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ON A BORDERLINE BETWEEN FACT AND FICTION LITERARY OUTPUT OF EUGENE VODOLAZKIN

The paper focusses on two works of the contemporary Russian writer Eugene Vodolazkin (born 1964) that met with the highest response in the Czech milieu, i.e. *Laurus* (2012) and *The Aviator* (2015). Using the methods of genre analysis and comparison, the essay examines their specific genre features and a borderline made up of mediaeval historical facts, traits of a chronicle, biographical novel, hagiography and legend in the case of *Laurus* and, in the case of *The Aviator*, the genre of a diary achieved by placing the main character's recollections into the diary records and by facts connected with Saint Petersburg.

Keywords: Eugene Vodolazkin, novels, *Laurus*, *The Aviator*, literary genre, genre borderline, method of comparison

Eugene Vodolazkin (born 1964) is not unknown to the Czech readers. In November 2015, he even visited the Czech Republic together with his colleague Vladimir Sharov to participate in an international scientific conference on translations of Russian literature in Prague and Brno. Both authors presented and read excerpts from their works at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University.¹ Being greatly interested in the history and Russian literature, Eugene Vodolazkin studied at the Faculty of Arts of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kiev and then completed a postgraduate study programme on Old Russian literature at the Old Russian Literature Department of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (the so-called Pushkin House), which was managed by a leading expert on Old Russian literature Dmitry Sergeyeovich Likhachev (1906–1999). Eugene Vodolazkin's first novel was a peculiar type of historical prose *Solovyov and Larionov* (2009), followed by *Laurus* (2012), *The Aviator* (2015), *Brisbane* (2009) and other works.

¹ The author of this paper participated in organising the Brno conference and meeting with the writers.

The paper concentrates on two works by Eugene Vodolazkin, *Laurus* (2012) and *The Aviator* (2015), which have been translated into Czech and met with a good reception among the Czech readers.² Regarding the literary genre, both novels oscillate on a borderline between belles-lettres and fiction. The paper defines the specific genre features and genre borderline in the novels using a method of genre analysis and comparison.

The contemporary Russian prose and its reception in the Czech milieu was examined by the Brno researcher Josef Šaur who commented in several papers³ on certain one-sidedness, namely the fact that translators into the Czech language prefer works thematizing the 20th-century history or contemporary Russia that are filled with critical contents towards the Russian society. By contrast, works of high artistic quality but without a clear overlap to the societal events enjoy only a marginal interest among the readers.⁴ For example, the publication of Peter Silaev's novel *Exodus* is reflected in a large review in the *A2* periodical, while, according to Josef Šaur, Eugene Vodolazkin's *Laurus* failed to attract the deserved attention.⁵

Yet, *Laurus* and *The Aviator* definitely attracted attention of the Czech professional public. In this context we can mention another Brno researcher Ivo Pospíšil, professor of the Slavonic Studies who has dedicated several papers to novels by Eugene Vodolazkin. Ivo Pospíšil has pointed out the interconnection of science and belles-lettres, which is a characteristic feature of the Russian literature, on the example of two artistic figures Eugene Lyatsky and Eugene Vodolaz-

² Both Czech translations of the examined novels were carried out three years after their publication in the Russian Federation. *Laurus* was translated into Czech by Anna Rosová in 2015. The readers could read *The Aviator* in 2018 in the translation by Zdeňka Vychodilová. Cf. J. Vodolazkin, *Laurus*, 1st ed., Dobrovský s.r.o., Prague 2016, 353 p.; J. Vodolazkin, *Letec*, Omega, Prague 2018, 416 p.

