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CONTENTS

TOLSTOY AND THE DRAGON

by Jane Abramson

Approved by

Randall Jarrell
Director

Examining Committee

Harry Frieston

Jordan E Kerbard

Randall Jarrell

Marian Franklin

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Seldom has an author excited more intense admiration among literary judges for his superb artistic powers and relentless pursuit of self-perfection than Count Lev Nikolayevitch Tolstoy. Critical appraisals of Tolstoy are, indeed, imbued with sheer awe of this somewhat mysterious and mystifying giant. Many seem, in fact, to adopt an attitude that only Nature, herself, would be adequately equipped to judge, to value, to approve or to condemn the somewhat sensational, highly dramatic Russian literary figure. One critic, for example, says:

> 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.[1]

In spite of the legendary aura which surrounds the author, most critics have been astute enough to discern the battle which raged between Tolstoy the moralist and Tolstoy the artist for mastery of his works of art. The popular conception of the struggle's being won by the philosopher in him after a spiritual crisis in middle age, I find misleading. There was, in fact, no period in his life when either the

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[1] Philip Rahv, Introduction to The Short Novels of Tolstoy, p. v.

artist or the natural man can be said to have been definitely superceded by the moralist. In a sense, My Confession is as inevitable a work of art as Anna Karenina. And as proved by Boyhood and Youth, there is equally no period after early childhood when the moralist in him was not astir. All the fluctuations and convulsions of his younger life were but preliminary skirmishes which led inevitably to the major contest at the age of fifty.

Critics have also been aware of the conspicuous part which the death-theme plays in the writings of Tolstoy. They note the fact that death hovers over the finest scenes of the Sevastopol stories and War and Peace; they see that the atmosphere of both passionate and innocent love in Anna Karenina is darkened by the presence of Levin's dying, consumptive brother; they shrink in horror from the unbelievably stark realism of The Death of Ivan Ilyich. Never, however, do they accept Tolstoy's inordinate preoccupation with death as being at all out of the ordinary; rather, they maintain that the intensity of his concern with death is proportionate to the intensity of his concern with life.

It is my thesis, however, that for Tolstoy death was far more than an unavoidable aspect of life to be explored with the calm objectivity of the intellect. Indeed, it engendered a superstitious fear within him which he attempted to exorcise by evolving a religious philosophy that curiously blends elements of both Christianity and Buddhism. It was, at the same time, strangely bound up with his strong sexuality which was often stronger than either his dreams of purity or even his moral disapproval. It was, as well, a subject with which he was to duel in all of his important works. In his early period, he wrote to

affirm life even in the face of death; in his later creations, he wrote to convince himself that there need be no dread of the final encounter.

What may one learn of Tolstoy if he examines the author's portrayals of death? One must first realize that death may be likened to the ink blot which is used in psychological testing. Both are ill-defined and meaningless until the subject has projected into the amorphous mass his personal concepts and prejudices. Thus, one may find that when Tolstoy peered at formless death and revealed what he saw in narrative form, he was to expose the many paradoxes of his personality. In the death scenes, he displays, by turns, his cold, severe rationalism and his Epicurean joy of life, his spontaneous, passionate nature and his predilection for ascetic self-laceration. He tells the reader that he has found a salvation beyong recurrent ecstasy and despair in a renunciation of desire and responsibility. Yet his face remains harrowed and distraught despite his assertions that he has found serenity in the face of the cruelty of death.

Death, of course, rears its head so often in the many different works of Tolstoy, that all may not be treated in a paper of limited scope. Hence, I have chosen to concentrate upon those scenes in which Tolstoy treats not only the physical process of dying but also the mental gymnastics of the hero who is soon to meet his end. I have singled out those scenes where the paradoxes of Tolstoy's personality are most clearly in evidence, where his indisputable artistic genius is most readily apparent.

I TOLSTOY AND THE DRAGON

Tolstoy says:

> There is an Eastern fable told long ago, of a traveller overtaken on a plain by an enraged beast. Escaping from the beast he gets into a dry well, but sees at the bottom of the well a dragon that has opened its jaws to swallow him. And the unfortunate man, not daring to climb out lest he should be destroyed by the enraged beast, and not daring to leap to the bottom of the well lest he should be eaten by the dragon, seizes a twig growing in a crack in the well and clings to it. His hands are growing weaker and he feels he will soon have to resign himself to the destruction that awaits him above or below, but still clings on. Then he sees that two mice, a black and a white one, go regularly round and round the stem of a twig to which he is clinging and gnaw at it. And soon the twig itself will snap and he will fall into the dragon's jaws. The traveller sees this and knows that he will inevitably perish; but while still hanging he looks around, sees some drops of honey on the leaves of the twig, reaches them with his tongue and licks them. So I too clung to the twig of life, knowing that the dragon of death was inevitably awaiting me, ready to tear me to pieces; and I could not understand why I had fallen into such torment. I tried to lick the honey which formerly consoled me, but the honey no longer gave me pleasure, and the white and black mice of day and night gnawed at the branch by which I hung. I only saw the inescapable dragon and the mice, and I could not tear my gaze from them. And this is not a fable but the real unanswerable truth intelligible to all.[1]

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[1] Leo N. Tolstoy, My Confession, Collected Works (v. 7), pp. 21-22.

This passage from My Confession, written between 1879 and 1882, is merely an amplification of several sentences which Tolstoy wrote after the death of his brother Nikolai in 1860.

> Of what use is anything, since the agonies of death will come tomorrow, with all the abomination of self-delusion and falsehood, and since everything will end in nothing, in absolute naught for oneself?[1]

Throughout his life, Tolstoy struggled in the grips of the knowledge that no matter how joyful, beautiful or passionate a life man experienced, death inevitably awaited him offering only annihilation and oblivion. He groped for an assurance that death was not total destruction but rather a passageway to another level of existence. Tormented by the fear that death cancelled out all meaning and purpose, leaving only a horrible vacuum in which it was impossible to live, Tolstoy evolved the following philosophy:

> If a man could place his happiness in the happiness of other beings, that is if he would love them more than himself, then death would not represent to him that discontinuance of happiness and life, because happiness and life of other beings is not only not interrupted with the loss of life of a man who saves them, but is frequently augmented and heightened by the sacrifice of his life.[2]

Unable to cope with death in any other way, Tolstoy sought to forget himself, his terror, and his sense of isolation in "love," or in a kind of disappearance and dissolution in the whole of humanity, in group-consciousness. Having discovered a shelter from the fear of death, Tolstoy seized upon it, created a set of moral truths and rules,

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[1] Quoted in Janko Lavrin, Tolstoy: An Approach, p. 85.

[2] Tolstoy, On Life, Collected Works, (v. 7), p. 309.

and began preaching his new religion with all the fervor and vehemence of Christ on the Mount.

Before he set down and promulgated his spiritual precepts, however, he began a detailed investigation of the world's religions in order to cull thoughts which would best guide man's moral and religious life. In March, 1884, for example, he wrote:

> Must compose for myself a Circle of Reading: Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Lao-Tse, Buddha, Pascal, the Gospels.[1]

His hostility to individualism, however, was to be his chief criterion of truth as he waded through the output of civilization's greatest minds. In On Life, Tolstoy lists some of the tenets which he amassed from his religious study:[2]

> 'Life is a wandering and perfecting of the souls attaining a greater and ever greater good,' said the Brahmins.
>
> 'Life is self-renunciation for the sake of attaining blissful Nirvana,' said Buddha, a contemporary of Confucius.
>
> 'Life is the path of humility and abasement of self for the sake of attaining the good,' said Lao-Tse, another contemporary of Confucius.
>
> 'Life is love of God and of our neighbors, which gives man the good,' said Christ.

Buddhism, Tolstoy found, more than any other religion stressed the separation and strife which the cultivation of individuality engendered. Any and all of the following representative Buddhist teachings, for example, could have sprung from the pen of Tolstoy:[3]

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[1]Quoted in Ernest J. Simmons, Leo Tolstoy, p. 394.

[2]Tolstoy, On Life, op. cit., p. 244.

[3]Paul Carus, The Gospel of Buddha.

> Attain that composure of mind which is resting in the place of immortality. Self is but a heap of composite qualities, and its world is empty like a fantasy.
>
> It is lust, passion, and the thirst for existence that yearns for pleasure everywhere, leading to a continual rebirth! It is sensuality, desire, selfishness; all these things, O Brethren, are the origin of suffering.
>
> Self is death and truth is life. The cleaving to self is a perpetual dying, while moving in the truth of partaking of Nirvana is life everlasting.

Man, Tolstoy was to ascertain, must view death as the end of his perishable body and individuality, as the state wherein the soul returns to the Whole, to the living God. Death did not mean an entrance into a new individual life hereafter or the confrontation with a despotic master who would punish man for his ignorance. For him, it was a transformation into a state in which there was no desire, no separate existence; it offered peace to man, weary of the solitude of the self. In an entry in his diary dated January 21, 1910, Tolstoy crushingly denounced the concept of immortality:

> We speak of the life of the soul after death. But if the soul lives 'after death,' it should have lived also 'before life.' Onesided eternity is an absurdity.[1]

The author's negative attitude to a life eternal is, again, a strikingly Buddhist viewpoint.

