

TOLSTOY



THE SHORT NOVELS OF TOLSTOY

SELECTED WITH AN
INTRODUCTION BY
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PREFACE

*The critic's euphoria in the Tolstoyan weather.
Tolstoy and literature. The green twig and
the black trunk.*

The art of Tolstoy is of such irresistible simplicity and truth, is at once so intense and so transparent in all of its effects, that the need is seldom felt to analyze the means by which it becomes what it is, that is to say, its method or sum of techniques. In the bracing Tolstoyan air, the critic, however addicted to analysis, cannot help doubting his own task, sensing that there is something presumptuous and even unnatural, which requires an almost artificial deliberateness of intention, in the attempt to dissect an art so wonderfully integrated that, coming under its sway, we grasp it as a whole long before we are able to summon sufficient consciousness to examine the arrangement and interaction of its component parts.

Tolstoy is the exact opposite of those writers, typical of the modern age, whose works are to be understood only in terms of their creative strategies and design. The most self-observant of men, whose books are scarcely conceivable apart from the ceaseless introspection of which they are the embodiment, Tolstoy was least self-conscious in his use of the literary medium. That is chiefly because in him the cleavage between art and life is of a minimal nature. In a Tolstoyan novel it is never the division but always the unity of art and life which makes for illumination. This novel, bristling with significant choices and crucial acts, teeming with dramatic motives, is not articulated through a plot as we commonly know it in fiction; one might say that in a sense there are no plots in Tolstoy but simply the unquestioned and unalterable process of life itself; such is the astonishing immediacy with which he possesses his characters that he can dispense with manipulative techniques, as he dis-

penses with the belletristic devices of exaggeration, distortion, and dissimulation. The fable, that specifically literary contrivance, or anything else which is merely invented or made up to suit the occasion, is very rarely found in his work. Nor is style an element of composition of which he is especially aware; he has no interest in language as such; he is the enemy of rhetoric and every kind of artifice and virtuosity. The conception of writing as of something calculated and constructed—a conception, first formulated explicitly by Edgar Allan Poe, upon which literary culture has become more and more dependent—is entirely foreign to Tolstoy.

All that is of a piece, of course, with his unique attitude toward literature, unique, that is, for a writer of modern times. For Tolstoy continually dissociated himself from literature whether considered matter-of-factly, as a profession like any other, or ideally as an autonomous way of life, a complete fate in the sense in which the French writers of Flaubert's generation conceived of it. In his youth a soldier who saw war at first hand, the proprietor and manager of Yásnaya Polyána, a husband and father not as other men are husbands and fathers but in what might be described as a programmatic and even militant fashion, and subsequently a religious philosopher and the head of a sect, he was a writer through all the years—a writer, but never a litterateur, the very idea repelled him. The litterateur performs a function imposed by the social division of labor, and inevitably he pays the price of his specialisation by accepting and even applauding his own one-sidedness and conceit, his non-committed state as witness and observer, and the necessity under which he labors of preying upon life for the themes that it yields. It is with pride that Tolstoy exempted Lérmonov and himself from the class of "men of letters" while commiserating with Turgénev and Gonchárov for being so much of it; and in his *Reminiscences of Tolstoy* Górky remarks that he spoke of literature but rarely and little, "as if it were something alien to him."

To account for that attitude by tracing it back to Tolstoy's aristocratic status, as if he disdained to identify himself with

a plebeian profession, is to take much too simple a view of his personality. The point is, rather, that from the very first Tolstoy instinctively recognized the essential insufficiency and makeshift character of the narrowly aesthetic outlook, of the purely artistic appropriation of the world. His personality was built on too broad a frame to fit into an aesthetic mold, and he denied that art was anything more than the ornament and charm of life. He came of age at a time when the social group to which he belonged had not yet been thoroughly exposed to the ravages of the division of labor, when men of his stamp could still resist the dubious consolations it brings in its train. Endowed with enormous energies, possessed of boundless egoism and of an equally boundless power of conscience, he was capable, in Leo Shéstov's phrase, of destroying and creating worlds, and before he was quite twenty-seven years old he had the audacity to declare his ambition, writing it all solemnly down in his diary, of becoming the founder of "a new religion corresponding with the present state of mankind; the religion of Christ but purged of dogmas and mysticism—a practical religion, not promising future bliss but giving bliss on earth." No wonder, then, that while approaching the task of mastering the literary medium with the utmost seriousness, and prizing that mastery as a beautiful accomplishment, he could not but dismiss the pieties of art as trivial compared with the question he faced from the very beginning, the question he so heroically sought to answer even in his most elemental creations, in which he seems to us to move through the natural world with splendid and miraculous ease, more fully at home there than any other literary artist. Yet even in those creations the very same question appears now in a manifest and now in a latent fashion, always the same question: How to live, what to do?

