Some evaluations of Tolstoy by avowed Marxists were touched also with impressionism. Heavily impressionistic criticism marked, for example, the somewhat naïvely old-fashioned comparative study of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky by the physician-writer Vikentii V. Veresaev [Smidovich] (1867–1945), who thought of himself as a Marxist maintaining a belief in intuition. His arguments reflect a strong undercurrent of the organicism that, as Terras has shown, underlies a good portion of Marxist thought. Veresaev, well known in his day for his very popular naturalistic stories about the seamy side of life and for his own case work as a physician, exuberantly praised the “life-asserting” message of Tolstoy’s works and condemned the morbid message of Dostoevsky’s works. In accord with his own scheme of things and as he saw them arranged in Tolstoy’s works, Veresaev divided Tolstoyan characters into two types—those who lived by the rules of reason, that is, approaching things analytically and, therefore, theoretically, and those who synthesized experience. The latter were the ones who were truly alive, responding intuitively to “living life” (a term he borrowed from Dostoevsky), without being preoccupied with dissecting or analyzing their experience. Reason and logic, Veresaev opined, were a dead side of man. He found in Tolstoy’s works many people who were dead or dying from an excess of logic, which had led them to arrange their lives according to a pattern, rigid habits, and a pref-
ference for routine. Among the living characters he found Natasha
Rostov and Pierre; among the dead was Speransky, the perfect
logician (War and Peace). Sergei Ivanovich Koznyshov and Varenka
of Anna Karenina were both on their way toward living death. They
were already too weakened by their own reasonableness and the
logic of a well-regulated life to respond to the vagaries of "living"
love. Veresaev noted the custom of nonverbal communication
among the dead and dying characters, who seemed to prefer sign
language to words; apparently they were regressing to animal
levels of consciousness. He commented on the hypocrisy and gross
insensitivity to the needs of the people that were displayed by those
who offered organized charity in Resurrection. He also made a
number of clinical observations on the necrosis of society, some of
which were more cute than acute. He claimed, for example, that
the physical love between the Pozdnyshev couple in The Kreutzer-
Sonata was love between corpses. He referred to "The Death of
Ivan Ilych" and Resurrection as stories in which hordes of cadaver-
ous characters led lifeless lives and the protagonists were trying to
escape the same fate at the eleventh hour. Finally, Veresaev
claimed that the value of Tolstoy's works was in their ability to
convey the feeling for real life as opposed to sham life—the mere
semblance of living practiced by so much of society; on reading
Tolstoy's works one felt disgust for those who exchanged living life
for the creature comforts and mere appearances of a dead life
without real feelings—a practice, Veresaev claimed, that led people
to regression into patterns of unconscious life and vegetation. In
this sense Veresaev found Tolstoy's works edifying. They taught
people how to live correctly by showing the incorrect ways of living
in modern society.  

A lengthy but less original impressionistic study of Tolstoy by the
Marxist sympathizer V. P. Kranikhfel'd (1865–1918) also deserves
mention. Kranikhfel'd, who practiced a sociological form of literary
criticism, stressed the connection of a writer to his own social back-
ground. He referred to Tolstoy as "the parting gift of the landed
gentry to Russia." Tolstoy, Kranikhfel'd said, was constitutionally
unable to understand the middle class. He wrote only about the
nobility and the peasants. Comparing Tolstoy with Dostoevsky,
Kranikhfel'd noted that each of them saw the peasant from a
different and rather subjective angle. For Tolstoy the peasant was
real: a benign natural man, healthy, friendly, joyous and round,
symbolized by Platon Karataev as a kind of roly-poly, jolly character. For Dostoevsky the peasant was the "insulted and injured" member of society: the suffering, underprivileged wretch who was directly beneath him on the social scale. Therefore, whereas Tolstoy was able to feel sympathetic and at ease with the peasant, like a true aristocrat Dostoevsky could feel only a suppressed hostility masked in charity. Taking his cue from the symbolists, Kranikhfel'd rejected the image of Tolstoy created by Mikhailovsky as "a two-faced Janus, with one face sanctimoniously directed toward heaven, the other toward earth and sin." Kranikhfel'd insisted that Tolstoy was whole, and that his worth resided in his contradictions. Therefore no meaningful division of Tolstoy into an artist and thinker was possible. Nor were the other labels that scholarly writers always tried to pin on him correct. Tolstoy's character was like life itself—contradictory, containing both the positive and the negative aspects of man and uniting the opposites. In one of his more interesting observations Kranikhfel'd insisted that, strictly speaking, there never was such a thing as a Tolstoyan doctrine, a statement that agreed with Tolstoy's own repeatedly stated views. According to Kranikhfel'd, bookish and abstract writers had maligned Tolstoy because they could not understand him. They could not understand anything unless and until they put a label on it. Tolstoy, however, never invented any doctrine; everything he wrote, Kranikhfel'd said, was autobiographical, and there was almost no fiction in his works in the sense of invention. Everything was recorded as it was; he represented the truth, tentatively, with only slight modifications such as the names of characters in *War and Peace*, which were easily recognized as names of real families of the Russian nobility with one or two letters changed or transposed. *War and Peace*, Kranikhfel'd claimed, was Tolstoy's best work. It had no unity of theme or plot and no plan, only a unity of the author's mood. Taking his cue from R. V. Ivanov-Razumnik, Kranikhfel'd stressed the absence of types in Tolstoy's works. Tolstoyan characters were individuals, copied from life and thoroughly alive. Even if they did have certain unifying features, these would be something like the roundness of Platon Karataev. Repeating Merezhkovsky's point, Kranikhfel'd said roundness seemed to crop up with the most diverse of characters such as Napoleon, Stiva Oblonsky, Kutuzov, and Anna Karenina. Then echoing D. N. Ovsianiko-Kulikovsky, Kranikhfel'd said that perhaps Karataev
was an exception to the absence of types in Tolstoy's works, for he was devoid of personal characteristics and made up only of typical features; thus he was a real prototype of the Russian peasant, in the most general sense of the word, whose thoughts were the collective thoughts of the entire peasant class. All other Tolstoyan characters, however, were thoroughly individualized and, in this sense, like Tolstoy himself—imperfect, human, undefined, and free to develop. According to Kranikhfel'd, Tolstoyan characters were also fleeing from themselves. A good example was Pierre Bezukhov of *War and Peace*, who would rather face the hostile outside world than look inside himself. He could only do that when he was either exhilarated or intoxicated. Tolstoyan characters, Kranikhfel'd observed, reflected man as he really was, weak and imperfect, not as he would like to be, i.e., they were not really model characters at all. For Kranikhfel'd this was the real value of Tolstoy's works. One could learn from them about man's real nature. In this way Tolstoy's works served an important edifying purpose.

Critiques of Tolstoy and his works by the writer Maksim Gorky (pseudonym of Aleksei Maksimovich Peshkov, 1868–1936), a sincere but unorthodox Marxist, paralleled those of Lenin and offered, on the whole, commonplaces. Gorky described Tolstoy as a documenter of Russian life for the preceding six decades. Conspicuously excluding Dostoevsky from his list of Russia's literary great, he named Pushkin and Tolstoy as the greatest. He praised Tolstoy for accurately reflecting Russian life but derided his religion as an anachronism—a rank corruption of "the Russian national prejudice" and thus a residue of Russian tribalism rooted in paganism and developed in centuries of ignorance and oppression. Gorky's personal reminiscences of Tolstoy are, on the other hand, impressionistic and excellent. His observations are keen, professional, and unmatched in their insight into Tolstoy's astonishingly complex mature personality. Gorky admitted that he could not quite fathom Tolstoy, who struck him as the archetypal trickster and a slightly sinister variant of a tribal sage—a cunning old Russian sorcerer and miracle worker (*kudesnik*). Gorky believed that there was a good deal of hypocrisy in Tolstoy's moral positions and had serious reservations about Tolstoy's "grotesquely oversized personality" (*nepomerno razrosshaisia lichnost'*) which he held responsible for Tolstoy's firm conviction that he had earned for himself the right to remain immortal in the flesh. Contrary to the
opinion expressed by most commentators, Gorky did not believe
that Tolstoy lacked the capacity for logical thinking. He thought,
on the contrary, that Tolstoy had an unusually logical, even pedan-
tic, mind. This made him at once dogmatic and erratic. He always
drew his conclusions on the basis of observable evidence, Gorky
said, without allowing any speculative abstractions or ideas to inter-
fere. It was this dependence on concrete evidence, however, that
made his intellectual position less stable. New evidence could, for
instance, completely change his mind and make him reverse him-
self. Gorky claimed that it was this peculiarity of Tolstoy's mind
that was responsible for most of his weird and spectacularly wrong
prejudices and myopic views, which could be, on occasion, ex-
tremely irritating. Gorky's observations on Tolstoy are, to date,
probably the best single source of biographical evidence about him.

Another borderline Marxist, the narodnik Evgenii Andreevich
Solov'ev (1863–1905), known at the time under various
pseudonyms (Andreevich, Skriba, and others), wrote several arti-
cles and a monograph on Tolstoy. He regarded Tolstoy as a
fighter for human rights and individualism (a critical stance for
which he is ignored by the Soviets). He discussed the effectiveness
and simplicity of Tolstoy's style, and Resurrection as a strident ex-
pression of social criticism. In 1908 Petr B. Struve (1870–1944),
whose Marxist affiliations were never firm, wrote a series of
sociological critiques of Tolstoy, arguing from positions fairly close
to those of Plekhanov (see below): he challenged Tolstoy's intellec-
tual positions, questioned his significance as a social phenomenon,
and suspected that his religion, as an evolution from what he be-
lieved to have been originally pantheism to rigorous Christian asc-
eticism and rejection of nature worship, was never quite genuine.
The Marxist educator N. N. Iordansky (1863–1941) characterized
Tolstoy as a social thinker and tried to present him as an apostle of
social revolution in spite of himself: despite Tolstoy's rejection of
socialism, what he did write effectively rocked the establishment,
thereby hastening the coming of the revolution. Iordansky's posi-
tion here was somewhat exceptional, insofar as it approaches that
promulgated by Lenin in opposition to Plekhanov's then very
popular views.

It is an undeniable historic fact that orthodox Marxists right up
to the Russian revolution, i.e., before the views of Lenin prevailed,
heartily disliked Tolstoy for his ideological recalcitrance. The early
Marxist N. V. Shelgunov (1824–91) believed that Tolstoy held himself deliberately aloof from issues and harsh realities of life and blithely indulged in a self-serving justification of the status quo as perceived by the privileged classes. Shelgunov primly referred to *War and Peace* as a series of motley scenes about the life of the privileged classes, of artistic merit but trivial. Pierre Bezukhov was to him the uncouth spokesman of Tolstoy’s disorderly philosophy of life, a philosophy that was raw and undigested, consisting of parts of Slavophile doctrine, aristocratic frivolity, hypocrisy, and nonsense. Shelgunov also rejected Tolstoy’s philosophy of history as too impersonal; he was offended by a total absence of intelligent design in Tolstoy’s conception of history, which Shelgunov found to be anarchic and described as “collective fatalism.” Qualitatively apart from the rest of orthodox Marxist criticism of Tolstoy before the revolution are the outstanding scholarly studies of his work and philosophy by Liubov I. Axelrod-Orthodox (1868–1946), who was awarded her Ph.D. in Germany for her dissertation on the correlations between Tolstoy’s ethics and poetics. Her influence on the views of Plekhanov and other erudite Marxists is unmistakable. She defined Tolstoy’s Weltanschauung as religious idealism and, as such, inimical to Marxist thought. In detailed analyses of Tolstoy’s works she arrived at the conclusion that religion was central to Tolstoy’s art and, therefore, could not be isolated from it. Her views were, thus, directly opposed to the views of Lenin. She described Tolstoy as a metaphysical romantic who held a tragic Prometheus view of man. This vision was reflected in his dual view of the world as in a cracked mirror. The split was visible in the duality of many of Tolstoy’s characters who were the projections of his own tragic self. The duality was caused by Tolstoy’s inability to reconcile individualism with the realities of life.

