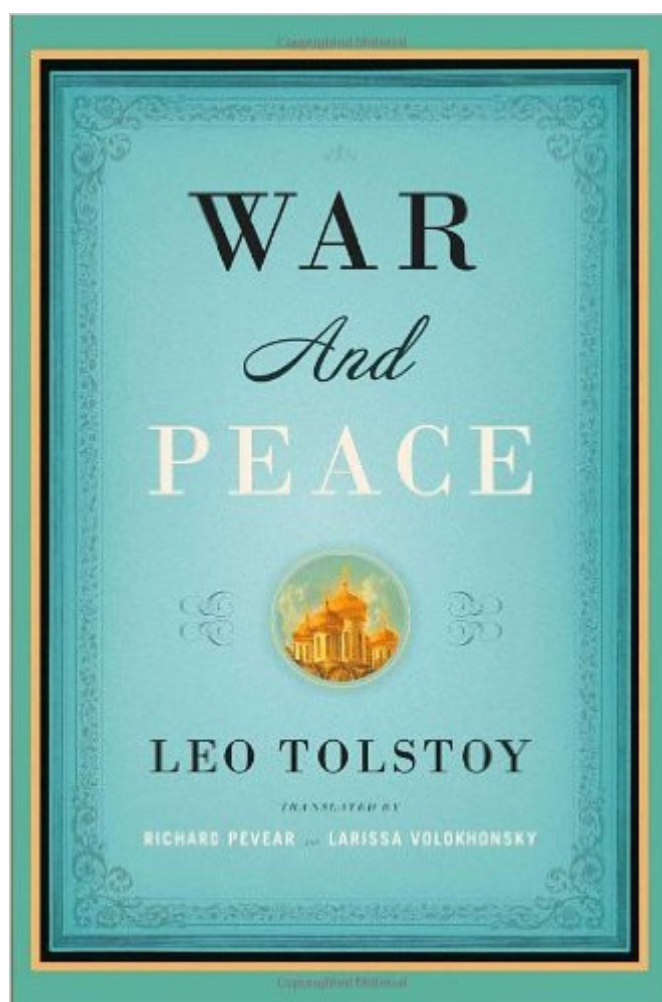


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# War And Peace (Vintage Classics)



## Synopsis

The basis for the A&E miniseries starring Paul Dano and Lily James. From the award-winning translators of *Anna Karenina* and *The Brothers Karamazov* comes this magnificent new translation of Tolstoy's masterwork. *War and Peace* broadly focuses on Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812 and follows three of the most well-known characters in literature: Pierre Bezukhov, the illegitimate son of a count who is fighting for his inheritance and yearning for spiritual fulfillment; Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, who leaves his family behind to fight in the war against Napoleon; and Natasha Rostov, the beautiful young daughter of a nobleman who intrigues both men. As Napoleon's army invades, Tolstoy brilliantly follows characters from diverse backgrounds—peasants and nobility, civilians and soldiers—as they struggle with the problems unique to their era, their history, and their culture. And as the novel progresses, these characters transcend their specificity, becoming some of the most moving and human figures in world literature.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (1,179 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

"War and Peace," by Leo Tolstoy, © 2007, translation by Richard Pevear and Larissa

Volokhonsky  
Alfred A. Knopf, publisher  
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 this particular volume.  
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. "War and Peace" is a fictional, lengthy novel, based upon historical fact. In his Epilogue, Tolstoy yields us a shrewd dissertation on the behavior of large organizations, much of it by way of analogy. It's actually an oblique, often sarcastic, commentary on the lunacy of government activities and the madness of their wars.

**EVALUATIVE SUMMARY:** I feel compelled at the outset to offer a brief paragraph in response to certain reviews which I've seen listed here on . In regard to "ungrammatical" and "poor syntax" instances, it is prominently and clearly stated in Pevear's/Volokhonsky's introduction that a primary objective of this translation (paraphrasing) is to empower the reader with a real sense of Tolstoy's writing style - and that goal they achieved quite nicely; however, this caveat hardly rendered the work ungrammatical in any sense whatever. To the contrary, I found this rendering to read notably more fluidly than the renowned Maude edition, (which I have read twice), and much easier to initially digest (syntax) than the works, of say, William Faulkner or John O'Hara, both of whom also employed a unique, but brilliant writing style. As I didn't see any actual citations of poor grammar in the instant reviews I'll close my case regarding this topic on that particular note. Here are some particularly positive points of this translation of "War and Peace":

