

## PLOT STRUCTURE AND COMPOSITIONAL FEATURES IN THE HISTORICAL NOVEL BY ALEXEI TOLSTOY “PETER THE GREAT”

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**Annotation:** This article explores the creation and artistic structure of Alexei Tolstoy's historical novel Peter the Great (Peter I). It examines the interrelation of historical fact and artistic imagination, the plot and composition, the epic mode of narration, the character system, and the author's poetic mastery. The study also offers several theoretical insights

**Key words:** novel trilogy, protagonist, real life and artistic truth, plot, composition, epic narrative method, system of images, poetic skill

### INTRODUCTION

The outstanding Russian writer, playwright, poet, public figure and academician Alexei Nikolaevich Tolstoy (1883-1945) lived and worked in Tashkent during World War II, 1941-1943, among the staff of the Gorky Institute of World Literature of the USSR Academy of Sciences and other Russian intellectuals [8. 464]. During this period he initiated the preparation of the textbook History of Multinational Soviet Literature. In addition, he completed the first part of the play “Ivan the Terrible” - “Two Eagles” and the second part - “The Hard Years”.

### METHODOLOGY

The object of the research is Peter the First, the historical epic novel by Alexei Nikolaevich Tolstoy. The study applies biographical, analytical, historical-comparative, and typological-comparative methods to analyze the novel's form and content.

### RESEARCH OUTCOME

While in Tashkent, Tolstoy reworked his trilogy “The Walking on Torment”, written with great interruptions. He abandoned some parts and achieved compositional integrity [18]. He also wrote a satirical comedy in four acts, The Hideous Strength, a screenplay, The Raid of the H-Division, about the courage of soldiers in encirclement, the novel The Don (The Defense of Tsaritsyn), and an anti-war pamphlet play, The Devil's Bridge, revised as The Führer. He completed the cycle of short stories “Ivan Sudarev's Stories”, including such works as “At Night at the Haymaking Field”, “How It Began”, “Seven Orphans”, ‘Nina’, “Supernatural Incident” [15. 205].

By the mid-1930s A. Tolstoy completed the second volume of his historical novel “Peter the Great” [18]. After studying archival sources, he came to the conclusion that “it is impossible to write a historical novel in the form of a chronicle”. In the artistic fabric of the novel he included the most important events of the era - the Streltsy rebellion, the Azov campaigns, the borrowing of foreign experience, the Battle of Narva and others. The author created vivid artistic images of Peter and other historical figures. Especially vividly he conveyed the daily life of simple, poor, but hoping for the best people and their sincere attitude to the reforms of the emperor. Considerable attention is also paid to fiction, which does not allow you to refer the novel to the category of dry historical chronicles.

Unfortunately, A. Tolstoy could not complete the trilogy. Because of the outbreak of war, he temporarily postponed work on the third part. In a letter to A. Ignatiev at the end of May 1942, he admitted: "I can not start a big case - only articles, only articles ... and most of all I want to start the third part of Peter" [30. 121].

Obviously, the thought of continuing the trilogy never left him. However, being heavily loaded with social and cultural activities, he was never able to seriously begin work. Life was short, and the idea remained unrealized. Thus, the return to the theme of Peter the Great remained only in the plans [21].

The novel is based on the real historical era of the reign of the Russian tsar and first emperor Peter Alexeevich (1672-1725) [2. 191], nicknamed Peter the Great, when Russia took a step forward on the path of progress and reform.

Staying true to the historical truth, the author does not gloss over the cruel measures that Peter resorted to in order to achieve his goals. Thus, the events of October 10, 1698 are described, when the Streltsy riots were brutally suppressed in Moscow: more than 1000 Streltsy were executed, about 600 were beaten, many were exiled, and Peter personally beheaded five of them - these facts are reflected in the novel.

The historical background of the novel "Peter the First" begins with the struggle for power after the death of Tsar Fyodor Alekseevich. Princess Sophia and her favorite Vasily Golitsyn kept the minor heirs Ivan and Peter under control, while poverty, discontent, and riots reigned in Moscow and its environs.

Young Peter lived in Preobrazhensky with his mother Natalya Kirillovna. He meets a foreign captain Franz Lefort and falls in love with Anna Mons, the daughter of a wine merchant. However, for security reasons his mother gives him in marriage to Evdokia Lopukhina. Peter's life is nevertheless filled with war games. Moscow is restless. Suppression of rebellions is accompanied by cruelty. Peter's heir Alexei is born. Relations with his wife remain strained. His mother dies.

Until the beginning of the XVIII century in the country fails to establish stability. The campaigns to the Crimea and Azov are unsuccessful. Poverty, discontent, rampages are aggravated. Peter's business is also not easy. However, the confidence of foreigners in the reformer grows stronger.

The construction of the fleet begins in Voronezh. Under the name of Sergeant Pyotr Mikhailov, he travels to Germany, Holland and England, studying crafts. In his absence, Sophia raises a new Streltsy revolt. Upon his return, Peter brutally suppresses it. Fear reigns in the country. Byzantine traditions are destroyed. Golitsyn and his family are exiled to Kargopol, Sophia is imprisoned in the Novodevichy Convent. Peter indulges in debauchery, distances himself from his wife, the birth of an heir does not change the situation. The beginning of the XVIII century is marked by a difficult economic and political situation. People from poverty are not bent on stealing.

