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FAITH AND MORALITY IN TOLSTOY'S THE IMP AND THE CRUST

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ABSTRACT

Short stories are literary discourses having a compact effect and need a deep reading because of their multilayered semantic structure. Sometimes, their shortness requires expressing the facts through examples because difficult topics can be grasped more easily through examples, and complex phenomena can be more easily etched into our memories when systematically transformed into examples and images. In this way, the messages to be given and the actions to be intended through the story can be realized more easily as in the short story *The Imp and The Crust* (1886) with its Russian title *Как чепменок краюшку выкунал* by Tolstoy. In this respect, short stories are types of literary discourse that provide the desired outcome through narrative in the shortest and quickest way. This study, based on qualitative research method, adopts a 'general survey model' that aims to describe a past or present situation as it is. According to this model, the study's sample consists of the author's short story *The Imp and the Crust* (1886) and his non-fiction works such as *A Confession* (1882) and *My Religion* (1885). The research topic is defined within its own context and as it exists. The study aims to reflect the author's faith and moral concerns about life, based on a discourse-focused analysis of *The Imp and the Crust*, a short story by Tolstoy, considered one of the greatest writers of all time, who was engaged in a religious quest.

KEYWORDS: Faith, Morality, The Imp and The Crust, Tolstoy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, who was born in 1828 into an aristocratic Russian family, is most renowned for his novels *Anna Karenina* (1878) and *War and Peace* (1869), which are frequently regarded as the heights of realism literature. His semi-autobiographical trilogy *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, and *Youth* (1852-1856) and *Sevastopol Sketches* (1855), which are based on his experiences in the Crimean War, bring him literary fame for the first time in his twenties. He writes numerous novellas and dozens of short stories including *Hadji Murad* (1912), *Family Happiness* (1859), and *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886). In addition, he writes several philosophical writings and plays. Tolstoy, considered one of the greatest writers of all time, is a writer on a religious quest and concerned with moral issues in life, as evidenced by some of her short stories such as *The Imp and The Crust* (1886) that is the subject of the study and, his non-fiction books, *A Confession* (1882) and *My Religion* (1885). His lines in the last one are especially noteworthy: "For thirty-five years of my life I was, in the proper acceptation of the word, a nihilist-not a revolutionary socialist, but a man who believed in nothing. Five years ago, faith came to me; I believed in the doctrine of Jesus, and my whole life underwent a sudden transformation. What I had once wished for I wished for no longer, and I began to desire what I had never desired before. What had once appeared to me right now became wrong, and the wrong of the past I beheld as right. My condition was like that of a man who goes forth upon some errand, and having traversed a portion of the road, decides that the matter is of no importance, and turns back. What was at first on his right hand is now on his left, and what was at his left hand is now on his right; instead of going away from his abode, he desires to get back to it as soon as possible. My life and my desires were completely changed; good and evil interchanged meanings. Why so? Because I understood the doctrine of Jesus in a different way from that in which I had understood it before." (Tolstoy, 1885, p. IX).

Writing within the framework of social realism, the main orientation of Soviet literature, Tolstoy believes that a person can perceive a religion and live according to its rules using his own reason, without being bound to any sect or group. Furthermore, as someone who seeks to reach God, Tolstoy meticulously examines the religious beliefs that emerged during his time, both in heavenly and philosophical contexts, and utilizes those that are compatible with his own thought system. He exchanges ideas with famous thinkers of the time,

such as Mahatma Gandhi, takes an interest in other Far Eastern philosophies, and even studies and takes notes on the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad, also making use of the Quran. As a result, within the framework of the rules that form the basis of all true religions, and within the context of Christianity, to which he belonged, he establishes his own belief system by defining a value system where love and good morals predominated. (Çetinkaya, 2024, p. 800).

