Held Captive: Tolstoy, Nabokov, and the Aesthetics of Constraint

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Abstract

This dissertation examines a counterintuitive artistic imperative that emerged from the struggles of Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Nabokov with an aesthetic problem of Kantian provenance. These two authors are widely considered to be opposed in their vision of art, but I show that their aesthetics in fact converge upon the same goal: to grant the reader a particular kind of freedom. These authors shared the Kantian view that aesthetic enjoyment requires that the reader not be constrained by any interest or concept. This feeling of freedom, they believed, is threatened not only when a reader looks to an artwork to satisfy his appetites (and thus remains bound by his sensuous interests), but also when he employs the artwork for a further intellectual or creative purpose of his own (and thus remains bound by his concepts). On the latter point, they concluded that too much interpretive license, rather than liberating the reader, actually leaves him trapped within his preexisting conceptual framework. To ensure that their own works grant the freedom necessary for genuine aesthetic pleasure, they developed narrative strategies that (in an apparent paradox) restrict how we read the text.

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Introduction

Does beauty create more beauty? Should art aim to inspire more art? When we talk about beauty, we often take for granted the ancient idea—going back at least to Plato—that good art should and does inspire its appreciators to pursue their own creation. Plato held that beauty ignited a desire that would lead us to seek goodness and truth, and his idea that beauty begets more beauty remains at the core of our understanding of art, from the discourse of reality television to the most sophisticated accounts of aesthetic experience by contemporary scholars.

Elaine Scarry, drawing on Plato, considers beauty (in people as well as in art) to be something that "repeatedly brings us face-to-face with our own powers to create."[1] Every way in which we respond to art, she claims, is a kind of creation; even the mere act of looking "is directly connected to acts of drawing, describing, composing, love making."[2] Past art and future creation are intrinsically linked. Alexander Nehamas likewise defines beauty in terms of the desire it inspires: "Beautiful things don't stand aloof, on their own, but direct our attention and our desire to everything else we must learn and acquire in order to understand and possess them, and they quicken the sense of life, giving it new shape and direction."[3] Nehamas relies on not only Plato but also

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[1] Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 115.

[2] Ibid., 72.

[3] Alexander Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art* (Princeton University Press, 2010), 76-77.

Nietzsche, quoting the latter's rumination on our interest in beauty: "What do we long for at the sight of beauty?...To be beautiful. We imagine that there is much happiness bound up in this."[4] Nehamas affirms Nietzsche's intuition that we seek out the beautiful in order to beget more beauty, in this case in ourselves. Heidi Klum, the model and host of *Project Runway*, a reality television show about fashion design, partakes in a debased version of the same discourse. "Tell us about your inspiration and your look," she instructs each aspiring fashion designer in every episode, assuming that each beautiful thing comes from a previous beautiful thing, before becoming fodder for the next.[5]

The discourse of inspiration suggests that art exists in large part as a resource—a resource for more art-making. We engage with art best when we engage with it creatively, whether that means using it to make art of our own, or simply conferring a new meaning on it by placing it within a new interpretive framework. But a few critics have also expressed concern that these same creative impulses can in fact interfere with our capacity to perceive and appreciate the artwork itself. Susan Sontag famously argued that a certain kind of 'creative' critical approach actually detracts from our encounters with an artwork. It is not the critic's task "to find the maximum amount of content in a work or art, much less to squeeze more out of the work than is already there," she protested.[6] Against critics who relied on Marx's and Freud's "aggressive and impious

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[4] Ibid., 132.

[5] For one of countless examples, see Heidi Klum, "The Runway's in 3D!," *Project Runway*, airdate: October 15, 2015, DVD.

[6] Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), 14.

theories of interpretation,"[7] she claimed that "interpretation takes away the sensory experience of the work of art," and that we cannot afford this loss: "All the conditions of modern life—its material plenitude, its sheer crowdedness—conjoin to dull our sensory faculties."[8] Modern critics, according to Sontag, should attend to what the artwork offers our senses instead of attempting to "tame" it with their analytical tools: "In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art."[9] An erotics of art, one imagines, would revolve around the contemplation of an object's formal features, its sensuous surface.

Sontag's call for an erotics of art has been echoed in the past decade by a critical turn away from what is alternatively called "deep," "symptomatic," "paranoid," or "suspicious reading." These terms all refer to the kind of reading that seeks to penetrate beyond what is evident in the text, to uncover what the text ostensibly hides or represses. Deconstructive, psychoanalytic, and Marxist critical practices all belong to the category of suspicious reading. Some contemporary critics in literary studies and beyond have come to question these dominant critical modes. They wonder whether our social, political, and cultural circumstances demand a critical practice that does not attempt to look beyond what is manifest. As scholars Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus put it, "Those of us who cut our intellectual teeth on deconstruction, ideology critique, and the hermeneutics of suspicion have often found those demystifying protocols superfluous in an era when images of torture at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere were immediately circulated

[7] Ibid., 7.

[8] Ibid., 13.

[9] Ibid., 14.

on the internet."[10] Best and Marcus argue that criticism that seeks to unveil obscured mechanisms of violence might not be so useful in an era when this violence is plainly on the surface. Eve Sedgwick, in her critique of "paranoid reading," suggests that our historical experience has disproved a key assumption of this type of reading, namely that merely exposing violence and oppression helps eradicate them.[11] Best and Marcus group the various alternatives to suspicious reading under the term "surface reading,"[12] stressing the affinities between all forms of criticism that eschew hermeneutics, from New Formalism to the kind of "distant reading"[13] pursued by Franco Moretti.

Although many contemporary critics of suspicious reading frame their critique in (the often instrumentalizing) terms of our current cultural and political needs, the dispute between depth and surface reading is, in fact, perennial and fundamental. It speaks to a

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[10] Stephen Best, Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no.1 (Fall 2009): 2.

[11] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michèle Aina Barale, and Jonathan Goldberg, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2003), 140.

[12] Best and Marcus edited a special issue of the journal *Representations* that included critical works which in one way or another engage with the "surface" of texts. "Following the lead of our contributors, we take surface to mean what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts; what is neither hidden nor hiding," they explain, "A surface is what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*." Best, Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," 9.

[13] Moretti describes the objectives of distant reading in the following way: "At bottom, [close reading is] a theological exercise—very solemn treatment of very few texts taken very seriously—whereas what we really need is a little pact with the devil: we know how to read texts, now let's learn how *not* to read them. Distant reading: where distance, let me repeat it, is a condition of knowledge: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems." Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review*, 1 (Jan–Feb, 2000): 57.

profound ambivalence in aesthetics over whether our own creative abilities enhance or detract from our experience of an artwork. Scarry and Nehamas implicitly defend a harmony between our own creative activity and our capacity to appreciate and understand an artwork. Interacting with an artwork inspires us to create, which in turn enhances our interaction with the original artwork, in a kind of virtuous circle. Other critics—including critics as divergent in their practices as Sontag and Moretti—suggest that readerly creativity can stand in the way of appreciating an artwork. Sontag's erotics of art and Moretti's distant reading each respond to the concern that our own subjectivity can prevent us from getting a grasp on a work of literature. And how can we appreciate an artwork properly if we fail to see it for what it is? Like surface readers, I am skeptical that transgressive hermeneutic practices necessarily enrich our encounters art, and I share their methodological preference for reading "with the grain" of a text rather than against it. But I am less interested in considering which methods of reading might be most useful to our current moment than in investigating what might be lost to us as subjects of aesthetic experience when our own creativity is given free rein.

This dissertation interrogates the assumption that the greater our license as readers to interpret a text, the more we benefit from engaging with it. As modern readers, we expect a certain degree of independence when it comes to handling a text, and we might experience authors who deny us that independence as impoverishing our aesthetic experience, not to mention exerting an illegitimate power over us. Drawing on the literary and discursive works of Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Nabokov, I will argue the opposite: that far from detracting from our experience, authors we perceive as controlling may be granting us a freedom we could not otherwise obtain. We should not abandon

hermeneutics—this dissertation is itself, of course, a work of interpretation—but we should appreciate more fully what we gain from texts that restrain our creative powers and compel us to read at the surface.

Controlling Authors

Tolstoy and Nabokov both have a reputation for being controlling, even domineering authors. The early Tolstoy deserves this reputation less than the later Tolstoy, but even his early works have prompted critics like Mikhail Bakhtin to argue that Tolstoy sought to impose a particular vision on his reader. Bakhtin accused Tolstoy of creating a "monologic artistic world" in which the author's worldview is privileged above all others. The author is regarded as a tutor, the reader as an ignorant pupil. Bakhtin contrasted Tolstoy's monologic world, which circumscribes the reader's capacity to respond to the author, with Dostoevsky's "polyphonic novels," which, according to Bakhtin, put the ideas of author, characters, and readers on equal footing.[14] Bakhtin attributed Tolstoy's monologism to his limitations as an artist; he suggested that in Tolstoy's hands the novel simply had not reached its full potential. Extra-aesthetic concerns likely shaped Bakhtin's reading,[15] but the distinction he draws between Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's authorial presence is not a trivial one.

[14] Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Idea in Dostoevsky," in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 79.

[15] For a discussion of Bakhtin's charge against Tolstoy, see Caryl Emerson, "The Tolstoy Connection in Bakhtin," *PMLA* 100, no. 1 (1985): 68-80.

Nabokov energetically cultivated a reputation as a controlling author, referring to his characters as "galley slaves"[16] and conceiving of his fictional worlds as games that only skilled readers were invited to play. Alfred Appel described reading Nabokov's novels as a "game of perception," in which "everything is there, *in sight* (no symbols lurking in murky depths), but one must penetrate the *trompe l'oeil*, which eventually reveals something totally different from what one had expected."[17] In other words, Nabokov rewards the reader who reads carefully but nevertheless at the surface, attending to the design of the work rather than trying to look beyond it. Other kinds of readers—the careless, the suspicious—are punished. In both his fiction and his interviews and lectures, Nabokov never ceases to mock suspicious interpreters. He advises critics: "Ask yourself if the symbol you have detected is not your own footprint. Ignore allegories."[18] His demand for his own literary biographer, he said, would be "plain facts, no symbol searching, no jumping at attractive but preposterous conclusions, no Marxist bunkum, no Freudian rot."[19] Many readers of Nabokov have noted the force of his authorial presence, but the writer Geoff Dyer puts it perhaps most pithily, advising aspiring authors not to

[16] Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 95.

[17] Alfred Appel Jr., "Nabokov's Puppet Show Part I," *New Republic* 156, no. 2 (1967): 27-30.

[18] *Strong Opinions*, 66.

[19] Ibid., 156.

"be one of those writers who sentence themselves to a lifetime of sucking up to Nabokov."[20]

Tolstoy and Nabokov were intent on teaching their readers how to read. For all of their differences as artists and thinkers, they are united in this intention. There is perhaps no other writer in the Russian canon who equals their efforts to regulate how their works would be received. Part of the work of this dissertation will be to delineate the subtle strategies these authors use to control our reading. For the moment, it will suffice to point out that the authors tutored their readers both in the many forewords and afterwords each appended to his literary texts, and in the corpus of discursive writing on aesthetics each produced. Tolstoy, for example, wrote an afterword to his novella *The Kreutzer Sonata* in order "to express, as far as possible, the essence of what I wanted to say in this story, and the conclusions which, in my opinion, can be made from it."[21] Nabokov, in the foreword to the English translation of his novel *Despair*, tells his readers that this novel "in kinship with the rest of my books, has no social comment to make, no message to bring in its teeth. It does not uplift the spiritual organ of man, nor does it show humanity the right exit."[22] Tolstoy's and Nabokov's directives to the reader are clearly different—the former

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[20] Geoff Dyer, "Ten rules for writing fiction" *The Guardian*, February 19, 2010, accessed April 20, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/feb/20/ten-rules-for-writing-fiction-part-one.

