

Title: Performance and the Crisis of Modern Subjectivity in *Kreutzer Sonata*
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Kreutzer Sonata stands much of Tolstoy criticism on its head. Tolstoy is widely read as an optimistic realist who believed common sense and simple living could solve life's main problems. A key first step towards virtue is the individual's pursuit of his authenticity; the drive to elucidate true motives and desires purifies morally because it clears away false social accretions upon the authentic self. As a corollary Tolstoy abhorred literary modernism with its focus on artifice, ambiguity, and evil.

Kreutzer Sonata suggests the truisms are wrong. The story is precociously modernist in its fascination with the gaps and breakdowns within rational moral thought (Tolstoy's own). At the heart of the problem it exposes authenticity in the Tolstoyan sense as non-existent.

Authenticity is undermined by role-playing and dissembling. Behind every role-play we typically imagine a motive, hence some authenticity. But when pretence becomes second nature, a *permanent* state of being, even the dissembler himself can no longer trace anything he genuinely wants or believes. The story paints all human relations as ruses; the wife and the musician are dissembling, but so are all mating couples, all married couples, all artists, women, Jews, human beings. With the adulterers the hero himself lies so instinctively (there are numerous examples) that he cannot divine what he is lying *for*. Nor can he dig down in his own mind to the stable desires that would signify a self: he wants a woman, but gets one and is unsatisfied; wants to get rid of the woman, but does and is no happier; thinks he prizes chastity, but can't help promoting families with lots of children – while forgetting about his own children; demands the commandments be followed but proudly breaks them; wants to kill his wife's lover but not enough to do it in the wrong footwear. A crisis of authenticity is at the heart of this story with modernism's unreliable first-person narrator, whose flawed field of vision is all we're allowed, a story whose "stolen" title suggests everything in our world lacks an authentic self, an artwork that tells us not to trust artworks and that perhaps, with the sad exception of lust, *nothing* in the modern psyche is genuine.