

THOREAU, TOLSTOY AND WALDEN WOODS: THE CLINTONS AND BELFAST

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Provenance

INTRODUCTION

In late June 1940, we were told by the British Army that my¹ father, a Newcastle-upon-Tyne surgeon, was missing, presumed dead in the German conquest of France^{1,2}. My maternal grandfather, Edward Nettleton, who had twice circumnavigated the world under sail in *Royal Forth*, 3,130 tons launched 1893, told me that I was now head of the Hedley-Whytes and had better read the works of Henry David Thoreau. Grandfather and I knew that his daughter Nancy, my mother, possessed Thoreau's books and had read them. I did as bid^{3,4,5,6}.

In late July 1940, we went to meet my father in Leeds. A month earlier in Saint-Nazaire, the Chief Radiographer of my father's RAMC 8th General Hospital had approached my father. The Radiographer had been a prisoner of war in Germany during World War I. This experience he did not wish to repeat. "Let's capture a ship. What about *The Glenaffric* in dock here?" The dock master refused to open the locked gates to release *The Glenaffric*. He was shot. The gates were opened. The 8th RAMC General Hospital British patients and Staff loaded with the Chief Radiographer as Acting Navigation Officer. This officer had been a Shipping Pilot before becoming a Chief Radiographer. After picking up survivors from the sunken Cunard Liner, the *Lancastria*, in July they reached Plymouth^{7,8}.

After Leeds we, as a family, took the Stranraer to Larne Ferry arriving in Belfast for Christmas 1940. Transport and clearance of the twenty-four volumes totaling nearly one hundred pounds of the 1939 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* which had been my father's gift to me that year caused grumbling and an excessive workload for the Customs Officers at Stranraer and Larne.

WARTIME BELFAST EDUCATION

From then until August 1942 most of the tuition I remember was in the form of set tutorials at Musgrave Park Hospital by RAMC Officers and staff. From March 1942 I was tutored by members of the U.S. Army Harvard 5th General Hospital^{9,10}. After each lesson I had to write up a summary for my father^{3,4,5,6}. I remember we covered blood transfusion^{11,12},

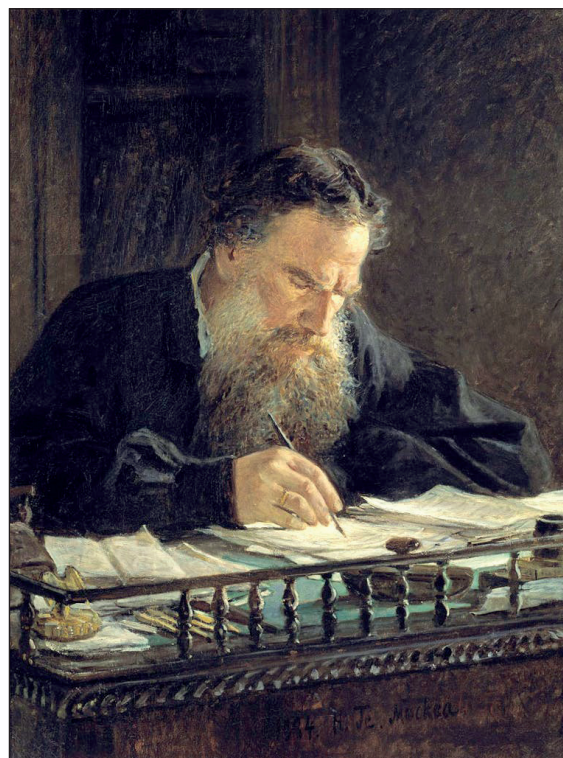


Figure 1.

Portrait of Count Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy (1828-1910), 1884, by Nikolay Nikolaevich Ge (1831-1894). Oil on canvas, 96.2 cm x 71.7 cm. From the collections of the State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Hall 31, No. 2637.

Reproduced with their permission exclusively for this Medical History. This famous painter of portraits became a close friend of Tolstoy.

1 This and subsequent first person singular and plural references are to the first author.

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vitamin A¹³, Tolstoy's (Fig.1) *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*^{14,15}. Thoreau's *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience*^{16,17}, Pandemics, and why Nobel Prizes are awarded.

