

stress on the last syllable, or perfective, with stress on the first. But either way, Makar Semenov is part of what the soldiers observed, though the perfective/pluperfect version does put the emptying of dirt before the soldiers' noticing, thus reducing the ambiguity somewhat. My colleague Olga Hughes, a native speaker of Russian, is willing to absolve Tolstoy of carelessness on this basis. However, I still think Tolstoy could have done a better job with this sentence, making clear that the soldiers saw only the incriminating dirt, not the man, e.g., Солдаты заметили ту землю, которую Семенов (раньше) высыпал ог, using a participle instead of a "which" clause, Солдаты заметили землю, высыпанную Семеновым.

6. Actually, the error was already present in the only surviving manuscript variant, in which the character is not yet named. "The next day the soldiers noticed that the new convict was spreading earth. They began to search in the stockade and found the hole." На другой день, солдаты заметили, что новый колодник высыпал землю, стали искать в остроге и нашли дыру (*PSS* 21: 475).

7. True, there were later editions of the *Third Russian Book for Reading* and of the *Collected Works*, but there is no evidence that Tolstoy took any part in these publications.

8. In the commentary to the story by V. S. Spiridonov in the Jubilee edition (*PSS* 21:654) there seems to be an implication that the revised *Posrednik* text was Chertkov's and only had Tolstoy's passive assent: "These changes were introduced into the text of the story by V. G. Chertkov with Tolstoy's consent" (655). But the only evidence for this is Tolstoy's "Do it yourself" letter of 5-6 February. Spiridonov then does point out that the *Posrednik* ("I won't tell") text was used in the Sytin edition of the *Collected Works*, edited by P. I. Biriukov (Moscow, 1913). He then says simply, "In this (the 'I don't know') version it [the story] is printed in the present [Jubilee] edition." He does not argue the point or explain how this decision was reached. In my opinion, the decision was incorrect.

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## Was the Master Well Served?: Further Comment on "God Sees the Truth, but Waits"

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In a paper appearing in this issue of *Tolstoy Studies Journal* Hugh McLean draws our attention to certain problematic passages in Leo Tolstoy's "God Sees the Truth, but Waits." I am very pleased to have been asked to contribute some remarks of my own to complement, and to contend with, those of Professor McLean. I am delighted at the attention given to a story which I (and Tolstoy himself—in *What Is Art?*) count among his best. I am sure that both Professor McLean and I will be content to let the readers of *TSJ* make their own judgements about the issues that we raise.

I turn first to Professor McLean's contention that the following sentence does not make sense:

На другой день, когда вывели колодников на работу, солдаты заметили, что Макар Семенов высыпал [perfective ВЫсыпал or imperfective высыПАЛ] землю, стали искать в остроге и нашли дыру.

Professor McLean maintains that according to this sentence there would be no need for the authorities to investigate since the soldiers saw Makar scattering the earth from his excavation. I am quite willing to admit that this sentence is potentially ambiguous, especially considering the complexity of translating it into equivalent English. An exact translation, taking into account the sequencing of tenses in reporting actions in Russian, would be:

“On the next day, after the convicts had been taken to their work, the soldiers noticed that Makar Semenov had scattered dirt about, began to search the prison, and found the hole.”

Readers already know that Makar had scattered the dirt around, but the soldiers do not; they observe the result of Makar's action [if perfective], that dirt has been scattered about, not the action itself. True, in Russian and certainly in English translation this can be confusing, especially given the sequence of tenses. Not surprisingly, then, a translator—Professor McLean cites the translation of Louise Maude—might express this relation of tenses through equivalence, thus: the soldiers noticed that someone had scattered dirt around. In my opinion this need not prove that the translator is tacitly correcting an authorial lapse; she might just as likely be accommodating the lack of clear perfectivization in the verbal system of English.