In 1880, when Turgénev visited Yásnaya Polyána after a long estrangement, he wrote a letter bewailing Tolstoy's apparent desertion of art. "I, for instance, am considered an artist," he said, "but what am I compared with him? In contemporary European literature he has no equal. . . . But what is one to do with him. He has plunged headlong into another sphere: he

has surrounded himself with Bibles and Gospels in all languages, and has written a whole heap of papers. He has a trunk full of these mystical ethics and of various pseudo-interpretations. He read me some of it, which I simply do not understand. . . . I told him, 'That is not the real thing'; but he replied: 'It is just the real thing' . . . Very probably he will give nothing more to literature, or if he reappears it will be with that trunk." Turgénev was wrong. Tolstoy gave a great deal more to literature, and it is out of that same trunk, so offensive in the eyes of the accomplished man of letters, that he brought forth such masterpieces as *The Death of Iván Ilych* and *Master and Man*, plays like *The Power of Darkness*, also many popular tales which, stripped of all ornament, have an essential force and grace of their own, and, together with much that is abstract and over-rationalised, not a few expository works, like *What Then Must We Do?*, which belong with the most powerful revolutionary writings of the modern age. For it is not for nothing that Tolstoy was always rummaging in that black trunk. At the bottom of it, underneath a heap of old papers, there lay a little *mana*-object, a little green twig which he carried with him through the years, a twig of which he was told at the age of five by his brother Nicholas—that it was buried by the road at the edge of a certain ravine and that on it was inscribed the secret by means of which "all men would cease suffering misfortunes, leave off quarrelling and being angry, and become continuously happy." The legend of the green twig was part of a game played by the Tolstoy children, called the Ant-Brothers, which consisted of crawling under chairs screened off by shawls and cuddling together in the dark. Tolstoy asked to be buried on the very spot at the edge of the ravine at Yásnaya Polyána which he loved because of its association with the imaginary green twig and the ideal of human brotherhood. And when he was an old man he wrote that "the idea of ant-brothers lovingly clinging to one another, though not under two arm-chairs curtained by shawls but of all mankind under the wide dome of heaven, has remained unaltered in me. As I then believed that there existed a little green twig whereon was

written the message which would destroy all evil in men and give them universal welfare, so I now believe that such truth exists and will be revealed to men and will give them all its promises." It is clear that the change in Tolstoy by which Turgénev was so appalled was entirely natural, was presupposed by all the conditions of his development and of his creative consciousness. In the total Tolstoyan perspective the black trunk of his old age represents exactly the same thing as the green twig of his childhood.

Even the crude heresies he expounded in *What is Art?* lose much of their offensiveness in that perspective. In itself, when examined without reference to the author's compelling grasp of the central and most fearful problems of human existence, the argument of that book strikes us as a wilful inflation of the idea of moral utility at the expense of the values of the imagination. But actually the fault of the argument is not that it is wholly implausible—as a matter of fact, it is of a long and reputable lineage in the history of culture—as that it is advanced recklessly and with a logic at once narrow and excessive; the Tolstoyan insight is here vitiated in the same way as the insight into sexual relations is vitiated in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Still, both works, the onslaught on modern love and marriage as well as the onslaught on the fetishism of art to which the modern sensibility has succumbed, are significantly expressive of Tolstoy's spiritual crisis—a crisis badly understood by many people, who take it as a phenomenon disruptive of his creative power despite that fact that, in the last analysis, it is impossible to speak of two Tolstoys, the creative and the non-creative, for there is no real discontinuity in his career. Though there is a contradiction between the artist and the moralist in him, his personality retains its basic unity, transcending all contradictions. Boris Eichenbaum, one of the very best of Tolstoy's Russian critics, has observed that the spiritual crisis did not operate to disrupt his art because it was a crisis internally not externally determined, the prerequisite of a new act of cognition through which he sought to re-arm his genius and to ascertain the possibility of new creative beginnings. Thus *My*

Confession, with which Tolstoy's later period opens and which appeared immediately after *Anna Karénina*, is unmistakably a work of the imagination and at the same time a mighty feat of consciousness.

