

What these early critics could not predict, however, was that *The Lord of the Rings* would reawaken an appetite for fantasy literature among readers and create a new genre: adult fantasy. Since its publication, those critics who appreciate Tolkien have worked to establish criteria by which Tolkien and other fantasists should be judged. Among them was Elizabeth Cook, who wrote in *The Ordinary and the Fabulous*, “The inherent greatness of myth and fairy tale is a poetic greatness. Childhood reading of symbolic and fantastic tales contributes something irreplaceable to any later experience of literature. . . . The whole world of epic, romance, and allegory is open to a reader who has always taken fantasy for granted, and the way into it may be hard for one who never heard fairy tales as a child.”

Legacy Tolkien’s life’s work, the creation of Middle Earth, “encompasses a reality that rivals Western man’s own attempt at recording the composite, knowable history of his species,” wrote Augustus M. Kolich in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Kolich continued, “Not since Milton has any Englishman worked so successfully at creating a secondary world, derived from the real world, yet complete in its own terms with encyclopedic mythology; an imagined world that includes a vast gallery of strange beings: hobbits, elves, dwarfs, orcs, and, finally, the men of Westeros.” Throughout the years, Tolkien’s works—especially *The Lord of the Rings*—have pleased countless readers and fascinated critics who recognize their literary depth.

Responses to Literature

1. Discuss the effect of using children and other characters small in stature as opponents of evil in *The Hobbit*. Once you have explored this topic, use your conclusions to write a short children’s story featuring a young character fighting the forces of evil.
2. Tolkien claimed that *The Lord of the Rings* is not meant to be an allegory of the modern world, specifically World War II. After doing some research on World War II, write a short paper tracing similarities and differences between the vast struggle faced by Middle Earth and that faced by our world during World War II.
3. Using the Internet and the library, research “flat characters” and “round characters.” Then, choose four characters from either *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings*. Based on your research, do you feel these characters are flat characters or round characters? Compare them to characters from at least one other novel and one film who are flat or round characters. How could the flat characters be made round? Support your argument in a brief essay.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The story of David and Goliath is perhaps the most popular story of an underdog, but Frodo’s struggle against the dark forces of Middle Earth, to some, is an equally compelling tale of a surprise victor. As the popularity of each of these stories indicates, humans enjoy participating in the fight against seemingly superior powers. Here are some more popular underdog stories:

The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1831), a novel by Victor Hugo. Hugo’s unlikely hero is Quasimodo, a hunchback who lives in Paris’s famous cathedral.

Rocky (1976), a film directed by John Avildsen. This Academy Award winner is the story of an obscure boxer in Philadelphia who gets a shot at the world championship.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone (2001), a novel by J.K. Rowling. Harry, an orphan raised by his cruel aunt and uncle, is transformed from a timid weakling to a powerful hero when he attends Hogwarts, a school for wizards.

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Leo Tolstoy

BORN: 1828, *Yasnaya Polyana, Russia*

DIED: 1910, *Astapovo, Russia*

NATIONALITY: *Russian*

GENRE: *Fiction, nonfiction*

MAJOR WORKS:

Childhood (1852)

War and Peace (1869)

Anna Karenina (1877)

A Confession (1884)

The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Other Stories (1886)

Resurrection (1899)

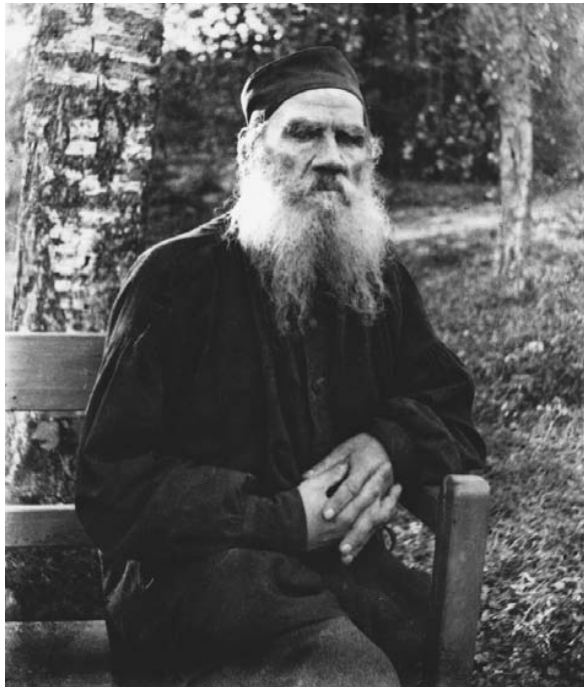
Overview

Russian novelist and moral philosopher Leo Tolstoy was one of the great rebels of all time, a man who during a long and stormy life was at odds with the Church, government, literary tradition, and his own family. His novel *War and Peace* has been called the greatest novel of all time. Tolstoy's brooding concern for death made him one of the precursors of existentialism, yet the bustling spirit that animates his novels seems to convey more life than life itself.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Religious Aunt Leaves Strong Impression Leo (Lev Nikolayevich) Tolstoy was born on August 28, 1828, in the Tula Province of Russia, the youngest of four sons. His mother died when he was two years old, whereupon his father's distant cousin Tatyana Ergolsky took charge of the children. In 1837 Tolstoy's father died, and an aunt, Alexandra Osten-Saken, became legal guardian of the children. Her religious fervor was an important early influence on Tolstoy. When she died in 1840, the children were sent to Kazan to live with another sister of their father.

