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## The semantics of *pity* and *zhalost'* in a literary context

### Introduction

Do the English and Russian emotion terms *pity* and *zhalost'* mean the same thing? What dimensions of meaning must be considered in investigating the relations between the two concepts? How might a comparative analysis of these terms help us better understand both the role of *zhalost'* as an organizing conceptual principle in Tolstoy's thought and fiction as well as the conventional use of the word *pity* to represent this principle in English translations of his texts?

I will attempt to answer these questions through a case study of the translation equivalents *pity* and *zhalost'*. In calling them translation equivalents, I am merely relying on evidence from bilingual dictionaries which, almost without exception and without qualification, give one term as the primary target-language equivalent or definition of the other (although other terms are often listed as secondary equivalents). I will demonstrate why a translation-equivalent mode of thinking about these emotion terms is wrong and how a better understanding of the similarities and differences between the meanings of the terms illuminates readings of Tolstoy in both the original Russian and English versions.

This study represents a contribution to the critical literature on Tolstoy both from the pedagogical perspective of shedding light on a problem in teaching Tolstoy in English translation as well as from the textual perspective. A study of the conventional conceptualization of the emotion *zhalost'* is crucial to understanding Tolstoy's aesthetic reconceptualization of it, but to my knowledge Tolstoyan *zhalost'* has not been systematically examined from this angle. To illustrate the critical relevance of this study from a textual perspective I will treat the representation of *zhalost'* in *The Death of Ivan*

*Il'ich* through a discussion of narrative details not mentioned in previous critical treatments of the story.

### The Comparative Semantic Analysis

In a note in his 1994 commentary to Maude's translation of *Resurrection*, Richard Gustafson comments on the centrality of *zhalost'* to Tolstoyan ethics and suggests that this term might better be translated into English as "empathetic compassion" or simply "feeling for" (Tolstoy 1994, 490-1; see also Gustafson 1986, chapter 4). The first part of this study will examine existing semantic analysis of *zhalost'* and *pity* in order to test Gustafson's intuition. For this examination, I have relied on an eclectic mix of sources from psychology (Oatley 1992, Fehr and Russell 1984, de Rivera 1977, Davitz 1969), philosophy (Ackerman 1995, Savan 1981, Cartwright 1981, Blum 1980, Solov'ev 1899), anthropology (Harré and Finlay-Jones 1986, Heclas 1986, Lutz 1986) and linguistics (Wierzbicka 1998a, Zalizniak and Levontina 1996, Levontina 1995, Apresian and Apresian 1993, Kövecses 1990, Iordanskaia 1974) as well as on the two explicit comparative analyses of the terms that I was able to find (Wierzbicka 1972, 64ff and 1992, 411; Apresian 1997). Some of the ideas which follow are also my own, at least a few of which derive from informal surveys that I conducted with native speakers of Russian and English. Based on the evidence, it seems that the relationship between *zhalost'* and *pity* can best be summarized through consideration of seven dimensions of meaning which concern both emotion concepts in general and these two emotion terms in particular.

1. The meaning of each term is affected considerably by the status or value of emotions and emotional expression in each culture. A succinct way of capturing the differing value of emotion for Russians and Americans has been suggested by Wierzbicka (1992) in her analysis of the key Russian word *dusha* ("soul") which she juxtaposes to the English concept *mind*. Whereas Russian *dusha* incorporates both emotion and thought, both spiritual and more prosaically psychological aspects of cognition, English *mind* narrowly profiles mental operations and is dismissive of emotional content. For Russians, emotions intermix with logical operations in the functioning of the *dusha*; for Americans, however, emotions are conceptually separate from the operations of the mind, even interfere with or distort "efficient" thinking, and

are exiled to the less profiled realm of the *heart*. If we understand these two concepts as folk representations of human cognition, then we see that *chuvstva* have a rather different operational status than *emotions* do (for elaboration of this point, see Wierzbicka 1999, chp. 1). The contrast in the way Russians and Americans conceptualize the metaphorical location and function of emotions in general naturally affects the value of individual emotion concepts like *zhalost'* and *pity*.

2. Russian *zhalost'* and related words are overwhelmingly more frequent in Russian than English *pity* and related words are in English. Using the data in three frequency dictionaries (two Russian and one English, all based on a corpus of one million words from a variety of text genres), we see that the frequency of four *zhal-* words (*zhalost'*, *zhalet'*, *zhalkii*, *zhal'*) is 225 and 219 while the frequency of three *pity* words (*pity*, *piteous*, *pitiful*) is just 19 (Zasorina 1977, Longrenn 1993, Kucera and Francis 1967). Even allowing for differences in the number of terms indexed, their multiple meanings, and for the less than exact nature of information provided by statistics on word frequencies, these results suggest a potentially significant difference in the relative cultural value of each concept.

3. Related to this difference in frequency is the degree to which each term can be said to be a good example of the general category of emotion concepts in each language. If emotions in a given culture form a network of meanings with some emotions being understood as good examples of the category of emotions (*love*, *anger*) and others as less prototypical concepts (*respect*), where do *zhalost'* and *pity* respectively fall? The concept *zhalost'* seems to be a much more prototypical emotion in Russian culture than *pity* is in American culture; in other words, *zhalost'* is a key cultural concept whereas *pity* is at best a marginal one.

4. Despite these differences, the terms do have considerable conceptual overlap. Both are stimulated by recognition of another's misfortune, and both are semantically complex concepts. Each, in fact, possesses two contrasting meanings, one of which is positive (*pity* as sympathy or *zhalost'* as love) and the other of which is negative (*pity* as belittlement or *zhalost'* interpreted as insulting or degrading). In modern usage, however, the meaning hierarchies of the terms are reversed, and the cultural value of the positive and negative senses of each term is different. The negative sense of English *pity* clearly

predominates while the positive sense is strongly associated with the religious sensibility of the emotion's experiencer. By contrast, in modern Russian the positive (or what Levontina (1995) calls the "neutral") sense of *zhalost'* seems to predominate. The negative sense, which has been termed *oskorbitel'naia zhalost'* ("insulting *zhalost'*"), which semantically overlaps with the dominant sense of *pity*, is nearly obligatory in the meaning of the derived form *zhalkii* (e.g. *zhalkii trus* or "pitiful coward") and also seems to be increasingly associated with the other *zhal-* words (including *zhalost'* itself). In my analysis, I will be comparing the dominant senses of the two terms: negative, non-religious *pity* and positive *zhalost'*. [1] I will also be limiting myself to those contexts in which one person feels pity toward another.

