To our daughter Sonya

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Acknowledgments

To read Tolstoy and write about him leads one, certainly me, to ponder his or her own experience and how it was shaped. My interest in Tolstoy's prototypes began with listening to Hugh McLean's lectures at Berkeley almost precisely a half century ago. Yet earlier Michael Holquist and Arkady Nebolsin guided my work at Yale University on how the great writer infects us so reliably with targeted emotions in his novel, making us react to fiction almost as if it were fact. The former introduced me to anthropological perspectives on the arts, the latter to how the history of literature is one of increasing insight into human nature and experience. Spending most of my career at Texas A&M University teaching a course on the world's greatest novels—in which *War and Peace* has to contend with *Anna Karenina, Crime and Punishment,* and *The Brothers Karamazov*—I have relished the often quizzical and skeptical reactions of our Aggie students. My university, its College of Liberal Arts, the Melbern G. Glasscock Center for Humanities Research, and the Department of International Studies have generously supported this course, as well as providing me with the opportunity to conduct and discuss research on what is truly one of my favorite books.

Earlier versions of portions of my study appeared in *Tolstoy Studies Journal*, *Rusistika*, and *Яснополянский сборник* (*Yasnaya Polyana Collection*), as well as in *Л. Н. Толстой и мировая литература: материалы III международной конференции в Ясной Поляне, 28–30 августа 2003 года* (*L. N. Tolstoy and World Literature: Proceedings of the III International Conference in Yasnaya Polyana, August 28–30, 2003*), edited by Galina Alexeeva. Many other portions were presented at various academic conferences. All are much revised and therefore entirely superseded by the present volume. In the course of these revisions, I received much helpful advice from such friends as Gary Saul Morson, Donna Tussing Orwin, Michael Denner, Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, Jeff Love, Joe Carroll, Dirk Vanderbeke, Alla Polosina, Vladimir Piskunov, and Olga Slivitskaya, as well as a number of anonymous peer reviewers. Lidia Opulskaya made it possible for me to spend some wonderful months working in the

Tolstoy Museum library in Moscow, much aided by Valentina Bastyrkina, truly an angel for Tolstoy scholars. If anything has been achieved here, it could not have been done without their intelligence and candor, nor without being able to stand on the shoulders of work performed by so many Tolstoy scholars and evolutionary scientists. In particular, permit me to single out four indispensable monuments of scholarship. The first is the careful presentation of all surviving drafts of *War and Peace* in volumes 13–15 of the Jubilee Edition; this allows us to peer into the novel at various stages of its formation, as well as to take note of ideas, especially references to family history, that Tolstoy did not include in its final version. All of this would have been an impenetrable haystack for me but for Kathryn Feuer's *Tolstoy and the Genesis of "War and Peace,"* edited by Robin Feuer Miller and Donna Tussing Orwin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), which provides an invaluable roadmap into the creation of one of the world's greatest works of art. The third essential source was the recent publication of Sofia Andreevna Tolstoy's *My Life*, translated by John Wordsworth and Arkadi Klioutchanski (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010), a prodigious work of memoir, translation, and editing. Lastly, I am grateful to have had at my disposal Sergei Mikhailovich Tolstoy's concise and colorful compendium of family history, *Tolstoy and the Tolstoys: Sketches from The History of the Family*.[1]

I brought my manuscript to Academic Studies Press expressly to work once again with Brian Boyd, who inaugurated this series on evolution, cognition, and the arts. It would have remained an indecipherable mess but for close readings and insightful commentary by him, Tom Dolack, Ekaterina Yanduganova, and Olga Muller Cooke, my wife and colleague. David Michelson, Alessandra Anzani, and Kira Nemirovsky provided cheerful and much needed guidance through the preparation process.

