

Leo Tolstoy's “Resurrection”

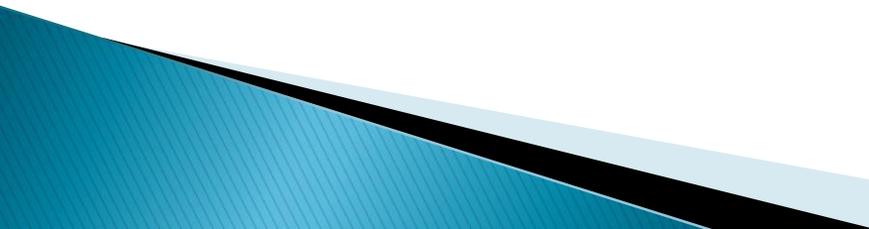
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Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910)

- ▶ Landowning Family
- ▶ Orphan by age 10; theme of death
- ▶ Army
- ▶ *War and Peace*, 1869
- ▶ *Anna Karenina*, 1877
- ▶ Founded Schools for his Peasants
- ▶ Religious Transformation and Non-Violence
- ▶ *Resurrection*, 1899



Tolstoy and Realism

- ▶ Mid-19th Century to early 20th Century
 - ▶ Response to Romanticism
 - ▶ Balzac, Flaubert, Dickens, Henry James
 - ▶ Tolstoy and Dostoevsky
 - ▶ Stories and characters appear objectively Real
 - ▶ In fact, stories are controlled to function as a Social Criticism
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Tolstoy and Marxism

- ▶ Marxists in Soviet Union were ambivalent
 - ▶ Applaud his criticism of Czarist Russia: lack of morals and spiritual emptiness
 - ▶ Uncomfortable with non-violence as social force of change
 - ▶ He saw family and religion as the solution to modernity; not a powerful state
 - ▶ He would most likely have been as critical of Soviet Union as an Authoritarian and morally empty state as Czarist Russia
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Resurrection Plot Overview

- ▶ Katerina Maslova, Katusha, was an orphan; at age 16 her guardian's nephew seduced her, she got pregnant, the child died, and she became a prostitute
- ▶ At age 26 she was accused of complicity in murder. Her seducer, Dmitri Nekhludoff, now having an affair with a married woman, hears the news and feels guilt. He is called to jury duty.
- ▶ The defendant is Katusha; she is accused of having helped rob and poison the merchant from Siberia.
- ▶ Though innocent, a legal oversight by Jury leads to her being sentenced to four years hard labor in Siberia.
- ▶ Later, he realizes his privileged life is empty; he tries to give his land to Serfs; wants to marry Katusha.
- ▶ She rejects his offer and seems proud of her occupation as a prostitute, because it alone gives some meaning to her otherwise empty life.
- ▶ He travels with her to Siberia; she converts to Christianity and they both have a spiritual transformation.

Spiritual Conflict

“In Nekhlyudov, as in every man, there were two beings; one the spiritual, seeking only that kind of happiness for himself which tends towards the happiness of all; the other, the animal man, seeking only his own happiness, and ready to sacrifice to it the happiness of the rest of the world. At this period of his mania of selfishness, brought on by life in Petersburg and in the army, this animal man ruled supreme and completely crushed the spiritual man in him” (p. 65).

Spiritual Blindness

- ▶ “In his soul – in the very depths of his soul – he knew that he had acted in a base, cruel, cowardly manner, and that the knowledge of this act of his must prevent him, not only from finding fault with anyone else, but even from looking straight into other people’s eyes, not to mention the impossibility of considering himself the splendid, noble, high-minded fellow, he thought he was. But he had to, in order to go on living his life boldly and merrily. There was only one solution to the problem – not to think about it. And he did not” (p. 78).

Spiritual Awakening

- ▶ “It was so great, and the defilement was so complete, that he despaired of the possibility of being cleansed. ‘You know you did try before to perfect yourself and become better, and nothing came of it,’ whispered the voice of the tempter within. ‘What is the use of trying again? Are you the only one? All are alike, such is life,’ whispered the voice. But the free spiritual being, which alone is true, alone powerful, alone eternal, had already awakened in Nekhlyudov, and he believed in it. Enormous though the distance was between what he wished to be and what he was, nothing appeared insurmountable to the newly awakened spiritual being” (pp. 119–120).

