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DEATH AS AN EXISTENTIAL CATEGORY IN FEDOR TYUTCHEV'S POEMS AND LETTERS

Abstract. The article discusses the topic of death in the poems and letters of Fedor Tyutchev in the light of the theories of religious existentialism by Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Jaspers. The author of the article claims that Tyutchev was immersed in a borderline state caused by guilt and despair, which became the basis for his gloomy reflections on death. Realizing that he is a sinner, a religious person constantly returns to thoughts about his guilt before God. In Jaspers' existential theories, guilt is closely associated with death. Jaspers puts the concept of existence, introduced by Kierkegaard, into the basis of his theory with the help of the borderline situation of guilt and death. In Kierkegaard's theorizing, death is understood as a way of comprehending paradoxes that are insoluble for the human mind. The author of the article offers an interpretation and shows the way out of the crisis situation in which the Russian poet was, based on the views of Kierkegaard, who saw salvation from despair in Divine faith. It is claimed that Tyutchev shared the path proposed by Kierkegaard. This is clearly seen in his poems and letters, where the poet constantly turns to religious motives, which makes it possible to verify the sincerity of his faith in God.

Keywords: existentialism; Russian literature; theory of literature; Tyutchev; Kierkegaard; Jaspers.

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СМЕРТЬ КАК ЭКЗИСТЕНЦИАЛЬНАЯ КАТЕГОРИЯ В СТИХАХ И ПИСЬМАХ ФЕДОРА ТЮТЧЕВА

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается тема смерти в стихах и письмах Федора Тютчева в свете теорий религиозного экзистенциализма Сёрена Кьеркегора и Карла Ясперса. Автор статьи утверждает, что Тютчев был погружен в пограничное состояние, вызванное чувством вины и отчаяния, что и стало основанием его мрачных размышлений о смерти. Понимая, что является грешником, религиозный человек постоянно возвращается к мыслям о своей виновности перед Богом. В экзистенциальных теориях Ясперса вина тесно сопряжена со смертью. Ясперс помещает в основу своей теории понятие экзистенции, введенное Кьеркегором, с помощью пограничной ситуации вины и смерти. В теоретизированиях Кьеркегора смерть осмысливается в качестве способа постижения парадоксов, неразрешимых для человеческого разума. Автор статьи, основываясь на воззрениях Кьеркегора, видевшего спасение от отчаяния в Божественной вере, предлагает интерпретацию и показывает путь выхода из кризисной ситуации, в которой находился русский поэт. Утверждается, что Тютчев разделял путь, предложенный Кьеркегором. Это отчетливо видно в его стихах и письмах, где поэт постоянно обращается к религиозным мотивам, что дает возможность убедиться в искренности его веры в Бога.

Ключевые слова: экзистенциализм; русская литература; теория литературы; Тютчев; Кьеркегор; Ясперс.

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Introduction – death in the Existential Philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard

From the point of view of existential philosophy, death is not a universal phenomenon, since every person is aware of his death in a unique way. The founder of existentialism, Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), argues that death cannot be considered an objective phenomenon, since it cannot be rationally explained. According to Kierkegaard, death is an irrational and subjective experience. Kierkegaard argues that “for a Christian, death is not the end of everything, and not a simple episode in the only reality, which is eternal life” [3, p. 27]. Death is an integral part of existence. It is possible to consider death as the greatest event in the existence of a person, which releases the possibilities hidden in him up to this moment. According to Kierkegaard, man, being mortal, is able to establish a personal connection with the eternal God only through faith.

Guilt as the cause of thoughts about death in the theories of Karl Jaspers and Hans-Georg Gadamer

Fedor Tyutchev (1803–1873) was a very passionate and amorous man. In addition to the most scandalous connection with Elena Denisieva (1826–1864), there are other rumors about his love stories. A love affair outside of marriage in the Christian tradition is considered a sin of adultery. And the presence of an adulterer's spouse is an aggravating circumstance, since, firstly, he offends God doubly, not only committing the sin of adultery, but also desecrating the union sanctified by Him, and secondly, he also hurts a loved one. Tyutchev, being a religious man, of course, was aware of this and, for sure, was tormented by remorse. This was supposed to plunge the poet into a state of existential schism, which is a kind of borderline situation, about which Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) wrote: “A person's spiritual situation arises only where he feels himself in borderline situations. There he remains as

himself in existence, when it does not close, but all the time breaks up again into antinomies” [8, p. 322].

