

TOLSTOY AND BLOOMSBURY

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*....of the three great Russian writers, it is Tolstoi
who most enthralls us and most repels.*

Virginia Woolf

For most of members of the circle which came to be known as the "Bloomsbury Group,"¹ Tolstoy, unlike Dickens or Thackeray, was more of a contemporary than a writer from the previous era. Their connection with Tolstoy was constantly kept alive by those among them who were most active in England's burgeoning Tolstoy "industry" in the beginning of this century: David ('Bunny') Garnett's mother, Constance, was one of Tolstoy's English translators; Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster were instrumental in presenting Tolstoy to post-Victorian generations; and Woolf's husband, Leonard, even attempted to learn Russian in order to translate and publish Gorky's *Reminiscences of Tolstoy*.² In their writings, letters, diaries, and public statements, Bloomsbury's writers, critics, historians and even painters often appeared to engage in a direct dialogue with Tolstoy and to formulate their own ideas by actively arguing or agreeing with his. This "intimacy" with a foreign writer may seem particularly strange if one remembers that these same people frequently had little more than disdain for Tolstoy's counterparts and contemporaries in their own literature.

¹I am using the term loosely, mostly applying it to Virginia Woolf and her large circle of friends and acquaintances. It is not my purpose here either to define what "Bloomsbury" was or to argue who rightfully "belonged" to it. I am aware that E.M. Forster is usually seen as having been but on the "periphery" of Bloomsbury while Katherine Mansfield, although on friendly terms with at least some of the "essential" members of the group (i.e. Virginia Woolf, her sister Vanessa, Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Maynard Keynes, Desmond MacCarthy, S.S. Kotliansky, etc.), is not at all considered to be a Bloomsbury "insider." Neither is Ottoline Morrell, even though she was a popular hostess for their gatherings and -- at times -- a good friend of both Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf. But those distinctions are irrelevant for this paper which uses "Bloomsbury" as a term of convenience for a generation of writers, artists and their friends who, because of their proximity to one another, affected each others' views and tastes and created an influential intellectual "subculture."

²Which he did with the help of S.S. Kotliansky and, sometimes, Virginia Woolf. Both works were published by the Hogarth Press which the Woolfs owned. "Our actual procedure in translating," writes Leonard Woolf in his autobiography, "was that Kot did the first draft in handwriting, with generous space between the lines, and we [he and Virginia] then turned his extremely queer version into English. In order to make this easier and more accurate, we started to learn Russian and at one moment I had learned enough to be able to stumble through a newspaper or even Aksakov" (Leonard Woolf, *Beginning*, 247).

The reasons for this affinity with Tolstoy vary. Some have little to do with Tolstoy as an artist. There was, for example, a political incentive to admire Tolstoy: Bloomsbury was a generation of pacifists, many of whom (Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, and Duncan Grant, to name just a few) refused to fight in the First World War. As Alex Zwerdling points out in *Virginia Woolf and the Real World*, "Tolstoy was the first writer in modern times to link Christianity with an absolute refusal to fight, and his pacifist works were widely known in other countries" (Zwerdling, 391). Even though the vast majority of the group rejected Christianity, Tolstoy's pacifism was still powerfully influential. George Trevelyan's response to Tolstoy's views in 1904 is quite characteristic of the turn-of-the-century generation: "Tolstoi's letter in *Times* has set me thinking very uncomfortably -- or *feeling* rather. It fills me with (i) a new sense of doubt and responsibility as to my own manner of life (ii) as to this of war. I feel as if we were all living in the City of Destruction..." (in Russell, I, 294; his emphasis). Tolstoy's "The Law of Love and the Law of Violence" (1909) was of particular importance here since it was written only a few years before the "Great War" broke out.

Though attracted to Tolstoy's pacifism, Bloomsbury writers and critics were never blind to its possible shortcomings. In *Civilization and Old Friends* (1927),³ Clive Bell thus summed up the misgivings he and many other members of the group felt about Tolstoy's doctrine of "nonviolence":

Tolstoy may have conceived a world in which everyone would be so good that he would not wish to interfere with anyone else, a world cleansed of greed and hatred, envy and ambition, in which even if he had them a man would never act on his evil passions. More probably, Tolstoy believed that there would always be violent, meddlesome, greedy, and envious brutes who would follow instinct down any dirty alley, but held their existence unimportant so long as the others preserved their saintliness unspotted. Saintliness, argued Tolstoy, can be preserved by submitting passively and with a good grace. And so it can, and enormously increased to boot; but civilization would perish. (Clive Bell, I, 171)

Other reasons for Tolstoy's popularity with Bloomsbury can be directly linked to the group's general dissatisfaction with domestic literature. Not quite happy with the likes of Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells or John Galsworthy and hating to have to learn from the Victorians against whose values they liked to rebel, Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey and E.M. Forster inevitably looked elsewhere for literary models.⁴ Russia was a logical

³Leon Edel even associates Bell's interests in "civilization" with Tolstoy: "[T]he strange conversion of the family *parvenu* spirit in Clive made him want to write a treatise on civilization, on the 'new renaissance,' on art -- very much as Tolstoy, a rough nobleman with the smell of the fields and manure about him, encountering life's subjects, wanted to write great essays: What was philosophy? What was art? What was life?" (Edel, 17).

