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Chronology

1724 Pyotr Tolstoy (great-great-great grandfather) given hereditary title of Count by Tsar Peter the Great

1821 Death of Prince Nikolay Volkonsky, Tolstoy's grandfather, at Yasnaya Polyana, Tula Province, 130 miles south-west of Moscow

1822 Marriage of Count Nikolay Tolstoy and Princess Marya Volkonskaya

1828 28 August (Old Style) Birth of fourth son, Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy, at Yasnaya Polyana

1830 Death of mother

1832 The eldest, Nikolay, informs his brothers that the secret of earthly happiness is inscribed on a green stick, buried at Yasnaya Polyana (Tolstoy later buried there)

1836 Nikolay Gogol's *Government Inspector*

1837 Death of Alexander Pushkin in duel

1840 Mikhail Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*

1841 Death of Lermontov in duel

1842 Gogol's *Dead Souls*

1844 Enters Kazan University, reads Oriental languages

1845 Transfers to Law after failing examinations. Dissolute lifestyle: drinking, visits to prostitutes

1846 Fyodor Dostoyevsky's 'Poor Folk'

1847 Inherits estate of Yasnaya Polyana. Recovering from gonorrhoea, compiles scheme for self-perfection. Leaves university without completing studies, 'on grounds of ill health and domestic circumstances'

1848–50 In Moscow and St Petersburg, debauchery and gambling, large debts. Studies music

1850 Ivan Turgenev's *A Month in the Country*

1851 Travels to the Caucasus with Nikolay, who is serving in the

1852 Enters the army as a cadet (junker); based mainly in the Cossack station of Staroglad Kovskaya. Sees action against the Chechens, and narrowly escapes capture. Death of Gogol. Turgenev’s *Sketches from a Hunter’s Album*.

1853 Turkey declares war on Russia.

‘The Raid’

1854 France and England declare war on Russia. Crimean War starts Commissioned, serves on Danube front. November: transferred at own request to Sevastopol, then under siege by allied forces.

1855 Death of Nicholas I; accession of Alexander II. In action until the fall of Sevastopol in August. Gains celebrity with ‘Sevastopol in December’ and the following sketches ‘Sevastopol in May’, ‘Sevastopol in August’ (1856), ‘Memoirs of a Billiard Marker’, ‘The Woodfelling’.

1856 Peace signed between Russia, Turkey, France and England.


1858 Long-term relationship with peasant woman on estate, Aksinya Bazynina, begins. ‘Albert’.

1859 Goncharov’s *Oblomov*; Turgenev’s *Home of the Gentry*. Founds primary school at Yasnaya Polyana. ‘Three Deaths’, *Family Happiness*.

1860 Death of Nikolay from tuberculosis at Hyeres (France). Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the House of the Dead* (1860–61). Turgenev’s *On the Eve*.


1862 Turgenev’s *Father and Sons*. Starts a magazine at Yasnaya Polyana on education for the peasants; abandoned after less than a year. Police raid on Yasnaya Polyana. Considers emigrating to England and writes protest to the Tsar. Marries Sofya Andreyevna Behrs (b. 1844).

1863 Polish rebellion.

Birth of first child, Sergey (Tolstoy and his wife were to have thirteen children – nine boys and four girls – of whom five died in childhood). Begins work on a novel ‘The Decembrists’, which was later abandoned, but developed into *War and Peace*.

‘Polikushka’, *The Cossacks*.

1865 Nikolay Leskov’s ‘Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District’.

First part of *War and Peace* (titled 1805).

1866 Attempted assassination of Tsar Alexander II. Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*.

1867 Turgenev’s *Smoke*.

Visits Borodino in search of material for battle scene in *War and Peace*.

1868 Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*.

1869 Publication of *War and Peace* completed.


Dostoevsky’s *Devils*.


1873 Begins *Anna Karenina*. Raises funds during famine in Bashkiriya, where he has bought an estate. Growing obsession with problems of death and religion; temptation to commit suicide.

1874 Much occupied with educational theory.

1875 Beginning of active revolutionary movement.


1877 Turgenev’s *Virgin Soil*. Journal publication of *Anna Karenina* completed.

1877–8 Russo–Turkish War.

1878 Reconciliation with Turgenev, who visits him at Yasnaya.
CHRONOLOGY

Polyana. Works on 'The Decembrists' and again abandons it. Works on Confession (completed 1882, but banned by the religious censor and published in Geneva in 1884).

1879 Dostoyevsky's Brothers Karamazov

1880 Works on Critique of Dogmatic Theology

1881 Assassination of Tsar Alexander II. With ascension of Alexander III, the government returns to reactionary policies

Death of Dostoyevsky

1882 Student riots in St Petersburg and Kazan universities. Jewish pogroms and repressive measures against minorities

Religious works, including new translation of the Gospels. Begins 'Death of Ivan Ilyich' and What Then Must We Do?. Studies Hebrew

1883 Deathbed letter from Turgenev urging Tolstoy not to abandon his art

1884 Family relations strained, first attempt to leave home. 'What I Believe' banned

Collected works published by his wife

1885 Tension with his wife over new beliefs. Works closely with Vladoimir Chertkov, with whom (and others) he founds a publishing house, The Intermediary, to produce edifying literature for the common folk. Many popular stories written 1885–6, including 'What Men Live By', 'Where Love Is, God Is', 'Strider'

1886 Walks from Moscow to Yasnaya Polyana in five days. Works on land during the summer. Denounced as a heretic by Archbishop of Kherson

Death of Ivan Ilyich, 'How Much Land Does a Man Need?', What Then Must We Do?

1887 Meets Leskov

On Life

1888 Chekhov's The Steppe

Removes meat, alcohol and tobacco. Growing friction between his wife and Chertkov. The Power of Darkness, banned in 1886, performed in Paris

1889 Finishes 'Kreutzer Sonata'. Begins Resurrection (works on it for ten years)

1890 'Kreutzer Sonata' banned, though on appeal by his wife to the Tsar publication was permitted in Collected Works

1891 Convinced that personal profits from writing are immoral, renounces copyright on all works published after 1881 and all future works. His family thus suffers financially, though his wife retains copyright in all the earlier works. Helps to organize famine relief in Ryazan province. Attacks smoking and alcohol in 'Why Do Men Stupefy Themselves?'

1892 Organizes famine relief. Fruits of Enlightenment (published 1891) produced in Maly Theatre, Moscow

1893 Finishes 'Kingdom of God Is Within You'

1894 Accession of Tsar Nicholas II. Strikes in St Petersburg

What Then Must We Do? banned

1895 Meets Chekhov. Power of Darkness produced in Maly Theatre, Moscow

'Master and Man'

1896 Chekhov's The Seagull

Sees production of Hamlet and King Lear at Hermitage Theatre, severely critical of Shakespeare

1897 Appeals to authorities on behalf of Dukhobors, a pacifist religious sect, to whom permission is granted to emigrate to Canada

What is Art?

1898 Formation of Social Democratic Party. Dreyfus Affair

Works for famine relief

1899 Widespread student riots

Serial publication of Resurrection (in book form in 1900)

1900 Meets Maxim Gorky, whom he calls a 'real man of the people'

1901 Foundation of Socialist Revolutionary Party

Excommunicated from Orthodox Church for writing works 'repugnant to Christ and the Church'. Seriously ill, convalesces in Crimea; visitors include Chekhov and Gorky

1902 Finishes 'What is Religion?'. Writes to Tsar Nicholas II on evils of autocracy and ownership of property

1903 Protests against Jewish pogroms in Kishinev

'After the Ball'

1904 Russian fleet destroyed in Tsushima Straits. Assassination of V. K. Plehve, Minister of the Interior

Death of Chekhov

Death of second-eldest brother Sergey. Pamphlet on Russo-Japanese war published in England

'Shakespeare and the Drama'

1905 Attempted revolution in Russia (attacks all sides involved). Potemkin mutiny. S.Y. Witte becomes Prime Minister

Anarchical publicist pamphlets

Introduction to Chekhov's 'Darling'
Introduction

Although *War and Peace* has often been described as the greatest novel ever written, Tolstoy once claimed it wasn’t a novel at all. Henry James, giving the title as *Peace and War*, called it a fluid pudding and included it in a list of ‘large, loose baggy monsters’. By contrast, it has also been compared to *The Iliad* in scope and technique, and Prince Dmitri Mirsky, the distinguished émigré historian of Russian literature, called it ‘the most important work in the whole of Russian realistic fiction’.1

Tolstoy’s protestation that it wasn’t a novel had a particular purpose. He wanted his readers to expect something broader and deeper than the romances they were used to finding in fiction. There would be no single hero and heroine, no straightforward system of exposition, crisis and resolution, no orthodox ending. It was a book in which Tolstoy made up new rules as it expanded: a society novel that turned into a family story, only to grow into a historical chronicle and a mighty epic that was underwritten by a deep interest in individual destinies and intimate human detail. It was a fifteen-year tranche of human experience (1805–20), fictional and real, located in Russian society in an age of critical importance for Europe as a whole, and Tolstoy made an unprecedented attempt to bring together the widest possible range of interests – personal, social, psychological and historical. But most important is his instinctive skill as a teller of stories and creator of characters. The lasting quality of *War and Peace* lies in its compelling narrative and fascinating people, imagined and historical. Perhaps *Peace and War* might have been a more appropriate title, because only about a third of the action takes place on or near the battlefield. Anyone coming to this novel for the first time can be assured of one thing: you are going to enjoy some very good stories.

But first we need to sketch in some background. Tolstoy begins his novel by throwing an evening party to welcome his characters and his
readers. The year is 1805 and Napoleon's aggressive actions, especially the recent seizure of Genoa and Lucca, seem likely to threaten Russia's western borders. The huge and humbling Pierre Bezukhov and the neat, self-assured Prince Andrey Bolkonsky are guests, and their maturation and misadventures will form the main interest of the novel. At first the two young men have everything going for them. Pierre inherits a huge fortune and marries well. The efficient Andrey will find success in all that he does as a landowner and soldier. But both of these gifted and fortunate men will make many mistakes, feel constantly unhappy with the course of their lives, take appallingly bad decisions and have to live with the consequences. The same applies to the leading female character, Natasha, whose progress from childhood to full maturity is so convincingly depicted that she has been described as 'certainly the most wonderfully made character in any novel.'

