

"God Sees the Truth, but Waits" *

Lucinda Kryter

This story by Tolstoi is different in many ways from those of the present-day masters of the short story. There are no stylistic innovations and no such fast pace and intensity as are found in so many modern short stories. And yet the story has that essence which makes it a great and lasting short story. It has a simplicity and realism that, while nothing like Hemingway's, is actually more effective in my opinion. The reader doesn't have the feeling in this story of any conscious and direct effort on the part of the author to achieve simplicity through words or style. The emphasis here is on the story to be told and the theme to be presented, not on the manner in which this is achieved.

The story is written as a narration, just as someone might tell it, and in somewhat formal language. In the first two paragraphs we are told whom the story is about, where he lives, what he does, what he looks like, something of his past history and present status in life. The third paragraph prepares us for the rest of the story and we proceed from there. Thus, in three short paragraphs the author has given us the description of the main character, has set the stage in terms of place and circumstance, and the words of Aksionov's wife — "Ivan Dmitrich, do not start today; I have had a bad dream about you" — prepared us for the story to follow. This method of presentation would be considered amateurish and lacking in style or imagination if used by a present-day writer. Yet I think this very straightforwardness contributes greatly to the depth and sincerity of the story.

One factor is rather obviously omitted in the introductory material — that of time. Perhaps this is done to emphasize the element of universality in the story. Much of Tolstoi's lasting popularity is, of course, due to the fact that he dealt with universality. It is almost as if Tolstoi, instead of taking a small, rather insignificant theme to fit the brevity of his story, has broken off a small piece of a larger universal theme.

Aksionov sought vengeance against Makar Semzonich and though he prayed for peace he could get none — he was unhappy and wretched. Yet when his opportunity to wreak vengeance came, he passed it by and forgave Makar — and with forgiveness, peace came to him.

There is irony in the ending of the story. Makar confesses

his guilt, but Aksionov was dead when the order for his release came through.

When I first read this story there was some thought in my mind that Tolstoi meant it as a denunciation of a God who, though he knows the truth, waits till too late to reveal it. Yet, on the other hand, it could be meant as an expression of the value of suffering, faith, and forgiveness in achieving a true love of God. I believe both could apply to the story and both are equally universal in application. The title "God Sees Truth But Waits" would imply either injustice and fickleness or it could imply the need for absolute faith and trust in God who alone always knows the truth.

At any rate, this story was one of my favorites in this volume. It had a refreshing appeal in this era of theme-over-theme-over-theme, of psychological analysis of human motivation, and the supposed necessity for either obscuring the point in a series of unrelated, page-long sentences, or stripping the words-per-sentence to the point where it is no longer realistic, only artificial.

Nothing is included in this story that does not add to the theme and over-all impression. There are no superfluous words, phrases, or descriptions. There is a definite feeling of continuity from beginning to end — a continuity that is never broken throughout the story.

One might say that a story presented as this one is, could not hold a reader's attention. Yet it certainly held mine. This is due in large part, as I said before, to the fact that what is said in this story is more important than the way it is said. This is not to imply that the style is not effective — to me it was most effective, simply because it was such a natural way of expressing what the author wished to say.

*Editors' note: Because of a general interest in the requirements of good examination answers, this composition, taken from an examination in Freshman English, was considered by the editors a suitable contribution for **Manuscripts**.