INTRODUCTION

_Resurrection_ (1899), Leo Tolstoy's last novel, combines a love story and a ferocious attack on the Russian regime of the time. It tears down tsarist society while rebuilding the lives of Katiusha Maslova and Prince Dmitry Nekhlyudov. Years after an early love affair, the two incongruously meet again in a courtroom. Nekhlyudov is a member of a jury trying Maslova for murder, but it is not long before he puts himself on trial and proceeds to condemn all of upper-class and official Russia. Meanwhile, Maslova evolves from prostitute to revolutionary. In the stories of Maslova and other convicts, Tolstoy depicts the hard lot of women and the disenfranchised in nineteenth-century tsarist Russia. The secret of Tolstoy's ongoing relevance is to speak to and for the individual, with fearless disregard of the consequences for institutions, no matter how entrenched or respected. But he also holds individuals to high moral standards, and thereby ennobles their lives.

_Resurrection_ is part of the last, sad drama of Tolstoy's long life. He was born in 1828 to a wealthy gentry family at Yasnaya Polyana (in Russian, Clear Glade), an estate 130 miles southeast of Moscow built by his grandfather, Prince Nikolai Volkonsky. The fourth of five children, he lost his parents early, but he grew up in a benevolent extended family. As a young man in the 1850s, he fought in the Caucasus and the Crimean War, lived in St. Petersburg, and traveled to Europe twice. He consorted with peasants, Chechen rebels, Cossacks, soldiers, and the Petersburg literary elite, whom he shocked with his womanizing and moralizing when he first arrived in the capital. He became a
famous author, publishing an autobiographical trilogy (*Childhood-Boyhood-Youth*; 1852, 1854, 1857) as well as a series of war stories culminating in the masterpiece of his youth, *The Cossacks* (1863). In 1862, he married Sofya Andreevna Behrs (1844–1919) and settled with his young bride at Yasnaya Polyana, which he celebrated in his most famous works, *War and Peace* (1865–69) and *Anna Karenina* (1875–78). Nineteen years and many children later—the Tolstoys had thirteen in all, eight of whom evolved to adulthood—the family began to winter in Moscow, where Tolstoy wrote about the harsh consequences of the migration from the countryside to the city in *What Then Should We Do?* (1884). He was already in the midst of a religious crisis that he described in his *Confession* (1880). In the 1880s, he created a new syncretic religion based on a “harmonized” version of the Gospels as prepared by himself. *What I Believe* (also called *My Religion*; 1884), his declaration of his new faith, influenced such people as the young Jane Addams (1860–1935), founder of the settlement-house movement in the United States. He became an enemy of the state and a guru preaching moral, political, and religious reform. Always interested in public education, he began to write stories for the people, and founded a highly successful mass circulation press called *Intermediary* (1884). In the 1890s, his sense of the crisis in the countryside deepened as he worked on famine relief among the peasants, and he expressed his new ideas in political tracts. Struggling to control his own appetites, he became vegetarian and preached abstinence in his writings. The changes after 1880 gradually alienated him from his wife and family. Relations with them continued to deteriorate until, at age eighty-two, he left home in the middle of the night and died in a train station a few days later, on November 7, 1910.

Tolstoy wrote *Resurrection* in three stages over ten years (1889–1899). Starting in 1891, on moral grounds he had refused to copyright or accept payment for new works published after 1881, but he made an exception for *Resurrection* in order to finance the immigration of a persecuted religious sect, the Doukhobors (Spirit Wrestlers), to Canada. The novel is based on a true story acquired from a lawyer friend, in which a member of a jury in the trial of a prostitute accused of theft recognized her as the former ward of a relative, whom he had seduced
many years before. This story appealed to Tolstoy both personally, because it addressed his guilt about casual sex in his youth, and as a social thinker concerned about the exploitation of the lower classes. It also became a vehicle for "reasonable consciousness," a concept that he had developed extensively in his philosophical tract *On Life* (1888). In works like *The Kingdom of God Is within Us* (1893), he argued that the social dysfunction and injustice characteristic of late nineteenth-century Russia could only be solved one person at a time, through a transformation in each individual from a self-centered quest for happiness to a self-conscious embrace of the happiness of others. Prince Nekhlyudov and Maslova each model this transformation in a very personal way. Nekhlyudov proposes to Maslova although he does not love her, but Maslova, although she loves him, rejects him so as not to tie him to her. Instead she plans to marry a political prisoner whom she does not love and join him in his idealistic work, while Nekhlyudov is freed to start a new, presumably moral life.

