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The Formulations of the Idea of 'Oblomovism' in
I. A. Goncharov's Novel *Oblomov*

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The main aim of the dissertation is to reinterpret the problem of how the idea of 'oblomovism' emerges in Goncharov's novel entitled *Oblomov*. A reinterpretation of the novel is needed, because the concept of 'oblomovism' (*Oblomovian* nature) has become a widely used critical line of argument (*topos*) in literary historical and analytic approaches of Goncharov's work, which can be traced back to N. Dobrolyubov's interpretation. To interpret the semantic world of Goncharov's novel and particularly its main character along this line of argument may suggest a clean, unquestionable truth. However, reinterpretation is required also because 'oblomovism' becomes an explicit issue in Goncharov's text itself as well, if one addresses the level of how the heroes are pictured.

We are convinced that both representations of 'oblomovism' – how the idea is demonstrated in *Oblomov* by the characters themselves, and how the definitive contemporary critiques approached it – operate with considerable simplifications. 'Oblomovism' in Goncharov's novel emerges in a much more complex and much richer form than it is explained either by the characters of the novel at the plot level, or by the mentioned critical trend.

The dissertation focuses on the artistic forms that may contribute to a more nuanced interpretation of the idea of 'oblomovism.' In order to conduct a thorough analysis of how 'oblomovism' is pictured in the novel, we study the book from five different aspects. These directions define the structure of the dissertation and the main topics of the chapters as well. Besides, we also provide a more general idea synthesizing these forms of the poetic definition of 'oblomovism.' All of the definitions interpret 'oblomovism' in the context of the idyll, though to a varying extent.

The analysis is started by a review of literature on 'oblomovism' in Chapter One, followed by Chapter Two in which the issue of *apathy* is studied. Thereafter, the problem of picturing the idyll is addressed from two perspectives: first, structures of space and time are studied in Chapters Three and Four; and second, Chapter Five examines the dreams of Oblomov. Both approaches enable us to interpret the process of how the interpretation of the possibility of the existence and availability of an idyllic human state of affairs (the idyll) is continuously changing in Oblomov's mind. Besides, we also examine, how the general duality of utopianism is pictured, e.g. the imagination of a perfect world that seems to be available, and the understanding that in reality no such world exists.

Chapter Six puts in centre stage the problem of *thinking with heart*, pointing also at the Biblical context. Along certain motifs we study in detail how the archaic elements of the

concept of *heart* and *thinking with heart* are reinvigorated, and how this fits into the general idea of 'oblomovism' and also into the question of the idyll.

In the last analytic chapter preceding the summary we go on elucidating and completing our definition of the artistic model of 'oblomovism' linked to the problem of the idyll in the context of tales. We pay attention to *Yemelya the Simpleton* and Pushkin's *A Tale about a Fisherman and a Fish* and also *Bova Korolevich* belonging to the *bylina* tradition as well.

The first chapter deals with the critical interpretations of 'oblomovism,' and it is structured along the following aspects of the approach present throughout the whole of our dissertation: social aspects of 'oblomovism' (e.g. the disputed questions about Russia being on the border of the old and new era); 'oblomovism' in the light of Goncharov's character; aesthetic aspects of 'oblomovism' and finally, the philosophical aspects of 'oblomovism.'

Most works that interpret this novel by Goncharov share the phenomenon that researchers recognize apathy in the state of 'oblomovism.' Thus, when they are thinking about the character of Oblomov, in most cases they give their opinion of apathy itself, and the related state of idleness. In the dissertation we explore how the various views on apathy can be identified in Goncharov's work, including the evaluations traced back to the interpretation of apathy rooted in cultural history. In other words, this means that the novel gives voice to the memory of apathy as a cultural *topos*. We conclude that Oblomov can be characterized primarily by an artistic spirit giving priority to seclusion. The hero lives his life according to standards different from the majority of the society from which he withdraws. Hence, Oblomov is not the ill, depressed, sinful hero, as he has been seen by numerous researchers. On the contrary, he is the hero who is able to live an intensive emotional and intellectual life, and thus able to perceive existence (and draws its "patterns" in his imagination) through the active contemplation typical of artists.

