
Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych*: First and Final Chapter

Richard Sokoloski

University of Ottawa

Chapter one of *The Death of Ivan Ilych* seems anomalous in the general scheme of the work. While a strict temporal sequence occurs throughout subsequent chapters, until the hero's demise, the opening chapter, appearing *in ultimas res*, begins the narrative with an extended ending. Analyses of this structural imbalance have maintained that the author's shift in symmetry is conscious and justified. The present work attempts to add to the discussion by invoking two fundamental aspects of Tolstoyan aesthetics: the use of subtext as a means of narratorial commentary, and the inter-relationship between language and the fictive reality it creates. As will be shown, the function of the deceased title character within the first chapter provides not only the key to *how* the story is told, but *why*.

Three studies that treat the positioning of the chapter are relevant. C.J.G. Turner has indicated¹ that the pre-emptive design was a modification of an earlier plan whereby Peter Ivanovich, who disappears at the end of chapter one, had originally been intended as a narrative agent empowered to relate, on receipt of a diary from the surviving widow, the story of his friend's life and death. As a corollary to his main concerns with the function of word clusters in the text, Turner stresses that the opening chapter provides "a sort of psychological exposition by depicting the norms of social propriety against the background of which Ivan Ilych's life is set and at the same time [. . .] already includes some slight warning of future developments" (121). G. Schaarschmidt emphasizes a more integral justification by situating the chapter

linguistically within a pervasive and complex pattern of time and discourse modes (Schaarschmidt 356-366). In his view, a thematic dominant, namely the tension between inert habit and dawning awareness, emerges more effectively as a result of the chronological displacement of the first chapter. Paraphrasing Turner's argument, Schaarschmidt agrees that the chapter "anticipates the comparisons and contrasts made in later chapters" (364), yet goes further by concluding that thematically the chapter is "in itself an intricate part of this structure of contrasts and that its position in the story is therefore determined by this structure" (364). Both approaches justify the chapter on the basis of organizational principles relating to its role as a narrative conveyance. G.R. Jahn, who has devoted considerable attention to the problem of chapter one, has explored further similarly inspired interpretations.² Thus, the chapter provides the reader with "an ever-broadening view of Ivan Ilych" himself, and a "focusing of the various attitudes toward death, which culminates in an unresolved question about the meaning of Ivan's demise" on which the reader himself is subsequently obliged to "render judgment" (Jahn *An Interpretation*, 36-37).

On the basis of the above interpretations, all of which attribute an epilogue-cum-prologue function to the first chapter, Tolstoy's desire to locate the narrative spatially and temporally is clear. In a text entitled *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, the swift elimination of the main protagonist permits few temporal options other than to the past, in other words, toward the character's life. By displaying and dispatching Ivan Ilych in the opening lines, the author is in fact *dissuading* the reader from an affective response to the character's death.³ Through deft signaling in an otherwise enigmatic passage describing the countenance of the deceased—"The expression on the face said that what was necessary had been accomplished and accomplished rightly. Besides this there was in that expression a reproach and a warning to the living" (98-99, 64)⁴—Tolstoy implants the normative principle that is to be affirmed throughout: endorsing the hero's attainment of a spiritual life and repudiating the mechanical ("dead") way in which he lived his conventional life. Predestined, rather than impending judgment of Ivan Ilych at a time when narratively speaking his life has not yet

begun, is embedded within the chapter in a variety of ways. Performing the role of an *abstract*,⁵ the first chapter gives the entire work a form of cyclical closure: as an initial digest of the author's conclusion, and as a prefatory confirmation of that conclusion. Circumventing the narrative thus, Tolstoy presents more than a structural anomaly—namely a sequential inversion of the hero's life and death—he in fact lays the classical foundations of the hero's tragedy.

The posthumous introduction of Ivan Ilych in the first pages is more than a cryptic *memento mori* for a society of philistines. The chapter's function is two-fold: to pre-scribe a reprehensible life to a dead personage, and then, more significantly, to de-scribe how his death has resolved the problems of that former existence. Subtextually, a corpse divulges Tolstoy's abstract: Ivan Ilych lived badly, saw his error, then died well.

