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Tolstoy's Other Sister-in-Law in *War and Peace*

Generosity constitutes one of the distinctive virtues of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. The novel is bounded by welcoming Rostov feasts near the beginning and in the first epilogue. The narcissistic Natasha is forgiven her mistakes, much as Nicholas and Pierre muddle through their youthful struggles to reach respected maturity, much as Princess Maria's tireless devotion to her irascible father is rewarded in the end with a happy marriage. Even Prince Andrei, intended as cannon fodder at Austerlitz, is allowed to survive and enjoy life until his later death after Borodino. Most importantly, the major characters are rendered in such a fashion as to be received by most readers as positive, sympathetic, and/or admirable.

Yet not all of the players are accorded their author's beneficence, if only for purposes of dramatic contrast. This was the writer's reason for creating Prince Andrei, no doubt thinking that he could not permit all of his central heroes to survive the Napoleonic wars unscathed. Indeed, young Petya Rostov is struck down almost immediately in his first taste of combat. He, at least, is accorded some positive pages, as is Sonya, who is denied

romantic satisfaction in the end, perhaps unfairly. But then there is Tolstoy's depiction of the remaining Rostov sibling, Vera, a characterization which lacks any redeeming qualities.

What fascinates our inquiry is the likelihood that Tolstoy's bias against Vera may be largely rooted in the author's personal experience with her acknowledged prototype, Elizaveta Andreevna Behrs, known to him as Liza. Natasha, according to many scholars and Tolstoy's own admission, appears to gain from her association with Liza's sister, Tatiana (Tanya) Andreevna, albeit with a well-acknowledged admixture from Tolstoy's own wife, Sofia Andreevna. But if family prototypes played a positive role in their characterization, it seems that this relationship had the opposite effect with Vera. Insofar as Tolstoy appears to have been thinking about Liza in his unremittingly negative and monotone portrait of Vera, the results are, if anything, somewhat shocking for a writer of Tolstoy's normal sensitivity. Personal experience and immediate family history appear to have played a role.

In his stimulating biography of Tolstoy, A. N. Wilson suggests that the writer utilized autobiographical materials to concoct "his version of how he wanted his life to be [...] arranging events to make them tolerable to himself" (186). By drawing on his own experience and the family history which shaped him, Tolstoy evidently used his composition of *War and Peace*, as in other works, as a means of thinking about issues of deep personal interest to him and as a means of imagining (auto)biographical alternatives. With respect to characters based on his parents or himself, he generally improved on family history.¹ Tolstoy's other sister-in-law is an exception to this rule.² He appears to have used his characterization of Vera as a means of venting his frustrations regarding Liza. Insofar as Sofia Andreevna shared his work on the novel, his wife also participated in this process.³

We are able to make the Liza-Vera association with confidence, for Tolstoy used Liza's name in the plans and early drafts. At the first public reading from the novel, Tanya Behrs made a positive identification: "Vera, well, this is Liza to the life. Her sedateness and relations to us are rendered truthfully" (Kuzminskaya 291-92). Tanya's comment, originally made in an 1864 letter, makes it clear that she and Sofia Andreevna long had strained relations with their blonde eldest sister. She later recalled her as "virtuous and dull Liza" and flatly concluded, "My elder sister Liza had a serious and unsociable character" (Kuzminskaya 293). Sofia Andreevna recalled their being "not on very good terms" (Tolstaya 63). Whether Liza took note of this is unknown, but it is impossible to imagine she was unaware of how her sisters thought about her, given that they expressed their negative opinions so openly.

In telling Tanya Behrs he was modeling a character after her—it could not have been long before she recognized herself in Natasha—Tolstoy was continuing a family game regarding prototypes. The Behrs sisters discussed with Tolstoy the models he used for his characters in *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, *Youth* (Kuzminskaya 101). And they responded in kind. Frustrated with Tolstoy's bungling, timorous courtship in the summer of 1862, Sofia Andreevna decided to prod the writer by writing a story called "Dublitsky." According to Tanya's recollection, "Dublitsky" conveyed a thinly disguised depiction of their current situation. Dublitsky was a "middle aged, outwardly world[ly] man, energetic and intelligent, with changeable attitudes toward life," who frequented a house with three daughters, Zinaida, Elena, and Natasha, listed here in order of their age (Kuzminskaya 81). Sofia Andreevna recalled that she depicted Dublitsky as having an "unattractive outward appearance" and that he was "hardened" (Tolstaya 23). Tolstoy must have had mixed feelings regarding this depiction, which he immediately took to heart. He referred to himself

