

Representation of human suffering in modernist literature

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The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th is marked by a great degree of uncertainty. The war left a big imprint on the destinies of people, forcing them to rethink and doubt conventional values. Many authors have focused on the internal struggles of people and their real situation in the post-war world. They put their heroes in spaces and worlds where there was nothing reliable, and sometimes there was even no sense in their existence. Virginia Woolf, for instance, gave the world her work *Mrs. Dalloway*, which shows in detail society and specific characters trying to find themselves and the purpose of their lives in the post-war world. Samuel Beckett, on the contrary, drew a picture of emptiness and the absence of literally everything, from meaning to Higher Powers. This essay will analyze in detail the causes and expressions of human suffering in the realities of the lack of certainty and meaning.

The characters of *Mrs. Dalloway* written by Virginia Woolf are a vivid illustration of the emptiness and fear of the future that overtook society at the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century. The war ended quite recently and its presence remains an intangible haze in the work. Traumatic events damaged not only people's bodies but also broke their destinies, taking away hope for a happy tomorrow and joy. Instead, wartime gave such heroes as Septimus Warren Smith utter dullness and meaninglessness of being, which would be called post-traumatic stress disorder by psychologists of the 21st century. Day after day it drove him and his loved ones into a cage of dry existence, but not a bright life. The soldier does not remember the last time he experienced something. Of course, Septimus survived, which could not but rejoice, but there, on the battlefields, somewhere in Italy, his beloved comrade Evans remained. Together with him, at that moment, Septimus' soul froze and sank into the abyss of despair. He does not understand how to live on, he does not know if he has another vocation and if he has at least some future that will give him a sense of existence. It would seem that his beautiful young wife is next to him, even she "was so unhappy, for weeks and weeks now," (Woolf, 2000, p.59). Although they appear together in public and look like a happy couple, each of them is unhappy in their way. As much as Septimus Smith was lost in life, his wife also lost herself. Trying to give her husband peace and the necessary help, she only wasted her time in vain. Together with him, Rezia loses her meaning of life, she cannot imagine herself without her husband and cannot be realized as a spouse, since she cannot support her beloved in any way. Thus, having no sense of being, a young couple goes to the bottom together. There is no meaning in their life and there is no place for a happy future since then there were no people able to give Septimus Warren Smith a sophisticated treatment.

On the contrary, in the work of Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, there are no traumatic events that took away hope. However, there is no evidence that the existence of characters has any meaning. Initially, the very structure of the play gives a hint of the chaos and uncertainty reigning in the world where Didi and Gogo live. The theater of the absurd, which violates the classical structure of the three acts, the author, deprives the viewer of hope for the development

of the play in the third act - all this only emphasizes the lack of meaning. It is impossible to ignore the fact that throughout the work the main characters are waiting for the arrival of Godot. Even taking into account the minor action, Estragon himself emphasizes that "Nothing happens, nobody cares, nobody does, it's awful!" (Beckett, p.27). People who seem to be free from everything, having the ability to do anything, are prisoners of their expectations. Not knowing why, they are waiting, not even knowing what they are waiting for, the heroes of Beckett's play lived their lives day after day, losing understanding of what was happening and never finding the meaning of their existence.

However, the authors of both works give a hint that in the future there is a chance to find meaning and at least some specifics in the existence of heroes. Virginia Woolf, though, depicts disfigured human lives affected by the consequences of the war. However, looking entirely at the society existing in the post-war world, readers see that people are trying to live their fragmented lives no matter what. Her party and her desire to return to her former luxury, although they look pathetic, represent the very resilience of the human soul that can overcome even such difficult times.

Beckett, on the other hand, does not give us characters in which we see potential hints of fighting struggles. He gives hints, which can only be noticed by conducting a detailed analysis. Throughout the work, we are near a certain tree. Ann Bugliani notes "It reminds us of the tree of life mentioned in both Genesis and Revelations, the tree of the knowledge of good and of evil" (Bulganini, 2004, p.15). It would be logical to assume that such an explicit biblical reference carries a deep meaning. It should be emphasized that throughout the play "The Tree is always there" (Kolve, 1976, p.108). That is, a certain stability and specificity in the life of Estragon and Vladimir are still present. The leaves of this tree are the "sign of vitality and life" and the fact that the tree comes to life in the second act gives the reader hope that Didi and Gogo will someday meet Godot or find their own meaning.

Summing up, we can say that both worlds drawn by the authors do not give people any certainty and force them to live in suffering, in search of meaning. The characters in the work of *Mrs. Dalloway* Virginia Woolf, although they live in the present, all their hope was fading, and the meaning of life remained in the past. Gogo and Didi in Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* have no mining not in the present nor the past. They are surrounded only by a ghostly expectation and hope that something will ever change. But the authors still showed some mercy. Each of them hid a ghostly hint that everything is going on as usual and the heroes are moving in the right direction.

References:

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