Though lifeless, Ivan Ilych animates the first chapter. News of his demise precipitates a myriad of shufflings and stirrings: opportunities for his colleagues materialize, funeral and burial arrangements are sought, practical measures relating to his family situation are pursued. Exposing the spiritual emptiness of Ivan Ilych's earthly cohorts, the chapter implicates the hero, a "colleague of the gentlemen present who was liked by them all" (96, 61) and whose death "made a mess of things" (97, 63). The underside of social probity and material advantage are hastily disclosed and adjudicated by Tolstoy, and while particulars are withheld in regard to Ivan Ilych, his circumstantial condemnation is confirmed. The denunciation of the milieu wherein he gained prominence, the cynical portrayal of his intimate acquaintances with whom his life and career were inextricably entwined, the depiction of his wife whose false grief cannot conceal a contemptible self-interest, all recall the hero's life *avant la lettre*. When the second chapter opens with the pithy appraisal—"Ivan Ilych's life had been most simple and most ordinary, and therefore most terrible" (104, 68)—the intent is amplification, not exposition. Judgment has fallen.

Ivan Ilych's life is, in effect, sketched in miniature in the opening scene: his lively conversations in the

judicial chambers between cases; his passion for card playing; his concern with promotion; his relations with his wife and friends; and his concern for the furniture and decorations of his apartment. The attitudes and actions of his friends and wife, the hypocritical disparity between their real feelings and their public gestures, are in perfect accord with the laws by which Ivan Ilych had lived. They act toward the fact of his death in exactly the same way he would have acted toward theirs. (Wasiolek 153)

Death has removed Ivan Ilych from his former life—more than physically. Fleshed in by a familiar authorial method ("the combination of the assertion of a permanent, individualizing feature with the expression of a moral judgment" [Christian 149]), Ivan Ilych's presence in the first chapter is not only physically repugnant but *ethically* opposed to those who define his former world. Throughout the chapter Tolstoy empowers the motionless corpse, who is far more than a character awaiting delineation—merely an "occasion" (96, 61) for acquaintances and a "distraction" (101, 66) for his widow—to enmesh a "reproach" and "warning" about life and death to the reader.

Schaarschmidt's term "*externalized interior monologue*"⁶ is apt to the extent that it implies non-verbalized narration designed to augment the *tellability*⁷ of a text. The role of Peter Ivanovich, once contemplated as a narrative appendage, remains crucial in this respect. Though attention centres on his role as a foil to illustrate varying negative attitudes towards the hero's demise (by Ivan Ilych's colleagues, his wife, by himself), his character also affords the deceased a dominant non-verbal status in the deeper structure of the chapter, thus reinforcing the cohesion between text and subtext. Endowing Ivan Ilych with a status that in the first chapter distances him from an erstwhile colleague and his unchanged conventions, the author implants an underlying tension between two opposing views of life.

Tolstoy's separation of the hero from his former milieu is made manifest through the character of Peter *Ivanovich* (lit. "son of Ivan"). Ivan Ilych's entry into the text occurs circuitously and from afar. Narratorially, the simultaneous

revelation of a character and his death in an abrupt announcement read by Peter Ivanovich—himself a non-participant both on entering and exiting the chapter (discussion of the Krasovsky case, the card game already begun)—prompts superficial thoughts of advancement and a short exchange on Ivan Ilych's illness. Abandoning the matter of his friend's death, Peter Ivanovich reorients the conversation to the spaces that divide human beings. The lingering thought that Ivan Ilych is now somehow apart, distinct—dead—when his colleagues live on, reverberates throughout the rest of the chapter. Tolstoy's relevant signaling through Peter Ivanovich is marked.

"We shall have to go to see her, but they live so terribly *far away*."

"*Far away* from you, you mean. Everything's *far away* from your place."

"You see, he can never forgive my living *on the other side* of the river," said Peter Ivanovich, smiling at Shebek. Then, still talking of the *distances* between *different* parts of the city, they returned to the Court.

Besides considerations as to the possible transfers and promotions likely to result from Ivan Ilych's *death*, the mere fact of the *death* of a near acquaintance aroused, as usual in all who heard of it the complacent feeling that "*it is he who is dead and not I*."

