

Title: The Role of Homer in the Development of Tolstoy's Aesthetics  
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"I proudly say that I am an aristocrat, by birth, by my habits, and by my situation... I am an aristocrat because I was taught since childhood to love and respect the upper classes and to love elegance *as it is expressed not only in Homer, Bach and Rafael, but in all the details of life as well.*"

(Tolstoy, an unused variant to *War and Peace* [1863-1869], 13: 239 italics added)

"The higher, better examples of art were concentrated in the expression of religious feelings and were always equally accessible, whether to the rulings and wealthy or to the ruled and poor. Such were the artistic works ...of ancient Greece, *from the Parthenon to Homer... .*"

("On That Which is Called Art" [1896], 30: 258 italics added)

As these quotations suggest, Tolstoy's reading of Homer changed significantly over time. According to Tolstoyan works of various periods, Homer is now aristocratic, now popular; now decadent, now austere; now secular, now religious. How can these seemingly contradictory readings of Homeric poetry be resolved?

As his beliefs about the nature and purpose of art gradually developed into the aesthetic system described in "What is Art?" Tolstoy's understanding of Homer changed in relation to his ideas about art in general. By closely following Tolstoy's references to the Homeric epics against the background of his changing views on aesthetics, this paper will explore the role of that varying reading both as a catalyst for and representative of broader transformations in Tolstoy's understanding of art. The fact that Tolstoy's inconsistent Homer was nevertheless consistently a representative of what Tolstoy believed art should be will in turn shed light on some major contradictions inherent in his aesthetic system.

Works Cited:

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