



The Diaries of Sofia Tolstoy

Sofia Tolstaya, Cathy Porter (Translator), Doris Lessing (Introduction)

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After marrying Count Leo Tolstoy, the renowned author of *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*, Sofia Tolstoy kept a detailed diary until his death in 1910. Her life was not an easy one: she idealized her husband but was tormented by him. She lived against the background of one of the most turbulent periods in her country's history, as old feudal Russia was transformed by three revolutions and three major international wars.

Yet it is as Sofia Tolstoy's own life story—the study of one woman's private experience—that these diaries are most valuable and moving. They reveal a woman of tremendous vital energy and poetic sensibility who, in the face of provocation and suffering, continued to strive for the higher things in life and to remain indomitable.

The Diaries of Sofia Tolstoy Details

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From Reader Review The Diaries of Sofia Tolstoy for online ebook

Patrice says

I didn't have the time to finish this book but I hope to go back to it when I do have time. It is absolutely fascinating. Such insight into Tolstoy and his world! They both kept diaries and shared them with each other. I'm reading War and Peace and it occurs to me that it's rambling nature is a bit like a diary. Although it obviously has a plan, it seems to be a story that is told in real time.

Jason says

I found this fascinating, but difficult to get through. I felt Sofia got very whiny in her diaries; while I realize that's what diaries are for, it's difficult to read page after page after page of the same whining. With that said, it's an intriguing look at a fascinatingly strong woman at a time and place where that was a no-no. While each year's heading contains context for each year, I do recommend highly reading the introduction as it gives a great deal of social, political, and economic background of the time in which Sofia lived. I recommend this, but be forewarned-her husband was an ass and most of her children are bratty horrible people.

Cheryl says

I've actually read the introduction and the first 20 pages or so of this book; just grabbed it up when I saw it at the bookstore.

I've read enough to confirm my existing impression that Tolstoy, the finest novelist of his age and place, was a rotten person, at least to live with.

Looking forward to seeing how Sonia Tolstaya struggled to reconcile her own desires with being a "good wife" to Tolstoy and a good mother to their nine (surviving) children.

On Edit

I never finished this book. No more than 50 pages or so.

It was just too depressing. These are Sofia's own diaries; and they are filled with her depression, unhappiness, and even despair. Tolstoy treated her terribly; she lost children to death; she took Tolstoy's dictation and copied clean copies of his manuscripts for him *and* raised and taught the children (many children) and ran the household and entertained the guests and managed the money and the budget...and Tolstoy gave her credit for none of it. He was a genius on the page, but a jerk in life.

I couldn't read any more.

I have just finished "The Wives" which covers the same ground, plus several more writers and their wives, but it was third person, and much shorter. I couldn't face several hundred pages of such unhappiness. The wives of the other writers actually seemed much happier, or at least content, than Sofia Tolstoy. Come to think of it, none of them had to deal with constant childbearing, as she did, in addition to everything else. Perhaps that helped them cope.

Petra says

I could only read this book in smaller doses. Sofia's life is full of pain, sorrow, anguish, fear.....or was it that bad? Sofia herself said that she only writes in her diary when she's feeling sad, lonely, mad, depressed, etc. There are large gaps of missing time....were these the good times of her life when she laughed and enjoyed it?

At the beginning of each diary is a short telling of what was going on in Russia and in Leo's life (what he was writing, thinking, doing). Yet in Sofia's diary, these things are not often mentioned. Her diary is full of children, lessons, darning, teaching, sewing, household chores.....everyday life.

What I found fascinating was what wasn't written. These diaries have made me interested in reading biographies of both Leo and Sofia. Sofia was a strong woman of her time. I'd like to find out more about her. Recommended but with a caution: this is not easy reading. It's sorrowful.

Rebecca says

Difficult to rate as I presume these diaries weren't written with publication in mind. As a result, many of the entries are mundane and day to day and it can be difficult to get fully invested in individuals and properly follow the family's history as there are many gaps in time and context (although this edition does help with providing brief synopses of major historical and familial events at the beginning of every year). However an interesting and insightful take on the difficulties of living with a personality like Tolstoy, highlighting the gulf between the public perception of him and his actual behaviour toward his wife and family, as well as on the hardship of living in the times themselves (especially considering the Tolstoys led a relatively privileged existence) - the constant fear and presence of tragedy, death and illness, as well as the monotony and repetitiveness of much of everyday life.

Danelle says

The Diaries of Sofia Tolstoy are just that: the personal diaries of the wife of Count Lev Nikolavevich Tolstoy (or as most of us know him, Leo Tolstoy). This book is no walk in the park. It's big and tedious, but in between all of those days with mundane entries, there are some pretty amazing ones - and those are what make this book stand out.

