

## ON THE PROBLEM OF OBLOMOV'S IMAGE INTERPRETATION

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### **Abstract**

*The article analyzes the problem of Oblomov's image interpretation in cultural, historical and literary aspects.*

**Keywords:** *character, hero, image, type, Il'ja Oblomov, Ivan Gončarov*

### **Rezumat**

*În articol, analizăm problema interpretării chipului lui Oblomov din perspectivă culturală, istorică și literară.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *personaj, erou, chip, tip, Ilia Oblomov, Ivan Goncearov*

Ivan Gončarov's novel "Oblomov" (1859) has remained the focus of academic attention for already 160 years. The disputes that arose with the appearance of the novel do not fade. Primarily, the identity of the novel's main character is being argued: whether he is positive or negative, and, if he is both positive and negative, then what the reason for this duality might be. Critics are uncertain what literary type to assign the protagonist of the novel to: whether he is the type of a country squire, similar to Gogol's country squires from "Dead Souls" (a lot of common features are found in Oblomov and Manilov); or whether he is the type of a "superfluous man" who culminates the gallery of Onegin, Pečorin, Belto, Rudin; or whether he is a national, all-Russian type similar to the character of Russian folktales Emelya and the hero of folk epics Il'ja Muromec; or whether he is a ubiquitous type similar to Don Quixote, Hamlet, Prince Myškin (and here we mean not resemblance, not a typical character, but the symbolism of the hero and the novel in general). Hence the ambiguity of the concept of "Oblomovshchina" (Oblomovism): whether it is a local, national, Russian phenomenon, or a global, universally human one; whether it is limited to the time frame of Russian life during the period of serfdom, or whether it is a timeless phenomenon, in which case a national archetype should be referred to.

Some critics, following Vissarion Belinskij and Nikolaj Dobroľubov, point out such a peculiarity of Gončarov the writer as the absence of an explicit authorial attitude to the world depicted: "Mr. Gončarov draws his figures, characters, scenes primarily to satisfy his need and enjoy his ability to draw; he leaves his readers to speak and judge and derive moral consequences

from them" (Белинский/Belinskij, 1956, p. 312); I. Gončarov "does not draw and, apparently, does not want to draw any conclusions" (Добролюбов/Dobroljubov, 1991, p. 36). The absence of an explicit authorial attitude toward the characters and events leads to various interpretations of the novel. Thus, M. V. Otradin notes: "The question: what is the reason for Oblomov's apathy, his skepticism towards 'external' life? – was posed again and again. The answers offered by Russian critics were on different planes: sociological, philosophical, moral-psychological or even purely physiological" (Отрадин/Otradin, 1991, p. 11).

N. A. Dobroljubov's article "What is Oblomovism?" (1859) is an important stage in the critical comprehension of Gončarov's novel. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries readers perceived "Oblomov" according to N. A. Dobroljubov, who saw in the novel a depiction of the decay of serfdom Russia, and in the main character – "our indigenous folk type" (Добролюбов/Dobroljubov, 1991, p. 41), embodying laziness, inaction and stagnation of the serfdom system. N. A. Dobroljubov is primarily interested in "Oblomovism", so the critic focuses not on the individual, but on the typical features of the hero; the social is more important here than the personal. Oblomov is first and foremost a "barin" (rural aristocrat), and it is precisely this "rural aristocratism", that is, the life at the expense of others, which leads the hero to inactivity, helplessness and apathy. This brings Oblomov closer to the preceding "superfluous" heroes of Russian literature: Onegin, Pečorin, Belto, Rudin, who "see no purpose in life and find no decent activity" (*idem*, p. 47). "Oblomovism", i.e. gentry's inactivity and dreaminess, according to N. A. Dobroljubov, "puts an indelible stamp of idleness, freeloading and utter uselessness in the world" (*idem*, p. 61) on Onegin, Pečorin, Belto, Rudin, Oblomov. Therefore, the critic calls for a "merciless judgment", for the removal of the "halo of exclusivity" from the "superfluous people" and for the adoption of the "type of a doer" as an ideal.

N. A. Dobroljubov, who unites all the "Oblomovs" by their external features – laziness, quasi-profound verbiage, idleness, apathy – does not speak about the inner world of the hero, which distinguishes Oblomov from others and makes him one of the few, and namely which is paid attention to by the critic A. V. Družinin, who sharply disagreed with N. A. Dobroljubov and wrote in the same 1859 year the article "Oblomov". A Novel by I. A. Gončarov", where, in particular, he pointed out that "it is impossible to know Oblomov and not to love him deeply..." (Дружинин/Družinin, p. 112). A. V. Družinin saw a "bad" Oblomov, "almost disgusting", lying on the sofa, arguing with Zahar – in the first part of the novel, and a "good" Oblomov, "touching", "deep", "likeable", "in love", crying "over the ruins of his happiness" – in the second part. It is not the social essence of Oblomovism that is important to A. V. Družinin, but rather the true living poetry and the

