

# Terror Un-sublimated: Militant Monks, Revolution, and Tolstoy's Final Master Plots

Inessa Medzhibovskaya  
Eugene Lang College, New School

Tolstoy's death, spurred by the unbearable family sufferings of the past four months of his life, put an end to all the creative designs of this man of genius. N. Gusev (Гусев 1937: 142).

You can't mix up these two things: priesthood and Christianity. (Tolstoy to Dushan Makovitsky on June 11, 1905; Маковицкий, 1:310)

Reading an unfinished literary work is an imaginative adventure. As we grapple with the fragments of the artist's unfinished writings our relationship with the unuttered—that which the author did not fully articulate—becomes complicated. In a finished masterpiece, there may be intended silences and calculated narrative chasms to prepare us for an encounter with the unutterable. In an unfinished masterpiece, the unutterable looms over the unuttered. In Tolstoy's case, we are faced with dozens of unrealized plots from his final decade that engage with historically-concrete but unpredictable realities of marvelous proportion—episodes of political violence, revolutions, wars—while maintaining their focus on the intimate and the ordinary, and on the spiritual constants of human life. Tolstoy's very anticipation of death was unspeakably exploratory. The leitmotif of the final years is the thirst for what Tolstoy called “the artistic” (художественное), which lent him a special gentleness with which he superimposed his favorite human situations (searches and quests, conversions and apostasies, prostrated silences, crimes followed by moral

regeneration, discoveries of love followed by dying, etc.) onto the material borrowed from a turbulent reality. In his hands, historical reference is denuded and held up to the court of unfailing moral certainty, and at the same time humanized, made frailer in its proportions and validated artistically. Just like *Hadji Murad* (1906), the last of his longer completed masterpieces, Tolstoy's fragments of 1904-1910, are crowning achievements in the use of psychological realism, but with an admixture of satirical grotesque, combining elements of magic with epic detachment and adventurous solemnity—and all this with an assured allegorical and paradigmatic touch.

In this gallery of texts-in-the-making, one stands out as an eloquent example of Tolstoy's lifelong fascination with the unutterable, emphasizing a connection between an esoteric force and its expression, the most literal of which is indeed the explosion of a terrorist's bomb. The unfinished plot in question concerns a former hieromonk who leaves the church to join the revolution and experiences an epiphany during his execution. This is all that a surviving plan for the story started in January 1909 informs us about. In the eventful months of his penultimate year of life, Tolstoy drafted the first three chapters of an untitled text about the priest. He was unable to settle on a name for the hieromonk, alternating between Ilidor and Isidor, and even Ivan, the priest's secular name (Prince Ivan Tverskoy). The priest's break with the church and his revolutionary career as an agitator and then as a member of a

combat organization, his meeting with the tsar and execution in the symbolic last chapter (the twelfth) are recorded in the plan. From the point of view of plot, the idea of the priest's epiphany and martyrdom was likely the impetus for writing the story.

Only the first chapter, which describes the priest's doubts about his vocation during Mass, is more or less complete. This is hardly the only such cause de célèbre in Tolstoy's oeuvre: We may recall Father Sergius, the eponymous hero and former Prince Stepan Kasatsky of the earlier novella finished in 1898. A similarly intense struggle mistaken by onlookers for religious fervor takes place within the former Prince Ivan Tverskoy; he concludes the service, but is powerless to suppress all signs of inner agony. Immediately after the service, the priest escapes from the adoring parish through the Holy Gates of the iconostasis and immures himself behind the tightly shut door of his cell. There he begins writing a journal documenting his lost faith, which breaks off on a sentence fragment about the absence of a God (нет и нет его) who has failed to reveal Himself (открыться) to the priest. This fictional diary entry is dated quite precisely, September 15, 1902. The emerging story, detailing the crumbling worldview of an aristocrat and member of the military elite, then a failing spiritual doctor, a subversive tramp, imprisoned agitator, member of the radical revolutionary unit with sleep cells abroad—all in one—is gripping. We last see him either rushing to see the sire or killing him, assuming responsibility for his actions and dying as punishment for the crime. The last phrase of the outline for the never-to-be-written chapter twelve states: "Execution and doors smashed." This must be the priest's moment of regained faith, an encounter with the unutterable, God's momentary appearance, or a literal "revealing" if we borrow from the priest's invectives against the hidden God in the diary of the third chapter.

The consistency of corrections in the manuscript shows that despite the drafts' sketchiness and brevity, Tolstoy's decisions were very deliberate. In a research note that appeared on the pages of this journal in 2009, I offered a detailed analysis of the manuscript, the outline for the story, and also all known published variants of the story so as to connect the issue of publication history and significant reading patterns of the surviving drafts by previous editors to the political, historical, religious and aesthetic contexts in which it was done. Based on textological evidence, I corroborated the corrections of redactional errors made by the publishers of Tolstoy's posthumous works (1911-1912) and then found again in the Jubilee edition (1956). In particular, I suggested that the priest's name had to be "Isidor" rather than "Iliodor" and that the reading of the word "doors" in lieu of "robbers" at the very end of Tolstoy's plan for the story was correct.

The potential quality of the artistic representation of the priest's last epiphany suggests that the fragment was far from an abandoned project. There is additional evidence in favor of accepting the view that in January 1909 Tolstoy simply put the plan aside to let it ripen. Pages of his last notepad filled on 24 October (OS) at Optina Pustyn', when fever had already shaken his body and mere hours remained before the final stretch of his flight which was to end at Astapovo, depict a plot about a priest who was converted by a free-thinking man, someone whom the priest himself was trying to convert (PSS 58:123). This was the last, but not the sole, reemergence of the priest associated with a symbolic passage from one worldview to another before or after January 1909, and it is indicative of Tolstoy's preoccupation with recalcitrant characters, riotous elders or troubled priests. So insistent in Tolstoy are the reappearances of these rebellious figures (with or without a cassock), and so remarkable is his pursuance of their elusive psychology and iconic

bearing that the artistic figures and their common plight of angst before doors deserve close examination. Is Tolstoy's interrupted work a case of the terroristic sublime, contentment on the scaffold? But what if the epiphany that Tolstoy intended his priest to have is different from this terroristic substitute? Or is it perhaps a case of terror un-sublimated, when a mass of false excitement is let out through the mysterious open door that is "smashed" by the priest in the last line of the outline?

Doors have a traditionally rich connotative history in Tolstoy's art and thought. These are the metaphysical doors through which Prince Andrey Bolkonsky rehearses his exits from, and returns to, life (Vinitsky 80-86, Галаган 96-98) and the doors through which Natasha Rostova comes back to life, having overcome her grief for Andrey in *War and Peace*. These are the doors in the "Arzamas Nightmare" (1869) and "Memoir of a Madman" (1884) denoting the threshold at which death, hidden from plain view, suddenly makes itself apparent; it enters without knocking to torment its host with existential anguish.<sup>2</sup> Beckoning death is the image that Tolstoy had in mind when describing in his diary Sofia Andreyevna's stealthy visit to his bedroom on the night of his flight from home. Dressed in her white nightgown, she descends like a harbinger of the end in order to search through his papers and confiscate his rewritten will.

Tolstoy also used the image of the door in a more picaresque vein. Let us recall the doors that, despite his insistent banging on them, stay shut to the penitent man in Tolstoy's "The Repentant Sinner" (Кающийся грешник 1885, publ. 1886). The doors of Paradise (двери райские) are finally thrown open on the sinner who is embraced by John the Evangelist when the latter is put to shame by the sinner for not keeping good on his promise of unconditional love. It is noteworthy that in January 1909 when he was at work on the hieromonk plot Tolstoy was simultaneously

revising the schedules for the second edition of *The Circle of Reading* (Круг чтения 1903-1908) where the story of the sinner at the doors of Paradise was included for reprint as reading for January 14. It is also noteworthy that while revising his selections for *The Circle of Reading*, Tolstoy returned not only to the theme of heavenly doors, but also to the problem of the doors separating true faith from sham. The voice from behind the door (голос из-за двери) that first advises the repentant sinner to walk away restores the partition between true faith and institutional religion. Only love "smashes" through these doors.

In his unfinished play *And Light Shineth in Darkness* (И свет во тьме светит 1896-1902), an argument ensues between the free-thinking Nikolai Ivanovich Saryntsev and Father Gerasim; each party engages with furor in the task not only of converting the other and proving him wrong, but of standing on the other side of the door which separates heaven from hell (Act II, scene XII). In his argument, Gerasim quotes Matthew 16:18 to support the political tandem between the "two kingdoms," the Church and the State.

