

sort of motivation for Tolstoy's absolute language, taking it out of Bakhtin's logos-centered treatment and into the realm of the divine Image.

The second highly attractive argument in Mandelker's book is her reformulation of Tolstoy and the female question. Tolstoy is not a misogynist, she persuasively argues, if we make some effort to see his views in the context of the patronizing feminism of his time (her case in point is John Stuart Mill) and if we eschew our own post-Freudian reflexes about active sexuality as always central to self-fulfillment. Tolstoy insists that womanly pursuits are both superior to male ones and singularly unglamorous; that passionate love and motherhood can co-exist in the same body; and that radical chastity was an honorable choice for a human being (not merely a reaction to disappointments in the erotic realm, nor an outgrowth of Tolstoy's own personal anxieties). To my mind, this sort of rigorous, informed feminist thinking about great—and greatly vulnerable—male writers applies the best of new theory in a responsible and most provocative way.

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Amy Mandelker's *Framing Anna Karenina* has become the first book I turn to for ideas about Tolstoy's novel. Her monograph was an ideal choice for Ohio State's *Theory and Interpretation of Narrative*, a series which evidently seeks to occupy the middle landscape between out-and-out theory and practical criticism. *Framing Anna Karenina* is a worthy contribution to the current state of our critical dialogue on such issues as the feminist reading of Tolstoy (especially the question of his misogyny), genre criticism (*Anna Karenina* and the realist novel), and the poetics of prose (the inter-implicated topics of framing, ekphrasis, the sublime, and mythopoesis). Although these concerns provide the major terms of reference for Mandelker's work, the next turns in critical theory are unlikely to make her book obsolete, because it possesses strengths of a different order as well: first, Mandelker is a superb close reader, whose explications of the key passages suggested to her by her theoretical concerns do justice to Tolstoy's call for critics to bring to light his novel's "labyrinth of linkages." Second, this is a truly comparative work. Professor Mandelker's sustained juxtapositions of Tolstoy with the Victorians (Dickens, Eliot, Thackeray, Trollope, and many others) and, less extensively, with such classics of modernism as Proust and Joyce, are always illuminating.

Mandelker belongs with those feminist scholars who argue against dismissing Tolstoy's vision of gender relations by applying the label 'misogyny' to them. Hers is the most nuanced, detailed, and sustained elaboration of the position that (a) Tolstoy should not be looked at from a presentist perspective and (b) along with misogynist elements, his writings also contain a powerful feminist critique of gender inequality and its implications for both men and women. I for one am convinced.

Mandelker sees Tolstoy as striving to achieve in *Anna Karenina* what she calls an "iconic aesthetics": just as an icon, for the faithful, is not a representation but a window into transcendent truth, so the verbal image

(especially the verbally-inscribed visual image) becomes invested with sublimity and with the power to infect the viewer with true knowledge and agapic love. Over the course of her study, Mandelker gradually builds an argument involving the use of framing, iconic aesthetics and the categories of the beautiful and the sublime, the implications of social gender, and the trope of ekphrasis. Deriving her version of the sublime from classical aesthetics (especially Kant and Burke), she associates the sublime at various points with the realm of the masculine, the heroic, the disembodied, and the subject (and perhaps artistic genre?) of landscape. The category of the beautiful she links with the portrait, the embodied, the mundane, and (of course) the feminine.

She sees the device of framing as operating the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime, invoking an idea derived from Kant: frames make us aware of form and limitation--and hence of the (boundless) sublime. Whereas aesthetic contemplation is for Kant a disinterested activity, the highest art, for Tolstoy (in *What is Art?*) moves the audience to a state of Christian community and love. She sees Tolstoy, in *Anna Karenina* as, variously, "Easternizing" the Kantian sublime by means of iconic aesthetics and moving towards a modernist practice: "An emphasis on the frame is a modernist move that sets up the experience of the sublime and signals that the viewer must access ultimate vision through an aperture leading from the earth-bound into a transcendent realm"(80). This entire apparatus of argument is brought to bear upon Mikhailov's portrait of Anna and related ekphrases, which for me are the centerpiece of the book.

Mandelker shows how Mikhailov's portrait of Anna is at the center of a network of portraits, either actual paintings or scenes of Anna that set her off by the use of a frame, as if she were a portrait. Mandelker is a superb guide to the nodes of this complex schema. A few examples will have to do: thus, Mikhailov's portrait is bracketed by two symposia on love (the two dinners with Lyovin and Oblonsky); Vronsky's viewing of Anna at the Opera recapitulates the main motifs of Karenin's viewing of Anna's portrait earlier; the "portrait" of Anna reading an English novel on the train anticipates "her final reading of life from her carriage window," and "her last suicidal vision, which Tolstoy expresses in the metaphor of reading by candlelight, thus making the tableau of Anna reading the controlling image for the entire novel" (138-390).

