

The Non-Acting Character Type in Natural School Literature

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Abstract

In literary criticism, the category *Act* is used to characterize the character's position in the space of different genres, both artistic and border ones that arose at the intersection of a document and a literary text. The purpose of this research is to use the writings of F.M. Dostoevsky, A.N. Maykov, N.A. Nekrasov, included in the *Petersburg Collection*, to describe the historical and literary facts that allow us to bring into the light the phenomenon of a non-acting character type (in particular, the bureaucrat) as a system-forming event of the literary process of the XIX century. Philosophical hermeneutics and related literary hermeneutics are the major research methods, as well as the comparative-typological method and the comprehensive system analysis, based on the unity of the structural artistic phenomenon and the aesthetic self-organization. There were analyzed the characters and their actions in the context of works included in the uninvestigated collection of the XIX century. The character, who was brought to the forefront of Russian literature of that period, is a bureaucrat, who commits no Act. The *Crisis* (loss) of an Act is a consequence of a changing world view. This research allows offering insights into the understanding of the environment, in which the nineteenth-century Russian historical and literary process has been forming.

Keywords: nineteenth-century Russian literature, *Act Crisis*, the *Petersburg Collection*, F.M. Dostoevsky, A.N. Maykov, N.A. Nekrasov

Introduction

The problem of literary character's act is one of the recent ones (Mathewson, 2000; Macherey, 2006) due to a change in the scientific paradigm, cognitive revolution and the anthropocentric paradigm formation, when the human factor remains significant among the scientific research methods (Miller, 2003). In literary criticism, anthropocentric approach is about realizing that human factor takes the central place in the existence of literary text (Bressler, 2007). However, one cannot claim that this approach has been already formed to its complete form. The term *anthropological literary criticism* unites a complex of different theories and concepts concerning the problem of the *image of a man in literature*.

In recent years, there is a sufficient number of works devoted to the nature of an act and its specific features. At first, philosophers were the ones to go into an act problem. Scientists have drawn a line between the act and a habitual action, revealed the basic transformations that occur with the object and the subject during the action (Tillman, 2016). Some scientist considering the concepts of an Act, Deed and Responsibility, as well as the personality's agency and relationship

between culture and being, come to the conclusion that it is necessary to investigate being in culture as a continuation of personal responsible moral stand (Guseynov, 2017).

The main characteristics of the Act are *responsibility* and *agency* (Belova, 2008; Arpad, 2012; Roesen, 2013). The Act is often studied by means of a hylomorphic concept that covers the relationship between the primary matter and the substantial form (Buganza, 2014). The Act must be analyzed in the context of the *freedom* concept. The Act category is analyzed from the point of religious anthropology. In this regard, there are covered problems of interaction between the purpose of an Act and the way of its achievement, revealing the backbone of morality (Gogotishvili, 2015). The religious aspect of an Act should also be taken into account: based on sacred texts, divine intervention into people's actions is studied in detail. Moreover, attention is drawn to the medieval interpretation of a free human will and its relation to the divine (Trego 2013).

Many researchers address the philosophical concept of the Act introduced by M.M. Bakhtin. Thus, they reveal the main facts of his biography and track the evolution of his philosophical concept in their general literary and philosophical studies (Renfrew, 2015). Bakhtin's chronotope concept – chronotop concept is disclosed through the connection with the plot, the literary world of the writing and through the character – was analyzed in detail (Lawson 2011).

In general, the interest of foreign researchers in the category of Act has been recently rising. A large number of published works, analyzing the Act through the prism of literary and philosophical categorical apparatus, speak for this rise. Recently, notion of Act has become a part of professional literary criticism tools. The range of specialists, who made the Act an object of special analysis, is constantly expanding (Epstein, 2000; Nikolaev, 2012; Khalizev, 2014). This research interprets the Act as a competent, volitional, value-weighted deed, committed by a character, which lays grounds for the literary world and determines the character's attitude to this world. L.G. Krishtaleva writes about the most important categories of an Act: *acceptance* or *rejection* of the world (Krishtaleva, 2010). Thus, Act settles how the communication between the person and the world is carried out, and marks the uniqueness of the person's place in this world.

