

ten its origins. When Joseph Krauskopf died, he gave the college his extensive collection of books and expressed the hope that a reproduction of his home library be built to house them. The trustees followed his wishes, and The Joseph Krauskopf Memorial Library was completed in 1924. The Memorial Room in the library is an exact replica of the founder's home library.

Krauskopf was ordained at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1883 and from 1887 until his death was rabbi of the Congregation Keneseth Israel in Philadelphia. His writings include *Evolution and Judaism* (1887).

Peter Kupersmith
Delaware Valley College

Notes

1. *My Visit to Tolstoy: Five Discourses by Rabbi Joseph Krauskopf*, printed by Oscar Klonower in Philadelphia in 1911.

2. **Editor's Note:** In a letter to V. S. Solovyov, dated 7 August 1894, Tolstoy commented upon Krauskopf's visit:

Krauskopf turned out to be a man of very un-Christian nature, which did not however interfere with his very reasonable plan; and I, no matter how useless my sympathy may be, sympathized with him. His un-Christian nature I noted from the brochure that he gave me on the topic of "an eye for an eye." He says there that "an eye for an eye" is right, and that turning the other cheek is wrong; what is more, he says that when it comes to turning the other cheek and giving one's cloak that one should not turn one's cheek nor give away one's shirt, but instead show a fist and a knout. (*Литературное наследство*. Москва: Издательство АН СССР, 1939. Том 37/38, книга 2, стр. 274. My translation.)

Solovyov's article on the Talmud was entitled "The Talmud and the Latest Polemical Literature about It in Austria and Germany" (Талмуд и новейшая полемическая литература о нем в Австрии и Германии) (1885).



A Response: L.N. Tolstoy's Short Story "God Sees the Truth, but Waits"

In 1975 Professor Jahn of the University of Minnesota published an article entitled "A Structural Analysis of Leo Tolstoy's 'God Sees the Truth, but Waits.'" According to Jahn, the structure of the story is determined by two significant events that are symmetrical but reveal contrasting characteristics of the protagonist, Aksyonov.

However, the contents of the story lend themselves better to a division into four episodes. Aksyonov is introduced as a happy and successful merchant who leaves home on a business trip and whose jolly disposition lasts until the morning of the next day, when he is accused by police of having murdered the merchant who occupied the hotel room next to his (he did not share the room with the other merchant, as Jahn writes. In that case it would have been unlikely that he had not noticed that his companion had been murdered). Hereafter, the second phase sets in: an official finds in Aksyonov's bag a bloody knife and arrests the frightened but innocent man. The third phase encompasses the thirty-six years he spends in a Siberian prison, during which period he considerably ages, never laughs, and turns to the Lord. Then a new group of convicts is brought in, and one of them, Makar Semyonov, is from Vladimir, like Aksyonov. Of course, Semyonov heard about the slaying of the merchant, adding that the man in whose bag the bloody knife was found was obviously the culprit; and, furthermore, that nobody else could have stuck the knife into the bag because the bag was at the head of the bed and placing it there would have awakened anyone else. Hereupon Aksyonov grows very suspicious because who other than the killer would have known the bag's location. Such a fury takes hold of Aksyonov that he can only think of revenge. But the tale takes still another turn: Aksyonov catches Semyonov throwing dirt from under one of the plank beds. The latter is in the process of digging a tunnel and threatens to kill Aksyonov if he turns him in. What follows can be considered the fourth phase: when being interrogated Aksyonov does not betray Semyonov. This touches the latter so deeply that he comes up to Aksyonov, makes a full confession, and begs him to forgive him. Aksyonov replies that

God will forgive him, and that he himself is perhaps a hundred times worse than Semyonov.

