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When Truth Voices the Same Text Through more than One Author: A Comparative Study of Tolstoy's “Oak Scene” and Larkin’s “The Trees”

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I. INTRODUCTION

The first glimpse at the scene of the *"oak tree"* at the beginning of Part 3, of Tolstoy's novel "*War and Peace*" strongly reminded me of Philip Larkin's poem *"The Trees"*. On first reflection, the two authors are held in the highest esteem by critics, biographers and generations of readers. Examining all available relevant sources, it has become obvious that this alleged imitation has completely escaped researchers' notice . Also, our initial survey has shown that a plethora of research has been conducted on Tolstoy's " *War and Peace*". To mention just a few studies: Trepanier (2011). Romney (2011), Bell (2002), Bencivenga (2006), Schwarz (2014), and a relatively fewer scholarly enquiries have been carried out on Larkin's "*The Trees*". Among them are: Ibrahim (2013), Upadhyay (2017), Banerjee (2008) , however, as yet, no attempt, to the extent of our knowledge, has been made to bring the two texts together by way of comparison and /or contrast.

The present study will consult biographical sources in search of possible shared grounds that could account for any literary affinity between the two authors who are apparently incompatible, as we will try to demonstrate in more details later in this paper, in almost all aspects of their real lives as well as their artistic resourcefulness. Furthermore, the two texts will be read together and rather than sketching a superior/inferior or precursor / epigone relationship between them, the present study will try to use the critical commentary on one text to illuminate aspects of the other, and thus get the synergy of both texts.

II. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Taylor (2000), remarks that it is not uncommon even for illustrious writers and musicians to be involved in plagiarism suits, and that the regularity of such allegations represents a major characteristic of our modern cultural life. In support of his claim, Taylor provides a list of famous authors each of whom has recently been discredited on account of conscious imitation. Among them are : David Lodge , Ian McEwan and Oliver Russell.

It is beyond dispute that violation of copyright is construed as a crime in law systems, and that unacknowledged copying has been claimed to be a crime since writing became a profession. However; in literature, according to Taylor (ibid), it is hard to substantiate a case of suspected plagiarism as there is no copyright on images and only word for word copying can prove the charge. The complexity inherent in any effort to trace a line of authorial influence in a literary text lies in the fact that a text is embedded in an inaccessible circles of cultural and sociolinguistic contexts in which it is produced and received. It is worth noting that literary plagiarism as a criminal act is dealt with in accordance with moral and legal standards via lawsuits and forensic evidence, but more commonly it is just an aesthetic judgment in which a critic drops his/her personal conclusion regarding a given text's breach of originality standard and/or its textual or ideological similarity to another text.

The notion of textual similarity is thoroughly discussed by Ronald Barthes, a French essayist and critic, who states that "*any text is an intertext*" (Sanders 2006: 15). Barthes' statement, it seems, confirms Allen's (2000) assertion that Barthes does not look for final meaning in the text and that his textual analysis strives for tracing the manner in which a text, borrowing Barthes' words , "*explodes and disperses*"(ibid: 77)

Related to any discussion about similarity and coincidence is the idea of intertextuality, which holds that a text's meaning is shaped by another text or that a text is a permutation of other texts. Based on this assumption, one cannot overlook the fact that writers are often walking this thin line between intertextulity and plagiarism. Helene (2010) believes that imitation is in the heart of literary writing, at least in the sense that writers draw on their own previous reading. Thus, she claims that writers' strife for originality is self-contradictory and paradoxical. She also argues that the concept of originality turns to pieces when confronted with the reality of a text. She quotes Giraudouxas as saying: “*Plagiarism is the basis of all literary expression, except the first, which is in fact unknown"* (Helene,ibid: 2).

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This last point is given some credibility by Hick's (2013: 161) claim that when Hegemann, a German writer, published her novel " Axolotl Roadkill" and was criticized for copying from Airen's "Strobo", she admitted taking from Airen's novel and apologized, but defended her literary approach arguing that " *there is no such thing as originality anyway, just authenticity*". There seems to be some logic in Hegemann's claim that originality does not exist. That is probably true since " originality" suggests first example which is untraceable, whereas "authenticity" is attainable as it only means genuineness and trueness.