"Father Gerasim: 'The Church cannot teach the contrary....It is said: 'I give you power...and the *gates of hell* shall not prevail against it.' (...)  
Nikolai Ivanovich: 'But I... don't acknowledge this... I've learned that the Church sanctions oaths, murder, and executions.'" (PSS 31:150; translation *Tolstoy Plays* 3: 61)

Although the meaning of this unfinished and somewhat autobiographical play is ambiguous, it is significant that Tolstoy traps Gerasim, the churchman, into threatening his opponent with the gates of hell rather than showing him the way towards light through the gates of Paradise. In his own epistolary standoff in January 1907 with a real-life hieromonk, John of the Theological Seminary of Penza, Tolstoy insists on the necessity of the destruction of both members of the evil alliance, the church and the state:

In the religious sense, the church is the same as what the state is in the social sense. ....The sooner people get rid of one and the other the closer they shall come to happiness. The destruction of one and the other—particularly the former—is the main task of our time. (PSS 77:21)

In at least three earlier cases, Tolstoy associated the Holy Communion with the doors to Heaven, where doors serve as the catastrophic boundary between faith and its loss. The most notorious is of course the scene of Tolstoy's own bolting from the Holy Communion at the foot of the doors in Chapter 14 of *A Confession* (PSS 23:51-52), and an even more shocking version of the same flight in the drafts of this chapter (23: 506). A more detached and even mocking description of the doors as the site of defilement and fraud, unquestioned either by the priest or by those present at the service—save the stunned narrator—is provided by Tolstoy in his conclusion to *Critique of Dogmatic Theology* (Исследование догматического богословия; PSS 23: 296-297) and in chapters XXXIX-XL of Part I of *Resurrection*, the official pretext for Tolstoy's excommunication in 1901. The only other precedent for doubts coming from a priest's confrontation with the doors in private on the other, inner side of the Lord's temple, is presented by Tolstoy in the first chapters describing Father Sergius's life in the monastery. Here we encounter Father Sergius's strained religiosity, a consequence of his choice to lead a monastic, celibate life over the option to commit regicide, the revenge he had reckoned impossible to take on the tsar for the insult and injury wrought against him. Although there are traces of familiar characters transitioning from *Father Sergius* into the hieromonk story, such as the society of learned women and wise elders ready with advice at the monastery, Tolstoy's Prince Ivan Tverskoy pursues a tactic contrary to the one Sergius adopts, who only mutilates his pride, body and celibacy but ends up a proudly

humble vagabond. Tolstoy's plan for Ivan is clearly a polemical development of his former investigations into the priestly life turned riotous, or riotous life turned priestly, where violence and faith are intertwined.

Tolstoy was long interested in identifying a difference between anarchic vagabondry and a more focused rebellion. We should consider in this respect the contrast in *Resurrection* between a torpid priest monotonously administering the Eucharist in a prison chapel and an unforgettable old tramp encountered by Nekhliudov, first on the ferry and then in prison in Book III, a man who is "by himself" and recognizes no higher power—tsars neither on the throne nor in heaven.<sup>3</sup> The difference is developed in the form of direct confrontation which recurs in *The False Coupon* (*Фальшивый купон* 1904). In that work, a deceitful and devious Father Misail, who mistreats his charges in the gymnasium and then rises steadily through the Church hierarchy as a powerful celibate priest, faces fierce resistance from the dissident Father Isidor (sic) who is imprisoned in a monastery and subjected to disciplinary inquest for his courageous sermons against capital punishment, political oppression, and religious persecution, delivered personally to the royal family at their palace.<sup>4</sup> Tolstoy's typist may have taken his cue from this very Isidor in correcting the name of the hieromonk from "Iliodor" to "Isidor," a change that Tolstoy must have approved, since among other numerous corrections made in the typed text, Tolstoy did not deem it necessary to correct the changed name. It is true that the handwritten manuscript version reads clearly: "The Diary of Iliodor" (*Дневникъ Илиодора*), bottom page (981/2 (29/2) l. 5). But in the typewritten manuscript version that bears Tolstoy's extensive corrections the name "Isidor" that replaced Iliodor remained unaltered throughout: Исидоръ... встал во весь свой высокий рост и подошел к алтарю. (Isidor rose up to the top of his tall height and came up to the altar.) (981/3 (29.3) 5 of 7). Had the

name been merely the copyist's mistake—a possibility, given that all copying at this advanced stage of work was done in-house or on short notice—Tolstoy would have insisted on the change. Perhaps the very choice of name was meaningful, both for Chertkov and for Tolstoy. Or could the contrary be true—that the name of the priest was of really no significance to Tolstoy and even the copyist's possible error did not trouble him? If considerations of routine accuracy prevailed, the decision to substitute Iliodor for Isidor would have meant not to honor the established practices of Tolstoy scholarship. Its unspoken rule holds that in making textological and editorial choices preference should be given to the last published versions of the editions that Tolstoy authorized or, in the absence of those, the last typewritten drafts that received his corrections. With respect to the hieromonk story, we are dealing with the latter case, where the last correction is to “Isidor.”

Instead of insisting on retaining “Isidor” simply because that was the last instance when Tolstoy dealt with the manuscript (the decision suggested by me in 2009 as formally correct, based on my study of the manuscripts), there should be other creative indices taken into consideration in order to understand the dynamic of Tolstoy's plan. It therefore may be wise to go deeper into the priestly genealogy in Tolstoy's oeuvre. There are several important texts to be added to the roster of other unfinished works preceding the hieromonk story, such as “Posthumous Notes of the Elder Fyodor Kuzmich” (“Посмертные записки старца Федора Кузьмича” 1905), Tolstoy's variation on the legend about Tsar Alexander I's forgery of his own death. This imagined autobiography of a self-deposed ruler escaping from the evils of his tsardom into freedom is one of Tolstoy's most spectacular unfinished tales, mixing uplifting historical rumor with rich fictional detail. The tsar's bodily death is symbolic: the royal power was vested in his body when he was crowned at the Royal Doors. But only when Strumensky, his lookalike, and bodily alter

ego, and a soldier in the guards, is executed by flogging is the tsar's spirit released. The falsely devout Alexander dies in his old body, which is “instrumental” for the life of a converted spirit, under the assumed name of a modest elder (the name “Strumensky” implies instrumentality because “strument” (струмент) is a colloquial and archaic form for instrument in Russian). Tolstoy was as enamored of the plot as he was of all plots that humbled the rich and the proud. He was perhaps even more drawn to another priestly fragment completed in 1906. The story was preliminarily titled “Father Vasily” (Отец Василий); Tolstoy considered the plot “wonderful” (чудный) (PSS 55: 248). Vasily Mozhaisky is a modest, hard-working priest, with a loving wife and three children who don't want to follow their parent's vocation. The story breaks off when a letter from the older son arrives from town (PSS 36: 88). In all probability, the story was supposed to cast in sharp relief the conflict between fathers and sons on the one hand and, on the other, the conflict between the duty and faith of the fathers and civil and political engagement sought by the younger generation (Ломунова 102-103).

