

Review Article: A Meeting of Two Shining Souls, Addams and Tolstoy

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Cracraft, James. *Two Shining Souls: Jane Addams, Leo Tolstoy, and the Quest for Global Peace*. Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2012. Hardcover. ISBN: 978-0-7391-7450-0.

On July 24 1896, Jane Addams (1860–1935), the founder of Hull House in Chicago (1889) arrived at Yasnaya Polyana to meet Tolstoy, accompanied by her companion Mary Rozet Smith and Tolstoy’s British disciple, Aylmer Maude, who acted as liaison (*Jane Addams Papers Microfilm 29: 0284*).¹ This meeting, the iconic event in the Addams lexicon, has mostly recently been assessed by James Cracraft.

Cracraft examines annotated books in Addams’ personal library related to Tolstoy and refers to the *Jane Addams Papers* for his study. He favors a Jane Addams biography written in 1935 by her nephew, James Webber Linn, as well as a few other older volumes. These biographies must be used in conjunction with more recent studies, that focus on Addams’ impact across many disciplines, including works by Mary Jo Deegen (1990), Katherine Haddock Joslin (2004), Charlene Haddock

Siegfried (1996, 2010), and Marilyn Fisher (2009), as well as biographies by Jean Bethke Elshtain (2002), Victoria Brown (2004), and Louise Knight (2005). All of the above-mentioned books explore the Addams-Tolstoy relationship in some way. While Cracraft quotes, from most of them, he says, in general, American biographers treat the Addams-Tolstoy relationship “marginally” and contain “multiple errors” (x).

Although his claim has merit, the Brown and Knight biographies, which deal with Addams’ life through the 1890s, show a depth of research and comprehension of the subject. Cracraft supposes the research on the American side suffers “most likely” because the scholars “do not know Russia and Russian” (x). His own areas of specialization include Russian history and Russian-American relations, and he finds that the story has been largely ignored on the Russian side (x). A cross-section of sources used by Cracraft includes the Jubilee Edition of Tolstoy’s complete collected works, *Л. Н. Толстой и США: Переписка* (2004), *Библиотека Льва Н. Толстого в Ясной Поляне* (1999), the *Centenary Edition* (1929–1937),

biographies by Maude (1910), Simmons (1946), Troyat (1965), and Wilson (1988), with some reference to critical studies by Gustafson (1986), Orwin (1993), and Medzhibovskaya (2008).

Cracraft's conversation is far-ranging: Along with talk of war and peace, Kant, Gandhi, and the three Roosevelts (Teddy, F.D.R, and Eleanor), he provides an overview of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American and Russia society, touches on the Tolstoy-America relationship... the list goes on. Unfortunately, covering all of these topics requires more attention than the size of the volume permits, and the admirable scope of the book inevitably results in occasional omissions and misstatements.

For instance, the author says Addams' reference to Tolstoy throughout her life "[...] has not been explained before, nor even noted," especially "in light of her stature as a Progressive-era reformer" (1). Yet the number of specialized works on Addams mentioned in this review speaks to the contrary. If, however, Cracraft means treatment of the subject is omitted from a number of general Progressive Era studies, he is on firmer ground.

Cracraft's intent is to present a "study of the interchange of radical ideas across national, generational, gender, and other boundaries," rather than a biography of Addams and Tolstoy. He sees it "as a story, with Addams as its fulcrum, of Tolstoy's initial reception in America and subsequent influence on American culture" (x). Yet, for this "initial" period (1885–1889), while Addams spent most of her time touring Europe, William Dean Howells and Isabel Hapgood played important roles in the initial introduction of Tolstoy to America. In 1886, one year after the "official" start of the American "Russian Craze," Howells, as editor for *Harper's Magazine*, used his columns to introduce Tolstoy to the American public; Howells is considered the key figure in the process (Silberman 490–511). Hapgood, who had translated some of Tolstoy's works earlier, visited

him in 1886 to undertake the translation of *On Life*, and she wrote about him in magazines and her own books. However, over the next few years, she turned down Tolstoy's request to translate what she considered his more controversial works as they discussed subjects not in keeping with her conservative views. Although she was in contact with Tolstoy in the 1890s and worked with him to raise money during the 1893 famine, others had become more important Tolstoy proselytizers by that time, especially Clarence Darrow and Ernest Crosby.

