

MIMESIS AND MORAL EDUCATION IN ANNA KARENINA¹

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Anna Karenina offers us a practical moral experience during which, and by means of which, we can confront moral complexity and hone our moral and aesthetic awareness.² Tolstoy locates his implicit invitation to self-awareness within a novelistic structure that draws us into moral struggle. He encourages us to scrutinize our own moral and aesthetic reactions by establishing a variety of surrogates and "mirrors" for us (either represented or implied) in the text. Facilitating self-awareness and self-confrontation are episodes depicting the reception of art: the scene in the artist Mikhailov's studio, and the scene in which Lyovin meets Anna under her portrait. Those chapters foreground the ethical dimension of aesthetic experience and ask us to conceive of ourselves as responsible moral subjects with a choice of reading well or badly. This essay treats first the reader's moral education, and then the reader's aesthetic education, but in fact each learning experience implies the other.

Moral Education: Education through "Weaknesses" and Mimicry

Like 18th century poeticians and Russian utilitarian critics, Tolstoy voiced the belief that literature could shape its audience morally. From the beginning of his writing life, Tolstoy held fast to the idea that literary art must appeal to an audience's capacity for empathy in order to produce a moral effect. However, as he wrote in 1852, morally effective literary works elicit empathy only if readers "recognize in [a character] as many of their own weaknesses as they do their virtues; the virtues are optional; the weaknesses necessities" (*PSS* 46:145). Didactic literature must do more than preach, Tolstoy again suggested in 1894: "To depict people as exemplars for life, the most necessary thing is not to forget the human element, the weaknesses..." (*PSS* 67:113)

Tolstoy's appreciation of error-centered didactic strategies eliciting identification evokes Aristotelian and neo-Aristotelian poetics. Aristotle may be said implicitly to ascribe a moral function to the plot of tragedy when he states that the best plays portray a hero's fall from happiness to misery by means of *hamartia*, a term that has been variously interpreted to mean "'a moral flaw,' 'an error in judgment,' or a mere 'misstep'" (Grube xxiv). In Aristotle's view, the tragic character is a person neither thoroughly good nor thoroughly wicked, but "a character between the two" (Aristotle 24).³ The spectators' fear for this character—"someone like themselves" (*ibid.*)—, and their pity for the undeserved misfortune entail *catharsis*, an emotional purification or an intellectual clarification (the exact meaning of the term is disputed) that appears to include a change in moral awareness (Aristotle 11).⁴ As one scholar explains, the "requirement that the character be like ourselves makes possible the *sympatheia*, the emotional identification which is necessary if we are to feel pity or fear" (Grube xxiii).⁵

But Tolstoy's notebooks also reveal his affinity with Plato, when they emphasize the contagious, imitative character of aesthetic experience. An entry from 1884 suggests that, unless a work of art represents through "mimicry" both error and its overcoming, the work will fail to act on others:

It's been known for a long time, that an artist teaches not that which he wants to teach, but that which he is able to teach. That which he defeated in himself, and which became the *überwundener Standpunkt*, he can unmask; that which he not only thinks is good, but which he passionately loves, only that can he make others love. . . . [A]n artist acts on others not by proving [*dovodom*], but through mimicry [*mimichnost'*], eliciting imitation [*podrazhatel'nost'*]. (PSS 52:127)

Tolstoy's statement suggests that he viewed aesthetic experience as a two-way performance, during which an artist relives and an audience imitatively experiences moral struggle, self-overcoming, and conversion. The artist teaches best who imparts a deeply-felt experience of moral conflict, succeeding better than a polemicist who presents ready truths.

Tolstoy's comments reflect his general belief in the value of moral struggle. He viewed the encounter with one's own mistakes as a precondition for moral growth, as this notebook entry of 1889 attests:

Just now in Tula, looking at all the vanity and stupidity and the vileness of life, I thought: no need as before to get indignant about the stupidity of life, to despair What is it that I want? That there be no movement? That people never make mistakes and never suffer? But that's the only means of coming to know one's mistakes and of correcting one's path. (PSS 50/51:174)

Life without "stupidity" would present no obstacles, and therefore no opportunity for moral work; it would hardly deserve the name of life.⁶ A book that invites sympathetic error can therefore provide its readers with an opportunity to "live" in the Tolstoyan sense by making and correcting mistakes. Although they do not set forth an original poetics, Tolstoy's reflections on technique are remarkable for another reason: when applied to *Anna Karenina*, they turn out to describe his own rhetorical strategies.

Anna Karenina repeatedly elicits moral self-evaluation, as Tolstoy draws readers into a "relationship" with Anna and her brother Stiva that includes three attitudes: attraction, alienation, and implicated identification. In the case of Anna, Tolstoy elicits a fourth attitude, compassion, which develops out of the third. As we will see, Tolstoy offers us contradictory cues in order to engage us in the beneficial experiences of error, self-contradiction, and self-overcoming. Let us begin our discussion of Tolstoy's moral education of the reader at Tolstoy's own starting point, with Stiva.

The Reader's Experience of Stiva

Near the beginning of the novel, Tolstoy represents a complicitous exchange of looks in a mirror:

"Any papers from the Office?" asked Stepan Arkadich, as he took the telegram and sat down before the mirror.

"They're on your table," answered Matvei with a questioning and sympathizing glance at his master—adding after a pause with a sly smile: "Someone has called from the jobmaster's."

Stepan Arkadich did not answer, but glanced at Matvei's face in the mirror. From their looks, as they met in the mirror, it was evident that they understood one another Matvei put his hands into the pocket of his jacket, put out his foot, and looked at his master with a very slight, good-humoured smile (I.2:3-4).⁷

The passage represents Stiva communing in the mirror with a sympathetic presence. We see ourselves reflected in a fellow-onlooker, Matvei, whose indulgent smile we are invited to imitate.

Throughout the opening scene, the text establishes Stiva's "plump, well-kept body" as a source of pleasure. We read for instance that "Matvei blew some invisible speck off the shirt which he held ready gathered up like a horse's collar, and with evident pleasure invested with it his master's carefully tended body" (I.2:5).⁸ With a small step, one may pass from enjoyment of the body to tolerance of the whole person.⁹ Soon, indeed, the narrative almost explicitly invites us to overlook Stiva's misbehavior. After all, the members of his household overlook it: "although he was entirely at fault and was conscious of it, almost everyone in the house—even the nurse . . . sided with him" (I.2:5).

It turns out that almost everyone who meets Stiva smiles involuntarily.¹⁰ Tolstoy foregrounds this mesmerizing effect by means of an extended description:

Oblonsky was not only liked by everyone who knew him for his kind and joyous manner and his undoubted honesty, but there was something in him—in his handsome and bright appearance, his beaming eyes, black hair and eyebrows, and his white-and-rosy complexion, that had a physical effect on those he met, making them feel friendly and cheerful. "Ah! Stiva! Oblonsky! There he is!" people almost always said with a joyful smile when they met him. Even if conversation with him sometimes caused no special delight, still the next day, or the next, every one was as pleased as ever to meet him. (I.5:13)

Stiva's admirers in the novel include vulgar Frenchwomen, but also the principled and idealistic hero of the novel, Konstantin Lyovin. Konstantin claims to prefer kasha and cabbage soup to fancy restaurant food, but "lacks the strength" to keep from smiling as Stiva orders dinner at the *Anglia* restaurant.¹¹ As Stiva consumes oysters, Lyovin and a Tatar waiter look on, transfixed with pleasure:

Oblonsky crumpled his starched napkin and pushed a corner of it inside his waistcoat, then, with his arms comfortably on the table, attacked the oysters.