> In any case, the doctrine of immortality (eternal life as distinct from mere survival after death), the existence of a permanent spiritual substance, and of a

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[1]Tolstoy, Last Diaries, p. 45.

> being thinking and feeling apart from material conditions, did not come within the range of evidence recognized by the Buddhists.[1]

From the Gospels, Tolstoy accepted fully only the Sermon on the Mount, which he reduced to five bald rules: do not be angry; do not commit adultery; do not take oaths; do not resist evil; be no man's enemy. It is interesting to note how the author adopts Christian thought to meet his own immediate needs:

> The whole teaching of Christ is that his disciples, having understood the illusory nature of personal life, should renounce it and transfer it into the life of the whole of humanity.... Any meaning given to a personal life, if it be not based on the renunciation of self for the service of man, humanity, the Son of Man, is a delusion which flies to pieces at the first contact with reason.[2]

It was, therefore, the symbol of Christ rather than His teachings which Tolstoy clasped wholeheartedly to his bosom. From the example of Christ, for example, Tolstoy derived his belief in suffering as a way of effecting the transformation from life to a state of freedom from damnation and destruction. In a letter to Alexei Bakhunin, Tolstoy expounded upon this tenet:

> ...we look on material suffering, especially an illness and death, as misfortunes, when in fact all suffering--always unavoidable, just as death itself--only breaks down the limitations which constrain the spirit, destroy that illusory materialistic attitude, and restore us to that peculiarly human understanding of life in a spiritual

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[1]Edward J. Thomas, The History of Buddhist Thought, p. 106.

[2]Quoted in Lavrin, op. cit., p. 98.

> and not in a materialistic being. Death does not exist, or is only deliverance and regeneration. I say this because I experienced it with unusual force and clearness in time of sickness. There is no worse condition for reaching the true well-being than the very one which men desire for themselves and others--health, riches, fame. May God grant that you feel the beneficence of suffering.[1]

As important as Christ and Buddha in shaping Tolstoy's spiritual philosophy were the Russian peasants. In My Confession, the author states:

> In contradistinction to the people of our circle, who struggled and murmured against fate because of their privations and their suffering, these people accepted diseases and sorrows without any perplexity or opposition, but with the calm and firm conviction that it was all for good. In contradistinction to the fact that the more intelligent we are, the less do we understand the meaning of life and the more do we see a kind of bad joke in our suffering and death, these people live, suffer, and approach death, and suffer in peace and more often in joy. In contradistinction to the fact that a calm death, a death without terror or despair, is the greatest exception in our circle, a restless, insubmissive, joyless death is one of the greatest exceptions among the masses.[2]

Thus, unable to take anything for granted, himself, not even his innate joy of life, he was to be attracted to the peasant's complete acquiescence. Imbued with terror at the thought of death, Tolstoy yearned for the quiet calm with which the uncivilized being met his end. Plagued all of his life by the assertion of his instincts over his conscience, he longed for the peasant's natural morality.

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[1]Tolstoy, "There is No Death." Independent, 69 (December, 1910), 1395.
[2]Tolstoy, My Confession, op. cit., p. 60.

Tolstoy never faced the issue of whether the peasant's effortless acceptance of death was due to the fact that life had never given him the chance to be possessive, self-indulgent, and egotistical. He was hostile to the suggestion that the peasant's muteness in the face of suffering could be attributed to his poorly-tuned sensibilities and inadequate intelligence. Rather than feeling that the peasant had escaped morbidity by being, in a sense, partially stunted, he believed that his tranquilness stemmed from his individual consciousness' having been dissolved in that of the group. Ultimately, Tolstoy was to take the warm, vegetative, de-personalized existence of the peasant and make it the final criterion of moral, aesthetic and spiritual value.

II THE DRAGON AND THE NOVEL

The preceding remarks should provide, however summarily, some indication of Tolstoy's philosophical outlook as he approached the depiction of death. It is necessary, however, to examine the author's fictional works carefully in order to gain an insight into the way in which Tolstoy either elaborated upon, added to, or contradicted these basic principles.

One of Tolstoy's earliest attempts to create an extended sketch of the human reaction to death was written in 1859 and entitled Three Deaths. In it, Tolstoy presented a set of too-calculated variations on his favorite theme, centered about the moral conclusion which was to be elaborated upon in My Confession: the more primitive the consciousness, the simpler the death.

The first death to be treated is that of a pampered middle class lady who, stricken with consumption, will not admit that she is dying but insists upon going abroad to recover her health. When she is forced to receive the consolation of religion, she still tries to derive physical rather than spiritual hope and dies painfully, protesting "My God! Why must it be?"

Uncle Fyodor is an earlier rendition of Nikita in Master and Man and like him

> was patient and could wait for hours, even days, without growing restless or irritated. The thought that he would die...came upon him, seeming not very unpleasant, nor very awful. Not unpleasant, because his life had been no unbroken feast, but rather an incessant round of toil of which he had begun to weary.[1]

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[1]Tolstoy, Master and Man, in The Short Novels of Tolstoy, edited by Philip Rahv, p. 568.

But Tolstoy, in a letter to Countess Alexandra Tolstaya, presents his own views on the reasons for Uncle Fyodor's complacent acceptance of death.

> The peasant dies in peace, and he dies so precisely because he is not a Christian. He keeps by habit to Christian observances, yet his religion is a different one; it is the religion of Nature amidst which he lives. With his own hands he fells trees, mows, slaughters and breeds sheep as naturally as children are born and old men die; he knows this law of nature and has never turned away from it, as the old lady has done; he sees nature face to face.[1]

The third depiction of death involves a hewn tree. Here, death is divested of all feeling, suffering or regret and is clean and decisive. It is a fact stripped bare of the torment and sentiment which cling like parasites to distorted humanity.

In each of these sketches, Tolstoy emphasizes the isolation which, he knew, death imposed on its victims. Even nature is wholly indifferent to the hewn tree. Indeed, "the trees, more joyously than ever, extended their branches over the new space that had been made in their midst."[2] The indifference of Nature to death, therefore, is emphasized by associating it with her unquenchable impulse to life.

Only the lady, however, feels this extreme isolation because she is an egotist. "None of them care anything about me," she cries in anguish. "They are all right, and so they don't care. O my God!" Death, then, becomes agonizing to man to the degree to which he is conscious of the indifference; the consciousness becomes unbearable when man outgrows his instinctive submission to life and finds no spiritual serenity to take

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[1]Quoted in Lavrin, op. cit., p. 84.

[2]Tolstoy, Three Deaths, in Tolstoy's Tales of Courage and Conflict, edited by Charles Neider, p. 247.

its place.

Master and Man and Hadji Murad were the last works of Tolstoy to treat man's confrontation with death. In these short novels, however, one may see that the author was not to put down the philosophical threads which he picked up in Three Deaths.

In Master and Man, Vasili Andreevich Brekhunov, lost in a snow-storm with his servant Nikita, sees that he is perishing amid the white expanse with no conceivable means of escape. He, like the woman in Three Deaths, feels his extreme isolation.

> Then he thought of the wormwood tossed by the wind, which he had twice ridden past, and he was seized by such terror that he did not believe in the reality of what was happening to him....this was a real desert in which he was now left alone like that wormwood, awaiting an inevitable, speedy, and meaningless death.[1]

In an attempt to free himself from the anaesthetizing terror he, like the prosperous, ailing woman, turns to religion; the desperate effort is in vain, however, for he seeks not spiritual but physical hope.

> 'Queen of Heaven! Holy Father Nicholas, teacher of temperance!' he thought, recalling the service of the day before and the holy icon with its black face and gilt grame, and the tapers which he sold to be set before that icon and which were almost immediately brought back to him scarcely burnt at all.... He began to pray to that same Nicholas the Wonder-Worker to save him, promising him a thanksgiving service and some candles. But he clearly and indubitably realized that the icon, its frame, the candles, the priest, and the thanksgiving service, though very important and necessary in church, could do nothing for him

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[1]Tolstoy, Master and Man, op. cit., p. 572.

> here, and that there was and could be no connection between those candles and services and his present disastrous plight.[1]

Nikita in Master and Man is a three-dimensional, more artistically conceived Uncle Fyodor. He embodies one of Tolstoy's most strongly held beliefs: that natural man with his simplicity and full acceptance of the life beyond is far superior to civilized, conscious, sophisticated man with his artificially multiplied needs. One can almost envision Tolstoy's nod of approval when the chilled servant, frightened by the thought of death, mutters: "Lord, Heavenly Father" and "is comforted by the consciousness that he was not alone but that there was One who heard him and would not abandon him."[2] As the more intelligent master struggles to find and painfully achieves spiritual enlightenment, his man lies already prepared for death having reasoned in the following way:

> He felt himself dependent on the Chief Master, who had sent him into this life, and he knew that when dying he would still be in that Master's power and would not be ill-used by Him. 'It seems a pity to give up what one is used to and accustomed to. But there's nothing to be done; I shall get used to the new things![3]

Hadji Murad is a Caucasian tale of the mountaineer chieftain, Hadji, who deserts his leader Shamil and goes over to the Russians out of vengeance and personal ambition. An irresistible desire to see his son, who is held as a hostage by Shamil, leads him to escape into the mountains where he is run down and killed.

