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Shakespeare in the Steppes: I. Turgenev's interpretation of stock plots and images

Василина Катерина. Шекспір в степах: тургенівська інтерпретація традиційних сюжетів і образів.

Стаття присвячена вивченню специфіки реценції шекспірівської спадщини в Росії XIX ст. на основі аналізу творчості Івана Тургенєва, російського письменника та знавця шекспірівської творчості. Очевидно, що сюжети й образи з шекспірівських драм опрацьовуються та інкорпуються різними культурами з різним ступенем інтенсивності, залежно від намірів письменника-інтерпретатора, контексту культурного діалогу та фонових знань реципієнта. І. Тургенєв відіграв важливу роль у популяризації шедеврів Шекспіра, викладаючи свої ідеї в есеїстиці, перекладах та використовуючи алюзії на тексти Шекспіра в багатьох своїх творах. У фокусі уваги цієї статті – два твори – «Гамлет Щигровського повіту» та «Степовий король Лір». У кожному з них представлено специфічне бачення вічних образів крізь призму російської дійсності XIX ст.

Звертаючись до традиційного сюжетно-образного матеріалу, І. Тургенєв описує актуальні проблеми свого часу: пасивний стан російської інтелігенції, свавілля місцевих поміщиків, нікчемність буття «вічних типів» у тогочасному «російському світі». Тургенівський Гамлет – слабкий, занадто обережний, іноді жорстокий і водночас боязкий. Російський Король Лір – епатажний, егоцентричний, жорстокий і абсолютно дикий. Його раптова смерть зумовлена, насамперед, поведінкою та ставленням до рідних, друзів і підлеглих. І. Тургенєв змінює жанрові параметри вихідних текстів, розширюючи засоби характеротворення, трансформує систему образів персонажів, включає в текст російські реалії, і таким чином не лише адаптує твори Великого Барда до смаків своїх співвітчизників, але й долучається до творення світового шекспірівського дискурсу.

Ключові слова: традиційні сюжети та образи, шекспірівський дискурс, Гамлет, Король Лір, типізація, обрамлення, «оповідання в оповіданні», модернізація, «доместифікація» традиційного матеріалу.

Shakespeare has become a household name all over the world, inspiring scholarly research and appropriation of his images in mass and popular culture in the form of film adaptations, literary versions, paintings, and memes. Great Bard's reputation as the master of tragic conflicts as well as elaborated plots and images is undisputed and firmly established.

Shakespeare's works have turned into a wide source of so-called stock images and plots, which are reinterpreted and incorporated by different cultures, facilitating their dialogue and leading to "the mutual enrichment of interacting cultures"¹. This cultural dialogue takes its turn under the different circumstances that surround it: artistic intentions of the recipient author, cultural and historical context as well as background of the hypothetical recipient. Though literary texts have to be based on some universal knowledge to evoke the reader's interest, still an individual perception of it may be quite contradictory. To explain this, one can turn to a well-known text of "Shakespeare in the Bush"² by an American anthropologist Laura Bohannan. A well-known version of "Hamlet" turns into quite a trivial story in the course of close reading by an African tribe, who apply their cultural and social values to the drama. Therefore, turning to stock elements, writers engage in a kind of virtual controversy with their predecessors and thus contribute to the modernization of the classical heritage, give it a new facet, reveal the hidden, subtextual meanings of the original.

World's acquaintance with Shakespeare's legacy started during his lifetime with the spread of English theatrical performances in Europe³. According to Yu. Chernyak, "Shakespearean discourse is a heterogeneous phenomenon in

¹ Липич Т. Диалог как форма взаимодействия культур. Научные ведомости. (2009) БелГУ. Серия : Философия. Социология. Право. 2009. Т. 9. Р. 51.

² Bohannan L Shakespeare in the Bush. *Picks from the Past* (electronic journal), 1966. August-September. URL: <https://www.naturalhistorymag.com/picks-from-the-past/12476/shakespeare-in-the-bush>.

³ Sříbrný Z. Shakespeare and Eastern Europe. Oxford University Press, 2000. P. 6.

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terms of national representations and polymorphic in terms of ontological embodiment... Each of the national modifications is to some extent unique because it reflects the values that are important for cultural consciousness of a particular ethnic group at a particular stage of its historical development”⁴.

Shakespearean plots and images as transformed in the context of different national cultures (e.g. Ukrainian⁵, French⁶, German⁷, English⁸, and American⁹, etc.) have become a focus of special research. The most recent research includes a newly launched international book series “Shakespeare in European Culture” “promoting the historically based study of the aesthetic, cultural, linguistic and political functions that Shakespeare as a figure and his works have played in Europe’s complex and evolving multilingual and multicultural spaces during the past 425 years”¹⁰. The 2020 edition “Shakespeare in a Divided America” by James Shapiro has a very explicit subtitle “What his plays tell us about our past and future” and delves deeply into the historical context of Shakespeare’s influence¹¹.

At the same time, the Russian resonance of the work of the Swan from Avon remains on the periphery of comprehensive literary and critical consideration. There are only separate studies dedicated to this field of research and they mainly have a rather

⁴ Черняк Ю. Специфіка актуалізації ціннісної семантики «Гамлета» В. Шекспіра в українському шекспірівському дискурсі: автореф. дис. ... канд. філол. наук. Київ, 2011.

⁵ Черняк Ю. *Op. cit.*; Бовсунівська Т. Параболічне мислення у творчості Шекспіра та Шевченка. *Шекспірівський дискурс*. 2011. Вип. 2. С. 141-151; Задорожна Л. Вартісні орієнтири вчинку: В. Шекспір і Т. Шевченко. *Шекспірівський дискурс*. 2011. Вип. 2. С. 152-163.

⁶ Торкут Н. Вільям Шекспір у французькому культурному просторі часів Просвітництва та Романтизму: парадокс рецепції і резонанс парадоксу. *Шекспірівський дискурс*. 2011. Вип. 2. С. 220-250.

⁷ Хитрова-Бранц Т. В. Шекспірівський дискурс в німецькій літературі преромантизму: генезис, механізми структурування, провідні конституенти : автореф. дис. ... канд. філол. наук. Дніпропетровськ, 2009.

