

Litera

Правильная ссылка на статью:

Mysovskikh L.O. — Existential and psychological grounds of criminal behavior of the heroes of Mikhail Lermontov and Fyodor Dostoevsky // Litera. — 2023. — № 7. DOI: 10.25136/2409-8698.2023.7.38571 EDN: TMGBZT URL: https://nbpublish.com/library_read_article.php?id=38571

Existential and psychological grounds of criminal behavior of the heroes of Mikhail Lermontov and Fyodor Dostoevsky / Экзистенциально-психологические основания преступного поведения героев Михаила Лермонтова и Федора Достоевского

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[Статья из рубрики "Литературоведение"](#)

DOI:

10.25136/2409-8698.2023.7.38571

EDN:

TMGBZT

Дата направления статьи в редакцию:

05-08-2022

Аннотация: В статье сквозь призму философии экзистенциализма и социальной психологии исследуются предпосылки преступного поведения главных героев романов Михаила Лермонтова «Герой нашего времени» и Федора Достоевского «Преступление и наказание» – Григория Печорина и Родиона Раскольникова. Автор статьи утверждает, что причины преступного поведения как Печорина, так и Раскольникова являются внутриличностными. Однако личностные характеристики индивида формируются под воздействием социума, в котором он существует, что и демонстрируется на примере главных героев романов Лермонтова и Достоевского. Таким образом, в статье наглядно показан главный принцип философии экзистенциализма в действии: существование человека предшествует его сущности. Автор статьи приходит к выводу, что Печорин и Раскольников обладают многими сходными чертами характера, а основное отличие между ними заключается в социальном статусе персонажей. В обоих романах писатели

порицают пороки российского классового общества. Автор статьи резюмирует, что с точки зрения религиозного экзистенциализма судьба Печорина является куда более мрачной, нежели судьба Раскольникова, так как душу Печорина забирает всепоглощающее ничто, душа же Раскольникова получает шанс на спасение. У героев Достоевского всегда есть надежда, так как Бог указывает им путь, по которому человек может прийти к благодати. Именно здесь кроется основное различие между Лермонтовым и Достоевским.

Ключевые слова:

экзистенциализм, психологизм, русская литература, теория литературы, художественная литература, философия, Лермонтов, Достоевский, Печорин, Раскольников

Introduction

In fiction, the philosophy of existentialism is most often associated with writers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, who created their most memorable characters in the middle of the twentieth century. However, it is well known that Sartre and Camus had predecessors. Existentialism originates from such philosophers as Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). It is also well known that questions and ideas that can be considered existential, such as the meaning of life and the difficult position of a person in an increasingly alien world and an indifferent Universe, can be found even earlier in the world of art and literature. In search of the precursors of the existential hero, we turn to the Russian literature of the XIX century, which witnessed the appearance of the predecessors of existential heroes in the works of Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841) and Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881).

Purpose, materials and methods

The purpose of this article is to study the existential and psychological foundations of criminal behavior of the main character of Mikhail Lermontov's novel «Hero of Our Time» - Grigory Pechorin - and the main character of Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel «Crime and Punishment» - Rodion Raskolnikov. Such studies bring us closer to the answer to the question of whether the characters of the Russian classical literature of the XIX century can be considered as precursors of existential and absurdist heroes of the mid-XX century, many of whom also had criminal tendencies.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the research is the classical developments of recognized existentialist philosophers S. Kierkegaard, J.-P. Sartre, K. Jaspers, as well as modern scientists engaged in existential theories in the field of literary studies A. Koshechko, G. Moskvin, L. Mysovskikh, N. Ulitina.

The material of the research is Mikhail Lermontov's novel «The Hero of Our Time» and Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel «Crime and Punishment», in which the existential-psychological foundations of the criminal behavior of the main characters are identified, for which the following scientific methods are used: biographical, dialectical, hermeneutic. The biographical method makes it possible to establish the origins of Lermontov and Dostoevsky's interest in the nature of criminal human behavior. The dialectical method makes it possible to discover the truth through reasoning and argumentation. The hermeneutic method makes it possible to explore the artistic images of the novels of Lermontov and Dostoevsky in the cultural context of the epoch.

Results and discussion

In Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment*, the author's focus on psychological observations and psychoanalysis is clearly highlighted. It is possible to note Dostoevsky's commitment to the use of psychological realism. The novel focuses on the theme of man as a product of his environment. Dostoevsky penetrates into the most secret corners of the human psyche and puts them on display to the reader, mercilessly highlighting the hidden from the initial view and, sometimes, the terrifying essence of the «crown of creation». «It is precisely where man, in his blind and destructive passions, rebels against the demands of reason, against all the rules of decency and universally recognized morality – it is there that the true ontological reality of the human spirit breaks out, through the thin shell of universally recognized empirical reality» [\[16\]](#). This is exactly what we can observe on the example of Rodion Raskolnikov, when we begin to understand the motives of the crime committed by him.

