

Research Notes

Whose Holy of Holies? Bakhtin's Polyphony and Tolstoy the Author-God

In his 1963 monograph *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*,¹ Mikhail Bakhtin famously categorizes Lev Tolstoy as a “monologic” author. In his discussion of Tolstoy’s story *Three Deaths* (1859), he writes:

The words and consciousness of the author, Lev Tolstoy, are nowhere addressed to the hero, do not question him, and expect no response from him. The author neither argues with his hero nor agrees with him. He speaks not with him, but about him. The final word belongs to the author, and that word—based on something the hero does not see and does not understand, on something located outside the hero's consciousness—can never encounter the hero's words on a single dialogic plane. A similar disjuncture separates his heroes from one another. (71)

According to Bakhtin, in Tolstoy’s world the creator’s judgment is final, unquestionable, and indeed unknowable, since all of his creatures are trapped within the capsule of their monologic imaginations. For Bakhtin, the blinkered, at times solipsistic existence of Tolstoy’s characters presents a stark contrast to the expansive and interpenetrative universe modeled in the fiction of Fyodor Dostoevsky, an author whose work Bakhtin describes as uniquely “polyphonic”:

What unfolds in his novels is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness;

rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with his own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. (6, emphasis in original)

According to Bakhtin’s well-known theory, Tolstoy’s detached objectivity and refusal to speak with his characters violates their right to self-definition since, in Bakhtin’s view, the individual’s innermost identity cannot be fixed by an external, monologic voice: “The truth about a man in the mouths of others, not directed to him dialogically and therefore a secondhand truth, becomes a lie degrading and deadening him, if it touches upon his ‘holy of holies,’ that is, ‘the man in man’” (59). In Bakhtin's polyphonic novel, characters can respond to what anyone else, including the author, says about them.

It is no accident that Bakhtin uses a biblical image, the Holy of Holies, to characterize the individual’s innermost “word.” The most sacred place in the Hebrew Temple of Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies housed the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the tablets on which the Ten Commandments—the divine word—had been inscribed. A curtain separated the congregation from the Holy of Holies, and the High Priest was allowed entrance only once a year, on the Day of Atonement.

Bakhtin’s metaphor is significant because it implies that every individual has his or her own holy of holies which, presumably, contains his or her own individual “word.” The polyphonic novel is thus one in which the divine-authorial word is

no longer hidden behind a curtain but is instead one of many words circulating in a “great dialogue.”

By invoking the Holy of Holies, Bakhtin’s distinction between monologic and dialogic authors implies a similar distinction between the Old Testament and New Testament Deities. The first Deity, like Bakhtin’s Tolstoy, keeps his singular truth behind an insuperable barrier. The second, like Bakhtin’s Dostoevsky, makes his truth the property of all men. According to the Gospels of Luke, Matthew, and Mark, the curtain in the Temple of Jerusalem was torn when Christ died, meaning that the Christian era began when the divine word was liberated from its priestly sequester and entered into what Bakhtin might call a dialogic relationship with the “holy of holies” of each individual. As the theologian Kevin Vanhoozer has recently observed, “Transposed into theology, radical polyphonic authorship stands for the way in which God orchestrates an open-ended conversation among his creatures” (312).

Transpositions like Vanhoozer’s are not unusual. Christianity lies at the root of much of Bakhtin’s thought, and polyphony in particular has a clear theological grounding. As Ruth Coates has put it, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Creative Work* expresses the

central Christian tenet of the active goodness of the ideal author-creator whilst redefining the best possible manifestation of aesthetic love such as to have it CONSIST in a radical respect for the freedom of his creation/characters rather than a guarantee of their blessedness. (89)

Bakhtin’s ideal author is a mirror of his ideal deity. Both allow their creatures maximum freedom, even if this freedom leads them to suffering or damnation. As an author who grants his characters constant access to his “word” without binding them to his will, Bakhtin’s Dostoevsky is the earthly approximation of his polyphonic God.

