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BODY AND SOUL: REALISM AND THE IDEAL
IN NINETEENTH CENTURY RUSSIA

By
Mary Lee Holshouser

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Approved by

Director

Robert M. M. M. M.

Examining Committee

Mar. Tindall

W. H. H. H.

Raymond C. C. C. C.
Chairman.

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PREFACE

My paper is entitled "Body and Soul: Realism and the Ideal" and by this I would simply affirm as others have before me that although an artist deals with the materials of his social milieu, his relation to his time and place is subordinate to his citizenship in the society of Everyman. Through the medium of a particular society in a particular period of history he confronts anew the universal problems of human existence. In my paper I discuss each major writer of the nineteenth century in Russia individually in an attempt to understand his view of reality and of his society, and note the common ideas running throughout the period. Some of the writers are quite expressive of the spirit of the times while others are more individualistic. A number of central themes appear in varying form in all of the writers studied.

The problem of evil is treated from some point of view by each of the writers. Often it is discussed indirectly in an analysis of the evils of the society of the day, but its implications are always broader. At the beginning and end of the century we find two men whose ideas of the nature of both good and evil are very similar. Pushkin and Tolstoy found spontaneous goodness in the simple values of life. Evil resides in the type of trivial approach to

life typical of the bon ton society. Man in attending only to his own desires and activities misses the real fulfillment of life which comes from living for others. Those who live close to the soil have not lost this awareness, for there is a power manifest in the very soil itself, a regenerative and healing power which works through those who remain attached to it. This power is the deep and simple fact that is God. This agrarian idealism is not found in any of the other writers under discussion. It is introduced at the beginning of the century with Pushkin and re-echoed at the end in Tolstoy. Goncharov did not attack the system of aristocratic agrarianism, but his main character, Oblomov, was destroyed by the destructive element of his particular aristocratic environment, Oblomovka. Chekhov finds it necessary to refute this "back to nature" and "simple peasant" idea, for he is a member of the very class under discussion. He has only to say that he belongs to the peasant class and cannot be astonished by peasant goodness to bring the whole theory into question. Gogol also treats provincial Russia, but he never saw beyond the distorted vision of his own mind. He saw evil everywhere, the primary and inescapable fact of human existence. Existence is empty and meaningless; happiness is a dream or an illusion, less painful if it is not hoped for or searched for. Dostoevsky is not daunted by the problem of evil. He examines life and accepts whatever is there as

significant, and evil itself becomes a value. Through its purgation one arrives at a real consciousness of the nature of oneself and the nature of reality. Man attains to salvation by participation in evil, not by attempting to be superior to it. Through the depths of human sin, one is raised to the level of human goodness. This is the descent into hell necessary for man's ascension into heaven. Dostoevsky could not accept the idea in its literal form that the suffering of One had brought salvation for all, although this was the very essence of the faith he professed. For him each must relive the crucifixion and the descent in his own life.

These varying interpretations of the problem of evil in human existence led to a range in attitudes from an exuberant optimism in Pushkin — a belief that life can have meaning and man can find it — to the extreme pessimism of Gogol who saw in life only emptiness and illusion. The theme of futility is recurrent in the literature and expressive of the social struggle of the day. Chekhov, the last writer of the century, had become thoroughly disillusioned with all the theories and ideals which those before him had held. He no longer believed in the potency of ideals, and could only describe the pathetic reality of a disillusioned society. Turgenev, writing a generation earlier, also reflected the idea of futility. His characters gain a measure of nobility through

their struggle, but the struggle can lead nowhere. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky were more optimistic because they believed in the efficacy of their particular views of regeneration.

This feeling of futility arose partially from the growing isolation of man from man, and group from group during this period - another recurring theme. The consciousness of a growing inability to communicate with those around them in any meaningful fashion is seen in Oblomov, in Turgenev's heroes who are never understood by the peasants they sacrifice their lives to save, in the Chekhov figures who never get beyond a superficial and conventional level of communication to real personal interaction. Both Dostoevsky and Tolstoy deal with individual salvation which may come indirectly from others, but which cannot be communicated directly to others.

The last major idea found throughout the literature is related to the idea of regeneration. Woman and regeneration are linked together in the tradition of the time. Woman is pure and noble, simple and naturally good. The ideal of womanhood is an obsession with these Russian writers, with the possible exception of Tolstoy who reasserted the masculine. Turgenev's women are such prototypes of this idea that they have almost no reality for us today. If the writers fail to use feminine characters in this role of the bearer and sustainer of life they may substitute as Gogol does the idea of Mother Russia, the mysterious force moving towards fulfillment. This idea

has a possible basis in the old forms of worship of the fertility of the soil and of woman as the agent of new life.

In the following pages each of the major writers of nineteenth century Russia ^{is} ~~are~~ discussed individually. Where the themes mentioned above appear, they are noted along with other more individual ideas of the writer. The paper concludes with a restatement of the major themes, and a reassertion of the thesis that the writers were born of their day and created with the materials of their milieu, but their insight went beyond the level of a particular society to touch on the problems of Everyman.

PUSHKIN

Russian literature comes into being with Pushkin, and he is the prophet of many of the ideas found throughout the literature of the nineteenth century. The later writers behold him with respect and a certain awe. Dostoevsky regards him as the greatest Russian and first to glimpse the true value of the Russian character. Tolstoy reincarnates his ideas on a larger scale. All the writers who follow deal with themes portended in his works. He has become Russia's Shakespeare, her most beloved writer.

Literature before Pushkin was artificial and conventional. Pushkin was that figure familiar in all national literature, the great writer who abandoned an alien tongue--in this case French and the Church Slavonic--in favor of the vernacular, thereby developing that vernacular into a literary language. (Dante, Villon, etc.) He discarded old and alien forms along with their language, and ushered in the nineteenth century with freshness and originality. In his depiction of Russian society, he revealed its inner conflicts and moral problems and disclosed his own moral ideals.

He was quite Russian. He loved his country while possessing no illusions about her. Through his writing he contributed to the development of a national awareness. He wrote of Russia, of her peasants and simple artisans, of her nobility and aristocracy, of her old men and women, of

her young dreamers and philosophers. He adapted his style and language to every literary form, leaving us a rich variety of dramas, short stories, lyrics, verse-novels, essays, critical studies, fairy tales, epigrams, philosophical poems, historical verse, and a number of translations. He had an immense knowledge of folk-lore, songs, and legends derived from his travels through Russia, and he incorporated these into his works. He abhorred everything artificial, but loved all that is spontaneous and beautiful in life. He did not ignore the suffering and disillusionments which are part of life and often wrote of them; while incorporating the whole of life into a joyous experience. He was grateful for the variety of experience which life offered and embraced all of its richness. He gloried in the human values--in freedom, love, art; and his work is strongly humanistic.

In his scorn for the artificial, and thus for the imitative writers who had preceded him, and in his love of freedom, we find the basis for his development of Russian realism. He was the founder of Russian realism, the first to give a realistic treatment of his society.

He was a realist, but he finds ideals in his reality, and his writings are a defense of these ideals. Eugen Oneghin, his verse-novel, introduces us to his basic thought and to the ideas which carry over into the nineteenth century.

Oneghin is the complete egotist. His sole concern is

self-indulgence and self-gratification. He has not even the stature of a Prometheus' rebelling against a treacherous ideal; for he has never seen far enough beyond his own reflection to know that ideals exist. A more shallow view of life than Oneghin's is difficult to conceive, and yet this is a commonly held view in any society.

Oneghin is bored. At the tender age of twenty he has tasted all of life's pleasures and found them but ashes. And what is the range of his vast experience of life? A day with Oneghin begins at noon with a careful hour or so of dressing, a saunter in the open air, and a dinner of champagne, roast beef, and truffles. It continues with a ballet to which he arrives late and leaves early in order to have three hours to change his dress for the ball. As Petersburg awakens to the sound of bakers and fishmongers, Oneghin returns from the evening and retires. So we find him in a state of hypochondria, musing over his lost youth. We must give him credit for his round of intrigues and love affairs and duels. He has played many roles but none of them his own. And now he is bored. Fortunately some novelty presents itself now and then, first in the inheritance of a country estate. This held his interest two days.

"For fashion or antiquity
Produced in him the same ennui."¹

He formed a friendship from sheer boredom with a young and rather futile character, Lensky, who is eighteen

¹
A. Pushkin, Eugen Oneghin, University of California Press, 1937, p. 33.

and in whose breast the fire of love still burns brightly. The veteran lover for whom love's passions are extinguished listens patiently to his young friend, and magnanimously refrains from disillusioning him. Oneghin is undoubtedly one of the most ridiculous figures in literature, the shallow egotist who believes that life was created for his personal pleasure. He has sold his soul for a few brief fleeting emotions.

His antithesis is Tatiana, who falls in love with him, and whom he rejects in the role of disillusioned lover and moral guide. Pushkin confesses to us that he has always been in love with his heroine. She is his ideal. Life is not empty for those who have sold their souls in a desire for self-assertion. Tatiana is the essence of life, its spontaneity and honesty. She is the pure Russian heroine, embracing life as completely as Oneghin rejects it. In country or city society, she is the same, never adopting the fashionable customs of the day. Oneghin is manners; Tatiana is morals. Oneghin is superficial; Tatiana is real.

