УДК 82.091

**T. Kovalevskaya**

# SHAKESPEARE AND DOSTOEVSKY: THE HUMAN CONDITION AND THE HUMAN AMBITION

*The article considers W. Shakespeare's influence on F.M. Dostoevsky in terms of philosophical categories. I show that Dostoevsky viewed Shakespeare's works as embodying a particular type of human ambitions opposed both to Dostoevsky's own Christian ideal and to the atheistic worldview of his ideological opponents. Shakespeare's human being is a self-deifying individual who attempts, through an effort of his will, to turn himself in the center of the universe, possessing of his own, independent transcendence.*
Keywords: *Dostoevsky, Shakespeare,* Demons*,* Richard II*,* Henry IV*, self-deification.*

Surprisingly, the subject of Shakespeare's influence on Dostoevsky is very little researched. When I started investigating this topic about 5 years ago, I could only find an article on Stavrogin and Prince Hal published in 1962, and a few short pages in general works and collections such as *Shakespeare and the Russian Literature* and *Shakespeare and the Russian Culture* [8, 9, 13]. Recently, however, the subject is gaining increasing popularity, and hopefully, this odd situation will soon be properly rectified.

Such little interest shown by the academic community is all the more surprising because Dostoevsky valued Shakespeare's works almost as highly as he did the Bible. In 1849, Dostoevsky writes his brother from his prison cell in St. Peter and Paul fortress, "My dear brother, I received your letter and the books (Shakespeare, the Bible, *Otechestvennye zapiski*)… Re-read the books you had sent. My special thanks for Shakespeare. How did you guess?" [4. 28:1. P. 160–161)[1]. Characteristically, young Dostoevsky places Shakespeare before the Bible. Shakespeare clearly is a great artistic and philosophical presence for Dostoevsky, and maybe more philosophical than purely artistic, because Dostoevsky could be also fairly critical of Shakespeare's works; he certainly was not in any blind awe of the Bard: "Shakespeare is said to have no corrections in his manuscripts. This is why he has so many monstrosities and so much

[1] All the references to this edition are henceforth given in the text. The first number refers to the volume, the number after a hyphen to the sub-volume if there is one, and the number after the semicolon to the page.

tastelessness, and had he worked more, things would have been better" (28:1; 311). Yet Shakespeare truly does occupy for Dostoevsky a place next to the Bible. Harold Bloom in his monumental monograph on Shakespeare begins by attempting to explain Shakespeare's timeless importance by claiming that Shakespeare not only tells us who we are, but he created us in his plays [1. P. XX]. For Dostoevsky, Shakespeare's works and characters evidently signified a certain key type of human ambitions and the outcome of the realization of these ambitions.

The word "ambition" itself seems to be one of the Bard's crucial words. It travels from play to play, and in each and every one, it is loaded with heavily negative connotations, denoting false aspirations to a station for which human beings were not even meant. The word "overreaching" Harry Levin used to describe the characters of Christopher Marlowe is even more appropriate for the characters of Shakespeare's plays. For the Bard, human ambition is inevitably overreaching and self-defeating in its improper aspirations[1]. It is not accidental that the words "ambition" and "ambitious" are used far more frequently in the histories and tragedies with their incessant motif of overreaching (roughly 33 and 35 instances respectively versus about 11 instances in comedies, depending on the exact distribution of plays between the categories). Dostoevsky viewed Shakespeare precisely as a poet who had, with the ultimate fullness, depicted this type of an ambitiously overreaching human being and explored philosophical and religious underpinnings of such ambitions. This overreaching stretches into the metaphysical and the eternal.

It is worth noting at this point that both Shakespeare and Dostoevsky create works that are deeply rooted in a specific time and place. Their characters' attitudes, behavior, mindsets, and decisions depend heavily on specific political situations, on particular customs and traditions, yet at

[1] The pursuit of unduly ambitions was a problem for the Elizabethan age in general. See [5]. On ambition in Shakespeare's work see also [7. P. 135-146]. Shakespeare's clearly negative attitude toward ambition may be interesting as yet another argument in the perennial question of whether Shakespeare wrote what we today know as Shakespeare. In his recently published biography of Shakespeare, Igor Shaitanov rightly remarks that taking sides in the Shakespearean question is not a matter of convincing arguments, it's a matter of faith [12. P. 11-12), and I would also add that partly, it is a matter of ingrained social conventions when a less-than-stellar social background combined with a lack of extensive formal education are taken to equal the impossibility of actor William Shakespeare writing the plays attributed to him. Nonetheless, Shakespearean works taken and analyzed together exhibit a remarkable consistency of thought and mindset and a stunningly middle-class attitude to life: overreaching ambition is seen as the root of all evil.

