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**L.N. TOLSTOY'S « THE CIRCLE OF READING»:
GENESIS AND POETICS**

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The late period of L.N. Tolstoy's oeuvre is characterized by a variety of genres. Aside from religio-ethical treatises, collections of wise thoughts and pamphlets, Tolstoy discovered a genre form that seems to have no parallel in either fictional or non-fictional heritage of the writer.

The calendar as a collection of wise thoughts for each day of the year started to hold a special place in Tolstoy's work since the 1880-s when the writer made his mind to compile *The Circle of Reading*. Putting the idea into life proved to be a challenging task that stretched out for 25 years - up to his death; Tolstoy kept perfecting his calendar, the first version of which was published as a separate edition in 1903 under the title *The Thoughts of Wise Man for Every Day*. Tolstoy did not abandon the idea of adding new sayings into the calendar and returned to it in 1906, simultaneously finishing his work on another calendar – *The Circle of Reading*.

However, Tolstoy was not satisfied with the latter compilation of wise thoughts either, so the editing process of the text lasted for two years, and the writer could not see the final version of the text published. In the last years of his life, he also worked on the collections *For Every Day* (1906-1910) and *Path of Life* (1910). Although all Tolstoy's calendars should be seen as chapters of one text that took the writer quarter century to complete, we consider *The Circle of Reading* the most comprehensive and, therefore, the most significant one of them all, as it surpasses all other texts of the genre in the heterogeneity of its content and form.

The Circle of Reading (1906, 1908) is a didactic compilation of aphorisms and short stories for daily reading arranged by the calendar principle. The text is divided into the twelve months of the year, and each day of a month comprises thematically homogenous sayings of great thinkers of the past and present. Each week is separated from the next one by “weekly readings” – short stories and excerpts from journalistic and religio-ethical works of those writers and philosophers with whom Tolstoy sided in ethical matters.

The Circle of Reading is the only calendar-type compilation that combines wise thoughts with full-length texts or textual fragments. Whereas the formal originality of the compendium leaves no doubt, its genesis and its underlying structural principles defy straightforward interpretations. It is the synthetic nature of *The Circle of Reading* that presents challenges for a scholar: being a whole, the text is heterogeneous in many respects: in its genesis, genre, content, and even in its philosophy. Therefore, we consider simplistic and controversial the few existing interpretations of *The Circle of Reading* that downplay the dialectical nature of the text for the sake of moral ideas of Tolstoy and other thinkers scattered through it.

The genesis of *The Circle of Reading* as a synthetic text and distinctive characteristics of its heterogeneous nature have never been the subject of a special study. The organizing principles of the text that render it unique remain unclarified: the compilation form of *The Circle of Reading* comprising aphorisms, both fictional and non-fictional, was unrivalled for its time despite its apparent resemblance to its predecessors – calendars. In Tolstoy studies, the place *The Circle of Reading* occupied in Tolstoy's late period has not been firmly established either: treating the compendium of aphorisms and short stories on a par with the writer's culminating texts fails to account for its significance in the last decade of Tolstoy's life. Consequently, substantial gaps in the studies of *The Circle of Reading* that have not been filled yet impede its comprehensive understanding as a definitive text for the Tolstoy of the 1900s that set cardinal directions of the writer's work of that period. In this respect, a systematic study of *The Circle of Reading* and its

multi-level analysis appear to be particularly **topical**.

The novelty of the present research stems from the fact that in Tolstoy studies, *The Circle of Reading* has rarely been addressed as a synthetic text. Principles of adding texts of various genres into the calendar as well as criteria that guided Tolstoy in selecting texts for *The Circle of Reading* still wait to be uncovered. Whereas the aphorisms included in the compilation have become a subject of several special studies, the corpus of “weekly readings” has never been considered in the context of the general poetics of the compilation and of Tolstoy’s system of beliefs at large. In this work, we will demonstrate how *The Circle of Reading* resolves philosophical and ethical contradictions incipient in Tolstoy’s early writings; reveal the mechanisms that shaped the form and content of the compilation; and finally, specify the role of *The Circle of Reading* against the backdrop of the writer’s other didactic writings.

The object of this research is *Circle of Reading*¹, a compilation of wise thoughts whereon Tolstoy worked during the last decade of his life, and a complex of the writer’s fictional texts and his works on ethics and religion, illuminating the key ideas of *The Circle of Reading* and summing the tenets of the writer’s system of beliefs. We also focus on the writer’s diaries and correspondence to trace distinctive features of his system of beliefs. The object of research includes Russian literary calendars of the first half of the nineteenth century, as one section in the first chapter of the dissertation is devoted to comparing them with *Circle of Reading*. Analysing “weekly readings”, we address fictional and journalistic writings of other authors, so they should be mentioned in this regard as well.

The subject of this research is the genre and biographical genesis of *The Circle of Reading* that helps problematize the temporality of the compilation of wisdom; principles of internal and external structure of *Circle of Reading*; the ideological context of the calendar regarded in terms of the conscious and the unconscious in Tolstoy’s late period; and the poetics of the fictional “weekly readings”.

