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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

The transliteration in the notes and bibliography is according to the Library of Congress system, for the benefit of specialists. Transliteration in the text has been modified to facilitate pronunciation for non-Russian speakers: y instead of final ii, ye instead of initial e, yu instead of initial iu, and so on. The soft and hard signs, ‘ and ”, have been omitted altogether. Well-known Russian names are rendered in the standard English spelling, for example, Leo Tolstoy rather than Lev Tolstoi. Translations from the Russian are mine unless otherwise indicated.
Bondarchuk’s
*War and Peace*
INTRODUCTION

Sergei Bondarchuk’s *War and Peace* (*Voina i mir*, 1965–1967) is perhaps the most grandiose film ever made, as well as the most expensive, costing an estimated $700 million in today’s dollars. But it is more than a blockbuster: of the many adaptations of Leo Tolstoy’s classic novel, it is clearly the best. It was also the first Soviet picture to win an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. Although it has certainly earned its place in the history of world cinema, it is important for another reason. Conceived as an “answer” to King Vidor’s *War and Peace* (1956), Bondarchuk’s film is arguably the major artifact of the cultural Cold War waged by the USSR against the United States.

*War and Peace* was in production from 1961 to 1967, a signal period in Soviet history, and its historical context is quite important. These were transitional years for the USSR in general and for Soviet cinema in particular, spanning both the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras. Nikita Khrushchev’s tenure as first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1953–1964) was marked by a series of largely unsuccessful reforms, particularly in agriculture, but also in the party structure and government operation. The era is most remembered, however, for three reasons. First, the Secret Speech of 1956 and subsequent de-Stalinization were unquestionably significant. However, for purposes of evaluating *War and Peace*, the other two reasons are probably more important, as chapter 1 explains. Second, there was the continuation of the Cold War and, indeed, a heightening of Cold War tensions. Third, there was the Cold War’s polar opposite, the relaxation of cultural restrictions known as the Thaw (*ottepel*). In contrast, Khrushchev’s successor, Leonid Brezhnev (1964–1982), represented “stagnation” (*zastoï*), a refreezing of Soviet culture as well as a paradoxical attitude toward the Cold War. Brezhnev was, after all, an architect of détente but also of the “second Cold War” in the early 1980s.

Before embarking on our examination of *War and Peace*, a brief overview of the historical context is in order to understand the backdrop against which *War and Peace* came into being. It emerged not out of a vacuum but rather from the vagaries of post-Stalin cultural politics. After all, its director, born in 1920, was a product of the Stalin era and was certainly affected by
the contorted course of de-Stalinization under Khrushchev and the attempt to re-Stalinize certain aspects of Soviet life under Brezhnev.

From Khrushchev to Brezhnev

When Stalin died on 5 March 1953, he left the nation rudderless. The first order of business was to find a successor, and Nikita Khrushchev, Lavrenty Beria, and Georgy Malenkov struggled for sole power. The cultural Thaw, which is inextricably linked to Khrushchev, did not begin with the death of Stalin, nor did it end with Khrushchev’s ouster by Brezhnev in 1964. The Thaw was a relatively quiet cultural revolution, but its impact on Soviet society was at least as important as that of the earlier cultural revolution of 1928–1932. On the one hand, according to historian Miriam Dobson, the Thaw was “forward-looking, ambitious, and full of hope”; on the other hand, it was “disorienting and potentially unsettling.”

A few months after Stalin’s death, changes were noticeable in the press as party leaders began the “overt encouragement of stylistic reform.” Stalin’s name began to disappear, and the strident rhetoric of late Stalinism was toned down. Censorship was relaxed, and journalists began to criticize social and economic problems such as shoddy goods, crime, alcoholism, and hooliganism. In 1954, following Ilya Ehrenburg’s novel *The Thaw (Ottepel)*, several other novels appeared that offered mild critiques of the Soviet culture of bureaucracy and corruption. At the same time, there were also signs of a thaw in foreign relations with Yugoslavia and China. Khrushchev and US president Dwight Eisenhower met for the first time at the Geneva summit in July 1955 to discuss arms control and European security issues.

Then came the Twentieth Party Congress of February 1956 and Khrushchev’s Secret Speech, “On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences.” This four-hour speech detailed the illegal arrest, torture, and imprisonment of Communist Party members, criticized Stalin for the Red Army’s defeats in the summer of 1941, denounced the deportation of national minorities that had occurred during and after the war, and blamed Stalin’s egotism for the break with Yugoslavia. The speech was published the next day in Italian newspapers and quickly circulated in samizdat format in the USSR. In the summer of 1956 there was a mass amnesty of political prisoners, with 7 million to 8 million released by the end of 1957. Prominent members of the KGB were forced into retirement.

According to Polly Jones, a specialist on Soviet culture, de-Stalinization meant that “the very ideas of stability, control, and authority were thrown
The rewriting of history books began. Some city names that had been sovietized were renamed to sound more Russian; Stalingrad became Volgograd. The Stalin Prize became the Lenin Prize. Some Bolshevnik victims of the Great Terror of the 1930s were exonerated. The political fallout was immediate. The party faithful were demoralized if they were innocent, terrified if they were not. In 1956 Hungary rebelled against Soviet power, an uprising the USSR crushed by force.

Not surprisingly, cinema was greatly affected by this upheaval. The cinema of the Thaw marked the first time since the 1920s (Soviet cinema’s golden age) that cineastes outside the USSR took serious notice of Soviet movies and their makers. The cinematic Thaw was part of the European transformation in film art known as Neorealism in Italy and the New Wave in France. However, because of Soviet cinema’s centrality to the state’s political project, one might argue that this cultural transformation had even greater societal impact in the USSR than it did elsewhere. The Thaw’s effect on cinema was marked first and foremost by humanism (with the individual, not the group, placed front and center) and second by a reflective questioning of the Socialist Realist aesthetic and its canon. As film scholar Alexander Prokhorov writes: “During the Thaw, film privileged visual expression over narrative and sound.”

At the time of Stalin’s death, Soviet film production was so low as to be almost nonexistent. Of the dozen or so studios, only Mosfilm, Lenfilm, and Soiuzdetfilm/Gorky Studio were producing movies with any regularity. The number of movie theaters was on the rise, but nearly a decade after the end of World War II, there were few new Soviet films to be seen. Ten days after Stalin’s death, the government abolished the Ministry of Cinematography and replaced it with the Main Administration on Cinema Affairs, located within the Ministry of Culture. This was a welcome move as far as the cinema community was concerned. Because it took cinema out of the direct line of fire by the party and the government, filmmakers might be less fearful of possible repercussions and more encouraged about new productions. Although the literary debate about Socialist Realism’s efficacy as the state’s aesthetic doctrine had begun very cautiously by late 1953, the new thinking did not trickle down to the studios until the end of 1954.

In 1954 Ivan Pyrev, who had been director of the Mosfilm studio during the war, regained that position. Unpredictable and autocratic but a good judge of authentic talent, Pyrev brought new energy and initiative to the filmmaking enterprise. Under Pyrev, an influential director in his own right, Mosfilm was rebuilt and expanded and became the home of many
bright young talents, including Bondarchuk. Pyrev was also adept at bending the numerous rules that still existed in the Main Administration on Cinema Affairs, if doing so would benefit his filmmakers.

