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For readers accustomed to the explosion-laden, big-screen adaptations of James Bond, Ian Fleming's fifth novel, *From Russia with Love* (1957), ends somewhat unexpectedly—with a literal battle of books. The climax finds 007 on the Orient Express in the company of Tatiana Romanova, an apparent Russian defector who has helped him acquire a decoding device from the Soviet consulate in Istanbul. In Trieste, the pair are joined by a man claiming to be a fellow British agent sent from London to aid their escape. In actuality, he is Donovan "Red" Grant (a.k.a. Krassno Granitski), a merciless assassin sent by SMERSH, the counterintelligence branch of Soviet state security, and he is packing a deadly firearm disguised as a copy of *War and Peace*. After secretly drugging Romanova and luring Bond into a false sense of security, Grant holds the agent at gunpoint and reveals SMERSH's devious plan to discredit and murder the famous British spy. As the train enters the tunnel at Simplon Pass, Grant fires, but the bullet is blocked by Bond's gunmetal cigarette case, which he has cleverly shoved into his copy of Eric Ambler's 1939 thriller *The Mask of Dimitrios*. In the ensuing scuffle, 007 manages to kill the Soviet assassin with the villain's own weaponized *War and Peace*—death by Tolstoy.[1]

Fleming had a fascination with book-guns and their ironic commentary on the relationship between culture and violence. We learn in *Goldfinger* (1959) that Bond keeps his Walther PPK in hollowed-out volume titled *The Bible Designed to Be Read as Literature*,[2] a Good Book clearly not meant for good deeds. Similarly, the great Russian tome serves as a useful device. For one, it is huge; an agent could easily bludgeon an opponent with even the flimsiest of Dover Thrift Editions. Its girth also makes it ideal for concealing an explosive charge. On a figurative level, of course, the novel is a heavy-handed cultural cipher. Michael Denning points out that "[this] scene is not only a virtuoso Bond ending but is also an amusing allegory of a wider battle of books, with the plucky English thriller besting the powerful Russian work of literature."[3] There is, however, more than political allegory at work here. The

scene dramatizes what scholars have termed the Cultural Cold War, wherein the Anglo-American intelligence community covertly propagandized art and literature under the guise of organizations such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), an international society of humanists and intellectuals who waged, often unwittingly, a war of words against communist ideology. In retrospect, Fleming's choice of Tolstoy is uncanny. As I argue, the CIA, through its cover foundations, sought to appropriate the novelist and his legacy as the embodiment of freedom and individualism—in effect, a Russian writer who could be *turned* against the Soviet Union. After achieving international fame as a novelist, Tolstoy, in his later years, became a committed pacifist and an advocate for Christian anarchism, a biblically based creed that rejected not only organized religion but state authority in general. By 1901, the Russian Orthodox Church had excommunicated him, and the czarist government had come to view him as a threat. At the same time, Tolstoy embraced the simple life of a peasant and set about creating what his translator, Richard Pevear, describes as "a stateless, egalitarian, agrarian society of non-smoking, teetotal vegetarians."[4] The writer continued working until November 1910, when—frustrated by financial and familial dramas—the eighty-two-year-old abruptly left his estate at Yasnaya Polyana and died of pneumonia a week later at the provincial train station of Astapovo. Three years after the publication of *From Russia with Love*, the CCF marked the fiftieth anniversary of Tolstoy's death by organizing a conference that attracted a wide range of writers and academics from around the world. Secretly sponsored by the CIA, the Tolstoy gathering, which took place in Venice in the summer of 1960, was intended to counter similar events planned by the Soviets, which the CIA feared would portray the Russian novelist as a prophet of Bolshevism, a writer who recognized the historical importance of common people and who took up a humble life in solidarity with the proletariat. In response, the West hoped to claim Tolstoy not as a devout Christian—as one might expect—but as a thinker whose individualist philosophy could not be contained by Cold War ideologies. Essentially, they sought to secularize his Christian anarchism as a form of radical liberty—a Bible aimed at totalitarian power.

Drawing on declassified CIA files available through the agency's FOIA Electronic Reading Room, as well as CCF archives held in the Special Collections Research Center at the University of Chicago, this essay investigates how the CIA and its intellectual cadre sought to establish Tolstoy as a global writer whose worldview was unassimilable to either Marxism or capitalism while ensuring that Tolstoyan freedom would stand in sharp contrast to Soviet

authoritarianism. The history of the 1960 Tolstoy gathering and its role in this endeavor have not been fully explored. Frances Stonor Saunders's groundbreaking account of the CCF devotes a paragraph to the event, while Duncan White's more recent and otherwise thorough history of Cold War literary intrigues makes no mention of it. Brief accounts appear in the biographies of some of the key players, but again these are cursory. In our current era of resurfacing Cold War tensions, the time has come for a fuller account of the relationship between the CIA and the Tolstoy Foundation, the CCF's behind-the-scenes organization of the conference, and the significance of this event in the context of US-Russian culture wars. At the same time, I contend that this conference and the intelligence community's manipulation of the humanities in general ultimately conflicts with Tolstoy's antipathy toward state sponsorship of the arts and the weaponization of culture in the service of nationalistic agendas.