1. Here we have a smooth and fluid read. Tolstoy's style yields some repetition but never redundancy - he does this in a clever manner and the translators have shrewdly served it up. We have not seen this before in prior translations.
2. This translation allows the reader to think for himself/herself. One of the best examples is actually discussed in the introduction: (P/V) "The school children in their chairs drove to Moscow." Another translation has it this way: "The School

children played in their chairs as if they were driving to Moscow." See what I mean?<sup>3</sup> The names of the principals are conveyed more appropriately, "Andrei" instead of "Andrew," "Marya" instead of "Mary".<sup>4</sup> The language is more modern and the syntax less stilted than previous translations.<sup>5</sup> I felt, in a real sense, "the soul" of each of the principals, as well as that of Tolstoy himself, which I had not previously experienced. This is especially true in regard to characters Pierre Bezukov and Andrei Bolkonsky.<sup>6</sup> Two percent of the book's text was written in French and it is maintained that way, with a clear English translation in respective footnotes on the very pages in which the French passages appear. This makes for very convenient reading.<sup>7</sup> Brief endnotes exist where appropriate and the translators did not go overboard with lengthy passages which can be distracting in other versions of the work. They give you what you need to know to pursue these topics further, on your own, if you wish.<sup>8</sup> There is a fine map of The Battle of Borodino grounds (page 856) which is really about all one needs in order to understand the primary battle details (Borodino) within this work.<sup>9</sup> The character descriptions/identifications at the front of the book are spot-on and the Introduction adequately prepares the English reader to understand such Russian nuances as "patronymic" names.<sup>10</sup> Just past the endnotes, you'll find a very informative "Historical Index" which lists all the actual primary officers, European leaders, and nobility mentioned in "War and Peace".<sup>11</sup> This volume is nicely bound (sturdy red cardboard binding) with an equally high-quality, attractive dust cover. It will look nice on your bookshelf, either with or without the dustcover. I have few criticisms of this tremendous work and of the appurtenant translation, but here they are:<sup>1</sup> I chuckled aloud when I read Pevear's and Volokhonsky's attempt to mimic the speech (dialogue) of the very likable character, Denisov - it wasn't very good. Denisov was clearly tongue-tied. The translators, for the most part, inserted a "gh" where I would have inserted a "w" (in regard to pronouncing "Rs and Ls"). I got the general feeling that neither of the translators had ever actually encountered a person plagued with this somewhat tragic speech impediment! To counter this gaff, as I read along where Denisov was engaged in dialogue, I simply mentally inserted my own "Ws" wherever I came across the egregious "GHs".<sup>2</sup> I encountered VERY FEW typographical errors, those occurring on pages 3, 355, and 484, respectively. I've already reported them directly to the publisher for correction in subsequent editions.<sup>3</sup> There is one error that will befuddle many readers. It's in regard to Pierre's numerology on page 665. If you add up the numbers as stated in the book, it adds up to 661, and not 666 (The Biblical Mark of the Beast), as the manuscript states. This caveat is noted in the Maude translation of "War and Peace" but not in this one. To correct the problem, one has to account for the implied letter "e" in "l'(e)mpereur Napoléon," which has a numerical value of 5, making the formula work correctly, totaling 666 as stated in the manuscript. It's complicated... you'll

probably have to read a page or two and work it out for yourself to grasp the problem. In any case, the P/V translation needs either a footnote or an endnote.<sup>4</sup> I encountered one strange incongruity which was initially a little disturbing to me and which appears on page 687. In the second to the last paragraph, it says, "...instead of Mademoiselle Bourienne, the boy Petrushka read to him..." In the Maude translation of "War and Peace," it reads, "...instead of Mademoiselle Bourienne -- a serf-boy read to him." Now THAT is a significant difference in that it sounds like either Pevear and Volokhonsky actually added a character to Tolstoy's masterpiece, or, Maude ignored one! I could think of only two legitimate reasons for how this might ethically occur: a. the two translations were derived from different source documents, one mentioning Petrushka, the other not, or, b. the publisher may have made an "intentional error" that would likely not be noticed by anyone in an effort to enable the documentation of an unauthorized publication of copyrighted text by unscrupulous publishers at a later date. In any case, I'm really curious about this and would love to hear the reason for the difference in translations. In the end, of course, actually adding a character would go far beyond the ethical purview of a translator (as would ignoring/omitting one). To finalize, the newly published (10-07) Pevear and Volokhonsky translation of "War and Peace" is nothing short of superb. It clearly transcends the previous translations of Garnett and Maude. If you plan to read Tolstoy's masterpiece for the first time, this is the translation that you want. 02-29-'08

