

century nobleman in the southern Kingdom of Naples. Released as *Sunshine at Night Too* (Il sole anche di notte, 1990), this video is for the time being available in Italy only.⁵ Once more, Tolstoy's narration is not reproduced in *Sunshine at Night Too* as a costume film with a philological or didactic intent, but is rather de-familiarized to make it correspond to the real and urgent issues of the directors' own country and times.

In repeatedly embracing Tolstoy as one of the major stars in their intellectual firmament, the Tavianis show how ethically relevant and artistically productive he continues to be throughout the decades—provided, that is, that his legacy be approached with piety, intelligence, and patient determination. The Tavianis do approach Tolstoy's work this way. They think it through until they are able to reformulate it in terms which Tolstoy himself might use today, were he still with us.

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Notes

1. *Saint Michael Had a Rooster* (San Michele aveva un gallo). A Film by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani. Based on a story by Leo Tolstoy. Starring Giulio Brogi, Renato Scarpa, Vittorio Fantoni, Cinzia Bruno, Daniele Dublino, Virginia Ciuffin. A RAI Radio-Ager Film Coproduction. Film @ 1971 RAI Radio and Ager Film. Video @ 1997 Fox Lorber Video, 419 Park Ave. South, N.Y. N.Y. 10016.

2. Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi, *Bozheskoe i chelovecheskoe*, in vol. 42 of *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 1957, pp. 194-227.

3. On *Saint Michael Had a Rooster* see Fulvio Acciaini and Lucia Coluccelli, *Paolo e Vittorio Taviani* (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1979): 68-82 (11 Castoro cinema 65); Guido Aristarco, *Sotto il segno dello scorpione. Il cinema dei fratelli Taviani* (Messina and Florence: G. D'Anna, 1978):101-52; rpt. as "San Michele aveva un gallo," in his *I sussurri e le grida. Dieci letture critiche di film* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1988): 173-206; Pier Marco De Santi, *I film di Paolo*

e *Vittorio Taviani* (Rome: Gremese Editore):74-85 (Effetto Cinema 16); Franca Faldini and Goffredo Fofi, eds., *Il cinema italiano d'oggi 1970-1984 raccontato dai suoi protagonisti* (Milan: Mondadori, 1984): 127-30; Riccardo Ferrucci and Patrizia Turini, *Paolo e Vittorio Taviani, La poesia del paesaggio* (Rome: Gremese Editore, 1995): 119-23; Aldo Tassone, *Parla il cinema italiano* (Milan: 11 Formichiere, 1980), vol. 2: 335-37, 350-51, 357-58, 360, 361, and 370; and Bruno Torri, ed., *Il cinema dei Taviani* (Roma: Ministero degli affari esteri, Direzione generale relazioni culturali, 1989): 29-31 (English on 79-82).

4. The original of Roman's objection to Mezhenetskii's political line (end of Tolstoy's Chapter 11: Tolstoi, PSS 42: 222) is worded as follows:

"We can't be said to be enjoying life. And if we are stuck here, we must thank the reaction, and the reaction is a product of [your faction having killed Czar Alexander 11 on] March 1st."

"Ne ochen'-to naslzhdaemsia zhizn'iu (...) A esli i sidim zdes', obiazany etim reaktzii, a reaktsiia proizvedenie pervogo marta."

5. Giuliani G. De Negri presenta *Il sole anche di notte* (*Sunshine at Night Too*), un film di Paolo e Vittorio Taviani. Con Julian Sands (Padre Sergio), Charlotte Gainsbourg (Matilda), Massimo Bonetti, Margaritha Lozano, Patricia Millardet (Aurelia), Rudiger Vogler, Pamela Villoresi, Nastassia Kinski (Cristina). Sceneggiatura di Paolo e Vittorio Taviani. Liberaamente tratto dal romanzo Padre Sergio di L. Tolstoj. Film (D 1990 Italia - Francia - Germania: Filmtre / RAIUno / Capoul / Interpool / Sara Film / Direkt Film. Video (D 1992 Ricordi Video - via Berchet 2 - Milano.

David Holbrook. *Tolstoy, Woman, and Death: A Study of War and Peace and Anna Karenina*. Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1997. Pp. 273.

As I learned from a *Festschrift* published in honour of his seventieth birthday, David Holbrook is a prolific writer in many genres: poet, novelist, literary critic, educational theorist,

music critic, and writer of "psycho-social and philosophical criticism." The attached bibliography lists no fewer than 45 volumes of which Holbrook is the sole author, plus many more which he edited, co-edited, or contributed to. He is at present an Emeritus Fellow of Downing College, Cambridge, having been for several years Director of English Studies there. He knows no Russian and has never written on Russian literature before, but has to his credit critical books on Dylan Thomas, Sylvia Plath, C. S. Lewis, Edith Wharton, D. H. Lawrence, and Charles Dickens.