¹ As the object of this research, we use the second edition of *The Circle of Reading* published in the *Complete Works of L.N. Tolstoy: 90 vv.* (1928-1964). It is necessary to indicate that *The Circle of Reading* as it was printed in this and other editions took shape as early as 1904, when the writer completed the final draft of the compilation. In January 1905, Tolstoy sent the collection to I.I. Gorbunov-Posadov for printing. In 1907, the author decided to conduct a thorough revision of *Circle* (although Tolstoy had been making changes to the text during the two previous years). Having made numerous corrections, in 1908 Tolstoy noted in his diary (diary entry: February 9) that he had completed the editing work. As N.N. Gusev points out in his commentary to *The Circle of Reading* (42; 577), the revision was mainly targeted at aphorisms, which Tolstoy kept adding, excluding, and correcting. The following fictional “weekly readings” appeared in the second edition of the compilation: “Non-believer”, “Poor People” and “The Power of Childhood” by V. Hugo, “Thief’s Son” after N.S. Leskov, “Free Man” (excerpt from the novel “Resurrection”) and “The Sisters” after G. Maupassant. Conclusions regarding the tendencies in the writer’s work of the 1900s, presented in the third chapter of this work, are based exclusively on our observations concerning the conception of *The Circle of Reading* that remained unchanged from 1904 to 1908; stylistic changes and insignificant content revisions (with regard to “weekly readings”) made by Tolstoy for the second edition have no bearing upon our conclusions.

The aims of this research are to identify the role of *The Circle of Reading* in Tolstoy's late period of work and to expound the principles of its structural organization by analysing the corpus of "weekly readings".

To reach these aims we need to address the following **objectives**:

1. To consider *The Circle of Reading* in the context of the calendar tradition of the second half of the nineteenth century;
2. To analyse the problem of temporality in Tolstoy's writings and the ways of solving it in *Circle of Reading*;
3. To articulate the principles of internal and external structure of *Circle of Reading*;
4. To expound those aspects of the plot and ideas of *The Circle of Reading* that resolve hitherto unresolved contradictions in the writer's philosophy – the relationship between the subjective and the objective, the conscious and the unconscious, the rational and the moral, etc.;
5. To explicate the poetics of the fictional "weekly readings" that most clearly illuminate Tolstoy's ideology of that period and demonstrate the principles of selecting texts for *Circle of Reading*.

The methodological basis of the research consists of methods aimed at the multi-multifaceted study of *The Circle of Reading* as a text combining both fictional and non-fictional elements. In Chapter 1 of the dissertation, we deploy methods of historical and genetic criticism to analyse calendar sources (the genesis of *The Circle of Reading* and the way of its transformation informed by Tolstoy's objectives); methods of typological analysis (to analyse typical calendars of that time and their reflection in *Circle of Reading*), and genre analysis (to explore the genre peculiarities of *Circle of Reading*, their evolution and operation in different contexts). In Chapter 2, we draw upon the structural and biographical approaches to reveal the organizing principles of *The Circle of Reading* that trace their origins back to the writer's system of beliefs, and to reflect on the impact some facts of Tolstoy's biography had on compiling the miscellany of aphorisms (his work on *The Four Gospels Harmonized and Translated* and on his religio-ethical treatises). In Chapter 3, we undertake motif analysis of "weekly readings", with the elements of narratological analysis, aimed at expounding the narrative devices of *The Circle of Reading* (instruments of cohesion in "weekly readings").

Key claims of the thesis to be defended:

- 1) Modelling his *The Circle of Reading* primarily after the traditional Russian calendar, Tolstoy transforms the tradition. The common feature calendars and *The Circle of Reading*

share is that they compile texts of miscellaneous genres; however, the function of this multi-genre nature is different in each case. Whereas in the traditional calendar the plethora of genres reflects the intention of the publisher to encompass as many areas of contemporary life as possible and to inform the reader about each of them, *The Circle of Reading* embodies Tolstoy's idea that we can talk about truth in a variety of ways – through both short texts (aphorisms) and the longer ones (such as “weekly readings” and excerpts from treatises). The form of the texts may vary but the content remains similar. The multi-genre nature of the text is yet another manifestation of the idea of “unity” that Tolstoy pursued, compiling *Circle of Reading*.

- 2) A calendar offered its readers some guidance in how to plan and navigate their lives; it provided some information useful in people's everyday life; it stored applied knowledge, unnecessary and therefore easily forgotten. Likewise, *The Circle of Reading* serves to remind the reader about another side of life – the ethical one about which a person could have forgotten in the bustle of everyday life as they may forget practicalities of everyday life. In this context, material and spiritual life converge in their pragmatics, becoming equal in this respect, and are in this way presented in *Circle of Reading*.
- 3) The calendar as it was established by Tolstoy is based on the principle of repetition; repetition and the cyclical nature of the calendar, in their turn, eliminate the idea of the fluidity of time that gets captured in one day and thereby stopped. *The Circle of Reading* as a calendar-type compilation implies reading the same texts year after year, which means that, alongside the time, spiritual life remains immutable too, and not only should its value be recognized but, after recognizing it, it should be preserved for a long time. Parables as a type of “weekly readings”, on the one hand, are not tied to time, and on the other – are universally didactic to the extent required by Tolstoy's intent. This peculiar trait of parable genre was the main reason why Tolstoy resorted to parables in *Circle of Reading*.
- 4) We suggest considering *The Circle of Reading* from the perspective of three principles that, on the one hand, elucidate its ideological nature, and on the other – indicate the reasons why Tolstoy adopted the calendar form to express his views in the late period of his work. These three principles we relate to those spheres (cultural, biographical, social) which, to some degree, could have partaken in bringing about Tolstoy's calendars.
- 5) The principle of “circular reading” stated in the title of the compilation of aphorisms dates back to Tolstoy's earlier projects – *The ABC Book* (1872), *The New ABC Book* (1874-1875), *Books for Reading* in four parts (1875, 1885), and *The Four Gospels Harmonized and Translated* (1882). From this perspective, mindful reading becomes particularly important, and the reader attends only to those truths that are clear to them and are not prompted by the author's subjective view. Tolstoy selects some “weekly readings” because

