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LEO TOLSTOY (1828-1910), born of a noble Russian family, is universally acknowledged to be one of the world's great writers. Always an idealist, he began writing to further certain reform ideas he cherished and by the end of his life was the most conspicuous literary figure in the world and one of its greatest single moral forces.

TOLSTOY portrays not only the physical milieu but also the intellectual and spiritual revolution of his time in his works, which emphasize love, faith, simplicity and the Christian brotherhood of man. The six short stories which comprise this volume span almost a half century of the author's writing and furnish representative examples of Tolstoy at his early and late best.

F. D. REEVE, who has written the Introduction to this collection, teaches Russian literature at Wesleyan University. He has translated numerous short stories, plays and novels from the Russian and has made extended visits to the Soviet Union.

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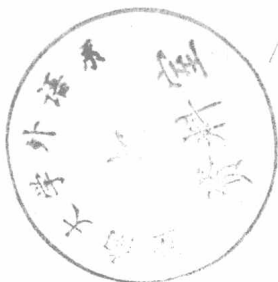


Short Masterpieces by
TOLSTOY

TRANSLATED BY MARGARET WETTLIN

Introduction by F. D. Reeve

A LAUREL EDITION



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INTRODUCTION

In 1903, asked by his friend P. I. Biryukov to supply some autobiographical information for the first edition of a book on himself, Tolstoy cited the tone of moral crisis which he felt had pervaded his life and listed four periods into which, he said, his life divided:

. . . Remembering my life, i.e., thinking back on it from the point of view of the good and evil I did, I saw that my life falls into four periods:

That wonderful, especially in comparison to what followed, innocent, joyful, poetic period of childhood up to fourteen.

Then the second—a terrible twenty years or period of vulgar licentiousness, of ambition-serving, vainglory and, chiefly, lust.

Then the third, an eighteen-year period from my marriage to my spiritual birth, a period which from the world's point of view may be called moral, i.e., during these eighteen years I lived a proper, honest family life, not yielding to any of the vices castigated by public opinion, a period during which all my interests were limited to egoistic concern for my family, for augmenting my wealth, for achieving literary success, and to pleasures of all sorts.

And, finally, a fourth, twenty-year period in which I am now and in which I hope to die, from the viewpoint of which I see the whole significance of my past life and which I would not wish to alter in the slight-

est, except in those evil habits acquired by me in previous periods.

. . . I think that, despite great inadequacies, such an autobiography would be more useful for people than all that literary chatter which fills the twelve volumes of my works and to which people nowadays attach undue importance.

Though the reverse is true—the actual importance of Tolstoy's literary work has required that attention be paid to all aspects of his biography—Tolstoy's life itself is a rare and edifying example of aristocracy. In "Two Hussars" the genuine count is the one who has the courage of his passions, the skills of a long memory, and a consciousness of vitality that encompasses in one night a ball at the Marshal's of nobility and wild gypsy dances. The first Count Tourbin extends the privileges of class to affirmation of life: he controls others by sympathy and devotion, asserting his will on them to their satisfaction. He unmasks the fraudulent, risks his own life to emphasize its realness, and pretends to no standards he cannot exemplify by his self-control. A count, he is an aristocrat by birth. His largeness of spirit, his daring, his sophistication, his integrity and love—he goes back to kiss the sleeping Anna Fyodorovna good-bye—his irreverence for the dead and the effete—he appears at the gypsy debauch in Anna Fyodorovna's dead husband's overcoat; he deliberately insults the cavalryman for an attempt at specious friendship—his manner and the sympathies it expresses, define both himself and the sort of aristocracy to which inherited privilege is entirely natural.

The count's son is a travesty of the father. We are kept in suspense to the end of the story by our doubt that the integrity with which the father seized life can be actually subverted by the son's manner. After all, Anna Fyodorovna is now given over to cards and to her daughter with the same simple, even if narrowed, intensity with which she one night gave herself up to a hussar. Liza is a paragon of modesty and rural elegance, but, as Anna Fyodorovna muses, stroking her head, "It isn't what my hair was at her

age . . . Oh, Lizochka, I could wish for you. . . ." The twenty-three-year-old girl, like the twenty-three-year-old boy, not only recalls Anna Fyodorovna's memories and arouses in her the desire to relive the past, but also points up the discrepancy between the past and the present.

At the beginning of the story, this theme is presented by a catalogue of socioeconomic changes which visibly measure changes of manner (deportment). It is recapitulated at the beginning of the second part of the story (chapter nine). The change is considered historically—from 1825 to 1848, from the spirit of the Decembrists to the tone leading up to the Crimean War—and marked by births, deaths, and the usual chronology of our social world. The story as a whole may be read, then, as a study in the meanings of manner. The aristocracy of manner which Tolstoy defines through the first Tourbin fits, partly, Tolstoy as count and especially Tolstoy as a writer, a man whose skill and integrity included all levels of social activity and all habits of thought that shape human life.

