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## Bakhtin and Tolstoy

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## Bakhtin and Tolstoy

### Abstract

This article is a study of the way Bakhtin compared and contrasted Dostoevsky and Tolstoy throughout his career. Special attention is given to Bakhtin's two "Prefaces" of 1929 and 1930 to *Resurrection* and to the dramas in the *Collected Literary Works* edition of Tolstoy. Bakhtin's view of Tolstoy is not as narrow as is generally thought. Tolstoy is seen as one of many figures of European literature that make up Bakhtin's literary consciousness. He serves as a point of contrast with Dostoevsky and is described as belonging to an older, more rigid, monologic tradition. Bakhtin's prefaces to Tolstoy's works are not just immanent stylistic analyses but can be seen as well as one of the moments when Bakhtin turns to a sociology of style in the wider sense of examining the social-economic conditions that engender style. The prefaces represent a foretaste of Bakhtin's historical poetics of the 1930s.

### Keywords

Bakhtin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Prefaces, comparison, Collected Literary Works, literary consciousness, monologic tradition, sociology of style, social-economic, style, historical poetics

## BAKHTIN AND TOLSTOY

ANN SHUKMAN

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The temptation to look at Tolstoy and Dostoevsky as opposite poles is one to which many modern critics have succumbed (Steiner); and Bakhtin, at least at one stage of his thinking, was no exception. Everyone who has read *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* will recall the juxtaposition of Tolstoy's monologism with Dostoevsky's polyphony: the aphorism—"Tolstoy's world is monolithically monologic"; the explanation—"The hero's discourse is included in the solid frame of the author's discourse. Tolstoy's monologically naive point of view and his discourse penetrate everywhere into all corners of the world and of the spirit, subordinating everything to its unity" (*Problemy Poetiki* 94-95); and the example—the analysis of the story "Three Deaths" (a particularly choice example of Tolstoy's barely concealed didacticism). Tolstoy's novels are admitted to be more complex, but though their heroes interact, have their own fields of vision (*krugozory*), and even though "their voices *nearly* fuse with the authorial voice," yet still "with their fields of vision, their truths, their searchings and disputes, they are all inscribed into the monolithically monologic whole of the novel which completes them" (*Problemy* 123). All this of course, for Bakhtin was quite different from Dostoevsky's method.

In spite of this somewhat curt dismissal of Tolstoy in comparison with Dostoevsky (an author whose outlook was clearly more congenial to Bakhtin) we find references to Tolstoy in nearly all of Bakhtin's "own name" writings from all periods of his life and certainly in all those that deal at any length with general literary topics. Tolstoy is constantly in Bakhtin's mind as a source for examples or for contrasts. He is part of that ground swell of famous and less famous literary names which accompanied Bakhtin

throughout his life and from which he constantly drew for references. In addition, there are important passages on Tolstoy in several of his papers of the 1930s and later;<sup>1</sup> there are the recently published notes taken by R.M. Mirkina of Bakhtin's lectures on Tolstoy in 1922-3 in Vitebsk. And most important of all, there are Bakhtin's two prefaces of 1929 and 1930 to *Resurrection* and to the dramas in the *Collected Literary Works* edition of Tolstoy.

Bakhtin is known best for his studies of Dostoevsky and Rabelais: only now with the publication of more details of his biography and more of his papers is it becoming possible to piece together the overall picture of Bakhtin as a man who dedicated his entire life to literature. The range of his knowledge of European literature from classical times to the present was vast (Holquist) and his dedication to his topic, allied to what must have been a special genius as teacher, meant that practically all his adult life he was involved in the teaching of literature. In Nevel in 1918-1921, in Vitebsk in 1920-1924, then in Leningrad (1924-29); during his years in Saransk (1936-37, 1954-65), when he at last had an official teaching post, Bakhtin was actively involved in teaching all kinds of literature to all kinds of people (Mirkina; Bakhtin, *Lektsii*; Basikhin; Kozhinov). Something of the flavor of Bakhtin's teaching to non-specialists (in this case school children) emerges from Mirkina's notes: the approach is by theme and character, and the method that of paraphrase while emphasizing certain underlying philosophical or moral problems; there is no discussion of Tolstoy's method, no discussion of the literary background or of the topicality of the issues (Mirkina). Even allowing for the note-taker's youth and probable lack of sophistication it can be assumed that these notes are a fairly true distillation of Bakhtin's lectures, the lecturer being more concerned to involve his audience and capture their interest than to theorize or generalize.

