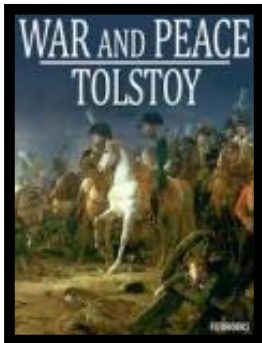


War and Peace

by Rev. Joe Dirt - Monday, July 15, 2013

<http://www.curmudgeon-alley.com/war-and-peace/>



I knew very little about War and Peace before I read the book except it was written by a Russian Leo Tolstoy and it was very long. It is long, about 1300 pages in paperback. By comparison the Harry Potter box set is 4167 pages with the print admittedly larger. I think the majority of us have read all the Harry Potter books.

This is not an attempt to review such a classic, but perhaps some impetus for someone to read this worthy book.

It is an historical novel. It uses the fortunes of several folks to move the narrative forward. It is a love story, but certainly not in the vein of Jane Austen. Tolstoy brings the characters alive to point that you do care what happens to them. Will Natasha marry the Prince? Will Princess Mary ever find happiness? How long will Count Bezukhov put up with his wayward wife? Will the Rostovas go bust before the novel ends? I had to remind myself it was normal for those times. I found it a little creepy that 30 and 40 year old men were chasing the main love interest of the story, 16 year old Natasha. Apparently if you were not married by the time you were 17 or 18 you were an old maid. People were not so worried about marrying for love, but in making a match that increased the family's finances.

It is a history of Russia from about 1800 to 1813 or so. The epilogue goes past those dates. It is the story of Bonaparte's invasion into Russia and the Russian response. It is an historical analysis of those times. One of his recurring themes is the fallacy of most historians who analyze history from the point of great men. Tolstoy seems to believe that like most of us great men also have the tiger that is life by the tail and they are just hanging on for all they are worth. He continually brings to task historians that portray Bonaparte as a genius, military or otherwise. He sees him as a murderous thug who rose to power through a series of historical accidents. Of course, that in itself is only history repeating itself.

I probably should have known, but did not, that the French's brief occupation of Moscow resulted in Moscow essentially being burned to the ground.

Tolstoy saw the Russian commander-in-chief's, General Kutuzov, genius in using Mohammed Ali's strategy of the roper-doper. It was very effective, but he had to fight everyone from the Emperor on down to keep to it.

It is surprisingly a spiritual book if not directly religious. It is a discussion of philosophy and theology. It is a peek into the Russian aristocracy of the time. I came to realize that the Russians had a system of serfdom whose objects barely had more freedom than the American slaves. The dissipated, luxurious life lead by the aristocracy was only viable due to this abusive system.

It is not a hard read. The Russian names are not any worse off the tongue than Klingon names from Star Trek. I learned a great deal about the history of the time. Tolstoy like Dostoevsky has an amazing insight into the human character and human motivations. It is a thoughtful book exploring many ancillary subjects.

I was consumed by the story as I read it, as Robin will testify. I just had to give her updates to story from time to time. And when a book does that to you, it is a good read.

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