The view of Helene(ibid) is shared by Zuccala (2012) who comes up with the interesting idea of educated imagination in which she supposes that humans are motivated to recreate familiar metaphors. It is this recreated metaphor, according to Zuccala (ibid), that critics should be looking for in any work of literature, and that the function of a critic is to try to interpret a work of literature in the light the literature he/she knows.

Perhaps it is also illuminating to throw some light on the study of Amidu (2001) on whether or not Tarafa has stolen from Imru- Al Qays (both were Arab pre-Islamic poets). In his treatment of the dispute, he mentions that the issue of literary ownership provokes a number of controversial questions: which poet lived off the work of another, who treated what theme better, who was the first poet to employ a special idiom or a pattern of theme distribution, but to him, the vital question lies in the possibility or otherwise of two or more poets treating the same motif in similar or identical wording; that is, coincidence of phraseology and thoughts. As he further argues, the classical literary corpus exhibits not a few examples of poetical pieces which have similar wording although they are presumed to have been produced by different authors.

Wiley (2008:220) elaborates on Amidu's point assuming that the issue of conscious influence is obscured by the Romantic writers. He reports Coleridge justifying his appropriations from Friedrich Schelling as saying:

" *Truth may voice the same text through more than one author and I care not from whose mouth the sounds are supposed to proceed, if only the words are audible and intelligible* ".

He also reports Mathew Lewis when admitted to plagiarism in his Novel "The Monk" as saying "

"*It may be called plagiarism but it deserves praise as the great writing consists in selecting what is most stimulant from works of our predecessors and in uniting gathered beauty in a new whole*" .

One reads in the above quotations a trend in Romanticism that seems to delineate creativity as making new combinations of already existing ideas and forms. This point is in harmony with Vaver's (2012) claim that arts and literature flourished well enough in the Enlightenment and the Victorian era without the principle of infringement being in use.

Mole (2008) differentiates between culpable and poetical versions of plagiarism. According to him, the first occurs when the borrowings are conscious, unfamiliar, unacknowledged and unimproved. Reversely, imitation could be excused if the borrowings are unconscious or if the source is cited or if the copied material is well known that an informed reader would recognize it, and if the poet has improved it.

The foregoing discussion roughly culminates in three points relevant to our present concern. Simply put, the first point is that plagiarism, it seems, is on every writer's mind. The second is that there is no systematic way to identify plagiarism. The third point pertains to the fact that there seems to be no uniform agreement among literary theorists on condemnation of plagiarism, unless it is word for word copying which is obviously culpable. In fact, some critics and writers think that the imitation in which the plagiarist improves the visions of the original is not only harmless but is desirable.

The Two Authors Considered:

What sets Larkin aside from Tolstoy, apart from the fact that each belongs to a different genre, is the literary eras in which they appeared. Tolstoy lived in the epoch of Romanticism, whereas, Larkin teamed up with the modernists. Thus, to contrast the two authors, one might as well need to contrast the movements of Romanticism and Modernism, and that would undeniably be too big an undertaking to be squeezed in the present study. However if one gives little attention to this chronological aspect of their creativity, the similarities that have been spotted seem to overshadow all their possible ideological and stylistic discrepancies.

Philip Larkin is a poet whose ingenuity I personally appreciate. He is in the list of poets whose writings are particularly appealing to me, and he has always been among the selection I teach to my students at university. My instinct about him is that he is an original writer who has provided readers of English literature with a unique literary experience. However; this should in no way mean that my judgment of him is impressionistic. Critics hold him to be one of the most outstanding English poets: Michael (2012) reports an article in "*The Times*" listing the 50 Best British Writers since 1945, with Philip Larkin leading the list, and George Orwell in second position. He is also described by Salwik (2010) as one of the finest and most read poets in England since WW11, and by Ross (1993) as the poetwho enjoyed the affections and consequent popularity not bestowedto a poet since Tennyson. Wheatcroft (1993) accounts for the fame he enjoyed by claiming that he (Larkin) has something

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"English" in the sparseness of the output of poem he has produced . In his words:

