

REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMININITY IN TOLSTOY'S NOVEL *WAR AND PEACE*

Abstract: This study presents the epic role of the feminine character in a mixed novelistic formula, Tolstoy's formula that reunites heroic narrative structures with family novel structures. The War and Peace cycle is Tolstoy's Iliad and Odyssey in the context of a realistic, modern vision of the 19th century and a distinct personal attitude towards both the concept of heroism (valid in wartime) and woman's role in peacetime. A conservative, even misogynistic writer, Tolstoy turns the epilogue of his novel into an ode to life and the Demeter-like woman who keeps on living and is capable of repairing the damage that war has caused. Like Pierre, Natasha is an illustration of "Karataevism", Tolstoy's specific concept of the "Evangelical simplicity" of the true way of life.

Key words: heroic novel, family novel, Demeter femininity, Karataevism.

War first, woman last

In Tolstoy's world, unlike in Balzac's, the time of attractive women begins and ends very early. A forty-year old woman, like Anna Pavlovna, is considered already old, hence a premature classification of women in women and post-women, namely asexual beings who no longer stir anyone's love interest and are unproductive for the plot: responsible mothers, loving grandmothers, devoted nannies, boring aunts. None of them draws the writer's attention to themselves; the world belongs to the very young and at this level the main concerns are love and finding the right match. Like in any family novel, the plot evolves around two generations: the parents and their children. The parents' only duty is to ensure, like the Rostovs, or hinder, like possessive Prince Bolkonski, their children's happiness. If women's only vocation is their family, in men love and the assertion of their private and public ego are declared at the same time, as simultaneous ages.

However, the heroic scheme requires that facts should come first and love second – the Heroic and the Eros, always in this order – the latter as the prize for the former and never vice versa (Durand 194). As the expression of the phallic stage and the exponent of an androcratic society, the hero, unless he despises women, manifests a tacit reservation towards them, at least until he gets to know them better. Attitude sometimes blends with fabulous amorality, as in Dumas's *Musketeers*, where everything is schematic, therefore clearer: the hero always takes action, he is placed somewhere beyond good and evil, while the woman is a tool, an obstacle or a break in the heroic journey. Realism complicates things, it makes them less transparent, but it does not affect the substance of the myth. A hero – a "social" hero – like Julien Sorel, son of the same mythical father Napoleon, will think the same after conquering Madame de Rénal: "Is to be happy, to be loved, no more than that?"

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According to Durand, two things threaten the hero: sexuality, namely depravation and squandering, and wealth, which invalidates the ideal (Durand 183). Still, the woman is always present in the initiatic scenario, for she plays unquestionable roles on the path to inner achievement of a masculinity that claims to be self-sufficient; her most important role is to convert the hero, innately extroverted, to the values of the inner world. But the woman can never come before heroism, because the ontological order of experiences has already been decided by the roots of the heroic genre – the fairy tale. If she appears too soon, she will be savoured and then disposed of quickly, like Dido, Queen of Carthage, because the heroic rank that destiny has promised man is threatened. An exception is made only for the woman who remains active because she resembles an Amazon and follows her lover or husband in his adventures, as the mediaeval work about Érec and Énide shows. The woman who appears before the heroic deeds have taken place has only one chance, that of resigning herself to waiting, in order to become the hero's final target and reward. In this case, the myth speaks about active waiting, Penelope's waiting, when the most precious weapon is memory. It is a type of waiting that involves the tacit preservation of the hero's memory and his periodic infusion, by any means, with the set of past common values. For if squandering stalks the hero, then she, the woman, must send him subtle spiritual flows to remind him of these values, while in *The Odyssey* the messengers are the gods and Penelope's weaving is a metaphor for weaving the destiny.

