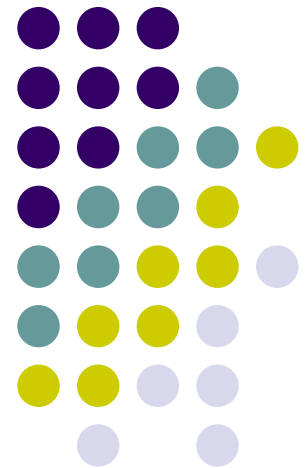


# Life and Death in Russian Literature (Part 2) Tolstoy and in part , Chekhov,

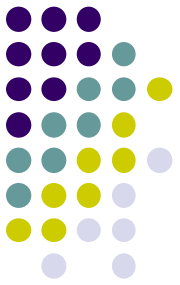
Global Focus on Knowledge / 2009 Summer No.8  
8 June

Mitsuyoshi Numano

(The Department of Contemporary Literary Studies / Slavic Literature,  
Faculty of Letters)



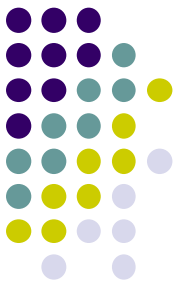
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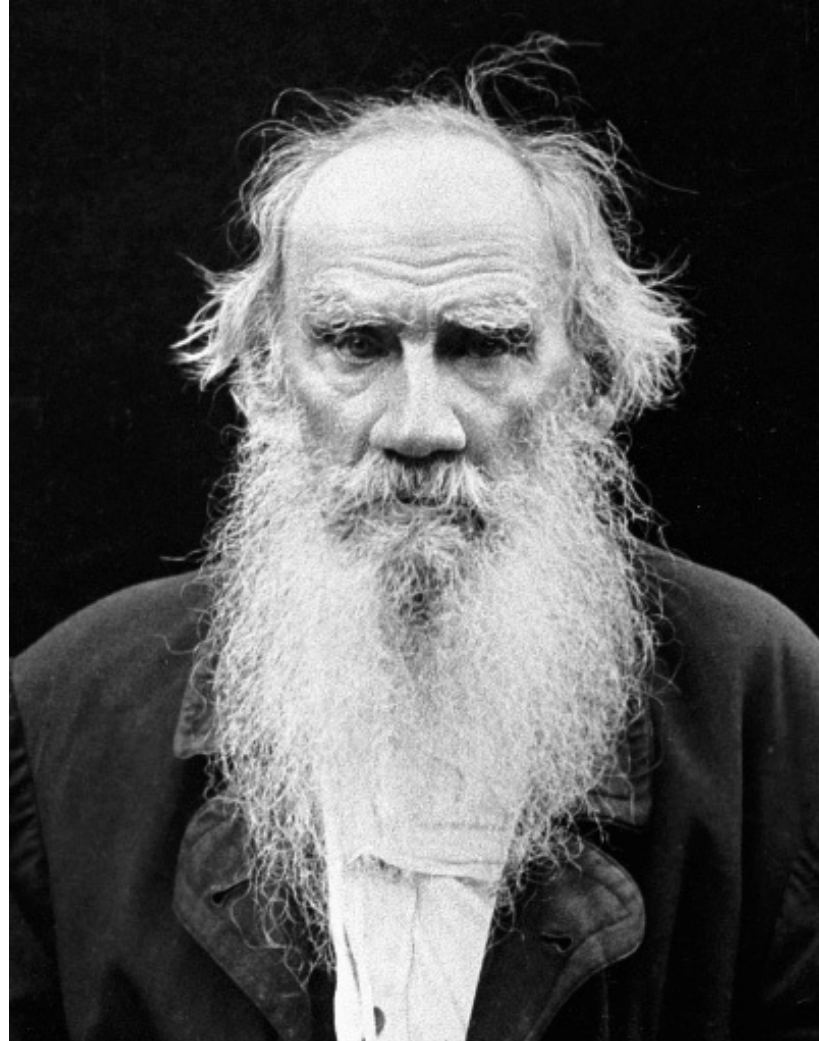
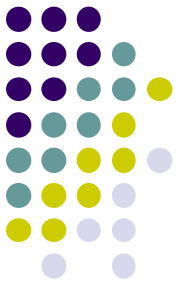
# Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy

- Л е в Н и к о л а е в и ч  
Т о л с т о й  
Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy (Tolstoi)  
28 August 1828 (Bunsei 11) ~
- 7 November 1910 (Meiji 43)

