

Chronology^I

- 1828 Born August 28, son of Count Nikolai Ilich Tolstoy and Princess Marya Nikolaevich Volkonskaia, at Iasnaia Poliana (Clear, or Ash Tree Glade), an estate inherited from maternal grandfather in Tula Province about 130 miles south of Moscow. As a child known as Lyova-Ryova (Crybaby Lev) because he is so sensitive and cries so easily.
- 1830 Mother dies, leaving four sons – Nikolai (b. 1823), Sergei (b. 1826), Dmitrii (b. 1827); and Lev (b. 1828) – and younger sister Marya (b. 1830).
- 1836 Tolstoy family moves to Moscow to prepare eldest son Nikolai for university.
- 1837 Father dies; Tolstoy children placed under guardianship of his very pious sister, Countess Aleksandra Ilinichna Osten-Saken. Distant relative, T. A. Ergolskaia, Tolstoy's beloved "Aunty," assumes major role in raising the children. Family lives mostly in Moscow, summers at Iasnaia Poliana.
- 1841 Aunt Aleksandra dies, and Tolstoy children move to Kazan (an ancient river port with Tatar as well as Russian cultural influences about 400 miles east of Moscow on the Volga) to live with her sister Pelageia, married to an influential Kazan landowner.
- 1844 Enters Kazan University to study oriental languages intending to become a diplomat. Transfers next year to the Faculty of Law.
- 1847 Begins Franklin journal with daily schedules and records of actual adherence (and most often, non-adherence) to them. Begins diary which, in various forms and with some significant breaks, he keeps for the rest of his life. Daily routine includes physical exercise – riding and gymnastics. Physically active, strong, agile, and good at all sports for his whole life. Hospitalized more than once for venereal disease. Fragments survive of a commentary on the discourses of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and a comparison of Tsarina

Chronology

Catherine the Great's *Instruction* with Montesquieu's *De L'Esprit des Lois*. Around this time he reads all of Rousseau, "including the dictionary of music," as he later told one commentator. Rousseau is the thinker who most influenced T (see note 1 at the end of this chronology for a list of abbreviations used), who returns to him many times over his life and once said there were many pages in Rousseau that he felt he could have written himself.

May: withdraws from university without graduating and returns to Iasnaia Poliana. Philanthropic work among his peasants with mixed results.

1848 Moves to Moscow, where frequents high society and does little else.

1849 Moves to St. Petersburg, plans to enter civil service, then studies briefly in the Faculty of Law at the university there. Thinks of joining an élite guards unit. Returns to Iasnaia Poliana, where opens a school for peasant children. This year and the next spends much time thinking about music and playing piano. Fragmentary writings on music survive. Plays piano and loves music passionately his entire life. Favorite composers include Weber, Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, Schumann, Bach, Chopin, and early Beethoven; also folk and gypsy music. His Russian favorites are Glinka and then Tchaikovsky. Even in old age he never once speaks of abandoning music or music-making, although he claims at times that his tastes in music have changed. Applies to civil service and in 1850 is accepted at beginning rank in Tula province.

1851 More socializing in Moscow, and heavy gambling at cards. Various ideas for fiction recorded in diary. Writes the unfinished "History of Yesterday," first surviving artistic work.

April: returns with his artillery officer brother Nikolai to the Caucasus, Russia's southern frontier. Translates part of Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, and begins to write *Childhood*.

July 3: conceives idea of never-completed novel called *Four Epochs of Life*. (The four stages are childhood, adolescence, youth, and young manhood.)

November: begins to read Plato's dialogues in French translation of Victor Cousin. Of these, *Symposium* and *Phaedo* are his favorites. He rereads these and other Platonic dialogues several times in his life.