She who does not weave loses – this is what the feminine destinies in *War and Peace* prove. Tolstoy's heroes also reach the stage of emotional stability only in the end. Sonya loses Nicholas because she is torn between her love for him and her gratitude towards his family; having been reprimanded by the countess, she decides to stand aside and offer him the chance of a good match that would save the Rostovs from bankruptcy. She takes this decision but deep in her heart she hopes he will say no, but he does not. He enjoys the freedom he has regained, so a new scenario can start. And it does start, for he takes the classical path, that of a knight saving a damsel in distress, making a socially accepted couple with Mary Bolkonskaya, who is now free, rich, generous and pious. Andrew, who is too soon linked with a woman, also gets the chance to choose, after the experience of fighting in a war, being hurt at Austerlitz and suffering from his wife's death helps him to set things right. Natasha awakens a numb human being to life, but she does not have the strength to resist Andrew's intransigence – he agrees to postpone their marriage until the next year, to please old Bolkonski – so she loses her exuberance that no longer has an object to concentrate upon. Her falling in the arms of Anatole Kuragin is the expression of her natural impulse to fulfil her huge erotic availability at once. In her case, this is an “innate” vocation that she has forbidden herself for such a long time and without which she now feels useless. That year of “probation” alters her moral physiognomy and as a result Kuragin manages to destroy her precarious inner balance, infusing her with a sensuality that moderate, calculating, abstinent and superhuman Bolkonski has never allowed himself to express. Between “the aloof genius” and the affection of a more accessible being, between distance and closeness, between the reverential admiration of a man who troubles her with his qualities and the immediate sensuality of an average individual, Natasha chooses to live the moment and to... fail. Bolkonski intimidates with his obvious superiority and the meeting and reconciliation between the two are possible only when, facing death, he becomes human through suffering and understanding. Frantic Natasha and calculating Bolkonski, a couple of unequal age and temperament, living at different inner rhythms – keen reasoning and exuberant sensibility – cannot last because it is made of entities that are original, too strong. Tolstoy, the family life psychologist, suggests, and affirms in the Epilogue, a simple truth: to become closer to people, one must take an “aurea mediocritas” and partly give oneself up.

For Natasha, like for Anna Karenina, love is the ultimate, namely exclusive and continuous, manifestation. She won't tolerate intermittent love, she accepts it only because she has no choice, but she does not understand it and does not follow it until the end. Natasha undergoes a dashing experience that can only take place in the present. Any delay would be like dying a little. She is a character who completely lacks the capacity to live virtually or through someone else's experiences; above all, she is the paroxystic expression of offering love as life's sole good cause. The name Tolstoy chose for her cannot be a coincidence: Natalie means birth, life. The writer projected in Natasha, as he did in Anna, the image of the complete woman, the woman endowed with all the gifts and breathing "vividness", an intense experience that makes her unique and raises her to supreme beauty. Tolstoy's women can be judged first of all based on the lifeless–living, spontaneous–fabricated opposition. Women endowed with a natural vital force erupt when this force is kept under control. The punishment for their extremely vivid manifestations does not come from the society whose rules have been broken, but from their own selfishness; this is where Anna becomes fundamentally different from Natasha. Only in a general, non-distinctive way can Anna be considered a victim of her own sincerity who does not tolerate a hypocrite existence, and she is a victim because she confronts the system of conventions and social philistinism. Closer to reality is her representation as a "femme fatale", a manifestation of a dominating Faustian personality and desire for power, as a being that lays her stake on her aesthetic nature, as a being "who *wants everything for her*: Vronsky's love, Karenin's approval, to be accepted in a society whose rules she has broken, the child whom she placed second after her lover etc. *Selfishness* is not a heroine's congenital feature, but a (monstrous) consequence of the *self-centredness* caused by her love for Vronsky and her fulfilment through this love [author's emphasis]" (Cifor 122). Compared with Anna, Natasha is remorseful and her suicide attempt comes from her desire to punish herself. Anna commits suicide to punish Vronsky, as she warns him, because he has not risen to the level of her affection and he no longer focuses exclusively on loving her. But through this couple Tolstoy shows clearly that the innate difference between man and woman lies in the fact that the latter gives herself up to love and has the power to keep it as a supreme ideal. Vronsky is, as the very inspired critic G. Ibrăileanu said, "an ideal man in a real world" (Ibrăileanu 303), but when it comes to love he can only be a man!

Paradoxically, in a novel like *War and Peace*, the erotic theme does not belong to the framework of family life. This indicates that what we deal with is a mythical-erotic scheme, the inevitable love-war rivalry. Based on this scheme, Natasha fails her accomplishment by violating a classical interdiction, that of the erotic break or "silence", in the same way that Psyche broke the mystery of love when she wanted to see her husband's face. The overflowing wealth of her life turns against her and, judging from human standards, like in the case of Bolkonski, what is too much is, in fact, too little. What follows is crossing hell, redemption and a second chance. Natasha and Pierre as a couple discover each other after they have lived a life as friends and, as Tolstoy intimates, they make the couple that goes through life. This confirms that, for the writer who found the illustration of natural piety in the Russian peasant's modest destiny, the exception always loses and the usual always wins.