folk life, which are tightly connected in the novel. In Oblomovism the critic singles out both the negative and the poetic, the comic and the sad. N. A. Dobroljubov categorically refused to notice anything in Oblomov except his "utter worthlessness"; for N. A. Dobroljubov Il'ja Il'ič is "repulsive in his nothingness" (*idem*, p. 58). A. V. Družinin holds Oblomov dear as a "weirdo" and a "child" unprepared for adult practical life: "...It is not good in the land where there are no kind and incapable of evil weirdos like Oblomov...! Such people are sometimes harmful, but very often likeable and even reasonable..." (*idem*, p. 122). Oblomov "...is dear to us as a man of his land and his time, as a kind and gentle child, ... we like him as a weirdo, who in our era of self-love, subterfuge and untruth peacefully ended his life without offending any person, without deceiving any person, without teaching any person anything improper" (*idem*, p. 125). Družinin's point of view on the novel and the protagonist was not as popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as N. A. Dobroljubov's interpretation of the novel.

D. I. Pisarev in his article "I. A. Gončarov's Novel "Oblomov"" (1859) highlighted that the novel "belongs to all centuries and peoples," but it is especially significant for the Russian society. The critic saw in the apathy of the hero something similar to Byronism, but he particularly pointed out the fact that Oblomov is a man of the transition era, who cannot step resolutely from the old Russian life into the European one. In the new European life, according to D. I. Pisarev, there is no place for the dreamer Oblomov; it will be the world of thought and labor, the world of Shtoltz and Olga. In the articles written two years later, D. I. Pisarev would speak negatively about the novel Oblomov, calling it a slander of Russian life. The change of D. I. Pisarev's opinion is bound up with the sharp negative appraisal of I. A. Gončarov and his novel by A. I. Gercen who in the article "The Superfluous People and Zhelcheviki (caustic people)" (1860) did not agree with N. A. Dobroljubov, refusing to include Oblomov into the gallery of true and authentic "superfluous people", which he considered to be himself and his comrades, the best people of the 1830s and 1840s, who did not manage to make the most of their lives because of political reaction. M. A. Protopopov also wrote about it in his article "Gončarov" (1891): "For Onegin, Pečorin, Beltov and Rudin... the course of their lives lay in involuntary inaction, while Oblomov believed all his happiness in inaction... It is impossible to place next to each other the people whose ideals of happiness are diametrically opposed. Oblomov, dying on three featherbeds from the paralysis that befell him because of gluttony and immobility, and, for example, Rudin, dying with a banner in his hand on the paving stones of Paris..." (Протопопов/Protopopov, 1991, p. 195).

Critic N. D. Ahšarumov in his article "Oblomov. Gončarov's Novel" (1860) noted that there is no essential difference between Shtoltz's Alabors and Oblomov's inactivity, because Shtoltz works for his personal benefit and

comes to the same Oblomovism. N. D. Ahšarumov concludes that such a "European" "Stoltsev's" life, as it is presented in the novel, cannot attract a Russian man (Ахшарумов/Ahšarumov, 1991).

Ap. Grigor'ev shared M. F. de Poulet's opinion that Oblomov is a poet and a people's poet at that, if he were not a poet, he would not die (Григорьев/Grigor'ev, 1967, p. 335). For Ap. Grigor'ev the important thing about Oblomov is his connection to the national soil and the fact that Oblomovka is a literary embodiment of the national sources of Russian life, which give strength to love, live and think (*idem*, p. 327).

"Soil" ideas are also reflected in Y. N. Govoruha-Otrok's article "I. A. Gončarov" (1892). The critic interprets Oblomovka as a country of "traditions" where there is no spiritual movement but there is spiritual life. Thanks to folk and Christian sources, Oblomov possesses love and spiritual beauty, "but his soul is not awakened, it is tormented by the need for active love – and does not know where to find the satisfaction of this need" (Говоруха-Отрок/Govoruha-Otrok, 1991, p. 209). For a "correct understanding of Oblomov's type" Govoruha-Otrok proposes "to correct Gončarov..., to completely eliminate the trait of physical illness in the character he (Gončarov) created" (*idem*, p. 206).

On the basis of the fact that the hero lives his dreams and poetic experiences rather than everyday real life, it was suggested more than once in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that Oblomov is just a mentally ill, mentally unhealthy person, that I. A. Gončarov creates an almost clinical picture of Oblomov's neuropathy (see Otradin, 1991; Piksarov, 1952; Razumihin, 2004).

