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Hemingway and Tolstoy: "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" and "Death of Ivan Il'ich"

Drawing some parallels between Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" and Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*, Hugh McLean noted the similarity between the two "biological" writers, by which he meant their interest in "birth and death" (McLean 207).

However, one must make a fundamental distinction between Hemingway and Tolstoy's "biologism." The former remains on this side of the instinctive, of the here and now. The latter crosses over into the super-empirical, to the idea of "moral force" (a phrase from the afterword to *The Kreutzer Sonata*) as a means of personal transformation. Tolstoy and many of his characters strive to be "above the world" (*PSS* 42: 208), as he says of Svetlogub in *Divine and Human*. In Hemingway, this takes the form of absolute trust in the earthly.

McLean rightly notes that the "unheroic death" in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" is a response to *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*. Harry's final insights do not lead to "transcendence" or "redemption," but rather conjure up feelings of "aggression against his wife" (McLean 209–210).

Here I examine the interrelationship between the two texts, focusing primarily on the composition of narrative and the placement of characters, the portrayal of their relationships with one another and with the world in the context of their fictional reality. Additionally, I look at Tolstoy and Hemingway's artistic philosophy through the lens of twentieth-century philosophical thought.

Hemingway's narrative style is similar to Tolstoy's. Both use introspection; in both the narrator and author attempt to "read" the minds of their protagonists; and they both convey inner monologues in which memories of the past alternate with thoughts of the coming end. Hemingway's narrator, like Tolstoy's, knows everything about his characters, but perhaps reveals himself less, as if refusing to share the entirety of his knowledge.

Hemingway's narrator supports his protagonist's self-criticism that only leads him to disenchantment with the past and present. Disappointment and even the meaninglessness of life is one of Hemingway's central themes, if we exclude *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Where Ivan Il'ich is a judge and man of high society, Harry is a writer, that is, a man of high society to the second power. Moreover, given Harry's profession, one cannot help but draw parallels with Hemingway himself, for whom Harry is surely a double. In this way, Hemingway's affinity for the image of Harry is revealed.

Ivan Il'ich is not such a close figure for Tolstoy, though Tolstoy does endow him with his own fears and hopes, his own confession and exhortation.

Ivan Il'ich's profession as a judge lends him a certain amount of officiousness that, for the author,

is ultimately subject to dismantling. At the same time, the transition from judging others to judging oneself is played out, but this latter is a higher form of judgment. In this dimension, judgment is derivative of the Last Judgment, the direct and indirect acceptance of which is present in all Tolstoy's work.

In the beginning, Ivan Il'ich is presented as a kind of Everyman who tries to conform to public opinion. It is a different matter, of course, when the immensity of the character's microcosm is shown to surpass the macrocosm.

The role of the twentieth-century writer signifies Harry's obligatory moment of light "bohemianism" and subtlety that, however, do not lead to his being contrasted to the other characters. Sensitive to life's impressions, Harry is one among equals, just like everyone else. He himself understands himself this way, seeking interaction with the widest variety of people. The orientation of the dying protagonist, author, and narrator of "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" is on the whole dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense of the word.

This is in contrast to the already hackneyed Bakhtinian idea of Tolstoy's "monologism." Tamarchenko refers to the monologic *novel*, but insofar as the stories and plays are also "novelistic," one could argue that the generic moniker applies to all of Tolstoy's work (Тамарченко).

But are Tolstoy and his characters really so monologic?

Like Harry, Ivan Il'ich spends most of his life trying to live a clichéd life, "like everyone else." The protagonist's discovery of the falsity of human relationships results in a tacit challenge to those around him, in the attainment of "truth" outside of the human and the worldly, in individual personalism.

Personalism as a philosophical stance can strive to avoid conflict between identities, converging and becoming one with dialogism. Ivan Il'ich was an individualist even when he thought of himself in terms of high society's clichés insofar as such clichés provided a false sense of community. The observance of stereotypes in no way negates one's volition.

But Ivan Il'ich remained an individualist even when he was dying insofar as he distinguished himself from everyone else. But this does not mean that outside of this antinomy Ivan Il'ich was beyond individualism—it simply assumed a different form. The "second," final individualism was deeper, since in it he discovered real meaning.

The dying or dead (in this latter capacity, he is still beyond death) Tolstoyan hero is ready both for intersubjectivity (Husserl's term) and for "dialogue," but from within this individual personalism. This gesture toward another is indeed a Tolstoyan orientation, but it requires us to correct the concept of dialogism (see below).

