
From The History of Tolstoy Criticism

Andrei Bely's *Leo Tolstoy and Culture*

Introduction

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In 1912 the publishing house The Path [*Путь*] released an anthology of essays entitled *On the Religion of Lev Tolstoy* [*О религии Льва Толстого*]. Among the contributions was a piece by Andrey Bely, "Lev Tolstoy and Culture," which follows here in English translation. It was neither the first nor the last piece Bely devoted to Tolstoy, but it provides a sustained view of Tolstoy's significance as Bely understood it, and sheds light on some profound concerns that both authors shared.

Tolstoy's death in 1910 heightened an already intense interest in him on the part of Russian Symbolist writers. Nearly all of them had written and spoken about the subject of Tolstoy, not only because of his tremendous literary achievements, nor, for that matter, because of the flood of international attention directed at him, but more specifically because in Tolstoy they found a rich point of reference against which to define their own ideas and aesthetics. Among them, Bely had a special connection, owing to his father's personal acquaintance with the great author. Bely considered Tolstoy an important figure in his own personal life, as well as in the history of Russian literature generally.

In true Symbolist fashion, Bely opens his essay by trying to reconcile a dichotomy. Tolstoy as artist and as man, or phase-one and phase-two Tolstoy, combine and come to fruition at Astapovo, where Lev Nikolaevich achieves his abiding goal of outweighing the world and defeating

death. Astapovo is the culmination of two series, life and art, just as "Symbol Embodied" is the culminating norm of the creative and cognitive series in Bely's "Emblematics of Meaning," written the year before Tolstoy's death.¹

Why, we might ask, does Tolstoy require such a culminating moment? Do his celebrated accomplishments, literary and otherwise, really demand this sort of redemption: the death (if only in worldly terms) of their creator? Bely believes they do, and the bulk of his analysis is devoted to the theme of incompleteness in Tolstoy. Tolstoy's form is inadequate to his content; his philosophy, his sociology, and even his art are muddled; and he is generally unable to fulfill the requirements of any single field of human endeavour. Thus, while we may praise Tolstoy, we never really know on what grounds. The problem, according to Bely, is that there *are* no such grounds, at least not in this world. And so much the worse . . . for the world. The only true terms of praise for Tolstoy are that he succeeded in outweighing the world: success *within* the world can only be failure, while the "failures" of *War and Peace* serve ultimately to indicate the infinite ambitions of Tolstoy's genius, a genius that was never realized—*could* never be realized—in a mere work of art, much less in a reader or sermon. Only silence (Kutuzov's and then Tolstoy's), and the final gesture of departure, can outweigh the world.

This is the thrust of Bely's argument: the incommensurable facets of Tolstoy form a jumble when looked at from *this* world, but their coexistence can inspire us to imagine *another* world in which they are whole. It is the same sort of world where parallel lines meet. Tolstoy himself, then, is a symbol in Bely's favourite sense: an unexpected juxtaposition that hints at transcendence. He shares this distinction, we learn, with two of

Bely's other favourite authors, Vladimir Solovyov and Friedrich Nietzsche.

In fact, one might suspect that in this essay Lev Tolstoy serves primarily as a logo for Andrey Bely's favourite ideas. Tolstoy's flight, as described by Bely, appears to satisfy the description of *zhiznetvorchestvo*—the concept of "life-art" that so captivated Bely's generation, and that seems so alien to Tolstoy. As for incomplete, fragmentary art: that evaluation pertains much more clearly to Bely than to Tolstoy. Indeed, one scholar has asserted that in this essay's description of *War and Peace*, Bely "actually seems to be providing . . . a description of the evolving conception of his own novel, *Petersburg*."² Tolstoy speaks for Bely, then—and Bely speaks for Tolstoy: he cannot escape the spirit of "correcting" Tolstoy, of assuming that the great author needs an interpreter, or a spokesman, or someone to explain what he really meant or should have meant. This is tricky ground, with no clear indication where one author's territory ends and the other's begins.

There is, however, some justification in Tolstoy's novels for Bely's thesis, though Bely himself does not appeal to it explicitly. When he claims (directly) that Tolstoy was unable to express himself fully in words, Bely echoes Tolstoy's own descriptions of many of his favourite characters—for example, Pierre and Natasha in *War and Peace*, or Levin and Kitty in *Anna Karenina*. A highly developed facility with words, such as that possessed by Bilibin in *War and Peace*, often indicates a lack of deep commitment or even real meaning. We can therefore reconstruct Bely's point by saying that

- 1) Tolstoy is right, because
- 2a) the natural tendency of words, a tendency that has accelerated in modern times, is to subdivide meanings, vocabularies, and specialties, to the point where
- 2b) the deepest meanings slip through the cracks between these subdivisions, and
- 3) even so great a verbal artist as Tolstoy is unable to overcome this inherent limitation of worldly words.

Bely himself does not justify his argument on these grounds, but they are the common ground between his ideas and Tolstoy's work. The limitations of language in this world, and the concomitant necessity for truly meaningful action, are what allow Tolstoy to find transcendent significance in Levin's mowing, and Bely to find it in Tolstoy's flight from the earth.

1. "Emblematika smysla," *Simvolizm: Kniga*. (Moscow: Musaget, 1910), pp. 49-143. The article has also been translated: "The Emblematics of Meaning," *Selected Essays of Andrey Bely*, ed., tr. Steven Cassedy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 111-197. See also Cassedy's excellent introductory essay in that volume.

2. Manus Ljunggren, *The Dream of Rebirth: a Study of Andrej Belyj's Novel Petersburg* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wicksell International, 1982), 31

Andrei Bely's (Boris Nikolaevich Bugaev's) *Leo Tolstoy and Culture*

Published 1912 in the collection of articles
On Leo Tolstoy's Religion [О религии Льва Толстого]

Translation and annotation

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Some maintain that Leo Tolstoy was a brilliant artist. They hold that all his preaching during his final decades bore nothing but pathetic fruits. Others maintain just the opposite: they claim that the universal and historical significance of this individual Leo Tolstoy lay in his ability to sacrifice his artistic genius in the name of religious truth. This individual grew, as it were, in direct proportion to the degree that Leo Tolstoy rejected his own individuality. All these critics, however, acknowledge a crisis in the middle of his writing career. One half of the soul of a great man lived, acted, and created and then suddenly it was no more: half the soul disappeared. And during the last decades, another half of the author's soul wrote, lived, and acted. The soul, however, is indivisible, so the stamp of inanimateness, of lifelessness, should have been observable in either the first or the second half of Tolstoy's life.

Is this, indeed, the case?

One could argue long and hard with the adherents of Tolstoy the artist, those who deny the greatness of the second half of his life, but there is something in this argument that should give one pause: despite his artistic powers, the creator of *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace* could not manage to create his own personal life with the same vigor and convincingness with which he sculpted before us the imaginary life of his heroes

—fictional characters who seem so much more real to the collective consciousness of humanity than the life of any real, living, average person.

Cursing culture, he remained within culture; rejecting the State, he never left it—where could he have gone? All his deliberations about the authentic life of labour were deliberations about some imaginary life, one unfeasible within the framework of the present political system.

On one side of the scales rests Russia, England, France and others—Japan, Morocco, India, all the countries of the world that are at the mercy of the natural development of capital, civilization, the State; and on the other side of the scales should have been Leo Tolstoy himself. Despite all his condemnations of the principles of its development, the terrestrial globe was little perturbed by Tolstoy. Leo Tolstoy argued that his concept of justice ought to outweigh the earthly, quotidian stagnation that covers the entirety of the world. “Just try and tip the scales,” they answered.