Continuing to use the diary as a particular narrative form, Tolstoy on October 21, 1909, drafted a plot about the posthumous notes of a certain Father Aleksey, a meek country priest who dies and leaves behind a journal expressing frustration with regard to his vocation. Tolstoy called this plot “the priest's memoir”: “It might turn out very good. Maybe I will write it” (PSS 57: 155). Aleksey is not a proud aristocrat like Kasatsky or Tverskoy; he is humble and more sympathetic to the peasant women sacrificing their last kopeck to the Mother of God of Kazan than to any sophistic defenses of the official creed. One must say that Tolstoy's attack on the faith of humble village priests is a new development: similar characters from world literature always won his admiration. Most notable is Tolstoy's love of the wretched but not embittered Dr. Primrose of Oliver Goldsmith's

*The Vicar of Wakefield*. Despite his perpetual bad luck in life Primrose retains his faith in good fortune and refers with humor to the adverse twists of his fate.<sup>5</sup> It may seem that Aleksey's death, quiet and uneventful, is in keeping with this humble expectation of good fortune arriving sometime. But the eight notebooks that he asks his wife to send to his trusted friend Miropolsky to be published contain disturbing material. They explain that his strife, like the hieromonk's of the January 1909 fragments, begins with Mass. Aleksey's motivation for publishing his diary is primarily financial, as he hopes to gain some profit from this enterprise. It is hard to judge conclusively by the unfinished texts, but there are several strong indications that Aleksey's last epiphany is "strange" and that the strangeness dates back to the scene of Mass. Leaning over the dying man, his wife notices

a strange smile on his pale, drawn face : —  
 "What is it, father?" asked Maria Efimovna. —  
 'So good, so good.' He repeated this twice. —  
 'What is good?' He moved his head. — 'You  
 won't understand anyway,' and he closed his  
 eyes, a smile on his face. A few minutes later he  
 died. These are his notes: 1. I served Sunday  
 Mass as always, few people attended.<sup>6</sup>

Here the narrative breaks off. The strangeness of Aleksey's demeanor is possibly a reference to a much earlier dialogue between Tolstoy's autobiographical subject bolting from the church in the famous scene from *A Confession* (1879-1882) and Ivan Turgenev's short story "The Story of Father Aleksey" (Рассказ отца Алексея 1877), which must have supplied a literary precedent for the scene in Tolstoy. Turgenev's old provincial priest Aleksey relates the story of his son Iakov, a seminary graduate, who becomes possessed and rushes out of the church after the Communion, but not before he crushes the chalice and destroys the wafers. At his death, Iakov confesses to his father that at the moment when he was facing the priest who was soliciting an oath from him, the devil

appeared behind the priest's back. Undoubtedly, Tolstoy returned to and revised the Turgenev story, borrowing for this purpose the priest's name, as well as the motifs of temptation at the doors, the spilt wine and disruption of the Holy Communion.<sup>7</sup>

The hieromonk and the two Aleksey plots are highly polemical when measured against other literary instances of false submission, in particular the heroes of Herzen's "Duty Above All" (Долг прежде всего 1851) and Chekhov's "Archbishop" (Архиерей 1902). In this respect, Tolstoy does not so much polemicize against the authors of these pieces whom he admires, but radically corrects the behavior of their heroes who, despite their lost faith, are timid enough to remain faithful church servants to their own demise. Herzen's story was one of Tolstoy's life-long favorites, and he would read it aloud throughout the summer of 1906, trying to impress its beauty on all who were there to listen. Herzen's explanation of his intent in presenting a defeated revolutionary who is converted to Catholicism and who remains a priest despite his disgust with the church was this:

In Anatol I planned to portray a man full of strength, energy, talents, but whose life is burdensome, empty, false and joyless because of the constant contradiction between his strivings and his duty. (Герцен 1: 424)

Note that the Royal Orthodox Doors serving as a threshold for Tolstoy function similarly in Herzen's story, with the image of the Catholic curtain standing in for Anatol's pent-up skepticism:

The more he gazed from behind the curtain at the grandiose and mysterious Catholic ritual, the less faith he found in himself, and a new onslaught of painful suffering would commence for him. (Герцен 1: 395)

The monk Anatol Stolygin conceals his inner struggle for many years until the Father Superior sends him away on an honorary mission to

Montevideo. Stolygin happens to sail across the ocean towards his own release of sorts: an untimely death from yellow fever. Herzen's mastery in describing the volatile spiritual states of the priest enslaved to his ecclesiastical duty inevitably produced an impression on Tolstoy. On July 26, 1905, according to the memoir of Dushan Makovistky, Tolstoy said about Herzen's story: "There is nothing equal to this in Russian literature. *Who is to Blame?* is timid, but this one is buoyant" (Маковицкий 1: 354-55; see also Гусев 1941: 511). The buoyancy lay hidden in the acts of conversion and reversion, in the transition from revolution to religion, contrary to the scenario of Tolstoy's hieromonk.

In Chekhov's story, the end that befalls the Archbishop, whose moral and spiritual disintegration also begins during Mass and who is soon to die from typhoid fever, is even more frightening than the demise of Anatol Stolygin. The types of fever may be but casual coincidences, but Chekhov's character is even more beholden to his duty than Herzen's Anatol; he has never allowed himself the slightest deviation from its burdens, to say nothing of the possibility of being insubordinate. In this grim account nothing gets smashed except tableware and that through sheer, regrettable clumsiness. No epiphanies occur while this servant of God prepares to die, bemoaning the shallowness of human passions, hating his duty, and seeing clearly through his mother's material interests and lack of true pity for him. He also sees the true nature of the attentiveness to his needs from a young hieromonk, obligingly running errands for the senior cleric whom he hopes soon to replace (Чехов 6: 432-33). To his question: "Who is opening and closing the doors downstairs"? his niece Katya responds: "It's just your stomach grumbling, uncle!" (435).

The sources exploring the fates of priests, monks, and hermit elders highlight both the positive and negative inspirations for Tolstoy's solution in the broken doors. This solution

crystallizes further in the process of deciphering the hieromonk's fictional name and its possible prototype. Tolstoy's general dislike for deathbed narratives, from last-minute discovered diaries to diaries sketched at threshold moments, is assuaged time and again for his fictional monks and priests. Moreover, their private genres appear at just the right time so as to indicate some contemporary relevance. Tolstoy is very specific in noting that his Father Aleksey dies at the end of October 1906. He is equally particular in assigning the date "Sept. 15, 1902" to the entry in Iliodor/Isidor's diary where terrible things are said about lost faith. The years spanning 1902–1906, in which seditious diaries are written by church servants, are hardly unimportant. This period saw an unprecedented rise in criminal activity among priests in Russia—of a political and nonpolitical nature—occurring against the backdrop of a new terror wave when a score of top government officials (governors, ministers and their minions), including members of the royal family (Grand Prince Sergey Aleksandrovich), were killed. We find in the pages of Aleksey Suvorin's diary for July 15, 1902 a very characteristic reaction to General Sipiagin's assassination in April, mocking the government:

They were saying today that Sipiagin's assassin is Count Ignatiev, student of St. Petersburg University. Khudiakov said this. Nonsense, of course. There is talk about a monk who showed up for a visit with the assassin, got arrested and betrayed many. (Суворин 348)

Devious priests like Gapon and Iliodor (Sergey Trufanov)—double agents, scandal and pogrom instigators—were the talk of the day. Since 1898, Chertkov and Biriukov's *Free Thought*, later *Free Press*, had taken special delight in publishing long reports on scandal and crime in the monasteries, and on peasants' riots against churchmen, alongside Tolstoy's addresses to and correspondence with more conscientious priests.<sup>8</sup>

These stories were constantly discussed in the Tolstoy household.

On January 5, 1909, days before he proceeded to sketch his hieromonk drafts, Tolstoy received two visitors who turned out to be ill-suited, but provocative company. One was the modest, unknown priest Gorbanevsky, Tolstoy's admirer and high school Bible teacher. The other was a promising literary and intellectual historian, Mikhail Gershenzon. Of the former Tolstoy did not expect anything beyond complete devotion and an attentive ear to his preaching, and he was not disappointed. On the contrary, from the latter, whom Chertkov had brought to Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy expected much. Gershenzon had authored volumes about the intellectual history of "young Russia" (*Молодая Россия* (1908)), and was the famed biographer of Herzen and Chaadaev. Tolstoy owned Gershenzon's biography of Father Petcherine, the former dissenter and revolutionary-minded defector from the Russian academic bureaucracy under Nicholas I, who converted to Catholicism in Europe and became an important but controversial Redemptorist priest. In his biography of Pecherin, Gershenzon wrote a brilliant analysis of Herzen's visit to Pecherin near London in 1853 to castigate Pecherin for finding refuge from the revolution in religion. Gershenzon's biography used extensive quotations from the unpublished and thoroughly sensational, yet touching memoir by Pecherin, his *Notes from Beyond the Grave* (*Замогильные записки*).<sup>9</sup> Tolstoy's conversation with Gershenzon turned into a mirror reflection of Herzen's confrontation with Pecherin. Gershenzon demanded proof from Tolstoy that love is God, implying that he would appreciate a sounder metaphysical foundation for showing how love functions in society. Implicit in this interrogation was the idea that the social being of man is not governed by love alone. Tolstoy's acrimonious responses were amply recorded in his diary (and by Gusev, in his memoir) (PSS 57: 5; Гусев 1973: 228). Gusev reminisced that on the

same day at dinner, for which both Gorbanevsky and Gershenzon apparently stayed, Gorbanevsky regaled the audience with interesting bits of scandal from the life of the clergy. Tolstoy tried to gather details relating to such scurrilous tales about monastic life. He must have hoped to learn some much-needed information for his story-in-progress, and both Gorbanevsky and Gershenzon could be good sources of information: the former thanks to his station, and the latter thanks to his close familiarity with Pecherin's *Notes*, one of the most enigmatic examples of priestly deathbed memoir. Perhaps because Gershenzon's mood remained sour, the conversation soon turned to another priest, Sergey Trufanov, or hieromonk Iliodor of Tsaritsyn, the most seditious priest on the Russian religious and political scene. Tolstoy's reaction to stories about Iliodor was quite unexpected. When Gorbanevsky remarked that the famous Iliodor "drank a lot," Tolstoy retorted: "This is a sign of sincerity." When Gusev observed that drinking might be the sign of a person stifling his consciousness of the truth, Tolstoy retorted again: "Then there is something to be stifled...—the most terrible people are the cold, calculating and self-confident egotists" (Гусев 1973: 229).

