

**THE THEME OF THE FAMILY IN THE NOVEL
BLEEDING EDGE BY THOMAS PYNCHON³**

Abstract

The article deals with the theme of the family in the novel *Bleeding Edge* by T. Pynchon. The purpose of the article is to reveal the reinterpretation of universal values through the image of the family and transition from postmodernism to metamodernism as a way of expressing the reinterpretation in the novel *Bleeding Edge* by T. Pynchon. The research object has been chosen because it helps comprehend a philosophical aspect of the work and understand the worldview of the writer. The story about the life of an American family turns out to be a very convenient form of a story about the life of the American society. The comprehensive research methodology has been used in the work: the synthesis of the comparative historical method, holistic analysis, elements of mythopoetic and hermeneutic methods. Poststructuralist approaches are taken into account, as well as the “close reading” technique. The article examines the relationships of all the family members. Their development and tendency to return to family values have been traced. It has been revealed that in the second decade of the 21st century, there is a tendency to search for support in the family, overcome interpersonal differences, find some points of contact – and to build one’s future based on returning “old” values: family, love (not so much passion as affection and devotion), mutual understanding, art and beauty. The author emphasizes that there should be continuity from generation to generation in order to pass on family traditions and values. The main character, Maxine, does everything possible to have a complete family. A significant role of parents as wise mentors in the upbringing of children has been proven: Horst, Maxine’s husband,

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instills in children a kind of culture to which he himself is attached; Ernie, Maxine's father, teaches her to trust herself and her children. It is determined that the tragedy of September 11, 2001 becomes a reminder of eternal values. The author's intentions are aimed at the fact that namely the family gives an opportunity to reflect the model of the modern society and show the possibilities of its evolution. In accordance with the change of milestones, values and philosophy of life, the method of postmodernism is organically replaced by the method of metamodernism.

Keywords: Thomas Pynchon, postmodernism, metamodernism, circular composition, family, motif, family values, childhood.

Анотація

У статті розглядається тема сім'ї у романі Т. Пінчона «Остання межа». Мета статті – виявити переосмислення загальнолюдських цінностей через зображення сім'ї та перехід від постмодернізму до метамодернізму як засіб переосмислення буття в романі Т. Пінчона «Остання межа». Цей об'єкт дослідження обраний тому, що саме через нього можна досягнути філософський аспект твору, зрозуміти світогляд письменника, а розповідь про життя американської сім'ї виявляється дуже зручною формою розповіді про життя американського суспільства взагалі. У роботі використана комплексна дослідницька методологія: синтез порівняльно-історичного методу, цілісного аналізу, елементів міфопоетичного і герменевтичного методів. Враховувалися постструктуралістський підхід і техніка «close reading». У статті розглянуто взаємовідносини усіх членів сім'ї. Простежено їх розвиток та тенденцію повернення до сімейних цінностей. Виявлено, що у другому десятилітті 21-го століття з'являється тенденція до пошуків опори в сім'ї, подолання міжособистісних розбіжностей, знаходження точок дотику – і будівництва свого майбутнього з опорою на «старі» цінності, що повертаються:

сім'я, любов (не стільки пристрасть, скільки прихильність і відданість), взаєморозуміння, мистецтво, краса. Автор підкреслює, що має бути наступність від одного покоління до іншого, щоб передавалися сімейні традиції та цінності. Головна героїня Максін робить усе можливе, щоб була повна сім'я. Доведено значну роль батьків як мудрих наставників у вихованні дітей: Хорст, чоловік Максін, прищеплює дітям культуру, до якої сам прихильний, Ерні, батько Максін, навчає довіряти собі та своїм дітям. Визначено, що трагедія 11 вересня 2001 року стає нагадуванням про вічні цінності. Авторські інтенції спрямовані на те, що саме сім'я дає змогу відобразити модель сучасного суспільства та показати можливості його еволюції. Відповідно до зміни орієнтирів, цінностей та життєвої філософії метод постмодернізму органічно змінюється на метамодернізм.

Ключові слова: Томас Пінчон, постмодернізм, метамодернізм, кільцева композиція, сім'я, мотив, сімейні цінності, дитинство.

Introduction

Thomas Pynchon is one of the brightest representatives of American postmodern writers, the winner of the Faulkner Prize, the author of novels, short stories and essays. His personality is shrouded in mystery as the writer avoids public speaking and does not give any interviews. The interest in his work does not subside every year, but on the contrary, increases. Two magazines *Pynchon Notes* and *Orbit: Writing Around Pynchon* are dedicated directly to a creative work of Thomas Pynchon. The favorite aspects considered in the novels of the writer are paranoia, entropy, conspiracy theories. Many Ukrainian literary critics turned to Pynchon's works (Denisova, 1999; Lisun, 2012; Bondarevskaya, 2010, and others).