Having rejected private property, Tolstoy never completely left it. Denying the conventions of civilization, he was hemmed in from all sides by these conventions, and to such an extent that it sometimes appeared that the very civilization against which he rebelled took advantage of him to further its own goals. It seemed he protested against everyone, and his words rang out in the corners of the world carried by . . . the telephone wire. Moreover, we all saw this protest . . . on the movie screen, where we saw him trudging behind the plow.

Leo Tolstoy wanted to suffer for the truths he preached, but never found a way to do so. At a time when someone who merely imagined a different political system was sent to the icy reaches of the Narymsky territory,¹ he—the

enemy of any and all governments, both old and new—remained in full view of the world at Iasnaia Poliana, as though illuminated from all five corners of the world by the floodlights of the very civilization he rejected. “Can you really shoulder the entire terrestrial sphere?” he was asked by the Europeans, the Americans, the Asians, and the Australians. And the sense of all the teachings, preaching, allegories and parables lead to one answer: “I can.” “Just you go ahead and try,” answered the world. Tolstoy stood his ground and, indeed, it seemed as though he tried to do precisely what the world dared him to do. Communes of Tolstoyans appeared on the banks of the Black Sea;² the Doukhobors eventually made it to Canada.³ Was this the answer the whole world awaited? If so, it was a meager reply. Better not to have answered at all than with the Tolstoyans and their communes.

But Tolstoy got to his feet and set off, abandoning culture and the State. He set off into the airless expanse, into some new dimension hidden from us. And since we do not know the trajectory of his path, it seems to us that Tolstoy has died, when in fact he has really just disappeared from our field of vision. Instead of death, let us call it Tolstoy's departure: we know that his death is not death, but a resurrection. His action brings new meaning to the notion of insolence. He must be either Antichrist or a new hero. He rose to his feet and said, “I will now tip the scales of justice, outweighing all of Europe, Australia, Asia, Africa and America. You will soon see me with the terrestrial sphere square on my shoulders.” He bent over, touched his hand to the ground, and fell dead. We know, though, that this death is not real.

It must have taken great moral fortitude to postpone for so many years his long-planned withdrawal from the world, and then to set off, as an octogenarian elder, on a journey through death. Death will imperceptibly overtake us all. We are all either fleeing death or seeking it without having lived our allotted span. Tolstoy did not flee death, and it would be even less true to say that he sought it. With a wise smile, he awaited death for decades so that, espying it from afar, he could stand up in the face of all the world and pass through death.

This act made the whole world gasp, yet it was the product of the gradual growth of Tolstoy's personality precisely during those long years when the choir that sang the praises of Tolstoy the artist reproachfully fell silent when confronted by Tolstoy the man. In the experience of silence, in ascetic practice, Tolstoy the man grew just as the censure rang out against his preachifying feebleness. It has long seemed to us that Tolstoyism consists of essentially reciting truisms and commonplaces about how good is good and evil is evil. It has long seemed to us all that the conclusions drawn from these truths are nothing more than the folly of an old man played out in the face of the whole world. And we have long declared Tolstoy's path to be one of creative feebleness. But in the end, this feebleness proved to be his titanic strength as he traversed death. The words that seemed so simple and inartistic proved to be not so simple, and the invisible rays of a light of higher beauty illuminated what had seemed so inartistic. Now, at the end of his career as a preacher, we excuse the beginning of his preaching that had once seemed to us to be feeble. The purposeless purposefulness of all those commonplace truths, moralizing, sermons, and parables proved to be the fulfillment of the purpose he had set for himself: to overcome death. Having accomplished this goal, his artistic barrenness was made fruitful by rays of light cast from his being.

Thus erred the supporters of Leo Tolstoy the artist, those who denied in him the great announcer of the religious growth of the individual. But perhaps they erred as well in the first part of their judgment about Tolstoy. Was the brilliant profundity of his artistic creations really and truly so inarguable? Do they love him for his art? Is that why one ought to love him? Four times now I have pored over *War and Peace*, and each time I have been amazed by details that I had never before noticed. For me, *War and Peace* exists as four totally dissimilar novels.

When I read it as a child, what struck me was the all-encompassing scope of events depicted by Tolstoy. The calm contours of his characters passed before me in the events of Alexander's time. *War and Peace* seemed like a huge reflec-

tive lake into which Russia itself was peering, and I experienced the novel as an epos.

The second time I set out to read *War and Peace* was after Merezhkovsky's research,⁴ and the peaceful fabric of the narrative seemed to be woven together from lyric vortices created by infinitesimally small events in the work. It was a storm of the finest and most subjective experiences heaped one upon the next, and the sum of these experiences formed the peaceful contour of the novel. What had seemed to be a smooth and glassy lake turned out to be covered by furiously churning waves, and only the great dimensions of the lake and its distance hid the size of these lyric waves. What from afar seemed to be a peaceful narrative was covered by the froth and thunder of raging elements.

The third time I returned to *War and Peace* was around two years ago, and I was again amazed. The main characters of the novel, the hidden recesses of their souls, seemed to be symbols of the some providential characteristics of the Russian soul. The heterogeneity of the events and characters in the novel seemed to me to be the heterogeneity of the soul of Leo Tolstoy. I sank into that soul as into a deep sea, and could see neither the epos of my youthful perception of the novel, nor the psychological lyricism of my second reading. The lyricism seemed more than mere lyricism: in the most subjective of moments I saw everywhere a trans-subjective sense.

Finally, this year I once again carefully reread the Tolstoy's brilliant work, and it struck me from an entirely new angle. In the prosaic deliberations about war, in the character of Kutuzov as the ideal of the national hero, I saw once again an entirely new profundity. Kutuzov seemed to me to be the concentration of all the epic, lyric and symbolic threads of the novel. A coloured rainbow of creative experience was combined in him, and these colours combined to produce the one white ray of Tolstoy's own life. The inarticulateness, the dumbness and the seeming simplicity of Kutuzov seemed to me to be a symbol of Tolstoy himself during the second period of his career. This simplicity proved to be only the transparency of an abyss, just as the seemingly witless teachings of Tolstoy turned out to be profound. The sum of

these teachings was *his blinding demise*. Tolstoy's novel became richer and deeper with every reading, and now, when I'm asked about *War and Peace*, my emotional excess leaves me speechless. The genius of Tolstoy the artist is, for me, the genius of Tolstoy who is more than an artist. With artistic genius alone Tolstoy could not have given us such a *wise symbol* as *War and Peace*.

Whenever I hear the calm truisms about Tolstoy's genius—voiced in a tone that we usually reserve for speaking about the weather—I simply refuse to believe that his genius has really penetrated the consciousness of the ordinary person. What gets repeated are the truths read in the respected thick journals, and if these respected thick journals had instead described Tolstoy's novel as pale and drawn-out, then the calm truisms about Tolstoy the artist's genius would not ring out with an irritating persistence from apathetic mouths.

