

on the works of Tolstoi and Nabokov—*Kreutzer Sonata*, *Pale Fire*, “Pozdyshev’s Address”—that probe the limitations of the skeptical disposition and its impact on our ability to engage with the world beyond ourselves. The author argues that by reflecting on our own skepticism, we may actually deepen our engagement with it (for better or worse).

What sets this book apart is its clarity and accessibility. Gershkovich presents complex ideas in a way that is easy to follow and engaging. As a Tolstoi specialist, I wonder that Gershkovich did not explore Tolstoi’s hermeneutics of translation for the Gospels, or his reaction to the peasant children reading in “Who Should Learn Writing from Whom . . .” Both these works address directly how to overcome “skeptical” reading. That said, the book is very well-researched and thoughtfully written, making it an excellent choice for both scholars and general readers interested in the intersection of art and philosophy.

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***Tolstoy in Context.*** Ed. Anna A. Berman. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2022. xxxiv, 357 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Chronology. Index. Photographs. \$105.00, hard bound.  
doi: 10.1017/slr.2024.83

Part of the Cambridge University Press series “Literature in Context,” this excellent volume offers thirty-nine concise but highly informative essays by leading scholars of Russian literature and history that place Lev Tolstoi into a variety of contexts, from Russia’s class and estate systems to artistic representations of Tolstoi himself, both in his time and after his death. The volume is divided into six larger sections: “The Man” (introducing the writer’s biographical background); “The Russian Social and Political Contexts”; “Literature, the Arts, and Intellectual Life”; “Science and Technology” (including Tolstoi’s relationship to the natural world); “Beyond Russia” (examining Tolstoi’s international connections, such as his reception in India and his engagement with American thinkers and political activists); and “Tolstoi’s Afterlife” (focusing on adaptations of Tolstoi’s works in various arts, their English translations, the writer’s biographies, and complete works editions).

The main strength of the volume, in my opinion, consists not only in the useful background information that each essay offers but also in the strong conceptual underpinning of the contributions. Tolstoi was a deeply conflicted artist and thinker, and most authors productively engage with his contradictions and paradoxes. His life, as Andrei Zorin points out in his chapter, was modeled on the Romantic myth of lost unity, even as Tolstoi himself often countered Romantic ideals and aesthetics in his works. Often portrayed as a lone “giant,” towering over the rest of Russian literary figures, Tolstoi, in fact, was embedded in the literary context of his time, shared many preoccupations of his generation, and conducted an intense dialogue with his predecessors and contemporaries (Ilya Vinitsky). A future pacifist, he enlisted in military service and glorified (albeit with ambivalence) the Russian army’s military successes in *War and Peace* and, moreover, paradoxically used the language of war to advance his anti-war agenda (Donna Tussing Orwin). While deeply sympathizing with and at times idealizing the peasantry (and trying to imitate it in his dress and lifestyle), Tolstoi was painfully aware of his privileged noble status (Sibelan Forrester) and downplayed the brutality of serfdom in his works (Anne Hruska). Suspicious of industrial progress, he was nonetheless fascinated by the technological inventions

of his lifetime and embraced progress when it served the moral betterment of humankind (Julia Vaingurt). Valorizing nature as a state of authenticity and goodness, Tolstoi at the same time struggled with the realization that not everything that is natural is moral (Thomas Newlin). His pedagogical views were fraught with tension between traditional and modern elements: the link Tolstoi established between knowledge/pedagogy, on the one hand, and violence/injustice, on the other, anticipated key ideas of post-structuralism and decolonial educational thought (Daniel Moulin-Stožek). The very movement he gave his name to—"Tolstoianism"—was a contradiction, since the idea of a "movement" undermined Tolstoi's critique of organized religion and could be seen as a dangerous distraction from Christ's teaching (Charlotte Alston). The list can go on and on, including Tolstoi's "tortured relationship" with the Russian Orthodox Church (Francesca Silano, 64) and his contradictory attitudes to philosophy, theater, and music as illuminated in the contributions by Jeff Love, Emily Frey, and Caryl Emerson, respectively. What emerges from the collection as a whole is a nuanced and complex portrait of this important figure and his time, mostly free of the uncritical reverence that sometimes marks scholars' approach to Russian classics.

It is impossible, in the space of this review, to do justice to each contribution to the volume. My omissions by no means reflect the quality of the essays, as they are all superb. Anna Berman, who both edited the collection and contributed a preface and a rich essay on Tolstoi's views on family, is to be congratulated on this accomplishment. This volume will become an indispensable source for scholars and teachers of Tolstoi, as well as for non-specialist readers. Many chapters can be used as a background reading for students who might need a broader historical context to understand some aspects of Tolstoi's works, especially since Tolstoi is often taught to students outside of the Russian or Slavic majors. In addition to the rich essays, the volume offers a list of suggested further readings, as well as a timetable, which lists not only events in Tolstoi's life but other artistic developments in Russia and beyond, thus firmly placing the writer in a broader context, as promised by the volume's title.

My only reservation about the volume has to do with its thematic organization. Some of the essay topics are very specific (like the fascinating piece on clothing by Daniel Green), while some are rather broad in scope. An example of the latter, "Tolstoy's oeuvre," beautifully written by Chloë Kitzinger, would have fit better in an introductory section (for example, after the preface), offering a broad overview of Tolstoi's art. More importantly, the selection of topics, or "contexts," at times felt too cautious and traditional. While questions of sexuality and gender are addressed in Anne Lounsbury's nuanced chapter on "the Woman Question," a separate essay would have highlighted these important issues and brought Tolstoi closer to our contemporary moment and to our student audience. The absence of a chapter on empire, race, and colonialism (even though some of these themes are touched upon in passing in Orwin's, Newlin's and Suvij Sudershan's chapters) is particularly glaring, given both Tolstoi's relentless critique of imperialism in his later works and the current political developments in our region. While I realize that the volume was most likely prepared before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, this omission is symptomatic. The one missing *context*, ironically, turned out to be the most important for the moment in which the volume appeared. This is not to diminish the excellent scholarly and editorial work that went into the creation of this volume; rather, it is a testimony to the state of our field, which is thankfully undergoing a much-needed self-reflection and reevaluation.

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