Realizing his sinfulness, a religious person inevitably feels a sense of guilt before God. And in Jaspers' theories, guilt and death are inextricably linked. Jaspers argues that “not only death, but also fatal illness, suffering, guilt, struggle also put the individual in a borderline situation, making it inevitable to realize his own finiteness, pulling him out of the world of everyday life, whose worries, passions and sorrows now reveal their insignificance” [8, p. 18]. Analyzing Jaspers' theories, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) comes to the conclusion that among the many borderline situations, “the situation of death is highlighted in Jaspers himself, along with the situation of guilt. In the way a person behaves when he is guilty, moreover, when he finds himself face to face with his guilt, something comes out, reveals – existit” [2, p. 21]. That is, it is through the borderline situation of guilt and death that Jaspers lays the foundation of his theory of the category of existence introduced by Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard himself perceives death as a perspective for studying the antinomies of being, insoluble with the help of reason, for which the contact of mortal man with the eternal God is unthinkable. According to Kierkegaard, the birth of existence occurs at the antinomic moment of contact of mortal individuals with the infinite God. Then both the sin of man and the infinite love of God are activated. Faith in this phenomenon determines the formation of human existence, blessed by God. At the same time, a person is aware of his sinfulness and limitations. This is necessary to solve problems with existing social practices, including the fight against sins and the active practice of love.

The causes of Fedor Tyutchev's feelings of guilt

It is important that the theme of death in Tyutchev's letters to Ernestine is noticeably intensified after 1850, when Tyutchev falls in love with Elena Denisieva. This moment becomes a turning point in the development of Tyutchev's sense of guilt, plunging him into a borderline situation. And after Elena's death, Tyutchev practically stops writing to Ernestine, and the topic of death from letters turns into poetry, which can also be considered as confirmation of our hypothesis. Now

Tyutchev stops openly cheating on his lawful spouse, and the sense of guilt in front of her begins to blunt.

However, the guilt before God for the sin remains. In Orthodoxy, adultery is a grave sin. This sin is never without destruction. Families are being destroyed, peace in the human soul is being destroyed, the joy of life is being destroyed. A person feels guilty in front of loved ones whom he betrays. The Church teaches that not only the soul belongs to God, but the whole person, including his body. Therefore, adultery leads to destructive consequences that affect the entire human existence. Not only the Church as such, but also the body of each individual believer is a temple in which God dwells through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the sin of adultery is opposed to Divine purity and holiness. Tyutchev, being a deeply religious man, was well aware that he was committing a grave sin. That is why the guilt that tormented the poet was so strong.

It is known that Tyutchev did not seek to publish his poems, therefore, he did not write them for people. Rather, in verse he poured out his soul before God, conducting a kind of dialogue with Him through poetry. That is why, after Denisieva's death, the theme of death turns into poetry: now Tyutchev suffers from the realization of his guilt before God and pours out his spiritual torments to Him through poetry. Thus, the frequent reference to the issues of death in Tyutchev's letters addressed to his lawful wife Ernestine, to whom he openly cheated, in our opinion, may have an existential basis.

The theme of death in the letters of Fedor Tyutchev

The peculiarity of the epistolary genre is its intimacy. The author addresses his letter to a single and well-defined person, and not to a wide readership. This makes it possible to be sure that in his letters to his wife Tyutchev was quite sincere and expressed those emotions that really worried his soul. Thus, in a letter dated July 9, 1851, Tyutchev writes: "Nothing will calm the mortal anguish that grips me as soon as I stop seeing you. And yet I know perfectly well that if I succumb to this voice for the sake of a brief relief, I will only aggravate the irresistible power of the disease..." [6, p. 44]. There is an obvious analogy with Kierkegaard's concept of despair, which he considered a sin and a "disease to death". This is despair without opportunities, hopes or op-

tions. "Despair is hopelessness, consisting in the impossibility of even dying" [3, p. 34].