Innokenty Annenskij in his article "Gončarov and His Oblomov" (1892) urges not to "dwell on the question, what type is Oblomov. Negative or positive?" (Анненский/Annenskij, 1991, p. 226). The critic attributes this question to the "school-market" type, with "sticking labels" on the literary characters by a conspicuous trait. I. F. Annenskij thinks that the definition "a type of a sluggard - Oblomov" established in school practice neither reflects nor reveals the artistic image of Oblomov. The researcher sympathizes with Oblomov: "Why does not his (Oblomov's) passivity produce an impression of bitterness or shame on us? Look at what is opposed to Oblomov's laziness: the career, secular vanity, petty chicanery or cultural and commercial activity of Shtoltz. Cannot one feel in Oblomov's robe and couch the denial of all these attempts to solve the question about life" (*idem*, pp. 227-228). Analyzing the text, the critic highlights such qualities of Oblomov as honesty, humanity, kindness, decency. I. F. Annenskij sees in Shtoltz not a "man of action" of the Russian life, but a "dealer". This assessment of Shtoltz's activities had become commonplace by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: "Practicality without an ideal element, without an ideological basis, is the same Chichikovschina, no matter how aesthetically colored it might be" (Протопопов/ Pro-

topopov, 1991, p. 203). A. P. Čehov spoke negatively about Shtoltz: "Shtoltz does not inspire any confidence in me. The author says that he is a great guy, but I don't believe him. He is a sheer rogue, thinking very well of himself and self-satisfied" (Чехов/Čehov, 1976, pp. 201-202). In the diary entry of year 1921, Prišvin considers the confrontation between Shtoltz and Oblomov as a moral and philosophical problem of national importance: "No "positive" activity in Russia can withstand the criticism of Oblomov: his tranquility conceals a demand for a higher value, for such an activity for which it is worth losing tranquility. It cannot be otherwise in the country where any activity aimed at improving one's existence is accompanied by a sense of wrongdoing, and only the activity in which the personal is completely merged with the cause for others can be opposed to Oblomov's tranquility" (Пришвин/Prišvin, 1969, pp. 233-234).

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, critics developed an interest in Goncharov as an artist and in the issues of his novel poetics. I. Annenskij singles out such peculiarities of Oblomov's poetics as the prevalence of pictorial, visual elements over aural and musical ones, description over narration. Hence the exceptional imagery of Gončarov's word (Анненский/ Annenskij, 1991, pp. 211-212). D. S. Merežkovskij was one of the first to regard I. A. Gončarov as a symbolist artist, paying attention to the symbolism of his realism in the article "The Outset of New Idealism in the Works of Turgenyev, Gončarov, Dostoevskij and Lev Tolstoj": "Goncharov possesses, together with Gogol, the greatest capacity for symbolism among all our writers. Each of his works is an artistic system of images, below which an inspirational thought is hidden. The characters are only part of the whole, ...only a series of symbols necessary for the poet to elevate the reader from the contemplation of the private phenomenon to the contemplation of the eternal... It is not the contrast between such types... as the dreamy Oblomov and the active Shtoltz the purest and, moreover, involuntary, deeply real symbolism" (Мережковский/Merežkovskij, 1990, p. 542). Here the term "symbolism" can be interpreted in different ways. Firstly, as a deliberate desire to conceal in an artistic image the idea, the author's thought; secondly, as an artistic direction; thirdly, as an opportunity to convey in words, forms, structures a specific meaning, which needs to be realized, disclosed while reading the work.

V. E. Maksimov, V. I. Čujko and V. G. Korolenko also wrote about Gončarov's penchant for image-symbols during this period (see Отрадин/Otradin, 1991). Thus, I. A. Gončarov was no longer regarded only as an outstanding writer of humdrum daily life. In Oblomov were distinguished not only the traits characteristic of Russian people, but also the traits of universal human types, such as Hamlet and Don Quixote, especially since these parallels were suggested in the novel by I. A. Gončarov himself. The



essence of Oblomov's destiny acquired universal traits, not limited by the specific historical framework.

In his "First Speech in Memory of Dostoevskij" (1881) Vladimir Solov'ëv spoke of the power of Gončarov's artistic generalization: "It is the power of artistic generalization which enabled him to create such an all-Russian type as Oblomov, the breadth of which we would not find in any other Russian writer". In the footnote V. S. Solov'ëv clarified his thought: "In comparison with Oblomov the Famusovs and the Molčalins, the Onegins and the Pečorins, the Manilovs and the Sobakevič, not to mention Ostrovskij's characters, all have only *special* significance" (СОЛОВЬЁВ/Solov'ëv, 1990, p. 170).

Not all critics regard Oblomov as a national type embodying the Russian mentality. Thus, K. F. Golovin contrasted Oblomov with Peter the Great, believing that the strong-willed Peter is a more faithful representative of his people than the lazy Oblomov (Отрадин/Otradin, 1991, p. 19). However, more often Oblomov was regarded as a national type, especially as it is known that I. A. Gončarov himself thought that his novel would be more understandable to a Russian person, as purely Russian problems were addressed in it (Гончаров/Gončarov, 1980, p. 471). V. V. Rozanov wrote in the year of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gončarov's death: "One cannot mention a Russian person without recalling Oblomov... That 'Russian essence', which is called a Russian soul, a Russian element... acquired under Gončarov's pen one of the greatest self-awarenesses, the outlines of itself, the interpretations of itself, the reflections on itself... 'Here is our intelligence', 'here is our character', 'here is the resume of Russian history' " (Отрадин/Otradin, 1991, p. 19).