Six years after writing *What is Art?* Tolstoy finished *Hadji Murád* (1904), one of the finest *nouvelles* in the Russian language and a model of narrative skill and objective artistry. Is not the song of the nightingales, that song of life and death which bursts into ecstasy at dawn on the day when Hadji Murád attempts to regain his freedom, the very same song which rises in that marvelously sensual scene in *Family Happiness*, a scene bathed in sunlight, when Másha, surprising Sergéy Mikháylych in the cherry orchard, enjoys for the first time the full savor of her youthful love? *Hadji Murád* was written not less than forty-five years after *Family Happiness*. And in *The Devil*—a moral tale, the product, like *The Kreutzer Sonata*, of Tolstoy's most sectarian period and extremest assertion of dogmatic asceticism—what we remember best is not Eugène Irténev's torments of conscience, his efforts to subdue his passion, but precisely the description of his carnal meetings in the sun-drenched woods with Stepanida, the fresh and strong peasant-girl with full breasts and bright black eyes. The truth is that in the struggle between the old moralist and the old magician in Tolstoy both gave as good as they got.

***The rationalist and anti-Romantic in Tolstoy. Sources
in the eighteenth century. Divergence from the
intelligentsia. Creative Method.***

Tolstoy has been described as the least neurotic of all the great Russians, and by the same token he can be said to be more committed than any of them to the rational understanding and ordering of life and to the throwing off of romantic illusions. Unlike Dostoévsky, he owes nothing either to the so-called natural school of Gógol or to the Romantic movement in western literature. The school of Gógol is a school of morbidity, whereas Tolstoy is above all an artist of the normal—the normal,

however, so intensified that it acquires a poetical truth and an emotional fullness which we are astounded to discover in the ordinary situations of life. Analysis is always at the center of the Tolstoyan creation. It is the sort of analysis, however, which has little in common with the analytical modes of such novelists as Dostoévsky and Proust, for example, both characteristically modern though in entirely different ways. While in their work analysis is precipitated mainly by deviations from the norm, from the broad standard of human conduct, in Tolstoy the analysis remains in line with that standard, is in fact inconceivable apart from it. Dostoévsky's "underground" man, who is a bundle of plebeian resentments, is unimaginable in a Tolstoyan novel. Even in Tolstoy's treatment of death there is nothing actually morbid—certainly not in the description of the death of Prince Andréy in *War and Peace* and of Nikolay Lévin in *Anna Karénina*. As for *The Death of Iván Ilych*, that story would be utterly pointless if we were to see Iván Ilych as a special type and what happened to him as anything out of the ordinary. Iván Ilych is Everyman, and the state of absolute solitude into which he falls as his life ebbs away is the existential norm, the inescapable realization of mortality. Nothing could be more mistaken than the idea that Tolstoy's concern with death is an abnormal trait. On the contrary, if anything it is a super-normal trait, for the intensity of his concern with death is proportionate to the intensity of his concern with life. Of Tolstoy it can be said that he truly lived his life, and for that very reason he was so tormented by the thought of dying. It was a literal thought, physical through and through, a vital manifestation of the simplicity with which he grasped man's life in the world. This simplicity is of a metaphysical nature, and in it, as one Russian critic has remarked, you find the essence of Tolstoy's world-view, the energising and generalising formula that served him as the means unifying the diverse motives of his intellectual and literary experience. It is due to this metaphysical simplicity that he was unable to come to terms with any system of dogmatic theology and that in the end, despite all his efforts to retain it, he was compelled to exclude even the

idea of God from his own system of rationalised religion. Thus all notions of immortality seemed absurd to Tolstoy, and his scheme of salvation was entirely calculated to make men happy here and now. It is reported of Thoreau that when he lay dying his answer to all talk of the hereafter was "one world at a time." That is the sort of answer with which Tolstoy's mentality is wholly in accord.

The way in which his rationalism enters his art is shown in his analysis of character, an analysis which leaves nothing undefined, nothing unexplained. That systematisation of ambiguity which marks the modern novel is organically alien to Tolstoy. Given the framework in which his characters move we are told everything that we need to know or want to know about them. The tangled intimate life, the underside of their consciousness, their author is not concerned with; he sets them up in the known world and sees them through their predicaments, however irksome and baffling, without ever depriving them of the rationality which supports their existence. For just as in Tolstoy's religiosity there is no element of mysticism, so in his creative art there is no element of mystery.

