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Musiy V.B.

D. Sc. (Philology), Professor at the Chair of Philology
Department of World Literature
Odessa I.I. Mechnikov National University
24 / 26 French Boulevard
valentinanew2016@gmail.com

**TO THE QUESTION ABOUT THE ROOTS OF SHOCKING IMAGE
OF WORLD IN MODERN LITERATURE**

The author of the article refers to the analysis of one of the features of modern prose: the picture of the world, which is created by its authors, could not fail to shock the reader. Heroes while cooking on the fire burn vintage books, heroine-a librarian after work kill men in the dark alleys of the city kitchen with kitchen knife ... The focus of the proposed article- several works of contemporary writer A. Potemkin, the picture of the world in which could not fail to shock the reader. Works are studied at a number of levels: motive, in terms of semantics and the role in them of Bible images, allusions to familiar classical works to the reader, etc.

Key words: *picture of the world, motive, allusion, grotesque, prose*

Contemporary prose increasingly appreciates as shocking. And indeed: the hero of the last novel by Vladimir Sorokin “Manaraga” is a chef who prepares meals at vintage books; the heroine of the novel by Alexey Salnikov “Petrovs in flu and around it”, librarian and a passionate reader of literature for children and young people, from time to time, kills men, obeying an internal call to bloodshed. The proposed article is about several such works. The purpose of the article is to identify the roots of this literary phenomenon.

The world revealed on the pages of Alexander Potemkin’s books is particularly arresting, even shocking, since it is presented from a viewpoint that does not correspond to the author’s own worldview based on spirituality, morality, and humanity. These are the concepts espoused by and addressed in the works of classical writers such as Nikolai Gogol, Nikolai Leskov, Ivan Goncharov, and Fyodor Dostoevsky. These are writers most clearly alluded to in Alexander Potemkin’s novels. He presents an alarming picture of the state of the world in detailed, hyperbolic and even grotesque form. This causes the reader not only to experience a sense of dread over the seemingly fast-approaching eschatological disaster, but also to think about and ultimately believe that each of us is not a mere speck in the Universe, but a viable part that is responsible for what is going on, even if not participating actively. And the central characters in Alexander Potemkin’s novels are endowed precisely with this understanding that the future of mankind depends on them. This is what makes them relevant and significant.

I will not go into the chemical formulas and economic, sociological, and political calculations and conditions in Alexander Potemkin’s books. I trust that the author,

a doctor of economic sciences, knows what he is talking about. It is the literary merits of his books, the elements that make literature a creative art, that are much more important for me. I will try to define the parameters of Alexander Potemkin's literary world. By "literary world," I mean the literary techniques, based on certain literary principles, a specific writer employs in all of his books to answer the main soul-searching questions he addresses, as well as those questions contingent upon the specific traits of his literary consciousness. In writer Alexander Potemkin's case, these questions are raised by the impoverished spirituality and morality that people experience when crassness and utilitarianism take the upper hand. For example one of his characters (Nastya Chudetskaya in *The Abolition of Man*) assesses the current state of culture: "Who looks at the creations of Michelangelo? Who reads lines from *The Divine Comedy*? Who becomes acquainted with the works of geniuses? Who plumbs the depths of science? A few paltry individuals." And she goes on, "... the economy has become the absolute sovereign of the world. Today it zealously dictates the average norms, mass patterns, standards, and unified tastes. For the highest purpose of economic activity is to draw the maximum profit" [3, 126-127]. And it is one step (and, as terrible as this may seem, it has already been taken) from such standardization of man to losing an understanding of the value of everything living on earth. So the main protagonist in each of Alexander Potemkin's books, taking responsibility for the future, is trying to come up with the idea of a new man. This is perhaps the main motif in all of the writer's books. In so doing, his characters are not only engaged in reasoning and forming theories, but are willing to become the material for creating a new race of people, even if this requires that they experience violence and suffering. "Perhaps," thinks Khimushkin in *The Abolition of Man*, "as the result of this violence I will become the next material for building a new universe? The creation of a sweet-smelling kingdom of total reason will begin from my atoms and cells". Another character in the same novel, Viktor Dygalo, at the expense of his own life while abolishing degenerated man, finds the point on earth from which is it necessary to throw out the energy of destruction for the sake of the future: the creation of a new super continent on which a population of new, perfect people will appear. The topic of creating man in God's image is also central in *Bondage*. Parfenchikov, the central character in this book, is called to take on "the fate of his fellow countrymen." He is to be constantly engaged in experiments aimed at changing the human race. These experiments are to raise the efficiency of the Russian, "he should be the best of the best, the cleverest of the cleverest, the longest lasting, the strongest, omnipotent, like our Father in Heaven, and at some point even become God Himself!" [1, 136]. A particular feature of Alexander Potemkin's books related to this universal task, the solution of which he entrusts to his characters, is their illustrative nature. This gives rise to the symbolic images, names, and, for me the most interesting, the possibility of discerning a metaphorical origin in them. Take, for example, the motif of moving ("ferriage"), which is significant in the life of Vasily Karamanov, a character in *Myself*. A contemptible lad, who is subjected to increasingly cruel punishments, moves from one part of the world to another: from home to a children's colony ("a polygon for mortification of the human spirit and

flesh”), from there to an estate where he becomes a slave who is tortured and lives with the pigs, from there to a colony for underage criminals, and so on. It is worth noting that the town where the colony is situated is called Perevoz (translated from the Russian as “ferriage”). This is probably not accidental. For the novel deals with a kind of initiation the character undergoes as he moves from one state to another (first, understanding the injustice of humiliation and alienation from people, then becoming increasingly immersed in himself, and later acquiring freedom from the environment and self-cultivation, and, finally, coming up with a goal in life and forming an idea that will determine the content of his life). Ferriage, moving in this case, indicates what is going on with the protagonist, who dies in one capacity to be born in another as a hero-ideologist.