of their potential “doublet-type affinity”. The short stories have “doublet” plotlines that present alternative scenarios of resolving the same “ethical situation” and offer the future reader a choice between the two strategies of action. This alternative can be seen as Tolstoy’s endeavour to abandon his “Self” which was the writer’s intention since the 1880’s.

- 6) The structural affinity between *The Circle of Reading* and *The Four Gospels Harmonized and Translated* sheds light on how “weekly readings” authored by Tolstoy work – it can be said that the plot of each of them in a particular way expresses the idea underlying the whole compilation.
- 7) The miscellany of “weekly readings” in *The Circle of Reading* should be seen as Tolstoy’s general attempt to transcend the contradictions incipient in his early works. In particular, the writer levels the categories of the conscious and the unconscious and shows how they interact by selecting numerous “weekly readings” and aligning them with the ethical conception of the compilation.
- 8) Tolstoy's work on *The Circle of Reading* chronologically coincided with his search for a new narrative form that would render the plot and the didacticism equal significance in the text. We assume that, working on the compilation of aphorisms, Tolstoy realized the impossibility of creating such a narrative form, and therefore, the texts started in that period were left unfinished (“The Forged Coupon”, “My Dream”, “Posthumous Notes of Starets Feodor Kuzmich”) as they followed the repeatedly tried-and-tested model that the writer sought to transcend but failed in that. In that model where to Tolstoy actively resorted in 1903-1905, the didactic element prevailed over the artistic one, with the plot development driven by the moralistic denouement. In “weekly readings” Tolstoy strives to reduce the didactic element in prose, among other things, by editing texts of other writers. However, he fails to redress the imbalance in his own texts included in the compilation. *The Circle of Reading* reflects the stages of the aforementioned pursuit and, ultimately, explains the phenomenon of Tolstoy’s unfinished fictional works of the 1900s.

The theoretical significance of research is established by the fact that for the first time in Tolstoy studies we provide a conceptual account of the phenomenon of the calendar text in Tolstoy’s work as it is exemplified in *The Circle of Reading* by relating it to the writer’s biography, system of thinking, and his creative work. Moreover, the frontal analysis of “weekly readings” has made it possible to overcome one of the key contradictions in Tolstoy’s philosophy - in the relationship of the categories the conscious and the unconscious, inform his ethical doctrine, which, nevertheless, by now have been regarded by scholars as mutually exclusive. And finally, the present research has revealed the tendencies in Tolstoy’s late period that so far have eluded scholars’ attention; it is they that account for the distinctive characteristics of Tolstoy’s fictional

writings of the 1900s.

The practical relevance of research lies in the possibility to use its observations and theoretical results in the educational process – in lectures, seminars and study guides on the history of the Russian literature and culture. The analysis of the calendar tradition contemporary to Tolstoy enhances our knowledge about the culture of everyday life in the second half of the nineteenth century; the systematic account of the ethical and religious views of the writer in the late period of his creative activity can be utilized in teaching philosophy and ethics as separate subjects.

The structure of research:

The dissertation consists of introduction, three chapters, conclusion, bibliographical review, and appendix. In the introduction, the author indicates its topicality, novelty, its theoretical significance and its practical relevance, and specifies its object and subject, its aims and objectives. Each chapter has three sections, the first two of which contain observations about the specific form and structure of *The Circle of Reading* and the third one demonstrates how the discovered principles operate in the miscellany of “weekly readings”. Chapter 1 is devoted to the genesis of *The Circle of Reading* and the problem of its temporality. The observations are made on the material of parables, one of the most frequently used genres in “weekly readings”. In Chapter 2, we identify general structural principles of *The Circle of Reading* underlying both the text as a whole and its separate parts, in this case - short stories authored by Tolstoy. Chapter 3 takes as its object the stories by other writers, which we address in terms of the conscious and the unconscious and their way of operating in those stories. In the conclusion, we present the results and findings of the research, projected onto Tolstoy’s creative work of the 1900s.

The content of the dissertation

Chapter 1 of the dissertation addresses the question of genre sources of *Circle of Reading*, which in the scholarship has been placed in the contest of the Old Russian tradition and the tradition of aphorisms. Whereas the influence of the Old Russian booklore on the writer is generally acknowledged, the writer’s interest in collections of aphorisms never became the subject of a separate study before the work of N.A. Karlik. In her monograph ‘Tolstoy’s aphoristics: *The Circle of Reading* as a collection of wise thoughts’, the scholar has shown that the popularity of editions of aphorisms at the end of the nineteenth century was determined by the historical and cultural context: the genre wherein the writer could succinctly phrase the ideas that were in high demand at the turn of centuries became one of the most powerful tools of efficient propaganda. However, *The Circle of Reading* has never been juxtaposed with its literary predecessors in the close genre – printed calendars extremely popular at the end of the century.