"Not bad," he said, pulling the quivering oysters out of their mother-of-pearl shells with a silver fork [*sdiraia serebrianoiu vilochkoi s perlamutrovoi rakoviny shliupaiushchikh ustrits*], and swallowing one after another. "Not bad," he repeated, lifting his moist and glittering eyes [*vskidyvaia vlahnye i blestiashchie glaza*] now to Lyovin, now to the Tatar.

Lyovin also ate the oysters, though he preferred bread and cheese. *But he was gazing admiringly at Oblonsky.* Even the Tatar, who, having drawn the cork and poured the sparkling wine into the thin wide glasses, *with a noticeable smile of pleasure*, straightening his white tie, stole glances at Oblonsky. (I.10:32, emphases added)

Stiva's sensuous consumption of oysters (known in food lore as aphrodisiacs) fascinates those who observe it into a kind of voyeurism. The text of course implies the presence of another voyeur, through the representation of two observers, surrogates for the reader in the text.¹² If, like Lyovin, we "voyeurs" give in to these vicarious enjoyments, we are conceding something to Stiva's way of looking at life; and, in the context of a scene that contrasts Stiva's libertinism with Lyovin's moralism in love, we thus also concede something to Stiva's view of marital infidelity. That concession will of course have implications for us soon as evaluators of Anna's choices. Stiva's repeated affirmation of the oysters's tastiness ("not bad" [*nedurny*]) constitutes also a subtle moral apologia, since "not bad" implies moral as well as culinary acceptability. An abundance of sibillants and hushers evoke the represented action, so that the Russian text phonetically simulates Stiva's ingestion of delectable shell-fish, transferring the pleasure to the verbal plane for the reader's simultaneous delectation. Thus, the scene in the restaurant not only *represents* a seduction, it also *performs* a seduction. One might understand Stiva's seduction of Lyovin as partially metaphoric of the reader's own seduction by Tolstoy's text.

Readers schooled in Tolstoy's aesthetic ideas can connect Stiva's infectiousness with the essential criterion of art as Tolstoy would later define it: "The stronger the infection, the better the art qua art without regard for its content, that is, independently of the worth of those feelings that it communicates" (PSS 30:149). But Stiva's infectiousness also prefigures that produced by what Tolstoy would later call "counterfeit" art. According to Tolstoy in *What Is Art?*, certain so-called works of art only simulate the effects of "true" art, while actually bringing about a person's "corruption, an unsatisfiable urge for pleasure, and the weakening of a person's spiritual powers" (PSS 30:179).

Indeed, the novel begins by discrediting Stiva, exposing his capacity for self-evasion and equivocation ("my own fault; and yet I'm not guilty" [I.1:2], he declares of his adulterous liaison with his children's governess). It is unlikely, then, that the reader could feel morally comfortable in succumbing to Stiva's charms. In the episode of the dinner, Tolstoy

interrupts the implied seduction of the reader by depicting the discomfort and withdrawal of the observing object of seduction. Stiva wants his friend to feel "merry," but Lyovin, "if not exactly in bad spirits, felt constrained" (I.10:32). As the scene ends, the friends drift apart, suddenly estranged (I.11:39). The text therefore requires us to reject the very aesthetic enjoyment it also invites us to enjoy.

Tolstoy does not drive us now to a categorical condemnation of Oblonsky. While refuting Stiva's view of love, marriage, and adultery, Lyovin suddenly remembers his own past struggles with carnality, and so falters: "At that moment Lyovin remembered his own sins and the inner struggle he had lived through. He added unexpectedly, 'However, maybe you are right after all. It's very possible... But I don't know, I really don't know'" (I.11:38-39).¹³ As the observer looks inward, the text forestalls judgment.

Tolstoy has already employed a similar maneuver in the novel's second chapter. Stiva had written a note arranging a tryst with the children's French governess, but his wife has intercepted it:

She was sitting there: the careworn, ever-bustling, and (as he thought) rather simple Dolly—with the note in her hand and a look of terror, despair, and anger on her face.

"What is this? This?" she asked, pointing to the note.

And, as often happens, it was not so much the memory of the event that tormented Stepan Arkadich, as of the way he had replied to his wife.

At that moment there had happened to him *what happens to people when unexpectedly caught in some shameful act*: he was not able to assume an expression suitable to the position in which he stood toward his wife now that his guilt was discovered. Instead of taking offense, denying, making excuses, asking forgiveness or even remaining indifferent—anything would have been better than what he did!—his face *completely involuntarily* ("reflexes of the brain," thought Stepan Arkadich, who was fond of physiology), *completely involuntarily* suddenly smiled its usual, kind, and thus stupid smile. (I.1:2, emphases added)

The passage points to the typicality of Stiva's "involuntary" response. If we condemn Oblonsky here, we condemn ourselves.¹⁴ Laughing or smiling here, we too ignore moral criteria. We prove ourselves "merry," subject to "reflexes of the brain." Tolstoy even forces us to perform the "reflexive" action of rereading a phrase ("completely involuntarily"). By means of these minute rhetorical operations, Tolstoy does not permit us really to detach ourselves from Stiva Oblonsky. We have too much in common with this character whom the text encourages us temporarily to imitate. Once again, we catch ourselves smiling in the mirror.¹⁵

The text's several references to the wide range of people "with something in common with Oblonsky" further imply the reader's own susceptibility to the kind of temptations that imperceptibly seduce Lyovin. For instance, Stiva had been right to sense that "everything would 'turn out' splendidly" in his relations with a forbidding new supervisor, whom he

wins over by introducing him to a special kind of drink: "'After all, they're all human beings, just like us poor sinners: what is there to be angry and quarrel about,' he thought" (IV.7:341). Acknowledging kinship requires that we recognize ourselves willy-nilly as like Oblonsky; but it also requires that we evaluate him and ourselves in dismay and shame.¹⁶

This threefold strategy, enforcing seduction, alienation, and ambivalent feelings of kinship, works to complicate the reader's ethical experience. The fact that Tolstoy has created characters in this novel who are less sympathetic and morally more repugnant than Stiva—like the calculating, hypocritical Lydia Ivanovna who chases Stiva from her salon in a kind of exorcism—further enforces our solidarity with this amoral scoundrel.

The Reader's Experience of Anna

In his representation of Stiva's entrancing and glamorous sister, Anna Karenina, Tolstoy intensifies the reader's experience of moral conflict, increasing the attractions of seduction while fully exploring the moral and spiritual costs of Anna's error and the alienating transformations it produces in her character. He intensifies the reader's conflict further by eliciting implicated, if only partial, identification (for instance, when Anna surrenders to her desires as she journeys to St. Petersburg during the storm). And, depicting with great pathos her extreme unhappiness, he makes it even more difficult and ethically more problematic, within the context of the novel's larger moral vision, for readers to sustain their alienation from the heroine.¹⁷ Meanwhile, as with Stiva, Tolstoy invites us to analyze each phase of response—attraction, alienation, identification, and (in Anna's case) compassion—by portraying observer-figures responding to Anna in the text.¹⁸ Once again the reader becomes both actor and spectator in an ethical drama.

