



## The Power of Darkness

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### Places Discussed

Russian village. The setting of the play is an unnamed, large Russian village, in which peasants live and behave in a manner disrespectful of common decency. They mistreat each other whenever the opportunity arises, tolerate immoral marriages, steal from each other, and even murder one another when it serves their purposes. Himself a Russian count, Tolstoy underwent a profound religious conversion late in life and preached in his works a faithful following of Christian virtues and morality. Having lived most of his life in the Russian provinces, he was also keenly aware of the backwardness of the peasants and of their wont to follow their impulses regardless of the consequences.

Although Russia's serfs were freed from virtual slavery in 1861 and expected to show great improvement in their life, there had been little progress when Tolstoy wrote his play. In the character of Akim, a simple, illiterate, inarticulate, and humble villager, who keeps reminding everyone that a man should have a soul and follow God's laws, Tolstoy presents a model to be emulated. Akim's insistence on righting the wrong brings his son, Nikita, who had committed several crimes, including the murder of his newborn baby, to a sincere confession and repentance at the climax of the play. What saves *The Power of Darkness* from being merely a preachy and moralistic exercise is Tolstoy's flair for dramatic action, compact plot, and creation of distinctive characters. He presents his Christian message indirectly and dramatically, as a depiction of universal human tragedy.

### Bibliography:

Christian, R. F. *Tolstoy: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1969. A starting place for critical research.

De Courcel, Martine. *Tolstoy: The Ultimate Reconciliation*. Translated by Peter Levi. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988. A long and thorough discussion of Tolstoy, public and critical reception of *The Power of Darkness*, and the events of Tolstoy's life that surrounded the play and the time immediately following it.

Noyes, George Rapall. *Tolstoy*. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 1968. Connects the many works of Tolstoy and refers to biographical information pertinent to the understanding of his writings. Composed greatly of Tolstoy's published writings, diaries, and letters. Explains the theme of conversion in *The Power of Darkness* and the dramatic differences between this play and Tolstoy's novels.

Simmons, Ernest J. *Introduction to Tolstoy's Writings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968. Discusses all the works of Tolstoy that have proved to have enduring significance. Devotes a chapter to Tolstoy's dramatic writings. Also discusses the literary devices and theatrical production of *The Power of Darkness*.

Troyat, Henri. *Tolstoy*. Translated by Nancy Amphoux. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967. Gives biographical information concerning the time of writing *The Power of Darkness* and Tolstoy's intentions for it. Includes many illustrations.

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