³ Cf. J. Šaur, *Hlavní tendence v aktuální české recepci ruské literatury*, in: I. Pospíšil (ed.), *Střední Evropa včera a dnes: proměny koncepcí II (jazyk – literatura – kultura – politika – filozofie)*, Jan Sojnek–Galium, Brno 2018, p. 197–204; J. Šaur, *Paradoxy české recepce současné ruské literatury (Gluchovskij, Rubina, Vodolazkin, Silajev)*, in: I. Pospíšil, L. Paučová, M. Zelenka (eds.), *Kontexty literární vědy VIII*, Tribun EU, Brno 2018, p. 171–182; Ё. Шаур, *Актуальные процессы в чешской рецепции русской литературы (2012–2016)*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323377493_AKTUALNYE_PROCESSY_V_CESSKOJ_RECEPCII_RUSSKOJ_LITERATURY_2012-2016 (3.7.2023).

⁴ J. Šaur, *Hlavní tendence v aktuální české recepci ruské literatury...*, p. 202–203.

⁵ J. Šaur, *Paradoxy české recepce současné ruské literatury...*, p. 178–179.

kin and their novels *Tundra* and *Laurus*⁶. He discussed the genre features of *Laurus* and *The Aviator* in a paper from 2020.⁷ In another essay, he dealt with poetological traits and the value of *Laurus*.⁸

The novel *Laurus* cannot be categorically classified as a particular genre type because it includes poetological traits of several novelistic types mingling in the work. Regarding the genre type, this novel is therefore interpreted as a non-historical novel (Pospíšil, Žemberová),⁹ contemporary mythological novel (Stankeviča)¹⁰ or alternative historical science-fiction (Chernychova).¹¹ At the same time, traces of a legend and contemporary desert island adventure are often emphasised. The novel has mingling poetological traits of belles-lettres and non-fiction, which create a distinctive borderline that we will discuss later.

Eugene Vodolazkin reflected on *Laurus* as follows: “There is very little fiction in it. As a matter of fact, the text corresponds to the Old Russian historical facts. I lived there for thirty years.”¹² The author himself therefore emphasised the factual features over fiction, thus affecting the classification as non-fiction literature. He explained his attitude to the novel by the poetics of mediaeval literature, which is characterized by absence of literary genres based on fiction: “Moreover, in the Middle Ages, there was a special form of poetics that I used in my work on *Laurus*. As a matter of fact, it is no literary poetics because in the Middle Ages, it did not exist in a form in which we under-

⁶ Cf. И. Поспишил, *Феномен связи литературоведения и литературного творчества: Евгений Ляцкий и Евгений Водолазкин на контекстуальном фоне*, in: *Универсалии русской литературы 6. Сборник статей*, Научная книга, Воронеж 2015, p. 227–244.

⁷ Cf. И. Поспишил, *Тема память кейс стади на материале современной литературы*, “*Philologia Rossica*” 2020, no. 3, p. 72–89.

⁸ Cf. И. Поспишил, *Аксиологический феномен в ‘неисторическом романе’ Евгения Водолазкина ‘Лавр’*, in: J. Dohnal (ed.), *Revitalizace hodnot: utěnění a literatura II*, Tribun, Brno 2015, p. 591–601.

⁹ Cf. И. Поспишил, *Аксиологический феномен в ‘неисторическом романе’...*, p. 591–601); V. Žemberová, *Žáner nehistorický román*, ‘*Opera Slavica*’ 2020, no. 3, p. 31–41.

¹⁰ Cf. A. Stankeviča, *Vodolazkin’s novel „Laurus“: Genre experiment*, <https://sgem-social.org/index.php/elibrary-research-areas?view=publication&task=show&id=3242> (8.7.2023)

¹¹ Cf. Т.Л. Чернышова, *Понятие альтернативы в современной русской прозе (на примере романов Евгения Водолазкина “Авиатор”, “Лавр”, Гузели Яхиной “Зулейка открывает глаза”)*, “*Вестник самарского университета. История, педагогика, филология*” 2018.

