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### **“I am fond of the French and the Swedes...” Swedish visitors to Leo Tolstoy**

True to his internationalist outlook, Tolstoy always tried not to show any bias as far as nations and peoples were concerned. Nevertheless, according to his son Lev L'vovich, he is supposed once to have confessed that he was especially fond of the French and the Swedes (Tolstoj 43). Three Swedish names were singled out by the son as having made a strong impression upon his father, “the well-known Swedish writer” Jonas Stadling, “the young journalist” Valdemar Langlet and “the obviously half-mad” Abraham Bonde (35). In all three Tolstoy found features and opinions dear to his heart.

In early 1892, Jonas Stadling (1847–1935), a journalist and a philanthropic Baptist, learned about the great famine in Russia. Encouraged by American charitable institutions, he decided to travel to the affected regions in order to participate in the relief work and give publicity to the catastrophe. As Tolstoy and his family were actively working among the starving peasants, it felt natural to join them in their efforts. In Moscow, Stadling met Tolstoy's wife, who was in charge of the international contacts. Stadling could promise a considerable amount of money, plus twenty wagons of flour (*Minnen* 49). All personal costs

would be covered through articles in the Swedish and American press.<sup>1</sup>

Stadling arrived in the small Klekotki railway station, southeast of Tula, on February 25.<sup>2</sup> The next day he braved a heavy snowstorm, covering the forty kilometres to Tolstoy's headquarters in an open sleigh. In the afternoon, they passed the river Don, and there—on the other side—lay the village of Begichevka. In front of a one-storied mansion the coachman stopped their sleigh. The courtyard was full of peasants, waiting to see Tolstoy. The writer was not in at the moment, and Stadling was shown to his study. Vera Kuzminskaya, Tolstoy's niece-in-law, greeted him welcome in English, and, after her, a thin young woman, dressed like a Russian peasant girl, entered the room. “Countess Tolstaya?,” asked Stadling. “That's what they call me,” answered Maria Tolstaya, Tolstoy's twenty-one year old daughter (Stadling, *Från det hungrande* 33).

A deep voice revealed that Leo Tolstoy himself had arrived. Dressed in a long sheepskin coat, he entered the room, greeted the Swedish traveller with a firm handshake, complimented him for his warm Lappish dress and showed him to the room where he was to stay. When Tolstoy kneeled down to help his guest to pull off his boots, Stadling could not but be amazed: The Count demonstrated in a very concrete way the equality of all men.

After a while, the relief workers—all young and all vegetarians—gathered for dinner. The main topic at the table was the famine. “It is an enormous catastrophe, as you soon will see for yourself,” Tolstoy explained to Stadling. The government had finally granted financial help, and now it was important to see that as little of the money as possible got lost. Later in the afternoon, Tolstoy was receiving people in distress, and in the evening more relief workers arrived with their reports about the situation.

When Stadling woke the next morning, the courtyard was again full of people who had come to seek help. At breakfast it was decided that Stadling

would accompany Maria L'vovna to Pinki, one of the affected villages.

With Tolstoy's daughter as the driver, their sleigh crossed the endless steppe. The first sight of the village was depressing: tumbledown cottages, the roofs of which had been given to the cattle as a last resource. One izba with dirty floors and an ice-covered window was used as a hospital. Almost all families had been affected by smallpox, typhus and other diseases, but the hospital could be used only for the worst affected. While Maria L'vovna set up a soup kitchen, Stadling walked around in the village. On their way back to Begichevka, Maria L'vovna asked Stadling about his impressions. "Terrible" was the only word he could come up with. But what about her? Was she unafraid of catching a disease? No, she answered, under such conditions "it is immoral to be afraid" (*Från det hungrande* 67).

Tolstoy, too, was depressed when he returned to the headquarters that evening: "I feel really ashamed of my work, which is just palliative. We cannot know whether it is of any use. If the people are to be given any real help, they must be roused from their apathy" (68). About his own share in the work Tolstoy commented: "I do not preach. I am so bad myself that I don't have the right to teach other people. [...] We do not know the results of our actions. We only know that is right to wish what is good and fully work for its fulfilment" (68–69).

On Saturday evening, all relief workers came together for discussion. Stadling felt like he was sitting in the company of Socrates or Jesus and their disciples. He was particularly interested in Stundism, a Christian sect, and Tolstoy told him about a letter which he had received from a peasant Stundist with a detailed report on the cruel persecutions of the dissents. "Such men are real heroes," Tolstoy said (Stadling, *Tolstoyana* 175). They also talked about Mormonism, about which Stadling had written a book after a visit to Salt Lake City. Tolstoy turned out to be well acquainted with

the movement, but he dismissed the teaching of Joseph Smith as ninety percent pure invention (*Från det hungrande*, 83). His own solution was simple:

Above all, Christians ought to put themselves into a natural relation to one another and the rest of the world, that is, follow Christ and realise his teaching in daily life, instead of wasting energy organising sects, building churches, supporting clergy, and disputing each other's dogmas. (82)

Someone asked about Edward Bellamy's utopian novel, *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (1888). Everyone was attracted by Bellamy's vision, said Tolstoy, "but when I say to his admirers, come and let's take the first steps towards the realisation of this ideal, then they all turn their back on me!" (84).