The reference and discussions of Tolstoy that occur in his other, general writings on literature illustrate some particular points or topics under consideration. So in an essay of 1924, the philosophizing of Andrei Bolkonsky (*War and Peace*), like the philosophizing of Ivan Karamazov (*The Brothers Karamazov*), is taken as an example of how such material, if it is to be integrated into a novel, must be intimately related to the "concrete world of human action," the character's own specific ethical personality and his position in life:

Unless all these judgements were somehow inextricably bound up with the concrete world of human action they would remain

isolated prosaisms, as sometimes happens in Dostoevsky's work and as happens in Tolstoy, for instance in *War and Peace*, where towards the end of the novel the cognitive philosophical historical judgements entirely break off any connection with the ethical event and are organized into a theoretical treatise. (Bakhtin, *Voprosy* 39-40)

At the time when that essay was written (1924), Bakhtin had not yet arrived at his rigorous contrast of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. So we find too that in the earlier essay "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" Bakhtin groups "nearly all of Dostoevsky's characters" *together* with Pierre (*War and Peace*) and Levin (*Anna Karenina*) among those characters who "take possession of the author" (*Avtor* 18-20). This category is distinguished in Bakhtin's typology from the category where the author "takes possession" of the character or from that where the hero is the author. In view of Bakhtin's later judgement that all Tolstoy's heroes are "inscribed within the monologic whole of the novel," it is interesting to read what he has to say of characters who "take possession of the author":

The emotional-volitional referential orientation of the hero, his cognitive-ethical position in the world, is so authoritative for the author that he cannot help seeing the referential world only with the eyes of the hero and cannot help experiencing except within the hero's life; the author cannot find a convincing and solid axiological point of departure outside the hero. (*Avtor* 18)

To put Pierre and Levin in such a category (which is quite arguable) is a long way from the strictures against Tolstoy's monologism in the Dostoevsky book.

In "Discourse in the Novel," written in 1934-35, Bakhtin rethinks Tolstoy in the light of a more general approach to the novel as a genre: what distinguishes the novel from other literary forms? Its heteroglossia, its capacity to incorporate pluralities of speeches and of voices. The dialogism of the novel may be internal or external: it may be between characters or between character and author; or it may be between author and readership, author and tradition. Looked at from this larger perspective, Tolstoy too loses his monologic mask and is revealed as participating in the greater dialogue. The naive point of view, for instance, must inevitably, when found in a novel, "acquire an internally polemical character and consequently be also

dialogized (as is the case with the Sentimentalists, with Chateaubriand and with Tolstoy)” (*Slovo* 91). Baroque heroics, the glorification of war, for instance, lived on in the novel—but with a difference:

Wherever [such] direct pathetic discourse appeared, its nature stayed the same: the speaker (the author) adopts the conventional pose of the judge, preacher, teacher, etc. or his discourse appealed polemically to the unmediated impression of the object or of life, unsullied by ideological assumptions. Tolstoy’s discourse, for instance, moves between these two poles. The special features of such discourse are everywhere defined by the heteroglossia (literary and real life) with which this discourse is dialogically (polemically or didactically) correlated; for example, direct “unmediated” depiction turns out to be a polemic de-heroization of the Caucasus, of war and military exploits, even of nature. (*Slovo* 210)