¹² V. Golovanov, *V Rusku bude vždy vše tvrdší*, “*Literární noviny*” 2015, no. 10, p. 28.

stand it today. There was literature but no belles-lettres. Belles-lettres has an element of fiction, but there was no fiction in the Middle Ages. In the view of a mediaeval person, fiction was a lie"¹³ We need to point out that the author is still professionally concerned with research into mediaeval literature.

As mentioned above, the novel *Laurus* cannot be classified as a particular genre type because it is penetrated by poetological traits of several novelistic types — biographical novel, novelistic chronicle, the so-called non-historical novel or contemporary mythological novel. The borderline between non-fiction and fiction in the novel lies in mediaeval facts, chronicle-like structure and a biographical basis.

Non-fiction is represented by mediaeval historical facts, which can be observed from the first to the last page. A closer contact with the history is mediated through the already archaizing composition of the novel, consisting of a prologue and four parts¹⁴ where the life journey of the mediaeval healer Arseny develops. The readers are drawn into the mediaeval atmosphere by a detailed description of the scene where villages and towns such as Belozersk, Pskov, Polock or Novgorod, work and everydayness of their inhabitants, but also illnesses (plague, warts, coughs or tumours) that people had to face are mentioned. The mediaeval atmosphere is also reflected in the linguistic features where the ecclesiastical Slavonic language is used.

The traits of a biographical novel, or novelistic biography, which mingle with the traits of hagiography and legend, can be observed in the main character's four names (Arseny, Ustin, Laurus, Amvrosy) and two nicknames (Rukinec, Vratch) over the various periods of his life. The novel follows Arseny's life from his birth to death. He acts as a healer and miraculously saves seriously ill people (the wife and daughter of Prince Mikhail, Sister Agafia, mother of a boy called Silvestr), but he is still perceived as feeble-minded. After his death, his body shows no traces of decay or changes of its appearance although it lay under the open sky for a long time. Then Arseny's body disappears.¹⁵

The connection with a novelistic chronicle can also be observed in a chronicle-like structure of the novel, i.e. the capturing of Arseny's life until his death, the spatial pulsation and the concept of a doorstep, which also appears in Vodolazkin's work. The chronicle-like

¹³ V. Golovanov, *V Rusku bude vždy vše tvrdší...*, p. 28.

¹⁴ *Prolegomena*, 1 *The Book of Knowledge*, 2 *The Book of Submission*, 3 *The Book of Journeying*, 4 *The Book of Peace*.

¹⁵ Cf. E. Водолазкин, *Лавр*, Издательство АСТ, Москва 2013, http://loveread.me/view_global.php?id=34991 (10.7.2023)

spatial pulsation was defined by Ivo Pospíšil as a transformation of a spatial amplitude, which is characterized by expansion and contraction. In the novel *Laurus*, the chronicle-like spatial pulsation can be observed in an expansion of the space when, after Ustin's death, Arseny leaves his home at the churchyard wall near the village of Rukina Slobodka. He travels through villages (Koscheyevo, Pavlovo, Gory, Sortino, Kuligy, Dobrilov, Zagorje, Ivachevo, Krasnoye, Voznesenske) where he heals the villagers. With this help, the wife of Prince of Belozersk and the wife of the Pskov mayor are cured. The healer Arseny's journey continues through Vienna and Venice to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The contraction of the space occurs at the end of the novel when Arseny returns to Russia, near the village of Rukina Slobodka.

According to Ivo Pospíšil¹⁶, the term doorstep is an important poetological feature of a novelistic chronicle that also appears in *Laurus* several times. In the *Book of Knowledge*, the word doorstep is used only once, when the elderly Nikandr is carrying dead Ustina and her child from Arseny's home and stepping over the doorstep. In the given context, the doorstep can be interpreted as a boundary between the safety of home and the world and its crossing leads to the loss of security.¹⁷ In the *Book of Submission*, the doorstep can again be perceived as a boundary between home and the world. Let us recall a scene from Arseny's journey when he decides to leave Ivan's house. Arseny steps down to the doorstep with a feeling of no way back.¹⁸ We can observe the doorstep in the sense of home security further on when Arseny is taking a pilgrim to his home and the pilgrim recognizes his house and doorstep.¹⁹ The doorstep in the sense of a boundary

¹⁶ Cf. I. Pospíšil, *Ruská románová kronika. Příspěvek k historii a teorii žánru*, Univerzita J. E. Purkyně, Brno 1983; I. Pospíšil, *Labyrint kroniky. Pokus o teoretické vymezení žánru*, Blok, Brno, 1986.

