

Fall 2005
Slavic Department
G6215: Tolstoy's *War and Peace*
Prof. Liza Knapp

Rationale

The status of *War and Peace* as a world classic is generally accepted. And yet this novel tends to elude sustained academic study. Weighing in at well over 1,000 pages, the novel requires a substantial commitment on a course syllabus. When tough curricular decisions are made, *War and Peace* is all too often replaced with the blither *Anna Karenina*, a novel that has attracted lots of scholarly and popular attention of late. Another stumbling block has been its structure and its anomalous generic status. (Is it a novel? Is it a chronicle? And why, to paraphrase Flaubert, does Tolstoy philosophize so much?).

This course seeks to put *War and Peace* center stage, while also placing it in the larger intellectual and literary context. *War and Peace* is read, along with many other works, in the graduate Tolstoy course. This course will offer the opportunity to delve further into the novel, and to become acquainted with ancillary texts that may not yet be familiar to them.

Course Description

The primary goal of this course will be to study *War and Peace* in the original Russian. As we read the novel, we will focus on features of Tolstoy's poetics, with particular attention to what he does with narrative point of view. We will also look at its structure (or its notorious lack of structure). We will read major and many minor works of criticism that the novel has inspired.

Our reading of the novel will be enriched by ancillary texts aimed at opening up new perspectives on the novel. They focus on particular aspects of *War and Peace* that make it interesting or problematic.

Although Tolstoy was unabashed about *War and Peace* being a "departure from European forms," it bears some generic resemblance to the novels of the West. We will attempt to explore these elements, along with Russian sources. Tolstoy is known for his personal fondness of English family novels. And he was reading a number of them aloud to his family before and while writing *War and Peace*. We will attempt to document some of the links between *War and Peace* and this tradition, which provide a model for making "home events" novelistic. (We will pay particular attention to Charlotte Yonge's *Daisy Chain, or Aspirations*.) A major influence on Tolstoy's understanding of family life and life in general was Rousseau. We will read relevant sections from *Emile*.

We will also engage with Tolstoy's depiction of war, looking both at his philosophy of history (its sources, its original aspects) and his literary techniques for representing war.

In writing about war, Tolstoy drew on his own experience as well as literary models, primary among them being Stendhal. (And so we will read *The Charterhouse of Parma*.) We will also focus on the figure of Napoleon, as he appeared in historical sources and fictional representations. In relation to Tolstoy's philosophy of history, we will read Isaiah Berlin's now classic *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, as well as some Joseph de Maistre. Also relevant to our discussion of Tolstoy's epic intentions will be the *Iliad*, another of the important sources of *War and Peace*

In our study of *War and Peace*, we will be paying careful attention to language and the philosophy of language expounded in the novel. (It could be argued that Tolstoy in *War and Peace* was just as much concerned with the nature of language as the nature of history.) To this end, we will read works such as Rousseau's "Essay on the Origin of Languages," a source of many of Tolstoy's ideas about language, as well as discussions of Tolstoy's own verbal art, including works of the Russian formalists (Shklovsky) and modern critics (Morson, Uspensky). Tolstoy uses the juxtaposition of the Russian and French languages in the novel to demonstrate his views about the nature of language, but he certainly does not stop there. In key moments, we see the characters speculating on the limits of human language and the relations between language and thought (as well as emotion). And we will explore what Tolstoy does with binary oppositions. (Tolstoy uses diptychs as a compositional principle; he is forever thinking in terms of binary oppositions – as demonstrated in the very title of the novel.) Making use of 20th c. discussion of how binary oppositions figure in language and civilization, we will look at Tolstoy's problematics of binary oppositions.

Reading of the text of *War and Peace* will be supplemented by examination of some drafts, diaries and letters by Tolstoy. We will begin with Tolstoy's *Sevastopol Sketches*, an early work of Tolstoy's that set the stage for his subsequent depiction of war (and peace). There are a number of superb works about the writing of *War and Peace*, its intellectual and literary background, including the classic study by Boris Eikhenbaum, which we will read. Our guide for the genesis of the novel will be the study by Kathryn B. Feuer.

Prerequisites: ability to read Russian texts and graduate standing (or the instructor's permission).

