

The Mortality Theme in A.I. Herzen's Novel *Who Is To Blame?*

Tatiana SHVETSOVA

Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov, Arkhangelsk,
Russian Federation

Abstract. *This article deals with the representation of the mortality theme in the work of the Russian writer of the 19th century. The purpose of the paper is to reveal peculiarities of the esthetic shaping of the mortality theme in the context of A.I. Herzen's novel.*

The relevance of the theme under study is determined by the relationship with the recently developing trend – thanatological literary criticism.

Appeal to the death theme in A.I. Herzen's artistic and journalistic creativity is inadequately treated in scientific works. In view of the fact that the creation of the novel by A.I. Herzen was influenced by the personal tragedies of the writer's life, the study of the theme of death in his key novel is a prerequisite for understanding the entire novelism of the Russian prose writer.

*Mortality theme gets an unusual interpretation in the novel *Who is to blame?* The crisis situation – being in the mortal existence – enables the main protagonist to discover his own unlimited will and demonstrate an action that is understood as being "actively-responsible" and definitely oriented in the world. The novelist shows a secular, desacralized attitude toward death in the text. Thus, the writer and his literary character are aware of the dramatic nature of human existence left by the Creator, and consisting in the contradiction between the inevitability of death and the thirst for immortality inherent in humans.*

In addition, the article examines the issue of functioning of the dual motive – the motive of death and spiritual resurrection

The article is devoted to the problem of the "action crisis" (disappearance) of a literary hero in Russian literature of the 1840-50s. Relying on the understanding of the "crisis of action", proposed by M.M. Bakhtin, the author comes to the conclusion that the hero "retreated" during the crisis periods of the development of Russian literature, culture and society, in the situation of the "breakout"

*The results obtained allow talking about the possibility of building a new approach to understanding the novel *Who is to blame?* in the context of the Russian historical and literary process.*

Keywords: mortality, death, immortality, initiatory component of mortality motives, action, A.I. Herzen.

Introduction

Considerations on death enrich the human spiritual experience and often determine the structure of human thinking and worldview. The close interest of representatives of various sciences to the mortality theme indicates the relevance of the chosen subject matter.

The only thing that we (people) can know with all the immutability and certainty is that each of us is mortal. As expressed by Michel de Montaigne, "nature compels us to it. "Go out of this world," says she, "as you entered into it; the same pass you made from death to life, without passion or fear, the same, after the same manner, repeat from life to death. Your death is a part of the order of the universe, 'tis a part of the life of the world... Shall I not change this goody contexture of things for you?"¹.

¹ M. Montaigne, *The Essays of Montaigne*, Complete. Translated by Charles Cotton, vol. 1 Project Gutenberg Ebook. 2006. p. 43, from <http://infomotions.com/sandbox/great-books/mirror/pg3600.txt>, accessed 13.03.2018.

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Whether we want it or not, however, because of the very fact of human mortality, we cannot help but keep in mind the perspective of our own death. The thought of it can frighten and suppress – but the experience of many shows that the realization of own future death can give a special meaning to life, make every day lived brighter and more significant. Paradoxical as it may seem – however, it is noticed that it is in those cultures where it is not customary to talk and think about death, depression and suicide are becoming particularly widespread. There is good reason for one of the most popular psychotherapeutic exercises, in its different variations, when it is proposed to imagine that today is the last day in our life. Practice indicates that if this exercise is done with the right motivation, it can enrich our life with new, still unexperienced impressions and reflections, on the basis of which we really begin to appreciate our own life. The testimonies of many people who survived the clinical death collected by the resuscitators (R. Moody, E. Kubler-Ross, etc.) are even more revealing: here the results may also seem paradoxical, since, on the one hand, the majority of respondents who had similar experience stated that they ceased to fear death; on the other hand, they recognize that they have seen their lives on the new side and started appreciating it much more.

The main paradox of life and death is the finality of human life, the absolute inevitability of its completion. Against the background of a person's knowledge of this fact, life itself can seem meaningless: why should we exist if this existence inevitably ends?

Methods of research

This article is a historical-literary study which applies comparative-historical and historical-functional research methods. These scientific methods are actual application of the hermeneutical approach as the basis of the theory of perception, understanding and interpretation of a literary text depending on the context, which is a combination of national, cultural, socio-historical, philosophical, ideological and subjective peculiarities that influence the author's specific judgments.

The author has chosen the concepts of the theme and the motive as a starting point in this study, analyzing concepts by means of the structural method.

The actual analysis of the literary text is carried out using a descriptive strategy.

Research background

The problem of life and death, their relationship and interrelations remains central to thinkers for millennia – starting from anonymous authors of ancient religious philosophical concepts and classics of ancient and Hellenistic philosophy, in which Socrates, Plato, Epicurus, Lucretius, Seneca Marcus Aurelius and others paid special attention to this topic. In the Middle Ages, philosophy, which was at that time mainly theocentric, continued the ancient tradition of considering the paradox of life and death in a religious vein (Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Piter Abelard). The philosophers of the New Age and the Enlightenment (M. de Montaigne, F. Bacon, R. Descartes, B. Spinoza, B. Pascal, I. Kant, L. Feuerbach

and others) shifted the emphasis to the "positivist" and "objectivist" approach. In this framework, the main requirement is to consider this problem strictly rationally, within biological understanding. In the 20th century, however, there is a kind of "renaissance" of the approach that goes beyond strict biologism and is distinguished by the search and exploration of the spiritual components of the problem (M. Heidegger, J.-P. Sartre, A. Camus, K. Jaspers, E. Mounier, P. Ricoeur, J. Maritain, etc.).

The analysis of the relevant publications proves that researchers actively discuss issues related to the attitude towards death in modern society; they speak about the need for a new methodological paradigm in comprehending these issues. Discussions about traditional historiographical genres covering this problem prove to be topical.

