By and large, most prerevolutionary critics liked the artist but dislik ed the thinker. Even when the critics thought that the function of the writer was to communicate ideas, they did not like Tolstoy's brand of ideas. His real importance to Russian criticism lies perhaps in a stature large enough to provoke a series of important critics to voice themselves about him. In that sense—paraphrasing Lenin—he can be looked at as the mirror of prerevolutionary criticism. Most important critics found themselves confronted with the enormous bulk of Tolstoy and realized that they had to say something. What they said was often more revealing about them than about Tolstoy, who intrigued them more as a man than as an artist.

They were more interested in the message than in the form of his work. Perhaps the most perplexing problem confronting critics of Tolstoy was to decide whether he merely wrote well about Russia past and present, or was able to find answers to her problems and a message for the future, that is, whether Tolstoy was simply a good storyteller or a prophet. Most critics never satisfactorily resolved this dilemma. Indeed, Tolstoy himself provided the clue to the chronic misinterpretation of his message and suggested why he was so frequently misread: his message was neither social nor ideological but psychological. It was an attempt to reconcile civilized man with his shadow—the uncivilized, irrational side of our nature that we must face in order to grow. In Tolstoy's works this inferior side
is laid open with an incisive, psychologically subtle narrative technique, which analyzes the motive factors of consciousness. These are, on the one hand, the will, which can best be regarded as a dynamism subordinated to consciousness, and on the other, compulsion—an unconscious dynamism that replaces our wills by an involuntary motivation or impulse, ranging from mere interest to possession. Tolstoy shows this compulsion to be the great mystery of human life that often thwarts our conscious will and our reason by an inflammable element within us, appearing now as a consuming fire and now as life-giving warmth. Such an undertaking was without substantial precedent in literature and, in the ruling climate of scientific rationalism, it invited meaningful comparisons only with the prescientific past. Next to some quite traditional views set forth by the author it appeared as an attempt to counteract the aims of civilization: to thwart progress and the other comprehensive efforts to deliver man from a bondage to nature. Thus one can say that Tolstoy's psychological message was so new indeed that it seemed old.

The treatment of Tolstoy by his critics should be seen as a phenomenon within a special Russian tradition that presses every writer into the service of his society, as a seer and maker of images furthering its life. In this tradition the writer is expected to suggest new forms of experience by combining traditional elements in an original fashion, as if to try to widen the confines of society that tend to standardize experience within it. He must stimulate memory and imagination, find and recover visions overlooked and chances unrealized, in a continuing effort to construct new models for a better life. His imaginings must be functional in terms of both the past and the future life of society. First, they must represent the meaningful outcome of prior events; second, they must seem symbolic of coming events, seeking to shape a purposeful end with the material at hand. The best writer, accordingly, is not only a mirror but a teacher of life. His ideas foreshadow lines of future social and intellectual development. Whether his images will have limited validity or broad appeal as symbols, however, depends on the viability of his ideas: the more subjective and unusual they are, the more limited their value to society is likely to be, even though it may well be supreme to the individual himself. Under the weight of such expectations, critics were understandably curious to know how via-
Tolstoy's prodigious storytelling skills were never seriously doubted. True, he was often charged with being careless with style, even writing ungrammatically; and some critics wondered what he was doing in his experiments with form. Indeed, some even questioned the merits of Tolstoy's technique of "morbid" psychological analysis while praising the wholesomeness of his art. But that is unimportant in view of the general critical agreement on the value of his lucid writing: he had real power to captivate and enthrall the reader, for he created an imaginary world of unsurpassed clarity and vividness. This skill enabled him to say important things in a most effective manner. On the whole, then, only a minor portion of critical concern pertained to form and Tolstoy's competence as an artist. But if only a few critics examined his art, many more were preoccupied with his ideas and his proposals for curing society's ills. And in this respect they found his work less admirable.

Throughout Tolstoy's lifetime, Russian society encountered awesome problems that required wise and effective solutions as alternatives to a sanguinary revolt. These problems had, of course, two aspects: an outer social one, in which injustice, for example, was objectively seen; and an inner psychological one, relating to the individual, where issues often appeared as ideological. The question had become not only "what to do?" but also "what to think?" about the realities of modern life. Tolstoy's answers to either side of the dual question struck his critics as inadequate.