According to Kierkegaard, anxiety is a feeling of probability that a person experiences in relation to all phenomena that are present in reality. Anxiety is not identical to despair, since despair originates in a person's soul because of his own internal contradiction, and the cause of anxiety are factors affecting the personality from the outside world. It is self-contradiction that torments Tyutchev, who with all his soul wants to see Ernestine, but cannot do it, because he realizes that such a meeting will give relief only for a brief moment, followed by even greater suffering and even more painful despair. And Tyutchev obediently accepts his suffering.

Kierkegaard argues that death leads a person to infinite submission, which is the greatest fear and ethical self-contradiction. When a person encounters the extreme point of the moral boundary, he falls into a spiritual antinomy, expressed in absolute submission. When the humble Abraham had to sacrifice Isaac, human morality ceased to prevail over Abraham, so he became absolutely submissive and fell into the highest degree of despair. Such a spiritual situation for a person means the impossibility of continuing existence. Therefore, a person is seized by the desire to die. It would have been better for Abraham to die than to kill his son, whom he found only in old age. In essence, despair determines the ontological unthinkability of the distance that runs from the perishable to the eternal, from the desire for freedom, to the awareness of duty. A person thinks about such problems in the process of self-identification, trying to answer questions about the meaning of life, the existence of God and the identity of himself. Here people tend to do two things: they either turn away from such fundamental problems, or they think only of necessity, falling into pessimism because of their deterministic and fatalistic perspectives.

Dutifully accepting the suffering of separation and realizing the impossibility of changing the current situation on his own, Tyutchev hopes for the protection of God. In a letter dated September 4, 1851, he writes: "My dear kisanka... Every time I see death strike its next blow, the 1000 miles separating us fall like a heavy stone on my heart... May God protect you" [6, p. 103].

Speaking about the funeral of Ekaterina Karamzina in a letter dated September 17, 1851, Tyutchev notes how piety helps the relatives

of the deceased overcome despair and fear: "Their grief is great, although it is softened and, as it were, dominated by a reverent feeling – loftily pious in Lisa, pious in Sophie, but in its own way. They talked about the details of this death so soon, completely devoid of the usual fears, longing, etc. There was so much life around that death almost disappeared, but still, when the feeling of reality returned, poor Liza began to cry and sob again..." [6, p. 107].

Kierkegaard offered man the same way to save himself. Anxiety and despair can lead a person to real freedom – freedom from fear, awareness of the falsity of ultimate goals when they are not accompanied by faith in God: "The only thing that can truly disarm the sophistry of fear is faith, the courage to believe that the very state of fear is a new sin, the courage to fearlessly abandon fear, and only faith is capable of this; faith cannot thereby destroy fear, but itself, being eternally young, gets out of the mortal moment of fear again and again" [4, p. 143]. The final point in Kierkegaard's discussion of death, despair, and freedom is faith. When a person gains faith, he begins to perceive the world around him through a spiritual dialogue with God. This helps the individual to overcome his sinfulness, limitation and death. Man comes to understand that all being and his own existence is the result of Divine creation, that is, everything is created by the creative forces of God.

Although Tyutchev himself feels that salvation from fear and anxiety should be sought in faith, gloomy thoughts and fears do not leave him. In a letter dated October 16/28, 1853 Tyutchev writes: "You see, pussy, there are people who are haunted by the thought of death, but I am haunted, as a threat of redemption, by the fear of losing you..." [6, p. 144] From July 23, 1856: "I am like a man who knows in advance what kind of death is predetermined for him, and as a result, always and in all everyone sees the harbingers of the event, which he should be afraid of" [6, p. 246].

