
The Function of Pain in Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*

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His pain, that dull gnawing ache that never ceased for a moment [...], acquired a new and more serious significance [...]* (85; 143)¹

In Tolstoy's short novel *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*, Ivan undergoes agonizing pain in the months before his death. The gnawing pain, the presumed result of a fall while hanging curtains, comes to interfere with every aspect of his life. For three days immediately preceding his demise, he screams without stopping. By the end of the story, Ivan's pain has become not only the central fact of his existence, but also ostensibly the vehicle of his salvation.

What is the function of pain in the narrative? This is an especially important question since the necessity of Ivan's suffering and its role in his spiritual resurrection have been called into question by some readers. Edward Wasiolek has pointed out that some critics of the story find Ivan's spiritual transformation "by way of great physical and moral suffering" artistically "clumsy" and "arbitrary" (1961, 314). In this view, Ivan's unbearable pain seems "unrealistically disproportionate to the probabilities of his character" (314). Ivan's sudden death bed conversion, when the pain ceases to have meaning for him, "has struck some readers as incredible or artistically unjustified" (Jahn 1993, 30).

In this paper I will systematically and formally examine the role of pain in the story.² I will specifically address its intimate connection to the cluster of figurative motifs which form the artistic backbone of the story and its symbolic value as the logical representation of Ivan's life. In so doing, I will not only demonstrate that the pain

serves a central artistic purpose, but also suggest how an examination of its role provides some insight into Tolstoy's understanding of a meaningful life.

I do not intend to introduce a radically new interpretation of the story's meaning. This would not be an easy task since, as Jahn, among others, has pointed out, "there are, in fact, few stories whose intended meaning is so abundantly clear" (1982, 237).³ I offer instead a further exploration of the coherence of different elements in the text on a formal level. "The novel lends itself magnificently [. . .] to a 'formalist' or close linguistic analysis, for Tolstoy's art is rich in calculated linguistic effects" (Wasiolek 1978, 170). Surprisingly, few systematic studies of this kind exist; at the very least, the story's potential in this regard has not been fully exploited.

In Jahn's words, "the text of the novel contains within it a number of subtexts [motifs or themes], which both complement and compete with what is reported on the surface level" (1993, 73-74).⁴ These motifs include, but are most certainly not limited to, the following: the journey motif (Salys); the motif of enclosure or delimitation (Jahn 1983 and 1993); the theme of ambiguous foreign phrases (Salys); the light/dark figurative motif (Danaher); and thematic repetitions of key words and their derivatives, for instance, *priiatnyi* (pleasant) and *prilichnyi* (decorous) (Turner).⁵ The motifs in the story cross-reference each other, creating a complex network of figurative associations. The light and dark figurative motif, for example, intertwines with the journey motif ("he was [. . .] attracted to people of high station [*svet*] as a fly is drawn to the light [*svet*]" [69; 130]); with the theme of enclosure or delimitation ("black border" [61; 123], the screens which block out the gleaming embodiment of the pain [94; 151], and the black bag [105; 160]); and with the motif of ambiguous foreign expressions (in the name "Shwarz," meaning "black" in German, and in the expression "le phénix de la famille" [69; 130]). The motifs not only interact with each other, but also "interact with the text to realize [. . .] the transformation of death into life for which the novel is remarkable" (Jahn 1993, 77).

To understand the function of Ivan's suffering in the story, one must look at how his pain is represented in its principal figurative motifs. Even

a superficial examination of these representations does in fact shed some light on the artistic significance of Ivan's sufferings.

The double meanings inherent in two foreign expressions alert the reader to the importance of the pain in Ivan's life. The inscription on Ivan's watch, *respice finem* or 'look to the end' (70; 130), emphasizes Ivan's slow, agonizing death over his comfortable, decorous life. Similarly, Ivan's designation as "le phénix de la famille" (69; 130), poorly translated for Russian readers of the collected works as "gordost' sem'i" (69; 130), forecasts his painful death and rebirth in a merging with light. The foreign expressions suggest that extreme suffering is to be Ivan's destiny.

