The symbolization of the fragmented plot structure in Ludmila Ulitskaya's novels

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The reception of Ludmila Ulitskaya's oeuvre in Russia is ambivalent. While the author's works are extremely popular with readers and sell in huge numbers both in Russia and abroad, Russian literary critics often receive them with a degree of skepticism. A general opinion is expressed by the well-known critic Galina Yuzefovich in connection with *Lestnitsa Iakova* (2015a; Eng. trans. *Jacob's Ladder*, 2019*)*: "it is impossible to escape the impression that you are sitting in the kitchen (well, at most in a café) with your girlfriend, and she is telling you the exciting, colorful, and tragic story of her family. It's a completely harmless pastime, even good for the soul, but somehow unnecessary, or what. It lacks weight. Something that, when seen, makes you feel a little ashamed" (2017, 171).[1] A specific objection often raised about Ulitskaya's novels concerns the excessive complexity and/or fragmentation of the novel form. The time structure of *Zelenyi shater* ([2010] 2015b; Eng. trans. *The Big Green Tent*, 2015c), for example, is judged by Natalia Ivanova to be "a medley, a mush" (2011), while Konstantin Kropotkin says that "the problems of the Kukotskys are unnecessarily stretched out over the course of a whole novel, and *Jacob's Ladder* is markedly heavy and far too long" (2018).

The role and perception of fragmentation and wholeness, as is well known, varies from one cultural period to another:

> In some epochs, the fragmentary formulation of thought testifies to its powerful rationalism – its all-embracing, universal, almost axiomatic character; in other epochs, on the contrary, fragmentation expresses the complete opposite of a universal view of the world, the unknowability of phenomena, the impossibility of coming into possession of a detailed map of a fragmented and disjointed reality […]. (Smirnova 2021, 34)

On this basis, the history of literature can also be described in terms of the alternating dominance of the quest for fragmentation vs. wholeness, and the quest for fragmentation certainly seems to be a prominent trend in 20th century literature.

At the same time, fragmentation and wholeness cannot be thought of as merely opposing, or largely mutually exclusive, principles. Their contradiction can and has been resolved in Yuri Lotman's theoretical works. In his very first pioneering work, *Lektsii po struktural'noi poetike* (Lectures on structural poetics, [1964] 1994), Lot-

man stated that the work of art is a "unified, multifaceted, functioning structure" that recreates reality, "as a both modelling and semiotic phenomenon" (29). The basic premise of Lotman's early works is that the work of art, as a model, replaces reality in a simplified form and can be broken down into levels and smaller units, while functioning semiotically as an iconic sign, i.e., it refers as a whole to the reality with which it has a motivated relationship. This duality of the work of art is reflected in the basic principle of the functioning of culture in the later concept of the semiosphere. Based on the results of brain research, Lotman introduces a system-wide opposition related to the different functioning of the two cerebral hemispheres: the *discrete* (segmented) and the *continuous* information processing/text generating mechanisms. While the two together form a unified system (what Lotman calls personality), in the texts produced by the former (discrete) the meaning is the sum of the separate signals, in the other (continuous) type of texts the meaning cannot be broken down into the separate meanings of the signals (1999, 46). This dual yet unified mechanism becomes the minimum condition of the functioning of culture in Lotman's definition. This mode of operation is the basis for the equivalence of human intellect, text, and culture.

In this context, in principle, any literary work can be described as a simultaneous manifestation of discrete and continuous text generating mechanisms. In what follows, I will attempt to show the simultaneous operation of discrete and continuous text generating mechanisms in the structural features of Ulitskaya's three major novels – *Daniel' Shtain, perevodchik* (2006; Eng. trans. *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*, 2011), *The Big Green Tent* and *Jacob's Ladder* – in the context of the Lotman's concept of the semiosphere.

The fragmentary structure of the three novels, consisting of discrete units, is fully in line with the 20th century trend which is manifested in the disintegration of the large prose forms, the fragmentation of the genre of the novel into shorter genres. The above-mentioned critiques essentially reflect on this fragmentary structure and ignore the continuous text-generating mechanism, which is manifested in the symbolic processes that ensure the unity of the plot fragments. These processes also have an important role in Ulitskaya's works, though they are less visible on the surface of the plot. As they have received considerably less attention in criticism and academic literature, I focus primarily on them in my study.