We get an inside look at what Tolstoy was like, how it was to live with this 'genius', how life in Russia was at this turbulent stage in that country's history, and the struggle many women have with trying to be everything. Because that is exactly what Sophia did - everything. She raised the children, took care of the peasants, kept track of the planting and harvesting, & payment of workers, managed Tolstoy's publishing and printing, did all of his copying, made clothing for her family...this woman had no time to herself except for when she wrote in her diary. (It was no surprise that she felt suicidal!) Her husband hated that his copyrights weren't given to 'the people'. He hated that he lived in a large house with servants. He raved about this and said he would be better off without all of it and preached this to his followers - yet he never did a thing to change any of it. He constantly berated Sophia for being "materialistic" but never once thought of how else they would manage to feed their children (they had 13 - 5 died in infancy or childhood). And through all of this, it seems that only she sees how contradictory and hypocritical his views were when one looked at how

he lived.

She struggles most with how much of herself she's given to her family and how little of it she has left for herself.

She writes, *“Everyone asks: ‘But why should a worthless woman like you need an intellectual, artistic life?’ To this I can only reply: ‘I don’t know, but eternally suppressing it to serve a genius is a great misfortune.’ ”*

Kara says

Wow, this blew me away. I hadn't known much about the lives of Sofia and Leo before this so I knew from the get go I was going to learn a lot. It was chilling how human Sofia was and how she had to go through what she did sometimes with Leo - the fights, the quarrelling, it hurt her deeply. I think that she was a great woman after reading the book and I hope others read the diaries too for insight.

Inna says

The book I read was actually ?????? ? ???? (Love and Rebel - <http://inostrankabooks.ru/ru/book/17797/>) / but I couldn't find it on goodreads, so... The book is mostly a diary by Sofia Tolstaya for just one year - 1910 - the year Lev Tolstoy ran away from his estate (and his wife) and died several days later from pneumonia. With his wife being banned from the room he was dying in. Thus we follow the events which led to this tragedy from the point of view of Tolstoy's wife (labelled by some as the cause of his death, the 'Xanthippian' figure or worse). However "Love and Rebel" is more than just her diary (which she started keeping after some events led her to believe that there is a conspiracy around her - and she was not quite wrong, by the way - so she wanted the world to know 'the truth' the way she wanted to present it). However it is more than just her diary, so we shouldn't give credit to the editor - it is an elaborate compilation of several diaries, including Tolstoy himself, Tolstoy's daughter, sons, secretary, doctor and also some notes and letters, which all together form a more or less complete picture. Which is not that flattering to Tolstoy's wife, to be honest, but even less flattering to Tolstoy himself. She definitely deserves sympathy even though sometimes her constant nagging, hysterics and self-pity get on one's nerves.

Mythili says

She writes, *“Everyone asks: ‘But why should a worthless woman like you need an intellectual, artistic life?’ To this I can only reply: ‘I don’t know, but eternally suppressing it to serve a genius is a great misfortune.’ ”* Though Sofia's frayed nerves and endless crying scenes got a bit tedious, I really enjoyed getting to see her life (and all its contradictions) so closely. As these diaries (which span more than half century) demonstrate, it's not your average woman who is responsible for darned Leo Tolstoy's socks as well as proofing the first draft of War and Peace.

Amber Vrenna says

She was such an interesting person, and her diaries convey this. I absolutely loved this book.

Abi Rhodes says

Sophia Behrs was only 18 when she was introduced to the 34-year-old Count Leo Tolstoy, in 1862, and by the September of the same year they were married in Moscow. On the eve of their wedding Leo Tolstoy asked his bride-to-be to read his diaries, in which he describes his sexual relationships with serfs, a love affair with one young woman in particular who bore him a child, and his homosexual leanings. The young Sophia was both devastated and disgusted by what she had read:

“The whole of my husband’s past is so ghastly that I don’t think I shall ever be able to accept it ... When he kisses me, I am always thinking, ‘I am not the first woman he has loved’. It hurts me so much that my love for him – the dearest thing in the world to me ... should not be enough for him.”

From this undesirable beginning sprang a tortuous and tumultuous life together. The Tolstoy’s lived in Yasnaya Polyana, Leo’s 4,000 acre estate, and had 13 children in all, eight of whom survived. Sophia was to be in charge of the estate, the children and Leo himself and it is through her diary that we gain an insight into how unhappy she was with her lot. In 1863, after only a year of marriage, she states:

“I am to gratify his pleasure and nurse his child, I am a piece of household furniture, I am a woman. I try to suppress all human feelings.”

Their relationship was composed of two disparate characters. Sophia wanted a more spiritual side to their life together whilst Leo demanded sexual relations but refused to use birth control. When Sophia did get pregnant he would become repulsed by her:

“My pregnancy is to blame for everything – I’m in an unbearable state, physically and mentally ... As far as Lyova is concerned I don’t exist.”

