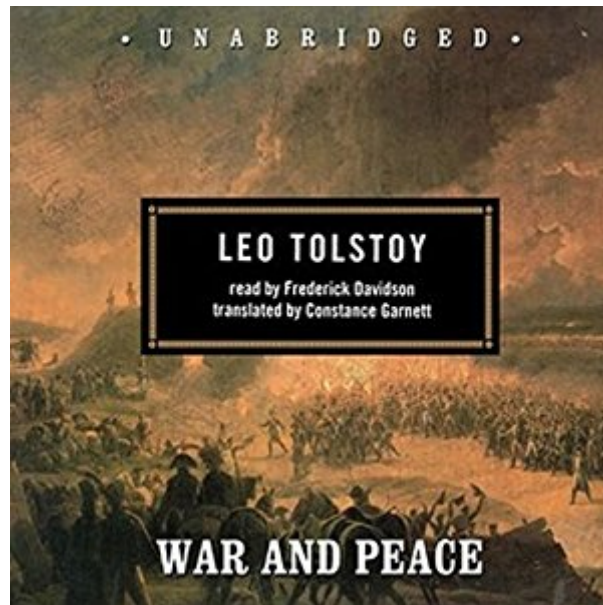


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War And Peace



Synopsis

Often called the greatest novel ever written, *War and Peace* is at once an epic of the Napoleonic Wars, a philosophical study, and a celebration of the Russian spirit. Tolstoy's genius is seen clearly in the multitude of fully realized and equally memorable characters that populate this massive chronicle. Out of this complex narrative emerges a profound examination of the individual's place in the historical process, one that makes it clear why Thomas Mann praised Tolstoy for his Homeric powers and placed *War and Peace* in the same category as the *Iliad*: "To read him . . . is to find one's way home . . . to everything within us that is fundamental and sane." --This text refers to the Mass Market Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This review is broken down into two segments, a Descriptive Summary and an Evaluative Summary. If you're already very familiar with the story of "War and Peace," you may wish to skip directly to the latter facet of my review which is essentially the critique of the Constance Garnett translation.

DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY: In 1805, Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Austria to expand his European empire. Russia, being an ally of Austria, stood with their brethren against the infamous Emperor. Napoleon prevailed and a treaty was ultimately signed at Tilsit. In 1812, Napoleon invaded Russia, again in an effort to expand his empire. The end result of this tragic war was that Napoleon's army of about 600,000 soldiers was reduced to roughly 60,000 men as the defamed Emperor raced from Moscow (which he had taken), back across the frozen Russian tundra in his carriage (leaving his troops behind to fend for themselves) for Paris. That encapsulizes the military

aspect of this work. But the more intricate story involves both the activities and the peccadillos of, primarily, three Russian families of nobility: The Rostovs, the Bolkonskys, and the Bezukovs. The continual thorn of "The Antichrist," Napoleon, really just provides the wallpaper for this story of romance, riches, desolation, love, jealousy, hatred, retribution, joy, naivety, stupidity, and so much more. Tolstoy has woven an incredibly intricate web that interconnects these noble families, the wars, and the common Russian people to a degree that would seem incomprehensible to achieve - but Tolstoy perseveres with superb clarity and great insight to the human psyche. His characters are timeless and the reader who has any social experience whatever will immediately connect with them all.

How does one do justice to a work as monumental and vast as Tolstoy's 'War and Peace' in the short space this review grants? Indeed, I toyed with the idea of trying to encapsulate this epic work in 100 words, but failed. I do know of one review of 'War and Peace' that was even shorter; it read: Napoleon invaded. It snowed. Napoleon failed. Russia won. Perhaps that does encapsulate it. Tolstoy would have probably respected such as description, for, as verbose as he and other Russian novelists seemed to be (given a purely page-count analysis), he appreciated brevity and essentialism in the description. This holds true for 'War and Peace'. I was amazed at the lack of what one might hold to be extraneous detailing in the text -- I would have expected long, drawn out and tedious renderings of situations, emotions or events, but such is not the case. In Tolstoy's following of the Rostovs (poor country gentry) and the Bolkonskis (higher society), and a hero Pierre Bezuhkov, he illustrates basic truths in the way life is lived, and the way it ought to be lived. Tolstoy was a moralist, but no mystic in his writing (unusually so, given his general mystical sentiments in life). He felt it absolutely essential that the novelist should tell the truth, and mystical digressions lead away from that. His characters grow as we watch, and he recounts details that are important (such as Natasha and her doll as a child, and then later Natasha going to church -- these are two ages of the same person, to be sure, but not a simple updating of the character, as if an actress wearing a different costume).

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