In his novel, Pushkin is condemning the romantic view of life, and asserting an idealistic realism. Oneghin is called Childe Harold. He hangs a portrait of Lord Byron on his wall. His life is a destructive force in society, as well as a waste. He kills his friend Lensky in a duel as a point of honor, although he knew himself to be in the wrong. He enjoys crushing a young girl's dreams, for he

can play a romantic role of the disillusioned young cynic. Romanticism is incorrigible egotism and can only end in futility.

Pushkin is the founder of Russian realism. In Tatiana we see the ideal presented, and the nineteenth century conception of the purity of the feminine idea introduced. The Faustian theme used repeatedly by the later Russian writers is hinted at in Oneghin, as well as the tragedy of the wasted life later to be developed by Goncharov and Turgenev. With Pushkin the nineteenth century is under way.

GOGOL

Bertrand Russell has said that a writer deals with ideas in the crucible of the imagination. If we were to examine the receptacle into which the ideas and events of Nikolai Gogol's experience were poured, we would find a curiously distorted vessel. There would be little discernible similarity between the ingredients of concrete experience which flowed into this fermenting furnace and the artistic creations which erupted from it. Fact and phantasy are inextricably entwined to present a Gogolian world where the final joke is on man.

Gogol had a fantastic imagination that went far beyond the real. His earliest stories are rather insipid, and he would never have gained fame as a writer on the basis of them, but they introduce some basic themes later ingeniously developed in his more mature works. These stories, Evening on a Farm Near Dikanka, and the Migorod series arise from the legends and fairy tales of Ukrainian folklore. Here the Devil is a favorite character, and he gleefully deceives his victims until they have fallen under his spell. In his later and really great stories the Devil becomes an inescapable evil linked with man's very existence, the Satanic force that dangles before man the glittering hope of happiness and fulfillment but snatches it away just as it is within his grasp. The hollow sound of demonic laughter echoes through most of Gogol, as every form of man's

ridiculous pretensions are laid bare, and his pitiful shallowness opened to all. Man stands in horrified bewilderment at the revelation of his pettiness, and he sinks before the cruel joke life played on him by permitting him his illusions.

It is an illusion which destroys the young artist Piskarev in one of the Arabesque stories, Nevsky Avenue. Piskarev believed in beauty and goodness and the possibility of happiness in life. One evening he and a friend, Lieutenant Pirogov, are walking along the gay avenue of Nevsky Prospect along which life flows continuously. At the same moment they both catch glimpses of very lovely young women walking in opposite directions, and at Pirogov's instigation they part company, each following the girl of his choice. Piskarev is enchanted by his girl's fresh loveliness, and as he followed her along the Prospect he envisions himself her knight, ready to perform any act to obtain her trust and favor. With this rapturous vision before him, he follows her up a staircase into an apartment of vice where she smiles at him impudently and utters some vulgar phrase. Piskarev is horrified, rushes to his rooms, and sinks into a world of dreams. Only there is his ideal possible. He is unable to face the reality of disillusionment and becomes an opium addict. He is once more deceived by his own dreaming and decides to go and redeem her from her miserable existence. He finds her in the same place, her loveliness as yet untouched by the life she is leading and offers to marry her. She scorns his offer, preferring her

life to one of poverty and hard work. For Piskarev this is the final and unbearable blow. Unable to face life without ideals, he kills himself.

"All is deceit, all is in a dream, all is not what it seems." ¹

The pursuits of his friend are much more successful. He is at first thwarted in his plans by the woman's husband, but continues to pursue her, until he is discovered kissing her by Schiller, her very German husband. Pirogov is roughed over a bit, but the next day finds him blithely dancing the mazurka, ready for new adventures. And life flows along just the same on Nevsky Prospect, indifferent to all that has happened. Whatever you bargain your life for, you are lost.

"Your first and only love is a meretricious woman whose purity is a myth, and this myth is your life." ²

It is into this queer, nightmarish world that the pathetic figure of Akaky Akakievich is introduced in the superb story, The Overcoat. Dostoevsky said that all Russian writers come from under Gogol's Overcoat. Akaky is that meek little clerk who lays bear the flaws in life itself. He has not the Aristotelian stature of a tragic figure, but he is The tragic figure; he is Everyman eternally cheated by life. He would appear absurd, a simple copying clerk whose only pleasure was to take home copy-

¹ N. Gogol, Tales of Good and Evil, John Lehmann, London 1949, p. 150.

² V. Nabakov, Gogol, New Directions Books, Norfolk, Conn., 1944, p. 12.

Varvara is revealed as empty. Nabakov believed that Inspector

work from the office, if the world in which he appears were not so absurd. The greatest decision of his life is to have a new overcoat made, and this overcoat becomes the symbol of his joy in life. A poor symbol? But what better could such a world have to offer. That is the pathetic irony of existence; our symbols of the good, however meager, are greater than the good itself; for it does not exist. And man in trying to secure it is grasping too high, even as Akaky was. He had emerged from the chrysalis in a new overcoat; it gave his life meaning for one day. But even that brief happiness is begrudged man. What was given for a moment is immediately taken away. Akaky's overcoat is stolen, leaving him defenseless before the prospect of emptiness. He cannot regain it, and so must die. The story of the return of the ghost of Akaky to steal the overcoat of one of the officials who would not help him recover it is the final ironic twist. There is no justice or retribution possible in life. Only in the realm of the imagination or perhaps in a fairy-tale existence can life assume any rationality.

The horror of Gogol lies in his revelation of the inner evil in the most "ordinary" and "normal" circumstances of living. This is fully developed in his play, The Inspector General, and in his unique novel, Dead Souls. Both of these treat of the same theme, man's bargaining with evil to gain whatever he imagines will bring him happiness, and his subsequent loss of self-respect when the bargain is revealed as empty. Nabokov believes The Inspector

General to be the greatest play ever written in Russian. Young radicals hailed it as a satire on corruption in the government's bureaucracy. As a realist Gogol did portray the life of his society, or his particular conception of it, but he was never completely a realist. He was always concerned with the eternal, the ideas behind the realities. The Faustian motif is introduced in the character of Khlestakov in The Inspector General and again in Chichikov in Dead Souls. Khlestakov, a very insignificant young man, is mistaken for an inspector general whose arrival was expected in a small provincial town. The young opportunist very readily falls in with their error and decided to capitalize on it. He is not a very subtle person, is indeed somewhat lacking in common sense, but the officials are so intent on preserving their own positions that they are completely blinded to Khlestakov's character. He very easily deceives them and extracts a goodly sum in bribes before making an easy get-away. The stupidity and corruption of the officials is laid bare in the remarkable last scene. The Postmaster reads a letter in which Khlestakov's identity is revealed along with his utter contempt for those he has deceived. The officials are left stunned and bewildered, utterly naked without their protective cloak of pretensions.

The real emissary of the devil is Chichikov of Dead Souls. He is traveling throughout provincial Russia to purchase dead souls, those serfs who exist only as names

on a list and as figures on the master's pocketbook. These serfs had died during the year but were not removed from the government lists until the end of the year. As a consequence the owners must continue paying taxes for them. On the plot level, Chichikov is purchasing dead souls to use as ostensible credit against a large loan from the government. On the symbolic level Chichikov is Satan's emissary, purchasing human souls. The persons who sell their dead serfs to him are those who for one vice or another have sold out to the devil. When his fraud is revealed, their souls are also revealed. Gogol is at home with his caricatures of human beings, for this was the way the world appeared in his distorted vision. His moralist nature dictated the necessity of writing a sequence to Dead Souls which would portray the positive and virtuous characters nowhere to be found in the first part. The second part was never completed. The remnant we have shows an unsatisfactory portrayal of his good characters. He does not really know them and so he glosses them over and sentimentalizes them. In traveling through his Gogolian world, he had never met any characters who had found value in life. The only moments of hope come in his hymns to mother Russia. These are written into Dead Souls but are utterly divorced from the novel. As visionary dreams they have no corresponding reality in his realm of lost souls. Yet the hymn to mother Russia has become a classic example of the cult of the worshipers of the regenerating spirit of

mystic Russia. It is quoted here because it has influenced many of the writers who follow by its early expression of the idea of Pan-Slavism, the destiny and messianic purpose of the Slavic soul.