The genius of Tolstoy the artist is, for me, inarguable. But what right do I have to turn my personal delight into an inarguable claim? If the Hottentots and the Chukchi were to join the Australians and the Japanese in praising Tolstoy, the universality of this recognition would still not be the same as absolute truth. If we turn to the competent court of the few and the select, then we find disagreement about Tolstoy the artist. The deceased Vladimir Solovyov, whose artistic taste I cannot doubt, expressed an opinion of Tolstoy's novels quite at odds with public opinion. "In frank discussions with his friends, he (Solovyov) admitted that *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* left him bored."^{*} What is more, Tolstoy—at least in his second period—would have agreed with Solovyov. In any case, there is nothing ridiculous in Solovyov's judgment, and it leads one to gloomy

* Prince Evgenii Trubetskoi, "The Life of V. S. Solovyov" («Личность В. С. Соловьёва») (Bely's note). [Bely refers to an article in the collection *On Vladimir Solovyov* (О Владимир Соловьёве), published in Moscow by Put' (the publisher of *On Tolstoy's Religion*) in 1911. It contained articles by, *inter alia*, Blok, N. Berdiaev, Viacheslav Ivanov, and Sergei Bulgakov, who was also the editor of *On Tolstoy's Religion*.]

thoughts. The only ridiculous thing would be for anyone to laugh at the great Russian philosopher's verdict on Tolstoy's artistic career. The enthusiasm shared by Turgenev and Dostoevsky for *War and Peace* stand in direct contrast to the entirely unenthusiastic opinion of Solovyov and Tolstoy himself. Merezhkovsky, in principle, and many prelates of the Church shared this far from enthusiastic attitude. The rebellion by an artist of genius against his own works does not, in principle, merit serious consideration, all the more so because another great Russian writer would have agreed to some extent with Tolstoy: Gogol. Fortunately, Tolstoy couldn't burn *War and Peace*, though Gogol succeeded in reducing his *Dead Souls* to ashes.

By claiming that Tolstoy is a brilliant artist, we essentially try to break down an unlocked door. Such an action is of questionable merit. If we bear in mind that in the mouths of Leo Tolstoy's enemies the mention of his artistic accomplishments is simultaneously the piquant salt with which they season their abuse of him, then the desire for rhetorical praise of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* disappears. Praise serves merely to obscure the problem of impartially studying a question: Why did Tolstoy give up being an artist? Praising Tolstoy's art to the detriment of his personal life actually means reducing his achievements as a writer to zero. And for that very reason, upon hearing the banal claims about the virtues of Tolstoy the artist, we recall, on the one hand, the criticisms of these virtues by Vladimir Solovyov and, on the other, we recall the time when Tolstoyism was all the rage. There is something negative that underlies the praising of Tolstoy's artistic talent, and we see in it a certain cowardly haste to solve the Tolstoy question, as a mere pretext, with the treacherous and deliberate goal of putting Tolstoy back on the shelf so as to return, as quickly as possible, to the daily grind. The opposed opinion concerning Russia's great writer suffers from the same sort of inflexible, over-simplified way of thinking. According to this way of thinking, the meaning of Tolstoy's career lies in the sum of all the moral words he pronounced from behind the plow. I recall that at one time the newspapers gossiped about the visit to

Iasnaia Poliana by the French journalist, Paul Déroulède.⁵ Upon arriving at Iasnaia Poliana, he set off to the field to watch Tolstoy plow. The great plowman kept on plowing, so the well-known Frenchman—I imagine him irreproachably dressed—had to march through the clods of black earth while jotting down every chance reply Tolstoy made to his words. There is really something ridiculous about this scene—obviously the French journalist marching through the newly-plowed furrows is ridiculous, but even more ridiculous was the famous plowman who refused to tear himself away from the plow for even five minutes to spend some time with an interesting guest. We find in this scene a symbolic plowing: before a representative of the world—a world which Tolstoy condemned, a world covered by the moldiness of civilization—Tolstoy was breaking the ground of this terrestrial sphere with the steel blade of his truth. If this thought were not at that very moment in Tolstoy's soul he would not have continued his capricious task with such deliberate indifference. Had Paul Déroulède appeared together with representatives of the entire world (writers, scientists, kings) before Leo Tolstoy, he would not have ceased his symbolic activity. In this example, he is really nothing more than a caricature of himself.

For those who believe that the very meaning of Leo Tolstoy's work is connected with his proselytizing to *urbi et orbi* for the last few decades, the ridiculousness of the Tolstoyan plow remains unseen. They probably naively believed that Paul Déroulède was only the first of many swallows. After the newspapers reported on how Paul Déroulède had *walked behind the plow*, this group, in all likelihood, hoped that once the other writers of the world had mounted this tribune especially built for them to watch Tolstoy's plowing, they would leave off merely watching through binoculars and would instead trudge behind the plow like Tolstoy. If Paul Déroulède had walked behind the plow, why not Ibsen, Sudermann,⁶ Maeterlink and D'Annunzio? For years, a pilgrimage to Iasnaia Poliana has seemed more a pilgrimage to Tolstoy's plow than to Tolstoy himself. From a distance, Tolstoy seemed at best an appendage to his own plow, a cheap

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preacher, of this most eloquent artist of the word, amazed us. His inarticulateness, though, was later transformed into the extreme clarity that characterized his maxims. This clarity was a sign that the artist who stood silent before us had learned to master his forced artistic silence. These maxims later turned into the eloquent silence of the notorious *Circle of Reading*.⁷ It is as clear as a bell to us how the idea to compile *The Circle of Reading* occurred to Tolstoy. Having stripped the root-idea of his creative genius of all the flowers and petals—which seemed to him to be unnecessary but which were what truly constituted his personal authority—Tolstoy saw revealed not a reflection of his own individuality, but only the outline of an idea. What he wanted to see, though, was a quintessence, not a mere outline. The outline of the ideas in Tolstoy's work was then revealed to be the outline of an entire series of such ideas that had already been individually pronounced by the sages of all times and nations. Tolstoy was obviously aware of the power that lay in these individual pronouncements, but he was only dimly aware of his own powerlessness to speak outside of his given artistic individuality. Having realized that there was a certain lack of clarity in his own maxims, the great artist of the word began to diligently decorate his books of maxims with the flowers of others. Tolstoy decked his withering root, which was uselessly jutting from the earth, with garlands made of flowers he found elsewhere. (All the while, he scrupulously and studiously picked off from the root his own flowers.) These strangers' flowers, however, plucked as they were from the roots that nourished them, wilted pointlessly on the root of Tolstoy's preaching. The necessity of adorning his maxims with aphorisms from Confucius, Buddha and Schopenhauer was the great crisis of Tolstoy's last decades. Tolstoy's crisis was his inability to see his failings as a preacher. In his desire to correct this shortcoming, Tolstoy the preacher fell silent, crushed by *The Circle of Reading*.

The Circle of Reading turned out to be not a sunny circle but the circle of the sun, drawn on a piece of paper, and such a circle was nothing more than a geometric figure. It would be naive to see in this circle a corona of light rays. But when

Tolstoy was compiling this *Circle*—he would draw the sun on the paper with his pen—he likely hallucinated and saw a sunbeam emanating from the prosaic circumference of the figure he had drawn.

