
Tolstoy's Aesthetics: A Harmony and Translation of the Five Senses

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I

My comments in this essay do not pretend to be a well-elaborated contribution to Tolstoy's aesthetics—but consist, rather, of one preliminary remark, two working hypotheses, and one summary paradox.¹

To begin with the preliminary remark. Tolstoy, as is well known, spends much more time defining what art should not be, or what sorts of art are counterfeit, than he does defining the creation and forms of true good art. True art appears to come into being almost spontaneously, as if it “created itself.” What matters is not a set of techniques—artists command them, of course, but should not foreground them—but rather a series of effects; what art *is* is judged by what it does and how it acts, both on its creator and on its receiver. Art's action is to transmit feelings (or, more precisely, the feel of a primary experience) by means of infection. Its success is measured in three ways: by the degree of particularity or “definitiveness” of the feeling transmitted (особенность чувства); by its degree of clarity (ясность); and finally, by the sincerity of the artist (искренность художника) (*What is Art?*, ch. XV). Of these three, Tolstoy considered the third quality, sincerity, to be the “chief and most precious” (главное и драгоценнейшее) (ch. XII). It is also, I would add, the most contested and difficult. For it is not enough for Tolstoy that a genuine, sincere artist (especially one from the upper, educated classes) be simply seized by inspiration or glimpse the sublime. What, then, is sincerity?

It seems to me that Tolstoy, over his long life, came to expect two qualities of a member of the upper class who wished to produce sincere art. Both are modelled on his own personal spiritual experience. First, the artist must be dissatisfied with himself and eager to be transfigured through artistic activity. And second, this “dissatisfaction with self” must be combined with an indifference, even a defiance, toward one's own society, which naturally desires that the artist please it, serve it, and integrate into it. The first expectation is clearly pious and salvational; the second is rebellious and Romantic. (The latter quality helps to explain how Tolstoy could say about Mikhail Lermontov, whose biography and ethical priorities could otherwise only have repelled him, that “Turgenev was a *littérateur*, Pushkin was one too . . . [only] Lermontov and I are not *littérateurs*” “Тургенев - литератор, Пушкин был тоже им . . . (а) Лермонтов и я - не литераторы”]²) Sincerity, for artists from the corrupted classes, could not be achieved by strong, straightforward feeling alone; it had to be a feeling that irritated or nagged at the reigning norms. That a person might register strong spontaneous feeling in a highly conventional form was not in principle impossible, but it raised Tolstoy's suspicions. (We recall his letter to I. I. Biriukov in December 1887: “If a poet can speak by means of verses in such a way that we don't notice that these are verses, then it's okay. . . .” [“Если может поэт так сказать стихами, чтобы мы не заметили, что это стихи, - хорошо. . .”]³) That, it seems, is the key phrase: “so that we don't notice.” A curious inconsistency results. Although the content and themes of good, true art should be in some manner opposed to the norms of one's society, a slap in the face of what is considered conventional wisdom and “good taste,” its form should be maximally invisible: this, for us privileged and thus disfigured people, is sincerity. Now for my first working hypothesis.

Hypothesis #1 expands on a single word in the title of this essay. For Tolstoy, art is a unification. I have dared to describe Tolstoy's aesthetics as a paraphrase of his “Gospels Project” (“Соединение, перевод и исследование четырех Евангелий”), because the good news about authentic art is compatible with the Good News about Christ. This idea is not new. In an important

article from 1996, Amy Mandelker argues that Tolstoy's "theory of reception aesthetics" is "eucharistic"—and that the dynamics of *What is Art?* "rests on a view of art as sacrament."⁴ Several further parallels might be noted.⁵ First, what is important in art—as in faith—is not to fill a container with specific content (with a theme, a name, an image, a miracle); what is important is to orient oneself properly toward a goal, and then to seek.⁶ Art is not located in the artefact; rather, like certain notions of God and His Holy Spirit, it is Invisible, Unnamable, a conduit through which we move toward the Good. In this movement, as always for Tolstoy, the first steps are crucial. And at the lower levels of our quest for self-perfection, art is for us the very best guide—because it is so palpable, so accessible, so pleasurably available to the senses. Tenderly, naturally, it conduces us to "reasonable understanding" ["разумение"], that blissful state in which faith and reason are not felt to be contradictory.