The diametrically opposite interpretations of Oblomov and Oblomovism also persisted in the twentieth century. At the turn of eras, in the period of world wars and revolutions, against the background of apocalyptic gloomy prophecies, the patriarchal Oblomovka seemed an apologia of peace, tranquility and unchanging stability.

During the Soviet period of Russian history, N. A. Dobroljubov's point of view dominated. The literary character Oblomov became more and more a nominal figure, embodying laziness and inaction. Yet, there were also works that argued that the image of Oblomov should not be simplified. For example, N. I. Pruckov in his book "The Mastery of Gončarov the Novelist" (1962) showed the continuity of Gogol's school in Gončarov's works and noted that the comic portrayal of Oblomov reveals a tragic face.

In the years referred to as "stagnant", A.V. Družinin's point of view on the novel became relevant again. Il'ja Il'ič was perceived as a "positively wonderful person" who had expressed by his life position and destiny "a credo of non-action in the conditions of a deplorable reality" (Краснощекова/Krasnošekova, 1970, p. 151). "Behind Oblomov's inactivity," wrote E. Krasnošekova, "there is not only natural laziness, nurtured since childhood

dependency, but also apathy– the result of an intelligent and honest man's disappointment at the very possibility of real activity" (*idem*, 1970, pp. 38-39). According to E. A. Krasnošekova: "In Oblomov Gončarov, following Gogol, denounces not so much a personality but a human type" (*idem*, 1970, p. 11). The critic saw in Oblomov an "outer man" (the first part of the novel) and an "inner man", a mask and a face, the "bad" and the "good", a hidden "living soul" behind the image of a "vulgar man".

In the 1970s, Nikita Mihalkov presented a sentimental interpretation of the central image of I. A. Gončarov's novel in the film "A Few Days from the Life of I. I. Oblomov". Already in the very title of the film, including the initials of the hero, the director focuses on the fact that Oblomov has a name, that he is a personality, thus breaking the established perception: "Oblomov–Oblomovism". There are no scenes of guests coming to Oblomov's house, and the hero's lifeline at Agaf'ja Pšenicina's is also omitted. For N. S. Mihalkov it was important to show a pure, honest, kind soul of a Russian man, whose breadth corresponds to the vast expanses of patriarchal Russia, which does not keep up with the world of fashion, progress, civilization, but which preserves the moral laws of life in the traditions and culture of its people. Proponents of N. A. Dobroljubov's point of view accused N. S. Mihalkov of poetizing the serf owner Oblomov and noted: the film is dominated by unmotivated admiration for the hero, decorativeness and untruth, superficial beauty opposing beauty (Рассадин/Rassadin, 1982).

A true apologia for the "imperfect" but wonderful and alive person Oblomov and for the defenseless, charming, idyllic Oblomovka can be found in Y. M. Lošic' book Gončarov (1977). The critic defines Gončarov's method as mythological realism and identifies the following strata in Oblomov: of fairy-tale folklore (Russian epos), of ancient books (biblical stories) and specifically literary (parallels with "Faust", "Don Quixote" and "Hamlet"). According to Y. M. Lošic, Oblomov is Emelja, Il'ja Muromec, Don Quixote and Hamlet. Shtoltz, on the other hand, is a tempter demon, Mephistopheles, representing the activity of "dead-active" hoarders and the vanity of life, which destroys the Oblomovka Eden (Лощиц/Lošic, 1977, pp. 168-193).

Critic V. A. Nedzveckij continues the line of E. A. Krasnošekova and Y. M. Lošic, considering that the opinion of "Oblomov's" author about the main character is expressed in the words of Shtoltz: "This is a crystal, transparent soul; such people are few; they are rare; they are pearls in the crowd" (Недзвецкий/Nedzveckij, 1996, p. 30). V. A. Nedzveckij defines "Oblomov" as a novel about different kinds of love. The critic writes that "...love for Gončarov is the principal source of being, and not only that of individual, but also of familial and societal, even of natural and cosmic" (*idem*, p. 31), "...love is not limited to the happiness of the lovers, but humanizes other relationships of people, up to those of social classes" (*idem*, p. 32). The union of

Olga and Shtoltz is doomed precisely because it is "self-contained and devoid of humanizing social ideals" (*idem*, p. 34). The critic draws a conclusion that "as the work develops, Gončarov's very hope of creating an image of a harmonious man and the similar love on the material of contemporary reality was a utopia... The main reason for the drama depicted in the novel shifts from Il'ja Il'ič, who in the end preferred idyllic peace to eternal movement, to a spiritless and soulless social reality that 'is no good anyway'" (*idem*, p. 34).