the same time, both writers' works are ultimately timeless. For both Shakespeare and Dostoevsky, human actions and historical events transpiring in our physical world are motivated and propelled forward by the metaphysical engines determining people's actions. It becomes particularly clear if we compare Shakespeare to Dante or Albertino Mussato. In both the *Divine Comedy* and in Mussato's *Ecerinis*, the grand religious and metaphysical subjects serve mostly as a commentary on topical political events, and not vice versa. In Shakespeare's plays and Dostoevsky's novels, on the other hand, metaphysics comes first, and transcendence and history combine to charter the unchanging path overreaching human beings take toward self-destruction, even if they do not think that such is their destination.

*Demons* is Dostoevsky's most openly Shakespeare-oriented novel. Even in its genre, *Demons* is meant to be projected onto Shakespeare. The novel is styled "a chronicle" (10; 7), the word used in Russian to denote Shakespeare's histories. This is further emphasized when Varvara Petrovna Stavrogina reads *Henry IV*, "the immortal chronicle" (10; 36), to look for clues to her son's behavior. One of the chapters is titled "Prince Harry. The Proposal" referring to Prince Hal, and Verkhovensky and Lebyadkin both claim that Stavrogin himself used to call Lebyadkin "his Falstaff."

Thus, we are invited to view Stavrogin as a sort of Prince Hal, future King Henry V, the epic winner of a seemingly hopeless battle, someone who in his youth explores the iniquities of the humankind to shine all the brighter against the background of his previous unsavory exploits. In the words of Prince Hal himself,

> I'll so offend to make offence a skill,
> Redeeming time when men think least I will.
> (Part 1, act 1, scene 2)

It is noteworthy that the word "ambition" or "ambitious" is not once applied to Prince Hal or Henry V, only to Percy in *Henry IV* ("Ill-weav'd ambition, how much art thou shrunk," says Hal having slain the rebellious Percy [part 1, act 5, scene 4]) and to king Henry IV himself in *Henry V*. And indeed, Prince Hal does reform, and if we develop the offered parallel between Stavrogin and Prince Hal, such a reading seems to promise a glorious future for Stavrogin.

Another Shakespearean parallel offered in the text is no less glorious, at least in literary terms, it is a parallel between Stavrogin and Hamlet. Varvara Petrovna bemoans the fact that her son has neither Horatio, nor Ophelia. If the absence of a Horatio means the absence of a trustworthy friend, the absence of an Ophelia means Stavrogin has not yet driven anyone to suicide, be it deliberate or not. Ironically, Stavrogin has both, and in abundance, too. Many characters vie for the role of Horatio in the novel, and Matryosha, unbeknownst to Varvara Petrovna, is Stavrogin's Ophelia whose death, probably caused as unintentionally as Ophelia's death in *Hamlet*, is his final undoing. Then there is Liza Tushina, another candidate for the role of Ophelia, as her involvement with Stavrogin also ends in tragedy and death. The parallels with Hamlet are fascinating, but for my present purposes, I will restrict myself to merely mentioning them and will concentrate on *Henry IV* and its significance for the novel.

As I have already said, the most obvious reading showcases Stavrogin as a sort of a diamond in the rough, someone who will perform great deeds in the future, despite his present depravity. Yet even before the novel ends with Stavrogin's suicide, there are indications in the text that there should be another reading of Shakespearean parallels in the novel, and, in a typically Dostoevskyan way, this hinted-at reading emerges directly from the openly proposed one[1]. It does not mean that the proposed one is untrue. Given Stavrogin's significance for virtually every character in the novel, the glory of the Stavrogin/Hal parallel is a "what could have been"[2], while another Shakespearean allusion moves firmly into the foreground.

---

[1] On Dostoevsky's poetics of veiling his most important references see [10].

[2] It is unclear what exactly Dostoevsky read from Shakespeare's works. He mentions a few plays, but not *Henry V*, or *Richard II* which we will touch upon later. Prince Hal's reformation takes place at the end of *Henry IV*, part 2, so for that, Dostoevsky would not have needed to read the following play. With that qualification in mind, it is interesting to note that Henry V's military victories could have been relevant for Dostoevsky with his attention to Russia's military campaigns, particularly those intended to help fellow Orthodox Christians in the Balkans living under the Ottoman Empire. See *The Diary of a Writer* for March of the year 1877, in particular, "The Russian People Has Grown Too Much Into a Reasonable Understanding From Their Own Point of View" etc. (25; 65–74). *Demons* was published in 1971–1872. The interpretation of Henry V's glory, however, isn't quite as simple as it might seem. Some changes in the 20th–21st centuries' perception are interesting to trace. In 1944, the film based on *Henry V* was intended to arouse patriotic feelings during World War II, and at the end of the play, Chorus's final words are cut to eliminate even the mentioning of Henry VI's tragic reign and the bloody civil war that followed the glorious victory at Agincourt. In 1989, Chorus's words are left intact, but Chorus himself is emphatically removed from the action, and his dampening short monologue doesn't

Prince Hal is to become King Henry V. Stavrogin also has royal prospects ahead of him. In a feverish monolog where he describes his vision of the future, Verkhovensky calls Stavrogin his future Ivan Tsarevich.