Tolstoy took an interest in Stadling's native country. What did the Swedes think of Russia? Stadling assured him that the old view of Russia as the archenemy was losing ground, as people now were able to distinguish between the Russian government and the Russian people. Of modern Swedish writers, Tolstoy only knew Ernst Ahlgren, a pseudonym for Victoria Benedictsson, but Stadling got him interested in Viktor Rydberg and his poem "Den nya Grottesången" ("The New Grotti Song," 1891) with its criticism of unregulated capitalism.

In his memoirs from 1930, Stadling recalls an episode, which he had refrained from telling earlier. Returning from one of the famine-stricken hamlets, they discussed the situation of the peasantry. Did Tolstoy believe that the situation would change for the better in the event the peasants' ideals, like the *mir* institution, were realized? After a moment of silence, Tolstoy, much to the surprise of Stadling, predicted that "everything will go to ruin before something better can be built!" (*Minnen* 50).

After one week in Begichevka, Stadling on March 3 travelled to Samara in the company of Tolstoy's son, Lev L'vovich and Pavel Birjukov, the future biographer of Tolstoy. In all, Stadling spent about four months in Russia, assisting in the relief work. The Tolstoy's had only praise for him; Tolstoy called Stadling "very nice" (PSS 84: 130), while Lev L'vovich found him to be "a sympathetic comrade and, what's most important, a fine and very kind man" (*В голодные* 86).

Of all the innumerable visitors to Tolstoy, Abraham Bonde (born around 1820, year of death unknown) is undoubtedly one of the most eccentric and memorable. Having found Yasnaya Polyana almost empty, he appeared at Tolstoy's headquarters in Begichevka on April 28, 1892. Already the outward appearance of the old man was sure to catch attention: an enormous felt hat, greyish yellow, long hair and beard, a strange gaze, a shabby shirt open at the chest, bare dirty feet. His baggage consisted solely of a worn-out dressing gown and a big watch with an attached compass.

Bonde's life-story was as peculiar as his looks. He said he was a Swede,<sup>3</sup> who had lived in America for thirty years. He had been a merchant, living a carefree life in New York, but when he heard one of his tenants calling him a "blood-sucker," living on other people's misery, his eyes had been opened. He gave away everything he owned and left America in search of true happiness. Somewhere during his travels through Japan, China and India, he heard about Tolstoy and immediately realized, "That's the man for me!" (*Сухотина-Толстая* 309). In Singapore, he learned from a Russian Jew about the whereabouts of Tolstoy, and together they took off for Russia, walking through Malacca, Burma and Tibet on foot. Now Bonde had come to Tolstoy to settle down for the rest of his life. His plan was to teach the writer's children "physiology," so that they would get to "know the laws of nature, learn to live according to these laws and become happy."

The life philosophy of this "practical philosopher," as he called himself, was simple (PSS

87: 145). Not riches, but an ascetic, natural life could bring peace of mind and health. Bonde was a strict vegetarian, accepting neither milk, nor eggs. A curious habit of his was to sleep with a bottle under his neck as a remedy against deafness. In Begichevka he only asked for a small area of land, a spade and some potatoes, as he wanted to demonstrate how one person alone could feed ten people without the use of draft animals. The soil was to be fertilized with his own excrement. But as it turned out, Bonde was too weak for physical work, and most of his time he spent lying on the kitchen floor.

Tolstoy was fascinated by his strange guest, who looked a bit like himself and with whom he admittedly had many thoughts in common.<sup>4</sup> To Vladimir Chertkov he wrote about Bonde's teaching:

You have to work yourself to get food from the earth without any work animals, not have any money, not sell anything, not possess anything superfluous, but share everything with other people. Naturally, he is a consistent vegetarian, speaks well and, above all, he is straightforward, fanatically devoted to his ideas. (PSS 87: 145)

Tolstoy's wife, still in Moscow, was informed that the visitor spoke excellent English and was "very wise, original and interesting" (PSS 84: 146). In his diary, Tolstoy jotted down: "My shadow. Same thoughts, same disposition, minus sensitivity" (PSS 52: 66). Bonde called himself a nonbeliever; for him Jesus was just an ordinary man, no more God than anyone or anything else. Religion with its moral restrictions only hampered life:

Everything that takes place happens for the good of it all. If somebody comes up to me and says: "I have killed your family," I would answer him: "My friend, you have done the best possible thing; if I kill someone, it means that it has to be that way." (*Раевская* 419).