# Portrait by Ivan Kramskoy (1873) The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

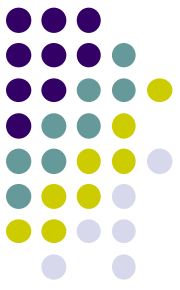


# Tolstoy, in his Later Years (1900s)



# Dostoevsky and Tolstoy

## The Two Giants of World Literature (1)



Two great writers who have often been compared

Dmitry Merezhkovsky. *Tolstoy and Dostoevsky*.  
1901-02

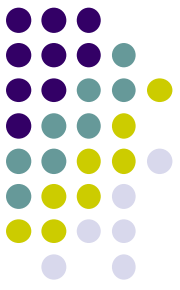
Dostoevsky: “a seer of the spirit”

Tolstoy: “a seer of the flesh”

George Steiner. *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*. 1959

Dostoevsky: the continuity of a tragic world view  
from Oedipus Rex

Tolstoy: the epic tradition from Homer



# Dostoevsky and Tolstoy

## The Two Giants of World Literature (2)

- Isaiah Berlin. *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History*. 1953

The fragment of verse by the ancient Greek poet Archilochus

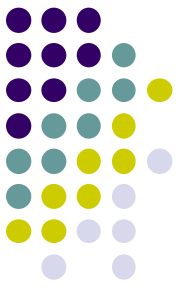
“The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.”

Dostoevsky: hedgehog

Pushkin: fox

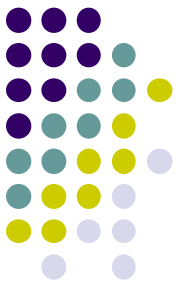
Then, how about Tolstoy? He is diagnosed as a fox who imagined himself a hedgehog (according to Berlin's hypothesis).

# Tolstoy's Life and Career (1)



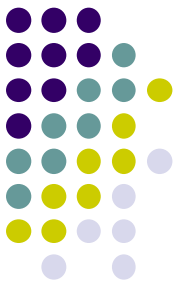
- 1828 Tolstoy is born in Yasnaya Polyana, in Tula Province, the fourth son of Count Tolstoy.
- 1847 Tolstoy leaves Kazan University without a degree. He returns to Yasnaya Polyana planning to manage his estate. He enrolls at the St. Petersburg Academy of Military Engineering.
- 1852 Tolstoy is appointed a subaltern of artillery. He publishes *Childhood*, which gains immediate notice. (“the dialectics of the soul”)
- 1854 Tolstoy is sent to Sevastopol as an artillery officer.

# Tolstoy's Life and Career (2)



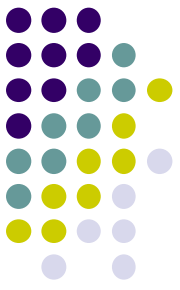
- 1855 Tolstoy publishes *Sevastopol in December* and *Sevastopol in May*.
- 1862 Tolstoy begins writing the novel, *War and Peace*, which is completed in 1869.
- 1873 Tolstoy begins writing the novel, *Anna Karenina*, which is completed in 1878.
- From the 1880s, after the “conversion”, Tolstoy develops his new radical faith known as Tolstoyanism and increasingly begins to reject secular literature.





# Tolstoy's Life and Career (3)

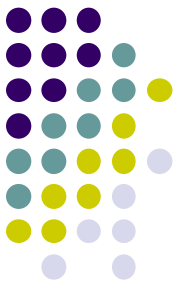
- 1886 *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*
- 1886 *Ivan the Fool*
- 1889 *The Kreutzer Sonata*
- 1891 Tolstoy renounces the copyright of all his works written after 1881.
- 1897 Tolstoy supports the Doukhobors who are being persecuted.
- 1898 *What Is Art?*
- 1899 Tolstoy publishes *Resurrection* in order to assist the Doukhobors financially, dedicating the proceeds from the novel.



# Tolstoy's Life and Career (4)

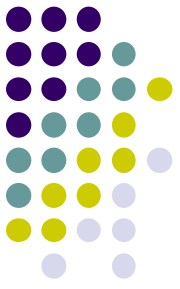
- 1901 Tolstoy is excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox Church.
- 1904 During the Russo-Japanese War, Tolstoy condemns the war and writes the letter, *Bethink Yourselves.*, to the Tsar and the Japanese Emperor.
- 1906 The article, *I Cannot Keep Silence* (against the death penalty)
- 1910 Tolstoy leaves his home incognito. Along the way, he contracts pneumonia and dies at Astapovo station on the Ryazan-Ural railroad. The international press reports on his death.