Unlike most of his contemporaries, Tolstoy did not pass through the school of Romanticism, and perhaps that is the reason he never hesitated to strike out the dark areas in the space in which he outlines his leading figures. He has few links with the literary culture evolved in Russia after 1820; the fact is that he has more in common with his literary grandfathers than with his literary fathers. Insofar as he has any literary affiliations at all they go back to the eighteenth century, to Rousseau, to Sterne, to the French classical drama, and in Russia to the period of Karámzin, Zhukovsky, Novikóv, and Radichev. He has their robustness and skepticism. His quarrels with Turgénev, his inability to get on with the liberal and radical writers grouped around the *Contemporary*, a Petersburg periodical edited by the poet Nekrásov in which Tolstoy's first stories were published, are explained not so much by personal factors, such as his intractability of temper, as by the extreme differences between the conditions of his development

and those of the Russian intelligentsia, whose rise coincides with the appearance of the plebeian on the literary scene. Tolstoy's family-background was archaistic, not in the sense of provincial backwardness, but in the sense of the deliberate and even stylized attempt made by his family—more particularly his father—to preserve at Yásnaya Polyána the patriarchal traditions of the Russian nobility of the eighteenth century. It was a conscious and militant archaism directed against the “new” civilization of Petersburg, with its state-bureaucracy and merchant princes. The young Tolstoy was scornful of the “theories” and “convictions” held by the writers he met in Petersburg in the 1850's; instead of putting his trust in “theories” and “convictions” he relied on those Franklinesque rules and precepts of conduct with which he filled his diaries—rules and precepts he deduced from his idea of unalterable “moral instincts.” In Nekrásov's circle he was regarded as a “wild man,” a “troglo-dyte”; and in the early 1860's, when he set out on his first European tour, Nekrásov and his friends hoped that he would return in a mood of agreement with their notions of education and historical progress. Nothing came of it, of course, for he returned armed with more of those “simplifications” that cut under their assumptions. But if the Westernizers found no comfort in Tolstoy, neither did the Slavophiles. The latter's ideology, with its forced and artificial doctrine of superiority to the West, was also aligned with plebeian tasks; at bottom it represented the discomfiture of a small and weak plebeian class in a semi-feudal society, a discomfiture idealised through national messianism. It was an obscurantist ideology incompatible with Tolstoy's belief in self-improvement and in the possibility of human perfection. Moreover, in Tolstoy's approach to western culture there was no distress, no anger, no hostility. He was never put off by it, for he considered European culture to be a neutral sphere the products of which he could appropriate at will, and in any order he pleased, without in the least committing himself to its inner logic. He felt no more committed by his use of western ideas than the French-speaking gentry in *War and Peace* feel obligated to import the social institutions

of France along with its language. Thus Tolstoy was able to sort out western tendencies to suit himself, as in *War and Peace*, where he is to some extent indebted for his conception of Napoleon to certain French publicists of the 1850's and 60's, who in their endeavor to deflate the pretensions of Napoleon III went so far in their polemics as also to blot out the image of his illustrious ancestor. Again, in that novel he is partly indebted for his so-called organic idea of war to Proudhon's book *La Guerre et la Paix*, which came out in a Russian translation in 1864. (Tolstoy had met Proudhon in Brussels in March, 1861.) And the arbitrary way in which he helped himself to the ideas of western thinkers is shown by the fact that he entirely ignored Proudhon's enthusiastic affirmation of Napoleon's historical role. The West was the realm of the city, a realm so strange to Tolstoy that he could regard it as neutral territory. The city was essentially unreal to him; he believed in the existence solely of the landowners and of the peasants. The contrast between Dostoévsky and Tolstoy, which Merezhkóvsky and after him Thomas Mann have presented in terms of the abstract typology of the "man of spirit" as against the "man of nature," is more relevantly analysed in terms of the contradiction between city and country, between the alienated intellectual proletariat of the city and the unalienated patriciate-peasantry of the country.

