

chemistry teachers to teach dialectical materialism does not mean it was actually taught!

Q: How much did all this change after reunification?

A: A great deal, especially in subjects such as history. Of course, *Staatsbürgerkunde* ceased even to exist by 1990. In fact, after November 1989, nobody paid attention to schoolbooks in civics and history. When

I was at the Goethe Gymnasium between 1992 and 1995 we used West German history textbooks. The old GDR ones were superseded by events – and we hadn't yet received new textbooks. Everything was in a state of upheaval and educators hadn't yet decided what to enshrine as the new curriculum. We learned from mimeographed materials and from discussions – which I much preferred to dry textbooks.

Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*

Comparative treatments in Soviet and post-Soviet textbooks

John Rodden and Cristen Reat

Soviet educators had an ambivalent relationship to their native literary genius and his *chef d'oeuvre*: Leo Tolstoy and *War and Peace*. Tolstoy and his masterwork were too ideologically incompatible and too artistically powerful simply to co-opt as exalted socialist precursors – and yet too culturally significant simply to ignore. They had to be embraced – but partially, in both senses of the word: a partial image of the whole – to which orthodox educators were extremely partial.

In light of those ideological and cultural tensions, let us examine how schoolbooks have differed between the Soviet and post-Soviet eras via a single significant example: how two textbooks treat the masterwork of the leading Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy.

This essay compares and contrasts Soviet and post-Soviet pedagogical treatments of Tolstoy by examining *War and Peace* as it is presented in secondary school literature textbooks. It is an attempt to place the textbook within the world of Soviet and post-Soviet pedagogy and education.¹ The schoolbooks selected for analysis are from two representative moments in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras: a 1973 ninth-grade literature textbook (edited by Boris Bursov) and a 1996 tenth-grade literature textbook (edited by Yuri Lebedev). Our attention to the treatment of Russia's greatest author and greatest work – Tolstoy, then and now – does not merely illuminate the changing historical approach to Tolstoy and his work, but also sug-

gests further how ideology reflects both state cultural policy and conceptions of national identity.

For it warrants emphasis that the Soviet textbook was integral to the goals of the Ministry of Education. As one literary scholar put it: 'At all times the teacher is supposed to bear in mind that the subject outline and the textbook are his main tools in the teaching of literature.'² Although Soviet instructors did have access to supplementary teaching materials, the textbook was the primary source for class lessons: 'The textbook is the only source of literary history encountered by a pupil at school, and therefore the manner in which it is presented is of utmost importance for understanding the material covered.'³ Such convictions have re-emerged in the Russian pedagogy of the post-Soviet era with a Tolstoyan accent on the existential power of art. Lebedev writes in his 1996 edition that Tolstoy regarded literature as 'the textbook of life.'⁴

An examination of the historical and institutional context of our two secondary school literature textbooks from the 1970s and 1990s raises first this question: How did Soviet literary critics of the Brezhnev era and post-Soviet textbook authors approach Tolstoy?

In the 1910s and 1920s, Georgi Plekhanov and Anatoly Lunacharsky sharply criticized Tolstoy largely because of his doctrine of non-resistance to evil and his calls for moral self-perfection.⁵ This critique came

1 It is worth mentioning the difference between the textbook 'collectives' of the Soviet era and how this process is undergoing change in post-Soviet Russia. For example, the 1996 *Russkaia literatura* for tenth graders indicates that the publishing house *Prosveshchenie* contracted Yuri Lebedev, an individual author, to produce the textbook. The one-author system reflects a shift to the Western model of how textbooks are produced. However, both volumes of the 1996 *Russkaia literatura* for eleventh graders list more than twenty authors as contributors. Such diversity indicates that textbook production in Russia is a hybrid of Soviet and Western practices, a mix of communism and capitalism that

reflects the competing ideologies and methodologies also prevailing in other institutions of the post-Soviet era.