5. With these considerations in mind, it is clear that *pity* and *zhalost'* imply significantly different relationships between the experiencer (subject) and the object of the emotion. *Pity* tends to imply the superiority of subject over object; the object is assumed to be not like the subject. *Zhalost'* tends to assume an affinity or at least potential affinity between subject and object or, as Solov'ev (1899, 107) wrote, the *uravnenie* ("equalizing") of subject and object. Another way of stating this difference is to say that, in the Russian conceptualization, the subject may perceive the object as *svoi* ("one's own"), in the wide sense of the term, while in the English conceptualization the object is unambiguously *chuzhoi* ("foreign, alien") and that these relations are highlighted by the respective emotions. [2]

In modern English usage of "pity," the strong hierarchical relationship between subject and object is often realized as condescension toward or belittlement of the object. Typical reactions to being pitied include anger against the pitier or a feeling of having been grievously insulted. American activists for the disabled have come to reject an attitude of "institutionalized pity" which, they claim, patronizes the disabled by implying that there is something shamefully wrong with them (the object is *chuzhoi*) which they must try to overcome in order to be considered normal (*svoi*) (Shapiro 1993). Monica Lewinsky, of all people, perhaps best summarized this meaning of *pity* during an interview with Barbara Walters in a statement about her ex-friend Linda Tripp. Lewinsky said of Tripp: "I pity her. I would hate to be her. She is not me." [3]

Other evidence of English pity's association with conceptual distancing of subject from object comes from the use of the word *pity* in American English expressions like *pity-date*, *pity-vote*, and *pity-sex*. To my knowledge, these expressions have no direct equivalent in Russian: while in Russian many things can be done *iz zhalosti* ("from *zhalost'*"), the Russian phrasing has considerably less expressive value than the English nominalized expression. The English expressions presuppose one person's power to grant a "pity-something" to another and imply mild to strong condescension intermixed with some genuine concern for the object's state. This is a productive phrase type in American English (for example, *pity-dinner*, *pity-present*, *pity-kiss*, etc.), and it must be assumed that this usage of *pity* reflects the word's core semantics. In a structural analysis of English emotion terms, de Rivera (1977) also argues that *pity* is closely related to *contempt*, *scorn*, *anger*, *annoyance*, *impatience*, *disgust*, and *hate* as an emotion which metaphorically implies the movement of the object away from the subject. This interpretation of *pity* is similar to Levontina's negative *zhalost'*, which can be stimulated by *ottalkivaiushchaia slabost'* ("repulsive weakness") and inspires *otvrashchenie* ("aversion, disgust") (1995, 222).

In my informal survey of native speakers, Russian reactions to being pitied varied, in keeping with the semantic duality of *zhalost'*, but overall positive responses were much greater in the Russian sample than the English. One Russian respondent indicated that she would react to being "pitied" by feeling *teplee na dushe, legche* ["warmer in the soul, lighter"], a response hardly imaginable in the English context.

In fact, *zhalost'* generally indicates not a distancing or contrasting of subject and object, but a closeness between them. To this extent it has ties, as Wierzbicka has argued, with the Russian concepts of *tovarishch po neschast'iu* ("comrade in misfortune") and *sud'ba* ("fate"). There is an implicit recognition that a misfortune which could befall others might easily happen to you as well because *sud'ba* levels the playing field. [4] This is in direct contrast with the American cultural perspective, in which the role of chance and fate in one's life is minimized to the point of being considered irrelevant, and the burden of personal responsibility for both one's good and bad fortune is correspondingly exaggerated.

6. This consideration leads naturally into my sixth point: *pity* and *zhalost'* encapsulate remarkably different perspectives on suffering. Cartwright (1981) argues that pity tends to imply indifference to the object's situation and minimal involvement on the subject's part in the object's misfortune. At best, pity is merely polite recognition of another's suffering; often it includes a judgmental component which finds the object at fault for his or her own misfortune. In the pragmatic American context, the acceptable response to suffering is the adoption of practical measures to fix the problem by, for example, extricating oneself from the unfortunate circumstances which cause the suffering. Failure to do so may reflect badly on the sufferer.

In the Russian context, the object is not blamed for the misfortune since certain kinds of misfortune are not viewed in terms of their potential to be fixed. *Zhalost'* is an emotion which expresses the fraternity of living things confronted with misfortune, and it is typically stimulated either by misfortune in general (which lacks concrete embodiment) or by specific misfortunes for which no one in particular is to blame and which may not be, pragmatically speaking, fixable (sickness, old age, extremely burdensome social conditions). In fact, if it is strongly felt that the person who is suffering is responsible for his or her own unfortunate circumstances, *zhalost'* may not be an appropriate emotional reaction at all. [5]

Virginia Woolf saw the suffering-*zhalost'* relationship as one of the key themes of Russian literature and one of the most difficult for a Western reader to comprehend: "The assumption that in a world bursting with misery the chief call upon us is to understand our fellow-sufferers[:] this is the cloud which broods above the whole of Russian literature, which lures us from our own parched brilliancy and scorched thoroughfares to expand in its shade" (1925, 245). This particular distinction is reminiscent of the different evaluations of another pair of English-Russian translation equivalents: *self-assurance* and *samouverennost'*. In keeping with the American emphasis on individual self-reliance, self-assurance or self-confidence is unambiguously positive, perhaps even necessary for social or economic success. In Russian, *samouverennost'* has distinctly negative connotations and is closer in tone to English arrogance: too self-assured and therefore exhibiting a disdain or disregard for others. [6]

In the Russian context there seems to be an assumption that totally self-assured people are self-promoting at the expense of others.

