

WAR AND PEACE BY LEO TOLSTOY: AN EPIC OF RUSSIAN LIFE

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Abstract: Leo Tolstoy's novel War and Peace is an epic work that covers a wide range of topics: from the historical events of the Napoleonic Wars to deep philosophical reflections on fate, morality, and human destiny. Tolstoy creates a multi-layered narrative that intertwines the destinies of several aristocratic families against the backdrop of significant historical changes. The novel explores the inner transformation of key characters - Pierre Bezukhov, Andrei Bolkonsky, and Natasha Rostova - through the prism of their personal quests and spiritual growth. Tolstoy also offers an alternative concept of history, which emphasizes not the actions of great personalities, but a variety of random factors and the actions of ordinary people. War and Peace is a philosophical study of war, peace, human nature, and the place of man in a larger historical context.

Keywords: Leo Tolstoy, "War and Peace", philosophy of history, psychological novel, Napoleonic Wars, Pierre Bezukhov, Andrei Bolkonsky, Natasha Rostova, morality, fate, inner growth, epic, Russian literature.

War and Peace, an epic novel written by Leo Tolstoy in the 1860s, is considered one of the greatest works of world literature. This sweeping narrative covers the lives of various social classes in Russia during the Napoleonic Wars, exploring issues of war, peace, society, morality, and the fate of man. Tolstoy takes the reader back to the early 19th century, when Europe was engulfed in Napoleon's wars. The plot centers on the fate of Russia during this dramatic period, as reflected through the stories of several families, such as the Bolkonskys, Rostovs, and Bezukhovs. War and Peace touches on such important historical events as the Battle of Borodino, the Patriotic War of 1812, and subsequent political events that dramatically changed the course of history.

The plot of the novel covers a decade of the characters' lives and is divided into four volumes, where the action alternates between the peaceful life of the aristocracy and the harsh realities of war. Main characters:

- Pierre Bezukhov is one of the central characters, the heir to a huge fortune, searching for the meaning of life and his place in the world.
- Andrei Bolkonsky is a noble but disappointed officer, striving for exploits and inner peace.
- Natasha Rostova is a young, emotional and full of life girl who undergoes significant changes during the course of the novel, reflecting the inner path to maturity.

Through these characters, Tolstoy shows the diversity of human life, the contradictory nature of human actions and the search for the meaning of life in conditions of war and peace.

War and Peace: Tolstoy depicts in detail both the destructive power of war and the fragility of peace. War is presented not as a heroic action, but as a chaotic, cruel and senseless catastrophe. Peaceful moments, on the contrary, are filled with philosophical reflections on human life, happiness and love.

Fate and free will: One of the key questions of the novel is the role of fate in human life. Tolstoy explores whether people can control their own destiny or are they just pawns in the hands of history.

Morals and personal growth: The novel's heroes face internal crises and moral dilemmas. Pierre Bezukhov's path from a frivolous young man to a philosophical seeker of truth is an example of internal growth and the search for meaning.

Tolstoy raises deep philosophical questions in *War and Peace*. He criticizes historians who try to explain the course of history through the actions of great personalities, such as Napoleon. In his opinion, history is driven by a combination of small events and the actions of many people. Tolstoy also raises the question of the meaning of life and the search for inner peace.

The novel is written in a vivid and rich language, which varies depending on the situations described - from epic battle scenes to intimate moments of love and grief. Tolstoy masterfully combines historical facts and fictional events, creating a sense of authenticity and a deep connection between the past and the present. Structurally, *War and Peace* is a unique combination of a fictional novel, a historical chronicle, and a philosophical treatise. This allows Tolstoy to explore various aspects of life: from macrohistorical processes to the microcosms of individual families.

Psychology of the characters and their development. One of the most impressive aspects of *War and Peace* is the depth of the psychological portrait of the characters. Tolstoy explores the inner experiences of the heroes with such precision that their emotions and actions become understandable and close to the reader. Each of the central characters goes through significant personal changes.

Pierre Bezukhov goes a long way from a naive and confused young man who does not know what to do with a huge fortune to a mature man who has found peace of mind and harmony. At the beginning of the novel, Pierre does not understand his place in society or his purpose. His participation in Freemasonry, attempts to find the meaning of life and wanderings are a reflection of the spiritual quest of a person striving for inner truth.

Andrei Bolkonsky at the beginning of the novel is a man disappointed in life and in the people around him. He craves glory and exploits, but gradually realizes that the true value of life lies not in glory, but in love and simple human joys. His encounters with Natasha and his death on the battlefield symbolize the profound transformation of his soul, from pride to humility and wisdom.

Natasha Rostova is a figure of sincerity and emotional purity. Throughout the novel, she grows, her youthful dreams and romantic passions giving way to more mature feelings and an awareness of reality. Her emotional ups and downs, especially after her failed engagement to Anatole Kuragin, show how difficult life situations can change a person.

One of the novel's main features is its detailed description of war. Tolstoy does not simply show wars as a political event, but as a human tragedy. Battles that are described as heroic feats in history books are depicted in the novel through the prism of pain, fear, chaos, and death. In *War and Peace*, there is no clear line between heroes and villains on the battlefield; instead, Tolstoy emphasizes the senselessness and uncontrollability of war.

The famous Battle of Borodino scene, one of the key events in the novel, shows war not as a strategic confrontation, but as a terrible, senseless and chaotic phenomenon. Napoleon, who is often portrayed as a great military leader, is presented in Tolstoy's novel as a man whose decisions and ambitions lead to senseless human suffering. He is shown as detached, devoid of understanding the true consequences of his actions.

