Introduction

Donna Tussing Orwin

One hundred years ago, on November 20, 1910 (or November 7, according to the Russian calendar at that time), Count Leo Tolstoy died of pneumonia in the home of the stationmaster at a railway stop called Astapovo. In the seven days during which he lingered, reporters gathered at the obscure station to wire capitals all over the world about his illness and death. It was the first great media circus, made possible by the existence of the telegraph, as well as by Tolstoy's own global reach. He was celebrated not only as a writer of fiction, but also as a moral thinker and reformer whose jeremiads and solutions influenced people everywhere, from Mahatma Gandhi in India, to the founders of the kibbutz movement in Palestine, to Jane Addams, the founder of the settlement movement in Chicago. When I lecture in the older buildings at the University of Toronto or at other universities in North America, I imagine Tolstoy's ideas echoing in these places from the days when my predecessors debated them in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After Tolstoy's death, there was a battle to assimilate his considerable authority to various causes often at odds with positions he had taken while he was alive and able to defend himself. The concluding chapter in this volume, by Michael A. Denner, documents the different and contradictory ways that Tolstoy was used during the Russian Revolution and its aftermath (1917–24) by all sides of the conflict, from dark red to lily white, about Russia and its future. Even the Bolsheviks embraced Tolstoy, especially in the early years after the Revolution. Once they began to consolidate their power, however, they regarded Tolstoyanism and Tolstoy as rivals, and they undertook an unprecedented propaganda campaign to separate the two. They persecuted the movement while assimilating the man, whose message they proceeded to tailor to their own specifications. Their unprecedented success in this propaganda effort created an official Soviet Tolstoy. (This Tolstoy and the "real" one are in fact distant cousins, though not kissing ones.) In the years since the fall of the USSR, scholars in Russia and abroad have been reading Tolstoy outside

the Soviet lens. The present book continues that process with eleven original essays, each of which represents a new departure in Tolstoy studies. All of them engage Tolstoy's intentions, and therefore his thoughts. They have been arranged to encourage the reader to compare them, and this brief summary of their contents is intended to stimulate the comparison.

The book begins with Caryl Emerson's piece on Tolstoy and music. Tolstoy's abiding love of music, and, more importantly, his reliance on it in his aesthetics, reveals the romantic in the realist. If music expresses feeling (as Tolstoy declared in a diary entry in 1852), then psychological prose must depend in various ways on music, as Emerson indeed shows. Tolstoy's theory of art as infection, according to which an artist pours his feelings into the recipient of his art, is deeply musical. He wanted to believe that in and of itself infection as a form of pure communication was good, though it could be used to bad ends. He thus distinguished between means and ends in the folk story "The Empty Drum" (1891). The hero Emelyan uses the drum employed by the Tsar to summon soldiers to war to lead them to a river, where he smashes the drum, and releases the soldiers from the Tsar's power. In a reverse direction, Emerson explores how in *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) an initially pure infection by art can over time, and in relation to the character and situation of the recipient, mutate into something ugly, even murderous. In a "coda," Emerson discusses musical adaptations of Tolstoy that might have pleased or infuriated him.

The second chapter, by Andreas Schönle, treats something even more fundamental to Tolstoy (and life) than music: death. All great art either depicts or responds to it, of course, but I would observe that Tolstoy's anarchic individualism makes it central to his aesthetics. Schönle starts with the death of Maman in *Childhood* (1852) and the boy's reaction to it. The sublimity of this dread and incomprehensible event generates both fear and pleasure as the bereaved child distances himself from it by absorbing it in imagination. This form of the sublime is Kantian, though Tolstoy need not have learnt it directly from the master. (Schönle digresses to bring in the astonishingly relevant reaction of the poet Zhukovsky to the death of his friend, and Russia's greatest poet, Alexander Pushkin.) The chapter goes on to reveal Tolstoy's fascination with corpses, and "their ability to generate aesthetic pleasure": the dead Chechen in *The Cossacks* is but one instance of this. An obsession with the dead continues throughout Tolstoy's long creative life, but Schönle does detect a change in his attitude which he attributes to the writings of Schopenhauer, whose notion of the sublime "enables the self to rise above the will to live, which had produced an illusory notion of individuality." But what Schönle calls the "seduction" of the

Schopenhauerian sublime is counterbalanced in Tolstoy's later years by an absorption in life, and a Kantian emphasis on moral action in the everyday.

