

# Excerpt terms and conditions

This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

---

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

---

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest you read the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

# **THE TOLSTOY STORY PLAY**

**by**

**V. Glasgow Koste**



**The Dramatic Publishing Company**  
Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

**\*\*\* NOTICE \*\*\***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty fees are given in our current catalogue and are subject to change without notice. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed anytime it is acted before an audience. All inquiries concerning amateur and stock rights should be addressed to: THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, 311 Washington St., Woodstock, Illinois 60098.

**COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR HIS AGENT  
THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES.**

This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including but not limited to the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication, and reading are reserved. On all programs this notice should appear: "Produced by special arrangement with THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois."

©MCMXCI by  
V. GLASGOW KOSTE  
Printed in the United States of America  
*All Rights Reserved*  
(THE TOLSTOY STORY PLAY)

ISBN 0-87129-043-X

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



With the support of the  
Indiana Arts Commission and  
National Endowment for the Arts.

*THE TOLSTOY STORY PLAY*'s development was supported by an Individual Artist's Master Fellowship grant from the Indiana Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts, and an award by the TADA! Theatre of New York City (Theatre And Dance Alliance, Inc.), where it was given a staged reading.

The play was first produced by Eastern Michigan University's Theatre of the Young (TOY) and by the Wings Youththeatre of Escondido, California.

## FROM THE AUTHOR

*THE TOLSTOY STORY PLAY* is in the story theatre form/style represented in the commercial theatre by such Broadway productions as Paul Sills' *Story Theatre* and Sondheim's *Into the Woods*, though the form itself originated long before, in humbler circumstances.

*THE TOLSTOY STORY PLAY* juxtaposes and sometimes fuses dramatic and narrative modes in a play which is not only composed of stories, but also is *about* Story as human art, craft, and survival tool. Its theme is that an individual's "real" life is in itself a complex, primal story, made of overlapping, interwoven stories, lived and to some degree authored, acted, and directed by its protagonist. So this play's form and subject fuse.

When an actor transforms into a character while narrating his own moves and moods in the third person, the merging of outer/inner, involved/objective is experienced and witnessed, as it is in dream and in child's play. The style is at once primitive and sophisticated—entertaining, accessible, and surprising.

*Note: See "SYNOPSIS," "PRODUCTION NOTES" and "QUOTATIONS" at the back of the script for more detailed information.*

**The Tolstoy Story Play is dedicated to  
a great American storyteller  
whose storytelling ancestors came from  
The Old Country of Tolstoy.**

# **THE TOLSTOY STORY PLAY**

(NOTE: The play is written as if for a company of six, but it can work for a much larger cast or a minimum of five actors playing a minimum of twenty-one characters. Every scene (story) requires a "teller," who may be played by different actors.)

## **CHARACTERS**

### **TELLERS**

**THE MONARCH** (either a king or queen)

**THE CON ARTISTS**

**THE HAPPY WOMAN** (or man)

**THE GRANDPARENT**

**THE CHILD**

**THE WOLF** (or wolves)

**THE FARMER**

**THE GOVERNOR**

**THE GOVERNOR'S TEAM**

**THE GLUTTON**

**THE COLLEGE STUDENT**

**THE PARENT**

**THE STREET PERSON**

**THE MILLIONAIRE**

**THE JUDGE**

**THE OFFICER**

**THE ADVISORS**

**THE THINKING KING** (or Queen)

**THE ENEMY**

**THE WISE ONE**

# THE TOLSTOY STORY PLAY

AT OPENING: *Unseen voices are heard.*

ALL. STORIES...STORIES...stories...stories...stories...  
stories...*(In haunting, chanting series of overlap and echo, with different volumes, pitches, qualities, melodies: a collage of sound made from the word—as evocative as its meanings, and culminating in all voices combined in harmony or unison.)* STORIES!

*(ONE enters.)*

ONE *(mysteriously)*. ...once-upon-a-time,

*(TWO enters.)*

TWO *(in the same mood)*. —long-ago stories...

*(THREE enters.)*

THREE *(in the same haunting tone)*. —of faraway people...

*(FOUR enters briskly, in an abrupt change to bright, down-to-earth tone/pace).*

FOUR. —and ALSO guess-what-happened-just-now stories...