The strength of *War and Peace* is in the weakness of its characters. The novel is a detailed casebook of human inadequacy and imperfection; so many avoidable errors are made that it will be a long time before contentment and equilibrium start to emerge, and for some of the characters new insight comes too late.

Oscar Wilde said that what made Russian writers' books 'so great is the pity they put in them'. They have seen life, tackled it and tried their best, and they know a truth that rarely declares itself, especially in stories that are meant for entertainment. It is this: virtually everyone—even people in advantageous or privileged circumstances—finds the living of life a worrying and difficult business most of the time. The novel takes us in rich detail through all the seven ages of man from childhood to old age, and explores their difficulties, all of which are played out under the gathering shadow of death, the one certainty. As another Russian writer, Boris Pasternak, concluded in the novel *Dr Zhivago*: 'Living life is not just a walk across a field.'

But there is more. Only a few of the 500 characters in the novel pause to think about the complex and difficult process by which human lives evolve, but Pierre and Andrey are never happier than when unhappily gnawing at the meanings, difficult choices and hidden possibilities that may or may not underlie human existence and searching for clues to make life better and easier. A series of vital questions is waiting for them and for the reader: What and where is happiness? How do you distinguish it from fun? How is it possible to live on in the sure and certain knowledge of death? Is the concept of God any help? What are the roles of fate and luck in human experience? How can a person find complete freedom? Are there any ultimate philosophical truths that we can rely on? What should you do with a human life?

But Tolstoy knows that you cannot spend all your time philosophizing. The sheer thrill of being alive, the excitement of surrendering to the moment and revelling in pleasure, are infectiously represented in a series of set pieces. Sometimes the occasion is exquisite enough to be the high point in an individual's life. It is hard to imagine Count Ilya Rostov ever being any happier than when he dances the 'Daniel Cooper' at home (Volume I, Part I, Chapter 17), unless it is when he proposes a toast to General Bagration at a lavish dinner that he has put on at the English Club with money he cannot afford to spend (II, I, 3). For senior soldiers there is the glorious opportunity to be noticed by an emperor; hence the obsequious behaviour of an elderly general before Tsar Alexander I (I, II, 3), and the suicidal rush into the River Viliya by a Polish general anxious to please Napoleon, which costs the lives of forty men but wins him a medal (III, I, 2). Even young Petya Rostov is borne away with mindless rapture at the mere sight of the Tsar (III, I, 21). By contrast, almost all of the younger characters find sublime happiness in falling in love, and at one point the entire Rostov household seems to be dizzy from it:

Love was in the air at the Rostovs' at this time, as it always is when there are very young and very charming girls around. Any young man arriving at their house and seeing those young girls' faces, so sensitive and always smiling (probably at their own good fortune) amid all the chasing and scurrying, and hearing all their frivolous girlish chatter, so good-natured, open to everything, brimming with hope, and their equally frivolous singing and music-making, enjoyed the same sensations of love-sickness and impending bliss that the young Rostovs were themselves enjoying. (II, I, 10)

There are many occasions for tears of joy. Dancing is one such: for example, Natasha's instinctive Russian dancing after the hunt (II, IV, 7) is a reminder of her father's happy evening with the Daniel Cooper, her own unspeakable delight at her first ball, whirling around with Prince Andrey (II, III, 16) and Denisov's amazing mazurka at Igel's (II, I, 12). It is useful to emphasize such bliss not least because Russian literature has a reputation for gloomy introspection which is only partly deserved. It gives the novel its most unusual quality, Tolstoy's ability to lead us through disappointment, frustration and tragedy without our bitterness or cynicism. He declares, against all odds, the goodness
INTRODUCTION

of living. This is the spirit of the whole novel, you will see it at its best in Volume II, Part IV – all thirteen chapters.

LIFE AND DEATH

_War and Peace_ was written during one of the few periods in Leo Tolstoy's life when he had a sense of tranquility and purpose. Superlatives are needed to describe him: a big, strong man with a formidable intellect, powerful emotions, and extraordinary qualities and defects that ran to extremes. He lived a long life, and left behind work that fills ninety large printed volumes, the biggest and richest individual contribution to the treasure-house of nineteenth-century Russian culture.

Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy was born in 1828 into the Russian aristocracy, at Yasnaya Polyana, 130 miles south-west of Moscow. His parents died when he was young, but he and his siblings grew up happily, cocooned by female relatives. At the age of sixteen, he entered the university at Kazan but failed his courses and returned to Yasnaya, which he had just inherited. By then, aged nineteen, he had contracted his first dose of venereal disease, a continuing risk during the following years of debauchery and gambling in Moscow and St Petersburg.

Tolstoy's largely autobiographical _Childhood_ was accepted by the _Contemporary_ in 1852, the first writing he had submitted for publication. Despite its modest aims and rather dry realism, it was popular and was followed by _Boyhood_ (1854) and _Youth_ (1857). Even greater success attended the three-part _Sevastopol in December, May and August_ (1855–6) – which presented his experiences and observations as an artillery officer while leading men under fire during the Crimean war (1854–6), and undermined the false glamour of warfare. He soon became well known in St Petersburg literary circles, though he found celebrity uncongenial and hurried back to Yasnaya.

Tolstoy was occupied with _War and Peace_ throughout the 1860s. The serious writing began in 1863, just as his first son was born. His wife Sonya (short form of Sofya Andreyevna) was only eighteen, and she bore him another twelve children. He devoted the 1870s to _Anna Karenina_, and despite his artistic and commercial success, he became obsessed by thoughts of his own mortality and tormented by a religious yearning that could not be reconciled with the activities of the Church, and he thought constantly about suicide; this spiritual crisis is minutely described in _A Confession_ (1879–9).

Eventually he came through it, but his life was radically changed.

LIFE AND LITERATURE

He now avoided society, living and working at Yasnaya Polyana, wearing a peasant's shirt and doing much manual work, he renounced writing, violence, stimulants of all kinds, including meat-eating, and he required impeccable moral standards of all. This was his new religion: the best of Jesus, without his church. His moral stance – especially his pacifism – attracted interest from all over the world, and Tolstoyan communities were formed in several countries by disciples. But he was impossible to live with. His lack of love and charity towards those closest to him, especially his wife, remains as a blot on his reputation. He did continue to write, including _The Death of Ivan Illyich_ (1886), _Resurrection_ (1899) and _Hadji Murat_ (1911), and a moving five-act tragedy of gruesome subject matter, _The Power of Darkness_ (1899).

But at the age of eighty-two Tolstoy, estranged from all his family except for one daughter, Alexandra, fled with her, for a monastery. He fell ill at a (now famous) railway junction, where he died. His body was interred at the top of a small ravine at Yasnaya, where as a small boy he had searched for a little green stick on which was supposedly inscribed a secret formula guaranteeing permanent happiness and brotherly love.
involvement in the abortive Decembrist uprising of 1825. Then Tolstoy pushed back in history to 1812, and finally to 1805: he would start when Napoleon, a self-appointed emperor, moved against the Austrian-Russian coalition. Tolstoy planned that events in 1825 and 1856 would form later volumes of a trilogy. But his main interest was in writing about the joys and misfortunes of aristocratic family life. Plans and drafts were adopted, revised, abandoned and replaced in profusion. In 1865 thirty-eight chapters were published in the Russian Messenger, and came out in book form the following year, under the title 1805; still at this stage only a relatively short work was envisaged. Later Tolstoy decided on a new title, All's Well That Ends Well, but as the historical and military interest developed this was reflected in the final title, adopted in March 1867. Sonya insisted on abandoning serial publication, for good financial reasons there was more money to be made from publishing (and republishing) in book form than from a journal - and the novel came out in six volumes in 1868 and 1869.

Tolstoy drew heavily on real-life sources. For military scenes, his extensive research, including memoirs, and his own first-hand experience guaranteed the sureness of his grip on the details of battle. For characters, his family contributed: his maternal grandfather, Nikolay Volkonsky, monster that he must have been, provided a prototype for Andrey's father; his own father for Nikolay Rostov; and his wife's sister, the impish Tanya, for Natasha. The dualism in Tolstoy's own personality is reflected in Andrey and Pierre - intellect versus spirit, discipline versus laxity, stiff pride versus spontaneity and generosity. As the Russian novelist and critic Dmitri Merezhovsky said: 'The artistic work of Leo Tolstoy is at bottom nothing less than one tremendous diary, kept for fifty years, one endless, explicit confession.'

Another example can be seen in the popular political view that when the British Prime Minister retired from office in 2007 he did so having secured peace in Ireland after generations of bloody conflict, and that this was perhaps the most important part of his 'legacy'. Mr Blair pulled the levers: peace resulted. Do you believe it? Tolstoy tells us that this is an unsophisticated view of how history works. It is probably truer to say that Mr Blair happened to be in the right place (and thus eligible for credit) at a time when all the multitudinous circumstances leading up to the final peace settlement (war-weariness among them) came together to end the conflict for good. It could have been the previous prime minister, or the next one, or somebody else; it happened to be Tony Blair.