The narrative introduces Anna through the eyes of the man who will become her lover. Her firm step, elegant posture, her graceful, supple movements attract Vronsky, and thus the reader, for whom he now becomes the surrogate. The projection of positive moral qualities, and a promise of acknowledgement, also attract him: "he saw in her sweet face as she passed him something specially *tender* and *kind* . . . Her bright grey eyes which seemed dark because of their black lashes rested for a moment on his face *as if she were recognizing/acknowledging [priznava] him . . .*" (I.18:56, emphases added). As in the representation of Stiva, Tolstoy foregrounds a moment of recognition capable of abolishing distance between self and other.¹⁹

As Stiva's attractive exterior elicits involuntary attraction, so Anna's grace exerts a reflexive pull on Vronsky.²⁰ Tolstoy foregrounds Anna's smile, as he had foregrounded Stiva's: "'Yes, the Countess and I have talked all the time—I about my son, and she about hers,' said Karenina, and a smile brightened her face, a caressing smile on his account" (I.18:57-58). This smile communicates itself to Vronsky, as her brother's did to Lyovin and many others: "Vronsky did not take his eyes off her, and kept smiling, he knew not why" (I.18:57). Throughout this episode, the text enforces our

identification with Anna's admirer. Indeed, the narration presents Anna exclusively through Vronsky's eyes—as "Karenina"—during the entire sequence.²¹

When observer-figures in the text fall in love with Anna, and many do so,²² the text can be said often to "prompt" its readers to respond at least partially in kind. (Dolly's children, for instance, are at first drawn to their aunt, apparently attracted by her "peculiar charm" and vying to "get as close to her as possible, to touch her, hold her little hand, kiss her, play with her ring, or at least touch the frills of her dress" [I.20:66].) As was the case with Stiva, the text continually represents Anna's magnetism, for instance her effect on Kitty. This magnetism enhances seduction: "before Kitty had time to regain her self-possession she felt not only that she was under Anna's influence but that she was in love with her . . ." (I. 20:65). The narrative often connects Anna's hypnotic effect to her "charm" [*prelest*], a word as ambiguous in Russian as it is in English.²³ The word *prelest* is one Tolstoy would use many years later in *What is Art?* to describe a quality and effect of art: "The charm [*prelest*] of a painting, of sounds, of images infects every person, no matter what his degree of development" (PSS 30 109). Tolstoy marks it in the novel through repetition, most obviously when he introduces Anna at the ball through Kitty's admiring gaze:

Kitty had been seeing Anna every day and was in love with her . . . but seeing her in black she felt that she had never before realized her full *charm* She now realized that Anna could not have worn lilac, and that her *charm* lay precisely in the fact that her personality always stood out from her dress (I.22:72, emphases added)

Spellbound, Kitty then watches Anna's and Vronsky's mutual intoxication and seduction:

Anna smiled—and the smile passed on to him; she became thoughtful—and he became serious. Some supernatural power attracted Kitty's eyes to Anna's face. She looked *charming* in her simple black dress, *charming* were her full arms with their bracelets, *charming* was her firm neck with its string of pearls, *charming* was the curly hair now disarranged, *charming* was the movement of her small feet and hands, *charming* was her handsome, animated face (I.23:76, emphases added)

Suddenly, however, the text lays bare the other side of charm: "but there was something terrible and cruel in her charm. Kitty admired her even more than before, and suffered more and more" (I.23:76). Kitty, who is now our viewing consciousness, experiences an inner struggle, as she becomes aware that she has lost Vronsky to Anna: "'Yes, there is something strange, demonic, and charming about her,' thought Kitty" (I.23:76). Tolstoy thus explicitly connects "charm" to its more sinister meanings. Anna's hypnotic effect can induce the morally problematic surrender of rational control—a state Richard F. Gustafson has called "intoxicated consciousness"—against which Tolstoy would caution in his later tracts, notably in *What Is Art?*²⁴

For, like Stiva, Anna prefigures the bad and counterfeit art of *What Is Art?*.²⁵ Tolstoy's repetition of "charming" in these passages works hypnotically—like an incantation or magic charm—and linguistically imitates Anna's effect on Kitty and Vronsky, while his recurrent use of the ambivalent word "charming" to characterize Anna serves to destabilize the reader's relationship to her.

Although the text seems on the one hand to distance us from Anna, on the other it enforces our identification with her. Filtering the scene at the ball through Kitty's eyes, Tolstoy plants an observer-figure in the text who not only watches, but who sees herself in Anna as in a mirror. Kitty "noticed that Anna was elated with success, a feeling Kitty herself knew so well. She saw that Anna was intoxicated by the rapture she had produced. She knew the feeling and knew its symptoms, and *recognized* them in Anna . . ." [I.23:74, emphasis added]. The reader in the text, Kitty, understands by seeing herself in another ("in the mirror of Anna's face" [I.23:74, emphasis added]), just as observer-figures in the novel had been permitted to recognize themselves in Stiva.²⁶ By calling Anna's face a mirror, the text implies that she reflects not only Vronsky, who mirror-like imitates her every expression, but Kitty as well. Tolstoy thus contrasts a second kind of reflection involving recognition of self in another, with the first, purely imitative or reflexive reflection portending a dangerous loss of autonomy.

But Tolstoy's rhetoric in *Anna Karenina* connects the reader more inevitably to an ideal—absolute empathy born of understanding another as oneself—central to the novel's moral vision and to Tolstoy's religious philosophy as a whole, when it leads the reader into the fourth phase of response, compassion. The narrative positions us as Anna's intimates, the implied interlocutors for her desperate soliloquies. She looks out the window at the landscape and feels that "everybody would now be as pitiless toward her as the sky and the trees" (III.15:265), but the reader is led to contradict her. The narrator soon compares Anna's heaving sobs to the desperate sobbing of a punished child (III.16:267). It is difficult to turn one's back on a sobbing child. The text thus invokes the reader's forgiveness.

Anna herself has learned the lesson of compassion. When Karenin reproaches his wife for the pain she has caused him, Tolstoy turns the tables on his reader, who had hitherto perceived Karenin primarily through Anna's and Vronsky's eyes:

"That's all very well, but you think only of yourself! The sufferings of the man who was your husband do not interest you. What do you care that his whole life is wrecked and how much he has suf . . . suf . . . suffled!" [*pelestrada*]

That struck her as funny; but immediately after she felt ashamed that anything could seem funny to her at such a moment. And for the first time she felt for him and put herself for an instant in his place, and was sorry for him. (IV.4:331-332)

It is likely that "suffled" looks funny to the reader as well. As in the passage where we smiled at Stiva's "stupid smile," we have imitated the

shameful behavior. For a moment, we too have been tempted to laugh. Tolstoy draws us nearer to Anna, and into compassion, by means of synchronic laughter and shame.

When Tolstoy depicts Vronsky's failure to attend to his own compassionate feelings, he invokes the mirror—and by analogy alludes to the pattern we have been seeing throughout the novel, in which a mirror mediates the recognition of self in other. Vronsky and Anna have quarrelled:

But, as he was going out, he thought she said something, and suddenly his heart ached with pity for her.

"What, Anna?"

"Nothing," she answered, in the same cold quiet manner.

"If it's nothing, then *tant pis!*" he thought, again chilled.

