

LEV TOLSTOY'S COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE 20th CENTURY ENGLISH WRITERS

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Abstract

This research is the first attempt to study the relations between Tolstoy and the 20th century's English writers. Studying Tolstoy's assessment of English writers at the beginning of the 20th century is actually comprehensive. First of all it includes the facts of Tolstoy's correspondence with English writers and tries to show different moments of the relations between Tolstoy, Shaw and Wells. Studying ideas which were expressed by Tolstoy in his letters, memories and diaries enriches our knowledge about him. Second, the release of Tolstoy's relation with English writers leads us to a deeper understanding of the European and world literary movements. At the same time this article enlightens Tolstoy's attitude to English literature. On the background of these creative disputes, it is possible to observe how widely Tolstoy has affected the world literature. Third, the friendship relations between Russian and English writers, unity of their opinions and affairs assist the advance of the universal culture and understanding. Fourth, the topic of this article will give way to further research on the study of the problems of great literary and scientific interest and will be the experience in studying literary relations between writers of different countries.

The main problems which are discussed in this article are:

1. Tolstoy's relations with the 20th century English writers;
2. The type of problems which Tolstoy devotes himself in correspondence with English writers;
3. The comparative way to show how Tolstoy applied the aesthetic and artistic demands in the assessment of the works of any writer;

The aim of this article is to attract the readers' attention to Tolstoy's statements on the main questions of works of art, to help them imagine Tolstoy's attitude towards the 20th century writers, to show the formation of these relations and the ways of how one Russian writer and English writers solved the problems of the 20th century European literature.

Key Words: Tolstoy, English writers, comparative assessment, Shaw, Wells

LEV TOLSTOY'UN GÖZÜYLE XX. YÜZYIL İNGİLİZ YAZARLARI

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Özet

XIX. yüzyılın sonu XX. yüzyılın başlangıcında İngiliz Edebiyatı toplumdaki sosyal zıtlıkların gerginleşmesini yansıtan zor bir gelişim çağı içindedir. Dekadan edebiyat gerçekçi edebiyatın karşında durarak, İngiliz edebiyatında bunalıma sebep olur ve yıllar boyunca her iki edebiyatın bir arada bulunarak süregelmesi zıtlığın doruk noktaya ulaşmasını sağlar. İngiliz yazarlar, bu fikri kararsızlığın üstesinden gelip doğru yolu bulmak için derin kanaate ihtiyaç duymaktaydılar.

Tolstoy, engin fikir ve estetik değerlere sahip kişiliğiyle farklı akımlara mensup İngiliz yazarların hemen hemen hepsine aynı ilgiyi gösteriyordu. Hem fizyoloji ve psikoloji, hem de sosyal, tarihi ve siyasi konuları ele alan yapıtlar onun dikkatini çekiyordu. Bu yaratıcılık tartışmalarının arka planında Tolstoy'un dünya edebiyatına ne denli büyük etkisi olduğunu gözlemlemekteyiz.

Makalemizde ele aldığımız konular öncelikle şunlardır:

1. XX. yüzyıl İngiliz yazarlarının Tolstoy'la ilişkilerinin izlenmesi;
2. Tolstoy'un İngiliz yazarları ile yazışmasında önemsedığı problemlerin ortaya konulması;
3. Tolstoy'un İngiliz yazarların yapıtlarını değerlendirirken, estetik ve sanatsal konulardaki taleplerini nasıl uyguladığının karşılaştırma yolu ile sergilenmesi.

Makalede amacımız Tolstoy'un sanat eserlerine dair ölçütlerine okurların dikkatini çekmek, onlara, Tolstoy'un XX. yüzyıl İngiliz yazarlarına ait düşüncelerini göstermeye çalışmak, Tolstoy ve İngiliz yazarları arasındaki ilişkilerin şekillenmesini izleyerek onların XX. yüzyıl Avrupa edebiyatının problemlerine çözüm aramalarını sergilemektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tolstoy, İngiliz yazarları, karşılaştırmalı değerlendirme, Shaw, Wells

1. INTRODUCTION

Over one hundred-years the name of the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy has been pronouncing with delight throughout the world.

Leo Tolstoy left behind three large novels, tens of narratives, hundred of stories, a few dramas, the treatise about art, a lot of publicist and critical articles, thousands of letters and volumes of diaries.