A negative attitude toward Tolstoy as a prophet (a political figure and social phenomenon) thus prevailed among Marxists right up to the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, demonstrating once more that in matters political, such as sociological criticism, opinions are often a matter of the fortunes of war. Leon Trotsky [Bronstein] (1877–1940), another learned Marxist in the orthodox mold, wrote a brief but colorless obituary on the occasion of Tolstoy’s death, commenting on his significance as an old-world phenomenon about to be buried, but he judiciously refrained from making any rash predictions about his future value to the Marxist cause. A. S. Dolinin,
later a prominent Soviet scholar, briefly and perfunctorily examined the impact of certain negative experiences on Tolstoy's outlook. It was only after the Russian revolution that A. Lunacharsky (1875-1933) made a serious scholarly effort to reinterpret Tolstoy in the light of Lenin's articles about Tolstoy. Before the revolution the point of view represented by Plekhanov prevailed among Marxists. Detailed discussion of both these points of view follows.

Two eminent Marxists, Plekhanov and Lenin, each wrote a series of articles about Tolstoy. The unflagging homage paid to everything Lenin ever wrote makes it impossible to underestimate the importance of his articles on Tolstoy for Soviet literary scholarship. It has also removed from the limelight Plekhanov's similar but essentially more erudite contribution. The two sets of articles were initially written as a polemic exchange between the two leaders of Russian Marxism who were vying for the ideological control of the Communist movement in the area of culture. These articles show that the Bolshevik Lenin, a revolutionary radical, found Tolstoy to be much more acceptable to the Marxist cause than did the Menshevik Plekhanov, a more moderate, traditionally intellectual evolutionist. Eventually political events gave the victory to Lenin, but initially it was Plekhanov who won battles because he took a more orthodox, liberal rational approach.

PLEKHANOV

A prominent émigré Marxist theoretician, historian, philosopher, literary critic, and leading spirit of the Interminist Internationale, Georgi V. Plekhanov (1857-1918) probably contributed more than any other theorist to the formation of Marxist aesthetics. His views were inseparable from his political convictions. He was the originator of the "theory of labor" in aesthetics (see his series of "Letters without an Address," written between 1899 and 1900). In the war of ideas against capitalism, he looked for new standards in art to consolidate the ideological positions of the working class in their resistance to the decadent forces of modernism (discussed in his "Proletarian Movement and Bourgeois Art" [1905] and "Art and Social Life" [1912-13]). He worked out a system of aesthetic judgments whereby the value of a literary work would be assessed according to the sociological merits of the views and opinions expressed in it by the author and his characters. He called this criterion of judgment
a "sociological equivalent." Plekhanov expanded Chernyshevsky's concept of utilitarian art (poleznoe iskusstvo) to include message (ideinost'). His principal premise for judging value in any work of art thus consisted of three basic criteria: utility, simplicity, and important message that had social value. His other premise for passing judgment on a work of art was whether its execution corresponded to its design, so that the author accomplished what he had set out to do. The Soviets now think that this premise was a mistake that led to separation of form and content and ultimately resulted in the development of formalism.

Plekhanov wrote six articles about Tolstoy to combat what he thought was a growing trend among Marxists to equate Tolstoy's teachings with those of Marx. This was a period of intense struggle for definition of Marxist goals. Concerned about signs of undue growth of Tolstoy's popularity among liberal Marxists, Plekhanov felt it incumbent upon himself to define exactly the extent of Tolstoy's usefulness to the Marxist cause. Plekhanov, whose final evaluation of writers rested on their attitude toward the class struggle, tried to show that the great artist Tolstoy was a very poor thinker who was quite remote from reality, had wrong ideas, had never read Marx, and was therefore hardly in a position to be a good sage or "teacher of life."

Plekhanov's disagreements with Tolstoy were ideological in nature. Some of these concerned the highly controversial and volatile issue of the origins and purpose of art. In the first "Letter without an Address" (1899), Plekhanov challenged Tolstoy's recent (1898) definition of art in What Is Art? as a mode of communicating feelings through symbols. Plekhanov thought it one-sided and inadequate; he claimed that the definition should also include the communication of thoughts. Thought stabilized artistic expression by giving it direction. It also made art into a social phenomenon. Unlike ordinary speech, Plekhanov said, art transmitted thoughts and feelings with living images, rather than logic and abstract thought, which, he assumed, belonged outside the realm of art:

According to Count Tolstoy, art expresses the feelings of people, whereas words express their thoughts. This is inaccurate. The word serves people not only as a means of expressing their thoughts but also their feelings. Proof of this lies in poetry the medium of which is indeed the word. . . .

It is also inaccurate to say that art expresses only the feelings of people. No, it expresses their feelings as well as their thoughts, but it
expresses them not in abstracto but as living images. And this is its most salient characteristic. In Count Tolstoy's opinion, "art begins when man, aiming to convey to others a feeling that he himself experienced, stimulates it in himself again and tries to express it with certain external signs." But I think that art begins when man recalls feelings and thoughts he experienced under the influence of the surrounding reality and gives them a certain expression through images. It is self-evident that in a vast majority of instances he does so aiming to convey what he thought and felt to other people. Art is a social phenomenon.\textsuperscript{15}

So Plekhanov declared that Tolstoy's latest definition of art excluded thoughts and images. It will be clear later in this chapter what this pedantic point has to do with Plekhanov's conviction that great ideas uplifted and ennobled even poor and mediocre art, whereas poor or trivial ideas reduced even great art to insignificance. On this point, it will be noted, Plekhanov is quite close not only to Pisarev but to Tolstoy's own positions on how to judge value in a work of art. Their disagreement stems from differences in opinion on what constitutes great ideas.

Plekhanov could not abide Tolstoy's religious ideas. He felt that Tolstoy's art was ruined by them. His attitude toward Tolstoy was therefore ambivalent. He acknowledged grudgingly that Tolstoy was a great Russian writer. Plekhanov felt that his writings could and should have been of colossal significance to Russia and the world. He therefore could not forgive Tolstoy for squandering his great talent on unworthy causes. Most sources minimize Plekhanov's bitter resentment of Tolstoy as a man.\textsuperscript{16} Yet nearly all of his utterances about Tolstoy seethe with an ill-concealed irritation. Plekhanov thought that Tolstoy's influence on young writers was excessive, even if it was preferable to that of the decadents (2:437, 440). His reluctant admission of excellence in Tolstoy was nearly always accompanied by a sour note. His articles abound in sarcastic references to Tolstoy as a "star of the first magnitude," "our great," "our famous novelist," a rich, educated count, and "our remarkable [zamechatel'nyi] artist." But he was disinclined to discuss the details. His stiffness and mockery of Tolstoy contrast oddly with his warm praise and expansive treatment of the mediocre civic poetry of Nekrasov, whose often trite and pretentious lines Plekhanov lauded for their lofty civic sentiment ("N. A. Nekrasov" and "Pokhorony N. A. Nekrasova," 2:187–209), and his glowing account of Chernyshevsky's dismal novel What Is to Be
Done? ("O romane Chernyshevskogo Chto delat?," 2:192) for the right ideas they contained. Plekhanov hinted that the amorous involvements of Chernyshevsky’s feminist heroine Vera Pavlovna were much more meaningful than the frivolous philanderings (buduarnye pokhozhdeniiia) of Tolstoy’s heroes and heroines (2:176–78). In what seems to have been pique at Lenin, Plekhanov wrote in 1917 that Nekrasov and Chernyshevsky, and not Tolstoy, were the true sages of the period between 1860 and 1895: they saw history with the eyes of the raznochintsy, not the nobility (2:192).

There can be doubt that an unsatisfactory message would ruin Plekhanov’s enjoyment of a literary work no matter how excellent the form in which it was expressed. And, so far as Plekhanov was concerned, Tolstoy’s poor ideas spoiled his art. Plekhanov sometimes preferred not to refer to Tolstoy as a great artist or a genius, but called him merely a sizable (krupnyi) talent (2:436). Plekhanov’s reluctance even to discuss the details of Tolstoy’s art and his inclination to treat it as spontaneous or as neutral reality are exemplified in his long quote from War and Peace about the girl Malasha and Field Marshal Kutuzov at the war council. He ignored the vividness of the scene and its artistic merits and concentrated on the similarity between the little girl and his own political opponents, whom he likened to her in intelligence. He said that an alert, naïve observer will notice little things but will miss bigger issues. He advised his opponents to outgrow the psychological level of a child (pererasti psikhologiiu rebenka) ("Devochka Malasha," 2:451–52).

With a certain amount of malicious glee, Plekhanov referred to Tolstoy as a “chronicler of nests of gentlefolk” and, rather testily, declared that he, like any enlightened, progressive Russian, could accept Tolstoy only up to a point. He could only bring himself to appreciate Tolstoy, and at that fitfully, when in his writing he depicted unsatisfactory social conditions:

And from “where” to “where” do the people of this second category appreciate Tolstoy?

