From Paradise to a Graveyard: Aleksey N. Tolstoy's Representations of Places Between Literary and Ideological Discourses

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ABSTRACTS

Der Beitrag beschäftigt sich mit der Darstellung und Rolle von europäischen Städten in ausgewählten Texten des neo-realistischen russischen Autors Aleksej Nikolaevič Tolstoj, einem prominenten Akteur der russischen bzw. sowjetischen Literatur zwischen 1910 und 1945. Je mehr sich der Autor in seinen Texten mit Fragen nationaler Identität auseinandersetzt, umso wichtiger werden seine Begegnungen mit anderen Kulturen, da sie ihm ermöglichen – oder ihn auch dazu zwingen, Russland aus der Perspektive eines Außenstehenden zu betrachten. Der Fokus des Beitrags liegt deshalb auf Reisen Tolstojs nach Deutschland und Frankreich zwischen 1908 und 1935. Die Darstellung der von Tolstoj besuchten europäischen Städte reicht dabei von ausdrücklich subjektiven Beschreibungen, über die Bezugnahme auf literarische Topoi, bis hin zur Instrumentalisierung für geo-kulturelle Ziele im sowjetischen Kontext. Im Laufe der Jahre wird ein deutlicher Wandel sichtbar: Der zunächst als produktiv wahrgenommene Kontakt mit europäischen Kulturen schlägt in eine tiefgreifende Entfremdung um. Allerdings erhält sich Tolstoj in einigen privaten Texten einen gewissen „Bewegungsspielraum", um eine andere Sicht auf Europa zum Ausdruck zu bringen als in seinen offiziellen Texten. Als theoretischer Rahmen der Analyse dient Detlev Ipsens Definition von „Orten" als Schnittpunkte individueller Wahrnehmung und kultureller Deutung. Die Synthese der Erfahrungsebene mit dem symbolischen Potenzial von Orten ist nicht zuletzt für die Anwendbarkeit auf sowohl literarische wie auch dokumentarische Texte wichtig. Der Begriff „Geokulturologie" im Anschluss an Susanne Frank ermöglicht dabei eine Annäherung an den Wandel von Tolstojs Sicht auf die besuchten Orte.

The contribution explores the significance of European locations in the writings of Aleksey Nikolayevich Tolstoy (1883–1945), a neo-realist writer and prominent figure between 1910 and 1945 of Russian respectively Soviet literature. The more the author deals with questions of na-

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tional identity in his writings, the more important become his encounters with other cultures, as they give him the chance – or force him – to glance at Russia from an outside point of view. Presenting some of the author's journeys to Germany and France between 1908 and 1935, this contribution demonstrates how his topographies of the visited European cities oscillate between explicitly subjective descriptions, references to literary topoi and an instrumentalisation for geo-cultural purposes in the Soviet context: Over the years, the first, allegedly productive encounter with European cultures changes into an experience of deep estrangement combined with the claim of the Soviet Union's cultural superiority. Yet, there are other texts that give Aleksey Tolstoy "room for manoeuvre" to express a much more personal view on Europe than in his official writings.

The theoretical framework of the analysis is based on Detlef Ipsen's definition of places, underlining both the concrete experiential character as well as the meaning-making potential of places. For tracing Tolstoy's changing interpretation of the visited places, Susanne Frank's works on geo-kulturologija and its relation to geopoetics gave important impulses.

Aleksey Nikolayevich Tolstoy (1883–1945), from the very beginning, associated his writing career with specific geographical locations.[1] He developed a huge sensitivity regarding a special "genius loci" influencing his work or – in a broader sense – culture.[2] Though he underlines the importance of time and thus tries to catch the "duch vremeni" – "zeitgeist", the specific location where he attempts to experience the "zeitgeist" and to put it into words is of considerable significance.[3] This applies the more as Aleksey Tolstoy travelled a lot between Russia and Western Europe. The more the author deals with questions of national identity in his writings the more important become his encounters with other cultures, as they give him the chance – or force him – to glance at Russia from an outside point of view. Vice versa, Tolstoy's perception of Western Europe can, therefore, be seen as an indicator for his relation to Russia.

His numerous journeys to Western Europe cover a period of almost 40 years. They can be divided into four phases that will also function as chapters in this article: 1. private journeys to Europe before World War I, 2. journeys to Great Britain and the Western

1 In the West, the writer is mainly conceived as a "Soviet writer" referring thereby to his best-known works, the trilogy "Road to Calvary" (Khozhdenye po mukam, 1925–1941) and the historical novel "Peter the Great" (Petr I, 1930–1945) and to his role as a leading figure in the literary field after returning from emigration in 1923. For further biographical information (in Russian) see for example A. Varlamov, Aleksey Tolstoy, Moskva 2008. For a short biographical overview in English see online: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aleksey-Nikolayevich-Graf-Tolstoy.

2 For the importance of "space" for Russian cultural identity see S. K. Frank, Überlegungen zum Ansatz einer historischen Geokulturologie, in: Ead. and I. Smirnov (eds.), Zeit – Räume: Neue Tendenzen in der historischen Kulturwissenschaft aus der Perspektive der Slavistik, München 2002, pp. 55–75. Concerning the question of the influence of a certain place on the creativity of a writer see for example M. Marszałek and S. Sasse, Geopoetiken, in: Eaed. (eds.), Geopoetiken: Geographische Entwürfe in den mittel- und osteuropäischen Literaturen, Berlin 2010, pp. 7–18, at 10.