The notion that something could be stifled and that the priest was therefore a riddle to be solved, not merely a reclusive Gothic-Romantic type as fashioned by Pecherin, was a new direction for Tolstoy and a silver lining to the seemingly unsuccessful visits in January 1909. At first, Tolstoy envisioned the hieromonk in the picaresque spirit of drink and merriment. For Tolstoy, the best stories from time immemorial had come from the *inter pocula* rounds of monastic retreats. Tolstoy spoke approvingly of Pushkin's Misail and Varlaam, the happy and perennially drunk monastic fugitives in scene VIII of *Boris Godunov* (Маковицкий 2: 603). Over the years, he collected an impressive array of popular legends about monks and their drinking habits, not infrequently taking place in the company of the devil.<sup>10</sup> Tolstoy's

own rendering of the tale of the repentant sinner trying to break through the doors of paradise is a version of the Baroque Russian legend about a drunk (бражник). One of the crossed-out lines in Tolstoy's manuscript of the hieromonk story focuses persistently on the theme of imbibing: "Wine. He finished the cup and put it down." On the obverse side of the manuscript Tolstoy lists questions about monastic routines involving wine. Questions six and seven read: "6. What do they sing? 7. Did he (clarify) ever drink himself and when? (PSS 37:453 and 29/2 leaf 1, obverse of the manuscript). Also crossed out by Tolstoy on the typewritten text of the priest's doubts was this sobering thought about the sanctity of the Eucharist: "He remembered the brand of the wine" (29/3 leaf 5 of the manuscript).

Through a fascinating coincidence, when he was about to give up on his favorite motif of debauched transubstantiation, Tolstoy received a letter on January 8, 1909, from Arseny, hieromonk of the Donskoy Monastery in Moscow. Arseny wrote the letter in response to newspaper statements Tolstoy had published some time before about the unshakeable nature of his religious convictions. Arseny's plea impressing on Tolstoy the necessity to return to the bosom of Orthodoxy only reinforced Tolstoy's resolve to find artistic passages towards sublimity other than conversions of the converted (Маковицкий 3: 493). Alongside rather customary day-to-day entries in Tolstoy's diary after 1880 describing death as new birth, and birth as movement towards death and liberation, we find in January 1909 new notes condemning the abrogation, by secular individuals and churchmen alike, of the right to render judgment about sacred things. In these notes Tolstoy likens the procession towards death in old age to political execution. In several entries related to the hieromonk project, Tolstoy dreams of writing a piece of "terrible force" (PSS 57: 4-13). If not through the symbolism of transubstantiation, whence came the terrible force of the emerging story?

Such a force was initially ensconced in the very word "hieromonk." In Tolstoy's time, a hieromonk (Иеромонахъ (Ἱερομόναχος)) was a high black priest who had taken vows and abandoned the world to reside in a monastery (Даль 2: 162). The prefixes "hiero-" and "hieratic" from <hieros> (holy) usually denoted authority over sacred things, in this case, religious or sacerdotal leadership. Tolstoy's hieromonk loses this authority as soon as he experiences doubts. Tolstoy soon decided to rechannel his narrative while still remaining undecided about the priest's name. Still, it was clear enough for him that the wine-loving Iliodor of Tsaritsyn (and the thematically related plot) was no longer a suitable prototype. Although nicknamed the Russian Savonarola, Iliodor was a petty and unappealing character, a leader and an activist within the Black Hundreds who romanced, depending on the political climate, the authorities as well as the radical right, Rasputin as well as his enemies, and then who, after being outsmarted at his own game with the Church, was defrocked and who tried to involve Lenin in his schemes. In short, he was completely unlike either the aristocratic and noble Ivan Tverskoy or the equally noble and morally upright, if ideologically deluded, revolutionaries in Tolstoy's "Pavel Kudriash" drafts from October 1908 onward.<sup>11</sup> Although it may be true that following his transfer to Tsaritsyn in 1908 Iliodor was still at the height of his fame in January 1909, his activity was becoming so odious that it is inconceivable that Tolstoy would consider his fictional incarnation.<sup>12</sup> Tolstoy's entry against expropriation, "this empiétement [Tolstoy translates the word as "seizure, confiscation"] of the sacred and of the deeds of the Lord" (PSS 57: 14-15), which causes ninety-nine percent of all evil in the world, is precisely the crime Iliodor (Trufanov) commits. The entry falls on January 20, the day of another momentous meeting, this time with Archbishop Parpheny of Tula, whose visit to Yasnaya Polyana Tolstoy not only ardently desired, but even confirmed in a trip made especially for

that purpose. Several accounts of this meeting were made by Tolstoy himself, Dushan Makovitsky, Gusev, and last but not least, the journalist Sergey Spiro, who arrived to interview Tolstoy about the conversation and later published its record, which Tolstoy authorized for the newspaper *Russian Word* (Русское слово).

On January 20, 1909, Archbishop of Tula, Parpheny Levitsky (1858-1921) arrived at Yasnaya Polyana in the company of Tikhon Kudriavstev (the Kochaki priest), his private monastery companion (keleinik), the district police officer, the district superintendent of police and the two village constables. Gusev and Makovitsky based their summaries on Tolstoy and family accounts of the meeting because both of them were absent from the estate on errands during the peak of Tolstoy's conversation with His Grace. Since Tolstoy fell asleep and slept late into the afternoon; the venerable guest and his retinue had to wait patiently downstairs until Sofia Andreyevna finally roused her husband. The point of the meeting was to debate religious issues. This was clear to everyone, as well as to Aleksandra Lvovna and Varvara Mikhailovna Feokritova, her friend and Sofia Andreyevna's secretary. In the absence of Makovitsky and Gusev, the two young women concealed themselves in an adjacent room and took shorthand notes of Tolstoy's talk with Parpheny. Tolstoy approved of their indiscretion in the evening when he suddenly entered Aleksandra Lvovna's room where she was restoring the interview (the unrecorded passages) with Varvara Mikhailovna (Маковицкий 3: 306-307). According to Gusev's testimony, Tolstoy quizzed the Archbishop about certain details of monastic life, which he needed for the hieromonk story (Гусев 1937: 234-35). Feokritova related afterwards to Makovitsky that after the Archbishop's departure Tolstoy wept a bit, adding that there was nothing to be ashamed of. Apparently, Tolstoy had told the Archbishop:

"I am so grateful to you that you had the courage to come visit." "The pleasure is all mine. It is such a happiness for me," responded the cleric. (Маковицкий 306-307)

Everyone noticed that although the Archbishop spoke less than Tolstoy (and haltingly at that), he said interesting things and looked emotionally moved. Although upon his return from Chertkov's home Gusev preferred to stay out of the Archbishop's sight for fear of being forced to kiss his hand and submit to his blessing, Tolstoy sent for him, with a request to fetch a copy of *The Circle of Reading* with the entries covering the first twenty days of January. Tolstoy gave the Archbishop a copy of this with his autograph and a pack of photographs of him which Chertkov had taken. Shaking the priest's hand while saying good-bye, Tolstoy said warmly: "'Thank you again for your courage,' and he burst into tears. This visit was very pleasing to him" (Гусев 234-235).