Methods

The methodological research basis involves works, devoted to the Act as a philosophical-gnosiological category and category of literary text poetics.

The analysis was performed relating to works, selected from the *Petersburg Collection* published by N.A. Nekrasov – F.M. Dostoevsky's novel the *Poor Folk*, A.N. Maykov's poem the *Mashenka*, N.A. Nekrasov's poem the *Lullaby Song* (a poem imitating the Lermontov).

The analysis was based on the typological similarity of characters. The image-type of a bureaucrat was considered in accordance with the immanent analysis (holistic analysis of an image, implying the immersion in the text, image-and-text correlation and image-and-image correlation within both the external and internal context). The bureaucrat's act was described according to the following algorithm: 1. Situation description. 2. Occasion analysis. 3. Character's act structure building (intention – implementation – output). 4. Act-and-World correlation. 5. Character's speech-thinking acts analysis. 6. Act implementation manner.

In strictly theoretical terms, we suggest the main content of a literary work to be taken by an occasion – particular event (feelings, thoughts, and actions) that took place during the action.

Character's special status is determined by the fact that, unlike other characters, he/she is a center, where the action comes from.

The Act as an object of literary analysis implies a detailed study of features that the literary world has, as well as the identification of character's place in it. The theoretical and literary analysis of actions allows studying in detail the literary character, determining the moral problems and revealing the spiritual and moral milestones within the structure of the original World and Man concept.

Historical-functional and cultural-historical methods were taken as the leading research methods, as they allow taking into account the features and models of the text image-structure, as well as the ideas and characters reflected in the text.

Results

In the forties of the XIX century, bureaucrat became one of the objects turned into a literary image by Russian writers (Nazarenko, 2007; Koshelev, 2009; Shcheglov, 2010; Bogdanov, 2011). Bureaucrats were a new material and spiritual force, shaped within the framework of the old society.

In Russia, bureaucrat is liable to government service. In *People and Ranks*, Yuri Lotman writes that *a bureaucrat is a man, whose very name came from the word [chin]ⁱ. In the Old Russian language, [chin] means order. <...> A bureaucrat is an emolument-dependent person, whose welfare directly depends on the State. He/she is confined to the administrative machine and cannot act outside it. This bound reminds of itself in a crude manner on the first day of every month, when bureaucrats had to be paid throughout the Russian Empire. At this point, emolument-dependent bureaucrat turned out to be the most reliable servant. In France, the old bench of the eighteenth century – Nobility of the Mantle – gave ideologists to the third estate during the revolution, while Russian bureaucrats showed themselves in revolutionary movements to be less active than all other groups (Lotman, 1994).* The researcher outlines the following key features of the image: bureaucrat's duty is to keep the peace, he/she is *the most reliable servant*, showing himself (herself) as a less active party in the revolutionary movement. Russian writers of the 18th century were describing the public and private space of the bureaucratic world. In Russian literature, this character was an image for the evolution of ideas about service and ministration to ride on.

The *Finnish Herald*ⁱⁱ for 1845 has such a report on the bureaucrats: *We want to experience the reality at all costs, so our most beloved character now is not a poet, not an improviser, not an artist, but a bureaucrat, or a tax farmer, maybe, a pawn, generally a taker, namely – the most unethical being in the world (Merten, 2006).* Literature introduces such a subject to the reader that does not bring aesthetic pleasure. The new character contradicts the poetry and harmony of the world created by the God. There is a conflict, a dissonance rising along with the problem of the world-man relationship.

S.P. Shevyrev, who was one of the first critics to write about the *Petersburg Collection*, assumes that the bureaucratic world is the major and the only material worked out in the *Petersburg* literature. *In the northern capital, there is another world, fancied with splendor and beauty, under the magnificent world of European glory, luxury and bliss that is invisible to the naked eye. This world is the world of poor bureaucrats-copyists, who are hardly noticeable screws in the government machine, but still people. Besides their job to deliver an infinite number of management papers throughout Russia, they also deliver to the literary public frankly the only material for*

vaudevilles, comedy, novels, satirical scenes, sketches, and ect. The entire Collection runs on them. There is hardly a night for the public not to laugh at them in the Petersburg and Moscow theaters (Shevyrev, 1846).