Tolstoy’s dialogism, in Bakhtin’s understanding, has dual orientation: it is directed both towards the reader and his assumptions, and towards the subject of the discourse:

Tolstoy’s discourse is remarkable for its sharp internal dialogism and it is dialogized both in the object and in the reader’s field of vision. . . . These two lines of dialogization (in most cases polemically colored) are very closely interwoven in his style; Tolstoy’s discourse, even in its most “lyric” expressions and most “epic” descriptions, harmonizes and disharmonizes (mostly the latter) with various factors of the heteroglot socio-verbal consciousness in which the object is entangled, and at the same time polemically invades the reader’s referential and axiological field of vision in an effort to stun and destroy the apperceptive background of his active comprehension. In this respect Tolstoy is the heir to the eighteenth century, and especially to Rousseau. (*Slovo* 96)

This very often results with Tolstoy in a tendency to make propaganda, to narrow the targets of his polemic to the issues of the day, to write in the style of a pamphlet:

Hence that heteroglot social consciousness with which Tolstoy is polemicizing is sometimes narrowed down to the consciousness

of his immediate contemporary, a contemporary of the day and not of the period, and as a result there ensues an extreme concretization of the dialogism (almost always a polemic). (*Slovo* 96)

What about the other extreme in Tolstoy's writing—the use of unanswerable aphorisms, universal pronouncements, Biblical quotations? Authoritative discourse in the novel, argues Bakhtin, is a contradiction in terms:

Authoritative discourse . . . admits of no play with the enframing context, or play with its boundaries. . . . It enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass that had to be either accepted as a whole or rejected as a whole. . . . The addressee and the understander of it is a distant descendant; dispute is impossible. (*Slovo* 156)

In the novel its role is negligible: it cannot be two-voiced; it cannot be represented, but only communicated:

For this reason the authoritative text always remains, in the novel, a dead quotation, excluded from the literary context (for instance the Gospel texts in Tolstoy at the end of *Resurrection*). (*Slovo* 157)

It can, of course, be argued, as Gary Morson has done, that the very fact of such pronouncements being placed *in a novel* means that they are dialogized on a higher level: "There is no immediate contextualization, but there is meta-contextualization" (676). Any authoritative discourse can in fact be made to appear relative. Bakhtin himself does this in his treatment of Tolstoy's most "authoritative" of novels, *Resurrection*: his method here is to relativize Tolstoy's "absolutism" by placing the work in its historical context and viewing it from the position of hindsight thirty years after it was written. By showing up the legal system, the church, administration and other social institutions for their inner meaninglessness as Tolstoy does in the novel, Tolstoy reveals his lack of historical sense and understanding of the dialectic process of history:

Tolstoy's nihilism which spread its negativeness over all human culture as something conventional and invented by men is the

result of that same misunderstanding of the historical dialectic which buries the dead only because the living have arrived to take their place. Tolstoy sees only the dead, and it seemed to him that the field of history would remain empty. (preface to *Resurrection* xii)

In another important study of the 1930s, "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel," Tolstoy is given passing mention, although the period covered by the study in fact leads only up to the Renaissance with few references to later writers (*Formy* 231, 314). In the "Concluding Remarks" to the essay, however, which Bakhtin added in 1973, and which brings the topic up to date, Tolstoy's treatment of time is sympathetically summarized as follows:

In Tolstoy's writings, as distinct from Dostoevsky's, the basic chronotope is biographical time which flows in the internal spaces of the houses and estates of the nobility. Of course, there are in Tolstoy's works, crises, falls, renewals and resurrections, but they are not momentary and are not excluded from the flow of biographical time but are firmly welded to it. For instance, Ivan Il'ich's crisis and insight [*The Death of Ivan Il'ich*] lasts for the whole of the last period of his illness and is only resolved at the very end of his life. Pierre Bezukhov's renewal [*War and Peace*] is lengthy and gradual and fully biographical. Less lengthy but not momentary is the renewal of repentance of Nikita ("The Power of Darkness"). There is only one exception in Tolstoy's works and that is the quite unprepared, quite unexpected, radical renewal of Brekhunov at the last moment of his life ("Master and Man"). Tolstoy did not value the moment, he did not strive to fill it with something essential and decisive, he rarely uses the word "suddenly," and it never introduces a significant event. Unlike Dostoevsky, Tolstoy loved duration, the extension of time. After biographical time and space, Tolstoy gave most significance to the chronotope of nature, the family-idyllic chronotope, and even the chronotope of the work idyll (in his descriptions of peasant labour). (*Formy* 398)