Externally, the story seems far different from both Master and Man

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[1]Tolstoy, Master and Man, op. cit., pp. 572-573.
[2]Ibid., pp. 569-570.
[3]Ibid., p. 568.

and Three Deaths. In its philosophy, however, Hadji Murad bears a strong resemblance to the latter tale. At the end of the story, for example, Hadji lies dead, mutilated by his adversaries. But as "the black blood flowed from his head, soaking the grass" "nightingales, that had hushed their songs while the firing lasted, now started their trills once more: first one quite close, then others in the distance."[1] Here, again, the insouciance of Nature in the face of death is intensified by associating it with her pulsating, unquenchable life.

Hadji Murad is, as well, the kind of natural man whom Tolstoy lovingly depicted in Master and Man and Three Deaths. The description of his dying, huddled with his followers in a thicket, is prepared for by the portrayal of the death of Gonzalo's horse

> that had strayed from the others and was hit in the head by a bullet. It did not fall, but breaking its hobbles and rushing among the bushes it ran to the other horses, pressing close to them and watering the young grass with its blood.[2]

Both the Caucasian leader and the horse have been nurtured by Nature--each has been born in her presence, each has lived in her midst, each now returns to her arms to die. Both suffer, yet die with simplicity, courage, and a lack of spiritual enslavement to life.

In Hadji Murad, the nightingales sing no dirge for the massacred men who lie before them; in Three Deaths, the space left by the hewn tree is soon covered by the extended arms of the neighboring trees. Both passages bear witness to an artistic device and a philosophic principle of Tolstoy's--that death is always to be found juxtaposed with life.

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[1]Tolstoy, Hadji Murad, in The Short Novels of Tolstoy, op. cit., p. 716.
[2]Ibid., p. 713.

In Master and Man, for example, death and life lie on top of one another; it is death which maintains the warmth of life in the numbed body of Nikita. In War and Peace, as well, death comes to one person at the same time that life is engendered in another. Prince Andrei enters the room in which his wife, Lise, has given birth to a child.

> She was lying dead, in the same position he had seen her in five minutes before and, despite the fixed eyes and the pallor of the cheeks, the same expression was on her charming childlike face with its upper lip covered with tiny, black hair. 'I love you all, and have done no harm to anyone; and what have you done to me?' said her charming, pathetic, dead face. In a corner of the room, something red and tiny gave a grunt and squealed in Mary Borgdanovna's trembling white hands.[1]

Death is again joined with life in Chapter Twenty, Part Five of Anna Karenina (the only one of 239 chapters to be given a title--"Death"). Levin has just watched the women lay out the corpse of his brother, Nikolai. But

> Scarcely had the one mystery of death enacted itself before his eyes, when another mystery, equally unfathomable, had arisen, calling him to love and to life. The doctor confirmed his surmise about Kitty. Her indisposition was due to pregnancy.[2]

Tolstoy linked life and death together, not only because he recognized the fact that life presses forward even in the presence of man's destruction, but also because, in his mind, life was a kind of death-process. Its flow continued, one moment annihilating the next, from the instant of birth until the time of man's inevitable dissolution. As Tolstoy was to write to the poet Fet in 1860:

> There is nothing worse than death, and when

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[1]Tolstoy, War and Peace, p. 353.

[2]Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, pp. 532-533.

> you properly think that with it everything comes to an end, then there is nothing worse than life either.[1]

Since the author felt that the beauties and riches of life would eventually come to naught, he preached a policy of indifference to and severance from the physical world.

> There is something especially gratifying and grand in indifference to life: and I enjoy the feeling. How fortified against all things I see so long as I can feel firmly persuaded that I have nothing to look for save death.[2]

In his novels and stories, Tolstoy depicts not only the fate of those who cling to the physical and material pleasures of life, but also the spiritual release which accrues to those who renounce life and fully embrace death.

In Anna Karenina, Anna seeks death to avenge her mistreatment at the hands of Vronsky, to punish the people who have assailed her for an illicit romance, and to rid herself of her inner torment. But at the moment before she hurls herself in the path of an oncoming train, "the darkness that had enveloped everything for her lifted and for an instant life glowed before her with all her past joys."[3] Thus, even weighted down by the miseries of life and in quest of the merciful oblivion of death, she is unable to see the uselessness of life or to divorce herself from it. Too late does she realize that the very earthly love from which she is fleeing binds her to life and prevents her from meeting her final encounter with courage and the hope of a union with God.

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[1]Quoted in Lavrin, op. cit., p. 82.

[2]Quoted in Hugh I'Anson Fausset, Tolstoy, p. 111.

[3]Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, p. 801.

> She dropped on her hands under the truck, and with a light movement, as though she would rise again at once, sank on her knees. At that same instant, she became horror-struck at what she was doing. 'Where am I? What am I doing? Why?'... 'God forgive me everything!' she murmured, feeling the impossibility of struggling ....And the candle by which she had been reading the book filled with trouble and deceit, sorrow and evil, flared up with a brighter light, illuminating for her everything that before had been enshrouded in darkness, flickered, grew dim, and went out for ever.[1]

In contrast to Anna Karenina is Platon Karataev, the most memorable peasant to be portrayed in War and Peace. This little rotund soldier with his folk-songs and sayings, his evening prayer "Lay me down like a stone, O God, and rouse me up like a loaf," and his touching oddities is made the embodiment of ideal simplicity. He is not only free of the desire to dominate and possess, but also reveals no earthly attachment whatever. As Tolstoy says:

> Karataev had no attachments, friendships, or love, as Pierre understood them, but loved and lived affectionately with everything life brought him into contact with, particularly man--not with any particular man, but those with whom he happened to be. He loved his dog, loved his comrades, and the French, and loved Pierre who was his neighbor. But Pierre felt that in spite of Karataev's affectionate tenderness to him...he would not have been grieved for a moment at parting from him....His life, as he regarded it, had no meaning as a separate thing. It had meaning only as part of a whole of which he was always conscious.[2]

And because Karataev is imbued with "de-egofied" love, he is able to die without fear or regret.

In his philosophical treatises, Tolstoy insisted upon the need for

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[1]Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, p. 802.

[2]Tolstoy, War and Peace, pp. 1078-1079.

the Karataev kind of non-specific, all-embracing love. In his novels, however, Tolstoy the artist seems at odds with Tolstoy the moralist. Olenin in The Cossacks, for example, at first wants to sacrifice his own personal life for the benefit of others.

> 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 that are illegitimate, but not the need for happiness. But what desires can always be satisfied despite external circumstances? What are they? Love, self-sacrifice?[1]

Soon, however, he himself admits that

> Self-renunciation is all nonsense and absurdity! That is pride, a refuge from well-merited unhappiness, and salvation from the envy of others' happiness: "Live for others and do good" --Why? when in my soul there is only love for myself and the desire to love her and to live her life with her? I now desire happiness. I do not now love those others. Formerly I should have told myself that this is wrong. I should have tormented myself with the question: What will become of Lukashka, of her, and of me? Now I don't care. I do not live my own life, there is something stronger than me which directs me. I suffer; but formerly I was dead and only now do I live.[2]

Prince Andrei, as well, wishes to lose himself in the same amorphous mass of love after he has been wounded at the battle of Borodino.

> During the hours of solitude, suffering and partial delirium he spent after he was wounded, the more deeply he penetrated into the new principle of eternal love revealed

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[1]Tolstoy, The Cossacks, in The Short Novels of Tolstoy, op. cit., p. 252.
[2]Ibid., pp. 306-307.

> to him, the more he unconsciously detached himself from earthly life. To love everything and everybody and always to sacrifice oneself for love meant not to love anyone, not to live this earthly life. And the more completely he destroyed that dreadful barrier which--in the absence of such love--stands between life and death.[1]

But when Natasha Rostov comes to tend him, she renews his desire for love and life.

> Love for a particular woman again crept unobserved into his heart and again bound him to life, and joyful and agitating thoughts came again to mind.[2]

On June 30, 1898, Tolstoy wrote in his diary:

> To many it seems that nothing will remain if you exclude personality from life and a love for it. It seems to them that without personality there is no life. But this only appears so to the people who have not experienced self-renunciation. Throw off personality from life, renounce it, and then there will remain that which makes the essence of life--love.[3]

But having created the virtuous and selfless Sonya in War and Peace, Tolstoy stands by approvingly when Natasha says to her contented husband, Pierre:

> 'To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away.' She [Sonya] is one that hath not; why I don't know. Perhaps she lacks egotism, I don't know, but from her is taken away, and everything has been taken away....She is a sterile flower--you know, like strawberry blossoms. Sometimes I am sorry for her, and sometimes I think she doesn't feel it as you or I would.[4]

Thus, on the one hand the author maintains that one devoid of indi-

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[1]Tolstoy, War and Peace, p. 1087.