The attention of scholars of different specialties to the mortality theme is dictated by the disappointment and collapse of the former world and the growing anxiety of mankind².

In modern science, the problem of life and death is developed most actively by the well-known philosopher and culturologist P.S. Gurevich, including works especially in the monograph *Life After Death*, dedicated specifically to this theme³.

The interdisciplinary approach to the study of the basic problems of human existence is a characteristic feature of the modern academic situation. In the framework of this process, the formation of such a discipline as "literary thanatology" should be considered as an element of the broader concept of "humanitarian thanatology" (these terms were suggested by R.L. Krasilnikov, who devoted several serious studies to this theme (see, e.g.: Lupia⁴; Krasilnikov⁵; Spoljar⁶; Frank⁷).

"Fiction is one of the main sources of thanatological information; based on the author's inspiration and revelation, it allows one to hear the echoes of the thanatological experience of past generations, try on different models of the attitude to death and the other world," notes R.L. Krasilnikov⁸.

In the same connection, V.Yu. Lebedeva speaks of a "mortal" or "thanatological discourse" (whether in the literature as a whole or, as in this case, in the creative work of a specific writer)⁹.

² L. Frank (Ed.), *Representations of Death in Nineteenth-Century US Writing and Culture*, Routledge, 2018, p. 757.

³ P. S. Gurevich, *Life after death*. Magadan: Magadan Publishing House, 1992.

⁴ L. A. M. Lupia, *An Interdisciplinary Bibliography for the Study of Death and Dying. A review of Death and Dying: An Annotated Bibliography of the Thanatological Literature by John F. Szabo*, Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010.

⁵ R. L. Krasilnikov, *Thanatological motives in fiction (Introduction to literary thanatology)*, Moscow, Yazyki Slavyanskoi Kultury, 2015, 488 p.

⁶ P. Spoljar, "The insolvent debt of the death of the Father in Aurélia de G. de Nerval: Romantic or melancholic complaint?", in *Annales Medico-Psychologiques*, CLXXIV (2016), no. 9, p. 757-762.

⁷ L. Frank (Ed.), *Representations of Death in Nineteenth-Century US Writing and Culture*.

⁸ R. L. Krasilnikov, *Thanatological motives in fiction (Introduction to literary thanatology)*, Moscow, Yazyki Slavyanskoi Kultury, 2015, p. 4.

⁹ V. Yu. Lebedeva, *The motive of metaphysical death in the Russian novels of V. Nabokov, Author's abstract from PhD Thesis (Philology)*, Yelets, 2009, p. 5.

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A collection of articles entitled *Mortality in Literature and Culture* and devoted specifically to the problem under consideration was published in 2015¹⁰. Authors studying various aspects of the problem, such as, for example, the semantics and semiotics of the concept of mortality, took part in this project.

Another academic collection *Representations of Death in Nineteenth-Century US Writing and Culture*¹¹ is worth mentioning as a striking and illustrative example, which also demonstrates the multidimensionality and multivalence of the problem under study. The authors of the collection (among them J. Kusich, S. Shapiro, E.K. Miller, etc.) analyze the cultural-historical, social, sexual and epistemological contexts of the "obsession with death" in American literature of the 19th century; reporting the results of racial and gender studies of social practices regarding the loss and perpetuation of the memory of the deceased, as well as literary rethinking of death caused by personal and national trauma.

The representation of death as an independent protagonist responds to the archaic aspiration to anthropomorphize uncognizable phenomena of the surrounding world. A special discourse in the history of literature is formed by the dead and their varieties (phantoms, ghosts, mermaids, etc.). Thus, M. Fleischhak and E. Schenkel analyze the episodes of invasion of ghosts in the life of the living people based on a wide literary material – from the Middle Ages to the turn of the 19th-20th centuries¹².

The problem of interest is touched upon in publications aimed at studying genres that describe the image of the human body during its posthumous decomposition as a phenomenon of aesthetics. The roman-charogne in horror literature, also known as "gothic", refers to this kind of genre. This is discussed in the work of J. Schmitt¹³.

These publications reflect the ideas of the multilayered world, the shifting of boundaries between the worlds – the world of the living and the world of the dead.

Formation of the twofold motive of death and spiritual rebirth in the world literature

The attention paid by the world literature to the problems of human death, immortality, dying and rebirth throughout its entire history has determined the formation of literary thanatology as a special academic discipline. Literary criticism, as emphasized by R.L. Krasilnikov in this connection, "has a strong research tradition, formed terminological apparatus and methodological basis. It is able to

¹⁰ R. L. Krasilnikov, "Epistemological Problems of Humanitarian Thanatology," in A. G. Stepanov, V. Yu. (Eds.), in *Mortality in Literature and Culture*, Moscow, Novoye Literaturnoye Obozrenie, 2015, p. 7-17.

¹¹ L. Frank (Ed.), *Representations of Death in Nineteenth-Century US Writing and Culture*.

¹² M. Fleischhack, & E. Schenkel, "Ghosts - or the (Nearly) Invisible: Spectral Phenomena in Literature and the Media", in *ALPH: Arbeiten zur Literarischen Phantastik / ALPH: Approaches to Literary Phantasy*, IX (2016), p. 107-113.

¹³ J. Schmitt, "O Imaginário do Cadáver em Decomposição: Das Danças Macabras ao Roman-Charogne", in *Ilha do Desterro*, LXVIII (2015), no. 3, p. 83-97.

provide thanatology – a young discipline – with its own experience in solving scientific problems"¹⁴; at the same time, the theory of motive and the methodology of literary motivational analysis correspond most adequately to the goals of the new discipline from all the broadest literary tools.

Considering the motive as a plot-forming phenomenon, modern researchers rely on the definition given by A.N. Veselovsky, who by the term "motive" meant "a formula which responds ... to the questions that nature put to man everywhere, or fixed especially bright, seemingly important or repetitive impressions of reality"¹⁵. They also use the definition of the motive given by Yu.M. Lotman, where "the motive is an elementary, inseparable unit of narration ..."¹⁶.

