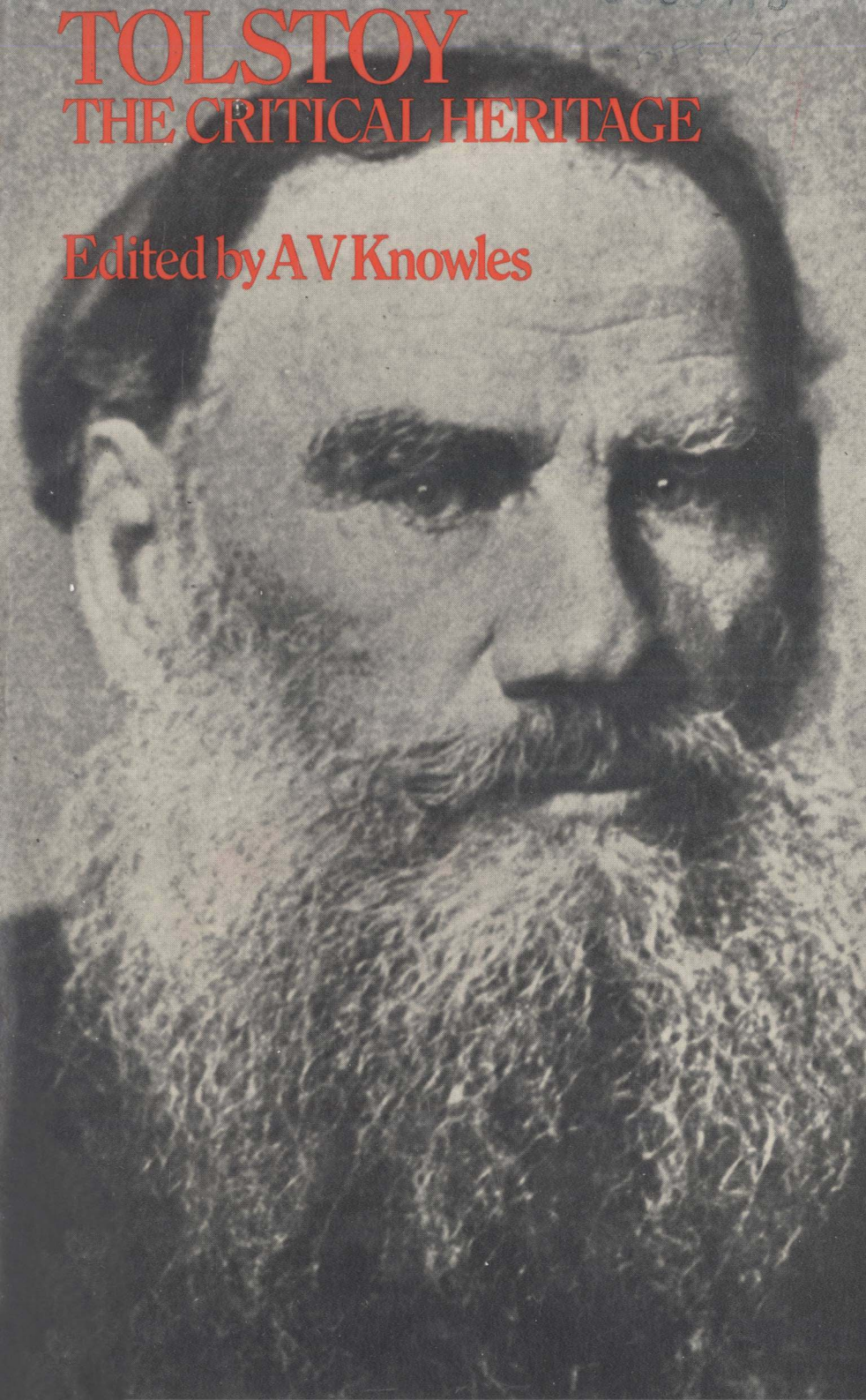


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TOLSTOY

THE CRITICAL HERITAGE

Edited by A V Knowles



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THE CRITICAL HERITAGE

Edited by
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General Editor's Preface

The reception given to a writer by his contemporaries and near-contemporaries is evidence of considerable value to the student of literature. On one side we learn a great deal about the state of criticism at large and in particular about the development of critical attitudes towards a single writer; at the same time, through private comments in letters, journals or marginalia, we gain an insight upon the tastes and literary thought of individual readers of the period. Evidence of this kind helps us to understand the writer's historical situation, the nature of his immediate reading-public, and his response to these pressures.