In the journey motif, the centrality of suffering in Ivan's life is pushed one step further: his illness with its pain is explicitly compared to his life. The progression of his illness is described in the same terms as the progression of his life. At one point Ivan refers to his life this way: "It is as if I had been going downhill [*shel pod goru*] while I imagined I was going up" (107; 161). This phrasing is immediately echoed in a description of his physical condition: "with what regularity he had been going downhill [*shel pod goru*]" (108; 162). At another point the text unequivocally associates Ivan's illness with his life: "'Just as the pain [*mucheniiia*] went on getting worse and worse, so my life grew worse and worse,' he thought" (108-109; 163).⁶

At the same time Ivan's pain is also treated, in the motif of delimitation or enclosure, as that which he is desperately struggling against. Ivan tries to screen off the pain, as he had successfully screened off a series of other unpleasantnesses in his life. His attempts, however, fail; personified in the pronoun *it*, the pain shines through all the screens: "nothing could veil *It*" (94; 150). His struggles then come to be embodied in the image of confinement in a narrow black bag. The representation of pain as a source of enclosure or confinement is undone only moments before Ivan merges with the light at the end of the black bag: "Suddenly it was all dropping away at once from two sides, from ten sides, from all sides"* (113; 167; Jahn 1993, 39). With the addition of the evidence

from the motif of enclosure, a triple correspondence is established: Ivan's pain equals Ivan's life which is exactly what he ends up struggling against.

For Ivan, the pain represents the most tenacious unpleasantness (*nepriiatnost'*) he has ever experienced. It is thus associated with the *priiatnyi/prilichnyi* (pleasant/decorous) motif.⁷ The pain, moreover, is present in the light/dark figurative motif from its trivial inception as a dark (and therefore, negative) image: "only a bruise [*sin-iak*]" (80; 138).⁸ Its effects are also consistently described in terms of dark imagery.

The motif represented by the word clusters *priiatnyi* (pleasant) and *prilichnyi* (decorous) and their cognates and derivatives eventually merges with the theme of deceit and untruth ("prilichnaia lozh' [a decorous lie]" [104]).⁹ A dramatic reversal occurs, and for Ivan pleasantness and untruth become one. The most significant unpleasantness and the only one to cause Ivan real harm, the pain, is affected by this: the pain becomes symbolic of truth (*pravda*). What was once pleasant (his comfortable life) comes to be seen as a lie, and what was once unpleasant (the pain, a dark image) ultimately inspires Ivan's spiritual transformation. Pain as truth is symbolized, via the light and dark figurative motif, in the shining personification *it*.¹⁰ The pain gleams and flashes its persistent message to its reluctant addressee: "*It* would flash through the screens and he would see it"* (95; 151). The screens "did not so much fall to pieces as became transparent, as if *It* could penetrate anything"* (94; 151).

What then do the embedded figurative motifs tell the reader about the function of Ivan's suffering in the story? Ivan clearly is destined for both pain and death. The pain, moreover, is intimately related to his life; his struggle against the pain therefore becomes a struggle against it. The pain is also connected with falsity and untruth (*lozh'*). At the same time, it has a positive aspect. As the light/dark figurative motif shows, it becomes an embodiment of the true light. From a dark bruise to a blazing light that nothing can block out, the pain develops from a mere unpleasantness to an external representation of the truth. Pain is simultaneously Ivan's cruel destiny and his means of salvation.

In his life, Ivan has systematically alienated him-self from others. He screens out unpleasantness, he attempts to wall himself off (“ogradit’ sebia” [74; 134], “vygorodit’ sebe mir” [74; 134]), and in his judicial work he is a master of the “priem otstraneniia” (72; 132) which allows him to deal only with the superficial, formal elements of each case. Ivan’s symbolic confinement in the narrow black bag figuratively embodies this alienation. The black bag is his life, pushed to its logical extreme.

