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**SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN M. O. MENSHIKOV
AND S. A. TOLSTAYA IN THE CONTEXT OF EVOLUTION OF THE ESSAY WRITER'S VIEWS**

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Abstract

The article analyzes the specific features of the relationship between M.O. Menshikov and S.A. Tolstaya reflected in the notes written by the essay writer and the countess, their correspondence, essays, and memoirs. The peculiarities of how Menshikov depicted the personality of Tolstaya are described. The research shows how the perception of Tolstaya by the essay writer was changing in close connection with his comprehension of L.N. Tolstoy's personality and writings and the evolution of his views. The article adds to the image of the writer's wife; based on her diary entries it is pointed out that Menshikov's essays were of great interest to the whole Tolstoy family and were read out loud in the family circle up to 1916.

Keywords

M. O. Menshikov – S. A. Tolstaya – Notebooks – Correspondence – Essays – Personality

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Introduction

At the current stage of the development of journalism history, scholars put a lot of effort into studying the legacy of a famous Russian essay writer Mikhail Osipovich Menshikov (1859–1918). The processes that are taking place include comprehension of the cultural dialog between the journalist and his contemporaries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, analysis of his political, social, literary, critical, philosophical, and futuristic views, active exploration of his biography and artistic legacy, identification of the strengths and weaknesses of his essays, and determining the significance of his works for the modern time.

From the perspective of comprehension of Menshikov's life and creative work, it is extremely important to explore his close cooperation with the most outstanding men of letters of his time: N.S. Leskov, A.P. Chekhov, and L.N. Tolstoy.

In the last decade of the 19th century, thoughtful readers saw Menshikov as an interesting and sincere conversationalist. The Tolstoy family were avid readers. Articles by Menshikov published in Gaideburov's populist titles, the literary newspaper "Nedelya", and the magazine "Knizhki 'Nedeli'", especially those connected with L.N. Tolstoy's writings ("The 13th volume of Count L.N. Tolstoy's writings (1891), "The first writing by Count L.N. Tolstoy. With respect to the 40th anniversary of his literary work" (1892), "Work of conscience" (devoted to the article "Non-Activity" by Count L.N. Tolstoy)] (1893), "Lead astray" (devoted to the short story "Master and man" by Count L.N. Tolstoy) (1895), "Mistakes of fear" (1896), etc.) were noticed and read by the writer's family. These and many other works did not only encourage Menshikov to grow closer with Tolstoy but also allowed him to enter the writer's family circle.

The relationship between Menshikov and Tolstoy, their correspondence, literary and socio-political dialog, and the writer's influence on Menshikov represent the subject matter of a few large scientific works¹. However, Tolstoy's wife has nearly always been overlooked by researchers as a member of relationships with the essay writer. Among Menshikov's works, there are articles, letters, and notebooks where the essay writer reflected upon the figure of Sophia Andreyevna Tolstaya. In the diaries, notes, and correspondence of the great writer's wife, there are also a lot of references to the famous essay writer and his artistic work.

Methods

In the course of the study, such empirical methods were used as observation and sampling of textual sources from archives of newspapers, journals, and scientific literature looking at this topic. The comparative method was also important within the framework of this research and allowed us to identify the difference in Menshikov's attitude to L.N. Tolstoy and S.A. Tolstaya.

¹ D. V. Zhavoronkov, Pisatel i ego kritik: pisma M. O. Menshikova L. N. Tolstomu 1890-nachala 1900 gg. Filologiya: nauchnye issledovaniya num 3 (2018): 75–89. Retrieved from: https://nbpublish.com/library_read_article.php?id=26881; G. V. Zhirkov, Se chelovek... Publitsisticheskoe slovo L. N. Tolstogo k cheloveku i chelovechestvu: Monograph (Moscow: Flinta, 2019); N. I. Krizhanovsky, Publitsistika M.O. Menshikova v kontekste kritiko-filosofskoi mysli rubezha 19 – 20 vekov: Monograph (Armavir: RIO AGPA, 2012); S. M. Sankova y A. S. Orlov, Mikhail Menshikov (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2017) y V. B. Trofimova, "M.O. Menshikov kak literaturnyi kritik", Literaturovedcheskii zhurnal num 35 (2014): 198–224.

The close connection of the explored issue with the biographies of the above-mentioned people and the need for analysis of the cultural atmosphere conditioned the usage of the biographical and culture-historical methods. In the course of work with texts written by Menshikov, S.A. Tolstaya, and L.N. Tolstoy, techniques of linguistic and typological analysis were used.

