

FEATURES OF THE RECEPTION OF DOSTOEVSKY'S WORKS IN *THE MASTER OF PETERSBURG* BY J. M. COETZEE

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INTRODUCTION

The Master of Petersburg by J. M. Coetzee obviously belongs to genre of fictional biography, one of the most prevalent genres in contemporary Anglophone literature. Just remember *Chatterton, The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* by P. Ackroyd, *Nothing Like the Sun: A Story of Shakespeare's Love Life*, *Napoleon Symphony: A Novel in Four Movements* by A. Burgess, *The late Mr. Shakespeare* by Robert Nye, *According to Queeney* by Beryl Bainbridge, *Flaubert's Parrot*, *Arthur & George* by J. Barnes etc. First of all, these works are characterized by a combination of factual and fictional, in which the factual can be both documentary and "forged", therefore it is an imitation of a document. This phenomenon has a specific name – mockumentary, a contamination of *mock* and *documentary*. Mockumentary often appears in works about well-known artists and writers as a literary device, which is employed to enhance the credibility of the story. It is closely related to intertextuality, an integral part of contemporary creative writing.

It is unnecessary to prove that any author of fictional biography risks. The risk is doubled if it is a matter of books that do not fit perfectly into this specific genre but are somehow relevant to it or even deconstruct it, as it is often observed in works of postmodern orientation. The risk is tripled when a writer intrudes into an "alien" national mentality and unfolds the socio-historical background of the created biographical situation. And in general, the risk is immense when the author undertakes a task to write about a figure of such enormous scale and such incredible complexity as Fedor Dostoyevsky. This is the case, in fact, with the J.M. Coetzee's novel *The Master of Petersburg*.

A key question posed by almost everyone who ventured to interpret Coetzee's novel is the question of the purpose of writing the work, since it is too unusual, and for some critics and readers the author's approach to create Dostoevsky's image is shocking, especially since the novel is written by the writer who has an extremely high reputation in the contemporary literary world. Below, giving a brief overview of the critical reception of the novel, I will analyze some of the answers to this question, therefore the main purpose of this exploration is to answer it; at the same time, the following caution is important. The depth and sharpness of the author's drafting of numerous interrelated moral, philosophical, social and political problems, the exceptional content density of his works and the remarkable artistic inventiveness obviously make any unambiguous assessments and interpretations impossible.

Related to the main task is such a question as – why Dostoevsky? And one more question – is Coetzee's novel congenial (in a sense) to the author of *The Devils*, as in order to write about him one requires extraordinary intellectual power, creative and psychological courage? It is a priori clear that without trying to achieve such congeniality, no matter how pretentious and presumptuous it may seem, the novel would be doomed. Therefore, the proposed paper is an attempt to provide an interpretation of the above-mentioned questions and problems. One of the efficient ways of realizing such an attempt is to read the novel through the prism of its intertextual sources and components. Another way is to get as close as possible to the text of the novel in order to see the author's program in its multilayer structure.

Thus, the aim of the research is to identify the different aspects of Coetzee's conception of creative genius, keeping in mind that *The Master of Petersburg* is not just a novel about Dostoevsky and Rissia of nineteenth century, but also about a genius artist in general, his ambivalent, unreliable, uncertain essence and extremely complicated relationships with reality.

1. *The Master of Petersburg* in critical reception: a short review

The Master of Petersburg was translated into Russian by Sergei Ilyin in 1999. The analysis of poetic and stylistic features of the translation, in the general ideological and artistic context of the work, causes the opinion, that the interpreter uses the translation strategy of "domestication". Considering the peculiarities of the translator's use of epithets, comparisons, lexical-semantic filling of the text and its intonation-syntactic coloring, it can be concluded that the translator deliberately oriented towards the approximation of the text both to Russian literary speech of the 19th century and to the stylistics of Dostoyevsky. Recognizing the advisability of transfer title of the novel as "Osen' v Peterburge", the option in Ukrainian as "Volodar Peterburga" seems more appropriate.

It is natural, that *The Master of Petersburg* caused a lot of responses among Russian literary critics. Most of them said that Coetzee freely reconstructs the initial moment of the creative history of *The Devils* and on this basis builds an individual myth about Russian writer, too far from the "real" Dostoevsky. These feedbacks were mostly negative, and in part simply contentious. Despite all the reservations made by the authors of the reviews about the writer's undisputed "right" to "his word" about Dostoevsky, the novel's ratings are largely limited to his "incredibility", or to the fact that the work "like any bold experiment, deserves attention"¹. Andrey Stepanov, ironically calling Coetzee "ideal" Nobel laureate, claims that in Russia "the novel had no success", despite the "brilliant translation, and even very brilliant, somehow too much, against the

¹ Волгин И. Из России с любовью? Русский след в западной литературе // Вопросы литературы. 1999. № 1. URL : <http://magazines.russ.ru/inostran/1999/1/volgin.html>. Access date (22/9/2019).

original" (!), and puts forward his version of such "failure": "This novel in Russia had no more chances than in South Africa any "Autumn in Johannesburg" of Russian production, write it though Dostoevsky himself..."². Both of these theses are not supported in the article, especially since in fact several editions of the novel (translated as "Osen' v Peterburge"³) were completely sold out shortly after publication.

