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ON BOOKS



VIRGINIA PASLEY

A Tolstoyan Sweep

"Tolstoy," by Henri Troyat. (Doubleday: \$7.95. 762 pp. index.)

Other biographies of the great Russian author have been written before and perhaps there will be others after this one, not that they will be needed. Henri Troyat has written a book that could as well have been a broad sweeping Russian novel, even such a one as Tolstoy himself might have written.

For it has everything, war and peace, romance and true love, anger and hatred, petty bickerings and personality conflicts—a vast panorama of people and the Russian landscape, a hero of magnificent virtues and equally towering faults, plagued by his own warring ideas and feelings which he could not control, hurting and hurt by those he loved most.

No one has ever put in focus so well the fruitful and terrible marriage between Sonya Behrs, daughter of a childish love, and the man who was to be considered the greatest novelist in the world.

Differing in temperament in almost every way, they quarreled early and late. Yet it was Sonya who was able to decipher his scribbles, even filling out his sentences, and made fair copies of his works, handling many of the details of publication, even going to the czar to seek reversal of his ruling against "The Kreutzer Sonata."

This though it was in "The Kreutzer Sonata" that Tolstoy gave her the ultimate insult—"We were two convicts serving life sentences of hard labor welded to the same chain, we hated each other, we were used to making each other's lives hell, and trying all the time not to see it."

The world looked in on the finale of their



Leo Tolstoy in 1902

marred by archaic language and excessive imagery but at its best good enough to range alongside Shelley and Blake who had strong influence on him. And although he is best known for religious poetry, he wrote such lines as "I fear to love thee, Sweet, because/Love's the ambassador of loss," and "Know that at end/Pain was well paid sweet Friend./Pain was well paid, which brought me to your sight."

Although Walsh has filled out his character and life, the enigma of why he turned to opium is not solved, though the unhappy circumstances of his life are the key to his inability to stay off drugs. It is a story of particular interest in this day of youthful dope addiction—Thompson may have started using laudanum in his late teens—and flower children who live in the city streets.

Other Books

"*Look at Us,*" words by William Saroyan, photographs by Arthur Rothstein. (Cowles: \$12.50. 203 pp.) A picture may be better than a thousand words but not if the words are Saroyan's. These pictures are as various as you could want: country life, village life, city life, children, old people, presidents, celebrities, even Saroyan and his grandchildren and they give Saroyan a chance to talk about war and peace, horse racing, the weather, education, race problems, the American barbershop and a good deal more.

"*The Odyssey of Homer,*" translated by Albert Cook. (Norton: \$6.00. 340 pp.) A new translation in verse that combines a nice balance of modern and poetic words to make the whole ring true and read easily. A nice book to take along on a tour of the Mediterranean or the Greek islands, tucked along with one of Ernie Bradford's guides or just to reread or even discover for the first time.

"*Plum Pie,*" by P. G. Wodehouse. (Simon and Schuster: \$4.95. 252 pp.) Not 20 black-birds but nine great juicy plums will fly out at you from this newest collection of short stories by the master. Wodehouse is at home on both sides of the Atlantic though nowadays he spends most of his time on Long Island and his stories have now a midatlantic accent. Even Freddy and Jeeves are in the good old U.S.A. much of the time and, of course, funny as ever.

"*Accessories After the Fact,*" by Sylvia Meagher. (Bobbs-Merrill: \$8.50. pp.) Sylvia Meagher's reasoned attack on the Warren

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appoint her. But the moment she was face to face with him again, at the dinner table, in the drawing room or outside on the grounds, she was irritated by something he did."

There are pictures of the life of the peasants, of court circles, of the Tolstoy disciples, of his contemporaries, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Gorky and Chekov in a marvelously broad and deeply interesting book.

Fragile Poet

"*Strange Harp, Strange Symphony,*" by John Walsh. (Hawthorn: \$8.95. 298 pp.)

It is a narrower, more fragile life that Thomas Walsh reconstructs in "Strange Harp, Strange Symphony," the life of Francis Thompson who is best known for his religious poem, "The Hound of Heaven." But still not so narrow as his earlier biographers and benefactors, the Meynells, would have had it.