> We will say he is "hiding," Verkhovensky said quietly, in a lover-like whisper, he sounded as if he were drunk. "Do you know what this word 'hiding' means? But he will appear, he will. We will spread a legend better than that of the castrates. He is there, but no one has seen him. Oh, what a legend we could create! And the most important thing is, the new power is coming. …Listen, I won't show you to a single soul, I will show you to no one, it must be so. And yet, you know, we might show you, to a single person out of one hundred thousand. And the rumor will spread throughout the land: he has been seen, he has been seen. They saw Ivan Filippovich, the god sabaoth, ascending to heaven in a chariot before a crowd, they saw him with their own eyes. And you are not Ivan Filippovich, you are beautiful, proud like a god, you do not seek anything for yourself, you have the aura of a victim, you are 'hiding.' The legend is the thing! You will conquer them, one glance from you, and you will conquer them. You bear the new truth and you are 'hiding.' … and the earth will moan in a great moan, 'The new rightful law is coming,' and the sea will rise, and the silly show-booth [*balagan*] will collapse, and then we will think about building a new edifice of stone. For the first time! And *we* will be the builders, we alone (10; 324–326).

Verkhovensky's speech abounds in references, both direct and indirect, to all types of texts, from folk legends (the castrates whose founder

---

diminish the overall feeling of triumph. In 2012, Chorus is one of king Henry's men, one of those who fought at Agincourt, and his final lines are delivered as he is all alone, thus, in the viewers' eyes, turning to naught the famous promise of "He that shall live this day, and see old age, // Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours, // And say 'To-morrow is Saint Crispian.' // Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars, // And say 'These wounds I had on Crispian's day'" (act 4, scene 3). The glorious promise of eternal glory and brotherhood for the soldiers at Agincourt seems futile.

Incidentally, Hamlet, too, was, politically speaking, far from a successful claimant to the throne. Where his father and uncle promoted the greater good of Denmark, Hamlet essentially eliminated the royal family and turned the country over to Norway. Even though Hamlet never intended it, because of his revenge, Denmark as a kingdom in its own right was no more. A somewhat unexpected and paradoxical praise of Claudius as king see [6. P. 298–325]ю Knight deliberately provokes us, inviting us to take a closer look at our customary assessments. Therefore, even the parallel with Henry V might not be ultimately as flattering for Stavrogin as we are invited to believe.

and leader Kondraty Selivanov claimed to be both god the father himself and also emperor Peter III who had miraculously escaped assassins sent by his wife) to the Bible. The stone edifice sends the readers back to the very beginning of the novel, where in Stepan Verkhovensky's poem rendered in a highly comical way, some athletes complete the building of the tower of Babel and the inhabitant of, say, Mount Olympus flees, and the humankind takes his place and begins a new life with new penetration into things ("*novaya zhizn' s novym proniknoveniem veshchei"* [10; 10]). What had been comical in the almost make-believe, childish rebellion of the father, has become far more sinister in the son's ambitions. And there is another reference here, a nod to *Henry IV* again, but not so much to Prince Hal this time, but to his father, Henry IV, who compares himself to his predecessor Richard II. Whether Pyotr Verkhovensky does know Shakespeare's history or not (he spoke about Falstaff as if he didn't know where the character came from [10; 148–149]), Dostoevsky certainly did, and the proper mode for Stavrogin's life Pyotr envisions is much the same King Henry IV suggests to his wayward heir. This is the kind of behavior he practiced himself, the kind of behavior, he claims, that helped him win the crown:

> Had I so lavish of my presence been,
> So common-hackney'd in the eyes of men,
> So stale and cheap to vulgar company,
> Opinion, that did help me to the crown,
> Had still kept loyal to possession
> And left me in reputeless banishment,
> A fellow of no mark nor likelihood.
> By being seldom seen, I could not stir
> But, like a comet, I was wond'red at;
> That men would tell their children, 'This is he!'
> Others would say, 'Where? Which is Bolingbroke?'
> And then I stole all courtesy from heaven,
> And dress'd myself in such humility
> That I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts,
> Loud shouts and salutations from their mouths
> Even in the presence of the crowned King.
> Thus did I keep my person fresh and new,
> My presence, like a robe pontifical,
> Ne'er seen but wond'red at; and so my state,
> Seldom but sumptuous, show'd like a feast
> And won by rareness such solemnity.
>
> (Part 1, act 3, scene 2)

Verkhovensky's plans for Stavrogin are very reminiscent of this proper behavior practiced by Henry IV who dethroned his cousin. Thus the frame of reference encoded in the allusions to *Henry IV* leads not to the theme of a future ideal monarch who currently explores all the ways of humankind, but to the theme of usurpation.