The question is easy to answer. People of this second category value in Tolstoy a writer who, although he never did understand the struggle to restructure social relationships because he remained completely indifferent to it, nevertheless felt deeply the unsatisfactory nature of the present social structure. But mainly they value in him a writer who used his huge artistic talent in order to depict this unsatisfactory nature, however sporadically, or rather, occasionally, he may have actually done so.
This is from "where" to "where" do the really progressive people of our times appreciate Tolstoy. [P. 336]

Plekhanov primly refused to grant Russian writers of gentle birth any status higher than that of chroniclers of their times. They were writers without a valid message, mere clerks of history. He accused Tolstoy, along with other outstanding Russian writers with an aristocratic background, of unconscious bias and a retrograde tendency to promote the cause of the nobility. This tendentiousness he found revealed in a predilection to depict the life of the nobility in an appealing light (v privlekatel'nom svete):

[Count Tolstoy was] a chronicler of the life and mores of "nests of gentlefolk," . . . an interpreter of the mental and emotional states of their inhabitants, just as were Pushkin, Lermontov, and many, many other stars of lesser magnitude. In calling them all chroniclers of nests of gentlefolk, pointing out their intrinsically genteel point of view, I do not in the least want to imply that they were bigoted supporters of class privileges, heartless defenders of the exploitation of the peasant by the nobleman. Of course not! These people were in their own way very kind and humane, and many a nobleman sharply condemned the overburdening of peasants—at least sometimes—some of them did. But this is not at all the point. The point is that no matter how kind and humane our great artists may have been, it is nevertheless quite clear beyond the shadow of a doubt that in their works the life of the gentlefolk is depicted not from its negative side, that is, the side from which the conflict of interests of the nobility with those of the peasantry would be revealed, but from a side from which this conflict is completely unnoticeable. . . . I will remind the reader of the joys of Christmastide at the country estate of the counts Rostov Otradnoe, in the district of Ryazan [in War and Peace]; servants from among the serfs participate alongside their masters in those joys which were depicted for us with such incomparable, inimitable skill. In painting the Otradnoe idyll Tolstoy did not in the least try to conceal anything, spruce it up or brighten it up. As a matter of fact, he never even thought of the Otradnoe serfs. His attention was concentrated on the depiction of the love of Nikolai Rostov for Sofia, and the involvement of serfs in the joys of Christmastide was depicted by him entirely in passing, and merely because it was impossible for him not to depict it: the picture would have been less than true to life otherwise. And if the pictures of these manorial daily pursuits painted by him turned out to be a genuine idyll, then this is neither the fault nor the achievement of the artist. He could not help it if such idyllic scenes did indeed take place amidst all the horrors of serfdom. [2:190–91]

By contrast, Plekhanov said, Nekrasov depicted the same way of life in sharply negative colors, and it was thus that the heroic mili-
Not only was Count Tolstoy a scion of our aristocracy; for a long time he was also the promoter of its ideology, although admittedly not in every respect. Even though the life of our landed gentry is depicted in his brilliant novels without undue idealization, it is nevertheless depicted there from its best side. Its revolting side, the exploitation of the peasants by the landowners, appears not to have existed for Tolstoy. In this is revealed the very peculiar and at the same time invincible conservatism of our great artist. And this conservatism, in turn, is responsible for the fact that even after Tolstoy finally did turn his attention to the negative side in the life of the nobility and began to condemn it on moral grounds, he nevertheless continued to pay attention to the exploiters, not the exploited ones. Whosoever fails to take due note of that will never reach a correct understanding of his morality and religion. [P. 370]

Plekhanov claimed that, for the most part of his life, Tolstoy remained indifferent to the plight of the lower classes, whom he refused to know other than as Platon Karataev. He cared only for their moral, not social, improvement.

Plekhanov insisted that there was an organic connection between Tolstoy's art and his religious ideas. The most vivid and appealing scenes in his works since Childhood and throughout War and Peace served to promote faulty religious concepts, which eventually evolved into his notorious theory of nonresistance. In emphasizing the indivisibility of Tolstoy's art and religion, Plekhanov spoke not of social determinism but of a pernicious psychological condition that tended to involve both author and reader. Plekhanov's major intellectual project was to counter the effects of Tolstoy's teachings, and these were powerfully reinforced by his art. He said that confusion about Tolstoy's role as "a great teacher of life" arose because Tolstoy's great formal skill lent strength and persuasion to his distorted ideas. The reader, always astounded at the unmistakable quality of genius in Tolstoy's works, and feeling that great art always carried great ideas, naturally assumed that Tolstoy's ideas were great. However, although rapture with Tolstoy's great art was legitimate, it should not be extended to his ideas because they were all wrong, and eventually they had thoroughly corrupted his great art. Plekhanov set out to explain in detail what had happened, as, he said, was his duty as a critic and a lover of Tolstoy's great art. Integral to the problem was Tolstoy's sinister theory of nonresistance. The theory, he said, "had been buzzing in Tolstoy's head for quite a long time. In 1861 [the equine protagonist of] his [story about the horse] 'Kholstomer' explained in a similar fashion the
[proprietary] meaning of the word mine etc. . . . One can see from this, by the way, that Tolstoy was only partially right when he spoke of a conversion, which he said he experienced in the beginning of the 1880s. There was a change in his mood, yes, but his ideas remained the same" (p. 357). These ideas could be traced through all of Tolstoy's works, from the already mentioned example in My Confession to the earliest. "His teachings about morality have remained purely negative: 'do not get angry; do not fornicate; do not swear; do not make war. This, for me, is the essence of the teachings of Christ.' And this negative morality was, in its onesidedness, far below the positive moral doctrine that evolved among people who were first and foremost concerned with the 'happiness of the people and the improvement of their lot' [Nekrasov's famous phrase]" (pp. 335-36). Rooted in class consciousness, Tolstoy's nonresistance theory promoted a notion of religion and a state of mind that could be described only as a state of reduced consciousness. Plekhanov, who knew pleasure to be the enlightened materialist's goal in life, thought of conventional religion as a harmful soporific that dulled consciousness with pious phrases and a futile ritual. It was used by the establishment to keep the people in an abject and unenlightened state so that they would demand less than their fair share of pleasure in life. Tolstoy voluntarily inflicted the same condition upon himself. He was a disappointed, naive materialist who had turned to religious idealism and asceticism after he had failed to find satisfaction and pleasure in a normal life of selfish, social, and political concerns. Christianity conflicted with his nature. Plekhanov, who thought of an enlightened religion as a set of rules and morality as a code to regulate human conduct, found that Tolstoy's four other17 rules of negative morality insulted intelligence and caused depression and feelings of futility. In denying pleasure as a goal in life, Tolstoy was denying life itself. It was after Tolstoy had emptied his mind of normal human concerns that the vacuum became filled with the fog of his infantile faith:

Concern about personal happiness does not satisfy Tolstoy, concern about the welfare of the people does not have any appeal for him ("what do I care?"). The result is psychological emptiness that indeed denies all possibility of life. It is imperative that the emptiness be filled with something. But with what? Either with concern about personal welfare or concern about the welfare of the people or, ultimately, both. But we have seen that concern about personal welfare did not satisfy Tolstoy, concern about the welfare of the people
did not appeal to him; therefore nothing could come from a combination of these two concerns but zero. And this means that neither in personal nor in social life was there anything that could fill that nagging emptiness in the soul of our great artist. How could he help then but turn away from the earth toward heaven, that is, start looking up to "someone else's will" for the urgently needed answer to the question "why do I live?" Here lies the solution to the riddle of why Tolstoy did not himself notice the untenable nature of his infantile beliefs. [P. 334]

Plekhanov did not question Tolstoy’s artistic accomplishments, but he devoted no interest to them because he thought of them as intuitive or unconscious. He referred to Tolstoy somewhat contemptuously as a genius who could make reality live in his works but could not himself live in reality, or find any real meaning in life. Plekhanov disagreed with Mikhailovsky that Tolstoy was a repentant nobleman. Having found no real meaning in life, Tolstoy became wrapped up in himself and turned to religion.

These later conscious attempts to bring religion into art resulted in hypocrisy, Plekhanov explained. To illustrate, he contrasted Tolstoy's and Chernyshevsky's theories of art, which were erroneously thought similar, he said, because their theories were poles apart on the issues that good art should promote. Tolstoy and Chernyshevsky agreed that good art should explain the meaning of life, but they disagreed on what that meaning was. Chernyshevsky was a materialist who accepted life, appreciated the physical beauty of its forms, and saw its meaning in concrete terms of social issues. Tolstoy was a convert to religious idealism who now looked for the meaning of life beyond a life in the flesh, which he repudiated; he hoped to find such a meaning in religious abstractions. A conflict was inevitable once he tried to implement his view of life with concrete, living images of art, unless he did so spontaneously and unconsciously, as he had before his conversion. As soon as he tried to express consciously this truly irreconcilable conflict between imageless abstractions and concrete images, lies and distortions resulted. Moreover, to express his conversion, Tolstoy had to realign drastically all his preferences. If he repudiated the artistic purpose of promoting the joys of life and allowed art to extoll only the joys of an afterlife, he had to repudiate all his works, including War and Peace and Anna Karenina. Tolstoy’s preparations to settle himself in the Christian condition of increased conscience with decreased consciousness were signaled, Plekhanov found, by the extraordinary and selfish antics of Konstantin Levin (Anna Karenina).
Plekhanov described what he saw as lies and distortions resulting from this turn of events in Tolstoy's life and his subsequent need to justify himself. Tolstoy lied, for instance, in this *Confession* about his motives for writing. It was extremely difficult to believe, Plekhanov said, that the only reason Tolstoy wrote *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* was vulgar vanity and greed. Tolstoy also lied about his indifference to religion during most of his life. Already in *Childhood* he showed a fondness for the religious antics of Grisha the Fool. Sarcastically Plekhanov asserted that he would never dare question Tolstoy's sincerity in castigating himself for shortcomings he was not guilty of. But, he added, there had been nothing intrinsically wrong with Tolstoy that a change in orientation could not have cured. Tolstoy was a man of great and unique gifts, a man of tremendous vitality, a natural pagan who loved life but violated his nature by forcing himself into religious quietism. In adopting a set of mind-withering metaphysical tenets, he encapsulized himself inside a narrow sectarian outlook and ruined his chances of becoming an important teacher of life for the Russian people.

Plekhanov also tried to show the effects of corruption on Tolstoy's psychological skills. He acknowledged Tolstoy's great ability to draw the reader into the stream of consciousness of his characters but denied that he was a great psychologist. With reference to Tolstoy's analysis, considered his most outstanding characteristic, Plekhanov claimed that it developed because in his youth Tolstoy was interested only in himself. Therefore he could not lay claim to interest in, or understanding of, other human beings. Reluctantly Plekhanov agreed that Tolstoy usually depicted reality without embellishments and shunned artistic effects, as Chernyshevsky had already noted; nonetheless, many of Tolstoy's psychological effects were tricks. Granting that Tolstoy's descriptions of the fear of death were legitimate since his own life was shot through with intermittent fears of death, Plekhanov questioned whether Tolstoy's famous wartime descriptions of death and dying were not at least in part based on a vivid imagination. He alluded to Tolstoy's own extensive experience with the fear of death as neurotic, i.e., something less than martial and brave:

I grant that a really good artist, even if he did not personally participate in certain events, could, to a certain extent, "guess" his way toward a fairly close approximation of what actual participants may have experienced if he himself has had comparable experiences. But such doubtless value of analogous experience merely reinforces the
case all the more convincingly in favor of actual personal experience. Let us take, for example, some of the battle scenes that occur in the works of Tolstoy. Many, many minor details of these scenes were almost certainly construed "as a guess." Still, the overall character of the sensations of the participants impresses one as astonishingly true to life only because our great novelist has himself experienced similar fears. And if anyone tried on that basis to detract from his achievement as an artist, he would only reveal himself as not a very perspicacious critic. [2:441]

Interpreting Tolstoy's art psychologically, Plekhanov tried to explain it as a product of the conflict between Tolstoy's artistic sense and his unartistic views. He attempted to define its main stimulus as a neurosis that arose from a conflict between an uncontrollable love of life and an ungovernable fear of death. Tolstoy's novels were one gigantic act of sensuality, for he was, according to Plekhanov, not only a great lover of life but also a great poet of the lust for life who was intermittently assailed by an uncontrollable fear of death. In this great conflict periods of ascendance of an ascetic, life-denying Christianity alternated with periods of blithe paganism, creating an artistic dilemma:

If life by itself has no meaning; if "only tenets of faith give meaning to life," then it is clear that the breathless exhilaration of Natasha during her preparations for the ball that is so sympathetically depicted in War and Peace or the boundless joy of life that seized the same Natasha at the hunt and made her squeal wildly from sheer animal excitement will also be deprived of all meaning. Well, if the endlessly varied manifestations of the joy of life have no meaning by themselves, then their artistic depiction can have no meaning either. Thus the triumph of the Christian over the pagan in the soul of Count Tolstoy forced him to adopt sharply negative positions toward his former activity as an artist. [P. 395]

Sometimes the aversion became strong enough to interfere with the artistic result. With age, Plekhanov found, this tendency increased, until Tolstoy rejected all his artistic works. The repudiation of his immortal works was a childish, petulant gesture based on Tolstoy's incomplete understanding of current issues, because of his unenlightened consciousness, Plekhanov explained, referring to it as a diseased condition that Tolstoy had brought upon himself by his religious orientation.