⁸ Гончаренко Е. Шекспір – Джойс – Шекспір. *Шекспірівський дискурс*. 2011. Вип. 2. С. 251–256; Жлуктенко Н. Шекспірівський дискурс у романі Пітера Акройда «The Lambs of London». *Шекспірівський дискурс*. 2011. Вип. 2. С. 257-266.

⁹ Висоцька Н. «Макберд!» Б. Гарсон і традиція шекспірівського бурлеску у культурі США. *Шекспірівський дискурс*. 2011. Вип. 2. С. 267-283.

¹⁰ John Benjamins e-Platform. Shakespeare in European Culture. URL: <https://benjamins.com/catalog/sec> (accessed 15 August 2021).

¹¹ Shapiro J. Shakespeare in a Divided America. New York : Penguin Press, 2020.

generalized overview of Russian perception of Shakespeare's heritage. One has to mention a monograph "Shakespeare and Eastern Europe" (2000) by Zdeněk Stříbrný¹², several articles like "Shakespeare in Russia"¹³, "Shakespeare in Russian Political Discourse"¹⁴ by N. Zakharov, "'One cannot Act Hamlet, One must be Hamlet': The Acculturation of Hamlet in Russia" by Thomas Grob¹⁵, etc. At the same time, it is evident that a thorough study of Russian Shakespearean discourse can help to form a consistent diachronic vision of the specifics of rethinking Shakespearean dramatic stock material. It seems only natural to approach this broad theme through in-depth research of separate author's artistic retelling of Great Bard's works.

To begin with, Shakespeare's artistic heritage gained public interest in Russia in the 18th C. through German and Russian interpretations, namely through adaptations by Tsarina Catherine II the Great (ruled 1762-96) and Sumarokov's "Gamlet"¹⁶. The attraction of Shakespeare's genius got even stronger in the 19th C. when great Russian writers directly or indirectly were inspired by his dramas: A. Pushkin, M. Lermontov, M. Karamzin, V. Belinsky just to name a few. The works of the English man-of-letters were well-known to the general Russian public; the background knowledge of Russians was created with the help of theatrical productions (by prominent directors Kunst, Mochalov, Sumarokov¹⁷), as well as through translations¹⁸.

¹² Stříbrný Z. Op. cit.

¹³ Zakharov N. V. Shakespeare in Russia. An Electronic Encyclopedia "The World of Shakespeare" (ed. Zakharov N. V., Gaydin B. N.). URL: <http://world-shake.ru/en/Encyclopaedia/3934.html> (accessed 10 August 2021).

¹⁴ Захаров Н. В. Шекспир в российском политическом дискурсе. Знание. Понимание. Умение. 2019. № 4. URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/shakespeare-in-russian-political-discourse> (accessed 15 August 2021). DOI: 10.17805/zpu.2019.4.21

¹⁵ Grob Th. 'One cannot Act Hamlet, One must be Hamlet': The Acculturation of Hamlet in Russia. Shakespeare and Space. *Theatrical Explorations of the Spatial Paradigm* / eds. Habermann Ina and Witen Michelle. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. P. 191-228.

¹⁶ Stříbrný Z. Op. cit. P. 27-29.

¹⁷ Аникст А. Шекспир. Москва: Книга, 1974. С. 134.

¹⁸ Калапова Е. Б. В. Белинский о Шекспире. К вопросу о месте В. Г. Белинского в истории русского и зарубежного шекспироведения. Москва : Высшая школа, 1964. P. 55.

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A real milestone in the Russian reader's acquaintance with English genius was the creative work of I. Turgenev, a prominent Russian writer, playwright, poet as well as translator. He had a great influence on the readers of his time, his work attracted attention "by its sophisticated lack of hyperbole, its balance, and its concern for artistic values. His greatest work was always topical, committed literature, having universal appeal in the elegance of the love story and the psychological acuity of the portraiture"¹⁹. Having spent a lot of time abroad, he was an ardent "Westernist" (*zapadnik*) and had strong convictions about the necessity of reform in his country. He engaged himself in educating the Russian reader by introducing the best pieces of world literature and gained the fame of a thorough Shakespearean scholar during his lifetime. When Tsar Alexander II disapproved of the great celebration of Shakespeare's tercentenary²⁰, I. Turgenev called Great Bard "father Shakespeare", thought him to be "one of the two or three great pinnacles of world literature"²¹ and dedicated a passionate speech to him ("Speech on Shakespeare"). He also engaged in theoretical comprehension of the leading concepts of the literary heritage of his senior colleague in a number of essays (the most famous of which is "Hamlet and Don Quixote"); he engaged in translating some of Shakespeare pieces, revealing his own literary talent and deep understanding of the original texts²². I. Turgenev turned to creative interpretation and adaptation of ideology, of moral and ethical issues of Renaissance mastermind in his own works of art as well.

Turgenev's creative dialogue with Shakespeare as a reflection of Russian vision of the classics is presented in the study by M. Bellmut Serrano ("Turgenev's Appropriation of

¹⁹ Freeborn R. "Ivan Turgenev". Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020. 5 Nov.
URL: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ivan-Sergeyevich-Turgenev> (accessed 17 August 2021).

²⁰ Захаров Н. В. *Op. cit.*

²¹ Waddington P. *Turgenev and England. New Zealand* : Victoria University of Wellington, 1980. P. 8.

²² Волков И. Иван Тургенев – переводчик В. Шекспира. *Имагология и компаративистика*. 2019. № 11. С. 97-120.

King Lear: a Case of Medieval Transmission and Adaptation")²³. The author of this paper also tackled this topic in several articles²⁴. The given research presents a more comprehensive analysis of the interpretation of original plots and images by the famous Russian writer and connoisseur of Shakespeare. Hence, the purpose of this investigation is to clarify the specifics of I. Turgenev's creative dialogue with the Great Bard in such prose pieces as "Hamlet of the Shchigrovsky District" (1852) and "A Lear of the Steppes" (1870).

