

NAXOS
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**CLASSIC
FICTION**

Leo Tolstoy
**The Kreutzer
Sonata**

Read by **Jonathan Oliver**

**THE
COMPLETE
CLASSICS**

UNABRIDGED



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1	<i>The Kreutzer Sonata</i> by Leo Tolstoy read by Jonathan Oliver	7:34
2	The train moved faster and faster...	7:27
3	Chapter 2	5:40
4	'But you are talking all the time about physical love...'	5:44
5	Chapter 3	3:23
6	Chapter 4	6:50
7	Chapter 5	7:47
8	Chapter 6	3:26
9	Chapter 7	3:02
10	Chapter 8	3:27
11	Chapter 9	4:57
12	Chapter 10	3:58
13	Chapter 11	8:55
14	Chapter 12	6:26
15	'It began during the first days...'	1:44
16	Chapter 13	8:21
17	Chapter 14	7:35
18	Chapter 15	6:09
19	Chapter 16	9:37
20	Chapter 17	5:55

21	Chapter 18	4:58
22	Chapter 19	8:08
23	Chapter 20	9:10
24	Chapter 21	6:09
25	'Had I been pure, I should not have understood...'	7:41
26	Chapter 22	3:49
27	'For the first time I wished to give physical impression...'	3:45
28	Chapter 23	9:19
29	Chapter 24	6:14
30	Chapter 25	6:08
31	'Oh, I am afraid, afraid of railway carriages...'	4:43
32	Chapter 26	5:09
33	'Previously I had doubted and thought...'	4:56
34	Chapter 27	5:57
35	'When people say they don't remember what they do...'	7:26
36	Chapter 28	8:29
37	Afterword by the Author	8:38
38	How about the human race?	6:52

Total time: 3:55:49

Leo Tolstoy

(1828–1910)

The Kreutzer Sonata

Leo Tolstoy holds a unique place in European – possibly world – literature. Many of his books have the unquestioned status of masterpieces, and in Russia he is revered as much as Shakespeare and Elgar are in Britain, or Goethe and Wagner in Germany, or Zola, Flaubert, Stendhal and Debussy combined in France. But he has a similar hold on the spiritual as well as the artistic heart and mind, making him almost a kind of Gandhi or Luther. This is not just in a metaphorical sense, and not just in terms of the fervour with which his devotees adored his writings and followed his actions; in the later years of his life he became a figurehead for a new kind of Christianity, and, having had his works banned by the secular authorities, he was excommunicated by the Church.

He cannot have been surprised – after all, he wanted to abolish governments

and the Church altogether. He wrote against the prevailing orthodoxy (political and religious) in a largely totalitarian state, and it was only the extremely special regard in which he was held by the public that stopped him from receiving harsher penalties than bans. He took up the cause of passive resistance to evil, and would be an influence on Gandhi when the latter decided to adopt a non-violent approach in his attempt to gain independence for India. Tolstoy's beginnings, however, were starkly different from the ascetic conclusion.

He was born to the gentry, on the family estate, and educated privately before attending Kazan University. But even there he showed a displeasure at the way things were run and the courses were taught – and he left before graduating. He was well-read and intelligent, but was also

in a position to enjoy considerable privilege, which he did. His remembrances of this dissolute time in his life later caused him profound distress and regret. His actions went far beyond youthful indiscretions or drink-fuelled gambling and debauchery; there were duels and even a suggestion of a murder.

It was a decision to travel with his brother to the Caucasus that appears to have triggered a greater moral sense. The countryside and especially the peasants and their way of life seemed to stir something profound in him. Warfare would, too. He joined the army and saw active service during the Crimean War. And a final shift in his thinking was inspired by trips to Europe in the late 1850s and early 60s. Apart from giving Tolstoy a sense of the world outside the repressive and inward-looking Russia of the time, his European experiences allowed some of Tolstoy's angry views to crystallise, thanks to the sympathetic understanding of other European intellectuals and artists. He determined never to serve the State again, started to believe in the possibility of change through education (he went on

to found an experimental school on his family's lands), and began to write.

Although he would never free himself completely from the autobiographical in his later works, his earliest were quite specifically memoirs. They were not as comprehensive as his diaries, however. These he kept assiduously, and in a token of fervent honesty he showed them to his bride-to-be on the eve of their marriage. She discovered not merely that he had had considerable sexual experience before he met her, but that he had fathered a child by one of the serfs who still worked on his farm. Sonya dealt with that, however, and with much more besides. Their marriage, though it gave them 13 children, was deeply unhappy, despite the evident initial attraction. The honeymoon period lasted long enough for her to keep his business affairs under control, which involved managing his experimental schools and allowing him the freedom to write. The literary world owes Sonya an incalculable debt. While she was beside him, he wrote *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. These two contain evidence of what were to become his later preoccupations

– pacifism, the corrupting capacity of government, the foolhardy conventions that stifle people, and the dead hand of dogma that kills mankind's relationship with God.