[21] Leo Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata and Other Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 163. "Posleslovie k «Kreytserovoy sonate»" in L. N. Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 90 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1928–58), Hereafter PSS. PSS, volume 27: page 79. "Попытаюсь это сделать, то есть в коротких словах выразить, насколько это возможно, сущность того, что я хотел сказать в этом рассказе, и тех выводов, которые, по моему мнению, можно сделать из него."

[22] Vladimir Nabokov, *Despair* (New York: Vintage, 1989), xii.

encourages us to draw a certain moral lesson from his work while the latter denies us the right to do so—but they are equally forceful. In the following chapters, I will argue that their shared intention to control our reading cannot be attributed solely to quirks of personality, or, as Bakhtin suggested of Tolstoy, to insufficient mastery of their artistic tools. Instead, this intention speaks to a set of shared aesthetic ideas that was crucial to the practice of both authors.

Tolstoy and Nabokov shared the Kantian notion that aesthetic pleasure is only possible when a spectator's response is not constrained by any interest or concept. As literary authors, they (unlike Kant) had to contend *in practice* with the problem of ensuring the spectator's freedom. They developed narrative strategies to ward off what they saw as two twin threats to the reader's freedom: that he would take only an unreflective, sensual pleasure in the text (and thus remain trapped by his interests), and that he would instantly incorporate the text into his own creative or intellectual activity (and thus remained trapped by his concepts). The latter threat, perhaps the more insidious one, persuaded both authors that total interpretive license gives the reader only a false sense of autonomy, and thus inhibits his aesthetic pleasure. And the divergent styles of their mature work—Tolstoy's asceticism, Nabokov's excess—both derive, in part, from their efforts to grant the reader the freedom he needs to experience aesthetic delight.

Pozdnyshev's Vices

An early, unpublished work by Nabokov helps to illustrate the kind of freedom both authors prized and sought to grant their readers. In 1926, Nabokov "rewrote" Tolstoy's late novella *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Tolstoy's novella, first published in 1889, tells the story of a sexually obsessed upper-class gentleman who becomes convinced that his wife is having an affair, and murders her as a result. An unnamed narrator relates the tale. While traveling on a night train, the narrator joins a conversation about love, marriage, divorce, and what relations ought to obtain between men and women. This conversation excites and upsets another passenger, Pozdnyshev, who believes that his fellow travelers are in fact subtly referring to his own unhappy family life. When the other passengers disperse, Pozdnyshev offers to tell the narrator the entire story. He begins with his early sexual experiences, which he suggests ruined the possibility of his ever having a happy marriage. He then details the years of hostility between him and his wife. Finally, he reveals that his suspicion that his wife was having an affair with her musical partner, a violinist, drove him to murder her. Pozdnyshev repents for the murder but insists that he is not solely to blame: the perverse mores of his social class doomed his marriage.

Nabokov's friends at the Berlin Journalists' Union invited him to play the role of Pozdnyshev in a mock trial of Tolstoy's protagonist.[23] Nabokov accepted the challenge and detailed his preparations for the performance in a series of letters to his wife, Vera. First Nabokov studied Tolstoy's novella: "I read *The Kreutzer Sonata* today: a rather vulgar little pamphlet—although once it seemed very 'powerful' to me." Then, with his

[23] Brian Boyd mentions the episode in his biography of Nabokov, and Nabokov discusses it himself in his letters to Vera. Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 261.

fellow performers, he rehearsed the speech he wrote for the defendant, entitled "Rech' Pozdnysheva": "I read my speech at the committee meeting (praise and more praise…I am beginning to get sick of it: it even went so far as them saying I was 'subtler' than Tolstoy. Terrible nonsense, really)." And after giving his performance, he reported to Vera that he had created a Pozdnyshev "completely different" from Tolstoy's.[24] Nabokov did indeed depart from Tolstoy in both content and form. Nevertheless, their Pozdnyshevs have much more in common than he admits to Vera. In particular, "Rech' Pozdnysheva" diagnoses the very same malady diagnosed in *The Kreutzer Sonata*: that we are perpetually bound by our own desires and habits of thought. Our feeling of autonomy is diminished above all by our own sensuous and rational preoccupations.

Although Nabokov referred to *The Kreutzer Sonata* as a "vulgar little pamphlet"—he objected to its vehement call for chastity—the story clearly had not lost all of its power to him. He admired it enough to incorporate into his own text some of its visual details, such as the play of light and shadow in Tolstoy's depiction of the dimly lit train compartment in which Pozdnyshev tells his tale.[25] Nabokov also borrows snippets of Tolstoy's language to relate the prehistory of Pozdnyshev's crime: "I was barely sixteen years old…I did not yet know women…I was already perverted…there was

[24] Vladimir Nabokov in letters dated July 6, July 12, and July 13, 1926, *Letters to Vera*, eds. Olga Voronina and Brian Boyd (London: Penguin Classics, 2014), 125, 140, 142.

[25] "Rech' Pozdnysheva" in the manuscript box labeled "Rech' Pozdnysheva." Holograph draft of mock trial. In Russian. 1927 July (5 leaves). Came with his letters to Vera Nabokov, Vladimir Nabokov papers 1918–1987, The Berg Collection, The New York Public Library, N38. All translations of this text are mine. In the first three sentences of the speech alone, Nabokov evokes three distinct qualities of light: the "brightly lit living room" (ярко освещенной гостиной) where the murder takes place, the dagger blade's "flash" (сверканью лезвия), and Pozdnyshev's "twilight of atonement" (сумрачное раскаянье).

something singular and touching in this fall…I was deeply, deeply sad."[26] The way Nabokov abridges many of Tolstoy's sentences suggests, however, that these linguistic borrowings (perhaps in contrast to the visual ones) are motivated less by admiration than by a desire to ironize the stark moral message of the original work.

Nabokov critiques Tolstoy for making Pozdnyshev the bearer of an absurd philosophy that condemns sexual desire. By emphasizing Pozdnyshev's bewilderment at his own persistently destructive actions, Nabokov portrays him as a character who senses the strings of his puppeteer and stages a rebellion of sorts against him:

> I was destined to act the way one might act if one were determined, no matter what the cost, to create an example of an unhappy marriage. And in doing so to prove, through the example of my own fate, that there are no hellish tortures, corrupt or vulgar acts, that could be worse than marriage.[27]

Nabokov's Pozdnyshev cannot make sense of his actions without positing some greater authoring force that aims to paint marriage as an abomination. He realizes that he is being served up as a specimen, but by rejecting any social explanations for his crime, he refuses to play that role. Whereas Tolstoy would make him an example of the general sin of sex and marriage, Nabokov's Pozdnyshev insists on the singularity of his crime, and thus on his own responsibility for it: "I understood that it was not marriage itself that was sinful.

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[26] "Rech' Pozdnysheva," N38a. "Я не знал еще женщин…Я уже был развращен… в этом падении было что-то особенное и трогательное."

[27] N38b. "Мне суждено было поступать так, как стал бы поступать человек захотевшей во что бы то не стоило создать пример несчастнейшего брака — и доказать собственной своей судьбою, что нет такой дьявольской пытки, таких нечистоплотных и грубых деяний —которые были бы хуже брака."

It was only my marriage that was sinful because I sinned before love."[28] Nabokov's Pozdnyshev defends his dignity, his selfhood, by denying his ability to represent anyone else. He disavows any lessons to be learned from his life, along with all claims to moral certainty: "I don't know anything. I only remember that I was too prejudiced against true passion, against true transcendent love, to appreciate and liberate the new feeling I experienced that night."[29] In rewriting Pozdnyshev, Nabokov characteristically endows him with a good memory. He replaces the character's meditations on social ills with a vivid recollection of the night he fell in love: "small trifles of that walk, the color of the water, the reflection of the shrubs."[30] These precise, idiosyncratic memories reinforce the singularity of the character. It is hard to symbolize your entire social class when you are noticing the reflection of a particular shrub.

A review in *Rul'* of the mock trial declared that Nabokov had created an entirely new Pozdnyshev: "In [Sirin's] inspired, creative rendering, Tolstoy's killer-philosophizer became a suffering individual, who recognized his own guilt before his wife, before the ruined possibility of real love."[31] The review responds to the greater self-awareness of

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[28] N38f. "Я понял что грешен не брак вообще, а грешен был именно мой брак — оттого что я грешил против любви."

[29] N38. "Я ничего не знаю. Помню только, что был слишком предубежден против истинной страсти, истинной возвышенной любви, чтобы оценить, освободить новое для меня чувство которое я испытал в тот вечер."

[30] N38a. "малейшие мелочи той прогулки, цвет воды, отраженье кустов."

[31] Raisa Tatarinova, "Sud nad 'Kreytserovoy sonatoy'," *Rul'*, July 18, 1926, 8. "В его [Сирина] творческой вдохновенной передаче толстовский убийца-резонер стал живым страдающим человеком, сознавшим свою вину перед убитой женой, перед погубленной им возможностью настоящей подлинной любви." Sirin was Nabokov's pen name.

Nabokov's Pozdnyshev, to his lyrical musings on the nature of love. It goes on to note that the changes Nabokov introduced posed some problems for the trial: "Such a departure from Tolstoy demanded that the trial's participants reckon with the existence of two Pozdnyshevs."[32] The mock trial was to end with a vote on the defendant's guilt, but Nabokov had altered Pozdnyshev so much that it now seemed there were two defendants. Which one was the audience to deliberate on? Were they judging Tolstoy's "killer-philosophizer" or Nabokov's "suffering individual"?

It is true that Nabokov had given Pozdnyshev a kind of dignity that Tolstoy had perhaps denied him by making him the agent of an abstract moral message. But Nabokov's audience seems to have overestimated the extent to which Nabokov had altered the essence of Pozdnyshev's crime. At root, his portrait of Pozdnyshev is not so different from Tolstoy's. Both authors suggest that Pozdnyshev has become enthralled by certain ideas that prevent him from being attentive to other people. Nabokov merely inverts the value of Pozdnyshev's beliefs about sexual desire: in Nabokov's rendering, the puritanical lesson propounded by Pozdnyshev is not the product of illumination but the source of his error.

In Tolstoy's version of their courtship, Pozdnyshev believes that he is in love with his wife when in fact he merely lusts after her. The truth of their relationship is obscured by his false belief that sexual desire and love can coexist. Blindness to this truth dooms his marriage. Nabokov's Pozdnyshev, in contrast, believes that he only lusts after his wife when in fact he is in love with her. The truth of their relationship is obscured by his false

[32] Ibid. "Такое отступление от Толстого поставило всех участников суда в необходимость считаться с существованием двух Позднышевых."

belief that sexual desire and love *cannot* coexist. Blindness to this truth dooms his marriage. Nabokov's Pozdnyshev explains: "You see, in my blindness, I had decided that I only needed her body and that she knew this…"[33] Nabokov thus inverts the content of Pozdnyshev's post-murder revelation. Conjugal love does not mask sexual desire; rather, cynicism about one's sexual desire masks conjugal love.

Tolstoy and Nabokov disagree about the particular ideas that preoccupy Pozdnyshev, but they each want to demonstrate that Pozdnyshev is confined by his preoccupations. For both, Pozdnyshev's character serves to illustrate how our habits of thought blind us to the presence of other people, other conscious beings with inner lives as complicated as our own. This form of blindness—produced by a hyperactive ego, by the patterned chatter of our own minds—worried both authors. Throughout his life, Tolstoy was obsessed with the way we can become imprisoned by our appetites as well as by our routines, including our habitual patterns of thought. Tolstoy's well-known concern about habits inspired Victor Shklovsky's theory that art serves to "defamiliarize" our lived experience. Nabokov's similarly lifelong concern about the blinding effects of appetites and intellectual preoccupations manifested in the two distinct breeds of maniac that populate his fiction: the character who single-mindedly pursues his appetites, and the character who is gripped by a cherished idea. These two maniacal types are most fully realized in Nabokov's two great villains: Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* and Charles Kinbote in *Pale Fire*. Nabokov may have rejected Tolstoy's austere ethical prescriptions,

[33] N38e. "Вы понимаете я по слепоте своей ведь решил про себя, что мне нужно только ее тело, решил что она знает это…"

but he tacitly affirmed his broader moral vision: we recognize other people only when we momentarily escape the closed circuits of our own minds. How are we to do this?