"Over the remaining twenty three years of his life, he became talismanic and far more famous, that itself was striking in view of how exiguous his output was. There was something "English" also (again, may be too self-consciously so) about that exiguity. A statement- as it were, that we don't have to write big books like the Americans and the Russians, we can get away just with writing four pamphlets of no more than forty eight pages each"(Wheatcroft, 1993: 104)

Larkin's uncompromising condemnation of Russian literature is of special significance to the present study as it might vaguely or disguisedly encapsulate his attitude towards Tolstoy. This tentative generalization is further strengthened by autobiographical evidence in which Larkin himself offers the ground to think of him as distant from Tolstoy: In a letter to his muse and mistress Monica Jones in 1966,Larkin related his recollections and memories about his habit of excessive engagement with writing fiction and poetry when he was a schoolboy, motivated, as he claimed, by a strong desire to be a key figure in the realm of literature. Interestingly, he, derogatively, admitted that he held everything off in order to dedicate all his time to writing as though he were Tolstoy (Gilroy, 2007).

Spurred by the fact that Larkin is critical of Russian writings basically for their lengthened plots , and spurred as well by Larkin's disparaging reference to Tolstoy, one can't help following the line of thought in which Larkin might not have been influenced by Tolstoy, especially as regards "*War and Peace*" which, if we take Larkin's word, would be the most repulsive text combining every element that Larkin loathes: lengthiness of plot as well as themes of spirituality, patriotism, and family life all of which were outside Larkin's circle of interest.

To further pursue the argument of the unlikeliness of Larkin's borrowing from, or consciously copying Tolstoy, it is fundamental to expose the two authors as diametrically opposed in the way their creativity is generated. From Salwak's (2010)standpoint, the concerns of pornography, sexism, racism, misogyny, gloom and lack of progress in life are persistent themes in Larkin's writings .This claim is backed by Motion's (a poet and biographer) description of him as " *the poet who had been greatly admired as the writer of haunting poems of melancholy and sadness"(cited in Banerjee,2008: 428).*

Reading Larkin, you are sure not to miss this melancholy which seems to pervade his correspondence, and more importantly, his poetry. As for his religious identity, Rácz (2012) describes Larkin as the most clearly agnostic of all twentieth century poets.

In contrast with Larkin, Tolstoy is thought of as a religious thinker and a social reformer. Moral and political views can easily be traced through his writings. He is viewed by Blume (2011:327) as a religious figure who "*sought to find his moral voice in his fictional works.*" And that he is " *a brand connoting politics and religion as much or more than art* ". Blume also reportsa claim made by "The Times", in Tolstoy's eightieth birthday celebration, that Tolstoy was often received according to opinion on his politics or his religion rather than on the basis of his literary artistry. In line with this point is that of Fuller (2009), who describes Tolstoy as a campaigner for social justice who demonstrated courage of his convictions.

In light of the foregoing discussion, there seems to be little doubt that Larkin could have been drawn to Tolstoy. It appears that the two writers have considerably different outlooks on life, and each of them appeals to a different community of readers and that Tolstoy, in his literary and real-life endeavors, had a charisma which Larkin totally lacked. Larkin's writings are different from that of Tolstoy in that they do not seem to comprise didactic themes. Tolstoy's literature is instructional as well as entertaining, and Tolstoy and Larkin are as far away from each other as a strict follower of religion should be from an agnostic.

Thus the two writers could be polarized on ideological and religious grounds, as well as on the basis of the literary movements they belonged to, and of course, on the basis of their different categories of literary composition.

In deciding on the issue of textual conformity, which has so far been deliberately avoided, a number of considerations should be taken into account:

First, we have to acknowledge that whether or not Larkin actually drew upon Tolstoy, and whether or not the detected similarity between the two texts is to be interpreted as sheer coincidence, all that may never be answered for sure. The most sensible proposition, we believe, is to accept Al-'Askarõ's view , cited in Amidu (2001) that in cases of suspected plagiarism only God knows where the truth lies.

A claim of plagiarism is usually hard to uphold. The writer accused of copying has to be cognizant of the parallels between his work and that of another author. It is ,presumably, intentional, so the question here is how might one be able to confirm an intention? Therefore, this study will adopta milder attitude towards this unproved allegation.

