ідеї представлено у цій статті як ключові. Концепція божевілля часто пов'язана з темою смерті та таємницею, хворобою, маренням, трагічними та навіть комічними рисами. Це коротке дослідження досліджує те, як концепт божевілля вплинув на літературу: класичну та сучасну. Увагу було приділено традиційним уявленням про безумство в конструюванні структури персонажів, створених Вільямом Шекспіром та Едгаром Алланом По. Очевидно, що одним із найважливіших моментів тут є співвідношення між божевіллям і Танатосом (тяжінням до смерті), оскільки вони означають зміну реальності та, в результаті, кінець. Але, найістотніше, статтю присвячено мотиву божевілля в сучасній поезії з посиланням на літературні тексти, написані Чарлі Кокс, Олівією Гатвуд та одним із найпопулярніших поетів у сучасній літературі – Аттікусом. Вочевидь, мотив божевілля в літературі / поезії наразі – це суміш традиційних особливостей та нових рис, що робить його унікальним. Стаття репрезентує способи реалізації мотиву божевілля в поетичних текстах, як його кодовано, і, крім того, які інтерпретації може бути декодовано під час роботи над аналізом літературних текстів, що передбачають наявність мотиву божевілля.

Ключові слова: мотив, сучасна література, поезія, код, образ, інтерпретація, текст, концепт, божевілля, мистецтво.

The concept of madness is quite widespread in art in general and in contemporary literature in particular. It has a variety of images and can be implemented into the literary text in a great many of ways, starting from using it as an artistic detail, constructing specific setting or just creating the characters with various mental issues.

Madness in art can be a simple feature of something / somebody or may transform into a symbolic sign to tell an important information about the whole society or historic epoch. As Simona Olaru-Posiar states: “Since ancient times, people

have been fascinated by madness. Famous characters from Greek mythology and ancient tragedies are afflicted by this disease, and scholars and philosophers address the phenomenon of madness in their writings” [8; p. 1]. People all over the world both are charmed and frightened by madness, that is why the artifacts dealing with madness are quite popular throughout the whole history of humanity, and they are a solid part of contemporary art as well, elite and mass, in pop culture for instance, such as the movie production, music industry and literature.

Recent literary research deals with the phenomenon of madness as the theme in literature (N. Fridricova "The theme of madness in fiction written in English" [4]), dwelling on the images of madness in different historical epochs (D. Howarth "On the historical depiction of madness in American Literature" [6]), and, of course, as the category of motif (S. Olaru-Posiar "Briefing for a descent into hell: madness as a literary motif in world literature" [8]). All those studies show that scholars in various countries being the representatives of different age and cultural code are still interested in investigating the meaning of madness in literary texts, in psychology of creative process and writers' / narrators' creative destinies.

The **main goal** of the actual article is to prove that the motif of madness is still an important one in the literature, exactly – poetry, of the XXIst century and explore the role and functions of this motif, its traditional and new features and the way it is incorporated into contemporary poetry.

Main part of the article. Madness is the object of study for lots of philosophers and art / literature researches and has its own history of investigating in humanities. N. Fridricova writes: "Madness with its comic and tragic aspects has always been attracting people's attention and since literature has appeared, the authors have begun to reflect this interest in their works. This literary heritage enables us to follow the fascination with madness through the history. As Jose Barchilon says in the introduction to Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*: "Folly is so human that it has common roots with poetry and tragedy; it is revealed as much in the insane asylum as in the writings of a Cervantes or a Shakespeare, or in the deep psychological insights and cries of revolt of a Nietzsche... fascinating as Renaissance men found it – they painted it, praised it, sang about it – it also heralded for them death of the body by picturing death of the mind. (Foucault 1965, vi)". He continues saying that many of the literary works dealing with madness portray it as an existing social phenomenon which is an inevitable part of the human condition. In each of these works we can observe the theme of madness in its time and from proper social perspective of the period" [4; p. 7]. Studies of M. Foucault are also important for the research of B. Songzi and Q. Mingli, they declare that: "To differentiate madness with mental illness, Foucault pointed that "madness becomes the name for a condition which expresses a basic, not to say cosmic, lack, while mental illness is the term used to describe how society conceives of, and controls, madness", from which he implied that madness defined as mental ill-

