

The Whole World of Tolstoy

“Tolstoy—he’s a whole world...”
M. Gorky

Translation: Lev Tolstoy’s “Hieromonk Iliodor”

Editor’s note: This translation by Hugh McLean (University of California, Berkeley) accompanies Inessa Medzhibovskaya’s research note in the preceding section. The material is drawn from pages 288-290 (text of the story) and pages 452-454 (textological commentary by V. S. Spiridonov) in volume thirty-seven of the Jubilee Edition of Tolstoy’s Complete Collected Works (Полное собрание сочинений). To our knowledge this is the first English-language translation of the story. The translator would like to express his thanks to Michael Denner for his active assistance and shrewd advice in preparing this translation.

I.

During the service Hieromonk Iliodor was sitting in the sanctuary of the monastery church with his head bowed and his eyes closed. Very soon he would have to stand up, approach the altar, face the Royal Doors, make certain motions with his hands, utter certain words and then go up to the altar, take in his hands the gilded silver chalice and begin to celebrate the mystery: partaking of the body and blood of Christ the God. Already three and a half years had passed since Prince Ivan Tverskoi had ceased to be Prince Tverskoi and a retired colonel in the Guards and had become the humble monk Iliodor, yet nothing had ever happened to him like what was happening now. During the first three years after his tonsure he had lived in an

isolated cell in the woods and saw only his supervisor-elder and his sister, who visited him once a year, and the brethren in the church, with which, however, he had no connection. This life for him had been absolute bliss. His consciousness of God’s presence in his soul grew greater and greater in proportion to his liberation from the passions of the flesh, and this gave him full satisfaction. Likewise his conversations with the very old, gentle, simple-hearted and deeply religious elder, his reading of holy books, the Prophets, the Gospels, the Epistles, and especially one of Paul’s epistles that was especially close to his heart, as well as solitary prayer, but not only at the prescribed times, but a continual prayerful mood, reminders of the brevity of life and consciousness of the God within him—all this gave him not only satisfaction, but also awareness of liberation from corporeal bonds and joy that approached ecstasy. Such had been the case for about three years. But at the end of those three years something had happened to him: besides the minutes, hours and days of rapture there had begun to occur minutes, hours and days of depression, weakness and melancholy. Iliodor told his elder about this, and the elder advised him—and for Iliodor the elder’s advice was a command—to take turns serving in the church along with the brethren and to receive pilgrims. For some time visitors to the monastery had been talking about Father Iliodor, and as soon as it became known that he would receive pilgrims, visitors besieged him. At first the consciousness of his obedience to the elder and of the good he might do for people, and also the physi-

cal weariness he experienced while fulfilling all these duties that had been assigned him, freed him from the hours and days of depression that he had previously experienced. The very physical and spiritual weariness that he had felt while fulfilling all the obligations that had been laid on him was often pleasant. The weekly service in the church which the elder had recommended also had an uplifting effect on him.

Now, sitting in a chair in the sanctuary and waiting for his time to act, as always happens, quite unexpectedly and inappropriately he thought about a conversation he had had that morning with a female pilgrim and confessant. An old maid, a supervisor in a girls' school, she was obviously ecstatically devoted to him. She spoke to him about the great good he was bringing to people by his life and teachings and said that he had saved her from unbelief and ruin. In the morning, when she had said these things to him, he had paid no attention to her words. But now, in connection with the prayer...¹ he recalled them and was horrified to realize how they had flattered him and given him joy. He understood how much praise like this and in general popular fame were important to him, dear to him. And remembering the words of that woman, he also recalled how the bursar had ingratiatingly told him of the pleasure he had felt when the good-natured elder, speaking of the pilgrims who visited Iliodor, smilingly said that he could now die joyfully, knowing that he had a successor. He recalled one after another instance, when, forgetting his soul and God, he had given himself up entirely to earthly fame. And he was horrified and began to pray, begging God to help him. And he thought that he would soon be delivered from temptation by the important moment in the celebration of the mystical rite he was about to perform. And suddenly—O horror—he quite unexpectedly, without any preparation, felt that what he was about to do would not and could not help him. He recalled that formerly the celebra-

tion of this mystery, when he had received the Eucharist from the elder, had inspired him, but how now, when he performed the rite himself, he was indifferent—yes, completely indifferent—to it.