It is difficult to disagree with the opinion of Alexander Bezzubtsev-Kondakov that "to think about how close Coetzee's Dostoyevsky is to the real writer is thankless and unnecessary"; but when the author of a generally interesting and in-depth article sets the "most important" in the novel as "to recreate the atmosphere in which Dostoyevsky's characters live, to introduce their characters into the world of "underground people"..."⁴, it is already difficult to agree with such a narrowing of the "super purpose of the novel. This opinion also prompts the debate of the critic that Coetzee "created a typically postmodernistic novel, based on the principle of *memory of the text*"⁵. In this regard, it should be noted that the use of various so-called postmodern techniques (collage and pastiche, exposure of the means, intertextuality, play with reality, texts and the reader etc.) does not make Coetzee a conceptual postmodernist, since he is not "indifferent" to the world and a human. Everything that comes out of his pen is an absolutely serious and responsible word about our time and the eternal problems of human existence. It is imperative to remember such an installation of the writer in order not to fall into his rhetorical condemnation for pessimism, travesty, apology of decentration, flicker of meaning, incompleteness of construction.

Igor Volgin, a well-known researcher of Dostoevsky's life and creative work, has repeatedly mentioned Coetzee's novel, calling it a "talented" book (such an assessment should be considered at least ambiguous. Rather, such an assessment should be at least ambiguous, especially since the retelling of the novel by Volgin is riddled with ironic remarks that over-simplify some, at first glance, "frivolous" episodes of the work, such as "draws love episodes with meticulous neophyte"; "Fyodor Mikhailovich as a decent person politely invites Anna Sergeevna to beget with him a child"; "The painful cohabitation of the future author of *Devils* with Anna Sergeevna <...> is, so to speak, purely official in nature" etc.). To Volgin's thought, "all the pathos of "Osen' v Peterburge" is in the attempt to reproduce circumstances, so that they *could*

² Степанов, Андрей. Дж. М. Кутзее: «идеальный» нобелиат? URL : <http://www.read.in.ua/book196041>. Access date (22/9/2019).

³ Кутзее Дж. М. Осень в Петербурге / пер. с англ. Сергея Ильина. Москва : ЭКСМО, 2016. 288 с.

⁴ Беззубцев-Кондаков Александр. Двусмысленность пустыни. О прозе Джона Максвелла Кутзее [Часть первая]. URL : <http://www.topos.ru/article/6548>. Access date (22/9/2019).

⁵ Ibid., italicized by the author – O.K.

have preceded the appearance of the great novel..."⁶. Undoubtedly, the reproduction of such circumstances was very important for Coetzee, however, it is unlikely that the "pathos" of the novel can be reduced. In addition, the pathos (or irony) of Volgin could be unquestionably supported if the novel belonged to the literature of type "John Doe without a secret" or "John Doe without trousers".

Particularly harsh was the reaction of Pavel Fokin, the author of the book "Dostoevsky without gloss" (and a whole series of biographies of Russian artists with this formulation). In it, P. Fokin refers Coetzee's novel to books by "spiritual looters, for whom a miracle is not a miracle at all, but only a plot for a bad joke..."⁷.

Claims for the Coetzee's novel are expressed even in academic studios. For example, Dagna Berzhayte, a lecturer at the Department of Russian Philology at Vilnius University, details (and not always correctly) recounts a novel, points to its glut of "not always convincing, sometimes boring dialogues" and states: "if the novel did not mention Dostoevsky's name, then it is difficult to tell to make this book look really interesting to someone..."⁸. In her perception, the novel leaves "a sense of absolute anguish and hopelessness..."⁹. Such a feeling is caused of complete absorption of the father by the loss of his son (here the author, following some other interpreters of the work, believes that the main impulse for its writing was the tragic death of Coetzee's son John two months before his twenty-three years). Therefore, according to D. Berzhayte, this is a novel dedicated to parents, a novel about the suffering of parents, the only desire of which remains to return the lost children.

