

# A Spiritual and Moral Pursuit of Russian Literature in the 19th Century (Axiological Aspect of Literary Research)

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## Abstract

The study of the axiological problems in literary studies is a fundamental direction of modern Russian Philology. In this paper, we will first consider the search process for the orientations of values of Russian writers of the classical period of Russian literature in the 19th century; and second, the spiritual themselves foundations as ideological constants of the writers. The pursuit of Russian writers for a worldview, the appeal to universal categories of life, the aspiration to comprehend their laws and to apply them to the Russian reality defined the specifics of the Russian mentality and gave the world magnificent examples of the literary creativity based on absolute moral values.

**Keywords:** Russian Literature; Axiology; Moral Values; Ideological Hero.

## 1. Introduction

The moral character of Russian classical literature is its distinctive feature, beginning with early, such as *The Tale of Bygone Years* and *The Word of Law and Grace* by Metropolitan Hilarion. Trying to comprehend their own history, ancient Russian scribes did so in coordination with the highest ethical standards set by Christianity. The development of different and styles only strengthened this trend, which reached the highest point of its development in the literature in the 19th century. No matter how the basic idea of time is embodied, through affirmation or denial, it is inevitably centered around the concepts of the high morals and commandments given to humanity by Christ.

The 19th century of Russian literature is called "Golden," and the works of this period are unconditionally recognized as classic, as they are addressed to imperishable, eternal, absolute values. At this time, literature becomes not only and not so much a "textbook of life" as a kind of "ideological and moral foundation" (Vail and Genis, 1991, p. 6), and the basis for the development of philosophical thought.

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Since "the deepest and most significant ideas were expressed in Russia not in systematic scholarly works, but in completely different forms, literary. Our penetrating, beautiful literature as is well known as some of the deepest, philosophically comprehending life ..." (Frank, 1992, p. 474).

## 2. Materials and Methods

The material of consideration is the works of Russian literature of the 19th century, as well as the critical heritage of Russian writers, classics of literature. The research methodology is based on axiological and cultural-historical literary methods.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The crisis passes of Russian history left no reason for optimism. The work of writer-realists was characterized by a tragic perception of reality, rejection of new morals, sadness for the collapse of the old noble nests and related moral values, as well as a sad awareness of the spiritual degeneration of the land-owning class. It is not surprising that, despite the creative individuality of each author, the corps of writers of the "Golden" century of Russian literature combine the search for the hero of the time and socially useful work for him, which is embodied in the image of unnecessary people giving attention to certain socio-psychological types; the desire to understand the specifics of the Russian national character; keen interest in the deep manifestations of the human soul; strengthening of psychological insight; spiritual search; the problem of personal freedom and purposefulness of the will. "At the same time", as noted by Osmolovskiy (2001), "research about the person and human relations is directed toward the solution of metaphysical and social problems. Knowledge of human nature, in addition to self-interest, was focused on the justification of the meaning of life and ontological values" (Osmolovsky, 2001, p. 18; Yazdekhashti et al., 2015). Philosophically comprehending the surrounding reality, Russian writers focused their efforts on the question of the fundamental principles of life and the purpose of human life, by means of a synthesis of philosophical, sociological, historical and psychological analysis.

In Goncharov (1980), the creative process of understanding reality was protracted, since, according to the writer, *"творчество требует спокойного наблюдения уже установившихся и успокоившихся форм жизни, а новая жизнь слишком нова, она трепещет в процессе брожения, слагается сегодня, разлагается завтра и видоизменяется не по дням, а по часам"* (p. 115). This is probably due to the fact that all his novels are *"связаны одною общею нитью, одною последовательною идеею – перехода от одной эпохи русской жизни... к другой"* (Goncharov, 1980, p. 107), and in the center of this trilogy is the artistic nature and the changes that occur with it during the breakup of the old socio-economic

