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Aestheticized History: Tolstoy's Homeric Inheritance

This inquiry aligns Lev Tolstoy's *War and Peace* with Homer's *Iliad* from a historiographical and philosophical perspective in light of the intellectual category Tolstoy developed and termed *istoriia-iskusstvo*, or 'history-art'. By examining Tolstoy's diaries, notebooks, letters, and novel drafts, I intend to show how Tolstoy regarded Homeric epic as participating in the category of history-art, and investigate the reasons for and methods by which Tolstoy utilized Homeric epic in his own masterpiece. After proposing a Tolstoyan definition of epic, I will consider how Tolstoy's appropriation of Homeric material legitimized his historical revisionism in spite of its inconsistency with historical facts, enabling it to both achieve the authoritative scope of epic and pass into collective memory.

In 1852, the 24-year-old Tolstoy made the following notation in his journal: 'Составить истинную правдивую Историю Европы нынешн[его] века. Вот цель на всю жизнь.'¹ More than a decade before he began *War and Peace*, the author was dreaming of a history of Europe that is истинная, правдивая – true, faithful. In the first days of the year 1863, in his first entry for that year, Tolstoy writes, 'Эпический род мне становится один естественен.'² Then, ten days later: 'В Кремле... воспоминания войны и молодости и силы. Полководец — римский нос, сухой, и только успех дела и никаких других соображений.'³ These reflections, appearing just before Tolstoy began work on *War and Peace*, demonstrate two things: first, by 1863, Tolstoy felt himself master of the epic genre. Second, Tolstoy linked war, youth, and strength in memory. Whether his memory or not, whether impetus for the novel or not, Tolstoy nostalgically and positively recollects a warlike vitality, personifying it in a mysterious general for whom success in battle is the sole preoccupation. That these reflections appear directly before he begins *War and Peace* is significant. Despite his aspirations at 24, the elder Tolstoy did not produce a true, faithful history; instead, he produced an epic.

¹ 'To compile a true, faithful history of Europe in this century. Now that is the aim of a lifetime.' *Lev Tolstoi: Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii (Lev Tolstoy: The Collected Works)*, 90 vols. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1935-1965), xlvii (1952), p. 304. Hereafter, references to the text will be shortened to PSS. All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own. Throughout this paper I have employed the Library of Congress transliteration standards excepting well-known personal names, for which I apply the common English spelling: Tolstoy instead of Tolstoi, Gogol instead of Gogol, and Alexander instead of Aleksandr.

² 'The epic mode has become the only natural one for me.' PSS (vol. 48), p. 48.

³ 'In the Kremlin... memories of war, youth, and strength. A general – Roman nose, stiff, only success in battle and no other thoughts.' PSS (vol. 48), p. 50.

History as art: an overview

We begin with a question: if what Tolstoy sought was a true, faithful history, why did he choose to write a novel instead of a historical account? If we can answer this, we will gain a profound insight into the meaning *War and Peace* had for the author.

Tolstoy was adamant on one point: *War and Peace* is *not* a novel. In an 1865 letter to his editor, Tolstoy stipulates: '[С]очинение это не есть роман и не есть повесть и не имеет такой завязки, что с развязкой у нее [уничтожается] интерес. Это я пишу вам к тому, чтобы просить вас в оглавлении и, может быть, в объявлении не называть моего сочинения романом. Это для меня очень важно, и потому очень прошу вас об этом.'⁴ Although, for us, *War and Peace* is certainly a novel, I will comply with Tolstoy's wishes and refrain from calling it that. One of possible translations for сочинение, which is what Tolstoy terms his work, is composition, from the Latin *compono*, to put together. Today, a composition is also a work of art, though typically of music or of poetry. If Tolstoy has 'put together' disparate elements into a work of art which must not be regarded as a novel, it is partly because it must not be regarded as *merely* a novel – after all, novels are fiction. Fiction is full of frivolous things like завязки and развязки – knots and their unraveling.

Although, by the 1860s, Tolstoy has seemingly dispensed with the dream of writing history, he has not dispensed with the desire for truth. An early draft of *War and Peace* begins with his uncertainty as to the category of the work, but ends with a return to his youthful commitment to истинна, truth:

Я боялся писать не тем языком, которым пишут все, боялся, что мое писанье не подойдет ни под какую форму, ни романа, ни повести, ни поэмы, ни истории, я боялся, что необходимость описывать значительных лиц 12-го года заставит меня руководиться историческими документами, а не истиной.⁵

Tolstoy does not wish to write novels. He also does not wish to write poetry or history. The rejection of the last category is crucial. For Tolstoy, historical documents cannot relate truth. Such documents are limited to facts, individuals, and perspectives which are relative, myopic, contradictory, or altogether in error. To begin to answer the question 'Why did Tolstoy not write a history?' we must consider that, for Tolstoy, histories are as fictional as novels. Tolstoy was after something truer than fiction and greater than history, and he articulated a category for it in his notebook: история-искусство, or history-art, which is something altogether different from история-наука, history-science.

⁴ 'This composition is not a romance and it is not a novel and it does not have that knot which, once unraveled, destroys interest. I am writing this to you to ask that in the table of contents and, maybe, in the announcement, for you *not to call my composition a novel*. This is very important for me, and that is why I ask you for this.' *PSS* (vol. 61), p. 67.

⁵ 'I was fearful of not writing in the language in which everyone else writes; fearful that my writing will not fit any existing form, neither romance, nor novel, nor poetry, nor history; fearful that the necessity of describing the significant personages of the year of 1812 will force me to be guided by historical documents and not truth.' *PSS* (vol. 13), p. 53.

