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Alexander Pushkin's Sources of the Meaning of the People's War in L. Tolstoy's Novel *War and Peace*

Alexander I. Ivanitsky^{id}✉, Ksenia A. Nagina^{id}

Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow, Russian Federation

✉meisster@mail.ru

Abstract. The aim of the study is to characterize the relationship between the image of the people's war in L. Tolstoy's novel *War and Peace* and the image of the Pugachev rebellion, as depicted in A.S. Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*. The character of Fyodor Dolokhov uniquely embodies the symbolic polyvalence of the notion of "war" in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. On one hand, he epitomizes its negative aspect – aristocratic pride and egoism, the central maladies of Russian life. On the other, Dolokhov's predatory "ferocity" and "savagery" make him a key agent of the 1812 Patriotic War, which affirms the idea of "peace" as a universal, "communal-swarm" existence. In this, Dolokhov channels the primal, "elemental-hunting" spirit of popular war, personified by Tikhon Shcherbaty. The prototype for such war, as an uprising of primitive hunting instincts, appears in Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter* through Pugachev's rebellion. Its leader reveals the rebellion's essence to Grinyov via a Kalmyk tale of an eagle and raven: *Better to drink living blood once than feed on carrion for three hundred years*. Meanwhile, the turncoat Shvabrin exposes the logic behind Dolokhov's amoral noble "self-will" – first adopting the "elemental-hunting" ethos as a mark of distinction, then dissolving into it completely. Like Shvabrin as Grinyov's "useful saboteur", Dolokhov plays an analogous role for Tolstoy's protagonists (Pierre Bezukhov, Nikolai and Natasha Rostov). Both antagonists compel the heroes to harness that same primal vitality and will, rooted in nature yet guided by reason, measure, and morality. The following conclusions have been made in this research: within the literary universes of Pushkin and Tolstoy, a dialectical interaction between raw nature and human nature is revealed; by threatening to plunge the ordered world into primordial chaos, the elemental force of war, uprising, distraction ultimately reinforces its very structure.

Keywords: *The Captain's Daughter*, *War and Peace*, people's war, war as hunting, "swarm principle", helper-antagonist, harmony of will and duty

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Пушкинские истоки значений народной войны в романе Л. Толстого «Война и мир»

А.И. Иваницкий^{ID}✉, К.А. Нагина^{ID}

Российский государственный гуманитарный университет, Москва, Россия

✉meisster@mail.ru

Аннотация. Цель исследования – характеристика взаимосвязи образа народной войны в романе Л. Толстого «Война и мир» с образом пугачёвского бунта повести А.С. Пушкина «Капитанская дочка». Доказывается, что характер Фёдора Долохова по-особому проявляет символическую многозначность понятия «войны» в романе Толстого. С одной стороны, он замыкает на себе ее негативное значение – аристократической гордыни и эгоизма, главных проблем русской жизни, с другой – присущие Долохову охотничье «зверство» и «бешенство» делают его ключевым действующим лицом Отечественной войны 1812 г., утверждающей идею «мира» как всеобщего «общинно-роевого» бытия. Этим Долохов проявляет первичное, «стихийно-охотничье» начало народной войны, олицетворяемое Тихоном Щербатым. Утверждается, что прообраз такой войны, как восстания первобытной охотничьей стихии, представляет пугачёвщина в пушкинской «Капитанской дочке». Смысл бунта его вождь раскрывает главному герою Гринёву в калмыцкой сказке о соколе и вороне: «...чем триста лет питаться падалью, лучше раз напиться живой кровью». Отмечается, что перешедший на сторону Пугачёва Швабрин (как «полезный вредитель» Гринёва) предвосхищает соответствующую роль Долохова в отношении главных героев «Войны и мира» (Пьера Безухова, Николая и Наташи Ростовых). И Швабрин, и Долохов вынуждают своих антагонистов проявлять жажду жизни и волю, которые восходят к тому же стихийному началу, но направляются разумом, мерой и моралью. В результате сделаны следующие выводы: в художественном мире Пушкина и Толстого проявляется диалектическое взаимодействие природы и человеческого естества; угрожая ввергнуть мир в первозданный хаос, стихия войны, бунта, разрушения укрепляет его порядок.