⁴See, for example, Woolf's "Modern Fiction" (in *Common Reader*, 150-158), where she laments the state of the literary scene which is dominated by Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy. See also her famous essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (in *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays*, 94-119).

choice. The annual London performances of Diaghilev's Ballet Russe (both Diaghilev and Nijinsky were frequent visitors of Bloomsbury "salons," particularly that of Lady Ottoline Morrell⁵) helped to put that distant -- and therefore exotic -- country permanently in vogue. Not only Tolstoy but also Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Turgenev, Gorky and even Aksakov were widely read and frequently discussed. The interest in Russian literature was further stimulated by the 1917 Revolution and the presence within the group of several Russians -- among them, S.S. Koteliarsky, Boris Anrep, and Maynard Keynes' wife Lidya Lopokova. Consequently, from the very beginning of its existence (1917), the Woolfs' Hogarth Press made a point of translating and printing Russian books. Richard Kennedy, who worked for Hogarth in 1928, echoed the sentiments of many Bloomsbury readers when he wrote in his diary: "I like the Russian books better than any others we publish" (Kennedy, 42).

Some critics believe that at least in the case of Virginia Woolf, the preference for Russian authors can be partially explained by fierce competitiveness with other English writers. Thus Phyllis Rose suggests that Woolf was simply "on safer ground" with foreigners: "They were from a different country, wrote in a different tradition. So she could read Colette and Proust with pleasure, while Mansfield and Joyce produced anxiety and irritation. Tolstoy, so distant from her in time, geography, and by virtue of his background, could evoke her strongest admiration" (Rose, 262).⁶ Rose's point may have some validity. Yet notwithstanding both Woolf's self-doubts and the sometimes political or even fashionable nature of Bloomsbury's fascination with Russia, it would be a great mistake to downplay the genuineness, seriousness -- and the possible consequences -- of their admiration for Russian writers in general and Tolstoy in particular.

"Nothing seems to escape [Tolstoy]," mused Woolf in "The Russian Point of View" (1925). "Nothing glances off him unrecorded.... Even in a translation we feel that we have been set on a mountain-top and had a telescope put into our hands. Everything is astonishingly clear and absolutely sharp" (Woolf, *Common Reader*, 185-186). It was primarily this combination of precision and scope that seems to have drawn Woolf's generation to Tolstoy. "Tolstoy....," wrote E.M. Forster to Woolf in 1927, "could vitalise

⁵Barbara Bagenal's description of Morrell's parties during the Russian Ballet's early seasons in London (1912, 1913) shows the kind of excitement that the performances created: "Many of us who went to these parties were greatly influenced by the Russian Ballet and we often went to Ottoline's house straight from Covent Garden. Philip Morrell played the pianola for us and we all danced madly together -- probably still influenced by the ballet. They were great gatherings" (in Noble, 145).

⁶Rose is oversimplifying Woolf's attitude to Mansfield here. Despite Woolf's sense of rivalry she actually acknowledged liking several of Mansfield's stories (particularly "Prelude"), found it easy and exciting to discuss writing with her (Woolf allegedly told Mansfield that she was "the only woman with whom I long to talk work" [in Tomalin, 198]), and thought that Mansfield "has a much better idea of writing than most" (Woolf, *Letters*, II, 159). Upon Mansfield's death in 1922 Woolf noted in her diary: "I have the feeling that I shall think of her at intervals all through life. Probably we had something in common which I shall never find in anyone else" (Woolf, *Diary*, II, 227).

guillotines... as well as tea tables, could command certain moods or deeds which our domesticity leads us to shun as false" (in Quentin Bell, II, 134). Because of his ability to present one with a whole picture, Tolstoy, according to Forster, had no equals in English literature: "No English novelist is as great as Tolstoy -- that is to say has given so complete a picture of man's life, both on its domestic and heroic side" (Forster, *Aspects*, 7). Lady Ottoline Morrell's emotional and somewhat naive reaction to reading Tolstoy in 1916 likewise stresses the writer's satisfying "completeness": "I have just finished *War and Peace*. It is amazing, almost incredible that a man could have created it. It stretches over the whole life of Russia and Europe. It is tremendously august and beautiful" (Morrell, 153).