Researcher V. I. Mel'nik in his work "The Realism of I. A. Gončarov" (1985) challenged the point of view expressed by E. A. Krasnošekova, Y. M. Lošic and V. A. Nedzveckij. He believes that it is impossible to regard I. A. Gončarov as a writer who idealizes Oblomov and simultaneously to relegate the problem of "Oblomovism" to the background, as not being important in the evaluation of the hero and, therefore, not influencing the definition of the whole problematic of the novel, "otherwise, one can come to a wrong one-sided conclusion, to the justification of Oblomov, to the apologization of the spiritual values of the supposedly idyllic Oblomovka" (Мельник/ Mel'nik, 1985, p. 11). V. I. Mel'nik defines Gončarov's method as "synthetic," that is, in the writer's novels he sees an organic interrelation of the eternal and the modern, the philosophical and the everyday, the moral and the social: "The strength of Gončarov's realism lies precisely in the dialectical approach to the subject of representation, based on historicism in showing how complexly, contradictorily, sometimes dramatically, but always inseparably, interpenetratingly is intertwined in the human personality the 'eternal', the 'natural'- and the socially determined" (*idem*, p. 10); "...the novelist, proceeding from contemporary social problems, rises to raising 'eternal' moral questions; the social and the moral in this work are inextricably linked, interdependent" (*idem*, p. 13). In his work V. I. Mel'nik tries to show the "mechanism" of this interaction in the artistic fabric of the novel "Oblomov", dwelling on the philosophical motifs and the genesis of artistic images in Gončarov's work (from the "superfluous man" type to Hamlet and Don Quixote).

At the height of "perestroika" there was published an article by V. Kantor "The Extended Skill of Sleeping" (1989), in which the author criticized Y. M. Loshits and N. S. Mihalkov for the apologia for Oblomov, denouncing the "upbringing and way of life" that ruined the "noble man" Oblomov. The idyll of Oblomovka, according to V. Kantor, is parasitic; it is the cult of the dead. Because of the habit of sleeping and the rejection of any spiritual labor, the man is doomed. "Oblomov" is a novel-warning for Russia. In Shtoltz Kantor sees a "new man", urged to guarantee Russia's bright future (Кантор/ Kantor, 1989).

V. N. Krivolapov in his article "Once Again on "Oblomovism"" (1994) continued V. I. Mel'nik's ideas, noting that Il'ja Il'ič's virtues and faults live only in unity, that I. A. Gončarov "was able to discern in 'Oblomovism' both



what is worthy of poetization and what deserves to be denounced. And not only to discern, but also to implement it artistically, so that the first is not able to live without the second" (Криволапов/Krivolapov, 1994, p. 47). Let us highlight the critic's thought that merely the idea itself without its artistic refraction has no meaning in literature.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the debates have not ceased; some still defend Oblomov while the others criticize him. V. I. Holkin in his article "The Russian Man Oblomov" (2000) defines I. A. Gončarov's novel as a sensual-philosophical work; "it is not types and characters that act in it, but it is soul, mind and flesh that live there; it is filled to the brim with confessions of love" (Холкин/Holkin, 2000, p. 27). A.V. Romanova sees in Oblomov's inaction an act of opposition to the advancing progress (in its inhuman hypostasis) (Романова/Romanova, 2002, p. 70). A. Razumikhin in his article "'Oblomov" - The Experience of Modern Perusal" (2004), on the contrary, gives the "sick" Oblomov a clinical diagnosis: neurotic. A man can afford not to act, but humanity cannot: "The book is about what awaits a people not willing to wake up" (Разумихин/Razumihin, 2004). Razumihin compares Oblomov to Mitrofanuška, who did not want to study or work, but lived at the expense of others: "How convenient it is not to know anything, and not to see that because of excitement, running, begging at benches, sleeplessness Agaf'ja Matveevna has lost weight, and her eyes have sunken in. What to call this: holy simplicity, or utter egoism?" (*ibidem*). A. Rančín in his article "What is Oblomovka?" (2006) ascends his critique of Oblomov to its climax, saying that "Oblomov possessed not only inherent laziness and rural aristocratism, but also inexplicable, unmotivated cruelty" (Ранчин/Rančín, 2006, p. 30), he gives the example of Oblomov the child who killed a dragonfly, a spider and a fly. According to A. Rančín, Oblomovka's idyll is not poetic, but parodic and ugly.

Summarizing these points of view, we may conclude that the interpretation of Gončarov's novel "Oblomov", especially of the main character, seems to be the most controversial. Oblomov is an integral artistic image, the unambiguous interpretation of which leads to the simplification of the message of the novel. We can agree with the opinion of V. N. Krivolapov, who wrote: "When it came to the image of Oblomov, the efforts of critics to understand its structure inevitably diverted to its (structure's) simplification. The comprehension of the phenomenon was implemented while its rectification. The goals were different (either to debunk Oblomov or to exalt him), the tools used were also different (from categorically declaring "untrue" everything positive about Oblomov to dissecting him into two characters, and the novel into two parts), but the main method remained uniform - straightening and simplification, the substitution of ambiguity with unambiguity" (Криволапов/Krivolapov, 1994, p. 30).