From this it follows that the major obstacle to appreciating the truth of the Gospels—the miracles and supernatural myths—has an equivalent in counterfeit art: a reliance on "striking effects" [поразительность], borrowed motifs [заимствование], and the interest or curiosity factor [занимательность]. All three "counterfeit" qualities are characteristic of the fanciful, proselytizing stories recorded by the disciples of Christ but they are not, Tolstoy insists, essential to the message of the Life itself. And thus Tolstoy's emphasis, in his own rewritten version of the Gospels, on the underlying anarchy of that sacred Life: its rejection of all earthly authority and institutions. To serve Christ, and to serve Art, means to disavow schools, disciples, criticism, all the sundry "priesthoods" of special training and arduous languages that of necessity turn art into a craft: to disavow everything, in fact, that might interfere with the artist as a contact-point for love. Neither complexity of construction nor any other cleverness are needed here. What is needed is unity—and for Tolstoy, unity in art is not Aristotelian, but Augustinian. It should work to simplify and purify, and it exists beyond considerations of time.

Such notions, in my view, help us to under-

stand the scorn that Tolstoy heaps on Richard Wagner. Wagner's own model for the "unification of the arts," the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Tolstoy investigated with considerable interest—but only until he realized, doubtless with mounting disgust, that this proposed "music of the future" did not intend to "unite" in the sense of purify or simplify into a single translucent moral feeling, but to "unite" in the sense of amalgamate, synthesize, mix and fuse various artistic media, pile one "поразительность" and "занимательность" on top of another and then sink the whole composition in a morass of mystical narrative borrowings, or myths.⁷ Henceforth Wagner, heretic "unifier" and false prophet, would be for Tolstoy the anti-exemplar, the producer of counterfeit art par excellence.

Tolstoy's hostility to Wagner does highlight one important point, however. Since for Tolstoy art is what it does, he sought a "соединение," a unification or "harmony," not at the level of the artistic source (that is, not in an artist's complexity or in a stage-manager's ingenuity) but in the receiver, in the audience or the target of the artwork. What must be harmonized, then, are our impressions and reactions. Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* was corrupt precisely because it mixed singing, acting, talking, dancing, and dreaming in a profligate way, and this confounded and inflamed the eye, the ear, the body. Such art was counterfeit because it was a spectacle—and complicated, overly clever spectacles interfere with seeing.⁸ True vision requires careful vertical focusing. As Tolstoy jotted down in his diary on 12 July 1900: "Every art is a chessboard, which must be penetrated deeply in order to find the new. People who are not capable of penetrating in this way make raids on the neighbouring arts on behalf of their own field and think that they are finding the new: poetry raids music, and vice versa; painting raids poetry, etc." ["Каждое искусство - шахматное поле, кот(орое) надо углубить, чтобы найти новое. Люди же не могущие углубить прихватывают в свое поле из соседни(х) искусств и думают, что творят новое: поэзия - музыку, и наоборот, живопись - поэзию и т.д."]⁹(PSS 30: 28). By thus dispersing, agitating, and confusing our attention,

such raiding activity of artists—desperate for the effect of novelty—disunifies rather than unifies the world.

Earlier in this same diary entry from mid-July 1900 Tolstoy had written, apropos of God's will: ". . . Although I do not know what this meaning is, I know that there is a meaning, and I know what I must do in order to live in accordance with this meaning: I must do that which unites" [" . . . хотя не знаю какой, но знаю, что есть смысл, (знаю,) что мне надо делать, чтобы жить согласно с этим смыслом; делать надо то, что объединяет"]. We might conclude that correct art resembles correct faith in this sense: that both clarify as they unite, creating an impression of singular, irresistible truth. Six months before, Tolstoy, in a wonderfully obstinate moment, had jotted down a similar idea based on musical material, specifically on what was wrong with polyphony: "It's necessary that a voice say something, and here there are many voices, and each of them says nothing" ["Нужно, чтобы голос говорил что-нибудь, а то много голосов, и каждый ничего не говорит"¹⁰]. Just as lines of music should be kept separate so that each can speak clearly and be heard, so should the arts be kept separate, since each has its own medium and task—and each, as it were, must answer for and "clarify" its own particular organ of perception. Otherwise our unharnessed senses will run wildly out of control. This leads to my second working hypothesis.

