Rehabilitating Bakhtin's Tolstoy: The Politics of the Utterance

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> Every one of your words could be taken in two senses, as if there were another word hidden beneath it!
> *Crime and Punishment* (pt.VI, ch. 2)

Mikhail Bakhtin's compelling vision of polyphony changed forever the way we read Dostoevsky. It is perplexing, therefore, why Bakhtin so often proved an unsympathetic and even obtuse reader of Tolstoy.

Bakhtin's anti-Tolstoy bias is too conspicuous to be dismissed as a mere anomaly. Even Bocharov, who helped save Bakhtin's works from oblivion, admits his mentor "was often unfair to Tolstoy" (1999 [1993], 513). Vaiman, who read *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* ecstatically as a student in 1963, nevertheless faulted Bakhtin later for distorting the truth about Tolstoy (282). Emerson reached the stark conclusion in 1985 that "Bakhtin's world is not designed to accommodate writers like Tolstoy. In it Tolstoy is a loser, the negative example" (75). Bakhtin's Tolstoy- blindness, she believes, is the consequence of his "obsession with the double-voiced word" (1995, 129) and his inflexible "categories of authoring" (1989, 160). In the same vein, Mandelker points out that by portraying Tolstoy as a "monolithically monological" author Bakhtin needlessly perpetuates the icon of him as dogmatist and thereby diverts us from the subtleties of his art (147-148).

One aspect of the problem is inconsistencies in Bakhtin's treatment of Tolstoy. Bakhtin on occasion finds the positive features of "dialogicality" and "multivoicedness" in his novels, as well as autonomy of action and thought in his characters—things which he repeatedly denies in the Dostoevsky book (Shukman 1984, 57-59). Meticulously compiled notes of Bakhtin's lectures from the 1920s contain no evidence that he preferred Dostoevsky to Tolstoy (Mirkina 238-288) and seem to confirm Shukman's thesis that Bakhtin adapted his view of Tolstoy to suit specific texts. A case in point are Bakhtin's Tolstoy prefaces of 1930, which offer a very different and sympathetic image of Tolstoy only one year after the appearance of the Dostoevsky book. All this points to an instability in Bakhtin's appraisal of Tolstoy, which some critics have attributed to his struggle for survival in politically uncertain times (Clark/Holquist 155; Shukman 1989, 139).

My goal here is to show how such political circumstances contributed to Bakhtin's negative appraisal of Tolstoy in the two versions of his Dostoevsky book—*Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Work* [*PTD*] (1929) and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* [*PPD*] (1963). Metaphorically speaking, the aim is to "rehabilitate" the Tolstoy Bakhtin used as a whipping boy on both occasions.

The present argument follows the lead of critics who have pointed to esoteric political implications in Bakhtin's theoretical writing,[1] in particular Groys and Ryklin, who suggest that the "carnival" texts are aesthetic responses to the terror of the 1930s.[2] The approach is new only in that it supplies a more detailed account of political circumstances surrounding the Dostoevsky-Tolstoy dichotomy and thus shows more fully the contexts in which Bakhtin's Aesopian language needs to be interpreted. Moreover, I have chosen to underscore the vastly different political climate in Russia of the late 1920s and that of the early 1960s, since Aesopian strategies are designed in part to circumvent the taboos of *contemporaneous*[3] circumstances. Each version of the book, therefore, must be examined individually.

Let us begin with *PTD*.

In *PTD* (1929), Bakhtin's assault on Tolstoy occupies only a small space. Nevertheless it presents an antithesis crucial to the argumentation of the book. According to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky, the polyphonic author, empowers his characters, gives them independent voices, and even allows them to argue cogently points of view which are diametrically opposed to the author's. Tolstoy the

monologist, on the other hand, allows his characters no real freedom, insisting rather that they conform (in action and word) to the stable, indisputable truth which the author knows beforehand:

> Tolstoy's world is monolithically monological; the character's word is confined in the hard frame of the author's words about him. Even the character's last word is given in the packaging of the author's own word; the character's consciousness is only one element of this fixed image and, in essence, is predetermined by this image, even when this character undergoes a crisis and radical change of view. (*PTD* 53)

In short, Dostoevsky is an egalitarian writer who carries on a "dialogue" with his characters, while Tolstoy is an authoritarian who speaks for them. To illustrate this, Bakhtin contrasts the way Dostoevsky gives priority to the voice of his character-narrator in *A Gentle Creature* with the way Tolstoy, in three well-known works, forbids his characters from verbalizing their pre-death experience:

> Tolstoy . . . calmly introduces the thoughts of a dying character, the last burst of his consciousness, his last words directly into the fabric of the author's own discourse (we see this already in "The Sevastopol Tales" [Praskukhin of "Sevastopol in May"]; especially good examples are his late works: "The Death of Ivan Il'ich" and "Master and Man"). . . . The structure of Brekhunov and Ivan Il'ich as artistic images does not differ at all from the structure of old prince Bolkonskii or Natasha Rostova. The self-awareness and word of the character do not become the dominant structuring principle despite their thematic importance in the works of Tolstoy. A second fully sovereign voice (besides the author's) does not appear in his world. . . . Tolstoy's monologically naive point of view and his discourse penetrate everywhere, into every corner of the world and the soul, subordinating everything to its own singularity. (*PTD* 53)

Bakhtin conveniently overlooks the fact that the speaker in Dostoevsky's story is not the heroine, but the person who drove her to suicide and, before that, into silence. We do not *hear* the heroine's "last word." Her last word, metaphorically speaking, is her mangled corpse. In fact, all three of Tolstoy's stories provide a more direct account of the dying characters' thoughts than *A Gentle Creature*, where we must scrutinize every word of the disturbed narrator to understand —through his filter—the experience of his victim. Bakhtin, I believe, means to say something perfectly valid—-that the Dostoevskian way of conveying a character's thought is in certain important respects different from Tolstoy's. But he leads us toward a skewed and unfair conclusion about Tolstoy and then implicitly generalizes it for all his works ("does not differ at all from . . . old prince Bolkonskii or Natasha Rostova"). Bakthin follows one of the cardinal rules of all rhetoric: one must use "available means of persuasion" to present not necessarily what is true, but what "resembles the true" (Aristotle 33, 36). Discrediting Tolstoy, I would argue, makes sense not in terms of a reasonable presentation of critical insight, but in terms of an Aesopian strategy which deforms it.

To understand this strategy it will be useful to place *PTD* in the context of Bakhtin's evolution as a thinker. De Man justifiably observed that Bakhtin was by nature not a literary scholar but a "metaphysician" who used language and literature to talk about the human situation in general (110). The concept of "dialogue," which underpins virtually all his writings, therefore, is not necessarily, nor inherently linguistic—it relates to the interaction of conscious beings whether or not they speak a language at all. It is a religious concept which lies at the core of human existence and gives it meaning. Like Buber's "I and Thou," it is a communication that "silence bears" (4) and that forms the basis of human empathy.