The calendar of the second half of the nineteenth century as a mass-market edition with the widest readership of all social stripes could have attracted Tolstoy exactly for that reason. Miscellaneous practical information found in the calendar, its thematic content determined by its type, its

affordability and cheapness – all these made the calendar, alongside the Bible, a handbook for everyone. We assume that Tolstoy, bearing witness to the steadfast relativisation of ethical norms at the end of the nineteenth century and, at the same time, having difficulties with publishing his religio-ethical treatises in Russia, decided to resort to the form that not only could pass the censorship with minimum losses but could also have a broader circulation among common people. Thereby the writer acquired an opportunity to focus on communicating the truths that, in his view, were to be always kept in mind under the historical and social circumstances of that time. The calendar form of *The Circle of Reading* solved another problem that had been Tolstoy's concern since his youth. It is the representation of time and the mechanisms of its capturing and fixing. All these prompted the writer to seek a new genre, which happened to be the calendar.

Tolstoy's interest in calendars was not sporadic. This is attested to by the collections of calendars in the writer's private library, by his random comments on them in his diaries, and by the fact that he read the authors who wrote on folk calendars – B. Auerbach and V. Reel. Tolstoy's recourse to the calendar as the source of knowledge about common people and as a genre form as well as a book essential for everyday life shows that the calendar played an important part not only in the writer's quotidian life but in his life in art too.

The most widespread types of calendars at the end of the nineteenth century were universal ones and thematic ones. Tolstoy, looking for a convenient calendar form, in his first attempt at giving life to his idea – *Calendar with Proverbs for 1887* (1886) strives to overcome the standard content of both types of calendars containing a large bulk of essential practical tips. In the first edition, Tolstoy sets four sections: the calendar proper that included the church calendar, a section with proverbs, housekeeping tips that concluded each month, and an article about what can be observed in the sky. Given the fact that the writer allotted much space specifically to proverbs while significantly transforming the sections with practical tips and astronomical information (the information provided in these sections differed in form from that contained in traditional calendars), we can say that that calendar falls under the category of specified calendars. Tolstoy considered the calendar as a failure but still held on hope to create another calendar, which in a relatively complete form was published in 1903 under the title *The Thoughts of Wise Men for Every Day*. However, the writer did not stop there either – the content of the latter edition seemed deficient to him, and he started “expanding” it, which resulted in his creating *Circle of Reading*.

And yet Tolstoy's compilation of aphorisms and stories for every day retained some relics of standard calendars. Firstly, Tolstoy wrote a **preface** to the miscellany of aphorisms, just as it was done in calendars of that epoch. In it, the author discussed the organizing principles of his calendar, the tasks it was meant to perform, and the purpose of the whole enterprise: Tolstoy sought to “provide the wider readership with an everyday circle of readings”, which demonstrates that the writer targeted his work not at a particular narrow cohort of readers, but at a mass reader. Apart from that, a preface could be a way of addressing the reader. While impersonal calendars were bought massively, a preface was the way of getting the reader interested in the particular topics of the calendar. Both *The Circle of Reading* and calendars share the principle of **multi-genre compilation**: from aphorisms to fictional texts. In the compilation of wise thoughts, we encounter aphorisms, sayings, short stories, poems, pieces of journalism, extracts from religious writings etc. Calendars accommodate a variety of genres, too – in different types of calendars we can come

across biographies, wise thoughts, short stories, etc. In case of traditional calendars, such a plethora of genres seems to be serving the publisher's purpose to embrace as many provinces of modern life as possible and to give the reader some idea about each of them. Regarding *Circle of Reading*, it had no direct informative or educational function.

Tolstoy strives to show that we can speak about the truth in a variety of ways – in separate statements or in full-length texts, but also in excerpts from them or in few poems. And finally, the calendar gave the reader **guiding lines** for planning their lives. A list of public holidays, commercial and legal information, railway maps and tickets fares, the church calendar and other religious information – all that was useful in everyday life. The calendar stored some practical information that a person could have forgotten and did not have to always remember. Likewise, *The Circle of Reading* serves the reader a reminder about the other side of life – the ethical one that could have slipped a person's mind like as the price of the watermarked paper does. In this perspective, material and spiritual life become levelled in the pragmatics.

Paragraph 1.1.2. looks at the calendar as a distinct way of time representation. I.A. Paperno in her monograph points out that the question of temporality was Tolstoy's concern throughout his life since the moment when he had realized that he had not been able to capture the passed day in a text (see "The History of Yesterday"), as the time constantly expands and transcends the described moment. The scholar points out that the calendar circle made time predictable, that is – fathomable and known beforehand. The same is true about the diary form, which does not exclude adding, crossing out, planning, etc., and, in other words, is a flexible form.