A major part of Plekhanov's argument comprised efforts to expose Tolstoy's impotence as a thinker. Plekhanov tried to demonstrate that conceptual confusion (smeshenie predstavlenii) reigned
in Tolstoy's mind, whose capability diminished after his conversion to Christianity. Tolstoy's thinking became eclectic and contradictory. Many areas of philosophical thought were inaccessible to Tolstoy's mind, which dealt in futile, philosophically naïve concepts on the order of the classic dilemma of the chicken and the egg:

Tolstoy's doctrine of nonresistance to evil is based wholly on the juxtaposition between matters eternal and temporal, the spirit and the body. . . .

In the shape in which it occurs in Tolstoy's writings, it is tantamount to a juxtaposition between man's inner world, which is seen as the sum total of his ethical needs and aspirations, and the external world that surrounds him. Each individual's own personal body, as well as the bodies of his entire kith and kin, is regarded as part of the external world. The whole thing is just one of a number of ways to contrast being and consciousness. It is by no means uncommon in the history of thought; but with Tolstoy it becomes especially plastic, whereby all its inherent contradictions become very prominent.

Consciousness is not independent of being. It is first determined by being, and then influences being, thus helping being to evolve further. . . . Why [says Tolstoy] is it wrong to rescue a child from being battered by his mother? Because . . . violence applied to this Megara would constitute undue influence upon her by the external world. Therefore the state of her consciousness would be unduly determined by existential factors. Sometimes Tolstoy goes even further in using strictly materialistic arguments for what goes on in man's inner world. . . . But these are only isolated instances, erratic flashes of materialistic thought that do not merge into a coherent system and are badly expressed. In his overall outlook Tolstoy is and remains an extreme idealist in whose eyes materialism is pure nonsense. . . .

It is impossible to go any further in claiming the independence of man's inner world from external conditions. . . . This declaration of independence of the inner world from the outer is tantamount to an assertion that it is unnecessary to exert any planned influence upon conditions surrounding man, any control of consciousness over being. And Tolstoy does indeed claim that all this is unnecessary. [Pp. 341–42]

Echoing similar claims by Mikhailovsky and Gorky, Plekhanov speculated that apparently Tolstoy was serious about desiring for himself immortality in the flesh. Plekhanov regarded Tolstoy as an uprooted, mentally disturbed old Russian squire in a morbid and despairing state of mind (a state Plekhanov thought was typical of the decadent period in history), asking unanswerable metaphysical
questions instead of trying to resolve problems that were well within his reach. Soviet sources usually represent Plekhanov's comparison of Tolstoy to the hero of S. Karonin's (1853-92) story "A Village Neurotic [Derevenskie nervy]," Gavrilo, as a sign that Plekhanov realized the closeness of Tolstoy's ideas to those of the peasant. Actually, the critique is an attempt to satirize Tolstoy's mental condition, a heavy-handed parody of Tolstoy's eccentric behavior in public and his efforts to emulate the peasant's mode of life.

Have you had a chance to read the so-called Confession of Count L. Tolstoy? Doesn't Gavrilo ask himself the same questions: "Why, what for, and then what?" which plagued the famous novelist? Still, while the rich and educated count had every opportunity to answer those questions less hideously than he did in actual fact, Gavrilo, by his very station in life, was deprived of any means and any assistance in finding the proper answers. Surrounded as he was by ignorance and obscurity, there was no sign of relief for him anywhere in sight.

He cried, behaved as an eccentric, was rude to the priest, and abused the medical orderly, and his exchange of fisticuffs with the village elder landed him in jail. He was rescued by the same medical orderly who drew the court's attention to the morbid psychic condition of the defendant. Gavrilo calmed down only much later, after he had found a job as a caretaker in a neighboring town. Once there, he no longer had anything to brood about. [2:304-5]

The article contains an address that seems to echo an earlier tirade by Dostoevsky (quoted on p. 136). Both represent, of course, the established tradition whereby Russian critics advise Russian writers on correct behavior. In his address Plekhanov counseled Tolstoy to be sensible, stop his antics, and leave home if his family irritated his nerves. Rather than working with farm implements and mulling over old problems, a change in environment and a new involvement with its problems was all that was necessary, Plekhanov said, to stabilize Tolstoy's mind:

The metaphysic is then transformed back into a normal human being, who thinks about things that are related to normal life, but thinks about them not in his old, but in a new way. There are additional ways of effecting a cure of the same sickness: get away from the environment that led you to "thoughts about death," forget the old surroundings, find something else to do that would have nothing in common with your old environment. It may well be that these new surroundings that come to provide you with shelter will turn out to have "accursed questions" of their own, but to begin with these questions will be alien to you, and by the time they find access to your
mind, you will have had a chance to recover your wits. . . . A cure of this sort by escape is not very attractive, but sometimes it can be effective. Gavrilop chose just such a cure and recovered in his own way. And he was cured not by any "broom" but by a simple change in his surroundings. The village he left behind ceased to bother him with its tensions, and the "thoughts about death" disappeared along with them. [2:306]

In addition to his personal criticism, Plekhanov challenged Tolstoy's qualifications as a literary critic. Tolstoy, he claimed, was inconsistent. When he wrote the introduction to the Russian translation of Wilhelm von Polenz's (1861-1903) social novel *Der Büttenbauer* (1902), he said that critiques should never be written apropos the work discussed. Yet his own introduction, if anything, was an apropos critique. Moreover, Tolstoy was arbitrary and dogmatic about matters concerning aesthetic judgment. He repeatedly assessed the poet N. A. Nekrasov as devoid of talent, and he was wrong. He was deliberately ignoring the virtues of Nekrasov's uneven poetry (2:198, 202). Similarly, Tolstoy ignored all his life the existence of Chernyshevsky, although he had borrowed large portions of Chernyshevsky's theory of art. Chernyshevsky, on the other hand, had early acknowledged Tolstoy's merits.

Plekhanov also challenged Tolstoy's qualification as a social reformer. Most of all he focused on Tolstoy as a deviant social phenomenon, finding Tolstoy's nonresistance theory clearly absurd. Tolstoy's inability to see the merits of opposing force with force disqualified him as a serious thinker. Plekhanov felt that Tolstoy was so preoccupied with his theory that he became hypnotized by it and did not notice that it was useless and persuaded no one but himself. The value of Tolstoy's writings, Plekhanov asserted, was not in their message but in their usefulness as propaganda: Tolstoy supplied vivid illustrations of social injustices that aroused others to action against the establishment:

The value of Tolstoy's sermon was not in its moral or religious aspect, but in vivid depictions of that exploitation of the people without which the upper classes could not exist. Tolstoy considers this exploitation from the point of view of the moral harm it causes the exploiters. Still, none of this interfered with his ability to depict these things with his usual, which is to say gigantic, talent. . . .

Whenever he begins with the power at his command to analyze the psychological motivation of representatives and defenders of the existing order of things; when he exposes all the conscious and unconscious hypocrisy revealed in their continuous sanctimonious ref-
erences to the public good—then he must be credited with tremendous civic achievement. He preaches nonresistance to evil by force; yet some of his pages that are like the ones I just described arouse in the readers' hearts a sacred desire to meet reactionary violence with revolutionary force. He recommends limiting protests to weapons of criticism; yet those splendid pages doubtless provide ample justification for sharpest criticism with weapons. All this—and only this—is valuable in the sermons of Count Tolstoy. [Pp. 377-78]

Such an effect, Plekhanov went on, was hardly anticipated by the celebrated author-pacifist who found no virtue in civic militancy. His spontaneous, intuitive genius compelled his interest in the plight of the common man, whom he depicted with characteristic effectiveness; any effect beyond that, however, was unintentional. Tolstoy had remained consistent in his attitudes since Childhood. He condemned the modern proletarian as a “sad mistake” because the latter was too active in civic affairs and not submissive and placid like Platon Karataev. Tolstoy's own attacks on the establishment were too traditional to bother anyone. His tirades were the railings of Constitutional Democrats, coached in the language of mysticism. Plekhanov dismissed them as socially irrelevant. He found Tolstoy's views incredibly unrealistic; he was shocked and amazed to find Tolstoy throwing together political reactionaries, clerics, and radical revolutionary assassins as indulging equally in “orgies of selfish animalism.” Sentiments like these established Tolstoy's utter political naivete, and Plekhanov judged it a good thing that Tolstoy was not interested in politics: otherwise he might have become a rabid reactionary. Plekhanov deemed it not unlikely that a mild evolution toward a higher social consciousness was taking place in Tolstoy's mind; but the growth was insignificant and hardly adequate. Tolstoy never came to realize that it was not enough to repudiate upper class values just for himself, but that it was also necessary to struggle for the enlightenment of others. So, Plekhanov concluded, under the circumstances, how could Tolstoy ever seriously be believed to be a national or international sage or teacher of life?

In Plekhanov's opinion, then, Tolstoy was a revolutionary freak—a politically counterproductive phenomenon of Russian life—a great artist who chose to remain peripheral to the revolutionary movement. He was useful to the Marxist cause only in the limited sense of having an unusual talent for depicting vivid scenes of social injustice. He was otherwise a poor thinker and a reactionary:
His own moral and mental development took a path that had nothing in common with the path along which moved the moral and mental development of the educated Russian raznochinets. Tolstoy is a squire to the tips of his fingernails even where he appears as a revolutionary. In his rejections there is not a single atom of revolutionary fervor. [2:198]

But this is not important. For in what is important, Tolstoy was absolutely right. One cannot imagine any group of people further removed from him ideologically than modern socialists, to put it more accurately, those among them who fully understand the meaning of their own theoretical views and their own practical aspirations. One could not put it any better: "it is like two ends of an open ring. . . . One must travel the entire distance before one can get from one end to the other." Whoever fails to understand the implications of this is guilty of conceptual confusion.

Just how many among us are nowadays guilty of this sin, let the reader be the judge. [P. 359]

This last remark is of mild historic interest. It appears to have been aimed at none other than Lenin, who in 1908 declared Tolstoy to be the "mirror of the Russian revolution." Apparently Plekhanov hoped to implant in the reader's mind the same doubt about Lenin's intellectual integrity as he did with his remarks about Tolstoy. Whether or not the hint ever registered is a matter of conjecture. Soviet sources apparently chose to ignore it, since the passage appears freely in Plekhanov's writings selected for publication by Soviet editors. Perhaps its subtlety eludes them. However, one must not assume anything with certainty. Soviet squabbles sometimes take bizarre turns. They are as well hidden from the outside world by their complexity as were the court intrigues of old Byzantium, to which they bear a not inconsiderable resemblance. Furthermore, Plekhanov's arguments were ambivalent even by Russian standards. His method of proof was petty and argumentative. He engaged in personalities, denigrated his opponents with sarcasm and innuendo, drew obscure allegorical inferences understandable only to insiders, and employed the other intricacies of nineteenth-century Russian journalese called Aesopic language. For a period of time, most major Marxists tended to side with Plekhanov's claim that Tolstoy's art was damaged beyond redemption by false ideological content that, because it was integral to Tolstoy's art, could not be extracted and isolated from it. This point of view did not so well survive the test of politics and time, however, and the current Marxist position is different. It underwent change after the revolution, when Lenin's articles became the official statement of
policy on Tolstoy. The two positions are remarkably different in spirit.