Nature and the material world are also formative themes in Tolstoy's art, which in this respect as in so many is influenced by philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Fundamentally for Tolstoy, human beings are animals with big brains. This means that we have a special relation to other animals, and also obligations to them as our kin. Robin Feuer Miller's chapter compares Tolstoy's view of animals to those of present-day thinkers like Peter Singer, Martha Nussbaum, and especially Nobel Prize winner J. M. Coetzee, author of *The Lives of Animals*. Tolstoy's attention to the animal in man helps account for the earthiness of his fiction. Overall, however, its effect is not to denigrate humans, but to raise animals to the level of "non-human autonomous beings" which we cannot simply regard as objects to serve our needs and pleasure. In Tolstoy's aesthetics, "[a] successful artistic rendering of the hare or the wolf would embody both the feelings of the artist and the essential quiddity of the animal itself." Although human beings are usually held to a higher moral standard than other animals in Tolstoy's art, at times they act simply in accord with their animal natures. This happens most brutally but understandably in war, and here Miller's study intersects with mine on war in Tolstoy and the untranslatable Russian concept of *molodechestvo*.

My chapter ponders why an author so opposed to war might write so much about it, and even describe it sympathetically. The answer resides partly in Tolstoy's cultural heritage, but also in a wartime experience that taught him the joys of anger, which he had to depict and somehow explain. Combat can also educate. War is hell in Tolstoy's art, but some good things can result for those who must engage in it.

On the hunt and at war, man is an animal, and experiences animal fears and pleasures, but that is not the whole story in Tolstoy's art. Irina Paperno investigates precisely the side of Tolstoy that develops out of his "big brain," and is *not* simply natural. She argues that in the late 1870s Tolstoy was fed up with art, which tended to slip out of the moral control of the artist, and was looking to philosophy to express more clearly and precisely what the moral "I" wanted to say. He therefore proposed to his close friend Nikolai Strakhov that they explore and elucidate their religious worldview together in a dialogue on "personal faith in the age of reason and science." Strakhov turned out not to be the ideal partner in this endeavor, but through it Tolstoy got to the point, in 1879, where he wanted to write his own confession, which he finished in 1882. In it the general reader took the place of Strakhov as his interlocutor, and, after 1879, Tolstoy's letters to

Strakhov lost their confessional tone and content. Strakhov continued to treat Tolstoy as his guru, although it was the man and his art, and not his philosophizing, that most impressed him. Meanwhile, Tolstoy had found a way to communicate more directly with others than through art.

Tolstoy's preoccupation with spirituality did not come out of the blue, and it was mediated by a respect for science typical for his age. Ilya Vinitsky explores the way science and forms of transcendentalism intermix in Tolstoy and his contemporaries in the 1860s. The key elements in this counterintuitive marriage are ethical; all Russian thinkers of the time, whatever their political stripe or bent toward science, had moral goals. Focusing on the death of Andrei in *War and Peace* (1865–69), Vinitsky argues that Tolstoy imagines life after death as a merging into all that is living in nature. He discards the notion of a hierarchical Herderian chain of being that Pierre celebrates in his conversation with Andrei at the ford. But at the same time, the individual soul seems still to exist "as one of the countless phenomena of life in nature."

Gary Hamburg discusses the content of Tolstoy's later spirituality. In his old age, Tolstoy rejected the distinction between reason and revelation. Nonetheless, the teachings of reason require faith, because human beings are still more sentient animals than reasoning beings. According to Hamburg, *On Life* (1887) translates into philosophical terms the Christian ethical code discussed in *What Do I Believe?* (1884), and it also refashions Christian notions of personal immortality into a philosophical conception connecting altruism, memory of the good, and "soul force."