Tolstoy's friends made this same mistake when they saw the importance of his life in these sermons emanating from Iasnaia Poliana and racing around the globe. *The Circle of Reading* was the quintessence of all of these sermons; it was the silence of Tolstoy himself, the silent recognition of the crisis in his own preachifying personality. Tolstoy began by pronouncing his own, Tolstoyan word about the true life. He then began to quote others, and Tolstoy the preacher finally dissolved into these quotations. "Lev Nikolaevich, what do you think about such and such?" would resound voices from all corners of the earth. In response, the customary answer from Iasnaia Poliana was "Buddha says . . . Confucius says . . . Schopenhauer says . . . Thus spoke (of all people!) Henry George . . . So say the school boys, and the peasant says such and such . . ." Tolstoy's sermons often came down to the recommendation of some anonymous peasant. Many of Tolstoy's "mouths" appeared in the pages of journals thick and thin. Thus Tolstoy the preacher was replaced by dozens of Tolstoy-patented peasants, repentant *intelligents*, students, and sectarians. *The Circle of Reading* broadened into a circle of chattering people. Tolstoy meanwhile zealously commented upon all of this bleak palaver about how the world was bad because it promoted science, art, culture and government, etc. This circle of chattering people finally began to build villages. Tolstoy, though, never settled in these villages. He went on commenting on his own thoughts and those of others.

It is obvious that the preacher in him fell silent.

More than once the means of artistic representation have been referred to as a butterfly. For some time, Fet's moniker as the poet of butterflies compromised his muse in the eyes of the Russian public—a public that busied itself with anything, even peeling potatoes, but never with a frivolous collection of butterflies. The frivolousness of a bunch of fluttering butterflies of art is perhaps not

so frivolous—it is, in fact, quite fruitful when one considers that these same frivolous butterflies, attracted by the colourfulness of petals and by their fragrance, carry fertilizing pollen among the flowers. The butterfly, the petal, and the floral perfume of art are the conditions necessary for the fruit of the future to ripen—fruit that will eventually fall to the ground with its many seeds. And were it not for the petals, butterflies and smell of flowers, the many truths that were contained in seeds would never have interwoven our Russian soil with its philosophical roots. Often enough, what underlies the rejection of the poetic means of representation is a narrow lack of foresight.

The potential for moral and religious ideas, variously conceived, is contained in the very butterflies and flowers of Tolstoy's creative work, through these butterflies and flowers that at first seem devoid of serious ideas. In Tolstoy's sermons, however, one finds a dull and far from complete enumeration of these very same ideas. Among the adherents of Tolstoy the prophet, this enumeration takes on the repellent form of a catalogue. Tolstoy was sufficiently protected from Tolstoyism if only by his *Circle*. In this sense, Tolstoy's *Circle of Reading* was less a geometric figure and more a circular shield that was produced by Tolstoy's silence at precisely the place where Tolstoyism shook the foundations of the old world with its eloquent, but ultimately empty . . . twaddle.

We have touched on the two sides of the career of a great Russian writer, two halves of his bifurcated soul. This bifurcation manifests itself in the complete sunderance into two, mutually antagonistic camps of supporters.

One camp asserts the importance of Tolstoy the artist, though Tolstoy is more than merely an artist. The second camp supports Tolstoy the preacher, and this camp is entirely incorrect: Tolstoy is more than a preacher.

If he is neither preacher nor artist, then who is Tolstoy? He is either not a preacher or not an artist, or perhaps he is both together. In the first case, his creative impotence, being the result of a failure of will, would undermine the meaning of Tolstoy's entire career. And the great Tolstoy would be . . . merely a *great failure*. If, on the

other hand, he were both preacher and artist, Tolstoy would be an unheralded event in a new history, for he would represent a breakdown of scales of value, whereas it is only within these definite boundaries that human activity of any sort possesses significance.

If some lunatics were to appear who absurdly rejected Tolstoy's great importance in the history of our society's development, we would respond with a disdainful silence. Nonetheless, this disdain would be a bit unfair, since the rejection of Tolstoy's activities would have some validity.

Every piece of creation requires embodiment, and the growth of a person's life is judged by those around him according to the fruits of this growth. Creative products are just such fruits. The criterion for judging all creative works is the harmony of the form with the content of the creating soul. Every creative work is content presented in a definite form. The more definite the form, the clearer the content becomes. Furthermore, the form of an artistic work is really just thoroughly embodied content. Only by comprehending artistic form in such a way does the paradox of believing that the sense of works of art is in their form, and only in their form, become deeper. The ability to verbally embody the richness of some moving subject matter really represents a mastery of subject matter itself. On the other hand, the inability to find a form of expression for some stage of internal development means that it is impossible to speak of the overcoming of this stage to achieve the next, deeper and more substantial stage. When we plunge into the ineffableness of our personality, we are all more or less geniuses. The genius that is native to all of us is simply the indissoluble individualism of every person. Whatever differentiates a given Peter from all other Peters in the world is, potentially, Peter's specific genius. In that sense, we are all geniuses.

Genius in science, art, or public life is genius of another kind. It is, so to speak, productive genius. This sort of genius is connected to precise and distinctive expression of reality through word, formula, or gesture. To recognize precisely and intelligibly what it is within me that makes me different from every other being in the surround-

ing world; to arrange the material of sounds, colours, formulae, gestures and words so that the irrational depths of my individuality become the norm for the construction of my particular world—such is the task of the creative genius: that which is the most individual and the ultimate in him becomes the universal starting-point for the world he creates. Once this world is embodied in some creation, the creator's personality explodes: the most individual point of this personality, having been objectified in art, becomes the least individual part of an individual recognized anew. Hence begins another period of creative searching, until it too is crowned with a victory over the most individual element.

This process of incarnation, of taking what is most individual and making it into something that is embodied through creative work and released into culture at large, presupposes that the artist has fully assimilated and mastered the individual contents of his own stage of development. Does the artistic work of Lev Tolstoy possess this formal mastery?

Tolstoy's novels are immense in scope, by which I mean both their sheer size and their content. When we survey these novels, though, we are immediately struck by their incompleteness, especially by their unfinished proportions. We see a series of completed scenes, one after another, which are communicated in a truly brilliant form. In his depiction of the minutest movements of souls of Pierre Bezukhov and Andrei, we see an astonishing treatment of discrete details of the overall subject matter of *War and Peace*. Obviously, the most individual psychology of each character in the novel coalesces into one immense edifice of the human soul, for every element stands in one-to-one relation with the other: the pangs of birth experienced by the little princess (Bolkonsky's wife), and Anatole's amputated leg merge with the chunks of human flesh on the fields of Borodino. Prince Andrei's search for meaning and value in life merges with Pierre Bezukhov's search for the same in Freemasonry and later in Platon Karataev's words and deeds. Be it Andrei's transfer from headquarters to Field Forces or Pierre's apocalyptic kabbalism and numerology, each of these individual and separate

pearls produced by Tolstoy the artist are really atoms of a single form. Out of these separate pearls, according to Tolstoy's plan, a seamless whole of *War and Peace* should coalesce. The overall sum of these moments forms an integral sculptural relief that depicts a soul searching for meaning against a background of the events of the Russian experience. This structural relief is absent, however, in *War and Peace*. In its stead we find something akin to a jigsaw puzzle: we see on one piece the hand of a soldier in battle, there a helmet, there a saber in the hand of a soldier in a different uniform—and we can predict the eventual image of the unfinished puzzle, saying that the picture obviously depicts a battle between two enemy soldiers.