Ivan’s pain exacerbates his alienation. Jahn notes: “As his sufferings increase he withdraws more and more from the life of those around him” (1993, 38). Elaine Scarry, author of a study of the psychological effects of pain, has written aptly: “[I]n serious pain the claims of the body utterly nullify the claims of the world” (33). Tolstoy’s fictive world reflects this. Pain poisons every aspect of Ivan’s life: he makes mistakes in court, he loses concentration while playing cards, and at home he is looked upon as a nuisance. His suffering completely isolates him, his field of movement gradually contracts until he ends up lying alone on the sofa in his study (Jahn 1993, 29-30).

In this way, Ivan’s pain, like the image of the black bag, represents a logical extension of his life. Wasiolek has written that “everything that happens in *The Death of Ivan Il’ich* happens with the necessity of a formal syllogism” (1961, 151). Ivan suffers because the effect of the pain—complete alienation—is an extreme form of how he lived his life. His agony physically represents his life reduced to its unfortunate essence.

The alienating role of the pain comes out in another motif in which the pain comes to be intimately associated with hatred (*nenavist’*) and anger or spite (*zloba*). This motif vividly illustrates the story’s moral that compassion and pity (*zhalost’*) for others, the direct opposites of isolation and alienation, are fundamental to spiritual health.

At several junctures the text refers ominously to the connection between Ivan’s illness and his lack of compassion for other people. Struggling with the first stage of his illness, Ivan “was angry at the misfortune, or at the people who were

causing him unpleasantness and killing him, and he felt that this anger was killing him”* (86; 144). It is anger or malice toward others that is the implied source of his fatal sickness. Similarly: “this embitterment [*ozloblenie*] with circumstances and people aggravated his illness”* (86; 144). Later the text reads: “anger [*zloba*] was suffocating him”* (91; 148), which implies a connection to the motif of enclosure and the suffocating narrowness of the black bag. Even on the brink of spiritual rebirth, Ivan lets himself hate and suffers because of it: “As soon as he admitted that thought, his hatred [*nenavist’*] increased and, along with the hatred, agonizing physical suffering [*muchitel’nye stradaniiia*]”* (111; 165).

Before his spiritual transformation, Ivan is motivated only by self-pity, and, despite his own complete lack of compassion, he hates other people who are either unable or unwilling to pity him. After his first visit to a doctor, Ivan concludes that it looks bad for him and that the doctor is indifferent: “this conclusion struck Ivan painfully, arousing in him a feeling of pity [*zhalost’*] for himself and angry bitterness [*zloba*] toward the indifferent doctor”* (84; 142). Ivan will not pity the doctor for his coldness despite the fact he himself behaved like the doctor toward defendants in court. Praskov’ia Fedorovna also pities herself and hates others: “Having come to the conclusion that her husband had a dreadful character and made her life miserable, she began to pity herself [*zhalet’ sebia*]; the more she pitied herself, the more she hated her husband”* (83; 141). Self-pity is an index of spite or hatred for others which, in turn, is a direct source of Ivan’s pain.

Because of his selfishness, Ivan cannot engage in healthy relationships with other people. He responds to kindness with spite: “This unusually kind look embittered him [*ozlobilo ego*]”* (90; 147). He responds to his wife’s touch with hatred, which explicitly makes him suffer: “Her touch made him suffer from a surge of hatred toward her”* (102; 157). Ivan even responds to inanimate objects, such as his night stand (*tumbochka*), with spite: “it was in his way and it hurt him, he grew furious with it” (92; 148).¹¹ Hatred and spite control and poison his life and consequently make

him suffer.

Ivan's sickness at first only increases his spitefulness, isolating him further from others. Only when he is completely alienated from others, does he discover how difficult it is to be alone: "it's hard for me alone" (96; 152),¹² "Ivan Il'ich dreaded being left alone" (100; 155), "he wept on account of [. . .] his terrible loneliness" (105; 160). He discovers also that the cure for loneliness is treating others as he himself wants to be treated, that is, compassionately.

