Conversion as Narrative: Radical Personal Transformation in the Life and Art of L. N. Tolstoy, 1879-1910

By

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Acknowledgments

In the opening chapter of his *Confession*, Lev Tolstoy describes the resistance that he encountered in his youthful quest for moral perfection: "I was alone," he writes, "absolutely alone, when I searched for the good." By its nature, writing a dissertation is a solitary task, but I am extremely grateful to be able to say that I have not felt alone at any point in this process.

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A note on translations and transliterations

Except where otherwise noted, all translations of Russian texts are my own. Where a citation refers to an English-language source, the translation should be assumed to be that of the author of that source.

All citations follow the guidelines provided in the *Chicago Manual of Style* with the exception of citations to Tolstoy's *Complete Collected Works*. These citations follow the format "*PSS* X: Y," where X refers to the volume number and Y to the page number. For lengthy quotations, I have provided the orginal Cyrillic text in brackets following my translation. When citing passages from Tolstoy's *Complete Collected Works* that feature pre-revolutionary orthography, I have modified the text to accord with the orthographical and morphological norms of modern Russian. To improve the readability of long quotations, I have removed the brackets that the editors of the *Complete Collected Works* use to indicate Tolstoy's use of abbreviations. Thus, where the original text reads "кот[орый]," I have substituted "который." Shorter quotations are provided in English with key words and phrases provided in transliterated form in parentheses. All transliterations follow a modified version of the Library of Congress system with the exception of the names "Tolstoy" and "Dostoevsky."

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Abstract

This study focuses on representations of radical personal transformation in a number of fictional, autobiographical, and publicistic works dating from L. N. Tolstoy's late period (1879–1910). I posit that Tolstoy's account of his own conversion was neither an accurate portrayal of the writer's lived experience nor a complete fabrication. Rather, it represented a highly stylized narrative account that mixed truth with fiction. Ironically, the transformation that supposedly signaled Tolstoy's rejection of his earlier literary productions largely reiterated a model of personal transformation that was first developed in those very works. An approach that treats Tolstoy's own conversion as the reiteration of a narrative structure rather than as a fundamentally new experience allows us to draw broader conclusions regarding his artistic evolution and the evolution of the Russian realist tradition as a whole.

The study includes three chapters. The first chapter discusses the evolution of the field of conversion studies from its inception in the late nineteenth century to the present day, and argues for a narratological approach to conversion, one that frames the phenomenon as a textual representation of spiritual experience rather than as a category of experience itself. The second chapter is primarily devoted to an analysis of Tolstoy's *Confession*. While critics have often viewed the text as a more or less accurate autobiographical account, I demonstrate its fictive nature through a comparison of the autobiographical account that Tolstoy presents and the documentary evidence regarding the events in question. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of several fictional productions that were composed in the 1880s and 1890s. The third chapter presents a close reading of Tolstoy's last major novel, *Resurrection*. While the work has long been seen as an artistically flawed attempt to express late Tolstoyan moral teachings and political critiques in the form of a fictional narrative, I argue that it can also be read as a subtle meditation on the limitations of its author's own claimed conversion. This interpretation is supported by an analysis of *Father Sergius*, a text in which the element of self-criticism is presented in a far more explicit form.

Introduction

В умной критике искусства всё правда, но не вся *правда, а искусство потому только искусство, что оно* всё.

-Л. Н. Толстой, Письмо к Н. Н. Страхову, 1876

In late March of 1942, the eminent Soviet critic and literary theorist Boris Eikhenbaum queued up with his family on the shores of Lake Ladoga to flee his native Leningrad for the relative safety of Saratov. The journey across the icy expanse known as the "Road of Life" was a treacherous one: Soviet vehicles were frequently targeted by German bombers or plummeted through cracks in the ice. Given the dangers that awaited him, it is likely that Eikhenbaum gave little thought to the briefcase he carried in his hand, which explains why he would have set it down when the truck that carried him broke down in the middle of the lake. Eikhenbaum turned away from his briefcase for a moment, but it was a moment too long: When he looked back, it was gone. The loss of luggage was a constant threat for those who traveled on the ice roads: As the philologist Dmitrii Likhachev recalled in his memoirs, thieves would sometimes steal suitcases from starving evacuees and then throw their victims through the ice.[1] That Eikhenbaum managed to avoid such a fate, however, would have provided little consolation, for in that briefcase were notes and drafts that represented years of intense scholarly labor,

[1] D. S. Likhachev, *Vospominaniia* (St. Petersburg: Logos, 1995), 336.

including all of the materials for his planned fourth volume on Lev Tolstoy.[2] The loss was incalculable for literary scholarship. Eikhenbaum's earlier studies on Tolstoy had furnished groundbreaking insights into the writer's works and the nature of literature itself, and there can be no doubt that his planned follow-up to *Tolstoy in the Seventies* (Tolstoi. Semidesiatye gody) would have shed new light on the writer's artistic and ideological development in the years following his spiritual crisis when he attempted to refashion himself as a social critic and moral teacher.

The fate of Eikhenbaum's lost notes and drafts remains a mystery to this day. One scholar has speculated that a thief may have stolen the briefcase, hoping to find food or valuables inside. If this was the case, one can only wonder at the thief's reaction when he found only "worthless" papers inside. Perhaps he kept the briefcase and discarded the papers, allowing them to sit on the ice until the spring thaw came, plunging them into the frigid depths of the lake. It is tempting to think that this might have happened, since the image of Eikhenbaum's manuscript disintegrating in the icy waters of Lake Ladoga would provide a perfect metaphor for the state of scholarship on the last three decades of Tolstoy's career throughout much of the twentieth century. Like Eikhenbaum's manuscript, the late Tolstoy has, to quote Jeff Love, long "lain buried," having been reduced to a simplistic cliché. [3] The late Tolstoy has often been presented as a crank, a tiresome moralist, and a second-rate thinker, a man whose ideas might be of some interest to students of pacifism, but whose works, with a handful of exceptions, are of little interest to literary scholars.

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[2] For a detailed account of the loss of the notes and manuscripts, see Carol Any, *Boris Eikhenbaum: Voices of a Russian Formalist* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 168.

[3] Jeff Love, "The 'Late' Tolstoi," *Slavic Review* 70 (2011): 747, 748.

The reasons for the relative neglect of Tolstoy's late period are complex and tied to the very different forces that shaped twentieth-century literary criticism in the Soviet Union and the West. With regard to Soviet criticism, the dearth of detailed analyses of this period can be explained as a function of two factors. The first concerns the content of Tolstoy's late teachings. In the last three decades of his life, Tolstoy preached an idiosyncratic and highly individualistic form of Christian anarchism. It comes as no surprise that the Bolsheviks would have been suspicious of both the religious orientation of his teachings and their radical rejection of all earthly authorities. From the time of the October Revolution until the post-World War II period, access to Tolstoy's religious writings was highly restricted and there were virtually no attempts by Soviet scholars to conduct a rigorous examination of the writer's "reactionary" phase. In the 1950s, however, the de facto prohibition on scholarly treatments of the late Tolstoy began to weaken. Here scholars encountered a new problem: Vladimir Lenin had written several short pieces that touched on Tolstoy's late period, and the ideas that he presented in these articles granted him the same degree of dictatorial power over developments in the world of literary scholarship in death that he had enjoyed in the political realm in life. As a result, it was virtually impossible for Soviet scholars to address Tolstoy's late period without placing—or at least appearing to place—Lenin's theses at the center of their arguments.

While the post-war period witnessed the appearance of a number of insightful studies of Tolstoy's late writings, including L. D. Gromova-Opul'skaia's dissertation "Osobennosti realizma L. Tolstogo v pozdnii period tvorchestva (1880-e-1900-e gody)," E. N. Kupreianova's *Estetika L. N. Tolstogo*, and K. N. Lomunov's *Nad stranitsami*

"Voskreseniia," the shadow of Lenin loomed large: The dominant tendency in post-war Soviet criticism was, to quote Gromova-Opul'skaia, "to regard Lenin's articles on Tolstoy not only as unquestionable theses which can be more or less successfully illustrated by material from Tolstoy's works, but as a program of investigation of Tolstoy."[4] As Andrei Tarasov notes, it was only in the early 1980s that Soviet scholars were able to publish analyses of the writer's late works without employing an explicitly Leninist idiom.[5]

While scholars in the West were free from the ideological and political restraints that limited their Soviet counterparts, they too have largely failed to provide comprehensive treatments of Tolstoy's late period that would match the depth and breadth of the body of critical literature that exists on his early and mature periods. Although numerous studies exist on Tolstoy's philosophical and moral teachings and on individual literary works that date from his late period—the scholarship on *The Kreutzer Sonata*, *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*, and *Hadji Murat* is particularly extensive—there have, as Love notes, been surprisingly few attempts to provide a comprehensive analysis that would chart the connections and tensions between these two bodies of writings.[6] What

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[4] Quoted in Gleb Struve, "Tolstoy in Soviet Criticism," *The Russian Review* 19 (1960): 173. Struve also quotes a similar statement by V. S. Asmus: "In Lenin's short articles on Tolstoy is to be found a wealth of ideas and conclusions which would suffice for half-a-score of big volumes. But it is just this brevity which makes Lenin's judgments about Tolstoy not only into succinctly formulated conclusions from study, but also into a program for further investigations. The point of view Lenin developed with regard to Tolstoy must be applied to the entire material of the great writer's work and of his philosophical and publicistic legacy. It is necessary to investigate in detail the way in which the fundamental contradiction between Tolstoy's art and world outlook, revealed by Lenin's analysis, comes to light whenever he touches, as an artist or thinker, upon any new sphere."

[5] Andrei Tarasov, *Chto est' istina? Pravedniki L'va Tolstogo* (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2001), 24.

[6] Love, 748.

little work has been done in this area has largely appeared in broad biographical surveys covering Tolstoy's entire life and career, surveys that are limited by two constraints. The first concerns the motivations and interests of Tolstoy's biographers themselves: Comprehensive surveys of Tolstoy's career have, for the most part, been produced by scholars who are attracted to the writer by the fictional masterpieces of his mature period and who take a dim view of his late period, which they see as an unjustified rejection of those masterpieces.[7] The second constraint stems from the extent to which biographical studies, by their very nature, straddle the line between scholarly and popular approaches. Unlike their Soviet counterparts, Tolstoy's Western biographers have been charged with not only analyzing the writer's works and ideas, but also with explaining the cultural context in which they were produced to their audience. As a result of this requirement, there is a marked tendency towards oversimplification in many Western analyses of Tolstoy's late period.

Recent years, however, have witnessed a renewed interest in the last three decades of Tolstoy's career, with both Russian and Western scholars publishing penetrating analyses that break through the tired clichés to reveal the depth and complexity of his late works.[8] This renewed interest in the late Tolstoy has naturally served to focus scholars'

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[7] One exception to this tendency is Rosamund Bartlett's recent biography *Tolstoy: A Russian Life* (Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), which presents a sophisticated and sensitive treatment of the writer's late period.

[8] See, for example, A. G. Grodetskaia, *Otvety predania: Zhitiia sviatykh v dukhovnom poiske L'va Tolstogo* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2000); Ilya Kliger and Nasser Zakariya, "Poetics of Brotherhood: Organic and Mechanistic Narrative in Late Tolstoi," *Slavic Review* 70 (2011): 754-772; Inessa Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of His Time: A Biography of a Long Conversion, 1845-1885* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009); Irina Paperno, "Leo Tolstoy's Correspondence With Nikolai Strakhov: The Dialogue on Faith," *in Anniversary Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Donna Tussing Orwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) and *Who, What Am I? Tolstoy Struggles to Narrate the Self* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014); I. V. Petrovitskaia, *Lev Tolstoi: Publitsist i obshchestvennyi deiatel'* (Moscow: Ikar, 2013); Lina

attention on the thorny issues surrounding the spiritual crisis and conversion that he claimed to have experienced in the 1870s, since these are the events that divide the late Tolstoy from the mature Tolstoy. Among the recent works that have addressed questions related to Tolstoy's dramatic midlife turn to religion, Inessa Medzhibovskaya's *Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of His Time: A Biography of a Long Conversion* deserves special attention, as it represents the first study in any language to focus specifically on the theme of conversion. Beginning in 1845, when Tolstoy penned his first diary entry, and ending with the completion in 1887 of "On Life" (*O zhizni*), a long philosophical essay that she views as the "crown of [his] conversion," Medzhibovskaya meticulously examines the philosophers and movements that shaped the writer's intellectual and spiritual evolution. Tolstoy's conversion, she concludes, should be seen as a "gigantic philosophical and religious project, the search for a new outlook rather than a crisis-begotten tragic moment."[9] While there can be no doubt that her detailed and comprehensive analysis of the impact that Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Plato, Spinoza, and many other philosophers had on Tolstoy will continue to influence scholarly treatments, Medzhibovskaya's most important achievement consists in demonstrating that the term "conversion" itself provides a fitting description for the transformation that Tolstoy claimed to have undergone in the 1870s.

Steiner, "The Russian Aufklärer: Tolstoi in Search of Truth, Freedom, and Immortality," *Slavic Review* 70 (2011): 773-794; Tarasov; Justin Weir, *Leo Tolstoy and the Alibi of Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011) and "Violence and the Role of Drama in the Late Tolstoy: The Realm of Darkness," in *Anniversary Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Donna Tussing Orwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Two works intended for a broader audience by Pavel Basinskii (*Lev Tolstoi. Begstvo iz raia* (Moscow: ACT, 2010) and *Sviatoi protiv l'va: Ioann Kronshtadtskii i Lev Tolstoi: Istoriia odnoi vrazhdy* (Moscow: ACT, 2013)) also deserve mention, as they indicate that the recent renewal of interest in the period extends beyond the confines of the small community of Tolstoy scholars:

[9] Medzhibovskaya, xv.

By placing the question of conversion at the center of her analysis, Medzhibovskaya has provided a new idiom with which to conduct a very old debate, one that that centers on the question of whether we are better served by speaking of "one Tolstoy" or "two Tolstoys." Gary Saul Morson, who has idenitifed this question as one of five unresolved issues in the critical literature on Tolstoy, summarizes the terms of the debate as follows: "[Is] there, as Tolstoy himself claimed, a radical break in his career, occurring around 1880, when he renounced his former convictions? Does his art and thinking change radically at this point?"[10] During the writer's lifetime, the "two Tolstoys" model represented the dominant tendency. This model takes at face value Tolstoy's own repeated claims of having undergone a radical transformation following his crisis, a transformation that led him to adopt a new way of thinking, a new set of ideals, and a new approach to art. Following his death, however, critics increasingly began to question this approach, spurred on by the realization of the broad thematic and ideological parallels that spanned his early, mature, and late works. In the Soviet context, Eikhenbaum was one of the first to advocate for the "one Tolstoy" model. The critic wrote two articles in which he questioned the accuracy of Tolstoy's own claims regarding the crisis and conversion that he supposedly experienced in the 1870s. The first, which was entitled "On Tolstoy's Crises" (*O krizisakh Tolstogo*, 1920), decisively rejected the received interpretation that holds that the publication of the *Confession* marked a sharp turning point in the writer's career:

> To this day, it is thought that Tolstoy's creative work is sharply divided into two periods: before the *Confession* and after it. To this day it is believed that after the *Confession* Tolstoy became a moralist.

[10] Gary Saul Morson, "The Tolstoy Questions: Reflections on the Silbajoris Thesis," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 4 (1991): 116.

> This is incorrect. Crises accompany all of Tolstoy's creative work. And this is absolutely not a characteristic of his [psychological] nature. It was art itself that underwent these crises.
>
> [До сих пор считается, что творчество Толстого резко делится на два периода до «Исповеди» и после нее. До сих пор полагают, что после «Исповеди» Толстой стал моралистом. Это неверно. Кризисы сопровождают все творчество Толстого. И это—совсем не особенность его натуры. Кризисы эти переживало само искусство.]

In a characteristically Formalist fashion, Eikhenbaum went on to argue that the "true foundation" of all of Tolstoy's crises was not psychological or spiritual, but rather resulted from his search for new artistic forms (*Nastoiashchaia osnova vsekh etikh krizisov Tolstogo—iskanie novykh khudozhestvennykh form i novogo ikh opravdaniia*).[11] The critic would return to this question in a 1939 article entitled "On the Contradictions of Lev Tolstoy" (*O protivorechiiakh L'va Tolstogo*), in which he argued that Tolstoy's crisis of the 1870s was neither the first nor the last one that he experienced, and reiterated his position that these crises were rooted in questions of literary form.[12] Later, Nikolai Rodionov, one of the editors of the Jubilee edition of Tolstoy's works would present a far blunter endorsement of a holistic approach to Tolstoy's career. In a diary entry dated

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[11] B. M. Eikhenbaum, "O krizisakh Tolstogo," in *Skvoz' literaturu*: *Sbornik statei* (Leningrad: Academia, 1924), 69.

[12] See B. M. Eikhenbaum, "O protivorechiiakh L'va Tolstogo," *Literaturnyi sovremennik* 7-8 (1939): 231-250. The essay was also included in B. M. Eikhenbaum, *Lev Tolstoi. Semidesiatye gody* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1960), 229-268. A similar argument—that Tolstoy's evolution centered more on questions of form than those of content—can be found in Eikhenbaum's groundbreaking study focus on questions of form over those of content in Eikhenbaum's groundbreaking study *The Young Tolstoy* (Molodoi Tolstoi, 1922), where the critic argues that Tolstoy's early diaries are not objective representations of reality, but complex experiments in literary form: "In his moral and philosophical reflections, it is not so much the content that interests Tolstoy as the consistent and strict form itself; it is as if he is enamored with the fullness (*zakonchennost'*), harmony (*stroinost'*), and external authority (*vneshiaia neprerekaemost'*) that a thought that has passed through his logical apparatus acquires." B. M. Eikhenbaum, *Molodoi Tolstoi* (St. Petersburg/Berlin: Izdatel'stvo Z. I. Grzhebina, 1922), 28-29.

December 8, 1945, he wrote, "Two Tolstoys or one? One Tolstoy! And there is no contradiction whatsoever!"[13]

The "one Tolstoy" model has played a particularly prominent role in post-war American criticism, where one of its most influential advocates, Richard Gustafson, has also been among the most radical. In his seminal study *Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*, Gustafson identifies a consistent approach to philosophy, ethics, and politics "grounded in personal religious experience" that runs through Tolstoy's works. "I have found no evidence in the ninety published volumes of his work," he writes, "to suggest the radical shift in attitudes or theoretical understanding that many have deduced from reading *A Confession*."[14] He goes on to argue for a unified reading of Tolstoy's entire oeuvre:

> Just as in any human utterance a sound takes its meaning only from within the total statement, so any Tolstoyan text takes its meaning only from within the complete oeuvre. To understand any part of his life's text, a story or novel, an essay or tract, a diary entry or a letter, we must see the particular set of words in their relationship to all his words. The pattern of this relationship is shaped by the process of articulation. *The primary rule in reading Tolstoy, therefore, is that the later clarifies the earlier.* This does not mean that an earlier work of art is better than a later one or vice versa. It does mean, however, than an earlier work may be an experimental version of a later one and that later works may reveal the hidden patterns and meanings of earlier ones.[15]

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[13] Quoted in Lev Osterman, *Srazhenie za Tolstogo* (Moscow: Monolit, 2000), 109. This passage is also cited by G. M. Hamburg in "Tolstoy's Spirituality," in *Anniversary Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Donna Tussing Orwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 142.

[14] Richard Gustafson, *Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), xiv. My italics.

[15] Ibid., 7. Gustafson is hardly alone in identifying patterns of what we might refer to as "internal intertextuality" in Tolstoy's works. As Justin Weir notes, in his late period "the more didactic Tolstoy repeatedly returns to his earlier fiction, recasting in a moral light not only its themes, but also its aesthetic assumptions." (Weir, *Alibi of Narrative*, 3.) Natasha Sankovitch comments extensively on this aspect of Tolstoy's work in her study on the author's use of repetition: "Repetitions that occur across the boundaries of separate works belong to a perspective outside of any one of them, that is, they are part of what readers construe as Tolstoy's authorial discourse. They tell us something about his authorial preoccupations, habits of thought, and association. At the same time, intertextual repetitions may serve as clue to the fact that in addition to a given

While not all critics are as radical in their formulation as Gustafson, few modern scholars would deny the fundamental philosophical and thematic continuity of Tolstoy's early, mature, and late periods. And yet the ascendance of the "one Tolstoy" model raises an obvious question, one that has yet to be fully resolved in the critical literature: How are we to interpret the writer's own repeated claims of having decisively turned his back on his earlier fiction? If there was indeed only one Tolstoy, must we conclude that the writer was lying or suffering from delusions when he insisted that he had left his former self behind following the completion of *Anna Karenina*?

In a brief essay entitled "The 'Late' Tolstoi," Jeff Love hints at a compelling solution to this dilemma. Love's essay, which appeared as an introduction to a series of three articles on Tolstoy's late period in *Slavic Review*, begins with a reflection on the "trenchant irony" by which "this most elusive of writers has so often been transformed into a formulaic caricature, even in rather sophisticated treatments of his work."[16] The late Tolstoy, argues Love, was an extraordinarily complex writer, one who "presents one of the most formidably varied, generically promiscuous, and experimental bodies of work in modern literature."[17] And yet despite the diversity and complexity of his late period, the dominant tendency in the critical literature has been to simplify the last three decades

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work there is a larger work in view. This larger work or whole consists of the combined significance that attaches to the repeated element in its separate contexts. When taken together by a reader the separate iterations can be seen to comment upon, embellish, or interact in some other way with one another." As Sankovitch concludes, these intertextual echoes "contribute to our creation, our sense, of Tolstoy the author." (Natasha Sankovitch, "Creating and Recovering Experience: Repetition in Tolstoy" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1992), 221-222.)

[16] Love, 747.

[17] Ibid., 748.

of his life and career through resort to one of many "time honored clichés." (He mentions Isaiah Berlin's "hedgehog and fox," but we might add Gustafson's "resident and stranger," the populist critic Nikolai Mikahilovskii's "right hand and left hand,"[18] and Lenin's "ingenious artist" and "landowner playing the holy fool in Christ."[19]) The fault for this, Love provocatively suggests, lies not so much with Tolstoy's critics as with the writer himself: Tolstoy's "directness of statement" and constant references to the value of simplicity succeeded in convincing his readers and critics that there truly was little complexity or depth in his late art and thought, effecting, in Love's words, "a kind of hermeneutic self-embalming."[20]

For Love, then, Tolstoy's late persona was itself an elaborate construction, a rhetorical pose rather than a straightforward representation of reality. The value of Love's approach is that it allows us to grasp the paradox at the heart of Tolstoy's conversion—that the transformation that supposedly signaled the writer's rejection of his earlier literary productions largely reiterated a model of personal transformation that was first developed in those very works. While numerous scholars have discussed the influence that the author's biography had on his early and mature fictional productions, less has been written on the influence that the models of character development presented in these works had on his autobiographical self-conception in his late period. As I will argue in this dissertation, Tolstoy's written accounts of his own radical transformation were neither direct representations of reality nor outright lies. Rather, the conversion itself was

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[18] See N. K. Mikhailovskii, "Desnitsa i shuitsa L'va Tolstogo," in *N. K Mikhailovskii: Literaturno-kriticheskie stat'i*, 59-180 (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1957).

[19] V. I. Lenin, "Tolstoi kak zerkalo russkoi revoliutsii," in *L. N. Tolstoi v russkoi kritike: Sbornik statei*, ed. S. P. Bychkov (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1952), 57.

[20] Love, 748.

a work of art, an elaborately constructed narrative, one that enabled him to come to terms with the contradictions of his own position in society, and one that stemmed naturally from a broader movement from descriptive to narrative modalities that spanned his entire career. This approach allows us to reformulate the terms of the debate: The question is not whether there was one Tolstoy or two, but how the one Tolstoy managed to convince himself and his readers that there were two.

My goal is not to determine whether or not Tolstoy underwent a "true conversion"; neither will I attempt to elucidate the ideological evolution that led to his claimed transformation. Rather, this study will explore the rhetorical strategies that allowed Tolstoy to conceive of a continuous ideological and aesthetic evolution in terms of a stark bifurcation, and to identify those moments in which the writer himself indicated that he was aware of the fictive nature of his ruse. This approach will allow us to draw broader conclusions regarding Tolstoy's evolution as an artist and religious thinker and the evolution of the nineteenth-century Russian realist tradition as a whole. By framing textual representations of conversions as consummate examples of what Wolf Schmid refers to as "narrative events" (see Chapter I, pp. 80-86), we are able to perceive broad structural confluences between secular narratives of transformation in Imperial Russia and the religious conversion narrative tradition that arose during the seventeenth century in the Protestant West.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter, which is largely theoretical in orientation, presents an historical overview of the evolution of the field of conversion studies from its inception in the late nineteenth century to the present day. Here we will discuss three distinct stages in the development of conversion studies: the

early psychological approach that was pioneered by G. Stanley Hall and that reached its apogee in William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*; the sociological approach associated with John Lofland, Rodney Stark, David Snow, Cynthia Philips, Richard Travisano, and others; and the more recent attempt at a holistic synthesis advocated by Lewis Rambo. Despite the substantial differences in these three approaches, they are united by a shared conviction that religious conversion can be studied through the prism of individual experience. This approach, I argue, is flawed: As a number of scholars have recently suggested, when we study conversions we are not studying experiences themselves, but rather textual representations of these experiences. I add to this growing body of scholarship by arguing for the application of Schmid's theory of narrative eventfulness to the study of textual representations of radical personal transformation. I illustrate my theoretical discussion in this chapter through an analysis of the representation of radical personal transformation in two novels written during Tolstoy's mature period: *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*.

The second chapter is primarily devoted to an analysis of Tolstoy's *Confession*. While many critics and biographers have approached the text as a more or less accurate representation of its author's lived experience, I demonstrate its fictive nature through a comparison of the account of the author's past that is presented in the text and the documentary evidence regarding the events in question. Having established that a referential approach to the text is infeasible, I step back and discuss the complex history of the work's conception and composition, tracing the steps that led Tolstoy to embrace an autobiographical framework in order to express his religious and philosophical views The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of three works that were composed in the

1880s and 1890s: "Notes of a Madman," *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*, and "Master and Man." Where the *Confession* applies patterns of character development taken from Tolstoy's fiction for the purpose of presenting an autobiographical narrative, in these texts the process moves in the reverse direction: the central narrative of the *Confession* provides the basis for the transformation of characters in Tolstoy's fiction.

The third chapter presents a close reading of Tolstoy's last major novel, *Resurrection*. While the work has long been seen as an artistically flawed attempt to express late Tolstoyan moral teachings and political critiques in the form of a fictional narrative, I argue that it can also be read as a subtle meditation on the limitations of its author's own claimed conversion. This interpretation is supported by an analysis of *Father Sergius*, another work written in the same time period and one in which the element of self-criticism that subtly works its way into *Resurrection* is presented in a far more explicit form.

Chapter I: Conversion as Narrative

Un homme, c'est toujours un conteur d'histoires, il vit entouré de ses histoires et des histoires d'autrui, il voit tout ce qui lui arrive à travers elles; et il cherche à vivre sa vie comme s'il la racontait.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée*

"Tolstoy has almost lost his mind"

In June of 1880, the flowers of the Russian literary world gathered in Moscow to celebrate the unveiling of a monument to Aleksandr Pushkin, the country's greatest poet. As Marcus Levitt notes in his study of the celebration, "The list of those involved reads like a 'who's who' of mid-century Russian culture—including Fedor Dostoevsky, Ivan Turgenev, Alexander Ostrovsky, Gleb Uspensky, Ivan Aksakov, Nikolai Strakhov, Pavel Annenkov, Andrei Kraevsky, Aleksei Suvorin, Mikhail Katkov, Nikolai Rubenshtein, Vasilii Kliuchevsky, and many more."[21] One name, however, was conspicuously absent from the list of attendees: Lev Tolstoy. Tolstoy's absence at the commemorative ceremonies was not due to lack of effort on the part of the event's organizers. In May the Society of Lovers of Russian Literature (*Obshchestvo liubitelei russkoi slovestnosti*) had dispatched Ivan Turgenev to Tolstoy's estate at Iasnaia Poliana, and while the two men had succeeded in patching up the tensions that had threatened their friendship in recent

[21] Marcus C. Levitt, *Russian Literary Politics and the Pushkin Celebration of 1880* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 1.

years, Turgenev failed to convince Tolstoy to accept the invitation. The writer's pointed refusal to attend the unveiling quickly gave rise to rumors regarding his mental health: In a letter to his wife dated May 27, Dostoevsky reported that Turgenev had told him that "Tolstoy has almost lost his mind, and perhaps has even lost it completely" (*Tolstoi pochti s uma soshel, i dazhe, mozhet byt', sovsem soshel*). A second letter written on the next day indicated that Turgenev was not the only source of the rumors: "Katkov has also confirmed that he […] has gone completely mad" (*on sovsem pomeshalsia*). [22]

Dostoevsky, Turgenev, and Katkov may have been among the first to ascribe Tolstoy's dramatic turn from literature to religion to his pathological constitution, but they would hardly be the last. Five years after the Pushkin celebrations, the populist critic Petr Lavrov began an essay on Tolstoy entitled "Old Questions: The Teaching of Count L. N. Tolstoy" (*Starye voprosy: Uchenie grafa L. N. Tolstogo*) by peremptorily declaring that the writer "has ceased to be accessible to any arguments from the outside." "In his present state of mind," wrote Lavrov, "any attempt to argue with him is useless."[23] Throughout the essay, Lavrov placed great emphasis on passages in Tolstoy's works in which the writer describes his own thinking as illogical or resulting from an unhealthy state of mind, noting, for example, that "the author himself has admitted several times that his past judgments were mistaken, that he even had periods when he was 'not

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[22] Fedor Dostoevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 30-i tomakh*, ed. V. G. Bazanov, vol. 30 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1988), 166, 168.

[23] P. L. Lavrov, *Sotsial'naia revoliutsiia i zadachi nravstvennosti/Starye voprosy* (Petrograd: Kolos, 1921), 100. Lavrov's central contention in the essay is that Tolstoy's post-conversion writings had revived "old questions" of religion that had been decisively resolved decades before: "The repetition of the fundamental claims with which our grandfathers struggled," he writes, "inspires a certain shame amongst the grandsons" (96).

entirely mentally healthy.'"[24] The revelations that Tolstoy claimed to have experienced during his spiritual quest, Lavrov argued, were themselves evidence of his instability: "There appears that characteristic phenomenon of sudden epiphany, that illusion that one often encounters in the words of *mental patients* (psikhicheskie bol'nye): 'Now I understood'; 'Now everything became clear to me.'"[25] While few modern critics would employ such blunt language in their appraisals, Lavrov's skeptical attitude towards Tolstoy's claimed transformation has long outlived him.[26] As Medzhibovskaya writes, "Tolstoy scholars often enclose the word 'conversion' within quotation marks […] and even oftener preface it with 'so-called.'"[27]

In approaching Tolstoy's dramatic rejection of his earlier literary masterpieces as a manifestation of the writer's pathological condition rather than as a sincere intellectual and spiritual transformation, literary figures of the 1880s were largely reprising the role that their predecessors had played in the 1850s in responding to Nikolai Gogol's turn to an austere, ultra-conservative variant of Russian Orthodoxy. What is remarkable about the reaction of Gogol's erstwhile comrades to his *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends* (Vybrannye mesta iz perepiski s druz'iami) is not that they rejected his political views—this was to be expected—but that they seemed to be

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[24] Ibid., 116.

[25] Ibid., 119. My italics.

[26] Few, but not all: In an article published in 2005, Daniel Rancour-Laferriere maintains that Tolstoy's *Confession* provides indisputable evidence that the author is "mentally disturbed" and proceeds to diagnose his subject with "narcissism, masochism, severe depression, manic-depressive mood swings, hypomanic episodes, mixed episodes, and other psychopathologies." Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, "Does God Exist? A Clinical Study of the Religious Attitudes Expressed in Tolstoy's *Confession*, *Slavic and East European Journal* 49 (2005): 445.

[27] Medzhibovskaya, xi.

incapable of conceiving that an individual could experience such a radical ideological shift. As Robert Maguire notes, "The possibility of sincere religious conversion was allowed only by a few like-minded friends. Some people suggested mental derangement […] Some suspected that he might be trying to tap a few conservative roubles."[28] While Vissarion Belinskii referred to Gogol's transformation as a "conversion" in his famous letter of 1847, his usage of the term suggests that he had little understanding or appreciation of what the process entails: "Your conversion," he wrote, "may perhaps have even been sincere. But the thought of bringing it to the attention of the public was most unfortunate" (*Vashe obrashchenie, pozhalui, moglo byt' i iskrenno. No mysl'—dovesti o nem do svedeniia publiki—byla samaia neschastnaia*).[29]

The evident discomfort with the notion that the transformations of Gogol' and Tolstoy represented sincere and legitimate conversions speaks to the limited influence

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[28] Robert A. Maguire, "The Legacy of Criticism," in *Gogol from the Twentieth Century: Eleven Essays*, ed. Robert A. Maguire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 10.

[29] V. G. Belinskii, "Pis'mo k Gogoliu," in *N. V. Gogol' v russkoi kritike: Sbornik statei* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1953), 250. The connection between Tolstoy and Gogol was made years before the former ever suffered his crisis. In a remarkably prescient essay on *War and Peace*, the critic and literary historian Aleksandr Skabichevskii had warned of the possibility that Tolstoy would someday reject literature in favor of mysticism. The warning came in the context of a discussion of the relationship between Pierre Bezukhov and Platon Karataev in *War and Peace*. Karataev, argued Skabichevskii, might have functioned as a successful and even attractive personage in the novel had Tolstoy not insisted on "lifting him onto a pedestal [and] presenting him as some sort of exalted mouthpiece for folk wisdom" capable of inaugurating a spiritual rebirth in the hero. In contrast to the heights of realism that Tolstoy had attained in the rest of the novel, Pierre's spiritual rebirth struck Skabichevskii as "contrived, unnatural, and false." The only place that Tolstoy could have encountered "such miraculous transformations," he suggested, was in Gogol's letters. He closed his essay with a warning that Tolstoy might someday suffer the same fate as his predecessor: "We will confess openly that we are frightened for Count Tolstoy. We fear that one of the most powerful, bright, and attractive talents of our time will perish just as terribly as perished the talent of Gogol'. It is very possible that this will come to pass." Aleksandr Skabichevskii, "Graf Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi kak khudozhnik i myslitel'," in *Sochineniia A. Skabichevskogo v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 1., 611-669 (St. Petersburg: Obshchestvennaia pol'za, 1895), 669.

that the concept of conversion itself has had in the Russian cultural consciousness. While scholars of Western literature have long employed theories of religious conversion in their analyses, specialists in Russian literature have been reluctant to even use the term. There is a long-standing belief that conversion is a fundamentally Western, and more specifically Protestant, innovation, a conceptual framing of personal experience that lacks a clear analogue in the Russian tradition. The religious philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev alludes to this view in *Self-Knowledge* (Samopoznanie), his posthumously published collection of autobiographical reflections: "Conversion," he writes there, "plays a much larger role among Catholics and Protestants than it does among us. Western Christians make a production of (*ochen' razduvaiut*) conversion. Among us Russians it is less prominent and remains more in the depths."[30] As if to underscore this point, Berdiaev uses the Latin form of the word "conversion" rather than the Russian "*obrashchenie*."

At first glance, Berdiaev's claim seems surprising. After all, was not the conversion of Kievan Rus' in 988 a watershed moment in the formation of Russian national identity? In order to resolve understand Berdiaev's argument, it is useful to distinguish between two distinct meanings that are attached to the term "conversion" in the Western tradition, both of which coalesced in the fourth century. The first model is inexorably tied to Constantine the Great, whose baptism followed his famous vision on the eve of the Battle of Milvian in 312 A.D. In the Constantinian model, conversion is presented as a collective transformation, one that is essentially political in nature and frequently coercive. The account of the conversion of the Franks in the fifth century under Clovis I presented in Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks* typifies the

[30] Berdiaev, N. A., *Samopoznanie: Opyt filosofskoi avtobiografii* (Moscow: Kniga, 1991), 84.

Constantinian model. According to Gregory, Clovis was led to accept baptism by his wife Clotilda. He resisted her entreaties until the fifteenth year of his rule when, like Constantine before him, he appealed to Christ on the eve of a successful battle. Having vanquished his enemies, Clovis was prepared to accept baptism, but doubted that his subjects would follow him in embracing Christianity. As he explained to St. Remigius, the Bishop of Rheims, "I have listened to you willingly, holy father. There remains one obstacle. The people under my command will not agree to forsake their gods." To his surprise, his subjects were more than willing to follow him: "He arranged a meeting with his people, but God in his power had preceded him, and before he could say a word all those present shouted in unison: 'We will give up worshipping our mortal gods, pious King, and we are prepared to follow the immortal God about whom Remigius preaches.'" Gregory's account of the baptism of the Franks explicitly invokes Clovis' Roman predecessor: "Like some new Constantine he stepped forward to the baptismal pool, ready to wash away the sores of his old leprosy and to be cleansed in flowing water from the sordid stains which he had borne so long."[31] *The History of the Franks* suggests that Clovis' baptism did not lead to any substantial changes in his conduct or conception of morality:

> As soon as all three [rival kings] were slain, Clovis took over their kingdom and their treasure. In the same way he encompassed the death of many other kings and blood-relations of his whom he had suspected of conspiring against his kingdom. By doing this he spread his dominion over the whole of Gaul. One day when he had called a general assembly of his subjects, he is said to have made the following remark about the relatives whom he had destroyed: 'How sad a thing it is that I live among strangers like some solitary pilgrim, and that I have none of my own relations left to help me when disaster threatens.' He said this not because he grieved for

[31] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin, 1974), 143-144.

> their deaths, but because in his cunning way he hoped to find some relative still in the land of the living whom he could kill.[32]

While Clovis does not appear to have used violence to coerce his subjects into accepting Christianity, the same cannot be said of his eighth-century successor, Charlemagne, who massacred thousands of Saxon captives in 782 during a long and ultimately successful campaign to Christianize his rivals and expand his domain. From these examples, it can be seen that this model of conversion was more firmly rooted in the brutal politics of medieval expansionism than in the trials and travails of spiritual experience.

At the same time that the Constantinian model was taking shape, there arose a second discursive tradition, one that presented conversion not merely as a politically motivated shift in religious affiliation, but rather as a radical personal transformation that takes place on the level of the individual believer. This tradition began with the account of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus recorded in the Book of Acts and was continued in the pre-Nicene era in apocryphal texts that described the conversions of characters from the gospels—the fourth-century *Gospel of Nicodemus*, for example, included accounts of the conversions of both Pontius Pilate and Longinus, the Roman centurion who was said to have pierced Jesus' side—as well as in philosophical dialogues that were composed with a clearly polemical goal in mind: Justin Martyr's second-century *Dialogue with Trypho* included rhetorical attacks on his Platonist and Jewish opponents; Arnobius of Sicca, who wrote *Seven Books Against the Heathens* during the reign of Diocletian in the late third and early fourth centuries, employed the example of his own conversion in his

[32] Ibid., 157-158.

long-raging battle against his pagan former coreligionists.[33] The most important conversion narrative to emerge in late antiquity, however, was undoubtedly Augustine's *Confessions,* which were completed around the turn of the fourth century. Augustine describes his own conversion as an instantaneous transformative moment that followed years of doubt, spiritual longing, intellectual exploration, and struggles with sexual temptations. Although Augustine was far from the first person to leave a written record of his conversion, he *was* the first to present it in the form of a fully developed spiritual autobiography, one that not only provides a vivid and fully individuated self-portrait, but also includes extended meditations on the nature of the self and the role that memory plays in its construction. He can thus be seen as the progenitor of the textual tradition that, as we will argue in the second chapter of this study, Tolstoy ultimately embraces in his own *Confession*.

In the West, the Augustinian model of conversion largely receded with the onset of the Middle Ages. This was generally a time of stasis in the development of the conversion narrative tradition, a period during which a handful of themes were repeated in theological treatises without substantial development.[34] The situation only began to

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[33] For more on Justin Martyr and Arnobius, see A. D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 254-271.

[34] During this period the concept of conversion as a model of individual spiritual experience survived within the context of early Catholic monasticism, although there were substantial changes. Since the vast majority of medieval monks had been born into the Christian faith, they presented their entrance into monastic life, not their baptism, as the beginning of conversion. This gave rise to an understanding of conversion that placed far greater emphasis on its durative properties than its punctual properties. The Rule of St. Benedict, which was written in the middle of the sixth century and which borrowed heavily from the earlier Rule of St. Augustine, for example, treats conversion not as a single moment, but as an ongoing process. Indeed, continual conversion (*conversatio*), or turning towards God, is the express goal of monastic life; the word itself is synonymous with "the monastic life" (*conversatio morum*). As Leonard Hinsley explains, in the Benedictine paradigm conversion is not a change in religion. Rather, "[T]he ideal of

change around the 1100s against the backdrop of a broader social and intellectual transformation that has been described as the "Renaissance of the twelfth century." During this period, increasing contacts between Christians and representatives of Judaism and Islam gave rise to several important developments. As Ryan Szpiech notes, twelfth-century theological treatises on conversion frequently made reference to their authors' personal experience. Szpiech argues that this shift reflected a broadening conception of textual authority, which was no longer restricted to scriptural sources.[35] Karl Morrison envisions the transformation of the concept of conversion as something of a return: "[T]welfth-century writers were the first since Antiquity to have a vocabulary with which to speak about the inner life with great refinement. Linguistic tools for investigating the enigma of soul and mind were among the casualties of the fall of Rome. Beginning around the middle of the eleventh century, they were recovered and developed."[36] Another area where we can see twelfth-century writers returning to the traditions of late antiquity concerns the range of texts that could be used to discuss the phenomenon. Where early medieval treatments were almost always presented in the form of theological treatises, from the twelfth century on writers began to embrace autobiographical and even

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conversion in the Middle Ages had more to do with the establishment of a setting that disposed the Christian to a deeper life in Christ, which in turn would bring about the interior conversion of the individual. To convert to Christ involved not only receiving the sacrament of baptism, or learning the Lord's Prayer or the Creed by heart but also knowing the love of Christ and living by his law of love. This interior conversion demands repentance, true belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the establishment of a personal relationship with Christ. It entails a 'new life in Christ,' which implies a process of growth in holiness." Leonard Hinsley, "Monastic Conversion: The Case of Margaret Ebner, in *Varieties of Conversion in the Middle Ages*, ed. James Muldoon (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997.)

[35] Ryan Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 61.

[36] Karl Morrison, *Understanding Conversion* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), 8.

fictional forms in order to portray conversions. The return to an explicitly Augustinian biographical form began in the eleventh century with the publication of the German monk Othloh's *Liber de tentationibus*, a clear imitation of the *Confessions*, and continued into the twelfth century with Guibert de Nogent's *De Vita Sua*, a work that has been described as the first medieval autobiography to trace its author's life all the way from childhood to the present.[37] The autobiographical turn—or return—in twelfth-century religious writings opened the door for the emergence of self-consciously fictional representations of conversion. As Szpiech writes, "The step from confessional self to fictional hero in polemical writing is a small one to take."[38] For evidence of this transition we might look, for example, to "The Second Nun's Tale" ("Þe Seconde Nonnes Tale") from Chaucer's fourteenth-century *Canterbury Tales*. Although Chaucer's plot and themes are almost entirely drawn from hagiographical and, to a lesser extent, scriptural, sources, the conversion and martyrdom of the protagonist, Valerian, which is related in the form of a narrative poem, is clearly presented as a fictional text.

The next major development in the evolution of the Western conception of conversion came about as the result of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. This did not, however, happen immediately. The so-called "magisterial reformers"—Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Huldrych Zwingli—made conscious efforts to minimize their status as converts. Their goal was to position themselves as true Christians who had not

[37] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23.

[38] Szpiech, 216.

abandoned the Church, but rather had been abandoned by it.[39] It was the Puritans, who saw their goal as "reforming the Reformation," who were most responsible for the creation of what we might refer to as the "modern conversion narrative." One of the earliest Puritan conversion narratives, *The Burthen of a Loaden Conscience*, was written by the English Puritan Richard Kilby in 1608. Although Kilby's work did not present a comprehensive autobiographical account, it included numerous references to the author's own spiritual experience. In Kilby's writings, we find the first evidence of the emergence of the experiential model that is central to the modern conception of conversion: internal crisis is followed by an intense period of intellectual and spiritual searching that continues until the moment of epiphany.[40] Kilby's account provided a model that would be repeated in innumerable Puritan and Quaker writings from the 1640s on. The impetus for the explosion in published conversion narratives in England and the North American colonies during this period was largely institutional in nature: Around this time Puritan pastors began to require those who wished to join their congregations to give public testimony explaining how they came to experience divine revelation. The inevitable result of this policy was the proliferation of highly formulaic accounts of religious conversion. As Hindmarsh notes, even when individual accounts differed from the prescribed model, their authors frequently made note of this variance, thus providing negative proof of the model's authority. The basic elements of the seventeenth-century Protestant conversion narrative have survived to the present day with only minimal alterations. When we discuss the conversion narratives of modern American political

[39] As Hindmarsh notes, Luther's celebrated account of his "tower experience" was not widely publicized, but rather was snuck into the prologue of the 1545 Latin edition of his works (26-27).

[40] Ibid., 40-41.

figures like George W. Bush and Ben Carson, we are dealing with a narrative structure that is inseparably connected to this tradition.

If we turn now to the Slavic context, we find that while the Constantinian paradigm of conversion is certainly an important discursive presence in the Russian cultural consciousness, the Augustinian conception of conversion as a radical spiritual and ideological transformation that takes place on the level of the individual, a model of experience that would prove to have such profound impact on the development of the Western mentality, is largely absent. The accounts of the baptisms of two tenth-century pagan leaders that we find in the twelfth-century *Primary Chronicle* (Povest' vremennykh let) place far more emphasis on the *political* transformation of the Slavic people as a whole than on the *spiritual* transformations of individual believers. According to the *Primary Chronicle*, the first Russian to accept baptism was Ol'ga, a powerful ruler who is the subject of two distinct accounts in the text. The first account, which is known as "The Revenge of Ol'ga" (*Mest' Ol'gi*), portrays the princess as a bloodthirsty and calculating pagan leader, a woman whose lust for vengeance is matched only by her cleverness and capacity for deceit. The second account, which describes Ol'ga's baptism, largely mirrors this portrayal. Ol'ga's conversion to Christianity comes as the result of a marriage proposal issued by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII. Upon receiving the proposal, the princess points out that she would have to be baptized in order to marry Constantine, and sets off to Greece to receive instruction in the Christian faith. When it comes time to receive her baptism, Ol'ga asks Constantine to personally perform the ceremony. Following her conversion, the Emperor once more asks for her hand in marriage, but Ol'ga surprises him by refusing the proposal, citing her new faith's

prohibition of incest as justification: "How can you marry me, after yourself baptizing me and calling me your daughter? For among Christians that is unlawful, as you yourself must know." The Emperor admits that he has been "outwitted," and sends her back to Kiev laden with riches.[41] While this episode describes Ol'ga's adoption of a new religion, and thus technically qualifies as a conversion, it is not presented as the sort of dramatic personal transformation that we find in the Augustinian tradition. The Ol'ga of the revenge episode and the baptized Ol'ga are far more similar than they are different: Both employ clever tricks and the prospect of marriage to extract earthly advantages.

The account of the baptism of Ol'ga's grandson Vladimir follows a similar pattern: the transition is better described in terms of Christianization in the Constantinian sense than as the sort of radical personal transformation that is central to the Augustinian conception of conversion. The *Primary Chronicle* portrays the prince's decision to embrace Christianity as the result of a fundamentally political calculation—i.e. as the result of his desire to find a religion that would accord with his subjects' cultural and aesthetic inclinations—rather than as the result of an individual spiritual quest. Moreover, the text provides little indication that Vladimir's baptism is associated with any substantial changes in his conduct. While he ceases erecting idols to the pagan gods and begins to build churches, he does not abandon his warlike ways, but rather continues to prosecute his long-standing war against the Pechenegs, and launches a campaign against the Croats. The only indication that Vladimir's newfound faith has a meaningful influence on his policies concerns his indecision on how to respond to a wave of crime that strikes his realm in 996. Vladimir hesitates to punish bandits because he "fear[s] the

[41] Samuel Hazard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, ed. and trans., *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text* (Cambridge: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953), 82.

sin entailed." Ironically, the *Chronicle* suggests that it is his bishops who manage to convince him to abandon the one policy that appears to have any connection to the Christian Gospel by arguing that, "he was appointed of God for the chastisement of malefaction […] so that it was entirely fitting for him to punish a robber condignly." Vladimir's acceptance of this advice is not presented as a break with his past, but rather as the continuation of pre-Christian legal practices: "Thus Vladimir lived according to the prescriptions of his father and grandfather." [42] And where the element of personal transformation and spiritual questing that is essential to the Augustinian conception of conversion is only dimly present in the expository account of Vladimir's personal decision to accept baptism, it is completely absent in the description of the Christianization of his subjects. The *Chronicle* leaves absolutely no doubt that the baptism of the population of Kievan Rus' was the result of a coercive mandate: "Vladimir sent heralds throughout the whole city to proclaim that if any inhabitants, rich or poor, did not betake himself to the river, he would risk the Prince's displeasure."[43]

In the Western context, as we have seen, evolutionary leaps in the development of the Augustinian tradition occurred during periods marked by a heightened interest in the individual. In Russia, this interest appeared far later, and in a far weaker form. As Likhachev notes in his study *Man in the Literature of Ancient Rus'* (Chelovek v literature drevnei Rusi), "In Russian history […] there is one strange and perplexing property. Strong characters and vivid details of these strong characters only appear in its presentation from the sixteenth century" (*V russkoi istorii* [...] *est' odno strannoe i*

[42] Ibid., 122.

[43] Ibid., 116.

vyzyvaiushchee nedoumenie obstoiatel'stvo. Sil'nye kharaktery i iarkie kharakteristiki etikh sil'nykh kharakterov voznikaiut tol'ko s XVI v.).[44] Indeed, it was only in the sixteenth, and especially seventeenth, centuries that what Likhachev refers to as "the discovery of character" challenged the idealized and static image of the individual that had dominated earlier texts. The seventeenth century witnessed the composition of several important texts that presented more realistic characters that were capable of change. *The Life of the Archpriest Avvakum, Written by He Himself* (Zhitie protopopa Avvakuma, im samym napisannoe) adapted hagiographical patterns for the purpose of autobiographical exposition, furnishing the first full-fledged spiritual autobiography in the history of Russian literature. This period also witnessed the production of a handful of texts that not only featured realistic characters but also plots that described protagonists' journeys from sin to redemption, such as "The Tale of Savva Grudtsyn" (*Povest' o Savve Grudtsyne*) and "The Tale of Woe-Misfortune" (*Povest' o Gore–Zlochastii*). It is important to note, however, that these texts did not signal the emergence of the spiritual autobiography or the conversion narrative as prominent genres in Russian literature. It is telling in this respect to compare Avvakum's *Life* with John Bunyan's spiritual autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, which is considered a classic exemplar of the seventeenth-century Protestant tradition. While both works were written at roughly the same time—the former in approximately 1672-1673 and the latter in 1666—their status within their respective religious and literary traditions could not have been more different. Avvakum's *Life* was a completely novel development in the Russian literature: it was the first, and for a considerable period of time only, full-fledged

[44] D.S. Likhachev, *Chelovek v literature drevnei Rusi* (Moscow: Nauka, 1970), 6.

spiritual autobiography to be written in Russian.[45] Bunyan's spiritual autobiography was, in contrast, the product of a firmly entrenched literary tradition comprising thousands of individual works.

Ultimately, the failure of the conversion narrative to acquire salience in the Russian context can be seen as the result of the factors that influenced the textual representation of religious conflict in Russia and the West. As we have seen, the emergence of the conversion narrative as a relevant model for describing individual spiritual quests only occurred in conditions marked by a substantial degree of religious and ideological mobility: The Protestant Reformation allowed for individuals to change their denominational affiliation; these shifts in denominational affiliation led in turn to the emergence of the conversion narrative as a salient model for broader, and not always explicitly religious, transformations on the level of individual consciousness. In the Russian historical context, however, religious mobility was severely restricted. Where the members of early Protestant sects made a conscious decision to adopt a new faith, the vast majority of the Russian Orthodox Church's members had been born into the faith, and were denied a meaningful opportunity to explore alternative religious affiliations.[46] Until the October Manifesto of 1905, which recognized freedom of conscience as a civil right, shifts in institutional religious affiliation were severely limited. Conversion was a

[45] This is not to say, of course, that Avvakum's *Life* was *sui generis*, but rather to draw attention to the fact that its sources were to be found in the Russian hagiographical tradition rather than in any autobiographical tradition.

[46] This point should not be overstated, as there were concerted efforts to convert non-Christian and non-Orthodox residents of the empire throughout its history. These efforts, however, tended to occur on the geographical peripheries of the empire, and had only a limited impact on the broader development of the cultural consciousness. For an insightful discussion of such efforts between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, see Michael Khodarkovsky, "'Not by Word Alone': Missionary Policies and Religious Conversion in Early Modern Russia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38 (1996).

one-way street, synonymous with baptism into the Orthodox Church: One could become Orthodox, but converting from Orthodoxy to another religion was prohibited by law. And while religious conflicts certainly occurred in the Russian context, two factors prevented these conflicts from giving rise to the sort of textual tradition that coalesced as a result of the Protestant Reformation. First, Russian schismatics and sectarians, like the first-generation Protestant reformers, viewed themselves as the defenders of the historical faith that had been betrayed by the corrupt official Church; they did not view themselves as having found a new religion, but rather as having preserved the old one. Second, where the Protestant Reformation was guided by highly educated clergymen, Russian schismatic and sectarian movements were associated with illiterate peasants who were incapable of creating a textual tradition to account for their religious experience. Perhaps as a result of these historical and institutional factors, the Russian language lacks a clear equivalent for the English concept of conversion. The terms that are most frequently used to describe what in the West would be referred to as a conversion—*priniatie khristianstva* or *kreshchenie*, for example—are primary associated with joining the Orthodox Church. Although the word *obrashchenie* is sometimes used to describe conversions like the one Tolstoy claimed to have undergone, its close association with pagan or magical transformations (i.e. from man to wolf or some other animal) makes it an awkward descriptor for such transformations, despite its etymological similarities to the term "conversion" (the Latin *convertere* and the proto-Slavic *obratiti* suggest both a turning towards the divine presence and a transformation).

Given the absence of a strong Russian conversion narrative tradition, it is hardly surprising to observe that the treatments of Tolstoy's transformation that we find in

scholarly and biographical treatments of the writer have frequently betrayed a remarkably unsophisticated grasp of the vast body of research that exists on the phenomenon of conversion itself. A somewhat extreme, but nonetheless representative, example of this tendency can be found in A.N. Wilson's 1988 biography of Tolstoy. Wilson makes no attempt to hide his disdain for Tolstoy's late period, which he sees as the outgrowth of a regrettable and distinctly Russian tendency by which writers are tempted to refashion themselves as prophets, a phenomenon that he argues strikes Western readers as "embarrassing or a bit of a bore."[47] What is more significant than Wilson's appraisal itself, which, one might argue, appears to be little more than a projection of his own biases onto an entire hemisphere of readers, is the justification that he offers in the subsequent paragraph. According to Wilson:

> The lives of those who have been transformed by the ethics of the Gospel are, for the most part, those of a profoundly mystical character—figures who believe in some way or another that they are encountering not just a set of extraordinary ethical commands, but the presence of Jesus himself. In lives as various as Francis of Assisi, John Wesley or General Booth of the Salvation Army, for example, this seems to be an inextricable part of the experience. Tolstoy never had an encounter with Jesus, nor, as far as is recorded, did he ever believe that he had met with Jesus in prayer or had any of the mystical experiences of others who have decided that they must live as Jesus taught. Tolstoy's decision to live in this way seems to have been purely idiosyncratic and arbitrary.[48]

[47] A.N. Wilson, *Tolstoy* (New York: Norton, 1988), 300. Over twenty years after the publication of his biography, Wilson would revise his views. In a brief piece published on slate.com in 2008, he distanced himself from the claim that he had made in his biography that, "the more evidence we possess about Tolstoy, the less he makes sense": "I wrote those words more than 20 years ago, and the intervening years have changed my view. Tolstoy does now make very clear sense to me. The anniversary [of his death] gives us the opportunity to realize that there are not two Tolstoys, the novelist and the sectarian anarchist. There was one. *War and Peace* is not just a great national and family saga, it is a novel about personal and national regeneration. He was one of history's great truth-tellers, the first of the great dissidents, and their patron saint." (A.N. Wilson, "Leo Tolstoy, Russia's Thunderous Prophet: The great writer's life and work, 100 years on," http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2010/11/leo_tolstoy_russias_ thunderous_ prophet.html, accessed February 12, 2016.)