3 A. N. Tolstoy, Novye materialy i issledovanya (Ranny A.N. Tolstoy i ego literaturnoe okruzhenye), Moskva 2002, p. 195.

frontlines in 1916, 3. his emigration-period from 1919–1923, and 4. his official journeys as a Soviet writer and delegate in the 1930s.

In my analysis I will focus on Tolstoy's changing perception of cities like Paris, Berlin and London, as the author portrayed them in public articles and private letters between 1908 and 1935.[4] As I will show, over the years, the tune of Tolstoy's official writings about Western Europe changes remarkably. The more he understood himself as a "Russian writer" whose duty is to strengthen the people's identification with their homeland in times of war and crisis, the more changed his perspective on the Western European countries he visited in his official writings. In Tolstoy's novels and articles since the 1920s, Europe becomes the negative counterpart to Soviet Russia whose "bright future" is predicted by the author.

But – through the years and regardless of his official position – there are also other texts about his encounters with Western European cultures that give Tolstoy "room for manoeuvre" to express a much more personal view on Europe than in his official writings. It is important to contrast both forms in order to obtain a full impression of the author's use and construction of places.

For Tolstoy, major cities within Russia (Saint Petersburg, Moscow) or beyond (foremost: Paris, Berlin, London) are locations, where cultural processes crystallize on a material, social or moral level. It is here that such processes become visible, tangible, perceptible and describable for the author. In my analysis of cities as "places of encounter" I follow the definition of place as suggested by Detlev Ipsen:

> *Places constitute themselves around meaning and senses* […] *Despite all interdependencies and hybrid forms it makes sense to understand places as focal points of an immediate perception, of cultural interpretation and meaning as well as of social action*.[5]

Combining psychological approaches with sociological ones and underlining the concrete, experiential, and performative aspects of place, Ipsen refers explicitly to the theoretical frameworks set by Feld / Basso, Castells and Giddens.[6] Ipsen's definition works so well for Tolstoy's texts because it does not imply a hierarchical order or an opposition between space and place, which both cannot be found in Tolstoy's texts as well. Furthermore Ipsen's definition connects places to the categories of experience and event: "The relation between space and place can be compared to that of time and event […] Spaces correspond in their formality to the abstract time of day, hour, and minute; places are

4 For an analysis of postrevolutionary geographies sketched out in Russian literature of the 1920s see E. Ponomarev, Geografiya revolyucii. Puteshestvie po Evrope v sovetskoy literature 1920-kh godov, in: Voprosy literatury 6 (2004), online: http://magazines.russ.ru/voplit/2004/6/ponom8-pr.html (accessed 10 September 2018). A shorter and revised version is also available in German: E. Ponomarev, Die Geographie der Revolution, in: W. Fähnders (ed.), Berlin, Paris, Moskau, Bielefeld 2005, pp. 191–209.

5 "Orte konstituieren sich um Sinn und Sinne […] Trotz aller Verflechtungen und Mischformen ist es sinnvoll, Orte als Kristallisationspunkte der unmittelbaren Wahrnehmung, der kulturellen Deutung und Bedeutung und des sozialen Handelns aufzufassen." D. Ipsen, Ort und Landschaft, Wiesbaden 2006, p. 64. [All translations are, unless otherwise noted, mine. K.B.]

6 Ibid.

lived time, they are an event."[7] This event-character is very important in the analysis of the role of places in situations of cultural encounters, because it makes clear that places are not given or inalterably existing but subjectively constructed. Writing about his experiences abroad in a generalizing and authoritative way, Tolstoy especially since the 1920s makes his readers (almost) forget that his is only one perspective amongst others. Using very detailed descriptions of odours, noises, colours and the feelings that these (might) evoke, Tolstoy conveys "a feeling for the place", that is already determined. Therefore, the emotional and symbolic interpretation of a place is just the point where a potential manipulation of his readers takes place as he instrumentalises topographies for ideological purposes. Thus, how Tolstoy describes his impressions in Paris, London and Berlin does not change remarkably throughout the years – what changes is the focus on what he chooses to describe, which associations the images tend to generate and what he silences.

After his return from emigration in 1923, the author outlines a special post-revolutionary geography by semanticizing the visited Western European locations in contrast to those in Soviet Russia. This literary technique might be compared to the "symbolic topographies" Oliver Lubrich identifies in Virginia Woolf's personal travel notes.[8] However, Tolstoy, unlike Woolf, writes not primarily for himself, trying to deal with obviously difficult travel experiences, but for the Russian respectively Soviet public. According to Susanne Frank, semanticising geographical locations can be described as a "geopoetical technique" that can be found both in literary and non-literary texts. Analyzing the functions of geopoetical techniques and their relation to geoculturological discourses, she states: "In general, […] geopoetical techniques pursue geoculturological goals."[9] She defines "Geokulturology" as follows:

> *The term geoculturology indicates a knowledge discourse that assumes and postulates geo-spaces or regions in terms of geo-cultural entities. In analyzing these entities as given objects it construes them semantically and semiotically and therefore pursues ideological and political goals.*[10]

7 "Das Verhältnis von Raum und Ort ist vergleichbar mit dem von Zeit und Ereignis […]. Räume entsprechen in ihrer Formalität der abstrakten Zeit von Tag, Stunde, Minute; Orte sind gelebte Zeit, sie sind Ereignis." Ibid.

8 "Die unscheinbarsten Details tragen dazu bei, der Reise Bedeutung zu verleihen. Sogar die Bemerkungen zum Wetter fügen sich zu einer Sequenz, die oberflächlich dem Gemütszustand der Reisenden entspricht. […] Und auch die Landschaften sind semantisiert. […] Die Reisende bewegt sich sensibel durch eine symbolische Topographie." O. Lubrich, Faschismus im Selbstversuch: Rhetorik und Psychologie bei Virginia Woolf, in: Orbis Litterarum 64 (2009), pp. 1–32, at 7–8.