It makes more sense to apply Jahn's "symmetry of opposites" to the fourth phase: Aksyonov becomes aware of Semyonov being the killer and is full of anger and thoughts of revenge. During the interrogation he considers his options: why should he protect Semyonov who ruined his life? On the other hand, what would he gain by telling on him? Thus, he replies that he did not see anything and does not know anything. Indeed, again after the conversation with Semyonov, in which the latter confesses his crime, Aksyonov has a change of heart which can be called a conversion. He tells Semyonov: "Бог простит тебя, может быть я во сто раз хуже тебя! (PSS 21: 253)."

The wording here is of great importance. Jahn writes: "In the second half he [Aksyonov] sheds tears of joy as he hears Makar's confession and forgives him" (Jahn 1975: 264). The author of the article uses here words that do not occur in the original. Aksyonov does not forgive Semyonov personally; he leaves the matter in the hands of the Lord. In fact, until the last moment his outlook on life is grim: he has nowhere to go, his wife has died, and his children have forgotten him. There is, indeed, a watershed in his behavior; he cries together with Semyonov, but, although the latter implores Aksyonov to forgive him, he leaves the act of forgiveness to God. He, indeed, sheds tears with the man who caused him so much suffering. However, nowhere in the text does it say that they are tears of joy. Thus, the terms of the conversion have to be scaled down considerably. A close reading of the text suggests that Aksyonov is desperate until the last moment but is so deeply touched by Makar's tears that he withdraws from a personal response and leaves it to God to forgive. And then, indeed, he suddenly feels much better. Thus, this scene can be interpreted as follows: Aksyonov's feelings of despair, anger, and revenge are yet too fresh for him to forgive. However, leaving the act in God's hands, he feels a great burden alleviated since he is certain that he will never harm Makar because of evil impulses. It should be added that even on this diminished scale, Aksyonov's conversion is impressive.

One can agree with Jahn with regard to his criticism of N.N. Gusev's statement that Tolstoy did not express any mystical-religious ideas in the story. On the other hand, it is important to differentiate here: it

cannot be doubted that Aksyonov's conversion to leave it to God to forgive Semyonov is spiritual and rooted in his deep belief in God. At the same time, there is nothing mystical about this conversion; many people have testified to a similar experience.

In addition, the suggestion that the contents of the story would not have been infringed upon if the title were changed to "Tale about the Merchant Aksyonov" was not Gusev's, as Jahn implies, but was made by Lenin's sister, A.I. Elizarova. The latter liked Tolstoy's narrative, based on a popular folk tale, very much, but as a stout communist had difficulties accepting the name of the Lord in the title.

Thirty years later, Professor Hugh McLean of the University of California, Berkeley, threw down the gauntlet to Professor Jahn with regard to the latter's interpretation of Tolstoy's story. But first, I would like to respond to what McLean labels as Tolstoy's error. It concerns the sentence: "На другой день, когда вывели колодников на работу, солдаты заметили, что Макар Семенов высыпал землю, стали искать в остроге и нашли дыру" (PSS 21: 251,252). In a footnote, McLean discusses the ambiguity of the verbal form *высыпал* which, depending on the stress, can be imperfective or perfective, resulting in an English translation of either "was scattering" or "had scattered." He adds that his colleague Olga Hughes, a native speaker of Russian, reads it as a perfective. To my mind, there is no ambiguity: the form is definitively perfective. It is, after all, very unlikely that Semyonov was scattering dirt and thus, taking the risk of being observed by the soldiers.

Much more serious is McLean's claim that Tolstoy erred by inserting Makar Semyonov's name, since the soldiers had only been confronted by someone's act of scattering. However, it can be argued that Tolstoy made use of a long-established literary device of naming a person unknown to certain characters in a story or a play but known to the readers or audience.

But the bulk of McLean's article involves the question of which version should be preferred with regard to Aksyonov's interrogation after the authorities had found out that an escape tunnel was being dug.