Morrell goes on to describe how she and Katherine Mansfield luxuriated in the sumptuous details of Tolstoy's narrative:

[W]e used to lose ourselves in scene after scene of *War and Peace* -- especially [Katherine] loved the chapters where the young girls washed and dressed themselves with excitement for a ball, or went on masquerading expeditions in sledges, and then the scene where Natasha slipped off the slippers from her little feet and jumped into her mother's bed while her mother was reciting her evening prayer, 'Can it be that this couch is my bier.' Natasha snuggling under the bedclothes, giggling to herself and then peeping out to look at her mother until she made her smile. Then she too got into bed and they began their evening talk. Recollecting these things with Katherine was like living them again with her. (Morrell, 186)

Morrell's description provides an excellent testimony to how much Katherine Mansfield must have really meant it when she wrote to Constance Garnett in 1921 that "the younger generation owe you more than we ourselves are able to realise. These books have changed our lives, no less" (in Drabble, 380).⁷

Mansfield's strong sentiments appear to go much deeper than merely a trendy fascination with exotic authors, and so do Virginia Woolf's feelings for Tolstoy, whom she considered "the greatest of all novelists" (Woolf, *Common Reader*, 185). Woolf, in fact, felt so drawn to Tolstoy that she found solace -- and excitement -- in re-reading him during the first dark months of the Second World War: "*War and Peace* is the greatest novel in the world; and if I'm not bombed I shall read that and *Anna Karenina* this winter" (Woolf, *Letters*, VI, 361). "Always the same reality," she wrote in her diary in 1940, "like touching an exposed electric wire... his rugged short cut mind -- to me the most, not sympathetic, but inspiring, rousing genius in the raw. Thus more disturbing, more 'shocking,' more of a thunderclap, even on art, even on literature, than any other writer" (Woolf, *Diary*, V, 273).

⁷Mansfield appears to have been quite "intimate" with Tolstoy for she even used one of his characters to describe her own father: "Father's a Tolstoy character. He has just the point of vision of a Tolstoy character. I always felt that Stepan in *Anna Karenina* reminded me of someone -- and his well-nourished, fresh body was always curiously familiar to me -- of course -- it is my Papa's... the smile and the whiskers" (in Tomalin, 12).

When Rose describes Tolstoy as the writer who was in all respects "distant" from Virginia Woolf, she simply ignores Woolf's own statements as to how close Tolstoy could be to the English sensibilities she shared with her readers. "From his first words we can be sure of one thing...", Woolf wrote in *Common Reader*, "here is a man who sees what we see, who proceeds, too, as we are accustomed to proceed, not from the inside outwards, but from the outside inwards" (Woolf, *Common Reader*, 185). In that she drew a major distinction between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky: it was Dostoevsky, not Tolstoy, who would appear to be "alien, difficult, a foreigner" (Woolf, *Common Reader*, 185), and whose point of view ("from the inside outwards") was drastically different from what English literary audiences had been accustomed to.

Woolf's description of Tolstoy as "a man who sees what we see" is also noteworthy because it helps to underscore the crucial difference between her generation's perception of the writer and that of their Victorian predecessors. To many Victorian critics Tolstoy was, indeed, rather "distant." "[A]n English mind," wrote Matthew Arnold in 1887, "will be startled by Anna's suffering herself to be so overwhelmed and irretrievably carried away by her passion.... ...that Anna, being what she is and her circumstances being what they are, should show not a hope, hardly a thought, of conquering her passion, of escaping from its fatal power, is to our notions strange and a little bewildering" (in Knowles, 357).⁸ Arnold also used this occasion to congratulate his countrymen (and, presumably, countrywomen) on their superiority to the "Slavs": "I remember M. Nisard saying to me many years ago at the École Normale in Paris, that he respected the English because they are *une nation qui sait se gener* -- people who can put constraint on themselves and go through what is disagreeable. Perhaps in the Slav nature this valuable faculty is somewhat wanting; a very strong impulse is too much regarded as irresistible, too little as what can be resisted and ought to be resisted..." (Ibid.)⁹. But what Arnold saw as a "valuable faculty" of "decorum" and "constraint," Lytton Strachey (who in

⁸Arnold and his contemporaries did, however, find Tolstoy's 'moral sense' close to theirs -- "Our Russian novelist deals abundantly with criminal passion and with adultery, but he does not seem to feel himself owing any service to the goddess Lubricity, or bound to put in touches at this goddess's dictation" (Arnold, in Knowles, 359). "[Tolstoy's] daring is great, for he has withheld nothing in the story of Anna's shame. Yet from first to last his appeal is made entirely to the moral sense of the reader..." (W.J. Dawson, cited in Knowles, 362).

⁹It is highly ironic, of course, that while Arnold is castigating the Slavs for their passions, complimenting the English for their moderation, and praising Tolstoy for his moral sense (which enables him, in Arnold's opinion, to be less "shocking" to the English reader than Flaubert or other French writers), he appears to be totally unaware of Tolstoy's rather strong anti-English bias, which is quite evident in *Anna Karenina*. Far from sharing Arnold's view on the "excesses" in the "the Slavs," Tolstoy actually seems to find dangerous extremes in "the English." Thus there are strong indications in the novel that the way Vronsky (who, like Stiva, is an obvious Anglofile) and Anna (who likes to ride horses and read English novels) behave is much more "English" (*too* 'liberal,' 'progressive,' 'emancipated' and, inevitably, 'amoral') than "Russian" (more conservative, traditional and, ultimately, more 'moral'). It is Prince Shcherbatsky, Dolly and eventually Kitty and Levin who, in Tolstoy's scheme, represent the true "Russian" way of life.