From her diary the reader soon discovers that Sophia did everything within their relationship, around the estate and was even a literary agent for her husband. She ensured copyright for his works and battled continuously with the Russian censors on his behalf. She put in a tremendous amount of effort into advancing his writings and every evening she would copy out his untidy drafts with her neat handwriting, returning them to Tolstoy the next day for him to revise once again, which would lead to more copying for her. Sophia copied out *War and Peace* seven times! But it is this aspect of their relationship that provides her with a sense of being wanted and needed by her husband.

When he reached middle age Tolstoy turned away from writing toward shaping his own version of Christianity. In the mid-1880s Leo became a religious guru and turned his back on fiction and on his wife. He threatened to give away all his property and the copyright to his works to the Russian people. Around this time Sophia’s diary entries become more fraught:

“What I have predicted has come true: my passionate husband has died, and since he was never a friend to me, how could he be one to me now? This is not the life for me.”

On many occasions, throughout the diary, the reader is privy to Sophia's longing to have the time to become a musician or artist, "hundreds of times I have felt my intellectual energy stir within me, and all sorts of desires – for education a love of music and the arts ..." But this was not to be: "... time and time again I have crushed and smothered these longings". She does have music lessons and tries, in a two and a half hour session, to master the "8th Invention by Bach". Her creative abilities were not only musical, for some of Sophia's fascinating photographs of the Tolstoy family are reproduced here.

The Diaries of Sophia Tolstoy is a 450page tome that spanning 57 years in the life of this remarkably intelligent and tolerant woman. Her life was not an easy one, for she loved her husband even though he tormented her, and in the background to it was one of the most turbulent times in Russian history. These private diaries offer the reader an insight into the predicament of women in the past (I can't see many 21st century females putting up with that kind of behaviour) but the pages are mainly filled with deep-seated neurosis, pain and anguish. They are not an easy read, so I would recommend a 'dipping-in-and-out' approach...

Daphné says

I'm dropping the course that assigned me this book. Not that it's because this book is so astonishingly boring but I just really, really don't like the course.

This book, however, really does make you want to throw it against a wall, rip your hair out, go back in time to slap Sofia in the face so she might start to rethink her life and leave her f*cktard of an husband. I would have never been able to finish this book and I'm so glad I found a way out of having to read this.

Susanna says

While it seemed like it took me forever to read this book, in the end it was well worth it. I am unfamiliar with the Tolstoys, having never read any of Leo's works, but Sofia's diary was still fascinating. Not only did it provide significant insights into the complex life of Tolstoy and his family, it also gave an insider's views of Russian history between about 1870 and 1920 - the time that experienced the violent transition from the Romanovs to the Bolsheviks. And even if I wasn't interested in Leo Tolstoy or Russian history, Sofia's diary still gives testament to a difficult marriage between a persnickety (and that's being extremely kind) "genius" and his rather suppressed wife.

Book received through Goodreads' First Look program.

Elena says

"Sonia, draga mea, sunt vinovat, dar sunt ?i un nesuferit, numai c? în mine se afl? un om minunat care uneori doarme. S?-l iube?ti ?i s? nu-i repro?ezi nimic, Sonia!" ,îi scria Lev Tolstoi în 1863 so?iei. Oricine ar citi această carte, imposibil s? nu observe cum i-a urmat îndemnul, iubindu-l profund întreaga via??, în ciuda caracterului s?u, de multe ori ursuz.

Jurnalul Sofiei, de?i semi-oficial, Tolstoi având acces la el, descrie f?r? menajamente via?a lor conjugal?, tranparen?? ce devine dureroas?, aproape o povar? pentru cei doi parteneri din cauza cuvintelor grele ce ?i le adresau în dese momente de mânie. Duelurile verbale erau ceva la ordinea zilei. C?snicia lor a stat de la bun început sub semnul geloziei, al unei permanente, adesea nefondate, suspiciuni. Un impediment a fost

poate ?i diferen?a de vârst? ?i experien?? dintre cei doi. S? nu uit?m c? ea nu avea decât 18 ani când a devenit so?ia unui Tolstoi deja celebru, în vârst? de 34 de ani.

Recenzia completa o puteti citi aici: <http://satmaya.blogspot.ro/2012/07/vi...>

Kristen says

after 3 pages you see where Tolstoy got all his material for Anna Karenina. Poor Sofia, her husband wasn't exactly supportive. Too bad she didn't have modern medicine to help her. I still haven't finished this, I read a few pages at a time, its really all I can take.

Not totally fair to judge her too harshly though, it was her personal dairy and in those days, that's all she had.