[2]Tolstoy, Ibid., p. 1088.

[3]Quoted in Lavrin, op. cit., p. 77.

[4]Tolstoy, loc. cit., p. 1275.

viduality is bound to be blessed by possessing the "essence of life," whereas on the other hand, he sits back smugly while his "essence" is labelled "sterility."

In the last diaries of Tolstoy, the elementary explanation of death as a deep sleep which lasts not for a night but for an eternity is both broadened and twisted to conform to the author's philosophy. On February 13, 1910, Tolstoy wrote: "As I fall asleep, I lose consciousness of my waking self; as I die, I lose consciousness of the self which has lived this life." On February 27, 1910, he reiterated these thoughts: "To fall asleep actually means to die, it means to lose consciousness of one's self. On March 1, 1910, the words "It is time to go to sleep, i.e. to die" appear. And on May 20, 1910, the most significant interpretation of the relationship between death and sleep is expounded upon: "What we call reality is a dream which continues all our lives and from which we awaken only slightly in old age...and we awaken completely at death."[1]

It is not surprising to find, therefore, that a favorite device of Tolstoy's is to take a character who is unable to free himself from the chains of reality, plunge him into the dream world, and have him emerge not only unencumbered by the yoke of mortality, but ready for the complete wakefulness of death. Prince Andrei, for example, has just given up the idea of diving into the pool of eternal love, preferring instead to bask in the much more accessible radiance of Natasha. Tolstoy the moralist chastises Tolstoy the artist and man for indulging in such sentiment, convinces him that Prince Andrei must be taught a semi-conscious lesson, and finally lulls the pain-racked hero into sleep.

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[1]Tolstoy, Last Diaries, edited by Leon Stilman.

> He dreamed that he was lying in the room he really was in, but that he was quite well and unwounded. Many various, indifferent and insignificant people appeared before him. He talked to them and discussed something trivial. They were preparing to go away somewhere. Prince Andrei dimly realized that all this was trivial and that he had more important cares, but he continued to speak surprising them by empty witticisms. Gradually, unnoticed, all these persons began to disappear and a single question, that of a closed door superceded all else. He rose and went to the door to bolt and lock it. He went, and tried to hurry, but his legs refused to move and he knew that he would not be in time to lock the door though he painfully strained all his powers. He was seized by an agonizing fear. And that fear was the fear of death. It stood behind the door. But just when he was clumsily creeping toward the door, that dreadful something on the other side was already pressing against it and forcing its way in. Something not human--death--was breaking in through that door and had to be locked out. He seized the door, making a final effort to hold it back--to lock it was no longer possible--but his efforts were weak and clumsy and the door, pushed from behind by that terror, opened and closed again. Once again, it pushed from outside. His last superhuman efforts were vain and both halves noiselessly opened. It entered and it was death, and Prince Andrei died. But the instant he died, Prince Andrei remembered that he was asleep, and at the very instant he died, having made an effort, he awoke. 'Yes, it was death! I died--and woke up. Yes, death is an awakening!'[1]

In Master and Man, Tolstoy again employs the dream to depict man's groping for the significance of life and death. Unlike Prince Andrei, however, Vasili Andreevich is not an aesthete or an intellectual, but an insensitive, coarse peasant more concerned with amassing a fortune than

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[1]Tolstoy, War and Peace, p. 1090.

with achieving spiritual salvation. It is interesting, therefore, to note the way in which the artist in Tolstoy adapts his style to fit the needs of his moral chaperone.

> Vasili Andreevich saw himself lying in his bed at home. He was lying in his bed and could not get up. Yet it was necessary for him to get up because Ivan Matveich, the police officer, would soon call for him and he had to go with him--either to bargain for the forest or to put Mukhorty's breeching straight. He asked his wife: 'Nikolaevna, hasn't he come yet?' 'No, he hasn't' she replied. He heard someone drive up to the front steps. 'It must be him.' 'No, he's gone past.' 'Nikolaevna, Nikolaevna! Isn't he here yet?' 'No.' He was still lying on his bed and could not get up, but was always waiting. And this waiting was uncanny and yet joyful. Then, suddenly, his joy was completed. He whom he was expecting came; not Ivan Matveich the police officer, but someone else--yet it was he whom he had been waiting for. He came and called him, and it was he who had called him and told him to lie down on Nikita. And Vasili Andreevitch was glad that that one had come for him. 'I'm coming!' he cried joyfully, and that cry awakened him, but woke him not at all the same person he had been when he fell asleep. He tried to get up but could not, tried to move his arm but could not. He was surprised, but not at all disturbed by this. He understood that this was death, and was not at all disturbed by that either. And he remembered his money, his shop, his house, the buying and selling and Miranov's millions, and it was hard for him to understand why that man, called Vasili Brekhunov, had troubled himself with all those things with which he had been troubled. 'Well, it was because he did not know what the real thing was,' he thought...'He did not know, but now I know and know for sure. Now I know!'[1]

Tolstoy would have the reader believe that the dreams which Prince Andrei and Vasili Andreevich experience cause them to disavow both

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[1]Tolstoy, Master and Man, op. cit., pp. 576-577.

spiritually and rationally the joys and sorrows of life in order to stand unafraid on the brink of death. The former, for example, is portrayed as awakening from his dream no longer able to participate in the human activities which surround him. The grief of Natasha and his sister arouse no sympathy in him and he can only mutter to himself:

> They can't understand that all these feelings they prize so--all our feelings, all those ideas that seem so important to us, are unnecessary.[1]

But one feels that it is death, with its messengers pain and suffering, which assumes command of his body, conquers his will to live, and destroys the possibility of pity, sympathy, jealousy or fear. It is because of weakness, resulting from loss of blood and torment, that he surrenders his will to live, becomes indifferent to death, and enters it in a state of exhausted peace. The agonies which he experiences before death are much like those of Nikolai Levin in Anna Karenina:

> His sufferings, growing more and more severe, did their work, and prepared him for death. He could not lie comfortably in any position, could not for a moment forget himself. There was no part of his body, no limb, that did not ache and cause him agony, Even the memories, the impressions, the thoughts within this body aroused in him now the same aversion as the body itself. The sight of other people, their remarks, the reminiscences--it was all a torture to him...All his life was merged in the one feeling of suffering and desire to be rid of it. It was evident that that transformation was happening to him that would make him look upon death as the fulfilment of his desires, as happiness.[2]

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[1]Tolstoy, War and Peace, p. 1086.

[2]Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, pp. 530-531.

Like Vasili Andreevitch in Master and Man, Prince Andrei has become not reconciled to death, but numbed by it. And one feels strongly that man's spiritual doubts and joys are determined by physical fluctuations--that he will look to the sky to forget the wounded flesh which tortures him, or to the earth when he is physically able to manifest interest in life.

III PASSION VERSUS PIETY

In The Kreutzer Sonata, Pozdnyshev venemously declares: "You know, what is vilest about it is that in theory love is something ideal and exalted, but in practice it is something abominable, swinish, which it is horrid and shameful to mention or remember."[1] The hero of the short story "Oasis," also moans: "Of women I knew only that they were dangerous, and I was afraid of them." At the same time, Tolstoy was capable of creating works which are imbued with sensuality. In The Cossacks, for example, the following passage appears:

> He kept lifting his eyes...and looking at the powerful young woman who was moving about. Whether she stepped into the moist morning shadow thrown by the house, or went into the middle of the yard lit up by the joyous young light so that the whole of her stately figure in its bright coloured garment gleamed in the sunshine and cast a black shadow--always he feared to lose any one of her movements. It delighted him to see how freely and gracefully her figure bent; into what folds her only garment, a pink smock, draped itself on her bosom and down her shapely legs; how she drew herself up and her tight-drawn smock showed the outline of her breathing bosom; how the soles of her narrow feet in her worn red slippers stood on the ground without altering their shape; how her strong arms with the sleeves rolled up, exerting the muscles, used the spade almost as if in anger, and how her deep dark eyes sometimes glanced at him.[2]

That Tolstoy had lived sensually is proven by the confessions of his diary. In entry after entry he accuses himself of gluttony, sloth, vanity, mendacity and diffidence or describes such incidents as the following:

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[1] Tolstoy, The Kreutzer Sonata, in Tolstoy's Tales of Courage and Conflict, op. cit., p. 494.

[2] Tolstoy, The Cossacks, op. cit., p. 269.