These are the kind of ideas that Tolstoy advances in his epilogue. His general purpose is to debunk. Most of all, he wants to cut Napoleon down to size, not only because he was a hated enemy of Russia, but because he was also a ludicrous figure of overweening, pompous pride. At the same time Tolstoy is keen to take issue with the traditional writers of history, who distort the truth by their narrow-minded attitudes and over-simplification. As Henry Gifford wrote: 'War and Peace has its pages of pamphleteering. But they cannot be torn out,
because the argument is continuous. On every page lies the imprint of
the same evolving experience.¹⁰

The 1860s were a golden decade in Russian literature. In 1862 Ivan
Turgenev published Fathers and Children, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky
was at his most prolific, issuing Notes from Underground in 1864,
Crime and Punishment in 1866, The Idiot in 1867–8, and starting
work on Devils in 1869. A measure of the achievement of War and
Peace is that it transcends even these masterpieces. Virginia Woolf
made the point succinctly: 'There remains the greatest of all novelists
— for what else can we call the author of War and Peace?'¹¹

NOTES

1. Preface to The Tragic Muse (1907–9), and letter to Hugh Walpole,
19 May 1912; see Henry Gifford (ed.), Leo Tolstoy: A Critical
2. D. S. Mirsky, A History of Russian Literature (New York, Alfred A.
4. Alvin Redman (ed.), The Epigrams of Oscar Wilde (London, Bracken
5. Boris Pasternak, Dr Zhivago, translated by Max Hayward and Manya
6. See Aylmer Maude, The Life of Tolstoy: First Fifty Years (Oxford,
7. A short 'early version' of War and Peace was published in Moscow
(2000) based on published material, odd pages and extracts from
notebooks up to 1866. This was immediately rejected and transcended;
it is now of interest only to a few scholars. The recent English transla-
tion of this abandoned draft, which omits valuable material from
the novel and radically alters the ending, should be ignored.
8. From D. Merezhovsky, Tolstoy as Man and Artist (L. Tolstoy and
Dostoyevsky) (London, Constable, 1902), cited in Gifford, Leo Tolstoy:
A Critical Anthology, p. 113.
9. Winston Churchill, My Early Years; cited in a reader's letter to The
11. From Virginia Woolf, 'The Russian Point of View', cited in Gifford,
Leo Tolstoy: A Critical Anthology, p. 188.

Translator's Note

This novel has been well served by its several translators into English.
Only the very first attempt suffers from serious shortcomings, but it
was a brave undertaking by Clara Bell, less than twenty years after
publication (1885–6). She worked from a French text created by a
woman identified only as 'Une Russe', and her version is surprisingly
effective, though much of the original has been omitted and what
survives is nearer to paraphrase than translation. The early translations
by N. H. Dole (1889) and Leo Wiener (1904) were more accurate,
though they still contain plenty of small slips, and their American
phrasing now has an archaic ring. Constance Garnett, the admirable
eye doyen of Russian literature in English translation, produced a
sensitive version in 1904; she had a delicate feel for language, though
there are some errors. Then, in 1923, came the masters, Louise and
Aylmer Maude, who lived in Russia and had the advantage of being
able to consult Tolstoy himself. He gave their work his personal
endorsement, even claiming that 'better translators ... could not be
invented'.¹ Their version of War and Peace, now fast approaching its
centenary, is still read as a classic in its own right, and the errors that
it contains are so few as to be negligible. It has been succeeded by
Rosamary Edmonds's equally reliable (at times derivative) translation
(1957), which Penguin has used for nearly half a century, (updated in
1978); and then by a sound American version, by Ann Dunnigan,
in 1968.

So why do we need another translation?

It is not unusual for the great classics to be retranslated every couple
generations. Language changes and, without worshipping modernity
for its own sake, publishers recognize the need to accommodate new
readers by using phrasing more closely attuned to their way of speaking.
Infelicities will be edited out, such as 'Andrey spent the evening with
a few gay friends', 'Natasha went about the house flushing', 'he exposed
himself on the parade ground' or 'he ejaculated with a grimace'; we
cannot read phrases like these without raising an inappropriate smile.
On the other hand, it is most important not to over-modernize. Tempting though it may be, I cannot use popularized phrases like 'buzzword', 'oddball' or 'hooliganism'.

Secondly, a translator hopes to squeeze out one or two errors or ambiguities that still linger. Previous translators have missed the fact that an object referred to in a famous Tolstoyan metaphor about things colliding and recoiling is not a ball in flight but a billiard ball on the table; and they all translated the phrase 'smotret' ispodlob'ya' as 'to look at from under the brows' when it means to look sullenly or furtively.

But these reasons are hardly enough on their own to justify a new translation. There is one way in which all the existing versions fall short: from Constance Garnett onwards they have been produced by women of a particular social and cultural background (Louise having contributed more than Aylmer to the Maudes' version), with some resulting flatness and implausibility in the dialogue, especially that between soldiers, peasants and all the lower orders. A specialist critic puts it well, speaking of the Maudes, who are the most highly regarded translators: 'Their work can always be counted on for . . . negative virtues: sobriety, explicitness, a firm hold on the argument. However, their resources are limited in range of tone. They have little sense of colloquial idiom . . .'2

To take a specific example: Pierre, watching as a cannonball crashes down into the Rayevsky redoubt and takes a man's leg off, hears another soldier call out in response: 'Ekh! Neskladnaya!' (III, II, 31). The English versions of this are: 'Ekh! You beastly thing!' (Dole); 'Oh, awkward one!' (Weiner); 'Hey, awkward hussy!' (Garnett); 'Awkward baggage!' (Maude); 'Oh you hussy!' (Edmonds); 'Ah, you're a bungler!' (Dunnigan). Curiously enough the best in terms of naturalness of expression is Clara Bell's: 'Ah, you brute!' The original, with connotations of both awkwardness and femininity, is rather difficult to translate, but one thing is certain: no soldier in the heat of battle ever said anything like most of the phrases we have been offered so far.

The previous translations also have an excess of niceness and exactitude that can sound jarring to today's readers. Natasha looks in the mirror and says: 'Can this be I?' Lavrushka is sent off 'in quest of fowls'. More than once we hear that 'Pierre fell to musing'. Elsewhere someone says: 'Ay, listen what folks are prating of'. Similarly, there must be better ways of saying: 'The crushing weight of his arm fell impotent as though spellbound', or 'the resolutive moment of battle had come'. Non-existent English exclamations like 'Ay!', 'Ey!', 'Ekh!' or the misused 'Eh!' still abound. In such old-fashioned phrasing I have tried to make improvements.

This is not to denigrate the translations that have been enjoyed by millions; it is merely to indicate that this version follows a translation strategy that is slightly different from what has gone before.

In the introduction to his Don Quixote, John Rutherford divides translators into cavaliers and puritans. The cavalier takes some liberties; the puritan is a stickler for exactitude. Rutherford's intention was to combine the virtues of both and avoid their vices, a sensible if difficult plan. The previous translations of War and Peace have erred slightly too much on the puritan side, literal fidelity being set at a higher premium than writing naturally in English. It is now time to move somewhat in the other direction.

Let me give a couple of small examples. If a Russian asks, 'Did you study in Kiev?', another Russian will respond by saying, 'In Kiev'. The puritan will use that repetition, while the cavalier would give the normal English speaker's response, 'Yes', or 'Yes, I did.' Similarly, when a Russian mother says to her child, 'Ne nado!', the puritan will be tempted to render this literally as 'That's not necessary!', whereas the cavalier will go for 'Don't!'

The reason for this puritanism is not far to seek. It lies in what Rutherford refers to as a 'mistaken attitude of reverence for the original artist beside whom it's all too easy to feel like humble artisans who can only ever aspire to produce a pale shadow of the original . . . a self-fulfilling prediction . . . Literary translators must conquer these fears.'3 This is good advice. Without ever drifting too far away from the original, it does seem reasonable to aim for the kind of English that would have occurred naturally in its context and now sounds appropriate.

Another way to look at this is to imagine how the average Russian reads War and Peace and to try to recapture something similar in the translated text. Tolstoy's literary style has its faults — such as undue repetition, grammatical inaccuracy and some sentences of excessive length — and many of them have to be faithfully reproduced in order to avoid falsification, but by and large he is an easy read for a Russian (and comparatively easy to translate). Stylistic angularities, shocks and surprises are infrequent, and the dialogue in particular is individualized but always natural. It seems most important to ensure in any translation the same kind of smooth reading, and varied but realistic-sounding dialogue. In rendering colloquial speech, of course, a translator has to choose a particular regional dialect and its idioms, and I have used a
British English form of speech, without, I hope, making the text unnatural for non-British readers.

The first edition (1868–9) of the novel had long passages in French. But Tolstoy had second thoughts and removed most of them during a drastic revision in 1873. Previous translators cut these further and provided translations in footnotes. But few readers today have a sound knowledge of French, so I have decided to translate all of it.

Does this change matter? Sometimes it does, but it is possible to indicate that a speaker is using another language. It is not unusual for Tolstoy himself to say (in Russian) for example, 'Since Pierre was speaking French at the time he . . .' I have used this kind of formula on those few occasions when a linguistic choice or shift has real significance, e.g. in the second paragraph on the opening page. It remains true that certain characters – Bilibin, for example – lose some of their finesse because of this treatment, but there seems to be an overall gain in following the lead established by Tolstoy (and the Maudes with his blessing) by making the text more directly accessible.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

For almost a century several editions of War and Peace vied for acceptance. The first book version appeared in six volumes (four in 1868 and two in 1869), but was riddled with errors, nearly 2,000 of them. Then, in 1873 Tolstoy published his revised edition. In the 1930s Russian scholars preparing the Jubilee Edition of the Complete Works of L. N. Tolstoy decided to use the fifth edition of 1886, even though Tolstoy had not been involved in its publication, but they did incorporate some of the 1873 emendations (a second edition was based on the 1873 text). When it was discovered later that numerous changes in the 1873 edition had been introduced by N. N. Strakhov, most of them without Tolstoy's approval, a team of scholars led by E. Zaydenshnur set about the formidable task of collating and comparing all versions, including the manuscripts, copies (mainly in Sonya Tolstoy's hand), annotated editions and corrected or half-corrected proofs, with the goal of eliminating any alterations introduced by outsiders. Their work bore fruit in the early 1960s, when a truly definitive text emerged, from which all subsequent editions derive.


NOTES

As with astronomy in days gone by, so today in matters of history the conflict of opinion depends on the recognition or non-recognition of an absolute entity for the measurement of visible phenomena. In astronomy it was the earth's immobility; in history it is personal independence, or free will.

