Jesse Stavis, University of Wisconsin-Madison

"This Will Be the Story of Chertkov": Resurrection as a Critique of Tolstoyanism

The dominant tendency in the critical literature on *Resurrection*, Lev Tolstoy's third and final major novel, has been to view the work as a transparent attempt to recast "Tolstoyan" political and moral teachings in the form of a fictional narrative. Critics who have embraced this interpretation generally argue that the novel's protagonist, Prince Dmitrii Nekhliudov, is essentially an autobiographical projection who functions as a mouthpiece for the author. My paper argues against this interpretation by elaborating on an enigmatic remark that the critic and philosopher Nikolai Strakhov made after hearing Tolstoy read an early draft of the novel in 1895. "In one form or another," wrote Strakhov, "this will be the story of [Tolstoy's chief disciple Vladimir] Chertkov." By linking Nekhliudov with the leading representative of Tolstoyan activism, Strakhov implies that the novel goes beyond a mere reframing of the author's late ideology. Rather, it presents a more complex and nuanced treatment of the inherent tensions between Tolstoy's frequently stated opposition to direct involvement in political and social reform and his participation in a movement that was inexorably linked to such reforms. My paper expands on Strakhov's interpretation by examining several instances in the novel in which Tolstoy appears to subtly criticize the Tolstoyan enterprise. Ultimately, I argue, the protagonist can be seen as both an autobiographical projection whom Tolstoy uses to advocate for social and political reform and as a critical representation of Chertkov's vision of Tolstoyan activism. The novel thus simultaneously functions as both a vehicle for spreading Tolstoyan political views and a means for the author to explore the limitations of Tolstoyanism itself.