Perhaps the most forceful objection to Bakhtin’s polyphony theory belongs to Dostoevsky’s biographer Joseph Frank, who writes:

[S]ince [Bakhtin’s] critical terms (dialogue, monologue) are ultimately grounded in the Christ-man paradigm of his philosophy, he is constantly tempted to suggest an absolute independence that cannot in fact exist. [...] [I]f we take the term “polyphonic novel” in the strong sense asserted by Bakhtin, it does not define a new form at all because he is unable to explain how the absolute independence of fictional characters can combine with the unity of a work of art. (29)

Frank implies that Bakhtin’s theory is not so much religion-based as religion-biased. Bakhtin exaggerates Dostoevsky’s neutrality in order to remake him in the image of the polyphonic God. By now this fact has been widely acknowledged, but what has received decidedly less attention is the extent to which Bakhtin might have similarly exaggerated his account of Tolstoy. To this day it remains commonplace to call Tolstoy an “authoritarian” author, with Bakhtin’s Dostoevsky book frequently invoked as evidence. But was Tolstoy really the literary equivalent of a demiurge? Are his characters, as Bakhtin argues, really never allowed to occupy “the same plane with the author’s word and the author’s truth” (72)? Or is Bakhtin overstating Tolstoy’s distance in order to maximize the contrast with his Dostoevsky?

Caryl Emerson has written that any categorical distinction between the “monologic” Tolstoy and the “polyphonic” Dostoevsky is “far too facile” (“The Tolstoy Connection” 76). Building on this idea, my article aims to show that Tolstoy did not hide his truth as assiduously as Bakhtin claims. Rather than doggedly asserting a single authorial truth, Tolstoy’s fiction actually suggests a variety of ways that subjective and objective kinds of knowledge and experience might be reconciled. Because it would be impossible to address all of

these instances in so short an article, I will focus here on two episodes where Tolstoy, similar to Bakhtin, uses the Holy of Holies as a metaphor for an individual's innermost "word." The first of these episodes occurs in the final pages of *Anna Karenina*, when Konstantin Levin uses the image to describe the unspeakable contents of his soul. The second episode comes at the conclusion of *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*, when the metaphorical curtain separating the author's "word" from that of the protagonist is torn.

The Holy of Holies in *Anna Karenina*

In the last pages of *Anna Karenina*, the work's moody protagonist wonders whether he should tell his wife about a recent religious epiphany he has experienced. "No, there's no need to say it," Levin finally decides. "It is a secret [тайна] that is necessary for me alone, important and inexpressible in words" (PSS 19: 399). What Levin has realized is that there is something highly subjective about his newfound belief, and this subjective element makes it difficult if not impossible for him to communicate it. Whatever the changes taking place within him, he reflects, "there will still be the same wall between the holy of holies of my soul and other people, even my wife" (PSS 19: 399).

Konstantin Levin spends most of *Anna Karenina* seeking universal answers to big philosophical questions. Though a consistent source of anguish, his desire for objective truth seems to be an essential and unalterable part of his personality. As his brother-in-law tells him early in the novel:

"[Y]ou're very much of a piece. That's your virtue and your shortcoming. You have a character that's all of a piece and you want life to be composed of a single piece too—but that's not how it is. [...] All the variety, all the charm, all the beauty of life is made up of light and shadow."

Levin sighed and made no reply. He was thinking of his own affairs, and was not listening to Oblonsky. (PSS 18: 46).

However correct Oblonsky's assessment, it falls on deaf ears. And even if Levin were paying attention, one suspects that his brother-in-law's insight would have little effect. However many times he moves from one idea to another, Levin never relinquishes his desire for objective knowledge. As we shall see in a moment, even his final epiphany, for all its emphasis on subjectivity, hinges on the idea that his religious convictions are shared by "millions of men."

Levin never learns that his search for universal truth is quixotic. He does, however, learn to keep his universal truth to himself, a lesson that comes only after many failed conversations of the kind just quoted. In fact, *Anna Karenina* offers something of an encyclopedia of miscommunication and failed dialogue, largely confirming Bakhtin's observation that Tolstoy's characters are separated from one another by a "disjuncture" similar to that which supposedly separates the characters from the author himself.

Caryl Emerson has described Dostoevskian polyphony as "a dialogue of ideas" in which readers, characters, and author communicate on an "equal plane" ("The First Hundred Years" 128), but the dialogue we find in Tolstoy raises doubts about whether two individuals can occupy an "equal plane" for even a short amount of time. Levin notices something similar, at one point telling Kitty: "More often than not people get into heated arguments because they can't make out what exactly their opponent is trying to prove" (PSS 18: 417). Ironically, however, Levin has miscommunicated his theory of miscommunication, obliging the narrator to step in and clarify:

Levin had often noticed in discussions between the most intelligent people that after enormous efforts, and an enormous amount of logical

subtleties and words, the disputants would finally come to the awareness that what they had so long been struggling to prove to one another had long ago, from the beginning of the argument, been known to both, but that they liked different things, and would not define what they liked for fear of its being disputed. [...] This is what he had been trying to say. (PSS 18: 417)

Levin observes that disputants often withhold the (emotional and deeply subjective) grounds of their arguments for fear that these grounds will be disputed. But, as Tolstoy shows in this passage, a lack of shared grounds is not the only obstacle to effective communication. The listener must listen carefully, and the speaker, unlike Levin in the foregoing episode, must be articulate. As *Anna Karenina* proceeds, a pattern emerges: The more intimate the utterance, the less likely it is that these three conditions—shared grounds, attentive listening, and articulate self-expression—will be met. The more subjective the idea, the more difficult it is to convey.

This is the conclusion Levin comes to at the end of the novel. His holy of holies, he realizes, is not open to dialogue. True as it may be, this insight should not be confused with the actual, philosophical content of Levin's epiphany, which is squarely religious. Though Levin chooses not to articulate his newfound truth to other characters in the work, he does attempt to explain it to himself, and we as readers are allowed to eavesdrop on the process. Thus, before we can say whether Levin's truth corresponds to the "author's truth," we must first understand what that truth is.

Following the death of his brother from tuberculosis, Levin is haunted by the feeling that existence is meaningless, and toward the end of the novel his search for a unified theory of life has led him to the positivistic view that he is nothing but a "bubble-organism" that endures for a time and then pops (PSS 19: 370). Though he rejects this

thought as untrue, it pursues him nonetheless, and he imagines that the only way to escape it is suicide. Levin's problem, it seems, is that he sees himself as an object rather than a subject. He brackets his own subjectivity in order to perceive himself in universal, biological terms, and this drains his personal, subjective life of meaning.

To regain this lost meaning, Levin must inscribe his subjective experience into the objective framework that his mind seems to crave preternaturally. The catalyst for this change occurs when he hears a peasant criticize one man for "living for his belly" and praise another for "living for his soul" (PSS 19: 376). Though the peasant cannot explain what he means, Levin understands him perfectly well, and as Levin reflects on this understanding he comes to feel that he and the peasant and, by extension, millions of other people are united by a shared conscience: "I and millions of men, men who lived ages ago and men living now [...] are all agreed about this one thing: what we must live for and what is good" (PSS 19: 377). Despite this knowledge's apparent universality, Levin also recognizes that its roots are also deeply personal:

He had lived (without being aware of it) by those spiritual truths that he had sucked with the milk of his infancy, but he had thought, not merely without acknowledging these truths, but deliberately avoiding them. [...] "I looked for an answer to my question. And thought could not give an answer to my question—it is incommensurable with my question. Life itself gave me the answer, in my knowledge of what is right and what is wrong." (PSS 19: 379)

Because it connects his personal experience to the experience of others, Levin's epiphany does not require him to relinquish his previous desire for a single, unified truth. The moral element of his subjectivity, he decides, is universal.

As the euphoria of the insight passes, Levin begins to suspect that there might be a flaw in his

reasoning, and he asks himself whether his Christian faith is really as objective as it seems. “But what about the Jews, the Muslims, the Confucians, the Buddhists,” he wonders. “Are hundreds of millions of people really deprived of that highest good without which life has no meaning?” (PSS 19: 398). But Levin avoids pulling this thread, which has the potential to unravel his entire new set of beliefs, by once more placing his subjectivity in the foreground:

“But what am I asking about?” he said to himself. [...] “I am asking about the way that all the diverse faiths of humanity relate to the deity. I am asking about the general manifestation of God to the entire world with all of its blurry patches. To me individually, to my heart has been revealed a knowledge beyond all doubt and unattainable by reason, and here I am obstinately trying to express it in words.” (PSS 19: 398)

On the one hand, Levin imagines that conscience is universal. On the other, he disclaims the authority to attribute this conscience to all humanity. Paradoxically, the objectivity of his truth is subjective. His vision of universal conscience satisfies his implacable need for universal truth, while his simultaneous affirmation of his subjectivity protects this truth from the corrosive power of “objective” rational inquiry.

