

# The Emperor Has No Voice!

## How Not to Do Things with Words in *War and Peace*

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At the height of the battle of Borodino Tolstoy's Napoleon stands on a hill trying to control his troops. Suffering from a severe head cold, though, he is barely able to issue commands. Napoleon, literally and figuratively, has lost his voice. This almost comic image of Napoleon is part of the caricature that Tolstoy made of him in *War and Peace*. Napoleon's complete lack of stature undermines the very idea of the "great men who make history." Tolstoy's presentation dismantles both Napoleon as a historical figure and the entire concept of the "great man." Richard Gustafson calls Napoleon the "absolute stranger," who does not connect to the world around him and imagines he can control it with his will (228). This illusion of power and control turns him into a ridiculous figure. "Look who you have believed in! Here he is!" the author seems to say, according to Donna Orwin (110). By the end of the nineteenth century, V. Sorokine had called the presentation of Napoleon in the novel the "final destruction of the image of Napoleon in Russia"; in her analysis of Napoleon's image in Russian culture, Molly Wesling remarks that "Tolstoy's withering portrait of Napoleon in *War and Peace* attacks the Napoleonic myth at its heart" (44).

While there seems to be scholarly agreement on the effect of Napoleon's presentation in the novel, *how* Tolstoy achieves this effect remains largely unanalyzed. It is true that Napoleon's very appearances in *War and Peace* are often ridiculed through the lengthy descriptions of his toilet, the

emphasis Tolstoy puts on the Frenchman's little white hands, and his impression on other characters. Robert Lois Jackson points out that Tolstoy works out the "mighty dynamism of Napoleon" more through characters in the novel who try to emulate Napoleon than through the character of Napoleon himself (107). Analyzing Napoleon as the example for, and attempt of, "mastery of the world," Jeff Love calls him the "north star" for the orientation of Andrei and Pierre, who at first emulate Napoleon and only later develop away from this model (158). The emulation is here more important than the model itself. Michael Holquist likewise shows how Andrei originally emulates Napoleon's language (216).<sup>1</sup>

An additional device Tolstoy uses to "lower" Napoleon has remained largely unexplored: The complex and competitive play of linguistic systems—French and Russian—in the novel.

Throughout *War and Peace*, Tolstoy uses a remarkable amount of French in the direct speech of characters as well as in the narrative passages; this use of French, however, underwent significant textological changes in the various editions of the novel. Starting from the first edition published serially in *Russian Herald* («Русский вестник») in 1865, the French in the text was translated in footnotes, a procedure that was so unusual that the editors included a footnote (before Tolstoy's own) explaining it:

To maintain the atmosphere (колорит) of the conversation of the characters, the author

very often uses French expressions. For those who do not know French, these expressions are joined by a translation in the footnotes. (1: 593)<sup>2</sup>

The translations in the footnotes are always Tolstoy's own and, as Gary Saul Morson has shown, they are a peculiar text, full with wordplay and Gallicisms (47). (The use of колорит in the editor's note above is likely an unintentional contribution to this game.) The first and second (printed almost immediately after the first) complete editions of *War and Peace* in book form, published in 1868, kept all the French. Five years later, however, in 1873, the third edition of the novel appeared; this time it was considerably revised, with all foreign expressions and passages removed and replaced with Russian, and the historical essays moved to the end of the book. It is not entirely known who was behind this revision and whether it was done by Tolstoy himself or only with his permission. This step was revised in a beautiful edition in 1886, which mainly used the version of the 1868 edition. Almost at the same time, the novel was published in a simpler edition, obviously aimed at the general reading public, again without the French but including the historical essays. Subsequent editions of the novel—two more in Tolstoy's lifetime—include both the French and the historical essays.

Boris Eikhenbaum summarizes the textual difficulties of *War and Peace*: "We have before us a striking and irremediable fact: there is no obvious, definite, "canonical" text of *War and Peace*, and it is not possible to establish it by any means" (242). This large number of different publication makes close textual analysis difficult, as there is no final version authorized by Tolstoy himself. However, Eikhenbaum, Shklovsky and the editors of the *Complete Collected Works in Ninety Volumes, Academic Jubilee Edition* (*Полное собрание сочинений в 90 томах*

*академическое юбилейное издание*)<sup>3</sup> agree that the 1868 book edition is the most authoritative. It is this edition in the *Complete Works* that I use for this article, as it is based on the 1868 edition; I also note some of the varia in the other editions.

Defending charges from his critics, who considered the use of French in the novel exaggerated and inconsistent, Tolstoy himself cited the example of Napoleon, comparing the Frenchman's depiction to a painter's use of shadows:

And so, without denying that the shadows put on by me are probably incorrect and coarse, I would only ask those to whom it seems absurd that Napoleon should speak now Russian and now French, to realize that this seems so to them only because they—like a man looking at a portrait—see not the light and the shadows but only the black spot under the nose. (*War and Peace* (Maude) 1307)

Like a painter, who uses different strokes and a combination of colors to achieve a certain effect, the writer in this case uses languages as a device to create an impression of Napoleon. Looking closely at this "black spot under the nose" and analyzing the use of languages can reveal the way in which Tolstoy creates his effects.