The Biblical motif of the seed is perhaps even more significant in all of Alexander Potemkin’s novels (the Gospel of John 12:24). In *Myself*, the main protagonist is a seed that falls on stony ground (in this case the stony ground is an unnatural situation where people prove to be insensitive, stony, always ganging up on the boy). Since it is impossible to grow on stony ground, Vasily Karamanov dies as far as the human community is concerned, cutting himself off from it in spirit. In *The Abolition of Man*, Semyon Semyonovich Khimushkin has a dream in which he sees himself as a wheat kernel planted in soil where he undergoes new birth in spring as a stalk. In *Bondage*, Peter Petrovich Parfenchikov, after moving to the provincial town of Kan, takes great pains to cultivate the field where he plans to grow poppy necessary for the “first genetic incubator.”

After alienating themselves from society and concentrating on the idea of creating a perfect person, Alexander Potemkin’s characters surrender to the powers of the experiment. This is another indicative plotline of his books. Limiting himself to biological factors in understanding the nature of man, Karamanov concentrates on genetics and tests people for genes that poison the human origin (greed, arrogance, immorality), while improving his model of ideal man (homo cosmicus). In *The Abolition of Man*, Gusyatinikov also carries out research to discover the worst in people at the genetic level. However, his goal is not to improve the nature of man, but, on the contrary, to identify in pure form aptitude for destruction. So whereas the protagonist in *Myself* experiments primarily on other people (the owners of the cherished banknotes of the Russian Bank of Foreign Economic Activity, theater employees, politicians, and scientists), in *The Abolition of Man*, the central character mainly carries out experiments on his own moral self: how low can he stoop and to what extent can he destroy the human in himself. In *The Russian Patient*, on the contrary, after moving from Moscow to the god-forsaken town of Velsk, Anton Antonovich Puzyrkov is solely engaged in experiencing violence against himself. Admittedly, in this novel there are elements of the so-called twin myth: Puzyrkov’s brother, Andrei Antonovich, is a well-established Moscow oligarch who will go to any lengths of violence for the sake of his own material gain and founds, among other things, an International Academy for the Enhancement of Man’s Spiritual World for the purpose of eradicating spirituality and lowering the level of culture

and the intellect to “the level of the city pavement.” Andrei Puzyrkov is the brother-antagonist of Anton Antonovich Puzyrkov.

After meeting Professor Koshmarov (the twin of Doctor Raysky from *The Russian Patient*), Peter Petrovich Parfenchikov in *Bondage* finds out that he is a target of experiments to change human nature. And this is something different from Potemkin’s other novels, where the protagonist himself was always the initiator of the experiment. At first, they are experiments of an ethnic nature: Parfenchikov is injected with doses of blood of other ethnicities. In so doing, Alexander Potemkin uses an interesting literary technique: the action in the novel acquires a cyclical nature: one and the same situation (the protagonist wakes up, goes to work, and engages in his business of selling ships) is repeated three times, but each time showing how the main character deals with the situation as a German, Jew, and Russian. During another experiment, to which the main character of *Bondage* is subjected, he becomes two people: both a prisoner and the prison superintendent. Since both characters perform under the same name (like Golyadkin in Dostoevsky’s *The Double*), the prisoner is deprived of his name and can only be called by his cell number. However, it can be presumed that the motif of doubling is of a primarily psychological nature in *Bondage*. In this case, Peter Petrovich Parfenchikov and Professor Koshmarov are two aspects of the main protagonist’s personality, whereby he becomes the experiment subject and the experimenter at the same time. “To be honest,” Parfenchikov admits to himself after another meeting with the professor, “this is the first time I’ve had the thought that it is not some Professor Koshmarov, a bespectacled old man and schemer, who has been appearing to me, but my own alter ego.” “After all, he has never appeared during withdrawal,” he continues his ruminations. “I only meet him when I am in a state of euphoria. When I am soaring in the clouds to purify my thoughts. I am going to have to keep a close watch on myself in order to clearly understand who this strange professor is. Is he me thirty years from now, a projection of what I will be in the future, or indeed a mysterious old man who passionately wishes to experiment with the human genome?”