Walsh has found new material which shows that Thompson did attempt, between bouts of drug addiction, to enter the normal world; that he had at least three love affairs which affected him to a greater or less degree. His poems to his last love were suppressed during his lifetime. His recounting of the life he led in the London streets under heavier and heavier doses of laudanum were destroyed by the Meynells to save his reputation.

It was a sad life and a broken one. But out of it came some marvelous poetry, often

marriage in 1910, the flight of the old man from his wife, the lingering death in a station-master's house from which she was excluded, the divided family.

Troyat, without taking one cubit from Tolstoy's stature, shows him as a man whose mind and body were continually at war. He wished for purity and chastity but only because the flesh so appealed to him. He wanted to give all he had to the poor, to lead the life of a peasant, but he could not give up the pleasures of his country estate for long—and of course Sonya, who threw herself into his charities at times, would not go so far as to join him in wishing for a rude simple life. The fact was they really could not get along with each other.

"How she loved," writes Troyat, "how she admired him, when he was not there to dis-

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Commission's hearings and report is much more convincing than any of the books written by screamers and theorists. It is hardly possible to read it and retain surety that Oswald was the man who assassinated the President. Miss Meagher is devastating in her presentation of some of the evidence. Her main point is that the testimony should be retaken using the American adversary system so that points that were ignored or glossed over could be dealt with fully.

"DNA: At the Core of Life Itself," by Lawrence Lessing and the editors of Fortune. (Macmillan: \$3.95. 85 pp.) A clearer and elegant explanation of the molecule that determines the pattern of life with some thoroughly horrifying possibilities for the future when it will be possible to manipulate physique and character traits.

"Last Reflections On a War," by Bernard B. Fall. (Doubleday: \$4.95. 288 pp.) The most thoughtful and brilliant correspondent of the Vietnam war is dead, killed in that war before a rare disease could end his life. This, his last, was compiled from material chosen by his wife and includes his last tape, cut off in midsentence by the charge that killed him. In addition there is another taped interview which gives the background of his life and some of the reasons why he felt impelled to return so often to the Vietnam scene. There is

also a hitherto unpublished essay on the problem of making peace entitled, "There Is Going to Be a Silence . . . A Way to End Revolutionary Wars," which is enlightening and dismaying at the same time. The author of "Hell in a Very Small Place" is one of the most important writers on Indochina and this is one of his most important books. His discussion of United States policy over the decades, coming as it does from an outside view, is particularly interesting.

"The Last Migration," by Roger Frison-Roche. (Harper & Row: \$4.95. 335 pp.) There is a sense of nostalgia in reading stories of people today who still lead the nomadic life that must have been that of our own ancestors. This is only part of the fascination of "The Last Migration," where the conflicts between even a benevolent government like Norway and the wandering, freedom-loving Lapps are crystallized in Kristina, the heroine of the earlier "The Raid." A moody sadness pervades the book, along with the beauty of far wild places and people.

"Andy Warhol's Index," by Andy Warhol. (Random House: \$4.95. Unpaged.) As crazy as you might expect with pop-ups and noise-makers and inserts and hidden goodies. The noisiest of the pop-art contrivers has put some of his notions into a book with the help of a good many people. If Marshall McLuhan is on your Christmas list this might make a good present for him.

"The Irrational Journey," by Pauline de Rothschild. (Harcourt, Brace & World: \$3.95. 110 pp.) Baroness de Rothschild is an American. She and her French (and very rich) husband spent a charmed season in Russia in the dead of a recent winter and she writes of it with amusement and affection with special comments on art and architecture, food and decoration, manners and meaning. A sparkingly poetic and pretty book.

MYSTERY OF THE WEEK: "As Good as Gold," by Edward Wymark. (Coward-McCann: \$4.95. 237 pp.) Adventure, smuggling, among the jet-set—the real jetters, pilots around the world—"As Good as Gold" sets down mostly in London and Hong Kong. The smuggling deals in gold and worse and the hero, a pilot who moves in a set too expensive for him, is involved, how much will not be known until the last chapter. An involved story but told with originality.