At times, the device is quite simple and superficial: Take for an example Napoleon's head cold at Borodino. He is the only character in *War and Peace* to suffer from a head cold (насморк); everybody else has either "la grippe" (Anna Sherer and "everybody") or "l'angine" (Hélène). It is certainly remarkable that these two women suffer from a disease with a French name while Napoleon is afflicted with a good old Russian head cold. His voice and thus the power of his language cannot hold up to Russian reality.

Tolstoy's use of language play can also be quite sophisticated, employing a mode of satire nowadays familiar from comedians such as Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, and Sasha Baron Co-

hen, whose work as *Borat* has been widely discussed in Russian studies lately<sup>4</sup>: He uses Napoleon's direct speech, usually quotes known from Napoleon or taken from his memoirs, to show his readers what a fool this man is.

Gary Saul Morson, whose analysis of the language of *War and Peace* has brought wider attention to Tolstoy's use of language modes, calls Napoleon a "semiotic totalitarian" (87). It could also be observed that Napoleon in *War and Peace* comes off as a thoroughly semiotically illiterate person. He simply cannot read the reality around him and as a consequence cannot use language correctly. While he does not expressly make grammatical errors, his word choice is always inappropriate and often nonsensical, especially when he himself considers it particularly wise.

Napoleon's linguistic inability in *War and Peace* is twofold: He is semiotically illiterate, unable to differentiate between different kinds of signs, such as symbols and their referents; and he is blind to the difference of language mode, unable to distinguish between constative (descriptive) and performative language. Austin describes the difference between utterances that can be true or false and utterances that do not report or describe but "perform" an action through the speaking of the words, such as to make a promise, issue an order or marry someone by saying "I do" (Austin 6-7). While *constatives* are mainly defined by their meaning, the most relevant aspect of the performative is the force of the utterance (Felman 8). Napoleon fails to understand this difference and thus often uses language inappropriately.

Napoleon's ability to "get away with" incorrect language—because he is Emperor, because no one will correct him—means that he can continue to live in a world of illusions. However, the moment he enters Russia his language choices become untenable; his semiotic delusion brings failure. His illiteracies—semiotic and language mode—render Napoleon unable to deal

with Russian reality. He cannot perceive it and therefore cannot react to it.

### Semiotic Illiteracy and its Consequences

The most important device in this undermining of Napoleon's authority in *War and Peace* is Tolstoy's use of different languages and modes of speaking. Shklovsky understands the use of French and Russian regarding Napoleon as an important comical device in the novel that results in Napoleon's appearance as a caricature. He wonders how much less funny the novel must seem in French (219). As Boris Uspensky has pointed out, Napoleon's speech is actually one of the best examples of purely literary French in the novel, as the historical Napoleon did not speak any Russian and his utterances in Russian—even in a mix of French and Russian—thus cannot be explained as a reproduction of real speech. The decision for one language over another for Bonaparte is thus always based on literary decisions, not on an attempt to create a realistic image (54).

The novel's most striking instance of mixing language comes when Napoleon has his first chance to actually look at Russia, the country he is about to invade. He stands at the Western bank of the Neman and gazes across it into the vast unknown space ahead of him:

Увидав на той стороне казаков (*les Cosaques*) и расстилавшиеся степи (*les Steppes*), в середине которых была *Moscou la ville sainte*, столица того, подобного Скифскому, государства, куда ходил Александр Македонский, Наполеон [...] приказал наступление. (3:1:7: 625; PSS 11: 8)

Seeing Cossacks (*les Cosaques*) on the other side and the spreading steppes (*les Steppes*) in the middle of which lay *Moscou la ville sainte*, the capital of the state, similar to the Scythian state into which Alexander the Great had

marched—Napoleon [...] ordered an advance [...]. (3:1:7: 607)

On the level of plot, this moment is the first collision between the French army and the Russian land. Shklovsky points out that this clash of France and Russia is expressed in this “immediate collision” (ШКЛОВСКИЙ 219) of French and Russian words in this text. We can even see a penetration of French words into the Russian text. It is not the penetration of the French language into the text of the novel, as French has been present in it from the opening pages. Historically as well, French was of course present in Russia long before Napoleon invaded.