It is worth noting that I. Turgenev engages himself in a creative dialogue with Shakespeare on the formal and semantic as well as on ethical and aesthetic levels. Therefore, it is necessary to turn to the direct study of Russian writer's texts and consider specificities of adaptation of Shakespearean stock material in these literary works.

In both prose pieces I. Turgenev created direct intertextual links to Shakespeare's pieces by placing the name of famous characters in the title, appealing to the so-called background knowledge of the recipient, adjusting the reader's expectations: it is obvious that for the educated Russians these names (Hamlet, Lear) were well-known and created links to the world cultural canon.

Relocating events, the writer resorted to the "nationalization" of traditional plots. In particular, his Hamlet lives in the Shchigrovsky district, and King Lear dwells in the steppes. This, on the one hand, allows the author to modernize the plot, bring classical events closer to the realities of Russian life, and on the other hand, to give the work a national flavor through a very clear and recognizable geographical location of tragic vicissitudes.

²³ Serrano M. B. Turgenev's Appropriation of King Lear: A Case of Medieval Transmission and Adaptation. *Moderna spark*, 2019. Vol. 113. No. 2, P. 59-86.

²⁴ See: Василина К. Специфіка переосмислення шекспірівського сюжетно-образного матеріалу у повісті І. Тургенєва «Гамлет Щигровського повіту». *Ренесансні студії*. 2009. Вип. 12-13. Р. 220-231; Василина К. Особливості переосмислення трагедії «Король Лір» В. Шекспіра у російській літературі ХІХ ст. (на матеріалі повісті І. Тургенєва). *Держава та регіони. Серія: Гуманітарні науки*. Запоріжжя, 2010. № 4. Р. 13-17; Василина К. І. Тургенєв vs В. Шекспір: специфіка творчого діалогу. *Вісник ЗНУ. Серія: Філологічні науки*. 2015. № 2, Р. 17-28.

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The transfer of the heroes of Shakespeare's drama onto Russian soil is one of the means of typifying human kinds. In his essay "Hamlet and Don Quixote" (1860) I. Turgenev states: "All men, to my mind, conform to one type or the other; one to that of Hamlet, another to that of Don Quixote – though it is true, no doubt, that in our era the Hamlets are far more common"²⁵. The author sought to illustrate the thesis that the Russian reality is rich in various kinds of human types, formulated in the works of Shakespeare. The Russian artist, who called himself a "Westernist (*zapadnik*)"²⁶, sought to teach readers to see the eternal problems in everyday life, to understand their compatriots who are concerned about the same universal problems as Shakespeare's contemporaries, to recognize themselves as part of Western civilization.

So, I. Turgenev considered Hamlet one of the human types who embodies some contradictory traits such as self-consciousness and self-inflicted distrust, awareness of the necessity of changes and indecision in action, search for popularity, and scorn of everyone around²⁷. This is exactly the image he creates in his short story "Hamlet of the Shchigrovsky District" which was published in "Sketches from a Hunter's Album".

Alluding to the literary prototype in the title of his short story, I. Turgenev emphasizes, on the one hand, the connection of his character with the Prince of Denmark, and, on the other hand, their differences, adding the national colouring to the protagonist's image (it is known that the district (*povet*) is a territorial division used in Russia). The title itself is a key to the writer's interpretation of the image as contrasting notions combined tune in the reader's expectations and add some ironic hue to the story.

I. Turgenev uses the framing narrative (a story within a story) to introduce his version of Russian Hamletism. In "Hamlet

²⁵ Turgenev I. Hamlet and Don Quixote (translated by Moshe Spiegel). *Chicago Review*. 1965. Vol. 17, No. 4. P. 93. URL: www.jstor.org/stable/25293952 (accessed 16 August 2021).

²⁶ Головкин В. М. Художественно-философские искания позднего Тургенева (Изображение человека). Свердловск : Издательство Уральского института, 1989.

²⁷ Turgenev I. Hamlet and Don Quixote. Op. cit.

of the Shchigrovsky District” the soliloquy of a little man is preceded by the narrator’s short presentation of the circumstances of his meeting the Hamlet, and the end of this wordy and egocentric oration is marked by the sudden disappearance of the speaker before dawn.

The beginning of the story sounds very calm and trivial: the description of the society of Russian nobility assembled for hunting creates the backdrop for the story and explains why the narrator could not sleep at night and indulged in the conversation with the Hamlet.

The Russian writer presents his version of Hamlet’s story before voicing his character’s name, letting readers find obvious allusions and judge the hero by themselves. So, the name of the converser is placed after his confession just before his disappearance: “don’t ask me or anyone else for my name. Let me remain for you an unknown person, a Vasily Vasilyevych who has been crippled by fate. At the same time, as an unoriginal person, I don’t deserve any particular name. But if you earnestly want to give me some kind of title, then call me... call me Hamlet of the Shchigrovsky District... And so farewell”²⁸.

The framing helps to arrange the meeting in close proximity with this protagonist, a very typical and unremarkable creature, to let him grasp the narrator’s attention. Listening to the Hamlet with curiosity, the storyteller is both shocked and disgusted, left in doubt after the vanishing of the protagonist into thin air. Thus, the frame helps to create a realistic setting, incorporate the story into Russian reality and emphasize the triviality of such a happening, i.e. seeing the Hamlet.

I. Turgenev portrays the Hamlet in a specific environment that lacks any glamour of courtly life: the protagonist appears before the reader in bed and never leaves this “scene” from which he utters a series of monologues. Namely, the narrator meets this Hamlet in the chamber, that they had to share for one night: “The small, greenish, dampish room... was already occupied by another guest, who had already undressed completely seeing me,

²⁸ Turgenev I. Hamlet of the Shchigrovsky District. *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* (translated and introduction by Freeborn Richard). Penguin books, 1990. P. 381.

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he swiftly plunged under the counterpane, with which he covered himself right up to his nose, twisted and turned a little on the crumbling feather mattress and grew still, looking sharply up from beneath the rounded rim of his cotton nightcap”²⁹. This nightcap, which Russian Hamlet constantly manipulates with in the process of unfolding his story, adds to the unattractive image of this character, humiliates him, makes him insignificant, petty, and pathetic.

