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MAIN ISSUES IN THE NOVEL “CITY OF GOD”

BY E. L. DOCTOROW

Fiction by Edgar Lawrence Doctorow (b. 1931) plays a central role in the history of modern American literature. He is considered one of the most talented, the most ambitious and most respected American novelists of the era of postmodernism. In this paper, I will study E. L. Doctorow’s novel “City of God” closely. To my mind, E. L. Doctorow has surpassed all other living writers in his 19th and 20th centuries’ American life vivid depictions. The aim of this work is to determine main philosophical and social issues in the novel.

John Clayton called E. L. Doctorow “radical Jewish humanist” [1, p. 54–55]. Some researchers consider irony of this writer as the trend of deconstruction. Simon Critchly (author of “Ethics of Deconstruction”) notes that there is no need to revalue

the influence of deconstruction theory on the novel because deconstruction, according to Critchly, occurs in the novel “ethically” [2, p. 54]. Matthew Henry admits: “E. L. Doctorow has made a career out of historical fiction, and he is renowned for both examining and rewriting the American past <...> because for Doctorow there is no fact or fiction, only narrative” [4, p. 33].

“City of God” (2000) is a kaleidoscopic novel, which aims to create a new moral guideline related to modern scientific concepts and posthuman understanding of life. The events of the novel are set in New York around the protagonist – priest Thomas Pemberton, with the nickname “Pem”. The characters are connected with each other by series of events; the author refers to the eponymous philosophical and theological work by Aurelius Augustine to discuss issues of morality, good and bad [5, p. 67]. As E. L. Doctorow writes, evil is non-existential and common in human society. Augustine describes a city where people are lead by faith, and E. L. Doctorow depicts the City of People without love and faith in God. Evil exists and people

behave according to its principles, which do not always correspond with God's will. Picturing the destinies of the characters raises the issues of moral values and social problems. Everett thinks that his bad deeds (murder) are correct and fair [3, p. 187]. The veteran committed evil because of survival instinct and realized that evil many years later. Sarah's father understands that the everyday Nazis' violence was evil, but his pain and anger are blunted. He realizes that "everything that happened was routine" [3, p. 79].

The issue of universal justice is represented in the novel in the discourse of postmodern indecision. The novel examines American spiritual aspirations in the period of scientific progress and free-thinking. Scientific stories about cosmogonic events and narratives about divine world creation in the synagogue – the signs of the historical discourse and the myth of creation – are mixed in the book.

The novel "City of God" depicts the last decades of the cultural and intellectual life of the twentieth century. According to E. L. Doctorow, if religion

disappears, science will replace it. However, science, becoming a new religion, reveals the foundations of culture to discount the importance of modernist theories regarding ontogenetic and phylogenetic revolution.

In the novel the nature of faith, mystery of the human mind and destiny are deeply analyzed. Everett's reflections about the universe at the beginning of the novel expose separation of reason and faith, scientific theories about the origin of life and religious beliefs.

Furthermore, there is the issue of Jewish immigrants from the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union in the novel. The New Church is a new City of God, which unites different people at new grounds, but for the eternal purpose – to help them in finding the way to God through love for man.

This study allows determining in E. L. Doctorow's "City of God" such main issues as: the problem of universal justice and humanity; the role of science and religion; universal moral values in the world; the uniting of Jews and Christians in their souls and creativity; good and evil; the nature of faith; the

mystery of the human mind and destiny. The originality of E. L. Doctorow's prose, meaningful depth of his works, variability and diversity of characters can be used as a subject for further research.

References

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