In the end, through the discovery of the truth about life and death, and about himself, Ivan Il'ich is elevated above the other characters. However, this elevation comes specifically in the act of dying, as he forgives others and is united with them.

Tolstoy and his hero gradually emerge on the level of universal, ontological, and anthropological invective and insight. As a result, the image of Ivan Il'ich becomes a kind of symbol of "man in general," but now in a deeper sense than was present at the beginning. The title of Tolstoy's text, initially evoking thoughts about someone and something profoundly personal, symbolizes by the end the maximally public even as it retains the idea of the personal.

The "man in general," the Everyman, recalls images from the medieval miracle plays, from which one can draw a straight line to Tolstoy's dramas (Шульц, *Историческая поэтика*). The symbolizing of the image of the protagonist (and to a lesser extent, of his surroundings) shifts the genre of the work toward the conventional parable.

The conventionality, the parable-ness of *The Death of Ivan Il'ich* is not immediately apparent, but shows itself after deeper immersion in the text and context of the work. In the late Tolstoy, what is

most concrete, separate, and detailed emerges as the most conventional in the medieval sense, including the sense in which the representatives of medieval philosophical realism ascribed real existence to abstract concepts.

Every work of art undoubtedly emerges onto the level of universals, and "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" is no exception. Hemingway, however, is more interested in the deeply personal and personal-social (and this against the backdrop of his unwavering attention to the general flow of life, which he has in common with Tolstoy), as well as in the symbolization of the personal.

More often than not, Hemingway focuses on the gap between individual "existence" and the general flow of life, which in this case leads to fixation on a definite emptiness in "existence," independent of the outside world being contemplated. Whatever might happen to the individual existence, whatever it might contemplate, in Hemingway it most often perceives a lack and emptiness.

For Harry, the way out of such emptiness is his own death.

If, as he is dying, Ivan Il'ich sees the world, including the world of people and things, as false (with the exception of the few positive emotions evoked by this world), then Harry, who always perceives the world in its real form, colors his perception with a markedly subjective and emotional acceptance.

As a result, objects in Hemingway's artistic world return to life connoted.

I have in mind here the interchange between Husserl's phenomenology and Tolstoy and Hemingway's artistic philosophy. (Kazakov offers a phenomenological reading of Tolstoy and an analysis of Hemingway (Казаков)). Husserl raised the question of intentional acts of consciousness (i.e., oversimplifying things, of perception) independent of the question regarding the beingness of the world, whether or not the world is "real." Tolstoy underscores the problem of consciousness and to some degree the "irreality" of the world. This is the case in *The Death of Ivan Il'ich* and largely in Husserl. Hemingway describes the very acts of perception without doubting the existence of "reality."

Harry's subjective perception of the world and things, however, grants freedom to these "things themselves" (Husserl's phrase), which exist in Hemingway's reality objectively and independently of any external vantage point. However they are perceived, they still have meaning in themselves. Hemingway's "things themselves" are a peculiar corollary to Tolstoy's "common life," the idea of which fades a bit in Tolstoy as he occupies the position of individual personalism.

In Tolstoy's trust in "life" one notices his proximity to the "philosophy of life" in general and to Dilthey in particular (and to Heidegger, who succeeded him). Although the latter wrote about "existence," he privileged "pure" being and dissociated himself from existentialism.

In both Tolstoy and Hemingway, life stands as a kind of "fate." That is, it contains a moment of predetermination, with which, however, one "must struggle."

In all this, both writers reveal a tendency to symbolize things perceived by their characters. They embody not only the fabric and material, but also the idea of existence, considered good in and of itself. In the late Tolstoy, the idea that existence is equal to the good gives way to the idea of the positivity of death, which Tolstoy does not contrast to existence but of which he shows to be a part.

Harry's vision of nature is also registered symbolically. This is primordial Africa, to which he feels a strong affinity and attraction that makes him a kind of "natural" man, in the tradition of Rousseau and Tolstoy.

This "natural" exterior is completely removed from the noble Ivan Il'ich and represented rather by the figure of Gerasim: "Gerasim was a clean, fresh-faced young peasant who had grown plump

on town food. He was always cheerful, always simple" (*PSS* 26: 96).

