

# The Original War and Peace

## July 2012



Portrait of Tolstoy by Ivan Kramskoy, 1873

**W***ar and Peace* by Count Leo Tolstoy is generally regarded as one of the greatest novels ever written. The six volumes of the first book edition in Russian were published in 1868 and 1869. Translations appeared in England and the United States in 1886, and the book has been in print ever since. These first Russian and English editions are highly sought by collectors.

However, the first 250 pages of the Russian version – Parts First and Second, through the Schongraben battle – had appeared earlier, in 1865 and 1866. The first appearance in print was in a Moscow literary journal, *Russian Messenger*; and the second – a book edition put out by the publisher

of the literary journal – appeared in Moscow in 1866 with a different title: *One Thousand Eight Hundred and Five* (hereafter “1805”).

The existence of this early version of the first part of *War and Peace* is well known to Russian literature scholars. But book dealers in their catalogues rarely refer to it. Probably this is because the text of 1805 has never been translated into English. Moreover, copies of the *Russian Messenger* journal from 1865-1866 are not readily available in the West. And the first book version of 1805 is almost unobtainable.

What should a collector prefer? Is 1805 so similar to *War and Peace* that it should be regarded as a “first edition” of the great work? Or is it sufficiently different that it be regarded as a very rare edition of a separate work by the great author?

It is what it is: both similar and different. The structure and flow of the 250 pages of 1805 are the same as in *War and Peace*. But by the time he completed the great work, Tolstoy had gone back and significantly edited those beginning 250 pages, eliminating some long sections and editing others.

**I**t is said that confession is good for the soul. On that premise, I confess that the first time I tried to read *War and Peace* in English some fifty years ago, I failed. I still have my inexpensive Modern Library edition, all 1136 pages, with the note that I bought it in 1962. I remember that first failure now with embarrassment. I made it through perhaps 30-40 pages before losing any handle on the Russian names. Also, the story didn't seem to be going anywhere. So I put it away.

Some four decades later, the accidents of life led me to take a stab at learning Russian – which in turn led me into collecting Russian firsts. A long-time friend, Prof. Irwin Weil of the Northwestern University Slavic department, told me he had learned



Young Tolstoy (ABOVE) and Sophia Bers Tolstoy



Russian by reading Tolstoy and that his first conquest had been *War and Peace*, which took him a summer. I don't think he made it sufficiently clear to me that one needed to know grammar and Russian verbs before reading serious Russian prose.

Anyway, I found a tutor, bought a couple of texts, a dictionary, and a 12-volume paperbound modern set of Tolstoy's works. It took a while to get to the point of reading with a dictionary. After a couple of years, it seemed like a good idea to spend a month in Russia – to hear the language spoken and to expand my limited vocabulary. Prof. Weil helped make the arrangements.

While I was in St. Petersburg, I met a local book publisher who showed me a book by Tolstoy he had recently published – in Russian – entitled *1805*. It was a reprint of the first book edition of 1866. I had never heard of it and asked if I could buy a copy of the reprint. He told me that it had sold out. Also, having quickly grasped the limits of my proficiency with the Russian language, he volunteered that it had never been translated into English. He said it would be impossible to find a first edition of *1805*.

That's a terrible thing to say to a book collector.

Leo ("Lev") Nikolayevitch Tolstoy (1828-1910) was the heir to two great family traditions. His mother's, the Volkonskys, traced their line back to Prince Ryurik, which placed them higher up the aristocratic ladder than any family other than the Romanovs. The Tolstoys were also highly regarded, but their family tree was fuller than their bank account.

Tolstoy is so well known to Caxtonians and other friends of literature that the usual biographical background may be truncated here.<sup>1</sup>

We may pick up the story in early 1863. During the prior decade, following an unsuccessful university career marred by various forms of debauchery and then a five-year stint in the army, Leo had published a number of highly-regarded short works in literary journals. These included his semi-autobiographical recollections in *Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth*, and several stories and reports based on his experiences in the Caucasus and the Crimea.