Results

The research identifies the difference in the attitude of a famous Russian essay writer Menshikov to L.N. Tolstoy and S.A. Tolstaya. The article shows the evolution of Menshikov's views on Tolstoy's socio-philosophical standpoint. The dual nature and changes in Menshikov's opinion of the writer's wife are analyzed. A significant result of this research is that it sheds light on one more aspect of Menshikov's life, namely his relationship with the wife of the great Russian writer over one and a half decades. Menshikov's originally controversial, sometimes cynical opinion of the countess was later enriched by understanding her life drama and internal tension. In the course of reflection upon the personality of Tolstaya, Menshikov also pays attention to her internal roughness, lack of delicacy, and the wish to emphasize her own tough position in the family.

The results of this research suggest that one more step has been taken towards creating a chronicle of Menshikov's life and artistic work.

Discussion

One of the first scientific works shedding light on Menshikov's attitude to Tolstaya was published in 1980 in the historico-biographical almanac "Prometei" and remains largely unknown today². The article contains long extracts from the essay writer's notebooks, which reflect "the best time of his relationship with Tolstoy". The article is accompanied by a preface and comments by A.S. Melkova.

These notes reflect Menshikov's perception of the wife of the great Russian writer and show, on the one hand, his sensitivity and, on the other hand, his inclination towards criticism and harshness of opinions. For example, the description of Menshikov's visit to Yasnaya Polyana on 20 August 1896 contains a slightly retouched but critical portrayal of Sophia Andreyevna. Citing what the countess said about L.I. Veselitskaya, Mikhail Osipovich conveys her attempts to show off and the primitiveness of her speech. The author deliberately includes repetitions ("good" twice and "love" three times), contrived excitement, and similar structures in her quotes ("Why has she forgotten us?... Oh, how good it would be! I love her sincerely — if I love someone, I do love them sincerely...")³. Meanwhile, Menshikov's comment on the countess's words is extremely short: "About Lida"⁴.

In the letter to A.P. Chekhov written on the same day from Yasnaya Polyana, Menshikov describes his meeting with the "lionesses" — the writer's wife and daughters Tatyana and Maria — in more detail. Having found out that the guest came to them from Chekhov, they asked why the writer did not come over as well. Menshikov tells the addressee how he, with the "delicacy" "typical" of him, explained that Chekhov "did not want

² M. O. Menshikov, Iz zapisnykh knizhek, in: Prometei: a historico-biographical almanac from the series "Life of outstanding people" (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 1980).

³ M. O. Menshikov, Iz zapisnykh knizhek... 248.

⁴ M. O. Menshikov, Iz zapisnykh knizhek... 248.

to bother” the hosts⁵. Further in the letter he quotes the reply of Tolstoy’s wife ironically, “Sophia Andreevna, with her typical delicacy, stated that it was so depressing that whole crowds of jerks besiege their house while nice people who they value feel shy to come...”⁶. The humorous and ironic tone of these lines was created by Menshikov with the help of a recurrent reference to the “delicacy” of speech “typical” of the participants of this conversation and a sharp semantic contrast between the words indicating the “delicacy” of Sophia Andreyevna’s speech and the phrase “whole crowds of jerks besiege our house”⁷. The reader can also feel Menshikov’s self-deprecating humor in this dialog since he could also be called a “jerk” in this situation.

On 21 August 1896, the essay writer defined Tolstoy’s attitude to his wife figuratively: it resembles God’s attitude to nature. If Menshikov were to create corresponding mythology, “he would portray the Supreme spirit being in love with the matter”⁸. However, this metaphor is followed by a rhetorical question, partly depreciating the high comparison, “On the sidelines, why would the absolute mind, blissful in its tranquility, spend time and energy to animate nature?”⁹. While at the beginning of the note, the perception of the writer and his wife is unambiguously poetical (“God” and “nature”), at the end the author’s slightly disparaging attitude to the woman comes out: the supreme and self-sufficient principle does not at all need to “spend time and energy to animate nature”.

In his notes about meeting with Tolstoy in Yasnaya Polyana in 1900, Menshikov does not mention the writer’s wife. When the essay writer visited Tolstoy in Yasnaya Polyana in 1901, he made some controversial notes. For example, on 7 July, Menshikov wrote that when he was walking through the rooms of Tolstoy’s house, he said hello to “Sophia Andreyevna, who was wearing something white and pottering around in the corner”¹⁰. This description reflects a detached perception of the woman. On the same day, Menshikov made a note about an extract from a dialog between Sophia Andreyevna and her husband. When “she laid his chest with cotton wool, rubbed his feet with spirit, and his stomach — with a mixture of oil and chloroform”, Leo Nikolaevich uttered fondly, “Dear, do not think that I am not grateful to you”¹¹. The writer’s words retold by Sophia Andreyevna to Menshikov, as well as deliberate enumeration of what she had done for her husband on that day, testify to certain show-off of hers but do not diminish her care for Tolstoy and his sincere gratitude.