Given that the calendar genre entered Tolstoy's work in 1886 during his work on the calendar of proverbs, we can assume that since that time the idea of the stopped, unalterable time started appealing to the writer more and more. It manifests itself not only in multiple attempts at compilations uniting layers of time in one flow to avoid its fluidity ("Thoughts of Wise Man", "Essarhaddon, King of Assyria", "The Three Questions"). Alongside calendars, Tolstoy resumes keeping the diary: it can be assumed that in the late period of his work the writer discovers a new form of time and either sets it off against the former one – that of the diary, or strives to combine them – their fluidity and stasis.

The calendar as it was devised by Tolstoy is built upon the principle of repetition, and repetition, or cyclicity, in its turn, eliminates the fluidity of time, as it gets captured in every day and, therefore, stopped. The idea of *The Circle of Reading* and other calendar-type compilations implies reading the same texts year after year, which means that alongside time, spiritual time ceases to change too. We can assume that herein lies one of the tenets of Tolstoy's ethics – it is crucial not only to achieve a state wherein the rational good operates as a natural law but to remain in this state, not to succumb to the temptations of material life and thereby to reach the state of detachment (26; 280). The calendar becomes a container capable of keeping the accumulated ethical power in its initial uncontaminated form and of transporting it unchanged across the years.

In the same paragraph, we put forward three dichotomous principles that, on the one hand, clarify the ideological nature of *Circle of Reading*, and on the other, indicate the reasons why the writer chose the calendar form to communicate his views in the late period of his work. Correlating with the respective spheres of human life and society, these three principles are equally important for uncovering the reasons behind Tolstoy's calendars. The first sphere is the cultural one,

dominated by Tolstoy's belief that a person's essence is shaped by both external and internal factors, the second one is biographical, containing the writer's observations about the place of his own "Self" among other people like him, and finally, the third one is social, explicating the communicative function of *The Circle of Reading* and focused on the interaction with readers.

In paragraph 1.2.3, we show how the general conception of time embodied in *The Circle of Reading* operates on the level of particular texts of the miscellany, namely, in the parables of "weekly readings". The parable as a text expressed the same idea of universality not only by the encoded in it moral lessons going back to the Gospel commandments and therefore universally relatable, but also by its content, as much as possible detached from spatial and temporal particularities. Thus, taking "The Big Dipper" legend as an example, we demonstrate the general direction of Tolstoy's editing work with other people's texts and reveal the reasons that drove him to turn to them. The writer moderates religious (Protestant) motifs in the legend and simplifies the content of the text, previously imbued with everyday details.

Chapter 2 traces the structural and conceptual connection of *The Circle of Reading* with other texts - *The Four Gospels Harmonized and Translated* (1882), *The ABC Book* (1872), *The New ABC Book* (1874-1875), *Books for Reading* (1875, 1885). *The Four Gospels Harmonized and Translated* (1882) was the direct predecessor of *Circle of Reading*. Both *The Gospels* and the compilation of aphorisms adopt a cyclical form, and the cyclical nature of both texts is related to the dissemination of the word of truth. It is likely that Tolstoy became aware of flaws of the form he had employed in his *Gospels* and decided to resort to the genre that could perfectly match his system of beliefs. The circle, a figure wherein all points are located at an equal distance from its centre, becomes the metaphor of the writer's worldview. Notwithstanding that the circular form implies systematic reading of the text, the aphorisms and "weekly readings" of the *Circle* allow for reading in random order. The miscellany is in a way hyper-text, and its structure cannot be described as chaotic. On the contrary, *The Circle of Reading* sets if not the recommend order of reading than the perspective – the ethical one – through which all the texts should be read. It is not the order of reading but the very fact of reading that matters.

The status of reading as an independent value aimed at edifying or instructing the reader was established by Tolstoy long before *The Circle of Reading* – in *The ABC* (1872), *The New ABC* (1874-1875), *Books for Reading* (1875, 1885). It is important that both *the ABC* and *Reading Circle* are multi-genre texts, and preparing each of them, Tolstoy worked with a large number of sources. *The ABC* can be viewed as an initial stage of a big project that concludes with *Circle of Reading*, to which attest analogies between the content of both collections. In terms of volume, aphorisms and wise thoughts may be likened to a few-sentence-long folk stories. Reading one story per day is not different from reading a day-related collection of aphorisms - in the case of *The ABC*, it develops the practice of reading and in the case of *Circle of Reading*, it hones the skill of moral behaviour. Excerpts from religious books in *the ABC* is the equivalent of "weekly readings."

In *The ABC*, “Nestor's Chronicle” is supplied by a reading guide; similarly, Tolstoy appends an afterword to Chekhov’s “The Darling”, giving instructions on how to read the story. Journalism texts paired up with fictional “weekly readings” and highlighting their meaning exemplify another type of annotations. All these could be read as analogies showing that the structure of *The Circle of Reading* stems not only from the calendar tradition and from the cultural tradition at large, but also from the writer’s literary biography. Finally, both in *The ABC* and in *Circle of Reading*, as well as in other texts of Tolstoy, we encounter a question-answer form of narration. This dialogic form provides another clue to understanding the compilation of aphorisms and “weekly readings,” namely, the free choice of the reader who not only follows the author, but also decides for himself which way of approaching the truth is closer to him. We have found out that these methods go back to the principle of “doublet-type affinity”, drawing on which Tolstoy selected some stories for *Circle of Reading*. The “doublet plots” are addressed in the second paragraph of the second chapter of the present research work.