The force of the "idyllic-cyclical" ingredient in Tolstoy's *Childhood, Boyhood and Youth* is again referred to in Bakhtin's study of the novel of development (*Roman* 199, 201).

It is thus justified to regard Bakhtin's treatment of Tolstoy in the



essays discussed as judicious and at times penetrating, though fairly restricted, although Tolstoy is nowhere picked out for special attention: he is one of many figures of European literature that make up Bakhtin's literary consciousness. He serves as a point of contrast, as illustration, and nearly always Bakhtin relates him to one literary tradition or another.

As a summary of some of the features that Bakhtin saw as marking the difference between Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, his notes on the treatment of death in the two authors are worth recalling:

Dostoevsky has far fewer deaths than Tolstoy and in most cases they are murders and suicides. Tolstoy has very many deaths. One could even speak of his passion for describing deaths. Moreover, and this is very typical, he describes death not only from the outside but also from the inside, that is from the very consciousness of the dying person, *almost* as a fact of that consciousness. ("K pererabotke" 314)

That "almost" is important: for whereas in Dostoevsky consciousness is always open, unfinalized and therefore he *could not*, in Bakhtin's terms, describe death from within, Tolstoy tended always to reify, give finality and completion to the consciousnesses he describes:

How does consciousness fade away for the one who is conscious? This is possible [to describe] only thanks to a certain reification of consciousness. Consciousness is here given as something objective (object-like) and almost neutral in relation to the impassable (absolute) boundary between the I and the other. He [Tolstoy] passes from one consciousness to the other as from one room to another, he does not recognize the absolute threshold. . . . In Tolstoy's world another person's consciousness is described as one which has a certain minimum of reification (objectness), and for this reason there is no impassable abyss between death from within (for the one who is dying) and death from without (for the other). . . . In Dostoevsky's world, death finalizes nothing because it does not touch what is most important in that world—consciousness for itself. ("K pererabotke" 314, 315)

Consciousness for itself in Bakhtin's thinking knows neither beginning nor end: it unfolds only from within and thus is, by its

nature and for itself, infinite. Consciousness of one's own death, like consciousness of one's own birth, is a contradiction in terms (*Avtor* 92). ("Cemeteries are filled only with others") (*Avtor* 99). It was Dostoevsky's achievement to have portrayed in literature consciousness for itself: Tolstoy, in these terms, belonged to an older, more rigid, "monologic" tradition.

Bakhtin's two prefaces of 1929 and 1930 are written for the explicit purposes of showing how these works of Tolstoy's fit into the social background of the period at which they were written and how they express Tolstoy's own ideological position of the time. Of all Bakhtin's "own name" writings they are by far the most sociologically oriented and the closest to a Marxist point of view. There is no problem in relating the material and the approach of these prefaces to the material and the approach of Medvedev's (Bakhtin's?) *The Formal Method in Literary Studies* published in 1928: if anything, the sociology of the prefaces is a little cruder than that advocated in the Medvedev book. Medvedev<sup>2</sup> is always careful to emphasize the refracting and refracted nature of literature as a part of the general ideological milieu, the creative role of literature and its capacity to influence the ideological purview (*Formal'nyi* 27-28). In Bakhtin's preface to Tolstoy's dramas however, we read:

And indeed, Tolstoy's writings, like those of any other writer, were wholly determined, of course, by his period and by the historical disposition of the social-class forces in the period. (preface to *Dramatic Works* iv)

(Note the "wholly" and the "of course," to be discussed below.)

