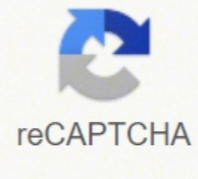




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How big is war and peace

An essay on translating WAR AND PEACE by Richard PevearTo many prospective readers Tolstoy’s War and Peace is the most intimidating of literary monuments. It is there, like a vast, unexplored continent, and all sorts of daunting rumors circulate about life in the interior. But once you cross the border, you discover that the world of War and Peace is more familiar and at the same time more surprising than the rumors suggested. That is as true for the translator as it is for the first-time reader. We spent three years working full-time on the translation, revising it, copy-editing it, proofreading it twice, meaning that each of us read the novel some five times in Russian and in English. Yet even in my final checking of the proofs, I still found myself delighting, laughing, or holding back my tears as I read. An example of this last is the moment near the end when Pierre and Natasha, after all the harrowing experiences they’ve lived through, finally meet again in Princess Marya’s drawing room. Pierre sees that Princess Marya has someone with her, but doesn’t realize who it is. Princess Marya is perplexed. She again shifted her gaze from Pierre’s face to the face of the lady in the black dress and said: “Don’t you recognize her?” Pierre glanced once more at the pale, fine face of the companion, with its dark eyes and strange mouth. Something dear, long forgotten, and more than sweet looked at him from those attentive eyes. “But no, it can’t be,” he thought. “This stern, thin, pale, aged face? It can’t be her. It’s only a reminiscence of that one.” But just then Princess Marya said: “Natasha.” And the face, with its attentive eyes, with difficulty, with effort, like a rusty door opening – smiled, and from that open door there suddenly breathed and poured out upon Pierre that long-forgotten happiness of which, especially now, he was not even thinking. It breathed out, enveloped, and swallowed him whole. When she smiled, there could no longer be any doubt: it was Natasha, and he loved her. What makes this passage so moving is not only the drama of the moment itself, but the way Tolstoy has sensed it and captured it in words. It can’t be paraphrased; the translator has to follow as closely as possible the exact sequence and pacing of the words in order to catch the “musical” meaning of the original, which is less apparent than the “literal” meaning, but alone creates the impression Tolstoy intended. I’ve said “translator,” and in a sense our collaboration is so close that the two of us make up one translator who has the luck to be a native speaker of two languages. That situation has its advantages. Translators are always in danger of drifting into the sort of language that is commonly referred to as “smooth,” “natural,” or, as they now say, “reader friendly,” and is really only a tissue of ready-made phrases. When that happens to me, as it sometimes does, Larissa is there to stop me. Where I have my say is in judging the quality of our English text, that is, in drawing the line between a literal and a faithful rendering, which are not at all the same. If the translation does not finally “work” in English, it doesn’t work at all. I’ll take an example of what that collaboration can produce from Tolstoy’s description of the Russian army crossing the river Enns. After a good deal of confusion, the hussar captain Denisov finally manages to clear the infantry from the bridge and send his cavalry over. As the first riders move onto the bridge, Tolstoy writes: “On the planks of the bridge the transparent sounds of hoofs rang out. . . .” The Russian is unmistakable—prozrachnye zvuki “transparent sounds”—and I find its precision breathtaking. It is pure Tolstoy. To my knowledge, it has never been translated into English. What we find in other versions is the “thud” or “clang” of hoofs, and it is likely that I would have done something similar if Larissa had not brought me back to what Tolstoy actually wrote. His prose is full of such moments. Coming upon them and finding words for them in English has been one of the most rewarding aspects of our work. Here is a very different and rather amusing example of the search for fidelity. Count Ilya Andreich Rostov, Natasha’s father, is giving a banquet in honor of General Bagration. Ordering the menu, he insists that “grebeshki” be put in the “tortue.” I assumed that tortue was French turtle soup, but what about grebeshki? The Russian word can mean either “cock’s-combs” or “scallops.” Which would you put in a turtle soup? I did research into the uses of cock’s-combs, but with rather unappealing results. I looked at previous translations: one has “scallops” and thinks the soup is a “pie crust”; another has “cock’s-combs” but in a “pasty”; in