"....Russia! Russia! I behold thee--from my alien beautiful, far-off place do I behold thee. Everything about thee is poor, scattered, bleak; thou wilt not gladden, wilt not affright my eyes with arrogant wonders of nature, crowned by arrogant wonders of art, cities with many-windowed, towering palaces that have become parts of the crags they are perched on, picturesque trees and ivies that have become part of the house, situated amid the roar and eternal spray of waterfalls; I will not have to crane my neck to gaze at rocky masses piled up, without end, on the height above; there will be no flash of sunlight coming through the dark arches thrown up on one another, covered with grapevines, ivies, and wild roses without number--there will be no flash through of the eternal lines of gleaming mountains in the distance, soaring up into argent, radiant heavens. All is exposed, desolate, and flat about thee; like specks, like dots are thy low-lying towns scattered imperceptibly over thy plains; there is nothing to entice, nothing to enchant the eye. But just what is the incomprehensible mysterious power that draws one to thee? What is there in it, in this song of thine? What is it about that song which calls one, and sobs, and clutches at one's very heart? What sounds are these that poignantly caress my soul and strive to win their way within it, and twine about my heart? Russia! What wouldst thou of me, then? What incomprehensible bond is there between us? Wherefore dost thou gaze at me thus, and wherefore has all that is in thee and of thee turned its eyes, filled with such expectancy, upon me?..Yet still, filled with perplexity, I continue standing motionlessly, though an ominous cloud, heavy with coming rains, has cast its shadow over my head, and thought has grown benumbed before thy vast expanse..What does that unencompassable expanse portend? Is it not here, within thee and of thee, that there is to be born a boundless idea, when thou thyself art without mete or end? Where else if not here is a titan to rise, when there is space for him to open as a flower opens, and to stretch his legs? And thy mighty expanse awesomely envelopes me, with fearful might finding reflection in my very heart of hearts; through thy preternatural sway have my eyes come to see the light....Ah, what a refulgent, wondrous horizon that the world knows naught of! Russia!"....3

3

N. Gogol, Dead Souls, Rinehart & Co., New York, 1948,
p. 270-271.

GONCHAROV

The most tragic figure in all of literature is the superfluous man, the man completely estranged from his environment, who must suffer in a kind of dumb anguish a fate over which he has no control, which isolates him from the life around him and leaves him in final opposition to life itself. And, paradoxically, in the incongruities arising from the position of the superfluous man in a society which does not understand him and which he cannot understand is material for the greatest comedy. It is ironical that the most complete picture of this character in Russian literature comes from the pen of Ivan Goncharov whose life had little more variation than the meek little clerk in The Overcoat, and whose other writings never rise above mediocrity. And yet it was from the patient pen of Goncharov that the countless details issue forth to give us Oblomov.

The comedy of Oblomov is the picture of a man who cannot get out of bed; tragedy comes when the bed becomes a grave from which there is no escape. The whole dramatic action of the book is built around the problem of getting Oblomov out of bed, symbolically arousing him to life, to an identification with his society. When we are first introduced to him, he is in his typical position, and it is morning. The props are some conventional dust-covered furniture, a dirty plate containing a bone, an outdated newspaper, a used towel thrown on the sofa, and two or three

open books with yellow pages. What ensues is what Macaulay in his essay on Oblomov terms a mock-morality play.

Oblomov has seven visitors who attempt to arouse him from bed. Some motivating action has aroused each of them from bed this morning, and each presents his reasons for living. Volkov finds sufficient stimulation in the endless round of social activity. "By Jove, how jolly life is!" Oblomov merely winces and turns over on his back. Sudbinsky, his next visitor, has been up since dawn attending to his new business as Head of a Government department and must hurry, hurry, hurry to do all he can to forward his career. Oblomov reflects that this is "wasting a man; intelligence, will and feeling are not wanted." He finds each purpose insufficient to arouse him from his indolent day-dreams. Penkin, the writer and reformer; Tarantiev, ready to take advantage of Oblomov's lazy good-naturedness; the doctor who prescribes activity for the sake of Oblomov's health; and Stolz, who wants him to wake up and live. He provides some excuse to each of them and remains in bed. Oblomov is not oblivious to the fact that he is different from other people. He is rather sensitive about it, and scolds his old servant Zahar vigorously for comparing him to other people. He always rebukes Zahar when a tender, weak spot is touched. He is a little perplexed himself by his estrangement from society.

"Why am I like this?" Oblomov asked himself almost with tears, and hid his hand under the blanket again. "Why?" After seeking in vain for the hostile power that prevented him from living like 'other people' he sighed, closed his eyes, and in a few minutes drowsiness began to benumb his senses. "I too... wished for something fine... It must be my fate." 1

A few moments later he is asleep and in his dream of Oblomovka we find the reason Oblomov differs from other people. We find his fate.

The scene has shifted to a slumberland paradise of warmth, tranquility, and drowsiness. Days and seasons merge into the other imperceptibly. Nature here - the sun, the hills, the sky - sings a gentle soothing lullaby to an already drowsy child. The inhabitants of Oblomovka live in unruffled peace and quiet. Their days are a repetition of rich heavy meals, followed by long hours of heavy irresistible sleep. Sleep is disturbed only for food. This is Oblomovka where

"everything promises a calm, long life till hair turns from white to yellow, and death comes unnoticed like sleep." 2

We are very nearly lulled into the tranquil acceptance of this gentle nirvana, when Goncharov brings us abruptly back to the reality of Oblomov's snoring. This concrete result of that dream world is the proof of its reality and its simultaneous condemnation.

In part II Stolz succeeds in prodding Oblomov out of

1 I. Goncharov, Oblomov, J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., London, 1946, pp. 94-95.

2 Ibid, p. 97.

bed. Superficially Stolz is the antithesis of Oblomov, ambitious and energetic, getting somewhere in this world. But Goncharov is careful to show us that the warm friendship which exists between the two is possible only because there is something of Oblomov in Stolz, and a flicker of Stolz in Oblomov. A completely Stolzian world is hardly to be preferred to an Oblomovian one. Stolz is able to arouse Oblomov momentarily; but it is Olga, a true Russian heroine who is able to prolong his estrangement from his bed. With Olga, Oblomov transfers his dream world to life; he doesn't lose it. Olga is vital and alive and her vitality seems enough for both of them. She believes that the chrysalis of her love is enough to transform this embryo to a new creation. Oblomov allows himself to indulge in poetical fantasies in which he dreams of a new life with Olga, and there follows a summer of idyllic change of seasons until both are awakened by the sharp breath of reality. Oblomov is forced to choose between Olga and his dressing gown, but the choice was made for him long before in Oblomovka. He is inextricably linked to his fate of Oblomovism. His love affair raises him for a moment to the level of humanity, and the comedy becomes a tragic-comedy when his disease takes the upper hand and spreads its virus throughout the tissue of his life.

With Olga Oblomov's life has reached its highest peak and when that episode is completed it sinks in swift descent.

E. E. Schattschneider, "Oblomov: The Superfluous Man," English Review, Vol. 19 (March-April, 1942), p. 178.

He is swindled out of his revenue and sinks into a life of helpless poverty. His only comfort is his landlady, whom he marries and who cares for him as his childhood nurses in Oblomovka had done.

"He is like a goldfish whose bowl of water has become dirty. He gazes around with perplexed goldfish eyes." ³

A visit to Oblomov in this stage is like a visit to the dead, and there is little difference between the coffin of his existence and that final one which carries him to the cemetery.

Stolz and Olga have married, of course, and lead a full happy life. At moments they are both haunted by the memory of Oblomov, and he remains an imperceptible part of their lives, enriching them and spurring them out of the inertia of self-satisfaction.

Goncharov's final condemnation of Oblomovism comes after the story is completed. Stolz and a friend are walking down the street, wondering how the beggars they saw had come to such a plight. Among them Stolz sighted old Zahar, the servant of Oblomov, who refuses to leave his master's grave. They are bound together, all the masters and slaves of Oblomovism, and the slaves were destroyed along with their masters. The final destructiveness of Oblomovism is seen in the figure of this sobbing old man.

And so to the list of the world's great figures in whom comedy and tragedy are fatally intermingled, we add

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R. Macauley, "Oblomov: The Superfluous Man," Partisan Review, Vol. 19 (March-April, 1952), p. 178.

the character of Oblomov, part of ourselves and yet completely divorced from our existence.

Oblomov hit at a sensitive spot of Russia and went straight to the heart of one of her most serious problems. Thus it was both loved and resented by the Russian people. This problem was primarily a climatic one, no longer a difficulty in the twentieth century of temperature control. It was the long Russian winter spent drowsily around the fire. Oblomov's indolence is the Russian winter; his love affair is the sudden and brief summer in which a flurry of activity occurs, only to be buried again in the sleepy days of the Russian winter. Acquiescence was easy and Oblomovism became a term of national self-reproach.

TURGENEV

Man is always on the eve of greatness. A few more steps, the most imperceptible forward movement may suddenly usher in the millenium. This is the paradoxical nature of man. He must strive for happiness, for perfection, but it will always be just around the corner, as close as breathing and as far away as the last galaxies of the heavens. At times the forces of history seem to isolate one group or another, making its striving appear a little more futile, a little less related to the achievements of mankind. A group is sacrificed on the altar of stubborn and irreducible facts not yet ready to become the ideals of the future, a grim reminder that ideals must be tempered with realities. There is such a group in the Russia of the sixties and seventies, and it is of their strivings that Turgenev writes. This is a group that would like to ignore history, that makes an attempt to break completely with society, and assert the idea as the only reality. The mistake of the nihilists is a profound one that has long been in man's system of thinking. It is a dualistic conception of life that attempts to separate mind from matter and individual man from his society. It has neglected the organic unity of life, the inter-relation of realities and ideals, mind and matter. Man has been either interpreted completely in terms of his environment or completely in terms of his unique individuality and his freedom of will. Nihilism is the colossal assertion

of man's freedom of will, that he has the power to destroy his environment and the ability to recreate it in an entirely new form. The failure of nihilism is the answer of the stubborn historical facts that they exist not only in men's minds as part of the past, but they are contained in the present and influence the future.