If we compare *Problems in Dostoevsky's Art* (1929) and the Tolstoy prefaces (1929; 1930) with the essays "The Problem of Form, Material and Content" (1924), and "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" (early 1920s)—to bear in mind only those works which are indisputably and wholly Bakhtin's—then a fairly marked shift of emphasis in Bakhtin's treatment of literature is apparent. The Tolstoy prefaces are explicitly sociological in their material; the study of Dostoevsky too, though primarily concerned with Dostoevsky's creative method, nonetheless declares unequivocally at the beginning:

At the basis of our analysis is the conviction that every literary work is inwardly, immanently sociological. Living social forces

cross each other in it, each element of its form is suffused with living social evaluations. For this reason even a purely formal analysis must take each element of the structure as a point of refraction of living social forces, as an artificial crystal whose facets are so constructed and polished as to refract rays of social evaluations and to refract them at a certain angle. (*Problemy tvorchestva* 3-4)

And an immanent sociological analysis of style should lead on to the question of “the historical social-economic conditions for the birth of that style” (*Problemy tvorchestva* 213).

There is nothing of this in the essays: neither history, nor society, nor economic conditions are mentioned. The essays are inward looking quasi-meditations on the nature of man and of literary creation (*Avtor*) and on the literary work as aesthetic object (*Problemy*). Admittedly though, the keynotes of all Bakhtin’s thinking are already announced and explored: the inclusiveness of the work of art which as an aesthetic event (*sobytiie*) brings together elements from many different spheres of life and subsumes them into the aesthetic creation; and the essential nature of the “other” both for the constituting of consciousness (the “I”) and in creation. By the late twenties, however, Bakhtin had moved to a more extroverted view of literature and of man: his style became crisper and less turgid.

The Tolstoy prefaces then, which are not just immanent stylistic analyses, can be seen as Bakhtin’s turning to a sociology of style in the wider sense of examining the social-economic conditions that engenders it, and a foretaste indeed of his historical poetics of the 1930s.

Before discussing the prefaces themselves it is worth recalling what Bakhtin had to say in much later years about the sociological approach to literature. In his commentary on Lunacharsky’s review of the first edition of the Dostoevsky book, Bakhtin in the second edition (1963) has this to say about the historical-genetic approach:

The exceptionally acute contradictions of early Russian capitalism, and the split in Dostoevsky as a social person, his personal inability to take a definite ideological decision, taken by themselves, are something negative and historically transient, but they gave the optimum conditions for the creation of the polyphonic novel. . . . Both the period with its specific contradictions, and the biological and social personality of Dostoevsky

with his epilepsy and ideological split, have long since faded into the past, but the new structural principle of polyphony which was discovered in these conditions has maintained and will maintain its literary significance in quite different conditions of periods to come. The great discoveries of human genius are possible only in certain conditions of certain periods, but they never die away and do not lose their value with the periods that engendered them. . . . The discovery of the polyphonic novel, which Dostoevsky made, will outlive capitalism. (*Problemy poetiki* 61-62)

Art in other words is socially and historically conditioned, but it is also timeless; and the birth of a new form, though it may arise in the optimum conditions of a particular epoch, will have been prepared by many years of past literary traditions and general aesthetics: "Poetics must not, of course, be detached from social and historical analyses, but it must not be dissolved in them" (*Problemy poetiki* 63).

In spite of Bakhtin's declaration that Tolstoy's works are "wholly determined" by the epoch and by the historical disposition of the social class forces in that epoch, in fact the thrust of the two prefaces is focussed on Tolstoy's own ideological development, which is presented at least partially as a response to the times; the works under consideration are fitted into the dialectic of ideology and epoch.