THE FRAGMENTATION OF THE PLOT STRUCTURE

The discrete text generating mechanism works in a similar way in all three works: the articulation of space and time in different ways results in a highly fragmented plot. The most common form of structuring is the alternation of episodes in the life of one hero with events in the lives of many other heroes. This can happen on the same timeline, as in the case of the three central heroes of *The Big Green Tent*, especially in the second half of the plot, when, after finishing school, Ilya, Sanya and Mikha are separated and the events of their lives are described in turn, interspersed with those of several minor characters. In the Jacob novel, the episodes of Nora and Jacob's story unfold on two parallel timelines (first and last thirds of the 20th century), alternating

between the two. In the Daniel novel, the alternation of events in the different life stories is usually accompanied by an alternation of timelines: Daniel's life story is divided into episodes linked to different periods in the lives of characters of different ages. Timelines and their associated locations may alternate within a hero's life, disrupting the linear sequence, or shorter or longer sections may be left out of the linear life story.

The fragmentation is also reinforced by the fact that the protagonist is not a single figure in any of the three novels: Nora is as important a character in *Jacob's Ladder* as Jacob; a minor character becomes the protagonist for the duration of a section of the plot in *The Big Green Tent*,[2] and the actual protagonists often appear only as episodic characters in the lives of other characters, as Daniel Stein, for example, in the life of Ewa Manukyan.

The Daniel novel is a unique phenomenon in terms of fragmentation, insofar as it is not only the result of the articulation of space and time. The plot of the work is composed of a number of non-fiction texts, written in different periods, locations and languages, and belonging to different textual subjects, some of which are linked to specific characters, and others are impersonal quasi-documents. Their juxtaposition mimics the work of a historian trying to reconstruct certain events or the life stories of historical figures from various sources.

In the case of the text types[3] connected to specific persons, interactions such as correspondence and transcripts of recorded conversations predominate, which may form smaller blocks within the plot. However, the text units themselves, typically linking only two persons, are largely isolated from each other: they are not linked at all or only indirectly to other characters not involved. This is even more the case for impersonal documents,[4] which, since their textual subject is not identifiable, can only be loosely connected to the other textual units. The isolation of the different text units that make up each of the plot fragments is reinforced by the lack of a unified narrative perspective and voice; even Ewa Manukyan, who comes close to a narrative role, does not have access to the overwhelming majority of the characters and their texts. All in all, the structure of the plot in this work is a puzzle: the reader has to piece together a picture of the protagonist Daniel Stein from the separate text units.

THE SYMBOLIZATION OF THE PLOT STRUCTURE
DANIEL STEIN, INTERPRETER

The link between the isolated fragments of the plot on the thematic level is, naturally, first and foremost the person of the protagonist, whose life path at certain points directly or indirectly intersects with the life paths of the majority of the characters. The figure of Daniel Stein himself, while his life is divided into discrete units, symbolically represents the principle of continuity: he acts as a mediator and a link not only between languages but also between religions, nationalities and family members, as has been pointed out in academic literature.[5]

The symbolic meaning of continuity can also be identified in the segmentation of the macrostructure: the novel is divided into five large sections, which can be linked to *The General Epistle of James* in the New Testament. Ulitskaya's protagonist

is striving for the revival of James' church, and the structure of the novel with its five large parts represents the fivefold division of James' epistle. As József Goretity puts it in his article:

> It would require a long study of its own to show how Ulitskaya, in the *five* parts of her novel *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*, develops, embedded in stories, resurfacing again and again like an underground stream, and shown from different points of view, all the major themes of the *five* parts of the general epistle of James in the New Testament, such as the usefulness of trials, the origin of sin, the impartiality of Christian faith, the worthlessness of faith without action, the sins of the tongue, the primacy of heavenly wisdom over human pseudo-wisdom, the condemnation of partisanship, the caution against conceit and the warning against swearing. […] In other words, Ulitskaya's book is a 21st century novelistic unfolding of James' letter,[6] both in content and structure. (2009, 27)

On the other hand, the fivefold division of the macro-structure of Daniel's novel is symbolized by the work's motto, taken from the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more then ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue" (1 Cor 14:18–19). In the light of this detail, the five structural units of the novel are given the status of a single word, i.e., the plot fragments that make up each section are treated as symbolically unified.

From the point of view of the duality of the discrete and continuous text-generating mechanisms, it is particularly significant that the context of the excerpt chosen as the novel's motto is the opposition between the individual and the larger unit (the congregation): the language user's appeal to God or to the people. In the case of the former, the individual builds only himself and "speaks in tongues" which are incomprehensible to others, while in the case of the latter, the teaching appeals to reason and reaches people. The significance of this dichotomy is indisputable in Ulitskaya's poetics, but here it is of primary interest as the continuous text-generating mechanism. This endeavor to overcome separation and unify the plot fragments also appears in the symbolization of the structure from the vantage point of the motto.