2 Shneidman N. N. 1973a, *Literature and Ideology in Soviet Education*. Toronto, 333.

3 Shneidman N. N. 1973b, 'Soviet Approaches to the Teaching of Literature,' 332.

4 Lebedev, Iu. V. 1996. *Russkaia Literatura, desiatyi klass* [Russian Literature textbook for the tenth grade], 296.

5 Shneidman N. N. 1973a, *Literature and Ideology in Soviet Education*, 47.

at a time when the social aspects of literature and the class position of a writer were emphasized, whereas discussions of form and aesthetics were treated as bourgeois criticism. In the 1920s and 1930s, Lenin's respectful essays on Tolstoy were not yet widely known and cited by Soviet literary critics.⁶ In the early Soviet era (primarily pre-socialist realist), Tolstoy was often condemned as a reactionary who had aristocratic biases and was therefore unsuitable for a central place in the Soviet pedagogical heritage. A marked tendency among Soviet critics of the 1950s and 1960s was to interpret *War and Peace* largely in terms of class and country, showing the cleavage between the people and the aristocracy – and the moral superiority of the former over the latter.⁷

Tolstoy's artistic writings – even after his religious conversion in the 1880s – were condemned in the 1920s and 1930s as depicting only the nobility and the wealthy. Before Lenin's literary essays on Tolstoy became canonical, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* were denounced as counterrevolutionary.⁸ Only after World War II did changes occur in teaching Tolstoy. Lenin's critical articles on Tolstoy became the guiding authority for the view that a more unified approach to Tolstoy as an artist-thinker should be undertaken. These essays did not address the literary heritage of Tolstoy, but instead focused on the political and social struggle taking place around Tolstoy's personality. Lenin emphasizes the contradictions in Tolstoy, but he insists that they are a reflection of contradictory conditions in Russia during the last decades of nineteenth century. Lenin's article, 'Tolstoy as the Mirror of the Russian Revolution,' written in 1908 to celebrate Tolstoy's eightieth birthday, figures prominently in the 1973 textbook.

Lenin's articles are concerned with social issues rather than art, but they do devote time to the study of genre, composition, and other aesthetic problems that had been ignored previously. Lenin describes traits that are considered positive or negative depending upon how useful they can be to the cause of the working class. Tolstoy's idea of moral self-perfection seems to contradict Marxist teaching, but Soviet ideologists argued that revolutionary change in society occurs at various rates, so moral self-perfection as an individualistic pursuit can actually be useful.⁹

In the 1950s, there was a great effort to bring interpretations of Tolstoy closer to the problems of contemporary reality, just as was done with other

nineteenth-century classics. During this period, ideological aspects were re-emphasized in the study of literature. There was an increased stress on patriotism, as well as criticism of the Orthodox Church, the judicial system, and the corrupt social order.¹⁰

Because the textbook collectives demanded that teachers highlight the historical process in teaching literature, the textbooks focused on the role of the *narod* (the people) in the historical process. The key to handling *War and Peace* became the image of the people, i.e., the three main characters' close association with the *narod*. Educational functionaries thus sidestepped the fact that the protagonists in the novel are aristocrats – like Tolstoy himself. By taking advantage of Tolstoy's genius for creating unforgettable characters and presenting the heroes as embodying the sensibility of the People in the context of the sweeping events of history, the textbook writers repositioned *War and Peace* as a pre-socialist novel.¹¹

The organizing principles for the two schoolbooks differ dramatically: The 1973 textbook thematizes the *narod* and history, whereas the 1996 edition highlights language, aesthetics, and spirituality. Attending to history in the earlier edition means focusing on the appearance of revolutionary proto-Decemberists within the framework of the character discussions, whereas the 1996 emphasis turns to religion, featuring the eternal soul, an ahistorical matter. Let us now examine these divergent orientations of the two textbooks in closer detail.

The 1973 edition

During the Soviet era, given the cultural authority of Lenin's *obiter dicta* and Tolstoy's great popularity among readers, cultural commissars and textbook authors realized that it was impossible to exclude Tolstoy from the socialist literary heritage. Tolstoy was unquestionably part of the Russian literary tradition, but how could he be part of the communist heritage? Excluding his works would be too great a loss, so the textbook collectives had to find some way of claiming this heritage in part and rejecting or remolding those facets of it that did not conform to M-L ideological criteria. Tolstoy was not the only bourgeois writer embraced in the M-L cultural policymakers' reclamation project: because they perceived that Soviet culture needed a pre-1917 literary pedigree, they sought

6 Shneidman N. N. 1973a, *Literature and Ideology in Soviet Education*, 48.

7 Christian, R.F. 1976. *Tolstoy: A Critical Introduction*, 145–6.

8 Struve, G. 1960 'Tolstoy in Soviet Criticism,' 181.

9 Shneidman N. N. 1973a, *Literature and Ideology in Soviet Education*, 52.

10 Schneidman, 337.

11 Shneidman asks:

What about the university student who studies the foundations of Marxism-Leninism and is being trained to approach a work of literature from a class point of view and who realizes that, 'in spite of the fact that *War and Peace* is penetrated throughout by the "people's conception" and the problem of the masses – the main characters in the plot are not people belonging to the camp of the oppressed and those deprived of civil rights?' (1973b, 338)

to claim the great bourgeois authors as part of the socialist heritage.