¹⁷ "Старец сделал знак монаху, чтобы обождал снаружи. Он взял Арсения под руку, и Арсений разом обмяк. Когда они поднимались на крыльцо, нога старца несколько раз поехала по ступеньке. Стоящие увидели это и заплакали." Е. Водолазкин, *Лавр...* http://loveread.me/view_global.php?id=34991 (14.7.2023)

¹⁸ "Арсения обдало холодом. Он все еще держался за дверное крыльцо. Возникло желание потянуть за него и вернуться в теплую избу. Но спустившись с крыльца, он понял, что уже не вернется. Сгущались ранние сумерки. Арсений шел, испытывая холод и страх. Он и сам не понимал, зачем вышел из тепла." Е. Водолазкин, *Лавр...* http://loveread.me/view_global.php?id=34991 (15.7.2023)

¹⁹ "Опознав в одном из наметенных сугробов свою избу, незнакомец решительно направился к крыльцу. Так же решительно на него поднялся

is mentioned once again when the past and present mingle in the *Book of Journeying*.²⁰

Contrarily, connection with the Russian classical literature is demonstrated by the picture of kissing the earth, which refers to the work of Fedor Dostoevsky. In Dostoevsky, the kissing of the earth, which then develops into a motif, appears in *Crime and Punishment* and *Brothers Karamazov*.²¹ In *Crime and Punishment*, this act symbolizes Raskolnikov's first step to a catharsis. Raskolnikov kisses the earth in order to gain strength and then, on the advice of Sonya, confesses to the murder of Alyona Ivanovna and her sister Yelizaveta. In *Brothers Karamazov*, the youngest brother Alyosha finds strength in a contact with the earth. In Dostoevsky's novels, this return to the earth (in Russian почва), tradition and moral values was demonstrated in the spirit of the so-called pochvennychestvo, a line in Slavophilia professed by the writer.

Dostoevsky's image of the unity of man and land through which Alyosha gains his strength shifts in Vodolazkin's work where we can observe finding new life security in Laurus' search for a dwelling:

Он шел без внутренних сомнений, шел бодрым шагом человека, знающего путь. К концу дня Лавр достиг желанного места. Оно показалось в точности таким, каким он его видел во сне. Прочитав благодарственную молитву, Лавр поцеловал обретенную землю и сказал:
Сей покой мой в век века, zde вселюся.
Сказал:
Приими мя, пустыня, яко мати чадо свое.²²

The connection to Russian classical literature can also be observed in the symbolism of three, which we can see in *Laurus* in the case of Arseny (e.g. the *third* child) or the passage of time (e.g. *three* days, *three* nights, *three* years).²³ The frequency of the number three can there-

и захлопнул за собой дверь." Е. Водолазкин, *Лавр...* http://loveread.me/view_global.php?id=34991 (15.7.2023)

²⁰ "Это был старый купеческий дом красного кирпича. Окна его по вечерам светились желтоватым электрическим светом. Когда Строев первый раз вернулся с раскопок, он остановился у крыльца, чтобы полюбоваться их сиянием." Е. Водолазкин, *Лавр...* http://loveread.me/view_global.php?id=34991 (14.7.2023)

²¹ Cf. A. Lazari, *Symbol ziemi w twórczości Fiodora Dostojewskiego*, "Slavica Wratislaviensia" 1986, p. 7–12.