1852 Hunting, gambling, and womanizing. Recurrent venereal disease. Reads Plato and various works by Rousseau, especially "The

Chronology

- Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar” (from *Emile*). Finishes *Childhood* and works on *The Raid*. Conceives idea for *Novel of a Russian Landowner*.
- January: takes an exam for the rank of cadet and joins the artillery as a “bombardier fourth class” stationed in the North Caucasus.
- February: nearly killed in action by a shell that shatters the wheel of a cannon he is aiming.
- August 3: “In my novel [*Novel of a Russian Landowner*] I will lay out the evil of the Russian government, and if I find that satisfactory, then I’ll devote the rest of my life to the construction of a plan for an electoral monarchic and aristocratic government based on existing elections. This is truly a goal for a virtuous life. Thank you, Lord, give me strength” (d).
- September 2: reading Dickens’s *David Copperfield* for the second time, pronounces it “delightful” (d).
- November 30: “Four epochs of life will be *my* novel up until Tiflis. I can write about it [that is, my own life], because it is far from me. And as the novel of an intelligent, sensitive and erring person, it will be instructive, though not dogmatic. The novel of a Russian landowner – that will be dogmatic” (d).
- PUBLICATIONS: *Childhood*. Well received by both public and literati.
- 1853 Recommended for promotion to ensign. Sends in letter of resignation from army, but all leaves forbidden until the end of the Russo–Turkish War (declared on June 14). Gambles at cards and womanizes. Works intensively at times on *Novel of a Russian Landowner*, and comments frequently on writing by himself and others.
- July 27: intimidated by Ivan Turgenev’s *Sportsman’s Sketches*: “It’s somehow hard to be writing after him” (d).
- August 28–30: works on “The Fugitive,” the first, incomplete version of *The Cossacks*.
- September 13–17: Writes and sends off story *Notes of a Billiard Marker* in a white heat, “so carried away that it’s even hard for me: I feel faint” (d).
- October 6: Applies for active service against the Turks.
- October 18: “don’t forget to look at it [each composition] from the point of view of the most narrow reader, who is seeking nothing in a book but entertainment” (n).
- November 26: asks brother Sergei to send him *David Copperfield* in English.

Chronology

December 1: “Literary success, satisfactory in and of itself, is achieved only by means of developing a subject from all angles. But the subject itself must be an elevated one if the labour is always to be pleasant” (d).

PUBLICATIONS: *The Raid*.

1854 Promoted to ensign for distinction in action in the Caucasus. Gambling and womanizing. Reads voraciously: Goethe, Schiller, Lermontov, Pushkin, Harriet Beecher Stowe, George Sand, contemporary Russian playwright Ostrovsky, and others. Reaches Bucharest in March, takes part in the siege of Silistria and the retreat, at the end of June, back to Bucharest.

July 11–12: reads Dickens’s *Bleak House*, published in translation in *The Contemporary*.

September 6: promoted to second lieutenant. Arrives in Kishiniev on September 9, and applies for transfer to the Crimea where allied siege in the Crimean War is taking place.

September–October: sale of main house at Iasnaia Poliana – it is dismantled and carted away – for 5,000 roubles to raise money after heavy gambling losses.

November: transferred to the Crimean front, and arrives at Sevastopol November 7.

November 21: receives rejection by Tsar Nikolas I of proposal submitted by group of artillery officers to publish a popular journal for soldiers.

PUBLICATIONS: *Boyhood*.

1855 Takes part in defense of Sevastopol, sees action on the notorious fourth bastion (in April), fights at fall of Sevastopol in August. Reads Goethe, Thackeray (*Vanity Fair*, *Henry Esmond*, *Pendennis*), Balzac, and others. Works on *Youth*, the continuation of *Childhood* and *Boyhood*.

January: gambles away all 5,000 roubles received for sale of house.

January–February: works on several plans for military reform.

March 4: records plan to found new religion: “in accordance with the development of humanity, the religion of Christ, but cleansed of faith and mystery, a practical religion, not promising future bliss, but giving bliss on earth [...] To act *consciously* to unite people by means of religion – here is the foundation of a thought that will, I hope, captivate me” (d).

March 11: “A military career is not for me, and the sooner I get out of it to give myself utterly to literature, the better” (d).

Chronology

Mid-November: arrives in St. Petersburg, moves in with Turgenev. Makes friends with leading literati, all anxious to meet L. N. T., celebrated author of enormously popular war stories. Generally regarded as best young Russian writer, especially admired for gifts of psychological analysis and moral power. Carouses, gambles, loves gypsies and gypsy music.

Later November: meets distant, somewhat older relative A. A. Tolstaia, a lady-in-waiting at the Court, who becomes a lifelong friend and confidante. By mid-December is fighting bitterly with Turgenev, loves to *épater* his new, cultured friends by claiming to despise such cultural icons as George Sand, Homer, and Shakespeare.