In his novel, Dostoevsky tries to solve the existential psychological problem of the nature of criminal human behavior: whether it is inherited or acquired under the influence of the environment. On the one hand, man is what he is, because nature or God made him that way. Consequently, a person cannot be held responsible for his actions, because they are carried out in accordance with his essence. On the other hand, people are viewed as products of their environment, society. From birth, a person receives a certain status, immersing him in a system of social relations that ultimately determine what and how he thinks and who he becomes. From this point of view, the causes of crime and violence lie in the social structure of society, defined by poverty and unequal opportunities. Raskolnikov did not see anything bad for society in the murder of the old woman. But such a worldview was formed by the society itself. Discussing how Napoleon would have acted if the key to his elevation was the murder of an old woman, Raskolnikov is confident that such a great man, from his point of view, would not have wavered for a moment in his determination.

The term «existentialism» was applied to Dostoevsky retrospectively. Sartre considered his conceptual aphorism «if there is no God, then everything is allowed» to be the very essence of existentialism. Today Dostoevsky is a recognized existential writer of the XIX century. His novels are permeated with existential issues, in particular, he tries to solve the existential-psychological problem of the nature of criminal human behavior. In this case, we face a logical question: if Sartre's theories can be applied so organically to Dostoevsky's novels, then why not apply them in a similar way to other authors of works of fiction, including those representing Russian literature, including writers who are the predecessors of Dostoevsky and who had a significant influence on him. So, it is known that Dostoevsky was greatly impressed by the work of another Russian writer and poet – Mikhail Lermontov, whose «diamond prose», embodied in the novel «*Hero of Our Time*», served as a kind of spark for Dostoevsky's thoughts. Considering the existential foundations of the nature of Raskolnikov's criminal behavior, Dostoevsky largely reflects in his character the features of the hero Lermontov – Pechorin, because the existential foundations of the nature of the criminal behavior of both characters are largely similar. In fact, it can be argued that Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov is born from the image of Pechorin. The main difference between the main characters of the two Russian writers lies only in their social status: «if Pechorin had been born poor, he would have become Raskolnikov, if Raskolnikov had been rich, he would have turned into Pechorin» [\[8, p. 33\]](#). Therefore, the existential theories derived in Western Europe in the twentieth century, in our opinion, it is quite possible to apply to Russian writers of the first half of the XIX century, and not only to Dostoevsky. A common feature of Lermontov and Dostoevsky with Western European existential writers of the

twentieth century is the expression in their works of concern arising from the realization that a person is free and responsible for his own actions. Perhaps the most striking example of the consonance of the novels of Lermontov and Dostoevsky with existential works of art of the twentieth century is Camus' novel «The Outsider». The main character Mersault kills a man unknown to him. Despite the fact that he was tried and found guilty, Mersault has no remorse. He does not resist imprisonment, because he is physically incapable of it, and this condition does not depress him. His apparent indifference means that he is alien not only to society, which cannot understand the reasons behind the murder, but also to himself.

It is possible to mention some more famous existential writings, where similar problems are presented. For example, the play «Waiting for Godot» by Beckett and «Young Adam» by Trocchi. In the first case, it is the fear of what free will and responsibility mean for the individual that makes the main characters inactive, waiting for instructions on what to do from the eternally absent Godot. Trocchi's novel also describes a murder and a trial, but this time the culprit, narrator Joe, escapes punishment and is content to watch the trial of a man convicted of his crime. And again, the lack of emotion or remorse is striking, since Joe, like Mersault, seems to lack any moral imperative to act in a way that society would consider morally acceptable. Thus, here we can note almost complete identity with the views of Pechorin, whom Lermontov placed above morality or simply outside it, like the future Nietzschean superman. The connecting theme in all these texts is that if a person is free and responsible, then only he can decide what the concepts of «right» and «wrong» mean, and therefore the judgment comes only from the individual. Such literature depicts a gloomy existence, which suggests that existential life is a painful life that must be endured alone, as Lermontov's hero Pechorin did.