Crosby and Addams crossed paths as they began lecturing and writing about Tolstoy's philosophy. Cracraft describes Crosby, who visited Tolstoy in 1894, as the leading American Tolstoyan (29). He believes that Addams was, "at some time in her twenties [...] a sincere admirer of Tolstoy, even something of a disciple," but meeting Tolstoy at the age of thirty-six "did not make her a full-fledged Tolstoyan" (40), nor did she become one in the future (143).

Addams, to the contrary, did identify herself as a Tolstoy disciple. When in October 1897 the New York Social Club asked her to share the platform with Crosby for a Tolstoy lecture, Addams said he should be the only speaker, confessing to "not altogether agreeing with Mr. Crosby's presentation of Count Tolstoy's views." Addams asked: "It would be a sad spectacle—would it not?—if two non-resistant disciples wrangled over their master's doctrines?" In the end, Addams agreed to lecture with Crosby, calling him "the most eminent, and certainly the most sincere Tolstoyan in this country" (*Microfilm* 3: 0863, 0880).

When Crosby died in 1907, Addams, the conflicted disciple, continued to critique Tolstoy's philosophy. At the same time, she became more deeply involved with the growing peace movement. Addams helped to organize the International Women's Peace Society and worked to keep America out of World War I; her popularity declined across the country due to these activities.

By the end of the 1920s, she regained public support and became a Nobel Peace Prize recipient in 1931.

The earliest direct references Addams made about Tolstoy appear to be in two letters written during the period (1883–1888), neither of which is mentioned by Cracraft. He does speculate that Addams learned about Tolstoy through reading Howells or foreign editions of Tolstoy's works while she was abroad (1883–1885, 1887–1888) (10–11). Addams referred to Tolstoy in an 1886 letter while in Baltimore between European tours. She wrote to her sister about “becoming interested in Russia through the two Tolstois we read,” and referred to reading a Gautier's guidebook, which had information on Russia that was “very interesting and sketchy” (*Microfilm 2*: 0373). The next letter, written in 1888 from Munich, had a much more serious tone (*Microfilm 2*: 0639–44). In it, Addams explains to a friend her purchase of a reproduction, Albrecht Durer's Paumgartner Altar, a triptych which depicted a Nativity scene flanked by two Knights. Addams identifies the Knights as St. George and St. Eusebius, but it is more likely that the knights were in fact representations of the altar's patrons. In any case, St. George, on the left hand panel, grasps a fierce looking but subdued dragon by the throat; St. Eusebius, on the right side stands guard (Wolf *Durer* 66–69). Addams, who greatly admired Durer's work and philosophy, wrote of the epiphany she experienced in looking at the scene:

I believe Tolstoi is right, that the *Right* never accomplishes itself spectacularly, that it is due to people like Durer rather than Luther that the Reformation that turning back to the Good came about. You know the German proverb that the good is the greatest enemy of the best. I think that Luther, Erasmus and the rest of them were *good* but that the best was being done quietly, and is always being done in that way, not often so clearly as Durer makes it. His

knights are not fighting and look as if they realized how useless it was—that it must come in another way, and they are ready to try it [...] with insight that they have the truth. (*Microfilm 2*: 0643–44)

Her use of the word “Quietly” in this context makes her statement important, since it shows her initial reaction to Tolstoy's nonresistance philosophy. Denner, in his article, “Tolstoyan Nonaction,” says that Tolstoy advocated, “...if not outright quiescence, then in the very least profound passivity and submissiveness to fate” (Denner 9).

Addams' first public reference to Tolstoy came in her 1892 lecture, “Subjective Necessity for Social Settlement.” Cracraft comments on “the influence of early Christianity and particularly of Tolstoy's teachings on the founders of Hull-House” (6). In laying out her democratic ethos, Addams' language in *Subjective Necessity* was, at some points, very similar to that of Tolstoy's in *What Then Must We Do?* and *What I Believe*. Her claim that the early Church was more authentic than what developed later reminds one of Tolstoy's in *What I Believe*; she goes on to observe that Tolstoy “reminded us all very forcibly of Christ's principle of nonresistance” (*Jane Addams Reader* 24).

