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IDENTIFICATION OF “ONESELF” IN “THE OTHER” IN JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER’S NOVEL “EVERYTHING IS ILLUMINATED”

In the scientific literature there are concepts of “cultural identity”, “national identity”, and “ethnic identity”. [11; 12] Identification is frequently associated with how people assess, comprehend, or unconsciously experience their place in the surrounding socio-cultural world.

According to P. Gurevich, identification is “a deep human need”, which is tightly connected with the other basic needs of the individual: firstly, with the need of communication; secondly, with the need of creative work, which involves an addressee; thirdly, with the need of “awareness of deep roots” i.e. with people’s pursuit “to perceive themselves as a link in a stable chain of mankind that emerged in prehistory”; fourthly, with the need “to pursue and explore the world; to understand the sense of the universe”; fifthly, with the need to develop “the system of orientations which give the ability to identify oneself with a certain recognized model”. [9, 226]

According to the definition by A. Belik, ethnic identity is “a sense of belonging to a particular cultural tradition”. [6, 173] A. Sadokhin points out that identity requires a person’s conscious acceptance of cultural values, language, norms, and rules of behaviour, which are characteristic of his/her native culture and thus shape axiological attitude to oneself, to other people, as well as to society and the world as a whole. [12, 22-23]

Modern anthropology treats the concept of “nation” broader than that of “ethnic group”. Consequently, identification does not correlate with the origin, but with the type of culture. However, ethnic identification does not completely coincide with the cultural one, as the basis for establishing the equivalence may be presented by physiological (inborn) correspondence.

National identification involves correlation with cultural tradition. However, the culture of a nation is not uniform: in the presence of nationwide symbols and archetypes cultural codes of different subcultures within one society vary rather significantly. In other words, cultural identification clarifies national identification, and it is quite important which subcultures people identify themselves with.

Identification is also associated with self-awareness. S. Lurie asserts that any “self-image” can be represented by three components: “the image for others”, “the image for oneself”, and “the image in oneself”. “The image for others” can be described as a set of attributes ascribed to oneself, which are translated into the language of other cultures. “The image for oneself” is recognized by society and represents a set of characteristics that are desirable to oneself. “The image in oneself” is unconscious, but it determines the consistency and rhythmicity of the actions of ethnos members. [11, 228]

N. Volkovetska assumes that the problem of identity in its basis is deeply dialogical, therefore it manifests itself through binary oppositions “Me – You” and “mine – someone else’s”. [8, 6] The researcher also points out that an important contribution to the development of the theory of identity was made by representatives of interactionism and cognitive psychology. They initiated a transition from monological to dialogical consideration of identity (A. Abushenko, M. Zakovorotna, A. Symonova and others). Thus, representatives of these trends created concepts that relied on dialogism as a characteristic feature of identity: concept of the “[looking glass self](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Looking_glass_self)” by Charles Cooley, the “self” by George Herbert Mead, “social identity” by Erving Goffman, etc. [2; 3; 10]

German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas also treats the issue of dialogic identity within the framework of anthropology. The scientist claims that identity can manifest through social and discursive interaction between individuals. [13]

However, the main idea of the dialogical nature of the human “self” was developed by Mikhail Bakhtin. It consists of three basic components: “I-for-myself”, “I-for-the-other”, and “other-for-me”. The “I-for-myself” is an unreliable source of identity, and the scholar argues that it is the “I-for-the-other” through which human beings develop a sense of identity because it serves as an amalgamation of the way in which others view me. Conversely, “other-for-me” describes the way in which others incorporate my perceptions of them into their own identities. Identity, as M. Bakhtin describes it, does not belong merely to the individual, rather it is shared by all. [5, 731]

These provisions are methodological grounds for analysing the problem of national identification in Jonathan Safran Foer’s novel “Everything Is Illuminated”, as they give an idea of the dynamics in the characters’ self-consciousness.