Pynchon's novel *Bleeding Edge* attracted the attention of many literary scholars abroad (Anderson, 2013; Chappell, 2016; Cohen, 2013; Ivancsics, 2015; Konstantinou, 2013; Pappademas, 2013; Pöhlmann, 2016; Rolls, 2013; Siegal, 2016). Many researchers dwelled on the analysis of storylines, plot, puns, reflections of the

tragedy of September 11, 2001 (Anderson, 2013; Konstantinou, 2013; Pappademas, 2013, Rolls, 2013). According to Ukrainian literary scholar S. Radchenko, the novel *Bleeding Edge* can no longer be attributed to postmodernism, but to metamodernism or postpostmodernism: “Despite Pynchon being usually considered as postmodern writer, the use of metamodern categories for describing his narrative strategies confirms the idea of the novel’s post-postmodern orientation” (Radchenko, 2019). Brian Chappell investigates the eschatological process in this novel by T. Pynchon (Chappell, 2016). In the article “*Meatspace is Cyberspace: The Pynchonian Posthuman in Bleeding Edge*” J. Siegal examines “indirect critique of utopian posthumanism in *Bleeding Edge* by analyzing the deleterious effects that an emerging Internet culture has on the novel’s characters” (Siegal, 2016). The researcher B. Ivanscics attracted aspects of the information society and cyberspace (Ivanscics, 2015). S. Pöhlmann considers the author’s interpretation of money as a meta-reality at the plot and style level. Literary critic J. Cohen argues that T. Pynchon puts the family in the first place, believing that only it is real, and everything else that surrounds people is fake (Cohen, 2013). However, despite the fact that a fairly wide range of researchers have addressed various aspects of the novel *Bleeding Edge*, the theme of the family with a deep study of images and the relationship of family members have not yet been considered.

The purpose of the article is to reveal the reinterpretation of universal values through the image of one family and transition from postmodernism to metamodernism as a way of expressing the reinterpretation in the novel *Bleeding Edge* by T. Pynchon. To do this, it is necessary to consider the theme of the family, relationships between a man and a woman, parents and children, as well as identify and trace the motif of childhood as the cornerstone of the human personality. The research object has been chosen because it helps comprehend a philosophical aspect of the work and understand the worldview of the writer. The story about the life of an American family turns out to be a very convenient form of a story about the life

of the American society.

Methodology and Methods

The comprehensive research methodology has been used in the work: the synthesis of the comparative historical method, holistic analysis, and some elements of mythopoetic and hermeneutic methods. Poststructuralist approaches are taken into account, as well as the “close reading” technique.

Results and Discussions

Set of the novel *Bleeding Edge* takes place in New York between the spring of 2001 and the spring of 2002. As B. Chappell rightly notes, Pynchon’s work can be considered “as a historical meta-text. Each novel within this meta-text depicts a moment of dramatic (and usually catastrophic) change, from the moment that America was first mapped by Europeans, to the onslaught of world wars and subsequent multi-national efforts to control the world, to the failed promise of the 1960s, to the reining-in of the Internet” (Chappell, 2016). In the novel *Bleeding Edge*, T. Pynchon describes the increased role of the Internet, its pernicious influence, the total control of business and government with its help, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack in New York. According to B. Chappell, in recent times a writer “has been more directly concerned with world domination, the incremental folding of diversity under an umbrella of technocratic control” (Chappell, 2016). All this has a pernicious effect on the human personality, but there is a source that can help a person remain himself: it is a family.

The main character of the novel *Bleeding Edge* is Maxine Tarnow, she brings up two teenage sons. At the beginning of the novel, her husband Horst Loeffler does not live with the family, he temporarily parted with her. Maxine has parents Ernie and Eleine, who also live in New York, as well as a sister, Brooke, with whom she has a very difficult relationship. *Bleeding Edge* is a coming-of-age and personality-building novel, not just for the children, but also for Maxine and her husband. In the process of narration, the reader notices how the main characters reexamine the family and personal values, their relationships and outlook on life change in a positive

direction.

Maxine Tarnow – a financial fraud private investigator, she “runs a small fraud-investigating agency down the street, called Tail ’Em and Nail ’Em – she once briefly considered adding “and Jail ’Em,” but grasped soon enough how wishful, if not delusional” (Pynchon, 2013). As rightly noted by B. Ivancsics, “*Bleeding Edge* qualifies as the first Pynchon-novel to fully employ a female sleuth” (Ivancsics, 2015). Subsequently, the reader learns that her certificate is being taken away, but she is illegally investigating fraud in the company at the request of a friend Reg Despard, who was commissioned to make a documentary about hashslingerz, a computer security firm. Despite the fact that all sorts of plot lines are intertwined in the novel, the main one, according to Don Anderson, is the following: “The plot of this novel is a bodying forth of maternal care, of mother-love” (Anderson, 2013). Indeed, everything related to the relationship between Maxine and her sons is permeated with maternal love and care, responsibility and trust.

