CHAPTER ONE

TOLSTOY AND HIS CRITICS:
THE INTELLECTUAL CLIMATE

From the middle of the nineteenth century to the revolution of 1917, the volatile intellectual climate of postreform Russia produced six major trends in literary criticism, each inspiring its critics' reaction to Tolstoy. These trends resulted in the following groups. (1) The early radicals of the 1850s and 1860s were pragmatic rationalists who wanted to adapt and use the achievements of Western civilization to overcome Russia's backwardness and who expected literature to promote current social issues. (2) The Slavophile and so-called organic critics—both antirationalist, politically conservative, mythically inclined Russian nationalists, the Slavophiles concerned more with Russia's past, the organic critics with her future—agreed that literature should serve the cause of the Russian people by promoting their message of Russia's mystical nature at home and abroad. (3) A number of writers, poets, and critics known loosely in the 1860s as the aesthetes opposed didacticism in art and developed an aesthetic theory in which art was an autonomous phenomenon that should be enjoyed as a value in itself. They proposed that literature should raise the general level of culture among the population. As critics they believed that their task was to exemplify how a man of taste uses and evaluates literature, and thus show how literature is to be absorbed into society. Their criticism also had its pedants, some of whom were still trying to apply canons of ideal form in the eighteenth-century tradi-
tion. (4) The so-called narodniki, a large and diverse group of fairly sophisticated critics including the radicals of the 1870s and 1880s and others who combined a good education with a taste for literature and an interest in civic affairs, were interested in subjective psychology and concerned about the rights of the individual—issues they wanted good literature to promote. (5) The symbolists and the impressionists, who began with the ironic gesture of turning away from the world of the marketplace, with all its blurred sounds and imprecise meanings, renounced rhetoric, moral judgment, and all other idols of the tribe, and concentrated on the poet’s function as a maker of poems. Their technique, which was paradoxical, encyclopedic, and discontinuous, was a technical innovation, heralding a new mode. The ironic mood of saying one thing and meaning another is incorporated in their doctrine of the avoidance of direct statement. But as critics they thought of art mainly as a vehicle for the promotion of the artist’s ego and believed literature to be an experience in itself. They wanted literature to probe the deeper meaning of reality, which, they thought, could be done by means of a literature that was rich in verbal symbols of the inexpressible. (6) The Marxists, after successive failures of the early radicals and the narodniki to come up with viable methods of dealing with various important issues, settled on dialectical materialism as the only reliable method of probing ontological questions and other issues related to man’s ability to control his environment. They viewed literature as a means of promoting Marxist ideology and Marxist ideas among the people. All these divergent groups of critics disagreed in their views but had one thing in common—a desire to control the intellectual climate of their country. They will be discussed here in roughly the same chronological order in which they appeared.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Russian intellectuals felt that their politically beleaguered country was being forced by history into an untenable state from which escape would be difficult. To counteract this trend, they turned to literary criticism as the means by which to steer their nation onto a better historic course. As the heirs and spokesmen of this critical attitude, Russian literary critics are apt to make random and haphazard use of their material, often, in fact, to treat the writer as source material for their political ideas, ignoring what does not suit and selecting bits and pieces to moralize on. I believe that there are elements in the
Russian mentality that account for the strange disjointedness of the critics’ thinking, their tendency to talk about everything and nothing at once, to digress and yet be extremely popular. This strange informality needs to be explained and understood. It frequently happens that a conscious and cultivated understanding must first be produced through analysis of the cultural patterns in question before one can even think about beginning to understand the issues involved. At the same time, for purposes of scholarship the digressions need to be eliminated as no longer relevant, since they addressed themselves to a contemporary audience that was preoccupied with these issues and that mixed literature and reality, something that is not done today. To comprehend Russian criticism it is therefore essential to approach it with historical understanding, and also with an alertness to the difficulties bestrewing a path on which few of our Western scholarly minds have ventured. This book is thus an attempt to extract from the writings of these popular critics that which is relevant to Tolstoy as part of the country’s literature and culture but not sociopolitical, topical, everyday affairs.

The Russian intelligentsia felt cornered by history. During the previous three hundred years their country had changed from a tribal to a modern society. This transition had been the single most important factor shaping Russian life. Its results were momentous. It brought about a radical alteration in Russia’s cultural, social, and political goals, as the society began changing gradually from the customs of an illiterate oral society to those of a literate society. Consequently, Russia still presents a blend of old and new customs. Older patterns of thinking and communication with corresponding states of mind persist alongside newer, more recently acquired patterns. This turbulent process, which is inadequately understood, is still going on in Russia, and in it, even posthumously, Tolstoy plays an integral role. The full meaning of this involvement and the significance it indicates for the writings of Tolstoy apparently have not been investigated or taken seriously enough to be related to the pronouncements of his critics. Yet to overlook this fact, or to dismiss its implications as obvious or superficial, is tantamount to missing the whole point of Russian criticism, whose principal concern was never the form of literature but rather the life of the nation.

In fact, Russia’s entire way of thinking, not just its political institutions, changed during the late nineteenth century. Karl R.
Popper shows in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* how change from a traditional to a modern society involves a partial dissolution of tribal customs and a series of reactions. Change leads to tension and conflict, but also to a renaissance—a great spiritual revolution, an invention of critical discussion and, in consequence, of logical thought free from magical obsessions. All of these factors were at work in nineteenth-century Russia. At the same time we find symptoms of a new uneasiness and an increase in self-consciousness accompanied by insecurity, as in the appearance of a puzzling new phenomenon—the alienated intellectual (the "superfluous man")—as soon as the strain of civilization was beginning to be felt. Under such conditions the demand arises for a new interpretation of issues in accord with the spirit of the age, to compensate for the altered situation of consciousness. Critics, as the intellectual leaders of the nation, assumed that it was their responsibility to supply such an interpretation. The tasks of Russian criticism thus appear much more varied, and the individual phases of the long process of its development much more contradictory, than is the case in Western criticism.

Historically, like so much else in Russia that is culturally modern in origin, literary criticism began in part as an importation from abroad. At first the situation in the new discipline was relatively simple. Critical articles began to be published in the latter part of the eighteenth century by prominent, well-educated Russians who held that there was a need to guide and control a growing native literature that was becoming strong enough to displace foreign translations as the standard reading fare. Critical standards were borrowed from the West, partly from French classicism (Boileau) and partly from German romanticism (Novalis, the Schlegel brothers). A new dialectical method of intellectual inquiry was adapted from the German philosophy of objective idealism (Hegel) for use in judging literature in polemic debates. But although one may recognize that the standards and aims professed in these articles were broad and humane, in actuality there was a divorce between theory and practice. An intense struggle developed between adherents of liberal, "enlightened," pro-Western attitudes, and those who held conservative, nationalistic views. Far from becoming resolved, ideological conflicts eventually produced two opposite movements, one liberal and one conservative, accommodating, respectively, progressively extraverted international and regressively
introverted conservative nationalistic views. The conflict between the two trends adumbrated the powerful tensions that arose, gradually, in the national psyche after the sudden intrusions of Western culture in Russia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and their momentous growth. The tensions reflect, on the one hand, the changes in thinking usually stimulated by literacy and expressed in a better command of logic, detachment, rationalism, and various desires for enlightenment, rapid progress, and social change. On the other hand, they reflect the mysticism and ebullient conservatism sustained by massive oral traditions of a tribal past, prevalent in large segments of the population and supported by many of the old nobility. By 1852 when Tolstoy's first work, "The Story of My Childhood" (later renamed Childhood), was printed in the Contemporary, the opposing factions had found support in, and become affiliated with, politically active groups referred to as radicals and Slavophiles. Critics who were disinclined to join either movement and who preferred to remain detached were christened aesthetes and were treated with disdain by members of both activist camps.

From the beginning, relations among all groups were characterized by animosity. The Slavophiles attacked the radicals as theoreticians, using the term as a pejorative label, trying to demonstrate the fallaciousness of their rational, mechanistic, and analytical conceptions. The progressive radicals, who were strict rationalists, condemned the Slavophiles for being retrograde mystics, but agreed with them that literature must have a message. However, the battle between the civic and aesthetic critics was fought with such bitterness that made any reconciliation seem impossible. Radicals and Slavophiles alike expressed savage contempt for the effete notions of the aesthetic critics, with their idea of "art for art's sake." Both found the theory that literature should serve as its own message deeply repugnant. They thought it a shameful waste of a valuable cultural resource that could be used to promote important ideas. Because attitudes toward literature were so drastic, few commented on the artistic value of the work itself.