Turning away, he went out. As he was going out he caught sight in a looking-glass of her pale face and trembling lips. He even wished to stop and say a comforting word to her, but his legs carried him out of the room before he had thought of anything to say. (VII.25:678-9)

Impeded by a reflex of the body, Vronsky fails to act on his deepest moral and emotional impulses, which initially have been stirred by a mirrored reflection of a suffering fellow-being. Like Stiva's stupid smile, this reflex action indicates a failure to act on the responsibilities that bind human beings to those closest to them. Here again is Oblonskyism, as the body overrides the mind's capacity for moral judgment or independent thinking.

Aesthetic Education: Lyovin in the Portrait Scene

By means of an episode that has been viewed as the keystone in the novel's arch,²⁷ Tolstoy represents the reader to him or herself as participant and judge, while he elicits the four responses we have been examining: attraction, alienation, identification, and pity. The portrait scene forces us to confront and scrutinize our ambivalent response to the heroine. It allows us to observe—and, through a surrogate, to "experience"—the tension between two kinds of love, erotic and agapic, without entirely resolving that tension.²⁸

On one level, the portrait scene—like other representations of Anna in the novel that convey her extraordinary loveliness—not only represents Lyovin's seduction, but also seduces the reader, for whom Lyovin is the surrogate.²⁹ Just as Vronsky imitates Anna's smile and Kitty stands fascinated by an enchanting Anna, attracted by some "supernatural power," Lyovin, in the portrait scene, cannot "tear himself away" from the beautiful portrait of a "living and charming [prelestnaia] woman" which "attracted [his] involuntary attention" (VII.9:630). Tolstoy hints at an erotic attraction: the eyes of the beautiful woman in the painting "trouble" Lyovin (VII.9:630).

Because Tolstoy suggests that the mediation of the portrait intensifies Lyovin's attraction to Anna, the portrait scene may be understood as a meditation on the moral role of art, and, more specifically, as Tolstoy's meditation on his own novel and its ambiguous moral effects. The scene in fact represents the process that has been occurring throughout the novel: the audience's seduction, by means of art (the novel itself). To the extent that the scene suggests that art abets the morally destructive effect of an erotic seduction, Tolstoy may be said clearly to anticipate here his own later criticisms of art in *What Is Art?*, where he also connects aesthetic to erotic pleasure.³⁰ That the painting collaborates in a dangerous seduction also brings to mind Plato's charge against poetry: "It has a terrible power to corrupt even the best characters, with very few exceptions" (Plato 436).³¹ Indeed, Kitty will soon chastise Lyovin for having "fallen in love" with Anna. Worryingly, Lyovin now attributes to Anna that quality he had formerly valued in Kitty alone—sincerity [*pravdivost'*] (VII.10:634). On one level, then, the portrait scene encourages readers to analyze their own seduction, and to consider the moral implications of their aesthetic pleasure—at the very moment they are experiencing such pleasure as readers of Tolstoy's text.

As the episode draws to a close, Lyovin strives to enter Anna's thoughts, then experiences tenderness and pity, worrying that "Vronsky did not completely understand her" (VII.10:634). But the context makes clear that erotic feeling taints Lyovin's tender thoughts. Lyovin soon acknowledges that there had been something "not right" (VII.11:635) in his pity for Anna.³² Thus the episode forces readers to scrutinize the very response that the novel ultimately seems most to honor. The episode insures that readers subject to criticism—without, however, entirely discarding—their own admiration, pity, and tenderness for the heroine.

Standing next to her likeness, Anna makes a comment that evokes Aristotle's explanation for the origin of *mimesis*, while also implicitly identifying an essential feature of Tolstoy's own art and alluding to Tolstoy's own mimetic practices. The text has periodically represented—via the Oblonsky siblings—a love of pleasure for its own sake; now it takes note of the human pleasure in recognizing likenesses: "I am laughing," Anna explains to Lyovin, acknowledging his bon mot critiquing French realism,³³ "'as one laughs on seeing an excellent likeness'" [*kak smeesh'sia, kogda uvidish' ochen' pokhozhii portret*] (VII.10:632). Anna's words evoke the *Poetics* and the Aristotelian belief that imitation, a natural human activity, affords pleasure: "The reason is that learning things is most enjoyable, not only for philosophers but for others equally, though they have but little experience of it. Hence they enjoy the sight of images because they learn as they look; they reason what each image is, that there, for example, is that man whom we know" (Aristotle 7).³⁴ Anna's near-quotation from Aristotle, uttered in a scene that dwells on the resemblance of a portrait to its original, can remind us to behold, learn, and infer from our own mirror-like portraits in the text.³⁵ Lyovin's look in the mirror before he visits Anna,³⁶ and a possible pun in that scene on the French word for "mirror," *glace*,³⁷ both suggest that Tolstoy was seeking to draw his readers' attention to the capacity of mimesis to hold the mirror up to human nature.

Thus, if *Anna Karenina* to a large extent reiterates Platonic conceptions of mimesis, it also pays homage to Aristotelian and neo-Aristotelian theories of mimesis, which accord imitation a positive function. As we have seen, Aristotle's theory of tragedy justifies mimesis as a positive moral instrument, when it speaks of the catharsis experienced by an identifying audience.³⁸ It is not so surprising to discover an homage to Aristotle in a text that self-consciously asks us to behold beings like ourselves and that periodically invokes the conventions of classical tragedy, for instance in the dark foreshadowings of Anna's end. The Aristotelian belief that the best plays elicit pity and fear in response to the visitation of misfortune on beings like oneself anticipates Tolstoy's own aesthetics of compassion.³⁹ Yet when Anna so readily focuses on the *pleasurable* in this context, Tolstoy may also be reminding us to keep our distance from our own pursuit of aesthetic pleasure, and from theories of art that valorize pleasure. In fact, Lyovin's look in the mirror before he visits Anna ("Glancing in the mirror, Lyovin saw that he was red in the face, but he was sure he was not tipsy..." [VII. 9:630]) suggests that the encounter with one's likeness might induce more discomfort than pleasure, if one were in command of one's faculties.

Mimesis as Spiritual Education

Eastern Christian doctrine emphasizes the fact that God created human beings in His image and likeness (*obraz i podobie*). The holy ones and the saints strive to realize this likeness in themselves; thus, they may be called "*prepodobnye*," or "very like." As Ernst Benz explains,

the consciousness that man is created "in the image of God," and that he carries the icon of God within himself is so central to Orthodox theology . . . that the idea of original sin never could become established within the Orthodox Church in its blunt Western form. (Benz 18)

Benz writes that "the work of redemption . . . consists in renewing the image of God which the first man stained by sin . . . The whole meaning of redemption, then, is linked with this concept of image" (19). Mediating this renewal are the icons [*obrazy*], through which individual believers are changed into the likeness of Christ.⁴⁰ Tolstoy's persistent invocation of the question of beholding likenesses may evoke the Orthodox doctrine of redemption, in addition to the Aristotelian concept of mimesis. While implicitly acknowledging oneness with others created in God's image and likeness, the Tolstoyan character can be renewed in the image of God. And, beholding themselves in the text's mirrors, readers ultimately can accede by this same logic to an redemptive sense of "being like."⁴¹

An emblematic vignette in the novel's penultimate chapter directs our attention to the importance of this kind of recognition. Kitty stages an "experiment" for Lyovin's benefit in which baby Mitya gives proof of awareness when he recognizes his mother and smiles, but frowningly shakes his head at an unfamiliar female face (VIII.18:737). Kitty and Lyovin

delight in the smile of recognition that indicates that the baby has recognized his "own people" [*svoikh*] (VIII.18:737). Tolstoy has just been representing Lyovin's deepening understanding of the way love binds him in relatedness to other human beings, and in this context the child's recognition of his family members carries special meaning. On a metaphoric plane, to recognize "one's own people" means of course to perceive oneself as connected to the human family. Therefore, the vignette represents as pivotal the very experience this essay has been treating, the recognition of one's own kind (in the text's mirrors and portraits).⁴²