9 "Gemeinhin, […] dienen geopoetische Verfahren der Verfolgung geokulturologischer Ziele." S. K. Frank, Geokulturologie – Geopoetik. Definitions- und Abgrenzungsvorschläge, in: M. Marszałek and S. Sasse (eds.), Geopoetiken: Geographische Entwürfe in den mittel- und osteuropäischen Literaturen, Berlin 2010, pp. 19–42, at 41.

10 "Mit dem Begriff Geokulturologie soll also ein Wissensdiskurs bezeichnet werden, der Geo-Räume bzw. Regionen als geokulturelle Einheiten voraussetzt, postuliert, sie als gegebene Objekte analysiert und sie gleichzeitig semantisch und semiotisch konstruiert und damit nicht zuletzt auch ideologische und politische Ziele verfolgt." Ibid., p. 31.

According to this definition, I will speak of a geoculturological strategy, Tolstoy uses by semanticising geographical locations in his writings of the 1920s and 1930s.

1. Prewar Times: Feeling at Home Abroad

Until the outbreak of World War I Tolstoy travelled mainly for personal reasons. In 1901 he enrolled as a student of engineering in Saint Petersburg. After the revolutionary events of 1905 the Technical Institute was closed and Tolstoy continued his studies in Dresden in 1906. According to his letters, he enjoyed living in Dresden very much. These letters already indicate Tolstoy's typical manner of perceiving and describing his encounters with other cultures. He constructs himself as a distant observer who claims to see more than the locals. Reporting on a visit to a beer garden on a Sunday he wrote to his parents that the Germans are unaware of their favourable living conditions. While they are content with their beer, the numerous foreigners living in Dresden have to "feel and live" for them.[11]

In 1906, Tolstoy has not yet decided to quit the Institute and to focus on an artistic career. With the help of his future wife Sofiya Dymshic, who at this time was already studying painting, he finally chose arts over his education as an engineer. With her he was visiting Paris in 1908, 1911 and 1913. On the one hand, these journeys are partly motivated by an attempt to overcome a personal and artistic crisis. On the other hand, they are connected to joyful events: In 1908 Tolstoy and Sofiya arrived in Paris shortly after their marriage and it was in Paris that he managed to enter the Russian artistic circles, which appeared hermetically closed for him in Saint Petersburg. In 1913 their daughter was born in Paris.

While Tolstoy's perception of Russia in general, or of Saint Petersburg in particular,[12] revealed a certain boredom with his homeland, he is overwhelmed by his first impressions of Paris: "What an amazing, firework-like city of Paris. And the people are lively and cheerful."[13] His contacts with the French capital range primarily on the visual and emotional levels – the atmosphere is more important than any specific encounter. Throughout his letters, it remains unclear if he ever had or even tried to have personal contact to the French whilst living in the Russian circles and aiming for his compatriots' approval as an upcoming writer. He mainly describes public spaces like boulevards and cafés. In doing so, his view remains superficial – he mentions clothes and customs, construes out

11 "Вообще здесь жизнь хорошая, светлая, и благоприятные условия, чтобы сделать ее таковой, хотя на немцев это не действует — они только знают свое пиво и больше ничего. Зато иностранцы (которыми кишит Дрезден) чувствуют и живут для них." A. N. Tolstoy, PerepiskaA. N. Tolstogo v dvukh tomakh, vol. I, Moskva 1989, p. 118f.

12 "Cheers to Moscow's health! And Saint Petersburg shall go to hell, this dull, faded, neurasthenic city." / "Пью здоровье Москвы, и да провалится Петербург к черту – скучныи и вялыи и неврастеническии город." Ibid., p. 182.

13 "Что за изумительный, фейерверковый город Париж […] И люди живые, веселые." Ibid., p. 124.

of these impressions a general characterisation of French culture. Summing up his impressions, Paris seems to be a huge "greenhouse":

> *Daily life proceeds as if organized by women; it is talking and screaming about beauty, feathers, bawdiness, a fine and fugacious love. The people blossom like flowers to love and their relations are fragile, airy and bright. The French are sinfully chosen orchids and the greenhouse that is filled with their fragrance – is Paris.*[14]

Tolstoy embeds the French capital in the symbolist, cyclical model of blossom and decline.[15] Following this model, the city and its inhabitants are described as bound to the natural cycle of life and death, yet they seem well aware of their amusements' fugacity. In 1908, he does not judge the debaucherous social life that he ascribes to French culture in general in terms of decadence and moral decline. As little a role as Russia plays for Tolstoy's first contact with French culture, as small is the author's interest in social questions. The otherness of the French for the writer is more exotic than distancing.[16]

2. World War I: Rescue for the "Second Home" Paris

With the outbreak of World War I, Tolstoy started working as a journalist (which he had rejected until then) and became, as he put it, "a patriot".[17] Being a patriotic writer for Tolstoy meant to unite the Russian people in times of crisis by assuring them of the persistence of a national identity.[18]

As a war correspondent Tolstoy became a precise observer of the events on the battlefields from the east to the west. In August 1914 he travelled along the frontlines of Volhynia, Galicya and the Caucasus and in 1916 he was part of an official Russian delegation of journalists visiting London and Paris. For his literary works of these years the war played

14 "Здесь все живет женщиной, говорит и кричит о красоте, о перьях, о разврате, о любви изощренной и мимолетной. Люди как цветы зацветают, чтобы любить, и хрупки и воздушны и ярки их сношения, грешные изысканные орхидеи французы и теплица, полная греховного их аромата, – Париж." Ibid., p. 132.

