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On The Semantics of the “Turgenev’s Girl” Psychotype

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In the first half of the 19th century, in the context of crisis of Christian beliefs an intensive formation of revolutionary intelligentsia began in Russia. Ivan Turgenev, one of the most penetrating writers-psychoanalysts, was the first who showed the nature of “new people” and predicted their historical mission of a revolutionary rebuilding of the country. The writer portrayed them in types of “Turgenev’s girl” and “Turgenev’s character”. In the strict sense of the term, “Turgenev’s girl” is a flapper, who rejects a traditional idea about the role of a woman in society. (The beginning of this understanding was shown in the story “Conversation” (1844-1854)). She is looking for a hero, a man who will show her the highest truth of existence and she is ready to sacrifice her life. She considers the ideas of social revolution to be this kind of the highest truth. In his works of fiction (“Rudin” (1855) and “Virgin Soil” (1876)) Turgenev showed that the way which characters choose will lead them and Russia to a “sophisticated suicide”. The character types, which were discovered by Turgenev, were analyzed as evocation of abnormal psychology. The classic couple of characters, which were anticipated by Turgenev, are Nadezhda Krupskaya and Ulyanov-Lenin. Meanwhile both in school curricula and in Russian literary studies the type of “Turgenev’s girl” is very vague, not clearly defined and still presented as romantic.

The aim of this article is to show the “Turgenev’s girl” type out of this kind of mythology. The results of it – the scientific description of the above mentioned psychological types – can be used in teaching the history of Russian and world literature, psychoanalysis, philosophy and cultural studies.

Keywords: Turgenev, “Turgenev’s girl”, typology of literary characters, history of Russian literature, women’s emancipation, abnormal psychology.

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Introduction

There can be hardly found such a vague term as “Turgenev’s girl” both in the typology of Turgenev’s characters and, probably, in the typology of the characters of Russian literature as a whole. School and university textbooks, articles and monographs (!), but mainly lesson

plans, students’ best compositions, works of fiction and numerous Internet sites provide the readers with vast material portraying the image of “Turgenev’s girl” as a “high”, “poetic”, “pure”, “chaste”, “moral”, “spiritual”, “romantic”, “in love”, “ardent”, “passionate”, “strong”, “progressive”, “proud”, “ambitious”, “dreamy”,

"searching", "zealous", "aspiring" nature... The words "truth", "verity", "feat", "sacrifice" pair with these attributes. A girl is usually portrayed in pink, white or blue, and close to nature. Her figure serves the illustration to the topic of "the first love".

At the same time the readers face a great number of *quite different* characteristics. As a result, they have almost no chances to get out of mess of mythological ideas of "Turgenev's girl".

Theoretical prerequisites

Contextual-and-comparative analysis (Vasilyev, 2011) and following the structural meanings (Olshansky, 2008) of the analyzed Turgenev's text enable to get free from the mythology, tagged to this type by the Marxist literary criticism.

On the semantics of the "Turgenev's girl" image

Acquaintance with a real image-variant inevitably turns out to be too unexpected for an unsophisticated reader. Who will be enchanted with a thirty-year-old girl with a harsh voice, "large red hands" (Turgenev, 1982, 135), who smokes pajitos and is secretly and meekly in love with a hero-self-murderer? The writer describes it the following way: "A nihilist *pur sang*. Heavy and ugly <...> but virgin in 30. <...> Never wears gloves. <...> Capable of every dedication. Eats only bread, pounds of bread. Nechaev makes an agent out of her" (Turgenev, 1982, 408). What is considered to be a final image of "Turgenev's girl" is the image of Fekla Mashurina from "Virgin Soil" novel. L.V. Uspensky comments on the name of Tekla: "The Russian form of this name was regarded folksy and rough in pre-revolutionary Russia" (Uspenskii, 2008, 360). As for the connection with S.G. Nechaev, an ominous historic figure, it means that a heroine-revolutionist *is capable of murder* for ideological

reasons. When the case in point is that "one man has turned out unreliable and must get rid of", Mashurina remarks: "If the thing is settled, then there is nothing more to be said!" (Turgenev, 1982, 136). F.M. Dostoevsky described the spirit of Nechaev (nechaevshchina) as an "evil" one, the deepest pathology of national spirit (Kovtun, 2011, 1045-1057). Turgenev conveyed similar meanings in the novel he planned to be a novel summing up the researches of such character types as "Turgenev's girl" and "Turgenev's boy". The space of "Virgin Soil" is formed around the archetype plot about the Antichrist as the space of anti-world (this problem is discussed in my previous articles).