The separate volumes in the *Critical Heritage Series* present a record of this early criticism. Clearly, for many of the highly productive and lengthily reviewed nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers, there exists an enormous body of material; and in these cases the volume editors have made a selection of the most important views, significant for their intrinsic critical worth or for their representative quality—perhaps even registering incomprehension!

For earlier writers, notably pre-eighteenth century, the materials are much scarcer and the historical period has been extended, sometimes far beyond the writer's lifetime, in order to show the inception and growth of critical views which were initially slow to appear.

In each volume the documents are headed by an Introduction, discussing the material assembled and relating the early stages of the author's reception to what we have come to identify as the critical tradition. The volumes will make available much material which would otherwise be difficult of access and it is hoped that the modern reader will be thereby helped towards an informed understanding of the ways in which literature has been read and judged.

B.C.S.

Preface

Much of the contemporary response to Tolstoy's fiction, especially in his own country, was ephemeral and not unduly enlightening, some of it was not without interest, but only a little of it was of any lasting merit. Because of this, when we read what his contemporaries had to say about him we learn, ostensibly at least, far more about the state of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary criticism than we do about Tolstoy the writer. That is not to say, however, that the seeds of what was to become the main growth of Tolstoyan criticism are entirely absent; but many of them are in general so well concealed by extraneous wrappings, instructions, exhortations, denunciations and words of caution that they are not readily exposed to the light of day.

The amount of critical comment written in Tolstoy's lifetime is immense; even the early trilogy, 'Childhood', 'Boyhood' and 'Youth', received well over one hundred reviews and notices; and once he had become well known all the critics, and indeed everybody who was anybody (and many more who were not), felt obliged to put pen to paper. Such a vast amount of criticism presents serious problems to an editor of a volume in the present series; consequently some sort of fairly arbitrary limitation has had to be imposed on the selection. In the first place it would be foolish of me to claim to have read everything that appeared, and this sets some limitation at the outset; second, much of it is so lacking in any, even negative, value that it has been rejected out of hand; third, a large proportion of it is hardly more than a recapitulation of the text, or of what fellow-critics wrote, and this has also been excluded. The final choice therefore has been restricted primarily to criticism of Tolstoy's works of imaginative fiction; consequently there is little comment on his writings of a political, social,

religious, publicistic, or educational nature *per se*, or his views on art and literature, or on his plays and ideas about the drama. I have started with a number of opinions on his early works, as these had their influence on the reception of the major novels; the main body of the selection is concentrated on the reception of 'War and Peace' and 'Anna Karenina', and then there is a number of the later, more general, comments. Within this selection I have included a few words from some of Tolstoy's fellow-writers, for in some respects, despite their brevity, they are among the most perceptive; I have also attempted to give fair coverage to Tolstoy's reception outside Russia. Within the obvious limitations of such a scheme, it is to be hoped that a reasonably well-balanced picture of the contemporary response will clearly emerge.

Finally I owe Tolstoy an apology. He would without doubt have hated this book.

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I would like to thank Professor R.F. Christian (University of St Andrews) for the initial suggestion that I should undertake this book; Professor Miriam Allott (University of Liverpool) for her kind encouragement; the staff of the Harold Cohen Library (University of Liverpool) for their assistance on many matters, and especially Miss Joan M. Lea of the inter-library loan department for her cheerful optimism and quiet efficiency; the Lenin Library, Moscow, USSR, for their willingness to make material readily available to me; the British Library in London and Boston Spa; my colleague in the Department of Russian, University of Liverpool, Mr R.M. Davison, for his help and understanding; and Mrs Doris Haughton who typed much of the manuscript.