Each one thought or felt, "*Well, he's dead but I'm alive!*" (96, 62)

The customary reflection at once occurred to him that *this had happened to Ivan Ilych and not to him*, and that *it could not and should not happen to him* [. . .] After which reflection Peter Ivanovich felt reassured that, and began to ask with interest about the details of Ivan Ilych's death, as though *death was an accident natural to Ivan Ilych but certainly not to himself*. (Emphasis mine—RS; 102, 67)

In the ensuing three "scenes" of the chapter: the viewing of the body, the conversation with the widow, attendance at the requiem service, Peter Ivanovich functions further as a covert means of discourse for Ivan Ilych. Their linkages are re-emphasized throughout the chapter by otherwise redundant references to their past, a past which

nonetheless binds and obliges:

Peter Ivanovich had studied law with Ivan Ilych and had considered himself to be under obligation to him. (97, 62)

[. . .] he had known [Ivan Ilych] so intimately, first as a merry little boy, then as a schoolmate, and later as a grown-up colleague. (101, 66)

[. . .] a little Ivan Ilych, such as Peter Ivanovich remembered when they studied law together. (103, 68)

Peter Ivanovich's first sight of the corpse establishes more ties to advance the subtext. Tolstoy in this instance is the ubiquitous "seer of the flesh,"⁸ both of the living *and* the dead, as a normally staid funereal scene becomes energized by corporal depiction and movement. Peter Ivanovich retains the dominant position, though the presence of his dead colleague is continually underscored by the author through pride of place: of the six paragraphs that comprise the viewing, Ivan Ilych's corpse re-emerges ominously at the conclusion of three of them. Midst a plethora of figures, heads, hands, arms, legs, whiskers, lips, eyebrows, all variously engaged in bowing, crossing and glancing, the skittish Peter Ivanovich is several times taken up with the inert body. Compared with the always "playful" (97, 62) and reassuring countenance of Schwartz, Ivan Ilych's appearance, to which Tolstoy devotes an entire paragraph, evokes a completely opposite reaction in his former schoolmate and colleague, to the extent that Peter Ivanovich commits a rare and conscious impropriety.

The dead man lay, as dead men always lie, in a specially heavy way, his rigid limbs sunk in the soft cushions of the coffin, with the head forever bowed on the pillow. His yellow waxen brow with bald patches over his sunken temples was thrust up in the way peculiar to the dead, the protruding nose seeming to press on the upper lip. He was much changed and had grown even thinner since Peter Ivanovich had last seen him but, as is always the case with the dead, his face was handsomer and above all more dignified than when he was alive. The expression on his face said that what was

necessary had been accomplished, and accomplished rightly. Besides this there was in that expression a reproach and a warning to the living. This warning seemed to Peter Ivanovich out of place, or at least not applicable to him. He felt a certain discomfort and so he hurriedly crossed himself once more and turned and went out of the door—too hurriedly and too regardless of propriety, as he himself was aware. (98-99, 64)

The text is deliberately encoded. The corpse's haunting expression, assured in its duty (death) and its "reproach" and "warning" (to the living), is underscored by what might be called a metaphorical re-animation of the dead, primarily through *diction*, *repetition* and *euphony*. While initial sentences in the passage evoke a sense of inert intransitive form ponderously bearing downward—"lay" [lezhai], "as dead men always lie" [kak vseгда lezhat mertvetsy], "heavy" [tiazhele], "rigid" [okochenevshimi], "sunk" [utonuvshi], "forever bowed" [sognuvsheiusia], "sunken" [vvalivshikhshia]—suddenly a transitive protrusion upward occurs, after which the dead Ivan Ilych, looking thinner, more handsome, eventually speaks, reproaches, warns. Motion becomes now "thrust up" [vystavliai], "in the way peculiar to the dead" [kak vseгда vystavliaiut mertvetsy] (lit.: 'as corpses are always thrust up'), "protruding" [torchavii], "seeming to press" [nadavivshii], while in its appearance the body had "changed" [peremenilsia], "grown thinner" [pokhudel], "was handsomer" [krasivee] (98-99, 64; inclusive).

Various forms of sequencing, all reliant upon syntactic and euphonic affinities, are used by Tolstoy to exploit the thematic hostility between Peter Ivanovich and Ivan Ilych. Direct speech is absent, as discourse is relegated to implicit verbal correspondence and body motion. When Peter Ivanovich enters "like everyone else on such occasions" [kak vseгда chto byvaet], "feeling uncertain what he would have to do [chto emu tam nado budet delat']—Ivan Ilych lies "as dead men always lie" [kak vseгда lezhat mertvetsy], "in a way peculiar to the dead" [kak vseгда vystavliaet mertvetsy], with an expression that belies no uncertainty whatsoever, for: ". . . what was necessary had been accomplished, and accomplished rightly" [chto nuzhno bylo sdelat']

sdelano, i sdelano pravil'no].⁹ Further information transfer within the scene results exclusively from facial description. Entering Ivan Ilych's house, Schwartz's "wink" tells Peter Ivanovich: "Ivan Ilych has made a mess of things—not like you and me"; (97, 63) the former's "face," "whiskers," "seriously compressed lip" and "figure" convey his "solemnity," which nonetheless is exposed by "the playful look in his eyes"; a "twist of his eyebrows" (97, 63; inclusive) reveals to Peter Ivanovich where the body is lying. On fleeing Ivan Ilych's countenance and its reproachful admonition, which is construed as "out of place" [neumestnym], Peter Ivanovich is again comforted by Schwartz's "look," which reconfirms their planned card game (99, 64; inclusive).