With his extreme views, Bonde appeared as an annoying parodic version of Tolstoy. Nothing escaped the Swede's accusing finger. When the relief workers gathered for the usual Saturday evening social, Bonde demanded that the samovar be removed: "If people only knew how much blood and suffering every cup of tea has cost, something which I have seen with my own eyes in China, they would not be drinking tea" (Величкина 98). Tolstoy agreed to drink only barley coffee, but also this substitute was severely condemned: "Corn should not be wasted that way!" (Скорородов 320).

Despite his fascination with Bonde, Tolstoy did not want to spend the rest of his life in close vicinity to him. Unfortunately, neither did any of Tolstoy's acquaintances accept to be the host of the Swede. As Bonde did not have any passport (he did not consider himself a citizen of any state), he had no legal right to stay in the central part of Russia. When Tolstoy returned from Begichevka to Yasnaya Polyana on May 24, Bonde was invited to come with him, but one day later. Tolstoy explained his decision thus: "I don't like the way people pay attention to me when I go by train alone. But to take with me my double, and, furthermore, a half naked double, that is too much for me!" (Сухотина-Толстая 307).

Life in Yasnaya Polyana turned out to be troublesome for Bonde. Tolstoy did not find time for him, and the children showed no interest in his teaching. Meanwhile, Bonde's lectures on "physiology" seem to have limited themselves to checking whether the women wore a corset or not. He did not show any persistence in his farming, but after a few minutes of work he would lay down on the grass. He wore as little clothes as possible; sometimes he could undress himself completely and stroll around in the garden while his washing dried.

Sofia Andreyevna took a strong dislike to Bonde, and likewise, the Swede showed no reverence for Tolstoy's wife. When she made it

clear that he could not settle down in Yasnaya Polyana, he answered calmly: "If you need this spot of land, then I can move slightly to the side and occupy a similar spot there. Surely I should also have a place of my own on this earth" (Толстая 281). And, much to Tolstoy's amusement, Bonde moved his dirty feet a few meters. Another quarrel between Sofia Andreyevna and Bonde broke out when Yasnaya Polyana was visited by the French journalist Jules Huret. When Huret asked for permission to smoke and lit a cigarette, Bonde—a fanatic non-smoker—asked permission to spit in his face (Сухотина-Толстая 311).

When Sofia Andreyevna threatened Bonde with the police, it was decided that he should move to their daughter Tatyana Sukhotina-Tolstoya's estate a few kilometres away from Yasnaya Polyana. Here he got a small wooden hut of his own with the only "furniture" being the bottle he needed as cushion. Most of his time Bonde spent sitting on the floor, writing in his notebook. As he was using a simplified orthography of his own, no one else could read his writings. Sometimes he would receive Tolstoy and other guests, and when he started to talk, "passionately, honestly, convincingly," everybody listened with interest (Сухотина-Толстая 313).

At the end of June, Bonde left the Tolstoy family with the two hundred roubles that Tolstoy had refused to accept as an allowance for the starving peasants. He forgot to take with him the watch, and as the Swedish address he had given turned out to be faulty, the parcel with the watch was returned a few weeks later.

Shortly after Bonde's departure, Tolstoy got a visit from Ida Bäckmann (1867–1950), a teacher and journalist. She was accompanied by a friend. Tolstoy's youngest daughter, Aleksandra, showed them to the library, where Bäckmann among other titles spotted *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890) by William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army. Tolstoy entered the room with a

gentle smile, assuring his Swedish guests that they did not disturb him in his work.

What did he think of anarchism? Bäckmann asked. Tolstoy detested theoretical anarchism, but considered the striving to get away from all authorities as the solution to mankind's problems. The task of man was to obey God's will, as it had been formulated by Christ, "the first and greatest anarchist" (*Farliga* 137). The biggest obstacle for progress was the false teaching of the church and its priests. Tolstoy surprisingly confessed that he was not sure of the historical existence of Jesus, but the main thing was that the truth had once been revealed. Its actual source did not matter. In everyone there was a sparkle of God, and you could either increase or diminish it.

Talking about literature, Tolstoy praised the German realist Wilhelm von Polenz, while severely criticizing Zola, Ibsen and the latest works by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. Strindberg was a writer with a huge creative capacity, but had lately gone astray. But, generally speaking, Tolstoy saw no future for literature as an art form: "If someone has something important to say, he will do it straight out, without all the novel's artificial devices, which are added only for the amusement of idlers" (143).

