



The images of Stiva Oblonsky and Konstantin Levin in “Anna Karenina” by Leo Tolstoy: intuitive perception of life

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ABSTRACT

The problem of comprehension of the essential in human "I" is discussed in the article as a phenomenon of the writer's psychology on the example of two images of the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina" – Stiva Oblonsky and Konstantin Levin. Intuitive feeling of living as the expression of the essential combines two images taken by us, the mouthpieces of the two views on life in general, and on family in particular. Stiva Oblonsky and Konstantin Levin in the writer's conception of the philosophy of life by L. Tolstoy are the carriers of two forms of national family life. The characteristic of essential in the human "I" of Stiva Oblonsky and Konstantin Levin provides the capability to detect semantic references in the texts of L. Tolstoy and the German philosopher of the 20th century M. Heidegger, as both thinker understand the contents of the human "I" as a universal component of personality, which is the main criterion in the evaluation of a person, his thoughts and actions. Inter-textual analysis of "Anna Karenina" by L. Tolstoy and of the separate artistic and philosophical works of Heidegger has shown that the philosophy of life of Konstantin Levin, written by L. Tolstoy, resonantly echoes with the philosophy of "the pathway" of the German philosopher M. Heidegger.

Key words: novel "Anna Karenina", intuitive, sense of life, essential in the human "I".



1. INTRODUCTION

The first sentence of the novel “Anna Karenina” by Leo Tolstoy – “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way” – contains two maxims concerning two family models as forms of human existence: the first model is given in the form of statement of a well-known assumption: probably and even for sure “happy families are all alike”. The second model is the model of “unhappy family” – contains an indicator (the pronoun ‘every’) on the perception of the judgement as a form of being of an individual. The novel “Anna Karenina” is perceived as an artistic-aesthetic manifestation of the writer’s second maxim, which became crucial in the perception and interpretation of the novel’s semantic structures.

The life of an individual within a family (the basic idea of the novel being the idea of a family) begins with the image of Stepan Arkadyevich Oblonsky (Stiva). The phrase “Everything was in confusion in the Oblonskys’ house” does not just concretize the individual in the spatial-temporal determination of his life, but it gives a semantic formula of being of this family.

2. METHODS

In this article it is interesting to examine two images of the novel given in the title, in the framework of inter-textual analysis, with the aim of studying the psychological depths of the writer in the comprehension of the essential in human «I». The image of Stiva Oblonsky, with which the novel begins, and which forms many of its storylines, is given, at first glance, as the antipode of Levin. However, despite the fact that Stiva and Levin in the writer's conception of the philosophy of life are the carriers of two different forms of family life, they have much in common. This common is in the national attitude, defined by the intuitive feeling of «vital life» (Veresaev). Structural-semantic analysis of the text with the aim to characterize this intuitive feeling of life in both characters, which is the task of this problem, showed, that Levin's way to the realization of this feeling is much more complex and contradictory than the way of Stiva Oblonsky.

3. RESULTS

As it is evidenced by the narration itself, the *case* of Tolstoy, introduced by the writer's intention, is the main structure-forming beginning of the novel: its plot lines with all



events, system of the characters with their actions, etc. Consequently, the *case* according to Tolstoy becomes the main artistic and aesthetic unit, that allows us to comprehend the full depth of the work. The *case* of Tolstoy as an art-aesthetic category, determines both the private life of an individual, and the life of an individual in general in its universal nature.

The image of Stiva, which begins the series of *events* of the novel within the category of *case*, has not a secondary role in the semantic content of the novel. It is Stiva Oblonsky, an aristocrat and descendant of Rurik, in the writer's conception of the novel becomes the bearer of the truth of *vital life* that the people know intuitively.

The event, which begins the novel, in accordance with the writer's conception of the novel as a formative principle of a *typical situation*, if we are talking about families of aristocrats of the time described by Tolstoy, is *a situation* in which a number of characters wishing to change this situation somehow, get inadvertently included (servant Matvey, wife Dolly, Anna, Levin). *A typical situation* becomes a situation with contradictory relations, forming a chain of events, structuring multiple storylines within the main idea of the novel – the family idea.

At the beginning of the novel, Stiva Oblonsky finds himself in a *critical (borderline) situation* for the family which he has to overcome somehow. “But what's to be done? What's to be done?” (T1., p.7) he says to himself in despair, finding no answer.