Unlike *pity*, *zhalost'* may also include an active desire on the part of the subject to attempt to alleviate the object's suffering. Solov'ev (1899, 97) writes: [*Zh*]alost' priamo pobuzhdaet nas k deistviu s tsel'iu izbavit' drugoe sushchestvo ot stradaniia, ili pomoch emu ["*Zhalost'* prompts us to direct action with the goal of freeing the other creature from suffering or to help him"], although he recognizes that the conduct inspired by *zhalost'* may be purely internal and does not have to be realized in practical action. The desire prompted by *zhalost'* to alleviate another's suffering seems to be less oriented toward practical considerations than it is expressive of the subject's "feeling for" and possibly even co-suffering with the object: for example, the subject might experience a desire to reach out and stroke the sufferer's head. Wierzbicka (1992, 411) has pointed out that this kind of feeling for another living being in misfortune can be represented in Russian not only lexically but also grammatically through the suffix *-en'kii* (her example is the word *p'ianen'kii*: drunk, but viewed by a non-judgmental, empathetic speaker who has "warm" pity for the person). To Wierzbicka's observation might be added that the same perspective can be achieved in certain syntactic contexts by use of the so-called dative of interest (or empathy) (Cienki 1993). [7]

7. A final dimension involved in comparing the meanings of *pity* and *zhalost'*, and a significant one for Tolstoyan *zhalost'*, concerns how each concept is represented metaphorically. Prototypical emotion concepts tend to be strongly metaphorized (Kövecses 1990), and it is not surprising that pity, a marginal example of the category of English emotion concepts, is only weakly metaphorized (e.g., "the springs of pity in one's heart"). *Zhalost'*, however, along with emotions like *strakh* ("fear") and *otrashchenie* ("disgust"), has central metaphoric representations (Apresian and Apresian 1993). [8] *Zhalost'* is understood metaphorically via its representation as physical pain; it is an emotion in which the *reaktsiia tela [...] okazyvaetsia kliuchom k tomu, chto proiskhodit v dushe cheloveka* ["the reaction of the body... turns out to be key to what is happening in the person's soul"] (Apresian and Apresian 1993, 33). Russians speak of *ostraiia zhalost'*, *zhguchaia zhalost'*, *muchitel'naia zhalost'*, *nesterpimaia zhalost'*, and *shchemiashchee chuvstvo zhalosti*, and in the same way they might speak of physical pain (*bol'*). Compare

Solov'ev's association of *zhalost'* and pain (1899, 60): *zhalost' sostoit voobshche v tom, chto dannyi sub''ekt oshchushchaet chuzhoe stradanie ili potrebnost', t. e. otzyvaetsia na nix bolee ili menee boleznenno, proiavljaia, takim obrazom, svoiu solidarnost' s drugimi* ["*zhalost'* generally consists in a given subject's feeling another's suffering or need, that is, the subject experiences a more or less pained reaction, demonstrating in this way his solidarity with others"]. In a similar manner, one dictionary of Russian synonyms defines *zhalost'* as *chuvstvo dushevnoi boli* ["feeling of soulful pain"] (1970, 330).

Apresian and Apresian note that *zhalost'*, like *bol'*, can take the predicate verbs *kol'nut'* (prick; cf. *v boku kolet* "to feel a pricking sensation in one's side"), *pronzit'* (pierce; cf. *pronzit' shtykom* "to pierce with a bayonet"), and *shchemit'* (press or pinch; cf. *shchemit grud'*, *shchemit dushu* "to press on or pinch one's chest or soul"). One can also be *do boli* or even *do smerti zhalko liudej* ("to feel *zhalost'* for people to the point of pain or death"). The concept *pity* has no equivalent conventional means of representation; the phrases "pierced by pity" or "pained with pity" are nonconventional expressions which seem to considerably overstate the intensity of the feeling.

One is tempted to see etymological support for the conventional representation of *zhalost'* as physical pain by associating the *zhal-* root in *zhalost'* with the *zhal-* root in *zhalo* ("sting") and *zhalit'* ("to sting"), thereby embodying the emotional feeling in the experience of being stung. [9] By contrast, *pity* is, etymologically speaking, a form of the word "piety," which attests to its strong religious connotations and excludes the possibility of an original sense deriving from unmediated sensual experience in and of the world. [10]

This comparative sketch of the meanings of *pity* and *zhalost'* can be profitably summarized from four perspectives. Each perspective is intended to bring out different dimensions of the distinction between the concepts. Taken together, along with the particular points discussed above, they indicate that *pity* and *zhalost'* are, at least in some respects, nearly antonymous concepts.

1. Assertive vs. presumptive aspects of meaning: Zalizniak (1992; see also Zalizniak and Levontina 1996) has made a distinction between the assertive (explicitly stated or foregrounded) aspect of a word's meaning and the presumptive (implied or



backgrounded) aspect. [11] This distinction can be used to capture a primary difference in semantic profiling between *pity* and *zhalost'*. English *pity* asserts or foregrounds the contrast between subject and object while merely presuming (politely recognizing) the suffering of the object; positive *zhalost'*, on the other hand, profiles the misfortune of the object and backgrounds the objective difference between subject and object, sometimes to the extent that it is rendered wholly irrelevant (considered, for example, merely the result of the caprices of fate). *Pity* is a subject-focused emotion to the extent that it highlights the good fortune of the subject by juxtaposing it with the misfortune of the object [12]; positive *zhalost'* seems to neither heavily subject- nor object-focused, but rather profiles the solidarity of living things created by misfortune. This perspective on the meaning of these emotion terms provides a framework in which to motivate the polysemy of both as well as the observed shift in the meaning of the Russian term from positive to "insulting" since polysemy and meaning shifts are potential in the interplay between the assertive and presumptive components of each term's meaning.

2. Instinctive vs. normative emotions: Relying on C. S. Peirce's sign theory, Savan (1981) proposed a threefold classification of emotions ranging from natural instinctive emotions through moral emotions and culminating in the so-called logical sentiments. The distinction between the first two classes is relevant to a comparison of *pity* and *zhalost'*.

Natural instinctive emotions are those most clearly associated with the instincts of feeding and breeding (such as *fear*, *joy*, *grief*). They are emotions which find their objects without learning or conditioning, and their natural goal is security, rest, restoration of peace of mind and equilibrium. Moral emotions, the second class, are socially conditioned or normative emotions. They are learned "through experience, through participation in specific human relationships" (Savan 1981, 331). To illustrate the difference, Savan offers the distinction between *anger*, an instinctive emotion, and *indignation*, its moral or normative equivalent. It seems clear that positive *zhalost'* comes much closer to being understood by Russians as a natural instinctive emotion while *pity* is fully normative, what Savan terms a "practical" sign. In fact, *pity* has been classified as a "Fortune-of-others" emotion: "What is at issue [in these emotions] can best be described as *relative* advantages and disadvantages enjoyed by the self vis-à-vis

the other [...] Since people cannot help but evaluate the fortunes of others at least in part with reference to their own situations, this is a perfectly reasonable conclusion" (Ortony et al 1988, 104). The same could not be said as a succinct characterization of positive *zhalost'*.