Everywhere in Tolstoy we find magnificent scenes from Russian daily life, of Russian aristocratic families, of the Court, of the battlefield and the commander's tent. We know that all of these moments and scenes are moments of one greater, single scene called *War and Peace*. Where, though, is the integrality of this brilliantly conceived scene so brilliantly executed in thousands of minute details? The structure of *War and Peace* stands before us still in the creative forest. The collective soul of the Russian people, splintered by Tolstoy into the sum of his struggling and suffering heroes, fails to emerge in *War and Peace*. There is no natural point of architectonic unity and, in that sense, there is no composition. Rather there are a few points that are plotted out and meant to symbolize the entire structure: Platon Karataev, Kutuzov, to some extent Pierre Bezukhov. The diverse streams of Tolstoyan creativity in *War and Peace* flow together into one point, it is all there, each moment better than the next, and you await the confluence of the heterogeneity of means into one united, final end. And suddenly the end arbitrarily erupts into this brilliant novel as a scrupulous article about war. Meanwhile the means, the streams, the souls of the heroes, unexpectedly disappear, for you are left unsatisfied by Natasha, Pierre, and Nikolai Rostov as they are depicted in the final chords of the novel. It seemed to you that the majestic path of the novel would lead to an exquisite palace, and instead you are confronted with a roadblock, a

moralistic dissertation, which, no matter how profound, is nonetheless not art. The brilliantly assembled, complex construction is crowned not with a shining cupola but with . . . a thatch roof. Tolstoy's mortal enemies might reply "Much ado about nothing. . . ." It strikes me now that the main subject matter of *War and Peace* is the depiction of common daily life in Russia of that time, but I would also say, along with Merezhkovsky, that one likely finds the daily life of the Russian soul of all times. It further strikes me that in this depiction of daily, psychological life, Tolstoy was the first Russian artist of the word to recognize this daily life. In this sense, Tolstoy is a Columbus of sorts and to say otherwise is to gainsay the obvious. But if Tolstoy's main task had been only the discovery of a new America (which, by the way, he accomplished inadvertently), rather than searching for the *meaning* of this discovery—what then is the meaning of that long dissertation on war, and what are we to make of Kutuzov in the guise of some Buddhist sage who defeats Napoleon with the magic of his nirvana. Let us suppose that Tolstoy's main task had not been the artistic conception of the East-West problem, and let us suppose that the events of 1912, Natasha, and Andrei were nothing more than secondary means toward this task—in this case, what are we to make of the brilliant scope of the descriptions of the psychological particulars of the Russian soul? It would have been simpler to make *War and Peace* into a historical sketch, and not the immense, universal-historical, unfinished canvas that we have before us. I call this novel an unfinished canvas. Is it possible that the battle in Pierre Bezukhov's soul—his plans for a terrorist attack on Napoleon, his capture, his decision to adopt a simple life—all of it gets settled when he finds peace and the answer to his confusion under the heel of his wife, the once dazzling Natasha transformed into the coarse and plump Natalya Ilinichna? Can it really be that Tolstoy's task was to show how great human passion ends in vulgar, petit-bourgeois calm? And that the fate of all the Bezukhofs of the world is to become worthless freeloaders, and that all the Natashas are destined to perform only the natural, animal functions of copulation, reproduction, and nourishment? No,

no and no. The great diviner of the human soul fell silent at this point—the general aim of *War and Peace* is really purposefulness without a purpose: It is not the art of religion or enlightenment, rather a peculiar, conscious asceticism. It is in the peculiar fate of Natalya Ilinichna that we can see for certain that Tolstoy fell silent because he was unable to say what he wanted, and not that he fell silent because he had said his piece. Her fate is repeated in all the Natashas of his later work—she turns into Anna Karenina and eventually into the heroine of *The Kreutzer Sonata*.

In this sense, the form of Leo Tolstoy's work is inadequate to its contents. And it is in the incomplete mastery of form that we espy his inner battle as an artist. We do not encounter such a battle in Pushkin's works, nor in Goethe's. The refined, classical artist was constitutionally alien to Tolstoy. This type of artist, though, is the most perfect kind. Were Tolstoy to have completed his huge artistic canvas, were he to have aligned all the various details of his architectonics into a compositional unity, he would have taken his place in the age above all the Sophocleses, Goethes, and Shakespeares, for even in his imperfect creations he, like Ibsen and Dostoevsky, rose to the level of some of these. But, in the final analysis, Tolstoy was a failed artist because he was an artist who failed to master form.

Tolstoy's failure to master form might be of a dual nature: it may arise from a lack of technical mastery or from the enormity of the contents. Well, of course, this lack of mastery of form is attributable to the massiveness of the subject matter. Even when he was still an artist, Tolstoy was already not an artist. He was part preacher from his earliest days.

His artistic crisis is understandable.

Having become a preacher, though, Tolstoy failed to meet some of the essential characteristics of a brilliant preacher. There are two kinds of sermons: those that are expressed in the practical actions of a person's life, and those that are expressed in words. The sermon expressed in Tolstoy's life, to the very last day of his life, contradicted the sermon he preached. He chased after, lashed out at, and denied culture; he rejected government; and all the while, he remained part of

culture and part of government. A verbal sermon either directly ignites its flame or it succeeds by dint of its logical conclusions. Tolstoy's articles, lessons and parables failed to light any fires. As for logic—at present, the sermon that persuades through logic is suited for only specialized pulpits. The logical structure of Tolstoyism may well be sound, but it is not sound solely on the grounds of logic.

Repudiating art, logic, and science, Tolstoy lacked the necessary qualities of a religious preacher. His words failed to light a real flame. Tolstoy's most clearly expressed religion is entirely rationalistic, and rationalism and religion are *contradictio in adiecto*. It would seem that either authentic religious experience was foreign to Tolstoy, or else that his experience was even less effectively expressed in words than his art. Judging by the fact that Tolstoy could find no better means for expressing his religious experience than the scrupulous selection of others' words (*The Circle of Reading*), it might be said that Tolstoy's personal sermon ended in crisis.

Two crises separate Tolstoy from the many decades of his artistic career: first he failed to express his truth as an artist, and later he failed to proclaim that truth to the world in a sermon. How can we not call Leo Tolstoy a *great failure* if we define his career by its accomplishments?

But the great truth behind Tolstoy's flight from Iasnaia Poliana, that singular feat which anyone with eyes was expecting, like some religious portent, makes us see in Tolstoy something more than an artist and preacher. With this great truth, Leo Tolstoy truly began to communicate with us.

All of his artistic works might well be religious thunderclaps and clamor, like the works of the Old Testament prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. After Christ though, the prophets were superseded. Therefore the religious truth in Tolstoy's works, the very thing lifts them out of any known framework, is made up of deaf and dumb heat lightning that illuminates, from time to time, the subconscious depth of the souls of all the Prince Andreis, the Bezukhovs, and the Nekhliudovs. (It is significant that *Resurrection* begins with an incomparable description of a spring storm.) In

Tolstoy's work,

Bolts of summer lightning,
Igniting, one and then the next,
Like demons, deaf and dumb,
Converse among themselves.
(Tiutchev)⁸

As an artist, Tolstoy was a deaf and dumb prophet. The prophet vainly tried to convey his message through art, and art fell silent in the prophet.

When the prophet began to speak in sermons, the pointlessness of prophesying became apparent. The prophetic type is a character from the Old Testament: until Christ, all the prophets were prophets of the Word. But the Word has already been embodied, it has become flesh, though Tolstoy denied the authenticity of this embodiment. He did so because he wanted to become a prophet. Tolstoy did not begin to prophesy out of pride or self-assuredness—he sincerely believed that it was his mission, never suspecting that this very mission had been rendered unnecessary by Christ. For this reason the words about the "Truth become Flesh" took on such an abstract meaning for Tolstoy. In trying to attract, he distracted, finally he was distracted from his own abstractness, and Tolstoy the prophet in effect fell silent.