Tolstoy's close friend Chertkov was apparently troubled by the fact that Aksyonov was lying during the interrogation when he declared that he had not seen anything and did not know anything. Chertkov argues

that the passage could easily be rewritten without either changing the contents of the story or Aksyonov telling a lie. Indeed, a new version was written, although it is uncertain by whom. In it Aksyonov replies: “Не могу сказать, ваше благородие. Мне Бог не велит. Я не скажу” (PSS 21: 334). This version was not used in the Jubilee edition, and McLean writes: “I do not agree with this decision. The ‘I won’t tell’ text is the latest approved by the author, and according to standard textual principles, it should stand as canonical” (McLean 79).

In his response to McLean’s article, Jahn argues—and to my mind convincingly—that, taking into consideration Aksyonov’s highly agitated disposition during the interrogation, it is more believable that he said, after moments of confusion, that he had not seen and did not know. It would have required an inner tranquility, which at that moment Aksyonov obviously missed, for him to say that God forbade him to speak and that he would not tell. I agree with Jahn that such a response at that moment would be premature. But he stretches credibility much too far when he continues: “These words imply that a perfect link of communication between Aksyonov and the deity already exists as it does at the end of the story” (Jahn 2004: 83). One would think that for such a link to exist a much more sophisticated person would be needed. Returning to the controversy regarding the versions “I did not see” and “I won’t tell,” the matter is more complicated than alleged in either of the two articles. When Aksyonov sees that Semyonov is busy digging a hole under one of the plank beds, the latter “рассказал, как он прокопал проход под стенами” (PSS 21:251). There is no doubt that “прокопал” is perfective, and the translation must therefore be “told that he had dug a passage under the walls...” Aksyonov had not witnessed that; he had only seen Semyonov scattering dirt from under the plank bed. Thus, he had seen only part of the operation. It seems that what Chertkov suggested to Tolstoy in his letter of 31 January 1885, namely that Aksyonov declared that he did not do the digging and remained silent about whether or not he knew who did, would in all likelihood have been the most satisfying version. In addition, apart from the valid point made by Jahn that during the interrogation Aksyonov was still lacking in acquiescence to reply with such self-assurance, the “I won’t tell” version portrays Aksyonov actually in a

weaker position than the “I did not see.” By stating that the Lord did not order him to speak up, Aksyonov in essence withdraws from commenting on the matter himself and hides behind God’s judgment. And by stating that he will not tell, says actually that he knows the truth but will not reveal it. As to this version, it is a moot point, to my mind, whether Aksyonov’s defiant behavior has to be interpreted as an expression of courage.

My interpretation of the story is as follows: a simple man is unjustly convicted of a crime he did not commit. Consequently, during twenty-six years he suffers in a Siberian prison. Then he comes face to face with the real murderer, who begs for forgiveness. Until, at the last moment, full as he is of bitterness, anger, and thoughts of revenge, a conversion takes place in Aksyonov. He feels that he has received the strength to keep his bad feelings under control and to leave it to God to forgive the murderer. In this context, special attention should be paid to the phrase “И вдруг у него на душе легко стало” (PSS 21: 253). About the use of *вдруг* (suddenly), M.B. Khrapchenko wrote: “Major changes in heroes’ inner life were not seldom characterized by the author [Tolstoy] by means of the word ‘suddenly’” (Храпченко 392). In this context it is important to remember the famous lines Tolstoy wrote in his essay of 1862, “Are the Peasant Children to Learn to Write from Us, or, We to Learn from the Peasant Children?": “Our ideal is behind us, not before us. Education spoils, it does not correct men. The more a child is spoiled, the less he ought to be educated, the more liberty he needs” (*Tolstoy on Education* 222). Aksyonov is of course not a child, but as a simple soul he has in common with children that he is unspoiled, and the sudden revelation of how to act falls into fertile earth in Aksyonov’s case. Although it is impossible to accept Gusev’s interpretation of the story in full, he makes the following important remark: “But if it is impossible to see that any mystical concepts are expressed in the story ‘God sees the Truth, but Waits,’ there is no doubt on the other hand, that one of Tolstoy’s dearest ideas is expressed in the story—the belief in the power of goodness (Вера в силу добра)” (Гусев 78).

I would like to add to this dictum: the belief of simple people in the power of goodness. And Aksyonov was one of these simple souls.