In addition to the New Testament texts, the fivefold division of the macrostructure is also symbolically linked to the most important part of the Old Testament, the five books of Moses. Using Alexander Men's interpretation of the Old Testament as a starting point, Galina Pavlovna Mikhailova draws formal and thematic parallels between certain parts of the Daniel novel and the relevant books of Moses (2015). In this way, the underlying theme of the work, that is, the close relationship between the Jewish and Christian religions and the idea of continuity and unity, is symbolically encoded in the macro-structure of the novel, which can be interpreted in both Old and New Testament contexts.

THE BIG GREEN TENT

Less radically fragmented than the Daniel novel is the plot of *The Big Green Tent*. It has a narrower space, a less fragmented temporal structure, and a unified narrative voice to ensure the unity of the text. Yet the academic literature on the work

has suggested that it is not a novel but a series of separate short stories.[7] This idea is based on the fact that the chapters, each with its own title, are more or less isolated and self-contained plot fragments, each representing an episode or a stage in the life of a different hero. Most of the characters who temporarily occupy the role of protagonist within the fragments have no connection with the characters in the other fragments, and their story has no bearing on the fate of the three central figures.

The fragmented nature of the plot is counterbalanced by a system of characters structured as a social network. The heroes' relationships form a network that corresponds to the "six degrees of separation" model first proposed in Frigyes Karinthy's story "Láncszemek" ("Chains", 1929) and further developed by Manfred Kochen and Stanley Milgram in the 1960s.[8] According to this model, in the world of the narrative, it is possible to move from one minor character to another or to the central hero in a few steps.[9]

In addition to this type of interconnectedness of the heroes, as in the Daniel novel, the symbolic layer of the macrostructure also functions according to the principle of continuity, ensuring the unity of the plot. The 12th chapter out of 30 in the work is the "The Upper Register", whose location thus coincides with the point of the golden section, and this in itself indicates the prominence of the chapter on the wedding of Liza and Boris.

An identifiable prototype is behind the figure of the bride, Liza, in the person of the still performing Elizaveta Leonskaia (Latynina 2011). In addition to her fame as a pianist, Leonskaia was one of the friends of Joseph Brodsky, and the poet dedicated several poems to her and she was the last person to meet the poet before his death (this is recalled in the last scene of Ulitskaya's novel). The figure of the elderly pianist who performs at the wedding is also linked to a prototype: Maria Yudina, Stalin's favorite pianist, appears in the episode. In one of the most legendary episodes in Yudina's biography, she donated her fee for a Mozart sonata she recorded for Stalin in a single night to a monastery asking them to pray for Stalin's salvation. In this way, the prologue (Stalin's death) and the epilogue (Brodsky's death) of the novel are symbolically linked in the wedding episode through the figures of the two pianists, i.e., structurally the beginning and end point of the section are treated as symbolically unified.

In addition to the symbolic unity of the macrostructure, the individual plot fragments are also organized into smaller structural units. The chapter "The Upper Register", for example, is not only linked to the prologue and the epilogue, but also has a specific reflective relationship with the chapter "King Arthur's Wedding". The latter (which precedes the wedding of Liza and Boris in the order of the chapters) is a travestied representation of the elegant event among the musical elite of the capital, described largely from the point of view of Sanya. The wedding of one of the characters of the episode, nicknamed King Arthur, is seen from the point of view of Ilya and Olga. The setting is a neglected house in a suburban settlement near Moscow; the female figure, named Lisa, is not the bride but the ex-wife who is about to marry her own sister to Arthur; her name, which sounds like a distorted version of Liza, is in fact a nickname she received because of her nose. The physiological details de-

picted in the episode are characteristic of grotesque realism in the Bakhtinian sense, which extend to the depiction of Lisa's emigration.

The grotesque wedding episode, a travestied representation of specific elements of the musician's wedding, is also in parallel with the final chapter of the work. In the chapter entitled "Ende gut", Sanya, like Arthur's Lisa, leaves the country by a sham marriage. The ironic description of the meeting and marriage in Moscow with the "fictitious" American bride Debby is both a counterpoint to the spiritual closeness of Sanya and Liza, the pianist and the literary equivalent of one of the most distinguished musical techniques of Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances*, the fusion of American jazz sounds with Russian folk melodies.[10] Overall, the symbolization of structure in the novel *The Big Green Tent* acts against the fragmentation of the plot, i.e. the discrete and the continuous text generating mechanisms are both active.