(*FIVE enters.*)

FIVE (*in FOUR's mood*). —of us people...

ONE. —and you people, HERE!

TWO. And NOW! Like, for instance, you know how it is when somebody all of a sudden says—oh, maybe they'll say—

THREE and TWO (*together*). You're not gonna believe this!

THREE (*playing a "real" every-day scene*). Do you know what she says to me? She says—(*Stops, marvelling at the memory relived.*) She actually said—(*Another incredulous stop.*)

FOUR (*after split-second, bursts in*). Yeah? WHAT?? What did she say?

THREE. You're not gonna believe it, I'm telling you—

FOUR. TELL me!

THREE. I still can't believe this, it's unbelievable.

FOUR. You're unbelievable! (*Turning to FIVE.*) Do you believe this? S/he\* won't tell me what—

THREE. I *am* telling you, she—

FIVE (*from outside the scene*). Stories! Ordinary stories...(*All OTHERS speak urgently—in undertones and whispers—to each other.*)...all around every day, listen to them!

THREE. All right, here's what happened, let me *tell* you—

\* Casting can be gender-free throughout: a queen instead of a king, a woman as judge, etc.

FOUR. *Tell me already!*

THREE. She says I started the whole thing—I nearly fell over, I...

FOUR. She said that?? She said *you*—

THREE. Am I standing here telling you? I swear, that's exactly what she said; she said—

FOUR. I don't believe it. (*To ONE.*) Listen to this—you know what s/he says Trina says I said? About the fight?

ONE. How should I know? What s/he said Trina said you said? (*To THREE.*) What *did* you say she said?

THREE. She said I started it! I couldn't believe what I was hearing—she said—

ONE. She never said that. I was there. What she said was, she said—

TWO (*entering scene*). You're not gonna believe what happened to me on the way over here! You know how Laura had a doctor's appointment because her mother's brother-in-law—

ONE. Wait a sec, wouldn't that be her uncle?

TWO. Not exactly, because—well, maybe he's her *step*-uncle-in-law—

ONE. You know what Laura told me about breaking up with—

FIVE. Hold it! Just a minute, you guys! (*Direct question to AUDIENCE MEMBER.*) Do you ever tell stories? (*Waits for response, reacts to it, then to another.*) Do you? (*Responds to whatever the reaction.*) Any kind? (*To another.*) True ones?

ONE. I saw him wave at that girl over there when they were coming into the gym (or theatre or auditorium) before. And then she—

TWO. Really?

THREE. No! (*To AUDIENCE*). S/he's kidding. S/he just made that up to get you interested, s/he's just getting you in the mood for—

ONE. It's TRUE.

FOUR. What's true?

ONE. It's true that I just made it up. Gotcha!

THREE. That reminds me of a joke I just heard, from—

TWO. Me, too! (*This triggers ALL into addressing the following, in rapid overlapping succession, to some segment of the audience.*)

ONE. Did you hear the one about the—(*Continues the telling—as each of the OTHERS do—with quiet, intense directness, to her/his part of the audience.*)

FOUR. It seems there was this traveling salesman, and—

TWO. There was this used-car salesman in Ypsilanti,\* and—

THREE. —this computer sales rep from Newark, and she—

ONE. What happened was that—

TWO. —and it came to pass that—

THREE. You remember that old pink Packard Uncle John drove for nineteen years, and—

FOUR. Will you ever forget the look on her face when she opened that door and saw us—

ONE. That's what you told him—you were only three years old and you walked straight up there, bold as brass, and said—

THREE. This happened before you were born—

TWO. Once upon a time, a long time ago—

FIVE. Hear and attend and listen, Best Beloved—

\* Name of performance place.

ALL (*in overlapping succession, so that there's almost an echo effect*). STORIES!

(*SIX has entered, lurks, listens, tries to enter in.*)

TWO. Ever since people made up language and started talking—

THREE. *Millions of years ago, I bet—*

FOUR. You should have seen this dinosaur—I mean, all of a sudden I hear this—well, actually, I thought at first it was THUNDER—

FIVE. Even before *history* they were telling—

ONE. *History, get it? (Indicating AUDIENCE MEMBER.) His Story?*

THREE. Oh yeah, *history!* *That's* where that came from! I never thought of that!