When the new Five-Year Plan was unveiled in 1955, it called for substantial investment in all aspects of cinema, with a target of 75 new titles to be produced in 1956.9 By the late 1950s, Soviet studios were turning out more than 100 films annually. In 1959 the number was 137, up from 9 in 1951.10 For the first time in more than twenty years, people who loved movies had real choices, and cinema surged in popularity. Studios began to organize film festivals that encouraged genuine public discussion of the pictures screened. *Cinema Art (Iskusstvo kino)*, which had been transformed in the late 1940s as an agent of the “cult of personality” surrounding Stalin, once again published film criticism of genuine merit. The long-defunct fan magazine *Soviet Screen (Sovetskii ekran)* was brought back to life in 1957; although the reborn publication was mainly a pictorial devoted to developing a star culture, it also translated some of the critical debates for its readership, the nonprofessional moviegoing public. In terms of censorship, studios were given more authority to govern themselves, rather than being subjected to central oversight.11

Artistically revolutionary pictures appeared during this era, such as Mikhail Kalatozov’s *The Cranes Are Flying (Letiat zhuravli, 1957)*, Sergei Bondarchuk’s *The Fate of a Man (Sudba cheloveka, 1959)*, Grigory Chukhrai’s *The Ballad of a Soldier (Ballada o soldate, 1959)*, and Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Ivan’s Childhood (Ivanovo detstvo, 1962)*. Not only did these pictures make history in the USSR; they also made waves in the West for their artistic achievements. The fact that they were hailed abroad and won prizes at international film festivals was a point of special pride for filmmakers and the Soviet public alike. The majority of the artistically renowned films of the late 1950s and early 1960s “revisioned” World War II, moving away from generals, maps, and complaints about the Allies and toward the human cost of the conflict. Individualism was the hallmark of the Thaw in film, and directors cautiously put their individual stamps on these films without breaking wholly from the conventions of Socialist Realism.

Alongside this exciting cultural ferment, however, the Cold War heated up as the USSR began to flex its muscles. In 1957 the Soviets launched their first intercontinental ballistic missile and the satellite *Sputnik*; that year they also detonated a hydrogen fusion bomb, causing shock and consternation in the United States. Nevertheless, in June 1957 the Party Presidium voted Khrushchev out of office while he was vacationing in Finland. With the help
of the KGB and the army, he managed to quash this attempted coup, but the Central Committee exacted a price: limits on the extent of de-Stalinization. A putative Khrushchev supporter, Leonid Brezhnev, saw his star begin to rise at this time.

Khrushchev continued to face opposition within the party, even among his supporters. This opposition was intensified by worries over international crises and domestic failures. Khrushchev flailed about in an inconsistent manner, and this did not inspire confidence among the party leadership or the rank and file. Indeed, as Jones notes, there was “no consistent commitment to liberalization on the part of the authorities, not even within the various cultural communities.”

In 1958, for example, despite the cultural relaxation of the Thaw, Boris Pasternak’s novel Dr. Zhivago was savagely attacked in the press after its publication in the West, and Pasternak was forced to decline the Nobel Prize in literature. Yet in 1962, Khrushchev personally authorized the publication of an equally incendiary novel, Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich. Khrushchev praised Stalin as a theoretician in 1959, but in 1961 he hinted that Stalin was responsible for the 1934 assassination of Sergei Kirov and ordered Stalin’s body removed from Lenin’s mausoleum in Moscow’s Red Square.

By the end of 1962, the “fragility” of the Thaw and its “potential for reversal” were sadly obvious. Censorship had once again become more stringent, and the press began to attack Solzhenitsyn. Dmitry Shostakovich’s Thirteenth Symphony Babi Yar, based on Yevgeny Yevtushenko’s poem about the World War II massacre of Jews in Kiev, was savaged in the press. The symphony could no longer be played, although Shostakovich was still allowed to perform some of his previously banned works.

After the fright caused by the Hungarian revolt in 1956, Khrushchev’s foreign policy became increasingly erratic, alternating between diplomacy and belligerence. Given the Cold War face-off, relations with the United States were most important. Here too, we see Khrushchev’s ambivalent policies and behavior. He first visited the United States in the fall of 1959, a friendly visit to set up cultural, educational, scientific, and sports exchanges. But the mood quickly soured due to events in 1960 and 1961. In May 1960, shortly before a scheduled summit in Paris, an American U-2 spy plane crashed on Soviet soil. In September 1960 Khrushchev famously banged his shoe on the table at a United Nations meeting in New York. In April 1961 the Berlin Wall crisis and the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba both occurred.

The fiasco at the Bay of Pigs, and Khrushchev’s low opinion of John F.
Kennedy, emboldened the Soviet premier to begin constructing missile silos in Cuba in the late summer of 1962. On 22 October Kennedy ordered a blockade of Cuba and placed US forces on high alert. After nearly a week of diplomatic gamesmanship, the silos came down on 28 October. As far as Soviet citizens were concerned, this was a clear victory for the United States. (*War and Peace* had begun filming in September 1962, just before the Cuban Missile Crisis began. Not surprisingly, the news greatly unnerved the cast and crew.) The Cuban Missile Crisis marked the beginning of the end of the Khrushchev era. Just before the second anniversary of the crisis, on 14 October 1964, the Central Committee met while Khrushchev was on vacation in the Black Sea and unanimously voted him out. Leonid Brezhnev became the party secretary.

Brezhnev was the anti-Khrushchev, a skilled politician with many friends in the party. He instituted a number of reactionary measures: he restored the party privileges that Khrushchev had worked hard to limit, cracked down on the arts, and restored Stalin’s good name, especially as a wartime leader. But at the same time, he ended the influence of bogus scientific theories that had crippled Soviet science, such as Lysenkoism, and he stopped the bullying of the Russian Orthodox Church that had been prominent under Khrushchev.

By the time Khrushchev was ousted, the cultural climate was cooling down. Although Brezhnev was an unknown quantity to most filmmakers, politically astute directors understood that a return to greater cultural control was probably imminent. Brezhnev admired Stalin in many ways, and like him, Brezhnev preferred straightforward, representational art. He sought to harness the arts in pursuit of the state’s goals and had little tolerance for artistic experimentation.

Nevertheless, the Thaw in cinema did not truly end until 1968 (the year of the invasion of Czechoslovakia), after *War and Peace* was finished. Indeed, the Thaw and Brezhnev’s policy of détente effectively inhibited neo-Stalinist efforts to turn the cultural clock all the way back to Stalinism. However, an important step in the hardening of the cinematic line occurred in 1963, when the Main Administration on Cinema Affairs was abolished in the Ministry of Culture and ministerial status was restored to cinematography by the reestablishment of Goskino, headed by Aleksei Romanov. Goskino was answerable to the State Council of Ministers on economic matters and to the Communist Party’s Central Committee on ideological matters. In mid-1963 Goskino turned down a number of scripts intended to critically
explore the late Stalin era. By the late 1960s, a number of films, particularly several about the Russian Civil War, had been banned outright.

Important to the success of Bondarchuk’s film was Brezhnev’s desire to promote patriotic culture in the USSR and raise the military’s profile. His central focus was to expand the nascent cult of World War II into a massive state enterprise, with Victory Day as a major national holiday. Although films about World War II were privileged, films with other military-patriotic themes were also welcome, especially one about Napoleon’s 1812 invasion.

In the Brezhnev era, filmmakers also faced increasing pressure to make movies with mass appeal. By this time, a large number of Soviet citizens owned televisions, and television began to compete seriously with the movies. As the cinema box office began its downward spiral in the mid-1960s, Goskino began to pay attention to audience preferences. As a result, it vigorously promoted the work of directors who catered to the public’s taste for lighter genres such as comedies, science fiction, detective films, and melodramas. This atmosphere helps explain the mixed reception of War and Peace, a decidedly artistic film.

**Why War and Peace?**

Why write a book about Bondarchuk’s War and Peace? A masterpiece of epic filmmaking, it is certainly Bondarchuk’s most ambitious picture in his storied forty-year career in the movies. More important is the complexity of the film, which operates on a number of different levels: as the biggest epic in an era of film epics, as an admirable attempt to adapt Tolstoy’s sprawling novel for the screen, and as a historical film of grand proportions. Bondarchuk took literature and history seriously, striving to make a historically authentic film that was also true to the spirit of Tolstoy’s novel. Furthermore, Bondarchuk’s War and Peace exemplifies the transition from the intimacy of Thaw-era cinema to the monumentalism of many of the films of the Brezhnev era. This means that an analysis of Bondarchuk’s War and Peace has the potential to illuminate an important but less studied aspect of Soviet cultural politics.