Unfortunately, I have failed to find any feedback on Coetzee's novel by Lydmila Saraskina, today one of the most productive and profound researchers of Dostoevsky's biography and works. In addition to the fundamental biography of F.M. Dostoevsky (2013) and the monograph "*The Devils: a novel-warning*" (1990) L. Saraskina is the author of a number of popular editions about Dostoevsky and people in his circle. Moreover, she is the author of an intensive and profound book "Testing the future. F.M. Dostoevsky as a participant in modern culture", which explores contemporary literary, artistic, and journalistic reflections on Dostoevsky's work, but the name of J.M. Coetzee is not even mentioned in it.

⁶ Волгин И. Из России с любовью? Русский след в западной литературе // Вопросы литературы. 1999. № 1. URL : <http://magazines.russ.ru/inostran/1999/1/volgin.html>. Access date (22/9/2019); italicized by the author – O.K.

⁷ Фокин, Павел. Достоевский без глянца. URL : www.informaxinc.ru/lib/dostoevsky/fokin. Access date (22/9/2019).

⁸ Бержайте, Дагне. Посвящение отцам, или Диалог с русской литературой (Дж. М. Кутзее. Осень в Петербурге) // LITERATŪRA. Research journal for Literary Scholarship. 2009. No 2. Vol. 51. С. 27.

⁹ Там же. С. 31.

Thus, in Russian literary criticism, Coetzee's novel received controversial responses, and the problem of the author's "super purpose", in fact, remained bypassed.

It is significant that the original perception of the novel in the Western literary world was mixed. Responses in book reviews of prestigious editions (*The Independent*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Spectator*, *The New York Times*) demonstrated the perplexity of the reviewers and replete with question marks. Yes, a columnist for *The New York Times* wrote that the novel is "dense and difficult", "frustrates at every turn" and without "any clear narrative resolution"¹⁰.

Academic experts also seemed unstable in their reflections and evaluations. So, well-known literary theorist and expert on Russian classics Joseph Frank wrote about "enigmatic and rather puzzling book, whose aim is difficult to unravel", "and the effect that he creates is more somnambulist than realistic"¹¹. J. Frank draws parallels between Dostoevsky's rejection of terror in the Russia of nineteenth century and Coetzee's position in the complicated political situation in South Africa in the 1980s. Therefore, the "super purpose" of the novel Joseph Frank considers the author's explanation and protection of his socio-political and aesthetic position, the complexity of the relationship of "reality" and "fiction". However, it is hardly legitimate to reduce the multifaceted artistic system of the novel to this thesis. It should be noted that Joseph Frank, in his assessment of the novel *The Master of Petersburg*, acknowledged the writer's right to fictionalization, however he reproached the author that he had not made the necessary reservations and had not addressed the reader, explaining that he did not create the image of a "real" Dostoevsky. At the same time, J. Frank points out that Coetzee's Dostoevsky may encounter the same thing as Dostoevsky himself, whom he once identified with the narrator of *Memoirs From the House of the Dead*, considering him to be his wife's murderer.

Another interpretation of creativity as the central problem of the novel is offered by David Atwell, author of the monograph "J. M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing: Face-to-face with Time". He claims that the *Master of Petersburg* embodies the idea of the subconscious essence of the writing, and "Dostoevsky" by the very process of creation tries to bring back the dead son from the darkness of nothingness¹².

¹⁰ The Master of Petersburg [Reception]. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Master_of_Petersburg. Access date (22/9/2019).

¹¹ Frank, Joseph. *Between Religion and Rationality: Essays in Russian Literature and Culture* / Joseph Frank. Princeton University Press, 2010. P. 202.

¹² Atwell, David. *J. M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing: Face-to-face with Time*. Oxford UP, 2015. 272 p.

Athena Andreadis, a well-known author and editor, describes Coetzee's novel as a good example of a narrative "from inside another writer"¹³. In addition, she originally interprets the system of characters of the work, claiming that all characters of the novel are sustained in the spirit of Dostoevsky and at the same time are imprints of his personality and the embodiment of such archetypes as the Anima, the Guide, the Superego, the Id.

It is significant that the mention of *The Master of Petersburg* also got into "Dostoevsky's *Devils*: A Critical Companion", edited by William J. Leatherbarrow, in which the novel is declared "historically unreliable"¹⁴.

2. Intertextual sources of *The Master of Petersburg*

The very fact that the main character of *The Master of Petersburg* "Dostoevsky" inevitably incorporates the fictional discourse of the work into a wide field of intertextuality.

Talking about the intertextual component of *The Master of Petersburg*, researchers most often talk about the novel *The Devils* (the Coetzee's novel also often directly mentions or allusively reminisces a number of works of the Russian classic – *Poor Folk*, *Notes from Underground*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Memoirs From the House of the Dead*. Undoubtedly, *The Devils* is the main pretext of the Coetzee's novel, but it is equally important to say about those intertextual sources of work that are not so obvious and relate more not to Dostoyevsky's creative work but rather to his critical reception in Western artistic and aesthetic thought.