> He [Ivan Il'ich] felt good when Gerasim would, sometimes all night long, hold his legs and would not want to sleep, saying: "Do not worry, Ivan Il'ich, I'll manage to sleep;" or when, suddenly being informal, would add: "It's one thing if you're not sick, but otherwise, why shouldn't I help you?" Gerasim alone did not lie to him. Everything showed that he understood what was happening and did not think it necessary to hide it; he simply pitied his weak, emaciated master. Once, when Ivan Il'ich was sending him away, he even said plainly: "We are all going to die. Why shouldn't I work a bit?" (*PSS* 26: 98)

In the citations above, Gerasim's peasant origins are underscored (i.e., the reference to "town food") as well as the fact that he "did not lie"—did not lie about everything since he understood that death is inevitable for everyone. Here one clearly discerns all the characteristics of the "natural" man in the spirit of Rousseau and the future Heidegger, who also struggled with "culture," albeit on different grounds and in a different context.

Similar in the two works is the description of the cause of the characters' fatal illnesses. The cause is accidental: Ivan Il'ich is bruised, while Harry receives a light scratch. The idea of chance turns out to be philosophically grounded. It points to the inscrutability of fate, which remains fate in its predetermination, manifesting itself in the inevitability of death.

Chance points also to the foundational role of the small and insignificant in big events, one of Tolstoy's favorite ideas. And chance does not contradict the idea of Providence, to which both writers in one way or another pay tribute. On the one hand, everything (at least death) is known a fortiori, while on the other hand, everything happens by an inner freedom, everything is possible. St. Augustine, of whom Tolstoy thought highly, formulated a similar "dialectic."

A. A. Donskov draws attention to the role in *The Death of Ivan Il'ich* of such a detail as the curtain "on" which Ivan Il'ich thinks he lost his life (*PSS* 26: 95). In Dal's dictionary, a гардина (curtain) can also be a занавес (theater curtain) (Донсков 151). In this way, the "theatrical" (in the sense of being false) "code" of the protagonist's life is revealed. Even Harry notices the theatricality of his existence, even more so since the writer, like an actor, is a kind of artist.

Similarly to Ivan Il'ich, Harry reflects at length on the falsehood of his former life, particularly with regard to his relations with Helen. The latter is called by name only at the end; before this, she is mentioned only as the "woman," a fact that underscores Hemingway's consistent "biologism": To Harry, she is only the manifestation of the gender he needs, and not a separate, independent person.

The name "Helen" in Hemingway might go straight back to *War and Peace*, where a character of the same name represents empirical "biologism" and appears in the deeply negative role of a high society socialite and as the manifestation of sensual perception. Perhaps Harry and partly the narrator's negative evaluations of Helen stem from this source.

"Falsehood" for Harry, the narrator, and the author is not so much an existential state of the world as it is *empirical psychology*, *the outer form* of mutual relations between self and other. It is precisely in connection with the idea of the falsehood of mutual relationships that the topos of theatricality comes up in Hemingway.

In his reflections on falsehood, Harry's grievances are directed more at himself than at Helen or the world in general, which in Hemingway are "beautiful, as always" (Blok). They are even more than beautiful: On the threshold of departure, he tinges his perception of the world with a special, parting acceptance.

What Hemingway calls Harry and Helen's "quarrelling" all the same betrays the striving to overcome their moments of alienation from one another. The very attempt at conversation is important. Tolstoy, by contrast, affirms the fact of non-understanding.

Over the course of Hemingway's story, Harry experiences the complex, non-linear transformation of the perception of his own dying. He experiences, alternately, fear, curiosity, stoicism, and indifference. He sees falsehood both in life and in death: "If he lived by a lie he should try to die by it" (Hemingway 45).

Harry believes that he will leave nothing behind, and it is against the backdrop of Tolstoy that one sees Harry's clinging to life as such. The high value placed on life contrasts with the realization that death opens up another, truer path. In the end, Harry senses in his own way his movement on this path.

Undoubtedly, in the beginning, Ivan Il'ich clings to life as well, valuing at first only himself, his purely outward presence in it, but not the inner fulfillment of this presence. (Hence, the absence of any thought as to what might remain after his death.) Only the very act of dying, or rather, of death opens up to Ivan Il'ich his beingness, gives already his afterlife a sense of fulfillment.

In order to return to life, to live in the full sense of the word, Ivan Il'ich has to die.

Notwithstanding Helen's sincere assurances (and this in contrast to Ivan Il'ich's wife), Harry knows that he will die soon. Helen calls on him not to give up. Harry's intuition, however, proves to be stronger than Helen's assurances and sensibilities, although even he tries to heed them to some degree. And in this, there is no weakness, no surrender! Hemingway in no way condemns this empirical, everyday moment. In the case of Ivan Il'ich, any hope to avoid death is treated as cowardice, as an act of surrender.

