

# Review Article: *War and Peace*, Original version

Hugh McLean

University of California, Berkeley

**Лев Толстой, *Война и мир*. Москва: Захаров, 2000. 799 pp. Cloth.**

***Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace, Original version.*  
Trans. Andrew Bromfield. N.p.: Ecco, 2007. xxii + 885 pp.**

Opposite the title page of the Russian version of this "original" edition of the great novel there is a page, repeated on the back cover, of enticements to prospective readers (and buyers). It is worth quoting in full.

For the First Time. The Real Lev Tolstoy. The Real *War and Peace*. The first full version of the great novel, created toward the end of 1866, before Tolstoy reworked it in 1867-69. Five chief distinguishing merits. 1. Twice as short and five times more interesting. 2. Almost no philosophical digressions. 3. A hundred times easier to read: the entire French text is replaced by Russian in the author's own translation. 4. Much more "peace" and less "war." 5. Prince Andrei and Petya Rostov remain alive.

How alluring! Of course, most of us fortunate enough to live in the enlightened, technologically advanced twenty-first century are far too busy to tackle the ponderous, old-fashioned vastness of the canonical *War and Peace*. Here is a shorter, cozier, reader-friendlier version, purged of all that nasty French, purged also of two painful and unnecessary deaths that spoil the serenity of the full version. What could be better? Rush out and buy it!

On the reverse side of the title page we are given the following information:

In the preparation of this edition there were used texts published by E. E. Zaidenshnur in the 94<sup>th</sup> volume of *Литературное наследство*; manuscript material for the novel in volumes 13-16 of the 90-volume Jubilee Edition of L. Tolstoy's works; and also the third edition of the novel, published in 1873, during Tolstoy's lifetime, in four volumes.

Who put all this together is not stated. The publisher, Igor Zakharov, is known for reprints of out-of-the-way literary texts from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, useful and welcome in their way, but notably devoid of any new input of literary scholarship. An article in the *St. Petersburg Times* informs us that Zakharov did the editorial work himself. "I took out all the brackets, cleaned it up, took out all the French—and here it is! There is not a single word by Zakharov here."<sup>1</sup> Apparently there was quite an uproar in Russia when Zakharov's edition was published, "a huge wave of protest, objection, and fury of the wildest variety," according to an article in *The New York Observer*.<sup>2</sup> There was even a "public trial" of the book, shown on national television, during which, to heated criticisms from Tolstoy scholars, Zakharov essentially replied, "To hell with you all! Let them read it overseas."

Of the three sources cited by Zakharov, by far the most important is the first, the text put together by Evelina Zaidenshnur (1902-85) and a team of assistants at the Tolstoy Museum in Moscow and published in 1983 as volume 94 of *Литературное наследство (Literary Heritage)*, under the title *Первая завершенная редакция*

романа *Война и мир*." To this edition Zaidenshnur, already the author of a substantial study of the genesis of the novel («*Война и мир*» Л. Н. Толстого: *Создание великой книги* [Москва, 1966]), supplied a long (fifty-seven pages) introduction, not reproduced in the Zakharov edition, "How the First Version of the Novel 'War and Peace' Was Created." This introduction—and indeed the whole edition—is polemical. The target, though never explicitly named, is perhaps the greatest of all Tolstoy scholars, Boris Eikhenbaum (1886-1959). On the basis of *his* study of Tolstoy's early drafts Eikhenbaum had come to the conclusion that in its early life *War and Peace* had been almost a private affair in the Tolstoy-Bers families, with most of the main characters drawn from Tolstoy's and his wife's relatives, many of them still living, but imaginatively transposed back into the Napoleonic era. It was to be a delightful gentry romance, one of the proposed titles of which was *All's Well That Ends Well*. Not too much war, not too much philosophy, no needless deaths. Only in the later stages of work, according to Eikhenbaum, did the novel expand, not only in size, but in philosophical, historical, and spiritual depth to become *War and Peace* as we now know it.