This film is also a significant artifact of the cultural Cold War between the United States and the USSR. From its genesis as a response to American director King Vidor’s War and Peace (1956) to its afterlife as a film much admired in the West (more so than at home), Bondarchuk’s film offers a concrete look at how Soviet patriotism was constructed during the Cold War.
Moreover, the film is emblematic of growing Russian nationalism, intended to unify the country under the umbrella of an all-wise Mother Russia. But instead, it exacerbated the state’s already troubled relations with its many ethnic minorities, contributing to its demise in 1991.

This book is organized thematically. Chapter 1 covers the making of *War and Peace*, a story that is almost as interesting as the film itself. It examines the fraught history of the film’s production. Bondarchuk was a complicated man who liked to think of himself as a demanding but reasonable “actor’s director.” However, many of his cast and crew felt that he was in fact a tyrant, which led to exceptional volatility during a production process that seemed to drag on forever. This chapter also demonstrates the Soviet state’s involvement in film production, particularly how Minister of Culture Yekaterina Furtseva interceded in the filmmaking at key junctures. Finally, this chapter explicates the ambivalent reactions to the film, which greatly disheartened the cast and crew, who were very proud of their work, especially Bondarchuk. Although we cannot know what Soviet audiences thought, we do know that they decided not to see parts three and four, despite the large turnout for parts one and two.

Chapter 2 analyzes the film as an epic, particularly as a Soviet epic. It would be a serious mistake to characterize Bondarchuk’s picture as a crassly politicized version of Tolstoy’s novel. Bondarchuk had too much respect for Tolstoy. However, it is also true that Bondarchuk chose to focus on aspects of Tolstoy’s philosophy in *War and Peace* that were congenial with Soviet ideology. Therefore, the film definitely emphasizes Russia as the motherland and Russian patriotic culture. Although these characteristics were present in the script from the beginning (it was finished in early 1962, before Khrushchev’s ouster), they became a hallmark of the finished film in terms of both style and content. Therefore, Bondarchuk’s film became a bulwark of Brezhnev’s political culture, which privileged the military and sought to inculcate Soviet citizens with patriotism.

Chapter 3 studies the film as a literary adaptation, to examine how Bondarchuk’s *War and Peace* fits into adaptation theory and to assess its fidelity to Tolstoy. Everyone—cast, crew, and critics—acknowledged that Bondarchuk and cowriter Vladimir Solovev made every effort to be faithful to the novel. Indeed, the first title on the screen—“Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*”—pays homage to the author. Only after this does Bondarchuk get credit as the director. The question is, how could any film, even one with a 250-page script and that ran for seven hours, be faithful to a 1,200-page book that is literature and philosophy in almost equal measure? Obviously, Bondarchuk and
Solovev had to engage in extensive cutting, and what they omitted from the film is as revealing as what they included.

Chapter 4 examines the film as an independent historical work. Bondarchuk immersed himself in historical as well as literary sources. The point of this chapter is twofold: to evaluate how well the film operates as a “big picture” history of 1812 and its epoch, and to examine how well the film conveys Tolstoy’s idiosyncratic philosophy of history, which downgrades human volition and autonomy in favor of large impersonal forces that supposedly determine the course of history. Filming the “history” was arguably the trickiest aspect of Bondarchuk’s *War and Peace*, given that the official Soviet politicization of history was grounded in Marxism.

Chapter 5 compares Bondarchuk’s film with its nemesis, King Vidor’s 1956 version of *War and Peace*, an Italian-American coproduction. Although Vidor was constrained by the Western model of filmmaking, which emphasized commercial returns and audience appeal, his film is a solid effort that found an audience in the USSR. There is no question that Bondarchuk’s picture is more “Russian”—how could it be otherwise?—but is it better aesthetically or truer to Tolstoy? In other words, did Bondarchuk’s *War and Peace* succeed in its goal of surpassing Vidor’s effort?

Chapter 6 takes a look at Bondarchuk’s next film after *War and Peace*, *Waterloo* (1970), which he considered an epilogue to the earlier picture. This film, an Italian-Soviet coproduction, was produced by Dino De Laurentiis (who also produced Vidor’s *War and Peace*) and Mosfilm, the USSR’s leading studio; it was distributed in the United States by Columbia Pictures. The film, which reportedly cost $38.9 million, was, like Bondarchuk’s *War and Peace*, one of the most expensive films of its time. Despite its stellar cast—Rod Steiger as Napoleon, Christopher Plummer as Wellington, and Orson Welles as Louis XVIII—the picture was not as well received in the West as *War and Peace*. Bondarchuk’s vaunted ability to work with actors was not in evidence in his only English-language effort. However, the battle scenes, Bondarchuk’s forte, are magnificent. Nevertheless, this film can be considered Bondarchuk’s “Waterloo,” as it stymied his quest to become a major European director.

The conclusion ties up Bondarchuk’s career after *War and Peace* and *Waterloo* and examines the recent history of the former. It also sums up the reasons why *War and Peace* belongs in the pantheon of great epic films.
In 1959 American director King Vidor’s 1956 adaptation of *War and Peace*, starring Henry Fonda, Audrey Hepburn (a favorite with Soviet audiences), and Mel Ferrer, was released in the USSR. It was one of a wave of American films imported following a US-Soviet cultural exchange agreement in 1958. Although some Soviet critics have claimed that the film was not well received by Soviet audiences, 31.4 million spectators bought tickets, putting it in second place for foreign films and tenth place overall, belying those claims. Surprisingly, it was the only adaptation of Tolstoy’s masterwork in the past forty-one years.

The first screen adaptation, a Pathé Frères/Khanzhonkov coproduction, appeared in 1912, two years after Tolstoy’s death. It was directed by Pyotr Chardynin and featured the fabled star of the imperial Russian screen, Ivan Mozzhukhin, as Prince Andrei Bolkonsky and ballerina Vera Karalli as Countess Natasha Rostova. It had 1,000 extras. World War I led to renewed interest in Tolstoy’s novel, and three versions were made in 1915, although only two were released. The first, titled *War and Peace* (*Voina i mir*) was produced by Thieman & Reinhardt’s leading directors, Vladimir Gardin and Yakov Protazanov, with Olga Preobrazhenskaya (later a Soviet director) as Natasha. The Khanzhonkov studio and Chardynin took another stab at the novel in *Natasha Rostova*, with Karalli again playing Natasha but Vitold Polonsky playing Andrei this time; Mozzhukhin was cast as the cad Anatole Kuragin, who seduces Natasha. Apparently the market was sated, because Drankov & Taldykin’s production, directed by Anatoly Kamensky and first mentioned in the press 1914, was never released. Then came Vidor’s Italian-American production after a four-decade hiatus.

**Genesis**

After the release of Vidor’s film in the Soviet Union, sentiments began to grow that it needed to be “answered” with a bigger and better epic. In the opinion of Russian film scholar Fyodor Razzakov, Vidor’s *War and Peace*...
was a weapon in the Cold War, intended to show that the United States was richer than the USSR. These rumblings increased in 1961 as the 150th anniversary of Napoleon’s invasion approached and plans were made to open the Museum-Panorama “Battle of Borodino” on Kutuzov Avenue in Moscow. There can be little doubt, however, that the primary impetus for a Soviet War and Peace was the cultural Cold War. Some Soviet citizens were outraged that “their” masterpiece had been appropriated by the Americans, who presented merely a facsimile of Russian culture. In February 1961 the Central Committee of the Communist Party received a letter from scientists, cultural figures, and military officers complaining that an “American” War and Peace had appeared on Russian screens. Shortly thereafter a group of leading cinematographers also wrote a letter demanding a Soviet War and Peace, stating: “As is well known, the American film, based on this novel, communicated neither the artistic nor the national aspects of Tolstoy’s epic, nor the great, liberating spirit of the Russian people.” Bondarchuk himself wrote letters to friends and colleagues: “Why is it that this novel, the pride of Russian national character, was adapted in America and released in their cinema halls? And we ourselves are not able to adapt it? It’s a disgrace to the entire world!” The Central Committee took these complaints seriously and turned the project over to the minister of culture, Yekaterina Furtseva. The film was going to be a goszakaz, a state-ordered picture that guaranteed good distribution and lots of prestige.