We have applied the structural approach to the analysis of plots and motifs of “weekly readings” and have traced the same pattern operating in fourteen of them out of the total thirty-two. We have called the pattern identified through the comparative analysis of plots the “binary structure”. Such an approach to *The Circle of Reading* expands our comprehension of it as a hybrid text that encompasses sometimes mutually exclusive aphorisms and plots. Having explored the repertoire of topics in all fictional “weekly readings”, we have singled out the most frequent ones and called them “**ethical situations**” wherewith Tolstoy was most preoccupied and that invariably correlate with the Gospel. Each ethical situation is illustrated by two or three narrative examples. We have called them **micro-plots**, or doublet plots, because they represent different, alternative scenarios of resolving the same “ethical situation”.

Since the compilation of aphorisms was conceived by Tolstoy as an edifying text, weekly readings have the moral to them, but delivered in a narrative way. Each text with a positive ending has a double, or a dublet text, with a negative ending. The positive ending hinges on the protagonist’s ability to abide by the laws of Christian faith that have a transformative affect not only on the protagonist himself/herself but on the other characters around him as well. We assume that Tolstoy uses texts-doubles to reduce the ideological pressure over the reader to whom both aphorisms and weekly readings are addressed. Within the bounds of *Circle of Reading*, the writer gives the reader an opportunity to choose between two lines of behaviour in a particular ethical situation.

The potential (ideal) reader of the book, having read his way through it, must have noticed thematic echoes between doublet plots that were spaced out and placed in different weeks. Having discovered a common point of departure in two plots, the reader could follow the alternative ways of the plot development and observe how the protagonist – with greater or lesser losses, with a disastrous ending or without it – comes to embracing the Christian ethics as the only one acceptable under the circumstances of wrongful life. However, the moral itself is not granted ready-made to the reader as it is “packed” into the fictional texts (and not only into the aphorisms), albeit rather unambiguous ones, yet prompting the reader to employ some interpretative skills to uncover the author’s position. The paradox of *The Circle of Reading* lies in the fact that Tolstoy, positing his own moral position as the only true one, nevertheless, creates the situation of moral choice for the

reader and on the level of binary narratives tries to show which behaviour strategy is preferable and what consequences each of the two ways of acting bring about.

Paragraph 2.3. explores the cyclical structure of the weekly readings authored by Tolstoy himself. In this paragraph, we analyse the following texts: “A Prayer”, “Korney Vasilyev”, “Berries”, “Free Man”, “What For?”, “Divine and Human”. In *Confession*, Tolstoy puts stress on the fact that his own process of coming closer to the truth was accompanied by constant shifts from the joy of comprehending the meaning of life to the disappointment in it. As these shifts had a cyclical nature in Tolstoy’s life, which he imparts to the reader, they may be called the “circles” of the writer’s life quest for meaning. The characters of Tolstoy’s short stories from *The Circle of Reading* share with the author that cyclical stages. Ultimately, Tolstoy uses emotional experience structured in that fashion and leading to revisiting the meaning of life to “prolong” the moment (contrary to M.M. Bakhtin’s idea that Tolstoy did not attach due importance to the moment), by filling it with character’s thoughts and feelings to make possible the character’s further inner “recovery” after the tragedy that occurred to him/her causing his/her rebirth.

In Chapter 3, we explicate the poetics of the “weekly readings” authored by other writers, such as A.P. Chekhov, G. de Maupassant, I.S. Turgenev, N.S. Leskov, V. Hugo and A. France, by establishing the relationship between the categories of the conscious and the unconscious in these texts and in Tolstoy’s works of the late period. The unconscious, according to Tolstoy, is not only the animal nature of the man driving him to a life of passions but an innate moral sense inherent in positive characters of his own works (Natasha Rostova, princess Maria, Platon Karataev and others). Consciousness is the lot of those people who, being a part of society, committed a sin or followed the path of sin, but with the help of faith have become aware of their wrongfulness and converted to the truth (Prince Andrey, Ivan Ilyich). This opposition is very common in the late period of Tolstoy’s work. It is precisely then when the writer stops splitting the protagonist’s path to faith into the conscious one and the unconscious one and brings them together. Therefore, it can be said that it is in that period of his work that the writer became aware of the contradiction in his conception of faith and sought to overcome it by means of fiction. The characters, having passed the conscious stage of life and having eventually entered the unconscious stage, which already feels like their own element, epitomize the “reasonable heart” that Tolstoy called for.

This principle marks the further way of Tolstoy's characters. The importance of this shift in perspective is highlighted by that fact that in the earlier period of Tolstoy’s work, his “converted” characters, for example, Andrey Bolkonsky, Anna Karenina, Ivan Ilyich, died after having known the truth. In the 1980s and 1990s, when Tolstoy's doctrine was finally shaped, he prioritizes repercussions of acquiring faith, when not only does the good illuminate the path of the character himself, but also affects the other, thereby convincing the character in the reality of "perpetual amplification of life." In order to discover the divine truth in himself/herself, it does not suffice for the character to “convert” himself/herself, but it is necessary to “convert” others, which in this case amounts to doing a good deed - a fundamental action on the path to faith, according to Tolstoy.