But Tolstoy was shrewder than he had appeared. On 22 January he wrote in his diary:

Yesterday the Archbishop was here, and I spoke to him from my heart, but with caution, *without exposing* the whole sin of his activity. But I should have done so. Sonya's story about my conversation with him did it for me. He was willing to convert me most likely or, failing this, to destroy or diminish my influence on faith and on the church, which is evil-doing according to them. It is especially unpleasant that he asked to be informed when I started to die. Aren't they devising something in order to assure people that I 'repented before death'? And therefore I make known and I repeat, it seems, that I am as unable to return to the bosom of the church, to receive extreme unction as I am to utter obscenities before dying or to look at obscene pictures, and therefore everything they will say about my repentance before dying and about my Holy Communion is a lie. I am saying this because

there are people for whom, in accordance with their religious understanding, Holy Communion is a religious act, i.e. a manifestation of their striving towards God, but for me every such ceremonial action as Communion would be renouncing one's soul, goodness, Christ's teaching, God. (PSS 57: 16)

After this comment, it is hardly surprising how he used any information Parpheny may have supplied to him for the story. When, on February 3, Sergey Petrovich Spiro, a correspondent of the Moscow newspaper *Russian Word* (*Русское слово*) volunteered or was assigned (accounts differ) to interview Tolstoy about the Archbishop's visit, Tolstoy readily received him, despite having coming down with a bad cold. One serious inducement to do so was Spiro's promise to publish the interview if Tolstoy authorized its proofs. Tolstoy wrote in his diary on February 4, 1909:

Someone arrived from *Russian Word* asking about the Archbishop. I did the dictation, proofs today. Sent back. Signed a letter for an Old Believer. Interesting letters, especially one on the lack of faith among the common folk. (PSS 57:20)

Spiro's interview, which exists in two versions, adds important details to our knowledge of the negative inspirations Tolstoy derived from his conversation with Parpheny for his plans to depict monastic life and the good hieromonks. According to Spiro's newspaper article of Tolstoy's account of his interview with Parpheny, the prelate was anxious about the meeting, fearing Tolstoy would "talk him down" even if he agreed to see him. Tolstoy began by making it known to Parpheny how many visits and how much correspondence he received and how touched he was by the numerous expressions of goodwill from churchmen. He also expressed regret that it was impossible for him to grant all the clergy's wishes with respect to his religious convictions, just as it would be impossible to soar in free flight. Parpheny listened respectfully,

interrupting Tolstoy's tirades to observe that that it was wrong to destroy people's faith. Tolstoy kept correcting Parpheny, to no avail, that he was reinstating faith when it was either lacking or had been viciously bastardized. In support of this argument, he read to Parpheny his selections on religion from January 14-15 of *The Circle of Reading*, thoughts from Channing, Emerson, Thoreau, and Kant in particular. Taunting Parpheny's patience, Tolstoy bombarded him with quotes from the apostles on civil disobedience, self-reliance, and Protestant-transcendentalist talk of moral illumination. According to Tolstoy, Parpheny was pleasantly impressed ("I saw that this reading produced a good impression on him, which was also very pleasant to me"), but took back the praise in his next round of reproaches about Tolstoy's destruction of faith. Tolstoy told Parpheny a parable about Matryona, a debauched woman from the village whom he once spotted praying devoutly in her hut. Passing by her window many times, he was surprised to observe her still bowing deeply: "And to destroy that faith, which causes such a prayer, I would consider to be the greatest crime." The Archbishop did not object to this either, but repeated how wrong it was to destroy faith. Then he was kind enough to supply Tolstoy with the information Tolstoy needed "about life in the monastery." Spiro's interview with Tolstoy ended. The journalist could sense that Tolstoy needed the information for some new piece of fiction, but neither Tolstoy nor Gusev, whom he queried about the new work upon exiting Tolstoy's room, elaborated on this (Gusev said evasively that Tolstoy was going through a transitional stage in his writing) (*Русское слово* 5, February 1909). In a collection of interviews (1911) with Tolstoy issued after the writer's death, Spiro modified a few small, but significant details about Tolstoy's meeting with Parpheny:<sup>13</sup>

When listening to Lev Nikolayevich, I was trying to record his account literally whenever

possible. When he finished, he asked me to read back what I had written. Lev Nikolayevich listened to me attentively and remained pleased, telling me only to cross out two or three phrases which he found unsuitable. Later in our conversation, Lev Nikolayevich spoke openly to me about some of his other impressions concerning the Bishop's visit, which obviously hold an enormous interest, but he willed, because the content was of an intimate nature, that this part of the interview not be printed. Lev Nikolayevich's wish is law of course. ("Первая" 3-12)

After the episode with Parpheny Tolstoy must have had new doubts concerning the religious honesty of the clerics. But what could be appealing about the fictional character in the story he had not yet abandoned? While there used to be a few venerable Iliodors prior to the infamous Savanarola of Tolstoy's lifetime, the good and pious Isidors far outweigh their counterparts in the Russian and Catholic Church hierarchy. Judging by *The False Coupon*, Isidor satisfied Tolstoy more than Iliodor as a radical yet extremely honest, martyr-like religious type. Excluding Iliodor-Trufanov, there were to be found among the Iliodors mostly Church builders, good and unquestioning Church servants and Father Superiors.<sup>14</sup> The Isidors have a greater religious (as well as literary) pedigree than the Iliodors: The most famous literary case was the virtuous nun Isidora seduced by the demonic Melmoth in Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*. Other Isidors and Isidoras were theologians and spiritual writers, martyrs, canonized Holy Fools and persecuted religious reformers (*Энциклопедический словарь* 13: 364-66). One of these Isidors was quoted by Tolstoy, naturally without attribution to the source, in the addenda section of the selections for *The Circle of Reading*: "If you are amazed when you look at the stars or the depths of the sea, enter thy soul and be astounded" (PSS 42: 443; italics in the original). This Isidor of

*The Circle of Reading* sounds more like Kant and Emerson than Archbishop Parpheny. Tolstoy, it seemed, was leaning towards "Isidor" for the name of his title character.

As late as 1928, *Press and Revolution* (Печать и революция) announced the forthcoming publication of "Hieromonk Isidor" (sic) in the new complete edition of Tolstoy's fictional prose. The announcement noted that the story *The Divine and the Human* (Божеское и человеческое 1904) and the dramatic fragment *Children's Wisdom* (Детская мудрость 1908-1909)—a work directed against capital punishment and previously under ban—would be published for the first time while *Hadji Murat*, "Posthumous Notes of Elder Fyodor Kuzmich," all of the plots centered around Pavel Kudriash and "Hieromonk Isidor" would be restored to their original uncensored form (229-31).<sup>15</sup> It is unclear whether the grouping of Tolstoy and Iliodor was so strongly on the mind of "the central Soviet power" as to unite the exposes published against Iliodor since 1928 in the journal *Red Archives* (Красный архив) with the ongoing campaign to demonize and dismiss Tolstoy's ideologically problematic writings. During and after the 1928 centennial, as the first Jubilee volumes started to appear, Tolstoy's religious and iconoclastic writings were already undergoing a censorship at least as severe as was conducted under the tsars. Because of Gorky's growing importance at the end of the 1920s and the early 1930s, the quirky supporter of Iliodor's literary talent, and the jealous, and inconstant, disciple of the great Lev may have been instrumental in imposing Iliodor as the hero's name, now that his own failed God-building enterprise was entering its final downward spin. Moreover, Gorky loved symbolism. In 1914, he wrote Amfiteatrov in support of Iliodor's "The Holy Devil," making allusions to Gapon:

A curious coincidence: In the year '05 (1905) the priest was a forerunner to the revolution,

now it is a hieromonk. Let us hope that next time the role will be played by an Archbishop. (Варламов 427)

Be that as it may, in the years 1932-1933, Gorky was heavily promoting Tolstoy's authority for the construction of the Socialist Realism doctrine. In the released volume twenty-seven of *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (*Большая советская энциклопедия*) an entry on Ilidor-Trufanov was squeezed in between the opening entry, "socialist granaries" (зерновые), and the one closing it, "imperialism," in which he was described as one of the sworn enemies of the Soviet power and the Soviet people (27: 756). Both Tolstoy and Ilidor were fatefully united in the title of the story that Vasily Spiridonov, the story's editor who was also the editor of the tale about the repentant sinner for volume twenty-one, revised for the Jubilee volume around the same time.

