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Tolstoy, Zionism, and the Hebrew Culture

Rafi Tsirkin-Sadan

Columbia University

In framing the Jewish “petite-bourgeoisie disease,” Amos Oz lists a handful of ideological “visions” that informed the Zionist project from its inception: reestablishing the Davidic Dynasty; a handful of messianic dreams; a Marxist utopia; a sober social democracy; a serene, Viennese-like bourgeois state; and last but not least the Tolstoyan-*Narodnik* dream (Oz). This dream enriched the Jewish national revival in the Land of Israel with ideals of personal growth and social justice to be achieved through communal life and agricultural labor. In this sense, the combination of Tolstoy’s moral radicalism and Anarchic Socialism perfectly fits the utopian undercurrents of Zionism. The *Narodnik* version of the Zionist dream indeed merits a study of its own, but the present article takes stock of the different modes of Lev Tolstoy’s reception into Hebrew culture, with an emphasis on the influence he had on three of the most outstanding writers: Aharon David Gordon, Yosef Haim Brenner, and Lea Goldberg. None of these Hebrew intellectuals sufficed with a general review of the Russian novelist’s great works (*War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, and *Resurrection*) and essays on public affairs, as they also delved into his aesthetic and ethical thought. In this respect, their affinity for the pillars of Tolstoy’s work—his view

of literature as an educational tool, the “simple life,” vegetarianism, and pacifism—is part and parcel of a broader phenomenon among the Eastern and Central European intelligentsia during the first decades of the twentieth century.

All three writers who are the main concern of this essay were born in Eastern Europe and were deeply influenced by Russian literature and philosophy before and after their immigration to the Land of Israel. In fact, the reception of Tolstoy into Hebrew culture is part of a broader phenomenon of Jewish-Russian contacts at the turn of the twentieth century when educated Jews born in the Pale of Jewish Settlement in the Western and Southern provinces of the Russian Empire started to look for modern means of self-realization. These contacts are evident from the involvement of Jews in Russian intellectual life as well as from the flow of aesthetic ideals and political ideologies from the Russian public sphere into Jewish discourse. This reality had a crucial effect on the formation of Modern Hebrew culture, whose preoccupation with the existential dilemmas of the Jewish people did not prevent it from relying on the philosophical apparatus typical of Russian literature, critique, and social thought.

In setting the stage for this discussion, it bears noting that Gordon, Brenner, and Goldberg embraced Tolstoyan thought within the framework of their efforts to improve the material and spiritual lot of both the Jewish individual and collective. Additionally, the use that each of them made of his literary works and philosophy clearly reflects their intellectual identities. Gordon availed himself of Tolstoy's ideas in his capacity as a national publicist and ideologue. Brenner's vantage point is that of a multi-dimensional and fiery intellectual—a novelist, literary critic, and publicist. While Goldberg was above all a poet, in turning to Tolstoy she was primarily donning the hat of cultural ideologue and literary scholar. The disparate intellectual identities and leanings of Gordon, Brenner, and Goldberg behoove us to take a closer look at Tolstoy's acceptance into Hebrew culture from the broad perspective of literary and intellectual history. This undertaking promises to shed light on the points of convergence between Tolstoy's reception into Hebrew culture and that of other preeminent nineteenth-century thinkers, such as Fyodor Dostoevsky and Friedrich Nietzsche. In turn, these insights will help scholars place the ties between Hebrew culture, Russian culture, and European cultures within a single continuum.