By constructing the narrative with the help of artistic images, the author expresses his point of view in relation to the depicted, thus revealing the idea of the work. With all the critics' disagreements about the novel "Oblomov" the only thing they agreed on was the recognition of I. A. Gončarov's artistic mastery. Thus, V. G. Belinskij pointed out that I. A. Gončarov is keen on his drawing skills. N. A. Dobroljubov sees the strength of the writer's talent in 'the ability to capture the full image of an object, to mint it, to sculpt it', 'the tranquility and fullness of his poetic worldview' (Добролюбов/ Dobroljubov, 1991, p. 35). A. V. Družinin draws a parallel between Gončarov's talent and that of the first-rate painters of the Flemish school (Дружинин/ Družinin, 1991, p. 108), where artists, using various expressive means, fill the forms of ordinary things with lush colors, making us feel their color, taste, smell. For A. P. Miljukov the author of "Oblomov" is a master, which is confirmed by the "faithfulness of drawing", "striking vividness of colors", "nature", "distinct forms", but at the same time A. P. Miljukov considers untrue the characters, ideas, understanding of Russian life in I. A. Gončarov's works (Милюков/ Miljukov, 1991). As we have already noted, according to I. Annenskij, the peculiarities of I. Gončarov's poetics lie in the predominance of vivid visual elements over auditory, musical ones, descriptions over narratives, hence the exceptional imagery (Анненский/ Annenskij, 1991, pp. 211-212). N. I. Pruckov wrote that "Gončarov is a master of precise and plastic reproduction of domestic objects, all sorts of details, poses, gaze, gesture, figures, setting" (Пруцков/ Pruckov, 1962, p. 93). V. A. Nedzveckij: "In "Oblomov", Gončarov's ability to draw Russian everyday life with picturesque plasticity and tangibility clearly manifested itself" (Недзвецкий/ Nedzveckij, 1996, p. 38). I. Suhih says that I. A. Gončarov belongs to the number of objective, plastic writers, for whom the image (the image-character, landscape, object, detail) means more than the philosophy, thought or idea itself (Сухих/ Suhih, 206, p. 225).

It should be noted that the unity of opinions on Gončarov's picturesque, masterful creation of artistic images is not reflected in the consensus on the main character of the novel "Oblomov". Ideas, thoughts about the essence of the events and characters of a work of fiction can be conveyed only, or predominantly, in artistic images, in their connections and interactions. Consequently, when critics differently interpret Oblomov, they rather often highlight those traits in the image that support their ideological commitment. Thus, for the revolutionary democrat N. A. Dobroljubov, Oblomov is a parasitic rural aristocrat (barin), while for the Slavophile Ap. Grigor'ev he is a folk poet. If the images are masterfully written, they should fully express the author's ideas. There is a certain contradiction in I. Suhih's statement that for I. A. Gončarov the image means more than the idea. How can an image mean more than an idea? In a literary text an idea, a philosophy, a thought

are expressed through artistic images. I. A. Gončarov was piqued that he was regarded only as a brilliant writer of everyday life: "These praises would have been much more valuable to me if in my painting, for which I was especially praised, were found those ideas and generally all that ... fit into the images, pictures and simple, uncomplicated events written by me. Others did not find or did not want to find anything in my images and pictures, but more or less vividly drawn portraits, landscapes, maybe living copies of morals - and nothing more" (Гончаров/Gončarov, 1980, p. 102). Accurate is N. I. Pruckov's judgment on the peculiarities of I. A. Gončarov's creative manner: "Every detail in the novelist's artistic system becomes poetically tangible. It gets its own image and weaves harmoniously into the fabric of the novel, serves to reveal ideas and characters" (Пруцков/Pruckov, 1962, p. 93).

I. A. Gončarov himself explains in detail his own method of creating an artistic image in his critical articles. Thus, in his article "Better Late Than Never" I. A. Gončarov separates and contrasts conscious and unconscious creativity: "An artist thinks in images, - said Belinskij, - and we see it at every step... But how he thinks... Some say consciously, others - unconsciously. I think it is both: it depends on what predominates in an artist- the mind or fantasy and the so-called heart. He works consciously, if his mind is subtle, observant and dominates his fantasy and heart. Then the idea is often expressed apart from the image. And if the talent is not strong, it overshadows the image and becomes a tendency. The mind of these conscious writers completes what the image does not completely tell, and their creations are often dry and incomplete; they address the mind of the reader, talking little to the imagination and emotions. They persuade, teach, and assure, thus hardly affecting. And vice versa- with an excess of imagination and with- relatively less brilliant against the talent - mind the image absorbs the meaning, the idea; the picture speaks for itself..." (Гончаров/Gončarov, 1980, pp. 104-105). It is worth noting the importance of the writer's last-mentioned thought for the interpretation of his work.