Describing Harry's death, Hemingway, just like Tolstoy, combines inner and outer perception in their disjunction. Harry himself senses: "[A]nd there, ahead, all he could see, as wide as all the world, great, high, and unbelievably white in the sun, was the square top of Kilimanjaro. And then he knew that there was where he was going" (Hemingway 56).

In this citation, "all the world" and images of nature are juxtaposed as if they were not part of the world. For Harry, however, such an opposition is natural.

The life of "all the world" as a world of people and things is linked primarily to falsity in the perception of the one dying, but the life of all nature, symbolized by the "snows of Kilimanjaro," leads the hero along a special path, of which Harry sensed himself deprived at the beginning. He goes "high," to a special chronotope of the natural and primordial state. In this regard, Harry is closer to Olenin (*The Cossacks*), who strives to be one with the nature of the Caucasus and in general to Tolstoy's people of nature than to Ivan Il'ich. The path going "high" leads to a merging with nature.

The image of Kilimanjaro's summit, "unbelievably white in the sun," recalls the image of the "light" (*PSS* 26: 113) Ivan Il'ich sees and also signifies the overcoming of death. But for Harry, this overcoming is not beyond the empirical, but natural. The fact that Hemingway makes the central image of Harry's last visions the title of his story testifies to the author's acceptance of the ideas of "nature" and the "primordial state," to the primacy of these ideas in the text.

Helen's perception of Harry's death is given superficially, practically without direct reference to her emotions, but lest one be deceived, the narrator alludes to them:

> Then she took the flashlight and shone it on the other cot that they had carried in after Harry had gone to sleep. She could see his bulk under the mosquito bar but somehow he had gotten his leg out and it hung down alongside the cot.

> The dressings had all come down and she could not look at it.
>
> "Molo," she called, "Molo! Molo!"
>
> Then she said, "Harry! Harry!" Then her voice rising, "Harry! Please. Oh Harry!"
>
> There was no answer and she could not hear him breathing.
>
> Outside the tent the hyena made the same strange noise that had awakened her. But she did not hear him for the beating of her heart. (Hemingway 56)

Hemingway's psychologizing obviously differs from the nineteenth-century approach. In "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," Hemingway strives to express the interior by means of the exterior, by means of details and things (the mosquito bar, the cot, the flashlight—all these are in Helen's range of perception). But Tolstoy, too, envisaged such an approach with his radically detailed descriptions that included even "unnecessary" things.

Tolstoy, however, is not as keen on psychology in the narrow sense as he is on "pneumology" (a term from Berdyaev and Sedlmayr), that is, on the purely spiritual side of personality and the problem of consciousness (which interested Hemingway, too). The superficial emotional side of personality is the target of irony and exposé in Tolstoy (cf. the reaction to the death of Ivan Il'ich or the representation of jurors in *Resurrection*).

For Tolstoy, what happens in an individual person's soul (if that person is self-conscious) is tantamount to a shock taking place in the outer world, a transformation of the world. Recall the passage from *Divine and Human*: "And he [the dying schismatic] felt that it was already happening, happening in the whole world, because it was happening in his soul, enlightened by virtue of his proximity to death" (*PSS* 42: 224).

Harry's inner shock as he crosses over into death does not change the world; it only changes him. Ivan Il'ich, seeing himself differently at the end, sees differently ("truly") his own outer chronotope (to the extent that one exists).

As one reads Hemingway's text, one often gets the impression that Harry's self-criticism is superfluous. Take, for instance, his thoughts about his supposed selfishness regarding his relationships with women or about the fact that he was planning to write more than he did, that he destroyed his talent and betrayed himself.

Helen, whom Harry accuses precisely of "keeping him well," sincerely loves Harry in her own way and values him differently from the way he values himself. Helen is endowed with sincerity in her feelings and relationships, though it is true that she does not see in Harry what he sees in himself: complexity, superfluous reflexivity, ambiguity. In the case of Ivan Il'ich, the sense of superfluous self-criticism never arises. This informs the way Tolstoy constructs his narrative and groups his characters.

Because of Helen's lack of understanding, Harry views her mostly negatively, although he does not fully articulate this. We can understand his position in terms of the "lie" mentioned earlier, but the lie is not as widespread as it is in Tolstoy, and it is partly overcome through the characters' attempts to listen to one another.