Ключевые слова: «Капитанская дочка», «Война и мир», народная война, война как охота, «роевое начало», помощник-антагонист, гармония воли и долга

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Introduction

In Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1863–1869), scholars have repeatedly identified allusions to Alexander Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter* (1836): both works depict the spiritual journey of their protagonist(s) against the backdrop and under the influence of a “people's war” (Fedorova, 2023). As is known, Tolstoy's novel presents war with two polar symbolic meanings. The first represents aristocratic pride and egoism – qualities blindly worshipped by Hélène and Anatole Kuragin, Andrei Bolkonsky (before his wounding at Austerlitz), Napoleon, Speransky and others. The second embodies the principle of “peace” – that communal “swarm-like” existence which asserts itself in opposition to Napoleon in 1812. This constitutes the “people's thought” personified by Platon Karataev.

Additional layers of meaning behind “war” in the novel may be illuminated by the Pushkinian origins of the character Fyodor Dolokhov – an antagonist and saboteur of the main heroes, who “...draws into himself the plans, beliefs, and life principles of others, so long as they bear the mark of ‘all is permitted’” (Kamianov, 1978, pp. 171–172). The roots of his character can be traced back to *The Captain's Daughter* as well.

Results and Discussion

The defining trait of Dolokhov, which sets him apart from other characters representing “war” in the novel, is his predatory “ferocity” and “savagery” – qualities he himself presents to Nikolai Rostov during their friendship as his personal credo: “...peredavlyu vsesh, koli stanut na doroge”¹, “...mne chto nuzhno, ya prosit' ne stanu, sam voz'mu”². This essentially ‘bandit-like’ nature makes

¹ Tolstoy, L.N. (1938). *The Complete Works* (Vol. 10, book 2, p. 43). Moscow; Leningrad: State Publishing Hudozhestvennaya Literature. (In Russ.)

² Tolstoy, L.N. (1937). *The Complete Works* (Vol. 9, book 1, p. 148). Moscow; Leningrad: State Publishing Hudozhestvennaya Literature. (In Russ.)

hunting the most natural and desirable form of existence for Dolokhov (Gevel, 2021)³. He embodies both the hunter and the beast⁴. Prince Andrei, in a conversation with Pierre, calls him a “zloj <...> sobakoj”⁵. For Dolokhov, war becomes the ultimate hunt – a perpetual struggle for prey, where the enemy is merely quarry.

This is vividly illustrated in the novel’s early drafts:

“Doloxovu vdrug pokazalos’ tak legko imet’ delo, vmesto e’toj groznoj, tainstvennoj massy’, s rumyany’m oficerom i ego soldatom, tak oxvatilo ego e’to oxotnich’e chuvstvo, kotoroe govorit tak sil’no o tom, kak by’ ubit’ zverya, chto zaglushaet vsyakoe chuvstvo opasnosti, chto on ne ispy’ty’val drugogo volneniya, krome radosti, kogda bezhal s dvenadczat’yu soldatami k doroge. Zver’ ego by’l rumyany’j oficer”⁶.

Here, Dolokhov exhibits traits of a primal, “military-hunting” ethos, akin to the folk spirit Tolstoy depicted in *The Cossacks* (1863) – a key source for the “thought of the people” in *War and Peace*. For example, the old Cossack Eroshka, like his kin, feels closer to *abreks* and wild beasts than to soldiers sent from Russia, as both live by the same rules as their Cossack hunters. Lukashka – the romantic rival of Olenin, a nobleman from Moscow – first claims a “trophy” by killing an *abrek*, but later, while attempting to capture the man’s brother alive as another prize, becomes the victim himself (the hunt transforms into an equal duel) (Nagina, 2018, pp. 22–25). This reveals Dolokhov’s intuitive connection to the soldiering masses. As noted by V.I. Kamianov; “*The soldiers’ song <...> placed Dolokhov in a new relation to his former friends.... If earlier he stood out among them with cold audacity and dictatorial airs, now it was through his bond with the folk*” (Kamianov, 1978, p. 134). Yet Dolokhov embodies only the primordial, “elemental” layer of the people’s war of 1812 – an epic “hunt” for Napoleon:

“Ochen’ chasto ranenoe zhiivotnoe, zasly’shav shorox, brosaetsya na vy’srel na oxotnika, bezhit vpered, nazad i samo uskoryaet svoj konecz. To zhe samoe delal Napoleon pod davleniem vsego svoego vojska. Shorox Tarutinskogo srazheniya spugnul zverya, i on brosilysya vpered na vy’srel, dobezhal do oxotnika, vernulsya opyat’ nazad i, nakonecz, kak vsyakij zver’, pobezhal nazad, po samomu nevy’godnomu, opasnomu puti, no po znakomomu, staromu sledu”⁷.

Thus, the meaning of the “people’s war” in the novel bifurcates. If the “swarm-like essence” of war as “peace” is embodied by Platon Karataev, then war as the pinnacle of hunting existence is personified by Tikhon Shcherbaty. The

³ As observed by O. Gevel, Tolstoy consistently associates Dolokhov with hunting imagery in his diary entries.

⁴ Tolstoy, L.N. (1940). *The Complete Works* (Vol. 11, book 3, p. 199). Moscow; Leningrad: State Publishing Hudozhestvennaya Literature. (In Russ.)

⁵ Tolstoy, L.N. (1938). *The Complete Works* (Vol. 10, book 2, p. 119). Moscow; Leningrad: State Publishing Hudozhestvennaya Literature. (In Russ.)

⁶ Tolstoy, L.N. (1949). *The Complete Works* (Vol. 13, p. 401). Moscow; Leningrad: State Publishing Hudozhestvennaya Literature. (In Russ.)

⁷ Tolstoy, L.N. (1940). *The Complete Works* (Vol. 12, book 4, pp. 91–92). Moscow; Leningrad: State Publishing Hudozhestvennaya Literature. (In Russ.)

fundamental kinship between Dolokhov and Shcherbaty manifests in the killing of prisoners, who acquire the dual significance of military trophies and hunting prey⁸.

These dimensions of Dolokhov's character find their precursor in Pushkin's Pugachev. The underlying nature of the popular uprising Pugachev leads is revealed by Pushkin in the "introductory" description of the Orenburg province as a rebellion of primitive elemental forces against rational, settled order:

*"Siya obshirnaya i bogataya guberniya obitaema by'la mnozhestvom poludikix narodov, priznavshix eshhe nedavno vlady'chestvo rossijskix gosudarej. Ix pomnutny'e vozmushheniya, neprivy'chka k zakonam i grazhdanskoj zhizni, legkomy'slie i zhestokost' trebivali so storony' pravitel'stva neprestannogo nadzora dlya uderzhaniya ix v povinovenii..."*⁹.

The Kyrgyz hat Pugachev wears when traveling with Grinyov from the Berdskaya settlement to the Belogorsk fortress, and *"...kibitka, zapryazhennaya trojkoyu tatarskix loshadej"*¹⁰ links him to this world of "semi-savage peoples" where his rebellion was born and nurtured. This same primordial world is represented by the defector Yulay (later executed by Pugachev's men) and the Bashkir scout brought to Belogorsk fortress – a man who had lost his tongue, ears and nostrils for previous rebellion. As we know, this same punishment befell Pugachev's closest associate Khlopusha in the story. Therefore, when Pugachev promises to "reward" (*"pozhalovat"*) Grinyov *"...kogda poluch[it] svoe gosudarstvo"*¹¹, he essentially expresses these peoples' desire to return to their primal state, and the runaway Cossacks' wish to transition into it.