A Special Relationship

By the late 1950s, it was no secret that art—and literature in particular—served on the front lines of a global struggle. What was not known at the time, however, was the role of the CIA in waging a clandestine cultural offensive through various cover organizations and publications. The agency's activities were intended, in part, to counter similar efforts carried out by the Eastern Bloc. White has uncovered how much time and effort both superpowers spent in waging their literary war: "Secretive agencies established propaganda networks to amplify the voices of those writers whose work found ideological favor, and both Western and Communist secret services sought ways to censor, intimidate, or silence those writers whose work was critical of their countries."[5] While part of this project targeted readers in developing nations—most famously the CIA's dissemination of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) in an effort to curb the threat of Soviet influence—the primary audience for the agency's efforts consisted of European intellectuals, who, the agency feared, still flirted dangerously with Marxism and communism. In her study of the CIA's manipulation of arts and letters, Saunders describes the program as an extensive, covert network composed—"whether they knew it or not"—of writers, artists, musicians, and academics. Through them, she writes, "[the CIA] stockpiled a vast arsenal of cultural weapons: journals, books, conferences, seminars, art exhibitions, concerts, awards."[6] In essence, the project amounted to the humanities division of the Truman Doctrine, and its primary vehicle was the Paris-based Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), which, from its establishment in 1950 to its public outing as a CIA front by the *New York*

Times in 1966, conducted a range of activities in Western Europe and beyond. Among these, the CCF sponsored several literary journals, most notably *Encounter*. Cofounded by the poet Stephen Spender, the journal appealed to former communists and disgruntled leftists who found in its pages a venue for cultural critique and intellectual debate. Greg Barnhisel, whose scholarship has untangled the extensive network of government agencies and private organizations that discreetly influenced postwar American culture, argues that the journal, along with the CIA's other venues, played a significant role in shaping the legacy of modern art and literature, "[forging] links . . . between artistic modernism, intellectual freedom, and anticommunism."[7] Indeed, the CIA championed even the most avant-garde art, which the agency saw as the antidote to socialist realism. This introduced a measure of historical irony; while J. Edgar Hoover was busy compiling dossiers on Richard Wright and Nat King Cole, and McCarthyites in Congress railed against abstract expressionism, the CIA was quietly promoting Jackson Pollock and sending Louis Armstrong to play across the Atlantic.

The CIA likewise took an interest in canonical authors, especially Tolstoy, whom it sought to reinscribe not as a Russian writer but as a world author whose anarchist vision stood in sharp contrast to communist repression. In this endeavor, the CIA was aided by private, ostensibly neutral humanitarian foundations. By the late 1950s, the American intelligence community had established clandestine sponsorship of several organizations deemed useful in curtailing international communism. The "CIA spent millions of dollars on its anti-Communist client organizations every year," writes Michael Warner, the agency's former deputy chief of the History Staff. "Indeed, the CIA's International Organizations Division (IO) secretly became one of the world's largest grant-making institutions"—rivaling even the "Big Three" of Ford, Rockefeller, and Carnegie.[8] These venerable organizations themselves often worked in conjunction with the CIA by pouring money into cultural projects that the agency found useful. In 1951, the Ford Foundation bankrolled the creation of the Chekhov Publishing House, one of the few Russian-language publishers outside the USSR. Founded by George F. Kennan, the architect of communist containment and soon-to-be US ambassador to the Soviet Union, who was then running the foundation's East European Fund, the Chekhov firm published both Russian classics and manuscripts smuggled from behind the Iron Curtain. Its goal, according to a 1953 review committee, was "to help win the battle for men's minds."[9] However, the publisher's intended audience was not Russian readers in the USSR but Russian émigrés living in the West,

displaced individuals whom the CIA was eager to enlist as both sources of intelligence and potential leaders of a post-Soviet society. To that end, the agency also cultivated a relationship with the key rallying organization for Russian exiles: the Tolstoy Foundation.

By the 1950s, the CIA had already developed a rapport with various members of the Tolstoy family, and that relationship helped shape the literary intrigues to come. In fact, the family's association with the American intelligence community predates the CIA itself. During the Second World War, the novelist's intrepid grandson, Ilya Andreyevich Tolstoy, worked for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), serving as President Franklin D. Roosevelt's envoy in Tibet. The most significant relationship, though, was that between the CIA and the New York–based Tolstoy Foundation. Established in 1939 by the novelist's youngest daughter and former secretary, Alexandra Tolstoy, the foundation was initially created to help early White Russian émigrés—those who fled their homeland in the wake of the 1917 revolution—begin a new life in the United States. Under the directorship of Alexandra Tolstoy's friend, Tatiana Schaufuss, the organization eventually established European headquarters in Munich and offices in Austria, Italy, France, Belgium, Iran, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. Paul B. Anderson, an early proponent of Slavic studies in the United States, praised the organization as a bastion of Orthodox Christian values. In his laudatory (almost hagiographic) profile of the foundation, which appeared in the *Russian Review* in 1958, he emphasizes its humanitarian project. "At all times the objective has been clear," he writes, "to give a home to the homeless and to care for those who are unwanted."[10] By late 1950s, the Tolstoy Foundation had become the point of contact for Soviet defectors, refugees whom the organization encouraged to "come out of a wandering void into useful citizenship."[11] With only a limited budget, the foundation's scope of activity was impressive. "How has this all been financed?" Anderson asks. "Miss Tolstoy would say, by a miracle."[12] As it happened, the foundation had guardian angels in both New York and Washington.