Menshikov finished off this note with the words said by Sophia Andreyevna proving her attention to her husband and the desire to prevent his illnesses, “I begged him not to go. ‘Collect yourself, it is cold,’ I said. <...> Well, you cannot force him to stay anyway. So he went there and returned stiff with cold...”¹².

The note made on 13 July 1901 in Yasnaya Polyana shows that Menshikov continued reflecting upon the internal moral difference between the spouses critically, “From the very first word of our conversation, the countess started talking of herself, as usual. She told me that she was terribly tired, that she could hardly breathe because of all those worries

⁵ Anton Chekhov i ego kritik Mikhail Menshikov: perepiska, dnevniki, vospominaniya, stati: Content, articles, preparation of texts, and notes by A.S. Melkova (Moscow: Russkii put, 2005), 82.

⁶ Anton Chekhov i ego kritik Mikhail Menshikov... 82.

⁷ Anton Chekhov i ego kritik Mikhail Menshikov... 82.

⁸ M. O. Menshikov, Iz zapisnykh knizhek... 249.

⁹ M. O. Menshikov, Iz zapisnykh knizhek... 249.

¹⁰ M. O. Menshikov, Iz zapisnykh knizhek... 250.

¹¹ M. O. Menshikov, Iz zapisnykh knizhek... 251.

¹² M. O. Menshikov, Iz zapisnykh knizhek... 252.

(while looking absolutely healthy), that she never thinks of herself and always of others, etc. This is her mania to bring all topics back to herself and speak only of herself"¹³. Many components of this quote are indicative of Menshikov's attitude to Sophia Andreyevna: emphasizing her habits ("as usual"), the comment on her looks contrasting with her complaint about being tired ("while looking absolutely healthy") as well as the final diagnosis: "mania... to speak only of herself"¹⁴. On the one hand, the note conveys the peacockery shown by the writer's wife to her guest through her constant desire to emphasize her significance and suffering. On the other hand, it shows Menshikov's unfavorable attitude to her.

In his notes, the essay writer renders the feeling of growing discord in the Tolstoy family, which lead to the Tolstoy's flight from his house in 1910. Watching the count's wife in 1901 and reflecting upon the results of the years-long family life of the spouses as well as Sophia Andreyevna's state of mind, Menshikov observes bitterly, "...the great husband, who made her bear his seed 13 times nine months each, i.e. for nearly ten years, transforming her through her common life with the baby, was not able to communicate his genius to her; instead, he brought her closer to insanity"¹⁵.

Menshikov shows the writer's wife as a person similar to Chekhov's "darling" (he puts this word in Tolstoy's mouth in his notes¹⁶), who changed drastically and sometimes contradicted herself. For instance, the countess complains that "only now she understands to which degree she has lost the opportunity to live her life for herself, giving it to other people, to her husband and children — now their children have grown up and her husband is dying — and she will remain lonely, like in the desert, unable to lead her own life"¹⁷. After complaining about her life, about the fact that "everything has been taken away from her, even her soul", Sophia Andreyevna says that "only now has she understood her mistake, which was to marry a man so much older than her"¹⁸. Menshikov feels the inconsistency of the words said by Sophia Andreyevna and comments her speech sharply in brackets, "She is lying — she has always been complaining about it, and very tactlessly indeed, and now, at the age of 57 she cannot forget that she is 16 years younger than her husband".

Explaining the reason of such behavior shown by the countess, the essay writer notes cynically, "obviously, Sophia Andreyevna still feels like a woman who needs a man and is trying to put on youthful airs"¹⁹, for "she is wearing total white, lace, and has a becoming hairstyle"²⁰. The "final chord" of Menshikov's note is a phrase the countess "endlessly repeats about L.N.'s illness" and from whom it sounds no less cynical than Menshikov's above-cited observation, "Anyway, it cannot last for a long time, he won't endure long"²¹. The meaning of this undersong heard and recorded by Menshikov is clear: he observed an exhausted woman who spoke her wishes out loud.

In early May 1902, in Countess Panina's country house in Gaspra Menshikov saw Sophia Andreyevna as a completely different person: caring and seriously worried about her

¹³ M. O. Menshikov, Iz zapisnykh knizhek... 252.