Bäckmann listened to Tolstoy "with a respectful silence," even though she felt a growing opposition to much of what he had to say. Everyone looks at things in his own way, she thought, while Tolstoy tried to prove that his thoughts were universal. Vegetarianism was an issue that provoked heated comments. Tolstoy could not accept that you kill in order to satisfy your hunger, and his visitors' objection that an exception had to be made for people in the North, like the Eskimos, met with no response. They should rather die than eat meat, Tolstoy said.

When Bäckmann and her friend were invited to the dinner table before leaving, they could not but notice all the meat that was served. Why does Tolstoy tempt his guests with immoral meat-

eating? Bäckmann thought, while chewing the served oxen-tongue.

In August<sup>5</sup> of the same year, yet a fifth Swede came to see Tolstoy. Alfred Jensen, journalist and literary critic, made a Russian tour, visiting places of cultural interest. Upon his arrival to Yasnaya Polyana, he gave his calling card to one of Tolstoy's daughters. While waiting, he looked around: well-kept lawns and arbours, croquet-rings and bicycles, young people carrying fishing rods. Jensen was shown his way to Tolstoy's bedroom and study. He noticed the simple furniture; the bed and the dresser could have been made by the writer himself.

With "an unaffected kindness" Tolstoy shook the visitor's hand (Jensen 229). In the eyes of Jensen, the 74-year-old writer looked like a patriarch from the Old Testament: shortcut hair, long white beard, a simple peasant caftan. He spoke slowly and distinctly. Even though Jensen knew Russian, Tolstoy sometimes chose German or English expressions, when he wanted to explain something more complicated. When Tolstoy found that his guest had not had anything to eat since breakfast, he invited him to the dining room where Jensen was served a simple meal of potatoes, baked savoury omelette and black sour bread.

After coffee, Tolstoy rose and started walking back and forth while talking. Tolstoy complained that the Russian peasants did not have enough land to feed their big families. And now, because of a new period of drought, there were risks of more famine. Talking about politics, Tolstoy revealed an unexpected sympathy for the British constitution. The next topic was anarchism. Apparently remembering his conversation with Bäckmann, Tolstoy wanted to know whether anarchistic literature was published in Sweden. And, was it true that the population of the Scandinavian countries was healthy and prosperous? Jensen quickly answered affirmatively.

Then they moved over to literature. Tolstoy confirmed his dislike for Ibsen, but in a Russian

magazine, he had found an interesting work by another Norwegian writer, Aleksandr Kielland. But what about Vladimir Korolenko? Jensen asked. His *Blind Musician* (Слепой музыкант) had been translated to Swedish in 1890. Tolstoy abruptly stopped and folded his arms: “He lies; he is sentimental and theatrical” (232). Poetry he dismissed as an “abomination.” As for his own writing, the authorities did all they could to prevent his works from being published. This he said in an “endearing and cordial manner,” without any trace of bitterness.

After a few hours, Jensen decided that it was time to leave. Tolstoy accompanied him to the door and pressed his hand once again. Jensen left, overwhelmed by Tolstoy’s kindness and hospitality, but this did not prevent him from effectively preventing the Russian writer from receiving the Noble prize in literature a few years later. His expert’s reports to the Swedish Academy in 1901 and 1902 made it clear that Tolstoy’s later writing was of no value. The big novels were good literature, but Tolstoy’s other writings were just a hoax. In his statement of opinion from 1902, Jensen writes: “Tolstoy might be called Russia’s great conscience, but he is not its great heart and—I hope—even to a less degree he is its great future thought” (Хьетсо 146).

The Swedish student Valdemar Langlet (1872–1960) had one major interest, Esperanto. In 1895 he was invited by Russian Esperantists to visit Russia together with a friend, Eric Etzel. In Moscow they stopped for a few days in early June, doing sightseeing under the guidance of a certain Puchkovsky (“Impresoj” 5). One of Puchkovsky’s Esperanto friends was Ivan Tregubov, an ardent follower of Tolstoy. In the company of Tregubov and Puchkovsky, Langlet and Etzel visited Tolstoy in his Moscow house. Langlet was well acquainted with the religious writings of Tolstoy and, moreover, with the writer’s positive attitude towards Esperanto.<sup>6</sup>

Sitting at the back porch of the house in the Khamovniki alley, the young men listened to the words of Tolstoy, “so overwhelming and perspicaciously penetrating, so convincing in their inexorable logic and so moving with their endless love for all people [...]” (*Till häst* 45). “We must give room for love of God and man,” Tolstoy told them. “We must try to give it even more room than what we hope it will eventually get—we must work for the ideal, even if it seems unattainable” (46). One should never give way to egoism or let prejudices come between oneself and the ideal. Langlet, who could relate to the conflict, listened eagerly to Tolstoy’s advice. Afterwards he sat at his hotel room, writing down his impressions of the meeting with “*perhaps* the most brilliant and surely the most original among the thinkers of our time” (46).