In the theory of intertextuality and in the practice of analyzing different artistic texts rooted in intertextual writing strategies, it has become axiomatic that for many contemporary writers, pretextual sources may be not only the works of a particular author but also, first, the circumstances of the biography of an author, and, secondly, the critical discourse related to his works. In the case of "Dostoevsky" and the novel *The Master of Petersburg*, it seems especially important.

I leave for another time a detailed analysis of the "biographical intertext" of the novel by Coetzee (about which literary critics also sporadically wrote, mainly emphasizing the "inventiveness" and "inorganic nature" of the biographical situation reproduced in *The Master of Petersburg*) and focus critical intertext of the novel.

The Coetzee's interest and deep knowledge of Dostoevsky's legacy attests to his interviews, in which he speaks about the author of the *Crime and Punishment* as a genius and as well about the contradiction of his nature and

¹³ Andreadis, Athena. *The Master of Petersburg*. A novel by J. M. Coetzee. URL : <http://www.toseekoutnewlife.com/coetzee.html>. Access date (22/9/2019).

¹⁴ Dostoevsky's *The Devils*: A Critical Companion / ed. by William J. Leatherbarrow. Northwestern University Press, 1999. P. 158.

worldview¹⁵. The importance of Dostoevsky's experience for the author of *The Master of Petersburg* is also indicated by numerous references to Dostoevsky in various works of Coetzee, including fictional ones, such as the novel *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007), where a separate section is dedicated to Dostoevsky.

Finally, Coetzee is the author of the critical studio *Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky*¹⁶ and a number of reviews on critical works devoted to the creativity of the author of *The Devils* such as the fundamental monograph of the above-mentioned J. Frank¹⁷.

All this makes it possible to say that critical discourse of Dostoevsky's work was in the field of Coetzee's view. In particular, the opinion of the author of "The Devils" as a mystic, a prophet, an expressionist of the ambivalence of life and human nature, is widespread in Western literary circles (see, for example, the section "The German «myth» about L. Tolstoy and F. Dostoevsky in the first third of the XX century" in the G.A. Time's book¹⁸) was largely driven by the reviews of modernist writers, who were also partly literary critics.

One of those who saw in Dostoevsky an ingenious visionary of the innermost depths of the human heart was Thomas Mann. He consistently presented his version in an introduction to the American edition of the writings of the Russian writer with accented title "Dostoevsky – in Moderation"¹⁹. In this article, Thomas Mann proceeds from the axiom of literary criticism that every character of a writer is a part of himself, and speaks of Dostoevsky's epilepsy as a disease that is consistently implicated in the various variants of the novel being of his characters, "sinners": "No matter to what extent the malady menaced Dostoevsky's mental powers, it is certain that his genius is most intimately connected with it and colored by it, that his psychological insight, his understanding of crime and of what the Apocalypse calls "satanic depths," and most of all his ability to suggest secret *guilt* and to weave it into the background of his frequently horrible creatures – all these qualities are inseparably related to the disease..."²⁰.

The "mystical awareness of guilt" accented by Thomas Mann in his assessment of Dostoevsky, the author of *The Master of Petersburg* just brings to the surface, or deconstructs, according to postmodern terminology. Well known, the principal deconstructivist seeks to expose, debunk, unmask the

¹⁵ See, eg, J. M. Coetzee in Conversation with Jane Poyner // J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual / Ed. J. Poyner. Athens, Ohio, 2006. P. 21-24.

¹⁶ Coetzee J. M. *Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky* // *Comparative Literature*. Vol. 37, No. 3 (Summer, 1985), pp. 193-232.

¹⁷ Frank, Joseph. *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-187*. Princeton University Press, 1995. 544 p.

¹⁸ Тиме Г. А. Россия и Германия: философский дискурс в русской литературе XIX – XX веков. Санкт-Петербург : Нестор-История, 2011. 456 с.

¹⁹ Mann, Thomas. *Dostoevsky – in Moderation*. URL : <https://ru.scribd.com/doc/195155175/Dostoevsky-in-Moderation-Thomas-Mann>. Access date (22/9/2019).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

"hidden", prove the failure of the author's construction and the delusion of any rationalized meanings. Instead, Coetzee's artistic discourse is little in line with such canons of deconstruction. Another thing that author of the novel uses these means to embody in expressive paintings and images the "mysterious guilt" of which Thomas Mann speaks, but not names directly.