In September 1862 he married Sophia Bers. His biographer, A.N. Wilson, believed that it was this marriage which "produced the Shakespearian alchemy in his imagination." He added:

[It] is doubtful if [*War and Peace*] would have been written at

all had not the manuscripts been copied and stamped with the signature, not of God, nor of Tolstoy, but of his wife.<sup>2</sup>

*War and Peace* grew out of Tolstoy's decision to write about the Decembrists – the “Dekabristi” – who in 1825 had sought to overthrow, or at least constitutionalize, the Romanov dynasty. Tsar Alexander I had died, and the succession was uncertain. Both the conspirators and government supporting regiments gathered outside the Senate building in St. Petersburg not far from the Neva on December 14, 1825. After some initial confusion, Alexander's son, Nicholas I, easily put down the reformers. Their leaders were executed, and 120 of the conspirators – all members of the gentry – were sentenced to hard labor in Siberia.<sup>3</sup>

One of the Decembrists exiled to Siberia was Tolstoy's mother's relative, Count Sergei Volkonsky. In late 1860 Tolstoy while traveling abroad had met the aging Volkonsky in Italy. The old man and many other exiles had been released following an amnesty declared by Alexander II. Tolstoy's biographer Wilson notes that they must have spoken “of the Decembrist Rising and of Volkonsky's sufferings at the hands of the autocracy.”<sup>4</sup>

Tolstoy initially conceived the story as having three parts. In reverse chronology, they were: (a) the 1856 return of the exiles from Siberia, (b) the 1825 Revolt itself, and (c) the roots of that uprising, which lay in the exposure of Russian aristocrats and other veterans of the Napoleonic Wars to the political theories of equality and fraternity that had been developed during the period of the French Revolution.

The part about the return of the exiles in 1856 was probably started in the latter part of 1860 even before he met Volkonsky in Italy.<sup>5</sup> The lead character, who later became the model for Pierre Bezukhov in *War and Peace*, ponders the changes that have occurred between 1825 and 1856, and muses that “Russia's strength is not in us [the aristocracy] but in the people.” Simons calls this first (though chronologically last) section “an extraordinarily vivid picture of peasant life.”<sup>6</sup>

Tolstoy's writings about the the return in 1856 were not published either in a journal or as a separate book. A modern Russian edition of Tolstoy's *Collected Works* (Moscow 1958) states that a segment was first published in 1884 in a Russian volume – which I have not seen – entitled *Twenty Five Years, 1859-1884*.<sup>7</sup> Three years later three chapters – 70 pages – appeared in the Seventh Edition of Tolstoy's *Collected Works*, published in Moscow in

1887, where they were presented as part of a “novel” entitled *Decembrists*, along with a note by Tolstoy, which translates roughly (by me) as follows:

The three chapters of a novel printed here under the title “*Decembrists*” were written before the author undertook *War and Peace*. At that time he considered writing a novel in which the main characters would be Decembrists, but he did not write it because, trying to recreate the time of the Decembrists, he involuntarily shifted in thought to an earlier time, to the past of his heroes. Gradually before the author were opened deeper and deeper the sources of the occurrences about which he intended to write: families, education, social conditions and the like of these favored people; finally he stopped at the time of the war with Napoleon which he described in *War and Peace*. In the end of that novel are already seen the signs of that excitement which were reflected in the events of December 14, 1825.

Later the author again undertook work on the *Decembrists* and wrote two other beginnings which are here printed at the end of this article.

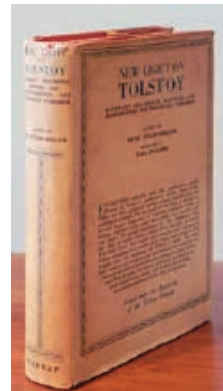
These are the origins of the proposed parts of the novel which, evidently, are not destined to be written.<sup>8</sup>

As far as I have been able to determine, these three chapters dealing with the return of the Decembrists have never been translated.

A few other fragments on the return of the Decembrists were found, translated, and published in English with the authorization of Tolstoy’s daughter in *New Light on Tolstoy*, edited by Rene Fulop-Miller.<sup>9</sup> The editor wrote of these fragments that, “here, as in perhaps no other work, the author has succeeded in portraying the very life and soul of the Russian peasant.”<sup>10</sup>

As to the second part of the projected trilogy – the 1825 Revolt itself – no manuscript drafts or fragments have survived.