> Yesterday could not forbear signalling to someone in a pink dress who looked comely from a distance. Opened the back door, and she entered. Could not even see her; all seemed foul and repellent, and I actually hated her for having caused me to break my rule.[1]

His confessions were conditioned by the ideal of self-perfection which he had set for himself but could never attain; the struggle between passion and piety led him to condemn every physical expression of life which did not serve some practical end. As Maxim Gorky said of Tolstoy in his Reminiscences: "The flesh rages and riots, and the spirit follows it helpless and miserable."[2] And again: "Woman, in my opinion, he regards with implacable hostility and he loves to punish her, unless she be a Kittie or Natasha Rostov....It is the hostility of the male who has not succeeded in getting all the pleasure he could, or it is the hostility of spirit against 'the degrading impulses of the flesh'."[3]

Tolstoy, then, was to be tortured throughout his life by sexual desire and the guilt which arose from the satisfaction of this physical need. The same ambivalence which characterizes Tolstoy's attitude toward sex--attraction yet repulsion--is also manifest in the author's conception of death. One may go a step further and maintain that both the horrifying and desirable aspects of death take on distinct sexual overtones.

In The Notes of a Madman, the narrator, on a business trip, finds himself one night in a small hotel room. Alone in this room which is clean, whitewashed and square ("how unbearable, I remember, it was, precisely, that the little room was square") with a bit of red curtain over the window, the traveller is suddenly overcome with anxiety; he is run-

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[1] Hugh I'Amson Fausset, Tolstoy, p. 73.

[2] Maxim Gorky, Reminiscences, p. 1.

[3] Ibid., p. 14.

ning away from something, but from what? Why this anguish which is "like the anguish before nausea, only spiritual"? What is he afraid of? Death, to Tolstoy, reveals itself at this point, in the horror of its inevitability, as the cause of this nauseating anxiety.

> I tried to shake off this horror. I found a brass candlestick with a candle, half burned down, which I lit. The red flame of the candle and its size, a little smaller than the candlestick, all this said the same thing. There is nothing in life; only death is and it must not be....It's dreadful. It seems that you fear death, but then you begin to remember, you think of life, and then it is this dying life that you fear. Somehow life and death merged into one....Once more ...I tried to fall asleep, but it's there, the same horror, red, white, square....It is tormenting, drily, angrily, tormenting; not a drop of kindness do I feel in myself, but only even, calm, anger directed against myself and against that which made me.[1]

The sensitive reader, with perhaps a primer of Freud's principles at his fingertips, cannot help but draw his own conclusions from Tolstoy's anecdote. To be sure, the red flame--the brief life of man--is soon engulfed by the tallow of death. But in this brief paragraph, one may find, as well a wealth of sexual symbols. Does not Tolstoy, for example, bemoan the fact that his fleshly desires (represented by the flickering flame) have eaten into his moral and spiritual life (represented by the tapering tallow), that his passion has contributed to his self-deprecation and inner torment?

And why does Tolstoy dwell on the horrifying aspects of the white square room with its red curtains? Like Levin in Anna Karenina, Tolstoy had given his bride, Sonya Behr, the diaries which he had kept over the years listing his past infatuations and affairs. The young woman cried

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[1]Quoted in Tolstoy, Last Diaries, in the introduction by Leon Stilman, p. 11.

bitterly over what she read and was later to write an autobiographical novel entitled Whose Fault[1] which involved Prince Prozorovsky who married at thirty-five, as Tolstoy did, a girl of eighteen. The prince of this work is a rough, sensual animal who, when he walks behind his fiancée in the garden, stares hungrily at her hips and mentally undresses her. After the wedding, the pair leave in a coach, and in the darkness the animal Prozorovsky commits the act for which Anna is unprepared and which seems disgusting to her. Indeed, Sonya was to note in her diary that: "The role of the physical side of love plays a great part with him. And that is awful. For me, on the contrary, it means nothing."[2]

His wife's attitude toward the physical side of his nature was perfectly clear to Tolstoy and he was continually to berate himself for having forced his animal-like ways on his chaste bride. In The Kreutzer Sonata, for example, Pozdnyshev, in talking about his honeymoon, says:

> It was awkward, shameful, vile, pitiable, and, above all, it was wearisome....It was something analogous to what I experienced when I was learning to smoke, when I was sick at my stomach and salivated, and I swallowed it down and pretended that it was very pleasant. Just as from that, the delights of marriage, if there are any, will be subsequent; the husband must educate his wife in this vice, in order to procure any pleasure from it....It is unnatural....It is vile and shameful and painful....And the pure maiden, I am convinced, will always hate it.[3]

Freud states:

> The female genitalia, are symbolically represented by all such objects as share with them the property of enclosing a space or are capable of acting as receptacles....Many

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[1]Tikhon Polner, Tolstoy and His Wife, p. 166.

[2]Simmons, op. cit., p. 251.

[3]Tolstoy, The Kreutzer Sonata, op. cit., p. 490.

> symbols rather refer to the uterus than to the other genital organs; thus cupboards, stoves, and above all, rooms.[1]

The square room, then, in the passage from The Notes of a Madman, may well stand for the sexual organs of Tolstoy's wife, Sonya. But the author emphatically states: "How unbearable, I remember, it was, precisely, that the little room was square." Tolstoy represses the thought of the sexual act, but is, at the same time, tormented by it; he is terrified by the idea that the womb is square rather than the rounded enclosure which he knows it to be. He continually employs the adjective "white," symbolizing the gleaming purity of Sonya which he felt he had violated through passion, or the red of the flame and the curtains.

It is important to note that the author uses the expression "life and death merged into one" and the idea of the rather sexual union between being and non-being elicits the dry, angry torment in Tolstoy's soul. The hatred of death, therefore, is inextricably mingled with the fear of sexual desire--both are inevitable, to Tolstoy; both suggest the loneliness of the reasoning and helpless ego.

In The Death of Ivan Ilyich, as well, Tolstoy's unmistakable aversion yet attraction to sex is bound up with his depiction of the act of dying. At one point:

> It seemed to him that he and his pain were being thrust somewhere into a narrow, deep black sack, and they kept pushing him further and further in, and still could not thrust him to the bottom. And this operation was awful to him, and was accompanied with agony. And he was afraid, and yet wanted to fall into it, and struggled and yet tried to get into it. And all of a sudden he slipped and fell and woke up.[2]

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[1]Sigmund Freud, A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, p. 163.

[2]Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich, in Great Russian Stories, edited by Isai Kamen, p. 206.

Here, again, one sees the author's utilization of the dream device to probe more deeply into the mind of his doomed hero. But whereas in the dream sequences in Master and Man and War and Peace the author seemed to have full command of his subject and an ever-present consciousness of the moral he wished to promulgate, in this scene his sexual struggle assumes mastery of his intellect. The black sack unquestionably represents the female organs and he wishes to lose himself in the abyss of sensation which the sexual act engenders; at the same time, his frantic desire to abstain from lustful pleasures creates within him a horror of the very deed he contemplates. Just as Tolstoy the moralist condemned Tolstoy the man for his inordinate fear of death, so the moralist condemned the man for his desire to indulge in physical pleasures. Just as the man retained his longing for the solace of death, so the man yearned to be swept up in the tide of sexual emotion.

Again and again within the story, Tolstoy's hidden anguish floats to the surface:

> His marriage...as gratuitous as the disillusion of it and the smell of his wife's breath and the sensuality and the hypocrisy![1]
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> - - - - - - - - - -
>
> Ivan Ilyich looks at her, scans her all over, and sets down against her her whiteness and plumpness and the cleanness of her hands and neck, and the glossiness of her hair, and the gleam full of life in her eye. With all the force of his soul he hates her. And when she touches him it makes him suffer from the thrill of hatred he feels for her.[2]

And, as if to fight this anguish and yet resign himself to it, the author continually returns to the image of the "black sack."

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[1]Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich, op. cit., p. 207.
[2]Ibid., p. 202.

> All those three days, during which time did not exist for him, he was struggling in that black sack into which he was being thrust by an unseen resistless force. He struggled as the man condemned to death struggles in the hands of the executioner, knowing that he cannot save himself. And every moment he felt that in spite of all his efforts to struggle against it, he was getting nearer and nearer to what terrified him. He felt that his agony was due both to his being thrust into this black hole and still more to his not being able to get right into it.[1]

It is interesting to note the way in which Tolstoy has Ivan Ilyich come to the full realization of the meaning of life and death:

> At that very moment Ivan Ilyich had rolled into the hole and had caught sight of the light, and it revealed to him that his life had not been what it ought to have been but that that could still be set right.[2]

In his book Youth, Tolstoy classified love into three categories: beautiful love, self-sacrificing love, active love; he then remarked:

> I do not speak of the love of a young man for a young girl, and hers for him. I fear these tendernesses, and have been so unfortunate in life as never to have seen a single spark of truth in this species of love, but only a lie, in which sentiment, connubial relations, money, a desire to bind and to unbind one's hands, have to such an extent confused the feeling itself, that it has been impossible to disentangle it. I am speaking of the love for man which, according to the greater or lesser power of the soul, concentrates itself upon one, upon several, or pours itself upon many: of the love of mother, father, brother, children, for a comrade, friends, fellow countrymen, in short of love for humanity.[3]

In this passage, Tolstoy's love for humanity sounds not like a convenient escape from his personal fear of death, but like a substitute for

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[1]Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich, op. cit., p. 213.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Tolstoy, Youth, Collected Works (v. 1), pp. 351-352.

his unsatisfied sexual love. Indeed, in The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Master and Man, one may find demonstrations of brotherly love, but the demonstrations are of a distinctly sexual rather than a spiritual nature.