For Zaidenshnur Eikhenbaum's "legend" was a heresy, blasphemy, a Carthage that had to be destroyed. For her *War and Peace* was *the* national epic, an iconic celebration of the victory of the Russian people, the Russian nation, over a ruthless foreign invader. It was a sacred text. It expressed the same patriotic spirit that had led to Russia's equally glorious victory over the German invaders of 1941-45, a war in which a nephew of Zaidenshnur's, to whom she dedicates the edition, had perished. To celebrate Russia's victory, Zaidenshnur insists, had been from the beginning Tolstoy's intention. To prove this point she essentially concocted this "original" version. She used, first, the installments of the novel that had been published serially in the magazine *Русский вестник* (*Russian Herald*) in 1865 and 1866. These install-

ments ended with the battle of Schön Graben. To continue the novel Zaidenshnur then resorted to a series of manuscripts believed to antedate 1867, which carry the story to a possible ending.

Besides her objection to the Eikhenbaum-inspired view of the genesis of the novel, Zaidenshnur also found thoroughly unacceptable the way the early drafts had been published in volumes thirteen and fourteen of the Jubilee Edition—fragmented, disconnected, lacking direction. Her aim was therefore clear: "Only publication of the first *completed* early version, on which Tolstoy had worked for three years, irrefutably demonstrates that it was not a 'family chronicle' of two gentry dynasties that Tolstoy had conceived, but a 'history of 1812.'" There were historical events and historical scenes in the very first drafts. And it was after finishing this first completed version that Tolstoy at last gave his work the immortal title *War and Peace*.<sup>3</sup>

In any case, whatever her polemical motives, Zaidenshnur's was a perfectly legitimate scholarly project, a by-product of the work to which she had devoted such immense effort, the study of the genesis of the novel. Her work appears to be scrupulously accurate, reproducing the text of the manuscripts just as Tolstoy wrote them, with words crossed out or inserted enclosed in the brackets Zakharov is so proud of demolishing. If Tolstoy wrote in French, she reproduces the French, supplying translations in footnotes. All this academic scrupulousness has of course been expunged in the Zakharov edition as nothing but irritating pedantry.

My conclusion, therefore, is that the Zaidenshnur edition provides a valuable resource to Tolstoy scholars without direct access to the manuscripts, even though many may not share her passionate wish to discredit the Eikhenbaum "legend." It offers a fascinating opportunity to enter Tolstoy's workshop, to watch him as he writes and especially as he revises, trying to understand the reasons for each decision. One can also

marvel at the enormous labor that went into the making of this book, the huge amount of creative energy. Writing is hard work, even for a genius.

To be sure, this early "complete" version concocted by Zaidenshnur is very uneven. The early parts, those actually published by Tolstoy, do read like real Tolstoy. They have the finish of a thoroughly revised and polished text. The later parts, culled from manuscripts, show more clearly a work in the process of gestation, often still in search for the concrete detail needed to realize a scene or an event, to make it come alive. There was still a long distance to anything like a final text. This entire version, including the initially published parts, was to be revised again and again before it reached that Elysium.

The narrative in this version gets more and more hurried toward the end, as if Tolstoy were not really trying to produce a publishable text, but was only sketching for himself possible plot developments or scenes to be developed later. The battle of Borodino, for example, which in the canonical version occupies some ninety pages (Three, II, 19-39), in the Zakharov version is disposed of in twenty-three pages. Most of the basic ingredients, however, are already there—views of the battle from both sides, and from the commanding generals, Napoleon and Kutuzov, down to lowly privates. Tolstoy had already conceived the idea, perhaps modeled on the role of Fabrice del Dongo at Waterloo in Stendhal's *Chartreuse de Parme*, of "defamiliarizing" the battle scene by putting Pierre there, an incongruous civilian in a white hat, who just came to see the show, risking his life in the process. (That he survived unscathed was a miracle bestowed on him by his creator, who had from the beginning destined him as the perfect mate for the incomparable Natasha.)