15 W. Kissel, Die Moderne, in: K. Städtke (ed.), Russische Literaturgeschichte, Stuttgart 2002, pp. 226–289, at 228.

16 Whilst Tolstoy ascribes Paris an eminent role to the beginning of his writing career, for his literary works until World War I cities within Russia or abroad only play a minor role. The novellas and novels are primarily situated on estates in the Russian countryside. Whenever Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Venice or Paris are part of the story, these cities function as counterparts to the simple and natural life of the countryside. For their description Tolstoy draws on the literary discourse of modernity and takes up a critical but finally undecided point of view. K. Bauer, Liebe – Glaube – Russland: Russlandkonzeptionen im Schaffen Aleksej N. Tolstojs, Stuttgart 2018, pp. 58–67.

17 „Я работаю в „Русских ведомостях", никогда не думал, что стану журналистом, буду писать *патриотические* статьи. Так меняются времена. А в самом деле стал патриотом." Tolstoy, Perepiska A. N. Tolstogo v dvukh tomakh, vol. I, p. 212 (emphasis in the original). "I am working for the "Russian News", and have never thought that I would become a journalist and write patriotic articles. Times are changing. And I have really become a patriot."

18 Although living in a multi-ethnic imperial society, Tolstoy thinks in national categories and is mostly speaking in a homogenising way about "Russia" or "the Russian people" – or in the case of other countries, of "the Germans", "the French", "the British" etc. If he draws any distinction, it's rather a social than an ethnical one.

an important role as well. In his short stories Tolstoy often reflects on the impact of war on the life of Russian people from different social classes.[19]

The view on all social classes – not only the members of the higher ones like before – also holds for Tolstoy's writings about Paris during World War I. Tolstoy maintains his focus on the French capital as a symbol for the whole country. The impressions that he writes down are ambivalent. They oscillate between an alarming tune, stating the impending downfall of the city and – on a more general level – of France, and a lyrical description of the city in which war and death are reduced to rather atmospheric elements.

One of the first articles he published in August 1914 as a correspondent for "Russkie vedomosti" (Russian News) is a passionate and dramatic call for help. Reminding his compatriots that it was Paris that had become a "second home" to many Russians in the nineteenth and twentieth century and praising its creative energies (from which Tolstoy himself had drawn at the beginning of his artistic career), he declares that it is now Russia's turn to save the town and its inhabitants: "Paris, where so much had happened, people's second home, Paris could not die. One must not rip out the heart and stay alive."[20] But Tolstoy is not only evoking his readers' compassion by using the device of personification. By declaring Russia to the saviour of France he also refers to a crucial element of Russian collective memory, built in the nineteenth century: After the defeat of Napoleon's army Car Aleksandr I claimed to be the "saviour of Europe" and Russia was supposed to be the leader of an "Holy alliance".[21]

Two years later, in the articles during his journey to London, Paris and the Western frontlines in 1916 the writer changes his tune. The exuberant love of life, Tolstoy attributed to prewar-Paris, is still there, but reduced to a "sad beauty of life" (печальную красоту жизни).[22] The impressions, the writer shares from his stay, are rather those of a flaneur, not those of a war correspondent:

> *Paris, always wreathed in transparent, bluish haze, grey and monotone, with buildings that look one like another; with its mansards, cupola and triumphal arches, interrupted and girded by a belt of green boulevards… The huge city lives all day inexhaustibly, thunders and waves; at night it is flowed by light. The mist is transparent, the whole city is like a forest out of blue shadows.*[23]

19 See Bauer, Liebe – Glaube – Russland, pp. 68–85.

20 "[…] Париж, где столько совершалось, вторая родина людей, Париж не может погибнуть, нельзя вырвать сердце и остаться жить." A.N. Tolstoy, Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii (hereafter PSS), vol. III, Moskva 1949, p. 110.

21 J.M. Hartley, Is Russia Part of Europe? Russian Perceptions of Europe in the Reign of Alexander I, in: Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique 33, no. 4 (Oct.–Dec. 1992), pp. 369–385, at 374.

22 Tolstoy, PSS, vol. III, p. 108.

23 "Париж, всегда занавешенный прозрачной, голубоватой дымкой, весь серый, однообразный, с домами, похожими один на другой, с мансардами, куполами церквей и триумфальными арками, перерезанный и охваченный, точно венком, зеленые бульварами... Весь день неустанно живет, грохочет, колышется, по ночам заливается светом огромный город […] Туман прозрачен, весь город раскинут чащей, будто выстроен из голубых теней." Ibid.

The author alternates between the description of visual impressions and their emotional effects. Several times, he starts a sentence with the phrase "you feel" (вы чувствуете), e. g.: "[…] but you feel not exhaustion, having wandered through it [Paris] all day, but a quiet, gentle melancholy. You feel that they understood death here and that they love the sad beauty of life…"[24]

Having in mind all of Tolstoy's war time articles, it is obvious that he tends to present Britain and France as much more suffering from the war than Russia. Visiting the Western frontlines in France in 1916 he writes to his wife: "The atmosphere here is very gloomy, everything revolves around the war. You feel the war with such an intensity that we do not know in Russia. They balance on a knife's edge."[25]