As part of his deliberations over how to rehabilitate the Jewish national collective, Aharon David Gordon (1856–1922) was primarily interested in the ethical-philosophical side of Tolstoy's work. Indeed, Tolstoy's teachings served as a central component in Gordon's "Religion of Labor," which epitomizes the Zionist ideal of working the national land as a remedy to the ills of the extra-territorial Jewish existence. After his *Aliyah* (the return to the Land of Israel) in 1904 at the age of forty eight, Gordon devoted himself to farming as well as propagating the idea of Jewish re-territorialization. Thanks to his essays and his own personal example, Gordon became the spiritual father of the Zionist Labor movement

which dominated Zionist culture and politics in the early decades of the twentieth century. Gordon focused on Tolstoy's later literary output and theological essays, which excoriate the institutions of Western civilization (*Resurrection, Master and Man, The Kingdom of God is Within You, What is Art?*). The epitome of Gordon's occupation with Tolstoy was his translation of *What is Art?* and the attendant introduction *Towards Understanding the Difference between Judaism and Christianity* (Le-birur ha-evdel bein ha-ihadut va-ha-natsrut). Surprisingly, the introduction (both the introduction and the translation were published posthumously) does not explain why Gordon felt the need to bring Tolstoy's essay to the Hebrew reader. Instead, he expounded on the inherent problem of rendering this particular text into Hebrew for a Jewish audience: the fact that Tolstoy presented Christian art, and thus Christianity in general, as an alternative to "decadent art" and to declining Western civilization. At any rate, Gordon agreed with Tolstoy's diagnosis that the West's aesthetic tradition was ill.

It is only natural to assume that the Russian novelist's belief in the life and labor of the simple peasant as a means for reviving both the individual and all of humanity was the inspiration behind Gordon's decision to translate *What is Art?*. More specifically, the latter sought to warn the Jewish intelligentsia against the temptations of the West's decadent civilization, lest it paralyze the individual's creativity. Furthermore, in his renowned essay "Man and Nature" (*Ha-adam ve-ha-teva* 1910) Gordon distinguished between an exploitative and integrative approach to nature. He also opined that making the observation of nature a goal in itself disrupts man's connection to nature. In order to renew this bond, Gordon recommended physical labor on the grounds that this experience removes the barrier between man and nature and expands the consciousness, which has been stunted by civilization. At this point Gordon follows Tolstoy's correlation between the

desire to control history, nature, and fellow man with the division in the consciousness between Subject and Object, for the moment a person removes himself from the rest of existence. This process, according to Tolstoy, is inherently violent and thus leads to spiritual deterioration. Against this backdrop, it is worth noting that Gordon's description of work in the bosom of nature is highly reminiscent of the scene in *Anna Karenina* of Konstantin Levin toiling in the field alongside the peasants of his estate. Both writers accentuate the worker's direct link to the universe—a state of mind that precludes the division between Subject and Object. Like Tolstoy, Gordon was against the exploitation of nature and even saw it as an act of violence, one no different from any other kind of violence. Moreover, Gordon's pacifism undoubtedly drew sustenance from Tolstoy's call for peaceful resistance to evil—an approach that was adopted by many admirers throughout the world, including Mohandas Gandhi who turned it into an entire philosophy.

The presence of ideas like pacifism, vegetarianism, the bond with nature, and nationalism in Gordonian thought not only raises questions with respect to Tolstoy's influence on the Hebrew ideologue, but to that of the German Völkisch Movement, which endeavored to redefine man's place in the world against the backdrop of urbanization, industrialization, and the rise of nationalist discourse. Gordon's writings also show an intimate knowledge of German literature and national thought. The metaphysics of the Völkisch Movement were indeed colored in nationalist colors. For instance, Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, among the movement's leading thinkers, raised the banner of Romantic nostalgia for myriad *völkisch* (ethnic) nationalist symbols, such as the land, the village, and the peasant ("Land und Leute" 13–164). In Riehl's estimation, identifying with these symbols endows people with a shared experience that has been lost in the modern world. These ideas certainly come up in Gordon's writing. In fact, as

Boris Eikhenbaum demonstrated in his monumental study on Tolstoy, German Völkisch thought, especially Riehl's ideas, had an appreciable impact on the Russian novelist's worldview. It should be recalled that Boris Eikhenbaum documented Tolstoy's passionate reading of Riehl's writing and the trip that he had organized to the folklorist's house in Germany (Eikhenbaum 52–88). In light of the above, the argument can be made that, despite his unequivocal pacifism and moral universalism, Tolstoy internalized the basic concepts of nationalist discourse. To complicate matters even further, the novelist's ideas merited a great deal of interest in *fin de siècle* Germany among intellectuals, like Riehl and Rainer Maria Rilke, who were searching for a solution to the crisis of values that European civilization was mired in.