ness was the symbol of under domination, because "the denouncing of madness became a general form of moral critique" in western culture. Faced with the situation, madness was rectified to be the expression of certain universal truths lacking in society, which is also the foundation of his discussion on madness and literature" [9; p. 253]. It is necessary to state that madness is an inevitable part of literature both classic and contemporary and writers / poets implement this theme / concept / motif in various aspects of literary texts notwithstanding the genre or historical period. For instance, the research "Symptoms of disorder. Reading madness in British literature, 1744–1845" deals with the analysis of the texts written by Ch. Smart and W. Cowper, W. Blake, S.T. Coleridge, Tennyson [7], N. Fridricova analyzes the works created by Edgar Allan Poe, Wilkie Collins, Doris Lessing, Jean Rhys [4]. It proves that madness has been in great demand among the writers throughout history of literature. E. Brason proposes such an idea: "Madness has long been a popular theme for literature, featuring as a trope of horror, mystery, tragedy and comedy genres in varying degrees of amplitude. The topic has provided a significant access point for analyzing historical, socio-political and cultural issues as it addresses controversial themes of alienation and criminality as well as philosophical theories of perception and consciousness. As a result, studies on the representation of madness in literature have been dominated by historical approaches that focus directly on social, political, philosophical and psychoanalytical interpretive models" [2; p. 2].

The best examples to focus on madness in classic literature are the creative pieces by W. Shakespeare and E.A. Poe. E. Brason writes: "Madness has plagued the minds of some of the most intriguing and iconic characters of literary history. Shakespeare's famous mad characters: Hamlet, King Lear and Macbeth of the eponymous plays are the earliest examples from English Literature. His characters descend, true to tragic form, from noble heights to deplorable lows of violence, murder and derangement" [2; p. 4]. That clearly coincides with another idea about his creative works in connection with the madness: "Death always lingers about the kind of madness as a tragic experience, in order to prove this, Foucault made Shakespeare's works as example. Madness as a tragic experience always causes death and murder in Shakespeare's works which "... occupies an extreme position in that it is invariably without issue. There is no going back to truth or reason. It opens only onto a tear in the fabric of the world, and therefore onto death. (Foucault, 2006, p. 38)". Undoubtedly, death cannot bring peace or harmony,

while madness will still be alive in the society, no matter how long the death ends, madness stays longer and plays the living role in death. As a result, death and madness form a condition which seems that there is a limit between death and madness, but the limit cannot be transcended. Madness is a tragic experience and death turn into a symbolic relationship, that is, madness continuously tries to transcend the limit of death, while death still insists on confronting with the transcending madness, eventually, the confirmation helps both sides to sustain themselves beings. Therefore, madness as a tragic experience represents the transgression of death" [9; p. 254]. That is close to the research made on E.A. Poe, whose texts on madness are also connected to Thanatos principle, as "Poe's ability to so accurately describe a serial killer in an age when the phenomenon wasn't yet defined or understood noteworthy. It makes sense that Poe's serial killer characters have therefore served as the basis for many of those encountered in 20th–21st century fiction. The desire for death, destruction, and pain brings to mind the later psychoanalytic concept of Death Drive"[6]. Dwelling on this later historical period of literature E. Brason studies the range of texts: Ch. Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, B. Easton-Ellis' *American Psycho* and J. Bavlille's *The Book of Evidence* [2].

