

The mythologization of the Celtic Tiger in the creative work of Anne Enright (by the example of the historical novel “The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch”)

By

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of the novel “The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch” (2002) written by the modern Irish English-speaking writer Anne Enright (b. 1962). The long process of assimilation of the national worldview with an alien English had irreversible consequences for the Irish society, in particular its culture, literature, because of which there was a rethinking of ethnic and national stereotypes, symbols and images associated with everyday life, cultural traditions of the Irish. Due to the fact neomythologism or secondary mythologism respond to the requests of a certain society in a certain period to take into account definite realities, myths gradually have become heterogeneous and multidirectional. Historical events, the status of a famous person could be mythologized, i.e. freely interpreted, and this further contributed to the polarization of the image, respectively. The novelty of the study lies in the fact that Anne Enright has provided an alternative interpretation of the Celtic Tiger period and its consequences concerning the Irish society through the retrospection. In the work the authorial position of Enright on relevant issues, acute for the modern society, is analyzed. The paper also reveals the ways to represent the image of the woman-immigrant Eliza Lynch, through which the problems of racial and ethnic identity, raised in the novel, and conflicts, occurring on this ground, are revealed. Specific techniques introduced by the writer contribute to the creation of another image of E. Lynch in the national (Irish) worldview.

Keywords: Irish literature; Anne Enright; novel; Celtic Tiger; mythologization.

Introduction

Internal changes in the Irish society, due to economic-political and social upheavals that occurred in the end of the XXth and the beginning of the XXIth century, reflected in the creative works of modern Irish English-speaking writers as John Banville (b. 1945), Emma Donoghue (b. 1969), Colm Tóibín (b. 1955), Sally Rooney (b. 1991), etc.

The name of Anne Enright (b. in 1962) still little known to Russian readers. Meanwhile, she created several works that left a noticeable mark not only in the history of the Irish literature, but also European and world literature in general. The creative work of the writer has not received the detailed study in Russian literary criticism: it is not thoroughly studied by foreign researchers as well. A few reviews, comments and articles presented by M. Kennedy, J. Shumaker, P. Coughlan and several other researchers are devoted to the analysis of the artistic originality of A. Enright's works, which are noticeable for the history of the Irish literature. The issues of the development of society in today's conditions – these deeply relevant and acute problems – are embodied on the pages of her books. Thus, one the main themes in the Irish literature dealing with the interpretation of the Celtic Tiger period takes on a special significance while the creative work of A. Enright is considered.

Despite the numerous studies in different spheres (mostly social, economic and

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political), this problem, first of all in dynamics of its literary interpretation, is not represented widely and deeply. According to number of studies, the Celtic Tiger period is believed to be mainly positive factor influencing the Irish society's life. However, modern Irish English-speaking writers, namely A. Enright doubt that statement and suggest another or alternative view on this issue. The authorities are making efforts to popularize only the positive effects of the Celtic Tiger, deliberately not affecting the negative, for example, the financial crisis, decline in wages, increase in housing prices and unemployment, whereas A. Enright reflects on these topical unresolved conflicts in her works. References, arguments about the Celtic Tiger and the postceltic period are accompanied by the motive of anguish, which expresses the inability to return to the cultural traditions of the past and preserve them, preventing the assimilation of the national Irish worldview from an alien English. Mythologization of socio-cultural values of the past and modern realities of the writer Anne Enright becomes innovative.

The objective of this work is to define the specific features of the mythologization experience of the Celtic Tiger period in the historical novel "The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch" (2002).

Chronological framework of this research covers the end of the XXth and the beginning of the XXIth century, the period that due to the clash of foreign and national traditions, desire for renewal, on the one hand, and the desire to preserve centuries-old values, on the other, is of scientific interest. The problem of center and periphery in the modern global literary space still causes numerous discussions. Since we are dealing with the issue of the Celtic Tiger period and its consequences, we are to mention that it should be studied with regard to the issue of Irish identity, the hyphenated or Irish-English (Shumaker, 2005).