For Tolstoy's text to be an unambiguous mistake or a source of confusion in Russian (rather than simply a difficulty for the English translator) the Russian sentence would have had to have been the following: солдаты заметили, что Макар Семенов ВЫСЫПАЕТ землю. Here the present tense indicates that the soldiers noticed the action while was in progress; the past tense would indicate that the action had taken place prior to its being noticed by the soldiers and that Makar at that moment was no longer performing this action.

It would make no difference if the verb form were the past tense *imperfective* ‘высыпАЛ’ (and it might very well be). Whether the soldiers noticed that Makar “had been scattering” [habitually, for awhile, or whatever] or “had scattered” the dirt around, the salient point remains that he was no longer doing it at the time. A sentence certain to

produce the confusion which Professor McLean ascribes to it would read this way: “Солдаты заметили, КАК акар Семенов ВЫСЫПАЕТ землю.”

Two further passages from the story support the contention that Tolstoy was well aware of the issues of tense and aspect and in fact used these as I have suggested. Near the end of the story, after Makar has broken down following his confession to Aksenov, we read: “Когда Аксенов услышал, что Макар Семенов плачет, он сам заплакал. . .”

This sentence is grammatically analogous to the one in dispute, but Tolstoy here clearly means that Aksenov hears Makar's weeping and he uses the present tense (‘плачет’) to specify this. Conversely, in the earlier sentence—“на другую ночь . . . он [Аксенов] услышал, что кто-то подошел и сел у него в ногах”—the past tense perfective clearly establishes that Makar's actions were already completed by the time Aksenov “sensed” that someone was there with him, sitting on his cot. Since Tolstoy seems clearly to have been conscious of the distinctions entailed by the selection of aspect/tense in these two examples, most likely he was aware of them in the sentence under discussion. Finally, in the disputed sentence the existence of the clause “когда вывели колодников на работу” seems to specify not only *what* the soldiers saw but also *when* they saw it—*after* they had led (perfective) the convicts out to work. So the soldiers did not see Makar himself scattering the dirt, since he has told Aksenov that he scattered the dirt *while* the convicts were being taken out to work [“высыпает [землю] на улицу, когда их гоняют на работу”].

It is surely not *clear* that this sentence represents a stylistic, logical, or grammatical error on Tolstoy's part, or a lapse in continuity. In any case, the editors who fifteen years later produced the numerous and significant emendations for the Posrednik edition of the mid-1880s left this particular sentence unchanged.

As another part of his argument, Professor McLean resurrects the textological question (discussed at length in the Jubilee Edition [hereafter JE], vols. 21 and 85) of the changes introduced into the story for the Posrednik version. He is concerned with only one of these changes, that in which the 1870s version's simple denial by Ak-

senov that he knows anything about Makar's escape hole is replaced by a longer text designed to enable Aksenov to avoid telling a direct lie without reporting Makar. As Professor McLean explains, V. G. Chertkov disliked the fact that a lie leads to "the greatest spiritual feat of the hero's life." Tolstoy gives Chertkov permission in writing to change this and so the Posrednik edition (and all later versions of the story brought out by D. I. Sytin, who published and distributed the Posrednik materials) replaced Aksenov's original response: "Не видал и не знаю" (hereafter, the "I don't know" version); with this one: "Не могу сказать, ваше благородие. Мне Бог не велит сказать, и не скажу. Что хотите со мной делайте – власть ваша" (hereafter, the "I won't tell" version). Starting with V. S. Spiridonov in the Jubilee Edition, the editors of various later editions of the story have generally concluded that this change (and the others) was concocted by Chertkov and agreed to by Tolstoy, quite possibly without the latter's full knowledge in advance of the details of the emendations.