Kierkegaard was able to find an explanation for such anxieties and offer a way to escape from them. The Danish thinker came to the conclusion about the existence of a paradox in which a person is both reality, being, possibility, and non-existence. This can be compared to an amazing process when a magical metamorphosis occurs with an ugly caterpillar and it turns into a beautiful butterfly in an incomprehensible way. In the same way, a person's existence is formed from the possibilities given to him, after which the personality enters reality. At the same

time, the ontological embodiment of reality is an additional eventuality for creation. The existence of a person at any moment of his life is accompanied by anxiety, since diverse eventualities are not deterministic, which leads to uncertain expectations. For Kierkegaard, death is an opportunity for the constant creation of an existential individual. To be more precise, there is no single predestination, where the grounds and results of existence are prescribed. On the contrary, any point in time presupposes various options for action, and therefore the prospect of creation. Death openly carries the unknown, latently present at any point in time, and this is a process in which a person feels the meaning of self-identification and existence, a process where it is constantly reflected and reproduced.

In a letter dated June 15/27, 1859 Tyutchev exclaims: "Ah, loneliness is my death..." [6, p. 300] The category of "loneliness" as an existential one is unequivocally present in the Western European philosophy of the twentieth century. However, some researchers also attribute it to Kierkegaard's existential philosophy, endowing loneliness with religious content. So, Natalia Bedritskaya believes that "for Kierkegaard, the high value of solitude, solitude lies in the fact that it leads to God. But also in another way: the path to God is always the path of the lonely" [1, p. 19]. However, in this letter, Tyutchev does not consider loneliness as a path to God, except as such a path to death from the torments caused by loneliness. For Tyutchev, loneliness is a painful feeling. Perhaps, in solitude, Tyutchev felt the state of existential schism more acutely, being left alone with his sense of guilt, which plunged the poet not only into the spiritual disease of despair, but also into physical pain...

The transition of the theme of death into the poems of Fedor Tyutchev

Every Tyutchev biographer considers it necessary to inform about the tragic love that unexpectedly came to the poet in adulthood. There are good reasons for this: a powerful feeling, regarded by the poet's entourage as shocking, "lawless", became a source of inspiration. It brought to life the famous poetic cycle, one of the peaks of the Russian artistic word. In the center of the figurative system of the works is a couple gripped by painful love-suffering.

As for the theme of death in Tyutchev's poems, it becomes most acute, starting with the poem "*All day she lay in oblivion*" (1864), which the poet wrote during Denisieva's death throes: "All day she lay in oblivion, / And shadows covered her whole. / The warm summer rain was pouring – its jets / They sounded merrily on the leaves. / And slowly she came to her senses, / And began to listen to the noise, / And listened for a long time – carried away, / Immersed in conscious thought... / And so, as if talking to herself, / Consciously she said / (I was with her, killed, but alive): / (...) / "Oh, how I loved all this!" / You loved, and like you, to love – / No, no one has yet it worked! / Oh my God!.. and survive it... / And the heart did not break into pieces..." [7, p. 220].

When Tyutchev wrote these lines, Denisieva was near death due to aggravated tuberculosis. By genre, this is a farewell love lyric, by size – iambic with a cross rhyme, 4 stanzas, the final one comes after the sharpening, like an afterword, almost like an epitaph. The last days of Elena Denisieva fell on July-August 1864. Before Tyutchev's eyes, not only his beloved woman was dying, but also the mother of his children, the youngest of whom was barely 3 months old. This child died a year later. The poet spent a lot of time at the bedside of his beloved. A cycle of poems dedicated to her death has been preserved, where documentary details are especially poignant.

In this poem, Tyutchev begins with a description of one of those days, showing a vivid contrast of the season, blooming nature and an untimely dying woman. A few exclamations and ellipsis. "Her shadows covered her": a metaphor that has become a reality – death has already approached Denisieva's bed. The inversion in the third line of the first quatrain creates a feeling of the sound of falling drops ("it was raining"). "They sounded funny": heartbroken, the poet still notices the cheerfulness of that terrible day. The second stanza is a slow enumerative gradation of the actions of a person who has almost stepped over the edge of this world. The oblivion is interrupted, and she seems to come back to life. "I listened for a long time": such a simple, familiar sound of rain. "Conscious thought": here is not just admiring, but saying goodbye. "Killed, but alive": an oxymoron. "She spoke": Tyutchev lovingly reproduces the words of a person dear to his heart. This is a sad exclamation with an interjection, a recognition of earthly life in love. In the finale, the author's digression, a restrained sob: "You