Although Tolstoy also travelled along the Russian frontlines in 1914, crossed destroyed villages, spoke to wounded soldiers, met with prisoners of war, he avoids in his articles any appearance of despair or defeat. It is only in his letters to his wife that he mentions these experiences. Instead, his reportages (Po Volyni / Through Volhynia or Po Galicii/Through Galicia) are full of vivid descriptions of colourful, supposedly peaceful landscapes in late summer or autumn and of the busy life in cities like Kiev or Lviv that almost make readers forget the nearby trenches.[26] Compared to his visits to London and Paris in the early years of the war, his role has now changed. He is an official Russian delegate, travelling as a journalist. Besides, he describes himself as a "patriot" who sees his duty in uniting the split Russian society and strengthening the people's belief in their ability to defend the country. Pursuing these goals he uses the descriptions from situations abroad to make his readers in Russia feel that other countries are in greater danger than Russia. The impressions from Paris and London he shares with his readers are dramatic. Especially the personification of Paris as a body whose heart is to be ripped out appeal to the people's compassion. Although Tolstoy uses contrasts between life in Europe and Russia he never works with simple negative stereotypes – even when talking about Germany.[27] Since 1917, however, Germany, France and Great Britain do not play any role for Tolstoy's writings as his attention is exclusively directed at the events within Russia.

3. Emigration: Living at a Paradisiac Place or in a Mausoleum?

Tolstoy attentively observed the events of the Russian Revolution from the very beginning in February 1917. At first he was enthusiastic about the events and hoped for a new democratic order. With the failure of the Provisional government and the coming into

24 "[…] но не утомление вы чувствуете, проблуждав по нему весь день, а спокойную, тихую грусть. Вы чувствуете, что здесь поняли смерть и любят печальную красоту жизни…" Ibid.

25 "Здесь настроение очень тяжелое, все занято воинои, война чувствуется с такой силой, с какой мы и не знаем в России, поставлено на карту все." Tolstoy, Perepiska A. N. Tolstogo v dvukh tomakh, vol. I, p. 246.

26 See the collection of articles in Tolstoy, PSS, vol. III.

27 "Germany" is not represented by a special symbolic place but with the help of such personifications as "Berta Krupp" and "Maks Vuk". Tolstoy, "Otechestvo", in: Tolstoy, PSS, vol. III, pp. 9–13.

power of the Bolsheviks his attitude, however, changed. Primarily to escape the hunger in Moscow he left for Odessa with his family in the early summer of 1918. There he was working temporarily for the anti-Bolshevik side, writing propaganda. When the allied forces could no longer defend Odessa from the Red Army, Tolstoy and his family decided to leave Russia.

Coming back to Paris in late summer of 1919 after a long and exhausting journey that was not without danger, Tolstoy's first impressions sound like those of earlier, peaceful times.[28] He writes to his writer-friend Ivan Bunin who stayed in Odessa:

> *It is so good here that everything could be absolutely good, if we would not know that our relatives and friends struggle over there* […] *France is an astonishing and terrific country with principles; it is of a good age and its house has been occupied for a long time. Here won't be any Bolsheviks – whatever they might say…*[29]

France offers him the needed shelter, is depicted as the "second home" which Tolstoy had mentioned in an article during the war. In some further letters he continues to praise France as a "beneficial and peaceful land" that provides "excellent red wine" and a plentiful life – in short: an ideal surrounding for creative work. But in contrast to his earlier journeys to France when he tried to immerse himself into the inspiring atmosphere, his main focus is now on the events in Russia, especially since 1921, when he starts to change his mind about the future of Russia under Bolshevik rule.

Tolstoy's self-understanding as a Russian writer is strongly connected to the existence of a Russian state whose government is capable of keeping the huge country together and of defending its territory against enemies as well from the inside as from the outside. The more he becomes persuaded of the fact that the Bolsheviki can guarantee the persistence of the country, the clearer he expresses his conviction that emigration can only be a provisional state of existence. Even though this meant to accept the regime from which he fled and that he accused publicly for being involved in the "vivisection" of Russia's body.[30]

Tolstoy's perception of emigration corresponds quite well with Edward Said's postcolonial definition of an intellectual exile, which is marked by a peculiar relation to places of origin and residence:

> *There is a popular but wholly mistaken assumption that being exiled is to be totally cut off, isolated, hopelessly separated from your place of origin. The exile therefore exists in a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of*

28 Regarding his emigration period see E. Tolstaya, Degot' ili med. Aleksey N. Tolstoy kak neizvestny pisatel', 1917–1923, Moskva 2006.

29 Здесь так хорошо, что было бы совсем хорошо, если бы не сознание, что родные наши и друзья в это время там мучаются […] Франция – удивительная, прекрасная страна, с устоями, с доброй стариной, обжилой дом... Большевики здесь быть не может, что бы ни говорили… Tolstoy, Perepiska A. N. Tolstogo v dvukh tomakh, vol. I, p. 280.

30 See therefore Tolstoy's "Open letter to N. V. Chaykovskomu", published in April 1922. Ibid., p. 306.

> *the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another.*[31]

In Tolstoy's case, it is the permanent focus on the events in Russia that shapes his relation to his European host countries as well as to the other émigrés. As Tolstoy and many of his fellow countrymen were deeply convinced that they will return to Russia soon, they felt no need to assimilate or integrate into their host countries' cultures. Analyzing writings of several Russian émigré writers at the beginning of the 1920s – amongst them those of Tolstoy – Galina Time is talking about "the Russian view of 'the other'" that connects all texts.[32] By feeling superior in comparison to the citizens of postwar European countries, many members of the Russian émigré community tried to preserve pre-revolutionary Russian traditions and values rather than integrate into another culture. In Edward Said's definition they are like