Due to the fact that the Irish literature has long remained in the shadow of English verbal art, it was perceived as literature that is English, and only with the independence associated with the concept of Irishness the problem of national identity loss has become extremely relevant in the modern Irish and global literary space.

The author A. Enright tries to represent the modern Irish in the image of Eliza Lynch, being both Irish and Paraguayan (mythologization of the hyphenated or Irish-English identity issue). Hence, the heroine is an allegory to the modern Irish society that hardly able to feel fully Irish but alien. Despite events in the novel take place in Paraguay, they awaken reminiscences of the Celtic Tiger period with its exaggerated belief and hope for better future not considering the real conditions that the society lives in. Additionally, Eliza Lynch is believed to be an allegory to the issue of migrants that concerns the Irish people in the postceltic period. Many reforms which were introduced to ease the life of immigrants (that moved to Ireland due to the economic progress and possibilities, respectively) were claimed to be absurd and shallow. Thus, analyzing the image of the immigrant Eliza Lynch we could understand the tendencies of the Irish society's development.

It is also important to add that the ethno-national mentality of the Irish is reflected in a certain contradictive way in the works of modern Irish English-speaking writers, so the appeal to the detailed study on a specific literary material contribute to a deeper understanding of the problems of Irish society. This explains the relevance of our research.

The main goal of this work is to trace specific ways of interpretation of the heroine's image in the novel "The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch". It would be wise to mention that the aim of our study is identified by several specific tasks. Firstly, to analyze the historical novel in detail. Secondly, to define different ways of interpretation of the heroine. Thirdly, to systemize all information and draw conclusions.

The theoretical and practical significance of the dissertation lies in the fact that the statements and conclusions can be used in further study of the literary output of Anne Enright in particular and in general issues of the current trends in the development of Irish literature as well.

Literary Review

Researcher M. Kennedy in the article "Freeing The Smothered (M)other: The Refocalisation of the Reluctant Mother in Modern Irish Society as Evinced Through the Works of Anne Enright" examines in detail the political and socio-cultural factors that influenced the formation in the consciousness of modern Irish society of the image of a mother showing contradictory or ambivalent feelings towards children (Kennedy, 2013). The research material is two works by the A. Enright, namely the novel "The Gathering" (2007) and the essay "Making babies: Stumbling into Motherhood" (2004). The traditional image of a mother, a woman defender and keeper of the hearth, and the contradictory image introduced by Enright are strikingly different from each other, one seems to be the antipode of the other. If the tendency to destroy and deny traditional images of world literature, in particular the image of the mother, was found in English and American literatures already at the end of the XX century and is a consequence of the spread of postmodernism concepts, then in Irish literature this trend has not been so strongly and deeply consolidated. In the article, M. Kennedy reflects on the status of women in past and present realities, focusing more on the psychological aspect of the problem of the emergence of ambivalent feelings

In the article "Uncanny Doubles: The Fiction of Anne Enright", researcher J. Shumaker draws parallels between the story "The Portable Virgin" and the novel "What Are You Like?" (Shumaker, 115). The main theme in the works is the theme of memory space, which is relevant for the European and world literature of the XX century. For Ireland, this problem becomes especially relevant during the period of decolonization in the emerging intercultural dialogue of the countries. The importance of preserving the national cultural heritage as the embodiment of the value of tradition, historical memory in general in modern conditions determine the range of dominant problems in the works of many Irish writers, including A. Enright. Researcher P. Coughlan examines the right of women to artistic creativity which has been discussed and always criticized. With the development of European civilization, such discussions escalated and subsided depending on political, socio-cultural factors in a particular country. Undoubtedly, in the development of women's literature it is necessary to consider the role assigned to the feminist movement. In Ireland, for a long time (until the second half of the XX century inclusive), the image of an ideal mother woman was cultivated, whose rights and duties were limited to running a household and taking care of her husband and children. Similar articles in the constitution were supported by the church with its Catholic worldview, in which a woman evoked a direct association with the image of the Holy Virgin Mary. Feminist critics have defined this forced idealization of a woman with the restriction of her sphere of activity and interests as discriminatory, since she is represented as morally weak, second-rate.