"But I will take the Eucharist myself. I will be part of it. Joined with it in spirit. But that is only the surface." And horror gripped him. He had been assailed by doubt. And doubting, he understood that in this matter there was no middle ground: either it was really a great mystery or it was a terrible, disgusting fraud. He forgot everything and suffering torments, tried not to think. Yet he thought and thought, forgetting where he was and what lay before him. Father Evmenii came up to him and reminded him that it was time.

Iliodor raised himself up to his full height and without understanding at first what was happening to him, went up to the altar. Hearing the singing, he came to his senses sufficiently to recall what was expected of him, what he had so often done. But in the process of doing it, and the more he went on with it, the more anguished he became. He had told himself that perhaps the celebration of the rite would liberate him from the temptation of human glory, but now, when he had torn himself away from his thoughts and prayers, he had done so to fulfill the demands not of God, but of people. And it turned out that celebrating the rite was also seeking human glory. He recalled that he had cut off little bits of bread from the Host, and he also recalled the taste of the wine he had poured into the chalice. And all the while he was celebrating with an external appearance of respect and solemnity something toward which he no longer felt the required respect or solemnity. And more and more he despised himself for what he was doing. However, he completed the ceremony and [asked] the names of children and adults. Returning through the Royal Doors to the sanctuary, he drank up the wine in the chalice and put it down.

"You seem not yourself, Father" said Evmenii.

"Yes, there is something, I am a little unwell," he lied.

Many,² noting his agitation, attributed it to his special, supernatural religious mood. His female adherents were in a throng by his cell. But he received no one and locked himself up in his cell.

II.

On that day Iliodor visited the elder and returning to his cell, remained there for 12 days without coming out. Red-haired Mitrii brought his dinner and supper from the refectory, but ate it all himself. Iliodor ate nothing and subsisted all that time on consecrated bread and water. Mitrii heard his sighs, his weeping and loud praying.

Iliodor's Diary

15 September 1902. Yes, everything is over. There is no way out, no salvation. The main thing is that there is no God—the God I served, to whom I surrendered my life, whom I begged to reveal Himself to me—who could hear me. He is not; he does not exist.

Hieromonk Iliodor: History of Writing and Publication [by V. S. Spiridonov]

The idea of writing "Hieromonk Iliodor" arose toward the end of December, 1908. In his diary for 3 January 1909³ Tolstoy wrote: "I think more and more about the story" (vol. 57, p. 4); and on 14 January he noted, "Yesterday I began to write. I don't know what title I will give it. I passionately want to write, but what I wrote is weak. But perhaps" (vol. 57, p. 16). That in these entries he is referring to this particular story is confirmed first by the fact that in this period there are no indications of any other project and second, by a note by Tolstoy's daughter on the manuscript of the story, "Written in the middle of January, 1909" (see manuscript description 3).

Evidently in the interval between the 3rd and 13th of January Tolstoy drew up a plan for the story (manuscript description 1) and in January wrote the beginning of the story (see manuscript description 2). Tolstoy's holograph was then copied on a typewriter. On the typed copy Tolstoy made small corrections. At this point work on the story ceased, and it remained unfinished.

However, Tolstoy ascribed great significance to this project and intended to continue it.

In his diary for 27 January 1909 he wrote, "The second thing⁴ I have started may have terrific force. That does not mean that I expect it to affect people visibly, but the terrific force of the revelation of His law. I want very much to write... and The Elder" (vol. 57, p. 38). By "The Elder" he undoubtedly meant "Hieromonk Iliodor."