Eminent Victorians mocked the Victorian 'faculties' of, among others, Arnold's own father, Dr. Thomas Arnold) condemned as nothing more than sheer hypocrisy and unwillingness to acknowledge one's true feelings. Many in Bloomsbury prided themselves on feeling much closer to Anna and her allegedly "Slavic" emotionalism than to Matthew Arnold and the Victorian 'prudishness' he esteemed.¹⁰

Hard as they may have tried, Woolf and her friends could not, however, ignore the fact that many of Tolstoy's ethical values were even more intolerant and unbending than those of their own Victorians.¹¹ Tolstoy's dogmatic views on art were notoriously difficult to take. And yet, as S.P. Rosenbaum points out in *Victorian Bloomsbury: The Early Literary History of the Bloomsbury Group*, "[f]or all the perversity of *What Is Art?*, its expressive, emotive, socially aware aesthetics permanently influenced Bloomsbury aesthetics" (Rosenbaum, 32). In this case, Bloomsbury painters and art critics were as affected by Tolstoy as were the Bloomsbury writers. Roger Fry liked to think that "the proper answer to Tolstoy's 'What is Art?' was the counter-question 'What isn't?'" (in Rosenbaum, 9) and that "the value of the aesthetic emotion... is clearly infinitely removed from those ethical values to which Tolstoy would have confined it" (in Clive Bell, II, 73), yet even Fry had to admit that "the first fruitful work in aesthetics had been done by Tolstoy" (Rosenbaum, 32).

Ottoline Morrell, being more religious and less artistically sophisticated than her Bloomsbury friends, did not appreciate the value they placed on nonjudgmental detachment in art, and must have heard plenty of discussions on the matter, when, in her diary in 1918, she strongly condemned Bloomsbury modernist views: "[A]ll these modern artists don't know what it means to have a love for humanity....They say it 'ruins their flame.' But how selfish they are, and by being so their flame flickers and dwindles, instead of becoming a torch of fire like Tolstoy's" (Morrell, 234). Morrell's close friend, Bertrand Russell, seems to have been of a similar opinion -- even though he did not particularly care for Tolstoy's skills as a philosopher. "What is valuable in Tolstoy, to my mind," Russell wrote in a letter to a friend, "is his power of right ethical judgements, and his perception of concrete facts; his theorizings are of course worthless. It is the greatest misfortune to the human race that he has so little power of reasoning" (Russell, I, 288).

Even though, unlike Morrell or Russell, the majority in Bloomsbury found it

¹⁰ Arnold's pronouncement that "we are not to take 'Anna Karenine' as a work of art; we are to take it as a piece of life" (cited in Knowles, 353) was equally unlikely to please Bloomsbury craft-conscious aesthetes. It should be noted, however, that Virginia Woolf, who was often as attracted by Victorian sensibilities as she was offended by them, found much to admire in Matthew Arnold's work. Thus she often quotes his poetry in her diary and at one point makes a firm promise to herself -- "that I will one of these days read the whole of Matthew Arnold" (Woolf, *Diaries*, III, 226).

¹¹ In this respect, the Bloomsbury modernists were more intellectually honest than Vladimir Nabokov, for example, who dismissed the moralist in Tolstoy much too lightly and preferred to see in him only that which he found attractive. See, for example, Nabokov's discussion of *Anna Karenina* in his *Lectures on Russian Literature*.

impossible to share Tolstoy's ethical values or his "anti-art" views on art, Tolstoy's overall popularity among them remained extraordinarily high. Not only Tolstoy's own works but also works about him became of great importance. Gorky's *Reminiscences of Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy* seems to have been particularly revered. In a "Publisher's Note" to the 1934 edition of the work, Leonard Woolf gives the following description of the book's initial reception: "Fourteen years ago The Hogarth Press published Maxim Gorky's *Reminiscences of Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy* and it is not an exaggeration to say that it was recognized almost immediately as one of the few masterpieces of modern biography. The first edition was exhausted in a few months and the book was reprinted before the end of 1920" (Gorky, 7). Gorky, Leonard Woolf noted, "makes one hear, see, feel Tolstoy and his character as if one were sitting in the same room -- his greatness and his littleness, his entrancing and infuriating complexity, his titanic and poetic personality, his superb humour" (Leonard Woolf, *Downhill*, 67). Gorky's faithful recording of Tolstoy's frank and even bawdy statements on sex and women must have particularly delighted Bloomsbury insiders since frank and bawdy discussions of this taboo subject -- in both its hetero- and homosexual varieties -- had been a trademark of Bloomsbury gatherings virtually from the start.¹²

From all this evidence it should be quite transparent that Tolstoy had a great impact on Bloomsbury's intellectual fervor. What is much less clear, however, is whether he directly influenced their artistic works; whether, for example, Bloomsbury's most prominent writers -- Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster -- would have been any different as creative artists were it not for their contact with Tolstoy. This other kind of a "reaction" to Tolstoy -- expressed not with statements but with art itself -- is much harder to document. Yet it definitely deserves the most serious consideration.