Just as in astronomy the problem of recognizing the earth's motion lay in the difficulty of getting away from a direct sensation of the earth's immobility and a similar sensation of the planets' motion, so in history the problem of recognizing the dependence of personality on the laws of space, time and causation lies in the difficulty of getting away from the direct sensation of one's own personal independence. But just as in astronomy the new attitude was, 'No, we cannot feel the earth's movement, but if we accept its immobility we are reduced to absurdity, whereas if we accept the movement that we cannot feel we arrive at laws,' so in history the new attitude is, 'No, we cannot feel our dependence, but if we accept free will we are reduced to absurdity, whereas if we accept dependence on the external world, time and causation we arrive at laws.'

In the first case, we had to get away from a false sensation of immobility in space and accept movement that we could not feel. In the present case it is no less essential to get away from a false sensation of freedom and accept a dependence that we cannot feel.

Notes

VOLUME I
PART I

1. Genoa and Lucca . . . Buonaparte family: Genoa and Lucca were territories recently annexed by France. Napoleon's Corsican name was Napoleone Buonaparte; the original version (with a 'u') is used here as a deliberate insult.

2. Novosiltsev's dispatch: N. N. Novosiltsev was a special ambassador sent to Paris by Emperor Alexander to assist with (ultimately abortive) peace negotiations.

3. 'Oh, don't talk to me about Austria!': Only a few weeks earlier (in April 1805) the Third Coalition had been formed between Great Britain, Austria and Russia. Their plan was to defeat Napoleon by means of a three-pronged attack. The Russians had been let down before by the Austrians, and there were many who believed they could not be relied on now.

4. the hydra of revolution . . . murdering villain: The French Revolution is still fresh in the memory. In its wake revolutionary stirrings were being sensed in other European countries, including Russia. Napoleon, with his common background, seems to embody the new republican spirit which threatens the stability of countries ruled by monarchs.

5. She has refused to evacuate Malta: Malta had been taken by Napoleon in 1798, and then captured by the British in 1800. Under the Peace of Amiens Great Britain was due to leave the island, but refused to do so. Russia's offer to mediate between the British and the French was rejected, and the two countries went to war in 1803, with Russia supporting the British against Napoleon.

6. Wintzengerode: Many of the characters are real people; the most important ones are identified as 'Historical Figures in War and Peace' in 'The Characters' (p. 1372).

7. Lavater . . . paternity bump: J. K. Lavater (1741-1801) was a Swiss physiognomist, one of the forerunners of phrenology, a pseudo-science
based on the idea that bumps on the skull indicate various mental capacities.

8. the Duke of Engghien: The Duke of Engghien was shot by the French in 1804, after being wrongfully accused of plotting to assassinate Napoleon.

9. Louis XV: King of France from 1715 until his death in 1774.

10. the Social Contract: Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Contrat Social (1762), a treatise on government and citizenship, was regarded by some people as a cause of the violent excesses of the French Revolution of 1789.

11. the 18th Brumaire: The date on the French Revolutionary Calendar (9 November 1799) of a successful coup, following which Napoleon became First Consul. 'Brumaire' was the second month in the French Revolutionary Calendar, 22 October–20 November. Brume is French for 'fog'.

12. all those prisoners ... killed in Africa: A reference to Napoleon's authorization of the brutal killing of 3,000 Turkish prisoners at Jaffa in September 1799.


14. Napoleon on the bridge at Arcola ... plague-victims: At Arcola in 1799, leading the French against the Austrians, Napoleon had risked his life by rushing on to a bridge carrying a flag. In Jaffa in 1799 he had taken another risk by visiting a plague hospital.

15. Caesar's Commentaries: Julius Caesar's Commentaries on the Gallic War, one of the foundation stones of military history written by a highly successful general.

16. a freemason: Freemasons were a byword for liberal thinking, but were also regarded by the authorities as proto-revolutionaries. It isn't clear here which way Pierre is thinking.

17. typical of Petersburg in June: It is actually July; Tolstoy must mean it is like the best nights in June.

18. name-day: A saint's day celebrated by Russians who were named after that particular saint, here St Natalya's Day.

19. Catherine's time: Catherine the Great was Empress of Russia from 1762 to 1796.

20. Salomon: An Italian opera-singer resident in Russia and appearing with a touring German company in the winter of 1805–6.


22. Count Orlov: Count Alexey Orlov was a popular and generous Moscow grandee, famous for his lavish hospitality and entertainment.

23. errare humanum est: It is human to err (Latin).

24. his last duty: This duty is to receive extreme unction, be anointed with consecrated oil by a priest.
with the folded leaves untrimmed. Thus the first reader uses a page-knife to slit them open.

39. A Key to the Mystery: K. Eckardtshausen’s mystical work, A Key to the Mysteries of Nature, was popular in Russia at the time, and widely read by freemasons.

40. The Great Century: The French term ‘Le Grand Siècle’ meant the age of Louis XIV (1638–1715), King of France (1643–1715). Here it is loosely applied by the Russians to the age of Catherine the Great.

41. It is easier for a camel... kingdom of God: Quoted from Matthew 19:24 and Mark 10:25.

42. A Dussek sonata: Jan Ladislav Dussek, born in Bohemia in 1760 and died near Paris in 1812, enjoyed great popularity in Europe as a first-rate pianist and composer of piano pieces.

43. Mikhelson’s army, and Tolstoy’s: The old prince refers to a plan for attacking the French from three sides at once, Generals Mikhelson and Tolstoy commanding two of the armies involved.

44. Marlborough... God knows when we’ll see him: A French comic song that became popular early in the eighteenth century, when the Duke of Marlborough led the English army in several campaigns against the French.

45. Rurik: A Scandinavian prince, who, according to legend, came down to Novgorod in the ninth century and founded the Russian state.

46. Potyomkins: G. A. Potyomkin (1739–91) was a famous Russian army commander of the late eighteenth century.

47. Hof-kriegs-wurst-schnaps-rath: Court-war-sausage-schnapps-council (German). This is the prince’s ironical version of the name bestowed on the Austrian War Council.

48. Ochakov: A fortress at the mouth of the Dnieper, successfully stormed by General Suvorov during the Russo-Turkish war of 1787–91.

49. Zubov... false teeth: There is an easy pun here on the Russian word zub, which means tooth.

PART II

1. 11th of October 1805: Until 1918 Russia used the Julian Calendar, as opposed to the Gregorian Calendar universally accepted today. At this period Julian (or ‘Old Style’) dates lagged behind Gregorian (or ‘New Style’) dates by a difference of twelve days. The dates used throughout War and Peace are predominantly Old Style.

2. Tsaritsyn Field: Tsar’s Field, soon to be renamed ‘The Field of Mars’, was in Petersburg.


4. leg-bands: Soldiers, like peasants, did not wear socks; they were issued with strips of cloth for use as foot-bindings.

5. Got a move on then, didn’t we?: Neither the Russian nor the Austrian army had hurried into position, believing Napoleon to be busy with preparations for the invasion of England. When the news came through that Napoleon was already at the Rhine it was essential to speed up the movement of the Russians, so they were supplied with carts, which doubled the rate of their advance.

6. doppel-kännchen: A strong liqueur flavoured with cumin and caraway seeds (German).

7. shakos: Tall, nearly cylindrical military caps with plumes.

8. sabretache: Flat ornamental bag slung from a cavalry officer’s sword belt.

9. Campo Formio: The little town where the French and the Austrians signed the peace treaty (17 October 1797) which ended Napoleon’s successful campaign in Italy.

10. Demosthenes... golden mouth: According to legend the Greek orator Demosthenes (383–322 BC) corrected a speech impediment by practising oratory with a pebble in his mouth.

11. all three are Gascons: The Gascons were renowned for their clever talk and boasting.

12. Napoleon rose from obscurity at Toulon: During the siege of Toulon, a royalist stronghold, in 1793, Napoleon commanded the republican artillery with distinction and gained his first significant promotion to brigadier-general, at the age of twenty-four.

13. Chasseurs: Cavalry.

PART III

1. state councillor: The Russian civil service was divided into eleven ranks, the top eight of which conferred hereditary nobility. A state councillor occupied the fifth rank and was entitled to be addressed as ‘your Worship’.

2. Emperor Alexander’s visit to Potsdam: In October 1805 Alexander I had gone to Berlin to solicit Friedrich Wilhelm III’s support in opposing Napoleon. Their secret agreement signed at Potsdam was overtaken by events on the battlefield.

3. Paris possessing his Helen: In Greek legend Paris, the son of Priam (King of Troy), precipitated the siege of Troy by abandoning his wife, Oenone, and abducting the beautiful Helen.

4. petizanfan, alley cooshey dormir: Phonetic version of the French ‘petits-enfants, allez couche dormir’ (‘off you go to bed, little children’).
PART I

1. Will you call her *tu* or *vous*: Russian is like French in using the second person plural in a formal situation and the second person singular between intimates. Sonya and Nikolay are at that delicate stage when it might, or might not, be appropriate to advance their relationship from the former to the latter.


3. *the Arkharovs’ ball*: The Arkharovs were a real-life Moscow family, very rich and famed for their lavish hospitality.

4. *Sing hymns ... fight us*: These execrable verses by N. P. Nikolev were declaimed at a real-life banquet in honour of Bagration.

5. *Pavel Ivanovich Golenishchev-Kutuzov*: Golenishchev-Kutuzov was present at the real-life occasion, handing out copies of his verses, no less execrable than those of Nikolev.

6. *How the devil ... mess like that?*: According to a current French idiom *‘to do something for the King of Prussia’ meant ‘to get nothing but trouble for your pains’*.

7. *Corner there*: Dolokhov and Rostov are adversaries in the game of faro (the game played by Herman in Pushkin’s and Tchaikovsky’s *Queen of Spades*). Bending down the corner of a card indicated a doubling of the stake.

PART II


2. *Freemasonry*: Freemasonry on the Anglo-Scottish model was introduced into Russia in 1761. Although seen as subversive and frequently suppressed, it was undergoing a period of prosperity under Alexander I.