The remaining contributors to this volume concentrate on Tolstoy's art. Edwina Cruise may have finally put to rest (by rendering it irrelevant) the dispute about which English novel Anna Karenina might be reading on her return by train to St. Petersburg. Having read dozens of such novels herself, many of them forgotten today, Cruise concludes that Anna's novel is a palimpsest, or perfect parody of them. She provides crucial new insight into the role of the English novel in Tolstoy's own version of the perfect one; although Anna never reads another English novel after that train ride, she and other female characters are formed by their reading habits. Cruise focuses on four novelists – Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and Mrs. Henry Wood – who each meant different things to Tolstoy, and each influenced his art. This chapter also broadens into a larger discussion of the English novel in the Russia of the 1860s and 1870s.

Justin Weir explains why Tolstoy's aesthetics generally made drama unattractive to him as a mode of art; without the assistance of a narrator,

play-goers (or readers) can know little about the inner life of a character. On the other hand, Tolstoy's greatest play, *The Realm of Darkness* (1887), is an appropriate vehicle for the story he tells. The very limitations of drama as Tolstoy conceived it make it suitable for this play about infanticide and its consequences. Evil destroys conscience, and drama, according to Tolstoy, cannot depict either it, or memory, through which conscience operates. *The Realm of Darkness* dramatizes inexplicable evil without having to explain it, and ends with the repentance of the main protagonist and his return to humanity. Weir places *The Realm of Darkness* in the larger context of Tolstoyan drama, and the theme of violence in his art.

Finally, Gary Saul Morson discovers a new genre in Tolstoy's oeuvre hidden in plain view: the short form. Morson ranges over vast territory in aesthetics gathering the fundamentals of this form and proving its historical existence. Having documented Tolstoy's lifelong interest in short forms of many types, he provides some wonderful interpretations of a subgroup of stories that are elaborations of the "wise saying." I would suggest that the short form may have engaged Tolstoy because it provided a bridge between universal truths, and truths that the individual can grasp and use for moral guidance. In other words, Tolstoy's interest in the form attests to his moral anarchism, or the extreme moral individualism manifest from his earliest writings.

Tolstoyanism and related phenomena like Tolstoyan communes did not survive the chastening horrors of the last hundred years. As it turned out, human beings were too imperfect, too capable of evil, to live in the peaceful and rational way that the movement promoted. But Tolstoy does survive, both as a man and as a writer of fiction. For a long time, many scholars in Russia and abroad rescued him from his association with Tolstoyanism or Marxist-Leninism by, implicitly or explicitly, driving a wedge between the thinker and the writer. In recent times that distinction, most famously drawn in the West by Isaiah Berlin in his landmark *The Hedgehog and the Fox* (1953), has been questioned if not denied outright. All the contributions to this anniversary volume engage Tolstoy as both a writer and a thinker; and all unearth nourishing capillaries running between the two roles. This is not to say that Tolstoy's thought or ideology explains his fiction or vice versa. A mixture of hope and stark realism about the human condition informs both, but while Tolstoy's hopefulness can be a defect in his thought, which can expect too much of human beings and sweep too much of human history under the carpet, in his fiction it is yet another element of his unsurpassed realism, which would be less true and less complete without it.

Even Tolstoy's thought remains relevant, especially but not exclusively as expressed in his fiction. One may well ask why, given his preoccupation with feelings and their association in his own mind with music, Tolstoy became an artist of the word rather than a musician. The answer is complex. First of all, as Caryl Emerson so ably demonstrates in her discussion of musical adaptations of Tolstoy, words sing in his fiction, and the great Russian realist is a poet in this regard. Second, much of Tolstoy's prose is dedicated to *proving* the primacy of feeling in human nature. Tolstoy uses words in order to stake poetry's claim to superiority over philosophy. Beyond this essential romantic paradox, however, lurks a dedication, not always acknowledged by Tolstoy but omnipresent in his writing, to the word as the instrument of reason and its all-important manifestation in human nature: the conscience. (Reason also functions as the voice of mere self-serving calculation, of course.) If the voice of conscience usually speaks later and more softly than other, stronger impulses in the human soul, it acts to correct these, thereby enforcing natural moral discipline in what would otherwise be a tyranny of feeling. According to Tolstoyan psychology, human reason both exacerbates the bad consequences of the natural self-absorption such as obtains in other animals, and provides us with a dignity potential if not always active in our souls. We have moral choice, and we reason our way to right or wrong action with words. Over and over again Tolstoy's fiction demonstrates this paradigmatic action for good or ill in the soul. The educated need self-analysis to reform themselves, while the uncorrupted and uneducated unselfconsciously access the folk wisdom that embodies what Tolstoy calls "common sense." Either way, morality speaks in paradoxes that reflect the existence of moral choice in human nature. This ethical component of Tolstoy's prose differentiates it, at least theoretically, from the Nietzschean-influenced Symbolist prose that follows it in Russian literature, and connects it to the Russian eighteenth-century Enlightenment that precedes it. The essays in this book all demonstrate in different ways the unique admixture of narrative and ethical thought that makes Tolstoy such a fascinating figure and a great writer.

