

Leo Tolstoy Off and Online

By [John Freedman](#)

June 16, 2013

The  **Moscow Times**

I always wanted to own the 90-volume set of Leo Tolstoy's collected works. But I never have.

I own a facsimile copy of the 19-volume set of Pushkin's works, originally printed in 1937 and reprinted in 1998.

I have those 30 beautiful, sky-blue volumes of Chekhov's collected works published in the 1980s.

I have four sets of the complete works of Shakespeare — three in Russian and one in English.

The Tolstoy collection I own is a sad, indeed paltry, 14 thin volumes. "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina" take up six volumes between them. And to add insult to injury, somebody made off with the first two books of "War and Peace" (volumes four and five), and the first book of "Anna Karenina" (volume eight).

This is a hazard of owning a library and having friends. Friends are friends only to a point.

When it comes to books, friends are enemies. They are marauders, cheats and thieves.

I have a rule: "Never lend out books." It's a good rule and a smart one. Because over the years of my long life I have learned that a lent book is a lost book. To wit: the first halves of my copies of "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina." Lent and lost.

The problem is that rules are made to be broken and I am a wimp. I may mutter and moan and complain and roll my eyes, but I have yet to turn down anyone who says, "Oh! Wow! You have THAT? Can I borrow it?! I'll get it back to you right away!"

Imagine if I had owned the incredible 90-volume Tolstoy collection and somebody made off with the first halves of "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina." Man would I be furious. Maybe what this all means is that I'm lucky.

Still, I'm not sure why I never bought that collection. Too much money? Too much space? Too little time?

Who knows why we do the things we do? And why we don't do what we don't?

Somebody will explain it to me someday on Huffington Post, I'm sure. In the Weird News, Crime or Sex sections. But until that time I guess I'll remain in the dark as to why I never bought that astonishing 90-volume Tolstoy that took thirty years to publish — 1928 to 1958.

Now, all those hip, savvy, techno-friendly young people reading this column already know where this conversation is headed. All you folks my age, and even a little younger, are probably wondering: Where is this guy going with all this?

Bear with me. I'll be there in a minute.

But first I need to ask: Who needs to own 90 volumes of anything anymore? Do you realize how much dust those 90 volumes will collect? A lot. I know. The walls of my study are lined with over 3,000 books. I sneeze all the time.

Haven't you already unloaded all your LPs and CDs? Replaced them with horrible little mp3 files on your computer or iPod? Don't you watch half your movies as downloads? Admit it, you have an iBook or an iReader or whatever they're called. You download your books. You don't carry them home from a store in a bag anymore and put them on a shelf.

Well, if the folks at Russia's Leo Tolstoy Museum have their way, you'll soon be able to access all 90 volumes of Tolstoy's collected works online. The Tolstoy Museum has joined with ABBYY, the software company, to scan, correct and make the entire collection freely available "in one click," as they put it.

According to a [report](#) published by RIA Novosti, the organizations are currently seeking volunteers to do the scanning and correcting of selected segments. If you have Russian and you want to be one of the volunteer scanners, you can sign up on the Reading Tolstoy [web page](#). A [Facebook page](#) called "All Tolstoy in One Click" was opened in late April.

Pretty much all of Tolstoy, and all of the 90-volume collection in question, are already available on the net in the form of Pdf documents. Irina Petrovitskaya has offered downloads

of every volume on her [website](#) since 2009. They are also available as a torrent file on [websites](#) requiring registration.

But this new project is going to put all those fat novels, angry essays, scintillating short stories and blustery plays right at your fingertips, anytime you want them.

It's pretty cool, I'll admit. But I'll also reveal the real reason I'm so happy to hear about it. Now I'm going to go out and buy those 90 volumes and put them right there on my book shelf in between Alexei Tolstoy and Konstantin Trenyov. And the first time somebody says to me, "Hey, can I borrow 'How Much Land Does One Man Need?' or 'Hadji Murat'?" I'm going to say, "Nope." And then I'm going to say, "Just go online and get it there. And leave my books alone!"

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/06/16/leo-tolstoy-off-and-online-a34431>