

Reviews

Faggionato, Raffaella. *L'alambicco di Lev Tolstoj. 'Guerra e Pace' e la massoneria russa*. Viella, Rome, 2015. 433 pp. Illustration. Notes. Appendices. Bibliography. Index. €30.00.

LEV TOLSTOI'S ALEMBIC: 'WAR AND PEACE' AND RUSSIAN FREEMASONRY is the new book by Raffaella Faggionato, author of *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia: The Masonic Circle of N. I. Novikov* (Dordrecht, 2005). On the one hand it takes further her investigation of the history of Russian Freemasonry up to the first decades of the nineteenth century (Appendix: 'A Short History of Freemasonry under Alexander I', pp. 372–90), and on the other is likely to be recorded as a milestone in the study of Lev Tolstoj's masterpiece. As the title implies, it sheds light on the many masonic sources consulted by the Russian writer, and on the very different roles they played in various stages of his work.

Well known even to the common reader is the story of how Tolstoj's wife 'copied out *War and Peace* seven times from beginning to end' (Mirsky), and in the last seventy years several 'layers' of the author's manuscripts have been published and studied by different scholars. Here Faggionato combines the results of a thorough investigation of a mass of documents from the Iasnaia Poliana and Russian State libraries and from Tolstoj's Museum in Moscow, including diary entries, books and manuscripts Tolstoj purchased or read, notes he took, drafts, rewritings, annotations on copies and even printed proofs. She achieves important results, providing a key to understanding the evolution of Tolstoj's artistic method, from 'realistic' to 'mystical-symbolic', as defined by recent scholars.

This rich book is masterly arranged, from the many apt epigraphs to the very large and detailed, almost exhaustive bibliography, leaving an impression of convincing unity. Following an informative introduction, it is divided into five parts, each formed by two chapters of short paragraphs, whose titles define each step of the investigation, leaving the reader to ask why the impact of Freemasonry on Tolstoj's masterpiece has not been stressed strongly before. As a matter of fact, in the final version of *War and Peace*, the masonic affiliation of Pierre Bezukhov plays a comparatively small role, and a series of patent inconsistencies in the description of persons and rituals could lead readers to think that Tolstoj had only a very superficial knowledge of Freemasonry, or that he used his sources to give a parodic image of it (V. I. Shcherbakov). But the books and manuscripts perused by Faggionato (let it be noted that in the ninety-volume 'Jubilee' edition of Tolstoj's *oeuvre* the drafts regarding this aspect have not been included, while the new 100-volume edition is still very far from complete) reveal a very different story.

Faggionato begins with Tolstoi's predecessor, Alexander Pushkin, as chronicler of the Russian nobility's intellectual history, whose *Queen of Spades* is recalled in a crucial episode of *War and Peace* during Pierre's visit to his dying father (1.1). A reconstruction of the considerable interest in the history of the late-eighteenth- to early-nineteenth-century Masonic movement by pedagogists, thinkers (A. Herzen) and historians (M. Pogodin) between 1856 and 1862 follows (1.2). Part two is devoted to Tolstoi's earlier literary project on the Decembrist movement (1860–63) and his discovery of its deep Masonic roots (2.1), and anticipates the writer's idiosyncratic use, in the final version of *War and Peace*, of 'published and unpublished sources' (on M. Speranskii, I. Lopukhin, M. Mudrov, F. Rostopchin, etc.), bought and collected at this stage. While real, historical figures were called to play an increasingly symbolic, often parodic, role, their ideas and words were eventually assigned to very different fictional characters (2.2). A pun repeated in the introduction to the Russian translation of one of the books bought in 1864, i.e. Miguel de Molinos's *Spiritual Guide*, is seen as a possible source of Tolstoi's decision to turn the final title from *War and the Human Universe* to *War and Peace* (in both cases 'Voyna i mir', but using the different 'i' of the pre-Revolutionary Russian alphabet in the last word).