Interest in Tolstoy within the German-Russian-Jewish expanse was paralleled in many respects by the magnetism of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy. Nietzsche offered his uncompromising individualism ("aristocratic radicalism") as an alternative to the Judeo-Christian morality, which he believed was responsible—in both its ancient and modern incarnations—for the general crisis of values. At the time, the German philosopher also had a profound effect on Hebrew culture, most notably on discourse concerning the re-evaluation of all values and the creation of the "new Jew" who embodies the values of creativity and masculinity (Golomb). Gordon was influenced by Nietzsche's ideas as well. Given the stark differences between Tolstoy's Neo-Christian teachings and Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy, this would appear to be untenable. However, in Eastern Europe, and particularly among Jewish Renewal intellectuals such as Gordon, there were indeed attempts to integrate these two approaches, which share the radical criticism of liberal European culture. After all, both Tolstoy and Nietzsche sought to restore authenticity to human existence.

His affinity for Tolstoyan thought notwithstanding, Gordon disagreed with the novelist's reservations about positivism, scientific development, and the overarching idea of progress. For example, Gordon supported the establishment of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Moreover, as a Jewish nationalist thinker, Gordon was incapable of accepting in a literal fashion Tolstoy's claim that only Christianity could save humanity from its maladies. As a result, he interpreted the argument as an abstract vision that ignores the concept of nation, while connecting the actual individual to the actual society. As far as Gordon was concerned, the life of the individual was linked to both the life of the nation and the national landscape. Therefore, the life of the nation is bound to have a significant impact on the individual member. In the end, Gordon primarily considered the Tolstoyan approach to be an educational ideal.

As an aside, it is interesting to note that there is no evidence to suggest that Gordon ever altered his view of Tolstoy, even after the publication of the memoirs of Sofia Andreevna, Tolstoy's wife, about the tempestuous life and incessant conflicts at the couple's estate, Yasnaya Polyana. Gordon's friends and admirers considered him one of the few people who fulfilled the Tolstoyan expectations for spiritual renewal. For example, in testimonials that were penned about Gordon in the wake of his death, key figures of the Labor Zionist movement, such as Benzion Yisraeli, Alexander Ziskind Rabinowitz, and Yakov Fichman, referred to him as a paragon of morality—as a spiritual leader whose life exemplified the right path (M. Kushner). The argument can even be made that they considered Gordon the personification of Tolstoy—a greater Tolstoyan than even Tolstoy himself. That said, most of Gordon's cohorts in the Labor movement made no mention of his writings, focusing instead on his external appearance and behavior. It stands to reason that the veneration of Gordon's personality was predicated on what Hans Robert Jauss coined the "horizon of expectation" (Jauss 3–

45), which in this particular case was triggered by Tolstoy's powerful prophetic image. Here, too, a distinction must be drawn between the novelist's actual ideas and the prophetic image he struck donning peasant garb out in the fields of Yasnaya Polyana. In contrast, the emphasis in Hebrew-Zionist culture on Gordon as a farmer in the *moshavot* (Jewish colonies) of Ottoman Palestine mostly stemmed from the Zionist's rural orientation.