Langlet returned to Russia two years later, in 1897. This time he was going to southern Russia in order to live and work with the Don Cossacks for a few months. In Moscow he learned that the Tolstoy family had already in early May moved to Yasnaya Polyana. The night train brought him to Tula, where he changed for a train to the Kozlovka station and then walked to Yasnaya Polyana. As he walked up the lane towards the main building, he spotted “a tall, skinny figure with broad, straight shoulders and a wavy long, greyish beard” on the balcony (54). Tolstoy was doing his morning exercises.

Langlet gave his calling card to a young man, a friend of Tolstoy’s youngest son. To his name he had added in Esperanto: *Amiko de Tregubov kaj Pučkovski*. Dressed in a blue dressing gown with a towel as belt and a pair of old slippers on his feet, Tolstoy appeared, cordially greeting his Swedish visitor. He even claimed that he remembered Langlet from two years earlier. Perhaps Langlet would like to accompany him on his morning swim in the pond by the gates? Soon they splashed about to their heart’s content, “like two boys who had been able to get away from their teacher” (55).

After the swim, Tolstoy asked his guest to teach him “the famous Swedish gymnastics.” Langlet readily demonstrated Ling’s gymnastic movements, but when Tolstoy tried to repeat them, he almost overturned the bathing hut. This was not the stern moralist that Langlet remembered from 1895, but a vigorous, playful and happy man.

After breakfast Tolstoy returned to his work on *What Is Art?*, while Langlet strolled around with the young people of the house. At two o’clock a four-dish dinner was served. Across the table from Langlet sat Tolstoy’s wife, Sofia Andreyevna, “an unusually educated, intelligent and noble person” (59). She spoke several languages: Russian with her youngest son Mikhail and his tutor, French with Langlet, the fourteen-year-old daughter Aleksandra and her Swiss governess, and English with yet another governess. Tolstoy, who spoke German with Langlet, could not refrain from commenting upon the linguistic chaos: “Imagine how our life would be much easier, if we, like our guest here, had taken some trouble to learn and speak Esperanto” (63).

Sofia Andreyevna told Langlet about her role as a kind of private censor of her husband’s works. Thanks to her, *War and Peace* had been purged from “some horrible details, coarse expressions put in the mouths of its characters and scenes, which for a pure heart would have made the enjoyment of this work very mixed” (59–60). Only when it came to *The Kreutzer Sonata* Tolstoy had refused to listen to his wife. Sofia Andreyevna confessed, “I have never read the whole work [...], and I hate it; I do not want to put it in the hands of people that I love” (60).

When the others left the table, Tolstoy and Langlet remained sitting. After a while Tolstoy rose and started to walk back and forth, talking for almost two hours about art and his forthcoming book, *What Is Art?*. Everyone had decided that the goal of art was beauty, but no one was able to say what “beauty” meant. Art was seen as self-sufficient with no room for morality. Tolstoy did not agree:

They all lie, they lie, I tell you, consciously or unconsciously, and I want to show them that they lie! I want to show them that their theories are hollow and untenable and that one well-aimed and powerful push is enough to make their theories fall like decayed beams. (68)

Langlet asked whether Tolstoy’s thoughts about art had any positive content. “I don’t want to construct any system,” Tolstoy answered.

There are already too many of them. I just maintain that art has the right to be universal and understood by everyone. [...] All genuine art, all true art is understood by the general public; I don’t hesitate to say that a work of art is beautiful only in the proportion to the number of people who take an interest in it and understand it. (68)

Among pictorial arts, Repin and Nikolay Ge were great artists. This was something Tolstoy had understood when walking around in the Tretyakov Gallery in the company of peasants with “unspoiled taste” and watching their reactions. In literature, the great names were Dickens, Hugo and Dostoyevsky. “But your Ibsen, just to take one example, that is a writer that I don’t understand. Do you?” (69).

As Tolstoy returned to work, he gave Langlet a French book to read, *Le travail* (1890): “This is one of the best books that I know; it is written by a peasant, a friend of mine—his name is Timofei Bondarev—and it has been published with my foreword. I advise you to take a look at it, and if it has not yet been translated, then translate it to Swedish” (70).

In the evening, the whole company went for a walk to see Maria L’vovna who lived with her husband in Ovsyannikovo. Tolstoy walked so fast that the others had problems in keeping pace with him. Three kilometers from Yasnaya Polyana, horses and a van were brought to them, and while the ladies took the van, Langlet and Tolstoy rode at gallop across fields and creeks, stopping in a village

to talk with the peasants before reaching Maria L'vovna's simple farm house.