We will now examine at length a passage in Tolstoy's notebook from 1870 and refer to it often in the sections that follow. Capturing the dynamic and nuanced multiplicity of life is beyond the ability of traditional history, Tolstoy writes, dedicated as it is to lifeless facts:

История хочет описать жизнь народа — миллионов людей. Но тот, кто не только сам описывал даже жизнь одного человека, но хотя бы понял период жизни не только народа, но человека, из описания, тот знает, как много для этого нужно.⁶

The complexity of human life can be communicated only through art, which is not limited to facts. Yet it is not enough to merely aestheticize history. Perhaps surprisingly, especially when considered in an academic context, Tolstoy says that one must also have love: love for the past. The past must not be simply critiqued and evaluated from a place of complacent presentism, privileging the current historical moment. The past must be experienced, it must be *felt*:

Нужно знание всех подробностей жизни, нужно искусство — дар художественности, нужна любовь...
Искусства нет и не нужно, говорят, нужна наука...
Любви нет и не нужно, говорят. Напротив, нужно доказывать прогресс, что прежде всё было хуже.
Как же тут быть? А надо писать историю. Такие истории писали и пишут, а такие истории называются: — наука.
Как же тут быть?!⁷

Deeply troubled by history's inability to communicate human experience, Tolstoy proposes art and love as antidotes. This is no bohemian dismissal of rigor, however, and art must be tempered by commitment to truth and faithfulness. Perhaps the formulation is something like this: love attaches us to the past, art empowers that past to speak, yet history is what art must speak about. Tolstoy outlines the mistake of a history which selects monumental figures and events and leaves out the discontinuities, ruptures, and trifles that connect them:

Остается одно: в необъятной, неизмеримой скале явлений прошедшей жизни не останавливаться ни на чем, а от тех редких, на необъятном пространстве отстоящих друг от друга памятниках — веках протягивать искусственным, ничего не выражающим языком воздушные, воображаемые линии, не прерывающиеся и на веках...

⁶ 'History seeks to describe the life of a nation – millions of people. But anyone who has not only described the life of even one person but has also understood the life period of not only the nation but also that person by means of such writing, he knows how much is required for this task.' *PSS* (vol. 48), p. 125.

⁷ 'What is needed is knowledge of *all* the details of life, art is needed – the gift of artistry, what is needed is love ... There is no art and no need for it, they say, what is needed is science [...] There is not love and no need for it, they say. On the contrary, we must demonstrate that there is progress, that everything in the past was much worse. What is to be done? But it is necessary to write history. Such histories have and will be written, and they are called – *science*. What is to be done?' *PSS* (vol. 48), p. 125.

Но искусство это состоит только во внешнем: в употреблении бесцветного языка и в сглаживании тех различий, к[оторые] существуют между живыми памятниками и своими вымыслами. Надо уничтожить живость редких памятников, доведя их до безличности своих предположений. Чтобы всё было ровно и гладко...⁸

The academic, colourless language of history-science strips the past of truthfulness, Tolstoy argues. First, this is because an insular, jargon-filled, carefully unenthusiastic academic language is искусственный, artificial: nobody who is real communicates like that. Second, such language is ничего не выражающий, it does not *express* anything, least of all the contradictions, discontinuities, and deformations which constitute the живость, liveliness, of historical personalities. Academic history, in other words, dehumanizes, sterilizes, and ossifies the past. For this reason, Tolstoy insists that poetic language is so essential to historical work. It is not enough to recollect the past in facts. The past must be resurrected in language. This is an epistemic position because it contends that art is the means by which history comes to know itself. Indeed, we can regard *istoriia-iskusstvo* as a way of knowing.

In the same notebook entry, Tolstoy asks:

Что делать истории? [...] Браться описывать то, что она может описать, и то, что она знает — знает посредством искусства. Ибо история, долженствующая говорить необъятное, есть высшее искусство. Как всякое искусство, первым условием истории должна быть ясность, простота, утвердительность, а не предположительность. Но зато *история-искусство* не имеет той связанности и невыполнимой цели, к[оторую] имеет история-наука. *Ист[ория]-иск[усство]*, как и всякое искусство, идет не в ширь, а в глубь, и предмет ее может быть описание жизни всей Европы и описание месяца жизни одного мужика в XVI веке.⁹

Here, we see that Tolstoy revert to his intention of producing a history of Europe. Gary Saul Morson has analysed the juxtaposition of art and history in Tolstoy's work in terms of the particular and the universal: history conveys grand narratives while the poet focuses on details. The poet is the better historian for it because concrete particulars are more real than general abstractions: 'History, as Tolstoy understood it, is shaped by the sum of nongeneralizable incidents.'¹⁰ The critical point of Tolstoy's reflection in his notebook

⁸ 'There is only one thing left: on the vast, immeasurable cliff of past life phenomena, to stop at nothing, and from those occasional monuments, standing far apart in an immense space, those milestones, to reach out with an *artificial language that expresses nothing*, those airy, imaginary lines which are not interrupted even when describing milestones [...] But this art consists only of appearance: in the use of a *colourless* language and the smoothing out of those contradictions which exist between living monuments and their fiction. It's necessary to destroy the aliveness of these rare monuments, to lead them to the same absence of personality. So that everything is even and smooth...' *PSS* (vol. 48), p. 125. (Italics mine.)

⁹ 'What should history do? [...] Describe that which it is capable of describing; that which [history] knows, it knows only by means of art. For history, which must communicate the immeasurable, is the highest artform. As all art, the first condition of history must be clarity, simplicity, and assertion rather than presumption. But history-art lacks that connectedness and unachievable goal which history-science has. History-art, like all art, follows not width but depth, and its subject can be the description of the life of all Europe, or the description of one month in the life of a 16th-century peasant.' *PSS* (vol. 48), p. 125.

¹⁰ Gary Saul Morson, *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in 'War and Peace'* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 145.

is that history is unsayable. Presumably, as Morson points out, this is because of the unimaginable number of concrete incidents it contains. However, history can come to know the unsayable and convey it by means of art. Within *istoria-iskusstvo*, the historical and the poetic are no longer juxtaposed. For Tolstoy, a work like *War and Peace* is not an example of poetry-opposed-to-history but is rather an instance of a unique way of grasping the past.

In an 1868 notebook entry, just after jotting down the ultimate goal of history ('знание движения человечества,'¹¹ naturally), Tolstoy asks, 'Где законы?' – 'where are the laws?' If we infer, as I think we should, from the preceding statement that Tolstoy is asking about the whereabouts of *historical* laws, then the answer he provides to his own question is another instance of the notion of *istoriia-iskusstvo*:

Где законы? —: Или мистическое движение вперед, или художе[ственное] воспроизведение воспоминаний.¹²

Here, Hegelian forward motion, which is representative of mystical progress wherein everything in the past was much worse, is contrasted with the *aesthetic reproduction of memories*. This latter process is at the heart of what Tolstoy regards as the function of epic, and here it will be helpful to define what this literary category meant for the author.