Social psychology, studying the influence of a group on an individual, tries to determine the degree of conditionality of his behavior by this influence, which is defined as a phenomenon of conformity, which in modern research is considered as «a way to agree on the basic values of social reality» [9, p. 59]. In the study of Dostoevsky's *Crimes and Punishments*, one can use a socio-psychological approach that takes into account the nature of the society of the novel, the influence of society on individual heroes, especially Raskolnikov.

«Crime and Punishment» raises the problem of «freedom of choice», which in this case was «imposed» on a person by his social position and his ideas about the actions of outstanding people. And the imposed «freedom» ceases to be such. Dostoevsky shows what consequences await society as a result of the use of «free will» by its members. He is trying to find a force capable of resisting the «free will» of man. The main character of the novel appears to be a man who has suffered a deep psychological trauma that has clouded his mind and led not just to the commission of sin, but to its peculiar sacralization, the transformation of sin into a certain sublime theory, which Raskolnikov develops in favor of public ideas about the success of the individual, which gave rise to the murderer in Raskolnikov. He understands that, from the point of view of society, a poor person who has not achieved success in the competitive struggle of individuals is a despised person, unworthy of the respect of society. And Rodion himself shares this point of view. And so, in order to get rid of his own self-contempt, the contempt cultivated by society, he finds no other way out than committing a terrible crime. That is, Raskolnikov's crime is his inner need, nurtured by public ideas about the greatness and success of a person.

Pechorin's crimes are even more determined than Raskolnikov's by the internal needs of the Lermontov character. Pechorin's cynicism and boredom, combined with his selfishness, are among the main reasons why he harms others. Lermontov's novel is replete with such

descriptions. The sufferings that Pechorin causes to others range from the relatively minor heartache of the characters (Maxim Maksimych, Werner, Mary, Vera) to, in modern terms, frankly criminal acts: the abduction of a minor girl Bela, and the murder of Grushnitsky in a duel. It is often difficult to understand the motives of Pechorin's malice. And it is also difficult for him to explain his actions. For example, he asks himself why he is courting Princess Mary and thus trying to break the heart of Grushnitsky, who is head over heels in love with her, although Mary is not particularly attracted to Pechorin himself: «I often ask myself why I am so persistently seeking the love of a young girl whom I do not want to seduce and on whom I will never get married?» [\[5, p. 225\]](#) G. Moskvin, exploring the meaning of love for Lermontov through the prism of existential theories, notes that in the years of the creation of the novel «The Hero of Our Time» for its author, «love is not so much the highest value as an absolute existential condition, sine qua non of being» [\[6, p. 59\]](#).

Raskolnikov can be regarded as a Nietzschean rebel. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, the superman commits a crime for self-affirmation. The good of humanity does not bother him at all. Rodion Raskolnikov lives in a world without mercy, faith, hope, justice. His life has no purpose. He challenges the very state of his being, unnecessary suffering, the absurd contrast between an innate sense of justice and morality, on the one hand, and the injustice of the world around him, on the other. He does not consider the idea of class struggle, does not try to find like-minded people to unite and resist injustice together. He prepares and commits his act alone. And alone, he is forced to bear the burden of moral responsibility for him, a burden that eventually crushed his psyche.

Similarly, Pechorin is a harbinger of the Nietzschean superman. Pechorin is a proud, energetic, strong-willed, ambitious man. In fact, this is the description of the Nietzschean superman. However, after discovering that life does not meet his expectations, and he has nowhere to put his personal qualities, Pechorin becomes embittered, cynical and bored. That is, Pechorin «makes his existential choice, having got into a borderline situation» [\[7, c. 81\]](#), about which Karl Jaspers wrote in the twentieth century: «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» [\[18, c. 322\]](#).

Raskolnikov's fate is not the fate of a single person who is an exception to the rules. This is the fate of the entire lower class in Russia, and – more broadly – of all marginalized and exploited representatives of the lower classes around the world. And it doesn't even matter what mental qualities representatives of the lower classes have: gentleness and kindness or egoism and intellectual prudence. Raskolnikov, by the way, combines all these qualities. Dostoevsky draws in his novel characters of the lower class, with the most diverse types of characters, but their lot is the same – the contempt of society. Sonya is kind and willing to suffer to make people happy. That's why she's a prostitute. In her house there is terrible poverty. And she is doing everything in her power to somehow improve the well-being of her family. Dunya is ready to make any sacrifice to help her loved ones. She goes through all sorts of humiliations in Svidrigailov's house. The latter can be represented as one of the hypostases of Raskolnikov himself, whose name is vanity. The antipodes of Sonya and Dunya are Svidrigailov and Luzhin. The money that Svidrigailov gives Sonya is not a symbol of his kindness. He does this only for his own pleasure, for the elevation of himself both in his own eyes and in the opinion of others. Luzhin is a calculating manipulator. He is too arrogant, counting on his own strength and on the helplessness of his victims. No matter

how different the psychotypes of the heroes of Dostoevsky's novel beat, they are all flawed people in some way. Nevertheless, for Dostoevsky, «regardless of what people are like, whether they are good or evil, the significance of their lives is equivalent» [17, c. 154].