> […] *a shipwrecked person who learns how to live in a certain sense* with *the land, not on it, not like Robinson Crusoe whose goal is to colonize his little island, but more like Marco Polo,* […] *who is always a traveller, a provisional guest, not a freeloader, conqueror, or raider.*[33]

In Tolstoy's eyes, living on foreign soil – even within a strong and cultural prosperous Russian community – cannot be a permanent solution. Tolstoy shows the consequences of an unwanted permanent life beyond Russia in some of his novellas. In one of them, entitled "N.N. Burov i ego nastroenya" (N.N. Burov's moods; 1922), two Russian émigrés at first enjoy living in Paris, believing to return soon, after the Bolsheviks' defeat. Their relationship, though, gets worse when the male protagonist Burov returns from a trip to the Finnish-Russian boarder and states: "[T]here is no Russia anymore but a graveyard and terrible people, not similar to humans any longer – everybody has lost his mind."[34] The hope to return home, "everybody in one's own house" has gone.[35] Burov is already on the verge of committing suicide because a life without his Russian homeland seems senseless to him. While living amidst the French in a vivid surrounding, he is longing for simplicity, something that can be called one's own: "'Would you please understand', he said […], 'even the Papuan has his house and his sun above the roof, but we are worse off than straying cats.'"[36]Although his friend Vera Ivanovna has restrained him from committing suicide, everything has changed: The feeling of estrangement is

31 E. Said, Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals, in: M. Bayoumi and A. Rubin (eds.), The Edward Said Reader, London 2000, pp. 368–381, at 370.

32 G. Time, Exil als Reise: der russische Blick des anderen (1920er Jahre), in: W. Kissel (ed.), Flüchtige Blicke: Relektüren russischer Reisetexte des 20. Jahrhunderts, Bielefeld 2009, pp. 285–300.

33 Said, Intellectual Exile, p. 378.

34 "[…] России больше нет, а есть кладбище и страшные люди, не похожие уже больше на людей — все сошли с ума…" A.N. Tolstoy, N.N. Burov i ego nastroenya, in: Sovremennye zapiski, IX (1922), pp. 116–128, at 121.

35 Ibid., p. 119.

36 "Поймите, – говорил он, […] даже у папуаса есть свой дом и свое солнце над крышей, а мы хуже, чем бездомные кошки." A.N. Tolstoy, PSS, vol. IV, Moskva 1949, p. 499.

illustrated in the protagonists' different perception of colours and noises on the streets of Paris.[37] In the end, the couple walks through Paris without even noticing the life around them.

As Tolstoy's belief in a powerfully restored new Russia after the end of civil war is growing, his perception of a permanent life in Europe becomes darker and gloomier. His impression of Paris – and the whole country of France as a cultural community – changes from a "paradisiac place" to a "graveyard". His wife remembers a conversation during the summer of 1921: "Please understand, Tolstoy said, and squeezed my hand, Europe is a graveyard. The whole time I feel the scent of decay. Until I get mad! It is not only impossible to work here, but to breathe at all. Living amongst the dead! I hate these people. We have to flee from here."[38]

During his time in Berlin from October 1921 until his return to the Soviet Union in August 1923 Tolstoy becomes a harsh critic of those intellectual émigrés who declare Russia dead and seek for the creation of an alternative, so-to-say extra-territorial "Russia beyond Russia". Living permanently in such an imaginary "Russia", on foreign soil, only tolerated by the European hosts, is no longer acceptable for the writer. Tolstoy argues several times that the Russian emigration, living in a post-war Europe characterized by moral and cultural decline, a huge economic crisis and social poverty, must necessarily go down together with its surrounding. For his description of life in Paris and Berlin Tolstoy uses motifs like hallucinations, delirium, fog, darkness, or the prophecy of an impending artistic and physical death that can be counted among the classical repertoire of exilic writing since Ovid: "This awesome Paris, the most wonderful city in the world is filled with maniacs. Such a France is doomed to die."[39]

Following Oswald Spengler's idea of cities as stone-like manifestations of the moral and economic decline at the end of a civilizational stage, Tolstoy describes post-revolutionary life in Soviet Russia in terms of naturalness and simplicity, even a bucolic idyll. Russia, symbolized by the own house, one must return to, to end the feeling of being "unhoused" becomes the central motif for Tolstoy's argument to return. Like Burov in the novella, the author declared in an open letter from 1922 his sole wish was, to have "one's own sun above the roof".[40] The bold colours of Paris (or New York in "Fata Morgana") are just a delusory surface. Life in Soviet Russia may be colourless, but it is authentic instead.[41]

37 "Эта пестрота и шум бульвара были как галюцинания."/"The boulevard's tawdriness and noise were like a hallucination." Tolstoy, N.N. Burov i ego nastroenya, p. 119.

38 "Пойми, – говорил Толстой, сжимая мне руку, – Европа – это кладбище. Я все время чувствую запах тления. До галлюцинаций. Здесь не только работать, здесь дышать нечем. Жить в окружении мертвецов! Ненавижу людей. Надо бежать отсюда." N. Krandievskaya-Tolstaya, Vospominanya ob A. N. Tolstom, Sbornik, Moskva 1982, pp. 95–119, at 112.

39 "Великолепный Париж, прекраснейший из городов мира, наполнен сумасшедшими […]. Такая Франция обречена на гибель." A.N. Tolstoy, PSS, vol. XIII, Moskva 1949, p. 19.

40 Tolstoy, Perepiska A. N. Tolstogo v dvukh tomakh, vol. I, p. 314.

41 See for example the novella "Fata Morgana" (1923) or the novel "Emigranty" (1935) in which the use of contrasts is a central device to semanticise geography for ideological reasons.