In the early spring of 1942, Theodore L. Badger, Head of Medicine as well as Pathology at Musgrave Park, took over the domiciliary management of the tuberculosis of my sister, my brother and myself^{18,19,20,21}. Ophthalmologist Benjamin Rycroft, later knighted^{13,22}, had suggested that we read Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (translated by Constance Garnett) published in 1911^{14,23,24}. The chapters describing the decline and death of character Nikolay Levin from tuberculosis were exceptionally moving, inspiring my admiration for Tolstoy. I learned from my tutors and later reading that this account was based on Tolstoy's personal experience with the death of his own brother, Dmitry, in 1856^{25,26}. Badger suggested that I read *Walden*, which I did¹⁶. Rycroft then brought a copy of Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*¹⁷, which he said had influenced Tolstoy who had read widely in several languages including English^{25,26}.

The Harvard Faculty at Musgrave Park also discussed with me their own publications and careers. When I had almost recovered from lobar pneumonia²² I was told about Tolstoy's last days^{25,26}. When I got tuberculosis and appeared healed¹⁸ I was told of 1837 Harvard Graduate Henry David Thoreau's death from TB and the disease's courses in his brother and two sisters^{27,28}. I could not help but recall my earlier reading of *Anna Karenina*. Tuberculosis was endemic in 19th Century New England, and was the largest single cause of premature death^{27,28,29,30,31}. Physician- Statistician Edward Jarvis had reported "consumption" as the cause of 21 percent of all deaths in the town of Concord, Massachusetts, during the period 1828-1878²⁷. Henry David Thoreau's paternal grandfather Jean Thoreau and father John had also succumbed, as had members of many prominent Concord, Massachusetts families including the Emersons and Ripleys^{28,32}. At Musgrave Park my teachers reminded me of the long history of tuberculosis and the ongoing campaign to reduce its incidence and mortality in Northern Ireland^{33,34}.

Rycroft told me that in Lenin and Stalin's USSR you could not be promoted to a high level in the Soviet Army, Police or Ambassadorial Services unless you were conversant, not only with Tolstoy's writings, but also with the influence of Thoreau and of his landlord Ralph Waldo Emerson^{35,36}. Lenin had attended the Imperial University of Kazan, founded in 1804, where Tolstoy had studied^{25,26}. *Thoreau's Civil Disobedience* had been translated into Russian by the close of the Nineteenth Century^{37,38}.

KAZAN STATE UNIVERSITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

While Secretary of State of the United States (2009-2013), Hillary Rodham Clinton visited this historic institution, now Kazan State University, which she described in her October 14, 2009 remarks as "a very excellent university" which "increasingly has a reputation beyond Russia"^{39,40,41} (Fig. 2). Secretary Clinton's visit was intended to promote



Figure 2.

Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast (QUB), Hillary Rodham Clinton, 2020. Photograph by Andrew Towe, Parkway Photography Ltd., reproduced by permission of QUB. Chancellor Hillary Rodham Clinton wears the gown of her honorary degree of Doctor of Laws, QUB 2018.

intercultural dialogue and cooperation⁴². Immediately before her October 2009 trip to Moscow and Kazan, she had visited Belfast, a destination familiar from her years as First Lady of the United States. There she addressed a full session of the Northern Ireland Assembly with themes of devolution, disarmament and the common good⁴².

Progress was evident in the January 2017 Conference held at the Kazan State University on "Literary Studies and Aesthetics in the 21st Century" which featured an American paper on classroom teaching of Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*; this presentation "sparked a serious, albeit at times guarded discussion," about the Presidency of Russia⁴³.

HILLARY RODHAM 'S EDUCATION

At Wellesley College, Rodham became Valedictorian in 1969. She used to visit "nearby" Walden Pond⁴⁴. Wellesley College in Wellesley, Massachusetts, was founded in 1870 to advance the higher education of talented women⁴⁵. On May 31, 1969, Hillary Rodham (Fig. 2) delivered the Valedictorian's Address at Wellesley College's Graduation Ceremony. Rodham set aside her prepared remarks and reviewed the address of the previous speaker, Edward W. Brooke, Republican United States Senator for the

Commonwealth of Massachusetts, who served two terms from 1967-1979⁴⁴. The impromptu but polished address by Rodham attracted wide attention and launched Hillary Rodham Clinton's career. Her career includes a plurality of popular votes of almost three million in the Presidential Election of 2016.