The theme of usurpation and the related theme of impostorship run through all the references mentioned before. The completion of the tower of Babel is a usurpation of the place previously rightfully occupied by the inhabitant of Mount Olympus. The leader of the castrates attempts to usurp the place of the Lord Himself, and at the same time to present himself as a victim of usurpation, because if he is truly Peter III, his throne was stolen from him by his treacherous wife. And Stavrogin, therefore, turns out to be just another one in the endless line of usurpers claiming the power both earthly and spiritual.

Since Shakespearean reference to usurpation and impostorship is not the only one, and the legends of the castrates seems to provide both the earthly and the spiritual frames of reference, the question naturally arises why Dostoevsky needed yet another allusion to usurpation and impostorship encoded in the nod to king Henry IV.

Here we should keep in mind an interesting word that creeps into Verkhovensky's speech, namely, the word "victim," an unusual word for the future king of both heaven and earth, and turn to another reference to Shakespeare made by Verkhovensky's father, Stepan Trofimovich.

Unlike his son, Stepan is a lover of art. Back in his youth, he "agreed unquestionably that the word 'fatherland' was useless and comical; he agreed that religion was harmful, but he stated loudly and firmly that boots were less important than Pushkin, and even much less so" (10; 23). (The comparison of Pushkin to boots in importance once again refers to Shakespeare, as it plays on the famous statement by the radically utilitarian critic Dmitry Pisarev that boots are more important than Shakespeare, *sapogi vyshe Shekspira*. It is interesting to observe how so many of Stepan's aesthetic statements turn out to be tied to the Bard, either openly or covertly.) In his old age, Stepan continues in the same vein, and proposing to give a speech on the necessity of art, he selects several symbols forming a kind of philosophical shorthand for the various human conditions and ambitions as Stepan sees them. In the final version, he posits the following question: "What is more beautiful: Shakespeare or boots, Raphael or petroleum?" The answer is: "Shakespeare and Raphael are

above the liberation of the serfs, above the people's national spirit [*narodnost'*], above socialism, above chemistry, above almost the entire humankind, because they are the fruit, the true fruit of the entire humankind, maybe, they are the highest fruit there can be" (10; 372–373). Dostoevsky's own high regard for Shakespeare and for Raphael's art may lead readers to believe that by making a reference to Shakespeare, Stepan alludes to some kind of a positive program for the humankind, something not only purely aesthetical, but also something deeply and correctly spiritual, but this is not so. Spiritual revelation will only come to Stepan shortly before his death. At the time when he makes the speech, he is still much the same as he was during his younger years, and Shakespeare stands for something that is not spiritual, it is, on the contrary, rebellious and purely human. It becomes particularly clear when we turn to the drafts for *Demons*.

In the drafts, Granovsky who will become Stepan Verkhovensky in the final text, says, "So the entire question is: Shakespeare, or Christ, or petroleum" (11; 369). The answer is, "Vive Shakespeare and à bas le pétrole!" (11; 371). Characteristically, it is not "Shakespeare AND Christ, OR petroleum," but Shakespeare, OR Christ, OR petroleum. Shakespeare is opposed to BOTH Christ and petroleum. Shakespeare is not the religious way emblematized by Christ, and not the atheistic, science-based way emblematized by petroleum. This is the third way.