Many researchers have paid attention to the importance of the family in the novel *Bleeding Edge*, as well as in other novels by T. Pynchon. Thus, J. Siegal correctly notes that “the idea of the family as a saving grace from the rationalization, regimentation, surveillance, control, and dehumanization that result from the development of technological global capitalism has been a recurring theme in each of Pynchon’s novels since and including *Vineland*” (Siegal, 2016). J. Cohen also highlights the importance of the family in the novel *Bleeding Edge*: “For Pynchon – the embattled bard of the counterculture, disabused of all allegiance – the last redoubt has become the family, and the last war to be waged is between our virtual identities and the bonds of blood”, and comes to the conclusion that “the online moguls have tried to persuade us that we’re not losing a nation, we’re gaining a world. Pynchon proposes that both are mere second lives, fakes. Only family is real” (Cohen, 2013). The novel shows that a return to family values leads to the construction of new relationships in the family, a sense of security

and support.

Maxine, while investigating, never forgets to pay attention to her sons, Ziggi and Otis. She is a caring and hardworking mother. Hearing that a war might start in the Middle East, Maxine immediately switches to her sons: “Toggling Maxine immediately into Anxious Mom mode, thinking about her boys, who might be too young to draft at the moment, but ten years from now, given the way U.S. wars tend to drag out, will be fish in a barrel, more than likely the kind of barrel that holds 42 gallons and is going currently for about 20, 25 bucks” (Pynchon, 2013). However, she does not forget that she has to earn money and provide for her children, so she easily returns to work “humming the working-mom blues” (Pynchon, 2013). J. Siegal notices how the author describes the maternal instinct, comparing it to computer programs, “anxious Mom mode”, “parental subroutines kick in” (Siegal, 2016). At the beginning of the 21st century, the Internet is being introduced into the minds of people, and without noticing it, the characters of the novel are likened to computer programs, which is reflected in their vocabulary, behavior and consciousness: the line between the real and the virtual is blurred. Nevertheless, fortunately, in the family, people do not turn into robots. Maxine is a caring mother; she is interested in what her sons do, what they watch on TV, what video games they play. This is not due to distrust or control on her part, she just wants to be always aware of their affairs so that she can keep up a conversation with the children. When Ziggi leaves for “krav maga” (Israel hand-to-hand combat), his brother Otis, along with Maxine’s girlfriend’s daughter Fiona, watch *The Aggro Hour*, the content of which his mother knows very well. She watches with interest as they interact. Otis, being “in full being-a-gent mode”, asks Fiona if it would be cruel for her, and she, flirtingly, asks him to warn where not to look. Ziggi joins Otis and Fiona after training, and after a while Maxine looks into the boys’ room and finds that all three of them are staring at the screen, on which “unfolding a first-person shooter, with a generous range of weaponry in a cityscape that looks a lot like New York” (Pynchon, 2013). She reminds that she has already warned them not to use

violent games. However, the children claim that this video game is non-violent, it has been developed by Fiona father's partner, and they are beta-testing it: people who break the rules, steal, yell at children, when pointing weapons, they simply disappear, and there is no blood on the screen. Maxine wonders if the punishments for such minor offenses are not too cruel, but then she concludes that it may be "a virtual and kid-scale way of getting into the antifraud business". Thus, she approves of their video game – not for cruelty, but for the fact that it helps to form an active life position, an honest and humane attitude towards other people.

Bleeding Edge can be called a coming-of-age novel: in it, not only the children grow up, but also the main character herself, her husband and her sister. Horst Loeffler, a financial broker, after cheating on Maxine with her childhood friend Heidi, temporarily separates from his wife. The author describes him in such a way: "A fourth-generation product of the U.S. Midwest, emotional as a grain elevator, fatally alluring as a Harley knucklehead, indispensable..." (Pynchon, 2013). The author tells how Horst meets Maxine in Chicago when she is on her first fraud case. Horst is kind to her and, having learned that she is Jewish, even wants to convert to Judaism, but, having studied all the nuances, changes his mind. This underlines his strong attraction to her and his desire to be next to her, to do the same as Maxine, but the difficulties of switching to another religion cool his ardor. After the marriage, Horst sees nothing at all, except for his electronic spreadsheets; he does not notice that his wife wants attention and tenderness. In a conversation with Daytona, Maxine suddenly remembers Horst, with whom they broke up. She says that when she realized that family life was a burden for her husband, they had disagreements. After his departure from the family, Maxine does not receive any help from him, not even alimony. She gets an apartment, and he gets a car – "the 59 Impala in cherry condition" (Pynchon, 2013). She absolutely does not hold a grudge against him, but at the same time she does not want to talk about this topic, "because Horst is history" (Pynchon, 2013), as it seems to her at the

beginning of the novel.