Tolstoy was educated at home by German and French tutors. Not a particularly apt pupil, he was good



Leo Tolstoy *Tolstoy, Leo, 1897, photograph. The Library of Congress.*

at games. In 1843 he entered Kazan University to study Oriental languages, intent on a diplomatic career. Finding these studies too demanding, he switched two years later to study law. Despite the relative ease of this new pursuit, Tolstoy left in 1847 without taking his degree.

Army Life and Early Literary Career Nikolay, Tolstoy's eldest brother, while on furlough from military service, asked Tolstoy to join him in the south. Tolstoy agreed. After a meandering journey, he reached the mountains of the Caucasus, where he sought to join the army as a Junker, or gentleman-volunteer. He passed the necessary exams and was assigned to the 4th Battery of the 20th Artillery Brigade, serving on the Terek River against the rebellious mountaineers.

Tolstoy's border duty on a lonely Cossack outpost consisted of hunting, drinking, sleeping, chasing girls, and occasionally fighting. During the long lulls he first began to write. In 1852 he sent the autobiographical sketch "Childhood" to the leading journal of the day, the *Contemporary*. Nikolai Nekrasov, its editor, was ecstatic, and when it was published (under Tolstoy's initials), so was all of Russia. Tolstoy now began *The Cossacks* (1863), a thinly veiled account of his life in the outpost.

From November 1854 to August 1855 Tolstoy served in the battered fortress at Sevastopol. He had requested a transfer to this area, where one of the bloodiest battles of the Crimean War was in process. (The Crimean War of 1853–1856 was a clash between Russia and the allied forces of France, England, Sardinia, and the Ottoman Empire. The war was infamous for brutality and its many examples of military incompetence.) He later fictionalized his experience of the 4th Bastion, the hottest area in the conflict for a long while, in writing and revealed his distinctive Tolstoyan vision of war as a place of confusion, banality, and heroism. The first of the three "Sevastopol Tales" was the talk of Russia, attracting (for almost the last time in Tolstoy's career) the favorable attention of the czar.

School for Peasant Children In 1856 Tolstoy left the service (as a lieutenant) to look after his affairs in Yasnaya Polyana. He made his first trip abroad the following year. He did not like Western Europe, as his stories of this period show. He was becoming increasingly interested in education, however, and he talked with experts in this field wherever he went. In the summer he returned to Yasnaya Polyana and set up a school for peasant children. In 1860–1861 Tolstoy went abroad again, seeking to learn more about education; he also gambled heavily. During this trip he witnessed the death of his brother Nikolay in the south of France. More than all the grisly scenes of battle he had witnessed, this event brought home to Tolstoy the fact of death, the specter of which fascinated and terrified him throughout his long career.

Golden Years of Family Happiness and Professional Productivity In September 1862 Tolstoy wrote his aunt Alexandra, "I, aged, toothless fool that I am,

have fallen in love.” He was only thirty-four, but he was sixteen years older than Sofya Andreyevna Bers (or Behrs), whose mother had been one of Tolstoy’s childhood friends. Daughter of a prominent Moscow doctor, Bers was handsome, intelligent, and, as the years would show, strong-willed. The first decade of their marriage brought Tolstoy the greatest happiness. Never before or after was his creative life so rich or his personal life so full. In June 1863 his wife had the first of their thirteen children.

Since 1861 Tolstoy had been trying to write a historical novel about the Decembrist uprising of 1825 (a failed revolt against the czar by about 3,000 soldiers). But the more he worked, the farther back in time he went. The work would become the vast *War and Peace*. The first portion of *War and Peace* was published in 1865 (in the *Russian Messenger*) as “The Year 1805.” In 1868 three more chapters appeared; and in 1869 he completed the novel. Tolstoy had been somewhat neglected by critics in the preceding few years because he had not participated in the bitter literary politics of the time. But his new novel created a fantastic outpouring of popular and critical reaction.