[48] Wilson, *Tolstoy*, 301.

Although Wilson hedges his claim with the limiting clause "for the most part," the basic thrust of his argument is clear enough: "true" conversions follow the Pauline model of sudden mystical revelation; since Tolstoy never experienced such a revelation, his claims to have undergone a conversion experience should be treated with skepticism.

Wilson is hardly alone in adopting this sort of approach: With very few exceptions, those who have criticized Tolstoy's claims to have undergone a conversion experience have tended to evaluate these claims in reference to an unstated normative assumption about what a "true" conversion ought to look like. The flaw in this approach is that the critics who have embraced it are almost always ignorant of the vast empirical and theoretical literature on religious conversion, a literature that stresses the diversity of the phenomenon at every step. As we shall see, scholars of religious conversion have consistently and convincingly argued that the Pauline model is only one of many models of conversion, and that it may not even be the most common one. Indeed, even a cursory review of the vast theoretical and empirical literature on the conversion leads to the conclusion that it is impossible to describe any one model as representing "true conversion."

One of the central claims on which the present study is based is that any discussion of Tolstoy's depiction of radical personal transformation must take into account the scholarly literature on conversion. To this end, I will now provide a brief history of the field of conversion studies from its inception in the late nineteenth century to the present day.

A Brief History of Conversion Studies

Perhaps the most striking feature of conversion studies as a whole is its interdisciplinary orientation. Since the late 1800s, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, theologians, and historians have all weighed in on the question of conversion and have often reached vastly differing conclusions. Due to the breadth and diversity of the field, a comprehensive treatment of the various approaches that have been adopted will not be possible within the scope of the present study. Rather, we will limit ourselves to a broad overview of three of the most significant approaches to the phenomenon of religious conversion in twentieth-century scholarship: psychological, sociological, and holistic.

Early psychological approaches: The Clark School and William James

The advent of modern conversion studies is typically identified with a broader movement in early American psychology that sought to apply scientific, rather than theological, methods to the study of religion. The leading figures in the early "psychology of religion" movement were believers themselves, and they made no attempt to hide their associations with liberalizing movements within American Protestantism. As a result, early studies of conversion were often "scientific" in name only: the writings of the leading figures in the field frequently failed to draw a complete distinction between proselytizing and objective analysis, betrayed a preference for mellifluous turns of phrase over detached observation, and employed experimental designs and analytical techniques that fell far short of the level of rigor that modern social scientists would expect.

The birth of the "psychology of religion" movement is tied to the Clark school, a group of scholars that included a number of prominent psychologists who all taught or studied at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts.[49] Despite their numerous points of contention, the members of the Clark school were united by the conviction that conversion is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather a visible manifestation of a larger structure of religious experience, and that the rigorous study of conversion thus has the potential to allow us to draw deeper conclusions about the nature of religious experience itself.

The founder of the Clark school was G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924), who developed what is known as the *sexual theory of conversion*, which held that religious conversion generally occurs during adolescence and that it signals the subject's acceptance of a sexual ethic based on altruistic Christian love rather than animalistic lust. This approach was highly influenced by the since-debunked theories of embryonic development pioneered by the German evolutionary biologist Ernst Haeckel. Haeckel is best known for his theory of recapitulation, which held that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny;" i.e. that the development of each individual member of a species passes through all the evolutionary stages of the species itself. By experiencing a conversion during the period of sexual awakening, Hall maintained, the individual believer recapitulates the earlier cultural evolution that he associated with the advent of Christian ethics.[50]

Although Hall played a vital role in establishing the psychology of religion as a legitimate academic enterprise by founding several journals (the most important of which

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[49] For an overview of the Clark School, see Hendrika Vande Kemp, "G. Stanley Hall and the Clark School of Religious Psychology," *American Psychologist* 47 (1992): 290-298.
[50] See: H. Newton Malony, "G. Stanley Hall's Theory of Conversion," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 3 (1984): 2-8.

was the *Journal of Religious Psychology*), his theories themselves proved to have a limited impact on subsequent developments.[51] Far more influential was the work of his students James Henry Leuba (1867-1946) and Edwin Diller Starbuck (1866-1947), who attempted to add a measure of methodological rigor to their mentor's sweeping theoretical statements. Leuba's most important contribution to the psychology of conversion came in the form of a lengthy article in *The American Journal of Psychology* entitled "A Study in the Psychology of Religious Phenomena," which was published in 1896.[52] The article presents a detailed analysis of several written accounts of conversion experiences. For Leuba, conversion denotes an act of "self-surrender" that results from the subject's realization of his or her irredeemably sinful nature. He describes the moment of conversion itself as an "ecstatic condition [that] gives to the convert the illusion that he perceives unutterable, divine truths; that the mysteries of life have become lucid."[53] While Leuba followed Hall in presenting conversion as "a physiological as well as a psychic step in the evolution of man," he downplayed the sexual aspect of the phenomenon. Furthermore, by choosing subjects who had experienced conversion in early adulthood and middle age, he implicitly challenged his mentor's claims that conversion is the product of the "*Sturm und Drang*" of adolescence. Starbuck was the author of the most influential work to emerge out of the Clark school: *The Psychology of*

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[51] According to Vande Kemp, the central theories expressed in Hall's magnum opus, a two-volume work entitled *Adolescence* that was only published in 1905, were already considered to be outdated by 1900. She notes that, "It is possible to read a current overview of the conversion literature without mention of Hall." Vande Kemp, 295.

[52] James H. Leuba, "A Study in the Psychology of Religious Phenomena," *The American Journal of Psychology* 7 (1896): 309-385.

[53] Ibid., 352.

Religion: An Empirical Study of the Growth of Religious Consciousness. Published in 1899, the study centered on the statistical analysis of a large sample of questionnaires. Starbuck's two most significant findings were: 1) that conversion is generally "a process of struggling away from sin, rather than of striving towards righteousness"[54] and 2) that conversion is "a distinctly adolescent phenomenon" that occurs almost exclusively between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five.[55] Starbuck thus followed Leuba's presentation of conversion as a crisis brought about by an obsession with sin while deferring to Hall in framing it as a product of adolescence, without, however, adopting his teacher's emphasis on sexuality.

One of the most serious limitations of the Clark school's approach stemmed from its severely restricted frame of reference. The members of the Clark school approached conversion almost entirely within the framework of American Protestant theology. Hall was by far the most explicit in this regard, arguing that conversion "is chiefly a Puritan and more specifically a New England orthodox Congregationalist idea."[56] While other members of the Clark school were less dogmatic on this point—Leuba, for example, conceded that the concept of a "new birth" predates Christianity[57]—there can be no doubt that they all approached the phenomenon through the discursive framework of contemporary American Protestant revivalism. Since "conversion" in this tradition

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[54] Edwin Diller Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Study of the Growth of Religious Consciousness* (London: Walter Scott Ltd., 1900), 64.

[55] Ibid., 28.

[56] G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology*, Vol. 2 281 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905), 280.

[57] Leuba, 313.

generally refers to a deepening of faith in an individual who is already nominally a member of a given religious community, the members of the Clark school generally avoided discussion of other, perhaps more common, usages of the term. Their conceptual framework was thus ill suited for the discussion of a change between two distinct religious traditions (e.g. a Christian who converts to Buddhism or vice versa), much less a more radical transition from complete unbelief or atheism to religiosity.

As a result of this restricted frame of reference and other methodological shortcomings, the work of the Clark school is generally seen as something of a false start in conversion studies. With the possible exception of Starbuck's study, the contributions of the Clark school are today largely seen as historical footnotes, and are rarely cited in recent scholarship on religious conversion.[58] The chief significance of the movement was that it paved the way for William James' groundbreaking work *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which was originally presented as a series of twenty lectures at the University of Edinburgh in 1901 and 1902.[59] The publication of the lectures is widely seen as a watershed moment in the development of conversion studies: One scholar has even gone so far as to claim that "virtually everything written since that time is little more than a gloss on James' penetrating analysis of the conversion experience."[60]

James' relationship to the Clark school was by no means simple. On the one hand, he clearly agreed with their contention that religious experience is amenable to

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[58] Vande Kemp, 295.

[59] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience, A Study in Human Nature, Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered At Edinburgh in 1901-1902* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905).

[60] Donald Capps, "Sin, Narcissism, and the Changing Face of Conversion," *Journal of Religion and Health* 29 (1990), 233.

psychological interpretation, and he peppered his lectures with approving references to Starbuck's work and quotations from his questionnaires. On the other hand, he was ambivalent towards Starbuck's claim that conversion is an essentially adolescent phenomenon, and he rejected Hall's sexual theory outright.[61] Moreover, James implicitly rejected the Clark school's contention that conversion provides a window into the nature of religious experience as such. Rather, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* he suggests that there are two fundamental modes of religious consciousness, which he refers to as "the religion of healthy-mindedness" and the religion of "sick souls," and that only the second mode is conducive to conversion.

In James' lexicon, healthy-mindedness is synonymous with optimism. The healthy-minded man sees himself as fundamentally at home in the universe; his "temperament is organically weighted on the side of cheer and fatally forbidden to linger […] over the darker aspects of the universe."[62] In its most extreme form, a healthy-minded outlook can lead to the complete denial of the existence of evil itself, to a foolish, Candidian insistence that "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds." More typically, however, healthy-minded people are willing to acknowledge evil, but do not believe that it prevents them from finding happiness or meaning in life. James refers to

[61] See James, 12: "Even were the asserted synchrony [of adolescence and religious awakening] unrestrictedly true as a fact (which it is not), it is not only the sexual life, but the entire higher mental life which awakens during adolescence. One might then as well set up the thesis that the interest in mechanics, physics, chemistry, logic, philosophy, and sociology, which springs up during adolescent years along with that in poetry and religion, is also a perversion of the sexual instinct—but that would be too absurd. Moreover, if the argument from synchrony is to decide, what is to be done with the fact that the religious age *par excellence* would seem to be old age, when the uproar of the sexual life is past?"

[62] Ibid., 82.

such people as the "once-born;" they are those who instinctively accept the world and their place in it, and who thus have no need for conversion.[63]

Where the healthy-minded man sometimes "seem[s] to have started life with a bottle or two of champagne inscribed to [his] credit," the same cannot be said of his antipode, the "sick soul."[64] Far from denying the existence of evil, the sick soul believes that, "the evil aspects of our life are of its very essence, and that the world's meaning most comes home to us when we lay them most to heart."[65] Like the healthy-minded, sick souls occupy a continuum. In mild cases, such spiritual sickness presents itself through a dull sensation of melancholy, a gnawing sense of estrangement, and an "incapacity for joyous feeling."[66] In extreme cases, this elemental pessimism can lead to crisis, to a state of complete paralysis that James refers to as "anhedonia," a neologism formed from the root "analgesic" that was coined by the French psychologist Théodule-Armand Ribot.[67] Those who suffer from anhedonia are constitutionally incapable of finding meaning in a world ruled by death: "All natural goods perish. Riches take wings; fame is a breath; love is a cheat; youth and health and pleasure vanish. Can things whose end is always dust and disappointment be the real goods which our souls require? Back of everything is the great specter of universal death, the all-encompassing blackness."[68] According to James, there

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[63] The term "once-born" is borrowed from the writings of Cardinal John Newman. See Mary L. Coolidge, "Some Vicissitudes of the Once-Born and Twice-Born Man," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 11 (1950), 75.

[64] James, 133.

[65] Ibid., 128.

[66] Ibid., 145.

[67] Ibid., 143.

[68] Ibid., 136.

are only two ways to overcome such a condition: suicide and conversion. To undergo conversion, to become "twice-born," requires the sufferer to discover a perceived truth that allows him to find meaning in the face of death.

For James, the consummate twice-born sick souls were Tolstoy and John Bunyan, the author of the well-known seventeenth century allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*.[69] Both men, he argues, were confronted with a contradiction between two competing worldviews, one life-affirming, and the other life-negating. In his spiritual autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, Bunyan describes how he was torn for many years between two competing convictions about the afterlife. He alternated between believing that Christ's blood had secured his salvation and despairing that he had somehow "sold Christ," thereby forfeiting His sacrificial gift. For Tolstoy, the source of anguish was in the here and now, not in the life to come. As he struggled to finish *Anna Karenina*, he became logically convinced that there is no meaning in life that death will not erase, and that he should therefore commit suicide to spare himself from further suffering. And yet a vague inner voice insisted that he must actively participate in the life in time. For both men, the contradiction led to a full-blown crisis, which only ended when one vision managed to gain dominance over the other. Bunyan became convinced that he was indeed saved; Tolstoy came to believe that there is meaning in life that death will not destroy. It is on this basis that James arrives at his famous characterization of the conversion experience as "the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto

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[69] On Tolstoy, see ibid.,146-153; on Bunyan see 154-158.

divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities."[70]

James elaborates on the nature of this transformation in a two-part lecture entitled "Conversion" in which he attempts to distinguish between the normal oscillations between various senses of self and intellectual foci that we observe in everyday life and the radical transformation that conversion connotes:

> Our ordinary alterations of character, as we pass from one of our aims to another, are not commonly called transformations, because each of them is so rapidly succeeded by another in the reverse direction; but whenever one aim grows so stable as to expel definitively its previous rivals from the individual's life, we tend to speak of the phenomenon, and perhaps to wonder at it, as a 'transformation.'
>
> These alternations are the completest of the ways in which a self may be divided. A less complete way is the simultaneous coexistence of two or more different groups of aims, of which one practically holds the right of way and instigates activity, whilst the others are only pious wishes, and never practically come to anything. [...] Such fleeting aspirations are mere *velleitates*, whimsies. They exist on the remoter outskirts of the mind, and the real self of the man, the center of his energies, is occupied with an entirely different system. As life goes on, there is a constant change of our interests, and a consequent change of place in our systems of ideas, from more central to more peripheral, and from more peripheral to more central parts of consciousness. [...] Now there may be great oscillation in the emotional interest, and the hot places may shift before one almost as rapidly as the sparks that run through burnt-up paper. Then we have the wavering and divided self we heard so much of in the previous lecture. Or the focus of excitement and heat, the point of view from which the aim is taken, may come to lie permanently within a certain system; and then, if the change be a religious one, we call it a *conversion*, especially if it be by crisis, or sudden.[71]

This provides the basis for his second attempt to define conversion: "To say that a man is 'converted' means, in these terms, that religious ideas, previously peripheral in his

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[70] Ibid., 186.

[71] Ibid.,190-191.

consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual center of his energy."[72]

It is difficult to gauge the impact that James' lectures had on the subsequent development of conversion studies. While it is true that many scholars who have investigated the phenomenon of conversion since James have acknowledged the importance of his characterization of the experience, the idiosyncratic nature of his methodology made it difficult, if not impossible, for subsequent investigators to meaningfully apply his conclusions. As James E. Dittes argues, any attempt to extract "central propositions" from *The Varieties of Religious Experience* that would serve as the basis for an explicit transferable model will inevitably meet with failure. James consistently introduces concepts that appear to function as "tightly defined analytic categories," but these categories are almost always provisional in nature, employed to illuminate a single thought and then abandoned.[73] As a number of scholars have pointed out, while James is still held in high regard by contemporary experts, his writings failed to—or perhaps were not intended to—create a coherent school of religious psychology.[74]

And yet despite James' failure to produce a transferable framework for the analysis of religious experience as a whole or for religious conversion specifically, there can be no doubt that *The Varieties of Religious Experience* had an enormous influence on

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[72] Ibid., 192.

[73] James E. Dittes, "Beyond William James," in *Beyond the Classics? Essays in the Scientific Study of Religion*, ed. C. Y. Glock and P. H. Hammonds, 291-354 (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

[74] See Dittes. Jacob A. Belzen, "The *Varieties*, the Principles and the Psychology of Religion: Unremitting Inspiration from a Different Source," in *William James and* The Varieties of Religious Experience, ed. Jeremy Carrette (Milton Park: Routledge, 2005), 55, and Ralph W. Hood, "A Jamesian Look at Self and Self Loss in Mysticism," *Journal of Psychology of Religion* 1 (1992).

subsequent studies conducted by practitioners of psychology and other disciplines. While later scholars would take issue with many of his specific claims, James' fundamental conception of conversion as a discrete category of psychological experience that expresses itself in terms of a process of crisis and resolution, of division and unification, has informed virtually every major study of the phenomenon since his time. While his theory was undoubtedly influenced by contemporary Protestant theology, James succeeded in establishing conversion as a generalizable pattern of human experience that is rooted in individual psychology rather than in the dogma of any given religious tradition.

John Lofland and the Sociology of Conversion

By 1930, the psychology of religion movement had largely died out. Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi suggests that there were three reasons for the virtual extinction of what had once been considered a promising field of inquiry. First, leading scholars in the field failed to draw a distinction between scientific study and religious advocacy. Second, they had employed insufficiently rigorous methodologies in their studies, embracing a fundamentally subjective approach to scholarship that failed to withstand the challenges posed by rival methodologies that purported to be more objective and "scientific," such as behaviorism and psychoanalysis. Third, psychologists of religion failed to achieve a critical mass in academic departments or to groom protégés who would carry on their work.[75] While psychologists of later generations continued to produce studies on

[75] Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, "Psychology of Religion 1880-1930: The Rise and Fall of a Psychological Movement," in *Current Perspectives in the Psychology of Religion*, ed. H. Newton Malony (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977). See also: Orlo Strunk, "The present status of the psychology of religion," *The Journal of Bible and Religion* 25

conversion, they largely abandoned the sort of attempts to arrive at a comprehensive characterization of the experience that were characteristic of turn of the century religious psychology, tending to focus instead on more narrow attempts to determine the psychological characteristics that predispose an individual to experience a dramatic religious transformation.[76]

By the mid-1960s, there was a clear shift towards applying sociological methods of inquiry to the phenomenon of conversion.[77] The sociological approach differed from the earlier psychological approach in three key ways. First, where psychologists generally approached conversion in the context of the American mainstream Protestant tradition, sociologists tended to focus on marginalized social groups (i.e. "cults"). Second, where psychologists like Hall, Starbuck, and James saw conversion in terms of the psycho-spiritual development of the individual, sociologists conceived of the phenomenon primarily in terms of shifts in group allegiance and affiliation. Third, where early psychological studies presented conversion as a self-willed reaction to a psychological

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(1957) and W. Douglas, "Religion," in *Taboo Topics*, ed. N.L. Farberow (New York: Atherton Press, 1966).

[76] Lewis Rambo describes this approach as "microscopic," and opposes it to the "theoretical and global" approach characteristic of early American studies of conversion. Lewis Rambo, "The Psychology of Conversion," in *Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. H. Newton Malony and Samuel Southard (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1992), 159-160.

[77] This mirrored a broader trend in the scholarly analysis of religion. According to Neil C. Warren, "From 1950 to 1960, one hundred thirty articles reporting on empirical studies in the psychology and sociology of religion were published in the United States. Of these only some 30 percent were written by psychologists, while well over 50 percent were written by sociologists. Between 150 and 175 empirical studies in the psychology and sociology of religion were published between 1960 and 1970. Again, 25 to 35 percent were written by psychologists, and by far the majority were authored by sociologists." See Neil C. Warren, "Empirical Studies in the Psychology of Religion: An Assessment of the Period 1960-1970," in *Current Perspectives in the Psychology of Religion*, ed. H. Newton Malony (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 93.

crisis, sociologists placed a far greater emphasis on the role that missionaries play in actively inducing both crisis and conversion.

The leading figure in the new sociology of conversion was John Lofland, who authored or coauthored over forty articles on conversion and so-called "new religious movements." His groundbreaking study "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective," which was co-authored with Rodney Stark, and which focused on a messianic cult founded by a Korean immigrant based in a large city in the American West, typified the sociological approach.[78] Lofland and Stark argued that complete conversions can be described in terms of a model of successive stages, each of which brings the convert closer and closer to fully identifying with the cult. While staged models were not fundamentally new—Starbuck had suggested his own five-stage model—Lofland and Stark placed such models at the center of their framework. Specifically, they argued that conversion could be conceived in terms of seven successive steps. David Snow and Cynthia Philips summarize their argument as follows:

> [The Lofland-Stark] model suggests that "total" conversion, involving behavioral as well as verbal commitment, is a function of the accumulation of seven "necessary and constellationally sufficient conditions." Specifically, a person must (1) experience enduring and acutely felt "tensions," (2) within a "religious problem-solving perspective," (3) which results in self-designation as a "religious seeker." Additionally, the prospective convert must (4) encounter the movement or cult at a "turning point" in life, (5) form an "affective bond" with one or more believers, (6) "neutralize" or sever "extracult attachments," and (7) be exposed to "intensive interaction" with other converts in order to

[78] John Lofland and Rodney Stark, "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective." *American Sociological Review* 30 (1965): 862-75. Although the authors concealed the identity of the movement, its leader, and its headquarters, subsequent scholarship has left little doubt that the "cult" in question was the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church. See David A. Snow and Cynthia L. Philips, "The Lofland-Stark Conversion Model: A Critical Reassessment," *Social Problems* 27 (1980): 430.

> become an active and dependable adherent. The first three factors are classified as "predisposing." They hypothetically exist prior to contact with the group and function to render the individual susceptible to conversion once contact is established. The remaining four factors are regarded as 'situational' contingencies. They hypothetically lead to recruitment to one group rather than another, if any other, and to the adoption of the group's worldview.[79]

In a later article coauthored with Norman Skonovd, Lofland attempted to account for the marked variation in individual conversions within the seven-stage model by distinguishing between six distinct "motifs," each of which can be further classified according to five "major variations:"[80]

CHART 1
CONVERSION MOTIFS

Major Variations	Conversion Motifs					
	1. Intellectual	2. Mystical	3. Experimental	4. Affectional	5. Revivalist	6. Coercive
1. Degree of Social Pressure	low or none	none or little	low	medium	high	high
2. Temporal Duration	medium	short	long	long	short	long
3. Level of Affective Arousal	medium	high	low	medium	high	high
4. Affective Content	illumination	awe, love, fear	curiosity	affection	love (& fear)	fear (& love)
5. Belief-Participation Sequence	belief-participation	belief-participation	participation-belief	participation-belief	participation-belief	participation-belief

While sociologists in the second half of the twentieth century were primarily concerned with describing and classifying various manifestations of the conversion

[79] Ibid.

[80] John Lofland and Norman Skonovd, "Conversion Motifs," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20 (1981): 375.

experience among a diverse range of religious movements, there were also several significant attempts to arrive at a new definition of conversion. Richard Travisano's 1970 essay "Alternation and Conversion as Qualitatively Different Transformations" returned to a problem that was first raised by James: How are we to distinguish between true conversions and other, less dramatic forms of personal transformation? In his essay, Travisano opposes true conversions to mere "alternations." An alternation, he argues, represents a change that develops out of the subject's existing worldview, or "universe of discourse," without threatening the fundamental principles of that worldview. A man who becomes a father or a professor who is promoted to chairman of his department may experience difficulties in effecting a transition, but neither of them is required to assume a radically new conception of their selves or their place in society. Converts, on the other hand, effect "transitions to identities which are proscribed within [their] established universes of discourse, and which exist in universes of discourse that negate these formerly established ones." "In conversion," he writes, "a whole new world is entered, and the old world is transformed through reinterpretation. The father sees his bachelorhood as youthful fun; the convert sees this as debauchery […] The ideal typical conversion can be thought of as embracing of a negative identity. The person becomes something which was specifically prohibited."[81]

For the most part, however, broad theoretical investigations like Travisano's were the exception. More frequently, sociologists pushed the question of the definition of conversion to the periphery and focused on charting the ways in which various religious

[81] Richard Travisano, "Alternation and Conversion as Qualitatively Different Transformations," in *Social Psychology Through Symbolic Interaction*, ed. G.P Stone and H.A. Farberman (Waltham: Ginn-Blaisdell, 1970), 244.

movements understood the concept. In the 1970s, attempts to describe and classify various manifestations of conversion were applied to dizzying array of religious groups, ranging from Catholic charismatics[82], to UFO cultists[83], to the post-hippy "Jesus Movement."[84] While these studies produced a number of interesting conclusions, they tended to raise more questions than they answered. Is conversion a fundamentally religious phenomenon, or can the term be applied to other ideological or perspectival shifts? Is the convert's role primarily passive or active? Should conversion be seen in terms of individual transformation or shifts in broader social realities? To what extent are conclusions relating to a particular group applicable to other groups? The position that a given scholar takes on any of these contentious questions is heavily dependent on the specific group or groups that he studies and his preexisting conception of what qualifies as a conversion.

Lewis Rambo's Holistic Approach

By the 1980s, the failure to arrive at coherent and widely accepted answers to the sorts of fundamental questions discussed above led some to question the value of

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[82] Frances R. Westley, "Searching for Surrender: A Catholic Charismatic Renewal Group's Attempt to Become Glossolalic," in *Conversion Careers,* ed. James T. Richardson, 113-128 (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977).

[83] Robert W. Balch and David Taylor, "Seekers and Saucers: The Role of the Cultic Milieu in Joining a UFO Cult," in *Conversion Careers,* ed. James T. Richardson, 43-64 (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977).

[84] Robert B. Simmonds, "Conversion or Addiction: Consequences of Joining a Jesus Movement Group," in *Conversion Careers,* ed. James T. Richardson, 113-128 (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977).

unidisciplinary approaches to conversion and the possibility of formulating models that would account for all of the diverse phenomena that are grouped under the conceptual framework of conversion. This in turn led to a shift towards more broadly holistic approaches. The leading figure in this effort has been Lewis Rambo, a professor of religious psychology at the University of Chicago who is widely considered to be one of the foremost living scholars of religious conversion. Rambo's role is that of a bibliographer and a synthesizer: His work attempts to bridge disciplinary divides by incorporating earlier approaches into a generalizable conceptual framework. In his 1993 book *Understanding Religious Conversion*, Rambo argues that it is not possible to produce a single, authoritative definition of conversion that will hold true for all religious movements: "There are many different experiences of salvation and no one way is mandatory. Stated starkly, conversion is what a faith group says it is."[85]

Rambo's most important contribution to the debate on the nature of religious conversion consists in his insistence that conversion rarely occurs through a single transformative moment. While not denying the possibility of sudden conversions, he argues that we are better served by speaking of the "conversion process" than of the "conversion event." In addition, Rambo has offered his own staged model of conversion, which, like Lofland and Stark's model, includes seven steps. However, where the Lofland and Stark model posits a series of seven stages that must be traversed in order to achieve "true" conversion, Rambo's model is broader and less restrictive. He presents it as an organizational principle that is useful for conceptualizing the general progression of conversions, but rejects the notion that such a schema can serve as a "universal or

[85] Lewis Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), xiv.

invariant tool" that would allow us to pass normative judgments on the validity of a given conversion. Thus, he freely admits the possibility that the movement from one stage to the next may not be linear or straightforward. Rambo's seven stages are:

> 1) *Context*: The historical and cultural setting in which a conversion takes place, the "overall matrix in which the force field of people, events, experiences, and institutions operate on conversion." Context determines the nature of the conversion, but converts themselves also have the potential to alter the context.[86]
>
> 2) *Crisis*: The period during which the subject becomes convinced that his current "fundamental orientation to life" is inadequate. The crisis can result from internal psychological factors or it can be initiated by contact with an advocate of an opposing worldview. It can occur suddenly and without warning, but more often it is cumulative.[87]
>
> 3) *Quest*: A period of intensified searching for "meaning and purpose in life"; "Quest is an ongoing process, but one that will greatly intensify during times of crisis."[88]
>
> 4) *Encounter*: The point at which the subject comes into contact with a representative or advocate of an alternative worldview, often a missionary.[89]
>
> 5) *Interaction*: The stage during which subjects "learn more about the teachings, life-style and expectations of the group, and are provided with opportunities, both

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[86] Ibid., 20-43.

[87] Ibid., 44-55.

[88] Ibid., 56-65.

[89] Ibid., 87-101

formal and informal, to become more fully incorporated into it." The duration of this stage varies widely depending on the nature and doctrines of the faith group in question.[90]

6) *Commitment*: This is "the fulcrum of the change process." "Following a period of intensive interaction, the potential convert faces the prospect, the choice, of commitment […] A specific turning point or decision is often required and/or experienced, and this commitment decision is often dramatized and commemorated—sealed with a public demonstration of the convert's choice."[91]

7) *Consequences*: The broad range of psychological, ideological, and behavioral changes that result from conversion. These can be long-lasting or temporary.[92]

[90] Ibid., 102-123.

[91] Ibid., 124-141.

[92] Ibid., 142-164.

Testing Rambo's Staged Model: The Conversion(s) of Pierre Bezukhov

The chief advantage of Rambo's approach is not that it provides a rigid model for determining whether a given transformation qualifies as a "true conversion," but rather that it furnishes us with an idiom for discussing such transformations, one that allows us to judge the extent to which a transformation accords with an archetype and to identify those areas where it diverges from that archetype. In this section, we will demonstrate the advantages provided by such models through a brief analysis of the transformations experienced by a single character in Tolstoy's mature fiction: Pierre Bezukhov, one of the central protagonists in *War and Peace*. Our secondary objective will be to draw some preliminary conclusions regarding the representation of radical personal transformation in Tolstoy's pre-conversion fiction, conclusions to which we will return in our discussion of the treatment of this theme in his autobiographical writings and late fiction.

Context

Despite the fact that Pierre presents the clearest example of a convert in Tolstoy's mature fiction, he enters the novel appearing to be very much one of James' "healthy-minded" men. In the opening scene at Anna Pavlovna Scherer's soiree, Tolstoy repeatedly emphasizes his childlike qualities: He is likened to "a child in a toy store" (*kak rebenok v igrushechnoi lavke*)[93]; his face is described as "childlike, kindly, and even a bit foolish" (*detskoe, dobroe, dazhe glupovatoe*)[94]; he makes what his friend Prince Andrei

[93] *PSS* 9: 12.

[94] *PSS* 9: 25.

regards as "childish speeches" (*detskie rechi*) in support of Napoleon and ultimately is banished from Moscow for playing an adolescent prank.[95] Not long after his banishment, he is interrupted while playing make-believe, imagining that he is Napoleon pronouncing sentence over a defeated William Pitt.[96] For Tolstoy, childhood is the time when "the two finest virtues—innocent joy and a boundless thirst for love (*nevinnaia veselost' i bespredel'naia potrebnost' liubvi*)—[are] one's lone impulses in life,"[97] and Pierre seems to embody precisely this innocence and vivacity, especially when viewed against the background of the cold, artificial, and machine-like milieu inhabited by the aristocratic elite. A child in a hulking man's body, he exudes a contagious sense of energy and decency: "His smile […] seemed to say, 'Opinions are opinions, but you can see what a good and decent lad I am" (*dobryi i slavnyi malyi*).[98]

Crisis

In order to become a candidate for conversion, one must first suffer a fall. For Pierre, the fall from a state of child-like grace is precipitated by the death of his father, Count Kirill Vladimirovich Bezukhov. While waiting outside the dying count's sickroom, Pierre makes a fateful decision, one that ultimately seals his fate: "[He] decided for himself that all of this was precisely as it had to be, and that on this night, in order not to lose himself and do something stupid (*poteriat'sia i nadelat' glupostei*), he ought not to

[95] *PSS* 9: 27.

[96] *PSS* 9: 65.

[97] *PSS* 1: 45.

[98] *PSS* 9: 27.

act in accordance with his own reason, but rather must submit himself completely to the will of those who were leading him (*predostavit' sebia vpolne na voliu tekh, kotorye rukovidili im*)."[99] The acquisition of wealth and influence leads to a dramatic change in Pierre's position, which Tolstoy describes in terms of a contrast between *the present* (teper') and *the past* (prezhde): "*Formerly* (prezhde) Pierre constantly felt that everything he said in the presence of Anna Pavlona was indecorous (*neprilichno*) […]. *Now* (teper') everything that he said came out charmingly (*charmant*)."[100] Ultimately, his decision to silence the voice of his own conscience and submit to externally imposed norms leads him to fall into the grasp of the Kuragins, the family which, more than any other, represents the corrupt values that guide conduct in the adult world. His fall is sealed when he proposes to Hélène Kuragina, a development that owes as much to external pressures as it does to his sexual appetites. Tolstoy repeatedly emphasizes the role that social expectations play in describing his hero's thought process in the period leading up to his proposal: "Pierre knew that *everyone was waiting* (vse zhdut) for him to finally say that one word and cross that well-known line, and he knew that sooner or later he would cross it"[101]; "With horror he felt that every day he became more and more tied to her *in the eyes of people*, that there was no way for him to return to his former view of her, that he could not tear himself away from her, that this would be terrible, and that would have to tie his fate to hers."[102] In presenting Pierre's thoughts in the moment immediately leading up to

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[99] *PSS* 9: 95.

[100] *PSS* 9: 249. My italics.

[101] *PSS* 9: 154. My italics.

[102] *PSS* 9: 255. My italics.

his proposal, Tolstoy employs impersonal third-person plural verbs to demonstrate the role that externally-imposed behavioral norms play in his decision:

> ‘*They say* something in particular in these situations,’ he thought, but he could not remember precisely what it was that *they* say. He gazed at her face and moved closer to her. She blushed. […]
> […] ‘*Je vous aime*!’ he said, having recalled what one was supposed to say in these situations; but his words sounded so meager that he felt ashamed of himself.
>
> [«Что-то такое особенное *говорят* в этих случаях», думал он, но никак не мог вспомнить, чтò такое именно *говорят* в этих случаях. Он взглянул в ее лицо. Она придвинулась к нему ближе. Лицо ее зарумянилось. […]
> […] — Je vous aime! — сказал он, вспомнив то, чтó нужно было говорить в этих случаях; но слова эти прозвучали так бедно, что ему стало стыдно за себя.][103]

Ultimately, Pierre’s decision to marry is the result of a conflict between two conflicting forces: the voice of society and the voice of the conscience, which Tolstoy refers to as the “inner voice” (*vnutrennii golos*), which tells him that “this happiness is not for you.”[104] At this point, it is the voice of society that wins out, sealing his fall.

Pierre’s life as a wealthy, married, and possibly cuckolded *chudak* provides the context for his eventual crisis and subsequent attempts at regeneration. The crisis itself is precipitated by his duel with Dolohov, a duel that takes place because Pierre has placed all of his faith in the judgment of others. When he wounds his rival, however, the suppressed voice of his conscience reemerges: “‘What happened?’ he asked himself. ‘I have killed, the lover, yes, killed the lover of my wife. Yes, that is what happened. Why?

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[103] *PSS* 9: 261. My italics.

[104] *PSS* 9: 260.

How have I come to this?' 'Because you married her,' answered the inner voice."[105] The crisis itself erupts shortly after Pierre leaves his wife. While waiting for horses at the Torzhok station, he is overcome by a series of accursed questions:

> 'What is bad? What is good? What must one love and what must one hate? What is the point of life and who am I? What is life and what is death? What force governs us all?' he asked himself. And there was no answer to any of these questions, save for one illogical answer, one that was not an answer at all. This answer was: 'You will die and everything will end. You will die and find out everything or cease to ask.' But dying was also terrifying.
>
> [«Что́ дурно? Что́ хорошо? Что́ надо любить, что́ ненавидеть? Для чего жить, и что́ такое я? Что́ такое жизнь, что смерть? Какая сила управляет всем?», спрашивал он себя. И не было ответа ни на один из этих вопросов, кроме одного, не логического ответа, вовсе не на эти вопросы. Ответ этот был: «умрешь — всё кончится. Умрешь и всё узнаешь, или перестанешь спрашивать». Но и умереть было страшно.][106]

~~Quest~~ and Encounter

Pierre's crisis turns out to be remarkably brief in duration, and it is impossible to speak of any "questing" stage. Almost immediately after reaching his lowest point, he meets Iosif Alekseevich Bazdeev, a well-known Freemason, experiencing what Rambo would refer to as an "encounter" with a representative of a new religious or spiritual worldview. Bazdeev does not win Pierre over through rational arguments, but rather through the force of his personality. Indeed, the effect of his speech is implicitly

[105] *PSS* 10: 28.

[106] *PSS* 10: 65.

compared to hypnosis: "Pierre felt confused and wanted to tear himself from this gaze, but the shining, aged eyes irresistibly pulled him in."[107]

Commitment

According to Rambo's model, the "encounter" stage is followed by "interaction," the stage during which eventual converts "learn more about the teachings, life-style and expectations of the group, and are provided with opportunities, both formal and informal, to become more fully incorporated into it." It might be argued that Pierre's attempt to refashion himself as a Freemason fails to produce the desired results precisely because he largely skips the phase. From the moment that he first encounters Bazdeev, Pierre is overcome by the sensation that he has already undergone a transformation; he is certain that Freemasonry represents "a brotherhood of men united by the goal of supporting one another on the path to virtue" even before he comes to possess even a preliminary understanding of the order's doctrines and operations. Following Bazdeev's departure, Pierre paces around the room at the station, "reflecting on his depraved past and with the rapture of renewal imagining his blessed, blameless, and virtuous future, which seemed to him to be so easy [to attain]." "In his soul," writes Tolstoy, "there was not a trace of his former doubts." [108]

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[107] *PSS* 10: 66. Rancour-Laferriere presents a convincing argument for treating Bazdeev as a surrogate father figure. See Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, *Tolstoy's Pierre Bezukhov: A Psychoanalytic Study* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), 98-109.

[108] *PSS* 10: 72.

The account of Pierre's initiation into the order, however, indicates that his newfound faith is mired by the same destructive social influences that had brought about his fall. One passage in particular captures the shortcomings of Freemasonry:

> Hoping to enter into a completely new life, a life completely different from his former one, he had expected something exceptional, something more exceptional than what he saw. The skull, the tomb, the gospels—it seemed to him that he expected all of this, that he expected something more. Trying to summon within himself a feeling of tenderness, he looked around. 'God, death, love, the brotherhood of men,' he said to himself, connecting these thoughts to vague but joyful notions of *something*. The door opened and *someone* entered.
>
> [Надеясь вступить в совершенно новую жизнь, совершенно отличную от прежней, он ожидал всего необыкновенного, еще более необыкновенного чем то, чтò он видел. Череп, гроб, Евангелие — ему казалось, что он ожидал всего этого, ожидал еще большего. Стараясь вызвать в себе чувство умиленья, он смотрел вокруг себя. — «Бог, смерть, любовь, братство людей», — говорил он себе, связывая с этими словами смутные, но радостные представления *чего-то*. Дверь отворилась и *кто-то* вошел.][109]

Pierre expects *something* (chto-to), but what he gets is *someone* (kto–to). The problem with the Freemasons, then, is not their ideology itself—indeed, of the seven virtues that the order preaches, five are broadly compatible with Tolstoy's own post-conversion religious views[110]—but the fact that Freemasonry is a human institution run by men drawn from the same rarified milieu in which he had first suffered his fall into depravity. Indeed, throughout the ceremony, Tolstoy gently mocks the human pettiness that accompanies what is meant to be an otherworldly ritual. One of the first things that Pierre

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[109] *PSS* 10: 75. My italics.

[110] The seven virtues are: 1) keeping the secrets of the order; 2) submission to its leaders; 3) morality (*dobronravie*); 4) love for humanity (*liubov' k chelovechestvu*) 5) courage (*muzhestvo*); 6) benevolence (*shchedrost'*); and 7) "love of death" (*liubov' k smerti*). Of these, only the first two can be said to be incompatible with late Tolstoyan religious philosophy. It is telling in this respect that Pierre values the second virtue—obedience—most highly, while he finds the seventh—cultivating a love of death—to be incomprehensible.

notices is that the brother who is charged with initiating him into the order is an acquaintance; later he recognizes another mason as a tutor who had formerly been employed by the Kuragins and a third as the French abbé whom he had encountered at Anna Pavlovna Scherer's soirée. At the height of the ceremony his thoughts of salvation are interrupted by a whispered squabble over whether he should first receive a symbolic spade and then prostrate himself before the gates of the temple, or prostrate himself and then receive the spade. When the leader of the lodge asks the brothers to make a monetary contribution, Pierre's reaction speaks to the influence that social norms and expectations continue to have on him: His first impulse is to pledge his entire fortune to the order, but he ultimately decides to give the exact same amount as everyone else.

Interaction and Consequences

When Pierre returns home from the initiation, he believes that he has "completely changed and left behind his former way of life and habits."[111] For a time, there appears to be a degree of truth in this perception. When his father-in-law pays him a visit, for example, he does not give in to the temptation to please others that had formerly guided him, but rather issues a stern rebuke, thereby freeing himself, at least partially, from the destructive influence of the Kuragins. During a visit to his friend Andrei, who is mired in a deep depression, the newly converted Pierre enthusiastically preaches the advantages of a life of faith and good deeds. While he is unable to convince Andrei of the existence of God or the truth of Masonic teachings, his optimism and faith prove to be contagious.

[111] *PSS* 10: 83.

Following their conversation, Andrei experiences the first stirrings of his own transformation and feels that he too has entered into a "new life."[112]

On the whole, however, Pierre's life following his initiation as a Mason turns out to be a disappointment. Before long, he begins to slip back into his old habits. When he travels to his southern estates to institute reforms, he once more finds himself surrounded by ingratiating hangers-on who pull him back into his old life: "Again whole days, weeks, and months of Pierre's life passed […] with the same parties, luncheons, breakfasts, and balls […] In place of the new life that Pierre had hoped to lead, he was living the same former life, only in different surroundings."[113] The same questions that had tormented him at the Torzhok station remain unresolved, albeit with reduced intensity: "Pierre no longer experienced moments of despair, melancholy, and disgust for life as he had before, but the same sickness that had earlier manifested itself through sharp paroxysms remained within him, and did not leave him for even a moment: 'What is the use (*k chemu*)? For what (*Zachem*)? What is the meaning of that which happens on the earth (*Chto takoe tvoritsia na svete*)?'"[114]

As we have already suggested, Pierre's mistake is that he commits to the Masons before having interacted with them and determined whether their teachings actually provide the answers that he seeks, and, if so, whether their conduct aligns with these teachings. When he finally has the opportunity to witness the workings of the Petersburg lodge, he is deeply disappointed. After a year of tireless service to the order, he finds that

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[112] *PSS* 10: 118.

[113] *PSS* 10: 104.

[114] *PSS* 10: 297-298.

"the soil of Freemasonry on which he was standing slipped further away from his legs the firmer he tried to stand on it."[115] He becomes increasingly aware of the problems introduced by his fellow Masons' lives outside the confines of the order: "Pierre knew all the brothers, the members of the lodge, in his [everyday] life, and he found it difficult to see them only as brother Masons rather than as Prince B. or Ivan Vasil'evich D. whom he knew in his [everyday] life as being for the most part weak and depraved men."[116] Although he clings to the naïve belief that the teachings of order themselves contain the truth, he becomes convinced that, "Russian Freemasonry had set off on a false path and diverged from its roots."[117] After a trip abroad to consult with leading Masons in Western Europe, Pierre returns and delivers a speech to the lodge in which he gently tries to push them to accept the goal of non-violent political reform. His proposals are ridiculed and rejected, leading him to fall once more into depression. He reconciles with his wife, and while he writes in his diary that he is "experiencing a joyous feeling of regeneration" (*shchastlivoe chuvstvo obnovleniia*), it is clear to the reader that his spiritual path is once more following a downward trajectory.[118] His diary entries speak to his despair: One entry describes a dream in which he is attacked by a pack of dogs that represent his passions.

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[115] *PSS* 10: 171.

[116] *PSS* 10: 172.

[117] *PSS* 10: 173.

[118] *PSS* 10: 178.

Second crisis, second encounter

Pierre's tortured attempts to find the truth he seeks in Freemasonry ultimately lead him to embrace the mystical side of the order's teachings. Intoxicated by apocalyptic fantasies and experimentations in numerology, he becomes convinced that he is "l'Russe Besuhof," and that he is destined to kill Napoleon. At the same time that his Masonic beliefs are becoming increasingly fanatic, Pierre begins to consider two alternative foundations of faith: the first is familial, and is tied to his budding affection for Natasha Rostova, and the second is national, and manifests itself in his awed reaction to the patriotic fervor of the Russian army at the Battle of Borodino. Nonetheless, he keeps to his plan to kill Napoleon; he absconds from his house during the French invasion and purchases peasant clothing and arms with the goal of murdering the Emperor whom he had once idealized. His plot, however, fails to materialize. He is captured by the French and imprisoned. After his interrogation, Pierre and a number of other prisoners are marched out to a field where two posts have been erected. The French begin to bind and execute the prisoners. Believing that he is about to die, Pierre is overcome by a feeling of numb horror. After shooting five prisoners, though, the French take Pierre and the rest of the prisoners back to their quarters. The executions inaugurate a second crisis, one that decisively ends his period of infatuation with Freemasonry:

> From the moment that Pierre saw the terrible murder committed by men who had no desire to do it, it was as if the spring in his soul on which everything depended and on which his conception of life relied had suddenly been pulled out and everything collapsed into a pile of meaningless rubbish. Although he was not yet aware of it, his faith in the order of the universe, in humanity, in his own soul, and in God was destroyed. Pierre had experienced this state before, but never with as much force as now. Before when he had experienced these sorts of doubts, the doubts were rooted in his own guilt. And in the very depths of his soul Pierre had felt that it was possible to secure salvation from this

> despair and doubt. But now he felt that it was not his own guilt that had caused the world to collapse before his eyes, leaving only meaningless ruins. He felt that to return to faith in life was beyond his power.
>
> [С той минуты, как Пьер увидал это страшное убийство, совершенное людьми, не хотевшими этого делать, в душе его как будто вдруг выдернута была та пружина, на которой всё держалось и представлялось живым, и всё завалилось в кучу бессмысленного сора. В нем хотя он и не отдавал себе отчета, уничтожилась вера и в благоустройство мира, и в человеческую, и в свою душу, и в Бога. Это состояние было испытываемо Пьером прежде, но никогда с такою силой как теперь. Прежде, когда на Пьера находили такого рода сомнения, сомнения эти имели источником собственную вину. И в самой глубине души, Пьер тогда чувствовал, что от того отчаяния и тех сомнений было спасение в самом себе. Но теперь он чувствовал, что не его вина была причиной того, что мир завалился в его глазах, и остались одни бессмысленные развалины. Он чувствовал, что возвратиться к вере в жизнь — не в его власти.][119]

Once more, however, this period of crisis and despair proves to be short-lived. Before long, Pierre experiences a second encounter with a representative of an alternative worldview in the person of the soldier Platon Karataev, who embodies the highest virtues of unlearned peasant spirituality. Lying next to the slumbering Karataev, Pierre once again experiences a feeling of regeneration: "[…H]e felt that the world that had formerly been destroyed was moving in his soul once again with a new beauty, [rising] on new, unshakable foundations."[120] By the time that the first month of his captivity has passed, Pierre has undergone a complete and lasting transformation.

> It was precisely during this time that he acquired that sense of peace and satisfaction with himself that he had earlier strove towards in vain. For a long time he had searched in his life from all directions for that peace and harmony with himself that had struck him in the soldiers at the Battle of Borodino; he had searched for it in philanthropy, in freemasonry, in the dissipation of social life, in wine, in heroic, self-sacrificing deeds, in

[119] *PSS* 12: 44.

[120] *PSS* 12: 48.

> romantic love for Natasha; he had searched for it with his mind, and all of these searchings and efforts had deceived him. And without thinking about it, he had acquired this sense of peace and this harmony with himself only through the horror of death, through deprivation, and through that which he came to grasp in Karataev. It was as if those horrible moments that he had lived through during the execution had forever washed away from his imagination and memories the anxious thoughts and feelings that had formerly seemed important to him. […]
> […] Only here and now for the first time did Pierre come to fully value the pleasure of eating when he was hungry, of drinking when he was thirsty, of sleeping when he was tired, of warmth when he was cold, of conversation with people when he wanted to hear a human voice. The satisfaction of his needs—good food, cleanliness, freedom—now, when he had been deprived of them, seemed to Pierre to be the most perfect happiness […]]
>
> [И именно в это-то самое время он получил то спокойствие и довольство собой, к которым он тщетно стремился прежде. Он долго в своей жизни искал с разных сторон этого успокоения, согласия с самим собою, того, что так поразило его в солдатах в Бородинском сражении — он искал этого в филантропии, в масонстве, в рассеянии светской жизни, в вине, в геройском подвиге самопожертвования, в романтической любви к Наташе; он искал этого путем мысли, и все эти искания и попытки обманули его. И он, сам не думая о том, получил это успокоение и это согласие с самим собою только через ужас смерти, через лишения и через то, что он понял в Каратаеве. Те страшные минуты, которые он пережил во время казни, как будто смыли навсегда из его воображения и воспоминания тревожные мысли и чувства, прежде казавшиеся ему важными. […]
> […] Здесь, теперь только, в первый раз Пьер вполне оценил наслажденье еды, когда хотелось есть, питья, когда хотелось пить, сна, когда хотелось спать, тепла, когда было холодно, разговора с человеком, когда хотелось говорить и послушать человеческий голос. Удовлетворение потребностей — хорошая пища, чистота, свобода — теперь, когда он был лишен всего этого, казались Пьеру совершенным счастием […]] [121]

Pierre's transformation is sealed in a dream that he has during the period of his confinement. The dream begins with a pure distillation of his newfound faith, which Pierre immediately associates with Karataev: "Life is everything. Life is God. Everything shifts around and moves and this movement is God. And where there is life there is the

[121] *PSS* 12: 97-98.

delight of the consciousness of the divine (*naslazhdenie samosoznaniia Bozhestva*). To love life is to love God. The most difficult and most blessed thing of all is to love this live in all of its sufferings, in the innocence of its sufferings." Having contemplated these words, Pierre suddenly recalls a figure from his distant past, a Swiss teacher of geography, who shows him a globe:

> This globe was a living, oscillating sphere without dimensions. The entire surface of the sphere consisted of droplets that were firmly pressed together. And all of these droplets moved, shifted around; now they fused together into one and now they separated into many. Every droplet tried to spread out and occupy as much space as possible, but the others, trying to do the same thing, constrained it, sometimes destroying it, and sometimes merging with it.
> "This is life," said the aged teacher.
> "How simple and clear it is," thought Pierre. "How could I have not known this earlier?"
>
> [Глобус этот был живой, колеблющийся шар, не имеющий размеров. Вся поверхность шара состояла из капель, плотно сжатых между собой. И капли эти все двигались, перемещались и то сливались из нескольких в одну, то из одной разделялись на многие. Каждая капля стремилась разлиться, захватить наибольшее пространство, но другие, стремясь к тому же, сжимали ее, иногда уничтожали, иногда сливались с нею.
> — Вот жизнь, — сказал старичок учитель.
> «Как это просто и ясно», подумал Пьер. «Как я мог не знать этого прежде».][122]

It is highly significant that Pierre's transformation, though inaugurated by Platon Karataev, is immediately associated with his distant past. For Tolstoy, conversion signifies both the beginning of a new life, one that is defined by its opposition to the convert's sinful past, and a return to the state of childlike innocence that had preceded that sinful past.

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[122] *PSS* 12: 158.

Consequences and commitment

The last two stages of Rambo's model are *commitment* and *consequences*. Pierre passes through both of these stages, but in his case the order is reversed. Tolstoy alludes to the consequences of Pierre's transformation in the chapter that immediately follows the passage quoted above, which describes Pierre's new approach to requests for financial assistance. When he had first inherited his father's fortune, Tolstoy tells us, such requests had caused him great anxiety: Unable to determine which requests were legitimate, "he had given to everyone while he still had something to give." Following his release from captivity, "he found to his surprise that in all these questions there were no longer any doubts or quandaries. Now there was a judge within him who decided what needed to be done and what did not need to be done in accordance with certain laws of which he himself was not aware."[123] By allowing the "inner voice" of the conscience to once more determine his actions, Pierre has secured the gift of discernment. Another consequence of Pierre's transformation is his marriage to Natasha. While his marriage lacks the formal characteristics of the initiation into Freemasonry that he had passed through earlier, it nonetheless reflects a full embrace of his newfound "Karataevian" faith: As he later tells Natasha, "[Platon] would have approved of our family life. He wanted to see decency (*blagoobrazie*), happiness, and tranquility in everything, and I would have been proud to show him us."[124] At the same time that he is committing himself to family happiness, however, Pierre is also becoming increasingly involved with the movement that will

[123] *PSS* 12: 209.

[124] *PSS* 12: 293.

ultimately lead the disastrous Decembrist uprising, which, he reluctantly admits to his wife, Karataev would not have approved of. By casting Pierre as a future Decembrist, Tolstoy seems to suggest that the privileged position that his hero occupies at the end of the novel will be short-lived, that his progress will eventually be threatened by his drive to intervene in political life of his country.

As we have seen, the concepts and terminology that scholars have developed in order to discuss religious conversion can be fruitfully applied to describe radical transformations in Tolstoy's fiction, including those that accord with traditional conceptions of the conversion, such as Pierre's decision to join the Freemasons, as well as transformations that are not explicitly linked to a formal shift in religious affiliation.

The Narrative Turn

While Rambo's work has received generally positive reviews, several leading scholars have found fault with the breadth of his conception and his relativistic approach to earlier research. In a brief but insightful review, Lofland hits on the fundamental problem with what he calls Rambo's "inclusive" approach to conversion: "Rambo's everything-is-sometimes-true view […] has its limitations. If almost everything is sometimes true […] are we left with anything more than this to say about conversion?"[125] Richard Machalek, another prominent sociologist, raises similar objections, questioning whether an approach that defines conversion as "what a faith group says it is" can have any meaningful interpretive value. Machalek astutely notes that the limitations of Rambo's approach mirror the shortcomings of conversion studies as a field of inquiry itself.[126]

Machalek is hardly the only scholar who has expressed his frustration with the limited results that traditional psychological and sociological approaches to conversion have yielded. In recent years there has been a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the direction that conversion studies has taken. In a 2003 article in *Review of Religious Research*, Pehr Granqvist contrasts the immense interest in religious conversion with the very limited conclusions that the theoretical study of the phenomenon has provided. While, "One might imagine that such an immense theoretical and research interest would

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[125] John Lofland, review of *Understanding Religious Conversion*, by Lewis Rambo, *Sociology of Religion* 55 (1994): 100.

[126] Richard Machalek, review of *Understanding Religious Conversion*, by Lewis Rambo, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33 (1994): 192-193.

have brought about a great deal of agreed-upon knowledge concerning the characteristics and correlates of religious conversions," the scope of consensus has turned out to be very limited: "besides minor agreement on some very general conversion correlates and characteristics, the study of conversion is marked by major disagreements."[127] In a 2007 article in *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* Henri Gooren identifies ten weaknesses that have limited the value of traditional psychological and sociological approaches to conversion, including an insufficient conceptualization of the role of the individual in effecting conversion, a failure to distinguish between conversions that denote a radical spiritual transformation and those that denote mere shifts in denominational affiliation, a tendency to focus exclusively on marginalized Christian movements, and geographical, age, and gender biases that have largely restricted the scope of the field to the study of American and Western European adolescent and young adult males. As a result of these shortcomings, argues Gooren, the attempt to produce a generalizable model of religious conversion has failed.[128]

A strong argument that can be made that the failure to arrive at a more comprehensive and generalizable theory of conversion stems from the insistence on treating the phenomenon in purely *experiential* terms. As a number of scholars have argued, the fact that religious experience can only be approached through the medium of narrative exposition is of essential importance. In David Yamane's words, "When we study religious experience we cannot study 'experiencing'—religious experience in real

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[127] Pehr Granqvist, "Attachment Theory and Religious Conversions: A Review and Resolution of the Classic and Contemporary Paradigm Chasm," *Review of Religious Research* 45 (2003): 172-173.