3. *a leading freemason and Martinist since the days of Novikov*: The Martinists were a branch of Russian freemasonry founded in 1780, taking their name from L. C. de Saint Martin, a noted theosophist. N. I. Novikov (1744–1818) was a satirical journalist and freemason who had been imprisoned under Catherine the Great for his outspoken anti-government opinions.

4. *a volume of Thomas à Kempis*: This would have been *Imitation of Christ* (1420), a highly influential religious treatise commonly attributed to Thomas à Kempis (c. 1380–1471). Mystical in tone, it explores the inner life and the value of contemplation.

5. *Sic transit gloria mundi*: Thus the glory of the world passes away.

6. *Marat*: Jean-Paul Marat (1743–93) was a Swiss-born French politician, active in republican and revolutionary circles.

7. *Hard luck ... George Dandin*: A well-known quotation from Molère’s comedy *George Dandin* (1668).

8. *a joke he had heard in Vienna*: According to a current French idiom *‘to get something for the King of Prussia’ meant ‘to get nothing but trouble for your pains’*.

9. *Count Buxbôwend*: The Russian general left in charge of the allied forces after the battle of Austerlitz.

10. *complete liberation of his peasants from serf rule*: Pierre is an early reformer in freeing his serfs; the serf system would survive officially in Russia until 1861.

11. *this is Herder’s doctrine*: J. G. Herder (1744–1803) was a German historian and philosopher who argued the merits of intuition and irrationalism.

12. *Platov’s division*: General M. I. Platov (1731–1818) was a distinguished Cossack commander who had served alongside Suvorov and Kutuzov.

13. *the battle of Friedland*: This was fought in East Prussia on 14 June 1807. The French, with their superior artillery, defeated the Russians.

PART III

1. *Speransky*: Count M. M. Speransky (1772–1839) was a close adviser to Alexander I on home affairs. He was a would-be reformer, but his ideas offended the conservative aristocracy, and he was dismissed in 1812.


3. *Illuminism*: A secret, pseudoscientific movement of the late eighteenth
century founded in Germany. Among its wide-ranging beliefs was a clear strain of republicanism, which led to its suppression.
4. Finnish campaign: Russia occupied Finland in February–May 1808. At home the war was unpopular.
5. 'ein Mann zu sein': 'Being a man'.
6. a brother killed in Turkey: Russia had been at war with Turkey on and off since 1806 and hostilities would continue until 1812.

PART IV

1. *pas de châle*: A French shawl dance, given here as an example of Natasha’s training in western formal dance routines.
2. fetch me a cockerel...oats: This would be for fortune-telling based on the way the fowl pecked up the oats.
3. *my favourite nocturne, the one by Mr Field*: Born in Dublin in 1782, John Field settled in Russia and died in Moscow 1837. A composer of piano music, he devised the style and name of the nocturne, handing it on to its greatest exponent, Chopin.

PART V

1. the *Astraea lodge ... the ‘Manna Seekers*: Masonic lodges in Petersburg.
2. *Napoleon’s seizure ... sent to every European court*: The seizure of the Duchy of Oldenburg in north-west Germany in 1810 was a breach of the Tilsit agreement. Tsar Alexander circulated a strong protest against it.
3. *Peter the Great’s old cudgel*: Peter the Great, Tsar 1682–1725, oversaw Russia’s emergence as a major European power. Despite introducing many reforms, Peter was an authoritarian ruler who imposed swift, often cruel, punishments on all wrongdoers.
4. Mademoiselle George: A French actress, whose real name was Marguerite-Joséphine Weimer (1787–1867), celebrated for her beauty and accomplished performances on stage.
5. *they all sat down*: It is still a Russian tradition to sit down for a few moments of reflection before starting out on a journey.

VOLUME III

PART I

1. *Continental System*: An embargo on trade with England announced by Napoleon in 1806 and imposed on all of Europe.
Notes visiting the actual territory at Borodino, and included it here in his text.

7. Marin . . . Gerakov: S. N. Marin and G. V. Gerakov were two minor writers. Here, the former adds to the many parodies of the latter's work.

PART III

1. Columbus's egg: A trick that is easy once you know how to do it. Legend has it that Columbus, riled by the charge that anyone could have discovered America, once asked the company how to make an egg stand on end. When nobody could do it he tapped one end of an egg against the table and stood it up, showing how easy things can be once a pioneer has led the way.

2. boyars: The boyars had been the Tsar's right-hand men in medieval Russia. The title had been abolished almost a century before, and Napoleon's repeated use of the term is an ironic indicator of his ignorance.

3. attempt on Napoleon's life in Vienna in 1809: Friedrich Staps failed in an attempt to stab Napoleon outside the Schönbrunn Palace in October 1809, and was summarily executed.

4. the business of the 7th of September: That is, the battle of Borodino. Ramballe is using the New Style date.

5. Talma, la Duchênois, Potier, the Sorbonne: Talma was a celebrated tragedienne, la Duchênois a popular actress and Potier a well-known comedian. The Sorbonne, the University of Paris, founded in the mid-thirteenth century, had been closed down in 1792.

VOLUME IV

PART I

1. the possible implications of the words, 'Natasha is nursing him': Under Russian Church law a man could not marry his sister-in-law; Nikolay and Princess Marya would therefore be unable to get married if Prince Andrey were to survive and marry Natasha.

2. Paula and Laura: The martyred brothers Florus and Laurus (third century AD), beatified in the Russian Orthodox Church, became the patron saints of horses for the peasants, who mispronounced their names.

PART IV

1. Sir Robert Wilson's Diary: Sir Robert Wilson (1774-1849) was Britain's military commissioner in Russia during the period 1812-14.

EPILOGUE

PART I

1. Seven years had passed: the story ended in 1823; it is now 1820.

2. Photius, Schelling, Fichte, Chateaubriand: Photius (1792-1838), the conservative-minded head of the Novgorod monastery, castigator of freemasonry and all forms of liberalism. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775-1854), a German philosopher who saw nature as a single organism working towards self-consciousness and art as a vital part of this process. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), a German Idealist philosopher and political thinker whose early enthusiasm for the French Revolution developed into strong condemnation of Napoleon. François René Vicomte de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), a French writer and statesman who spent much of his life abroad, supported the restoration of the French monarchy and refused to serve under Napoleon.

3. gave Poland a constitution: Following the Congress of Vienna (1815) Poland was re-established as a country with its own constitution.

4. the Holy Alliance: An alliance founded in 1815 between Austria, Prussia and Russia as a means of guaranteeing peace; it soon became an instrument of political repression.

5. Golitsyn: Prince A. N. Golitsyn (1773-1844), Minister of Education and Spiritual Affairs under Alexander I, head of the Bible Society, was charged with implementing the increasingly reactionary principles of the Holy Alliance.

6. Shishkov: Admiral A. S. Shishkov (1754-1841), President of the Russian Academy (1813-41), a keen Slavophile opposed to any reform of the Russian language.

7. Semyonovsky regiment: This famous regiment, founded by Peter the Great in 1687, was disbanded by Alexander I in 1820 following a mutinous protest against a German commander, with cruel punishments meted out to its members.

8. fifty years ago: War and Peace was completed in 1869.

9. posted to Turkey: In 1795 Napoleon applied unsuccessfully for a posting in Turkey for the purpose of reorganizing the Sultan's artillery.

10. During the wars in Italy . . . while he is still there: By the time General
Suvorov entered northern Italy and defeated the French in 1799. Napoleon had left for Egypt.

11. Not unto us . . . but unto Thy Name: At the instigation of Alexander I, these, the opening words of Psalm 115, were inscribed on a victory medal of 1812.

12. Laocoon: In Greek mythology, a Trojan prince who offended the gods and was strangled by a sea-serpent.

13. the Bible Society: The Russian Bible Society had been formed in 1813 by A. N. Golitsyn, a lifelong friend of Alexander I, who was influenced by the society's reactionary views concerning the superiority of the Gospel over scientific methods of study and education. The society would be suppressed in 1826 by Tsar-Nicholas I.

14. Gossner and Madame Tatarinova: The Munich-born pastor and mystic Johann Gossner was expelled from Bavaria in 1817 and invited to Petersburg by the Russian Bible Society, of which he became a popular director. Also in 1817, E. F. Tatarinova founded a 'spiritual union' in Petersburg which enabled its followers to achieve ecstasy and make prophecies through dervish-like dancing.

15. Madame Kurtdiner: Baroness Barbara Juliana Kruthener (1764–1825), a popular sentimental novelist from Riga, living in Petersburg in 1821, whose mystical writings held a strong appeal for Alexander I.

16. Magnitsky: M. L. Magnitsky (1778–1853), Minister of Education and Spiritual Affairs in 1819, was despised by the liberals for his reactionary attitudes and oppressive measures.

17. Pugachov: Yemelyan Pugachov (1726–75), the Cossack leader of a revolutionary movement, ultimately ill fated, in the Volga region during the years 1773–5.

18. Tugendbund: A German patriotic league (founded in 1808) devoted to the overthrow of Napoleon.

19. Russian band: A pun on the German word bund (union) and the Russian word bunt (riot).

20. Mucius Scaevola: The Roman Gaius Mucius Scaevola famously showed resistance to torture by thrusting his right hand into a fire and holding it there until it was consumed. 'Scaevola' means 'left-handed'.