Life itself gives the answer. And this truth is known by the common people owing to their natural instinct: “Never mind, sir; everything will *come round*,” (hereinafter, italic highlighting are ours – A. Z., A. S., M. S.) said the servant Matvey, answering Stepan Arkadyevich's wordless question. This way Tolstoy presents torn, but not ruptured dialogue between the two "I"-s within the family. In addressing the question "To go, or not to go?" for reconciliation with his wife the sense of duty overcomes within Stepan Arkadyevich, the sense defined by an inner voice of Stiva Oblonsky – a voice of *vital life*, which defines many of his actions. A sense of duty as a category of obligation determines its essential earth (family) genesis, gives him the opportunity to plead himself "guilty".

With this “*will come round*”, which is the popular philosophy of family life of people, in which there is a wisdom and genetic memory of the nation, as Tolstoy says, “all



families” including “the Oblonskys’ household” are kept. In Oblonskys’ house the old nanny Matriona Philimonovna acts as a carrier of this philosophy of family life.

Thus, Tolstoy’s hero fails to find a reasonable answer to the mind-set vital question “What’s to be done?”. Stiva Oblonsky’s life *comes round* thanks to the intuitive submission of his character to natural instinct, the instinct of the *living creature*. This feeling allows him to retain zest for life, to perceive life in all its diversity.

Vikenty Veresaev in his work entitled “Long Live the Whole World! (On Leo Tolstoy)” gives interpretation and develops one of the main ideas put forward in the doctrine of Henri Bergson, according to which “intelligence is characterized by a natural incomprehension of life”. And, on the contrary, “instinct ... is molded on the very form of life. While intelligence treats everything mechanically, instinct proceeds ... organically (1, p.79). Based on this very statement of Bergson, Veresayev argues that: “... a number of his basic propositions are of great importance. Any thinking person, who listens to his own inner voice, has already long ago been vaguely feeling things of which Bergson speaks. Vividly, clearly and deeply they were felt by Leo Tolstoy”. (Veresaev,1991, p.77).

Veresayev’s term “vital life”, included in the scientific use of Tolstoy study long ago, is the evidence of the development of the principal provisions in Bergson’s doctrine of intuition in the human “I”, a natural instinct, as according to Bergson’s teachings (Bergson,2001; Bergson,2010), quoted by Veresaev, human beings are not “pure intellects” (Veresaev,1991, p.77). There is another force – the power of instinct. Stiva Oblonsky by instinct, inherent by a nature of the Russian people as a genetic memory of the nation, “realizes” that *vital life* cannot be defined by any specific content. And that’s why there is no point in puzzling oneself with analytical questions, such as “What’s to be done?”, “What’s the meaning of life?”. There is but one answer, and it is in the *vital life* itself, within which all the essential content of the human “I” in all its expressions is manifested.

4. DISCUSSION

Stiva Oblonsky and Konstantin Levin – the two heroes of the novel, who are instinctively drawn to each other. Tolstoy has described several meetings of these characters. Moreover, most of them are *random* within the storylines of the novel. But



in the writer’s conception of the novel they – these *random* meetings are natural (i.e. logical): forming a chain of collisions, they constitute a series of events. These two characters do not just drawn to each other, but within the framework of their dialogues the most crucial problems are solved, which the life itself puts before them. At the beginning of the novel the dialogue between Stiva Oblonsky and Konstantin Levin is given. Stiva, caught up in a difficult family situation, turns to Levin with the most important question that needs to be answered: “What’s to be done – you tell me that; what’s to be done? Your wife gets older, while you’re full of life” (T1., p.50). Levin, laconically and with a slight smile, answers simply: “Don’t steal loaves”. That means – not to take someone else’s, i.e. not to be dishonest, immoral. Stepan Arkadyevich enters into polemics with Levin’s moral.

Levin develops his judgments following the teachings of Plato, but *his feelings in this mind-comprehend* idea of love don’t agree with everything. This is the reason why the dialogue hangs in the air, why it does not end with logically deduced judgements.

Tolstoy’s Levin, a man prone to reflection, in which a considerable part belongs not only to the analysis of the world but to introspection as well, has stumbled in his logical judgements, derived through intellectual comprehension of life. It turned out that not everything of the logical world is accepted by the heart, therefore, this world, represented by the intellect, cannot be the expression of the essential in life in general and in the human “I” in particular.