The paradox at the heart of Levin's truth is also apparent from the metaphors he uses to describe it. The first of these metaphors concerns the difference between objective and subjective points of view. Staring at the sky, Levin acknowledges that the stars are stationary and that their movement is an illusion. Still, he reasons, the view from Earth should not be discounted: “Looking at the motion of the stars, I can't picture to myself the rotation of the earth, and I'm right in saying that the stars move” (PSS 19: 398). Here Levin's meaning is clear enough. Subjective experience has value even if it contradicts objective fact. But in the next

paragraph Levin's imagination carries him farther afield, and his increasingly elaborate metaphor begins to lose coherence:

And could the astronomers have understood and calculated anything if they had taken into account all the complicated and diverse motions of the earth? All the marvelous conclusions they have reached about the distances, weights, movements, and deflections of the heavenly bodies are founded on the apparent motions of the heavenly bodies around a stationary earth, on the very motion that I see before me now and which has been the same for millions of men throughout the ages and was and will be always alike, and can always be trusted. And just as the conclusions of the astronomers would have been idle and unfounded had they not been founded on observations of the visible heavens in relation to a single meridian and a single horizon, so too would my conclusions be idle and unfounded if not they were not founded on that conception of right, which has been and will be always alike for all men, which has been revealed to me as a Christian, and which can always be trusted in my soul. The question of other religions and their relationship to the Divinity I have neither the right nor the ability to decide. (PSS 19: 398–99)

In his first analogy, Levin divides objectivity and subjectivity into separate spheres. In his second analogy, he conflates them, once again demonstrating that his epiphany has not freed him from his habit of merging the universal and the particular. In comparing his conclusions to those of astronomers, Levin affirms that what he sees “has been the same for millions of men throughout the ages and will always be alike.” At the same time, he acknowledges that his morality is specifically Christian, and this makes him stop short of extending his “universal” faith to other religions. While Levin can be sure that Muslims, Jews, and

Buddhists see the same sky he does, he cannot be sure that they all obey the same rule of conscience. His vaguely Kantian analogy connecting the starry heavens above and the moral law within is therefore a failure.²

Levin's incoherent analogy should be understood as another example of failed communication in the work, this time between hero and reader. But unlike earlier communication breakdowns, such as the one with Kitty quoted above, the narrator does not step in to explain what Levin actually had in mind. This is because Levin has in fact said exactly what he means, though what he means is comprehensible and adequate only to Konstantin Levin. It arises from his own experience and fulfills his own subjective needs. It is not supplied by the author for universal consumption. Though we are shown a person arriving at truth, we are not asked to believe that this truth is the "author's truth" or that it should—or even can—be the reader's. After all, what if the reader is a Jew, a Muslim, or a Buddhist? Is he or she incapable of knowing truth or appreciating a central facet of *Anna Karenina*, simply because he or she lacks the religious upbringing of Konstantin Levin? If Tolstoy the author-deity knows the answer to this question, he is silent about it, though this does nothing to diminish the gravity or the authenticity of his character's insight.

Bakhtin's notion of truth is of course rather different. "Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction," he writes in *Problems* (110). Though this idea seems to imply that all truth is local and subjective, Bakhtin insists that dialogism is not a kind of relativism.

It should be pointed out that the single and unified consciousness is by no means an inevitable consequence of the concept of a unified truth. It is quite possible to imagine and postulate a unified truth that requires a

plurality of consciousnesses," he writes, suggesting that there is nothing wrong with singular truth as long as it manifests itself dialogically. (81)

As we have seen already, the fiction Bakhtin categorizes as monologic is not monologic because it *contains* a single truth but because its characters cannot *engage* with that single truth. This, again, is why Bakhtin claims that Tolstoy's characters are less free than Dostoevsky's. They lack the ability to question their "author's word."

But what, exactly, is the "author's truth" of *Anna Karenina*? Tolstoy himself seemed to dismiss the question altogether when he famously declared that the message of *Anna Karenina* was the entire contents of *Anna Karenina*. Vladimir Alexandrov describes the work's lack of a singular truth more analytically:

Anna Karenina can be seen as an array of readings that contradict and diverge from each other, and that cluster around an opposition between personal truths and universal truth. It does not seem possible to resolve this difference by accepting only one or the other kind of truth because there are too many examples of each in the novel for either to be dispensable. (297)

According to Alexandrov (and I agree), there is no super-truth in *Anna Karenina*, no singular idea that subordinates all the local and subjective truths that arise during the lives of its many diverse characters. Perhaps, then, characters in the novel are not free to grapple with their "author's truth" because their author never had a truth to begin with.

