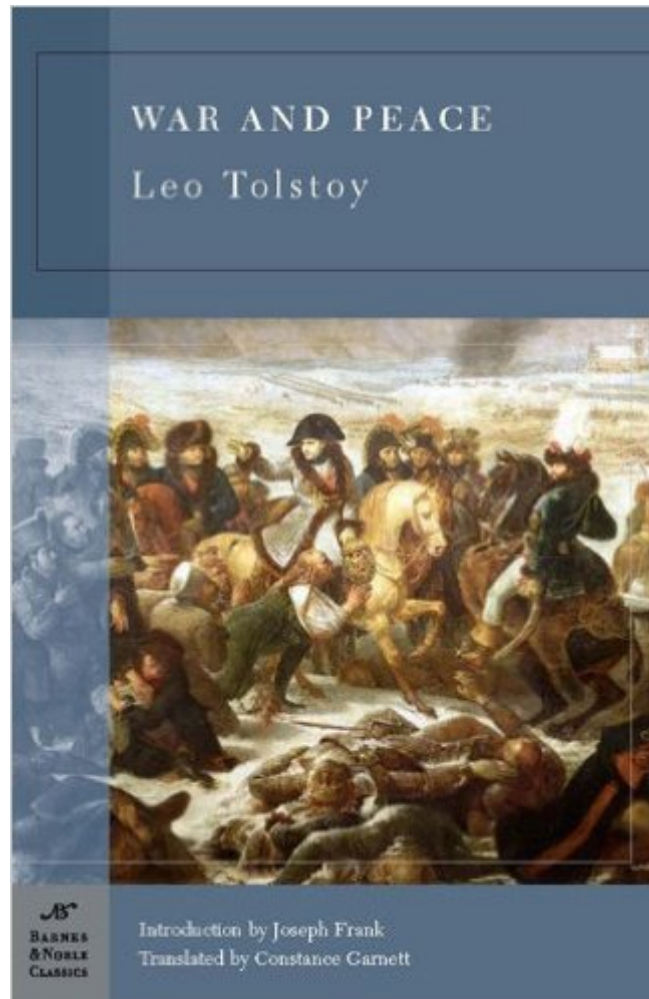


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War And Peace (Barnes & Noble Classics)



Synopsis

War and Peace, by Leo Tolstoy, is part of the Barnes & Noble Classics® series, which offers quality editions at affordable prices to the student and the general reader, including new scholarship, thoughtful design, and pages of carefully crafted extras. Here are some of the remarkable features of Barnes & Noble Classics: All editions are beautifully designed and are printed to superior specifications; some include illustrations of historical interest. Barnes & Noble Classics pulls together a constellation of influences—biographical, historical, and literary—to enrich each reader's understanding of these enduring works. The most famous—and perhaps greatest—novel of all time, Tolstoy's War and Peace tells the story of five families struggling for survival during Napoleon's invasion of Russia. Among its many unforgettable characters is Prince Andrey Bolkonsky, a proud, dashing man who, despising the artifice of high society, joins the army to achieve glory. Badly wounded at Austerlitz, he begins to discover the emptiness of everything to which he has devoted himself. His death scene is considered one of the greatest passages in Russian literature. The novel's other hero, the bumbling Pierre Bezukhov, tries to find meaning in life through a series of philosophical systems that promise to resolve all questions. He at last discovers the Tolstoyan truth that wisdom is to be found not in systems but in the ordinary processes of daily life, especially in his marriage to the novel's most memorable heroine, Natasha. Both an intimate study of individual passions and an epic history of Russia and its people, War and Peace is nothing more or less than a complete portrait of human existence. Joseph Frank is Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature at Princeton University and Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature and Slavic Languages and Literature at Stanford University. He is the author of a five-volume study of Dostoevsky's life and work.

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Customer Reviews

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 the Constance Garnett translation. 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 encapsulates 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.

How does one do justice to a work as monumental and vast as Tolstoy's 'War and Peace' in the short space this review grants? Indeed, I toyed with the idea of trying to encapsulate this epic work in 100 words, but failed. I do know of one review of 'War and Peace' that was even shorter; it read: Napoleon invaded. It snowed. Napoleon failed. Russia won. Perhaps that does encapsulate it. Tolstoy would have probably respected such as description, for, as verbose as he and other Russian novelists seemed to be (given a purely page-count analysis), he appreciated brevity and essentialism in the description. This holds true for 'War and Peace'. I was amazed at the lack of what one might hold to be extraneous detailing in the text -- I would have expected long, drawn out and tedious renderings of situations, emotions or events, but such is not the case. In Tolstoy's following

of the Rostovs (poor country gentry) and the Bolkonskis (higher society), and a hero Pierre Bezuhkov, he illustrates basic truths in the way life is lived, and the way it ought to be lived. Tolstoy was a moralist, but no mystic in his writing (unusually so, given his general mystical sentiments in life). He felt it absolutely essential that the novelist should tell the truth, and mystical digressions lead away from that. His characters grow as we watch, and he recounts details that are important (such as Natasha and her doll as a child, and then later Natasha going to church -- these are two ages of the same person, to be sure, but not a simple updating of the character, as if an actress wearing a different costume).

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