The problem of apathy really leads to the idyll, as in the novel it is connected to the thinking about the possibility of creating an ideal life. Oblomov turns towards his inner world, as in the real world he is not able to reach any idyll. Hence, the problem of idyll reveals the topic of seclusion from society mirroring a mode of life that may be considered as ideal. The focus is on the quest, as the hero is pictured in the desire to create an acceptable way of life. In the dissertation we describe, how the possibility of the realization of the idyll is blurred in the novel. Along the lines with this topic most researchers examine Oblomov's dream in the novel, as did Merezhkovsky, Bakhtin, Böhmig, Kantor, Mann and others. The dissertation points out that the idyll is discredited in well-outlined poetic forms in the whole novel and not just in one part. We suppose that in Goncharov's *Oblomov* the issue of idyll is

most visible in the poetic details of picturing space, and all these details contain important meanings. This argument may be also supported by the concept of the idyllic *chronotope* elaborated by Bakhtin.

We examine this question by studying the three main spaces that appear in the novel, namely the house of Oblomov and the two locations where he moves. We conclude that all these spaces are means for the poetic conceptualisation of the dilemma of the possible emergence of an idyll. During the analysis we separate Oblomov's self-idealized inner space (in a metaphoric interpretation: the spiritual sphere where also dreams are delineated) from the outside world. This way we may characterize the hero's concept on the idyllic world as it appears in his mind. The internal space becomes parallel with the external world condemned by the hero, as it is characterized by numerous motifs (e.g. being a guest, being lifeless etc.) that appear in the descriptions of both worlds. We recognize that first, certain negative motif of the outside world appear in connection with Oblomov's inner space as well; and second, those ones also appear that characterize the ideal world, the evident manifestations of the idyll imagined by Oblomov. Consequently, the internal world – the inside space – by its content is not far away from the external world from where Oblomov intends to escape, the two spaces turn out to be similar in many respects. This also means to reveal that the things Oblomov considers as ideal are shown in fact not to be ideal at all.

The analysis of the three main spaces pictured in *Oblomov* enables us to study thoroughly certain motifs of utopia and to understand that Oblomov cannot live a real life in utopistic spaces. In this novel the focus of Goncharov's interpretation of the medieval idyll based on the antique world is shifted to the importance of morality and humanity, connected to well-outlined features of particular cultures. 'Oblomovism' explores the content of the desired life, however, the hero's concept of this life lacks proper elaboration and remains up to the final point incomplete. Goncharov reveals that no ideal world exists. In the novel 'oblomovism' is gradually transformed into an idea of *the attempt at reaching the idyllic*. Stolz differentiates between the 'oblomovism' belonging to Oblomovka and St. Petersburg, though they are similar in their contents, neither of them can reach an accomplished ideal life.

In order to explain apathy and to understand the nature of Oblomov's inner world we focus on the descriptions of three dreams. The first one is the dream described by the narrator in Chapter Eight of Book One; the second is the dream pictured in *Oblomov's Dream*; and the third represents the dream in Chapter Four of Book Two, described by Oblomov. While examining the dreams, we intend to map out, on which points Oblomov's and the narrator's interpretation of the idyllic life differ. It is highly important that while *Oblomov's Dream*

models the hero's closed past, the lost idyll, his childhood, in the other dreams the hopes in the future are manifested, and suggest about the possibilities of their realization in the external world. Concerning the latter, *Oblomov's Dream* represents a sample, the starting point, which is later reshaped, changed by the hero's experiences, thus the other two dreams show the redrawn ideal. In all three dreams we examine the characteristics, the mode of life and the *Weltanschauung* of people pictured in the ideal world, and also the role of landscape descriptions in this modelling of human life. We reveal the differences between the urban and rural forms of existence shown in the novel.

The analysis of the inner and outside worlds pictured in Goncharov's work also contributes to the understanding of Oblomov's search for the meaning of life. We explore that the text contains a double perspective at all levels of the meaning-emergence, developing both the positive (idyllic) and negative (anti-idyllic) aspects of the conceptualised life visions. Regarding Oblomov's inner life we may see how the idyll appears in all three dreams, but at the same time the process of its turning into some kind of an anti-idyll is presented as well.