After an outdoor candlelight supper in Yasnaya Polyana the same evening, Langlet was already prepared to leave, but he was persuaded by the Tolstoy family to stay for the night. In the big dining room upstairs, Langlet and Tolstoy played a game of chess. Tolstoy was tired but he soon confined his Swedish opponent's king and queen in a corner and checkmated him. "Nein, Sie spielen nicht gut!" was Tolstoy's verdict (78). Langlet was placed in the library for the night. From the bookshelf he picked *Der Gefangene im Kaukasus*, a German translation of Tolstoy's own *Prisoner of the Caucasus*, a choice which pleased Tolstoy.

Early next morning Langlet and Tolstoy again went for a swim. Breakfast extended to a one hour conversation. What should one do to live a truly human life? Did one have to sacrifice everything, refrain from your own wishes and plans? Tolstoy gave the young man a searching glance before answering. There were two ways for those who wanted to live a life of dignity, a truly Christian life. One was to give away everything in order to follow Him and serve other people without getting anything in return. Even if this way could lead to suffering and death, it was the best way. "Such a life for six weeks, it is, believe me—the old man gave me a flaming glance and struck his fist in the table—worth much more, infinitely more than yours and my life for six and sixty years" (83).

For people who were too weak to follow Christ's example there was another choice, that is, "to try to fulfil the Christian idea to *the greatest possible* extent, as far as our powers permit" (84). This was the way Tolstoy had tried to take, as he did not have strength to follow the right way. His duty and mission were now to write and talk to people about the most important things in life. Tolstoy had given up everything:

I have even managed to free myself from the feelings for my family—I appreciate them all as

excellent persons and I try to keep up good relations with them as they are living close to me, but for me every person is my brother, and everyone is as dear to me, no matter if he is relative or not, compatriot or a foreigner. (85)

People told Tolstoy that he should use his gift as a writer by writing fiction, but, Tolstoy asked Langlet, who has been of greater benefit for mankind—Francis of Assisi or Goethe? Tolstoy could say that he now was only thirty years old, and not seventy. "Life, real, true, genuine human life does not begin until the new spiritual 'I' starts to develop; before that we are only embryos, foetus in the womb" (87). There are many things we cannot understand—like death and life after death—and the only true thing is that "there is a God, that he is love and that we must love each other" (87).

In the autumn, Langlet returned from the Don, riding on horse all the way to St Petersburg. Passing through Tula, he decided to pay Tolstoy a new visit. He arrived late on September 19, and, without invitation, hurried up the stairs to the upper floor where the family was gathered for evening tea. Langlet was cordially greeted and immediately questioned about his journey. Tolstoy asked him to remain a few days as his guest. Langlet had in fact appeared at exactly the right moment. Tolstoy had written an open letter to the Swedish press concerning the Nobel Peace Prize, and needed a translator and a go-between. Rumours had it that Tolstoy was a candidate for the first Peace Prize, but unwilling to accept the nomination, he wanted to recommend the Doukhobors instead, a Russian sect, whose members were severely persecuted as they refused to pay taxes and serve in the army.

In all, Langlet stayed three days in Yasnaya Polyana, working in the afternoons with Tolstoy on the letter. Tolstoy dictated in German, translating and changing his Russian text, and Langlet took it down in shorthand, later translating it to Swedish. Their mutual work was done on September 21, and

on the next day Tolstoy wrote an accompanying letter to the chief-editor of *Stockholms dagblad*, recommending Langlet as “une jeune homme Suédois de beaucoup de talent” (PSS 70–71: 148). His open letter was published in the main Swedish newspapers in mid-October.

On his last morning in Yasnaya Polyana, Langlet sat in Tolstoy’s study and listened to the writer giving him “a brilliant survey of contemporary political and social conditions in Russia, illustrated by vivid and characteristic examples from real life” (*Till häst* 403). Tolstoy showed him a letter from an exiled Russian follower of his and another letter from a Dutchman, a prominent person, who tried to live partially according to Tolstoy’s principles. While the former letter was full of devotion and decisiveness, the Dutchman showed something of the same inner conflict that tormented Langlet: the choice between a life for other people and a life of private interests.<sup>7</sup>

During his stay Langlet also got to know Lev L’vovich, Tolstoy’s son, whom he found to be “an unusually sympathetic, noble and warm-hearted man, who has inherited many of his father’s best traits” (399), and he spent many pleasant hours in the company of Lev L’vovich and his Swedish wife Dora. Not only had Lev L’vovich been successfully cured from his nervous problems by the Swedish occupational therapist Ernst Westerlund (1839–1924), but he had also found a wife in the physician’s daughter, Dora (1878–1933).

