

How to Read Tolstoy's *War and Peace*: Antiquity and Equivalence**

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/LC.2018.056>

In the subtitle of the chapter on *War and Peace* in his book *The Art of History*, Christopher Bram promises us to finally explain “how to read *War and Peace*, often called the greatest novel ever written” (Bram 2016: 75). However, what follows in his book are well known theses about the unpredictability of fate, observations on Tolstoy's pace of narration and the dispensability of the second epilogue. Eventually, “the truth of *War and Peace*” allegedly “lies in the examples of individual men and women trying to find the room to be human inside the dense machinery of history” (ibid.). It offers everything but an instruction for the appropriate reading of truly “the greatest novel ever written”. But is this necessary at all? No scholar has yet recommended a specific reading attitude in order to decode this vast novel, most probably because a “realistic” text does not seem to require special decoding. The flow of history itself seems to provide the narrative line, along which we scrape through these 1600 pages. But why then should it be the greatest novel ever written? Could not every one of us with some talent reproduce such a flow of history?

Therefore and nevertheless, the readers of *War and Peace* are in need of some guidance – not only because they might lose orientation in the multitude of scenes, figures, actions and places, but also to be able to grasp the poetic structure of the novel. This structure alone gives order and meaning to all episodes throughout, makes all figures necessary, interconnects all places of action. Once you see the structure, you will never lose orientation. You are in a cosmos, not in a chaos. Every word on these 1600 pages will appear to be necessary, because in a cosmos every detail finds its place. This is what Tolstoy himself

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** The article is a revised and extended version of the paper “*Vojna i mir' Tolstogo – 'Iliada' Novogo Vremeni?* (Tolstoy's *War and Peace* – an *Iliad* of Modern Age?)” originally published in Russian in: *V napravlenii smysla. Mezhdunarodnyj sbornik statej pamjati professora Natal'i Vasil'evny Zhivolupovoj*. Nizhnij Novgorod: Nizhegodskij gosudarstvennyj lingvističeskij universitet im. N. A. Dobroljubova 2012, pp. 316–327.

meant, responding to his editor “that in order to tell him the essence of his novel he would be obliged to reproduce the whole text word by word” (Tolstoj 1978–1985: vol. 18, 784).

Since this is not necessarily guaranteed by other authors, “how to read *War and Peace*” sufficiently differs from a general instruction for reading a historical novel. On this difference, which in fact, despite Harold Bloom’s preference for Tolstoj’s *Hadji Murad* in *The Western Canon*, makes *War and Peace* an unrivalled piece of art, I will reflect from three narratological aspects: first – on the role of equivalence in the narrative flow, second – on its hints at and parallels to Homer and Plutarch, and third – on some implicit metapoetic reflection in the novel. Of course, I cannot claim to be exhaustive in any of these aspects, but at least they shall be sufficiently illuminated to provide some hints on how to read this unique work of art properly.

In his *Iliad*, Homer effectively concentrates on just one episode of the war, wisely dismissing the entirety of the 10-year long conflict. Already Aristotle praises this decision in his *Poetics*, chapter 23:

[...] the transcendent excellence of Homer is manifest. He never attempts to make the whole war of Troy the subject of his poem, though that war had a beginning and an end. It would have been too vast a theme, and not easily embraced in a single view. If, again, he had kept it within moderate limits, it must have been over-complicated by the variety of the incidents. As it is, he detaches a single portion [...] (Aristotle 1907: 89).

– whereas Tolstoj goes through the entire ten years of his war with few jumps and abridgements. Why is something that would have been wrong for Homer, right in Tolstoj’s case? We can, of course, speculate that Tolstoj wanted to write *his Iliad*, the *Iliad* of the Russian people, with his own narrative means, with the means of the nineteenth century. But what does that mean? Through the Napoleonic wars Russia did not, unlike Greece, become the leading culture of Europe; France, unlike Troy, has not perished. Certainly, the use of French has been pushed back after Napoleon, but this is rather an anecdote than a result. Nor does God interfere in Tolstoj’s novel. Moreover, Tolstoj himself does not seem to like a comparison of his novel with the *Iliad*: his heroes are all too human, they do not achieve anything great, they are sometimes stupid and sometimes wise, they have nothing to do with the larger-than-life Homeric heroes.