Stepan Arkadyevich is another. It would seem that relying on the formula “*then we shall see*” (T1., p. 8), he spinelessly obeys the natural course of events. However, in this seeming lack of will lies the intuitive acceptance of life as it is. As the essential “I” of Stiva Oblonsky is perceived his consideration of life as the highest value.

Stiva Oblonsky’s “beauty of life” is something that is comprehended not by the mind, but by the sense. That’s why *all-of-a-piece* Levin’s speculative judgements are not accepted by Stiva: “You have a character that’s all of a piece, and you want the whole of life to be of a piece too—but that’s not how it is” (T1., p.51). Not coincidentally, Tolstoy stresses that the conversation with Levin exhausted Stepan Arkadyevich. Thus, Levin’s logical reasoning failed to answer Stiva Oblonsky’s question “*What’s to be done?*”. The answer is in the intuitive sense of *vital life*. Feeling of the voice of *the*



living creature and a sense of guilt towards his loved ones, as two parameters of his nature, determine his essential “I”.

By the words of Stiva Oblonsky, who has the gift of understanding people (it is no coincidence that throughout the novel he acts as a linking element in many storylines), at the beginning of the novel Tolstoy, describing the meeting of Levin, who came from his village to Moscow, with Stiva Oblonsky, gives a key phrase that is perceived as formulaic definition of Levin’s life path. Levin’s being *all of a piece*, by definition of Stiva Oblonsky, is his *quality* and his *failing* (T1., p.51).

Levin himself knows from the experience of his spiritual life that the *case* does not often correspond with the *goal*. Levin constantly feels the duality of his inner voice. However, in this internal dialogue with himself that lasts until the end of the novel, the voice of instinctive craving for patrimonial, for something that was laid by the genetic memory of his kin, wins. For this victory Levin has to fight with “doubts, everlasting dissatisfaction with himself, vain efforts to amend, and lapses, and everlasting expectation of a happiness”. This is the essential substance of his “I”.

Part 3, Chapter 4 of the novel portrays a symbolic scene of mowing – the clearest proof of *intuitive* harmony with life, *without thoughts*, speculations about it. The semantic implication of this scene lies in accepting life as it is, without encroachments on the system and attempts to find one’s purpose in public life etc.

Thus, Tolstoy, presenting his hero in a number of events, many of which, at first sight, are perceived as casual, leads him to comprehending the essential in his human “I” and in life itself. Konstantin Levin’s actions in the end are motivated not by the subject’s mind, not by his intellectual activity, but by the practical acts of his natural “I”, the acts that finally determine the essence of his life. He, like Stiva Oblonsky, comes to the intuitive comprehension of the truth of life, to the fact that a person lives, i.e. creates, suffers, rejoices etc., *because he lives*.

It is known that Leo Tolstoy’s novel “Anna Karenina”, was at the time perceived as a challenge to Russian society, becoming European, with appearing new type of attitude to marriage and family. All that worried Tolstoy and gave impetus for writing this piece. The age of technicalization, according to the Russian writer, is detrimental for the essential content of the human “I”.



In the 20th century, a similar attitude towards the age of industrialization began to take shape in Europe. The clearest evidence of this attitude is the work of the German philosopher of the 20th century Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), who was interested in ontological problems throughout his creative life, particularly, in the problems of being in their essential content. In a number of works, especially in those of the later period of the philosopher's creativity, the issues, as the philosopher himself says, of industrial, “cybernetic” society of the age of *enframing*, are raised.

M. Heidegger, like Leo Tolstoy, was concerned about the inner world of a man in conditions of the so-called “technological progress” of society, what gives us the right to appeal to some of his philosophical reasoning in the context of our understanding the novel by Tolstoy. Especially as the artistic style is typical for the late Heidegger, which is noted by all the scholars of the philosopher.

Heidegger is extremely concerned about the process of subjectivation of the human person. In the article entitled “The Origin of Art and the Destination of Thinking” the philosopher expresses his concern regarding the state of art in the world of industrial society, while this world is increasingly becoming cybernetic. He writes: “...industrial society constitutes the ultimate elevation of egoity, that is, of subjectivity” (Heidegger,1993, p.287).