Therefore, when Maxine is in the shower, Horst suddenly appears. He is interested in where his sons are, admits that he was very bored. Ziggi shows up and rudely says, “Mom, who’s the sleazebag, lemme guess, another blind date?” (Pynchon, 2013). With this phrase, he seems to want to distance himself from Horst, perhaps subconsciously considering him a traitor, because his son needed a wise mentor all this time. Nevertheless, the son and father hug for a long time, they are very happy to meet, and later Otis joins them. They order pizza to take away, have fun chatting. When father calls Maxine “my little everything bagel”, sons roll their eyes in tenderness. It is felt that they are pleased with the appearance of their father, despite the fact that he declares that he will stay in New York for some time; that is, allegedly he has not arrived forever. When Maxine finishes work and looks into the room, she sees how the children sleep with their father in front of the TV screen. She concludes, “Well, they love him”. She even for a moment wants to lie down next to them, to feel a real family, some kind of protection and support that Maxine lacked before. However, not much time has passed since his sudden appearance, and she leaves for another room. When Elaine, Maxine’s mother, invites everyone to coffee after the school play, Horst does not agree, it is still uncomfortable for him to go to his ex-mother-in-law, knowing that she is actually displeased with his appearance, and he refuses. Maxine, immediately, like a devoted wife, comes to his defense: “Maybe he’s trying to be polite, you’ve heard of that?” (Pynchon, 2013). She expresses concern, trying to remember how it should be in a normal marriage, reminding her ex-husband to call if he is late. It occurs to her that it would be nice to meet eyes, but alas, Horst is not yet confident in himself, in his full return to the family. However, Maxine completely trusts her husband and lets the children go with him for the whole summer to the Midwest, where he grew up. Nevertheless, due to the uncertainty of the situation and the desire to prove something to herself, Maxine has chance relationships with other men – without love, without continuation; she has no confidence that her husband will remain in

the family. At the same time, she cherishes her relationship with Horst, and after the children inform her that they will be back in two days, she “wanders uneasily around the place, convinced she has left evidence of misbehavior out in glaringly plain sight that will, not exactly get her in trouble with Horst, but oblige her to be heedful of his feelings, which despite appearances, he may actually have” (Pynchon, 2013). She even asks her childhood friend Heidi to come over with Carmine as if by chance for support. Heidi realized that Maxine was trying to avoid trouble, but she refused to help and advised her to get rid of her uncertainty. Maxine is not sure yet that Horst is back for good.

The children missed her: “Hey Mom. Missed you”, and she missed them: “She kneels on the floor and holds the boys till everybody gets too embarrassed” (Pynchon, 2013). In this scene, one feels love, and the joy of meeting with children, and a slight sense of guilt towards her husband. When the boys have gone to bed and Maxine is about to watch a movie, Horst asks if he can stay for a while, and she, afraid to reveal her feelings yet, refers to her sons, “The boys will be thrilled, I think” (Pynchon, 2013). At the same time, everything leads to the restoration of the family; even in an invitation to The First Annual Grande Rentrée Ball, or Geeks’ Cotillion from Gabriel Ice, the firm that Maxine checks, the double name of the woman is indicated, “Ms. Maxine Tarnow-Loeffler”. If earlier in the novel the reader meets only Maxine Tarnow and Horst Loeffler, then the combination of surnames becomes a kind of sign for family reunification. Horst himself does not yet understand that he really wants the warmth and comfort of the family life. At some point he thinks that he is not a family man and the best space for him is some kind of the motel somewhere in the Midwest: “My ideal living space is a not too ratty motel room in the deep Midwest, somewhere up in the badlands, about the time of the first snows” (Pynchon, 2013). However, here they are watching the weather channel together with the sound off, and Maxine suddenly notices that she is talking about work and Horst is listening to her carefully, which was not the

case before. The author suggests, “the formal amiability is catching”. Not only does Horst listen to his wife talk about difficulties at work, but also he even asks how he can help her. Moreover, she offers him to accompany her to the ball. Horst is worried about having to dance, but he cannot; Maxine tries to teach him how to dance when the children drop in and joke: “Vice-principal’s office, you two” (Pynchon, 2013). Therefore, slowly, they learn to avoid interpersonal disagreements, look for common ground, and attachment to each other appears.

Once at a party, Eric, with whom Maxine had a one-night stand, approaches Maxine, and she is afraid that her husband will somehow find out about this episode. She does not want this to happen: after all, Maxine has only now gained a fragile hope of restoring the family. From fear, she even feels that he “invisibly nearby, gazing at them” (Pynchon, 2013). Being afraid that Eric will be frivolous, Maxine loudly asks that Horst to hear, “Did you see my husband around here anywhere?” (Pynchon, 2013). Thus, she makes it clear that for her the main thing is a family. And one warm evening, the whole family decided not to order pizza, but went to Tom’s Pizza, and Maxine catches herself thinking that “they’ve done anything all together as a family” (Pynchon, 2013).