In the former tale, for example, it is the simple strength and tenderness of the peasant Gerasim which brings solace to the dying Ivan Ilyich. Again and again, Ivan longs to have his legs lifted on Gerasim's shoulders for "he fancied he felt better while Gerasim had hold of his legs." And it is significant to note that when Ivan first dreams that he is being plunged into the black sack, and views his emersion into the comforting dark with joy and dread, he awakens to find "his wasted legs clad in stockings, raised on Gerasim's shoulders, the same candle burning in the alcove, the same interminable pain."[1]

In Master and Man, as well, the transport of self-surrender which Vasili Andreevich experiences as he revels in the love for the man who lies beneath him, has all the intensity of a sexual climax.

> He remembered that Nikita was lying under him and that he had got warm and was alive, and it seemed to him that he was Nikita and Nikita was he, and that his life was not in himself but in Nikita....And again he heard the voice of the one who had called him before. 'I'm coming! Coming!' he responded gladly, and his whole being was filled with joyful emotion. He felt himself free and that nothing could hold him back any longer.[2]

It was, of course, part of Tolstoy's philosophy that death was fearful only when the doomed creature possessed neither faith, love for his fellow man nor total renunciation of the ties which held him to life. To stress the mysterious beauty which death had when viewed as the first

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[1]Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich, op. cit., p. 206.

[2]Tolstoy, Master and Man, op. cit., p. 577.

step toward a complete union with God, therefore, Tolstoy likened the moment before total oblivion to sexual orgasm.

Ivan Ilyich, for example, felt that "suddenly everything was dropping away all at once on both sides and on ten sides and on all sides."[1] And when Prince Andrei in War and Peace dies, "all at once it grew light in his soul and the veil that had till then concealed the unknown was lifted from his spiritual vision. He felt as if powers till then confined within him had been liberated, and that strange lightness did not again leave him."[2] Anna Karenina, too, found that the sorrow, evil and deceit of her life became illuminated by a penetrating light.

As one reads of the sudden knowledge, power and serenity which engulf these characters at their deaths, he cannot help but remember Dostoyevsky's description of the sensations which immediately precede Prince Myshkin's epileptic seizures in The Idiot:

> ...suddenly amidst the sadness, spiritual darkness and depression, his brain seemed to catch fire at brief moments, and with an extraordinary momentum his vital forces were strained to his utmost all at once. His sensation of being alive and his awareness increased tenfold at those moments which flashed by like lightening. His mind and heart were flooded by a dazzling light. All his agitation, all his doubts and worries, seemed composed in a twinkling, culminating in a great calm, full of serene and harmonious joy and hope, full of understanding of the final cause....[3]

At the age of seventy-two, Tolstoy wrote in his diary:

> Dull, miserable state the whole day. Towards

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[1]Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich, op. cit., p. 214.

[2]Tolstoy, War and Peace, p. 1090.

[3]Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Idiot, p. 258.

> the evening this mood passed into tenderness--a desire for fondness, for love; I longed as children do to press up to a loving, pitying human being, to weep with emotion and to be comforted. But whom could I come close to like this? I think of all the people I loved, and not one of them can offer me the sympathy I need. If I only could become little again and snuggle up to my mother as I imagine her to myself! Yes, yes, mother whom I called to when I could not speak; she--my highest image of pure love; not cold, divine love, but earthly, warm, motherly. It is that for which my battered, weary soul is longing.[1]

Thus, at the end of his life, Tolstoy was to provide the explanation for the torment which had plagued his youth and which was to color every scene involving death. It was his need for an all-embracing, protective mother who made no distinction between one child and another that led him to cry out for Christian love, to plead for the submergence of the individual in the oneness of humanity. It was the image of his Madonna-like mother which made all physical indulgences seem sordid and repulsive. It was the conflict which resulted from his need to satisfy his bodily urges and his desire to remain true to that "image of pure love" that led Tolstoy to long for the utter peace of the womb. And it was not being able to gain that dark haven, that "black sack," which made Tolstoy look hungrily toward death with its merciful oblivion.

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[1]Quoted in Lavrin, op. cit., pp. 118-119.

IV TOLSTOY AND HIS ART

In What is Art?, Tolstoy maintained that the role of the artist was to instill in his audience the "consciousness that our well-being, both material and spiritual, individual and collective, temporal and eternal, lies in the growth of the brotherhood of man."[1] Hence, Tolstoy was to bring art, as he did culture in general, to the bar of his chosen standard, and question the way in which it could be employed to promote brotherhood and self-perfection, and to teach about God, freedom and immortality.

If, he believed, the mission of true religion was to find the meaning of life, if its gospel was love and unity, then art whose activity was to direct our affections had first to depict and then brand the evils of life, and next to point the way to the goal of the rapprochment of the classes. It should speak a comprehensible language and appeal to those feelings which unify men and lead to moral improvement. Its subject matter should be as broad as life itself; its method should be clear and simple description. It was to be classified as "bad" or "good" depending upon how sincerely and truthfully the artist conveyed his love of his subject and how well he communicated his knowledge of humanity. Its chief purpose was to express the truth of man's soul, to express those mysteries for which the channel of speech was inadequate.

Realism, too, Tolstoy decried, feeling that it was primarily concerned with portraying life as it exists or as it could be, not as it

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[1]Tolstoy, What is Art?, Collected Works (v. 11), p. 292.

should be. Again, realism left the practical conclusion to the percipient's own judgment. Tolstoy, however, felt that the conclusion should be the aim and objective of the entire work, and should be clearly discernible throughout.

Eight years after Tolstoy began his protracted search for a religion which would enable him to live without fear of death, he wrote The Death of Ivan Ilyich in order to communicate his new-found faith and serenity. A close study of this work, published in 1886, will reveal the extent to which Tolstoy, himself, lived up to the artistic ideal which he established eleven years later in What is Art?

Ivan Ilyich is not a thinking, seeking man, but an ordinary vulgar representative of the educated classes. He is the typical official who worships correctness, makes a conventional marriage and derives his pleasures, apart from the satisfaction of his appetites, from petty professional pride and petty social vanity. He injures himself while arranging the furniture in the new house which signalizes his ascent in the scale of bourgeois respectability, and the fatal disease which is to destroy him takes root.

As the disease secretly advances within him, he becomes aware that he is a solitary, querulous individual surrounded by people absorbed in their own trivial concerns. He is:

> left alone with the consciousness that his life is poisoned for him and poisons the life of others, and that this poison is not losing its force, but is continually penetrating more and more deeply into his whole existence...and he had to live thus on the edge of the precipice alone, without one man who could understand and feel for him.[1]

[1]Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich, op. cit., p. 188.

Like the noblewoman in Three Deaths, he "cried at his own helplessness, at his awful loneliness, at the cruelty of people, at the cruelty of God, at the absence of God." He realizes that death has him in its grip, and in a sense, has always cast its foul shadow over his existence.

> 'Death, yes Death, and they all of them don't understand, and don't want to understand, and feel no pity!....And the worst of it was that IT drew him to itself not for him to do anything in particular, but simply for him to look at IT straight in the face, to look at IT, and, doing nothing, suffer unspeakably.[1]

Ivan knows the destructive force from which he cannot escape and his awareness intensifies his impotence. Death has, as yet, no meaning for him, as life, with all of its decorum, had not. He gropes for a meaning, an explanation which will relieve him from the loneliness "than which none more complete could be found anywhere--not at the bottom of the sea, not deep down in the earth." He looks at his past life and finds it all, despite the propriety, unpleasant, worthless, deadly, "a horrible vast deception that concealed both life and death." He cannot, however, accept the fact of death in his past life, and so he cannot accept it in the little life which remains to him. Like Nikolai Levin in Anna Karenina and the lady in Three Deaths, he takes the sacrament and it merely renews his hope of physical recovery. But the peasant Gerasim is always present, a man who does not lie to Ivan or to himself by saying that death is not present, but rather understands "what it meant, and saw no necessity to disguise it, and simply felt sorry for his sick, wasting master."

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[1]Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich, op. cit., p. 194.

Finally, after three days of perpetual mental and physical anguish, Ivan realizes that what had hindered him from accepting death was "the claim that his life had been good. That justification of his life held him fast and would not let him get forward, and it caused him more agony than all."[1] Two hours before death, Ivan renounces his claim to life and finds peace.

> He looked for the old accustomed terror of death, and did not find it. Where is it? What death? There was no terror, because death was not either. Death is over...it's no more."[2]

Thus, Tolstoy has indeed centered his tale around one central dogma: that death has the power to obliterate all meaning and purpose in life unless one recognizes the essential worthlessness of his existence and looks to death not as an executioner but as a consolatrice.