This dialectical dilemma was fundamentally a didactic one: how could Soviet cultural functionaries teach both Tolstoy and M–L truth? How could they claim the greatest prose writer in the Russian language and the spiritual and religious sage of millions, and yet also promote communist ideology? How was it possible both to expose readers to the literary power of Tolstoy and simultaneously to advance M–L ideology? How would textbook authors resolve this dilemma of focusing on politics and not aesthetics when presenting Tolstoy?¹²

The first half of this dialectical dilemma, which is largely pedagogical, occurs at the level of *War and Peace* itself. The textbook policymaker's most immediate problem regarding Tolstoy was how to handle the aristocratic protagonists as a means to promote class consciousness. The character approach in the table of contents of the 1973 textbook is faithful not to M–L pedagogy, but to Tolstoy. Typically, M–L pedagogy would feature plot via history, or emphasize setting via social structure, whereas characters were used to symbolize class and to critique class types. Such an approach highlights political issues, not aesthetic ones. However, the textbook authors could not avoid acknowledging the importance and centrality of the main characters in *War and Peace* by merely presenting the novel's greatness as consisting in its brilliant plot lines and skillfully drawn settings. They had to concede that Tolstoy had created immortal characters, but their task involved portraying these unforgettable characters as types who are closely identified with the *narod* and who reflect nineteenth-century social historical developments.

It must be re-emphasized that Tolstoy's power of characterization was the essence of his literary achievement. Its unique features stand in opposition to the M–L ideologists' claim that Tolstoy's characters must be understood in relation to the people. Such a claim justifies the 1996 return to aesthetics, because if Tolstoy is introducing a new kind of characterization in Russian literature in the nineteenth century, then it merits explanation as to what he does differently than other authors and why readers find his characters immortal and unforgettable. Tolstoy's protagonists develop during the course of the action without hav-

ing any tendency to betray their true selves. Such character development runs counter to the approach of M–L ideology, which implies that they are static characters for the most part, especially Pierre and Andrey.

Lenin's essays on Tolstoy figure prominently in the 1973 Bursov edition. His view of Tolstoy, which focused on the contradictions in the man and in his work, dominated and determined the limitations of Tolstoyan criticism in the Soviet Union. Lenin's criticism made it easier for Soviet critics to appropriate Tolstoy as part of the Soviet cultural heritage. To accommodate the restrictions of Soviet didactics, *War and Peace* had to be viewed as a mirror of nineteenth-century Russia.¹³

That was how the novel was presented as historically faithful and socially accurate. Lenin himself highlights Tolstoy's contradictions, which can be invoked as one of the tactics of claiming him – via the argument that his great novel serves as a magnificent mirror because it contains and reflects all of these contradictions. The Marxist and socialist realist approach emphasizes man's social nature, whereas Tolstoy emphasized the eternal nature of man's soul, but such religious beliefs were characteristic of nineteenth-century society.

The second half of the dilemma focuses on Tolstoy the man. He was not simply a writer or an artist; he was the moral and spiritual exemplar of the nation. However, his status as an aristocrat posed a great problem: M–L pedagogy had to both lionize an aristocrat as *the* great writer of his age and explain that he still speaks to the socialist realist era. The educational functionaries had to demonstrate both that they recognized the literary value of *War and Peace* and that Count Tolstoy anticipated the events of 1917.

The task of the textbook writer thus became a virtuoso challenge of claiming the past, constructing a canon, and rehabilitating the bourgeois-humanist heritage. In the U.S., such dilemmas are typically discussed in terms of canon formation, but this problem extended far beyond the realm of an academic issue in the communist world: it was a national problem, a problem of communist culture, and a problem of reconceiving the past. What would this past include?

In order to claim Tolstoy, educators had to recast history to make it seem as if the author were actually

12 The textbook states: 'The fundamental contradiction in Tolstoy's world view – the contradiction between his spiritual aspiration to unite with the *narod*, to live with their interests while denying the revolutionary path of the liberation of the people – intensifies in the years of the new revolutionary situation (1879–1881).' (Bursov, B.I. 1973. *Russkaia Literatura, deviatyi klass* ... Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 273).