# The Experiences with Death at Sevastopol (1)



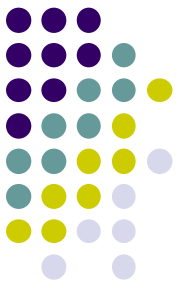
- In 1851, Tolstoy entered the army and took part in campaigns against the native tribes in Kavkaz.
- In 1852, Tolstoy requested transfer to Sevastopol, where one of the bloodiest battles of the Crimean War took place. He served at the fourth bastion, the hottest area in the conflict.
- *Sevastopol in December* and *Sevastopol in May* are the short stories based on his experiences there.
- His experiences in battle helped stir his subsequent pacifism.
- Cf. The British nurse Florence Nightingale dedicated herself to helping the wounded soldiers during the Crimean War. (The International Committee of the Red Cross' founder, Henri Dunant, claimed that his idea had been influenced by her.)

## The Experiences with Death at Sevastopol (2)



- *Sevastopol in May*
- The description of a soldier's stream of consciousness in the instant before he is killed by a bomb.
- “A glacial terror, which stifled every thought, every sentiment, took possession of his soul. He hid his face in his hands.
- Another second passed, during which a whole world of thoughts, of hopes, of sensations, and of souvenirs passed through his mind.”

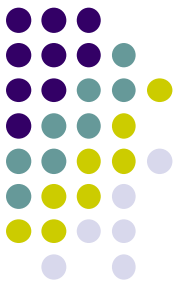
# The Fear of Death at Arzamas



- In 1869, on trip to Penza Province, Tolstoy stopped overnight at a hotel in Arzamas, where he suffered an inexplicable attack of fear of death.
- A letter to his wife

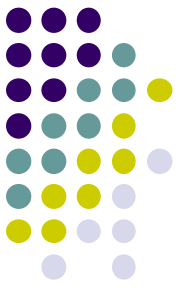
“Something unusual happened to me. It was two o’clock in the morning. I was terribly weary; I really wanted to sleep, and nothing was hurting me. But suddenly I was seized by despair, fear, and terror such as I have never before experienced. (...) I have never experienced such an excruciating feeling, and I hope to God no one else experiences it.” (→In later life, Tolstoy described this night in an unfinished story entitled *Notes of a Madman*.)

# Reading *War and Peace* (1)



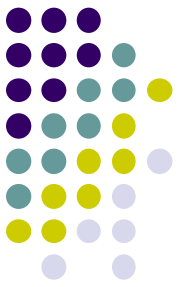
- The outline of the novel
- Title: *War and Peace* / *Война и мир*
- The novel is about both the historical tale of wars and the story of “peaceful” life (particularly that of aristocratic families; their social life, romance, and family life) described against the background of the Napoleonic Wars (Napoleon’s Invasion of Russia, better known in Russia as “the Patriotic War”) in 1812.
- Principal characters
- Prince Andrew Bolkonsky
- Count Pierre Bezukhov
- Natasha, the daughter of the Rostov family

## Reading *War and Peace* (2)



- A “monster” of a novel that encompasses the entirety of life and death.
- Tolstoy writes that *War and Peace* “is not a novel, even less is it a poem, and still less an historical chronicle. *War and Peace* is what the author wished and was able to express in the form in which it is expressed.”
- Henry James refers to Tolstoy’s novels as “loose baggy monsters”.

# Reading *War and Peace* (3)



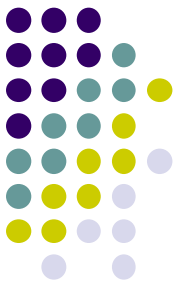
The privileged moment of life and death — the moment of revelation

Prince Andrew Bolkonsky, who suffers a near fatal wound at the Battle of Austerlitz (1805), saw the “everlasting sky” in the face of death.

“Above him again was the same lofty sky with clouds that had risen and were floating still higher, and between them gleamed blue infinity. (...) 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.”

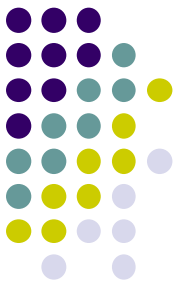


# The influence on Japanese writers



- In *The Story of a Head That Fell Off* (1917) by Akutagawa, the central character of this story, a Chinese soldier, who suffers a near fatal wound of a Japanese cavalryman's sword thrust, looks up the deep blue sky with deep emotion.
- *War and Peace* had a direct influence on Akutagawa, who was reading the novel at that time.