Pity (*zhalost'*) is the antidote to the pain. Ivan's pain eases when Gerasim is with him because Gerasim pities him: "Only Gerasim recognized Ivan's position and pitied [*zhalel*] him. And so Ivan Il'ich felt at ease only with him"* (98; 154). His son, too, feels true compassion for his father: "It seemed to Ivan Il'ich that Vasia was the only one besides Gerasim who understood and pitied [*zhalel*] him" (104; 159). Precisely at the moment when his son kisses his hand, Ivan falls through the black bag and sees the light: "Then he felt that someone was kissing his hand. He opened his eyes, looked at his son, and felt sorry for [*stalo zhalko*] him. His wife came up to him [. . .] He felt sorry for [*stalo zhalko*] her, too" (112-113; 166). Lack of pity and the presence of pain are one and the same thing: "He felt sorry for [*zhalko*] them; he must act so they won't be hurt"* (113; 167).

Ivan's habit of screening or walling himself off from the "unpleasantness" of other people finds its extreme form in his illness and in the suffering which accompanies it. He finds an antidote to the pain and a solution to a life wrongly lived only in understanding the necessity for compassion and pity.¹³

What else besides the necessity of pity and compassion does Ivan discover about life in his alienation and agony? As with all Tolstoyan spiritual heroes, Ivan uncovers the falseness of social relations and artificiality of social conventions.¹⁴ Before his transformation, Ivan was a character "blind to life" who "acquire[d] manners from society in order to turn away from the reality of his natural self" (Smith 224-25). During his spiritual transformation, he returns to his child-

hood as the one source of true light in his life, a time before the corrupting influence of high society on his behaviour. In short, he turns away from the "artificial" and returns to the "natural."¹⁵ His struggle with the pain forces Ivan to "simplify" his view of the world by relearning trust for his instincts.

Ivan's salutary return to the "natural" through the coercive medium of physical suffering is fleshed out in a motif which I will call the theme of the five senses. The text quite openly details Ivan's coming to terms with his pain through the natural language of the senses.

Forms of the verb *videt'* (to see) and the adverb *ochevidno* (evidently) constantly recur throughout the story.¹⁶ Ivan clearly learns to distinguish the artificial from the natural by sight. When Ivan's brother-in-law visits, he comments to Praskov'ia Fedorovna: "'Don't you see it? Why, he's a dead man! Look at his eyes—there's no light in them'" (89; 147). Ivan wonders: "Isn't it evident [*ochevidno*] to everyone but me that I'm dying?"* (91; 148). Ivan's progress in understanding his sickness is often described in terms of his sense of sight: "That look [*vzgliad*] told Ivan Il'ich everything"* (89; 146), "Ivan Il'ich saw that he was dying" (92; 149). Looking at his wife, daughter, and a doctor at one point, Ivan "sees" the truth: "In them he saw himself—all that for which he had lived—and saw clearly that it was not real at all, but a terrible and huge deception" (110; 164). "Seeing" becomes the opposite of hiding, of screening off reality and the truth: "Only Gerasim did not lie; by everything he did it was clear [*vidno bylo*] that he alone understood the facts of the case and did not consider it necessary to hide [*skryvat'*] them"* (98; 154). Ivan "sees" the light at the end of the black bag (112; 166). One possible cause of Ivan's illness is a "blind gut" ("slepaia kishka" [91]). The Russian *slepoi*, as the English *blind*, has a connotation of inability to understand the truth or see reason (*slepaia liubov'* [blind love] or *politicheskaiia slepota* [blind to politics]). The implication is that blindness (*slepota*) is precisely what Ivan must overcome. He must regain his sight to be able to see the truth.