REVISION/EDIT: "Some comments about the 2005 BRIGGS and other translations" I just received (02-28-'08) my new BRIGGS translation (Viking/Penguin) yesterday and it has a lovely binding, "sewn". Of course, it was originally priced at \$40 bucks, (\$56 Canadian) (!!!), initially way more pricey than the P/V translation. But now it's a steal because you can get a brand new copy for under \$15 or pick up a very good used one for \$10 here on , (mine was supposed to be used, at \$10, but it looked brand new to me). I would speculate that the Briggs translation was somewhat financially doomed at the outset, (hence, the heavily discounted 2008 price), just BECAUSE folks anticipated the near arrival of the P/V translation which came out just a year following Briggs' "War and Peace," in addition to the negative impacts of the latter's initial \$40 price tag. I just got started on Briggs last night and, so far, I'm VERY pleased with the smooth, modern-language translation, (but absent of any anachronistic/modern "buzzwords"), and, I'm even more copasetic with the book's straightforward layout. The main text is nicely supplemented with 5 or 6 detailed maps, a list of principals (both fictional and non-fictional), and 2 commentaries, all at the rear of the text. There is NO introduction by the translator and it's a direct read -- rendered entirely in English with almost no footnotes to bother with. There are historically-oriented endnotes but, as they are at the finale of the work, I find them useful and yet not distracting. The book is almost exactly the same size and weight

as the P/V translation, with a beautiful white cover and dust jacket. The few early complaints I hear on Briggs is that he "British-izes" the dialogue, using words like "mate" as soldiers address one another... so it's not written in "American" English. This fact, too, probably doomed him a bit in pecuniary terms, at least in the USA. But that is a very small caveat and I don't personally mind it at all. As Briggs pointed out in his commentary (paraphrasing), he had to choose an English dialect to translate it TO and, since he himself was English, that is the vernacular which he chose to utilize. Makes sense to me. Briggs' credentials are well up to par as a former Professor of Russian at the University of Birmingham, (Edgbaston, 26,000 students), coupled with the fact that he has previously translated many other literary works from their original Russian language. In any case, I'll do a full review when I've finished this alternative "War and Peace" English translation. In addition to the Pevear/Volokhonsky (2007) and Briggs (2005) translations, "War and Peace" has also been translated by the following people: Clara Ball, (1886, from a French translation source document by "Une Russe," an unknown woman); N.H. Dole, (1889); Leo Weiner, (1904); Constance Garnett, (1904); Louise and Aylmer Maude, (1923... the Maudes, who lived in Russia, had actually consulted with Tolstoy himself during their work on the project); Rosemary Edmonds, (1957, updated version, 1978), and; Ann Dunnigan, (1968, which is lauded as "...a sound American version").pat

I started off with Pevear/Volokhonsky translation ("P/V", *War and Peace* (Vintage Classics)), but midway through also got a Maude translation ("Maude", *War and Peace* (Oxford World's Classics)), and finished the reading using both. This review addresses specifically these two editions linked here - apparently there are multiple different editions using these same translations. P/V, I understand, is a recent new translation with an aim to better transfer the original literary tone of Tolstoy's Russian while the Maude is a (the?) classic translation continuously in print for almost a century but revised by Amy Mandelker for the modern audience (how much revision I do not know since I have not read any older Maude edition, but I presume the revisions are carried out conservatively). Both are accompanied with extensive end notes and other supplementary materials to provide contextual information. An interesting thing I noted is that both have the French passages in text with the translation in footnotes, and I understand that it is a P/V innovation that was adopted in the new Maude edition I'm addressing. I've got Maude because while reading P/V I came across passages that are not merely awkward but incomprehensible despite the copious book-end notes. The Maude reads straight-forward and generally presented me no problem in following the narratives and conversations. Returning to problematic passages in P/V, I found some of them more lively and direct ONCE I already understood the gist of the passage from the Maude.

There are some other passages where P/V simply reads more direct and lively whereas Maude reads more dry and flat. For the larger part, though, the translations are almost identical. For first-time readers of "War and Peace", I would recommend the Maude. It is written in a comprehensible straight-forward manner, accompanied with more extensive set of supplementary materials to explain the context (e.g, maps, more book-end notes, etc.), and is handsomely produced (kudos to Oxford Classics' series producers). P/V, I think, despite some passages where the translation is more engaging, is of interest more to those who already read an older translation and understand the basic text, who seek a different (or differently nuanced) translation. I'll throw in an opinionated commentary. While the P/V's aim is admirable and ambitious, I feel it ultimately failed to achieve that objective. I'm a "lay" first-time reader of "War and Peace" with no background in the Russian language or the Russian literature, and the odd incomprehensible English passages only invoke the expected negative reaction and tell me nothing of Tolstoy's "War and Peace". On the other hand, if I were an avid fan of "War and Peace" and want to get the feel of the original literary tone of Tolstoy's Russian "War and Peace", I would learn Russian and read "War and Peace" in Russian instead of mucking around with another English translation. The appeal of the new P/V translation therefore seems rather limited to certain specific audience. Lastly, actually about "War and Peace" itself. Tolstoy's writing on the (early 19th century) Russian society and family interaction is, despite the age, witty and engaging - the portrayal of family life in the Epilogue, Part I, truly hits it home. However, the battle scenes and his theory of history are, to this modern day reader, bit wearisome. NOTE: Do NOT read the foreword/preface/introduction (whatever it's called) by Amy Mandelker at the beginning - it contains plot spoilers.

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