The specificity of the transformation of the stock elements is determined by the genre parameters of the target text. Shakespeare’s tragedy allows portraying the characters through their words and deeds along with the words of other participants of events. The prose piece format (short story) enables the Russian writer to diversify the techniques and methods of creating images. Thus, direct portrait characteristics are complemented with self-characterization, lyrical digressions, description of the environment, etc.

For example, the narrator’s remarks as for the behavior of Hamlet of the Shchigrovsky district: “My neighbor glanced at me in silence”³⁰, “The speaker let his head drop and raised his arms high in the air”³¹, “The speaker’s cheeks reddened and his eyes lost their brightness”³², etc. help to create a behavioral portrait of the man and hint at his emotional state. The narrator’s thoughts about the man reveal some ironic attitude to this strange orator: “Listen to the words he is using... My neighbor was beginning to amuse me”³³, “I raised my head and looked with redoubled interest at this odd fellow”³⁴.

Direct depiction of the appearance helps to visualize the protagonist as a vague and unnoticeable creature: “In the faint illumination of the night-light I could scarcely make out his features”³⁵, “He raised himself a little and folded his arms; the

²⁹ Ibid. P. 360.

³⁰ Ibid. P. 369.

³¹ Ibid. P. 373.

³² Ibid. P. 377.

³³ Ibid. P. 361.

³⁴ Ibid. P. 362.

³⁵ Ibid. P. 362.

long shadow of his nightcap bent round from the wall to the ceiling”³⁶. Details of the interior create some contrast to the confessional pathos of the soliloquy (namely intimate atmosphere in a small damp room). It is evident that all these means of characterization reinforce the impression of the character's speech, underline his non-originality and enhance the dramatic effect.

The major part of the text is occupied with the confessional and self-centered dialogue of the Russian Hamlet. He presents himself through his speech, his behavior, and details of observation.

The general outline of Russian Hamlet's life at first glance bears little resemblance to the brisk and vulnerable existence of Shakespeare's protagonist. However, a closer reading of the story by I. Turgenev allows seeing analogies and allusions, which relate primarily to the inner world of the main character. Focusing on the psychological portrait of his Hamlet, I. Turgenev to meet his ends provides only a few key episodes from the Prince's life, which remotely resemble the events of Shakespeare's drama and approximate it to the realia of Turgenev's day. Namely, it is reported that the Russian weirdo also studied at the university, quickly got disappointed in the value of books and theoretical training. Turgenev's Hamlet even belonged to one of the intellectual circles (popular at the time), which he denounces as a preposterous and insincere organization of fake friends. According to this man: “a circle's the destruction of any original development.... A circle is a lazy and flabby kind of communal, side-by-side existence... a circle replaces conversation with discourses..., distracts you from isolated, beneficial work..., it deprives you of freshness and the virginal strength of your spirit... it's mediocrity and boredom... A circle is a place where underhand eloquence flourishes... Oh, students' circles! They are not circles, they are enchanted rings in which more than one decent fellow has perished!”³⁷. I. Turgenev introduces this description of student organizations to voice his

³⁶ Ibid. P. 363.

³⁷ Ibid. P. 368-369.

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disapproval of their impracticality and artificiality; underlines the inactive position of his compatriots, the Hamlets, who do nothing but meditate and are useless in the society in need of reformation. Russian Hamlet's inability to blend into society similarly adds to the creation of the image of a skeptical and lonely person.

Another allusion to Shakespeare's plot is the story of the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia. It is transformed into a dotted line of relations between Russian Hamlet and his young, pure, naive wife Sofia who prematurely dies at birth. It is also complemented by short affairs with other ladies (Linchen) which serves as a kind of extension to Shakespeare's claim that his Hamlet was tired of women.

Let's remind that according to I. Turgenev, the prince's attitude to Ophelia is saturated with cynicism and a "deep consciousness of his helplessness, of his weakness, his incapacity to love"³⁸. When describing the funeral of his unfortunate wife, Turgenev's character does not show any feelings for her, depicting in detail the church and the funeral procedure and cynically reporting: "Kind, kind being that you were, but you still did well for yourself in dying!"³⁹. Self-representation and impression on other people are even more important to him than the tragedy he encounters. Even many years later he is still not sure whether he has been in love with her or not: "I suppose that I was in love with her. Even though by now I should know, yet – my God! – I don't know even now whether I loved Sofia or not"⁴⁰.

So, everything told in the story aims at highlighting the image of the Russian Hamlet as seen by I. Turgenev and his contemporaries. It seems that all Hamlet's soliloquies blend here into one lengthy monologue of a selfish and rather cruel character. It is noteworthy that emphasizing the egotistic nature of Hamlet, the Russian writer brings it to the extreme. The protagonist of this story draws all of the recipient's attention solely to himself and gives no possibility to his accidental

³⁸ Turgenev I. Hamlet and Don Quixote. Op. cit. P. 101.

³⁹ Turgenev I. Hamlet of the Shchigrovsky District. Op. cit. P. 377.

⁴⁰ Ibid. P. 376.

interlocutor to insert any remark into his tragic self-centered monologue.

Sometimes it seems that Hamlet of the Shchigrovsky district does not need a listener at all, he is indifferent to the judgments of the interlocutor; completely absorbed in his thoughts, he not once interrupts the narrator's remarks and selfishly imposes his point of view: " 'But admit it,' he added, suddenly glancing sideways at me, 'I must seem to you to be an extremely odd fellow, an original character, as they say, or perhaps something worse, let's suppose: perhaps you think I am trying to make myself out to be an eccentric?'"⁴¹. The Russian Hamlet resorts to interpreting the narrator's emotions trying to sustain a kind of dialogue: "That is, I entertain you, you mean... So much the better. Well, then, sir, I'll tell you that in these parts people do me the honour of calling me original..."⁴².