For whatever reasons (political or personal), Bakhtin chose early on to explicate this vision of the world through the analysis of literary art. While it is difficult to ascertain the precise dates of his earliest writings, their sequence is clearly evident from a fundamental shift that occurs in them with regard to his attitude toward the artistic word. In "Art and Responsibility" (1918) Bakhtin makes no mention of verbal art at all—he writes about ethics and *art in general*. In "Toward a

Philosophy of the Act" (late 1920-early 1921), however, he analyzes at length Pushkin's poem *A Parting* [*Razluka*] to illustrate his ethical phenomenology. Here, Bakhtin makes the turn to *verbal art* and attempts to stake out his own turf by polemicizing with the Formalists. As Tavis points out, Bakhtin reacts to what he perceives to be the Formalists' fixation on mechanical linguistic features and their denial of human subjectivity (73-74). He sees in the poem a dialogue *not of the characters' words but of their "emotional-volitional centers,"* their *points of view*. At this point, Bakhtin *does not give priority to the characters' speech*, but concerns himself still with the competing human perspectives which converge in the author's imagination. In "Author and Hero" (early 1920s), Bakhtin is *thoroughly involved in literary art*, but he continues to focus on the *visual-emotive phenomenology* of interpersonal relations rather than the characters' speech. "How does the author enter the character so as to witness reality through his eyes?" "To what extent does the author's 'excess of vision' allow him to complete the character's limited view of himself?" These are the questions that hold Bakhtin spellbound in "Author and Hero." *There is no effort to* see the character's word as the primary determinant of his being. In "The Problem of Content, Material and Form" (1924) Bakhtin still speaks about a person's existence in the world as if it were realized tangibly in the way one sees not speaks.

In the latter half of the 20s, however, verbalism—*the priority of the character's or author-narrator's utterance*—becomes the litmus test for Bakhtin and those who co-authored with him *Freudianism* (1927), *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (1928), and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929). These books defined their approach in contradistinction to various -isms that acquired currency the mid-1920s. Voloshinov's *Freudianism* faults Freud's theory for dismissing the verbal content of thought. The other two base their argument almost exclusively on the priority of the word as metonym of social discourse, either attempting to overturn the prevailing ideology of the word (Formalism) or filling out the ideology that had no theory of the word (Marxism).

When and how Bakhtin wrote *PTD* remains, in large degree, a mystery. Some concept of a work about Dostoevsky occupied him as early as 1919 (Nikolaev 227). A partial "prototext" may have existed in the early 1920s (2, 440), as is suggested by a note Bakhtin wrote to his brother in January 1922, that he was working on "a book about Dostoevsky"(2, 433). In August there appeared a published announcement that the "book" was already "written"(2, 433). The reliability of this announcement, however, is highly suspect (2, 434). One should not conclude, therefore, that *PTD*, as we know it, belongs mainly to the early 1920s. The fact that most of the references in it are to books published in the mid-1920s and the fact that Bakhtin himself told Duvakin that it was written in 1928 (217) suggest that the creation of the book in its ultimate form took place for the most part in the latter half of the 1920s. This is evident, moreover, in *PTD's consistent valorization of the characters' speech over their way of seeing*. Bakhtin's shift from pure philosophy to philosophical literary criticism may well have been a result of his own disposition, his own gift. The literature he chose to write about and the angle from which he approached it, however, seems to have been at least in some measure influenced by the political realities of his time. As Clark and Holquist point out, "Bakhtin was an astute student of his own time and place. He studied them like a scholar, marking *Pravda* editorials with colored pens to bring out the hidden meanings. . . . [He] constantly scan[ned] the political horizon for signs of which way the breeze of the permissible will next flow" (153). Bakhtin's decision to champion the utterance and the word over non-verbal phenomena made sense in an era when speech itself was vulnerable to persecution. To be sure, censorship was less severe in the 1920s than it would become under high Stalinism, but those attuned, as was Bakhtin, to the subtle "breezes" of change, understood that verbal discourse occupied a precarious place under the eye of the Bolsheviks. "Dialogue," in the broad philosophical sense Bakhtin originally conceived

it, would be meaningless in the struggles of his time if it were to remain the province of Buber's unspoken communication. "Life on a silent ... foundation," which Bakhtin was still willing to contemplate in "Toward a Philosophy of the Act" (1920-21) (1994, 44), was already unacceptable to him in the mid and late 1920s, because it meant keeping ones thoughts hidden, never allowing them to enter into a dialogue with his time or times to come. Moreover, he was undoubtedly emboldened by the relaxation of state controls over speech in the NEP years, when pluralism in the arts and aesthetic criticism (paralleling "polyphony" in Bakthin's novelistic world) were tolerated and in some instances encouraged (e.g., Trotsky and Lunacharsky).

Bakhtin's Aesopian strategy required that some diligent readers be able to decipher analogies such as this one, that is, analogies between the critical material he examined and the contemporary political situation. By favouring "polyphony" over "monologism," "word" over "silence," he was in turn limiting the choice of literary models from which such analogies could be drawn. If he chose as his positive model an author who immersed us in the world of unspoken thought, he would be undercutting his argument. If he chose, however, an author whose characters emerged as personalities from their voices and realized themselves primarily in speech, he would have at his disposal ample material to illustrate his verbal model.

It is this circumstance that made the Dostoevsky-Tolstoy opposition so convenient for Bakhtin's purposes. Dostoevsky's most memorable characters identify themselves first and foremost by the way they use words. Their very being-in-the-world hinges on their speech. Devushkin is an aspiring poet and stylist; Raskolnikov commits his innermost thoughts to an article he debates with Porfirii Petrovich; Myshkin mesmerizes people with his stories and oracular pronouncements; Stavrogin is a persuasive orator; Ivan Karamazov is a gifted speaker and writer. Even minor characters engage us largely by their verbal idiosyncrasies (Marmeladov, Raskolnikov's mother, Lebeziatnikov, General Ivolgin, Ippolit, Petr and Stepan Verkhovenskii, Marya Lebiadkina, Fyodor Karamazov, Smerdiakov). The logo-centrism of Bakhtin and his circle—evident in the statements below —was well-suited to explaining Dostoevsky's art:

> The basic defining interest of the novel as a genre, that which constitutes its stylistic uniqueness, is *the speaking subject and his word.* (Bakhtin 1975, "Slovo v romane" 145)
>
> *Life begins only at the point where utterance crosses utterance*, i.e., where verbal interaction begins. (Voloshinov 145)
>
> Personality is itself generated through language . . . . Consequently, a word is not an expression of inner personality; rather, *inner personality is an expressed or inwardly impelled word.* (Voloshinov 153)

Bakhtin's equation of thought with inner speech, simplistic as it was, made considerable sense for Dostoevsky's characters, who often work through problems of deductive reasoning in private, that is, to the degree that his characters engage in abstract, analytic, or speculative thought.

By contrast, Tolstoy's major characters find fulfillment when they abandon ideologies, arguments, and syllogistic reasoning. For them (although not always for the author) truth eludes them so long as they try to reduce it to a formulation of words. They grasp truth when they stop trying to verbalize it and simply experience it sensually, as Pierre finds the answer to life and death in droplets fusing and separating in a liquid globe, or Andrew understands his place in the world when he looks at the sky. To be sure, words can be used to reduce these visions to abstractions, but in doing so we always lose the essence of what makes the characters alive. They exist, primarily, by what they see and feel. If one's sense of being-in-the-world describes the reality that our world is uniquely our own, this reality is less a function of speech for Tolstoy's characters than a function of perception and apperception. Seifrid is correct, therefore, in defining Tolstoy's epistemology through the sensory premise that "a thing can be known only if it is seen, . . . as though seeing were constitutive of truth" (436). Tolstoy's fiction succeeds or fails, therefore, by

measure of how well readers are able to use his characters' sensitivities as windows onto their objective world.