in his diaries as Dublitsky.⁴ Furthermore, the story also included a second suitor for Elena, the twenty-three-year-old Smirnov, in whom Tolstoy recognized the young Mitrofan Polivanov, a rival for Sofia Andreevna's attention. As if this were not enough, Sofia Andreevna arranged for Dublitsky (Tolstoy) to wed Zinaida (Liza Behrs), while she herself married Smirnov (Polivanov) (Kuzminskaya 82; Tolstaya 23). Once the story achieved its intended purpose and Tolstoy proposed, Sofia Andreevna destroyed it. But clearly it was not forgotten. What we know is partly based on Kuzminskaya's recollections, recorded in the 1920s. A couple of years after his marriage, Tolstoy, perhaps coyly, asked whether he should name the character based on Liza Behrs "Vera" or "Zina," short for Zinaida (Kuzminskaya 377). It is likely that Tolstoy got Natasha's name from "Dublitsky" (Tolstaya 23). He preserved their birth order in the novel: Much as Liza was senior to Sofia Andreevna, Vera is Natasha's older sister.⁵ Notably, Sofia Andreevna depicted Zinaida as "a cold blonde with an unattractive personality" (Kuzminskaya 81). One wonders if Liza ever saw the story. If so, it could not have helped matters.⁶

Tolstoy's negative inclination to Vera Rostova is readily evident from the very start of his outlines. Notably, these were sketched while he was still using Liza Behrs' first name. In the drafts, she is described as "old blond Liza, smart, attractive, graceless, considerate (PSS 13: 13)," as having a "[l]ove of profit [...] Prim, proud [...] not loved. Vain [...] only interest is getting her sister to envy her. [...] Logically wise, knows much and reads, loves to judge and is surprised that her wisdom does not come out wisely. [...] Doesn't love anyone [...] Begins to suffer in maidenhood, throws nets in vain, envies sister. Catches Berg almost with deception" (PSS 13: 18).

Although Vera Rostova is able to attract Berg in the published novel, evidently on the strength of her own true qualities, her image in the novel hardly improves, as we see from Tolstoy's

introduction of this character. Note how he hints at some spiritual lacking in her:

The smile did not enhance Vera's beauty as smiles generally do: on the contrary it gave her an unnatural, and therefore unpleasant, expression. Vera was good-looking, not at all stupid, quick at learning, was well brought up, and had a pleasant voice; what she said was true and appropriate, yet, strange to say, everyone [...] turned to look at her as if wondering why she had said it. (*War and Peace* 37)

Repeatedly, Tolstoy reminds us of this failing via the reactions of bystanders. A few pages later Vera's mother responds to one of her statements, "Vera [...] how is it you have so little tact? Don't you see you are not wanted here?" (*War and Peace* 39). This even happens when, as in one draft, she speaks with good intentions (*PSS* 13: 158). It becomes evident that, indeed, Vera is jealous of Natasha and Sonya, who are both in love. Sonya complains, "I love her so much, and all of you, only Vera [...] What have I done to her?" (*War and Peace* 57). Evidently this is in response to Vera's threat to expose the love poetry Nicholas wrote to Sonya and thereby to prevent their eventual marriage. Clearly she lacks empathy; she somehow does not grasp what others feel, giving forth slight hints of autism—quite the opposite of Natasha's characteristic compassion. While other members of the family cry for joy when they receive Nicholas' first letter from the front, Vera is characteristically unable to share their emotion. It seems she simply does not understand; she says, "From all he says one should be glad and not cry" (*War and Peace* 205). Mild forms of autism often involve a tendency to misinterpret social discourse by taking it literally. Later she makes an awkward moment between Nicholas and Sonya even more awkward with another inappropriate statement, prompting the narrator to comment, "Vera's remark was correct, as her remarks always were, but, like most of her observations, it made everyone feel

uncomfortable" (*War and Peace* 262). There is little wonder that her family is relieved to see her get married, feeling "a certain awkwardness and constraint [...] as if they were ashamed of not having loved Vera sufficiently and of being so ready to get her off their hands" (*War and Peace* 393).