December: introduced by friends to poetry of F. I. Tiutchev. Along with Pushkin and A. A. Fet (with whom he became friends in early 1856), Tiutchev becomes his favorite Russian poet.

PUBLICATIONS: *Notes of a Billiard Marker*, *Sevastopol in December*, *Sevastopol in May*, and *The Wood-felling*.

1856 Participates in both Petersburg Westernizer and Moscow Slavophile circles. Quarrels and reconciles with Turgenev, whom he sees frequently. Under influence of Petersburg friends, especially aesthete V. P. Botkin, indulges and explores all forms of sensuality, from physiological to aesthetic and musical. Attends theatre, concerts, and operas. Keeps a mistress for a few months. Reads Shakespeare, Pushkin, Dickens (*The Pickwick Papers*, *Little Dorrit*), Thackeray (*The Newcomes*), Goethe, Molière, and Homer. In literary polemics, chooses the side of sympathetic portrayal, which he associates with Pushkin and Dickens, over that of satire, associated with Gogol. Briefly courts neighbor Valeriia Arsenieva. Works intensively on and completes part one of *Youth*. Begins two comedies, *A Noble Family* and *A Practical Man* (which remain unfinished), continues *Novel of a Russian Landowner* and *The Cossacks* and begins the novel *The Decembrists*. Remains interested his entire life in the 1825 Decembrist revolt of gentry army officers. Conceives and works on a story called “The Distant Field,” never finished and related in subject matter to *War and Peace*.

February 2: hears of death from tuberculosis on January 18 of brother Dmitrii.

March: Poet N. Nekrasov, T’s editor, intervenes to prevent a duel between T and one Longinov.

March 26: Promoted to lieutenant for “outstanding bravery and courage” at Sevastopol.

Chronology

- May–June: responding to political ferment under new tsar Alexander II, presents a plan to his serfs to free them.
- Fall: sends in his resignation from the army, which becomes effective in the following year.
- December 15: attends performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.
- PUBLICATIONS: *Sevastopol in August, 1855* (signing with his full name for the first time), *Meeting a Moscow Acquaintance in the Detachment (The Demoted Officer)*, *A Landowner's Morning* (the only part published from the unfinished *Novel of a Russian Landowner*), *Two Hussars*, *The Snowstorm*. Separate editions of *Childhood and Adolescence*, and *War Stories*.
- 1857 Mixed relations with Turgenev; close to Botkin. Reads Balzac, Tocqueville (*L'Ancien Régime*), Goethe, and *Don Quixote*.
- January: Attends musical evenings, and especially enamored of Beethoven; meets an itinerant musician, Georg Kizevetter, gets idea for story *Albert*. Leaving in late January, travels to France, Switzerland, northern Italy, and Germany; returns at the end of July. While abroad writes *Lucerne* in the form of a letter to Botkin, works on *Albert*, part two of *Youth* (never completed), and *The Cossacks*.
- March 25: witnesses a guillotining in Paris: "A strong impression that will leave its mark. I am not a political man. Morality and art. [These] I know, love, and can do" (d). On same day writes to Botkin that "Human law is nonsense! The truth is that government is a conspiracy not only to exploit, but mainly to corrupt citizens. [...] I will never serve *any* government anywhere."
- April–May: idyllic two months in Switzerland: "I am gasping from love, both physical and ideal. [...] I am taking a very great interest in myself. And I even love myself for the fact that there is so much love of others in me" (d, May 12).
- Friendship with AA intensifies.
- July 12–20: loses heavily at roulette in Baden-Baden.
- July 24: on way home, sees and admires Raphael's painting of the Madonna in Dresden. (AA later gives him a copy, which hangs first in his bedroom at Iasnaia Poliana and then in his study.)
- August: having reread *Iliad*, vows to completely rewrite *The Cossacks*. Two weeks later rereads the Gospels "which I had not done for a long time."
- Fall: distressed by declining reputation. In December or January 1858, drafts project to found a musical society in Moscow.
- PUBLICATIONS: *Youth* and *From the Notes of Prince D. Nekhliudov*. *Lucerne*, both poorly received, the latter soon rejected by T himself.