This principle is a key to the subjectivity of Tolstoy's fictional worlds, from which *PTD* subtly distracts us. For Bakhtin, monological discourse denies the "subject" and presents everyone and everything as an "object." In it characters are "object[s] of the author's intention" (*PTD* 83), while in polyphony they are "*subjects* . . . , not objects" (*PTD* 13). Belying this is the simple truth that we cannot cognize an object unless we are subjects. Nature is not just beautiful, it is always beautiful to someone. What passes for pure objectivity in Tolstoy's writing—our sense that reality itself is appearing before our eyes as we read—is actually a form of subjectivity. As Kupreianova demonstrates, Tolstoy's representational genius lies not in his ability to "describe" the object (138), but to create the "sensation" of the object (16), that is, the subjective apprehension of it in sensory perception. Using Tolstoy's experimental nature descriptions, she shows how he recorded physical details as might a botanist or phenologist—colour, shading, texture, angle of vision, sound, temperature—in nominal form with minimal syntax (145-51). His aim was to register the immediate experience of the scene that occurs at the initial moment of apprehension, before the reflective capacity of the mind begins to remake it into an object of reason or aesthetic consciousness:

> April 12. . . . Nightingales. Frogs, pollywogs croak. 3-inch grass in the woods, lungwart blossoms and yellow all over. . . . April 20. Not flowering but rising high: wild radishes, tiny wormwoods pale, dandelions' stars. The autumn tillage is overgrown. On the hillock—plowed rows or none. People walking, sowing. The seed is crusted; there's a black row, yellow-white roots turned up from beneath the ground. (quoted 145-146)

Fortunatov points out that the sequence of details in passages like these indicates movement through the scene and further embeds us in the mind of the witnessing subject (27). Variations of this technique in Tolstoy's fiction likewise draw us into the perceived reality of a character and make us feel this raw subjective experience as the character's own, not the author's objective description of it.

Although Bakhtin refuses to validate Tolstoy's "silent" way of enabling his subject, he acknowledges at one point in *PTD* that Tolstoy's more articulate characters can enter into something resembling a verbal dialogue with the author:

> The degree of objectness of the hero's depicted word can vary. It is sufficient to compare, for instance, Prince Andrew's words in Tolstoy with the words of Gogol's heroes, for example, Akakii Akakievich. To the degree that the direct concrete intentionality of the hero's words increases and their corresponding objectness is reduced, the interrelation between the author's speech and the hero's speech begins to approach the interrelation between two sides of a dialogue. The difference in vantage point between them is diminished and they can find themselves on the same plane. In truth this occurs only as a tendency, as a striving towards a limit which is not achieved. (*PTD* 84)

Bakhtin does not seem troubled that this passage contradicts what he said elsewhere in *PTD* about Tolstoy's novels. It makes sense though in terms of Aesopian discourse, because the author must provide some clue that his main argument contains exaggeration. Contradiction is a handy tool for doing so.

It is natural for those who admire Bakhtin to look for extensions of his method that might accommodate Tolstoy's "silent" subjectivity as well as the rich intersubjectivity in his novels. Morson and Emerson suggest how this might be done when they draw out features of multivoicedness and multiperspectivalness from passages in *Anna Karenina* (329-43). They extract subtle inferences from the minute flux of Anna's thoughts—its autoreferential quality, its spontaneity, its agile means of processing recollections and images which surface and then disappear, its anticipations and suppositions about how others will see her actions and what conclusions they will draw about her own intentions. They reveal a seething intersubjectivity that pulls the reader into the same unfinalized speculation about motives,

causes, perceptions, and responses which grips Anna herself. Bakhtin would probably have smiled upon their analysis because it operates from his concern with otherness, the convergence of separate consciousnesses, and the fluctuation between insideness and outsideness, empathy and detachment, acting and reacting which comprise for him the seductive core of all art and all life. Their analysis, however, remains rooted to Bakhtin's logocentrism. It still focuses on verbal behaviours, although the concept of "inner speech" allows them to bridge the gap between the spoken word and Tolstoy's "silent" interior monologues.

Admittedly, Morson's and Emerson's main purpose is to explicate Bakhtin, not to rewrite him, but if one's primary aim were to understand Tolstoy, one would say that the Bakhtinian model of discourse is simply incapable of describing the dynamics of non-verbal and pre-verbal thought so crucial to the experience of Tolstoy's characters. Bakhtin, of course, knew that thought is not necessarily speech. He showed this in "Author and Hero." He knew the reality Dennett describes in *Consciousness Explained:* "the phenomenology of vivid thought is not restricted to *talking* to oneself; we can draw pictures to ourselves in our mind's eyes, drive a stick shift car to ourselves, touch silk to ourselves, or savor an imaginary peanut butter sandwich" (59). But in *PTD* Bakhtin was focused on ideological thought, which needs words to develop and reach expression, not the evanescent play of wordless images. The political agenda of this book required him to do so because he was talking ultimately about the survivability of intellectual discourse.

In Bakhtin's Aesopian language the intrinsic "silence" of Tolstoy's characters represented the lack of dialogue in a repressive society. Its converse was the voice of the tyrannical author who usurps their speech. Bakhtin could reasonably count on his readers to draw such analogies in the late 1920s. But a new phenomenon emerged at the same time which played handily into this strategy and greatly enhanced its aesthetic reach. This was the state sponsored enshrinement of Lev Tolstoy on the occasion of his 100th birthday (September 1928), which made Bakhtin's allegorical conflation of Tolstoy with monological Marxism a palpable reality. It was as if the state were realizing Bakhtin's metaphor.

The Tolstoy fête of 1928 was organized on a scale unheard of since the Pushkin celebrations of 1880 and 1899. The so-called "Jubilee Edition" of his complete collected works in 92 volumes was authorized in 1925 and placed in the hands of a State Editorial Commission headed by Lunacharsky, the Commissar of Enlightenment. Before his death in 1924, Lenin left instructions that it was to include everything Tolstoy wrote without exception and without censors' deletions ("Ot izdatel'stva " 5-6). No other writer had yet been accorded such an honour by the Soviet state. By comparison, Dostoevsky's works were offered to the public in a partial edition which contained only his fiction (1926-30).[4]

The central Party apparatus organized a huge official celebration. Like the Pushkin fêtes sponsored by the Tsarist regimes, this event quickly turned into an official canonization, signaling the approval of the highest state authorities. Tolstoy's works were issued in unusually large numbers to insure that all schools, libraries, trade unions, and political organizations had access to them. Articles about Tolstoy by well-known Marxists were republished in numerous anthologies, especially Lenin's famous "Tolstoy the Mirror of the Russian Revolution," which became required reading for every Soviet schoolchild. *Knizhnaia letopis'* for 1928 lists more than a hundred separate book titles by or about Tolstoy with a total issue of more than 1,500,000 volumes. Among them was a complete edition of Tolstoy's fiction by the State Printing House in 250,000 copies. Tolstoy's home in Moscow was restored and opened to the public, while a large new building was donated by the Moscow Soviet to preserve the collection of books, manuscripts, and memorabilia that were streaming into the newly organized Tolstoy Museum from all over the country. The ancestral home at Iasnaia Poliana was renovated and opened as a museum, while the school at Tolstoy's estate was rebuilt and supplied with new dormitories. Celebrations took place in schools, units of the Red Army, trade unions, and even

temperance societies. Commemorative events occurred in every major city in the Soviet Union from Minsk and Leningrad to Novosibirsk and Baku, and it was announced that Tolstoy was being translated for the first time into Armenian, Byelorussian, Tatar, Turkish, Ukrainian, and Esperanto. Statues of Tolstoy were erected and a medallion with his profile was issued for public sale. The extravaganza so preoccupied the Party that it virtually forgot to celebrate the 100th birthday of Chernyshevsky , which passed concurrently with slight attention.[5]

The Bolsheviks' lovefest was not with Tolstoy the religious leader. Tolstoyanism, which had roughly 6,000 adherents by 1917 and perhaps triple that number by the mid-1920s, was being violently crushed even as hymns were being sung to Tolstoy's fiction in the press. 1928 marked the beginning of organized terror against the Tolstoyan sect, replete with arrests, murders, and acts of arson (Edgerton 1-41). By 1931, hardly one thousand Tolstoyans remained.