Writing about Tolstoy's families, real and imagined, of course, also leads to thoughts about one's own family. As an orphan, Tolstoy did not take his family for granted. Neither do I. As the subject of protracted custody proceedings, I appreciate how my loving parents fought long and hard to determine who would be

1 С. М. Толстой, *Толстой и Толстые*: *Очерки из истории рода,* перев. Н. И. Азарова (Москва: «Советская Россия», 1990). This is the source for color reproductions of family portraits. Drawings come from Т. Поповкина и О. Ершова, *Первые иллюстраторы произведения Л. Н. Толстого* (Москва: «Изобразительное искусство», 1978). Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holders and obtain permission to reproduce this material. Please do get in touch with any inquiries or any information relating to these images or the rights holder so that any errors or omissions in the above can be incorporated in future reprints or editions of this book.

the one to take care of me. Blessed, thanks to their remarriages, with more than a dozen full, half-, and step-siblings, I soon learned to negotiate fine degrees of relatedness; always living with a large, loving family, like Tolstoy, I was never alone. When Olga and I became parents ourselves, like the Tolstoys and many others, we carefully selected family names for our children that gratefully commemorate our ancestors: Alexandra (Sasha), Sophia (Sonya), and Nicholas (Kolya). This volume is dedicated to the second amongst them, Sonya, whose name has special resonance in the Russian culture we teach.

In order to help the reader keep track of the many characters and actual personages on whom the former appear to be modeled, we have referred to the former by their names *as commonly translated into English*, the latter by their formal Russian names. Thus we distinguish the fictional Nicholas Rostov from the actual Nikolai Ilich Tolstoy, albeit the latter was often called "Nicolas" by family members. One exception to this rule is Tanya Behrs (later Kuzminskaya), who first served as a prototype for Natasha at fourteen; referring to her by her familiar name allows us to maintain a clearer distinction from Tatyana Alexandrovna Yorgolskaya, Tolstoy's foster mother, whom we refer to by surname. Another is Tanya's sister Elizaveta Andreevna Behrs, referred to by her familiar name, Liza, in real life and apparently in the drafts of *War and Peace*. For the same reasons of clarity and some economy, I have dropped "Prince" and "Princess" from Andrew, Mary, and Vasily, albeit Tolstoy referred to them with their titles in the novel. Mary becomes "Countess" after her marriage to Nicholas in the First Epilogue. Frankly, most of the other major characters bear titles that Tolstoy rarely uses. This will keep Andrew and Mary distinct from Prince Bolkonsky, their father, and Countess Rostova, Mary's eventual mother-in-law.

While the entirely of the main text and parenthetical commentaries in footnotes are written in English, I decided to leave references to Russian sources regarding Tolstoy in their original Cyrillic. This will provide the most dependable access for scholars capable of reading the rich literature available about the author. Russian is transliterated in what seems to me to be the easiest means for English speakers to mimic proper pronunciation—albeit some popular spellings were retained, such as Nikolai, Elizaveta, Alexander, Lev, and Potemkin.

Introduction

In my childhood we shared a country house with our cousins on the north shore of Oahu. After lunch on large family weekends my father would gather us, his children, our cousins, and any other kids visiting, in one of the rooms of the bedroom wing and tell us a lengthy story of how we, to cite one example, all went on a boat trip along the Congo. Expecting that each of us would take a keen interest in whatever role he assigned us in the narrative, he included in his tale all the children who were in the room—and he made sure that we were pleased with his depiction of us. There was no great art involved. I do not remember how any of his stories ended—very likely his aim was to put us all to sleep—but his concern for our feelings nevertheless placed curbs on his artistic license.

In no other respect do I compare my father with Leo Tolstoy, yet reading *War and Peace*, I am reminded of those storytimes in Laie. Tolstoy used members of his immediate household and his parents and grandparents as models for characters in large part as an expression of his devotion to them. Yet my comparison is not far off the mark: according to Victor Shklovsky, Tolstoy's new wife Sofia Andreevna wanted him to write about her and their relatives in a narrative as "comfortable" as "a carriage drawn up to their front door."[1] *War and Peace* is not quite "comfortable" in all respects and it is much more than a "carriage," but rather, as we shall discuss, in large part it constitutes Tolstoy's deep consideration of how productive families and the author himself are constructed. At a minimum, the massive evidence we have of this modeling establishes that Tolstoy subsequently thought about his own family a lot and repeatedly so throughout the years he devoted to *War and Peace.* Yet more, he not only used the family history available to him as points of departure to inspire his narrative, Tolstoy's prototypes were sometimes points of return. This becomes evident as we trace various character arcs as they were developed from initial sketches, via drafts, to the published version, insofar as in their final rendering some characters come to resemble their initial models more than at