formation and the formation of a new one. Having struck with his first novel "terrible blow to romanticism, dreaminess, sentimentality, provincialism" (V.G. Belinsky), Goncharov told an "ordinary story" of the spiritual development of the hero under the influence of upbringing and circumstances, the loss of romantic illusions, and with them the immediacy and purity of feelings which led Alexander Aduev to a logical result: a collegiate adviser, a good state living, earning a lot of money and in time marrying a rich woman. However, showing two historical stages of the condition of society, the author, on the one hand, departs from the idealization of the landowner-patriarchal way of life, and on the other, rejects extremes of bourgeois practicality, in this way no find in the dialogical conflict of the novel, the solution of the question of historical development and the maintenance of progress. It is quite natural that the title character of the novel Oblomov looks much more sympathetic and livelier than the man of business Stolz, who appears more like a scheme necessary to the author to solve his creative problem. Regret about the departure of the old moral principles and awareness of the inevitability of their fracture led the artist, according to Staroselskaya (1990), to this tragic inconsistency: "the inability and unwillingness to understand the 'new truth', the craving for the ideals of the old noble nests; and, at the same time, a clear condemnation of stagnation and 'Oblomov sleep', very clearly expressed in Ordinary History and Oblomov, irreconcilability to the feudal-serf remnants" [p. 63]. With even greater force, these contradictions are depicted in the Precipice, where "the liberal convictions of Goncharov, his hopes that the old will progressively disappear with the help of bloodless reform coexisted with a firm belief in the rightness of the old morality (expressed by Tatiana Markovna Berezhkova) and a denial of the program 'new people' (following Mark Volokhov)" (Staroselsky, 1990, p. 63). In creating the image of a positive hero, thinking about the possibility of achieving spiritual harmony, Goncharov eventually comes to understand progress as the improvement of the moral nature of man, the necessity of appropriating the best of the old life, and on this foundation creating the new one.

The idea of the possibility of achieving harmony as a result of moral improvement and enlightenment of the individual is near to Turgenev, who throughout his creative life sought answers to questions about the meaning of human existence, the spiritual foundations of existence, freedom and direction of the will. At the same time, the writer associated moral perfection with the individual's desire to get rid of selfish aspirations, to overcome the congenital defect of self-love, obedience to the duty, the rationalist ethics of which the artist accepted, creatively rethinking the ideas of Kant, Hegel, Fichte. 'The unnecessary person', brought by Turgenev in the novels of this period comes to understand his role and his place in society and finds a possible case for him, which corresponds to the artistic task of the writer, taking impressions from reality and drawing "быстро изменяющуюся физиономию русских людей культурного слоя" (Turgenev, 1960-1968, p. 303) at critical

moments in the civic and social life of the country. Experiencing shock and loss, Turgenev's hero comes to the conclusion that *"жизнь не шутка и не забава, жизнь даже не наслаждение... жизнь – тяжелый труд. Отречение, отречение постоянное – вот ее тайный смысл, ее разгадка: не исполнение любимых мыслей и мечтаний, как бы они возвышенны ни были, – исполнение долга, вот о чем следует заботиться человеку; не наложив на себя цепей, железных цепей долга, не может он дойти, не падая, до конца своего поприща"* (Turgenev, 1960-1968, p. 50). Solving the dilemma of 'personal happiness vs duty', the best Turgenev characters inevitably choose duty, honoring the author's idea, which, in our opinion, is due not only to his philosophical views, but also the Christian faith. The creative thinking of the writer reflected the well-established tendency in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, according to which the Christian worldview "is assimilated by the consciousness of the Russian man so that it begins to work on a subconscious level" (Chernov, 1994, p. 152). In this regard, the thought of Kurlandskaya (2001) deserves attention. Kurlandskaya notes: "in Turgenev's worldview the forties that primordial Russian concepts peculiar to the Christian Orthodox consciousness have already appeared in the fifties" (Kurlyandskaya, 2001, p. 11). In literary texts this was embodied in the characters' awareness of their sinfulness, guilt, the need to obey sense of duty and humanistic ideals. This probably explains the fact that one of the stable motives in the writer's work is the motif of the cross, understood by Turgenev's heroes, primarily as obedience service to duty.