Such is the known background. Professor McLean makes the case that Tolstoy wrote this emendation himself, but I remain unconvinced. Tolstoy's letter giving Chertkov permission to make changes seems clear and unambiguous to me. The relevant passage says: "На исключение тех мест, [Chertkov had also asked permission to excise some passages from "Кавказский пленник" for the same edition] о которых Вы писали, я очень радостно согласен и благодарен. *Только сделайте сами. Если бы я стал делать, я бы все переделал, а время нужно на другое*" (emphasis mine). From this it seems clear that Tolstoy wanted, indeed was glad and relieved, to take no active part in the revision which he authorized. I see no compelling documentary reason to believe that Tolstoy made the changes himself.

Professor McLean candidly acknowledges that his conviction that the "I won't tell" version of the passage is to be preferred rests primarily on his feeling that it is superior to the earlier one. In his view, with its perfect shape and its greater suitability to the context, it has the hallmarks of the master's style, and it is well beyond the talents of Chertkov.

I can agree that the passage is in part characteristically Tolstoyan, especially the latter half of it: "Сколько н бился с ним начальник, Аксенов больше ничего не говорил." However, the first part—for our purpose the more relevant one—strikes me as a false note in the story. "Мне Бог не велит сказать. И не скажу. Что хотите со мной делайте – власть ваша" strikes me as sanctimonious and premature, given the context in which the words are uttered. These words imply that a perfect link of communication between Aksenov and the deity already exists as it does at the end of the story. In fact, however, during his interrogation by the warden Aksenov is confused: "У Аксенова тряслись руки и губы, и он долго не мог слова выговорить." He feels as he did twenty-six years earlier when the police questioned him and confronted him with the bloody knife which had been found in his pack: "Аксенов хотел отвечать, но не мог выговорить слова."<sup>1</sup> We also learn that during the two weeks between Aksenov's realization that Makar was the murderer of the merchant and his interrogation by the warden he has been beset by powerful feelings of resentment, anger, and the desire for revenge:

И такая скука нашла на Аксенова, что хоть руки на себя наложить.

– И все от того злодея – думал Аксенов.

И нашла на него такая злость на Макара Семенова, что хоть самому пропасть, а хотелось отместить ему. Он читал молитвы всю ночь, но не мог успокоиться.

So far from being in a tranquil state of communion with the deity, Aksenov is profoundly upset. Yet in the revision insisted upon by Chertkov and favoured by Professor McLean, he responds to the warden with the calm fearlessness of a saint, perhaps even a would-be martyr: "God does not command me to tell. And I will not. Do with me as you will; the power is yours." We might also ask why the warden does *not* do something, seeming to accept what is, after all, open defiance from one of his prisoners with nothing more than some additional attempts at persuasion ("сколько не бился с ним начальник"). Surely verisimilitude demands that if the convict Aksenov had announced "Well, I know who did it but I'm not going to tell you" the warden would have had to

deal with great severity with this open challenge to his authority. Wouldn't there have been threats, beatings, solitary confinements to bend the stubborn Aksenov to the warden's will? For this reason, too, I find it difficult to believe that Tolstoy himself wrote that emendation. More likely something like the following occurred: Chertkov was bothered by Aksenov's lie, and asked Tolstoy to change the passage; Tolstoy instructed him to "Go ahead, but do it yourself"; Chertkov replaced the offending passage with a slightly reworked version of an earlier one in the story in which Makar has threatened Aksenov with a terrible revenge if he reports him, and Aksenov retorts that "I shall tell or not, as God directs."<sup>2</sup>

Beyond these stylistic reasons for my preference for the earlier ("I don't know") version of this passage over the later one ("I won't tell"), I believe that there is also a significant thematic point at issue here. This requires us to reflect for a moment on why Chertkov felt so strongly that the passage needed to be changed.