Hypothesis #2: Tolstoy's most enduring passion was to punish the sense-passions, and this shaped his aesthetics in an odd fashion. Let us return to the title of this essay, this time to the word "translation" [перевод]. Authentic art, in the Tolstoyan definition I am trying to develop here, is a harmony and a translation (that is, a transmission) of strong, clear, feeling from one person to another. But in Tolstoy's discussion of its contemporary "civilized" forms, art appears not as a stimulation of our senses toward Goodness, Beauty, or Truth, but rather as that which chronically pulls us into transgressive play, as an assault upon the senses. Music irritates the ear. French

impressionism violates the eye. Dance is offensive because it arouses an eagerness—or at least it arouses Tolstoy's eagerness—to touch (sexual desire).

The forms of art that Tolstoy condemns enjoy an unusual status in his thought. On the one hand they are unnecessary, immoral, and should thus disappear. On the other hand they are wholly necessary, to tempt and magnify our weaknesses and to punish us for them. Tolstoy tends to begin with the vice and then work back to the art. "People are bad and they love their vices" ["Люди дурны и любят свои пороки"], he wrote categorically in 1882, in a letter drafted to the art journal editor N. A. Alexandrov. Art, it appears, is an accomplice in this sinful love. And Tolstoy manages to insult almost all the fine arts in a single paragraph. "Girls are dancing with naked legs—it's useless, but there are people eager to watch, so it's art. Pull a lot of sounds together and tickle our ears with them—that's art. Draw naked women or some grove: art. Pick out a few rhymes and describe how gentlemen fornicate: art" ["Пляшут девки с голыми ногами—бесполезно, но есть охотники смотреть—искусство. Много звуков набрать и щекотать ими слух—искусство. Написать голых женщин или рошу—искусство. Подобрать рифмы и описать, как блудят господа—искусство"] (*PSS* 30: 209-212, esp. 211).

In fact, as anyone who loves both the greatness of Tolstoy and the greatness of art will admit, Tolstoy is so reductive that at times he competes favourably with the most furious worshippers of Freud. In *What is Art?*, French novels are all written by authors sick with "erotic mania." The upper classes have always valued only pride, vanity, lust, and boredom [гордость, тщеславие, похоть, скука] [ch. IX]. Tolstoy asserts as self-evident some astonishingly untrue statements about our relations with our bodies, such as: "After all, considering the question of food, it would occur to no one to see the significance of food in the pleasure which we receive from partaking of it" ["Ведь разбирая вопрос о пище, никому в голову не придет видеть значение пищи в том наслаждении, которое мы получаем

от принятия ее”)(ch. IV)—when of course such an idea does indeed occur to millions of people, who would point out, common-sensically, that the pleasure of food is absolutely part of its function and central to its ability to nourish us.

Even the word (and the caressing sounds of words) insult us—although it is true that the word receives less attention than do the other artistic media. For the word is always ready to draw attention to itself in an exhibitionist fashion, like the undressed bodies that recur obsessively in that letter to Alexandrov. Consider, for example, Tolstoy’s marginal comments in his copy of *Hamlet*, all those “not relevant,” “to no purpose” “why?” [“не кстати,” “ни к чему,” “зачем”],¹¹ and also his remark, in “On Shakespeare and on Drama” [“О Шекспире и о драме,” 1906], that during his re-reading of *King Lear* one of the reasons that he “not only experienced no pleasure, but felt irresistible revulsion, boredom and bewilderment” [“не только не испытал наслаждения, но и почувствовал неотразимое отвращение, скуку и недоумение”] was that, in Shakespeare’s dramas, thoughts, and utterances arise not in logical fashion out of real emotional situations (at least as Tolstoy understands that process) but out of the sounds of words, out of consonances and verbal puns.¹² Significantly, Tolstoy is not just disappointed or unmoved by Shakespeare’s plays, he does not just leave them in peace and turn away; he is outraged and disgusted. He stays put, reading, re-reading, reading into, reducing the text to absurd and mean-spirited paraphrase. In Tolstoy’s assaulted, insulted body, which at some level appears to crave this assault and this insult as its just and unescapable punishment, all feelings unite, harmonize, and intensify to resist the effects of art. His disgust is a counter-attack—but it is not, of course, either a definition of art or an analysis of it. What lies at the base of this battle against the passions by means of the passions? And why does Tolstoy select, to defend himself, the crudest possible weapons?