That Russia and Russians were frequently on Woolf's mind as she was writing her novels is quite evident. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa prefers reading "of the retreat from Moscow" to sharing the bed with her husband; her nemesis, Miss Kilman, a religious spinster competing for the heart and mind of Clarissa's daughter, is resolved to "think of Russia" whenever she needs a spiritual uplift (Woolf, *Dalloway*, 46, 195). In *Jacob's Room*, several Cambridge undergraduates come to the conclusion that Russian literature may be quite good "but these Slavs aren't civilized" (Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 75). In

¹²Given Tolstoy's contemptuous and dismissive portrayal of a gay couple in *Anna Karenina* (two officers in chapter XIX of part II), hints of 'shameful' lesbianism in Betsy Tverskaia's circle of female friends (e.g. Sappho Stolz, who in addition to her conspicuous name is said to have a masculine way of shaking women's hands), and his scathing depiction of a high government official convicted on the charges of "muzhelozhstvo" (Article 995 of Russian Legal Code prohibiting homosexual intercourse) in *Resurrection* (Simon Karlinsky, for example, is convinced that Tolstoy used this episode, as well as other similar ones, "to illustrate the corruption and moral laxity of Tsarist Russia" which in his opinion was too tolerant of homosexuality [Karlinsky, 349]), it is of course highly unlikely that Tolstoy would have been sympathetic to Bloomsbury's homoerotic experimentations and practices. It is quite possible that E.M. Forster's frequent discomfort with Tolstoy and even his dislike for *Anna Karenina* could have something to do with what Forster may have perceived as Tolstoy's homophobia.

Woolf's tongue-in-cheek *Orlando*, the young protagonist falls in love with an impish French-speaking Russian princess (à la Natasha Rostov, whose first name as well as what could be a corrupted version of her patronymic -- Il'inishna -- appear in the princess's own onomastic concoction - Marousha Stanilovska Dagmar **Natasha Iliana** Romanovitch) whom he first beholds skating on ice (with the grace of Kitty Shcherbatsky yet also with the masculine agility and athleticism of Konstantin Levin).

Woolf liked to point out that "[t]he most elementary remarks upon modern English fiction can hardly avoid some mention of the Russian influence" (Woolf, *Common Reader*, 157), and it only stands to reason that "the most elementary remarks" upon Woolf herself should mention "the Russian influence," especially that of Tolstoy. Yet Phyllis Rose is not the only critic who underestimates his possible impact on Woolf. For example in *The Victorian Heritage of Virginia Woolf*, Janis M. Paul states: "Woolf loved Russian fiction but found it ultimately alien to her sense of the factual world. ... The novelist who repeatedly elicits Woolf's praise is not Tolstoy but Defoe" (Paul, 32). This statement is particularly odd in light of the numerous instances of Woolf's extraordinary praise for Tolstoy, some of which have been cited earlier. And why would the critic want us to see Woolf's literary affinities in terms of either Defoe or Tolstoy but not both? As a matter of fact, Woolf scholars can sound downright parochial -- and even defensive -- when it comes to Woolf's reaction to Russian literature. Many of them downplay her strong sentiment that "if the Russians are mentioned one runs the risk of feeling that to write... any fiction save theirs is waste of time" (Woolf, *Common Reader*, 157). Typically, in *Bloomsbury Aesthetics and the Novels of Forster and Woolf* David Dowling does not even mention Tolstoy as a possible ingredient of either "Bloomsbury aesthetics" in general or of Woolf's (and Forster's) literary background in particular.¹³ And then there are always those critics who appear to confuse their own vague notion of Russian literature with Woolf's, attributing to her the views she could not possibly have. Maria DiBattista, for example, suggests that Woolf considered "Chekhov, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy... novelists of the soul" (DiBattista, 5). Woolf, of course, knew better than to call Chekhov "a novelist" and she was also very careful to point out that, in her opinion, it was "life" that "dominates Tolstoy" and it was Dostoevsky who was a true "novelist of the soul" (Woolf, *Common Reader*, 186).

Not all of Woolf's readers have been so blind or careless. Thus when *The Years* came out in 1937 one reviewer immediately picked up on what seemed to him was Woolf's contrasting her own sense of "discontinuity" of modern time with Tolstoy's feeling of "continuity of life": "This feeling is very strongly conveyed in *War and Peace*, and it is conveyed mainly by Tolstoy's unique apprehension of the simultaneity of life. His picture shows us all the generations at once, childhood, youth, middle age, old age, a changeless picture modified by ceaseless change: and it is this completeness that gives us the measure and the sensation of the passing of time. It also gives time its continuity. Mrs.

¹³To be fair, other "influential" foreigners -- like Sigmund Freud, who obviously was incorporated into "Bloomsbury aesthetics" -- are likewise ignored.