There follows: *Columbus had no pleasure at discovering America like our modern literature coming to the idea that a bureaucrat is also a man. As if there were doubts. This philanthropic tendency, adopted from the West, has centered in our literature around the bureaucratic world. Literature has recognized the humanity of a bureaucrat denying the humanity of Russian people and coming across the mission to develop the idea of humanity in this sphere in years ahead, thereby assuming that all Russian people must pass through humanization* (Shevyrev, 1846).

The collection of works written by Russian writers is notable for the fact that, firstly, it has not been reprinted since first publication, so it is a rare one now. Secondly, it has never been analyzed as a single text. Thirdly, the *Petersburg Collection* appeared in print at the stage of genesis and rapid development of a realistic paradigm regarding the pictorial-verbal knowledging of relations between the world and a man that have turned to complication in the XIX century.

In Russian literature, there has been an opinion that Nekrasov's book was not a significant work itself, but a continuation of the previous edition – *Petersburg: The Physiology of a City* (Lotman, 1964). This was, probably, the reason why the *Petersburg Collection* was out of interest for the researchers.

In the 1940s, critics twitted the authors with unoriginality, imitation, and combination of Pushkin's, Lermontov's and Gogol's principles. There were many pushbacks: authors were framed for the lack of novelty, simple plots, poor content, bad language and poor logic (Aksakov K.S., Nikitenko A.V., Senkovskiy O.I., Brant L.V. et al.).

The textual analysis, performed in 1846, shows a certain dynamics in interpreting and presenting the well-known themes and images. For example, the *Lullaby Song* presents the image of a bureaucrat in a less static and grotesque manner than *The Servant* poemⁱⁱⁱ, published in the first book, does. It is noteworthy that the bureaucrat's way of life in the second work is a result of changes that occurred in the world.

The *Petersburg Collection* contains three texts on the biography of public servants: F.M. Dostoevsky's novel the *Poor Folk*, A.N. Maykov's poem the *Mashenka*, N.A. Nekrasov's poem the *Lullaby Song*

In the new Nekrasov's collection, bureaucrats appear not as civil servants, but as a caring guardian (Makar Devushkin), a father (Vasily Tikhonych Krupa) and a child. Their actions are less dependent on circumstances. Authors of the *Petersburg Collection*, unlike the authors of the *Petersburg: The Physiology of a City*, describe not the public, but the personal space of bureaucrats.

The *Petersburg Collection* opens with a story about a poor servant. The *Poor Folk* was under attention of critics of the XIX - XXI centuries much often then other works, as it was the first published work of a great writer. The Makar Devushkin's story repeats the story of Samson Vyrin (*The Stationmaster* by Pushkin), while the story of poor Varya (known as Barbara in English translated versions) is alike the story of poor Lisa and poor Dunya, but with a happy ending (Kasatkin, 2011). A similar situation is with the next writing – *Mashenka*. Critics (Shevyrev S.P. and Belinsky V.G.) noticed this feature of novels, published in the *Petersburg Collection*, back in the 1940s. Apparently, they were addressing the Pushkin's praetexta to make certain adjustments to the motives and images that were developing in parallel with the shaping cultural meanings.

N.M. Karamzin and A.S. Pushkin described the world, where the balance was lost. The harmony has been destructed because character's relations with the beloved being should be terminated. As we recall, Liza was abandoned by Erast, while the Samson Vyrin was abandoned by his beloved daughter Dunya, who made off together with a traveling officer. Such destruction ends with the main character's death: Lisa dived into the pond, while Vyrin drank himself. V.E. Vatsuro wrote that Samson Vyrin was murdered by the same world that made his daughter happy (Vatsuro, 1994).

Karamzin's poor Lisa feels the uniqueness of her own place in the world in a very special way (Nikolaev and Shvetsova, 2015). The Act committed by Lisa is an attempt to escape the disharmony into which she was drawn. The world that condemned Lisa to death is unfair and unreasonable. Her death (suicide) eliminates the apparent reasons for happiness. Thus, girl's act stands for her disagreement with the existing order of things, her rejection of such an unfair world.