Before considering Coetzee's vision of "Dostoevsky's guilt," let us dwell on another problem closely related to it, as well as with the whole complex of socio-historical and moral-psychological problems of the work. This is the relationship between "parents" and "children". This problem, traditional for Russian literature, in Coetzee's novel is the quintessence of "Dostoevsky's" intense dialogues with various characters – detective Maximov, terrorist Nechaev, Anna Sergejevna Kolenkina, Matryosha. This is also exacerbated in the protagonist's internal monologues with expressive specific formulas: "the history of the world has to consist of nothing but fathers and sons at war with each other"; "Fathers and sons: foes: foes to the death"; "Not *the People's Vengeance* but *the Vengeance of the Sons*: is that what underlies revolution – fathers envying their sons their women, sons scheming to rob their fathers' cashboxes"; "The children against those who are not children, those old enough to recognize in their lovemaking the first foretaste of death..."²¹.

It seems very likely that for the author of the novel, the first impulse of artistic and aesthetic comprehension of this problem was its production in Sigmund Freud's famous work "Dostoevsky and Parricide". Freud points to the four features of Dostoevsky's rich personality: "Four facets may be distinguished in the rich and complex personality of Dostoevsky: the creative artist, the neurotic, the moralist and the sinner"²². All of these Dostoevsky hypostases are more or less represented in *The Mater of Petersburg*. Let us dwell on the latter. Freud in particular writes: "it must be asked why there is any temptation to reckon Dostoevsky among the criminals. The answer is that it comes from his choice of material, which singles out from all others violent, murderous and egoistic characters, thus pointing to the existence of similar tendencies within himself, and also from certain facts in his life, like his passion for gambling and his possible confession to a sexual assault upon a young girl..."²³.

Of course, there are a lot of reasons to discuss this categorical conclusion, but this kind of overtone of Dostoyevsky's sinfulness is an artistically logical ending in Coetzee's novel.

Dostoevsky is in a state of special artistic and psychological trance when he writes about Stavrogin, and identifies himself with Stavrogin and with his adopted son. That is why the sin of the "most terrible devil" passes over to him.

²¹ Coetzee J. M. *The Master of Petersburg*. URL : <http://flibusta.is/b/126075/read>. Access date (22/9/2019).

²² Freud, Sigmund. *The Complete Works*. URL : <https://www.holybooks.com/sigmund-freud-the-complete-works>. Access date (22/9/2019).

²³ Ibid.

It is not excluded that Coetzee in forming such a concept of "Stavrogin" relied on the aessay "Stavrogin" by Nikolai Berdyaev. In this essay, a well-known Russian philosopher emphasized the unique status of this character in the system of heroes of the writer. He names him "one of the most mysterious images not only of Dostoevsky, but of the whole world literature", and highlights the author's attitude to Stavrogin: "He is romantically in love with his hero, captive and deceived by him. None of them had ever been so in love, no one had ever spoken so romantic. Nikolai Stavrogin is the weakness, the seduction, the sin of Dostoevsky. The other he is taught as an idea, but Stavrogin is known for him as evil and perish"²⁴.

It is significant that Berdyaev apparently did not know about Dostoyevsky's commentary on Stavrogin's character. It is usually reduced to the phrase "I took it from my heart", as it does, for example, L. Saraskina in the book "Fedor Dostoyevsky. The Overcoming of Demons"²⁵. In the meantime, it is important to provide an accurate quote, restoring its context. In a letter to M. Katkov dated 8 (20) October 1870, F.M. Dostoevsky describes the significance of Stavrogin's character in *The Devils*: "this incident (refers to events triggered by Peter Verkhovensky in provincial town described in the novel. – O.K.) – only the accessory and setting of another person's actions that could really be called the main face of the novel. This other person (Nikolai Stavrogin) is also a grim face, also a villain. But it seems to me that this person is tragic, although many people will probably say after reading: «What's this?» I sat down for a poem about this person because for too long I already want to portray him. In my opinion, this is both a Russian and a typical person. I will be very, very sad if I fail. It will be even sadder if I hear the verdict that the person is stilted. I took it from my heart...."²⁶.

Calling Berdyaev's essay a possible intertext to the novel *The Master of Petersburg*, I would like to reckon that Berdyaev's concept of Stavrogin's could become known to the author from another plausible source. Coetzee was reviewing Joseph Frank's monograph and could not ignore the proposed version of Stavrogin's character, very close to Berdyaev's. Based on the drawings and sketches for *The Devils*, Coetzee analyzes the transformation of the "Prince's" image in the novel and the representation of his idea of denying any difference between good and evil and, in particular, concludes: "Indeed, the abominable violation of little Matryosha is really a terrible experiment designed to test such ideas in practice...."²⁷.