One of their most common attributes was a sense of performing an important function, of being part of a serious endeavor—serious, not solemn, for there is too much sarcasm in most of the reviews to pose a question of solemnity. Sharing this serious attitude, the critics thought their function was to influence both writ-
ers and readers. The area of specific concern for many critics was determined by prior assumptions of what is and what is not important, relevant knowledge. Many critics were fired by a desire to become intellectual leaders of the people. Unfortunately, some of them deluded themselves into thinking that their activity was the equivalent of the work of literature itself. Critics frequently charged each other with being unable to discern an important issue treated successfully by an author (cf. Pisarev and Grigor'ev, pp. 46, 82 below). They took malicious pleasure in exposing so-called inferior considerations that were based on, for example, the explicator's own moral or aesthetic judgment, which they took pains to present as subjective, arbitrary, and therefore irrelevant. The eccentrics on the fringe of each movement were welcome targets for the fire of the other critics. Today, now that the dust has settled, one can see that the fire on all sides was concentrated on the extreme flanks of the enemy. The center of each group was left unscathed since, in truth, there was no fundamental disagreement between them. They all wanted good literature to promote the cultural message of the Russian people, even if their individual notions about the nature of that message differed considerably from camp to camp and from man to man. All critics urged writers to envision new types of Russian men and women who would be representative of the times and could serve as models of conduct for future generations. The radicals wanted their model citizens of the future to be depicted as thoroughly civilized, enlightened people: progressive, rational individuals, well-educated urban bourgeois (hence the Soviets politely dismiss their views as utopian socialism), who would be free from the mistakes, the customs, and the prejudices of Russia's dismally ignorant tribal past. An outstanding example of literature written to radical specifications is Chernyshevsky's famous 1863 didactic bestseller of dubious artistic merit, What Is to Be Done? Tales about New People, which presents a series of model citizens—appealing characters who struggle against great odds to attain a worthwhile goal. Eventually they succeed in freeing themselves from their rude tribal past and sexual prejudices, and from then on lead successful, industrious, socially useful lives.

The Slavophiles, who were known to their opposition as reactionaries, condemned Chernyshevsky's book for its "one-sided rationalism" (see Dostoevsky's polemic with it in his Notes from the
Underground), its "rectilinear" ideas, and its cardboard characters. Assuredly, the Slavophiles projected their own models as contemporary versions of the saints and heroes of Russia's fabulous past. They criticized the radicals' criteria, which they found too negative and nihilistic, but not their methods. They agreed that literature should edify and civilize the people, helping them adjust to modern life. But they looked for their message in conservative, nonpolitical areas. They worshipped the obsolete, often garish forms of old Russian tribal lore and culture and wanted Russian writers to use and celebrate it in modern works by bringing it up to date and back to life. They urged writers to galvanize the relics of Russia's presumably glorious tribal past, to employ exotic forms and expressions derived from old Russian folklore and culture, and to develop an ornamental style to match it.

Remarkable early success in this area of mainly formal accomplishment was achieved by N.S. Leskov (1831–95), a writer with a gift for an unusual turn of phrase but no talent for plot who devised and introduced the written equivalent of traditional Russian oral narrative, since then named the skaz. He was a past master of a style that escapes the fixity of the printed page, that sounds in our ears with the immediacy of the heard voice, the very voice of unpretentious truth. Some of his stories appear as though they may have been designed for the amusement of Russian merchants whose financial power made them want to claim a descent from fabulous heroes and saints. The ceremonial style in a number of his other stories reflects the manners and mores and modes of address pertaining to medieval days. But Leskov's writings are essentially not medieval, nor are they merchant tales with a style molded to suit the specific customs, mannersisms, and pleasures of a restricted elite. He wrote to restore the rhythms and mannerisms of the oral speech in the new medium of literacy.

The conservation of old Russian customs by the Slavophiles was not a symptom of romantic nostalgia. Rather, it provided a setting in which to preserve the group identity of the Russian people. The Slavophiles, who worried about the disintegration of the Russian family under pressure of civilization (see Dostoevsky's remarks on this issue in chap. 3), felt that the Russian customs provided a matrix within which to contain and preserve their national character. They felt that tradition, the continuity of law, custom, and usage must be maintained, or Russian society would disintegrate
and its cohesion would be lost. They wanted to develop literature in this period as essentially the encyclopedic and moral instruction of Russians, to preserve Russian integrity. This literature, however, was intended to be pan-Russian. Its continuity was to be supplied by a fresh and elaborate development of the oral style, whereby a whole way of life, and not simply the deeds of heroes, would be held together and so rendered transmissible between the generations. Several other writers not in the least belonging to the Slavophile orientation (Zamiatin, Bely, Remizov, Zoshchenko) also engaged in developing a new oral style to suit modern Russia. Inhibition against too much change encouraged some of them to frame contemporary events as though they were the acts and words of ancestors. This, naturally, did not please the progressives. For the best part of his creative life, Leskov was hounded and ostracized by the radical press for combining in his work "the worst features of Slavophilism, aestheticism, and obscurantism."

The anachronistic nature of demands to restore literature to its tribal role as the encyclopedia of society's values is obvious. The notion that literature performs a serious educational function and has a significant effect upon the fortunes of society derives from older, preliterate forms of social organization that depend on poets for their continuity and coherence. In oral societies the work of poets is essential to the development and transmission of culture and must so function; otherwise it is not respected. Besides being the artists and entertainers of the tribe, the poets are also its wise men and prophets. They formulate and popularize new ideas, invent and lay down ground rules for proper personal conduct, and describe in vivid, entertaining, and uplifting form the important issues and the desirable and undesirable features of community life. They share the belief that a poet is a sage. As such, he is the final authority on all matters he treats, and sooner or later he deals with everything in the heavens above and the earth below. Sometimes he advises the technical trades; but for the most part he invents and promulgates various formulas for a good life— procedures that help integrate the individual into society and steer him through life. In this way the poet proves his worth to his society. He gives it a set of values that are current, a model structure to emulate, and a stable self-image. In a word, the poets of oral societies do what organized religion and culture do with varying success in their societies—provide satisfying norms for those deep
human needs that otherwise find a banal and dangerous antisocial expression. In Russia this concept of poet as sage prevailed; it exists yet, complicated by modernity but basically intact.

Nearly every prerevolutionary critic agreed, for example, that the protagonist of the new Russian fiction should be a commoner, not the nobleman who had been the hero in the past, whose historic role was now finished. They usually lavishly praised the writer who had succeeded in making a commoner the strong hero, and they censured with specific criticism the writer who failed to do so. Chernyshevsky, for instance, reproached Turgenev for having failed to produce a strong, positive new hero in his works ("A Russian at a Rendezvous" [1858], to which the aesthete P. V. Annenkov replied in a rebuttal entitled "The Literary Type of a Weak Man" (1858) that the type of hero Turgenev created was not only positive but dynamic: he stood for progress and creativity, creative people being always such "weak" characters. Another aesthete, A. V. Druzhinin, discussed the controversial hero of Goncharov's famous novel *Oblomov* in similar terms. In a pathetic "Preface to My Novels," Turgenev tried to defend himself against his accusers, claiming that he had done his level best to depict and embody, conscientiously and dispassionately, in appropriate types what Shakespeare called "the body and pressure of time." Critics of all persuasions thus wanted Russian writers to serve as bards and prophets of a new Russian society of classless citizens. More recently, the Bolsheviks have repeated the demand for this new type of hero even more restrictively, insisting that he be a proletarian.

The origins of this idea in oral tradition appear to be beyond reasonable doubt. Certainly it was from this point of view that Tolstoy's value as a writer was judged by his Russian critics. They judged not his art but his potential as a cultural leader of the nation. His performance as an inventor of new patterns for living in a modern world was admired by some and deprecated by others. Any evaluation of Tolstoy's critics that fails to consider this basic criterion of their judgment is likely to be deficient. Moreover, adoration of writers and exaggerated concern for what they can do, as though they were magi, able to summon and control the dark sinister forces of our primitive unconscious nature that may destroy culture, are psychologically sound notions born of intuitive wisdom and nonanalytical patterns of thinking. And indeed, as Victor Terras points out, Russian critics speak of poets as prophets in the most
literal sense. If we consider this attitude we cannot lump utilitarian Russian criticism together with sociological criticism. The latter is rational in nature, Western in origin, and purely social in orientation; whereas the former is a mixture of mystic and social ideas—thought-feelings about social and cultural affairs that are relatively poorly differentiated, as is characteristic of traditional, archaic thought. Clearly, we have a situation where archaic notions and progressive thinking overlap each other in the critics' minds.