F.M. Dostoevsky and V.N. Maykov settled this situation in another way. Dostoevsky's novel in letters presents the bureaucrat's personal space extension, lightning up his inner world (Zhuchkova, 2016). The very first phrase turns heads: *How happy I was last night—how immeasurably, how impossibly happy!*^{iv} This is the emotional upheaval of a person at the thought that he can serve someone, be useful; this is an expression of ultimate pleasure. Dostoevsky's character is in harmony with the world order.

Makar Devushkin is not a simple little man, a poor copyist: he was granted award and is able to support the girl. He is a character, who is on the path to find own voice. Makar Devushkin tries to acquire a narration style – and at the same time, he repeats to Barbara all the time that his narration is bad, that he cannot express himself beautifully... In his last letter, he notes: *...at length I am beginning to improve my style*^v. Letters are the means of communication between him and Barbara, while the very communication is sparked the love of both characters. Barbara did not read books while she was living in her parents' house in the village – she discovered Pushkin and Gogol only when she arrived in St. Petersburg ... An episode, when she takes a book from the Pokrovsky Library (written in Latin) and falls into confusion, as she could not read it. She did not know the language, did not know the code, so the person – the owner of the book – remains alien to her.

The Logos, the Style, the Word are a unique substance that reunites the man with the God. Devushkin writes: *As soon as ever I got to know you I began both to realise myself and to love you*^{vi}. Thus, he learns his personal identity through this communication.

Barbara Dobroselova gets married. In his last letter to her, Makar Devushkin expresses the extreme degree of suffering, a flush of desire to commit suicide: *Dearest, I could throw myself under the wheels of a passing vehicle rather than that you should go like this. <...> I shall die—for certain I shall die, for my heart cannot bear this misery*^{vii} (Dostoevsky 1846, 164-165). The character stays alive, but he lost his *darling, angel, dearest Barbara Alekseevna*. He accepts the world, agreeing with the situation that has arisen. Poor servant, described by F.M. Dostoevsky, chose not to end his life.

Dostoevsky had shown with his first writer's experience what should be stroked for. The story of poor Barbara ended happily: she married Mr. Bykov, who has offered his hand once, and became a landowner. She became the lawful wife of a rich man. Devushkin ended with awaken consciousness and self-consciousness. This aspect was alighted by Yu.M. Proskurina. She considers the *consciousness awakening* that attracts *not only sympathy, but often respect* as a

highest point of the artistic method development within the context of the Natural School, forming in the frame of the *Petersburg Collection* (Proskurina, 2001).

Thus, tale of poor people is a realization of a utopian idea of the reunion of living beings. This is an ability to survive and save oneself in a world, where the God does not manifest himself in any way for some reasons. The scale of a little man does not allow him/her to rebuild the world, since he/she is disproportionate to it. Makar, however, is already at the outbreak door.

T.A. Kasatkina interprets the meaning of the *Poor Folk's* title as follows: *People make themselves unhappy by leaving and forgetting each other. Poor Folk is a tautology because all people are evil children in relation to the Heavenly Father. At this point, the true meaning of the word "poor" is revealed as "forgotten, abandoned". <...> This meaning was put into the core of The Stationmaster, where pictures painted to the tune of The Prodigal Son, are hanging on the wall for visitors to see. In Christianity, such motifs are traditionally interpreted as the history of relationships between the God and people, who turned away from him wishing to be like gods and without God. "Prodigal children" are "evil children" and "poor folk" (Kasatkina, 2011).*

Maykov introduced another variant of Pushkin's plot development. *Mashenka* poem is a story of a father, who has lost and regained his daughter. The author changed the ending of the plot of a story about the poor Dunya: his Mashenka returned to her father's house. A. Maykov, just as F.M. Dostoevsky, shown the bureaucrat's personal space and inner world. The author describes the Crupa's preparations for the arrival of his daughter from the boarding house, his affection after her ran away from home and curses addressed to her (just as Samson Vyrin, he wishes Masha: *it would be better if she died*) in a nice and true manner.

Maykov *rewrites* the final line of Pushkin's plot: father and daughter stay alive. The daughter returns to her father and asks for forgiveness, and the father accepts her, forgets about the parental curse and forgives the hussar-offender.