Given Tolstoy's massive yearly output combined with the customary eight- to ten-year-cycle that he was allowing himself to finish longer works in his final three decades (the pattern of "Father Sergius," *Resurrection*, *Hadji Murad*) it was inevitable that at his death some work would remain unfinished. Making allowances for his usual, decade-long pace in rendering his works complete, how should we distinguish the stillborn plots and the chaff from what could have provided the grist for Tolstoy's next masterpiece? I think that Tolstoy's late-life preference for fragments is precisely in the nature of his constant experimenting with the right position vis-à-vis "radical interruption." According to Kant's *Third Critique*, this interruption is the last boundary separating art from that which is not of human making. How are we to interpret Isidor's-Ilidor's recalcitrance, his inevitable martyrdom and Tolstoy's preoccupation with the sublime scene of the broken doors? Let me quote from Jay Bernstein's interpretation of the "smashing" of

obstacles, by means of which an art of terrible force "calls commonplace understanding into question":

An exemplary work of art disrupts *sensus communis*, and provides glimpses of the monstrous, what Heidegger called *ungeheur*, and what was closer to sublimity.

However, both for the sake of self-authentication, provocation of this sort

should not be empty, idle, fruitless [...] Freedom is grounded in the response to the work [...] because interruption is a judgment on the judger, it again appears correct to point to a deeper confluence of beauty and sublimity [...] the linkage between sublimity, alterity [...]. (Bernstein 93, 105)

But is it through crime that Tolstoy intended one of his last literary characters—soon to be taken like his author to "an execution," and thus to martyrdom—to be saved in the alterity of the subliminal beyond? It is not through any nihilistic freedom of "willing nothing" or a commitment to violence that Tolstoy's hieromonks perform their acts of eternal return while their author rehearses his own execution, all the while looking for an artistic exit and end to his life.

Tolstoy is hardly the only ageing author to entertain an interest in terrorist plots. In one of his later essays, titled pertinently "Late Works," John Updike, who also titled his final novel *Terrorist* (2007), made a respectful notation to one of Theodore Adorno's most well-known dicta: "The power of subjectivity in the late works of art is the irascible gesture with which it takes leave of the works themselves" suggesting that a "geriatric ebb of energy is bound to affect late works, not necessarily to their detriment (Updike 71).

As Shklovsky writes in a provocative essay, the later Tolstoy was a shape-shifter and a rebel who continued to reinvent himself: "There lived at Yasnaya Polyana an intemperate, unfulfilled and restless man" (Шкловский). Does restlessness and

curiosity about the sublime necessarily lead one to a monastic or a prison cell? Or to vagabondry?

Tolstoy heaped scorn on writers of respectable age who lacked grace or artistic decency and thus had lost sight of the aims of creation. Aleksandr Vasilievich Tsinger, a close friend of the family and of Tolstoy's older children, recalled that in one of the conversations he held shortly after his excommunication, notably on priests and resurrection, Tolstoy sharply rebuked Ibsen for his just-published symbolist play, *When We Dead Awake*. Facing his listeners in an intimate circle of family and friends, Tolstoy vented his indignation against Ibsen's unfortunate lapse of reason. In *When We Dead Awake* Ibsen sought to recover the lost secret of artistic production. Unable to finish his last masterpiece, "Resurrection Day," Ibsen's artist rushes defiantly into a blizzard and dies in an avalanche in the mountains, accompanied by the ghost of the woman he had loved. Tolstoy went on record saying: "This is terrible! And why would an old man write such rubbish?" (Цингер 3). Judged on Tolstoy's terms, it was pure rubbish indeed: Ibsen's play contained more than a few indiscretions that in Tolstoy's mind rendered it counterfeit. Consider how Rubek describes the despair at his unsuccessful attempts to create art and lead an eventful life: "The train stopped at every little station, although absolutely nothing happened" (Ibsen 226-27). Was this the moment Tolstoy had been waiting for to initiate his own eventful escape by train?

Tolstoy rejected Ibsen's vision of resurrection and showed similar indifference to other symbolist "scandals at the door," including Knut Hamsun's *At the Gates to the Kingdom* which premiered as *У врат царства* at Moscow Art Theater on March 9, 1908, with Vasily Kachalov in the title role. But Tolstoy discussed real-life plots with enthusiasm, including those pertaining to hideous murders committed by or against provincial clergy. Hearing the report of a hieromonk who saved a woman's life by risking disfavor and imprisonment, Tolstoy

broke into tears and pledged to write the story, since Maupassant, the only other appropriate candidate, was already dead:

Isn't this indeed good? If only Maupassant were alive, I would write him by all means. He would make a chef d'oeuvre out of this subject. And I, if only I were young enough, I would write it well, too. (Цингер 146-47)

In the Tsinger account, edited by Gusev for reissue in 1937, Tolstoy does more than ridicule Ibsen's bourgeois decadence. After passing the torch to the deceased Maupassant, he suddenly takes it back, turns around and adds robustly: "No, I will still write it, and well at that!" (Гусев 1937: 143-46).

As becomes clear from the above accounts, the sublime appeal of the hieromonks lay for Tolstoy in their capacity for charity and self-sacrifice, which in itself was transgressive and punishable. Hence, Tolstoy's dictum quoted at the beginning of this essay, "You can't mix up these two things: priesthood and Christianity." Let us return to the issue of radical interruption in the face of sublimity. Taking his cue from Kant, Tolstoy advises one to pause before entering a church. The authorities construed this advice as an act of sedition. One of the paraphrases that Tolstoy made of Kant on the question of the gates, intended for the entry under March 25 of the second edition of *The Circle of Reading*, was noticed by the censors and had to be excluded:

The tight gates and the narrow path which lead into life is the path of a good life. The spacious gates and the wide path along which most people walk is the church. This does not mean that there is something about the church and its doctrine that brings people to ruin, but that the act of entering the church and observing its rites is taken by people for the ways they should truly serve God. (PSS 42: 430)

Like other social rites and performances, mere entrance into a church was fraught with the danger

of losing one's human strengths. Two instances are of interest in this regard. The first is Tolstoy's memorable metaphor of the life mistaken for "existential hustling" (суতোлока существования) and the ruckus caused by the doors of various clubs, public spaces and assemblies—all depicted in Chapter 5 of his tract *On Life* (О жизни 1887). Without experiencing real life, people "retreat from the thronging at its doors" (PSS 26:337, my emphasis). The second example comes from "The Old Man at the Church" (Старик в церкви), Tolstoy's parable for the children's version of *The Circle of Reading*, completed in 1907.<sup>16</sup> The tale is a kind of autobiographic self-parody that depicts miraculous feats like treading water by churchless believers with independent faith (comparable to his tale, "Three Elders" (Три старца 1885)). The old man in the 1907 tale is righteous and meek, virtually a living saint, who has never been to church, but under pressure from his wife and children agrees to oblige his family just once. He swiftly treads water across a lake on his way to church while his family takes a boat. As soon as he enters the church, the old man sees a host of demons: They are busy stretching a long piece of hide to make room for an expanding roster of sinners who pass through the doors giggling, kissing icons, and gossiping. The old man giggles at the devils, and they enter his name on the roster. He turns away to run out, but his ability to tread water is gone and he starts drowning during his flight, now at the mercy of his family who pick him up half-alive (PSS 40: 405-06).

This story exhibited almost prophetic self-mockery. Ivan Bunin described Tolstoy shuffling his feet at the gates of the Optina Pustyn' Monastery—the indicator of the departing genius's last temptation (Бунин 28–29). Bunin reminded those prone to fantasize about the possibility of Tolstoy's return to the Church of the thought Tolstoy had chosen for the November 7 entry of his *Thoughts of the Wise* (Мысли мудрых людей), the precursor to *The Circle of Reading*:

Enter through the narrow gates: broad are the gates and spacious the path leading toward ruin; and many go that way: but tight are the gates and narrow the path leading into life, and few find them. (Бунин 46)

In the lines Tolstoy wrote in his notepad on the eve of his departure from home we see the monastery and the revolution discarded in one breath. Tolstoy chose the "religious and moral law" which would neither allow a human being to arrange the lives of other human beings nor permit submission to the order set up by others and contradicting this law (PSS 58: 233).