But why does Tolstoj succeed by doing exactly what Homer does well to avoid? How does he master the overwhelming stream of events, which Homer wisely filters by concentrating on just one episode of the war? An answer to how the novel nevertheless keeps its semantic unity, and a key for the reader for handling the vast text volumes of the novel could be extracted from Theodor Fontane’s remark that “in the first page of a novel there must be the seed of the whole” (Fontane 1909: 17, translation – M. F.). With Tolstoj, this, I suppose, is a little different, his novel is rather “knitted backwards”, that is, the first pages, similar to the beginning of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* offer us merely a superficial critique of the Russian upper class in a light tone, it’s little more than a warm-up, while the last few pages of the epilogue reveal the deep semantic structure of the novel. But this will be our punch line, so be patient, dear reader.

There is only one direct reference to the *Iliad* in *War and Peace*: the lovely, lavish, well-dressed, draped with diamonds Hélène, the protagonist of the “negative” figure group of

the Kuragin family, who marries the “positive” protagonist Pierre – she must be understood as a reference to Helen from Homer’s *Iliad*. The fact that Hélène without a trace of bad conscience takes a lover can be understood as an interpretation of Helena being raped by Paris. Only once is she explicitly compared with her archetype, but, as usual in Tolstoy’s novels, this comparison is refracted through the consciousness of a protagonist. Pierre reflects on how others think about him:

То вдруг ему становилось стыдно чего-то. Ему неловко было, что он один занимает внимание всех, что он счастливее в глазах других, что он с своим некрасивым лицом какой-то Парис, обладающий Еленой (Tolstoy 1932: vol. 9, 331).

Or he would suddenly feel ashamed of he knew not what. He felt it awkward to attract everyone’s attention and to be considered a lucky man and, with his plain face, to be looked on as a sort of Paris possessed of a Helen (Tolstoy 1993: vol. 1, 276–277).

Only from the perspective of the St. Petersburg society, which Tolstoy portrays satirically with consistence, Hélène is a Helena who is worthwhile to be won. Pierre is ashamed not only because he is the center of attention, but also because his prospected marriage is based only on physical desire he cannot resist. Intuitively, he knows that he sank to the low level of a Paris, who simply wants to conquer a beautiful woman.

Tolstoy, however, alludes twice to another ancient Greek literary work – the comparative biographies of famous Greeks and Romans, the famous *Bioi Paralleloi* (*Parallel Lives*) by Plutarch. This becomes clear by a closer look at the different assessments of Napoleon and the Russian patriotism in two Petersburg salons before Napoleon’s invasion of Russia. In Hélène’s salon, Napoleon is admired and all pin their hopes on reconciliation, while in the salon of Anna Pavlovna Sherer all are inspired by the rising Russian patriotism: “В кружке Анны Павловны напротив восхищались этими восторгами и говорили о них, как говорит Плутарх о древних” (Tolstoy 1932: vol. 11, 62); “Anna Pavlovna’s circle on the contrary was enraptured by this enthusiasm, and spoke of it as Plutarch speaks of the deeds of the ancients” (Tolstoy 1993: vol. 2, 396).

Here, as in the case of Pierre imagining Helena, the reference serves a perspective deflection. Tolstoy with his artist’s intuition avoids the direct expression of patriotic sentiment. The comparison with Plutarch’s biographies, which have no historical but rather a moral and didactic function, puts the point of view of the St. Petersburg courtiers into perspective. However correct their point of view may be, it arises from a moralizing stereotype.

Ultimately, it seems to be rather Plutarch than Homer with whom Tolstoy should be compared. Plutarch is his forerunner not in a concordance of theme, but of literary method. Plutarch’s method, which makes his figures so vividly perceptible, is the contrasting comparison, which is particularly effective when the corresponding figures, as in Plutarch, are neither antagonists nor competitors. In Plutarch’s work, comparison is independent from inner world relationships and real connections between the protagonists who are compared, because the device of comparison here has the function to lay bare the semantic interrelation between concepts of man. The tension between these concepts produces the semantic space, which is constitutive for the overall message of this work of art.

The reference to Plutarch, to his pairwise comparative biographies, points to one of Tolstoy’s central methods: the contrasting pairing of figures or, in philological terminology,

the equivalence of persons. Each main figure of *War and Peace* is standing in several such pair equivalences, and these equivalences contain one fundamental semantic structure of the novel. Kutuzov and Napoleon: both are far from calling the shots, but while Kutuzov – full of wisdom – lets happen what must happen, while Napoleon is the victim of his own narcissistic illusion that his ‘dispositions’ are the cause of something – if he wins – of his victory, if he loses – of his defeat.

