

Here are some selections (in translation, of course) from Tolstoy's great novel *War and Peace*.

I. This is how the world looks to a young Russian soldier in 1805 who has not yet experienced battle in a society that highly honors warriors, at least officers:

.... An empty space of some seven hundred yards was all that separated [the Russians and the French]. The enemy ceased firing, and that stern, threatening, inaccessible, and intangible line which separates two hostile armies was all the more clearly felt. "One step beyond that boundary line which resembles the line dividing the living from the dead lies uncertainty, suffering, and death. And what is there? Who is there?—there beyond that field, that tree, that roof lit up by the sun? No one knows, but one wants to know. You fear and yet long to cross that line, and know that sooner or later it must be crossed and you will have to find out what is there, just as you will inevitably have to learn what lies the other side of death. But you are strong, healthy, cheerful, and excited, and are surrounded by other such excitedly animated and healthy men."

So thinks, or at any rate feels, anyone who comes in sight of the enemy, and that feeling gives a particular glamour and glad keenness of impression to everything that takes place at such moments.

II. Here is the young officer battle:

Though he thought of everything, considered everything, and did everything the best of officers could do in his position, he was in a state akin to feverish delirium or drunkenness. From the deafening sounds of his own guns around him, the whistle and thud of the enemy's cannon balls, from the flushed and perspiring faces of the crew bustling round the guns, from the sight of the blood of men and horses, from the little puffs of smoke on the enemy's side (always followed by a ball flying past and striking the earth, a man, a gun, a horse), from the sight of all these things a fantastic world of his own had taken possession of his brain and at that moment afforded him pleasure. The enemy's guns were in his fancy not guns but pipes from which occasional puffs were blown by an invisible smoker.

III. In this chapter, one of the main characters, Prince Andrei, has fallen in battle, wounded. This is 1805, the Battle of Austerlitz in which Napoleon faced Russia and Austria. The French have won. Note that many of the younger generation admired Napoleon enormously, including young Russians. Also note that almost all the upper class Russian spoke French with great facility, so it is perfectly believable that Prince Andrei understands what is being spoken around him.

On the Pratzen Heights, where he had fallen with the flagstaff in his hand, lay Prince

Andrew Bolkonski bleeding profusely and unconsciously uttering a gentle, piteous, and childlike moan. Toward evening he ceased moaning and became quite still. He did not know how long his unconsciousness lasted.

Suddenly he again felt that he was alive and suffering from a burning, lacerating pain in his head. "Where is it, that lofty sky that I did not know till now, but saw today?" was his first thought. "And I did not know this suffering either," he thought. "Yes, I did not know anything, anything at all till now. But where am I?"

He listened and heard the sound of approaching horses, and voices speaking French. He opened his eyes. Above him again was the same lofty sky with clouds that had risen and were floating still higher, and between them gleamed blue infinity. He did not turn his head and did not see those who, judging by the sound of hoofs and voices, had ridden up and stopped near him.

It was Napoleon accompanied by two aides-de-camp. Bonaparte riding over the battlefield had given final orders to strengthen the batteries firing at the Augesd Dam and was looking at the killed and wounded left on the field. "Fine men!" remarked Napoleon, looking at a dead Russian grenadier, who, with his face buried in the ground and a blackened nape, lay on his stomach with an already stiffened arm flung wide.

"The ammunition for the guns in position is exhausted, Your Majesty," said an adjutant who had come from the batteries that were firing at Augesd.

"Have some brought from the reserve," said Napoleon, and having gone on a few steps he stopped before Prince Andrew, who lay on his back with the flagstaff that had been dropped beside him. (The flag had already been taken by the French as a trophy.) "That's a fine death!" said Napoleon as he gazed at Bolkonski.

Prince Andrew understood that this was said of him and that it was Napoleon who said it. He heard the speaker addressed as Sire. But he heard the words as he might have heard the buzzing of a fly. Not only did they not interest him, but he took no notice of them and at once forgot them. His head was burning, he felt himself bleeding to death, and he saw above him the remote, lofty, and everlasting sky.

He knew it was Napoleon—his hero—but at that moment Napoleon seemed to him such a small, insignificant creature compared with what was passing now between himself and that lofty infinite sky with the clouds flying over it.

At that moment it meant nothing to him who might be standing over him, or what was said of him; he was only glad that people were standing near him and only wished that they would help him and bring him back to life, which seemed to him so beautiful now that he had today learned to understand it so differently. He collected all his strength, to stir and utter a sound. He feebly moved his leg and uttered a weak, sickly groan which aroused his own pity.

"Ah! He is alive," said Napoleon. "Lift this young man up and carry him to the dressing station." Having said this, Napoleon rode on to meet Marshal Lannes, who, hat in hand, rode up smiling to the Emperor to congratulate him on the victory.