This distinction harmonizes with Solov'ev's classification of *zhalost'* among the three *pervichnye nraivstvennye chuvstva* ("primary moral feelings") and his discussion of it as a generalized form of the instinctive love of parent (mother) for child (1899, 62). [13] It also helps us understand the remarkably different perspectives on suffering encoded in each term. *pity* profiles the practical aspects of the object's suffering and implies, from the viewpoint of social norms, the object's responsibility for the circumstances. *Zhalost'*, however, is more of a spontaneous outpouring of concern for another's misfortune; it is a feeling which arises merely because the object is suffering, and the object's control over the suffering is not a relevant factor in the stimulation of the feeling. Levontina (1995, 220), for instance, calls *zhalost'* the most elemental and the least controllable of the four Russian synonyms for *pity* and *compassion* (*zhalost'*, *sostradanie*, *sochuvstvie*, *uchastie*). It is a *neposredstvennaia reaktsiia dushi na chuzhoe stradaniia* ["unmediated reaction of the soul to another's suffering"] (1995, 222).

This distinction came out clearly in the surveys I conducted. For example, when asked to invent a probable context based on the sentence "He's a pitiful sight," English speakers talked, typically in a judgmental tone, about homeless drunks, bums, and drug addicts; the "pitiful" aspect of these people was their failure to live up to some socially acceptable standard of appearance and conduct. Russian speakers, asked to flesh out a context from the equally bare (although not equivalent) sentence *U nego takoi zhalkii vid* ["He has such a pitiful look"], provided a sympathetic description of the object's situation or emotional state which might justify a *zhalkii vid*: the object was like a *pobitaia sobaka, glaza takie grustnye i bol'shie* ["a dog that had been beaten, with such big, sad eyes"], the object *nikak ne voskrutitsia iz etoi situatsii* ["will not manage to extricate himself from the situation"]. American evaluations stressed the different social statuses of subject and object (or the contrast between the object's pitifulness and his or her potential to be otherwise) while Russian assessments merely attempted to capture the nature and quality of the object's suffering.

An evaluative difference of similar character was elicited by reactions to the sentences "He smiled pitifully" and its lexico-syntactic Russian equivalent *On zhalko ulybnulsia*. Almost all English speakers believed the subject was trying, unsuccessfully, to cover up something he had done wrong or at least to soften the reaction of the person witnessing the smile who knew of his mistake (a teenager caught smoking marijuana by his mother). The smile both admits the violation of some behavioral norm and functions as a plea for mercy; the smile is "pitiful" because both people involved recognize the smiler's guilt and consequently the moral superiority of the one (the mother) over the other (the pot-smoking son). While Russian speakers indicated that a guilty (*vinovataia*) smile was not excluded, they gave preference, barring more contextual details, to a reading which focused on "feeling for" the person smiling because of the person's discomfort in a difficult situation. For example, he overheard someone say something nasty about him and reacts by smiling "pitifully."

It could be said that, in its ideal form, *zhalost'* is naturally assumed to exist as a basic relational principle among members of a given community and is not dependent on the social duty or contractual responsibility which members of the community may feel toward one another. The non-normative nature of *zhalost'*, in its ideal form, may explain why explicit verbalization of the emotion tends to be taken as insulting (Levontina 1995, 220). Explicit verbalization of a feeling naturally assumed to exist already may be interpreted as an intention to assert the presumptive aspect of the term's meaning. In the case of *zhalost'*, the presumptive aspect highlights the contrast between subject and object, thus potentially belittling the object or profiling the subject's superiority over the object. This distinction may also explain why *pity* can arguably be felt only for other humans while *zhalost'* may be felt for animals (*zhalost' k bezdomnym sobakam* ["*zhalost'* for homeless dogs"]) and marginally even for vegetation (*zhalost' k slomannomu derevtsu* ["*zhalost'* to a broken tree"] in Levontina 1995, 223): the scope of the former, but not the latter, is circumscribed by its socially normative character.

3. A third way of summarizing the comparative analysis is by examining the relationship between *pity* and *compassion*, on the one hand, and *zhalost'* and *sostradanie*, on the other. According to Blum (1980), *compassion* is not mere abstract awareness of another's suffering but a complex emotional attitude toward another which usually

involves imaginative dwelling on the other's misfortune, an active regard for his good, and a view of the other as a fellow human being. With *pity*, one remains aloof from the other's suffering; the suffering is what fundamentally distinguishes that person from oneself. *Compassion* is therefore life-affirming, *pity* is not. The Russian translation equivalents of *pity* and *compassion* – *zhalost'* and *sostradanie* – tend rather to be taken as synonyms of one another. Iordanskaia claims that the latter is a narrow synonym to the former to the extent that *zhalost'* is stimulated by any evil whereas *sostradanie* is specifically stimulated by another's suffering (Iordanskaia 1974, 103). Confirmation of the synonym status of these two Russian terms can be found in Karaulov's 1994 Russian word-association dictionary, where *zhalost'* is given as the second most common reaction to the stimulus-word *sostradanie*. [14]

4. Finally, I would like to suggest that a brief examination of conventional antonyms for each term also succinctly illustrates the distinction between them. When covertly asked for an antonym for *pity* in an informal survey I conducted, native English speakers typically answered *respect* or *admiration*, word choices which confirm the belittling or patronizing meaning of *pity* in modern usage. Given the same context in Russian, Russian respondents chose the antonyms *prezrenie* ("contempt"), *otvrashchenie* ("disgust"), *prenebrezhenie* ("scorn, disdain, disregard"), and *ravnodushie* ("indifference"), thereby underscoring the empathetic aspects of *zhalost'* and at the same time rendering positive *zhalost'* and *pity* themselves near antonyms of one another. Iordanskaia (1974, 103) suggests the word *zloradstvo* (compare Germ. *Schadenfreude*) as an antonym to *zhalost'*, that is, malicious delight in another's misfortune.