The answer to this question is not easy. Tolstoy—who could create marvelously persuasive fictions from the point of view of a woman, a child, a Caucasian tribe, a horse—found it

exceptionally difficult, in the ethical realm, to imagine a genuine, fully-embodied other. That real others could, say, be indifferent to the seductions of music or poetry; not care for meat, tobacco, or wine and thus feel obliged neither to exaggerate their effects nor to forbid their consumption; assign sex a defined but minor role in their lives and thus see genuine grace, physical discipline, and beauty in ballet rather than solely “naked legs”; listen to Beethoven but not feel threatened, be unbothered by Wagner: if such ideas occur to Tolstoy at all, he quickly banishes them. Everywhere he takes a stand on the senses and sensual passions from within his own isolated, sovereign self. It is important, I think, not to confuse this position with the more famous charge, made by (among others) Lev Shestov: that Tolstoy’s aesthetics is motivated by anger against what he himself is, by “ferocious hatred for the educated classes, for art, for science,” which ultimately transformed the great artist into a punitive ethical solipsist.¹³ That this is so should not surprise us, for such craving for humiliation goes hand in hand with pride—as the author of *Father Sergius* knew better than anyone. Moral preachers usually believe that good and evil are fixed points in the cosmos; this belief alone can elevate their word. What seems peculiar and restrictive to me is not that fact but rather that Tolstoy, so co-resonant and sympathetic as a creative artist, is in the realm of ethics a *corporeal* solipsist. However good and evil might be fixed, surely a responsive human body is more accidental, diverse, and motley. There are no grounds for standardizing its reactions, for assuming that my body is anyone else’s. Tolstoy, however, does so assume: his own pleasures, curiosities, inclinations, phobias become for all others the “always.” In narrative fiction (Ivan Il’ich’s slow dying, for example) this rhetoric can be awe-inspiring. When generalized into a theory of perception with commanding moral imperatives, such a position is—my own Bakhtinian reflexes prompt me to say—a terribly difficult, honourable, exhausting, and ultimately false way to relate to the world.

In an excellent recent article on “Tolstoyan echoes” in *The Idiot*, Donna Orwin remarks on the

differences between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky on the question of nature and virtue (Orwin 1999: 87-102, esp. 89-91). Both believed in the natural goodness of children, but, during the stress of maturation and adult striving, Dostoevsky felt that corruption was inevitable and that no one, therefore, was to blame. Tolstoy, in contrast, did not believe in the inevitability of our corruption. Like Rousseau before him, he sought some outside force or institution that could assume the blame. Nature—which Orwin defines for Tolstoy as “conscience in human beings and necessity in the external world” (91)—could keep our expansive vitality and self-love in check. With Orwin’s observation in mind, we might conclude that Tolstoy caricatures so reductively the “civilized” art of his time precisely because it cannot be brought under either of those two qualities essential for Tolstoyan “nature”: conscience within, necessity in the outside world.¹⁴ Or, as Tolstoy puts the matter in *What is Art?* [ch. V], art must cease to be viewed as a “means of pleasure” [средство наслаждения] and begin to be considered “one of the conditions of human life” [одно из условий человеческой жизни]. Does this suggest that pleasure is not a condition of human life? If so, it is a more chilling thought than, say, Plato’s mandate to exile the “intoxicated poets” from the ideal Republic, which was merely a political act undertaken in defence of civic virtue. Tolstoy, much more radically, would constrain and exile the arts as practised in his day in order to defend natural virtue. “Nature” in this instance is measured solely by the besieged and vulnerable nature that Tolstoy acknowledged as his own.