What penetrates here is precisely *Napoleon’s* French. The French words refer to Napoleon’s consciousness, though it is not his direct speech. The narrator himself intersperses his description with Napoleon’s words, an emphasized form of free indirect discourse (writing as if from the characters point of view but grammatically still in the mode of the narrator). In his analysis of Tolstoy’s use of characters’ speech, Uspensky comes to the conclusion in such cases of complex direct and indirect language acts that the effect is similar to the Formalist notion of “laying bare of the device,” drawing attention to the work’s literariness. In this particular instance, he points out that the French words represent

elements of someone else’s speech—of narrated monologue inserted in the authorial text. What we have there, then, is essentially a translation of the authorial text into the individual language of the character. (55)

This effect could have been achieved, and is achieved elsewhere in *War and Peace*, by simply using French words within the Russian text. Here, however, the French doubles the Russian in more than one sense: Not only do the French words, as translations, have the same meaning as the Russian words, they are in fact nothing but

Galicized versions of them. The Czech critic Pavel Trost points to the peculiarity of the French words in this—and other—passages:

As to the French of the French in Russia, it has the peculiar, ridiculous sound of deformed Russian (les steppes, les boyards, les cosaques, le Kremlin, Moscou, la metropole des Czars): This ridicule expresses the capitulation of the French language before Russian reality. (Trost 55, my translation).

Tolstoy’s choice of terms is significant in this case: степь (step’, steppe) and казак (kazak, Cossack). The first one refers to the vastness of Russia and its unique nature. It is an original Russian word that seems to be especially created to describe this particular aspect of Russian geography. Казак (Cossack), on the other hand, describes a *social* reality alien to Napoleon. Thus in this little passage, Napoleon’s failure to grasp Russian geography and Russian society is encapsulated into these two words.

The insertion of the French terms into the Russian text here is not neutral; it adds a decisively mocking tone to the passage. Napoleon is mocked by his own words. Peculiar to Tolstoy here is how the device is distributed throughout the text and used inconsistently. The parentheses interrupt the flow of the text, breaking the illusion that the reader hears Napoleon’s actual thoughts, causing the reader to stumble, and thus calling attention to the form and language of the paragraph. We once again encounter “laying bare of the device,” pointing to the literariness of the text. It feels as though a comedian has stepped up behind the thinking Napoleon, assuming a mock serious demeanor as he supplies Napoleon’s “authentic” voice in “air quotes” in the middle of his Russian thoughts. Tolstoy, the master of an “absolute language” (Morson 14ff) that does not allow dialogue or discussion, here undermines Napoleon’s authority simply by quoting.

At stake here is not only the incompetence of the French language to grasp Russian reality but also Napoleon's personal incompetence to grasp this same reality before him. Take the repetition of "steppes" at this moment: Where are the steppes of Russia at the Polish-Lithuanian border? Napoleon looks across the border and imagines he can see all the way to "*Moscou*." He is unaware of the vastness of the land before him and he does not begin to understand this strange country.

Moreover, the French words that collide with the Russian text foreground their own limitations, not only insofar as they are versions of Russian words, but also because they are, for the most part, suggestively confined to parentheses. Although Napoleon is about to invade Russia, he will not conquer it. His stay there will be equally parenthetical for Russian history, a short insertion of Napoleonic French culture that will never be able to overcome Russia. General Tolstoy uses a strategy of containment for this culture and the corresponding French language from the very beginning—and especially here, at the moment of invasion.

Because it is not set apart by parentheses, especially marked in this paragraph is the expression "*Moscou la ville sainte*." This is Napoleon's destination. Why is this expression not presented as the French translation of a Russian term? The most obvious explanation seems to be the most convincing one: because it is not a translation. The term "*Moscou la ville sainte*" is translated in the footnotes of the novel variously as "sacred Moscow" (священная Москва) (e.g., 3.1.7; PSS 11: 20; 3.2.7; PSS 1: 196) or as "holy Moscow" (святая Москва) (e.g., 3.3.19; PSS 11: 324) Neither of these Russian expressions appears in the body of the text. For the "true" Russians in the novel, it is not just Moscow that is holy; it is the entire holy earth of Russia that Kutuzov wants to defend: "We shall drive him [the enemy] out of

the holy Russian land" (3:2:35: 807), he says after the battle of Borodino.

From the moment he enters holy Russian space, Napoleon is thus exposed as the victim of his own imagination: Napoleon grasps neither Russia's vastness nor its nuances; he aims for Moscow, believing that this is the center that holds all of Russia together and thus that conquering it will mean conquering Russia. In this, the discrepancy between his reading and the true (Tolstoyan) reading of Russian reality has become obvious. Lydia Ginzburg discusses Napoleon's obsession with arbitrary signs and symbols in a comparable context, such as the fact that Murat was called "The King of Naples." These signs all belong to an "imagined reality, which, in Tolstoy's opinion, is not able to authorize or substantiate its symbolism" (132). In his obsession Napoleon has established for himself a symbol of Russia, and now believes that the only task remaining is to "transcribe" this symbol once he has conquered it. He will be proved wrong.