Lewis Ward noted: “In Jonathan Safran Foer’s postmodern novel, “Everything Is Illuminated”, we see a semi-autobiographical journey in search for generational memory, family secrets, and the display of self-identification through a combination of Joycean stream-of-consciousness narration, picturesque demonstration of words, and magic-realism.” [4, 152] The story plot carries on with two intermingling narratives presented by two central characters of the novel: Alex and Jonathan. The writer uses a complex narrative structure and narrative polyphony to demonstrate versatility and counterpoint of the images and topical issues. The plot is divided into several “episodes” followed by Alex’s letter to Jonathan inserted at the end of each episode discussing the authenticity of the account, his opinions about their grandparents, and his relationship with Jonathan. The major addresser in the novel is Alex. Jonathan, on the contrary, is introduced in the story as “the hero” [1, 27] and his every statement is recorded by Alex. Jonathan, in this manner, is deliberately “made silent” through Alex’s narration. There is no direct “voice” from Jonathan except for Alex’s description of his witness and his comments on Jonathan’s preceding remarks. Jonathan’s only narrative, however, lies in his magic-realistic fable ‒ a story of his grandfather, Safran. Thus, the presented narrative technique together with the way central characters are depicted in the novel, makes it possible to trace first of all the process of self-identification of the Ukrainian character Alex.

The story unfolds with Alex’s self-introduction. The author intentionally does not provide any characteristics of the Ukrainian personage, but allows the hero to talk about himself. Thus, the image of Alex is revealed through the character’s own representation of his personality, which is quite essential since Alex is the narrator in the story of a quest of a shtetl named Trachimbrod.

Alex’s image corresponds to the so-called “Pseudo Me”: “I dig Negroes, particularly Michael Jackson. I dig to disseminate very much currency at famous nightclubs in Odessa. Lamborghini Countaches are excellent, and so are cappuccinos.” [1, 2] His own version of English, in which Alex uses a series of synonyms instead of regular phrases, his own particular lexicon: “dub”, “spleening”, “first-rate”, or “premium” [1, p. 1-3], and his bragging of women always “want to be carnal with me” [1, 2] all point to his simple naivety. Primitiveness of speech and thought of this character, who introduces himself as an English expert and interpreter, makes the reader perceive him as a common person. He imitates the image of “flaneur” (introduced by Polish sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman), which was generated by mass culture, possessing very little knowledge of who he really is and who he wants to be. Alex describes himself as “a very premium person” [1, 2], an “unequivocally tall” [1, 2] young man with “an aristocratic smile” [1, 2] who is the girls’ favourite. This self-image is perceived with irony because it does not line up with reality. Thus, the character identifies himself by means of “the image for others” which appears quite different from who he really is.

However, despite everything Alex is a curious young man. He knows little about the world, but strives to cognize it. Although his English is far from perfect, the character attracts readers by his desire for knowledge when he talks about the upcoming trip to Trachimbrod: “I desired to see new things. I desired to experience volumes. And I would be electrical to meet an American.” [1, 27]

Jonathan Safran Foer creates a discourse of the meeting-knowledge of “the Other” by representatives of two different cultures in conditions which are unfamiliar to them. American Jew of Ukrainian descent Jonathan and Ukrainian lad Alex, who are of the same age, become the subjects of international dialogue. Through the cognition of “the Other” they identify and accept their differences, integrating these diversities into identity. The novelist makes his characters equal communicants who are open to the dialogue-knowledge. This dialogue goes through several stages.

The initial stage is “the first impression” about each other. The writer demonstrates the way stereotypical thinking functions in different cultures, as well as how public images “organize the space of public opinion on a global scale” [7, 349]. Young men seem to be set to confirm their stereotypes of “the Other”. A young American perceives Ukraine as a somewhat wild and exotic country in which “stealing is <…> a thing that occurs very repeatedly to people on the train from Ukraine.” [1, 23] In his turn, Alex reckons that Jewish people have “shit between their brains” [1, 3], because that is how his father and grandfather describe them. Nevertheless, Alex’s expectations do not come true. When Alex first saw Jonathan at the train station in Lutsk he remarked that the foreigner looked neither like an American, nor like a Jew: “He did not appear like either the Americans I had witnessed in magazines, with yellow hairs and muscles, or the Jews from history books, with no hairs and prominent bones. He was wearing nor blue jeans nor the uniform. In truth, he did not look like anything special at all. I was underwhelmed to the maximum.” [1, 32]