The corpse's gaze, along with its "warning", continues to follow Peter Ivanovich, who by now has left the room. In the next and somewhat ambiguous scene on the "pouffe," though Tolstoy largely employs formal discourse in Peter Ivanovich's conversation with the widow, it is in direct response to the latter's admission of how her husband during the last days screamed so that one "could hear him three rooms off" (101, 67), that Peter Ivanovich, off in an adjoining room, abruptly recalls a second time the earlier-observed animated contortions of his dead colleague's face, and is once more overcome with dread.

The thought of the suffering of this man he had known so intimately, first as a merry little boy, then as a schoolmate, and later as a grown-up colleague suddenly struck Peter Ivanovich with horror [. . .] He again saw that brow, and that nose pressing down on the lip, and felt afraid for himself. (101-102, 67)

Ivan Ilych's discomfiting presence is invoked yet again through use of furniture, furnishings and apparel. Corporeal allusions metaphorically give way to domestic items such as a table, lamp, sofa, pouffe, ash-tray, knickknacks, pink cretonne upholstery, lace, a shawl, a handkerchief in the midst of which ensues a serious discussion on an appropriate material domicile for Ivan Ilych's remains, his burial plot, and on the possibility for greater financial reward from his death. Unlike Ivan Ilych initially depicted as blissful in his rest,

motionless, with limbs sunk “in the soft *cushions* of the coffin, the head forever bowed on the *pillow*” (98-99, 64), Peter Ivanovich receives a more arduous time (as does Praskovya Fedorovna) with the adjacent furnishings, a subject on which the deceased had in fact consulted him:

As he sat down on the pouffe Peter Ivanovich recalled how Ivan Ilych had arranged this room and had consulted him regarding the pink cretonne with green leaves. (100, 65)

Like the hero's corpse, furnishings also move inexplicably and inappropriately, and indeed become anthropomorphized and menacing. Their vigilant presence mirrors the disconcerting expression of the dead Ivan Ilych. Thus, the pouffe, “disarranged” [rasstroivshiisia] “in its springing motion” [pruzhinami], “yielding improperly” [nepravil'no podavavshiisia] under Peter Ivanovich's weight, almost prompts the widow to “forewarn” him [predupredit'], though she (unlike Ivan Ilych's corpse) feels that such a “forewarning” [preduprezhdenie] might be considered “out of keeping” [ne sootvetstvuiushchim]. Later in the scene, the furniture (above all, the pouffe) which Ivan Ilych while alive had himself “arranged” [ustrail] and “discussed” [sovetovalsia] with Peter Ivanovich, is at one point described as “relieved” [osvobozhdennyi] of his weight, and thus begins to “rise” [volnovat'sia], to “give him a push” [podtalkivat' ego]. Reseating himself, Peter Ivanovich, “suppressing” [pridaviv] the now “rebellious” [buntovavshiisia] pouffe, once more on rising, sees it has again “rebelled” [zabuntoval], and has “even creaked” at him [dazhe shchelknul]. Following his “struggle” [bor'ba], Peter Ivanovich is described as “sullen” [nasupivshis']. As Praskovya Fedorovna begins calmly to reveal the true motive of her conversation (financial gain), Peter Ivanovich bows and once more tries “keeping control” [ne davaia raskhodit'sia] of the furniture's springs, which nonetheless again “immediately began quivering under him” [totchas zashelivshimsia pod nim] (100-101, 65-66). Like her struggling interlocutor, Praskovya Fedorovna is similarly set upon by furnishings, in this case, a

table that clings relentlessly to her shawl. Both she and her guest are left visibly affected by what are, for dramatic purposes, more than inanimate objects. Construable as black humour or comic relief on an external level, the presence of the furniture on closer study suggests a more integrated subtextual role.