a third the “cock’s-combs” are in a “soup”; the fourth agrees about the soup, but puts “croutons” in it. Going by my own taste, I decided to put scallops in the turtle soup. This reading got as far as the first set of page proofs. Just then we met by chance (at a dinner in Paris) a woman who used to run a cooking school. We asked her which it should be. She, too, was puzzled. A few days later we received a long email from her. She had become so intrigued by our question that she went to the French National Library the next day and looked up the history of the culinary use of cock’s-combs. She was happy to inform us that they came into fashion precisely around the time of the Napoleonic wars and were a key ingredient in turtle sauce. Suddenly the whole passage made sense, because the chef replies to the old count’s order: “Three cold sauces, then?” The other translations have “three cold dishes” or “entrees,” with no relation to sauces at all. Thanks to Mme. Meunier, we were able to make the correction in the second set of proofs. But does such a small thing really matter? Well, it certainly did to Tolstoy. What this seemingly trivial detail reveals is the extraordinary accuracy of his memory, even in the smallest things. Cock’s-combs had gone out of fashion by his time, but he knew where to place them and in what. Tolstoy’s prose is a rich, fluid, multivoiced artistic medium. There is, for instance, a war between the French and Russian languages in War and Peace that mirrors the war between the French and Russian armies. His play with French and with gallicized Russian is a major element of social satire in the novel’s composition, allowing him the sort of linguistic infiltrations later found in Joyce and Nabokov. This adds a verbal dimension to War and Peace that English readers don’t suspect is there, because previous English translations have eliminated it. But this precocious modernism is never word play for its own sake. It is always moved by passion. The world of War and Peace envelops you. It is full of uncertainties, surprises, constantly shifting perspectives, but once you enter it you feel that you’re in sure hands. Over it all is that “infinite sky” that Prince Andrei discovers as he lies wounded on the field of Austerlitz. This vast unity that embraces the greatest diversity is the secret, the mystery, of Tolstoy’s art. It presents a great challenge to its translators, as I’ve tried to suggest in a small way. World War I was an international historical event. Many battles were fought around the world with volunteers and enlisted soldiers. The causes of the war, devastating statistics and interesting facts are still studied today in classrooms, history books and museums. The Beginning and End of the War The beginning of the war started with the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria. He was heir to the throne, but was murdered by a Serbian nationalist. The war broke out a month later when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. The war began on July 28, 1914 lasting four years, three months and fourteen days. The fighting ended on Nov. 11, 1918. It would take another six months before the war would officially end with a negotiated peace treaty five years after the assassination of the archduke. Names The war has been called several different names. World War I is often abbreviated as WWI in writing. In conversation and writing, it is referenced with several other names. It can be referred to as The Great War, The World War, The War of Nationals and The War to End All Wars. Casualties and Injuries During the four years of combat, 65 million soldiers fought in the battles. Eight million of the soldiers were killed worldwide. Another 21 million were injured and seven million were maimed with missing limbs. The United States only participating in the war for seven months, but had daunting statistics for casualties and injuries. During that seven-month period, 117,000 soldiers died and 204,000 were injured. Noteworthy Weaponry Facts Chemical weaponry was used for the first time in World War I. Airplanes were used to fight in the war with 70 different types used by all nations. The planes allowed explosives to be dropped to the ground. A machine gun could fire 600 rounds a minute which was considered the equivalent firing of range of more than 150 rifles. Medical Strides and Advancements Medical strides and advancements were a benefit of the war. Blood banks were first used during the war for necessary transfusions. The blood was stored on ice for up to 28 days. Plastic surgery was invented following World War I. A surgeon started the surgeries to help shrapnel victims with extreme facial injuries. Many techniques spearheaded the way for facial reconstructive surgery. MORE FROM QUESTIONSANSWERED.NET

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