The nihilist never completely exists, even in literature. He would be a contradiction in terms, a man without humanity. The most complete expression of the nihilist in Russian literature is the figure of Bazarov in Fathers and Sons. Will-power it is true is Bazarov's strong point, but it is not all-sufficient or even omnipotent in his life. He denies the realities of emotions, but he is guided by them in his passionate love for Madame Odintsov. He attempts to conceal his deep love for his old parents, but a concealed fact loses nothing of its actuality. Bazarov is a nihilist with ideals, and the positive character of ideals refutes an all-out nihilism. Ironically Bazarov the would-be nihilist falls madly in love with Madame Odintsov, the real nihilist of the book. Madame Odintsov is the emotional nihilist. She has lost all faith in emotions and in love. Believing in nothing, she will not and cannot act. Bazarov can only act because of the positive nature of his beliefs; they are not merely negative. Through Madame Odintsov Turgenev asserts that nihilism leads to inactivity, to futility. Futility is reflected in Bazarov's life also, especially as he moves among the peasants.

He can find no means of communication with them. Chekhov develops this theme later in his short story, The Villa. Master and man, intellectual and peasant have no real basis for understanding one another. They may be defined in terms of each other, but this does not destroy the essential gulf which separates them. Bazarov and his friends make the fundamental mistake of becoming so absorbed in the abstraction of mankind that they lose sight of concrete man. Theirs is another variation of the Biblical flood idea, the destruction of man for the sake of his redemption. We will hear its tones again in terms of the 1905 and 1917 revolutions. The love of humanity isolates Bazarov from man. Fathers and Sons is the best of Turgenev's works. In terms of contemporary society some of his other books, On the Eve, First Love, etc. seem most unrealistic. In the course of a couple of generations, his romantic conception of women and his idealistic love scenes have become almost inconceivable and even a little revolting. Woman has found a new status in twentieth century society, which she prefers to the old pedestal.

The concept of the purity of the feminine idea runs throughout Russian literature. Woman is the eternal Madonna, man's strength and his security. This is a direct reversal of the Genesis myth in which Eve is man's downfall. Such a sentimental glorification of the fertile power of woman is another retreat from freedom to security, a flight

"The Russian Sketches" fulfilled his pledge in fight against
... The peasants are presented with a peculiar kind

back to the safety of the womb. This idea still has its vogue in European thought, but is less and less typical of modern society. Woman has ceased to be man's mother and has become his wife. Turgenev's women are still mothers, not to their children as Tolstoy's women are, but to their husbands. Yelena is not the symbol of creativity and fertility but of security, and the love between her and her husband Insarov is painfully idealistic and sentimental. They do not bravely clasp hands and face the world together as the surface interpretation might imply. Instead she clasps him to her breast protectively and faces the future, a rather ignoble conception of both man and woman. This theme is recast in another story mentioned above, First Love, in which a father and his young fifteen year old son are both in love with the same woman. Love as implied by Turgenev becomes a mere transference of mother-love. Such an interpretation might horrify Turgenev or elicit remarks about the effect of Freud on the present generation, but this will not destroy its validity for those who have seen this attitude and obsession still at work in the minds of many Europeans.

Works which still ring true, which we can still believe in, are Turgenev's short stories. He was brought up on his mother's estate and as a child was aware of the evils of serfdom. His short stories, collected in a volume entitled "A Sportsman Sketches" fulfilled his pledge to fight against serfdom. The peasants are presented with a peculiar human

dignity against the background of injustice and repression. They are not idealized, as perhaps they are in Tolstoy. Among them are brutes and unfeeling men who cheated each other. But among them also are the pathetic victims whose lives have been crushed by stupid forced marriages, by poverty, and by the willfulness of a selfish master or mistress. Turgenev gave to his peasants the same emotions of love, courage, loyalty, and dignity previously ascribed only to the aristocracy. He preached the simple dignity of all men, peasant or master. It was not necessary for him to rail against the evils he saw; it was only necessary to describe them and they spoke for themselves. One of the most touching stories is the story of Moo-Moo, a mute serf who lived for a few moments in his love for a puppy. A willful whim of the proprietess deprived him of this one thing he loved. The position of the proprietess is all too clear. What could it possibly matter if a mute peasant lost his happiness, his puppy? What possible right could he have to expect happiness? He was a slave whose only reality lay in being commanded and in obeying. The humanity of a slave is an indictment against his master.

Turgenev was most successful in his depiction of these people whom he had seen intimately, and in his presentations of ideas. His two novels dealing with ideas, Fathers and Sons, and Smoke, are among his best works. Smoke cannot be properly called a novel; it has the barest plot necessary to allow for a discussion of the ideas

current in Russia. But it is a fascinating recounting of the activities of those thinkers and talkers that were enraptured by the ideas of Slavophilism or Westernization but could never put them into action. We emerge with Litvinov the hero, feeling, as the title suggests, that political affairs in terms of these people are pretty futile, smoke without fire.

Turgenev spent a great part of his life in Europe. His style is European and often he treats a subject previously handled by a great European writer. One of his most powerful handlings of another man's plot and basic ideas is in the story, A Lear of The Steppes. The action is the same, but is translated into terms of Russian figures, and rivals Shakespeare in its powerful description. We see the Lear of the steppes on the roof of his house from which his daughters have turned him out, tearing off the roof with his bare hands, a magnificent figure against the fury of a stormy Russian sky. Faust and Asye are others he treated in the same manner.

Among the writers treated in this paper, Turgenev would rank lowest as a real creative artist. Some of his works have already lost their reality for us, and for a realistic writer this is a serious test. Realities remain real only in terms of the ideals which they represent. The ideals must be in terms of Everyman's experience.

"If a great people does not believe that the truth is only to be found in itself (in itself alone and exclusively), if it does not believe that it alone is fit and destined to raise up and save all the rest by its truth, it would at once sink into being ethnographical material, and not a great people. A really great people can never accept a secondary part in the history of humanity, nor even one of the first, but will have the first. A nation which loses this belief ceases to be a nation."¹

The evidence of a growing national consciousness can be noted in all of the writings thus far in the nineteenth century. In Gogol we see the lyrical surges in his most pessimistic work prophesying a new Russia at the sight of which all other nations and people will stand aside and give it the right of way. Even before Gogol, Pushkin is given credit for unearthing the stately Russian figure.

"Everywhere in Pushkin there sounds a faith in the Russian character, in its spiritual might, and where there is faith there is hope, great hope for Russia."²

The superfluous men of Goncharov and Turgenev are being replaced by men of a new spirit. Russia is "on the eve," and even Chekhov foretold the wonders of the future although he found no bridge to them from the evils of the day. In Dostoevsky we find the most intense and the most dramatic expression of the belief in the future of Russia and the uniqueness of the Russian idea. It is in him that

¹ F. Dostoevsky, The Diary of a Writer, Scribner's Sons, New York, 1949 p.1035.

² Ibid, p. 976.

we find the clearest expression of what has been termed the messianic consciousness of the Russian people, which Nicolas Berdyev says is the most vital medium for an understanding of Russian history and of Soviet Russia today. In Dostoevsky the mission was expressed in terms of Byzantine Christianity with a dynamic interpretation in terms of the suffering Christ bearing salvation through suffering, and Russia is to be a martyr to the cause of bringing this basic truth to the rest of civilization. In Russian Communism this same basic doctrine is preached, that of Russia's mission to the world. Only now the terms are not the law of love, but the law of bread. Dostoevsky conceived that only Russia could redeem Europe, for only in the elemental faith of the Slavic character is the true notion of God retained. Europe has lost the belief in God through the forces of Roman Catholicism which, as we will see later in the legend of the Grand Inquisitor, reduced the fundamental truth of Christianity to the level of the herd by basing it on earthly bread, on authority, and on miracles. She had also adopted the creed of scientific atheism, "all things are lawful;" she had lost her freedom and had become a slave to that which she owned. Europe had sold her birthright to humanity for a "mess of pottage." Russia had endured long her burden of suffering, but now she had a clear message to mankind. However her mission would not be understood by Europe for a long time,

for Europe could not understand a country ready to sacrifice itself for the oppressed of the world. So Russia must bear the burden of being misunderstood and falsely accused by those who accord their own motives to everyone else; for only she can lead others to redemption.

"It is necessary that the sun shine. The sun appeared in the East, and it is from the East that the new day begins for mankind."³

This is Dostoevsky's fundamental position in regard to his society. He is a Slavophile because he is a man of faith and not a man of reason, of love and not of logic, and yet he felt within himself all the forces which tried man's faith almost beyond endurance.