Notably, although "she was certainly good-looking and sensible," Vera is unable to attract a suitor until she is twenty four, a late age in Russia at the time (*War and Peace* 393). Furthermore, Berg—as we might sense from his unusual forenames of Aphonse Karlovich—is not from an established Russian family and, as such, does not constitute an estimable catch (*War and Peace* 50). The "son of an obscure Livonian gentleman," he has no money or family connections, but spiritually he seems to be a match for Vera, given his insensitive grasping for social advancement (*War and Peace* 393). Nicholas refers to him as a German (*War and Peace* 209).⁷ Truly, Tolstoy uses Berg to diminish Vera's image. It hardly reflects well on Vera that her future husband applies for the Foot Guards because he calculates that there are more vacancies in that service due to battlefield attrition and, hence, more opportunities for promotion (*War and Peace* 51). Modern readers may well favor a self-made man, but this does not seem to suit Tolstoy's aristocratic sympathies, not at least of the sort he expressed in this novel. Like the grasping Boris Drubetskoy, Berg is not the type to leave any opportunity unexploited. In the midst of the tragedy and loss at Austerlitz, Berg is anxious to show off the wound he suffered to his right hand and to make sure that Nicholas Rostov knows that he remained at the front: "I held my sword in my left hand. Count. All our family—the von Bergs—have been knights" (*War and Peace* 247).⁸ This is the only occasion where Tolstoy refers to him as "von Berg." A similar scene in the drafts follows the battle of Borodino (*PSS* 14: 263).

Described as "a limited egotist," he repels even Boris with his "stupidity and egotism" (*PSS* 13: 167,

120). There is little wonder then that Vera's parents approve his proposal with evident misgivings: "No one up to now had proposed to her. So they gave their consent" (*War and Peace* 393). Even the manner of Berg's affection is insulting to Vera. Although he claims he is not marrying for money, he has clearly considered the matter with cool calculation: "I have my position in the service, she has connections, and some means. In our times that is worth something, isn't it? But above all, she is a handsome, estimable girl, and she loves me" (*War and Peace* 393). Only in the next paragraph does he remember to add that he loves her. According to Tolstoy's initial sketch, Berg "does not love, but needs a wife in the physical and social sense" (PSS 13: 16).⁹ Nor does Berg lose sight of Vera's dowry. On the eve of their wedding, he threatens to break off the engagement if her dowry is not specified and some of it received in advance (*War and Peace* 394). Some of this no doubt reflects the financial practices of the Napoleonic era, but, as presented in the 1860s, it probably places the couple in a bad light as do many of Berg's other actions and expressed opinions.

Matters, if anything, only get worse after their wedding. The Bergs decide to not have children—it is not clear how this was to be prevented. Rather, they prefer to "live for society" (*War and Peace* 413). At least Tolstoy cut from the novel a scene where Berg makes advances on Natasha (PSS 13: 700). Particularly devastating is Tolstoy's account of the dinner party that the Bergs throw in the most *comme il faut* manner. Berg even has "his hair pomaded and brushed forward over his temples as the Emperor Alexander wore his hair" (*War and Peace* 412). They take perverse delight in their soiree following the mode set by others. As if this were not sufficiently negative, Berg evaluates the evening on the basis of crass cost/benefit calculations, satisfied that the gain in social connections outweighs the expense (*War and Peace* 412). Much as we might expect from his tactless wife, Berg openly shares his thinking with Pierre.

And then there is Vera's attempt to conduct a conversation with Andrei that infamous evening. Somehow she manages to direct their *tête-à-tête* into a discussion of whether her sister, Andrei's fiancé, "Could [...] be constant in her attachments?" She reminds Andrei of Natasha's puppy-love infatuation with Boris Drubetskoy, saying "you know between cousins intimacy often leads to love. *Le coisinage est un dangereux voisinage*" (*War and Peace* 415). Whose side is Vera on? What is she trying to do, if it is not to disrupt her sister's engagement with hints of incest? Notably, Andrei subsequently queries Natasha about Boris, but their engagement survives for the time being—but only for the time being (*War and Peace* 417). In the drafts Tolstoy makes more explicit the connection between Vera's remarks and Andrei's insistence on a delay in his marriage to Natasha (PSS 13: 734).

