

THE ELUSIVE PEACE: REVIEWING PEACE THROUGH WAR LITERATURE**Veenu Pant**Assistant Professor
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The literature of war has existed since the ancient times. War is a dominant force and literature of war often remind us that war is an ever present situation in human society and peace is as eluding now as it was hundreds of years ago. Tales of war are not just relieving the event as it had happened it is more often a tale of human emotions and realisation of self in the face of death. War is result of social and political conflicts and thus death, desire, human frailty and human sacrifice all get entwined as one in War literature. War literature is often a great source of history because in all its intense morbid and inhumane character war often brings out the best and the worst in the people. This paper proposes to discuss two case studies from the war literature: WAR & PEACE by Tolstoy and AN INNOCENT SOLDIER by Josef Holub. Both the books are on the same theme but from different perspective. While Tolstoy depicts the Napoleonic War on Russia in 1812 from the point of view of Russian nobility and people, Holub writes it from the perspective of a German boy forced by circumstances to serve The Grande army. War and Peace portrays the war within and without, deals with a range of human emotions, social norms, failing morality and the challenge of the outer world. An Innocent Soldier portrays the invasion from the eyes of two young teenagers who do not belong to France, they have no reason to be at war with the mighty Russia yet are forced to be a part of the army that marches ahead haughtily and has to retreat back defeated and butchered. Studying history through these two works of War Literature the paper proposes to study the yearning for ever elusive peace.

Keywords: War, Peace, Napoleon, Russia, 1812, Soldier, Death

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Desired, sought after yet, achievable yet unachieved: Peace is the Mirage we all are running after. The very idea of peace in present day world is elusive. Someone has recently commented on the situation as “Hidden in darkness of early morning hours news paper boy quietly throws a thousand dead in my courtyard”. Alas how true it is, everyday as we start a new day the newspaper brings in the realisation of darkness and death surrounding us all. Attacks on humanity are so common that greatest fear is of sterilisation of emotions towards such acts in near future. Peace is seen by many as fleeting moment between two acts of violence. In this world of blood, death and horror where war seems to be the only constant literature like War & Peace and The Innocent Soldier provide us with a hope, a vision of love and trust, a bond of friendship and a quest for inner self.

War and Peace of Tolstoy is novel written in 1860's, not very long after Napoleon was defeated, dead and buried on a lonely island. The novel focuses on war but as Tolstoy himself has said that it is more regarding the irrationality of human behavior, the unusual reaction which makes us different and the rashness which seems to occupy all of us at some moment. General Kutuzov, the Great Russian general who became the first opponent to defeat Napoleon on land is great not because he plans his attacks and executes them in a very methodical and conventional manner, the way we often imagine as military leaders to work like, but because he is very unpredictable. He acts on spur of the moment, willing to adapt and change and is continuously coming up with seemingly weird ideas. His plans are revised with the turn of events and each one is vastly different from last one. His only desire seems to be Russian victory and his simplicity prevents him from taking defeat personally. He is humble and spiritual; it is his faith in divine that makes him kneel in front of a Holy Icon after Russian victory at Borodino. He is so different from his opponent Napoleon and his understanding of the philosophy of human nature is what takes him from a shattering defeat to a glorious victory. Tolstoy draws this character with more respect than others because in this Russian General we all find a person who is ready to sacrifice his pride if he can save his people from a war which is advancing towards their homes without mercy. In him we can see the desire of peace even when the war is inevitable. In General Kutuzov we see a man so different from Napoleon who is bent on becoming the master of all the known world. To me the General symbolizes the hope for life, the hope for peace and the hope for a better world.