The epic: history and poetry

Typically, epic is approached as a literary form grounded in both history and everyday reality, a panorama of the great and the trifling which orients the reader's (or hearer's) present to their past. Paul Merchant defines epic as 'a chronicle, a "book of the tribe", a vital record of custom and tradition, and at the same time a story-book for general entertainment [...] [E]pic itself may have originated in the need for an established history.'¹³

The European epic tradition begins with Greek oral poetry, which is the only traditional heroic poetry that receives its message from transmitting deities.¹⁴ It is the Muses who favour the *oidos*, singer, with access to the narrative of the past, and both Homeric and Hesiodic¹⁵ epic calls upon the Muses to supply its content. Significantly, the nine Muses are the daughters of Memory, and epic poetry acts as a sort of remembering which is formed by the poet into theatre: 'The poets' tales are of course presumed true – after all the past is real – but the muses are less an archive than divinities presiding at a performance.'¹⁶ The past, then, is not merely summarized and bulleted – it is aestheticized. An oft-quoted passage from Hesiod's *Theogony* allows insight into this process:

¹¹ 'The knowledge of what moves humanity.' *PSS* (vol. 48), p. 87.

¹² 'Where are the laws? Either we have mystical forward progress, or the aesthetic reproduction of memories.' *PSS* (vol. 48), p. 87.

¹³ Paul Merchant, *The Epic* (London: Cox & Wyman, Ltd, 1971), p. 2.

¹⁴ Andrew Ford, *Homer: The Poetry of the Past* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 31.

¹⁵ While Hesiod is not quite contemporaneous with Homer, likely writing a bit later, it is not misleading to analyse them together since the poets are dated to around the same time, located in the same genre, and incorporate the same elements (such as invocation to the Muses).

¹⁶ Ford, *Poetry of the Past*, p. 6.

Happy is he whom the Muses love
 Sweet flows the voice from his mouth.
 For if someone has pain and fresh grief from his soul
 and his heart is withered by anguish, when the poet,
 the servant of the Muses, chants the fames of men of former times
 and blessed gods who hold Olympus,
 then straightaway he forgets his sad thoughts and thinks not of his grief,
 but the gifts of the gods quickly turn him away from these.¹⁷

Memory has a double function here, facilitating forgetfulness by remembering. Listeners forget their sorrows to recollect those who lived before and who must not be forgotten by hearkening to the sweet voice of the chanting, Muse-beloved poet. The spell works because the recovery of the past is poetic; it is an aesthetic act which establishes distance between the hearer and the self while collapsing distance between the hearer and the past. As an aesthetic experience facilitated by divine (rather than ordinary) memory, the past recovered by means of pleasure does not serve a solely didactic purpose. It also reorients the audience to the past by remaking it for the present as the present responds by being remade in turn. Andrew Ford writes:

The function of this memory is not simply preservation of the past but a psychological experience, to change the present frame of awareness [...] [S]acred memory moves us [...] not 'back' but elsewhere [...] This effect has been variously named as a sense of 'participation' [...] but I prefer to take a name out of Homer, via the Greek literary critics, *to enarges*, 'vividness.'¹⁸

Epic, then, is a privileged means of recovering the past by invoking aesthetic vividness which prompts self-estrangement, thereby altering the course of the present.

By considering passages from Tolstoy's journals and early fiction, I have arrived at a relatively comprehensive Tolstoyan definition of epic. Long before beginning work on *War and Peace*, Tolstoy found what he explicitly regarded as epic among the Terek Cossacks, during his military service in the Caucasus. In 1856, he writes in his diary that he began to cry 'when reciting the Cossack song. I'm beginning to like the epic legendary manner. I'll try and make a poem out of the Cossack song.'¹⁹ It is revelatory that this aim, which later developed into Tolstoy's first novel, *The Cossacks*, is a poem begotten by a song that brings its listener to tears. The subject matter of the Cossack song that affected Tolstoy so much and which he describes as 'epic' and 'legendary' is likely similar to the content of a song in the novel with which Eroshka, a Cossack, regales the protagonist Olenin; the narrator specifies that Eroshka's song is representative of 'authentic'²⁰ Cossack songs. The song is a lament, a sorrowful retelling of war and loss. The themes of battle, death, and nature are prevalent among the songs of those Terek Cossacks the narrator describes and among whom Tolstoy lived.²¹

¹⁷ Hesiod, *Theogony*, ed. and trans. by H.G. Evelyn-White (London: Heinemann, 1914), ll. 96-103.

¹⁸ Ford, *Poetry of the Past*, p. 54.

¹⁹ PSS (vol. 47), p. 82.

²⁰ PSS (vol. 6), p. 108.

²¹ Below are two excerpts from traditional Terek Cossack songs, such as Tolstoy is likely to have encountered:

Near the end of the novel, a group of doomed Chechen warriors sing a similar lament: ‘Suddenly from the Chechens arose the sound of a mournful song, something like Daddy Eroshka’s “Ay day, dalalay.” The Chechens knew that they could not escape, and to prevent themselves from being tempted to take flight they had strapped themselves together, knee to knee, had got their guns ready, and were singing their death-song.’²² Since this song is described as similar to Eroshka’s, it, too, is likely to be a grieving eulogy for past events. The song helps the Chechens accept their fate because it facilitates forgetfulness of the personal through communion with the collective.

Such songs are sorrowful and they bring Eroshka to tears just as they brought the young Tolstoy to tears. They weep partly because the song is deeply moving, of course, but it achieves this poignancy because it is a disclosure of past events through aesthetic vividness. Eroshka and Tolstoy are not privy to a mere preservation or recitation of a past they can still recall, but to its reincarnation as they relive it. For the youthful Tolstoy of 1856, this vivid experience is germane to the epic genre. By 1865, he notes: ‘План истории Напо[леона] и Алек[сандра] не ослабел. Поэма, героем к[оторо] й б[ыл] бы по праву человек, около к[оторо]го все группируется, и герой — этот человек.’²³ Whether the latter sentence is intended to be a summary of the work that will ultimately become *War and Peace* (if so, then it ought to be noted that the text started out as a poem), or a description of how epic ought to function more generally, is not important here.