¹⁴ M. O. Menshikov, Iz zapisnykh knizhek... 252.

¹⁵ M. O. Menshikov, Iz zapisnykh knizhek... 252.

¹⁶ M. O. Menshikov, Iz zapisnykh knizhek... 251.

¹⁷ M. O. Menshikov, Iz zapisnykh knizhek... 252.

¹⁸ M. O. Menshikov, Iz zapisnykh knizhek... 252.

¹⁹ M. O. Menshikov, Iz zapisnykh knizhek... 252.

²⁰ M. O. Menshikov, Iz zapisnykh knizhek... 252.

²¹ M. O. Menshikov, Iz zapisnykh knizhek... 252.

husband's health. Her concentration on her husband is reflected in the description of Tolstoy having breakfast on a sofa and in the telegram about Tolstoy's condition sent to the doctor Shchurovskii by the countess with a strong recommendation to visit them²². Although the notes do not contain a detailed description of these episodes or corresponding comments, Menshikov's letter to L.I. Veselitskaya (of 2 May 1902) has been preserved, where the essay writer describes the countess's behavior in detail. According to Menshikov, Sophia Andreyevna, who has come to Gaspra after a few days of being away, "is still brilliant in her role of a sovereign mistress"²³. Having returned from Moscow, she found her husband with an upset stomach and "immediately took everything in her own hands": from the menu to control of the chamber pot²⁴. However, in this letter the essay writer also conveys certain show-off of Tolstoy's wife: Mikhail Osipovich notes that Sophia Andreyevna was "terribly flattered" when Tolstoy said that after her departure to Moscow he "waited for her all the time"²⁵. The countess even said, "He has told it to me for the first time!"²⁶, which the author commented in the following way, "Probably, for the thousand and first time." Sophia Andreyevna "thought it over and agreed with me"²⁷.

In the notes and letters under examination Menshikov shows what caught his eye in Sophia Andreyevna: narrow-mindedness, egotism, the wish to exhibit herself and make a show of her intense work, to emphasize her disadvantaged, undeservedly humiliating position in the family. The essay writer got a deep feel of the psychological reasons for such behavior of Tolstoy's wife, i.e. her tiredness of family worries and routines. This assumption was proved by a publication of a cycle of poems in prose in the third issue of the literary magazine "Zhurnal dlya vsekh" [Magazine for all] with a self-explanatory title "Stony" [Moans] under a nickname "Tired", the recurrent motif of which is "the moaning voice of the main female character — a lonely woman tired of grief and losses", and the narrator has a lot in common with Tolstaya²⁸.

Sophia Andreyevna's daily cares and her commitment to her family and husband were sidelined by the essay writer. In our opinion, the negative characteristics of Leo Tolstoy's wife in Menshikov's notes are connected with the contrast seen by the essay writer when he was observing the Tolstoy couple: the husband's grandeur (which Menshikov admired), his self-forgetfulness, internal delicacy, and aspirations for the high religious, philosophical, and moral spheres of life were contrasted with his wife's roughness of feelings, earthliness, being absorbed with everyday routines, small-mindedness, and even egotism. It appears that it happened because the essay writer had different expectations of meeting Tolstoy's wife. Sophia Andreyevna saw the tragic inconsistency in her family life herself. In her memoirs "My life" she wrote, "...my poor dear husband kept waiting for that spiritual unity from me, which was nearly impossible given my material life and cares that I could not escape. I would not have been able to share his spiritual life only by word of mouth..."²⁹.

²² M. O. Menshikov, *Iz zapisnykh knizhek...* 253.

²³ Anton Chekhov i ego kritik Mikhail Menshikov... 212.

²⁴ Anton Chekhov i ego kritik Mikhail Menshikov... 212.

²⁵ Anton Chekhov i ego kritik Mikhail Menshikov... 212.

²⁶ Anton Chekhov i ego kritik Mikhail Menshikov... 212.

²⁷ Anton Chekhov i ego kritik Mikhail Menshikov... 212.

²⁸ Yu.G. Baikova, *Liricheskie dnevniki S.A. Tolstoi (tsikl stikhotvorenii v proze "Stony")*, in: L.N. Tolstoy – eto tselyi mir: Materials of the 31st International Tolstoy Readings devoted to Leo Tolstoy's 180th anniversary (Tula: Tula State Lev Tolstoy Pedagogical University Publishing, 2008), 38.

²⁹ S. A. Tolstaya, *Moya zhizn. Prometei: a historico-biographical almanac from the series "Life of outstanding people"* (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 1980), 193.