Every effort has been made to obtain permission from the copyright holders to reprint material, and for such permission I wish to thank the following: the Estate of Maurice Baring for an extract from his book 'Landmarks in Russian Literature' (No. 86); William Blackwood & Sons Ltd for an extract from George Saintsbury's 'The Later Nineteenth Century' (No. 100) and for C. Whibley's review of 'Anna Karenina' (No. 84); Miss D.E. Collins for an extract from G.K. Chesterton's Leo Tolstoy (No. 98); the Editor of the 'Contemporary Review' for part of J. Wedgwood's Count Leo Tolstoi (No. 49); the Estate of Edward Garnett for his Tolstoy's Place in European Literature (No. 95); the Editor of the 'Guardian' for part of C.H. Herford's Leo Tolstoy: His Life and Work (No. 104); William Heinemann Ltd and Dodd, Mead & Co. Inc. for an extract from Count Lyof Tolstoi in 'Critical Kit-Kats' by Edmund Gosse (No. 89); J.C. Medley and R.G. Medley, the owners of the copyright, for an extract from George Moore's Avowals (No. 52); the Editor of the 'New Statesman' for unsigned comments on 'Childhood and Youth' (No. 13), 'War and Peace'

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Note on the Text

The extracts printed in this volume from commentators who wrote in English follow the originals in all important respects; I have not standardized the various versions of Russian names, as in some ways they have a period charm of their own. The translations, except for No. 9, are my own. There is always a certain problem with the transliteration of the Cyrillic script, but I hope the system adopted here strikes the reader as both reasonable and consistent; in my translations feminine surnames, except for Karenina, have been masculinized. Quotations from Tolstoy's works have in general been omitted, although where they are central to the passage they have been retained; where the content of an omitted quotation is not immediately apparent, a short description is appended; three dots ... , where printed, are in the original, but four indicate an omission by me. Dates, where they refer to Russian originals, are in the 'Old Style' or according to the Julian calendar, which was in operation in Russia until after the Revolution; it was twelve days behind the Gregorian in the nineteenth century and thirteen in the twentieth. Information on Russian literary and historical references in the text is gathered together in the Appendix.

Contents

PREFACE	<i>page</i> xiii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xv
NOTE ON THE TEXT	xvii
INTRODUCTION	I
Before 'War and Peace' (1852-65)	
I NEKRASOV on some early works:	
(a) On 'Childhood', letter, 1852	47
(b) On 'The Memoirs of a Billiard-marker', letter, 1854	47
(c) On 'Boyhood', letter, 1855	48
(d) On 'Sebastopol in May', letter, 1855	48
(e) On 'The Woodfelling' and 'Sebastopol in August', reviews, 'Contemporary', 1855-6	49
2 ANNENKOV on 'Childhood' and 'Boyhood', review, 'Con- temporary', 1855	50
3 DUDYSHKIN, review of 'The Raid' and 'The Woodfelling', 'Fatherland Notes', 1855	53
4 DRUZHININ on the bad style of 'Youth', letter, 1856	55
5 Unsigned review of 'Sebastopol in August', 'Fatherland Notes', 1856	57
6 CHERNYSHEVSKY on Tolstoy:	
(a) Review of 'Childhood', 'Boyhood' and 'The Military Tales', 'Contemporary', 1856	59
(b) On 'Youth', letter, 1857	62
7 K.S. AKSAKOV on Tolstoy's powers of analysis, 'Russian Conversation', 1857	63
8 TURGENEV on the early Tolstoy:	
(a) On 'A Landowner's Morning', letter, 1857	65
(b) On 'The Cossacks', letter, 1863	65
(c) On 'Polikushka', letter, 1864	66
9 KHOMYAKOV on Tolstoy's view of art and literature, speech, 1859	66
10 PISAREV on what to look for in Tolstoy's writing, 'Day- break', 1859	67