Many of the people of the Labor Zionist movement indeed understood Tolstoy's philosophy as a moral ideal and guide to a productive life in the "village." For example, Aleksandr Ziskind Rabinowitz published a monograph on Tolstoy, which concentrates on the intellectual's ethical journey and spiritual upheavals, but ignores his aesthetic achievements (Rabinowitz). Dvora Dayan, one of the founders of Degania, the first kibbutz (and the mother of Moshe Dayan), recalls how a pilgrimage of Jewish Tolstoyans to their hero's grave in Yasnaya Polyana launched the establishment of a commune in his spirit, which subsequently served as a model for Degania (Dayan). Likewise, Noah Naftulski, a dear friend of Gordon, was a staunch Tolstoyan until the day he died (S. Kushner). Berl Katznelson, one of the prominent ideologues and political leaders of Socialist Zionism, expressed his deep admiration for the "great Russian" on several occasions (Shapira). Against this backdrop, it is important to note that the rural orientation of Zionist-Hebrew culture stands in stark contrast to Yiddish culture's largely modernistic and Marxist predisposition for city life. Accordingly, Yiddish intellectuals did not display much genuine interest in the philosophical dimension of Tolstoy's work.

Alongside these displays of esteem, there were also members of the Labor Zionist movement who had an ambivalent attitude towards Tolstoy. The central figure of this camp was undoubtedly Yosef Haim Brenner (1881–1921), perhaps the most prominent contributor to Jewish cultural discourse

during the early twentieth century. Brenner's expressionist fiction was in many senses a breakthrough in Jewish artistic self-realization. However, his polyphonic novels also reflect the political and philosophical trends among Russian Jewry at the beginning of the twentieth century: Zionism, Marxism, Nietzsche, and Tolstoy. By virtue of the combination of expressionism and realism as well as his poignant opinions on journalism and literary criticism, Brenner became an almost prophetic figure. This image was further intensified by his untimely and violent death during the 1921 riots in Mandatory Palestine.

In contrast to Gordon, who was mainly interested in Tolstoy's moral and religious thought, Brenner focused on his literature and non-fictional social commentary. Brenner's affinity for Tolstoy is implicit in his early belletristic works: *In the Winter* (Ba-Horef 1903), *Around the Point* (Mesaviv Le-nekuda 1904), and *One Year* (Shana Ahat 1909), which by and large reflect his personal experiences. Moreover, this affinity is explicit in his letters and essays. For example, Brenner published an article following Tolstoy's death that critically assays the novelist's literary oeuvre. Between the lines of this piece, Brenner also examined his own Tolstoyism. Like Gordon, he translated a couple of Tolstoy's works: *Master and Man* (1914) and several chapters from *Anna Karenina*.

Over the course of his truncated life, Brenner mercilessly scrutinized all the philosophical and political outlooks that he encountered, including Nietzsche's thought, Zionism, the principles of the Jewish Socialism, and that of the Russian liberal movement. In all likelihood, this tendency was a manifestation of his individualistic quest for 'truth' and self-edification. Brenner indeed started his intellectual journey as an avowed Tolstoyan. As he came of age, Tolstoy's moral philosophy served as a spiritual anchor in an alienating world devoid of all transcendental horizons. The protagonists of Brenner's first novels (*In the Winter* and *Around the Point*) spurn culture and turn to personal

rectification—vegetarianism (Brenner himself was a vegetarian for most of his adult life) and overcoming their innate selfishness—as an answer to their existential questions. From the age of seventeen, Brenner identified with Tolstoy's approach to art. In letters from this phase of his life, Brenner wrote that, aside for the purely aesthetic element, a complete work of art must contain a moral dimension. Therefore, it is hardly surprising to find that he was deeply moved by Tolstoy's penultimate "moral" novel, *Resurrection* (Brenner, *Igrot* 219). Put differently, at this stage of his spiritual development, Brenner whole-heartedly agreed with the Russian writer's criticism of "art for art's sake."