[128] Henri Gooren, "Reassessing Conventional Approaches to Conversion: Toward a New Synthesis," *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 46 (2007): 346-348.

time and its physical, mental, and emotional constituents—and therefore must study retrospective accounts—linguistic representations—of religious experiences."[129] Yamane goes on to argue for a reorientation of studies of religious experience through the use of narratological analysis.

There is evidence to suggest that just such a narrative reorientation is already under way. The leading figures in this project, however, do not view conversion through the lens of traditional psychological, sociological, or anthropological conceptions, but rather have adopted a more broadly textual approach to the phenomenon. At the same time that traditional empirical approaches to religious conversion appear to be floundering, a number of scholars and theorists have discovered that a narratological conception of conversion has the potential to resolve broader questions related to the expression of the self through autobiographical texts. Recent examples of works that have productively applied a narratological framing to the question of conversion include Morrison's *Conversion and Text: The Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatsos* and *Understanding Conversion*, Massimo Leone's *Religious Conversion and Identity: The Semiotic Analysis of Texts*, Patrick Riley's *Character and Conversion in Autobiography: Augustine, Montaigne, Descartes Rousseau, and Sartre*,

[129] David Yamane, "Narrative and Religious Experience," *Sociology of Religion* 61 (2000):171-189. While both psychologists and sociologists have certainly been aware that "the conversion experience" is ultimately accessible only through narrative accounts, they have tended to assign relatively little importance to this feature of the phenomenon. Lofland and Skonovd, for example, treat the conversion narrative as an intermediate level that provides an essentially accurate picture of a raw experience, positing, that since "the conversion experience *itself* is partly molded by expectations of what conversion is about or 'is like' that there is therefore the probability of a relatively 'good fit' between the real experiences and the paradigmatic accounts." Lofland and Sknonovd, op. cit., 375.

and Talal Asad's "Comments on Conversion."[130] What ties these authors together is their shared insistence that written and oral accounts of conversion do not present facsimiles of reality or "raw experience," but are rather stylized narratives that accord with the expectations furnished by the social contexts in which they are written in order to advance their author's rhetorical goals. As Morrison writes, narrative accounts of conversion "are not vivid experiences, but literary compositions, which by their very nature are fictive."[131] Leone goes a step further, treating "the self of converted people, before, after and during religious conversion as *a sort of lie* [...] as a story, which converted people constantly recount to themselves in order to consolidate their identity and eliminate the feeling of vertigo which seizes everyone who has lost one's own spiritual equilibrium."[132] Riley adopts this basic framework and adds to it by exploring the historical evolution of the conversion narrative. He demonstrates how post-Enlightenment thinkers adapted patterns from religious narratives in constructing a secular sense of self.

Indeed, there is a natural confluence between the concepts of narrative and conversion, as both evoke a sense of change or transformation. In traditional theories of narrative, narrativity is contrasted with description. In the simplest terms, the narrative is

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[130] Karl Frederick Morrison, *Conversion and Text: The Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatsos* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992); Massimo Leone, *Religious Conversion and Identity: The Semiotic Analysis of Texts* (London: Routledge, 2004); Patrick Riley, *Character and Conversion in Autobiography: Augustine, Montaigne, Descartes, Rousseau, and Sartre* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004); Talal Asad, "Comments on Conversion," in *Conversions to Modernities*, ed. Peter van der Veer, 263-273 (New York: Routledge, 1996).

[131] Morrison, *Conversion and Text*, vii.

[132] Leone, xii. My italics.

distinguished from the descriptive text by the presence of change and alteration; descriptive texts are static, while narrative texts are dynamic.[133] Conversion narratives adapt this process of transformation to the description of a given character or narrator's spiritual life and stretch it to the extreme.

We should hasten to point out that a narrative framing to conversion in no sense entails a complete rejection of traditional empirical approaches to the phenomenon. It is entirely possible to adopt an approach to conversion that stresses its narrative properties while retaining the wealth of observations furnished by empirical approaches that are framed as investigations of conversion experiences. A narrative approach merely serves to remind us that the models of conversion presented by psychologists and sociologists are not models of experience itself, but rather models of the narrative retelling of that experience. As we have seen in our discussion of Pierre's conversions in *War and Peace,* the stages of Rambo's model, for example can be appropriated almost without alteration and treated as Proppean functions that combine to form a coherent account of lived experience. We can use such models as a measuring stick to determine the extent to which a given transformation in a literary work qualifies as conversion with respect to the parameters that have traditionally been assigned to that term or whether we are better served by describing it through alternative models of personal transformation.

Converts, of course, are not the only people for whom, to quote Snow and Machalek, "personal biographies and identities are continuously redefined in the light of

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[133] See, for example, Tzvetan Todorov, "The 2 Principles of Narrative," *Diacritics* 1 (1971): 37-44; Todorov argues that transformation is one of two constitutive properties of narrative (the other being succession). See also Gerald Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, rev. edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 28, where the "narrative event" is defined as "*a change of state* manifested in discourse by a process statement" (my italics).

new experiences."[134]As the cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner argues, the impulse to define ourselves in narrative terms is an unavoidable aspect of human cognition:

> We seem to have no other way of describing "lived time" save in the form of a narrative. […] When someone tells you his life […] it is always a cognitive achievement rather than a through-the-clear-crystal recital of something univocally given. In the end, it is a narrative achievement. There is no such thing psychologically as "life itself." At very least, it is a selective achievement of memory recall.[135]

Indeed, the narratives that we construct about and for ourselves play an essential role in maintaining our sense of existential equilibrium. Without such narratives, life would present itself as an infinite series of isolated moments with no unifying element save the continuity of the corporeal body that experiences them. By conceiving of our pasts as a unified chain of causally related events, we are able to make sense of our present condition, and even plot the future trajectory that our life stories will take.

What, then, distinguishes converts' constructed senses of self from those of other people? The chief property that allows us to differentiate between conversion narratives and other life stories can be expressed in terms of the difference between continuous and discrete change. It seems reasonable to posit that vast majority of people conceive of their own narrative arcs in terms of a more or less continuous progression: The self moves through various stages marked by changes and rites of passages—graduation, marriage, promotions, retirement—each of which introduces material and psychological alterations,

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[134] David Snow and Richard Machalek, "The Convert as Social Type," *Sociological Theory* 1 (1983): 269.

[135] Jerome Bruner, "Life as Narrative," *Social Research* 71 (2004): 692. Bruner is, of course, not alone in approaching the concept of the self as a narrative construction. In fact, this supposition is so widespread that it has become something of a critical cliché. For a few recent examples, see Michael Bamberg, "*Who am I?* Narration and its Contribution to Self and Identity, *Theory & Psychology* 21 (2011): 3-24; Daniel Dennett, "Why Everyone is a Novelist," *The Times Literary Supplement*, Sept. 16-22, 1988; and Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

but which collectively do not challenge its fundamental unity. It is only at the rare moments when we pause and compare our present self to our past selves that we are struck with the realization that this continuity is essentially a fiction. What is essential for our purposes is that for the "healthy-minded man" these sensations are fleeting; they are jarring exceptions in a life that is otherwise lived in accordance with an illusion of continuity. For the convert, however, the perception of a division is not a rare exception, but rather is elevated to a place of central importance. His personal narrative is not continuous, but rather is structured around a single discrete break that divides the sinful past from the righteous present. Snow and Machalek hit on this feature in their discussion of "autobiographical reconstruction." Following conversion, they argue:

> [T]he past is not only shattered; the disjointed pieces are reassembled in accordance with the new universe of discourse and its grammar. Some aspects of the past are jettisoned, others are redefined, and some are put together in ways previously inconceivable. One's biography is, in short, reconstructed […]
>
> […T]he convert's former understanding of self, past events, and others is now regarded as a misunderstanding. Following the formula "then I thought…now I know," previous motives, feelings, and evaluations are regarded as misguided or erroneous […]
>
> […] Gripped by the realization that preconversion interpretations were erroneous, the convert comes to redefine the past 'correctly.' Old facts and aspects of one's biography are thus given new meanings. Not only are former identities evaluated negatively but the course and character of the convert's life history is typically reconstructed as troublesome, misdirected, even loathsome […]
>
> […] That converts can look back and see the "true state" of their lives prior to conversion is understandable considering that the past is viewed from the vantage point of the enlightened present. Since the present functions as the final arbiter of truth about the past, biographical reconstruction may even involve the fabrication and insertion of events "wherever they are needed to harmonize the remembered with the reinterpreted past" […] The convert is not perpetuating fraud but aligning the past 'with the truth that, necessarily, embraces both present and past' Ironically, the convert is not privileged to a nonpartisan knowledge of his

> or her past. Conversion as biographical reconstruction denies one an undistorted recall of the past.[136]

This narrative rupture both challenges and paradoxically solidifies the convert's sense of self. For Riley, this aspect of conversion forces us to confront the paradoxical nature of the autobiographical enterprise itself:

> […A]s much as [conversion] provides an anchor and a source for autobiographical narrative, it also serves to disrupt any stable self-definition. The more completely one's character has changed, the more difficult it is for preconvert and convert to coincide sufficiently to constitute a coherent, single identity […]
>
> […] Conversion in all of its manifestations, from the early Christian to the modern eras, evokes the fantasy underlying any autobiographer's desire to provide a *total* image of his or her life, namely a narrative point of view residing in death. One's autobiography always comes too early: I have not finished living yet, my story is incomplete, but if I wait until the very end it will be too late to write it. If, however, I undergo a conversion experience, I live through a death of the self that allows me to apprehend my character as totality, but at the cost that I am no longer "myself." That is conversion's primary paradox.[137]

This approach to conversion suggests that James only grasped half of the problem when he defined the phenomenon as a "process by which a self hitherto divided […] becomes unified." While conversion may present itself as a process of unification on the experiential plane, what is essential for our purposes is that this unification can only be accomplished by effecting a division on the narrative plane.

Indeed, many, if not most, of the tropes that we associate with the classical model of Christian conversion speak to the presence of this division. Traveling on the road to Damascus, the Pharisee Saul of Tarsus is blinded by a divine vision. When he regains his sight, he becomes the Apostle Paul, a completely different person, one defined in terms

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[136] Snow and Machalek, 266-268.

[137] Riley, 3, 16.

of his opposition to his former self.[138] Following his baptism, St. Augustine sees his former self as a sleeping man and his present, post-conversion, self as one who has awakened. Meditating on the meaning of the phrase "the justice of God," Martin Luther experiences a revelation that convinces him that he has, "been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates."[139] Bunyan likens conversion to the grafting of a tree: a wound must be inflicted in order for the branch of God's love to take root ("The Word is the graft, the soul is the tree, and the Word, as the scion, must be let in by a wound.").[140] Like Augustine, the American Protestant minister Jonathan Edwards describes conversion as an "awakening" that opens the eyes of the believer to a world that is outwardly the same but which is imbued with a sensation of *newness*: "Persons after their conversion often speak of religious things as seeming *new* to them; that preaching is a *new* thing; that it seems to them they never heard preaching before; that the Bible is a *new* book: they find there *vein* chapters, *new* psalms, *new* histories, because they see them in a *new* light."[141] Everywhere we look, the principle of division, the opposition between the old, slumbering life and the new, awakened life pervades such narratives.

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[138] It is important to note that Saul did not adopt a new name in the same sense that those who enter into monastic orders do: "Saul" was his Hebrew name, while "Paul" was his Latin name, which he used in his ministry to the gentiles. Nonetheless, the transition from one name to the other has often been seen as signifying the extent of his transformation.

[139] Martin Luther, preface to *The Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Works*, trans. Andrew Thornton, "Modern History Sourcebook: Martin Luther: The Tower Experience, 1519, accessed March 6, 2014, http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/ 1519luther-tower.asp

[140]John Bunyan, *The Acceptable Sacrifice: or, The Excellence of a Broken Heart, Being the last works of Mr. John Bunyan* (London: 1718).

[141] Jonathan Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton and the Neighboring Towns and Villages," in *Puritan Sage: Collected Writings of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, 164-218, ed. Vergilius Ferm (New York: Library Publishers, 1953), 193. My italics.

In Tolstoy's writings, this opposition is frequently expressed through the temporal designations "*teper'*" (now; nowadays; today; at the present time) and "*prezhde*" (previously; formerly, in the past). Consider, for example, the description of Pierre's transformation towards the end of *War and Peace*:

> From the outside, Pierre had changed very little. In appearance, he was exactly the same as he had been *before.* Just as *before*, he was absent-minded and seemed to be occupied not with what was before eyes, but with something all his own, something special. The difference between his *former* and *present* state consisted in the fact that *before* when he had forgotten what was before him and what was said to him, he would dolefully wrinkle forehead as if he were trying, but failing, to descry something far off in the distance. *Now* he still forgot what was said to him and what was in front of him; but *now* he peered into that which was before him and listened attentively to that which was said to him with a barely perceptible and seemingly mocking smile, although it was clear that he was seeing and hearing something entirely different. *Before* he seemed to be a good man, but unhappy, and people involuntarily moved away from him; *now* a smile of joy constantly appeared around his mouth, and his eyes shone with sympathy for people—with the question of whether they were satisfied like he was. And people found it pleasant to be in his presence.
>
> *Before* he had talked a great deal, had become heated when he talked, and had listened little; now he rarely got carried away in conversations and was able to listen so well that people eagerly told him their most intimate secrets.
>
> [Пьер почти не изменился в своих внешних приемах. На вид он был точно таким же, каким он был *прежде*. Так же, как и *прежде*, он был рассеян и казался занятым не тем, что́ было перед глазами, а чем-то своим, особенным. Разница между *прежним* и *теперешним* его состоянием состояла в том, что *прежде*, когда он забывал то, что́ было перед ним, то, что́ ему говорили, он страдальчески сморщивши лоб, как будто пытался и не мог разглядеть чего-то, далеко отстоящего от него. *Теперь* он так же забывал то, что́ ему говорили и то, что́ было перед ним; но *теперь* с чуть заметною, как будто насмешливою, улыбкой, он всматривался в то самое, что́ было перед ним, вслушивался в то, что́ ему говорили, хотя очевидно видел и слышал что-то совсем другое. *Прежде* он казался хотя и добрым человеком, но несчастным; и потому невольно люди отдалялись от него. *Теперь* улыбка радости жизни постоянно играла около его рта, и в глазах его светилось участие к людям, — вопрос: довольны ли они так же, как и он? И людям приятно было в его присутствии.

> *Прежде* он много говорил, горячился, когда говорил, и мало слушал; *теперь* он редко увлекался разговором и умел слушать так, что люди охотно высказывали ему свои самые задушевные тайны.][142]

We see the same opposition between *teper'* and *prezhde* in the closing lines of *Anna Karenina*, which describe the change that has taken place in Konstantin Levin's perspective:

> […] but my life *now*, my entire life, regardless of what may happen to me, every minute of it, is not only not meaningless, as it was *before*, but possesses the undeniable meaning of the good that I am capable of investing it with.
>
> [[…] но жизнь моя *теперь*, вся моя жизнь, независимо от всего, что может случиться со мной, каждая минута ее — не только не бессмысленна, какою была *прежде*, но имеет несомненный смысл добра, который я властен вложить в нее!][143]

[142] *PSS* 12: 205. My italics.

[143] *PSS* 19:399. My italics.

Conversion as Narrative Event

One of the chief advantages of a narrative approach to conversion is that it gives us access to the vast set of methodological tools furnished by narrative theory. Of these tools, Wolf Schmid's theory of *narrative eventfulness* is particularly well suited for discussing the textual representation of conversion. Schmid introduces eventfulness in response to a recurring problem posed by the breadth of the concept of narrative itself. As we have already noted, in traditional theories of narrative, narrativity is contrasted with description, with the former being characterized by the presence of change and alteration and the latter by stasis. The problem with this dichotomy is that alteration is such a ubiquitous property of literary texts that the practical utility of defining a given text as a narrative is quite limited. In order to grasp this point, it is useful to compare two texts, both of which feature a narrative account in which a wild animal is killed: the famous wolf-hunting scene in *War and Peace* and the Brothers Grimm fairytale "The Singing Bone" (*Der singende Knochen*).[144] Tolstoy's hunting scene describes how Nikolai Rostov, accompanied by members of his household, sets out to capture a wolf. He comes close to subduing it, but loses it at the last moment. When his huntsman succeeds in capturing the wolf, Rostov is jealous. "The Singing Bone" also centers on the death of a wild animal, although this time it is a fearsome boar that has been terrorizing a fictional kingdom. The king offers his daughter's hand in marriage to anyone who can kill the beast. Two brothers accept the challenge and set off into the woods to find the boar. The older brother sets off to a tavern, where he drinks wine in order to fortify himself for the

[144] For a recent English translation of the story, see Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm,* trans. and ed. Jack Zipes, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 89-91.

hunt. When he leaves the tavern, he encounters his younger brother, who has already managed to kill the boar. Stricken with jealousy, the older brother decides to kill his sibling and bury him beneath a bridge in order to claim the reward. Years later, his treachery is discovered and he is bound in a sack and thrown off the bridge.

It is quite clear that both texts technically qualify as narratives: At the beginning of each text a wild animal is alive and free; at the end it is killed and captured. There can be no doubt that we are dealing with a change of state, and not a mere static description. And yet it is equally clear that the differences are far more substantial than the similarities. In "The Singing Bone," the death of the boar is central to the progression of the story. Had the younger brother failed to kill the boar, then his older brother never would have become jealous and murdered him. The boar's death constitutes a vital link in the chain of the narrative. The wolf-hunting scene plays a completely different role in *War and Peace*. Prior to this episode, the wolf had never been mentioned, and indeed, it is not mentioned again at any point in the novel. As Morson argues, the wolf-hunting scene is one of many instances in the novel that appear, at first glance, to have no impact whatsoever on the development of the novel's plot: whether the wolf is captured or not has no significance whatsoever for the fates of the novel's heroes; had the wolf escaped, Natasha would still betray Andrei and Napoleon would still invade Russia. [145] Although it is technically a narrative account, the scene's function is primarily descriptive: Its purpose is to draw a sketch of Nikolai Rostov's place within a social hierarchy and of his psychological disposition at a particular moment in the novel.

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[145] Gary Saul Morson, *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in* War and Peace*,* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 148-149.

In order to draw a meaningful distinction between these two episodes, we need a more sophisticated interpretive device than the narrative/descriptive binary provides. As Schmid argues, "Literary theory must do more than just register the presence of changes of states […W]e require categories which will allow us to distinguish between the countless natural, actional, and mental changes […] that take place in a storyworld, according to their importance."[146] Toward this end, Schimd proposes that we use the concepts of 'event' and 'eventfulness' to judge the degree of narrativity in a given narrative text. An event is a change of state that is "real" (within the context of the fictional work) and "resultative": "Every event," he writes, "is a change of state, but not every change of state constitutes an event."[147] Schmid presents five criteria for judging the eventfulness of a given development in a narrative:

> 1. *Relevance*. In order to be an event, a narrative development must introduce a change that is "felt to be an essential part of the storyworld in which it occurs." Thus, developments that include a transformation of some aspect of the storyworld that is peripheral or trivial do not constitute events. For example, the statement, "He walked into the room and moved the pen from the desk to the table" is not likely to qualify as an event unless the change in the pen's physical location is relevant to subsequent developments. The statement, "He walked into the room and killed his wife," on the other hand, is almost certain to qualify as an event.

[146] Wolf Schmid, *Narratology: An Introduction*, trans. Alexander Starritt (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 8.

[147] Ibid., 9.

2. *Unpredictability*. In order to qualify as an event, a transformation must in some sense defy the expected patterns of the storyworld. Narrative developments that merely reiterate the expected patterns in a given storyworld do not qualify as events. The unpredictability of a given narrative development, argues Schmid, should be judged against the *doxa* of the storyworld in question, and not by the individual reader's expectations.

These first two criteria are considered to be the minimal necessary conditions for a development to be considered an event. The three remaining criteria help to determine the degree of eventfulness, but are not necessary preconditions for a development to qualify as an event. They are:

3. *Persistence*. Developments marked by a high degree of eventfulness have a lasting effect on the storyworld.

4. *Irreversibility. "*Eventfulness increases with the irreversibility of the new condition which arises from a change of state. That is to say, the more improbable it is that the original condition can be restored, the greater the level of eventfulness."

5. *Non-iterativity*. Developments that are repeated are characterized by a lesser degree of eventfulness than developments that are singular and unique. Schmid uses the example of Chekhov's story "Darling" (*Dushechka*) to show how a repeated pattern loses its eventfulness. The first time that Olia Plemiannikova marries and readapts her views and interests to accord with her husband's, it seems like an event; the repetition of this pattern, however, "shows it to be the

> unchanging emptiness of a vampire's existence," and thus undermines the eventfulness of each subsequent transformation.[148]

According to this framework, a conversion represents a "prototypical perfect event" in the inner life of the character who experiences it.[149] This approach to conversion has several advantages. First, an event-based approach allows us to bypass an obstacle that has confounded traditional psychological and sociological approaches: the impossibility of distinguishing between "true" conversions and other, less dramatic forms of personal transformation, or between conversions and "alternations," to use Travisano's terms. An event-based approach suggests that there is no clear line between the two phenomena; conversion merely denotes a transformation that is marked by an extremely high degree of eventfulness. Second, event-based narratology allows us to grasp the significance that conversion plays in the broader historical development of realism in general, and of Russian realism in particular. For Schmid, the radical ideological and existential transformations that we encounter represent the culmination of a realist tradition that was centered on the spiritual and intellectual development of the fictional hero, a tradition that would soon be challenged by what he refers to as the "post-realist" works of Chekhov. This allows us to conceive of the development of the Russian conversion narrative in terms of broad shifts in literary conceptualization rather than through the narrow prism of theology. Third, and perhaps most importantly, Schmid's five criteria for eventfulness provide a perfect model to capture one of the most salient features of Tolstoy's representations of conversions: their incomplete nature. As we shall see, while Tolstoy's representations of conversion undoubtedly qualify as events based

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[148] The five features of the narrative event are defined in ibid., 9-12.

[149] Ibid., 9.

on the two most significant criteria—relevance and unpredictability—he frequently leads the reader to question the persistence, irreversibility, and non-iterativity of the changes that are described. He repeatedly presents transformations that appear to qualify as "prototypical perfect event[s]," but almost always challenges his own assertions that a true transformation has occurred by depicting the hero's backslide into his former patterns of life. The repetition of what are claimed to be singular, irreversible events introduces substantial complications.

While an event-based approach provides a valuable perspective for analyzing the sort of conversions that we encounter in Tolstoy's works, it is insufficient on its own. After all, we can conceive of many transformations that would satisfy each of Schmid's five criteria without qualifying as conversions in the sense in which the word is normally used. If, for example, a story relates how a man who is on the way to propose to his girlfriend is suddenly victimized by a terrorist bombing, then the development would satisfy all five of Schmid's criteria for eventfulness: the loss of mobility and capacity for procreation would undoubtedly be relevant to the subsequent development of the narrative; such an event would surely be unpredictable in relation to the *doxa* of the storyworld; the protagonist's loss of his legs would, by definition, be persistent, irreversible, and non-repeatable. And yet while this development would undoubtedly qualify as a "prototypical perfect event," no one would call it a conversion. Thus, it is insufficient to merely define conversions as developments with a maximal degree of eventfulness. We require three additional criteria to distinguish between conversion and other developments marked by a high degree of eventfulness.

1. Conversion narratives describe transformations in the inner lives of individuals.

Events that effect a purely external transformation do not qualify as conversions. The locus of conversion is always the inner spiritual or intellectual life of the individual subject.

2. Conversion denotes a dramatic reorientation of the subject's existential outlook, moral code, or fundamental worldview. In this sense, conversion can describe transformations that are not, strictly speaking, religious. What is essential is that values that are transformed are of a similar status as those that are traditionally ascribed to religious values. Mere changes in behavioral patterns or tastes, no matter how dramatic, do not qualify as conversions. An alcoholic who quits drinking will no doubt experience dramatic changes, but the act of abstention does not in and of itself signify conversion. (It goes without saying, of course, that conversions can and often do lead to dramatic alterations in behavior. In order to speak of conversion, however, such alterations must follow from a broader spiritual, intellectual, or moral transformation.)

3. Conversion implies the presence of a discrete break in the autobiographical narrative of the subject who experiences it. Thus, we should expect conversion narratives to contain references that explicitly focus the reader's attention on the opposition between the subject's present, post-conversion self and former, pre-conversion self.

Narrative and Conversion: The Case of Konstantin Levin

Anna Karenina was the last major fictional production that Tolstoy wrote during his mature period. The novel reaches what would appear to be its natural conclusion at the end of the seventh part when the titular heroine completes her downward trajectory by throwing herself under the wheels of a train. Tolstoy, however, chose to extend the narrative by including an eighth part in which he described the fates of several other characters in the months following Anna's suicide, focusing particularly on Konstantin Levin. When we are reintroduced to him in Chapter Eight of the final part of the novel, Levin is mired in the same state of despair and existential doubt that Tolstoy would later ascribe to himself in the *Confession*. This crisis, explains Tolstoy, began when he had witnessed the death of his brother: "[He] was horrified not so much at death as at life without the slightest knowledge of where it came from, what its purpose was, or what it was" (*otkuda, zachem, i chto ona takoe*).[150] The faith of his childhood having been supplanted by a faith in materialism, he finds himself without succor or support: "Levin suddenly felt himself to be in the position of a person who has exchanged his warm coat for muslin clothes and who, having found himself in the cold for the first time, becomes undoubtedly convinced, not by reasoning but by his entire being, that he is as good as naked and that he must inevitably suffer a torturous death."[151] Although the happiness of the first months of marriage had dulled this sensation, it returned with a vengeance during his period of idleness in Moscow. Caught between a materialist worldview that provides

[150] *PSS* 19: 367.

[151] *PSS* 19: 367-368.

no answers and a Christian faith that strikes him as absurd, he falls into a state of despair: "He was in a state of torturous discord with himself (*on byl v muchitel'nom razlade s samim soboi*) and strained with all of his mental energy to escape from it."[152] He searches for answers in the writings of philosophers (Plato, Spinoza, Kant, Schelling, Hegel, and Schopenhauer) and theologians (Khomiakov), but finds no relief. Like Tolstoy in the *Confession*, he is tempted by the thought of ending his life: "A happy family man, a healthy person, Levin was so close to suicide several times that he hid a rope in order not to hang himself with it and feared to go out with his gun in order not to shoot himself."[153] The turning point in Levin's crisis comes when he has a conversation with a peasant named Fedor, who draws a comparison between two other peasants. The first, Mitiukha, is a greedy man who lives only for himself; the second, Fokanych, is a righteous man who "lives for his soul" and "remembers God" (*On dlia dushi zhivet. Boga pomnit*). It is precisely these words, writes Tolstoy, that inaugurate Levin's recovery: "These words spoken by the peasant had the effect of an electric spark in his soul, suddenly transforming and unifying into one complete cluster the disparate, impotent, disconnected thoughts that had never ceased to occupy him."[154] He comes to grasp that he has erred in assigning such great importance to his rational consciousness, and that faith can only be grasped through the totality of his being, that there is a "spiritual strength" (*dukhovnaia sila*) within him, a force that, though it might wane, can never be destroyed.[155]

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[152] *PSS* 19: 369.

[153] *PSS* 19: 371.

[154] *PSS* 19: 376.

[155] *PSS* 19: 386.

Gary Spence has argued that the treatment of Levin's crisis and recovery represents a flaw in the construction of the novel. His conversion, writes Spence, "is not adequately integrated into the body of the novel, but is a kind of epilogue," one that does not follow organically from the preceding seven parts: "Levin is perplexed, and, before his marriage, depressed; but there is not enough of the 'Arzamas misery' in him for it to be intelligible why he should be drawn towards suicide. That he is in danger of killing himself is something we are told but is not vividly realized."[156] While I agree with Spence's complaint that the epilogue seems to be "tacked on," I believe that he misses the main flaw in the presentation of Levin's conversion: His crisis is presented as a rupture with his past life, when in fact it largely reiterates the spiritual quest that he has already charted over the course of the first seven parts. Levin had confronted the specter of human mortality at the end of Part Three—while lying awake and listening to his brother's consumptive coughing, "Death, the unavoidable end of everything, for the first time appeared before him with overwhelming force (*neotrazimoiu siloi*)"[157]; he had already confronted his lack of religious faith during his conversation with a priest before his marriage. Indeed, as Kitty herself realizes in Part Eight, the torment that her husband experiences as a result of his "unbelief" is itself laughable (*s ulybkoi dumala o ego neverii i govorila sama sebe, chto on smeshnoi*).[158] Why, then, must Levin retrace the steps that he has already taken? It is precisely the distinction between lived experience

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[156] Gary Spence, *Tolstoy the Ascetic* (Edinburgh/London: Oliver & Boyd, 1967), 56.

[157] *PSS* 18: 367-368.

[158] *PSS* 19: 366.

and the reconstruction of experience in the form of a narrative that allows us to answer this question.

Narratives are fundamentally acts of mnemonic recall, and it is no coincidence that there are numerous references to memory and forgetfulness throughout Part Eight. The epilogue begins by focusing on Sergei Ivanovich Koznyshev, Levin's half-brother. Having spent six years laboring on a study of the forms of government in Europe and Russia, he had anticipated that "the appearance of his book ought to make a serious impression in society, to result, if not in a revolution (*perevorot*) in scholarship, then in any case to arouse great excitement in the scholarly world."[159] His hopes, however, had been quickly dashed, as the book received only one review, a hatchet job written by a young *feuilletonist* whom Koznyshev had once inadvertently offended. Realizing that he must break with the past in order to move forward in life, Koznyshev dedicates himself wholly to the effort to aid the Serbian rebels: "He devoted himself completely to the service of this great cause and *forgot* to think (*zabyl dumat'*) about his book."[160] When Koznyshev arrives at the Kursk station with his friend Katavasov, he encounters Anna's brother, Stepan Arkard'evich, who has also found that the only way to move forward in life is to forget the past. When Stepan hears that Vronskii is on the train, he is struck by a pang of sadness. The pain brought about by his momentary recollection of Anna's death, however, quickly passes: "For a moment Stepan Arkad'evich's face expressed sadness, but a minute later when, with a light spring in his step and smoothing out his sideburns, he entered the room where Vronskii was, Stepan Arkad'evich had already *completely*

[159] *PSS* 19: 350.

[160] *PSS* 19: 353. My italics.

forgotten (vpolne zabyl) his desperate weeping over the corpse of his sister and saw in Vronskii only a hero and an old friend."[161] In contrast to Koznyshev and Oblonskii, Vronskii is unable to find a new meaning in life. His estrangement from life stems from his inability to remember his former happiness, from the impossibility of reconstructing a narrative that would give some meaning to what had transpired. When we catch our first glimpse of Vronskii two months after Anna's suicide, he is a broken man: "[L]ife has no value for me," he tells Koznyshev. Koznyshev responds by predicting that Vronsky will "come back to life" (*Vy vozrodites'*). The words, however, ring hollow. Vronskii's dull indifference is suddenly pierced when he *remembers* the reproachful expression on the face of Anna's corpse. This memory dominates his vision of his past and his relationship with her. He attempts to replace it with a more positive memory, but proves incapable: "He *tried to remember* (staralsia vspominat') her as she had been then, when he had first met her at the station. [...] He *tried to remember* (staralsia vspominat') his best moments with her, but those moments were poisoned forever."[162]

For Levin, the peasant's exhortation to "remember God" serves as the catalyst for his own narrative reconstruction of the past. Upon hearing these words, he contemplates the trajectory that his life has followed, constructing a coherent narrative of the past that allows him to account for his present situation:

> Yes, I must *come to my senses* [lit. *remember myself*. JS.] and think it over. […] Everything from the beginning […]
> […] And he briefly repeated to himself the entire course that his thought had followed over the last two years, at the beginning which was the clear, obvious thought of death at the sight of his beloved, hopelessly ill brother.
> Having understood for the first time then that for every person and for himself there is nothing to come but suffering, death, and eternal oblivion,

[161] *PSS* 19: 355-356. My italics.

[162] *PSS* 19: 362. My italics.

he had decided that it was impossible to live like that, that it was necessary to either explain his life in such a way that it would no longer appear to be a cruel joke played by some demon, or to shoot himself.

But he had done neither one nor the other, but rather had continued to live, to think, and to feel, and had even gotten married during this time and had experienced many joys and had been happy when he thought about the meaning of his life.

What did this mean? It meant that he had lived well, but thought poorly.

He lived (without being aware of it) by those spiritual truths that he had imbibed with his mother's milk, but had thought not only without acknowledging these truths, but assiduously avoiding them. Now it was clear to him that he was only able to live thanks to the beliefs that he with which he had been raised. […]

[…] I searched for an answer to my question. But thought could not give me the answer; it does not correspond to the question. It was life itself that gave me the answer through my knowledge of what is good and what is bad. And I did not in any sense acquire this knowledge; it was given to me together with everything, *given* because I could not have taken it from anywhere.

[«Да, надо *опомниться* и обдумать […] Всё сначала […]

И он вкратце повторил сам себе весь ход своей мысли за эти последние два года, начало которого была ясная, очевидная мысль о смерти при виде любимого безнадежно больного брата.

В первый раз тогда поняв ясно, что для всякого человека и для него впереди ничего не было, кроме страдания, смерти и вечного забвения, он решил, что так нельзя жить, что надо или объяснить свою жизнь так, чтобы она не представлялась злой насмешкой какого-то дьявола, или застрелиться. Но он не сделал ни того, ни другого, а продолжал жить, мыслить и чувствовать и даже в это самое время женился и испытал много радостей и был счастлив, когда не думал о значении своей жизни.

Что ж это значило? Это значило, что он жил хорошо, но думал дурно.

Он жил (не сознавая этого) теми духовными истинами, которые он всосал с молоком, а думал не только не признавая этих истин, но старательно обходя их.

Теперь ему ясно было, что он мог жить только благодаря тем верованиям, в которых он был воспитан. […]

[…]«Я искал ответа на мой вопрос. А ответа на мой вопрос не могла мне дать мысль, — она несоизмерима с вопросом. Ответ мне дала сама жизнь, в моем знании того, что хорошо и что дурно. А знание это я не приобрел ничем, но оно дано мне вместе со всеми, дано потому, что я ни откуда не мог взять его».][163]

[163] *PSS* 19: 378-379. My italics.

It is significant in this respect that Fokanych, the peasant who "remembers God" is also referred to as "Platon." The name obviously recalls Platon Karataev, but also the philosopher Plato, whose theory of recollection (*anamnesis*) holds that man possesses complete knowledge from the moment of birth and that learning is merely a matter of recalling this knowledge.[164] For Levin, accessing the truths that he had already known from his past through the process of recollection provides a path forward in life. As he explains in the closing lines of the novel:

> I'll get angry at the coachman Ivan in the same way; I'll argue in the same way; I'll express my ideas inappropriately; there will be the same wall between the holy of holies of my soul and others; even with my wife—I'll to accuse her for my own fears and to repent for it in the same way; I'll to fail to understand with my reason why I pray in the same way, and I will pray. But my life now, my entire life, regardless of what may happen to me, every minute of it, is not only not meaningless, as it was before, but possesses the undeniable meaning of the good that I am capable of investing it with.
>
> [«Так же буду сердиться на Ивана кучера, так же буду спорить, буду некстати высказывать свои мысли, так же будет стена между святая святых моей души и другими, даже женой моей, так же буду обвинять ее за свой страх и раскаиваться в этом, так же буду не понимать разумом, зачем я молюсь, и буду молиться, — но жизнь моя теперь, вся моя жизнь, независимо от всего, что может случиться со мной, каждая минута ее — не только не бессмысленна, как была прежде, но имеет несомненный смысл добра, который я властен вложить в нее!»][165]

Levin's conversion, then, comes not as the result of a new discovery (*"Ia nichego ne otkryl"*), but rather as a result of the ability to conceive of his life in terms of a coherent

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[164] On Plato's theory of *anamnesis*, see R.E. Allen, "Anamnesis in Plato's *Meno* and *Phaedo*," *The Review of Metaphysics* 1 (1959): 165-174 and Norman Gulley, "Plato's Theory of Recollection," *The Classical Quarterly* 4 (1954): 194-213.

[165] PSS 19: 399.

narrative. This observation allows us to understand why Tolstoy considered it necessary to reiterate the spiritual trajectory charted by his hero in the body of the novel. It also accounts for his decision to apply the same principle to his own life in his *Confession*, a text that we will discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter II: A False *Confession*

О многих печалях и мучениях своей жизни Толстой говорит с откровенностью, которая кажется часто ненужной.

-Владимир Эрн, «Толстой против Толстого»

Introduction: Tolstoy's *Confession*

In the last chapter, we rejected attempts to frame conversion as a discrete experiential category, arguing that it should rather be seen as a narrative structure that purports to describe an experience. In this chapter we will apply this framework to Tolstoy's account of his own conversion. It is important to note from the outset that when we speak of the "narrative" of Tolstoy's conversion we are not referring to one specific text, but rather to a comprehensive public persona that the author cultivated through both his written works and the statements that he frequently made regarding his transformation throughout the last three decades of his life. Among these testimonies, however, the *Confession* (Ispoved') enjoys an undeniable primacy. As the most detailed, comprehensive, and widely read account of the conversion, it, more than any other work or utterance, has shaped our understanding of Tolstoy's crisis and transformation. Thus, while we will make reference to a number of works written from the mid to late 1870s through the early 1880s, it is this text that will constitute the primary focus for this chapter.

This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part ("Truth and Lies"), we will establish the fictive nature of the *Confession* by comparing the claims that the author makes in the text with the existing documentary evidence regarding the events that it describes. In the second part ("A Crisis of Form"), we will step back to examine the history of the composition of the work, charting the long path that led Tolstoy to embrace an autobiographical framework as a means of expressing his religious and ideological convictions. In the third part ("I once was lost, but now am found") we will return to the *Confession* itself, analyzing how Tolstoy employs the principle of temporal division that is central to the construction of archetypical Western conversion narratives in constructing his life story. The fourth and final part ("From Life to Art and Back Again") focuses on a number of works written in the 1880s, both fictional and non-fictional, in which the author reprises the central narrative of the *Confession*.

Before beginning our analysis, however, we should first provide a brief synopsis of the work itself. In its final form, the *Confession* includes sixteen chapters, which fill just under sixty pages in his *Complete Collected Works*. The first three and a half chapters are devoted to an account of the author's life from birth until the 1870s. Here Tolstoy describes his youthful loss of faith, his descent into a life of unbridled sin and egotism, and his deluded belief that he would find meaning in literary activity and family life. In the middle of the third chapter, he describes his first premonitions of an impending crisis. Although he was at the height of his artistic powers, he writes, he began to be tormented by doubts in the meaning of his success and his life as a whole. In Chapter Four he describes how these doubts intensified, erupting into a full-blown spiritual and existential crisis. Having come to believe that there is no meaning in life that

death will not destroy, he fell into a deep depression, and even contemplated suicide, a prospect that both tempted and frightened him. Chapters Five through Eight recount the author's strained attempts to find an escape from the plight that had befallen him. He looks for answers in the natural sciences, in philosophy, and in Epicurean abandonment, but is dissatisfied at every turn. Chapter Nine marks the beginning of his recovery, which is inaugurated by the realization that reason alone is incapable of determining the meaning of life. This leads to a major epiphany in Chapter Ten, where he finally realizes that he has erred by only considering the perspectives of the members of the educated elite. The suffering masses, he comes to see, have always known that life has a meaning, even if their mentality is still clouded by the same superstitions that he had earlier criticized in his religious acquaintances. Chapters Eleven through Fifteen are largely dedicated to a recounting of his attempts to process the implications of his newfound faith. Although he initially returns to the religion of his youth, he quickly becomes discontented with the hypocrisy of the official Church, which preaches humble submission and the brotherhood of men at the same time that it gives its blessing to war and inequality. The sixteenth and final chapter ends with the author at an impasse: he is fully convinced that life has a meaning and that there is a measure of truth in the teachings of the Church, but he is equally certain that there is also a measure of falsehood in its dogma. His task, he writes, is to "separate one from the other" (*otdelit' odno ot drugogo*).[166]

Although the main body of the text ends without a firm resolution, Tolstoy provides clear indication at the end of the work that he has undergone a real and lasting transformation. In a brief passage included at the end of the last chapter, he describes a

[166] *PSS* 23:59.

dream that he had in 1882, three years after he completed the body of the text in 1879. In the dream he is lying on his back on a platform suspended by ropes. With every movement, he becomes more and more entangled in the ropes. He realizes that he has not yet asked himself where he is and what he is lying on. Looking around, he perceives that the platform is suspended over a bottomless chasm. Staring down at the depths below him and up at the endless expanse above him, he is terrified that he will fall. Eventually, though, he grasps that there is a mechanism holding him in place, one that he had not previously been aware of:

> I do not so much look around as I feel with my entire body that which is supporting me. I see that I am not hanging or falling, but standing firmly. I ask myself how I am holding on; I touch myself; I look around and I see that beneath me, beneath the middle of my body, there is one cord, and when I look up [I realize that] I am lying on it in the most firmly balanced position, and that it alone is what supported me before. […] In my dream I am even surprised that I did not understand this earlier. It turns out that there is a column by my head, the firmness of which is not in doubt, despite the fact that it stands on nothing. From that column a loop has been extended in a way that is both ingenious and simple: If you lie on this loop with the middle of your body and look up, then there can be no question about falling. All of this was clear to me, and I was glad and clam. And it was as if someone was saying to me; "Look and remember." And I awoke.
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> [И я не столько оглядываюсь, сколько всем телом своим испытываю ту точку опоры, на которой я держусь. И вижу, что я уж не вишу и не падаю, а держусь крепко. Я спрашиваю себя, как я держусь, ощупываюсь, оглядываюсь и вижу, что подо мной, под серединой моего тела, одна помоча, и что, глядя вверх, я лежу на ней в самом устойчивом равновесии, что она одна и держала прежде […] Я во сне даже удивляюсь, как я не понимал этого раньше. Оказывается, что в головах у меня стоит столб, и твёрдость этого столба не подлежит никакому сомнению, несмотря на то, что стоять этому тонкому столбу не на чем. Потом от столба проведена петля как-то очень хитро и вместе просто, и если лежишь на этой петле серединой тела и смотришь вверх, то даже и вопроса не может быть о падении. Всё это мне было ясно, и я был рад и спокоен. И как будто кто-то мне говорит: смотри же, запомни. И я проснулся.][167]

[167] *PSS* 23:59

The dream, which, as Medzhibovskaya points out, features imagery adopted directly from a parable by Arthur Schopenhauer (with whom Tolstoy polemicizes in the early chapters) leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that the author's transformation is real and lasting.[168]

The title of the text deserves special attention. It is important to note that Tolstoy did not choose to call the work a "confession" himself. When he submitted the manuscript for publication, he appended the title *My Life* (Moia Zhizn'), but crossed it out.[169] In the proofs that were prepared for the work's publication in *Russkaia mysl'*, the text was presented under the modest heading "An Introduction to An Unpublished Composition" (*Vstuplenie k nenapechatannomu sochineniiu*); the "unpublished composition" referred to Tolstoy's *Study of Dogmatic Theology* (Issledovanie dogmaticheskogo bogosloviia), which was completed in 1882. As Gusev points out in his commentary on the text, the title *Confession* did not appear in print until 1884, when the first professionally produced edition was released in Geneva. There are, however, a number of references that suggest that this title came into use much earlier, and perhaps even before the work was completed. The first known reference to the work as a "confession" appeared in Tolstoy's wife's journal in late January 1881, but it is not clear whether she was the first to call it by this title, or whether she was repeating Tolstoy's

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[168] Medzhibovskaya, 162, 248. Medzhibovskaya refers to a passage in Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* in which the author likens man to a puppet hanging by a rope: "[Eventually] this rope becomes weak, the puppet sinks; if it breaks, the puppet must fall, for the ground under it supports it only in appearance."

[169] Nikolai Gusev, "'Ispoved'': Istoriia napisaniia i pechataniia," in PSS 23: 523-524. See also Paperno, *Who, What Am I?*, 72. Due to Tolstoy's refusal to add a disclaimer stating that he had since repented of the views expressed in the text, the planned publication never occurred. The first printed edition of the essay was published in Geneva in 1884. The first legal Russian edition did not appear until after the 1905 Revolution. For a detailed account of Tolstoy's battle with the censors, see N.N. Bakhmet'ev, "L.N. Tolstoi i tsenzura v 80–kh godakh," *Novoe vremia*, no. 11694, 1908.

own words. In any case, there can be no doubt that he accepted this title as legitimate, for he quickly began to refer to the work as a confession in his personal correspondence.[170] The significance of this title hardly needs to be explained: It clearly evokes a number of earlier works published under the same heading, the most famous of which are undoubtedly the confessions of Augustine and Rousseau.[171] (The connection is even more obvious in Russian, which uses the singular "*Ispoved'"* for all three works.) While there is no evidence that Tolstoy consciously sought to emulate either of his predecessors, his acceptance of this title invites, or perhaps even demands, a comparison.

It would seem natural to assume that Tolstoy's *Confession* would bear a greater resemblance to the *Confessions* of the French *philosophe* than to those of the Bishop of Hippo. In his youth, Tolstoy had worshipped at the feet of Rousseau, even going so far as to wear a locket with the writer's portrait around his neck.[172] His passion for the writer does not appear to have waned in the least in the aftermath of his conversion: In a letter to

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[170] See Gusev.

[171] Other famous "confessions" in the Russian literary tradition include Nikolai Karamzin's "My Confession" [*Moia ispoved'*], which was published in the form of a letter to the editor of a journal in 1802, and Nikolai Gogol's posthumously published "Authorial Confession" (*Avtorskaia ispoved'*). See Nikolai Karamzin, *Izbrannye sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1964), 729-738; Nikolai Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v chetyrnadtsatykh tomakh*, vol. 8 (Leningrad and Moscow: Institut russkoi literatury "Pushkinskii dom," 1937-1952), 432-467.

[172] Hugh McLean, *In Quest of Tolstoy* (Brighton: Academic Studies Press, 2008), 144. The literature on Rousseau's influence on Tolstoy is vast. See, for example, Margaret M. Bullit, "Rousseau and Tolstoy: Childhood and Confession," *Comparative Literature Studies* 16 (1979): 12-20; J.M. Coetzee, "Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky, *Comparative Literature* 37 (1985): 193-232.; Galina Galagan, *L. N. Tolstoi: khudozhestvenno-eticheskie iskaniia* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1981); and Donna Tussing Orwin, *Tolstoy's Life and Thought, 1847-1880,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 39-49. Less has been written on Tolstoy and Augustine. For a rare example of a critical treatment, see Alla Polosina, "L. N. Tolstoi i Avrelii Avgustin o pamiati, vremeni i pronstranstve," in *Lev Tolstoi i mirovaia literatura* (Tula: Iasnaia Poliana, 2005), 65-76.

Bernard Bouvier, the President of the Geneva-based *Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, written in 1905, he proudly declared that, "Rousseau has been my teacher from the age of fifteen. Rousseau and the Gospels have been the two great and beneficent influences of my life."[173] Tolstoy's attitude towards Augustine, in contrast, was one of open contempt. In his 1893 essay "Religion and Morality" (*Religiia i nravstvennost'*), he derisively referred to Augustine as one of the founders of "the state religion of the Romans,"[174] and in his diary entry for June 6, 1889, Tolstoy included him in a list of other early Christian theologians whose ideas he rejected, writing that, "as people, they are [our] brothers and are worthy of love, but as self-proclaimed vicars of Christ, his enemies, they are abhorrent and pernicious. And one must not forget this" (*kak liudi oni brat'ia i dostoiny liubvi, no kak samozvannye namestniki Khrista, ego vragi, oni nenavistny i vredny. I ne nado zabyvat' etogo*).[175]

Given Tolstoy's affinity for Rousseau and aversion towards Augustine, it is somewhat surprising to note that, on the surface at least, his spiritual autobiography far more closely resembles the latter's work than it does the former's. Tolstoy's somber, serious tone and concise narration comes far closer to Augustine's style than it does to Rousseau's, which is chatty, ironic, and prone to digressions. And where Rousseau's self-portrait is highly individuated, both Tolstoy and Augustine strive to present their own

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[173] *PSS* 75:234. In the letter, Tolstoy gladly accepted Bouvier's offer to join the society. As McLean notes, this was a marked departure from the "scornful silence" with which he ordinarily greeted such requests. (McLean, 144).

[174] *PSS* 39:9

[175] *PSS* 50:92. The other two "so-called fathers of the Church" whom Tolstoy mentions are John Chrysostom and Basil the Great.

experiences as fundamentally universal, as a model that other men can—and, indeed, ought to—emulate. As Riley explains in his study on conversion and autobiography:

> Rousseau's claim that his life should serve as a reference point for the study of man does nothing to jeopardize his simultaneous affirmation of uniqueness. On the contrary, the invitation to comparison is only offered so that it can become all the more clear that there is no one else like Rousseau. Augustine writes a subjective history whose personal content is evacuated upon conversion; the text soon becomes the universalizing story of the sinner's turn towards God, in whose presence all souls are reduced to equivalence.[176]

As we shall see, however, Tolstoy shares his "teacher's" laissez-faire attitude towards factual accuracy, his penchant for creatively twisting the truth for the sake of narrative coherence.[177]

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[176] Riley, 90. Andrew Wachtel echoes this observation and applies it to Tolstoy: "There is […] something quite problematic in comparing Tolstoy's *Confession* to Rousseau's. From the first lines, the latter insists on his own originality. […] Tolstoy, on the other hand, insists, time and again, that individuality is at the root of his problems. Whenever he thinks he is special or different he despairs, but when he thinks like 'everybody else,' he is saved. In this respect, the tenor of Tolstoy's autobiography is more like Augustine's than Rousseau's. For, like Augustine, Tolstoy wishes to merge himself into something larger, outside the self. After Rousseau it is hard to see a confessional text as anything other than a document celebrating its author's individuality. If individuality is the very problem to be overcome, a means must be found to allow the author to be not just himself but a model or a symbol of Everyman." Andrew Wachtel, "History and Autobiography in Tolstoy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, ed. Donna Tussing Irwin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 187.

[177] On Rousseau's penchant for creatively altering the truth, see Leo Damrosch, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Restless Genius* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), 9 and Eugene L. Stelzig, *The Romantic Subject in Autobiography: Rousseau and Goethe* (Richmond: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 72.

Truth and Lies

Ivan Turgenev was already in failing health and less than a year from his death when he received a copy of the *Confession* at his Paris apartment. "I read it with great interest," he wrote in a letter to Dmitrii Grigorovich dated October 31, 1882: "It is a remarkable thing by virtue of its sincerity, honesty, and strength of conviction" (*vesch' zamechatel'naia po iskrennosti pravdivosti i sile ubezhdeniia*).[178] Turgenev may have been one of the first to lavish praise on Tolstoy for the sincerity of his effort, but he was hardly the last. In his 1902 study *L. N. Tolstoy: His Life and Literary Activity* (L. N. Tolstoi: Ego Zhzin' i literaturnaia deiatel'nost'), the Marxist critic and Tolstoyan sympathizer Evgenii Solov'ev wrote that in the *Confession*, the author "bared his soul with a candidness that had never been seen before. […] Tolstoy told us everything, both large and small, about his life." [179] A memoir account written by the journalist and playwright Petr Boborykin in 1908 used strikingly similar language to describe its author's first impressions after reading proofs of the text in 1882: "The *Confession* […] inspired a deepened interest in [Tolstoy's] spiritual life; it engaged me with its sincerity (*privlekla menia svoei iskrennost'iu*) and ignited a desire for a personal acquaintance."[180]

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[178] It is important to note that despite his praise for Tolstoy's sincerity, Turgenev's reaction to the work was far from positive. In the very next line, he harshly criticized Tolstoy: "But it is entirely built on unstable foundations, and in the end it leads to the darkest negation of the living, of human life. This is, in its own way, a sort of nihilism." See Ivan Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, vol. 13, book 2 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1968), 89.

[179] Evgenii Solov'ev, *L. N. Tolstoi: Ego zhizn' i literaturnaia deiatel'nost'* (St. Petersburg: Izd. F. Pavlenkova, 1894), 154.

[180] P.D. Bobrykin, "V Moskve- U Tolstogo," in *L.N. Tolstoi v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov*, vol. 1, ed. S.A. Makashin (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literature, 1978), 266.

We find a similar appraisal repeated in studies by prominent twentieth century Western critics as well. Ernest Simmons, whose 1946 biography of Tolstoy is still widely cited by scholars today, called the *Confession* "one of the noblest utterances of man," and went on to praise the "complete sincerity [with which] Tolstoy made it clear that he was uncompromisingly turning his back on all the joys and fame and magnificent artistic achievements of his fifty years of existence in search for a new way of life that would enable him to seek moral perfection in service to God and humanity."[181] A cursory review of online reviews for English language translations of the *Confession* suggests that this is an area where critics' views largely align with those of "naïve" readers: "Here is a man whose simplicity and sincerity permeate every page," writes one reviewer; "[T]here is no mistaking the excruciatingly painful honesty with which he did his best to work out, and then live up to, his beliefs," opines another; "Tolstoy's honesty at his own selfish motives and his disappointment with the true value of his accompleshments [sic] is wonderfully refreshing," adds a third.[182]

In theory, "sincerity" is, of course, not entirely synonymous with factual accuracy. In practice, however, this distinction has often been lost. Indeed, many readers and critics have been so taken by the apparent sincerity of the work that they have treated it as a straightforward exercise in autobiographical exposition, "a wonderful account of the attack of melancholy which led him to his own religious conclusions," to quote

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[181] Ernest J. Simmons, *Introduction to Tolstoy's Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 96.

[182] Customer reviews by Stephen Coltin, John L. Leland, and "Peranikan," Amazon.com, http://www. amazon. com/Confession-Leo-Tolstoy/product-reviews/0393314758 (accessed October 2, 2014).

William James.[183] This interpretation has been particularly dominant in the biographical literature. Consider, for example, how Pavel Biriukov, Tolstoy's personal secretary and official biographer, employed the *Confession*. For Biriukov, the challenge of describing Tolstoy's transformation was great indeed: "I halted in bewilderment before the enormity of the task that lay before me," he writes in the introduction to the second volume of his biography, "before the responsibility that I have taken upon myself to describe this enormous and deep event." This challenge, however, was "substantially mitigated" by access to Tolstoy's own written account. As a biographer, he writes, his task was merely to identify materials "that would add to that which is already known, to that which the writer himself imparted in his inimitable *Confession*, so that the portrait of his spiritual life with all of its sufferings and joys would become, if it is possible, still brighter and clearer" than the account that Tolstoy presented in his autobiographical work. [184] Thus, Biriukov treats the *Confession* as a sort of guidebook for navigating the period that it purports to describe. For the most part, this is how subsequent biographers have employed the text as well.[185]

This view, however, is not shared by all of Tolstoy's critics. A handful of critics, most of whom have made no attempt to conceal their hostility towards Tolstoy's religious and publicistic writings, have suggested that the author intended, whether consciously or

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[183] James, 147.

[184] Pavel Birikuov, *Biografiia L'va Nikolaevicha Tolstogo*, vol. 2 (Moscow: 1923), 141.