Methodology

The methodological framework of the study is based on the comparative-historical method that allows to trace changes in the Irish society and culture that influenced the creative work of modern Irish writers.

Also, we have used the technique of a complex analysis while considering the modern Irish historical novel, identifying the process of the mythologization of the “Celtic Tiger period”, its consequences, respectively.

The following works laid fundamentals of our study:

1. Cahalan James M. (1988). *The Irish Novel. A Critical History*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd.
2. Cahill S. (2008). “A Greedy Girl” and “A National Thing”: Gender and History in Anne Enright’s *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*. *Irish Literature: Feminist Perspectives*.
3. Connolly P. (1982). *The Literature and the Changing Ireland*. Bucks: Colin Smythe.
4. Smyth J. (1961). *The Novel and the Nation*. London: Pluto Press.

Results

In the analyzed novel the author A. Enright traces the connection of events with the period of the Celtic Tiger, as well as the situation that followed in Ireland at the turn of the century. All these problems concerning the Paraguayan reality are undoubtedly acute for the modern Irish society in the beginning of the XXI century. The images of the present were localized in the past and deliberately transferred to another area, the Paraguayan lands. Their dissimilarity to the national (Irish) modernity, realities were obviously underlined by their temporal and spatial distance in the novel. Thus, the modern postceltic realities are mythologized by A. Enright. All the questions raised in the novel are connected and interpreted mostly through the image of Eliza, in whose monologues the position of the author herself could be highlighted.

The personality of the real historical figure, Eliza Lynch, who had a huge impact on the worldview of the Paraguayan nation, is characterized by researchers mainly in a negative light, one-sided, and this trend continues to this day, which seems to make her responsible for all the cruelty, despotism of Francisco Lopez. Anne Enright presented her own interpretation of this image, identifying the national (Irish) character in the context of Paraguayan history. Thus, she contrasted the existing interpretation of the personality of Eliza Lynch in the history with her new image, which is multifaceted and at the same time contradictory. It is important to note here that a peculiar experience of mythologizing a well-known (for Ireland) historical figure was carried out, respectively. The woman is deliberately portrayed by A. Enright, on the one hand, as a stranger, an immigrant, whose ethnic, racial identity is seen as oppositional to Paraguayan and therefore threatening to her, on the other – deified, highly revered, owed and shown in the novel as an inaccessible kind of idol to Paraguayans. Thus, Dr. Stewart and others close to F. Lopez note the sexual attractiveness of the heroine, her emancipation, saying that “There was nothing like a good root around the Lopez ladies to remind Stewart of Eliza Lynch who had a different order of flesh from the

rest of us” (Enright, 2003).

Doctor Stewart, reflecting on this question further uses the words root, i.e. origin, and flesh – body, which seems to hint at the absence of the Paraguayan roots and thus separates Eliza in ethnic terms. Meanwhile she is still considered as a threat because the woman can destabilize, blur the concept of nationality (in this case, Paraguayan), simultaneously coexisting with the Irish, European one, as well as with nationalities with a colonial system (Cahill, 2008).