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The hero of War & Peace is not General Kutuzov but Pierre, who is often hailed as a reflection of Tolstoy himself. He is awkward, uncouth but truthful. He too is irrational and impulsive. His marriage with Helene, his staying back in Moscow with Freemasons', his disillusionment because of their passivity, his firm belief that he is destined to kill Napoleon, all reflect his impulsive nature. But it is his search for the meaning of life that acquires the central position in this novel. When Tolstoy said that War and Peace is not a novel but a book of philosophy of life he probably is referring to him only. It is through Pierre that Tolstoy muses of meaningful existence in face of death. Pierre is one central character in this piece of War literature who is not associated with war directly but whose life is dictated by war. He represents a common man whose views Napoleon, the advancing enemy of his land, as a great man. The question which arises is 'Why Great?' Answer is easy to understand from the eyes of a common man: Great because rising from a common birth he has become an Emperor, he symbolizes hope and equality. Pierre is also behaving as a typical Russian when he fails to understand the threat of advancing Napoleonic army. Reflected through the story we find Tolstoy lamenting the absence of Russian culture among its nobility.ⁱ

War and Peace also gives us the story of Prince Andrew, a man so typically built in the ideal image of what a MAN should be like. He is handsome and wealthy but when we say that he is an ideal man the meaning is that in him we find a person who is courageous, devoted, ready to fight and die for his land and his people, he is passionate yet unattached to emotional relationships. He loves his family, a very small family indeed, comprising of his father, younger sister and his beautiful and virtuous wife yet he goes to war and burns out himself to death. He is friend of Pierre yet when in his first meeting Pierre touches his hand he cringes back as he is not compatible with open show of emotions. Andrew's flaw is not seen to be so: his detachment from emotional bindings is seen as an intellectual advantage by the society which views him as perfectⁱⁱ, albeit an emotional handicap. Andrew seems to be free from search for the meaning of life, he is unable to forge deep and lasting relationships and is stern enough to be unwilling to forgive even whom he loves for their misdeeds. Andrew reflects a very typical notion of Man in our society, a notion which is ever present, the values which are seeded deep inside a boy child as he is growing up to be a man that results in his inability to be touched by others throughout his life. The notion that a man feels no pain and is not supposed to express fear is what makes them often cruel towards those who love them and if we look deep into their being we find them so lonely. Andrew too despite of all his intelligence and perfection is a lonely individual whom even the love of Natasha cannot save.

As we go through the initial chapters we find a very interesting conversation between Andrew and Pierre which reflects the similarity between them, the similarity of thought, the similarity of desire, a yearning for peace. When Andrew says 'If everyone fought for their own convictions there would be no war', Pierre replies that it would be splendid. This reply is significant because it shows the yearning for Peace. Andrew's reply confirms that yearning as he says 'Very likely it would be splendid, but it will never come about.....'. The words give

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us a hope and snatch it away as both the warrior and the civilian desire peace but alas it still remains elusive.

Princess Lise's statement that she doesn't understand why men cannot live without war is not only her opinion, it encompasses all women who dread war and are made to bear the ills of war much against their desire. She is pregnant, sick and insecure, she needs her husband to be with her, she wants to be in the city where help is easily available, yet her husband takes her to his estate and leaving her with his family goes to fight a war. She dies during childbirth, her death is not death of a wealthy woman, it is death of millions like her who die because of apathy and indifference of their loved ones who think their presence is needed elsewhere.ⁱⁱⁱ

Another character Natasha is so full of life; she is everything the other society girls/ladies are not. Innocent and brave, Natasha is one of Tolstoy's greatest creations not only in War & Peace but as reflected through his another great writing Anna Karenina. She is a representation of joyful vitality and possess the ability to experience life in all its aspects. She is an antithesis of society women around her, she represents purity and thus is a dream like creation so different from the women of those times who were the centre of attraction in society. Natasha is lively and spontaneous in contrast to Helene, the first wife of Pierre, who is stony and scheming. Natasha charms everyone she meets be it Andrew Bolkonski or Anatole Kuragin, and finally Pierre Bezukhov. Natasha is charming but she is never found to come across as a show-off or a flirt seeking men's attentions yet she is desired and sought simply because she is pure and simple and enjoys life by being herself, by existing in her own unique way. She makes wrong decisions and tries hard to amend them. In the process she grows from a mere child to a strong woman. Punished and rejected by Andrew because of her momentary attraction towards Anatole she repents her error with sincerity that even the stern and unforgiving Andrew forgives her and expresses his love for her on his deathbed. Natasha's spiritual development is through the twists and turns her life takes, she is neither philosophical nor does she learn through religion or books. She just grows wise and mature with the demands of life and changes radically. Through her we see the changing upper society from carefree life in clubs and parties to meaningful existence among farm hands and fields.