The term "*Moscou la sainte*" appears next in the text during a dinner meeting between Napoleon and the Russian envoy Balashev. Napoleon asks the Russian many questions about Moscow:

"How many inhabitants does Moscow (Москва) have? How many houses? Is it true that *Moscou* is called *Moscou la sainte*? How many churches are there in *Moscou*?" (3:1:7: 625; PSS 11: 30)

Particularly interesting is how in Napoleon's first question, Moscow (Москва) is rendered in Russian, while in the question as to whether "*Moscou*" is really referred to as "*Moscou la sainte*," the city is again named in French. "*Moscou la sainte*" is a purely French concept that infects the next question as well; the number of churches bares Napoleon's Gallic conception of Moscow. Balashev answers: "The Russians are

very devout” (693). Thus Napoleon speaks about *Moscou* while the Russian speaks about Russia as a whole.

This device of associating Napoleon with his nonsensical *bons mots* in French rather than with his more reasonable Russian utterances has been used earlier in the novel, when we actually see Napoleon for the very first time after the battle of Austerlitz. Napoleon sees the wounded Prince Andrei and pronounces him dead: “Voilà une belle mort,” said Napoleon looking at Bol-konsky.” Later he will realize that his impression was wrong and exclaim (presented in Russian): “Ah! He is alive!” (1:3:19: 291; PSS 9: 356).

The switch from French to Russian matches the famous shift from death to life that frames Andrei’s recognition of Napoleon’s smallness. As Jeff Love points out in his analysis of the scene, it moves from a focus on death (Andrei assumed for dead and thus celebrated by Napoleon) to life, when the reader realizes that Andrei is alive and sees the scene through his eyes (163). Andrei looks at Napoleon and experiences him as small and insignificant.

The switch, however, indicates not only death and life, but also error and truth. Napoleon makes his erroneous observation in ornate French with the adjective “belle,” turning it into a pseudo-poetic utterance that can be remembered as one of his famous *bons mots*. His realization of the truth, however, is rendered in simple, straightforward Russian. Thus from Napoleon’s very first appearance in the text, his voice in French is marked as error and nonsense. Whenever Napoleon’s words are not translated but instead rendered in French, it seems, he is faced with something he cannot grasp and misnames it, be it the beautiful death of a Russian officer or “*Moscou la sainte*.”

### Performative Illiteracy

The first words by Napoleon that appear in *War and Peace* are quoted by Prince Andrei at Anna Sherer’s salon:

‘*Dieu me la donne, gare à qui la touche*,’ [Bonaparte’s words spoken as the crown was placed on him]. On dit qu’il a été très beau en prononçant ces paroles,’ he added, and repeated the words once more in Italian: ‘*Dio mi la dona, guai a chi la tocca*’ (1:1:4: 17).

With these words, Napoleon crowned himself during his coronation on December 2, 1804, an important act for European politics. In the novel this event makes a strong impression on the Russian aristocracy as well. They are outraged by Andrei’s quoting of this utterance. To understand the significance of Napoleon’s act and Andrei’s admiration, it is helpful to have a closer look at this ceremony.

The ceremony had been carefully planned and included a prominent role for the pope, who anointed the crown before Napoleon took it himself (as part of the plan, not as an affront to the surprised pope, as anecdote has it). While it marked a definite shift in power, Napoleon orchestrated the event in a way that implied tradition: He used a crown that was called the “Charlemagne Crown,” even though the original had been destroyed in the Revolution. The crown used in the ceremony was a copy, and other regalia used in the ceremony were stylized to look medieval. The ceremony itself was a combination of Bourbon coronations and rituals from Charlemagne’s coronation. Thus Napoleon created an image of following in the footsteps of the French dynasties while at the same time actually trying to break with this tradition completely. While the pope was part of the ceremony, by crowning himself Napoleon made a brazen gesture of rejecting the pope’s authority over him. Prince Andrei refers to this very instance,

and emphasizes Napoleon's choice of words at this moment.<sup>5</sup>

For a study of Napoleon's speech acts, this scene is crucial because it is the basis of his authority as the emperor of France and thus of his authority for performative speech acts. As Austin points out, the authority of the speaker to perform the act is a crucial condition for the felicity (success) of a performative utterance (24). Napoleon takes this authority from his position as emperor; and it is the coronation that put him in this position.

This coronation is, at first glance, a conventional occurrence, in keeping with the level of authority of the other emperors of his time. These other emperors, however, received their authority in a conventional act of inauguration, crowned as the successors of their predecessors and in continuation of a hereditary line. They followed the conventions in that they were authorized to assume power. The performative act of their coronation thus fulfills all of Austin's requirements.

