Leadership in the Russian literature of the 19th century

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Abstract In the Russian classical literature of 19th century, one can find a variety of leadership patterns, expressed with psychological and philosophical depth. Absolute power, indifferent to life of a common ‘small’ man – this key problem was developed in Pushkin’s poem ‘Bronze Horseman’. Power that solve global, mainly political issues evenly, according to its own nature, prove to be a destroying force for a man occupied with his private cares. Spiritual leadership” of an old monk Zosima in Dostoevskiy’s novel ‘The Brothers Karamazov’ deprived of all external attributes of power, shows an example of resignation, humbleness, of a leadership totally devoted to a service to God. This paper is dealing with the analysis of describing leadership in the classical Russian literature of the 19th century. Leadership as manipulating, presuming deception and egoism of a leader, for whom all other people around are no more than means to achieve his own goals – is vividly represented in Dostoevskiy’s novel ‘Demons’. A special place in Russian literature takes up a leader-author – the one who makes a plot/narrative and obtains its fulfilment and for whom all other people are no more than characters in a play created by him. This kind of leadership is expressed in aesthetic terms such as ‘text’, ‘character’, ‘author’. It has as its aim getting an aesthetical delight. Such are characters Onegin and Pechorin in novels by Pushkin and Lermontov. Our results of the analysis of Russian classical literature allows us to make a manifold, vivid, and psychologically reliable picture of leadership.

1 Introduction

The theme of leadership and power takes a prominent place in Russian classic literature in the 19th century (Gardner 2011). Knowing the mode of leadership, appeared as a result of this consideration which is also important for understanding contemporary Russian culture and its role in a global world. Eventually, every concept of leadership depends on general model of power and shows itself through relation of a leader (power) to common people. Philosophy helps us in formulating a basic discourse in such relations (Bass 1990). Although some nuances could be disclosed only through a narrative, in a literary text (Badaracco and Joseph 2006). Understanding how various modes of a leadership in Russian classic literature set up could clear a lot in most of contemporary philosophical and sociological concepts of leadership. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of portraying leaders and leadership in the classical Russian literature of the 19th century. We provide various examples from famous literature masterpieces and contemplate the roles and places of leaders in the Russian society.

2 An image of a leader in poetry of Pushkin

Alexander Pushkin was the first who raised a leadership theme in his poem “Bronze Horseman”. The protagonist in poem is so called “small man”, i.e. the most common man -- not reach, not of a high rank, a very modest social position. His main purpose – personal happiness and love, family. And all this is ruined at once by a powerful and indifferent element – the great flood of 1824 that ruined Saint Petersburg. Seemingly an element, a nature is the cause of disaster. But the hero embraced with madness, blames the tsar, the supreme power. He sees something common between blind nature and power that is subjected to
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'objective', 'external' laws and totally indifferent to mere human purposes. To common people power turns out to be as destructive as elements. Peter I, a tsar whom Pushkin admired and respected, appears as a symbol of power. Pushkin’s message is that supreme power is objectively, according to its own nature indifferent to a common man, even does not know about his existence. Leader as a holder of supreme power – no matter how good he is – cannot and should not take into consideration purposes of a common man. A tragedy lies in a nature of leadership itself. Leader by definition is the one who serves common purposes, so he inevitably loses a sight of a personality.

After Pushkin the theme of a 'small man' becomes one of the most important in Russian literature, particularly in Gogol and early Dostoevsky creative work. Society losses a person because of his insignificance and unimportance compared with social purposes and commonly acknowledged social life. He as if does not exist, there is nobody to look for him.

3 Model of leadership in Dostoevsky’s creative work

Quite another side of leadership can be seen in Dostoevsky’s novel ‘The Brothers Karamazov’. Old monk Father Zosima is clearly a spiritual leader (Newark 2018). His aim is to bring a man to God. The main obstacle on this way is adherence to conventional values accepted in definite social circles. For instance, a false shame. A scene of conversation between Zosima and Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov is amazing in this connection. Fyodor Pavlovich is a man of unbridled passions. He drinks hard, brings home prostitutes in presence of his wife. But nevertheless, he seems not to be ashamed. All what he does is done openly. More than that, he even tells everybody about his disgrace. He seems posing a challenge to society. But Zosima observes that he is nevertheless ashamed and makes more vices and madness because of deep shame feeling. And instead of shaming Fyodor Pavlovich, remembering him of conscience, Zosima says: “Don’t be ashamed of yourself too much”. At first sight it sounds at least strange. But Zosima’s thought is much deeper: shame to society often leads not to improvement, but to a deeper collapse according to logics: all go to waste anyway. That is why secular society values only correspondence to conventional laws and do not able to forgive. Zosima suggests to Fyodor Pavlovich another way: religious repentance. Zosima’s position is that only in church, in God one can get a redemption. Here we have an opposition of shame and repentance. Spiritual leader leads towards repentance and forgiveness (Shushok and Scott 2010), while secular leader tries to disclose people and put them to shame. In both cases purpose is the same: improvement. But means are highly different.