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND DATES

Throughout the book, except in quotations and titles, we have used spellings of well-known Russian names that are conventional in English. Where the name is not familiar, and in Russian quotations, we have followed a modified form of Library of Congress transliteration to render Cyrillic into the Latin alphabet.

Readers should keep in mind that, until after the Revolution, Russia used the Julian Calendar (often called Old Style), which in the nineteenth century was twelve days behind the Gregorian one used in most other countries. When two dates are given for the same event, the first is in Old Style and the second as the Gregorian equivalent.

Ellipses in square brackets are not in the original quotation.

CHAPTER 1

Tolstoy and music

Caryl Emerson

Tolstoy's relations with music – the least mediated of the temporal arts, and thus for him the most potent – were reverent, wary, and on occasion punitive. He was fascinated by the *force* of music, just as he was by the force of sexuality, beauty, and war. By "force" Tolstoy did not mean violence or disruption, but the power to organize, suddenly and irresistibly, all our scattered actions and feelings into a coherent meaningful whole. Thus focused in its energies, the human organism would fear nothing, not even its own mortality. But since this heightened condition lent itself equally well to sublime insight and to irrational acts, it had to be carefully watched. Furthermore, music, being neither an instinct nor a force of nature but the product of creative human striving, obligated its practitioners to positive deeds as our more animal sides did not. The intensely receptive and aesthetically arousable Tolstoy worked hard at the piano as a young man, and he continued to revere music long after he had abjured war, sex, and beauty. Everything he wanted to accomplish through words happened faster and more purely through music.

These fundamentally Romantic priorities manifested themselves early. In a diary entry from November 1851, the 23-year-old Tolstoy charted the fine arts according to their ability to act on the imagination.[1] The realm of visual art or painting is space, where we realize an image of nature. The realm of music is harmony and time, where we realize feelings. Poetry, by expressing our feelings toward nature, partakes of both. The transition from visual art to music passes through dance; from music to poetry, through song. Although poetry might be "clearer" in its referents, music is "fuller in its imitation of a feeling" than any verbal (and spatial) art could ever be. As Tolstoy would subsequently argue through his treatises and the experience of his fictional heroes, emotional fullness in music is an autonomous quality. It cannot be prompted or sustained by any image, concept, or narrative "program," which inevitably confuses and blurs the purity of musical effect.[2] Purity in this instance is not a moral category but more a

thermodynamic one. The key parameters are accuracy and efficiency: how to communicate a feeling and unite people through it without loss of precision and heat. In his mature theory of art, Tolstoy would call this energy transfer "infection" – perhaps to emphasize its involuntary, irresistible dissemination among all live organisms exposed to it. Emotions, Tolstoy believed, were our single wholly reliable human common denominator. But the experiences that produce these emotions are inevitably individualized, locked up in the personal: they are impenetrable and can be reconstructed only after the fact, partially, and at great risk. The Tolstoyan word laboriously recreated this uniquely experiencing individual. The musical utterance was more fortunate; being universal, it could be conveyed without intermediaries. Its effect was of unsegmented, unreflective, spontaneous flow. This competition between words, the professional medium that Tolstoy came to control absolutely, and music, the passionate avocation that (if successful) controlled him, lasted until the end of his life. Melody and rhythm affected him with disastrous directness.