It should be emphasized that this contributes to the image of Elisa as an immigrant who poses a threat to the stability of the national society, the Paraguayan land, as she makes every effort to legitimize the status of her sons (that are humiliated by the word bastards), which also threatens the racial stability of Paraguayans. Consequently, the word root, introduced by Enright in the description of the heroine, isolates Eliza from the local society and declares her freedom and dangerous power, as well. Taking into account her origin (she is a migrant from Ireland), the woman cannot and will not be able to belong to the Paraguayan land (in the novel it's emphasized by the repeated phrase “Eliza cannot be rooted”). She is depicted as wild and independent, and for this reason it is impossible to control her, to do anything, treating as a personal plot of land that would be obviously more familiar to every Paraguayan concerning the common gender hierarchy issue. A woman is perceived by the local population, mainly métis (descendants of the interracial marriages), as well as wealthy class, not only as a refugee, i.e. the scum, the dirt under my feet; in the original monologues and dialogues, Paraguayans do not consider it necessary to use the relevant euphemisms, so Eliza's name gradually becomes synonymous to the turd (Enright, 2003), the exact translation of which is excrement and the phrase the Irish whore (Ibid.) enriches the description of a woman, who copulates with many men and, as residents note in conversations accompanied by rude male laughter, suffers from sexual attraction to animals. This choice of linguistic, stylistic means intensifying the negative connotation, also slang phrases, characteristic of male institutions, are aimed at depicting the heroine as an insignificant woman who came only with one goal – to satisfy everyone sexually, while gradually achieving her position in a society that is extremely unfriendly to her and is unable to accept her on equal terms with the local population. Accordingly, the episodes in which the heroine is depicted as an immigrant, a dirty migrant, are replete with varieties of obscene vocabulary, which seems to transport the reader to the table with all the métis talking about Eliza Lynch, the lover of Francisco Lopez. The image of Eliza is mystified as it is interpreted as the following: “It was around this time that the story went about that Eliza ate the flesh of the dead. She said it tasted just like pork, but gamier – like the truffle-hunting boars you get in the Auvergne. The story was universally believed – it was the truffles that did it. You could not invent a derail like the truffles” (Enright, 2003). The ironical tone is believed to belong to the author Anne Enright.

In the paper, along with the extremely negative characterization of the image of the heroine, somewhat exaggerated, there is also a positive one, expressed in a sense of admiration, reverence and even a kind of deification of the woman from the lower classes, about whom at the same time there are so many unpleasant rumors. The same people say the following about her: “Eliza Lynch was Paraguay. She had produced, for the honor of the country, three living sons” (Enright, 2003). The children of the powerful commander-in-chief Francisco Lopez, paradoxically, have previously been repeatedly pejoratively called bastards (of course, secretly from him), given the origin and reputation of their mother, his beloved, as well as their extramarital relationships. Such a contradictory attitude of the people towards Eliza and her

children, extremely negative and at the same time positive, makes this female image multifaceted.

A reverence close to the deification of Eliza, which contributes to her isolation from the local people, can also be revealed in the episode in which Dr. Stewart presents and describes in detail the war, in particular its devastating consequences, in the form of a painting on canvas created by an unknown artist. So full of military actions, the picture described by the doctor has neither an author, nor a name, it is like hundreds of other paintings. Of the heroine, Stewart says: “She's out of the picture. Her portrait would be hung on the opposite wall, endlessly looking. Trying to discover where it all went wrong” (Enright, 2003). The woman is simultaneously outside the image and is the one for whom everyone fought, she is both an Angel of Mercy and an Angel of Death (Ibid). The image of Eliza Lynch is polarized, as the heroine personifies a certain deity for the Paraguayans in the work, which, of course, distances her from the one-dimensional image of the Irish Lady Macbeth, a common interpretation of a real historical figure in the few existing sources.