In 1951, the struggling Tolstoy Foundation had received a grant from the East European Fund, but the Ford trustees—perhaps put off by what Kennan's biographer, John Lewis Gaddis, calls the foundation's "monarchist tendencies"—eventually decided to withdraw support, leaving Kennan to secure CIA funding on the group's behalf.[13] In truth, the agency archives depict a somewhat strained relationship, with the foundation playing the role of the disadvantaged ward perpetually in need of cash. The minutes of a Deputies' Meeting held on April 18, 1955, offer a telling snapshot of the relationship

from the CIA's perspective. The high-level gathering included, among others, Allen Dulles, Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) from 1953 to 1961; Frank Wisner, Deputy Director of Plans (DDP) and one of the architects of the Congress for Cultural Freedom; Richard Helms, chief of operations for the Directorate of Plans and future DCI; and Richard Bissell, special assistant to the DCI and former deputy administrator for the Marshall Plan. During the meeting, between discussions of US Army intelligence operations and the question of maintaining a US consulate in Hanoi (Dulles thought they should "stay on a little longer"), the DCI announced that he had received a report to the effect that the Tolstoy Foundation was "about to go under again."[14] Dulles then "approved Mr. Wisner's suggestion that this matter be referred to Nelson Rockefeller."[15] This exchange suggests that by the mid-1950s the CIA had begun turning to outside donors to help keep the Tolstoy Foundation afloat. However, the agency continued to advocate for the foundation and vouch for its efforts. This is confirmed in a letter from Dulles to Alexandra Tolstoy on July 31, 1959, after she had sent him a plea for financial support. "We are well aware of the valuable work that you and the Foundation continue to do," he told her, "and I wish that I were in a position to help. Unfortunately, I am not, but would be happy to testify to the effectiveness of your undertaking, if that would be of assistance in your approach to private foundations."[16] In fact, the CIA had already acted as guarantor for the foundation's activities on at least one occasion. In March 1958, Dulles reassured a worried New York lawyer representing one of the foundation's donors that the organization was still reputable: "I can tell you that our information indicates that the Tolstoy Foundation, Inc., has been and continues to be quite effective in the welfare and relief fields in which it operates. It is my personal opinion that this activity is deserving of your continued support, at least for another year."[17] Such were the little miracles that kept the foundation off the streets.

The Soviets, for their part, recognized the Tolstoy Foundation as a legitimate threat. As early as 1948, Moscow was using its overseas radio service to lambaste the group as a lair for "Fascist White Guard gangsters."[18] One 1960 broadcast accuses both the Ford and the Tolstoy foundations of "recruiting many spies and saboteurs from among the traitors and other apostates who fled from the people's democracies."[19] As it happens, they were not far off the mark. Despite the organization's financial difficulties, CIA records reveal that the agency valued the foundation as an attractive channel for Soviet defectors who could become potential assets. Initially, though, at least one of the agency's spotters abroad, a Circassian operating out of Jordan, feared that the idealistic

organization might actually get in the way of recruiting efforts. According to a 1953 report, the agent, code-named NOSTRIL, expressed concerns to his CIA handler over "the possibility of the Tolstoy bunch siphoning off all our prospects or getting them in such a mental state that they may not respond as amenably to recruitment."[20] Nevertheless, by the end of the decade the agency had come to rely on the foundation as a talent pool. In 1957, the CIA began running project AEREADY (later renamed AEDEPOT), an effort to train and place a team of sleeper "hot war" agents behind the Iron Curtain. The renewal memorandum for the 1958 fiscal year confirms the importance of the "Tolstoy Foundation and other so called 'clearing houses' furnishing valuable leads and probable candidates."[21] In essence, the CIA's employment of "the Tolstoy bunch" in this way serves as an operational counterpart to the agency's posthumous enlistment of Leo Tolstoy to "recruit" intellectuals over to the Western cause.

The impetus behind the 1960 Venice conference may be traced, in part, to an exchange of letters between Allen Dulles and Alexandra Tolstoy concerning the legacy of her father in anticipation of the anniversary of his death. On February 2, 1959, Tolstoy shared with Dulles her concerns over Soviet appropriations of her father's work:

> Next year, on [*sic*] November 20, 1960, will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the death of my father Leo Tolstoy. You may be already aware that the Soviets are going to try to capitalize upon this anniversary through their detestable propaganda. This my father would never have stood for; everything he represented and every day of his life is one hundred percent against the lies and tyrannies of the communist criminals.[22]

In addition to "encouraging a Leo Tolstoy revival throughout the free world," her plan at the time included petitioning the US postmaster general to include a Tolstoy commemorative stamp as part of the "Champion of Liberty" Series. In his response on February 19, Dulles sympathized with her concerns and endorsed the stamp proposal, noting that it "would indeed do much to remind the Free World of his devotion to the cause of human rights and liberty."[23]

Behind the scenes, however, wheels within wheels had begun to turn. In the wake of Alexandra Tolstoy's letter, Richard Bissell, who had taken over as DDP from Wisner, sent a memorandum to Desmond FitzGerald, chief of Psychological and Paramilitary Staff. "It seems to me," Bissell wrote, "we should be able to do something useful in the propaganda line about the 50th anniversary of Tolstoy's death."[24] Bissell copied Cord Meyer, chief of the International Organizations Division, who later passed the suggestion on to Dulles

himself. In his communication to the DCI, Meyer also enclosed "a resume of the present status of IO Division planning on commemoration of this event."[25] This indicates that plans were in motion to make use of the occasion prior to Alexandra Tolstoy's appeal. If, as Saunders puts it, the American spy bureau "[positioned] intellectuals and their work like chess pieces to be played in the Great Game,"[26] the Meyer memorandum reveals that the board was already set for the Tolstoy tournament by February 1959.

