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Anna Karenina - T. Stoppard vs. L. Tolstoy

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Abstract

Aim. The aim of the research is to compare Konstantin Levin's function in the film Anna Karenina(2012) by Joe Wright, the script written by Tom Stoppard and the novel Anna Kareninaby Leo Tolstoy and to determine how much his figure was changed in the film adaptation under the influence of the scriptwriter's and director's stance.

Methods. The subjects of the study were the film *Anna Karenina* (2012) by Joe Wright, the script written by Tom Stoppard and the novel *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy. They are analysed with the use of the theory of script writing, different types of character classifications and the text corpus analysis, taking into account the cultural, historical and economic features of scriptwriting and film production.

Results. The analysis shows that Konstantin Levin's function of the second protagonist that is characteristic for the novel is further developed in the screenplay but is omitted in the film. The discrepancies with the source book and the screenplay are caused by the influence of the film director during the film production.

Conclusions. Even though the study considers the texts that are closely interrelated, the individual author's stance influences the text of the screenplay so much that it gives us an opportunity to call Tom Stoppard, the scriptwriter, a writer in the full sense of the word.

Key words: script, protagonist, scriptwriter, character, classification

Introduction

In 2012 one of the most debatable film adaptations of L. Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina* was made by Joe Wright, the director, together with Tom Stoppard, the scriptwriter. It "has divided the opinions of the critics and audiences alike." (*Anna Karenina* – User Reviews, 2012). Being a blend of tradition and avant-garde, theatrics and cinema, the film makes us think about the relationship between classics and modern art, between the source text and its adaptation, examine the modern audience attitude towards literature and film adaptations. When watching a film adaptation of classics, the audience should be "informed" (Idlis, 2006, p. 12) in order to understand that the changes made in the plot, the "gaps" and "blanks" (Leitch, 2003, p. 159) in the film are "legitimate" (Idlis, 2006, p. 12). "Many nuances of the relationships are not explained

at all and, had I not read the book many times over, these would have been lost on me."(*Anna Karenina* – User Reviews, 2012).

When writing a script every scriptwriter has to find a compromise between the author's, the director's and his own stance, the producer's "the drive for profits" and "the demands of the audience" (Lawson, 2014, p. 277). One of the examples of it is the theatrics of Anna Karenina that was not envisaged by the scriptwriter and was eventually suggested by J. Wright. This inevitably affects the character hierarchy.

Being important

Striving to address the widest possible audience the promoters of the film *Anna Karenina* (2012) advertised it as a tragic love story of two upper-class Russians: Anna Karenina and Alexey Vronsky, Anna being the protagonist. In late-19th-century Russian high society, St. Petersburg aristocrat Anna Karenina enters into a life-changing affair with the dashing Count Alexei Vronsky." (Anna Karenina, 2012). The text corpus analysis of one review at the site *Anna Karenina – User Reviews. IMDb* shows that the audience pays much more attention to Anna and Vronsky than to any other character. Anna is mentioned in the text 7 times, Vronsky -2, Karenin - 1, Oblonsky - 0, Betsy - 1, Dolly - 1, Kitty-1, Levin - 2. In ten viewers' reviews published on the same site Anna is used - 19 times, Vronsky - 15, Karenin - 5, Levin - 4, Oblonsky - 3, Kitty -3, Dolly - 1, Betsy - 1. In terms of percentage: Anna accounts for - 37%, followed by Vronsky - 29%, Karenin - 9.8%, Levin - 7.8% and Kitty - 5.8%, Dolly – 1.9% and Betsy - 1.9% respectively. Levin is only the forth on the list. It means that not every viewer considers him to be worth mentioning. It's evident that Levin's story line is a minor one, in spite of the fact that the 19th century Russian critic Alexander Stankevich states in his article *Karenina and Levin* that Tolstoy promised us in his work one novel, and gave two – [обещал нам в своем произведении один роман, а дал — два] (Stankevich, 1878, p. 785) underlining that Levin is the protagonist of the second one.