PART II


2. Thiers: Adolphe Thiers (1797–1877), statesman and historian, twice Prime Minister of France.
The Characters

**The Bezúkhovs**¹

Count Kirill Bezukhov  
Pierre Bezukhov, his natural son, also known as Pyotr Kirillovich (or Kirillych), which means Peter, son of Kirill  
Pierre's cousins, the Mamontov sisters, Katerina (or Katishe), Olga and Sofya

**The Bolkonskys**

Prince Nikolay Bolkonsky  
Prince Andréy Bolkonsky, his son  
Princess Márya, his daughter  
Princess Liza, or Lise, Andrey's wife  
Prince Nikolay Bolkonsky, son of Andrey and Lise

**The Rostovs**

Count Ilya Rostov  
Countess Natalya, his wife  
Count Nikolay Rostov, their elder son  
Count Pyotr Rostov, or Pétya, their younger son  
Countess Véra, their elder daughter  
Countess Natalya, or Natásha, their younger daughter  
Sófya, or Sónya, a cousin brought up in the family

**The Kurágins**

Prince Vasily Kurágin  
Prince Anatole, his elder son  
Prince Hippolyte, his younger son  
Princess Yélène, known throughout as Hélène, his daughter

**The Drubetskóys**

Princess Anna, known throughout as Anna Mikháylovna  
Boris, her son

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**Other Prominent Characters**

Akhrosimov, Márya Dmitriyevna, a formidable personality, friend of the Rostov family  
Alpatyev, old Prince Bolkonsky's steward  
Bazdévëv, Osip, a leading freemason, a strong influence on Pierre  
Berg, Alphonse, a Russian officer  
Billiv, a Russian diplomat  
Bourienne, Mademoiselle, Princess Marya's French Companion  
Denisov, Vasiliy or Vâska, a Russian officer, a close friend of Nikolay Rostov  
Dolokhov, Pédiya, a Russian officer and high-living man-about-town  
Dron, a village elder at Bogucharovo  
Ilágin, one of the Rostovs' neighbours at Otradnoye  
Iógel, a dancing master  
Karagín, Julie, an heiress  
Karátäyev, Platón, a simple peasant whose natural goodness makes a great impact on Pierre  
Karp, an insubordinate serf at Bogucharovo  
Mávra, a maid with the Rostovs  
Pelagéya, a pilgrim  
Schérer, Anna (Anna Pávlóvna), a leading Petersburg society hostess  
Tushin, Captain, a battery captain at the battle of Schongrabern

**Historical Figures in War and Peace**

Alexander I, Tsar of Russia, often referred to as the Emperor  
Arakchëyev, Count A., minister under Alexander, a reactionary and ruthless figure  
Armfeldt, Count G. M., a Swedish soldier and statesman  
Bagration, Prince P., a Russian general  
Barclay de Tolly, M., a senior Russian general  
Baláshev, General A., one of Alexander's most trusted aides  
Bennigsen, Count I., a Hanoverian general in the Russian army  
Berthier, P.-A., Marshal of France, Chief of Staff to Napoleon  
Bessières, Jean-Baptiste, a distinguished soldier, Marshal of France  
Caulaincourt, General A. de, French Ambassador to Russia  
Chichagóv, Admiral P., commander of the Army of Moldavia  
Clausewitz, Karl Marie von, a Prussian soldier serving as a Russian staff-officer, later to become famous for his treatise *On War* (1833)  
Davout, L., Prince of Eckmühl, Marshal of France  
Dokhtúrov, D., a Russian general  
Kutuzov, Field-Marshal M., Russian commander-in-chief at Borodino  
Milorádovich, M., a Russian general  
Murat, Joachim, King of Naples, commander of Napoleon's cavalry in 1812  
Napoleon I, Emperor of the French  
Pfuel, Ernst von, Colonel, then General, a Prussian soldier in Russian service
Rostopchin, Count F., governor-general of Moscow
Speránsky, M., the minister who inspired Alexander’s first reforms
Stein, Baron H. K. von, a Prussian statesman noted for his liberal views
Toll, Karl von, Quartermaster-general of the Russian army
Wintzengerode, Count F., General, a Württemberger in Russian service
Wittgenstein, General Ludwig, a Westphalian in Russian service
Wolzogen, General Ludwig von, a Prussian soldier in Russian service

NOTE

1. Word stress is important in Russian and the correct stresses are marked in the names listed here. Two names that are pronounced differently from what you may expect are Vasily (Vass-ee-ly) and Boris (Ba-rees), both stressed on the second syllable.
Summary of Chapters

VOLUME I
Part I (July–August 1805)

1. Anna Scherer’s soirée in Moscow. Prince Vasily negotiates.
3. Andrey Bolkonsky arrives to rejoin his pregnant wife, Lise.
5. Pierre’s indecision over choosing a career.
6. Pierre visits Andrey and goes on to Anatole Kuragin’s. Dolokhov’s bet.
7. A double name-day celebration at the Rostovs’.
9. Nikolay has joined the army.
10. Nikolay’s relationship with Sonya.
11. Natasha and Boris. Boris’s mother, Anna Mikhaylovnna.
12. She takes her son to visit the dying Count Kirill Bezukhov.
14. Countess Rostov gives Anna Mikhaylovnna money for her son’s uniform.
15. Dinner at the Rostovs’.
18. Prince Vasily Kuragin’s machinations over the dying count’s inheritance.
19. Anna Mikhaylovnna takes Pierre to see his dying father.
21. Death of the count.
23. Prince Andrey arrives with Lise.
24. The old prince discusses Napoleon’s merits with his son.
25. Andrey leaves for the army. Lise is unhappy and frightened about giving birth.

Part II (October–November 1805)
1. The Russian army prepares for an inspection at Braunau.
2. The inspection takes place. Zherkov and Dolokhov.
3. Kutuzov and an Austrian general. The ‘unfortunate General Mack’.
5. Nikolay is encouraged to apologize to his commanding officer.
6. Crossing the Enns.
7. Incidents on the crowded bridge.
8. The burning of the bridge. Nikolay’s undistinguished baptism of fire.
9. Andrey is sent with dispatches to the Austrian court. The war minister.
10. Andrey stays with Bilibin.
13. Andrey returns to Kutuzov.
15. Andrey reports to Bagration. Captain Tushin. Soldiers at the front.
16. Andrey surveys the position. The first shot.
17. The battle of Schöngrabern. Captain Tushin sets fire to the village.
19. Two Russian commanders at loggerheads. Nikolay is injured.

Part III (November 1805)
2. Pierre is trapped into a fashionable but loveless marriage.
3. Prince Vasily takes Anatole to Bald Hills – a match for Princess Marya?
4. Anatole impresses the ladies, but not the old prince.
5. The old prince’s opposition. Marya catches Anatole kissing Mlle Bourienne.
7. Nikolay visits Boris and Berg, and meets Prince Andrey.
8. Nikolay is inspired by a close view of the Emperor inspecting the troops.
10. Nikolay remains ecstatically inspired by the Emperor.
11. Dolgorukov tells of his meeting with Napoleon. Kutuzov is pessimistic.
13. Nikolay at the front. Visit of Bagration and Dolgorukov.
15. Kutuzov at loggerheads with the Emperor.
16. Andrey halts the Russian retreat, but is then badly wounded.
17. Nikolay meets the wounded Boris. He cannot believe how bad things are.
18. Nikolay misses a chance to assist the Emperor. Disaster on a frozen dam.
19. Andrey, despite medical treatment, seems likely to die, and is left behind.
APPENDIX I: SUMMARY BY CHAPTERS

VOLUME II

Part I (1805–6)

1. Nikolay brings Denisov home on leave.
2. Count Ilya Rostov prepares a grand dinner in honour of Bagration.
3. The dinner at the English Club, Count Rostov’s finest hour.
4. Insulted by Dolokhov, Pierre challenges him to a duel.
5. Pierre wounds Dolokhov and emerges unscathed.
6. Pierre and Hélène have a furious argument. He sends her away.
7. At Bald Hills Andrey is presumed dead, but the news is kept from Lise.
8. Lise is about to give birth. Andrey returns.
9. A baby son is born, but Lise dies in childbirth.
10. Denisov and Dolokhov at the Rostovs’. Love is in the air.
11. Dolokhov proposes to Sonya and is turned down.
12. Iogel’s ball. Denisov’s impressive mazurka.
13. Dolokhov goads Nikolay into gambling, and losing.
14. Nikolay ends up owing 43,000 roubles.

Part II (1807)

1. Pierre meets Osip Bazdeyev, a celebrated freemason.
2. Bazdeyev talks about supreme wisdom and Pierre’s unhappy life.
3. Pierre becomes a freemason.
4. At the conclusion of the ceremony Pierre feels like a new man.
5. Prince Vasily, seeking a reconciliation between Pierre and Hélène, is violently rejected.
6. At another of Anna Scherer’s soirées Hélène invites Boris to visit her.
7. Boris goes to her soirée and Hélène urgently invites him to dinner next day.
8. Old Prince Bolkonsky gives Andrey his own estate at Bogucharovo.
9. Bilibin writes caustically about the campaign. The sick baby recovers.
10. Pierre visits his southern estates bent on reform, but he is easily duped.
12. A philosophical discussion on the ferry.
14. The old prince takes to Pierre.
16. Denisov illegally seizes supplies from his own army and is wounded.
17. Nikolay visits Denisov, waiting in a vile hospital for his court martial.
18. Denisov reluctantly agrees to petition the Emperor for a pardon.
19. Nikolay’s inopportune visit to Boris at Tilsit.
20. Nikolay manages to get the petition to the Emperor, but it is rejected.
21. Alexander and Napoleon meet. Nikolay is depressed and gets drunk.

Part III (1808–10)

1. Andrey empathizes with a moribund oak-tree that refuses to welcome spring.
2. Visiting Otradnoye, Andrey overhears Natasha in a late-night conversation.
3. Andrey revisits the old oak-tree, which is now bursting with new life.
4. Arakcheev rejects Andrey’s memorandum on reform of the military code.
5. Andrey is more impressed by Speransky, admiring his self-assurance.
6. Andrey agrees to work on a committee for the reform of the Legal Code.
APPENDIX I: SUMMARY BY CHAPTERS

7. Pierre, dissatisfied with freemasonry, seeks reassurance from Bazdeyev.
8. Pierre, wanting to do good, agrees to a reconciliation with Hélène.
9. Hélène, a successful society hostess, now receives Boris regularly.
10. Pierre's diaries and dreams show how disturbed he is.
12. Natasha and Boris are mutually attracted. Sonya seems to love him too.
13. Following a late-night talk with Natasha, the countess sends Boris away.
14. Natasha is involved in fastidious preparations for her first grand ball.
15. Natasha makes a good impression. Pierre is seen talking to Andrey.
16. Pierre asks Andrey to dance with Natasha. They captivate the company.
17. Andrey decides he must marry Natasha. Pierre feels humiliated by his wife.
18. Andrey visits Speransky and is disillusioned by his vacuous character.
19. Andrey visits the Rostovs and is once more enchanted by Natasha.
20. Berg and Vera, assiduous social climbers, invite Pierre to dinner.
21. The evening is exactly like all the others – just what the Bergs aspire to.
22. Natasha's head is turned. Pierre tells Andrey to go ahead with the match.
23. The old prince insists on a year's delay for the wedding. Natasha is shocked.
24. The engagement is kept secret. Andrey leaves for western Europe.
25. The old prince's attitude to Marya becomes increasingly cruel.
26. He threatens to marry Mlle Bourienne. Marya would like to run away.