Even before committing the crime, Raskolnikov appears to the reader as a flawed person: hungry, withdrawn, with obvious mental problems. And all his inferiority is a product of the socio-economic environment in which he exists all his life. Crushing poverty makes Raskolnikov, Sonya, and Dunya flawed people... Standing on a step or several steps above them financially, Svidrigailova, Alyona Ivanovna, Luzhin makes flawed a false sense of superiority and the power that their finances give them over poor people, the opportunity to bully them, humiliate and demonstrate their superiority and enjoy such a position themselves. All this turns them, perhaps, into even more flawed people than those beggars whom they despise and oppress. And the hero of Lermontov – Pechorin, perhaps, can be put at the very top of this ladder of flawed people, since Pechorin is capable of destroying or breaking the life of a person who, in his opinion, is so insignificant that he does not even deserve moral reasoning about the actions that are committed against him.

Raskolnikov, like Pechorin, reacts rather sluggishly to the social injustice surrounding him. Nevertheless, he shows amazing determination in the implementation of the plan to kill the old interest-bearing woman. It is this criminal act, according to Dostoevsky's plan, that absorbs all the antagonism between the oppressed and the oppressors. Thus, Dostoevsky's novel «Crime and Punishment» can be considered a social protest against the existing social order, which is a painful reality for members of society. And the purpose of the novel is the search for a new society, more just, more humane and a new personality: healthy, happy and beautiful.

In the novel, the reader discovers ideas formed in Raskolnikov's mind about people and creatures trembling. People have the right to violate moral guidelines. Trembling creatures are deprived of such a right. That is, in Raskolnikov's understanding, morality is intended for trembling creatures. Napoleon, as a «great man», can afford to be outside of morality in order to achieve his «great» goals. Dostoevsky contrasts Raskolnikov's egoism and individualism with Sonya Marmeladova's peaceful and submissive worldview. Raskolnikov's code of ethics, which is based on atheism, which makes him related to Sartre's existentialism, allows him to transgress the norms of social behavior and violate the law, since he considers himself a carrier of new ideas, a person different from trembling creatures. Raskolnikov's radical individualism leads him to severe psychological trauma and subsequent insanity. In contrast to Raskolnikov, Sonya endures poverty, grief, hunger, humiliation and bullying with equanimity.

The psychological description of the characters in the novel draws Dostoevsky into the intimate sphere of the subconscious. According to Freud, dreams occupy a special place in psychoanalysis. Dreams symbolically direct a person's attention to the meaning of the events taking place. This is exactly Raskolnikov's dream about killing a horse. Having already conceived a crime, Raskolnikov subconsciously warns himself against committing it. The brutal murder of a horse foreshadows the murder of a pawnbroker and her sister committed by him. Svidrigailov's dreams are similar, in which he sees a reflection of his animal lust. Dostoevsky uses an internal monologue through which he conducts a psychological study of his characters, which allows the reader to better understand why they commit certain actions. The use of an internal monologue reveals Raskolnikov's soul to the reader, showing the duality and inconsistency of his personality. In this way Dostoevsky reveals the psychological states of the characters and the types of their consciousness. The

technique of internal monologue was used by Lermontov even before Dostoevsky. So, Pechorin, talking about the absurdity of his life «alone with himself» expressed the following thoughts: «Why did I live? For what purpose was I born?.. And it was true that it existed, and it was true that I had a high appointment, because I feel immense powers in my soul» [\[5, c. 247\]](#).

A person, from the point of view of the founder of existentialism Kierkegaard, goes through three stages of the existential path: aesthetic, ethical and religious, after which he acquires faith. However, this restricts the freedom of the individual. N. Ulitina, exploring the existential problems of man in Lermontov's work in the context of Kierkegaard's existential theories, comes to the following conclusion: «The path to God is spirituality, faith presupposes conditions for spiritual development, while Lermontov, through the image of Pechorin, notices that then, obeying the will of God, a person gives Him his freedom and his responsibility. Both authors show the same existential experiences in choosing the true path, their heroes believe that only faith will save a person. Pechorin wants to convince himself that he also has faith in the form of hope for the future, but in fact nothing happens, hope dies, and God does not save from the horror of death. Pechorin comes to the conclusion: if he goes into higher development ("healing of mental illnesses"), then he will cease to be a person, himself, that is, a person, since this transition implies submission to the Absolute, and the person again falls into spiritual slavery» [\[15, p. 58\]](#).