The second stage of the dialogue-knowledge is debunking of “authenticity” of the stereotype. It can be primarily traced in the change of Alex’s ideological paradigm. It should be noted that self-identification of the characters starts from the moment when they realize their interdependence in this intercultural dialogue, when “Me” is perceived from the perspective of “You”. Alex is interesting to Jonathan because he is the bearer of the culture to which belonged Jonathan’s grandfather Safran. The American realizes that he could also be a member of that culture if not for war. At the same time Jonathan is the representative of American culture, which young Alex wishes to belong to: “I desired to show him that I too could be an American”. [1, 28]

From the very beginning Alex tries to follow his stereotypes about Americans: in the way of thinking, appearance, and behaviour. The young man believes that Americans spend all their time in bars and nightclubs with girls. For this reason, the character comes up with different names for himself that would create his desirable self-image: “Baby”, “All Night”, “Currency” [1, 1]. In his novel about Trachimbrod Alex introduces Jonathan as “the hero”, thus dividing all personages of the work into the hero and the rest. He classifies himself and his grandfather to the second category. Thus, subconsciously Alex chooses to be inferior. Another proof of this idea is constant Alex’s desire to feel Jonathan’s protection. Alex seeks to receive his friend’s approval, which is extremely important to him: “Please be truthful, but also please be benevolent, please” [1, 26]. Alex is even willing to change his own version of the story: “I apologize for the last line, about how you are a very spoiled Jew. It has been changed”. [1, 24] On the one hand, the need for protection and readiness to obey “the Other” may be perceived as a sign of inferiority ‒ a feature that is considered typical of Ukrainian people. On the other hand, it can be regarded as a desire to learn, to become better.

It is worth noting that Alex is a constantly evolving character. His identification with “the Other” and getting to know Jonathan better dispel false stereotypes of the Ukrainian about Americans. It also helps Alex not to be afraid to admit his true “self”: “I did not go to a famous nightclub, of course <…> because I do not love famous nightclubs. They make me feel very cheerless and abandoned.” [1, 215] The dialogue with “the Other” promotes self-identification of the character. It expands the boundaries of his perception not only of the present but also of the past, catalyzing the development of his personality.

Accordingly, the horizon of the reader’s expectations expands as well, because there appears different Alex – a serious, thoughtful, and responsible young man. This turn in the image of the personage is brightly demonstrated by the dialogue between Alex and Jonathan about the events of World War II: “It surprises me that no one saved her family,” I said. “It shouldn’t be surprising. The Ukrainians, back then, were terrible to the Jews. They were almost as bad as the Nazis. It was a different world. <…> “This is not true.” “It is.” “I cannot believe what you are saying.” “Look it up in the history books.” “It does not say this in the history books.” “Well, that’s the way it was. Ukrainians were known for being terrible to the Jews. So were the Poles. Listen, I don’t mean to offend you. It’s got nothing to do with you. We’re talking about fifty years ago.” “I think you are mistaken,” I told the hero. “I don’t know what to say.” “Say that you are mistaken.” “I can’t.” “You must.” [1, 62] The words “You must” which were said by Alex indicate his desire to be justified in the eyes of “the Other”, Jonathan. The personage really does not have any idea of how Ukrainian people treated Jews at that time. His encounter with Jonathan and their common quest of the past open a completely different side of the history of Ukrainian land to Alex. This new knowledge causes ideological fracture in his mind, the character begins to see himself and “the Other” in the cultural and historical context. The change of mind also manifests itself in the changing speech of the personage. Thoughts are expressed sequentially, and there are less inappropriate words in Alex’s narrative.