Addams said Tolstoy assuredly has numerous followers who believe “evil can be overcome only with good and cannot be opposed.” However, it was here that she carved out her differences with him:

If love is the creative force of the universe...so surely is anger and the spirit of opposition the destructive principle of the universe, which tears down, thrusts men apart, and makes them isolated and brutal. (24)

From that time on, Addams eschewed Tolstoy's quietist philosophy. Her vision, as spelled out in “Subjective Necessity,” called for the avoidance of antagonism in the daily life of her settlement house, and it shaped her future pacifist philosophy (*Jane Addams Reader* 24; Fischer 80). The speech

symbolized her move toward a radical pragmatic feminism based on action and inclusive of all members of society. Siegfried, in an introduction to a reprint of Addams' *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902), says Addams "belongs to an alternative tradition of radical pragmatism that has its roots in American history and culture" (ix), and that she "developed a uniquely pragmatic version of feminism" (xi).

Cracraft finds that Addams was "not by any stretch a radical feminist," his reason being, she "did not see gender as everywhere and always the decisive factor in an unending contest for power" (144). Charlene H. Siegfried, in the introduction to a reprint of Addams' *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902), offers a more muscular evaluation. She maintains Addams "belongs to an alternative tradition of radical pragmatism that has its roots in American history and culture (ix). Moreover, Addams developed a uniquely pragmatic version of feminism," and was one of its original theorists" (xiii). Siegfried's discussion here and in her 1996 book *Reweaving the Social Fabric*, provides the framework necessary for a conversation about Addams' contribution in the field of American Pragmatism. Furthermore, Cracraft asserts that Addams was "not a thinker to be ranked" with James or Dewey despite "tentative" efforts to show the contrary (149). He refers the reader to a footnote (162), where he cites Siegfried's "Introduction" without further discussion. In it, she explains that Addams organizes the book around "what she identifies" as "a perplexity," which in Siegfried's opinion reveals "a rupture with conventional attitudes, beliefs, and practices." According to Siegfried, Addams does not merely use "perplexity," as "a rhetorical organizing mechanism, it demonstrates her ethical approach," which shows "moral development through perplexities" (Siegfried, xxii-xxiv). Siegfried says that Addams' approach shares common features with James's and Dewey's ethical theories, "yet also creatively diverges from theirs" (xxiii). I concur

with her analysis and have explored Addams' use of "perplexity," myself ("Jane Addams and Tolstoy" 9), linking it with Tolstoy's use of this aporetic device in *A Confession* and *What I Believe*." Medzhibovskaya makes reference to Tolstoy's "creative aporia" in *Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of His Time* (299). While a more complete evaluation of Addams' place in the development of American pragmatic philosophy is beyond the scope of this essay, the above discussion underscores the fact that Addams has a place alongside James and Dewey, counter to Cracraft's view.

Moreover, Dewey first came to Chicago in 1892, not 1894 as Cracraft claims (90). He spent a week at Hull-House in January of that year sharing ideas with Addams and touring the settlement house. After the visit, Dewey wrote to Addams that her way was the right one (Knight 238-9; Siegfried *Pragmatism* 44, 45, 73-6, 111, 141, 228-30; Rockefeller 207). Siegfried (*Pragmatism and Feminism* 73-6, 111, 141, 228-30), all stress the reciprocal nature of the relationship. During the Pullman Strike in Chicago in 1894, Dewey first agreed with Addams about the need to avoid antagonism (Knight 322-3), but then changed his mind, presaging his agreement with Wilson about America's entry into WWI (Rockefeller 290-305 *passim*). Other reformers, Darrow among them, also supported Wilson. Dewey criticized Addams' "Tolstoyan" position in various articles (Rockefeller 292-93).