"A thought uttered is a lie."⁹

He knew this truth, just as he knew that his entire prolix life was only an experiment in silence. And when he understood this, he set off to die, but death eluded him. And for the first time the ray of an enormous religious event shone through Tolstoy to light up Russia for an instant. For an instant, Tolstoy was an authentic break in the clouds that loom on the horizons of our lives.

Who, then, is Tolstoy?

When it comes to the hierarchy of existing autonomous values of art, science, philosophy, and public interest, Leo Tolstoy could not fit into the strictly defined categories, the sum of which forms the criterion of our judgments of value. This hierarchy of values reminds me of a city that is based on a grid, with rows of parallel streets intersected now and then by avenues. The city symbolizes the theoretically significant directions

in the development of the arts, of science, and of philosophy. If I take A Street, I'll never reach B Street. Proclaiming myself as an artist, I create significant works in the category of art, knowing that it is henceforth impossible for me to create anything significant in philosophy. In this city of culture, there are rows of parallel and non-intersecting streets of art, science, and philosophy. There might be, from time to time, permitted passages from one street to another, but there are no plazas into which all the streets run. From that point of view, Stefan George¹⁰ is more an artist than Leo Tolstoy since the former satisfies more of the methodological requirements of pure art, and the fulfillment of these requirements is the only principle that is used to judge the aesthetic merits of a work. Tolstoy is more than just an artist, and therefore he is less than an artist, at least within the framework of aesthetics. On the basis of these same judgments, Rickert¹¹ is a better philosopher and Virchow¹² is a better scientist. So far as contemporary theory of values is concerned, any pure poet of flimsy rhymes, any mediocre junior university lecturer, and any commonplace sociologist will find himself a place in the abovementioned schools. In this sense, the activity of a poet, a scientist, or a sociologist is, by definition, something valuable, while Tolstoy's activities are seen as worthless, and perhaps invaluable. The great significance that one feels so clearly in Tolstoy's life remains undefined within the framework of contemporary art, philosophy, science, public interest, and political affairs. The point where Tolstoy's various pursuits interconnect lies outside the boundaries of the city. It is unrealizable, and in that sense, it seems useless. Tolstoy's most valuable contribution turns out to be his spiritual exaltation. Of course, no modern philosopher—who would naturally reject Tolstoy as a philosopher—would say this. He would, as they say now, orient Tolstoy in art, just as an art critic reading a lecture on George's artistic composition would likely fail to find any such artistic composition in Tolstoy works and would, instead, "orient" him somewhere other than in aesthetics, probably in philosophy, but only because the art critic is no philosopher. If one were to meet three professors—one of sociology, one of art criticism,

one of philosophy—each would try to foist Tolstoy on the other. All three would admit his importance, but the philosopher would claim that the importance of Tolstoy lies in aesthetics while the art critic would claim that Tolstoy's importance was for sociology, and the sociologist would claim that Tolstoy was important as a philosopher. So all three reject Tolstoy and palm him off on religion. But we know how Tolstoy felt about religious leaders: in a literal sense of the word they rid themselves of him, chased him beyond the pale of religion. Therefore, Tolstoy stands before us as some kind of *Eternal Jew*, a restless exile from all settled ways of life in contemporary culture and government. The white ray that combines these cultural pathways, given the impossibility of a point where the paths intersect, is ultraviolet, not visible to the eye, which is to say black light. In the parameters of present culture, the great Tolstoy is Tolstoy the Black.

I admit that I have laid it on thick in this portrait. The intelligentsia everywhere accepts Tolstoy, but this acceptance is from the heart rather than from cultural consciousness. When it comes to theoretical questions, the heart is silent and therefore Tolstoy's acceptance by the world is only an understandable but unjustified instance of the logical inconsistency of *this world*.

Tolstoy was too great a figure in the nineteenth century; the logic of the contemporary world sometimes grows dim in the blinding light of his praise, a praise *in spite of everything*. If logic is forced to spare Leo Tolstoy from time to time (for if logic refused to spare him, it would risk being overthrown by the world it rules), it sternly refuses to spare those who seem to the contemporary world to be less notable. Its relatively just verdict has been brought against Nietzsche. Who is Nietzsche? A poet? No, not a poet. Is he purely a scholar? Even less so. A philosopher? What kind of philosopher was he? He had not even mastered Kant. The red ray of suffering shining upon *Crucified Dionysus* turns out to be ultraviolet, that is to say a black light. Nietzsche ends up outside the cultural pale. On the same basis, Vladimir Solovyov also finds himself beyond the pale, since he is not a pure philosopher: his metaphysics are logically frail, his poetry

is technically frail, and his mysticism is open to attack by religion. Making matters worse, there is no basis on which to defend Solovyov against these claims of weakness. Husserl and Cohen seem to me to be more logically right than Solovyov, and not only Husserl and Cohen, but their Russian disciples as well. And any modern adolescent has a greater mastery of poetic structure than Solovyov. And when it comes to his mysticism . . . well, open any old-fashioned Church mystic and, in comparison, Solovyov seems . . . like a reprehensible dilettante. Today, the names of Tolstoy, Nietzsche and Vladimir Solovyov are all well regarded, but only because they have departed: *de mortuis aut bene aut nihil*.¹³ Their "lack of content" is shamefully hushed up. The pursuits of the living are subjected to a cultural rout all the more devastating. Just listen to what they say about Merezhkovsky and V. Ivanov.* "Merezhkovsky is neither poet nor artist nor preacher. He is nothing more than a unsophisticated publicist." In art circles, they oppose him, correctly insofar as their own criteria are concerned, to the aesthetically more refined. . . bagatelles of Kuzmin.¹⁴ In circles where philosophy reigns, they rightly compare him to the first graduate student they come upon. In religious circles, he is unfavourably compared to any parson. Ranks of the most sincere and suffering people end up out of reach, with no place *in this world* and its autonomous, nonintersecting avenues of philosophy, science, art, and so forth.

Those things that trouble us most as human beings are considered harmful and muddled—like jumbled *patchwork fields*. The person who dwells on the meaning of life is likewise seen as a *patchwork field*. *This world* professes something *inhuman*. It is another question entirely whether it professes something superhuman or subhuman. In the latter case, the universal State of autonomous and parallel values oddly resembles the Approaching Beast, arising from the waters.

Irrespective of their various convictions,

* I refer here only to rebukes of the artistic form and device in their works, not to judgments concerning the substance of the ideas that they propagate. (Bely's note)

professions, or personalities, a whole group of people turns out to be *Wandering Jews*. What unites them, what makes those of us who are not completely benumbed by *this age* hearken to them, is their argument for the meaning and rightness of a culture beyond the present one with its methodologically separated avenues. They are searching the world of culture for their own metropolis. But the cities of today are all the same: be it in Melbourne, Hong Kong, or Calcutta, or for that matter in Tsarevokokshaysk,¹⁵ they will not find what they have not found in Moscow, Petersburg, Paris, New York or London. For if today in Tsarevokokshaysk we do not find the contemporary cultural ideal (the network of parallel avenues), tomorrow this ideal will inescapably become reality.

The Metropolis Tolstoy sought, one that we all seek, is impossible in the world of contemporary culture, though it would be possible in a world of *another* culture, one that rejects the present. Tolstoy could not say his piece, neither as an artist nor as a preacher, because he sought the world of this Metropolis on the same plane as that of today's culture. One must seek it on either the plane above or the plane below. And since Tolstoy plowed his little scrap of earth on a *patchwork field* located at a place that does not now exist, but will be built by the culture of tomorrow, his words turned out to be not at all the words he really wanted to say.