²² Е. Водолазкин, *Лавр...*

²³ Arseny fails to save a child, therefore he says prayers for its soul three days and three nights because the soul remains in the place for three days. The sisters put

fore resemble the work of Dostoevsky where, based on the writer's three-value logic, the time data, descriptions of the environments, situations and acts of the characters, are carried out three times.²⁴ This phenomenon is also apparent in Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer* whose literary genre lies on the border between belles-lettres and non-fiction.

Up to now, *The Aviator* (in Russian *Авиатор*) has been regarded a contemporary desert island adventure where the parallels of Innokenty versus Robinson and Biblical Lazarus were accentuated. The genre classification oscillates between utopian and simultaneously dystopic novel (Pospíšil)²⁵, alternative historical novel (Chernychova)²⁶ or novel with Gothic traits (Maguire).²⁷ We will show the borderline between belles-lettres and non-fiction in *The Aviator* below.

The framework structure of *The Aviator* is that of a diary where, from almost the beginning, the dominant theme concerns Innokenty's recollection of the past provoked by shimmering air, wind or cold weather. Innokenty wakes up in a hospital, remembering nothing. Over time, he experiences fragments of memories based on sensory perceptions. His first recollection is winter weather, frost and feeling cold²⁸ in the street. Winter weather and shimmering air with the blush of dawn²⁹ then initiate further memories. Importantly, recollections related to labour camps have a real basis. Eugene Vodolazkin filled *The Aviator* with memories of imprisonment in labour camps on

Arseny in a cell where he should have survived the winter but he returned to the graveyard in three days. Cf. Е. Водолазкин, *Лавр...*

²⁴ Dostoevsky's three-value logic appearing in his literary outputs was pointed out by the Slovak dostoevskologist Andrej Červeňák. Cf. A. Červeňák, *Tajomstvo Dostojevského*, Pedagogická fakulta v Nitre, Nitra 1991.

²⁵ Cf. И. Поспишил, *Тема память кейс стади на материале современной литературы*, "Philologia Rossica" 2020, no. 3, p. 84.

²⁶ Cf. Т. Л. Чернышова, *Понятие альтернативы в современной русской прозе...*, p. 139.

²⁷ Cf. M. Maguire, *Institutional Gothic in the Novels of Vladimir Sharov and Evgenii Vodolazkin*, "Canadian Slavonic Papers" 2019, no. 4, p. 431.

²⁸ "Говорил ей: в холода носи шапку, иначе отморозишь уши. Посмотри, говорил, сколько сейчас прохожих без ушей. Она соглашалась, мол, да-да, надо бы, но не носила. Смеялась над шуткой и продолжала ходить без шапки. Такая вот картина всплыла в памяти, хотя о ком здесь идет речь — ума не приложу." Е. Водолазкин, *Авиатор*, Издательство АСТ, Москва 2019, p. 11.

²⁹ "В открытой форточке воздух палаты смешивается с зимним воздухом за окном. Становится мутным, дрожит, плавится, и вертикальная планка рамы сливается со стволом дерева, и ранние сумерки — где-то я уже видел." Е. Водолазкин, *Авиатор...*, p. 13.

the Solovetsky Islands, the so-called Solovky, experienced by the well-known Russian mediaevalist Dmitry Likhachev. Vodolazkin had a personal acquaintance with Likhachev because during his studies in the Pushkin House, Likhachev worked as manager of the Old Russian Literature Department. The novel comments on physically demanding labour, carrying heavy logs, frequent amputations of the prisoners' limbs and tragic fates of women raped by the prison guards.³⁰ Vodolazkin treated Likhachev with reverence, admiration and respect: "He had a gruesome life: imprisonment on the Solovetsky Islands, Leningrad blockade, criticism. He was a man who knew life in its real, even horrendous form."³¹ The borderline between belles-lettres and non-fiction in *The Aviator* is made up by Likhachev's memories of the labour camps, which are incorporated into the novel's diary structure and stylized into Innokenty's recollections.