"Virgin Soil" novel is written in 1876. However, the subject of his research was clearly defined by Turgenev in "Perepiska" ("Correspondence") story (1844-1854): "But we are psychologists. Oh yes, we are great psychologists! But *our psychology is akin to pathology; our psychology is that subtle study of the laws of morbid condition and morbid development*, with which healthy people have nothing to do..." (Turgenev, 1980a, 27). With the words of a hero from "Correspondence" the writer positions himself as a psychoanalyst. In 1879, at the dawn of his career, Turgenev confirmed "excessive constancy", "straightforwardness of direction" and "uniformity of aspirations" in observation of the "*troubled, psychologically complex, even morbid*" which was not a "particular fact" but was "brought forward *from the interior* by the same *people's, social life*". "During all this time I endeavored <...> faithfully and impartially to portray and embody in fitting types what Shakespeare calls "the body and pressure of time" and that quickly changing physiognomy of Russian people of the cultural layer which predominantly served the object of my observations" (Turgenev, 1982, 390, 396). Thus,

the writer's primary object of interest is "quickly changing" (and historical in this respect), deep, social *psychopathology*.

The process of *analytical reading* presupposes the presence of technologies, which adequately correlate with the writer's artistic method, statement of one or another task, strict adherence to the text meanings, etc. (See (Govorukhina, 2012) about the structure of a reader's activity, conditions and aims of meaning production). *Ordinary reader* is far from all this. The meanings he / she can extract from a fiction text are seen from the image of "Turgenev's girl" created by him.

The problem, however, is not only in this. The material serves the evidence that the image exists in two dimensions. 1) "Turgenev's girl" is *any heroine*, portrayed by Ivan Sergeevich. The writer's unusual poetic gift, his ability to aestheticize, fill with numerous allusions, and portray good and bad characters as obscure, mysterious (the principle of "secret psychology"!) and many-dimensional ones produce a charming and hypnotic effect. A reader is destined to imagine the aesthetic as the ideal. Meanwhile, Turgenev's poetics totally resists simplified interpretations. In this regard we can mention *broad, vague* (from a scientific point of view, not in its direct meaning) understanding of this culturological term. 2) "Turgenev's girl" in its narrow meaning is a *new* Russian socio-psychotype, discovered by Turgenev first. The fact of discovery is fixed by L.N. Tolstoy, in particular: "Perhaps, those whom he depicted never existed, but they came to existence after he had depicted them" (M. Gorky and A.P. Chekhov, 1951, 161). We argue that the main traits of the type are the motifs of emancipation, search for truth, finally leading to the idea of a revolutionary terror. These criteria make it impossible to refer Liza Ozhogina, Liza Kalitina, Anna Odintsova as well as many other characters to the "Turgenev's

girl" type. In a historical perspective the classical "Turgenev's girl" is Nadezhda Krupskaya, who devoted her life to the ideals of Ulyanov-Lenin, her husband and revolutionary leader. In the XX century both psycho-types become dominants of Russian life.

Ordinary reader has the right to express his subjective ideas of the "Turgenev's girl" image (Bleich, 1978, 264). As it has been mentioned above, a significant problem is seen in the fact that the same understanding is presented in school textbooks and often in the latest researches... The authors are evidently not confused by the fact that "Turgenev's girl" can appear before the readers as "pure", "moral", "spiritual", "advanced" murderer or as a "progressive" heroine, following her darling to suicide, death (Anisimov, 2011, 351) (it's the problematics of "Rudin", "On the Eve", "Virgin Soil" novels). According to Dostoevsky's description, Evdoksiya Kukshina is a "*progressive louse* which Turgenev combed out of Russian reality" (Dostoevsky, 1989, 404). Kukshina is a classical variant of "Turgenev's girl". Metaphoricalness of Dostoevsky's description seems to be more adequate than the fixed mythopoetics of the image. Thus, if we notice that modern interpretations of classical texts do not differ much from recent Marxist ones the situation is in urgent need of correction. Unfortunately, the scope of this article can't embrace a deeper insight into this problematics.

The most stable variants of Turgenev's plot presuppose the presence of "Turgenev's girl" and "Turgenev's hero". She is on the threshold of life, facing the choice (Anisimova, 2011, 82). It implies the choice between several candidates for her hand and will determine her future. She makes her choice in favour of a "progressive" hero, tries to recognize a leader in him. It is he who will reveal the truth, lead her and fill her life a higher sense. This variant of such a

story line was first developed in details in "Correspondence" story. (And later in the novels mentioned.)