According to Heidegger, who himself emerged as a thinker in the age of industrial society, it is necessary to take *a step back*. *A step back* in terms of existence in the industrial society the late Heidegger presented primarily in his two works: “The Pathway” and “Creative Landscape: Why Do We Stay in the Provinces?”. Already the titles themselves answer the question “What is *a step back*?”. *A step back* is a step in the province, to the natural life. Province as the experience of life has shaped his *philosophy of the pathway* (Heidegger,2010; Heidegger,1993,P 6). The definitions, developed by M. Heidegger (see about it (Heidegger,2010; Heidegger,1973; Heidegger,2012)), are used in a wide range of works of literary and philosophical nature (see, e.g. (Sayapova,2014)).

In our opinion, the Russian version of the *philosophy of the pathway* as the philosophy of the essential content of a person even before Heidegger was discharged by Leo Tolstoy in his novel “Anna Karenina”. With the words of his hero, Konstantin Levin,



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who, as it is written by biographers and researchers of the writer’s creative work, in many respects portrays the writer himself, Tolstoy represents his own philosophy of life, which is genetically associated with the wisdom of the Russian patriarchal life. Tolstoy’s Levin, like Heidegger, finds his philosophy of life, living in the natural earth interests, plunging into farm labour, which connects a man with his roots – *the soil* and however, reveals to him the vastness of the sky, elevates the soul.

Philosophy of Levin’s life as Russian version of the philosophy of the pathway was not formed immediately, enormous effort was needed to Levin to come to the truth of life, to *intuitive* cognition of essential in self-“I”. He goes through many trials, especially trials of secular life.

Tolstoy, when describing the life of Levin after his marriage, writes: “Now, involuntarily it seemed, he cut more and more deeply into the soil like a plough, so that he could not be drawn out without turning aside the furrow”. And further: “To live the same family life as his father and forefathers...” (T2., p.377). Tolstoy, like Heidegger, writes that the *soil* is what determines the existence and essential content of the human "I". The expression of this essential in a man when he “cuts into the soil”, happens “seemingly involuntarily”. This Tolstoy’s “involuntarily” says that a person shouldn’t look for the essential of his "I" through something external, it's in the most natural content of a man, in his roots, in that *soil*, where he was born, where he lives, it is already in everything that he creates unconsciously day by day. This idea is reinforced by Tolstoy with Levin's words that his whole life is filled with things that “his father and forefathers” used to face during their lives, “had no meaning at all for him, when *he began to think*” (T2, p.377). Without *thinking*, Levin “knew in just the same way *how* he had to do it all, and *what* was of more importance than the rest” (T2, p.377). Life under the laws of the *soil* did not need the evaluations.

As soon as a man perceives himself a thinking entity, capable of analysis, the harmony of being is destroyed at his eyes, the integrity of the inner world is destroyed. Tolstoy, assessing and commenting on the actions and thoughts of his Levin about the meaning of life, writes: “...he had been living rightly, but thinking wrongly” (T2., p. 383).



5. INSIGHTS

Tolstoy, like Heidegger, knows with his intuition of a writer-thinker that the essential in a man, i.e. his spiritual principles are rooted in the earth life. Tolstoy's Levin finds the answer to his long-lasting question “What's the meaning of life?”, the answer to which could not be given by the idea: “The answer has been given me by life itself, in my knowledge of what is right and what is wrong” (T2., p. 384). Finally, Tolstoy, as Heidegger later, rejects the mind in the discovery what is there in the human soul. Levin's inner monologue sounds like this: “But who discovered it? Not reason. Reason discovered the struggle for existence, and the law that requires us to oppress all who hinder the satisfaction of our desires. That is the deduction of reason. But loving one's neighbor reason could never discover, because that is unreasonable” (T2., p.384).

6. CONCLUSION

Thus, it becomes obvious that the detected echoes in the texts of Leo Tolstoy and the German philosopher of the 20th century M. Heidegger, suggests that for both of them the essential content of the human "I" as a universal component of personality is the basic criterion in the evaluation of a person, his thoughts and actions. In the 19th century on the example of the Russian man, Tolstoy told about a man in general, about natural intuitive comprehension by a man of essential in life and in the human "I". Stiva Oblonsky and Konstantin Levin, in the writer's conception of the philosophy of life of Leo Tolstoy, are the carriers of two forms of national family life, each of which is determined by the intuitive feeling of vital life.

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