And yet, another equivalence: “Кутузов [...], выслушивая донесения, он, казалось, не интересовался смыслом слов того, что ему говорили, а что-то другое в выражении лиц, в тоне речи доносивших, интересовало его” (Tolstoy 1932: vol. 11, 247); Kutuzov, “[...] when listening to the reports it seemed as if he were not interested in the import of the words spoken, but rather in something else – in the expression of face and the tone of voice of those who were reporting” (Tolstoy 1993: vol. 2, 526).

In other words, Kutuzov, as imagined by Tolstoy, is interested in the structure of the speech like a psychoanalyst, he gains the strategically much more important knowledge not on the level of information, but from the structure of his interlocutors’ speech. In this, Kutuzov resembles Tolstoy himself, who in *War and Peace*, as in his other works, infuses the more or less banal conversations in salons or on the battlefield with the much more meaningful second dialogue of gestures, facial expressions, associations. This dialogue can be called analogical communication, and it expresses what is much more important than facts: the quality of relationship. Here, war, as a very special form of relationship, can only be understood on the analogical level; on the informational level it is chaotic and unsteerable. Napoleon, other than Kutuzov, is able to hear only the thematic, factual content of others’ speech; he is blind to the intentions of his interlocutor, both when the latter is flattering him, as well as when he is being duped by the refined allusions of the tsarist diplomat Balashev, as it happened in Vilna. Therefore, Kutuzov and Napoleon represent the alternatives of communication: Napoleon’s communication is logic-informational, Kutuzov’s – analogic-relational. Precisely this is the reason why Kutuzov allows himself to sleep during the war council. He knows that the war will not be decided by logical operations, presented by his fellow generals.

I cannot, of course, examine all equivalences between heroes in the novel. Even the least significant figures of the novel are engaged in such equivalences. However, the following mirror structure is of particular importance. The two central sources of perspective and identification in the novel are Pierre Bezukhov and Natasha Rostova. They resemble each other in their naiveté and their non-understanding of social and cultural conventions – an ignorance, which is positively valued by Tolstoy in the Rousseau tradition. Both are therefore frequently used for estrangement in the Formalist meaning: Natasha, most obviously, as an opera visitor in a scene, which can be regarded as a model of estrangement.

Она не могла следить за ходом оперы, не могла даже слышать музыку: она видела только крашенные картоны и странно-наряженных мужчин и женщин, при ярком свете странно двигавшихся, говоривших и певших; она знала, что всё это должно было представлять, но всё это было так вычурно-фальшиво и ненатурально, что ей становилось то совестно за актеров, то смешно на них (Tolstoy 1932: vol. 10, 142).

She could not follow the opera nor even listen to the music, she saw only the painted cardboard and the queerly dressed men and women who moved, spoke, and sang, so strangely

in that brilliant light. She knew what it was all meant to represent, but it was so pretentiously false and unnatural that she first felt ashamed for the actors and then amused at them (Tolstoy 1993: vol. 2, 199).

Through Pierre's glasses above all, the war is the object of estrangement. On one hand, Pierre's view from a distant hill at the battlefield, which stretches out before him like an amphitheater, aestheticizes the murderous events to some kind of musical show:

Эти дымы выстрелов и, странно сказать, звуки их производили главную красоту зрелища. Пуфф! – вдруг виднелся круглый, плотный, играющий лиловым, серым и молочно-белым цветами дым, и бум! – раздавался через секунду звук этого дыма. „Пуф-пуф” – поднимались два дыма, толкаясь и сливаясь; и „бум-бум” – подтверждали звуки то, что видел глаз. Пьер оглядывался на первый дым, который он оставил округлым плотным мячиком, и уже на месте его были шары дыма, тянущегося в сторону, и пуф... (с остановкой) пуф-пуф – зарождались еще три, еще четыре, и на каждый, с теми же расстановками, бум... бум-бум-бум – отвечали красивые, твердые, верные звуки (Tolstoy 1932: vol. 11, 149).

These puffs of smoke and (strange to say) the sound of the firing, produced the chief beauty of the spectacle.

“Puff! Puff!” – and two clouds arose pushing one another and blending together; and ,boom, boom!’ came the sounds confirming what the eye had seen.

Pierre glanced round at the first cloud, which he had seen as a round compact ball, and in its place already were balloons of smoke floating to one side, and – “puff” (with a pause) – “puff, puff!” three and then four more appeared and then from each, with the same interval – “boom-boom, boom!” came the fine, firm, precise sounds in reply (Tolstoy 1993: vol. 2, 505–506).