He could not tell how his daughter was in arms of his,

And could not say a word. – Dad,

I am sorry! – Am I a beast or a jude to you?

– *Forgive me! – Stop! The God will forgive you!*

What would you say, Masha? Would you forgive me too?

(Maykov, 1846).

The father, left by his daughter, finally agrees with the situation, accepts it. He takes no action to restore the shaken order of things.

Thus, characters of the *Petersburg Collection* have accepted the world that has offended them. There is no Act as a strong-willed deed. In our opinion, this is the novelty of the *Collection* written in 1846: authors show that characters with old morality lose the qualities of an epic character. In the new historical context, such characters turned out to have dead morality (Iskander). *Dead morality* is a product of a new time; it does not give the character the opportunity to commit a moral act. Their decisions and actions are perceived as immoral ones. In general, no matter what character of the *Petersburg Collection* we will take as an example, they all are united by the fact that none of them is capable of committing a real Act. In other case, when a certain act was still committed, it is qualified as immoral act, violating the family and/or social standards.

By the final of the Collection, there is an increasing sense of failure and disharmony of the world. Thus, N.A. Nekrasov's poem (parody of the *Cossack's Lullaby* written by Mikhail Lermontov) brings up the life of a future bureaucrat within the public space of the city. Petersburg is a dead city that appeared against nature – it is a cemetery city, a place, where the Creator does not show himself, where the connection of times is broken, just as the continuity of generations. Life in the city is a natural movement toward death with assumption that no rebirth will follow. In a world without God and spiritual foundations, bureaucrat's performance becomes comic in some way. Any act becomes worthless and meaningless:

When you are older, you'll be a householder

With a high-high rank,

And then you'll be a vain master:

Russian nobleman.

You will live a fine life...

And die a quite death

Sleep my servant, darling!

Rock-a-by, my lad (Nekrasov, 1846).

The Rehash of N.A. Nekrasov is centred on the problem of character's act, most significantly on its absence. The poet finds himself in the maelstrom of a common search for the causes of the Act Crisis (Nikolaev and Shvetsova, 2014). In the *Lullaby Song*, addressed to the civil servant, his life path is represented in the logic of a mean material existence:

As gentle as a little lamb,

And nice as a wall,

Somewhere pretty you will clam

And snake along them all.

(Nekrasov, 1846).

Nekrasov takes it meaningfully pointing out that there is no place for an act in the life of a bureaucrat, who *snakes along*. Writings are placed within the Collection to show the movement of editor's thoughts and reveal the author's concept: to open eyes on the world created by the Higher Will.

Texts of different genres, included in the *Petersburg Collection*, are united on a compositional level, like the *Tales of Ivan Belkin* written by A. Pushkin. The Collection is opened by stories about the characters (including bureaucrats), who tend to moral rebirth (usurped fatherhood and broken generational bridge, Masha leaves her father and thereby breaks their relationship, but later regrets it). The following novel *The Martingale* written by A.F. Odoevsky is centered on the coffin maker – a being, who ties the earthly and afterlife worlds; he is a person selling death and having grudges against people. Finally, Collection ends with three Nekrasov's poems about human vices. According to the common interpretation made in a purely social context, these are poems of an atheist and a revolutionist. As we recall, the *Lullaby Song* poses the same question as the F.M. Dostoevsky does in his first work: could a person live without the God. Dostoevsky was aware that Devushkin's life was a preparatory stage, and Devushkin himself understood this well. The author of *Poor Folk* has been thinking in sacred categories before he

received existential experience. His character (Makar Devushkin) is striving to live with God by his side. Nekrasov, however, presented a desacralized space, where no place for God can be found. Therefore, everything done by a person (including the bureaucrat's life) turns into a comedy. The image of a bureaucrat, introduced by Nekrasov, is an image of a civil servant, who has lost the high idea of service.

Discussion

The issue of *Natural School* as a specific phenomenon in the Russian literary process has been debated a lot in special periodicals (Peters, 2012; Brunson, 2016; Kazakov and Medvedeva, 2017; Harrison, 2017). The character of the *Natural School* was not subjected to special research. Yu.V. Mann has chosen the man and the environment as a subject for his research (Mann, 1988). According to M.V. Stroganov, the man (literary character) has been considered in Russian literature as a social phenomenon since the 1840s. The most common type of a character is an acting character, namely – a character performing certain functions in the society (Stroganov, 1996).