The subtheme of “seeing” as truth culminates in the personification of the pain as *it*. The primary function of *it* is to be looked at: “*It* drew his attention to itself [. . .] only so that he should look at *It*, look it straight in the eyes”* (94; 150). *It* also looks back at Ivan: “*It* was distinctly looking [*gliade*] at him from behind the flowers”* (95; 151). Ivan journeys to self-knowledge in part by regaining his sight.¹⁷ Pain makes him see through the artificial and recognize the natural elements in his life.

Ivan also spends a good deal of time “listening” for the truth. He listens to his pain (85; 143),¹⁸ and to his brother-in-law’s assessment of his condition (89; 146). He listens to the medicine, full of false hope that it will cure him: “He remembered his medicine, got it, took it, and lay down on his back, listening [*prislushivaias*] for the beneficent action of the medicine”* (90-1; 147). Immediately before merging with the light at the end of the black bag, Ivan listens for the truth: “[H]e grew still, listening” (112; 166).

It is important to note that the pain is described explicitly in terms of sound. It is never quiet: “the gnawing, agonizing pain, never silent [*ne utikhaiushchaia*] for even an instant”* (99; 155).¹⁹ It is a dull or deafening pain (“*glukhaia bol*” [85]). The Russian term *glukhaia bol* translates as “dull pain,” but *glukhoi* has an additional sense not captured by the English word “dull.” Consider the phrases *glukhaia provintsii* (god-forsaken provinces), *lesnaia glush* (the depths of the forest), and *v glushi* (in the backwater, in a remote place). In these expressions *glukhoi* implies a lack of truth and clarity, a sense of being at a dead end or being lost. As with the word *slepoi* (blind), the use of the word *glukhoi* (dull, deaf) in regard to the pain is particularly apt in its implication that Ivan must find a way out of the spiritual backwater (*v glushi*) by overcoming his deafness (*glukhota*) to the truth.²⁰

The pain is also related, although less pervasively, to the senses of smell and taste. It is associated with foul odours: “The pain in his side still oppressed him, [i]t seemed to him that his breath had a disgusting smell”* (87; 144). When Ivan must be helped by Gerasim to go to the bathroom,

he experiences “torment [*muchenii*] from the uncleanness, the unseemliness, and the smell” (95; 152). It is significant that Gerasim himself does not mind the foul smell and that Ivan notices “the pleasant smell of tar” from Gerasim’s boots and “the fresh winter air” (96; 152) which Gerasim brings with him.

Another index of the pain is a strange taste in Ivan’s mouth: “a queer taste in his mouth” (82; 141) and “the same familiar loathsome taste in his mouth” (91; 148). How things taste to Ivan eventually seems to become an index of their goodness or naturalness. The blandness of the special food prescribed by the doctors undermines its curative power: “Special foods were prepared for him on the doctors’ orders, but all those foods became increasingly distasteful [*bezkusnee*] and disgusting to him” (95; 152). More-over, the medicine which the doctors prescribe is also understood to be inefficacious by its “familiar sickly-sweet [*pritorny*] hopeless taste”* (100; 155).²¹

Of all the senses, it is touch which sparks Ivan’s discovery of the truth. Before learning the value of compassion, Ivan screens off physical (not to mention emotional) contact with others. Touch is painful to him. Talking to his family about the bruise on his side, Ivan says eerily: “Kogda tronesh’—bol’no” (80).²² Gerasim’s touch gives Ivan real alleviation of the pain: “Again Ivan Il’ich felt better when Gerasim held his legs” (97; 157); “Strange to say it seemed that he felt better while Gerasim held his legs up” (97; 153).²³ Furthermore, as we have already seen, Ivan merges with the light at the end of the black bag precisely at the moment when his son kisses his hand (112; 166). Ivan’s rediscovery of touch and its relation to compassion is therefore a landmark on his journey to self-knowledge.