Lenin showed less interest in Tolstoy as a person and concentrated on the efficacy of his works. For Lenin, Tolstoy was not so much a confused and bewildered Russian aristocrat, bemused by the complexities of modern age and wallowing in reflexia, as a great writer and a lucid thinker who clearly reflected the mood and the events of his time. Confused on many issues, and not knowing any of the answers, he nevertheless managed to pose and record for posterity most of the really significant issues and unanswerable questions of his day. According to Lenin, Tolstoy thus qualified as a faithful chronicler of the events, moods, and conditions during the turbulent forty-year period that began with the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and ended with the peasant revolts of 1905.

LENIN

As regards literature, communism's greatest sage and the foremost authority on Marxism today, Vladimir Ilych Lenin [Ul'ianov] (1870-1924), was a pragmatist. One would look in vain for extensive theoretical studies in literary criticism or aesthetics in the many volumes of his collected works. His first article on Tolstoy was written for the express purpose of explaining the meaning of Tolstoy as a mirror of the Russian revolution. His subsequent articles were primarily restatements of his original premise. Their number (six), tenor, and timing suggest that they were intended to offset the impression Plekhanov's articles created. However, these small pieces have had a profound effect upon the evolution, standards, and methods of Soviet literary criticism, and now form its basis.

Soviet scholarly and critical sources agree today that practically all major premises of Soviet literary criticism derive in one way or another from Lenin's articles on Tolstoy. This is probably an exaggeration. Yet Struve is unjust in saying that those articles were perfunctory, or that they do not warrant the importance attached to them by Soviet literary scholars. Like so much of what is accepted as valid about the Soviets today, this opinion stems partly from a disdain for the issues involved—issues that are fundamental to the philosophy of communism. Lenin's articles dealt with very broad definitions. He was concerned with assigning Tolstoy his proper place in history and defining his usefulness to the Marxist cause. Looking at Tolstoy both as a man and as a writer, Lenin
explained how his extraordinary life and vivid art galvanized every significant issue he touched, which then could be dealt with exhaustively by properly trained Marxists.

Lenin examined Tolstoy's art as a significant phenomenon of Russian life. He credited Tolstoy with an ability to present forcefully the important, yet not always topical, issues that had been brought to the attention of the public by Marxists before. Tolstoy's treatment reactivated them; it provided these issues with a new, artistic form that made them more permanent and provided them with an important feature: plasticity, which offset the threat that the issues could be flattened out by repetition and lose their power to hold the public's attention. Lenin, who thought of the revolution as a three-stage process, assigned Tolstoy a place as a sage or chronicler of its middle or second stage:

Tolstoy's commentary is not new. He has yet to say anything that has not been said long before him in European and Russian literature by people who were on the side of workers. But the uniqueness of Tolstoy's criticism and its historical significance is in the fact that it expresses, with such power as is common only to artists of genius, the radical break in the views of the broadest masses of the population during the specified period, namely, those of the peasant population of rural Russia. For Tolstoyan criticism of the present order of things differs from criticism of the same order of things by representatives of the modern labor movement precisely because Tolstoy's positions are those of the patriarchal, naïve peasant; Tolstoy imbues his criticism, his doctrine, with the psychology of the peasant. The reason Tolstoy's criticism is distinguished by such force of feeling, such passion, convincingness, freshness, sincerity, fearless determination "to reach the root," find the real cause of the misery of the masses, is that his criticism actually reflects the break in the views of millions of peasants who have just come into freedom from serfdom and seen that this freedom means new horrors of ruin, hungry death, homeless life among city dregs, etc. Tolstoy reflects their mood so truthfully that he himself carries into his doctrine their naïveté, their alienation from politics, their mysticism, desire to leave the world, "nonresistance to evil," impotent curses of capitalism and the "power of money." The protest of millions of peasants and their despair—this is what has come together in Tolstoy's doctrine. [P. 67]

In short, Tolstoy brought all these issues into prominence by correlating and juxtaposing them in the context of his works in an extraordinarily vivid, visual form: "Tolstoy not only contributed works of art that will be always valued and read by the masses, . . . he managed to convey with remarkable power the mood of broad masses, . . . sketch their situation, express their elemental feeling of
protest and outrage. Tolstoy belongs primarily to the epoch of 1861–1904, and in his works he gave flesh and blood and extraordinary plasticity, both as an artist and as a thinker and preacher, to the historically unique features of the entire first Russian revolution, its strength and its weakness” (p. 59). Lenin's opinion was based on sound current scholarship, especially his assertion that in Tolstoy's hands, those features became world literature, and thus a permanent record of the times. Tolstoy's prominence as a world figure in itself gave him importance; the issues he touched were automatically propelled into significant notice. So, Lenin said, by reflecting the causes and reasons for the Russian revolution in his works, Tolstoy made the Russian revolution into a world issue.

Lenin discussed Tolstoy's uniqueness as a writer who had repudiated his own class and become a writer of national stature. Lenin disagreed with those who, like Plekhanov, claimed that Tolstoy expressed only the aspirations of his own class. The rapid changes caused by the industrialization of Russia, he said, had jolted Tolstoy out of his aristocratic complacency and sharpened his perceptions. In turn, this caused him to repudiate the values of his class. His ties to the nobility were thus incidental. Alienation enabled him to gain a proper perspective, a superior historical vantage point, and with it an undistorted point of view. A significant contributing factor was his expulsion from the Russian Orthodox church. Tolstoy thus found himself outside the old feudal society and tribal culture. Being neither of the establishment nor a Marxist, Tolstoy reflected the outlook of the disenchanted, disenfranchized masses. In many ways his position also corresponded to the point of view of other alert thinking men of his day, the raznochintsy (cf. the opposite point of view expressed by Plekhanov).

To this, Lenin said, was added Tolstoy’s unique ability to put his views into a highly effective artistic form that included an ability to create vivid, memorable types:

Tolstoy knew rural Russia, the life of landowners and peasants, superlatively well. His works contain such pictures of that way of life as to make them into masterpieces of world literature. The drastic breakup of all “old foundations” of rural Russia sharpened his perceptions, deepened his interest in what was going on around him, brought about a break in his whole outlook. By birth and upbringing Tolstoy belonged to the upper landowning nobility in Russia. He broke with all customary views of that environment and in his last
works descended with passionate criticism upon all contemporary governmental, church, social, and economic conditions based upon slavery of the masses, their poverty, the ruin of peasants and small owners generally, upon coercion and hypocrisy which still saturate contemporary life from top to bottom. [P. 66]

Lenin was more tolerant of Tolstoy's foibles than one would expect from one of his inflexible temperament. As a rule, he treated Tolstoy with considerable affection. He spoke of Tolstoy as though he were old Russia, the living embodiment of its strengths and weaknesses: the healthy, sober realism of the Russian people, and the corrupting influence of their obsolete religion. Lenin found other correspondences between Tolstoy's and the peasants' points of view. Like the peasant, Tolstoy hated the old forms of government. And, like the peasant, he wanted a new government without any ideas on how to achieve one. But with even more fervor than that for forms of exploitation, he hated the new menace of capitalism. His confusion on this subject reflected the confusion of the peasant who resented the status quo, yet acquiesced in it from a long-standing habit of submitting to authority. Tolstoy's theories rationalized the failure of the peasant to take his destiny in his own hands: his sloth, ignorance, stubbornness, and apparently unbreakable habit of sitting things out and doing nothing about them, while appealing to an absolute authority in heaven and on earth to solve all his problems conveniently:

Although the peasants desired new forms of community life, they had a very unconscious, patriarchal, feeble-minded attitude toward the shape this community life was supposed to take, what struggle it would require to actually earn their freedom, what leaders they could have in this struggle.... The whole previous life of the peasants had taught them to hate the master and the government official, but it did not and could not teach them where to look for answers to all those questions.... The majority of the peasants cried and prayed, foolishly argued and dreamed, wrote petitions, and sent petitioners, exactly in the spirit of Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy!... The Tolstoyan ideas are a mirror of the weaknesses, the shortcomings of our peasant revolt, a reflection of the spinlessness of the patriarchal village and the ingrained cowardice of the property-oriented small peasant. [P. 56]

Lenin explained his reasons for regarding Tolstoy as a mirror of the Russian revolution. He outlined the social, political, and historic reasons for giving Tolstoy this role, as well as the attitude he
recommended others to take toward Tolstoy as an artist and thinker (sage). It would be reasonable to assume that the correct attitude was, first of all, the

attitude toward any writer who wrote several outstanding literary works that assure him a place among the greatest writers of the world, a thinker who with enormous power, conviction, and sincerity raised a whole series of questions in relation to the fundamental features of the contemporary political and social order. . . .

Tolstoy began to write when serfdom was still in force but already at a time when it was clearly living out its last days. Tolstoy's main activity falls into that period of Russian history which lies between its two turning points, the years 1861 and 1905. During that period traces of serfdom, its direct residues, were permeating the entire economic (particularly rural) and political life of the land. This period was characterized by two simultaneous phenomena: spontaneous vigorous growth of capitalism at the grassroots level, and vigorous implantation of capitalism from above. . . .

The political structure of Russia during that time was also thoroughly permeated by serfdom-related practices. One can see this in the structure of the government, . . . the dominant influence of the landed gentry upon the affairs of state, the abuses of power by government officials, especially those in higher, more privileged positions of power, who also happened to be members of the landed aristocracy.

This old patriarchal Russia quickly began to fall apart after 1861 under the influence of world capitalism. Peasants went hungry, died out, were ruined at a pace faster than ever before, and fled to the cities, leaving the land behind. Railroads, factories, industrial complexes were being built at an increased pace thanks to the readily available "cheap labor" of the ruined peasants. There was rapid growth of high finance, big business, and industry.

