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INTRODUCTION

Tolstoy

Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy came of an ancient noble family with numerous branches and illustrious connexions. He was born in 1828 at Yasnaya Polyana, about 130 miles south-west of Moscow, and spent most of his life there.

He was the youngest of four brothers; one sister came after him, at whose birth his mother died. In spite of this, he appears to have had an idyllic country childhood, the atmosphere of which is recaptured in his semi-autobiographical *Childhood*. When he was nine, the family moved to Moscow for the boys' education; but later, after the death of their father, they lived in Kazan, under the guardianship of an aunt. Here, during his teens, Tolstoy had ample opportunity for the indulgence of those weaknesses and passions which were for years to be the torment of his conscience—vanity, ambition, gambling, and 'above all, lust'.

Tolstoy spent barely two years at Kazan University. He left in 1847, intending to look after Yasnaya Polyana, the part of the family inheritance that had fallen to him, and to improve the lot of the serfs. His first attempts in this field failed. By 1848 he was again enjoying the dizzy pleasures of town life, and for the most part continued to do so till 1851. In the spring of that year he left for the Caucasus with his elder brother Nicholas, an officer in the army on active service there.

Tolstoy spent two and a half years in the Caucasus; it was to be, as it had been for Pushkin and Lermontov, a maturing force for him both intellectually and spiritually. In the intervals of hunting, gambling, whoring, and fighting the mountain tribes he read and wrote. *Childhood* was completed and published in Nekrassov's progressive journal, *The Contemporary*. It brought him immediate fame. Even in this first work, Tolstoy revealed his gift for 'debunking' what he saw to be affected and insincere in behaviour. *The Cossacks*, though

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finished several years later, was also a product of this time. It is an expression of ardent youthful pantheism inspired by closeness to nature and primitive man. The influence of Rousseau, Tolstoy's constant hero, is clearly felt.

Soon after the Caucasus, Tolstoy was in the thick of the fighting at the siege of Sebastopol in the Crimea. His experiences there filled him with revulsion against the barbarous futility of war (*Tales of Sebastopol*, 1855–6). On his return from the war he stayed with Turgenev in St Petersburg and was lionized in literary circles. But tiring of the *literati*, and what he felt to be their humbug, he left for Yasnaya Polyana with a plan to free his serfs. This, and a dream of marriage, came to nothing; and Tolstoy set out for his first European tour (1857). His enjoyment of Parisian cultural and other delights was shattered by the spectacle of a public execution. He returned to Russia after spending the summer in Switzerland.

A new enthusiasm now took hold of him: teaching. He started his own school for the peasant children at Yasnaya Polyana on revolutionary lines. It was highly successful. In order to acquire more knowledge of educational methods, Tolstoy set out in July 1860 for his second and last trip to Europe. But at Hyères in the south of France his brother Nicholas died of tuberculosis. His death was a profound shock for Tolstoy. What was life for, if this was the end? He continued his pedagogical researches, however, visiting more schools in England, Belgium, and Germany.

In April 1861 he returned to Yasnaya Polyana, which, apart from some winters in Moscow or famine-stricken districts, and occasional trips to the Bashkir steppes, he was not to leave for the next 49 years.

1861 was the great year of the emancipation of the serfs, and Tolstoy held for a time the post of Arbitrator between nobles and peasants in his district. In September 1862 he married Sofia Behrs, the daughter of a boyhood 'flame'. She was 18—sixteen years younger than himself.

For the sake of his family (children were born in rapid succession) Tolstoy now felt the urge to improve and add to his estate. At the same time he had, at least temporarily,

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found the stability he needed to write well; and it was this period that saw the creation of the great novels. *War and Peace* was published serially in Katkov's magazine *The Russian Messenger*, the first part appearing in 1865, the last in 1869. The novel was widely acclaimed, and Tolstoy's reputation as one of the greatest contemporary writers was assured. His second masterpiece, *Anna Karenina*, was written in the years 1873–7. In the meantime, Tolstoy had been busy with two 'A B C' books, containing short stories for children.

Tolstoy was now, to all appearances, at the peak of happiness, with health, wealth, fame, and a satisfactory family life. But all this began to seem pointless to him and his inner despair grew to such an extent that he had thoughts of suicide. In spite of—or because of—his lust for life, Tolstoy had for years been haunted by the spectre of death and excelled at portraying it. Like most of his literary heroes he had, with more or less concentration, been perpetually searching, particularly since the death of Nicholas, for an answer to the question 'What is the meaning of life, if death is the end?' Now, as with his latest hero, Levin in *Anna Karenina*, this question took hold of him with the force of an obsession, to the exclusion of all else.