In principle, Slavists should welcome the "invasion" of their territory by scholars and critics from other fields, in the hope that they bring with them new insights and perspectives, jarring us out of our parochialism. Of course, they cannot be expected to function as fully qualified scholars of the Slavic texts they choose to write about. Holbrook could read only translations, rather arbitrarily chosen, of the two novels he made his subject, Constance Garnett for *War and Peace* and Rosemary Edmonds for *Anna Karenina*. He had no access to the vast critical literature on Tolstoy in Russian and—surprisingly—also seems unaware of two important French works that bear directly on his topic, Marie Semon's *Les femmes dans l'oeuvre de Leon Tolstoi: romans et nouvelles* (Paris, 1984), and Semon, ed., *Tolstoi et la mort* (Paris, 1986). Even with English-language Tolstoy criticism Holbrook's acquaintance seems spotty. In an introductory chapter he engages, rather hostilely, with Richard Gustafson's *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*, Amy Mandelker's *Framing Anna Karenina*, and Judith Armstrong's *The Unsaid Anna Karenina*, and lists a number of others in his bibliography. Yet even there he passes over such crucial texts as R. F. Christian's *Tolstoy's War and Peace: A Study*, Gary Saul Morson's *Hidden in Plain View* and Donna Orwin's *Tolstoy's Art and Thought, 1847-1880*. We cannot, therefore, strictly speaking consider Holbrook's book a work of serious scholarship. Furthermore, even within its self-imposed limitations it is an exceptionally sloppy job, carelessly written and badly edited, crammed with

errors, misprints and misspellings. The Fairleigh Dickinson University Press also deserves censure of an atrocious job of copy-editing. I feel it is a reviewer's assignment to call the author to account for his mistakes, but after doing so I hope I can summon sufficient serenity and balance to credit what genuine insights and challenging hypotheses the book contains.

First of all, a great many Russian names are garbled. It seems as if Holbrook took handwritten notes, then misread his own handwriting when transcribing them, and never bothered to check anything. Thus we have "Tikhar" for Tikhon (37), "Sergin" for Sergius (40), "Bivikov" for Bibikov (52), "Pelagya" for Pelageya (53, 54), "Paul" (for Pierre) Bezuhov, "Doholov" for Dolohov (97), "Melynkovs" for Melyukovs (96), "Tuskin" for Tushin (125), "Rastoptokin" for Rastopchin (127), "Veskovsky" for Vezlovsky (215, 216), "Mikalovna" for Mikhailovna (247, 262), "Larrin" for Lavrin (269), "Silbajovis" for Silbajoris, and "Stenbock-Fermov" for Stenbock-Fermor (*ibid.*). Kutuzov and Kutusov are used interchangeably. There are mistakes the spelling check on the computer should have caught, such as "irresistable" (64), "acquiesed" (156), "galvanished" (233), and "superceded" (250), but there are others it would not have recognized. Of these my favourite is "settler's" for setter's (235: "the expression of his face, like a faithful settler's"). The computer also would not know that the French phrase *huis clos*, which means "closed doors," has been misunderstood ("enclosed in a huis clos," 263). Two whole lines in the quotation on p.144 are printed twice, and the footnote on p. 153 contains exactly the same sentence as the main text to which it is attached.

A number of sentences are meaningless as they stand. "Rostov was a truthful young man: he would not have unintentionally [sic] told a lie" (127). The same Nikolai Rostov hunts for himself, Rostov, in the hospital, instead of for Denisov (135). The passage quoted on p. 155 makes no sense with the word "two" left out ("The man who eats two dinners obtains possibly a greater amount of pleasure. . ."); and on p. 241 we are startled to encounter "the mistress of

Anna Pirogova," since a few pages earlier we had been told that Tolstoy's neighbour, Aleksandr Bibikov, had a mistress, Anna Pirogova, who committed suicide when he jilted her, throwing herself under a train, thus of course serving as a model for Anna Karenina.

Holbrook is puzzled by the word order in Edmonds's translation as quoted on p. 195: "Her words gave him that strange feeling of revulsion for someone with tenfold force." He quite reasonably comments, "I am not clear of the meaning of the phrase 'for someone with tenfold force'." (The original reads "On s udesiaternennoi siloi pochuvstvoval pripadok etogo stranogo. . . chuvstva omerzeniia k komu-to," literally, "He with tenfold force felt the onset of that strange. . . feeling of revulsion for someone.") However, Holbrook has severe word order problems of his own, leading in two cases to ludicrous results: ". . . [H]e felt his mother had been destroyed as an infant by some 'terrible force' at the moment when he hungered for her" (52) and "It is likely that childbirth, to a man whose mother died in childbirth at the age of one and a half, seems to be the most terrible thing in the world" (58).