The female characters in *War and Peace* play a significant role in the development of the plot and the disclosure of the main themes of the novel. Although at first glance their lives seem

secondary against the backdrop of great historical events, Tolstoy endows his heroines with depth and inner strength.

- Marya Bolkonskaya is one of the most profound and contradictory heroines of the novel. She combines humility and spirituality, readiness for self-sacrifice and internal struggle. Her relationship with her father, the old Prince - Bolkonsky, is full of drama and tension, which makes her character even more multifaceted.

- Helen Kuragina is a vivid image of a socialite for whom the external attributes of success are important. She is contrasted with more spiritual characters such as Marya and Natasha, and represents the superficial values of society. Sonya is a symbol of loyalty and devotion, although her fate often remains in the shadow of brighter and more dynamic heroines. Sonya is a character whose inner world is revealed through her sacrifice and self-denial.

An important element of War and Peace is Tolstoy's reflection on the nature of historical processes. He rejects the traditional view of history, according to which great personalities such as Napoleon or Alexander I determine the course of events. On the contrary, Tolstoy emphasizes that the course of history depends on many random and unpredictable factors. In his view, no person, no matter how great, can control history - it develops independently, like a natural phenomenon. This idea is manifested in the way Tolstoy describes historical events: great battles, diplomatic maneuvers and political decisions often turn out to be meaningless against the backdrop of a huge mass of human destinies and experiences. Tolstoy offers an alternative philosophy of history, in which the first place is not taken by "great figures", but by many ordinary people and their actions.

In War and Peace, Tolstoy masterfully uses motifs and symbols to emphasize the key ideas and themes of the work. These elements help to better understand the author's philosophical and moral views, and also create emotional and symbolic content for the plot. The motif of the road is one of the main ones in the novel. The road symbolizes the path of life, changes and inner searches. Pierre's travels, Andrei Bolkonsky's trip to war, the Rostovs' flight from Moscow - all these episodes are connected with the motif of the road as a symbol of the changes that the characters experience.

Natural phenomena: nature plays an important role in the novel, acting as a metaphor for the emotional states and internal changes of the characters. For example, the oak tree that Andrei Bolkonsky sees at the beginning of the novel symbolizes his own feeling of emptiness and despair. Later, when the tree is renewed, Andrei also begins to feel the revival of internal strength. **War as an element:** Tolstoy repeatedly depicts war as an uncontrollable and elemental force. War acts like a natural phenomenon - it goes beyond human control, and its consequences are unpredictable. For Tolstoy, the idea that war is meaningless and destroys everything in its path, like a natural disaster, is important.

Tolstoy uses War and Peace not only as a means for philosophical reflection, but also as a criticism of society. In the novel, the author shows the failure of the aristocracy and the superficiality of secular society. Through the images of such characters as Helen Kuragina, Tolstoy ridicules the meaninglessness and moral emptiness of life based on the pursuit of money, status and external success.

Social balls, intrigues and discussions of political events are often shown in contrast to the true depth of the characters' experiences. For example, Natasha Rostova, having attended a ball for the first time, feels delight, but later realizes that there is emptiness behind this externally brilliant life. Tolstoy emphasizes that real human values are not hidden in social glitter, but in sincerity, simplicity and spirituality.

Another important element of criticism is the attitude towards the army and state institutions. Through the images of generals such as Kutuzov and Napoleon, Tolstoy contrasts wisdom and experience with imaginary glory and vanity. Kutuzov, as the embodiment of patience and folk wisdom, is often depicted as the opposite of the ambitious Napoleon, whose aspirations for greatness lead to destruction.

The image of Mikhail Illarionovich Kutuzov occupies a special place in the novel. Tolstoy portrays him not only as a talented military leader, but also as a person with a deep understanding of the course of events and the fate of the people. Unlike Napoleon, who perceives war as an arena for personal glory, Kutuzov acts based on a broader understanding of the need to preserve the people and the country. Kutuzov does not interfere with the course of events and does not try to actively manage them, which often causes criticism and discontent among his subordinates. However, it is precisely this philosophical attitude, humility before the natural course of things, that makes Kutuzov a symbol of true wisdom for Tolstoy. He understands that great historical processes cannot be controlled, and that his task is to direct events based on the interests of the people, and not his own glory. An important moment is the scene of the surrender of Moscow, when Kutuzov decides to leave the city, although this is perceived by many as a defeat. However, it is more important for him to preserve the army and forces for the future battle than to defend the capital at any cost. This decision, although seemingly cowardly, turns out to be correct in terms of the final result - victory over Napoleon. The Legacy of the Novel

War and Peace has had a profound influence on literature, philosophy, and art. Not only was it an important step in the development of realism, but it also offered a new way of looking at history and human destiny. Tolstoy had a profound influence on subsequent generations of writers, such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, Thomas Mann, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf.

War and Peace has inspired interpretations in theater, film, and music over the decades. In the 1960s, director Sergei Bondarchuk made an epic film of the same name, which received international acclaim and an Oscar. Musicians such as Sergei Prokofiev wrote musical pieces inspired by the novel. Today, War and Peace remains a relevant work, read and discussed around the world. It continues to be one of those books that make you think about the deep questions of human life, about the meaning of war and peace, about a person's place in history and how personal decisions can influence the fate of an entire nation.

Conclusion: "War and Peace" is not only a classic work of Russian literature, but also the greatest achievement of world culture. Leo Tolstoy managed to cover broad layers of history, philosophy, psychology and morality in one novel, creating a work that has remained relevant for more than a century and a half. This epic about human destinies, war and peace, love and suffering remain an unsurpassed example of the depth and power of literary art. Tolstoy shows in his work that even against the backdrop of great historical cataclysms, the most important thing for a person is his inner life, his moral choices and the desire for truth and love.

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