Personality of Alex undergoes huge changes in the novel, since the character is on the path of self-identification. He learns to make his own decisions and take responsibility for them. Alex kicks his alcoholic father out of the house and becomes the only hope and support for the family. Transformation of a dreamy boy into a conscious man ends up when the hero realizes that he should live his life in Ukraine, but not in the United States: “That is a dream that I have woken up from. I will never see America, and neither will Little Igor, and I understand that now.” [1, 241] Having learned the truth about the past of his grandfather and the whole Ukrainian nation, Alex accepts such a historical and identificational heritage in its entirety. It is proved by the fact that in his letters to Jonathan he, as Alex Perchov and a Ukrainian, begs forgiveness for what his grandfather had done and for the mistakes of previous generations.

Thus, the development of image of Alex takes place in the process of his interaction with the representative of another culture. Following Mikhail Bakhtin, it is possible to assume that in such a way the writer expresses the basic philosophical intention of the novel ‒ finding of oneself takes place in identifications with “the Other”.

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**Анотація**

Стаття присвячена дослідженню проблеми національної самоідентифікації українців через співставлення двох культур у романі Джонатана Сафрана Фоера «Все ясно». Важливу концептуальну роль у розкритті питання самоідентичності відіграє поняття «Іншого», впроваджене Михайлом Бахтіним. У даному романі досліджувана проблема розкрита через героя-українця, який, прагнучи самореалізації, вийшов на шлях самопізнання, замислюючись над тим, хто «Я» такий і у яких «Я» стосунках з «Іншим». Очима “Іншого” письменник показав, як світ бачить українців і як українці бачать себе та інших. Однак, створюючи образ українця, автор відійшов від моделі стереотипної репрезентації «Іншого», генеруючи ідею необхідності його пізнання. Образ Алекса в романі американського письменника відображає еволюцію, розвиток особистості героя, який проходить шлях особистісної і національної самоідентифікації в діалозі з «Іншим», змінюючи свою світоглядну парадигму. Присутність «Іншого» в досліджуваному творі створила умови для діалогу різних національних культур, у якому через пізнання і розвінчання стереотипних уявлень народів один про одного стала можливою українська самоідентифікація героя.

***Ключові слова:*** ідентичність, національна самоідентифікація, діалог, пізнання, «Інший».

**Summary**

The article investigates the problem of Ukrainian national identity by comparing the two cultures in the novel by Jonathan Safran Foer “Everything Is Illuminated”. An important conceptual role in revealing the question of identity is represented by a notion of “the Other”, which was introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin. The problem under study is disclosed in the novel through the Ukrainian character who seeks self-realization and gets on the path of self-cognition, posing a question of who am “I” and the relationship between “Me” and “the Other”. The writer deliberately created a discourse of the meeting-knowledge of “the Other” by representatives of two different cultures in conditions which are unfamiliar to them. Through the eyes of “the Other” the writer shows how the world sees Ukrainians and how Ukrainians see themselves and others.

However, crafting the image of a Ukrainian, the author withdrew from the model of stereotyped representation of “the Other”, generating the idea of ​​the necessity of cognition. Along with the change in the standard idea of Americans, Ukrainian Alex no longer desires to follow their behaviour, appearance and thinking. Instead, there appears real Alex – a curious, thoughtful young man who is on the path of self-cognition. Thus, the substitution of traditional values and notions for the instrumental-individualistic global morality of today has prevented the full development of the personality of the protagonist and his self-identification until the moment of his meeting with “the Other”.

The image of Alex in the novel by the American writer reflects the evolution and development of the character’s personality, who undergoes personal and national identification in the dialogue with “the Other”, and thus changes his ideological paradigm. The author puts forward the concept of realizing human needs in preserving one’s identity in front of the global threat of mental, cultural and national depersonalization.

The presence of “the Other” in the work under consideration has created conditions for the dialogue between different national cultures, in which Ukrainian self-identification of the character became possible through cognition and debunking stereotypes of peoples about each other.

***Keywords:*** identity, national self-identification, dialogue, cognition, “the Other”.