Schedule

week 1: Introduction: Tolstoy before *War and Peace*.

week 2: Prelude: *Sevastopol Sketches*. (During this period, students should read through *War and Peace*.)

week 3: "The Distant Field," "Decembrists," and the Genesis of *War and Peace*. Readings will include Feuer, *Tolstoy and the Genesis of War and Peace*; Eikhenbaum, *Tolstoy in the Sixties*; and sections of Orwin, *Tolstoy's Art and Thought*, as well as selections from writings by Tolstoy (fragments, drafts, etc.) that led to *War and Peace*.

week 4: *War and Peace*, Volume 1, Part 1. Other readings: Morson, *Narrative Freedom*; Uspensky, "Point of View on the Phraseological Plane"; Rousseau, "Essay on the Origin of Language"; Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* [end of Part 1: Nastasya Filippovna's nameday party].

week 5: *War and Peace*, Volume 1, Parts 2 & 3. Other readings: Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*; selections from de Maistre, *Les soirées de Saint-Petersbourg*.

week 6: *War and Peace*, Volume 2, Parts 1, 2 & 3. Other readings: selections from Yonge, *Daisy Chain*; selections from Roosevelt, *Life on the Russian Country Estate* and Figue, *Natasha's Dance*.

week 7: *War and Peace*, Volume 2, Parts 4 & 5. Other readings: Rousseau, selection on opera from *Julie*; Shklovsky on "ostranenie"; Derrida, selections on binary oppositions.

week 8: *War and Peace*, Volume 3, Parts 1 & 2. Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*. [Alternative: Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*].

week 9: *War and Peace*, Volume 3, Part 3. Other readings: *Material i stil' v romane L'va Tolstogo 'Voina i mir'* and selections from Sankovitch, *Creating and Recovering Experience: Repetition in Tolstoy*. Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*.

week 10: *War and Peace*, Volume 4, parts 1 & 2. Other readings: Leontiev, "The Novels of Count L. Tolstoy: Analysis, Style, and Atmosphere" and George Clay. *Tolstoy's Phoenix*.

week 11: *War and Peace*, Volume 4, parts 3 & 4. Other reading: Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*.

week 12: *War and Peace*, Epilogues. Other readings: Rousseau, selections from *Émile*

week 13: Reception and responses. Readings: Tolstoy's "On *War and Peace*"; a selection of critical responses, with emphasis on the structure of the novel. (If there is interest, we may look at literary responses to *War and Peace* or responses in other media.)

week 14 & 15: presentation of student work

The workload will consist of careful reading and preparation of *War and Peace*; the reading of ancillary texts from various fields (literary works, criticism, history, philosophy); class presentations; a short paper devoted to textual analysis (5 pages) and a longer paper on a topic of the student's choice (10-20 pages).

Bibliography

Literary works:

Tolstoy. *Sevastopol Sketches, War and Peace*, and selected drafts, diaries, and letters
Stendhal. *The Charterhouse of Parma*
Yonge. *Daisy Chain or Aspirations* (selections)

Other:

Isaiah Berlin. *The Hedgehog and the Fox*.
George Clay. *Tolstoy's Phoenix: From Method to Meaning in War and Peace*.
Boris Eikhenbaum. *Tolstoy in the Sixties*.
Caryl Emerson. "The Tolstoy Connection in Bakhtin," in *Rethinking Bakhtin*.
Kathyn B. Feuer. *The Genesis of War and Peace*.
Richard Gustafson. *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*.
Konstantin Leontiev. "The Novels of Count L. Tolstoy: Analysis, Style, and Atmosphere," in *Essays in Russian Literature: The Conservative View*, pp. 225-356.
Gary Saul Morson. *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in War and Peace*
Donna Tussing Orwin. *Tolstoy's Art and Thought, 1847-1880*.
Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Emile* (selections); "Essay on the Origin of Language"; *Julie* (short selection)
Natasha Sankovitch. *Creating and Recovering Experience: Repetition in Tolstoy*.
Viktor Shklovskii. *Material i stil' v romane L'va Tolstogo 'Voina i mir'* and "Art as Technique."
Boris Uspensky. "Point of View on the Phraseological Plane," in *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form*.

and selected articles or excerpts about *War and Peace* and related topics.