There are historical errors—Holbrook is not at all interested in the historical side of *War and Peace*. "The czar has made a treaty with Napoleon at Tilsit, but in June Napoleon decides to march on Moscow" (81; of course there was an interval of five years between the two events.) Holbrook seems quite unaware of the nature of Pierre's activities in the Epilogue, his involvement in the Decembrist conspiracy, or of the ominous threat that hangs over his family as a result.

There are also biographical errors. Holbrook confuses Tolstoy's daughter, Tat'iana L'vovna, with his sister-in-law, Tat'iana Andreevna Kuzminskaia (née Behrs), listing Tat'iana L'vovna as a model for Natasha and a source of information about "what the effect of a seducer's persuasions would be on a young girl" (100, 158). (Tat'iana L'vovna was only four years old when *War and Peace* was finished.) Prince Andrei is said to be going to war because, he says, "he cannot tolerate the woman-dominated socialite circles of Moscow

life" (80). But of course it is St. Petersburg, not Moscow, life that is in question. In general, Holbrook shows no sensitivity to the contrast between the two cities, which is so important in both novels. He also seems to have no clear idea of Russian class divisions. He lumps together the Francophile Petersburg court and its entourage with the Moscow-centred old-line nobility as the "ruling circles" of Russia and accuses them of doubtful patriotism; he also calls what are clearly aristocratic relationships "bourgeois families."

Perhaps the most troubling error is the one on which Holbrook's psychological theory is based, the notion that Tolstoy's mother "died in childbirth" when he was "eighteen months old." In fact, of course, he was just short of two years old, and she did not die in childbirth. To be sure, Tolstoy himself is partly responsible for this error, since in his "Reminiscences" he says that he was one and a half years old when his mother died. The facts, however, are that Countess Mariia Nikolaevna Tolstaia died on 4 August 1830, five months after the birth of her daughter, and Tolstoy's sister, also Countess Mariia Nikolaevna Tolstaia, who was born on 2 March 1830. In the vague medical terminology of those days, the cause of Tolstoy's mother's death was listed as "nervous fever" [nervnaia goriachka]. She is said to have been ill only a few days. Whether her death had anything to do with her recent parturition is anyone's guess.

So much for the errors. Holbrook is a believer in what he calls "existential psychotherapy," apparently a deviant descendant of Freudian psychoanalysis. His authorities, he tells us, are Viktor Frankl, Rollo May, Irvin Yalom, Harry Guntrip, John Bowlby, and D. W. Winnicott. I am no connoisseur of the work of these writers and cannot judge whether Holbrook is faithful to them, but he says it is ideas derived from them that he brings to bear on Tolstoy.

Along with Death, his chief focus, as his title indicates, is Woman (not women, but Woman, which gives the topic a high-sounding, metaphysical aura). Tolstoy, Holbrook believes, is rightly to be admired because he had a deep understanding of Woman. At any rate he created

some of the most captivating, full-blooded female characters in literature.

But there is a paradox: despite his evident extraordinary capacity to identify with female characters and understand their feelings, Tolstoy was also an extreme misogynist. He is the author of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, a “psychotic” (Holbrook’s word) display of hatred of women and of revulsion against human sexuality as such. And in his personal life Tolstoy turned a happy marriage into a nightmare, treating his wife with great cruelty while preaching a doctrine of universal love. How can we account for this anomaly?

As might be expected, Holbrook’s search for a psychological explanation takes him back to the writer’s earliest childhood, and especially to the death of his mother, allegedly “in childbirth.” His theory thus invites comparison with the work of Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, *Tolstoy on the Couch: Misogyny, Masochism and the Absent Mother* (1998). Neither author knew of the other’s work. Rancour-Laferriere is a qualified Slavist as well as a Freudian, and his work is free of the disfiguring technical shortcomings of Holbrook’s. It is also far richer in both biographical and literary detail, since it ranges over Tolstoy’s entire oeuvre. Rancour-Laferriere likewise has his dates straight (and of course a Freudian interpretation to account for Tolstoy’s confusion of them). For Rancour-Laferriere there were two critical traumas in Tolstoy’s early childhood. First, his mother did not nurse him as she should, but handed him over to a peasant wet-nurse. Then, several months later, she “died on him.” These events triggered in Tolstoy a rage at being deprived and abandoned that lasted his entire life, transmuted into a generalized hatred of women. Holbrook, operating with the wrong dates, arrives at an analogous, though different, explanation. For him the crucial trauma is the Primal Scene. Living as a baby in his parents’ bedroom, Tolstoy must have seen (or perhaps just heard) his parents engaged in the sexual act. As Freudian children will, he interpreted what he saw (or heard) as aggressive and violent. Sometime after his mother’s death his baby brain put together a syllogism that re-

mained embedded there forever: sex leads to pregnancy, and pregnancy causes death; ergo, sex is murder. Holbrook does not perceive rage as the dominant emotion in the infant Tolstoy, but simply anguish at the abandonment; later, as a mature male, he develops intense feelings of guilt over the sexual—and therefore murderous—desire he cannot help experiencing toward women.