But this peroration raises still another problem that we have touched on in the previous paragraphs: the reasons for the confusion in the minds of the critics. V. V. Zenkovsky in his History of Russian Philosophy, devotes a good deal of space to what he calls the "theurgic restlessness" of the Russian intelligentsia in this period. Aside from theurgy, the restlessness was caused largely by anxiety—not knowing what to do now, where to steer the nation, whether to pursue a destiny that follows the Western ideal of territorial expansion or to promote Russia's eschatological message of moral regeneration, i.e., whether to pursue a Western course of progress in space or an Eastern one in time. Pavel Miliukov makes some revealing remarks about this dilemma in his "Degeneration of Slavophilism," where he claims that the idea of nationhood interfered with Russian messianism, whereas the messianic idea interfered with the idea of nationhood. Some of the anxieties appear to have arisen from personal subliminal conflicts—doubts about the reality of divine interference in human affairs, as enlightened Russians abandoned their traditions, lost faith in eternal life and the sacral world of religion in favor of the profane world of science, progress, and strict temporality. Evidently, this created a conflict of consciousness, which expressed itself in an obsessive consternation at not being able to figure out what to do to satisfy the zeitgeist that at this time, appeared to them dressed in a thoroughly modern, scientific garb as history. Theirs was a divided state of mind. The topic seems to me important, and I hope I may be allowed to digress to illustrate it.

The causes of this anomaly may be considerably more substantial than mere bewilderment from rapid social change, if one is to believe Claude Lévi-Strauss, who, along with Havelock, Cassirer, Eliade, and Jung, declares that civilization and literacy cause significant changes in traditional man's thinking habits. These writers suggest that the "savage mind" (traditional man) tends to think in
space (images) and believe\(^9\) in time, whereas modern man has come to think mainly in time (logic) and believe in space. Modern man therefore explores the limits of space and vigorously pursues territorial, social, and intellectual progress, whereas traditional man, who abhors change and is not interested in social progress, pursues moral progress and the limits of time (eschatology). This pattern, says Lévi-Strauss, changes with advances in civilization, when interest in eschatology slowly fades\(^{10}\) and is replaced by interest in scientific goals.\(^{11}\)

Noted scholars have looked into the divided state of the Russian mind. G. P. Fedotov asserts that it is still mostly on the side of religious imagery and atemporality, and that Russian peasants remain religious to this day, clinging in a new civilization to the old values of a faith in supernatural, sacral aspects of an atemporal life.\(^{12}\) Zenkovsky insists that the mind of the Russian intellectual is dominated by what he calls “mystic realism”: a theurgic faith in history as destiny and a belief in a metaphysical connection between the realms of nature and culture.\(^{13}\) Nicolas Berdiaev claims that “the Russian idea” is that life is a meaningless affair as an individual experience but has meaning on a higher plane as part of the life of the nation, which must play a significant role in a hidden reality made up not only of commonplace secular, i.e., natural, experiences, but also of a man-made, cultural, supernatural segment of experience.\(^{14}\) Such ideas clearly originate in archaic, symbolic thought. Popper has shown that whereas modern literate societies function largely by way of abstract relations, such as exchange and cooperation, tribal or closed societies have a biological unity.\(^{15}\) Indeed, the average Russian even today sees his nationality, not as an ethnic fact, but as a mystic and fatal condition and a commitment to a historic goal. The Russian is extraordinarily, one might say suicidally, attached to his people. Countless testimonials exist besides Alexander Solzhenitsyn and his book The Gulag Archipelago about the Russian’s strange need to be with or return to his people, even with the knowledge that he might be destroyed as a result. The Russian has an irrational sense of belonging there no matter what. He sees himself as alive only as a member of his tribe, this body of people that, to him, is a mystic social organism like a monstrous swarm of bees that is at once his home and destiny and that he calls his narod.\(^{16}\) The role of this narod in the overall scheme of things depends on the leaders it elects to follow and the historic
course they choose to pursue. In essence, then, one can say that the average Russian cares for no salvation other than as a member of his nation, which is his entrance to immortality. The intellectual message of the nation, the values and ideas by which all its members in good standing will be judged at the end of time by some recondite agent of history, is in the hands of leaders and writers who, as the sages of the nation, decide on its content, and thereby critically influence the nation's future. This somewhat irrational theory should help explain the Russian's extraordinary predilection for ideology, as well as the admiration and apprehension with which they treat their writers. In spite of the inroads made into Russian thinking by Western rationalism and skepticism, this irrational attitude persists and colors Russian thinking to an astonishing degree. It also seriously affects the policies of Russian governments. It is fair to conclude that the cultural situation described is one in which traditional thinking still dominates the important relationships and valid transactions of life.

Probable answers to two of our questions have now already been revealed, namely, why message is so important to Russian criticism, and why Russian critics treat Tolstoy with such vehemence and ideological intolerance. And, although much of it may be speculative, the answers to several other puzzles become apparent if we consider precisely what the educational mechanisms amount to in an oral culture. Presumably, as Russia accommodates herself to literacy, these mechanisms will wither away. But for the time being her sociopolitical structure still resembles nonliterate societies where the task of education could be described as putting the whole community, by means of repeated indoctrination, into a formulaic state of mind in order to preserve its integrity.

So far, so good. Yet I propose now to look at the problem from the reverse end of the telescope, so to speak, not as a part of a process but as seen at a point in time. I have outlined the probable causes of confusion in the minds of progressive as well as conservative critics. Indeed, the atmosphere among the literati at this time was almost hysterical—fraught with irrational tensions and charged with emotion. The sharpness of polemics in the press, the importance attached to current issues, the deviousness with which some important issues were treated—all suggest the bizarre, morbid, anomalous mood of the time. In an age that was witnessing the aftermath of the change of Russia from an oral to a literate society,
it was natural that concern with political principles and theories should have been intense and the criticism heated. In the midst of the furor, only an occasional voice could be heard appealing to the participants, urging restraint. The overheated atmosphere is usually traced to the difficulties created by the obsolete political regime. And, to be sure, these were responsible in part. At the time, however, there were also considerable tensions in the social fabric of Russia due to the burgeoning conflict between the old establishment and the rising new intellectual elite of "men of odd backgrounds," the raznochintsy, who were preparing for leadership, challenging the cultural values, power, and privileges of the old elite, and clamoring for the destruction of its supporting structure, which was based on the old tribal hereditary class distinctions. For this reason, Turgenev coined for them the name nihilists in his famous novel Fathers and Sons (1862), a work of literature that became the arena for this heated conflict and the issues it created. In this case, we may say, the novel was usefully and rather precisely applied to help define a current sociopolitical problem, and proposed a method for dealing with it.

But there is, slipped in during the course of this development, a curious circumstance: many of the critics who wrote at this time were not literary critics at all but social thinkers who turned to literature for political reasons. The archaic system of government, in its own distress caused by rapid changes in the social fabric of the nation, had instituted a severely restrictive, repressive censorship that bluntly forbade open discussion of political issues. Literature was the only forum that remained at least partly open to indirect discussion of vital issues. Literary criticism thus offered the only possibility of intellectual control over life, and literature was the sole means of testing and transmitting ideas. Already in 1830 the famous poet-aristocrat Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837) had proposed in all seriousness that literary criticism should be developed into a science to control public opinion. The history of Russian criticism, we conclude, is the story of intellectual controls that failed, for Russian history took its course regardless of its critics. This course was one of gradual regression toward more archaic, tribal forms of communal life that, apparently, laid the groundwork for the acceptance of communism.