But Tolstoy asks his readers, first, to remember their common end. The motif of encroaching mortality enters the novel near the very beginning, subtly, when Stiva spies an item in the newspaper about there being "no more grey hairs" (I.3:7). Lyovin, however, perceives these greying strands:

"But I am still alive: what am I to do now? What am I to do?" he said despairingly. He lit a candle, got up carefully, went to the looking-glass, and began examining his face and hair. Yes! There were grey hairs on his temples. He opened his mouth: his double teeth were beginning to decay. He bared his muscular arms. Yes, he was very strong. But Nicholas [his brother], who was breathing there with the remains of his lungs, had once had a healthy body too (III.31:318-319)

Here the double likeness—the dying brother one resembles, and the image in the mirror—instucts the character in an emblematic instance of *memento mori*. On one level, of course, the looking-glasses in *Anna Karenina* enhance the realist illusion: they motivate a character's self-scrutiny, rendering plausible their colloquies with themselves. But on another level, these mirrors direct us to engage in self-reflection, forcing us in this case to behold ourselves as bound for death.

Setting forth another implicit "mirror" for his readers, Tolstoy represents a hedonist's insight into his own mortality. Prince Shcherbatsky tells Lyovin an anecdote that displays in miniature the rhetorical strategy at work in *Anna Karenina* as a whole:

"An egg that has been rolled very often becomes a '*shliupik*.' And so it is with ourselves: we keep on coming and coming to the club until we turn into *shliupiks*. There! Now you're laughing, but we are already thinking of how we shall become *shliupiks*...! You know Prince Chechensky?" asked the Prince, and Lyovin saw by his face that he was going to say something droll. "No, I don't." "You don't ? Three years ago he was not yet among the *shliupiks* and he showed a bold front, calling others *shliupiks*. Well, one day he arrives, and our hall-porter... You know Vasily?... Well, Prince Chechensky asks him: 'I say, Vasily, who is here? Any of the *shliupiks*?' And Vasily replies: 'Well, yes: you're the third one!' Yes, brother! That's how it is!" (VII.8:626)

Here, the rueful, "'Yes, brother!'" brings to mind the larger point, never far from the foreground in this novel, that what is at stake is the acknowledgment of ambivalent kinship, and ultimately the establishment of a community held together by brotherly feeling. This aging prince, however, is made to recognize only his membership in a society of death-bound pleasure-seekers; the insight presages Anna's dark vision of humanity as she journeys in her final carriage-ride.

In Christian terms, to become aware of oneself as a creature of flesh, dominated by fleshly desires and bound for decay, is to become fully cognizant of one's fallenness. Anna's bleak insights communicate that kind of awareness, unrelieved by any redemptive sense of what else besides common desires might bind human beings. As Anna watches boys eating ice-cream from the windows of the carriage during her final ride, she asserts that "'we all want something sweet and tasty': "'if we can get no bon-bons, then dirty ice creams! And Kitty is just the same: if not Vronsky, then Lyovin. And she envies and hates me. And we all hate one another: Kitty me, and I Kitty! Now that is true'" (VII.29:688). Tolstoy "disproves" the validity of Anna's vision by awakening in us feelings of intense pity for her sufferings in the scenes that have immediately preceded her carriage ride. Although Anna herself at this point has no access to a humane and balanced vision, Tolstoy has been awakening his *readers* to redemptive awareness. A novel that has been teaching us through our own imitation of Oblonsky, that to be human is to harbor an inner Oblonsky, amoral, mindless, and hungry for pleasure, also teaches us that part of the human response to suffering is generosity and compassion for others. Tolstoy thus contrives to have us become Oblonsky but also transcend him. We "know" Anna is wrong, not only because the text contradicts her assessment of Kitty, for instance, but also because our own compassion for Anna proves her wrong.

As we have seen, Tolstoy's rhetorical strategies, although they afford the reader an ambivalent experience, do express a moral argument, one that fits a Christian paradigm. Let us summarize the stages in this argument: Tolstoy engages the reader in the infectious experiences of attraction and sympathy for morally flawed characters, the Oblonsky siblings.⁴³ First "infecting" the reader with what may be called Oblonskyism, Tolstoy leads readers to take responsibility for sin. To understand oneself as sinful means also to conceive of oneself as bound to the body, and thus as bound for death. However, in reading, we slowly come to realize that a "bad" infection with the Oblonsky germ is sapping our defenses against a "good," redemptive infection with feelings of kinship for flawed fellow-beings.⁴⁴

In the logic of Tolstoy's argument, it is only after passing through a first, compromising, "bad" ethical (and aesthetic) response, that we can proceed to a second level of positive recognition and understanding. Tolstoy uses Stiva to take us to the first level, but it is only as we read through Anna's story that we move to the second level, the level at which we understand, with Lyovin, the moral beauty of living by the law of love. At every stage in this process, the narrative makes demands on the reader's capacity for self-reflection. It must be said, however, that while a Christian argument certainly *informs* the novel, its presence does not cancel out the

emotional and moral complexity of the ambivalent reading experience that Tolstoy affords us.

The Aesthetics of Responsibility: Mikhailov's Studio

When the artist Mikhailov suggests, near the novel's mid-point, that to paint Christ is to paint "the highest theme open to art" (V.11:432), he points to an ideal that lies at the novel's ethical center. More crucially for us here, however, Mikhailov's painting represents the two choices that Tolstoy's novel imparts to us by means of its rhetoric: evasion versus responsibility. Mikhailov paints Matthew 27:24, Pilate's evasion ("he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it"). Tolstoy's rhetoric throughout the novel tempts his readers into behaving like Pilate but at the same time, by holding up the mirror, that rhetoric also forces them to acknowledge responsibility for error.⁴⁵

Like Pilate, Tolstoy's characters repeatedly attempt to evade their own consciences.⁴⁶ Stiva specializes in forgetting his wife, children, and obligations; Anna screws up her eyes against truths; Vronsky never entirely comes to grips with his moral situation. Not one of the visitors to Mikhailov's studio—neither Anna, nor Vronsky, nor Golenishchev—grapples with the implications of the painting. But Tolstoy allows us to improve on this embedded audience's performance, by granting us access to Mikhailov's perspective on his own work.⁴⁷ Tolstoy makes sure that readers, along with Mikhailov, but unlike the embedded audience who overlook it, do notice the watchful figure of St. John in the painting's background.⁴⁸ As the episode draws to a close, Mikhailov gazes for a long time with a "rapturous smile" at the figure of the disciple, "which he knew to be beyond perfection" (V.12:433). The text invites us here to notice not only Jesus at the center, but another one who took responsibility by bearing witness.⁴⁹ In asking us to notice (certainly a prerequisite for bearing witness), Tolstoy invites us into responsibility.⁵⁰

To approach Tolstoy's novel as an experience is to remain faithful to Tolstoy's own pragmatic, dynamic conception of art, as he summarizes it in *What Is Art?*: "*Art is a human activity consisting in this, that a person consciously by means of certain external signs hands on to others the feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings and experience them*" (PSS 30:65, emphases in the original). As Silbajoris explains, for Tolstoy art is "not some static concept or entity, but . . . an event that is continuously happening between the object of art and the beholder" (Silbajoris 107).⁵¹ Though Tolstoy does not dwell on the cognitive function of art in his treatise on aesthetics, his own narrative technique places considerable demands on a reader's cognitive faculties. Unlike the indolent Oblonsky and Koznyshev or the other frequenters of the club—that "Temple of Idleness" (VII.8:626)—, we may avoid neither our own consciences, nor the "mental and spiritual strain" (I.11:39) that Stiva dreads.⁵²

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NOTES

¹ A shorter version of this article was presented at the AAASS convention in Washington in October 1995.