First, what is relevant for our purposes is that Tolstoy describes epic as a поэма, poem, especially when considered in light of his earlier description of epic as song. Regardless of whether it is recited or sung, for Tolstoy, epic has a distinct, aesthetic form. That both Tolstoy’s journal entries and *The Cossacks* associate epic with performance is significant. While it is, of course, a rhetorical and unsystematic association, it nevertheless anticipates (by nearly a century) the work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord in Yugoslavia in the 1930s, when they recorded traditional South Slavic songs and situated epic poetry within the context of oral traditions. The Parry-Lord theory of Homeric composition identifies epic poetry with the singing of stories by the means of remembered formulas; each song is spontaneously adapted to the individual performance context, taking into account both audience and occasion.

Не орел под облаками / Высоко летает, / Там стандарт над казаками / Гордо, гордо развевает ...
It’s no eagle flying high / Beneath the clouds, / It’s a standard above the Cossacks / Proudly, proudly waving ...

And:

Как на горе жито, / Под горою быто, / Под белою под березой / Казачок убитый. / У этого казаченьки / Нет отца, ни матери, / Некому по нем жалковати, / Головку связати ...
As lived on the mountain / Is life beneath the mountain, / Beneath the white, beneath the birch / Lies the Cossack – killed. / This little Cossack / Has no father or mother, / No-one to lament for him, / Or tie up his head ...

Pesni Tereka: Pesni Grebenskikh i Sunzhenskikh Kazakov, ed. by B.N. Putilov (Grozniy: Checheno-Ingushskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel’stvo, 1974), p. 30.

²² *PSS* (vol. 6), p. 144.

²³ ‘The plan for the history of Napoleon and Alexander hasn’t lost its appeal. An epic poem, the hero of which should by rights be a person round whom everything is grouped, and the hero should be that person.’ *PSS* (vol. 48), p. 61.

Second, in terms of content, Tolstoy regards the epic poem as grounded in history, hearkening back to Hesiod's description of epic as conveying 'the fames of men of former times.' Yet the author does not intend to directly recite the facts about Napoleon or present them in a straightforward manner – he intends to write a poem, not a history. Like the bard of epic, Tolstoy seeks for the truth of the past to be carried by aesthetic force. Tolstoy regards epic, then, as prompting intense affect by means of estrangement and vividness. Linking this quality to Tolstoy's description of epic poetry as related to true past events that have been reconstructed aesthetically, we arrive at a definition of epic which, whether deliberately or not, resonates substantially with that which Hesiod developed nearly three thousand years ago.

We gather that *War and Peace* was intended to be an epic from Tolstoy's self-analysis that the epic has become for him the only 'natural' mode just as he begins writing it, and that it was intended to be specifically a Homeric epic from his later claim that it is 'like the Iliad.'²⁴ It follows, then, that Tolstoy must have located Homeric epic in the category of istoriia-iskusstvo. Tolstoy reflected:

Древние были сильнее и умнее нас, потому что всё то, что мы называем философией, историей, юриспруденцией, богословием, они называли ораторским искусством. Первое есть признание возможности объективных выводов, второе — один субъективный взгляд.
Объективна только форма.
Всё субъективное, и одно субъективное имеет содержание.²⁵

Ancient authors, according to Tolstoy, had grasped the importance of the power of language in conveying what we later, weaker types term history. This is because they knew that objective history, and history-scientific conclusions, are simply not possible. For Tolstoy's ancients, the only possible history is one elevated to oratorical magnificence through субъективный взгляд, the subjective view. This simply means that history is humanized and grounded by and within a particular subject, both the poet and the poet's audience, whence it acquires substance and meaning.

In 1865, after reading Trollope, Tolstoy temporarily breaks with his rejection of novelistic writing to arrange such writing into four categories:

Есть поэзия романиста: 1) в интересе сочетания событий — Braddon, мои казаки, будущее; 2) в картине нравов, построенных на историческом событии — Одиссея, Илиада, 1805 год; 3) в красоте и веселости положений — Пиквик — Отъезжее поле, и 4) в характерах людей — Гамлет — мои будущие.²⁶

²⁴ Quoted by Maxim Gorkii in *Reminiscences of Tolstoy, Chekhov and Andreyev*, trans. by Katherine Mansfield, S.S. Koteliansky, and Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1948), p. 57.

²⁵ 'The ancients were stronger and more intelligent than us, because everything that we call philosophy, *history*, jurisprudence, theology, they called oratorical art. The first is the acknowledgment of the possibility of objective conclusions, the second – only of the subjective view. Only the form is objective. Everything is subjective, and only that which is subjective possesses substance'. *PSS* (vol. 48), p. 111. (Italics mine.)

²⁶ 'The poetry of the novelist consists in: 1. The interest of events – Braddon, my Cossacks, my future work; 2. The representation of customs built on historical events – the Odyssey, the Iliad, 1805; 3. In the beauty and humour of situations – Pickwick – A Distant Field; 4. The characters of people – Hamlet – my future work.' *PSS* (vol. 48), p. 64.

1805, or *War and Peace*, is here classified with Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. We see, once again, that Tolstoy regarded his composition as Homeric, which means, as he makes explicit in this notebook entry, that it is historical. There is an almost anthropological quality to Tolstoy's description here: works such as Homer's are not only historically faithful, they are also a representation of the customs or mores of a particular historical moment.

We can try to catch Tolstoy on a word and point out that in this passage, he has acquiesced to being a novelist, after all. However, given his consistent rejection of the genre in his journals, notebooks, and letters, it is more likely that Tolstoy jotted the phrase поэзия романиста, the poetry of the novelist, without giving it much thought, which is precisely the type of automatic categorization that he wishes his work to escape. The poetry he intends is an evocative картина, representation, which does not derive its substance primarily from plot, pleasure, or character, but from resurrection of the past. In some sense, the association of Homeric epic with Tolstoyan epic anticipates Mikhail Bakhtin's famous argument that contemporary writing necessarily 'novelizes' all other genres, including that of epic poetry, since a strict adherence to any other genre can function only as satire. Novelized epic is, perhaps, another term for Tolstoy's composition, since it retains the features typically associated with epic while making use of novelistic techniques. While its allegiance is to a historical event, its evocation of that event is aesthetic and literary, which means it necessarily includes plot, character, and, crucially, pleasure.

The narrator opens the third section of the third volume of *War and Peace* with Zeno's paradox. *Istoriia-nauka* parses the movement of history into arbitrary units, just like the ancients had done with the distance passed by Achilles and the tortoise, with the same irrational results: 'Историческая наука в движении своем постоянно принимает всё меньшие и меньшие единицы для рассмотрения и этим путем стремится приблизиться к истине.'²⁷ However, the truth is not in the events themselves but in the spaces between them, which are nothing other than movement. For Tolstoy, what is special about *istoriia-iskusstvo* like Homer's is that it supplies the sense of continuity to historical events. The organic flow which unites what Tolstoy referred to as 'the description of the life of all Europe, or the description of one month in the life of a 16th-century peasant' is made possible through art.