In short, pain seems to sharpen or heighten all of Ivan’s senses. In this way, dying an agonizing death (*smert*) returns Ivan to life (*zhizn*). Prior to the introduction of pain into Ivan’s world, his life is described in distinctly non-sensual terms.²⁴ Bland and monotonous, it is a false life or a death-in-life. However, as Ivan begins to suffer, sensual imagery floods into the narrative. In dying, the text informs us, Ivan (re)discovers life. The pain

impels him to turn away from the “artificial” social conventions and to turn back to this own “natural” instincts. A sensory image of grotesque dimensions, the pain restores his ability to see and hear, to smell and taste, and, above all, to feel.

We are now in a position to return to our original question: what exactly is the function of pain in Tolstoy's story? In examining the representations of pain we have first of all seen that seemingly insignificant details are the interpretive locus of the text. Word associations in the network of embedded motifs hold the key to the meaning of the story. Prosaic words—seeing, hearing, anger, pity, deaf, blind, life, and death—are “estranged” and impregnated with meaning in the context of the narrative. In Jackson's words: “As with Pushkin, one feature of Tolstoy's phenomenal genius is his capacity to invest outwardly ‘simple’ prose with all the inner complexity and protean character of a poem” (21, n. 7).

In this process of creating meaning out of the mundane, pain is a central element which dismantles Ivan's comfortable world. The brute reality of his illness rips him from his familiar surroundings, eliminates his stake in social conventions, and forces him to seek a new perspective from which to understand his life. His world is “defamiliarized” or “estranged” by the pain: his agony turns his pleasant and decorous life into something unpleasant and false, something to be struggled against. At the same time, under the influence of the pain, Ivan gradually learns to “see” things rather than merely recognize them.²⁵ By completely alienating Ivan from society, the pain creates the conditions for his realization that he has lived his life wrongly.

The centrality of Ivan's suffering emerges from the series of reversals which form the artistic skeleton of the story.²⁶ His suffering motivates these reversals. As his torment increases, Ivan's views on his own life change radically: his once pleasant (*priiatnaia/priiatnost'*) life becomes overtly unpleasant (*nepriiatnaia /nepriiatnost'*). His trust in social institutions as embodiments of the truth (*pravda*) gradually disappears, and he eventually concludes that society is a locus of

deceit and falsehood (*lozh'*). At the same time, the pain he undergoes transforms his spite (*zloba*) and hatred (*nenavist'*) into love (*liubov'*) and pity (*zhalost'*) for others. Moreover, the sensory insistence of physical suffering takes him from a bland death-in-life (*smert'*) to a life (*zhizn'*) guided directly by faith in his own instincts.

I would contend that all these reversals explicitly come together in the gleaming personification *It* (*ona, ee*). The clear antecedent of *It* is the pain (*bol'*): “But suddenly [. . .] the pain [*bol'*] in his side [. . .] would begin its [*svoe*] own gnawing work”* (94; 150).²⁷ In the critical literature on the story, *It* has been identified with pain (*bol'*), life (*zhizn'*), and death (*smert'*), all of which are grammatically feminine in Russian (see, for example, Comstock and Gutsche). Surprising as it may be, *It* seems to have been underanalyzed. The characterization of pain in the cluster of motifs suggests that the feminine pronoun simultaneously represents pleasantness (*priiatnost'*) and unpleasantness (*nepriiatnost'*), truth (*pravda*) and falsehood (*lozh'*), hatred (*nenavist'*) and love (*liubov'*), as well as life and death. Tolstoy exploits the grammatical structure of Russian to drive home his point that the pain is the key to the reversals. The pain liberates Ivan from the deadening consequences of a formulaic life and is the focal point of his transformation from death to spiritual rebirth.

Tolstoy suggests by this that meaningful spiritual growth cannot take place without discomfort. Two kinds of growth could be identified in the story: mechanical, additive growth, not meaningful in a spiritual sense, and integrative, systemic growth, which is spiritually meaningful. Before his illness, Ivan is obsessed with the first kind of growth: he wants a bigger salary, an ostentatious home, a more influential job. This mechanical accumulation leads to a spiritual dead end or death-in-life.