# Reading *War and Peace* (4)



A supreme example of the realist novel  
("the omniscient point of view")

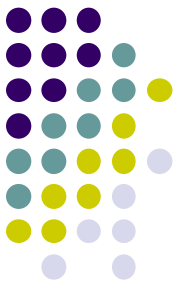
The detail: the accuracy of metonymic detail

The larger cosmic rhythm

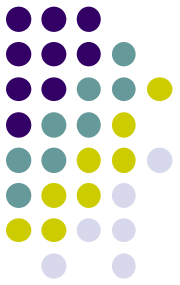
The technique used by Tolstoy: the **defamiliarization**  
(ostranenie с т р а н е н и е )

(the concept developed by Viktor Shklovsky,  
a literary critic and theoretician of Russian Formalism)

# Reading *War and Peace* (5)



- The change in the heroine, Natasha, in the epilogues
- Natasha had married in 1813, and in 1820 already had three daughters and a son.
- “In her face there was none of the ever-glowing animation that had formerly burned there and constituted its charm. Now her face and body were often all that one saw, and her soul was not visible at all. All that struck the eye was a strong, handsome and fertile woman. (...) At the rare moments when the old fire kindled in her handsome fully-developed body she was even more attractive than in former days.”

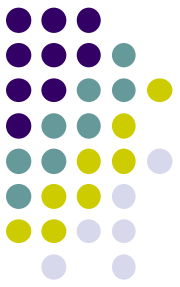


**Soviet movie *War and Peace* (1967)**  
**Directed by Sergei Bondarchuk**  
**(Played by Lyudmila Savelyeva as Natasha, Sergei Bondarchuk as Pierre)**

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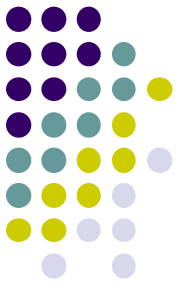
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# Reading *Anna Karenina* (1)



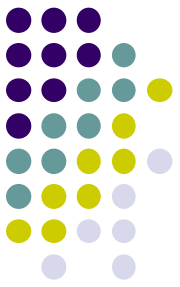
- The outline of the novel
- The best classic “novel of adultery”?
- A young married woman Anna, who possesses irrepressible vitality.
- Anna’s husband is an important government official Karenin, twenty years her senior.
- A cavalry officer Vronsky, who embarks on a passionate affaire with Anna.
- Levin, a stand-in for Tolstoy himself, struggles to find the meaning of life but comes to lead a happy married life with Kitty.

# Reading *Anna Karenina* (2)



- The meaning of the epigraph “Vengeance is mine, I will repay.”
- Source: the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 32:35)
- The Word of God delivered by Moses  
“To me belongeth vengeance and recompence;  
their foot shall slide in due time:  
for the day of their calamity is at hand,  
and the things that shall come upon them make haste.”
- What should the interpretation of the epigraph be like? What was Tolstoy’s intention in using this?

# Reading *Anna Karenina* (3)



## The death and life foreground in the novel

- The death of Levin's brother and Kitty's pregnancy (Levin's wife)  
→The cycle of death and life
- Struggling to find the meaning of life, Levin comes to take a view that *the God is the ultimate purpose* of life, which leads to a happy married life. He feels happiness working side-by-side with his farmers.
- Bringing ruin on herself, Anna is driven to commit suicide on the railroad tracks in the end. Does her death come as a punishment? A punishment from whom?

# Reading *Anna Karenina* (4)



The fundamental contradiction in Tolstoy

He wanted to make himself as a hedgehog?

Coexisting contradictions: intention to control life unitarily based on ethical thought crossed with a vital spirit intent on experiencing the various joys of life.

- The struggle between the “flesh” and “spirit”, and the triumph of “flesh” over “spirit”

The contrast between the pure love in the family life of Levin and Kitty and the carnal love of Anna and Vronsky that inevitably brings them to ruin.