How he pursued his search for an answer and ultimately found it is told in *Confession* (1879—postscript 1882). For Tolstoy the problem was fundamentally a religious one and the answer was characteristic of the man: it was to be found in *right living*. After intensive study of the Bible in Hebrew and Greek and conscientious attendance at church, Tolstoy came to the conclusion that the essentials of Christianity were not in the Church's dogmas and mysteries, against many of which his reason revolted; nor in much of its practice, which outraged his conscience (later he was excommunicated for these views), but in the basic teaching of Christ: that the love of God and of one's fellow-men are one, and that in the practice of this love man finds inward peace. This was his much-discussed 'conversion'. But the new outlook was the full flowering of ideas he had partially and at intervals expressed before, not a sudden change.

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What he believed to be the substance of the Gospels appeared (eventually in print) under the title *The Gospel in Brief* (1883). Expositions of his own faith followed: *What I Believe* (1884), *On Life* (1887). Among his most notable works of this period are powerful onslaughts on manifestations of evil in society, particularly in contemporary Russian society—on poverty (the result of the greed and indifference of the rich), on capital punishment, on war, and so on. His ideal of non-violence brought him many disciples, and had a great influence later on Gandhi. The autocratic Tsarist regime did not allow the publication of many of these polemical works. They circulated in manuscript or appeared abroad. Tolstoy's followers suffered arrest and imprisonment. He himself was spared, thanks to his national and international reputation.

The idea that any falling-off discernible in Tolstoy's creative writing after 1880 can be attributed directly to his conversion is probably an over-simplification. He did indeed turn his back on his earlier writings, which he considered to be mainly of entertainment value for the idle rich, but he continued to bring his artistic powers to bear in his vigorous tracts and pamphlets; and some of his best—if smaller—productions in fiction belong to this later period. In some ways religion injected new life into his writing. His novel *Resurrection*, short stories such as *Master and Man*, and his plays bear witness to this fact. Apart from these works, in many of which the 'upper classes' figure—but not to their advantage—Tolstoy wrote a number of 'folk tales' following the principle explained in his treatise *What is Art?* (1898): not only should the material of a work of art be sought in the lives of working people, and its inspiration be religious in the deepest and widest sense, but it should also be comprehensible to simple folk, 'capable of uniting men in brotherly love'. Two of the best of these folk tales, *Two Old Men* and *Does a Man Need Much Land?*, are closely akin in idea to *Master and Man*.

Tolstoy's efforts to put his religious beliefs into practice met with tragic difficulties, as his wife could not share his views. Yet the possession of money and property became a torment to him. The compromise he evolved satisfied neither himself

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nor his critics: he renounced the title 'Count', made over his property to his wife, and led an austere life, dressing and often working as a peasant; but he still lived in the comfortable family home.

However, the breach between him and Sofia became gradually unbearable. In the autumn of 1910 he suddenly left home secretly, hoping to find a haven for what remained of his life in some solitary peasant's hut. He caught a chill on the way and died at the railway station of Astapovo on 7 November.

Master and Man

During the winter of 1891–2, when there was a famine in central Russia, Tolstoy lived in the village of Begichevka, in the Ryazan district, organizing food centres for starving peasants. While engaged in this work, he was lost in a snowstorm. The subject of *Master and Man* apparently originated then, though years before he had written a story entitled *The Snowstorm*. It was not till September 1894, however, that he wrote the first draft. The story was published in 1895.

Between the first draft and publication, Tolstoy reworked the story several times. On 3 January 1895 he wrote of it in his diary 'In form it is now adequate, but in content still weak.' Three days later he wrote 'Bad. Neither has any character. Now I know what to do.' The successive drafts do in fact show how Tolstoy filled out and deepened the characters. He took most trouble, however, over the final scene, containing the heart of the 'idea' which was to be conveyed primarily through the experience of Brekhunov—at first glance perhaps not an eminently suitable character for this purpose.

Tolstoy when writing his stories had usually been under the influence of a dominating idea. The view that art should give to humanity more than just beauty or pleasure—that, for instance, it should have a social content—is characteristically Russian. Tolstoy in his later years propounded the view that the basic moral philosophy of a work of art was the crucial factor in its worth and that the business of art was 'to render comprehensible and accessible what might have

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been incomprehensible and inaccessible in the form of argument'. In *Master and Man* two individuals are caught up in a terrifying phenomenon of nature: a snowstorm. By showing how they react when face to face with danger and lonely death, Tolstoy is able to express implicitly what he feels to be essential to man for his understanding of the meaning of life and for his acceptance of death.