After a honeymoon on Gotland, the young couple came to Yasnaya Polyana in September 1896 with the intention of settling down there (Толстая 451). Two years later, the in-laws, Ernst and Nina Westerlund (1839–1922), were invited to Yasnaya Polyana, as Dora was expected to soon give birth to her first child. In Yasnaya Polyana they stayed for five weeks in May and June. Tolstoy had been happy with his son’s choice of wife, in his spare time teaching her Russian (Толстая 452), but for her father he did not give much, although he

was grateful for the doctor’s cure of his son. After the couple’s departure he wrote in his diary that his son’s “very crude and uncouth, but most good-natured *beux parents*” finally had left (PSS 53: 199). Lev L’vovich thinks that the reason for his father’s animosity was that Westerlund treated him too familiarly, tapping him on the shoulder and giving him medical advice. Tolstoy called the Swede “a German *muzhik*, a bourgeois, obtuse, lagging thirty years behind medical science” (“Опыт моей жизни” 89), but he nevertheless agreed to treat his recurrent stomach problems with the egg-based diet that seems to have been Westerlund’s universal cure.

On the occasion of the birth of their second grandchild, Pavel, Dora’s parents spent August 1900 in Yasnaya Polyana. At the end of the same year, Doctor Westerlund came alone upon hearing about his grandson Lev L’vovich Jr’s serious illness. Unfortunately, he arrived too late and could only attend the funeral of the child.

Jonas Stadling stayed in touch with Tolstoy and his family all through the nineties. In his archive there are letters from Tolstoy, Sofia Andreyevna and the children, Maria, Tatiana and Lev L’vovich. His book about the relief work in the Ryazan and Samara districts was published in Swedish in 1893 and in English in 1897. In 1896, he translated four articles by Tolstoy, publishing them with the writer’s permission under the title *Religionen och moralen med flera uppsatser*. In the Swedish press, he reported about the persecution of the Doukhobors and about Tolstoy and his writings.

In May 1898, Stadling came to Russia in search of the Swedish engineer S. A. André’s lost balloon expedition. He had seen the expedition leave from Svalbard a year earlier in its attempt to cross the North Pole, and, like many others, he was now worried about the fate of the three men involved. For half a year, Stadling travelled under harsh conditions in Siberia, covering altogether 2,500 miles, without finding any trace of his compatriots. (The expedition had in fact perished just a few days

after its start, not far from its starting point.) What he gained was a mass of information for a coming book about the life of the native Siberian population and their religious life.

Stadling had been invited to visit Yasnaya Polyana by Lev L'vovich and Dora, and on his way back to Sweden in late November, early December 1898, he got off the train in Tula to spend a few days at Tolstoy's mansion. He was cordially met as an old friend of the family. Tolstoy had grown older, but he was still hale and hearty. Old times were remembered. Maria L'vovna recalled how she and Stadling had visited the village of Pinki in a blizzard (Stadling, *Minnen* 68). In all, about four million people had died that year. Tolstoy's son told Stadling that he had just received a plea for help from Samara, an area which once again was plagued by famine. It was a painful subject, and, with a tired expression upon his face, Tolstoy commented: "Isn't it unnatural and grotesque that we year after year try to relieve chronic famine with alms! If the evil is to be cured you must attack its roots..." (*Genom Sibirien* 279).

Tolstoy was interested in Stadling's Siberian journey and Stadling told him about the native population and the Doukhobors, who had been exiled to the Yakutsk region. Stadling wondered whether it was a great loss for Russia that good people like the Doukhobors were sent into exile or forced to leave their native country. Tolstoy did not see it as a tragedy:

Just like me, they do not consider any country upon this earth to be theirs. It is difficult for them to live here in Russia. Therefore they move to a country where the conditions are better. This is something completely natural. (279)

The discussion was continued the next evening by the samovar in the kitchen. With the help of his diary notes, Stadling told about how he travelled three hundred miles, drawn by dog teams or reindeer, across the tundra between the Lena and

the Yenisey. They spoke in English, but sometimes Stadling changed to Russian in order to reproduce some characteristic local expressions. On the third day, they talked about the role of Shamanism in Siberia. Tolstoy knew about similar fanatic sects in the European part of Russia with ecstatic orgies that often ended in sexual licentiousness. Impressed by Stadling's narrative talent and philanthropic concern, Tolstoy wondered why he had not received the appreciation in Sweden that he deserved. Is not this typical, he said, that the newspapers decide who should be raised and who should be degraded, all in the interest of Mammon. But, on the other hand, "the main thing in all our doings [...] is to follow the voice of conscience" (*Minnen* 71).

Six years later, on the evening of January 21, 1905, Tolstoy told his doctor Dushan Makovitsky that he had been visited by a Swedish writer who had written an article about Strindberg and Tolstoy. The meeting had given him the possibility to once again attack August Strindberg, the "psychopath" (Маковицкий 145). The identification of the visitor, apparently the last Swede to visit Tolstoy, has so far not been successful.