Death in Venice

In 1959, planning for the Tolstoy conference naturally fell to the CCF and its secretary-general, the composer Nicolas Nabokov, a cousin of the novelist Vladimir Nabokov. A naturalized US citizen, Nabokov had come to the attention of the CIA through an incident at the Waldorf Astoria "Peace Conference" in 1949, a Soviet-sponsored gathering of American leftists and Eastern Bloc delegates in the heart of Western capitalism. During the event, which became something of a media circus, Nabokov confronted the beleaguered Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich over the USSR's recent denunciation of Igor Stravinsky and other modern Russian musicians. Shostakovich, muzzled by Soviet authorities and forced to toe the party line, was publicly humiliated. Evidently, this unsavory stunt proved Nabokov had the right sort of theatrics for cultural diplomacy. Nabokov came to be further involved in political intrigues through his friendship with Michael Josselson, the CIA officer responsible for setting up the CCF, and his association with Kennan, who was the center of a group of "anticommunist Russophiles" in Georgetown.[27] Like Stephen Spender, Nabokov would later claim that he had no knowledge of CIA funding or involvement in the organization's affairs. Whether or not this is true, Nabokov certainly understood that the CCF played a strategic role in the Cultural Cold War. From its offices in Paris, Nabokov proceeded to enlist the help of his friend Sir Isaiah Berlin, the Oxford don and historian of ideas who had become a well-regarded authority on the Russian novelist after the publication of *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History* (1953). The organizing committee also secured the assistance of the Ford Foundation, which would publicly sponsor the event, as well as the Tolstoy Foundation and family, including Serge Tolstoy, the novelist's grandson. From the outset, the 1960 conference was intended to strike a diplomatic tone—at least, on the surface. Venice was chosen, in part, because it was perceived as a more neutral location than, say, London or Paris. The CCF outsourced the on-site planning duties to the Italy-based Cini Foundation and its secretary-

general, the literary scholar Vittore Branca, thus allowing Nabokov and Berlin to focus their efforts on gathering a lineup of speakers capable of rescuing Tolstoy from a fate worse than death: appropriation by Marxist ideologues.

For many years, the official Soviet attitude to Tolstoy had been dominated by a handful of essays penned by none other than V. I. Lenin. In particular, Lenin's "Leo Tolstoy as the Mirror of the Russian Revolution" (1908) had a profound influence on later Russian thinkers attempting to reconcile Tolstoy's worldview with the Communist Party line. At the time, however, Lenin was writing against the grain. Many revolutionary hard-liners regarded Tolstoy as a reactionary author whose greatest work, *War and Peace*, while offering an all-encompassing panorama of Russian society, ultimately celebrated aristocracy and nationalism in its three main characters: the patriotic Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, the educated but ineffectual Pierre Bezukhov, and the endearing but flighty Natasha Rostova. It was not until the Second World War, when Russians perceived a parallel between Napoleon's invasion and Hitler's, that Tolstoy's epic of defiance again reached a national—even nationalist—audience.[28] In addition, just as the czarist regime took issue with Tolstoy's antigovernment rhetoric, revolutionary thinkers rejected his pacifist stance in late works such as *The Kingdom of God Is within You* (1894), in which he argues that "socialists and communists" are no better than "monarchists, conservatives, and capitalists" because none of them have "[anything] better to offer by way of reconciling mankind than violence."[29] Each new revolution, he writes, "serves but to increase the power of those in authority at the same time to enslave their fellow-men."[30] In spite of this, Lenin sees Tolstoy as a complex amalgam of conflicting attitudes. In his 1908 essay, which refers to the ill-fated uprising of 1905, Lenin argues that the many contradictions in Tolstoy's life and works embody the conflicting impulses of the First Revolution and explain its eventual failure:

> On the one hand, we have the great artist, the genius who has not only drawn incomparable pictures of Russian life but has made first-class contributions to world literature. On the other hand we have the landlord obsessed with Christ. . . . On the one hand, merciless criticism of capitalist exploitation, exposure of government outrages, the farcical courts and the state administration, and unmasking of the profound contradictions between the growth of wealth and achievements of civilisation and the growth of poverty, degradation and misery among the working masses. On the other, the crackpot preaching of submission, "resist not evil" with violence.[31]

By embodying these contradictions, Tolstoy bears witness to a necessary stage in the evolution of socialism; he represents, according to Lenin, a patriarchal

"peasant" perspective, a desire to tear down the institutions of church and private ownership, "to replace the police-class state by a community of free and equal" workers.[32] Lenin's pronouncements paved the way for the production, between 1928 and 1958, of a definitive, ninety-volume Jubilee Edition of Tolstoy's complete works. From a scholarly perspective, the Soviet literati had staked their claim in the novelist's legacy.

Moreover, for a writer whom the American establishment was attempting to turn into a champion of individual agency, Tolstoy's perspective on history raises additional complications. He roundly rejected the Great Man view of historical events. In the course of chronicling Napoleon's disastrous campaign in *War and Peace*, the novelist repeatedly asserts that history—and the history of warfare, in particular—is ultimately, like a grand chess match, "the result of numberless collisions of various wills."[33] But the "law of retrospection," as Tolstoy calls it, clouds the historian's judgment, imbuing the historical narrative with a false sense of purpose and inevitability.[34] Thus, French historians attempt to justify their hero by claiming the emperor was aware, all along, of "the danger of the campaign," and Russian chroniclers praise their own generals for purposefully "luring Napoleon into the depths of Russia," to the very walls of Moscow, thereby setting the stage for his shameful and deadly retreat in 1812.[35] Even at the time, Tolstoy argues, the leaders of both nations

> [supposed] that they knew what they were doing and that they were doing it for themselves, and yet they were all involuntary instruments of history, and performed work hidden from them but comprehensible to us. Such is the inevitable fate of all men of action, and the higher they stand in the human hierarchy, the less free they are.[36]

Concerned that Tolstoy's outlook could be recuperated as a proto-Marxist historical materialism, Berlin argues in *The Hedgehog and the Fox* that Tolstoy rejects the Marxist conception of history as a science, opting instead for a view of history as a friction between individualism and impersonal forces.[37] For Berlin, Tolstoy's true subject in *War and Peace* is "the contrast between the universal and all-important but delusive experience of free will, the feeling of responsibility, the values of private life generally, on the one hand; and on the other the reality of inexorable historical determinism."[38] To be sure, Tolstoy's perspective also presents difficulties for Marxist critics who interpret history through the prism of class struggle. In *The Historical Novel* (1937), the Hungarian philosopher and literary critic György Lukács commends Tolstoy for revealing "the contradiction between the protagonists of history and the living forces of popular life" but faults him for rejecting the possibility of "con-

scious historical action."[39] Echoing Lenin, Lukács grants that while "Tolstoy completely fails to understand the movement of revolutionary democracy already beginning in his time," his works themselves—when viewed through the dialectic of history—represent "a shift from past to present," a necessary step on the path to revolutionary action.[40]

