

REJECT A HIT

IN THIS ISSUE: *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy
SPOOF-REJECTED BY TOM BENTLEY

February, 1868

Mr. Tolstoy:

Re: your "War and Peace" query—my God, man, one word: editing! Readers today are busy counting the serfs, polishing their mazurkas and dusting their Pushkin collections. They haven't the stomach to digest a 12-room dacha of a work. Think a brightly lit (but slight) tea garden of literature for today's busy readers, or at most an airy drawing room. And let's be reasonable—War AND Peace? Confine it to one, and save 350 pages.

Now, some specifics: Instead of the original Saint Petersburg setting, it's best to confine the whole thing in a tiny village, eschewing all those dreary travel scenes. If I have to read again about the boorish behaviors of a panoply of grubby roadside characters, I'll scream! And let's avoid all that violence and mayhem; we can't found literary works on sensationalism, you know. And any drinking scenes have to go—that's a fusty Russian stereotype that could use refreshing. Perhaps all the villains could be low-level clerks? Everyone hates a clerk.

You do show some promise with character, though must you go on so? No more interminable sighs for the women or long-winded hortatory oaths from the men; think clean, declarative, adjective-free sentences. It should also go without saying that no women should die in childbirth—ugh! And really—including the French, even if the portrait is unflattering, in a popular novel? No. No French.

The work shows no small promise—but it's TOO LARGE! Tighten its belt, shave its unshorn soldiers and pare 10 peasants for every one saved, and you might have something here. In fact, this might make a perfect piece of flash fiction. Cut it down to 500 words and resubmit.

Best,

Tom Bentley

Let's step once again into the role of the unconvinced, perhaps even curmudgeonly or fool-hearted editor: What harsh rejection letters might the authors of some of our favorite hit books have had to endure?

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: If you'd like to be the one doing the rebuffing, channel the most clueless of editors by humorously rejecting a hit in 300 words or fewer. Then, submit your letter via e-mail to wdsuggestions@fwmedia.com with "Reject a Hit" in the subject line.