The ships of the new flotilla, built in Voronezh, reach the Crimea and the Bosphorus. Turkey finds itself in a difficult position. However, at Narva Russian troops are defeated by Swedish King Charles XII. Peter does not lose heart. He unites the troops, creates a disciplined army, even uses church bells to cast cannons. Dozens of warships are built. The fortress of Marienburg is taken. Narva is again occupied.

In the novel the themes of friendship, loyalty, love and betrayal are discussed in detail. However, the main emphasis is placed on the reforming activities of Peter and his companions, aimed at building a centralized state and bringing the country out of backwardness and poverty.

In the course of the plot, the protagonist is formed as a person. The first book is written in the tradition of world novelism. It describes the childhood and adolescence of the future emperor, and also gives a panorama of the country through the representatives of various estates. The book ends with Peter's realization of the need for reform. The romantic line is poorly developed, as:

A. Tolstoy deliberately reveals the character of the hero not at the crossroads of love, but on the fields of creating a new empire. Relations between people are built on purpose and interest. Gradually the scope of time narrows: the first book covers 16 years, the second - 5 years, the third - 6 months.

The writer seeks to penetrate deeper into the inner world of Peter. In the following books he reveals the complex phenomenon of the personality of the reformer, who created a great empire at the cost of sacrifice. The Russian state together with the genius of Peter enters a new era. Peter appears not as an abstract figure, but as a living person. The author does not go into everyday life, but reveals the characters through the fates of participants in historical processes. Thus, the novel provides an opportunity to understand the attitude of different social strata to the reforms carried out by an outstanding man - a powerful ruler at the center of the epic narrative, as well as allows us to penetrate into the atmosphere of that era, its historical flavor and ethnographic features. As Victor Petyolin rightly noted in the preface and comments on the novel, director Nikolai Simonov, who made the movie "Peter the Great" based on the book, especially appreciated these very merits of the work [12].

Although, as already mentioned, the novel remained unfinished, it reflects the accession to the throne of young Peter after the death of his father and the brutal massacre of his loved ones, his irascible and careless youth, the struggle for power between the boyar clans, and, finally, his desire to defend the honor of Russia and raise the country to a new level.

## DISCUSSION

The hero of the novel Peter goes through severe trials that require great strength, dedication and courage. He loses his parents, does not find understanding in his wife, his loyal associate Menshikov systematically steals, and his beloved Anna betrays him. The protagonist does not meet sympathy neither in grief nor in suffering. He constantly feels lonely. In the periods of military failures, struggle with opponents of reforms - open or secret, wanderings abroad, when he persistently learns craft skills, Peter is in dire need of support and sympathy [24. 192].

It is important to note that it is in these trials that his human personality is formed and perfected. The writer effectively uses the poetic motifs of journey, path, and trial as key elements of the plot.

Alexei Tolstoy leads the image of Peter through the path of elevation of the hero's character. In the third book we see a self-confident, determined personality, concerned about Russia's military victories. Tolstoy's belief in the strength and power of man, in his ability and potential to change the world fully confirms the thesis of the "new man", put forward by the literary politics of the time when the novel was created. Thus, the author was in line with the socio-political and literary-ideological policy of the 30-40s of the XX century. He supported the position according to which the great goals of Peter, aimed at the development of Russia along the European path of progress, justified his cruelty. Undoubtedly, the writer, who justified the principle "the end justifies the means", fulfilled a certain public order.

Looking for an artistic solution that corresponds to the spirit of the era, the author failed to unite the individual parts of the novel in a compositionally complete work. Each part covers separate events. Surprisingly, the writer was not able to carefully trace the fate of all the introduced

characters. Therefore, most of them remain loosely connected to the main plot. As a result, there is a kind of mosaic of plot lines. Of course, we should recognize Tolstoy's desire to embellish the novel, using a variety of historical sources: archival documents, memoirs of eyewitnesses, court reports, diaries and personal correspondence, as well as historical songs, folk humor and legends.

### CONCLUSION

A. Tolstoy puts the image of the protagonist Peter in the center of the epic narrative, building all the other characters around him. According to the author, this principle should have determined the basis of the composition of the work. Consequently, this historical novel is built not on the unity of the main and secondary plots, but on the system of characters. Therefore, A. Tolstoy first of all reveals in detail the image of Peter the Great, and then - those who are closest to him. August, Charles XII, the Turkish Sultan, Sophia, Vasily Golitsyn, Anna and many other characters disappear from the narrative immediately after the completion of their relationship with the protagonist. Naturally, the plot is also shaped accordingly.

Auxiliary characters help to clarify the historical situation, but none of them can be compared to Peter in terms of the scale of personality, breadth of outlook and creativity. It is such comparisons that contribute to a more vivid disclosure of Peter's image as a reformer-sovereign. It is noteworthy that Peter's activities are shown in parallel with the life stories of ordinary people, such as Brovkin, Loskut, Overian, Golikov. This creates an opportunity to show the picture of the era from different angles.

In the first book, the language of the author and the characters is harmonized stylistically. In the second and third books, the narrative speech (of the author) is noticeably separated from the speech of the characters. This is explained by the fact that A. Tolstoy consciously seeks to give an assessment of each of Peter's actions, to pass an artistic judgment on them. We can also see that the writer does not quite approve of the complete destruction of the "old" for the sake of building a "new". However, A. Tolstoy recognizes the achievements of Peter the Great - the creation of a powerful fleet, the construction of St. Petersburg, military victories - worthy of respect and recognition. In such places, he fully adheres to the principles of historicism.

The writer describes the external appearance of the characters, their facial expressions, behavior. However, except for some gestures, he fails to penetrate deeply into the psychological state of the characters through internal dialogues and monologues.

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