FOUR (*indicating another AUDIENCE MEMBER*). Or *herstory*.

FIVE. I knew that.

TWO. *Their stories, our stories—*

ONE (*pedantic teacherly shtick*). Today's "theirstory" lesson deals with—

TWO. —true stories, tall stories, folk tales—

THREE. Wherever there's folks—

FOUR. —there's tales—

FIVE. Wherever there's—(*At last noticing SIX.*) Don't you ever talk?

SIX (*furtively, spy/gangster style*). Leo sent me.

ONE (*keying into the same tone. looking around nervously*). Leo??

SIX. Yeah, Leo. Tolstoy. (*No reaction.*) Leo Tolstoy, remember?

FIVE. Of course! The one that wrote that thousand-page novel called *War and Peace*, right?

SIX. That's the one.

TWO. I read the Peace parts.

THREE. I read the War parts.

ONE. I read it all.

FOUR. A *thousand pages*?!

ONE. Small print. Couldn't put it down.

FIVE. I couldn't pick it up!

SIX. BUT what gets me is, he also wrote a *short story one third of one page* long.

ONE. That's short, all right.

TWO. I could do that.

SIX. You could write Tolstoy's fables and tales?? You could write a Tolstoy story???

TWO. No. My *own* story. A (actor's last name) story. My story.

THREE (*pronouncing it like "mystery"*). Mystery?

TWO (*beguiled*). Hey!

SIX. Anyway, Leo sent me. Leo T., remember? That's what we're here for?

TWO. Oh, that's right! (*They quickly group up and plunge.*)

ALL. We are a troupe—

ONE. —of timely,

TWO. —timeless,

THREE. —true—

FOUR. —or tall

ALL (*mysteriously*). TALE TELLERS—

FIVE. Tempted—

ONE. —to attempt

TWO. —to tackle,

THREE. —to TELL—

ALL. —together—

FOUR. —these twice-told—

FIVE. —tales,

ONE. —these Tolstoy tales.

SIX. Leo sent us!

ALL. THESE TOLSTOY STORIES!

ONE. —from a hundred years ago, *seven*—

THREE. That's magic!

ONE. —seven stories,

TWO. —from the far side of the world—

FOUR (*with a glorious Slavic accent*). —from old Russia—

FIVE. —long ago,

ONE. —far away RUSSIA! (*This triggers the COMPANY to break apart all at once, each simultaneously beginning to tell—in expressive, improvised, Slavic-sounding language—a story to a part of the audience. This GOES ON, sustained for a time by the fun and fascination of the flavorsome sound and the verve of the tellers. Continues, with a visual “CUT” sign, some difficulty in bringing the COMPANY back to focus and finally, a blast from a coach whistle.*) HOWEVER!

TWO. —we're telling Tolstoy's tales—

FIVE. —in *English!*—because we're in England?

TWO. —in *American*, because we're in America—

ALL. NOW! HERE!

FOUR (*after a beat*). STORY ONE!

TELLER. So one time there was this king.

(*KING is entering mood, character, action.*)

TELLER. And he got sick—I mean *seriously sick*. And he kept *on* being sick; he *stayed* sick. With the miseries.

He felt so downright depressed, so desperately despondent, so simply *sad* all the time, that he got to where he didn't care *what* happened. Which he knew was bad for his people. So he says, he says—

KING. Half my treasury! I'll give a whole half of the whole thing to whoever cures me—anybody that cures me, they get a whole half of the whole thing, I'm talking a straight 50% here! Tax-free!

TELLER. So his CONSultants\* CONvened to CONfer, see CON 1. These CON artists—I mean EXPERTS—got together—(*ALL circling around, pacing back and forth, colliding, etc., as they mumble in undertone gibberish, under the following lines.*)

TELLER. —for diagnostic discussion...

CON 2. —and eclectic encounters...

CON 3. —and panicky panels...

TELLER. —to figure out how to cure the king.

CON 1. They had several seminars where...

CON 2. —lots of learned language got loose-lipped around.

TELLER. The experts were ex-spurting—spouting out loud—I'm talking TALKING here, a continuous colloquium...

CON 3. I mean, this was no *simple* symposium! It went *on*—

ALL CONS (*rotating, fast*). —and on and on and on and on and—

TELLER (*breaking into their midst*). —'til *finally*, at *last*, the oldest expert—

\* More than three actors can be "experts" if the company is large, with lines shared among them.