Tolstoy's Way

Both Tolstoy and Nabokov believed that art has the potential to free us from the strictures imposed by our own bodies and minds. The idea that aesthetic experience liberates us from such constraints has its roots in Kant. On Kant's view, aesthetic experience prepares us for moral action by training our capacity to contemplate something without considering the practical purpose it might serve. Kant argued that when we judge something to be beautiful, our approval has nothing to do with our own particular demands, whether sensuous or rational. We do not appreciate the beautiful object because it gratifies our appetites or promotes our purposes. Rather, we experience a "disinterested" pleasure. Kant considered disinterest—the capacity to forget our biological needs and our rational aims—the prerequisite for aesthetic pleasure and moral action. Kant's idea that aesthetic experience allows us to feel free from our own preoccupations influenced both authors, but it steered them toward divergent artistic techniques: toward greater and greater austerity in the works of Tolstoy and toward more embellishment and formal excess in the works of Nabokov.

Scholars tend not to associate Tolstoy's aesthetics with Kant's. There are a couple of important reasons for this. First, Tolstoy never read Kant's *Critique of Judgment*; he

inherited Kant's ideas through compendia of aesthetic thought[34] and through the writing of intermediaries such as Schopenhauer. Tolstoy read the latter's *The World as Will and Representation* in the summer of 1869, and wrote the poet Afanasy Fet about the tremendous impression it made on him: "I have unending enthusiasm for Schopenhauer and I'm experiencing a number of spiritual delights that I have never experienced before. I have written out his entire composition and keep reading and reading (I read Kant too), and I believe that not a single student in his course studied as diligently or learned as much as I have this summer."[35] (It is unclear which work of Kant's Tolstoy refers to here; perhaps he only means the discussion of Kant in the Appendix to *The World as Will and Representation*.) Tolstoy was undoubtedly roused and influenced by Schopenhauer's philosophy, but as Boris Eikhenbaum remarked in another context, "he makes use of Schopenhauer, but 'breaks' with his system in those instances when it does not coincide with his views or 'rules.'"[36] Tolstoy certainly departed from Schopenhauer on matters of art.

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[34] Leo Tolstoy, *What Is Art?* (Liberal Arts Press, 1960). In *What is Art?* Tolstoy frequently cites William Knight, *The Philosophy of the Beautiful* (London: Murray, 1893) and Max Schasler, *Ästhetik als Philosophie des Schönen in der Kunst* (Berlin: Nicolaische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1872).

[35] *Pis'ma, 1863-1872* in PSS, 61: 215. Letter to Afanasy Fet April 22?, 1869. My translation. "Знаете ли, что было для меня нынешнее лето? — Неперестающий восторг перед Шопенгауером и ряд духовных наслаждений, к[оторых] я никогда не испытывал. Я выписал все его сочинения и читал и читаю (прочел и Канта), и, верно, ни один студент в свой курс не учился так много и столь многого не узнал, как я в нынешнее лето."

[36] Boris Eikhenbaum, "Lev Tolstoy, Semidesyatye gody," in *Raboty o Lve Tolstom Filologicheskoe nasledie* (St. Petersburg: Fakul'tet filologii i iskusstv Sankt Peterburgskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2009), 635. My translation. "Он

While he likely became familiar with Kantian aesthetics through Schopenhauer, Tolstoy's own aesthetic thought has more in common with Kant's than Schopenhauer's. Schopenhauer believed that aesthetic cognition breaks radically with ordinary cognition and allows the observer to look beyond individual phenomena to the objective ideas that they manifest (Platonic Ideas). As philosopher Bart Vandenabeele puts it, Schopenhauer believed aesthetic cognition offers us a "view from nowhere, a perspective of a subject no longer governed by an *ego*." Schopenhauer, he explains, thought that "pure will-less objectivity can be attained only if we are no longer there."[37] On Schopenhauer's account, we can perceive objective truth—Platonic Ideas rather than individual phenomena—only when aesthetic cognition (or death) allows the ego to vanish completely. Tolstoy, however, sees continuity between aesthetic cognition and ordinary empirical cognition. From the beginning of his career, Tolstoy rejected the Romantic notion of the visionary artist who can apprehend something beyond what is given to the senses. In his study of Tolstoy's early works, Eikhenbaum has shown that Tolstoy turned away from the ideas of his immediate predecessors and looked instead to the art and thought of the 18th century, to the tradition of his "grandfathers" rather than his "fathers." [38]

Like Kant, Tolstoy acknowledged that aesthetic apprehension, since it is given to our senses, must be subjective. But he also recognized, just as Kant did, that our aesthetic

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пользуется Шопенгауэром, но «разрывает» его систему в тех случаях, когда она не совпадает с его взглядами или «правилами.»"

[37] Bart Vandenbeele, "Schopenhauer and the Objectivity of Art," *A Companion to Schopenhauer* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell), 221- 222.

[38] Eikhenbaum, "Molodoi Tolstoy," in *Raboty o Lve Tolstom Filologicheskoe nasledie*, 78.

judgments appear to be more than mere expressions of preference. They carry with them a kind of normative demand. We feel as though other people must respond to the objects we find beautiful the same way we do. Tolstoy thus faced the paradox that Kant had identified as the Antinomy of Taste,[39] and pondered how we could account for both the subjective and objective aspects of our aesthetic experience.

Chapter One of this dissertation argues that *Anna Karenina* dramatizes the problem that Kant had formulated into the Antinomy of Taste. The novel probes whether and how we can distinguish ordinary sensuous pleasure—the kind of pleasure we take in food, wine, comfortable furniture—from the aesthetic pleasure we derive from beauty. Kant had called objects that elicit sensuous pleasure "agreeable" and those that elicit aesthetic pleasure "beautiful." In *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy illuminates the familial relationship between the beautiful and the agreeable by way of the Oblonsky siblings, Stiva and Anna. Stiva Oblonsky is the purveyor of sensuous delights, such as those of food and wine, while Anna Karenina is linked throughout the narrative with art. She is a model for several paintings, and the manner in which she cultivates her appearance suggests that she is an artist in her own right. Anna's disillusionment at the end of the novel is associated, at least in her own mind, with her artistic failure. She believes that her lover Vronsky no longer values her beauty and becomes convinced that she had never

[39] Kant recognized both the subjective and the objective aspects of our encounters with beauty and formulated the following antinomy: "(1) *Thesis*. A judgment of taste is not based upon concepts; for otherwise one could dispute about it (decide by means of proofs). (2) *Antithesis*. A judgment of taste is based on concepts; for otherwise, regardless of the variations among [such judgments], one could not even so much as quarrel about them (lay claim to other people's necessary assent to one's judgment)." Immanuel Kant *Critique of Judgment,* trans. and ed.by Werner S. Pluhar (Hackett Publishing, 1987), § 56, 211.

been more to him than a source of merely sensuous pleasure. Her fate speaks to both the seeming impossibility of differentiating the beautiful from the merely pleasing, and the fatal consequences for the artist who can no longer believe that her art provides anything other than sensuous satisfaction.

Tolstoy ultimately does not ratify Anna's disillusionment with her art, I argue, nor does he suggest that there is no distinction to be made between material and aesthetic pleasures. What appears to set aesthetic perception apart in the novel is the spectator's sense that he is drawn out of himself; he momentarily forgets to pursue some particular objective of his own. For all of Tolstoy's disagreements with proponents of art for art's sake, he evidently shares with them the Kantian idea that a sense of freedom from our own desires is a marker of aesthetic pleasure. In *Anna Karenina* and in Tolstoy's later works, the real artwork—the artwork that elicits a properly aesthetic pleasure—quells our creative desires instead of igniting them.

At first glance, it might seem strange to argue that disinterested pleasure is central to Tolstoy's aesthetic thought. Disinterest might appear to be at odds with Tolstoy's later definition of art in his aesthetic tract *What is Art?* There Tolstoy argues that art is a communication of feeling, and his emphasis on the way the spectator partakes in the feeling of the artist seems like the very opposite of detachment, the attitude we typically associate with disinterest. The apparent incongruity between disinterest and communion is another reason why Tolstoy's affinity with Kant on aesthetics has been undervalued. But the kind of communion Tolstoy had in mind is in fact perfectly compatible with disinterested pleasure. Tolstoy rejects only *detachment*, not *disinterest*. He rejects the Schopenhauerian notion that disinterest facilitates detachment. Schopenhauer accepted

Kant's idea that in a moment of aesthetic delight we are free from our preoccupation with our own desires. Unlike Kant, however, he saw aesthetic experience as a way to escape from our painful, mundane existence. Tolstoy, in contrast, remained closer to Kant himself. Tolstoy assimilated not only the Kantian idea that aesthetic delight relates to our freedom from our particular desires, but also Kant's thought that aesthetic experience is the ground for our sense of community. It prepares us to treat others as ends. It primes us for moral action.

Kant, of course, was interested only in better understanding our aesthetic pleasure, whereas Tolstoy, a literary artist, wanted to create works that elicited this pleasure. In Chapter Two, I turn to an analysis of Tolstoy's discursive writing on art in conjunction with his late fiction (*The Kreutzer Sonata*, *After the Ball*, *Hadji Murat*). I demonstrate that his prescriptions for artists were motivated by a utopian dream of creating an artwork that would liberate the spectator completely from his physical and rational preoccupations.

Tolstoy made some outrageous pronouncements in his essays on art. He denounced not only the works of Shakespeare, Goethe, and other artistic giants, but also his own great novels. "I consign my own artistic productions to the category of bad art!"[40] he declared. Tolstoy compared listening to Wagner's music to a night of drinking and smoking opium; he likened decadent art to rotten cheese. In his survey of modern aesthetic thought, the philosopher Paul Guyer claims that Tolstoy "offered as narrow an

[40] *What Is Art?*, 155. *Chto takoe iskusstvo?* in PSS, 30: 163. "При этом еще должен заметить, что свои художественные произведения я причисляю к области дурного искусства, за исключением рассказа «Бог правду видит», желающего принадлежать к первому роду, и «Rавказсного пленника», принадлежащего ко второму."

aesthetic theory as we have seen throughout our survey of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."[41] Tolstoy's extreme statements tempt us to conclude that he no longer considered artistic work something worth pursuing.

My task in the second chapter is to show that, on the contrary, we should consider *What is Art?* a desperate, and not illogical, attempt to *defend* art and the activity of the artist. I compare aesthetic accounts spanning three centuries—from Kant to Tolstoy to Susan Feagin, the last representing a prevailing view in contemporary philosophy—to suggest that the idea of a freedom from our own creative impulses, like the idea of inspiration, is deeply engrained in Western aesthetics, even if it has not received as much attention. In one way or another, each of these thinkers proposes that a properly aesthetic experience is defined by our sense that we are *not* inspired to create something of our own. Tolstoy is thus not alone in his conviction that we can appreciate an artwork properly only when we are not consumed by our own appetites and objectives, including creative ones. Kant and Feagin make no stipulations about the techniques an artist must use to produce artworks that will still our creative powers and elicit our appreciation. But Tolstoy, as an artist, is deeply concerned with that question. How can one make such an artwork, thereby ensuring that one's creative work offers something beyond mere sensuous satisfaction?

His answer: create works that are simple, sincere, and morally unimpeachable. If one creates an artwork according to these parameters, Tolstoy suggests, one can be sure that the work will never be merely consumed, will never ignite creative desire, and will always compel its audience to attend to it, and by extension to the artist who created it. In

[41] Paul Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics 3 Volume Set*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 296.