A moralist's perspective: living women and lifeless women

There is a Helen in this war too. She is the realistic replica of the mythical Helen, but this time the stress is laid on her frivolous side: she is the woman who always brings with her the brightness of a ball room, the lowest cleavage and a constant smile for everybody. She is the perfect beauty, first only the exceptional beauty – "so lovely that not only did she not show any trace of coquetry, but on the contrary she even appeared shy of her unquestionable and all too

victorious beauty” (Tolstoi I 19) – , then also frivolity, as a compulsory consequence, as Homer taught us. And the epithet “lovely” always accompanies her, reminding of her illustrious model. She is a Helen focused on the gilded surface of the world and its erotic measure, therefore she has a bigamous nature; a Helen who, no longer having to marry Pierre, wonders how she could have two men, a foreign prince and an old dignitary, at the same time. Essentially, the phenomenology of the beauty has not changed at all since Homer. This modern Helen no longer causes wars, but she is a magnet that can cause unhappiness to those around her. On discovering her, Pierre watches her with “almost frightened” eyes, as if looking at earthly things that one finds perfect, thus walking into her trap and the trap of family arrangements. Just as Penelope’s beauty faded in comparison with Calypso’s perfect and unaltered beauty – yet she was preferred because she was alive and represented both the past and the future for Odysseus – so Hélène, equal to herself, fades by comparison with explosive, unexpected, desperate, happy or lackadaisical Natasha. Only the beauty containing its opposite or the beauty that depends on its inner ardour can be considered beauty. Tolstoy is a subtle observer of femininity, he is sensitive not only to women’s inner rhythm, but also the metamorphoses of their ages. He notes that Sonya had been growing prettier and prettier for a while, but at the age of nineteen her beauty was stable and “promised nothing more than she was already” (Tolstoi II 278). Her further evolution will confirm a lack of mobility that will cause her emotional failures. Hélène’s beauty is also lifeless, like a beautiful doll exhibited to be admired. In fact, this is the only kind of beauty that she will ever have. Her life, made up of those ingredients that make it a predestined undistinguished existence, is also fading. This is a kind of mechanism consisting of perfect diplomacy in society, aloofness, self-satisfaction and total lack of passion. After all, Tolstoy’s feminine universe is divided in lifeless women and living women. Lifeless is Natasha’s elder sister, the conformist, moralist and parvenu Vera, a good match for Berg, the man who measures life not in years, but the number of his promotions. What gives life to a being is the eyes, for example, Princess Bolkonskaya’s bright eyes that make you forget that she is not beautiful, eyes that express emotional availability above all. Lifeless women can have an affair or, best-case scenario, find a good match, but only living women can fall in love. In Tolstoy’s book, like in Dostoyevsky’s, the model of feminine beauty, of hidden, non-obvious beauty, in close connection with inner beauty, comes from the Orthodox canon. Natasha becomes beautiful again only after her expressions clear through suffering.

Natasha seduces not through her beauty, which, if judged thoroughly, does not respect the canons, but through an overwhelming impression of life. When the spring of her feelings dries, she suddenly looks ugly. The writer’s preference for transparent women who are not hypocrites, who await for the fulfilment of their destiny with fatalist humility, is obvious: Natasha reveals herself outwardly with ingenuity and exuberance, Mary Bolkonskaya is piously modest, Sonya, the girl without dowry, is another Mary, an expression of sacrifice and devotion. In fact, men or women, all Tolstoy’s characters can take the same subtle test essential for the writer, a test that measures the capacity to perceive “something” called life. One can perceive life as frivolous or serious, as a predisposition to either its ornate, though shallow appearances or its modest but deep essence.

Peace after war and the life of the couple after marriage

Idealistic literature, including heroic literature, avoids the failure of the couple, “the falling into the world”, either by killing it, or by ending the plot, lest it should not degrade. Tolstoy the realist does not shrink from showing the dark side of existence, the dignity and hardships of everyday life with all its minor concerns. Marriage, like any institution, predisposes to emotional failure through the simple moral obligation that it entails at the emotional level. The parody written by

ironical writer like Thackeray in *Rebecca and Rowena* denounces exactly the pattern of the heroic novel and offers a “non-canonical” continuation of Scott’s characters’ life, opening an ending that should have stayed close², in which the former ideal couple, the knight and the damsel, live a boring marital *comme il faut* lacking any charm. Tolstoy takes a different path. He discourages the paradox of the poetry of the non-poetic. Călinescu compared him with Goethe, as both of them are inclined to depict modest, domestic love with its minor joys and troubles, like that of the Kitty-Levin couple; the critic notices that “Tolstoy’s genius lies in avoiding romance and the idealistic description of people” (Călinescu 566). On dealing with Tolstoy’s work, Toma Pavel (320) speaks of the “anthropology of staying away”: the characters are independent of the environment and build their own islands of authenticity and justice on which they can discover individual happiness.