It is perfectly logical that when explaining the meaning of the rebellion to Pyotr Grinyov, Pugachev derives it from a Kalmyk fairy tale about an eagle and a raven. The predatory, hunting-themed moral of the tale – *"... chem trista let pitat'sya padal'yu, luchshe raz napit'sya zhivoj krov'yu"*¹² – essentially anticipates Dolokhov's ethos of life as war.

Meanwhile, Pugachev's chief accomplice in the story becomes the nobleman Shvabrin, who embodies the philosophy of amoral "self-will". Having become the "false", Pugachev-appointed commandant of Belogorsk Fortress, Shvabrin ultimately transforms into a slave of the rebellious element, *"valya[yas'] v nogax u beglogo kazaka"*¹³. Notably, in doing so, Shvabrin renounces his noble emblems

⁸ By taking young Petya Rostov on a dangerous reconnaissance mission against Denisov's objections, Dolokhov essentially aims to mold him into a predator like himself – intention underscored by his callous remark *"Gotov!"* (upon Petya's death, treating it as the killing of a beast. On this "predatory-elemental" dimension of the people's war in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, see (Nagina, 2018)).

⁹ Pushkin, A.S. (1950). *Complete Collected Works* (Vol. 6, p. 446). Moscow; Leningrad: Academy of Sciences of the USSR Publ. (In Russ.)

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 504.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 475.

¹² Ibid., pp. 507–508.

¹³ Ibid., p. 511.

and thereby his identity. Immediately after the fortress's capture by Pugachev, he appears "*sredi myatezhnyx starshin... obstrizhennyj v kruzhek i v kazaczkom kaftane*". During his second visit to Belogorsk Fortress, Grinyov sees that Shvabrin "*otpusstil sebe borodu*"¹⁴.

I. Toybin (1976, pp. 219, 236) notes a significant paradox: the nobleman Shvabrin joins Pugachev, while Captain Mironov, a man of the people, remains faithful to his oath until the end. This reveals the antithesis between the "elemental" war in *The Captain's Daughter* and the popular principle based on order and morality. Dolokhov, in a certain sense, combines the traits of both Pugachev and Shvabrin: the primal-hunting (bandit) element and "libertine" worship of it, ultimately dissolving into it.

At the same time, as V. Kamyranov accurately observes, Dolokhov in *War and Peace* has no equal in... paradox (Gevel, 2017). While consistently acting as a "saboteur" toward the main spiritually "growing" characters – Pierre, Nikolai, and Natasha Rostov – Dolokhov invariably facilitates their growth. Most importantly, by "arranging" their marital happiness (which he continuously threatens yet remains deprived of himself). By seducing Hélène and provoking the duel with Pierre, Dolokhov opens Pierre's eyes to the dead end of his life and prompts him to start anew, ultimately leading to his happy marriage with Natasha. By assisting Anatole in Natash's abduction, Dolokhov prevents her marriage to Prince Andrei and "guides" her toward Pierre. By gambling with Nikolai Rostov (whom Sonya preferred to him), Dolokhov destroys this union, directing Nikolai to his true destined match, Princess Marya. Thus, "all of Dolokhov's actions ultimately lead to the only possible conclusion in Tolstoy's world – the creation of a large family". In this sense, Dolokhov resembles Mephistopheles, "who, beyond all count / Does good everywhere, wishing evil to all". The infernal principle in Dolokhov is implicitly established by his "double" smile. Being alien to everyone, disappearing into nowhere (in the final version of the novel, he has no address), and successfully playing all games, Dolokhov easily seduces the higher ranks, particularly Anatole and Pierre Bezukhov, understanding their characters and provoking their exhaustive manifestation. We see Dolokhov himself only through the eyes of other characters. The anagram of his surname reinforces the trait of coldness, which directly or indirectly accompanies all episodes featuring him (Gevel, 2017, pp. 42–51). The infernal semiotics of Dolokhov's image have also been noted by V.I. Kamyranov (1978, pp. 171–172), G. Clay (1998, p. 120), and D. Oliver (2003, p. 58).