Menshikov's relationship with the Tolstoy couple continued after 1902. In 1902–1903, the essay writer softly expressed his disagreement with Tolstoy's philosophy and his interpretation of Christian teachings (refer to the article "Science and the dark god" (January 1902) and "Conversation about war and peace" (January 1903)). Most importantly, Menshikov's internal growth took place over this period connected with understanding the role of Orthodox Christianity in the life of the Russian civilization. Therefore, arguing with apologetics of paganism presented in the works by V.V. Rozanov, in his cycle "Letters to neighbors", Menshikov published articles "The foul things in paganism" (October 1902) and "About the coffin and the cradle" (November 1902) in defense of Christianity. Later, when the Russo-Japanese War started, he developed the topic of Orthodox Christianity on the articles "Motherland and heroes" and "Eternal Sunday" (April 1904).

Rejection of the pacifist views of Tolstoy, which manifested themselves during the war, served as a trigger for Menshikov's criticism of Tolstoy in the article "Tolstoy, Mendeleev, Vereshchagin" (August 1904). In many articles that were published after 1904 ("Two prophets" (1907), "Leo Tolstoy as a journalist" (1908), "Tolstoy and power" (1908), "Is Count Tolstoy suffering?" (1910), "Falsehood of Tolstoy's views" (1912), etc.), Menshikov condemns Tolstoy's anti-state and anti-religious anarchistic essays. However, up to 1906, they continued seeing each other, and their correspondence finished only in 1908.

Researchers have also pointed out many times that Menshikov's negative attitude to Tolstoy's journalism and social position reflected in his articles of the second half of the 1900s and in the 1910s coexisted in Menshikov's consciousness with great and constant reverence for Tolstoy as an artist^{30,31,32}.

Tolstaya's diaries and daily planners testify to steady interest in Menshikov's creative work of the whole Tolstoy family. From 1897 to 1916, reading of the articles by the essay writer from "Novoe vremya" in the family circle is mentioned six times in these sources³³. By contrast, reading the works by another famous author of newspaper articles, V.V. Rozanov, is mentioned by Sophia Andreyevna only once, in 1913 — after Tolstoy's death³⁴. Some of Menshikov's articles were of special interest to Tolstoy's wife. For example, after reading the essay "On physical love" (originally — "Parts of a novel. On physical love") published in 1897 in the September issue of "Knizhki 'Nedeli'" Sophia Andreyevna makes a few personal notes, which echo with Menshikov's ideas. For instance, Menshikov describes his understanding of ideal upbringing, "In advance, from the date of birth, it is necessary to do everything so that a young man (for which read "any person" — N.I. Krizhanovsky) is a master of this passion rather than its slave..."³⁵. Feeling alike to what she read, the countess writes about her life experience that is similar to this thought, "... all those affections for my husband and other people in my life have always been stronger in the sphere of soul, art, and mind than in the sphere of physical attraction"³⁶.

The main message of this diary entry is connected with Sophia Andreyevna's desire to overcome all corporeal aspects and get closer to the spiritual ones so that after death she can reside next to her son Vanechka, who she loved dearly and who died at an early age,

³⁰ N. I. Krizhanovsky, *Publitsistika M.O. Menshikova...* 67-68.

³¹ G. V. Zhirkov, *Se chelovek...* Publitsisticheskoe slovo... 689.

³² D. V. Zhavoronkov, *Pisatel i ego kritik: pisma...*

³³ G. V. Zhirkov, *Se chelovek...* Publitsisticheskoe slovo... 676.

³⁴ S. A. Tolstaya, *Dnevnik*. In two volumes. Vol. 2... 402.

³⁵ S. M. Sankova y A. S. Orlov, *Mikhail Menshikov...* 470.

³⁶ S. A. Tolstaya, *Dnevnik*. In two volumes. Vol. 2... 305.

“May God help me to leave the physical sphere, refine my soul spiritually, and with a pure heart enter the sphere where my Vanechka resides”³⁷. This quote is similar to the following extract by Menshikov, “The supreme good requires the body to serve as a *tool* (italics by Menshikov — N.I. Krizhanovsky) of the spirit...”³⁸.

The tragic life of her dear son Vanechka who died at the age of six was constantly present in Sophia Andreyevna’s diary and materialized into a separate biographical narration “Vanechka’s death”. In it the countess cites an extract from Menshikov’s letter, “Even the cold Menshikov wrote about him, ‘When O saw your little son, I thought that he would either die or become a greater genius than his father’”³⁹. Sophia Andreyevna’s dislike for the essay writer is obvious (“even the cold”), but one can also notice her motherly recognition of his rightness: Vanechka’s parents, many relatives, and acquaintances of the Tolstoy family saw the sickly child as an outstanding person who had spiritually developed at an early age.