I. A. Gončarov refers to himself as an "unconscious" artist who "writes by instinct," by fantasy, more by heart than by mind. Arguing with the neo-realists who called for abandoning fantasy in art and "taking pictures of nature and life "by mind"", I. A. Gončarov notes: "These snapshots will never replace the paintings illuminated by the rays of fantasy, full of fire, awe and hot breath. To write artistic works by mind alone is like asking the sun to give only light, but not to play its rays- in the air, on the trees, on the waters, not to give those colors, tones and tinges of light that convey beauty and brilliance to nature! Is this real? And what is mind in art? It is the ability to create an image. Consequently, in a work of art only the image is clever - and the stricter it is, the cleverer it is. One mind in ten volumes cannot say

what is said by a dozen faces in some 'The Inspector General' " (Гончаров/ Gončarov, 1980, p. 141)!

The image is a priority for I. A. Gončarov; it is a primary element in the poetics of the writer, more important than the plot and the architectonics of the work. Gončarov notes: "Drawing, I seldom know at that moment what my image, portrait, character means: I only see him alive in front of me and watch if I draw him correctly, see him in action with others – hence, I see scenes and draw these others here, sometimes far ahead, according to the plan of the novel, not quite foreseeing yet how all the parts of the whole scattered in my head will be connected together... I always have one image and together the main motif: namely it leads me forward– and on the way I inadvertently grab what comes to hand, that is, what is close to it" (Гончаров/ Gončarov, 1980, p. 105). Since I. A. Gončarov classifies himself as a type of "unconscious" artists, stating that he "always has one image", hence it is the image in Gončarov's works that, as he himself understood it, "absorbs in itself the message, the idea".

The basis of the artistic image is traditionally considered a way of depicting human life, presented in an individualized form, but simultaneously concluding in itself the generalized beginning, behind which are guessed those laws of the life process, which form the people namely of this type. In other words, the categories of *type* and *character* are brought to the forefront when creating artistic images-characters. If type is the manifestation of the general in the individual, then character is, primarily, the individual: "Type is a social or class concept. Its formation is determined by historical conditions, class relations, everyday circumstances (Gogol's landlord type, Ostrovskij's merchant type). But each type has its numerous variations – characters, i.e. more individual formations of human psyche, depending on his or her inner qualities. Gogol and Ostrovskij focused on the portrayal of types; Turgenev and Tolstoj focused on the portrayal of characters" (Пустовойт/ Pustovojt, 1974, p. 111).

In singling out and distinguishing between the categories of *type* and *character*, one should also take into account the theses of M. M. Bahtin's work "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity". M. Bahtin notes: "The hero from the very beginning is given as a whole <...> everything is perceived as a moment of characterization of the hero, bears a characterological function, everything is reduced and serves to answer the question: who is he" [Бахтин/ Bahtin, 1979, p. 151). "If character is set in relation to the latest values of the worldview <...> expresses the cognitive and ethical attitude of a person in the world <...>, then type is far from the limits of the world and expresses the attitude of a person in relation to the values already concretized and limited by epoch and environment, to benefits, i.e. to the essence, that has already become existence (in the action of character essence is still

becoming existence for the first time). Character is in the past, type is in the present; the character's environment is somewhat symbolized, the object world around type is inventoried. Type is the passive position of the collective personality" (*idem*, p. 159). "Type is not only tightly intertwined with the world around it (the object environment), but is depicted as conditioned by it in all its moments, type is a necessary moment of some environment (not the whole, but only a part of the whole). <...> Type presupposes the author's superiority over the hero and his complete value noninvolvement in the hero's world; hence the author could be absolutely critical. The independence of the hero in a type is considerably reduced..." (*idem*, p. 160).

The main character of the novel "Oblomov" should be viewed and studied as an integral artistic image that combines the features of type and character in equal measure. One should not limit oneself to singling out a general social type ("the psychology of a rural aristocrat-landlord" or "a superfluous person"), which was done by N. A. Dobroľubov and his followers; or determine only individual character traits (a living soul, heart, conscience), which was preferred by A. V. Družinin and his followers. This approach gives a rather one-sided interpretation of the image of Oblomov since the artistic expression of Il'ja Il'ič's merits and demerits is possible only as a whole: the human drama, which, on the one hand, is determined by the social status of the hero, his upbringing and the landlord's behavior, and on the other hand - by Oblomov's moral and philosophical quest for the answers to the eternal questions about the essence of existence.