The key texts of this period either have an open ending, wherein the protagonist integrates the awareness he has achieved (Nekhlyudov, Father Sergius, “It's You”, “After the Ball”), or the ending with the death of the protagonist, which complies with Tolstoy's logic of the earlier period when dying was seen as liberation (Khadzhi-Murat, Fedya Protasov, etc.). And only in 1903 did Tolstoy write three fairy tales, simultaneously with the short story “After the Ball” (“Esserhaddon, King of Assyria”, “The Three Questions”, and “Work, Death, and Sickness”), wherein the protagonist not only embraces the truth, but also lives on with it in order to preach it to others.

From this perspective, Tolstoy's characters need the unconscious to become carriers of truth, in other words, having rationally grasped the need of communion with God, they become capable of fathoming God with their heart; the conscious, in its turn, become a prerequisite of spreading the truth among people: preaching as a communicative genre is meant to produce an effect on the listener (reader – in this case), which cannot be done without the intellectual, that is rational, component, as well as without sincere faith, as was Tolstoy's belief.

Suggestion that Tolstoy pursued while working on *The Circle of Reading* becomes the principle device of resolving the tension between the conscious and the unconscious in the compilation of aphorisms and short stories for every day. Having discovered that these categories are equally involved in characters' psychological behaviour, Tolstoy finally manages to combine edification and fictionality in one text, without downplaying either of them.

In paragraphs 3.1. and 3.2., we demonstrate how the principles outlined above operate in the “weekly readings” that we have grouped into two categories – those describing female consciousness and those presenting cases of either institutional or human judgment. The female protagonist of A.P. Chekhov's short story “The Darling” epitomizes for Tolstoy the “unconscious” living, that is “living from the heart”. Tolstoy edits the story, aligning it with his own philosophy and as much as possible “depersonalizing” the protagonist so that she becomes the embodiment of the “universal”, that is, all-embracing love that only women are capable of. Françoise from Maupassant's short story “The Sisters” impersonates the dark side of the unconscious. Tolstoy uses the plotline of “The Sisters”, based on the incestuous relationship between a brother and a sister, for polemical purposes: the writer speculates about the ethical power of art and about its permissiveness, referring to depictions of incest in Wagner's operas and to F. Nietzsche's philosophy and arguing with them. It is worth mentioning the series of stories by V. Hugo, who questions the rightfulness of judgment as such. In the story “Bishop Myriel”, which is a passage from the novel *The Miserable*, we witness the merciful act of the bishop who forgives Jean Valjean, thus rendering inevitable his spiritual revival. The story “The Power of Childhood”, on the contrary, describes the situation of human fallacy with regard to a captive representative of authorities, who was saved due to the compassion of an angry mob for the son of the accused.

By analysing all of the weekly readings, we have demonstrated how Tolstoy in *The Circle of Reading* strives to elaborate a universal form of writing aimed at a wide audience and, at the same time, combining the principles of fictional (plot-driven) and non-fictional (didactic) text. Experimenting with different forms, he had penned texts that were included in *The Circle of Reading* as separate stories. Some stories are devoid of didacticism and, at first glance, seem to provide objective narration of events (“What For?”, “Berries”, “Korney Vasilyev”). Taking the

parabolic narration (as a ready form) as a point of departure and moving through his own texts and texts of other writers (and developing didacticism and the plotline in them), Tolstoy struggled to discover a new type of narrative, formally – fictional, but in essence – instructional, preserving the equivalence of these two components in it. Prior to *Circle of Reading*, Tolstoy had developed this form by introducing into a text an ideologist, the type of character that enters his works in the late 1880s (an ideologist communicating and uttering the idea of good but never embodying it in his behaviour). It can be assumed that in *The Circle of Reading* Tolstoy continued his quest for a new narrative form, and therefore, for the compilation he selected texts with an ambiguous plotline that was accentuated by the doublet-text, suggesting a totally different resolution.

We contend that Tolstoy failed to find any other devices to combine fictional prose and didacticism. However, Tolstoy was not quite satisfied with that form either: the plurality of possible readings of an ethical situation centred around the balance of the conscious and the unconscious had an ultimate effect of eroding didacticism as such. Having mechanically joined the genres, having aligned aphorisms and short stories, he returns to writing texts in his traditional format, which is seen in such unfinished texts as “The Forged Coupon”, “The Posthumous Notes of the Starets Fyodor Kuzmich”, “Alesha Gorshok” etc. (the phenomenon of unfinished texts can be interpreted as Tolstoy’s failure to find a new narrative form, his unwillingness to repeat himself and to return to the former ideological writing that he had practiced both before *The Circle of Reading* and in the process of working on it). Mechanical linking precluded rhetorical homogeneity and brought about stylistic roughness, whereas working solely with fictional texts proved futile, as led to the narrowing of the didactic scope of the compilation.

Even though *The Circle of Reading* failed to achieve the overarching goals that the writer had set for himself while creating it, with the help of that compilation of aphorisms and short stories for every day Tolstoy managed to resolve many contradictions that had haunted him throughout his creative life, the key one being the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious.