Inevitably, because the work is an aesthetic production, it takes liberties with events (perhaps it is more appropriate to say that the work became an aesthetic production in the first place precisely because it permitted Tolstoy to take liberties with events). Since the events did happen, it will be a subject of critique and possibly ridicule. Such commentary comes not from literary critics, but from the representatives of *istoriia-nauka* and from those who lived through the events it describes. Both groups approach the work not as poetry but as *istoriia-nauka*, reading it the way one might read a newspaper, objecting to lack of consistency with facts and their own experience. Military reviewers were deeply critical of Tolstoy's interpretation of history.²⁸ Lieutenant-General M. I. Bogdanovich

²⁷ 'Historical science in its movement constantly takes smaller and smaller particles for observation and by this path attempts to approach truth.' *PSS* (vol. 11), p. 267.

²⁸ Donna Tussing Orwin, 'War and Peace from the Military Point of View', in *Tolstoy on War: Narrative Art and Historical Truth in 'War and Peace'*, ed. by Rick McPeak and Donna T. Orwin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), pp. 98-110 (pp. 99-100).

and Colonel A. N. Vitmer, both professional historians, objected to the methods, the theories, and the facts Tolstoy employed. General Mikhail Dragomirov went so far as to say that Tolstoy did not understand basic history.²⁹ Contemporary historians tend to agree with the original assessments. Dominic Lieven's recent book demonstrates that Tolstoy's version of the War of 1812 greatly undermines the significance of Russia's achievement: 'The popular or 'Tolstoyan' Russian interpretation of the war fits rather well with foreign accounts that play down the role of Russia's army and government in the victory over Napoleon.'³⁰

Since Tolstoy's composition is not history and is not beholden to the terms of *istoriia-nauka*, these criticisms simply do not matter. Instead of asking whether Tolstoy's description of events is accurate, the work compels us to ask what such a description of events is able to accomplish. In other words, in undermining the historical account, how does Tolstoy's work alter the meaning of the war? By de-emphasizing government and military leaders, Tolstoy's aesthetic rendering of the war created a radically different sort of patriotism. It privileged the ordinary Russian soldier and peasant as embodiments of the artless, populist ethos of *narod*, the people. I suggest that it is precisely Tolstoy's elevation of *narod* that motivates his invocation of Homer as aesthetic model and moral mentor.

Strategies of legitimacy: popular voice and authority

Tolstoy chose to associate his composition with Homer's *Iliad* for three reasons: first, for Tolstoy, Homeric material was an authentic, unmediated expression of the people. Second, Tolstoy genuinely regarded the *Iliad* as one of the greatest productions of literature.³¹ Finally, as we saw earlier, Tolstoy classed the epic into that special category of composition which has the power to resurrect the past. The second two reasons have much to do with authority, both historical and literary, which canonical antiquity has traditionally supplied. Yet it is the first reason, curiously removed from notions of authority, which made Homer's epic and not, for example, Vergil's, the precursor to *War and Peace*.

In the years immediately preceding work on *War and Peace*, from 1860 to 1863, Tolstoy published several pedagogical articles. Once again critiquing the Hegelian notion of historical progress, he contrasts elite scholars and ordinary people, deciding to take the 'side' of the *narod*, the people:

[Я] должен склониться на сторону народа, на том основании, что, 1-е, народа больше,

²⁹ Dominic Lieven, 'Tolstoy on War, Russia, and Empire' in *Tolstoy on War*, ed. by McPeak and Orwin, pp. 12-25 (p. 12)..

³⁰ Dominic Lieven. *Russia Against Napoleon: The Battle for Europe, 1807-1814* (London, Penguin, 2010), p. 10.

³¹ See letter 88 to A.A. Tolstaya on August 18, 1857 in *PSS* (vol. 60), p. 222; the first paragraphs of Прогресс и Определение Образования, in *PSS* (vol. 8), p. 326; the journal entry for 23 August, 1857, in *PSS* (vol. 47), p. 153; the journal entry for 21 July 1870, in *PSS* (vol. 48), p. 128; the letter 321 to Fet in January 1871, in *PSS* (vol. 61), p. 247; the letter 17 to P.D. Golokhvastov in April 1873, in *PSS* (vol. 62), p. 22; the quote attributed to Rousseau in *Krug Chtenia* for February 1, 1905, in *PSS* (vol. 41), p. 76. Note that when one of the epics is mentioned, it is almost always the *Iliad* given as literary example rather than the *Odyssey*.

чем общества, и что потому должно предположить, что большая доля правды на стороне народа; 2-е и главное — потому, что народ без общества прогрессистов мог бы жить и удовлетворять всем своим человеческим потребностям, как-то: трудиться, веселиться, любить, мыслить и творить художественные произведения. (Илиады, русские песни.)³²

We see here that Tolstoy associates the *Iliad* not with elite culture but with practical, everyday wisdom which ordinary people have always possessed. Tolstoy is clearly certain that Homer's epic, like Russian folk songs, is the sort of artistic expression that springs from 'below,' and has no need of educational institutions or patronage. There is a handwritten addition to the above passage, immediately after художественные произведения, artistic works, wherein we see that the *Iliad* is associated not only with folk music, but also Greek sculpture and, even more surprisingly, the Bible: '(Венера Милосская, Библия, Илиада, русскія пѣсни ...).'³³

The link between Homer and popular expression is reiterated in another such article: 'Без Библии немыслимо в нашем обществе, так же, как не могло быть мыслимо без Гомера в греческом обществе, развитие ребенка и человека.'³⁴ For Tolstoy, Homeric epic constituted part of the essential moral education of ancient society, combining the immanent and the transcendent in powerful but accessible language. Tolstoy's perception of the *Iliad* as unmediated and authentic cannot be overemphasized. We know that the production of *War and Peace* owes something to the novels of writers such as Dickens, Thackeray, and perhaps most particularly, Stendhal's *Charterhouse of Parma*. However, none of these other works can offer to Tolstoy what the *Iliad* can in terms of its immediacy and authenticity, reflecting not the mind of a single, educated aristocrat, but the consciousness of the common people. Of course, associating Homeric poetry with the public is not unique to Tolstoy, and was a popular notion in 19th-century Russia. During the turbulent epoch, many thinkers and writers – the Decembrists among them – privileged Greek over Roman antiquity³⁵ because it came to be associated with democratic and decentralized social structures rather than imperialistic ambition, prompting writers such as Gogol and Belinskii to argue that Vergil was inferior to Homer.³⁶