The whole room was full of furniture and knickknacks, and on her way to the sofa the lace of the widow's black shawl caught on the carved edge of the table. Peter Ivanovich rose to detach it, and the springs of the pouffe, relieved of his weight, rose also and gave him a push. The widow began detaching her shawl herself, and Peter Ivanovich again sat down suppressing the rebellious springs of the pouffe under him. But the widow had not quite freed herself and Peter Ivanovich got up again, and again the pouffe rebelled and even creaked. When this was all over she took out a clean cambric handkerchief and began to weep. The episode with the shawl and the struggle with the pouffe had cooled Peter Ivanovich's emotions, and he sat there with a sullen look on his face.¹⁰

At this point, it is only the recollection of Schwartz's expression that once again calms Peter Ivanovich's misgivings.

In the penultimate scene of the chapter, the requiem ceremony, Peter Ivanovich is confronted again by the corpse's hostile countenance and its implicit admonition. Tolstoy's means become more ingenious. Prior to entering the death-chamber through a dining room where a “clock stood that Ivan Ilych had liked so much” (103, 67), Peter Ivanovich encounters his deceased colleague's children: the daughter, accompanied by her fiancé, and the son. On leaving the mass, Peter Ivanovich meets Gerasim. It is apparent though in this series of meetings which frame the final confrontation between Peter Ivanovich and Ivan Ilych, that various evocations of the latter, though mounting in intensity, ultimately prove ineffectual, as Peter Ivanovich behaves toward his dead colleague in an increasingly perfunctory manner. Ivan Ilych is ignored. The paragraph warrants inclusion in its entirety; relevant passages are italicized and subsequently discussed.

In the dining room where the *clock* stood that *Ivan Ilych* had liked so much and had bought at an antique shop, Peter Ivanovich met a priest and a few acquaintances who had come to attend the service, and he recognized *Ivan Ilych's daughter*, a handsome young woman. She was in black and her *slim* figure appeared *slimmer than ever*. She had a gloomy, *determined, almost angry expression* and bowed to Peter Ivanovich *as though he were in some way to blame*. Behind her with the same *offended* look, stood a wealthy young man, an examining *magistrate* whom Peter Ivanovich also knew and who was her fiancé, as he had heard. He bowed *mournfully* to them and was about to pass into the death-chamber when from under the stairs appeared the figure of *Ivan Ilych's schoolboy son*, who was *extremely like his father*. He seemed a little *Ivan Ilych*, such as *Peter Ivanovich remembered when they studied law together*. His *tear-stained eyes* had in them the look that is seen in the *eyes of boys of thirteen or fourteen who are not pure-minded*. When he saw Peter Ivanovich, he *scowled morosely and shamefacedly*. Peter Ivanovich nodded to him and entered the death-chamber. The service began. Peter Ivanovich stood *looking gloomily* down at his feet. He did not look at the dead man, did not yield to any depressing influence, and was one of the first to leave the room. (103, 67)

Cross-references between this scene and Peter Ivanovich's first encounter with the dead *Ivan Ilych* are abundant and significant. As embodiments of their deceased father, the two children (and the fiancé) are endowed with epithets and expressions that Tolstoy has earlier implanted in the text. The erstwhile "handsome" [krasivee] corpse returns in the "handsome" [krasivuiu] daughter; similarly, while the dead *Ivan Ilych* was "much changed and had grown even thinner" [ochen' peremenilsia, eshche pokhudel], the daughter's "slim figure appeared slimmer than ever" [taliia ee, ochen' tonkaia, kazalas' eshche ton'she]. The "reproach" and "warning" issued to Peter Ivanovich by the countenance of the "dignified" *Ivan Ilych*, reiterated during the scene on the "pouffe," become now in the figure of his daughter outright "blame" [vinovat] conveyed through "a determined, almost angry expression" [reshitel'nyi, pochti gnevnyi vid]. The daughter's

fiancé, like *Ivan Ilych*, a "magistrate" whom Peter Ivanovich "also knew," exhibits "the same offended look" [s takim zhe obizhennym vidom]. The young son, "extremely like his father" [uzhasno pokhozhego na Ivana Il'icha], a veritable "miniature *Ivan Ilych*" [to byl malen'kii Ivan Il'ich] in Peter Ivanovich's eyes, weeps and scowls in shame.¹¹