This entire process of this swift, painful breakdown of the foundations of life in old Russia is reflected in the works of fiction written by Tolstoy the artist, and in the views of Tolstoy the thinker. [Pp. 65–66]

Tolstoy's doctrine is assuredly utopian and thoroughly reactionary in the strictest, profoundest sense of the word. But this does not mean, nor should it be construed to mean, that it cannot be socialistic or that it does not contain critical elements that can provide valuable material for the enlightenment of progressive classes. [P. 77]

The contradictions in the works, views, doctrines, the school of Tolstoy are glaring indeed. On the one hand we have the brilliant artist who has produced not only incomparable pictures of Russian life but also first-rate works of world literature. On the other hand we have a country squire acting the fool-in-Christ. On the one hand
The Marxist Critics I

we have a remarkably powerful, direct, and sincere protest against social lies and falsehood, while on the other we have the “Tolstoyan,” i.e., the washed-out, hysterical creature, a gutless species known as the Russian intellectual who publicly beats his breast and cries: “I am vile, I am wretched, but I am working on my own moral self-improvement: I no longer eat meat and nourish myself with rice patties.” On the one hand Tolstoy remorselessly criticizes capitalist exploitation and exposes the violent methods of the government, the farce of the courts, and of public administration, reveals the entire extent of the contradictions between the growth of wealth and the achievements of civilization, and the increasing destitution, brutalization, and misery of the working masses; on the other he preaches his feeble-minded doctrine of “nonresistance to evil” by forceful means. On the one hand, there is the most sober realism of his works, the tearing away of all and sundry masks; on the other he preaches one of the vilest things on earth—religion—and wants to replace priests who look upon their job as an official function with priests who would do the same from moral conviction, that is, he promotes the far subtler and therefore particularly disgusting form of clericalism. [P. 54]

Glar ing contradictions, irreconcilable differences, and general inefficiency were, in Lenin’s view, characteristics of old Russia. They were the reason it functioned so badly as a society. The many discordant factors rendered the society itself ineffective. Because Tolstoy’s views represented the agglomeration of these contradictions, they were subject to the same shortcomings. Obviously these views were obsolete, reactionary, utopian, even vile; but because they were so incongruous and so contradictory, there seemed no need to be unduly concerned with them. They were infantile and could be safely ignored. By any standard they were outdated. This aspect of Tolstoy’s philosophy was most blatant in his contention that the national trade should be conducted on the basis of barter, as is customary in a tribal society, rather than a money economy.

On the other hand, Tolstoy knew rural Russia extremely well and rendered an unmatched artistic account of its life during the transitional period between 1861 and 1905. According to Lenin’s own diagnostic theories, this was the second stage of the triple series of revolutionary upheavals that made up the great Russian Revolution, during which the changeover from an agrarian tribal to an industrial civilized society would occur. This second period was marked by especially severe confusion and drastic changes, and it was extremely difficult to describe it objectively. Tolstoy was its chronicler, as well as its living embodiment. His works, as well as he
himself, reflected the tensions between the still largely extant remnants of the tribal society—patriarchal old rural Russia—and a new Russia that was for the time being completely overwhelmed by Western-style capitalism. In exposing this situation—this preparatory revolutionary process and its pressures—in his works, Tolstoy revealed it as a historic necessity:

In a series of brilliant works that he produced during more than half a century of creativity, Tolstoy painted mostly the old, prerevolutionary Russia, which remained in a state of semiserfdom even after the year 1861. He described the Russia of the villagers, the Russia of the landed gentleman and his peasant. In depicting this stage in the historic life of Russia, Tolstoy managed to raise in his works so many great issues, and succeeded in rising to such heights of artistic performance, that his works are now counted among the greatest in world literature. So, the period of preparation for a revolution in a country that was severely oppressed by serf-owners has been revealed, thanks to Tolstoy's brilliant treatment, as a step forward in the artistic evolution of mankind. [P. 58]

Tolstoy was an expert observer of these disturbing events in the life of the country, when old social forms were being replaced with the new, and the ensuing confusion and perturbation. He depicted the resulting complexities in their historical perspective. He showed the disintegration of the old establishment with its traditions, and the tensions that followed between the old and new forms of life, truthfully and without distortion. His works exposed the decay of old institutions, the rotten state of the old regime, and the habitual exploitation of the people by the gentry that was still taken for granted by both sides. In fact, he himself actively contributed to the breakup of the old system. Lenin was delighted with Tolstoy's spirited attacks upon the hallowed institutions of the old order: the family, the landed squirearchy, the church, the courts, the press, the sciences, the civil and military administrations. He viewed these attacks, furthermore, as topical. They came at a time when the archaic social order and type of land ownership had become utterly untenable, and Tolstoy's works represented the makeshift condition of the economy, which was summed up so well by Levin of *Anna Karenina* as being in a state of flux, a state during which there was no telling what would eventually come of it all. His works also reflected the ineptitude of the peasant in dealing with old and new conditions alike. The free villagers of the day were the serfs and bondsmen of the past but lacked the protection of the old system
and the skill to maintain their freedom. They were especially vulner-
able to attacks from both the old officiولد and the private
sector. Faithfully, and with extraordinary vividness, Tolstoy fo-
cused on the vulnerability of the peasant who was menaced by the
new predators, the capitalist operators who came to the village to
prey on the peasant. Tolstoy’s works reflected the narrow bigoted
outlook of the peasant, his incompetence, emotionalism, spontane-
ous vehemence, and untrained, uneducated mind. The peasants,
Lenin said, were indeed ignorant and superstitious, and they saw in
capitalism one of the menaces of a new apocalyptic age that was
descending upon them from the city and from abroad (pp. 59–60).

Tolstoy’s works also reflected the prevailing mood of the period:
a mood of anger, fear, and rebellion. The peasant was in an ugly
mood, for he had accumulated hatred in centuries of oppression.
His aspirations were frustrated, for he had put his trust in a cor-
rupt and incompetent government. Tolstoy’s works in fact de-
scribed the fears and worries of an administration that had only its
own interests at heart, the hypocritical mentality of landowners
who spoke of helping the peasant but were only concerned about
helping themselves, the disgust of the peasant with his infantile
masters’ and government’s failure to protect him, and at the same
time his childish trust in the higher wisdom and competence of the
church and the czar. By depicting the politically unsophisticated
point of view of rural Russia, Tolstoy also revealed in his works the
causes of the failure of the first round of revolutionary riots in
1905: “Tolstoy reflected accumulated hatred, ripe aspirations for a
better life, desire to get rid of the past—and the immaturity of
daydreaming, lack of political training, and revolutionary
spinelessness. Historical and economic conditions explain both the
necessity for the appearance of the revolutionary struggle of the
masses and their lack of preparation for the struggle, the Tolstoyan
nonresistance to evil, which was one of the most serious causes of
the defeat of the first revolutionary campaign [of 1905–6]” (p. 57).
Tolstoy’s works posed and illuminated most of the important prob-
lems and questions of the period: the enlightenment and education
of the people; the menace of capitalism; the selection of leaders;
the means of fighting for freedom; the causes of the peasants'
mistrust of other classes, including the proletariat; the necessity for
violent overthrow of the old regime; the organization of the com-
munal living of the future; and the weaknesses of the old system.
Tolstoy also brought out the important issues of the day, including the need for self-discipline and a new, historically (rather than religiously) oriented ideology that served as a guide for the future, replacing the old religion that may have had its uses in the past but was not completely useless and thus an impediment to progress. Tolstoy's works offered vivid illustrations of what was right and what was wrong about old Russia, and why the time had come for a revolution. Lenin thus described Tolstoy as a tribal sage—a poet who reflects and formulates important issues and describes in vivid entertaining form the desirable and undesirable features of social and political life.

In order to demonstrate how Tolstoy embodied within himself the faults and virtues of old Russian mentality, Lenin examined Tolstoy's paradoxical and many-faceted personality. On one hand, Lenin said, Tolstoy was modern: a brilliant writer who mercilessly criticized the old regime by means of most effective, sober realism. On the other hand there was an anachronistic side to his personality: a savage noble, putting on antics and playing the fool-in-Christ to command attention in the hallowed traditions of old Russia with its czars and its boyars. He was also a Russian intellectual, a superfluous man, confused and disoriented, who preached the preposterous doctrine of nonresistance, spouting vague metaphysical nonsense and indulging in childish fancies. But the point was that these contradictions within Tolstoy were not incidental, Lenin said. They reflected the current contradictions in Russian reality and were indicative of the considerable morbid tensions that developed in the social fabric from the all-too-rapid changes in its structure (p. 55).

Tolstoy's views thus gave a fairly accurate cross section of the welter of existing opinions of his day, when everyone was offering solutions to current problems without having any idea what to do. This made his personal problems a significant index of objective reality. Tolstoy combined conservatism and radicalism, reflecting the state of mind of most Russians at the time, who were engaged in the process of readjusting themselves to the rapidly changing conditions. He reflected the generally unstable intellectual climate of the age. The causes of Tolstoy's confusion, Lenin found, were the same that created confusion in the minds of most Russians who lacked training in Marxist interpretation of history. His condition also established him as irrevocably committed to the past. Lenin, who apparently reserved for himself the role of pediatrician in
assisting mother Russia in giving birth to a new communist society explained Tolstoy's qualifications as her tutor. He would not be allowed into this promised land of the future because of his resistance to modern ideas. Like Moses, he could only guide her during exodus from the darkness of slavery. Lenin argued that although Tolstoy could see extremely well into the past, he could not see well into the future because he lacked greater historic perspective. He had a powerful intellect but it was not attuned to the twentieth century; it bogged down in concepts and prejudices of the past, into which Tolstoy had a keen but exclusive and one-sided view. Thus he could not interpret the future, or find any but naive answers to the sophisticated problems of the future, because his vision past a certain point in history was blurred and everything beyond marred by extreme confusion, errors, and subjective judgment. His rational approach to problems of the past gave way to irrationalism and mysticism. His castigations of the establishment were correct and in tune with historic conditions, but his suggestions of a mystic solution to Russia's problems in the future were not. His eschatological prognostications were typical of his uninformed view and the blurred vision of the decadent period. His vehement criticism accompanied a failure to take action.

Lenin described some of Tolstoy's unsound, unfocused, undifferentiated reasoning, in which fighting the regime of the landowners became a rejection of all authority and vague daydreams of communal living in Utopia, fighting a police state became a rejection of all politics, and fighting the established church became the hope for a substitute religion based on submission. Tolstoy's rejection of landed property in his way led him to reject all property. His rejection of capitalism came to include all those who fought it. His impotent cursing of the decrepit old regime accompanied a failure to make any provisions for dealing with the new menace of capitalism, for Tolstoy advocated the overthrow of the old regime but remained uninvolved in preparations for the revolution of 1905. Lenin explained Tolstoyism as a manifestation of the latent streak of stagnant savage or, as he put it, "asiatic" mentality in every Russian. Historically, he said, this mentality was "finished" by the revolution of 1905, which also discredited Tolstoy's utopian eschatological views and destroyed his theory of nonresistance.