Where does this all lead? Since art, by its very nature, attacks the senses, the moral obligations of the “artistic contract” must be formulated anew—and suspiciously. The artist (or performer) is to be blamed for improper arousal; the receiver must answer for disciplining the senses once they have been aroused. This new set of duties might explain the peculiar tendency of the mature Tolstoy to “start with self-discipline itself” and then work back to the virtue, just as, in condemning modern art and ballet in the letter to Alexandrov, he began with the vice and worked back to the art. Work-

songs might not necessarily be better than Beethoven, but their performance is yoked to exhausting labour and thus they offer less chance for us to “forget ourselves” amid pure music; likewise, vegetarianism is the preferable diet, not because Tolstoy (an experienced and passionate hunter) necessarily considered all animal life sacred—but because he had a strong liking for meat, and valued the self-discipline involved in giving that pleasure up. And let us not forget beauty, which provides such deep pleasure, and which is insulted and discredited as a foundation for aesthetics in the opening chapters of *What is Art?* It seems that Tolstoy’s real concern surfaces near the end of his “Preface to the Works of Guy de Maupassant” [“Предисловие к сочинениям Гюи де Мопассана”], when he objects to stories built around the follies of carnal love. “And then: is this beauty really beauty, after all?” Tolstoy asks. “What’s it all for? It would be good if one could stop life with it. But it goes on. And what does it mean, that life goes on? Life goes on, which means: your hair falls out, turns grey, your teeth rot, wrinkles come, a foul smell from your mouth . . .” [“И потом, точно ли красота это - красота? А потом, зачем все это? Ведь это хорошо было бы, если бы можно было остановить жизнь. А она идет. А что такое значит: идет жизнь? Идет жизнь, значит: волосы падают, седеют, зубы портятся, морщины, запах изо рта . . .”] (Tolstoy 1983, XV: 246). Guy de Maupassant is poorly served by Tolstoy’s preface, of course; that French master was able to invest more tolerance, generosity, and love in his battered, endearing women’s bodies than Tolstoy could have done in his wildest dreams. But it would seem that Tolstoy’s irritated verdict here is not about beauty, not about bad art, not even about sinful sexual love. It is about the aging, disobedient, but still thirsting body. Whenever one tries to cast the blame, it is not the artefact itself but the receiving, thirsting body that is the court of last resort. For such a body, a feeling of wholeness is possible only through the renunciation of a temptation. A dialogue is set up between that living temptation and its renunciation. Other sorts of dialogues (say, between living

people) are superfluous, and only reluctantly credited as sources of new information or learning.

But paradoxes remain, and I will close on one of the most difficult. Tolstoy was a seer of the flesh. This is true, whether he chose to praise the flesh or to punish it. However much he was drawn to other religious systems—and he investigated many oriental religions that promised liberation, during the very years he worked most intensely on his theory of art—he never ceased believing in the human body as primary reality, trusting that it was where we had to begin. He obsessively recorded its triumphs and failures, measured his days by it, worked his resurrectionary aesthetics through its feelings and needs. But he never forgave the body. In part, as I have suggested, this was his reluctance—or inability—to endow any body with responses or priorities different from his own; this is a lonely and most likely a distorting path. In part it was the gesture of a psyche so richly gifted and so blessed with appetites and energy that success, achievement, and personal mastery no longer qualified as events; only renunciation was an event. And there is also the possibility, hinted at by Ivan Bunin in his remarkable memoir-portrait of Tolstoy, that the real struggle within Tolstoy's soul was not what Isaiah Berlin would later label the Hedgehog versus the Fox but rather a battle between the Faustian striver or pedagogue, grounded in this world, and the oriental ascetic, who would neither reform the world nor judge it, preferring instead to leave the Chain.¹⁵ But most central for the aesthetic side of the problem, Tolstoy would not allow art to function as a transforming or transfiguring antidote to the body's downward slide. "From Plato to Tolstoy, art has been accused of exciting the emotions and thus of disturbing the order and harmony of our moral life," Ernst Cassirer wrote in his chapter "Art" from *An Essay on Man*. "But the flaw in this theory is obvious. Tolstoy suppresses a fundamental moment of art, the moment of form."¹⁶ Cassirer is correct. Form can redeem us, educate us, restore us. But form is also that which bestows a body. It spreads out and endures in time. Thus it always risks becoming "artificial," counterfeit, a