[185] See, for example, the accounts provided by Edward A. Steiner, Romain Rolland, and Ernest Simmons in their biographies. All three accept the claims that Tolstoy makes in the *Confession* without question, liberally peppering their accounts of what Steiner calls "the terrible years" of crisis and conversion quotations and paraphrases lifted from the text. Edward A. Steiner, *Tolstoy: The Man and his Message* (New York: Flemming H. Revell Company, 1908), 198-212; Romain Rolland, *Tolstoy*, trans. by Bernard Miall (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1911), 133-154; Ernest J. Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1946), 317.

not, to deceive his readers in order to gain sympathy and fame. The populist critic Nikolai Mikhailovskii was one of the first to adopt this approach. In the May 1886 iteration of his column "Diary of a Reader" (*Dnevnik chitatelia*), Mikhailovskii seized on the recent publication of the twelfth volume of Tolstoy's collected works as an opportunity to heap scorn on the writer and on the *Confession* in particular. The critic wrote that he had chanced to read Tolstoy's text at the same time as he was perusing the deathbed letters and reminiscences of N. K. Pirogov. Pirogov, explained Mikhailovskii, had mentioned an episode from his youth when he had stolen a few sugar cubes for one of his schoolmates. Although this "crime" was trifling, Pirogov described the feelings of guilt that it led to with the sort of simplicity and earnestness that Mikhailovskii argued was completely lacking in Tolstoy's *Confession*:

> [Tolstoy,] it would seem, confesses to sins that are much more serious [than Pirogov's], saying, for example, that "I killed people." But these are just terrible words, and they mean only that Count Tolstoy served in the armed forces, and in accordance with his service took part in battles. Let Count Tolstoy himself consider this type of action to be simple murder, but a huge, overwhelming majority of readers—that is, those before whom he is confessing—not only will not cast stones of shame and contempt at him on this account, but rather will think: "Well done! A brave man, entirely worthy of the ranks and honors that he has received." And such are all the sins for which Count Tolstoy repents […]
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> […] In his *Confession* Count Tolstoy does not confess at all, but appears before us in the clothing of a repentant sinner, and either in the sort of costume that was fashionable in its time, or in the cloak of a preacher raging at the sins of society. I do not say that this is a bad thing; I merely do not see in it humility or genuine self-flagellation.
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> [Он, по-видимому, кается в грехах, гораздо более крупных, говорит, например: «я убивал людей». Но это только страшные слова, а означают они лишь то, что гр. Толстой служил в военной службе и, по долгу службы, принимал участие в сражениях. Пусть гр. Толстой сам считает этого рода действия простым убийством, но огромное, подавляющее большинство читателей, то есть тех людей, перед которыми он исповедуется, не только не бросят в него по поводу этого признания камнем позора или презрения, а подумают: молодец!

> храбрый человек, вполне заслуживший те чины и ордена, которые он получил. И таковы все грехи, в которых кается гр. Толстой. […]
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> […] В «Исповеди» гр. Толстой вовсе не исповедуется, является нам не в одежде кающегося грешника, а либо в таком костюме, который в свое время был модным, либо в мантии проповедника, громящего грехи общества. Я не говорю, что это худое дело, я только не вижу здесь смирения и подлинного самобичевания.] [186]

Over twenty years later, Vladimir Lenin would adopt a similar tone in his famous essay "Tolstoy as a Mirror of the Russian Revolution" (*Tolstoi kak zerkalo russkoi revoliutsii*), where he heaped scorn on the would-be prophet, describing him as "a worn-out, hysterical sniveler (*istaskannyi, isterichnyi khliupik*) […] who, publicly beating his breast, wails, 'I am wretched and repulsive, but I practice moral self-perfection; I don't eat meat anymore, but rather nourish myself on rice cutlets!'"[187] More recently, Wilson has called the *Confession* "a transparent piece of self-deception" and made reference to its author's "psychotic ability to find dissatisfaction in the areas which should have given the greatest and noblest forms of pleasure."[188]

While much of the criticism that has been heaped on Tolstoy's late writings by openly hostile commentators is marked by pettiness and a tendency towards pathological analysis, in this case at least, it is the doubters who have come closer to the truth than those who have accepted the *Confession* at face value. To demonstrate the infeasibility of a referential interpretation, we need only pose a simple question: When did Tolstoy's crisis begin and when was it ultimately resolved? The question should, by all rights, be easy to answer. After all, as an historical personage, Tolstoy is hardly a mysterious or

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[186] N.K. Mikhailovskii, "Nechto o morali—O gr. L.N. Tolstom," in *Sochineniia N.K. Mikhailovskogo*, vol. 6 (St. Petersburg: Russkoe bogatstvo, 1897), 358.

[187] Lenin, 57.

[188] Wilson, *Tolstoy, 312*, 313.

inaccessible figure like Homer or Shakespeare. On the contrary, we have a remarkably detailed record of his daily activities from a relatively early age thanks to the volumes of diaries, letters, and memoirs that he and his contemporaries wrote and preserved. What is more, the *Confession* itself includes a number of temporal markers that ought to give us clues about the dating of the events it describes: Tolstoy tells us, for example, that the crisis began "five years ago," that his suicidal depression lasted for "an entire year", that three years passed between his return to the Church and his rejection of it, and that the dream described in the epilogue took place two years after he completed the main body of the text. And yet when we turn to the critical literature, we find a baffling degree of diversity in the responses that scholars give to the question we have posed. The conversion is frequently said to have occurred in "the late 1870s," but when precise dates for the onset of the crisis are given, they range from 1876,[189] 1877,[190] 1879,[191] 1880,[192] and even to "the early 80s."[193] This confusion stems from two sources. The first concerns the imprecise and inconsistent fashion in which critics have employed the term "crisis." In conversion theory, "crisis" generally refers to the initial onset of despair that leads the eventual convert to acknowledge the necessity of finding a new religious worldview. In Tolstoy criticism, however, the term is often applied to the entire process that elapsed in

[189] Biriukov, 179.

[190] David Matual, "On the Poetics of Tolstoy's *Confession*," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 19 (1975): 283; Ernest Simmons, *Tolstoy*, 317.

[191] David Patterson, Introduction to *Confession*, by Leo Tolstoy (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1983), 5.

[192] Andrew Donskov, "Leo Tolstoy and Nikolaj Strakhov: A Personal and Literary Dialogue," in *L.N. Tolstoy and N.N. Strakhov: Complete Correspondence* (Moscow: L.N. Tolstoy Museum, 2003), xiv; Colm McKeogh, *Tolstoy's Pacifism* (Amherst NY: Cambria Press, 2009), 19.

[193] David Shepherd, "Conversion, Reversion and Subversion in Tolstoi's *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*." *The Slavonic and Eastern European Review* 71 (1993): 401.

the time between the first manifestation of suicidal ideation and the writer's ultimate break with the Church. The chief source of confusion, however, is Tolstoy's own conscious manipulation of the dating.

In order to grasp this point, we need merely return to the question we posed above: When did the crisis begin? The first reference to the crisis in the text itself appears in the middle of Chapter Three. Its onset is described as a gradual process that first manifested itself in occasional moments of doubt and despair, which Tolstoy refers to as "*ostanovki zhizni*"—moments when life seemed to stop. "These moments," he tells us, "always expressed themselves through the same questions: 'What is the purpose?' 'Well, and then what?'" (*Zachem? Nu, a potom?*) Although Tolstoy does not indicate how much time passed between the initial appearance of doubts and the eruption of his full-blown crisis, he does appear to provide a fairly precise indication of when then the *ostanovki zhizni* themselves began: He tells us that it was "five years ago," that it was fifteen years after his marriage, and that it began "when I was almost fifty." The problem is that these claims yield two completely different dates. Since the *Confession* was written in late 1879, it would stand to reason that "five years ago" must refer to 1874, or perhaps to 1875. And yet his wedding was in 1862; if the crisis took root fifteen years after that, then it must have been in or around 1877, a date that accords with his claim that he was almost fifty. It also accords with a reference in one of the drafts that the crisis took hold "when I was finishing my book *Anna Karenina*."[194]

Let us consider each of these dates, starting with the later one. The suggestion that the crisis began in 1877, it must be said, is completely inconsistent with the timeline presented in the rest of the text. In the *Confession,* Tolstoy describes a spiritual journey

[194] *PSS* 23: 494.

that lasted for several years. As we have already mentioned, he claims that the period during which he lived without any faith at all lasted for "an entire year" and that "about three years" passed between his return to the Church and his movement away from it. While it is possible, and perhaps even likely, that there was some degree of overlap in each of these stages, it is clear that we are dealing with a long, drawn-out process. One of the very last developments in this process concerns his growing dissatisfaction with the Orthodox Church during the time of the Russo-Turkish War. Since the war began in the spring of 1877, it is simply not possible to accept the suggestion that the crisis began in the very same year.

The earlier date—1874—has several apparent advantages over the later one. First, it is relatively consistent with the timeline presented in the rest of the text. As we have already seen, Tolstoy describes three stages that lasted for one year, "about two years," and "about three years." Factoring in the imprecise nature of designations like "an entire year" and "about two years" and allowing for the possibility of overlap, it is at least conceivable that he is describing a process that could have unfolded between 1874 and 1879. And yet there is substantial basis for rejecting this dating as well. According to the *Confession*, at least a year passed before Tolstoy even considered the possibility that he had been wrong to reject faith. If the crisis began in 1874, then this realization cannot have occurred before 1875. And yet there are a number of references in his diaries and correspondence from the early to mid-1870s that demonstrate that his revived interest in religion appeared years before the date he suggests in the *Confession*. In a letter dated September 23, 1873, for example, he described sitting for a portrait with the artist Ivan Kramskoi: "I sit and chat with him and try to convert him from his Petersburg faith to the

faith of the baptized" (*iz Peterburgskoi staraius' obrashchat' ego v kreshchenuiu veru*).[195] Perhaps the strongest evidence against the timeline implied by the *Confession,* however, comes in the form of a brief note that he scribbled to himself on a loose sheet of paper in February of 1874:

> Having lived less than fifty years, I have become convinced that earthly life gives nothing, and that an intelligent man who gazes upon earthly life seriously—pains, fear, odium, struggle—*for what?*—will shoot himself for the sake of madness, and Hartman and Schopenhauer are right. But Schopenhauer hinted that there is something that kept him from shooting himself. And it is this *something* that is the aim of my book. By what do we live?—*Religion*.—
>
> [Проживя под 50 лет, я убедился, что земная жизнь ничего не дает, и тот умный человек, который вглядится в земную жизнь серьезно, труды, страх, упреки, борьба — *зачем?* — ради сумасшествия, тот сейчас застрелится, и Гартман и Шопенгауер прав. Но Шопенгауэр давал чувствовать, что есть что-то, отчего он не застрелился. Вот это *что-то* есть задача моей книги. Чем мы живем? — *Религия.*][196]

If the crisis that Tolstoy describes in the text actually occurred, then this note provides incontrovertible evidence that it must have appeared at least a year earlier than he indicates in the text.

The realization that Tolstoy appears to have consciously manipulated the dating of his crisis and conversion forces us to look more closely at the rest of the claims that he makes in the text. Once we abandon the assumption that the *Confession* is nothing more or less than an honest and accurate retelling of lived experience, we begin to see that the text is riddled with claims that are at best questionable and at worst demonstrably false.

Tolstoy's narrative begins to diverge from the truth in the very first chapter, which describes his youthful loss of faith. Although he was baptized and raised in the

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[195] *PSS* 62: 48.

[196] *PSS* 48: 347.

Orthodox Church, he writes, by the time he was a teenager he no longer believed in its dogmas: "From the age of sixteen I ceased praying, going to church, and fasting on my own volition" (*Ia s shestnadtsati let perestal stanovit'sia na molitvu i perestal po sobstvennomu pobuzhdeniiu khodit' v tserkov' i govet'*).[197] Due to the influence of his peers and his early infatuation with the writings of secular critics of institutional religion like Voltaire, he, like most of his acquaintances, came to regard religion itself as a foolish, outmoded superstition: "I sympathized with [the] jokes made by my elders and drew from them the conclusion that though it is necessary to learn the catechism and go to church, it does not follow from this that one ought to take these things too seriously."[198]

All of this is presented as a straightforward recitation of the truth, and yet virtually none of it is accurate, or at least not in the sense that the author presents it to be (or that critics have interpreted it as being). In the first place, it is simply not true that Tolstoy stopped going to church voluntarily at the age of sixteen. The diaries that he kept in his twenties and thirties include numerous references to churchgoing, none of which provides any indication whatsoever that his attendance was forced. In one entry dated May 29, 1856, when he would already have been twenty-seven years old, for example, we find the following statement: "After sitting with Auntie until half past one, I set off through the fields to the church. It was very pleasant."[199] Less than two years later, when

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[197] *PSS* 23: 3.

[198] *PSS* 23: 2.

[199] *PSS* 47: 77.

he was twenty-eight, he writes, "I went to church. It was good. Christ is risen!"[200] Three years later we read, "I slept and went to the all-night Easter service. Perhaps I will fast."[201] Nor is it true that he ceased praying when he was an adolescent, as he claims in the *Confession*. If we turn once more to his diaries, we find a number of entries that describe what would certainly appear to be sincere prayers offered up to God. Consider, for example, his entry for June 11, 1851:

> I didn't sleep at all last night. After writing in my diary, I began to pray to God. It is impossible to convey the sweetness of the feeling that I experienced while praying. I read the prayers that I usually do: Our Father, the Mother of God, the Gate of Mercy, the Appeal to the Guardian Angel, and then I prayed more. […] The feeling of terror vanished completely. I could not distinguish individual feelings of faith, hope, and love from the general feeling. No, here is one feeling that I experienced yesterday—love for God. A lofty love that unites within itself everything that is good and negates everything that is bad.
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> [Вчера я почти всю ночь не спал, пописавши дневник, я стал молиться Богу. — Сладость чувства, которое испытал я на молитве: передать невозможно. Я прочел молитвы, которые обыкновенно творю: Отче, Богородицу, Троицу, Милосердия Двери, воззвание к Ангелу хранителю и потом остался еще на молитве. […] Чувство страха совершенно изчезло. — Ни одного из чувств Веры, надежды и любви я не мог бы отделить от общего чувства. Нет, вот оно чувство, которое испытал я вчера — это любовь к Богу. — Любовь высокую, соединяющую в себе все хорошее, отрицающую все дурное —][202]

While an Orthodox theologian might object to the prayer's mixture of Christian imagery with a pantheistic sensibility, for our purposes what is significant about this entry is that it clearly contradicts Tolstoy's claim in the *Confession* that he considered prayer to be meaningless, if not absurd. Moreover, the reference in the third line to "the prayers that I

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[200] *PSS* 48: 10. It would, of course, be a mistake to read too much theological content into his use of this traditional Easter-time greeting.

[201] *PSS* 48: 34.

[202] *PSS* 46: 61-62.

usually [read]" indicates that this was hardly the first or the only time that he addressed himself to a higher power. Indeed, we find another example of such a prayer in his entry for June 18, 1861, when he was mired in doubt and self-reproach related to his marriage nine months earlier: "Where am I? Where is that 'I' that I myself loved and knew, that emerges from time to time to gladden me and frighten me? I am small and insignificant. [...] I am a gambler and a drunk. […] What do I need? […] My God, help me. Let me live forever in this consciousness of you. […]. A mad night (*bezumnaia noch'*). I am searching for You. […] Lord, have mercy and help me."[203]

Perhaps the strongest evidence that the pre-conversion Tolstoy was not nearly as indifferent to religion as he suggests in the *Confession* comes in the form of the very literary productions that he rejects as mere exercises in vanity in that work. In *Childhood*, his very first novel, for example, Nikolen'ka Irten'ev, the protagonist and narrator, describes his memories of spying on a holy fool in prayer when he was a small child. The holy fool, a wandering pilgrim named Grisha, works himself into a religious ecstasy, repetitively chanting, prostrating himself again and again, and scraping his chains against the floor. Watching Grisha pray, the child is overcome with "a chill and anguish of soul." Reflecting on this memory in the narrative present, Irten'ev writes:

> Much water has flowed since that time, many recollections of the past have lost their meaning for me and have become dim dreams, and even the pilgrim Grisha has long since finished his last pilgrimage; but the impression he made on me, and the feeling he evoked will never die in my memory.
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> O, great Christian, Grisha! Your faith was so strong that you experienced the proximity of God; your love was so great that words came forth from your lips on their own accord—you did not measure them with your reason. […] And what lofty praise you gave to His splendor when, failing to find words, you fell to the ground in tears!

[203] *PSS* 48:54

> [Много воды утекло с тех пор, много воспоминаний о былом потеряли для меня значение и стали смутными мечтами, даже и странник Гриша давно окончил свое последнее странствование; но впечатление, которое он произвел на меня, и чувство, которое возбудил, никогда не умрут в моей памяти.
>
> О великий христианин Гриша! Твоя вера была так сильна, что ты чувствовал близость бога, твоя любовь так велика, что слова сами собою лились из уст твоих — ты их не поверял рассудком. […] И какую высокую хвалу ты принес его величию, когда, не находя слов, в слезах повалился на землю!..][204]

As the Marxist critic Georgii Plekhanov argued in a 1911 article, even if we doubt that *Childhood* is as rigidly autobiographical as it has generally been assumed to be, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that "a person who was actually divorced from the Christian religion could not have written these lines."[205] The same can be said of the two mystical experiences that Prince Andrei undergoes in *War and Peace*. Lying wounded on the battlefield at Austerlitz, the prince does not contemplate the imminent dissolution of his physical body or his material consciousness. Rather, as he stares at the sky above him, he comes to realize that, "all is empty, all is a lie except those infinite heavens. There is nothing, nothing but that. But even it does not exist; there is nothing but peace and stillness. Thanks be to God!"[206] When, towards the end of the novel, he is mortally wounded at the Battle of Borodino, Andrei begins to feel himself merging with the cosmic all: "Love impedes death," he realizes: "Love is life. All, all that I understand, I understand only because I love. All is, all exists only because I love. It [love] binds

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[204] *PSS* 1:34-35.

[205] G. V. Plekhanov, "Eshche o Tolstom," in *L. N. Tolstoi v russkoi kritike: Sbornik statei*, ed. S. P. Bychkov. 2nd edition (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1952), 441. See also L. I. Aksel'rod, *Tolstois Weltanschauung und ihre Entwickelung*, (Stuggart: Druck der Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1902), 13-15.

[206] *PSS* 9: 344.

everything into one. Love is God, and to die means that I, a part of this love, will return to the common eternal source." "Death," he comes to realize, "is an awakening."[207] That Tolstoy was able to present such a vivid description of a mystical "merging with the all" does not, of course, provide sufficient evidence to establish that he had experienced such a sensation himself, any more than his ability to convincingly describe the inner lives of his female characters would prove that he had been a woman. The fact remains, however, that in the *Confession* Tolstoy does not merely say that he was not a believer, but that the concept of belief itself lacked any meaning for him. These passages, and many others like them, provide clear and indisputable evidence to the contrary, revealing that the author's decision to present himself as a committed atheist is less a reflection of autobiographical reality than it is a crafty rhetorical pose that allows him to advance a social critique in the guise of a self-critique.

At the end of the first chapter of the *Confession*, Tolstoy writes that his faith in God was supplanted by a faith in moral self-perfection, but that this drive led him to embrace unbridled egotism. At first glance, this statement appears to be more or less accurate: the endless lists of rules for moral conduct that the young Tolstoy wrote (and more often than not quickly broke) would seem to vouch for the validity of the characterization. There is also ample evidence to support his claim that his own strivings towards perfection often led him to adopt a condescending, arrogant pose in his interactions with others. The problem, however, is that in the *Confession* he suggests that he had only recently come to realize the inherent dangers of the pursuit of perfection: "*Now*, remembering that time, I see clearly that my faith […] *at that time* was a faith in

[207] *PSS* 12: 64.

perfection" (Teper', *vspominaia to vremia, ia vizhu iasno, chto vera moia* […] v to vremia *byla vera v sovershenstvovanie*).[208] This is quite simply impossible to believe. One need only go back to his presentation of his protagonist's development in the novels *Boyhood* (Otrochestvo, 1854) and *Youth* (Iunost', 1857) to find convincing evidence to the contrary. Under the influence of an older friend, Nikolen'ka Irten'ev, the novels' protagonist, comes to see "man's vocation in perpetual perfection."[209] Very quickly, however, this drive to attain moral perfection gives way to an attempt to become *comme il faut*, which Irten'ev defines as speaking French proficiently, keeping his fingernails well-groomed, and, most importantly, cultivating "indifference to everything and a constant expression of refined, supercilious boredom."[210] The connection between Irten'ev's drive to perfect himself and his transformation into a shallow social climber is so clearly foregrounded in the text that it is impossible to believe that Tolstoy had only come to realize the defects of this approach in the 1870s.

In Chapter Two, Tolstoy describes his first encounters with the literary world. He lampoons his fellow writers as self-proclaimed priests in the cult of art whose only point of agreement concerned their own vital role in fostering historical progress:

> The view of life of these people, my fellow writers, consisted in the belief that life in general goes on developing, and that in this development the most important role is played by us, men of thought, and that of these men of thought we—artists and poets—exert the most important influence. Our calling is to teach people. In order to not pose to ourselves the natural question of what I know and what I am to teach, this theory asserted that it is not necessary to know, that the artist and poet teaches unconsciously.

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[208] *PSS* 23: 4. My italics.

[209] *PSS* 2: 75.

[210] *PSS* 2: 173.

> [Взгляд на жизнь этих людей, моих сотоварищей по писанию, состоял в том, что жизнь вообще идет развиваясь и что в этом развитии главное участие принимаем мы, люди мысли, а из людей мысли главное влияние имеем мы — художники, поэты. Наше призвание — учить людей. Для того же, чтобы не представился тот естественный вопрос самому себе: что я знаю и чему мне учить, — в теории этой было выяснено, что этого и не нужно знать, а что художник и поэт бессознательно учит.][211]

Although Tolstoy notes that he was occasionally stricken by doubts in the legitimacy of this credo—when he witnessed an execution in Paris and when his older brother suffered a horrific death from tuberculosis, for example—these moments, he maintains, were exceptions to the rule; on the whole he remained a staunch advocate of progress: "'Everything evolves and I evolve with it, and why it is that I evolve with all things will be known someday.' So I ought to have formulated my faith at that time."[212] It was devotion to progress, he explains, that led to his decision to open a school for the peasants on his estate in the late 1850s: "Here also I acted in the name of progress. […] I said to myself: 'In some of its developments progress has proceeded wrongly, and with primitive peasant children one must deal in a spirit of perfect freedom, letting them choose what path of progress they please.'" This muddled approach introduced an insoluble problem. In the classroom, he writes, "I was ever revolving round one and the same insoluble problem, which was: How to teach without knowing what to teach?"[213]

Once more, Tolstoy provides what would seem to be a straightforward, believable account of the past that is clearly at odds with his actual writings from that time period. It is simply not true that his pedagogical theories were guided by a devotion to progress. On

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[211] *PSS* 23: 5.

[212] *PSS* 23: 8-9.

[213] *PSS* 23: 9.

the contrary, as a lifelong devotee of Rousseau, he was one of the most virulent critics of this theory. This can clearly be seen in a well-known article that he wrote in 1862 under the title "Who Should Learn Writing from Whom? The Peasant Children from Us, or We from the Peasant Children?" (*Komu u kogo uchit'sia pisat', krest'ianskim rebiatam u nas ili nam u krest'ianskikh rebiat*?). Not only does the article provide undeniable evidence that Tolstoy was well aware of the problem of teaching without knowing what to teach long before his crisis in the 1870s, it also contains an unambiguous rejection of the pursuit of progress, especially in relation to pedagogy. He presents an explicit critique of the idea that the goal of education is to aid the pupil's moral and intellectual development. Instead, he argues, the goal of education should be to help the pupil preserve a measure of the "harmony" that he possesses at birth, but that is lost through the process of socialization. "[T]he eternal mistake of all pedagogical theories," he writes, is that "we see our ideal before us [i.e., in progress] when it is really behind us [i.e. in harmony]."[214] An article written in the following year (1863) under the title "Progress and the Definition of Education" (Progress i opredelenie obrazovaniia) presented an even more direct rejection of the theory of progress: "I do not hold to the religion of progress," he wrote there; "except for faith, nothing proves the necessity of progress."[215]

Chapters Three and Four of the *Confession* describe the onset of the author's spiritual crisis. Tolstoy describes his early premonitions of an impending crisis as "suspensions of life," as moments when the sensation of forward movement gave way to

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[214] *PSS* 8: 321.

[215] *PSS* 8: 327.

a sensation of having stopped abruptly. “The moments when life stopped,” he writes, “always expressed themselves through the same questions: for what? Well, and what then? (*Zachem? Nu, a potom?*):

> At first it seemed to me that these were pointless, meaningless questions. It seemed to me that [the answers were] well-known, that if I ever should want to occupy myself with their resolution, it would not be worth the effort, that now I merely didn’t have the time to busy myself with them, but that when I should take it into my head to do so, I would find the answers. But these questions began to repeat themselves more and more often, and they more and more urgently demanded answers, and like dots falling into one place, these questions for which I had no answer stuck together into one black stain.
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> [Сначала мне казалось, что это так -- бесцельные, неуместные вопросы. Мне казалось, что это всё известно и что если я когда и захочу заняться их разрешением, это не будет стоить мне труда, -- что теперь только мне некогда этим заниматься, а когда вздумаю, тогда и найду ответы. Но чаще и чаще стали повторяться вопросы, настоятельнее и настоятельнее требовались ответы, и как точки, падая всё на одно место, сплотились эти вопросы без ответов в одно чёрное пятно.][216]

Before long, he writes, his inability to answer what seemed to be “such stupid, such simple, and such childish questions” drove him to the brink of suicide, an escape that both tempted and frightened him.[217] All of this is presented as a completely new experience, as something Tolstoy had never imagined, much less anticipated. And yet the parallels between his account of his own crisis and the crisis that overcomes Pierre Bezukhov at the Torzhok station (see Chapter One) are undeniable. Like the narrator of the *Confession*, Pierre’s crisis first manifests itself as a state of paralysis brought about by his reflection on “the accursed questions.” And, like Tolstoy, he both longs for and fears death. It is difficult to reconcile the existence of this passage from *War and Peace* (and

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[216] *PSS* 23:11.

[217] Ibid.

several others that resemble it in form and content) with the claim that he regarded such questions as "pointless" or "meaningless" before the mid-1870s.

Perhaps the most significant of the false epiphanies described in the *Confession* takes place in Chapter Ten, in which the author describes his turn towards the common people as a source of spiritual nourishment. The peasants' acceptance of their own mortality is one of the aspects of their spirituality that convinces him that they have a firmer grasp on truth than do the members of the upper class. Where the gentry, he writes, typically view death as something "tormenting, unyielding, and sorrowful," the peasants confront their own passing "without horror or despair" (*bez uzhasa i otchaianiia*). This is certainly an intriguing observation, but it is hardly the recent revelation that Tolstoy describes it to be in the *Confession*.[218] In *Childhood*, one of his earliest works, Irten'ev recalls how his peasant nanny Natal'ia Savishna "left life without regrets, not fearing death, which she accepted as a blessing […] She accomplished the best and greatest task in life—she died without regret or terror" (*Ona sovershila luchshee i velichaishee delo v etoi zhizni— umerla bez sozhaleniia i strakha*).[219] This was hardly the only work in which this idea appeared in Tolstoy's early fiction. The observation that the peasants are more capable of confronting their own mortality than are the gentry provided the central theme for another early work, the short story "Three Deaths" (*Tri smerti*), which was published over two decades before the Confession was written. The story centers on the contrast between how two people—one a rich noblewoman, the other a poor coachman—confront their impending demise. The rich woman refuses to admit

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[218] *PSS* 23: 40.

[219] *PSS* 1: 95.

that death is imminent; she insists on travelling abroad to seek treatment even though she has no hope of making it to the border alive. Her illness alienates her from her travelling companions, who lack the courage to tell her of the folly of her plans. When she finally realizes that she is dying, she tries to take solace in religion. The words that she speaks, however, are little more than empty commonplaces mixed with her true feelings of desperation and bitterness: "I am a Christian. […] I know that I have not long to live; I know that if my husband had listened to me earlier, I would be in Italy and perhaps—probably, even—I would be healthy. Everyone told him so. But what is to be done? Clearly it's as God wills it."[220] Even the priest who is summoned to hear her last confession does not appear to believe in his own preaching; he speaks of God's infinite compassion while he urges her to try to procure a certain herb in a last-ditch effort to forestall death. The peasant coachman, in contrast, understands and acknowledges that death will soon take him. His last act is to give his warm winter boots to a younger man who asks for them in exchange for a pledge to plant a marker on his grave; his last words express a sincere plea for forgiveness from those who have been forced to care for him in his dying days. His is precisely the sort of "tranquil death […] without horror and despair" that Tolstoy suggests he had only begun to notice following his turn to the common people in the 1870s.[221]

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[220] *PSS* 5: 62.

[221] It is important to note that Tolstoy explicitly rejected a Christian interpretation of this story. In a letter to Aleksandra Tolstaia dated May 1, 1858, he wrote: "You look in vain at [my story] from a Christian point of view. This was my idea: three creatures died: the noblewoman, the peasant, and the tree. The noblewoman is pathetic and repulsive because she has lied for her entire life and lies in the face of death. Christianity, as she understands it, cannot resolve the question of life and death for her. Why die when one wants to live? The peasant dies peacefully precisely because he is not a Christian. He has a different religion, although he performs Christian rites by habit. His religion is nature, with which he has lived. He himself cut down trees, sowed rye, and reaped it;

Indeed, the entire notion that the "turn" towards the common people described in the *Confession* ever took place is patently absurd. From his earliest artistic attempts, Tolstoy stocked his works with strong, wise peasant characters that embodied the spiritual characteristics that he would later claim to have discovered in the late 1870s. To accept the claims that he makes in the *Confession*, we would either have to ignore the existence of Grisha the Fool from *Childhood*, Uncle Eroshka, a central character in his 1863 novel *Cossacks* (Kazaki), Platon Karataev, and a whole range of bright peasant personalities featured in *Anna Karenina*, or assume that Tolstoy did not understand his own works in the least. As Wilson argues, "the picture of his slow turning-away from the life of the urban intelligentsia towards rural piety is a totally false one."[222]

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he killed sheep and witnessed the birth of sheep, and children were born, and old men died, and he firmly knows this law, the law from which he, unlike the noblemen, never hides, but directly and simply looks it in the eye." *PSS* 60: 265-266.

[222] Wilson, 312.

A Crisis of Form

The observation that the central turning point in the text appears to be contrived suggests that we must divorce ourselves from the notion that the *Confession* represents an earnest attempt to describe lived experience as it actually happened. In the first chapter of the present study, we will recall, we discussed Massimo Leone's provocative definition of the conversion narrative as "*a sort of lie* [...] as a story, which converted people constantly recount to themselves in order to consolidate their identity and eliminate the feeling of vertigo which seizes everyone who has lost one's own spiritual equilibrium." The value of Leone's framing is that he emphasizes the fictive nature of conversion narratives while acknowledging that they generally have some basis in actual experience. Indeed, he presupposes that a rupture has taken place, and merely calls into question the veracity of attempts to describe this experience in the form of a narrative. The problem with conversion narratives, then, is not that they are invented out of whole cloth, but that they impose a false sense of coherency and cohesiveness on what is in truth a chaotic, perhaps even incomprehensible, experience.

Here the approach that Eikhenbaum sketched out in his 1920 article "On Tolstoy's Crises" is instructive. In this article, we will recall, Eikhenbaum argues that the crisis of the 1870s was neither unique nor unexpected, but rather the repetition of a pattern that first emerged in the 1860s, when Tolstoy stunned readers and critics by temporarily abandoning literature to write theoretical articles on pedagogy. The "true foundation" of both of these crises, he argues, was "the search for new artistic forms and new justifications for them." Gustafson, for his part, has harshly criticized this approach,

arguing that Eikhenbaum's approach is "at best backward. The crises were moral and religious, and they led to reevaluations of literary forms."[223] While I prefer Gustafson's formulation over Eikhenbaum's, which strikes me as the critic's projection of *his own* overriding concerns onto the subject of his analysis, the notion of a "crisis of form" itself is a fruitful one, for it allows us to grasp that Tolstoy's philosophical struggle was less a quest for a truth not known to the author than it was a quest to find a means capable of expressing that truth. Thus, in tracing the conception and composition of the work, we are better served by an approach that frames it as a fundamentally literary composition rather than one that attempts to identify biographical correlates for each of the stages described in the text.[224]

As we have seen, Tolstoy had already arrived at the central conclusion that he would advance in the *Confession* by 1874, when he wrote that religion alone can provide the basis for a meaningful existence. It would, however, take almost five years to find a form capable of expressing this conclusion in a coherent, convincing form. Tolstoy's first attempt to demonstrate the necessity of religion came in the form of a vita (*zhitie*) of Justin Martyr. The choice of the second-century Christian apologist was well considered: As Eliziveta Kupreianova notes, Justin's progression from paganism to Platonism and finally to Christianity largely mirrored the trajectory that Tolstoy would ascribe to

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[223] Gustafson, 4.

[224] Indeed, by the end of his life, Tolstoy himself came to conceive of confessions as a genre in explicitly literary terms. In 1910, his fellow writer Ivan Nazhivin informed Tolstoy that he had been working on his own confession. Tolstoy responded with enthusiasm: "'That is good, very good!' he said, 'I think that this type of literature […] will soon take the place of all of our novels and stories and supplant them." Quoted in M. A. Aldanov, *Zagadka Tolstogo* (Berlin: Izdatel'stvo I. P. Ladyzhnikova, 1923), 90.

himself in the *Confession.* [225] Although he had planned to include his vita in a published collection—a project that he had proposed to Archimandrite Leonid in November 1874[226]—he never completed it: the manuscript trails off after a page and a half in the middle of Justin's conversation with the old man who will turn him away from philosophy and towards Christianity.

Following this failure, Tolstoy abandoned the form of a narrative entirely. Between the time that he set aside his vita of Justin Martyr and the beginning of the first draft of the *Confession* in 1879, he drafted at least seven works that attempted to demonstrate the failings of materialism and the necessity of religion. His first attempts date from late 1875 and early 1876, when he wrote three brief essays. The first was an untitled composition that scholars refer to as "On the Meaning of the Christian Religion" (*O znachenii khristianskoi religii*) which was written in October, 1875. Here Tolstoy approaches religion not through the prism of his own experience, but on the societal level. The essay, which fills four pages in his *Complete Collected Works*, is divided into three parts. (The parts are labeled "3," "4," and "5," which indicates that part of the work was probably lost or destroyed.) The first part begins with the claim that "all thinking people" acknowledge that "we have long ceased to be Christians":

> The meaning of religion in our time appears to resemble a rotted or torn connection that once was an important force of cohesion for society. Many things that were once tied together by religion are still stuck together, and the traces of the connection are still visible, but the connection is already gone. And every movement reveals that that which formerly was unified is no longer held together by anything and is freely breaking apart.

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[225] E.N. Kupreianova, *Estetika L.N. Tolstogo* (Moscow/Leningrad: Nauka, 1966), 242.

[226] *PSS* 62: 125-126.

> [Значение религии в наше время представляется невольно подобным перегнившей или перержавленной связи, которая когда-то была главной силой сплочения обществ. Многие из связанных когда-то религией предметов держутся еще вместе и видны еще следы связи, но связи уже нет. И при каждом движении видно что то, что прежде было сплочено, ничем уже не сдерживается и свободно распадается.][227]

The collapse of a traditional religious worldview, he goes on to argue, can be seen in the loss of faith in the divine right of kings, in tolerance for religious minorities (a truly Christian nation, he maintains, could never extend official tolerance to Jews, who, by definition, regard Christ as a deceiver), and in changing attitudes towards marriage and the upbringing of children. In the second part, Tolstoy divides his acquaintances into three broad categories. The first category includes unbelievers who maintain that religion is a social necessity; having failed to find an adequate replacement for religion, they pretend to believe in it. The second category includes those who regard religion as superfluous because they have not yet confronted any of the questions that it alone can answer. The third, and numerically smallest, group includes those who have rejected religion and attempt to use reason to resolve life's deepest questions. The last part of the essay presents a general lament over the absence of faith in European and Russian society: "In Europe, in the French and Swiss republics, all preaching is permitted save for Christian [preaching]. Blessed are those who do not see this and hope to resurrect Christianity. I do not and shall not quarrel with them."[228]

While it succeeds in presenting a concise and convincing social critique, "On the Meaning of the Christian Religion" is largely devoid of metaphysical content: Tolstoy

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[227] *PSS* 17: 353.

[228] *PSS* 17: 356.

fails to provide a meaningful definition of either religion or Christianity. His next two essays— entitled "On the Future Life Outside of Time and Space"(*O budushchei zhizni vne vremeni i prostranstva*, November, 1875) and "On the Soul and Its Life Outside of the Life that is Known and Comprehensible to Us" (*O dushe i zhizni ee vne izvestnoi i poniatnoi nam zhizni*, late 1875-early 1876)—attempt to rectify this shortcoming. The first essay begins by describing three conceptions of the afterlife: materialist, idealist, and religious. Materialists hold that life ends with the destruction of the sensory organs, but fail to see that life is more than merely the consciousness of space and time. Idealists believe that consciousness and memory will be destroyed at death, but that life will nonetheless continue. Finally, believers maintain that the soul will reside with the Patriarchs in a state that is outside of time and space. Having briefly explored these three possible answers, Tolstoy returns to the question of the future life itself, and deems it senseless: "The question of when and how the future life will begin has no meaning, for we use the words 'future life beyond the grave' (*budushchaia zagrobnaia zhizn'*) to express in time and space that which properly speaking is outside of time and space."[229] This leads him to acknowledge a paradox at the center of the question:

> The question is whether there is a life for us outside of that form in which we understand it. Is there something in our life that does not belong to space and time? If there is, then there is. And 'there is' in this sense means 'there will be.'
>
> The very concepts of space and time destroy themselves.
>
> If there is infinite time, then my life is an infinitely small moment of time. And all of my life here is only a moment (in the mathematical sense). Conversely, life is infinite, [being] composed of moments in an infinite series. If there is an infinitely small space, then my body infinitely embraces space as a whole and every (mathematical) point is within me. And, conversely, I am a (mathematical) point in the infinite.

[229] *PSS* 17: 338-339.

> [Вопрос о том, есть ли жизнь для нас вне той формы, в которой мы ее понимаем? Есть ли в нашей жизни то, что не подлежит пространству и времени? Если оно есть, то оно есть, а есть в этом смысле значит — будет.
> Самые понятия пространства и времени сами себя уничтожают.
> Если есть бесконечное время, то моя жизнь есть бесконечно малый момент времени. И вся моя жизнь здесь есть только момент (математический смысл) и обратно, т. е. жизнь есть бесконечность, составленная из моментов в бесконечном ряду. Если есть бесконечно малое пространство, то мое тело обнимает бесконечно великое пространство и всякая точка (матем[атически]) включена в меня. И обратно: я — точка (математически) в бесконечном.][230]

Here Tolstoy expresses in a muddled form an idea that he would later return to in his introductory remarks to the *Gospel in Brief* (Kratkoe izlozhenie Evangeliia, not to be confused with the longer and more detailed *Perevod i soedinenie chetyrekh Evangelii*) that he composed in 1881): The "true life" (*istinnaia zhizn'*), he would write there, is both "outside of time [and] only in the present."[231]

Tolstoy's third attempt to write an essay on the necessity of religion— "On the Soul and Its Life Outside of the Life that is Known and Comprehensible to Us"— combines the polemical thrust of "On the Meaning of the Christian Religion" with the metaphysical orientation of "On the Future Life Outside of Time and Space." Here he takes aim at positivism, which, he argues, fails to account for those aspects of our lives that are not subject to elemental physical forces. By treating the laws that govern inorganic matter as universal, positivists deny the legitimacy of the questions that Tolstoy sees as central to the philosophical enterprise: "[W]hat is life and what is death? What happens with each of us when we perceive our lives, when we think, desire, rejoice, and

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[230] *PSS* 17: 339.

[231] *PSS* 24: 802.

suffer? What waits for us in the place whither we are all going?"[232] Positivists insist that these are "futile, unnecessary, and trifling questions for a living man" (*bespoleznye nenuzhnye, prazdnye dlia zhivogo cheloveka voprosy*), but their rejection of what Tolstoy regards as the central problem of "true philosophy" merely reflects the inadequacy of the tools—sensory perception and reason—that they bring to bear upon it. The essay essentially advances the same conclusion that Tolstoy would describe in Chapter Nine of the *Confession*—that reason alone is incapable of revealing the meaning of life—although it does it in a far more circuitous, clumsy fashion.

Having failed to complete an essay on religion that satisfied him, Tolstoy shifted gears, choosing instead to phrase his argument in the form of a philosophical dialogue. His "Christian Catechism" (*Khristianskii katekhizis*), written in the fall of 1877, when he was at the height of his devotion to the Orthodox Church, can be seen as a transitional work. [233] While it is comprised primarily of straightforward claims about faith, it is presented catechistically, in the form of a series of questions and answers. It thus has the properties of both an essay and a dialogue. The catechism is divided into three sections. The first, "On Faith" (*O vere*) is concerned with questions of spiritual epistemology. Here he argues that, while it is possible to live without rational knowledge, "knowledge of faith" (*znanie very*) is essential for human life. Tolstoy's response to a question about what is necessary to save one's soul is particularly interesting: He first wrote that we need "A clear definition of that in which we believe" and only later added "and a life that corresponds to that in which we believe." Once again, we see that at this time Tolstoy was primarily concerned with questions of form (i.e. with the question of how to *define*

[232] *PSS* 17: 334.

[233] *PSS* 17: 363-368.

his faith), and that questions of content (i.e. those concerning the nature of this faith and its practical consequences) were of secondary importance. This section also includes substantial digressions that explain the errors of contemporary philosophy, and of materialism in particular, digressions that introduce a polemical tone that seems rather out of place in the context of the catechism. The second section, "On Revelation" (*Ob otkrovenii*), deals with the source and transmission of spiritual knowledge. Spiritual knowledge, writes Tolstoy, comes from God, and is implanted in every man's soul. It is also known through holy writings (*sviaschennye pisaniia*), ancient tradition (*predanie*), and the examples of righteous men (*primery*). Although it is labeled a "Christian Catechism," Tolstoy adopts an unquestionably ecumenical stance. Judaism, Buddhism, and Islam, he writes, are all capable of expressing the same truth, and Christianity is true only "to the extent that it reveals the knowledge of faith, revelations in the hearts of men, and to the extent that its teachings do not contradict this knowledge."[234] The third and final section, entitled "The Christian Catechism," is fragmentary and difficult to comprehend. It reads as follows:

> Q: What does the first transmission of Christian revelation consist of?
> A: In the holy books of the Old Testament.
> Q: Which ones?
> A: The Book of Genesis.
> Q: Why is it holy?
> A: [The] creation [of the universe].
>
> [*B*. В чем состоит первая передача откровения христианского?
> *O*. В священных книгах Ветхого завета.
> *B*. Какие?
> *O*. Книга Бытия.
> *B*. Почему она священна?
> *O*. Сотворение.][235]

[234] *PSS* 17: 366.

[235] *PSS* 17: 368.

At this point the manuscript cuts off.

Following the failure of "The Christian Catechism," Tolstoy made a sharp transition. In "Interlocutors" (*Sobesedniki*), which was written in the winter of 1877, the formal dimension of his crisis is particularly clear. The first draft of the work takes the form of a Socratic dialogue. Here Tolstoy employs seven voices to represent seven different worldviews. The characters and the models on which they are based are laid out in an introductory paragraph that precedes the text itself. They are: 1) Strem., a forty-two year old " healthy idealist philosopher […] a wealthy aristocrat, a retired lieutenant" modeled on Fet, Strakhov, Schopenhauer, and Kant; 2) Maikov, a thirty-seven year old proponent of the natural sciences who insists on the importance of foundations and defends progress and the drive for perfection; he is modeled on Rudolf Virchow, the father of modern pathology, Emil du Bois-Reymond, a prominent physiologist who gave a lecture that Tolstoy attended during his second trip abroad in 1860, John Tyndall, an English physicist, and John Stuart Mill; 3) Bibikov, a thirty-five year old positivist who believes in progress but denies the necessity of theoretical foundations; 4) Stal'nikov, a fifty-six year-old archimandrite, an "intelligent priest" who "rejects knowledge" ; 5) Iunovich, a fifty year-old "wiry dialectician, a gentleman who justifies faith with sophisms"; he is modeled on the Slavophile theorist Aleksei Khomiakov and Tolstoy's acquaintance Prince Urusov, with whom he corresponded on religious questions; 6) Father Pimen, a humble, sleepy seventy year-old monk; and 7) Ivan Il'ich, who represents Tolstoy at the age of forty-nine.[236] The characters begin by debating the nature of faith and its relationship to reason. Strem. begins by insisting on the primacy of pure

[236] Ibid.

reason, which leads him to deny the possibility of faith; Maikov agrees with him, but emphasizes experiential knowledge over abstract ratiocination; Stol'nikov weighs in by declaring the impossibility of faith to be a settled question; Iunovich disagrees, arguing that faith is a legitimate mode of cognition, but that it is fundamentally inarticulable; Father Pimen offers the strongest defense of faith, but it is based entirely on the authority of the Church. The answers given by each are fragmentary, and at times contradictory. Ivan Il'ich, for example, begins by demanding that each of the interlocutors define precisely what they mean by "faith." A few lines later, however, he reverses course, arguing that faith itself is fundamentally indefinable. Following their initial discussion on the necessity and definition of faith, Tolstoy includes a brief note stating that the next section will deal with the relationship between utilitarianism and moral law. This part, however, was never written. As a whole, the draft of the first part is highly fragmentary: While the lines spoken by the author's alter ego, Ivan Il'ich, are occasionally fleshed out, he resorts to brief paraphrases to describe the other characters' views.

When Tolstoy returned to the piece a few days later he decided to radically simplify his approach. Rather than utilizing seven separate voices, he chose instead to use a more straightforward dialogical approach. The two voices in the second draft belong to "I" (presumably Ivan Il'ich) and "K" who, as Medzhibovskaya argues, probably represents Kant.[237] The dialogue begins with K. posing a question: "What is religion-faith?" (*religiia–vera*) I. responds that while he is incapable of formulating a coherent general definition, he can answer the question in reference to his own beliefs. K. cuts him off, arguing that the religion-faith that I. has yet to define is nothing more than

[237] Medzhibovskaya, 186.

superstition. Belief in, for example, the Virgin Birth or the divinity of Christ, he argues, is not only irrational, but also unnecessary. K. then attempts to extract I.'s own understanding of religion-faith. I., however, refuses to give a straightforward answer: He insists that merely by posing the question, K. has conceded that it exists and that it in some sense contradicts reason. He then asks K. to clarify this point. In response, K. argues that the concept of God has been formulated as the inverse of man's weaknesses: Since man is mortal, corrupt, ignorant, and bound by the constraints of spatial existence he has made a God who is immortal, incorruptible, omniscient, and omnipresent.

At this point, however, the dialogue abruptly cuts off with the following line: "I wanted to directly express the idea that has just occurred to me in the form of a conversation, but I got lost" (*zaputalsia*).[238] Tolstoy then presents yet another attempt to express his idea, this time in the form of a straightforward essay. The essay, which he appended to the dialogue that he had failed to complete, expresses many of the conclusions that he would later advance in the *Confession*: that rational knowledge is itself rooted in faith, that the foundations of faith are inaccessible to human reason, and that belief in the existence of God is as necessary as belief that two times two makes four. Unlike in the *Confession*, however, these conclusions are presented in a muddled, barely comprehensible form. We will quote a brief excerpt from the beginning of the essay to illustrate this point:

> Faith is that knowledge on which all rational knowledge is founded. Rational knowledge cannot be founded on itself. It [rational knowledge] destroys itself. The infinite divisibility of infinite space, of time, atoms and so forth.
>
> Where are the foundations of this knowledge, of faith? Outside of man, outside of human reason. In simple speech we say: *in the heart* or in faith

[238] *PSS* 17: 373.

> itself [… The tendency to] answer the question of the source of faith by responding "in faith" serves as a chief source of mistrust in faith. This answer is essentially tempting only for those for whom the methods of reason (i.e. of reason that rests on faith) is precisely a causality, which they append to faith. I believe because I believe senselessly in rational knowledge; but one must not forget that this answer is obligatory only in relation to those questions that are inexplicable to reason.
>
> [Вера есть то знание, на котором основывается всякое разумное знание. Разумное знание само на себе основываться не может. Оно само себя разрушает. Бесконечная делимость бесконечного пространства, времени, атомы и т. п.
>
> Где основы этого знания — веры? Вне человека, вне разума человека. В просторечии мы говорим: в сердце или в самой вере, т. е. в самом себе. […] Ответ на вопрос, где источник веры? — в вере, — служить главным источником недоверия к вере. В сущности же этот ответ соблазнителен только для тех, которые методы разума (разума, зиждущегося на вере) именно причинность, прилагают к вере. Я верю, потому что верю совершенно бессмысленно, в смысле всякого разумного знания; но не надо забывать, что этот ответ законен только по отношению к тем вопросам, которые разумом не объяснимы.][239]

The form of the essay thus allowed Tolstoy to express a series of ideas that he was unable to communicate in the form of a dialogue, but it did not yet allow him to express them in a way that was easily comprehensible to himself, much less to his readers.

Despite the failure of "Interlocutors," Tolstoy did not entirely abandon the idea of writing a philosophical dialogue on faith. In "Debates on Faith at the Kremlin," which was written in early May of 1878, he employs a number of characters, including a first-person narrator who has been freed from the "lies" of materialism, but who is as yet unable to express his own views; Kartavtsev, a professor of physiology and a staunch materialist; Pafnutii, a former schismatic who has rejoined the Church; a nameless schismatic who clings to the Old Belief; a "gentleman in a coat" who harshly criticizes the "diabolical" official Church; a merchant who insists that love is a gift from the Holy

[239] Ibid.

Spirit; and an officer who emphasizes good deeds over codified religious beliefs.[240] While the piece is far more polished than "Interlocutors," it similarly fails to reach a concrete conclusion. Nonetheless, "Debates on Faith at the Kremlin" represents an important transition in Tolstoy's approach. Unlike "Interlocutors," the dialogue is bracketed by a detailed narrative that introduces the main characters and sets the scene for the debates that follow. This decision might indicate that Tolstoy was becoming increasingly convinced that a more broadly literary approach would allow him to communicate the conclusion that he had been unable to express in the form of an essay or a dialogue.

To a great extent, Tolstoy's remark at the end of his second draft of "Interlocutors"—"I got lost"—can be seen as a motto for all of the works that he attempted to write on the necessity of religion between 1874 and 1879. He constantly moved back and forth between various generic forms, but proved incapable of finding one that would allow him to express his argument clearly and convincingly. But while Tolstoy's generic framing and terminology underwent substantial changes, his conclusions remained essentially the same. In each of his aborted attempts, he argues that the function of the natural sciences is to describe the physical world and elucidate the laws by which it operates. Science, however, is incapable of answering life's deepest questions, of explaining why our momentary existence within the infinite flux of time is meaningful. For this, religion is needed. It alone allows us to account for those aspects of human life, cognition, and spirituality that are inaccessible to reason. The problem, then, was not so much intellectual as it was rhetorical: What was needed was a formal framework that would allow him to explain his perspective on faith and its relationship to

[240] *PSS* 17: 145-150.

rational knowledge in a way that would be comprehensible to himself and his readers. It was the autobiographical framework that would ultimately allow him to resolve this issue. At the same time that Tolstoy was struggling to express his views on faith, he was also becoming increasingly interested in the idea of writing his own life story. While this second project was initially distinct from the first one, the two ultimately came together and yielded the *Confession.*

The first signs of Tolstoy's shift towards autobiographical narration can be found in his remarkable correspondence with the critic and philosopher Nikolai Strakhov, a correspondence that began in the early 1870s and lasted until Strakhov's death in 1896.[241] In a letter dated November 30, 1875, Tolstoy described his youthful attempts to scale "the mysterious mountain of life," a goal that he eventually reached by securing literary fame and a stable family life. Having reached the summit, however, he was struck by a feeling of disappointment, a "gradually dawning bewilderment that I had erred in assigning such value to those fruits that I had attained." "On that peak," he came to realize, "there was nothing that I had been waiting for […]"[242] This image of a man looking down at life from on high would reappear in Tolstoy's first, aborted, attempt to write his autobiography. In May of 1878, he wrote a brief, fragmentary piece under the heading "My Life" (*Moia zhizn'*). "In three months I will be fifty years old," he wrote in his preface, "and I think that I am standing at the zenith of my life. […] I have chosen the present condition from which to examine and describe my life because it is only now, for

[241] For an insightful analysis of the two men's correspondence, see Paperno, "The Dialogue on Faith." See also Donskov.

[242] *PSS* 62:27. A longer excerpt from this letter appears below, in the section entitled "From Art to Life and Back Again."

less than a year, that I find myself in a spiritual state of calm, clarity, and resolve the likes of which I have never before experienced in my life."[243]

But while Tolstoy's mindset was clearly that of a convert, "My Life" was not yet a conversion narrative. The few pages that Tolstoy completed featured an impressionistic style that recalls early works like *Childhood* far more than it anticipates the sparse polemical framing of the *Confession* and his subsequent religious writings. After naming the date and place of his birth in the first sentence of the text, Tolstoy declares that, "This is the first and last remark that I shall make about my life that is not based on my recollections (and impressions)."[244] Having explained his reasons for writing and the method that he has chosen, Tolstoy launches into a description of his earliest memories, which he (rather implausibly) claims date from his infancy:

> I am tied up. I want to work my hands free, but I cannot do it. I shout and cry, and though my cry is unpleasant to me, I cannot stop. Someone is bent over me—I cannot remember who—and everything is cloaked in half darkness, but I remember that there are two people and that my shouts are affecting them: they are alarmed by my shouts, but they cannot untie me as I desire and I shout louder. It seems to them that this is necessary (that is, for me to be tied up) at the same time that I know that it is not necessary, and wish to prove this to them, and I burst out with a shout that is disagreeable for me, but which I cannot contain. I perceive the injustice and cruelty, not of people, for they have pity for me, but of fate. [I feel] pity for myself. I do not know, and shall never know, what this was: had they swaddled me when I was nursing and I was thrusting out my hands, or had they swaddled me when I was already over a year old so that I would not claw at a sore, or have I combined both into one memory as happens in dreams? There are many impressions, but I am certain that this was my first and strongest impression of life.
>
> [Я связан, мне хочется выпростать руки, и я не могу этого сделать. Я кричу и плачу, и мне самому неприятен мой крик, но я не могу остановиться. Надо мною стоят нагнувшись кто-то, я не помню кто, и всё это в полутьме, но я помню, что двое, и крик мой действует на

[243] *PSS* 23:469.

[244] Ibid.

> них: они тревожатся от моего крика, но не развязывают меня, чего я хочу, и я кричу еще громче. Им кажется, что это нужно (т. е. то, чтобы я был связан), тогда как я знаю, что это не нужно, и хочу доказать им это, и я заливаюсь криком противным для самого меня, но неудержимым. Я чувствую несправедливость и жестокость не людей, потому что они жалеют меня, но судьбы и жалость над самим собою. Я не знаю и никогда не узнаю, что такое это было: пеленали ли меня, когда я был грудной, и я выдирал руки, или это пеленали меня, уже когда мне было больше года, чтобы я не расчесывал лишаи, собрал ли я в одно это воспоминание, как то бывает во сне, много впечатлений, но верно то, что это было первое и самое сильное мое впечатление жизни.][245]

The rest of the text continues in a similar vein. The first section, which lasts from 1828 until 1833 includes faint memories of being bathed, his first impressions of nature at the age of four or five, and his first encounter with his tutor, an encounter that awakened his comprehension of "duty," of "the cross that every person is called to bear."[246] At around five or six, the memories become clearer—"clearer than real life,"—although the author confesses that it is difficult to place them in the proper order.[247] He vividly remembers waking up surrounded by his brothers and his tutor, the latter still dressed in a nightgown. It is at this point—around the age of six—that "My Life" trails off. While it is interesting as an experiment, it is difficult to see how Tolstoy would have been able to relate later events based entirely on his memories and impressions and without any reference to external sources of information.