1 Victor Shklovsky, *Lev Tolstoy*, trans. Olga Shartse (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), 365.

the outset of his writing. Whether or not Tolstoy was rationalizing the paths his forebears took, as appears to have been the case in his novel, he cared for the people he was writing about, like my father and most people with their relatives; it follows that he usually would treat them well. It is an additional indication of Tolstoy's affection that, as we reconstruct how he developed these characters, the trend is generally positive: Tolstoy usually *improved* his family history in the course of writing his novel.

For Tolstoy the novel in part was a vehicle for thinking about family issues apparently of emotional significance to himself. If so, it then follows that the prototype-character relationships had to be kept relatively close, lest this personal meaning be dissipated. Biographers regularly depend on *War and Peace* and its drafts when they attempt to reconstruct the author's ancestors: in effect, they assume that Tolstoy was telling the truth, only slightly camoflaged, in his fiction. Nevertheless, we will also see how these materials suggest that Tolstoy also played with alternatives to what he knew of his family history. Distinguishing fact from fiction in such cases will require all of the facts we have available.

Readers of *War and Peace* who have enjoyed it in its own right do not need to know that its author consciously and conspicuously based central characters on close members of his family. But once we learn that this is the case—as we are continuing to do even now, a century and a half after publication of the novel—it cannot help adding to our understanding of Tolstoy's work. Despite its notorious length, *War and Peace* is also short in some respects: there are important gaps in the narrative. Why is Pierre alienated from his father? What is wrong with Vera Rostova? Why are all of the Kuragins so morally reprehensible? How does it happen that an unlikely match transpires between Nicholas Rostov and Mary Bolkonskaya, helping to bring the complicated plot to a happy close? Careful study of how Tolstoy alludes to members of his own family in the novel and its drafts sheds needed light on these and many other issues. It also helps to bring to the surface how most of us, though lacking this same information, have made sense of his masterpiece.

Additionally, close examination of Tolstoy's family history offers vital insight into some of the curious passages in his immense narrative. One glaring example is Tolstoy's reuse of the same first names. For example, there are three prominent Nicholases in the novel: Andrew's father and son, as well as Nicholas Rostov. It is normal practice for an author to vary first names so as to forestall confusion on the part of readers, certainly an issue in a novel with almost two hundred named personages. Why not call one of the Nicholases something else? However, the rationale for Tolstoy's practice becomes partially clear when

we consider that Andrew's father is modeled after Nikolai Volkonsky, Tolstoy's maternal grandfather, whereas Nicholas, who formally in Russian would be Nikolai Ilich Rostov, is based on Nikolai Ilich Tolstoy, the writer's own father. Evidently retention of their actual given names helped Tolstoy keep track of whom he was writing about. Although their activities in the ensuing fiction may have strayed far from the actual family history, it appears that via their names Tolstoy retained a link in terms of both character and, for him, personal resonance. The case of Andrew's son, called Nikolenka or Koko in the novel, remains unexplained. Why wasn't the child given another of Russia's numerous first names? One cannot argue that, Nikolai being a popular name in Russia, Tolstoy is being representative, for surely there would then be at least one Ivan and more than a single Olga in the novel.

I wonder whether Tolstoy's devotion to close relatives limited the free hand an author normally enjoys with his fictional characters, whether their rendition would have to be, on balance, morally positive, and whether truly bad things could not happen to them. Was the Russian writer somewhat biased in his portrayal of real personages emotionally close to him, especially his immediate ancestors and his newly acquired in-laws? Among numerous and often profound influences on this masterwork, Tolstoy's relationship to real life family prototypes, people he was anything but indifferent to, must be taken into account. Whereas, as it will be seen, this perspective on the novel will seem to be irrelevant to many of its pages, especially those dealing with well-known personages and historical events, like Napoleon and the Battle of Borodino, Tolstoy's actual relationships, insofar as we are cognizant of them, appear to have been highly salient to most scenes involving the central, and supposedly fictional, characters. Inasmuch as a major theme of the novel is historical causality, it is at least ironic that Tolstoy in respect to most of his protagonists placed a limitation on his own free will.