The paradox can be explained by the fact that Tolstoyanism, given its sizable following, was a genuine political threat in the countryside where the Party initiated forced collectivization at the outset of the First Five-Year Plan (October 1, 1928). On the other hand, as Ia. Lur'e points out (55-60), the new Soviet state required a sense of its own historical legitimacy, a sense that the Revolution was not an accident, as émigré writers like Aldanov and Berdiaev insisted, but a natural outcome of an age-old struggle against oppression. Here Party ideologues turned to Tolstoy as the author of a work which showed history unfolding by magnificent providential necessity, wherein momentous events are made not by individuals but by the collective will of a nation.[6] It was at this time that the Party began encouraging writers to follow the stylistic model of *War and Peace,* a cue quickly picked up by Fadeev (*Razgrom,* 1927) and others. There was something reassuring in the normalcy of Tolstoy's world, something less threatening than Dostoevsky's eccentricities. An important factor, of course, was Lenin's well-known hatred of Dostoevsky.[7] Rumour had it, conversely, that Tolstoy was Lenin's favourite author and *War and Peace* his favourite piece of fiction.[8]

Emulation of Tolstoy was part of that process which led to the establishment of Socialist Realism as official policy at the First Soviet Writers' Congress in 1934, where André Malraux told his audience "Leo Tolstoy is more contemporary than many of you" (quoted by Robin 26). The thrust of the Congress was to abandon experimentation and return to the norms of the previous century—not so much Dostoevsky's, but Tolstoy's. In Bakhtinian terms it was a return to "monologism through the normalization of language" (Robin xxii). Tolstoy's impact, however, was not just stylistic. As Slonim points out, the very doctrine of Socialist Realism was in large degree modeled after Tolstoy's aesthetic theory:

> [Tolstoy] was not only the patron of the resurgent realistic school, mainly promoted by the Communists, but also the precursor of their aesthetics. Tolstoy . . . demanded a "moral point of view," for which the Communists substituted a socio-political one. His condemnation of contemporary works of fiction as mere playthings for the upper classes, his rejection of decadents and symbolists. . . , his emphasis on the "message" . . ., his desire to transform literature into a vehicle for . . . mass education, were fully utilized by the Communists. . . . In short . . . *What is Art?* is more enlightening for the understanding of Soviet literary criticism than the few pages of Marx, Engels, and Lenin which are always quoted in Moscow as the source of Communist aesthetics. (177-178)

All of this drives home the point that the affinity Bakhtin intimated in *PTD* between Tolstoy's way of thinking and the mentality of Stalinism did not require a huge leap of imagination for his contemporaries to decipher. Stalinism had a Tolstoy-like face, although this face, of course, had been sculpted by Party ideologues for their own aims. No one understood this better than the artists and critics of *Novyi LEF,* who—during the brief period of the journal's existence (1927-28)—continually satirized the Party's aesthetic conservatism in terms Bakhtin could easily endorse. Tret'iakov's article "The New Lev Tolstoy" in the first issue is a good example:

> Automatism of thought tells us: "There was a bourgeois state and it became a proletarian state, there was a bourgeois industrial base and it became a proletarian industrial base, there was a bourgeois art and it became (or will become) a proletarian art, there was a bourgeois Tolstoy and he will become a proletarian Tolstoy."
>
> Indeed, try carrying these daring parallels to such absurd extremes as "a proletarian church" and a "proletarian Tsar," and you'll see that one parallel will not suffice.
>
> The great "describer of life" plus "the teacher of life"—that's the simplified formula for the anticipated Tolstoy. (Tred'iakov 34-35)

Maiakovsky, the leading poet of *Novyi LEF,* ridiculed the Party's Tolstoy-mania and the surfeit of cheap publications by Tolstoy in his play *The Bedbug* (1928), where a book peddler hawks his wares, shouting, "What does a woman do when her husband is not at home? *105 Funny Anecdotes by Count Lev Tolstoy*—1 ruble, now only 15 kopecks" (Scene 1). The alliance between burgeoning Stalinism and the packaged Tolstoy was firmly entrenched by late 1928, and Bakhtin could hardly have been unaware of it.

In the text of *PTD* itself, however, indications of hidden discourses about contemporary reality are necessarily subdued, indirect, and, of course, ambiguous. By far the greater part of the book is couched in a dispassionate scholarly idiom that does not call for esoteric reading, and its argumentation is balanced and persuasive. Nevertheless, we have the testimony of the author himself that writing *PTD* forced him to dissimulate, truncate lines of reasoning, and "not speak about the main questions" (Bocharov 1999 [orig. 1993], 475). What textual evidence is there of such compromises?

Following Strauss's precept that Aesopian intent reveals itself at moments of illogicality, inconsistency, obscurity, and enigmaticness (36), one could argue that these features are most tangibly manifest at the beginning and end of *PTD*. *PTD* opens with a short preface that withholds important information and offers sociological jargon not characteristic of the style or argumentation in Bakhtin's book. The initial paragraph (about why the author "excludes historical problems" and treats only "theoretical" ones) is, to say the least, obscure. It does not explain what "historical problems" are omitted nor does it give the reason for doing so, except to mention unspecified "technical considerations" (*PTD* 3). This paragraph, understandably, has caused considerable speculation. Osovskii believes Bakhtin prepared a history of polyphonic genres which he later "restored" in the Menippean segment of *PPD* (69-70). Kozhinov offered the hypothesis that the historical portion of the book was probably cut by the publisher (Priboi) to conserve space (52). Bocharov (1999), however, points out in an unpublished paper that these explanations are implausible, given that Bakhtin began work on the history of the novel only in 1930s and saw Menippean satire as relevant to Dostoevsky only in the 1940s (27). Bocharov himself offers no alternative hypothesis about what Bakhtin meant by "historical problems." Any number of reasonable inferences (including non-political ones) are possible, but the mere fact that Bakhtin chose to open his book with an ambiguous utterance is itself consistent with strategies of Aesopian (and therefore aesthetic) discourse.

