

overall impression of the stanza remains remarkably close to Hope's intention – a series of vivid images conveying the sense of expectation in a boy's long train journey alone – and the poem as a whole retains the combination of clear reasoned argument and startling image or comparison so characteristic of Hope's writing. When Hope's poetry is informed by the circumstances of Australian life it generally looks through these circumstances to a broader human reality, and this means that the sentiment, if not the exact words, can be translated with some confidence. In Lazareva, Hope has found a sympathetic and attentive interpreter with a fine ear for Hope's and her own language – a translator, indeed, of whom he would have been proud.

Lazareva's volume also contains a small selection of translations from other English-language poets (and one Spanish), including her entries for the 2010 and 2011 Pushkin in Britain Festivals, ranging chronologically from John Aubrey in the seventeenth century to the young Melbourne-based poet Emilie Zoey Baker. Lazareva uses the same techniques here as when translating Hope, and shows great versatility in breathing a new Russian life into the original texts.

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Dominic Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon: The True Story of the Campaigns of War and Peace* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2010), 618 pp.

Few events in modern history have captured the popular imagination as strongly as the fate of Napoleon's *Grande Armée* in Russia. Artistic tributes have been many and varied, from Tchaikovsky's rousing '1812 Overture' to the paintings depicting French soldiers frozen in the snow. Probably no one has done more to shape the modern understanding of Russia's war against Napoleon than Leo Tolstoy. Indeed, for many, Russia's war against the French *is* the war as depicted in the writer's magnum opus *War and Peace*. The publication of Dominic Lieven's *Russia against Napoleon: The True Story of the Campaigns of War and Peace* is likely going to change that. In the introduction Lieven admits his long-standing desire to set the record straight: 'I am an old-fashioned historian who likes his stories to be true, or at least as close to the truth as an honest, knowledgeable and meticulous study of the available evidence allows.... Hearing an untrue tale

told over and over again annoyed me' (3). The reader ought to be grateful for the annoyance that provided the incentive behind the book. At its most basic *Russia against Napoleon* is a straight-forward chronological account of Russia's involvement in the struggle to bring down Napoleon Bonaparte. The account begins with an overview of Russia's status as a great power during the Napoleonic wars. The author then proceeds to a detailed analysis of the state of Russia's army and the effort to improve its fighting capabilities. When Alexander concluded the treaty of Tilsit with Napoleon in 1807, he understood that the alliance would not last and that it was essential to prepare for a future showdown. The tsar was not mistaken. On 24 June 1812 the French advance guard crossed into the Duchy of Warsaw, thereby setting in motion a train of events that would end in Napoleon's downfall. To deprive the French of the chance to meet the enemy in battle, Alexander adopted a strategy of 'deep retreat'. In the short run, the decision to evade the *Grande Armée*, widely frowned upon at the time, led to Russia's blood-letting at Borodino in September 1812, and, worse still, to the abandonment of Moscow. In the long run, it set the stage for the virtual destruction of Napoleon's army in the freezing cold of the Russian winter. Alexander, meanwhile, ignored his generals' advice for a premature conclusion of hostilities and resolved to continue prosecuting the war. Accordingly, he set about rebuilding his armies. Between 1812 and 1814 alone, more than 650,000 new men were conscripted, many of whom were serfs supplied by their landlords. This was the force that would take part in the Battle of Leipzig, the war's greatest military engagement before Waterloo, and that eventually entered Paris in triumph.

The story of Russia's war effort against Napoleon has never been told by a Western historian. Taking advantage of the post-Soviet opening of the military archives, Lieven has examined a vast array of primary sources including such indispensable information as papers on recruit levies, general logistics, the Reserve Army, and personnel records, many of them held by the Russian State Military Historical Archive. In addition, he draws extensively on memoirs, diaries, and private letters from participants on both sides of the conflict. The result is as ambitious and comprehensive an account of the political, economic, social, and military aspects of the war from the Russian perspective as we are ever likely to get, but it is more. *Russia against Napoleon*, a historical tapestry of epic proportions, is above all a great yarn. Historians have long tended to downplay Russia's tremendous contribution to the anti-French coalition. For the social historian,