The fates of people, the reflection of the different sides of the social reality and private life of the people, the description of the state orders, the philosophical and moral searches, and the mode of life were absorbed in artistic works of Tolstoy.

The creative work of Leo Tolstoy was based on the great national literary traditions of Russian literature persisted on these traditions and enriched it. In Tolstoy's opinion, the main line of the development of Russian literature was in a realistic direction, which was founded by Pushkin and Gogol. All leading and progressive Russian writers followed this path. From his first steps in literature, Tolstoy tied his fate with the realistic direction and was loyal to it till the end of his life.

About his focus of assessment of art and literary works Tolstoy wrote a letter to Octave Mirbeau in 12 October 1903. He wrote: "I think that each people uses different ways to express the common ideal in art and thanks to this fact we feel a special pleasure when we find our ideal which was expressed in a new form unexpected by us" (Толстой, 1954, 134).

The period between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries can be considered as an age of controversy between the realistic-revolutionary and conservative forces in English literature. During these years the realist-revolutionary and conservative literatures had existed side by side and the controversy between them reached its peak. The idea that a writer's having certain principles was the only way to find the right direction among the diverse attitudes of English writers became important. Tolstoy, being a man of vast aesthetic values and of thought was interested in almost equally all English writers of different methods and styles. He was interested in both the works which put forward only psychological and philosophical themes and the works which discussed social, historical and political problems.

2. TOLSTOY AND HIS ATTITUDE TOWARDS ART

In the treatise *WHAT IS ART* Leo Tolstoy states his theoretical reflections about art. The appearance of his treatise coincided with the spread of modernism and decadence. Tolstoy's purpose was both to criticise the decadence and to clarify the real nature of art. Refusing the decadence theoreticians' doctrine, he gives the definition of art: "To define art exactly, one must stop to look at art as the means of the enjoyment and regard it as one of the conditions of human life" (Толстой, 1951, 63).

Knowing native literature perfectly, Tolstoy was also a deep expert in literature abroad especially in the West European countries. He followed fixedly and persistently everything that took place in literary life in many countries.

He knew excellently the classical works of the West European writers who lived at the beginning of the century and at the preceding ones. Thus, it allowed him to judge about the direction of the development of literature abroad in the second half of the last century and in the beginning of the 20th century.

3. TOLSTOY AND HIS RELATIONS WITH ENGLISH WRITERS

He took great notice of English literature. "I know too little about English life to judge it. I like England in many respects. But what I know about its people I have taken mainly from English literature"- he said (Литературное наследство, 1965, 112-113).

In literary legacy of Tolstoy which was connected with the last ten years of his life there were five names of English writers: Joseph Rudyard Kipling, Rider Haggard, Herbert George Wells, Jerome K. Jerome, and George Bernard Shaw. These writers represented the different directions of English literature. Thus, it can be stated that the range of association of Tolstoy with the writers of England wasn't large enough. But having known the material closely we can see Tolstoy dwelt upon the problems which concerned the writers over and over again. William Shakespeare, John Ruskin, Thomas Carlyle, Jonathan Swift, Daniel Defoe, Laurence Stern, Samuel Richardson, Charles Dickens, Herbert Wells, Bernard Shaw and the other names were mentioned in the diaries, articles and the letters by Tolstoy. He studied their works, re-comprehended them and criticised them as he was a merciless judge. All of these facts confirm

that Tolstoy had a great degree of knowledge on English literature.

3.1. The correspondence between Tolstoy and Shaw

The correspondence was a lively form of association to Tolstoy. “It’s always joyful for me to feel my brotherly contacts with people which would seem as too far from each other in geographical, ethnographical and political aspects as it can happen with people” (Толстой, 1949, Т.80, 107).

The correspondence between Tolstoy and Shaw began in 1906. Having sent Tolstoy a philosophical play MAN AND SUPERMAN of his own, Shaw wanted to know the writer’s opinion. In his replying letter, Tolstoy pointed out that the author’s wish to astonish and to strike the reader with large erudition, talent and mind often distracts the attention from the essence of the subject. In a talk to Aylmer Maude in September 1909 Tolstoy repeated his opinion on the insufficient access and understanding of Shaw. Aylmer Maude was an Englishman, a translator of the works by Tolstoy into English, an editor and a publisher of his works in England, an author of two-volume biography of Tolstoy in English THE LIFE OF TOLSTOY. Maude recollected that Tolstoy considers Shaw original, in his opinion many words of Shaw deserve to be quoted permanently but he lacks something. His lack is a wish to be original and to surprise the readers (Maude, 1908, book2, 238).