All these are connected to the time schemes modelled in the novel. In this respect, we focus on the parts of the text, in which Oblomov is meditating about the life that would be ideal for him. Thus we study the appearance of space and time (the forms of chronotopes) first in the description of the family house at the beginning of the novel, in some details of Oblomov's daydreams; then on the example of the garden that symbolizes the love of Oblomov and Olga; and finally in the delineation of the Vyborg district. We also intend to explain, how the different forms of time are pictured in the novel, such as *real time* and *inner time*, and also to explain the reason for elaborating the concept of *timelessness*. Regarding inner time, the fact that the hero is placed on the border of real time and timelessness is of crucial importance. In the first book the space of the *house* is narrowed down to one room by the narrator. Regarding space and time an intermediate status appears that tears out of the past, but does not belong to the present, either. In this form of time memory and real time are intertwined. The thoughts of Oblomov are born in the isolated space of the room that recalls the past, but excludes the present world. The hero creates his dreams about the ideal life partially relying on his childhood experiences, and partially on the experiences of his St. Petersburg life after leaving Oblomovka. Oblomov aims at creating the feeling of *infinity* of time (timelessness), and *counting* is a key motif of the characterization of his efforts. In this particular case *counting* marks the withdrawal from real time and the birth of absolute calmness. Harmony lies in the even motion of time, since the rhythm of the beatings of heart

and pulse is the same. While he is dreaming, Oblomov strives for creating this form of time, out of which, however, he is always pushed off by external effects and sensing the real time.

The second relevant part of the text is the description of the garden of love. This space is dominated by strong emotions and thoughts. This is also demonstrated by the picturing of the unpredictability of time. The inner balance of the hero is lost due to his love felt for Olga. Real time is pictured through the acceptance of the downturns in spiritual life, and also through the disturbing strength of losing balance. Immediateness is a definitive element in the latter, and so are the random, unexpected shifts between harmony and disharmony. In timelessness no intermediateness or real time can be experienced. Nothing is there to show the frames of definite time. This is a question about the pre-Fall era, thus about the life in Paradise. *Timelessness* is an important phenomenon of the Golden Age of humankind. Oblomov speaks about the pre-historic era. At the same time, his focus on self is replaced by the thinking about mankind. Thus timelessness is exposed already in the mentioned scene, however, it appears in full only in the Vyborg district.

The various phases of time becoming never-ending are demonstrated also by the gradual widening of the spaces pictured. In the first part of the book, in the house on the Gorokhovaya street, though Oblomov feels the state of timelessness, the outside world always gets him out of his dreams, back to the real frames of space and times. Though in Oblomovka the locals feel the timelessness, the hero finds it boring. Vyborg is different from the space of the Gorokhovaya street house in that there Oblomov does not think about the future. However, Vyborg is similar to Oblomovka in the sense that the main characteristic of Vyborg is that it is *unchanging*. However, timelessness is not equal to inner time, as the latter is characterized by its intermediateness. What is important in timelessness is not the recall of memories and the full living of the future, but the natural and evident evenness. In Vyborg Oblomov is torn out of the connection between real and inner time and space. In this place the hero gets rid of life. However, also anti-idyll appears here through the identification of the space with *death*, since real life is absent from the world of Vyborg.

Thereafter, we shift to the theme of *thinking with heart* appearing in the novel in Chapter Six of our dissertation. *Thinking with heart* serves as a measure for the values outlined in *Oblomov*, closely connected to the dilemma of the idyll, as a perception based on the harmony of human heart and reason may create an ideal world, let it be an inner or external one. The inner balance of *thinking with heart* is the ground for right decisions, for the development of ideal love and understanding between people, thus it belongs to the idea of utopia. Goncharov examines those questions of human existence that are also discussed by the Bible with a

general meaning. In this sixth chapter of the dissertation we strive for presenting coherently the poetic definitions of human heart as a metaphor that gives parallels to the poetic thinking represented in the biblical text. Studying these overlaps of the Bible and the novel *Oblomov* shows what kinds of weaknesses of human nature Goncharov accentuates. Lessons from the Holy Bible seem to be incorporated into the Goncharov-book; in other words, the Bible and the *Oblomov* – if approached in the same intellectual context – transform the same spheres of human experience into artistic text. One of the fundamental ideas in the Bible is the ever-present possibility of the elimination of human imperfectness and the perspective of salvation open for everyone. According to our perception, it is through the concept of *thinking with heart* that Goncharov is able to describe how Oblomov excels from his environment, showing human greatness. Occasionally he becomes victim of losing the balance of heart and mind, nevertheless his heart remains pure and without any selfish intentions. Hence, by extending our earlier thoughts on the complexity of ‘oblomovism’ we may also conclude that by its content ‘oblomovism’ is far more than the denial of expected duties in the hope of establishing a right way of life. The term connected through a name to a particular person, demonstrates the richness of the human heart, which is a key element of human personality, and also that Oblomov’s heart is not burdened by any sinful thoughts. From this perspective, ‘oblomovism’ is also a form of moral excellence, which leads back to the cultural-historical interpretation of apathy, according to which apathy may be the characteristic feature of the most exceptional persons. Oblomov ‘in his heart’ is much more than the other inhabitants of Oblomovka, as he turns away also from the St. Petersburg way of life, seemingly very different from the life in Oblomovka, but concerning the motifs used in the novel, showing nevertheless rather similar features to that world. From this point of view he does not copy the existence of those who trying to follow a new worldview in fact repeat the laws pertaining to Oblomovka. We need to add that even the Vyborg district does not become the perfect copy of Oblomovka left by the hero in his childhood. Hence, though Oblomov does not reach the idyllic existence described in the second dream, we also cannot state that he turned time back to Oblomovka. Oblomov strives for creating the harmony of the two forces, however, there are many events in the novel showing his efforts failing.