According to I. Turgenev, Hamlet really suffers, he inflicts wounds on himself, he tortures himself by the "double-edged sword of analysis"⁴³. Therefore, his main character, smaller, however, in the scale of his personality, reveals a masochistic tendency to self-reflection and self-humiliation. The monologue of Turgenev's Hamlet is full of exalted exclamations, unimportant and detailed descriptions of the misfortunes and numerous embarrassments he had to endure. Hamlet's questions, voiced in numerous soliloquies, are somehow diminished to the profane level. The highly philosophical question "to be or not to be?" is interpreted by the author in terms of a limited outlook and a poor inner world of Hamlet of the Shchigrovsky district, who replaces metaphysical reflections on the quintessence of being with considerations about the essence of his egoistic self.

Hamlet of the Shchigrovsky district is tormented by an inner conflict that is similar to that of his literary prototype: his mind and feelings contradict each other and bring him to the apprehension of his insignificance, pettiness, nastiness. He used to be a prominent figure, valued and loved, at his young age:

⁴¹ Ibid. P. 363.

⁴² Ibid. P. 364.

⁴³ Turgenev I. Hamlet and Don Quixote. Op. cit. P. 96.

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“what expectations I aroused in my youth! What an exalted opinion I had of my own person before going abroad and immediately after my return”⁴⁴. Later he is overwhelmed with his self-doubts and turns into a kind of frightened phantom. As he puts it: “And why do all these things happen? For two reasons: firstly, I am poor, and secondly, I have become reconciled...”⁴⁵. This reconciliation that makes people indifferent to life and unwilling to change anything is under the attack of the writer.

While the Russian writer considers English Hamlet’s skepticism and struggle with authority his strong sides, he exposes these features as the drawbacks of his character. Russian Hamlet’s criticism of the world’s seemingly unjust attitude to him sounds more like the whining of an unfortunate, beaten whelp. The tragic fate of the Danish prince which is to put right the wrongs of time turns into a selfish desire to gain recognition in society, to underline self-importance. Russian Hamlet also does not tolerate the world, but his protest is stimulated by a very selfish imperative, i.e. he is not worried about the time that is “out of joint”, he is oppressed by the fact that he is surprisingly unoriginal and banal.

Hamlet of the Shchigrovsky district is too far from its prototype in terms of intelligence and moral strength. I. Turgenev emphasizes this fact not only by describing the nervous and exalted behavior of the hero, underlining the insignificance and non-originality of his dilemmas but also by featuring the fact that this hero is not brave enough. When he has been talking about his life quite loudly quite for a while, one of the important guests from behind the wall shouts very angrily: “ ‘I’ve never heard anything like it,’ the sleepy voice of Mr. Kantagryukhin grumbled from the next room, ‘who’s the fool that’s decided to talk away at this time of night?’”⁴⁶, this makes the speaker feel frightened and humble. His reaction is instant and unambiguous, he “swiftly plunged under the counterpane”, and spoke in an alarmed tone: “ ‘Tut, tut,’ he whispered, and as though literally

⁴⁴ Turgenev I. Hamlet of the Shchigrovsky District. Op. cit. P. 364.

⁴⁵ Ibid. P. 362.

⁴⁶ Ibid. P. 380.

apologizing and bowing in the direction of Kantagryukhin's voice murmured respectfully: 'Of course, sir; of course, sir. Forgive me... His lordship must be allowed to sleep, he should sleep... he must gather his strength, well, at least so that he can eat tomorrow with the same enjoyment as he has eaten today'⁴⁷.

The cowardice of Russian Hamlet, who humiliates himself, bows low to the authority of the rulers reduces the pathos of the image, emphasizes the reader's attention to the fact that though a lot of people aspire to be like Hamlet, not everyone can remain as resolute as the Danish prince in achieving their own goals.

Full of self-doubt, Turgenev's hero does not believe in his power to change his petty existence, still, he is surprisingly attached to life, he doesn't dare to commit suicide "I had more than once intended to hang myself!"⁴⁸. His reasons are far from Hamlet's existential doubts.

It turns out that the Russian character lacks any positive features, nothing seems to make the reader sympathize with him. Shakespeare's Hamlet had a devoted companion, Horatio, and it is this young man's loyalty to the prince that often arouses admiration and compassion of the recipient. During his monologue, the Russian Hamlet never mentions the presence of a friend or like-minded person. This fact underscores the loneliness, isolation from society, and admiration of this position of a hermit, characteristic of the Russian intelligentsia.

Hence, I. Turgenev concludes that Hamlets who are able to reflect, are aware of their helplessness, and are ubiquitous, at the same time, often turn out to be inappropriate, useless and superfluous. Turning his gaze to Shakespeare's drama, I. Turgenev offers his original vision of the tragedy of the Russian intelligentsia, which, immersed in self-reflection, is unable to change anything in this world, often becomes clumsy and even harmful. Hamlets, which are plentiful in Russia, often turn out to be ridiculous as, pondering over the nature of the evil in the world, they are afraid to disappoint and interfere with those in power. The author of the story, who "became not only a

⁴⁷ Ibid. P. 381.

⁴⁸ Ibid. P. 373.

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chronicler of his own generation and his own society but also a critic of his own generation's Hamletism"⁴⁹ condemns the tendency to demagoguery and indecision, noting that such petty people are unable to do great things and solve global problems. Here the Russian writer himself acts as a skeptical Hamlet who does not believe in good foundations in man.

“And I, gentlemen,.. ‘used to know a King Lear!”⁵⁰

Another instance of I. Turgenev's adaptation of Shakespeare's images is represented in his novella “A Lear of the Steppes”. Praising the universality of Shakespearean images and giving tribute to his talent, I. Turgenev turns to the creation of another typified character while criticizing the drawbacks of his society.

King Lear in the image of Harlov becomes the embodiment of a typical representative of the provincial nobility, who feels very free in his estates and behaves too willfully. I. Turgenev emphasizes the limited outlook and total ignorance of such landlords, who by their life position, egoistic and consumptive attitude to the environment predetermine the tragic end of their existence.

The plot structure of Shakespearean drama is carefully rethought by the Russian author. Turning to the classical plot, I. Turgenev uses the frame narration, which serves as an introduction and allows to highlight the events set out in the main narrative block, to embed these events in the realis of the Russian provincial life.