Since the very first film adaptation Levin has not been taken into account by scriptwriters, film directors and, therefore, viewers. In the 1935 film with Greta Garbo "the only scene devoted totally to Kitty and Levin – their wedding – seems to be included only for the sake of its "Russianness" (Makoveeva, 2001, p. 119). Even in the 1967 Russian version of *Anna Karenina* directed by A. Zarkhi Levin "receives less attention than in the novel" (Makoveeva, 2001, p. 123). The first serious attempt "to restructure the concept of the novel" was made by Bernard Rose in 1997. "For the first time in the history of Anna Karenina adaptations, Levin's philosophical quests occupy a privileged position in the plot. He transforms into the narrator … and even into Tolstoy himself by the end of film." (Makoveeva, 2001, p. 126). But Bernard Rose's "attempts to emphasize parallels between Levin and Anna" may seem to be "maladroit" and resulting "in comic effects" (Goscilo, 2001, p. 7).

T. Stoppard believes Levin to be "important" (McRrum, 2012, p. 12). He starts the script with a scene in Levin's country estate and pays much more attention to Konstantin than most of the previous adaptors. 47 out of 199 script pages contain episodes with him, but not all of them were finally included into the film. But, unlike the book and the script, Levin cannot be called the protagonist of the film. Nevertheless, Levin in the film – contrary to current trend of producing "fewer and fewer films with complex characters" – is still one of the most important and vivid characters, because "in the end, what the audience remembers most are … the characters, their relationships, what they were struggling with, and how the audience identified with them" (Schock, 1995).

To prove this "the nine character types" offered by D. Wisehart may be used (Wisahard, 2015). In the script, as well as in the book, Levin possesses the traits of character of a reformer, he is a "perfectionist" who can be sometimes "critical and judgmental" (Wisahard, 2015), for example, in his attitude towards Oblonsky's "paperwork" (Stoppard, 2012, p. 15) and his "freshly baked roll" (Stoppard, 2012, p. 18) – his mistress. He is an achiever having the "fear of being worthless" (Wisahard, 2015), searching for the aim of life, an artist with the "yearning for true love, prone to … emotional breakdown" (Wisahard, 2015). Levin is afraid that he is not good enough to be loved by such a perfect creature as Kitty. This makes him run away to the country or rush to Kitty's house just before the wedding to ask if she really wants to marry him. He can be reckoned among observers – "keen conceptualizers" (Wisahard, 2015). Both in the script and in the book, he is considered to be "eccentric" (Wisahard, 2015) due to his ideas about love, women and family: "Levin (cont'd) An impure love is not love, to me. To admire another man's wife is a pleasant thing, but sensual desire indulged for its own sake is greed, a kind of gluttony, and a misuse of something sacred which is given to us so that we may choose the one person with whom to fulfil our humanness. Otherwise we might as well be cattle. Countess Nordston: Ah, an idealist!" (Stoppard, 2012, p. 130). In the novel he is also characterized by countess Nordston as a skeptic: "I love it when he looks down at me from the height of his grandeur: either he breaks off his clever conversation with me because I'm stupid, or he condescends to me." (Pevear, Volokonsky, 2013, p. 49) – [Я люблю, когда он с высоты своего величия смотрит на меня: или прекращает свой умный разговор со мной, потому что я глупа, или снисходит.] (Tolstoy, 2014, p. 57). Levin has the traits of a leader, he is "self-reliant" (Wisahard, 2015), ready to assume the responsibility for his family. This trait allows Kitty's father to trust him with his beloved daughter. He is an adventurer with "a lust for life" (Wisahard, 2015). He mows with peasants and is not afraid to look ridiculous in the book and in the script. Tom Stoppard's attitude towards Levin partly coincides in the script with the one of L. Tolstoy, but it contradicts to the film when his behavior in Moscow makes us think about Pierre Bezukhov's awkwardness and self-doubt or about F. Dostoevsky's characters: Alyosha, Versilov, Prince Myshkin compared with holy fools. Holy fools unlike western jesters were revered in Russia, for example, Saint Basil the Blessed. V. Solov'yev believed that "Dostoevsky's interest

in the type of holy fool should be connected with the main categories of the writer's world outlook and aesthetics, with the choice of the dreaming hero." (Levashova, 2001, p. 42, Solov'yev, 1990, p. 46). According to the philosopher, "people of faith are creating our life: those who are called dreamers, utopians, fools – they are prophets, truly the best people and leaders of mankind" (Levashova, 2001, p. 42, Solov'yev, 1990, p. 46). Konstantin Levin tries to be a businessman in the novel, but not very successful due to his artistic nature. He is a dreamer and a philosopher. The fact that he feels himself out of place among Moscow upper-class members and resembles a holy fool is stressed in the film. However, originally in the screenplay Konstantin Levin was created under the influence of the Protestant philosophy. He was strong and practical, his features of the reformer were pronounced more than of the observer and the artist, thus contradicting the "idyllic super-type" to which he is ranked in Russia.