In order to understand this third way, we should turn to another Shakespeare's history, *Richard II*. Whether Dostoevsky read it or not, *Richard II* simply encapsulates and explains best what is present, in my opinion, in most of Shakespeare's plays. In *Richard II*, the bishop of Carlisle, while consoling the King, says the following:

> My lord, wise men ne'er sit and wail their woes,
> But presently prevent the ways to wail.
> To fear the foe, since fear oppresseth strength,
> Gives, in your weakness, strength unto your foe,
> And so your follies fight against yourself.
> Fear and be slain – no worse can come to fight;
> *And fight and die is death destroying death,*
> *Where fearing dying pays death servile breath*.
>
> Act 3, scene 2 (italics mine. – *T.K.*)

Death destroying death is a Biblical reference to Epistle to the Hebrews, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and

blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15). The "He" of the quote is Jesus. Therefore, Carlisle's passage likens Richard to God, which is naturally part of traditional medieval political theology, yet this likeness to Christ is not achieved in a self-sacrifice, it is achieved in a fight, that is, in being ready to not only die, but also to kill. This is no longer some kind of proper imitation of Christ's acceptance of God's will, this is a sacrilegious view of battle and killing as a proper way to godhood. This is more pagan than Christian, yet it is stated in Christian terms, making Richard in both his suffering and his struggle a new would-be Christ. This is why I called particular attention to the word "victim" in Dostoevsky, for it is the link to the pseudo-Christ-like ambitions of Verkhovensky for Stavrogin, and another possible link to Shakespeare's texts.

When giving the bishop of Carlisle these words which appear to be absent from Shakespeare's source, Holinshed's *Chronicle* [1. P. 106–107][1], Shakespeare certainly had no inklings of ancient Germanic beliefs that viewed death in battle precisely as a way to deification, yet in his play, he almost miraculously resurrects this view: the ultimate human ambition is to commit an act, usually a transgressive act of violence and murder, that will turn a human being into a superhuman being, essentially, into a god. This is what Macbeth ponders when he contemplates Duncan's murder.

> I dare do all that may become a man;
> Who dares do more is none.
> LADY MACBETH. ...
> When you durst do it, then you were a man,
> And, to be more than what you were, you would
> Be so much more the man.
>
> (Act 1, scene 1)

This is the essence of the third way emblematized by Shakespeare. This is human ambition to become more than a man by a single transgressive action that establishes him as a superhuman being, as a god in his own right. Shakespeare views human ambition as an ambition

[1] Unfortunately, with the full text of Holinshed being unavailable so far in the Russian libraries, that was the only source I had at my disposal.

toward self-deification, an ambition that has existed in the human consciousness for millennia, alternatively waning and waxing in importance, and in Shakespeare's plays, it assumes the central part in human aspirations.

Thirst for breaking through the confines of the human nature with its principal attributes of finality and mortality is evident in the European and even Indo-European culture since its earliest extant testimonies. Consider *Gilgamesh* where the gruesome reality of death drives Gilgamesh to seek deification in which quest he fails. Germanic peoples performed a neat philosophical[1] trick and turned death itself into the way to immortality and divinity. Our knowledge of Germanic myths and beliefs is sketchy at best, but we may assume that the idea of a fighting death which leads to a glorious afterlife in the halls of the gods who are as mortal as humans was common. From what we know from Scandinavian sources, that afterlife led up to the second death in the battle in the end of the world, ensuring the rebirth and continued survival of the world [3]. Pagan self-deification, therefore, was a natural part of human existence. It was accepted by all the parties, both gods and humans alike. Pagan self-deification was achieved through a single act of human will, a heroic decision to enter a hopeless fight to the death where death itself meant more than what a victory could achieve. It is particularly obvious if we consider examples from various Germanic cultures. In *Beowulf*, the titular character's final engagement with the dragon is not necessary to secure him either fame or fortune, but it secures him heroic death. In *The Battle of Maldon*, ealdorman Byrhtnot completely botches his task of protecting Essex by letting the attacking Vikings land on the mainland, yet he still earns praise from the poet, and those warriors who fled and didn't die in battle with him deserve shame. Essex is lost, yet Byrhtnot's deed is still heroic. However, in *The Battle of Maldon*, we can already observe the evolution of the perception of such heroic death since the poet explains Byrhtnot's behavior with the word *ofermod* meaning hubris(the devil is described in a manuscript as "*engels ofermodes*"[2]).

[1] I don't mean to claim that ancient Germans had anything by way of formal philosophy, but, for want of a better term, I use that word to refer to the ways of making sense, and particularly metaphysical sense, of human life, which ancient Germans certainly did.

[2] On this subject see, in particular [11].

