



## THE IMPORTANCE OF LEO TOLSTOY'S WORK IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

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### Abstract

In this article, there are fully information about great writer Leo Tolstoy, his life and his works. All his works are very interesting and meaningful. In addition, there are also some comments and meanings about Leo Tolstoy's works. Furthermore, there are also information the influence of Leo Tolstoy to great writers and prominent political scientists. Lastly, there are his testament.

**Key words:** Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, War and Peace, Anna Karenina, The Last Station, Leo Tolstoy's testament

Born in 1828 in Yasnaya Polyana, Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy – known to us as Leo Tolstoy – was a novelist, essayist, playwright, and towards the end of his life a renowned moral thinker and social reformer. The scion of prominent aristocrats, Tolstoy was born at the family estate, about 130 miles (210 kilometres) south of Moscow, where he was to live the better part of his life and write his most-important works. His mother, Mariya Nikolayevna, née Princess Volkonskaya, died before he was two years old, and his father Nikolay Ilich, Graf (count) Tolstoy, followed her in 1837. His grandmother died 11 months later, and then his next guardian, his aunt Aleksandra, in 1841. Tolstoy and his four siblings were then transferred to the care of another aunt in Kazan, in western Russia. Tolstoy remembered a cousin who lived at Yasnaya Polyana, Tatyana Aleksandrovna Yergolskaya (“Aunt Toinette,” as he called her), as the greatest influence on his childhood, and later, as a young man, Tolstoy wrote some of his most-touching letters to her. Despite the constant presence of death, Tolstoy remembered his childhood in idyllic terms. His first published work, *Detstvo* (1852; *Childhood*), was a fictionalized and nostalgic account of his early years. A Second Lieutenant in the Crimean War, a founder of schools, a husband and a father to no less than thirteen children, his writing has influenced everyone from Mahatma Gandhi to Ernest Hemingway. It began in 1852 with *Childhood*, the first part of a well-received autobiographical trilogy that also included *Boyhood* and *Youth*. Already in the army by this time, Tolstoy had dropped out of Kazan University and joined his brother in the Caucasus. This time in military service informed much of his early work, such as the short



story Sevastopol Sketches (1855) and *The Cossacks* (1863). *The Cossacks* was widely praised, especially by Tolstoy's contemporary Ivan Turgenev, but it was *Sevastopol Sketches* that formed the basis of one of his most highly praised works: *War and Peace*.

Educated at home by tutors, Tolstoy enrolled in the University of Kazan in 1844 as a student of Oriental languages. His poor record soon forced him to transfer to the less-demanding law faculty, where he wrote a comparison of the French political philosopher Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Laws* and Catherine the Great's *nakaz* (instructions for a law code). Interested in literature and ethics, he was drawn to the works of the English novelists Laurence Sterne and Charles Dickens and, especially, to the writings of the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau; in place of a cross, he wore a medallion with a portrait of Rousseau. But he spent most of his time trying to be *comme il faut* (socially correct), drinking, gambling, and engaging in debauchery. After leaving the university in 1847 without a degree, Tolstoy returned to Yasnaya Polyana, where he planned to educate himself, to manage his estate, and to improve the lot of his serfs. Despite frequent resolutions to change his ways, he continued his loose life during stays in Tula, Moscow, and St. Petersburg. In 1851 he joined his older brother Nikolay, an army officer, in the Caucasus and then entered the army himself. He took part in campaigns against the native peoples and, soon after, in the Crimean War (1853–56). After the Crimean War Tolstoy resigned from the army and was at first hailed by the literary world of St. Petersburg. But his prickly vanity, his refusal to join any intellectual camp, and his insistence on his complete independence soon earned him the dislike of the radical intelligentsia. He was to remain throughout his life an "archaist," opposed to prevailing intellectual trends. In 1857 Tolstoy traveled to Paris and returned after having gambled away his money. Tolstoy's works during the late 1850s and early 1860s experimented with new forms for expressing his moral and philosophical concerns. To *Childhood* he soon added *Otrochestvo* (1854; *Boyhood*) and *Yunost* (1857; *Youth*). A number of stories centre on a single semiautobiographical character, Dmitry Nekhlyudov, who later reappeared as the hero of Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection*. In "Lyutsern" (1857; "Lucerne"), Tolstoy uses the diary form first to relate an incident, then to reflect on its timeless meaning, and finally to reflect on the process of his own reflections. "Tri smerti" (1859; "Three Deaths") describes the deaths of a noblewoman who cannot face the fact that she is dying, of a peasant who accepts death simply, and,



at last, of a tree, whose utterly natural end contrasts with human artifice. Only the author's transcendent consciousness unites these three events.

Returning from Europe inspired, Tolstoy married Sophia Andreevna Behrs, 16 years his junior. He set up independent schools in his home province and began work on *War and Peace*. He also completed *The Cossacks*, which he had started ten years earlier to pay off a gambling debt. Not published in its complete form until 1869 – first in *The Russian Messenger* in periodical form as '1805' – *War and Peace* is now regarded by many as the best novel ever written. It was instantly popular with readers, although criticized by the literary left for lacking in social critique, Tolstoy however did not regard *War and Peace* as a novel, but as more of an epic in prose. It was *Anna Karenina* that he would regard as his first true novel. Described by Dostoyevsky and Vladimir Nabokov as 'flawless', and by William Faulkner as 'the best ever written', *Anna Karenina* was for many Tolstoy's greatest novel. Through the life of the title character and the contrasting fortunes of the semi-autobiographically inspired Levin, the story explores a multitude of themes including jealousy, hypocrisy, marriage and society, as well as agrarian connection to land. It is seen as the first step in a transitional phase from the realist to the modernist novel, with James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner as just a few of those embracing some of its stream of consciousness style.