"Real" literature is always aimed at reflecting and revealing, in one way or another, the fundamental existential problems of life and death, the sense of existence and destiny of human life, etc. The main place here is given to the problem of death in its correlation with life. "The study of attitudes towards death, which deserve attention on their own, can shed light on the attitudes of people in relation to life and its basic values"¹⁷.

"Perception of death, the afterlife, links between the living and the dead"¹⁸ – all these themes remain vital throughout the history of mankind and the development of literature since the very first of its samples. It is characteristic that the best of these samples, within the framework of the mortal themes and motivations, very often reproduce a well-defined motive – the motive of "spiritual death" and "spiritual rebirth". This twofold motive eventually developed into a mythologeme that is fully recognizable and widely represented in the literature, the main character of which (as a rule, a cultural hero) "is in the realm of death, this is a living dead man, destined to have a new birth and transfiguration"¹⁹.

In modernist and post-modernist literature this motive is actively employed already in the "main novel of the 20th century" – *Ulysses* by J. Joyce, as convincingly shown, for example, by Jibu²⁰. Death occupied an important place in the matrix of the comprehensive philosophical worldview of Joyce and his artistic choice. As Jibu highlighted, relying on the concepts of dialogism, polyphonism and carnivalism of M.M. Bakhtin, *Ulysses*, in fact, deconstructed and undermined, through carnivalization and travesty, the entire range of traditional religious and political associations relating to death, desacralized this concept, thereby "returning" it to the everyday, "empirical" context. The polyphonic method, as pointed out by the author, allowed Joyce, desacralizing death, at the same time paradoxically to make it

¹⁴ R. L. Krasilnikov, *Thanatological motives in fiction (Introduction to literary thanatology)*, p. 17.

¹⁵ A. N. Veselovsky, *Historical poetics*, Moscow, Vysshaya Shkola, 1989, p. 494.

¹⁶ N. A. Igonina, *Methods of lyricism in the small genres of Russian classical prose, PhD Thesis (Philology)*, Moscow, 2011, p. 64-65.

¹⁷ P. S. Gurevich, *Life after death*, Magadan, Magadan Publishing House, 1992, p. 115.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ N. Kalina, "Myth in the modern world," in J. Campbell, *The hero with a thousand faces*, St. Petersburg, Peter, 2017, p. 17.

²⁰ J. M. George, "James Joyce and the 'strolling mort': significations of death in *Ulysses*", in *Mortality*, XXII (2017), no. 1.

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the focus of an alternative vision, to restore its real relationships with such vital problems as, for example, the health and quality of human life.

In the twofold motive identified by the author: the motive of death as a "spiritual death" and "spiritual rebirth" (resurrection, renewal) an archetype is embodied that is similar to the one embodied in the famous apocrypha *The Mother of God Purgatory*. Traveling to the underworld (usually "intra vitam"), in which death is rather "spiritual" than physical, the process of spiritual and moral rebirth of the characters is shown.

The popularity of this twofold motive throughout the development of world literature has, in our opinion, a deep cultural and historical rationale. It is well known that the echoes of ancient ritual practice, in particular its initiatory aspects, are reflected in the literature from earliest times. In the initiation ceremonies, whether it is a common practice to reach a certain age or initiation of a religious-mysterious character, death (pretended, "spiritual", imaginary, etc.) played a colossal role precisely as a threshold beyond which the "initiated" had to abandon his former personality in symbolic terms.

Here are some of the most significant, in our opinion, examples. Thus, already in the very first of the major literary works that have reached us – the Sumero-Akkadian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (XVIII-XVII centuries BC) – the main character visits the Lower World three times in pursuit of immortality, but the only thing that he gets is advice to put up with his fate of a mortal human being since it is pointless for humans to try to escape death, because it is the will of the gods that all humans must die:

the great gods held an assembly,
Mammitum, maker of destiny, fixed fates with them:
both Death and Life they have established,
but the day of Death they do not disclose²¹.

Similarly, Homer's Odysseus descends to Hades to learn his future from the prophet Tiresias. (It should be added here: it is not surprising that this motive "penetrates" later in Joyce's Ulysses, who, as is known, chose Homer's *Odyssey* as an intertextual model). The eleventh of the twelve famous exploits of Hercules is the abduction of the dog Kerberos (Cerberus) from Tartarus. According to the so-called "*Alexandrias*" – the literary treatments of the "life" of Alexander the Great (IV century BC), known from Hellenistic times and enjoyed extreme popularity for many centuries both in the West and in the East – the great king also descended into the kingdom of Darkness, where he found a source, granting immortality. However, he failed to use it "as intended", because it was not destined for him.

This theme was readily taken up by the best Roman authors. Aeneas in the sixth song of the *Aeneid* of Virgil (the 1st century BC) descends to Tartarus (Avernus), where he meets his own father, who foretold the future greatness of Rome to him. Orpheus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (the 1st century BC) descends to hell to save his beloved Eurydice. The religious and moral "regeneration" of the

²¹ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, A New Translation. Translated by A. George, New York, Penguin Books, 1999, p. 46.

protagonist Lucius is the main content the *Golden Donkey* by Apuleius (the 2nd century AD), the heroine of the insert story Psyche (the choice of the name is very meaningful: in Greek Ψυχή is "soul") firstly, being obedient to the prophecy of the Pythian oracle, gets dressed in a funeral outfit for her own wedding with Cupid, the god of love; secondly, she descends into the underworld in search of her already beloved and lost husband.