Leo Tolstoy, whose philosophy of life is based on spirituality, simplicity, and compassion, left an indelible mark on literature and philosophy with his profound understanding of human nature and the meaning of life. According to Tolstoy, human nature is inherently inclined towards good, but material greed and excess corrupt this nature. True morality, according to Tolstoy, is based on simplicity, contentment, selflessness, and the Christian understanding of love and compassion. Leo Tolstoy's philosophy of life emphasizes the importance of spiritual awakening and inner transformation. He believes that true fulfillment and purpose can be found by establishing a deep connection with one's inner self and the universe. The spiritual awakening and search for meaning depicted in Tolstoy's "A Confession" illustrate a journey to understand the deeper truths of life.

Literary discourses are discourse type reflecting their writer world view, value judgements that is, their ideologies embedded in the deep structures of these discourses. That's precisely why discursive analysis is necessary. When analyzing literary discourse, it is important to consider not only the linguistic context but also non-linguistic contexts such as social, cultural, and historical contexts for reaching the true meaning of the discourse or understanding the action intended through it. As understood from his literary discourses Tolstoy is a writer who has social concerns, and questions the meaning of life and the moral ideal through spiritual and social criticism. He is an honorary member (1873) and academician (1900) of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences. From his autobiographical trilogy, *My Childhood* (1852), *Early Youth* (1852-1854), and *Youth* (1855-1857), with original titles (*Детство*, *Отрочество*, *Юность*), Tolstoy makes the spiritual world of man, moral values, and judgments the main subject of his works. As understood from Çetinkaya (2024, p. 799), Tolstoy maintains his presence in the literary world as a personality who could not remain indifferent to the events around him. He defends the peasants he had the opportunity to observe in Yasnaya Polyana, where he was born and raised, until the end of his life, emphasizing that

life only has true meaning if one lives as a peasant. Adding to this, the religious and spiritual crisis he experienced in the 1870s due to his finding Orthodoxy meaningless led the author to expose the immense distortions of Russian society and its administrative structure with complete clarity, and at times, to offer solutions through his own belief system. As Patterson stated in the introduction to *Confession* (1983, p. 5) he translated, "the *Confession* marks a turning point in Tolstoy's concern as an author, and after 1880 his attention was concentrated quite explicitly and almost exclusively on the religious life that he believed to be idealized in the peasant."

This study will shed light on the religious and moral aspects of Tolstoy in the frame of the analysis of his literary discourse, *The Imp and The Crust*.

2. TOLSTOY'S RELIGIOUS AND MORAL ASPECTS REVEALED IN THE IMP AND THE CRUST

Short stories are intensive narratives that need a deep reading because of their multilayered semantic structure. Sometimes their shortness requires that the truths be understood by explaining them with examples. Since difficult topics can be grasped more easily through examples, complex facts can easily become etched in our memory when they are systematically transformed into examples and images. If the message that the story in question aims to convey and the action intended to be achieved through the story is expressed in an ordinary and plain narrative, the text type would change and the action intended through the discourse might not be realized. In this respect, short stories are types of literary discourse that provide the desired outcome through narrative in the shortest and quickest way as in *The Imp and The Crust* (1886).

This is a didactic short story formed around the story persons such as an unnamed peasant, the imp and The Devil and the motifs such as 'poor peasant, devil, deceive and leading to sin, rich peasant, lower self, alcohol, become swinish'. It is about an imp that works under the Devil's command and attempts to deceive a peasant and cause him to sin. At the beginning of the story, the imp steals a piece of bread that the peasant took with him when he went plowing early in the morning. The imp, whose aim is to make the peasant angry and swear, and to make him sin fails because the peasant thinks that someone in need has stolen his bread and does not get angry. The imp, crestfallen at not having made the peasant sin, goes to report what had happened to the Devil, his master. The Devil gives the imp three years to

