

The New Tolstoy Encyclopedia

Hugh McLean

University of California, Berkeley

Бурнашева, Н. И., ed. *Л. Н. Толстой*

Энциклопедия. Москва: Прозвещение, 2009.

848 pp. Cloth. ISBN: 9785090171632.

The practice of issuing "encyclopedias" of individual writers has been well established in Russia for some time. An excellent one on Lermontov (*Лермонтовская энциклопедия*) was issued as long ago as 1981, in the same format and by the same publisher as the *Short Literary Encyclopedia* (*Краткая литературная энциклопедия*), that infamous compendium which we Slavists have necessarily come to rely on, despite its many egregious faults, biases and omissions. There likewise exists a three-volume encyclopedia of Pushkin associations—people and places—in the Pskov *gubernia* alone, and another devoted exclusively to *Evgenii Onegin*. And there are others.

Now we have this massive Tolstoy encyclopedia: a huge, heavy book of coffee-table dimensions—large pages, double columns, lots of illustrations (all brownish-tinged, no pretty color plates, unlike the Lermontov volume). To judge by the editor's preface, its conception and perceived readership, however, are markedly different from most earlier models. This Tolstoy is definitely *not* aimed at scholars, though they may still find it of some use. The preface notes sadly that present-day Russian young people are not reading *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, regarding them as old-fashioned, long and boring (rather as young Americans view *Moby Dick*). So this volume is at least in part intended to make Tolstoy more accessible to them, but it seems also to be aimed at "general readers" who need some helping grappling with the great national icon.

After the preface and a brief chronology, the book is divided into thirteen sections: Tolstoy's works (209 pages), Biography (195 pages), How Tolstoy worked (twenty-one pages), Tolstoy as pedagogue (fourteen pages), Tolstoy's world-view (sixty-four pages), Russian and world history in Tolstoy's works (sixty-one pages), Tolstoy and Russian literature (eighty-nine pages), Tolstoy and world literature (sixty-four pages), Tolstoy and folklore (two pages), Tolstoy's poetics (twenty-four pages), Tolstoy and world culture (seventy pages), From the history of Tolstoy scholarship (thirteen pages), and Tolstoy in school (two pages). The section on Works is subdivided into Artistic works (112 pages), Unfinished works (twenty-two pages), and Non-fiction (публицистика) (sixty-five pages); the section on biography into Biographical facts (twenty-four pages), Tolstoy's correspondents and addressees (102 pages), Surroundings (peasants) (fourteen pages), Memorable places (thirty-nine pages), and Diversions and manner of life (sixteen pages). The section on Tolstoy and world culture is subdivided into sections on art (seventeen pages), music (twenty-three pages), and theater and cinema (thirty pages). There is a full index.

The number of contributors is large. I counted thirty-four different ones in the first third of the volume alone, some with a considerable number of articles, others with as few as one. There is no separate list of these contributors or their affiliations, but the author of each article is indicated.

It is obviously impossible even in an extended review to give anything more than a highly selective, essentially arbitrary survey of the articles in such a volume. One general feature that a foreigner notices at once with regret is its national exclu-

sivity. This is a Russian book addressed to Russians, with nothing done to welcome foreigners. To be sure, there are sections on "Tolstoy and World Literature" and "Tolstoy and World Culture," but in neither of these is there a single bibliographical item cited in any language but Russian. As a particular anomaly there is no article on Shakespeare in the section "Tolstoy and World Literature," nor is Shakespeare's name to be found in the index. A perfectly respectable article, by I. O. Shaitanov, on Tolstoy's notorious diatribe on Shakespeare is nevertheless to be found in the non-fiction section, and its bibliography does list in English the famous essay by George Orwell, apparently never translated into Russian. This is almost the sole non-Russian bibliographical reference in the entire book.

The general tone of the volume is worshipful to the point of idolatry. Every word of the master is treated with reverence, his latter-day doctrines expounded fully and without dissent. Tolstoy's Bog ("God"... now capitalized!) is given due respect. The writer's rejection of and conflict with the Orthodox Church are not smoothed over, but also not accompanied by the anticlerical indignation customary in Soviet times. In political matters, the articles on several Russian emperors are on the whole respectful; even the loutish anti-Semite Alexander III is described as "a devoted family man, deeply religious, with a strong sense of responsibility, a benevolent, honorable man" (517). Only the two Nicholases are treated with disdain, since both were condemned by Tolstoy himself, the now sainted Nicholas II called in "I Cannot Be Silent" "the stupidest and most inhumane of all the Romanovs" (556). On the other side, Lenin is identified, as in bygone days, as the manager (руководитель) of the "Great October Socialist Revolution," but the article on him, by T. N. Arkhangel'skaia, treats rather coolly his seven articles on Tolstoy; they are no longer pronouncements of genius become infallible scripture. She does credit him, perhaps justifiably, with

having had Yasnaya Polyana and the Tolstoy house in Moscow placed under state protection. Another survival of Soviet locutions is the qualification of the French Revolution as "bourgeois," and by an unfortunate misprint identified as having taken place in 1889-1893 (458).