On the other hand Pierre, in the middle of the battle, experiences the actions of soldiers as a sort of ritual dance movements and the approaching projectiles as rain or hail that arbitrarily kills figures standing around. In it one might see Tolstoy's pacifist message of the futility of war, but in this novel the war, this slaughter of the peoples, is, beyond all political and military intentions, an inevitable rule of history, to criticize which is simply pointless.

Tolstoy equips the eyes of these two heroes with a thematically non-understanding and a structurally knowing view, a view at false conventions in case of Natasha, while in Pierre he exposes the impassionate, in Homeric sense divine perspective of a visual artist, an artist who constructs “Puff-puff, bum-bum” equivalences, which, beyond the thematic effect of the projectiles, unfold a beauty which should not be confused with mere aestheticism, because equivalences create meaning. Therefore, Pierre and Natasha both have an eye for these structural connections; in Pierre it is realistically motivated by the covertness and absent-mindedness of a foolish, good-natured bear, and in Natasha by her childish freshness of perception. After 1500 pages, Pierre and Natasha, the clumsy bear and the nymphet find one another and marry, and in doing so they immediately lose this special ability of perception: Natasha becomes blind from love and enslaves herself to her husband, and Pierre becomes a self-serving wind bag. This has to happen, because their gift of seeing was used only for the novel, and the novel came to its end.

Before that, however, and this enforces the semantic analogy between them, both characters must be trialled by temptation through similar figures, which are even siblings:

Pierre by Hélène Kuragina and Natasha by Anatole Kuragin, who makes her lose her head and almost manages to seduce and to entice her. The Kuragin siblings, in this respect, stand in a close semantic analogy, which should not be confused with their pragmatic neighborhood as siblings – however, their family proximity provides the realistic motivation for the semantic parallelism between them, the latter being, as always in Tolstoy, pivotal. However, it does not follow from their similarity as sibling that both have the power to seduce morally upright persons.

Being stupid and seductive forms the basis of the similarity between Anatole and Hélène. They contrast, however, in the versions of their stupidity: Hélène's passive stupidity, which is the most elaborate form female stupidity assumes, is praised in the salons as the paradigm of feminine cleverness. It stands in contrast to the highest elaboration of male, active stupidity, the brazenness of Anatole, which, however, in men's circles might be perceived as a virtue. The third child of Prince Vasiliy, Hippolyte, makes the equivalence more complex, even though he is only a secondary character. He also embodies a form of stupidity. His father, Prince Vasiliy himself, who is anything but stupid, points this out: "Ипполит, по крайней мере, покойный дурак, а Анатолий – беспокойный" (Tolstoy 1932: vol. 9, 19); "Hippolyte is at least a quiet fool, but Anatole is an active one" (Tolstoy 1993: vol. 1, 7).

All three are equally stupid, but while Anatole and Hélène contrast in gender and in forms of stupidity, Hippolyte shares an analogy with his sister because like her he is "a quiet fool". On the other hand, Hippolyte is, in opposition to the beau Anatole and the beauty Hélène, extremely ugly. This is a trap laid by Tolstoy; because it makes us think that Hélène's unchanging smile is incomparable to Hippolyte's unchanging expression of "self-confident contemptuousness". Above the constancy of expression of the two, which could be taken as wisdom or on the contrary as hollowness, we find the telling analogy between the words for her looking self-satisfied (*samodovol'no*) and his looking overconfident (*samouverenno*):

Le charmant Hippolyte поража́л своим необыкновенным сходством с сестрою-красавицей и еще более тем, что, несмотря на сходство, он был поразительно дурен собой. Черты его лица были те же, как и у сестры, но у той все освещалось жизнерадостною, самодовольною, молодою, неизменною улыбкой жизни и необычайною, античною красотой тела; у брата, напротив, тоже лицо было отуманено идиотизмом и неизменно выражало самоуверенную брюзгливость, а тело было худощаво и слабо. Глаза, нос, рот – все сжималось как будто в одну неопределенную и скучную гримасу, а руки и ноги всегда принимали неестественное положение (Tolstoy 1932: vol. 9, 53–54).

Le charmant Hippolyte was surprising by his extraordinary resemblance to his beautiful sister, but yet more by the fact in spite of this resemblance he was exceedingly ugly. His features were like his sister's, but while in here case everything was lit up by a joyous, self-satisfied, youthful, and constant smile of animation, and by the wonderful classic beauty of her figure, his face on the contrary was dulled by imbecility and a constant expression of sullen self-confidence, while his body was thin and weak. His eyes, nose, and mouth all seemed puckered into a vacant, wearied grimace, and his arms and legs always fell into unnatural positions (Tolstoy 1993: vol. 1, 14–15, italics in the source).