The frame in the story of “A Lear of the Steppes” is built in a slightly different way from that of the story analyzed above. The initial element of this frame is a graphically isolated fragment in which the writer appeals to Shakespeare's authority and expresses admiration of how accurately the great man-of-

⁴⁹ Freeborn R. Introduction. *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* (translated and introduction by Richard Freeborn). Penguin books, P. 10.

⁵⁰ Turgenev I. A Lear of the Steppes. *The Project Gutenberg eBook, A Lear of the Steppes, etc.* (translated by Constance Black Garnett). 2016. P. 3-150.
URL: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/52642/52642-h/52642-h.htm#A_LEAR_OF_THE_STEPPES (accessed 1 August 2021).

letters could convey the essence of human types: “The conversation turned on Shakespeare, on his types, and how profoundly and truly they were taken from the very heart of humanity. We admired particularly their truth to life, their actuality. Each of us spoke of the Hamlets, the Othellos, the Falstaffs, even the Richard the Thirds and Macbeths – the two last only potentially, it is true, resembling their prototypes – whom he had happened to come across. ‘And I, gentlemen,’ cried our host, a man well past middle age, ‘used to know a King Lear!’”⁵¹. This exclamation arouses everyone’s interest in the story which occupies the major part of the novella.

The final element of the frame is the concluding phrase: “And so this is what I had to tell you of my *Lear of the Steppes*, of his family and his doings. The storyteller ceased, and we talked a little longer, and then parted, each to his home”⁵².

The plot similarities between Shakespeare’s “King Lear” and I. Turgenev’s “A Lear of the Steppes” are more abundant. Referring to the source text, I. Turgenev tries to represent the key elements of the famous fabula. For example, there is a moment of distribution of landed property, which is a kind of parallel to King Lear’s division of his kingdom and power. Harlov very carefully, knowledgeably shares his possessions among his daughters, the first acquaintance with whom makes the reader understand that the Russian Goneril (Anna) and Regan (Evlampia) are a kind of arrogant weasels.

Interestingly enough, I. Turgenev does not describe the father’s attempt to learn anything about his daughters’ attitude to him. It is worth mentioning that Shakespeare introduces this episode as one of the tense nodes of the plot in his drama and presents it the first Act: “Tell me, my daughters, – / Since now we will divest us both of rule, / Interest of territory. Cares of state, – / Which of you shall we say doth love us most?”⁵³. Hinting at the dependence of the share that a daughter will have on the sincerity and intensity of her feelings to her sire, the

⁵¹ Ibid. P. 3.

⁵² Ibid. P. 149.

⁵³ Shakespeare W. King Lear. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* / ed. Bullen Arthur Henry. Collectors Library Editions in Colour, 2007. P. 515.

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notorious king arranges a certain prerequisite for lies and flattery in which two of his daughters indulge very easily. While this moment leaves space for revealing the character of sincere, naive, and somewhat straightforward Cordelia who is chaste at heart and cannot lie even to please her beloved father. Her actions speak louder than words and true love is revealed in her faithfulness and loyalty to her dad till the very end of her short life.

The absence of these forced pseudo-confessions when a person, who deprives himself of his belongings, seeks to obtain at least some moral compensation in the form of expression of feelings, makes the image of the third daughter out of place in Turgenev's version. Though, according to Serrano, Evlampia has a double nature (combines the features of Cordelia and Goneril⁵⁴), it is still evident that Cordelia's part is relatively weak and overcome by that of a more cruel daughter. Like Cordelia, Evlampia cannot express her feelings to her father at all, she even does not try to do it, though at the end of the story she went to live in the nunnery to atone for her sins, in her heart she is far more of a Goneril type.

The Russian writer did not believe that anything could shatter and alter the worldview of his hero. Despot Harlov was confident in his power and obedience of his daughters; he did not need seemingly sincere words from his children whom he treated as his property. E. g., when asked by the narrator's mother whether he was completely certain about his daughters and son-in-law, Harlov superficially answered: " 'Were you pleased to speak of Volodka? A poor stick like him? Why, I can do as I like with him, whatever it is ... what authority has he? As for them, my daughters, that is, to care for me till I'm in the grave, to give me meat and drink, and clothe me... Merciful heavens! it's their first duty'⁵⁵."

The impetus for the division of property and wealth was prompted to Harlov by an irrational motive, namely, a dream, which the landlord interpreted as the approach of his premature

⁵⁴ Serrano M. B. Op. cit. P. 74.

⁵⁵ Turgenev I. A Lear of the Steppes. Op. cit. P. 40.

and sudden death. When asked about the reason for such a hectic decision which also seemed rather impulsive as according to the law after Harlov's death his property would be divided between his daughters in equal parts, the landlord feverishly replied: " 'Eh, ma'am, ...you will keep coming back to that. There is, maybe, a higher power at work in this, and you talk of melancholy. I thought to do this, madam, because in my own person, while still in life, I wish to decide in my presence, who is to possess what, and with what I will reward each, so that they may possess, and feel thankfulness, and carry out my wishes, and what their father and benefactor has resolved upon, they may accept as a bountiful gift.'"⁵⁶. The keywords in this speech are "in my own person", "I wish to decide", "carry out my wishes" which indicate a strong-willed and even excessively authoritarian way of Harlov's governing the estate, these words also manifest his desire to solely dominate in the life of his children and fulfill the role of a "benefactor" revered by everyone.

I. Turgenev gradually makes the atmosphere in the text even tenser and brings the events to a dramatic denouement. Harlov tries to keep certain privileges, as Lear did in his time: he keeps a "rawboned mare" with a "droshky"⁵⁷ for some rides, a "swarthy page"⁵⁸ Maximka for him to read the only book on the estate, cut his hair and shave his master, as well as some allowance. At the same time, the steppe King Lear has the right to stay in the house to preserve his freedom of movement. It is obvious that by minimizing and making Harlov's wishes petty, the Russian artist criticizes egotism, arrogance, and the limited outlook of Russian small landowners.