In the conclusion, we present the main findings of our research work:

- 1) *The Circle of Reading* sums up Tolstoy’s inquiries into multiple issues among which are the mechanisms of narrative representation of personal time. Tolstoy conceives time in its universality, which, being regulated by the calendar form, becomes, like the truth, one for all people. Sharing with other people the same position with respect to time, a person gets a chance to do good without worrying about the realms beyond his/her control, among which space and motion should be mentioned.
- 2) *The Four Gospels Harmonized and Translated* as a direct predecessor of *The Circle of Reading* rests upon the principle of the “circle”, with all its parts having equal significance in the whole: reading one fragment, you can at any time go to the preceding or to the following one. The same principle can be spotted in the compilation of aphorisms and short stories, where ethical clusters comprising it are attached to a particular day of the year, and therefore, moving across the time to any particular time point can be easily done. However, Tolstoy gave importance not only to the temporal embeddedness of the narrative but to the very fact of daily reading. In this regard, reference to collections of folk stories, *ABCs* and

Books for Reading appears to be relevant. The principle of “selective reading” is applicable to them as well – the stories they include can be read in random order, and the comprehension of the book will not suffer from that. In *Circle of Reading*, Tolstoy combines the idea of universal time stemming from the calendar principle with the idea of universal reading originating in folk stories. We believe that this apposition led the writer to discovering the unity of form and content that he sought after.

- 3) The reader-oriented nature of *The Circle of Reading* manifests itself not only in the free choice of a text to read but in the pattern of behaviour embedded in the texts of the compilation. It is precisely for that reason that Tolstoy introduces “doublet plots” in the text, suggesting alternative resolutions of the same ethical situation. And in spite of the fact that the priority is given to the plot where the protagonist comes to understanding the Gospel commandments with lesser losses, through such a reader-oriented approach Tolstoy strives to transcend his own rigid moralism and share with the reader the right for a subjective understanding of the text.
- 4) It is not only the parable as one of the genres of “weekly readings” that takes on the function of representing the writer’s views. The short stories penned by Tolstoy and included into *The Circle of Reading* also reflect his ideas about time, or, more accurately, about the flow of life in time. The time in these short stories has a cyclical and phasic nature – before converting to faith through the acts of humility and acceptance, characters endure emotional turmoil – “deadening” and “revival” – caused by the spontaneous resistance of their consciousness. This process of coming to God is identical to that we read about in *Confession* and it marks the religious path of the writer himself. As we see, in *Circle of Reading*, Tolstoy invites characters to act on the pattern discovered by himself.
- 5) And finally, most of the fictional “weekly readings” wherein the psychologism of the narration draws upon the interaction of the categories of the conscious and the unconscious should be seen as Tolstoy’s experiment in working out a new narrative form combining the storyline and didacticism. We believe that Tolstoy’s work on the compilation proved impossible the balance that the writer so fervently sought after. Only some of the “weekly readings” can be considered close to Tolstoy’s intent but they belong to other authors, and the corrections to them added by the writer attest to his gravitation towards religio-ethical system of values and to his commitment to implement them.

By and large, the calendar form, structure, and poetics of *The Circle of Reading* show that the compilation of wise thoughts as a novel and, in fact, unique stage of Tolstoy's life in art, on the one hand, summed up the writer's long-lasting enquiries in the fields of biography, literature and philosophy, and on the other – allowed the writer to bring many of them to a close. In this sense, it seems reasonable to view *The Circle of Reading* as Tolstoy's culminating work, summing the results of his creative quest.

Testing the results of the research

The main results of research were presented at Russian and foreign conferences in the period from 2015 to 2018: «International Conference of Young Philologists» (April 2015, 2016; Tartu, Estonia), «Youth Scientific Conference of the School of Philology of the HSE» (April 2015; Moscow), «International Youth Scientific and Educational Festival of L.N. Tolstoy» (November-December 2016; Kazan), White readings (October 2016; Moscow), «V Youth Scientific Conference "Text - Comment - Interpretation"» (April 2016, 2017; Moscow), «"Reasonable, good, eternal ... ": problems of production, preservation and dissemination of culture in Russia from the Nekrasov era to the present (estate, literature, museum)» (June, 2017; Yaroslavl), «XI International Scientific Conference " Leo Tolstoy and World Literature "» (August, 2018 ; Yasnaya Polyana, Tula), «Leo Tolstoy and the press of his time» (November, 2018; Warsaw, Poland).

The main results of dissertation are published as following articles:

1. Tulyakova A.A. Tolstoi, Artsybashev i Vagner: ob odnom sluchae polemiki v «Kruge chteniia» L.N. Tolstogo [Leo Tolstoy, Mikhail Artsybashev, and Richard Wagner: About One Case of Polemics in Tolstoy's «The Circle of Reading»] // Slověne. 2017. Vol. 6. № 2. Pp. 444-455.
2. Tulyakova A.A. Chitatel' na rasput'e: «dubletnye siuzhety» v «Kruge chteniia» L.N. Tolstogo [Reader at the crossroads: «doublet plots» in L.N. Tolstoy's «The Circle of Reading»] // Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. 2018. № 430. Pp. 39-44.
3. Tulyakova A.A. Dzhon Reskin v «Kruge chteniia» L. Tolstogo: o tvorcheskoi istorii legendy «Bol'shaia Medveditsa (Kovsh)» [John Ruskin in L. Tolstoy's «The Circle of Reading»: On the Creative Story of the Legend «The Great Bear (Bucket)»]// Sibirskii filologicheskii zhurnal. 2018. № 3 (*forthcoming*).