Part IV (1810-11)

1. Nikolay returns home, and has doubts about Natasha's marriage.
3. Nikolay decides to go hunting.
4. The wolf-hunt begins.
5. A wolf is caught.
8. Countess Rostov wants Nikolay to marry Julie Karagin. She nags Sonya.
10. The Rostov children reminisce. Mummers. A troika ride to the Melyukovs'.
11. At Melyukovka. Sonya tries her fortune outside, at the barn.
12. Nikolay and Sonya in love. Natasha and Sonya try their fate with mirrors.
13. Nikolay's marriage to Sonya is opposed. Nikolay rejoins the regiment.

Part V (1811-12)

4. Pierre and Marya discuss Boris Drubetskoy and Natasha.
5. Boris empathizes with Julie in her 'melancholy'. His proposal is accepted.
6. Count Ilya, Sonya and Natasha stay with Marya Dmitriyevna in Moscow.
7. The Rostovs call on the Bolkonskys. Disastrous relationships.
8. The Rostovs at the opera. Hélène is in the next box.
APPENDIX I: SUMMARY BY CHAPTERS

10. Natasha meets the seductive Anatole and falls under his spell.
11. Anatole and Dolokhov in Moscow.
12. Hélène tells Natasha Anatole is in love with her.
13. Mme Georges' recitation at Hélène's. Natasha is bemused by Anatole's persistent wooing.
16. Anatole rejects Dolokhov's dissuasion as he prepares to abduct Natasha.
17. The abduction begins but is frustrated by a footman.
18. Marya Dmitriyevna is furious with Natasha. Count Ilya is not told.
19. Pierre sees Natasha and confirms that Anatole is already married.

VOLUME III

Part I (May–July 1812)

1. For all their illusion of self-will 'great leaders' are directed by history.
2. Napoleon crosses the Niemen. Polish uhlans are drowned in the Viliya.
4. Balashev is sent to Napoleon, and meets Murat, 'King of Naples'.
5. Balashev, treated badly by Davout, is finally brought to Napoleon.
6. Balashev’s meeting with Napoleon.
7. Balashev dines with Napoleon.
9. Andrey at Drissa. His ideas on the three armies and eight parties.
10. Andrey meets Pfuel, a conceited theorist and military ‘expert’.
14. Nikolay controls his fear as he goes into action at Ostrovna.
15. Nikolay, with his huntsman's eye, excels in battle.
18. At Mass Natasha hears the special prayer for victory.
19. Pierre, haunted by the number 666, sees that he must destroy Napoleon.
20. Petya is keen on the army. Pierre decides to stop visiting Natasha.
21. Petya is crushed at the Kremlin, but overwhelmed by seeing the Emperor.
22. Assembly of nobility, including Pierre, and merchants at Sloboda palace.
23. The Emperor speaks. Pierre offers to fund a thousand men.

Part II (August 1812)

1. The events of 1812, despite the 'planning', were unforeseen and fortuitous.
2. Prince Bolkonsky's mind is going. Julie writes to Marya.
3. Alpatych is sent to Smolensk.
4. Smolensk is under fire. Alpatych meets Andrey, who tells them to leave.
7. Napoleon orders the advance on Moscow. An encounter with Lavrushka.
8. Prince Bolkonsky has a stroke, and then dies, nursed by Princess Marya.
10. Princess Marya speaks to Dron.
11. She addresses the suspicious peasants, who refuse to leave Bogucharovo.
12. Princess Marya recalls her father's death.
13. Nikolay and Ilyin arrive at Bogucharovo, willing to help Marya.
14. Nikolay brings the peasants into line. Marya falls in love with him.
15. Andrey meets Denisov, who wants to develop guerrilla resistance.
16. Andrey trusts Kutuzov and his motto: 'Patience and Time'.
20. Pierre arrives in the theatre of war and seeks out the army's position.
21. The Icon of Smolensk is deeply revered by the soldiers and Kutuzov.
23. Bennigsen explains the army position; it is all beyond Pierre.
25. The spirit of the army. What is war? Andrey thinks of Natasha.
27. Napoleon's dispositions, and how they failed to materialize.
28. Napoleon's cold. The reasons behind the battle.
29. Napoleon talks to De Beausset and Rapp. The game begins.
30. Pierre watches the battlefield from a mound at Gorki.
31. Pierre sees violent action in and around the Rayevsky redoubt.
32. The redoubt is taken and retaken. Pierre tackles a French officer.
33. The battle proceeds in its own way despite the many orders issued.
34. Expected successes are not achieved. Massive, useless slaughter.
35. Kutuzov. An order to renew the attack tomorrow. The spirit of the army.
36. Andrey is hit by a bursting shell. The dressing-station.

APPENDIX I: SUMMARY BY CHAPTERS

37. Andrey undergoes an operation on his thigh. Anatole's leg is amputated.
38. Napoleon's dark mood, though he believes few Frenchmen fell in Russia.
39. Moral victory for the Russians, but everyone doubts the value of it all.

Part III (September 1812):

2. The campaign before Borodino. Kutuzov's subsequent movements.
3. Kutuzov and his generals. To defend or not to defend Moscow?
4. The war council at Fili. With a heavy heart Kutuzov opts for retreat.
5. The abandonment of Moscow. Rostopchin's inconsistent behaviour.
6. In Petersburg Hélène converts to Catholicism and plans remarriage.
7. Hélène writes to Pierre asking for his co-operation over the divorce.
8. Pierre walks back to Mozhaysk, where he meets his own groom.
10. Pierre goes to see Rostopchin. The 'traitor' Vereshchagin.
11. Rostopchin warns Pierre that he must leave. He goes away in secrecy.
12. The Rostovs prepare to leave. Petya is in the army, but still with them.
13. Natasha invites wounded men to occupy their house.
14. Natasha rearranges the packing. Unknown to her, Andrey is brought in.
15. Natasha defeats her mother; they take wounded men instead of luggage.
16. Berg wants to borrow a cart. More and more wounded men fill their carts.
17. They trundle off in heavy traffic, with Andrey. An encounter with Pierre.
19. Napoleon surveys Moscow, awaiting a deputation of boyars.
20. Moscow is empty, like a dead beehive. Napoleon’s grand coup de théâtre has failed.
21. Incoming soldiers block the bridge. There is looting.
23. Abandoned workmen drink and brawl.
24. Rostopchin, feeling sidelined, needs a victim. Vereshchagin is available.
27. Pierre stays on to do his deed. The drunken Makar Bazdeyev has a pistol.
28. Pierre saves the occupying Captain Ramballe’s life. They dine together.
29. They talk confidingly of women and love. A small fire is visible.
30. The Rostovs’ staff see the fire at Mytishchi.
31. The count is informed. Natasha gets through to see Andrey.
32. Andrey is in and out of consciousness. Natasha now stays at his side.
33. Pierre sets out. He saves a child from the fire.
34. He defends an Armenian woman, and is then arrested as an arsonist.

VOLUME IV
Part I (August 1812)
1. Anna Scherer’s soirée. News that Hélène is seriously ill.
2. A victory at Borodino is reported. Death of Hélène.
3. Michaud reports the loss of Moscow to the Tsar.
4. Nikolay is sent to Voronezh. He stands out in provincial society.
10. He failed in militarism, diplomacy, justice, religion and everything else.
12. Pierre wants freedom, but he is full of *joie de vivre* and energy.
14. Pierre laughs at the idea of them locking up his real self and immortal soul.
15. The Russians at Fominsk and Maloyaroslavets. Dokhturov the real hero.
16. Konovnitsyn, who brought news of the retreat, is another unsung hero.
17. Kutuzov, awakened at night, thanks God for the salvation of Russia.
18. The French run away in panic, and Napoleon comes near to being caught.

Part III (October-November 1812)
1. Russia behaved like a duellist who dropped his rapier and seized a cudgel.
2. Russia did not play by the book. The success of guerrilla warfare.
3. Denisov and Dolokhov plan to join forces and attack the fleeing French.
4. Young Petya Rostov turns up with a message.
5. From afar Denisov and Petya observe Tikhon Shcherbaty at work.
6. Sent to catch a Frenchman, Shcherbaty returns empty-handed.
7. Petya feels sympathy for a captured French drummer-boy.
8. Dolokhov and Denisov plan their attack. Petya insists on going with them.
9. Dolokhov and Petya infiltrate the French camp to get information.
10. Night. Petya is in a magic kingdom, dreaming. He is ready for anything.
11. In his impetuosity Petya is soon killed. Pierre is among the men rescued.
12. Pierre struggles on with the other prisoners. Karatayev is ill.
14. Karatayev lags behind and is shot. His dog is left howling.
15. They are rescued by Dolokhov. Pierre sees Petya's dead body.
16. The French army, at half strength, is a ragged shambles.
17. Russian and French manoeuvres are like a game of blind man's buff.
18. Even in retreat the absurd Napoleon is described as a 'great man'.
19. Four good reasons why the Russians did not cut off the French.