He ends his last article during emigration, "Some words before the departure" (Neskol'ko slov' pered ot-ezdom), a harsh, polarizing and cynical text about life in the (urban) West, with a glorifying-kitschy vision of a future life in Russia: "And then we will see from the doorsteps of our homes an eased off world, peaceful fields, the growth of bread. The birds will sing about peace, about silence, luck and blessed work on earth that has lived through evil times."[42]

Between 1919 and 1923, Tolstoy has gone through a quick change. Whereas his first statements were still of a private character, his later statements in articles, letters and his novels are claiming to speak for those who have not given up Russia yet and who loved their homeland so much that they could not imagine to stay longer abroad then necessary. In his writings he uses the supposed "signs" of the impending cultural and social downfall of the European countries to propagate return. The manifestation of these "signs" is intimately connected to places like Paris and Berlin. Those Russians who are not coming home either live a meaningless and joyless life in these cities or are going mad. The former French "greenhouse" has become a "mad house" for the Russians, living abroad.

But Tolstoy also preserved some room for manoeuvre. In his science fiction novel "Aelita: The decline of Mars" (1922) which can be read as an allegory for the relation between Russia and the West at the beginning of the 1920s, Tolstoy explicitly describes two different worlds – the earth (Soviet Russia) and the planet Mars (Western Europe). However, by close reading one can find that these two worlds share a lot of common history and that the foreign planet offers many attractions – and even true love – that returning home is finally more forced than chosen freely.[43]

4. Soviet Times: Europe as "Madhouse" and "Underworld"

After his return to Soviet Russia in August 1923 he continues to claim to be in an authoritative position to speak about the situation in Europe and the Russian emigration. Several of his adventure and detective novels from 1924 to 1932 are set in Europe.[44] They perpetuate Tolstoy's new geographical order insofar as Paris, Berlin, London and Stockholm are the places of conspiracy, crime and amorality in contrast to the simple, but honest common-weal-oriented life in Soviet Russia. The European cities function as stages on which the moral, social and economic decline is shown in different scenes.

42 "И тогда увидим с порогов мировых своих жилищ успокоенную землю, мирные поля, волнующиеся хлеба. Птицы будут петь о мире, о покое, о счастье, о благословенном труде на земле, пережившей злые времена." Tolstoy, PSS, vol. XIII, p. 23.

43 For a detailed analysis see for example K. Bauer, Flucht vor dem Tod: Heimkehr in Aleksej N. Tolstojs Roman „Aelita. Der Untergang des Mars", in: K. M. Sicks and S. Juterczenka (eds.), Figurationen der Heimkehr: Die Passage vom Fremden zum Eigenen in Geschichte und Literatur der Neuzeit, Göttingen 2011, pp. 194–212. M. Schwartz, Expeditionen in andere Welten: Sowjetische Abenteuerliteratur und Science-Fiction von der Oktoberrevolution bis zum Ende der Stalinzeit, Köln 2014.

44 See for example Tolstoy's novels „Emigrants" (Emigranty) or „Garin's death ray" (Giperboloid inzhenera Garina).

In his description of Paris and to some extent of Berlin, too, Tolstoy focuses mainly on public spaces, and it seems that life predominantly takes place in cafés, restaurants, and on boulevards.

In the post-revolutionary geography that Tolstoy uses in his novels, Paris stands for an unnatural, artificial life and a country that has forgotten its great revolutionary past. The Russian émigrés who are still living there are depicted either as deplorable maniacs, proud but poor intellectuals or as criminals who plot against Soviet Russia. The German people have to deal with the reparations imposed by the peace treaty of Versailles and suffer great poverty. The difference between Paris and Berlin becomes obvious in their different description by the narrator: In the case of Paris, odours, noise and colours remain an important part of the description. Berlin, in contrast, is shaped by monotony, darkness and paleness.

Not only in literature, but also in reportages about his journeys to Europe during the 1930s Tolstoy fulfils the official requirement of depicting the West as consisting of declining decadent civilizations.[45] The titles underline the topical frame of his texts since the 1920s – darkness, death, underworld; he calls them for example: "Journey to another world" (Puteshestvie v drugoy mir, 1932), "Parisian shades" (Parizhskie teni, 1935), "Orpheus in the Underworld" (Orfey v adu, 1935). But even though he does not tire of confirming publicly the new, post-revolutionary geographical order that elevates Moscow to the new centre of a future civilization that will replace the European leadership – in his letters you find some very surprising statements, which show a persistent enthusiasm for life in Europe.

In a letter from 1927 he writes to an old friend about a "poor, grey and trivial" life in the Soviet Union that seems to be provincial for someone who has just returned from the "magnificent Berlin."[46]An interesting discrepancy also becomes apparent when comparing Tolstoy's article "Journey to another world" and a letter he sends to his wife about the same trip. The article offers the impressions of "a single man" who walks through Moscow one day and, after a journey of one and a half days, leaves the train in "a different world" – in Berlin.[47] While Tolstoy in earlier times never reflected upon his kind of perceptions, he now specifies these: He characterizes his impressions as "sharp sighted" but nevertheless "hasty", and refers later on to a "superficial view" resulting from the brevity of the journey (mimoletnaja poezdka).[48] It's the point of view we already know, focused upon public spaces, buildings, streets, and clothes. The whole article is based on polarities: "darkish corridors" in the underground and "humid gleaning asphalt" on

45 W. S. Kissel, Reisen zur Sonne ohne Rückkehr: Zur Wahrnehmung der Moderne in russischen Reisetexten des 20. Jahrhunderts, in: Id. (ed.), Flüchtige Blicke: Relektüren russischer Reisetexte des 20. Jahrhunderts, Bielefeld 2009, pp.11–44, at 34.