The *Divine Comedy* of Dante Alighieri remains an unsurpassed masterpiece both in the world literature as a whole and in literature oriented towards Christian values. Dante's poem had a tremendous impact on the entire subsequent development of the literary process – and, in particular, on Russian writers. Here it is appropriate to recall the *Dead Souls* by Nikolai Gogol. While in the first volume Chichikov presented a certain travestized version of Antichrist, by the third volume he, according to Gogol's plan, was to experience a moral transformation comparable to the conversion of the persecutor of Christians Saul to the apostle Paul. Yu.V. Mann²² convincingly showed that when creating *Dead Souls* Gogol was guided by the structure, architectonics and motives of the *Divine Comedy*. This is evidenced by the three-part composition of Gogol's "poem", and its poetics, and numerous Dantean allusions, generously scattered throughout the text.

The intertextual connection "Gogol and Dante" has been the subject of the most active discussion for more than two centuries. The "hints at the grandiose design, as well as the future fate of Chichikov" were also the reason for comparing the brilliant creations of Gogol and Dante²³ – and, last but not least, the author's definition of the genre as a "poems". It should be added that probably the distinctly traced choice of the apostle Paul as the "ideal prototype" of Pavel Chichikov and his fate could also be inspired by the Italian poet who considered St. Paul along with the Virgil's Aeneas his only "forerunners" in the afterlife journey (except, of course, Christ). It is for this reason that Dante calls Paul "the chosen vessel" of Christianity.

Below it is intended to show that the twofold motive of death and spiritual rebirth is quite clearly traced in another significant work of the 19th century Russian literature – the novel of A.I. Herzen *Who is to blame?*.

It should be noted in this connection that in this case one can also speak about a direct impact of Gogol's poetics and motivations on A.I. Herzen; for a good reason A.I. Herzen is spoken of as "a sensitive interpreter of Gogol's creativity"²⁴. A lot of works are written about Herzen's attitude to Gogol; it is known that this attitude was complicated. In particular, this concerns the harsh criticism of A.I. Herzen concerning the most controversial work of N.V. Gogol *Selected places from correspondence with friends*, in which the author himself saw a "confessional" reflection of the initiatory processes of "spiritual death" and the

²² Yu. V. Mann, *In search for a living soul: Dead Souls. The writer-the critics-the reader*, Moscow, Kniga, 1984.

²³ A. A. Asoyan, *Dante in Russian culture*, Moscow, Center for Humanitarian Initiatives, 2015, p. 68.

²⁴ S. A. Dzhanumov, "Creativity of N.V. Gogol in assessment of A.I. Herzen," in M. B. Loskutnikov (Ed.), in *Rusistics and comparativistics: Collected scientific articles in 2 books: Issue 7, book 2*, Moscow, MSPU Press, 2012, p. 144.

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religious and spiritual revival that happened to him. A.I. Herzen was unanimous with V.G. Belinsky and other critics in the evaluation of this book. Gogol's artistic creativity – and primarily *Dead Souls* – was evaluated by Herzen extremely high, and he recognized the impossibility of unambiguous evaluation and perception as one of the main advantages of this masterpiece: "The merit of the work of art is great when it can elude any one-sided view ..." ²⁵.

It is curious that A.I. Herzen was one of the first readers of N.V. Gogol, who paid serious attention to his "close echoing" of Dante. "As early as in the mid-1930s, Herzen began to closely monitor the creative work of Gogol. In Herzen's diaries traces of the young writer's deep reflections on Petersburg stories and especially *Dead Souls* can be found. Noteworthy, for example, is his idea that Gogol's realism is not limited to the merciless destruction of the existing, that it also bears within itself the desire for a social renewal of life" ²⁶.

In the summer of 1842, Herzen, in particular, makes the following entry in his diary, reflecting on the first volume of *Dead Souls*: "Here, passing from the Sobakeviches to the Plyushkins, you are engulfed with horror, with every step you are getting stuck, drowning deeper. The lyric place will suddenly be enlivened, illuminated, and now replaced again with a picture that reminds you even more clearly, in which trash of hell you are, and how Dante would like to stop seeing and hearing – and the funny words of the merry author are heard ..." ²⁷.

A.I. Herzen was one of the first to note another symbolic and semantic core of Gogol's poem – correlation of the title epithet "dead souls" rather with numerous landowner characters who are physically alive and quite well, but spiritually dead than with those "fictively alive" (until the next census) peasants, who are defined so by Chichikov. In his publicistic essay *On the Development of Revolutionary Ideas in Russia* Herzen perceptively states: "Gogol's poetry, his sorrowful laughter is not only an indictment against such an absurd existence, but also a painful cry of a man trying to escape before he is buried alive in this world of madmen. For such a cry to break out of the chest, it is necessary that something healthy would remain in it, so that the great power of revival resides in it. Gogol felt – and many others felt with him – *that there are living souls behind the dead ones...*" ²⁸.

Undoubtedly, it would be hard to see a direct "successor" of Gogol's tradition in A.I. Herzen. On the contrary, as the researchers quite reasonably point out, "N.V. Gogol and A.I. Herzen, contemporaries, are antipodes in many ways. Their names seldom stand side by side as close and especially related. The nature of their connection with the epoch, as well as the ratio of the ideological and the aesthetic in creativity separate them most irresistibly" ²⁹. Nevertheless, the above

²⁵ A. I. Herzen, *Diary 1842–1845*, in *Collected Works in 30 volumes*, Vol. 2. Moscow, USSR AS Press, 1954, p. 220.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 411.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 220.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 188.

²⁹ E. I. Annenkova, "Gogol and Herzen in the 1940s: ("Selected Places from Correspondence with Friends" and "From the Other Bank")", in *Issues of Russian Literature*, LV (1990), no 1, p. 44.

quotation from Herzen's diary about the "great power of revival" that had risen to prominence in the *Dead Souls* could be used, to the best of the author's belief, as an epigraph of the novel *Who is to blame?* by A.I. Herzen.