This brings me to another special feature of Alexander Potemkin’s novels that denotes the particular ambience of his literary world: his interest in the subconscious spheres of the human psyche, as well as in the activity of the mind, which he declares to take precedence over the physical. *The Russian Patient* continues one of the leading motifs of *The Abolition of Man*: like Dygalo, Puzyrkov concentrates on his own mind. Like Dygalo, and many of Potemkin’s other characters, Puzyrkov is asocial (he holds himself aloof from society, although he conducts his experiments in a social milieu) and the opposite of others, at least this is how he understands himself. The main issue addressed in *Bondage*, however, is ways to achieve freedom. Whereby Parfenchikov is mainly concerned with internal freedom, which he achieves by withdrawing into his imagination, induced by taking opium. “In order to be totally free, all you need is to cultivate a passion for this magical flower,” he decides. In other words, since it is impossible to change the world (it is not subject to change), the mind must be changed, which is capable of shaping the world as necessary (in this case with

the help of opium). The subtitle of the novel “Essay for Oneself” is not accidental. Particularly worth noting in this respect is the “intellectual ecstasy” described in the second chapter of *Bondage*, which Parfenchikov experiences after discovering that anything can be destroyed by the power of thought. Or the scene, rather the “fantastical scene of the subconscious” that opens up to Parfenchikov: “there is an incredible number of different floors, whimsical characters hide in many corners, the outlines of fantastical themes peek out from behind every door, manuscript texts just beg to be discovered.” This shows the intricacy and multifaceted nature of the psyche, which means there is an endless multitude of virtual worlds into which self-awareness can lead.

There are many other aspects of the Alexander Potemkin’s literary world. I could talk about his skilful structuring of the plotline, the correlation of statics to dynamics, and the place dialogical conflict occupies in his books (for example, Viktor Dygalo-Nastya Chudetskaya in *The Abolition of Man* or Golovina-Mazurina in *The Russian Patient*, and although in the second, these characters do not directly meet, I think the worldviews they express are directly opposed). I would also draw attention to the symbolic meaning of fire – an element that at once destroys and purifies – in several of his works. Alexander Potemkin’s dialogue with his predecessors – Alexander Pushkin, Alexander Sukhovo-Kobylin, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Ivan Goncharov – deserves separate study. I will mention only one parallel. Alexander Potemkin’s story *The Desk* centers on a character who becomes so integrated into his status of a bureaucrat that he turns into the main attribute of the bureaucracy, a desk. Let us remember that “desk head” was an official title in the past. But Arkady Lvovich Dulchikov not only becomes an intrinsic part of his desk, he also begins to experience amorous feelings for it. Here we recall the character of Gogol’s *The Overcoat*. The oxymoron (the girlfriend made from padding) we find in the description of the life changes of poor Akaky Akakievich (he meets a “pleasant girlfriend ... and this girlfriend is no other than the same overcoat with thick padding) is turned in Alexander Potemkin’s story into the tragicomic image of a beloved desk. And the way the bureaucrats of provincial Velsk conjecture about Puzyrkov is reminiscent of the way the bureaucrats in Nikolai Gogol’s *Dead Souls* conjecture about Chichikov. Alexander Potemkin’s books are certainly interesting for the literary critic, which means they have literary value. But more important is that they make any reader think about what is going on, stir up his soul, prompt him to reflect and, most of all, try to find ways, together with the author, to revive spirituality and renew man. As a result, man is not abolished, but changed and changed for the better. So, as for me, the roots of such shocking image of world in the literature are in the anxiety caused with the danger for human being in modernity.

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Мусій В.Б

Одеський національний університет імені І.І. Мечникова
кафедра світової літератури
valentinanew2016@gmail.com

**ДО ПИТАННЯ ПРО КОРИННЯ ШОКУЮЧОГО ОБРАЗУ СВІТУ
У СУЧАСНІЙ ЛІТЕРАТУРІ**

Авторка статті звертається до однієї з показових для сучасної прози особливостей – створення письменниками картини світу, яка шокує читача. Герої спалюють раритетні видання книжок, героїні після роботи вбивають чоловіків кухонним ножом у темних провулках міста... У центрі уваги – декілька творів сучасного письменника О. Потьомкіна, картина світу у яких не може не шокувати читача. Твори досліджуються на мотивному рівні, з точки зору семантики біблійних образів, алюзій на добре знайомі класичні твори.

Ключові слова: картина світу, мотив, алюзія, гротеск, проза.

Мусій В.Б.

Одесский национальный университет имени И.И. Мечникова
кафедра мировой литературы
valentinanew2016@gmail.com

**К ВОПРОСУ О КОРНЯХ ШОКИРУЮЩЕГО ОБРАЗА МИРА
В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ**

Автор статьи обращается к анализу одной из особенностей современной прозы – созданию ее авторами картины мира, которая не может не шокировать читателя. Герои во время приготовления пищи на огне сжигают раритетные издания книг, героини-библиотекарши после работы убивают в темных переулках города кухонным ножом мужчин... В центре внимания в предлагаемой статье – несколько произведений современного писателя А. Потемкина, картина мира в которых не может не шокировать читателя. Произведения исследуются на ряде уровней: мотивном, с точки зрения семантики и роли в них библиейских образов, аллюзий на хорошо знакомые читателю классические произведения.

Ключевые слова: картина мира, мотив, аллюзия, гротеск, проза

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