Throughout the summer and fall of 1863, Tolstoy labored on the chronologically-earliest part of



*New Light on Tolstoy* is the only English translation of his writing about the return of the Decembrists.

his story: the period of 1805-1812. In October 1863 his wife wrote that he intended to call it *The History of 1812*. But his curiosity about historical causation – like that of other Russian intellectuals of that period – led him to keep digging for earlier causes. How could one understand 1812 without knowing what had happened in 1805, or even earlier?

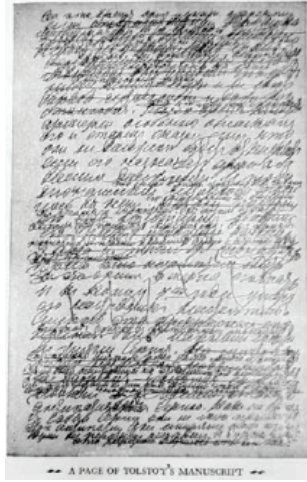
For Tolstoy his family history was intertwined with that of Russia, both in fact and imagination. Thus, his story of the Napoleonic era became fused with that of his family, and his characters were modeled upon members of his family. The Bolkonsky family in the book – particularly the old Prince and his daughter Maria – were modeled on Tolstoy's mother's family – the Volkonskys.

(In early drafts they were even named "Volkonsky.") Similarly, several of the Rostovs were modeled on the Tolstoy (and in the first drafts, the Rostov family was named "Tolstoy").<sup>11</sup> Tolstoy's wife's sister became the model for Natasha – the central female character.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps something of Tolstoy himself found its way into the central character, Pierre.

As Tolstoy's biographer Wilson observed, "there is ... hardly an incident, conversation or character which the commentators are not able to tell us is 'autobiographical' – and in those passages which are not, ... there is a conspicuous flatness."<sup>13</sup>

Thanks to Tolstoy's wife, vast quantities of drafts and scraps of manuscripts were saved and now reside in the Tolstoy Museum in Moscow. Scholars have been unable to determine precisely when particular parts were written.

In 1862 Leo succumbed to an old weakness – gambling – and lost 1,000 rubles playing Chinese billiards. Not having the cash, he approached a Moscow publisher, M. N. Katkov, editor of the periodical *Russian Messenger* ("Russkii Vestnik") seeking an advance on an as-yet unpublished novelette, *The Cossacks*. Katkov was happy to oblige. It took Tolstoy most of two years to satisfy this commitment. He was paid by the page, thus eliminating any bias in favor of brevity.



Tolstoy manuscripts are notoriously difficult to decipher.

In September 1862, Leo and Sophia married; and their first child, Sergei, was born June 28, 1863. Perhaps by mid-1863 the money from the journal publication of *The Cossacks* was running out.

Whatever the combination of causes, about this time Leo began negotiating with Katkov for the serial rights to his book about the origins of the Decembrist Revolt. He demanded and received a deal for 25 rubles per page. Sophia did not like the deal; she thought he should publish the novel in book form because a popular book might have a second or even a third edition.<sup>14</sup>

In September 1864, Tolstoy noted in his diary that he had so far written “about a hundred and twenty printed pages” of his novel.<sup>15</sup> But the first volume of *War and Peace* was not published until early 1868. What were those 120 “printed pages”?

It turns out that they were the early chapters of a novel entitled *One Thousand Eight Hundred and Five*. In December 1864 Tolstoy handed over to Katkov the first 38 chapters – or about 160 pages (up from the 120 he had completed three months earlier). These chapters would soon appear under the title *1805* in the February and March 1865 issues of Katkov’s *Russian Messenger*.

In January 1865 Tolstoy wrote to his friend, the poet Fet:

Do you know what surprise I have in store for you? ... In a few days *the first half of Part I of 1805* will appear. Please, write me your opinion of it in detail. What I have printed formerly, I now regard only as a trial of the pen and a kind of draft of an opus. What I now print, although I like it more than my former work, seems weak, as *introductions* must be. But what comes after – tremendous!<sup>16</sup> (Emphasis supplied.)