This is the recipe for escaping into true freedom, and this is why Tolstoy's hieromonk does not perform acts of salvation through the experience of nihilistic destruction. By violating the priestly code of behavior in favor of humanity and love for another, the hieromonk dies symbolically, breaking doors and stepping beyond himself, or "au-delà," as Maurice Blanchot explains sublime escapes into the "infinite conversation" (Blanchot 148-9). One remembers in this regard Tolstoy's loving and decade-long rewriting of Father Myriel's open-door policy for the convict and thief, Jean Valjean, whom he calls "my brother" in *Les Misérables*. Tolstoy reworked for the November section of *The Circle of Reading* the beginning parts of Hugo's novel, mesmerized by the "heroism of passive obedience" practiced by Bishop Myriel (Monsignor Bienvenu) (42: 278-84).<sup>17</sup> Years earlier, in 1872, Tolstoy had written a simpler Russified rendition of the same episodes from Hugo, "The Archbishop and the Robber. A True Tale" (Архиерей и разбойник. Быль), which he published in the Second Russian Reader (1875). These texts were edited for the Jubilee edition by none other than the editor of the hieromonk story, Spiridonov (PSS 21: 188-190). Tolstoy's focus on the "doors" and the "robber," repeated multiple times in this short fragment, is striking, as is the focus on how a robber is hounded and sought in

order to be punished. By literally throwing all doors open and thereby making a conduit to grace, Myriel smashes the doors of monastic convention by not resisting Valjean's robbery and by his willingness to sacrifice his own well-being for the sake of another. In the 1906 version, which is closer to Hugo's text, the focus on these open/smashed doors is also significant: "These doors don't inquire of the one entering whether he has a name, but whether he has grief. You are suffering... welcome" (PSS 42:281). Tolstoy's other adaptations of Hugo in *The Circle of Reading* for children and adults were among the most important steps taken by him in favor of representing self-sacrificial humanity from afar.<sup>18</sup>

In the 1900s, monastic transgression and revolution were the order of the day. Published next to Spiro's interview with Tolstoy were accounts from the same issue of *Russian Word* about Priest Gapon's 1906 adventures in Paris and his bribe-taking for political services before being found hanged in St. Petersburg:

What would I do if I were made a czar? I would steal a hundred dollars and flee. The devil take it! Really, I care neither for revolution nor for reaction... Why would I give a damn about such trash?

To the right of the Spiro interview on the same page appeared an essay "It Is Time" ("Попа") by Sergey Yablonovsky, which was directed against public executions and capital punishment. Despite the abundance of material on criminal priests in the media, especially of the sort found in Chertkov's *Free Press* or that material which the celebrated lawyer Anatoly Koni would supply to him, Tolstoy was not drawn to such sensationalism. A good case in point is the murder of hieromonk Illarion in his cell by a young disgruntled man made known by Koni both to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky (Кони 3: 269-278). One hears its overtones in the Tikhon chapter of Dostoevsky's *The Demons*.

Tolstoy's artistic focus on political terror, especially expropriation and armed robbery, and then later on imprisonment, was constant throughout. But in all artistic renditions of prison conditions (including those done of executions in *Resurrection* and "The Divine and the Human"), Tolstoy always eschewed the element of the Gothic and the satanic in his earlier descriptions of revolutionaries' epiphanies at death. Or he mercilessly ridiculed the delusions (i.e. in the characters of Merzeniecki and Novodvorov). Moreover, he never missed an opportunity to criticize such delusions in other writers. In May 1908 and January 1909, he described the joys and terrors experienced by Leonid Andreev's heroes in "The Seven Who Were Hanged" as "disgusting" and psychologically "false" (PSS 56: 403, 57:271). Exactly during the time of Tolstoy's active work on his hieromonk plot in January 1909 Chertkov recalled these epithets concerning the false psychology of the last moments in Andreev's story: "What a senseless, despairing, shameless jamboree of words!" (Чертков 124). Not even Andreev's dedication of the story to Tolstoy, which was published in the New York edition of it in English in 1909, could alter his opinion.<sup>19</sup> According to Tolstoy, there could be nothing sublime about the killing of one human being by another, only horror at the senselessness of the act. In 1901, the painter Ilya Repin published his memoir about the execution by hanging of Dmitry Karakozov that many years ago he had had the misfortune to witness and that he had described with revulsion, likening the event to hell breaking loose, and noting the terror devoid of glamour or attraction. Judging by a mass of coincidental descriptive details between this account and, say, the execution of Svetlogub in Tolstoy's "The Divine and the Human," there is little doubt concerning Tolstoy's perception of the aesthetics of graphic horror, of death at the moment of execution.<sup>20</sup>

Tolstoy's artistic approach to the conditions under which a revolutionary and a monk had met their death is remarkably similar. One need only compare the questions Tolstoy asked of and about assassins and monks in the adjacent drafts of "The Assassins. None are Guilty" (УБИЙЦЫ. НЕТ ВИНОВАТЫХ (PSS 37: 381-2)), written in December 1908, to the questions he wrote for the hieromonk story a week or two later:

These questions Tolstoy dictated to Gusev (manuscript no.10 of the Kudriash-assassins plot)

- 1) Are those on trial for the assassination of the grand prince kept in solitary confinement or may some of them be kept together?
- 2) Can there be any interaction between them?
- 3) Can they receive information from outside [the prison]??
- 4) Is the day of the trial announced in advance or only on the eve? And how much time can elapse between the announcement of the time of the trial and the trial itself?
- 5) Are meetings with the closest kin allowed? With whom specifically and how can they be arranged??
- 6) Are they allowed to interact with common criminals?
- 7) How are they being transported to the trial?
- 8) In what room is the trial [taking place]?
- 9) What is the structure and the procedure of the trial?

The word hangman (палач) was then added by Gusev to Tolstoy's dictation at the end of the outline. Tolstoy continued: "It is desirable to have answers to all the questions: the most detailed ones regarding how it is normally done and whether there may be any exceptions" (PSS 37: 383-4).

To this, Tolstoy added:

- 1) Under court martial are defense lawyers allowed to have contact with the indicted? How? Where?

- 2) [May I have a] Description, if possible, of a room (помещение) for court martial?
- 3) What does the priest's forewarning to the witness to speak the truth consist of?
- 4) Who are the executioners? How much do they earn?
- 5) In what prison in Moscow are those subject to statute 279 being kept? In the common cell or in solitary confinement? Do they receive visits?
- 6) How are bombs being made?
- 7) [left blank] (PSS 37: 384)

Compare this with the seven questions for the hieromonk plot on the obverse of the first leaf of the manuscript text of the first three chapters ("manuscript 2"):

- 1) How is the whole service conducted?
- 2) How do the monks conduct service, in what order?
- 3) What prayers (do they sing)?
- 4) Who takes the Eucharist on his own?
- 5) Who conducts service in the monastery together with the Deacon?
- 6) To whom / what do they sing?
- 7) Did he drink alone and when? (PSS 37: 453)

Despite the proximity of the two projects, their heroes were intended to meet different ends even though they all were to be executed. Some concluding remarks are now in order: Like Christ's, the former hieromonk's death could only be for the sins of others: He smashed through the doors and continued on to heaven by dying for the robber. In this sense, his death should be seen as plainly and as divinely as the version of Christ Tolstoy presents to us in his commentary and retellings of the gospels. It should not be forgotten that one chapter in Tolstoy's commentary is titled "Jesus is the Door of Life" ("Иисус-дверь жизни"; PSS 24: 477-89). This is surely Tolstoy's rendition of John 10.8-15:

I am the gate (variant: door) for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the

gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. [...] I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (*New Oxford Annotated Bible* NT 142)

This reading of death and dying through the lens of generosity and hospitality in the house of being corresponds to Tolstoy's progress from his earlier understanding of death as the aporetic door to the final certitude of survival through the vehicle of reasonable consciousness. Consider this fragment from the notebook of a thirty-year-old author written on April 11, 1858:

Yasnaya Polyana. I saw in a dream that in my dark room the door suddenly and terrifyingly opened and then it closed noiselessly. I was scared, but I was trying to believe that it was wind. Somebody told me: go and close it, and I went and wished to open it at first, but somebody kept it closed from the back. I wished to run away but my feet got stuck and an unspeakable horror possessed me. I woke up and was glad for my awakening. What was I happy about? I received my consciousness back and lost the one I used to have in my dream. Could a dying person be this happy? (PSS 48: 75)