Well, I cannot presume to judge between these two hypotheses. I will agree that the sexual attitudes evinced in *The Kreutzer Sonata* and its “Afterword” are pathological. Horror at sex was obviously rooted deep in Tolstoy’s psyche. How it got there I don’t know. The death of his mother was unquestionably an important event in his life and possibly the ultimate cause of his sexual hang-ups (though, as Rancour-Laferriere notes and Holbrook ignores, perhaps less important than it would have been had he not been part of an affluent extended family, surrounded by relations and servants, among whom were several surrogate mothers). What surprises me is the assurance with which these theorists write about what tiny, pre-verbal children think and feel about big events, such as death, in the adult world around them, and what they make of these feelings later. It’s fun to dream up hypotheses, but I don’t see any way of verifying them, even with living subjects, let alone in the case of a writer long deceased.

Besides the Primal Scene, Holbrook has a larger psycho-philosophical theory which he applies to Tolstoy’s novels, one we might call womb-envy, though he does not use this term. The idea is that women by nature play the central roles in the basic biological events of gestation, birth, and nurture of children. Men are envious. Men feel superfluous and even guilty during birth scenes, as Levin does during Kitty’s parturition. Helplessly breastless, they then have little to do with the nurture of their offspring. No diaper-changers they—Pierre hastily hands his baby son over to a female nurse when he has an “accident.” Tolstoy’s men no doubt relate to death in a more profound, philosophical way than his women do, but as Kitty shows at her brother-in-law’s bedside, women are far more

competent at the practical tasks of caring for dying persons, making them feel cared for and as comfortable as possible. Thus women are preoccupied with "being," as Holbrook calls it, whereas men fill their lives with "false male doing," which includes wars and politics. They thus compensate for the risk women naturally undergo in bearing children by manufacturing risks for themselves. Here I think Holbrook may be generally on the right track. But he muddles his own point by mixing it up with Tolstoy's neurosis: ". . . Prince Andrey goes off to war, and in this he represents one impulse in Tolstoy's men, to deny the feminine aspect of his own personality; and the reason is the unconscious fear of tenderness and pregnancy as death" (76).

Further, Holbrook is not willing to accept Tolstoy's confinement of women to their biologically determined roles, however vital. Like many others, he dislikes the image of Natasha in the Epilogue as a totally committed mother, displaying the healthy stain on her baby's diaper. She has lost all her glamour, put on weight, no longer sings. For Tolstoy this is a wholly natural development, a proper movement from one stage of life to another. But for Holbrook it is "propaganda," a misogynist's effort to confine women to the nursery and deprive them of any cultural or intellectual life. What is Natasha to do, he reasonably asks, after her babies grow up? To judge by her mother, there is nothing left but to decline into senile dependency and death.

Polemicalizing with Gustafson, Holbrook views Anna Karenina as a tragic heroine who made the right choices, even though these proved fatal. Married through her aunt's machinations to an older man she never loved, in entering into an adulterous love affair with Vronsky, she was choosing "life." It is her tragic fate that this choice necessarily involves abandonment of her beloved son, Seriozha. In the framework of nineteenth-century Russian society there was no solution to her dilemma, and it ultimately brought her to suicide, as her insecurity and jealousy became more and more destructive. Though she is "duplicitous and evades reality," she pursues "authenticity, whose claims are un-

deniable, even if they lead to death" (261).

Holbrook's treatment of Anna's tragedy, and of the two novels generally, form part of another agenda he is pursuing, perhaps his main reason for writing the book. He is using Tolstoy for an attack on contemporary fiction—and indeed on the modern world as a whole—for having trivialized human sexuality and with it human life itself. Tolstoy's central theme, according to Holbrook, is "an existentialist one—an urge, as acted out in *Pierre*, *Andrei*, and *Levin*, to try to find whether life can have any meaning. . . . He is the novelist of devotion to solving the problem of existence—a stance that makes nearly all the literature of the present time appear trivial and worthless" (259). However we may feel about this harsh judgment, we can recognize Holbrook's genuine love for Tolstoy's two great novels and appreciate the intelligence and perception he has brought to bear on them. One only wishes that he—and his publisher—had taken more pains with the articulation of his ideas.

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Notes

1. Edwin Webb, ed. *Powers of Being: David Holbrook and His Work* (Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press; London: Associated University Press, 1995).
2. Curiously, on p. 88 Holbrook rechristens Judith Armstrong "Dorothy."
3. I cite N. N. Gusev, *Letopis' i zhizn' L'va Nikolae-vicha Tolstogo, 1828-1890* (Moscow, 1958), 13.