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## Notes

1. Stadling published his reports in *Aftonbladet* (Stockholm), *The Century: Illustrated Monthly Magazine* (New York) and *Новое время*.
2. All dates are given according to the Julian calendar.
3. In the commentary to the *PSS*, the Swede is repeatedly called "von Bonde." It is true that Bonde (the Swedish word for "peasant") was an old noble family in Sweden, but the family did not use the prefix "von." It is unclear whether Abraham Bonde really belonged to the Swedish noble family, as he is not to be found in the Swedish book of noble families. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Tolstoy thought Bonde had a Jewish background (*PSS* 66: 227). To further complicate the

question of the man's identity, he is called von Bunge in Sofia Tolstaya's memoirs (*Моя жизнь* 280).

4. Bonde is considered to be the prototype for the old tramp in *Ressurrection*, who lives without a passport and confesses a religion of his own (Сухотина-Толстая 490).

5. In a newspaper article (J. J. "Hos Leo Tolstoj," *Svenska dagbladet* 22 Sept. 1892), Jensen says that he visited Tolstoy in September, but in his book from 1896, he mentions that Nikolay Strakhov was in Yasnaya Polyana on the same day as he. Strakhov visited Tolstoy twice that summer— from around June 20 to July 5 (PSS 87: 154) and in the beginning of August (Опупьская 10).

6. In the same year, Langlet and Etzel published a small booklet in Russian, *Некоторые из новейших отзывов о международном языке "Эсперанто"* (SPb, 1895; printed in Warsaw), which, besides an article by Langlet, also included a letter from Tolstoy to Esperanto enthusiasts, dated April 4, 1894.

7. It can be added that Langlet was to do important humanitarian work for the benefit of thousands of persecuted Jews in Budapest during Second World War.

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### “Though this be Madness”: Sofia Tolstaya’s Second Response to *Kreutzer Sonata*

Madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be breakthrough. It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death.

R. D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience* (1967)

[...] when a heroine goes mad she always goes into white satin[...].

Richard Sheridan, *The Critic* (1779)

Lev Tolstoy’s controversial novella *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) is a fictional narrative that takes the form of a heart-rending confession by a conscience-stricken Russian aristocrat. Years earlier, the hero Pozdnyshev had married a much younger woman, partly to satisfy his intense physical desires; over time, he becomes pathologically jealous of her non-physical, but deeply emotional, relationship with a musician. In a fit of fanatical rage, Pozdnyshev murders his wife and is subsequently condemned to recite a brutally frank account of his crime to any interested listener. In Tolstoy’s telling of the tale, the reader is the captive listener, figured as a fellow railway passenger addressed by Pozdnyshev on an all-night journey.

Tolstoy’s faithful and devoted wife of nearly fifty years, Sofia Andreyevna Tolstaya (née Behrs) (1844-1919), not only repeatedly and laboriously copied her husband’s story each time he made revisions to satisfy the censors, but also wrote at length about it in her own letters, diaries, and her voluminous autobiography. She disagreed markedly with Tolstoy’s emphases and conclusions at almost every turn; moreover, she was deeply embarrassed that the reading public had construed the story as a reflection of her own marriage to the

famous writer. In a most extraordinary and intriguing twist of events, Sonya turned to writing fiction herself. She composed two “counter-stories,” her own literary challenge to *The Kreutzer Sonata*, texts that remained in manuscript form, buried in her archive until a few years ago.

In the second of her stories, “Song Without Words” (1898), Sofia Andreyevna explored the relationship of a talented composer and musician with members of the Tolstoy family circle. In fact, during the summers of 1895-97 Sergei Taneyev (1856-1915), who had studied composition with Tchaikovsky and piano with Nikolai Rubenstein, visited the Tolstoy estate in Yasnaya Polyana. Sonya developed a deep attachment to him that evidently embarrassed her children and enraged her husband. Taneyev himself, it seems, was more attracted to men than to women, and remained largely unaware of the intensity of Sonya’s affection.

In Sofia’s story, the young heroine Sasha, distraught after the death of her mother, emerges from her mourning only to become consumed by an interest in music, and by a man who both composed and performed it. When the musician consistently rebuffs her advances, the heroine, manifesting an array of strange symptoms, sinks into madness. The tale ends when she finally decides to have herself committed to a “University Clinic for Nervous Diseases.” Sofia Tolstaya’s story reveals a deep understanding of a woman’s psychology: her depression, her obsessive-compulsive behaviors, and suicidal tendencies.

Madness as both a fact of life and a theme in literature has been investigated thoroughly. Foucault’s classic study *Madness and Civilization* (1965) describes the shift from the medieval period when insanity was considered part of everyday life: Fools and madmen (and women) walked the streets freely. He argues that it was only in the early 1800s that such people began to be considered a threat, resulting in the building of asylums to house them,