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[245] *PSS* 23: 469-470. There is an interesting, though probably coincidental, echo in this passage of St. Augustine's account of his infancy in Chapter Six of his *Confessions*. Although Augustine, like Tolstoy, describes developments that he could not possibly remember ("I began to smile, first in my sleep, then when awake"), unlike Tolstoy, he admits that the source of his knowledge is not his own memory, but rather the memories of his caretakers and his observations of other infants. In this sense, the fourth-century theologian would ironically appear to be more concerned with the veracity of his account than the nineteenth-century "realist." Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 34.

[246] *PSS* 23: 472.

[247] *PSS* 23: 473.

While he never completed "My Life," Tolstoy did not abandon his goal of writing his life story. He was spurred on by a short account of his literary accomplishments that his wife wrote for him in November 1879. "My wife has written a biography of me," he told Strakhov: "And if God grants me life and I someday take it into my head to write my own story, then this would be a miraculous canvas for me […]"[248] In fact, he had already begun to paint the first strokes on his "miraculous canvas" shortly before sending the letter. Several drafts and outlines written in late 1879 provide evidence of a new direction in Tolstoy's conception. Rather than starting with his birth, he now planned to begin with the onset of his crisis. A brief outline began with the phrase that he would eventually use as the opening line of Chapter Four of the *Confession*: "Life stopped" (*Zhizn' ostanovilas'*).[249] Another unfinished fragment began, "I was almost fifty years old when I was overcome by a state of mind that almost led me to suicide and eventually led me to the state of mind in which I find myself now."[250] The first completed draft, which dates from around October of 1879, began with the following line: "I grew up, grew old, and looked back at my life" (*Ia vyros, sostarelsia i oglianulsia na svoiu zhizn'*).[251] As Eikhenbaum notes, this line "places a border between the former life and the new one that Tolstoy had now entered."[252] It thus provides evidence of a transition away from the impressionistic style of "My Life," in which Tolstoy had tried to capture all of the most

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[248] *PSS* 62: 454.

[249] *PSS* 23: 518-519.

[250] *PSS* 23: 518.

[251] *PSS* 23: 518-519.

[252] Eikhenbaum, "O protivorechiiakh," 43.

significant impressions of his early childhood, towards the approach that he would use in the final version of the *Confession*, which largely sacrificed detailed description in an attempt to capture the broad sweep of his spiritual evolution.

At first glance, there is nothing particularly surprising about Tolstoy's turn to autobiography. After all, he had long drawn from the reservoir of personal experience in crafting his fictional productions; as the Symbolist writer and critic Dmitrii Merezhkovskii argued, his works "are so tied to his life, to the personality of the author, that it is impossible to speak of one without the other."[253] And yet for the first thirty years of his career, he had pointedly refused to employ the autobiographical "I," preferring instead to use fictional characters to describe his own thoughts and experiences. In fact, he actively resisted attempts to link his fiction to his life. For example, when Nikolai Nekrasov, the editor of *Sovremennik*, changed the title of his first novel from *Childhood* (Detstvo) to *The History of My Childhood* (Istoriia moego detstva) Tolstoy was outraged: "Who could care in the least about the history of *my* childhood?" he objected in a letter dated November 18, 1852.[254] The decision to express his views on the impotence of rational thought and the necessity of religion in the form of an autobiographical text was therefore a significant reversal, one that allowed Tolstoy to resolve the issues that had stymied his attempts to write an essay or a philosophical dialogue. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the turn to autobiography was merely a formal innovation. This is where Eikhenbaum's argument in "On Tolstoy's Crises" falls short. For Eikhenbaum, it is folly to speak of the philosophical, spiritual, or even psychological components of

[253] Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, *L. Tolstoi i Dostoevskii: Vechnye sputniki* (Moscow: Respublika, 1995), 13.

[254] *PSS* 59:211.

Tolstoy's crises: They were, he writes, "in no sense a unique feature of his nature" (*sovsem ne osobennost' ego natury*). This interpretation stems from Eikhenbaum's own interest in questions of the evolution of literary genres, but it fails to account for the motivations that guided Tolstoy. His turn to autobiography was not the result of purely literary concerns, but rather of a deeper philosophical development: As Irina Paperno has demonstrated, over the course of the 1870s, Tolstoy became increasingly convinced that spiritual knowledge requires each individual to possess a tellable narrative of his own past.

This idea is particularly prominent in a series of letters that Tolstoy wrote to Strakhov in 1878 and 1879.[255] When, in 1878, Strakhov wrote a letter to Tolstoy describing his own feelings of stasis and decay, the latter responded by telling his friend to "Write your life." Strakhov demurred, explaining that "I have never properly lived. In the period of greatest development of my powers (1857–67), I didn't so much live as submit to life, yield to temptations; but I was so tormented that then I renounced life."[256] Despite Strakhov's attempt to rebuff his suggestion, Tolstoy refused to drop the request. In late May of 1878, he reiterated his demand: "I keep on at you about something that's tricky: give me a straight answer – how do you know what has guided and what guides you now in life?" Strakhov once again demurred in his response: "You ask what I live by. But, first, I must say that I do not at all live." Tolstoy responded once more with frustration, writing on May 29, 1878 that:

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[255] The correspondence between Tolstoy and Strakhov during this period is discussed in detail by Paperno in both "The Dialogue on Faith" and *Who, What Am I?* Although most of the material from the former work is preserved in the latter, there is some variation in the material that is quoted. Thus, we will include citations to both works in the following section.

[256] Quoted in Paperno, *Who, What Am I?*, 61.

> Your merit lies in the fact that you have proved that philosophy – thought – cannot, in any manner, serve as the foundation for spiritual life, but your error lies in the fact that you do not admit that it is necessary that these foundations (if foundations are what they are) do exist […] [those foundations which we] cannot possibly gain by reason, or by our very nature, and which are therefore given to us. It is in this sense that I ask you: what do you live by – and you, about the most important thing, say in jest, mistakenly: I do not live.[257]
>
> [Заслуга ваша в том, что вы доказали, что философия — мысль — не может дать никакого определения этим основам духовной жизни, но ошибка ваша в том, что вы не признаете того, что основы (если они — основы) необходимо существуют […] такие, которых мы — по вашему же определению — разумом, вообще своей природой, ниоткуда взять не можем, и которые поэтому даны нам. В этом-то смысле я спрашивал вас: чем вы живете, — и вы неправильно, шутя о важнейшем, говорите: я не живу.][258]

Tolstoy dropped his challenge for a time, perhaps fearing that he was irritating his correspondent. The break, however, did not last long. In early November 1879, he once more pleaded with Strakhov to compose his own autobiographical narrative: "Write your life story; I still want to do the same thing. But we just need to set this up so as to arouse disgust for our lives in all our readers" (*vozbudit' k svoei zhizni otvrashchenie vsekh chitatelei*).[259] Once more, Strakhov proved incapable of answering the challenge:

> It's very hard for me to judge my life, not just the most recent events, but also the most distant ones. Sometimes my life appears vulgar to me, sometimes heroic, sometimes moving, sometimes repulsive, sometimes unhappy to the point of despair, other times joyful. […]
> […] These oscillations cause me great distress: I can't get any truth from myself! And it doesn't happen just in my reminiscences, but every day in all my affairs. I don't feel anything purely or directly, everything in me splits into two.[260]

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[257] Ibid., 62.

[258] *PSS* 62: 426.

[259] *PSS* 62: 500.

[260] Quoted in Paperno, *Who, What Am I?*, 64.

> [О жизни своей мне судить очень турдно, не только о ближайших, но и о самых далеких событиях. Иногда жизнь моя представляется мне пошлою, иногда героическою, иногда трогательною, иногда отвратительною, иногда несчастною до отчаяния, иногда радостною. […]
> […] Эти колебания составляют для меня самого немалое огорчение: я сам от себя не могу добиться правды! И это бывает со мною не только в воспоминаниях, но и каждый день во всяких делах. Я ничего не чувствуюпросто и прямо, а все у меня двоится.][261]

This repeated refusal dismayed Tolstoy. In late November, he drafted a letter in response: "Your letter distressed me greatly. I have felt a lot and thought it over a lot. I think you are spiritually ill […] And it is impossible for you to write your life story. You don't know what is good and what is bad in it. And one needs to know." Fearing that his tone was too harsh, Tolstoy chose not to send the letter. Two weeks later, though, he sent a revised version that presented the same conclusion: "You were not able to say what you have inside, and something incomprehensible came out. But you must not write your life story. You will not be able to."[262] As Paperno argues, this episode in the two men's correspondence suggests that Tolstoy had come to believe that autobiographical narrative is indispensable for spiritual knowledge: "to tell one's faith was to tell one's life, and to tell one's life meant to tell a story of one's search for faith."[263]

By embracing the form of the autobiography as both an embodiment and a defense of his religious convictions, Tolstoy was, in a sense, attempting to write his own vita, thus coming full circle to his earlier attempt to write the life of Justin Martyr. The

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[261] B. Modzalevskii, ed. *Perepiska L. N. Tolstogo s N. N. Strakhovym* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia B. M. Vol'fa, 1913), 238.

[262] Quoted in Paperno, *Who, What Am I?*, 64.

[263] Quoted in Paperno, *The Dialogue on Faith*, 110.

comparison is a useful one, for, like the *Confession,* vitae adapt individuated biographies into a semi-fictionalized, highly structured form for the purpose of demonstrating a religious claim about their subjects (i.e. that the person being described is, in fact, a saint) while inculcating moral lessons through the examples of their lives. Tolstoy's acquaintance with these texts dated from his early childhood; as he recalled in his introduction to Biriukov's biography, one of his aunt Aleksandra's favorite ways to pass her time was to read vitae.[264] As a number of scholars have pointed out, the influence of this tradition can be seen in many pre-conversion works: Hagiographical motifs have been identified in his early trilogy *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, and *Youth*, in *War and Peace,* and in *Anna Karenina*.[265] In the 1870s, Tolstoy's interest in the Russian hagiographical tradition grew even stronger; in her diary entry for March 27, 1871, Sof'ia Andreevna noted that her husband "has been dreaming of writing something from ancient Russian literature. He is reading the *Chet'i Minei* and the lives of saints and says that this is our genuine Russian poetry" (*nasha nastoiashchaia russkaia poeziia*)."[266] This interest in the Russian hagiographic tradition can be seen in his choice of texts for the *Primer,* which included three texts from two well-known *Chet'i Minei*—"On Filargii the Monk" (*O Filargii monakh*) and "On the Woodcutter Murin" (*O drovoseke Murine*) were adapted

[264] *PSS* 34: 363.

[265] For general comments the influence of the Russian hagiographical tradition on Tolstoy's works, see Margaret Ziolkowski, *Hagiography and Modern Russian Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 218-245. On hagiographical motifs in *Childhood*, see T. A. Karpeeva, "Traditsii 'zhitiia' i ikonopisi v povesti L.N. Tolstogo 'Detstvo,' http://old.kpfu.ru/miku/info/sob /konf_tolstoi/s6.htm, accessed April 4, 2016); on *War and Peace*, see B. M. Eikhenbaum, "Cherty letopinsogo stilia v literature XIX veka," in *Trudy otdela drevnerusskoi literatury*, vol. 14, ed. D. S. Likhachev (Moscow/Leningrad: 1958), 545-550; on *Anna Karenina*, see Grodteskaia, 98-206.

[266] S. A. Tolstaia, *Dnevniki S. A. Tolstoi, 1860-1997* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo imeni Sabashnikovykh, 1928), 34.

from Makarii's *Chet'i Minei* and "The Life of the Venerable David" (*Zhitie prepodobnogo Davida*) was adapted from the *Chet'i Minei* compiled by Dmitrii Rostovskii—and, as we have already mentioned, in his proposed collaboration with Archimandrite Leonid in compiling a broader collection of *vitae*. During this time, Tolstoy's conception of *zhitiinost'* appears to have broadened to encompass not only classical lives of Orthodox saints, but also secular texts that revealed the depth of their authors' personality: In a letter to Aleksandra Tolstaia, he asked his relative if she had ever read Pascale's *Pensées*, before adding that "I do not know a better *vita"* (*Ia ne znaiu luchshe zhitiia*.)[267]

Although Tolstoy himself never referred to the *Confession* as an "autobiographical vita", it is interesting to note that he *did* ask Strakhov to send him a copy of Avvakum's in March of 1878. At first glance, the Old Believer firebrand would seem to be an unlikely source of inspiration for Tolstoy. Avvakum was, after all, a fanatic whose objections to the institutional church were almost entirely based on his heterodox views regarding the outward signs of religious observance. And yet despite this fact, the sixteenth-century heretic proved to be an appealing figure for Tolstoy owing to the force of his personality and his vivid style, if not his theological propositions. In his memoirs, V. F. Lazurskii noted that Tolstoy effusively praised Avvakum as an exemplary stylist, and in her journal entry for February 3, 1904, Sof'ia Andreevna described how Tolstoy had read excerpts from S. M. Solov'ev's historical account of Avvakum aloud to his family: "While reading, tears came to his eyes. He spoke of [Avvakum] with respect and

[267] *PSS* 62: 262.

love."[268] Although it would be a mistake to view Avvakum's *Life* as a direct model for Tolstoy's *Confession*, it is possible to identify broad confluences in the works' autobiographical framing and rhetorical objectives.[269] Indeed, A.N. Robinson's classification of Avvakum's *Life* as a "confessional sermon" (*ispoved'-propoved'*)—i.e. an autobiography written with a didactic aim—provides a fitting description for Tolstoy's text as well. The comparison, however, can only be taken so far. Avvakum's account presents a spiritual autobiography of its author, but this autobiography is in no sense a conversion narrative, since it is impossible to identify a single point where the author's worldview undergoes a dramatic transformation. Rather, the changes that take place all relate to external factors— i.e. to the missteps of the official Church, which Avvakum regards as a tool of the Devil—rather than to the narrator's own inner spiritual development. As we shall see in the next section, while Tolstoy's *Confession* may have been broadly inspired by his experience of reading native Russian religious literature, both its form and content far more closely resemble the Western conversion narrative tradition than they do any autochthonous model.

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[268] See E. A. Maimin, "Protopop Avvakum v tvorchestve L. N. Tolstogo," in *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury*, vol. 13, ed. D. S. Likhachev (Moscow/Leningrad: Akademiia Nauk, 1957), 505.

[269] See A. N. Robinson, "Ispoved'-propoved' (o khudozhestvennosti 'Zhitiia' Avvakuma)," in A. N. Robinson, *Istoriko-funktsional'noe issledovaniia* (Moscow: Nauka, 1967), 358-370. While no scholars have, to my knowledge, attempted a detailed comparison of the two texts, the writer D. N. Maimin-Sibiriak obliquely points in this direction in remarking that, "Turgenev alone judged [Avvakum's *Life*] by its merits and only his good manners prevented him from comparing it to Count Tolstoy's *Confession*." (Quoted in V. I. Malyshev, "Zametka o rukopisnykh spiskakh Zhitiia protopopa Avvakuma," in V. I. Malyshev, *Izbrannoe: Stat'i o protopope Avvakume*, ed. V. P Budaragin, G. V. Markelov, and N. V. Ponyrko (St. Petersburg: 2010), 153.)

"I once was lost, but now am found"

In order to grasp the extent to which the central narrative of the *Confession* accords with the model of the Western conversion narrative, we need only compare the stages of Tolstoy's account with Rambo's model of conversion. Rambo, we will recall, conceives of conversion as a series of seven stages: 1) context; 2) crisis; 3) quest; 4) encounter; 5) interaction; 6) commitment; and 7) consequences. If we apply this model to the text, we see that the chapter division almost perfectly lines up with these stages.

Stage	Description	Chapter(s) in the *Confession*
Context	The historical and cultural setting in which a conversion takes place; the "overall matrix in which the force field of people, events, experiences, and institutions operate on conversion."	1-3.5: Discussion of the lack of substance in religion of the educated classes; negative influence of social pressures; impotence of art and family happiness.
Crisis	The period during which the subject becomes convinced that his current "fundamental orientation to life" is inadequate.	3.5-4: Initial appearance of doubts; suicidal temptations.
Quest	A period of intensified searching for "meaning and purpose in life."	5- 7: "And I searched for an answer to my questions in every area of knowledge acquired by man. For a long time I carried on my painstaking search…"; rejects answers provided by science, philosophy, and life experience of contemporaries.
Encounter	The subject comes into contact with a representative or advocate of an alternative worldview, often a missionary.	8: Turn to the common people; realization that they understand the meaning of life.
Interaction	The subject "learn[s] more about the teachings, life-style and expectations of the group, and [is] provided with opportunities,	9- 15: Contemplates limits of reason; studies religious texts; conversations with sectarians; tries to accept Orthodox Church but is

	both formal and informal, to become more fully incorporated into it."	ultimately unable to do so
Commitment	"Following a period of intensive interaction, the potential convert faces the prospect, the choice, of commitment… A specific turning point or decision is often required and/or experienced, and this commitment decision is often dramatized and commemorated—sealed with a public demonstration of the convert's choice."	16: Comes to grasp that there is a measure of truth in religion, but that the Church is corrupt; commits himself to distinguishing truth from falsehood.
Consequences	The broad range of psychological, ideological, and behavioral changes that result from conversion. These can be long-lasting or temporary.	Epilogue: Has become certain that life has a meaning.

There are, of course, significant differences between Rambo's model and the experience Tolstoy purports to describe. Rambo is dealing primarily with missionary-facilitated conversions to established religious communities, while Tolstoy's religious journey was largely self-willed and did not involve contact with a representative of a defined group; unlike in Rambo's schema, the categories that he introduces do not always align with distinct, identifiable factions or sects. There are, in addition, a handful of stages that do not accord perfectly with the model: It is not clear, for example, to what extent "Commitment" and "Consequences" are treated as separate phases in the *Confession*. Nonetheless, when taken as a whole, the model provides a remarkably accurate temporal schema for charting the stages of Tolstoy's crisis and recovery.

If we move beyond the experiential dimension of the *Confession* and examine its rhetorical construction, we find even deeper confluences between Tolstoy's text and the canonical exemplars of the Western conversion narrative tradition. As we noted in

Chapter One, conversion narratives in the Western tradition are marked by the presence of a discrete break that divides the righteous past from the sinful present, a break that Tolstoy frequently describes through constructions that oppose *teper'* (now; nowadays; today; at the present time) and *prezhde* (previously; in the past) or, more rarely, *togda* (then). In the *Confession* this opposition takes center stage. Almost every chapter features an explicit or implicit comparison between present (post-conversion) enlightenment and former (pre-conversion) ignorance. We have already mentioned the first instance in which this strategy is deployed in our discussion of Tolstoy's claims to have only recently come to grasp the dangers posed by his pursuit of perfection. There he wrote, "Now, remembering that time, I see clearly, that my faith […] at that time was a faith in perfection" (*Teper', vspominaia to vremia, ia vizhu iasno, chto vera moia* […] *v to vremia byla vera v sovershenstvovanie*). We find almost the exact same construction repeated in the next chapter, where Tolstoy recalls his first brushes with the community of artists in the 1850s:

> *Now*, recalling that time, my disposition *then* and the disposition of [my fellow writers…] I find it pitiful, dreadful, and laughable—the exact same feeling that one experiences in an insane asylum. [...]
> [...] It is terribly strange, but *now* it is understandable to me [...]
> [...] *Now* it is clear that there no difference from an insane asylum; *then* I had only dimly suspected this, and as all insane people do—I called everyone insane except myself.
>
> [*Теперь*, вспоминая об этом времени, о своем настроении *тогда* и настроении тех людей […] мне и жалко, и страшно, и смешно, — возникает именно то самое чувство, которое испытываешь в доме сумасшедших. […]
> […] Ужасно странно, но *теперь* мне понятно. […]
> […] *Теперь* мне ясно, что разницы с сумасшедшим домом никакой не было; *тогда* же я только смутно подозревал это, и то только, как и все сумасшедшие, — называл всех сумасшедшими, кроме себя.][270]

[270] *PSS* 23: 5. My italics.

Again, we see the temporal logic of conversion in operation: only *now* can I see what I was blind to *then*. We find a similar construction in the next chapter, although here the reference to the past is not explicitly marked by a temporal adverb, but rather implied through the use of preterite verbs. Describing his first attempts to teach, he writes that, "*Now* (*Teper'*) it is funny for me to recall how I prevaricated (*kak ia vilial*) in order to fulfill my whim to teach, even though *I knew* very well in the depths of soul that I was not able to teach anything that was needed because I myself *did not know* what was needed."[271]

As a rule, the "now" denoted by *teper'* refers to the narrative present; i.e. to the privileged post-conversion position from which Tolstoy is recalling his past. In some instances, however, it is used in passages that utilize the present tense to describe past events. Even in these cases, *teper'* almost always is granted a greater truth-value than *prezhde*, despite the fact that the truth it encompasses is only a relative truth, and not the ultimate truth towards which Tolstoy is striving. For example, in Chapter Four, Tolstoy describes his growing consciousness of his own mortality, which convinces him of the absurdity and vanity of existence:

> The *former* deception of the joys of life [...] no longer deceives me. Try as I might to tell myself: 'You cannot understand the meaning of life, so don't think about it—just live'—I cannot do this, because I did it for too long *before*. *Now* I cannot avoid seeing the days and nights rushing forward and leading me towards death. I see this alone because this alone is the truth. Everything else is a lie.
>
> [*Прежний* обман радостей жизни […] уже не обманывает меня. Сколько ни говори мне: ты не можешь понять смысла жизни, не думай, живи, — я не могу делать этого, потому что слишком долго делал это *прежде*. *Теперь* я не могу не видеть дня и ночи, бегущих и

[271] *PSS* 23: 9. My italics.

> ведущих меня к смерти. Я вижу это одно, потому что это одно — истина. Остальное всё — ложь.][272]

As we know, he will eventually move past the conviction that all sincere thought ends with the acknowledgment that death is the only truth. Nonetheless, this idea comes closer to the truth than the unthinking Epicureanism that had come before (*prezhde*), and thus is privileged.

The function of this opposition is to effect a sharp division between pre- and post-conversion selves. This motivation also explains why Tolstoy is so relentless in criticizing his youthful transgressions. If we turn to two classic Western exemplars of the genre—Augustine's *Confessions* and John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*—we will see a similar propensity to cast the former self in a darker light than the facts would dictate. Both Augustine and Bunyan describe the same basic progression as Tolstoy: despite receiving a religious education, they lost their faith and fell into sin. And both are just as harsh on themselves as Tolstoy is in condemning this life of sin. In his *Confessions,* Augustine castigates himself for having stolen trifles from his parents and cheated at childhood games when he was a small boy. Later, when he reached sexual maturity, he "ran wild in the shadowy jungle of erotic adventures."[273] He devotes substantial attention to one episode in his adolescence when, accompanied by a rowdy gang of his mates, he stole pears from a vineyard. While the theft of fruit might seem like a relatively minor infraction, Augustine uses it to illustrate his fundamentally sinful nature: "It was foul, and I loved it. I loved the self-destruction, I loved my fall, not the object for which I had fallen but my fall itself. My depraved soul leaped down from your

[272] *PSS* 23: 14. My italics.

[273] Augustine, 53.

firmament to ruin. I was seeking not to gain anything by shameful means, but shame for its own sake."[274] Bunyan also places great emphasis on his youthful sins in his spiritual autobiography. He faults himself for cursing, violating the Sabbath, harboring a passion for boisterous dancing, and even for his burning desire to ring church bells that did not belong to him ("Now you must know that before this I had taken much delight in ringing, but my conscience beginning to be tender, I thought such practice was but vain, and therefore forced myself to leave it; yet my mind hankered; wherefore I would go to the steeple-house and look on, though I durst not ring").[275]

For the modern reader encountering these texts for the first time, both men's obsessions with what seem to be relatively minor sins are difficult to comprehend. Why does Augustine shed so many tears over spoiled fruit? Why does Bunyan, who never seems to have caused any real harm to anyone, consider himself to be "the chief of sinners?" The answer lies in the nature of the narrative accounts that they present. For both authors—and for Tolstoy as well— exaggerating the severity of their youthful sins is essential for maintaining the structural coherence and emotional impact of their narratives. In order to "arouse disgust" in their readers, it is necessary for the authors of conversion narratives to convince the audience of the depth of their depravity. Where the facts fail to cast the former self in a sufficiently negative light, they must be exaggerated or invented. As we concluded in in the first chapter of the present study, the conversion narrative is built around the presence of a discrete break, one that separates the sinful past from the righteous future. It stands to reason that the impact of the transformation will

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[274] Ibid., 56.

[275] John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners in A Faithful Account of the Life and Death of John Bunyan*, 9th ed. (London: S. Gilbert, 1716), 14.

vary in direct proportion to the depths of the depravity from which the author has rescued himself. If the basic shape of the conversion narrative can be expressed through the formula, "I once was lost, and now am found," then it follows that the more lost I was, the more dramatic the impact will be on those around me when I am finally found. As a number of scholars have noted, Tolstoy himself had acknowledged the truth of this proposition in one of his earliest works. In *Youth*, Irten'ev recalls that:

> It seemed to me to be so easy and natural to tear myself from my entire past, to change, to forget everything that was, and to begin my life with all of its relationships again, that the past did not weigh on me or constrict me. I even took pleasure in my disgust for the past and tried to see it as being darker than it had been. The blacker was the circle of memories of it, the purer and more radiant appeared the bright, pure point of the present and the rainbow-colored hues of the future that emanated from it.
>
> [Мне казалось так легко и естественно оторваться от всего прошедшего, переделать, забыть всё, что было, и начать свою жизнь со всеми ее отношениями совершенно снова, что прошедшее не тяготило, не связывало меня. Я даже наслаждался в отвращении к прошедшему и старался видеть его мрачнее, чем оно было. Чем чернее был круг воспоминаний прошедшего, тем чище и светлее выдавалась из него светлая, чистая точка настоящего, и развивались радужные цвета будущего.][276]

This is precisely the template that Tolstoy follows in the *Confession*, crucifying an invented past self in order to emphasize the degree of the transformation that he claims to have undergone.

It would, however, be a mistake to assume that Tolstoy's decision to structure his autobiographical narrative on the basis of a discrete temporal break was entirely motivated by his drive to restore his psychological equilibrium, for there were also fundamentally political motives at play. In the *Confession,* the juxtaposition of *teper'* and *prezhde* (or one of its functional equivalents) almost always denotes a temporal

[276] *PSS* 2:85.

comparison in which the present wins out over the past. There is only one exception to this rule: in Chapter One we see the phrase "*kak teper', tak i togda*"—"now, as in the past"—repeated several times in close succession:

> *Now, as in the past*, it is impossible to tell by the life of an individual, by his deeds, whether or not he is a believer. If there is a difference between devout Orthodox believers and unbelievers, then it is not to the advantage of the former. *Now, as in the past,* the open avowal and confession of Orthodoxy is most frequently encountered among people who are dim-witted, cruel, lacking in morals, and those who consider themselves to be very important […]
>
> […] Thus*, now, as in the past*, religious teaching that are accepted on trust and supported by external pressures slowly melt away under the influence of knowledge and life experience that contradicts those teachings, and an individual often lives for a long time imagining that the religious teachings imparted to him from his childhood remain whole within him even when in reality there is not a trace of them left.
>
> [По жизни человека, по делам его, *как теперь, так и тогда*, никак нельзя узнать, верующий он или нет. Если и есть различие между явно исповедующими православие и отрицающими его, то не в пользу первых. *Как теперь, так и тогда* явное признание и исповедание православия большею частию встречалось в людях тупых, жестоких и безнравственных и считающих себя очень важными [...]
>
> […] Так что *как теперь, так и прежде* вероучение, принятое по доверию и поддерживаемое внешним давлением, понемногу тает под влиянием знаний и опытов жизни, противоположных вероучению, и человек очень часто долго живет, воображая, что в нем цело то вероучение, которое сообщено было ему с детства, тогда как его давно уже нет и следа.][277]

Here the antonymic contrast between *teper'* and *prezhde* slips away: they paradoxically represent one and the same state of affairs. And this brings us to one of the central goals of the division of the self that is at the heart of the conversion narrative. The convert does not merely seek to convince his readers that he has changed, but also to present that change as a model for broader changes in society. Just as Tolstoy wants us to believe that he has effected a leap from the past to a present that is inherently superior, he wants us to

[277] *PSS* 23: 1. My italics.

see that society must also take this leap. In this sense, the accusation that Mikhailovskii leveled at Tolstoy—that he had dressed himself "in the cloak of a preacher [to rage] at the sins of society"—seems odd. His goal, after all, was *obviously* to preach twice-born truth to once-born sinner; had he had some other end in mind, he would not have chosen to express himself through a conversion narrative.

Tolstoy, of course, was far from the first to employ his own conversion as an instrument in a political struggle. Indeed, in the Western tradition, the conversion narrative plays much the same role as does the jeremiad, the other characteristic form of Puritan rhetoric. The goal of both forms is to advance a critique of contemporary society as a whole. The difference is that where the author of the jeremiad positions himself outside of the society he is criticizing, the author of the conversion narrative uses his former self as a stand in for that society. Thus, in order to attack the Manichean heresy, Augustine emphasizes his former connections to the sect. In a similar fashion, Bunyan lashes into himself for having been taken with the pageantry of the established Church: "I was so over-run with the spirit of superstition," he writes, "that I adored, and that with great devotion, even all things (both the high-place, priest, vestment, service, and what else) belonging to the church; counting all things holy that were therein contained."[278] Later, he describes his infatuation with rival Protestant sects, including the Quakers and the Ranters, for the sole purpose of criticizing their failings.

This is precisely what Tolstoy does in the *Confession*. He creates an image of his former self that shares the views of his contemporary opponents, passing off a venomous attack on his rivals in the form of a self-critique. The primary target of his assault, ironically, is not the official Church, but rather its secular, atheistic opponents. In order to

[278] Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 7.

reveal the shortcomings of the left intelligentsia, he reinvents his former self in the image of one of its representatives, and alters the facts when it is necessary to accomplish this goal. This can help us to account for many of the fabrications that we have identified above: Having come to believe that religion is an essential component of a meaningful life, Tolstoy reinvents himself as an atheist to reveal the deficiencies of unbelief; having failed to best his populist rivals in an open polemic, he casts himself as a staunch advocate of progress who has seen the errors of his way; having strengthened in his conviction that the peasantry comprehends the truth more than the gentry, he pretends that he had only recently come to realize that there is value in folk spirituality.

From Art to Life and Back Again

As Paperno notes, in the Western tradition the concept of conversion is marked by "a certain ambiguity: It refers both to abandoning of one faith for another and to a change to a more exacting attitude toward the faith one already has."[279] The *Confession* embraces both of these interpretations. While the repeated use of the *teper'/prezhde* dichotomy emphasizes the presence of a radical break, Tolstoy also suggests that his conversion was just as much a return to his past as it was a "new birth." This idea first appeared in the letter he wrote to Strakhov on November 30, 1875, in which, we will recall, he had likened his path through life to a man climbing a mountain:

> I have lived through that period of childhood and youth when I was climbing higher and higher on this mysterious mountain of life, hoping to find on its summit a reward that would be worthy of the efforts that I had expended; I have lived through that period of maturity, when, having reached the summit, I, satisfied and calm, fastidiously and unhurriedly relaxing, strolled, searching around myself for those fruits of life that I had earned; I have lived through the feeling of bewilderment at the thought that I had been mistaken to ascribe an extrinsic meaning to those fruits that I had attained, or at the thought that the disconnect between these fruits and the desire to attain them is the shared fate of all men. I have lived through the realization that on that peak there was nothing that I had been waiting for, and that now, like it or not, I am left with only one thing to do—to climb down the other side to the same place from which I came. And I have begun this descent. Not only are there none of the desires that so imperceptibly carried me up, but there is a contradictory, unworthy desire to stop, to grab onto something, there is terror (still more unworthy) before that which awaits me; and I slowly and observantly walk down, recalling the path that I have travelled, sorting out what is true and striving to extract from the path I have travelled and my observations of the world around me the secret of the meaning of that life that I have lived, and the still greater secret of what awaits me in the place whither I am involuntarily rushing.
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> [Я пережил тот период детства, юности, молодости, когда я поднимался выше и выше на эту таинственную гору жизни, надеясь

[279] Paperno, "Who, What Am I?", 73.

> найти на ее вершине результат, достойный положенных трудов; пережил и тот период зрелости, во время которого, войдя на вершину, я, довольный и спокойный, разборчиво и неторопливо отдыхая, шел, разыскивая вокруг себя те плоды жизни, которых я достиг; пережил и то понемногу наступавшее недоумение о том, я ли ошибся, приписывая несвойственное значение тем плодам, которых я достиг, или несоответственность этих плодов с желанием их достижения есть общая судьба людей; пережил и убеждение в том, что на вершине этой ничего не было из того, чего я ждал, и что теперь волей-неволей мне остается одно — спускаться с другой стороны туда, откуда я вышел. И я начал этот спуск. Не только нет более тех желаний, которые так незаметно внесли меня наверх, но есть противуположное, недостойное желание остановиться, придержаться за что-нибудь, есть минутами ужас (еще более недостойный) пред тем, что ожидает меня; и я медленно осмотрительно иду вниз, вспоминая пройденный путь, разбирая настоящий и стараясь из всего пройденного пути и из наблюдений окружающего меня проникнуть тайну того, что значит та жизнь, которую я прожил, и еще бóльшую тайну того, что ожидает меня там, в том месте, к которому я невольно стремлюсь.][280]

The image of conversion as a return to the past would reappear in the *Confession*. In Chapter Ten, when Tolstoy explains how his newfound faith saved him from the temptation to commit suicide, he writes that the "life force" that returned to him was "not new, but very old": "It was the same force that had guided me during the early periods of my life. In essence, I returned to the first things, to the things of childhood and youth. I returned to a faith in that which gave birth to me, and which asked something of me; I returned to the conviction that the single most important purpose in my life was to be better." The only difference, he goes on to explain, "was that I had once accepted all this on an unconscious level, while now I knew that I could not live without it."[281] The chapter ends with an extended metaphor in which Tolstoy likens himself to an oarsman who, accompanied by many other vessels, has followed the current, hoping that it will

[280] *PSS* 62: 27.

[281] *PSS* 23: 46.

lead him into safe harbor. In the middle of the current, he looks around and sees that he is racing headlong into rapids that will surely destroy his vessel. Convinced that there is no hope for salvation, he throws down his oars. Finally, however, he remembers his way, and, seizing his oars once more, begins to pull against the current, heading back towards the shore from whence he has departed. "The shore," he explains, "was God, the stream was tradition, and the oars were the free will given to me to make it to the shore where I would be joined with God. Thus the force of life was renewed within me, and I began to live once again."[282]

This passage can be taken as a template for interpreting the central paradox of the *Confession*. To this day, the publication of the work is seen as marking a decisive retreat from literary fiction, despite the fact that Tolstoy would go on to write and publish a great number of artistic works in the last three decades of his life. And yet at the same time it can be seen as Tolstoy's radical attempt to structure his own life story, his own narrative of self, on precisely the same pattern that he had employed so many times in the very works of fiction that he claimed to reject. In this sense it is folly to approach the *Confession* as an attempt to provide an accurate autobiographical account or to criticize the author for his failure to present a narrative that accords precisely with the established record regarding the events in question. Rancour-Laferriere has argued that Tolstoy's late religious works "are not literary works, properly speaking. The person who says 'I' in these works is not some fictional character or invented narrator. Rather, that person is Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy himself, who is honestly trying to represent himself to the

[282] *PSS* 23: 47.

reader […]"[283] This interpretation could not be further from my own. In my view, what the *Confession* presents is *precisely* an "invented narrator," a figure that is essentially a fictional character and who therefore cannot be judged by the standards of truth and falsity.

The *Confession* provided the most detailed version of a story that Tolstoy would repeat many times over the course of the three decades that separated its completion and his death, a narrative account that would become the bedrock of a newly reconstituted identity. The first reiteration of the central narrative of the *Confession* appeared in the "Notes of a Christian" (*Zapiski khristianina*) that he penned in 1881. Although the "Notes" were ostensibly presented as the continuation of the private diary that he had abandoned in 1865, the opening lines leave no doubt that Tolstoy had a wider audience in mind than this generic framing would suggest: "I know," he wrote, "that they will judge me for this title. […] Let them judge" (Znaiu, chto za eto zaglavie menia osudiat. […] Puskai sudiat).[284] Having issued a rejoinder to his would-be critics, he provided an abbreviated summary of the account from the *Confession*:

> I have lived on the earth for fifty years, and with the exception of fourteen or fifteen almost unconscious years of childhood, I have lived not as a Christian, not as a Muslim, not as a Buddhist, but as a nihilist in the most straightforward and genuine meaning of the word; i.e. without any faith.
>
> Two years ago I became a Christian. And since that point, everything that I see, hear, and experience, everything appears to me in such a new light that it seems to me that this new view of life of mine, which resulted from the fact that I have become a Christian, ought to be interesting and perhaps also instructive, and thus I am writing these notes. I have written a long book about how I passed from being a nihilist to being a Christian. In this book I gave a detailed description of how I leaved for more than thirty years enjoying universal respect, and even praise, for my compositions,

[283] Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, *Tolstoy's Quest for God* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 5.
[284] *PSS* 49: 7.

> which were composed by a nihilist. The word 'nihilist' is now taken to refer to social revolutionaries, but I employ it in its true meaning: unbelief in anything but mammon. There, in this book, I describe how I lived as such a nihilist for thirty-five years, how I wrote eleven volumes of compositions for the edification of the Russian people, for which, besides praise of all sorts, I received thousands of rubles, how I became convinced that I not only had nothing to teach to people, but decisively lacked even the slightest comprehension of what I was, what is good, and what is bad. And how, having become convinced of my own ignorance and not seeing any way out of it, I came to despair and nearly hanged myself, and how later through various torturous and difficult paths I arrived at my faith in the Christian teaching, and how I came to understand this teaching.
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> [Я прожил на свете 52 года и за исключением 14-и, 15-и детских, почти бессознательных, 35 лет я прожил ни христианином, ни магометанином, ни буддистом, а нигилистом в самом прямом и настоящем значении этого слова, т. е. без всякой веры.
> Два года тому назад я стал христианином. И вот с тех пор всё, что я слышу, вижу, испытываю, всё представляется мне в таком новом свете, что, мне кажется, этот новый взгляд мой на жизнь, происходящий от того, что я стал христианином, должен быть занимателен, а может быть, и поучителен, и потому я пишу эти записки. О том, как я сделался из нигилиста христианином, я написал длинную книгу. В книге этой я подробно описал то, как я больше 30 лет прожил, пользуясь всеобщим уважением, даже похвалами за мои сочинения, совершеннейшим нигилистом. Слово нигилист у нас принято теперь употреблять в смысле социал-революционера; но я употребляю его в его настоящем значении — неверия ни во что, кроме мамона. Там, в этой книге, я описываю, как я таким нигилистом прожил 35 лет, как я написал в поучение русских людей 11-ть томов сочинений, за которые, кроме всякого рода восхвалений, получил тысяч полтораста денег, как я убедился, что не только ничему не могу учить людей, но решительно сам не имею ни малейшего понятия о том, что я такое, что хорошо, что дурно. И как, убедившись в своем незнании, не видя из него выхода, я пришел в отчаяние и чуть было не повесился, и как потом различными мучительными и сложными путями пришел к вере в христианское учение, и как я понял это учение.][285]

Similar synopses worked their way into a number of other non-fiction writings composed between 1881 to 1886, including his *Synthesis and Translation of the Four Gospels* (Soedinenie i perevod chetyrekh evangelii, 1882): "Having been led into despair and the

[285] *PSS* 49: 8-9.

negation of life by reason that lacked faith, I, having looked around me at living humanity, became convinced that this despair is not the common lot of men, but that men have [always] lived and [still] live by faith."), his *Study of Dogmatic Theology* (1882: "I found salvation from despair in a union with the Orthodox Church. I was firmly convinced that its teachings contained the only truth, but many manifestations of this teaching that contradicted the fundamental concepts that I had about God and his law compelled me to dedicate myself to the study of these teachings themselves"[286]), and his long essay "What I Believe" (*V chem moia vera*, 1884: "I lived on the earth for fifty-five years, and, with the exception of fourteen or fifteen years of my childhood, I lived for thirty-five years as a nihilist in the most genuine sense of the word […] Five years ago I came to believe in the teachings of Christ and my life suddenly changed: I ceased to desire that which I had formerly desired and began to desire that which I formerly did not desire. That which had formerly appeared good to me now appeared to be bad, and that which had formerly appeared bad now appeared to be good"). [287] Before long, this narrative of crisis and redemption would work its way back into his fictional productions.

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[286] *PSS* 23: 59.

[287] *PSS* 23: 304. Tolstoy would continue to repeat elements of this narrative until the end of his life. In a preface to a Russian edition of Guy de Maupassant's works that he wrote in 1894, Tolstoy noted that he had first become acquainted with the French writer in 1881: "[…F]or me this was the most volatile period of the internal reconstruction of my entire worldview, and in this reconstruction that activity which is called 'artistic' and to which I had formerly dedicated all of my strength not only lost the importance that I had earlier ascribed to it, but became frankly unpleasant by virtue of the unnatural importance that it had acquired in my life […]" (*PSS* 30: 4-5). The central narrative of the *Confession* would appear once more in the preface to Biriukov's biography that he penned in 1905. Here Tolstoy describes his life as a progression of four stages: the first encompasses the "guiltless, joyful, poetic period of childhood" that lasted from birth until the age of fourteen; the second spans the "terrible twenty years […] of crude debauchery, service to ambition, vanity, and, most importantly, lust"; the third includes the eighteen years "from my marriage to my spiritual birth" when he had been a slave to "egotistical anxieties related to my family life, the improvement of my [material] condition, and the acquisition of literary success and of every sort of pleasure;" and finally, the fourth period "in which I am now living and in

The first attempt at a fictional representation of a conversion narrative came in the form of an unfinished short story entitled "Notes of a Madman" (*Zapiski sumashedshego*) that was drafted in 1884. The story is told by an unnamed first-person narrator who experiences a dramatic existential crisis that leads to an equally dramatic moral transformation. At the beginning of the story, we learn that the narrator has been declared insane by the authorities, a diagnosis that he disputes. He then relates the circumstances that led to this declaration, explaining that, though he had experienced moments of true religiosity in his youth, the awakening of his sexual drive at the age of fourteen had led him to live "like all boys:" "I began to know women and thus, seeking pleasure and finding it, I lived until I was thirty-five."[288] While traveling to the Penza province to inspect an estate, the narrator and his servant stop to spend the night in an inn near the town of Arzamas. He awakens in the middle of the night in a state of complete vertigo: "Why have I come here? Where am I taking myself? What am I running away from?" The answer, he realizes, is that he is running from his awareness of his own mortality: "[…] I saw and felt that death was approaching, and at the same time felt that it ought not to exist. My whole being felt the desire and the right to live, and, at the same time, the death that was taking place. […] Everything told me the same thing: There is nothing in life, but there is death, and it ought not to exist."[289] The feeling of apprehension recedes temporarily, but reappears with even greater intensity the next day. He beseeches God for

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which I hope to die, and from the perspective of which I perceive the entire meaning of the life that I have lived […]" (*v kotorom ia zhivu teper' i v kotorom nadeius' umeret', i s tochki zreniia kotorogo ia vizhu vse znachenie proshedshei zhizni*). *PSS* 34: 347.

[288] *PSS* 26: 467.

[289] *PSS* 26: 469-470.

answers, but his prayers are met with silence. Before long, this *ostanovka zhizni* erupts into a full-blown crisis that clearly echoes the one portrayed in the *Confession*: "From that time practical affairs, both agricultural and familial, interested me less and less. They even repelled me. Everything seemed to be not right. I did not know what was right, but that which had constituted my life ceased to constitute it."[290] Returning from another estate that he is considering buying, the narrator meets an old peasant woman who describes her impoverished existence to him. The recognition that his wealth stems from the exploitation of the toiling masses marks the beginning of a moral awakening: "Suddenly something that had long been dragging me down was torn away, as if it had been born. […] This was the beginning of my madness." His "complete madness" (*polnoe sumashestvie*), however, only manifested itself a month later during a church service. Noticing that people were pushing each other to get closer to the cross and that there were beggars waiting outside the church, he experiences a dramatic epiphany ("*mne vdrug iasno stalo"*) that dispels the sensation of internal rupture ("*razdiranie"*) along with his fear of death.[291] The story ends with the narrator giving away all the money that he is carrying to a beggar in the churchyard and returning home.

"Notes of a Madman" is an enigmatic story, and its incomplete nature makes it difficult to arrive at a conclusive interpretation of many of its features. It is not clear, for example, how we are to interpret references to the narrator's madness. At first glance, it would appear that these references are ironic, that it is society that is mad, and the narrator who is one of the few sane men of his class. On the other hand, there are a

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[290] *PSS* 26: 473.

[291] *PSS* 26: 474.

number of points where the narrator's ratiocinations appear to be disjointed. The internal logic of such statements as, "And it suddenly became clear to me that all of this [at the church] should not be. Moreover, it not only should not be, but was not, and if this was not, then there was no death or terror […]" (*Malo togo, chto etogo ne dolzhno byt', chto etogo net, a net etogo, to net i smerti i strakha*) is difficult to parse.[292] For our purposes, however, the chief significance of the story is that it presents the first instance in which the basic themes and images of crisis and conversion that had first appeared in the *Confession* manifest themselves in a fictional production.

The next work of fiction in which these themes would appear is far more polished and coherent. *The Death of Ivan Il'ich* (Smert' Ivan Il'icha, 1886) marks Tolstoy's return to artistic prose written for an educated audience. The novella centers on the passing of the titular protagonist, a member of the Court of Justice, whose "life was the most simple and most ordinary and most terrible."[293] The description of Ivan Il'ich's funeral in the opening chapter and the subsequent account of his career as a jurist presents a biting attack on the values of nineteenth-century *chinovniki*, but what is most significant for our purposes is the account of the revelation that he experiences at the end of the narrative. Having contracted a terminal illness of unknown provenance, Ivan Il'ich is forced to confront his own mortality and to ask himself what he truly desires. His first, instinctive response to this question is that he wishes to return to the life that he had been living before he had fallen ill, a life devoted to the acquisition of titles and material goods. This desire leads him to ponder what he considers to have been good about that life, which in

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[292] Ibid.

[293] *PSS* 26: 68.

turn spurs him to attempt to construct a coherent narrative of his past. When he first tries to do this, though, he finds that his past is ruptured: On the one side are memories of a morally pure youth, and on the other is the corruption of his adult life, on the one side "Vania" and on the other "Ivan Il'ich": "As soon as that which had resulted in his present self, Ivan Il'ich, began, then all those things that had formerly seemed to him to be joyful now melted away and transformed into something insignificant and often repulsive in his eyes.[294] Ivan Il'ich's thoughts repeatedly approach the same conclusion—that his suffering is the result of the corrupt life that he has lived (*"vse eto proiskhodit ot togo, chto on zhil ne tak*")—but he is unable to accept this conclusion: "he would immediately recall the correctness of his life and chase away this strange thought away."[295] As in "Three Deaths" and the *Confession*, the only source of spiritual nourishment that Ivan Il'ich finds comes from a representative of the peasantry. While his family and friends avoid acknowledging the reality of his situation, his peasant servant Gerasim is willing to acknowledge the truth:

> Gerasim was the one and only person who understood his situation and took pity on him. And for this reason Ivan Il'ich was well only with Gerasim. It was good for him when Gerasim, sometimes for whole nights on end, would hold his legs, and, not wanting to leave to sleep, would say: "Don't let yourself fuss, Ivan Il'ich, I'll get some sleep," or when, suddenly switching to an informal mode of address, he would add: "If you weren't ill, then why would I wait on you?" Only Gerasim did not lie; it was clear from everything that he alone understood the nature of the matter and did not consider it necessary to hide this, and simply pitied the emaciated, weak master. When Ivan Il'ich sent him away, he even straightforwardly said: "We will all die. Why not take the trouble?" signifying with these words that he was not burdened by his labors precisely because he was performing them for a dying man and hoped that someone would perform the same labors for him when his time came.

[294] *PSS* 26: 106.

[295] *PSS* 26: 107.

> [Один только Герасим понимал это положение и жалел его. И потому Ивану Ильичу хорошо было только с Герасимом. Ему хорошо было, когда Герасим, иногда целые ночи напролет, держал его ноги и не хотел уходить спать, говоря: вы не извольте беспокоиться, Иван Ильич, высплюсь еще; или когда он вдруг, переходя на ты, прибавлял: кабы ты не больной, а то отчего же не послужить? Один Герасим не лгал, по всему видно было, что он один понимал, в чем дело, и не считал нужным скрывать этого, и просто жалел исчахшего слабого барина. Он даже раз прямо сказал, когда Иван Ильич отсылал его: — Все умирать будем. Отчего же не потрудиться? — сказал он, выражая этим то, что он не тяготится своим трудом именно потому, что несет его для умирающего человека и надеется, что и для него кто-нибудь в его время понесет тот же труд.][296]

It is while gazing at Gerasim that he finally comes to realize that his "strange thought" is true: he has not lived as he ought to have. At first, this realization only magnifies his pain, but ultimately it paves the way for the epiphany he experiences at the end of the story. Having realized that he has ruined his life, Ivan Il'ich comes to see that all hope is not lost, that he can still rectify his error by dying and sparing his family from further suffering. Like Prince Andrei, he comes to realize that "to love everyone […] means to not live this earthly life."[297]

Notes of a Madman" and *The Death of Ivan Il'ich* not only reprise the central narrative of the *Confession*, but present it in a more rigid, uncompromising form. Where the narrator of the *Confession* experiences his transformation as a return to the youthful righteousness that has been lost, the protagonists of these two works effect a more radical break with their past selves. For them the passage into a new life requires that they sever themselves entirely from their former selves, effecting the complete rupture that Tolstoy himself was never able to accomplish.

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[296] *PSS* 26: 98.

[297] *PSS* 12: 61.

We find a virtually identical conclusion in "Master and Man," (*Khozian i rabotnik*), a short story that was completed nine years later, in 1895. The story centers on Vasilii Andreevich Brekhunov, a landowner whose sole aim in life is to increase his material wealth. When he finds himself stranded in a blizzard with his peasant servant Nikita, Brekhunov's first instinct is to save himself and abandon his companion: "It's all the same for him if he dies," reasons the landowner. "What sort of life is his? It would be no pity for him to lose his life, but I, thank God, have something to live for…" (*Emu* [...] *vse ravno umirat'. Kakaia ego zhizn! Emu i zhizni ne zhalko, a mne, slava bogu, est' chem pozhit'*...).[298] After an unsuccessful attempt to abandon Nikita, Brekhunov undergoes a change of heart. He opens his fur coat and covers his servant with his body. As he drifts in and out of consciousness, Brekhunov experiences a complete break not only with his former life, but with his sense of self:

> And he remembers that Nikita is lying underneath him, and that he is warm and alive, and it seems to him that he is Nikita and that Nikita is him, and that his life is not in himself, but in Nikita. […] "Nikita is alive, and that means that I too am alive," he says to himself jubilantly.
> And he remembers money, the shop, the house, purchases, sales, and Mironov's [a wealthy man whom he had envied. JS.] millions; he finds it difficult to grasp why this person, who had been called Vasilii Brekhunov, had occupied himself with the things with which he had occupied himself. 'Well, clearly he did not know what matters,' he thought of Vasilii Brekhunov. 'He did not know what I now know. Now there can be no mistake. *Now I know*.'
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> [И он вспоминает, что Никита лежит под ним и что он угрелся и жив, и ему кажется, что он — Никита, а Никита — он, и что жизнь его не в нем самом, а в Никите. Он напрягает слух и слышит дыханье, даже слабый храп Никиты. «Жив Никита, значит жив и я», — с торжеством говорит он себе.
> И он вспоминает про деньги, про лавку, дом, покупки, продажи и миллионы Мироновых; ему трудно понять, зачем этот человек, которого звали Василием Брехуновым, занимался всем тем, чем он

[298] *PSS* 29: 35.

> занимался. «Что ж, ведь он не знал, в чем дело, — думает он про Василья Брехунова. — Не знал, так теперь знаю. Теперь уж без ошибки. *Теперь знаю*».][299]

If there is one phrase that captures the confidence of the twice-born man, it is this: "Now I know." *Teper' znaiu*.

[299] *PSS* 29: 44. My italics.

Chapter III: The *Resurrection* of Doubts

Итак, почти все художественное творчество Толстого сводится к единой теме: найти для князя Нехлюдова место на земле, хорошее место, с которого вся жизнь мира представлялась бы ему гармонией, а он сам себе - красивейшим и величайшим человеком мира.

-Максим Горький, «История русской литературы»

After the Awakening

The narrative properties of conversion lend a sense of unity and finality to the experience of radical personal transformation: Following an extended struggle, the convert eventually reaches his goal, discovering a new truth and beginning a new life. And yet this sense of narrative cohesion ill accords with lived experience, which has the irksome tendency to go on even when the stories that we tell about it have reached their ends. What, then, happens after a conversion has taken place? In *The Death of Ivan Il'ich* and "Master and Man" Tolstoy had dodged this question by having his hero die immediately after experiencing an epiphany. Life, however, did not present such a convenient solution.

In the Protestant tradition, the aftermath of transformation is frequently presented as following one of two paths: backsliding and sanctification. Backsliding —the

reversion to the mindset and habits of the former self—has historically been a matter of great concern for members of faith groups that require or encourage their adherents to be "born again." In the mid-1650s the British Quaker James Nayler issued an open letter entitled "To a Convinced Backslider," in which he warned that God could pluck fish from the net of truth and cast them back into the ocean to perish.[300] Roughly fifteen years later, Anthony Tompkins published his "Faithful Warning to all Backsliders" in which he described his own battles with temptation, which he associated with his rational consciousness, or the "reasoning part" to use his words. The pamphlet closed with a stern caution "to all who are yet resisting the Light in their Consciences, to warn them to return, whilst it is day."[301] However, empirical studies of conversion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries suggested that while there was justification for these concerns, they may have been somewhat exaggerated: Starbuck surveyed one hundred believers and found that while ninety-three percent of women and seventy-seven percent of men reported that they had experienced some degree of reduction in their religious fervor in the time since their conversions, only six percent came to reject their newfound faith entirely. Based on these figures, he argued that while partial backsliding is "a very common phenomenon," it rarely leads to a total loss of faith: "[T]he effect of conversion," he concluded, "is to bring with it a changed attitude toward life which is

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[300] James Nayler, "To a Convinced Backslider," in *The Works of James Nayler (1618-1660*), vol. 2, ed. Licia Kuenning (Farmington: Quaker Heritage Press: 2004), 590.

[301] Anthony Tomkins, "A faithful warning to all backsliders, who hold the truth in unrighteousness, for to return to the Lord and cleave to the light which leadeth out of darkness" (London: 1668), 11. For an insightful discussion of the treatment of backsliding in the writings of seventeenth-century English Protestants, see A. Lloyde Moote, "Conversion and Backsliding in Seventeenth-Century England: From Puritan Millenarianism to the Great Plague, " Princeton University Davis Center Paper, 2000.

fairly constant and permanent, although the feelings fluctuate."[302] Starbuck suggested that in addition to a reversion to the former self, a convert might experience what he called "sanctification," which he defines as the polar opposite of backsliding. For Starbuck, sanctification is something akin to a second level of conversion: the convert not only perceives the existence of a religious truth, but comes to view himself as distinct from common believers, as "set apart for a holy life."[303] "Sanctification," he writes, "is the step, usually taken after much striving and discontent, by which the personality is finally identified with the spiritual life which at conversion existed merely as a hazy possibility." He goes on to compare the sanctified convert to a musician who "in some moment of inspiration […] becomes the instrument through which music flows."[304] But while sanctification is perceived as a further elevation, it also introduces significant pitfalls:

> The increased subjectivity and inner appreciation of religion which accompanies sanctification does not come without a sacrifice. There is, at the same time, a decided narrowing of the range of interest in outward things. This is the obverse side, and is perhaps an inevitable consequence of the awakening on the inner side. The mind seems to have drawn in the tentacles with which it felt its way into the manifold interests of its kind. In certain ways it has lost touch with the outer world. […]
> […]It is but a corollary of what has already been said to point out how readily sanctification passes over into a pathological condition […] The signs of abnormality which sanctified persons show, judged by the standards of what constitutes a normal citizen, are of frequent occurrence. They get out of tune with other people; often they will have nothing to do with church, which they regard as worldly; they become hyper-critical toward others; they grow careless of their social, political and financial obligations.[305]

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[302] Starbuck, 360.