Many directors vied for this important assignment, chief among them Ivan Pyrev, formerly the head of Mosfilm. As Kristin Roth-Ey notes: “Bringing a movie to the screen in the USSR always entailed an intricate choreography of institutional relationships,” and Pyrev had enemies among the Khrushchev-era reformers in the Kremlin. Furtseva was loath to appoint him as sole director. In their letter, the cinematographers had suggested Bondarchuk as director: “We must attract the best dramaturges and masters of cinema to work on it. The production of the film should be led by one of our best film directors. The most worthy candidate for us seems to be the laureate of the Lenin Prize, People’s Artist of the USSR, S. F. Bondarchuk.” Bondarchuk reluctantly accepted Furtseva’s offer. Initially, Bondarchuk and Pyrev were supposed to codirect, but Pyrev abruptly left the project after a failed love affair with Liudmila Maichenko, an actress being considered for the part of Natasha. That left Bondarchuk—unlike Pyrev, a non-Communist—to direct the film.
Despite the opinion of the Soviet cinematographers, Sergei Bondarchuk was not an obvious choice to direct such a politically important film. Indeed, he recalled that his first response was fear; he consulted with writer Mikhail Sholokhov, the world-famous author of *Quiet Flows the Don* (*Tikhii Don*), as to whether he should take on the task. After all, he had directed just one prior film, the touching psychological drama *The Fate of a Man* (*Sudba cheloveka*, 1959), based on a Sholokhov story about the travails of a Soviet prisoner of war in World War II. Granted, *The Fate of a Man* had been a major hit, but it was an intimate picture, about as far from an epic as any film could be. Yet Bondarchuk later reminisced, “If there hadn’t been *Fate*, I don’t think I would have dared film *War and Peace*."

Born on 25 September 1920 in the small southern Ukrainian village of Belozerka, in Kherson oblast, Bondarchuk was a child of the revolution. He was the son of a worker from the southern Russian city of Taganrog, famous as Chekhov’s hometown. He came from a mixed ethnic background. In addition to having Ukrainian blood, one of his grandfathers was Bulgarian, and a grandmother was a Serb. After spending his first seven years in the Odessa region, Bondarchuk and his family moved to the Taganrog area, where his father eventually became the chairman of a large collective farm. The young Bondarchuk was therefore a country boy and remained one at heart.

Bondarchuk wanted to be an actor from an early age and made his acting debut at age nine. He also experimented with homemade “cinema”: hand-drawn frames spooled between two bobbins. Strongly influenced by one of his uncles, an amateur comic actor, Bondarchuk performed semiprofessionally with the Working Youth Theater and then with the Robinson Crusoe Theater. He briefly left school to join a professional theater troupe in Yeisk, on the Sea of Azov, but eventually returned to Taganrog to finish his education. Bondarchuk hoped to join the Okhlopkov Theater in Moscow, but in 1937 he entered the Rostov Theatrical College instead. There he performed in the Dvatsky Theater, which subscribed to the Stanislavsky acting method, a tradition he valued.

When the German army invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, Bondarchuk enlisted in Groznyi and was part of the defense force in the Caucasus. He entertained the troops by declaiming Russian and Soviet literary classics. After his demobilization from the army he traveled, still in his soldier’s uniform, to Moscow to attend VGIK, the All-Union State Institute for Cinematography.
of Cinematography. The year was 1946. Bondarchuk was initially unsure about pursuing a career in cinema because of his love for the theater—VGIK had attempted to recruit him earlier when he was at the theatrical school in Rostov. But when he sat in on a class taught by leading director Sergei Gerasimov, he was sold on the idea of becoming a film actor. He passed twelve exams in one week and was accepted as a scholarship student in Gerasimov’s third-year acting class. Although he also attended lectures by Sergei Eisenstein and rehearsals with Vsevolod Pudovkin, Bondarchuk was profoundly influenced by Gerasimov’s theory of acting: “Each actor should become the director of his role.” Bondarchuk graduated from VGIK with perfect grades; to earn his diploma, he appeared in Gerasimov’s World War II film The Young Guard (Molodaia gvardiia, 1948), where he played the role of an elder, the “old Party underground worker” Valko.

Bondarchuk entered Soviet cinema at its nadir, in terms of both quantity and quality. (Cinema had been severely blighted during Stalin’s final years, for economic and political reasons.) Now officially a professional film actor, Bondarchuk appeared in a number of films from 1948 to 1951, including The Story of a Real Man (Povest nastoiashchego cheloveka, Aleksander Stolper, 1948), Michurin (Aleksandr Dovzhenko, 1948), and The Cavalier of the Golden Star (Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy, Yuly Raizman, 1951), before being cast in the role that would make him a star, the eponymous hero in Igor Savchenko’s Taras Shevchenko (1951). It was Bondarchuk’s mentor Gerasimov who recommended him for the role. Bondarchuk was deeply impressed by Savchenko, and he recalled: “For me [Savchenko] was an Academy. From him I learnt everything . . . everything . . . I did everything with him. So I can call myself his disciple.” Not surprisingly, the character Taras Shevchenko, which Soviet critics Galina Dolmatovskaya and Irina Shilova proclaimed “one of the best biographical roles in the history of Soviet cinema to the present day,” was the first role Bondarchuk was really proud of. In 1952, at the astonishingly young age of thirty-two and with only a few films to his name, Bondarchuk became a People’s Artist of the USSR, the highest honor for an artist. He also received Stalin’s direct praise for his part in Taras Shevchenko and came to international attention when he won a prize at the Karlovy Vary film festival in Czechoslovakia.

Following Taras Shevchenko, Bondarchuk took many roles in mediocre movies. Then, in 1955, he played the part of the sensitive Dr. Dymov in Samson Samsonov’s adaptation of Chekhov’s The Grasshopper (Poprygunia), which was a great success. Next to Taras Shevchenko, this was Bondarchuk’s second favorite role from his early career because of its psychological com-
plexity. *The Grasshopper* was followed by the lead role in Sergei Yutkevich’s *Othello* (*Otello*, 1955). Then came Bondarchuk’s directorial debut in *The Fate of a Man*, which won him many accolades, the grand prize at the Moscow International Film Festival, and international renown.

Two years later, he found himself at the helm of what would become the most expensive film made to date and perhaps the most expensive film of all time. Estimates of *War and Peace*’s costs range from a low of $29 million to a high of $100 million, the equivalent of about $700 million today. The true costs of the film will never be known because of the unprecedented level of “free” state support it received. For example, many Russian commentators have cited the *Guinness Book of Records*’ claim that there were 120,000 extras in the film who were provided “practically free” by Mosfilm. Moreover, it was “one of only a few Soviet films shot in 70mm format.” When the first of its four parts, “Andrei Bolkonsky,” was released, 2,805 copies were made (a record for Soviet cinema) for an audience of 58.3 million. The film was eventually shown in at least eighty countries and was seen by 250 million viewers worldwide. Even Tolstoy’s daughter Alexandra liked it. As film scholar Elena Prokhorova writes: “In short, *War and Peace* was designed as a Soviet prestige object, demonstrating the superiority of Soviet cinema.”

**Production**

It is fitting that this epic film, intended to smite American dominance in cinema, had an epic production that went on for more than six years. Bondarchuk’s *War and Peace* got the green light on 5 May 1961, when Minister of Culture Yekaterina Furtseva gave Bondarchuk 30,000 rubles—one-fifth of what he had asked for—in seed money. Work on the script began immediately, with Bondarchuk and writer Vasily Solovev serving as scenarists. Initially the film was approved for three parts; the writers received 4,000 rubles for the first part and 30 percent less for each succeeding part. Some filmmakers advised Bondarchuk to go back to the historical sources for 1812 and write a “fresh” screenplay, but he was deeply committed to Tolstoy’s text, as the finished film shows. Nevertheless, Bondarchuk “scrupulously” researched his subject. The two scenarists, who worked together harmoniously, wrote what was essentially a shooting script (Solovev recalls that the film could have been edited from it). It read, however, like a novel, at least in the opinion of literary scholar Evelina Zaidenshnur, who evaluated the
script for the Ministry of Culture. Historians and Tolstoy specialists gave it good reviews as well. The film had expanded to four parts by the time Mosfilm approved the thoroughly reworked script on 27 February 1962; a little less than a month later, on 20 March 1962, the Ministry of Culture endorsed the making of the film as presented.