lead the peasant into sin and if he fails within this period, he says he will duck the imp in holy water as seen in the following sentences. "If in three years you don't get the better of that peasant, I'll have you ducked in holy water!" The imp, frightened, quickly descends to earth. He finds a way to atone for his crime and disguising as a good man, he works for a poor peasant as a worker. He tells the peasant to plant wheat in the marsh during the dry summers. The peasant does as the imp instructed and plants the wheat in the marsh. That summer, while all the peasants' crops are scorched by the sun, his is lush, tall, and densely packed. He eats abundantly until the next harvest. The following summer, the imp tells the peasant to plant the wheat in the mountains. That year, the summer is rainy. While all the peasants' crops yield no wheat, he produces a very good crop. When he wonders what to do with all this wheat, the imp tells him to make wine. He makes wine from the wheat and drinks it himself and offers it to others. He curses his wife, who knocks over the wine while serving it. He serves wine to the rich villagers while ignoring the poor ones. After drinking a little, the owner and the rich villagers begin to chat, praise each other, and use flattering words. After another glass of wine, they abandon their pleasantries and resort to angry, cursed words. A fight breaks out, leaving each other's mouths and noses covered in blood. After drinking the third glass of wine, the owner and the other villagers begin to scream and roll on the ground like animals. This delights The Devil who achieves his goal. He wonders how the imp has managed to do this. The only thing it does is to make the peasant grow more wheat. The peasant, who used to never throw away even the smallest piece of his bread, begins to think of how to have fun when his wheat grows abundantly. When he becomes rich out of God's blessing, he begins to make wine for fun; the fox, wolf, and pig blood in his veins began to show. The Devil compliments and praises the imp. He forgives him and makes him his assistant.

In the story, the spiritual transformation of the main story person, the unnamed peasant, is in question. At the beginning of the story he is a poor man who is content and knows how to be content with little. In his first move, when the imp waits for the villager whose bread he stole to swear, he fails, as understood from the following lines:

"It was an imp who had stolen the bread while the peasant was plowing, and at that moment he was sitting behind the bush, waiting to hear the peasant swear and call on the Devil. ... The peasant was sorry to lose his breakfast, but 'It can't be helped,' said he. 'After all, I shan't die of hunger! No doubt whoever

took the bread needed it. May it do him good!"... The imp was crestfallen at not having made the peasant sin, and he went to report what had happened to the Devil, his master." (Tolstoy, 1907, p.132)

At the end of the story, when the peasant becomes rich through the imp's tricks, this good-natured man, because of drink turns into an animal character. Tolstoy compares all the men who drink alcohol to wild animals for indicating the evil that can be brought by alcohol as seen in the following lines:

All I did was to see that the peasant had more corn than he needed. The blood of the beasts is always in man; but as long as he has only enough corn for his needs, it is kept in bounds. While that was the case, the peasant did not grudge his last crust. But when he had corn left over, he looked for ways of getting pleasure out of it. And I showed him a pleasure—drinking! And when he began to turn God's good gifts into spirits for his own pleasure—the fox's, wolf's and swine's blood in him all came out. If only he goes on drinking, he will always be a beast! (Tolstoy, 1907, p.134)

Alcohol is also prohibited in Islam basing on the principle of protecting the intellect, which is one of the fundamental principles concerning the protection of religion, life, property, intellect, and generation (Aslan & Ünsal, 2021: 7). Despite the fact that the story is set in a Christian setting, the idea of the lower self (nafs) and the inner desires symbolized by imp can be conceptually compared. The imp in the story is not so much an absolute figure of evil from the outside, but rather the tendency towards evil within humanity. According to Tolstoy's religious-philosophical approach, the imp begins by leading a person into a small mistake, and then this small mistake grows into great moral ruin. Thus, it shows that evil, not good, grows through gradual progression. Here, the imp is less a metaphysical being and more the trigger and symbol of moral decline. Tolstoy's understanding of Christian morality surprisingly parallels the Sufi concept of the lower self. Imp is a kind of external drive, but what is truly decisive is how one's inner weakness reacts to it. It is not the imp that leads a person into sin, but their own weaknesses. In this respect, imp is actually an allegorical expression of the lower self. As Aslan and Ünsal (2021: 9-10) prove with Quranic verses and hadiths, in Islam, intoxicating beverages are forbidden because they harm individuals and society, causing hatred and enmity, and the punishment for drinking alcohol is established by the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Regarding the concept of Devil in Islam, Çelebi