[303] Ibid., 118.

[304] Ibid., 384-385.

[305] Ibid., 386, 389.

Tolstoy's experience in last three decades of his life contained elements of both backsliding and sanctification. On the one hand, there can be no doubt that he failed to follow through with all of the dictates of his newfound faith, that he was never able to effect the complete break with his aristocratic lifestyle and his vocation as an artist that he had proclaimed in the *Confession*. On the other hand, we can certainly see signs of something akin to sanctification in the increasingly dogmatic stances he took on a range of issues relating to politics and personal morality and in his uncompromising insistence that his wife and children accede to the demands of his newfound ethical code.

Many of the tensions that came to characterize Tolstoy's life in the period following his conversion, however, went beyond the poles of backsliding and sanctification, but rather stemmed from the difficulties he faced in reconciling his claims of having undergone a second birth with his need to conceive of his life in terms of a coherent narrative that would embrace both pre-conversion and post-conversion selves. Tolstoy was well aware that the fame that allowed him to exert influence on contemporary political developments was the fruit of the very artistic productions that he had come to reject. The question of the relationship between his past as a fiction writer and his present vocation as a moral teacher, therefore, was never far from his mind. This question, it is important to note, would never have arisen had Tolstoy embraced a Pauline model of conversion, one in which the rupture between former and present selves is regarded as complete and irreversible. Rather, it was the product of his distinct conceptualization of conversion as entailing both a radical break with the sinful past and a return to the enlightened innocence of the past that had preceded the descent into sin. From his earliest journal entries, it is clear that he considered a unified, coherent narrative

conception of the self to be indispensable, but his claims to have experienced a "second birth" threatened this sense of unity and coherency, introducing a new obstacle in what Paperno describes as his lifelong quest to "define his own self from the unmediated position of the speaking subject."[306] By the beginning of the 1890s, we see evidence of a heightened concern in Tolstoy's writings regarding the legacy of his own pre-conversion past. This concern manifested itself through a conscious turn to the past, a turn that left its mark on a number of works that directly referenced and engaged with his earliest works of fiction, including the short stories "Kholstomer," which he had begun in 1863 but only finished in 1886, and "The Devil," in which he revived the character of Nikolai Irten'ev, the hero of his earliest novels, in order to depict the deleterious influence of sexual passions. Perhaps the most significant work in which Tolstoy consciously returned to his pre-conversion fiction, however, was *Resurrection* (Voskresenie), his last major novel, which was published in 1899. It is this work that we will discuss in this chapter.

[306] Paperno, *Who, What Am I?*, 7.

“An unashamedly purpose novel”

The publication of *Resurrection* in 1899 came as a shock to both readers and critics alike; more than twenty years after the completion of *Anna Karenina,* the “great writer of the Russian land,” as Turgenev had famous called him in his deathbed entreaty, had finally and unexpectedly returned to the form of the large novel. In comparison to his earlier novels, which had featured hundreds of characters and multiple intertwining plotlines, the central narrative of *Resurrection* is simple and straightforward, focusing on the relationship between two protagonists, Prince Dmitrii Nekhliudov, a depraved aristocrat, and Katerina Maslova, a prostitute who is wrongly convicted of murder. In the opening chapters, Nekhliudov receives a summons for jury duty. When he arrives at the courthouse he is assigned to judge the case of a prostitute who stands accused of murdering a merchant. He is shocked when he recognizes the prostitute as Maslova, a young woman whom he had once loved, but then cruelly seduced and abandoned, an act that inaugurated her moral downfall and eventual descent into prostitution. Due to a purely technical error—the jurors inadvertently omit the phrase “without intent to take life” while filling out the verdict form—Maslova is convicted and sentenced to a lengthy term of penal labor in Siberia. The realization that he has wounded the same woman twice sparks a moral awakening in Nekhliudov: He resolves to do all that he can to secure her release, to accompany her to Siberia should he fail, and to offer her his hand in marriage in order to expiate his sins. The bulk of the novel is dedicated to an account of Nekhliudov’s efforts on behalf of Maslova and other oppressed prisoners whom he meets.

For the reading public, the novel's appearance was a surprising and unanticipated event. In truth, however, it was an event that had taken over a decade to come to fruition.[307] Tolstoy had first conceived of the basic plot of *Resurrection* in 1887, when the jurist Anatolii Koni told him a remarkable story about a petitioner who had come to his chambers one day bearing a frantic request. The petitioner, a young man with an aristocratic background, explained that he had recently served on a jury in the trial of a woman named Rozalia Oni, a Finnish prostitute who had been charged with theft. In an extraordinary coincidence, he recognized the defendant as the young woman whom he had seduced and impregnated when he was only sixteen years old. This act, he believed, had directly led to her descent into a depraved lifestyle. Stricken with grief, the young man immediately proposed to Oni, although she died of typhus shortly thereafter. Tolstoy was fascinated by the story and urged Koni to write an account. When his friend demurred, Tolstoy asked him for permission to use the incident as the basis for a fictional production.

That Tolstoy would have found Koni's story so intriguing comes as no surprise. As Hugh McLean notes, themes of "sexual guilt and revulsion" had long held the writer's interest, and these themes were particularly dominant in a number of works that he composed in the late 1880s and early 1890s, including *The Kreutzer Sonata*, "The Devil," and *Father Sergius*.[308] At the same time, the image of a repentant nobleman turning his

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[307] For a detailed account of the novel's conception, composition, and publication, see V. A. Zhdanov, *Tvorcheskaia istoriia romana L.N. Tolstogo 'Voskresenie*' (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1960). For a more concise summary, see N. K. Gudzii, "Istoriia pisaniia i pechataniia 'Voskreseniia'" in *PSS* 33: 329-422.

[308] McLean, 72. McLean argues that Koni's story would have been especially compelling to Tolstoy, since, as he would later confess, in his university days he had himself seduced one of his aunt's servants, a sinful act that he blamed for her subsequent moral and physical deterioration.

back on high society and his own sinful past and attempting to effect a union with a representative of the oppressed lower classes presented a narrative of conversion that broadly mirrored Tolstoy's own tortured efforts to forge a new existence unsullied by aristocratic privileges. (Sof'ia Andreevna noted these parallels in her diary entry for September 13, 1898: "It torments me," she wrote, "that Nekhlyudov the hero should be described in terms of his transformation from a state of degradation to a state of grace, for I see Lev Nikolaevich himself in this, and this is the way he sees himself too—when in fact he describes all these moral transformations very well in books, but never actually achieves them in life."[309]) But while he managed to write a handful of drafts between 1889 and 1891, his progress was slow and he eventually abandoned the project. It was not until 1895 that he returned to the work. In early August of that year Tolstoy read the first completed draft to a small group of guests that included Strakhov, Anton Chekhov, Sergei Taneev, a well-known composer who is widely regarded as the model for Trukhachevskii in "The Kreutzer Sonata," and Count Adam Olsuf'ev, a landowner and longtime family friend of the Tolstoys. The reaction of the assembled guests was mixed. Taneev found the second half of the draft lacking, complaining that it "does not produce as strong of an impression as the first."[310] Strakhov was taken by the central plot and theme of the project, but thought that the character of the hero and his "awakening" remained unclear. Tolstoy was disappointed by this lukewarm reception, but continued

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[309] Tolstoy, Sophia. *The Diaries of Sophia Tolstoy,* ed. O.A. Golinenko, S.A. Rozanova, B.M. Shumova, I.A. Pokrovskaya, and N.I. Azarova, trans. Cathy Porter (New York: Random House, 1985), 341.

[310] S.I. Taneev, *Lichnost', Tvorchestvo, dokumenty ego zhizni* (Moscow: Gosudarstennoe izdatel'stvo Muzykal'nyi sector, 1925), 61-62. Quoted in *PSS* 33: 346.

to work on the novel for the rest of the year before abandoning it once more in 1896. The novel might never have been completed had it not been for Tolstoy's involvement in the campaign to resettle the Dukhobors, a pacifist religious sect that was severely persecuted for their resistance to conscription.[311] In the late 1890s, a coalition of activists that included Tolstoy had persuaded the government to allow the Dukhobors to emigrate en masse to Canada, provided that they pay for the voyage with private funds. Although he had earlier denounced the practice of copywriting literary texts, he decided to make an exception for the sake of the sectarians: In 1898 he agreed to publish *Resurrection* and donate the profits to the relief fund. The final stage of composition began in July of that year and lasted until December 1899.

The publication of a new novel by Tolstoy was greeted as a major literary event in both Russia and the West. Not surprisingly, *Resurrection* enjoyed immediate commercial success in Russia, quickly selling more copies than either *War and Peace* or *Anna Karenina.* The novel was a smashing success outside of Russia as well: Between 1899 and 1900 no less than twelve German and fifteen French translations were issued.[312] The author's friend Vladimir Stasov, a noted art critic, described the excitement that the novel engendered among the reading public: "How all of us here rejoiced when we learned that the chapters of *Resurrection* will not be 60 or 80 but l00 or more. Without exception all are saying on every side: 'Ah, there will be more, more will be added! May God grant

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[311] On Tolstoy's involvement with the Dukhobors, see George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (Toronto and New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

[312] Simmons, *Introduction to Tolstoy's Writings*, 190. According to Simmons, many foreign translations were unauthorized, and some featured substantial revisions. The French newspaper *Echo de Paris*, for example, inserted gratuitous love scenes in response to public demand, while the editors of *Cosmopolitan* took the opposite tack, toning down passages that might offend their readers' prudish sensibilities.

that there will be more and more!"[313] There was no shortage of exultant proclamations from readers expressing their admiration for Tolstoy's achievement. "Your novel often ceases to be literature," wrote the dramatist Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. Nemirovich-Danchenko went on to explain that he was so engrossed by the text that he felt that he was not so much reading the text as he was living within its world: "For a person who is seriously occupied with literature and who is familiar with various approaches that are hidden from the gaze of the ordinary reader, it is difficult to give a full illusion of life even in the most talented pieces. But in *Resurrection* one cannot even speak of 'illusions.' This is not an illusion of life, but life itself."[314] For a certain category of spiritually inclined admirers of Tolstoy, the novel was not merely a literary accomplishment, but the catalyst for a life-altering experience. As one Russian reader exclaimed, "You feel yourself shaken to the core of your soul, as if you had been awakened from a dream […] The novel [….] cleanses, and lifts my soul, my heart, above all triviality and vulgarity."[315] Similar exclamations poured in from readers around the world. "I am in no condition to convey in a letter the enthusiasm with which the English public greeted your work," wrote one British correspondent; "Whatever words I would choose, they would not be able to express the rapture your book has inspired."[316]

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[313] Quoted in ibid., 193.

[314] Quoted in T. V. Romanova, "Otkliki pervykh russkikh chitatelei 'Voskrseniia,'" in *Roman L. N. Tolstogo "Voskresenie": Istoriko–funktsional'noe issledovanie* (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), 73.

[315] Ibid.

[316] Quoted in V. Z. Gornaia, "Zarubezhnye sovremenniki L. N. Tolstogo o romane 'Voskresenie,'" in *Roman L. N. Tolstogo "Voskresenie": Istoriko–funktsional'noe issledovanie* (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), 100.

Many critics, however, were less receptive, frequently objecting to what they saw as the novel's excessively didactic, moralizing tone. This view appears to have cut across political lines; the conservative critic Mikhail Moskal's complaint that in *Resurrection* "tendentiousness has replaced artistic creation," for example, largely mirrors the view of populist critic Mikhail Protopovich, who described the novel's main characters as ideological abstractions with no connection to reality, and complained that "there is no psychology in the novel whatsoever, and in general this is no novel at all, but rather an impassioned moralistic pamphlet oriented against our cultural and social ideals and strivings."[317] Vladimir Ern saw *Resurrection* as a testament to the author's "momentous fall": "Tolstoy transforms into a master of ordinary literary techniques, who, employing the techniques of Tolstoyan writing, writes a *roman à thèse* with relative ease, but one that is lacking in any inspiration, one without any higher calling."[318] Dmitrii Ilovaiskii, a well-known professor of history at Moscow State University and the editor of the conservative newspaper *Kreml'*, lodged a similar complaint, attacking Tolstoy for his "misanthropy in relation to all social classes with the exception of exiled convicts." The "excessively tendentious" novel, he predicted, would "be forgotten in the near future."[319] Similar critiques appeared in the foreign press as well. One early review in the English-language journal *Literature* claimed that, "Certainly 'technique' is conspicuous by its

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[317] Quoted in A. V. Knowles, *Tolstoy: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 396, 397.

[318] Vladimir Ern, "Tolstoi protiv Tolstogo," in *L. N. Tolstoi: Pro et contra: Lichnost' i tvorchestvo L'va Tolstogo v otsenke russkikh myslitelei i issledovatelei*, ed. K. G. Isupov (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkogo Khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 2000), 660.

[319] Quoted in E. G. Babaev, "Sud'ba 'Voskreseniia' (Pervye otkliki gazetnoi i zhurnal'noi kritiki v Rossii," in *Roman L. N. Tolstogo "Voskresenie": Istoriko–funktsional'noe issledovanie* (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), 16-17.

absence. There is no light and shade, no effective contrast, no balance or reserve in *Resurrection*. The reader plods on his way much in the same spirit as he puts up with a tedious friend for the sake of his sincerity." While conceding that the plot itself contained an "excellent theme," the unnamed reviewer complained that, "the main business of the writer is not to tell a good story well, but to write an indictment of the prison system in Russia." *Resurrection*, he concluded, is "an ill-proportioned and often nauseating book."[320] Later Western critics would echo this critique as well. Ernest Simmons, for example, described *Resurrection* as "an unashamedly purpose novel" throughout which the author's views on religion and politics "obtrude in a rather scholastic manner" and argued that the intellectual and spiritual development of the protagonist, "seems false to his nature, and more dictated by the author than by life."[321] Edward Wasiolek advanced a similar positions, arguing that, "[N]ever had Tolstoy's pedagogical bent assumed such gargantuan proportions as in *Resurrection*, nor had it ever posed so grave a threat to his art."[322] In his classic study *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, George Steiner expressed this view in even harsher terms:

> When Tolstoy came to write *Resurrection*, the teacher and prophet in him did violence to the artist. The sense of equilibrium and design which had previously controlled his invention was sacrificed to the urgencies of rhetoric. In this novel the juxtaposition of two ways of life and the theme of the pilgrimage from falsehood to salvation are set forth with the

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[320] Quoted in Knowles*, The Critical Heritage*, 413-414.

[321] Simmons, op. cit., 194, 195.

[322] Edward Wasiolek, *Tolstoy's Major Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 191. It is important to note, however, that Wasiolek maintains that despite the novel's tendentious tone, "the teacher and the prophet […] did not (seriously) mar *Resurrection*" (192).

> nakedness of a tract […the] thought of God […] burns with intolerable brightness and all but consumes the structure of the narrative.[323]

This interpretation has had a clear and deleterious impact on the novel's reputation; as Medzhibovskaya quips, "We treat *Resurrection* as grounds for Tolstoy's excommunication from the arts, in the same way that the Holy Synod of Russia treated it as grounds for his excommunication from the Church in 1901."[324]

This approach to the novel, it must be said, is certainly not without basis. There can be no doubt that Tolstoy used *Resurrection* to wage an unremitting assault against the pillars of contemporary society, presenting a damning portrait of governmental corruption, clerical hypocrisy, and aristocratic excess. Indeed, the novel's didactic orientation can be perceived from the opening passage, which presents a biting, ideologically tinged description of the coming of spring:

> No matter how hard the several hundred thousand people who had gathered in one small place tried to disfigure the land on which they huddled, no matter how they paved the earth with stone so that nothing could grow on it, no matter how they stripped every blade of grass that poked out of it, no matter how they burned smoky coal and oil, no matter how they cut down trees and chased out the animals and the birds, spring was still spring, even in the city. The sun shone, the grass, coming to life, grew and turned green everywhere they had not scraped it away, not only on the lawns of the boulevards, but also between the slabs of stone; the birch trees, poplars, and bird cherries unfurled their sticky, fragrant petals,

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[323] George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky: An Essay in the Old Criticism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), 92.

[324] Medzhibovskaya, xi. It is important to note that this characterization applies primarily to Western, and not necessarily to Soviet, criticism. While Western and Soviet critics have treated the novel as a straightforward didactic expression of Tolstoy's late moral and political philosophy, they have differed widely in the valuation they have assigned to the novel. For Western critics, the novel's didactic orientation is seen as prima facie evidence of its artistic inferiority. For Soviet critics, this assignation is more neutral, and merely places *Resurrection* in a long line of similar works that includes Chernyshevskii's *What Is to Be Done?* and Herzen's *Who Is to Blame?* and that prefigures the Socialist Realist tradition. On this point, see Ani Kokobobo, "Estranged and Degraded Worlds: The Grotesque Aesthetics of Tolstoy's *Resurrection*," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 24 (2012): 1-2.

> and the lindens swelled with bursting buds; the jackdaws, ravens, and doves, in accordance with the vernal season, were already joyfully preparing their nests, and the flies were buzzing at the, stirred up by the sun. All were happy—plants, birds, insects, and children. But people—big, grown-up people—did not cease to lie and to torment themselves and others. The people considered that what was holy and important was not the spring-time morning, not the beauty of God's earth, given for the glory of all creatures, this beauty, given to them for peace, concord, and love, but rather they considered holy and important that which they themselves had fabricated in order to exercise power over one another.
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> [Как ни старались люди, собравшись в одно небольшое место несколько сот тысяч, изуродовать ту землю, на которой они жались, как ни забивали камнями землю, чтобы ничего не росло на ней, как ни счищали всякую пробивающуюся травку, как ни дымили каменным углем и нефтью, как ни обрезывали деревья и ни выгоняли всех животных и птиц, — весна была весною даже и в городе. Солнце грело, трава, оживая, росла и зеленела везде, где только не соскребли ее, не только на газонах бульваров, но и между плитами камней, и березы, тополи, черемуха распускали свои клейкие и пахучие листья, липы надували лопавшиеся почки; галки, воробьи и голуби по-весеннему радостно готовили уже гнезда, и мухи жужжали у стен, пригретые солнцем. Веселы были и растения, и птицы, и насекомые, и дети. Но люди — большие, взрослые люди — не переставали обманывать и мучать себя и друг друга. Люди считали, что священно и важно не это весеннее утро, не эта красота мира Божия, данная для блага всех существ, — красота, располагающая к миру, согласию и любви, а священно и важно то, что́ они сами выдумали, чтобы властвовать друг над другом.][325]

As Mikhail Bakhtin notes in his 1930 preface to *Resurrection*, "This broad and purely philosophical portrait of spring in the city, of the battle between beneficent nature and pernicious urban culture […] sets the tone for all of the denunciations of human contrivances that follow: of the jail, the court, social life, and so on."[326] Indeed, this passage not only establishes the novel's tendentious tone, but also offers us a framework for interpreting subsequent events in the text. Just as we are led to view the coming of the

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[325] *PSS* 32: 2-3.

[326] M. M. Bakhtin, "Predislovie. Roman 'Voskresenie' L. Tolstogo," in *Lev Tolstoi: Pro et Contra*, ed. K. G. Isupov (St. Petersburg: Russkii khristianskii gumanitarnyi institut, 2000), 764.

spring in terms of a stark contrast that pits the beauty of nature against the artificiality of human contrivances and strivings, so too are we led to view all subsequent developments in the plot in terms of binary oppositions in which one element is presented as being clearly superior to the other. As V.G. Andreeva notes, the novel appears to be "entirely constructed on a system of contrasts […] of antithetical outlooks and points of view."[327] We encounter a number of these contrasts throughout the course of the novel. The first and most basic one arises out of the juxtaposition of the aristocratic seducer Nekhliudov and his lower-class victim, Maslova. From the outset, Tolstoy establishes a contrast by depicting them performing the same action—waking up—in two radically different settings. The prison environment is described in unremittingly bleak terms: "[In] the corridor there was a dismal typhoid air permeated with the odor of feces, tar, and putrefaction, which immediately filled every passerby with a sense of dismay and sadness."[328] Nekhliudov's apartment, in contrast, is filled with tokens of his material wealth. "All the things which he used," writes Tolstoy, "all of the toiletries, linens, clothes, neckties, tiepins, cufflinks, were of the very finest, most expensive sort, unobtrusive, simple, durable, and costly."[329] As Bakhtin argues, the contrasting settings play an essential role in establishing the initial opposition between Nekhliudov and Maslova and in cultivating the novel's tendentious tone:

> […T]he awakening of 'the tempter' in a comfortable bedroom in a cozy bed directly contrasts with Maslova's morning in the prison and her difficult journey to the court. This immediately gives a tendentious

[327] V. G. Andreeva, "O neskol'kikh tsentral'nykh antitezakh v romane L. N. Tolstogo 'Voskresenie,'" *Vestnik KGU im. N. A. Nekrasova* 4 (2012): 114.

[328] *PSS* 32: 3.

[329] *PSS* 32: 11.

> coloring to the entire description and determines the choice of every detail, of every descriptive word: each one must serve this denunciatory contrast. The descriptions applied to the bed—tall, spring-mounted, with a feather mattress—the descriptions applied to the shirt—Dutch, clean, with ironed creases on the chest (requiring so much labor from others!)—are entirely subordinated to a transparently emphasized socio–ideological function. Properly speaking, they do not so much depict as they accuse.
>
> [Пробуждение «соблазнителя» в комфортабельной спальне на удобной постели прямо противопоставляется здесь тюремному утру Масловой и ее тяжелой дороге в суд. Этим сразу дается тенденциозное направление всему изображению и определяется выбор каждой подробности, каждого эпитета: все они должны служить этому обличающему противопоставлению. Эпитеты к постели: высокая, пружинная, с пуховым тюфяком; эпитеты к рубашке: голландская, чистая, с заутюженными складочками на груди (сколько чужого труда!) — всецело подчинены обнаженно подчеркнутой социально-идеологической функции. Они, собственно, не изображают, а обличают.][330]

By linking his hero and heroine to two diametrically opposed settings, Tolstoy leads us to see the relationship between the two characters at the outset as a function of the broader opposition between rich and poor, oppressors and oppressed. As Maslova will later tell Nekhliudov, "I am a convict, and you are a prince."[331] Additional binary oppositions can be found within the protagonists themselves. Consider, for example, Tolstoy's characterization of Nekhliudov in Chapter Fourteen:

> In Nekhliudov, as in all people, there were two men. One was spiritual, and sought those blessings for himself that would be blessings for other people as well; the other was the animal man, seeking blessings only for himself and ready to sacrifice the good of all mankind to secure them. In the period of insane egotism that life in Petersburg and in the army had aroused in him, the animal man ruled over him and suffocated the spiritual man. But, having seen Katiusha and having once more felt what he had then, the spiritual man raised his head and began to assert his rights. And during the two days before Easter in there raged in Nekhliudov a ceaseless inner battle of which he was not consciously aware.

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[330] Bakhtin, 771.

[331] *PSS* 32: 203.

> [В Нехлюдове, как и во всех людях, было два человека. Один — духовный, ищущий блага себе только такого, которое было бы благо и других людей, и другой — животный человек, ищущий блага только себе и для этого блага готовый пожертвовать благом всего мира. В этот период его сумасшествия эгоизма, вызванного в нем петербургской и военной жизнью, этот животный человек властвовал в нем и совершенно задавил духовного человека. Но, увидав Катюшу и вновь почувствовав то, что он испытывал к ней тогда, духовный человек поднял голову и стал заявлять свои права. И в Нехлюдове не переставая в продолжение этих двух дней до Пасхи шла внутренняя, не сознаваемая им борьба.][332]

The distinction that Tolstoy draws between Nekhliudov's animal and spiritual selves leaves no room for ambivalence on the part of the reader. Just as we never doubt that we are meant to cast our lot with the forces of nature over the stultifying forces of urbanization that strive to suffocate them in the opening passage, we never ask ourselves whether we are meant to prefer the animal or spiritual self. The choice is obvious and has already been made for us.

As the novel proceeds, Tolstoy uses this rigid binary framework to wage an unrelenting attack on the political, economic, and social foundation of the reigning order. Throughout the novel, we are presented with scenes, images, and characters that have no direct connection to the central plot, but that are clearly presented to illustrate the pernicious effect of one or another societal failure. The tendentious effect of these episodes is heightened by the presence of a narrator who exerts a greater degree of dictatorial authority over the world of text than in any of Tolstoy's previous works. To be sure, this was not the first time that Tolstoy had allowed his narrator to employ what Morson, borrowing from Bakhtin, has called "absolute language," a narrative voice which, in contradistinction to the ironic discourse of the novelistic world, proclaims

[332] *PSS* 32: 53

eternal truths from a position outside of the text, and, indeed, from outside of history itself.[333] The difference between the use of this narrative voice in *Resurrection* and in Tolstoy's earlier novels is one of degree. In Tolstoy's earlier fiction, the voice of the absolute narrator is not nearly as imposing or as omnipresent as in *Resurrection*; it makes itself known, but then retreats, ceding the floor to the characters. The characters in those novels, for their part, enjoy a degree of independence from the narrator. In *War and Peace,* for example, Tolstoy's narrator issues lengthy proclamations about the nature of history, but these authoritative statements are issued on a plane that is both above and separate from the characters of the novel. In reacting to a given event in the text—to Natasha Rostova's betrayal of Andrei Bolkonskii, for example—the reader is not forced to rely on the narrator's authoritative judgment, but rather on more conventional novelistic cues. This allows for a wide degree of ambivalence: Readers can and do argue about whether the heroine of *Anna Karenina*, for instance, should be seen as a victim or a villain. In *Resurrection*, in contrast, the narrator seems to function as a dictator, arranging events in such a way as to elicit a single response and then reinforcing that response through explicit commentaries. Oftentimes, these narratorial interventions seem excessive or superfluous. Consider, for example, the scandalous account of a church service in the prison chapel that takes place in chapters thirty-nine and forty of the first part of the novel. In Chapter Thirty-Nine Tolstoy uses his trademark technique of *estrangement* (ostranenie) to attack the dogmas of the official Church, describing the blessing of the Eucharist as a magic trick ("The essence of the service consisted in the supposition that the slices of bread cut up by the priest and placed in the wine transform into the body and blood of God upon the application of certain manipulations and prayers") and the taking

[333] Gary Saul Morson, "Tolstoy's Absolute Language," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1981): 667-687.

of communion itself as a macabre exercise in cannibalism ("The priest carried the cup back behind the partition and, having drank up all of the blood that remained in it, eaten all of the pieces of God's body, diligently licked his mustache and wiped both his mouth and the cup, exited briskly from behind the partition in the most joyous spiritual disposition").[334] Although the extended satirical account leaves no doubt about the author's attitude towards the ceremony, Tolstoy insists on appending another chapter in which the narrator provides an authoritative explanation of the precise error at the heart of the ceremony. None of those present, he explains, stopped at any point to consider that Christ himself had "forbidden precisely that which was done here," including "the senseless verbosity and the blasphemous sorcery that was performed over the bread and wine" and the hierarchical structure of the clergy; "most importantly, he had forbidden […] sitting in judgment on people, imprisoning them, humiliating, torturing, and executing them, as was done here."[335] In order to explain how anyone could fail to realize the absurdity and hypocrisy of the liturgy, the narrator gazes into the hearts and minds of the participants and extracts their true motivations: The priest, we learn, "did not believe that blood turned into flesh, that it benefits the soul to pronounce a great many words, or that he had actually eaten a piece of God—it is impossible to believe that—but rather believed that it is necessary to believe in such things." His "faith" (or rather his faith in the necessity of faith) was spurred on by material considerations, the fact that, "for fulfilling the demands of this faith he had already received an income for eighteen years,

[334] *PSS* 32: 135.

[335] *PSS* 32: 137.

an income that supported his family."[336] The warden and guards who attend regard religion as important because it is endorsed by the highest authorities, and because they dimly perceive that it justifies their "cruel duties."[337] The prisoners, for their part, believe that the prayers have some magic power that will help them to attain material rewards. The explanation is entirely superfluous, but its inclusion is typical of the novel as a whole. Indeed, the narrator of *Resurrection* never misses an opportunity to editorialize, to extend the lessons of the narrative itself to the world outside of it.[338] We find another example of a politically charged narratorial commentary in the introduction of Maslova. Not content to merely convince us of the horrors of her life as a prostitute, Tolstoy insists on appending an explicit reminder that her plight is not unique, but representative of a larger social failing. From the moment that she established residence in the brothel, he writes, "there began for Maslova that life of chronic violation of every commandment, divine and human, a life that hundreds of thousands of women lead, not only with the consent but under the patronage of a government entrusted with the welfare of its subjects, a life that for nine out of ten women ends in painful disease, premature old age,

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[336] *PSS* 32: 138.

[337] *PSS* 32: 139.

[338] This interpretation lends credence to the critique that Pavel Medvedev levels against Shklovskii's interpretation of Tolstoyan *ostranenie.* According to Medvedev, Shklovskii and his Formalist allies had erred in assuming that Tolstoyan estrangement is primarily an aesthetic technique: "Tolstoi does not admire a thing that is made strange. On the contrary, he only makes it strange in order to move away from it, push it away in order to put forth the more sharply that which is positive: a definite moral value. Thus, an object is not made strange for its own sake, in order that it be felt, in order to 'make a stone stony,' but for the sake of something else, a moral value, which against this background stands out all the more sharply and vividly precisely as a moral value." P. N. Medvedev and M. M. Bakhtin, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. Albert J. Wehrle (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 60. See also Caryl Emerson, "Shklovsky's *ostranenie*, Bakhtin's *vnenakhodimost'* (How Distance Serves an Aesthetics of Arousal Differently from an Aesthetics Based on Pain), *Poetics Today* 26 (2005): 644.

and death."[339] By framing her story as "an extremely ordinary" (*ochen' obyknovennaia*) one, he explicitly invites us to approach the novel as a critical representation of contemporary society.[340] From a purely aesthetic standpoint, the problem with the narrator in *Resurrection* is that he aspires to a God-like independence from the events that he describes, but his voice is too discernibly tied to the persona of the author: Our knowledge that the narrator is repeating the same arguments that Tolstoy himself had made in numerous essays and articles robs us of the sensation that we experience when reading *War and Peace* or *Anna Karenina*, the sensation that the narrator is a conduit for knowledge that is deeper and more profound than any reader or any living man could possess.

Thus, it can hardly be said that critics are wrong to describe the novel as the author's tendentious attempt to reframe his late political and ethical philosophy in the form of a fictional narrative. Rather, the mistake that they have made is in assuming that it is nothing more than this. What critics have largely failed to acknowledge is that *Resurrection* also captures the doubts that Tolstoy harbored about the validity and finality of his own claimed conversion as well as his discomfort with his newfound vocation as a prophet and moral teacher. As we will see in this chapter, in addition to the didactic, externally-oriented critique of contemporary society that is so clearly present, *Resurrection* presents a far more subtle and ambivalent meditation on its author's biographical trajectory and the meaning of his own claims to have undergone a "second birth." By focusing on this second, hidden layer of the text, we can see that the image of grass growing between the cobblestones of Moscow provides a fitting metaphor for the

[339] *PSS* 32: 9-10.

[340] *PSS* 32: 5.

novel itself. Just as nature persists in the face of an urban environment that strives to snuff it out, so too does Tolstoy's sensitivity to the subtlety and paradoxically of life and artistic creation survive the assault waged by the stultifying forces of his tendentious intentions.

What's in a Name? The *Resurrection* of Prince Dmitrii Nekhliudov

The position that holds that *Resurrection* is little more than an attempt to repackage Tolstoy's post-conversion political and ethical ideology in the form of a fictional narrative rests, to a great extent, on a particular view of the novel's central protagonist, Prince Dmitrii Nekhliudov, and of his relationship to the author and the narrator. Critics who have adopted this position have overwhelmingly tended to view the hero as little more than a mouthpiece for the author, arguing that Tolstoy failed to produce the same impression that he had achieved in his earlier works, in which the heroes frequently seem to be not so much fictional characters as flesh and blood human beings. Many critics have seized on Nekhliudov's dependent relationship to the narrator as an artistic shortcoming of the novel. Edward Garnett argues that, "The central flaw in *Resurrection* is the unreality of the hero. […] Nekhliudov [is] not a man at all, but an automatic spectator of the extraordinarily vivid and remorselessly truthful series of scenes in Russian law courts and prisons."[341] The perspective of the hero, argues Spence, "is in exact accord" with the views that Tolstoy had expressed in his earlier essays; his comments on the events that unfold "give us definitive judgments on the motives of the oppressors […] and he expresses these motives in their baldest and crudest forms."[342] Orwin echoes this point, claiming that "the element of contrast between the message of the didactic narrator and the fictional characters" that was present in Tolstoy's earlier

[341] Edward Garnett, *Tolstoy: His Life and Writings* (London: Constable and Company, 1914), 89.

[342] Spence, 131.

novels "has disappeared in *Resurrection*."[343] For Eikhenbaum, Nekhliudov's apparent lack of independent agency is merely the culmination of a longer process through which the "the notion of character (*poniatie kharaktera*) almost disappears." In *Resurrection,* he writes, "this process of the disintegration of character is complete: Nekhliudov is no longer a character, a personality, at all."[344] And while Bakhtin assiduously avoids attaching any negative valuation to this feature of the novel, it is interesting to note that he refers to the "critical perspective (*kriticheskii krugozor*) of Nekhliudov and the author" as if they were indistinguishable.[345]

And yet the view that holds that Tolstoy intended for his hero to be a faceless vessel for the transmission of his late ideology is complicated by his name itself, a name that suggests a clear connection to Tolstoy's earliest works. A character called Prince Dmitrii Nekhliudov had appeared in five productions dating from the mid-1850s: the novels *Boyhood* and *Youth*, and the short stories "Notes of a Billiard Marker" (*Zapiski markera*, 1853-1855), "A Landowner's Morning" (*Utro pomeshchika, 1852*-1856), and "Lucerne" (*Iz zapisok Kzniazia D. Nekhliudova. Liutsern*, 1857), but since that time he had been absent from Tolstoy's fiction for over forty years. The prince's reappearance has puzzled critics for years, and a number of explanations have been offered. The most recent and most detailed analysis belongs to Orwin. In a 1986 article entitled "The Riddle of Prince Nexljudov," she argues that Tolstoy's decision to "resurrect" the prince was motivated by two goals: first, to underscore his own shift away from "unconscious

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[343] Donna Orwin, "The Riddle of Prince Nexljudov," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 30 (1986): 482.

[344] Eikhenbaum, "O protivorechiiakh", 44.

[345] Bakhtin, 763.

creation" and towards "rational consciousness," and second, to demonstrate that he had overcome the obstacles that prevented him from writing a didactic novel in the 1850s.[346] Without denying the legitimacy of Orwin's interpretation, I would like to suggest an alternative reading, one that rests on the fundamental structural confluence between Nekhliudov's evolution in *Resurrection* and the plots of two of the early works in which he had appeared. My central contention is that in each work in which Nekhliudov serves as the protagonist, we see evidence of a consistent pattern of narrative and ideological movement that ultimately leads to an unexpected shift in narrative focus from outwardly-directed social criticism to introspective self-criticism. Although each of the works that contain this master narrative initially appear to present straightforward ideological attacks aimed at revealing and correcting social ills, they ultimately become vehicles through which Tolstoy expresses his doubts and ruminates on his own shortcomings.

Nekhliudov makes his first appearance in Tolstoy's oeuvre in "Notes of a Billiard Marker," an enigmatic short story that was composed in 1853 but not published until 1856. The story is told from the perspective of an uneducated employee in a billiard hall that Nekhliudov begins to frequent. Before long, he becomes a regular at the establishment, and begins to lose large sums to other players. As his losses grow, he ceases to pay attention to his appearance or to the operation of his estate, which he mortgages to fund his passion for gambling. Eventually his debts grow so large that the proprietor of the establishment refuses to extend him credit. Stricken with shame, Nekhliudov shoots himself in the chest and dies on the floor next to the table. The story ends with his suicide note in which he laments his ruination: Having been given all that a

[346] See Orwin, op. cit.

man could desire—"wealth, a name, a mind, noble strivings"—he had lost everything in "one terrible minute of forgetfulness." Despite his best efforts to "pull himself from the filthy rut" into which he had fallen, he was incapable of reversing his fall: "When I was alone, I became uncomfortable and terrified by myself. When I was with others I involuntary forget my convictions; I could no longer hear my inner voice and fell once again."[347] Although the portrait of Nekhliudov that is presented in the story is vague and not entirely fleshed-out, the work introduces several important themes that would reappear later. The first concerns the autobiographical basis of the character. While Nekhliudov is not a direct proxy for Tolstoy, there is clear evidence that the author used his own experiences and traits in crafting the character. In an early draft, Nekhliudov is described as having a sister, brothers, and an aunt, but, like Tolstoy, no parents. (In the final version he is described as the son of a commander in the Corps of Cadets.) His passion for gambling also reflects Tolstoy's own penchant for making and losing large wagers at that time. In his commentary on the story, Tolstoy's son Sergei L'vovich points to a diary entry written in March of 1853 in which the writer refers to having lost a large sum to a billiard marker in Tiflis: "In that moment," he reflected, "I could have lost everything."[348] For our purposes, however, the most important theme that is introduced in the story concerns Tolstoy's treatment of sexuality and social pressure: Early on in the story, the other patrons of the billiard hall learn that Nekhliudov is a virgin and goad him into visiting a prostitute. This act, it is implied, marks the beginning of his moral descent.

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[347] *PSS* 3: 115

[348] S .L. Tolstoi, "Istoriia pisaniia 'Zapisok markera,'" in PSS 3: 317-319.

At the same time that he was writing "Notes of a Billiard Marker," Tolstoy was working on *Boyhood*, a sequel to his debut novel, *Childhood,* and would soon begin *Youth*, the last installment in the trilogy. Nikolen'ka Irten'ev, the trilogy's protagonist, first meets Nekhliudov at the very end of the second novel. Although he is initially repelled by the prince, the two eventually become close friend; they spend hours discussing abstract philosophical and political questions and sharing their secret hopes and dreams for the future. While the relationship suffers tense moments, it remains more or less intact at the end of the trilogy. In *Youth*, the prince plays a formative role in Irten'ev's moral development. "Under the influence of Nekhliudov," Irten'ev writes, "I unconsciously assimilated his approach, the essence of which consisted the exultant adoration of the ideal of virtue and the conviction that man's purpose is to constantly strive towards perfection" (*sovershenstvovat'sia*).[349] On the surface, this influence appears to be a positive one. The prince helps Irten'ev fight back against the negative influence of his youthful passions and peer pressure: for example, he scolds the narrator for taking up smoking to appear more mature, and manages to dissuade him from visiting a brothel. At the end of the trilogy, when Irten'ev fails his exams, it is the moral rules that he wrote under the Prince's influence that offer the only apparent path to reconstructing his life. There are, however, indications that this influence is not entirely positive. Irten'ev eventually perceives a split in Nekhliudov's character: On several occasions, Irten'ev and other characters accuse the prince of harboring the sin of vanity, claiming that he does not feel any true affection for his friends and lovers, but merely chooses those who are willing to idolize him. To a certain extent, this dangerous combination of

[349] *PSS* 2: 75.

moralistic piety and vanity begin to infect Irten'ev. For example, when Irten'ev travels to a monastery to confess his sins, we quickly see how an apparently pious act can serve to quench the thirst of the ego: On his return home he reflects that "the confessor was likely thinking that he had never met and never would meet again such a fine soul of a young man as I, and that others like me do not even exist" and proceeds to brag to the coachman about his confession.[350] Ultimately, the value of Irten'ev's drive towards perfection is itself cast into doubt, as his strivings towards virtue give way to a quest to be *comme il faut*. This downward progression anticipates, of course, Tolstoy's account of his own life in *Confession*, where, as we saw in the last chapter, he would describe the deleterious impact of his own drive to attain moral perfection.

On the whole, however, it is difficult to draw concrete conclusions about Nekhliudov's nature from *Boyhood* and *Youth* alone. In the trilogy, Nekhliudov functions as a secondary character; although he plays an important role, he is absent for long stretches of the text. A further complication is introduced by the narrative framing of the trilogy—because *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, and *Youth* are told exclusively through the eyes of an older Irten'ev who is looking back at his earlier experiences, we can never be certain whether we are getting an accurate portrait of the Prince or merely Irten'ev's perception of him. The greatest impediment to interpretation, however, is the construction of the character himself. In comparison to the vivacious Irten'ev, Nekhliudov seems to inhabit a more abstract realm. As Eikhenbaum argues, the prince is "not a figure created by the imagination, not an image that lives its own independent life, but a projection of

[350] *PSS* 2: 95.

several traits that Tolstoy saw in himself that were chosen for their dogma[tic resonances]" (*proektsiia* […] *nekotorykh, vybrannykh dlia 'dogmy' chert*).[351]

A more complete portrait of the character begins to emerge in two works in which he serves as the protagonist. The first, "A Landowner's Morning" originated out of a plan for a longer work that was provisionally titled *A Novel of Russian Landowner*. In contrast to his trilogy, Tolstoy intended for the *Novel of a Russian Landowner* to be "dogmatic," (*dogmaticheskii*) a term that lacked the pejorative connotations that it has in both modern Russian and English, and which can perhaps best be translated as "didactic."[352] The specific didactic aim that he set for himself was to illustrate the maxim that "happiness is virtue" (*schast'e est' dobrodetel'*). The story describes the aftermath of Nekhliudov's decision to abandon his study and return to his estate in order to better the lives of his six hundred serfs. The narrative begins with two letters: one written by Nekhliudov and the other a response from his aunt. Laying out his plans to his relative, the prince describes how he has "set out on quite a special path, but one that is good, and which, I feel, lead me to happiness."[353] His aunt is skeptical—she advises him "to choose well-trodden paths" which "lead one closer to success," and dismisses the peasants' poverty as "a necessary evil."[354] Thus, at the beginning of the story Tolstoy establishes the chief conflict as pitting Nekhliudov's pursuit of happiness through virtue against his aunt's endorsement of self-interest. As the story proceeds, Tolstoy presents a detailed description of a single morning that takes place a year after the prince has returned to his

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[351] Eikhenbaum, *Molodoi Tolstoi,* 87.

[352] See Orwin, op cit., 473-474.

[353] *PSS* 4: 124.

[354] *PSS* 4: 125.

estate. Nekhliudov makes a number of what seem to be earnest and well-intentioned attempts to help his impoverished peasants, but these attempts are constantly frustrated by the cruel economic realities of serfdom and by the gentry's inability to effectively communicate with the people. The dominant tone throughout the majority of the story is one of social critique: If a pure-hearted young man like the prince is incapable of improving the lives of his charges, then clearly it is the existing social and economic order that is to blame. Towards the end of the story, however, there is an unexpected twist that forces us to reconsider this interpretation. Returning home from his rounds, the prince begins to question his decision to leave the university. He compares the excitement, certainty, and sense of moral conviction that he had when he first decided to dedicate himself to the people with the crippling doubt and dejection the decision has caused him. It is here that we learn that his motivations may not have been quite as pure as he had initially presented them. In exchange for helping the peasants he had expected to be repaid with their gratitude: "And in exchange for this, I, who will do all this for my own happiness, will rejoice in their gratitude, and with every passing day I will move further and further towards my goal. A wonderful future!"[355] At the very end of the story, as the Prince sits ruefully and taps out disconnected chords on a piano, he imagines the adventures that await one of his few successful peasants, a young man named Iliushka. Picturing Iliushka's travels, he comes to view the serf as possessing the freedom that he as a landowner paradoxically lacks: "[…H]e ascends on invisible wings, flies freely and easily, further and further, […] and he feels gay and glad to be flying further and further away." Enchanted by this imaginary flight of freedom, the prince's grand plan to achieve

[355] *PSS* 4: 165.

happiness through virtue melts away. "Glorious," he whispers to himself in the last line of the story, before posing a rueful question: "Why am I not Iliushka?"[356] Having set out to help the peasants, Nekhliudov ultimately comes to envy them.

We find a remarkably similar pattern in "Lucerne", the last early work in which Nekhliudov appeared, which was published in the following year. The story, which takes place in a Swiss town famed for its scenic views, faithfully reproduces the details of an incident that Tolstoy experienced during his first trip abroad, and which he recorded in his diary entry of July 25, 1857. There he described how after a "stupid and boring dinner" he took a stroll and came across a street performer who was singing to the accompaniment of a guitar. The man's song was beautiful and it attracted a large crowd of English tourists. When the minstrel asked for alms, however, the crowd brutally mocked him. Outraged by the scene, Tolstoy invited the street performer to join him for a drink at a posh hotel restaurant. When the wait staff adopted what Tolstoy took to be an overly familiar tone in speaking with his guest, the writer erupted, causing a scene before retreating to his room.[357]

Like "A Landowner's Morning," Tolstoy's fictionalized retelling of this incident in "Lucerne" initially appears to be oriented as a work of social criticism in which Nekhliudov serves largely as a stand-in for the author. Tolstoy uses the incident as a springboard for an extended critique of the hypocrisy and artifice of civilization, and of civilized man's inability to appreciate the chaotic beauty that exists in true art and in nature. This is evident from the first scene, where Nekhliudov sits by the window in his

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[356] *PSS* 4: 171.

[357] *PSS* 47: 139-140.

hotel room and is enraptured by the view of the lake. The landscape, however, is spoiled by the intrusion of civilization, especially by the granite embankments lined with neatly planted trees, benches, and worst of all, by strolling Englishmen, all of which strike him as "miserable, vulgar human creations, not subordinated […] to the general harmony of the beauty [of the landscape], but rather crudely opposed to it."[358] While he is taking an after-dinner stroll, his mood is suddenly lifted by the sweet notes of a Tyrolean song being played by a diminutive street performer: "It was not a song," he writes, "but an ethereal masterly sketch of a song. I could not comprehend what it was, but it was beautiful."[359] Once again, however, the feeling of exultation gives way to disgust when he witnesses the little man's treatment at the hands of the crowd. The prince's righteous indignation reaches a tipping point when the waiter dares to take a seat at the table next to the minstrel. "What right," he bellows, "do you have to laugh at this gentleman and to sit down next to him when he is a guest and you are a lackey? Why didn't you laugh at me during dinner and sit down next to me? Is it because he is poorly dressed and sings on the street, while I am wearing fine clothes?" "If at that moment," reflects the prince, "I had been at Sevastopol, I would have taken great pleasure in throwing myself into the slaughter in the English trenches."[360]

Following his tantrum, the Nekhliudov takes leave of the singer. Alone in his

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[358] *PSS* 5: 4. The opening passage of *Resurrection*, it is interesting to note, essentially reprises this scene, although the imagery is inverted: In "Lucerne" Nekhliudov is annoyed when he finds that his pristine view of nature is spoiled by the intrusion of civilization, while in *Resurrection*, the grim portrait of the city is redeemed by the traces of nature that remain unconquered by man's "civilizing" impulse.

[359] *PSS* 5: 8.

[360] *PSS* 5: 19.

room once more, he launches into an acerbic rant that fills five of the story's twenty-three pages. The tone of outwardly oriented social criticism reaches its height as the prince rails against the evils that he has witnessed, presenting the crowd's mockery of the minstrel as a crime of historic proportions, one that reveals the inherent destructiveness and hypocrisy of contemporary society as a whole. He accuses the English of nurturing a boorish disregard for true art—"The word 'poetry' is a joke to you […] you regard love for the poetic as something befitting children and stupid young girls, and you laugh at them for it"—before attacking the hypocrisy of Swiss Republicanism: "Is that government really free," he asks, "when even a single citizen can be imprisoned who has not harmed anyone or bothered anyone, but merely does the one thing that he can do in order not to starve to death?"[361] Ultimately, the Prince portrays the incident as an illustration of the conflict between the righteous strivings of the individual and the false God of civilization: "We have one, only one, infallible leader. The Universal Spirit that penetrates us all together and individually, bringing us together, imbuing each of us with a striving towards that which is right […] And this one infallible, blessed voice drowns out the noisy, hurried development of civilization."[362]

Just as we saw in "A Landowner's Morning," however, there is an abrupt shift at the end of the story. In the very last paragraph, just as he has reached the height of righteous indignation, his thoughts are suddenly interrupted by the faint sound of the minstrel's guitar coming from far away. The plaintive note leads the Prince to make an abrupt about-face, to question both his anger and his actions:

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[361] *PSS* 5: 23.

[362] *PSS* 5: 24.

> No, something involuntarily said to me: you have no right to pity him or to be indignant at the prosperity of the wealthy. Who can weigh the internal happiness that lies in the soul of every one of these people? Somewhere out there right now he is sitting on a dirty road, and looking at the shimmering moonlit heavens and joyfully singing amidst the quiet balmy night; in his soul there is no reproach, no spite, no remorse. And who knows what is taking place right now in the souls of all of these people behind these rich, tall walls? Who knows whether there is as much carefree, tender joy for life and accord with the word as there is in the soul of that little man? Endless is the mercy and wisdom of He who has allowed and willed all of these contradictions to exist. Only to you, a pitiful worm who impudently and lawlessly strives to penetrate His laws, His intentions, only to you do they appear to be contradictions. He looks with tenderness from his bright, immeasurable heights and rejoices in the infinite harmony, in which you all contradictorily and endlessly move. In your pride you thought to tear yourself away from the laws that govern all. No, you too with your petty, vulgar indignation at the lackeys, you too have answered to the harmonious demands of the eternal and the infinite…
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> [Нет,— сказалось мне невольно,— ты не имеешь права жалеть о нем и негодовать на благосостояние лорда. Кто свесил внутреннее счастье, которое лежит в душе каждого из этих людей? Вон он сидит теперь где-нибудь на грязном пороге, смотрит в блестящее лунное небо и радостно поет среди тихой, благоуханной ночи, в душе его нет ни упрека, ни злобы, ни раскаянья. А кто знает, что делается теперь в душе всех этих людей, за этими богатыми, высокими стенами? Кто знает, есть ли в них всех столько беззаботной, кроткой радости жизни и согласия с миром, сколько ее живет в душе этого маленького человека? Бесконечна благость и премудрость того, кто позволил и велел существовать всем этим противоречиям. Только тебе, ничтожному червяку, дерзко, беззаконно пытающемуся проникнуть его законы, его намерения, только тебе кажутся противоречия. Он кротко смотрит с своей светлой неизмеримой высоты и радуется на бесконечную гармонию, в которой вы все противоречиво, бесконечно движетесь. В своей гордости ты думал вырваться из законов общего. Нет, и ты с своим маленьким, пошленьким негодованьицем на лакеев, и ты тоже ответил на гармоническую потребность вечного и бесконечного...][363]

Just as in "A Landowner's Morning," a harsh critique of contemporary social values suddenly and unexpectedly transforms into an equally harsh exercise in self-criticism.

In these two works, we see the emergence of a consistent master narrative, a

[363] *PSS* 5: 26.

virtually identical pattern of plot development. This master narrative has four components. First, the Prince always functions to some degree as a stand-in for the author; Tolstoy uses him as a vehicle for presenting his own experiences and traits in a fictionalized form. Second, Nekhliudov experiences an emotional progression that moves from a feeling of confidence, certainty, and even exaltation to a state of dejection and self-criticism. Third, at the beginning of the narrative, Nekhliudov positions himself as a defender of someone whose social position renders him vulnerable, but he ends up envying the object of his pity. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, Nekhliudov advances a particular ideological agenda or didactic aim that corresponds to Tolstoy's own stated views at the time of composition, but he always fails or falls short in some way. These failures serve as a subtle counterweight to the works' apparent ideological agendas. Although the primary moral thrust is never completely negated, it is substantially problematized.

If we turn now to *Resurrection*, we will find that virtually the exact same pattern is repeated there.

Defining the Dominant: Memory and Awakenings

If, as we have argued, the prototypical Nekhliudov plot is defined by the partial subversion of a thesis that had previously constituted the dominant element in the work in which he is featured, then it follows that we must first understand how the central narrative of redemption is constructed in *Resurrection* before we can comment on how Tolstoy questions, and ultimately subverts, this narrative. In this section we will examine the framework that is constructed in the first two parts of the novel, focusing on how the author employs references to memory and forgetfulness to establish a model of redemption for each of the two main characters.

At the beginning of the novel, both Maslova and Nekhliudov are described as fallen sinners. In both cases, this fallen nature is presented in terms of a rupture that divides their morally pure past selves from their depraved present selves. Through a series of staggered flashbacks, internal monologues, and narratorial commentaries, Tolstoy leads us to view both Nekhliudov and Maslova as bifurcated beings. The Nekhliudov whom we encounter at the beginning of the novel is an idle aristocrat who lives off of the income from two estates that he inherited after his mother's death. He spends his time dabbling in painting, for which he has no real talent, and pursuing two loveless relationships. And yet, we soon learn, he was not always like this: In his youth, the prince had been an idealist who, having read Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics* and Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, had come to the conclusion that private

ownership of land is indefensible.[364] When he inherited a small parcel of land following the death of his father, he ceded it to the peasants in accordance with this conviction. Years of exposure to the immoral influence of his comrades and fellow aristocrats, however, have dulled Nekhliudov's moral sensibilities. Thus, when his mother had died (an event that took place shortly before the beginning of the narrative), he had chosen to accept the two estates that she had passed to him in her will, acknowledging that he needed the income they provided in order to fund his extravagant lifestyle. There are clear parallels between the trajectory charted by the hero of *Resurrection* and the autobiographical narrator of the *Confession*. Like the narrator of the *Confession*, the protagonist of *Resurrection* is a fallen idealist who had committed himself to the task of moral self-perfection (*sovershenstvovanie*), but failed due to his inability to overcome

[364] George (1839-1897) was a self-taught economic theorist who is best known for his advocacy of a "single tax," a proposal that he first presented in his 1879 treatise *Progress and Poverty*. George maintained that private ownership of land was morally unjustifiable and economically disastrous. He rejected, however, calls for outright nationalization and redistribution of land, considering them to be infeasible and inefficient. In place of outright nationalization, he proposed an ingenious solution: Land would be regarded as common property, and those who wished to make use of it would pay rent in the form of a tax based on its assessed value. The proceeds of the tax would be used to administer a social safety net and provide other services to the populace; these services would function as compensation for those who chose not to claim the portion of land that was rightfully theirs. This model is referred to as a "single tax" system because the rent paid on the assessed value of land would constitute the sole source of revenue for the government. George's theories were embraced by a number of prominent intellectuals who sought a middle ground between laissez-faire capitalism and socialism, including Clarence Darrow, John Dewey, Albert Einstein, Helen Keller, Bertrand Russell, George Bernard Shaw, and Frank Lloyd Wright, but, despite a handful of successes on the local level, they failed to gain widespread acceptance. In Tolstoy's writings on George we see a repeated oscillation between two diametrically opposed positions: at times he harshly rejected the single tax on the grounds that it would require state violence to implement, but he also repeatedly presented it as the only way to avoid a bloody revolution. On Tolstoy's writings on George, see Kenneth C. Wenzer, *An Anthology of Tolstoy's Spiritual Economics* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1997); Rob Knowles, "Tolstoy's Henry George: 'A Step on the First Rung of the Ladder," in *Henry George's Legacy in Economic Thought,* edited by John Laurent, 49-70 (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2005); David Redfearn, *Tolstoy*: *Principles for a New World Order* (London: Shepheard-Walwyn, 1992); and my own "Double Thoughts on the Single Tax: Tolstoy, Henry George, and the Meaning(s) of Progress, [forthcoming] *Tolstoy Studies Journal*, 2016.

external pressures exerted by social norms and expectations. In charting this moral downfall, Tolstoy adapts the same distinction between "then" and "now" that recurs throughout the *Confession.* Here, however, the formula is inverted:

> *Then* he had been an honest, selfless young man who was ready to give himself over to any worthy cause; *now* he was a depraved, sophisticated egoist who loved only his own pleasure. *Then* God's creation had appeared to him as a mystery that he gladly and enthusiastically had tried to decipher; *now* everything in life was simple and clear and was defined by those conditions of life in which he found himself. *Then* what was necessary and important was communion with nature and with those thinking, feeling people who had lived before him (poets and philosophers); *now* what was important was human institutions and communion with his comrades. *Then* women appeared to him as mysterious and charming beings whose charm stemmed precisely from their mysteriousness; *now* the significance of women, of all women besides his relatives and the wives of his friends, was quite defined: A woman was one of the best instruments for experiencing pleasure. *Then* he had not needed money and could have taken only a third of that which his mother gave him and could refuse the estate he inherited from his father and cede it to the peasants; *now* the 1,500 rubles he received from his mother every month were not enough, and he had already had unpleasant conversations with her about money. *Then* he considered his spiritual essence to be his real self; *now* he considered his true self to be his healthy, vivacious, animal *I.*
>
> [*Тогда* он был честный, самоотверженный юноша, готовый отдать себя на всякое доброе дело, — *теперь* он был развращенный, утонченный эгоист, любящий только свое наслаждение. *Тогда* мир Божий представлялся ему тайной, которую он радостно и восторженно старался разгадывать, — *теперь* всё в этой жизни было просто и ясно и определялось теми условиями жизни, в которых он находился. *Тогда* нужно и важно было общение с природой и с прежде него жившими, мыслящими и чувствовавшими людьми (философия, поэзия), — *теперь* нужны и важны были человеческие учреждения и общение с товарищами. *Тогда* женщина представлялась таинственным и прелестным, именно этой таинственностью прелестным существом, — *теперь* значение женщины, всякой женщины, кроме своих семейных и жен друзей, было очень определенное: женщина была одним из лучших орудий испытанного уже наслаждения. *Тогда* не нужно было денег, и можно было не взять и третьей части того, что давала мать, можно было отказаться от имения отца и отдать его крестьянам, — *теперь* же недоставало тех 1500 рублей в месяц, которые давала мать, и с ней

> бывали уже неприятные разговоры из-за денег. *Тогда* своим настоящим я он считал свое духовное существо, — *теперь* он считал собою свое здоровое, бодрое, животное я.][365]

At times Tolstoy even reproduces entire phrases that had appeared in the *Confession.* In *Resurrection*, for example, we read that, "When Nekhliudov thought, read, and spoke about God, about justice, about wealth and poverty, everyone around him considered it to be out of place and in some way ridiculous […] When he read novels, told scabrous jokes, went to the French theater to see humorous vaudevilles and joyfully retold them, everyone praised and encouraged him" (*vse khvalili i pooshchriali ego*).[366] The echoes of the account of Tolstoy's own moral decline in the *Confession* are unmistakable: "Every time that I tried to express my most heartfelt desires to be morally good, I was met with suspicion and mockery, while as soon as I gave in to despicable passions, I was praised and encouraged" (*menia khvalili i pooshchriali*).[367]

For Maslova, the split between former and present selves is even starker, and is expressed through the two names by which she is called: In the scenes that take place in the past and in Nekhliudov's memories, she is Katiusha, but in the present she is almost exclusively referred to by her surname, or, more rarely, by her professional name, Liubov'. The depraved prostitute that we encounter at the beginning of the novel seems to be an entirely different being than the pure, chaste girl whom Nekhliudov had fallen in love with ten years before. The prince's reaction when the two meet for the first time after the trial is telling: "'Surely this is a dead woman,' he thought, looking at the face

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[365] *PSS* 32: 47-48. My italics.