Chronology

- 1858 Continues to oppose satirical, politically motivated literature. Proposal to friends, eventually rejected but seriously discussed, for a new journal with one goal only: to make people weep and laugh. January: begins friendship, close until 1861, with B. N. Chicherin, jurist and liberal philosopher. March: reads Gospels, starts unfinished story “The Bright Resurrection of Christ.” March 21: “the political excludes the artistic, because the former, in order to prove [its point], must be one-sided” (d). Follows debates in his district about emancipation of serfs, with other landowners signs a manifesto declaring that peasants should be freed with land, and that landowners should be compensated for this. Finishes *Albert*, writes *Three Deaths*, works on *The Cossacks*, begins *Family Happiness*. Starting December, 1857, tentatively courts E. F. Tiutcheva, the poet’s daughter. (Interest persists, with significant doubts and also other possible choices, through 1861.) May: begins passionate affair with married peasant Aksinia Bazykina from Iasnaia Poliana: “I’m in love as never before.” Spends summer on estate absorbed in Aksinia and farm life rather than literature. (The affair lasts until his marriage in 1862, and Aksinia bears T one son, Timofei, later a coachman on the estate.) In 1860 he wrote of this affair that “it’s no longer the feelings of a stag, but those of a husband for a wife” (d). August: reads published letters of Schellingian philosopher N. V. Stankevich from the 1830s. August 23: “Never has any other book made such an impression on me. I have never loved anyone as much as this man whom I have never seen” (letter to AA). December 23: mauled and nearly killed by a she-bear on bear hunt. PUBLICATIONS: *Albert*, poorly received.
- 1859 Relations with Turgenev worsen. Reads and admires George Eliot’s *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede*. Works intensively on and finishes *Family Happiness*, mostly disliked by friends, and rejected by him after its publication. Subsequently – from April on – withdraws from literary life, writes little, lives at Iasnaia Poliana, farming and hunting. February 4: first public address, given after joining the Society of Lovers of Russian Philology at Moscow University. Praises politically engaged “exposé” literature, but says that “the literature of a people is its full, many-sided consciousness, in which both the national love of the good and true and the national contemplation of beauty in a given epoch of development should be reflected.”

Chronology

- Besides the “temporal interests of society,” literature should reflect “eternal human interests, the ones that are most valuable and of greatest spiritual worth, in the consciousness of the nation.”
- October: starts another school for peasant children at Iasnaia Poliana.
 PUBLICATIONS: *Three Deaths*, *Family Happiness*.
- 1860 Continues to declare himself no longer a professional writer, but an educator.
- March 12: writes to brother of Minister of Education suggesting the foundation of a society to promote public education because “the most essential need of the Russian people is for public education,” which as of now does not exist, and never will if it is left to the state.
- In July goes abroad, returning to Russia only in April 1861, travels to Germany, France, Belgium, Italy, and England studying modern educational methods. In September brother Nikolai, who has accompanied him abroad, dies of tuberculosis.
- A month later T writes: “It will soon be a month since Nikolenka died. It’s horrifying how this event ripped me from life. Again the question: Why? It’s not long before I go there. Where? Nowhere. I’m trying to write, I’m forcing myself, and it’s not working only because I can’t ascribe to my work that meaning that I must have to have the strength and patience to work. Right during the funeral services I had the idea of writing a materialist Gospel, a life of Christ as materialist [. . .] Nikolenka’s death has been the strongest impression of my life” (d).
- After Nikolai’s death, a trickle of interest in writing turns into an underground river, works on *The Cossacks*, writes several chapters of *The Decembrists* (published in unfinished form only in 1884), and begins writing stories of peasant life, none finished, that draw upon his passion for Bazykina (“Idyll,” “Tikhon and Malanya”).
- December: In Florence meets second cousin S. G. Volkonskii, a Decembrist recently pardoned by Alexander II after over thirty years’ exile in Siberia.
- 1861 January: visits Naples and Rome, where feels “a return to art” (d).
 February 18–March 5: in London, visits Alexander Herzen several times, and perhaps attends a lecture by Dickens on education. (Subsequently reads Herzen’s journalism and corresponds with him about it.) Meets Matthew Arnold, who writes a letter of introduction for him asking London teachers to allow him to visit their schools.

