Female image of memory-centric happiness of first-wave Russian emigration

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Abstract. In the article, the starting point of the study is the changes in the semantic aspects of the work by Russian emigrant writers of the first wave. These writers bring conceptually significant topics to the pages of their works, thus highlighting the scale of the global catastrophe. It is argued that, under these conditions, an objective pattern is a change in genre preferences, in particular, the emigrant writers' turn to memoir genres as the most relevant in the context of emigration, which in turn entails a change in thematic priorities. Trace the features of the literary representation of the conceptually established understanding of happiness in the conditions of the first-wave emigration on the example of the works by the writers N. Teffi and Z. Shakhovskaya. Methods: comparative biographical analysis, the historical research method, and concept analysis. Unlike the male understanding of happiness by emigrant writers, female authors focus on the detailed (material) world rather than philosophical generalizations associated with history and politics. The very understanding of happiness for female writers, according to the authors, is akin to interpretations of the state of contentment, prosperity, well-being, joy from abundant life. The uniqueness of understanding the concept of "happiness" is primarily due to gender differences. The authors propose to connect the origins of the formation of this worldview with the folklore traditions of the Russian people, in which happiness is described as an emotionally elevated state of human satisfaction. A similar understanding is established in childhood, and its images become key in emigrant works. At the same time, the feminine view is characterized by patriarchal nature and belief in the victory of good over evil.

Keywords: first wave of Russian emigration, émigré literature, concept of "happiness", memorative centrality

1 Introduction

The year 1920 marked the beginning of the Great Exodus – the first wave of Russian emigration caused by the 1917 revolution and civil war. As J. Mianowska rightly noted, the "first wave" became the most active period in the Russian literary émigré community [1].

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According to researchers, the Russian émigré community had clear goals: preserve the memory of pre-revolutionary Russia, its traditions and system of values, which influenced and shaped their work, and, above all, the subject matter of the works. The main motive of many prose and poetic works is “nostalgia” for the lost homeland, memories of a life that was forever a thing of the past [2].

The purpose of this publication is to offer literary studies an underexplored feminine picture of memory-centric happiness in the work by first-wave Russian emigrants, the goal of the study is to trace the gender-based nature of the representation of a given concept using the example of the best Silver-Age writers abroad – N. Teffi and Z. Shakhovskaya.

2 Discussion

The theoretical framework of the study features the works by V.M. Piskunov, O.S. Tkachenko, T.N. Stoyanov, A.M. Novozhilov, A.A. Kuznetsov, A.V. Gromov, and others, where the subject of thorough research was the life and creative journey of prominent first-wave emigrants, however, the question of the features of the female representation of the concept of “happiness” remained on the periphery of research interest. The researchers V.T. Zakharova [3] and N.N. Koznova [4] reveal the genre-related features of émigré work.

The Polish researcher W. Tatarkiewicz [5] in his fundamental work “Analysis of Happiness” identifies the following meanings of the concept of “happiness”: 1) *good fortune, luck*; 2) *a state of intense joy*; 3) *possession of the highest benefits, a positive balance of life*; 4) *feeling satisfied with life*. In the dictionaries of V. Dahl [6], D. Ushakov, S. Ozhegov, happiness is defined as *a state of contentment, prosperity, well-being, joy* from abundant life.

It should be noted that modern studies on the nature of happiness are quite relevant and numerous but most of the studies are devoted to the connection of memories with past happiness and hopes for the future. It is argued that being unhappy can lead to seeing earlier life in an idealistic light. The concept of happiness does not always contain a positive assessment of a state or sensation, but rather contains a favorable perception of one’s life. Therefore, one of the consequences of the conceptualization of happiness is the ability, especially a creative person’s, to form their own sensory and cognitive judgments [7: 12].

3 Methods

A comparative biographical analysis of even a few works by female memoirists makes it possible to explore the features of understanding happiness as a subjective picture of comfort and prosperity, which is closest to childhood, family, and parental home. The historical research method and concept analysis substantiate the place and role of the concept of “happiness” in memoirs determined by a specific sociocultural situation.

4 Results

Childhood, a happy and carefree time, is the object of personal reflection in the work of female emigrant writers. The conceptualization of happiness lost is given through understanding the significance of Russia’s past. A similar technique is typical for most emigrant writers [3, 8].

Nadezhda Teffi expressed her search for worldview beacons in emigration in the following way: “As if frightened and yearning people are rushing about and grabbing at some phantoms, ghosts, delusional dreams. They tried to establish their new terrible life on something new, which was already doomed to die” [9].

In Teffi's work, a subjective assessment of what is happening is combined with lyrical digressions, retro-images. Ethical assessments are revealed in key situations:

- the formation of internal motives of human actions under the influence of external circumstances – fate and change of power;
- gender features of women in crisis conditions of emigration.

Like other emigrant contemporaries, Teffi turned to the genre of memoirs [10]. Restoring the stages of the past life in detail, the writer reveals two typical vectors of narration already in the first chapter of "Memories", echoing the works of I. Shmelev and I. Bunin: "There is no possibility of anything, fate prompts us to go" [11]. Nadezhda Teffi managed to capture the common reason for the departure of thousands upon thousands: the collapse of the previous foundations, fear for oneself and the loved ones, the desire to be freer, obedience to fate, and the will of higher powers. Teffi sees the horror of the historical moment in the fact that the revolution made the ordinary, average person dangerous.