# Reading *Anna Karenina* (5)



- The change in Tolstoy's attitude toward Anna in the course of the book?
- At first, Tolstoy did not make Anna beautiful and saw her as an incarnation of lechery.
- →A woman who should be condemned in the name of morality
- Her husband Karenin was initially portrayed as an honorable man.
- As she appears at the end of the novel, Anna is quite different from how she was originally conceived to be. Her name is even used as the title of the novel.
- “Deliberately she shrouded the light in her eyes, but it shone against her will in the faintly perceptible smile.” (the scene Anna first appears at the railroad station)

**Soviet movie *Anna Karenina* (1967)**  
**Directed by Aleksandr Zarkhi**  
**Played by Tatyana Samojlova (left)**

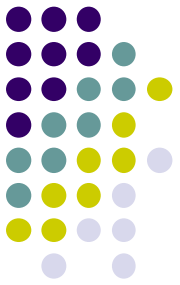
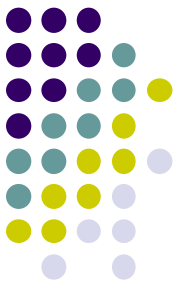


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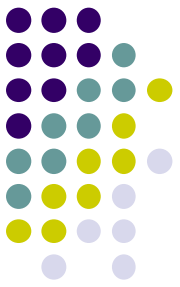
# *The Death of Ivan Ilyich (1886)*



- A judge Ivan Ilyich, at the age of 45, dies from a most trivial cause.
- As he lays dying, he realizes that almost nobody truly loves him — his lifelong friends and wife are hypocritical and calculating.
- He gets terrified at the thought of his approaching death and comes to see the falsity of his life.
- However, at the end of the novel, “Death is finished,’ he said to himself. ‘It is no more!’ He drew in a breath, stopped in the midst of a sigh, stretched out, and died.”

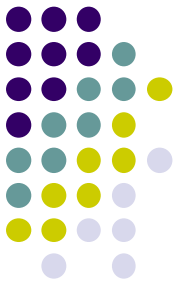
# The Way the Author Died

## — The *Sensational* Running Away and Death of Tolstoy



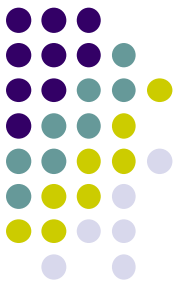
- The flight and death of Tolstoy was immediately broadcast by the international media.
- The police tried to limit the access to his funeral procession, but thousands showed up to pay their respects.
- The death of Tolstoy caused debate also in Japan.
- Hakucho Masamune: “When I pored over Tolstoy’s diaries, which recounted the whole story of his flight leading up to his death — his fear of God and of society, the way he snuck out of his house and went on his lonely journey, ending up dying in a ditch — it sounded so sorrowful but, at the same time, humorous...”
- Hideo Kobayashi argued against him.

# Anton Pavlovich Chekhov



- А н т о н П а в л о в и ч  
Ч е х о в
- Anton Pavlovich Chekhov
- Born on 17 January 1860 (Manen 1)
- Died on 2 July 1904 (Meiji 37)

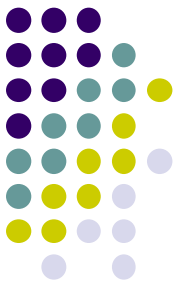
# Portrait of Chekhov by Osip Braz (1898)



# Chekhov's major works



- **As the greatest short-story writer of all time**
- *The Darling, The Lady with the Dog, The House with the Mezzanine*
- *A Dreary Story*
  
- **Classics of modern drama still frequently performed**
- The early vaudevilles
- The four great late masterpieces, *The Seagull, Uncle Vanya, The Three Sisters, The Cherry Orchard*



# “Ich sterbe”

## — Chekhov facing death —

- Chekhov was ill with tuberculosis, which was a mortal illness at that time. He wrote his last works finally realizing clearly that he was facing death.
- 1904 July 2, Chekhov was in a German health resort. He called a doctor and loudly proclaimed, “*Ich sterbe* (I am dying)” in German. Giving up on treating him, the doctor ordered champagne for him. Chekhov said “It’s a long time since I drank champagne...” He drained the glass and died, at the age of 44.



# The Play *The Seagull* (first performed in 1896)



- In 1988, two years after the first performance, the play was revived to acclaim by the Moscow Art Theatre (directed by Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko).
- Why does the main character, Treplyov (a young writer), commit suicide at the end of the play?
- What kind of “belief” will Nina, who gave up becoming an actress and apparently has been brought to ruin, be able to form and maintain?
- Why is the play classified as a “comedy”?

***Kamome* (2008)**  
directed by Tamiya Kuriyama  
starring Tatsuya Hujiwara