These themes become more and more explicit towards the end of *Anna Karenina*, the theological one in particular. When he had finished *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy began to shift away from the novel as a narrative form, and wrote shorter fiction, essays, pamphlets, parables, and tracts on art and religion. His shorter work also became more directly a reflection of his personal beliefs. *The Devil*, *Father Sergius*, *How Much Land Does a Man Need?*, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* and *The Kreutzer Sonata* were all written as a means of illustrating Tolstoy's shift towards a more fundamental theology, which included an ascetic of self-denial. This did not stop people from misreading *The Kreutzer Sonata*, and seeing it as a call for freedom from restraint. In it, the central character, Pozdnyshv, is travelling on a train when he overhears a conversation about love, marriage and divorce. He joins the conversation, and is startlingly frank about

how his initial love for his wife turned to a bitter mix of desire and hatred; how women's dresses arouse men's lust; and how music can inflame people's passions, even so much as to change their nature. This is a matter that touches him deeply, since his wife met a violinist with whom she would play Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata*, and Pozdnyshv becomes ragingly jealous. The opposing forces of his carnality and his desire for moral behaviour eventually drive Pozdnyshv to an act of explosive violence, for which he is seeking a kind of atonement.

Chekhov recognised the artistic strengths of *The Kreutzer Sonata*; but Theodore Roosevelt didn't – he said it 'could only have been written by a man of a diseased moral nature' – and the book was banned in certain states in America. There is a powerful irony in the idea of Tolstoy – who was trying to re-establish a purer connection between God and Man – being chastised as a degenerate by the Russian Church, by the Tsarist autocracy, and by the democratic free-for-allers of America all at the same time. While *The Kreutzer Sonata* seems extreme in its

expression of disgust at the nature of sex, and the furies it unleashes on marriage and lust, it still shows Tolstoy's great strengths: his unbowed intensity of feeling and his grasp of what happens in people's minds and hearts.

The last 10 or 15 years of his life saw an even greater determination to follow the principles he espoused, and even greater deterioration of relations with his family. He was disgusted with the sophistication and falsity of his early work, renounced possessions and money, and eventually (at the age of 82) left home with a daughter and his doctor to fulfil a long-held desire to become a wandering ascetic. A few days later at a railway station, he succumbed to suspected pneumonia, and died shortly afterwards, still refusing to see his wife. His home became a place of pilgrimage, and in a sense it still is; for anyone who loves literature must pay their respects to Tolstoy. It is not what he would have wanted – but then nothing ever was.

Notes by Roy McMillan



Jonathan Oliver's theatre credits include playing Claudius or Polonius in *Hamlet* and the Brother in *The Seagull* for the acclaimed Factory Theatre. His theatre work also includes two seasons at Shakespeare's Globe, the title role in Theatre Point's Corsican *Hamlet* at the Avignon Festival, and new plays at Nottingham Playhouse and Theatre 503. His radio credits include Roy McMillan's production of *Becket* and *The Girl at the Lion d'Or*, directed by Frank Stirling. His recordings for Naxos AudioBooks include *Ivanhoe* and *Descartes: an Introduction*.

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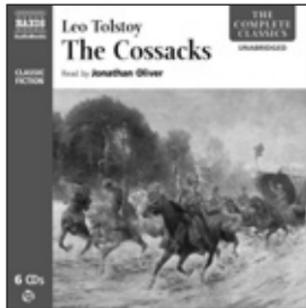
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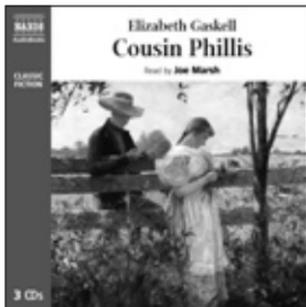
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Genevieve Helsby

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Leo Tolstoy

The Kreutzer Sonata

Read by **Jonathan Oliver**

It is hardly possible to find anything of equal importance in conception and beauty of execution. Apart from its artistic merits which are in places amazing, we should be grateful for the story alone, for it stimulates thought extremely ~ Anton Chekhov

Chekhov was understating the case – no other work in Russia inspired such outrage as Tolstoy's novella of desire and disgust, music and murder.

Marriage is a hellish trap, lust the hideous bait, and music an aphrodisiac which rouses passions that are best left undisturbed. So says Pozdnyshov as he relates the story of his wife's affair to his fellow train passengers.

Radical in its dissection of conventional hypocrisies, and intense in its discussion of Tolstoy's fundamentalist views, *The Kreutzer Sonata* was banned in Russia before its publication, and is startling even now.



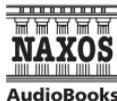
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