This “first half” of Part I appeared in the February and March 1865 numbers of *Russian Messenger* – the first appearance in print of any part of what became *War and Peace*.



*Russian Messenger*, 1866.

That left the “second half.” Tolstoy had referred in his diary in September 1864 to “120 printed pages.” My guess is that they were proofs of the first two segments of 1805: “In Petersburg” and “In Moscow.” When the final version appeared, these two segments comprised 130 printed pages. A third segment (“In the Country”) appeared in the March 1865 journal – taking that total up to the roughly 160 pages Tolstoy had given Katkov in December.

Throughout 1865 Tolstoy continued to expand his “introduction.” On December 21, 1865, according to a note printed in *Russian Messenger*, he completed a fourth segment, entitled simply “War.” It takes up the story of the Russian army led by Kutuzov in 1805. This fourth segment appeared in *Russian Messenger* over three issues – February, March, and April 1866. This amounted to another 130 pages. The total had thus risen to 290 pages – at 25 rubles per page.

These same *Russian Messenger* monthly journals during 1866 were carrying chapters of another new novel – Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. Katkov’s subscribers were thus being treated to the first appearances in print of two of the most magnificent novels ever written.

Sophia Tolstoy, a businesswoman as well as wife, got her way. She had wanted Tolstoy to publish his work as a separate book; so perhaps it was under her prodding that two months after the last journal chapter of 1805 appeared, Katkov in June 1866 published a separate book edition of 1805. It comprised all four segments that appeared in the journal issues

in 1865 and 1865 though the type was reset.<sup>17</sup> I was fortunate to be able to obtain a copy of this plain little book about seven years ago from one of the few Western dealers who handle Russian literature.

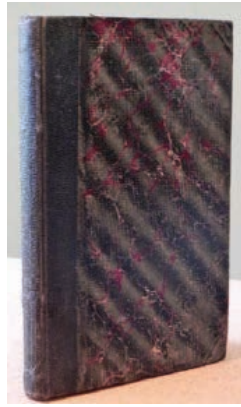
1805 was the true first edition of any part of *War and Peace*. Oddly, this first book edition is rarely mentioned. Apparently neither Tolstoy's first biographer

(Maude) nor his most scholarly one (Simmons) knew about it. Wilson knew about it but gave it only a sentence.<sup>18</sup> Although the number of copies is not known for sure, the 1992 Russian edition of *Tolstoy's Collected Works* contains a note quoting Tolstoy as saying that, "As far as I can remember, I verbally granted the right to print only 500 copies to be printed in 1865."

Apparently few of these copies were saved. Subscribers to the *Russian Messenger* would not have needed to buy the book version; and anyone who did buy the book would have found it superseded when the full *War and Peace* began to be published in 1868. According to the WorldCat records, the only libraries outside Russia holding copies are those at Harvard, the British Library, and the National Diet Library in Japan. The only Russian library which reportedly owns a copy is the National Library of Russia. The only copy coming up for auction in recent years was purchased in 1983 at Sotheby's and is likely the copy now in the British Library.

By the time *1805* appeared as a book in the spring of 1866, Tolstoy was already hard at work on the more ambitious superstructure he intended to place on the "foundation." Throughout 1866 he continued to research and write. In May he told his friend Fet that he had come up with a new title: "All's Well That Ends Well."<sup>19</sup> In September he explored the battlefield of Borodino, where Kutuzov's army fought Napoleon to a draw in 1812.

Tolstoy (or was it Sophia?) decided to publish the novel personally even though it meant borrowing to do it. He contracted with a printer to issue



The rare book edition of *One Thousand Eight Hundred and Five*, published in 1866.

the volumes separately as they were completed. He also settled on a new title – “*War and Peace*.”<sup>20</sup>

By the summer of 1867, with the new superstructure in draft, Tolstoy returned to the “introduction” and revised the four sections of 1805. Wilson says he “cut it quite heavily.” But a comparison of the texts shows how much of the original text and organization was retained.