11	GRIGORIEV on Tolstoy's negation and praise for the 'submissive', type of personality, 'Time', 1862	69
12	Unsigned review of 'Childhood and Youth', 'Saturday Review', 1862	72
13	Unsigned notice of 'Childhood and Youth', 'Athenaeum', 1862	76
14	TYUTCHEV on 'The Cossacks', verse, 1863	76
15	EDELSON, review of 'The Cossacks', 'Library for Reading', 1863	77
16	EVGENIYA TUR attacks Olenin, 'Fatherland Notes', 1863	78
17	ANNENKOV on Olenin and 'civilization', 'St Petersburg News', 1863	80
18	TOLSTOY on 'Polikushka' and 'The Cossacks', letter, 1863	83
19	E. MARKOV on Maryanka, heroine of 'The Cossacks', 'Fatherland Notes', 1865	84
20	PYATKOVSKY sums up Tolstoy's career, 'Contemporary', 1865	85
'War and Peace' (1865-9)		
21	BOTKIN, letter, 1865	89
22	Unsigned review of '1805', 'Book Messenger', 1866	90
23	AKHSHARUMOV, review of '1805', 'Universal Labour', 1867	91
24	ANNENKOV, review, 'Messenger of Europe', 1868	100
25	PISAREV on Nikolay Rostov, 'Fatherland Notes', 1868	114
26	TOLSTOY defends his 'novel', 'Russian Archive', 1868	124
27	Unsigned review, 'Affair', 1868	133
28	TSEBRIKOVA on Natasha Rostov, 'Fatherland Notes', 1868	137
29	BERVI-FLEROVSKY on the Bolkonskys, 'Affair', 1868	145
30	NOROV on Tolstoy's falsification of history, 'Military Almanac', 1868	149
31	LIPRANDI, note on the Battle of Borodino, 'Voice', 1868	152
32	DRAGOMIROV on Prince Andrey and the art of war, 'Weapons Miscellany', 1868, 1869	153
33	STRAKHOV, review, 'Dawn', 1870	159
34	DOSTOEVSKY, letters, 1869, 1870	170
35	SHELGUNOV on Pierre Bezukhov, 'Affair', 1870	171
36	TURGENEV, letters, 1868, 1869, 1870	181
37	SKABISCHEVSKY on Tolstoy's characters, 'Fatherland Notes', 1872	183
38	COURRIÈRE, a French view, book, 1875	190
39	RALSTON on Pierre Bezukhov, the typical Russian, 'Nineteenth Century', 1879	193

40	FLAUBERT, letter, 1880	193
41	DE CYON on Tolstoy's style, 'Nouvelle Revue', 1883	194
42	Unsigned review, 'Nation' (New York), 1885	198
43	Notice, 'Dial' (Chicago), 1886	201
44	Unsigned notice, 'The Critic' (New York), 1886	202
45	Unsigned notice, 'Athenaeum', 1886	203
46	Unsigned review, 'Saturday Review', 1887	205
47	Unsigned review, 'Spectator', 1887	206
48	KAREEV on Tolstoy's philosophy of history, 'Messenger of Europe', 1887	209
49	WEDGWOOD compares Tolstoy and Thackeray, 'Contemporary Review', 1887	211
50	A curious combination of novel and history, 'Westminster Review', 1888	215
51	SOREL: Tolstoy—historian, 'Revue Bleue', 1888	217
52	GEORGE MOORE, article, 'Lippincott's Magazine', 1903	222
53	MAUDE on Tolstoy's realism, book, 1908	225
'Anna Karenina' (1875-7)		
54	CHUYKO on Tolstoy and contemporary society, 'Voice', 1875	233
55	SOLOVYOV, review, 'St Petersburg News', 1875	244
56	TKACHOV attacks Tolstoy's aristocraticism, 'Affair', 1875	250
57	AVSEENKO, review, 'Russian World', 1875	261
58	SKABICHEVSKY on Tolstoy's prolix talent, 'Stock Exchange News', 1875, 1876	266
59	MIKHAYLOVSKY on Tolstoy's 'left hand', 'Fatherland Notes', 1875	274
60	NEKRASOV, verse, 1876	282
61	Anonymous notice, 'Russian News', 1876	282
62	Unsigned notice, 'Citizen', 1876	284
63	VEYNBERG lends Tolstoy his support, 'The Bee', 1876	286
64	DOSTOEVSKY, 'Diary of a Writer', 1877	287
65	TOLSTOY, letters, 1876, 1878	292
66	STANKEVICH on Anna, Vronsky and Karenin, 'Messenger of Europe', 1878	293
67	V. MARKOV on Tolstoy's artistically conservative novel, 'Week', 1878	305
68	SHEVITCH on Tolstoy's ideal of family life, 'North American Review', 1879	310
69	GROMEKA on Karenin, 'Russian Thought', 1883, 1884	312

70 STRAKHOV, review, 'Russia', 1883	321
71 DUPUY, book, 1885	325
72 BARINE on 'Anna Karenina' as autobiography, 'Revue Bleue', 1885	330
73 BULGAKOV on Tolstoy's view of marriage, book, 1886	331
74 Unsigned notice, 'The Critic' (New York), 1886	339
75 Unsigned review, 'The Literary World' (Boston), 1886	340
76 PAYNE, notice, 'Dial' (Chicago), 1886	342
77 Unsigned review, 'Nation' (New York), 1886	344
78 Unsigned notice, 'Eclectic Magazine' (New York), 1886	347
79 HOWELLS, review, 'Harper's Magazine', 1886	348
80 Unsigned notice, 'Athenaeum', 1887	349
81 TYLER, review, 'New Englander and Yale Review', 1887	350
82 ARNOLD, review, 'Fortnightly Review', 1887	352
83 DAWSON, on the sincere art of 'Anna Karenina', 'The Critic' (New York), 1896	362
84 WHIBLEY, (unsigned) review, 'Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine', 1901	363
85 KROPOTKIN, 'Superhuman Justice' or 'Society?', book, 1905	365
86 BARING, book, 1910	368