Within itself, Russian criticism reflected the same polarization that was characteristic of trends on the sociopolitical scene. The
Europeanized aesthetes, who had become alienated from their roots through an attitude of civilized disdain for the coarse Russian customs, eventually disappeared from the scene and were replaced by the symbolists. In every way just as uprooted as the aesthetes, the symbolists organized a successful quasi-redemptive return to their tribal roots. They revised the archaic notion of the poet as a tribal sage, but with an ingenious fin-de-siècle twist: they claimed to have lost interest in the coarse and trivial world of *phenomena* and rejected the materialism of the urban philistine, the modern savage, whom they would neither guide, advise, nor teach. Instead, they pictured themselves as mysterious magi, detached from banal worldly concerns, living alone in a world of *noumena*, protected against the phenomenological threat of philistine life. Thus they were inclined to cultivate the symbolist ivory tower, to defend the poet’s self-esteem and social status by indulgence in “mysteries” incomprehensible and useless outside the symbolist community, useless even to the majority of the Russian people who never could relate to the symbolists’ production of verse and prose. Yet artists are strongly influenced by their contemporary culture and its formulas, even if the formulas are inadequate to accord with the more sophisticated forms of their actual artistic achievement. It need not surprise us, then, that the works of Russian symbolists prove to have been composed formulaically and rhythmically, reflecting the return to the original tribal (oral) operational form. However, any attempt to summarize symbolist doctrine exposes the vagueness of the pronouncements of the various symbolists, not to mention their frequent contradictions. One might be forgiven for coming to doubt whether the term *symbolism* has any specific meaning at all, and to conclude that it is, like the term *romanticism*, simply the label for a cluster of tendencies, many of them not even closely related. All symbolist doctrines seem either to rest upon some kind of idealism or else to deny the dualism of ideality and materialism by believing these concepts to be abstractions out of a primary reality in which they exist undifferentiated. Some, like D. S. Merezhkovsky, were philosophers of symbolic form (see chap. 6). Most Russian symbolists tended to be experimenters with poetic form. Yet some of their leading representatives, such as Merezhkovsky, Zinaida Hippius, A. Blok, and V. Ivanov, felt that they were also committed to social progress. They quite seriously believed in the social and national mission of their movement, and saw themselves
as prophets, leaders, and reorganizers of Russian life. They had a theurgic conception of art as verbal magic, an idea that was especially important to the philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev and that emerged at various times in the poetry and criticism of Bely, Blok, V. Ivanov, and other symbolists.¹⁹

The positions of the civic critics also hardened and became more restrictive. The romantic early radicals were replaced by the slightly less romantic narodniki, the rural tribalists (the name literally means that) who naively adored the Russian peasant, threw bombs, and expected a cryptic message of salvation from Mother Russia. The defeat of the narodniki movement and the repression of the eighties were warning enough that Russian society would not be remade by romantic dreams and isolated acts of terrorism. The narodniki were replaced by the more urbane and practical Marxists, who corrected ideological blunders and a futile rural orientation by adopting as their own political base the cause of the rootless and exhausted tribe of landless peasants who were flocking to the cities in search of sustenance. The Marxists gave these poor, disoriented people a new name, the proletariat; a new tribal ideology, communism; and a new cultural identity and lease on life. The Marxists, with their functional approach to life, scorned any romanticism in literature that contained religious ideals, which the Marxists rejected as philosophic idealism and declared to be ideologically incompatible with materialism.

The attitudes of the Slavophiles also deteriorated toward restriction and intolerance. Their views gravitated further toward nationalism, mysticism, provincialism, and various other reactionary positions. The trend, then, was everywhere toward restriction: to conformity with standards set by an existing community, controls on thoughts and practices, and, in a word, traditionalism. This trend suggests the kind of political relationship by which society expected to be governed at the time. Conservatism was gaining ground. Many Russians were angered and frustrated by the mounting pressures of change. They wanted to retreat from the dizzying advances in civilization, go back in time, retrace the nation’s steps in history to see what went wrong. They blamed the government and the aliens for their troubles, which seemed to have multiplied astronomically since Westernization and urbanization. They wanted to dismantle the social structure that had become oppressive, to regroup and start anew from the cult of life as the simple tribal
The commune had. They sought to retreat as far as possible from Westernism, in which wit, they thought, merely produced woe and freedom of thought brought trouble. This attitude was expressed in, among other things, a new promotion of the archaic notion of the village commune (obshchina); the assassination of its strongest opponent, the able state minister P. A. Stolypin (1862–1911), by radical terrorists; and the growing chauvinism, bigotry, intolerance of aliens, and violence, as in the sharp increase of pogroms of Jews before the revolution. It is not too difficult to see how this Slavophile-inspired spirit of inertia and the nostalgic yearnings for the mythical “good old days”—for security, life in a closed commune, exclusion of aliens, and a return to the womb of Mother Russia for new strength after a long and debilitating foreign war (1914–18)—became transmuted into an enthusiasm for communism, which promised not only to satisfy these fundamental urges but also to offer an exciting spree of revenge and material rewards to the deprived people of the proletariat. More important, by returning the capital city to Moscow, the hub of old Muscovy, the communists would end the Saint Petersburg era of cosmopolitan Russian culture with all its vague, liberal, bookish notions of universal progress, the abstract, homogenized culture that had been foisted upon the nation by a renegade czar (Peter I) who built his eerie swamp metropolis in cahoots with hated foreign devils.

So, the urge to retribalize, to stop thinking and start feeling good again, and to get rid of the aliens and an incompetent czar (Nicholas II) who was influenced by his foreign wife became an enormously complex, emotionally charged issue that caught up the most personal and intimate feelings of the entire nation as they were deeply rooted in Russia’s obscure tribal past. There was rioting, and many expected worse things to come: an apocalyptic purgation, a mystic (which is to say, intellectually undifferentiated) regenerative experience on a national scale, which did arrive with the revolution as Lenin predicted. Some visionary poets had been predicting apocalyptic calamities for quite some time (Lermontov, A. Blok). In any event, the impelling mood was a vastly more complex, potent issue than a mere fashionable trend toward mysticism and anarchism, led by famous and aristocratic anarchists and mystics such as Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Tolstoy, among culturally disaffected members of an uprooted intelligentsia and a disenfranchized aristocracy.
In view of this, is it surprising that the so-called literary critics, for all the jarring discord among them on the intellectual plane, were united in feeling a profound uneasiness and anticipated an impending national reversal, or that, in their search for guidance, they turned to Tolstoy? Beneath the gloss of Western sophistication, many of them still cherished the naïve conviction that every great writer was a voice from God, an intellectual czar or judge (they had a winged phrase, "ruler of thought," which Pushkin had applied to Lord Byron), giving them the correct interpretation of reality and the means of accommodating it. They were looking for a father figure who would step forward in times of trouble, deliver the people from evil, and lead them into the promised land of the future. Yet in their arrogance and confusion from the subliminal conflict between a new consciousness and a lingering savage lack of mental discipline, they expected the answers to lie in confirmations of their own opinions. And when Tolstoy failed to oblige, they self-righteously charged him with being a great artist but a poor thinker, i.e., a failure as a national sage. Yet Tolstoy's accomplishments, the nature of which are only now emerging into full view, must be considered extraordinary in many ways. One can say without exaggeration that all the momentous issues that moved Russia in his day were in one way or another reflected in his works. He actually sought, and sometimes succeeded in finding, viable solutions to most of the problems that plagued society. The issue seems to me important enough that I examine it in detail.