² In *What is Art?* Tolstoy explicitly advocates putting art in the service of the audience's moral upbringing "Eliciting in people under imaginary conditions feelings of brotherhood and love, religious art will teach people in reality, under the same conditions, to experience the very same feelings; it will set down in people's souls the tracks along which the deeds of people brought up on art will follow" (PSS 30:194). Morson identifies the central place of what he calls "moral training" in *Anna Karenina*, a discipline that involves paying attention to infinitesimal responses in concrete ethical situations: thus Lyovin learns that "[t]he right thing to do is to develop a good moral sense over a lifetime and then trust one's morally trained eyes over any abstract philosophy. There is no shortcut to ethical judgment" ("Prosaics" 10-11).

³ *Poetics* 1453a.

⁴ *Poetics* 1449b.

⁵ In this connection, Grube cites Aristotle's definition of pity in the *Rhetoric* (2.8): "the kind of pain we feel at the sight of a fatal or painful evil which we might expect to befall ourselves or one of those close to us and when it seems near. Clearly, to feel pity a person must think that he himself, or someone belonging to him, is liable to suffer." As Grube remarks, "Aristotle recognizes that tragic pity can never be completely disinterested" (xxiv).

⁶ Since for Tolstoy, as Gustafson notes, "human life consists in acts of self-creation and self-overcoming" (412).

⁷ Citations are from L. Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina* (trans. Aylmer and Louise Maude), occasionally modified for accuracy. In checking the translation against the original, and in citing the Russian text, I relied on the 1970 edition of *Anna Karenina* (ed. V.A. Zhdanov and E.E. Zaidenshnur). Page numbers refer only to the English translation.

⁸ Merezhkovsky points out Tolstoy's "gift of insight into the body" (57): Tolstoy "explores in sensation what is most private, personal, and particular; takes subtle shafts of feeling, and whets and sharpens those shafts to an almost excessive sharpness...the peculiarity of his sensation will become for ever our own peculiarity. We feel Tolstoy afterwards, when we return to real life" (60-61). Tolstoy places his uncanny ability to convey physical sensation in the service of a moral lesson.

⁹ "If a claw gets caught, the bird is lost," to quote Tolstoy's proverbial epigraph to *The Power of Darkness* (PSS 26:123)

¹⁰ Pursglove discusses the smile as an individualizing trait and as a substitute for the spoken word. He notes that "the noun *ulybka* and the verb *ulybat'sja* [sic] appear 613 times in the novel. The number of references per character range from seventy-eight for Anna herself to single references for characters such as Stremov, Princess Bohl, and even Levin's dog *Laska*" (43). Of Stiva, Pursglove comments that "if readiness to smile can be considered a family trait, then Oblonskij is unmistakably Anna's brother, for he smiles more frequently than any other male character in the novel" (45).

¹¹ For other readings of this scene, see Gutkin, LeBlanc ("Unpalatable Pleasures"), and Orwin.

¹² For a discussion of Tolstoy's creation of an implicated, voyeuristic reader in his *Sevastopol Stories*, see Morson, "The Reader as Voyeur....".

¹³ Orwin comments that "Lyovin eventually learns Stiva's lesson, that to live means to be tempted and often to fall. *Anna Karenina* teaches that the imperfection of human beings imposed on them by their bodies is necessary in a free yet ordered universe..." (178). Orwin's observation is a valuable one. But for our argument, it is also important not to lose sight of the ways Tolstoy simultaneously engineers the reader's resistance to this lesson. Tolstoy allows us to understand that Stiva finds it quite convenient not to struggle for moral consistency.

¹⁴ Of Stiva, Morson writes: "We have met the enemy and he is us" ("Prosaics" 6).

¹⁵ Belknap discusses in similar terms the rhetorical turn of the passage in which Vronsky apprehends himself in the "mirror" of the coarse foreign prince, a "stupid hunk of beef" (IV. 1:323): "Before our eyes, Tolstoy has transformed himself from a fox into a hedgehog, recapitulating in a page or two the process through which he tries to carry all of us as we read *Anna Karenina*" (158).

¹⁶ Tolstoy employs this strategy more overtly in his tracts, many of which attempt to shame the reader into action.

¹⁷ Critics have often addressed the contradictions in Tolstoy's depiction of Anna. Responding to the first installments in the *Russian Herald*, an early reader even accused Tolstoy of "negligence" (*Golos* 105 [1875], qtd. in Knowles 242). Another found Anna's portrayal to be "irreparable": "It is not a question of her virtues or shortcomings but that she seems to bifurcate before the reader's eyes and two Annas appear—one comes directly out of the novel while the other is from the author's own attitude to her. Therefore when he writes about her directly it seems that he is not speaking about the woman he is describing" (Vs. Soloviev, *St. Petersburg News* [1875], qtd. in Knowles 249). Commentators frequently see the contradictions in Anna's portrayal as symptomatic of Tolstoy's own inner conflicts. Some maintain that, although Tolstoy may have intended to condemn his heroine, he fell in love with her instead (Steiner, for example). According to many, Tolstoy's artistic sensibility was often at variance with his moralism. But as we are seeing, Tolstoy's realism—and his "contradictions"—serve his moral ends. For critical reactions to *Anna Karenina* in the 19th century, see Babaev, Bychkov, and Gusev. Russian and Western comments on the novel have been collected and translated by Knowles.

¹⁸ See also Mandelker's insightful treatment of the role played by the represented observer in *Anna Karenina* ("Illustrate and Condemn" and *Framing 101* and *passim*.)

¹⁹ As Jackson has written, "Tolstoy's poetics of eye-to-eye contact is rich and diverse in content" (*Dialogues with Dostoevsky* 310, n. 10) Jackson's discussion of the scene in *War and Peace* when Pierre has been taken prisoner and faces his French captor, Davoust, has great relevance to Tolstoy's art in *Anna Karenina*. As Jackson points out, when the narrative affirms that "Davoust saw in [Pierre] a man," this suggests "an ideal truth: to see a person is to know him. The act of seeing in this sense is active cognitive, and ethical....To see truly in Tolstoy's conception is to *know*; and to know deeply is to *love and unite*....Such is the ethic of vision that will triumph in Pierre in the course of the execution scene he witnesses in Maiden Field" (*ibid.* 60; emphases in the original). However, in *Anna Karenina*, true knowledge of the other eludes Anna and Vronsky. Tolstoy continually points to the discrepancies between the lovers' perceptions of each other and their actual thoughts and feelings.

²⁰ For a different interpretation of Anna's hypnotic power over Vronsky, see Jackson, "Chance and Design in *Anna Karenina*."