The organizers of the Venice conference, therefore, had significant challenges to overcome in their attempt to wrest Tolstoy from the clutches of Bolshevism. But their efforts were aided by the fact that the global intelligentsia had, by midcentury, begun to view Tolstoy and other nineteenth-century Russian writers as culturally and politically distant from their Soviet successors. Despite the Soviet government's early embrace of the classics—Duncan White notes that by the 1920s state publishers were pushing out "large runs" of Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, and others[41]—the international literary community regarded the relationship between the USSR and the Russian greats as something closer to a hostage situation. When, in May 1958, the State Department asked William Faulkner to join a goodwill delegation of US authors traveling to the USSR, he refused, calling it "a 'betrayal' of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Gogol to offer even the 'outward appearance of condoning the condition which the present Russian government has established.'"[42] In a 1958 lecture at Cornell, Vladimir Nabokov similarly contrasted "the resplendent orb" of nineteenth-century Russian literature with "the bleakness" of contemporary Soviet writing, hampered by censors and state-controlled publishers.[43] "[The] evolution of liberal thought in Russia before the Revolution," he declared, "has been completely obscured and distorted abroad by astute Communist propaganda."[44] As if to symbolically rescue *War and Peace* and claim it for the forces of Western liberalism, Jackie Kennedy conspicuously carried a copy on her husband's campaign trail in the spring of 1960.[45]

The CCF archives held at the University of Chicago reveal that, as planning for the conference progressed, the organizers walked a fine line between maintaining the appearance of a fair event and crafting one that would achieve their goals. In a letter to Nicolas Nabokov on April 4, 1959, Berlin offered feedback on the conference plan draft and suggested a number of changes. For instance, Berlin objected to a section describing Tolstoy as a "critic of the dialectical approach to History," which would associate Tolstoy with Marx, even if in opposition. He suggested instead the wording "Tolstoy and the relation of the individual to society."[46] Most of the discussion, however, concerned the thorny question of potential speakers, which at the time included (tentatively) Edmund Wilson on Tolstoy and the novel, Kennan on Tolstoy and Russia,

Karl Jaspers on Tolstoy and ethics, R. K. Narayan on Tolstoy and the war of ideas, and Berlin himself on Tolstoy and history. Berlin and Nabokov were also keen to include scholars from behind the Iron Curtain, if only to lend the conference an aura of neutrality. For a time, Berlin even toyed with the idea of inviting Lukács. "I wonder," he wrote, "if it would be too bold or absurd to invite Lukacs [*sic*] to cooperate with Edmund Wilson on Section I [i.e. Tolstoy and the novel]? He is I suppose a genuinely intelligent man as well as a crook and would clear us of all suspicion of cold war attitude, and if he refuses this could be advertised."[47] Berlin's cynical suggestion encapsulates the realpolitik underlying the event, the shrewd game of posturing that advanced under the guise of cultural diplomacy. Lukács, at any rate, did not materialize. For that matter, neither did Wilson, who wrote to his friend Nabokov on April 15 that he "[didn't] take any interest in these literary conferences, & nothing—not even the prospect of seeing you—could induce me to take part in one."[48]

Setbacks aside, the organizing committee began soliciting a list of international sponsors whose endorsement would lend legitimacy to the event. In reality, this was intended to mask the involvement of the CCF and the Cini Foundation, which were already beginning to accrue suspicion. The Sponsoring Committee would eventually include, among others, W. H. Auden, Aldous Huxley, Pierre Emmanuel, John Dos Passos, E. M. Forster, J. B. Priestley, Ernest J. Simmons, Victoria Ocampo, Pierre Pascal, Isak Dinesen, Ignazio Silone, Raja Rao, and Richard Wright. With the list of sponsors taking shape, the question of a Soviet delegation remained unanswered. In a letter to Nicolas Nabokov, Simmons, the founder of Russian area studies in the US, captured what the organizing committee was also wondering: "I'll be very interested to see who these skull-and-boners tap for such an affair."[49] They did not have long to wait. During the summer of 1959, the Soviets began to make overtures. In a letter to Berlin on July 31, Nabokov—consciously aping the florid mannerisms of his literary cousin—informed his co-organizer that a "new character" from the USSR had arrived on the scene, a certain Popovkin, the director of the Tolstoy state museum at Yasnaya Polyana and "no doubt the descendant of the famous Popov who invented everything and onomatopoeically attractive to certain male members of our French Secretariat."[50] Nabokov goes on to relate how the oily apparatchik paid a visit to Tolstoy's grandson in Paris.

> The ci-devant Popovkin appeared here a couple of weeks ago, called Serge Tolstoy and Mme de Proyart [a French scholar and conference co-organizer], was received by both à bras ouverts, ate and drank a lot, was cheerful and said that "they" know already that something has

> been planned in Venice, that all of them are dying to go and are expecting before they die most anxiously invitations. Hence, there is hope that les Savants Soviétiques will be present unless they get frightened by the list of people we are inviting.[51]

Indeed, this welcome (if ambiguous) confirmation that a Soviet delegation would attend the conference did force the planning committee to reconsider some of their potential invitees. At George Steiner's suggestion, Nabokov and Berlin had toyed with the idea of inviting the vocal communist apostate Arthur Koestler, who had long been a thorn in the side of Soviet authorities, but Nabokov now concluded that this would be "foolish": "The name of Koestler is unpronounceable in their presence."[52] Instead, they sent invitations to sixteen Russian experts, including Nikolai Gusev, Tolstoy's former secretary, but the seventy-eight-year-old was unable to make the journey.