Part IV (November-December 1812)
1. The Rostovs. Natasha's grief is interrupted by bad news.
2. At first the countess cannot accept the news of Petya's death.
3. Marya stays on with Natasha, then they leave for Moscow.
4. The Russian generals want more glory, hence the battle of Krasnoye.
5. Kutuzov’s natural good sense and total consistency.
6. Kutuzov's speech of simplicity and sincerity moves the men.
7. A wattle wall is brought in to shield the fire.
8. Soldiers talk round the camp-fire under the night sky.
9. Two Frenchmen emerge from the woods, Ramballe and his orderly.
11. Kutuzov, his job done, declines and dies.
12. Pierre gets used to freedom and reviews his life.
13. Pierre is happy now, full of good will and liked by everyone.
14. The people return to Moscow and the city begins to recover.
15. Pierre meets Natasha again, much changed. She is pleased to see him.
17. Pierre spends long hours in the company of Marya and Natasha.
18. Pierre wants to marry Natasha. He leaves things to Marya.
19. Pierre is in a frenzy of joy. He loves everybody he meets.
20. Pierre has to go briefly to Petersburg, but the marriage is on.
Summary by Chapters

EPILOGUE

Part I (1813–20)
1. The forces at work in history act beyond human reason.
2. The popular concepts of chance and genius are entirely superfluous.
3. An infinity of chance contingencies caused these events, not Napoleon.
6. Marya comes to Moscow. The match with Nikolay becomes possible.
7. They live at Bald Hills, raising a family. The debts are paid off.
8. Nikolay eschews violence. Sonya, the ‘sterile flower’, lives with them.
9. The happiness and imperfections of family life.
10. Natasha monopolizes Pierre, but gives him total freedom round the house.
13. Pierre is worried about growing repression in the capital.
14. Pierre attacks the government, Nikolay defends, and little Nikolay listens.
15. The mutual, though different, love that exists between Marya and Nikolay.
16. Natasha’s jealous love. Little Nikolay’s desire to be worthy of his father.

Part II
1. The different faults of ancient and modern historians.
2. Historians, inconsistent and contradictory, stop short of real analysis.
3. The force of history is power, but how is it used to direct events?
4. The transfer of popular will to heroic leaders is a fallacy.
5. Will is only part of an event. Events often defy the will behind them.
6. No result stems from a given order. Orders come from the uninvolved.
7. Causation is complex. Retrospective explanations are too convenient.
8. We are not free, but consciousness creates in us an illusion of free will.
9. Actions are partly free, partly the products of necessity.
10. Freedom and necessity are interdependent. Neither is absolute.
11. Free will is an illusion. There are laws, and history must find them.
12. Free will must go. Personality depends on space, time and causality.
In 1951, after reading War and Peace for the twelfth time, the Russian writer Mikhail Prishvin (1873–1954) noted in his diary that he felt, at last, that he understood his life. Like all great works of art, Tolstoy's masterpiece has the capacity, on each successive reading, to transform our understanding of the world.

On any first reading, War and Peace is bound to dazzle with its immense panorama of humanity. The whole of life appears to be contained in its pages. Tolstoy presents us with a cast of several hundred characters. Yet to each one he brings such profound understanding of the human condition, with all its frailties and contradictions, that we recognize and love these characters as reflections of our own identity.

Tolstoy has an extraordinary clarity of expression - a quality which Anthony Briggs has happily maintained in this superb translation. Tolstoy might write longer novels than anybody else, but no other writer can recreate emotion and experience with such precision and economy. There are scenes in War and Peace - the unforgettable depiction of the Battle of Austerlitz, for example, or the ball where Natasha Rostov meets Prince Andrey - in which Tolstoy manages in a few words to sketch the mental images which might write longer novels than anybody else, but no other writer can recreate emotion and experience with such precision and economy. There are scenes in War and Peace - the unforgettable depiction of the Battle of Austerlitz, for example, or the ball where Natasha Rostov meets Prince Andrey - in which Tolstoy manages in a few words to sketch the mental images which allow us to picture ourselves at the scene and seemingly to feel the emotions of the protagonists. There are passages, like the death-scene of Prince Andrey, in which Tolstoy may give to his readers the extraordinary sensation that they too have felt the experience of death; and moments, like the wonderful description of the hunt, when Tolstoy lets them imagine what it is like to be a dog.

Tolstoy once said famously that War and Peace was not meant to be a novel at all. Like all great works of art, it certainly defies all conventions. Set against the historical events of the Napoleonic Wars, its complex narrative development is a long way from the tidy plot structure of the European novel in its nineteenth-century form. Tolstoy’s novel does not even have a clear beginning, middle and end, though it does, in one sense, turn on a moment of epiphany, the year of 1812, when Russia’s liberation from Napoleon is made to coincide with the personal liberation of the novel’s central characters.

While clearly still a novel, War and Peace can be understood, at another level, as a novelist’s attempt to engage with the truth of history. Tolstoy’s interest in history developed long before his career as a novelist. But history-writing disappointed him. It seemed to reduce the richness of real life. For whereas the ‘real’ history of lived experience was made up of an infinite number of factors and contingencies, historians selected just a few (for example, the political or the economic) to develop their theories and explanations. Tolstoy concluded that the histories of his day represented ‘perhaps only 0.001 per cent of the elements which actually constitute the real history of peoples.’ He was particularly frustrated by the failure of historians to illuminate the ‘inner’ life of a society – the private thoughts and relationships that make up the most real and immediate experience of human beings. Hence he turned to literature.

During the 1850s Tolstoy was obsessed with the idea of writing a historical novel which would contrast the real texture of historical experience, as lived by individuals and communities, with the distorted image of the past presented by historians. This is what he set out to achieve in War and Peace.

Through the novel’s central characters Tolstoy juxtaposes the immediate human experience of historical events with the historical memory of them. For example, when Pierre Bezukhov wanders as a spectator on to the battle-field of Borodino he expects to find the sort of neatly arranged battle scene that he has seen in paintings and read about in history books. Instead, he finds himself in the chaos of an actual battlefield:

Everything Pierre saw on either hand looked so indistinct that, glancing left or right over the landscape, he could find nothing that quite lived up to his expectations. Nowhere was there a field of battle as such, the kind of thing he had expected; there was nothing but ordinary fields, clearings, troops, woods, smoking camp-fires, villages, mounds and little streams. Here was a living landscape, and as he might he could not make out any military positioning. He could not even tell our troops from theirs. (Vol. III, Book II, ch. 21)

Having served as an officer in the Crimean War (1854–6), Tolstoy drew from his own experience to recreate the human truth of this celebrated battle, and to examine how its public memory could become distorted by the medium of written history. As Tolstoy shows, in the confusion of the battle nobody can understand or control what occurs. In such a situation, chance events, individual acts of bravery or calm thinking by the officers can influence the morale of the troops en masse and thus change the course of the battle; and this in turn creates the illusion that what is happening is somehow the result of human agency. So when the military dispatches are later written up, they invariably ascribe the outcome of the battle to the commanders, although in reality they had less influence than the random actions of the rank and file. By using these dispatches, historians are able to impose a rational pattern and ‘historical meaning’ on the battle, although neither was apparent at the time of fighting.
As a novelist, Tolstoy was interested most of all in the inner life of Russian society during the Napoleonic Wars. In *War and Peace* he presents this period of history as a crucial watershed in the culture of the Russian aristocracy. The war of 1812 is portrayed as a national liberation from the cultural domination of the French—a moment when Russian noblemen like the Rostovs and Bolkonskys struggled to break free from the foreign conventions of their society and began new lives on Russian principles. Tolstoy plots this transformation in a series of motifs. In Tolstoy's text the novel opens, for example, in the French language of the Petersburg salon—a language that Tolstoy gradually reveals to be false and artificial (the novel's most idealized characters, such as Princess Marya and the peasant Karataev, speak exclusively in Russian, or, like Natasha, speak French only with mistakes). Tolstoy shows the aristocracy renouncing *haute cuisine* for Spartan lunches of rye bread and cabbage soup, adopting national dress, settling as farmers on the land and rediscovering their country's native culture, as in the immortal scene when Natasha, a French-educated young countess, dances to a folk song in the Russian style.

On this reading, *War and Peace* appears as a national epic—the revelation of a 'Russian consciousness' in the inner life of its characters. In narrating this drama, however, Tolstoy steps out of historical time and enters the time-space of cultural myth. He allows himself considerable artistic licence. For example, the aristocracy's return to native forms of dress and recreations actually took place over several decades in the early nineteenth century, whereas Tolstoy has it happen almost overnight in 1812. But the literary creation of this mythical time-space was central to the role which *War and Peace* was set to play in the formation of the national consciousness.

When the first part of the novel appeared, in 1865–6, educated Russia was engaged in a profound cultural and political quest to define the country's national identity. The emancipation of the serfs, in 1861, had forced society to confront the humble peasant as a fellow-citizen and to seek new answers to the old accursed questions about Russia's destiny in what one poet (Nikolay Nekrasov) called the 'rural depths where eternal silence reigns'.

This was when these officers had first become acquainted with the patriotic virtues of the peasant soldiers in their ranks; when they had come to realize the potential of Russia's democratic nationhood. Through this literary genesis, *War and Peace* acquired several overlapping spheres of historical consciousness: the real-time of 1805–20 (the fictional setting of the novel); the living memory of this period (from which Tolstoy drew in the form of personal memoirs and historical accounts); and its reflection in the political consciousness of 1855–65. Thus the novel can and should be read, not just as an intimate portrait of Russian society in the age of the Napoleonic Wars, but as a broader statement about Russia, its people and its history as a whole. That is why the Russians will always turn to *War and Peace*, as Mikhail Prishvin did, to find in it the keys to their identity.

English readers will learn more about the Russians by reading *War and Peace* than they will by reading perhaps any other book. But they will also find in it the inspiration to make them think about the world and their own place in it. For *War and Peace* is a universal work and, like all the great artistic prose works of the Russian tradition, it functions as a huge poetic structure for the contemplation of the fundamental questions of our existence.

Above all, *War and Peace* will move readers by virtue of its beauty as a work of art. It is a triumphant affirmation of human life in all its richness and complexity. That is why one can return to it and always find new meanings and new truths in it.

NOTES