Conclusion

The novel «Crime and Punishment» is a trial of class society. Dostoevsky castigates the inhumanity, callousness, cruelty of people towards each other. Here are people deprived of any prospects and hopes for a better future. Raskolnikov sees in the old interest-bearing woman a parasite who is part of the exploiting class, sucking the blood out of him, and people like him. But Raskolnikov's rebellion is individualistic and is aimed not at fighting social injustice, but at satisfying his unhealthy egoistic ambitions. There is not even a glimmer of hope in the novel. The author denies any possibility of social struggle. Instead, Dostoevsky offers Christian humility and suffering. The novel «The Hero of Our Time» is also a trial of class society. Only here is presented the misfortune of the upper class of Russia, which in conditions of despotic tyranny does not have the opportunity to realize their talents and reveal the enormous potential inherent in a person. From the point of view of religious existentialism, Pechorin's fate is much more gloomy than Raskolnikov's fate, since Pechorin's soul is taken away by an all-consuming nothingness, while Raskolnikov's soul gets a chance for salvation. Dostoevsky's heroes always have hope, because «God is a kind of beacon, whose light is able to lead out of the most terrible darkness» [\[22, c. 88\]](#). This is where the main difference between Lermontov and Dostoevsky lies.

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Результаты процедуры рецензирования статьи

В связи с политикой двойного слепого рецензирования личность рецензента не раскрывается.

Со списком рецензентов издательства можно ознакомиться [здесь](#).

Представленная на рассмотрение статья «Эзистенциально-психологические основания преступного поведения героев Михаила Лермонтова и Федора Достоевского» предлагаемая к публикации в журнале «Litera», несомненно, является актуальной, ввиду рассмотрения проблемного вопроса на материале двух классических произведений русской литературы. Работа представлена на английском языке.

В поисках предшественников эзистенциального героя автор обращается к русской литературе XIX века, которая стала свидетелем появления предшественников эзистенциальных героев в произведениях Михаила Лермонтова и Федора Достоевского.

Целью данной статьи является изучение эзистенциальных и психологических основ преступного поведения главного героя романа Михаила Лермонтова «Герой нашего времени» – Григория Печорина – и главного героя романа Федора Достоевского «Преступление и наказание» – Родиона Раскольникова.

Материалом исследования послужили роман Михаила Лермонтова «Герой нашего времени» и роман Федора Достоевского «Преступление и наказание», в которых выявляются эзистенциально-психологические основы преступного поведения главных героев, для чего используются следующие научные методы: биографический, диалектический, герменевтический.

В статье представлена методология исследования, выбор которой вполне адекватен целям и задачам работы.

Данная работа выполнена профессионально, с соблюдением основных канонов научного исследования. Исследование выполнено в русле современных научных подходов, работа состоит из введения, содержащего постановку проблемы, основной части, традиционно начинающуюся с обзора теоретических источников и научных направлений, исследовательскую и заключительную, в которой представлены выводы, полученные автором. Однако, недостатком является отсутствие информации о разработанности темы в теории литературы, что помогло бы понять авторский вклад в решение заявленного вопроса. Библиография статьи насчитывает 25 источников, среди которых представлены труды как на русском, так и на иностранных языках. Большее количество ссылок на авторитетные работы, такие как монографии, докторские и/или кандидатские диссертации по смежным тематикам, которые могли бы усилить теоретическую составляющую работы в русле отечественной научной школы. Большое количество цитируемых работ Мысовских косвенно свидетельствует об искусственном «накручивании цитирований». Однако, данные замечания не являются существенными и

не относятся к научному содержанию рецензируемой работы. В общем и целом, следует отметить, что статья написана простым, понятным для читателя языком. Опечатки, орфографические и синтаксические ошибки, неточности в тексте работы не обнаружены. Работа является новаторской, представляющей авторское видение решения рассматриваемого вопроса и может иметь логическое продолжение в дальнейших исследованиях. Статья, несомненно, будет полезна широкому кругу лиц, филологам, магистрантам и аспирантам профильных вузов. Статья «Экзистенциально-психологические основания преступного поведения героев Михаила Лермонтова и Федора Достоевского» может быть рекомендована к публикации в научном журнале, входящим в перечень ВАК.