The *Iliad*, Tolstoy tells us, was for the Greeks. *War and Peace*, however, is for Russians. This exclusionary intention is made apparent in the first few lines of the text, when Prince Vasilii speaks: 'Он говорил на том изысканном французском языке, на котором не только говорили, но и думали наши деды.'³⁷ This specification im-

³² 'I must take the side of the people on the basis that 1, there are more people than high society, and this must suggest that there is a bigger portion of truth on the side of the people; and the most important 2 – because the people even without progressive society could live and somehow satisfy all their human needs: work, make merry, love, think and create artistic works (Iliads, Russian folk songs). *PSS* (vol. 8), p. 346.

³³ 'Venus de Milo, the Bible, the Iliad, Russian folk songs ...' *PSS* (vol. 8), p. 453.

³⁴ 'The development of the child and the human is incomprehensible in our society without the Bible, just as it was incomprehensible in Greek society without Homer.' *PSS* (vol. 8), p. 89.

³⁵ G. S. Knabe, *Russkaia Antichnost' [Russian Antiquity]* (Moscow: Russian State University for the Humanities, 1999), p. 135.

³⁶ Robert Maguire, *Exploring Gogol* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 300.

³⁷ 'He spoke that exquisite French language which our grandfathers not only spoke, but in which they thought.' *PSS* (vol. 9), p. 4.

mediately identifies the intended readers of the text and renders them complicit in the narrative and with the narrator – *our* grandfathers, the narrator's and the reader's. Of course, only a tiny percentage of the population spoke exquisite French, or any kind of French, thereby alerting the reader that although the narrative is about Russians, they are the elite kind. As someone almost pathologically self-reflective, Tolstoy attempts to justify why his narrative focuses on aristocrats in one of the composition's early drafts. That this was never published implies that the justification was aimed at himself rather than his audience. He finds there are three reasons: the first circumstantial, the second personal, the final literary.

Tolstoy explains that the only primary accounts of the Napoleonic Wars are contained in the letters, journals, and memoirs of educated elites.³⁸ This poverty of data, of course, can only serve to strengthen a suspicion of *istoriia-nauka*. Speaking frankly, Tolstoy does not find the middle strata of society – composed of merchants and coach drivers – either interesting or beautiful.³⁹ This reason serves to show that Tolstoy's priorities, while clearly classist, are primarily aesthetic: he seeks to narrate that which is interesting rather than that which is representative.

Although these first two reasons for writing about elites seem to contradict Tolstoy's aim of recreating true life, they in fact do not. This is due to the third reason. Tolstoy writes that he does not focus on the lower classes because he is proud to be an aristocrat: 'Я аристократ потому, что воспитан с детства в любви и уважении к высшим сословиям и в любви к изящному, выражающемуся не только в Гомере, Бахе и Рафаэле, но и во всех мелочах жизни.'⁴⁰ Whether Tolstoy was aware of it or not, referencing Homer at this moment, while justifying his literary choices, is deeply significant. Tolstoy's linking Homer to aristocracy motivates at least some of the reason for focusing on that social class. However, we have seen that Homer is, for Tolstoy, the unmediated expression of the *narod*, the common people, spontaneous and authentic. Yet Homeric epic is also the height of elegance and sophistication, representative not only of an art form associated with the likes of Bach and Raphael, but also with a refined and privileged way of life. Finally, Homeric epic is *also* historic, a reflection on past events.

The *Iliad* focuses almost exclusively on an elite class of warriors rather than merchants and craftsmen, yet the story is regarded by Tolstoy as flowing organically from the common people, through the mouth of an illiterate bard. The stories of Achilles and Agamemnon, whom everyone has heard of, are exciting for the public to hear and to share. This is a unique juxtaposition of form and content wherein accessible form conveys elite content while remaining faithful to history. In other words, to compose *istoriia-iskusstvo* – which means to compose faithfully, to include everything, while remaining pleasing and interesting – is to compose Homerically. The Homeric ethos is precisely

³⁸ PSS (vol. 13), p. 239.

³⁹ '[Ж]изнь купцов, кучеров, семинаристов, каторжников и мужиков для меня представляется однообразною, скучною... жизнь этих людей некрасива.' 'The life of merchants, coachmen, seminarians, convicts and peasants seems to me monotonous and dull... the life of these people is not beautiful.' PSS (vol. 13), p. 239.

⁴⁰ 'I am an aristocrat because since childhood I have been raised to love and respect the upper classes and to love that which is graceful, which is reflected not only in Homer, Bach, and Raphael, but in all the details of life.' PSS (vol. 13), p. 239.

what enables Tolstoy to focus on elites without guilt: it is a narrative of aristocrats, this is true, but that is partly what renders it pleasing. It is pleasing because kings are typically more exciting to hear about than merchants, and also because kings are accessible to historical memory – everyone in Russia had heard the names of Kutuzov and the particularly beloved Alexander.⁴¹ Accessible content conveyed in pleasing form achieves the scope, truth-value, and authentic immediacy of Homer – or the Bible.

There is another nuance to the text's exclusionary reference to 'our grandfathers': it did not start out only referencing French speakers. In the second draft for the introduction, explaining yet again why *War and Peace* is not a novel, Tolstoy reflects: 'Мы, русские, вообще не умеем писать романов в том смысле, в котором понимают этот род сочинений в Европе.'⁴² The seventh draft begins with, 'Пишу о том времени, которое еще цепью живых воспоминаний связано с нашим, которого запах и звук еще слышны нам.'⁴³ These varied beginnings signify only the Russian reader as the intended reader – мы, русские; we, Russians – who partakes in a shared history. These Russian readers may or may not be the aristocratic descendants of French-speaking grandfathers. The earlier versions of the introduction imply that the purpose of the exclusion is to distance from the text not the lower classes, but foreigners.