Prince Andrew remembered nothing more: he lost consciousness from the terrible pain of being lifted onto the stretcher, the jolting while being moved, and the probing of his wound at the dressing station. He did not regain consciousness till late in the day, when with other wounded and captured Russian officers he was carried to the hospital.

During this transfer he felt a little stronger and was able to look about him and even speak. The first words he heard on coming to his senses were those of a French convoy officer,

who said rapidly: "We must halt here: the Emperor will pass here immediately; it will please him to see these gentlemen prisoners."

"There are so many prisoners today, nearly the whole Russian army, that he is probably tired of them," said another officer.

"All the same! They say this one is the commander of all the Emperor Alexander's Guards," said the first one, indicating a Russian officer in the white uniform of the Horse Guards.

Bolkonski recognized Prince Repnin whom he had met in Petersburg society. Beside him stood a lad of nineteen, also a wounded officer of the Horse Guards.

Bonaparte, having come up at a gallop, stopped his horse. "Which is the senior?" he asked, on seeing the prisoners. They named the colonel, Prince Repnin. "You are the commander of the Emperor Alexander's regiment of Horse Guards?" asked Napoleon.

"I commanded a squadron," replied Repnin.

"Your regiment fulfilled its duty honorably," said Napoleon.

"The praise of a great commander is a soldier's highest reward," said Repnin.

"I bestow it with pleasure," said Napoleon. "And who is that young man beside you?" Prince Repnin named Lieutenant Sukhtelen. After looking at him Napoleon smiled. "He's very young to come to meddle with us."

"Youth is no hindrance to courage," muttered Sukhtelen in a failing voice.

"A splendid reply!" said Napoleon. "Young man, you will go far!"

Prince Andrew, who had also been brought forward before the Emperor's eyes to complete the show of prisoners, could not fail to attract his attention. Napoleon apparently remembered seeing him on the battlefield and, addressing him, again used the epithet "young man" that was connected in his memory with Prince Andrew. "Well, and you, young man," said he. "How do you feel, *mon brave*?"

Though five minutes before, Prince Andrew had been able to say a few words to the soldiers who were carrying him, now with his eyes fixed straight on Napoleon, he was silent....

So insignificant at that moment seemed to him all the interests that engrossed Napoleon, so mean did his hero himself with his paltry vanity and joy in victory appear, compared to the lofty, equitable, and kindly sky which he had seen and understood, that he could not answer him. Everything seemed so futile and insignificant in comparison with the stern and solemn train of thought that weakness from loss of blood, suffering, and the nearness of death aroused in him. Looking into Napoleon's eyes Prince Andrew thought of the insignificance of greatness, the unimportance of life which no one could understand, and the still greater unimportance of death, the meaning of which no one alive could understand or explain.

The Emperor without waiting for an answer turned away and said to one of the officers as he went: "Have these gentlemen attended to and taken to my bivouac; let my doctor, Larrey, examine their wounds. Au revoir, Prince Repnin!" and he spurred his horse and galloped away. His face shone with self-satisfaction and pleasure.

The soldiers who had carried Prince Andrew had noticed and taken the little gold icon [his sister] Princess Mary had hung round her brother's neck, but seeing the favor the Emperor showed the prisoners, they now hastened to return the holy image. Prince Andrew did not see how and by whom it was replaced, but the little icon with its thin gold chain suddenly appeared upon his chest outside his uniform. "It would be good," thought Prince Andrew, glancing at the icon his sister had hung round his neck with such emotion and reverence, "it would be good if everything were as clear and simple as it seems to Mary. How good it would be to know where to

seek for help in this life, and what to expect after it beyond the grave! How happy and calm I should be if I could now say: 'Lord, have mercy on me!'... But to whom should I say that? Either to a Power indefinable, incomprehensible, which I not only cannot address but which I cannot even express in words—the Great All or Nothing—" said he to himself, "or to that God who has been sewn into this amulet by Mary! There is nothing certain, nothing at all except the unimportance of everything I understand, and the greatness of something incomprehensible but all-important."

The stretchers moved on. At every jolt he again felt unendurable pain; his feverishness increased and he grew delirious. Visions of his father, wife, sister, and future son, and the tenderness he had felt the night before the battle, the figure of the insignificant little Napoleon, and above all this the lofty sky, formed the chief subjects of his delirious fancies. The quiet home life and peaceful happiness of Bald Hills presented itself to him. He was already enjoying that happiness when that little Napoleon had suddenly appeared with his unsympathizing look of shortsighted delight at the misery of others, and doubts and torments had followed, and only the heavens promised peace. Toward morning all these dreams melted and merged into the chaos and darkness of unconsciousness and oblivion which in the opinion of Napoleon's doctor, Larrey, was much more likely to end in death than in convalescence. "He is a nervous, bilious subject," said Larrey, "and will not recover."

And Prince Andrew, with others fatally wounded, was left to the care of the inhabitants of the district.