The overall work kept expanding as well. In mid-1867 it was advertised as a four-volume work. By the time it was finished, it had grown to six.

Tolstoy’s deal with the printer was for 4,800 copies. Each set of the six volumes sold for 10 rubles. Tolstoy had to advance 4,500 rubles to the printer, which required him to borrow 1,000.<sup>21</sup> He also agreed to give 30% of the gross proceeds to the printer and proof reader, which would leave him with about 30,000 rubles – then worth about 50 cents each, roughly \$15,000 in 1868 dollars. (A lot of money in 1868.)

The first three volumes were in the bookshops by the end of 1867, though the title page shows the year of publication as 1868. Tolstoy sold the books on subscription. Those who subscribed when it was advertised as a four-volume work apparently received Volumes V and VI free. Volume IV came out in March 1868; Volume V in March 1869; and Volume VI in December 1869. It had taken him six years.

The volumes came from the printer, F. F. Ris, in paper wrappers. Purchasers could bind them in whatever materials and styles they wished. Some sets were bound in six volumes – others in four or three. Soon after the first edition was completed, a second edition in Russian was published. The difference between the first and second editions can be determined by the number of pages in the first four volumes, which were different in the two editions.<sup>22</sup>

**T**he immediate critical assessment of *War and Peace* may be found in the biographies or in general works on the history of Russian literature. The evaluations of two of Tolstoy’s great contemporaries are worth reporting here.



First edition of *War and Peace*.

Turgenev and Tolstoy had had a falling out which almost led to a duel; and in 1868-69 personal relations continued to be strained. Turgenev's assessment as he read the initial volumes was not favorable, but by the time he had completed Volume IV, he wrote: "[N]othing better has been written by anyone in Russia, and probably nothing so good has ever been written."<sup>23</sup>

Dostoevsky (who never met Tolstoy) described the work even before he had finished reading it as, "A majestic historical novel! The characters are depicted in all their historical and everyday shortcomings, but the sweep, the great sweep of the epoch captures the heart of the reader. It reeks of the Russian soul."<sup>24</sup>

I once read somewhere that great fiction is a distillation of life. For readers who find that metaphor insightful, one might suggest that *War and Peace* is to most popular novels as Napoleon Grande cognac is to a decent table wine.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For readers curious to know more and who are unwilling to rely entirely on Wikipedia, books on Tolstoy abound. One of the best early sources is a biography written by Tolstoy's friend and translator, Aylmer Maude. *The Life of Tolstoy* (Oxford, 1908). A fine scholarly

work is Ernst J. Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy* (London, 1949); and A.N. Wilson's more recent *Tolstoy* (New York, 1988) is well worth reading.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, 210.

<sup>3</sup> Zetlin, Mikhail, *The Decembrists*, New York, 1958.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, 158, 211; Simmons, 280.

<sup>5</sup> Tolstoy's letter to Alexander Herzen, March 20, 1861; Simmons, 290.

<sup>6</sup> Simmons, 290; Wilson, 212.

<sup>7</sup> Note of Editor N. Akorov, 398.

<sup>8</sup> Vol. II, 491.

<sup>9</sup> London, 1931.

<sup>10</sup> p. viii.

<sup>11</sup> Wilson, 221.

<sup>12</sup> Simmons, 293.

<sup>13</sup> Wilson, 209.

<sup>14</sup> Simmons, 299.

<sup>15</sup> Wilson, 220; Simmons, 292.

<sup>16</sup> Simmons, 302.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, 238.

<sup>18</sup> Wilson, 238.

<sup>19</sup> Simmons, 304.

<sup>20</sup> Simmons, 304-05; Wilson, 245.

<sup>21</sup> Simmons, 304-05; Wilson, 245.

<sup>22</sup> Edgar Lehrman, *A Guide to the Russian Texts of Tolstoy's War and Peace*, Ann Arbor, 1980, p. viii.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Alexandra Tolstoy, *Tolstoy, a Life of My Father*, New York 1953, 179.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Joseph Frank, Dostoevsky, *The Miraculous Years, 1865-1871*, 279.