Much has been written concerning the influence of Rousseau on Tolstoy, but here again it is necessary to keep in mind that in western literature we perceive the Rousseauist ideas through the colored screen of Romanticism while in Tolstoy Rousseau survives through his rationalism no less than through his sensibility. In point of fact, the Rousseauist cult of nature is operative in Tolstoy in a manner that leads toward realism, as is seen in his Caucasian tales, for instance. If these tales now seem romantic to us, that is largely because of the picturesque material of which they are composed. A narrative like *The Cossacks* is actually turned in a tendentious way against the tradition of "Caucasian romanticism" in Russian literature—the tradition of Púshkin, Lérmontov, and Marlinsky. Olénin, the

protagonist of *The Cossacks*, is so little of a Romantic hero that he is incapable of dominating even his own story; the impression of his personality is dissipated as the attention shifts to the Cossack lad Lukáshka, to Daddy Eróshka, and to the girl Maryánka. Think what Chateaubriand would have made of a heroine like Maryánka. In Tolstoy, however, she is portrayed in an authentically natural style, with all the calm strength, unawareness of subjective values and indifference of a primitive human being. Though she is a "child of nature" and therefore an object of poetical associations, she is seen much too soberly to arouse those high-flown sentiments which "nature" inspires in Romantic poets like Novalis or even the Goethe of *Werther*. Where the Romantics convert nature into a solace for the trials of civilization, into a theater of lyrical idleness and noble pleasures, Tolstoy identifies nature with work, independence, self-possession.

Compared with Pierre, Prince Andréy or Lévin, Olénin is a weak hero, but he is important in that in his reflections he sums up everything which went into the making of the early Tolstoy and which was in later years given a religious twist and offered as a doctrine of world-salvation. The primacy which the issue of happiness assumes in Olénin's thoughts is the key to his Tolstoyan nature. "Happiness is this," he said to himself, "happiness lies in living for others. That is evident. The desire for happiness is innate in every man; therefore it is legitimate. When trying to satisfy it selfishly—that is, by seeking for oneself riches, fame, comforts, or love—it may happen that circumstances arise which make it impossible to satisfy these desires. It follows that it is these desires which are illegitimate, but not the need for happiness. But what desires can always be satisfied despite external circumstances? What are they? Love, self-sacrifice." In these few sentences we get the quintessence of the Tolstoyan mentality: the belief that ultimate truth can be arrived at through common-sense reasoning, the utilitarian justification of the values of love and self-sacrifice and their release from all otherworldly sanctions, the striving for the simplification of existence which takes the form of a return to a life closer to

nature—a return, however, involving a self-consciousness and a constant recourse to reason that augurs ill for the success of any such experiment.

Tolstoy's art is so frequently spoken of as "organic" that one is likely to overlook the rationalistic structure on which it is based. This structure consists of successive layers of concrete details, physical and psychological, driven into place and held together by a generalisation or dogma. Thus in *The Cossacks* the generalisation is the idea of the return to nature; in *Two Hussars* it is the superiority of the elder Túrbin to the younger, that is to say, of the more naïve times of the past to the "modern" period. (The original title of the story was *Father and Son*.) The binding dogma in *Family Happiness* is the instability and deceptiveness of love as compared with a sound family life and the rearing of children in insuring the happiness of a married couple. Yet the didacticism of such ideas seldom interferes with our enjoyment of the Tolstoyan fiction. For the wonderful thing about it is its tissue of detail, the tenacious way in which it holds together, as if it were a glutinous substance, and its incomparable rightness and truthfulness.

Parallelism of construction is another leading characteristic of the Tolstoyan method. In *War and Peace*, in the chronicle of the lives of the Bolkónsky and Rostóv families, this parallelism is not devised dramatically, as a deliberate contrast, but in other narratives it is driven toward a stark comparison, as between Anna and Vrónsky on the one hand and Kitty and Lévin on the other in *Anna Karénina*, or between two generations in *Two Hussars*, or between Lukáshka and Olénin in *The Cossacks*. One writer on Tolstoy put it very well when he said that in the Tolstoyan novel all ideas and phenomena exist in pairs. Comparison is inherent in his method.

His early *nouvelles* can certainly be read and appreciated without reference to their historical context, to the ideological differences between him and his contemporaries which set him off to confound them with more proofs of his disdain for their "progressive" opinions. Still, the origin of *Family Happiness* in the quarrels of the period is worth recalling. At that time (in

the 1850's) public opinion was much exercised over the question of free love and the emancipation of women; George Sand was a novelist widely read in intellectual circles, and of course most advanced people agreed with George Sand's libertarian solution of the question. Not so Tolstoy, who opposed all such tendencies, for he regarded marriage and family life as the foundations of society. Thus *Family Happiness*, with its denigration of love and of equal rights for women, was conceived as a polemical rejoinder to George Sand, then adored by virtually all the Petersburg writers, including Dostoévsky.