Later in the preface, Bakhtin lays down a swath "sociological" rhetoric:

> At the core of the present analysis lies the conviction that any literary work is internally, immanently *sociological*. In it living *social* forces intersect and every element of its form is permeated with *social* judgments [*otsenkami*]. Therefore a purely formal analysis must take each element of artistic structure as a point of refraction of living *social* forces, like an artificial crystal, whose faces are formed and polished in such a way as to refract specific rays of *social* judgments. . . . [I]n Dostoevsky's creative work his philosophical and *social-political* ideology was superseded by his *revolutionary* innovations in the field of the novel. . . . (*PTD* 3-4)

These statements make sense by themselves, but they tend to mislead us about the contents of the book. *PTD* is not a "sociological" study, unless we consider verbal relations between author and characters a form of sociology. In *PTD,* we find concentrations of such sociological jargon (which,

according to the editors of *SS,* "are taken as if on loan from the lexicon of V. F. Pereverzev") (2, 457) at certain critical junctures in the text—most notably, at the end of Part II, chapter 3, and at the end of the book.[9] Such passages were common and often served as a "writ of safe passage" for the writings of fellow-travellers (2, 470). At the end the 1920s such camouflaging had become more suspect, and some of Bakhtin's contemporary reviewers spotted it.[10]

At the end of book we find a passage that can be taken quite literally but describes a world opposite to the one Bakhtin has shown in Dostoevsky's works. It is a world without dialogue and without otherness:

> Communion with others has as if lost its own real body and wants to create one spontaneously for itself out of human matter. All of this is a most profound expression of social disorientation among the . . . intelligentsia, which feels itself dispersed over the world and trying to orient itself in isolation out of fear and sensing danger. . . . For the isolated individual one's own voice becomes ephemeral, one's own wholeness and one's inner harmony with oneself becomes a postulate. (*PTD* 174)

Quite unlike the official "Conclusion" which follows and indeed summarizes the book's contents, this closing has no real scholarly purpose. It is a poignant evocation of fear and loneliness, which speaks, of course, about the general human condition in times of oppression and strife. It stands out as an odd poetic meditation against the background of scholarly discourse. It jogs us to contemplate the timeless significance of the book and its relevance to realities unmentioned. When these lines were written, wholesale purges and round-ups had already begun. Some of Bakhtin's closest friends were disappearing into the labyrinths of the OGPU, and there were readers who could understand this subtext.

No one who reviewed *PTD,* of course, spoke about the book's secret agendas explicitly, but Lunacharsky alluded unsubtly to them in a review for the journal *Novyi mir* (October 1929). This review speaks allegorically about Bakhtin's apprehensions and seems to convey a dire prophecy (or warning) about the excesses he anticipates from Stalinism. It is important to note that Lunacharsky, Commissar of Enlightenment since 1917, had been removed from his post shortly before this review appeared.[11] From its brazen tone, it seems likely that he had his demotion in mind as he wrote. Lunacharsky correctly grasps that Bakhtin's book is not just about "polyphony" in Dostoevsky's novels, but also about the whole principle of pluralism in culture and "multivoicedness" in thought and discourse:

> A writer, if he is a poet, is not at all obligated . . . to bring unity and order into society and nature, nor even reduce them to a kind of monism by means of philosophical argumentation. He can . . . acknowledge the existence of an unreconcilable pluralism, he can acknowledge the unresolvable tragic reality in the universe stemming from the conflict of different forces struggling amongst each other. He can . . . confirm the existence of these differences . . . [and see in their interaction] a unifying concept. (199-200)

Like Bakhtin, Lunacharsky understands he is at the cusp of a monological era. Though he cannot speak openly about the contemporary situation, he points to it through the time transposition of Aesopian speech, recalling Dostoevsky's persecution at the hands of Tsarist police and comparing it to the fate of numerous other Russian writers. He reminds us that 1929 is the anniversary of Dostoevsky's arrest and sentencing to execution by firing squad. He talks about the compromises nineteenth-century writers made with the state just to survive, using Dostoevsky as but one example:

> With his whole being [*sushchestvom*]. . . Dostoevsky was aware that autocracy was devouring him. He did not want to be eaten alive. He had to take such a position as would save his place as prophet and would not lead to a conflict with the authorities who threatened to bring about a catastrophe in the immediate future. (205)

Belinsky, he says, might have sold his soul too "if he had not been lucky enough to die . . . before he was tortured" (203). Evoking the gruesome image

of perishing human flesh, he recalls the sobering lessons of the last century: "The epoch, one can say, was sown with corpses and semi-corpses, within which some people resisted and were broken, others bowed and stayed alive but were crippled, taking on vividly apparent pathological features"(203). Lunacharsky—being closer to the centre of power, knowing firsthand about atrocities hidden from the public, and nearing the end of his career with little to lose—could take a risk Bakhtin, at the beginning of his career, could not. Bakhtin survived to another time, when he would speak more candidly and with greater knowledge about the horrors Lunacharsky foresaw.[12] But that is the story of *PPD,* to which we now turn.

Shortly after completing *PTD,* Bakhtin was arrested. The book appeared in June 1929, and one month later he was sentenced to five years of hard labour. Thanks to Lunacharsky's favourable review and interventions by Gorky and A. Tolstoy, Bakhtin's sentence was commuted to exile. He spent the next thirty years studying, teaching and writing in relative oblivion.

In the 1940s, Bakhtin began nurturing the idea of revising the Dostoevsky book and made some preliminary notes for it. He did not begin doing so in earnest, however, until 1961, when the Italian publisher Einaudi approached him and asked him to abridge and update *PTD* as a foreword to a new edition of Dostoevsky's works (5, 650). Bakhtin completed the "Italian variant" and sent it off in the spring of 1962 (5, 651). Being dissatisfied with it, however, he accepted the more ambitious offer of the Russian publisher "Sovetskii pisatel'" to produce a wholly new and expanded version of the Dostoevsky book—a task he completed in 1963. In part to indicate that this new book was substantially different from the old one, Bakhtin renamed it *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics.* This new title also signaled a certain reconciliation with the Formalists with whom the Bakhtin circle had polemicized in the 1920s.

PPD was conceived and written at the peak of the so-called "thaw" in Russian letters. 1961 was the year Khrushchev launched his second major assault on Stalin at the 22d Party Congress, giving details of Kirov's assassination, concentration camps, and the complicity of Molotov and others in mass arrests and exterminations. At the end of the Congress (October 31) Stalin's body was removed from the Mausoleum on Red Square and buried in concrete at the base of the Kremlin wall. In 1962, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet allowed publication of Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.* The egregious horrors of Stalin's time were for the first time being looked at with some candor.

Given these circumstances, one might expect Bakhtin to have moderated his treatment of Tolstoy. What purpose could there be in further disparaging a Stalinistic Tolstoy when Stalinism appeared to be on the wane? Nevertheless, Bakhtin chose to accentuate the negative tones and ally Tolstoy even more closely with Stalin's legacy. By doing so he posed a more formidable interpretive problem than he had in *PTD.* He upped the ante, so to speak, just when the betting seemed over.[13]

To measure the scope of this problem, let us examine the changes Bakhtin made in *PPD* with regard to the Tolstoy question:

(1) all the passages about Tolstoy in *PTD* were transferred intact to *PTD*;

(2) a number of incidental references to Tolstoy were added which in no way change the thrust of *PTD*—Bakhtin reminds us that Tolstoy created "objective [*ob"ektnye*] images" of characters (*PPD* 47-48); he mentions Tolstoy as a non-polyphonic author (*PPD* 116); he points out that the word "epopoiea" can be used to describe a novel like *War and Peace* (*PPD* 158-9).