Dostoevsky focuses not on the external society of the nineteenth century as writers before him had done. He turned instead to the inner world, the inner life. In his world the realities are not the matter of superficial living of mundane existence. They are the ideas and forces of the psyche. Not one of his works is a study of society in transition; each of them deals with the fundamental problem of the existence of God and the nature of man. He searches the personality of his characters for answers to these problems. He explores the very nature of life and of man. What he discovers is not a pretty picture. His ventures into the very profundities of the human soul reveal the tragic duality of human existence. All his characters reflect this quality- this dynamic struggle within the human

³
Ibid, p. 609.

soul. Man is the battleground between God and the Devil, between Christ and anti-Christ. In one of his earliest works, The Double, this theme of the split personality is introduced in the character of Golyadkin, a poor clerk living in very dire conditions. The realities of his own miserable life keep him from obtaining the daughter of his superior whom he desires passionately, and he creates his own double in order to escape. His double resembles him at first, but later becomes more and more powerful. He becomes the success in business and in love that Golyadkin can never become, and in the end he destroys Golyadkin entirely, escorting him to an insane asylum. Golyadkin had sought his deliverance through a creation of his own mind, and in the end this overpowered him. Whenever man seeks within himself for his own salvation, he is doomed.

The book most similar to a social novel is the House of the Dead and as such is one of his least successful. He did not write it as an exposé of the conditions of Russian prisons, although it was taken as such by partisan groups. He rather showed the dual nature of the criminal - his goodness and kindness as opposed to the harshness of his deed. The work was based, as was most of Dostoevsky's work, on his own personal experience - this on a period of imprisonment in Siberia. His greatest treatment of the problem of crime and its effect on the criminal is Crime and Punishment. Raskolnikov, a poverty stricken student

contaminated with Western ideas, and the very embodiment of their logical implications, contemplates the murder of a wretched old pawn-broker whose wickedness is well-known to her patrons. She is a parasite, getting rich off the poverty of others. She is a leech; she makes no contribution to society, but draws her subsistence from it. Her life only adds to the burdens of society; her death would be beneficial. Therefore Raskolnikov feels he would be fully justified, would be committing no crime in murdering her. Once this idea has been created in his mind, he loses all control over himself, even as Golyadkin had done. He is no longer free to will or to reason. He can only obey the powerful forces within him which are driving him forward. He plans to use the money for the beginning of his career which will be a benefit to society. He is propelled irresistibly to the murder, but it involves not only the death of the old woman, but also of her young sister Lizaveta who was innocent of wrong. In the after events of the crime, Raskolnikov is in a constant state of inward agitation. He continues to try to convince himself that he has actually committed no crime, that he had merely rid the world of a louse. He cries out to his sister that he has only killed a principle, not a human being. Slowly, with the help of a young woman, Sonia, who has become a prostitute for the benefit of her family, he comes to understand the real nature of his crime. He had supposed

that to the exceptional man all things were lawful. He had wanted to see whether he was "a worm like everyone else or a man." By this crime he had hoped to free himself from the bonds of morality which bound everyone else. He had believed that by asserting oneself, one could become oneself. This same idea is evident in Stavrogin in The Possessed who by his suicide was to prove that by an exertion of his self-will, he could destroy God or rather become God. But their so-called freedom was terrible to them, for freedom isolated man from man. And it isolates man from himself. In denying God, man denies himself. All morality is grounded in God. Real freedom is possible only in denying oneself. To a few this knowledge seems to have been given innately, i. e. Aloysha in the Brothers Karamazov, but for the most part the understanding comes only through suffering, as it came to Raskolnikov- salvation and regeneration through sin and suffering is a basic theme in Dostoevsky.

Raskolnikov is the negative view of man's moral nature, and the negative answer to the problem of morality is expressed in his crime. In The Idiot Dostoevsky brings us to the very opposite type of character in Prince Myshkin. Myshkin is the veritable expression of the divine law. His instinctive reactions are an expression of the law of love. There are no off guard moments, no moments of hesitation between right and wrong, not even a single instance

of acting from any motivation other than that of love for his fellowman. Because of this quality the most varied types of people are drawn to him and love him. And yet he is esteemed as a rather naive simple man, lovable but nevertheless an "idiot." What is more significant is that he is not able to make much effect on the lives of others. His expression of the Christian law does not necessarily bring others to a similar expression of it in their own lives; and oddly enough it doesn't protect Myshkin himself from the final tragedy, the loss of his mind. Why? Because Myshkin is not really a valid embodiment of man, or even of the redeemed man, the Christian. Myshkin is inherently good, an impossibility in Dostoevsky's world. He is not an active force because he has not come to his state of regeneration through suffering. In order to do positive things in society, one must be aware of the destructive nature of society. Myshkin is futile because he does not know the power of evil within man and within society. Man's real maturity lies in assuming part of the evil in the world, even participating in it; but through this understanding comes a new interpretation. This brings a touchy question which seems to find a paradoxical answer in Dostoevsky's writing--what is the fundamental approach, life or the cognition of life? Is it enough to simply be good, inherently good, or must one arrive at goodness through the mediation of contact with evil? A major difficulty arises from the presentation of

his positive characters, particularly Alyosha in the Brothers Karamazov. His greatest positive character, the monk Zossima, had arrived at his state of goodness through participation in the affairs of the world as a soldier. Sonia had been forced to become a prostitute to support her family, but she had not been contaminated by the evil she had to bear to serve those she loved. She was fulfilling the law of self-sacrifice, "He who loses his life shall save it." Alyosha too, was beyond the humiliation of evil; for only self-assertion brings with it humiliation. There is no room for humiliation in the life that knows no pride. Each of Dostoevsky's characters must find this life of humility which leaves no room for humiliation. Humiliation presupposes a belief in one's rights and achievements. It presupposes self-assertion, and this in itself is self-destruction. The problem of whether or not redemption must be arrived at in the individual life is probably taken for granted in Dostoevsky. His presentation of Sonia and Alyosha is the regenerate man as opposed to the aspects of man reflected by the other characters in the book. He has stated that every man is guilty for the crimes of every other. The conception of universal guilt is an integral part of his work. Thus we can never judge one another, for in so doing we are judging ourselves; we cannot condemn one another, for this is to condemn ourselves. Evil is rooted deep in the paradoxical nature of man, and it is a common characteristic of all men; but it is not

fatal. Man's regeneration can come through suffering. Even if he is completely possessed with the illusions of the superman - as Raskolnikov was and as Dostoevsky believed Europe to be - yet he could not be led back to Zossima's life of self-denial, of finding himself by losing himself for others. The motivation for this change comes from the awareness of the fundamental truth that man without God is nothing and God is love.

His greatest treatment of the theme of the guilty man, and the question of the existence of God, is of course in his last and greatest book, perhaps the greatest book in any literature, The Brothers Karamazov. This was the culmination of his work and the final espousal of his statements and unsolved problems concerning the nature of man and the interpretation of the universe. In the inner consciousness of his characters are found the doubts and the agitations of man, the scene of an interplay of opposite elements which hold the universe in a form of dynamic instability. He mirrors the conflict between reason and instinct, between sensuality and religious faith.

The family Karamazov is man and his range of possible development. On the one extreme is Karamazov the father. He is the complete sensualist, consumed with lust, driven by desire. He does not possess freedom in any sense of the word. He is bound completely, a slave to his passions. Alyosha awakens in him some feeling akin to human kindness, but he is too caught in the morass of his self-indulgence

ever to be free. Mitya is very like him, but he has moments of honesty. With old Karamazov the battle has been won in favor of Bacchus. It still rages in Mitya and so he still has the possibility of redemption. He says of himself that he is "eternally torn between the ideal of Sodom and the ideal of the Madonna." Ironically, but in perfect artistic construction, Mitya and his father are passionately in love with the same woman, Grushenka, the mistress of an old merchant. She too embodies the duality of the flesh. She is as Mitya says, "the queen of all fiendish women unleashed in the world." And yet she is also the "naive and kind" person that Alyosha sees in her. The dual possibility is there, and through her self-sacrifice both she and Mitya are regenerated. Mitya hates his father because he sees himself and what he potentially is in his father. The other temptation of man is the intellect. Man can become as enslaved by his ideas as by his emotions. This is Ivan, the elder son, who is tormented by the question of the existence of God, who eventually denies God in an irresistible Promethean rebellion; and, consequently, must commit suicide as he sees the logical implications of his theory carried out in Smerdyakov's murder of his father. The only result of a denial of God is the destruction of man. Smerdyakov is the illegitimate son born as the result of the elder Karamazov's rape of the deaf-mute. He is the extreme opposite of Ivan, and Ivan hates him as Mitya hates his father, for the

realization of his theories, his abstractions made concrete and destructive to him. Alyosha, the youngest son, is found the ideal, the expression again of the Christian law of love, of humility, of self-sacrifice. Alyosha, too, has his complement in Father Zossima, the view of life that Dostoevsky ultimately stood for. These together were the possible range of man's development with all the stages in between--man could become obsessed with the senses or with the intellect. In either case he was doomed; for he was asserting self--the superman. Or he could live not for himself but for others, and thus for God, and in so doing he would find himself. Dostoevsky opposes faith to reason, love to logic. His most dramatic presentation of this is the story of the Grand Inquisitor, now renowned in all literature. Here he presents the most drastic arguments against the existence of God, or against any conceivable worship of or acknowledgement of such a God. Yet it is Ivan, the potential felodese, who presents the argument.