The speaker they were most eager to secure from behind the Iron Curtain, however, was Boris Pasternak, whose novel non grata, *Doctor Zhivago*, had been smuggled out of the Soviet Union in 1957 and published in the West with the help of the CIA. As a young man in 1910, Pasternak had accompanied his father, the painter Leonid Pasternak, on the journey to Tolstoy's deathbed in the small railway hamlet of Astapovo. In the station where the great writer had breathed his last, Pasternak found not a giant in repose but "a little, wizened old man, one of the old men created by Tolstoy, one of those he had described and scattered over his pages by the dozen."[53] Fifty years later, Pasternak's novel was drawing comparisons to *War and Peace* for its sober view of history, but the book also rankled Soviet authorities by refusing to exalt the Russian Revolution. Pressured by the government to decline the Nobel Prize in 1958, Pasternak had become a literary cause célèbre, and the CIA recognized his potential as an international symbol of communist repression. As Peter Finn and Petra Couvée have revealed, the CIA and the Eisenhower administration were "deeply involved" in disseminating the book across the globe and even smuggling miniature editions into Russia itself.[54] Berlin, who had known Pasternak since the 1940s and had visited him at the writers' colony of Peredelkino in 1956, was naturally eager to enlist the participation of a writer and intellectual who posed—in the view of John Maury, the CIA's Soviet Russia Division chief—"a fundamental challenge to the Soviet ethic of sacrifice of the individual to the Communist system."[55] But it was not to be. Fearing forced exile and "loath to disrupt his work schedule," Pasternak turned down the invitation to attend the Tolstoy gathering.[56] Even if he had accepted, poor health would have prevented him from joining; he died in May 1960, a month before the conference.

Despite these disappointments, the conference was ready to commence the following summer. A "lavish affair,"[57] the meeting took place in a former Benedictine monastery on the island of San Giorgio in Venice from June 29 to July 3, 1960. It was truly an international gathering. There, according to the Russian literary critic Marc Slonim, who was covering the event for the *New York Times*, prominent writers and Oxford dons "found themselves beside barefoot Hindus" and bearded ascetics.[58] In addition to those previously mentioned, the forty or so participants now included Alberto Moravia, Georgy Adamovitch, Lord David Cecil, the Abbé Pierre, Iris Murdoch, Herbert Read, V. S. Pritchett, and others. This lineup alone guaranteed that the conference was a success in the eyes of its organizers. There was a palpable sense, moreover, that Tolstoy had something to contribute to the mid-twentieth-century world. Gino Nogara, the Italian reporter covering the conference for *La Fiera Letteraria*, wrote that given "[the] awareness of our life's instability at this time of unknown [*sic*], worries and expectations are urging us to pay special attention to the moral and religious aspects of Tolstoy's work."[59] Nevertheless, the conference remained a venue for petty Cold War rivalries. Nabokov in particular was disappointed with the USSR contingent, which consisted of a handful of "stooges."[60] In his memoir, written after CIA sponsorship of the CCF had become public knowledge, the composer recalls with glee the sight of Soviets unwittingly taking part in an event organized by a rival intelligence organization.

> In retrospect, it is very funny to remember, for instance, the silhouettes of two Russians, a thin, long one and a short, stocky one. The thin one was the Secretary General of the Union of Soviet Writers, the short one an odious SOB called Yermilov, a nasty little party hack. They were standing, both of them, in line to receive their *per diem* and travel allowance from my secretary, or rather the administrative secretary of the Congress for Cultural Freedom.[61]

For Nabokov, the ultimate joke was that these hard-liners from the Eastern Bloc were so eager to spend a few days in Venice on the American dime: "Mr. Yermilov, turn in your grave: *you have taken CIA money!*"[62]

The CCF archive in Chicago contains what are either drafts or transcripts of some of the featured talks. These provide insight into how the contest for Tolstoy's legacy played out at the conference. Predictably, the Soviet speakers tended to downplay his faith, religious anarchism, and rejection of state authority in favor of his late embrace of peasant life. In a paper titled "Leo Tolstoy and the Soviet People," Georgy Markov, representing the Executive Committee of the Union of Soviet Writers, paints a decidedly socialist realist portrait of the writer on first page:

> The ordinary folk will always store the memory of this man in his coarse home-spun shirt, belted as the peasants do, cheerfully striding behind his plough. His creative genius, which has bequeathed the greatest of artistic treasures to the world, presents a model of how man should live, telling him to work and create, to abhor the parasite.[63]

After this paean to Tolstoy the worker, Markov proudly announces that 1960 in the USSR has been named the "year of Tolstoy," culminating in a forthcoming state celebration at the Bolshoi Theater in November. In addition, he continues, public lectures will be offered at the People's Universities of Culture, "which thousands upon thousands of factory workers and collective farmers attend at their own free will."[64] Markov concludes by pointing out that Lenin, upon hearing of the author's death in 1910, remarked that "by studying Tolstoy's works of fiction, the Russian working class will learn to know its enemies better; and by studying Tolstoy's doctrine the entire Russian people must learn wherein lay their own weakness, which prevented them from consummating the cause of their emancipation."[65] Similarly, Nikolai Gudzy, editor of the Jubilee Edition of Tolstoy's works, begins his paper by reminding the gathering of the praise Tolstoy received from "the lips of Lenin," who recognized "the writer's intimate, organic connection with the fundamental motive forces of the historical process [i.e., historical materialism]."[66] Apparently, not all the assembled scholars took these Soviet presentations in diplomatic stride. In response to the Eastern Bloc delegates, the Spanish writer Salvador de Madariaga declared, "Don't try to convert Saint Mark's follower into that of Saint Marx!"[67]