Zosima’s experience makes us to recollect a nature of original sin. God forbids Adam to eat of the fruit of knowledge, i.e. forbids to distinguish good and evil. Because any human knowledge of good and evil will be finite and conventional. More than that, conviction that one knows good and evil puts a human on the same level as God. And God becomes per se not so necessary to human. That are words of Satan to man: “Eritis sicut dei, scient es bonum et malum”. Adam breaks God’s prohibition and eats of the fruit of knowledge – not in search of evil, but in search of good – and what he gets is conditional human good and its first consequence is a shame. “I am ashamed” – he tells God. It is very important that after Adam has broken the prohibition, God do not turn him off. He asks instead: “There are you?” That means: “get back”. God is ready to forgive Adam in case he is remorseful. But Adam feels no remorse, only shame. And through shame he breaks a connection with God.

In what sense are Dostoevsky’s heroes independent, that is to say, in what sense do they lead an inner life? Fyodor Karamazov parades the disgraceful details of his intimate family life. To conceal these details or fear their disclosure would be to enter into external relations with people and become dependent on them both outwardly and inwardly. One might say of Fyodor Karamazov: he was ashamed and wanted to hide it. Thus, Lev Tolstoy says of his own characters: they spoke about a deceased colleague but thought about the forthcoming career changes his death would bring about. But the fact that Karamazov parades the most shameful details goes to prove that he is ashamed not of them, but only of his own shame. Karamazov is an 'inner man' in that, perhaps, sole sense that in him there is no distinction between the secret and the open, 'oneself and 'that which is being performed'. Karamazov is writing the text of his own independence of others. Of course, it is not true that he is independent, but it is true in the sense that he is the absolute author of his imaginary proof. Authorship is the only goal of the fool's mystery play which is being performed (Matyushova 2018). It would indeed be naive to think that Karamazov performs for none in particular: that he is really and truly overcoming his shame and his 'outwardness'. But he does put on a performance and, like every performance, it finds its justification in itself alone. Karamazov is already an author by virtue of the fact that he is completely captivated and satisfied by the conventionality of the performance. To the reality of his shame he opposes the conventionality of his shamelessness. In the outward exhibition of disgrace, it is impossible that there should not be deliberateness, but it is in just this deliberateness, and consequently, in
shamelessness, that the power of the mystery play and the merit of the author is revealed. Karamazov's judges become his spectators.

The author is not as dependent on his spectators as the accused is on his judges. The author is not subject to, but sick with the spectator. Having broken away from the normal state of dependence and the 'awkwardness' of his existence, that is, having annihilated the gulf between the inner and the outer in himself, the author in his entirety departs into the artificiality of mystery and form. He now serves that which is not subject to any judgment, but which demands something completely different: understanding. Understanding of the event is contingent upon the existence of the spectator and the witness, but where there is no one to understand there is no event. For this reason, Karamazov overcomes his dependence on others in the presence of others. He is not alone, he is not struggling with shame in silence, but in the performance of shamelessness. Like every author he is identical with his fool's mystery-shamelessness; like every author, he is not subject to external judgment; but he does not find a genuine spectator.

The person who identifies with sacrifice identifies also with disgrace and is thereby 'elevated' by it. He is not subject to evaluation because he has no need of it. Understanding and the business of the witness differ somewhat from the external relationship of the judge. One's need of a witness is immediate, as of a person. Between him and the author there cannot be conventional social criteria for moral appraisal. The witness 'dares not fail to understand' precisely because there is no middle way between understanding and non-understanding in the absolute addressees of the author. Here an 'interpersonal' relationship really does become a relationship between (inter) two personalities (Vries 2018), and it is precisely the author who raises it up to this level of meaning. It is true that the price of overcoming the conventionality (in the sense of social mediation) of the relationship here is the pure conventionality, the artistry of the author, who finds himself in the elemental whirlwind of the performance. Dependence on social convention is substituted for dependence on a person. The relativity of evaluation is transformed into an absolute. Alyosha, seeing the artificiality and the lie in Katerina Ivanovna, is right, of course, but it is evident how heavily being right weighs upon him. It is obvious that he does not dare himself to understand what is being played out before his eyes. And the fact that he comprehends the sources of the lies that are being told makes his position just as morbid and unnatural as that of Katerina Ivanovna and Grushenka. In this scene none of the characters occupy a favourable position.

