

Give War and Peace a Chance: Tolstoyan Wisdom for Troubled Times

By Andrew D. Kaufman

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From a popular Tolstoy scholar: an entertaining, thought-provoking, and accessible argument for why *War and Peace* is more relevant to readers now than ever.

"Nothing less than inspiring." --*Jay Parini, author of The Last Station*

"Mischievously compelling....An attaboy to Kaufman for reminding us of this novel's relevance to our anxious century." --*The Miami Herald*

"This lively appreciation...should persuade many hesitant readers to try scaling the heights of *War and Peace* sooner rather than later." --*Publisher's Weekly*

Considered by many critics the greatest novel ever written, *War and Peace* is also one of the most feared. And at 1,500 pages, it's no wonder why. Still, new editions keep appearing. In July 2009 *Newsweek* put *War and Peace* at the top of its list of 100 great novels and a 2007 edition of the AARP Bulletin, read by millions, included the novel in their list of the top four books everybody should read by the age of fifty. A *New York Times* survey from 2009 identified *War and Peace* as the world classic you're most likely to find people reading on their subway commute to work. What might all those *Newsweek* devotees, senior citizens, and harried commuters see in a book about the Napoleonic Wars in the early 1800s?


A mirror of our times.

War and Peace is many things. It is a love story, a family saga, a war novel. But at its core it's a novel about human beings attempting to create a meaningful life for themselves in a country torn apart by social change, political divisiveness, and spiritual confusion.

Give War and Peace a Chance takes readers on a journey through *War and Peace* that reframes their very understanding of what it means to live through troubled

times and survive them. Touching on a broad range of topics, from courage to romance, parenting to death, Kaufman demonstrates how Tolstoy's wisdom can help us live fuller, more meaningful lives. The ideal companion to War and Peace, this book will also be enjoyable to those who have never read a word of Tolstoy, making that masterpiece more approachable, relevant, and fun.

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Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #84237 in Books
- Brand: Simon Schuster

- Published on: 2015-02-10
- Released on: 2015-02-10
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.37" h x .70" w x 5.50" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 304 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"Give War and Peace a Chance...is an enthusiastic primer to Tolstoy's most famous work, which shows how genuinely exciting it can be to read." (*The Toronto Star*)

"That a novel 'full of clear, honest reflection on the pain of living' is also 'one of the most life-affirming works of fiction' becomes, for Andrew D. Kaufman, a contradiction worth exploring. He does so in this alluring study with a ferocity and lightness of touch that Tolstoy himself would have admired. By exploring a handful of key themes in *War and Peace*, Kaufman brings us back to the shimmering pages of a classic novel, and his book is nothing less than inspiring." (Jay Parini, author of *The Last Station*)

"If you come from a family, then you'll understand [*War and Peace*'s] deepest meaning, thanks to Mr. Kaufman's erudition and scholarship." (*The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*)

"No other novel in world literature possesses the intimidating allure of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. It is the very Everest of fiction, and most readers need a sherpa. Andrew Kaufman has not only produced a perfect guide to the setting, characters, history, and background of this epic work, all skillfully interwoven with events in Tolstoy's life; he has done so with zest and personality." (Dana Gioia, former Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts and internationally acclaimed poet)

"[Kaufman's] argument is mischievously compelling: Why waste money on motivational tapes and seminars when this fictional account of the Napoleonic Wars provides greater salve for the soul?...An attaboy to Kaufman for reminding us of its relevance to our anxious century." (*The Miami Herald*)

"Andrew Kaufman has written the book on *War and Peace* for our time. In his colloquial and personal style he explores, as his subtitle puts it, Tolstoyan Wisdom For Troubled Times, recovering this wisdom not only from Tolstoy's diaries, letters, and essays, but, more importantly yet, the text of the novel itself. This is quite simply the most engaging and thought-provoking book on Tolstoy I have ever read." (Richard Gustafson, Columbia University, author of *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*)

"Once you have taken Kaufman's well-informed yet unintimidating tour of the Russian classic, it will very likely move up to the top of your literary bucket list. Kaufman's mission is to share the wonder and power of this ageless novel he so clearly reveres and to make the case for its continuing relevance in the 21st century. He succeeds admirably... Even without ever having cracked the spine of the novel itself, readers will feel as if they have, coming to know its characters and their dreams, failures and destinies. [Kaufman] brings them to life with such affection that even the most flawed among them becomes someone we wish to know better." (*Bookpage*)

"Andrew Kaufman has found a refreshingly informal way of reading (and re-reading) *War and Peace*, weaving the lives of the novel's characters together with Tolstoy's life and his own. By breaking all the critical rules, he manages to enter into the ever shifting and growing reality that Tolstoy sought to portray, producing an excellent 'companion' for new readers of the novel." (Richard Pevear, best-selling, award-winning translator (with Larissa Volokhonsky) of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*)

"Kaufman looks to the novel for guidance, 'not so much as a set of answers to life's every challenge as an

attitude toward living.' [He] makes Tolstoy's characters lively and palpable... [and Kaufman's] enticing invitation may well persuade readers to finally dive into one of the world's most acclaimed—and daunting—novels.” (*Kirkus Reviews*)

“A serious, thoughtful inquiry into how literature can affect and change people's lives... Do give this fine, perceptive book a chance; it'll leave you more than ready to tackle Tolstoy's triumphant work.” (*Shelf Awareness*)

From the Inside Flap

Often hailed by critics as the greatest novel ever written, *War and Peace*, at 1500 pages, is also one of the most intimidating. Still, it is a perennial bestseller, with new editions appearing regularly--almost a century and a half after its first publication. So what does everyone find so irresistible in this novel about the Napoleonic wars?

A mirror of our times.

Beyond a rousing, unforgettable story, says Russian literature scholar Andrew D. Kaufman, Tolstoy's masterpiece can offer modern readers an urgent moral compass and a celebration of the deep joy of living. In *Give War and Peace a Chance*, his entertaining, thought-provoking, and accessible argument for why *War and Peace* is more relevant to readers now than ever, Kaufman argues compellingly that *War and Peace* is many things. It is a love story, a family saga, a war epic. But at its core it is a novel about human beings attempting to create a meaningful life for themselves in a country torn apart by war, social change, political intrigue, and spiritual confusion. *Give War and Peace a Chance* takes readers on a journey through *War and Peace* that reframes their very understanding of what it means to live through troubled times, and survive them.

Touching on a broad range of topics, from courage to romance, from parenting to death, Kaufman demonstrates how Tolstoy's wisdom can help us live fuller and more meaningful lives. An ideal companion to *War and Peace*, yet equally enjoyable to those who have never read a word of Tolstoy, *Give War and Peace a Chance* renders this greatest of masterpieces more approachable, relevant, and *fun*.

About the Author

Andrew D. Kaufman, internationally recognized Russian literature scholar at the University of Virginia, is the author of *Understanding Tolstoy* and coauthor of *Russian for Dummies*. An award-winning teacher of Russian language, literature, and culture, he is a featured Tolstoy expert on Oprah.com and is frequently invited to discuss Russian literature and culture on national and international television and radio programs.

Users Review

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David Paras:

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