While the gentlemen from Moscow went to great lengths to align Tolstoy with a communist worldview, their Western counterparts did not attempt to turn the writer into a proponent of capitalism. Rather, in keeping with the CIA's embrace of modern art, they portrayed him as a defender of liberty. Tolstoy's Christian anarchism, which Vladimir Nabokov characterized as "Jesus minus the church,"[68] became, in the hands of his Western interpreters, a kind of universalized rugged individualism—or, like 007's deceptive volume, a Bible designed to be read as literature. Problematically, this argument involved, at times, reimagining Tolstoy not as a humble peasant-lover but as the embodiment of masculine normativity. "Here we come to the kernel of his genius," Lord Cecil writes. "Tolstoy was in one sense a very normal human being—not a club-footed god or a brilliant freak-genius, but rather a healthy full-blooded male, born with a natural taste for the elemental universal activities of humanity: love and family life, hunting, friendship and society."[69] However, lest his audience begin to imagine Tolstoy as some sort of Russian Hemingway, Cecil clarifies that the writer "combined his robust normal male side both with an

extraordinary faculty for intellectual analysis and with a delicate feminine capacity for entering sympathetically into the feelings of every kind of person."[70] In his own paper, Berlin (mercifully) avoids this approach, arguing instead that Tolstoy's fascination with "the common people" stems from his investment in the past. "If there is an ideal of man, it is (so Tolstoy all his life maintained) behind us, not before us."[71] This is the crux of novelist's view of history: "It is mere blindness to believe, as the liberals or the socialists—the progressives—believe, that the golden age is still before us, in the future, that history is the story of progress, that material advance coincides with moral improvement."[72] In contrast, Berlin claims, Tolstoy takes the Rousseauian perspective that the way forward is to "seek to understand what is 'natural,' uncorrupt, sound, in harmony with itself and other objects in the world, and clear paths for development on these lines; not to seek to alter, interfere, mould."[73] Ironically, Berlin's paper presents a Tolstoy who does seem to concur with Marx on one thing: the modern condition is one of alienation.

In the end, Berlin argues that Tolstoy does not fall into either of the Cold War camps, but Berlin does so indirectly, by emphasizing that the novelist did not take sides in the ideological battles of his own day:

> Tolstoy does not fit into any of the well-known movements of his time. He is not in the least either a Westerner or a Slavophil; the former believed in the natural sciences as the door to the truth in all spheres, in social and political reforms, material progress, democracy, secularism. Tolstoy believed in none of these. He agreed with the Westerners only in condemning political repression, economic exploitation and everything else that leads to inequality between men. He believed in individual liberty, and in historical progress in a peculiar sense of his own, not identical with that of the Russian (or European) liberals or socialists of his day.[74]

On the surface, this appears to be a neutral stance on Tolstoy's politics, one that positions the writer above and beyond simple dichotomies. Looking back on the conference, Kennan recalls that this was precisely the impression he received from the event as a whole. Tolstoy, "with his massive literary and moral authority, was one of the few images imposing enough to bridge even the overriding ideological conflict of our day: neither side could afford to disown him—both of us had to do our obeisance to him and claim him for our own—a sure sign that there were things in life more fundamental than the differences between communism and capitalism."[75] Perhaps, but Berlin's characterization of the writer is arguably a more complex gesture. The scholar's rhetorical sleight-of-hand turns Tolstoy's singularity itself into an emblem of individualism and freedom—the twin stakes of the Cultural Cold War.

But to what end? In a recent article, Maria Volodina of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations claims that the conference "was of a paramount historical, literary and social importance—it exposed both an unfading worldwide interest in Tolstoy's works and the existing keen battle of opinions around his artistic legacy."[76] Be that as it may, the event's immediate impact in the context of the Cold War is more difficult to gauge. The 1960 gathering was an esoteric effort even by intelligence-community standards. This was not a contest for atomic secrets. No territory was lost or gained. The conference did not prevent the Vietnam War, dislodge Fidel Castro, or bridge a divided Berlin. A version of Berlin's paper would eventually appear in *Encounter*,[77] but even that expanded readership hardly seems to justify the year and a half of planning. Moreover, far from striking a blow against Marxism, the conference seems to have galvanized Soviet efforts to claim Tolstoy as their own. On November 19, 1960, the eve of Tolstoy's death anniversary, the Russian novelist and playwright Leonid Leonov delivered an address at the Bolshoi Theater to an audience that included Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev.[78] In his speech, which was reprinted in *Pravda* the following day, Leonov follows Lenin in proclaiming Tolstoy's historical fiction a testament to "the awakening of the people" while dismissing the writer's didactic writings and religious works as "less interesting" and misleading with respect to his "real outlook on the laws, society and civilization of his day."[79] Unlike Lenin, however, Leonov also feels compelled to rail against Western appropriations of Tolstoy and his works, especially those that would make him "a preacher of ideas" antithetical to communist ideology.[80] Although he does not mention the Venice conference specifically, Leonov makes an ominous observation. "We are not the only ones today commemorating Tolstoy," he warns, "and it may be that at this very hour somewhere someone's envenomed mind is endeavoring to use a selection of winnowed quotations from Tolstoy to do moral harm to our land, to which Leo Tolstoy belonged with his whole being and which he so glorified."[81] Similarly, the English-language version of *Soviet Union* magazine carried a Tolstoy tribute in which the author, one P. Nikolayev, praises the novelist for documenting the rise of "the peasant masses" while dismissing his "naïve theories of moral self-perfection," which Western intellectuals—"themselves literary mediocrities"—have been so quick to embrace.[82]

Ian Fleming's fictional weaponization of *War and Peace*—a Russian letter returned to sender, but not with love—encapsulates the Cold War instrumentalization of the arts. In Fleming's fantasy, Tolstoy's masterpiece is gutted, emptied of meaning, and turned into an instrument of aggression. Like the

larger literary war, the conference similarly amounted to a collection of gestures with questionable results. As Saunders points out, such activities risk betraying the very values they seek to promote. "What kind of freedom can be advanced by such deception?" she asks.