If this is the case, *Anna Karenina*'s characters are not less free than Dostoevsky's; they are simply free in a different way. In the absence of a single "author's truth," Tolstoy's characters, with Levin foremost among them, are at liberty to arrive at their own subjective truths and, if they choose, to keep them to themselves. Indeed, Levin's decision not to speak his truth may constitute the most

important difference between him and Tolstoy. Being an artist, Tolstoy seems to have considered it his calling to use “objective” art forms to convey his subjective experience and beliefs. As he writes in an 1868 notebook entry:

The objective world is the world of the unknown—God. One can and should sense this world, but treating it, as some do, as a foundation for worldly or historical conclusions is the source of all human error.

The ancients were stronger and more intelligent than we are because everything that we call philosophy, history, jurisprudence, and theology they called oratory. The first allows for objective conclusions, the second recognizes that there is only the subjective view. Form alone is objective. Everything else is subjective, and only the subjective has content. (PSS 48: 111)³

As his faulty analogy shows, Levin lacks Tolstoy's facility with “objective forms,” and it is likely that if he tried to share his truth with his intellectual friends he would only have exposed it to withering criticism. Indeed, when he tries in the same chapter to explain something far less esoteric—his opposition to Russia's participation in the Ottoman-Serbian war—his interlocutors repeatedly (and, it seems, willfully) misunderstand him. By keeping his paradoxical truth safely within the walls of his inner sanctum, Levin preserves his innermost “word” from any “dialogic” interference.

The Holy of Holies in *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*

Tolstoy uses the holy of holies metaphor quite differently in *The Death of Ivan Il'ich* (1886). Written in the aftermath of Tolstoy's spiritual crisis and self-described conversion, *Ivan Il'ich* conveys Tolstoy's newfound belief in the singularity and knowability of Christian truth (or at least his version of it). Rather than a strongbox for the individual's subjective faith, *Ivan Il'ich*'s holy of

holies contains the objective and, as we shall see, literal word of the author-Deity.

For many readers, *The Death of Ivan Il'ich* shows Tolstoy at his most monologic. Speaking in a voice of absolute moral authority, the novella's narrator unambiguously condemns the lifestyle, habits, and views of his protagonist and the bourgeois society he represents. His declaration that “Ivan Il'ich's life was most simple and ordinary and most terrible” (PSS 26: 68) must count among one of the most notoriously unequivocal statements in literature.

Yet at the same time the passage provides a key example of the work's irony or, as Bakhtin would have it, “double voicing.” Though it would seem from this passage that the narrator abhors all things simple and ordinary, there are other places in the work where simplicity is unmistakably valorized. The peasant Gerasim, who embodies Tolstoyan virtue, has “a kind, simple young face” (PSS 26: 96) and ministers to the suffering Ivan Il'ich “easily, willingly, simply” (PSS 26: 97). And then there is Ivan himself, who during his deathbed epiphany exclaims: “How good and how simple!” (PSS 26: 113).

What these examples suggest is that there are two “simples” at work in *Ivan Il'ich*: One that means “terrible” and another that means “good.” The first “simple” belongs to the Petersburg bourgeoisie and is used ironically to describe Ivan Il'ich's pre-conversion life and attitudes. The second belongs to the narrator and sincerely describes Gerasim's character as well as Ivan's very brief post-conversion ethos. Indeed, the entire novella can be understood as Ivan's journey from society's word to his creator's, from the “simple” that means “terrible” to the “simple” that means “good.”

We find a similar distinction between the words of author and hero during the episode in which Ivan receives his fatal wound. Writing from the perspective of the protagonist and, implicitly,

the entire Russian middle class, the narrator's voice is unmistakably ironic:

Ivan Il'ich himself oversaw all the arrangements, chose the wallpapers, bought the furniture—preferably antiques, to which he attributed a particularly *comme il faut* character—and supervised the upholstering. Everything progressed and progressed until it approached the ideal he had set himself. Even when things were only half arranged, their arrangement exceeded his expectations. He understood what a *comme il faut* and elegant character, free from vulgarity, it would all have when it was ready. [...] He was pleased by the thought of how his wife and daughter, who shared his taste, would be struck by it. (PSS 26: 78–9)

“*Comme il faut*,” “elegant,” “free from vulgarity”—all of these modifiers belong to Ivan Il'ich and his social set, and in the “objective” language of the narrator they all mean “terrible.”