Tolstoy judged the legitimacy of a piece of music intuitively, subjectively, on the evidence of his own motor reflexes and psychic reactions. If a performance caused him to weep or tap his feet, it was authentic – so much so that later in life he would beg his young friend, the pianist Alexander Gol'denveizer, *not* to play Chopin for fear he would "burst into tears."[3] If a musical experience failed to move him or required of him sustained, calculated intellectual attention, it was summarily dismissed as counterfeit. By our later, more scientific standards of physiology, Tolstoy was probably naïve as regards the body's immediacy[4] – and in any event, Tolstoy's custom was to assume that the needs and sensitivities of his own organism were the norm for all humanity. Nevertheless, music's ability to transform our psychological state, even against our will or logical judgment, remained for him a touchstone for all art, the aesthetic equivalent to a love relation and thus a source of the most severe anxiety as well as bliss.

In a letter to his son Lev and daughter Tatiana in March 1894, Tolstoy described a tirade he had been delivering on the dismal state of contemporary music to a student at the Moscow Conservatory. Suddenly, from somewhere, two students began to sing *Là ci darem la mano*, the seduction duet between Don Giovanni and Zerlina from Mozart's opera. "I stopped talking and began to listen, to feel joyful and to smile at something," Tolstoy confessed. "What a terrible force this is" (*PSS* 67: 79).[5] Tolstoy refers often to the "terror" (*strakh*) of music. From the "terrifying and joyful" (*strashno i radostno*) reaction of young Petya Rostov dreaming a choral symphony the night before his death in *War and Peace* to the

half-mad Pozdnyshev's ruminations in *The Kreutzer Sonata* – "It's a terrible thing, that sonata [...] and in general music is a terrible thing" (*PSS* 27: 61) – we are coaxed into accepting music as the great harmonizer and human reconciler as well as a stimulus for murder on par with jealous rage and possessive love. In April 1910, after Gol'denveizer had performed one of his host's favourite Chopin études, Tolstoy confirmed that he "loved music more than all the other arts."[6]

This chapter samples three aspects of Tolstoy's relationship to music: as part of his own life (both as pianist-performer and audience); as episodes in his verbal texts (fiction, semi-autobiographical writings, and philosophy of art); and, in a coda, Tolstoy's works set to music. A special constraint applies to this last category, since the mature Tolstoy did not approve of mixed-media art. He believed that each art form, in order to retain its focus and the infectious force peculiar to it, should cultivate its own field and not combine with neighboring media.[7] In principle, then, Tolstoy would condemn musical-dramatic settings of his verbal texts. But since nay-saying is so routine and easy to predict with this writer, we will take the more challenging path – briefly noting several twentieth-century musicalizations that Tolstoy, under certain conditions, might have welcomed.

MUSIC IN TOLSTOY'S LIFE

At Iasnaia Poliana as on most well-to-do Russian gentry estates, music-making was as integrated into daily life as the making of honey, boots, or jam. As a child Tolstoy received basic instruction in piano and at 17 began seriously improving his keyboard skills. Two years later, in 1849, he invited a German pianist from St. Petersburg to visit, whose companionship inspired him to sketch out a treatise on the "Foundations of Music and Rules for its Study"; in his unfinished novella, "Holy Night" (*Sviatochnaia noch'*, 1853), sessions with this pianist-theorist reappear as a first-person digression on the merits of Russian gypsy music versus German common practice.[8] Given his later celebration of the ethical tasks of art, it must be emphasized that Tolstoy never confused the authenticity of music as art with its social or moral setting. Although "visiting the gypsies" might be shameful according to his Rules of Life, Tolstoy always admired gypsy singing – with its rich chest tones, rhythmic variability, and pliable interweaving of solo and chorus. He paid it rapturous tribute throughout his life, from his 1856 "Two Hussars" (*Dva gusara*) to his drama *The Living Corpse* (*Zhivoi trup*) (1900), which features a gypsy chorus singing on stage at the end of the first act.