JACOB'S LADDER

The fragmentation in *Jacob's Ladder* is created in part by the two parallel timelines and in part by the omission of major periods within each timeline. This is reflected in the table of contents, which, as in the Daniel novel, uses chapter headings with year numbers to help orient the reader.[11] The fragmentation of the heroes' lives is further reinforced in Jacob's timeline by the alternation of narrative passages written in the first person singular – diary entries and letters – and narrative passages in the third person singular.[12]

The two timelines are linked on several levels. The thematic link is provided by the kinship between the two protagonists, Nora's involvement in the organization of her grandmother's funeral and her only encounter with her grandfather. Structurally, we can speak of a matrioshka formation: the life story of the grandparents, Jacob and Marusya, is described based on the family archives and within the framework of Nora's life. Certain life events of Nora's parents are outlined between the two planes, partly in the archive material and partly in Nora's present. At the same time, Nora herself only becomes acquainted with the letters and documents of her grandparents towards the end of her life's journey, which means that from her point of view – as opposed to the reader's – Jacob's life story appears as a unified whole. As a result, the position of the heroine, who is already looking back on her own life practically from the endpoint, is extremely close to the author's position, which looks at both life paths from the outside and connects them.

The symbolic link between the two planes is provided by a sentence quoted from Shakespeare's *King Lear,* which is also included among the chapter titles. Despite the large number of references to literary works in both timelines of the plot, Shakespeare's tragedy is the only one which both Jacob and Nora reflect on. In 1981, Tengiz proposes to Nora that they stage *King Lear* together. The starting point for Tengiz's interpretation is a line at the climax of Shakespeare's drama in the storm scene: "unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings!" (Ulitskaya 2015a, 199) Tengiz first quotes the excerpt in the original English, and then in Pasternak's transla-

tion. A few chapters later, Jacob reflects on an earlier translation of the same two sentences (which preceded Pasternak's), writing in a letter to Marusya dated 1912 that he had read *King Lear* and offering his own translation of the passage highlighted by Tengiz.

While designing the stage set for the play, Nora also uses the Shakespeare quote to interpret her own life situation, placing particular importance on the stripping down of the "self". In the planned final scene, the stripped-down, "bare man" is depicted through Christian symbolism: the ekphrasis of the stage's final scene represents the canonical elements of the icon of *Preobrazhenie* (Transfiguration): Lear's attendants are identified as disciples of Jesus, and, in the icon-painting tradition, the greatest emphasis is on the "flameless light" that Jesus radiates and that blinds the disciples. "Edgar, the Jester, and Kent watch them from below, like Jesus' disciples at the moment of his Transfiguration. The light is unbearable" (Ulitskaya 2019).[13] In the final chapter of the novel, it is on the feast of Jesus' transfiguration that Nora learns about the dossier on her grandfather kept in the KGB archives and is confronted with her father's actions. On the way home, while listening to the festive hymn in church, she recalls the line from Pasternak's poem "August", evoking the Transfiguration ("As always, a light without flame shines on this day from Mount Tabor…"; Ulitskaya 2019),[14] and it is then that she is inspired to write the novel that Jacob wanted to write. It is the symbolism of the transfiguration that connects the two protagonists of the novel and their respective timelines in the plot structure, and at the same time it reveals the human ideal common to the two protagonists and its sacral-mythical and literary source.

The link between Jacob and Yurik, who do not meet in the "reality" of the world depicted in the work, is specifically related to the symbolization of the macro-structure of the plot. Yet their figures can be set in parallel, since Yurik, too, although in a completely different musical genre, is trained as a musician from childhood, but later, like Jacob, his vocation is not exclusively or primarily music. Yurik also proves to be Jacob's heir in the sense that his son is the "new" Jacob, whose birth follows directly after the chapter that ends with the death of the elder Jacob.

Jacob dies suddenly, and Asya, returning home, finds on his desk several notes and books he has begun, including the score of Händel's *Messiah* oratorio. But Händel's work appears much earlier, at a turning point in Yurik's life. At Yurik's first choral rehearsal at the American music school, the conductor analyzes a part of *Messiah*, the choral movement entitled "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the Sin of the World" (John 1:29). In addition to the symbolic meaning of the sentence (sacrifice, a starting point on the road to redemption) and its context, which can be clearly related to Jacob's life journey, the *Messiah* is also in parallel with the macro-structure of Ulitskaya's novel, as the number of its movements is equal to the number of chapters in the novel. The oratorio's threefold structure is represented by the threefold life story of Jacob – Yurik – "new" Jacob, which thus encompasses the 100-year period of the plot and ensures its openness towards the future (the possibility of redemption).