TOLSTOY AS A PROPHET

To begin with, all of Tolstoy's work achieves the aim of good writers everywhere: he was able to reflect, idealize, and modify national standards of morality, and to influence people's fundamental values. Tolstoy's extraliterary projects, moreover, evince essentially the same orientation. In his experiments in teaching peasant children with heuristic methods, Tolstoy attempted to enter upon a new age of education that aims for discovery rather than instruction, a new way of teaching that avoids the harsh and crippling pressure of formal education, so as to replace the dangerous resentment that urges children to lawlessness by developing enthusiasm for learning and free development of natural talents. He knew of the dangerous resurgence of crude violence and tribalism in Russia and was aware of the tendency of natural
man to balk at cultural restrictions, even to rebel if he no longer feared a swift and sure retaliation. Tolstoy repeatedly warned the last czar, in urgent personal letters, that harsh restrictions, indiscriminately applied by a weak, incompetent government, were a bad policy that could trigger rioting. Concerned with the natural amoralism of the modern man, he wanted to free Russians from cultural domination by rational and aesthetic standards as they made their first contacts with literature. His series of *Readers for the People* and *Intermediary* publications advocated a sound Christian morality in place of an intellectual sophistication that the Russian people, he felt, did not need and could not absorb because such skills take time to develop and, unless based on traditional culture and ethics, lead to nihilism. He appealed to everyone to "bethink themselves" in terms of ethics: stop violence, wars, national arrogance, and racial (tribal) discrimination. He condemned aesthetic hedonism—art that served only pleasure—on grounds that such art made man selfish and arrogant and stunted his moral and religious sensibilities. Even Tolstoy's very strange doctrine of "nonresistance to evil" seems to have been invented for the moral, rather than intellectual, betterment of Russians. It looks very different, queer, ambivalent, and yet prophetic in the light of subsequent history, in which revolution and mass violence swept the country, nearly destroying its culture. It was followed by a popular posture of meek nonresistance to a harsh reign of terror imposed by a regime of archaic thinkers whose moral sensibilities were never akin to Tolstoy's, yet who now admire him and label him a "mirror" of their revolution. This curious admiration for an old-world aristocrat despite his background and religious stance is a major mystery that has not been explained by Lenin's famed articles on Tolstoy (see chap. 7). The admiration shows no signs of abating, despite major changes in the composition of the new regime since it was originally formed by Lenin in 1917.

The cause of this evident incongruity appears related to the fact that, in essentials, Tolstoy, too, was an archaic thinker. His moral position was not the strongest feature of his message and art. Unintentionally, in his art he reflected the amoral, intuitive, "pagan" mentality of many Russians and their traditional mode of thinking and feeling. He gave unconscious expression to, we may say, the dark undifferentiated soul of Mother Russia: that side of the Russian character that has remained innocent of culture and
resists it, that was at first greatly disturbed and then painfully torn apart by the conflicting forces of nature and invading culture, and that preferred to remain unencumbered by culture. It is the same essential, maternal, materialistic side of the Russian character that communism approached, by which it was shaped in Russia, and to which it owes its success.

TOLSTOY AS A WRITER

Tolstoy's writings seem to reflect the totality of Russian life in both form and content. The formal peculiarities of his technique embody, as it were, Russia's growing split between her unconscious and conscious, her traditional communal values and modern Western individualism. His works display the same incongruous mixture of conservative tendencies and radical innovation that characterizes Russian society and mores and is found in the works of many outstanding Russian writers who combine "archaisms and innovations" each in a blend peculiarly his own. Tolstoy's works are noted for their raw, undigested appearance: polished artistic passages are interspersed with highly self-conscious "invented" passages that detract from the overall quality of his work. The dual structure of his novels is so apparent, in fact, that several critics have spoken of actual stylistic and thematic breaks in them. The divisions, however, are not fatal to the artistic result. In fact, some of them provide additional insights and effects, such as the impression of conflict between Tolstoy's unconscious genius and the hyperconscious intellect that interferes with it and seems disturbed or unbalanced by culture. This feature has intrigued some critics, notably Mikhailovsky, who found it meaningful enough to discuss repeatedly and at length (see chap. 5).

The old-fashioned quality of Tolstoy's works is ostensibly related to past trends in European literature. His overt didacticism, stressing the moral purpose of art, is characteristic of the classical period. The "thinking intellect" who interferes with the "great talent" who writes the story for him is a device used by humanists and is found in the figure of the intruding neoclassicist author. The situation is actually a common one in eighteenth-century literature, where the narrator or editor often assumes the role of the omniscient guardian or alter ego of the protagonists. The variety of life is thus filtered through the medium of a harmonious, serene personality. The fake eyewitness account, which blends with memoir, confes-
sion, and travelogue, artlessly told but actually composed by riffling a *Baedeker*, is used by Goethe, Fielding, Thackeray, and Rousseau. The conflicts between poetry from the heart and the sordid prose of reality in characters who are outwardly ridiculous but inwardly great (Grisha the Fool in *Childhood, Karataev in War and Peace*) are themes that go back even further in time to preceding centuries (*Don Quixote*).

Tolstoy's earliest writings, moreover, were naïve, simple experiments in how to depict the flow of life; and the depiction of people as they are living and acting at the moment is a feature of sentimentalism, in which fiction strives to portray the unfolding of life. Here the narrator is active and agreeable and enjoys the present, which for him is filled with potentially crucial memories and vows; and the narrative is sometimes stretched to the point of actually stopping time to show the flow of thoughts (Sterne). Tolstoy does all of this and more with his "inner monologue." Actuality—life at the present moment—is important in Tolstoy's writing. Ideals are not simply relegated to the future (as they are, e.g., in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*); instead, characters are in the process of acting on their important concerns. Tolstoy employs the extensive as well as the intensive style of eighteenth-century sentimentalism, featuring background as well as foreground. He is at the same time meditative and descriptive, generalizing and realistic. Like his predecessors Fielding, Defoe, and Balzac, he achieves a heightened sense of actuality by combining detailed exposition with broad generalizations. He weaves a complex fabric of high verisimilitude by fusing thoroughly believable, commonplace, concrete details with generally known facts of history and geography. The first-person narrative allows him a direct treatment of feeling, which provides the gauge of sincerity and standard of moral values in sentimentalism, where the idea developed that to be natural was to be good and the noble savage came to be depicted as superior to civilized man. Such themes of worshipping essential, material Mother Nature are utilized by Tolstoy. As Captain Khlopov says in his early story "The Raid," "One learns from nature all the important lessons." Tolstoy depicted other themes of sentimentalism: the debilitating effects of "artificial" city life in pointed contrast to the regenerative effects of healthy "natural" life in the idyllic countryside; the loss of a sense of truth from the dehumanizing effects
of civilization; the simple hero and the slick villain; and the notion that a pure heart will give a spontaneous response that is immediate and true, whereas deliberation, detachment, contemplation, and a rational response are tantamount to insincerity and corruption.

Tolstoy’s novels, furthermore, are pedagogical. The genre intends the education of the reader as well as the hero, revealing its origins in the didactic and optimistic themes of the Enlightenment. Tolstoy’s novels resemble the sentimental novel of education called the Bildungsroman—a development of a traditional genre that employs the simple narrative of the picaresque tradition to depict a leisurely odyssey to self-awareness by a hero who ripens into maturity after a series of adventures that range from the sensual to the sublime. The emphasis on the conciliatory element—the protagonist’s eventual assimilation into society—shows the genre’s affinity with more archaic, unpsychological forms of fiction such as the folk tale with its naïve didactic message: the suggestion that every responsible individual must eventually integrate smoothly with society. Significantly, the hero of the sentimental novel that takes him through a picaresque journey of education does not grow, but simply matures. Eventually he flees back into the lap of bourgeois culture, accepting its solid, philistine values of wealth, success, and marriage. At this point Tolstoy departs from the sentimental journey of education. Deep and far-reaching changes take place in the Tolstoyan protagonist precisely with regard to his assimilation into society, for they lead ultimately to his repudiation of its values and his role in it. Tolstoy’s novels are stories of development, but a development with a different dimension and direction, as they point to the development of the inner man. His basic plot, to be sure, does follow rather closely the pattern common to the nineteenth-century novel of education: the hero spends a secluded childhood on a landed estate, undergoes several years of formal schooling, and completes his education by an extensive journey. But there is a radical difference between the forward-looking, utopian mood of the sentimental novel and the anguished state of the Tolstoyan protagonist. It is therefore not quite accurate to describe such borrowed patterns as influences upon Tolstoy. They were merely a foundation he used in discovering reality as he perceived it, which involved a journey into the unknown inner world of the protagonist. Memory and reflection, together with their attendant
phenomenon of moral guilt, not action and adventure, are the moving forces shaping the character's development, and in this the author himself actively participates.