A SAINT OR A HERO

According to the Russian character classification system Tolstoy's Levin is reckoned among the "idyllic super-type" ["житийно-идиллический сверхтип"] (Khalizev, 2002, p. 202), the type rooted in the old Russian literature dealing mainly with the life-stories of Orthodox saints. Besides that, K. Levin in the novel is believed to be L. Tolstoy's self-portrait, he was "modelled on Tolstoy himself" (McRum, 2012, p. 12). The writer used to be a spiritual leader of the nation in the second half of the 19th century with his simple "ascetic life, rejecting the world" [отвергающая мир «аскеза» Л.Н. Толстого] (Orekhanov, 2010, p. 241). The confrontation with the Orthodox church made him a hero for the Russian nation. "*Tolstovism* is as a matter of fact a national form of religious rebellion against Orthodoxy" [толстовщина, по сути, является общенациональной формой религиозного бунта против Православия] (Orekhanov, 2010, p. 233). "All educated Russian people read Tolstoy's novels" [романы Толстого читали все образованные русские люди] (Orekhanov, 2010, p. 230). However, in the 70's of the 19th century L. Tolstoy's attitude towards Orthodoxy was not as negative as in later years. Levin's doubts are the author's ones. He is struggling against them: "Do you believe everything that is taught by the holy apostolic Church," the priest went on: "I have doubted, I doubt everything," Levin said (Pevear & Volokonsky, 2013, p. 440) [Веруете ли вы во все то, чему учит нас святая апостольская церковь? – продолжал священник… - Я сомневался, я сомневаюсь во всем, - проговорил Левин…] (Tolstoy, 2014, p. 468). The priest who Levin confesses to is rather sympathetic in the book: "this…nice old man" [этот добрый и милый старичок] (Tolstoy, 2014, p. 470). He finally manages to change Levin's attitude towards religion, because what "he had said was not at all as stupid as it seemed to him at first, and that there was something in it that needed to be grasped" (Pevear & Volokonsky, 2013, p. 442) [Кроме того, у него осталось

неясное воспоминание о том, что то, что говорил этот добрый и милый старичок, было совсем не так глупо, как ему показалось сначала, и что тут что-то есть такое, что нужно уяснить] (Tolstoy, 2014, p. 470). In the screenplay nothing of the kind happens, because K. Levin and the Orthodox priest who is sent for when Levin's brother is dying are indifferent to religion. Levin does not ask any vital questions. As for the priest, he is busy with his job: he "bends over Nikolai … murmuring the prayers" (Stoppard, 2012, p. 158), in the next episode Levin and the priest discuss financial issues instead of eternal ones. "Levin counts money, for the services of the Priest… who is eating bread and soup" (Stoppard, 2012, p. 158).

Levin: Thank you, Father…and how much…?

He offers a handful of paper money

Priest: At your benevolence. It is a custom, not a levy, Your Excellency…. Jesus overturned the money-tables outside the temple, but…

He shrugs and puts the money away and returns to his soup" (Stoppard, 2012, pp. 158-9).

Unlike in the novel where Konstantin is deep in his thoughts, has "the feeling of horror" (Pevear & Volokhonsky, p. 504) and does not speak much, Nickolai's death doesn't impact T. Stoppard's Levin greatly. He is just "feeling out of place" and "embarrassed" (Stoppard, 2012, p. 158). In the final version of the film both of these episodes are excluded.

It is difficult to classify pragmatic Levin in the script as "an idyllic supertype". One can hardly find an equivalent of this type of character in the British and American literature classifications, but there are different kinds of heroes, for example, an everyday hero that correlates with Levin in the script. "The everyday hero has no outstanding abilities or attributes. They have sound moral judgment and show selflessness in the face of adversity" (Ray, n.d.). According to T. Stoppard, it is Levin who suits perfectly for altering into a hero mandatory for a commercially successful film. T. Stoppard transforms Levin – the idyllic saint in the novel –into an everyday hero. He is an honest hardworking man antipodal to the Russian idleness and vice. He demonstrates sound "moral judgment" dealing with love, fidelity, labour, etc. He faces inner "adversities," searching the right way to live. And in spite of the fact that he prefers cabbage soup: " Oblonsky (cont'd) Cabbage soup? ... Levin It's what I wanted" (Stoppard, 2012, p. 19), – and hates European clothes: "Oblonsky (cont'd) Oh, but look at you, in Western clothes you told me you'd never wear again (Stoppard, 2012, p. 16) – he seems to be more European and modern than any other main character of the script, especially because of his "respect for, the female domain instead of the homosocial sphere of masculine privilege and competition that dominates the upper-class world of Anna Karenina" (Goscilo, 2001, p. 7). Currently the issue of "the female domain" is being discussed rather passionately in the western world.

