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**LEO TOLSTOY IN THE INTERNET SPACE: REPRESENTATION,  
IMAGE, STEREOTYPE, MYTH**

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**Abstract**

The authors of the research reveal stereotyped (as well as mythological) notions about Leo Tolstoy in our contemporaries' mind and analyze their reflections in the modern culture and digital space. They consider the following Tolstoy's stereotyped images taking into account ambivalence of the axiological vector of their perception: a famous Russian writer (a master of the artistic word / a creator of bulky texts, which are hard to perceive); "a lord of thoughts" (a great teacher of life / a troublemaker undermining conventional values); religious reformer (the elder of Yasnaya Polyana / "a prophet without honour"); an aristocrat leading a simpler life (a nobleman, a refined person / a person striving to conform to the image of a plain man, a peasant, both in his exterior and interior); a role model (a moral compass / an immoral compass); a head of family (an ideal family man / a domestic tyrant); a person assessed by the society in terms of his conformity to current life guidelines (a pioneer of many modern fashionable trends / a traditionalist). The authors consider how these stereotyped images of Tolstoy are represented by lexical and phraseological means, by various kinds of art (folklore, painting, literature, cinema, animation) and mass media (caricatures, Internet-presentems: memes, demotivators, hashtags, etc.).

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## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, the categories of personal image (image) and public image have attracted more and more researchers' interest. This is due to the anthropocentricity of modern science. In research, a person and his characteristic ways of perceiving and processing information is put forward to the top. New scientific disciplines – imagology and image science – have appeared, which are developing so actively that they are now beginning to be included in the university education system. Imagological and image science studies become the basis for writing articles and dissertations, determine the topics of international scientific conferences. The provisions of modern imagology are being developed by the University of Amsterdam professor Leerssen (2021), who is actively published at present. In Russia (Tomsk), the “Imagology and Comparative Studies” journal has been being published since 2014, which is included in the Web of Science Core Collection's, Emerging Sources Citation Index and Scopus databases. All this confirms the relevance of our research.

## 2. Problem Statement

When we talk about imagology and image science, we inevitably come across the need to operate with concepts such as personal and public image. Since the public image is often defined through the personal one (for example, “public image as a socially oriented imprint of the personal image” (Olyanich, 2004, p. 133), we consider it necessary to focus on the image definition in more detail. Various areas of humanitarian knowledge (psychology, literature studies, cognitive science, communication science, etc.) give their own image definitions. We will take the characteristics formulated in the monograph by Shestak (2003), who studied the image as a linguistic essence and noted that the linguistic image is a brought together, superimposed, amalgamated or elementwise expressed by a functioning sign the meaning of seeing one picture through the outline gestalt of another, as a basis. In addition, it is important for us that the linguistic image, according to the researcher, is ready to transfer information about the compared objects, is subjectively and culturally conditioned, and, therefore, dynamic and to some extent hypothetical, polyinterpreted, semiotically extensible (Shestak, 2003, pp. 269-270).

Through the prism of image science, many scientific problems can be considered, including the question of a certain community's stereotypical ideas about any person who is significant for it, about his/her image, which is formed in the people's minds and in culture, about the influence of this image, which is constantly reproduced, supporting the corresponding ideas in society, to reality. One of such personalities is, undoubtedly, Leo Tolstoy. Everyone knows him as a great writer (a representative of the XIX – “golden” – century of Russian literature), a philosopher and thinker, an extraordinary teacher. Tolstoy's philosophical views in relation to modern sociology (Zheltova, 2017), the “philosophy of life” (Yevlampiyev & Matveyeva, 2018), the doctrine of good and evil (Klimova, 2017), a new understanding of biography (Makhlin, 2021), artistic creativity (Anichkin, 2018), aphoristics (Tulyakova, 2018) and the writer's language (Paducheva, 2018), comparative studies of Tolstoy and other writers' work (Emerson, 2020) – these are the issues related to the writer's creative legacy which concern today's researchers. But few people thought about the trace his personality has left in the world cultural space. What ideas about

Tolstoy do our contemporaries have, including his compatriots? In our research, we will try to answer this question.

### 3. Research Questions

Every person has his/her own Leo Tolstoy's image which, like any other famous person's one, is somewhat different from this image in other people. However, we are interested in Tolstoy's stereotypical images, i. e. such that many people have. What are these images, in what form do they exist in mass, including digital, culture, what can you rely on when identifying them?

### 4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to identify stereotypical (including mythological) notions of Leo Tolstoy in the minds of our contemporaries and analyze their reflection in modern culture and digital space.

### 5. Research Methods

In our study, we have used the imagological method to identify Tolstoy's stereotypical images (Leerssen, 2017), the biographical method, when analyzing mythologemes associated with his personality, have taken into account the results of statistical studies (Sokolov & Sokolova, 2019, 2020), as well as the results of applying the association experiment method, referring to the "Russian association dictionary ..." edited by Karaulov et al. (2002), used the comparative-contrastive method when analyzing Tolstoy's images represented by means of various art forms (folklore, painting, literature, cinema, animation) and mass media (caricatures, Internet-presentems: memes, demotivators, hashtags, etc.).