The servant Gerasim, of whom the reader has learnt *Ivan Ilych* "was particularly fond", adds a supporting role. Though introduced by the author earlier in the chapter at the viewing scene and denied any dialogue, Gerasim, through his movement ("strewing something on the floor"), had initially helped "reveal" his master to Peter Ivanovich, making the latter "immediately aware of a faint odour of a decomposing body" (98, 63). In the penultimate scene of the chapter, as Peter Ivanovich rudely takes leave of his dead colleague, Gerasim utters the maxim that proclaims his master's death, a maxim affirmed by *Ivan Ilych* only in the final moments of his own life (and of the text): "It's God's will. We shall all come to it someday." Unlike Peter Ivanovich, curiously unconcerned by "what he would have to do" [chto emu tam nado budet' delat'] (97, 63)—and displaying an expression remarkably akin to his dead master's, which had said "what was necessary had been accomplished, and accomplished correctly" [to, chto nuzho bylo sdelat', sdelano, i sdelano pravil'no] (98-99, 64)—Gerasim's depiction, after having directed his charge to a sledge, resembled "a man in the thick of urgent work," who "sprang back" to his task at hand, fully aware of "what he had to do next" [chto by emu eshche sdelat'],¹² now that formalities were over. As the first chapter ends, *Ivan Ilych's* death is complete. So too, the author's less apparent deliberations on the significance of his character's death and life.

To address his philosophical concerns, Tolstoy frequently resorted to a method that involved placing his characters in ambiguous situations to elicit an ethical decision from them. Their resulting responses are often the dynamic that motivates and elucidates his art. Responses that are life-denying and choose to ignore forces beyond the self are commonly contrasted with those that would affirm life and submit to an imperative perceived beyond

conventional limitations of the self. This desire, incarnate in all humanity, to reply in some way to these forces, even by rejecting them, has been called by one critic Tolstoy's "dialectic of incarnation" (Blackmur 3). In *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, the author adjudicates varied responses to human mortality, and ultimately how one's response *pre-determines* the life one might lead. The life, death, tragedy and salvation of Ivan Ilych, played out in twelve chapters of a text, are inscribed in the initial moments. The moral, which all tragedies must reveal, is likewise disclosed. Such a contrary plan, which gives the first chapter of *The Death of Ivan Ilych* its larger internal logic, has been eloquently described as a measure for all of Tolstoy's oeuvre.

[Tolstoy] exposes his created men and women to the "terrible ambiguity of an immediate experience" (Jung's phrase in his *Psychology and Religion*), and then by the mimetic power of his imagination, expresses their reactions and responses to that experience. Some reactions are merely protective and make false responses; some reactions are so deep as to amount to a change in the phase of being and make honest responses [. . .] But both the reactions and their responses have to do with that force greater than ourselves, outside ourselves, and working on ourselves, which whether we call it God or nature is the force of life [. . .] Both each individual life and also that life in fellowship which we call society are so to speak partial incarnations of that force. Tragedy comes from the failure to apprehend the character or direction of that force, either by an exaggeration of the self alone or the self in society. There is thus at work in the novels of Tolstoy a dialectic of incarnation; the bodying forth in aesthetic form by contrasted human spirits of "the terrible ambiguity of an immediate experience." It is this dialectic which gives buoyancy and sanity to Tolstoy's novels. (Blackmur 3-4)

Tolstoy's formulation and positioning of the chapter also confirm strategies that characterize his art of narrative. The deployment of incident and language, which imbues all of his writings with a larger 'telling' function, establishes a means of fictive communication that, though initially imperceptible, is universally accessible and

eventually evident in Tolstoy's way of thinking. The ordering of actions and their internal inter-relationship (*siuzhet*), which ultimately define subtext, in Tolstoy often run counter to an external or more easily revealed plot. Otherwise innocuous occurrences, which seem to appear in a superficially decorative manner, preserve a well defined relationship to subject matter. Similar to incident in its *pars pro toto* function, language also operates by a series of alignments within a larger totality. The inter-referentiality of signifier and signified is thus covertly exploited by Tolstoy. Just as life for Tolstoy revealed a larger spiritual essence, and reality was a representation of that truth, so too was literature to perform in the same manner.

Tolstoy's encoded manner of discourse, variously described as "emblematic," "metaphorical," "signs on the road of life," points ironically though methodically to a fixed destination.