The faith in family life is integral to Tolstoy. It has the deepest psychological roots in his private history, and socially it exemplifies his championship of patriarchal relations. It is a necessary part of his archaistic outlook, which in later life was transformed into a special kind of radicalism, genuinely revolutionary in some of its aspects and thoroughly archaistic in others. *War and Peace* is as much a chronicle of certain families as an historical novel. The historical sense is not really native to Tolstoy. His interest in the period of 1812 is peculiarly his own, derived from his interest in the story of his own family. He began work on *Anna Karénina* after failing in the attempt to write another historical novel, a sequel to *War and Peace*. And *Anna Karénina* is of course the novel in which his inordinate concern with marriage and family life receives its fullest expression.

*The existential center of the Tolstoyan art. Tolstoy
as the last of the unalienated artists.*

So much has been made here of the rationalism of Tolstoy that it becomes necessary to explain how his art is saved from the ill effects of it. Art and reason are not naturally congruous with one another, and many a work of the imagination has miscarried because of an excess of logic. "There may be a system of logic; a system of being there can never be," said Kierkegaard. And art is above all a recreation of individual being; the system-maker must perforce abstract from the real world,

while the artist, if he is true to his medium, recoils from the process of abstraction because it is precisely the resistant quality of life, its irreducibility, its multiple divulgements in all their uniqueness and singularity, which provoke his imagination.

Now there is only one novel of Tolstoy's that might be described as a casualty of his rationalism, and that is *Resurrection*. The greater part of his fiction is existentially centered in a concrete inwardness and subjectivity by which it gains its quality of genius. In this sense it becomes possible to contend that Tolstoy is much more a novelist of life and death than he is of good and evil—good and evil are not categories of existence but of moral analysis. And the binding dogmas or ideas of Tolstoy's fiction are not in contradiction with its existential sense; on the contrary, their interaction is a triumph of creative tact and a proof of the essential wholeness of Tolstoy's nature. The Tolstoyan characters grasp their lives through their total personalities, not merely through their intellects. Their experience is full of moments of shock, of radical choice and decision, when they confront themselves in the terrible and inevitable aloneness of their being. To mention but one of innumerable instances of such spiritual confrontation, there is the moment in *Anna Karénina* when Anna's husband begins to suspect her relation to Vrónsky. That is the moment when the accepted and taken-for-granted falls to pieces, when the carefully built-up credibility of the world is torn apart by a revelation of its underlying irrationality. For according to Alexéy Alexandróvitch's ideas one ought to have confidence in one's wife because jealousy was insulting to oneself as well as to her. He had never really asked himself why his wife deserved such confidence and why he believed that she would always love him. But now, though he still felt that jealousy was a bad and shameful state, "he also felt that he was standing face to face with something illogical and irrational, and did not know what was to be done. Alexéy Alexandróvitch was standing face to face with life, with the possibility of his wife's loving some one other than himself, and this seemed to him very irrational and incomprehensible because it was life itself. All his life Alexéy Alexandróvitch had

lived and worked in official spheres, having to do with the reflection of life. And every time he had stumbled against life itself he had shrunk away from it. Now he experienced a feeling akin to that of a man who, while calmly crossing a precipice by a bridge, should suddenly discover that the bridge is broken, and that there is a chasm below. That chasm was life itself, the bridge that artificial life in which Alexéy Alexandróvitch had lived. For the first time the question presented itself to him of the possibility of his wife's loving some one else, and he was horrified at it."

It is exactly this "standing face to face with life," and the realization that there are things in it that are irreducible and incomprehensible, which drew Tolstoy toward the theme of death. Again and again he returned to this theme, out of a fear of death which is really the highest form of courage. Most people put death out of their minds because they cannot bear to think of it. Górký reports that Tolstoy once said to him that "if a man has learned to think, no matter what he may think about, he is always thinking of his own death. All philosophers were like that. And what truths can there be, if there is death?" That is a statement of despair and nihilism the paradox of which is that it springs from the depths of Tolstoy's existential feeling of life; and this is because the despair and nihilism spring not from the renunciation but from the affirmation of life, Tolstoy never gave up the search for an all-embracing truth, for a rational justification of man's existence on the earth.

The fact is that Tolstoy was at bottom so sure in his mastery of life and so firm in his inner feeling of security that he could afford to deal intimately with death. Consider the difference in this respect between him and Franz Kafka, another novelist of the existential mode. In Kafka the theme of death is absent, not because of strength but rather because of neurotic weakness. He was ridden by a conviction, as he himself defined it, of "complete helplessness," and baffled by the seeming impossibility of solving even the most elementary problems of living, he could not look beyond life into the face of death. He wrote: "Without ancestors, without marriage, without progeny, with