War & Peace takes us through an array of emotional experiences, all different and equally significant. Be it the French character of Russian upper class or the selfish nature of those who are endowed with wealth and position or the naïve simplicity of Natasha and awkward clumsiness of Pierre, we see a world that is unable to understand what it stands for. Platon Karateav, a simple Russian peasant who represents the wise and philosophical Russian culture in deep contrast to the glitters of Western Europe makes us think of the contentment which arises from wisdom, the connection among human beings and nature. Death of Petya is significant in imposing upon the readers the truth that young minds should not be trained to view death as glorious, fighting for honour and national security is a duty which can be undertaken only when you are prepared and trained.

In the society fraught with differences, Napoleon is not only a political threat but he also represents a great social threat to these people as he has risen from Have Not's. Yet when we find clumsy and pot bellied Napoleon getting dressed in his chamber we feel pity for him as a failure, not in battlefield but in personal life. In imitating those whom he had replaced he has turned into them only and as a result he is a part of none: neither the Have not's nor the affluent. He seems to be a wandering soul in search of peace through wars, and every war takes him further away from his inner self and inner peace.

Tolstoy points out in *War and Peace*, that things are never as simple as they seem, the link between humanity is much above nationalist boundaries. Russians are bound too closely to the French society to be viewed as separate. Platon is a wise Russian, but Pierre was able to understand his wisdom as he had read so many French philosophers and lived in Paris. The interconnection between France and Russia is evident even in names, Pierre is addressed by his French name, never by his Russian name, Pyotr, Anatole addresses Natasha as Natalie. Tolstoy shows the impact of cultural interdependence and proves that it is inevitable. Patriotism, on the other hand, is based on a radically opposite belief: it separates the national identities, it dictates that one national group must be wholly separated from another, and that in order to survive they must be at war against each other.

War & Peace is an inner journey, it is historical as it recounts a war which turned the course of history but it is deeply philosophical as it weaves a story which ends in Peace attained through war. The philosophical musings associated with the characters, development of mature outlook through suffering all make us realise the futility of war. Russians win the war yet the losses are huge, they are able to hold not because of their French minded nobility but because of their simple minded Russian peasants who engage in burnt earth tactics to save their fatherland, their Field Marshal who kneels down in reverence to the divine will as he believes that the victory has been achieved because the divine grace was with them, their officers like Andrew who speak Russian because they are Russians and also because they are different from French.

Pierre in the end represents everything desired by a war shattered society trying to rebuild itself through peace: compassion, straightforward approach, truthfulness and simplicity. Andrew represents everything desired in a society approaching War: Commitment, passion, strength, bravery, intelligence, honour and emotional detachment. It is for us to decide whom do we choose 'Andrew' or 'Pierre', or like Natasha we choose as per circumstances- in War Andrew - in Peace Pierre.

The other piece of literature I wish to review is a teenage literature called "The Innocent Soldier". The innocent here represents the untrained farm boy who is forced by the circumstances to march with the Grande Army without his willingness to be a part of the show. The story is not as philosophical or deep rooted in human psychology as War & Peace, it lacks

the Midas Touch of Tolstoy and it is simply a historical fiction which narrates the lives of two boys forced to be a part of Russian Campaign yet it provides us with a perspective of peace.

Set in the background of Napoleonic invasion of Russia this story is about two German boys who are not associated with the ideal of French superiority or the concept of saving the revolution simply because of the fact that they are not French. The story has as Central character an orphan farm boy Adam Feuchter, who is taken to the town by his master, in the middle of the night and is drafted into Napoleon's Grand Army in the place of his master's son, Georg Bayh. He loses his identity fights and has to fight for his survival in harsh weather and situations. He is constantly harassed by a higher ranked soldier, Sergeant Krauter who makes him do menial and abhorring tasks. One day as he splashes through mud and muck his fate shines and he is promoted as a servant under Lieutenant Konrad Klara. Konrad is another German boy, a young teenager who is young lieutenant because of his family connection. As they march towards Russia Adam and Konrad develop a brother like relationship. They are two unwilling soldiers who have to save each other if they have to survive. The Grande Army start retreating after the Battle of Borodino. Moscow was so cruel to them and now as the Russians are hounding them away from their fatherland, the struggle gets even more difficult for these two young men.