Although Tolstoy is hardly the only author to rely on prototypes, this was a characteristic feature of his style, including in some of his other works. To cite only the most prominent example, as every informed reader of *Anna Karenina* acknowledges, *Lev*in, the secondary protagonist, is, to a large degree, a self-portrait of Leo or *Lev* Tolstoy, especially insofar as the author replays in that novel the events of his own marriage. As we will detail, prototypes are an unusually distinctive feature of *War and Peace* and thus demands extensive scrutiny in their own right. His unusual reliance on family prototypes cannot help but figure in our overall assessment of the novel.

Examining the remarkably close relationships extant between actual personages and the presumably fictitious characters depicted in its pages requires

close comparison of their literary images with what is known of their biographies. Often this practice poses a severe challenge to scholarship, inasmuch as most of the former made no other contribution to history and would not normally have drawn much notice or left a substantial record. This is often the case with Tolstoy's ancestors and especially with his female relatives. Fortunately, much has been written about his parents and in-laws *because* they were closely related to Tolstoy *and* owing to the role they are recognized to have played in his greatest creation. A large part of this family history was recorded only years later, after Tolstoy's novel was recognized as a classic. Indeed, there is a continuing, even burgeoning, spate of new publications about his family. Recently the University of Ottawa Press team of Andrew Donskov, John Wordsworth, and Arkadi Klioutchanski published his wife's voluminous and controversial autobiography.[2] This allows us to combine a prodigious amount of information in one systematic perspective.

Tolstoy's handling of his relatives could be interpreted through our ordinary understanding of nepotism, something readily grasped, indeed, usually expected, in popular culture. However, both to provide a systematic perspective for our study and to greatly deepen our understanding of both Tolstoy's practice and our reception of his novel, I wish to invoke the framework of evolutionary psychology, which offers powerful and well-tested *explanations* of the emotions and motivations that drive most people to favor kin, especially near relations. Our *proximate* preference for relatives is itself a likely expression of an *ultimate* tendency for genes to promote the fortunes of copies of themselves, as carried in the bodies of those family members. A copy of a gene is, after all, the same gene, so self-interest is a motivating factor. Hence, on the basis of one of its basic tenets, kin altruism, *we may expect an increasingly positive bias in the characterization of personages modeled on prototypes closer in genetic relatedness to the author.*

Altruism continues to be a central puzzle in evolutionary theory: if evolution proceeds on the basis of competition, how does altruism, behavior that favors others at one's own expense, evolve? Yet it has, to different degrees in many species, to a relatively high degree in humans.[3] Keep in mind here that we are focusing on kin altruism, which consists of preferential treatment rendered to kin. This includes relatives who are inferior to their competitors and who otherwise would not deserve such advantages.

2 S. A. Tolstoy, *My Life*.

3 For an overview of recent genetic theories of "prosociality," see Joseph Carroll, "Evolutionary Social Theory: The Current State of Knowledge," *Style* 49, no. 4 (2015): 512–541.

One of the key insights into the evolution of altruism in all social species was the theory of kin selection or the slightly broader theory of inclusive fitness. In the early 1960s W. D. Hamilton posited that altruism is predicted to evolve as a biologically adapted trait when *the benefit to the receiver times the degree of relatedness exceeds the cost to the altruist*. He formulated what became known as Hamilton's rule:

$$C<Br$$ [4]

Ultimately (that is, in evolutionary terms, through natural selection) we have evolved to favor and aid kin, even those who are not direct descendants, because then more of the genes that we share with our wider kin, according to our degree of relatedness, likely will be passed on, and hence our own genes benefit more from our support of kin, which carry their copies. Proximally (that is, in terms of immediate psychological motivation), we simply feel greater concern for our kin.