(3) two new passages about Tolstoy's style were introduced:

> It is characteristic in Dostoevsky's works not to include any s e p a r a t e thoughts, theses or formulations resembling sententions, maxims, aphorisms, etc., which when removed from the context and deprived of their voice would preserve in impersonal form their conceptual meaning. But how many such separate truths or thoughts one can extract . . . from the novels of L. Tolstoy, Turgenev, Balzac and others: they are dispersed both in the speech of the characters and in the author's

> speech; when removed from their voice they preserve the complete fullness of their impersonal aphoristic significance. . . . (*PPD* 110)

> . . . [I]n Dostoevsky's multivoiced novels there is considerably less linguistic differentiation, that is, variation of linguistic styles . . . than in the works of many monologists: L. Tolstoy, Pisemskii, Leskov and others. It might even seem that the characters in Dostoevsky's novels speak one and the same language, namely the language of the author. Dostoevsky was accused of such tiresome uniformity by many, including L. Tolstoy who also accused him. (*PPD* 211)[14]

(4) three new passages contrast the importance of carnivalesque textual features in Dostoevsky and their absence in Tolstoy:

> I will mention one more vividly carnivalized scene of scandals and dethronings at Marmeladov's wake . . . . [o]r the even more complicated scene in the parlor of Varvara Petrovna Stavrogina . . . . It is absolutely impossible to imagine such a scene, for instance, in a novel by L. Tolstoy or Turgenev. (*PPD* 169)

> All this obliges us . . . to characterize . . . those basic links in the tradition of carnivalesque genres connected directly or indirectly with Dostoevsky which determined the . . . atmosphere of his work and which are in many ways substantially different from the . . . atmosphere of Turgenev's, Goncharov's and L. Tolstoy's. (*PPD* 183)

> [In Dostoevsky's works] s p a c e receives additional meaning in the spirit of carnival symbology. . . . s t a i r c a s e , t h r e s h o l d , l a n d i n g acquire the sense of a "p o i n t " where . . . a radical shift occurs. . . . [T] here is no such interior at all . . . in the novels of Turgenev, Tolstoy, Goncharov and others. (*PPD* 199)

(5) a new section over four pages in length was added in which Bakhtin analyzes Tolstoy's story *Three Deaths* (1859) to illustrate how a monological author presents characters as isolated "objects" deprived of dialogical relations between each other (*PPD* 81-85).

Of these points the third requires some commentary and the last two deserve sustained attention. The quotation about aphorisms (in point 3) fits Bakhtin's model of Tolstoy as an author who purveys absolute truth in absolute language. Morson discusses this peculiarity of Tolstoy's writing, seeing it as a form of discourse that is "not open to qualification" (15). We are familiar, for instance, with aphoristic or pontifical pronouncements like the one which opens *Anna Karenina* ("All happy families resemble one another...."), the historical digressions in *War and Peace*, didactic responses to the question "What do men live by?" at the end of the story so entitled, and the catechismal precepts at the end of the novel *Resurrection*. Morson correctly argues, however, in contradistinction to Bakhtin, that such absolute statements can enter into a dialogue with the fictional text in which they appear, that is, they do not necessarily carry the authority of the author but can simply represent a voice extraneous to the fictional world that puts that world in some (not necessarily the correct) perspective (18-19). For example, the opening sentence of *Anna Karenina* is not necessarily true—rather it asks the reader to contemplate whether there are *any* "happy families" in the book and, if so, whether they really "resemble" each other. This is an important key for overcoming Bakhtin's antiquated terminology that uses "author's speech" to mean both the voice of narrator and the voice of the author of the work. Bakhtin never satisfactorily explains how he can so facilely conflate these two very distinct subjectivities in a "monological" text and then conveniently separate them in a "polyphonic" one. Nor does he ever adequately explain how to distinguish these two kinds of texts along the great divide that separates Dostoevsky from all other authors. His whole discussion of polyphony and monologism is intuitively brilliant, and everyone senses its profound insight. But Bakhtin never considered it necessary to explicate the precise features of each, nor to explore their possible variations. Instead he merely pointed to them (e.g., aphorisms), bringing out something meaningful and operative but not ultimately demonstrating that this or any other single criterion can

be used effectively to categorize specific texts as belonging to one category or the other. For if indeed Dostoevsky is the only polyphonic writer, there is no need for a system of categorization. The whole body of literature has already been accounted for. Here we have a case in point: Bakhtin does not put his own criterion to the test. Is it really true that in Dostoevsky we do not find maxims and sayings that pass from character to character, albeit never "separate" from a "voice," but nevertheless capable of an independent existence and thereby carrying some degree of authorial sanction? As Perlina points out, various sayings in *Brothers Karamazov*, such as Markel's statement, "Every one of us has sinned against all men," migrate from one character to another via quotation (23). This one even appears in the mouth of Dmitrii, who is unlikely to have heard it from any other character (bk.VIII, ch. 6). There are, moreover, sayings which survive from novel to novel, as for instance the Latin proverb "Homo sum, et nihil humanum a me alienum puto" spoken by both Svidrigailov and Ivan's Devil as a warning against hubris. In the passage quoted above (point 3), the problem is partly that Bakhtin exaggerates the contrast ("*any* separate thoughts," "the *complete fullness* of their impersonal aphoristic significance"). This is characteristic of a hyperbolistic strain in *PPD* (more prominent than in *PTD*), which sharpens the Dostoevsky - Tolstoy antithesis in general.

Points 4 and 5 are interrelated and must be understood in tandem, although their connection becomes evident only in the deep structure of Bakhtin's text, that is, on the level of the implicit rhetorical strategy of the entire book. Point 4 deals with carnival—the irreverent, bawdy, physicalistic "culture of laughter" that Bakhtin discusses in the Rabelais book. Point 5 deals with dialogue and polyphony. Bonetskaia correctly observed that these two concerns—each occupying a major portion of *PPD*—are rather tenuously connected in the design of the book (26). Bokshitskii thought them a "provocative incongruity" (232). The two concepts are perhaps not so incompatible as it might at first seem, but the fact that Bakhtin failed to explain adequately their theoretical interrelationship can be interpreted as a potential sign of their interconnection on the level of Aesopian discourse. *PPD* is a vastly more imaginative, daring and challenging *aesthetic* undertaking than *PTD*. If in *PTD* the subterfuge required that the reader grasp the analogy between Stalinistic thought and monologue, *PPD* required that the reader understand in carnival a whole culture spawned by high Stalinism, a culture in which genuine dialogue survived only in facetious genres which had the palliative but grotesque function of making the unthinkable laughable.

Tolstoy, whom Bakhtin had utilized before in a fairly innocuous way, was now drawn into an elaborate and gruesome overarching scheme that in some respects resembles carnival itself. In this grand design, Tolstoy is no longer only a monologist and tyrant, he becomes also a jailer and executioner.[15] This is the implication of Bakhtin's analysis of *Three Deaths*—not when we read it in isolation and perceive it as "unfair," but in the context of the whole book, whose subliminal agenda is a reckoning with the murders, purges, enslavements and collectivization campaigns of the past. In *PPD*, Bakhtin brought his polemic with Tolstoy to a lower level, but he did so in the Aesopian way —leaving clues to its ironic (or partially ironic) intent. Here Bakhtin's dialogue with Tolstoy is more tortured and intimate than in *PTD*. We cannot be certain whether we fully understand it, for so many implications seem ambiguous or unfocused —perhaps because they were directed to the private audience of Bakhtin's inner self.

To understand how one could arrive at such a reading, one must consider the segment devoted to carnival which Bakhtin added to *PPD* and which was completely absent in *PTD*. This section, comprising the middle third of the new book (120-208), contains the most vivid clues to the Aesopian agenda of *PPD*. The preface and conclusion of *PTD*, which, as we saw, hinted at the possibility of a hidden discourse, have been replaced at the perimeters of *PPD* by unremarkable scholarly prose with no apparent political suggestiveness.