In his obituary on Brenner, Hillel Zeitlin wrote that the writer's intellectual world as a youth was underpinned by Tolstoy's teachings. Zeitlin, with whom Brenner shared the quest for "truth" in their youth, added that, like Tolstoy and the rest of the Jewish Tolstoyans, Brenner believed that one's happiness does not rest on changing the social order, but on personal moral renewal. According to the article, a group of Jewish Tolstoyans that Brenner belonged to even wanted to buy a piece of land in America for the sake of realizing their mentor's vision. Having read Yitskhok Leybush Peretz's *Altvarg*, the young writer even traveled to Warsaw to ask the distinguished Yiddish author and playwright for assistance (Zeitlin 23–39).

Despite its piquant revelations, Zeitlin's piece does not fully represent his subject's worldview. Brenner's early letters and essays indicate that he was well aware of the deep skepticism concerning the effectiveness of the socialist revolution and the idea of progress in general on the part of anti-Positivist thinkers. These doubts are also reflected in Brenner's early novels. Fayerman, the protagonist of *In the Winter* is so taken by Tolstoy's criticism of liberal European culture that he eventually quits his pre-academic studies. Following in the Russian intellectual's footsteps, the protagonist claims that mankind's happiness

depends on each individual's moral rebirth, a process which must center around humility and the precept to "love thy neighbor." Similarly, Abramson, the main character of *Around the Point*, is an admirer of Tolstoy who believes that a life of simplicity and non-violence (including vegetarianism) will help him solve the existential doubts weighing him down.

Accolades aside, these early novels also disclose Brenner's first reservations concerning Tolstoy's teachings. Fayerman eventually reaches the conclusion that the Russian novelist is nothing more than a mystic who failed to resolve the contradictions between his life and preaching and that his erstwhile veneration of the novelist can be attributed to "literary rationalism." The protagonist of *In the Winter* even states that Tolstoy's acolytes were pathetic from the very outset. *Around the Point* also provides an ironic portrayal of Tolstoyans. At the end of the novel, Abramson has a nightmare in which the members of a Tolstoyan-Nietzschean colony are small bugs. Abramson's tragic end implies that Brenner used this character to rule out the possibility of a Tolstoyan redemption.

The doubts over Tolstoy's philosophy drove Brenner to question the authenticity of metaphysical searches. In the end, in the article "On the Seekers of God" (*Al mehapsei ha-elohim*) he opined that these sorts of quests, especially the return to religion of some Russian and Jewish intellectuals, like Dimitry Merezhkovsky and Hillel Zeitlin, was rooted in self-deceit. Brenner's criticism of Tolstoy was accompanied by his steadily mounting interest in Narodnik-Populist socialist thought, which placed an emphasis on the agrarian socialism of small agricultural communities and on bolstering the intelligentsia's commitment to the masses. While on the topic, it bears noting that Tolstoy also had an impact on Narodnik thought (Nikolai Mikhailovsky, Piotr Lavrov), especially his agnostic anti-Hegel and anti-Marx interpretation of history, his call for a

return to the village, and the heightening sense of guilt that he sought to instill in the nobility. However, whereas Tolstoy felt that the "return to the village" was a means for personal rectification and nothing else, the Narodniks expanded its reach to the national collective. In brief, it was the Narodniks' attempts to integrate socialist and nationalist elements as well as collectivist and individualist ideals that seized Brenner's attention.

Brenner first lauded Narodnik thought in the novella *One Year (Shana Ahat)*. The protagonist, Chananya Mintz, has a dream in which the Narodnik writer Gleb Uspensky needles Tolstoy to write stories for peasants instead of the upper class. This sort of criticism notwithstanding, it is evident that Brenner worshiped Tolstoy's story-telling prowess. What is more, he sought to forge a Tolstoyan-Narodnik synthesis that befits the Jewish reality. As an aside, Brenner's high esteem for Tolstoy's literary skills is corroborated in an autobiographical piece by Gershon Shofman, his friend, about the time they spent in Lvov. Shofman recounted a dream that Brenner had shared with him: While Brenner is talking to none other than Tolstoy himself, one of the Jewish novelist's friends heaps praise on his work. He also reported that Brenner was utterly embarrassed by this dream (Shofman 116–118).