In the 1890s Tolstoy also rethought his art to conform with his ideas. (He published *What Is Art?*, his major work on aesthetics, in 1895.) More than once during the writing of *Resurrection* he remarked that as a genre the novel was outdated because "it's shameful to write non-truth." He finessed this misgiving by producing a novel more like a documentary than any fiction he had written before. An extended example of a Russian genre known as "sketches" [*zapiski*], it combines the education of a narrator with accounts of his surroundings. Tolstoy's chief models in this genre were Ivan Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches* (1852) and Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from the House of the Dead* (1861). Unlike these works, however, *Resurrection* is not a first-person narration. In addition to his chief eyewitness (Nekhlyudov), Tolstoy's "sketches" feature a highly visible narrator, who opens the novel with a lyrical outburst, and who comments on Nekhlyudov and others. Nekhlyudov himself had appeared in early works of Tolstoy as a didactic character, and he is close in point of view to this narrator. Tolstoy once characterized the novel as "a general letter to many."¹ The narrator reports to readers on a reality that he responds to emotionally and even didactically, but even he himself does not understand it to the end.
The novel consists of three parts. The first introduces Nekhlyudov and Maslova and tells their intertwined story up to the present time, when each begins to face the consequences of their early sexual encounter. This part could stand by itself as a conversion story like *Death of Ivan Ilych* (1886) or *Master and Man* (1895), or a story about sex like *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1890). In part two, a newly enlightened Nekhlyudov travels to St. Petersburg to rescue Maslova and other convicts from miscarriages of justice. He also visits his country estates to rearrange his relations with his impoverished peasant neighbors along lines suggested by American social thinker Henry George, whose nationalization of land and single tax scheme Tolstoy greatly admired. Having failed to get Maslova's conviction overturned, Nekhlyudov departs for Siberia by third-class train, on which he meets *le vrai grand monde* of peasant artisans, whose hard-working simple ways Tolstoy hoped would replace the decadent life of the upper classes. In part three, continuing his journey, Nekhlyudov has arranged for Maslova to travel with the political prisoners, whom he therefore gets to know, and he also witnesses the degradation of prison life. This theme comes to a head in chapter nineteen, in which, speaking for Tolstoy, he concludes that the Russian criminal justice system has corrupted the entire nation for centuries, in the most extreme cases producing convicts who kill and eat comrades in the marshes to which they escape from prison. Tolstoy calls this cannibalism "Nietzschean" (and hence beyond good and evil) in contrast to his own implicitly Kantian "reasonable self-consciousness," the principle laws of which Nekhlyudov discovers in the Gospel of St. Matthew at the end of the novel.

The ferocious satire that snarls from the pages of this novel is achieved by an Enlightenment technique that Russian Formalist critic Victor Shklovsky dubbed "making strange" [*ostrenie*], the purpose of which is to focus readers' attention on things that they take for granted and therefore do not judge. The depiction of Christian communion as the literal devouring of the body and blood of Christ especially shocked Tolstoy's contemporaries—the Church excommunicated him for it—but throughout the novel he uses "making strange" to dismantle the tsarist regime piece by piece. Moscow
gentry life, St. Petersburg high society, the bureaucracy, the military, the criminal justice system, peasant life in the country, even the Church: nothing withstands his terrible, simplifying gaze. Every public institution is reduced to an instrument of force and self-interest. Unlike revolutionaries like the ruthless Novodvorov or the raging Kriltsov, however, Tolstoy hated violence, and he does not simply dehumanize tsarist officials so that readers might wish to kill them. Officials like Toporov, modeled on Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod Konstantin Pobedonostsev, are depicted as spiritually dead, but others, for instance, the alcoholic governor of the Siberian district, or Nekhlyudov's old comrade Selenin, themselves suffer from lives of injustice that they cannot escape. Furthermore, if a man can go bad, he can also recover, or at least perform good deeds. So Selenin, despite his "lifeless eyes," is touched by Maslova's case and succeeds eventually in having her sentence of hard labor reduced to exile to Western Siberia. With bureaucrats and soldiers, as with the convicts they hound, the problem as Tolstoy sees it lies not in human nature, but in a society that does not put love for individuals first.

