

SUMMARY

The aim of the dissertation was to investigate and demonstrate the impact of the Russian literary tradition on the work of John Maxwell Coetzee. I compared five literary works of the writer from the Republic of South Africa with an autobiographical trilogy of Leo Tolstoy and the novels of Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky. I also proved that the traces of contemporary Russian writer Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn can be found in Coetzee's books. A comparison of literary works distant in time and space is justified. It allows to discover and understand the fact that in spite of chronological, cultural, social and civilizational differences, they constitute one integral whole.

The theme of the first chapter of the dissertation are the links between Africa and Russia. Russia was always interested in the Dark Continent both in geopolitical and cultural areas. In the chapter I examined the origins and evolution of the African theme in Russian literature, as well as the reception of Coetzee's works in Russia.

The next three chapters are devoted to the connections between Coetzee and Russian literature. A comparative analysis starts from the dialogue of the South African writer with Leo Tolstoy and finishes at him. One can say that this is a literary journey which comes full circle. It allowed searching, gathering and interpretation of the elements which proved that the Russian literature is present in the Coetzee's works, the literature which he admired so much. The research material in the dissertation includes the following novels of the writer who comes from South Africa:

- *Boyhood, Youth, Summertime* – compared with the autobiographical trilogy of Leo Tolstoy *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth*
- *Disgrace* – juxtaposed with the novel *Crime and punishment* of Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky
- *Here and Now: Letters 2008-2011* – comparable to Dostoevsky's correspondence with his wife
- *Life and Times of Michael K.* – compared with *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn
- *Age of Iron* – compared with *Cancer Ward* by Solzhenitsyn and *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* by Tolstoy.

In the second chapter of the dissertation I analyzed the influence of Leo Tolstoy on the works of John Maxwell Coetzee. In the comparative study of the authors' biographies and the lives of their heroes, I paid special attention to childhood, adolescence, maturation, relationships with parents and religious and political beliefs, which influenced their adult life and the fate of their heroes. The comparative analysis was also applied to the moral and philosophical attitude of the two authors. Based on the knowledge that due to English translations Coetzee knew Russian literature, including the works of Tolstoy, I suppose that the social and religious ideas of the Russian writer (the Tolstoyan movement) were close to the South African novelist.

The next chapter of the dissertation was devoted to the links between Coetzee and Fyodor Dostoevsky, who often wrote about the fate of the oppressed people. In Coetzee's novels one can also find fragments which are the evidence of his empathy for people. Interest in people at the bottom is the social purpose of not only Tolstoy's works, but also Coetzee's. They both wanted to change the old, deceitful, unjust world and build a completely new and better order on the Earth.

The dissertation also drew attention to the people thrown to the margins of social life. *Disgrace* by Coetzee and *Crime and punishment* by Dostoevsky were an attempt to show the spiritual crisis of a man who suddenly lost his past and future after committing a crime, but not lost dignity. Coetzee, like Dostoevsky, was able to convey the most subtle psychological state of a man.

In the next part of the third chapter I compared the contemporary writers' correspondence (South African writer John Maxwell Coetzee and American Paul Auster) with epistolary heritage of Fyodor Dostoyevsky who regularly wrote to his beloved wife Anna. Due to letters for the first time we were able to know the facts from the personal life of Coetzee, who hid them carefully from readers.

The last chapter of the dissertation presents the relation between Coetzee and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. The attention is focused on what connects northern Russia and the cruel reality of the Gulag with a writer from South Africa. The dissertation showed that the characters of both literary works *Life and Times of Michael K.* and *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* lived in harsh climates and during unfavorable historical events. The heroes became accidental victims of mass terror and archetypes of universal and eternal human values because they had to live in the lands where the inhabitants were terrorized by the all-powerful totalitarian state authorities.

The fourth chapter is also a return to the creative union of Coetzee and Tolstoy, additionally supplemented by similarities with Solzhenitsyn. A triple comparative analysis of three literary works: *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (Tolstoy), *Cancer Ward* (Solzhenitsyn) and *Age of Iron* (Coetzee) showed the work of the South African writer in a completely new perspective. Each book tells the story of the death, but also the overwhelming outside world that surrounded heroes. In the works of Solzhenitsyn and Coetzee we can see parallels between communism in Russia and apartheid in South Africa. These works, like Tolstoy's literary masterpiece, remind the reader that all people are equal in the face of death.

Comparative analysis of literary works of Coetzee and Solzhenitsyn showed that the dialogue of South African and Russian writers turned into a conversation of many people, in polyphonic exchanges of views among the greatest masters of literature, first of all Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy. The conducted comparison resulted in the fact that the role of the speaker moved from one artist to another: voices of Coetzee, Solzhenitsyn, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy were heard.

The study confirmed that the ideas and views of the great Masters of Russian literature in the nineteenth century on important aspects of human life (faith, conscience, freedom, dignity, suffering, love) are beyond time and geographical distances. The tradition of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy is continued in contemporary Russian literature as well as world literature (Weltliteratur).