Lenin thus established Tolstoy's competence as unlimited socially and artistically, but limited in time. Tolstoy was no guide for the future. His death marked, as well as symbolized, the end of old
Russia. Within his own period, however, the information he pro-
vided was invaluable, and should be studied carefully and with
profit:

Tolstoy is dead, and prerevolutionary Russia is receding into the
past. Its weakness and ineffectualness have been formulated in the
philosophy and depicted in the works of the brilliant artist. But there
are things in his legacy that are not receding into the past, things that
belong to the future. This legacy has been accepted by the Russian
proletariat that is working on it. The proletariat will explain to the
masses, who now toil and are being exploited, the meaning of
Tolstoy's criticism of the state, the church, private land
ownership—not so that the masses could be content with self-
improvement and dreams about a "godly" life, but in order to make
them rise up and deliver a new blow to the czar's monarchy and the
squires' ownership of the land, which in 1905 were only slightly
damaged, and which now must be completely destroyed. The pro-
letariat will explain to the masses Tolstoy's criticism of capitalism—
not so that the masses should be content to curse capitalism and the
power of money, but so that they will learn with every step of their
lives, and in their struggles, to utilize the technical and social
achievements of capitalism, learn to join together into a united army
of socialist fighters, millions strong, who will depose capitalism [as a
form of government] and create a new society without impoverish-
ment of the people, without the exploitation of man by man. [P. 62]

Lenin warned, however, about the dangers of confused interpreta-
tion, from the high veracity of Tolstoy's pictures of the past, as a
blueprint for the future. Toying with Tolstoy's theories, he main-
tained, was harmful nonsense, and attempts to sanctify them crim-
inal nonsense. Those who did this, like the Russian liberals, be-
longed, like Tolstoy, to the past. The liberals were confused about
what constituted Tolstoy's good and bad points. They were equally
confused about the significative extent of Tolstoy's ideas:

Just look at the way Tolstoy is being assessed by liberal newspapers.
All they can come up with is empty official liberal prattle, all those
trite professorial phrases about the "voice of civilized mankind,"
"united response of the whole world," "ideas of truth and good,"
etc., for which Tolstoy so strongly—and justly—castigated the
bourgeois arts and sciences. They are incapable of expressing clearly
and directly their assessment of Tolstoy's views about the state, the
church, private land ownership, capitalism—and not because they
fear interference by the board of censors; on the contrary, the board
of censors helps them out of their embarrassment!—but because
every position in Tolstoy's criticism is a slap in the face of bourgeois
liberalism; because the fearless, open, sharp, and merciless postula-
tion by Tolstoy of the most painful, most accursed questions of our
time is enough by itself to constitute a slap in the face of those who
use trite phrases, shopworn devices for wriggling out of embarrass­
ing situations, all those devious "civilized" lies concocted by our lib­
eral (and liberal-narodniki) press. The liberals are behind Tolstoy all
the way, they support him against the synod—and at the same time
they are also friends with the Vekhi-people with whom "one can
have a good argument, but whom one must tolerate within the party,
because one simply must work with them both in literature and in
politics!" And the Vekhi-people are kissed and embraced by [the de­

The liberals are so fond of emphasizing that Tolstoy is "the great
conscience." Isn't this an empty phrase that is repeated in a thousand
variants in the New Time and the like? Isn't this just a way to avoid all
those concrete questions of democracy and socialism that have been
raised by Tolstoy? Doesn't this merely emphasize all that which ex­
presses Tolstoy's prejudice and not his judgment, all those things in
him that belong to the past, and not the future, his rejection of
politics and his preaching of moral self-improvement, and not his
stormy protest against class domination? [Pp. 61-62]

So, the liberals praised Tolstoy's weakest points—his subjective
opinions, formed as the result of subjective experience, of no value
to anyone, not even to Tolstoy himself. It was imperative, Lenin
insisted, to understand that the meaning of Tolstoy's real message
was not the vague message of his so-called Christian anarchism, but
a revolutionary call for action in clearing the land of old institutions
and other impediments to progress:

The effort to sweep away, raze to the ground the official church, the
landed squirearchy, and government by landed squires, to destroy
all the old forms and systems of land ownership, to clear the ground,
and to create everywhere, in place of a state run by privileged classes
supported by the police, communities of free and equal small
peasants—such an endeavor runs like a red thread through every
historical step taken by the peasants in our revolution; and there is
no doubt that the ideological content of Tolstoy's writings cor­
sponds far more to this endeavor of the peasants than to the abstract
"Christian anarchism" that the system of his opinions is sometimes
judged to be. [Pp. 55-56]

Only the vague mind of a liberal could be still in doubt about this,
Lenin said. The liberals failed to get the point of Tolstoy's message
because they were so used to compromise and abstraction that they
no longer recognized a revolutionary call for immediate action.
Yet, just as it was wrong to accept Tolstoy's entire message in­
discriminately, so it was wrong to condemn him indiscriminately
for his views that could not be judged by the yardstick of the present. The discriminating Marxist had to sift through Tolstoy's works for true and false statements: the objective and reasonable, and the subjective unreasonable elements, i.e., to separate Tolstoy's intellect from his prejudice. Properly interpreted, Tolstoy's works supplied a wealth of useful information. Therefore they should be made available in large editions to many people. In a style reminiscent of the last part of "The Death of Ivan Ilych," Lenin said that the average Russian, too, would have to be put through the paces of reading about Russia's past mistakes reflected in Tolstoy's works. The average Russian would have to be "pushed through" the "black bag" of his obscurity to greater awareness of the causes of past mistakes: woolly-mindedness, inertia, and a crippling lack of mental discipline. Tolstoy's works supplied plentiful illustrations of all such faults. By studying them, and learning from them, the average Russian could be "reborn" into a new and better breed of human being, a political animal:

By studying the works of Leo Tolstoy, the Russian working class will get to know better its enemies; understanding the teachings of Tolstoy will help the entire Russian people realize the nature of its own weakness which did not allow them to finish the work of their own liberation. One must understand this in order to move forward.

This movement forward is hindered by all those who declare Tolstoy to be "everyone's conscience," "the teacher of life." This is a lie, spread deliberately by liberals who want to exploit the controversial side of Tolstoy's teachings. This lie about Tolstoy as the "teacher of life" is repeated after the liberals even by some former social democrats.

The Russian people will achieve liberation [from prejudice] only when they understand that not from Tolstoy must they learn about how to attain a better life but from that class whose significance Tolstoy did not understand and which is alone capable of destroying that old world which Tolstoy hates—from the proletariat. [P. 68]

Clearly, the virtue of Lenin's short articles on Tolstoy was in his concise definition of Tolstoy's usefulness to the Marxist cause. The articles showed that Tolstoy's outstanding characteristics as a writer relieved him of the need to be a Marxist in order to be accepted by Marxists. They explained that Tolstoy's confusion was a well-deserved penalty for his failure to be a Marxist and disqualified him from being a "teacher of life": the excessive inward orientation of the Tolstoyan doctrine and its preoccupation with problems of consciousness failed to teach Russians how to deal with problems of
being. All the same, the Lenin articles maintained, his basic attitude was correct: it was revolutionary, radical, and socialist in essence. Because they supplied a wealth of memorable information about his age, his works could be made into a valuable tool in the hands of properly trained Marxists. Therefore he should be accorded the status of a "mirror," that is, a chronicler, a sage without a message, or a subaltern sage in an early stage of the Russian Revolution. With these guidelines one knew where one stood with Tolstoy.

These articles had no immediate effect until the Revolution of 1917. Soon afterward, however, their impact snowballed until it became nothing less than enormous. What follows is a brief enumeration of their effects on Soviet art and literary scholarship. One quite significant effect was that they boosted respect for classical literature and superior craftsmanship. And they also helped stay the contamination of literature by methods of political propaganda. There is no doubt that Lenin's articles on Tolstoy were instrumental in the definition of socialist realism adopted by the first Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, still held to be valid for Soviet and generally Marxist literature all over the world.

The articles enabled Soviet theoreticians to draw up guidelines for writers and critics. A major theoretical premise derived is the so-called theory of reflection, in substance Aristotle's theory, which allocates to art the typical, and to history the actual, elements of reality. Lenin's variant adds the supposition that typical (significant) elements of reality change with historical periods. They are referred to as "revolutionary changes in reality." One of the functions of literature, then, is to record and document these changes as they occur, and it is preferable that the writers be contemporary with the events described. Their task is to elicit the gist of empirical reality, which is, in Marxist authority (which reflects eighteenth-century rationalism and faith in the unlimited capacity of reason), completely though not easily knowable. Writers should document these changes and other typical aspects of their age in vivid, understandable form; these are crucial aspects of the work in terms of its "artistic quality," without which it is denied merit as a work of art. Images must be truthful and represent reality as it actually is. Anything that involves misrepresentation, or the presentation of something that was not actually there, is a falsehood and therefore unartistic. Within this truthfulness or "realism" the general and typical aspects of reality are to be given preference over unusual,
individual, or unique manifestations of reality. The work of art must represent not only its creator and his ideas but also his environment and the society that produced them. And it must teach. Any undue shift toward the creator and away from the environment is considered detrimental to the artistic and didactic quality of the work.

Accordingly, the artist is an eyewitness to history whose work must also have a message with ideological content (ideinost'), which conveys the significance of the described events and furnishes the understanding needed to recognize the direction of the historical development and to divine correctly its "revolutionary peaks." Thus ideological content, although including a partisan communist attitude, may extend further, since its purpose emphasizes useful information rather than a doctrinal position. It can be quite outside of party ideology, provided the artist honestly and truthfully recorded what he saw. However, the message must include reflections on the meaning of the "revolutionary changes in reality" depicted and described—significant shifts in historic reality, catastrophic events, generally unusual elements in their relation to the usual, routine elements, insofar as they illustrate or pertain to significant ideas. The artist is thus also an interpreter of history. He is, in a word, preferably a sage and teacher, and not only a chronicler, or clerk of history. The facts and ideas he presents must be described in a simple, unpretentious manner, a form that is easily understandable to the mass man. He must avoid causing confusion in the common man's consciousness by overwhelming him with too much contradictory evidence that must be filtered out. He must help the mass man's undifferentiated consciousness grow more differentiated by stimulating thinking. He does so by juxtaposing within his work significant events and ideas to bring out their mutual interrelatedness in vivid illustrations, in accordance with Lenin's theory of periodization. The writer-teacher-poet-sage is judged by how closely he reflects major trends of his period, and by how realistically, that is, accurately, he presents them, and generalizes the complex life processes he describes. The criteria are considered to be those of socialist realism.

This somewhat pedagogical theory also emphasizes the importance of creating vivid, memorable types that carry standard features of common humanity and the impersonal aspirations of many men, rather than individual, incidental characteristics. The mass
man, the average reader, must be able to relate to the protagonist, must want to imitate him, and must learn from him to approach his own problems of adjustment to society. In the theory narodnost', another important derivative concept with a long history in nineteenth-century Russian thought, became once again reiterated as a crucial element in a work of literature. Narodnost' implies plainness, or a simplicity of form and manner; it refers to the quality in a work that synthesizes salient characteristics of the national psyche, the goals and aspirations of the nation as a whole. The concept is elusive and difficult to define. It implies that the work is original and typical at the same time—unlike the literature of any other nation, yet immediately recognizable as belonging to one's own. Narodnost', furthermore, arises completely apart from conscious endeavor. A genuine artist is deemed to be projecting this quality into all of his work unconsciously, without knowing the process in the least. Narodnost' provides the work of art with the quality of inner wholeness and realism that cannot be pretended. And it also stamps it with the markings of national lore.