The depth, fertility, and rigor of evolutionary biology and psychology in explaining life opens many paths for inquiry. Here, we investigate whether it may help to account for Tolstoy's motivation to render his relatives as positively as he does in the novel. Although altruism toward kin manifests itself more mutedly in distant kin, as Hamilton's rule predicts, it becomes more resonant with Tolstoy's grandparents, and quite emphatic in the characters drawn after his mother and father, in other words, *it grows with greater degrees of relatedness to the author himself*.

However, kin altruism is only one of many forces working in the novel; as so often in real life, other factors greatly complicate the actual picture. Nevertheless, the signal, that is, the workings of Hamilton's rule, can be discerned, despite some contrary evidence, amidst the enormous noise of the text. As will be evident when we get into our detailed examination of Tolstoy's family relationships, inclusive-fitness theory explains from deep biological principles what we intuitively assume about family matters. Perhaps few readers will think we need to prove that, for example, most mothers love their children, but important insights may be gained if we do not take such a relationship for granted but rather ask why this should be so, biologically. Two other advantages to this

4 We can understand this equation as the cost (C) to the giver is less than the benefit (B) to the receiver times the degree (1/2, 1/4, 1/8, etc.) of their relatedness (R). W. D. Hamilton, "The Evolution of Altruistic Behavior," *The American Naturalist* 896, no. 97 (1963): 354–356.

perspective are a) that it provides both explanatory depth and, combined with related theories, much nuance, while potentially b) linking our study of the novel to the entirety of the life and behavioral sciences.

There has been little attempt to weigh the aesthetic consequences of Tolstoy's prototypes. What difference does it make when an author so consciously, if not also conspicuously, bases central characters on close members of his family? He used their actual names at first and only lightly disguised them thereafter: in addition to Tolstoy's retention of his father's and maternal grandfather's forename of Nikolai, this is captured by the slightest possible change he made applying his actual mother's name, Maria Nikolaevna *V*olkonskaya, to one of his heroines, Maria Nikolaevna *B*olkonskaya (referred to in our study as Mary), a single phonemic shift. In effect, he (and often members of his household) always *knew* whom he was writing about. Did this not rule out vast reaches of poetic license? Could he treat a beloved relative with a negative fictional portrayal? Theoretically, yes, he could, but generally he did not, possibly due to such family pressures as default expectations of kin altruism. One of the great but still unacknowledged virtues of the novel is its generosity: I am hardly alone in sensing that the author holds dear most members of the Rostov and Bolkonsky families, and therefore he is patient with them and forgives them their flaws. Could it be that Tolstoy's partiality was motivated by many of them being based on his own relatives? This may help us understand why we are willing to spend so many pages with them—to the point that they seem to be *our* relatives; it is difficult to think of another work that recruits as much affection as *War and Peace*.

There are some additional impediments to our inquiry. First, *War and Peace* is largely fiction. More than other extended fictions, historical novels are comprised of large dollops of *Wahrheit* (truth) in the *Dichtung* (poetry). Whereas readers may be confident that, following events familiar to most readers, Napoleon's *Grande Armée* will eventually be defeated, some of the same constraint pertains to his fictional characters, who generally retrace family history. However, it greatly interests us that Tolstoy did not merely repeat the biographies of kin prototypes; instead he *developed* their fictional arcs in directions that suggest both the partiality central to my inquiry and an intensive reexamination of his origins and alternative potential fates. A. N. Wilson suggests Tolstoy utilized autobiographical materials in his fiction to concoct "his version of how he wanted his life to be [. . .] arranging events to make them tolerable to himself."[5]

5 A. N. Wilson, *Tolstoy* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 186.

Second, Tolstoy utilized some of his relatives' actual personal faults in the published novel. Including negative features, albeit sometimes muted, conveys the sincerity of Tolstoy's consideration of his family past and present. Reading by reference to his prototypes allows us to surmise how Tolstoy viewed his own novel—he, of course, was its first reader—something he rarely wrote or spoke about; obviously, *War and Peace* itself constitutes this commentary. By drawing on his own experience and the family history that shaped him, Tolstoy evidently used his composition of *War and Peace*, as in other works, as a means of thinking about issues of deep personal interest to him and as a means of imagining (auto)biographical "what might have beens."