The events of September 11, 2001 make Maxine very worry about her husband: he was just supposed to be at the World Trade Center when a plane crashes into it. Horst does not call, and Maxine cannot get through because the lines are busy. She assures the children that she is not worried, and they try not to show their agitation, nevertheless, the tension is felt: “She holds their hands, one on either side, all the way home, and though this sort of thing belongs to their childhood and generally annoys them, today they let her” (Pynchon, 2013). Her anxiety about her husband is conveyed by the author, “Each time Maxine jumps to pick it up, hoping it’s Horst”, “Still no word from Horst. She tries not to worry, to believe her own pitch to the boys, but she’s worried” (Pynchon, 2013). Waking up from a nightmare, she goes to the kitchen and hears snoring from the spare room. “Trying not to hope, not to hyperventilate, she tiptoes in

and there yes it's Horst, snoring in front of his BioPiX channel, alone of all channels tonight not providing twenty-four-hour coverage of the disaster, as if it's the most natural thing in the world to be alive, and home" (Pynchon, 2013). Without expressing a stormy joy and not telling how worried she was, Maxine listens to how her husband and friend decided to spend the night in a motel, and why he was so lucky.

In the morning, Horst, like a loving father, proposes to his wife that they take the children to school together, and she agrees, remarking "other sets of parents, some who haven't spoken for years, showing up together to escort their children, regardless of age or latchkey status, safely to and from" (Pynchon, 2013). Therefore, the family assumes some kind of security. After the tragedy, Horst moves into his wife's room, "Horst shortly after September 11 having shifted his sleeping arrangements into Maxine's room, to the inconvenience of neither and to what, if in fact she ever went into it with anybody, would be the surprise of very few" (Pynchon, 2013). Maxine admits with difficulty that she missed her husband very much, "It's still too much for her to get her own head around, how much she's missed him" (Pynchon, 2013). Hence, a social disaster becomes a reminder of family values.

It is time to worry and Horst: one day the wife does not return home. Russian gangsters for ransom kidnapped her, along with Tallis, the wife of billionaire Gabriel Ice. However, they do not know that Tallis is divorcing her husband, and the women are released after a while. Horst is nervous; when Maxine returns he wonders where she was all night. He imagines she has a lover: "Who is it, Maxi, I'd rather hear now than later». His wife answers, "There is nobody but you, Horst. <...> Never will be" (Pynchon, 2013). Horst wants to emphasize how worried he was that she did not come home for the night, "Well, I called hospitals. I called cops, TV news stations, bail-bond companies..." (Pynchon, 2013). Feelings, love and care for each other are felt in this dialogue. They fall asleep together on the couch, and when the boys see them together, they rejoice, "Catching

sight of their parents on the couch, they start in with some hip-hop version of the Peaches & Herb oldie “Reunited and It Feels So Good”. Thus, at the end of the novel, the family is fully restored; there is a certain stability and confidence in future.

According to O. Dubinina, the semantics of the word “father” in the American context is also of great importance – these are the founding fathers of America, Puritan settlers and, later, revolutionary enlighteners (Dubinina, 2005). “Father” is associated with the motif of mentoring, wisdom, and Horst tries to fully fulfil this function. After arriving home, he takes his children to his new office at the World Trade Center and they have their lunch “at Windows on the World, which has a dress code, so the boys wear jackets and ties” (Pynchon, 2013). Thus, the father instills in the children a kind of culture to which he himself is attached. In addition, Horst travels with the children to the Midwest to introduce them to their parents, to their favorite places in Chicago. The father introduces his sons to old arcade games on the ancient machines, as if moving them in time, to his childhood. The boys are delighted: they are having a wonderful time with their father, eating at malls throughout Iowa. In New York, Horst continues to make time for his sons, “Horst, though not exactly hanging around the house all day, is finding time for the boys, more time, it seems from Maxine’s increasingly out-of-focus memories of the Horst Years, than he has ever spent before, taking them up to see a Yankee game, discovering the last skee-ball parlor in Manhattan, even volunteering to bring them around the corner for a seasonal drill he has always avoided, back-to-school haircuts” (Pynchon, 2013). This is how a father’s relationship with his sons is established, and his affection for children is manifested. One day, Maxine finds him assembling a computer desk from chipboard for Ziggy: sweat streams down the man in a stream, various fasteners and instruction sheets are scattered everywhere. No matter how difficult it is, but he is trying to do it for his beloved sons. The conversation between a father and his sons at Christmas is remarkable. Boys no longer believe in Santa Claus: “Seems various NYC junior know-it-all’s of Otis and Ziggy’s acquaintance have been putting around the story there’s no Santa”

(Pynchon, 2013). They wonder how their father at his age can believe in Santa. However, Horst explains that parents are agents of Santa and everything is done through Santanet, “Nobody has any trouble believing in the Internet, right, which really is magic. So what’s the problem believing in a virtual private network for Santa’s business? It results in real toys, real presents, delivered by Christmas morning, what’s the difference?” (Pynchon, 2013).