Tolstoy's view, the artist who curtails his reader's creative pursuits does not deny something to the reader. On the contrary, he bestows on him the gift of freedom from his own preoccupations and guarantees his aesthetic pleasure.

Nabokov's Way

Though Nabokov would not admit to subscribing to any particular school of philosophy, he displayed his Kantian heritage rather overtly. He explicitly advocated spectatorial disinterest, advising his students "to keep a little aloof, a little detached when reading" in order to enjoy "a pleasure which is both sensual and intellectual."[42] Like Tolstoy, Nabokov became acquainted with Kantian ideas through multiple intermediaries. Dana Dragunoiu has recently shown how Nabokov's father, the liberal jurist Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov, and the Russian neo-idealists of his father's circle may have introduced Nabokov to Kant's ethics.[43] Thomas Karshan has suggested that Nabokov received Kantian ideas by way of Schiller and Nietzsche.[44] In my own discussion of the paths by which Nabokov inherited Kant's aesthetics in Chapter Three, I stress the influence of Iulii Aikhenvald, a neo-Kantian literary critic and close friend of

[42] Vladimir Nabokov, "Good Readers and Good Writers," *Lectures on Literature* (San Diego: Mariner Books, 2002), 4,6.

[43] Dana Dragunoiu, *Vladimir Nabokov and the Poetics of Liberalism* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2012).

[44] Thomas Karshan, *Vladimir Nabokov and the Art of Play* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Nabokov's in the early years of the latter's émigré period in Berlin.[45] Aikhenvald was specifically interested in Kant's thought on questions of aesthetic pleasure and judgment.

In his fiction and his essays, Nabokov echoed the Kantian notion that an aesthetic attitude requires an attentiveness to the beautiful object itself, not to how well the object addresses our present needs. He inherited Kant's view that if our response to an artwork is governed only by our biological demands or prior concepts, we are not appreciating it in the right way. Aesthetic pleasure means transcending our own preoccupations. And like Tolstoy, Nabokov sought to determine what kind of artwork would produce that transcendence.

For Kant, the answer was an artwork that is unconstrained by any rule or interest in the making of it—even unconstrained by the artist's own intentions for it. This he considered the mark of genius. The genius artwork somehow has to surpass the artist's design. What does this mean for the practicing artist? How does the artist go about creating something that outruns his own intentions? How does he ensure the feeling of freedom crucial to our aesthetic pleasure when his own design for the work—his intentions, his concepts—seems to preclude that freedom from the outset? The practical problem of engineering "genius"—of manipulating the reader into feeling unmanipulated—brings Nabokov's aesthetic concerns close to Tolstoy's. Tolstoy and Nabokov shared the imperative to create an artwork capable of freeing the reader, though they disagreed about how an artist could do so, and about how much freedom was possible at all.

[45] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years*.

In the third chapter, I analyze Nabokov's early novel *Kamera Obskura* and its heavily-revised translation *Laughter in the Dark* alongside Tolstoy's late novellas *The Devil* and *The Kreutzer Sonata* to put in contrast their strategies for eliciting in readers that sense of freedom. By the time Tolstoy wrote *What is Art?* he was convinced that an artist could only hope to liberate the reader from his own desires by avoiding completely anything that would tempt them. Nabokov rejected Tolstoy's ascetic methods and pursued a solution at once more pragmatic and less artistically restrictive. To Nabokov, the kind of absolute freedom Tolstoy had envisioned appeared impossible: the artist could not compel us to abstain from pursuing our appetites completely. But the artist could compel us to *overindulge* in them, and then prompt us to reflect on the harmful aspects of our desires. Tolstoy calls on artists to pare down the stimulating features of a text; Nabokov, on the other hand, amplifies these elements to an absurd degree. Nabokov's freedom, granted through self-reflection, seems more attainable than Tolstoy's, if less ambitious and less absolute.

Pozdnyshev's Freedom

Turning back to Nabokov's rewriting of Pozdnyshev we can preview the divergent methods by which Tolstoy and Nabokov pursued the same goal: to grant the reader a freedom from himself. J.M. Coetzee, in his reading of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, observes how strange it is that Tolstoy aims to forestall readerly interpretation in a genre, the secular confession, that seems especially conducive to an interpretive response. We *want* to reinterpret Pozdnyshev's story, to read against his "self-diagnosis," Coetzee

argues. But Tolstoy tries to block that impulse by affirming Pozdnyshev's conclusions in the novella's "Afterword." Coetzee posits that Tolstoy had become bored and disillusioned with the endless process of interpretation.[46] Reading Tolstoy's novella in light of his aesthetic thought, however, establishes that it was not simply boredom that moved him to control the story's meaning as he does. Rather, it was the distinct danger Tolstoy recognized in interpretation.

Tolstoy had come to believe that the process of interpretation inevitably leads the reader nowhere but back to himself, to his own preoccupations. In Tolstoy's view, only an artwork that would not compel or require interpretation could liberate the reader from the constraints of his own mind. "An artist's work cannot be interpreted," Tolstoy declares in *What is Art?*. If an artwork is good, it affects the reader immediately, and as a result "all interpretations are superfluous."[47] In his essays on art Tolstoy suggested that an artwork should produce an attentive response that leads to no further elaboration; it should not encourage the reader to pursue the course of his own thoughts.

For *The Kreutzer Sonata,* as an artwork, to abide by the guidelines for good art that Tolstoy had theorized in *What is Art?* and dramatized within the story itself, it must encourage the reader to escape his idées fixes in a way that Pozdnyshev cannot. The fictional problem for Pozdnyshev becomes a metafictional problem for the reader. The solution is that Tolstoy leaves no room for interpretation in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. He does this not only to protect his own gloss on the story, but also to protect the reader from the

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[46] J.M. Coetzee, "Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky," *Comparative Literature* 37, no. 3 (1985): 204, 232.

[47] *What is Art?*, 111. *Chto takoe iskusstvo?* in PSS, 30: 123. "Толковать произведения художника нельзя" "все толкования излишни."

self-harming act of interpretation. He cannot of course, *prevent* the reader from reinterpreting Pozdnyshev's actions in one way or another, but he can *discourage* the reader from doing so by making this activity seem trivial and irrelevant in his "Afterword."

Nabokov, in his version of Pozdnyshev's confession, *proliferates* the possibilities for interpretation instead of reducing them. He multiplies the number of possible explanations for Pozdnyshev's crime. He has the protagonist perform for us an exercise in interpretation. Nabokov's character first offers the story of his crime as Tolstoy's Pozdnyshev had told it. The conventions of his class—trips to brothels, cynical courtship—led him astray. But he quickly declares: "I cannot go on in this manner. I lied just now."[48] He then proceeds with a second account. Perhaps it was his false theories about women and sex that led him to stifle his affection for his wife, to treat her roughly on their wedding night, and to ruin their marriage: "With my stupid and coarse theory, I ruined this night."[49] This second explanation is the one the *Rul'* review accepts as the truth. But in fact Nabokov's Pozdnyshev reverses himself twice more before he rests his case. A third explanation suggests that the murder was due not to a failure to express his passion, but to that passion itself: "It's strange to say, but perhaps the murder I committed was in its own way the most natural act of my entire life…because for the first time I gave full rein to my passion."[50] Yet *again* he retracts his theory, calling this third account

[48] N38a. "Я не могу продолжать в таком духе. Я сейчас солгал."

[49] N38e. "Я своей глупой и грубой теорией осквернил эту ночь."

[50] N38h. "Странно сказать, может быть убийство, которое я совершил было по-своему самым естественным поступком всей моей жизни…потому, что я впервые дал полную волю своей страсти."

an "excuse" (*opravdanie*). Reversing himself a final time, he insists that the second explanation must be the right one. He killed his wife by depriving her of affection and tenderness: "tenderness without which a woman cannot live."[51] But after so many reversals and rival explanations, the reader has come to doubt all of these stories. He senses that there is no end to the revisions and reinterpretations, no ground beneath them.

In "Rech' Pozdnysheva" we see in embryonic form an engagement with problems of interpretation that becomes a hallmark of Nabokov's fiction. Here, as elsewhere in his works, Nabokov allots his character a modicum of self-awareness, but reserves the lion's share of it for the author and reader. Pozdnyshev can interpret and reinterpret his story, but only from the perspective of the author and reader do we glimpse the potentially endless vista of revaluation after revaluation. The reader is thereby compelled to question the benefits of Pozdnyshev's interpretive activity, and of his own. In rewriting a story in which Tolstoy shut down all alternative interpretations, Nabokov instead creates in miniature the interpretive hall-of-mirrors that he would use so potently in later works like *Pale Fire*. Tolstoy and Nabokov appear to recognize the same dangers and to seek the same ends in thwarting an interpretive response. Both authors attempt to facilitate a reader's self-forgetting in their own works—Tolstoy by urging us to abstain from interpretation, Nabokov by forcing us to indulge in it, to recognize its endless regression, and eventually to give it up.

The Difficulty of Deference

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[51] N38g. "нежности без которой женщина не может жить."

Tolstoy and Nabokov's efforts to create works that restrain our impulse to interpret might make us nervous, or suspicious. After all, such artworks appear to endow the artist with unrivaled authority and to severely limit the spectator's range of response. They urge the reader to take things in, but not to answer or contest the artist with a creation of his own. Do such artworks simply tyrannize us as readers, offering the delight of self-abandonment at the price of our intellectual independence? In Chapter Four, I address this question, central to the dissertation, through an analysis of Nabokov's last Russian novel, *The Gift*.

Nabokov's title ostensibly refers to the creative "gift" of the novel's hero, Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, and most commentators take for granted that that the novel exalts authorship, perhaps even more so than Nabokov's other books. I propose an alternative reading of *The Gift*, one that focuses on the "gifts" bestowed on and by the reader. I argue that the pleasures and benefits of writers and readers in Nabokov's novel are not the same, but they are similarly significant. Fyodor's transition from being a reader to being an author entails *losses* as well as gains. One of the things he sacrifices for artistic work is a visceral connection to the people and things around him. In other words, Nabokov tells us that there are important benefits to remaining a reader.

There are responsibilities specific to readership, too. The ideal reader in *The Gift*, exemplified by Fyodor's fiancé Zina, is not a creative but a receptive reader. Zina could be called a "surface" reader. She recreates the imagined landscapes of Fyodor's book in her own mind, she appreciates the details of his designs, but she does not attempt to find or formulate a meaning in the work beyond what the author himself makes evident. As a

non-creative reader, a surface reader, Zina does not shape the meaning of Fyodor's book. She does, however, confer its value. As an artist, Fyodor translates living impressions into dead, abstract signs. This process of abstraction would be purely destructive, Nabokov suggests, were there not a reader—Zina—to restore the signs to life in her imagination. Nabokov's reader is indispensable to the work even if she does not dictate its meaning. My analysis of *The Gift* challenges the assumption that a non-creative reader is necessarily a disempowered one.

Building on the insights of my authors, I propose that intellectual autonomy need not come from mastering a text, from translating it through interpretation into one's own concepts. It can also be found in deferring to the text, without attempting to assimilate or exploit it. Such deference is more difficult than we might think. Perhaps because their own creative drives were so powerful, Tolstoy and Nabokov were keenly attuned to how immensely difficult it can be for us to attend to anything other than our own desires. In fact, they seem to think that this task is so difficult that it cannot be accomplished on our own. We need something forceful enough to draw us out of ourselves, and each sought in his own way to create that something. They wanted to create artworks that would compel us to abandon our preoccupations, including our creative and critical ones. The freedom Tolstoy and Nabokov offer us with their art is certainly not the only kind of freedom worth pursuing. One could argue that their form of freedom is compelling only to someone who already enjoys a host of other freedoms—physical and economic freedoms, for example. But it is not a trivial kind of freedom, either. By holding us captive, forcing us to attend to *their* work, these authors grant us a freedom from ourselves.