Woolf does not attempt continuity" (Edwin Muir, in Beja, 22). More recently, writing about *Jacob's Room*, Avrom Fleishman noted that a "wider vision of the space around Jacob is achieved by releasing the narrative perspective from its usual conventions and allowing it to move freely over the surface of the earth, as only novels like *War and Peace*... have been free to do" (Fleishman, 65). The critic also pointed out that the scene of war destruction in *To the Lighthouse* (the "Time Passes" chapter) is such "a vision of cosmic destruction" that it "bears comparison with Tolstoy's..." (Fleishman, 122). Another perceptive reader once remarked that Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* bears a resemblance to *Anna Karenina*: "Mrs Ramsay is a wonderful portrait of the mothering consciousness, and... the description of her relation with her children is unmatched in literature. The only thing I've read which can compare with it is Tolstoy's portrait of Dolly Oblonsky in *Anna Karenina*" (Juliet Dusinberre, in Warner, 140).

The truth is, Woolf found Tolstoy a great teacher. She envied his capacity for "sympathetic imagination": "The great novelist feels, sees, believes with such intensity of conviction that he hurls his belief outside himself and it flies off and lives an independent life of its own, becomes Natasha, Pierre, Levin, and is no longer Tolstoy" (Woolf, *Death of the Moth*, 157). While, like her friends, she was mostly "repelled" by the heavy moralism of later Tolstoy, she felt that his earlier works were much more artistic than they were "ethical." She even divined that in his best novels Tolstoy prized "detachment" as much as she -- or other modernist writers -- did: "Tolstoy only write[s] when the sediment is firm and the water clear" (Woolf, *Letters*, VI, 381).¹⁴ Woolf also found Tolstoy's narrative so powerful as to be haunting -- "Practically every scene in *Anna Karenina* is branded on me, though I've not read it for 15 years" (Woolf, *Letters*, IV, 4) -- and she revered his attention to details: "He notices the blue or red of a child's frock; the way a horse shifts its tail; the sound of a cough; the action of a man trying to put his hands into pockets that have been sewn up" (Woolf, *Common Reader*, 186).

It was Tolstoy's precision, richness of suggestive details, and his way of creating characters that Woolf appears to have most wanted to match with her own art. She once described his characters as being "complex by means of their effect upon many different people who serve to mirror them in the round" (Woolf, *Common Reader*, 161). There exists no better description for the major characters of her own novels, from Jacob (*Jacob's Room*; 1922) to Clarissa Dalloway (*Mrs. Dalloway*; 1925) and, particularly, Mrs. Ramsay (*To the Lighthouse*, 1927), who are constantly "mirrored" in other characters who find themselves under their spell. Like Tolstoy's Anna, Woolf's protagonists thus become magnets who attract almost everybody around them -- or, to use Woolf's own metaphor, "lighthouses," whose light reaches, and is reflected by, many characters in the novel.

Woolf may have envied Tolstoy's narrative precision and attention to details, but her own achievements in both could be rivalled by only a few writers in this century.

¹⁴She was not the only modernist who felt this way: both Joyce and Nabokov were more than willing to see Tolstoy as a forerunner of the kind of art they liked to practice. For more on that, see my paper, "'Tolstoy or Dostoevsky' and the Modernists: Polemics with Joseph Brodsky."

"[W]hen Virginia Woolf mentions nice things," wrote E.M. Forster, "they get right into your mouth, so far as the edibility of print permits. We taste their deliciousness" (Forster, *Two Cheers*, 251). Anyone who remembers the dinner scene in the first part of *To the Lighthouse*, would find it hard not to agree with Forster. Interestingly enough, the most sumptuously detailed description in the scene -- that of a dish of fruit (as seen through the eyes of Mrs. Ramsay) -- immediately follows a conversation about none other but Tolstoy:

[Paul] had read some of Tolstoi at school. There was one he always remembered, but he had forgotten the name. Russian names were impossible, said Mrs Ramsay. "Vronsky," said Paul. He remembered that because he always thought it such a good name for a villain. "Vronsky," said Mrs. Ramsay; "Oh, *Anna Karenina*," but that did not take them very far; books were not in their line. ... Now [Paul] was thinking not about himself or about Tolstoi, but whether she felt a draught, whether she would like a pear.

No, she said, she did not want a pear. Indeed she had been keeping guard over the dish of fruit. jealously, hoping that nobody would touch it. Her eyes have been going in and out among the curves and shadows of the fruit, among the rich purples of the lowland grapes, then over the horny ridge of the shell, putting a yellow against a purple, a curved shape against a round shape.... (Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 162-163).