Therefore, the equivalence between Hélène and Hippolyte has four levels, and from level to level we may approach, starting from their social mask, the depths of their personalities: 1. The allegedly "astonishing", "unusual" analogy between their facial expressions, 2. The

stark contrast between Hélène's physical beauty and Hippolyte's physical ugliness, 3. The analogy of the constancy of expression, 4. Their deep self-involvement.

Anatole, on the other hand, shares physical beauty with his sister, in addition to family similarity, so they are also analogous on the second level. According to Tolstoy's principle of balancing of analogy and opposition, their opposition on the third level – the striking passivity of Hélène and the most terrific activity of Anatole – is inevitable. This contrast does not simply reproduce the gender cliché of the passive woman and the active man. On the contrary, they both are necessarily opposed to another pair of characters, formed by the passive man Pierre and the active woman Natasha. During the first appearance, Natasha already steals a kiss from the perplexed Boris: “Она вдруг вскочила на кадку, так что стала выше его, обняла его обеими руками, так что тонкие голые ручки согнулись выше его шеи и, откинув движением головы волосы назад, поцеловала его в самые губы” (Tolstoy 1932: vol. 9, 130); “Suddenly she jumped up onto a tub to be higher than he, embraced him so that her slender bare arms clasped him above his neck, and tossing back her hair, kissed him full on the lips” (Tolstoy 1993: vol. 1, 55–56).

Pierre's passivity is evident in his relationship to Prince Vasiliy, who not only sets him up with Hélène, but also rips him off financially. It is also evident in his relationship with Anna Michaylovna, who helps him gain a fortune – his inheritance. Of course, by this analogy of relationship Prince Vasiliy and Anna Michaylovna are arranged in a semantic equivalence, which consists, like every equivalence, of an opposition – like in the fairy tale scheme he is the wrongdoer and she is the helper of Pierre, who can be called the prince of the novel, who has to find a fitting bride – and of an analogy – both are great manipulators and great social performers.

If we juxtapose the semantic relationship between active and passive figures with their pragmatic relationship, it becomes obvious that the passive Hélène is coupled with the passive Pierre, while the active Natasha wants to elope with the active Anatole. However, this coordination of pragmatic and semantic relationships does not seem to work. Eventually, the passive man has to find an active woman. But does the active man find the passive woman in this quartet? At first sight, this seems to be impossible. But we will find a solution for that. The semantic equilibrium is omnipresent in the novel. Maybe you already have an idea of the complex semantic interplay in this great work of art.

Another central equivalence is the complementarity of the four main male figures Andrey Bolkonsky, Pierre Bezuchov, Anatole Kuragin and Nikolay Rostov. We are dealing here with four forms of masculinity, more precisely, with four cultural encodings of masculinity. Andrei is the incarnation of rational reflection, a planner and a strategist, who, whilst in the War Council, manages to easily analyze the opinions and intentions of the generals. His first name is preprogrammed; it is derived from the Greek “*andros*”, *the man*. The obese Pierre is awkward and rather passive. Led by his sporadic inclination towards Mason's mysticism and pacifism he stumbles over the battlefield of Borodino with a comic white hat and a green tail, like his name patron Pierrot, or Zanni from *Commedia dell'arte*. His form of masculinity is that of tragicomic seduction, a plaything for a woman superior to him; he is the proverbial man-child. The beautiful Anatole embodies the man as a lover and seducer, in a word, Don Juan. His name is derived from the Greek “*anatolis*”, *the East*. What does the East have to do with Don Juan? The model for Anatole is none other than Paris, who started the Trojan War. Troy is the power in the East representing Asia Minor,

also called Anatolia. And just as Paris, according to Homer, has kidnapped Helena, Anatole tries to kidnap Natasha. However, as we know, there is also a Helena in Tolstoy's novel. Not coincidentally she is also in a relationship with Anatole the seducer; not by chance is there a rumor that once there had been an incestuous relationship between Anatole and Hélène. And here you have the missing couple: the active foolish Anatole fits perfectly with his passive dullard sister.

