

that respect, to differ considerably from the current writers of "significant" American literature, most of whom I believe to be dull, second rate, cowardly souls. It was Rabelais, I believe, who said that the proper function of mankind was to laugh. I agree with him. And I do not believe that he included in that function either the sad tired smile of irony or the loud weeping bellow of despair.

Donald Ogden Stewart

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All art forms have one essential basis. All are trying to snatch from mortality one tiny thing which at least must be immortal. All tend to merge, and yet all are variations from the others. Each has its tiny province of time and place to link with timelessness.

The art of fiction is one of the loosest of all these forms—so loose that it is exploited for every other end than its own: to utter prophecies, to "solve" problems, to teach moral lessons, to play mental games of chess with human pawns, to prove theses and to set out philosophies, to glorify the personalities of authors, and—under an adroit veiling of romance—to take revenge upon their enemies. Under all this smothering of interesting irrelevancies and sheer rubbish, the particular province of fiction is almost a lost spot.

Yet, no matter what it may be forced to do, there is still one thing that fiction *can* do better than any other form of art: it can deal with human life as it is lived upon the earth. That it does so through endless varieties of form and interpretation is a proof, not a refutation, of such a statement. Every great novel that has survived owes its survival to the vitality of the phase of human life which it somehow embodies. Fiction is the most concrete form of literature; and to those minds which cannot perceive that the abstract lives in the concrete, it therefore seems trivial. But, to my mind, all the high-sounding abstractions in the world have less value

and less delight than the perception, in the most local of habitations, of the most universal things.

Ruth Suckow

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If the human race ever has knowledge enough, it can get everything else there is to be got. It never will, but there is still a great deal of pleasure in adding to its knowledge and subtracting from its ignorance. Only one other form of pleasure surpasses this one.

Carl Van Doren

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I think of my work as being French in form and manner (Saint-Simon and La Bruyère); German in feeling (Bach and Beethoven); and American in eagerness.

Thornton Wilder

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The greatest work of the twentieth century will be that of those who are placing literature on a plane superior to philosophy and science. Present day despairs of life are bred of the past triumphs of these latter. Literature will lay truth open upon a higher level. If I can have a part in that enterprise I shall be extremely contented. It will be an objective synthesis of chosen words to replace the common dilatoriness with stupid verities with which everyone is familiar. Reading will become an art also. Living in a backward country, as all which are products of the scientific and philosophic centuries must be, I am satisfied, since I prefer not to starve, to live by the practice of medicine, which combines the best features of both science and philosophy with that imponderable and enlightening element, disease, unknown in its normality to either. But, like Pasteur when he was young, or anyone else who has something to do, I wish I had more money for my literary experiments.

William Carlos Williams

Next month: Statements from Conrad Aiken, Sherwood Anderson, Henry Seidel Canby, John Erskine, Zona Gale, James Weldon Johnson, Alfred Kreymborg, H. L. Mencken, Upton Sinclair, Genevieve Taggard, Irita Van Doren, W. E. Woodward

TOLSTOY COMES TO ST. PETERSBURG

A Centenary Study

By Alexander I. Nazaroff

ON a December day in 1855, a dinner is given on the premises of *The Contemporary* by its co-owners, Nekrassov and Panayev. The liberal and literary leaders of Russia are present: one sees the enormous, stately figure and beautiful head of Turgenev; the playwright Ostrovsky; the illustrious novelist Grigorovich, and others of equal distinction. M. Panayev's wife, an ex-ballerina with a perfect figure and an exquisitely beautiful face, permanently reflecting in a self-satisfied smile the admiration offered her by all, reigns over this masculine republic of talent, wit and brilliance.

Her irresistible eyes, nay, the eyes of the whole assemblage, turn time and again to the guest of honor—Sub-Lieutenant Count Tolstoy. The whole gathering, as planned by Turgenev, symbolizes the admission of the young author-soldier, who had returned from the Crimea only two weeks before to the Parnassus of Russia. But Sub-Lieutenant Count Tolstoy, dressed in an immaculate uniform jacket, is as cold as winter itself, as official as a diplomatic note. His piercing, expressive eyes are steely; his responses are monosyllabic, although faultlessly polite. This unexpected change in his demeanor astonishes and chills all who know him. In the first days after his arrival he was open-heartedness itself.

After this unsuccessful war, as after all unsuccessful wars in general, new winds are blowing in Russia—the ice of reaction has somewhat melted; the “political spring” is in the air, and everyone is talking of forthcoming great reforms and criticizing the Government. But no sooner does one of the guests venture some remark in this vein than Tolstoy's face assumes a sour and bored expression. “Oh, yes!” he says, quite casually, “it is considered fashionable nowadays to dis-

cuss the Government in bilious and venomous tones!” At such a sally everyone is taken aback. As a rule, such things are not spoken in the precincts of *The Contemporary*, the recognized bulwark of liberalism. Turgenev, who has been scribbling something in his note-book, attempts to save the situation. He waves his hand, in a tragi-comic manner inviting all to silence, and begins to recite, in his high falsetto voice so incongruous with his enormous stature, the nonsense verses which he has just improvised. He is greeted with general laughter and delight. His verses are a series of brilliant, inoffensively witty, verbal caricatures of some of those present . . .

Amid animated conversations the dinner progresses smoothly toward its end, when by chance someone mentions, in enthusiastic terms, George Sand's latest novel. Again Tolstoy speaks, and again all eyes turn to him. In a cold, indifferent tone, he protests: The novels of that female, who attempts to justify the wanton indecency of her own conduct behind her sonorous words on the emancipation of women? How can people with taste admire her dull, inept rhetoric? It is incomprehensible! Do they not see that all of her characters are hopelessly dead? “Besides,” (this is said with emphasis) “if there really were women like those she describes, they ought to be tied to the chariots of turpitude and dragged through the streets of the city!” There is general embarrassment at his words. Turgenev coughs; Nekrassov's hand nervously tugs at his drooping moustaches and his thin, long beard; Panayev concentrates upon his plate. It is a secret from nobody that Mme. Panayev practices that which George Sand preaches; that she is the wife not only of Panayev, but also of Nekrassov, and that these two gentlemen are