Despite the difference in literary and ideological approaches of N.V. Gogol and A.I. Herzen, a definite influence of the former on the latter is without doubt for the researchers. Thus, according to S. Mashinsky, "Hertzen experienced a strong influence of Gogol. Intonations characteristic of Gogol are already felt in some of his early works. In this respect *Patriarchal Manners of the Town of Malinov* is of interest. Sketches of an outlandish provincial town, its life, people, customs, naturally, excited the associations with the pages of some stories of *Mirgorod* and the Petersburg cycle in the reader's memory. The satirical denunciation of the landowners' life, of the entire feudal reality becomes the main theme of Herzen's prose. The parallels between Herzen and Gogol are well known: *Doctor Krupov* and *Notes of a Madman*, *Who is to blame?* and *Dead Souls* – these literary works reveal much in common in the nature of the artistic vision of the world and the creative method of both writers ... " ³⁰.

In addition, Gogol's *Dead Souls* actualizes Dante's problems in the creative work of A.I. Herzen. As underlined rightfully by A.A. Asoyan in his study of the fate of Dante's great poem in Russian literature, "the infernal character of the epoch of Nicholas was obvious to Herzen prior to *Dead Souls*, but this "poem that was born in travail" in which he heard "a bitter rebuke to modern Rus" gathered his life impressions in the well-known terrible image of Dante's hell. Since that time, it persistently pursued Herzen in meditations about his fate and Russia, but even in the most difficult days, Herzen was able to keep the presence of the spirit <...>. In these meditations, the shadow of Dante impacts the thought of Herzen about himself in other way than in the time of romantic experiences. The nightmare of Russian reality and the purgatory of the struggle are perceived by him like the trials that Dante went through, descending to Lucifer and ascending to the southern hemisphere. This parallel developed in another way as well. Thus, in a deeply radical article, according to Annenkova's opinion, with the pathos of a follower Herzen told about Dante, who, having reached paradise, came back to life and carried its cross, and in the diary, anticipating new repressions, almost the same words and almost at the same time Herzen wrote about himself: "I just hope my shoulders would not be broken under the weight of the cross" ³¹.

A.A. Asoyan pointed to the connection between the image structure of the novel *Who is to blame?* and the *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri. The researcher notes the obvious susceptibility of the Russian writer to the first part of Dante's poem, the preference given by him to the infernal scenes in the *Comedy*. This parallel reflects the development of the writer's ideas of non-existence.

Being primarily an artist of social and political conflicts, A.I. Herzen, as a deeply thinking writer who depicted widely the reality, could not avoid the theme of death in his works. Before every representative of the human race, the question

³⁰ S. I. Mashinsky, *Artistic world of Gogol*, Moscow, Prosveschenie, 1979, p. 411.

³¹ A. A. Asoyan, *Dante in Russian culture*, Moscow, Center for Humanitarian Initiatives, 2015, p. 112.

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of the meaning of life inevitably arises, as the loss of this meaning often leads to moral and physical destruction – it was this thesis that became the foundation for the writer in covering this problem.

It should be noted that the theme of death is not the leading, dominant subject in the creative activity of A.I. Herzen, nevertheless, in the novel *Who is to blame?* (1846) death acts as a constituent element of the worldview.

Who is to blame? is a novel unusual in its depth and scale. As known, this is the second work of the young writer. However, already in it he demonstrates the pulsation of his own thought and the whimsical artistic manner, which fascinates the game with the reader. In the last decade there has been a new "surge" of researchers' attention to various aspects of the poetics of this novel by A.I. Herzen. There are works that determine its motivational structure (Ayupov³², Sarsenova³³), the features of narration (Silantev, Sozina³⁴), the use of intertextual signs in the novel of A.I. Herzen (Sozina³⁵; Karpov³⁶), the realization of the motive of happiness in the text of *Who is to blame?* (Belyeva³⁷), the development of the problem of providentialism and the occasion (Benkovich³⁸).

It seems curious to look at the text of A.I. Herzen's novel from the perspective of the semantics of dying, considering that the mortality theme is presented in the text quite definitely. The writer develops an initiatory semantics related to the image of the main character of Vladimir Beltov in the deepest layers of the text.

The relevance of this subject for A.I. Herzen was emphasized by the historical context: the 1840s were the time when this novel was published. A.I. Herzen characterizes the reign of Nicholas, who created this state of life in death as the "devastating period". The author of *Who is to blame?* called this period a "smoothly murdered barren"³⁹. At the end of 1847, when thunder broke over literature and art, being aggrieved with the created situation, Professor A.N. Nikitenko wrote in his diary: "The vitality of our society is poorly manifested in general: we are morally closer to death than it should be, and therefore the physical

³² S. M. Ayupov, & I. K. Zainasheva, "Motives of Russian classics in the novel of A.I. Herzen "Who is to blame?"", in *The Humanistic Heritage of Educators in Culture and Education*, III (2008), p. 40-44.

³³ I. Zh. Sarsenova, "The concept of the garden in the fiction prose of A.I. Herzen", in *Studies in Humanities*, II (2012), p. 246-252.

³⁴ I. V. Silantev, & E. K. Sozina, "The narrative in literature and history (based on the material of A. Herzen's diary prose of the 1840s)", in *Siberian Philological Journal*, III (2013), p. 58-68.

³⁵ E. K. Sozina, *Dynamics of artistic consciousness in Russian prose of the 1830-1850s and the strategy of writing in classical realism, Author's abstract from PhD Thesis (Philology)*, Ekaterinburg, 2001.

³⁶ D. L. Karpov, *The tradition of Pushkin's prose and Russian novels of the mid-1840s, PhD Thesis (Philology)*, Yaroslavl, 2010.

³⁷ I. A. Belyaeva, "The novel of A.I. Herzen "Who is to blame?" and the problem of happiness in Russian prose of the 1840s", in *Bulletin of Moscow State Pedagogical University. Series: Philological education*, (2013), no 1, p. 38-44.

³⁸ M. A. Benkovitch, "The plot experiment (the problem of necessity and freedom of will) in the novel of A.I. Herzen "Who is to blame?"", in *Literature and Time* (collected articles), 1987, p. 39-57.