Alexander F. Zweers
University of Waterloo

Works cited

- Гусев, Н. Н. Лев Николаевич Толстой. Материалы к биографии с 1870 по 1881 год. Москва: АН, 1963.
- Jahn, Gary R. "A Structural Analysis of Leo Tolstoy's 'God Sees the Truth, but Waits.'" *Studies in Short Fiction*, 12(1975): 261-270.
- . "Was the Master Well Served? Further Comment on 'God Sees the Truth, but Waits.'" *Tolstoy Studies* XVI (2004): 81-86.
- Храпченко, М. Б. Лев Толстой как художник. Москва: Советский писатель, 1963.
- McLean, Hugh. "Could the Master Err? A Note on 'God Sees the Truth but Waits.'" *Tolstoy Studies Journal* XVI (2004): 77-81.
- Толстой, Л. Н. *Полное собрание сочинений в 90 томах*. Москва-Ленинград: Художественная литература, 1928-1964.
- . *Tolstoy on Education*. Trans. L. Wiener. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.



An Interview with Director Paul Schick

Paul Schick wrote and co-directed *Alyosha the Pot* (2006), a short film based on Tolstoy's tale of the same title.

Tolstoy Studies Journal: How did you first cross paths with Tolstoy?

Paul Schick: My first direct contact with Tolstoy took place in the summer of 1983, between high school in England and college in the U.S. As a child I'd seen a copy of *War and Peace* loitering at my (Freemason) father's bedside, and it may have been his recent death and the need to know him better that compelled me to pick up the Penguin tome and lock myself away until I'd read it through. I committed several passages to memory at the time that serve as touchstones still. Pierre's epiphany in particular hovered in view as I reflected during work on *Alyosha the Pot*: "To live with the sole object of avoiding doing evil so as not to have

to repent is not enough. I used to do that. I lived for myself and spoilt my life. And only now that I am living for others—or at least trying to—only now do I realize all the happiness life holds."

TSJ: So, which comes first for you: Tolstoy the Artist or Tolstoy the Thinker?

PS: How to separate the two, as if one could music from words in opera? We can agree, I imagine, that by Thinker you don't mean the purely intellectual, but the mental and spiritual project to which Tolstoy devoted himself post-*Anna Karenina*: Tolstoy the essayist, peace-activist, counter-cultural, proto-hippie, etc., whose legacy runs through Gandhi, King, and beyond. Was that not the same Tolstoy who conceived of the Russian peasant Kutuzov in *War and Peace* ("a simple, modest and therefore truly great figure who could not be cast in the lying mould invented by history"), or, for that matter Alyosha the Pot? The twin spirits of "simplicity and truth" inherent in these and other figures in his writing (e.g., Karatayev) seem to me features of *both* his art *and* his thought—to the extent that no segmentation of Tolstoy's biography into pre- and post-crisis, no reductive analysis of his works by form and content, and no account of the reception history of his oeuvre do justice to his meaning for me as a whole. Speaking as an artist and as a thinking person, Tolstoy the Artist and Tolstoy the Thinker are merely two sides of the same prodigious coin.

TSJ: Tell me a little about your previous experience with film making.

PS: During graduate school, when I should have been busy among the dust in the basement of the music library, I was off making a series of videos for CTV in New Haven. The first was a screen version of Claudio Monteverdi's *Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*, a setting of a dramatic scene by Torquato Tasso. Next I produced a video of the Ben Jonson masque, *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, paired with the Monteverdi as part of a half-hour show that aired repeatedly over those years. My favorite of the period was *Blessings II Go*, a video made in a Chinese take-out restaurant with a looped and amalgamated soundtrack of the Shem the Penman episode from *Finnegans Wake* and chant by the medieval mystic Hildegard of Bingen. In addition to a couple of really short pieces (*Irony, Starfire*), I was able to collaborate with composer Jack Vees on a video entitled *Rocket Baby*, featuring a long single take of