We analyze the connections between the *thinking with heart* and the picturing of nature in Goncharov’s novel. This leads to the evaluation of the opposition of urban and natural ways of life. While ‘‘thinking with heart’ recalls the innocent harmony of the pre-civilization existence, the unbalanced forces refer to the particularities of the disharmonious urban life. Oblomov tries to reach perfection, but the narrator doubts, whether a human being would be

able to control all his/her feelings. In the novel this accentuates the question of whether theories can be followed and realized.

In addition to all these, we study ‘oblomovism’ through the tales appearing in the novel. We examine within this framework the tale *Yemelya the Simpleton* and also Pushkin’s *A Tale about a Fisherman and a Fish*, and also the work *Bova Korolevich*. Our interest is concentrated on these particular tales because they contain the characteristics of idyll known from Goncharov’s *Oblomov*. Regarding the idyll, we intend to stress that the use of double perspectives in the relevant places of texts is typical of Goncharov’s way of picturing. One may summarize the core of this approach that while from a certain perspective Oblomovka is pictured as a harmonic, idyllic space (parallel to the tale *Yemelya the Simpleton*), another perspective identifies also disharmonic elements disturbing this space (see elements of the anti-idyll in *A Tale about a Fisherman and a Fish*). We have chosen these particular pieces because we suppose that their analysis may help us provide a more detailed picture on the relationship between idyll and anti-idyll in Goncharov’s work, and may also support our arguments given in the earlier part of the dissertation.

All in all, we paid attention to the phenomenon of Goncharov’s including various approaches to the idyll as given throughout different cultural epochs. Such modes of description appear that reflect the idylls as modelled in myth, by Antiquity, the Middle Ages and also 19th-century Russian literature. It becomes clear that ‘oblomovism’ is semantically inseparable from the concept of the idyll, regardless of historical era. Hence, the figure of Oblomov is shifted far away from the social type in light of which contemporary critics and thereafter a wider critical tradition tried to interpret the semantic world manifesting itself in *Oblomov*.

The novel describes at many levels, why the idyll does not become real, and why reaching the ideal life becomes impossible for Oblomov. The whole interpretation shows that the concept of ‘oblomovism’ makes the diversity of the points of view modelled in the work evident, and also reveals the various ways in which they are connected to different types of presentation (such as the openly moralizing positions of the narrator and Stolz, the inner system of perspectives hidden in the dreams, the dialogization of their interpretation; or, in other dimensions the poetics of space and time, the system of biblical allusions, the intertextuality originating from Pushkin’s tales, and cultural intertextuality, etc.). Consequently, it is not only about linking ‘oblomovism’ to the attitude of idleness (Stolz), and explaining the hero’s indolence referring to his upbringing in Oblomovka and to his habit of following his old way of life. Oblomov himself is in search for giving the proper answer to

the question concerning the reasons for his idleness. As he views the concept of 'oblomovism' is integrated into the process of self-interpretation that is closely linked to the perspective-forming effects of the experiences collected in the outside world. The narrator connects the hero's mode of seeing and the point of view reflected in the evaluations formulated in other persons' words. This may lead to the emergence of a more nuanced picture of Oblomov and 'oblomovism', including the motif showing how Oblomov strives for keeping away from any kinds of conformity to the expectations of the majority of society. Instead, he elaborates a view of life in which he is able to preserve his quality of humanity.