The common tune, which was expressed in the hatred to war and an aversion for decadence drew together Shaw and Tolstoy. The unity of the opinions brought Shaw to the unconditional acknowledgement of the main thesis of Tolstoy’s aesthetics. In 1910 Shaw sent Tolstoy a play of his own THE EXPOSURE OF BLANKO POSNET. In the accompanying letter he wrote that this cruel melodrama is one of the plays which Tolstoy writes so unusually well. “I couldn’t remember anything in all kinds of dramas which has stricken me more than an old soldier in your THE POWER OF DARKNESS, ...and in BLANKO POSNET I used as far as I can this auriferous vein of the dramatic material, which you open for the contemporary dramatists”, wrote Shaw (1911, 10).

In the replying letter Tolstoy points out: “I have read your play with pleasure. I’m in full sympathy with its subject” (Толстой, 1949, Т.81, 254).

Tolstoy roused the thirst for the young foreign men of letters to the creative work, put them to the large themes and problems, prompted to

shake up the public consciousness, and prompted a new organisation or a new decision of the concrete creative questions.

3.2. The correspondence between Tolstoy and Wells

On the 21st of November 1906, Herbert Wells wrote to Tolstoy: “My friend Aylmer Maude has told me you could have a look at any of my books. I did not sent you my books before because I imagine the stream of book presentations from the writing small fry of Europe and America comes down upon you and I considered not having a write to pretend to your attention... I ask you much not to regard my books as an impertinent encroachment on your time and accept them as a material taken of the admiration and love which I – together with all the writers of my generation- fell to you” (“Культура и жизнь”, 1960, No11, 38). Tolstoy sent Wells a short letter. “Dear Sir. I have received your letter and your books and thank you for both. I hope to have a great pleasure in reading them. Yours truly Leo Tolstoy” (Толстой, 1956, 253).

No wonder that their correspondence stops suddenly with it. Asserting that the subject of art is formed with the most various senses – strong and weak, important and insignificant, good and bad senses, and art infected the reader spectator or the listener with these feelings, Tolstoy could not perceive the works by Wells positively. He said: “I do not like the English refinement. This Wells – all of his some hints, one can know everything, and some words, the aliases, how platitude is it” (Маковицкий, 1922, 375).

3.3. Tolstoy’s attitude to writers of decadence

In his treatise WHAT IS ART Tolstoy gives the following definition to the activity of art. He writes: “The activity of art consists of the evoking the experiencing feeling formerly, and having evoked it with the help of the motions, the lines, the colours, the sounds and the images, which were put into words to reproduce these feelings in such a way that the others also feel them” (Толстой, 1951, 109).

Approving art, which assists the welfare of the working masses, Tolstoy treats the decadence art negatively. Kipling and Haggard were the main representatives of the decadence mentioned by Tolstoy in many sources. In the treatise WHAT IS ART he wrote: “The reading of the novels and stories by Zola, Bourje, Huysmans, Kipling and others with the most fascinating plots did not touch me for a minute. And I was vexed to the authors all the time as it is vexed to the man considered you so naive that

he does not even hide the way of fraud on which he was to catch you. From the first lines you see his intention to write and all the details are becoming not wanted and you found it tedious. The main point is that you know the author does not have any other feeling but the wish to write a story or a novel. That's why artistic impression does not absolutely come of it" (Толстой, 1951, 111).

Learning about the golden age examples of the classical West – European literature, Tolstoy compared it with the present literature and it seemed to him as losing the importance of the meaning, imitative and poor both on the hand of the art form and on the hand of ideological.

Tolstoy wrote: "Beginning from the great Dickens literature comes down to George Eliot at first, then to Thackeray. From Thackeray to Trollop, and then there begins the indifferent fabricating of Kiplings, Gohlkens, Rider Haggards and so on" (Толстой, 1952, 272-275).

In another part of the article ABOUT THAT WHAT DO ONE CALL THE ART he wrote: "Dickenses, Thackerays, V.Hugo came to an end. Their imitators are a legion but everybody is tired of them. Everything is one and the same and a new thing has been invented: It is Ibsen, Kipling, Raider Haggard, Doude-son, Meterlink and the others" (Толстой, 1952, 246).