This development arose, for Tolstoy, directly from the therapeutic act of writing itself, which he conceived of, at least in part, as an imaginative means of taking the sting of reality out of experience by making it repeatable. Tolstoy wrote to give himself a clearer idea of his own development and nature by describing his life and experiences. His earliest attempts to write were projections of his urge to investigate reality, to infuse meaning into an ambivalent environment that tormented him and resisted his attempts to understand it. He attacked duality, the paradoxically ambivalent nature of experience, in these sketches as though it were an intellectual problem. His narrator is at pains to correlate experience with preconceived notions—manifestations of the outer world of things with the inner world of thoughts—by bringing them together in his consciousness. In the attempt he continually evaluates both. He asks, for example, "Why is it that everything that seems so beautiful inside my soul becomes so ugly in reality?" Such judgment varies considerably from the accommodation portrayed by Sterne, who simply depicts external reality as absurd and illogical. It does not, furthermore, imply a desire to control reality. The goal of the Tolstoyan hero is his own development as an individual. Instead of trying to conquer nature without, he attempts to conquer his own nature by understanding it. He grows by trying to understand himself. B. Eikhenbaum has pointed out that Childhood, for Tolstoy, was not a matter of indulging in sentimental nostalgia about an idyllic childhood spent on a landed estate, but a research project, an investigation of human nature, a meticulous self-study undertaken as a journey of discovery into the secrets of growing consciousness. For Tolstoy consciousness was an important issue, involving the meaning of life and the destiny of man. His study of child psychology was the first step in his study of the natural man who, for him, symbolized the Russian national character.

Confessional autobiographies constitute the first half of Tolstoy's works in the 1850s. In his early sketches he attempts to reinforce his message with form. The gradual retreat toward the days of one's childhood employs forms indicating the psychological time of memory—autobiography, diary, and notebook. The image of the hero becomes transformed from that of adventurer through space
to confess, i.e., an adventurer through time. To suggest this transition Tolstoy experiments with *physiological sketch* to psychological descriptions as they might be gleaned from the works of sentimentalis. As a result, his marvelously concrete analysis becomes internalized. The "object-ivity" (relatedness to objects) of his descriptions is carried into the inner world of his protagonists, where it becomes part of the character. The growing psyche of the child-protagonist of *Childhood* is depicted in this way. In a number of ways, Tolstoy's autobiographical novels, and not such others as Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches*, are the most logical, and at the same time the most radical, development of the genre. The journal form, for instance, is given a function similar to the role of the confessions or the autobiography, for which it served as a preliminary sketch. The method underlined the fact that in the diary-autobiography the vital factor is the individual's growth. He grows by recollecting and reflecting upon his experiences. He writes because he thinks that he has never knowingly experienced a childhood, never consciously knew himself as a child. He is preoccupied with the idea that his childhood did not exist if he does not remember it fully. The intolerable burden of this unresolved past bears down on him; it impresses him as a sickness from which he must recover. He wants to shoulder the burden of his past, to affirm the organic connection between himself now and what he was in the past. He tries to recollect as much of his childhood and youth as he can. Losing all track of time, he buries himself in recollections of his earlier years, recording them as he remembers them up to the very point of the present. Extensive picaresque passages thus alternate with intensive confessional elements, until the two are combined in an ultimate synthesis that both transcends and unites the two elements of opposition. Tolstoy gave form to this psychological journey in his analytical trilogy, *Childhood, Boyhood*, and *Youth*, which dramatizes his idea of the three initial stages of consciousness. Each work represents one of the three basic stages in the development of personality. The first and most naive of these is childhood, a state of low, intermittent consciousness as it occurs in the naïve, untutored mind of a child who is content merely to watch something going on. The second stage is that of a boy who not only sees but feels and can intermittently think and understand. The third stage is that of a young man, more or less fully developed, who is capable not only of seeing and feeling, but
also of thinking and reflecting upon his experiences. At this stage the young man is continuously, fully, and painfully conscious of himself. Throughout the narrative not only do we watch the antics of the protagonist as he learns from his picaresque adventures, but we also participate in the experiences directly through the eyes of the protagonist, at a remove in time and space. The self-portrait of the artist as a young man affords us, in effect, two viewpoints, that of the "I" telling the story and of the "I" who experiences it, at which point the reader is jolted into viewing the youthful protagonist through the eyes of the omniscient narrator. With this double vision Tolstoy underscores not only the differences in levels of awareness but also the atemporal nature of consciousness. Dreamy experiences of the child are matched against the more alert responses of the narrator; and because of the narrative standpoint, the fully developed protagonist is present in the beginning, rendering a truer, fuller psychological portrait than would otherwise be possible. In letting the protagonist relate his own experience, to mirror life's procession as well as participate in it, Tolstoy lends his portrayal an added psychological dimension.

All of Tolstoy's stories written before 1862 were creative experiments. They have a direct bearing on his inner development and furnish, in effect, "illustrations" for his autobiography. Except for the war stories, there is little or no repetition in the choice of subject, and each story is written in a new form and from a new point of view. The protagonist in each, however, is motivated to examine his life. He asked probing questions, first in a dialogue with himself ("Do I hate what happened to me just now or do I love it?" [Boyhood]) and later in a dialogue with his environment. The young landowner of "A Landowner's Morning" talks to his peasants to find out what he is doing wrong, but they resist him and will not talk. This has only apparent similarity to a theme of sentimentalism (the shrewd country folk's mistrust of the sophisticated), in which wise nature comes to replace ill-advised bourgeois morals as protector and guide. In Tolstoy's works nature, including natural man, is inherently opposed to culture. It resists efforts of human intellect to infuse it with meaning and obstinately remains as it is—in an unconscious state. It does not lend itself to an invasion and conquest by intellect. It is hostile to the self-conscious civilized man whom it treats as an outsider, an alien. In Tolstoy's first full-length novel, The Cossacks (1862), Olenin flees civilization to embrace
primeval nature in the Caucasus. He hopes to be reborn by the
process of immersing himself in the rejuvenating flood of warm,
simple humanity. But instead of thriving in a medium of Rous­
seauesque permissiveness, he undergoes a psychological crisis and
must flee. His attempts to penetrate the self-contained world of the
cossack mountaineers end in dismal failure. He is unable to estab­
lish a meaningful relationship with any of them, and his eagerness
only increases the difficulties. In the end everyone is relieved to see
him go away. Attempts by a self-conscious civilized man to “culti­
vate” the natural man, within or without his natural habitat, pro­
vide the subjects of several of Tolstoy’s stories. In each of these,
efforts to achieve moral growth are translated into attempts to
improve upon nature according to urban values. Tolstoy’s war
stories illustrate this theme from a different point of view. Here the
determined efforts of the civilized man to act on his artificial stan­
dards during combat derange his self-conscious mind, whereas the
natural, instinctive man adjusts to these extraordinary conditions
more easily and sanely because he merely reacts, without much
conscious effort. In the stories the natural dignity and heroism of
common soldiers is juxtaposed with the unnatural and cowardly
behavior of officers, their paltry vanity, ambition, hypocrisy, and
lack of character in the face of death.

The war stories also explore another one of Tolstoy’s major
ideas: the notion that the “chaos” of experience is not a problem in
metaphysics but rather a psychological experience, a problem of
incomplete consciousness. Tolstoy suggests that the elements of
experience are not really incongruous but merely appear so to the
lopsidedly inward-oriented, excessively self-conscious mind of a ra­
tional, civilized man. He depicts war objectively in these stories,
using the techniques of the physiological sketch, as an ugly, sense­
less slaughter, and does not attempt moral judgment. Instead,
Tolstoy hints that all this may have an altogether different mean­
ing, that the significant aspects of reality and the important work of
nature go on in man and nature in ways that are hidden from the
intellect. This is the “unseen hand” of which other writers of the
time (e.g., Adam Smith in The Wealth of Nations) spoke, that rather
tired, forced poetical image of a huge ghostly arm that supposedly
led their protagonists toward happier goals, in terms quite charac­
teristic of the humdrum, prosaic style of the Age of Enlighten­
ment. These works also reflect a distrust of the church, an at-
Atitude that was widespread in the eighteenth century but had appeared sporadically long before, apparently with the impact of literacy, in dreams about a churchless Christianity (Boehme, Stilling, St. Martin, the Quakers). The eighteenth-century rationalist, in many ways an acutely self-conscious man who was painfully aware of the pitfalls of human reasoning, preferred to rely on his own reason or the guidance of a depersonalized spirit, rather than trust the reasoning of his elders. In the rationalistic mind an anonymous power replaced the church, the sacred society of the past, and the only higher order left was that of a personal intellect or a depersonalized spirit; but the nature of this invisibly effective higher intellect must be grounded, ultimately, in the religious attitudes of the author himself. Tolstoy revealed his view in *War and Peace*, where he speaks of a higher, nonhuman intelligence arranging the affairs of man and nature, against which all efforts and schemes of paltry human intellect to fathom its design are ineffectual. Some critics have interpreted this as a repudiation of reason by Tolstoy, but that interpretation is incorrect. Tolstoy merely insisted on a greater reliance on feeling and other archaic modes of thinking such as intuition. He was opposed to the idea (grounded in eighteenth-century rationalism) that the powers of intellect were supreme and unlimited, and he portrayed reason as clumsy and ineffective whenever it becomes too self-reliant. Conversely, he also depicted the older, more natural modes of thought as inadequate when one is dealing with the highly structured, artificial world of culture. Thus, he suggested a productive and organic union of opposites—reason and intuition. This theme parallels his idea of a synthesis of nature and culture in the consciousness of man.