#### The Representation of *zhalost'* in *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*

With a comparative sketch of the meanings of *pity* and *zhalost'* behind us, we are now in a position to take up the question of the representation of *zhalost'* in Tolstoy. There are two aspects to this question. First, how does Tolstoy's aesthetic reconceptualization of *zhalost'* differ from the conventional conceptualization of the term? In other words, if positive *zhalost'*, in its conventional sense, already is an *osobenno znachimoe slovo* ("particularly significant word") for Russians (Shmelev 1996), then how does Tolstoy extend or elaborate it to aesthetic effect? And, second, in what

ways does the English translation fail to capture Tolstoy's aesthetic reconceptualization or inadequately detail, in Jackson's words (1997), Ivan's journey from *uzhas* ("horror") to *zhalost*?

Reading the story carefully with the conventional representation of *zhalost*' in mind does result in a new perspective on three related elements in it: the theme of Ivan Il'ich as Everyman, the motif of touch, and the relationship between Ivan's pain and his spiritual recovery. I will briefly discuss the first, offer a new perspective from which to detail the second, and argue for the conceptual naturalness of the last given conventional metaphoric representations of *zhalost*' in Russian.

As I noted earlier, conventional *zhalost*', in direct opposition to *pity*, comes close to implying the equality of subject and object in the face of misfortune brought about by the twists and turns of fate; at the very least, the contrast between the relative positions of subject and object is not explicitly asserted. *Zhalost*' levels distinctions, a component of its conventional meaning that Tolstoy and Solov'ev logically extend, whereas *pity* asserts them. We might briefly compare Tolstoy with Dickens in this regard. Both might be called *pity*-writers, but Tolstoyan *zhalost*' levels social, economic, and other worldly distinctions among the characters; it requires seeing through (penetrating) the societal "encrustations" of difference. In Dickens, *pity* is also a key concept but operates within an existing system of social and economic difference; the emotion cuts across these hierarchies but does not neutralize them.

In *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*, Tolstoy levels the characters both by depicting Ivan Il'ich as Everyman and then underscoring this depiction by deliberately detailing similarities between him and all the other major characters in his social milieu (Petr Ivanovich and his other colleagues, Praskov'ia Fedorovna, Schwartz, his son, Liza's fiancé, the doctors). Ivan Il'ich's status as Everyman has been discussed elsewhere, as have many of the similarities between him and the other characters, but let me mention just one small detail which is indicative of the lengths to which Tolstoy obviously went to achieve a levelling effect. To the list of things which link Petr Ivanovich with Ivan Il'ich (starting with Petr's patronymic) must be added the subtle connection established through Tolstoy's use of the word *vintit*' in two different senses. It is first used in chapter I in reference to Petr Ivanovich's desire to leave the funeral early to "play vint." The text

notes, ominously: *Vidno, Petru Ivanovichu byla ne sud'ba vintit' nynche vecherom* ("Clearly it was not Petr Ivanovich's fate to play vint that evening"). [15] Late in the story, the word is used again, but this time in reference to a "tightening" or "screwing down" of Ivan Il'ich's pain: *Chto-to sdelalos' novoe: stalo vintit' i streliat' i sdavlivat' dykhanie* ("Something new happened: there began a tightening, a shooting, and suffocation") (XI). This late detail suggests that Petr Ivanovich's ultimate fate, like the fate of all the other vint players, will be the same as Ivan Il'ich's: an eventual tightening of the pain. The word also suggests that the painful sensation experienced by Ivan is somehow related to the card game, which is an accurate description: by chapter XI Ivan Il'ich has come to associate the pain with how he lived his life and vint is as emblematic of his pleasant and decorous life as anything.

The motif of touch is a significant one in the story and calls to mind that one possible pragmatic realization of positive *zhalost'*, perhaps even a typical one, is the instinctive desire to reach out to the suffering object and provide physical comfort. Gutsche has noted the systematic redefinition (de-conventionalization) of words which takes place throughout the story (1999, 81), and Jahn has argued persuasively that the artistic thrust of the story is dependent on the series of reversals which result from the competition between the conventional plot or text and underlying subtexts (1993, 1999). The motif of touch is realized in both redefinition and reversal, beginning with the conventionalized use of the word *tronut* ("touched") in the initial chapter:

*Petr Ivanovich znal, chto kak tam nado bylo krestit'sia, tak zdes' nado bylo pozhat' ruku, vzdoxnut' i skazat': "pover'te!" I on tak i sdelal. I sdelay eto, pochuvstvoval, chto rezul'tat poluchilsia zhelaemyi: chto on tronut i ona tronuta.* ["Petr Ivanovich knew that, just as it had been the right thing to cross himself there, what he had to do here was press her hand, sigh, and say, "Believe me!" So he did all this and as he did it he felt that the desired result had been achieved: that he was touched and she was also touched"] (I)

Here touching is manifested in a formulaic social ritual with the characters playing their assigned parts in the high-society play that is the sum of their lives. The characters are

manipulated, marionette-like, by the social principles which give their life a mere semblance of meaning.

The characters in the story are less souls than mere bodily vessels, less people than objects, like Ivan Il'ich himself becomes in chapter VIII when his body is listed in an inventory of the sickroom's decorative accessories (*ta zhe komnata, te zhe kartiny, gardiny, oboi, sklianki i to zhe svoe boliashchee stradaiushchee telo* ["the same room, the same pictures, curtains, wall-paper, medicine bottles, and the same aching suffering body"]). A case could be made that the people in this initial "touching" scene are even less alive than some of the objects in the room, for example, the *buntuiushchii puf* ["rebellious/rebellious couch"] which had engaged Petr Ivanovich in a spirited struggle just before the above passage. The reduction of people to objects in a world without genuine touching is reminiscent of a passage from Solov'ev in which he describes the consequences of a *bezzahalostnyi svet* ["world without *zhalost*"] (1899, 107): *Sushchestvo iavliaetsia tol'ko veshch'iu, zhivoe – mertvym, odushevlennoe – bezdushnym, srodnoe mne – chuzhim* ["Beings are just things, that which is alive is dead, the animate is the inanimate, that which is close to me is alien"].