He failed to understand one thing: we are all fated for silence.¹⁶ Our present day culture and nomenclature has splintered all the words and all the meanings that disquieted Tolstoy into thousands of shades of meaning. He spoke in a simple and direct manner, like a peasant, like a fool, and the authentic meaning of his words cannot be clearly understood. History has taught us the tendency of terms to change meaning. Previously they called the essence of all things *substance*; later it was called the basis of appearances; later yet, we were told that material was the basis of appearances; and then material turned out to be force and force turned out to be energy. What, then, is energy? Now, whenever we hear a statement about the *substantiality* of something or another, our first inclination is to ask what our

interlocutor what he means when he says *substance*. If the very meaning of specialized terms is splintered, then the meaning of the most ordinary, human words is even further splintered into a multiplicity of nomenclatures. Present day arguments are not about things of substance: indeed, we cannot even argue about the essence of things. Two camps are arguing about "*Logos*." One camp associates *Logos* with one reality, while the other camp associates it with a different reality. Both camps see the falsity of the *Logos* proposed by their enemy's system. We have been divided from one another by the parallelism that lies at the heart of the Babylon of our present culture. According to the map of this culture, a blind wall forever cuts me off from the currents of life that pass nearby. Going down the avenue of art, I have essentially the same experience as my brethren who walk beside me. However, if I were to proclaim aloud the results of my searching, those results would be distorted by the nomenclature of art, and a blind wall would separate me from those who are like me.

Tolstoy was not well versed in how nomenclatures affect communication and he directed his words at *this divided world*. His words were transmitted through this methodological prism, and they thereby took on a multiplicity of meanings. He was tormented by this multiplicity of meanings, but failed to understand that he himself was responsible. In the depths of his personal experience, Tolstoy stood at the point where several paths intersect and failed to realize that that this point had no place in the present culture. Culture redefined Tolstoy's unitary truth in the terms of diverse, methodological truths, and then it took Tolstoy to task for these truths and held him accountable for every nuance. For instance, Tolstoy's teaching about the humanness of Christ—as opposed to the divineness—was for Tolstoy, at least, something peripheral when compared to his own personal experience of Christ, about which he could say nothing. What he said about God might well have been at odds with what he knew intuitively. And thus he was excommunicated from the Church.¹⁷ What he said about art failed to convey a hundredth of his real understanding of what is art, and thus he was chased off

the avenue of contemporary aesthetics. He ended up chased away from everywhere and not so much because he was silent, but because he spoke. In his attempt to tell the untold, Tolstoy is in exile: here he is utterly beyond reach. He ended up being banished from this world. But the genuine meaning of Tolstoy's search, beyond the bounds of the present—Tolstoyan silence—connects all the world's exiles with him.

Those of us who search for the deepest, ultimate connection of thought and feeling, faith and science—we are all beyond the reach of the words and dealings of *this world*. *This world* will not heed us. In this world, we cannot express ourselves in words, not in maxims, not through our philosophical or scientific pursuits, not through civic deeds, but only through the real and tangible, a gesture of a departure. This real gesture, this religious sign, the only thing that justifies not only Tolstoy's denial of art but also his efforts as a preacher, is a departure.

Tolstoy departed. His demise lowered the curtain on the ultimate fate of his wandering. Had he fled ten years ago, we would have been witnesses to a new cycle in his search and, who knows, perhaps the destiny of future culture would already be worked out.

The wandering life is not a calm one. Leo Tolstoy wandered his entire life along the rectilinear boulevards of contemporary culture and State. Everywhere he dwelt on the cultural patchwork field, and he brought with him disorder and even scandal to the well-appointed boulevards of civilization. It was only during his final days, however, that he left on a real journey. If he had thought to find himself a peaceful place somewhere outside the city limits of this modern Babylon, he would never have had any luck. The city limits of Babylon are those of the horizon, for everywhere on the face of the earth you will find Babylon.

Tolstoy tried twice communicating through contradictory words: he traded the language of images for a language of preaching. Trying to use the language of images while preaching, he created for himself a *jumbled, patchwork field* of ideas; by putting these ideas in order and expressing them aloud, he created a *jumbled, patchwork*

field for others. Abandoning one untruth, he created another. Finally, he found that he could shake free from both untruths by abandoning every verbal confusion. His flight from the official Church, culture, the State, art and public affairs was a flight from *this world* by one of the greatest sons of this world. If he failed to conquer the world with either his words or his art, how can we hope to conquer the night that gathers around us?

But the fact that he has departed is a most important sign: It means there must be a place whither we, too, might go. If night besets us with all its horrors, then we need to create catacombs where we might feel safe where the flicker of the icon-lamp can illumine us. And thus, we should turn everything that seems to be a jumbled, patchwork field in our lives into passageways through our catacombs. Tolstoy's flight from the world is his only true teaching. But whither shall we go, if there are no catacombs? But, we each have a catacomb and it must be recognized, expanded, and turned into a meeting place. We are all, after all, outcasts: neither here nor there, neither in the pagan present, nor in the fading past, nor in the blinding future.

Understand: neither here, nor there,
'Tis our lot, cast from home.
The roosters crow, and crow again,
But dark remains the face of heaven.

Regardless of the differences in their world-views, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Vladimir Solovyov, Merezhkovsky—and the many others like them—are each transfixed by the insanity and horror of the present world. Nietzsche cursed the present; Tolstoy protested in deaf silence with his *Iasnaiia Poliana*; Vladimir Solovyov fussed over his theocratic utopia and, when he became disillusioned with it, began to predict a quick end to everything.¹⁸ Merezhkovsky tries fecklessly to reconcile the irreconcilable. They are all appanage princes of authentic culture, and how comical they are in their polemics against one another, considering that they are each equally misunderstood by the present culture. They tell the throng about the Bright Abode of the future that they have seen, but this throng thinks it's being fooled and chases

them beyond reach. Disunited and scattered, these appanage princes of pure Aryan culture perish one by one, struck down by the evil arrows of the invading barbarians. Can it really be that we, as weak and small as we are, will follow their example and waste our strength

... in clever,
Loud discussions,
And pointlessly noisy
Endless debates.

Would it not be better to forget this argument of *Slavs among themselves*, – a question that “they” will never solve? Would it not be better for us to follow Tolstoy's example, and shake off the dust of Babylon from our final words so that, in these final words, we can meet again beyond the boundaries of this Babylon? There, *in this world*, our quiet modest work will begin to flow, illumined by the prayer lamps in the catacomb.

Notes

My profound thanks to Prof. Tim Langen for all the useful advice he generously offered on this translation. Thanks also to Mrs. Anna Glavnova for her help.

1. A prison camp founded in the eighteenth century in the northern reaches of the Tomsk province. Among its inmates were Decembrists, participants in the Polish uprisings of 1830 and 1863, *narodniki*, and various representatives of revolutionary parties.

2. Tolstoyan communities were organized surprisingly early, the first dating to 1881 when N. L. Ozmidov established an agricultural colony based on Tolstoyan principles in the Caucasus. The communities established on the shores of the Black Sea date to a few years later. They later spread across Russia and to England, Holland, and the United States. Arguably, Gandhi's Tolstoy Farm in India could be labeled a Tolstoyan commune. See Edgerton for the most complete history of Tolstoyan communes.