[366] *PSS* 32: 48.

[367] *PSS* 23: 4.

that had once been sweet but that was now defiled and bloated, and the squinting black eyes that shone with a wicked glitter."[368] Like Nekhliudov, Maslova is presented as a victim of pernicious social influences. After leaving her position at Nekhliudov's aunts' estate, Maslova had made a sincere effort to find honest work. At every turn, however, she was thwarted by those who saw her not as a human being, but as a sexual object: Although she managed to find jobs in two different households, she was dismissed when she rebuffed her employers' advances. In desperate need of money, she was offered only two options by society: she could accept a job as a laundress, a prospect that the narrator describes as akin to a descent into a living hell of backbreaking labor in sweltering temperatures surrounded by malnourished and consumptive women, or register for a yellow card and lead a life of debauchery and moral self-destruction. Like Nekhliudov, Maslova has accepted what she takes to be broadly-shared values as the basis for her own (un)ethical outlook: Her interactions with society have convinced her that "the highest good for all men without exception […] consists in sexual intercourse with attractive women […] All of her past and present life confirmed the truth of this view."[369]

For both of the novel's protagonists, then, redemption will require a return to the self that has been lost. This pattern presents both a reiteration of the classical paradigm of conversion as well as a characteristically Tolstoyan inversion of it. On the one hand, a complete moral awakening will signal the sort of narrative bifurcation that we have identified as central to converts' self-conceptualization: the redeemed self will be defined in reference to the sinful past that has been cast aside. On the other hand, conversion will

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[368] *PSS* 32: 148.

[369] *PSS* 32: 151.

signal a *return* to the purity of the past that had preceded the fall, just as we saw in the *Confession*.

The central role that memory plays in this process is clearly accentuated in a number of instances.[370] The first references are negative, emphasizing Nekhliudov and Maslova's inability to remember their former selves; this forgetfulness, we are led to see, stands as both the cause and the consequence of their depraved existences. At the beginning of the narrative, the chasm between present and former selves is so wide for both protagonists that they are unable to even think of the past. When Nekhliudov first recognizes Maslova at the courthouse in Chapter Nine, the narrator explains that the prince "never recalled [her] (*nikogda ne vspominal*), because this memory was too torturous, and would have too clearly exposed him and demonstrated that he, who took such great pride in his decency (*poriadochnost'*), not only was not decent, but had had behaved in a truly base manner with this woman."[371]

For Maslova, the barrier separating the past and the present is even stronger. Her memory only extends to the recent present, and never touches on events from her former life. After the trial, the narrator explains:

> She *recalled* how her lawyer had looked at her, and how the judge had looked at her, and how the people in the courthouse who had crossed her path and then purposely rushed by had looked at her. She *recalled* how Bertha had come to visit her in the jail and told her that the student who

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[370] As Kuzina and Tiun'kin note in their monograph '*Voskresenie' L.N. Tolstogo*, "The heroes' memories are constantly […] repeated in the narration of the present." The use of staggered flashbacks rather than a straightforward chronological presentation, they argue, was not motivated by the practical need to provide exposition, but rather stemmed from Tolstoy's growing interest in the relationship between the operation of the conscious in the present and the perception of memory. L. Kuzina and K. Tiun'kin, *"Voskresenie" L. N. Tolstogo* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1978), 88.

[371] *PSS* 32: 31.

> had fancied her while she was living at Kitaeva's [brothel] had come to them and asked about her and was very sorry for her. She *recalled* her fight with her red-haired [cellmate] and felt sorry for her; she *recalled* the baker who had sent her an extra roll. She *recalled* many things, but not Nekhliudov. She *never recalled* her childhood and youth, and especially not her love for Nekhliudov. That was too painful. Those memories lay untouched somewhere deep in her soul. She never even dreamed about Nekhliudov. […] She had buried all of the *memories* of her past with him […].
>
> [И она *вспомнила*, как защитник смотрел на нее, и как смотрел председатель, и как смотрели встречавшиеся и нарочно проходившие мимо нее люди в суде. Она *вспомнила*, как посетившая ее в остроге Берта рассказывала ей, что тот студент, которого она любила, живя у Китаевой, приезжал к ним, спрашивал про нее и очень жалел. *Вспоминала* она о драке с рыжей и жалела ее; *вспоминала* о булочнике, выславшем ей лишний калач. Она *вспоминала* о многих, но только не о Нехлюдове. О своем детстве и молодости, а в особенности о любви к Нехлюдову, она *никогда не вспоминала*. Это было слишком больно. Эти *воспоминания* где-то далеко нетронутыми лежали в ее душе. Даже во сне никогда не видала Нехлюдова. […] Похоронила она все *воспоминания* о своем прошедшем с ним […].][372]

In order to prevent memories of her past self from entering into her consciousness, Maslova resorts to alcohol and tobacco.[373]

Thus, it is clear that for both characters the fall into sin is associated with forgetfulness. The first step to a lasting transformation, then, is to remember the former self that has been lost. We see this clearly in the account of Nekhliudov's awakening that is presented in Chapter Twenty-Eight. When the prince returns to his apartment on the evening of the trial he attempts to summon a memory from the recent past that will restore the sense of equilibrium that has been shattered by the chance reunion at the

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[372] *PSS* 32: 129-130. My italics.

[373] The idea that people use intoxicants to interfere with the operation of memory (and, more broadly, of moral consciousness) was a central theme of Tolstoy's 1890 essay "Why do Men Stupefy Themselves?" (*Dlia chego liudi odurmanivaiutsia?*) There he wrote that that his strongest urges to smoke always came "in those moments when I precisely did not want to remember that which I remembered, when I wanted to forget, to not think." (*PSS* 26: 277)

courthouse. Looking at a portrait of his mother in a velvet gown that exposes her bare décolleté, he tries to recall happier times, but his only memories are of the torturous period when she lie dying, "dried up like a mummy but still filling not only the whole room, but the whole house with heavy sickening smell which nothing could smother." The memory of his mother reminds him of Missy, another woman whose bared décolleté he has recently seen, and these memories prove to be no more soothing: "He thought with disgust now of her beautiful shoulders and arms. […] All of it disgusted him and at the same time made him feel ashamed."[374] For a moment he is tempted by the thought of escape; he contemplates a trip to Rome to work on his painting. Suddenly, his thoughts are interrupted by a series of memories from that distant past that he had forgotten long ago:

> And one after another the minutes that he had spent with her arose in his imagination. He *remembered* his last meeting with her, that animal passion that had taken hold of him at that time, and the disappointment that he experienced when his passion was satisfied. He *remembered* the white dress with the light blue ribbon; he *remembered* the service at the church. 'Clearly I loved her, sincerely loved her with a good, pure love on that night; I loved her even before that, and even loved her during the first time that I was staying with my aunts and was writing my thesis.' And he *remembered* himself as he had been then. The smell of that freshness, of youth so full of life washed over him, and he was filled with bitter sadness.
>
> The difference between the man he had been then and the man he was now was enormous: it was as great, if not greater, than the difference between Katiusha in the church and that prostitute who had gotten drunk with a merchant whom he had judged that morning. Then he had been a vivacious, free man with endless possibilities in front of him; now he felt trapped from all sides by the snares of a stupid, empty, aimless, insignificant life from which he saw no escape, and from which he for the most part did not even want to escape. He *remembered* how he had once taken pride in his straightforwardness, how he had once set a rule for himself to always tell the truth, and had really been honest, and how now he was caught up a lie, in the most terrible lie, in the lie that all the people around him took to be the truth. […]

[374] *PSS* 32: 99.

> And he vividly *recalled* the moment when he had caught up to her in the corridor, thrust some money at her, and run away from her. 'Oh, that money!' he exclaimed, *recalling* that moment with the same horror and repulsion that he had felt then. […] Only a blackguard, a villain, could not do that! […] They (people) can do as they like. Let them judge me; I can deceive them, but I will not deceive myself.
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> [И одна за другою стали возникать в его воображении минуты, пережитые с нею. *Вспомнил* он последнее свидание с ней, ту животную страсть, которая в то время овладела им, и то разочарование, которое он испытал, когда страсть была удовлетворена. *Вспомнил* белое платье с голубой лентой, вспомнил заутреню. «Ведь я любил ее, истинно любил хорошей, чистой любовью в эту ночь, любил ее еще прежде, да еще как любил тогда, когда я в первый раз жил у тетушек и писал свое сочинение!» И он *вспомнил* себя таким, каким он был тогда. На него пахнуло этой свежестью, молодостью, полнотою жизни, и ему стало мучительно грустно.
> Различие между ним, каким он был тогда и каким он был теперь, было огромно: оно было такое же, если не большее, чем различие между Катюшей в церкви и той проституткой, пьянствовавшей с купцом, которую они судили нынче утром. Тогда он был бодрый, свободный человек, перед которым раскрывались бесконечные возможности, — теперь он чувствовал себя со всех сторон пойманным в тенетах глупой, пустой, бесцельной, ничтожной жизни, из которых он не видел никакого выхода, да даже большей частью и не хотел выходить. Он *вспомнил*, как он когда-то гордился своей прямотой, как ставил себе когда-то правилом всегда говорить правду и действительно был правдив, и как он теперь был весь во лжи — в самой страшной лжи, во лжи, признаваемой всеми людьми, окружающими его, правдой. […]
> И он живо *вспомнил* минуту, когда он в коридоре, догнав ее, сунул ей деньги и убежал от нее. «Ах, эти деньги! — с ужасом и отвращением, такими же, как и тогда, *вспоминал* он эту минуту. — Ах, ах! какая гадость! — так же, как и тогда, вслух: проговорил он. — Только мерзавец, негодяй мог это сделать! […] Они (люди), как хотят, пусть судят обо мне, их я могу обмануть, но себя-то я не обману».][375]

It is this moment, when the walls that he has constructed between his former and present selves finally begin to collapse, that immediately precedes the prince's moral awakening.

[375] *PSS* 32: 100-101. My italics.

It is at this point that Nekhliudov resolves to effect a clean break with the life that he has been living, to beg Maslova's forgiveness, and to offer his hand in marriage to her.

He soon learns, however, that the realization of this plan will require that he inaugurate a moral reawakening within Maslova by helping her to bridge the divide between her former and present selves. When Nekhliudov had first caught sight of her in the courtroom, he had not perceived the split within her: Despite the changes wrought by the passage of time, he had seen "only [her] one unique inimitable spiritual personality."[376] When he finally manages to arrange to meet with her at the jail, however, he is overwhelmed by quite a different impression. Although he had expected her to be overjoyed by his appearance, he is shocked and dismayed to find that she treats him not as a former lover, but rather as merely another powerful man from whom she can extract money and favors. When she signals him to furtively slip some money into her hand, he is appalled, and remarks to himself that the Maslova he once knew has clearly died long ago. In fact, Nekhliudov misreads Maslova's reaction. When she recognized him, there was indeed a momentary awakening of her past self: "[His] reappearance startled her into remembering things she never thought of now. The first moment brought back to her dimly that new wonderful world of emotions and thoughts which had been revealed to her by the charming young man who had loved her and whom she had loved." Her memories of the love they shared, however, are quickly shattered by her memories of his betrayal: "Lacking the strength to understand it, she acted as she always did: she chased her memories away and tried to cover them with the distinctive fog of a dissolute life"

[376] *PSS* 32: 76.

(*postaralas' zastlat' ikh osobennym tumanom razvratnoi zhizni*).[377] As the narrator explains, since the time that she had begun to work as a prostitute, Maslova had come to believe that all men are motivated solely by their desire to satisfy sexual urges. Were she to alter her conception of life, "she would lose the meaning that it provided." In order to maintain the stability of her worldview, she resolves to treat Nekhliudov as she would an amorous client and to push away the memories of the past brought about by his reappearance: "These memories did not accord with her present outlook, and thus they had been completely crossed out from her memory, or, more precisely, were kept untouched, locked up, and sealed over in her memory." [378] In order to dull the pain caused by the recollection of her former self, she uses the money that Nekhliudov has given her to buy vodka.

When Nekhliudov returns for a second time, he finds Maslova drunk. This time she berates him, accusing him of using her as a tool for his own salvation, just as he had once used her to satisfy his sexual desires. While we will discuss this scene in greater detail in the next section, for the moment we will focus exclusively on the narrator's comments at the end of the episode. Maslova's anger, we learn, was not motivated by hatred of the prince, but rather was the result of "the torturous labor that was taking place within her. What Nekhliudov had said called her back to that world where she had suffered, which she had left without understanding it, and hating it. Now she had lost that forgetfulness in which she had lived, and to live with the clear memory of what had been

[377] *PSS* 32: 147.

[378] *PSS* 32: 152.

was too painful."[379] By the time of their third and final meeting, however, it is clear that Maslova has taken the first step on the path to redemption. Although she refuses his proposal for a second time, she asks him to forgive her for her outburst during their previous meeting. Nekhliudov recognizes that a change has taken place within her: "Yes, yes, she is an entirely different person," he remarks to himself.[380] This view is confirmed by the closing scene of Part I, where Maslova abstains from her customary evening glass of vodka.

In the second part of the novel, Nekhliudov leaves Moscow and travels to his estates, where he hopes to put his affairs in order in anticipation of his impending departure to Siberia. His visit to the first estate, Kuzminskoe, is brief. While there, he is struck by the peasants' impoverished state. Hoping to lighten their burden, he summons the village elders and offers to reduce the rent that they pay by a substantial amount. After briefly haggling, the peasants accept his offer. Although the amount they agree on is substantially lower than the rent that is charged by other landowners in the area, Nekhliudov senses that the peasants are disappointed. He leaves Kuzminskoe with a gnawing sense of dissatisfaction, although he is as yet unable to discern its source. From Kuzminskoe, the prince travels to his second estate Panovo, the place where he had first met Maslova. Upon his arrival, he sits down by a window and listens to the sound of peasant women washing clothes by the river. The sound reminds him of the past, unleashing a series of vivid memories that revive the image of his former self in his mind:

> And suddenly Nekhliudov *remembered* how in the exact same way long ago when he was still young and innocent he had heard here at the river

[379] *PSS* 32: 166.

[380] *PSS* 32: 195.

> these sounds of paddles beating wet clothes […] And it was not that he *remembered* himself as the eighteen year-old boy he had been then, but that he felt himself to be that boy, with the same freshness, purity, and a future filled with the greatest opportunities; at the same time, as happens in dreams, he knew that this was already gone, and he became terribly sad.
>
> [И вдруг Нехлюдов *вспомнил*, что точно так же он когда-то давно, когда он был еще молод и невинен, слышал здесь на реке эти звуки вальков по мокрому белью […] И он не то что *вспомнил* себя восемнадцатилетним мальчиком, каким он был тогда, но почувствовал себя таким же, с той же свежестью, чистотой и исполненным самых великих возможностей будущим и вместе с тем, как это бывает во сне, он знал, что этого уже нет, и ему стало ужасно грустно.][381]

And yet despite his knowledge that a return to the past is impossible, this is precisely what the prince attempts to do at Panovo. His first goal is to seek out Maslova's aunt in order to learn what became of the child he fathered with her. When he finally locates her, her reaction speaks to the distance that separates him from his former self: At first she does not recognize him, and when she finally does, she points out that that "you've grown old, your honor; you were like a fine burr, but look at you now! I can see that you've got worries."[382] The answers that he receives in response to his questions about the child serve only to bolster his dim awareness that the return to the past that he longs for is impossible. The child, he learns, was born healthy, but perished from malnutrition shortly after being taken to a foundling's hospital in Moscow. The chapter ends with a single terse sentence: "And that was all Nekhliudov could find out about his child."[383] The death of the child, we are led to see, is a sin that cannot be repaired, an indelible mark of a past that is gone forever.

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[381] *PSS* 32: 207-208. My italics.

[382] *PSS* 32: 213.

[383] *PSS* 32: 215

Nonetheless, the pull of his memory proves to be irresistible. After learning of his child's fate, Nekhliudov considers how to best help the impoverished peasants of Panovo. Reflecting on the disappointment that he had experienced while leaving Kuzminskoe, he comes to grasp the error in his thinking. He realizes that the peasants are mired in poverty because they lack access to arable land. This realization sparks yet another memory, one that concerns his former infatuation with the land-tax reforms proposed by Henry George:

> And he vividly *recalled* Henry George's fundamental proposition and his enthusiasm for it, and he was surprised at how he could have *forgotten* all of this. Land cannot be the object of private ownership; it cannot be bought or sold, just like water, air, and sunlight. All have an equal right to the land and to the benefits that it brings to man. And now he understood why he felt ashamed to recall the way he had arranged affairs at Kuzminskoe. He had been deceiving himself. Knowing that a man cannot proclaim his right to land, he had assumed this right for himself and had gifted the peasants a part of that which he knew in the depths of his soul he had no right to.
>
> [И он живо *вспомнил* основные положения Генри Джорджа и свое увлечение им и удивлялся на то, как он мог забыть всё это. — Не может земля быть предметом собственности, не может она быть предметом купли и продажи, как вода, как воздух, как лучи солнца. Все имеют одинаковое право на землю и на все преимущества, которые она дает людям». И он понял теперь, почему ему было стыдно вспоминать свое устройство дел в Кузминском. Он обманывал сам себя. Зная, что человек не может иметь права на землю, он признал это право за собой и подарил крестьянам часть того, на что он знал в глубине души, что не имел права.][384]

While he may not be able to turn back time and save the child he had lost, Nekhliudov is convinced that he can return to that period of youthful idealism that had come before his fall by implementing a single tax system at Panovo. When he summons the village elders, however, they refuse his offer to implement a single tax system, suspecting that it is a clever ploy designed to rob them of what little they have. And yet this rejection does not

[384] *PSS* 32: 218. My italics.

bother Nekhliudov: He returns to the manor house that night with a feeling of calm resolution. Sitting once more by the window, he experiences the sensation of having returned to his former self:

> This was a joyful, happy night for him. His imagination brought back the impressions of that happy summer that he had spent here as an innocent youth, and he felt himself now to be the same as he had been not only then, but in all the best moments of his life. He not only remembered, but felt himself to be the same has he had been when, as a fourteen year-old boy, he had prayed to God to show him the truth, when as a child he had cried at on his mother's lap when he parted from her, promising to always be good and never bring her sorrow; he felt himself to be the same as he had been when he and Nikolen'ka Irtenev had decided to always help each other to live a good life and to try to make all people happy.
>
> [Это была для него радостная, счастливая ночь. Воображение возобновило перед ним впечатления того счастливого лета, которое он провел здесь невинным юношей, и он почувствовал себя теперь таким, каким он был не только тогда, но и во все лучшие минуты своей жизни. Он не только вспомнил, но почувствовал себя таким, каким он был тогда, когда он четырнадцатилетним мальчиком молился Богу, чтоб Бог открыл ему истину, когда плакал ребенком на коленях матери, расставаясь с ней и обещаясь ей быть всегда добрым и никогда не огорчать ее, — почувствовал себя таким, каким он был, когда они с Николенькой Иртеневым решали, что будут всегда поддерживать друг друга в доброй жизни и будут стараться сделать всех людей счастливыми.][385]

His former self had been happy, the prince realizes, because he had considered only whether his actions accorded with his conscience, not whether they would secure material advantages for him. By presenting the peasants with an offer that was economically disadvantageous for him, he had succeeded in recapturing a part of the self that had been lost.

The last thing that he does at the estate is to rummage through an old chest of drawers, where he finds another powerful reminder of the purity of his past self: a

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[385] *PSS* 32: 224-225.

photograph of himself and Maslova taken during the summer when they first met, before their Platonic love had been shattered by his selfishness and lust. Upon leaving the estate, he experiences none of the sadness he felt while departing form Kuzminskoe: "Now he experienced the ceaseless joy of liberation and a feeling of novelty (*chuvstvo novizny*) that resembled that which a traveler must experience when discovering new lands."[386]

Nekhliudov's impression that he has effected a decisive break with the depraved life that he has recently been leading and returned to the pure self that he had been in his youth is reinforced by a chance meeting that takes place in the chapter that immediately follows his departure from Panovo. Upon returning to Moscow, the prince happens to run into Schönbock, his former comrade who had come to pick him up from his aunts' estate after he had seduced Maslova, and who had heartily congratulated him for achieving the sexual conquest that he had desired. In the years that have passed since their last meeting, Schönbock has aged considerably. Although he has amassed enormous debts, he has somehow kept his place in society, serving as a financial advisor to a senile millionaire. Nekhliudov is disgusted by his former comrade, and pointedly refuses Schönbock's repeated invitations to social functions. When the two part, Nekhliudov is struck by the distance that now separates him from his own period of depravity; his sinful former self seem as alien to him now as Schönbock does: "Was I really like that?" he asks himself; "Yes, perhaps not exactly like that, but I wanted to be like that and thought that that was how I would live my life."[387]

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[386] *PSS* 32: 233.

[387] *PSS* 32: 236.

Shortly after meeting Schönbock, Nekhliudov returns to the jail, where he gives Maslova the photograph that he had found at Panovo. When she takes it out that night, she is filled with soothing memories of her youth. The pleasant recollections are spoiled, however, when another woman, a nurse who works alongside her in the clinic, points out that the Maslova in the photograph is unrecognizable, and that "ten years have probably passed since then."[388] The comment leads to a dramatic change in Maslova's mood: she angrily springs to her feet and slams the door shut. The narrator explains the cause of this sudden change:

> Looking at the photograph, she had felt herself to be the same as she had been when it was taken, and had dreamed about how happy she had been and how she could have still been happy with him now. Her comrade's words had reminded her of what she was now and what she had been then, reminded her of all the horror of that life [in the brothel] that she had earlier only dimly perceived, but had not allowed herself to realize.
>
> [Глядя на фотографию, она чувствовала себя такой, какой она была изображена на ней, и мечтала о том, как она была счастлива тогда и могла бы еще быть счастлива с ним теперь. Слова товарки напомнили ей то, что она была теперь, и то, что она была там, — напомнили ей весь ужас той жизни, который она тогда смутно чувствовала, но не позволяла себе сознавать.][389]

Just as Nekhliudov's encounter with Schönbock had reminded him of his own depraved period, the nurse's comment reminds Maslova of her years in the brothel. However, unlike Nekhliudov, who takes pride in his return to his morally pure former self, Maslova reacts with anger, weeping "over her ruined life," cursing the man who had inaugurated her fall, and thirsting for vodka to drown out the memories and the pain.[390] And yet the

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[388] *PSS* 32: 243.

[389] *PSS* 32: 244.

[390] Ibid.

shame that Maslova experiences when she thinks about her life in the brothel and the anger that she still harbors against Nekhliudov for inaugurating her downfall ultimately prove to be incapable of halting the process of moral regeneration that has started within her. Towards the end of the second part, we learn that she has indeed turned a corner in her journey to redemption:

> [Maslova] continued to convince herself that she had not forgiven him, as she had told him at their second meeting, that she had not forgiven him, and hated him, but she had already begun to love him again for some time, and loved him so much that she was unconsciously doing everything that he wished her to do: she had stopped drinking and smoking, had abandoned her coquetry and accepted a position in the infirmary. Everything that she did she did because she knew that it was what he wanted. If she so decisively refused him every time he referred to his desire to sacrifice himself by marrying her, then this was only because she wanted to repeat those proud that she had once spoken to him, and, most importantly, because she knew that a marriage with her would lead to unhappiness for him. She had firmly decided that she would not accept his sacrifice […]
>
> [Маслова всё еще […] продолжала уверять себя, что она, как она это высказала ему во-второе свидание, не простила ему и ненавидит его, но она уже давно опять любила его и любила так, что невольно исполняла всё то, что и чего он желал от нее: перестала пить, курить, оставила кокетство и поступила в больницу служанкой. Всё это она делала потому, что знала, что он желает этого. Если она так решительно отказывалась всякий раз, когда он упоминал об этом, принять его жертву жениться на ней, то это происходило и оттого, что ей хотелось повторить те гордые слова, которые она раз сказала ему, и, главное, оттого, что она знала, что брак с нею сделает его несчастье. Она твердо решила, что не примет его жертвы […]][391]

Maslova's rediscovery of the Platonic love that she felt for Nekhliudov when the two first met demonstrates that she has succeeded in effecting a return to her past self. Though the transformation is not yet complete, it is clearly well under way.

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[391] *PSS* 32: 308.

The Egotism of Awakening

On the surface, then, the first two parts of *Resurrection* would appear to present a straightforward narrative of sin and redemption: Both protagonists begin in a state of moral purity, experience a fall due to the influence of external social norms, and effect—or at least begin to effect—a transformative return to their former selves. From this perspective, the central sources of dramatic tension can be expressed through two simple questions that are directly tied to the plot of the novel: Will Nekhliudov have the strength necessary to follow through with his redemptive plan, and will he succeed in convincing Maslova to play her part in this plan? And yet throughout the first two parts of the novel, we find numerous instances that suggest that this schema is overly simplistic, that Nekhliudov's plan itself is sullied by the same egotistical motivations that had brought about his initial fall, and that this egotism makes him an imperfect vessel for transmitting Tolstoyan truths.

Nekhliudov's egotism is especially clear in the description of his awakening in Chapter Twenty-Eight. The episode, which we have already alluded to in the previous section, marks a turning point in his life and the novel. In early drafts of the novel, Tolstoy had presented Nekhliudov's plan in an unambiguously positive light, as a spontaneous decision that ultimately secures salvation for both the offender and his victim; in one early variant Maslova accepts Nekhliudov's proposal, and the couple manages to escape to London, where they establish a press that issues propaganda on behalf of George's single tax. At the beginning of 1897, however, he abandoned this

approach after rereading his drafts. Tolstoy recorded his dissatisfaction in his first diary entry of that year:

> Began to reread *Resurrection*, and, having reached up to *his* decision to marry, I threw it away in disgust. Everything is false, contrived, weak. It is difficult to fix a spoiled thing. In order to fix it, it is necessary: 1) to alternately describe her feelings and life and his and 2) positively and seriously hers, and negatively and with a smile his. I will scarcely finish it. Everything is very spoiled.
>
> [Начал перечитывать *Воскресенье* [sic] и, дойдя до *его* решения жениться, с отвращением бросил. Всё неверно, выдумано, слабо. Трудно поправлять испорченное. Для того, чтобы поправить, нужно: 1) попеременно описывать ее и его чувства и жизнь. И положительно и серьезно ее, и отрицательно и с усмешкой его. Едва ли кончу. Очень всё испорчено.][392]

This new approach to Nekhliudov's awakening is evident in the first part of the final redaction of the novel. On the surface, Tolstoy presents Nekhliudov's decision to marry Maslova as the fruit of a broader, clearly positive, process of moral regeneration: "The God who lived within him had awakened in his consciousness. He felt himself to be one with Him, and therefore perceived not only the freedom, vivacity, and joy of life, but perceived all the power of goodness. All, all the best that a man could do, he felt himself capable of doing."[393] However, there are clear indications that there is something less than pure in the prince's awakening: "There were tears in his eyes when he said this to himself, both good and bad (*durnye*) tears; good tears because they were tears at the joy he felt at the awakening of that spiritual essence that had been slumbering within him for all of these years, and bad because they were the tears of the tenderness he felt towards

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[392] *PSS* 53: 128.

[393] *PSS* 32: 102.

himself, towards his own virtue."[394] In fact, even before this episode, Tolstoy hints that Nekhliudov's motives may be less pure and altruistic than they initially appear to be. When he first recognizes Maslova in the courtroom, the prince's first reaction is characterized not by repentance, but by the fear that the trial will bring their affair to light, exposing him to public ridicule: "Fear at the disgrace that would befall him if everyone here in the courtroom were to learn about his conduct muffled the internal work that was taking place within him" (*Strakh* […] *zaglushal proiskhodivshuiu v nem vnutrenniuiu rabotu*).[395] This fear is what prevents him from speaking up on Maslova's behalf during deliberations: He is worried that their relationship might somehow come to light if he were to say too much. Even when the verdict is read, he does not immediately repent. On the contrary, he reflects that, "the feeling that he had experienced was exaggerated as a result of an entire morning spent in such unfamiliar conditions" and resolves to go to a dinner party at the Korchagins' house "in order to rid himself of these heavy impressions."[396]

When, upon returning to his apartment, he begins to seriously consider the sins of his past, his thoughts are remarkably self-centered; he is less concerned, it seems, with the impact that his actions have had on others than he is with his own self-image. When he recalls his shameful decision to slip a hundred-ruble note into Maslova's apron, for example, he does not seem to be concerned with the impact that this had on her, but rather with the light in which it casts him:

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[394] *PSS* 32: 103.

[395] *PSS* 32: 74.

[396] *PSS* 32: 88, 89.

> Only a blackguard, a villain could have done that! And *I, I* am that villain and that blackguard! […] […] But am *I* really? […] Could it really be? […] Could it really be? Could it really be that *I* am really a villain? Well, and who else? […] And is that really the only thing? […] Are not *your* relations with Mar'ia Vasil'evna and her husband not filth, not baseness? And *your* attitude towards property? To make use of wealth that *you* consider illegitimate under the pretext that it came from your mother? And all of *your* idle, wretched life. And to crown it all, *your* behavior with Katiusha. Villain, blackguard! They (people) will do as they wish; let them judge *me*; *I* can deceive them, but *I* will not deceive *myself*.
>
> [Только мерзавец, негодяй мог это сделать! И *я*, *я* тот негодяй и тот мерзавец! […] Да неужели в самом деле, […] неужели *я* в самом деле, неужели *я* точно негодяй? А то кто же? […] Да разве это одно? […] Разве не гадость, не низость *твое* отношение к Марье Васильевне и ее мужу? И *твое* отношение к имуществу? Под предлогом, что деньги от матери, пользоваться богатством, которое считаешь незаконным. И вся *твоя* праздная, скверная жизнь. И венец всего — *твой* поступок с Катюшей. Негодяй, мерзавец! Они (люди), как хотят, пусть судят обо *мне*, их *я* могу обмануть, но *себя-то я* не обману».][397]

In this short paragraph, the prince uses no less than twelve pronouns to refer to himself while making only one reference to Maslova. Even then, the emphasis is on what his behavior towards her says about *him*, not the impact that it has had on *her*. And while the "recognition of his own baseness" is painful for Nekhliudov, there is also something "joyful and calming" (*radostnoe i uspokoitel'noe*) in it.

The sense of suspicion that Tolstoy cultivates through his reference to the prince's "bad tears" is reinforced by the contrast he establishes between Nekhliudov's spiritual exultation and Maslova's misery in chapters twenty-eight through thirty-three. Chapter Twenty-Eight ends with Nekhliudov basking in the pleasure of his perceived spiritual rebirth: "'How good! How good, O Lord, how good!' he said of what was in his soul," an emotion that stands in clear counterpoint to the description of Maslova's despair at the beginning of Chapter Twenty-Nine. Unlike her seducer, who feels that the path to

[397] *PSS* 32: 101-102. My italics.

spiritual bliss has been set out before him, Maslova weeps, feeling that it is necessary "to submit to that cruel and astounding injustice that had been done to her."[398] Unable to cope with the reality of her sentence and her cruel treatment at the hands of the same sort of young men in whose eyes she had previously found favor, she turns to cigarettes and vodka to dull her pain. Her first night as a convict ends as she lays down to sleep, trying to ignore the endless pacing of one of her cellmates, a deacon's daughter who had gone insane after drowning her baby in a well, and the child-like sobs of a nameless redheaded woman who cries over the memory of her first love, a factory worker who had burned her genitals with acid in order to amuse himself and his drunken friends. Again, the abject misery that Tolstoy evokes in his description of the prisoners going to bed at the end of Chapter Thirty-Two stands in clear and pointed opposition to the description of Nekhliudov waking up in Chapter Thirty-Three: "The first feeling experienced by Nekhliudov on the next day when he awoke was the consciousness of the fact that something had happened, and even before he remembered what had happened he already knew that what happened was something important and good"; "The thought that for the sake of moral considerations he would sacrifice everything and marry her especially touched him this morning"; "And when he imagined to himself how he would see her, how he would tell her everything, how he would repent of his sin, an especially rapturous feeling took hold of him, and tears appeared in his eyes."[399]

In the following chapters, however, Tolstoy quiets the reader's suspicions regarding Nekhliudov's intentions. While the question of his motivation remains unresolved, a subtle shift in the narrative works to alter our initial impression of the

[398] *PSS* 32: 104.

[399] *PSS* 32: 116, 117, 120.

Prince's plan. As he begins to work on Maslova's appeal, Nekhliudov becomes increasingly aware of the injustices on which the current social order is founded, expressing his critique in a series of long internal monologues in which it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between his voice and the voice of the morally authoritative narrator. At the same time as Tolstoy begins to effect a union between his narrator and protagonist, he introduces a theme that largely dispels the sense of ambiguity that is present in the early chapters, replacing it with a more straightforward black and white dichotomy. This dichotomy centers on the opposition between the voice of Nekhliudov's conscience and what Tolstoy calls "the voice of the tempter" (*golos iskusitelia*), which tries to lead him away from his righteous path. The "voice of the tempter" first appears during the awakening scene in Chapter Twenty-Eight of Part I. Having perceived the depths to which he has fallen, Nekhliudov is on the verge of a transformative moment when he is suddenly interrupted by the tempter:

> The distance was so great, the defilement so strong, that in the first minute he despaired in the possibility of cleansing himself. 'Clearly you have already tried to perfect yourself and to be better, but nothing came of it,'—said the voice of the tempter in his soul—'So why try again? You're not the only one; everyone is like that; that's how life is,' said this voice. But that free spiritual being that alone is true, only powerful, alone eternal had already awoken in Nekhliudov. And he could not but trust it. No matter how great the distance between that which he had been and that which he wanted to be, for the awakened spiritual being everything seemed possible.
>
> [Расстояние это было так велико, загрязнение так сильно, что в первую минуту он отчаялся в возможности очищения. «Ведь уже пробовал совершенствоваться и быть лучше, и ничего не вышло, — говорил в душе его голос искусителя, — так что же пробовать еще раз? Не ты один, а все такие — такова жизнь», говорил этот голос. Но то свободное, духовное существо, которое одно истинно, одно могущественно, одно вечно, уже пробудилось в Нехлюдове. И он не мог не поверить ему. Как ни огромно было расстояние между тем,

> что он был, и тем, чем хотел быть, — для пробудившегося духовного существа представлялось всё возможно.][400]

The voice of the tempter emerges once again during the prince's first meeting with Maslova at the jail. When she asks him for money, he hesitates:

> Again that tempter that had spoken to him last night raised its voice in Nekhliudov's soul, as always striving to lead him away from questions about what he should do towards the question of what would result from his actions and what would be convenient for him.
> 'You won't be able to do anything with this woman,' said the voice; 'You'll merely be tying a stone around your neck that will drown you and prevent you from being of use to others. Give her money, all that you have, say farewell, and end this forever,' he thought.
> But at that moment he felt that now, right now, something extremely important was taking place in his soul, that at this moment his inner life was at standing, as it were, on a wobbling scale, a scale which with the slightest effort might be turned to one side or the other. And he made the effort, calling forth that God whose presence he had felt in his soul the day before, and at that moment God answered within him. He decided to tell her everything right now.
>
> [Опять тот искуситель, который говорил вчера ночью, заговорил в душе Нехлюдова, как всегда, стараясь вывести его из вопросов о том, что должно сделать, к вопросу о том, что выйдет из его поступков и что полезно.
> «Ничего ты не сделаешь с этой женщиной, — говорил этот голос, — только себе на шею повесишь камень, который утопит тебя и помешает тебе быть полезным другим. Дать ей денег, всё, что есть, проститься с ней и кончить всё навсегда?» подумалось ему.
> Но тут же он почувствовал, что теперь, сейчас, совершается нечто самое важное в его душе, что его внутренняя жизнь стоит в эту минуту как бы на колеблющихся весах, которые малейшим усилием могут быть перетянуты в ту или другую сторону. И он сделал это усилие, призывая того Бога, которого он вчера почуял в своей душе, и Бог тут же отозвался в нем. Он решил сейчас сказать ей всё.][401]

In both of these instances, and in similar ones that follow, we are presented with what would appear to be a very clear choice, one for which we perceive that we already know

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[400] *PSS* 32: 103.

[401] *PSS* 32: 149-150.

the correct response. By phrasing Nekhliudov's dilemma in terms of the decision to follow the voice of his conscience or the voice of the tempter, Tolstoy shifts our attention away from the prince's egotistical motivations and towards the question of whether or not he possesses the resolve necessary to follow through with his righteous decision. This impression colors the reader's reaction to the events described in Chapter Forty-Eight, where Nekhliudov returns to the prison and finally offers his hand in marriage. Maslova not only refuses, but showers him with spite: "Get away from me. I am a convict, and you are a prince, and there's nothing for you here. [...] You want to save yourself through me! (*Ty mnoi khochesh' spastis'*) […] You had your fun with me in this life and now through me you want to save yourself in the other world! You are disgusting to me, you, your glasses, and your greasy face. Get away, get away from me, you!"[402] The accusation that Nekhliudov sees her as a mere instrument of his own salvation ought to confirm the reader's early doubts regarding the true nature his motivations. In fact, it achieves the opposite effect. Not only is Maslova drunk when she levels these accusations, but in the preceding chapters her anger had been presented as an attempt to forestall the process of moral regeneration that the long-suppressed memories of her youth have inaugurated. Due to the similarity of their spiritual biographies—both Nekhliudov and Maslova had experienced a fall and the beginning of a recovery—the reader comes to believe that both characters are merely at different points on the same path to resurrection, with the Prince having advanced a few steps further than the convict. The reader thus naturally assumes that Maslova's redemption depends on her accession to his plan. The chief question of the novel, then, the primary source of plot tension, becomes whether or not Nekhliudov will be able to persevere and follow through with his initial plan. The question raised at

[402] *PSS* 32: 106.

the beginning of the novel regarding *whether or not he ought to marry her in the first place*, is temporarily pushed to the side.

In Part II, the union between narrator and protagonist and the emphasis on the binary opposition between the voice of the conscience and the voice of the tempter both grow even stronger. While Tolstoy does not entirely neglect the complex narrative of redemption that he had introduced in the first part, this aspect of the novel becomes increasingly subordinated to his polemical aims. The account of Nekhliudov's attempts to reconnect with his past self at Panovo, for example, advances the redemptive narrative established in Part I, but this theme is drowned out by a focus on extratextual political and economic questions: Tolstoy devotes far more text to the prince's extended meditations on the injustice of private ownership of land in these chapters than he does to his quest to discover his past self. In the latter half of the second part, the question of Nekhliudov's motivations recedes almost entirely. The chapters that describe the prince's journey to St. Petersburg to work on Maslova's appeal are particularly tendentious. In Chapter Fifty-Nine of Part I, Tolstoy writes that, "One of the most common and widespread superstitions is that every person possesses defined qualities, that there is such a thing as a good man, a bad man, a smart man, a stupid man, an energetic man, an apathetic man, and so on. […] But this is incorrect. People are like rivers: the water is the same in all of us […]."[403] This is certainly an admirable sentiment, but it is hardly a principle that Tolstoy himself follows in his portrayal of the representatives of official Russia in the scenes set in St. Petersburg. We are presented with a seemingly endless series of meetings with lawyers, officials, and politicians, each of whom are transparently

[403] *PSS* 32: 193-194

constructed in order to demonstrate one or another failing of the state. Nekhliudov's first meeting is with Count Ivan Mikhailovich Charskii, a retired minister and "a man of strong convictions," convictions which consist in the belief that "just as it is natural for a bird to feed on worms, to be clothed in feathers and down, and fly in the air, so too was it natural for him to feed on expensive food prepared by expensive cooks, to be clothed in the finest and most expensive garments, [and] to ride the finest and most expensive horses."[404] Senator Wolf, who is known as *homme très comme il faut*, regards himself as "a man of chivalrous honor": "He understood 'honor' to mean that he should not take bribes from private citizens on the sly. But he did not consider it dishonorable […] to destroy and demolish [others], to exile or imprison hundreds of innocent people for their loyalty to their people and to the religion of their fathers, as he had done when he had served as the governor of one of the provinces of the Kingdom of Poland."[405] Another senator, Skovorodnikov, ends up casting the deciding vote against Maslova's appeal solely out of antipathy towards Nekhliudov: "[He] was a materialist and a Darwinian and he considered every manifestation of abstract morality or, still worse, religiosity, not merely as a contemptible folly, but as a personal affront to him. All of this fuss with this prostitute and the presence here in the Senate of a famous lawyer defending her and of Nekhliudov himself he regarded with extreme disgust."[406] Tolstoy reserves his most withering attack, however, for Toporov, a high official in the Holy Synod who is transparently modeled on Konstantin Pobedonostsev: Toporov, the narrator explains,

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[404] *PSS* 32: 250.

[405] *PSS* 32: 257.

[406] *PSS* 32: 277.

does not believe in the teachings of the Church, but rather views religious faith as a superstition, the maintenance of which is necessary to secure public order: "He related to the religion he upheld just as a chicken farmer relates to the offal that he feeds to his foul: the offal is very unpleasant, but the foul like it and eat it, and thus it is necessary to feed it to them."[407]

In spite of the increasingly tendentious tone that Tolstoy establishes in the second part of the novel, he includes at least two incidents that appear to cast doubt on the

[407] *PSS* 32: 297. The only meaningful development in this section that has any bearing on Nekhliudov's spiritual journey stems from an artistically flawed episode in which the prince once more confronts and overcomes the voice of the tempter. While in St. Petersburg, the prince meets the wife of an official, a charming young woman whose malleable views and attitudes depend entirely on the person with whom she is speaking. She showers him with affectionate commonplaces, professing sympathy for his efforts on behalf of wrongly imprisoned inmates: "I understand that, having seen all the suffering, all the horror of what is done in prisons," said Mariette, desiring one thing only: to attract him to her, using her feminine instinct to divine what was important and dear to him. "You want to help those who suffer, and it is so awful for the sufferers, so awful because of people, because of indifference, cruelty… I understand how one could sacrifice one's life for that, and I would make that sacrifice myself. But everyone has their own fate…" (288). Mariette's charms briefly lead the prince to question the validity of his plan: "Am I doing the right thing by leaving for Siberia?" he asks himself as he leaves her apartment. "And am I doing the right thing by giving up my wealth?" Having completed his business in St. Petersburg, Nekhliudov decides to stay for one day longer in order to join Mariette and her husband at the theater. When he arrives, however, he comes to realize that her only goal is to secure a liaison with him, and quickly takes his leave. The realization sparks a train of thought that we might regard as an epiphany were it not for the fact that it merely confirms what the prince has already thought for some time: "Everything was clear. It was clear that everything that is considered important and good is actually insignificant and shameful […]." There are two central flaws in the presentation of this episode: First, Tolstoy never makes us feel the temptation that Nekhliudov experiences; from the very first moment that Mariette appears in the novel, the narrator explicitly informs the reader that she is a sly temptress. Second, the prince's success in overcoming this temptation does not appear to advance his spiritual development in any meaningful sense; rather, it merely confirms that which he already knows to be true. It is difficult to agree with Gustafson's view that this episode "marks the beginning of [Nekhliudov's] awakening to a true grasp of his sin." There are numerous instances in the novel when the prince feels that he has finally come to a complete understanding of the nature of his crime. After describing the second meeting between Nekhliudov and Maslova at the jail, for example, Tolstoy writes that, "Only now was all the horror of it made plain. Only now did he see and realize what had been done to her" (166). It is difficult to determine why this particular realization is more important than those that precede and follow it. If anything, the repetition of these "realizations" only serves to highlight the inadequacy of the hero's perception. (See Gustafson, 170.)

accuracy of the prince's perception and the validity of his plan, incidents that reinforce the doubts that he had cultivated in narrating Nekhliudov's awakening. The first takes place when Nekhliudov returns from St. Petersburg to inform Maslova that her appeal has been denied. When he arrives, he is told that she cannot meet: She is being punished for making sexual advances towards the medical assistant whom she has been assigned to help. Only later do we find out that these accusations are objectively false: it was the assistant who was the aggressor, and he had lied about the prisoner's actions in order to shift the blame away from himself. But Nekhliudov believes what he has been told, and is horrified:

> He experienced a feeling similar to that experienced by people who hear news about an unexpected, grave misfortune. He felt very ill. The first feeling that he experienced upon hearing this news was shame. Most of all he was struck by the ridiculous joy that he had felt at her apparently changing spiritual condition. All of these words about her refusal to accept his sacrifice and reproaches and tears—all of this was, he thought, only the guile of a perverted woman who wished to use him as best as possible […]
> […] The formerly quieted cruel feeling of injured pride arose in him with new strength as soon as she mentioned the hospital. 'He, a man of the world, whom any high-society girl would happily marry, had offered his hand to this woman, and she was not able to wait and had started up an amorous intrigue with a medical assistant,' he thought, looking at her with hatred.
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> [Он испытал чувство подобное тому, которое испытывают люди при известии о неожиданном большом несчастье. Ему сделалось очень больно. Первое чувство, испытанное им при этом известии, был стыд. Прежде всего он показался себе смешон с своим радостным представлением о ее будто бы изменяющемся душевном состоянии. Все эти слова ее о нежелании принять его жертву и упреки и слезы — всё это были, подумал он, только хитрости извращенной женщины, желающей как можно лучше воспользоваться им. […]
> […] Затихшее было жестокое чувство оскорбленной гордости поднялось в нем с новой силой, как только она упомянула о больнице. «Он, человек света, за которого за счастье сочла бы выдти всякая девушка высшего круга, предложил себя мужем этой женщине, и она не могла подождать и завела шашни с фельдшером», думал он, с

ненавистью глядя на нее.][408]

Despite this apparent betrayal, the prince decides to keep to his plan. Later he records the incident in a diary entry in which he congratulates himself for maintaining his resolve:

> I have lived through a very difficult and very joyous experience. I found out that she had not carried herself well in the hospital. And suddenly everything became very painful. I did not expect that it would be so painful. I spoke with her with disgust and hatred, and later suddenly remembered about myself, about that fact that I have many times and now was, though only in my thoughts, guilty of the very thing for which I hated her, and suddenly in that very moment I was disgusted with myself, and felt pity for her, and I felt much better. If only we were always able to see the beam in our eye, how much better we would be.
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> [Пережил очень тяжелое и очень радостное. Узнал, что она нехорошо вела себя в больнице. И вдруг сделалось ужасно больно. Не ожидал, как больно. С отвращением и ненавистью я говорил с ней и потом вдруг вспомнил о себе, о том, как я много раз и теперь был, хотя и в мыслях, виноват в том, за что ненавидел ее, и вдруг в одно и то же время я стал противен себе, а она жалка, и мне стало очень хорошо. Только бы всегда вовремя успеть увидать бревно в своем глазу, как бы мы были добрее».][409]

There is an obvious irony in Nekhliudov's self-assured reference to the mote in his eye; he clearly fails to see that he is entirely guilty in his relations with Maslova, and that she is entirely blameless. The prince's decision to record this entry in his diary is equally significant. In Tolstoy's world it is only the narrator who possesses the ability to render authoritative judgment on events in the text. By rendering himself the subject of his own narrative, Nekhliudov usurps this authority. This incident "resurrects," so to speak, the reader's early doubts regarding the Prince's motivations and the accuracy of his perception.

The second incident takes place at the very end of Part II, when Nekhliudov pays

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[408] *PSS* 32: 305, 307.

[409] *PSS* 32: 326

a visit to his sister and brother-in-law. Like Nekhliudov himself at the beginning of the narrative, his sister Natal'ia is described as a fallen sinner. In her youth, the narrator explains, "she had been in love with his late friend Nikolen'ka Irtenev. They both loved Nikolen'ka and love in him and in themselves that which was good and which united all people." As the years went by, however, both had lost their moral grounding: "he through his military service and his depraved life, and she through a marriage with a man whom she loved sensually, but not only did not love all that had once been so holy and dear for her and Dmitrii, but did not even understand what it meant."[410] Her husband, Rogozhinskii, is a careerist who views any expression of virtue as a boastful display of pride. Upon hearing that Nekhliudov had ceded the land at Kuzminskoe (which would have passed to Natal'ia in the event of the prince's death) to the peasants, he had even considered initiating procedures to have his brother-in-law committed. When Rogozhinskii and Nekhliudov meet, a bitter argument ensues. Rogozhinskii smugly dismisses Nekhliudov's criticism of the judicial system, arguing first that only the guilty are punished, and then dismissing the plight of the wrongly convicted as a necessary evil; he pedantically explains the flaws of a socialistic distribution of land, ignoring the fact that Nekhliudov's Georgist remedy does not call for an equal distribution. The argument ends with hurt feelings on both sides: "Ignatii Nikiforovich felt that Nekhliudov condemned him, despised all of his activity, and he wanted to show him all the injustice of his verdict. Nekhliudov, for his part […] was fuming in his soul at the thought that this petty man so surely and calmly continued to consider as just and lawful what now

[410] *PSS* 32: 314

appeared to Nekhliudov to be undoubtedly absurd and criminal.[411]

At first glance, this episode would appear to present merely one more in a seemingly endless series of encounters between the enlightened hero and a morally corrupt individual who has fully inculcated the immoral principles on which the reigning social, political, and economic order is founded: Rogozhinskii's views, it would seem, differ little from those of Charskii, Wolf, Skovorodnikov, and Toporov. And yet Nekhliudov's reaction to this encounter is uncharacteristically conciliatory. Even in the midst of their dispute, Nekhliudov acknowledges "in the depths of his soul" (*v glubine dushi*) that his sister and brother-in-law have the right to consider the impact that his decision to cede Panovo to the peasants will have on their own interests and those of their children.[412] After the two men angrily part ways, Nekhliudov continues to regret having quarreled with his brother-in-law: "It is quite possible that what I said was correct," he remarks to himself, "but there was no need to speak as I did. I have changed little if I could get so carried away by a spiteful feeling that I offended him and aggrieved poor Natasha."[413]

In order to account for this unexpected reaction, we must carefully consider the content of Rogozhinskii's argument. Rogozhinskii positions himself as a defender of the traditional role of the gentry: "I consider that all of us who have been placed in a special position must bear those responsibilities that follow from this position, must buttress those conditions of life in which we were born which we have inherited from our

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[411] *PSS* 32: 322.

[412] Ibid.

[413] *PSS* 32: 325.

forebears and which we must pass along to our descendants."[414] This assertion closely echoes the argument that Levin advances in his dispute with Stepan Arkad'evich over the former's decision to sell a copse of trees to Riabinin, merchant from the lower classes, an argument that is widely seen as reflecting Tolstoy's own views at the time that he wrote the novel. Like Rogozhinskii, Levin is concerned that the gentry will lose their privileged position if they abandon their traditional role as landowners: "I am saddened and hurt see the impoverishment of the gentry, to which I belong, that is taking place on all sides." When Stepan Arkad'evich objects that it would be absurd to expect him to count every tree before selling the land, Levin counters by arguing that, "One must count. And here you have not counted, while Riabinin has. Riabinin's children will have the means to live and secure and education, while your children may not."[415] This connection allows us to see Rogozhinskii as more than just a representative of the values that Nekhliudov has come to reject. Rather, he functions as a stand-in for Tolstoy's pre-conversion self. This realization accounts for the prince's unexpected reaction to his argument with his brother-in-law: the ambivalent combination of "hatred" (*nenavist'*) and grudging sympathy that he feels towards "this alien, self-assured man who did not understand him" speaks to Tolstoy's own ambivalence towards the legacy of his own past. At the very moment in the novel when Tolstoy's hero feels himself to be on the brink of breaking with his old life and beginning a new one (*"S zavtrashnego dnia novaia zhizn'. Proshchai, staraia, i*

[414] *PSS* 32: 321.

[415] *PSS* 18: 179.

sovsem."), the writer is incapable of allowing the character to reject the values that he had formerly held dear.[416]

[416] *PSS* 32: 326.