CON 1 (*modestly bragging*). —professor emeritus, Medical Center, University of—

TELLER. —came up with a prescription. S/he says wisely—

CON 1. You know that wise old saying—

ALL (*canon-style, under*). Yeah, yeah, yeah?

CON 1. —about *walk* in another man's—

TELLER (*testily*). —or woman's, as the case may be—

CON 1. —shoes—

ALL. Yeah, yeah, yeah?

CON 1. —and then you'll understand that man—

TELLER (*rising irritation*). —or woman—

CON 1. —and *be* as that man—(*Anticipating.*)—or WOMAN—

TELLER. Right!

ALL. Yeah, yeah, yeah?

CON 1. Well, so all we have to do is find a happy man—

ALL. —or WOMAN—

CON 1. —and bring his—

TELLER (*desperately*). —or HER—

CON 1. —*shoes* to the king,

CON 2. —and the king can *walk* in them, *see*, and—

CON 3. —he'll be a happy man—

CON 2. —instead of the miserable monarch he's been lately.

CON 1. Right, he'll be well again—not sick and rich, not only wealthy—but *healthy* and wealthy and—oh no, not wise, *we're* his wise—

ALL CONS. CONSultants, RIGHT! (*They shake hands, slap backs, smack palms all around.*)

TELLER (*getting them back on track*). SO the search was on! (*They search.*) —far and wide they searched. And then wide and far! *Then*—they *researched*—

CON 2 (*stopping, annoyed*). AGAIN?

TELLER (*relentlessly, building*). —researched AGAIN,  
everywhere, tirelessly—

CON 1. I'm tired.

TELLER (*reproachfully, nudging*). —*tirelessly* seeking a  
happy man—

CON 1 (*triumphantly*). —or WOMAN!

TELLER (*chagrined*). Yes. But nowhere could they find a  
single—*person*—

CON 1 (*smugly*). That's it.

TELLER (*sailing on*). —who was really contented with  
what she—

CON 1. —or *he*, as the case—

TELLER (*ignoring this*). If a *person* was wealthy—

PERSON 1. Listen, I'm rich as a troll. (*Eureka reaction  
from CONS.*) But—I have this ulcer, and my blood  
pressure, I just took it, is 212 over—

TELLER. —OR..

PERSON 2. Terrific health!

CON 1. Terrific!

PERSON 2. I'm in Olympic shape—

CON 2. Olympic!!

PERSON 2. Ten on a scale of ten!

CON 3. TEN!!!

PERSON 2. BUT—they cancelled my credit cards...

CON 1. They didn't!

PERSON 2. ...they shut off my electric...

CON 2. They wouldn't!

PERSON 2. ...they're throwing me out of my condo be-  
cause my rent's—

CON 3. They couldn't!

TELLER. —OR..

PERSON 2. Me, I'm richer than Trump\* was, yacht-jet-limo-rich, AND I am in A-1 prime-time health—

ALL CONS (*ecstatic*). AHHHH!

PERSON 3. BUT—have you met my husband (wife)?!

TELLER. —OR..

PERSON 4. I'm wealthy, I'm healthy, my wife (husband) is the angel of my dreams—

ALL CONS. *Ahhhh!*

PERSON 4. —but we have this *son*—he's breaking our hearts, let me tell you, he—

CON 1 (*in despair*). WHAT NEXT?!

TELLER (*overlapping, topping*). FINALLY, all of a sudden—

CON 2. —in a last-ditch effort...

CON 1. —late...

CON 2. —one...

CON 3. —night...

ALL. —the search committee...

TELLER. —was *searching* through this shabby, *poor*...

CON 2. —old broken-down neighborhood—

ALL CONS. —and they heard a voice...

TELLER. —through a poor old broken-down window, saying...

HAPPY WOMAN. Now then. My work's done, I've had a bite to eat, and I thank my lucky stars I can ease on down to a good night's sleep and sweet dreams! What more could anyone want? I ain't rich, and I ain't young, but I am one happy woman (man).

ALL CONS. HALLELUJAH!

CON 3. Get that poor old happy woman's shoes!

\* This reference needs to be kept specific and recognizable; so may need updating.