Most likely, Sophia Andreyevna’s interest in Menshikov’s publications on family topics is explained by her constant thoughts about her children and the deceased Vanechka. On 7 January 1899 she wrote, “In the evening I read “The beginning of life” by Menshikov about the significance of children’s lives”⁴⁰. Reflections on children’s lives were featured in the chapter “Children” of the above-mentioned essay published in “Knizhki ‘Nedeli’” in December 1898.

The entry in the countess’s notebook made on 21 August 1898 is of particular interest. Firstly, it says, “Menshikov stayed with us for a couple of days, but there were only a few interesting conversations with him this time”⁴¹. The last two words prove that there had been some interesting conversations with Menshikov in his previous visits. Secondly, Sophia Andreyevna shows that Menshikov, just like her, understands the controversies in Tolstoy’s social position and does not put up with them, “Today he told Masha that he does not approve of the fact that L.N. started asking rich people for money to help the Doukhobors (“Spirit Wrestlers”). As for me, I have never been able to understand how one can live, write, and speak as controversially as L.N. always does”⁴².

When in 1904 Menshikov started actively criticizing Tolstoy’s socio-political speeches, no significant reaction appeared in Sophia Andreyevna’s diaries and notes. She hardly reacts to both negative and positive aspects of the dialog between the essay writer and her husband. For example, in her note of 11 August 1906, she writes the following about a debate between Menshikov and Tolstoy in Yasnaya Polyana, “Menshikov has come, some unpleasant conversations with Leo Nikolaevich”⁴³. In her note about family reading of Menshikov’s article “Two Russias” about Nesterov’s painting “Holy Russia” on 23 January 1907, she writes, “... Leo Nikolaevich really liked it, and he wrote a letter to Menshikov”⁴⁴.

³⁷ S. A. Tolstaya, Dnevnik. In two volumes. Vol. 2... 305.

³⁸ S. A. Tolstaya, Dnevnik. In two volumes. Vol. 2... 469.

³⁹ S. A. Tolstaya, Dnevnik. In two volumes. Vol. 2... 516.

⁴⁰ Tolstaya, S. A. Dnevnik. In two volumes. Vol. 1. 1862–1900 (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1978), 439.

⁴¹ S. A. Tolstaya, Dnevnik. In two volumes. Vol. 1... 403.

⁴² S. A. Tolstaya, Dnevnik. In two volumes. Vol. 1... 403.

⁴³ S. A. Tolstaya, Dnevnik. In two volumes. Vol. 2... 252.

⁴⁴ S. A. Tolstaya, Dnevnik. In two volumes. Vol. 2... 259.

Sophia Andreyevna starts writing negative reviews of the works by the essay writer in her diaries only after Tolstoy's death. For instance, when the article "Falsehood of Tolstoy's views" was published on 10 November 1912, two days later (on 12 November) the countess wrote, "I spent the whole evening reading articles about L.N. in 'Solntse Rossii' and Menshikov's vicious article in 'Novoe vremya'..."⁴⁵. In 1916, Sophia Andreyevna makes the last note about Menshikov, "In the evening Leva read to us a mere collection of boring words in an article by Menshikov"⁴⁶.

It is interesting to compare Tolstoy's and his wife's reaction to Menshikov's sharp criticism of the writer's opposition to the authorities and church in 1908. On 4 July, some Russian newspapers ("Russkie vedomosti", "Slovo", "Rech", "Sovremennoe slovo", and others) published the article "I cannot be silent" by Tolstoy, which condemned executions of revolutionaries by the government. In response to this piece, Menshikov wrote the articles "Leo Tolstoy as a journalist" (13 July) and "Tolstoy and power" (10 August) published in "Novoe vremya". As Tolstoy's secretary N.N. Gusev points out, Menshikov's works "did not only touch upon the writer himself but also upon his family"⁴⁷. Indeed, apart from emphasizing the weakness of Tolstoy's journalistic talent, the essay writer described the disastrous state of peasants in Yasnaya Polyana. Besides, Menshikov mentioned the wish of the writer's family announced by Chertkov to the public to sell the landlord estate in Yasnaya Polyana for public funds and distribute the land among peasants for free.