Chertkov began his request by indicating his anxiety over two passages in "Кавказский пленник" which he felt might cause the impressionable readers of this popular edition [лубочное издание] of the stories to go, if only slightly, morally astray: "Я наверное знаю что эти два места [in "Кавказский пленник"] должны вызывать в таких читателях одобрителный смех и, следовательно, давать им еще один толчок в том уже слишком господствующем направлении, которое признает, что несравненно практичнее при достижении своих целей не слишком строго разбирать средства" (PSS 85: 140). Chertkov wants the story to convey, without ambiguity, the message that sin is sin. He goes on to say that he is even more concerned about a passage in "Бог правду видит. . .": "скажу вам. . . о том, что меня давно мучает в вашем рассказе *Бог правду видит*." He describes the scene of the interrogation, concluding by citing Aksenov's answer to the warden: "Я не видал и не знаю." Chertkov then continues: "между тем он и видал и знает и, следовательно, прибегает к сознательной лжи ради спасения своего товарища, между тем самый этот его поступок производит впечатление высшего подвига его жизни (PSS 85:141)."

Chertkov is upset that the "conscious lie" told by Aksenov to "save his comrade" is presented as "the highest spiritual feat" of his life. Plainly, he has construed this moment as the story's climax, the point at which Aksenov enters into that state of spiritual exaltation which marks him at the end of the story.<sup>3</sup> Chertkov was appealing for something more appropriate than a "conscious lie" to match the sanctity of this moment. In agreeing that the revision is to be preferred to the original, Professor McLean seems also to agree to the proposition that at this moment of spiritual triumph a lie, even a kindly one, would be a false note.

The flaw in Chertkov's reasoning (aside from his neutral characterization of Makar, whom Aksenov hates and despises, as "his comrade" or "fellow prisoner") is that this is *not* the story's climactic moment nor is it Aksenov's "highest spiritual feat." When Makar comes to him on the night after the interrogation, Aksenov, still in the grip of a very human confusion and fear, says: "Что надо? Уйди! А то я солдата кликну." Realizing that Makar has come to confess and beg forgiveness, Aksenov is no longer anxious, but he remains aloof and unforgiving, saying: "Тебе говорить легко, а мне терпеть каково! Куда я пойду теперь? Жена померла, дети забыли; мне ходить некуда." At this point he is burdened with resentment and regret and still far from spiritual elevation. Only when he hears Makar burst into tears does a remarkable change overwhelm Aksenov. He, too, begins to weep and, when Makar again beseeches his forgiveness, Aksenov replies: "'Бог простит тебя; может быть, я во сто раз хуже тебя.' И вдруг у него на душе легко стало." At this point he is burdened with resentment and regret and still far from spiritual elevation. Only when he hears Makar burst into tears does a remarkable change overwhelm Aksenov. He, too, begins to weep and, when Makar again beseeches his forgiveness, Aksenov replies: 'А Бог простит? тебя; может быть, я во сто раз хуже тебя.' И вдруг у него на душе легко стало. Only now does he achieve his "highest spiritual feat" and the essence of that achievement is in his recognition that his "saintly" life in prison has not led to spiritual enlightenment and calm, that he has remained perhaps "a hundred times worse" than Makar.

I agree with Professor McLean that the point of the story is that Aksenov comes to believe that his punishment was deserved, and it is this punishment and suffering which finally alerts him to the fact that he is, in some real sense, perhaps really "a hundred times worse" than Makar. Like Makar he has still, after 26 years, not fully recognized his own spiritual nature. The path to understanding as depicted in the story is a long one. It begins around the time of his arrest and trial when, suspected even by his wife and with his appeal denied by the Tsar, he decides to "hope only in God." It continues through the establishment of the saintly persona which he develops while in prison. He accustoms himself to say that he is in prison on account of his own sins ["по грехам своим"], but he hasn't yet really accepted this or sincerely felt it: hence the sharp resurgence of anger, sense of loss, and desire for revenge that overwhelms him when he becomes certain that Makar was the real villain. Even after 26 years of self-denial and rigorous piety he is nowhere close to the realization that he himself is the "real" villain. Only after he has been touched to the heart by Makar's tears and understood that he and his tormentor are as one does he arrive at his true and final spiritual destination.