The above "touching" passage also introduces another touch-related theme in the story, namely, the subtext of hand-shaking or reaching out a hand toward another. There are repetitions of the phrases *pozhat' ruku* ["to shake one's hand"] and *dat' ruku* ["to give one's hand"] at the funeral, which denote merely conventional forms of social interaction. As the story progresses, however, Ivan Il'ich's acts of extending his hand to others become more meaningful. In chapter IV, after Ivan Il'ich's vint partner pushes the cards in his direction so he does not have to exert himself in reaching out, Ivan Il'ich thinks: *Chto zh on dumaet, chto ia tak slab, chto ne mogu protianut' daleko ruku?* ["What does he think – that I'm too weak to extend my hand that far?"], a phrase which points to both the literal text (the card game) and the metaphorical subtext of Ivan Il'ich's real (spiritual) sickness (his inability to reach out to others). Chapter VIII finds him reaching out (*podat'*) a hand to his servant and shaking hands with the doctor, both of which occur in the context of his realization that his loneliness is horrible (*odnomu uzhasno tosklivo*).

The touch motif is inseparable from the motif of alienation or enclosure which is realized most vividly in Ivan Il'ich's attempts to screen off awareness of all

unpleasantries and interpersonal difficulties, to wall himself up in his own well-regulated but intensely lonely world. Ivan Il'ich is *nepronitsaemyi* ["impenetrable"] to Praskov'ia Fedorovna's moods (II), the word implying both that his shields cannot be pierced (although the pain is later able to "penetrate all of his shields" (VI)) and that he is also incapable of understanding her feelings. The second implication follows from a metaphorical meaning of the verb *pronikat'/proniknut'*, which is also present in the English verbal equivalent "to penetrate": *poniat', razgadat', uglubivshis', vniknuv vo chto-nibud'* ["to understand, guess by having gone deeply into something"]. Tolstoy makes this metaphorical meaning explicit in his assertion that Ivan Il'ich *nichego ne mog poniat'* ["couldn't understand anything"] when sympathy (*uchastie*) was demanded of him during the illnesses of his wife and children. Ivan Il'ich's unwillingness in his conventional life to be "touched" by the misfortune of others close to him is foreshadowed by Petr Ivanovich's reaction to the corpse's *napominanie zhivym* ["reminder to the living"] at the funeral, which "seemed to him out of place or, at least, something which didn't touch him [*do nego nekasaiushchimsia*]" (I).

A key phrase in the story related to the touch motif, which has not been made much of in the critical literature to date, is Ivan Il'ich's own description of the bruise which marks the onset of his illness. Ivan Il'ich says (III), outwardly referring merely to his physical symptoms but at the same time unwittingly diagnosing his spiritual illness, "*Kogda tronesh' – bol'no*", which literally translates as "When you touch, it hurts," but which is unfortunately concretized in English translations ("When you touch it, it hurts"). Ivan Il'ich will soon learn to understand this principle in reverse: that touch is the only thing which stops the pain. He first discovers this in chapter V when he touches himself (*on stal shchupat' bol'* ["he began to feel (touch) the pain"]) and the touch seems to ward off the pain (*naoshchup' ne bol'no* ["it was not painful to the touch"]). [16] Generalizing this discovery in chapter VII, Ivan Il'ich asks Gerasim to hold up his legs, and the pain is surprisingly alleviated. Tolstoy subtly suggests that it is physical contact with Gerasim, and not the raised position of his legs, which alleviates the pain: Ivan Il'ich seems to not feel the pain (*Ivanu Il'ichu pokazalos', chto v etom polozhenii on sovsem ne chuvstvet bolii* ["In that position, it seemed to Ivan Il'ich that he could not feel the pain at all"]), which does not mean that the physical pain has in fact ceased, while Gerasim holds his



legs (*poka Gerasim derzhal ego nogi*). In the first use of this latter phrase, Gerasim has in fact been holding Ivan Il'ich's legs only to place them in a raised position on a pillow, and when he puts them down on the pillow (*kogda on opustil ix*), Ivan feels worse. Contact with Gerasim is therefore what prompts Ivan Il'ich to lose awareness of the pain, to feel a literal lightening (*oblegchenie*) of the pain which is caused by the heaviness of his loneliness (*mne tiazhelo odnomu*).

The motif of touch culminates in the last chapter with Ivan Il'ich's hand accidentally touching his son and his son raising his father's hand to his lips to kiss it. The wording here when the son *prizhal ego ruku k gubam* ["pressed Ivan's hand to his lips"] is a clear variant on the handshaking motif (*pozhat' ruku*) of the initial chapter as well as what might be called the *zh-* phonetic motif: touching – realized in the verbs *pozhat'* and *prizhat'*, and specifically in their masculine singular past tense forms *pozhal* and *prizhal* - is the start, phonetically and conceptually, of *zhalost'*. [17]

During the course of Ivan Il'ich's illness, touch is his medicine, but the medicine does not effectively cure him until the pain has made him receptive to its curative potential. How, specifically, does the pain prepare him for recovery? How, paradoxically, does the pain resurrect him from death to life? [18] Jahn has argued that Ivan Il'ich is effectively dead by the end of chapter VI and begins his recovery (his resurrection) from chapter VII (1993, 59); the key to understanding his progression in this regard is to learn to read "the apparently straightforward narrative metaphorically" (Jahn, 1993, 62). Following this principle, I would like to suggest that Tolstoy realizes Ivan Il'ich's recovery, and makes it believable, by aesthetically exploiting the conventional metaphoric representation of the emotion *zhalost'* as physical pain. Ivan Il'ich's literal pain becomes a sign of his metaphoric illness, a lack of understanding of positive *zhalost'*. This is a direct reversal of the normal process of feeling, in which the emotion *zhalost'* felt for a suffering object stimulates symptoms of physical discomfort in the emotion's experiencer. Ivan Il'ich, on the other hand, progresses from physical discomfort to *zhalost'*. In this sense, Ivan Il'ich lives emotionally backwards, resurrected to life from death by learning to feel *zhalost'* for others through his own symptomatic physical suffering.