There had been much debate. Should the film be shot in color? Should French be spoken in the film (as it was in the novel)? Should the skirmish at Schöngrabern prior to the Battle of Austerlitz be excised? Furtseva remained personally involved in the first two years of the production, which was generally a positive thing. On 26 March 1962, for example, she sent a letter to the assistant minister of agriculture requisitioning 900 horses for the production, and on 30 March she allocated nearly 1.4 million rubles to War and Peace—795,000 to cover the audition phase, and 600,000 for miscellaneous expenses.

The auditions for the 300 speaking parts were arduous; thousands of actors read for Bondarchuk. Even when he made a casting decision, there was trouble. His first choice for Prince Andrei, Oleg Strizhanov, backed out to accept a part at the Moscow Art Theater. A furious Bondarchuk pleaded with Goskino, the state film administration, to force Strizhanov to return. He then turned to Furtseva, who called Strizhanov at home and even met with him personally, to no avail. In the face of this defeat, Bondarchuk cast the extremely popular and gifted Innokenty Smokhtunovsky as Andrei, even though the actor wanted to play Pierre Bezukhov (a role Bondarchuk had taken for himself, to Smokhtunovsky’s disgust). However, director Grigory Kozintsev interfered and persuaded Smokhtunovsky to play the coveted title role in his own current film, Hamlet. After much wrangling with Kozintsev, Bondarchuk gave in, supposedly out of respect for the older generation, at least according to Solovev. More realistically, it was probably because Kozintsev had highly placed friends on the Cinema Committee. Bondarchuk then told Vasily Lanovoi that if he tried out for the part of Anatole Kuragin (even though Vadim Medvedev had already been cast), he could also try out for Andrei—a role Lanovoi was anxious to play. But later, Bondarchuk crassly broke his word, telling Lanovoi in a telephone call that he could be Anatole or nothing. The actor took the part.

With great reluctance, and at the insistence of Furtseva, Bondarchuk eventually cast his fellow student at VGIK, Viacheslav Tikhonov, as Andrei. In addition to being in the same class at VGIK, Bondarchuk and Tikhonov had acted together in two films: Sergei Gerasimov’s The Young Guard and Leonid Lukov’s It’s Impossible to Forget This (Ob etom zabyvat nelzia,
Tikhonov had dreamed of playing Andrei, but he had given up hope when Bondarchuk failed to call him for a tryout. For his eventual audition, Tikhonov (as Andrei) played opposite Bondarchuk (as Pierre Bezukhov, an act of self-casting that aroused some mockery) in a scene central to Andrei’s internal evolution: the discussion of Good and Evil. Although Bondarchuk accepted Tikhonov for this key role, he truly believed that a man “with worker’s hands” who had once worked as a mechanic could not play the role of a prince. Tikhonov joined the cast on 14 December 1962, three months after shooting started, when his commitment to Optimistic Tragedy ended.

Bondarchuk’s hostility to and bullying of Tikhonov almost led to disaster, as Tikhonov was driven into a deep depression and frequently threatened to quit the film.

Despite the difficulties of finding an actor to play Andrei, the hardest part to cast was undoubtedly Natasha. Bondarchuk initially considered dozens of established professional actresses, the top contenders being Anastasiya Vertinskaya, Natalya Kustinskaya, and Natalya Fateeva. When he decided to seek a fresh face, he called on the public to help him find his Natasha and received thousands of photographs of young women. Finally, he settled on Liudmila Saveleva, an unknown, nineteen-year-old ballerina who had just graduated from the Leningrad Choreography School. Saveleva had been ac-
cepted by the Kirov Ballet as a soloist when Bondarchuk’s associate, Tatiana Likhacheva, discovered her.77

Likhacheva had a hard time selling Saveleva to Bondarchuk, who had little respect for the acting abilities of ballerinas. But when Likhacheva showed him Saveleva’s screen test for another movie, Bondarchuk reluctantly agreed to invite her for a tryout. Saveleva herself was uncertain whether she wanted the role, which she felt Audrey Hepburn “owned.”78 Bondarchuk was not impressed with Saveleva at first glance and thought she did not resemble Natasha at all, but when she played the marriage proposal scene with Smokhtunovsky as Andrei, Bondarchuk and the crew proclaimed with one voice, “There she is!”79 She was a young woman the audience would “know and love . . . as Natasha.”80 Bondarchuk chose her because “she was like a clean white sheet of paper.”81

Bondarchuk even had trouble casting the secondary actors. For example, the actress he wanted for the part of Prince Andrei’s sister Marya, Antonina Shuranova, initially refused the role. In her last year at the Leningrad Institute of Theater, Music, and Cinematography, Shuranova intended to pursue a career in the theater and believed she was not particularly photogenic. There were other reasons for her refusal as well. She had not met Bondarchuk during the auditions and learned she had won the role only by reading it in a newspaper.82 Another factor was the low pay, only twelve rubles a day, which was “not a big sum” even in those days, and she was financially strapped.83 Shuranova eventually accepted because she wanted to work with the legendary actor Anatoly Ktorov, who had been cast as Prince Nikolai Bolkonsky, Andrei and Marya’s father. Ktorov was her mother’s favorite actor, and he beguiled Shuranova by calling her “Lady Tonya” at the tryouts. Likewise, Anastasiya Vertinskaya, who played Andrei’s unhappy wife, Lise, also turned down the role at first.84

Difficulties with actors were only one part of the production story. Bondarchuk also had a serious problem holding on to his cinematographers. Vladimir Monakhov, the first director of photography, abruptly left War and Peace to work on Samsonov’s Optimistic Tragedy. After this defection, Bondarchuk persuaded the husband-and-wife team of Aleksander Shelenkov and Iolanda Chen (Chen YuLan), famous for filming Zoja (Zoia, Leo Arnshtam, 1944), Admiral Ushakov (Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1953), and The Communist (Kommunist, Yuly Raizman, 1958), to be his cinematographers.85 Trouble began almost immediately: Shelenkov and Chen were shooting thirty to forty takes of each scene, an inordinate number.86 The couple exited the film on 20 May 1963 in the midst of a mini-scandal. They wrote a letter to
the general director of Mosfilm, Vladimir Surin, stating that their initial joy while working on *War and Peace* had quickly vanished. They accused Bondarchuk of running the production like a dictator; he failed to form a creative collective, refused to work collaboratively, and reshot material without their permission. In sum, they claimed it was impossible to work with him. Surin tried, unsuccessfully, to resolve the problem and ended up accepting their resignations. Shelenkov and Chen were replaced by thirty-one-year-old Anatoly Petritsky, the second cameraman, who had shot only one film independently, *My Younger Brother* (*Moi mladshii brat*, Aleksandr Zarkhi, 1962).87

Petritsky’s promotion was a stroke of much-needed good luck for *War and Peace*, as he proved to be not only extremely talented but also innovative. Petritsky had served for five years as an assistant cameraman and was eager to work on his own, so he had been reluctant to take another job as second camera, but Surin himself had offered him the job—an unusual step. Petritsky was well aware of the turmoil on the set. In addition to the first cinematographer, Monakhov, set designer Yevgeny Kumanov had resigned as well. By 1963, Petritsky had also left the picture, returning to Moscow to work with Ivan Pyrev on a movie project. Pyrev, who was probably jealous of Bondarchuk, urged Petritsky not to return to *War and Peace*. In March 1963, however, Surin urgently called him back, saying that Shelenkov was “ill” (an apparently frequent occurrence). Petritsky thought the difficulties between Shelenkov and Bondarchuk were a matter of generational conflict and that Shelenkov’s “illnesses” were symptomatic of the larger problem. Even so, Bondarchuk was reluctant to accept Petritsky as director of cinematography after Shelenkov and Chen departed and insisted that he share the duties with another cinematographer such as Gherman Lavrov or Vadim Yusov. Petritsky steadfastly refused, and pressure from Surin convinced Bondarchuk to give in and allow Petritsky to be the sole director of cinematography.88 However, relations between the two continued to be uneasy. After the tour de force scene of Natasha’s ball, Petritsky tried to quit, thinking that Bondarchuk wanted him out. But Surin told Petritsky that if he insisted on quitting, he would never work again.89 Bondarchuk recalled that Petritsky was inordinately sensitive, probably because he was not a war veteran.90 Many years later, Petritsky admitted that he had perhaps been too egotistical as a young man.91

Finally, there were problems with Bondarchuk’s choice for the film’s composer, twenty-five-year-old Viacheslav Ovchinnikov.92 Mosfilm’s Artistic Council, the studio’s censorship body, expressed grave doubts about his
youth. Some Ministry of Culture bureaucrats did not want him because he was still a student, but Furtseva was in his corner. Ovchinnikov immodestly argued that the Russian writer Mikhail Lermontov and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart had accomplished great things at a young age. Eventually, of course, Furtseva and Bondarchuk prevailed.