### 6. Findings

The analysis has shown that in one and the same stereotyped notion of a writer, opposite assessments of his personality and activity can be embodied, i. e. the axiological vector of the image perception and transmission can be ambivalent (positive or negative): Tolstoy-demiurge (doer) and Tolstoy-trickster (destroyer).

We have identified the following stereotypical Tolstoy's images:

#### 6.1. Leo Tolstoy – famous Russian writer (master of artistic word / creator of bulky and hard-to-perceive texts)

The media scene is dominated by memes and other Internet presentations which play upon the verbosity and stylistic redundancy of Tolstoy's most famous works. And this is no accident. Negative assessments of Tolstoy's style are highly relevant at the present time among young people studying the writer's most voluminous novel, "War and Peace", since it is included in the school curriculum. The ironic phrases popular on the Internet emphasize the difficulty of reading the novel: "This postcard is like War and Peace ... only 1273 pages shorter", "You are like War and Peace ... no, not that fat, but unique."

A video fragment from Google Corporation called “What would our world look like if the Internet had been existing for thousands of years?” is a popular meme on the Internet. In it, Leo Tolstoy complains that he cannot publish his long message on Twitter: “140 characters is an extremely frustrating and at the same time offending restriction to me” (Yugopolis.ru, 2012). Another meme is a creolized text which reconstructs the lesson situation: the teacher lectures the writer: “Have you written a 69758932765-word essay again?” (Pikabu.ru, 2018).

In contrast to the stereotypical notion of the insuperability of the “War and Peace” novel, Internet-presentems motivating schoolchildren to read it have appeared: “Read me completely” and “Go in for reading”. At the last one, Tolstoy was presented in the form of a coach, giving an important instruction: “Don't give up! The second wind will open on the 500th page”. His tracksuit has “War and Peace” written on it.

The basis for the memes on the Internet is a set expression “In words, you are Leo Tolstoy, but, in fact – just a shallow cock” and its numerous variations, supplied with appropriate images. There, Tolstoy, a great writer, a genius recognized by all, is contrasted with the statement recipient – a pitiful, unworthy idle talker (Arkhangel'skaya, 2016, pp. 258-264).

## **6.2. Leo Tolstoy – “a lord of thoughts” (a great teacher of life / a troublemaker undermining conventional values)**

Leo Tolstoy was an iconic figure who had a tremendous impact on his contemporaries. This influence concerned different aspects of life: ideological, artistic, aesthetic, ethical and pedagogical. During his lifetime, he had a lot of followers, and not only in Russia. “Tolstoy's” communities were created, the members of which tried to lead a lifestyle corresponding to the Tolstoy's system of philosophy (refusal to perform military service, non-resistance to evil by force, vegetarianism, refusal of carnal pleasures, serving himself, etc.). Tolstoy's influence on his contemporaries' minds and lifestyle is evidenced by the words “Tolstoyism”, “Tolstoyan”, “non-resistance” which have entered the Russian language.

The Tolstoy's image – the lord of thoughts – was supported in Soviet times by the popular, later came to be V.I. Lenin's catch phrase “Leo Tolstoy as a mirror of the Russian revolution” (as one of his articles was called). The modern caricaturist Katayev (2007) ironically visualizes this set expression, translating it into a literal plan: Lenin with a toothbrush, Stalin with a straight razor, and Trotsky with a comb in their hands stand in front of Leo Tolstoy, performing the morning ritual as in front of a mirror.

One of the Internet-caricatures depicts parents arguing about raising their daughter. The father, who looks like a “stereotypical” Tolstoy (beard, man's long belted blouse, hands tucked into his belt, bast shoes) suggests: “We will educate her according to Tolstoy's system.” The mother indignantly objects: “You're out of your mind! Remember the way Anna Karenina ended her life!” The described caricature reflects the opposite assessments of the writer' influence on the readers' minds: a great teacher and destroyer of values and social foundations.

### **6.3. Religious reformer (the elder of Yasnaya Polyana / “a prophet without honor”)**

As you know, in the second half of his life, Tolstoy made a departure from the official religion. This was reflected in some of his works, which were banned as harmful to reading, and Tolstoy himself, by the pronouncement of the Holy Synod of 1901, was recognized as an excommunicated person.

Tolstoy’s influence on his contemporaries’ minds was so great that the situation described contributed to the society division into his supporters and opponents: some called him a “teacher”, “a grand old man”, “a righteous man”, “an apostle of Yasnaya Polyana”, others – a “false prophet”, “a great heresiarch” (A. Akhmatova), “Pharisee”, “Beelzebub’s beloved friend” (Yeremeyeva, 2017, p. 188). A similar attitude towards Tolstoy continues in Russian society up to now. As is evident from the recent years publications, which have caused a great public attention (Orekhanov, 2019).

