

Title: Fictions of Freedom: Bunin's Liberation of Tolstoy  
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**Abstract:**

In his biography of Tolstoy, Ivan Bunin refers time and again to Tolstoy's "Kholstomer" to make sense of Tolstoy's life, his fiction, and his death. Count Bezukhov of *War and Peace* is called "the greatest of Tolstoy's Kholstomers," but Princess Liza and Prince Andrei are also included on that list, and of Tolstoy himself Bunin writes: "There is no way that he could have died like a deer. He had to die either like Ivan Ilich or like Prince Serpukhovskoi in Kholstomer, or, in the best case, like Kholstomer himself."

In this presentation I will explore Bunin's almost obsessive attention to the models of dying in "Kholstomer," drawing evidence from his biography of Tolstoy, *The Liberation of Tolstoy*, and from "The Dreams of Chang," his most explicit fictional engagement with his literary idol. Both of these works, while ostensibly homages to Tolstoy, complicate Tolstoy's own vision of death and liberation. What emerges is an inter-textual dialogue about physical entombment and spiritual liberation, in which each of these processes becomes an allegory of textual dynamics. Bunin ends up exposing the limitations of Tolstoy's fictional structures and, in his tributes to Tolstoy, he proposes the possibility of escape.