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Tolstoy’s Epilogue

(from the Maude translation, with Apologies to Auden)

This man is still needed to justify the final collective act.
That act is performed.
The last role is played.
The actor is bidden to disrobe
And wash off his powder and paint:
He will not be wanted any more.

And some years pass
During which he plays a pitiful comedy to himself
In solitude on his island
Justifying his actions by intrigues and lies
When the justification is no longer needed.

And displaying to the whole world
What it was that people had mistaken for strength
As long as an unseen hand directed his actions.

The manager having brought the drama to a close
And stripped the actor
Shows him to us.

“See what you believed in! This is he!
Do you now see that it was not he
But I who moved you?”

- Robin Feuer Miller