Writers of the *Natural School* often view the character as a function of reality. This approach to the image of a literary character allowed shifting the fault from a particular person, thereby eliminating the category of personal guilt. The literary character as a personality here has no weigh – he/she is just a necessary component of the social organism, which provides him a healthy existence (Podlesnik, 2014). Characters of the Petersburg Collection are bureaucrats, who fit the type of a little man (Melnikova 2015). Their relationship with the world (society) is built a little differently (Table 1):

Table 1. Relationship with the world (society)

	Poor Folk (F.M. Dostoevsky)	Mashenka (A.N. Maykov)	Lullaby Song (N.A. Nekrasov)
Character Image	bureaucrat	bureaucrat	child (future bureaucrat)
World Image	St. Petersburg	St. Petersburg	no site specificity
Character's Attitude Toward the World	Struggle-free	Struggle-free	Struggle-free
Act	Inner speech (letter)	Invective	Pre-act arrangements
Bottom Line	solitude	reunion	entering the world

The problem of a character and, consequently, of his/her act has never been so sharp as it was in the forties of the XIX century. Reference to the fact that a character is not being brought up in the Russian literary discourse of this time becomes almost universal and intrusive. Thus,

questions are beginning to arise within such an atmosphere: who is the character and what is he, how should he appear in order to correspond to the national perception of the world?

We tend to characterize the literary atmosphere, saturated with such questions, as the *anticipation of a character*. In this case, Act Crisis is a main feature of modern literature (Nikolaev and Shvetsova, 2017). At this point, character is obviously was not to arise in Russian literature at all, as the entire system of new meanings did not impose his/her formation. He/she did not fit into this system, but the question about him did, but remained unanswered. This question shaded the originality of the new system as an element of its skeleton.

We assume that the generational absence of a character in Russian literature of the forties of the XIX century is an evidence of a deep act crisis, characterizing the literary discourse of the era. *Non-acting* and *absence of a character* are interdependent issues. The first third of the nineteenth century was a time, when people began to question the postulate of *The Chosen One*, attributed to a literary character in its traditional interpretation, as well as the following concept of his *Mission in the World* (M.M. Bakhtin). The rapidly torn thread, tying the character with the world of sacred meanings and values, has led to the *Act Crisis*. Observations over this phenomenon, made while analyzing the *Natural School* writings, allowed conceptualizing and describing certain mechanisms underlying the cognitive strategies of Russian literary discourse.

As the ideas about the character have been lost in the Russian literature of the forties of the XIX century, a non-acting character has taken the stage, indicating the beginning of an Act Crisis. In our opinion, a non-acting character alarms about the crisis that has arisen in the social and literary thoughts in hand with new, previously irrelevant reasoning and discussions. Research on the crisis of character's act allows building a new model for literary process formation and development in Russia. At this point, our research has a future.

Conclusions

The *Petersburg Collection* (1846) laid out a new picture of the world: it is a world experiencing a crisis. The rank-based world was not a harmonious system any more. A bureaucrat, serving the interests of the State, has lost his/her status and destiny – to keep the peace. A new world with no authority capable of taking responsibility for the anarchy brings the non-acting character to date, since the very concept of an Act falls in value. A bureaucrat is a little man, namely – a person, who became little through own claims. He/she does not notice the preset harmony around him and does not know how to enjoy life. Building a model of a little man is a process of stating the damage that was made to the work of God. Defective being, therefore, becomes a parody of its creator. In other words, little man – a bureaucrat – formation in the nineteenth-century Russian literature is one of the secularization process echoes, testimony to Russian literature undergoing deep structural changes.

Notes

ⁱⁱIn Russian, bureaucrat is called the *chinovnik*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Russian journal published in 1845-1847 in Petersburg

ⁱⁱⁱ Never been translated before

^{iv} Translator: C. J. Hogarth

^v Translator: C. J. Hogarth

^{vi} Translator: C. J. Hogarth

^{vii} Translator: C. J. Hogarth

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