By her own admission, Addams' visit to Tolstoy in 1896, the centerpiece of Cracraft's book, was undertaken to assuage self-doubts about the direction of her life (*Twenty Years* 260-1). Addams' account of the meeting showed that she and Tolstoy were destined to clash from the start. Despite the views of later biographers, Cracraft does not think gender was an important issue or that Tolstoy was "sexist," but he says, to a certain extent, the differences of age, nationality, and social

status that separated the two impacted their mutual reactions.

Still, at the end of his discussion, Cracraft concludes the meeting was “one of a man and a woman” (34–5). In *Twenty Years*, Addams wrote that Tolstoy started by holding up one of the voluminous sleeves of her travel dress, which he said could make a dress for a young girl. She responded that young working-class American women wore dresses with larger sleeves than the one she had on. This answer, along with her inability, as she recalled, to defend satisfactorily Tolstoy’s criticism of her being an absentee landlord, underscored their differences (268).

Addams spoke admiringly of Tolstoy, but criticized his public defense of a young disciple who had been imprisoned for upholding Tolstoy’s philosophy; she described the defense—the subject came up during conversation at the dinner table—as “disappointing.” Addams felt it did not measure up to her own nonresistance philosophy exemplified by Hull-House practice, which she explained, “found antagonism a foolish and unwarrantable expenditure of energy” (272–3). It stands out as an important example of her underlying philosophy and intent. While her conversation with Tolstoy was cordial and respectful, the die was cast as she came to him already exhibiting a pragmatic feminist predisposition. Addams recalled in *Twenty Years* that her first instinct was to read everything she could find of Tolstoy’s works after leaving Yasnaya Polyana, and to try to adhere more closely to his philosophy upon her return to Hull House.

Once home, Addams concluded that she had too many responsibilities at Hull House to “save her soul” by baking bread, the task she had assigned herself (*Twenty Years* 275–7). Her disagreement with Tolstoy was essentially a clash of worldviews. Cracraft, in his comments on *Twenty Years*, rejects the idea that it is anything more than a history of the settlement house (150). This view misses the significance of the book. Siegfried, for

instance, describes *Twenty Years* as an example of how Addams “recasts her earlier self,” as seen in her earlier letters and journals, “to bring it in line with her later aspects” (“Cultural Contradictions” 69). Addams mentions Durer and “the sad knights... longing to avert blood” in *Twenty Years* without once referring to Tolstoy as she had in the 1888 letter (75). Her omission of Tolstoy’s name in the section about “Subjective Necessity,” where she recalls the nonresistance of the early Christians but again does not mention Tolstoy (123), seems to support Siegfried’s thesis. Still, Addams did not forget her earliest reactions to Tolstoy: She reframed them in the chapter “Tolstoyism,” in keeping with her status as the founder of Hull House and internationally known reformer.

On another front, Cracraft’s book presents new insight into Aylmer Maude’s relationship with Jane Addams. The two corresponded, and he wrote about his reactions to her ideas in his books. Cracraft says Addams’ criticism of Tolstoy’s absolute nonresistance stance eventually converted Maude more to her way of thinking (62–6). Maude assessed Addams’ contribution to society, her nonresistance philosophy aside, in a 1902 review of *Democracy and Social Ethics* in *The Whim* (1902). There he praised her sincerity and effectiveness as a reformer and, at the same time, concluded that she was “not primarily an author.” He thought Addams’ greatest contribution was in her work at Hull-House (*Microfilm* 11 supp.: 0195).

When reviewing Tolstoy’s opinion of America and his knowledge of it, Cracraft says Tolstoy’s main source of information about the country was second hand, since he never visited the United State and “never evinced any interest in doing so” (12). While it is true Tolstoy did not visit America, the rest of the statement is open to debate. Second hand is not synonymous with second rate. In 1851, Tolstoy turned to a self-help plan found in Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* (Silberman 107–130 *passim*), and he wrote approvingly of the message contained in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* after

reading it in 1854 (Simmons I: 118). In *What is Art?*, published in 1898, Tolstoy listed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as an example of universal art (Simmons II: 241).