As with most nonentities, little is known about Liza Behrs, but what has been recorded gives some support to Tanya and Sofia Andreevna's assertions. Two photos suggest that she was, like Vera, physically attractive. Born in 1843, she was eighteen when she was expecting a proposal from Tolstoy, but she did not get married until she was twenty five. There must have been other factors, such as her family status, that affected her ability to attract a husband, but it is notable that Tanya was attracting serious attention at only fourteen years of age, like Natasha in the novel. Pressure from her parents, her own infatuation with Tolstoy, his clumsiness as a suitor, Russian tradition by which she, as the eldest daughter, was expected to marry first, and other influences may have contributed to Liza's inability to discern in late summer 1862 that the writer was not interested in her as a wife. What was she thinking? No doubt she was in denial that her hopes were in vain. It is probably symptomatic that when Tolstoy finally popped the question, her father was surprised that it was to her sister, not to her. Perhaps it is significant that she subsequently contracted a marriage that, according to Sofia

Andreevna, was not consummated (Tolstaya 147). Eight years later she divorced Colonel Gavriil Emelyanovich Pavlenkov to marry her cousin, Aleksandr Alexandrovich Behrs.

It is probably a relief to all parties concerned that after the soiree Vera largely disappears from *War and Peace*, much as Liza disappears from her sisters' autobiographies. But there is one final, especially damaging, shot in the novel. During the evacuation of Moscow, when the Rostovs empty their carts and abandon their belongings so as to make room for wounded soldiers, Berg comes up to ask for a cart so that he can purchase a chiffonier for his wife. Apparently oblivious to the ongoing national tragedy, not to mention the consideration that the cart would have carried more Russian wounded, Berg expresses his "pleasure at his admirable domestic arrangements:" "It's such a beauty! It pulls out and has a secret English drawer, you know! And dear Vera has long wanted one" (*War and Peace* 766).

The consistent negativity of Vera and Berg's portrayal appears to reflect tensions with her prototype. Events surrounding Tolstoy's engagement to Sofia Andreevna may have played a role—they transpired only a year before Tolstoy began his work on the novel. The core issue almost certainly was Liza's disappointed expectation that Tolstoy would marry her.¹⁰ And she was not entirely off base; as of September 22, 1861, he confessed to his diary, "Liza Behrs tempts me, but nothing will come of it" (*Tolstoy's Diaries* I: 162). He, too, was being obtuse, for she and her parents were receptive to the match. Tolstoy certainly was a bumbling suitor, still undecided a year later. As many have surmised, he probably was in love with the entire Behrs family. He was once infatuated with the Islenev daughter who became their mother.¹¹ Probably still attracted to Lyubov, in 1856 Tolstoy wrote of his intention to marry one of her daughters—who were fourteen, twelve, and nine at a time when he was twenty eight (Меняйлов 28). Six years later, in August 1862, he

still had not made his choice. That month he could not tell A. A. Erlenwein which Behrs sister he preferred (Шымова 216). As the eldest sister, Liza and her father "assumed that it was she Tolstoy was courting;" Tanya, her mother, and her brother Sasha were more perceptive in noting Tolstoy's evident preference for the middle daughter (Troyat 235; Kuzminskaya 110ff). Just to make sure, Sofia Andreevna out-competed Liza, partly by showing Tolstoy the "Dublitsky" story written to arouse his jealousy. Even then the writer was unable to make his proposal verbally. Instead, he handed her his offer in the form of a letter on September 16, a letter which mentioned "Dublitsky" (*Tolstoy's Letters* I, 168). Although Sofia Andreevna later claimed that when Tolstoy proposed "people started congratulating me," there was a family uproar (Tolstaya 53). Andrei Behrs, the girls' father, was angry that Tolstoy had proposed to the middle sister, feeling that he should have made his offer to the eldest daughter. Indeed, he believed that Sofia Andreevna should decline the proposal in favor of her sister (Troyat 254; Tolstaya 53). Liza shut herself in her room and cried; her father also refused to appear (Troyat 259). To her credit, Liza was persuaded to see the light and it was she who got their father to give his blessing, acting with "remarkable nobility and tact" (Kuzminskaya 116). It must have been painful when family friends came to congratulate her the next day (Kuzminskaya 116). Nevertheless, a week later, on the eve of the wedding, Sofia Andreevna feared a reproach from her sister, but Liza only cried (Шымова 217; Гыцев 275–6). Her father refused to provide a dowry (Tolstaya 53).¹² Liza continued to look upon the match with "an involuntary note of condemnation toward Sonya and hostility toward" Tolstoy (Kuzminskaya 122).¹³

We see evidence of the strength of these tensions in Tolstoy's diaries: "September 10, 1862: I am beginning to hate Liza as well as pity her. [...] I'm beginning to hate Liza with all my heart" (*Tolstoy's Diaries* I: 166). In another entry on

September 17, 1862, he writes, “Liza is pitiable and depressed. She must hate me. She kissed me” (I: 167). Clearly he was not alone in seeing how obtuse Liza could be. His notes indicate his frustration, his fear that she would prove an impediment to his courtship, his pity, and, fairly or not, his guilt regarding her.