When Christianity took over Europe, the heroic ideal was remolded accordingly. Christian heroics are best embodied in the romances of the Knights of the Round Table. Deification through death gave way to the ideal of a Christian knight fighting for, and protecting those in need of help. The pagan Celtic cup of plenty was transformed into the Holy Grail, the cup holding the blood of Christ, and not the most powerful, but only the most pure knight could reach it. The Christian knightly thread will live on even after the end of the medieval romances, and death in a battle fought on behalf of those who need protection and defense can be treated not as self-aggrandizing self-deification, but as a selfless self-sacrifice. However, the emerging Renaissance, along with branding the Middle Ages as the Dark Ages, also brought with it the resurgence of the pagan self-deification. Yet the notion underwent certain significant transmutations. Death was no longer relevant as the means of achieving self-deification. During the now-despised Dark Ages, the medieval nominalists in their fight against universals, unintentionally pushed the Divine into an unknowable beyond, and made the singular, the unique the only perceivable thing in the world. Consequently, it was no longer possible to even attempt to relinquish the self in the act of a death in battle, since that self was the only knowable entity in the universe. Now the need to overcome the human attribute of finality moved to the foreground, and the new Renaissance hero sought to achieve divinity in a single destructive act aimed against another human being. Now death inflicted upon one's neighbor was viewed as proof positive of the hero's achievement of divine status, of his substantial transformation into a being of a different order, since another person's death was the symbol of the ultimate right to dispose of other people's life as the hero saw fit. Such a quest for self-deification was no longer an integral part of the universe, on the contrary, it was one of the paths toward its destruction.

Shakespeare, probably like no other Renaissance writer, sensed and put on page this dangerous ambitious yearning for what had never been within human rights and within human reach. His world is the Christian one, and in this world, such ambitions are transgressive and therefore destructive, they destroy not only the characters themselves, but the world around them. In Shakespeare's tragedies or histories, there is no possibility of being "reasonably" or "moderately" ambitious as we often say about our aspirations today, drawing a line between permissible and non-permissible ambitions. His characters can speak about of "the big

wars // that make ambition virtue" (*Othello*, act 3, scene 3), but then the warrior Fortinbras is described as "with divine ambition puff'd" (act 4, scene 4), both the word "divine" and Fortinbras's desire to fight for a barren plot of land not worth fighting over put a big question mark over the goodness of his ambitions. One of Shakespeare's most striking images in this regard is the "ambitious ocean" repeated twice in two different plays (*Julius Caesar*, act 1, scene 3; *The Merchant of Venice*, act 2, scene 7 where it is called "the watery kingdom whose ambitious head // spits in the face of heaven"), which emphasized Shakespeare's fascination with the image. As a non-sentient element, the ocean cannot be ambitious by definition, but there is an overpowering quality to it that nonetheless makes it an apt entity to be described with the word. Such images of the ocean call to mind the giant beast Leviathan, one, along with Behemoth, of the two symbols of God's creative power and abundance that He speaks about while addressing Job from the whirlwind and challenging his servant to rival Him (Job 41). The image of the ocean had some very topical relevance in Shakespeare's time. England was then becoming a great sea-faring nation, having defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588 and having established the first colony in the New World. The ocean now has both a historical meaning and a religious one, it's the embodiment of the present challenge to humans which they magnificently rise to in their maritime expeditions, and it is also home to a primordial challenge to humans' created nature, the reminder of their ultimate inability to be true rivals to their Creator. Characteristically, the word "ambition" is usually used in close conjunction with the word "pride." Thus, Coriolanus is described as "o'ercome with pride, ambitious past all thinking, // self-loving"(act 4, scene 6), and in *Henry VIII*, ambition is synonymous with pride: "Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition: // by that sin fell the angels" (act 3, scene 2). Lucifer's foremost sin was that of pride, and Adam and Eve were tempted by the promise of "ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5). In all other plays, "ambition" is a more indirect way to refer to the devilish pride of humans wishing to assume the place and powers of God for those whom they deem the lesser beings. (Characteristically, when acting God's part for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and effectively sentencing them to death, Hamlet replies to Horatio's doubts with a dismissive "they are not near my conscience" [act 5, scene 2] as if they were not human enough to merit as least some qualms over their certain deaths. To this, even the ever-faithful Horatio

replies with a rather ambiguous "Why, what a king is this!" prompting Hamlet into another recital of the justification for his revenge on Claudius.)

Dostoevsky saw in Shakespeare that third human way, the way away from Christ, yet the not the way of science either, the way of a human yearning for unlawful self-deification and destroying themselves and the world around them in the process. In his own works, Dostoevsky continued Shakespearean tradition (Russian native tradition offered very little, if anything at all, by way of heroic self-deification) and expressed it with stunning and even painful clarity.

The transgressive and destructive nature of such ambitions is the reason why in Shakespeare, as in Dostoevsky, they are doomed to failure. As Macbeth says succinctly,

> I have no spur
> To prick the sides of my intent, but only
> Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
> And falls on the other.
> (Act 1, scene 7)

This idea of overleaping and overreaching oneself is central to both Shakespeare and Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky called Shakespeare the poet of despair. This is the despair of his central characters who unfailingly follow the same course of actions with predictable results. Similar divine ambitions of Dostoevsky's characters also emerge in a novel after a novel with but slight variations.