Therefore, obeying a sense of duty, a person overcomes his alienation from the world. He discovers the great mystery of life: everything exists for itself, and ever at the same time is in close relationship and he consciously joins in its eternal cycle: *"жизнь только того не обманет, кто не размышляет о ней и, ничего от нее не требуя, принимает спокойно ее немногие дары и спокойно пользуется ими"* (Turgenev, 1960-1968, p. 191), *"держись только каждый крепко на своем месте, не теряй терпения, не желай невозможного, но делай, насколько хватает сил"* (Turgenev, 1960-1968, p. 179).

Charactering the present as a transitional time when *"развитие личного сознания и отрицание непосредственных идей и законов (авторитетных, патриархальных законов масс). Человек, как личность, ...становился во враждебное отрицательное отношение к авторитетному закону масс и всех. Теряя поэтому всегда веру и в Бога. ...Это состояние, т. е. распадение масс на личности, иначе цивилизация, есть состояние болезненное"* (Dostoevsky, 1971, pp. 246-248). Dostoevsky links the revival of personality and society as a whole with Christianity, the only place where, in his opinion, *"крайнее развитие личности и собственной воли"* (Dostoevsky, 1971, p. 246). The writer is convinced that the way out of this painful state, in which the Russian society is contemporary found to the

author is connected with the image and teaching of Christ. According to the artist, the highest goal of the historical development of mankind is to *"достигнуть полного могущества сознания и развития, вполне сознать свое я – и отдать это все самовольно для всех"* (Dostoevsky, 1971, p. 248), so the writer hopes for the advent of a Christian era, when a person does not bound *"не авторитетно, а высшей степени самовольно и сознательно необходимость возвращения в непосредственность, в массу"* (Dostoevsky, 1971, p. 248) and through this unity with all to be able to realize his "I" and gain spiritual freedom. This article allows us to penetrate into the originality of the philosophical and artistic thinking of the writer, to understand the laws of his characterology, in which a person is considered in relation to the universe and to society.

The belief in the possibility of a just social order based on the religious and moral revival of people is inherent in the great "clairvoyant spirit" Dostoevsky.

The author's ideal as a concrete sensual representation of the highest norm of perfection and the means of its achievement is expressed, first of all, in the emotional evaluation of the depicted, the most active side of the literary content. Let us consider the of means this expression in the works of Dostoevsky (Feizuldayeva et al., 2018; Kumari & Alexander, 2018).

The words 'idea' and 'ideal' occur in Dostoevsky's journalism quite often. In the period of his work after imprisonment, the writer sees the task of literature as that, which should lead the reader to the comprehension of the highest meaning of life. So, in 1873. in the article "About the Exhibition" Dostoevsky said that the modern artist should not rest on his laurels, but also conquer for Russian literature the area of the historical 'ideal' and the fantastic, for *"идеал ведь тоже действительность, такая же законная, как и текущая действительность"* (Dostoevsky, 1971, p. 301).

Such a comparison of the ideal and morality, Christianity and the "moral state of man and society" in general is characteristic of Dostoevsky. He emphasizes this idea repeatedly Gradovsky (1880, about Pushkin's speech): *"тем-то и сильна великая нравственная мысль, тем-то и единит она людей в крепчайший союз"* (*Diary of the Writer*, 1880, August).