After Borodino the pace quickens even more. The great council of war at Fili is disposed of in a single sentence (no little girl watching from on top of the stove). We jump to Moscow, where the

Rostovs, as in the final version, patriotically abandon their attempt to save their possessions and devote their wagons and carriages, and for a time their house, to taking care of the wounded. One of these, wounded of course, turns out to be Prince Andrei, but his reconciliation with Natasha is dealt with summarily. He says that he forgives her, and that's that, leaving the scene completely unrealized psychologically on both sides. Pierre is already involved in his calculations trying to match his name to 666, giving him divine authority to assassinate Napoleon; however, he is in the meantime given an opportunity to declare to Natasha his undying love for her, after which he wanders around Moscow dressed as a peasant and is arrested by the French.

We then jump to St. Petersburg, to another of Anna Scherer's soirées, and there learn that Hélène has just died after a miscarriage (there are already hints of a botched abortion). Petersburg opinion has turned sharply against Kutuzov on the news of the surrender of Moscow. The account of Pierre's experiences as a prisoner is much briefer, and Platon Karataev is yet to be conceived. Pierre is finally liberated by his enemy Dolokhov, fighting as a partisan along with Denisov and Petya Rostov, all of whom survive the war unharmed. Like many Muscovites, the Rostov family has taken refuge in Tambov. Old Count Ilya remains alive, though chastened by old age and bankruptcy. (No deaths allowed!) Prince Andrei is with them, being nursed by Natasha and Sonya, later joined by his sister Princess Marya, now in love with Nikolai. Pressed by the old Countess, Sonya nobly releases Nikolai from his promise to her, so that the family finances can be restored by his marriage to Princess Marya, which, happily, is also a love match. (The "sterile flower" motif for Sonya has not yet been introduced.) Prince Andrei realizes that Natasha had never completely loved him, a conversation with Sonya revealing to him that her real love is for Pierre. The happy news of Hélène's death removes any obstacle to their un-

ion, and Andrei cedes his claims without, apparently, any great regret.

Thus all the erotic knots have been duly tied, untied, or retied, and there is a double wedding at Otradnoe. Andrei and Nikolai then go back to their units and later find themselves together in Paris. "During their absence Pierre, Natasha, Countess (as she is now) Marya with her nephew, the old man, the old woman, and Sonya spent the entire summer of 1813 in Otradnoe and there awaited the return of Nikolai and Andrei."

After this sentence Tolstoy hopefully wrote the word «КОНЕЦ» (The End) in the manuscript. But of course the real end was still far off. Tolstoy was to work at the novel for another three years, revising much of the existing text and adding some of the most powerful and moving scenes, such as the deaths of Andrei and Petya and their aftermaths, and elevating the novel to the place it has held securely ever since, as one of the greatest ever written. The version "completed" in 1867, lively and entertaining as it is, would surely not merit such high honors. To claim that it is "five times more interesting" is simply absurd.

Now the translation. Andrew Bromfield is a very experienced translator, with many books, almost all of them contemporary fiction, to his credit. He has concentrated especially on the works of Viktor Pelevin, but he has also translated works by Boris Akunin, Aleksandr Ikonnikov, Sergei Lukianenko, Vladimir Voinovich, Leonid Latynin, and Nina Lugovskaya. He did one classic text, *The Heart of a Dog*, by Mikhail Bulgakov, but this Tolstoy is his first venture into the nineteenth century. One wishes he had made a better choice for this adventure.

I sampled a good number of passages and found the results generally very good. Bromfield knows Russian very well, and he commands a deft and supple English style. Like Pevear and Volokhonsky, he leans toward literalism, but never so far as to produce unwieldy translationese. On the whole he tries to reproduce intact the roughnesses

of Tolstoy's style, though at times he evidently found intolerable some of Tolstoy's repetitions, for instance, as he says in the preface, "his use of the same unvarying adjective throughout a single passage," which "creates an unrepentant hammering effect in Russian, but raises problems in English, which abhors repetitions of this kind" (xvii). Maybe so, but I suspect that the difference is not one between the two languages as such, but between Tolstoy's style and English school prescriptions for good writing.