By referring to Shakespeare, Dostoevsky places his characters, so firmly rooted in the political, journalistic, and religious arguments of the day, into a far greater context. They become another stage in the eternal human quest for trying to break through their limited, finite humanity to the infinite nature of a divinity. That quest also moves beyond Russia and embraces the entire European civilization.

Russian Orthodoxy offers up *theosis*, deification, as the ultimate goal of human existence. The same idea is present, although far less openly, in the Western theology [14]. The path to *theosis* is a long and laborious process of willingly subjugating one's will to that of God. However you describe the process, whether you call it attaining synergy of the Divine and the human wills, it still involves submitting to the will of the Lord. The way emblematized by Shakespeare's characters relies on the willful

manifestation of a human will which is the image and likeness of God and which is used in a single transgressive act in order to make a human a god. It is not accidental that Macbeth so easily believes the witches who tell him that he will not be killed by anyone "of a woman born," because in his interpretation it means he can no longer be killed by a human being. As far as Macbeth is concerned, he is no longer human, he is superhuman. In the end of the play, he discovers, however, that he has become subhuman.

> They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly,
> But bear-like I must fight the course.
> (Act 5, scene 7)

In a search of superhumanity and divinity, he lost that divine element he had had, his freedom of will. He is now a captive and bound animal, not an infinitely free god. The same fate befalls Dostoevsky's characters. Their transgressive actions separate them from humankind as subhuman creatures: Raskolnikov, who also tried to prove to himself that he wasn't a creature, and if he wasn't a creature, then he was logically the creator, finds himself cut from other people not as some lofty being, but as a hunted and haunted non-human. Their transgressive acts also render Dostoevsky's characters powerless to act like Stavrogin who, throughout the novel, largely follows the course of action chartered by others.

Shakespeare's humans and, by extension, Shakespeare's works for Dostoevsky stand for this transgressive human ambition towards divinity achieved through an effort of one's will which strives to take the place of the divine will. This is the third way between atheistic science-based petroleum and self-sacrificial Christ. Shakespeare is a poet of despair for Dostoevsky, because his central characters inevitably and tragically fail in their ambitions, just like Dostoevsky's characters do, and instead of great deeds they could have performed, they end up destroying what they were called upon to protect. Shakespearean context helps place Dostoevsky in a long-standing tradition of which Dostoevsky's himself is a new pinnacle. Viewed in comparison with Shakespeare, Dostoevsky continues to speak to his readers about the same types of human ambitions and aspirations that were Shakespeare's prime interest.

***References***

1. Bloom H. *Shakespeare: the Invention of the Human*. Yale University press, 1998.
2. Boswell-Stone W.G. *Shakespeare's Holinshed.The Chronicle and the Historical Plays Compared*. London, 1896.
3. Buzina T.V. "Vtoraya smert' - ot samoobozheniya k samounichtozheniyu." // Idei i idealy, 2011. №3(9). T. 1, ss. 88–100.
4. Dostoevsky F.V. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. 30 vols. Leningrad, 1972–1991.
5. *Esler A*. *The Aspiring Mind of the Elizabethan Young Generation*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 1966.
6. Knight G.W. *The Wheel of Fire*. 1964.
7. Kovalevskaya T.V. Ponyatie ambition v tragediyakh Uil'yama Shekspira («Gamlet», «Makbet», «Korol' Lir») // Vestnik RGGU. № 18, 2012, ss. 135–146.
8. Leer N. "Stavrogin and Prince Hal." // Slavic and East European Journal, 1962, vol. VI, # 2.
9. Levin Yu.D. *Shekspir i russkaya literatura XIX veka*. Leningrad, 1988;
10. Meerson O. *Dostoevsky's Taboos*. Dresden, 1998.
11. O'Keeffe K.O'B. "Heroic Values and Christian Ethics." // The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature. Godden M., Lapidge M., eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
12. Shaitanov I.O. *Shekspir*. Moscow, 2013.
13. *Shekspir i russkaya kul'tura*. Alekseev M.P., red. Leningrad, 1965.
14. Williams A.N. *Grounds of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas*. New York, 1999.