The details here are quite telling: the workings of the pain are described in the same terms as the bodily manifestations of the emotion *zhalost'* and these schematic representations of both pain and *zhalost'* resonate throughout the text in significant ways. To demonstrate this, I will consider, in turn, three symptomatic manifestations of *zhalost'* and their connection with Ivan Il'ich's pain: first, pressing or pinching (*shchemit'*); second, piercing (*pronzit'*); and, third, pricking or stabbing (*kol'nut'*). Tolstoy does not make use of any of these particular words in the story (that is, he does not represent them lexically), but he does make use of the physical sensations associated with the words (he represents them image-schematically).

The sensation of pressing or pinching which is conventionally associated with *zhalost'* via the word *shchemit'* is also the earliest manifestation of Ivan Il'ich's pain, described in chapter IV as a *postoiannaia tiazhest' v boku* ["constant heaviness in his side"]. The wording is significant: dictionary entries for the verb *shchemit'* exemplify it with the conventional phrase *shchemit v boku* ["to feel pressure in the side"] and also indicate that it can be used metaphorically in phrases *shchemit dushu* ["to press on or pinch the soul"] and *shchemit serdtse* ["to press on or pinch the heart"]. In the story, this physical sensation of Ivan Il'ich's pain is later metaphorically manifested as the "weight" of his loneliness: it is his isolation from others which really constricts him. His isolation is also explicitly associated with social convention given that the one thing which "pinches" him to the point of suffocation is his clothing, a blatant emblem of all the false social encrustations surrounding him: *On stonal i metalsia i obdergival na sebe odezhdu. Emu kazalos', chto ona dushila i davila ego* ["He groaned and tossed about, and pulled at his clothing, which seemed to him to be choking and stifling him"] (XI). To cure himself, Ivan Il'ich seeks *oblegchenie* (literally, a "lightening, release from the pressure") from both his physical and later spiritual sufferings: we are told, for example, in chapter VII that nothing *oblegchaet ego* ["lightens/eases him"] until the arrival of Gerasim and his healing touch. The pressure theme culminates in the final chapter, when Ivan Il'ich arrives at an understanding of genuine *zhalost'* by generalizing the painful weight of his own sufferings to those of others, and the weight is dramatically lifted from him: *I vdrug emu stalo iasno, chto to, chto tomilo ego i ne vykhodilo, chto vdrug vse vykhodit srazu, i s dvukh storon, s desiati storon, so vsekh storon. Zhalko ikh, nado sdelat', chtoby im ne*

*bol'no bylo*. ["And suddenly it grew clear to him that what had been oppressing him and would not leave him was all dropping away at once from two sides, from ten sides, from all sides. He felt *zhalost'* for them, he must act so that they would not feel pain."]

Ivan Il'ich's physical pain is less associated with a piercing sensation than it is with pressure, although we can recall here the use of the verb *vintit'* to describe an increase in his pain as well as the possible associations between piercing and the kind of aching denoted by the verb *nyt'*, which is used more than once to describe his physical suffering. Piercing is, however, closely associated with the metaphoric representation of Ivan Il'ich's pain, which Tolstoy pronominalizes as *ona* and which he represents as a blazing light. [19] *It* pierces or shines through (*pronikaet/prosvechivaet cherez*) all of Ivan Il'ich's defensive shields; it interrupts his daily routine and yet wants nothing from him except that he stop what he is doing and look at it. If we accept the metaphoric connection between *zhalost'* and the physical sensation *pronzit'*, we can clearly understand the force of Tolstoy's image: *it* is the pain, which by that point in the story is symbolically understood to be Ivan's false life (*lozh', lozhnaia zhizn'*), but it is also simultaneously – via the piercing component – associated with *zhalost'* or the truth (*pravda*) which Ivan must learn to overcome the pain. Ivan Il'ich is forced only to look at it, that is, to look simultaneously at both the falseness of his life and the truth of genuine *zhalost'*, both represented by the pain, and therefore to make the connection that the former can be overcome only by accepting the truth of the latter. The pronominalized pain is the nexus of the story's major reversal.

While the third sensation associated with *zhalost'*, pricking or stabbing, does not figure in the representation of Ivan Il'ich's physical pain at all, it is embodied in his spiritual suffering through the *ona* image. *It* stabs at Ivan Il'ich's eyes in exact imitation of the Russian proverb *Pravda glaza kolet* ["Truth stabs the eyes"]. [20] One Russian dictionary indicates that this proverb is typically used when someone demonstrates an "unwillingness to listen to an unpleasant truth" [*nezhelanie slushat' nepriiatnuiu pravdu*], which is a word-for-word paraphrase of Ivan Il'ich's problem.

## Conclusion

We have considered in some detail the relationships between the conventional meaning of Russian *zhalost'* and three thematic components of the *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*: Ivan Il'ich's status as Everyman, the motif of touch, and the pain/*zhalost'* relationship. Where do these considerations leave readers of the English translation?

The English translation certainly eliminates the *zhal-* phonetic motif, but this is not by any means the most significant omission. Considerably more important is that the conventional Russian association between positive *zhalost'* and a potential desire on the part of the subject to reach out and alleviate the object's suffering – by physical comfort, by touch – is also lacking for English readers of the text; in English *pity*, the subject is more likely to feel disgust for the object and experience a desire to physically turn away. The most difficult aspect of reading the text in English translation centers on the symbolic import of Ivan Il'ich's pain. Readers of the translation lack a sense of the Russian pain-pity relationship since *pity* is not symptomatically manifested (at least not conventionally) in physical discomfort. In other words, Russian *zhalost'* vividly suggests a folk model of human cognition and interpersonal relations which English *pity* does not. English readers are in the difficult position of trying to understand the value of Ivan's suffering without having access to a conventional conceptual link between his suffering and the emotion which ultimately neutralizes it.