The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor is set in Spain during the days of the inquisition. Christ miraculously returns to earth and is recognized by the people, but they are cowed into submission by the appearance of the Grand Inquisitor who orders Him arrested. Late in the night the Inquisitor visits Him in prison to defend the new order of things, atheism in the guise of religion. He

accuses Christ of making his demands on man too high, of setting up a religion which is not relevant to the "sinful and ignoble race of man." He claims that in accepting the three temptations that Christ rejected in the wilderness he is showing more love for mankind than Christ had shown in rejecting them. Christ had refused to turn the stones into bread, had thought that the loss of freedom was too high a price to pay for a piece of bread. This was His first misinterpretation of the history that was to come.

"But dost Thou know that for the sake of that earthly bread the spirit of the earth will rise up against Thee and will strive with Thee and will overcome Thee?" Dost Thou know that the ages will pass, and humanity will proclaim by the lips of their sages that there is no crime, and therefore no sin; there is only hunger?"⁵

And what of this freedom won at the expense of bread? Does it really appeal to man? Again the Inquisitor speaks,

"I tell Thee that man is tormented by no greater anxiety than to find some one quickly to whom he can hand over that gift of freedom with which the ill-fated creature is born."⁶

Instead of forcing man to follow Him, by setting up the law of bread, He desired man's free love and put him in the terrible position of having to make a choice. The burden of free choice is a fearful one.

In the second temptation, the Inquisitor reminds Christ

⁵ F. Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, Modern Library, New York, 1929, p. 310.

⁶ Ibid, p. 312.

He had a second chance to relieve man from the dreadful necessity of free choice. He could have cast Himself down from the pinnacle and been received by angels, thus establishing His way on the basis of the miraculous. Man could have been led as sheep to the worship of the miraculous. Indeed this would have answered his basic need.

"This craving for community of worship is the chief misery of every man individually, and of all humanity from the beginning of time."⁷

But He had desired that man would cling to God and not ask for a miracle.

And the last offer, the gift of all the kingdoms of the world. That would have solved man's universal craving for universal unity. And man could have known the happiness of complete submission. Christ rejected all of these because he had too much respect for man. He had rated him too highly, but now there are those who have corrected His work, who have substituted the security of bread, mystery, and authority for the freedom bequeathed on man by His submission to the suffering of the cross. And they would be victorious because they truly understood the nature of man. The lie would triumph, and Christ would be burned at the stake before all the people. As in another trial Christ listened to the accusations in silence. His only answer was a kiss on the aged lips of His accuser but at this the Inquisitor shuddered and released Him in the

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Ibid. p. 311.

dark town, telling Him to go and come no more. Love is ultimately and for all times held in opposition to logic. Love appears irrational, but it is the most profound truth, the greatest reality, and as such the only rationality. This is Dostoevsky's message to man. And with it goes the hope of redemption for everyman. He would have us know that we can not exhaust the love of God, even in our most vile moments. Through suffering and repentance we will be led back to God. In nineteenth century Russia, he saw the potential saviour of mankind, the country who could bring man back to this basic belief in the God of love.

TOLSTOY

The entire body of the literature of the nineteenth century is permeated by a growing national consciousness, and each writer however great has treated that which is for him purely Russian. The eclectic nature of the literature of other countries is not apparent here. The great works of the period bear only a superficial resemblance to what are known as their "influences." For these writers, Russia is more than an environment; she is almost a being, certainly a guiding force in the lives of her people. Thomas Hardy presents nature in somewhat the same manner, but his nature is not typically English countryside. The vast brooding quality which we translate in terms of our own experience is given as something peculiarly Russian. This conception of a people or a race as peculiarly themselves is difficult for a country which is a hodgepodge of nationalities to comprehend, and yet is an essential idea in the development of nations who feel themselves destined to rule the world or to save it. It was true of the Japanese and the Germans as it is true of the Russian people today. It is the belief that there is a spirit inherent in the nature of a country and a people which distinguishes it from every other country and people, and which will eventually manifest itself to the world. The nineteenth century was the era of Russian realism, because the writers turned to their country and the experiences of

a developing nation to find the redemption not only of their own society but eventually of Europe and the world. Dostoevsky believed in the reform of the individual which would lead to the reform of the nation. The unique possibility of personal redemption and transformation was available to the Russians through the purity of their Byzantine Christianity. Tolstoy found in the life and faith of the Russian peasant the meaning of life. He completely rejected the society of which Dostoevsky wrote: "The life of merchants, coachmen, seminarists, convicts, and muziks strikes me as monotonous and boring." These two giants of literary genius, writing at the same period, are strikingly different, and yet their differences heighten the value of each. We are closer in the similarity of conditions to Dostoevsky who wrote of urban life, of the abnormal, the insecure, the pathological--all favorite themes of our age of psychology. In sentiment we are closer to Tolstoy who writes of the security of an agrarian society unknown to us, but deeply desired by many who have found no stability in a society not rooted in the soil. In the present day when our technical and scientific progress has brought with it a terrible insecurity, this man who shows his contempt for civilization and "obstinately defends his hoe and wooden plow" has tremendous appeal.

Tolstoy was born to the aristocracy. He considered himself primarily a landowner and not a writer and was

throughout his life deeply attached to the soil. His novels are a panorama of the life of aristocratic society and inevitably end with an idyllic picture of life in the country. In War and Peace the principal characters still living after the events of 1805-1820 are presented to us in an Epilogue to reveal the joys of married life, family life in the country. Natasha and Pierre, Mary and Nicolas, are content in their simple manor life. In Anna Karenina the happiness of Kitty and Levin is in sharp contrast to the crushed figure of Anna and the empty life of Alex who seeks death in the war with the Turks. The superficiality of society life is laid bare in the endless soirees, in the shallow characters of Helene and her brother Anatole, and in the simple wisdom of the peasants, Feodor, and Platon Karataev.

As in Dostoevsky, so in Tolstoy there is a marked contrast between the artist and the moralist. The Diary of a Writer is certainly inferior to Dostoevsky's novels--quite pedantic and at times somewhat bigoted. Tolstoy was in a continual inner conflict about his artistic works and finally renounced them entirely at the age of fifty-two and wrote many articles and books on religion and the moral life. In these it becomes evident that the insight of the artist is not the insight of the logician, and Tolstoy as thinker is quite inferior to Tolstoy as artist. It is Tolstoy the artist that we would consider, and we would

approach him through his two masterpieces, War and Peace, and Anna Karenina. Few books have ever received the degree of praise awarded to War and Peace. We need consider only a few statements to recognize the impression this work has made.

E. M. Forster: Here is the greatest novel ever written. It has been called "life itself."

Virginia Woolf: There is hardly any subject of human experience that is left out of War and Peace.

The book has epic scope. It can not properly be called a novel and in fact defies classification. It is a tremendous mural of characters and experiences and events with universal significance for all who read it. It has no central plot, no central character. In War we have Napoleon and Kutuzov in their significantly different roles in the historical process. In Peace there are Pierre and Andrey, Natasha and Maria, and a host of secondary characters and subplots. One of the main figures of the book, the peasant, Platon Karataev, is seen only in a few pages, but his symbolic centrality is immediately established. Characters and events interweave, leaving an unforgettable pattern of human existence.

Pierre and Andrey are the variables in the novel-- Natasha and Princess Maria, the constants who contain within themselves, simply and unconsciously, the answers which both Pierre and Andrey are seeking. They are both searching for the aim of life, the explanation of the mystery of

existence. Prince Andrey seeks the aim of life in order to discover the intrinsic value, the good and evil of life, and to find some guide to conduct. Pierre was simpler. He knew instinctively the right and wrong, the good and evil, and invariably chose the former; but he wished to understand why. He wanted to find the harmony and inner peace which comes from implicit faith in the ultimate triumph of goodness.

"He had sought it in philanthropy, in Freemasonry, in the dissipations of town life, in wine, in heroic feats of self-sacrifice, and in romantic love of Natasha and all these quests and experiences had failed him."¹

Pierre found this inner tranquility after he had purged himself of all thought or care for past events. At an execution of his fellow soldiers all the plans and daydreams of his former days faded. Any question of judgment of the rightness or wrongness of the execution faded. There was left only the vacuum of meaninglessness.

"He felt that it was not in his power to regain faith in the meaning of life."²

At this moment when he was aware of his complete inadequacy to discover within himself the meaning of life, he found the renewal of faith on a sure and firm foundation in the simple words of the peasant Karataev.

¹ L. Tolstoy, War and Peace, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1942, p. 1071.

² Ibid, p. 1072.

Through his contact with Platon Karataev he saw that happiness consisted in satisfying one's needs, and unhappiness in superfluity. The joy in life comes from loving life, for life and God are synonymous.

"Life is everything. Life is God. Everything changes and moves and that movement is God. While there is life there is joy in the consciousness of the divine. To love life is to love God."³

Pierre had been searching for God in abstractions and found Him in the concrete experiences of life. He had sought Him through his individual pursuits, but found Him only when he had been completely purged of individual interests. He had found the meaning and joy of life.