Dostoevsky believed that moral values could not be relative. He sees danger in the refusal of perception of reality from the point of view of Christian ethics. In addition, for the writer it is important that the choice and acceptance of the ideal occurred consciously, as he also openly declares in the pages of the "Diary of the writer": *"...сделаться человеком нельзя разом, а надо выделаться в человека. Тут дисциплина... Мыслители провозглашают общие законы, т.е. такие правила, что все вдруг сделаются счастливыми, безо всякой выделки, только*

*бы эти правила наступили. Да если б этот идеал и возможен был, то с недоделанными людьми не осуществились никакие бы правила, даже самые очевидные" (Diary of the Writer, 1877, February).*

Quotations of this kind can proceed, however, from this number of statements it is obvious that Dostoevsky did not share the ideal into moral, public and social for it is the "two halves" of the same general concept of the norm that is clearly seen in the response to Gradovsky in the pages of *Diary of the Writer*, and a few years earlier, when explaining to the reader the meaning of words on 'stones' and 'loaves': "*Камни и хлебы значит теперешний социальный вопрос, среда. Это не пророчество, это всегда было... Христос отвечал: «не одним хлебом бывает жив человек» - т.е. сказал аксиому о духовном происхождении человека. Дьяволова идея могла подходить только к человеку-скоту.. Но если дать и красоту и хлеб вместе? Тогда будет отнят у человека труд, личность, самопожертвование своим добром ради ближнего, – одним словом, отнята вся жизнь, идеал жизни. И потому лучше возвестить один идеал духовный...*". In this statement there is no contradiction, there is only a conscious choice: civil up exist outside the moral, it should not exist. But if reality allows for the exclusion of morality from some aspect of life, there is only one solution: Dostoevsky chooses "stones" and not "bread", remains "with Christ" and not with "truth".

It is well-known, that the Gospel played a special role in the life of the writer. This book, presented by the wife of the Decembrist Fonvizina on the way to penal servitude, remained with him until the last minutes of his life. It was with her that he went in difficult moments and learned about his death (see Dostoevskaya Memories). For him, inclusion in the context of the new testament is a natural form of existence for an educated person, so he orients easily to gospel images and perceives life and the search for its meaning through the prism of these thoughtful and deeply felt symbols. In the journalism of the 70s on the pages of the *Diary of the Writer* he speaks about it quite clearly. However, in his literary work, the writer is not so unambiguous, and this ambiguity is a conscious tenet.

The position of Bakhtin (1972) on the polyphonism of Dostoevsky's novels is well known. "The object of the author's intentions is" carrying out the theme in many and different voices, in fundamental, irreplaceable polyphony and its discordance". This feature is explained by the fact that Dostoevsky's later works synthesize problems on a huge scale, reflecting the author's desire for a universal representation of reality. Therefore, the "idea in the narrow sense" that is, the views of the hero as an ideologist " are included in the dialogue on the basis of the same principle (Bakhtin, "single voice" and "multiple voice")" (Bakhtin, 1972, p. 196). This statement is controversial, although it formulates the basic principle of Dostoevsky's artistic method.

The writer saw the art of the novelist as "expressing his goal in the faces and images of the novel so clearly that the reader, after reading the novel, understands the writer's thought in the same way as the writer himself understood it when creating his work." Therefore, with all the "non-merging" voices of Dostoevsky's heroes, objective and independent from each other and from the author of ideas and their carriers, (the peculiarities of poetics noted by Bakhtin (1972)), the writer's novels cannot be subjectively colored. Otherwise, they lose their meaning not only the novel themselves as simple illustration of the inconsistency of life, but also the meaning of the writer's work, turning the author from a poet into a talented, even brilliant, copyist.

Nevertheless, the specificity of the expression of the author's position in *The Brothers Karamazov* is such that it often allows us to talk about the objectivism of the image. Dostoevsky himself in terms of *The Life of a Great Sinner* defines that specificity in the following way: "*Сухость рассказа иногда до Жиль Блаза. На эффективных и сценических местах – как бы вовсе этим нечего дорожить. Но и владычествующая идея жития чтобы видна была, т.е. хотя и не объяснять словами всю владычествующую идею и всегда оставлять ее в загадке, но чтоб читатель всегда видел, что идея эта благочестива. ... Тоже – подбором того, об чем пойдет рассказ, всех фактов, как бы непрерывно выставляется что-то и непрерывно поставляется на вид и на пьедестал будущий человек*" (Dostoevsky, 1971, pp. 71-72).