loved!” He bows to the depth and nobility of her feelings. Then the author stifles a cry of despair: “Oh, my God!...” This death is so unexpected and difficult, the poet lacks the strength to endure it. “To survive this”: he doubts that it is possible for him to continue further existence. “The heart did not break”: amazed at the endurance of human nature. “To pieces”: in this colloquial word – the abyss of grief. Love is one of the main images of this sad poem...

Time could not heal Tyutchev's emotional wounds, and a year after the tragic death of his beloved woman, the poet writes another sad poem – “*On the eve of the anniversary of August 4, 1864*” (August 3, 1865): “Here I am wandering along the high road / In the quiet light of the fading day, / It's hard for me, my legs freeze... / My dear friend, do you see me? / It's getting darker, darker over the earth – / The last glimmer of the day has flown away... / This is the world where you and I lived, / My angel, do you see me? / Tomorrow is the day of prayer and sorrow, / Tomorrow is the memory of the fateful day... / My angel, wherever the souls are, / My angel, do you see me?” [7, p. 226]. The analyzed text appeared on the eve of the mournful date. The emotional speech addressed to the lyrical heroine confirms that time could not dull the pain of mental suffering tormenting Tyutchev.

At the beginning of the poem, the subject of speech informs about the circumstances of the lyrical situation: he is walking along a country road in the light of the setting sun. To characterize the movement, the verb “wander” is used. A pedestrian walks slowly, making visible efforts – this is the semantics of the lexical unit. Its meaning interacts with the mention of the severity and difficulty of the path. A portrait of the hero appears before the reader – elderly, tired, mentally and physically exhausted.

The first quatrain ends with an appeal to sweetheart, which is repeated in the other two stanzas with some changes. First, the beloved is called a friend, then an angel. The last of the tokens is very informative: it informs about the huge distance between the separated lovers, and also determines the position of the lyrical addressee watching what is happening from above, from the heavenly “blue abyss”. The lyricism, emotionality and melodiousness of the refrain are supported by a pentameter choreographic line – a size almost not found in Tyutchev's works.

The picture of the surrounding world, presented in the second quatrain, loses concreteness. The outlines of the external details disappear in the gathering dusk. The motive of the memory, which develops in the final episode, comes to the fore. The past dictates plans that cover not only the coming day, but also the rest of the hero's life: the lot of the inconsolable lover is sadness, sorrow, indifference to the present. All the thoughts of the unfortunate are filled with pleas to the angelic soul of the lyrical "you". The timid hope of a fleeting meeting is mixed with despair and a bitter realization of the impossibility of former happiness. In fact, this is a description of "illness to death" from Kierkegaard's existential theories.

Conclusions – the way of salvation proposed by Søren Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard suggests a way to overcome the "disease to death", which consists in the synthesis of the finite and the eternal, realized with the help of faith in God. An encounter with death that will not be accompanied by despair is possible only through the integration of the eternal and infinite with the finite human being. A person is able to preserve the harmony of his spirit only if he considers his own death through the prism of faith in the infinite and eternal God. Thanks to faith in God, a person has the opportunity to find the serene happiness of existence, which will not be overshadowed by the prospect of ultimate suffering. Modern studies present the conclusions that Tyutchev is "like Kierkegaard in that he does not renounce God, preserving faith in his existential consciousness" [5, p. 88]. It is safe to say that Tyutchev shared the path proposed by Kierkegaard. This is clearly evident in Tyutchev's poetry, where he constantly turns to religious motives, which makes it possible to verify the sincerity of his faith in God. Perhaps it cannot be said that Tyutchev was able to completely get rid of the diseases of the spirit that tormented him, but, for sure, faith in God eased these torments, brought joy and helped the poet to live a long and fruitful life in creative terms.

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