This nationalistic tendency may be partly attributed to the fact that Tolstoy's Homeric *istoriia-iskusstvo* emerged at a time when the country's need for a uniquely Russian literature and history was paramount. Griffiths and Rabinowitz write:

Once Napoleon was beaten, writers in Russia sought to forge an independent literature that would not only celebrate the country's new status as a world power but also allow Europe to read its own destiny. For prophets, the wit or sentimentality of the novel, the bourgeois fantasy that sold books in Paris or London, was no fit medium [...] Russian writers aimed to take the genre beyond itself by making it something greater, more public, and more primary – in a word, by making it monumental, that is, epic.⁴⁴

The need for national literature – for epic – is not very much different from the need for national myth. If *War and Peace* is part of this myth in Russia – and it certainly is – it blossomed not in the organic, spontaneous, bottom-up fashion that Tolstoy imagines Homeric myth to have done. It is, instead, a deliberate and contrived narrative reflecting the unique historical vision of a single, well-educated, aristocratic man. The history Tolstoy produced was of necessity a distortion, aligned less with what the still-stricken country may or may not have needed, and more with what Tolstoy himself needed his country's history to have been. However, to achieve legitimacy for his work, he had to present

⁴¹ See, for example, Lieven's description of Alexander's visit to Moscow in July 1812: 'When Alexander emerged [...] outside his Kremlin palace [...] he was greeted by an immense crowd [...] The emperor was greeted with the ringing of the bells of all the Kremlin churches and wave after wave of cheers from the crowd. The ordinary people pressed forward to touch him and implored him to lead them against the enemy.' Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon*, p. 237.

⁴² 'We Russians generally are not capable of writing novels in the same sense that these compositions are understood in Europe.' *PSS* (vol. 13), p. 54.

⁴³ 'I am writing of that time which by the chain of still living memory is linked to ours, the scent and sound of which is still accessible to us.' *PSS* (vol. 13), p. 70.

⁴⁴ Frederick T. Griffiths and Stanely J. Rabinowitz, *Epic and the Russian Novel: From Gogol to Pasternak* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2011), p. 12.

the material *as if it were* the unmediated expression of the *narod*, emanating from an authentically Russian consciousness. This helps explain why Homeric epic, regarded by Tolstoy as an authentic and popular expression, was so important to the formation of *War and Peace*. Tolstoy can be said to have attained the authority of unmediated popular expression with every critic who describes Tolstoy's literary achievement as representative of artless naturalism: Isaac Babel regarded Tolstoy's fiction as 'the world writing itself'⁴⁵ and Matthew Arnold called it a 'piece of life'.⁴⁶ It is the use of what Morson terms 'absolute language' that lends *War and Peace* its quality of unmediated truth. The features of absolute language Morson presents – commands, proverbs, logical propositions, laws of nature and human nature, metaphysical assertions – which are unattributable to a particular narrator and therefore seem to arise from beyond history⁴⁷ characterize Homeric epic.

The *Iliad* begins with an invocation to the Muses which guarantees that the voice of the subsequent narration is not the singer's own, but is timeless and absolute: 'The invocation promises an ethos that is well enough summed up by the old term 'epic objectivity': once it is over, we will not expect to hear the voice of the poet as poet [...] the poet's individual personality is submerged.'⁴⁸ It is not Homer who tells his audience what occurred at Troy – he is merely a mouthpiece for divine knowledge. Before listing the ships and commanders who sailed to Troy, the poet requests aid:

Tell me now, you Muses who have your homes on Olympos.
For you, who are goddesses, are there, and you know all things,
and we have heard only the rumour of it and know nothing [...]
I could not tell over the multitude of them nor name them,
not if I had ten tongues and ten mouths, not if I had
a voice never to be broken and a heart of bronze within me.⁴⁹

This passage is similar to Tolstoy's lamentation above that history seeks to describe the lives of millions of people. Even more so, the Homeric invocation finds resonance in Tolstoy's attempt to describe a day of his life, entitled *A History of Yesterday*:

Бог один знает, сколько разнообразных, занимательных впечатлений и мыслей, которые возбуждают эти впечатления, хотя темных, неясных, но [не] менее того понятных душе нашей, проходит в один день. Ежели бы можно было рассказать их так, чтобы сам бы легко читал себя и другие могли читать меня, как и я сам, вышла бы очень поучительная и занимательная книга, и такая, что недостало бы чернил на свете написать ее и типографщиков напечатать.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Cited in A. K. Zholkovskii, 'Metaportrait of the Artist as a Young Man', in *Babel*, ed. by A. K. Zholkovskii and M. B. Iampol'skii (Moscow: Carte Blanche, 1994), pp. 15-56 (p. 33).

⁴⁶ Clinton Machann, *Matthew Arnold: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), p. 158.

⁴⁷ Morson, *Hidden in Plain View*, p. 15.

⁴⁸ Ford, *Poetry of the Past*, p. 26.

⁴⁹ *The 'Iliad' of Homer*, trans. by Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), Book 2 (ll. 484-90).

⁵⁰ 'God alone knows how many variable, absorbing impressions and thoughts, which provoke these impressions, although dark, unclear, but nevertheless comprehensible to our soul, occur each day. If it were possible to describe them so that I can easily read myself and others can read me as I can, a very instructive and absorbing book would result, a book for which there is not enough ink on earth to write it and typographers to type it.' *PSS* (vol. 1), p. 279.

The multiplicity of details that constitute a single historical moment is known to God alone – or the Muses. The ten tongues and ten mouths Homer lacks is repeated (and adapted to a writing culture) in Tolstoy's call for all the ink and all the typographers in the world. Yet somehow, both Homer and Tolstoy summon their respective tongues and typographers and manage to say the unsayable. How is this performative contradiction possible? It is possible because Homer and Tolstoy communicate a history in terms of that *ораторское искусство*, oratorical art, for which Tolstoy admired the ancients. Art does not have enough ink to grasp infinite complexity, but it comes the closest: 'Whatever the Muses give the poet, they withhold the all; there is an inevitable reduction from divine knowledge to *kleos*, which may be poetry or rumour or hearsay but never vision. The true account is still the total account.'⁵¹