The modern “Tolstoy's Train” Internet-presentem, created by Bondarenko (2013), depicts a halo in the form of a train traveling in a circle above the writer’s portrait. The duality of assessment lies in the fact that the halo supports the notion of Tolstoy as a great religious mentor, while the train and the railway refer to an important concept in his work, denoting a destructive force which presses down all living and spiritual things.

### **6.4. An aristocrat leading a simpler life (a nobleman, a refined person / a person striving to conform to the image of a plain man, a peasant)**

As you know, Tolstoy was born and raised in an aristocratic environment, in his youth he attached great importance to veneer, decency, *comme il faut* (from the French *comme il faut* – literally, “as it should”). However, in the second half of his life, there was a turning point in his worldview. It became characteristic of him to be simplified in clothing (a sailcloth or canvas blouse, encircled with a belt – the later famous man’s long belted blouse resembling a peasant’s clothes), nutrition (preference for simple dishes, later – vegetarianism), many types of activities (seasonal peasant work: ploughing, mowing, cutting trees; hand-made shoes manufacturing). He started looking like a peasant, and there is evidence that Tolstoy was more than once mistaken for a simple peasant, and not a representative of the upper class.

The image of Tolstoy the agriculturist created by I. E. Repin (painting “Ploughman. Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy in arable land”, 1887) has turned into a meme and continues an active life in the Internet space. In Smagin’s (2011) caricature, a corpulent muse with wings is walking behind a plough against the background of Tolstoy’s portrait.

Tolstoy’s desire for a simple life and rural labour is often played upon in online anecdotes. They ridicule the desire of Tolstoy the nobleman to live like a peasant, it is presented as whim, strangeness, absurdity or ostentatious action (Verner, 1997).

### **6.5. Role model (a moral compass / an immoral compass)**

This opposition is presented in the film “What Men Still Talk About” (2011, directed by D. Dyachenko) in the most concentrated form. The heroes of the film argue that Leo Tolstoy is both a moral and an immoral compass for a modern person (meaning the myth that the writer had many illegitimate children in a peasant environment). This fragment of the film is posted on the YouTube channel and is

very popular, as is evident by hundreds of thousands of views. This is obviously due to the fact that the Russian people's idea of Leo Tolstoy as a moral and at the same time immoral compass coincides with his film image.

The considered stereotype is supported in collective consciousness by Tolstoy's image as the head of the family. The Tolstoy family seemed ideal for many years. However, after a turning point in Tolstoy's worldview, the idyll ended. In this regard, an ambivalent assessment of the writer's personality arises in the collective consciousness: Tolstoy first appears as an ideal family man, and then as a domestic tyrant. The cartoon video posted on the YouTube channel for the song "About Leo Tolstoy, a Difficult Man" (words by V. Schreiber, A. Okhrimenko and S. Christie), which depicts the writer's family drama, consisting in the ideological spouses' disagreements: "From this in their family / Was an eternal and serious discord: / He was reproached for villainy, / It was not at all his fault", in a form stylized as urban yard folklore, is widely popular. In the cartoon by A. Yakovlev, Tolstoy waves a flag to the driver leading the train to Sofya Andreevna, tied to the rails. The writer holds a pen in his other hand, apparently intending to capture the finale of the "Anna Karenina" novel (Yakovlev, 2020).

#### **6.6. A person assessed by the society in terms of his conformity to current life guidelines (a pioneer of many modern fashionable trends / a traditionalist)**

In the collective consciousness, Tolstoy, striving for simplification in the last years of his life, is associated with a barefoot, bearded man dressed in a simple shirt (a modern man's traditional idea about a pre-revolutionary peasant), which is reflected in the "Russian Association Dictionary" edited by Karaulov et al. (2002): the stimulus word *Tolstoy* caused 42 reactions, among which there were ones supporting this stereotype: *beard, bearded, old man*.

In contrast to this, Tolstoy in the modern media scene does not appear as a traditionalist at all, but, on the contrary, as the initiator of modern fashionable hobbies: an article by Bessmertnaya (2016), posted on the Kommersant newspaper's website, is called "Leo Tolstoy as a hipster. Normcore, bookcrossing, weightlifting and other entertainment in Yasnaya Polyana". Popular on the net hashtag *#levwtolstovke* [*#leointolstovka*]. Tolstoy is often portrayed as a person who keeps up to the youth style of dress. At the same time, a wordplay is often used: "*Tolstoy in tolstovka*", "*Tolstoy's tolstovka*", where *tolstovka* is no longer a simple writer's blouse, but one of the modern warm clothes types. Tolstoy's portrait is often used as a print on hoodies. It is accompanied by inscriptions representing well-known writer's sayings, phrases attributed to him or comments such as: "Tolstoy is my homeboy", proving the relevance of the writer's image in the modern youth environment.

## **7. Conclusion**

Therefore, in the course of the study, stereotypical (including mythological) notion of Leo Tolstoy have been revealed, and their reflections in digital culture have been analyzed. Tolstoy's images in modern visual content emphasize the writer's contradictory personality and our attitude towards it, which is expressed in the axiological vector ambivalence of its perception and transmission.

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