Upon arriving in Palestine in 1909, Brenner began to claim that the "return to the village," namely the establishment of *moshavot* (colonies), is above all a collective and personal interest of the pioneers. The framework for pursuing the collective goal, Brenner averred, was the creation of a new national center. Alternatively, personal interest is essentially attained through their agricultural work, which provides for the material and spiritual needs of each laborer. This viewpoint is, in all likelihood, what ultimately inspired Brenner to translate Tolstoy's *Master and Man*—a story that champions the simple life of the Russian peasant. In a letter to Yosef Aharonowitz, the editor of *Ha-poel Ha-tsair*, Brenner pointed to the

difficulties of rendering “this ingenious work that was written in a simple plebian-Russian language” into Hebrew (Brenner, “Igro” 404). It is this statement, of all things, that hints at Brenner’s Tolstoyan-Narodnik synthesis and his desire to enlist *Master and Man* for patently Narodnik causes, like educating the masses in an authentic vernacular.

Notwithstanding his sympathy for elements of Tolstoyan thought, shortly after settling in Palestine, Brenner published a long and highly-critical article, “With the Passing of L. N. Tolstoy” (*Im moto shel L. N. Tolstoy*, 1910), that was solely intended to put an end to the blind worship of the Russian writer by members of the Labor Zionist movement. In writing this piece, Brenner removed himself once and for all from Tolstoy’s huge shadow. However, the article was not entirely negative. He averred that Tolstoy is, first and foremost, “the true realist” who managed to describe the most nuanced human feelings. Yet his greatest achievement, according to Brenner, was the balance he struck between the aesthetic and moral components of his stories. On the other hand, Brenner asserted that Tolstoy’s ethical ideas are infected by self-deceit, for they have failed to overcome his savage instincts as a Russian aristocrat. He also claimed that Tolstoy was lying to himself when he disowned his works, as the spiritual crisis and ethical questions that are reflected in Tolstoy’s early masterpiece *War and Peace* continue to inform his later works, such as *The Kreutzer Sonata*, *Resurrection*, and his moral essays. Therefore, the renunciation of his earlier artistic accomplishments, under the pretense that they are immoral, seems to be “empty posturing” on Tolstoy’s part. In a later article, “Peaks and Valleys” (*Aliot ve- eridot*, 1920) Brenner finally weaned himself off the utopian dream of establishing a Tolstoyan colony. More specifically, he reached the conclusion that the establishment of the *moshavot* in the Land of Israel was a critical existential need and not some trendy game for

those seeking out God. In other words, Brenner believed that collective improvement is on par with the personal variety, while eschewing the abstract nationalist metaphysics of Gordon’s philosophy.

The Hebrew intelligentsia continued to occupy itself with Tolstoy’s oeuvre many years after the heyday of Labor Zionism. Of particular interest is Lea Goldberg’s (1911–1970) high esteem for the Russian novelist. Through her activities as a poet, translator, and university professor, Goldberg came to be a major cultural ideologue after the foundation of State of Israel. Unlike Gordon and Brenner, Goldberg’s interpretation of Tolstoy reflects her sensitivities as a liberal European intellectual naturally committed to the concept of *Bildung*. And it seems the immigration to Mandatory Palestine in 1935 only deepened her attachment to European culture. Besides translating *War and Peace* into Hebrew (1952), she wrote the essays, “The Unity of Man and Cosmos in Tolstoy” (*Ahdut ha-adam ve-ha-iakum etsel Tolstoy*), “Anna Karenina,” and “Tolstoy and the Theater,” published in her collection of essays on Russian literature (*Ha-sifrut ha-rusit be-mea ha-19*). Goldberg also gave numerous lectures on related topics, particularly in *kibbutzim*. Last but not least, Tolstoy’s art is echoed in her poetry.