The periods into which Tolstoy divided his own life may be considered equivalents to the catalogue of changes given in "Two Hussars." Consciousness of life in all its details—which Tolstoy called his own highest quality—and sympathy for life in terms of an understanding of a harmonizing, eternal, and nonmaterial principle, or God, are analogous to the interlacing of details of manner and the pattern of life which this story is about. In the story, as in life, the relations are neither infinite nor nonmaterial, which Tolstoy's *theory* about their spiritual source suggests they must be. In his notebook for July 1908, however, among passages celebrating virtue and exhorting all men to live in God, he notes laconically: "Can't feel sorry for flies—there's a limit." It is the "fly"-quality in the cavalryman for which the first Tourbin slaps him down. It is this improper claim to possession which Tolstoy feels required by his own nature to hound down and expose, and which forms a central thread in all of the stories presented here.

"Two Hussars" was written in St. Petersburg in the spring of 1856. Tolstoy had moved to the capital in the late fall

of 1855 and was traveling in the best literary and social circles. His earlier stories had given him immediate recognition and extensive praise. "Two Hussars," published in the May 1856 issue of *The Contemporary*, was saluted by the literary world but adversely criticized by the social. Dedicated to Tolstoy's sister Mariya Nikolayevna and signed "Count Lev Tolstoy," the story had as epigraph two lines from an 1819 poem by Denis Davydov, a campaigner against Napoleon and himself a dashing figure and poet. Davydov's "Song of an Old Hussar" cites differences between two generations of hussars and refers to Henri Jomini, the then widely known Napoleonic strategist. Davydov says the younger generation is

Smarter now, supposedly,
Yet what do we hear from all?
Jomini, more Jomini,
And of vodka—not at all.

The elder Tourbin is a fictionalized portrait of Fyodor Ivanovich Tolstoy (1782-1846), a first cousin once removed, nicknamed "The American" for an extended voyage he had undertaken—a wild, brave man, a duelist, rake, lover of gypsy singing, and inveterate gambler. In the story, the son is less debauched and less interesting than the father. Although we know, of course, with whom Tolstoy's sympathies lie, it is from an entry in his diary on May 16, 1856 that we know definitely how he felt about the story. He cites Truzson as having "said perfectly that the second hussar is portrayed lovelessly."

The stories presented here document the scope, the perseverance, and the acuity of Tolstoy's examination of the actual and the possible relations between a man and the society which gives him his living. They sharpen our understanding of the power of Tolstoy's literary universe—of that vision which he was continually refurnishing with absurd (when isolated) fancies and strange political notions, that vision which yet in his writings bears down brilliantly on almost all parts of our own lives.

The stories here are not particularly "Russian"; they reach through beauty of language and literary style to exemplify terms and values celebrated in any Western country. If you will, their power is peculiarly Tolstoyan—a haunting search for "truth" moves each story.

These stories all present their search within the context of habitual lives in the world of the upper and upper-middle classes—even Yardstick, though "an ugly duckling," is an upper-class horse—and in the forms of social activity by which members of those classes express their personal power and desires for self-fulfillment. Tolstoy, of course, was a member of the upper class. His ethical studies were analyses of the obligations of the individual in regard both to necessary and possible social functions, but we understand the substance of his scholarship only through his transformation of it into fiction.

Tolstoy's own notes and letters all certify that the source, so to speak, for "A Happy Married Life" was his affection for and near-engagement to Valeriya Arsenyeva, a girl eight years younger than he. The relationship was finally terminated—whether before or during his work on "A Happy Married Life" (1857?-1858-59) is not accurately known—but the available biographical facts contradict the substance of the experience given in the story. Valeriya Arsenyeva was, apparently, not clever or imaginative or resourceful; after having broken with her, Tolstoy was left with a certain indifference, even dislike of her. In the story, of course, the marriage is repaired as the romance ends. The moving force behind the "plot" is Masha's energy and passion, her desire to possess herself. Young and naïve, she has to proceed through the social school Sergei Mikhailich has already passed, in order to be at all aware of the limits she may claim to that self which she would be master of and to that position in the world to which she asserts she has a just right.

If there be weakness in the story, it is, I think, that the authority by which she proffers her claims is obscure—we grasp this by comparing the resolution of "A Happy Married Life" with the end of *Anna Karenina*. In both, an older

husband and a lovely young bride move onto an unexpected plane of understanding through affection for their infant children—symbols of their status and of the future—and through awareness of mutual support of one set of values. The title “A Happy Married Life” is fitted ironically to the narrative, as its only use indicates. Sergei Mikhailich is having an argument with Masha (chapter seven): “You . . . *sacrifice* (he stressed the word) . . . and so do I. What could be prettier? A contest as to who is more magnanimous. What other happy married life is there?”