As Tolstoy well understood and demonstrated in his works, such use of detail as a focal point so that it becomes evocative of many possible meanings makes all the difference. The secret of his power as a writer often resides in his ability to use an artistic language in which each single semiotic sign reveals itself upon observation as a microcosm of the whole text. (Silbajoris 109)

What would otherwise appear to be situational action constitutes a crucial function of content. This guiding principle of Tolstoy's realism has been described as:

. . . the view that our casual everyday appearance, behaviour, conversation—in short, our everyday "character" and confrontations—contain, reflect, anticipate the larger shape of our destiny. [. . .] The beauty [of this method] lies in Tolstoy's ability to maintain a primary focus on upon the "natural" movement of surface action, of ordinary casual encounter and conversation, while at the same time revealing in this seemingly routine material the texture of a dynamic reality rapidly acquiring design and shape.¹³

For its subtleties and seeming incongruities, the structure of *The Death of Ivan Ilych* leaves little to chance. In the first chapter, Tolstoy gives his title

character an important literary afterlife. Preempting Ivan Ilych's former life, Tolstoy denies that life and underwrites the impending death certificate. Partly lyrical narrative and partly biography and inspired undoubtedly by Tolstoy's own incessant obsession with his own mortality. *The Death of Ivan Ilych* externally concerns the life and death of one Ivan Ilych Golovin, whose public and private existence, because it "went well, without change, and [. . .] flowed pleasantly" (119, 82), was "most terrible." Chronologically shaping the narrative in such a way that it begins and ends with the hero's demise, Tolstoy does more than circumscribe the life of a fictional creation; Ivan Ilych's agonizing departure becomes for Tolstoy both a condemnation and exoneration: of life as death, and death as life. The hero's lot is sealed from the outset as conventional dynamics of tragedy, dependent on a more equitable clash of free will and fate, are refused. The device of *a posteriori* exposition, with all action evolving fatalistically, hastens the tragic yet wholly anticipated "open-ended" finish. More akin to a figure of epic tragedy, Ivan Ilych's predicament allows him to confront fate valiantly though inexorably from beginning to end. In his case, from end to beginning . . . and back again. As with his hero, for Tolstoy, life and death, mutually negating constants, coterminous within the broader notion of being, remained tormenting imponderables, indeed till his own final breath.

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Notes

1. Turner 116-121. Two earlier variants of the chapter are extant, one being an addendum to the other (*PSS* 26:505-520).

2. Jahn, "The Role of the Ending in Lev Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych*," 37-43; *The Death of Ivan Ilych: An Interpretation* 31-39.

3. Turner rejects this consideration on purely narrative grounds, explaining the positioning as a "foretaste of the sorts of comparisons and contrasts that are to be drawn later in the story," arguing moreover that the chapter, had it been placed at the end, "would detract too much from the climax of Ivan Ilych's final vision and death." More than detract, it would be redundant. See Turner, 121.

4. The two sets of page numbers indicate the Russian text from *PSS* 26, and (in italics) the English text from Maude.

5. The word is used in terms of its significance in *Speech act analysis*, a prescriptive theory that attempts to reconcile spoken verbal utterances with formal poetic discourse. The theory essentially advocates that methods and rules observed by humans (consciously and subconsciously) when they employ words to speak *and* when they create works of literature—are largely the same. Intriguing research by proponents of the theory has focused on the notion of the *abstract* as a preparatory and pre-emptive strategy in narrative discourse, an initial sealing of a form of contract between speaker and addressee in relation to the larger contents of an utterance. The establishment of an initial agenda or "why" behind the tellability of a text, is usually revealed covertly and obliquely in the early stages of the narrative and serves to ratify the author's desire to tell a story and his/her subsequent invitation for the addressee to play the role of the audience. See especially Pratt, 59-63.

6. "This description [of the dead Ivan's countenance], which one is tempted to label an 'externalized' interior monologue, sums up the meaning of the whole story. What follows in the narrative is a description, with variations, of the same theme (Schaarschmidt 365).

7. The term also derives from Speech Act Theory, and refers to a literary text which is potentially detachable from its immediate context of discourse and is thus made susceptible to elaboration from the sender's point of view. Necessary for the formulation of a *tellable* text are the receptor's recognition and understanding of the information transfer on its primary semantic level; the processing of the message need not however relate to momentary, contextual stimuli. Literary works, like natural narratives, are hence conceived as formal elaborations of their *abstracts*. Pratt 136-147.

8. A term first coined by Merezkovsky.

9. 97-98, 63-64, inclusive; emphasis mine. It is instructive to compare the description of the dead Ivan Ilych (98-99, 64) with an earlier variant (PSS 26:506-507) to note the conspicuous absence of the signaling devices alluded to above (diction, repetition, euphony, juxtaposition). Curious as well is the manner in which the mere "sight" of the corpse to which Peter Ivanovich felt drawn, was later transformed by the author into a more intensive "reproach" and "warning" directed at the observer. The first plan read as follows; bracketed passages were struck by Tolstoy in the manuscript.