The preface to the dramas deals first with the early "pre-crisis" plays of Tolstoy's: why are they so unsuccessful as literary works? Bakhtin's answer is on the level of Tolstoy's personal predilections: first, Tolstoy all through his literary career was opposed to convention, and drama, as he later made explicit, was the most conventional of literary genres and therefore the one in which Tolstoy was least likely to succeed; second, Tolstoy in the first part of his career was above all concerned with the freedom and independence of the authorial voice—which, of course, is excluded from drama. These early dramas, however, are also responses to particular topical issues of the day: "The Infected Family" and to some extent "The Nihilist," are Tolstoy's evaluations of some of the ideas of the sixties—the "women's question," nihilism, the peasant problem. Since they were written at the time (1863) when Tolstoy was beginning to plan *War and Peace* their significance in Tolstoy's development as a writer must be to have made him seek values not in contemporary life but in the patriarchal way of life of an earlier generation.

Of greater interest are Bakhtin's comments on "The Power of

Darkness.” This is Tolstoy’s presentation of his personal belief that evil is a universal and timeless problem; but the play is also perhaps a polemic with the Populists who gave primacy to the social-ethical over the individual-ethical, and to the ideas of land and commune over the ideas of God and individual conscience. In this play Tolstoy portrays the social background as a fixed, unchangeable backdrop while, Bakhtin comments, “the real moving forces of peasant life, which determine peasant ideology, are neutralized, excluded from the action of the drama” (preface to *Dramatic Works* viii). Akim is described by Bakhtin as a proletarianized peasant, declassed and with the ideology of “someone who is declassed, broken with his class, who has left the real stream of the contradictory class process” (preface to *Dramatic Works* ix). The play then depicts the peasants and peasant life in the light of Tolstoy’s own ideological seekings, and the “power of darkness” of the title is least of all “the power of the ignorance born of economic and political yoke,” but the eternal power of evil over the individual soul. The play, Bakhtin implies, is Tolstoy’s attempt to turn the problem of social evil into a problem of personal evil.

This is explicitly the main point that Bakhtin makes about *Resurrection* in the second of the two prefaces. The nub of the ideology of the novel is that no one may judge another or punish another, the solution to the problem of evil lies within the individual. Bakhtin comments:

*This question of the personal participation in evil overshadows actually objectively existing evil, makes it somehow subordinate, somehow secondary in comparison with the tasks of personal repentance and personal perfection. . . . From the very outset there was a fateful substitution: instead of the question of objective evil the question of personal participation in it was raised. (Bakhtin’s emphasis) (Preface to Resurrection xviii)*

This substitution set the focus of the novel on the guilt-feelings of the exploiting classes; it was a typical expression of the ideology of the repentant nobleman. It was Tolstoy’s response to the radical changes in Russian society in the last years of the nineteenth century, the result of his “intense struggle for the social reorientation of his literary creation” (preface to *Resurrection* viii). And yet, *Resurrection*, in Bakhtin’s view, is a supreme example, perhaps the best in all European literature, of the ideological novel: the masterfully maintained criticism of all the social institutions, the sustained ideological

thrust, make it a model that even could be of use for nascent Soviet literature in its search for new literary forms.

Tolstoy's error, in Bakhtin's view, was to have been too condemning of all social institutions, to have ignored history and the constant process of renewal of social life. Bakhtin's essay is neatly framed by quotations from Lenin and from Plekhanov (preface to *Resurrection* vi, xix).

We do not at the moment know exactly when Bakhtin wrote these two prefaces, nor do we know the circumstances in which Eikhenbaum and/or Khalabaev, the editors of the series, invited him to contribute, nor do we know how he was allotted, or chose to write on, two of Tolstoy's post-crisis and most outspokenly Christian works (Christian, of course in Tolstoy's anti-ecclesiastical spirit). We know that at this period, during the late 1920s, Bakhtin was a member of a close theological group consisting of Pumpyansky, Yudina, M.I. Tubyansky (Bakhtin, *Pamyat'* 265-66); and there is evidence that all his life he was a practising believer. Certainly there is evidence from his early (pre-Leningrad) writings, as from his later writings, of interest in questions of religion. How, if at all, does Bakhtin in these other writings treat the two main questions raised in Tolstoy's works: man's need for God and the problem of evil?