Second, There seems to be no solid evidence as for any unacknowledged presence of Tolstoy in Larkin's life. Nothing of the whole literature that has been explored suggests that Larkin has read or even expressed a liking to Tolstoy, or to Russian literature at large. To the contrary, as Wheatcroft's quotation above shows, Larkin is critical of Russian literature. Also Thompson (2014: 128) quotes

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David Foster Wallace as saying " *I am the only 'postmodernist' you'll ever meet who absolutely worships Leo Tolstoy*" . For the sake of argument, this point of Thompson could be projected onto Larkin as he is part of the postmodernist movement which was dominant by the time he emerged from his youthful phase of literary career.

Third, as regards Tolstoy's image in England, Sampson (1990) sets up a contrast between the reception of Tolstoy in France and in England. He found out that Tolstoy was more favored in France and that the novel "*War and Peace*" ignited criticism and disapproval in England fueled by a prevailing attitude that a writer should portray his contemporary society and not a historical society about which he has limited knowledge. Sampson supported this last point by saying that during the WW11, many more conscientious objectors to war came from England than from France. He also referred to Tolstoy's short stay in England (only a couple of weeks) compared to a long time spent in France. We believe that these last two points of Sampson are far-fetched and negligible.

Interestingly,Blume (2011) maintains that Tolstoy was not introduced to the English reader until the turn of the twentieth century , when he accessed England via French translations of his works. This association with the French language, according to Blume, limited Tolstoy's readership in England to the upper classes and elites; not only that but he was mainly introduced, according to Blume, as a public figure whose proclamations against the church and his arguments against the government were detailed in articles in "The Times".

At least, one conclusion could be drawn from the above discussion; there seems to be no evidence that Larkin was directly familiar with Tolstoy's "*War and Peace*". Establishing this point as a fact could constitute tentative evidence that Tolstoy has never been a precursor to Larkin even though this supposition is blatantly contradicted by the fact that the two passages are too similar to render sheer coincidence credible.

The Two Texts Considered:

Before engaging with the texts of our focus, three points need to be highlighted. one is that the present study will not dwell on the issue of Larkin's conscious imitation of Tolstoy, as the previous discussion has simultaneously substantiated both its likelihood and its unlikelihood. The second point is that issues pertaining to the aesthetical value of the two texts, whether the value inherent in the composition or that stemming from creative engagement between the text and the reader, is outside the scope of the present study. One reason for turning the artistic evaluation of the two texts out of our present concern is that the two passages represent two different literary discourses, each of which has its different set of tools for evaluation. Add to this, our deep conviction that comparing an original text with a translated one, will definitely do injustice to both texts. The main purpose of this inter-textual reading of the two texts is to illuminate both texts by re-reading one with the other in mind. The third point is that throughout the coming discussion, the visions of the two authors under scrutiny will be presented through their narrative personae; "*the oak*" will speak for Tolstoy and " *the speaker*", for Larkin.

Now let's turn to the passage of *the oak tree* in Tolstoy's "*War and Peace*". The scene of the *oak tree* comes at the beginning of Part 3, when Prince Andrew is on the verge of undergoing major psychological transformation as he bumps into an oak tree during a journey he is making to one of his estates. Holmes (2015) has created Prince Andrew's character background:

"Prince Andrei is a rich, handsome, intelligent man in his early 30s, highly capable, but bored, depressed, self-preoccupied and disillusioned. Andrei's mother is dead and he shares his household with his sister and domineering father. His wife – whom he did not love – has recently died in childbirth, leaving him with a young son. It is early spring. Andrei is making a journey to inspect one of his many estates"(Holmes,2015: 186).

Tolstoy's oak scene runs as follows:

"*At the edge of the road stood an oak. It was an enormous tree, double a man's span, with ancient scars where branches had long ago been lopped off and bark stripped away. With huge ungainly limbs sprawling unsymmetrically, with gnarled hands and fingers, it stood, an aged monster, angry and scornful, among the smiling birch trees. This oak alone refused to yield to the season's spell, spurning both spring and sunshine. "Spring, and love, and happiness!" this oak seemed to say, "Are you not weary of the same stupid meaningless tale? I have no faith in your hopes and illusions" there were flowers and grass under the oak too, but it stood among them scowling, rigid, misshapen and grim as ever. "Yes, the oak is right, a thousand times right", mused Prince Andrei. "Others – the young – may be caught anew by this delusion but we know what life is – our life is finished!" (Tolstoy 1978 reprint: 492).*

The following lines are the opening lines of Larkin's "*The Trees*".