The Aviator features the so-called memory of a memory where a recollection of one event gradually retrieves recollection of another event and although they are very distant in time, they are connected by a joint sensual perception — image, sound or feel. For example, when recalling forced labour in the 1930s, Innokenty recalls the sea from a family holiday in 1911:

Потом нас обучали поворотам. Мы поворачивались направо, налево и кругом, и нас обвевало теплым, летним ветром, потому что даже на Соловках лето бывает теплым. В этом ветре запах сосновой смолы и таежных ягод смешивался со свежестью моря. [...] Незаходящее северное солнце блестело на гребнях волн. Мы стояли спиной к бухте, но, когда поворачивались, этот блеск был виден и по-настоящему меня радовал. Он напоминал мне море в окрестностях Алушты, где мы с родителями отдыхали в 1911 году.³²

These two memories are about twenty years apart, but they are connected by a sensual perception — glitter of the sun on the surface of the sea.

³⁰ "Брёвна. Большие брёвна на острове называли баланами. Тринадцать таких бревен каждому по уроку требовалось сдать чекисту в конце смены. Работали по двое — значит, всего двадцать шесть. Урок был невыполним — по крайней мере для тех, кто катим трудом прежде не занимался. [...] Ноги нередко отмораживали, и их приходилось ампутировать. Это не значит, что количество одноногих на Соловках резко увеличивалось, — такие люди обычно не выживали." Е. Водолазкин, *Авиатор...*, p. 148–149.

³¹ V. Golovanov, *V Rusku bude vždy vše tvrdší...*, p. 28.

³² Е. Водолазкин, *Авиатор...*, p. 135–136.

The inclusion of three diaries into the novelistic structure as boundary genres enhances the authenticity of the characters and events, thus making the play with time a thematic and morphological dominant of the work, as Ivo Pospíšil points out.³³ The first and largest diary is a diary of the main character Innokenty Petrovich Platonov, which records memories from the perspective of the present day (the late 1990s). The other diaries emerge after the death of Anastasia: Innokenty's diary continues and at the same time, Dr. Geiger and Anastasia Jr. (granddaughter of Innokenty's young-age girlfriend) write their own diaries. The changing perspectives therefore bring views of three persons on the same events. The records mingle and although their periodicity is not everyday, we can exceptionally find a record of one day by all three characters.

As the poetological traits of a novelistic chronicle also appear in *The Aviator*, the spatial relations in this novel can be characterized by the term chronicle-like spatial pulsation, much like in *Laurus*. The spatial amplitude gradually expands by the writing of the diary records. Innokenty's childhood was a time of happy moments, associated with Saint Petersburg. The memory of the city accompanied him throughout his life and even saved him at some moments³⁴:

Я ведь любил Петербург бесконечно. Возвращаясь из других мест, испытывал острое счастье. Его гармония противостояла в моих глазах хаосу, который пугал и расстраивал меня с детства. Я сейчас не могу как следует восстановить событий моей жизни, помню лишь, что, когда меня захлестывали волны этого хаоса, спасала мысль о Петербурге — острове, о который они разбиваются...³⁵

One of Innokenty's first memories of Saint Petersburg is the memory of a fire in the city, which aroused his sympathy for firefighting.

³³ Cf. И. Поспишил, *Тема память кейс стади...*, p. 86.

³⁴ We can see a contrast with the mentioned perception of Saint Petersburg in the work of the Russian 19th-century classical writer Dostoevsky whom the Saint Petersburg's milieu depressed by its heavy weight and dark side. In his correspondence with his brother Mikhail Mikhailovich, he referred to the city as hell, although he found it a source of inspiration and wanted to return there after his punishment in the forced labour. More on the ambivalence in F. M. Dostoevsky to Saint Petersburg. Cf. L. Paučová, *Saint Petersburg and Dostoyevsky's Diary of a Writer. On the Edge of a Literary Genre*, "Novaja rusistika" 2020, no. 1, p. 47–48 and L. Odehnalová, *Dostojevského Deník spisovatele v kontextech a konfrontacích*, Masarykova univerzita, Brno 2023, p. 113–114).