Up until September 1862 Liza had taken an interest and an increasing role in Tolstoy’s literary and intellectual activities. She published a number of sketches in his educational journal *Yasnaya Polyana*, but this cooperation tailed off after he married her sister. Their relationship was somewhat repaired in the years following as Tolstoy wrote his novel. Liza gathered books for him and did research on the Freemasons and Russian social life during the Napoleonic era for the novel, as did her father. In the fall of 1864, while Tolstoy was incapacitated with a broken arm, Liza took dictation from the author. Nevertheless, their intellectual relationship never seems to have been completely restored (Feuer 235). In late November 1864, Tolstoy wrote to Sofia Andreevna about “the virtuous, but dull Liza” (*Tolstoy’s Letters* I: 186). It is notable that Tolstoy felt free to express himself thus in a letter to Sofia Andreevna.

The crisis surrounding Tolstoy’s marriage was most likely only the climax of long-term incompatibility between Liza and her sisters, a sentiment evidently shared by the writer, to judge by his portrayal of Vera in the novel. As Sofia Andreevna says in her memoirs, her “sister Liza was always distant from us, while Tanya and I were always together, side by side” (Tolstaya 63). Liza was only slightly older, but had been given the role of policing her siblings. With perhaps understandable resentment, they called her “the professor” (Popoff 16). Neither Sofia Andreevna nor Tanya appear to have objected to Liza’s portrait as Vera in the novel—remember that Vera appears as “Liza” in the early drafts and that family members immediately saw through her subsequent disguise. It therefore should not surprise us that

Liza henceforth did not visit Yasnaya Polyana, whereas Tanya came with her family so often, usually for the entire summer, that the other remaining portion of the “big house” is called the Kuzminsky Wing.¹⁴ Indeed, Sofia Andreevna’s recently published complete memoirs, *My Life*, do not mention her elder sister for decades after the latter’s first marriage in 1868.¹⁵ Tanya later recalled that the “discord” between her sisters “lasted during the whole of their lives” (Kuzminskaya 33).

The drafts of *War and Peace* concerning Vera Rostova reflect the tensions in Tolstoy and his wife’s relationship with Liza Behrs. The initial outlines for the novel suggest that her characterization might have turned out yet more pejorative. There are hints in the draft plans that Vera would leave her husband or that Berg would abandon her (PSS 13: 17, 36). These are strangely prescient regarding Liza’s subsequent first marriage. One cryptic note states that Berg holds her in slavery (PSS 13: 36). Another speaks of someone’s—Natasha’s?—“disdain of Vera” (PSS 13: 397). There is one final bit of irony concerning Liza Behrs: As described above, at least at some point early in Tolstoy’s work on the novel, while the author still called the Rostovs the Tolstoyes, Liza achieved the status she so coveted, that of becoming a Tolstaya. We wonder if anyone took notice.

Liza Behrs could hardly have been proud of how she was immortalized in the novel. Unfortunately, her reaction to *War and Peace* is unknown. In any case, her image as Vera does not seem fair to Liza Behrs; while there was a “constraint” in their relations and other evidence hints at imperfections in her character, she was for a long time the presumed or at least possible object of Tolstoy’s attentions and, therefore, must have had some praiseworthy personal qualities. Rather, the available evidence suggests Tolstoy made her representation in the novel pejorative to express his own frustrations with Liza, to provide relief for Natasha’s virtues, and quite possibly to express his

feelings concerning his wife and other sister-in-law. Of course, there are no doubt other aesthetic, possibly philosophical, factors that should be taken into consideration, such as the need for dramatic contrast mentioned previously.