Tolstoy, whose positions—like those of other Russian thinkers—are characterized by a certain degree of organicism (which was an offshoot of German romanticism), came to see consciousness as a product of growth and assimilation: a gradual realization of intellect and its embodiment in nature. The notion seems to echo the Gnostic legend about Nous who became trapped in Physis after seeing his own reflection in it. According to Tolstoy, consciousness grew by feeding upon nature—becoming progressively more aware of it, sinking, so to speak, its roots into nature. The process had its ups and downs. It passed through what can be loosely described as a polarity, to an intensification, and eventually a rhythmic resolution, moving, as it were, from thesis to antithesis,
toward a grand synthesis of antinomies. A harmonious association between a growing, rational ego and the irrational, life-giving nonego, individual intellect and common nature, then, was a prerequisite for healthy growth, but this condition was initially absent when the intellect first realized itself by becoming aware of itself as a thing apart from, and thus opposed to, nature. At this stage efforts to control reality would result in hostility, a violent confrontation, a virtual state of war with nature, because of an excessive use of logic and analysis is that interfered with understanding (synthesis). Eventually, of course, growing awareness, patience, and a better understanding of the ways of nature would bring about a more productive, peaceful association. Thus war and peace were fundamental concepts for Tolstoy. It can even be said that war as an initial confrontation and peace as a resolution of conflict were, for Tolstoy, not so much objective conditions, social and historical concepts, as psychological states in the mind of a protagonist. The sequence also reflects the idea that all genuine transitions in life tend to be crises or sicknesses that must be resolved eventually through the good will of the protagonist. In time Tolstoy came to believe that genuine integration of intellect with nature was at best problematic. He found nature and culture to be not really compatible outside of man, other than as a corruption of nature in the form of civilization. Culture, he concluded, was a strictly internal matter, akin to religion—a state of mind, to be achieved successfully only within man's consciousness. What was adumbrated here by Tolstoy was a composite idea that prefigured modern existentialism and to which Sartre has referred in different contexts as "bad faith": in essence, that an individual must avoid falling into stereotyped behavior if he is to retain his integrity, a necessity for growth (in psychological terms, this is the Jungian persona that, developed to excess, is seen as preventing the individual from growing, even though in practice it assures him of social recognition and personal success). Tolstoy's writings present a record of his gradual realization of this complex idea.

In Tolstoy's works we can observe a number of developments that are strikingly different from those in the fairy-tale world of conventional fiction, including the novel of education. In fact, the experience of the Tolstoyan hero traces a curve diametrically opposed to that of the sentimental hero who, after sowing his wild oats, can nearly always count on being accepted back into society
Tolstoy dispenses completely with this staple of popular fiction whereby the author eases the reader at the end into an imaginary frame of mind about a world that is essentially, and comfortably, at peace with itself. It is important to recognize that these deep-seated changes in outlook dramatized in the Tolstoyan hero represent a very different point of view on society and the world. At an age when the sentimental hero prepares to marry and establish himself in society, the Tolstoyan hero only begins his adventures (for example, Pierre Bezukhov and Konstantin Levin). From a conventional background, his path leads him directly to the loneliness of a confrontation with himself. He is an awkward, passive man, wandering about, intensely preoccupied with himself. Living alone with his thoughts, he experiences a virtual breakdown on all levels of existence—within and without himself, psychologically as well as socially, accompanied by an alarming recognition of the tenuousness of individual life. And if this were not enough, he experiences a crisis of consciousness, which is identified with conscience. He is torn between a nagging sense of obligation to the soil and his socially defined position of master of the land. He therefore experiences a sense of guilt, because he blames himself for unthinkingly squandering the labor of his peasants. Indeed, it is this debt, in all senses of the word, that exerts such a moral influence on him. His thoughts often take on a moralizing tone, but he feels he has nowhere to turn, and his isolation leads him to a radical revision of all his standards. His goal may, in fact, become a desire to sublimate his earthly passions into a more permanent condition, a love that is directed only toward an infinite God. In the case of some Tolstoyan protagonists, we can actually point to the specific moment at which this development commences. In War and Peace Pierre Bezukhov turns to Freemasonry after experiencing a marital reverse. In The Cossacks Olenin, plagued by financial troubles and guilt, decides to take a drastic step: he isolates himself by setting out on the road to Caucasus, to become morally and psychologically regenerated there.

The Tolstoyan protagonist is intensely preoccupied with himself. He is convinced that his consciousness is the real center of experience, the place where opposites meet: events within and events without fused into an organic whole. His state of mind, his own psychological condition, is therefore more important to him than any objective conditions. Whatever misfortunes befall him he treats
them as passing incidents, never blaming the environment, only
himself, and experiencing a concomitant chronic dissatisfaction
with himself. In place of a sentimental education, the Tolstoyan
protagonist suffers a series of severe moral jolts. Morbid reflection
and a desire for self-improvement plague him constantly. The
condition periodically resolves itself in crises of consciousness. The
crisis is triggered by disillusionment with himself, reality, and life’s
ideals, which appear empty and false. He becomes a brooding,
solitary figure who mistrusts his own judgment, thinks he has lost
touch with reality because of his excessive reliance on rational
thought, and tries to come to terms with this somber realization as
best he can. He believes that his feeling, his own nature, and truth
stand in opposition to his reason, which he suspects of being too
structured and therefore unreliable. He continues to search vigor­
ously for truth and objective proof, which he believes to be hidden
somewhere in surrounding reality. He devises rules of conduct to
help himself be guided through the maze of conflicting experi­
ences. He adopts a number of standards that, often as not, are
based upon nothing more than feeling, are inadequately defined,
and must eventually be replaced. One such standard is the early
Tolstoyan ideal of womanhood as the wise, eternally feminine
world soul endowed with absolute characteristics: an indestructible
“she” who is the preserver of virtue, the family, and a model of
self-sacrifice (the image ends with War and Peace). This ceaseless
search for permanent standards is paralleled by another
tendency—to seek out and destroy false ideals, transient standards
of conduct that are not based on anything more substantial than
convention—say, the aristocratic standard of comme il faut that
Tolstoy rejected once he found it wanting in substance. In all this
frenetic moral activity and search for truth, analysis figures promi­
ently. Ideals and preconceived notions are examined closely; they
collide with logic but analysis does not destroy faith, it only forces
the protagonist to examine further his ideals. Thus one set of stan­
dards is periodically replaced by another. This cyclic development
has a vibrant intensity to it that lends the author-protagonist’s life a
compelling sense of dramatic realism, of social and psychological
growth.

Tolstoy’s works reflect the trend toward secularization in reli­
gious fiction, particularly in the didactic and the confessional
genres. The predecessors of the Tolstoyan protagonist were not
foolish men of action and adventure like Don Quixote, but self-conscious men of reflection. Tolstoy drew on the rise in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of secularized forms of pietistic literature, the fusion of which was accomplished in the sentimental novel of education. He made it more complex by combining it with romanticism's interest in the phenomena of consciousness and memory. These are the central themes of his works, upon which both the author and the protagonist reflect a great deal. The confessor, because of his fascination with inner states of the self and his past, often merges with the figure of the author. His orientation inward causes him to reassess his values, ponder life and death, doubt immortality, and lose hope of reconciling ideals with reality. His growing self-consciousness progressively "de-mythologizes" God: from a powerful parental figure projected outside to a mere subjective feeling and eventually an illusion. This development is paralleled by a corresponding development: a decrease in the role of the omniscient narrator and a corresponding rise in importance of the neurotic protagonist who takes over his function. The protagonist becomes the author's double, who represents him by taking over his psychological crises. In this way the cathartic act of writing enables the author to dispense with projecting his problems outside, and yet to detach himself from them, and thus come objectively to terms with himself and his own past. By making the protagonist his own shadow and burdening him with his unresolved problems of adaptation to the modern world, the author deals with them more objectively, and hence effectively, than if he confronted these problems directly within himself. Thus, the protagonist, although indubitably an important figure in Tolstoy's fiction, is not independent and therefore not the most important. Ultimately Tolstoy reserves that role for himself. In short, the one person who really grows is the author himself.