After 'Anna Karenina' (1886-1910)

87 DE VOGÜÉ on Tolstoy's Nihilism, book, 1886	371
88 OSCAR WILDE compares Turgenev, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, 'Pall Mall Gazette', 1887	373
89 GOSSE on Tolstoy, essay, 1890	375
90 LEONTIEV on Tolstoy's qualities, book, 1890	376
91 H. ELLIS on Tolstoy's conditions for human happiness, 'The New Spirit', 1890	382
92 LÖWENFELD on why Tolstoy was misunderstood by his contemporaries, book, 1892	384
93 SHESTOV on Tolstoy's lack of compassion, book, 1900	387
94 CHEKHOV on Tolstoy:	
(a) On 'Anna Karenina', letter, 1888	395
(b) On 'The Kreutzer Sonata', letter, 1890	395
(c) On 'War and Peace', letter, 1891	396
(d) On 'Resurrection', letter, 1900	396
(e) On 'Resurrection', letter, 1900	397
95 GARNETT on Tolstoy's place in European literature, 'Bookman', 1901	397

CONTENTS

96	MEREZHKOVSky on Tolstoy, 'the seer of the flesh', book, 1901	401
97	Some Western views of 'Resurrection':	
(a)	Unsigned notice, 'Academy', 1900	409
(b)	Unsigned review, 'Bookman', 1900	410
(c)	Unsigned review, 'Athenaeum', 1900	412
(d)	Unsigned review, 'Literature', 1900	413
(e)	Unsigned review, 'Nation' (New York), 1900	415
(f)	LE BRETON compares 'Resurrection' and 'Les Misérables', 'Revue des deux mondes', 1902	416
98	CHESTERTON on Tolstoy's fanaticism, article, 1903	418
99	OVSYANIKO-KULIKOVSKY on Ivan Ilich, book, 1905	419
100	SAINTSBURY on Tolstoy, book, 1907	424
101	PLEKHANOV on Tolstoy and Nature, 'Star', 1908	427
102	LENIN on Tolstoy as the Mirror of the Russian Revolution, 'Proletarian', 1908	431
103	HENRY JAMES on Tolstoy, books, 1897, 1909	433
104	HERFORD on Tolstoy after 'Anna Karenina', obituary notice, 'Manchester Guardian', 1910	434
105	GORKY recommends a young acquaintance to read Tolstoy, letter, 1910	438
	APPENDIX: Russian literary and historical references	440
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	447
	SELECT INDEX	450

Introduction

I

If one looks at nineteenth-century Russian history and literature as a whole, there would appear to be a striking similarity between historiography and literary criticism. Literature seems to pose the same almost unanswerable questions to the critics as history does to the historians and thinkers. The latter asked themselves consistently and continuously: What is history? What is Russian history? What is Russia's place in history? What is Russia's historical mission? Is Russian history in general terms similar to that of Western Europe or is it something quite different? Should Russia learn from the West, or does she have something to teach? Such questions lie at the basis of all Russian nineteenth-century historiography, and it would scarcely be a distortion of the facts if, in talking about literature, the words 'history' and 'historical' in these questions were replaced by 'literature' and 'literary'. To the educated Russians, living in a country which cocooned its population in numerous regulations and restrictions, where public political debate was to all intents and purposes impossible, literature was one of the few means through which ideas could be reasonably freely discussed; consequently literature, and the written word in general, was far more important a part of the life of the educated Russians than it was of that of their contemporaries in Western Europe. This goes some way towards an explanation of the remarkable zeal and intensity of many of the critics and the acrimony between them. Had the social and political conditions been different many of Russia's literary critics might well have followed other callings, and Russian literature itself might well have been different.