Goldberg’s approach to Tolstoy comes across in a particularly striking fashion in her long essay “The Unity of Man and Cosmos in Tolstoy.” As far as Goldberg was concerned, Tolstoy was deeply attuned to the unity between man and the universe, even if he was unable to bridge the gap between his worldview and feelings about the world. For example, Tolstoy’s call to “return to nature” has the potential to merge humanity with the cosmos and eternity. At the same time, though, it could also lead people to surrender to their animalistic urges and prevent them from attaining moral truth. According to Goldberg, this was why Tolstoy emphasized positive predispositions, such as Natasha Rostova’s, maternal instinct, which he went so far as to equate with moral law. Moreover,

his vision of moral renewal does not idealize suffering, ugliness, or strangeness. Unlike Dostoevsky and the Romantics, Tolstoy always associated beauty with physical and mental vigor. Accordingly, he could hardly be said to have respected “holy fools.”

These views should be understood as an expression of Goldberg’s objection to radical Romantic aesthetics. While there are some obvious Romantic and Symbolist influences in her early short stories, in her book of poetry, *On Blooming* (*Al ha-priha*, 1948), and in a later essay, “Notes on the Aesthetics of Symbolism” (*Hearot le-estetika shel ha-simbolism*, 1961) Goldberg warned that the Symbolist poets’ tendency to discover beauty through the senses is liable to lead them into a “dark abyss.” She did not consider this sort of descent to be a heroic act, but rather a humiliating one. Moreover, Goldberg took issue with the Symbolists’ claim that the physical world is merely a fictional object concealing the real and eternal. According to Goldberg, attempts to transcend objective reality through ecstasy can lead to extreme subjectivity, a state in which the poet is incapable of approaching the “pure idea.” What is more, poets that adopt this method run the risk of succumbing to crude sensuality and losing their faith in the power of art.

In the final equation, Goldberg believed that the evisceration of art is akin to spiritual death. As a remedy to the spiritual demise of radical Romanticism, she offered the simplicity of nature. By virtue of its constant renewal, she argued that “simple nature” is a fitting model for spiritual perfection. There is little doubt that Goldberg’s vision of rejuvenation (as featured in the collections *Lightening in the Morning* (*Barak baboker*, 1955) and *On Blooming*) was nourished by Tolstoyan thought. A case in point is the recurring image of the tree in *On Blooming*, which calls to mind the oak tree of Andrei Bolkonsky, the protagonist of *War and Peace*.

In dismissing the aesthetics of radical Romanticism, including that of its adherents in the Land of Israel, Goldberg probably had in mind not only post-Symbolist Russian and German poetry (e.g., Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelstam, and Rainer Maria Rilke), but also Tolstoy’s rejection of the “art for art’s sake” camp. This in no way implies that she fully accepted Tolstoy’s argumentation. For instance, her extensive research on the poetic and literary structures of Western culture, such as her study of the art of the short story, takes issue with his disapproval of excess attention to form in literature. Moreover, she naturally refused to accept Tolstoy’s renunciation of his prior work, which the novelist himself soon retracted. Similar to Brenner, Goldberg’s essay “The Unity of Man and Cosmos in Tolstoy” stresses his limpid artistic style and precise visual images.

In that same essay, Goldberg asserted that everyone has the potential to reach a state of simplicity, harmony, and goodness. Unlike the Romantic glorification of the extraordinary figure, Tolstoy’s writings highlight the idea that the average person has no aspirations of controlling reality or violently changing the course of history; consequently, the average person can focus on transforming his or her internal life. In this respect, the contrast between personal edification and historical drama in *War and Peace* exemplifies Lea Goldberg’s call for an unflinching spiritual effort in the face of the daunting limitations of reality (*Ktavim: Ha-omets Le-Khulin* 165–170). Against this backdrop, the question that begs asking is why Goldberg chose to translate *War and Peace* over other Russian masterpieces. One possibility is that she identified with Tolstoy’s above-mentioned refusal to glorify the historical drama. Alternatively, she may have sought to enrich Jewish discourse with a classic on humanistic values. Support for the second hypothesis can be found in Goldberg’s essay, “In the Light of Mercy” (*Le-or ha-rahamim*, 1938), where she argued that Jewish literature is bereft of mercy. More specifically,