There are three elements in Professor Mandelker's account which I would like to see either made explicit or rendered in greater detail. First, there is the evolution of the sublime. As I understand it, for Burke and Kant, it is associated with the outsize and the inhuman; for instance, with the mountains, the oceans, and the arctic wastes) but can be humanized and transformed into the beautiful when it is framed as art. What is the argument for associating the sublime and the beautiful with, respectively, the masculine and the feminine?

Second, there is the author's emphasis on Tolstoy's later writings. One of the things Mandelker is doing throughout is presenting a gendered reading of Tolstoy's aesthetics. In doing so, she takes *What is Art?* as the major gloss on the aesthetic assumptions of *Anna Karenina*. For instance: "In *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy uses framing and frame devices to thematize and

illustrate the views on representation and aesthetics that he would later state explicitly in *What is Art?* He thus engages the aesthetic debate over beauty and figures it in his novel in the framed beauty of the female body of his heroine, Anna Karenina" (83). She also takes such later fictions as *The Kreutzer Sonata* and *Resurrection* as realizations of potentials to be found already in *Anna Karenina*. Professor Mandelker's use of writings subsequent to the novel raises the issue of anachronism in relation to the novel's ethics of gender relations and its aesthetics.

If in some cases, for example in her reading of Varenka's significance (178), Mandelker sees later texts as explicating what is already implicit in *Anna Karenina*, in other cases I am not sure just what the relationship is supposed to be. For example, in discussing Tolstoy's view of sexuality in the late 80s, Mandelker writes:

"Tolstoy's attitudes reflect a rejection of all sexuality and sexual politics, not just female sexuality. If anything, in Tolstoy's writings male sexuality is attacked more viciously than female sexuality. Furthermore, the notion of a moral, Christian marriage that is sexually consummated is rejected entirely." As I read such passages, I wonder whether Mandelker intends to show the further evolution of Tolstoy's thought, or are these views to be taken as already informing *Anna Karenina*? For that matter, is Varenka's course in life already an illustration of the doctrine of radical chastity, or is it the result of her idiosyncratic choices?

It is especially in her treatment of the theme of family life that I find myself wondering whether Mandelker is not reading a later Tolstoyan philosophy back into the complexities of *Anna Karenina*. This question arises, for example, when I read that the childless Sviazhskiis are the novel's only happy family. Is Lyovin really that disillusioned with family life? It seems to me that if it is true that he is "disillusioned with in his experience of family happiness" (53), it is only in the sense that he has given up his illusions for an appreciation of the real thing by the end of the novel.

Similarly, I am not sure what bearing Tolstoy's later rejection of class art, with its reliance on the reader's familiarity with details of upperclass life, has on the introduction of social detail in *Anna Karenina*. Mandelker sees Tolstoy as engaged in the novel in an attempt at mythopoesis--an attempt at a universal, accessible art which would convey meaning through mythical, symbolic, and folkloric elements. Yet *Anna Karenina* strikes me as having no more (and no less) of a universal, mythical or symbolic quality than, say, *Pere Goriot*, *Our Mutual Friend*, or *Jane Eyre*. Clearly, Tolstoy's novel, resembles other great novels in combining the symbolic with the verisimilitudinous. If its ruling metaphors are universally comprehensible, why do they have to be pointed out by critics like Mandelker?

This brings us to a third aspect of *Framing Anna Karenina* which is problematic for me: Mandelker's handling of realism. At the very beginning of her study, Mandelker makes Tolstoy's struggle against the realist novel a critical issue for *Framing Anna Karenina*: "The thesis of this book is first that Tolstoy's literary-historical placement at the apex of realism is problematic, and second that *Anna Karenina* reflects Tolstoy's polemic with realist art and his quest for mythopoesis--two key elements of his aesthetic

philosophy that are made explicit in his later treatise, *What is Art?* (3). It would be helpful to have a general statement on the relevant distinctions between realism and not-realism. From a present-day perspective, it is difficult, if not impossible, to re-inhabit the mind of a reader who would define realist fiction as fiction devoid of symbolic or figurative meaning. Don't such distinctions belong as much to interpretive communities as to the texts they read?