Too often in dealing with spiritual experiences, Tolstoy will lose his perception, and project into the character his own self-consciousness with its needs and prejudices until the hero becomes merely a channel for ideas. In The Death of Ivan Ilyich, however, the moral kernel is blended with the inner life of the chief character; it merits, as does Hadji Murad, the following praise:

> Tolstoy's creative force springs from a pact made between artist and moralist, that each should give the other the right to set down 'the truth' exactly as he saw it; accordingly, the non-moral element in nature is done no less justice than is the 'moral law.' The two elements strike a just balance in Tolstoy's art, whereas, in works of the ordinary 'moral school,' the

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[1]Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich, op. cit., p. 213.
[2]Ibid., p. 214.

> bias of their pictures is practically a suppressio veri, which soon destroys its own purpose and appeal.[1]

The Death of Ivan Ilyich is, as well, written with a dynamic simplicity which is the reverse of rhetoric yet which has a rhetorical inflection. And in order to depict the so-called "evils of life," Tolstoy injects a note of irony into the elementary, yet vivid, turns of phrases. One of Ivan's partners at whist, for example, finds it incumbent upon him to attend his late friend's funeral.

> Pyotr Ivanovich went in, as people always do on such occasions, in uncertainty as to what he would have to do there. One thing he felt sure of--that crossing oneself never comes amiss on such occasions. As to whether it was necessary to bow down while doing so, he did not feel quite sure, and so chose a middle course. On entering the room he began crossing himself, and made a slight sort of bow. So far as the movements of his hands and head permitted him, he glanced while doing so around the room....A deacon in a frock coat, resolute and hearty, was reading something aloud with an expression that precluded all possibility of contradiction.[2]

In the preceding paragraph, one may find that Tolstoy's moralizing propensity is balanced by his penchant for scientific observation. He says, for example: "as people always do on such occasions." One immediately envisions the author as being a kind of bearded entomologist holding at arm's length a rather commonplace six-legged mite. In Sevastopol, 1854, as well, Tolstoy discusses the distinguishing characteristics of a rare discovery, using all the while an imaginary pointer:

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[1]"Review of Hadji Murad" Current Literature, v. 52 (April, 1912), 478-479.

[2]Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich, op. cit., pp. 161-162.

> During the first moments, there is visible on his mudstained face only fear and a certain simulated, premature expression of suffering, peculiar to men in that condition; but, at the moment when the stretcher is brought to him and he places himself upon it on his sound side, you observe that this expression is replaced by an expression of a sort of exaltation and lofty, inexpressible thought...[1]

With deft strokes, Tolstoy utilizes the cold blade of analysis to dissect and often, to condemn. Seldom does the blade reach the level of the unconscious as it does in the works of Dostoyevsky; rather, he concerns himself with placing the character in the known world and then dwelling on his gestures, manner of speech, rationalizations, and physical peculiarities. His practice, in short, is to pile up layer after layer of physical and psychological detail so that the character's reactions to crises which occur in his life will be both believable and predictable.

It would be well to examine certain sections of The Death of Ivan Ilyich so that one may see how Tolstoy paints an extended picture of the triviality and decorum in the life of a man, one which Ilyich recognizes on his deathbed as his own, and subsequently renounces.

> At school Ivan Ilyich had committed actions which had struck him beforehand as great vileness, and gave him a feeling of loathing for himself at the very time he was committing them. But later on, perceiving that such actions were committed also by men of good position, and were not regarded by them as base, he was able, not to regard them as good, but to forget about them completely, and was never mortified by recollections of them.[2]

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[1]Tolstoy, Sevastopol 1854, in Tolstoy's Tales of Courage and Conflict, op. cit., p. 61.

[2]Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich, op. cit., p. 168.

> To say that Ivan Ilyich got married because he fell in love with his wife and found her in sympathy with his view of life, would be as untrue as to say that he got married because the people of the world approved of the match. Ivan Ilyich was influenced by both considerations; he was doing what was agreeable to himself in securing such a wife, and at the same time doing what persons of higher standing looked upon as the correct thing.[1]
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> When he had half finished arranging the house, his arrangement surpassed his own expectations. He saw the comme-il-faut character, elegant and free from vulgarity ....In reality, it was all just what is commonly seen in the houses of people who are not exactly wealthy people, and so succeed only in being like one another--hangings, dark wood, flowers, rugs and bronzes, everything dark and highly polished, everything that all people of a certain class have so as to be like all people of a certain class. And in his case, it was all so like that it made no impression at all; but it all seemed to him somehow special.[2]

One of the most frequently used devices of Tolstoy is that of parallelism or the presentation of two different phases of a life separated by a sudden shock or by some new truth in the light of which all previous doings lost their importance and value to the hero. In Master and Man, it is the snowstorm which makes Vasili Andreevich sense the uselessness of having lived solely for material gain. In War and Peace, it is the sight of the warfare at Borodino which promotes a feeling in Prince Andrei that life was like

> magic-lantern pictures at which he had long been gazing by artificial light through a glass. 'Yes, yes! There they are, those false images that agitated, enraptured and tormented me,' said he to himself, passing in review the principal pictures of the

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[1]Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich, op. cit., p. 171.

[2]Ibid., pp. 177-178

> magic lantern of life and regarding now in the cold, white daylight of his clear perception of death. 'There they are, those rudely painted figures that once seemed splendid and mysterious. Glory, the good of society, love of a woman, the Fatherland itself...[1]

But in The Death of Ivan Ilyich, it is a physical phenomenon, the onslaught of death, which brings about the character's enlightenment. In delineating the plane of finite sensation, Tolstoy shows himself to be the realist par excellence, even though he was mercilessly to attack realism in What is Art?. Ivan's bodily sufferings are not realistically described; they are realized with imagination as well as pathological exactitude:

> The pain in his side was always dragging at him, seeming to grow more acute and ever more incessant; it seemed to him that the taste in his mouth was queerer, and there was a loathsome smell even from his breath, and his appetite and strength kept dwindling.[2]

One must remember, however, that in spite of Tolstoy's assertions to the contrary, it was not so much the metaphysical as the physical and biological fear of death which filled him with terror. In My Confession, this dread is clearly revealed by Tolstoy's having likened himself to the hero of an Indian tale which he narrates:

> Sakya-Muni, a young, happy prince, from whom have been concealed diseases, old age, and death, drives out for pleasure, when he sees a terrible, toothless, slavering old man. The prince, from old age has heretofore been concealed, is surprised, and he asks the charioteer what that is, and why that man has come to such a wretched, loathsome state? And when he learns that that is the common fate of all men, that he, the youth-

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[1]Tolstoy, War and Peace, p. 858.

[2]Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich, op. cit., p. 186.

> ful prince, has inevitably the same in store, he cannot proceed in his pleasure drive, but gives order to be driven home, in order to consider that. Evidently he finds some consolation, for again he drives our cheerful and happy. But this time he meets a sick man. He sees an emaciated, livid, shivering man, with blurred eyes. The prince, from whom diseases have been concealed, stops and asks what that is. And when he learns that that is sickness, to which all men are subject, and that he himself, a healthy and happy prince, may be as sick as that on the morrow, he again has no courage to amuse himself, orders himself driven home, and again looks for consolation, which he evidently finds for he drives out a third time; but this third time he sees again a new spectacle,--he sees that something is carried by. "What is that?" --A dead man. "What does a dead man mean?" asks the prince. He is told that to become dead means to become what that man is. The prince goes up to the corpse, and takes off the shroud and looks at him. "What will be done with him?" asks the prince. He is told that he will be buried in the ground. "Why?"-- Because he will certainly never be alive again, and there will be only stench and worms. "And is this the fate of all men? And will the same happen to me? Shall I be buried, and will a stench rise from me, and will worms eat me?"--Yes. "Back! I do not wish to go out for pleasure, and will never be driven out again." And Sakya-Muni could not find any consolation in life, and he decided that life was the greatest evil, and used all the forces of his soul to free himself from it and to free others, and to do this in such a way that even after death it might not return in some manner,-- to annihilate life with its root.[1]

Tolstoy was not to be sheltered from the sight of age, sickness and death for as long a time as Sakya-Muni. At the age of two, the author witnessed his dead mother and this experience was to give rise

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[1]Tolstoy, My Confession, op. cit., pp. 38-39.

not only to his sexual conflict but also to his extreme terror of death. Tolstoy tells of the traumatic occurence in Childhood:

> I could not believe that it was her face. I began to look more closely at it, and by degrees recognized the familiar features which were so dear to me. I shuddered from terror, when I convinced myself that it was she. But why were her closed eyes so sunken? Why this terrible pallor, and the black spot under the transparent skin on one of her cheeks? Why was the expression of her whole face so severe and cold? Why were her lips so pale, and their position so beautiful, so majestic, and expressing such an unearthly calm that a cold chill passed over my back and hair, as I looked at her?....Only then I understood what the strong and heavy odour came from, which filled the room, mingling with the odour of incense; and the thought that the face which only a few days before was beaming with beauty and gentleness, the face of her I loved more than anything else in the world, opened the bitter truth to me, and filled my soul with despair.[1]

The similarity between the corpse of Ivan Ilyich and that of his mother is striking:

> The dead man lay, as all dead men lie, in a particularly heavy dead way, his stiffened limbs sunk in the cushions of the coffin, and his head bent for ever on the pillow, and thrust up, as dead men always do, his yellow waxen forehead with bald spots on the sunken temple, and his nose that stood out sharply and, as it were, squeezed on the upper lip. He was much changed, even thinner since Pyotr Ivanovich had seen him, but his face--as always with the dead--was more handsome and above all, more impressive than it had been when he was alive. On the face was an expression what had to be done having been done, and rightly done. Besides this, there

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[1]Tolstoy, Childhood, Collected Works (v. 1), pp. 121-122, p. 126.