temptation, a centre of gravity which generates a desire, a striving, an insatiable appetite, and thus it can only be a pernicious obstacle to that momentary spark of ideal universal love, which cannot last. Form, for Tolstoy as a philosopher of aesthetics, cannot be reconciled with infection.¹⁷ Hence the anger; hence the disgust; hence the hope in resurrection once the Word is purified and grasped; hence, too, the paradoxical genius.

Notes

1. The present essay is a slightly revised and expanded English version of a paper, "Эстетика Толстого: Соединение и перевод пяти чувств," delivered at the Second International Scholarly Conference, "Tolstoy and World Literature," held at Iasnaiia Poliana on 22-26 August 2000.

2. Recorded by G. Rusanov ("Poezdka v Iasnuiu Polianu [24-25 avgusta 1883 g.], published in *Tolstovskii ezhegodnik 1912*, St. Petersburg, Moscow, 1912), as cited in Leusheva 413. This defiant understanding of Lermontov's own psycho-sociological significance for later generations—defiant and manly even vis-à-vis Pushkin's mythologized end—is developed by Powelstock.

3. The letter continues: ". . . а без этого лучше говорить, как умеешь, всю . . . Стихи? Мне кажется так: если совсем серьезно относиться к поэзии: хотя эта мысль светлохристовова воскресения—я бы начал говорить—писать, как вижу, чувствую, не стихами, а потом пришло бы место, где моя мысль потребовала бы больше сжатости, силы, законченности, и вышли бы стихи; может быть, так и кончилось бы стихами, а может быть, несколько строф, а потом опять проза. . ." (Tolstoy 1955: 226-27). Noteworthy here (in addition to a clear appreciation of poetry as a compressed, forceful, fully consummated form of speech) is Tolstoy's militant dismissal of the rights of a genre to shape a feeling, and also his refusal to regard poetry as "created" in any way different or more demanding than prose: what one needs to say simply "comes out" in poetry under certain conditions.

4. Mandelker 116-17. She elaborates in a series of remarkable insights: "Tolstoy's aesthetics are, in fact, a *summa theologica* in which we can discern several

key doctrines of Orthodox Christianity. Tolstoy's aesthetics can be characterized, therefore, as iconological, sacramental, eucharistic, pentecostal and evangelical: iconological in elevating true Christian art and the notion of subtle theophany over standard mimesis; sacramental in a certain naive conviction concerning the capacities of infection; eucharistic in the emphasis on the resulting experience of communion or brotherhood; pentecostal in an implicit reliance on supernatural conviction and discernment; evangelical in the intention to exhort readers to the experience of observance, conversion and witness" (117).

5. My discussion here was greatly stimulated by Patterson's passionate "Translator's Introduction" in Tolstoy 1992: ix-xxxvi.

6. Tolstoy makes this distinction clear in his "Predslovie k sborniku 'Tsvetnik'" (1886), in a discussion of truth in art (verisimilitude) versus fantasy or make-believe (выдумка). "He who writes the truth is not he who merely describes how something was, what one person does and what another person does, but he who shows what people should do, i.e., in accordance with God's will . . . Правда - это путь" (Tolstoy 1983, XV: 35).

7. For a good discussion of Tolstoy's differences with Wagner on this question of the synthesis of the arts, see Kuzina, esp. 109-13.