²¹ "Karenina" only becomes "Anna" at the very end of the chapter, when she is alone with Oblonsky (I.18:56). The narration now appropriately adopts the more intimate perspective of Anna's brother, and sheds the distanced perspective of the newly-met Vronsky.

²² The narrative repeatedly thematizes "falling in love with Anna." Those who do so (or at least claim to have done so) include Princess Vronskaya, the demi-mondaine Liza Merkalova, Lyovin, and as we have seen, Kitty and Vronsky.

²³ For a broader treatment of Tolstoy's use of the word *prelest'* in *Anna Karenina*, see Whitcomb, ("Treacherous 'Charm'" 214). Tolstoy fully exploits the word's aura of negative connotation, perceptible to modern Russian speakers in the verb *prel'stit'*, which can mean "to lure, entice," and *prel'stit'sia*, "to be tempted." As Whitcomb notes, the "significance of *prelest'* lies precisely in its problematic nature as a concept that sometimes promises its very opposite" (223, n. 2).

²⁴ Gustafson 349. Gustafson explains that for Tolstoy, "[i]ntoxication...hinders the activity of reason and thus opens the path to false understanding and flawed living. Intoxication befogs conscience. Furthermore, in intoxicated consciousness a person is attracted and affected, lured and led on by something foreign to it. Intoxication, thus, is a false facsimile of going forth and giving forth. In the state of arousal one is drawn into participation. In the moment of intoxication the sense of who I am and where I must go gets blurred. Stupefied, one forgets one's identity and vocation" (349). Thus, in "Why Do People Stupefy Themselves," Tolstoy asserts that the "confusion [*bezobrazie*], and above all the senselessness [*bessmyslenost'*], of our lives, arises chiefly from the constant state of intoxication in which most people live" (PSS 27:284). The consequences of intoxication are dire indeed: "The more a person stupefies himself, the more he is morally immovable" (PSS 27:275).

²⁵ As Silbajoris notes, for Tolstoy "his fiction itself was in an important way also a theory of art" (68). Bayley makes the point that "*Anna Karenina* does not only contain its own qualification and contradiction of Tolstoy's attitude to art—it also gives unexpected support to the examples of good and bad art that Tolstoy chooses" in his later theoretical statements on art (237).

²⁶ Ishchuk notes that in Tolstoy's writings, "'understanding' is treated as the greatest humanistic value," and adds that for Tolstoy, "'understanding' is the first step on the path to the movement of the artist to 'infection,' to the principal and universal (in Tolstoyan terms) law of art" (7).

²⁷ Grossman 8.

²⁸ Mandelker offers an excellent extended discussion of the portrait episode as an instance of *ekphrasis*, noting that the "description of Lyovin's act of gazing and the verbal description of the visual work of art...allows Tolstoy the opportunity for meta-aesthetic commentary" (*Framing Anna Karenina* 101). Mandelker fruitfully argues that "the figure of the framed woman regarded by a viewer in the text sets up the *mise-en-abîme* for our viewing of Tolstoy's novel, itself a portrait" (100). She notes that "we are made aware of the direction of our own gaze and the degree to which the novel presents Anna as spectacle and implicates us in its specularity" (100).

²⁹ Morson observes that the "device of the pictured audience is...deeply metafictional (more specifically, reader-implicating) in Tolstoi. These onlookers are...meant to be understood—but belatedly, only after we have made the error they exemplify—as metaphors for the process of reading the work in which they occur" ("The Reader as Voyeur" 480). See again Mandelker's reading of the portrait scene: "Lyovin's presence as the observer in the text mirrors the reader's role as voyeur and introduces the implicit comparison of Mikhailov's painted portrait with Tolstoy's verbal one" (113).

³⁰ See for instance LeBlanc ("Levin Visits Anna..."), who argues that Tolstoy encodes Lyovin's visit to Anna as a visit to a courtesan. That trope may suggest a judgment against Anna; illustrate her moral decline and/or self-perception; refract, somewhat ironically at Lyovin's expense, a cultural stereotype (Mandelker 111); or it may serve Tolstoy's social theme (Moscow as Babylon). But, for our purposes, it is important to see that Tolstoy, while distancing us from Anna, connects aesthetic infection to erotic infection. He thus once again problematizes aesthetic pleasure in ways that foreshadow his condemnation of "the art of our time and milieu," compared in *What is Art?* to a "fornicatress" [*bludnitsa*] (PSS 30:178). Mandelker, however, differentiates between the ultimate effect of Mikhailov's portrait on the beholder and the exclusively seductive effect of Anna's own aesthetic self-presentation at the opera; she finds that the latter anticipates Tolstoy's later critique of counterfeit art, while the former anticipates the "good art" of *What is Art?* (*Framing* 110-118).

³¹ Republic X 605 c-d. For more on Tolstoy's response to Platonic aesthetics, see Knapp's illuminating reading of "The Kreutzer Sonata" ("Tolstoy on Musical Mimesis").

³² Mandelker here suggests that Lyovin's pity points the reader to the proper response to Anna, and that Tolstoy here anticipates his later view that true art transmits feelings of compassionate love (*Framing* 115). But the episode paradoxically also evokes Plato's suspicion of the pity induced by mimesis. For Plato contends that poetry, by feeding "our hunger for tears and for an uninhibited indulgence in grief" induces the soul to relax its guard: "Our better nature, being without adequate intellectual or moral training, relaxes its control over these feelings, on the grounds that it is someone else's sufferings it is watching....For very few people are capable of realizing that what we feel for other people must infect what we feel for ourselves, and that if we let our pity for the misfortunes of others grow too strong it will be difficult to restrain our feelings in our own" (Republic X 606 a-b, 436-7). Lyovin gives voice to a similar distrust of pity

when he tells Kitty that "a sense of pity, after the wine that he had drunk, had misled him, that he had yielded to Anna's artful influence..." (VII.11:637).

³³ Anna and Lyovin point out that French realism's devotion to truth-telling is itself a convention, and share a joke at these realists' expense. Tolstoy here directs our attention to the paradox of representation that haunts any realist literary endeavor: he allows us to understand that no method of representation can eschew conventionality. In the portrait scene, Tolstoy implicitly valorizes classical theories of mimesis that do acknowledge the gap between representation and original. He further implies that it behooves the artist to adopt a broader notion of truth than the ultimately chimerical fidelity to facts espoused by the naturalist school. (A character in a realist novel, depicted next to her portrait and perceived in relation to that portrait, discusses the theory of realism while acknowledging the delight one experiences in seeing a resembling portrait—Tolstoy achieves dazzling metaliterary complexity reminiscent of Cervantes, Nabokov, or Borges.)

³⁴ *Poetics* 1448b. Greek aesthetics was on Tolstoy's mind just as he was beginning *Anna Karenina*, as his letter to Strakhov attests (PSS 62:24-25). He had immersed himself in the study of Greek in 1871.

³⁵ Halliwell concludes that for Aristotle, "the underlying explanation of the pleasure taken in the apprehension of mimetic objects...is the primary human pleasure in learning; learning and understanding therefore appear as the basis of both the active and the receptive interest in mimesis..." (71). Tolstoy has already been portraying mimetic pleasure in depicting Stiva's effect on others. The cry with which all greet him, "Ah! Stiva! Oblonsky! There he is!" suggests delighted recognition.

³⁶ Cf. Mandelker: "The juxtaposition of the two portraits—one real in a mirror, the other so real it seems to step from its frame—reinforces our sense of Anna and Lyovin as alter egos..." (112).