²⁴ Бердяев, Николай. Ставрогин. URL : <http://www.vehi.net/berdyaev/stvrogin.html>. Access date (22/9/2019).

²⁵ Сараскина Л. Федор Достоевский. Одоление демонов. Москва : Согласие, 1996. С. 391.

²⁶ Достоевский Ф. М. Полное собрание сочинений: в 30-ти томах. Т. 29 (1). Ленинград : Наука, 1986. С. 142.

²⁷ Frank, Joseph. Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-187. Princeton University Press, 1995. P. 467.

I will return further to the question of whether the novel has a "positive programm"; now let us emphasize that Coetzee, probably based on the assumptions of Thomas Mann, Freud, Berdyaev about the psychological and biographical genesis of "Stavrogin sin", not only expresses the ideas of his predecessors, but creates an original (fictional, but not speculative!) version of a genius artist and inserts it into the fundamentally important for him conception of the ambivalent essence of creativity and writing. The Coetzee's conception is affirmed in various aspects in all of his major texts – *The Life and Times of Michael K.*, *Fo*, *Disgrace*, *The Diary of a Bad Year*, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Elizabeth Costello* etc.

Equally difficult, in comparison with the problem of the "super purpose" of the the Coetzee's novel, is the question of its congeniality to the Dostoevsky's works. Of course, this is not about the "level" of genius (writing, well known, in essence is not a competition), but only about the organic inclusion of elements of the artistic system of the precedent author in the work-recipient. And here see in what way different intertextual components interact at different levels of *The Master of Petersburg*.

First, it contains a great deal of biographical intertext of Dostoevsky, open to the past (and partly to the foreseeable future) regarding the central episode of the work. The circumstances of the death of Dostoyevsky's father, the writer's occupation in the Petrashevsky Circle, civil execution, hard labor and life in exile in Semipalatinsk and others events of Dostoyevsky's life are mentioned or allusively presented in the novel.

Secondly, the whole complex of thematic motifs of Dostoevsky's works is unfolded in the Coetzee's novel: religious searches and doubts, spiritual separation of people and searches for mutual understanding, sin and conscience, conflict of parents and children, madness and pride, beating and falling, underground and double, betrayal and apostasy, permissiveness and retribution. It is known that Dostoevsky had a great intention to write a work in which all these problems would be generalized in the image of "the great sinner", and this image itself should have absorbed the features of the characters of all his previous novels. It is very likely that Coetzee was very familiar with the idea, as Joseph Frank writes about it in the work that Coetzee gave in the essay for *The New York Review of Books*, praising it very much: "In his aim of elucidating the setting within which Dostoevsky wrote – personal on the one hand, social, historical, cultural, literary, and philosophical on the other – Frank has succeeded triumphantly..."²⁸.

Particularly important in the series of "Dostoevsky's motives" in *The Master of Petersburg* is the motive of the twinning. Like in Dostoevsky's works, it is presented in two variants: internal split and the presence of hidden similarities between characters. The main character in Coetzee's novel is constantly

²⁸ See: <http://press.princeton.edu/titles/5691.html>.

experiencing a feeling the split of your inner world. It is reflected, in particular, in the image of a cracked bell: "There is a crack running through me. What can one do with a cracked bell? A cracked bell cannot be mended". His imagination, as told in the novel, "seems to have no bounds"²⁹ and constantly produces various bizarre phantasmagoric visions, such as a rat, which causes an association with detective Maximov; a terrible goddess, drawing the divine seed out of Shiva; an ox's head, a troll with features of Nechaev, etc. The system of characters of the novel is constructed in such a way that those who at first seem to be the antagonists of the main character (Maximov and Nechaev), gradually begin to approach both themselves and to "Dostoevsky" as well. The latter is not always aware of this. So, he spontaneously takes over from Maximov his version of the eternal conflict of parents and children, and then he does not hear the similarity in the interpretation of the same conflict by Nechaev. Obviously, the main character is not aware of the hidden self-characterization in how he explains the Nechaev phenomenon to Anna Sergeevna, giving him, at first glance, a paradoxical definition: "He is a sensualist. He is an extremist of the senses". Elsewhere, amazed of terrorist revolutionaries ("ever-eager to whip themselves into frenzies of self-righteousness) he calls them again "extremists" and "sensualists": "Extremists all of them, sensualists hungering for the ecstasy of death – killing, dying, no matter which"³⁰. "Dostoevsky" himself is impressed first by "passion of writing", though partly depicted in love passion. In doing so, he is aware of her sinfulness and openly calls it with a word *lust*, accompanied it by a clear epithet *distaste*. Nechaev's relationship with the women around him and ready for anything seems to "Dostoevsky" equally disgusting. The parallels between the antagonists are amplified by other connotative episodes and details. As "Dostoevsky" once betrayed his son, promising him to return, so Nechaev's father betrays his son when he reads letters addressed to the sisters and reports him to the police.