Neutrality and benevolence may sometimes be carried too far. The war between Tolstoy's wife, Sofia Andreevna, and his chief disciple, Vladimir Chertkov, was surely a central factor in the later years of his life, eventually leading to his famous departure ("ukhod," уход) from spouse and home at the age of eighty-two and a triumphant book by Chertkov with this very title, *Tolstoy's "Ukhoz"* (*Уход Толстого*). Yet in this encyclopedia you will find very little trace of this war. The article on Sofia Andreevna, by T. V. Komarova, is unreservedly eulogistic ("All that it fell to Sofia Andreevna to do during her life she did punctiliously, responsibly, and with great love...Disagreements in the family she experienced painfully, at times tragically" (312-13)). The latter sentence is as close as the article ever comes to evoking the Countess' hysterical outbursts, frantic spying and snooping, and staged suicide attempts. The article on Chertkov, by Iu. D. Iadovker, is likewise entirely favorable, praising him for repudiating his ultra-aristocratic heritage and becoming the master's closest and most enterprising disciple and later the most prominent custodian of his heritage, chief editor of the Jubilee Edition (for which, according to the article, he received no salary); there is not a word about his aggressive intrusions into the writer's private life or conflict with his wife.

The would-be teenage users of this volume will at least find ample resources for their term papers here, with long articles on all the major texts: *War and Peace* (7 pages) by the editor herself and *Anna Karenina* (also 7 pages) by O. V. Slivitskaia, who cites her own 2004 book on the novel, but not Vladimir Zhdanov's on its genesis. Evelina Zaidenshnur's thorough book on the

genesis of *War and Peace* is likewise not mentioned (nor, of course, Kathryn Feuer's marvelous one). These articles provide plot summaries, character analyses, genesis accounts and digests of critical judgments. Likewise, every single minor text receives a separate, if brief, article, including unfinished and abandoned efforts.

Space allocation remains a problem. If every scrap Tolstoy ever wrote deserves at least a paragraph, too little room is often left for major texts. I. Iu. Luchenetskaia-Burdina was given only two-and-a-half columns for *What Is Art?*, in which she could give only a cursory summary of its basic ideas. She does, however, allow herself some glimmers of critical judgment. "In the heat of polemics, while passionately defending his views on art," she writes, "Tolstoy could not avoid contradictions" (217). What those "contradictions" were, however, is left for the reader to figure out.

Thus one of the problems with this encyclopedia is the inevitable fragmentation. Everything is divided into disparate topics, treated separately. In consequence 195 pages are devoted to Tolstoy's biography, but there is no single article providing a sequential narrative of his life, only a series of snippets about particular people or places. I did, however, appreciate learning about the fates of all Tolstoy's children and many of his grandchildren. Those who emigrated are not condemned for doing so, even those who fought with the Whites in the Civil War, but the authors did have considerable difficulty in tracking down many of his widely scattered descendants. For instance, the account of Il'ia L'vovich's life in the United States is very sketchy. Still, it may be comforting to know that when dying of cancer in 1933 in a hospital in New Haven, attended by his sister Aleksandra, he was filled "with love for all" (322).

I must acknowledge that I was entirely ignorant of the whole subject of one notable exception to the general Russian exclusivity of this volume: an article by G. V. Alekseeva on Theodore Roose-

velt (565). Teddy apparently actually wrote an article "Leo Tolstoy" (1909), in which he called *War and Peace* an "amoral book." He also especially disliked *What I Believe* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*, saying (though in a letter, not in the article) that *Kreutzer* could have been written only by "a morally unhealthy person." Tolstoy read a Russian digest of this article and wrote in his diary, "Roosevelt's article about me. The article is stupid, but it was pleasant for me, gratified my vanity" (entry for May 20, 1909).

The section on Tolstoy scholarship seemed to me really scandalous in its omissions. Of course, no non-Russian scholarship is referred to at all, but even some of the greatest Russians are not mentioned: Boris Eikhenbaum, Viktor Shklovsky, Evelina Zaidenshnur, Vladimir Zhdanov, Vladimir Lakshin, Elizaveta Kupreianova, Iakov Bilinkis, Galina Galagan, Pavel Gromov. Aleksei Zverev and Vladimir Tunimanov, co-authors of the splendid new Tolstoy biography (which is unmentioned), are likewise excluded. None of these names are to be found in the index.

In short, one suspects that this volume, vast and formidable as it is, will not prove especially enticing to teenagers. Others may find it entertaining and rewarding to browse in. Because of the wretchedly inadequate bibliographies, scholars will find it of little use as a research tool, but they may still, as I did, enjoy dipping into it and may find some genuine illuminations.

One small illumination I derived from the volume's policy of printing diereses wherever required to indicate when the letter "e" signals a stressed, iotated "o." At least according to this source the surname of Tolstoy's beloved Auntie Tatiana was not Yergol'skaya (Ергольская)—as I have been told by various Russians and by Morton Benson's *Dictionary of Russian Personal Names*—but Yorgol'skaya (Ёргольская, with the Russian "yo" as the first, accented syllable).