As the performative has to be both conventional and performed by speakers authorized to do so, the words of the ceremony must follow what "amounts to the recitation of an already written script" (Loxley 74). The convention of this script must be traceable to an original moment, the moment of its invention. In his coronation ceremony Napoleon pretends to follow a convention and at the same time boldly breaks with it by saying the words quoted by Prince Andrei. In this way, he performs an act based on the "force of rupture," as defined by Jacques Derrida: At the beginning of a new tradition, at the time of break, the originary speech act cannot yet be based on precedent but in turn creates a new precedent. This can only happen when the force of this act produces a rupture and its legitimacy is not successfully questioned:

[An] originary performative that does not conform to preexisting conventions, unlike all the performatives analyzed by the theoreticians of speech acts, but whose force of *rupture* produces the institution or the constitution, the law itself, which is to say also the meaning that appears to, that ought to, or that appears to have to guarantee it in return. (Derrida, *Specters* 30-31)

By creating a performance that so strongly gives the impression of a legitimate and traditional ritual, Napoleon uses the "force of rupture" to establish his reign. Austin himself describes such constitutive acts as "procedures which someone is initiating," and calls this possibility "get[ting] away with it" (30). In this context, "getting away with it" means that the ceremony is valid if it is not exposed to be otherwise. In other words, Austin acknowledges that a procedure is valid if everybody accepts it as such. Napoleon also has "gotten away" with his ceremony and his new position as emperor has been accepted. Thus this performative act is the basis for further such acts.

This *force of rupture* and the "getting away with it" is inherent in the performative act of declaration. Derrida analyzes it using the example of the American Declaration of Independence. The signers of the Declaration sign in the name of the people and, in order to validate their authority, they invoke God. "For this Declaration to have a meaning *and* an effect, there must be a last instance. God is the name—the best one—for this last instance and this ultimate signature" (*Negotiations* 52).<sup>6</sup>

This invocation of God is plainly obvious in Napoleon's self-coronation. The act is also a constitutive act of rupture; Napoleon traces, in the most direct way, his authority to God, Derrida's "last instance and ultimate signature." His own power, Napoleon says, comes directly from God rather than being mediated through any

institution or convention, as would be the case in a traditional coronation ceremony. Because he takes the crown from the pope, thus removing the traditional authorized mediator from the ritual, Napoleon can say, “God is giving it to me.”

Napoleon’s speech act is an implicit performative: It does not explicitly state “I am declaring myself Emperor through God’s authority,” as a formally correct performative utterance should. It invokes this authority, however, and uses it as the source for the validity of the act of coronation. Significantly, it seems that Napoleon is aware of the dubious nature of this act and thus immediately combines it with a threat to those who dare to not accept it. His words, he seems to understand, depend on the power of his army.

At Anna Sherer’s salon, almost everybody doubts Napoleon’s legitimacy as emperor.<sup>7</sup> Immediately after Prince Andrei quotes the coronation, Anna Sherer expresses her hope that Napoleon will soon be defeated: “Les souverains ne peuvent plus supporter cet homme, qui menace tout” (1:1:4: 18; PSS 9: 24). In this utterance, she juxtaposes “*les souverains*,” the legitimate rulers and institutions of power, with “*cet homme*”—this man, who does not even have a title. To her, obviously, the act of his coronation was not felicitous because he did not have the necessary authority, nor did he follow the rules of the procedure. Her guests agree with her, referring to Napoleon over the course of the evening as “Buonaparte,” “Napoleon,” “Бонапарте,” and finally, after her reaction to Prince Andrei’s quote, as “*l’usurpateur*.”<sup>8</sup>

The only person who openly accepts the authority of Napoleon as emperor is Prince Andrei himself, who has already indicated his respect for Napoleon’s words by quoting them. He refers to Napoleon’s quality as emperor (император) (1:1:5; PSS 9: 27). The division of opinions regarding Napoleon thus does not only concern his role as a negative or a positive force in Europe, but extends all the way to interpreting his very defi-

nition as either emperor or criminal villain. If he is simply a villain who plays at being emperor, the consequences for his assumed authority are significant. All his acts as a statesman would thus be invalid.

For Napoleon’s performative acts in the novel, it is significant that Tolstoy introduces him through this dubious constitutive act. The difference between a performative and a constative, descriptive act is blurred for him from the outset. Originally, though, even if Napoleon’s acts do not follow the rules, they are still successful. It seems that Napoleon—who always “gets away with it”—is unaware of the rules and thus does not follow them.

Napoleon’s orders as commander in chief of his army show how much he trusts in the power of his words: He gives orders, his orders lead to actions, and these actions win or lose battles. In the early parts of the novel, this power still works quite well. Before the battle of Schöngrabern, Napoleon issues a disposition to his troops to encourage them for the upcoming battle. He ends his proclamation with a statement in the future indicative (perfective future in Russian):

This victory *will end* our campaign and we will be able to return to winter quarters, where new French troops, now being raised in France *will find us*, and the peace *I will conclude will* be worthy of my people, you and myself. (1:3:13: 289; PSS 9: 326, my italics)

Note that this proclamation is written and read to the troops *before* the battle that “will” be won and “will” conclude the campaign has even started. While this practice of predicting the future is not uncommon in motivational speeches, it is quite prominent in this case, especially because it is carried all the way through to the announcement of the final victory and the new world order. Napoleon is convinced that his pronouncement will render reality—in other

words, that he considers his proclamation a performative act.