The development of the Tolstoyan protagonist reflects one of the most significant developments in modern fiction: the gradual internalization and psychologization of reality, in contrast to older conventional genres where the protagonist projected himself outside. Such turning inward on the part of the protagonist to examine his reactions to his surroundings, rather than to deal with them in a direct confrontation, signals the change in the nineteenth century toward psychological forms of fiction. The author is no longer content to describe what he sees. Rather than picture the
Tolstoy and His Critics

infinite variety of life's panorama, he turns inward to consult his own mind about what it all means to him, to dwell on it and to reflect, catching every distortion as it is mirrored in his consciousness. In this sense Tolstoy's works, although they can be said to reflect, as a whole, the autobiographical trend in nineteenth-century fiction, represent its most modern psychological form. Tolstoy depicts psychological man, whose heightened impressions and alienation from his surroundings stem not from social or economic factors but from inner tensions: an increased inwardness and self-consciousness and a profound change in his manner of thinking.

Let us now review the findings of this chapter. We have adopted a hypothesis that literature—aside from its effect upon the conscious mind as a carrier of information—is also a recognizable technique and a complicated convention that sets up unconscious motions and reflexes that significantly alter patterns of perception and thinking. The Russian intellectuals were aware of some changes in their thinking caused by their European education. But they failed to understand that literacy, i.e., the form of literature, had more to do with this development than its content. The oral mode of communication is expressed in a given kind of language with a given kind of syntax. Literature proposes a different kind of language and a different syntax. What is overlooked is the fact that the first language is based on one kind of thinking, which we may call symbolic, whereas the second language is based on another kind of thinking, which we will call logical. And it proposes to substitute a different state of mind, the literate, which would be central to the experience of new Russia. So it was the form, and not the content, of education that had changed the thinking of Russian intellectuals to the point of being unintelligible to the common folk. The common folk, being illiterate, still thought in circular, archaic patterns, in symbols, analogies, and iconic concepts, and could not follow the logic of the intellectual who was trained to think sequentially, in abstractions and analytical concepts. It was because of this change in the pattern of his thinking, and not because of any changes in its content—his superior education—that he became a stranger among his own people, a "superfluous man." The error of Russian critics was in not taking this change in thinking into account, assigning it any kind of importance. The aesthetes among the critics, being interested in verbal structures, were aware of this
phenomenon, Still, they were too preoccupied with the aesthetic effect of the written word to note its psychological effect. (The root of the matter lies, of course, in the phenomenologists' assumption of an existence of an information content separable from its given form.) But it was the position of the civic critics that was widest of the mark. They thought that only the message of literature was important. In effect, critics did not believe that literacy as such had any significant effect on the mind, and they continued to believe that it was information that was important. This strictly rational, logical, abstract conception of the effects of literacy was the numb stance of the psychologically naive intellectuals of the day who did not understand the workings of the mind.

By contrast, Tolstoy was fascinated with the workings of his mind, and subjected them to a thorough rational analysis. Thus, what has been called Tolstoy's social intransigence was a psychological acuteness that appeared as a constant quest for innovation, evolving from the naturalism of his early sketches to the realm beyond it—the psychological realism of the inner monologue. This realism is both the sign of an extraordinary literary awareness and a perfectly consistent statement of his poetic and ideological vision of the human predicament as at once an inner and an outer experience of thinking and doing, which each deny the other, yet whose paradoxes assert the individual's freedom. Tolstoy, it seems, tried to show that this awareness was a new condition, an altered state of consciousness in man: the realization of a self that is at odds with itself; a permanently unstable condition that continuously violates its own system, often results in an inner split, and reconstitutes itself in the dialectics of thought and action. It is clear that this kind of interpretation of reality and analytical approach to literature was advanced for his time.

In summary, then, it can be said that the critics rejected Tolstoy's ideas because they disagreed with his interpretation of current events. The more thoughtful of the critics certainly comprehended something of his message. But because his conclusions did not support their own brand of social philosophy, they attacked him, not out of malice, but merely from the instinct of self-preservation. His inward-directed, psychological message was too new. It contained little that would recommend it to the radicals of his time, who were still immersed in rational man's strictly outward-directed wars with the environment. The radical critics were thoroughly preoccupied
with social issues from which—in the spirit of the eighteenth century—they expected answers to all of man’s problems.

It is thus easy to see that Russian criticism differs considerably from Western criticism. Russian critics are preoccupied with meaning, whereas Western critics tend to avoid reporting the content of literature and tend to emphasize its elements of artifice. Russian criticism imposes an extraliterary schematism on literature, a sort of sociopolitical color filter that makes some writers leap into prominence and shows up others as dark and faulty. This preoccupation with meaning and its resulting judgments usually meet resistance in the Western reader. Of course I do not doubt that the search for meaning occurs also in Western criticism, for we too have critics who glimpse ultimate cultural goals and spare themselves no pains to draw near to them. But our goals are different. We have a nonfunctional conception of literature that it is an art and not an instrument of indoctrination, and that therefore its content and quality must be judged first by criteria that are aesthetic. This approach is logical, perhaps necessary, in a relatively stable culture such as ours, wherein literary performance has become divorced from the day’s business. In Russia, however, literature is still part of daily life, reflecting changes in it that are sometimes as drastic as those that occurred in Europe during the Renaissance. The problems and issues that preoccupy Russian critics sound very strange to us. There is little in our civilization to foster strivings like theirs, not even in literary criticism, the custodian of cultural values. The insistence on the significance of message points up the need to approach the work of Russian critics with a particularly open and discerning mind. Whether the critical principles enunciated by the critics were valid or not, the fact is that they influenced both the form and content of Tolstoy’s work. Thus an understanding of what he achieved often depends on an acquaintance with the critical doctrines he and his contemporaries assumed to be the foundations of art. We need to know their norms because they represent a system of coherent values that may enrich our experience of literature and be useful to understanding Tolstoy. Without such knowledge we lack objectivity in reading his works and rely on a modern Western point of view, with its own limitations and prejudices. A good example of this is Georg Lukács’s position, which asserts that “in purely artistic terms Tolstoy’s novels are novels of disillusionment carried to an extreme, a baroque version of Flaubert’s form”: 
Tolstoy himself, it is true, occupies a dual position. From the point of view purely of form (a point of view which, in Tolstoy's special case, cannot possibly do justice to what matters most in his vision or in his created world), he must be seen as the final expression of European Romanticism. However, in the few overwhelmingly great moments of his works—moments which must be seen as subjective and reflexive in respect of each particular work as a whole—he shows a clearly differentiated, concrete, and existent world, which, if it could spread into a totality, would be completely inaccessible to the categories of the novel and would require a new form of artistic creation: the form of the renewed epic.

This world is the sphere of pure soul-reality in which man exists as man, neither as a social being nor as an isolated, unique, pure, and therefore abstract interiority. If ever this world should come into being as something natural and simply experienced, as the only true reality, a new complete totality could be built out of all its substances and relationships. It would be a world to which our divided reality would be a mere backdrop, a world which would have outstripped our dual world of social reality by as much as we have outstripped the world of nature. But art can never be an agent of such a transformation: the great epic is a form bound to the historical moment, and any attempt to depict the utopian as existent can only end in destroying the form, not in creating reality. The novel is the form of the epoch of absolute sinfulness, as Fichte said, and it must remain the dominant form so long as the world is ruled by the same stars. In Tolstoy, intimations of a breakthrough into a new epoch are visible; but they remain polemical, nostalgic, and abstract. 24

The Tolstoy criticism presented in the body of this book has thus two aims: (1) to describe the current problems as seen by the critics and Tolstoy's reaction to them; and (2) to suggest that critics misread Tolstoy because they did not understand him: they were too spellbound by their own ideas to understand the innovative author.