The story was first published in *Posthumous Artistic Works of L. N. Tolstoy* (Посмертные художественные произведения Л. Н. Толстого), vol. III (Moscow, 1912), with two cuts by the censors: 1) the passage beginning "And suddenly, O horror!" (p. 289, line 32) and ending "Drank up the wine in the chalice and put it down" (p. 290, line 19); 2) "Iliodor's Diary" were omitted entirely. The text appeared in full in the edition of the same book published in Berlin by I. P. Ladyzhnikov in 1912.

In the present edition the story "Priest-Monk Iliodor" is printed from manuscript No. 3. Mistakes of the copyist are corrected from the holograph.

Description of the Manuscripts

1. Holograph. 1 sheet in postal format. Plan of the story. Printed in the Variants section.
2. Holograph, 4 pages in quarto. *Beginning*: "Hieromonk Iliodor, with his head bowed." *End*: "He is not and does not exist." On the reverse side of p. 1 there are listed in Tolstoy's hand seven questions relating to the content of the story:

- (1) How is the whole service conducted?
- (2) How do monks serve, in what order?

- (3) What prayers?
- (4) How does he take the Eucharist himself?
- (5) Who in the monastery serves with him instead of a deacon?
- (6) What do they sing?
- (7) Did he himself drink and when?

3. A typewritten copy of the preceding manuscript, 7 pages in quarto, printed on one side only. At the end of the text there is a note by Tolstoy's daughter: "Written in the middle of January, 1909." The copy has mistakes. Instead of Ilidor the name of the priest-monk was copied as Isidor (the story was first published with this name). There are a few corrections by Tolstoy.

Notes (from *Complete Collected Works*)

- 1. Tolstoy's ellipsis.
- 2. Indentation by the editor.
- 3. Misprint in original 1509.
- 4. The first was "Who are the Murderers! Pavel Kudriash."

Works Cited

Толстой, Л. Н. *Полное собрание сочинений в 90 томах, академическое юбилейное издание*. Москва: Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, 1928-58.



Interview with Jay Parini

Editor's note: Jay Parini's 1990 novel Last Station, set in the Tolstoy household of 1910 and based on diaries and letters, has been released (December 2009) as a motion picture directed by Michael Hoffman. William Nickell is the Licker Research Chair at Cowell College, University of California Santa Cruz, where he lectures on Russian language and literature. He is the author of The Death of Tolstoy: Russia on the Eve, Astapovo Station, 1910, forthcoming from Cornell University Press. Parini is D. E. Axinn Professor of English and Creative Writing at Middlebury College.

William Nickell: At the outset I should say that I knew of your book from the very beginning of working on my own project that treats Tolstoy's final days and death, but wouldn't allow myself to read it because I didn't want to be influenced by a work of fiction when I was working with historical sources. But now I have finally read it and thoroughly enjoyed it.

Jay Parini: Well I'm glad, and I'll do my best to answer any questions you have about it.

WN: I know that it's been a long time since you wrote the book.

JP: Yes. I haven't been focused on this material for over twenty years.

WN: Your novel has an interesting format, structured around diary entries and letters written by people living in Tolstoy's household. In the afterword you describe why you chose that approach, and it makes a lot of sense. So my first question regards how you went back and forth between what was recounted in the historical records and what you were doing with the novelization. Where were you fictionalizing, or expanding upon, what was there in the records?

JP: From the start I realized that to try and do an objective account would be hopeless—that was one of my very first instincts about this. My editor suggested that I do a non-fiction account of the last year of Tolstoy's life. And I had that in mind for a little bit as I started working but quickly realized that I wanted to do it as a novel and have the option of being way more subjective and really going inside character's minds and hearts and trying to figure out what was going on. I could make a novel like the film *Rashomon*, which would be a layering of subjective viewpoints—sometimes the same scene observed by various eyes and ears—and to try and dig in at the realities that underlay Tolstoy's last year in that way.

I also wanted to use Tolstoy's last year as a kind of lens through which I could view the whole of his career. As people reflected in their own minds they could go back to their early days with Tolstoy, such