In part, this disappointment followed from the expectation, in Russian criticism, that literature should provide "types"—fictional characters who throw light on some current problem or significant aspect of contemporary life. The type, in this tradition, is expected to behave as would anyone else in the same difficult or ordinary circumstances, that is, behave normally; hence the type can represent an adaptation to life, thus becoming something of an objective standard of behavior for others either to follow or reject. Discussions on such standards readily transcended the limits of literary criticism. Critics aimed at the real conflict between the individuality of each man and the formation of general rules and models intended to guide many men; for this purpose they examined fic-
tional characters as though they were real people, asking what they would do in a given set of circumstances not depicted in the literary work. Critics differentiated, however, between realistic characters and ideal types who embodied new patterns of desirable future behavior. In particular, pundits at this time were looking for men of action, expecting to find the type of *raznochinets*—practical commoners who rose from a variety of ranks to make an impact upon the social scene with an aggressively materialistic approach to life evolved from a study of natural sciences. Instead, Tolstoy depicted noblemen, idealistic dreamers with a bent toward inaction and contemplation, whose quest for identity the critics belittled, connecting it with the obsolete type of the superfluous man. This interpretation illuminates the pervasive tension between the image Tolstoy created with his characters and the image superimposed upon them by the myopic critics. The quest for identity that dominates the ironic hero, the superfluous man who symbolizes the historically obsolete Russian gentry and the spiritual dichotomy of Russian life, is only superficially similar to the deadly serious Tolstoyan protagonist who “scientifically” strives to connect the lines of communication between the conscious and unconscious zones of human experience. The legacy of the superfluous man, however, gave critics an excuse for many an artistically inappropriate search for civic content, leading to meaningless discussions, skirmishes with the author, and elaborate stratagems to expose his lack of current ideas, all of which pointed to the ultimate importance of ideology in art. Moreover, critics discovered within the apparent type of the Tolstoyan hero an individual of distinctive personality. Some critics claimed that Tolstoy did not create a single type, that all his characters were unique. Some went even further charging that his characters reflected only Tolstoy himself. Furthermore, when they found the characters morally acceptable, reviewers rejected their interests and views as outdated. What could such untypical eccentric characters left over from the past, critics wondered, teach the ordinary modern youth who had to adjust to a changing society?

A brief survey will recapitulate the critics' concerns. I will discuss the problems they perceived in two steps: first, chronologically, in their social dimension; and then, as psychological or ideological dilemmas.

At first there were relatively few major changes in Russian society, and adjustment to them was not an overwhelming problem. In
the 1850s and 1860s the three burning issues were the freeing of the serfs, the conflict between the old establishment and the raznochintsy, and nihilism. Reviewers saw none of these subjects treated in young Tolstoy's works. The landlord-serf relations, powerfully rendered in "A Landowner's Morning" and "Polikushka," and the typically Tolstoyan moral contrast of peasant (good) versus gentry (bad) adumbrated in "Three Deaths" were seen as mere Slavophile sentiment. The message was moral, rather than social and Tolstoy never mentioned the need to free the serfs. Although the various states of mind and psychological problems of his protagonists were in most cases projected against a contemporary background, the relevance of the issues raised and characters portrayed to any social issue was tenuous or incidental. Critics found the untypical nature of socially irrelevant elements in Tolstoy's work so typical of Tolstoy that they labeled him a subjective writer. With the publication of War and Peace, which began in 1865, he also acquired a reputation as a historical novelist who promoted nostalgia for obsolete patterns of life.

In the later part of the century, however, these problems began to snowball. In the 1870s and 1880s the stale Westernizer/Slavophile controversy was turning into a nasty political issue as an ideological confrontation between Russia and the West. Immediate attention was focused on the narodniki, whose program included humanitarian causes, the rights of the individual, and the dignity of the common man. Their program was rational and abstract, yet it included ideas of an antithetical nature, irrational suppositions about the Russian peasant in archaic village communes as a great "teacher of life." The narodniki inherited these notions from the Slavophiles, whose labors were forever directed toward revealing the as yet unmanifest "whole man" in the Russian peasant, chosen for moral leadership as at once the greater and the future man of Europe and Asia. The narodniki pursued this dream of the Slavophiles by "going among the people" to establish bridgeheads of the educated among the ignorant folk. Although their utopian illusions about the people often led to disaster, as men of action they continued to carry out their program. Meeting the muzhik face to face, teaching him to cope with an increasingly complex outer life and learning from him the mystic secret of a harmonious inner life, became their most important concern. Tolstoy dealt with this baffling phenomenon in "The Divine and the Human," where he depicted the tragic fate of the millionaire Lisogub who, like
thousands of others, went to live with the peasants in their wretched villages. But this true story and the fictional story of Levin in *Anna Karenina* were acidly reviewed as *narodnik* and Slavophile, as marred by mysticism and irrelevance to social issues.