There are several Tolstoyan motifs going on simultaneously in this passage. There is Paul who, like Vronsky (whose name, ironically, he cannot even remember at first and, considering him a "villain," somehow associates with the English word "wrong"¹⁵), finds himself, at least momentarily, attracted to a married woman. Then there is, of course, the uninspired banality of Mrs. Ramsay's and Paul's conversation about Tolstoy. But it is the description of the dish which may be yet the most meaningful link to the Russian writer here. It was, after all, in a letter to her, in 1927 -- the same year as Woolf was completing the novel -- that Forster remarked that Tolstoy could "vitalise... tea tables," and by vitalizing her own "tea table" in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf is most likely paying Tolstoy a genuine poetic tribute and, in a sense, matching her own professional skills against those of the author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*.

E.M. Forster's possible "artistic" reaction to Tolstoy is, in some ways, harder to define than Woolf's. "One's impulse, on tackling the question of influence," he himself wrote in 1944, "is to search for a great book, and to assume that here is the force which has moulded one's outlook and character. Looking back upon my own half-century of reading, I have no doubt which my three great books have been: Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Gibson's *Decline and Fall*, and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.... But they have not influenced me in the least, though I came across them all at an impressionable age" (Forster, *Two Cheers*, 219). Whereas Woolf found Tolstoy "the most inspiring, rousing genius," even if not always "the most sympathetic," Forster seems to have been engaged in much more

¹⁵It was even easier to associate Vronsky's name with the English word 'wrong' if one was familiar with Matthew Arnold's article on Tolstoy. Arnold preferred the French translation of *Anna Karenina* to the English one and consistently used the French spelling of Russian names -- e.g. Wronsky, Warinka, Levine, Cherbatzky, etc.

of a love-hate relationship with the writer. Tolstoy truly "enthralled" and "repelled" Forster almost equally: he could lavish praise on him one moment -- "Most people agree that Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is the greatest novel that western civilization has produced" (Forster, *Two Cheers*, 223) -- and show spite the next. Forster may have considered *War and Peace* a truly great novel but it did not translate into eagerness to read other novels by Tolstoy: it was not until 1934, for example, that he finished *Anna Karenina*, which left him rather cold. He found the characters there "not really masterpieces" and thought that "Anna has been much overpraised and Kitty's nothing at all" (Forster, *Letters*, II, 123). Furthermore, when surveying his library in 1949 and describing, usually lovingly, the volumes it contained, Forster noted rather defiantly when he came to Tolstoy: "And, of course, I have some Tolstoy, but one scarcely wants Tolstoy in every room. Shakespeare, Gibbon and Jane Austen are my choice...." (Forster, *Two Cheers*, 304).

Forster seems to have been rather uncomfortable with Tolstoy not only as a reader but also as a critic: to him, the Russian always remained "one of the most complex and difficult characters with whom the historian of literature has to deal" (Forster, *Two Cheers*, 208).¹⁶ It is, perhaps, precisely in order to make him less frustratingly "complex" that Forster tends to oversimplify Tolstoy, suggesting, for example, that the writer is only concerned "with events and people" (Forster, *Two Cheers*, 226) or reducing "The Cossacks," "The Death of Ivan Il'ich,"¹⁷ and "The Three Hermits" to one common denominator -- "They all teach that simple people are best" (Forster, *Two Cheers*, 208). Unlike Woolf, who was usually more careful to draw distinctions between Tolstoy the artist and the preacher, Forster appears to blur them altogether, assuming that the primary purpose of all of Tolstoy's fiction was to "teach."

And yet Forster may have learned from Tolstoy more than he ever cared to acknowledge. Like Woolf, he was struck by Tolstoy's art in creating characters -- at least in *War and Peace*: "Tolstoy is conscientious over his characters, he has a personal responsibility to each of them, he has a vital conception of them, and though they are full of contradictions, those contradictions are true to life" (Forster, *Two Cheers*, 156). Interestingly enough, Lionel Trilling, one of the more perceptive Forster critics, noticed the same tendency in Forster's own characters and aptly compared them to Tolstoy's: "[Forster] is always shocking us by removing the heroism of his heroes and heroines....

¹⁶In a letter to Ottoline Morrell in 1910, Forster actually admitted that Tolstoy (as opposed to Dostoevsky) made him uncomfortable: "But Dostoieffskie always makes one feel 'comfortable' -- again difficult to define. Tolstoi doesn't" (Forster, *Letters*, I, 106).

¹⁷There exists an interesting biographical anecdote concerning "The Death Of Ivan Il'ich" and Forster. After suffering a stroke in 1964, Forster was helped around by his friends, who wrote letters for him and read him books. An unidentified "American friend" was one day reading Tolstoy's story to him and, fearing, perhaps, that Forster himself was quite close to death, got so overwhelmed by emotion that he could not finish the story (see Furbank, II, 319). The choice of the story was, most likely, Forster's own -- a rather conspicuous choice if we are to believe his biographer: "It was clear to him [i.e. after the stroke] that his remaining days must be a preparation for death" (Furbank, II, 318).