EUROPEAN ANAESTHESIA MEETING IN PRAGUE

On August 28th, 1970, as a newly-appointed Full Professor at Harvard University I flew to Prague as an invited speaker to the Annual Meeting of the European Society of Anaesthesia. At Prague Airport, I met Alex Crampton Smith, Nuffield Professor of Anaesthesia at Oxford University^{46,47,48}. I hired a small Ford and we drove off to Alex's assigned hotel. I noticed we were being followed by a late model Soviet car known by its manufacturer's acronym, VAZ (Volzhskiy Avtomobilnyi Zavod, or Volga Automobile Plant), with two fierce-looking men inside. On arrival at the hotel we were arrested. The Warsaw Pact^{49,50} Generals were having a meeting. Alex knew Russian from his World War II experiences. Professor Crampton Smith ordered our guards to carry my bags and take us to see the Senior Soviet General in the Hotel. This General apologized and invited us to the Warsaw Pact Military Leadership Reception where we were elegantly entertained with champagne, caviar and oysters. At the reception we were told by a Russian Army Staff Major that "A Dartmouth College graduate, a U.S. citizen, had recently been arrested in Prague." Fred Eidlin, the alleged U.S. spy, was being held by Czech Civil Authorities. "The spy was wrongly being held incommunicado," said the Staff Major. At a one-day trial in December 1970, Fred Eidlin was sentenced to four years hard labour. In February 1971 Eidlin was released^{51,52,53}. He subsequently achieved a distinguished academic career in the United States and Canada⁵⁴.

Our Soviet host, arranged the change of my Anaesthesia Society Meeting scheduled abode in an inferior hotel to an elegant Swedish Houseboat on the Vltava River. There I was treated well under Russian Army control. They drove me each day to Alex's Warsaw Pact Generals and our meetings. Alex and the Senior Generals of course knew all about Tolstoy and Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*.

To return to the West, I had to book a flight on Syrian Arab Airlines to Le Bourget Airport to the north of Paris. At Prague I had been escorted to the departing Syrian plane. As I ascended the stairs to the plane, a Soviet Army Major smartly saluted me and in French wished me "*Bon Voyage*". Syrian Arab Airlines thereafter ceased flying to and from Prague citing insufficient passengers.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR STANDARDIZATION, MOSCOW, 1987

On Saturday, August 29, 1987 my wife⁵⁵ (Fig 3) and I flew into Sheremetyevo Airport, Moscow, where I was to be leader of the United States Delegation to the Annual Meeting

of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) Technical Committee on Anaesthetic and Respiratory Equipment, as well as to chair the meeting of its Subcommittee on Lung Ventilators and Related Equipment, which included both Adult and Paediatric Intensive and Respiratory Care, Humidifiers and Patient Monitoring^{56,57,58}.

On Monday morning August 31, 1987, I as US Delegation Leader was introduced to my personal Intourist Liaison Officer. She had been a ballerina and then graduated from Moscow State University, founded in 1755 as Imperial Moscow University⁵⁹. She had written about Dickens' visits



Figure 3.

E. Tessa Hedley-Whyte, A.M. Hon., Harvard, M.B.B.S., Durham, M.D. Newcastle, Honorary Fellow, Newcastle University. Oil on canvas, 24" x 28.5", 1992, by Kathleen E. Williams, who arrived in the UK as a refugee in 1943.

to the United States. On the basis of her University grades she could determine the horse that she rode. I showed the ballerina two photographs of myself on my mare, Lorraine's Choice, one taken in Northumberland and the other in Concord, Massachusetts. She immediately spotted the change in locale and asked how I had managed the transatlantic move. I replied Lorraine's Choice had flown "Standby" from Heathrow to Kennedy, and then been transported to quarantine at Ithaca, New York. The ex-ballerina reported this information to her supervisor. Our Liaison Officer had also just finished her training. The resulting acquaintance of my wife and myself with this ex-ballerina led to a Soviet Army Major being assigned to assist us with the conduct of



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the ISO meeting. He was needed. The orders flew for Army radios, copiers, two Soviet Army translators, and more and more copiers. They arranged for my wife and I and other Heads of National Delegations to dine at privately owned restaurants: apparently a first for Moscow.