> To what degree was it admissible for [a] state to covertly intervene in the fundamental process of organic intellectual growth, of free debate and the uninhibited flow of ideas? Did this not risk producing, instead of freedom, a kind of ur-freedom, where people think they are acting freely when in fact they are bound to forces over which they have no control?[83]

This is the real legacy of the Tolstoy conference, the manner in which it bears witness to the bad faith efforts of the Cultural Cold War, which subordinated the humanities to the dark arts of intelligence and propaganda. What is more, I would argue that the novelist himself understood this danger. In his 1894 essay, "Patriotism and Christianity," he contends that when an individual seeking to confront evil misuses or abandons "the most powerful of weapons—thought and its expression—which move the world," the same individual may take up "the weapon of social activity, not noticing . . . that upon entering the social activity which exists in our world every man is obliged, if only in part, to deviate from the truth and to make concessions which destroy the force of the powerful weapon which should assist him in the struggle."[84] Truth, for Tolstoy, is the greatest power, but truth is distorted by the inherent duplicity of human motives: "It is as if a man, who was given a blade so marvelously keen that it would sever anything, should use its edge for driving in nails."[85]

Coda

In November 2010, the Russian Federation marked the centenary of Tolstoy's death in an unexpected way—by completely ignoring it. This was not due to the regime's lack of interest in literary matters. On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Anton Chekhov's birthday in January that same year, President Dmitry Medvedev made a pilgrimage to the writer's hometown of Taganrog in southern Russia and gave a speech praising his immortality and global appeal.[86] In contrast, Tolstoy received no official tribute from either President Medvedev or then prime minister Vladimir Putin. Internationally, a handful of academic conferences marked the occasion, including one at Tolstoy's former estate at Yasnaya Polyana, but the events of 2010 were decidedly humble in comparison with those of 1960.

Ironically, Tolstoy himself would have likely approved of this snub. In his book-length essay *What Is Art?* (1897), the writer comes to the conclusion that his own life's work, evidently, is not, preferring instead simple and pious works that communicate basic feelings.[87] Moreover, he adamantly rejects state sponsorship of the arts, which he likens to military spending and condemns as just as detrimental to human life as war.[88] In Tolstoy's view, most artists waste their potential acquiring useless skills to please authority, sacrificing their time, energy, and intelligence to what is effectively an aesthetic industrial complex. Tolstoy had no patience for pomp and circumstance, even less for the egos of Great Men. For him, art's mission is to "eliminate violence,"[89] and this may be the true reason behind the Russian government's official disregard: his pacifism and antimilitarism.

In his lifetime, Tolstoy made himself an antagonist of the church, the government, and the military, and those institutions still find him troublesome in postcommunist Russia. Covering the Tolstoy centenary for the *Guardian*, Luke Harding points out that the novelist would not "have kind things to say . . . about Putin's bureaucratic-authoritarian state, in which black-robed priests wearing clunky gold crosses appear on pro-Kremlin talkshows."[90] Indeed, in 2001, the Russian Orthodox Church reconfirmed Tolstoy's excommunication, and conservative commentators dismiss his views as "un-Russian."[91] Meanwhile, Putin has made his own values clear. In 2016, the Russian leader ordered a state celebration in honor of the hundredth birthday of Mikhail Kalashnikov, and he described the manufacturer's most famous creation—the AK-47—as "modern art."[92]

Today, with the unsettling return of open warfare in Europe, the Russian government's apparent rejection of Tolstoy's message seems tragically prophetic. At the same time, the CIA's emphasis on Tolstoyan freedom now appears just as futile and outdated as Lenin's endorsement of the writer's proletarian sympathies. All these positions ignore Tolstoy's central concern with *peacemaking*. There is a telling moment in *War and Peace*, when the imprisoned Pierre Bezukhov is interrogated by a French general, Marshal Davout, during the occupation of Moscow. At first, Pierre is intimidated by the officer, who has the power to execute him, but then the two enemies share a wordless exchange:

> Davout raised his eyes and looked fixedly at Pierre. For a few seconds they looked at each other, and that gaze saved Pierre. In that gaze, beyond all the conventions of war and courts, human relations were established between these two men. In that one moment, they both vaguely felt a countless number of things and realized that they were both children of the human race, and they were brothers.[93]

In his memoir, Kennan recalls a similar incident at the 1960 Tolstoy conference, when he suddenly found himself alone with the Soviet delegate, Yermilov, while attending an evening reception at the Doge's Palace. In that candid moment, the Russian—whom Nabokov had dismissed as a "nasty little party hack"—was no longer the representative of a hostile government but "entirely human," a fellow traveler in the most universal sense:

> Together we stood looking over the balustrade, onto the square, with its blaze of lights, its armies of café tables, its strolling crowds, its orchestras, its statues, the lights of ships bobbing and weaving offshore; and Venice, for the moment, had associated itself with Tolstoy in uniting the two worlds.[94]

Such moments remind us that Tolstoy's symbolic power is his ability to bridge the gap between peoples and ideologies, and that his greatest novel calls for a different sort of arming—not as a semi-automatic, but a semiotic deterrent in the struggle against global violence.

Notes

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