³⁷ "I'm so glad that *la glace est rompue*" [VII.10.634], Anna tells Lyovin as the scene draws to a close. It would not be unprecedented for Tolstoy to filter a French truism through Anna's consciousness, where it acquires particularized meaning. Her dream of the awful bearded peasant muttering the terrible phrase, "*il faut le battre le fer, le broyer, le pétrir*" [IV.3.329] distorts a cliché that conveys the urgency with which she seeks both life and death: "*Il faut battre le fer pendant qu'il est chaud.*"

³⁸ See n.3, above.

³⁹ Tolstoy himself posited a connection between the classical Greek ethos of compassionate identification—one that shaped the Aristotelian theory of tragedy—and the Christian law of love. Upon finishing the *Iliad* in 1857, Tolstoy wrote, "I read the inexpressibly wonderful [*prelestnyj*] end of the *Iliad*...I read the Gospel, which I haven't done in a long time. After the *Iliad*. How could Homer not have known that the Good is love? It's a discovery. There is no better explanation" (PSS 47 154). At the end of Homer's poem, Achilleus overcomes anger and enmity when he returns Hector's body to Priam. For a pertinent discussion of Aristotelian pity and fear in the work of a Russian author who often engaged in literary conversation with Tolstoy, see Knapp ("Fear and Pity in 'Ward Six'"). See also Mandelker, who argues that *Anna Karenina* is in fact a tragedy ["Illustrate and Condemn" 44, *Framing* 146 and *passim*.]

⁴⁰ Jackson calls attention to the expression *obrazuetsia* ("things will work themselves out") in the novel's first chapters. ("On the Ambivalent Beginning..."). Stiva calls *obrazuetsia* a "good little word," a phrase suggestive of the opening of the Gospel (the Good News) according to St. John: "In the beginning there was the Word." Tolstoy may thus be invoking the idea of a divine pattern (for *obraz* means "shape" and "form," as well as "image" or "icon") and a divine Logos as he begins the novel. Indeed, the novel as a whole answers a story of spiritual and familial fragmentation with a story of how the Good took form in Lyovin's soul and life. That said, Stiva's fondness for this expression also bespeaks his moral passivity: he wishes things would right themselves of their own accord (Whitcomb makes this point in "Resisting the Effortless in *Anna Karenina*").

⁴¹ Gustafson's study illuminates the connections between Eastern Christian theology and Tolstoy's poetics.

⁴² However, the vignette also offers a somewhat disturbing commentary on the idea of constructing a community based on notions of identity and identification. After all, society excludes Anna from its midst in part because she is different—she fails to conform to its norms. The novel's first sentence, connecting happiness to sameness ("All happy families are alike, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way"), brings this issue to the fore.

⁴³ Morson has suggested that "the key to understanding Anna is that she is Stiva's sister, Anna Oblonskaya" ("Prosaiscs," 7).

⁴⁴ I would like to thank Robert Belknap for helping me to perceive this pattern.

⁴⁵ Tolstoy describes his own strategy when he depicts Anna reading a novel and experiencing shame at her identification with the desires of the novel's hero: "she suddenly felt ashamed that he must have been ashamed, and that he was ashamed of the same thing—but what was he ashamed of? 'What am I ashamed of?' she asked herself with indignant surprise....At that very point in her recollections when she remembered Vronsky, the feeling of shame grew stronger, and some inner voice seemed to say to her, 'warm, very warm, burning!'" (I.29:92). Anna now reads in the way Tolstoy's text would have us read, for his narrative models and prompts our moral self-scrutiny.

⁴⁶ The theme of evasion pervades the novel. All the major characters evade or try to evade self-awareness and the demands of conscience. For example, Lyovin: "A struggle was going on between the desire to forget his unfortunate brother for the present, and the consciousness that it would be wrong" (I.28:24); "It is a pity, a pity, but I am not to blame," [Kitty] said to herself, but an inner voice said something different" (I.15:50); "But really, really I was not to blame, or only a very little," Anna said..." (I.28:90); "I made a mistake when I bound up my life with hers, but in my mistake there was nothing blameworthy, therefore I ought not to be unhappy. It is not I who is guilty," [Karenin] said to himself, 'but it is she...She does not concern me. She does not exist for me'" (III.13:254). Anna again: "The time came when I understood that I could no longer deceive myself, that I am alive, and cannot be blamed because God made me so, that I want to love and to live" (III.16:266-267); "But I was not guilty, and who was guilty? What is 'guilty'?" (VI.23:576). Anna's phrase echoes Pilate's "What is Truth?".

⁴⁷ Evdokimova pays special attention to Tolstoy's foregrounding of the painting's audience. Finke also notes Tolstoy's concern in this scene with the "vicissitudes of viewer response" (120). As has frequently been noted, Tolstoy frequently draws our attention to the insufficiency of any one perspective, for example in the chapters that describe the steeplechase. He thus acknowledges limits on understanding. But at the same time, he suggests that human beings do have access to moral truths. The Mikhailov chapters grapple with such paradoxes.

⁴⁸ Vetlovskaya suggests that the painting is an allegory for the central dichotomy in the novel between flesh and spirit, also remarking on the importance of the allusion to *John*, the Gospel that most explicitly concerns itself with that dichotomy.

⁴⁹ Mandelker ("Illustrate and Condemn") elaborates on some implications of Tolstoy's reference to *John*, and of his embedding of *John* as a witness. By directing our attention to the disciple, Tolstoy may be asking us to connect Mikhailov's project to *John*'s (the embodying in words of the divine, unchanging Word), and thus implicitly to juxtapose these two efforts to transcend the paradox of representation with his own such attempt as a practitioner of mimesis. However ironically, Tolstoy may be invoking the Johannine ideal of an unmediated discourse, in which there would be no gap between representation and truth. Throughout *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy's narrator (like Mikhailov and like Lyovin) constantly distinguishes between real and false coin, true and false language, and authentic and inauthentic art, thus seeking to define and express what is both morally and ontologically Real. In representing Christ before Pilate, Tolstoy also necessarily evokes Pilate's evasion as represented in *John* ("What is Truth?"). This phrase acquires additional resonance if one understands Tolstoy to be polemicizing with the poetics of naturalism in this scene. Unlike Zola who would assimilate literature to scientific observation, and thus claim to record scientifically determinable truth, Tolstoy suggests that a realist poetics must serve moral truth.

⁵⁰ In so doing he reiterates the message of the Gospel story to which *Anna Karenina* repeatedly alludes (for instance, Anna's phrase at the ball: "I won't cast a stone" [I.22]). In *John* 8:1-11, Jesus challenges hypocrites who would punish the woman taken in adultery: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone." All depart in silence, "being convicted by their consciences." Some years after completing *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy commented on this passage: "They understood that only he who is without sin can punish, but since there are not and cannot be such people, that no one may punish" (PSS 24:602). Tolstoy's contemporaries, he lamented, only sentimentalize the meaning of the parable, painting pictures and writing poems about it, but not confronting its ultimate implications.

⁵¹ Evdokimova also cites Silbajoris's statement in her thoughtful article treating the problematics of interpretation in the Mikhailov episode. She offers another perspective on Tolstoy's reader-oriented poetics in *Anna Karenina*.

⁵² I am grateful to Robert Belknap, Richard Gustafson, Deborah Martinsen, and Cathy Popkin for their help with earlier drafts of this material, and to my readers at *TSJ* for their suggestions.