The trees are coming into leaf
Like something almost being said
The recent buds relax and spread
Their greenness is a kind of grief
(Larkin 1974: 12)

Now let's compare the attitude of the speaker in Larkin's lines towards spring to that of Tolstoy's barren oak:

'"*Spring, love, happiness!' this oak seemed to say"(Tolstoy:492).*

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The first, and probably the most obvious, similarity between the two literary passages is that both scenes are set in spring. In Larkin's poem, the image of spring is spontaneously evoked by way of association. From the words *"the trees are coming to leaf*" one can easily surmise that this scene is in spring. The use of the progressive form designates the on-going state of the season. Similarly , In Tolstoy's passage spring is directly revealed "*Spring, the season of love and happiness"*. It goes without saying that both the speaker and the oak apprehend spring as signifying life, rebirth and reproduction. This life is conveyed visually in Larkin's poem by the evoked image of sprouting leaves, whereas in Tolstoy's passage it is verbally expressed when spring is described as cheerful and lovely. The two passages start optimistically. Both the desperate oak and the speaker , who is also agitated, are taken by what they later realize as apparently fleeting and illusive happiness. The speaker and the oak seem to converge in that they are fully aware of the inescapable natural processes that are inexorably at work in what might be called the life cycle represented in the process of flowering and, later, of shedding signifying birth and death. Banerjee (2008) proposes that the speaker in Larkin's "*The Trees*" is celebrating nature as it does not suffer from the terminal finalities of human life. The new leaves replace the dead ones in spring and they wane and die in autumn. Projecting the same idea of Banerjee onto the oak could constitute a further aspect of concordance between the two passages. On a deeper level, this scene in both passages is a commentary on our existence as it revolves around the cyclical nature of life illuminating the possibility, for human beings, of always starting again; if trees can renovate their life, perhaps man can, too.

Though not verbatim, Tolstoy's phrase*" the oak seemed to say*" , and Larkin's "*They (the trees) seem to say*" are just one example of total coincidence in phraseology which might give strong support to the line of conscious copying. However, one could find a way out for Larkin as "*seems to say*" is probably a commonly used phrase and no author could claim personal ownership of it, and it does not necessarily have any idiosyncratic reference or value. Taylor (2000) argues that almost every writer starts off with a pile of pet phrases stacked up in his head which close critical inspection reveals. Vaver (2012), argues that in order for a sentence to qualify for copyright treatment, what needs to be established is that in the production of this sentence it took the writer a long time drafting, refining, iterating, deleting, adding and changing of mind as to whether to drop or retain the sentence altogether. It is clear that a work of literature involves using a variety of skills and making judgments.

Coincidence of ideas can also be read from Tolstoy's "*the oak seemed to say*" and Larkin's " *something almost said*". The oak and the speaker are eagerly waiting for some news which is either delayed or faintly expressed as suggested by the expressions above. Ostensibly, it is the news of the new spring life carrying with it elation, hope and regeneration.

Although the phrases "*almost said"* and " *seemed to say*" actually mean " nothing has really been said" , they could also be taken as hints to a spark of hope in the oak and the speaker as for the essence of the awaited message which could not possibly be anything other than that life is renewable. They seem to know the "unsaid" or "faintly expressed" message beforehand and obviously they believe that the trees are surely deluded if this delayed message excludes death. So, the oak and the speaker ridicule the attitude of the trees and leaves towards this transient pleasure with its short span and with death at its heels. Adopting this view of the speaker and equally of the oak , one could mark the trees' contentment as mere foolishness.

This sillyjoy that prevails among the trees in both passages also lends itself as an instance of total coincidence between the two texts. In Larkin's poem, the phrase "*the recent buds relax and spread*" could be taken as a manifestation of liveliness and glee. The buds seem to be greeting or welcoming life. The same idea is found in Tolstoy's passage as the awkward lonely oak tree is *"among the smiling birch trees*" . Like Larkin's trees, Tolstoy's birch trees are smiling to spring and welcoming the new life with wild exuberance.