The idea is presented explicitly, in the form of argument, in *On Life*: man's visible life, from physical birth to physical death, is really the least important part of his true life. When he becomes a prey to his search for security and illusory happiness in this little part, or tries to buy security in the next through religious ritual or over-contempt for earthly life, he loses his sense of direction; but when he loves and serves, the torment of his struggle for survival and his fear of death recede, and he becomes part of the eternal spirit of goodness: not only through loving, but because his life flows into others who are still alive. (Cf. Matt. x. 39 and xvi. 26; and the lines in Pasternak's poem *The Wedding* in *Doctor Zhivago*:

Жизнь ведь тоже только миг,
Только растворенье
Нас самих во всех других,
Как бы им в даренье.

'Surely life too is only a moment, only a dissolving of ourselves into all others, as if we were making them a gift.')

Nikita, the peasant workman, kind, affectionate, obliging, accepting his lot, already possesses the essential: an unconscious sense of true values, which gives him a simple faith enabling him to accept death calmly, not as the end of everything, but as the beginning of something else, of which he is not afraid. He belongs in Tolstoy's portrait-gallery of peasants who know better than others how to live and how to die. But the important fact is that the bewildered, panic-stricken Brekhunov, hitherto self-regarding and self-deceiving, also comes to grasp the essential.

Although in the first part of the story the over-riding im-

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pression of Brekhunov is one of a calculating and greedy 'кулак' (wealthy peasant, exploiting others), there are hints, even from the first, that he has some sort of concern for his ill-clad dependent; but this concern is completely inhibited by other considerations. How important Tolstoy thought this inhibition is suggested by Brekhunov's dream. Dreams have often a special significance in Tolstoy's work. ('Ничего так, как они', he wrote in 1904, 'не открывает тайны душевной жизни') Years before, he had referred in a notebook to that kind of dream in which, in spite of effort, one feels unable to move—and had compared it with the sense one sometimes has, even in the best moments of waking life, that there is something vital lacking. It is perhaps significant that Brekhunov feels immobilized near a chest of candles (used as offerings in church), and that he tries to move, first to hand out a candle, and then because someone is coming do business with him about a wood. (Church rituals and money-making cannot bring the soul freedom?) The voice that ultimately liberates him and in answer to which he goes freely and joyfully is the voice of 'тот самый, который кликнул ему и велел ему лечь на Никиту'. The voice heard in the dream—but there recognized as something which has been heard before—is heard again at the end. Reality, dream and vision blend into one.

Self-interest, concern for Nikita, and, in Tolstoy's terms, divine revelation are also inextricably interwoven. Brekhunov's impulse to cover Nikita with his own body might conceivably have been prompted by a desire for self-preservation (but he was feeling warm at that moment) or, more probably, by an instinct to save, such as any normal man would feel in the circumstances: what is clear in any case is that he sees it simply as the only thing to do, and feels triumph at his decision. When, however, Nikita begins to revive, his triumph is mingled with a joy *such as he has never felt before*; and with that joy comes also a sense of relief for himself—relief that he has been saved from something besides a lonely death in the snow. And he has found the clue to life: the clue that helps him to slough off his past gladly, because it was worthless. A good action has brought its own reward.

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Brekhunov and Nikita are, however, much more than vehicles, each in his own way good to convey an idea. They are alive, so that the reader can almost feel their presence. Tolstoy does not stop to give detailed descriptions of appearance and personality. These are revealed gradually and naturally in the course of the story. Not only physical features and dress, but other details (gestures, gait, way of speaking—or keeping silent) all add up to solid, living people, basically true to themselves throughout, but with varying moods. Moreover, through his peculiar capacity for interpreting the inwardness of external detail and through his technique of the 'interior monologue' Tolstoy reveals the mental processes of his characters. He gives, too, added clarity and solidity through contrast. Nikita is not, seemingly, 'respectable' nor 'successful' (in spite of practical good sense), but is inwardly good: on the other hand Brekhunov, to all appearances both respectable and successful, is actually selfish and deceitful. In other hands than Tolstoy's such schematism might seem didactic and boring; but the characters are saved, in a literary sense, not only by their vividness: Nikita draws the sympathy of the reader by his warmheartedness; and Brekhunov is unconsciously funny—having landed himself in a terrible predicament through sheer greed and folly, he congratulates himself on his outstanding zeal and devotion to work!