³⁵ Е. Водолазкин, *Авиатор...*, p. 31.

The facts connected with Saint Petersburg shift the novel towards non-fiction. The other memories recall imprisonment on the Solovetsky Islands and a subsequent transport of prisoners from the Kema River to Sekyrnaya Hill. The shrinking of the space can be associated with awakening to the reality of a hospital room and later a joint inhabitation of Innokenty and Nastya.

Another poetological feature of the novelistic chronicle, which is also apparent in *The Aviator*, is the use of a dominant and formative line of the plot. The dominant line is connected with the present. It develops from Innokenty's awakening in the hospital, through familiarization with the environment and the late 1990s, finding a girlfriend from his youth, her subsequent death, relationship with Anastasia Jr., media coverage of his story, his deteriorating health, up to a fateful flight from Munich when the plane landing gear fails to extend. The formative lines include recollections of the past which freely follow each other. Innokenty's recollections of the past relate to his childhood, family, girlfriend Anastasia and her father Voronin who was executed upon a denunciation, but also forced labour on the Solovetsky Islands and people who hurt him by their actions.

Here, like in *Laurus*, we can observe a dialogue with Russian classical literature. In *The Aviator*, Vodolazkin mentions Dostoevsky's novel *Demons* and hints on Lermontov's work and Dostoevsky's other works such as *Crime and Punishment*. Innokenty seeks the truth about himself throughout the entire novel and, like Raskolnikov, commits a murder. The committing of this crime is anticipated by a statue of the goddess Themis with a severed scale, which represents the goddess of justice and law in Greek mythology. The scale was damaged by Innokenty himself in his youth:

Вид бронзовой статуэтки с отломанными весами был для меня в тот вечер самым страшным — страшнее даже этих существ, копошащихся в моем беле, страшнее, может быть, того, что мне в дальнейшем угрожало. Вид этой статуэтки не оставил ни малейшей надежды.³⁶

The plot of the novel features one more statue of Themis, which Innokenty sees during a visit to a family friend Professor Giacint. However, this statue had the scale intact.³⁷ The finding of the truth about

³⁶ Ibid., p. 122.

³⁷ “[...] на одном из шкафов стояла Фемида — в точности такая, как наша, только

the crime committed in the past — the murder of neighbour Zarecky — is closed in the final part when Innokenty draws a portrait of Zarecky and realizes that he murdered Zarecky himself with the statue of Themis. We meet with the symbolism of three at a lesser extent in the novel, mainly in time data (e.g. *three* days).

In the paper I was concerned with genre analysis of two novels written shortly after each other by the contemporary Russian writer Eugene Vodolazkin. It is difficult to classify the works as regards their genre definition. The genre type of the novel *Laurus* (2012) oscillates between a biographical novel, non-historical novel, neo-mythological novel and alternative historical science-fiction. *The Aviator* (2015) is referred to as an alternative historical novel, or a novel of utopian or dystopic nature.

Both of the examined novels have a genre borderline, which has its specific features in either novel. In *Laurus*, the genre borderline is made by mediaeval historical facts, traits of a chronicle and features of a biographical novel, hagiography and legend. In *The Aviator*, the genre borderline is made up by memories, which are inserted into a diary structure of this work and facts connected with Saint Petersburg. Thanks to the specific nature of the genre and succession to the values of classical Russian literature, Vodolazkin's novels have a potential to resonate in the Czech literary space for many years to come.

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с весами, потому что никто в гиацинтовском доме отломать их, похоже, не решился." Е. Водолазкин, *Авиатор...*, p. 145.

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