In his book *The Art of the Novel*, Milan Kundera (1988) suggests that the aim of the novel is to explore the existential possibilities of the human condition. The novel is an exercise in actualizing possible worlds, which is achieved by redefining or reconceptualizing key words which then serve as thematic windows on the world the novelist wishes to describe. A key to understanding the meaning of both the original Russian and the English translation of *The Death of Ivan Il'ich* is recognizing Tolstoy's reconceptualization the emotion term which we have been discussing. The conceptual starting-points for approaching this aesthetic redefinition are, however, significantly different for readers of the text in each language. For Russians, the move from a conventional understanding of *zhalost'* to Tolstoyan *zhalost'* represents a small and aesthetically believable conceptual shift, a natural development of the Russian emotion's semantic potential. For readers of the English translation, however, the move from conventional *pity* to Tolstoy's reconceptualization of it may very well be less of a shift

than a dramatic conceptual leap and less a matter of aesthetic verisimilitude than a good old-fashioned leap of faith. The fact that Ivan Il'ich is, both literally and figuratively, *do boli, do smerti zhalko liudei* ("unto pain, unto death pitying of people") resonates naturally in the Russian soul in a way that it does not, and perhaps cannot do, in the English mind.

## NOTES

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1. Levontina (1995, 227) suggests that *oskorbitel'naia zhalost'* may well be due to the "cult of the strong [*kul't sily*]" during the Soviet period and through which empathetic feeling for the weak became associated with humiliation or degradation (*zhalost' unizhaet cheloveka*: "*zhalost'* degrades people"). Recent social and economic changes may be further undermining the positive sense of the term (Mondry and Taylor 1998 and also Wierzbicka 1998b for an interesting rejoinder). It is interesting to note that, of all the treatments that I consulted, only Levontina's analysis strongly profiles *oskorbitel'naia zhalost'*; other semantic descriptions by Russian linguists treat mainly, if not exclusively, the positive sense of the term (e.g., Apresian and Apresian 1993, Iordanskaia 1974). It may be possible that Levontina's focus on the negative sense is the result of a reliance on the usage of educated, urban Russians who have been forced to adapt most rapidly to the changing conditions.

2. Levontina, however, argues that *zhalost'* does not report the solidarity of subject and object (1995, 225), which is in direct contrast to other semantic descriptions of the term and may reflect a difference in emphasis (solidarity as a relative, not absolute, concept).

Informal surveys which I conducted on conceptualizations of *zhalost'* yielded definite instances of solidarity with the suffering object, although this was by no means an obligatory component of the meaning in all contexts.

3. While one could make a statement in Russian similar to Lewinsky's, it would probably not be said in the third person, but only in the second: *Mne vas/tebia zhal'*. I am grateful to Alina Israeli for suggesting this.

4. For a discussion of the concept *sud'ba* as reflected in a series of Russian semantic constructions which profile lack of control over events (*oshchushchenie nepodvlastnosti cheloveku khoda sobytii*), see Zalizniak and Levontina 1996.

5. I am grateful to Aleksei Shmelev for suggesting this.

6. The positive Russian phrase here is *uverennost' v sebe*.

7. For example, in the sentence *Nado sostrich sobake sherst'* ("One should trim the dog's fur"), the dative *sobake* implies sympathy for the dog (it's hot out, and the dog is suffering under all that hair); the same sentence with a genitive construction (*u sobaki*) reports a more objective and less empathetic judgment on the speaker's part (Cienki 1993, 84). Empathy, in a wide sense of the term, also plays a role in Russian syntax (Yokoyama 1982).

8. *Strakh* is associated with paralysis and especially coldness (*xolodet' ot strakha* "to grow cold from fear"), the emotion *otrashchenie* with unpleasant taste (compare the English interjection "Yuck!" used in reaction to foul tastes as well as unpleasant or disgusting life experiences). Both of these emotions play, via their metaphoric realizations, small roles in *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*.

9. A survey of etymological dictionaries (Shanskii et al. 1971, Tsyganenko 1970, Preobrazhenskii 1959) does not provide support for this relationship. Although a false etymology, the connection nonetheless seems to have conceptual potential.

10. The relationship between piety and pity is suggested in an amusing aside by the narrator in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1997, 669): "I doubt whether that practice of piety inculcated upon us by our womankind in early youth, namely to be thankful because we are better off than somebody else, be a very rational religious exercise." His satirical definition of piety – thankful that we are not like someone else – is nearly identical to certain modern uses of pity.

11. So, for example, in the dialogue *–Ja poluchil stipendiiu Einshteina. –Povezlo!* ["– I received the Einstein Fellowship. –What luck!"], the word *povezlo* asserts "this is good (*khorocho*)" and presumes "this is a matter of chance (*sluchaino*)." The comment can be taken as a simple acknowledgement of the good fortune of another or as a mild insult if the recipient of the scholarship considers that getting the award was wholly a matter of merit and not merely blind luck (Zalizniak and Levontina 1996).

12. Note Wierzbicka's definition of *pity* (1972, 68): it "implies the thought 'what happens to him is worse than what happens to me' or even '... than what could happen to me'."

13. Although Solov'ev also uses the word *nравstvennyi* ("moral") in reference to *zhalost'*, his overall description is more in line with Peirce's level of natural instinctive emotions. In other words, he is not using "moral" in Peirce's sense of socially normative.

14. For a more detailed comparison of these synonyms, see Levontina 1995.

15. Citations of the story are taken from Tolstoy 1928-58 and will be referenced to chapter. I commented on this use of *vintit'* already in Danaher 1995, 230.

16. Jahn suggests that Gerasim's touch "may signify Ivan Il'ich's first step away from the source of total isolation and annihilation" (1993, 61); he has also written that Gerasim's relationship with Ivan Il'ich is "the first example of physical touching that is represented in Ivan Il'ich's life story" (1999, 198). Ivan Il'ich, however, first experiments on himself both in regard here to touch and later also in terms of self-pity (*zhalost' k sebe*); only after self-experimentation does Ivan involve others in both touching and "pitying."

17. Jackson (1997) has detailed parts of what I am calling the *zh-* phonetic motif, charting Ivan's journey from *uzhas* ("horror") through *neuzheli* ("can it really be?") to *zhalost'* and pointing out a key passage in chapter IV which plays on the *zha-* and *zhe-* elements of various thematically important words in the story.

18. That the pain does restore him to life is made clear in Ivan Il'ich's sensual awakening in the late chapters. See Danaher 1998 for a discussion of the theme of the five senses.

19. Danaher 1995 discusses *ona* as a light image, and Danaher 1998 discusses the symbolic implications of the feminine singular pronoun as a representation of the pain.

20. For the relevance of proverbs in the story's meaning, I am indebted to Jackson 1997, in which the import of the Russian saying *Zhena da muzh – zmeia da uzh* is discussed.



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