Chronology

- March: in Brussels begins *Polikushka*.
- Mid-March: writes Turgenev that he has returned to fiction, and is reading Goethe's *Faust*, which he highly praises.
- March 16: writes that public education is the most important, unifying task of society (n).
- March 31–April 6: in Weimar, visits Goethe's house, studies schools. Back in Russia on April 12, continues work on education. Now and throughout the 1860s spends much time hunting, sometimes going off for days with his friend D. D. Obolensky.
- April 20: applies for permission from the Ministry of Education to publish a journal called *Iasnaia Poliana* on practical pedagogy.
- May 16: over the objections of many neighboring landowners, is appointed Arbiter of the Peace to resolve disputes between peasants and their former masters. Landowners mistrust T because of his generous settlements with his own peasants both before and after the Emancipation Proclamation of February 19. (T resigns position in 1862, citing "sickness" as his reason.)
- May: challenges Turgenev to a duel following a quarrel, and the two break off relations until 1878.
- 1862 Works intensely on pedagogy, and especially the journal *Iasnaia Poliana*. In response to this, many schools for peasants founded nearby. T follows reaction to journal and his publications in it, and worries about perceived lack of interest (letter to Katkov, April 11). His pedagogical theories evoke mixed reaction in the press, but the journal itself, as well as his efforts to promote literacy, are widely praised.
- February: loses badly at cards (the last such episode), and finishes *The Cossacks* to pay debt. Reads and admires Dostoevsky's *Notes from a Dead House*.
- May–June: goes to drink *kumys* (fermented mare's milk) for his health in Samara province.
- July 6–7: in his absence secret police search *Iasnaia Poliana* looking for evidence of radical political agitation among the peasants by teachers at school. They find nothing, and T so infuriated that he considers immigration.
- September 16: proposes to eighteen-year-old Sofya Andreevna Behrs, daughter of a former playmate only two years his senior, and a prominent Moscow doctor. Marries her on September 23. Before he does so, he shows her his early diaries. Although the marriage is tumultuous from the beginning, the couple is very happy for the first twenty years, until T's religious conversion takes him in a direction

Chronology

that his wife cannot follow. Even after they begin to quarrel, the bond between the two is deep and endures until T's death.

October 1: writes E. A. Behrs (SA's sister) that his pedagogical journal is beginning to seem a burden. "[I'm] drawn now to free work *de longue haleine* [on a grand scale] – a novel or something like it."

PUBLICATIONS: Commences monthly issues of *Iasnaia Poliana* (lasting into mid-1863) to which he contributes "Education for the People," "Methods for Learning Grammar," "The Spontaneous Founding and Development of Schools Among the People," "The Iasnaia Poliana School in the Months of November and December," "Project for a General Plan for the Construction of Public Schools," "Upbringing and Education," "Social Work in the Field of Popular Education," "Who Learns to Write from Whom: Peasant Children From Us or We from Them?," and "Progress and the Definition of Upbringing."

1863 In January announces cessation of *Iasnaia Poliana*. Works on *Strider* ("the story of a horse" first conceived in 1856) and begins comic drama *The Infected Family*. Rewrites a short story *The Dream*, and tries unsuccessfully to publish it. Begins *War and Peace*, which will occupy him for another six years. Selected comments related to novel from diary:

January 3: "The epic mode is becoming the only natural one for me."

January 23: "It's been a long time since I have felt such a strong and calmly self-conscious desire to write. I don't have subjects, that is, no one [subject] stands out urgently, but, whether I'm wrong or not, it seems to me I could do any one of them."

February 23: reads Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* – "Powerful"; "I went through my papers – a swarm of thoughts and a return, or an attempt to return to lyricism. Lyricism is good. I cannot write, so it seems, without a set intention and enthusiasm."

June 2: "I'm reading Goethe, and thoughts swarm."

October 6: "I'm happy with her [SA], but terribly dissatisfied with myself. I'm sliding down toward death and I barely feel the strength in myself to stop. I don't want death, though, I want and love immortality. There's no use choosing. The choice was made long ago. Literature, art, pedagogy and family."

Forms close bond with SA's beloved lively and pretty younger sister Tatiana, who spends much time on estate. (Brother Sergei and Tatiana fall in love, but Sergei eventually does the "right thing" by marrying his long time live-in gypsy mistress Marya, who has borne him three children.)