The role of Maxine’s father, Ernie, as a wise mentor is noteworthy. Somehow in the conversation, he is even indignant that for some reason everyone reduces the role of father, “always the mother’s heart that falls out of the shoe box in the snow, nobody ever asks about a father, no, fathers don’t have hearts” (Pynchon, 2013). However, Maxine often communicates with her father, listens to his opinion. At the end of the novel, the daughter is interested in his experiences in the Cold War. In addition, he tells Maxine that the Internet was invented for the convenience of people, but it “creeps now like a smell through the smallest details of our lives, the shopping, the housework, the homework, the taxes, absorbing our energy, eating up our precious time. And there’s no innocence. Anywhere. Never was” (Pynchon, 2013). He talks about how the Internet provides apparent freedom, “Call it freedom, it’s based on control. Everybody connected together, impossible anybody should get lost, ever again. Take the next step, connect it to these cell phones, you’ve got a total Web of surveillance, inescapable” (Pynchon, 2013). Ernie sees the development of information technology as the root of all the evil.

Maxine’s parents Elaine and Ernie live in New York. Therefore, they are directly involved in the upbringing of children, instill in them a love of music. When Horst leaves the family, Maxine’s friend convinces her to go on a Caribbean cruise, and Maxine leaves the kids with her parents: “Her parents were more than happy to look after the boys” (Pynchon, 2013). Elaine and Ernie could not inculcate in Maxine love for opera, but the grandchildren listen to opera music with pleasure and take part in the discussion of

opera composers: “Fortunately it only skipped a generation, and both Ziggy and Otis now have turned into reliable opera dates for their grandparents, Ziggy partial to Verdi, Otis to Puccini, neither caring that much for Wagner” (Pynchon, 2013). As rightly noted J. Cohen, “adult sanity, then, must depend not on the lives we make online, but on the lives we make off it – our kids – on how we love them, and how we raise them, and the virtues and good-taste imperatives we pass on to them from our progenitors” (Cohen, 2013). The author emphasizes that there must be continuity from generation to generation in order to pass on family traditions and values.

Maxine has a very difficult relationship with her sister Brooke, who returns with her husband from Israel: “Maxine isn’t that eager to see her sister but figures she has to do at least a drop-by”, “The sisters warily exchange a hug”, “Maxine goes over to her parents’ for lunch, and Avi and Brooke are there as expected. The sisters embrace, though you could not say warmly” (Pynchon, 2013). At the end of the novel, the sisters have a good relationship: “Oddly these days Maxine finds herself zeroing in on her sister, understanding that among all the signs and symptoms of city pathology, Brooke historically has been her best indication, her high-sensitivity toxic detector” (Pynchon, 2013). Maxine becomes so attentive to her sister that even Brooke’s manner suspects her pregnancy. The sister wonders how Maxine realized it, because she only told her husband about it yesterday, and Maxine explains, “sisterhood is extrasensory” (Pynchon, 2013). There is no explanation in the novel why the sisters have been at enmity since childhood, but the positive dynamics of their relationship is reflected: over time, women are more patient and warmer towards each other.

It is quite interesting to compare the family traditions in Maxine’s family and her parents. When Brooke and Avi arrive, Elaine and Ernie greet guests with a traditional dish – Tongue Polonaise, “which has been slowly cooking all day in the kitchen, filling the place with a smell initially intriguing, soon compelling”, “Tongue Polonaise is a childhood favorite around here. Maxine used to think it meant some classical-piano novelty act”, “The Tongue

Polonaise comes in on a Wedgwood platter Maxine only remembers seeing at seder. Ernie dramatically sharpens a knife and begins carving the tongue as ceremoniously as if it's a Thanksgiving turkey" (Pynchon, 2013). The head of the slicing ceremony is Ernie, as this is his mother's recipe, and it is very remarkable that they continue the tradition and cook Tongue Polonaise for family holidays. However, their daughter Maxine no longer continues their tradition: she and her family mostly eat fast food, order takeaway pizzas or eat at eateries and cafes. When Maxine sits with her children and husband at a local Tom's Pizza, she is overwhelmed by nostalgic memories of how they were together more than once in this café: "Maxine thinks back to when the boys were little, the local practice in neighborhood pizza parlors then being to cut slices into small bite-size squares as an accommodation for little kids. When the kid can handle a whole slice, it's a kind of coming-of-age. Later on, with braces, there's a return to smaller squares" (Pynchon, 2013). Therefore, she believes that it can be called a family tradition, although she understands that it cannot be called delightful, but Maxine agrees to this one. Traditionally, the whole family gathers for Thanksgiving at Elaine and Ernie's. Since the holiday takes place after the September 11, terrorist attack "there is an empty space set seder fashion at the table, not for the prophet Elijah but for one or any of the unknown souls whom prophecy failed that day" (Pynchon, 2013). Except for that, everything is going on as usual. Grandfather with his grandchildren is watching *Star Wars*, Horst and Avi are talking sports, "Maxine and Brooke by the end of the afternoon have reached zinger parity with no lethal weapons appearing", Elaine scurries between the dining room and the kitchen. The turkey is successful. Everyone is very happy. The family holiday continues.