The hero's path

In spite of the fact that the "idyllic super-type" ["житийно-идиллический сверхтип"] (Khalizev, 2002, p. 202) which Levin in the book belongs to is a more complex character than Levin – an everyday hero – in the screenplay, K. Levin goes through all the stages of hero formation that Joseph Campbell describes in The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949) (Eckler, 2011, p. 1) and through deep changes in his life views.

1. "A call to adventure, which the hero has to accept or decline." "Adventure" may have the meaning "to take risks, try new ideas" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2005, p. 22) Levin does take the risk of proposing to Kitty both in the novel, in the script and in the film.
2. "A road of trials, regarding which the hero succeeds or fails." A trial means a process of testing the ability, quality or performance of somebody/something, especially before you make a final decision about them (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2005 p. 1637). Kitty refuses him. This is a test for his feelings. In the novel Levin is engaged in self-criticism: "Yes, she was bound to choose him. It had to be so, and I have nothing and no one to complain about. I myself am to blame. What right did I have to think that she would want to join her life with mine? Who am I? And what am I? A worthless man, of no use to anyone or for anything." (Pevear, Volokhonskaya, 2013, p. 84) – [Да, она должна была выбрать его. Так надо, и жаловаться мне не на кого и не за что. Виноват я сам. Какое право имел я думать, что она захочет соединить свою жизнь с моею? Кто я? И что я? Ничтожный человек, никому и ни для кого ненужный] (Tolstoy, 2014, p. 93). In the script he is "humbled and angry with himself and the world, he takes off his top hat and considers putting his fist through it but jams it back on his head" (Stoppard, 2012, p. 28). He escapes to Pokrovskoye. There he makes love to a peasant girl, mows and makes observations on peasant life. In the film he is shocked by the failure, he understands that his marriage is impossible and allows the servant to pull on his head the top hat. He steps from the theatre into the country in order to find solace there.
3. "Achieving the goal or 'boon', which often results in important self-knowledge." The time spent in Pokrovskoye gives Levin an opportunity to understand that though he gets "drawn to "the simple life" (Stoppard, 2012, p. 116), but he can be happy only with Kitty who is beautiful, smart and perfect.
4. "A return to the ordinary world, again as to which the hero can succeed or fail." After a certain period of time spent in the country Levin returns to Moscow, to the world of the Russian upper-class which he belongs to by birth and marries Kitty.
5. "Application of the boon, in which what the hero has gained can be used to improve the world." Levin becomes a loving husband and father. Levin becomes a hero; whose heroism is manifested in his self-denial for the sake of his family.

Levin: I came looking for you . . . I understood something . . .

Kitty: And what was that?...

Kitty (cont'd): What did you understand?

But the baby starts to yell for the breast. Kitty starts to undo her blouse.

Levin shakes his head: he'll tell her some other time, or maybe not" (Stoppard, 2012, p. 197).

When coming to the end of his path, Levin – a pragmatic person – turns into a man that can be reckoned among the idyllic super-type, because he gains an aim of life, an answer to the question how to live and "respect for, the female domain" (Goscilo, 2001, p. 7) .

Conclusion

Unlike the majority of the previous screenwriters T. Stoppard has taken L. Tolstoy's "family thought" [мысль семейную...] (Tolstaya, 1978, p. 502) into consideration and used the parallel, shy relationship between Levin and Kitty … to counterpoint Anna's affair" (McRum, 2012). Tom Stoppard has developed the" family thought" further by emphasizing Levin's "respect for, the female domain" (Goscilo, 2001, p. 7) and making him a everyday hero who is rather pragmatic. The study of the novel, the script and the film as closely interrelated texts shows that the individual scriptwriter's stance influences the text in such a way that it becomes possible to call Tom Stoppard a writer in the full sense of the word.

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