13 When justifying the salvaging and use of many nineteenth-century authors who were in fact aristocrats, one Soviet scholar explains:

In reality classes are not isolated from one another, but find themselves in a complex interaction. Owing to this, the ideologies of writers belonging to different classes often have, along with marked differences, similar, common traits. These similar sometimes common, traits are the reason for the fact that a writer, while being a representative of a certain class, also expresses to a degree the feelings, moods, strivings, and interests of persons belonging to other classes (Shneidman 1973a, 36).

a peasant champion at the time he wrote it. Lenin's attraction to Tolstoy centers on the fact that Tolstoy became a peasant champion and peasant himself *after* writing *War and Peace*. So the early Tolstoy is downplayed and the later Tolstoy is highlighted. The attention that the 1973 textbook gives to literary history is not exactly historically accurate, but it manages to stretch Tolstoy to fit the ideological mold. It is historically anachronistic, but the textbook authors downplay the Tolstoy who was actually the author of *War and Peace* and claim the later Tolstoy as their own. When discussing Tolstoy's life, they had to portray him as a progressive bourgeois humanist trying simultaneously to liberate the people and himself, but ultimately failing.

Although Tolstoy was obviously foremost a spiritual revolutionary, in order to be acceptable to M–L ideology, he had to be recast as a political revolutionary. Ironically, it looks as if the Russian Revolution led by Lenin did indeed owe a debt to Tolstoy. Lenin's essay on Tolstoy clearly states: 'Tolstoy decisively broke with the views and interests of the landowning class and came out as a great spokesman of those ideas and moods which developed among the millions of peasants until the time of the attack on the bourgeois revolution in Russia.'¹⁴ This approach to Tolstoy focused on the contradictions of the writer-thinker from a sociopolitical point of view, whereby Tolstoy was caught in the social and historical contradictions of his bourgeois age.

The strategy that was implemented thus approached Tolstoy via Tolstoy, so to speak, but twisted him in such a way to make him suitable for M–L pedagogy. Just as Tolstoy in his art and aesthetics highlights character because of the deep sincerity and emotional power they hold for the reader, Soviet critics to some extent approached Tolstoy according to character, but manipulated the concept for their own ideological purposes.

The same can be said for Nikolai Chernyshevsky's idea of the 'dialectic of the soul' when it is applied to Tolstoy's art. Soviet critics socialized Chernyshevsky's conception of 'soul' into 'the spirit of the Russian people' and eliminated his emphasis on religion and the *Christian* conception of soul. The overall tactics consisted in reworking the idea of 'soul' to make it suitable for M–L pedagogy. By adopting this strategy – to 'leninize' and 'marxify' Tolstoy – it is possible to omit discussing topics such as religion. And where it was impossible to avoid discussing a problem area

such as Tolstoy's membership in the aristocracy, Soviet critics could acknowledge that Tolstoy does not fulfill all M–L criteria perfectly.

The 1973 textbook's work focuses on the problems and the role and importance of the People in the war with France. To leninize Tolstoy, and to claim him for a canon in which socialist realism was the canonical approach, entailed shifting some values. The strategic process for claiming Tolstoy was twofold: first, by narrowing down the focus on Tolstoy to his relationship and the relationship of all the characters to the *narod*; secondly, by treating Tolstoy's personal history, which was mired in contradictions, as simply that of a man of his time caught in those historical contradictions.

The claiming of Tolstoy thus involved taking parts of him that were salvageable and advancing those acceptable parts in the textbooks by focusing on history and populism – not on religion and pacifism, which were reactionary and deplorable. These latter elements were either criticized or omitted entirely.

The 1996 edition

The re-education process, in which the rewriting of textbooks plays an important role and reflects the ongoing struggle of competing ideologies, is still evolving. A textual analysis of the 1996 Russian textbook shows that critics and educational bureaucrats of the 1990s were grappling with these ideological issues.