It is fundamentally significant that the characters attain their happiness not only "*thanks to*" Dolokhov's efforts but also to the "*Dolokhovian*" traits within themselves. Nikolai becomes a true soldier, in part by channeling his selfless hunting passion; Pierre's innate "*fury*" aids him in breaking with Hélène. Perhaps this

¹⁴ Pushkin, A.S. (1950). *Complete Collected Works* (Vol. 6, p. 509). Moscow; Leningrad: Academy of Sciences of the USSR Publ. (In Russ.)

is also why Dolokhov, as observed by G. Morson (1987, p. 151), “appears so frequently... is described in such detail... especially in the section initially titled “1805”, that... readers of the first hundred pages considered him the main character”, with whom most others are directly or indirectly connected. It is no coincidence that Dolokhov is the only one among the egoists and proud characters in the novel who cannot be called defeated. After the war of 1812, he, as is known, simply disappears from the plot into nowhere (Gevel, 2017, pp. 39–40).

In *The Captain's Daughter*, Pugachev plays a similar role of antagonistic helper to Grinyov, being “...*po strannomu stecheniyu obstoyatel'stv tainstvenno by'l s [nim]... svyazan*”¹⁵. While threatening Grinyov's noble world, Pugachev first spares him (executing his superiors for the same refusal to betray their oath), then orchestrates his marital happiness – returning Masha and releasing them together. Twice, Pugachev claims paternal rights over Grinyov: in the latter's dream at the robber's inn, and later by demanding to be his “*planted father*” at his wedding. This “help” remains ambiguous, carrying temptation within it. I.P. Smirnov, assessing Pushki's conscious choice of a fairytale model of the hero's initiatory journey in “The Captain's Daughter”, sees Pugachev as Grinyov's “supernatural helper”. The direct source of this motif is the Permian fairy tale “The Little Leshy” (Leshok), whose eponymous character the hero saved from the cold, just as Grinyov saved Pugachev in the blizzard-ridden steppe (Smirnov, 1974, pp. 292, 310). It is no coincidence that even then the coachman identifies animalistic, “pre-human” traits in Pugachev: “Must be a wolf or a man”¹⁶. The mythopoetic component of “The Captain's Daughter”, including in relation to Tolstoy's texts, has been indicated by L.A. Stepanov (1987, p. 187), S.Z. Agranovich and L.P. Rassovskaya (1990, pp. 31–45), A.I. Ivanitsky and K.A. Nagina (2024, pp. 242–250). Similar folklore and mythological subtexts in Tolstoy's prose, including in “War and Peace”, have been noted by S.A. Shultz (1998, pp. 33–43) and E.D. Tolstaya (2011, pp. 342–354).

The interplay of aid and seduction in Grinyov's “*mysterious bond*” with Pugachev reflects his service path, where he constantly chooses between “free will” (“*volya*”) and “*duty*” – a tension epitomized by the novel's epigraph on noble honor. Born a “*guard sergeant*” (“*serzhantom gvardii*”), he follows “*duty*” when honor demands it: obeying his father's orders to serve in Orenburg and Belogorsk Fortress, and refusing to kiss Pugachev's hand. Yet the same honor compels him to choose “free will” over regulations when defending Masha: dueling Shvabrin¹⁷,

¹⁵ Pushkin, A.S. (1950). *Complete Collected Works* (Vol. 6, p. 505). Moscow; Leningrad: Academy of Sciences of the USSR Publ. (In Russ.)

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 406–407.