As we have surmised—and have been able to do little more than surmise—Vera’s depiction represents a reduction from what probably was a fair moral assessment of Liza Behrs. There is little further qualitative alteration in her image as Tolstoy went from the drafts to the finished novel. She is no longer credited with having good intentions (*PSS* 13: 158). Her husband, whom Tolstoy hangs around her neck like a dead albatross, undergoes more changes, but these balance out fairly evenly. Berg is no longer credited as being married to a pretty wife and a support to his mother and sisters, but then a cryptic hint of his estrangement from his brother is not pursued (*PSS* 13: 16). Also muted is Tolstoy’s plan for Berg’s pretty first wife to deceive him and to conceive an illegitimate child, leading him to abandon her and request a divorce. We thus do not also see him happy over her subsequent death in childbirth (*PSS* 13: 17, 61). Were tensions gradually relaxed either from being expressed in the composition process or merely thanks to the passage of time? *War and Peace* closes on a possible note of reconciliation when Natasha names one of her daughters “Liza” (*War and Peace* 1040; *PSS* 12: 292)

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Notes

1. See Patricia Carden’s study of how his parents’ marriage is whitewashed in the form of the match of Nicholas and Princess Maria, and also my updating of this line of inquiry (Cooke, “Роман” 180–192). A similar trajectory is observed in Cooke, “Tolstoy’s Father” 129–154.

2. Anna Berman reminds us that Russian distinguishes between types of sisters-in-law (2009). As the sister of his wife, Liza, like Tanya, was Tolstoy’s свояченица.

Until his brother Sergei married Maria Shishkina, his gypsy common-law-wife in 1867, Tolstoy had no невестка. His sister Masha was his wife’s золовка. I am grateful to Professor Berman for her many helpful suggestions.

3. I refer to the writer’s wife by her formal name to avoid confusion with the character Sonya.

4. September 12, 1862: “I’m the repulsive Dublitsky [...] Granted I’m Dublitsky, but love makes me beautiful” (*Tolstoy’s Diaries* I: 167).

5. Tanya recalled that this story depicted the Rostov family “in embryo” (Kuzminskaya 82).

6. That Tanya and Sofia Andreevna were close is also evident from the depiction of the fifteen-year-old Natasha in “Dublitsky” as “a slender, high-spirited young thing” (Kuzminskaya 81).

7. Kathryn B. Feuer suggests that Berg may be modeled after N. V. Berg, a military interpreter whose unpatriotic writing about the French enemy in the Crimean War Tolstoy “knew and almost certainly disliked” (152).

8. Perhaps we are not being fair to Berg. After Austerlitz a rumor circulates in Moscow that when wounded in one hand, he nevertheless advanced, carrying his sword with his other hand (*War and Peace* 267).

9. R. F. Christian claims that Berg’s unfortunate way of expressing his marital intentions—“Das soll mein Weib warden”—is based on the experience of one of Tanya’s cousins (85).

10. Tolstoy himself openly spoke of this possibility to family members, thus contributing to Liza’s expectations (*Tolstaya* 23).

11. If Natasha and Vera Rostov are based on Sofia, Tanya, and Liza Behrs, respectively, then there may be some relationship in Tolstoy’s mind between their mother, Countess Natalia Rostova, and Lyubov (nee Islenev) Behrs, who wished to become a countess (Меняйлов 28). If so, Tolstoy appears to have made her one in *War and Peace*.

12. He also did not attend the ceremony, but this may have been due to illness (Tolstaya 53).

13. Kuzminskaya's memoirs were only written decades later, but, given her closeness to the Tolstoys, they likely reflect the way the writer and his wife recalled these events, whatever the truth.

14. According to Tolstoy's letter to his wife of July 9, 1872, she made plans to visit Liza's estate at Khodynino.

15. Sofia Andreevna recalls visiting Liza in the 1890s (Tolstaya 765, 937).

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When Did Ivan Il'ich Die?

Chapter twelve of *The Death of Ivan Il'ich* begins by noting that Ivan's final three days were spent in incessant screaming "during which time ceased to exist for him" (131).¹ In Chapter one, though, his wife Praskovya Fyodorovna tells us she experienced those three days differently: "It was unbearable. I don't know how I bore up through it all" (43). The reader is given no other detail of the days of screaming until the final hour or hours. The narrator tells us that Ivan finally admits to himself that his life had not been "the real thing," determines that he could still make it the real thing, and asks himself what the real thing is. We are told, "This took place at the end of the third day, an hour before his death" (132). We then get the