After his fall from the ladder, Ivan begins to experience pain. His illness progresses and intrudes upon his life. He is forced to re-examine his past and finds it spiritually lacking. The pain is thus a necessary catalyst for his rediscovery of spiritual life. Growth of this type is intrusive in

that a new element is introduced into an existent system of relations and forces a readjustment of those relations. It is growth from the inside out which brings about a fundamental change in who Ivan is. The representations of pain in the various subtexts clearly reinforce this interpretation.

In other words, Ivan's suffering both kills and resurrects him. His illness is both the source of his physical death and the stimulus for his spiritual rebirth. Whereas North American students of the text may be quick to associate suffering with punishment, Ivan Il'ich discovers that pain is a catalyst for self-knowledge and spiritual renewal. I would suggest that this "other, more serious meaning" (85; 143) of pain in the text makes Ivan's suffering a pivotal element in any consideration of the story's artistic value.²⁸

Notes

1. Citations from the story will appear in translation in the body of the paper and are referenced to both the original Russian text and the translation (see *Works cited*). The first number refers to the original version. An asterisk (*) indicates that the translation has been slightly altered to bring out the particularities of the original Russian which are at issue in this analysis.
2. The theme of Ivan's pain is, of course, not a new one in the criticism on the story. However, to my knowledge, a systematic treatment of the theme has not yet been undertaken.
3. For a recent attempt at a new interpretation, see Shepherd.
4. The term 'subtext' conventionally refers to the embedding in a text of allusions to other literary or cultural texts and in this context has a peculiar ring to it. Jahn is using the word in its more general sense as the implicit metaphorical meaning of a text. What he has in mind here is the cluster of figurative motifs or themes, the collective significance of which runs counter to the development of the bare plot (the 'text'). The themes themselves are obviously contained within the fabric of the text, which is another reason why the term 'subtext' seems inappropriate. In this paper, the words 'theme' and 'motif' will be used in place of 'subtext,' although reference is intended to the same phenomenon.
5. The shortening of the chapters as the story progresses might be considered a structural subtext in Jahn's sense of the term (Jahn 1982 and 1993); another structural subtext is the placement of Ivan's funeral in the first chapter, which seems to violate a narrative convention for artistic ends (see, most recently, Sokolowski). There is also at least one intertextual subtext which connects *The Death of Ivan Il'ich* with *Confession* (see Matual). For an examination of the religious motif in the story, see Gutsche and Jahn 1993, and for an interesting discussion of subtexts involving sounds and word play, see Jackson. Some further motifs in the story which have not been systematically documented elsewhere will be examined here.
6. The same idea is contained in the phrase: "Life, a series of increasing sufferings [*stradaniia*], flies faster and faster towards its end"* (109).
7. Gutsche's work suggests that this motif might be expanded to include the multitude of words in the story with the cluster *pr-* (90). Gutsche specifically points out the frequency of verbs with the prefix *pro-* in the section of the story immediately before Ivan's death (82). I would add the following words, all of which contribute to an understanding of the story when directly related to this and other motifs: *Praskov'ia*, *Pravovedenie* (Ivan's ministry and an ironic reference to his own "incorrect" behaviour in life), *napravlenie*, *pravda*, and *prиторnyi* (the sickly-sweet taste which the pain causes in Ivan's mouth). The network of associations in the text, via the cluster of figurative motifs, is quite expansive.
8. The Russian word *siniak* (from *sinii*) explicitly refers to a dark (dark-blue) discoloration. Danaher discusses the relationship between darkness and negativity.
9. The translation here reads "conventional deception" (159), which entirely misses the connection. On the relationship of the motifs of pleasantness and deceit, see Turner (119).
10. For a discussion of the pronoun *it* from a perspective complementary to the one presented here, see Parthé.
11. He is also able to "feel sorry for" money ("pozhal-et' deneg" [92; 149] without being capable of feeling sorry for his family and colleagues.
12. "Mne tiazheo odnomu" (96). Here the translation

interprets: "It's hard for me to get up" (152).