Married Natasha symbolizes female platitude that hurts more than male platitude, since it comes with the idea of removing life’s aesthetic features. The transition from the fairy-girl who used to make you dream and shared her vital force with you to the domestic, neglected, dishevelled wife who does not care for society, is jealous on any other woman and is obsessed with breast feeding and diapers, becomes “disgraceful”. The path to maturity does not lead to a fulfilled woman who has undergone various experiences, but to Natasha’s atavistic vocation: the vigorous, beautiful, fecund female who keeps watch and ward of her nest – her man and progeny. The role of an “exemplary wife and mother” literally dissolves everything that the unmistakable striking femininity symbolised and changes her being into a part – an essential part – of her family life mechanism. The most dramatic sign of depersonalization is the loss of spiritual transparency, replaced by an air of kindness, peace and serenity. The ardour that never left her when she was a girl lit her face only rarely and “when the old fire did kindle in her handsome, fully developed body she was even more attractive than in former days” (Tolstoi IV 312).

In *Epilogue*, Tolstoy proposes the image of family as female monopoly for which the price paid is the woman’s depersonalisation and her transformation into a mere womb, although she is the epiphany of the sacred model, “Gaia, who ensures stability and perpetuation” (Dărbăuș 119). However, the woman becomes the puppeteer who handles the centripetal forces of the domestic scene, a role that intensifies her possessive instinct. Călinescu was absolutely right when he limited women’s apotheosis to only several years, those years that cover the unsteady boundary between the girl and the woman. Tolstoy goes even farther, as he depicts not only how women lose their unforgettable charm, but also their depersonalization. Otilia was obsessed with her biological clock and what she senses to be the drama of femininity – “we only live five or six years” – but Tolstoy’s Natashas could say: “We only live until we get married”.

For Natasha, who has given up all her charm and, above all, has forgotten how to sing, vital force means only procreation. Her lust for life has turned into a biological excess. The imbalance caused by war, both in its magnitude and misery, is followed by the balance that peace brings to the rhythm of family life. In order to save the average, the rhythm of universal evolution dictates going from one extreme to the other. This is Tolstoy’s way to prove that Eros triumphs against Thanatos and that simple, anonymous existence levels individual outbursts. The reverse

² “Therefore I say, it is an unfair advantage which the novelist takes of hero and heroine, as of his inexperienced reader, to say good-by to the two former, as soon as ever they are made husband and wife; and I have often wished that additions should be made to all works of fiction which have been brought to abrupt terminations in the manner described [...]. A hero is much too valuable a gentleman to be put upon the retired list, in the prime and vigor of his youth; and I wish to know what lady among us would like to be put on the shelf, and thought no longer interesting, because she has a family growing up, and is four or five and thirty years of age? [...] Let us have middle-aged novels then, as well as your extremely juvenile legends ...” (William Thackeray, *Rebecca and Rowena*, Chapter I).

of the heroine is not only the anti-heroine, Helen, who shifts her excellence towards selfishness, but also the common, dull individual who completely gives himself up. This is one of the solutions of modern anti-idealism, the novel of the common individual, that will end in the “glorious” failure of the novel of the everyday existence, which will move up in the world in the 20th century. Tolstoy’s much debated “commonplace”, that absolute banality to which he condemns his characters is the mark of his objectivity as a genius, as Ibrăileanu says, the outcome of the detachment of a god who “sees people as if from Sirius”. And one can sense life’s inconspicuous dramatism in this daily commonplace (Ibrăileanu 295-296).