From 1873 to 1877 Tolstoy worked on the second of his masterworks, *Anna Karenina* (1877), which also created a sensation upon its publication. The concluding section of the novel was written during another of Russia’s seemingly endless wars with Turkey. The country was in patriotic turmoil. M.N. Katkov, editor of the journal in which *Anna Karenina* had been appearing serially, was afraid to print the final chapters, which contained an attack on war hysteria. Tolstoy, in a fury, took the text away from Katkov, and with the aid of N. Strakhov published a separate edition that enjoyed huge sales. Tolstoy’s family continued to grow, and his royalties made him an extremely rich man.

Spiritual Crisis The ethical quest that began when Tolstoy was a child and that tormented him throughout his younger years now drove him to abandon all else in order to seek the ultimate meaning in life. At first he turned to the Russian Orthodox Church, visiting the Optina-Pustyn monastery in 1877. He found no answers there. When he began reading the Gospels, though, he found the key to his own moral system in Matthew: “Resist not evil.” In 1879–1880 Tolstoy wrote his *A Confession* (1884) and his *Critique of Dogmatic Theology* (1891). From this point on his life was dominated by a burning desire to achieve social justice.

In the next few years a new publication was founded (the *Mediator*) in order to spread Tolstoy’s word in tract and fiction, as well as to make good reading available to the poor. In six years almost twenty million copies were distributed. Tolstoy had long been under surveillance by the secret police, and in 1884 copies of *What I Believe* were seized from the printer.

Tolstoy’s relations with his family were becoming increasingly strained. The more of a saint he became in

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Tolstoy’s famous contemporaries include:

Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837): Russian Romantic poet known for his verse poem, *Eugene Onegin* (1833). Pushkin is also a distant cousin of Tolstoy’s.

Ivan Turgenev (1818–1883): Aristocratic author of *Fathers and Sons* (1862) and lifelong friend of Tolstoy’s.

Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881): Another of the great Russian writers, and also one who dealt with issues of ethics and morals in his work.

Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880): French writer best known for his novel, *Madame Bovary* (1857).

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896): American abolitionist and novelist. Best known for writing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852).

the eyes of the world, the more of a devil he seemed to his wife. He wanted to give his wealth away, but she would not hear of it. An unhappy compromise was reached in 1884, when Tolstoy assigned to his wife the copyright to all his works before 1881.

In 1886 Tolstoy worked on what is possibly his most powerful story, “The Death of Ivan Ilyich,” and his drama of peasant life, *The Power of Darkness* (which could not be produced until 1895). In 1888, when he was sixty years old, his thirteenth child was born. In the same year he finished his sweeping indictment of carnal love, *The Kreutzer Sonata*.

Final Years Full of Personal Turmoil In 1892 Tolstoy’s estate, valued at the equivalent of \$1.5 million, was divided among his wife and his nine living children. Tolstoy’s final years were filled with worldwide acclaim and great unhappiness, as he was caught in the strife between his convictions, his followers, and his family. Unable to endure the quarrels at home, he set out on his last journey in October 1910, accompanied by his physician and his youngest daughter, Alexandra. The trip proved too stressful and he died on November 9, 1910.

Works in Literary Context

An enormously important figure in Russian literature and culture, Tolstoy is famous not only for his novels, short stories, and plays but also for his moral authority. By the turn of the century, he had achieved worldwide recognition and prestige. The influence of his thought was felt not only by virtually all of Russia’s leading cultural figures, but also beyond Russia’s borders by contemporaries such as George Bernard Shaw, Mohandas Ghandi, William Dean Howells, and Romain Rolland. Tolstoyism has not

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Tolstoy's most famous work, *War and Peace*, covers many characters over a long period in a time of war. Here are some other famous war epics:

The Iliad (7th or 8th century B.C.), an epic poem by Homer.

This epic poem details the siege of Troy by the Greeks. *Winds of War* (1971), a novel by Herman Wouk. Wouk's best-selling World War II epic became a popular mini-series in 1983.

Half of a Yellow Sun (2006), a novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. This prize-winning novel follows the lives of three people caught up in the events surrounding Nigeria's civil war in the 1960s.

endured, however; the religious and moral movement he founded did not remain strong after his death in 1910. Rather, his literary masterpieces have survived, retaining their freshness and vitality for new generations of readers.

Didactic Fiction Though Tolstoy was a masterful stylist, his works are never meant purely for entertainment. Embedded in his novels are lessons, morals, that he strives to impart to the reader. This makes his work, especially *War and Peace*, part of the tradition of didactic literature, or literature that teaches. Tolstoy was always interested in theories of education. Even in his early years he felt a strong sense of responsibility as a writer, and even before his religious conversion in 1880 he wrote many simple, edifying stories for peasants and less sophisticated readers. He printed his theories in his own education journal, *Yasnaya Polyana*, which he founded in 1862. Tolstoy's writing style frequently made use of structural devices that have been associated with education. For example, he used repetition for emphasis, asked questions and then answered them, enumerated features or characteristics of phenomena he was analyzing, and appealed to logic in support of his views. His fictional writings can be seen broadly as instructional art. *War and Peace*, for instance, teaches about historical development, just as *Anna Karenina* teaches about the destructive power of passion. In his later fiction, the moral lessons of his works stand in even sharper outline, and his stories become more schematic.