the fact that this was essentially a war fought and won by princes and dynastic alliances, sat uncomfortably with the emphasis on social forces and structural change. If Western historians had a hard time recognizing the magnitude of Russia's achievement, Soviet propagandists, in turn, were scarcely less biased. To jibe with official ideology, the tsar's responsibility for Russia's victory had to be minimized and, conversely, the popular resistance to the French invaders elevated to the status of a 'people's war'. What suffered most in these distorted versions was the pan-European aspect; in other words, Russia's essential post-1812 contribution to the reestablishment of European peace and security went largely unnoticed. In some way, then, Lieven's narrative serves as a salutary and long-overdue corrective to the kind of historiography that tends to portray everything connected with the imperial past as either reactionary or simply irrelevant. As the author reminds us, though, 'empire in its day – unlike very many nations – was often relatively tolerant, pluralist and even occasionally benevolent in its attitude towards the many communities sheltered under its protection' (12). This is a truth well worth contemplating and, more importantly, one that is being borne out by Lieven's meticulous analysis of Russia's prosecution of the war. A number of factors combined to lead Russia to victory. What Lieven calls the 'sinews of power', i.e. human resources, horses, military industry, and finance, certainly played a decisive and so far largely unacknowledged role. The superiority of the Russian horse and of the Cossack, Bashkir, and Kalmyk horseman provided the army with a decisive advantage over Napoleon. At the same time, leadership also mattered a great deal. The officers fighting on behalf of the empire, many of them non-Russian, subscribed to a code of honour, loyalty, and bravery that decisively influenced their conduct in battle and the general prosecution of the war. Contrary to Soviet ideology, the figure of Alexander I emerges as crucial in this context. Early on convinced of the interdependence of Russian and European security, the tsar displayed remarkable foresight, diplomatic skill, and just plain old fortitude. After learning of the fall of Moscow and faced with the prospect of his empire's imminent demise, he made the following rousing promise: '... if Divine Providence decrees that my dynasty should cease to reign on the throne of my ancestors, then after having exhausted all the means in my power I will grow my beard down to here [he pointed his hand to his chest] and will go off and eat potatoes with the very last of my peasants rather than sign a peace which would shame my fatherland and that dear nation whose sacrifices for me I know how to

appreciate' (241). These words express a determination and a generosity of spirit that throw a glaring light on Stalin's brutal exhortations to his people 130 years later.

This is military history at its finest: sober, humane, and written in a way that does not intimidate the novice with a surfeit of technicalities. *Russia against Napoleon* is also unique in that it combines the 'God's-eye view' and the 'view of the worm'. The pages are chock-full with memorable portraits of protagonists as varied as the conscripted state peasant Pamfil Nazarov, one of only two Russian private soldiers to commit his experiences to paper, or the unforgettable Count Alexandre de Langeron, a French émigré officer in Blücher's army whose military exploits had taken him across three continents. Leaving aside the extremely large numbers of individuals – individuals in the true sense of the word – that throng the narrative, it needs to be noted that battles and leaders are only part of the story. The author spends at least as much time on diplomacy, economics, espionage, and such apparently trivial but ultimately essential issues as the state of the recruit uniforms or the provision of vodka.

The occasional confusion regarding names and figures aside, one of the work's most appealing features is its user-friendliness. Not only does it include a number of helpful maps which cover all the major campaigns discussed in the text, it also boasts a delightful gallery of portraits depicting the main protagonists. Part of the work's eminent accessibility lies in Lieven's effortless command of the English language. True to his self-characterization as 'old-fashioned', he does not see the need to pay lip-service to the latest historiographical fashion. As a result, his narrative is mercifully lacking in academic jargon. Not surprisingly, then, the book is a splendid example of what a good history should achieve: it furthers our understanding of a particular event, era, or problem and at the same time provides a flavor of the sheer drama of history. This is a work of superlatives, and more than that, it is unmistakably a labor of love. Anyone with a desire to learn about Europe's past is strongly advised to take the trip to the library or the bookstore and to obtain a copy of this outstanding masterpiece.

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