This line of thinking, in turn, raises the question of why a responsible man like Tolstoy, who devoted so much of his time to helping others, should have concerned himself with mere fiction. With so many real-life problems to contend with, why should he bother with art? How could Tolstoy justify to himself the enormous effort he and other members of his family expended on his massive text, all undertaken without the initial assurance of financial gain or even a publisher? As other critics have noted, especially Gary Saul Morson in his *Hidden in Plain View*, the novel entails many aesthetic and intellectual risks.[6] We entertain the notion that work on this novel contributed to his intensive and usually recondite consideration of important issues personal to the author and his loved ones, issues of sufficient importance to justify undertaking these risks. In September 1863, at the very time he began what became *War and Peace*, he wrote to an editor that his story about 1812 is "not [being] written for publication."[7] Of course, Tolstoy reversed this posture and published his novel: we are well advised to distrust his assertion that he wrote it primarily for himself and his family, but should nevertheless wonder why he made this, even if disingenuous, comment at all.

Work on the present volume is motivated by the unusual attachment I have felt for *War and Peace* ever since I first read it in 1968 while sitting on a beautiful hillside pasture on the island of Molokai, at the very time I decided to make a career of studying Russian literature. How is it possible for mere print on paper about personages who never existed to elicit the sort of affection we often feel for family members and close friends? True, the point of much of my study is that

6 Gary Saul Morson, *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in "War and Peace"* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

7 Cited in Н. Н. Гусев, *Летопись жизни и творчества Льва Николаевича Толстого, 1828–1890*, ред. Л. Д. Опульская (Москва: Государственное издательство художественной литературы, 1958), том 1, 292.

the novel depicts actual people in fictional guise, people close to the author, but the question for us non-relatives is still pertinent: why do we or should we care about a work of fiction? Some might even wonder at times if this huge novel is that good a work of fiction. In some respects, it is, as Henry James famously commented, a "loose, baggy monster"; we will use our study to tie up a number of its stray ends. In terms of aesthetic harmony it pales by comparison to its littermate, *Anna Karenina*. Students regularly complain that it is too long, and abridged editions abound, usually excising Tolstoy's controversial authorial intrusions. Even scholars generally ignore the Second Epilogue, which is relatively unexamined.[8] And yet, my experience is that *War and Peace* calls forth an unusual degree of affection, especially for supposedly fictional characters like Pierre and Natasha.[9] Many readers are so taken with its pages that, like yours truly, they write books of their own about the novel. Two of many that come to mind are Daniel Rancour-Laferriere's *Tolstoy's Pierre Bezukhov?* a psychobiography of a fictional character partly based on analysis of the scholar's own dreams, and Andrew D. Kaufman's recent *Give "War and Peace" a Chance*, a lengthy introductory commentary much interwoven with that author's autobiographical meditations.[10]

This same attachment may be regarded as the major question we may pose of fiction. Indeed, is this not the central issue of most literary study: why do we ever feel such affection for a text, especially one of fiction? How does it produce such an emotion in us? In the case of *War and Peace*, almost certainly it will prove significant that the novel was born of the devotion the author felt for his family members whom he portrayed in its pages. Not just the unusual prominence but also the largely positive spin he gave to his family history speaks to this point.

Clearly, this affection was on Tolstoy's mind as he composed *War and Peace.* In 1865, while working on the novel, he wrote to another writer:

> Problems of the Zemstvo, literature and the emancipation of women obtrude with you in a polemical matter, but these problems are not only

8 On the other hand, see Jeff Love's magisterial study, "The Philosophy of History," in *Critical Issues: "War and Peace,"* ed. Brett Cooke (Ipswich: Salem Press, 2014), 225–239.

9 The popularity of such personages justifies R. F. Christian's statement, with this novel firmly in mind, that "it is the characters which a novelist creates which are the greatest and most memorable part of his achievement." R. F. Christian, *Tolstoy's "War and Peace": A Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 177.

10 Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, *Tolstoy's Pierre Bezukhov: A Psychoanalytic Study* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993); Andrew D. Kaufman, *Give "War and Peace" a Chance*: *Tolstoyan Wisdom for Troubled Times* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).