Then there was the matter of the military history consultants to contend with. Minister of Defense Rodion Malinovsky ordered the General Staff to open its archives to the production, and he appointed as chief historical consultants General of the Army V. V. Kurasov and Major General P. A. Zhilin. Kurasov, director of the War Academy of the General Staff and a Hero of the Soviet Union, was in charge. As a sign of the Ministry of Defense's wholehearted support of the project, other high-ranking generals were also appointed as consultants. General of the Army Markian Markovich, twice a Hero of the Soviet Union and known as a lover of Russian literature, became the consultant on general military affairs. Lieutenant General and Hero of the Soviet Union Nikolai Oslikovsky, an economist by training and a former film producer, became the consultant on cavalry operations. Marshal Vasily Chuikov, famous for the defense of Stalingrad, attempted to intervene in the production and objected to the formation of cavalry units for the film; Furtseva had to smooth things over. And when the editing of the battle scenes was finished in December 1963, they were shown to the highest-ranking officers in the military for approval, including seventeen marshals, with colonel general the lowest rank in the entourage.

As if having to please the generals were not enough, the film also had to pass muster with the political watchdogs at Mosfilm. These critics found the script's depiction of Pierre and his wife Hélène to be “somewhat banal history” compared with the battle scenes, and they called for better development of Natasha's brother, Nikolai Rostov, and the relationship between Prince Andrei and Captain Tushin. There was also wrangling over how many parts the film would be divided into; Bondarchuk and Furtseva wanted two long parts, but others argued that three or four would be better for distribution.

Then there was the task of gathering objects for the film. Bondarchuk was absolutely committed to historical verisimilitude, and he even called in a hairdresser from Paris to coif the cast for Natasha's ball. Furtseva ordered the cooperation of all the historical museums and archives in the Soviet Union; all told, fifty-eight museums, ranging from the Armory of the Kremlin Museum and the Military-Historical Museum to the Tretiakov Gallery and the Tolstoy Museum, provided furniture, paintings, dishware and
cutlery, decorative objects, sabers, rifles, and so on. Production manager Nikolai Ivanov recalled that the film could not have succeeded without the help of the directors and staffs of the museums. In addition, thousands of ordinary citizens sent personal period items for use in the film. Irina Skobtseva, who played Pierre’s wife Hélène and was Bondarchuk’s real-life wife, remembered that all the jewelry in the film had been donated.

What could not be found had to be constructed. The crew built 272 sets and fabricated “100 historically accurate artillery pieces” and 60 wooden cannons that looked like the real thing. Sabers were made from “undisclosed lightweight material to avoid injury” in the hand-to-hand combat scenes. Costumes were copied from period textiles and included 9,000 soldiers’ uniforms and 3,000 civilian costumes.

Finding animals for the film was an even more difficult problem. As noted earlier, Furtseva had already requisitioned 900 horses from the Ministry of Agriculture, but at least 600 more would be needed to accommodate the 1,500 soldiers acting as cavalry in the Battle of Borodino. Bondarchuk asked private owners for help, as well as circuses and slaughterhouses. They also needed dogs: sixty beagles and thirty borzois for the hunt scene. The borzois—a quintessential Russian breed that had once been a symbol of the aristocracy—were all donated to the production after a public appeal.

Meanwhile, a small creative group traveled to Transcarpathia in western Ukraine in April 1962 to prepare for shooting, which began symbolically on 7 September 1962, the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Borodino. The first scene shot was the French soldiers executing the Muscovites outside the walls of the Novodevichi monastery. After spending a month on this one scene, only 316 meters of film were usable, at a cost of 121,600 rubles. In addition to the number of takes demanded by Shelenkov and Chen, even after extensive rehearsals, the poor quality of the Soviet-made 70mm film necessitated extra takes due to breakage. Bondarchuk had wanted to use Eastman-Color, but for reasons of cost (and national pride), DS-5 and LN-5 film from the Shostinsky factory was employed. Cinematographer Petritsky recalled that there were mosquitoes in the emulsion, and often the film perforations did not match up. There were also difficulties with the Soviet-made 70mm cameras, especially with the fade and superimposition. Petritsky mused many years later: “The Americans could do it. Why couldn’t we?” The quality of the film stock, however, was the “scourge” of the production.

The next scene to be shot was the hunt scene. The borzois were not trained to hunt and did not want to run, but the crew managed to excite
them by using a pack of beagles. Then came the battle scenes. Schöngraben and Austerlitz were both shot near the village of Mukachevo in Transcarpathia. The first issue the filmmakers had to deal with was how to keep the inevitable signs of modernity, such as television antennae, out of the film. Then there were delays because Prince Andrei had not been cast; as noted earlier, Tikhonov did not join the production until the end of 1962.

Next, winter intervened. On 26 February 1963 shooting stopped; it was so cold that the production’s physicians barred the soldier-extras from working. In March Bondarchuk was called to Moscow for a meeting of government leaders, writers, and artists, and the pace of shooting slowed dramatically. From 15 March through 3 April, there were only six days of work; during this time, the average amount of usable film shot per day was 5.6 meters, at a cost of 120,000 rubles. Finally, on 17 May 1963, the shooting for these scenes ended; three days later, Shelenkov and Chen exited.

The next scene shot was the Battle of Borodino, a technically difficult episode that cinematographer Petritsky was justifiably proud of. The actual battlefield had been turned into a national park, with many monuments, so the location filming could not be done there. Instead, the battle was filmed near the village of Dorogobuzh in Smolensk province, in the Dnepr valley, a good stand-in for the real Borodino. Preparation for the shoot began on 1 August 1963, and the main part of the filming took place over six weeks in September and October. Hundreds of meters of rail had to be laid for the dollies used by the remote-control cameras. A fifteen-meter-high tower was built on a rolling platform with cables for the camera, along with a “suspension road” for aerial shots. The extras consisted of 13,500 infantrymen and 1,500 cavalrymen, all drawn from the Soviet army. The special effects were spectacular: 23 tons of explosives, 40,000 liters of kerosene, 12,000 aerial explosives, 10,000 smoke grenades. But the production did not rely entirely on modern effects; 1,500 antique weapons from Soviet museums were employed in the scene. Amazingly, there were no injuries to the cast or crew, but some horses were hurt during the re-creation of the battle.

After location shooting wrapped in October, the cast and crew returned to Moscow to shoot the interior scenes during December 1963 and January 1964. Here, Bondarchuk and Tikhonov famously tangled while shooting the scene that takes place in the corridor of Kutuzov’s headquarters. After twenty takes, Tikhonov shouted, “No, Sergei, I’m leaving. I can’t work with you. I don’t have the strength for this role. No! No!” After another twelve takes, they had only thirty meters of usable film.