Having lost his money and power, Harlov, like his literary prototype, is oppressed by children who have previously suffered from their father's willfulness. It is necessary to remind, that Goneril and Regan, who conspired to deprive their father of all the privileges, fulfilled their plot gradually and under the guise of good intentions: "I do beseech you / To understand my purposes

⁵⁶ Ibid. P. 41.

⁵⁷ Ibid. P. 10.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

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aright: / As you are old and reverend, should be wise. / here do you keep a hundred knights and squires; / Men so disorder'd, so debosh'd, and bold, / That this our court, infected with their manners, / Shows like a riotous inn: epicurism and lust Make it more like a tavern or a brothel Than a grac'd palace.../ be, then, desired... /A Little to disquantity your train; / And the remainder, that shall still depend, / To be such men as may besort your age⁵⁹.

Harlov's children also take away everything dear to him: the mare is sold so that it does not eat any oats, the Cossack is sent to school so that he would not be idle, and then the helpless father is kicked out of the house. Having conspired, like Lear's daughters, Sletkin and the two sisters carefully make others believe that the old man has gone mad and one should not take into account his caprices or believe his words: "Martin Petrovitch is full of whims and fancies, and it's impossible to humour him!"⁶⁰, "We can't treat Martin Petrovitch otherwise than we do; he's fallen into complete dotage. One can't humour all his whims, really. But we show him all due respect"⁶¹.

Under the influence of the circumstances generated by himself, Harlov reaches the extreme degree of degradation and moral decay, turns into a wild beast, almost losing his human form ("covered with mire, dishevelled, tattered, and soaking wet—so wet that steam rose all round and water was running in little streams over the floor—knelt, shaking ponderously, as it were, at the last gasp ... his head, which he was clutching, with both hands in the hair that blinded him with filth. ... He was awful!... Truly, so might have looked some antediluvian creature that had just escaped another more powerful monster, attacking it in the eternal slime of the primeval swamps."⁶²).

The finale of the tragedy is abrupt; the landowner, having suffered from humiliation and abuse of his nearest and dearest for a long time, decides to take revenge and dismantle the roof of his

⁵⁹ Shakespeare W. Op. cit. P. 520.

⁶⁰ Turgenev I. A Lear of the Steppes. Op. cit. P. 76.

⁶¹ Ibid. P. 81.

⁶² Ibid. P. 101.

house to express hatred for the ungrateful: "I will tear the roof off them, and they shall have no roof over their heads, like me. They shall learn to know Martin Harlov. My strength is not all gone yet; they shall learn to laugh at me! ... They shall have no roof over their heads!"⁶³. This is done in a wild frenzy, under the influence of another irrational, spontaneous impulse of the so-called mysterious and unintelligible Russian soul.

It needs to be noted, that, unlike Shakespeare's hero, Harlov does not experience a spiritual rebirth, his ultimate collapse determines the denouement of his whole life: he dies, falling off the roof, which he has dismantled himself. Thus, I. Turgenev underlines the idea that Harlov himself launched processes that led him to a fatal dead-end, hinting at the narrow-mindedness and parochialism of provincial lords and denigrating stereotypes of serfdom still strong in the Russian mind.

Retaining the main plot curves of the original, I. Turgenev, however, removed secondary plots, e.g. the story of the Earl of Gloucester and his sons that was designed as a parallel one to those of Lear's life trials.

Creating the image of an insane, strong and in his own way outstanding landowner Martin Petrovich Harlov, I. Turgenev describes the appearance of this kind of simple-minded strong hero (*bogatyř*) in every detail: "Picture to yourselves a man of gigantic stature. On his huge carcass was set, a little askew, and without the least trace of a neck, a prodigious head. A perfect haystack of tangled yellowish-grey hair stood up all over it, growing almost down to the bushy eyebrows. On the broad expanse of his purple face, that looked as though it had been peeled, there protruded a sturdy knobby nose; diminutive little blue eyes stared out haughtily, and a mouth gaped open that was diminutive too, but crooked, chapped, and of the same colour as the rest of the face... It was difficult to tell just what Harlov's face expressed, it was such an expanse... One felt one could hardly take it all in at one glance. But it was not disagreeable—a certain grandeur indeed could be discerned in it, only it was exceedingly astounding and unusual. And what hands he had—positive

⁶³ Ibid. P. 114-115.

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cushions! What fingers, what feet! ... his shoulders, like millstones”⁶⁴.

Fascinated by Harlov’s constitution, the author mocks at his manner of mispronouncing words and his exaggerated attention to his supposedly noble ancestors. It is thought that the lack of education and general culture, self-enthusiasm and selfishness, vanity and arrogance are considered by the author as the basis for the moral and physical degradation of the protagonist. The portrait characteristic of the landlord at the beginning of the piece is strikingly different from his characteristic (portrait, speech, behavior) on the eve of the climax of the tragedy. This makes the reader more aware of the depth of the fall and moral decline of the hero, caused by his own short-sightedness and excessive arrogance.

By modernizing Lear’s image, placing it in another space-time continuum, I. Turgenev retains certain features of the legendary king: in particular, Harlov is a kind of all-powerful ruler in his estate, he is a strong-willed man, treats everyone quite superficially (he “was in the habit of regarding every one as not fully grown up. He had the greatest confidence in himself and was afraid of absolutely no one. ‘Can they do anything to me? Where on earth is the man that can?’ he would ask, and suddenly he would go off into a short but deafening guffaw”⁶⁵).

Harlov’s two daughters are the obvious doppelgangers of Lear’s ungrateful children. Meeting them for the first time the reader cannot but feel some uneasiness. In describing Anna Martinovna, the author emphasizes that for all her outward attractiveness, she is very evil: “She was a woman of medium height, thin, very brisk and rapid in her movements, with thick fair hair and a handsome dark face, on which the pale-blue narrow eyes showed up in a rather strange but pleasing way. She had a straight thin nose, her lips were thin too, and her chin was like the loop-end of a hair-pin. No one looking at her could fail to

⁶⁴ Ibid. P. 5.

⁶⁵ Ibid. P. 8.

think: 'Well, you are a clever creature—and a spiteful one, too!'"⁶⁶.