The childhood motif develops in the novel not only through the images of Ziggi and Otis, but also through Maxine's own memories of her childhood. Many events that happened to her in childhood influenced her future fate. Therefore, in adolescence, Maxine and her friend Heidi spy on houses where, in their opinion, ghosts live. They

even bought cheap binoculars for this, so that they could see everything from the Maxine balcony. Perhaps, already at this age, the sprouts of her future profession appear. She also believes that she was sent to investigate fraud stories of her father: “At bedtime Ernie used to tell his daughters scary blacklist stories. Some kids had the Seven Dwarfs, Maxine and Brooke had the Hollywood Ten. The trolls and wicked sorcerers and so forth were usually Republicans of the 1950s, toxic with hate, stuck back around 1925 in almost bodily revulsion from anything leftward of ‘capitalism’...” (Pynchon, 2013), though her father confirms, “When you were little, I always tried to keep you as much as I could from joining in on all the brainless adoration of cops, but after a point you make your own mistakes” (Pynchon, 2013). Talking to her father in adulthood, Maxine tells him that she never gave in to scammers, but when she has met a war criminal she thinks that he can improve, “He can still turn away, nobody’s that bad, he has to have a conscience, there’s time, he can make up for it, except now he can’t” (Pynchon, 2013). The father says that he was always surprised at his daughter’s indignation when she saw injustice, and kept waiting for her to become as cold as everyone else, but at the same time prayed that this would not happen. In turn, she is afraid that her sons may become cynical, like their classmates, and if not, then “this world, it could destroy them, so easily”. The father, as a wise mentor, gives advice, so that she trusts the children and herself.

The author calls Maxine a Jewish Mother not because of her nationality, but because of her desire to help everyone. B. Chappell draws attention at this point, “...Pynchon often refers to her as a ‘Jewish Mother,’ a colloquialism describing more her tendency to worry about and to care for those around her rather than her religious identity” (Chappell, 2016). Maxine comforts her friend Heidi, lets Eric and Cassidy share a spare room after the terrorist attack, and takes care of the McElmo’s children when they come home late. She helps March find common ground with her daughter Tallis. Maxine advises Tallis to make peace with her mother and try to understand her, she tells her, “Your mama is the most important person in your life. The only one who can get the potatoes mashed exactly the way

you need 'em to be. Only one who understood when you started hanging with people she couldn't stand. Lied about your age down to the multiplex so's you could go watch 'em teen slasher movies together. She'll be gone soon enough, appreciate her while you can" (Pynchon, 2013). Thus, the main character speaks of the mother as the main guardian of the family hearth.

From the very beginning of the novel, there is a sense of the inevitability of some kind of collapse, whether it be a terrorist attack or a financial collapse. There is a premonition of disaster in the air. Maxine feels danger everywhere, she is afraid for the children: "Half the kids seem to be on new Razor scooters, so to the list of things to keep alert for add ambush by rolling aluminum", "The chance that automatic-weapons fire might break out at any minute put a sort of motivational edge on the day, but now the Vacancy just sits there, waiting" (Pynchon, 2013). The feeling that something terrible is about to happen does not let go of Maxine. On a subconscious level, all her fears are expressed through a dream when she sees the late Lester Traipse, whom she has accused of embezzling money from the hashslingerz, and to whom she warns of the tragedy, saying one word – "Azrael": "In nonbiblical Jewish tradition, as she is perfectly aware, Azrael is the angel of death. In Islam also, for that matter" (Pynchon, 2013). Fear is reinforced by the use of adjectives "anxious", "eerie". One day after a party, Maxine and Horst return home in a taxi, the driver turns out to be an Arab. First, she pays attention to the conversations in Arabic on the radio, and then she notices that the taxi driver has an Islamic name. From the negotiations she learns the only word – Inshallah, Horst interprets, "Arabic for 'whatever'", but the driver corrects him, "If it is God's will", and he looks at Maxine in such a way that "what she sees there will keep her from getting to sleep right away" (Pynchon, 2013). This premonition of something terrible does not let her go.

In the next chapter, the events of the September 11 tragedy are described. The boys, in fright, think that the war has begun, their mother reassures them that this is not so. In conversation with Vyrva,

Maxine says, “American neglect of family values brings al-Qaeda in on the airplanes and takes the Trade Center down?” (Pynchon, 2013). Vyrva, in her turn, says that the terrorists saw what the Americans had become, and decided that this was a “weak target”. Vyrva and Maxine realize that the rich and powerful people contributed to the tragedy. In addition, Heidi tells Maxine that people are degrading, adults behave like children, and they talk like children, “Can’t you feel it, how everybody’s regressing? September 11 infantilized this country. It had a chance to grow up, instead it chose to default back to childhood” (Pynchon, 2013). Thus, the author emphasizes the return to family values: this is the only thing that can save people from soullessness and indifference.