The story revolves around three characters, Adam Feuchter, Konrad Klara and Sergeant Krauter. While as Adam is a mere lad of sixteen, forced by life to march with army, Sergeant Krauter is an opportunist young man who is both cruel and greedy. He switches side as Russians start winning and fights against his own people. Konrad is a wealthy and spoiled child who learns the intricacies of life the harsher way on a battle field. Saved twice by Adam he starts considering him a family and is greatly attached to him despite the social gap. He wants to become famous but realises that the value of life is more than that of fame attained through death. Barriers of birth fall as the two fumble and struggle to reach back home. Out of the contingent of 15, 000 only 300 returned home to a hero's welcome, held in awe by the people Adam or Sergeant Adam actually enjoys life after reaching back. Strange are the ways of life.

The story is full of incidences which makes one realise the futility of war, it engages in narratives of ghastly fields and wells full of corpses to make us realise that in the end no one benefits. When a Russian woman gives shelter to Adam and Konrad she is being human, across borders of national identity, across divide to enemy and friend she is like a grandmother to these young boys^{iv}.

Hilarious and witty the story is a journey of life through the valley of death for these young men. The story contains a moral that peace is to be valued and every journey must end in peace and happiness.

The soldiers chosen by the author are German, thus not connected with Napoleon, they are forced to enlist as their land is occupied by French army. This shows the misery of occupants, they do not have the right to chose. Without any reason they are forced to fight those with whom neither they nor their nation is at war. They survive but the horrors of war are too much to bear^v.

As we review both the tales one so philosophical and deep and another adventurous and witty, we go through the same point in history: 1812 Napoleonic invasion of Russia and the plight of Grande army. The narration is different, seemingly the quest is also different but as we look into the journey of life of each and every character we find that the stream running beneath the brazen land of Russia or France or Germany is the stream of love and compassion. The journey may have different paths but the goal is peace within and around us.

Tolstoy through War & Peace shows us that culture brings in the notion of interconnected humanity, and the deep brotherhood of all humankind, too much to indulge in patriotic divisions. Josef Holub tells us that “there is nothing noble about war... the troops forget all their good habits.”^{vi} But the horrors of war forge a bond destroying the distinctions of birth and borders. In both the stories, through death and destruction, man searches for peace and love, a search so eternal and a desire so strong for a peace so elusive.

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An Innocent Soldier by Josef Holub

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ⁱ As we go through Chapter VI of War and Peace we find the following observations which support this fact,

(a) “Two footmen, ... listened to the French sentences which to them were meaningless”;

(b) “Well, mon cher” said the Vicomte, ... your little princess is very nice, very nice indeed, quite French,”

ⁱⁱ A quote from Chapter VIII explains it all “...thought Pierre. He considered his friend a model of perfection because Prince Andrew possessed in the highest degree just the very qualities Pierre lacked, and which might be best described as strength of will. Pierre was always astonished at Prince Andrew's calm manner of treating everybody, his extraordinary memory, his extensive reading (he had read everything, knew everything, and had an opinion about everything), but above all at his capacity for work and study. And if Pierre was often struck by Andrew's lack of capacity for philosophical meditation (to which he himself was particularly addicted), he regarded even this not as a defect but as a sign of strength. “

ⁱⁱⁱ Chapter VII contains this accusation on Andrew “I have long wanted to ask you, Andrew, why you have changed so to me? What have I done to you? You are going to the war and have no pity for me. Why is it?”

^{iv} Holub, Josef. *An Innocent Soldier*. New York:Scholastic Inc, 2007. English.Ch. 33, page 158

^v Ibid, Chapter 32, page 153

^{vi} Ibid, Chapter 23, page 125

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