Tolstoy recognizes that calling upon the Muses as evidence of authority, just like the use of absolute language, is a rhetorical trick, a literary device characteristic of the art of oratory prevalent in epic. So Tolstoy notes in 1870: 'Одно искусство не знает ни условий времени, ни пространства, ни движения.'⁵² It is not the Muses but Homer's and Tolstoy's grasp of linguistic art that enables them to overcome the limitations of time and space. The poet is unconstrained not only in relation to the historian, but more importantly, in relation to the very history he describes. In a draft of *War and Peace*, reflecting on the impotence of historical figures, Tolstoy wrote: 'Только Ньютон, Сократ, Гомер действуют сознательно и независимо, и только у тех людей есть тот произвол, который против всех доказательств о нервах доказывает моя, сейчас поднятая и опущенная рука.'⁵³ This is nothing less than astonishing. Neither historians nor the figures they describe have free will, a notion reiterated again and again in *War and Peace*. Napoleons and Alexanders are buffeted about by forces beyond their comprehension. Yet the likes of Newton, Socrates, and *Homer* – the singer-poet who is master of that which transcends the limitations of time and space – possess the necessary freedom to step outside history and reflect accurately upon the world. More to the point, this supernatural freedom can be demonstrated by Tolstoy's own uplifted hand. The conclusion we are invited to draw is that if Homer steps beyond time and space, so does Tolstoy.

Justin Weir describes Tolstoy's tendency to falsify and re-imagine the past, a tendency the author gives to his narrator and characters, as well: 'Characters, and sometimes Tolstoy himself, compose new or ideal identities by repeating a false past [...] falsehood is incorporated into being through a sort of false repetition – for example a memory that recapitulates an event that never happened.'⁵⁴ This false past is precisely what military critics like Dragomirov complained of. However, these distortions are not a historical error. For Tolstoy, to falsify history is the reason for invoking history in the first place. His motivation for falsifying has been examined by scholars;⁵⁵ whether it was arrogance, insecurity, the desire for mastery, political rebellion, or visionary genius that prompted falsification, Tolstoy knew from reading Homer that if a falsification is strong enough

⁵¹ Ford, *Poetry of the Past*, p. 86.

⁵² 'Art alone is not limited by conditions of time, space, or motion.' *PSS* (vol. 48), p. 118.

⁵³ Only Newton, Socrates, and Homer act consciously and independently, and only such people have the will which, despite all proofs regarding nerves, is proven by my now raised and lowered hand. *PSS* (vol. 14), p. 60.

⁵⁴ Justin Weir, *Leo Tolstoy and the Alibi of Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 64.

⁵⁵ Morson, *Hidden in Plain View*, p. 23.

– in other words, if it achieves the aesthetic and historical heights of *istoriia-iskusstvo* – it will pass into collective memory as history, not literature. This is the reason Tolstoy describes the *Iliad* as a historical narrative. After passage into history occurs, the text is safely beyond the reach of the first generation of critics who know it to be a fabrication: ‘Whether it is history or imagination is not insignificant, but it is less significant than one might think. As one repeats a repetition, whether the first articulation is true seems to matter less and less.’⁵⁶ The repetition itself, upon each re-reading or re-hearing of the narrative, is quite enough to pass for truth.

More importantly, it is quite enough for *Russian* readers, each generation of which inevitably has associations with Napoleon’s invasion which shapes reception of the text as personally significant history. It is unlikely that Tolstoy wished *War and Peace* to be read only by Russians, yet he sought to present it as though he wished it to be read only by Russians. This creates an air of authenticity because of its assumed exclusiveness and intimacy. ‘This is just what *we Russians* think of and remember war,’ both the published and unpublished introductions casually suggest, as though unconcerned with how Europe remembers Napoleon’s invasion. Of course, influencing how Europe remembers has been Tolstoy’s motivation since he was a 24-year-old dreaming of writing a true, authentic history of Europe. Here, a problem of effectualness arises: if Tolstoy’s work is a specifically Russian recollection, it lacks general legitimacy. Tolstoy solved the problem by grounding his unique, contrived, deliberate *istoriia-iskusstvo* with the generally acknowledged weight of Homeric epic so respected and celebrated in European literature. *War and Peace* is presented as a Russian work for Russians, yet it is also ‘like’ the Greek *Iliad* – not only due to plot and style, but also because it must achieve the same authority and lasting power.

Could Tolstoy have written *War and Peace* without Homer? It is very likely. Would *War and Peace* have become historical memory without Homer? Probably not. True, authentic history is not a matter of what happened, it is a matter of what should have happened. For Tolstoy, this reconstruction requires the trustworthy form of Homeric epic because it combines the voices of Russian *narod* and sophisticated Western elites. Homeric epic achieved immortality partly because it achieved authority. It was able to do so because its material encompasses the essentials of Greek identity. Gregory Nagy writes: ‘The *Iliad* purports to say everything that is worth saying about the Greeks [...] It is as if the *Iliad*, in mirroring for the Greeks of the present an archetypal image of themselves in the past, served as an autobiography of a people.’⁵⁷ Yet it says everything from a position of alleged neutrality. The identity of the poet is inscrutable, giving away nothing of itself, not taking sides with the Greeks or the Trojans, or if taking sides, doing it so subtly that it is difficult for readers to be certain of it and even more difficult to prove. This silence in regard to an authorial identity constitutes much of the epics’ power. Barbara Graziosi describes the epics as addressed to a universal audience, remaining ‘equidistant from all possible listeners [...] anonymity is their marker.’⁵⁸ In a certain sense, the entirety of Homeric epic takes the form of absolute language, unattributable and therefore universally

⁵⁶ Weir, *Tolstoy and the Alibi of Narrative*, p. 66.

⁵⁷ Gregory Nagy, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 18.

⁵⁸ Barbara Graziosi, ‘The Ancient Reception of Homer’, in *The Blackwell Companion to Classical Receptions*, ed. by Lorna Hardwick and C. Stray (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 26–37 (p. 28).

valid. Ruth Scodel writes: 'Though he pretends to be a neutral reporter, Homer manages his material ruthlessly [...] [Homer] presupposes that the audience knows the larger story, but it also asks them to forget all that happened [...] The scope of Homer's narratives gives them immense authority.'⁵⁹

Achieving authority by prompting an audience to forget what happened and replacing memory with his own curated version of events is precisely Tolstoy's aim. He achieves it for the same reasons Homer did, and only a stubborn Dragomirov would fail to be convinced. Historical facts are not important and whether Dragomirov was right or wrong has ultimately been irrelevant to the afterlife of the text.

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⁵⁹ Ruth Scodel, 'The Story-Teller and his Audience', in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. by Robert Fowler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 45-56 (p. 55).

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