Everyone can bring to mind Bakhtin's many remarks about the essence of life being dialogue (and absolute death correspondingly as the state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered). But there are levels of inwardness of this dialogue and at the most inward level Bakhtin wrote in one of his early essays:

Life (and consciousness) within oneself is nothing other than the coming into being of faith; pure self-consciousness of life is awareness of faith (that is awareness of need and of hope, of possibility and of the lack of self-sufficiency). Life that does not know the air it breathes is naive. (*Avtor* 127)

In fact at the most inward level the self comes to awareness of itself in recognition of the supreme other, God:

Without God, without faith in the absolute otherness, self-awareness and self-expression are impossible, and this is not, of course, because they would have no meaning in practice, but because trust in God is the immanent constructive factor of pure self-consciousness and self-expression. (*Avtor* 126)

Or, as he laconically noted in 1961: "God can get along without man, but man cannot do without God" ("K pererabotke" 309-10).

There is less direct evidence in the Bakhtin writings we have to date on the problem of evil. But the three Gospel references in "Author and Hero" shed some light on this question. They are: the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (*Luke* 18:10-14); the episode of the Canaanite women (*Matthew* 15:21-28); and the healing of the epileptic boy (*Mark* 9:17-27) (*Avtor* 127). The point in each of these episodes is the response of a human protagonist to God or to the person of Jesus: "God, have mercy on me a sinner" is the prayer of the publican; the Canaanite woman in faith begs a cure for her daughter, describing herself as one of the dogs that eat the childrens' scraps; and the father of the epileptic boy who cries out in faith, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." These are responses from the depths of the self, the depths in which, as Bakhtin wrote in the same essay, we sense our incompleteness and long for the miracle of a new birth, as we long for forgiveness in response to repentance (*Avtor* 112).

This essential inner self stands apart from the world: I for myself am not wholly connatural with the outer world, within me there always is something essential which I can oppose to the world, namely my inner activity, my subjectivity . . . this inner activity of mine is outside nature and outside the world, I always have an exit along the line of inner experience . . . there is a loophole through which I can save myself from being wholly a fact of nature. (*Avtor* 38)

Or, as he wrote in 1961, considering now the relationship of consciousness and materialism:

The discovery of the inner uniqueness of consciousness does not gainsay materialism. Consciousness is secondary, it is born at a certain stage in the development of the material organism, it is born objectively, and it dies (just as objectively) together with the material organism (sometimes, before it), it dies objectively. But consciousness has uniqueness and a subjective side; for itself in its own terms it cannot have either beginning or end. This subjective side is objective (but not object-like, not reified). (*K pererabotke* 315-16)

If we now return to look again at the Tolstoy prefaces I believe we can read them in another light: we may now be struck by the long passage that concludes the preface on the dramas and which deals with Tolstoy's inner religious quest and the struggle in it of two principles. Bakhtin sees Tolstoy as torn between two kinds of sectarianism: the protestant, property-owning Western, and the wandering homeless sects of Buddhism and Eastern religions, akin to the *stranniki*, the wandering pilgrims of old Russian. It is this latter principle which dominates in the last three of Tolstoy's dramas and the path chosen by the three main heroes of these plays, one which "might absolve them personally from participation in social evil," is "the great road of the eastern wandering ascetic" (preface to *Dramatic Works* x). And it is this "great road" of spiritual quest that in fact has the last word in the preface.

Similarly in the preface to *Resurrection* a long (disproportionately long?) section is devoted to summarizing Tolstoy's main religious message and Nekhlyudov's discovery of it:

What is the content of Tolstoy's thesis? It is not appropriate here to discuss Tolstoy's social-ethical and religious ideology. So we will touch on the content of this thesis in only a few words.