The analogy between Anatole and Paris becomes also evident in another passage. Anatole comes with his father to Lysye Gory, the estate of the Bolkonskiys, as he is to be married to Marya Bolkonskaya. However, his plan cannot be realized, since Anatole is flirting with all three young ladies present, including the "little princess" – the wife of Andrey – and the clerk Mademoiselle Bourienne. The situation leads to a beauty competition between the three women. Anatole chooses Mademoiselle Bourienne – obviously without the intent to marry her. He does not provoke a Great War like Paris, but cements an enmity between both Kuragin and Bolkonsky families, which only comes to an end on a deathbed, on which Andrey forgives Anatole, who is also badly wounded. Moreover, Anatole is no more heroic on the battlefield than Paris.

Finally, Nikolay embodies the fourth style of virility – the warrior, as his name indicates. It is derived from the Greek word for victory. His regiment is his second home, or more precisely, as it is mentioned in the novel, his real home. Therefore, without being questioned by his author, instead of his cousin Sonja, he can marry the ugly and rich Marya Bolkonskaya – it does not matter to him, "and [he] would even – he felt it – ensure Princess Mary's happiness" (Tolstoy 1993: vol. 2, 437). A warrior must come home as if returning to his mother (and go back to war); he must find a woman who mothers him and lets him go again.

The four main male heroes of the novel not only represent four varieties of masculinity, their respective character simultaneously can be seen as a representation of the ancient typology of four human characters. Anatole embodies the sanguine, Andrey – the choleric, Pierre – the melancholic, and Nikolai – the phlegmatic. This typology is not identical to the one used above, but can also be covered by a large number of citations. One typology does not rule out the other. In Tolstoy, each figure simultaneously plays a role in several equivalence systems.

Tolstoy, as he wrote to his editor Katkov, did not want his work to be understood as a novel. Not because he thought he would write an epos equal to Homer's epic. In his work, the most zealous novel reader and sentimental writer Julie Karagina tells us the real reason (Julie is important not only as a letter-friend of Natasha Rostova, but also as her structural counterpart: Julie's sentimental overexcitedness, fed by the reading of sentimental novels is contrasting Natasha's genuine sensibility): this Julie loves romances also in life, and therefore she announces to Pierre: "Но знаете, кто ее спас? Это целый роман. Nicolas Ростов. Ее окружили, хотели убить, ранили ее людей. Он бросился и спас ее..." (Tolstoy 1932: vol. 11, 179); "But do you know who rescued her? It is quite a romance. Nicholas Rostov. She was surrounded, and they wanted to kill her, and had wounded some of her people. He rushed in and saved her..." (Tolstoy 1993: vol. 2, 453).

This shows exactly why Tolstoy did not want to write a novel. He understands the word "*roman*" in its archaic meaning, which is still in use in his time, namely – a love affair. He understands this as a structural principle, according to which all that happens in a text is

merely there to tighten the knot, is merely an artificially made complication, which serves a well calculated goal: to put all the figures into the safety of marriage or below the ground, to dissolve all conflicts, to end it all to the final chord in a basic key. Neither Tolstoy, nor Homer does that, but Tolstoy chooses here a different path. It is not through the radical reduction to just one episode to achieve structural concentration that turns a stream of events into a work of art, but through a network of associative connections, which are neither causal nor of any other kind of content chaining. In the numerous reflexive passages of *War and Peace*, the author also shows an ostentatious contempt for the causality and man's ability to recognize its rules. It is not causality that determines the flow of history – the rational Napoleon could have known and calculated it – but its inner structure, which can only be understood indirectly, associatively, as demonstrated by Kutuzov and Bagration: „Напротив, лучшие генералы, которых я знал, – глупые или рассеянные люди” (Tolstoy 1932: vol. 3, 53); “The best generals I have known were, on the contrary, stupid or absentminded men” (Tolstoy 1993: vol. 2, 308).

History is not a causal chain, but a structural network the meaning of which is revealed only associatively, as if through divine inspiration; and this leads us to the most important, the deepest analogy between the *Iliad* and *War and peace*, an analogy which does not stem from the common theme of a long-lasting war with far-reaching consequences, not even from their narrative technique, which is quite different, but from the destiny of history, which according to Tolstoy is „... бессознательная, общая, роевая жизнь человечества ...” (Tolstoy 1932: vol. 3, 6); „... the unconscious, general, swarm-life of mankind ...” (Tolstoy 1993: vol. 2, 258).