G. M. Fridlender emphasizes that "Oblomov in Gončarov's novel ... is an everyday household type, but at the same time a social and psychological one. And simultaneously Oblomov's life story has a philosophical meaning; it poses certain crucial and important moral and historical questions to the reader. In other words, everyday life and psychology, on the one hand, and history, sociology, philosophy, on the other, are inseparable in the subject of depiction with which the realist artist deals" (Фридлиндер/Fridlender, 1980, p. 345). It is the holistic approach to the image that allows to reveal the idea of the work of art and the author's position, to trace and to show the unity of the eternal and the modern, the philosophical and the everyday, the tragic and the comic, the moral and the social in I. A. Gončarov's novel: "...through the image, connecting the subjective with the objective, the essential with the real, the consent of all these opposing spheres of existence, their universal harmony is worked out" (Эпштейн/Èpštejn, 1987, p. 252).

Not only the typical and individual, but also the writer's ideal is manifested in the artistic image. Fiction strengthens the generalized meaning of the artistic image, which is inseparable from the writer's idea of the ideal, emphasizes in it what helps to support this ideal or contradicts it. The two statements by I. A. Gončarov about the ideal are of special interest. Thus, in



a letter to I. I. Lhovskij in 1857 he notes: "It sometimes frightens me that I have not a single type, but all ideals: is it good? Meanwhile, to express my idea I do not need types, they would lead me away from the goal" (Гончаров/Gončarov, 1980, p. 244). In a letter to S. A. Nikitenko in 1866 we read: "I will tell you at last this, which I have never told anyone: from the very minute I began to write for the press... I had one artistic ideal: it is the portrayal of an honest, kind, likeable human nature, a highly idealistic person, struggling all his life, seeking the truth, meeting lies at every turn, being deceived and, finally, cooling down and falling into apathy and powerlessness from the awareness of the weakness of his and others', that is, of human nature in general... But this theme was too vast, I would not have coped with it, moreover, the negative direction had so much overwhelmed all the society and literature (starting with Belinskij and Gogol) that I succumbed to this tendency; instead of a serious human figure, I began to draw particular types, catching only the ugly and ridiculous sides. Not only mine, but no talent would have been enough for that. Shakespeare alone created Hamlet- and Cervantes created Don Quixote- and these two giants absorbed almost everything that is comic and tragic in human nature. And we, pygmies, cannot deal with our own ideas- and so we have only hints" (*idem*, pp. 318-319).

There seems to be a contradiction in Gončarov's words: at times he says that he has no types, but only ideals; then - that he always tried to portray an honest, kind, likeable person, who sought the truth and was disappointed; then - that instead of character he wrote particular types. In our opinion, there is no contradiction here: having organically combined in Oblomov's image character (individual), type (historically and socially determined generalization) and ideal (timeless, universal generalization, which sometimes in literary criticism is termed a supertype, an eternal image), Gončarov thus expressed his social, historical, philosophical, psychological ideas. That is why Gončarov, on the one hand, enthusiastically accepting N. A. Dobroljubov's article on the novel "Oblomov", wrote that "*the lazy image of Oblomov was the most conspicuous*" [Гончаров 1980: 106], that "*Oblomov was an integral, undiluted image of the multitude, resting in long and undisturbed sleep and stagnation*" (*idem*, p. 117), and on the other hand, in the letter to P. G. Ganzen in 1878 he noted: "...in Oblomov... with love is expressed everything that is good in a Russian person" (*idem*, p. 461).

Of course, the artist's desire while creating an image may not be fully realized in the work. I. A. Gončarov himself says about himself that he has only "hints": "I do not pretend to being deep, I hasten to note: and contemporary critics have already written that I am shallow" (*idem*, p. 107). Therefore some critics believe that the typical in the image of Oblomov prevails over the individual, while others, on the contrary, see in Oblomov a "living soul", and not a type, but an ideal close to supertypes, to the eternal images of Hamlet

and Don Quixote. Though Gončarov, like any true artist, has a tendency to doubt the power of his talent, let us note that the author of "Oblomov" is "profound", and one cannot agree with the critics opting for detaching a single dominating component in the image of Oblomov. The pursuit of limiting the analysis of the text to the abstract social essence of the hero leads to schematism, to the leveling and discoloration of the literary image, and to its emptying out of its individual richness and singularity. On the contrary, focusing attention only on the hero's individual traits leads to the loss in the image interpretation of historical, social, and temporal components, which are also important in an artistic image. "The purpose of the image is to transform a thing, to turn it into something else– the complex into the simple, the simple into the complex, but in any case to reach between the two poles the highest semantic tension, to reveal the interpenetration of the most different plans of existence" (Эпштейн/Ěpštejn, 1987, p. 252). It is necessary to consider the unity and interdependence of all the elements of Oblomov's image on the actual textual material, thus demonstrating that focusing only on one of the elements of Oblomov's image turns the image into a scheme, distorts the author's position and leads to the impoverishment of the artistic message and the idea of the work as a whole (see Бражук/Bražuk, 2014).

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