Masha’s complaint is obliquely put as criticism of her husband’s weak will. She says that he betrayed her by tolerating her inquisitiveness and by allowing her to satisfy what she called her wish to “live.” The wish is satisfied, though it leads to nothing conventionally more serious than a declaration of love by a stranger. However, Masha interprets her desires as themselves the instruments and measures of betrayal and reproaches her husband for not having kept her in his possession when he had the authority to do so. He, in turn, denies the validity of his authority—all along, Masha has appealed to conventional definitions; indeed, that is how and why she married—if the passion it protects is gone. At the end, their love is reaffirmed but their passion is exhausted.

The irony of the story is that nothing has happened—the conventions which restrict Masha’s search for life turn out to be finally and wholly adequate for her. Like her, her husband, who greatly feared his happiness would change, finds new happiness in the tranquillity of sure affection. Husband and wife have come to possess each other more than they at first desired—a carnal attraction and desire for self-assertion has changed into the maintenance of a condition in which each partner is gratefully possessed in peace by the other.

By March 1859, Tolstoy had finished the first draft of “A Happy Married Life” and read it at “evenings” in the drawing rooms of relatives and friends in St. Petersburg. At first delighted by his new composition, Tolstoy turned sharply against it—even considered publishing it under a pseudo-

nym not to sully his reputation—and, in a letter to Botkin on May 3, 1859, wrote, having received the proofs of the second part, that “I saw what shameful crap, what a blotch, not just as writing, but as morality, this foul composition is . . . I’m now buried both as a writer and as a man. This is for certain. Especially since the 1st part is even worse. . . .” To his relative A. A. Tolstaya he wrote that, on rereading, the story “appeared such shameful filth that I can’t pull myself together from shame and, I think, I’ll never write again.”

Of course, he did go on writing, and much of his indignation was directed not only against himself but also against the world—as in the story “Lucerne.” In May 1856, not long after he had finished “Two Hussars,” Tolstoy noted in his diary that he wanted to write the story of a horse. Horse stories were rather popular in the 1850’s and 1860’s, as Eikhenbaum has pointed out. Tolstoy’s idea, which was so vivid and sympathetic that at one point Turgenev was prompted to say, “Lev Nikolayevich, really, at some time you were a horse yourself,” was given further impetus and shape by the story of Kholstomer, which he probably heard from one of the Stakhoviches, his friends.

“Yardstick” (“Kholstomer”), dedicated to the memory of the writer M. A. Stakhovich, goes back to an account related by the writer’s brother, A. A. Stakhovich, a great horse breeder in Oryol province and founder of the Petersburg Racing Club. Stakhovich had heard of a great horse named Kholstomer who, in the early 1800’s, had covered 200 sazhen (about 2½ furlongs) in 30 seconds. After much investigation, he had learned that a stallion called Muzhik I, born in 1803 out of Baba by Lyubezny I and gelded in 1812, had been nicknamed Kholstomer by its owner Count Orlov for its great stride—as if it were measuring off *kholsty*, or big squares of burlap. M. A. Stakhovich prepared an outline for a story but was killed by his serfs in 1858 before he had written further.

Tolstoy returned to his notion for a horse story after a ride from Moscow to Yasnaya Polyana with A. A. Stakhovich in 1859 or 1860, during which Stakhovich recounted

to Tolstoy his brother's projected "The Adventures of a Piebald Gelding." In spring 1863, in the midst of settling down to new family life, Tolstoy worked on the story but, he felt, unsuccessfully. By 1864, the story was finished. After a fruitless attempt at publishing it (in a magazine that never got started), it lay in Tolstoy's desk until 1885, when his wife brought it out in the third volume of her edition of Tolstoy's works (1886). The story was checked by A. A. Stakhovich, and Tolstoy was helped in historical details by Stakhovich's son: "My son stood behind his chair and in ecstasy watched the wonderful lines flow out onto the paper; and the great writer would keep saying to him with a smile: '*There's something for you, and now something more.*'"

The story is both sentimental and fantastic, of course: the history of a creature who must outlive his glory in what a politician has recently called "the long twilight struggle" and who communicates with other horses in a skillful Russian literary style. The story is poignant and moving, behind its apparent simplicity, because of Tolstoy's skill in manipulating the point of view: we "see" Yardstick as author of his autobiography, as an outsider among the other horses, as the mere property of several owners (shifts in price reflect shifts in owners' viewpoints), as a romantic figure, as a beast or bundle of expendable energy, as an annoying job or duty for the stableboy, as the "subject" of a story, as a symbol of the change that marks all life, culminating in the knacker's complaint about the quality of the hide and the parallel but "useless" death of Serpukhovskoi, who, like the horse, has lost his central function in life and has no resources to find another. The story is highly moral, illustrating the inevitability of life's continuing on any terms except those of loss of consciousness. The horse accedes to his death with a natural grace which the man has long ago abandoned by turning love into self-pity and adventure into drink.

In 1895, Tolstoy published a story that indirectly comments on "Yardstick" and explicitly extends the moral to human life. In "The Master and the Workman," Brekhunov