Many researchers conclude that the novel *Bleeding Edge* ends with a reflection on family traditions, emphasizing their importance, and female friendship (Maxine stands up for Tallis against her husband and even against gangsters). They (Chappell, 2016; Rolls, 2013; Siegal, 2016) note the importance of the circular composition of the novel: it begins and ends with Maxine seeing her children off to school. At first, she does not want to let them go alone: “Yes maybe they’re past the age where they need an escort, maybe Maxine doesn’t want to let go just yet, it’s only a couple blocks, it’s on her way to work, she enjoys it, so?” (Pynchon, 2013). According to B. Chappell, “Not only is this image one of family togetherness and nostalgia for more direct and necessary caregiving, but also the style itself introduces the reader to the closeness with which Pynchon’s narrator will follow Maxine. The reader experiences her thought process as she experiences it, her tender rationalizations for continuing to accompany her boys around the block. The reader gains access to some valences of her vulnerability” (Chappell, 2016). Indeed, Maxine’s worries and concerns are connected with children, although at some point, due to a frivolous connection with the hired killer Windust, she unwittingly puts her children in danger. At the end of the novel, Maxine, trying to remember whose turn it is to walk the kids to school, lets them go on their own, though “she waits in the doorway as they go on down the hall. Neither looks back. She can

watch them into the elevator at least” (Pynchon, 2013). B. Chappell concludes, “the boys’ outgrowing of their mother reflects the onset of adolescence that has characterized them across the novel. But this desire for independence is especially noteworthy in light of the foiled attack on them, as retribution for Windust’s murder. Maxine has just experienced the ordeal of realizing that her own actions have rendered her family a target, which in turn yields the broader existential realization that safety (and innocence, to echo discussions across the novel) is an illusion” (Chappell, 2016). J. Siegal doubts about the safety of the family, “as the end of the novel demonstrates, the family structure offers only a provisional and dubious refuge from the posthuman condition because the family is always potentially under attack” (Siegal, 2016). He notes that at the end of the novel, Maxine’s character of fear for children changes, “As Ziggy and Otis stand like conjoined towers both in “their virtual hometown of Zigotisopolis” and in their living room on the novel’s final pages, Maxine recognizes that they are not susceptible only to the attacks of muggers, child molesters, violent criminals, stray bullets, and errant traffic. Now she must also worry that her son s– like the Twin Towers they resemble – may be blown “to pixels” (Siegal, 2016). Another literary critic, A. Rolls, also draws attention to the beginning and end of the novel and comes to the following conclusion: “The novel opens with Maxine walking her sons, Otis and Ziggy, to school, even though “maybe they’re past the age where they need an escort” (Rolls, 2013) and concludes with an act of spontaneous independence on their part... They (or the younger generation) do not need to be guided by their elders’ hands, and we may find encouragement in the prospect that they don’t want to be” (Rolls, 2013). Thus, we can conclude that in this novel the circular composition does not close the circle, but, as it were, turns into a spiral: the end repeats the beginning, but on a higher level. This indicates the development of family in future and the expansion of the scope of interpersonal relationships: children are allowed to go to school to study (that is, to gain knowledge about life) themselves – this is like a ceremony of

initiation, after which a person is considered mature and can soon create his own family. That is, new sprouts appear on a large family tree. This gives hope for the future, despite the total control of society, terrorist attacks and wars.

At the beginning of the novel, the main character is fascinated by the beauty of pear blossoms, “This morning, all up and down the streets, what looks like every Callery Pear tree on the Upper West Side has popped overnight into clusters of white pear blossoms. As Maxine watches, sunlight finds its way past rooflines and water tanks to the end of the block and into one particular tree, which all at once is filled with light” (Pynchon, 2013). J. Siegal draws attention to the description of pear blossoms at the end of the novel. In his opinion, the narrator “focuses on a pastoral image that contains the complexity of hope and ephemerality that has characterized recent events: “pear trees have exploded into bloom...for now the brightness in the street is from flowers on trees whose shadows are texturing the sidewalk. It’s their moment, the year’s great pivot, it’ll last for a few days, then all collect in the gutters”” (Siegal, 2016). Thus, the author emphasizes not only the frailty, but also the eternity of being: if at the beginning Maxine only admires the beauty of flowering, then in the end she realizes that this is not for long, but nevertheless, next spring everything will happen again – and it will always be so. Such a positive perception of the world gives the author the opportunity to outgrow the framework of postmodernism.

Conclusions

Thus, on the example of T. Pynchon’s novel *Bleeding Edge*, the article traces the relationship of family members, their development and the tendency to return to family values. If the postmodernism of the late 20th century is a statement of the collapse of society, now there is a tendency to seek support in the family, overcome interpersonal differences, find some points of contact – and build one’s future based on the returning “old” values: family, love (not so much passion as affection and devotion), mutual understanding, art and beauty. Namely the family gives an opportunity to display the model of modern society and show the

possibilities of its evolution. In accordance with the change of orientations, values and philosophy of life, the method of postmodernism is organically replaced by the method of metamodernism.

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