It seems to me that in practice, what the term "realism" subtends in *Framing Anna Karenina* is neither the tradition invented or described by civic or Marxist critics, nor a label for the products of the great age of the Russian novel, nor the set of tendencies in European art and literature described by Linda Nochlin. Rather, it is the Victorian novel--more particularly, its love-plots of marriage and adultery-- which seems to be the most important embodiment of literary realism. Mandelker offers the interesting suggestion that Tolstoy does not give us Anna's biography because he intended the reader to see the Victorian novel as the matrix from which she springs. She portrays Anna as a reader who is "ruined by realism," in the sense that she is seduced by her reading into seeking "an English happiness": "Anna's desire to be the heroine of an English novel is thus the desire to occupy a fixed social role or position, represented as offering total fulfillment" (127). Even Lyovin is motivated by the desire for an English happiness (62).

These are thought-provoking suggestions, but I am not always sure just how the plot of *Anna Karenina* and the plot of Anna's (and Tolstoy's) Victorian novel are to be aligned with each other. For example, If English happiness means an estate and a family, those are Lyovin's desires, but how far are they Anna's? Her "English" estate is very much a substitutive satisfaction--an estate instead of a real family. (On the other hand, Lyovin's estate is not "English in custom, manner, and style" (64); Sziashskii's is.)

Framing Anna Karenina leads me to conclude that Anna's plot begins after her "Victorian novel" culminates with her marriage to Karenin, a union which seems to track closely the Victorian plot of marriage for social role and position. But Mandelker has Anna reprise this plot in her affair with Vronsky:

The novel thus leads Anna into adultery through the evocation of desire for action, its frustration, and the displacement of desire onto a liaison with the male protagonist. The pursuit of English happiness brings about Anna's fall; she is seduced by visions of estate, not by that romantic 'chorus' of voices of adulterous heroines that corrupts Emma Bovary" (135).

That Anna might be drawn to Vronsky as a result of her desire for action makes sense; that this desire boils down to "visions of estate" suggests that she is drawn to Vronsky because he is richer than Karenin. Elsewhere, in one of her many astute comments on the hybridic quality of *Anna Karenina*, Mandelker observes that Tolstoy sought to combine the continental novel of adulterous passion (e.g., *Madame Bovary*) with the Victorian novel. Does

Professor Mandelker mean to suggest that Anna commits adultery for the sake of estate?

On the whole, the notion of Anna seduced by fiction would seem to require her to be a clean slate, written upon by the text she takes in. But what does she bring to her reading? After all, even Dante presumes that Paolo and Francesca were not indifferent to each other before they hit upon the pastime of reading aloud. ("...by what occasion did love grant you to know your uncertain desires?") What in the novel rules out taking Anna's encounter with the English novel as symptomatic rather than causal? Can we imagine Anna, as Tolstoy has created her, as fulfilled by her life with Karenin, as Tolstoy has created him? Indeed, Mandelker elsewhere offers the suggestion that both Anna's reading and her adulterous passion are implicated in attempts at self-knowledge and self-expression: "Within the confines of a life that denies her spiritual growth and autonomy, Anna's only avenue for the pursuit of complete psychic awareness is through adulterous passion." Further, Mandelker interprets Anna's suicide as in part an act of (largely unconscious) rebellion in the wake of what self-knowledge brings (98, 99, 162). I cannot see Anna as the product of a discursive field called "Victorian fiction." Rather, it seems to me that Anna's lived experience, her situation, and her chain of choices determine how she will read, how she will live, and how she will die.

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Mandelker is a critic's critic, who in *Framing Anna Karenina* has waded bravely into the thicket of received opinion about the novel and its author. She covers several loosely related questions, which she weaves together with her own brand of intelligent feminism. In what follows I comment on several aspects of her general argument. Often I elaborate on something I have learned from her. Where I disagree with her I make my point as forcefully as possible in the interests of debate.

Mandelker counts herself a student of Richard Gustafson, whose *Leo Tolstoy, Resident and Stranger* is one of the most important and original books on Tolstoy to appear in recent years. Mandelker continues Gustafson's revision and expansion of our understanding of Tolstoyan realism. Gustafson has coined the phrase "emblematic realism" to describe Tolstoy's particular blend of the real and the ideal. True mimesis for Tolstoy would include a revelation of the unseen as well as the seen, just as Homer depicted gods as well as human beings. For Tolstoy, however, human beings have no direct access to the unseen world, and therefore he never portrays it directly. It reveals itself through patterns that the reader picks up within ostensibly realistic stories. In the last third of her book Mandelker shows very convincingly that Tolstoy does not include random details for their own sake, and that seemingly realistic motifs, like the mushrooms in the courtship of Varenka and Koznyshev, have symbolic undertones.

We sense unseen reality through the sublime. The sublime, Mandelker explains, is essentially mysterious, and this distinguishes it from the beautiful, which applies to things we desire and want to have. Mandelker argues, however, that Tolstoy goes beyond the Kantian sublime to