13. Edgerton has written that, in Tolstoy's philosophy, "we find our own spiritual salvation only by losing ourselves in active love for others" (299), which is exactly Ivan's discovery. For a discussion of *zhalost'* (or, more exactly, the phonetic and spiritual journey from *uzhas* to *zhalko*), see Jackson.

14. Silbajoris notes that, for Tolstoy, "[s]ociety is a construct of artifices, and enculturation consists of learning to perceive these artifices as things natural to humanity" (150).

15. For a provocative discussion of the tension between the "artificial" and the "natural" in Tolstoy from a semiotic perspective, see Pomorska. On Tolstoyan "naturalness" and its connection to Rousseau, see the essay by Berlin.

16. The Russian word *ochevidno* is considerably more semantically transparent than its English counterpart. It could literally be translated as "that which is seen [*vidno*] by the eyes [*ochi*]."

17. Gustafson has concluded the following about *Anna Karenina*: "A change in the way of seeing the world results in a change in the way of being in the world" (143). The same is true for *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*.

18. The translation renders the original Russian "prislushivalsia k boli" (85) as "he watched the pain" (143).

19. The given translation of *ne utikhaiushchaia bol'* is "never ceasing pain" (155).

20. This line of thought could be pushed further by considering the various senses of the Russian root *slukh-*. The root has the general meaning of "listening," and, as noted above, this occurs in the text quite frequently. Consider, however, the verb *slushat'sia*, "to obey." As with *slepoi* and *glukhoi* there is a contrast between Ivan's behaviour in life—his blindness and deafness to the truth as well as this obedience (*slukh-*) to a spiritually bankrupt social code—and his death-bed revelation about the need to struggle against blind obedience to social norms. This "estrangement" of linguistic signs is a centrepiece of the text which leads Jahn to posit the following principle: "[V]ery often it seems most appropriate to read what are evidently figures of speech as though they had a direct, literal significance and, conversely, to read what is apparently

simple and direct as a metaphor" (1993, 73-74).

21. The translation has only "sickly" (155) for the Russian *pritornyi*. The use of this word calls to mind the honey in Tolstoy's *Confession* which the man trapped between two certain forms of death licks in desperation. This is a detail in the subtext relating *Confession* and *The Death of Ivan Il'ich* which is not pointed out in Matual.

22. The Russian phrase could be literally translated as "When you touch me, it hurts." The translation is much less general: "It hurts when it's touched" (138). This is just one example of a whole plethora of double-edged phrases in the story (see Jackson for many others). These phrases have a literal meaning, which is suggested immediately by the context in which they appear, as well as an "absolute" or symbolic meaning with reference outside the narrative itself, in some cases (as in the present one) existing as a comment on the narrative. As Morson has noted, absolute language is a common feature of Tolstoy's writings. These double-edged phrases resemble the foreign expressions in the text which have been analyzed by Salys.

23. Note the contrast between Gerasim's raising Ivan up and Ivan's "fall" from the ladder which presumably precipitated his illness.

24. Wasiolek has compared the description of Ivan's life before the onset of his illness to a chronicle (1978, 167ff).

25. The distinction between "seeing" (*videnie*) and "recognition" (*uznavanie*) was made by the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky in the following terms: "The purpose of the image is not to draw our understanding closer to that which this image stands for, but rather to allow us to perceive the object in a special way, in short, to lead us to a 'vision' of this object rather than mere 'recognition'" (10). "Recognition" is automatic; "seeing" de-automatizes perception.

26. Jahn 1993 provides a thorough account of the role of reversal in the story.

27. The possessive pronoun "its" (*svoe*) is italicized in the original Russian.

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