8. Tolstoy's reasoning here against Wagner is in the spirit of Rousseau's mid-eighteenth-century polemic against the establishment of a French theatre in Geneva (and implicitly against Voltaire), in which Rousseau argues that the plots of tragedy are "enormous, bloated, chimerical"; that fear and pity might be discharged during such spectacles but only in a trivial and transitory way, which has no edifying effect on moral growth; that public stage spectacles must cater to the public and the public's appetites are depraved, etc. See Rousseau, "Letter to D'Alembert on the Theatre."

9. The intriguing comparison here of artistic "purity" with chess—where creative combinations are limited by strict rules of subordination—merits more attention.

10. Diary entry for 18 December 1899, in Paliukh and Prokhorova 181.

11. For an interesting revisionist interpretation of these marginalia, see Rogers. Rogers's thesis is that Tolstoy

sensed—uncomfortably—that Hamlet himself from within the play was making the same critique of "unnatural language" that Tolstoy would like to make against the play, and that Tolstoy naturally resisted this potential infection and erected barriers against it.

12. As Tolstoy writes (1906): in Shakespeare, people in love, or preparing for death, or fighting and dying, do not speak "naturally" (Tolstoy 1983, XV: 258-59) but "говорят чрезвычайно много и неожиданно о совершенно не идущих к делу предметах, руководясь больше звуковыми, каламбурами, чем мыслями" (281).

13. See "The Good in the Teaching of Tolstoy and Nietzsche: Philosophy and Preaching," (Shestov 56-72, esp. 71). Such an unforgiving attitude toward what one knows best is combined, in Tolstoy's case, with a profoundly dualistic world view—which tended to mirror opposites. As D. S. Mirsky boldly expressed the matter for the first Tolstoy centennial: unlike the case of Rousseau, Goethe, Pushkin, Gogol, "there was no great variety of ingredients" in Tolstoy's personality. "He was one of the most simply composed of great men. But if there was no very great variety of elements in him, there was none that was not counter-balanced by its opposite. His mind was essentially dialectical, in the Hegelian sense. . . . But, unlike Hegel's system, Tolstoy's mind did not surmount the contradiction of 'thesis' and 'antithesis' by any synthesis. Instead of Hegel's 'triads,' Tolstoy was all arranged in a small number of irreducible and intensely hostile 'dyads.' . . . Dualism is the hall-mark of the ethical man. The essence of ethics is a dualistic pattern, an irreducible opposition between right and wrong or good and evil." Mirsky then identifies Tolstoy's personality-type with Narcissus (Mirsky in Smith 303-11, esp. 304)).

14. For example: Tolstoy is driven to a frenzy by hairdressers, gourmet cooks, and acrobats who call themselves "artists"—and why not, he asks, since we have not yet devised a definition of art that would seal them out? (See *PSS* 30: 210.) He will remedy this lack. Art must become part of nature: both relevant to conscience, and necessary.

15. In Bunin's Buddhist hypothesis, Tolstoy was indeed a genius, an old and wise soul, but with a strange "образная память" that was wedded to appetite, to striving, and to matter, expressing itself first in passionate sinning and then as a passionate "enemy of sin." In both phases, Bunin suggests, moral

figures who follow this path are “insatiable slaves of Maya” (68). Bunin, who worked for “Posrednik” in his youth and had several memorable meetings with Tolstoy, ultimately judged his master’s journey a flawed one, “the agony and horror of leaving [уход] the Chain, a consciousness of its vanity—and a thoroughgoing enchantment with it” (69).

16. In the opening pages of his lucid survey of Western aesthetics, Cassirer remarks that the imitation theory—which held sway until the watershed of Rousseau, Goethe, and the legitimation of individual creative sensibility—could never comfortably incorporate a “logic of the imagination,” which seemed inferior to the logic of pure scientific intellect. Thus an independent role for art always risked collapsing into one or the other side of the Kantian triad. To many theorists (and here we may include Tolstoy), it seemed preferable to look at art as an “emblem of moral truth” rather than as poor logic. Cassirer, of course, developed his own theory of art (and his own way out of the deadlock between objective and subjective aesthetics) by defining art as a “symbolic form,” which is pointedly “not the mere reproduction of a ready-made, given reality. It is one of the ways leading to an objective view of things and of human life” (143). “The awareness of pure forms is by no means an instinctive gift, a gift of nature,” he writes (144). “We may have met with an object of our ordinary sense experience a thousand times without ever having ‘seen’ its form. . . . It is art that fills this gap.”