For a while these concepts created some problems. It seemed as though under the pressure of the times the two basic elements of art—fact and idea—had suffered a schizophrenic split and separated, leaving one sector of the literary scene in possession of facts, another in possession of ideas. The eyewitness concept gave rise to crude "literature of fact," practiced by LEF and other literary avant-garde groups who studded their work with bulky quotes from the news media, slogans, and other pedestrian documents of the day that seemed to them the best original sources of information about the age. On the other hand, emphasis on message (ideinost'), national spirit (narodnost'), and types gave rise to the streamlined plots and crude generalizations produced by "Lit-front," and revolutionary romanticism, which scorned realistic detail and emphasized desirable typical features in revolutionary heroes and heroines to the point that they lacked recognizable individual features other than those of common humanity. They became folkloric: vaguely superhuman men and women of heroic stature and absolutely average human characteristics—semidivine archetypal figures who resembled the gods, saints, and heroes of yore. Such faults by design in following the theory have been corrected. But the trend toward the proliferation of types persists, apparently a result of Lenin's quite specific praise of Tolstoy's abil-
ity to create vivid memorable "types," rather than individuals. Soviet literature is still flooded with stereotypes and characters in whom individuality, human faults, and psychology are undeveloped. The positive hero of socialist realism is still a person of little individuality who thinks and behaves as though slightly benumbed. He is unself-consciously "like everybody" and performs more or less casually absolutely superhuman deeds of valor and achievement with blissful unconcern for his own interest, safety, and comfort. The situation could be seen as a really remarkable, sweeping effect of Lenin's few short articles on Tolstoy upon the Soviet literary scene and socialist realism, were it not that the phenomenon goes quite beyond the possibility of a rational explanation. It is only partly due to directed effort. Apparently, Lenin's articles verbalized an important national, if not universal, need for a literature that contained the folkloric ingredient of vivid realism, simplicity of plot, and romantic typification, with the poet as a balladeer who sings of great events and human ideals and does his best to awake and enlighten the culturally unresponsive mass man with any means available to his talent. He need not furnish psychological motivation and can mix realistic fantasy with reality. His stories must have a simple adventure plot and appealing characters who struggle against great odds to attain a worthwhile goal. They seek a treasure difficult to attain, battling hideous capitalist monsters in the name of communism. Thus, socialist realism, which on the one hand appears outre, contrived, and unimaginative, can on the other hand be said to be a valid effort to create Marxist folklore.

A number of guidelines derived from Lenin's articles on Tolstoy are related to thought control. These have come to be known under the general label of partiinost. The term means a conscious partisan communist attitude, harmony with the party's current instructions relative to the concrete historical situation described, because only the Communist party of the Soviet Union, the modern equivalent of the priestly class—the secret society of learned tutors—is presumed to be at all times in tune with history (destiny). The guidelines are probably set most for the benefit and guidance of critics. The narrow interpretation of alien ideologies is discouraged. So is the view that Soviet literature is a separate "proletarian" category of folklore. The party loyalty of a writer is not examined with emphasis. Marxist dogmatism is discouraged, as are a literal application of Marxist tenets to art, any peremptory inter-
ference by incompetent party functionaries in literary matters, and any attempts to streamline literature. The latest guidelines seem to promote a healthier approach to literature as a tool to inform the people's minds. A critic is to operate from a position of ideological strength. His first task is to establish whether the work will have a positive overall effect—examine what valuable ingredients the literary work contains next to its faults, what issues it promotes—issues which must be either useful to the Marxist cause or contain constructive criticism—regardless of the author's ideological attitudes or affiliations. Finally, he must establish whether or not the work reflects the really significant aspects of reality in its time. His task is thus to establish how well the work fits into the Marxist framework. If, on balance, the work seems positive, he approves of it. If not, he rejects it as onesided and negative. He must, of course, make adjustments for obvious manifestations of a dated ideology from the Marxist point of view of his day.

A further effect of Lenin's Tolstoy articles was greater tolerance toward individualism in the writer whose personal background would not be held against him. His personal foibles, for example, could also be dismissed as subjective and irrelevant. Ideological aberrations could be regarded as relative and peripheral and could be ignored if the work was not affected by them and contained valuable objective features. A writer could no longer be condemned for belonging to the wrong class; he was not to be considered confined to his social background, as he could rise above it by an effort of the will. His consciousness was then no longer entirely the product of his environment for he could influence and change it at will, once he had reached a certain level of enlightenment. This attitude prompted an open door policy of accepting writers with other ideologies if their art was valuable. One effect was a greater tolerance toward fellow travelers who were deemed capable of ideological growth. The insistence on facts and objective, commonplace ideas in massive quantities in a writer's work, eventually paved the road toward acceptance of objective writers with altogether alien ideologies (Bunin), whereas intolerance continued toward so-called subjective writers like Bely, Zamiatin, and, of course, Solzhenitsyn, whose writings strike the Soviets as highly subjective since they project opinions that are greatly at variance with their own. Thus the writer's interpretation remains a matter of supreme importance. It is quite important that the critic's opinions
be correct in every way. A critic’s error in interpreting the work is tantamount to an ideological calamity. The situation reflects the Marxists’ continuing uneasiness with and desire to bring some kind of order and orientation into the chaotic world of ideas.

Lenin’s articles on Tolstoy also further clarified the imperative need for Marxist training for anyone who had to make ideological judgments, as the critic should be thoroughly conversant with current and past standards for judging ideas. A Marxist critic must know how to interpret things in their proper historic perspective if he is to assess their meaning for the future.

The difference, then, between Lenin’s and Plekhanov’s interpretation of the value of Tolstoy, his work, and life was one of approach. A recent opinion states that “Plekhanov’s aesthetics was abandoned not because of any sudden discovery of a truly Marxist aesthetics in Lenin’s writings but because Stalin’s utilitarian and increasingly dictatorial attitude toward art was closer to Lenin’s than to Plekhanov’s and could be bolstered by invoking the former’s authority.” In my opinion this is only partly correct. The statement misses the very real point of the effect a literary work can have on the average reader, the mass man who is the object of indoctrination by literature. So it is the literary work, not its author, that matters most from the Bolshevik point of view. For Lenin writers were men charged with the guidance of the masses. Stalin, who coined the expression “engineers of the soul,” obviously agreed. To them the writer’s ideology was secondary, something for which he could be prosecuted as a private citizen, whereas for Plekhanov the real issue was the writer as a man who counted first and foremost because his ideas could not be separated from him. So, what for Lenin (and Stalin) was private and peripheral (Tolstoy’s prejudicial ideology) was public and central for Plekhanov. According to most Soviet sources, this inability to differentiate between personality and artist is the root of Plekhanov’s mistakes. Instead of focusing on the objective, positive aspects of Tolstoy’s work, he concentrated on their subjective, negative, unimportant aspects, and remained negative and destructive himself. Lenin accepted Tolstoy despite his prejudices. Plekhanov rejected him because of them. The issues involved here have received over the years an enormous amount of attention in Soviet publications, the extent of which can only be hinted at here.

Soviet sources that praise Lenin’s articles on Tolstoy for having laid the cornerstone of Soviet literary scholarship tend to grant
only minimal value to Plekhanov's erudite critiques of Tolstoy. In the West, Struve ("Tolstoy in Soviet Criticism") prefers, on grounds of scholarship, Plekhanov's and Lubov Axelrod-Orthodox's critiques of Tolstoy. He is supported by Zenkovsky, who thinks that Plekhanov is dismissed by the Soviets as a poor thinker arbitrarily, in deference to Lenin (s legkoi ruki Lenina). Yet Zenkovsky is not unaware of Plekhanov's unconscious leanings toward philosophic idealism, an absolute anathema to communists. Significantly, Georg Lukács, another recent casualty of Soviet persecution for revisionism, i.e., a tendency to introduce idealistic methods of reasoning, sees, like Plekhanov (and Pisarev long before him) an evolutionary trend in Tolstoy that Lenin did not, as he regarded Tolstoy as almost an object, an automatic recorder of history, rigidly confined to his own time slot. The difference here adumbrates the essential difference between idealist and materialist thinking and is therefore philosophically valid and substantial, rather than arbitrary and dictatorial. The difference is between thinking in rigid and thinking in fluid categories.

The Soviets accuse Plekhanov of using essentially a theoretical argument ("Feuerbachian heresy") against Tolstoy. Here are some of the specific objections: Plekhanov was arbitrary in assessing Tolstoy, whom he did not understand and failed to judge consistently. Plekhanov definitely failed to interpret Tolstoy as an artist and thinker and instead treated the two as an undifferentiated whole. He was dogmatic and peremptory ("everything bears the stamp of sketchiness"). In general he was too subjective to see the objective nature and results of Tolstoy's work. He was wrong to consider Tolstoy's contradictions as contradictions within Tolstoy himself rather than as a reflection of the times. Plekhanov never bothered to correlate these contradictions in Tolstoy to the glaring contradictions in Russian society and continued to treat them in isolation from issues. He decided that Tolstoy was remote from reality purely on the basis of Tolstoy's philosophy. And he made a grave error in claiming that Tolstoy was indifferent to human relations. The effort most objected to by the Soviets is Plekhanov's waste of rhetoric in arguing Tolstoy's philosophy, which they find obviously wrong. All such objections are clearly based on recognition of an abstract base in Plekhanov's thinking. And they also clearly derive from Lenin's articles on Tolstoy.

The subtle differences in Lenin's and Plekhanov's interpretations of Tolstoy, his work, and his message highlight the shadowy
expanse of esoteric variants in points of view between the two major factions of Russian Marxism—the revolutionary Bolsheviks (the pure materialists) and the evolutionary Mensheviks (the contaminated materialists). These differences apparently continue to exist even today, as witness the periodic outbreaks of persecutions for “revisionism,” which is treated as an epidemic disease with massive “purification” measures in the form of expulsions and arrests. To the Soviets, who now claim to have gained intellectual stability with their intricate, highly structured, and somewhat dogmatic philosophy of dialectical materialism, Plekhanov stands at an inferior level of communist philosophy. He is seen as a liberal intellectual who was working with the old values of utopian socialism. He is said to have been unable to overcome the mistakes of narodnichestvo and to have failed to recognize the full implications of the Marxist-Leninist theory of knowledge. Thus the coolness of Soviet Marxists toward Plekhanov, with his evolutionary individualism and superior intellectual stance, has another and chilling implication related to various forms of a revisionism and the Marxists’ implacable hostility toward any kind of philosophical idealism. It has always been the one inexpiable crime for any Marxist, however prominent, to raise himself intellectually above the group, to consider himself, wittingly or unwittingly, abidingly or momentarily, superior to others. Intricate considerations of this kind have always been difficult to understand for the Western mind trained in Aristotelian logic and made it impossible for outsiders to follow the tortuous path of the beleaguered Soviet intellectual in his search for ultimate truth. The diminished or lost prestige of brilliant and original thinkers such as Pisarev, Mikhailovsky, Plekhanov, Trotsky, and Lukacs illustrates the problems faced by honest practitioners of methods of literary criticism that are as involved in pragmatism and as politically motivated as the sociological method. To be appreciated in Soviet Russia, their findings must conform to party guidelines on the current formulaic state of the collective Russian mind, from which deviations are not allowed.

Liberal intellectual Marxism in its civilized Western version tends to dream of a social paradise where there is room for the dissident and the heretic. It seems unable to accept the harsh dialectic of Dostoevsky, the prophetic inventor of the new twentieth-century myth of the perfect state that seems to combine tribal and civilized features of society—a formulaic state of mind and homogenization.
The humanitarian Marxist seems unable to see that in an anthill there is no room for dissidents. Plekhanov had to find out this truth for himself. He awakened in 1918 only to find that his dream did not survive reality, and then he was not only disappointed but crushed, because, unlike his more logical rival, Lenin, he was unable to rationalize the cruel reality of terror tactics that were forcing him and his fellow Russians into a more efficient, sinister version of the old idea of the Russian narod as a domesticated swarm of bees. Plekhanov was fortunate in being spared by death from witnessing the further metamorphosis of his dream into a colossal beehive.