Of course, one can always find mistakes and inadvertent omissions in any translation and even more passages where one feels that the nuances, the precise flavor, has not been adequately conveyed. I will cite a few examples, but they should not be taken as representative of Bromfield's usually flawless efforts. They are exceptions.

In the opening scene at Anna Scherer's the beautiful Princess Hélène Kuragina sits apparently listening to the Vicomte de Mortemart relate the story of Napoleon's encounter with the Duc d'Eng-hien, a Bourbon whom he later had killed, in the rooms of the actress Mlle. George. But in fact Hélène is not listening. She is totally absorbed in narcissistic self-admiration, but she feels obliged to look as if she were listening and responding. There may also be a suggestion that she is too stupid to understand the story, but contrives to hide the fact. "Every time she was impressed by something in the story," as Bromfield translates the passage, "she glanced around at Anna Pavlovna and immediately assumed the same expression that the lady-in-waiting's face wore." But if she was impressed, why would she need a cue to the appropriate reaction? The Russian reads, "когда рассказ производил впечатление" with, I think, на других (on others) implied. Incidentally, in their new translation Pevear and Volokhonsky have it right, literally: "when the story produced an impression."

Another example. In the scene in Napoleon's dressing room, before the battle of Borodino, Bromfield has feminized Napoleon more than

Tolstoy did. He duly renders the "breasts like a woman's" (809) on that fat body, but he leaves out Tolstoy's somewhat remasculinizing detail: That these breasts were обросшие волосами, covered with hair. There is a more substantial omission on the next page. Napoleon is said to be "as cheerful as a man who has been waiting [no comma] biding his time for a chance to play a good card" (810). The Russian text continues, "не спрашивая, выиграет ли карта или нет, уже рад, что думает, что выиграл, что пришло время поставить карту" (not asking whether the card would win or not, already glad because he thinks it has won and the time has come to play it (733 in the Zakharov edition)). Bromfield has left this out.

A moment earlier Napoleon had cheerfully dismissed Colonel Fabvier, saying "à tantôt" (see you soon) in the French as recorded in the Zaidenshnur edition (671). Bromfield, however, following his policy of trying to restore a bit of the French flavor of the text purged by Zakharov, translates it as "Au revoir" (810). He evidently did not consult the Zaidenshnur text, but simply retranslated the phrase from Zakharov's Russian, and he guessed wrong.

There are, however, some more serious difficulties with the French. Back at the beginning of the novel, at Anna Scherer's soirée, the climax of the Vicomte's story is told in French: "L'ennemi de sa maison, l'usurpateur du trône, qui appartenait au chef de sa race, était là, devant lui, étendu..." (The enemy of his house, the usurper of the throne that belonged to the head of his dynasty, was there, stretched out before him...). Zaidenshnur's footnote, however, mistranslates the passage, interpreting "qui" as referring not to "trone," but to "ennemi-usurpateur," and renders it "тот, кто возглавлял его нацию." Zakharov inserted this mistranslation into the main text, and Bromfield rendered it literally, "the man who stood at the head of his nation" (24).

As always, the distinction between *ты* and *вы* (thou and you) presents nuances of relationships

very difficult to reproduce in English. Bromfield is forced to make do with some variant of "formal" or "informal," but a good deal of the effect is lost. There is the curious disparity between the usages of Pierre and Andrei. Though they are old friends, Pierre always calls Andrei *вы* (you), while Andrei calls Pierre *ты* (thou). This apparently symbolizes Pierre's lower social status, but he keeps it up even after he is legitimized and becomes a Count, richer than Andrei. When speaking French, however, they both use "vous," which seems to be a fixed feature of Russian French, at least as Tolstoy conveys it. Russians never say *tu*, no matter what their relationship. Even Sonya and Natasha say "vous" to each other.