Harlov's younger daughter Evlampia is generally portrayed as a savage and stern woman who aroused the narrator's dread: "Evlampia, too, was very good-looking; as much so as her sister, though in a different style. She was tall and stoutly built; everything about her was on a large scale: her head, and her feet and hands, and her snow-white teeth, and especially her eyes, prominent, languishing eyes, of the dark blue of glass beads... She did not, it seemed, know what to do with her massive fair mane, and she had twisted it in three plaits round her head. Her mouth was charming, crimson, and fresh as a rose, and as she talked her upper lip was lifted in the middle in a very fascinating way. But there was something wild and almost fierce in the glance of her huge eyes"⁶⁷.

Reproducing the main plot of Lear's division of power and wealth, I. Turgenev leaves aside the line of King Lear – Cordelia, and also rethinks certain images. In particular, the role of Kent (Lear's defender and comrade) is to some extent played by the narrator's mother, who constantly warns Harlov of danger, tries to keep him from making mistakes, she is always happy to accept this giant in her estate and willingly lends a helping hand to him in a difficult moment. The narrator himself is Harlov's defender, who empathizes with his misfortunes. I. Turgenev's image of Kent is split, compensating for the absence of such a positive character as Cordelia.

The image of the clown, who in Shakespeare's tragedy plays an important role as a mouthpiece of truth and wisdom, is also subject to creative rethinking in "A Lear of the Steppes". This character is represented by Harlov's late wife's brother, ironically nicknamed Souvenir, who "occupied a position between that of a buffoon and a dependant"⁶⁸.

This drunkard with the manners of a scoundrel ("had Souvenir had money, he would have turned into the basest

⁶⁶ Ibid. P. 26.

⁶⁷ Ibid. P. 31.

⁶⁸ Ibid. P. 18.

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person, unprincipled, spiteful, even cruel. Poverty kept him within bounds⁶⁹) was afraid of Harlov when the man had power and money, as soon as Martin Petrovitch funds himself in a humiliated position, Souvenir begins to mock him, to poke fun at him. In fact, it is Souvenir's foolish appeal that causes an outburst of Harlov's anger, his desire for revenge on his daughters, and, ultimately, the tragic ending of this gloomy story.

Another line of convergence between the pieces by Shakespeare and Turgenev is the description of the storm as a symbol of the approaching finale and tragic denouement. It is noteworthy, that Shakespeare's growing storm emphasizes Lear's mental anguish, his utter suffering. In I. Turgenev's text, Harlov, who was banished by his children, appears at the narrator's estate in the like weather conditions that echo the old man's despair and foretell his downfall: "All things living had hidden themselves; even the sparrows made no sound, and the rooks had long ago disappeared from sight. The wind howled drearily, then whistled spasmodically. The low-hanging sky, unbroken by one streak of light, had changed from an unpleasant whitish to a leaden and still more sinister hue; and the rain, which had been pouring and pouring, mercilessly and unceasingly, had suddenly become still more violent and more driving, and streamed with a rushing sound over the panes. ... It seemed there would never again in the world be sunshine, nor brightness, nor colour, but this rain and mire and grey damp, and raw fog would last forever, and forever would the wind whine and moan!"⁷⁰.

The specificity of elaborating the eternal theme of the conflict of generations by I. Turgenev is determined, among other things, by the genre nature of the work. If Shakespeare chose the genre of tragedy to describe a certain recurring situation in life, he portrayed his characters through their words and deeds. At the same time, the format of the novella allowed the Russian writer to diversify the techniques and methods of creating characters and to make his version of the ancient story closer to comprehension of a Russian reader of his time. Thus, direct

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid. P. 100.

depiction of characters and events is accompanied by dialogues and meditations as well as indirect characterization through speech and behavior. Following in the Shakespearean footsteps, Turgenev does not present himself in the text but, using the words of P. Waddington, allows "the local staff" in his books to undergo "the universalizing touch – the touch which, if not quite Shakespearian, is of the family of Shakespeare"⁷¹. One can see life itself and infer by themselves the subcontextual meaning of the modernized versions of eternal plots and characters.

Thus, one can conclude that using the stock plot and images, I. Turgenev resorts to the modernization of the protoplot, setting the action in the 19th C. Russia, as well to the extension of the original story by way of introducing additional plotlines and situations; he also examines the psychological sphere and everyday routine of the Russian province of the time.

It is the technique of continuing the plot that allows the author to ponder upon such topical issues as the position of an intellectual in the 19th C. Russia, to reveal his personal frustration with the reforms carried out at the time, skepticism about local petty tsars, personal viewpoint as for the dilemma of finding one's place in life and adequate self-identification, as well as generation gap problems, such as the relationship between parents and children.

I. Turgenev uses such a technique of rethinking the traditional material as "story within the story", which serves as a means of modernizing the timeless images, and allows to assess every day in terms of eternity. Processing of stock material is carried out on different levels: that of a genre, composition, ideological and semantic plane, stylistic colour, etc. Choosing the format of prose pieces, I. Turgenev significantly expands the range of methods of creating his images as he chooses different means of characterization: heroes' verbal self-characteristics and their featuring by other characters, thorough portrait and behavioral description, details of routine life that are also important for depicting the psychological state of the protagonists. In addition,

⁷¹ Waddington P. Op. cit. P. 8.

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I. Turgenev transforms the ideological and semantic level of the images. In particular, his Hamlet does not take revenge, he is a coward who is doomed to flee from the arbitrariness of circumstances and his own meanness all his life, and his Lear is incapable of spiritual rebirth even at the moment of death.

Entering into a creative dialogue with his predecessor, appealing to the cultural codes of the past, the Russian writer offered his own, original, nationally marked version of the interpretation of eternal images with reduced, domesticated pathos. In addition, he inscribed his works in the world Shakespearean discourse, once again testifying to the genius of the Great Bard and the vitality of his images and plots.

It is obvious that in the future this scientific problem can be studied on the basis of other texts by I. Turgenev, as well as in the context of the polemics of the Russian author with other classical writers.

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