By the latter part of the nineteenth century Russia’s internal problems were legion. The major issues now were industrialization, burgeoning capitalism, exploitation of labor, communism, anarchism, and terrorism. These were attended by a host of other problems such as the constant splitting off of a nihilistic element on the extreme left, whose program was absolutely hostile to culture. On the extreme right these developments elicited violence, suppression, bigotry, and other reactionary barbarian patterns. And as if these were not enough, they were followed by broad economic distress and disturbing changes in the structure of society: peasants fleeing the countryside; deteriorating patterns of village life; a declining sense of kinship; insanely self-centered, infantile, pleasure-seeking parents; abandoned, battered, killed, or suicidal children; clumsily aborted babies dotting the bottoms of ravines; and so forth—all of which bore dramatic witness to a seriously disturbed mental condition in many people and a crisis in the national consciousness. Although Tolstoy, in this period, had organized some famine relief, his unctuous pacifism and vague Christian anarchism drew fire from his critics as insensitivity to the situation, whereas his refusal to write any more fiction annoyed them. The occasional pieces of fiction he produced struck critics as remote from reality, dealing only with universals. He was accused of quietism. It was said that, being satisfied with a medieval life, he had no need to relate to the present and its experiments, just so long as he received homage.

Indeed, Tolstoy appeared unmoved by Russia’s current “struggle with the West” and the saber-rattling rhetoric of Pan-Slavism, which endeavored to present Russia as the rescuer of oppressed nations. His staunchest supporters disagreed with him on this issue, although not long before they had praised *War and Peace* as a perfect vehicle for the promulgation of Russia’s message of moral regeneration. Understandably, the opposition was more critical: although endorsing very different ideologies, Dostoevsky and Plekhanov agreed insofar as they both tried to expose Tolstoy as a reactionary whose thoughts about the common man left much to be desired, being the traditional thoughts of hidebound aristocrats.
Tolstoy's views on the ideological aspects of these issues fared no better. They suited neither side of an eschatological debate that raged for decades over the causes of Russia's acute crisis of consciousness. Adherents of a rational approach to history blamed him for mysticism, whereas proponents of intuitive wisdom accused him of rationalism.

The controversial Russian message of moral regeneration bears a curious resemblance to Tolstoy's international plea for moral renewal. Yet, despite widespread popular support, the latter received almost no understanding or support from Russian critics, who dismissed it as mysticism. They thought that the causes of moral problems were external, not within man.

In this controversy about the ability of Russians to cope with civilization, in which the entire intelligentsia participated, the crisis was defined primarily as a crisis of the intellect. The basic issue was how much training in directed thinking Russians could take before they lost their mental balance and intuitive virtues. Slavophile critics came out in opposition to European enlightenment on grounds that it made man rely too much on his reason to the detriment of feeling. They also claimed that Russia could not absorb, nor did she want, Western civilization, pointing out that a society can accommodate only that level of progress which it has developed and has begun to understand. But others, especially those who appreciated reason as an effective tool of controlling nature, disagreed. They were ethical rationalists who, disgusted with the melancholy picture of Russian life, wanted to improve it through enlightenment. They endorsed a broad social movement whose aim was not merely to raise or lower political rights to the same general level but, more hopefully, to abolish unhappiness altogether, with external regulations and egalitarian reforms. They were satisfied that what Russians wanted most was to improve their minds and learn to think ("to think, rather than to feel" is a slogan that figures prominently in the writings of the leading radical nihilist Pisarev; see chap. 2). Exasperated by the irrationality of the common man, they were determined to end it through education. They denied the role of the irrational as a significant cause of man's problems and looked for their solution outside of man, believing that everything highest and lowest was external. Civilization, and a rational view of life, meant an escape from mysticism. They had great disdain for mysticism, by which they meant everything and anything that was in-
explicable. The Slavophiles, on the other hand, warned that rapid changes in society could in themselves be responsible for the aberrant behavior of its citizens, declaring that progress enforced by will was always convulsive, and backwardness was closer to naturalness. Of course, the progressives could refer to such claims in scarcely flattering terms, since they appeared as attempts to retard man. They scorned Slavophile inertia, backwardness, faultfinding, timidity, and pettiness. They said it was nothing but naturalism, meaning a complete surrender to one's instincts. They supposed that the instincts had a constant downward tendency, and that naturalism amounts to an unethical sliding down an inclined plane. The Slavophiles countered that the retarding ideal, although more primitive, was also more natural, therefore beneficial, and more moral in that it kept faith with tradition. They pointed out that one is bound to observe that the man who is left to his own devices, and has therefore every opportunity for sliding downward, as for instance the primitive, not only has a moral code but one that in the severity of its demands is often considerably more exacting than our civilized morality; whereas the progressive ideal is more abstract, and seems more unnatural and less "moral," in that it demands disloyalty to tradition and becomes destructive. Critics opposed to rationalism welcomed democratic reason as a source of freedom and equality, but said that it could not perfect life and was in many ways hostile to life, as, for instance, in nihilism, which they related to negativism, a sterile and destructive analytical trend that came to prominence in Russia with Gogol’s, and in Europe with Schopenhauer’s, work. These writers had voiced what was obscurely felt by many Russians: not only the causes of the intellectual malaise of modern man, but also their profound feeling of a mystical identity with the world, an appeal they shared with Stirner and Nietzsche. Nihilism—as the extreme form of negativism—inspired an unbridled craving for individualistic supremacy and pleasure in naked egoism, a revolt against the conventional moral atmosphere, and a desire to shatter all moral and cultural foundations. All this had its source in rationalism, said the Slavophiles; and inasmuch as reason, when highly developed, can separate man from his own roots in instinct and tradition (they called it castration), it may cause him to be swept by the irrational to catastrophe. The one-sidedness of the pure rationalist takes the form of demonic compulsion; it has something of the character of going ber-
serk or running amok. In all cases it presupposes an atrophy of instinct that is not found in the true primitive, for which reason he is in general still free from the one-sidedness of the cultural barbarian.