The essential universal of life-practice is catering for images. Literary creative work also implies this or that degree of reflexion, regarding a "prototype", which is peculiar to both the author and a hero. Turgenev focuses his plots on a binary system of motifs, assigned to opposite images of Don Quixote and Hamlet. "All people seemed to belong to one of these two types more or less; all of us tend to be closer either to Don Quixote or Hamlet" (Turgenev, 1980a, 331). Marya Aleksandrovna, a heroine of "Correspondence" story, is oriented to the western culture, its Franco-Germanic models, and primarily George Sand's novels. She writes to her correspondent: "In the first place, then, let me tell you that all over the country-side I am never called anything but the female philosopher <...>. Some assert that I sleep with a Latin book in my hand, and in spectacles; others declare that I know how to extract cube roots, whatever they may be. Not a single one of them doubts that I wear manly apparel on the sly, and instead of 'good-morning', address people spasmodically with 'George Sand!' – and indignation grows apace against the female philosopher. We have a neighbour, a man of five-and-forty, a great wit <...>. For him my poor personality is an inexhaustible subject of jokes. <...> He swears that I use phrases of this kind – "It is easy because it is difficult, though on the other hand it is difficult because it is easy..." He asserts that I am always looking for a word, always striving 'thither', and with comic rage inquires: "Whither-thither? whither?" He has also circulated a story about me that I ride at night up and down by the river, singing Schubert's Serenade, or simply moaning, "Beethoven, Beethoven!" She is, he will say, such an impassioned old person" (Turgenev, 1980a, 34).

The heroine calls herself an old person because she is 26 and afraid to remain a spinster. At that Marya Aleksandrovna actually chooses between three candidates: an old one (a 45 year-old witty person), a young one and Alexey Petrovich, an acquaintance by correspondence. Her sister's example (and namely her family life) is right in front of her eyes. Her husband is "a simple and rather comic person; <...>. But she's happy, after all; she's the mother of a family, she's fond of her husband, her husband adores her... "I am like everyone else," she says to me sometimes, "but you!" A heroine-flapper envies her sister's happiness, hesitates between recognition and denial of a "common groove", traditional ideal which is also suggested by her uncle in particular: "husband, children, a pot of soup; to look after the husband and children and keep an eye on the pot" (Turgenev, 1980a, 35). Marya Aleksandrovna could marry a young candidate, "if she liked". "He is <...> well-educated, and has property. There are no difficulties on the part of my parents; on the contrary, they desire this marriage. He is a good man, and I think he loves me... *but he is so spiritless and narrow, his aspirations are so limited, that I cannot but be conscious of my superiority to him.* He is aware of this, and as it were rejoices in it, and that is just what sets me against him. *I cannot respect him, though he has an excellent heart*" (Turgenev, 1980a, 38). With her pride (which is one of her pathological features) "Turgenev's girl" judges and rejects an ordinary man. She needs a hero. "If he were a hero, he would fire her, would teach her to sacrifice herself, and all sacrifices would be easy to her! But there are no heroes in our times..." (Turgenev, 1980a, 30).

The heroine lives in the world of illusions. Subjective "I" is a criterion of her attitude to the world. "To seem" is a key word, determining her ideals. "Let them call me a female philosopher, a queer fish, or what they choose – I will remain

true to the end... to what? *to an ideal, or what?* Yes, to my ideal. Yes, I will be faithful to the end to what first set *my heart* throbbing, to *what I have recognized, and recognize still, as truth, and good...* If only my strength does not fail me, if only my divinity does not turn out to be a dumb and soulless idol..." (Turgenev, 1980a, 35). (Rodion Raskolnikov, a character of Dostoevsky's novel "Prestuplenie i nakazanie" ("Crime and punishment"), develops his theory on the same basis.) Compare it with an opposite position described in Leo Tolstoy's novel "War and Peace": "For us, with the rule of right and wrong given us by Christ, there is nothing for which we have no standard. And there is no greatness where there is no simplicity, goodness and truth" (Tolstoy, 1940, 165). The matter is not that Tolstoy is a writer, and Marya Aleksandrovna is a literary heroine, and not of his novel. It's important that Tolstoy stands on a world modeling position, *traditional* for the Russian culture. From this position "good and truth" appear to be a divine (external, aloof from a personality, and objective) reality. Men have nothing but take it.

Turgenev portrays "new" characters, who do not believe in age-old truth. This is what makes them "new". "New" people are given birth to by a crisis of Christianity, a "global project" as they often call it now. "Don't be afraid: I am not going to force upon you any great truths, any profound views. I have none of them – of those truths and views" (Turgenev, 1980a, 25), Alexey Petrovich writes to his old acquaintance, persuading her to be in correspondence with him. He confesses: "In my first youth nothing would satisfy me but to take heaven by storm for myself" (Turgenev, 1980a, 47). The words "and find God there" were, probably, not included in the story for censorship reasons (Turgenev, 1980a, 396). The Russian version finishes with the following phrase: "Though who says what life is, what truth is? Do you remember *who* didn't answer this question?"