Against this backdrop, there is a nostalgic reconsideration of the previous living conditions, peace, comfort, and stable life that become synonymous with happiness. Therefore, memoirs increasingly feature episodes, lengthy images of the past, especially the lost childhood, in which everyone was happy. The memoirist is trying to restore not so much the facts as the previous sensations, impressions, allowing one to observe the transformation of her worldview which took place from the moment of real events to the time of writing about them. In this context, the joy of finding an abundant shelter is explained as an attempt to return a catastrophically lost past, and the need to leave is indicated by the following significant phrase, "Lucky thing, in Kiev they have pastries filled with cream" [11: 270].

The conceptualization of "happy childhood" and the "home" associated with it occurs under the influence of irresistible forces. Teffi is trying to understand the conflict between character and circumstances. The writer marks a place where there is no anxiety, no fear as home. It can be a random room or a hotel suite, but the most important thing is to feel needed and protected.

It is symptomatic that, even when depicting idyllic childish retro images, N. Teffi does not speak of absolute happiness or peace. The writer often conveys a sense of happiness through ideological antonyms. Feelings of nostalgia, sentimentality, and regret, emotions prevail, details of the situation or the people around it are emphasized.

Zinaida Alekseevna Shakhovskaya also seeks to recreate the world of the past in small but familiar and significant details in her memoirs. Years later, the novelist recalls this time as an extraordinary vision, when shadow-like passers-by glided in the snowy darkness, gas lamps burned, and illuminated windows were reflected in the black Neva – "everything seemed unreal, shaky, vague, and yet it was happiness" [12: 69].

It is noteworthy that for Z. Shakhovskaya as well as for N. Teffi, the idea of happiness as a multidimensional and ambiguous concept is associated with the specific conditions of human existence, fate, values, and ideals characteristic of this era. Thus, both writers have similar interpretations of the phenomenon of happiness that are reflected in fiction and memoirs.

Z. Shakhovskoy's understanding of happiness is based on various standard situations. The dichotomy "Petersburg – Matovo" is a variation of the already well-known comparison "capital – countryside". This is not so much a spatial antinomy as an ideological one. The protagonist of the memoirs seems to be constantly on the border between the real and the unreal worlds, recreates a realistic model of the relationship between the world and the individual through the mention of numerous details. The protagonist notes that in addition to the ordinary life that went on for all to see, she had secrets carefully hidden from strangers. This refers to the first fascination with poetry, and bouts of unreasonable fear, and associative fantasies. At the same time, Shakhovskaya remains within the framework of the realistic type of artistic consciousness.

By including excerpts from letters in the narrative, the writer broadens the range of the reader's knowledge of the old days. Shakhovskoy's selection of events is more associative than logical: the description of a Russian wedding is followed by an image of a funeral ceremony, which the author explains by the need to explain these phenomena to the French reader.

One should note that the narrator, who is observant like a woman, pays a lot of attention to the material world: the task is not just to tell French-speaking readers about the habits of Russian life unknown to them. With each new detail, the narrator's memory moves to a different period, to a different moment of the emotional state.

The tone of her memoirs chosen by the author allows her to combine objective content with an extremely subjective assessment, makes it possible to demonstrate how the novelist is interested in "That world that is gone – the world that could have been mine..." [12: 6]. The writer she does not blame the revolution or other historical upheavals for this, believing that this is what life dictates. The heroine seems to have a premonition that there is no happiness and never will be. Z. Shakhovskaya claims that her "dreams of that time, remembered with particular clarity, were not always so sweet" [12: 52], just that a child's memory most vividly captured extremely happy moments. In every scene from this period, a complex subjective feeling shines through, inspired by subsequent realities, and every detail becomes a kind of allusion to the history of the country. The images introduced by the narrator are quite specific: it is scrutiny through the years. At the same time, the world acts as an integral picture of a life that is gone.

Signs of a happy childhood occur in the stories of female writers for a reason. The process of forming a future personality, raising a child in pre-revolutionary Russia presupposed an unconditional immersion in the mythological world of miracles, folklore traditions of the people, the world of folk tales, traditionally included in the range of children's reading. Reading or listening to fairy tales, future creative personalities certainly absorbed the memory of the family, assimilated the life affirmation and undying optimism characteristic of fairy tales, moral purity and the triumph of good over evil, making up for the absence of these qualities in real life. According to N.B. Kurpant, who researched the literature of the late 19th – early 20th centuries, childhood memories for the narrator are "... the form and way of finding peace and happiness, while the present moment is associated with the problem of choice" [13: 203].

In the process of depicting the reactions characteristic of people of a certain circle in a particular historical period, officers A. Denikin, V. Korsak, V. Obolensky, I. Savin and others use historical prose, journalism, and documentaries as sources. Moreover, a distinctive feature of memoirs by male authors is their focus on reliability and a comprehensive study of the issue, the authors combine an existing toponym with an exact date, while memoir writers freely use factual material. Thus, male emigrant writers see the will of God, politicians, and parents in revolution and emigration. Whereas female subtle and sensitive nature concentrates on fate, on the inevitability of circumstances, assigning herself a passive role.

5 Conclusion

The subconcept "happiness" for female writers is represented in the images of childhood, that is, in the period which, for male emigrants, is nostalgically marked by the loss of peace and serenity of the early years, which is difficult for a maturing personality. In the depiction of happiness, in contrast to the male vision, the female gaze is distinguished by its focus on small things, and dear details.

In émigré prose, the appeal to childhood memories, the revival of a happy and bright world in memory made it possible to indirectly join the basic mythologemes of the East

Slavic picture of the world, finding a means of consolation and, albeit for a short time, replacing and replenishing the missing state of psychological comfort. At the same time, each of the considered writers notes the attachment to the home, emotionally emphasizing and preserving all that is dear in the lost past.

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