As we begin reading the carnival segment we are alerted immediately to something unusual in

that almost the entire piece is written in an uncharacteristically turgid, unwieldy style which seems to be almost a parody of hack Soviet scholarship. It contains extensive, meticulously compiled lists of names only medieval or classical scholars are likely to recognize. It manifests a tireless compulsion for repetition and rediscovery of facts pointed out earlier. It contradicts itself frequently, or leads us down paths of inquiry which turn into dead ends. It overexplains what is clear and leaves dangling what is cryptic. It seems to have rhetorical aspirations at times, accumulating evidence in ascending categories which are later conflated or neglected. At other times there emerges a chatty strain. Finally, there is a penchant for referring the reader to parts of the text not yet read without indicating page numbers or their relevance to the topic at hand. In sum, Bakhtin lays a minefield that only a very determined reader will cross. To be sure, he does convey a great deal of information about Socratic dialogues and Menippean satire (the carnivalistic genres he considers significant for Dostoevsky), but he does so in a very inefficient and clumsy way. At one point, perhaps feeling the need to encourage the reader, Bakhtin breaks a smile and removes the scholarly mask momentarily to hint at the irony of his own excursus: "Now we can return to the carnivalization of genres in the sphere of the serious-facetious, even the very name of which already sounds carnivalesquely ambivalent" (*PPD* 152). This is an invitation to read the whole segment not only as an analysis of carnival, but as an example of it.

The reader who persists in trying to understand the significance of this section is rewarded with an abundance of interesting facts and images. The premise, however, that Menippean satire was "historically" important to Dostoevsky (*PPD* 121) is argued with little supporting evidence. In fact we are told repeatedly that Dostoevsky was generally unfamiliar with the genre. The principal importance of the Menippean ethos—apparently not so much for Dostoevsky, but for Bakhtin—is that it survived in the festive spoken culture and was immune from censorship.

One of the aims of the Menippean section in *PPD* may be to lead us through a graveyard of forgotten works and authors. Socratic dialogues were suppressed under Stalin. The complete edition of Plato's works, begun in 1922, was halted in 1929 after six out of the planned fifteen volumes were published; selected translations of Plato reappeared only in 1965. Xenophon's Socratic dialogues indeed did appear in 1935, but the eight other authors in this genre mentioned by Bakhtin (*PPD* 125) were not published at all. The authors Bakhtin lists as representing the tradition of Menippean satire experienced a similar fate (*PPD* 129-130). Petronius' *Satyricon* appeared in 1924, but not again until 1957. Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* did not appear until 1959. The only work by Varro to be issued under Stalin was a treatise on agriculture and animal husbandry; his 150 books of Menippean satires were neglected. In Bakhtin's lists we come across a few familiar names, but they crop up in a queue of unknown scribings, each representing a human voice and a human face. Menippos (*Μένιππος ο Γαδαρηνος*) himself, whose original texts were suppressed, is a voice we will never hear.

The theme of death is pervasive in Bakhtin's discussion of Menippean satire—less as an abstraction than as the image of living and speaking corpses. He uses Dostoevsky's graveyard symposium *Bobok* to illustrate the genre (*PPD* 159-171), he discusses Socrates' anticipation of dialogues with the dead after his execution (*PPD* 128), and he talks about the image of death giving birth (*PPD* 191). The point of all this is that carnival makes the boundary between life and death meaningless and thus anaesthetizes, through laughter, the fear of death and even the feeling of its reality. Carnival overcomes death by turning it "inside out" (*PPD* 141). It is the elixir that brings the dead back to life.

In Bakhtin's scheme of things, the relevance of carnival to Tolstoy is that he lacks it (point 4). Tolstoy becomes the poet of finalizing and unredeemable death (point 5). If we try to understand these two propositions together they make no logical sense. Common sense stops us, "Could not

the finality of death be transcended otherwise than by carnival?" Bakhtin, however, does not want us to ask this question when we read *PPD*. He wants us to accept the sense which these two propositions make *aesthetically*, that is, in the context of the poetic structure he devises—a structure that allows ideas, physical objects, metaphoric images and contemporary reality to coexist and become mutually signifying. Bakhtin's logic works, therefore, only if we allow it to be poetic. It works only if we allow the aesthetic (and Aesopian) project of *PPD* to reconfigure the scholarly one. This happens in *PPD* to a far greater extent than in *PTD*.

In *PPD* Bakhtin has fabricated a conceptual universe wherein distinctly different concepts and images function obediently in conformity with his design, a design which reflects his penchant for binary oppositions (let us recall "Author and Hero," "Epic and Novel"). He now recruits the dichotomy "Dostoevsky and Tolstoy," a minor device in *PTD*, into a grandiose binary archetype:

Dostoevsky	*Tolstoy*
spirituality	thingness
flesh (transcendent)	flesh (material)
subject	object
polyphony	monologue
dialogue	dialectic
unfinalized	finalized
life	death
freedom	oppression
author silent	author speaks
author absent	author present
novel	epic
questioning	dogmatism
myself and other	just myself

The items in each vertical series, though not identical, acquire covalence with other items in the same series. They become to some extent substitutable by virtue of their continual usage in similar contexts. We must understand Bakhtin's treatment of Tolstoy's *Three Deaths* in terms of this system of oppositions that was profoundly meaningful for him and had the advantage of being aesthetic pleasing.

In his analysis of *Three Deaths* (*PPD* 81-85), Bakhtin offers the reader a simple premise: Tolstoy, when he describes death, isolates the dying person and prevents her or him from communicating in any meaningful way with an other. The society woman is misunderstood by her family, the carriage driver Serega cares little for the dying Khvedor, and the tree dies without compassion from the other trees or creatures in the forest. All living flesh is absorbed into the regenerative flow of nature, which is indifferent (as in Turgenev's fiction) to human subjectivity and mortality. Bakhtin, however, does not read the story this way. He interprets it, rather, in the context of his overarching conceptual (and largely political) framework. Tolstoy becomes a heartless executioner, depriving his characters of their "last word":

> The consciousness and word of the author, L. Tolstoy, is nowhere directed to the character, does not ask him anything and expects no reply from him. The author does not argue with his character and does not agree with him. The last word belongs to the author and, because it is based on what the character cannot see or understand and what is inaccessible to the character's consciousness, it cannot encounter the character's word on the same dialogical plane. . . . Here there is only o n e c o g n i z i n g s u b j e c t, all others are o b j e c t s of his cognition. (*PPD* 83-84)

Of course Bakhtin does not call Tolstoy an "executioner," but the suggestion is carried by the archetypal associations. In notes for the revision of the book, the suggestion is less subtle. In the fragment "Rhetoric to the extent of its dishonesty . . ." (1943), for instance, Bakhtin talks about monological discourse as a way of "killing" the living subject:

> [There is] an element of violence in cognition and artistic form. . . . The word terrorizes [*pugaet*]. . .

> [There is] an element of violence in objective knowing. A preliminary killing [*umershchvlenie*] of the object is the presupposition of knowing. . . Where lies the power of an artistic image to kill[?] In closing off its future, showing it in its utilized state. . . . Here he is all of him now and no longer anywhere [else]. . . . He is dead and you can swallow him. (5, 65)

In "Notes. 1961" he compares Tolstoy's depiction of character with a show trial: "In a monological novel one often finds a trial without giving the defendant a last word" (5, 364). We also come across the following outlandish statement, obviously meaningful for Bakhtin in his own idiosyncratic sense: "Dostoevsky's heroes do not leave corpses. The image of a corpse . . . is impossible in the world Dostoevsky sees" (5, 365)! Are we to forget *Crime and Punishment, The Idiot, Gentle Creature*? Are we to assume Tolstoy "leaves corpses"? Here we see in raw form the kind of thinking that went into Bakhtin's discussion of *Three Deaths*. It seems clear that this story was chosen not merely to illustrate Tolstoy's "monologism" in just "any [*kakogo-nibud'*] particular work" (*PPD* 81), but to display it as the instrument of death.