Whereas Tolstoy was leninized and marxified in the era of Soviet literary criticism, a much more complex phenomenon occurred in the 1990s. Nonetheless, despite the intricacies and the difficulty of making any overall assessment, what is evident is the step away from a materialistic toward a spiritual interpretation. Such a move involves a shift away from the human being as a social and political creature, toward attending to man's 'inner needs.'¹⁵

The introduction to the 1996 literature textbook addresses issues that textbook authors deem crucial to students' understanding of nineteenth-century literature. Within the larger context of the contrasts between Slavophiles and Westerners, attention is devoted to exploring the differences between the development of Western thought in terms of Catholicism and Protestantism versus the Eastern Orthodox tradition. The West, on the one hand, traditionally considers evil as manifesting itself in the external material world, so that human reason

14 Bursov, 274.

15 Consider also the introductory statement in the 1991 Syllabus for General Institutions of Learning: 'The goal of literature education is to shape the spiritual world of a person, the creation of the conditions for the formation of the inner needs of the personality for continuous improvement, to realize each person's cre-

ative potential' (*Programmy* 41). Compare the above statement to the first sentence a student encounters in the 1973 ninth-grade literature textbook: 'The history of progressive Russian literature cannot be separated from the history of the liberation movement in Russia' (Bursov 5).

and intellect join forces to create a so-called heaven on earth and focus on material conditions. The Slavophiles, on the other hand, believed that worldly evil resides within man himself. As a result, Russian philosophical thought and especially literature are concerned with improving man's spiritual inner life – by practicing moral self-perfection.

The textbook thus discusses the psychological analysis of Tolstoy as revealing the endlessly rich possibilities in man for self-renewal. Social circumstances very often limit these possibilities, but in general they are not destroyed. The 'fluidity of man,' i.e., his ability to change, most concerns Tolstoy. The textbook editor, Yuri Lebedev, asserts that the most important theme of Tolstoy's biography and work is the evolution of man through practicing moral self-perfection. Tolstoy considered this idea to be the prerequisite for transforming the world. The 1996 textbook explains that the youthful Tolstoy belonged to the revolutionaries and materialists, though he soon abandoned them. It seemed to him that the revolutionary transformation of the external, social conditions of human existence was unlikely to have long-term prospects. By contrast, Lebedev explains, Tolstoy considered moral self-perfection a simple activity, which can be chosen freely by each person. The textbook summarizes Tolstoy's philosophy for the student: 'to have goodness around you, you must become good yourself: with moral self-perfection you can begin to transform your life.'¹⁶

Lebedev provides a complex set of issues to orient the student's reading of Tolstoy in the 1996 textbook. A new emphasis on spirituality and moral self-perfection pervades the text. On this reading, Tolstoy is intensely interested in the experiences and changes of his heroes—their ability to renew themselves and increase their attunement to the spiritual world. He believes that his art brings light to human souls and wishes to teach people 'how to love life,' for literature is (in the editor's words) 'the textbook of life.'¹⁷

The shift from the Soviet to the post-Soviet treatment of Tolstoy in literature textbooks involves replacing a purely political and ideological interpretation with one more concerned with ethical and spiritual issues. This shift is not merely a simplistic movement from ideology to interpretation, but reflects a complex series of interrelationships between interpreting Tolstoy in M–L terms to discussing him in more aesthetic terms. The divergent emphases are clear. The 1973 edition devotes little aesthetic attention to Tolstoy, let alone to addressing literary issues and poetics; i.e., to approaching Tolstoy via Tolstoy. The 1996 edition devotes much greater attention to aesthetic issues and places less emphasis on M–L pedagogy.

Yet both editions contain common strands of political and textual interpretation that allow for seeing the richness of themes in the work. Both of these interpretations also include historical contradictions. It seems implausible that the 1973 edition would emphasize character. However, given the dialectical dilemmas, the textbook collectives did address character, but in relation to the *narod* and history. It is also implausible that the 1996 edition would place *War and Peace* in any kind of M–L framework. Yet because of understandable continuities between the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, the 1996 edition's emphasis, while not explicitly on M–L pedagogy, is nonetheless on social questions and on class issues, and therefore still displays vestiges of quasi-Marxist elements.

Thus, whereas the 1973 edition is overtly ideological in nature, the 1996 edition attempts a new approach to interpreting Tolstoy that is tinged but not dominated by M–L ideology. The post-Soviet textbook allows today's Russian students reading *War and Peace* to discuss several topics – linguistic problems, cultural issues, and Tolstoy's own religious-ethical views – that were omitted during the Soviet era. Such a shift does not indicate that M–L ideology has been cast aside for something completely new, but it does reflect a sharp turn from a progressive interpretation to a more literary or formalistic one. The 1996 literature textbook's commentary on *War and Peace* is, therefore, not by any means a complete refutation of the 1973 edition: there are as many continuities as discontinuities.

16 Lebedev, 296.

17 Lebedev, 296.