(Turgenev, 1980a, 48) (Italics are the writer's ones – *V.V.*). In the French version Turgenev was more specific: "Rappelez-vous la question posée par Pilate, et restée sans réponse" ("Do you remember the question asked by Pilate but given no answer"). The matter concerns Pilate's question "What is truth?" that Jesus didn't answer (Turgenev, 1980a, 401) (See (St. John 18, 38)). The hero knows that the Gospel gives the answer. Christ tells Pilate: "For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to bear witness to the truth" (Ibid. 18, 37). (Compare: "Jesus told him: I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (Ibid. 14, 6); "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (Ibid. 1, 17).) The answer is simply ignored; in the nihilistic picture of world the truth doesn't exceed the limits of the statement of "two and two makes four" type.

Marya Aleksandrovna is wrong to ask Alexey Petrovich to remove her doubts and support her *beliefs*. He is not capable of this. A male philosopher and a female philosopher are twin heroes. In the interpretation of a Russian literary text they are people of "transitional" times or "hard times", a crisis, and thus the state of a disease is inevitable. Due to the objective course of history and their own choice, they appeared in a pathological situation. Nonsense of a human's existence opened in front of them. The world turned round its reverse side, the essence of which is stated in the concepts of "lie", "free space" (Pavel Kirsanov's definition), "tragic situation" (Alexey Petrovich establishes the universality of the situation to Marya Aleksandrovna: "Your position one may really call tragic. But let me tell you: "You are not alone in it; *there is scarcely any quite modern person who isn't placed in it*" (Turgenev, 1980a, 37)). Dostoevsky called it "underground". A "new" person faced the inevitability of re-actualization of evil. It is in the sphere of anti-world where Personality develops as a phenomenon and a fact

not only in Russian culture but also in Christian civilization of contemporary history. Turgenev was one of the first who grasped and described this process.

In “Correspondence” a future union of two lonely, unable to love people didn’t come true. The day before his meeting with Marya Aleksandrovna Alexey Petrovich falls in love with a dancer, goes to Dresden after her and, being left by her (!), dies from consumption. Chulkaturin, his double and a hero of “Dnevnik lishnego cheloveka” (“The Diary of a Superfluous Man”) (1848-1850), also dies, sentenced by doctors. Death of “progressive” heroes, whose images were focused on the image of Hamlet-Mephistopheles, is rather metaphysical. The nature itself “didn’t expect” their appearance and thus treated them as “unexpected and unwelcome guests” (Turgenev, 1980, 173). Thus, it is not surprising why the writer gives none of his main characters of this type any right to live. Rudin is a “sophisticated self-murderer”, Nezhdanov is a mere self-murderer, Bazarov

and Insarov die from an accidental disease, etc. Ivan Sergeevich “will not allow” Natalya Lassunskaya and Marrianna to cast in their lots with heroes-revolutionists, put out their quixotic enthusiasm. He will “match” them with ordinary heroes with the only merit to regulate their life. Elena Stakhova is the only novelistic heroine who will choose a militant “Don Quixote”. In the denouement of the plot of her life she will write: “I sought happiness, and I shall find – perhaps death. It seems it was to be thus: it seems it was a sin” (Turgenev, 1981, 298).

Conclusion

I think the readers will not be surprised by the conclusion that Turgenev’s anthropology isn’t out of date. Moreover, it is considered to be scientific and artistic system, clarifying modern picture of the world and a modern human’s psychology / psychopathology. Turgenev’s text, given a psychoanalytic analysis, displays the degree of topicality that exceeds the topicality of many fiction texts of recent times.

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К семантике психотипа “тургеневская девушка”

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В статье тип “тургеневской девушки” рассмотрен с заявленной Тургеньевым позиции психопатологии. Читательское представление о “тургеневской девушке” – “романтической”, “нравственной”, “духовной”, “передовой” (и пр.) героине – относится к сфере мифологии, закрепленной за данным типом, прежде всего, марксистским литературоведением. В научном понимании термина “тургеневская девушка” – впервые открытый и описанный Тургеньевым тип эмансипе, отвергающей традиционные представления о роли женщины в обществе. (Начало такого понимания заложено в повести “Переписка”, 1844-1854 гг.) Она ищет героя, вождя, способного открыть ей высшие истины бытия, и готова принести свою жизнь в жертву. Такими истинами ей представляются идеи социальной революции. Она готова на убийство по идеологическим мотивам. В романах “Рудин” (1855) и “Новь” (1876) Тургеньев показывает, что избранный героями путь ведет и их, и Россию к “сложному самоубийству”. Классическая пара героев, предвосхищенных Тургеньевым, – Надежда Крупская и Ульянов-

Ленин. Цель работы заключается в том, чтобы показать образ “тургеневской девушки” вне традиционной мифологии. Результаты – научное описание означенных психотипов – могут быть использованы в преподавании истории русской и мировой литературы, психоанализа, философии, культурологии, при построении ментальной истории.

Ключевые слова: Тургенев, “тургеневская девушка”, типология литературных героев, история русской литературы, женская эмансипация, психопатология, ментальная история России.

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