Third, at the stylistic level, intertextuality is manifested in the saturation of the novel with stylistic elements that refer to Dostoevsky's works. It is a dramatization of narrative and actualization of "closed chronotopes", and a rich one-rich paradigm with organic transitions from dream to reality and, finally, the overall tonal style of the work, close to the nineteenth-century speech. According to J. Frank, the novel recreates the atmosphere of Dostoevsky's early work *The Landlady*³¹.

At the same time, it is not to be understood that the imitative, isomorphic nature of Coetzee's poetics regarding the object of artistic reception goes into stylization "under Dostoevsky." More, *The Master of Petersburg* is quite

²⁹ Coetzee J. M. *The Master of Petersburg*. URL : <http://flibusta.is/b/126075/read>. Access date (22/9/2019).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Frank, Joseph. *Between Religion and Rationality: Essays in Russian Literature and Culture*. Princeton University Press, 2010. P. 197.

difficult to fit into the genre-style paradigm of a polyphonic novel, through which the poetics of the *Karamazov Brothers* is traditionally read out after M. Bakhtin. In fact, one voice sounds in Coetzee's novel – the voice of "Dostoevsky". The text does not contain anything that can be called "authorised speech". Although the story is told in third person, but it is significant that Dostoevsky appears in the narrator's text only as "(a) man", "he", and the names "Dostoevsky" or "Fedor Mikhailovich" appear exclusively in the speech of other characters. This indicates that the novel consistently adheres to the principle of personal narrative perspective.

3. "Stavrogin sin" in the artistic structure of the Coetzee's novel

Finally let's consider the most complicated episode of the novel, which has caused a great deal of criticism on J.M. Coetzee. It is the "attribution" of "Stavrogin sin" to the author of *The Devils*. As already noted, in the interpretation of Nikolai Berdyaev the very image of Stavrogin was the sin of the author, and after that so-called "Matryosha's problem" was subsequently formed in Dostoevsky studies. This problem is being discussed mainly in the speculative plane, and I haven't any intentions of joining it. It is just about the purpose for which such a risky situation is created in novel by the writer who far removed from provocative and scandalous literature. Above I have already briefly mentioned in what plot conditions and stylistic dimensions the situation of potentially hypothetical child molestation is described. Now consider this situation in the different aspects of the plot, characterological and conceptual logic of the novel.

1. There is no doubt, the culminating episode of the novel is well prepared for its storyline development. From the very beginning of the novel, "Dostoevsky"'s attention is drawn to the girl: he constantly notes special features of her appearance, voice, behavior, reactions to his actions, compares girl with her mother, imagines her in different situations. And although there is almost no erotic hue in this regard, sometimes it still implicates: "He cannot fail to notice the budding breasts"; "In that instant something passes between them from which he flinches as though pierced by a red-hot wire"; "Can it be that the avid glances he steals at the mother's throat, lips, arms pass the child entirely by?"; "He has no difficulty in imagining this child in her ecstasy"³². Gradually something completely unchildish appears in the portraying and behavior of the girl, a combination of contradictions, up to ambivalence (cf.: "When she raises her eyes, he is enveloped in a glance that is at once shameless and derisive... The smile she wears is taunting, provocative. Then the spell passes and she is a child as before, confused, ashamed..."³³). Of course, one has to take into

³² Coetzee J. M. The Master of Petersburg. URL : <http://flibusta.is/b/126075/read>. Access date (22/9/2019).

³³ Ibid.

account the narrative situation, because everything that the reader receives is a consequence of the mental and perceptual perception of the character. In part, the sensuality evoked by the girl and hidden from the protagonist erupts into confessions that seem to be utterances, such as: "Are they passed down from mother to daughter, these intimate smells? Loving the mother, is one destined to long for the daughter too? Wandering thoughts, wandering desires!..."³⁴.

2. The characteristic aspect of the analyzed situation is due to the fact that "Dostoevsky" is represented in Coetzee's novel as "passionate nature" (none of the critics of the novel seems to have questioned this interpretation of the "empirical" Dostoevsky), and not even just "passionate", but as a person who reaches extremes in all manifestations of his existence, lives on the edge, hangs "above the abyss", constantly risking falling "into the abyss" (it is not accidental that "falling" is a recurring motif of the novel). That is why Dostoyevsky was "fit" like no other for Coetzee's conception of "the most terrible sin".