The expression " *their greenness is a kind of grief* " suggests that the speaker wallows in self-pity seeing that his youth is not renovated like that of trees. Another equally plausible suggestion is that his unhappiness might have been afflicted by a feeling of sympathy for the trees resulting from his deep awareness that this greenness and blossoming is only short-lived and the buds will soon be devastated. The same idea is identified in the oak's response to spring:

With huge ungainly limbs sprawling unsymmetrically, and its gnarled hands and fingers, it stood an aged, stern, and scornful monster among the smiling birch trees" Spring, and love, and happiness!" this oak seemed to say, "Are you not weary of the same stupid meaningless tale?(Tolstoy; 492).

The extract above, reflects a big old , stern oak with lost branches and scarred bark amid, to borrow Wordsworth words in his masterpiece, "Daffodils", "the jocund company" of birch trees. The oak rejects spring as "*a stupid meaningless tale*", that causes weariness rather than happiness. Like the speaker in Larkin's "*The Trees*", the oak probably feels envious of the youthful glamor seen in the look of the birch trees, or it might be touched with the feeling of uneasiness on account of its awareness that this new life will soon succumb to death.

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The idea of spring or greenness eliciting dismay whether resulting from an emotion of antipathy or owing to excessive awareness of the awaiting destiny, is so discrepant from the response of the solitary rambler in Wordsworth's " *Daffodils*". The lone wanderer of Wordsworth cheers himself up with the company of the swaying daffodils; an experience which immediately provides him with a sense of relatedness, and whose vivid memory becomes a permanent instigator of delight and hope.

The second stanza of "*The Trees*" reads:

Is that they are born again
And we grow old? No, they die too
Their yearly trick of looking new
Is written down in rings of grain.
(Larkin: 12)

And Tolstoy's passage proceeds:

"'Are you not weary of that stupid, meaningless, constantly repeated fraud? Always the same and always a fraud? There is no spring, no sun, no happiness Look at those cramped dead firs, ever the same, and at me too, sticking out my broken and barked fingers just where they have grown, whether from my back or my sides: as they have grown so I stand, and I do not believe in your hopes and your lies. " (Tolstoy: 492)

Again here are two marvelously matching scenes. The speaker in the poem is wondering whether the trees are born again every spring, but he soon finds the answer for himself; they age and perish, too, like us human beings. He realizes that the flowering of new leaves he sees is just a trick and a fabrication of looking young and new.

According to (Ibrahim 2013: 115), the phrase "*rings of grain*" denotes that "*despite the fresh outer appearances, the trees are growing old inside*". Undoubtedly, the poem is trying to say that, after graying and shedding of leaves, a circle is scratched in the outer edge of the stem. This circle is a sign of death as it is an indication of life. Just as the "*rings of grain*" represent a concrete evidence that old age is engraved in trees' trunks in Larkin's "*The Trees"*, the expression "*sticking out my broken and barked fingers*" indicates that old age is also reflected in the cramped firs and broken and barked branches of the oak.

Like the speaker, the oak rejects spring and views it as incurring false hopes and lies.It even goes further to question and deny cosmic truths like the existence of the Sun. Regarding this last point, the speaker seems to be a little bit more optimistic in that he views life and death not as incompatible or mutually exclusive, but as existing side by side: Life is followed by death and death by life. The oak does not seem to recognize these fleeting illusions of life and this short-lived spring, therefore it fails to see the spring, the Sun, and the bliss felt by the trees "*There is no spring, no Sun, no happiness"*.

Both the speaker and the oak do not believe in the hopes of rebirth and regeneration. To the oak, the hope of resurrection is absurd *" I don't believe in your hopes and in your lies"*. in the same way the speaker believes that trees' immortality is beyond consideration; *" No, They die too"*. The underlying message that both scenes subtly convey is our natural instinct to attempt to hide the reality of our age as youth is considered a blessing and that it is always flattering to look younger.

