

TOLSTOY: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION. By *R. F. Christian*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969. vii, 291 pp. \$9.50, cloth. \$2.95, paper.

Christian's *Tolstoy: A Critical Introduction* deserves a prominent place in the renaissance of interest that Tolstoy has been undergoing in Western Europe and the United States. His book, unlike some recently acclaimed impressionistic works in the field, is supported by extensive scholarship in Russian sources and an expert, sensitive knowledge of the language. He makes full use of the huge Soviet Jubilee Edition, especially of its many drafts and variant readings of the belles-lettres, in a careful examination of all the memorable short stories and novels in an effort to ascertain what is typical of Tolstoy's fiction, the nature of its communication, and the extraordinary artistic devices employed in conveying it. The result is a fresh approach to a comprehensive definition of Tolstoy's creative art and one which is expressed with maturity of judgment and original insights. If Professor Christian tends to eschew the so-called higher criticism, which in this subject often seems to involve a large element of the certitude of ignorance, his more modest critical approach gains in authority by being based on the certitude of knowledge of Tolstoy's own understanding of what he was trying to achieve artistically, a body of information abundantly provided, though rarely translated, in his literary drafts and notes, in his diaries, letters, and in comments to friends. Much of the emphasis of Christian's analysis is inspired by his acute perception that "no writer can be great without possessing powers of observation to an abnormal degree, but Tolstoy's particular gift was the ability to look inwards. . . . It is typical of Tolstoy's style of writing to juxtapose a minute record of external detail with the thoughts it evokes in the observer's mind, exterior narrative shading into interior monologue" (p. 37).

Though the shorter pieces are by no means ignored, the book's core is understandably devoted to an analysis in depth of *War and Peace*, for which the author draws upon his previous investigation (*Tolstoy's 'War and Peace': A Study*, 1962), and to *Anna Karenina*. Despite Christian's frank commitment to Tolstoy's artistic greatness, the master's failings are fully discussed, such as lapses in the characterization of historical figures and in period background in *War and Peace* and errors of chronology in that novel and in *Anna Karenina*. With equal perspicacity he questions long-standing positions of other critics, such as Homer's imagined influence on *The Cossacks* and *War and Peace*, and *Anna Karenina's* supposed psychological and structural inadequacies. Among the book's positive virtues are frequent excellent translations used to illustrate points in the author's elucidation, and they are often executed on the correct assumption that standard renderings fail to reflect the special effects of Tolstoy's style.

Since Tolstoy is markedly an autobiographical novelist, there is real point in Christian's description of him as "an intensifying rather than an inventive genius," but this apt generalization is perhaps carried too far in the analysis, for Tolstoy's inventive powers, both in the form and content of his fiction, are very considerable. One might also object to the treatment of Olenin in *The Cossacks*, the scanting of Levin in *Anna Karenina*, and the rather cursory handling, despite its failings as a work of art, of *Resurrection*. But these are largely matters of opinion. Written with grace and occasional quiet humor, the book is an important contribution, and the pleasure it affords the reader is enhanced by the author's conviction, which suffuses the whole study, that Tolstoy "is a great novelist because he was a great man."

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