The novel opens with the Gospel texts (the epigraphs) and closes with them (Nekhlyudov's reading of the Gospel). All these texts are intended to emphasize one fundamental idea: that it is inadmissible for one man to judge another and also any activity intended to correct existing evil is inadmissible. People, sent into the world by the will of God, the master of life, must like workers do the will of their master. This will is expressed in the Commandments which forbid any violence against one's neighbour. Man may only act on himself, on his inner "I" (seeking the kingdom of God which is *within* us (all the rest will follow). (Bakhtin's emphasis) (preface to *Resurrection* xvii)

Nekhlyudov then realizes, and Bakhtin here quotes from the text of the novel, that

The only way to save oneself from that terrible evil from which people suffer was for people to admit always that they are guilty before God. . . . Now it was clear to him that all that terrible evil which he had seen in the prisons and gaols . . . arose only from the fact that people wanted to do the impossible: being evil to cure evil. (preface to *Resurrection* xvii-xviii)



Bakhtin's summary of the Tolstoyan message and his quotation of Nekhlyudov's awakening intrudes like a sudden "other voice" (an example of unidirectional two-voice discourse) into the sustained sociological-Marxist tenor of the preface. One cannot but be reminded of Bakhtin's own writings on faith and repentance. And it was presumably only a few months after writing the prefaces that Bakhtin was himself to write an appeal to the People's Commissariat of Health:

I have been sentenced to five years exile in the Solovetsky concentration camp. . . . In view of the fact that, given the state of my health, the sentence if left in force would undoubtedly be a sentence to a slow and agonizing death, I beg you to appoint a medical commission to examine the state of my health. (*Pamyat'* 267)

Prisons and jails were already a reality of Soviet life as they had been for Nekhlyudov's period. Pumpyansky had been arrested (albeit briefly the first time) and the Gulag was later to claim several of Bakhtin's close associates. "Being evil to cure evil": is this not Bakhtin's two-voice comment on the great social experiment that had failed? And should we not now re-read that declarative remark in the preface to the dramas that Tolstoy's writings, "like those of any other writer, were wholly determined of course by his period and by the historical disposition of the social-class forces in that period"; is not the dismissive "of course" a signal that we have here an example of vari-directional two-voice discourse, of parody in fact?

But then one may ask was Bakhtin really writing one thing and trying to say another? Condemning Tolstoy for his limited class ideology and yet presenting him as the mouthpiece for a message of vital importance and of universal validity: was this the inner sense of the recommendation that "our Soviet literature" could do well to take a lesson from Tolstoy? Perhaps the answers lie in two remarks of Bakhtin's. The first is from *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* where, commenting on one of Dostoevsky's anti-socialist and moralizing remarks from the *Diary of a Writer*, he says:

Dostoevsky's criticism cannot satisfy us and it suffers most of all from a failure to understand *the dialectic of freedom and necessity in the actions and consciousness of man*. (Our emphasis.) (*Problemy poetiki* 105)

The second is from the *Notebooks of 1970-1* where Bakhtin makes the remark:

The better a person understands his determinism (his thingness), the closer he is to understanding and realizing his true freedom. (*Estetika* 343)

It seems to me that the genius of Bakhtin was to explore both aspects of his dialectic to the full.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Solvo v romane" [Discourse in the Novel] (1934-5), in M. Bakhtin, *Voprosy literatury i estetiki* 72-233; "Formy vremeni i khronotopa v romane" [Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel] (1937-8), 234-407 (English translations of both these in M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*); "K pererabotke knigi o Dostoevskom," in M.M. Bakhtin, *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* 308-27.

<sup>2</sup> For convenience and out of respect to the memory of Pavel Nikolaevich ("illegally repressed" in 1938) we will refer to the books published under Medvedev's name as Medvedev's.

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