Remarkably many Russian critics of every persuasion believed that any civilization without a strong moral or ideological content was doomed, or they held some other such eschatological belief. The Slavophiles confidently predicted a physical catastrophe—a revolution—soon to befall the West unless moral regeneration were speedily effected there. They expressed the belief that the mentally sophisticated European bourgeoisie was headed toward "moral philistinism," a functional disease of the mind, a kind of moral idiocy that resulted from overdeveloped logical thinking at the expense of morally discriminating intuition. Some even went so far as to declare Western civilization a new form of barbarism that relied entirely on external standards (law) with practically no inner moral standards (grace). Of course, the Russian rationalists believed that moral transformation could be managed without religion; but they held firm convictions about the need for some kind of collective attitude equivalent to religion as the guiding principle in life, usually an evolutionary political theory based in history and national necessity. The antirationalists, on the other hand, insisted on religion as the only means to provide moral standards both within and without. Thus they amended this idea in Pan-Slavism, which included Russian Orthodoxy but, to all intents and purposes, was a political doctrine that promised to renew life in Europe with Russia's moral leadership. This leadership was to come from the naïve but open Russian mind that would guide the sophisticated but closed European mind toward regeneration. This was the extent of the Russian message of the "whole man," who echoes the "homo totus" of the Western and the Chên-yên (true man) of Chinese alchemy, the round primordial being who represents the greater man within, the Anthropos who is akin to God, and whom Tolstoy depicted in Platon Karataev (War and Peace). This inner man, primitive but harmonious, is of necessity partly unconscious, because consciousness is only part of a man and cannot comprehend the whole. But the whole man is always present, even in the European, for his fragmentation is nothing but an effect of his hyperconscious mind—his rationalism, which insists on dealing only with rational ideas. This whole inner man would reveal to the
European "superman," with his purely outward-oriented pursuits, the true meaning of life, which is a moral one and which the latter had lost by ignoring the irrational sources of inspiration that reason scorns. Although Tolstoy often said very similar things, his message was misunderstood and rejected on both sides of the debate. Apparently it was too symbolic. His explorations of the irrational side of human nature were seen as an unfortunate tendency to descend to primitive levels of thought. His call for a religiosity that would be based not on external ritual but on inner moral standards was interpreted as ethical nihilism and an attempt to do away with tradition and develop a new and personal heretical doctrine. Finally, Tolstoy's efforts to present the outer-directed hero, the dynamic man of action and empire builder (Napoleon) as obsolete, and to introduce the inner-directed antihero (Karataev, Kutuzov) and men of reflection (Prince Andrei, Pierre, Levin) as the psychological heroes of the future met with either complete misapprehension and perplexity, or attempts to interpret these men as potential men of action (cf. the various comments on Prince Andrei and Pierre as potential Decembrists, and Levin as a narodnik). Throughout his long career Tolstoy was pursued with one and the same persistent advice: stop writing messages and concentrate on writing fiction, which is the only thing you can do well. All the while, of course, message was of utmost concern for the critics, but their own message only. Such advice suggests that Tolstoy's critics lacked the very qualities they wanted him to have: prophetic perspicacity and an ability to foresee the lines of future social and intellectual development, qualities that are abundantly in evidence in an examination of both the content and form of Tolstoy's work.