God's Forgiveness Leads to Freedom

- ▶ “He prayed, asking God to help him, to enter into him and cleanse him, and what he was praying for had happened already; the God within him had awakened in his consciousness. He felt himself one with Him, and therefore felt not only the freedom, the fullness and joy of life, but all the power of righteousness. All, all the best that a man can do, he felt capable of doing” (p. 120).

Reflection on Thief

- ▶ “His health ruined by hard work, drink and debauchery – knocking aimlessly about town, his faculties dulled, he gets into some sort of a shed, and takes some old mats which nobody needs; and here we, well-to-do and educated people, instead of considering how to destroy the causes which have driven this lad to his present condition, think to mend matters by punishing him!...He could not understand why he had not been able to see all of this before, and why others were unable to see it” (p. 143).

Katusha Turns Bad

- ▶ “Wet, muddy and quite exhausted, she returned home, and from that day the change which brought her where she now was began to be wrought in her soul. On that dreadful night she ceased to believe in goodness. She used to believe in goodness, and believed that other people also believed in it; but after that night she became convinced that no one believed, and that all that was said about God and His laws was deception and untruth. He whom she loved and who had loved her – yes, she knew that – had abandoned her after he had enjoyed her, he had abused her love. Yet he was the best of all the people she knew. All the rest were still worse. All that afterwards happened strengthened her in this belief at every step. His aunts, the pious old ladies, turned her out when she could no longer serve them as before. And of all the people she met, the women used her as a means of getting money, and the men, from the old police-officer down to the warders of the prison, looked upon her as an object for pleasure. (151)

Moral Complexity

- ▶ “But can we not observe the same phenomenon when the rich boast of their wealth – that is, of their robbery; when commanders of armies pride themselves on their victories – that is murder; and when those in high places vaunt their power – that is violence? We do not see the perversion in the views on life held by these people only because the circle formed by them is larger and we ourselves belong to it” (p. 174).

Anarchism

- ▶ “Everything was so clear to him now, that he could not stop marveling why everybody did not see it, and why he himself had been blind for such a long time to what was so clearly evident... Now it was as clear as daylight to him that the chief cause of the people’s dire poverty was one that they themselves knew and always pointed out, namely, that the land which alone could feed them had been taken from them by the landlords...” (p. 245).

Land Reform and Serfs

- ▶ “Now it was as clear as daylight to him that the chief cause of the people’s dire poverty was one that they themselves knew and always pointed out, namely, that the land which alone could feed them had been taken from them by the landlords” (p. 245).

Justice

- ▶ “As if justice were the aim of the law,” said Nekhlyudov.
- ▶ “What is?”
- ▶ “The upholding of class interests! The law, in my opinion, is only an administrative instrument for upholding the existing order of things to the advantage of our class.”
- ▶ “This is a perfectly new view,” said Ragozhinsky with a little smile; “the law is generally supposed to have a totally different aim.”
- ▶ “Yes, so it has in theory but not in practice, as I have found out. The law aims only at preserving the present state of things, and therefore it persecutes and executes those who stand above the ordinary level and wish to raise it – the so-called political offenders – as well as those who are below the average, the so-called criminal types” (p. 358).

Forgiveness as Meaning of Life

- ▶ “Thus the idea became clear to him that the only certain means of salvation from the terrible evil from which men were suffering was that they should always acknowledge themselves to be guilty before God, and therefore unable to punish or reform others...Now he saw clearly whence came all the horrors he had seen, and what ought to be done to put an end to them. The answer he had been unable to find was the same that Christ gave to Peter. It was to forgive always, everyone, to forgive an infinite number of times, because there are none who are not themselves guilty, and therefore none who may punish or reform” (pp. 487–488).

Summary

- ▶ Realism used to show an objective view of Russian life
- ▶ Emptiness of Russian nobility: Shallow, social conventions
- ▶ Tolstoy's writing reflects the tensions in Russian society between nobles and serfs that would ultimately lead to Russian Revolution in 1917
- ▶ His view of crime is modern: recognition of social conditions that lead to criminality
- ▶ At the same time, his view is founded in Christian theology of Sin as universal, and Forgiveness as necessary
- ▶ Meaning of Life is found not in social status, wealth, possessions, but in Love, Forgiveness and Service