In addition to the specific connection with the Jacob novel, there are several parallels in Ulitskaya's oeuvre with different aspects of the *Messiah* oratorio. The *Messiah* is the first oratorio that encompassed not only certain episodes in the life of Jesus, but his entire life, which is in itself significant in Ulitskaya's poetics, which treats the life journey as a basic unit of the hero's portrayal. The genre-specific features of the oratorio, with its different musical forms (by mode of performance: solo singing, choir, orchestra, etc., by musical genres: recitativo, chorale, etc.), movements that can stand alone and be performed without any connecting narrative sections,[15] linked by the person of the "hero" on the one hand and by a distinctive musical language on the other, are the closest musical counterpart to the above-described plot structure that Ulitskaya employs in her novel *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*.[16] This is present in a more or less latent way throughout Ulitskaya's oeuvre, but in the Daniel novel a feature that is also characteristic of *Messiah* is of particular significance: the organic interconnection of the worlds of the Old and New Testaments. It is also in the Daniel novel that the ground-breaking characteristic of the *Messiah* is present: namely, that it uses passages exclusively from the Bible, the only authentic source on the subject, to present the sacred story in a profane form for a profane audience.[17] In Ulitskaya's work, on a clearly different level of profanation, questions of theology and church policy related to the protagonist are presented in a markedly profane context, using (quasi-)authentic source texts related to the subject.

CONCLUSION

In summary, Ulitskaya's three novels amply demonstrate the combined operation of the discrete and continuous text-generating mechanisms described by Yuri Lotman. The effect of the former can be observed in the fragmentation of the plot structure, which represents the fragmented nature of the human life journey and the impossibility of grasping its completeness, while it also models a given social intersection through the totality of the life journeys depicted. Less perceptible on the surface of the plot is the continuous text-generating mechanism which, through the application of various cultural codes, biblical, literary, musical, etc. allusions, both symbolizes the fragmentary structure and fuses it into a coherent whole.

Translated from Hungarian by Kristóf Hegedűs

NOTES

[1] Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Russian and Hungarian are by K.H.

[2] See, for example, the chapter "Poor Rabbit" (Ulitskaya 2015c, 370–394), whose protagonist (with a complete biography) is an episode character, the psychiatrist Dulin, who appears nowhere else.

[3] Some examples, selected on the basis of the chapter titles, with no structural or thematic connection (part and chapter number in brackets): "1959–83, Boston. From Isaak Gantman's Notes" (I/3), "September 1965, Haifa. Letter from Hilda Engel to her mother" (II/1), "June 1969, Haifa. Sermon of Brother Daniel at Pentecost" (II/30), "March 1994, Kfar Shaul, Psychiatric Hospital. From a con-

versation between Deborah Shimes and Doctor Freidin" V/3), "14 December 1995, Environs of Qumran. Church of Elijah by the Spring July 2006, Moscow. Letter from Ludmila Ulitskaya to Elena Kostioukovitch" (V/21) (Ulitskaya 2011).

[4] Also some examples: "August 1986, Paris. Letter from Paweł Kociński to Ewa Manukyan. 1956, Lwów. Photocopies from the NKVD archives" (I/11), "1984, Haifa. From 'Readers' Letters', Haifa News" (III/9), "From the Biography of Pope John Paul II" (III/48), "September 1992, Haifa. Wall Newspaper in the Parish House" (IV/29), "Psychiatrist's Conclusion" (V/4, 5) (Ulitskaya 2015c).

[5] Jasmina Vojvodić (2011) sees the essence of Daniel Stein in the fact that the hero is always in a boundary situation, constantly violating the civic, social, political, etc. rules of the outside world, while Benjamin M. Sutcliffe (2009) highlights tolerance as the connecting force in the figure of Daniel Stein.

[6] Here the author refers to the fragmented nature of the plot structure, which he elucidates with the metaphor of "a handful of pearls", following the tradition of interpreting the Epistle of James.

[7] Cf. Daria Evgen'evna Tishchenko: "Structurally, the work resembles a collection of short stories in which the author employs a modern non-linear narrative strategy. *The Big Green Tent* mixes the characteristics of the long and short prose forms, giving the reader the opportunity to decide about the manner of reading" (2014, 190).