As in earlier works, Tolstoy distinguishes two kinds of love, animal and Christian, in Resurrection. The latter is most definitely an ideal for individuals and society alike, but Tolstoy does not totally reject animal love in the novel. If he had intended readers to hate sex, he could have left it as disgusting as it appears in the relations between Nekhlyudov's sister and her husband, the hairy Rogozhinsky. But unlike the vignette in which convicts prepare for intercourse near an overflowing latrine, Nekhlyudov's seduction of Maslova takes place at Easter time, and is described with a passion that has made it favorite reading for generations of adolescent Russian boys. Young, uncorrupted people feel a mixture of animal love and agape, and Tolstoy never gets over his earlier opinion that the higher one rarely appears without the lower, especially in men. Hence almost all the political radicals are "in love," and, as the asexual Mary Pavlovna observes impatiently, even Simonson, although he doesn't realize it, loves Maslova sexually. After all, if there were nothing attractive about personal fulfillment through love and family, Nekhlyudov would not struggle so to relinquish his dreams of them. And struggle he does, right up to the
end, when he admires the governor’s daughter and her love for her babies. He goes directly from this domestic haven to the hell of the prisons. Tolstoy must count on the stark contrast between the two settings, and their hidden connection through the governor who heads them both, to bolster Nekhlyudov’s determination to devote himself to society rather than family. Sex is natural and therefore cannot be made totally strange in the way that power and politics are. The annual spring breakup of the river accompanies Nekhlyudov and Maslova’s fall from innocence, and each of them eventually wonders whether what happened to them then was not for the best.

Less utopian than the idea of a society based on Christian love, and just as revolutionary in spirit as his satire is Tolstoy’s psychology in the novel. Here the bedrock for him is nature, both eternal and ever changing. In one of the most famous pronouncements in the novel, his narrator declares human beings to be “like rivers.”

... the water is the same in one and all; but every river is narrow here, more rapid there, here slower, there broader, now clear, now dull, now cold, now warm. It is the same with men. Every man bears in himself the germs of every human quality; but sometimes one quality manifests itself, sometimes another, and the man often becomes unlike himself, while still remaining the same man.

The human personality is a combination of universal personality traits and changeability. All healthy, normal people have access to the same potential traits, but many circumstances, including heredity, body type, present situation, education, and others, may influence the shape of a particular personality at a particular time. Usually people act automatically, but at certain times they are able to choose among impulses and alter their personalities henceforth, perhaps forever, or perhaps only until another opportunity for change presents itself. At any given moment, each individual is unique for two opposing reasons: he or she is composed of a particular and to some extent chance combination of traits and habits, and he or she, through access to an inner moral voice,
has the potential to change for the better. That potential remains even in the likes of the generals and aristocrats whom Tolstoy can therefore judge so harshly. Maslova’s slight squint represents the uniqueness and mysterious potentiality of every individual.

The comparison of men to rivers is part of a larger parallel in the novel between nature and civilization, one in which civilization fares poorly. Again and again, Nekhlyudov finds relief from unbearable conditions created by human beings in breezes or scudding clouds or rainfall. The novel opens with the contrast between man and nature in this regard. Perhaps the most striking of many subsequent examples is the shower after the brutal march from prison to the train station in which five convicts die of the heat and no one feels responsible for their deaths. Nature is freer and less oppressive than civilization, and not once does Tolstoy associate human brutality with nature. But nature according to the older Tolstoy is not moral either, and hence Nekhlyudov concludes his journey toward redemption with laws from the Gospel of St. Matthew rather than an epiphany in nature such as Pierre Bezukhov experiences in War and Peace. Nekhlyudov has now arrived at the level of understanding of the Biblical epigraphs at the beginning of the novel, and Tolstoy’s “general letter” ends, as it had begun, with a direct statement from the narrator.

When Resurrection appeared, its author, Count Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy, was one of the most famous writers in the world, and the novel was quickly translated into many languages. More than ten translations of it appeared in Germany alone within two years, and contemporary writers from Franz Kafka to H. G. Wells admired it. (Wells wrote the introduction to it for the 1928 Oxford Centenary English edition.) Early readers were unsettled by its timeless perspective on their lives: anything outside eternal vistas of nature and morality was exposed as corrupt and artificial. Today, long after the world it described has vanished, Tolstoy’s radical novel still provokes and captivates. Those who identify with Maslova and other victims are grateful to Tolstoy for his respectful, humane treatment of them. The Nekhlyudov’s among us, moral compasses trained uncomfortably on themselves as much as on others, are moved by the character’s struggles and transformation. One by one,
readers are changed by the novel, although not always in exactly the way that Tolstoy hoped, and the proof of this is that no one who has read it can ever forget it.

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