¹⁷ On the life of an 18th-century Russian nobleman within the framework of two competing norms – state service and personal honor (the latter most vividly manifested in dueling culture) – see: Lotman, Yu.M. (1995). *Eugene Onegin: Commentary*. In Yu.M. Lotman, *Pushkin. Biography. Articles and Notes 1960–1990* (pp. 542–762). Saint Petersburg: Iskustvo-SPb. Publ. (In Russ.) For recent scholarship on this topic, see particularly (Zhang, 2024).

then sneaking into the besieged fortress to stop their forced marriage. Here, “free will” becomes a higher, “*knightly*” form of “*norm*” (“*norma*”)¹⁸. Grinyov’s ability to assert his will stems from a vital force rooted in nature itself – the same primal energy that animates “semi-savage peoples” at the initial stages of nomadic and hunter-gatherer development. This elemental collective force finds symbolic foreshadowing in the blizzard¹⁹. Yet in Grinyov’s journey, such natural impulses are tempered by reason, moderation, and duty, ultimately synthesizing in the concept of honor.

Meanwhile, the false-noble “*self-will*” of Shvabrin elevates the elemental-hunting morality into a perverse “*culture*”. Thus, Pugachev “*transfers*” the role of Grinyov’s “*useful saboteur*” to Shvabrin, who three times betrays his rival (foreshadowing Dolokhov’s “*sabotage*” of Nikolai Rostov): before Pugachev (twice) and the imperial investigators (once). Each act “*tempts*” Grinyov: to swear allegiance to Pugachev, confess to deceiving him about Masha’s identity, or implicate her to the authorities. By resisting, Grinyov emerges as both the Empress’s “*natural nobleman*” and Masha’s knight. It is this *positively provocative sabotage* that Dolokhov inherits from Shvabrin.

Conclusion

As our analysis demonstrates, the dialectically conceptualized image of the people’s war in L.N. Tolstoy’s novel is revealed, among other things, in the character of Fyodor Dolokhov – the antagonist and “saboteur” who pulls others’ plans, beliefs, and life attitudes to himself when they are marked with the sign ‘everything is permitted’. Evidently interwoven into the theme of war, this hero simultaneously displays both its “swarm principle” and its elemental chaos, its hunting instinct. The origins of both the hero’s duality and his functions in the novel seem to go back to the image of Pugachev, as it is created in A.S. Pushkin’s *The Captain’s Daughter*.

In Pushkin’s work, the elemental force of popular rebellion manifests in its primordial form – as an uprising of primitive (nomadic/hunting) collective existence against all settled order and law. The amoral self-will of the nobility not only reverts to this primal, predatory element, but becomes wholly consumed by it. Paradoxically, however, by relentlessly challenging the spiritually “evolving” protagonists, these embodiments of unbounded will compel them to harness that same elemental,

¹⁸ Thus, Grinyov, as T. Alpatova astutely observes (1995, pp. 59–70), never actually faces a choice between duty and conscience. This predetermines the hero’s formation amidst the unity of real contradictions and an ideal developmental trajectory. See (Girshman, Stulishenko, 1982, pp. 89–107).

¹⁹ A ballad counterpart to Pugachev’s patriarchal claims in the chronotope of a winter forest journey appears in Goethe’s *Erlkönig* (1782), known to Pushkin through Zhukovsky’s translation (1818). Yet in Pushkin’s realist tale, the metaphor’s subject and predicate are inverted. Pugachev is not a patron of winter’s elemental force, but rather a slave to his own titanic temperament – born of nature and thus alien to any order that would constrain his will. Here, the elemental becomes merely the outward expression of this temperament.

natural force – but in service of order and tempered by its measure. Thus, while perpetually threatening “ordered” norms, the “elemental” ultimately serves to affirm and refine them.

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Bio notes:

Alexander I. Ivanitsky, Grand PhD in Philology, Leading Researcher, Meletinsky Institute of Higher Humanitarian Studies, Russian State University for the Humanities, 6 Miusskaja Sq, Moscow, 125047, Russian Federation. ORCID: 0000-0002-1437-3671; SPIN-code: 7196-6291. E-mail: meisster@mail.ru

Ksenia A. Nagina, Grand PhD in Philology, Professor at the Department of History and Typology of Russian and Foreign Literature, Voronezh State University, 1 University Sq, Voronezh, 394018, Russian Federation. ORCID: 0000-0001-76-9228; SPIN-code: 2268-4171. E-mail: k-nagina@yandex.ru