Production continued mainly at the Mosfilm studio through 1964.
Filming of the next important scene, Natasha’s ball, began on 28 March 1964. Bondarchuk had originally hoped to use the large foyer of the Tauride Palace in Leningrad, but the electricity there was too unreliable for filming.\(^{132}\) They had to settle for a set built on Mosfilm’s stage 1—the largest pavilion, at 1,400 square meters. Gennady Miasnikov, one of the art directors, recalled that this set was a special challenge.\(^{133}\) A large space was needed to accommodate the more than 500 dancers that appear in the scene.\(^{134}\) According to Petritsky, the scene was filmed by four cameramen on roller skates using handheld cameras, but it was plagued by the exceptionally hot lighting system in the pavilion (the high temperatures melted the actors’ makeup) and the low quality of the film stock.\(^{135}\) Nevertheless, the scene is outstanding for its cinematography (a suspension rod was used for the overhead shots) and its choreography (Vladimir Burmeister, “very famous in ballet circles,” was the dance master), even though Tikhonov was concerned about his dancing ability.\(^{136}\)

In mid-June 1964 Bondarchuk traveled to Tolstoy’s ancestral home, Yasnaya Polyana, to restore his flagging energies. He returned to Moscow in early July, and on 23 July the production was struck with a terrible blow. While watching a screening of Mikhail Kalatozov’s new film *I Am Cuba* (*Ia Cuba*), Bondarchuk suffered a major heart attack. He was clinically dead for a few minutes, and doctors worked for more than two hours to stabilize him. Once he regained consciousness, his first words were that he wanted Sergei Gerasimov, his old mentor, to finish the picture. He was out of commission until 27 September.\(^{137}\)

By 1965, the Ministry of Culture was getting anxious about the slow pace of production. The film had cost 8,165,200 rubles to date, not counting all the “free” support offered by various agencies of the government. The decision was made on 26 May 1965, against Bondarchuk’s wishes, to send the first two parts to the IV Moscow International Film Festival, even though the film was unfinished. This decision forced the rapid editing of parts one (“Andrei Bolkonsky”) and two (“Natasha Rostova”).\(^{138}\) The hard and hurried work paid off, because *War and Peace* shared the grand prize with a Hungarian film, Zóltan Fábri’s *Twenty Hours* (*Húsz óra, 1965*).\(^{139}\)

The first half of *War and Peace* was released to the general public in 1966, as shooting continued. The line at the Rossiya Theater, Moscow’s largest, was a kilometer long.\(^{140}\) The head of Goskino, Aleksei Romanov, recalled that “the first part was seen by 49 million people in only five months, although . . . our film *War and Peace* did not have a single advertisement.”\(^{141}\) This is true, but it did have a significant amount of preproduction and pro-
duction publicity in the fan magazine *Soviet Screen* and even in the serious film journal *Cinema Art*.142

Shooting of the final scenes, including the magnificent Moscow fire episode, took place in the vicinity of the Iosifo-Volokolamsky monastery near the village of Teryaevo in Volokolamsk oblast.143 An extraordinary stand-in for old Moscow was constructed. The set crew had begun planning in late December 1965, but the building did not commence until 25 July 1966.144 The crew also built tracks for the camera dollies.145 Perhaps mindful of the difficulties of being director and lead actor simultaneously, Bondarchuk used a double, Yury Devochkin, in some scenes.146 At 2:30 p.m. on 6 October 1966, the burning of Moscow was filmed with six cameras (the cameramen wore flame-retardant clothing) and five fire engines, under the supervision of the production’s pyrotechnics specialist V. A. Likhachev.147 Petritsky feared that his cameras and film stock might melt, but fortunately, the scene proceeded smoothly, using SU and MIG-9 planes and helicopters for the aerial scenes.148 There could be no second takes. On 25 October filming was complete, four long years after it had begun. All that remained to be done was sound, music, and editing, as well as the six-month-long process of organizing the return of all the objects loaned by the various museums.149

On 28 December 1966 Mosfilm approved the finished part three (“1812”), as work on part four (“Pierre Bezukhov”) continued. Four months later, on 26 April 1967, part three was screened at the Cannes Film Festival, outside the competition. This showing—standing room only—was a “fantastic success.”150 The film was distributed to France, Japan, England, and Belgium before it was shown to the Soviet public.151 When part three premiered at the Rossiya Theater on 21 July, the audience, perhaps tired of all the hype since its win at the Moscow International Film Festival, or perhaps disenchanted with its serious subject, stayed away. Only 21 million people saw part three, a decline of 37 million. This was a real shame, since the Battle of Borodino is one of the best battle scenes ever filmed. Part four premiered on 4 November 1967 to even fewer spectators—only 19.8 million. Perhaps Bondarchuk and Furtseva had been right: the film should have been shown in two parts.152 Nevertheless, *War and Peace* was among the Soviet blockbusters of the 1960s and recouped its billed, as opposed to actual, costs.153 Parts one and two ranked twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh as all-time Soviet box-office hits.154 As the current head of Mosfilm, director Karen Shakhnazarov, observes: “Everybody wanted to see it,” even though the response was mixed.155

Because the film was conceived as a weapon in the Cold War, and because
Soviets tended to compare their culture to the Americans’, of special pride to the cast and crew was the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Picture of 1968, presented in April 1969. Only Saveleva attended the ceremony, ironically sitting next to King Vidor, who was gracious and praised the film lavishly. It also won prizes at the Venice International Film Festival and from the New York Association of Film Critics. As a whole, the cast was very proud of the film, and Saveleva hyperbolically called it a “gift to the Motherland like Tretiakov’s gift of the gallery.”

Virtually everyone involved in War and Peace regarded their participation as an endurance test. The chief reason was Sergei Bondarchuk, a workaholic who “lived in the studio.” Some of them were awestruck, considering him to be an “actor’s director.” Bondarchuk thought of himself this way: he believed that, from an actor’s perspective, the best director is one “who knows, understands, feels . . . the actor’s creativity.” Kira Golovko, who played Countess Rostova, recalled: “In my point of view, no one worked with actors as he did. I understood right away: a Big Actor is rehearsing and shooting the film.” Nikolai Trofimov, who played Captain Tushin, liked the way Bondarchuk interacted with him and believed the director had “full faith in his artists.” Trofimov called Bondarchuk his teacher, even though he was already an experienced actor. Even Saveleva, who was intimidated by Bondarchuk and called him an “absolute commander,” admired his efforts, like “the last of the Mohicans,” to preserve Russian culture.

These positive recollections are contradicted, however, by the memories of others who describe a very different Bondarchuk, an overweening authoritarian. The difficulty he had keeping cinematographers is a case in point; even his ultimate choice, Petritsky, had an on-again, off-again relationship with him. Shuranova described him as a “dictator” who made his actors, including her, very nervous on the set; she even lost her voice during the first take of her first scene, when Andrei is going off to war. Bondarchuk himself wrote: “The director has studied all the material for the film; he alone knows everything. He is tsar and god.”

Definitely worst was Bondarchuk’s treatment of Tikhonov. Trofimov reported that Tikhonov was forced to perform take after take. The scene where Prince Andrei defends Captain Tushin before General Bagration was re-shot twenty-nine times. Shuranova recalled that Tikhonov was even more nervous than she was. Tikhonov believed that Bondarchuk’s animus was caused by his belief that an actor from a working-class family could not play a prince. Tikhonov began to doubt himself, and after Bondarchuk repeatedly complained about the actor’s large hands, he wore white gloves in an
effort to conceal them. Bondarchuk’s words—“Bolkonsky is completely different”—kept ringing in his ears, and he asked to be released from the film more than once.

After the screening of the first two parts of *War and Peace* for the cast and crew at the Udarnik Theater, Bondarchuk praised everyone, especially Saveleva. To Tikhonov, he simply said, “You won the marathon.” In the end, Tikhonov faced a severe emotional crisis: “I didn’t believe in myself.” He felt that his “individuality had been squashed out of him” and thought he should quit acting. Nevertheless, the role was a real career booster for Tikhonov. Despite the critical ambivalence about Tikhonov’s Andrei, *Soviet Screen*’s 1966 readers’ poll chose Tikhonov and Saveleva as best actors for their performances in part one.