**ПРИРОДА И ПРИТЯЗАНИЯ ЧЕЛОВЕКА: ШЕКСПИР И ДОСТОЕВСКИЙ**

*Текст. Книга. Книгоиздание.* 2014, no. 1 (5), с. 62–87.
*Ковалевская Татьяна В.* Российский государственный гуманитарный университет (Москва, Россия). E-mail: tkowalewska@yandex.ru
**Ключевые слова:** *Достоевский, Шекспир, «Бесы», «Ричард II», «Генрих IV», самообожение.*

В статье рассматривается влияние У. Шекспира на Ф.М. Достоевского, анализируемое в мировоззренческих категориях. Такое сравнение актуально как в силу значимости английского драматурга для Достоевского, так и в силу весьма малой исследованности данной проблемы. На материале романа «Бесы» в сравнении с хрониками Барда показывается, что творчество Шекспира Достоевский трактовал как яркое художественное воплощение определенного типа человеческих устремлений, противопоставленного как христианскому идеалу самого Достоевского, так и атеистическому мировоззрению его идейных оппонентов. Человек Достоевского стоит на распутье, где на фигуральном камне ему указано три пути: Христос, или Шекспир, или петролей, как говорит в черновиках к «Бесам» Грановский, будущий Степан Верховенский.

Христос – это путь христианского братства, всеобщей взаимосвязи, взаимозависимости и ответственности всех за всех. Петролей – путь атеистического атомизированного общества, и эти два пути были предметом внимательного рассмотрения

исследователей. Однако до сих пор неизученным остается третий путь, обозначенный словом «Шекспир». В данной статье предлагается прочитывать человека Шекспира как самообожающегося индивидуума, пытающегося усилием собственной воли превратить себя в центр мироздания, обладающий новой, независимой трансценденцией. Это не атеистическая атомизированность безбожного бытия и не всеединство христианской веры, но новая, жестко структурированная квазирелигиозная структура, где место Бога занимает одна-единственная личность, претендующий на самообожение герой, желающий своей индивидуальной волей определять как собственную судьбу, так и судьбы других людей и всего мироздания.

Тема религиозного и политического самозванства подобного героя раскрывается Достоевским путем сложной системы отсылок как к русским сектам, так и к хроникам Шекспира, где, вопреки прямому утверждению «принца Гарри» в качестве своеобразного исторического прототипа Ставрогина, на первое место выходит не будущий победоносный монарх Генрих V, но узурпатор и вдохновитель убийства законного монарха Генрих IV. Одновременно отсылки к творчеству Шекспира выводят конфликт «Бесов» за пределы узкой, исторически конкретной проблематики русской политическо-религиозной жизни середины XIX в. и превращают его в универсальный конфликт самообожающегося героя и сопротивляющегося такому самообожению мироздания, конфликт, возникший в Новое время и впервые с максимальной наглядностью воплощенный в драматургии Уильяма Шекспира.

### *References*

1. Bloom H. *Shakespeare: the invention of the human*. New York, Riverhead Books, 1998. 768 p.

2. Boswell-Stone W.G. *Shakespeare's Holinshed. The chronicle and the historical plays compared*. London, 1896.

3. Buzina T.V. "Vtoraya smert' – ot samoobozheniya k samounichtozheniyu" [The second death – from self-deification to self-annihilation]. *Idei i ideally – Ideas and Ideals*, 2011, no. 3(9). Vol. 1, pp. 88–100.

4. Dostoevsky F.V. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenij: v 30 t*. [The Complete Works. In 30 vols.]. Leningrad, 1972–1991.

5. Esler A. *The aspiring mind of the Elizabethan Young generation*. Durham, Duke University Press, 1966. 296 p.

6. Knight G.W. *The Wheel of Fire*. 1964.

7. Kovalevskaya T.V. Ponyatie ambition v tragediyakh Uil'yama Shekspira ("Gamlet", "Makbet", "Korol' Lir") [The notion of ambition in William Shakespeare's tragedies ('Hamlet", "Macbeth", "King Lear")]. *Vestnik RGGU – RSUH/RGGU Bulletin*, 2012, no.18, pp. 135–146.

8. Leer N. Stavrogin and Prince Hal. *Slavic and East European Journal*, 1962, vol. VI, no. 2.

9. Levin Yu.D. *Shekspir i russkaya literatura XIX veka* [Shakespeare and Russian Literature of the 19th century]. Leningrad, Nauka Publ., 1988, 326 p.

10. Meerson O. *Dostoevsky's Taboos*. Dresden, Dresden Univ. Press, 1998. 232 p.

11. O'Keeffe K.O'B. *Heroic Values and Christian Ethics*. In: Godden M., Lapidge M. (eds.). The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991. 303 p.

12. Shaitanov I.O. *Shekspir* [Shakespeare]. Moscow, Molodaya gvardiya Publ., 2013. 474 p.

13. Alekseev M.P. (ed.) *Shekspir i russkaya kul'tura* [Shakespeare and Russian culture]. Leningrad, Nauka Publ., 1965. 822 p.

14. Williams A.N. *Grounds of union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas*. New York, OUP, 1999. 230 p.