Он лежал, как всегда, особенно утонувши в гробу—и в глазах бросали восковой лоб, вострый нос мемного на бок и руки, слабые, [всегда мощные] с отогнутыми кверху последними суставами пальцев. Он очень переменялся, но как все мертвецы, был очень хорош и серьезен. Серезность эта мне показалась неуместной. [Но это был не Иван Ильич, мертвец. Как всегда, только что я стал задумываться, я оберегая себя от мыслей о таких пустяках как смерть] я смотрел и только что почувствовал, что зрелище это притягивает меня, я быстро повернулся и пошел проч к [бакенбардисту] Шебеку, ждавшему меня у притолки.

He lay, as is always the case, in an especially sunken manner in the coffin. One was struck by the waxen forehead, the sharp nose slightly to the side, and his hands, frail, [still moist], with the final finger joints bent upward. He was much changed, but like all corpses, had a fine and serious appearance. The seriousness seemed out of place to me. [It somehow wasn't Ivan Ilych, but a corpse. As always, as soon as I began to reflect more deeply, I refused to yield to such foolish notions as death.] I gazed and immediately felt drawn to the sight of him there. I quickly turned away and went toward Shebek [with his side-burns], waiting for me at the door.

10. 100, 65. Again it is to be noted that, but for a scant mention of a "pink cretonne," references to furniture and furnishings in this scene are altogether absent from an earlier variant of the chapter. Detailed descriptions of numerous accouterments, including the pouffe and the table, eventually replaced an extended dialogue between Peter Ivanovich and Praskovya Fedorovna on the subject of Ivan Ilych's diary (26:507-509).

11. 103, 67, inclusive. Compare: 98-99, 64, inclusive.

12. 103, 68. Reference to an earlier variant of the chapter is again helpful. In the final version, earlier descriptions of Peter Ivanovich's encounters with his dead colleague's children and with Gerasim were both considerably reworked and expanded so as to include the numerous subtextual linkages already discussed. The final version of these two modified segments eventually replaced a lengthy description of Peter Ivanovich citing a fragment from the diary of his departed friend along with his subsequent reflections on his reading. Notable is the brevity of the discarded passage given below, when compared with the final versions of Peter Ivanovich's confrontation with the children and with Gerasim. Note too the relative paucity of encoded linkages to the viewing scene. The bracketed passage was struck by Tolstoy in the original.

В столовой с часами, которые он так рад был, что купил в брикабраке, я встретил в черном его красивую, грудастую, с тонкой талией дочь. Она имела мрачный и гневный, решительный вид. Она поклонилась мне, как будто я был виноват. В передней никого не было. Герасим, буфетный мужик, выскочил из комнаты покойника, перешеврял своими сильными руками все шубы, чтобы найти мою, и подал мне.

-Что, брат, Герасим, жалко [барина].

-Божья воля. Все там же будем, — сказал Герасим, улыбаясь и живо отворил мне дверь, кликнул кучера, поглядел и захлопнул дверь.

In the living room where the clock stood that Ivan Ilych had liked so much and had bought at an antique shop, I met his daughter, all in black, handsome, with a full bosom and a thin figure. She had a gloomy and angry, determined expression. She bowed to me, as though I were guilty. There was no one in the anteroom. Gerasim, the butler's assistant, darted out of the dead man's room, rummaged with his strong hands among the coats to locate mine, and gave it to me.

—Well, friend Gerasim, it's sad [about the master].

—It's God's will. We shall all come to it someday.

—Gerasim said smiling, and he briskly opened the door for me, shouted to the coachman, watched awhile, then slammed the door.

13. Jackson 325. Several scholars have explored the emblematic nature of Tolstoy's realism. Among others,

see Gustafson, 204 ("It is realism. But the concept of reality is expanded beyond the material and historical world to uncover the divine within and abroad. History, culture, nature, and human psychology transcend their material bonds, and the spirit is disclosed. In Tolstoy's emblematic realism, therefore, the signified is this expanded reality which itself embodies and reveals moral and spiritual truth to the characters and the readers."); Salys, 18 ("... signs that point ironically toward [a] true destination."); Danaher, 237 ("... metaphors reflecting the inherent meaning in the text as a whole.").

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