For Tolstoy, who projected his own feminine ideal in Natasha, trivializing the individual is not an aesthetic, but an existential solution with its own ideology. The lack of virtues, as Albérès shows in *History of modern novel* (Chapter X, *Conquering the Depths*) is not necessarily degradation, but a shift occurring within the individual’s radiography from self-assertion or a well-defined adventure to the capacity of searching the depths of his own being. Moving away from the structures of the exemplary means, in the last analysis, getting closer to life’s inexhaustible, obscure essence. In the *Epilogue*, LIFE becomes the great and only character in Tolstoy’s novel and influences all existences evolving under the sign of “Karataevism” – Christianity seen from the peasant’s viewpoint and spread by a simple, illiterate individual who embodies “everything Russian, kindly, and round” (Tolstoi IV 57). From Tolstoy’s perspective, Natasha’s trivialization, far from symbolising the fall from dream into life, is the fulfilment of the pure Demeter-type woman who represents life itself, not life for itself, life that is given to others and is therefore multiplied infinitely. The absolute lies not in a different world, as the Romantics used to believe, it lies here on earth, scattered in the various aspects of the palpable, of the human; or, as Platon Karataev says, life is everything, life is God, to love life is to love God and what makes you the happiest of all is to love life through its innocent sorrow. The solution for individual fulfilment lies in staying close to life through instinct, not mind, for greatness stays hidden from man’s intelligence and can only be perceived with the soul.

The long epilogue of marital bliss is closely linked with Tolstoy’s philosophical history, illustrating the concepts of anonymity and deindividualisation within the framework of a mediocre existence, towards balance and a middle course. It is not for nothing that Tolstoy says, in the beginning of *Anna Karenina*, that all happy families are happy in the same way, and only unhappy families are not alike. Nothing contributes more to people’s close relationships than simplicity. He shows that what lasts is only small happiness, that *aurea mediocritas* for which Levin and Kitty, characters in his next novel, will be the symbols; exceptional beings pine away and burn at the stake of a too great ideal. *Anna Karenina*, the novel of the revolt against reducing passion to a common conjugal relation, proves the same thing. The slight erotic weariness and the relative independence that habit causes become, in the mind of a woman who has staked everything on love, worrying pauses that tell her that Vronsky no longer loves her. This is exactly what *War and Peace*, written before the novel of adultery, shows: the desire to turn love to a conjugal relation, to make it a “natural”, legitimate means of possessiveness that substitutes individuality with exasperating platitudes – the price paid to keep domestic happiness in a permanent artificial state that can neutralize petty dramas, displeasures, temporary estrangement and fights between spouses, the ugliness of motherhood and the frustrations of femininity. By repudiating love for the sake of love, condemning it as useless in comparison with love that creates families, Tolstoy proves a resolute anti-romantic. Passionate love and the romantic imagery of love died with *Madame Bovary*, replaced by the realism of dangerous adultery hidden behind the lies of beautiful readings. This deals a death blow to Don Quixotism and conventions.

In Tolstoy's variant, of the three archetypes set by Julius Evola (125-132), the Amazon and the Aphrodite-type women represent the category of "scholarly" women, those who want to become modern Maecenas, exercising their authority on men either through "wit" or seduction. Both the independent Anna Pavlovna and Hélène, the woman with many lovers, are expressions of non-life; moralist Tolstoy condemns the former to sterility and the latter to death. Only the Demeter type – Natasha and her calmer and more spiritualised version, Mary Bolkonskaya, who becomes Nikolai's wife – shows the path to feminine fulfilment in times of peace: if war is against human reason and human nature, then peace means treating life simply and naturally. For Tolstoy's feminine characters, life is linked with maternal instincts above all. Fashionable women are selfish and do not have such instincts. They see everything in relation to individual comfort and the preservation of their own beauty: Hélène laughs at the idea that she might have a child; Vera would like to postpone having a baby as much as possible, because "we must live for society"; and spoilt Lise dies in childbirth, which she was afraid of all her pregnancy. Of everything that happens to her, all she remembers is the pain – a punishment that she feels she does not deserve, as she didn't deserve to be abandoned by the man who went to war. An unmarried woman, Anna Pavlovna reproaches Prince Kuragin that he did not know how to educate his boys properly and wants to "tame" rebellious Pierre and turn him into a conventional society person; another woman, Hélène's mother, is jealous on her own daughter.

There is an obvious contempt for "witty", cosmopolitan women, as there is, in Tolstoy's general conception, a distrust (also visible in his conception about military strategy and in Pierre's or Andrew's searches) in the ability of mind's force to reveal the meaning of life; this distrust is complementary to discovering love, faith and the values of the emotional unconscious mind. Reason and faith, individualism and anonymity, frivolity and seriousness, usefulness and uselessness, naturalness and artificiality – these are the moral terms through which Tolstoy's world can be seen. Today we could say, in precise words, that what Tolstoy appreciates in his feminine characters is their emotional intelligence. Natasha, either as an angelic adolescent or devoted mother, stays within the framework of the Demeter archetype. Sensual and adventurous representations do not suit her at all; they only make her terribly unhappy.