Chapter One

Beauty and Zest: Aesthetic and Material Pleasure in *Anna Karenina*

Eroding Distinctions

The rapid growth of the literate public in Europe during the second half of the 19th century meant that a greater number of people could participate in the production and consumption of art. At the same time, the Realist artistic movement brought art and life closer together in artistic practice itself. Jacques Rancière has argued that after the French Revolution artists abandoned the hierarchies of Aristotelian poetics—with its clear separation of the poetic and prosaic—and developed a "democratic" poetics in which anything could be worthy of representation. The boundary between aesthetic experience and lived experience was disappearing both in art and in life.[1] The imbrication of art and life, Rancière argues, posed a threat to art:

> From the point of view of Art, the "democratic threat" appears as follows: if the future of Art lies in the equivalence of Art and nonartistic life, and if that equivalence is available to anybody, what remains specific to Art? The new artistic formula might be the death of Art as well.[2]

Gustave Flaubert serves as Rancière's primary example of the artist who both welcomed and feared the eroding distinction between the stuff of art and the stuff of life. As a

[1] Jacques Rancière, *Politics of Literature*, trans. by Julie Rose (Cambridge ; Malden, MA: Polity, 2011).

[2] Jacques Rancière, "Why Emma Bovary Had to Be Killed," *Critical Inquiry* 34, no. 2 (2008): 233-248.

Realist, Flaubert embraced the commingling of art and life, which meant that the artist could treat any subject matter. But as an artist, he worried that the equivalence of the artistic and the mundane meant that art could be consumed like anything else. He worried that there would be nothing distinctive about the fruits of the artist's labor.

Tolstoy's position within the "democratic" poetics of the 19th century, with its advantages and its dangers, was similar to Flaubert's. Tolstoy, too, was a Realist who incorporated a range of the prosaic subjects into his artworks. And certainly Tolstoy also confronted a growing, increasingly diverse, and increasingly vocal reading public that questioned the specificity and value of the artist's labor.

In Russia, the question of the relationship between art and life was vehemently debated throughout the latter half of the century. Nikolay Chernyshevsky made perhaps the most provocative statement on the subject with his 1853 dissertation *The Aesthetic Relations Between Art and Reality*. As the son of a priest, Chernyshevsky represented in his own person the growing diversity of cultural commentators. And in his dissertation, he asserted that there is no difference between aesthetic pleasure and any other sensuous pleasure.[3] Chernyshevsky inspired ideological followers who became known collectively

[3] In his master's thesis *Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality* (1853), Chernyshevsky contends: "Stated plainly, evidently, it is impossible to doubt the fact that an aesthetic sensation is a sensation like any other." According to him, our "aesthetic sense" functions just like our five physical senses, and it can be similarly satiated, overwhelmed, or exhausted. My translation. Nikolay Chernyshevskiy, "Esteticheskie otnosheniya iskusstva k deystvitel'nosti (Dissertatsiya)," *Chernyshevskiy Sobranie sochineniy v pyati tomakh*, *stat'i po filosofii i estetike*, ed. Yu S Melent'ev (Moskva: Biblioteka Ogonek; Pravda, 1974), accessed April 15, 2016, http://az.lib.ru/c/chernyshewskij_n_g/text_0410.shtml. "Одним словом, нет, по-видимому, возможности подвергать сомнению факт, что наше эстетическое чувство, подобно всем другим имеет свои нормальные границы относительно продолжительности и интенсивности своего напряженного состояния и что в этих двух смыслах нельзя называть его ненасытным или бесконечным."

as the radical critics of the 1860s. One of these critics, Dmirty Pisarev, declared that aesthetics is no more a science than astrology and should be cast aside. He reduced the artist either to a craftsman, whose productions offer trivial enjoyments, or to a crude thinker whose inchoate ideas could be refined by critics and harnessed in service of progressive reform.[4] The discussions surrounding the relationship between art and life continued in the following decades and attracted an ever-wider circle of participants.[5]

Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and Flaubert's *Madam Bovary*, besides their other affinities, are both novels that respond to the eroding distinction between art and life, between aesthetic and material pleasure. Rancière discusses Flaubert's treatment of these pleasures in *Madam Bovary*. He argues that Flaubert makes his heroine his antipode, the anti-artist who serves as a foil to the writer himself. For Flaubert, as Rancière explains, the Kantian notion of disinterested apprehension is crucial to distinguishing aesthetic perception, and the capacity for this sort of perception is reserved for the writer alone. The artist sees things aesthetically, delighting in them "when they are released from all the ties that make them useful or desirable objects."[6] The non-artist (Emma) recognizes

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[4] Pisarev suggested that in order for literature to realize its significant civic mission we must "destroy aesthetics, send it to the same place we sent alchemy and astrology." My translation. Dmitry Pisarev, "Razrushenie estetiki," *Literaturnaya kritika v trekh tomakh*, *tom vtoroy stat'i 1864-1865*, ed. Yu S Sorokin (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1981), accessed May 9, 2016, http://az.lib.ru/p/pisarew_d/text_1865_razrushenie01.shtml. "…чтобы пробудить в расслабленной литературе сознание ее высоких и серьезных гражданских обязанностей, надо было совершенно уничтожить эстетику, надо было отправить ее туда, куда отправлены алхимия и астрология."

[5]See: Katia Dianina, *When Art Makes News: Writing Culture and Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2013).

[6] Rancière, "Why Emma Bovary Had to Be Killed," 241.

all perceptual qualities as "properties of real things that can be desired and possessed."[7] Rancière argues that Emma's death is Flaubert's way of punishing her for misconceiving the relationship between art and life, for failing to grasp that "art has to be set apart from the aestheticization of life."[8] By killing off the passionate Emma, Flaubert endorses the dispassion of the artist.

Tolstoy is less convinced than Flaubert that the distinction between aesthetic and material pleasure can be maintained, and his heroine becomes not his antipode but a surrogate for expressing his own doubts. In this chapter, I will argue that *Anna Karenina* dramatized both the difficulty of differentiating the beautiful from the merely pleasing and the fatal consequences for the artist who cannot maintain this distinction.

At first glance, some of Tolstoy's aesthetic pronouncements in the last decades of his life might suggest that he did not wish, as Flaubert did, to defend the specificity of aesthetic experience. In his unpublished essay *About What is Called Art* (1896), a sort of preliminary sketch for his famous treatise *What is Art?*, Tolstoy ostensibly addresses proponents of art for art's sake with the following verdict: "No matter how hard you try to define beauty, you cannot get away from the definition that includes all others: beauty is that which you like."[9] He appears to agree with the radical critics that material and aesthetic pleasures are one and the same. But I question Tolstoy's own acquiescence to such a reduction. After all, the adherents of art for art's sake to whom he claims to speak

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[7] Ibid., 242.

[8] Ibid., 240.

[9] "O tom, chto nazyvayut iskusstvom," in PSS, 30:268. Translations of this text are mine. "Как вы ни старайтесь определять красоту, вы не уйдете от того определения, включающего все ваши: то, что красота есть то, что вам нравится."

are not the ones who have to "try hard" to distinguish our pleasure in the beautiful from a mere satisfaction of the senses. They take this distinction for granted and expect others to do the same. The artist who *does* have to try—the one who longs for a distinction that he simultaneously suspects to be baseless—is Tolstoy himself. Tolstoy's words are thus not the resolution on beauty that they appear to be, but are rather an expression of the same unease that had afflicted Tolstoy's artists twenty years earlier in *Anna Karenina*. They are anxiously descriptive—descriptive of his own efforts to escape an unwanted conclusion—rather than calmly prescriptive.

Tolstoy, I argue in the first part of the chapter, departs from those who would defend art on the grounds that it offers us a pleasure entirely distinct from the pleasures of the senses. Unlike defenders of pure art such as his friend Afanasy Fet, Tolstoy rejected the Schopenhauerian picture of aesthetic experience as a will-less, desire-less contemplation. Instead, he adhered to the Kantian thought that while aesthetic experiences are not determined by a spectator's needs, they do not exclude desire entirely. Like Kant, Tolstoy believed that the interest we take in art and beauty is associated with our interest in society and communication. And in this social link, he saw a certain danger for the artist.

Through an analysis of the novel's artists—the painter Mikhaylov and Anna Karenina—I show that Tolstoy worried that the artist might be deceived about the nature of his own products. He might believe that his work elicits aesthetic pleasure when in fact it only gratifies his spectator's desires. The only thing worse for the artist than committing that error, Tolstoy suggests, is becoming disillusioned with his art altogether. I read Anna's tragic fate as an allegory for the artist who becomes convinced that there is

no difference between what she offers her audience and the kind of material satisfactions afforded by a chef, a winemaker, or a prostitute. Tolstoy seems to suggest that if an artist is to go on making art, he must find a way to be certain that he elicits a properly *aesthetic* response.

In the concluding sections of the chapter, I argue that an unusual criterion for assessing an artwork emerges in Tolstoy's novel. An artist can be sure that he has produced a true artwork when his work inspires no rival creations. An artwork that elicits an aesthetic response in *Anna Karenina* is one that makes the admiring spectator feel as though he has *already* taken part in its creation, and that no further creative activity is necessary.

Desire, Judgment, and Aesthetic Perception

"Vengeance is mine, I will repay."[10] The biblical epigraph to *Anna Karenina* asserts that judgment is the prerogative of God, and as imperfect human creatures we cannot and should not judge. The novel, of course, proceeds to demonstrate all the various ways we make judgments in matters both ethical and aesthetic. In fact, the words for judge and judgment (*sud*, *sud'ya*, *sud'yi*, *suzhdenie*) appear with the greatest frequency in aesthetic rather than moral contexts in the novel (i.e., Anna's visit to the painter Mikhaylov's studio). Aesthetic judgments—how we make them and whether they differ from mere statements of preference—interest Tolstoy, in part, because he

[10] Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, the Maude translation, revised by George Gibian (W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 1. Hereafter AK. *Anna karenina* in PSS, 18: 8. "Мне отмщение, и Аз воздам."

recognizes that the pleasure we take in art and beauty is related to the pleasure we take in food, wine, and other things given to the senses.

Tolstoy stresses the proximity between aesthetic and material enjoyment by personifying these pleasures in the siblings at the center of his novel: Anna Karenina and Stiva Oblonsky. Stiva is the purveyor of material pleasures. He is the first character we meet, and he is introduced by way of his desires. Stiva's wants assert themselves even before he is fully awake: "Stiva turned his plump, well-kept body over on the springy sofa as if he wished (*zhelaya*) to have another sleep." The Russian word "zhelanya" can be translated as desire or appetite, and indeed Stiva's desires are all appetites, cravings for physical satisfaction. As he wakes up, Stiva recalls a dream in which all of his appetites were so pleasantly satisfied. He repeats the word "yes," expressing his delight and indulgence:

> 'Yes, yes — what was it? he thought, trying to recall his dream. Yes, how was it? Oh yes — Alabin was giving a dinner party in Dramstadt — no, not in Dramstadt but somewhere in America. Oh yes, Dramstadt was in America, — and Alabin was giving the party. Yes, the dinner was served on glass tables — yes, and the tables sang "Il mio tesoro,"… no, not exactly "Il mio tesoro," but something better than that, and there were some kind of decanters that were also women.' His eyes sparkled merrily and he smiled as he sat thinking. 'Yes, it was nice (*horosho*), very nice.' [11]

[11] AK, 1. PSS, 18:8. "Он повернул свое полное, выхоленное тело на пружинах дивана, как бы желая опять заснуть надолго, с другой стороны крепко обнял подушку и прижался к ней щекой; но вдруг вскочил, сел на диван и открыл глаза./ «Да, да, как это было? — думал он, вспоминая сон. — Да, как это было? Да! Алабин давал обед в Дармштадте; нет, не в Дармштадте, а что-то американское. Да, но там Дармштадт был в Америке. Да, Алабин давал обед на стеклянных столах, да, — и столы пели: Il mio tesoro, и не Il mio tesoro, а что-то лучше, и какие-то маленькие графинчики, и они же женщины», — вспоминал он./ Глаза Степана Аркадьича весело заблестели, и он задумался, улыбаясь. «Да, хорошо было, очень хорошо…»"

All the pleasures to which Stiva says "yes"— sleep, food, wine, sex—are those that Kant in his *Critique of Judgment* had defined as pleasures of the *agreeable*. Kant's own example of an agreeable pleasure is the pleasure produced by Canary wine.[12] We respond to items such as wine with satisfaction, and we might even express this satisfaction, Kant argues, but we would not expect others to necessarily share in our pleasure. We recognize that these "agreeable" pleasures are purely subjective.