Curiously, the speaker and the oak seem to be a little attracted to what they have rejected. On his journey back home, Prince Andrew encounters the same oak again:

Everything was in blossom, the nightingales trilled and caroled, now near, now far away. The old oak, quite transfigured, spread out a canopy of dark sappy green, and seemed to swoon and sway in the rays of the evening sun. There was nothing to be seen now of knotted fingers and scars, or old doubts and sorrows. Through the rough century old bark, even where there were no twigs, leaves had sprouted, so juicy, so young it was hard to believe that aged veteran had born them. "Yes it is the same oak" thought Prince Andrei, and all once he was seized by an irrational, spring like feeling of joy and renewal(Tolstoy: 497)

And Larkin concludes his poem with these lines:

Yes still the unresting castles thresh
In full-grown thickness every May
Last year dead, they seem to say
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh
(Larkin: 12)

Once more, here is a case of total coincidence. The two passages equally celebrate the power of hope and resistance that the trees seem possess. The oak tree is vividly embracing the wind which it has, earlier, withstood" *the nightingales trilled and caroled, now near, now far away"* .In the same way the trees resist the winds of May, "unresting castles thresh in May". The image of a violently beating wind summoned by the word "thresh" in Larkin's poem, and the expression *"where branches had long ago been lopped off and bark stripped away"* in Tolstoy's Passage, is now giving way to a slight breeze that gently ruffles the blossoming tree leaves.

Tolstoy's portrayal of the wind as a tune corresponds to that of Samuel Butler Coleridge in his poem "The Nightingale":

And hark! the Nightingale begins its song,
Most musical, most melancholy Bird!
A melancholy Bird? O idle thought!
In nature there is nothing melancholy.

In the above lines, Coleridge is dissident of the way people describe the wind, a bird or any aspect of nature as melancholy. To him this is an inherited misconception and that melancholy is a pure production of man's heart

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that he has projected onto nature. This point of Coleridge rebuts the rudimentary attitudes of both the oak and the speaker.

Going back to the two texts of our present concern, the speaker and, equally the oak, seem to accept the invitation to be joyful. Banerjee (2008) thinks that the speaker becomes responsive to the promise of hope that the leaves avow its fulfillment. This entails that the speaker and the oak are vacillating between being simultaneously undeceived and accepting what they perceive as the falsehood of the situation.

The last stanza in Larkin's "*The Trees*" is a celebration of spring zest in natural cycles, even though they know that the whole thing is death disguised in life:

Last year dead, they seem to say
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh

Likewise, on his journey back, Prince Andrew beholds enormous transformation inthe oak's appearance:

Everything was in blossom, the nightingales trilled and caroled, now near, now far away. The old oak, quite transfigured, spread out a canopy of dark sappy green, and seemed to swoon and sway in the rays of the evening Sun

Three important points arise from the extracts above; one is that no matter how bleak or austere life becomes, there is always hope; the second is that one needs to concede that the ideas one holds forth are not always true, and the third point is that what matters is the internal persuasions one has, not the external appearance.

A final point which the present study is trying to assert, and which is probably subtly reiterated throughout the previous discussion, is that one way of handling similar texts could be by viewing them as complementary andas canceling each other's debt rather than always holding them as competing for supremacy and novelty .

III. CONCLUSION

Read together, the two texts have revealed diverse trajectories of possible literary influence. Similarities are found in ideas, phraseology and, more importantly, in the process of perceptual engagement with reality. Adopting Holme's (2015) psychiatric model which he has developed to analyze the oak scene, the oak, which symbolizes Prince Andrew's deplorable plight, has gone through three stages: the preoccupation of depression, relatedness and finally recovery. In other words, there is a consciousness development route starting with rejection, through ambivalence and finally leading to acceptance .The speaker in Larkin's "*The Trees*" seems to follow the same suit.

Finally, the major concern of the present study is to shed some light on the analogy between the two texts whose connection, though conspicuous, has gone unnoticed byreaders, commentators and critics.It is our firm belief that for someone who has read Larkin's "*The Trees*", it is hard not to remember it while reading Tolstoy's oak scene. However, one is tempted to pick Coleridge's words" *Truth may voice the same text through more than one author"* , and Al-'Askarõ's statement that in cases of suspected plagiarism only God knows where the truth lies.

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