3. The third, conceptual, section of the situation is inseparable from the central problem of the novel – the problem of creativity. For Coetzee being a writer, being an artist means, first, being fearless and "going to the end" in grasping any subject. Secondly, creative intention inevitably immerses a person in such depths of being, where everything risks reversibility, gravitates to ambivalence. Obviously, for both Dostoevsky and Coetzee, creativity is largely a sphere of irrational and intuitive, Dionysian component, fraught with unpredictable consequences. Description of the beginning of "Dostoyevsky"'s work on the creation of Stavrogin's character (even though he, in fact, does not yet know what this image is writing, such knowledge is given only to the reader by the name of the last section of *The Master of Petersburg*) does not cause any doubt about this kind of understanding of the nature of creativity. More, here it is necessary to take into account the passionate-painful love of the hero for his stepson-son and the same passionate-fervent desire to bring him back to life, to revive, to resurrect in any way, up to the willingness of "going to death". It is no coincidence that the novel twice mentions Orpheus, who descends into the underworld to return his beloved Eurydice. In fact, all that Dostoevsky does (physical intimacy with Anna Sergeevna, discussions with Nechaev and Maximov, in which Pavel is invisibly present, even the unconscious, dim feeling to Matryosha, who adored his son), is his searching to return his son. Finally, it remains the last – through creativity. But the artist draws from indiscriminate, unrecognized sources whose discovery turns into a stream of "automatic writing", so the results are unknown to him in advance (cf.: "He had not known beforehand it would be like this..."³⁵). To the protagonist of the Coetzee's novel, they appear to be unpredictable and highly contradictory.

³⁴ Coetzee J. M. *The Master of Petersburg*. URL : <http://flibusta.is/b/126075/read>. Access date (22/9/2019).

³⁵ Ibid.

Experienced by "Dostoevsky" "trifurcation" (he himself – Pavel – Nechayev) generates in the process of writing the devil Stavrogin, which is in each of them and in which there is each of them. "The most terrible sin" that pours out from the pen, leads "Dostoevsky" to comprehension: "He has betrayed everyone", "a great price to pay" and insight: "His heart, in fact, feels quite empty"³⁶.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the arrival of Dostoevsky to Petersburg in in the fall of 1869 by the will of John Maxwell Coetzee turns into an "existential adventure" in the spirit of Joseph Conrad. The novel belongs to the genre of fictional biography, an intensively evolving one in contemporary Anglophone literature. The author of *The Master of Petersburg* shifts and changes some facts of the Dostoevsky's biography in order to emphasize the peculiarities of the human and creative nature of the great Russian writer and, in general, to explore the depths and contradictions of creative genius. The novel received ambiguous appraisals in both Russian and Western literary criticism, and most critics noted the risky fictional ways of solving the central problem.

It would be banal to say that the Coetzee's novel is another variant of complexity, controversy, etc. the inner world of F.M. Dostoevsky, for this novel speaks of the "darkness of the human heart", which manifests the genius of the artist, but does not save from moral losses, warns about the eternal responsibility of parents to children, about the gravity and unpaid sin of "elders" before the "little ones." That is the positive program of the work, and it would be futile to expect from a modern artist to rock the lull of human vigilance. After all, the "real" Dostoevsky warned: "I am not the master of luring".

SUMMARY

The article concerns issues of the genre of fictional biography. The study examined the peculiarities of the artistic transformation of the circumstances of the F.M. Dostoevsky's creative biography in J. M. Coetzee's novel "The Master of Petersburg".

The author has investigated a lot of intertextual sources as factors of the fictionalization of Dostoevsky's biography such as critical essays as *Stavrogin* by Nikolai Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky and patricide* by Sigmund Freud, *Dostoevsky – but in moderation* by Thomas Mann, academic biographies and studies of F. M. Dostoevsky (J. Frank, William J. Leatherbarrow, L. Saraskina) and Dostoevsky's works, especially *The Devils*. An attempt was made to find out the motives of the author's appeal to the "dark" side of the inner world of Dostoevsky. The culminating episode of the novel, when Dostoevsky begins to write the novel *Devils*, is considered on three levels of the artistic system of the

³⁶ Coetzee J. M. *The Master of Petersburg*. URL : <http://flibusta.is/b/126075/read>. Access date (22/9/2019).

novel: 1) plot motivation; 2) characterological aspects; 3) conceptual level, determined by the problem of creativity as the central problem of the novel. Writer's work is mainly an irrational and intuitive sphere, Dionysian phenomenon, fraught with unpredictable consequences. So the author of the article tries to identify the "positive program" of the Coetzee's novel as a work about "darkness of human heart", that is cleared by the artist's genius, but it does not protect against moral losses.

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