Sophia Andreyevna was the first one to write a response to Menshikov. Her letter expresses extreme contempt for the "sly ever-wabbling newspaper writer playing both sides of the fence"⁴⁸. The countess accuses Menshikov of biased spreading of false ridiculous information about the buy-out of Tolstoy's landlord estate by the public and the poverty of the peasants from Yasnaya Polyana and reprimands him for using the name of Tolstoy "for his own profit"⁴⁹. The final lines of the letter show a great degree of irritation felt by the writer's wife, "Mr. Menshikov does not understand that no matter how he stretches forward or snaps his tiny poisonous pincers, it is in his power to put out an oily candle but not the sun shining over the whole world"⁵⁰.

Tolstaya's letter was published in major newspapers, including "Russkoe slovo" with a very large circulation. In Menshikov's response under the title "The buy-out of Yasnaya Polyana", his opponent's letter is cited in full, i.e. the essay writer gave her an opportunity to speak from the stage of "Novoe vremya", showing the readers the tone of her speech. The essay writer brings a few accusations against the countess, partly mirroring her own accusations against him. Firstly, he accuses Tolstaya of lack of modesty and offending the proprieties: the article was addressed not the wife of "the public figure", who responded "so loudly"⁵¹ but to Tolstoy himself, "Is it decent for the countess to write a "response" when nobody addressed her?"⁵². Secondly, Menshikov accuses Tolstaya of a surprising change in her attitudes.

⁴⁵ S. A. Tolstaya, Dnevnik. In two volumes. Vol. 2... 382.

⁴⁶ S. A. Tolstaya, Dnevnik. In two volumes. Vol. 2... 434.

⁴⁷ N. N. Gusev, Pismo Tolstogo k Menshikovu, in: Literaturnoe nasledstvo, vol. 37–38 (Moscow: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1939), 187.

⁴⁸ M. O. Menshikov, Vykup Yasnoi Polyany, in: Pisma k blizhnim (St. Petersburg: Izdanie M.O. Menshikova, 1908), 518

⁴⁹ M. O. Menshikov, Vykup Yasnoi Polyany... 518.

⁵⁰ M. O. Menshikov, Vykup Yasnoi Polyany... 518.

⁵¹ M. O. Menshikov, Vykup Yasnoi Polyany... 518.

⁵² M. O. Menshikov, Vykup Yasnoi Polyany... 518.

Even a remote hint about alienation of her property turned out to be extremely worrying for Sophia Andreyevna and made her forget “her kind words and letter” and express “contempt for a person” who touched upon “her sacred right of ownership”⁵³. The third accusation is her neglect of her husband’s interests, who is “ill and elderly and preparing for an event of greatest importance for him”, therefore he would have hardly been interested in Menshikov’s article, but the letter written by the countess “not in *his* tone and not in *his* (italics by Menshikov — N.I. Krizhanovsky) language”⁵⁴ “will be great distress for him”⁵⁵. In the fourth place, the essay writer accuses Tolstaya of deceiving readers when she was describing the state of peasants in Yasnaya Polyana and when she accused Menshikov of rendering Chertkov’s words in a wrong way⁵⁶. The fifth accusation concerns the unskillful usage of expressive means in the phrase “the sun shining over the whole world”. Menshikov writes, “I imagine how the old genius will grit his teeth if he reads this indelicacy! <...> On top of all, the pompous hyperbole is meaningless. There has never been and there isn’t a person recognized globally”⁵⁷. In the sixth place, Menshikov accuses the countess of her intention to publish Tolstoy’s social and political writings in 25 volumes at the expense of the public. “They are uninteresting, these writings, and, in spite of being forbidden, they are not gaining popularity”⁵⁸. The seventh accusation is aimed at Sophia Andreyevna’s desire to control money belonging to a different person and live at their expense, using their fame. “I do not publish other people’s writings, I do not make use of other people’s work, I am not trying to bring my name into repute or gain publicity due to somebody else’s enormous fame”⁵⁹.