**Reception**

In a 1967 postmortem, part of the discussion centered on the paucity of reviews of the film; there were allegedly only four reviews about part one
(there were actually a few more, depending on what one counts as a review). Goskino head Aleksei Romanov complained: “This isn’t a lot, especially since there were nearly 7,000 articles published abroad about it.”\textsuperscript{177} As Russian film scholar Natalia Tendora put it: “Only in Russia was the success of the picture, as always, silenced.”\textsuperscript{178} According to Tendora, Bondarchuk’s unpopularity with film critics and other filmmakers was one reason for this relative silence.\textsuperscript{179}

The film’s reception in the USSR was definitely mixed; given the status of Tolstoy’s novel and the film’s monumental sweep, it could hardly be otherwise.\textsuperscript{180} Most critics found both good and bad in the film. As historian Stephen Norris notes: “Early reviews believed that Bondarchuk had for the most part captured the spirit of the times. They divided over whether or not he had captured Tolstoy’s spirit.”\textsuperscript{181} The journal \textit{Soviet Culture (Sovetskaiia kultura)} was perhaps the most enthusiastic, calling the film a “big, exciting work . . . a national work, lofty . . . mighty, deep, Russian.”\textsuperscript{182} K. Zamoshkin also saw the film as very Russian and very patriotic; it was “big, serious, deep, innovative.”\textsuperscript{183} Although critic A. Sofronov, writing in \textit{The Light (Ogonek)}, called the film a “talented reproduction” rather than a true screen adaptation, he still praised it as an “achievement,” especially the cinematography, the performances of actors Liudmila Saveleva and Anatoly Ktorov, and the film’s “patriotism and authenticity.”\textsuperscript{184} Director Khamil Yarmatov was especially sympathetic, noting the amount of work that had gone into the production. He cited Bondarchuk’s success in creating an “indelible spectacle” and wrote: “Without a doubt, the picture \textit{War and Peace} is not only a great event in our cinematography but one of the most successful adaptations of a Russian classic.”\textsuperscript{185}

It seemed that everyone could agree on a few points. First, the battle scenes were magnificent.\textsuperscript{186} Second, two of the cast members were outstanding: Anatoly Ktorov and Liudmila Saveleva. The casting of Ktorov as Prince Nikolai Bolkonsky was indeed a masterstroke. Ktorov, a major film star in the 1920s, had not acted in film in thirty years and had been working exclusively at the fabled Moscow Art Theater. He managed to achieve a purely Tolstoyan image of the old prince, who found happiness in endless activity.\textsuperscript{187} There was also general agreement that Saveleva was the perfect Natasha. No one, however, could outdo Bondarchuk in his praise. The “very Russian, very national” Saveleva, he declared, did not act; she “lived” the film.\textsuperscript{188} Scriptwriter Sergei Ermolinsky, who found the beginning of the film pretentious, saw Natasha as a “fresh breeze.”\textsuperscript{189}

Despite this praise, others considered the film a failure. One prominent
critic was Lev Anninsky, who thought Bondarchuk’s obsession with historical accuracy sapped the life from the film.\textsuperscript{190} Even more strongly, dissident director Sergei Paradzhanov argued that \textit{War and Peace} represented everything that was wrong with Soviet cinema; he saw it as indicative of an “amazing crisis” in the film industry.\textsuperscript{191} The highbrow journal \textit{Cinema Art (Iskusstvo kino)} was less direct in its attack. According to well-known director Georgy Daneliya, Bondarchuk and Solovev “chose the hardest but truest road. They \textit{tried} to bring Tolstoy’s thoughts to the screen. . . . Directors don’t like to bring ideas to the screen for fear of boring the viewer . . . Bondarchuk wasn’t afraid of \textit{boring the viewer} [emphasis added].”\textsuperscript{192}

The most scathing review came from Igor Zolotussky in the prominent literary journal \textit{New World (Novyi mir)}. Zolotussky argued that the film superficially reflected Tolstoy’s novel because only the book’s events (rather than the ideas) interested Bondarchuk. Zolotussky claimed that Bondarchuk’s \textit{War and Peace} was a “great spectacle,” but for Tolstoy, “war was not an epic.” For Bondarchuk, Zolotussky argued, “war is an epic without tragedy.”\textsuperscript{193} According to this critic, Bondarchuk had not captured the soul of the novel.\textsuperscript{194}

European reviews, in contrast, tended to be positive. A French review, for example, praised the film as “deeply individual, rich, and poetic”; French director Claude Autant-Lara admired Bondarchuk’s mastery of detail and thought the film transported the spectator into a richly nuanced world.\textsuperscript{195} One of Tolstoy’s grandchildren declared that it would have been “impossible to make it better.”\textsuperscript{196} British critic James Oldridge thought the picture captured the Russian soul (although he also thought the film could have been more dynamic to better suit contemporary tastes).\textsuperscript{197}

Because Bondarchuk’s \textit{War and Peace} was directed in part toward the American audience as an answer to Vidor’s film, the American response is particularly interesting. Soviet films had done poorly at the US box office in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and Hollywood distributors left the US-Soviet film exchange in 1963; art film distributors contracted directly with Soveksportfilm.\textsuperscript{198} However, Bondarchuk’s film was dealt with differently. As film scholar Tino Balio writes: “The biggest deal was Walter Reade’s acquisition of Sergei Bondarchuk’s epic \textit{War and Peace}, the most expensive film ever made up to that time. In 1968, Reade released a slightly cut and dubbed version of the film specifically to bypass the art house circuit.”\textsuperscript{199} Reade’s Continental Distributing paid $1.5 million for the rights and “spent the cost of a major film” on the dubbing and duplication of prints.\textsuperscript{200} The six-hour film opened on 28 April 1968 at the DeMille Theater in New York;
it was shown in two parts, with a two and a half-hour intermission. The cost of a ticket for the benefit premiere was a colossal $125; ticket prices for the public ranged from $5.50 to $7.50, the highest ever for a film screened in the United States (the previous record was held by *Funny Girl*, at $6).\(^{201}\)

As in the USSR, the reaction to the film was mixed. Critics were united in lambasting the dubbing.\(^{202}\) Renata Adler of the *New York Times* wrote that the dubbing of such a long film may have been a feat, but it was also a terrible mistake: “It is that this particular movie, so quintessentially Russian, gains nothing by dubbing. It loses romance and authenticity.”\(^{203}\) Variety’s “Beau” felt that the dubbing detracted from the emotional scenes in the film.\(^{204}\) Stanley Kauffmann, writing in the *New Republic*, noted that the dubbing had a “dead, studio quality.”\(^{205}\) Penelope Gilliatt in the *New Yorker* extensively bemoaned the decision to dub: “Dubbing a serious foreign picture is sometimes called ‘making it commercially viable.’ In the case of *War and Peace*, as usual, this turns out to be the gobbledygook phrase for letting sales chaps put a boot through it.”\(^{206}\) As far as the film itself was concerned, most American critics found it too long, especially the battle scenes. In the words of *Newsweek* critic Joseph Morgenstern, interest in the battle began “to pall after the 40,000th casualty.”\(^{207}\)

Although American reviewers had reservations about *War and Peace*, most of them thought the acting very good, especially Liudmila Saveleva as Natasha.\(^{208}\) *Time* admired the painterly grandeur of the film.\(^{209}\) “Mosk” in *Variety* wrote that “the costuming, sheer manpower, and the rattling din of violence overpower most critical reservations on this immense film.”\(^{210}\) Stanley Kauffmann acknowledged that Bondarchuk “tried throughout to make a film of *War and Peace*, not merely a chronicle of the novel on film.”\(^{211}\) Although the reviews could have been better, there is no question that *War and Peace* had an impact both at home and abroad, demonstrating the might of Soviet cinema.

Most critics, both Soviet and American, called Bondarchuk’s film an epic. As Soviet critic Elena Bauman wrote: Bondarchuk’s “films resemble grandiose frescoes with many figures. They contain numerous human tragedies and battle scenes. A sense of the eternity and harmony of nature, they are permeated with subtle lyrical feelings and deep philosophical thoughts, . . . an acute sense of the concerns, emotions, and moods of his contemporaries, the call of the epoch.”\(^{212}\) An analysis of *War and Peace* as an epic that reflects the “call of the epoch” follows.