



Tolstoy's Art and Thought, 1847-1880

Donna Tussing Orwin

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"My aim is to present Tolstoy's work as he may have understood it himself," writes Donna Orwin. Reconstructing the intellectual and psychic struggles behind the masterpieces of his early and middle age, this major study covers the period during which he wrote *The Cossacks*, *War and Peace*, and *Anna Karenina*. Orwin uses the tools of biography, intellectual and literary history, and textual analysis to explain how Tolstoy's tormented search for moral certainty unfolded, creating fundamental differences among the great novels of the "pre-crisis" period.

Distinguished by its historical emphasis, this book demonstrates that the great novelist, who had once seen a fundamental harmony between human conscience and nature's vitality, began eventually to believe in a dangerous rift between the two: during the years discussed here, Tolstoy moved gradually from a celebration of life to instruction about its moral dimensions. Paying special attention to Tolstoy's reading of Rousseau, Goethe, Schopenhauer, and the Russian thinker N. N. Strakhov, Orwin also explores numerous other influences on his thought. In so doing, she shows how his philosophical and emotional conflicts changed form but continued unabated--until, with his religious conversion of 1880, he surrendered his long attempt to make sense of life through art alone.

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