A long part three follows the complex development of Tolstoi's masterpiece from the very first projects of 1863 and the journal version (*The Year 1805*, 1864–66), to the intended first book edition (*All's Well That Ends Well*, January–November 1866), illustrating the essential function of the masonic sources in them (3.1) as well as in the variants of *War and the Human Universe* during the crucial summer–autumn of 1867 (3.2). 'Masonry breaks into the novel', as the title says, between the tenth and the twelfth versions of the incipit, written in May–December 1864. Initially seen as a complex of 'foreign' ideas, and later as a fundamental means of connection with the older, Catherinian, generation (p. 126), Freemasonry becomes an increasingly important element in the lives of the novels' main protagonists, especially the one who will be from now on called by the French form of his name, Pierre (meaning, significantly, also 'stone', p. 125), and almost to the same extent, his friend Prince Andrei (pp. 128–31).

Stressing that from the beginning the work was not conceived as an historical novel but that it was on historical documents that Tolstoi's search for the 'truth' of life relied (pp. 136–37), Faggionato illustrates in detail the difficult evolution from historically plausible to unlikely (or suppressed) 'masonic episodes', such as Pierre's meeting with the old Mason, his Martinist affiliation, his political activity and estate reforming, Prince Andrei's Masonic affiliation (of which in the final version only an allusion to 'women's gloves' remains), his political activities in 1809 on the side of, or against, Speranskii,

the Bogucharovo meeting and the many other conversations between the two friends, and finally Andrei/Pierre's speech at the Lodge. The masonic theme of the alternative between politically active and contemplative life (embodied by the 'political' Lopukhin and the mystical Pozdeev), interweaves with Tolstoi's own wavering between private life and social commitment and shapes the life paths of the two, to a certain extent interchangeable, heroes (p. 146). In the second half of 1867, while waiting for the third volume of the new book version to be published by Petr Bartenev, Tolstoi reworked all the masonic episodes, radically revising the proofs of the first two volumes. Faggionato maintains that by the end of November 1867 new visits to the Rumyantsev Museum and new readings of Masonic sources brought to the fore the 'inner man' and his spiritual travels, of which the outer ones were only an allegory (p. 172). In the first paragraphs she presents newly discovered materials from Freemason Sergei Lanskoï's (1787–1861) archive. Petr Titov's *Memoirs* are the established source of Pierre's dreams in the final version, but Faggionato offers new sources for the earlier variants of his diary and also some crucial scenes: Lanskoï's three notebooks about mystic alchemy (pp. 177, 179, 309–10); Iosif Pozdeev's (1742 or 1746–1820) correspondence with his pupils, inviting a purely spiritual way of living Masonry (p. 191); and descriptions of rituals (*obryadniki*) full of symbolic imagery (p. 192). The impact of these sources is demonstrated by describing (p. 187) and reproducing (p. 9, unfortunately without reference) a draft page, showing Tolstoi's autograph addition to the previous version of the meeting with the old Mason, which comprises a cross inscribed in a square as a symbol of light merged in the material world (p. 229). In the last paragraphs the new episodes of Pierre's admission to the Lodge and Pierre's diary are presented (pp. 197–203). Then follows a reconstruction of Tolstoi's work on the crucial third volume from 'the first half of August 1867' to 'the second half of August 1867', and ending with 'September 1867' and 'October 1867', up to 'the turning point' of November 1867, when the roles of the two heroes and the collocation of their love for Natasha are finally defined. The two final paragraphs show the changes introduced in the third volume that connect the individual spiritual journey to the history of the nation (the anachronisms necessary to achieve this are discussed in part four, pp. 235–38) and anticipate the direction of Tolstoi's work in 1868 and 1869.

Parts four and five, and the unnumbered final chapter, 'The Circle Closes', reconstruct this work, combining, in a sometimes precarious balance, three approaches: chronological (chronology of writing, chronology of the novel's subject lines), thematic and formal. Part four explores the connection between Tolstoi's new method and his 'new vision of the world', with a particular stress on the literal meaning of the word 'vision' (4.1). Faggionato argues that not only the symbolic images, but also the half-Theosophical, half-Hermetic

and Alchemical doctrines Russian Martinists had derived from the books of Böhme, Saint-Martin and others (p. 230), particularly appealed to Tolstoi, whose youthful distrust in the power of reason and theory to give a sense to life had become more radical. They presented a 'dualistic thought of a kind that answered to the writer's needs': not dialectical or excluding but, on the contrary, inclusive and 'constructive', admitting the contradiction at the basis of the life dynamic — death as a new life, a rebirth (p. 229). For this reason the 'new novel', written from summer to autumn 1867, became 'a long and complicated *initiatory journey*, a kind of alchemical *Great Work*' (p. 232), implying for Pierre a series of 'deaths' and 'rebirths' on a higher level, connected with, and corresponding to, the Masonic degrees, and for Andrei the individual overcoming of pride, ambition, faith in human reason and earthly love, in order to attain final illumination. At the same time, Faggionato maintains, almost all concrete historical facts were deleted and many anachronisms and unlikely details added to stress the unrealistic character and symbolic meaning of the story. Paradoxically, the more unlikely the background is, the more authentic the inner process of the heroes seems (pp. 213, 249).