(TDV, 99) describes the Devil as "A spiritual being that haunts a person and tries to mislead him." The writer expresses that "In the Holy Quran, the word devil (also iblis in eleven verses) is used eighty-eight times, eighteen of which are plural." He also adds that numerous hadith narrations point to devil's influence on all kinds of evil behaviors of humans, highlighting his deceptive, deceitful and insidious tactics. The hadiths also inform that devil is fierce, insidious, misleading, and provocative, commanding us to stay away from him and emphasizing the need to seek refuge in God from his evil. Devil not only encourages people to commit evil but also attempts to prevent them from performing actions that will bring them closer to God or to disrupt the acts of worship they are attempting to perform. In other religions, as Gürkan (TDV, 101-103) asserted, "Generally, in Jewish and Christian traditions, Devil has been attributed negative characteristics such as being a tester, tempter, liar, rebel, lord of the underworld (hell), punisher, the ancient enemy of God and humanity, a usurer who buys souls, an element that disrupts order, norms and morals, and incites anarchy. The concept of Devil in the Bible, while initially associated with evil functions in a more general and indirect sense, has gradually become synonymous with evil in a specific and active sense. This transformation occurred in the Old Testament, where Devil transitioned from an abstract concept with earthly contexts to a concrete celestial being. In the transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament, Devil rose from being an angel who was subordinate to God and not given much importance, to a cosmic power/enemy who is God's rival."

The Devil, whose duty on earth is to lead people astray from the right path, is very angry that his assistant, the imp, cannot make the villager swear. He says that if in three years he doesn't get the better of that peasant, he will have him ducked in holy water! As described in the Encyclopedia of Britannica (britannica.com), in Christianity, holy water is "water that has been blessed by a member of the clergy and is used in baptism and to bless individuals, churches, homes, and articles of devotion. A natural symbol of purification, water has been used by religious peoples as a means of removing uncleanness, either ritual or moral. Holy water is used in Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, certain Lutheran synods, Anglicanism, and various other churches."

As stated in the book titled *Holy Water and Its Significance for Catholics*, "Holy water is one of the Sacramentals, which are things made sacred by rites

of the church in the manner of Christ." (1909, p. 13) and "Holy water has been used in the church as it is now, through the centuries, back to the Apostles' days. It is spoken of in the 'Apostolic Constitutions.' Pope Alexander, who died in the year 130, in his pontifical decree confirming this Apostolic tradition says: 'We bless salt and water for the people, that all who may be sprinkled there with may be cleansed and sanctified. The martyr St. Justin, who died in the year 163, tells us that the faithful in his time were sprinkled in their assemblies with holy water every Sunday.'" (1909, p. 11-12.) As known, holy water is not just found in churches; many Catholics actually preserve holy water in tiny bottles or have holy water fonts in their homes because they believe in the protective power of holy water as expressed in the above mentioned book: "Inasmuch as harmful influences, and sometimes sickness, originate largely with the devil, the prayer of the Church in the blessing of the water directs herself principally against the evil spirit, and consequently holy water is in an especial manner a means of protection against this evil spirit (1909, p. 26-27). As understood from the following sentences, "If in three years you don't get the better of that peasant, I'll have you ducked in holy water!", The Devil and other demonic beings such as the imp are very afraid of holy water since "to duck someone in holy water" is a type of punishment.

As indicated in (sistersofcarmel.com), "The devil hates holy water because of its power over him. He cannot long abide in a place or near a person that is often sprinkled with this blessed water". "I have found by experience that there is nothing from which the devils fly more quickly than from holy water. They also fly from the cross, but they return almost immediately. Certainly, the power of holy water must be great; for my part, my soul feels particular comfort in taking it, and very generally a refreshment and interior delight which I cannot express" - St. Theresa of Avila.