Not only does Stiva gratify himself with food and wine, he also helps others to gratify their appetites. He brings his wife Dolly a pear, he gives his daughter, Tanya, the "two sweets which he knew she liked best,"[13] and he entertains his friend Constantine Levin twice with food and drink. Stiva loves dinner parties, and when he throws one, he satisfies his guests' desires not only for food but also for conversation. He makes everyone feel at ease, pairing the right people together and giving them the conversation topics for which they have been eager all evening: "In a moment [Stiva] had kneaded all that Society dough in such a way that the drawing-room was in first-rate form, and was filled with animated voices."[14] Stiva is compared to a chef kneading dough, and this association with food again suggests his role as the enthusiast of the agreeable. Food, of course, is a necessity as well as a pleasure. But Stiva is linked only with the *pleasures* of

[12] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 7, 55.

[13] AK, 8. PSS, 18: 11. "Он достал с камина, где вчера поставил, коробочку конфет и дал ей две, выбрав ее любимые, шоколадную и помадную."

[14] AK, 346. PSS, 18, 401. "В одну минуту он так перемесил все это общественное тесто, что стала гостиная хоть куда, и голоса оживленно зазвучали."

food. He offers his family gastronomic treats, but fails to provide his wife and children with necessary provisions for their summer stay in the country.

The label of "agreeable" can be applied to Stiva himself because like tasty food and wine he pleases the senses. The narrator explains, "there was something in him—in his handsome and bright appearance, his beaming eyes, black hair and eyebrows, and his pink-and white complexion, that had a *physical effect* on those he met, making them feel friendly and cheerful."[15] Stiva acts on the body, and an encounter with him produces an uncomplicated feeling of pleasure: "everyone was pleased as ever to meet him."[16] Stiva's servant Matvey takes pleasure in clothing "his master's well-kept body."[17] The Tatar waiter who serves Stiva and Levin their dinner looks at Stiva "with a smile of evident pleasure." And Levin, who prefers bread to oysters, is pleased nonetheless to see Oblonsky enjoying them.[18]

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[15] AK, 13. PSS, 18:17. My italics. "Степана Аркадьича не только любили все знавшие его за его добрый, веселый нрав и несомненную честность, но в нем, в его красивой, светлой наружности, блестящих глазах, черных бровях, волосах, белизне и румянце лица, было что-то, *физически действовавшее* дружелюбно и весело на людей, встречавшихся с ним."

[16] Ibid. "Если и случалось иногда, что после разговора с ним оказывалось, что ничего особенно радостного не случилось, — на другой день, на третий опять точно так же все радовались при встрече с ним."

[17] AK, 5. PSS, 18: 8. Altered to a more literal translation. "Матвей…с очевидным удовольствием облек в нее холеное тело барина."

[18] AK, 32. PSS, 18: 89. "Даже татарин, отвинтивший пробку и разливавший игристое вино по разлатым тонким рюмкам, с заметною улыбкой удовольствия, поправляя свой белый галстук, поглядывал на Степана Аркадьича."

Stiva's sister Anna, on the other hand, is linked not with food but with art. When we first meet Anna—at a train station—we see her through the eyes of Alexei Vronsky, her future lover:

> [Vronsky] followed her with his eyes as long as he could see her graceful form, and his face retained its smile. Through the carriage window he saw her approach her brother and speak to him with animation about something that evidently had no connection with him, Vronsky, and that seemed to him vexing.[19]

When Anna appears in the window, Vronsky's perspective on her is analogous to someone admiring a portrait. This encounter is the first of many instances in which Anna is presented within a frame as though she were an artwork, as Amy Mandelker has observed. Mandelker has also noted that Anna is a masterful manipulator of her own image and therefore not just an artwork but an artist in her own right: "In addition to the three painted versions and the verbal portraits sketched by other characters, there are Anna's own ekphrastically presented self-portraits; that is, Tolstoy's framings of Anna's presentations of herself as an art object."[20] If Stiva is the chef kneading the dough of society, Anna is the artist displaying her own beauty.

Anna's affect on others, in this case Vronsky, both resembles Stiva's and departs from it. Vronsky regards Anna sexually (as a society woman who might satisfy his lust)

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[19] AK, 58. PSS, 18: 68. Altered to a more literal translation. "Он провожал ее глазами до тех пор, пока не скрылась ее грациозная фигура, и улыбка остановилась на его лице. В окно он видел, как она подошла к брату, положила ему руку на руку и что-то оживленно начала говорить ему, очевидно о чем-то не имеющем ничего общего с ним, с Вронским, и ему это показалось досадным."

[20] Amy Mandelker, *Framing Anna Karenina: Tolstoy, the Woman Question, and the Victorian Novel* (Ohio State University Press, 1993), 110.

as well as aesthetically (as a vision in the frame of a carriage window). Anna's "graceful form" promises Vronsky sensuous gratification: an agreeable pleasure. But as Vronsky continues to look at Anna through the window he experiences not the uncomplicated sense of delight produced by the agreeable Stiva, but rather a mixture of pleasure and vexation. Vronsky smiles, but he feels frustrated by Anna's independence from him; he senses the distance between himself and the object of his admiration. Mandelker adduces Vronsky's desire for Anna to argue that Tolstoy sees no difference between the pleasure produced by beauty and sex. To her, Vronsky's desire indicates that "Tolstoy rigorously rejects the Kantian notion of aesthetic disinterest"[21] and consequently conflates what Kant called the pleasures of the beautiful and the agreeable. It is true that Vronsky's response to Anna does not exclude desire, but we need not conclude that this response signals a refutation of Kantian disinterest. First, although Vronsky is not insensitive to art and beauty, he is hardly exemplary as a spectator. Moreover, the desire inspired by Anna might be related to the one inspired by Stiva, but it is not the same.

As Richard Moran has argued, Kant's account of the pleasure we take in the beautiful does not exclude desire. Kant describes the liking associated with the beautiful as a pleasure that makes no reference to how the object we apprehend satisfies our individual desires: unlike the pleasure of the agreeable, it is a "disinterested" pleasure. Moran, however, shows that it is not that desire is uninvolved in aesthetic experience for Kant, but rather that aesthetic experience produces the impression that one's desires are

[21] Mandelker, 79.

"guided" by the object of beauty.[22] Moran proposes that Kant's demand for universal agreement in our judgments of beauty is derived from a more basic distinction in Kant, namely from "a prior sense of necessity or demand that characterizes the experience of the beautiful itself."[23] Our sense that the beautiful places us under an obligation represents "one of Kant's best insights about the beautiful."[24]

How is it possible that the beautiful makes demands on us? Moran explains that "the idea of something whose status as a value does not depend on my current desires or interests brings to the experience of that value a sense of my being measured by it (rather than my estimating it according to my own needs) and a normative direction of fit from oneself to the beautiful object rather than the reverse."[25] When we admire something that does not appear to answer directly to our needs, we feel as though we do not intend to admire this object but are rather *compelled* to do so. It is as if the demand on our attention and admiration prevails over whatever our particular desires might be, and in feeling our desires thus conquered we sense that the object itself has a kind of unconditional value.[26]

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[22] Richard Moran, "Kant, Proust, and the Appeal of Beauty," *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 2 (2012): 315.

[23] Ibid., 308

[24] Ibid., 322. Moran argues against the demand for universal agreement that Kant derives from this sense of obligation: "My own view is that Kant is right in this, as well as in agreement with Proust, in finding a sense of necessity or demand with respect to the beautiful that is not found with respect to either the agreeable or ordinary empirical judgments. However, he mislocates it in the demand for universal agreement, in part because necessity and universality are so deeply conjoined for him." Moran, 324.

[25] Ibid., 322.

[26] Ibid., 305, 322. Moran explains that we see a failure to recognize this value not as a sign of deficiency in the object but as a failure of judgment on our part. The beautiful is

Kant understands the beautiful as something that allows the observer to leave off pursuing his own gratification. Instead, the observer seeks to conform to what he regards as a demand made on him by the beautiful thing. It is by recognizing that he is answerable to something outside of himself—something other than his own needs—that the observer can register an object *as* beautiful.

Vronsky experiences precisely this reversal of the "direction of fit" when he looks at Anna. As Anna greets her brother, Vronsky gazes at her and smiles involuntarily: "Vronsky did not take his eyes off her, and kept smiling, he knew not why."[27] He does not initially mark Anna as a beauty. But he nonetheless continues to gaze at her feeling as if it is not by his own volition that he looks at and admires Anna. Vronsky becomes keenly aware of the way Anna's beauty does not answer to his own needs. And it is precisely through this reflection on his response to Anna—reflection on the way his desires are marginalized in her presence—that Vronsky finally does recognize her as a beauty. He stands in awe of her and feels that his desires have nothing to do with her, and consequently experiences an "unusual pleasure": the singular pleasure produced by art and beauty.[28]

Anna's capacity to elicit a distinctly aesthetic pleasure is even more clearly illustrated when her observer is not Vronsky by Kitty Shcherbatskaya. Like Anna, Kitty

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distinguished from the agreeable in that we consider such failure possible with regard to the former but not the latter.

[27] AK, 57. PSS, 18: 67. "Вронский, не спуская глаз, смотрел на нее и, сам не зная чему, улыбался."

[28] AK, 58. PSS, 18: 68. "как чему-то особенному, обрадовался тому энергическому пожатию."

is an artist of her own appearance, and Kitty responds precisely to Anna's artistry when she encounters her at the fateful Moscow ball that begins Anna and Vronsky's affair. Anna exhibits the crucial feature of beauty that Moran identifies in Kant's aesthetics: instead of answering the needs of her observes, she makes demands on them. Looking at Anna, who is dressed in black velvet, Kitty "felt that she had never before realized her full charm (*prelest'*). She now saw her in a new and quite unexpected light." Kitty acknowledges the superior artist, and notes that Anna's toilette "served only as a frame; she alone was noticeable."[29] Kitty also observes the impression Anna makes on Vronsky:

> What she saw so distinctly in the mirror of Anna's face, she saw in him. What had become of his usually quiet and firm manner and the carelessly calm expression of his face? Every time he turned toward Anna he slightly bowed his head as if he wished to fall down before her, and in his eyes there was an expression of submission and fear. 'I do not wish to offend,' his every look seemed to say, 'I only wish to save myself, but I do not know how.' His face had an expression which she had never seen before.[30]

Vronsky's relation to Anna here is obviously not free of desire. But, as Kitty sees it, his desire is less to gratify his own needs than to conform himself to the demands of the

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[29] AK, 72. PSS, 18: 84. "Но теперь, увидав ее в черном, она почувствовала, что не понимала всей ее прелести. Она теперь увидала ее совершенно новою и неожиданною для себя. Теперь она поняла, что Анна не могла быть в лиловом и что ее прелесть состояла именно в том, что она всегда выступала из своего туалета, что туалет никогда не мог быть виден на ней."