By trusting that his words of future prediction will come true, Napoleon in this case does not see the difference between a declaration as an act in the present and his proclamation, a projection into the future. The proclamation does not have this power. It does, however, succeed in rallying the troops for the battle. Thus, the act seems felicitous, as the soldiers are united in their fervor for the battle and the battle will be won. At this point in the novel, Napoleon's language still seems magical. The victory, however, is not the consequence of the prediction but of the fervor of the troops. Napoleon concludes that his prediction became reality just because he made it: He confuses cause and effect.<sup>9</sup> The misconceptions of cause and effect in history and the illusion of mastery over history is the dominant theme of the historical essays in *War and Peace*. Jeff Love, for example, calls Tolstoy's approach the attempt to overcome history by not focusing on normative philosophical concepts but rather on the principles of calculus (*passim* 58-96).

The absurdity of this way of thinking becomes even more obvious in Tolstoy's discussions of Napoleon's dispositions for the Battle of Borodino. Famously, Tolstoy considers these dispositions completely irrelevant. In Austin's words, we might say that they have no performative power and are thus "misfires" (16). From the beginning, Napoleon's disposition before the battle is marked as dubious. French historians, of whom Tolstoy famously has an even worse opinion than of historians in general, lavish praise on it: "The disposition, which French historians speak of with rapture and other historians with deep respect, was the following" (3:2:27: 781). This sarcastic introduction already indicates that we may expect something of which Tolstoy disapproves, as he disapproves of all historians' statements; he does not believe their scholarly ways can understand the actual flow of history.

Indeed, Tolstoy devotes almost an entire chapter to savaging this disposition, which he quotes twice.

Following this negative presentation of historians' analysis, Tolstoy proceeds to offer his own. Beginning with the conclusion—"Thus, none of the instructions of the disposition were or could be carried out" (3:2:27: 783)—he goes on to summarize the four major orders, always first summarizing the order, then providing the reason it was not and could not be carried out. This detailed critique offers a stark juxtaposition between Napoleon's words and the reality they are meant to affect. The first order is introduced thus: "In the disposition it is said (сказано), first [...]" (3:2:27: 782; PSS 11: 217). A summary follows, printed in italics (thus graphically marked in the text). Next, Tolstoy's evaluation starts: "This could not be done." What is "said" (сказано) and what gets "done" (сделано) are counterposed, an opposition emphasized by the use of the same grammatical form (past-passive participle). There are only words here, not action.

This effect is completed after the presentation of the battle, when Tolstoy quotes from Napoleon's memoirs. The battle of Borodino in *War and Peace* is thus framed by discussions of Napoleon's own words. In these passages from the memoirs, Napoleon gives his interpretation of the events, giving Tolstoy a chance to show that Napoleon never understood the events around him. While the dispositions before the battle are represented in Russian, undermining their authority by making them available to scrutiny by any reader, the final words from St. Helena are quoted in French, which makes them the longest French passage by Napoleon in the entire novel. In this quoted passage from his memoirs, Napoleon tries to influence reality in his usual way, through his words. He even convinces himself that the battlefield was not a space of slaughter but that "le champ de bataille a été superbe," by

counting how many Russian corpses there were for each French corpse.

### **Semiotic and Speech Act Illiteracy Cause the Final Defeat**

The last time Napoleon appears on the stage of *War and Peace*, he stands outside of Moscow, gazing at it from a hill. This passage gives his reputation the final blow by exposing both his semiotic and his language mode illiteracy.

In the beginning of the passage, we see Napoleon standing on top of Poklonny Hill, gazing at Moscow in the distance. Preceding this paragraph are two chapters describing in great detail how Moscow—after Kutuzov’s decision not to defend it—was abandoned by its inhabitants and stands now practically deserted. Tolstoy famously compares it to an abandoned beehive, completely devoid of life. The reader is therefore better informed about the situation than Napoleon. Little markers in the text indicate that the reader sees the situation from Napoleon’s point of view. Napoleon’s strangeness and his utter incomprehension of Russian reality are emphasized here more than ever:

At the sight of the strange city with the never seen forms of its extraordinary architecture, Napoleon experienced that somewhat envious and restless curiosity which people experience at the sight of alien forms of life that know nothing of them. *Obviously*, this city lived with all the forces of its own life. By those undefinable signs which, even from a distance, unmistakably distinguish a living body from a dead one, Napoleon saw from the Poklonny Hill the quivering of life in the city and *felt*, as it were, the breathing of that big and beautiful body. (3:3:19: 871; PSS 11: 323-24, my emphasis)

In this paragraph, narrative comment and free indirect discourse are intertwined in a way that makes it almost impossible to distinguish

them. The reader experiences the scene from Napoleon’s point of view but with added knowledge. The narrator’s explanation of Napoleon’s feelings at the beginning of the paragraph emphasizes his situation as a “stranger in a strange land,” and from this perspective the text plunges without warning into Napoleon’s point of view.