Helen has one important advantage in this discussion of personal truths: She loves Harry. The look of love carries the gift of understanding, which is why for a complete appreciation of "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" one must take into consideration Helen's idealizing view of the protagonist. This once again underscores the lack of complete self-consciousness on the part of the protagonist, the lack of complete self-understanding.

According to Bakhtin's theory of dialogue, only the "other" can provide this completion. In Tolstoy's text, these "others" are primarily the narrator and author. In Hemingway, Helen performs this role.

In terms of Bakhtin's theory, Helen in many ways gives Harry acknowledgement, that is, helps

him acquire a "self." Harry, however, either does not notice Helen's gift or else refuses to accept it. The conditions of dialogue are observed, but dialogue literally does not take place.

Indeed, in dialogue it is necessary for the "other" to notice and accept only what the "self" ascribes to itself, that is, incomplete self-consciousness, insofar as dialogue is not a tautology. It is necessary not for the sake of dialogue, but for each "self" to find itself, to find self-realization.

All of this requires us to make some correctives to the Bakhtinian theory of dialogue and its interpretation. And in the context of this article, it requires us to clarify the nature of the dialogical relationship between Harry and Helen. At this point, we need to return to the issue of Tolstoy's "monologism."

It appears that in Bakhtin's theory the fulfillment of self-consciousness that the "other" gives the "self" is largely formal, like the Kantian ethics that informed Bakhtin's thinking on the whole. Such formalism does not diminish the grandeur of the theory, but demands its own accounting.

According to Bakhtin, most important to dialogue is the acquisition by each participant of complete self-consciousness (a term Bakhtin likely took from Hegel), complete self-realization, complete understanding of oneself and the world. Understanding is beingness, as Heidegger would say. In mentioning Heidegger here, we place Bakhtin's philosophy against the backdrop of hermeneutics as this philosophy's natural sphere of formation and realization.

Bakhtin shifts emphasis away from concrete "selves" and "others" to the situation of their mutual interaction, seeing the good in the situation itself rather than in what each participant gains from it. Whatever complete intersubjectivity it realizes, interaction is made up of singularities. Bakhtin forces these singularities always to become aware of themselves "in pairs."

Indeed, "acknowledgement" (another term likely borrowed from Hegel, namely the discussion of master and slave) is given by the "other" to the "self, but this sensation is insufficient for complete self-consciousness.

Let us examine this in greater detail: On the one hand, we have the act of perceiving the "other" from the perspective of the "self." On the other hand, we have the perception of the "self" from the perspective of the "other." According to Bakhtin, the overlapping of these acts provides the desired dialogue.

However, the simple, formal co-existence of these acts of perception is insufficient. Much depends on the fulfillment of the acts, and on the internal position of the one who, at the moment, is being viewed as the "self" vis-à-vis the "other."

In Bakhtin, it turns out that even when the "other" destroys the "self," the former acknowledges the latter. If there is a dyad, then there should be dialogue. But Bakhtin, of course, was aware of this formalism when he spoke, for instance, about superficial dialogue.

"Double-voiced discourse" can border on the "other's" discrediting and mockery of the "self," and not necessarily acknowledgement. Is this really dialogism?

Bakhtin's "history of dialogue" includes moments of struggle with "monologism," after the destruction of which all that is negative ("monologic") is purged from the concrete cultural phenomenon that reigns. Such for Bakhtin is the case with Dostoevsky, who supposedly had no inclinations toward "monologism." Bakhtin assigns the latter to Dostoevsky's "antipode," Tolstoy. But to repeat, is Tolstoy really so "monologic?" And does not dialogue include monologue as one of its variations or bases?

Against the backdrop of this interpretation of Tolstoy and Hemingway's artistic discoveries, Bakhtin appears excessively formalistic.

The acquisition of the completion of oneself, the completion of self-consciousness that is given

to the "self" by the "other" depends not only on the fulfillment of acts of perception but also on the very "self" that returns this completion of self-consciousness (the gift of the "other") to itself, that is, to perception from the perspective of the "self." For the dialogical intersubjectivity and the acknowledgement of the "self" that emerges from this intersubjectivity a fundamental "moral exertion" (Tolstoy) on the part of the "self" is required, its act of understanding (and of self-understanding) as beingness. It is precisely to this conclusion that Tolstoy and Hemingway bring us when they are read against the backdrop of Husserl, Heidegger, and Bakhtin.

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