As the opponent of the untruthful principles and ideas of art, Tolstoy criticised the writers both who did not take care of their plays in terms of richness of content, who tried to close their emptiness with the help of outward effects. Tolstoy emphasised that the main task of whole art is transference of the new and important thoughts. "I read the books by Kipling, the verses by Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarme, the drama by Ibsen and I listen to music by Wagner, Liszt, Strauss and I do not know whether it is a hoax or it is serious" (Толстой, 1952, 483).

Tolstoy's biographer D.P.Makovitskiy wrote: "We were speaking about Kipling. L.N.Tolstoy told the absurdities, which were written by Kipling. He told the contents of one of Kipling's stories in which the rotting corpse of the Hindu man falls through the ceiling on the table..." (Маковицкий, 1922, 129). In 1892 Tolstoy wrote to his wife "Kipling is bad..." (Толстой, 1949, Т.84, 136).

In the memories of one of the writer's contemporaries it is written: "Kipling caused in him a deep disgust and he asked with indignation, how one can explain that such a man is a success? And at the moment he

began to tell his friend the contents of the novel *THE LIGHT WENT OUT*. He finished his story with an exclamation: "What a nasty thing" (Литературное наследство, 1965, 116).

Robert Edward Long after the interview with Tolstoy in 1899 wrote: "About English literature on the whole both old and new one as far as I understood he has not a high opinion. Tolstoy said: "It is very living and many-sided. But it does not suffice the main thing - namely a philosophical base. English literature spares too much attention to the intrigue, the adventures, chance circumstances and much lesser to the questions of principle" (Литературное наследство, 1965, 113)

Aylmer Maude in his book *TOLSTOY AND HIS PROBLEMS* wrote: "Novel-writing, Tolstoy says, stands, both in England and France, on a much lower level today than it did when he was a young man. Dickens and Victor Hugo were then in their prime - and who is there today to match them? They willingly dealt with subject - matter of vital importance, and treated it so that their readers caught the feelings. They dealt with the emotions of pity and affection and sympathy, they were concerned for the poor and oppressed, and they showed indignation at established wrongs in a manner that went home to men's hearts" (Maude, 1901, 137).

3.4. Tolstoy about Shaw

While Tolstoy was alive Bernard Shaw carried this invigorating jet to 20th century English literature. In Tolstoy's notebook we come across these words: "I have finished the book of Shaw. He has got more brains than is good for him. The article "Progress" is good. The author is very witty" (Толстой, 1951, Т.56, 179).

In connection with the book *THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF THE ANARCHISM* Tolstoy said: "I read Shaw's book about anarchism. It is very intelligent. All his things - dramas are very talented. And this book is very interesting because the author shows clearly that socialism is connected with the political system, with the violence, which a great many forget" (Толстой, 1956, Т.77, 108).

On the 14th of October 1909, the newspaper "Театр" wrote: "The great writer of the Russian land considers Bernard Shaw, whose play "Caesar and Cleopatra" is on at the Maly theatre today for the first time, highly talented, an interesting writer. Maybe, he puts forward his atheism in

some of his works much, but he excellently opens the hypocrisy of the contemporary society" ("Театр", 14 октября 1909, 5).

There were other outstanding English writers who displayed the examples of the writer's truthful courage not once but for many times. These writers leaned on Tolstoy in their aspiration after the rich in content realistic creative work. The works by Tolstoy helped them resist the influence of decadence and to create the books bravely putting forward the fundamental social questions.

4. CONCLUSION

Tolstoy created his works of art revealing the falsehood of the social system which is based on private property and human oppression, ardently criticizing the ruling economic, social, political orders and revealing the church and militarism. In his published articles he put forward the problems of the society. Hence, these articles have had immense international importance. In this way, Tolstoy undermined the ideological principles of ruling class both in Russia and in other countries. Many writers in different countries struggled for richness of content and truthfulness in art and in this way they fought against distortion of reality in literature. Tolstoy's influence promoted hunt for the new and capacious literary forms which at the same time were more useable for comprehensive artistic demonstration of reality. It is that reality which shakes the foundations of bourgeois England. New tendencies of Shaw's satiric comedy and new varieties of Galsworthy's wide epic novels have their sources in Tolstoy's works.

Thus, Tolstoy's aesthetical principles and artistic manners which were perceived creatively by the English literary environment opened new ways for literary development in England.

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