Not surprisingly, some critics have been troubled by Bakhtin's doctrinaire approach. Remizov, for example, finds Bakhtin's analysis "rigid" and "simplistic," suggesting the story is better read as an affirmation of "life's renewal" (136). For Vaiman, *Three Deaths* is not monological, but rather *about* the monological disconnectedness of human beings (286). To these objections one could add that Bakhtin stretches credibility when he decides to compare this short parable to Dostoevsky's major novels (*PPD* 85-88), even recasting it in a Dostoevskian manner:

> Let's move on to Dostoevsky. What would *Three Deaths* look like if Dostoevsky had written it (*let us entertain such a strange proposition for a moment*), that is, if it had been written *in the polyphonic manner?*
>
> First of all Dostoevsky would have made *all three planes* reflect each other. He would have linked them with dialogical relations. The life and death of the *driver* and the *tree* would be introduced into the purvey of the *lady's* consciousness, and the life of the lady into the purview of the driver's consciousness. . . . The lady's *truth* and the driver's *truth* would be made to confront each other. . . . *The whole work would be constructed as a great [bol'shoi] dialogue*, and the author would have performed the function of organizer and participant in this dialogue, not leaving himself the final word. . . .
>
> Of course, *Dostoevsky would never have depicted three d e a t h s* . . . . He would have depicted not the characters' deaths, but the *c r i s e s* and *t u r n i n g p o i n t s* in their lives . . . . (*PPD* 84-85)

Bakhtin seems to have forgotten about the tree after the first few sentences. But even between the lady and driver one could hardly imagine a great "dialogue" about "truth," nor an account of their life "crises" in a story of fifteen pages. One is tempted to read this passage facetiously, but there is too much seriousness in it to see it purely as irony. Bakhtin's description of *Three Deaths*, for all the inappropriateness of its comparisons, still provides us with an unretouched image of what the purely monological world looked like to him. This is fascinating and chilling.

It has been the purpose of this discussion to bring out the underlying causes of Bakhtin's uncharitable appraisal of Tolstoy. I have tried to show that its negativism is something that grew with time and was by no means deep-set in Bakhtin's early career. It developed in large degree from political realities that threatened his life and his ability to function as a scholar and thinker. In some respects Tolstoy became a scapegoat for Bakhtin's frustrations, a substitute target for the resentment he naturally felt toward those who had deprived him of a healthy creative environment. He continued to experience creative constraints throughout his career, even after he acquired recognition and a modicum of freedom. As Coates suggests, his life was warped early on, like Dostoevsky's, and he could never outgrow the legacy of terror and exile (22-23).

Bakhtin probably knew he was "unfair" to Tolstoy, but he could not be otherwise and still express what he needed to express at the time and

in the place he lived. His "unfairness" represented the person in him who is a "captive of his epoch," who can be liberated only by "times to come" (1986: 505). Emerson (1997) writes that Bakhtin "mastered certain protective skills and evasive tactics" that enabled him to survive (8). But they also exacted a price: they "deformed" "his major ideas and texts." We can see this as a failing. But we can also see in its distortions the burgeoning of an artistic project that served a lofty purpose. The Aesopian discourse ultimately "deformed" the scholarly one, and Tolstoy was its victim. We know, however, that different voices competed within Bakhtin when he thought of Tolstoy. To appreciate these voices unjudgmentally has been one aim of this endeavour.

Notes

1. See for instance Berrong, 105-111; Clark/Holquist, 81, 273-4, 295-320; Coates, 22-24; Griffiths/Rabinowitz, 277-279; Hirshkop, passim. My sources for the theory of Aesopian discourse have been Bukhshtab, Chukovskii, Losev and Strauss, q.v.

2. Groys (1989), for instance, reads Bakhtin's Rabelais book as a grotesque "aesthetic justification" of Stalinist brutality, allying Bakhtin with the repressive forces he ostensibly deplored (96). In a similar vein but from the opposite angle, Ryklin sees Bakhtin's explication of the carnivalesque tradition as an effort to disarm Stalin, transforming him into the hero of a magical tale in which all that was so horrifying can be undone with the right words (53). Both readings treat Bakhtin's theoretical writings as artistic works.

3. Here and elsewhere italics indicate my emphasis (DS). Spacing out belongs to the author.

4. Dostoevsky's 100th birthday (November 1921) was marred by famine and paper shortages caused by the civil war. The Party, however, made no special effort to celebrate it. It is indicative of official distaste for Dostoevsky that the November-December issue of *Pechat' i revoliutsiia* (1921) devoted less space to Dostoevsky's jubilee (299-300) than to Dante's (297-299).

5. A notice about Chernyshevsky's birthday (July 24) appeared in the July-August issue of *Pechat' i revoliutsiia* (no. 5) after the event (228). It announced that the celebration would be held in "the first half of October."

6. On this point see Cockrell, 56-63.

7. On Lenin's abhorrence of Dostoevsky, see Seduro, 72.

8. On Lenin's love for Tolstoy and *War and Peace*, see Gel'fand, 35.

9. One reviewer, Grossman-Roshchin, faulted Bakhtin for not mentioning Pereverzev in his book (98). The rapidly shifting political landscape, however, brought about an ironic twist. When PTD appeared Pereverzev was already slated for denunciation—a fact the publisher "Priboi" likely knew. His name may have been kept out of Bakhtin's book for good reason. Widespread public attacks began in January 1930, when the Presidium of The Communist Academy declared Pereverzev a "Menshevist" (See "Rezoliutsiia Prezidiuma...", 3). Bakhtin's reviewer himself was reprimanded in the same resolution for trying to combine Marxism with "Bergsonian aesthetics" (7).

10. À propos of the preface Grossman-Roshchin wrote: "The author in all seriousness assures us that [his method is sociological], but the formulation is strange, slippery, ambiguous. . . . The author having paid his dues to the sociological tax-inspector races along on the wings of a 'multileveled' construct. . . . The wolves of Marxism are sated while the lambs of idealism are spared" (94-97). Summarizing the book, Starenkov wrote: "We would not need to spend so much time on this book if it were not such a brilliant example of ideological mimicry" (108).

11. Pravda announced on September 13, 1929, that Lunacharsky's resignation had been accepted by the Presidium of Central Committee (Piiashev, II, 404).

12. Lunacharsky, born in 1875, died in 1933 of natural causes while in France. We now know from previously unpublished documents that during the brief time Stalin allowed Lunacharsky to advise him after September 1929, he was instrumental in persuading Stalin to rein in certain excesses. After February 1930, he had virtually no audience with Stalin. Among the things Lunacharsky managed to do was have Dostoevsky's grandson released from prison (Piiashev, I, 12-13; II, 396-397).

13. It may be of significance in trying to understand Bakhtin's motives for doing so that 1962 was also the year Kornei Chukovsky received the Lenin Prize for *Masterstvo Nekrasova*, a book which contained perhaps the most explicit primer on Aesopian speech ever published in the Soviet Union. The award conveyed a modicum of official acceptance for allegory as a form of political discourse.

14. Bakhtin does not indicate the source of Tolstoy's statement about monotony in Dostoevsky's style. It is apparently from reminiscences by G.A. Rusanov in *Tolstovskii ezhegodnik* (1912), 60.

15. It is worth noting in this context that George Steiner saw Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor as a reification of Tolstoy: "We observe in him attitudes of mind and forms of sensibility which are markedly Tolstoyan: an encompassing and autocratic love of humanity, that arrogance of reason when it believes itself to be in possession of assured knowledge, the strain of asceticism . . . " (336). (I am indebted to Donna Orwin for pointing this out—DS.)

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