The context marks “obviously” as Napoleon’s word, since the narrator and the reader are well aware that Moscow is not full of life. Napoleon again misreads a situation concerning the life and death of Russia (or of a Russian, as in the case of Prince Andrei). It has still not occurred to him that his instincts cannot be trusted in this strange land, that this war is not like all the others. He still sees what he wants to see.

By presenting these impressions of Napoleon in a way nearly indistinguishable from narratorial description, the text emphasizes the irony of the situation—a case of ironic free indirect discourse. The narrator mocks Napoleon in a simultaneously subtle and blunt way, while the reader participates: We are standing there on the hill with him, looking at Moscow, and sharing with Napoleon his feeling of near-fulfillment of his dreams; meanwhile *we* know that all this is false—the classic definition of dramatic irony.

The position of the narrator here, who lends his voice to Napoleon’s misperception, reminds one of the satirical devices employed by Sasha Baron Cohen or Stephen Colbert: The narrator takes on the role of the person he mocks. The satire shifts from the mocking parentheses to the assumption of Napoleon’s voice. The step is made from parody towards pastiche.

This passage prepares the reader for Napoleon’s exclamation of astonishment when actually seeing Moscow—or better, “*Moscou*”—because it is not clear that he ever manages actually to see the real Moscow through his illusions.

Now the text does not use subtle double-voiced irony, but simply lets Napoleon discredit himself with his own words. Here the text re-

sumes the mocking use of “*Moscou la sainte*,” this time expressing Napoleon’s excitement when actually seeing “*Moscou*”: “Cette ville asiatique aux innombrables églises, *Moscou la sainte*. La voilà donc enfin, cette fameuse ville! Il était temps” (3:3:19: 871; PSS 11: 324). We see Napoleon’s lack of knowledge and orientation emphasized by his characterization of Moscow as “*asiatique*.” In the subsequent narrative comment and transition to Napoleon’s next utterance, the narrator refers to Moscow macaronically as *эма* (that) *Moscou*, emphasizing through the combination of the Russian article with the French noun that Napoleon is not talking about the “true” “Moscow” (Москва) but his own illusion.

The ambiguous use of narrative comment and free indirect discourse ends. In the subsequent interior monologue, the text usurps Napoleon’s voice even more effectively and less ambiguously. Napoleon’s undying belief in the power of his words is ridiculed: Napoleon dreams of redefining the barbaric parts of Moscow through his sublime civilization: “On the ancient monuments of barbarism and despotism, I will write great words of justice and mercy” (3:3:19: 872; PSS 11: 324). Again, his method of redefining is by using his magic words, literally overwriting the Russian past.

Now that Napoleon has seen “*Moscou la sainte*,” the joke moves on to another word: boyars, “*бояре*” or “*boyards*.”<sup>10</sup> The term appears in Russian in the interior monologue and is then authenticated as Napoleon’s thought by the subsequent direct speech in French: “*Qu’on m’amène les boyards*.” Next it appears again in Russian, this time as an ironic touch to the narrator’s voice: “The general [...] galloped off at once to fetch the *boyards* (Генерал [...] поскакал за боярами)” (3.3.19: 872; PSS 11: 325). (The Russian boyar (боярин/бояре) is used in the text of the novel five times, all of them in this chapter and four times within two paragraphs.)

Unlike “*Moscou la sainte*,” the term “boyar” passes through the language barrier and is used both in French and in Russian. It is obviously Napoleon’s word even in Russian, as no Russian would use it in this context—there had not been boyars in Russia since Peter the Great; the term actually refers to the Moscovy period of Russian history. The narrator’s acceptance of Napoleon’s ahistoricity merely contributes to the humor of the statement, as does the general’s “galloping” off to fetch Napoleon’s imaginary boyars.

Napoleon then imagines all the grand things he “will” do to Moscow, again employing the future indicative (perfective future) verb tense:

From the heights of the Kremlin—yes, that’s the Kremlin, yes—I will give them the laws of justice; I will show them the meaning of true civilization, I will make generations of boyars remember their conqueror with love. I will tell the deputation that I did not and do not want war [...]. (3:3:19: 872; PSS 11: 325, my italics)

His ambitions progressively project further and further into the future—from his direct actions as soon as he arrives in *Moscou* to the way future generations will remember him. His plans become increasingly delusional and absurd, something underscored by his repeated use of the term “boyar.” Boyars are, after all, a relic of the past, not a sign of the future.