> was too in that expression a reproach or reminder for the living.[1]

The Death of Ivan Ilyich is a story in which art and purpose actually coincide and help one another. Artistic unity accrues from the need of Tolstoy to arrange everything in such a manner as to depict the transformation of the chief character and to stress the change itself as compared with his previous stage. Then, too, the artist in Tolstoy was free to indulge his passion for minute observation, analysis, and subtle criticism, while the preacher in the author had the opportunity to yield to his predilection for moralization.

In many of his other works, however, Tolstoy's powerful artistic instincts and his brooding thoughts seem to diverge at a certain point to the extent of turning against one another. To Gorky, Tolstoy confided that at times he dwelled more on art for its own sake than on theory.

> I, myself, when I write suddenly feel pity for some character, and then I give him some good quality or take a good quality away from someone else, so that in comparison with the others, he may not appear too black....That's why I say that art is a lie, an arbitrary sham, harmful for people. One writes not what real life is, but simply what one thinks of life oneself. What good is that to anyone, how I see that tower or sea or Tartar--what interest or use is there in it?[2]

What Tolstoy did not seem to realize was that in his best works, "real life" and his own conception of life were one and the same. In Hadji Murad, for example, Tolstoy distorts the bloated sensuality of Nicholas I and purifies the clean savagery of Murad to heighten the

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[1]Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich, op. cit., p. 162.
[2]David Kvitko, A Philosophic Study of Tolstoy, p. 89.

contrast between the two. And yet this tale pulsates with life as it is, not as it should be. The closing account of the death of Hadji Murad and his men in the rice fields has, as well, an unforgettable epic quality. But how is it done? With utter simplicity and truth. One cannot conceive of a more potent depiction of death than the following:

> His eyes, beautiful like those of a ram, gazed intently and seriously at Hadji Murad. His mouth, the upper lip pouting like a child's, twitched without opening. Hadji Murad drew his leg away from under him and continued firing.[1]

Tolstoy never communicated the beauty of men united before the final struggle with such impact, and yet the lesson is conveyed simply because the author wrote with his soul rather than with his intellect.

Tolstoy was to write the following as a warning to writers to be cognizant of the moral and social responsibilities of art:

> ...the aesthetic and the ethical are two arms of one lever: to the extent that you lengthen and lighten one side, to that extent you shorten and make heavier the other side. As soon as a man loses his moral sense, he becomes particularly responsive to the aesthetic.[2]

One can only wish that Tolstoy had been aware of the fact that an overemphasis on ethical values could tip the two-sided lever as well. For if Tolstoy was subtle, sensitive and decisive when he wrote about external experiences, he was cloudy, confused and even ungrammatical when he groped toward the metaphysical plane. Prince Andrei, for example, chants under Tolstoy's direction:

> Love hinders death. Love is life. All, everything that I understand, I understand only because I love. Everything is, everything exists only because I love. Everything is united by it alone.

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[1]Tolstoy, Hadji Murad, op. cit., p. 715.

[2]Kvitko, op. cit., p. 101.

> Love is God and to die means that I, a particle of love, shall return to the general and external source.[1]

Often, in his attempts to portray spiritual conversion, he became banal and insincere. Karenin, for instance, in Anna Karenina, changes like a chameleon from the overbearing, vindictive husband to the embodiment of Christ-like virtue:

> ...the joy of forgiving suddenly gave him not only relief from his sufferings but inward peace such as he had never experienced before. He suddenly felt that the very thing that was the source of his sufferings had become the source of his spiritual joy; that what had appeared insoluble so long as he indulged in censure, recriminations and hatred had become simple and clear when he forgave and loved.[2]

Tolstoy's regular practice in dealing with the ethical questionings of man, however, was to have his characters speak in the highly inartistic, didactic tone which he himself assumed in his prose works. Typical of such passages is the following which reveals the thought processes of Pierre at Borodino in War and Peace:

> The spoken word is silver but the unspoken is golden. Man can be master of nothing while he fears death, but he who does not fear death possesses all. If there were no suffering, man would not know his limitations, would not know himself. The hardest thing is to be able to unite the meaning of all. To unite all? No, not to unite. Thoughts cannot be united but to harness all these thoughts together is what we need! Yes, one must harness them, must harness them.[3]

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[1]Tolstoy, War and Peace, p. 1089.
[2]Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, p. 444.
[3]Tolstoy, War and Peace, p. 941.

Throughout his life, Tolstoy was almost wistfully to try to convince himself that one could achieve spiritual calm in spite of the loathsomeness of death; hence, in his fictional works, he depicted all of his heroes as rejecting life not because of their bodily sufferings but because they felt the necessity of entering an existence of eternal love. His attempts to cast an aura of holiness about death failed, however, because his descriptive powers were too great, his innate horror of death too firmly embedded, and his physical awareness too intense.

CONCLUSION

> Self-renunciation is all nonsense and absurdity! That is pride, a refuge from well-merited unhappiness, and salvation from the envy of other's happiness.[1]

In spite of all the soul-baring which Tolstoy was to do in My Confession, What I Believe and What is Religion?, never did he come closer to revealing the true reasons for the discord in his soul and the paradoxes in his personality. For Tolstoy was, indeed, the embodiment of egotism and self-consciousness. In Boyhood, he wrote:

> I often fancied myself a great man, who was discovering new truths for the benefit of mankind; and I gazed upon other mortals with a proud consciousness of my worth.[2]

But along with this provocative self-assertiveness went a cold moral censorship which condemned him for his egotism and feelings of superiority to the mortals who surrounded him. The inner judge in Tolstoy also forced him to open his eyes to his servitude to his instincts, to his all-consuming fear of death. Said the censor to Tolstoy: "If you can be leashed to your passions, if you experience dread at the thought of eternal oblivion, what distinguishes you from the very people that you scorn?"

Yearning to be free from the awareness of his moral, emotional, and physical failings, anxious to conceal his uncertainty and hidden fears, Tolstoy adopted and preached the philosophy of destroying one's

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[1]Tolstoy, The Cossacks, op. cit., pp. 306-307.

[2]Quoted in Lavrin, op. cit., p. 53.

personality both psychologically and metaphysically in order to enter an amorphous mass of de-individualized love. Tolstoy's conversion thus resulted not in a higher synthesis of life, but only in a series of suppressions; in the dictatorship of self-imposed puritanical rules for the sake of which he was ready to cripple his own existence and those of other men. His teachings prove, as well, that even the most selfless love can be dictated by a selfish need to preserve one's inner comfort. In My Religion, for example, he stated frankly that one should live for others, and only for others, because of the immediate personal benefits derived from such impersonal love:

> Death, death, death awaits you every second. Your life passes in the presence of death. If you labour personally for your own future, you yourself know that the one thing awaiting you is--death. And that death ruins all you work for. Consequently, life for oneself can have no meaning. If there is a reasonable life it must be found elsewhere: it must be a life the aim of which does not lie in preparing life for oneself. To live rationally one must live so that death cannot destroy life.[1]

Tolstoy's special brand of Christianity, therefore, was essentially a Buddhist-like escape from his loneliness, his torments, and most importantly, his biological fear of the one thing he disclaimed as a moralist--death. That the extreme demands of his Christian ethic did not bring about a moral harmony which would preserve the joy but deliver one from the slavery to the instincts is proved by the following comment which Tolstoy made to Gorky at the end of his life:

> The Kaliph Abdurahman had during his life fourteen happy days, but I am sure I have not had so many. And this is because I have never lived--I cannot live--for myself, for my own self; I live for show, for people.[2]

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[1]Tolstoy, My Religion, Collected Works (v. 7) p. 117.
[2]Gorky, op. cit., p. 33.

And in a letter which Tolstoy intended to leave for his wife, he wrote:

> Just as Hindus, nearing sixty, retire into the woods, and as old religious men seek to devote their last years to God and not to jokes, puns, gossip, or tennis, so for me, entering my seventieth year, the desire which absorbs my whole soul is for tranquillity, solitude, and if not for entire harmony, then at least for avoiding the crying discord between my life on the one hand, and my belief and conscience on the other.[1]

Hence, Tolstoy was to die the same lacerated, restless and pain-fully seeking soul as before, in spite of his preaching and his avowals that he had discovered the secret of happiness for all.

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[1]Lavrin, op. cit., p. 17.

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