³⁹ A. I. Herzen, *My past and thoughts* p. 35.

death arouses less natural horror in us"⁴⁰. Russia under Nicholas, as seen by the eyes of A.I. Herzen, recalled the "miserable cemetery", "Necropolis", the city of the dead (Chaadaev), the "Sandwich Islands". That is, according to the ideas of the people of the 19th century, it was the place where anthropophagy dominates (Nikitenko), and the inhabitants of this world were one and all "dead souls" (Gogol). In this "miserable cemetery" life has decomposed, but it has not become even a "real" death, continuing to remain in some intermediate state.

The role of the chronotope in the realization of the mortality motives in the novel *Who is to blame?*

The theme of death and hell, the possibility of posthumous existence worried humanity since ancient times. The idea of guilt and requital/retribution is associated with the image of hell. These constants determine the content of the novel *Who is to blame?* of A.I. Herzen. Hell acts here as one of the circumstantial signs of a thanatological act. In Herzen's novel hell is not a specific locus, as in Dante's *Comedy*, but the hero's state, the participants in the narration always carry their own hell with them.

At the same time, there a peculiar "topical" component is in the novel – the town of NN, whose inhabitants are seen by the author as some living dead, devoid of a truly "living" human feeling, existing as if purely mechanically, instinctively. The town of NN is quite conventional and even metaphorical – any Russian city of the epoch that was contemporary to the young author could be in its place; this metaphoricity adds the depth and "universality" to the mortality motives of the novel. The very epoch and, correspondingly, the chronological framework of the narrative is deprived of this conventionality: we see the characters existing in a definite historical period, which imposes a clear and powerful imprint on this existence.

The text of A.I. Herzen develops an important idea of N.V. Gogol, represented here at the level of allusions. A gigantic mythological image of Russia appears in Gogol's text, as the "other world" or the "after-death"⁴¹. Rus is the death that had already happened, but perceived as life "by force of habit". In Herzen's novel, a quiet and ordinary stagnation of social life in the town of NN takes the same image of a kind of the "after-death". Chichikov is trying to find a way to acquire a kind of immortality in the other world; Beltov leaves NN – and thus runs away from death, leaving his elderly mother and his dying beloved woman.

The lyrical digression in the poem *Dead Souls*, dedicated to the road, represents the reconciliation of the space of life and death, of the earthly and heavenly coordinates. Through allusion to N.V. Gogol (*Dead Souls*, Chapter XI)⁴²

⁴⁰ A. V. Nikitenko, *A diary*. Vol. I, Leningrad, State Publishing House of Fiction, 1955, p. 308.

⁴¹ E. O. Tretyakov, "Chichikov's image as an ontological mystery: the phenomenon of the enigmatic nature of thanatology of the *Dead Souls* by N.V. Gogol", in *Imagology and Comparativistics*, I (2015), p. 127-142.

⁴² N. V. Gogol, *Dead Souls*. Translated from Russian by D. J. Hogarth. The Project Gutenberg EBook, from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1081/1081-h/1081-h.htm> accessed 13.10.2018.

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with its epic immensity A.I. Herzen tries to show the miserliness of the social in the second part of his novel (Chapter VI)⁴³.

A.I. Herzen is building his tirades in an explicit orientation toward the style of N.V. Gogol, as evidenced by the verbal inclusions being present in the fragments. Even Herzen's structure of phrase construction recalls what Gogol did. In the poem *Dead Souls*, N.V. Gogol develops the mortality theme. Similarly, an infernal, mortality beginning pervades the scene created by A.I. Herzen. The key images involved in the description – the road, the garden and the river, traditionally have mortality semantics.

N.V. Gogol, *Dead Souls*⁴⁴

1. *The appeal of the lyric hero to Rus, a description of the topos*

"Ah, Russia, Russia, from my beautiful home in a strange land I can still see you! In you everything is poor and disordered and unhomely; in you the eye is neither cheered nor dismayed by temerities of nature which a yet more temerarious art has conquered; in you one beholds no cities with lofty, many-windowed mansions, lofty as crags, no picturesque trees, no ivy-clad ruins, no waterfalls with their everlasting spray and roar, no beetling precipices which confuse the brain with their stony immensity, no vistas of vines and ivy and millions of wild roses and ageless lines of blue hills which look almost unreal against the clear, silvery background of the sky".

2. *Visual description of the town*

"In you everything is flat and open; your towns project like points or signals from smooth levels of plain, and nothing whatsoever enchants or deludes the eye."

A.I. Herzen, *Who is to blame?*⁴⁵

1. *A description of the topos – the river crossing*

"The view from the hill was rather pleasing. A large, muddy road encircled the park and lead directly to the river. The water was high and on both banks there stood all sorts of carts, wagons, carriages, unhitched horses, peasant women with large bundles, soldiers and tradesmen. Two large bottom-flattened boats were constantly ferrying people back and forth. Loaded with people, horses and carriages these boats were slowly rowed across the river and resembled some ancient, recently excavated sea monsters, regularly raising and lowering their numerous appendages..."

2. *Sonic description of the river crossing*

"A variety of sounds came to the ears of the sitting couple: the creaking of carts, bells, the cries of ferrymen and somebody's barely audible answers from that direction; the scolding of hurrying

⁴³ A. I. Herzen, *Who is to blame?*, 1984.

⁴⁴ N. V. Gogol, *Dead Souls*, Translated from Russian by D. J. Hogarth. The Project Gutenberg EBook, from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1081/1081-h/1081-h.htm> accessed 13.10.2018.

⁴⁵ A. I. Herzen, *Who is to blame?*, p. 245-246.

passengers; the tramping of horses that were mounted on the dock, the mooing of a cow tied to the cart by the horns, a loud conversation of peasants on the bank who had gathered near the laid fire. The lady and the gentleman interrupted their talk, watching in silence and listening to those far away sounds..."