The robust octogenarian did not lose a bit of that older curiosity. But the door that he was planning to smash through at the absolute end of his narrow path had nothing of the aporia of perceptual experience. Death itself was a form of mastering the last good act, the arrival at alterity through the doors of unconditional love and kindness in the house of hospitable being.<sup>21</sup>

On the day Gorky received a telegram informing him of Tolstoy's death he remembered the episode on a Gaspra shore in the Crimea, the moment of being privy to Tolstoy's silent

command of chaos, its plots and tongues, and to Tolstoy's sorcery governing future unwritten plots, which forced Gorky to tiptoe on pebbles back to reality:

I once saw him as, perhaps, no one has ever seen him... I saw his smallish, angular figure in a gray, crumpled, ragged suit and crumpled hat. He was sitting with his head on his hands, the wind blowing the silvery hairs of his beard through his fingers: he was looking into the distance out to sea, and the little greenish waves rolled up obediently to his feet and fondled them as they were telling something about themselves to the old magician... I felt something fateful, magical, something which went down into the darkness beneath him and stretched up like a search-light into the blue emptiness above the earth; as though it were he, his concentrated will, which was drawing the waves to him and repelling them, which was ruling the movements of cloud and shadow, which was stirring the stones to life. Suddenly, in a moment of madness, I felt, 'It is possible, he will get up, wave his hand, and the sea will become solid and glossy, the stones will begin to move and cry out, everything around him will come to life, acquire a voice, and speak in their different voices of themselves, of him, against him,' I cannot express in words what I felt rather than thought at that moment; in my soul there was joy and fear, and then everything blended in one happy thought: 'I am not an orphan on the earth, so long as this man lives on it' (Gorky 54-56).

Gorky knew that only Tolstoy's sorcery with his unwritten plots provided a glimpse through the doors of the sublime.

#### Notes

For background on Tolstoy's unfinished Iliodor/Isidor story, see Medzhibovskaya's research note "Tolstoy's Hieromonk" in volume XXI (2009) of the *Tolstoy*

*Studies Journal*, pages 55-63. See also Hugh McLean's translation of the majority of the Jubilee version of the hieromonk plot in the same issue, pages 64-66. Many thanks to David Houston and Michael Denner for all their able help in editing this article; and Caryl Emerson for her advice on the preparation of the manuscript.

1. Courtesy of State Tolstoy Museum (ГМТ) in Moscow. I am grateful to Vitaly Remizov (Director) and Natalia Kalinina (Head of the Manuscript and PhotoVisuals Division) for permission to use the image from a photocopy of the plan.

2. The well-known episode of the nightmare he had at the Arzamas inn was related in a letter to his wife in September 1869 and retold fifteen years later in his fictionalized *Memoir of a Madman* [Записки сумасшедшего; 1884].

3. Tolstoy insisted on including the ferry episode under the title "A Free Man" (Свободный человек) in the second edition of *The Circle of Reading*. He worked on this edition intensively with Gorbunov-Posadov in 1908 and then with Chertkov through June of 1909 promoting Sytin's publication of this passage (PSS 42: 578).

4. See especially chapter XIX of Part I and chapters XIV and XVIII of Part II (PSS 36: 28; 36: 49-50; 36: 52).

5. For Tolstoy's high opinion of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, see his letters to Chertkov of January 19-21, 1887 (86:11), 7 August, 1887 (86: 73). See also the memoir of Sergey Tolstoy: С.Л.Толстой, 79.

6. See "Начало незавершенного рассказа "Записки священника" (1909)". *Литературное наследство. Том 69. 1*: 443-44. Gusev did not consider the hieromonk plot citable in his edited log of Tolstoy's unfinished plots. Thus, citing Tolstoy's diary entries for March 16 in which "Pavel" and "the elder" are mentioned alongside other developing plots Gusev does not consider these two related: "The content of the sketch of "The Elder" in the notes remains unknown" (Гусев 1937: 137), whereas in fact they appear to be the exact fragments of the hieromonk plot and the many variants of "Pavel Kudriah." The only priest plot that

appears on the list for the year 1909, the year of Gusev's arrest by the authorities and banishment from Yasnaya Polyana, is that of Priest Aleksey on which Tolstoy was at work in October 1909 (Гусев 137).

7. On Herzen's "The Story of Father Aleksey" see Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy and the Religious Culture*, 248. Since about 1859 Tolstoy's notebooks indicate his interest in Church scandal. See entries in Notebook 1 for October 24, 1859 (PSS 48: 79) and Notebook 8 for 1879 (PSS 48: 213).

8. A good example is issue 2 for the year 1902, the year the fictional hieromonk's diary is dated. See especially the note "О монастырях" [On Monasteries] detailing hideous crimes committed by senior clergy of Iaroslavl' province, and two letters of Tolstoy to priests, one orthodox, another a French pastor. *Свободное слово, январь-февраль (1902)*: 5-8; 19-21.

9. Tolstoy owned a bound copy of an offprint of Gershenzon's biography of Pecherin from the journal *Научное слово*. See item 767 in *Библиотека Льва Николаевича Толстого 1 (1)*: 182.

10. See the tale "A Monk" (Монах) that Tolstoy wrote down in his notebook after hearing it from his friend and wandering storyteller Shchegolenok (Записная книжка No. 8, 1879; PSS 48: 207-08).

11. On Iliodor's nicknames and exploits, see Figes and Kolonitskii, 10-11, Radzinsky, 113-15 and especially Варламов 419-30.

12. Long before 1917, Iliodor's star was considered to be in historical eclipse. See an entry on Trufanov which states that as early as 1911-1912 he had lost all political significance (*Новый энциклопедический словарь*. 19: 93-94).

13. See esp. page 11 for the change made by Spiro to the text of the original interview.

14. For an excellent source, see the unnumbered volume under "Ибак-Kliucharev" [Ибак-Ключарев] in *Русский биографический словарь*.

15. The announcement is not entirely accurate: "The Divine and the Human" was first published in the second volume of *The Circle of Reading* in 1906.

16. Tolstoy revised the tale from the eponymous legend heard back in 1879 from Shchegolenok. See Notebooks for 1879 (PSS 48: 211-12).

17. See chapters III through XII of book II of *Fantine* skipping the many details of Valjean's prehistory presented when the criminal awakens in his alcove in the dead of night after the welcome dinner at L'Abbé's of book II of *Fantine* (Hugo 73-106).

18. In the summer of 1905 Tolstoy regretted not behaving like a Myriel towards a man suspected of thievery (Маковицкий, 1: 306). Compare the adaptation of *Les Misérables* for the children's version of *The Circle of Reading, 1907* (*Бедные люди*; 40: 401-02). See also Tolstoy's translation of Hugo's story "The Atheist" (*L'Athée/ "Неверующий"*) included in his general edition of *The Circle of Reading* (PSS 41: 516-22). A young priest in Hugo's text breaks with the church claiming to be an atheist and a radical and dies saving the lives of others during a shipwreck.

19. See the dedication and Andreyev's explanatory note, "The Seven Who Were Hanged." Translated for Halcyon House by Herman Bernstein (5-10). See also Tolstoy's letters to Andreev of September 2, 1908 and his letter to Bernstein of May 5, 1909 (PSS 79: 182).

20. See Repin's "Казнь Каракозова. 1866" (Репин 204-205). If not by way of mouth, Repin's description of Karakozov's hanging would be known to Tolstoy from И.Е. Репин *Воспоминания, статьи, письма*. Ред. Н.В. Северовой. Санкт-Петербург: Коммерч. Скоропечать Э Тиле, 1901. Tolstoy owned a copy of the book which is preserved in his library.

21. Tolstoy's solution coincides with the policy of human care and responsibility for the first and final causes of life most vividly present in the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, especially his *Alterity and Transcendence* (q.v). See also Derrida's discussion of open doors in the house of being: at Levinas' prompting, Derrida attempts in his later work to move

beyond the aporetic moment of personal death (Derrida 1993, q.v); and Derrida 2000, esp. pp. 61, 129, 153-55. I am grateful to colleagues at the forum La Sincerità di Tolstoj organized by Università degli Studi di Milano at Gargnano Italy April 7-9, 2010 and to Jeff Love at the meeting of ASEES in Los Angeles on November 20, 2010 for reminding me in their comments on the earlier versions of this paper to connect the conclusion of this discussion with the ideas of the door discussed by me earlier as a symbol of Tolstoy's creative aporia (Medzhibovskaya 2005).

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