It is a tampering with the heroic in the manner not of Lytton Strachey but of Tolstoy" (Trilling, 16). One should also bear in mind that whereas for Woolf, as a genuine modernist, preaching was an absolute taboo, Forster himself often brought into his works what George H. Thomson calls "a firm moral vision" (in Wilde, 63). It was Woolf, in fact, who was among the first to publicly link Forster to the school of moralists: "Speaking roughly, we may divide [novelists] into the preachers and the teachers, headed by Tolstoy and Dickens, on the one hand, and the pure artists, headed by Jane Austen and Turgenev, on the other. Mr. Forster, it seems, has a strong impulse to belong to both camps at once" (Woolf, *Death of the Moth*, 166).¹⁸

Forster did have a sermon he wanted to preach -- and it bore a certain resemblance to Tolstoy's. While Forster was not a proponent of religious faith, he did believe that in order to fulfill their human potential people have to come into contact with higher spirituality. What Mrs. Wilcox represents in *Howard's End* and what Mrs. Moore stands for in *Passage to India* is precisely that blend of 'earth' and 'heaven' (Forster's "prose" and "passion") that Kitty and Dolly also possess and that Levin finally reaches at the end of the novel. Forster wants us, in his (and Margaret Schlegel's) rather lofty words, to build "the rainbow bridge that should connect the prose in us with the passion. Without it we are meaningless fragments, half monks, half beasts, unconnected arches that have never joined into a man. With it love is born, and alights on the highest curve, glowing.... Happy the man who sees from either aspect the glory of these outspread wings. The roads of his soul lie clear.... Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect..." (Forster, *Howard's End*, 186, 187). Unlike Woolf, Forster does seem to have shared not only some aspects of Tolstoy's spiritual vision but also Tolstoy's conviction that a writer has to enlighten his readers.

It appears that in general Forster and Woolf esteemed Tolstoy for vastly different reasons. While Woolf appreciated Tolstoy's intimacy with everyday life and cherished his microscopic details, Forster admired Tolstoy for his 'monumental' concerns and the sheer epic scope of *War and Peace*. "After one has read *War and Peace* for a bit," he wrote in *Aspects of the Novel*, "great chords begin to sound, and we cannot say exactly what struck them. They do not arise from the story.... They do not come from the episodes nor yet from the characters. They come from the immense area of Russia.... Very few have the sense of space, and the possession of it ranks high in Tolstoy's divine equipment. Space is the lord of *War and Peace*, not time" (Forster, *Aspects*, 39). Forster's admiration for the epic scope of *War and Peace* differs markedly from Matthew Arnold's conviction that Tolstoy committed a blunder by writing such a monumental historical novel

¹⁸It is obvious here that even Woolf was not always above labelling Tolstoy simply as "a preacher." Another significant feature of this statement -- especially in the view of critics' tendency to downplay Woolf's preoccupation with Russian writers -- is how matter-of-factly Woolf places the Russian authors next to English ones. If nothing else, it shows that Russian literature was an integral part of Woolf's everyday critical vocabulary and domain.

rather than sticking to what he knew best -- his own period and his contemporaneous society. It was probably the reaction of Arnold and other Victorian critics to *War and Peace* that led Forster to blame English "domesticity" for finding Tolstoy's preoccupation with global and historical themes "as false."

Forster admired not only the epic scope of *War and Peace* but also the epic omniscience of its author -- and in that he differed even further from many of his contemporaries who were rebelling against what they perceived as the 'tyranny' of a strong authorial presence. A less stylistically innovative writer than Woolf (or Henry James, for that matter), Forster himself was close to Tolstoy in his rather traditional order of narrative progression and a more distinguishable (and, as we have seen earlier, at times even 'preachy') authorial voice. Consequently, in *Aspects of the Novel* Forster felt compelled to defend Tolstoy's narrative techniques (and, indirectly, his own) against the criticism of an influential literary theoretician of the period, Percy Lubbock, a strong proponent of Henry James' innovative strategy of highlighting not his own but his protagonists' points of view: "[W]e are bounced up and down Russia -- omniscient, semi-omniscient, dramatized here or there as the moment dictates -- and at the end we have accepted it all. Mr. Lubbock does not, it is true: great as he finds [*War and Peace*], he would find it greater if it had a view-point; he feels Tolstoy has not pulled his full weight. I feel that the rules of the game of writing are not like this. A novelist can shift his view-point if it comes off, and it came off with Dickens and Tolstoy" (Forster, *Aspects*, 81).

It is difficult to initiate a meaningful discussion of Woolf's and Forster's possible artistic reaction to Tolstoy in this brief consideration. What is clear, however, is that a strong "artistic" reaction to Tolstoy did exist, and that for Bloomsbury as a whole the Russian writer was much more than just another fashionable name or a trendy topic for high-brow conversation, as some critics would like us to believe. Tolstoy appears, in fact, to have found his way not only into Bloomsbury's air but also into its "soil": he became one of very few literary transplants from abroad who actually sent deep roots into Bloomsbury's fertile intellectual ground. Like his best characters, so aptly described by Woolf, he became a commanding presence for the whole generation of outstanding writers and artists who felt his tremendous effect upon themselves and often "mirrored" him "in the round."

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