Conclusions

Naturally, we may wonder whether the writer from Yasnaya Polyana was attracted by the symbolism of archetypes or he paid tribute to his recognised misogyny. What is beyond question is that his feminine world is always divided in two parts. For instance, another criterion inferred from the theme of corruption induced by civilisation develops the opposition between country women and town women, between the highest Petersburg society and rural nobility: Natasha, Sonya, and Mary Bolkonskaya vs. Lise, Hélène or Julie Karagina. The writer forgets about the latter or removes them from his work. Only those women who can keep on living deserve his attention. "In the country" or "in the town" become moral options. One can sense that Tolstoy, the writer who shares many ideas with Rousseau, the apologist for the "natural state", despises everything that substitutes the natural ego with artificiality or falsity. The fashionable drawing room is an environment of falsity, of exercising power and, last but not least, of seduction, a place where one speaks for the sake of speaking and the stars are low creatures, while the natural, genuine beings like Pierre become disagreeable. Hélène's and Anna Pavlovna's need for society is, more often than not, a symptom of their poor inner life which they try to enrich by surrounding themselves by too many people.

Tolstoy's verdict is a very precise one: common women, but living women. Vera is common, but she is as lifeless as any stereotypical being. Instead, Sonya is an example of

mummification, the best example of what you may turn into if you give up living: a fruitless plant, as Natasha would say. Her robot-like devotion makes her become attached not to people, but to her home. Left alone, but living near Nicholas' family, she does not sense her unfulfilment, not even when she sees how happy her former lover is with his current family life. Her sin is resignation, emotional death, the fact that she is satisfied to be an appendix of the Rostovs, an appendix of life. She is a withered flower, as Sadoveanu called the women in his works about country towns. Among the various manifestations of the living women – Natasha symbolises exuberant life, Mary, the oppressed life, a latent form of life waiting for its moment of manifestation – Sonya can be blamed for not being strong enough to stay at the heart of life and fails to fulfil herself as a woman. Similar to her is Countess Rostova, a lifeless creature, for whom life “makes no impression at all” (Tolstoi IV 324) after her son's and husband's deaths. Through her, Tolstoy admits that all Natashas who have an exclusive Demeter-type vocation are in danger of letting the others absorb them completely. The countess, who is only sixty, shows what happens to a woman who has staked everything on family when she loses the people living her small universe: she becomes decrepit, sour, isolated – an old hag. She is alive only because her internal organs are still functional, and it pains her to see that young people show they understand her condition: “we must all become like her. [...] *Memento mori*” (Tolstoi IV 325). The world of peace, seen through the eyes of generations, leaves an overwhelming impression of growing older, a bad taste in the mouth, other than the one left by the cycles in Marquez's family novel, *A Century of Loneliness*, in which the idea of repeating family patterns in every new generation suggests permanence in the process of becoming.

Tolstoy strikes us with the opposition between his writing manners, between the daily routine and the exceptions of war, an opposition that we can't find in the previous heroic literature that created mobile, highly conflictual worlds under constant threat and historical evolution. This happens because Tolstoy focuses his observation and evaluation on family life, against which war appears as a period of crisis. Evolution is, for him, only social and moral, which means negating Romanticism and returning to the sources of Enlightenment. This is why women play no part in his heroic epic; they live in a different world. In heroic times, they arouse spiritual energy in others; after them, they mend the damage. *War and Peace* is Tolstoy's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. An *Iliad* without feminine stake, but with a huge national stake, a true *Odyssey*, like the return to the plain but essential meanings of life. In the novel of war we shall find neither the feminine prototypes of the heroic fable, nor the instigating Helen, nor the obstacle-type woman like Dido, because the perspective is based on the novel of peace and family in which the sovereign is the woman having Demeter-type functions: she is a catalyst, a life giver and a healer. Thanks to her, life goes on every day. She makes regeneration possible. War takes everything. Thanks to their naturalness, women are able to take back what was lost, to take things as they are and start over again. What is left for them when their blooming years are over and their personality starts to fade, after motherhood and family devotion, is a question to which the writer did not intend to answer either in his life, or in his book.

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