

## **Memoirs, a More Effective and Less Affective Historical Truth**

The invasions of Russia promoted by first Napoleon Bonaparte and later by Adolf Hitler, have both seen Europeans of different nations (this aside from the general view that conceives exclusively French and Germans as the actual invading armies), engaged in such ambitious operations. The outcome has always been the same, the Western invading armies has always retreated after an almost victorious advance, encircled in a way, not so much by the actual Russian army but by the fierce winter in the heart of "mother Russia". In both circumstances we have literary memoirs that have come to us. The first and most emblematic one, belonging to the Napoleonic invasion, is that of Leo Tolstoy, whom, in "War and Peace" "infiltrates" one of the Russian aristocrats in the retreat of the French emperor's army. The Russian character, Count Pyotr Bezukhov, expands the empathy of the reader towards both a French lieutenant and another Russian soldier of poor origins who was forced to be a soldier. The reader is literally set into both characters' "military boots" and cannot but feel a human compassion for the two fighting parts, both, as Tolstoy repeatedly claims, only puppets of inevitable forces.

A second memoir, this time belonging to Hitler's Operation Barbarossa, wants an Italian mountain Sargent Mario Rigoni Stern, to account on his own experience of the retreat. Aside from being astonished of the correctness of such soldiers in both defending, attacking but mostly allowing the Russian enemies to pick their wounded companions, soon the reader starts feeling, throughout the account of the retreat, a great compassion for the Russian folk, the much propaganda hated Bolsheviks. In one episode the Italian Sargent even ends up sharing a meal in a "isba" with two other Russian soldiers, this, in the middle of the last and decisive fights to get off the encirclement. In both cases, a great feature of literature based on real experiences is show, namely that of replacing the prejudices which keep growing in the hearts of humans consuming mass media, with pure human compassion. If the compassion is then addressed mostly towards humble and innocent characters, Tolstoy gives us also another great lesson, which wants also the powerful characters, the Napoleons and the Hitlers to be also carrier of, again, an inevitable historical happening which they cannot but second. In this respect we may ask what is the source of this dangerous movements and consider whether, in fact, as McLuhan claims they relate to the insertion of new forms of mass media technology in society and how art alone can alleviate their impact.