LENINGRAD

After the meeting in Moscow, my wife and I were flown to Leningrad. At the Hermitage Museum, my wife and I were inadvertently locked one evening in an upstairs gallery among works by Cezanne, Degas, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Matisse, Monet, Picasso, Pissarro, Renoir, and Toulouse-Lautrec. We reckoned that this collection approached a billion pounds sterling⁶⁰. With mixed feelings we were released by outside authorities. We were taken to the Summer Palace. This palace was being rebuilt after heavy damage during World War II. Here again, the Soviet Army would get things done with expertise and optimal speed.

WALDEN, CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS

My wife and I live in Walden Woods in Concord, Massachusetts (Fig. 4). It is a mile's walk to Henry David Thoreau's Cabin. A brick from the Thoreau Cabin was used to finish building the Institute and Museum-Library which was dedicated by President Bill Clinton and his wife Hillary Rodham Clinton, now Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast (QUB)^{61,62}. Much of the millions of dollars raised to preserve Walden was due to Don Henley's efforts as Drummer of the Eagles with the support of the Concord Conservation Association and two official visits of the Clintons. In early June 1998 President Bill Clinton's remarks at the dedication ceremony included his favourite quotation from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, Chapter II, "Where I Lived and What I Lived for":



Figure 4.

Fairhaven Bay on the Sudbury River at the southeastern foot of Fairhaven Hill and the adjacent Walden Woods. JH-W on Binn Pleasant, by Pleasant Colony out of Coal Binn. They look toward Fairhaven Bay Island; oil on canvas by Bridget Garrett (1966-), 1999, dimensions 18" x 22".

"Let us settle ourselves and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion and appearance... until we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place which we can call reality..."^{16,62}.

In 2012 the Walden Woods Project, founded 1990, honoured President Bill Clinton with its Inaugural Global Leadership Award^{63,64}. Also in 2012 the Walden Woods Project started "World-Wide Waldens" to connect and encourage school-aged students and their teachers to visit and preserve their Walden-like areas of environmental importance.

During the last decade, the planning for construction of a six-to-eight lane highway through part of Walden Woods was proposed to the Massachusetts State Legislature and Administration. I knew that the proposed route was over a marked Pre-Colonial Era Graveyard of Indigenous Peoples. As Chairman of the Fairhaven Preservation Association I met with my Executive Committee. I was directed to a suitable Concord attorney. We, the Fairhaven Preservation Association, documented the risk of starting a pandemic by disturbing such a graveyard^{65,66}. This information was used to prevent building of the proposed highway.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON, HARVARD PROFESSOR

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), was 1837 Harvard graduate Henry David Thoreau's landlord, friend, financier and Harvard Professor. After barely a year of their marriage, Emerson's first wife, Ellen, died, aged nineteen, of tuberculosis. Also, his two brothers, Edward and Charles, succumbed to tuberculosis at an early age. His own chronic infection had a major effect on his career and activities^{28,32}. Emerson twice visited Britain for long stays and interchanged Moral Philosophy with Thomas Carlyle, a Scot^{67,68}.

Renowned philosopher, author, landlord, plutocrat and America's Harvard Professor, Ralph Waldo Emerson survived almost to the age of eighty, supported by Transatlantic and Caribbean yachting and visits to Italian sun as recommended by Henry Ingersoll Bowditch^{29,30,31}, whose father, Nathaniel Bowditch, pioneered modern oceanic navigation⁶⁹.

In 1867 Ralph Waldo Emerson first published the poem "Terminus":

"...I trim myself to the storm of time,
I man the rudder, reef the sail,
Obey the voice at eve obeyed at prime:

'Lowly faithful, banish fear,
Right onward drive unharmed;
The port, well worth the cruise, is near,
And every wave is charmed.'^{70,71}

The Stranraer and Larne Customs Officers did not open Volume 8 of my *Encyclopaedia Britannica* to that quotation from Emerson's poem on our 1940 trip to Belfast, nor during our 1942 return with the 31st General Hospital to their new

quarters at Hatfield House. Under its contiguous oak, Queen Elizabeth I accepted the Crown of England. The Cecils were most hospitable.

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