Individuals, with their particular interests, hopes, anxieties, intentions, the whole conscious life of man for his own sake – all this is juxtaposed to the “true reality represented by history or the gods” in *War and Peace* and *Iliad*, respectively. We are part of it without rationally understanding it. Neither in Homer nor in Tolstoy may the heroes with their strategic decisions change history, as it is determined by the gods or by history itself. “And what about Odysseus and his wooden horse?” you will ask me. “Is he not the prototype of a modern, self-determined man, punished by Poseidon, but ultimately justified?”. More likely, Odysseus is the prototype of a person who is familiar with signs and symbols, of somebody who can understand the perspective of the other and grasp a situation intuitively. He is the prototype of a man who does not calculate the number of warriors or the strength of weapons. He operates with symbols that represent the gods, such as the Trojan horse, which is dedicated to the god Poseidon and for this reason is brought to the city by the Trojans. Thus, Odysseus is not the prototype of the “genius strategist” Napoleon, but of the scattered, always nodding Kutuzov, who intuitively understands the expressions on other's faces correctly. Unmilitary, fat, hardly able to ride a horse, Kutuzov becomes the “savior of Russia” because he understands the signs of history. This Kutuzov, by the way, like all the representatives of the Russian upper class, speaks almost exclusively French, reads French novels. Even during the Battle of Borodino, he reads Madame de Genlis, one of the authors who at that time generously favored the world with vernacular stories. “French dresses, French ideas, French feelings!” says Count Rostopchin (Tolstoy 1993: vol. 2, 179). If the cultural world is Greek on both sides in the *Iliad*, it is both French in *War and peace*, and in both cases we are not dealing with a cultural struggle, but with a document of a common, transnational culture.

Given the distant analogy between Odysseus and Kutuzov, between Greek and French European culture, one might think that the duration of war also creates an analogy between the two literary works. However, the ten years in the *Iliad* do not play any role at all, the event time of the epic only covers a few weeks. Perhaps, Tolstoy meant to build a reference – if not to Homer, then to the duration of the Trojan War, in order to make his object, the patriotic war of Russia against Napoleon even more sublime? But this is not the case either. It is clear from the drafts of Tolstoy's preface that he was only concerned with the events of the year 1812, but then went back to the year 1805, because "about our triumph", that is, about Borodino, he could not write "without writing about our failure and our disgrace" (Tolstoy 1932: vol. 16, 54)¹, i.e. about Austerlitz. Here, too, we see the most important structural principle for Tolstoy: equivalence. An event is only presentable when placed in the light of analogy and contrast. The equivalence between Austerlitz and Borodino is a structural necessity of the novel; it requires the extension of the event time to at least eight years.

Back to Plutarch. The second time he is mentioned is even more revealing and with this, as promised, we are coming to the key passage, which is the epilogue of the novel. Because of his moralistic-didactic tendency, Plutarch belongs to Nikolushka's. At a prominent position in the novel, i.e. on the very last page of the epilogue, Nikolushka sees Plutarch's famous Greeks and Romans in his dream:

Он видел во сне себя и Пьера в касках – таких, которые были нарисованы в издании Плутарха. Они с дядей Пьером шли впереди огромного войска. Войско это было составлено из белых косых линий, наполнявших воздух [...] Вдруг нити, которые двигали их, стали ослабевать, путаться; стало тяжело. И дядя Николай Ильич остановился перед ними в грозной и строгой позе.

– Это вы сделали? – сказал он, указывая на поломанные сургучи и перья (Tolstoj 1932: vol. 4, 294).

He had dreamt that he and Uncle Pierre, wearing helmets such as were depicted in his Plutarch, were leading a huge army. The army was made up of white slanting lines that filled the air like the cobwebs [...] Suddenly the threads that moved them began to slacken and become entangled and it became difficult to move. And Uncle Nicholas stood before them in a stern and threatening attitude. "Have you done this?" he said, pointing to some broken sealing-wax and pens (Tolstoy 1993: vol. 4, 485).

Nikolushka dreams the novel in which he himself is a figure, he dreams white lines – this is an army that has become a text, a text of ink and paper, which metonymically collapses into "white slanting lines" (see citation). We are coming to the end of the novel and the lines become weaker, they start to get confused – it is time to end the text, even if this is "difficult" for the author and the reader. The traditional possibility of ending the text explicitly had not been chosen by Tolstoy – there should be no *pointe*, no "resolution", because history itself has a meaning but not a resolution. Resolutions or *pointes* are our attempts to transform something internal, the structure, into something external, into an element of the so-called content of the work. Therefore, *pointes* always seem to us artificial. Tolstoy was not a realist because he faithfully depicted all historical events, but because he left the meaning of his

¹ In his second draft to a preface. Translation – M. F. The original reads as follows: "Мне совестно было писать о нашем торжестве в борьбе с Бонапартовской Францией, не описав наших неудач и нашего срама".

work where it belongs – in the structure. As little as Homer was a historian, Tolstoy did not want to compete with the historians of the Patriotic War. He cannot be measured by his allegiance to history. We hardly close the *Iliad* because we do not want to believe that Achilles was begotten by a God. The purpose of art is to generate internal meaning, but *pointe* is an external surrogate for such meaning.