Andrey also experienced this renewal of joy in living when he was wounded and completely unaware of and uninterested in the trivial events surrounding him. He is the logical result of the Tolstoyan theory of complete passivity and submission. He grasps the infinity of Divine Love which is so significant that its richest counterpart on earth seems trivial. He becomes indifferent to all the passions of living, and awaits the quick arrival of Death which will unite him with the source of life. His love of life leads him to the love of death. And he finds tranquility in death.

This resignation before the inevitable is seen in the treatment of Kutuzov as opposed to Napoleon. Tolstoy

³ Ibid, p. 1074.

rejects the idea that the supermen control the destiny of the world. They are merely the puppets of circumstance. Napoleon thought he was controlling events and shaping history, but rather he was being controlled by events, and history was shaping him. He had much less freedom than the man who has little power, for power is really dependent on all the persons and events who have made it possible for one man to be in power at one particular moment in history. The peculiar concatenation of events over which he had no control has placed him where he was. The truly historic person such as Kutuzov will realize his dependence on all of mankind and all of history. Every single act and event from the inception of time has placed him in the peculiar position in which he finds himself. Realizing this, Kutuzov dedicated himself to the service of history and of the group. Napoleon sought individual glory; Kutuzov sought only to serve his soldiers and his particular duty without any thought of individual gain. It is in the group consciousness that one is truly oneself.

War and Peace was the supreme expression of Tolstoy, the artist. His love of life throbs through every moment of the book. In his later novel, Anna Karenina, the moralist was beginning to usurp the position of the artist. He who had loved life was compelled by his moral convictions to judge it. He does so in the characters of Anna and Vronsky, who misunderstand the meaning of life. They had

thought themselves and their love sufficient to give life joy and happiness. Anna even sacrificed her son on the altar of love. But such a love was doomed--not because it was outside the legal bounds of society--but because it was purely individual, purely selfish. It was self-indulgence. Anna and Vronsky had thought that the satisfaction of love was the satisfaction of life, and they discovered their mistake too late. Anna lives only for herself, and thus transgresses the moral law. Her violent death is the inevitable result of her self-absorption. Levin finds the truth which Anna has missed in life. He is a young land-owner continually searching for meaning, and driven almost to the point of suicide in his failure to find it. He is led to the truth as Pierre had been by the words of an old peasant. He discovers that one must live for others, for goodness, for God, and real love is self-sacrifice, not self-assertion.

Tolstoy's work was a triumph of Russian realism. He was faithful to his depiction of life in the first half of the nineteenth century, but interpreted that life with his peculiar insight and genius. After reading his works it is indeed impossible not to realize the gulf which exists between a good writer and a great one. Tolstoy undoubtedly ranks with the great.

CHEKHOV

There is a radical difference between evolution and revolution. It is more than a difference in limits of time. A belief in evolution is the belief in the power of ideas to change things. It is a belief in a rational ordering of events. When a chasm appears between ideas and their realization, and no way is seen to bridge the gulf, one can be easily disillusioned with ideas and turn to violent action to achieve his purposes. Eighteenth century Russia had no important ideals, and when she became aware of ideals in the nineteenth century, she fell in love with them. Russians are not inclined to do things half-way. They throw themselves whole-heartedly into whatever they adopt. The difficulty is that in their enthusiasm they sometimes don't see the difference between the wading pool and the diving area until they are floundering around out of their depth. In the nineteenth century they became enamored of ideals, ready to die for them without really comprehending the nature of the idea and how it can be translated into action. We cannot be too hasty in judging them; it was perhaps not the fault of the one or the many that the bridge was lost between action and the idea. Perhaps the "times were not ripe." Possibly only a revolution could have jolted the Russian society from peasants to intellectuals out of passivity of the centuries. Whatever was responsible, the revolution occurred in all

its gory splendor and ushered in a twentieth century Russia radically different from previous eras.

Chekhov writes of the post-evolutionary and pre-revolutionary period in Russian history. His emotional turning away from ideals and accompanying sense of frustration and sadness echo the despair of the reformers at the enormous gap between words and actions. They despaired of seeing any concrete or permanent results from their ideals. The reforms of Alexander might momentarily be replaced by the reactions of Nicolas. Tolstoy grasped the nature of the difficulty when he saw that ideals should come from the bottom of society and not be imposed from above. The intellectuals had thought that they could use their thoughts to save society, but the masses did not even understand what was being attempted in their name. Bazarov cannot even converse with the peasants he is sacrificing himself to save, and his sacrifice is in vain. A Swiss correspondent has said that we are deceiving ourselves in the thought that we can give democracy to Germany. A few may understand it, but until all passionately desire it and believe in it, it will be only a futile and superficial structure.

Futility is the theme of the eighteen-eighties, and it is the theme of Chekhov. The sadness of lost ideals, the pathos of lost youth, "there has passed away a glory from the earth." The glory of idealism has become the frustration of disillusionment. Chekhov is tired of words.

He has too often seen his country-men entranced with the sound of their own words. He has attended too many committee meetings in which the fate of the peasants is solved and resolved in grandiose terms by officials whose servants are waiting for them outside by their carriages, stamping their feet and pinching their fingers to keep warm. He comes to the conclusion that ideas are foreign to the customary vagueness of the Russian character. As with some German philosophers, words are spun into elaborate theories without any relation to reality. Who can forget that magnificent scene in Gogol's Dead Souls when the Postmaster sets out to prove that Chichikov is none other than Captain Kopeikin (consuming eleven pages) before the Chief of Police suddenly realizes that in his opening sentence, the Postmaster had described the Captain as minus an arm and a leg. Chichikov is of course supplied with the proper number of appendages and by no possible stretch of the imagination could he have been the same person. This delightful but deadly vagueness in the Russian soul makes action difficult. The intentions are noble, but they seldom leave the realm of ideas. Gogol saw this defect and bitterly denounced it; Chekhov makes poetry of its pathos.

A belief in ideals unites people, and disillusionment isolates them. In writing of disillusion, Chekhov must write isolation. The most poignant expression of man in isolation is in the simple story, Grief. An old

cab-driver has lost his only son, and tries vainly to find someone who will share his grief or even listen to his story. Everyone he approaches is lost in his own futile efforts at living and is oblivious to an old man's mumblings. In his bewilderment and need he finds himself telling his story to his old horse. The irreparable sadness of human beings who need each other but are kept by an unconquerable isolation from the relief of communication is seen in A Dreary Story. A professor and his young ward have both become aware of the vulgarity of life, of its meaninglessness and dullness, and yet they waste their only opportunity for communion in conventional polite phrases. The unsurpassable isolation of man from man, the "lost lane end into heaven," is the common fate of all men. Those who are sensitive to life's complexities are trapped by them; those who are not are mere brutes, undeserving of the title of man.

Such brutes may be in power, however. This is merely one more phase of the futile nature of existence. Ward No. 6 is the story of a doctor thwarted by his own nature and the difficulties of his surroundings from effectively changing the conditions in his squalid hospital. He has retired to his office and a bottle of vodka. One day on a visit to the insane ward, he becomes interested in a young maniac who speaks of freedom and the injustices of society. The doctor finds him more sane than many of his associates outside the ward, but his visits arouse suspicion among the

staff members and local people. His insensate fellow physician creates the opportunity of trapping the doctor in the insane ward, and gleefully hands him the filthy robes worn by the deranged. As he was about to comprehend the nature of ideals, he is isolated from his society.

Chekhov begins in this story to criticise the Tolstoyian theory that man can be happy under any conditions, if he is free within himself. The doctor had attempted to say something like that to the young maniac before he himself was imprisoned. But he too succumbs to the horror of imprisonment, completely losing his mind.

In refuting idealism, Chekhov must refute Tolstoy, and he devotes several stories to a devastating criticism of his theories. He writes to Tolstoy, "There is peasant blood in me, and you cannot astonish me with peasant goodness." Tolstoy had placed his faith in the simple goodness of the peasant living close to the soil, and from his life had derived his ethics of non-resistance and moral self-perfection through simple living and hard work. In one of his greatest stories, My Life, Chekhov shows the weakness and inevitable failure of this position. Misail, the central character, is a son of a nobleman but decides to spend his life as a simple laborer among the peasants. He persuades his lovely fiancée to join him in this labor of love. They work among the peasants but are not able to help them very much. The peasants continue in their old

habits of stealing and drinking; they merely use this new situation as means for more thievery and drunkenness. Masha sees this and awakes to the fact that only she and Misail are benefiting from this experiment in service through identifying themselves with a group which had no conception of their ideals. They were doing nothing to change the system they condemned. Chekhov was revealing what he believed was the real implication of the Tolstoyan ethic. It was basically selfish, concerned only with the moral perfection of the individual, and it contained no notions of the means of changing social conditions. He himself had no answer to the problem of the salvation of society. Perhaps he no longer believed in the possibility or probability of redemption. Man is on a downward path, and there are no sudden uphill curves that might lead him back to happiness. The way before is clear and its direction is down.

He is typical enough of his generation to insert a few possibilities for an upward swerve, but one has the feeling that he doesn't really believe in them or want to. The doctor in My Life tells Misail and Masha that they can render a service to mankind and help it to progress through art or scholarship. His final character Nadya actually achieves a sense of accomplishment when she escapes from a mediocre marriage and turns to study. The overall tone of his works is minor and the predominant themes are

isolation and futility.