Later Tolstoy responded to the article “Tolstoy and power” by Menshikov. It is considered in the message addressed to the essay writer of 21 August 1908, which Tolstoy wanted to keep secret, unknown to his family and the general public. This is proved by the text of the message and confirmed by Tolstoy’s secretary N.N. Gusev⁶⁰. Expressing the characteristic idea of forgiveness, love for hateful people, and nonresistance, Tolstoy writes that he did not feel “an unpleasant feeling” after reading the article — on the contrary, he felt “not just emerging friendliness but real love for you, this very love for the people who insult me, the type of love I have been longing for and which I only rarely feel”, “love without the possibility of any exceptions, love for the hateful, insulting, and driving you away”⁶¹. The final sentence in Tolstoy’s letter (“If you want to reply to me in the same spirit as I am writing to you, I will be very glad”⁶² is a testament to Tolstoy’s openness and longing for mutual reconciliation with Menshikov, his hopes for understanding and forgiveness. However, the “great Leo’s” position in respect of executions of rebels remains the same, “It is also clear to me... that very soon it will seem very strange that people like you can defend the idea of executions”⁶³. According to Gusev, Menshikov did not respond to this message. It appears that the lack of reply can be explained by Menshikov’s understanding of Tolstoy’s unwillingness to see the real reasons for the executions and the fact that the writer applied his philosophy where it was the most destructive since it would leave murders and robberies committed by revolutionaries unpunished.

⁵³ M. O. Menshikov, *Vykup Yasnoi Polyany*... 518.

⁵⁴ M. O. Menshikov, *Vykup Yasnoi Polyany*... 519.

⁵⁵ M. O. Menshikov, *Vykup Yasnoi Polyany*... 519.

⁵⁶ M. O. Menshikov, *Vykup Yasnoi Polyany*... 520.

⁵⁷ M. O. Menshikov, *Vykup Yasnoi Polyany*... 520.

⁵⁸ M. O. Menshikov, *Vykup Yasnoi Polyany*... 521.

⁵⁹ M. O. Menshikov, *Vykup Yasnoi Polyany*... 522.

⁶⁰ N. N. Gusev, *Pismo Tolstogo k Menshikovu*... 188.

⁶¹ N. N. Gusev, *Pismo Tolstogo k Menshikovu*... 187.

⁶² N. N. Gusev, *Pismo Tolstogo k Menshikovu*... 188.

⁶³ N. N. Gusev, *Pismo Tolstogo k Menshikovu*... 188.

Besides, in November 1910 in his article “The crisis of Tolstoyism”, Menshikov wrote that sometimes he did not reply to Tolstoy’s messages because he did not want his correspondence to be publicly announced. “I have been flatteringly suggested by Tolstoy to exchange letters several times but nearly refrained from doing it due to different reasons, mainly because I knew the nasty habit of Tolstoy’s secretaries to make copies of his letters immediately and sometimes spread them in the public”⁶⁴.

The conceptual difference between the examined responses of Tolstoy and his wife to Menshikov is that the author of “War and peace” writes without anger, hides the message from the public, and tries to influence the addressee’s conscience and ethics. Sophia Andreyevna speaks out loud in public, tries to win over the public opinion by sending her response to newspapers and making a fuss. Tolstoy called for love and repeated his beliefs calmly while Tolstaya wrote about the issues connected with the material well-being of the estate in Yasnaya Polyana that worried her ignoring her husband’s position and expressed her anger using excessively vivid figures of speech.

It seems that as a result of public disclosure, in “Novoe Vremya” Menshikov responded only to Tolstoy’s wife, reminding that he did not intend to hurt her in the article and only wanted to point out the inconsistency of Tolstoy’s attitude to private property as a thinker.

Soon after the writer’s death, in the article “In memory of L.N. Tolstoy”, Menshikov recalls the grandeur of the novelist’s personality, “Whenever you came to Tolstoy’s house and no matter how heated your dispute with him was, you felt instinctively that you were facing a big, tense, passionate, fanatical soul looking for God and *faithful* to Him (italics by Menshikov). You could always feel that he was not an indifferent person, that what interested him was not petty things but the greatest things ever, that he was excited to death in the presence of an undiscovered Deity, which fills and surrounds us”⁶⁵.

Conclusions

The research sheds light on another aspect of Menshikov’s life and creative work — his relationship with Tolstaya. This relationship is considered in the context of Menshikov’s artistic interaction with the great writer, evolution of his views, and his correspondence and articles published in the newspapers “Nedelya” and “Novoe vremya”. Menshikov identifies the specific features of Tolstaya’s inner world: judging by the essay writer’s notes, letters, and articles, she combines such characteristics as the aspiration for living for the sake of external, material well-being of her family and husband, inability to accept the spiritual interests of Leo Nikolaevich like her own, dissatisfaction with her position in the family in front of her guests, tiredness of her life full of cares and people, and the desire to use speech in style without having an actual literary talent.

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⁶⁴ M. O. Menshikov, “Krizis Tolstovstva”, *Novoe vremya* num 12462 (1910).

⁶⁵ M. O. Menshikov, “Pamyati L.N. Tolstogo”, *Novoe vremya* num 12451 (1910).

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