Jewish authors, foremost among them Mendele Mocher Sforim and Brenner, may sympathize with their characters, but do not really love them. On the other hand, Russian literature, not least the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, places a premium on the virtue of mercy. Therefore, it appears that Goldberg rendered this exemplary work of Russian Christian-humanistic literature into Hebrew for the purpose of tempering Jewish discourse.

In an article in memory of Brenner, Goldberg determined that the former was indeed influenced by Tolstoy's ideal of self-perfection, but this was overshadowed by Brenner's scorn for Jewish weakness, particularly the Jewish Tolstoyans' failure to bring their spiritual revolution to fruition ("Le-zikhro shel Brenner" 182–184). To substantiate her argument, Goldberg points to the pessimism in Brenner's novel *Breakdown and Bereavement*. In sum, Goldberg felt that exposing Hebrew audiences to Tolstoy's work with an up-to-date translation constituted a more efficacious means for fostering individual and collective edification than reading Mendele or Brenner's unsparing criticism.

This outlook exemplifies the difference between Goldberg, Gordon, and Brenner's disparate approaches to Tolstoy's work. Goldberg's view is typical of a European intellectual or, more precisely, a Russian thinker with a Western orientation. In addition, her writing on this topic was a major component of her ongoing correspondence with Russian literature, if not an intra-Russian discourse that happened to be conducted in Hebrew. In the eyes of Russian expatriates in the Land of Israel, this sort of discussion was likely to be perceived as self-evident, but it was nevertheless a far-reaching cultural decision that sought to extricate Hebrew literature from its relative isolation and strengthen its ties with European culture. In this sense, reforming Jewish cultural discourse also had universal aspirations, for in the poet's eyes it is an

integral part of what Goethe referred to as *Weltliterature*. Similarly, Goldberg was undeterred by the unequivocally Christian elements in Tolstoy's work, and the argument can also be made that she was unconcerned about the Russification of Hebrew culture. Conversely, a radical Realist like Brenner would probably have viewed this approach to be self-deceptive, and it obviously runs counter to Gordon's nationalist ideology.

In light of the above, it stands to reason that the secret behind the Hebrew intelligentsia's attraction to L. N. Tolstoy is tied to the fact that his thought posed little threat to their nationalist ideology and even shares quite a few of the same fundamental concepts, most notably the objective of spiritual renewal. That said, Gordon, Brenner, and Goldberg clearly availed themselves of distinct aspects of Tolstoy's oeuvre for the purpose of forging Hebrew culture in their own image. In fact, each of these intellectuals embodies a "different" Tolstoy—a development that hints at the exceptional openness of Zionist-Hebrew culture in its nascent stages.

Tolstoy's image is also present in later periods of Hebrew culture. Until the early 1960s, there was indeed a steady flow of articles (at least some of which were taken from the Soviet press) and reviews of new translations in the Hebrew media, primarily the daily newspaper *Davar*, the major organ of Labor Zionist movement. In addition, there were stage and cinematic adaptations, reports on overseas events in memory of Tolstoy, and personal recollections of encounters with the acclaimed novelist. These works attest to the deep ties between Hebrew culture, especially its socialist streams, and its Russian counterpart. However, due to the Israeli public's mounting exposure to Anglo-Saxon literature in the 1950s and 1960s and a host of other factors, there has been a marked decline in interest in Tolstoy (and Russian culture in general), to the point where he has lost his dominant standing in Hebrew culture.

Notes

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