The minor characters have each, through a similar technique, an identity of their own: the hospitable Taras, with his instinct for property and his old man's predilection for an undisturbed routine; the wrinkled 'ласковая старушка', Petrukha with his quotations—even the passing travellers with their contradictory shouts. Mukhorty, the horse, has a personality almost as real as the humans; and Tolstoy brilliantly conveys the characteristic movements and sounds of other animals, which contributes to the realism of the country setting.

No more than the characters is the snowstorm 'described'. It is seen and felt through the sensations of Brekhunov and Nikita, and grows detail by detail in its frightening intensity. Here too are telling contrasts: in the desolate landscape iso-

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lated objects convey the sense of becoming lost: a mere potato-top; washing on a line (homely, suggestive of human life in the general bleakness) which, when seen for the third time, shows that the travellers are turning in a circle. Most terrifying of all in this respect is the wormwood bush. In the peculiar silence that is the result of wind sweeping across open spaces the few sounds which do penetrate the ear add to the feeling of desolation; and the cosy warmth, light and crowded human company inside Taras's *izba* make the cold and loneliness of the night outside more deeply felt.

Closely acquainted as he was with country life and never swerving from accuracy for the sake of 'poetic' effects, Tolstoy's language is plain and to the point: exact words are used for exact objects (e.g. in the details of the harness); adjectives are not ornaments, but there for a job—to convey precise impressions; and there is an unusual range of verbs for this purpose. The speech of the characters is authentic peasant speech: pithy, at times picturesquely expressive; at times, from the literary point of view, phonetically or grammatically incorrect.

Because it is a good story, well told, *Master and Man* has a permanent place in the world's literature. In our acquisitive, materialistic age its underlying idea gives it special value.

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ХОЗЯ́ИН И РАБО́ТНИК

1

Э́то бы́ло в семидеся́тых года́х,[1] на друго́й день по́сле зи́мнего Нико́лы.[2] В прихо́де был пра́здник, и дереве́нскому дво́рнику,[3] купцу́ второ́й ги́льдии[4] Васи́лию Андре́ичу Брехуно́ву, нельзя́ бы́ло отлучи́ться: на́до бы́ло быть в це́ркви, — он был церко́вный ста́роста, — и до́ма на́до бы́ло приня́ть и угости́ть родны́х и знако́мых. Но вот после́дние го́сти уе́хали, и Васи́лий Андре́ич стал собира́ться то́тчас же е́хать к сосе́днему поме́щику для поку́пки у него́ давно́ уже́ приторго́вываемой ро́щи.[5] Васи́лий Андре́ич торопи́лся е́хать, что́бы городски́е купцы́ не отби́ли у него́ э́ту вы́годную поку́пку. Молодо́й поме́щик проси́л за ро́щу де́сять ты́сяч то́лько потому́, что Васи́лий Андре́ич дава́л за неё семь. Семь же ты́сяч составля́ли то́лько одну́ треть настоя́щей сто́имости ро́щи. Васи́лий Андре́ич, мо́жет быть, вы́торговал бы и ещё, та́к как лес находи́лся в его́ окру́ге, и ме́жду ним и дереве́нскими уе́здными купца́ми[6] уж давно́ был установлен поря́док, по кото́рому оди́н купе́ц не повыша́л цены́ в окру́ге друго́го, но Васи́лий Андре́ич узна́л, что губе́рнские лесоторго́вцы[7] хоте́ли е́хать торгова́ть Горя́чкинскую ро́щу, и он реши́л то́тчас же е́хать и поко́нчить де́ло с поме́щиком. И потому́, как то́лько отошёл пра́здник, он доста́л из сундука́ свои́ семьсо́т рубле́й, доба́вил к ним находя́щихся у него́ церко́вных две ты́сячи три́ста, так что́бы соста́вилось три ты́сячи рубле́й, и, стара́тельно перечтя́ их и уложи́в в бума́жник, собра́лся е́хать.

Рабо́тник Ники́та, оди́н в э́тот день не пья́ный из рабо́тников Васи́лия Андре́ича, побежа́л запряга́ть. Ники́та не был пьян в э́тот день потому́, что он был пья́ница, и тепе́рь, с за́говен,[8] во вре́мя кото́рых он про́пил с себя́ поддёвку[9] и ко́жаные сапоги́, он зарёкся пить и не́ пил второ́й ме́сяц; не́ пил и тепе́рь, несмотря́ на собла́зн везде́ распива́емого вина́ в пе́рвые два дня пра́здника.

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