"Бог правду видит, да не скоро скажет" is, in my opinion, a miniature theodicy—an explanation of the existence of evil in God's world. The cruel injustice done to Aksenov turns out to be only an apparent evil; its real effect was to lead him to a true understanding of his fate and himself. Only by this difficult path does he come to experience genuine joy. It is within this broader purpose that we must decide whether the "I don't know" or the "I won't tell" version better fits with the state of Aksenov's spiritual condition at the moment of the interrogation. The original version is, as Chertkov said, a lie, morally imperfect but practical and very much of this world; it would be appropriate to one who had not yet quite found the way to his spiritual self. The pious truth of the revised version is noble, self-sacrificing to the point of inviting martyrdom, and appropriate to one for whom the world was already of no account.

I see the interrogation and Aksenov's response to the warden as one more step on the protago-

nist's road to spiritual enlightenment rather than as an evidence that he has already arrived. I therefore prefer the original version of the passage in question as more appropriate to a character still filled with anxiety, confusion, hatred, and despair. Aksenov will not get where Tolstoy wants him to go until he realizes that he and Makar are related as like unto like rather than as victim and tormentor. The text makes a point of the fact that Makar finds himself in prison on a false charge. He finds it ironic that he has been unjustly convicted for an action that was not a crime, having escaped punishment for the many crimes he had committed. In other words, Makar, like Aksenov, was unjustly convicted and sent to prison, but, unlike Aksenov, he freely admits that he is far from guiltless and that, therefore, his punishment is appropriate. Aksenov continues to believe in his own innocence until almost the last moment. It is only the tears he shares with Makar at the end that unites him to his former enemy and occasions the realization that everything he had lost, the suffering he had endured, really didn't matter at all.<sup>4</sup>

### Notes

1. It may be worth noting that when Aksenov finally does answer, he responds to both the policeman and the warden in the same way: "Не знаю." In both episodes Aksenov is confused, but in the first his confusion arises from fear and anxiety; in the second from uncertainty about what to do.
2. This manner of speaking is quite in the spirit of the particular context. Makar is threatening Aksenov, and Aksenov, filled with hatred and anger toward Makar, is in no mood simply to knuckle under to these threats. He responds so as to leave Makar in doubt as to whether he would tell or not.
3. Some of the other changes introduced into the Posrednik edition are significant in this respect, as suggesting that Aksenov has already attained spiritual enlightenment at the moment when the warden confronts him. For example, where the original version has Aksenov in prison buying and reading *The Lives of the Saints* [*Chet'i Minei*], the revision for Posrednik substitutes *The Gospels* [*Evangelie*], possibly suggesting that in prison Aksenov had become fully Christ-like rather than merely a simulacrum of Christ, as were the

saints. Again, in the passage where Makar warns Aksenov under threat of death not to report the tunnel, the original version notes that Aksenov was “shaking from head to foot with *zlost*” (the word is difficult to translate—something like ‘hatred and the desire to hurt’). The revised version seeks to show an Aksenov not quite so much in the grip of his ill feelings by omitting this phrase altogether. He therefore seems much more removed from his own painful memories than he was in the original. Finally, at the point in the story which I have identified as climactic, the original version has Aksenov say “Perhaps I am a hundred times worse than you” followed by the sentence: “И вдруг у него на душе легко стало.” [“And all at once the burden was lifted from his soul (lit. it became light, i.e.,

without weight) on his soul.”] In removing this sentence, the person who carried out the revision was clearly removing an important indicator that this was, in fact, the climactic moment of the story as Tolstoy wrote it.

4. Tolstoy will use a close variant of this ending in *Smert' Ivana Il'icha*. There Ivan remains in the grip of his illness until he finally realizes that his life, with which he had been so contented and of which he had been so proud, was really “не то” (“not the right thing at all”). At that moment, precipitated by touching by chance the hand of his son, the protagonist enters upon a spiritual life in which pain and death are no more.