While Napoleon develops all these grand thoughts and plans, his generals desperately try to tell him that Moscow is empty. They are less worried about the situation than about their inability to verbalize it to the emperor. While Napoleon is completely oblivious to these realities, he does realize that the sublime moment is going on for too long. We see Napoleon the performer in action trying to stage a performance: “[...] and sensing with his actor’s intuition that the majestic moment, having gone on

too long, was beginning to lose its majesty” (3:3:19: 873; PSS 11: 325).

While his intuition—as a general and even as a politician—has left him, he is still the sublime actor. He wants to grasp the sublime moment and he feels it disappearing. In reaction, Napoleon becomes active and does what he knows so well how to do: He orders his troops with a movement of his hand. And the magic seems to work: The machinery of the army functions without fault, one movement causes the next, and in perfect orchestration, the army marches into (deserted) Moscow. Napoleon is carried away by the spectacle in front of him, at least for a moment. The reader is aware that this performance is purely theatrical and that it is thus an empty sign: The machinery functions but there is nobody to fight. Even this apparently felicitous act is thus a “misfire” in Austin’s definition.

When Napoleon is finally told that Moscow is empty, his first reaction is silence: Napoleon, whose voice had been hoarse at Borodino, has now, for a moment, lost it completely. He recovers, though, and his first words are completely ordinary: “Bring my carriage (экипаж).” In the carriage, Napoleon speaks to himself—the last words Napoleon speaks as an actual character in the novel: “*Moscou déserte! Quel événement invraisemblable!*” (3:3:20: 875; PSS 11: 329). All he can do is express his consternation, finally admitting that Russia works in a way he does not understand. No further performative can change the situation; he is reduced to a constative act. He has lost his power, even in his own imagination. He does not proceed into the city but stays at its gates.

The last line of this chapter is a comment by the narrator, in French. This is the only comment in French in the entire novel that is not a direct or indirect quote from a character: “*Le coup de théâtre avait raté*” (3:3:20: 875; PSS 11: 325). It is a stylization of Napoleon’s manner of speaking by the narrator (Виноградов 154), but

in the form of direct speech. Thus, in the end, Napoleon the performer has been outperformed by the narrator, who now poses as Napoleon. If the narrator had earlier hijacked Napoleon’s voice to ridicule him and to undercut his perspective, a distinction between the narrator’s voice and Napoleon’s was always still palpable. In this final moment, the narrator takes on Napoleon’s voice and erases him from the text.

Napoleon, as a character in the novel *War and Peace*, has been annihilated and disappears. With this disappearance, the performative use of language as a tool of power has been completely discredited. Language is not to be used to create reality and to exert power over others; it fails at these endeavors. Napoleon’s language fails because it is not based on a true understanding either of reality or, more notably, of other people. His performatives have isolated him and thus rendered him powerless. His voice, only hoarse at Borodino, is now completely gone.

### Notes

1. Sergei Bocharov, who gives detailed analysis of almost all other characters in the novel, simply calls Napoleon the character “in whom the bourgeois approach to life is perfectly developed” (Бочаров 39, my translation).
2. This page appears as a facsimile in *Zaidenshnur* (Зайденшнур).
3. All translations of *War and Peace* are from Pevar and Volokhonsky. References are given as volume, part, chapter and page number in the translation, followed by the Complete Collected Works (Полное собрание сочинений, PSS) volume and page.
4. See for example the *Slavic Review* (Spring 2008) issue “Borat: Selves and Others,” which was dedicated to the discussion of the *Borat* film.
5. This summary of the events is based on Nicholls (67) and Furet (239, also quoted by Nicholls).
6. The need for a last instance when breaking the tradition of power transmission has already been

pointed out by Rousseau in *On the Social Contract*: “Gods would be needed to give laws to man” (86). Rousseau points out that the original authority for a new state has to come from a higher force:

It is this sublime reason, which rises above the grasp of common men, whose decisions the legislator places in the mouth of the immortals in order to convince by divine authority those who cannot be moved by human prudence. (69-70)

7. In one of the early draft versions, this aspect of accepting Napoleon’s status as emperor is made explicit: Anna Sherer: “Well, and what do you say about Bonaparte (о Бонапарте)? They call him here Emperor (императором) but I do not recognize him” (PSS 9: 64, my translation).

8. On further implications of the naming of Napoleon in the novel see Uspensky 27-32.

9. Napoleon’s approach to language here can also be interpreted as the creation of a “self-fulfilling prophecy,” as defined by Robert Merton. Interestingly, according to Merton, the self-fulfilling prophecy is always based on a mistake: “The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a *false* definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come true” (423).

10. The term “boyar” had a particularly exotic and Eastern European connotation in the nineteenth century. Bram Stoker’s *Count Dracula* describes himself thus: “Here [in Transylvania] I am noble; I am *boyar*; the common people know me and I am master. But a stranger in a strange land, he is no one; men know him not—and to know not is to care not for” (45). In both cases, the term “boyar” symbolizes the lack of connection between Western and Eastern European culture.

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