3. A sect that appeared in Russia during the second half of the eighteenth century. It denied the rites and orders of the Orthodox Church. The leader of the sect was

revered as the incarnation of the Deity. In 1895, they publicly demonstrated against military service, for which they were severely persecuted. In 1896, Tolstoy and his followers V. G. Chertkov, I. M. Tregubov, and P. I. Biriukov authored an appeal for aid to the Doukhobors which eventually won them refuge in Canada. See Maude's peculiarly titled *A Peculiar People: The Dukhobors*.

4. D. S. Merezhkovsky published his two-volume work *L. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky* in 1901 and 1902.

5. Paul Déroulède (1846-1914) was a political activist and poet who spent much of his adult life plotting revenge against Germany for France's loss in 1871. Déroulède visited Iasnaia Poliana in summer 1886 hoping to secure Tolstoy's support for the Frenchman's planned Russo-French alliance against the Germans. Tolstoy, whose recently completed *What I Believe* (1884) was in large part a polemic against violence, particularly State-sponsored violence, proved to be a poor choice as a spokesman for a military alliance.

6. Hermann Sudermann (1857-1928), one of the leading writers of the German naturalist movement.

7. The work Bely refers to has a complex and little examined history. Tolstoy worked on at least seven separate publications that have been called by him or his editors or his family *Circle of Reading*. A coherent textology for these works is complicated by at least three factors: the titles of these different works are similar; in his diaries and letters, Tolstoy himself referred to them variously and unsystematically; and Tolstoy worked on several different editions or revisions simultaneously.

The idea for a collection of sayings by writers throughout the ages apparently first occurred to Tolstoy on March 15, 1884, when he noted in his diary: "I need to put together a circle of reading for myself: Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Lao Tzu, Buddha, Pascal, the Gospels. It would be something useful for everyone" (PSS 42: 557). According to Maude, in 1886 Tolstoy and his household compiled a "popular Calendar with proverbs . . . recipes, advice on all sorts of subjects for everybody . . . The Calendar found its way into very many peasant huts" (II: 299-300). Apparently, this prototype was never "officially" published, and neither the Jubilee nor the 1965 *Collected Works* published by Khudozhestvennaia literatura mentions this 1886 work.

The first official publication (through Tolstoy's and Chertkov's publishing house, The Intermediary)

was accomplished only in 1903 with the publication of *Thoughts of Wise People for Every Day*. This original project was republished three times between 1903 and 1910, each time under a slightly different title or subtitle: *Thoughts of Wise People for Every Day: The Way of Life*, *Thoughts of Wise People for Every Day: Circle of Reading*, *Thoughts of Wise People for Every Day: A Wise Thought for Every Day* (Sekirin 1997, 7).

In 1904, Tolstoy began work on a second, somewhat different compilation entitled *A Calendar: The Circle of Reading for Every Day* (PSS 42: 588ff). This second project differed from the original project (i.e., *Thoughts of Wise People for Every Day*) in two ways: Tolstoy added about seven hundred of his own maxims (PSS 42: 563); and the new project contained "Sunday stories" or "weekly stories" (недельные чтения), short thematic stories placed at the end of each week. Tolstoy selected these stories from his own works and from the works of others (e.g., he adapted Leskov's *The Thief's Son* and translated *In the Port* by Maupassant). This project was first published in 1905 in three volumes (Sekirin 2000, 16). (However, Maude, who is usually very scrupulous in such matters and relied on Tolstoy's own records, has it published in two volumes in 1906 [II, 664].) In 1907, Tolstoy finished revisions of *The Circle of Reading*, which, because of censorship troubles, was not published until 1911, and then in three different editions, each differently abbreviated (Sekirin 2000, 17). In 1907, the same year as he began revisions of *The Circle of Reading*, Tolstoy began another project, arguably a new version of *The Circle of Reading*, fully entitled *Wise Thoughts by Many Writers on Truth, Life, and Behavior Collected and Arranged for Each Day of the Year by Leo Tolstoy* (Sekirin 1996, 9; Simmons 679), though usually referred to as simply *For Each Day*. Finally, another work of this ilk was begun in 1910 and published in 1911: *The Path of Life* («Путь жизни»). (Sekirin translates the title as *The Way of Life*, though this choice renders less clear the reference to Taoism and the writings of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, writings which play a fundamentally important role in the work.) In this project, Tolstoy further simplified the maxims and stories to reflect his "simple, clear, and comprehensible to all" doctrine from *What Is Art?*. Moreover, the calendar structure was removed and the maxims were collected under various rubrics (e.g., "Self Abnegation," "Love," etc.).

Thus, there are at least four separate but obviously interconnected works, all of which Tolstoy or his secretaries or his biographers have referred to as *The Circle of Reading*: the first calendar (1886) with

"recipes" that Maude mentions; the simple calendar of maxims (*Thoughts of Wise People for Every Day*); the complexly organized thematic calendar with weekly readings (*A Calendar: The Circle of Reading for Every Day*); and the final collection of maxims organized by theme (*Path of Life*). The second and third works were published in various editions, with different contents and under slightly different titles.

One final note on the matter of peculiar significance to Bely's comments: Tolstoy, wandering in and out of consciousness while lying on a tiny bed in the train station at Astapovo, demanded that someone record his final thoughts. Chertkov took up his pen and notepad and waited, but Tolstoy could only manage nonsense or silence. Tolstoy then repeatedly demanded that his final thoughts be read back to him and grew agitated when this could not be done. Chertkov finally calmed Tolstoy by reading to him passages from *The Circle of Reading* as though they were records of Tolstoy's final words. (It is unclear, though, which *Circle of Reading*.)

8. From F. I. Tiutchev's *Ночное небо так угрюмо...* (18 August 1865).

9. From Tiutchev's *Silentium!* (1830).

10. Stefan George (1868-1933), a poet and publisher of the influential *Blätter für die Kunst* who sought to renew German poetry by reintroducing a kind of neo-classicism made up of strict rules governing phrase, rhyme and meter.

11. Heinrich Rickert (1863-1936), a member of the Baden school of neo-Kantianism.

12. Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902), one of the founders of modern pathology and committed opponent of Bismarck.

13. "Say either good or bad about the dead." Judging by the context, Bely perhaps meant *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, i.e., "say nothing but good things about the dead."

14. Mikhail Alekseevich Kuzmin (1875-1936), a poet and musician who ran in the same circles as Bely. He frequented Ivanov's tower from 1905 to 1909, and wrote the music to Blok's 1906 staging of *The Puppet Show* [Балаганчик]. In 1910, Kuzmin published "On Beautiful Clarity" [О прекрасной ясности], which was generally seen as a polemic against the Symbolism

professed and philosophized by Bely. As far as bagatelles go, Bely is probably referring to *The Carillon of Love* [Куранты любви], short lyrics set to music, published in 1910.

15. A city in the Mari El Republic (southeast of Nizhni Novgorod), founded in 1584. Now called Yoshkar-Ola.

16. Perhaps Tolstoy saw the truth, and could not hold his tongue. Recall "I Cannot Be Silent," his 1908 article protesting capital punishment.

17. The Holy Synod published what is generally taken to be a decree of Excommunication against Tolstoy on February 22, 1901, for devoting his "literary activity, and the talent given to him by God, to disseminating among the people teachings repugnant to Christ and the Church" (Maude II, 575).

18. Dying of an incurable illness in 1900, Vladimir Solovyov penned his "Three Conversations," a gloomy picture of the end of the world, heralded by the appearance of the Antichrist.

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