[30] AK, 74. PSS, 18: 87. "То, что Кити так ясно представлялось в зеркале лица Анны, она увидела на нем. Куда делась его всегда спокойная, твердая манера и беспечно спокойное выражение лица? Нет, он теперь каждый раз, как обращался к ней, немного сгибал голову, как бы желая пасть пред ней, и во взгляде его было одно выражение покорности и страха. «Я не оскорбить хочу, — каждый раз как будто говорил его взгляд, — но спасти себя хочу, и не знаю как». На лице его было такое выражение, которого она никогда не видала прежде."

admired object. Kitty notices that Vronsky's pleasure is accompanied by submission, fear, perturbation, and a sense of his own vulnerability. One could deny that the effects Kitty observes are characteristic of an *aesthetic* experience by insisting that Vronsky's relation to Anna is only sexual. To me this seems unlikely. But even if we concede this point, it is important to remember that the reader here follows Kitty's gaze rather than Vronsky's. It is Kitty who ascribes these feelings of admiration, submission, and vulnerability to Vronsky. Perhaps Kitty is giving a faithful account of the scene. More likely, though, this admiration mixed with fear belongs, at least in part, to Kitty herself. It is inspired by *Kitty's* encounter with Anna's artistic creation, namely her own figure framed by the black velvet and lace of her dress. This interpretation seems all the more viable in light of Kitty's later perspective on Anna, when her gaze is no longer (ostensibly) mediated by Vronsky's.

The beautiful, unlike the agreeable, is something we feel that we, and others, ought to admire. Judgments about beauty have a normative aspect that judgments about the agreeable do not. The capacity of the beautiful to make us feel that we ought to admire it regardless of our own interests is dramatized in Kitty's final sighting of Anna at the ball. Anna thwarts Kitty's interests: Kitty's desire for social triumph and for a marriage proposal from Vronsky. Yet Kitty continues to admire Anna. Though crushed by the events of the ball, Kitty is compelled to marvel at her competitor:

> Some supernatural power attracted Kitty's eyes to Anna's face. She looked *charming* (*prelestna*) in her simple black dress; *charming* were her full arms with the bracelets, *charming* her firm neck with the string of pearls round it, *charming* her curly hair now disarranged, *charming* was every graceful movement of her small feet and hands, *charming* her handsome animated face, but there was something terrible and cruel in her *charm*.

> Kitty admired her even more than before, and suffered more and more. She felt herself crushed and her face expressed it.[31]

Like Vronsky at the train station, Kitty experiences her admiration of Anna not as an act of volition but as the effect of a supernatural power. The incantatory repetition of the word "charming" underscores the extent to which Kitty is mesmerized by Anna's image. Kitty "gazed at [Anna] with fear," feeling the same reverence and vulnerability that she had earlier ascribed to Vronsky. She sums up Anna's influence on herself by silently affirming, "'Yes, there is something strange (*chuzhdoe*), devilish (*besovskoe*), and charming about her.'"[32] Kitty underscores the effects of the beautiful that are central to Kant's account, namely reverence and demand. She experiences this demand as "possession" (*besovskoe*) and the reverence as a feeling of distance (*chuzhdoe*). Anna does not gratify any of Kitty's desires, sexual or otherwise. She acts on Kitty the way an artwork acts on its observer.[33]

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[31] AK, 76. PSS, 18: 89. I have altered the translation to restore the repetition of "charming" and to be more faithful to the Russian text. "Какая-то сверхъестественная сила притягивала глаза Кити к лицу Анны. Она была прелестна в своем простом черном платье, прелестны были ее полные руки с браслетами, прелестна твердая шея с ниткой жемчуга, прелестны вьющиеся волосы расстроившейся прически, прелестны грациозные легкие движения маленьких ног и рук, прелестно это красивое лицо в своем оживлении; но было что-то ужасное и жестокое в ее прелести."

[32] Ibid. " «Да, что-то чуждое, бесовское и прелестное есть в ней», — сказала себе Кити."

[33] It might be argued that one is not usually "possessed" by works of art. We go to the museum and see beautiful things that we might appreciate without feeling called upon to admire them in spite of ourselves. But I believe that many will recognize elements of such an experience as Kitty's when they recall the first time they encountered a particularly beloved artwork. Kitty's is perhaps the acme of aesthetic experience rather than its most typical manifestation.

Significantly, aesthetic experience in *Anna Karenina* is not marked by the kind of disappearance of the ego and absence of desire that is a hallmark of Romantic aesthetics. Characters do not experience the state of will-less contemplation that Schopenhauer had associated with aesthetic perception. Schopenhauer had posited that aesthetic contemplation disrupts our ordinary way of apprehending objects in the world. Typically we regard the things around us in terms of the way they relate to ourselves, "our own willing" as Schopenhauer puts it. Space and time, he contends, are the cognitive condition of this ordinary way of knowing the world through its relation to the ego. In our encounters with beauty, however, our ego is momentarily abolished and we can perceive the beautiful object outside its phenomenal relations. "I contemplate a tree aesthetically, i.e. with artistic eyes, and thus recognize not it but its Idea, it is immediately of no importance whether it is this tree or its ancestor that flourished a thousand years ago," Schopenhauer writes, "and whether the contemplator is this individual, or any other living anywhere and at any time."[34] Hence both the subject and the object of contemplation stand outside of space and time.

Kitty does not lose herself in contemplation of Anna's beauty—as would an Schopenhauerian aesthetic subject—but rather registers the demand that this beauty has on her as a perceiving subject. Observers of the beautiful in the novel never lose track of their own relation to the admired object. They are able to recognize something *as beautiful* precisely by reflecting on the capacity of the object to marginalize their individual desires and compel admiration. Tolstoy, like Kant, appears to incorporate

[34] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation: In Two Volumes*, vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 209.

judgment into the phenomenology of aesthetic experience. Tolstoy and Kant, in contradistinction to Schopenhauer, recognize the presence of desire in both the agreeable and the beautiful. As Moran puts it, "What is renounced in the experience of the beautiful (as contrasted with the agreeable) is not desire or gratification themselves; rather it is the authority and force of one's presently constituted desires and interests, which are instead given over to and guided by the confrontation with something outside them, independent of them."[35] Kant attends to the way our individual interests recede when we behold the beautiful. They are supplanted by a desire to admire, preserve, and otherwise accommodate the beautiful object. Tolstoy, too, regards the beautiful and the agreeable as related—desire is present in our experience of both—but also distinct in the way each affects our interests. Moreover, while Schopenhauer and his followers see aesthetic experience as a way to escape our mundane, social existence, Tolstoy, as I will argue in the next section, considers our interest in art and beauty comprehensible only in the context of our shared social life.

The Artist's Solitude and Sociability

The artist who retains the Schopenhauerian account of aesthetic experience enjoys an enviable independence from his audience, and from society more generally. If aesthetic apprehension provides an artist with access to a transcendental truth, then there need not be any other reward for the toil and sacrifice that art-making requires. The artist-prophet never doubts the purpose of his activity or the success of his artwork: he is

[35] Moran, 312.

immediately aware of his success when he glimpses some transcendent truth. But Tolstoy, as I have suggested, could not believe in the artist's extraphenomenal vision. His artists in *Anna Karenina* are thus forced to confront their dependence on an audience, and to ask what, if not an extraphenomenal vision, justifies the sacrifices demanded by artistic work.

The first requirement of artistic work is, of course, solitude. Tolstoy conceives of this solitude not as a luxury but as a burden. He demonstrates the way Mikhaylov, the only professional artist in the novel, must become almost antisocial in order to pursue creative work. The narrator tells us that Mikhaylov never "worked with such ardor or so successfully" as after a fight with his wife. In order to make art Mikhaylov retreats to his studio, and only when everyone leaves can he "[look] at his picture with his artistic perception fully alert, and [reach] that assurance of perfection, and consequent importance, of his picture which he needed to attain the intensity of effort—excluding all other interests—without which he could not work."[36] What Mikhaylov's work demands is something like the "energy of delusion" that Tolstoy considered necessary for his own literary writing.[37] All practical interests, including the interest in other people, are abandoned for the singular interest in artistic production. The urge to create is an isolating one.

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[36] AK, 426, 433. PSS, 19: 36, 44. "Никогда он с таким жаром и успехом не работал, как когда жизнь его шла плохо и в особенности когда он ссорился с женой." ; "Он стал смотреть на свою картину всем своим полным художественным взглядом и пришел в то состояние уверенности в совершенстве и потому в значительности своей картины, которое нужно было ему для того исключающего все другие интересы напряжения, при котором одном он мог работать."

[37] Boris Eikhenbaum, *Tolstoy in the Seventies*, trans. Albert Kaspin (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1982), 120.

It might appear as though Mikhaylov is rewarded for his toil and solitude by the gift of extraphenomenal vision. His solitary pleasure in his painting, *Pilate's Admonition*, bears a resemblance to the sort of aesthetic pleasure Schopenhauer ascribes to the artist. In Schopenhauer's view, an artist's contemplation of the Platonic Idea—a vision beyond the realm of objects bound by space and time—is the reward for his struggle and suffering. When Mikhaylov is alone in his studio, he feels that "no one had ever painted anything like [his *Pilate*]." He knows that "what he wanted to express in that picture had never yet been expressed by anyone."[38] He is convinced of his painting's perfection, and especially of the perfection of the apostle John. Upon first reading, it seems as though Mikhaylov's reward is his singular vision: the vision of John.

A closer analysis of the scene, however, reveals that Tolstoy mocks and critiques Mikhaylov's pleasure in this vision. It is not incidental that Mikhaylov is enthralled by John, whose role in the composition is that of an observer. (John was "watching what was taking place".)[39] As an observer, John occupies a position similar to that of the artist himself. Mikhaylov's pleasure in this figure is therefore not a delight in any Platonic Idea but simply a delight in his own image, perhaps his own mastery as an observer and artist. The distracted, almost careless way in which Mikhaylov works on the figure of Christ while admiring John is a further sign that his pleasure more likely proceeds from gratified vanity than a transcendent vision: "While correcting [Christ's] foot he kept glancing at the figure of John in the background, which the visitors had not even remarked, but

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[38] AK, 427. PSS, 19: 38. "Он не думал, чтобы картина его была лучше всех Рафаелевых, но он знал, что того, что он хотел передать и передал в этой картине, никто никогда не передавал."

[39] AK, 433. PSS, 19: 40. "вглядывавшееся в то, что происходило, лицо Иоанна."

which he knew to be the height of perfection."[40] The artist is convinced that he has a vision of something no one else has ever expressed, but the reader sees that this vision is a delusion and not an otherworldly truth.

The true reward for Mikhaylov's efforts is not a transcendent vision but an opportunity to connect with other people through his works. In order to create, Mikhaylov needs to distance himself from others, but to enjoy his creation he needs to reconnect with them. Mikhaylov fights with his wife and goes to work in his studio, but after completing a successful drawing he always remerges and coaxes her to make up. It is as if instances of failed communication and sociability motivate the artist to pursue a more perfect communication through art. Mikhaylov looks forward to seeing how his audience will respond to his art, because their response is part of his reward. He eagerly anticipates the arrival of Anna, Vronsky, and their acquaintance Golenishchev who have made plans to visit his studio.

In the scene in which Mikhaylov awaits the evaluation of his visitors, Tolstoy employs the vocabulary of judgment more emphatically than anywhere else in the text. For Mikhaylov, the narrator tells us, "Every remark, even the most trivial, which showed that those who judged (*sud'yi*) [the painting of Pilate] saw even but a small part of what he himself saw in it, moved him deeply." The narrator adds that Mikhaylov, "always attributed to those judges (*sud'yam*) a better understanding than his own, and always expected to hear from them something he had himself not noticed in his work, often

[40] AK, 433. PSS, 19: 40. "Исправляя ногу, он беспрестанно всматривался в фигуру Иоанна на заднем плане, которой посетители не заметили, но которая, он знал, была верх совершенства."

fancying that in their judgment (*suzhdenie*) he had really found that something."[41] And as Mikhaylov waits for the visitors' responses, "he believe[s] in advance that the highest and justest of judgment (*sud*) was going to be pronounced by these very visitors..."[42] The artist-prophet might enjoy his spectators' admiration, but their opinions would not unsettle him as they do Mikhaylov.