Getting to contemporary poetry it must be underlined that theoretically the article deals with the category of motif. Cambridge Dictionary says that motif is "an idea that is used many times in a piece of writing or music" [10]. In contemporary poetry the motif of madness usually correlates not only with illness or death that is traditional but with romantic relationships, shifting from Thanatos (Death Drive) to Eros (Life Drive). The state of illness in this case doesn't cause death but the feeling of the other (alternated) reality, often – delusional or depressive conditions. Still, of course, currently this motif has the features taken from classic literature, for instance, Edgar Allan Poe's depicting serial killer is implemented into O. Gatwood's poetry while creating male image who is captured by a desire as a mental disorder "...when a girl's body / goes still, the men obsessed with our necks, / the men who earned nicknames like Zodiac, / BTK, Ripper, Bone Collector, men who / said they would be gone in the dark. / ultimately, it was a sickness that killed them." [5; p. 145], so in this exact piece it can be seen that the motif has quite a complicated structure as it is motivated by Life Driver (Eros) realized in desire and gets to Death Driver (Thanatos) basically due to mental issue which changes not only the mindset or feeling but the identity of the lyric hero, even names become nicknames, hiding true

identities. Interestingly, using namedropping here enriches the story of lyric heroine with the stories from the outside the text, that expands the narrative and involves true crime episodes into the literary text not telling them directly to the reader. Here the motif of madness makes the character/s, involving both Eros and Thanatos at a time, simultaneously blurring not only the identity of the characters but the borders between reality and literature constructing it into one text, that makes it clear (or even more complicated) to great many of people.

Quite different connotations (both positive and negative) can be found in Atticus' poetry. For example, something unusual can be defined as "mad" and it doesn't mean that it must be ill or dangerous, it may be connected with something new or adventurous in a positive way : "Say what you will / but crazy isn't boring" [1; p. 82]. Also, the author uses the motif of madness depicting the creative process, which is widespread in literature as well, he writes: "Poetry at the wrong time is madness / poetry at the right time is magic" [1: p. 186], that can be decoded from the perspective of the author or reader. Actually, the process of creating the literary text is, undoubtedly, co-authorship of both the writer and the reader, but it is rather interesting representation that creative process of writing here is given as madness and sometimes, still, it must be noted, that creative process resembles flow and delusion somehow.

The motif of madness as a pivotal one is implemented into the book "She must be mad" by Charly Cox [3]. Literally, in this case the motif of madness correlates with life changing experiences and, surely, with being in love and the consequences of these experiences. However, it must be stressed that the part of the book "she must be mad" contains the texts of so-called "mind parts", and really have lots of traditional features, referring to illness, as well. Such kind of representation is the text "doctor, doctor, don't help me": "I think I crave rejection / And self-sabotage days / I like the way the taste / in their smokey beer cross haze / I like to feel this empty / to make some time of pain / nothing drives me more crazy / than the breaks of feeling sane" [3; p. 48]. The same connotation of the motif of madness is in the text "dysthymia": "It is uncomfortable blunt language / non apology screens sincere enough / for the screams and swearing / of what it's made me do / it circles on my tongue / bitter furs and tangs of acid / as I repent on how this thing / that I lost the remote for / could ever make you feel / I didn't love you / in the deepest way I could" [3; p. 72]. As a result, it is clear that the motif of madness here has to be interpreted with reference to mental issues, depression disorder,

etc. Despite, here, in these literary texts, is created the binary opposition “senses – mind” and at the end of the part about madness the writer states: “Your mind is biased / and your brain is blind / there’s still a store of / strength / left in you to find” [3; p. 75]. Thus, it can be interpreted that this “strength” is still in senses as the mind can be biased, blind and mad, wrong.

Conclusions and perspectives. This actual short research shows that the motif of madness in literature is still up-to-date, moreover, it has quite a great history. This motif can be implemented into prose, poetry and drama. The connotations of it may be both positive and negative. The motif of madness is often connected with Death Drive or Life Drive, the con-

cepts of illness, delusion and sometimes mystery or even with the process of creating something.

Still, the meaning and functions of it can be interpreted in traditional literary texts, starting with ancient myths to decoding it in the texts of contemporary literature as writers incorporate the motif of madness in their texts frequently and, in addition, it can be enriched with new features, signs and create unique interpretations. It can also help in research dealing with cultural code of different nations and generations. Any of these aspects of the motif of madness can become the object of study in perspective in various scientific areas of humanities and arts.

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