It should be noted that Anne Enright's novel deliberately repeats the words-antonyms black and white (as well as repeated phrases with these words), which creates a kind of subtext, which is based on a racial conflict. In the episode in which Eliza Lynch accompanies Francisco Lopez to the battlefield, this is most pronounced. The white ideal Eliza (English whiteness), like the queen of Paraguay, is used as a contrast to all the terrible military reality, mud (Paraguayan mud), and also in a broad sense – to the dark-skinned Paraguayan mestizo soldiers; in the novel we find the following description: “...her dress, bouncing on its hoops, just clear of the mud, and her parasol glowing like a living membrane in the sun...” (Enright, 2003). Stewart reflects on Eliza Lynch, marveling at how she was always “amazingly mud-free” adding that “it lifted their hearts (Lopez’s company and soldiers) to see her looking so fine” (Ibid.). Undoubtedly, all this creates the image of the white Queen Eliza Lynch, whose maternal care and support helped not only Francisco and the children, but also all the Paraguayan warriors to protect their lands, families. Thus, the key image is presented in the novel “The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch” both as a negative and as a positive heroine. On the one hand, threatening the stability of society force Eliza is associated with the dark nature of a woman-stranger who has the desire to be equally treated being the mother of three F. Lopez’s sons (for this reason the heroine is shown as the enemy of all Paraguayan land), on the other – she appears to readers as the white Queen, whose power contributed to the rise of the national spirit of the Paraguayan people during the war, which contradicts the first interpretation of her personality, as noted by researcher R. Rogers (Rogers, 2014).

The novel under consideration contains a gender conflict, which is expressed in the fact that Eliza Lynch, a migrant woman with an unenviable reputation, informally occupies a dominant position in politics, has an influence on society as a whole, eclipsing Francisco himself, a powerful ruler and commander-in-chief, which was unacceptable for the patriarchal system of values operating in Paraguay at that time. Cross-cutting oppositions in the work are introduced by the writer implicitly, through certain linguistic means, in particular words-antonyms, for example, the upper class and the lower class, black/dark and white, national and foreign, characterizing Eliza and mestizos. Enright's artfully veiled racial and gender conflicts in the novel do not lose their relevance to this day, they are a kind of challenge for Irish society in the end of the XXI century with its extremely biased attitude towards immigrants, the

deliberate division of people at the legislative level into ours and others (it would be wise to underline that many laws regarding newcomers were called absurd by researchers) (Moloney, 2003).

Discussion and Conclusion

The paper presents the analysis of the work, in which the writer deliberately placed the national context in the Paraguayan reality of the XIXth century, thereby through retrospection presenting the realities in which the modern Irish society lives at the turn of the centuries. The issues of the postceltic period concerning race, nationality, status of a person (especially a migrant) raised in the novel are connected and interpreted through the contradictory female image of a real historical person, the Irish Eliza Lynch (1835-1886). The plot of the novel is built around the theme of war, the motives of conquest, fiction placed within the depicted era and does not contradict the historical truth. The author's aloofness in the work helps to shift the point of view of historical events, as they are recreated from the words of Eliza Lynch and Doctor Stewart, the main narrators in the novel. Consequently, the description of the same events acquires a somewhat subjective character, which in turn contributes to the emergence of polar views on postceltic realities at the turn of the centuries, respectively.

The image of E. Lynch, which had previously been interpreted unilaterally and in a purely negative light, is mythologized by Anne Enright and acquires a new reading. The woman is perceived both as the threat to racial and ethnic stability, i.e. a migrant white woman with an unenviable reputation, the mother of illegitimate sons, and at the same as the Queen of the Paraguayan land, who gave heirs to the Paraguayan ruler Francisco Lopez. She is a representative of two nationalities (both Irish and Paraguayan), which in turn refers to the question of hyphenated nationality (English and Irish), which concerns the modern Irish society at the turn of the XXth and XXIth centuries. Even though the image of the heroine is revealed through retrospection against the background of the Paraguayan war, it is a kind of allusion to the present generation, which grew up in the conditions of the formed intercultural dialogue between Great Britain and Ireland. Thus, we can say that the image of Eliza, an ethnic Irish woman who has assimilated with the Paraguayan society, is still relevant to this day.

Additionally, the polarity that characterizes the image of Eliza Lynch is particularly relevant when considering the attitude of the modern Irish society towards immigrants in general. As we noted earlier, the recently enacted immigration laws have been called absurd by many researchers because of the presence of the discriminative direction in them. The article is of interest to researchers, literary scholars for further study of the creative work of Anne Enright, in particular, as well as development trends of the modern Irish literature.

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