The American researcher of F. M. Dostoevsky creativity, A. Gibson, traces the writer's journey "from soil on which Christianity grows" (Notes from the Underground), through the prelude to the religious novel (Crime and Punishment) to his final novel, imbued to the greatest extent with Christian motifs (*The Brothers Karamazov*) (Gibson, 1973). The religious aspect of Dostoevsky's work, along with his psychological discoveries, is most interesting to western scholars. In this regard, "Dostoevsky and His Fate" by Otto Kaus (1923), the main provisions of the subjective criticism of Fish (1976, 1973, & 1967), Heumann's (1967) work on the Grand Inquisitor and the problem of freedom, Rahve's (1972) study "Another Dostoevsky", as well as Rudicina's (1972) work, which discusses the features of the worldview of late Dostoevsky.

In speaking about the ideal and faith, the writer cannot talk about beauty and morality, for him they are inseparable concepts, as, accurately stated by the true remark of Solovyov (1990), "the good separated from truth and beauty, is only an indefinite sense, an impotent passion, the abstract truth is an empty word, and beauty without goodness and truth is an idol. For Dostoevsky they were only three inseparable of the one absolute idea" (p. 44). This idea was embodied for the artist in the person of Christ. Dostoevsky himself wrote about this clearly and definitely: "Moral is only that coincides with your sense of beauty and with the ideal in which

you embody it... I have one moral pattern and ideal Christ...". It is appropriate in this regard to mention another statement of the writer: "If I mathematically proved that Christ is beyond the truth, and indeed that the truth is outside of Christ, I would rather stay with Christ than with the truth" (Dostoevsky, 1971, p. 142).

However, from the point of view of Christian morality, life as an eternal confrontation between good and evil deprives a person of the meaning of existence. To save himself, a thinking person must make a choice, otherwise his consciousness, his personality will be destroyed. Understanding this, Dostoevsky leads the reader to such an understanding. However, ultimately sharpening the contradictions of existence and their possible resolution, the indicates a path, not imposing his solutions and convincing the reader to pass this way independently.

Thus, the approach to the moral ideal of the writer through empathy and reflection on the fate of the characters is a process deeply personal and difficult, and the understanding of its essence, largely subjective. Therefore, despite the clarity of the author's position, various interpretations of Dostoevsky's novels have a basis in the work itself. Its problems, types of conflicts, the system of images, the dominant tone and the particular organization of the narrative. For Dostoevsky it is very important to separate a direct journalistic statement from the artistic word. This is his main discovery: life revealed in the novel is much more voluminous and contradictory than the author's direct journalistic statement, even if it is hard-won and honed to aphorism (Jabbari et al., 2019; Nakhaee & Nasrabadi, 2019).

The identification of the dynamics of great meanings in literature is possible through the comparison of cultural constants and the temporary accentuation of their semantics.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The writer's artistic reality is formed by spiritual needs (Schleiermacher, 1977; Cawelti, 1976). The national particularity of Russian literature is largely determined by the axiological attitudes in Russian writers. In the model of the world and the person of Russian classics there is an eternal aspiration to happiness, freedom/will, peace, truth, good and justice. The ethical in the aesthetics of Russian literature specifies the path of the characters, the meaning of the story and the essence of the author's position. For example, Tolstoy wrote "there is no greatness where there is no simplicity, goodness and truth", Pushkin claimed the connection of truth with love and Mikhail Lermontov's hero saw the happiness in freedom and peace. Peace, in turn, is associated with faith in the harmonious arrangement of the world.

The 19th century, the post-reform era defined the tragic worldview of artists of the post-reform era, largely associated with the awareness of the moral



decomposition of society and the strengthening of social contradictions, it adding to the need to search for a comprehensive idea. And, despite the fact that the vectors of this search were individual for each author, all writers agreed on the need for the moral improvement of the individual, and the preservation of the best qualities of the outgoing era. This tension in the spiritual quest brings together literary gifts, dominating the differences that exist between them.

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