Toward the end of this paragraph, Ivan slips while hanging a curtain and bumps his side. Following this (ultimately fatal) accident, a new paragraph begins that describes Ivan's domestic interior from an entirely different perspective:

In reality it was the same thing that one finds in all the houses of people who are not exactly rich but would like to resemble the rich, and for that reason succeed only in resembling one another: there were damasks, dark wood, flowers, rugs, dull and polished bronzes—all the things that people of a certain class possess in order to resemble other people of that class. His home was so like all the others that it would never have been noticed, but to him it all seemed quite exceptional. (PSS 26: 79)

There is no trace of *Anna's* perspectivalism here. The narrator's reality is the only reality, and Ivan's attitudes and perceptions, no matter how “simple

and ordinary,” are socially conformist and therefore objectively false.

The dualism of Tolstoy's late work is well known. What interests me here is the location of the curtain scene. Standing as it does between the ironic description of Ivan Il'ich's tastes and the narrator's frank assessment of them, the curtain, like the one in the Temple of Jerusalem, separates the “word” of the created (“elegant,” “*comme il faut*,” etc.) from the word of the creator (“so like all the others,” “terrible,” etc.).

It seems reasonable to assume that Tolstoy intended the biblical allusion. As Gary R. Jahn has demonstrated, *The Death of Ivan Il'ich* contains many references to the Gospels. These include Ivan's fatal wound to the side, his appeal to his creator in chapter nine, his attempt to say “forgive me” at the end of chapter twelve, and the repetition of Christ's last words—“It is finished”—at the conclusion of the work (Jahn 486). Though he removed the torn curtain from his materialist rendering of the Gospels, Tolstoy seems to have retained it in *Ivan Il'ich* as a symbol of the barrier between man and God. Only after “tearing the curtain”—i. e., renouncing the bourgeois values that corrupted his life and shielded him from his creator's word—will the hero partake of his creator's truth.

As we have already seen, Ivan's eventual possession of his author's word is literal. During his deathbed epiphany he cries “How simple!” and for the first time, his notion of simplicity is the same as his narrator's. Ivan's last word—“joy”—undergoes a similar transformation. In an ironic passage in chapter three, Tolstoy writes: “His professional joys were the joys of ambition; his social joys were the joys of vanity; but Ivan Il'ich's true joys were the joys of playing bridge” (PSS 26: 82). After admitting on his deathbed that, in agreement with the narrator's view, his life has been terrible, Ivan feels pity for his family, appeals to his creator, and sees the light. “What joy!” he exclaims. This post-conversion joy is of an altogether different sort

than the “joy” the narrator sarcastically derides in chapter three. Freed from the ironic cast of Tolstoy’s indirect discourse, Ivan’s “joy” and “simple” are now identical to his creator’s. With the symbolic curtain separating Ivan from Tolstoy’s holy of holies torn at last, author and hero—or God and man, as the case may be—now occupy the same lexical and ideological “plane.” On Ivan’s personal Day of Atonement, creator and created are united by their shared word.

Conclusion

According to Bakhtin’s polyphony theory, Dostoevsky wrote novels in which the curtain separating hero and author is torn from the beginning: Dostoevsky’s major characters *always* have dialogic access to the divine-authorial word. As a work that ends as soon as the ironic distance between author and hero closes, *The Death of Ivan Il’ich* reminds us that the lines of communication are rarely so open in Tolstoy’s fiction. Bakhtin thought that the sequestration of truths in Tolstoy’s world deprived his characters of dialogic freedom. But, as we have seen, *Anna* suggests that the private inner sanctum might bring its own kinds of freedom—freedom from the “author’s truth,” freedom to affirm one’s own truth, and freedom to keep one’s truth to oneself. And, as *Death* shows, when Tolstoy did insist on an “author’s” truth, he did not always keep it hidden behind a curtain.

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Notes

All translations from the *Jubilee* edition of Tolstoy (PSS) are mine.

1. There are two versions of Bakhtin’s Dostoevsky book. The first, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Creative Work*, was published in 1929. The second, significantly revised edition, titled *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, was published in 1963. The first English-language edition, based on the 1963 text, was published in 1973.

2. Levin’s introspective stargazing echoes Kant’s famous declaration in the conclusion of *The Critique of Practical Reason*: “Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above and the moral law within” (164). A lifelong reader of Kant, Tolstoy quotes this passage at least twice in his writing (PSS 42: 78; PSS 26: 313).

3. The idea of form as an objective vehicle for subjective experience anticipates Tolstoy’s notion of art as infection in *What is Art?*

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