[8] See Stanley Milgram's small-world experiment (1967). The concept is also discussed in the novel in relation to the academic Sakharov: "Ilya's circle of friends and acquaintances was enormous. He even boasted a bit about the variety of his connections, and joked that if you didn't include the Chinese, common laborers, and peasants, he knew everyone in the world, either personally or through someone else. That's exactly how it was with Academician Sakharov. A certain Valery, an old acquaintance of Ilya's, worked closely with the academician: both of them were members of the Committee for Human Rights. After a few phone calls back and forth, Sakharov agreed to meet with Ayshe" (Ulitskaya 2015c). "Круг друзей и знакомых Ильи был огромным. Илья даже несколько кичился своими разнообразными связями, посмеивался: если не считать китайцев, рабочих и крестьян, все люди в мире через одного человека знакомы. С академиком Сахаровым оказалось именно так: некий Валерий, давний знакомый Ильи, был тесно связан с академиком, оба входили в Комитет прав человека" (Ulitskaya 2015b, 567). For a detailed analysis of the interconnected system of characters in the work, see Szabó 2022, 34–61.

[9] See, for example, the protagonist of the chapter "Poor Rabbit", Dulin, who is linked to the central heroes by three connections, registered at different points in the plot and not necessarily perceived by the reader: Edvin Vinberg, Dulin's elderly colleague, dies next to Ilya on a plane carrying emigrants to Western Europe, and Vinberg's gastroenterologist wife is Tamara's supervisor. General Nichiporuk, sentenced to compulsory psychiatric care by Dulin, was treated by Liza's army doctor grandfather during World War II, and in the present day of the plot, he returns the general's stolen medals to the family.

[10] For a detailed analysis of the musical aspects of the novel, including the relationship with Rachmaninov's work, see Szabó 2022, 126–147.

[11] See, for example, these successive chapters, "From the Willow Chest–Biysk: Jacob's Letters (1934–1936)", "Letters from the Willow Chest: War (1942–1943)", "Fifth Try (2000–2009)", "Family Secrets (1936–1937)", "Variations on the Theme: Fiddler on the Roof (1992)", "With Mikhoels (1945–1948)" (Ulitskaya 2019, 395–478).

[12] In addition to these, Ulitskaya also uses, albeit in a smaller number, real and fictitious documents from the KGB archives.

[13] "Эдгар, Шут, Кент смотрят на них снизу, как ученики Христа в момент его Преображения. Свет нестерпимый" (Ulitskaya 2015a, 210).

[14] "Обыкновенно свет без пламени исходит в этот день с Фавора..." (Ulitskaya 2015a, 719). On the relationship between Ulitskaya's work and Pasternak's Zhivago poems, see Szabó 2022, 163–177.

[15] Cf.: "what makes this work [Messiah] unique is that all of Handel's other sacred oratorios are narratives. They tell a story: Saul, Belshazzar, Samson, Jephthah. This one doesn't tell a story. What it does is it assumes that the listener already knows the story and invites the listener to join the composer on the librettist in a meditation on light and dark, often referred to life and death" (Gant 2021, 47:34–47:59).

[16] In Ulitskaya's works, it is not uncommon to find a structure organized according to musical principles, either in the macro- or micro-structure of the plot, cf. Szabó 2021.

[17] Cf. "The oratorio is not intended for liturgical use, and it may be performed in both churches and concert halls" (Britannica 2019).

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The symbolization of the fragmented plot structure in Ludmila Ulitskaya's novels

Fragmented plot. Symbolization of structure. Ludmila Ulitskaya. *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*. *The Big Green Tent*. *Jacob's Ladder*.

Ludmila Ulitskaya is considered by many to be a master of short fiction, and her novels are sometimes seen as an unsuccessful attempt to transcend the principles of the short forms. This article argues that *Daniel Stein, Interpreter* (2006; Eng. trans. 2011), *The Big Green Tent* (2010; Eng. trans. 2015) and *Jacob's Ladder* (2015; Eng. trans. 2019) are a special type of novel based on a duality that Yuri Lotman identified as the basic principle of the functioning of the semiosphere. The plot structure of Ulitskaya's novels is, on the one hand, *discrete*, that is, manifestly and strongly fragmented in space and time. On the other hand, however, it is *continuous*, that is, clearly unified through trans-symbolization of the structure, which is less perceptible on the surface. These non-explicit structural connections gain symbolic attributes and play a fundamental role in ensuring the unity of the plot in three of Ulitskaya's works.

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