Finally, an apparently quite arbitrary scene of the epilogue has the purpose of illustrating Tolstoy's artistic method, which at the same time is the true artistic method of any narrative art. This scene is a hidden metacommentary. Anna Makarovna has made some stockings for Nikolay, and now that they are finished, she solemnly unveils them:

[...] восторженный стон детских голосов поднялся в комнате.

– Два, два! – кричали дети.

Это были два чулка, которые по одному ей известному секрету Анна Макаровна сразу вязала на спицах и которые она всегда торжественно при детях вынимала один из другого, когда чулок был довязан (Tolstoy 1932: vol. 4, 280–281).

[...] and a rapturously breathless cry of children's voices filled the room. "Two, two!" they shouted. This meant two stockings, which by a secret process known only by herself, Anna Makarovna used to knit at the same time on the same needles, and which, when they were ready, she always triumphantly drew one out of the other in the children's presence (Tolstoy 1993: vol. 4, 470).

In defiance of the staid, old, stocking-knitting lady: here Tolstoy knits his novel. The epilogue of the novel is exactly the moment when Tolstoy takes the inner stocking out of the outer. The mysterious knitting style, however, consists of the fact that in addition to the outer stocking, the thematic flow of action, there is also a second, inner, hidden stocking: the meaning of the equivalences, which do not only relate people to one another, but also places (e.g. Moscow and Petersburg), times, objects, events, characteristics, wording, sounds, themes and motifs.

The reference to Plutarch led me to present mainly equivalences between persons, but the title *War and Peace* is an equivalence itself, and like any equivalence, it is both an opposition and an analogy. How does it produce meaning? The meaning of each equivalence lies in its concept, which contains both its opposition and its analogy aspect. *War and Peace* are the two aggregate states of history, as necessary and unavoidable as the tides, as the allegory at the beginning of the epilogue makes clear: "Взволнованное историческое море Европы улеглось в свои берега. Оно казалось затихшим; но таинственные силы,двигающие человечество [...], продолжали свое действие" (Tolstoy 1932: vol. 4, 235); "The storm-tossed sea of European history had subsided within its shores and seemed to have become calm. But the mysterious forces that move humanity [...] continued to operate" (Tolstoy 1993: vol. 4, p. 419).

The seemingly unhistorical private life and the historical clash of the peoples contain both war and peace, intertwined with each other: marital war on the one hand and brotherly embraces of Alexander and Napoleon in Tilsit on the other, the domestic happiness and the dissolution in the order of a soldier's life, the senseless slaughtering and the meaningless chatter in St. Petersburg salons. From the relation, from the equivalence between these two states of aggregation, history arises in its true sense – namely as an inner, structural necessity, history as meaning, history as text.

There is one question, that's left to be answered: why do the broken quills and the sealing wax sticks appear in Nikolushka's dream? In the foreground, a child's fear-filled experience from the previous day is being processed. Nikolushka is begging to be present when Uncle Nikolay and Uncle Pierre meet in Nikolay's study. He sits at the desk and listens to them, absentmindedly and unintentionally breaking the quills and sealing sticks left on the table. The damage is discovered, both uncles are annoyed, but he is not punished, and Nikolay throws the broken bars and feathers under the table. When this scene appears in Nikolushka's dream, it serves to underline the metapoetic character of the whole scene as well as of the entire epilogue. The youngest of all characters of the novel tells the author: it is enough; your heroes have become again the self-indulgent chatterboxes, just as people are – always and everywhere. They are no longer a part of an artistic construction and therefore must be abandoned. In that respect *War and Peace* does not simply have an "open" composition, it has a combination of a closed structure and an open thematic flow, which is characteristic for realism. If one, like Tolstoy, respects the boundary between theme and structure, then it seems as if we could go on forever describing events, but at a certain point the chaining possibilities become exhausted, the threads become weaker and come into confusion. And then Nikolushka – to whom the dream reveals the structural meaning of his own story, as it happens in the *Iliad*, where the gods unveil the meaning of their actions to the protagonists in a dream – tells his author that it is time finish now, or he will become a chatterer.

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