Works in Critical Context

Tolstoy's novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* were warmly praised in his lifetime and continue to be regarded by critics as among the best examples of the novel as a genre.

War and Peace *War and Peace* is expansive in conception and execution, supporting a cast of more than six hundred characters who play out their roles against a

historical backdrop provided by French leader Napoleon Bonaparte's military campaigns at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The novel's broad sweep, multiple perspectives, and lack of a clear generic identity has raised questions about its unity. Henry James and Percy Lubbock, for example, were critical of the novel's formlessness and lack of a center. Complaining that the work was truly two novels, not just one, Lubbock lamented the absence of a single point of view. Modern critics have responded to the problem of unity with various solutions. In "The Moral Vision: Tolstoy," Albert Cook, for example, found the novel's unity in its moral orientation; Edward Wasiolek, in *Tolstoy's Major Fiction*, found the structural principle in *War and Peace* to be the "interdiction of force in life," where force is understood as interference, violence, institutional intimidation, and psychological manipulation. This principle, he argued, underlies Tolstoy's entire creative activity.

One character in particular, Natasha Rostova, is universally praised, not only because she is so "full" a character, but also because she represents an ideal—the truly "natural person" Tolstoy strove to embody in his art. Another female character, Princess Marya Bolkonskaya, also occupies an important position. As he stated in *A History of Russian Literature*, D.S. Mirsky believed that it was with the women in this novel that Tolstoy really triumphed.

Anna Karenina *Anna Karenina* explores questions of love, sex, and marriage. For the depth of Tolstoy's treatment of these themes, it has achieved recognition as one of the great novels of world literature. Tolstoy's contemporary, Fyodor Dostoevsky, described the book as "flawless." Twentieth-century Russian writer and critic Vladimir Nabokov echoed Dostoevsky's sentiments, and even turned to Tolstoy's famous work in beginning his own novel about love and family life *Invitation to a Beheading: A Family Chronicle* (1969). Mirsky and others found in the novel's ending a reflection of Tolstoy's own growing spiritual perplexity, which culminated in his crisis and conversion to a new worldview. Tolstoy brought the novel to a conclusion with difficulty; the tragic atmosphere surrounding Anna's death is unsettling. As Mirsky commented, "the novel dies like a cry of anguish in the desert air."

Responses to Literature

1. Take a look at some of Tolstoy's educational writings. Would his ideas still work today? Can you think of any other suggestions to reform the educational system?
2. Tolstoy is said to have greatly influenced Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. Take a look at some of their writings, perhaps "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" and find connections between the ideas of these later men and those expressed in Tolstoy's works.
3. After reading *Anna Karenina*, examine Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. How are the title characters similar? How are they different?

4. Tolstoy was a bit of a mystic, and Russian culture over the years has been peppered with mystics such as Rasputin. What do you think accounts for these mystical and almost magical beliefs in an otherwise practical culture?

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Michel Tournier

BORN: 1924, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Friday, or The Other Island (1967)

The Ogre (1970)

The Fetishist, and Other Stories (1978)

The Golden Droplet (1985)

Overview

Michel Édouard Tournier, one of the most popular novelists in France, writes provocative fiction that blends myth and symbolism with realistic depictions of characters and setting. Tournier is a radical social critic, challenging cultural notions of the social contract handed down through myth and showing characters who select alternative modes of relating to their environment. Like the works of Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, and Vladimir



Michel Tournier Tournier, Michel, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Nabokov, Tournier's tales are densely packed with a complex network of symbols and allusions.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Influence of Germany and World War II Tournier was born on December 19, 1924, in Paris. His family was middle class. His father, Alphonse Tournier, founded and directed an organization that dealt with musical copyrights. Shortly after Tournier's birth, the family moved to the Parisian suburb of Saint-Germainen-Laye, where the author-to-be spent his childhood. When he was four years old, he underwent a painful tonsillectomy without anesthesia, which he later described as a kind of primitive initiation rite. Consequently, the theme of initiation figures prominently in many of his works. A sickly child, he excelled in theology and German studies.

Tournier's youth was indelibly marked by World War II. After attempts to appease the territorial ambitions of Adolf Hitler failed, the war began when Nazi Germany invaded Poland in 1939. Both Great Britain and France immediately declared war on Hitler and Germany. In the spring of 1940, France fell to Hitler's army and the country was occupied for much of the war.

The war years were particularly painful for Tournier, because he was raised in a household that had as much