3. *A rhetorical question of the lyric hero*

"Yet what secret, what invincible force draws me to you?"

3. *A rhetorical question of the lyric hero*

"Why do all these sounds from far away act so strongly on us, why are they so amazing – I do not know, but I do know that I hope to God that Viardot and Roubini would be always listened to with such heartbeat, with which many times I was listening to ..."

4. *Motive of a song*

"Why does there ceaselessly echo and re-echo in my ears the sad song which hovers throughout the length and the breadth of your borders? What is the burden of that song? Why does it wail and sob and catch at my heart? What say the notes which thus painfully caress and embrace my soul, and flit, uttering their lamentations, around me? What is it you seek of me, O Russia? What is the hidden bond which subsists between us? Why do you regard me as you do? Why does everything within you turn upon me eyes full of yearning? Even at this moment, as I stand dumbly, fixedly, perplexedly contemplating your vastness, a menacing cloud, charged with gathering rain, seems to overshadow my head. What is it that your boundless expanses presage? Do they not presage that one day there will arise in you ideas as boundless as yourself? Do they not presage that one day you too will know no limits? Do

4. *Motive of a song*

"some plangent and endless song of a barge hauler guarding the barges at night – that was a dull song, interrupted by a splash of water and wind that rustled between the willows at the riverside."

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they not presage that one day, when again you shall have room for their exploits, there will spring to life the heroes of old?"

5. *Contact of the external and internal space*

"How the power of your immensity enfolds me, and reverberates through all my being with a wild, strange spell, and flashes in my eyes with an almost supernatural radiance! Yes, a strange, brilliant, unearthly vista indeed do you disclose, O Russia, country of mine!"

5. *Division of the external and internal, and attempt to enter another reality*

"And I could fancy anything listening to monotonous, dull sounds; it seemed to me that with this song a poor man was eager to get from the stuffy sphere into another one; that he, without realizing, was announcing his sadness; that his soul sounded, because it was sad, because it was tight, and so on and so forth. It was in my youth!"

The text of A.I. Herzen demonstrates the idea of delimitating the two layers: the man-made, subordinate to man (*a herd, quacking, tramping, mooing*) and created by the Maker, not subordinate to man (*evening, night*). The change of times of day has its own logic. The lyric narrator relishes the order that is not arranged by him (*"so good that the evening will pass in an hour, that is, will change for night on time"*). However, the narrator will very soon grow weary of the well-oiled and harmonious world order.

The town of NN is represented as life in death in the novel *Who is to blame?*, where a young Russian gentleman, the owner of Beloye Pole estate, Vladimir Petrovich Beltov, has come from Europe to participate in nobiliary elections. In essence, Beltov is going through a transition procedure: he is crossing the border between Europe and Russia, the capital and the province, the new and the old, the familiar and the unusual. The condition for his survival and transfiguration is a compulsory passage of the "liminal zone". The provincial town acts as such a zone in the novel. The motives of boredom, despondence, and silence are persistently repeated in its description. The town is similar to Dante's hell, and the word "hell" appears time and again in the text.

The townspeople are not alive, nor are they dead yet (as later in the "The House of the Dead" and "Demons" by F.M. Dostoyevsky). These people live in boundlessness and anxiety. What surrounds them is not culture, this is devildom. The inhabitants of the town are people without God's protection and grace, without a guardian angel. The characters are tempted in their boredom. Herzen finds witty characteristics to describe the town life: everything that is happening is an "oblivious sleep", an "optical illusion", all the plot participants "live because they were born."

Vladimir Beltov, the protagonist of the novel, having arrived at the town of NN, is a welcome groom; Varvara Karpovna, the daughter of the meeting chairman, is kept for his wife. Beltov has two strings to bow: to marry Varvara or to arrange an affair with married Lyubonka Krutsiferskaya. He opts for the latter. Beltov creates a catastrophic situation for the Krutsiferskiis' family. By his act – the invasion and destruction of other people's family – he challenges the Supreme Judge ⁴⁶. Beltov deprives the Krutsifersky family of hope for salvation in Eternity. The moral iniquity is followed by no punishment, since all these people appear to have been already punished, they initially dwell in death. It can be assumed that Herzen's Vladimir Beltov is trying to find an alternative way to gain immortality in such a manner.

The title of the *Who is to blame?* is symptomatic. It is this binding force that integrates all the action, all the narratives. The guilt dominant is built in the title. Who is to blame in the misfortunes of people? V.A. Nedzvetsky reasons upon this question ⁴⁷. The answer is the same: there is no subject of guilt; it is a chance that is to blame. The chance is such a category that destroys truisms of the world order. The chance is a blind fate, a blind, chaotic will. The town of NN is a desacralized place. The all-merciful and all-powerful will does not ever manifest itself by any means in such a world. The space of the provincial NN town world is likened to a “deserted garden, / futile fortune of worthless herbs...” that are not taken care after; the owner's hand has ceased to care for his creation.

The initiatory component of mortality motives in the novel *Who is to blame?*

The main character of the novel of A.I. Herzen undergoes a peculiar ordeal by death in the plot. It acts as his visit to the otherworldly “land of the dead”. This journey is sharpened to become a mortal peril (a duel). The paradigm of Beltov's behavior corresponds to the model of an archaic hero who ought to touch the world of death in order to achieve the status of a hero. A hero is a person who performs a feat, proving his own special position in the world and his chosenness, perhaps, at the expense of his life.

Given Gogol's and Dante's context of the book, the following interpretation can be proposed: in Herzen's novel, Beltov “died”, and that is precisely why he found himself in the town of NN (this is an anti-world where everything is the other way around). Therein, he is out of breath, everything is nagging, it is wailsome (cramping), the “morbid awry” is developing in him. His manner is thrown into sharp relief with the entourage: in this dirty town, in a nasty hotel, being decently and neatly dressed, he is lying (holding a horizontal position, like a dead man in a coffin): “*When he looked at his watch having finished reading, he was very surprised it was so late, so he called his valet to order to prepare the apparel as soon as*

⁴⁶ T. V. Shvetsova, “Don Juan and Vladimir Beltov: toward the hero's action”, in *Bulletin of the Vyatka State University*, VII (2017), p. 84-89.