46 "Жизнь наша внешне бедная, серая, будничная. Приедешь сюда после блестящего Берлина – станет тебе коряво; серая толпа, теснота в городах, не города – большие деревни. Но и это мы переживем. Остались же мы суверенны […]." A. N. Tolstoy, Perepiska A. N. Tolstogo v dvukh tomakh, vol. II, Moskva 1989, pp. 22f.

47 Tolstoy, PSS, vol. XIII, p. 57.

48 Ibid., p. 58.

the surface.[49] Shops, colourful advertising, glass-architecture in the centre of the city are contrasted with big bourgeois houses for rent in the east of the town, huge abandoned industrial complexes in Spandau and finally supposed dog-houses, which turn out to be workers' homes. Next to them stands the villa which the architect Le Corbusier had inhabited and which the traveller also visits. Walking through the building, he mentions all the clever technological contrivances but makes a huge effort not to be impressed. The eschewing of material objects in this architecture and the scrupulous cleanliness evokes feelings of emptiness, bareness and "monasterial severity", which are uncanny and awkward to the visitor.[50] Resuming the impressions from his trip through the city, in the reportage the author performs a disenchantment of the Western World:

> *It seems the day will come soon when all this glamour of shiny junk, for which the clever, obstinate and tragic people labour in pain, hunger and despair, will suddenly crash and the broken glass of the enchanted kingdom will sound. This is the first impression of a Soviet traveller from one of the consequences of the huge crisis, much worse than the medieval plague.*[51]

In the letter to his wife, he starts with a much more detailed description of his journey through Poland. For Tolstoy, the landscape between Poland and Germany marks the frontier between East and West, first- and second-class life. From his stay in Berlin he also mentions the economic crisis, depicting his lonely walk through the shops. But this is only one side. On the other side, Tolstoy is fascinated by precisely the glamour and luxury he judged so harshly in his reportage: "Tusenka, this is not a shop, but something like a dream, like a palace."[52] He describes his shopping tour in detail: He buys a dressing gown for his wife, a new coat, shoes and a suit for himself spending 700 marks for all of it. At the end he even regrets the lack of time – and money![53]

On the one hand, he talks about the end of the bourgeois culture and pities the people for the economic crisis, but on the other hand he obviously enjoys the comfort and feels at ease with his new self-perception as a Russian traveller in Berlin: "Generally spoken, on the first day, for the first time in my life I did not feel like it used to be in earlier times: Arriving from Russia you feel that you are a barbarian, adding a timid 'bitte' [please] behind every word; but now I feel as if they were the barbarians – not me."[54]

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., p. 68.

51 "Представляется: недалек день, когда все это великолепие блестящего вздора, над которым в мучениях, в голоде, в отчаянии трудится умный, упорный и трагический народ, – вдруг рухнет, и зазвенят разбитые стекла зачарованного царства. Таково впечатление советского проезжего в первые часы от одной из сторон великого кризиса, более страшного, чем средневековая чума." Ibid., p. 62.

52 "Это, Тусенька, не магазин, а не то сон, не то дворец." Tolstoy, Perepiska; A. N. Tolstogo v dvukh tomakh, vol. II, p. 132.

53 Ibid.

54 "Вообще говоря – в первый же день я, в первый раз в моей жизни, почувствовал себя не как раньше бывало: приехал из России и чувствуешь, что – варвар, и робеешь, после каждого слова – bitte, - я теперь почувствовал себя как, будто не я, а они варвары." Ibid., pp. 130f.

While Tolstoy confirms the geo-culturological ambitions of Soviet ideology in his further articles covering his journeys through Europe, there remains some private "room for manoeuvre" for his – sometimes reluctant – fascination with Paris and London in his personal letters.[55]

5. Conclusion

In Tolstoy's texts, particularly those written abroad, big cities play an important role as "places of encounter." They serve as focal points for specific cultural or national characteristics, the interpretation of which changes with Tolstoy's self-perception and role as a writer, especially since the 1920s. Individual, personal impressions which dominate during his first journeys and even at the beginning of the emigration give increasingly way to generalizing statements that claim to express "the truth" – either about the West or post-revolutionary Russia – and the authority to judge the situation there.

Describing the materiality of streets and buildings, the weather, smells, noises, and sometimes the inhabitants as well, Tolstoy construes a specific semantically charged atmosphere of the places, serving more and more ideological, or more precisely – geoculturological – purposes. Observing and categorizing Berlin, Paris and London from a superior moral position in the late 1920s and early 1930s, his aim is no longer to explain "the other" / "the foreign" in a sense of translating it into his reader's world. Instead he tends to underline its strangeness – and to assure the reader at home how lucky he or she can feel to live in the Soviet Union.

Analysing the role of places in Tolstoy's works, one can follow the evolution of a more and more national, even patriotic encoding of his texts that seems to fulfil perfectly the ideological expectations of the Soviet leadership. To strengthen the people's identification with their homeland and to make them believe in a bright future, the author defines cultural differences between Western Europe and Soviet Russia by semanticising places. In doing so, Tolstoy engages actively in the geoculturological discourse to confirm the Soviet Union's assumed cultural superiority. However, the sporadic shining-through of his persistent fascination for Europe in personal documents gives reason to question the sometimes all-too one-dimensional appraisals of the writer.

55 More letters to his wife from his journeys in the 1930s can be found in Tolstoy, Perepiska; A. N. Tolstogo v dvukh tomakh, vol. II.