3. CONCLUSION

Short stories are types of literary discourse that use narrative to convey the intended meaning in the quickest and most efficient manner. Because of their complex semantic structure, they are intense narratives that require close reading. They are a sort of discourse that reflects the writer's worldview and value judgments in other words, ideologies that are deeply embedded in these discourses. Discursive analysis is required for this very reason. When analyzing literary discourse, it is crucial to consider not only the linguistic context but also the non-

linguistic context, including social, cultural, and historical factors, in order to determine its true meaning or understand the intended action through it. With the expressions of Çetinkaya (2024, p. 797), Tolstoy's works present the struggles of people trying to survive amidst the crumbling political, social, philosophical, and administrative atmosphere of the country, with an intense and profound perspective. Through his works, he portrays the deep moral decay experienced by the people as a result of the hardships faced by different segments of society during the late Tsarist Russia and the transition to Soviet Russia-a period that led to the author's excommunication from the Orthodox Church.

In the brief narratives, the truths must occasionally be explained with examples in order to be grasped. Complex information may readily stay in our memory when they are methodically converted into examples and imagery since examples make difficult subjects easier to understand as in *The Imp* and *The Crust*. Tolstoy is a writer who thinks the meaning of life and the moral ideal through social and spiritual criticism, as is evident from his fictional and non-fictional discourses. *The Imp* and *The Crust* is much more than just an allegory; it carries a didactic quality. As mentioned above, Tolstoy experiences a moral crisis in the 1870s and is subsequently greatly influenced by the ethical teachings of Jesus Christ. As understood from his sentences such as "I was listening to an illiterate peasant, a pilgrim, talking about God, faith, life, and salvation, and a knowledge of faith was opened up to me. I grew closer to the people as I listened to their reflections on life and faith, and I began to understand the truth more and more" (Tolstoy, 1983, p.83), he is a man who is engaged in a religious quest. He attempts to analyze the moral decay that has emerged in Russian society and, beyond that, in humanity in general, using teachings based on the Bible. He is also known as a moral thinker and social reformer. This story is likely more than just a cautionary tale about the evils of alcohol; it's something far deeper and more sociologically pervasive. While the story seems to convey this message, what truly matters is empathy, humanity, kindness, and responsibility. For example, If the peasant of the story, who is left with too much grain knew his responsibility towards other needy people, and he could empathize with them he wouldn't turn into a monster.

The Imp and *The Crust* is a literary representation of Tolstoy's moral values. In his discourse about the dangers of alcohol, Tolstoy tells the story of an imp that works for the Devil and tries to trick a peasant

into committing sin. He believes that although human nature is essentially good, excess and material greed ruin it. The transition of an honest and contented peasant into a greedy and self-centered person owing to prosperity serves as a vivid illustration of this principle in the story. Here, the devil figure stands for human weakness and greed in addition to exterior evil. This story illustrates the idea of moral purity and simple existence, which Tolstoy promotes in his book *What I Believe* (1886), through a specific story. From the story in which he uses literary devices, smiles such as "Now they are raging like wolves, ... they will be like swine.", metaphor such as "If only he goes on drinking, he will always be a beast!" and imagery such as "the fox's, wolf's and swine's blood in him all came out." to illustrate the unethical effects of drinking on men or to reveal the evil that can be brought by alcohol it is possible to infer his religious sensitivities and moral concerns. Tolstoy also reminds his readers of a doctrine such as 'Enjoining good and forbidding evil' that

encompasses all divine religions through his story created with the sub-themes of 'The devil leads people into sin' and 'Too much money leads people astray' or 'Greed can corrupt a person' and the main theme of 'Everyone, no matter how well-intentioned, can succumb to the bad effects of alcohol'. Isn't life a struggle between good and evil within every human being?

Tolstoy's philosophy of life, which is marked by spirituality, simplicity, compassion, moral purity, and social justice, continues to motivate people to lead fulfilling lives. Tolstoy's writings and philosophical observations provide a timeless manual for negotiating life's challenges and working toward a more compassionate and enlightened society. His legacy as a philosopher, novelist, and humanitarian echoes as a source of wisdom and inspiration for generations to come, resonating with people seeking deeper truths, personal development, and the advancement of society.

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