

- . "Introduction to Amiel's Journal." *What Is Art? and Essays on Art.* Trans. Aylmer Maude. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930.
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Гулин, А. В. Лев Толстой и пути русской истории. Москва: ИМЛИ РАН, 2004. 253 стр; 194 руб. (softcover).

If there were such a thing as "left" and "right" Tolstoyans, this book would likely belong to the productions of the latter camp. Alexander Gulin endeavors to identify some of the primary strands in Tolstoy's treatment of Russian history and, in so doing, the movement of Russian history itself in Tolstoy's time. What emerges is a portrait of Tolstoy as an emphatically nationalist writer whose fictions embody a persistently idiosyncratic—and largely syncretic—worldview.

The guiding argument is quite straightforward, its central proposition being that Tolstoy's attitude to history is shaped by a "religious-philosophical system" that comes to full expression in his fictional works dealing with Russian history, the crowning achievement of which is, of course, *War and Peace*. The book is organized accordingly: It opens with a preliminary account of the main elements of this "religious-philosophical system" and proceeds to examine their inflection in several of Tolstoy's works, culminating in a fairly extensive engagement with *War and Peace*.

The opening account features Tolstoy's adventures in the Caucasus and the fictions ostensibly arising from them, fictions which bracket Tolstoy's career as a writer. Here Gulin maintains that Tolstoy's experience in the Caucasus was pivotal to all his subsequent thinking about history. Specifically, he holds that Tolstoy began at that time to define an

opposition between nature and civilization that would become the lynchpin of his "religious-philosophical system." Briefly stated: The natural human being is purer, and morally better than the corrupted "ape of civilization," to borrow a term from Heidegger.

Gulin pursues this thesis in two of the Caucasus fictions, *The Cossacks* and *Hadji Murat*, and then develops its broader implications in his discussion of the Sebastopol sketches. Gulin's metaphysics become increasingly intense from this point on: he reads Tolstoy as opposing the common, "natural" Russian to the uncommon, unnatural creation of European civilization. While this opposition first gains larger political and metaphysical significance in the grim defense of Sebastopol against the European powers, it assumes titanic proportions on the pages of *War and Peace*, which, Gulin informs us, could have been called "Concord and Enmity" or, still better, "God and the Enemy of Humankind—the Devil" («Бог и враг человеческий—дьявол»). At stake in the novel is a veritable *Weltanschauungskrieg*, with the Russian victory representing not only the triumph of the good as embodied by the common Russian people, but also that of the naturalist view. In this latter sense, the good represented by Russian victory is not merely Russian: It belongs to all, at least according to Gulin who insists, immoderately but entirely consistently, that Moscow is sacred not only for Russians.

Now, there is no doubt a strong layer of support for Gulin's interpretation. That there is some form of opposition between the life of the natural human being and that of the supposedly civilized one, stands on the very surface of the texts Gulin examines. Moreover, that this opposition retains within itself a rejection of European culture, understood as the imposition of an alienating civilization, should surprise no one who has read Tolstoy's texts. That, indeed, this rejection may be accompanied by the celebration of purity, sim-

plicity, and popular wisdom—in a word, Russian virtue—seems only natural itself.

The problem is, however, that Gulin's discussions of the relevant texts rarely leave the element of the general long enough to provide a more carefully nuanced conception of the natural as opposed to the civilized. To be sure, Gulin makes efforts to bolster his argument, but these tend merely to repeat or restate the argument in slightly different terms or, in the worst case, to confuse it by adding another component without defining that to which the component is being added. This is particularly evident when Gulin seeks to ally his notion of naturalness with that of feeling or a metaphysical struggle between good and evil or the absence of original sin. While this final alliance may serve to establish a neat identity between naturalness and freedom from sin, Gulin does not adequately delineate the connection for one to assume so safely. As a result, he seems to add yet another component that does not extend, but rather distends, his argument.

In other words, Gulin seems to come too close to assuming that the opposition is self-evident (and in many different ways), such that a more perspicuous edifice of definition is not only unnecessary but obfuscating as well. That this is the case may be gleaned from his offhand comments about philosophy. For Gulin argues that Tolstoy tends to "philosophize through images" («философствовать образами»). Likewise, rather than defining his terms with conceptual precision, Gulin seems to rely on the fictional texts to define

them more clearly for us: Perhaps the images speak where his own interpretive text must guard silence. And, here, in a rather dramatic way, Gulin expresses one of the central problems for the critic who seeks to approach Tolstoy, to interpret him, to master him. For how does one explain Tolstoy faithfully by means of a language his writings seek maximally to overcome? The natural man has, after all, no need of the kinds of reflective procedures that are the very lifeblood of criticism: The natural man must negate them all.

Jorge Luis Borges claims that the novel is the genre which, like the natural man, most seeks to escape the generalizing force of the concept, of the reductive worldview. In dramatizing this problem in Tolstoy's view of history, Gulin's book shows just how difficult it is to avoid the unsettling impact of Tolstoyan irony, the fact that Tolstoy's fictions do tend to praise a state of being that they cannot possibly represent as it is because they are to the core immense generalizing edifices themselves: Form and content are at odds. Hence, if *War and Peace* does sing the praises of the natural being, offering grounds for the kind of account Gulin gives, the novel also complicates that account immeasurably through the means by which the latter is first made possible. It is this complication that gently unwinds the arguments Gulin advances, raising questions exactly where Gulin seems most to want answers.

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