⁴⁷ V. A. Nedzvetsky, “Who on Earth is to blame in the novel by A.I. Herzen *Who is to blame?*”, in *Literature at School*, VI (2010), p. 16-19.

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possible; however, both the surprise and the order were rather instinctive, since he was not going anywhere and nor did he care whether it was six or twelve in the morning. Having dressed with that thoroughness and neatness we get accustomed to living abroad for a long time and we soon get estranged from in the provinces, he, determined to get down to political economics, lay down in the same place and opened an English booklet about Adam Smith" (chapter IV)⁴⁸. All those around him are like dead men. Getting acquainted with the inhabitants of the town, Beltov is passing the circles of hell as the Dante's hero (each circle is for a peculiar sin).

The contents of the novel of A.I. Herzen suggests that, despite the absence of explicit references to the mortality theme, a problem that ascends to the dual mythologem of "death and resurrection" can be considered one of the main problems of the novel. In this regard, in the author's opinion, the references to Hufeland's essay "The Art of Prolonging Life" are indicative in the text. As is known, Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland (1762-1836) was one of the founders of gerontology, a professor at the University of Jena, an honorary member of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences⁴⁹. In 1820, the essay was published in Russian (translated from German by the student of Moscow University Peter Ozerov), entitled "The Science Showing Ways to Achieve Longevity". In his paper, Hufeland elaborates the idea of immortality, or eternal life. Any person is pushed for this idea by the fear of death, by the awe of human existence finiteness. The barrier between life and death, the realization "And what is There is never here!" (a quote from Schiller), the incompatibility of two planes in the structure of the universe – the empyrean and the terra firma becomes a reason for the tragic conclusion about God's non-involvement in temporal affairs.

In the town of NN, Beltov experiences, in fact, a ritually symbolic death, and, therefore, appears to be able to regenerate in a real, true life (what comes back to memory is Novalis's "Hymns to the Night" and the key message of this cycle: in order to come to God, one has to break from the night of life). The fact of his departure in the finale of the Herzen's novel proves the protagonist overcoming death.

In the novel of A.I. Herzen, the mortality theme intersects with the motive of sleep, which is made to appear by the writer as a kind of transformation of the departure from life. Meanwhile, it is known that sleep is one of the most important universals of human culture. It comes as a no surprise that the idea of "overcoming" sociophysical reality and expanding beyond it is laid in the artistic system of A.I. Herzen who listened to lectures on the German philosophy by Professor S.P. Shevyrev, so the "sleep" motive plays a significant role in his oeuvre.

The hero of the Herzen's novel needs to define existence by non-existence to realize the abundance of his own life. Death is the limit that shapes existence and determines it. Beltov is offered a duel – and refuses. He reflects on a suicide, but is not going to pursue this act. Beltov's rival, Dmitry Krutsifersky, also admits the idea of a suicide. Death in the novel loses its lofty sacred meaning; this is not a

⁴⁸ A. I. Herzen, *Who is to blame?*

⁴⁹ V. Kovalinskiy, "Science of a long-term life", in *Pharmaceutical Branch*, XXII (2010), no. 5, p. 110.

transcendental concept. Herzen removes the conceptual borderline between life and death. The character of Dr. Krupov appears in the novel with a definite function. He has to deal with death ex professo, but at the same time, he is a guide into life (he helps a servant to be brought to bed).

Thus, the actual situation of the hero's peril in the novel *Who is to blame?* is not set. The plot of the novel acquires finish through the motive of Beltov's arrival at and departure from the provincial town. The episode of the protagonist's contact with symbolic death (initiation) lies at the heart of this "circular" plot, as a result of which he is to change. All the dead remain in the town, while Beltov leaves.

It can be said that the mortality motives and the immortality theme permeate the entire text of the novel of A.I. Herzen. An important role in the realization of these motives is played by the image of a temple. The temple depicted throughout the pages of the novel does not perform sacred solemn rites. It becomes a meeting place of town officials for an exchange of civilities. The temple is not comprehended any more as a shrine preserved among the insanity, as a bastion of good, a haven for fellowship of God. A shift in attitude to the temple changes the perception and view of the world by characters. In actual life where the Supreme Judge does not reveal His presence, the idea of life and death, guilt and retribution becomes meaningless, and an actively responsible human act becomes value-irrelevant⁵⁰.

Conclusion

Realization and transformation of the mortality motives in the novel of A.I. Herzen *Who is to blame?* is associated with the performance of two major cultural and philosophical functions:

1. ontological: the author postulates the existence of two realities – the daily reality and some kind of the otherworldly one. They are linked by complex dialectical relations: we cannot clearly distinguish between the reality intended to be the "life" motive embodiment and the other one, the essence of which would be the mortality motive embodiment. Perceived from different perspectives, they can also be interpreted in different ways: in one "frame of reference" close to the conventional perception, "life" is represented by physical existence of the characters, while death is only mentioned in its physical aspect. At a deeper, metaphorically symbolic level, it is ordinary life of the characters that is "apprehended" as life-in-death being deprived of "abundance", of a full-fledged lively impulse;

2. worldview: the very fact of the protagonist's break with the dead-alive community, the initiatory "breakthrough" testifies to the author's conviction of the ability of an individual to resist circumstances, in particular, that situation of "life-in-death" where he finds himself by force of circumstances.

⁵⁰ N. I. Nikolaev, & T. V. Shvetsova, "Crisis of action" of the Russian literary character in literary discourse", in *Man in India*, IIC(2017), no. 10, p. 449-462.

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