It is impossible to leave the work of Chekhov without mention of his particular style. Beside Chekhov most

writers must appear crude and clumsy. His stories are of classic simplicity and beauty. They are full of warmth and humor, and rich in symbolic significance. He is still a realist, the last of the realists, and one can walk in and out of his stories assured of gaining insight without losing hold of reality--a feat not always possible with Gogol or Dostoevsky or Turgenev, and his stories are moving portrayals of the omnipresent reality of sorrow in human existence.

Their approach undoubtedly has validity. The nineteenth century writers were great realists, but their tragedy concerns was with eternal, the ideals behind the realists: Pushkin, Gogol, Goncharov, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Chekhov have something to say that concerns every man in every society. Their heroes are themselves viewed from a peculiar angle, and we see why and are not they simultaneously. We see their souls which have the intricate symphony of life, and are grateful for the wisdom of each theme. Each is age-old and new to us. We recognize each as part of our experience and yet beyond our experience. The tragedy and the comedy we find in ourselves and in those around us are realized and intensified in the great literary characters of nineteenth century Russia.

SUMMARY

"A fact is not only itself, but a symbol pointing beyond itself." --A. N. Whitehead

The most meager view of life is to see it completely in terms of externals. And ^{the} most superficial interpretation of Russian literature is to find in it only a realistic account of Russian society. The writers who merely record the society of their day never live beyond it, although they may emerge now and then in some doctoral thesis. Many of the critics writing on Russian literature have been interested primarily in relating it to Russian society. Their approach undoubtedly has validity. The nineteenth century writers were great realists, but their primary concern was with eternal, the ideals behind the realities. Pushkin, Gogol, Goncharov, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Chekhov have something to say that concerns every man in every society. Their heroes are themselves viewed from a peculiar angle, and we are they and are not they simultaneously. We see their motifs woven into the intricate symphony of life, and are grateful for the elaboration of each theme. Each is age-old and each is new. We recognize each as part of our experience and yet beyond our experience. The tragedy and the comedy we find in ourselves and in those around us are realized and intensified in the great literary characters of nineteenth century Russia.

The basic problem for any artist is the interpretation of life, the search for meaning. He may find it in himself, in his society or state, in negation, in action, in God. He may never find anything of significance and reject life as a not very funny joke. But in his description of his society, his answer to this basic question will be revealed. Pushkin, the first great Russian writer and the initiator of nineteenth century Russian literature, interprets his society in the characters of Oneghin and Tatiana. Oneghin wastes his life in frivolity and foolishness. He overlooks the basic values of life in his search for novelty and pleasure. In dramatic opposition to him is Tatiana, and from her simple purity and freshness springs the vital force sustaining and defining life. The romantic Oneghins, seeking individual gratification in every experience, indifferent to the needs of society, lead a futile existence. The sum total of their flutterings is ennui for themselves and waste for society.

Pushkin loved life and exulted in its spontaneous goodness and beauty. Wherever Gogol looked, he saw only evil. The devil was hiding in every corner and the most ordinary appearing circumstance reveals a nightmare of grinning demons. You purchase an interesting portrait, and suddenly there is Mephisto himself, laughing sardonically and stretching out his hand for your soul. Evil is inextricably bound with existence, and happiness is a cloak

snatched away as quickly as it is bought, paid for too dearly with one's soul. The effort is not worth the outcome, and submission to an empty existence is inevitable. Whatever your bargain with the devil, you have lost your soul (which perhaps you never had).

Gogol's world is a realm of lost souls. Goncharov has two worlds, the world of man and the world of the superfluous man. Within the framework of society there is fulfillment in striving and growing, and the goal of the struggle is a better life. For the superfluous man, the man estranged from his society, life gives no reward but death.

Both Goncharov and Turgenev treat of the superfluous man, but in both even the doomed estranged man must strive in order to assert his humanity. The death of a slug is not very tragic. The man who surrenders submissively to his fate is not the hero; it is Prometheus shaking his fist in the face of fate that is the comic and the tragic figure. Turgenev's heroes, Bazarov, Insarov are futile characters. They are potential leaders without anyone to lead. They are fervent reformers with no possibility of reforming anything. Their only glory lies in their striving. And this was their individual salvation, although it contributed little to the salvation of society.

Individual salvation is the concern of Dostoevsky. In the Gogolian world, every man had lost his soul through

participation in the evil inherent in life and society. This guilt was Gogol's doom, and Dostoevsky's redemption. It is through this baptism of crime, of sin, that man is able to comprehend his guilt and be led through suffering to repentance. This is the real baptism of fire. Through murder Raskolnikov is led to salvation. Unless man expresses his sub-conscious desire to be the superman in action, to be a little god, he may never become conscious of his guilt and can never be led to repentance and redemption.

Tolstoy is also concerned with individual salvation. Turgenev's potential leaders could find no one to lead. Tolstoy's characters could not lead anyone else, for no one would follow, but they could lead themselves. Tolstoy reasserts the Pushkin theme of goodness found in simplicity, and these two writers at the opposite ends of a century are surprisingly alike. They are nature lovers and believe in the regenerative power of the soil. They love life in all of its spontaneity and beauty.

"Life is everything. Life is God." Realism linked with idealism began on this note and ended on it.

For Chekhov was left only the disillusionment of realism divorced from any idealism. His emotional turning away from ideals was the destruction of realism. The external without the eternal is unbearable, a body without a soul. This is the lost youth atmosphere found in Chekhov.

He had grown old and found his ideals were but illusions. This was the real end of intellectual Russia. She could no longer believe in ideas, so she placed her faith in action and revolution.

The nature of the ideals in which the writers believed differ, but underlying all the writers is some feeling of the purity of the feminine idea. Perhaps this has its basis in the old religions of fertility worship, the identity of feminine regeneration and the regenerative power of the soil. The male is weak; the female strong. Turgenev's heroines are the personification of this belief. Pushkin's Tatiana is the positive force, the elan vital. Raskolnikov is led to salvation through the simple faith of Sonia. Olga is the only means by which Oblomov achieves enough humanity to be a loss to society. The only visionary moments in the writings of Gogol come when he addresses mother Russia and calls for a mystic regeneration of mankind. The Slavophiles adopted this belief and preached redemptive power inherent in the Slavic races. Only Tolstoy preserves a balance between the masculine and the feminine. In this way he is the most European of the nineteenth century writers, much more so than Turgenev whose pure loves and pure women border on the sentimental. Tolstoy retained the idea in his character of Natasha who was simple and good; but it is overbalanced by the corrupt Anna, and by the superior nature of the goodness of Pierre and Levin after

they had found the meaning of life. Tolstoy asserts the masculine and leaves the mystic faith of the eternal Madonna. Mysticism is an important element of Russian society. It takes reality and translates it into some kind of mystic ideal, as vague as the Russian landscape, and as pervasive. The growing national consciousness becomes a messianic concept that Russia alone is to redeem the world. A violent revolution is to usher in a peaceful world.

In nineteenth century Russia, the intellectual was an integral part of society. As a liberal or a conservative he might at times be at odds with the government or at one with it, but he was never completely divorced from it as he is in twentieth century Russia. Throughout the literature of the nineteenth century is the sense of growing isolation, not only of the intellectual from society, but of man from the group. As much as Dostoevsky talked of the saving power of mother Russia, his characters attain salvation by an act which completely estranges them from society. Raskolnikov wanders around after his crime unable to communicate with anyone until the real nature of crime is revealed to him. Turgenev's figures have deliberately isolated themselves from society by their nihilism which is itself a complete break with society. They believe this will bring them closer to those in whose name they endure the separation, but it merely isolated them

more. This is the superfluous man theme, the man for whom society has no place, who has lost his ability to act and be a positive force in a world he no longer understands. The supreme example of this man is Oblomov, who no longer has anything in common with his society. He cannot understand it, as it cannot understand him. Even Tolstoy, who preached that a man must lose his soul in the service of the group to find it, feels this isolation. Pierre and Levin learn from the words of the peasant, but they never really become one with them. Andrey discovers that complete love of God isolates one entirely from the world around him. The atmosphere of isolation is at its height in Chekhov. Each character needs the other, but they are prevented by an unsurpassable wall of division from reaching one another. They are alone with their grief and awareness of futility.

The nineteenth century began with the optimism of Pushkin. He saw the evils of his society and the dangers facing men, but he welcomed the challenge with a deep faith in the beauty of life. Gogol saw only submission to evil, but Turgenev and Goncharov discovered man attained to some stature by striving against evil, however futile the struggle might be. Dostoevsky used the evil to arrive at goodness. Tolstoy recaptured Pushkin's faith in life and nature. Evil could be overcome because it was a product of superfluity. The essential goodness of life was still

retained in the mind of the peasant, and from him one could learn the secret of happiness and value. Chekhov came from the peasant race and would not be astonished with peasant goodness. He refused to believe in the old ideals, and closed the pages of the nineteenth century sadly but firmly with a vision of the futility of the period's peculiar combination of realism and idealism. On the next page will be written the story of a Revolution.

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