***Resurrection,* Part III: The Dissolution of Binaries**

In the third and final part of the novel the unanswered questions regarding the legitimacy of the prince's motivations that were introduced in Part I reemerge with renewed force. Part III begins with an account of Nekhliudov's departure to Siberia along with thousands of convicts. This change in setting is accompanied by a broader shift in the construction of the narrative. The rigid dichotomy that had opposed the righteous Nekhliudov to the unfeeling officials who had thwarted his efforts to secure Maslova's freedom begins to crumble as Tolstoy introduces a number of new characters, most of whom are imprisoned revolutionaries. In comparison to the caricatured portrayals of the officials in the first two parts, the political prisoners are far more subtly rendered. As Nekhliudov comes to realize "they were not the complete villains (*sploshnye zlodei*) that some considered them to be, [but] neither were they the complete heroes that others thought them to be, but rather were ordinary people, among whom, as everywhere, there were good, bad, and average people."[417] Some arouse his disgust: Novodvorov, for example, couches his speech in the language of social justice, but his ultimate aim, as his name suggests, is to establish a "new court" with himself as tsar. Others, like Kryltsov, are more difficult to categorize. Although he is inspired by a sincere thirst for justice, Kryltsov fantasizes about dropping bombs on the gentry "as though they were lice." At least one of the imprisoned revolutionaries, Nekhliudov comes to see, is far superior to him. Vladimir Simonson, a former teacher who had been imprisoned for his subversive lessons, is modest and gentle; he lives by his own conscience and, though celibate, is

[417] *PSS* 32: 374.

capable of deep Platonic love. Where Nekhliudov wants to marry Maslova to atone for his sins, the narrator tells us, "Simonson loved her as she was now, and loved her simply because he loved her."[418] The introduction of a competing moral center has an important impact on the orientation of the narrative as a whole. The novel's tendentious edge, it must be said, is never dulled entirely—Tolstoy continues to portray a number of abuses, ranging from the decision to begin the forced march to Siberia in sweltering heat, which leads to the deaths of several convicts, to a harrowing account of the hanging of a teenaged revolutionary—but it becomes increasingly difficult to classify all characters according to a clear-cut dichotomy.[419]

As John Bayley argues, Nekhliudov's position with the narrative itself becomes "awkward" in the third part of the novel.[420] Indeed, the prince does not fit in with the others: he is neither a prisoner nor a revolutionary. Although he continues to serve as a mouthpiece for Tolstoy's critiques of the government, he moves further and further to the edge of the narrative. Before long, he even loses his tentative status as Maslova's intended. The lingering question of their future together is brought to a head when Simons offers to marry Maslova. Nekhliudov is unsure of how to react to this change in

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[418] PSS 32: 369.

[419] This is one area where Bakhtin's approach utterly fails to account for the novel's complexity. For Bakhtin, the plot of *Resurrection* is entirely subordinated to its author's didactic intentions. This approach leads him to describe Tolstoy's treatment of the revolutionary movement in exclusively negative terms: In the revolutionaries, argues Bakhtin, Tolstoy "sees *only* sinister conformity (*durnaia uslovnost'*) and human artifice" (Bakhtin, op. cit., 766).This characterization is clearly inaccurate. Merezhkovskii comes closer to the truth in describing some of the revolutionaries as "martyr[s] of [Tolstoy's] new 'Christianity.'" (Merezhkovskii, 234.) For a broad overview of critical views on Tolstoy's treatment of revolutionaries in *Resurrection,* see E.A. Masolova, "'Politicheskie' v romane L.N. Tolstogo 'Voskresenie,'" *Novyi filologicheskii vestnik* 2 (2008).

[420] John Bayley, *Tolstoy and the Novel* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 249.

circumstances. On the one hand, he realizes that he should be happy: "What Simonson had told him granted him freedom from the obligation that he had taken upon himself, which in moments of weakness seemed difficult and strange to him…"[421] On the other hand, Simonson's proposal arouses the same feelings of wounded pride that had tormented him throughout the novel:

> […] at the same time there was something not merely unpleasant, but painful. He had the feeling that Simonson's proposal had destroyed the uniqueness of his action, that it diminished the value of his sacrifice in his own eyes and in the eyes of other people: if a person, and such a good person who was in no way tied to her, desired to unite his fate to hers, then his sacrifice was not so meaningful.
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> [[…] а между тем ему было что-то не только неприятно, но и больно. В чувстве этом было и то, что предложение Симонсона разрушило исключительность его поступка, уменьшало в глазах своих и чужих людей цену жертвы, которую он приносил: если человек, и такой хороший, ничем не связанный с ней, желал соединить с ней судьбу, то его жертва уже не была так значительна.][422]

This passage reintroduces the idea that Nekhliudov's attempt to save Maslova is fundamentally motivated by egotism, not altruism, and thus forces us to reconsider our evaluation of Maslova's original accusation—that he had intended to save himself through her. Where this charge had originally appeared to be the defensive reaction of a depraved woman who was as yet incapable of coping with her own descent into immorality, it now seems to provide an accurate description of the prince's motivations.

Simonson's proposal also has the effect of rendering Nekhliudov's continued presence among the convicts superfluous; he has lost, it seems, the clear sense of purpose that had propelled him from the moment that he first caught sight of Maslova at the

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[421] Although I have not been able to find any direct corroboration for this theory, it is possible that Tolstoy chose the name Simonson to evoke Simon of Cyrene, the bystander who was enlisted to carry the cross for Jesus when he stumbled on his way to Golgotha.

[422] *PSS* 32: 405.

courthouse. It is in this state of confusion and depression that he meets a peasant while crossing a river on a ferry, a peasant who provides the clearest statement of the novel's moral stance. The peasant, who refers to himself only as "man" (*chelovek*) explains his views on religion: "I don't have any sort of faith. Because I don't believe in anyone, in anyone, except for myself." When Nekhliudov asks why different religions exist, his interlocutor answers that,

> There are different religions because people believe in people, but not in themselves. And I too believed in people and wandered, as if in the forest; thus I lost my way and didn't think I could find my way out. There's Old Believers, and New Believers, and Sabbatarians and Flagellants, and those with clergy and those without, and Austrians, and Molokane, and Castrators. Every faith extols only itself. And everyone has come unraveled like blind kittens. There are many faiths, but only one spirit. In you and in me and in him. That means that if everyone believes in himself, then everyone will be as one.
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> [Оттого и разные веры, что людям верят, а себе не верят. И я людям верил и блудил, как в тайге; так заплутался, что не чаял выбраться. И староверы, и нововеры, и субботники, и хлысты, и поповцы, и беспоповцы, и австрияки, и молокане, и скопцы. Всякая вера себя одна восхваляет. Вот все и расползлись, как кутята слепые. Вер много, а дух один. И в тебе, и во мне, и в нем. Значит, верь всяк своему духу, и вот будут все соединены. Будь всяк сам себе, и все будут заедино.] [423]

The fact that this conversation takes place on a ferry is itself highly significant. The image of crossing from one side of a river to the other evokes a number of passages from Tolstoy's earlier writings. In *War and Peace*, it is a conversation between Pierre Bezukhov and Andrei Bolkonskii that takes place on a ferry that inaugurates a transformation in the latter: The two friends' passage across the river marks the beginning of "a new life" for Prince Andrei.[424] In the *Confession*, as we have already

[423] *PSS* 33: 418-419.

[424] *PSS* 10: 118.

seen, Tolstoy describes his own spiritual journey as a metaphorical voyage from one riverbank to another. Our knowledge of these earlier episodes primes us to view the peasant's words as the catalyst for Nekhliudov's own transition from doubt to lasting faith.

And yet the passage across the river does not resolve all of Nekhliudov's concerns. Upon reaching the other side, the prince makes the acquaintance of a general, a drunkard who has been waylaid in the provinces. At first glance, the general would appear to be merely another caricatured representative of corrupt officialdom. "The general," writes Tolstoy, "belonged to that type of educated military man who consider it possible to reconcile liberality and humanity with their profession."[425] He goes on to explain that the general had turned to alcohol in order to dull his recognition of the impossibility of any such reconciliation. And yet despite the general's shortcomings, his household is described in unambiguously sympathetic terms. One of his guests is the governor of a remote Siberian town who has been transferred, it is implied, due to his predilection for same-sex relations. Unlike the officials in the first two parts of the novel, however, his duties have not corrupted him: although "surrounded by bribe-takers, he was the only one who refused to take bribes." The general's daughter and son-in-law produce a particularly warm impression on Nekhliudov: she is described as "an unattractive, artless (*prostodushnaia*) young woman entirely absorbed in her two children," while he is a liberal university graduate who works in the government service, and who has dedicated himself to saving a native tribe that is threatened with

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[425] *PSS* 32: 421.

extinction.[426] In the warm and welcoming environment of the general's house, Nekhliudov comes to feel that his recent past was nothing more than "a dream from which he had now awakened to reality."[427] When the general's daughter proudly leads him to the nursery to show the prince her children, he is overcome by the warmth of her unaffected love and suddenly feels a pang of envy for "just such a refined and pure happiness as this now seemed to him to be."[428] Where in the earlier chapters, it would have been easy to dismiss Nekhliudov's thirst for bourgeoisie happiness as merely another manifestation of "the voice of the tempter," it is more difficult to pass judgment on his reaction here; Tolstoy seems just as taken as his hero with the scene of domestic tranquility at the general's house.

While dining with the general and his family, Nekhliudov makes the acquaintance of a British missionary who is staying with them as a guest. The missionary asks the prince to accompany him on a visit to the prison, where he hopes to distribute gospel tracts to the inmates. Nekhliudov accedes to the request, agreeing to serve as the missionary's interpreter. While there, he once again encounters Maslova, who has already been informed of the success of her appeal, but who appears to regard this development as completely inconsequential. Upon catching sight of her, Nekhliudov once more experiences a longing for the simple family happiness that he has foresworn: "I want to live; I want a family and children; I want a human life."[429] Once again, it is impossible to

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[426] *PSS* 32: 428.

[427] *PSS* 32: 427.

[428] *PSS* 32: 430.

[429] *PSS* 32: 431.

either accept his desires as absolutely legitimate or to reject them as a manifestation of temptation. When Maslova reiterates her decision to marry Simonson, Nekhliudov experiences another awakening. This time, however, it is not the sort of clearly positive moral awakening that he had undergone following the trial, but rather the awakening that one experiences after a surreal dream:

> [He] sat down on a wooden bench by the wall and suddenly felt terribly tired. He was not tired from his sleepless night, from his travels, or from his anxieties, but rather felt that he was terribly tired of his entire life. He leaned back against the bench, closed his eyes, and instantly fell into a deep, sunk down into the couch on which he was sitting, closed his eyes and instantly fell into a deep, deathlike slumber. […]
> […] Nekhliudov woke from his stupor and was surprised at where he was.
>
> [[Он] сел на деревянный диванчик, стоявший у стены, и вдруг почувствовал страшную усталость. Он устал не от бессонной ночи, не от путешествия, не от волнения, а он чувствовал, что страшно устал от всей жизни. Он прислонился к спинке дивана, на котором сидел, закрыл глаза и мгновенно заснул тяжелым, мертвым сном. […]
> […] Нехлюдов очнулся и удивился тому, где он.][430]

Feeling exhausted and lacking any clear sense of what the future holds for him, Nekhliudov follows through on his promise to act as an interpreter for the missionary. The Englishman walks from cell to cell, questioning the prisoners and preaching a message of salvation through faith. The inmates, for their part, appear to be unswayed by this message, and mock the missionary's plea for them to turn the other cheek. Before long, the missionary loses heart and begins to shuffle wordlessly from cell to cell, trying to distribute his tracts as quickly as possible. In one of the last cells that they visit, the prince and the evangelist once more encounter the nameless peasant from the ferry, who has been placed under arrest for failure to carry government-issued documents. This time, however, the peasant's sagacity finds expression in apparent madness. He accuses

[430] *PSS* 32: 433-434.

the visitors of bearing the mark of the antichrist and castigates them for being motivated more by voyeurism than by altruism: "Well then," he shouts, "you've come to marvel at how the antichrist tortures people? Here you are: have a look." Although the Englishman believes that the ferryman is insane, he is clearly mistaken in this; as the two men take their leave, the nameless peasant makes a speech that seems to encapsulate, in its purest form, the moral message of the novel: "Worry about yourself and leave others alone. Everyone is his own self. God knows who to punish and who to spare, but we do not know […] Be your own master and you shall need no master. Go, go! […] You have feasted your eyes on how the servants of the antichrist feed men to lice. Go, go!"[431]

What are we to make of Nekhliudov's two encounters with the nameless peasant? For Tarasov, the character's function is entirely positive; the peasant, he argues is a "righteous man" (*pravednik*) who plays the same role in *Resurrection* as Platon Karataev and the peasant Fedor had in *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. Just like his forebears, argues Tarasov, "man" appears at precisely the moment when the aristocratic hero has reached an impasse in his spiritual quest, illuminating the way forward by expressing the author's own thesis in its clearest form: "The critique of Orthodoxy and of all other religions and religious tendencies, the rejection of a personified God (*Bog–lichnost'*) as the absolute essence of spirituality, the message of faith in oneself, in one's 'spirit,' which is the same for all men," argues Tarasov, provide "clear evidence" for the contention that the nameless peasant serves as a vehicle through which Tolstoy expresses his most deeply-held convictions.[432] E. A. Masolova takes the opposite approach in her

[431] PSS 32: 438.

[432] Tarasov, 131.

treatment of these scenes: "The schismatic," she argues, preaches the teachings of God in word alone: The old man lacks kindness for people and has no desire to forgive them." "Man," she concludes, is "a false teacher" (*lzheuchitel'*) whom Nekhliudov must forget in order to experience his final epiphany at the end of the novel.[433] The very fact that scholars can differ so drastically in their interpretation of these scenes, we should note, provides powerful evidence for our claim that the novel is not as simple as it initially appears to be. But which interpretation is correct? I would argue that both Tarasov and Masolova's readings are incomplete: Tarasov emphasizes the first encounter with the peasant at the expense of the second encounter, while Masolova emphasizes the second at the expense of the first. The significance of these episodes, however, only becomes clear when we consider them in combination. I would argue that Tolstoy's goal in these scenes is to subvert his readers' expectations. The effect of this subversion relies on our knowledge of his earlier works. When we first encounter the nameless peasant, we assume that he will play a role that is analogous to the one played by his peasant predecessors in *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. And yet the second encounter demonstrates the hero's inability to inculcate this thesis, his inability to effect the same merger with the lower classes that Pierre and Levin were able to achieve. Where in the first encounter on the ferry "man" is presented as the bearer of a lofty ideal, in the second encounter at the jail he emerges as a representative of the dark, deeply superstitious side of peasant spirituality that Tolstoy, as an educated aristocrat, was never able to penetrate or accept. We come to see the prince as a Moses figure who is forced to stand on the banks of the River Jordan as punishment for his pride. Just as he can never effect the

[433] E.A. Masolova, "Evangel'skii tekst v romane L. Tolstogo 'Voskresenie,' *Vestnik Komstrogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta im. N.A. Nekrasova* 2 (2015): 423.

same spiritual union with the lower classes that Pierre and Levin were able to achieve, Nekhliudov can never recapture the pure love that once united him with Maslova, can never fully return to the idealistic former self that he has lost.

An End Without a Conclusion

The novel, however, does not end with Nekhliudov's second encounter. After leaving the jail, the prince finds himself alone. Feeling himself completely incapable of grasping the meaning of life, he begins to pace back and forth. When he sits down, his eyes rest on a gospel tract that he has recently been given. Paging through the Gospel of Matthew, he appears to experience another epiphany. In reading the parable of the lost sheep, the prince finds what seems to be an accurate representation of contemporary society: "Yes, it was not the will of the Father that they should die, but here they are dying by the hundreds, by the thousands. And there is no means of saving them."[434] Moving ahead to the parable of the unforgiving debtor, he begins to perceive a way out of the hopeless situation in which he and his fellow men find themselves. When he reads the king's invocation to the forgiven debtor to show the same compassion that he has been given, Nekhliudov wonders aloud whether this is really the answer to all of his questions (*Da neuzheli tol'ko eto?*), to which the voice of his conscience responds, "Yes, only this" (*Da, tol'ko eto*):

> And what happened to Nekhliudov is what often happens to people who lead a spiritual life. What happened is that a thought that at first had seemed so strange, so paradoxical, even so laughable, by more frequently finding support in life, suddenly appeared to him as the simplest, most incontrovertible truth. Thus the thought became clear to him that the lone and incontrovertible means of salvation from the terrible evil from which people suffer consists only in the acknowledgement of oneself as being guilty before God and thus incapable of punishing or reforming other people. It had now become clear to him that all of the terrible evil that he had witnessed in the jails and prisons, and the calm self-assurance of those who caused this evil, resulted only from the fact that people wanted to do that which is impossible: being evil themselves, [they wanted] to reform evil. Vicious people wanted to reform vicious people, and they thought

[434] PSS 32: 431.

> they could accomplish this through mechanical means. But the only result of all of this was that needy and selfish people, having made a profession of supposed punishment and reformation of people, became completely corrupted and never ceased to corrupt those whom they torment. Now it had become clear to him what the source of all the horror he had seen is and what has to be done to destroy it. The answer that he had been incapable of finding was the same one that Christ had given to Peter: to always forgive everyone, to forgive an infinite number of times, because there are no people who are without guilt and therefore able to punish or reform others.
>
> [И с Нехлюдовым случилось то, что часто случается с людьми, живущими духовной жизнью. Случилось то, что мысль, представлявшаяся ему сначала как странность, как парадокс, даже как шутка, всё чаще и чаще находя себе подтверждение в жизни, вдруг предстала ему как самая простая, несомненная истина. Так выяснилась ему теперь мысль о том, что единственное и несомненное средство спасения от того ужасного зла, от которого страдают люди, состояло только в том, чтобы люди признавали себя всегда виноватыми перед Богом и потому неспособными ни наказывать ни исправлять других людей. Ему ясно стало теперь, что всё то страшное зло, которого он был свидетелем в тюрьмах и острогах, и спокойная самоуверенность тех, которые производили это зло, произошло только оттого, что люди хотели делать невозможное дело: будучи злы, исправлять зло. Порочные люди хотели исправлять порочных людей и думали достигнуть этого механическим путем. Но из всего этого вышло только то, что нуждающиеся и корыстные люди, сделав себе профессию из этого мнимого наказания и исправления людей, сами развратились до последней степени и не переставая развращают и тех, которых мучают. Теперь ему стало ясно, отчего весь тот ужас, который он видел, и чтò надо делать для того, чтобы уничтожить его. Ответ, которого он не мог найти, был тот самый, который дал Христос Петру: он состоял в том, чтобы прощать всегда, всех, бесконечное число раз прощать, потому что нет таких людей, которые бы сами не были виновны и потому могли бы наказывать или исправлять.][435]

Seeking to confirm this interpretation, Nekhliudov turns to the Sermon on the Mount, where he finds confirmation of the five commandments that Tolstoy had deduced from

[435] *PSS* 32: 441-442.

the gospels in *What I Believe*.[436] "The will of the Master is expressed in these commandments," he comes to realize; "If only people would fulfill these commandments, then the Kingdom of God would be established on earth."[437] This realization strikes Nekhliudov, and, it would appear, the narrator, as the final resolution of the questions that have tormented him: "From that night an entirely new life began for Nekhliudov," the narrator relates, "not so much because he had entered into new conditions of life, but because everything that happened to him from that moment assumed an entirely different meaning than it had before. How this new period of life will end, the future will show."[438]

The question of how we are to interpret the conclusion of the novel has been the subject of substantial debate. As Lomunov suggests, critics have offered at least five distinct answers to the question of who, if anyone, is resurrected at the end of the novel: 1) only Maslova is resurrected; 2) only Nekhliudov is resurrected; 3) both Maslova and Nekhliudov are resurrected; 4) no one is resurrected; 5) Tolstoy himself is resurrected, "having returned to artistic creation after writing religious tracts."[439] While they have differed widely on the meaning of the conclusion, critics have tended to agree that the closing scenes themselves are deeply flawed. Merezhkovskii described the final scene as containing "seventy of the weakest, most insignificant lines in the entire work."[440]

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[436] The commandments are: 1) to neither kill nor harbor anger towards one's fellow man; 2) to neither commit adultery nor lust after a woman; 3) to never seal a promise with an oath; 4) to turn the other cheek to an aggressor; 5) to love one's enemies.

[437] *PSS* 32: 444.

[438] *PSS* 32: 445.

[439] K. N. Lomunov, *Nad stranitsami "Voskreseniia*" (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1979), 322.

[440] Merezhkovskii, 238.

Chekhov agreed with this appraisal, arguing that the decision "to resolve everything with a text from the gospels" appeared to be "arbitrary" (*proizvol'no*): "There is no conclusion to the tale," he remarked, "and the one that we are given cannot be called a conclusion. To write and write and then to take everything and to dump it onto a text from the gospels smacks of theologizing" (*eto uzh ochen' po-bogoslovski*).[441] For Vasilii Rozanov, the title *Resurrection* itself appeared to be a misnomer: The concept of resurrection, he argued, implies a "spiritual paroxysm" (*dukhovnyi vzryv*), but what Tolstoy presents is merely the healing of old wounds.[442] Another critic, A.N. Aksakov, complained that the ending fell short of his expectations; he had assumed that the hero of the novel would fully inculcate Tolstoy's philosophical teachings, but was disappointed to find that he only came to grasp one element of the author's ethical approach; the overarching question of whether the meaning of existence stems entirely from the life in time or whether there is a life beyond the grave that awaits us, he complained, remains unanswered at the end of the novel.[443]

It is difficult to disagree with those critics who have expressed their frustration with the novel's final scene. Indeed, what Tolstoy offers us is a conclusion that appears to resolve everything, but that in fact resolves nothing at all. What will become of Nekhliudov? Will he go on to live the life of an itinerant beggar or will he find meaning in a life of bourgeois happiness? Tolstoy steadfastly refuses to answer this question, telling us in the last line of the novel that, "How this new chapter of his life will end, the

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[441] Quoted in K. N. Lomunov, "Pisateli-sovremenniki o poslednem romane L.N. Tolstogo ("Voskresenie" v otsenke A. P. Chekhova i A. M. Gor'kogo)," in *Roman L.N. Tolstogo "Voskresenie": Istoriko–funktsional'noe issledovanie* (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), 55.

[442] See Lomunov, *Nad stranitsami 'Voskreseniia,* 322.

[443] A. N. Aksakov, *K chemu bylo voskresat'?* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia V. Demakova, 1900).

future will show." What is more, the text itself provides ample reasons to doubt in the veracity and finality of the hero's epiphany. In the first part of the novel, Tolstoy had described his hero's past in terms of an endless series of apparent revelations, revelations that were always followed by a backslide:

> In his life Nekhliudov had already undergone more than once what he called 'a cleansing of the soul.' Cleansing of the soul is what he called that spiritual condition in which he suddenly, sometimes after a long period of time, having become aware of a slowing, and sometimes a complete halt, of his inner life, set out to clean out all the rubbish that, having accumulated in his soul, was the cause of this halting.
> After such an awakening, Nekhliudov always composed rules for himself, rules that he intended to follow forever: he would write a diary and begin a new life, which he hoped never to alter—'turning a new leaf,' as he said to himself. But every time the temptations of the world took hold of him, and without noticing it himself, he would fall again, and often lower than he had been before.
>
> [С Нехлюдовым не раз уже случалось в жизни то, что он называл «чисткой души». Чисткой души называл он такое душевное состояние, при котором он вдруг, после иногда большого промежутка времени, сознав замедление, а иногда и остановку внутренней жизни, принимался вычищать весь тот сор, который, накопившись в его душе, был причиной этой остановки.
> Всегда после таких пробуждений Нехлюдов составлял себе правила, которым намеревался следовать уже навсегда: писал дневник и начинал новую жизнь, которую он надеялся никогда уже не изменять, — turning a new leaf, как он говорил себе. Но всякий раз соблазны мира улавливали его, и он, сам того не замечая, опять падал, и часто ниже того, каким он был прежде.][444]

If, as we have suggested, a conversion is a consummate narrative event in the life story of the subject who experiences it, then this passage would appear to indicate that none of Nekhliudov's "awakenings" can truly be regarded as a conversion. A true narrative event is singular and noniterative, but what Tolstoy presents us with is a process that has already been repeated many times, and that might very well repeat itself again in the

[444] *PSS* 32: 101.

future. Nor is it clear that Nekhliudov's final epiphany introduces a truly resultative change into the structure of the storyworld, since we are never told precisely what the impact of this revelation will be. Far from embodying the certainty that we would expect from the post-conversion Tolstoy, the protagonist of *Resurrection* appears to reiterate the pattern that we find in Tolstoy's pre-conversion heroes: Like Pierre, Andrei, and Levin, his trajectory is not a linear path that ends with a final truth, but a spiraling sequence of apparent conversions, the incomplete nature of which are revealed through their repetition.

Conclusion: *Father Sergius*

As we have seen, it is possible to interpret *Resurrection* as a both a full-throated endorsement of Tolstoy's late moral philosophy and a pointed exercise in self-criticism. And yet there can be no doubt that the element of self-criticism is largely overshadowed by the outwardly-oriented social and political critique that dominates the text. In *Father Sergius* (Otets Sergii), which was written at roughly the same time as *Resurrection* (1890-1898), we find a similar duality of purpose, but here the relative weight assigned to each element is reversed.

Father Sergius opens with the following line: "In Petersburg in the 1840s there occurred an *event* (sobytie) that surprised everyone."[445] Tolstoy, of course, could not have been aware of how twenty-first-century narratologists would come to use the term "event," but the coincidence in terminology is nonetheless a productive one: *Father Sergius* begins with an apparent dramatic transformation, a narrative event that is ultimately shown to lack eventfulness. The plot of the story centers on the spiritual quest of Stepan Kasatskii, a handsome, wealthy officer in the Guards who, on the eve of his wedding, discovers that his intended had been the mistress of the Emperor. Upon learning of his bride's past, Kasatskii breaks off the engagement, resigns his commission, and, after settling his affairs at his estate, enters a monastery, where he is tonsured as Sergius. Like Nekhliudov, Kasatskii is driven by two competing motivations, the first of which is positive from the perspective of Tolstoy's stated religious views—the longing to return "to God, to the faith of his childhood (*k vere detskoi*), which had never been destroyed

[445] *PSS* 31: 5. My italics.

within him" —and the second of which is undeniably negative: the egotistical desire to "stand on new heights, from which he could look down on those people whom he had formerly envied."[446]

Having entered the monastery, Sergius adopts the same conscientious approach to his monastic duties as he had to his military career, taking solace in his vow of obedience to his *starets*. And yet despite his success in severing all external connections with his former life—he not only changes his name and forsakes his former dreams of martial glory, but also cedes all of his property to his sister—the transformation from Stepan to Sergius is not complete, for he continues to suffer from the ties that link him to the past:

> The only thing that tormented him was the memory of his bride. And not only the memory, but the vivid image of what could have been […]
> […]In his good moments Kasatskii was not bothered by these thoughts. When he recalled this in his good moments, he rejoiced at having rid himself of these temptations. But there were moments when everything by which he lived faded before him, and while he did not cease to believe in that by which he lived, he ceased to see it, could not summon within himself that by which he lived, and his memory and—it is terrible to say—regret over his conversion took hold of him.
>
> [Мучало его только воспоминание о невесте. И не только воспоминание, но представление живое о том, что могло бы быть.[…]
> […] В хорошие минуты Касатского не смущали эти мысли. Когда он вспоминал про это в хорошие минуты, он радовался, что избавился от этих соблазнов. Но были минуты, когда вдруг всё то, чем он жил, тускнело перед ним, он переставал не то что верить в то, чем жил, но переставал видеть это, не мог вызвать в себе того, чем жил, а воспоминание и — ужасно сказать — раскаяние в своем обращении охватывало его.][447]

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[446] *PSS* 31: 11.

[447] *PSS* 31: 12-13.

In his seventh year in the monastery, Kasatskii begins to feel that his faith is weakening: Performing his duties has become a habit, not a source of inspiration, and he is tempted by the sight of female parishioners. He confesses his sins to the abbot and is transferred to an isolated monastery where he can live the secluded life of a hermit. Six years later, however, his seclusion is violated by a group of wealthy revelers who visit him. One of the visitors, an eccentric divorcee named Makovkina, wagers that she will be able to spend the night in Sergius' cell. When Makovkina arrives, her presence reawakens the monk's former self. When he accidentally strikes her with the door, he hastens to beg her forgiveness, "suddenly reverting to his former customary manner of speaking with ladies" (*vdrug sovershenno perenesias' v davnishnee, privychnoe obrashchenie s damami*).[448] Seeking to ward off the carnal temptations that her presence has ignited within him, Sergius holds his finger over a candle, but is unable to bear the pain. In his desperation, he exits his cell to a porch, where he seizes an axe and chops off his finger. When Makovkina sees the bloody stump, she is struck by the realization of her sinful nature, a realization that spurs her own conversion: A year after the incident, we are told, she enters a convent.

By amputating his finger, Sergius manages to avoid the immediate temptation to engage in sexual intercourse with Makovkina. However, he inadvertently invites a new temptation: Stories about his act begin to circulate, leading to a steady stream of pilgrims to his hermitage. His fame only grows when he submits to a mother's request to lay hands on her ailing son and the boy recovers. Having become a famous man who is capable of securing substantial donations to the monastery, Sergius feels that "with every

[448] *PSS* 31: 22.

month, week, and day […] his inner life was being destroyed and replaced with an external [life]."[449] He comes to see himself as resembling "a place where formerly there had been a spring. 'There was a weak spring of living water, which flowed placidly from me, through me. That was the true life […]"[450] Sensing that the flame of his spiritual life is growing weaker, he begins to furtively plot his escape, gathering peasant clothes and questioning supplicants about the places where a wandering traveler might seek aid, but eventually abandons his plans. Eventually he begins to grow weaker, both physically and spiritually. In considering the crowds who ceaselessly flock to him, he realizes that, "He enjoyed and needed their love, but he felt no love for them. Now he had no love, no humility, and no purity."[451] His crisis reaches its peak when he is asked to lay hands on a young woman suffering from an apparent mental illness. Like Makovkina, she tries to tempt him, but this time he submits. After sleeping with her, he recoils in horror, not so much at the sin that he has committed as at the horror he feels when he thinks of the girl's father telling others about it. He sets off for the porch and seizes the axe with which he had cut off his finger, planning to use it to murder the temptress. At the last moment, though, his plan is thwarted by a servant who, thinking that Sergius intends to use the axe to chop wood, takes it and offers to perform the task himself. Passing by the sleeping girl, Sergius takes the peasant clothes that he has obtained, cuts his hair, and leaves his monastic life behind.

After leaving the monastery, he begins to wander aimlessly. Convinced that there is no God, he considers killing himself, a prospect that both tempts and terrifies him, just

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[449] *PSS* 31: 28.

[450] *PSS* 31: 30.

[451] *PSS* 31: 35.

as it had the narrator of the *Confession* and Bezukhov before him. He lies down and falls asleep, but the slumber is brief. When he awakens, writes Tolstoy, he experiences something that is somewhere between a dream and a memory (*On totchas zhe prosypaetsia i nachinaet ne to videt' vo sne, ne to vspominat'*). His thoughts bring him back to his childhood, and he remembers a girl named Pashen'ka, whom he had regarded as stupid and boring, but who represents a link with the distant past, and who appears to him to offer the only path to salvation. He falls asleep and dreams of an angel who tells him, "Go to Pashen'ka and learn from her what you must do, wherein lies your sin, and wherein lies your salvation."[452] Taking the dream as a divine revelation, he immediately sets off to the village where Pashen'ka lives. When he finds her, he sees that her life is a difficult one, but that she has accomplished what he has long yearned for, but never achieved: "Pashen'ka is precisely that which I should have been but was not. I lived for people under the pretext [that I was living for] God; she lives for God, imagining that she lives for people" (*Ia zhil dlia liudei pod predlogom boga, ona zhivet dlia boga, voobrazhaia, chto ona zhivet dlia liudei*).[453] Taking his leave of her, he wanders aimlessly for nine months before he is eventually arrested for failing to carry a passport and exiled to Siberia. The story ends with an apparent resolution: "In Siberia he settled down on a small plot owned by a wealthy peasant, where he still lives now. He works in the master's vegetable garden, teaches children, and cares for the sick."[454]

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[452] *PSS* 31: 38.

[453] *PSS* 31: 44.

[454] *PSS* 31: 46.

Like *Resurrection*, *Father Sergius* is in many respects a work of outwardly oriented social critique. Here the target is not the judicial system or the organs of political power, but the official Church, and monasticism in particular. In adapting a plot taken directly from a hagiographical text and rendering it the subject of a realist text set in the historical present, Tolstoy questions the sanctity of the lives led by men whom the Church regards as saints.[455] There are a number of passages in the story that present more specific criticisms of monastic practice. The abbot of the second monastery where the protagonist serves, for example, is described as a "worldly, crafty person" (*svetskii, lovkii chelovek*) who is dedicated to furthering his "ecclesiastical career" (*delavshii dukhovnuiu kar'eru*)[456]; the pilgrims who besiege him towards the end of his own ecclesiastical career are portrayed not as sincere spiritual seekers, but as "the most irreligious, cold, conventional type[s]:

> […] here there were pilgrims, retired soldiers for the most part, who had wandered away from their sedentary lives, impoverished and, for the most part, drunken old men who tramped from monastery to monastery only in order to be fed; here there were also grey peasant men and women with their egotistical demands for healing or for the resolution of doubts about the most practical matters: the marrying off of a daughter, the leasing of a shop, the purchase of a plot of land, or the expiation of the sin of an overlaid or illegitimate child.
>
> [[…] тут были странники, большей частью из отставных солдат, отбившиеся от оседлой жизни, бедствующие и большей частью запивающие старики, шляющиеся из монастыря в монастырь, только чтобы кормиться; тут были и серые крестьяне и крестьянки с своими

[455] The primary source for the plot was the vita of Iakov the Faster, but scholars have also identified motifs drawn from the vita of Sergius of Radonezh as well as allusions to Avvakum's *Life*. On Tolstoy's use of hagiographical sources, see Margaret Ziolkowski, "Hagiographical Motifs in Tolstoy's *Father Sergius*, *South Atlantic Review* 47 (1982): 63-80 and Marcia A. Morris, *Saints and Revolutionaries: The Ascetic Hero in Russian Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 117-120.

[456] *PSS* 31: 14.

> эгоистическими требованиями исцеления или разрешения сомнений о самых практических делах: о выдаче дочери, о найме лавочки, о покупке земли или о снятии с себя греха заспанного или прижитого ребенка.][457]

Where the element of externally oriented social critique dominates in *Resurrection*, however, in *Father Sergius* it is subordinated to the element of self-critique that we observed in the longer novel. While many critics have emphasized Tolstoy's indictment of sexuality, drawing parallels between other late works such as *The Kreutzer Sonata* and "The Devil," the author himself indicated that his primary target was the sin of pride.[458] Like Nekhliudov, Kasatskii makes a grand, seemingly sacrificial gesture that is motivated both by a sincere spiritual longing and the egotistical thirst for praise. Like Nekhliudov, he initially perceives this gesture as inaugurating a dramatic transformation, but eventually comes to realize that he remains the same sinner that he has always been.

Critics have long acknowledged that Kasatskii, to an even greater extent than Nekhliudov, functions as an autobiographical projection of the author himself.[459] When seen in this light, there can be no doubt that the work speaks to its author's lingering doubts about the finality, validity, and value of his claimed conversion. As Love argues, "*Father Sergius* reveals a mind impatient with the illusions it creates to such an extent that no doctrine, no one way, no final resting point could ever seem satisfactory or

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[457] *PSS* 31: 31.

[458] On this point, see Harry H. Walsh and Paul Alessi, "The *Apophthegmata Patrum* and Tolstoy's Father Sergius," *Comparative Literature Studies* 19 (1982): 1-10. Walsh and Alessi quote a letter from Tolstoy to Chertkov in which he indicates that his chief concern was not with "the struggle with the sins of the flesh, but with vanity and pride." (PSS 87: 71-27; their translation).

[459] See, for example, Lev Shestov, "Otkrovenie smerti: Poslednie proizvedeniia L. N. Tolstogo," *Sovremennye zapiski* 1 (1920): 99, where the author writes that, "Father Sergius—*or, it is better to say directly, Tolstoy*—begins to recall his former society life and to compare it with his new, hermitic [life]" (*Otets Sergii* ili, luchshe budem priamo govorit', Tolstoi *nachinaet vspominat' svoiu proshliuiu svetskuiu zhizn' i sravnivat' ee so svoei novoi, otshel'nicheskoiu*). My italics.

capable of resisting the corrosive activity of pure intellectual exuberance."[460] For Lev Shestov, the writer's constitutional incapacity to reach a final resting point, to decisively turn his back on the past that tormented him so, is evidence of Tolstoy's "great and enigmatic gift" (*velikii i zagodochnyi dar*): "when he approaches his goal he becomes convinced that he has not been going to the place he should have been" (*kogda on podkhodit k tseli, on ubezhdaetsia, chto shel ne tuda, kuda nuzhno bylo*).[461] For Kastatskii/Sergius/Tolstoy, the final resolution of the spiritual quest presents itself as a return, just as it had for Bezukhov, Levin, and the narrator of the *Confession*. For this late incarnation, however, the return is not a liberation, but rather an anguished affirmation of the prison of that self that can never truly be transcended.[462]

[460] Love, 749.

[461] Shestov, 99.

[462] I have borrowed this image from Morson, who argues that *Father Sergius* indicates "that Tolstoy was aware of the reasons he could not *liberate himself from his biographical prison*" See Morson, "Tolstoy's Absolute Language," 685. My italics.

Conclusion

Он так обрадовался и взволновался, открыв эту, как ему казалось, новую истину, что вскочил и в нетерпении стал искать, для кого бы ему поскорее пожертвовать собой... Сколько раз в жизни открывал он «эту, как ему казалось, новую истину»? Истина же эта роковая.

Иван Бунин, «Освобождение Толстого»

If we were to map our central thesis as a temporal progression, then the following schema would result: The young Tolstoy is fascinated by the idea of effecting a complete break with his past and starting a "new life" on righteous foundations; he experiments with images of radical personal transformation in his diaries, and these images ultimately work their way into his early and mature fictional productions; having reached the height of his artistic career, he again finds himself tempted by the prospect of "turning over a new leaf"; he writes his own autobiographical conversion narrative in which he adapts a model of character development that he had developed in the very works that he claims to be rejecting; for several years, he lives in the conviction that he has accomplished what his fictional heroes have long strove towards but never been able to accomplish: he has effected a complete conversion, one that has allowed him to perceive the essence of "true Christianity"; before long, this autobiographical narrative of conversion works its way back into his fiction in the form of straightforward narratives in which his heroes are able to accomplish what he has and more; as time goes by, however, he begins to be

tormented by doubts in the validity, finality, and value of his claimed transformation, and his fiction becomes an instrument through which he is able to simultaneously propagandize on behalf of his post-conversion moral and political ideology and to reflect on these doubts.

An approach to Tolstoy's conversion that emphasizes the narrative properties of the texts in which he alludes to his transformation not only allows us to reframe the long-raging debate between advocates of a "one Tolstoy" model and a "two Tolstoys" model, but also to draw broader conclusions about the evolution of the nineteenth-century realist tradition itself. Despite the absence of a firmly rooted tradition of written narratives of religious conversion that we discussed in the first chapter of this study, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the proliferation of autobiographical accounts that closely accorded with Western models of conversion, although the word "conversion" itself was only rarely applied to them. A partial list of well-known writers and intellectuals who claimed to experience some form of radical personal transformation would include not only Gogol', Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy, but also Nikolai Leskov, Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, Konstantin Leont'ev, Boris Chicherin, Petr Kropotkin, Nikolai Strakhov, and Lev Tikhomirov. At the dawn of the twentieth century, the frequency and intensity of these transformations only increased. Experiences of radical ideological change were the norm not only for a host of revolutionary activists, but also for their opponents in the self-styled "new intelligentsia" like Berdiaev, Sergei Bulgakov, and Semen Frank, who abandoned their former materialist beliefs and embraced an idiosyncratic synthesis of neo-idealistic philosophy and Eastern Christianity. In seeking to account for the emergence of Russian autobiographical accounts that are, at least

partially, functionally analogous to Western conversion narratives, it is useful to draw a comparison between the socio-ideological context of seventeenth-century Protestant England and nineteenth-century Tsarist Russia. As we noted in the first chapter of this study, increased degrees of ideological and confessional mobility played a central role in the cultivation of the Western conversion narrative tradition: The opportunity to change one's religious affiliation was a necessary precondition for the emergence of the conversion narrative as a salient model of autobiographical narration. We see a similar transformation taking place in Russian society over the course of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the century, individual identity was highly rigid and linked to membership in one of a handful of defined social classes: With rare exceptions, peasants were born and died as peasants, noblemen as noblemen. In the middle of the century, however, this rigid social hierarchy began to shift with the rise of the intelligentsia, a class that was defined not by the economic condition in which its members had been born, but rather by the ideologies that they came to profess. The possibility of reframing one's identity in terms of dynamic shifts in ideological affiliation rather than static affiliation with an established economic class laid the groundwork for the emergence of life stories defined by radical transformations.

At the same time, the development of literary forms capable of capturing the experience of such transformations provided a framework for their dissemination. The rise of Romanticism in the early decades of the nineteenth century inaugurated a shift towards the individual subject, a shift that led in turn to an increase in the production of works that were centered on the spiritual and intellectual development of these subjects. As Lydia Ginzburg notes in her seminal study *On Psychological Prose* (O

psikhologicheskoi proze, 1971), "the end of the 1840s and the first half of the 1850s saw in both Russian and the West a heightened interest in memoirs, autobiographies, notes, and essays—indeed, in every kind of documentary genre."[463] Before long, the principles of autobiographical writing began to influence developments in fiction writing: Ginzburg lists Konstantin Aksakov's *Family Chronicle,* Dostoevsky's *Notes from the House of the Dead*, and Tolstoy's *Childhood, Boyhood*, and *Youth* as examples of the sort of fictionalized memoirs that came to dominate Russian literature in the 1850s.[464] The tools that were developed to chart the trajectories of autobiographical and pseudo-autobiographical heroes in the 1850s were later deployed in realist novels of the 1860s and subsequent decades, novels that were capable of expressing "the artistic cognition of individual spiritual life and behavior," and, by extension, capable of describing radical transformations in an individual's spiritual life and self-conception. [465]

While the emergence of the nineteenth-century Russian conversion narrative drew on the French autobiographical tradition for its form, its content was influenced by the tradition of German idealist philosophy that entered into the Russian cultural landscape in the 1830s and 1840s. German idealism exposed a generation of writers and thinkers to an intellectual tradition that was deeply concerned with the nature of the self and its development. As Derek Offord writes, "German idealism was a vehicle for a national philosophical awakening in Russia, a means by which Russians could achieve

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[463] Lydia Ginzburg, *On Psychological Prose*, trans. Judson Rosengrant (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 197.

[464] Ibid., 199. Ginzburg astutely classifies Tolstoy's early contributions to this tradition as being "autopsychological," rather than strictly autobiographical, in orientation.

[465] Ibid., 221.

philosophical self-consciousness."[466] By casting the individual as an entity of equal or greater importance than the state, German idealist and French autobiographical influences allowed for the emergence of both nonfictional and fictionalized autobiographical forms to acquire salience in the Russian literary tradition. While this development did not directly introduce conversion as a central theme in Russian literature, it provided the soil on which this conception could take root. In this sense, the rise of the Russian conversion narrative tradition can be seen as the inverse of the progression in the West: Where Western conversion narratives first emerged in an explicitly religious context before eventually serving as the framework for secular literary productions, in Russia it was secular literature that provided the framework for the development of narratives that eventually acquired a religious or quasi-religious significance. Tolstoy was both an heir to this legacy and a central figure in its evolution and dissemination.

* * *

Although this dissertation has focused primarily on works dating from Tolstoy's late period, the conclusions that we have developed allow us to gain new insights into his artistic evolution as a whole. In the second chapter of the present study, we saw how narrative—and autobiographical narrative specifically—provided a solution for the problem of how to communicate a series of complex ideological developments. In the broadest sense, the shift from an essayistic framework, which attempts to capture truths in their static form, and an autobiographical approach, which presents philosophical

[466] Derek Offord, *Journeys to a Graveyard: Perceptions of Europe in Classical Russian Travel Writing* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 114.

conclusions as the endpoint of a dynamic progression, mirrors the longer, more gradual shift from descriptive to narrative modalities in Tolstoy's artistic method. As a number of scholars have observed, Tolstoy's early works are marked by a strong preference for description over narration.[467] Indeed, one of his earliest compositions, "A History of Yesterday" (*Istoriia vcherashnego dnia*), he dwells on the impossibility of providing a comprehensive account of even a single day: "God alone knows how many diverse impressions and engaging thoughts […] occur in a single day. If it were possible to narrate them in such a way that I could read myself and others could read *me* as I do, then a very instructive and engaging book would result, although one for which there is not enough ink or typesetters in the world to print."[468] In order to make sense of these impressions, we must translate them into the form of a narrative, which, by definition, will sacrifice accuracy for tellability. The influence of this skeptical attitude towards narration can be seen in the early short story "Sevastopol in May" (*Sevastopol' v mae*),

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[467] This preference was noted and frequently criticized by his contemporaries. Stepan Dudyshkin, the editor of *Notes of the Fatherland* (Otechestvennye zapiski) in the years following the departure of Belinskii and the death of Valerian Maikov, for example, complained that *Childhood* and *Boyhood* suffered from the absence of a love story. The novels, he argued, would have benefited from the addition of "a beautiful young girl of about eighteen or twenty who falls passionately in love with an equally handsome boy." Later, Dudyshkin would find similar faults in Tolstoy's short story "Sevastopol in August" (*Sevastopol' v avguste*), where he was once more disappointed to find "no action, but pictures and portraits." Another anonymous reviewer presented a more neutral take on the matter, observing that in the short story "The Woodfelling" (*Rubka lesa*) "L.N.T.'s story consists in the soldiers' talk; it has no content whatsoever" (*soderzhaniia v nem net nikakogo*). The descriptive orientation of Tolstoy's early fiction has been discussed by a number of later critics as well. In *The Young Tolstoy*, Eikhenbaum argues that in his early works the writer not only "not think about *fabula*," but that even that "there is no such thing as *fabula* in his imagination,"; "Tolstoy never tells [a story]… [he] never narrates" (*nikogda ne rasskazyvaet…nikogda ne povestvuet*). Käte Hamburger adopts a similar position, noting that even those early works that seem at first to be plot-centered often end up defying the reader's expectations; Tolstoy, she wrote, "avoids direct and continuous narrative as if to destroy mere plot." Quoted in Eric de Haard, *Narrative and Anti-Narrative Structures in Lev Tolstoj's Early Works* (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1989), 2-4.

[468] *PSS* 1: 279.

where one soldier, Pesth, proves incapable of resisting the impulse to exaggerate the importance of his own role during a recent engagement:

> And Pesth began to relate how he had led his company, how the company commander had been killed, how he had stabbed a Frenchman, how none of this would have happened had it not been for him, and so forth.
> The foundations of this story—that the company commander had been killed and that Pesth had killed a Frenchman—were accurate, but in relating the details the Junker invented and boasted.
> He boasted involuntarily, because during the time of the entire affair he had found himself in some sort of fog and forgetfulness to such an extent that everything that had happened seemed to him to have happened somewhere, sometime, and with someone. Quite naturally, he tried to reproduce these details from a perspective that would favor him.
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> [И Пест стал рассказывать, как он вел всю роту, как ротный командир был убит, как он заколол француза и что, ежели бы не он, то ничего бы не было и т. д.
> Основания этого рассказа, что ротный командир был убит, и что Пест убил француза, были справедливы; но, передавая подробности, юнкер выдумывал и хвастал.
> Хвастал невольно, потому что во время всего дела находясь в каком-то тумане и забытьи до такой степени, что всё, что́ случилось, казалось ему случившимся где-то, когда-то и с кем-то, очень естественно, он старался воспроизвести эти подробности с выгодной для себя стороны.][469]

This skeptical attitude towards his characters' impulse to structure their experience in the form of a coherent narrative account survived into Tolstoy's mature period. It is especially clear in the account of Nikolai Rostov's first brush with of combat in *War and Peace*. When Rostov rides into battle for the first time, his head is filled with romantic images gleaned from the stories other men have told about war. As the bullets start to fly, however, he finds that combat is far more chaotic and inexplicable than these stories would suggest. Knocked from his horse, he stands still for a full ten seconds, marveling at the absurdity of the thought that the French soldiers might actually want to do him

[469] *PSS* 4: 45.

harm: "Who are they? Why are they running? Can they really be running towards me? And why? To kill me? *Me*, whom everyone loves so much?"[470] Instead of responding to danger with heroism, as he had imagined himself doing based on the stories he has heard from other people, Rostov flees for the cover of some bushes. The influence of stories of martial glory is so strong, though, that he, like Pesth before him, cannot resist the temptation to retell his experience in terms that would accord with his own expectations and those of his listeners:

> He related the Schöngrabern affair to them precisely as those who have participated in battles usually describe them—that is, as they would have liked them to have been, as they had heard from other storytellers, so that they would be related as beautifully as possible, but absolutely not as they had really been. Rostov was an honest young man who would have never intentionally told a lie. He began to describe the battle with the intention of describing everything precisely as it had been, but imperceptibly, unwittingly, and inevitably he passed into falsehood. […] It is very difficult to tell the truth, and young people are rarely capable of it. [His listeners] were waiting for a story about how he had blazed with the fire [of battle], how he had forgotten himself, how, like a storm, he had thrown himself into the [French] square, how he had cut his way into it, chopping to the left and the right, how his sabre had feasted on meat, and how he had fallen in exhaustion, and so on. And he told them all of this.
>
> [Он рассказал им свое Шенграбенское дело совершенно так, как обыкновенно рассказывают про сражения участвовавшие в них, то есть так, как им хотелось бы, чтоб оно было, так, как они слыхали от других рассказчиков, так как красивее было рассказывать, но совершенно не так, как оно было. Ростов был правдивый молодой человек, он ни за чтò умышленно не сказал бы неправды. Он начал рассказывать с намерением рассказать всё, как оно точно было, но незаметно, невольно и неизбежно для себя перешел в неправду. […]Рассказать правду очень трудно; и молодые люди редко на это способны. Они ждали рассказа о том, как горел он весь в огне, сам себя не помня, как бурею налетал на каре; как врубался в него, рубил направо и налево; как сабля отведала мяса, и как он падал в изнеможении, и тому подобное. И он рассказал им всё это.][471]

[470] *PSS* 9: 230.

[471] *PSS* 9: 295-296.

He is interrupted by Prince Andrei, who sarcastically points out that, "there are many stories now about that affair."[472] As Morson argues, Andrei, "recognizes that [Rostov's] highly metaphorical and formulaic language is a product of genre rather than experience."[473] Rostov himself comes to a similar conclusion later in the novel. During his second campaign, he is bored when he is subjected to stories about the bravery of the Russian army: "After the Austerlitz campaign and the campaign of 1807, Rostov knew from his own experience that people always lie when telling about incidents in war, as he himself had lied. Moreover, he had enough experience to know that everything that happens in war does not happen in the way we imagine or describe it."[474]

This skepticism, it is important to note, never reaches the point of outright hostility or epistemological agnosticism. Through the person of his God-like narrator, Tolstoy *himself* is able to discern the reality that eludes his characters; immediately after he relates Pesth's erroneous retelling of the battle, the narrator announces "But here is how it really happened" (*No vot kak eto bylo deistvitel'no*); the story ends with the famous claim that, "The hero of my story, whom I love with all the power of my soul, whom I have tried to render in all his beauty, and who has always been, still is, and always will be beautiful, is the truth (*pravda*)."[475] In a similar fashion, while the Tolstoy who wrote *War and Peace* takes professional historians to task for relying on narratives to explain historical developments, he nonetheless allows his narrator to offer his own

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[472] *PSS* 9: 297.

[473] Morson, *Hidden in Plain View*, 111.

[474] *PSS* 11: 56.

[475] *PSS* 4: 59.

narrative, one that is presented as an accurate and authoritative account of what "really happened."

In Tolstoy's early and mature fiction, then, there is a tension between two competing attitudes towards narrativity, the first of which is skeptical, and which can be seen in how the author frames his characters' attempts to recast their own experiences in the form of a narrative, and the second of which is sympathetic, and can be seen in the freedom he grants to his narrator to provide an authoritative account of reality. In the 1870s, however, we can begin to detect a shift in his approach, one that leads him to more fully embrace the second, more sympathetic, attitude towards narrativity. This shift can be perceived through a comparison of the treatment of Pierre's transformation at the end of *War and Peace* and Levin's transformation at the end of *Anna Karenina*. In the earlier novel, the character's conversion is presented by a third-person narrator who maintains a certain degree of distance from the fictional subject he is describing; The narrator grasps the fundamental truth that had allowed Pierre to overcome his despair more firmly than the character himself. In the later novel, this distance begins to disappear. While Tolstoy does not entirely abandon the third-person narrative voice entirely, he presents Levin's crisis and recovery primarily through the character's own internal monologue. By the end of the novel, it is impossible to draw a meaningful distinction between the narrator's truth and the protagonist's truth. This shift led naturally to the *Confession*, where the distinction between author, narrator, and protagonist vanishes entirely.

And yet, as we have seen in our discussion of *Resurrection* and *Father Sergius*, Tolstoy was never able to overcome his skepticism entirely. At the same time that he was relying on his own conversion narrative as the bedrock of his reconstituted identity, he

was composing works that spoke to his awareness of the fictive nature of this narrative. Nowhere is the tension between these diametrically opposed attitudes towards narrative more clear than in one of his most enigmatic and least-known works, an unfinished fragment entitled "The Posthumous Notes of the *Starets* Fedor Kuzmich" that was written in 1905. The work is presented in the form of a series of diary entries written by Fedor of Tomsk, a monk who was rumored to be Alexander I, who, according to legend, had not actually died in 1825, but rather had abandoned his worldly post to follow a spiritual path. At first glance, the text appears to reiterate the central narrative of the *Confession*: The monk who pens the diary entries sees himself as a successful convert, as a man who has achieved victory over earthly temptation by decisively rejecting power and fame. In his waking life, Fedor explains, he is comforted by the sensation that he has "clearly recognized [his] position in the world: I—my entire life—is something that is necessary to Him who has sent me. And I am capable of doing that which is necessary for Him […]." At night, however, he is tormented by visions that reveal that his transformation is not complete: He dreams that he is swimming naked in a sea and that though he desires to reach the shore, he cannot: "The meaning of the dream was that the prison of my flesh still holds me back, but that escape is close at hand."[476] The Tolstoy who wrote the *Confession* was convinced that he had reached the shore; the Tolstoy who wrote the "Notes" grasps that this was an error.

The logic of conversion narratives is highly linear: Life is conceived as a broken line with the first segment extending to the point of rupture and the second extending indefinitely towards ultimate truth. In the "Notes," however, this linear schema is

[476] *PSS* 36: 65-66.

supplanted by a circular one. Fedor grasps that life is the constant repetition of a cycle in which old desires are constantly replaced by new ones. The only desire that can truly be fulfilled, he acknowledges, is the desire to perish, to achieve "liberation from the passions and temptations" that afflict the soul in life. Were he able to fully accept this principle, he writes, "then everything that brings me closer to death—old age and sickness—would be the fulfillment of my one and fundamental desire." But this is a desire that he cannot yet fully embrace:

> This is true, and I perceive it when I am healthy. But when my stomach ails, as it did yesterday and for the last three days, I cannot summon forth this feeling, and though I do not resist death, I am incapable of desiring its approach. Yes, this condition is a condition of spiritual slumber. I must wait calmly.
>
> [Это так, и это я чувствую, когда я здоров. Но когда я, как вчера и третьего дня, болею желудком, я не могу вызвать этого чувства и хотя и не противлюсь смерти, не могу желать приближаться к ней. Да, такое состояние есть состояние сна духовного. Надо спокойно ждать.][477]

And yet to "wait calmly" was something that Tolstoy himself proved incapable of doing. The frenzied chain of events that unfolded over the last ten days of his life—the furtive escape in the dead of night, the collapse in the smoke-filled third-class wagon, the spectacle at Astapovo station—are well known and need not be repeated here. The only question that remains is the one that Tolstoy and his characters had raised so many times: *Zachem?* Was it mere marital discord that spurred his flight? Was he, after thirty years of compromising, finally following through with the principles that he had formulated during that heady time in the 1870s when every day seemed to bring with it a new truth or a new reason to despair? Or was he, like his characters had done so many times before,

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[477] *PSS* 36: 73.

making one last desperate effort to turn over a new page in a book of life that was rapidly reaching its end?

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