17. Here, a binary distinction from the early work of Iuryi Lotman can be instructive. Lotman (1970) discusses the two contrasting poles from which we approach art—understanding it versus experiencing aesthetic pleasure from it—and aligns them with two types of pleasure. He seeks some definition of cognition that would apply the same variables to both, thus dissolving the need for the conscientious critic to choose between. His argument is as follows. Art is perceived by the senses. Art also is communication—a prerequisite as important to Lotman as it is to Tolstoy, although Lotman’s reasons are more cybernetic than moral. “It is impossible not to acknowledge,” Lotman writes, “that it is possible for every process of sensual assimilation to be represented as the reception of information.” [“Нельзя не признать, что всякий процесс чувственного освоения также можно представить как получение информации.”] He then offers a new (although admittedly somewhat crude) binary: “sensual pleasure can be defined as the

reception of information from non-systematic material (in contrast to intellectual pleasure, which is the reception of information from systematicity)” [“чувственное наслаждение можно было бы определить как получение информации из *несистемного* материала (в отличие от интеллектуального - получения информации из системности)”. This definition permits Lotman to investigate art’s effects through the medium of codes. “Intellectual pleasure,” we are told, “occurs as the result of applying to a communication or message one code or a small number of logically related codes [“Интеллектуальное наслаждение дается в результате приложения к сообщению одного или небольшого числа логически связанных кодов (это наслаждение в том и состоит, чтобы массу пестрого материала свести к одной системе)”. The time required for “intellectual pleasure” to register on the brain is, Lotman says, “instantaneous” [“мгновенное”]. He is apparently referring here to the fabulously satisfying “aha!” experience: the pleasure of getting a joke, grasping a concept, feeling suddenly “inside a meaning” where before one was outside. Sensual or sense-based pleasure [“чувственное наслаждение”] is different. “Sensual pleasure presumes the multiple application of diverse codes,” Lotman writes. “It is protracted and many continue as long as there is a definite reality that is subject to feelings, as long as there is some extra-systemic material capable of being introduced into various systems.” [“Чувственное наслаждение подразумевает применение многократных и разных кодов. Оно длительно и может продолжаться, пока есть определенная реальность, подлежащая чувствам, пока есть внесистемный материал, который подлежит ввести в различные системы.”] He proceeds to compare intellectual pleasure with a nutshell, “оболочка ореха,” that is thrown away once it is cracked, whereas sense-based “physical pleasure” strives to be continuous: it needs time, since the process of expression itself constitutes its content and value. Thus the reception of art involves both “intellectual joy” [“интеллектуальная радость”], the cracking of the nut, as well as a semiotic text that is more a texture, extensive in time and space, a “quasi-material fabric” [“квасиматериальная ткань”] that can be stretched and prolonged, thus guaranteeing us physical pleasure.

It might be argued that this binary opposition highlights one of the central paradoxes of Tolstoy’s aesthetics. Tolstoy insisted that the joy and authenticity of art was contained in a moment of “infection,” an instantaneous transfer of feeling that registered on the

senses. This was a purifying, simplifying moment, a reduction of the many to the one, a grasping of the truth: in a word, a moment with all the characteristics of Lotman's "intellectual joy." It cannot last. But the alternative type of joy that must supplement this "cracking of the nut"—a slower, more sensually extensive delight in the multi-codedness of the world, of our own bodies and powers of observation, of "motley, extra-systemic material"—this was a minefield of moral dangers for Tolstoy, since his approach to "extensive pleasures" in general was more punitive than celebratory. So, the paradox: Tolstoy the aesthetician, who would exile ideas and "занимательность" from the kingdom of true art, is most comfortable equating art with what Lotman calls the transitory moment of "intellectual pleasure." This magnificent author of the nineteenth-century's longest and structurally most ambitious novel did not want to deal theoretically with the problem of "extension" in the reception of art. See Lotman 76-78.

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