Both literature and the criticism of it, however, came

to Russia comparatively late. In the spring of 1825, some three years before Tolstoy was born, Russia's greatest poet, Alexander Pushkin, was reading an article by the novelist A.A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, in which the latter claimed that Russia had plenty of criticism but no literature. (1) Pushkin started to draft a reply: 'We have criticism? Where is it to be found? What have we critically analysed? Whose literary opinions have been accepted by the whole nation? Whose criticism can we cite? On whose authority can we lean?' (2) At the beginning of June, Pushkin sent a long letter to Bestuzhev-Marlinsky in which he wrote: 'We have criticism but no literature. Where did you get that idea? On the contrary it is criticism we lack.' (3) The difference of opinion between the two writers might well be explained by asking what each of them meant by 'criticism'. It is clear that Bestuzhev-Marlinsky also bemoans the absence in Russia of those sorts of critics Pushkin so desired - 'The Addisons, La Harpes, Schlegels, Sismondi' - on this they were agreed. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky had continued, though: 'We see plenty of critics, anti-critics, critics of critics, but few efficient critics.' Consequently Russia had no literature. Pushkin refutes this last statement; he modestly declined to quote himself as an example but insisted that Russia had indeed produced literature, with or without critics; he mentions Krylov (4) (who is far superior to La Fontaine) and Derzhavin (5) (who is far superior to Jean-Baptiste Rousseau) as examples of Russian writers, but 'we do not have a single commentary, a single book of criticism. We should rather say: we have some sort of literature, but no criticism'. (6) Indeed it would be hard to disagree with Pushkin if one considers that the first major work of literary criticism was Prince Vyazemsky's biography of the eighteenth-century dramatist Fonvizin (written in 1830, published in 1848), and which Pushkin thought 'well-nigh the most remarkable book to be written since we began writing books here'. (7)

Contemporary disagreements apart, there is no doubt that when Tolstoy began to publish in the early 1850s Russia had both literature and critics. What had happened in the intervening twenty years or so? It would be too simple, however tempting, to reply: 'Belinsky', but he certainly marks a watershed in the Russian reading public's attitudes to literature and its opinions about it. (8) Belinsky has much to answer for, not only on account of what he insisted literature should be and the later critics who took up his call, but also for the opposition he engendered. In short, Belinsky is the originator of the sociological, or 'civic', school of Russian

literary criticism; he demanded that literature should be modern, it should be true to life, and, most importantly, it should be inspired by socially significant ideas. He is usually seen as the true father of the Russian intelligentsia and 'the embodiment of what remained its spirit for more than two generations - of social idealism, of the passion for improving the world, of dis-respect for all tradition, and of highly strung, disinterested enthusiasm'.(9) But Belinsky and those who followed him can be fairly blamed for the contempt for form and workmanship in literature which had dire effects in the 1860s and 1870s. If he taught that content was more important than form, he was equally responsible for the fact that the Russians tended after him to look for prophecy rather than entertainment in their literature.(10)

With the death of Belinsky in 1848 the critical leadership passed on the one hand to those who followed his inspiration - the civic critics, honest, radical, 'Westerner' as opposed to 'Slavophile', people like Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov and Pisarev - and on the other to the rather more conservative representatives of the intelligentsia - the non-civic, aesthetic critics for whom literature was the ultimate expression of ideas, the writer was to be above such ephemera as the current problems of the day and for whom the ultimate criterion of literary merit was not content but form, critics like Annenkov and Druzhinin. Parallel with this development there was the reaction to it. The rejection of all Western ideas about literature, whether it was a question of the primacy of form as the aesthetic critics maintained or that of the social content as the civic critics demanded, led to a new call: that Russian literature should be *Russian*. All reliance on Western European norms and concepts should be overcome. Inspired in the early 1850s by Grigoriev, these new critics formed a cult of Russian originality, Russian character, Russian spirit. Grigoriev himself is remembered for his theory of 'organic criticism' which demanded the necessity of literature being an organic growth from the Russian soil (*pochva*, hence the untranslatable name of *pochvenniki* for his followers). Grigoriev admired everything Russian simply because it was Russian; and the main quality of the Russian character he saw as its meekness, its submissiveness, as opposed to the domineering, arrogant nature of Western European man. His best-known disciple, especially in connection with Tolstoy and Turgenev, was Strakhov. Such trends continued and developed, altered and expanded throughout the century until towards the end there arose new concepts and styles of criticism, the philosophical and the symbolist,