What should also be considered is the affect that *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* had on Tolstoy's contemporaries. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, who many consider Tolstoy's only true rival, had already had *Poor Folk* (1846) and *The House Of The Dead* (1860) published, and had completed *Notes From Underground* by the time the first installment of *War and Peace* arrived. However it can be no coincidence that his most celebrated works came directly after each of Tolstoy's masterpieces, firstly *Crime and Punishment* (1865-66) and then his final work – often regarded as his magnum opus – *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). Like the modernists or the beat writers that were to follow, every movement has its great works that other artists look to rival or surpass. It is this inspiration that could be the true measure of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, and their worth not only to Russia's Golden Age but to the arts in general. Stiva's sister Anna begins the novel as the faithful wife of the stiff, unromantic, but otherwise decent government minister Aleksey Karenin and the mother of a young boy, Seryozha. But Anna, who imagines herself the heroine of a romantic novel, allows herself to fall in love with an officer, Aleksey Vronsky.



Schooling herself to see only the worst in her husband, she eventually leaves him and her son to live with Vronsky. Throughout the novel, Tolstoy indicates that the romantic idea of love, which most people identify with love itself, is entirely incompatible with the superior kind of love, the intimate love of good families. As the novel progresses, Anna, who suffers pangs of conscience for abandoning her husband and child, develops a habit of lying to herself until she reaches a state of near madness and total separation from reality. She at last commits suicide by throwing herself under a train. The realization that she may have been thinking about life incorrectly comes to her only when she is lying on the track, and it is too late to save herself.

Happily married and ensconced with his wife and family at Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy reached the height of his creative powers. He devoted the remaining years of the 1860s to writing *War and Peace*. Then, after an interlude during which he considered writing a novel about Peter the Great and briefly returned to pedagogy (bringing out reading primers that were widely used), Tolstoy wrote his other great novel, *Anna Karenina*. These two works share a vision of human experience rooted in an appreciation of everyday life and prosaic virtues.

Vladimir Lenin wrote several essays about Tolstoy, suggesting that a contradiction exists within his critique of Russian society. According to Lenin, Tolstoy – who adorned the peasantry and voiced their discontent with imperial Russian society – may have been revolutionary in his critiques, but his political conscious was not fully developed for a revolution[1]. Additionally, Tolstoy's philosophy of non-resistance to evil made an impact on Mahatma Gandhi's political thinking. Gandhi was deeply moved by Tolstoy's concept of truth, which, in his view, constitutes any doctrine that reduces suffering [2].

Tolstoy based the prescription against oaths (including promises) on an idea adapted from his early work: the impossibility of knowing the future and therefore the danger of binding oneself in advance. The commandment against lust eventually led him to propose (in his afterword to *Kreytserova sonata* [1891; *The Kreutzer Sonata*], a dark novella about a man who murders his wife) total abstinence as an ideal. His wife, already concerned about their strained relations, objected. In defending his most-extreme ideas, Tolstoy compared Christianity to a lamp that is not stationary but is carried along by human beings; it lights up ever new moral realms and reveals ever higher ideals as mankind progresses spiritually.



With the notable exception of his daughter Aleksandra, whom he made his heir, Tolstoy's family remained aloof from or hostile to his teachings. His wife especially resented the constant presence of disciples, led by the dogmatic V.G. Chertkov, at Yasnaya Polyana. Their once happy life had turned into one of the most famous bad marriages in literary history. The story of his dogmatism and her penchant for scenes has excited numerous biographers to take one side or the other. Because both kept diaries, and indeed exchanged and commented on each other's diaries, their quarrels are almost too well documented.

In contrast to other psychological writers, such as Dostoyevsky, who specialized in unconscious processes, Tolstoy described conscious mental life with unparalleled mastery. His name has become synonymous with an appreciation of contingency and of the value of everyday activity. Oscillating between skepticism and dogmatism, Tolstoy explored the most-diverse approaches to human experience. Above all, his greatest works, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, endure as the summit of realist fiction.

A 2009 film about Tolstoy's final year, *The Last Station*, based on the 1990 novel by Jay Parini, was made by director Michael Hoffman with Christopher Plummer as Tolstoy and Helen Mirren as Sofya Tolstoya. Both performers were nominated for Oscars for their roles. There have been other films about the writer, including *Departure of a Grand Old Man*, made in 1912 just two years after his death, *How Fine, How Fresh the Roses Were* (1913), and *Leo Tolstoy*, directed by and starring Sergei Gerasimov in 1984.

There is also a famous lost film of Tolstoy made a decade before he died. In 1901, the American travel lecturer Burton Holmes visited Yasnaya Polyana with Albert J. Beveridge, the U.S. senator and historian. As the three men conversed, Holmes filmed Tolstoy with his 60-mm movie camera. Afterwards, Beveridge's advisers succeeded in having the film destroyed, fearing that the meeting with the Russian author might hurt Beveridge's chances of running for the U.S. presidency [3:117].

#### Leo Tolstoy's testament

Leo Tolstoy patiently directed his wife's head to an invisible non-stop walk, pitied him, did not utter a single Honest word. Once upon a time, the forty-three-year-old family spirit, built on love and respect, collapsed. Adib was so tired of his wife that in the end he was forced to take the head from his spiritual estate. Thus, 82-year-old genius Zotilyam was diagnosed, and he died of the world at the Astapovo railway station. His last words were: "Don't put my wife next to me."...[4:100].



Sofia Andreyevna sooner or later realized her mistake. After completing the work in 1919, looking at the girls with tears at the top, he said: "I noticed on your father's head." The daughters were silent, one mouth could not even utter a word. Because his mother told the truth.

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