Tolstoy's diary entry for 24 May/5 June, 1857, written during his travels in Switzerland mentioned an American, perhaps someone he met at an inn, and he jotted down, rather briefly, some impressions, apparently gleaned from their conversation. He refers to the Mormons and their founder, Joseph Smith from Utah, and his being lynched, along with a reference to hunting for "buffles" (*sic*), and "cerfs," (*sic*). Then Tolstoy wrote "I want to go" (мне хочется ехать) and ended with a reference to the Abolitionists and Harriet Beecher Stowe (PSS 47: 182–3). Moreover, information about Lincoln and the Civil War was available to Tolstoy in articles written by Chernyshevsky in *The Contemporary* in the 1860s (Laserson 212, 249, 259–67). In 1871, Eugene Schuyler, an American consular official at Moscow (Simmons I: 335), who translated "The Cossacks," discussed the teaching of reading in America with Tolstoy and helped him to get American primers for use in his Yasnaya Polyana school (Schuyler 285). Many such examples of Tolstoy's familiarity with the United States exist.

However, Tolstoy's active involvement with America did not come until in the middle of the 1880s, when he indicated reading Emerson (PSS 83: 443–4), Parker (PSS 49: 94, 104), and Henry George (PSS 52: 211–2). These are representative of his reading from American sources at the time. He had read Channing and Emerson earlier. George's *Progress and Poverty* inspired him to note in his diary about writing "a new *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (PSS 52: 130–1). And, in 1885, William Frey (1839–1888), a Russian who returned home from the United States after living on a Russian-American commune for eighteen years, visited Tolstoy and told him about his experiences (Simmons II: 66–7). Tolstoy, in a letter to Chertkov, spoke of the new and strange things Frey told him about American

life, that were totally alien to "our way of life" (PSS 85: 260–1); in another, he explained that Frey was redolent "of that fresh, powerful, immense world" (PSS 63: 147–153). That same year, Sonia Tolstoy wrote to her sister that, after an argument, Tolstoy asked for a divorce and said he would go to Paris or America (Simmons 2: 88). America was an alternate universe for Tolstoy.

The story of Tolstoy's involvement with America over the next twenty-five years, which Cracraft acknowledges in his book, was rich and varied. In light of this, it is odd that, right at the start, the author chooses an interview Tolstoy gave to *The New York World* on the occasion of the Abraham Lincoln Centenary (1909) to prove he was "too ill-advised about America to offer Americans information about their own country." Cracraft says Tolstoy's comments were "captious and ill-informed, illustrating his ignorance of Lincoln's career," and showing that he "used Lincoln's memory to promote his own philosophical views" (12). Tolstoy's remarks did undoubtedly reflect his philosophy, but they may be misconstrued here. He was not discussing the historical Lincoln. The interview had two levels: one a paean to Lincoln, the other a tale reminiscent of the parables Tolstoy wrote for children. Tolstoy said, "of all the great national heroes and statesmen of history," he gave Caesar, Napoleon, and Washington as examples, "the one real giant was Lincoln." Tolstoy called him "a Christ in miniature...whose name will live thousands of years in the legends of future generations ("Lincoln" 386–7). To underscore his point, Tolstoy told the journalist about a trip he took to the Caucasus, where he found that even people in "wild places," knew about Lincoln. Tolstoy spoke at length about their reaction to Lincoln (387–9). He thought Lincoln was "bigger than his country, bigger than all the Presidents together [...] because he loved his enemies as himself [...]" (390). Tolstoy saw him as "a strong type of those who make for truth, and justice, for brotherhood and freedom.

Love is the foundation of his life” (391). The American historian Doris Kearns Goodwin used an excerpt from the Tolstoy interview on a frontispiece of *Team of Rivals*. It came after a quote from Walt Whitman’s “The Death of Lincoln” (1879), which sounded a similar note. Tolstoy had read Whitman over the years, and seemed to agree with him here.

Two Shining Souls will find readers, despite its shortcomings, since it is the first book devoted exclusively to the Addams-Tolstoy relationship, which is a subject worthy of attention.

Notes

1. References to Microfilm are to the *Jane Addams Papers Microfilm*, citing reel and frame number.

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