Sedulously stripped of all "pedantry," the Bromfield translation contains no notes at all. The reader is evidently expected either already to know, for example—or more likely, not to care—who was the Ambassador Novosiltsev who stopped in Berlin when he heard the news that Napoleon had annexed Genoa and Lucca, instead of going on to Paris to negotiate. Countless historical personages and events are alluded to all through the novel. To me, at least, elucidation of their significance enhances one's understanding and appreciation. But no doubt I am a pedant.

The translation contains a very brief "Introduction" by Nikolai Tolstoy, a very distant relative of the author, an English writer and a (so far unsuccessful) candidate for Parliament. Nikolai Tolstoy asserts authoritatively that "there can be no doubt" that (Lev) Tolstoy intended this (early) version to be published. The basis for this very dubious doubtlessness is apparently the fact that Tolstoy had engaged an illustrator, Nikolai Bashilov, who unfortunately died before finishing the job. Thus the novel remained unpublished (except for the magazine parts) until the final book version in six volumes. Incidentally, the Bashilov illustrations are reproduced in the Zaidenshnur edition and are included in both the Zakharov edition and the translation, along with reproductions of several

manuscript pages, including the one with the would-be conclusive word "Конец" (The End).

Nikolai Tolstoy thus has no objection to the publication of this truncated version of the great novel and lent his name and reputation to the project. Those who have never read the book, he writes, "will be able to enjoy experiencing Tolstoy's first heady production of that wonderful work" (ix), while those who have will be able to compare it with its predecessor. It does not seem to occur to him that those in the first category are being deceived and may well think they are reading the real *War and Peace*.

Nikolai Tolstoy's "Introduction" is followed by "A Note on the Translation," signed jointly by Bromfield and Jenefer Coates, Editor. They duly cite the sources for the translation, which included not only the Zakharov edition, but also the Zaidenshnur one, with occasional quick looks at the canonical version. They claim (xi) that Zaidenshnur spent fifty years putting together her version, an assertion almost certainly false. She had indeed worked at the Tolstoy Museum all her life, since 1924, but she certainly did not spend all that time on this one project. Bromfield and Coates admit that claiming theirs as the "original" *War and Peace* might "cause purists to wince." But they defend themselves with the statement that theirs is not intended as a "substitute" for the canonical one, but is rather like a series of sketches in relation to the final canvas of a great painting. These sketches offer "absolute delight" to readers new to Tolstoy, who can then go on to the "greater pleasures of the longer text" (xii). All very nice, but how many of them will actually do that? At least the English edition avoids the vulgar hucksterism of Zakharov's "five times as interesting," but one wonders why such an experienced and respected

translator as Bromfield was willing to engage in this questionable project, though doubtless he cannot be blamed for the dishonest, deliberately misleading dust cover, which says simply *War and Peace. Original Edition*.

Bromfield and Coates go on to exaggerate greatly the degree of variation among later editions of *War and Peace*, from Tolstoy's revision of 1873 to the Countess's versions of 1880 and later, alleging that she made "her own changes" "censoring and suppressing whatever she deemed offensive or dangerous." No evidence for this claim is adduced. The implication is that there are lots of different texts of *War and Peace* around, and theirs is as valid as any other.

In conclusion, I will simply restate my worry that innocent English-speaking readers seeing this English edition, attractively printed and labeled *War and Peace. Original Version*, will buy it and read it, thinking they are reading the real *War and Peace*. Those of us in academia must at least do everything we can to prevent this edition from being assigned or recommended in any college course over which we have any influence.

#### Notes

1. I take this quotation from an essay on the translation by Mitzi Angel in *cruelestmonth.com* (Aug. 3, 2007).
2. Leon Neyfakh, August 20, 2007.
3. Zaidenshnur provides an interesting digression on the possibility that Tolstoy's intended title was not, to use the old orthography, *Война и миръ* but *Война и мѣръ*. She interprets мѣръ to mean not "the world," as in Mayakovsky's poem, but "community." Thus the title could be loosely translated as something like *War and We Russians*. Apparently the title does appear with the spelling мѣръ several times in the manuscripts, though ultimately миръ prevailed.