But there is an author of the scene: the one who composed it. The position of the author must be justified; it is precisely this which constitutes the criterion of artistry. The relationship of author and hero has to take place in order that the 'work' should take place. Creative work cannot be unconscious, for the very right to 'describe' or transform someone into a character is contingent upon authorial awareness. If Katerina Ivanovna were the true author of what is in essence her textual action, there would be no basis for Dostoevsky 'writing' her. But the question of the authorship of a character is more complicated than this. Katerina Ivanovna is the indisputable author in the sense that she herself chooses (or dooms herself to) the role of sacrifice. Sacrifice determines her behaviour, as she herself clearly understands. But she chooses to be a sacrifice. What she chooses consists in sacrificial action, and in this sense, she is pure text, pure conventionality of existence; self-renunciation. The essence of sacrifice is self-renunciation. But self-renunciation is equally the essence of shamelessness and disgrace. The plot-compositional mastery of Dostoevsky in this given instance consists in the fact that for Katerina Ivanovna a decision for shame and a decision for sacrifice coincide. For this reason, Katerina Ivanovna is a character with absolute ontological status. She herself chooses the mystery play, and to understand it is the same thing as to 'write' it. The pure witnessing activity of the one who describes is possible only in relation to an ontological character, that is, a self-appointed character. Dostoevsky writes, and we read in the sense that understanding is brought about (Zink 2010). Conversely any participation in the scene, any other position than that of writer and reader, Alyosha's position, for example, is inevitably non-understanding, sickness.

But this scene also has a purely metaphysical aspect. Once carried away, Alyosha, enters into a relationship not with the real Snegirov, but with the invented, the ideal Snegirov, who is called to participate in the triumph of good. It would seem that Alyosha has every reason to invent such a Snegirov: the triumph of good is to the real Snegirov's advantage, the real Snegirov is honest enough to value sincerity and the significance of the good which is coming about and, finally, the real Snegirov is intelligent enough to see Alyosha's sincerity and unselfishness in the matter. The latter is of especial importance; if Snegirov were able to suspect Alyosha of striking a pose and priding himself before him his rebellion would take quite a different form. But this is not the case: Snegirov clearly sees who is in front of him. Alyosha likewise clearly sees that Snegirov understands him. Since for the real Snegirov 'advantage, goodness and truth' in this matter coincide, and since Alyosha understands the real Snegirov very well, there would seem to be nothing more natural than for Alyosha to 'anticipate' Snegirov and believe in this anticipated Snegirov. The whole point is, however, that a selfless sacrifice can only be offered with the consent of the one for whom it is intended. To anticipate Snegirov would be to take away from him, not to recognise, his right not to accept the selflessness which is offered to him. Selflessness which does not
admit the possibility of being refused is, obviously, an extreme form of egoism, and Alyosha expresses precisely such extreme, direct egoism before Snegirov.

A colossal misunderstanding takes place: with all his might Alyosha demonstrates the purity of his and Katerina Ivanovna's intentions, but just this purity, openly displayed, that is, without any apprehension that it will be taken for something else, turns into a greater insult than any possible impurity. When Alyosha sees that his purity has been believed he decides that everything is already behind him and it is time to exult, when in fact the most important thing is yet to be done.

Purity has no direct form. A sacrifice is not higher than the person to whom it is offered. Here we approach Dostoevsky's central maxim: a person's right to deny every value, whether it be truth, goodness, beauty or advantage itself, is more precious than that value. Abstractly expressed this situation is nothing more than a paradox. But Dostoevsky gives it a concrete artistic interpretation. What is more, for him this situation, to all appearances, serves as an aesthetic principle. If this is so, then it is possible to assume that in Dostoevsky's texts, metaphysics and poetics are identical.

So, the power of God rests on a sincere remorse and complete forgiveness. And Farther Zosima as a spiritual leader leads people exactly in this way (Tesone 2000). Secular leader unlike rests his authority on a prevalent in given society (and quite different in various societies) norms, rules, prohibitions and laws, using a shame as a most efficient mean to reach a remorse and correction.

There is one more aspect of the problem: why every social rule should be conventional (Rowold and Schlotz 2009)? The best answer is by Marx (although in his secular position): each rule is an application of a common measure to a unique individual. That is why every rule, every moral regulation and every ideology is a form of 'false consciousness'. In every rule and every moral, a man is always not free. Marx sees a liberation of man in construction of a communism. And essence of communism is – to apply to every man individual evaluations and norms – in economics and in social life as well (Jian 2018). Be sure, Farther Zosima looks at the world in other way: God makes a man as a unique and free being, Divine Providence is always addressed to unique man and there is no Providence for social groups and social strata. That is why only in God man is really unique and really free. That is one more important difference between secular and spiritual state: secular leader rests his authority on common norms, although takes in account 'specific features'. Secular leader -- in order to become a leader - should formulate somehow a common aim. Spiritual leader sees an aim in a unique man.

4 Conclusions

Overall, one can agree that the issues of leadership and leaders was well reflected and described in the Russian classical literature of the 19th century. It becomes apparent that this issue was relevant then as it is relevant nowadays.

Summing our discussion up, we can say that Russian classic literature is very accurate in pointing some interesting and timely problem issues of a leadership: specifically, the notions of ‘a small man’ and a ‘sinful man’.

All in all, one can see that at least two great and even tragic questions are formulated in the works of Russian classics of the 19th century: a power and a common man, who does not see in himself (and really does not have) any social meaning; a power and a sinful, fallen man, a power and a sin.

References