The last thirteen paragraphs of this part are devoted to 'unlikely Pierre' and his utterly unrealistic masonic career as depicted in the final, and, for the last volume, intermediate versions. Of particular importance are three initiatory scenes (old Count Bezukhov's death, the meeting in Torzhok with the old Mason, now named Bazdeev, and the ritual of the admission to the Lodge, pp. 250, 252), from which emerges a pattern that is repeated and varied many times in the novel, and in particular in other initiatory scenes (such as the execution of the supposed arsonists at the Virgins' Field, p. 296). The pattern, i.e. the inability to act, the tense expectation of something unknown, terrible and unavoidable, the feeling that everything 'must be' exactly so, anticipates our universal sense of bewilderment and dismay in the face of the mystery of death (p. 253).

Strictly connected with Tolstoi's interest in the esoteric side of Masonry appear, in particular, such newly devised narrative components as 'dreams' (4.2), whose complex symbolism (the bed, the book, the 'Song of Songs') can be explained neither psychologically or psychoanalytically, but according to the hermetic, cabalistic and alchemical tradition. Faggionato stresses that Tolstoi was not reproducing his masonic sources blindly, but adapted them to his own design for the spiritual regeneration of his heroes.

In part five, which focuses on life 'journeys', bringing to its happy destination the horizontal movement of Pierre Bezukhov (5.1) and recapitulating the vertical ascent of the last Andrei Bolkonskii (5.2), is similarly new, and to be read exclusively in hermetic terms is the 'round', purely artificial and symbolic figure of Platon Karataev (pp. 305–15). Ancient Hebrew etymology and masonic-

hermetic symbolism are called upon to explain his name, the choice of a barrack (lodge) for the meeting with him, his love for singing and his almost feminine features, even his smell of sweat. Other important recurring elements of *War and Peace*, such as numerology (p. 315), the contraposition of light and darkness, the oak (as tree of life), the comet, the book, the sky, the door, are connected to the same tradition(s). Of particular interest are the idea of death as a form of rebirth to a higher degree of perfection (pp. 350, 355), which explains Prince Andrei's fate, and the figure of Natasha as personification of Tolstoi's particular philosophic-religious syncretism. When she speaks of Pierre as 'dark blue with red' and 'rectangular' she is combining, Faggionato maintains, the traditional colours of Christ's robe with the hermetic symbolism of divine humanity. Meanwhile, Nikolen'ka's dream in the epilogue is viewed as an allusion to victory over death and time via connections across generations, 'in an original interpretation of the alchemic *opus* as permanent physical and spiritual resurrections of the fathers in the sons' (p. 368).

As we know this solution for Tolstoi was only temporary, and by 1873 he had lost all interest in the hermetic sciences (p. 317). Nevertheless, Faggionato argues that the titles of such late works as *Path of Life*, *Circle of Reading*, *Resurrection*, *The Living Corpse* demonstrate that Tolstoi had not dismissed a particular way of imagining things, of using words in all their evocative power (p. 369).

It is impossible here to do justice to the complexity of this important scholarly study, which should be made available to a wider audience in translation as soon as possible.

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Gregory, Serge Vladimir. *Antosha and Levitasha: The Shared Lives and Art of Anton Chekhov and Isaac Levitan*. Northern Illinois University Press, DeKalb, IL, 2015. ix + 248 pp. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$39.00 (paperback).

IN his Introduction Serge Gregory comments that, despite the equal billing of the two figures of his title, his focus is principally on Levitan (p. 5). His achievement is to have supplemented the meagre materials on Levitan available outside Russia. He has plumbed sources in archives and libraries in Russia, mainly letters and memoirs relating to the period. Many of the letters were written by Chekhov and Levitan's mutual acquaintances, mostly women, who loved one or other of the grouping, and sometimes caused painful disagreements or catastrophic fallings in and out of love.