Mikhaylov considers Anna, Vronsky, and Golenishchev to be "wealthy Russians [who] comprehended nothing about art but pretended to be amateurs and critics."[43] Nonetheless, he is deeply affected by Golenishchev's remark, which suggests that the visitor shares his perspective on *Pilate*:

> Mikhaylov's mobile face suddenly lighted up. His eyes brightened…Mikhaylov was delighted with [Golenishchev's remark]. His opinion of that figure was the same…his depression changed suddenly into delight. In an instant his whole picture became alive before his eyes, with the inexpressible complexity of everything that lives.[44]

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[41] AK, 427. PSS, 19: 38. "Всякое замечание, самое ничтожное, показывающее, что судьи видят хоть маленькую часть того, что он видел в этой картине, до глубины души волновало его. Судьям своим он приписывал всегда глубину понимания больше той, какую он сам имел, и всегда ждал от них чего-нибудь такого, чего он сам не видал в своей картине. И часто в суждениях зрителей, ему казалось, он находил это."

[42] AK, 429. PSS, 19: 39. "В эти несколько секунд он вперед верил тому, что высший, справедливейший суд будет произнесен ими, именно этими посетителями, которых он так презирал минуту тому назад."

[43] AK, 428. PSS, 19: 39. "Вронский и Каренина, по соображениям Михайлова, должны были быть знатные и богатые русские, ничего не понимающие в искусстве, как и все богатые русские, но прикидывавшиеся любителями и ценителями."

[44] AK, 430. PSS, 19: 41. "Все подвижное лицо Михайлова вдруг просияло: глаза засветились…он полюбил Голенищева за это замечание и от состояния уныния вдруг перешел к восторгу. Тотчас же вся картина его ожила пред ним со всею невыразимою сложностью всего живого."

Mikhaylov's pleasure in his own work appears to be significantly enhanced by, if not entirely dependent on, the response of his audience. His solitude and toil is compensated by the chance to unite with someone else in a shared perspective. This scene helps Tolstoy to underscore the role art plays in facilitating social togetherness.

Kant, too, emphasizes the relation between aesthetic experience and the human inclination to sociability. In fact, he attempts to use this inclination to explain our interest in the beautiful and the normativity of aesthetic judgments. As Paul Guyer points out, this relation "provides at least a psychological explanation of why we demand taste from others," even if it does not do what Kant would like it to do, namely offer a "basis for expecting actual agreement in aesthetic response."[45] Kant asserts that aesthetic experience can communicate a feeling, and it is therefore a means to sociability and society. We all have a natural inclination to promote society, according to Kant. Consequently, we take an interest in those things that facilitate communication and we demand that others take an interest in these things as well.[46] "For we judge someone

[45] Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 364.

[46] Paul Guyer argues that Kant's requirement of "disinterested judgment" in judgments of taste suggested to Kant that there has to be something other than aesthetic experience itself that explains our interest in beauty. According to Guyer, however, Kant underestimated just how limited his requirement for disinterested judgment really is. Guyer argues that aesthetic pleasure adequately accounts for our interest in the beautiful: "If we accept Kant's connection of the pleasure of aesthetic response to the representation of the form of an object, rather than to any conceptual judgment about the history or future of the object as it is embedded in the causal nexus of actuality, that is, to its existence, it may indeed follow that aesthetic response is not pleasure in the existence of an object, but in its representation. However, that does not imply that this pleasure will not produce an interest in the existence of the object in a more ordinary sense—a desire—if the existence of the object is, as it will certainly be in many media, a condition

refined if he has the inclination and the skill to communicate his pleasure to others," Kant argues, "and if he is not satisfied with an object unless he can feel his liking for it in community with others. Moreover, a concern for universal communication is something that everyone expects and demands from everyone else, on the basis, as it were, of an original contract dictated by [our] very humanity."[47] We prize the capacity not only to appreciate the beautiful but to appreciate the beautiful together with others, and so we demand that others interest themselves in this common appreciation.[48]

In *Anna Karenina*, aesthetic delight facilitates sociability, and sociability enhances aesthetic delight. Anna, Vronsky, and Golenishchev set out to visit Mikhaylov's studio when they begin to find each other tedious. Their shared delight in one of Mikhaylov's paintings—a painting of two boys finishing—enables them to take pleasure in each other's company again. The visitors are "particularly animated and high-spirited"[49] on their trip home and they do not leave off discussing the painting. Although they lack the right words for what it is that captivated them, they do evaluate the artist's work aloud, proclaiming their pleasure and admiration: "How charming! How well he

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of the enjoyment of its representation. Thus, the fact that aesthetic response is disinterested does not require us to look outside of it for an explanation of some of our desires with regard to its object; certainly nothing in Kant's argument for disinterestedness compels this conclusion." Paul Guyer, "Interest, Nature, and Art: A Problem in Kant's Aesthetics," *The Review of Metaphysics* 31, no. 4 (1978): 583-4.

[47] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 41, 164.

[48] Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 364.

[49] AK, 433. PSS, 19: 45. "Вронский, Анна и Голенищев, возвращаясь домой, были особенно оживлены и веселы."

has hit it off," Vronsky says, "he does not even understand how good it is."[50] Like Kant, Tolstoy suggests that the propensity to ascribe our own aesthetic judgments to others has to do with our interest in communication and society. When Mikhaylov delights in his own *Pilate*, believing that it has communicated something to one of his visitors, he attributes pleasure to the other visitors as well. He looks at them and thinks, "on them too the picture had created an impression."[51]

But linking art with social relations concerned Tolstoy for some of the same reasons that it concerned Kant. Both Kant and Tolstoy worried that understanding aesthetic experience in terms of its social function—facilitating communication and sociability—could collapse the distinction between aesthetic pleasure and gratified appetites. Kant was concerned that if our interest in the beautiful is grounded in our inclination toward society, it would be difficult to distinguish the beautiful from the agreeable, the latter of which answers to our other inclinations and appetites.[52] A desire for sociability can easily shade into a desire for social recognition and vanity. If our interest in the beautiful is an "empirical interest," Kant argues, then we conceive of taste as catering to inclination, "and no matter how refined this inclination may be, still the interest will also easily fuse with all [other] inclinations and passions, which in society attain to their greatest variety and highest degree." It is "not without grounds," Kant suggests, that many have argued "virtuosi of taste, who not just occasionally but

[50] Ibid. "— Что за прелесть! Как это удалось ему и как просто! Он и не понимает, как это хорошо."

[51] AK, 430. PSS, 19: 41. "Михайлову казалось, что картина и на них произвела впечатление."

[52] Guyer, "Interest, Nature, and Art: A Problem in Kant's Aesthetics," 586.

apparently as a rule are vain, obstinate, and given to ruinous passions, can perhaps even less than other people claim the distinction of being attached to moral principles."[53] Those who claim to have the most refined taste may be the most in thrall to their own appetites.

Kant observes that it is possible to mistake the gratification of the senses for an aesthetic appreciation. The "virtuosi of taste" might think that they admire some work of art when in fact they merely gratify their own vanity. They delight in regarding themselves as connoisseurs, for example. These virtuosi of taste abound in Tolstoy's novel. Princess Betsy Tverskaya acts "horrified" that Vronsky leaves the opera diva Christine Nilsson's performance early "though she could not have distinguished Nilsson's voice from that of a chorus girl."[54] Tolstoy's narrator often seizes the opportunity to reveal the pretense surrounding the rituals of art, such as those of attending the theater. Anna's husband Alexei Karenin, though very different from Betsy in other respects, also goes to the opera only in order to gratify his desire for social recognition by seeing "everyone it was necessary for him to see."[55] Tolstoy certainly found audience pretenses blameworthy, but the proximity between the inclination to sociability and other inclinations creates a greater problem for Tolstoy's artists.

If it is not extraphenomenal vision but rather communion with others that compensates the artist, then the artist must seek assurance that his work indeed facilitates

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[53] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 41, 164-165.

[54] AK, 117. PSS, 18: 137. "— От Нильсон? — с ужасом спросила Бетси, которая ни за что бы не распознала Нильсон от всякой хористки."

[55] AK, 330. PSS, 18: 381. "Он отсидел там два акта и видел всех, кого ему нужно было."

communion. Otherwise, the artist suffers the difficulties and isolation of creative activity in vain. But how can the artist know that communion has been achieved? How can he be sure that his work has not simply gratified his vanity or that of his audience?

An artist's self-assessment is unreliable. He may be deceived about his purposes, as Mikhaylov is when he undertakes his *Pilate.* Mikhaylov believes that he wishes to express something new, but his conversation with Golenishchev reveals that it is chiefly vanity that compels him to tackle this religious theme. Golenishchev presses Mikhaylov to admit that he has painted this religious scene because he wishes to occupy himself with the same subject taken up by other great artists. Mikhaylov first acknowledges that he does not paint Christ as a God because he "could not paint a Christ whom [he] had not in [his] soul."[56] Under the pretext of discussing another painter's work, Golenishchev then hints that perhaps a painter who has no strong feeling for his subject ought to choose a different theme. "But if this is the highest theme open to art?" Mikhaylov asks. Golenishchev insists that an unclear relation to the subject—"Is this a God or not a God? —destroys the "unity of impression" in the painting. "Why so?" Mikhaylov responds, "To me it seems that for educated people such a question can no longer exist."[57] Yielding to the opinion of "educated people" is unquestionably a misstep in Tolstoy's world, and it

[56] AK, 431. PSS, 19: 43. " — Я не мог писать того Христа, которого у меня нет в душе, — сказал Михайлов мрачно."

[57] Ibid. " — Но если это величайшая тема, которая представляется искусству? — …. для неверующего является вопрос: бог это или не бог? и разрушает единство впечатления.
— Почему же? Мне кажется, что для образованных людей, — сказал Михайлов, — спора уже не может существовать."

suggests that the author is with Golenishchev[58]: "Golenishchev…keeping to his first contention that the unity of impression is indispensable in art…confuted Mikhaylov. The artist was perturbed, but could find nothing to say in defense of his opinion."[59] Despite Mikhaylov's belief that he wishes to convey something new, it seems likely that he has taken up his religious theme simply to count himself among the masters who have painted Christ. Looking at his own painting, Mikhaylov compares it to those of Titian, Raphael, and Rubens.[60]

But if an artist cannot rely on himself to assess his work, still less can he rely on the words of his audience. Mikhaylov easily mistakes his audience's feigned delight for the real thing. Anna compliments Mikhaylov's Christ because "she [feels] that it was the

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[58] In diary entry dated 13 March, 1870, Tolstoy makes a remark similar to Golenishchev's regarding Nikolai Ge's painting of Christ: "Ge paints *beautifully* a painting of a worldly Christ. But this, of all things, cannot be the subject of a painting concerning any worldly events." Tolstoy's remark further suggests that he sympathizes with Golenishchev's view. My translation. *Dnevniki i zapisnye knizhki 1858-1880* in PSS, 48: 118. "Ге пишет прекрасно картину гражданского Христа. А это одно, что не может быть сюжетом картины из всех гражданских событий."

[59] AK, 432. *Anna karenina* in PSS, 19: 43 "Голенищев не согласился с этим и, держась своей первой мысли о единстве впечатления, нужного для искусства, разбил Михайлова. Михайлов волновался, но не умел ничего сказать в защиту своей мысли..."

[60] Vladimir Alexandrov notes that Mikhaylov's *Pilate*, which "presents the perception and interpretation of a work of art as relativized to the extreme," stands in opposition to many other indications in the novel that communication between artist and audience is possible. The explanation for this scene cannot be that Mikhaylov "is not much of an artist," Alexandrov reflects, because his status as a painter of Anna suggests a deep affinity between Mikhaylov and Tolstoy himself. But we do not have to dismiss Mikhaylov's art all together to address the contradiction generated by this scene. Mikhaylov is a good artist, but his *Pilate* is a bad painting. Mikhaylov's affinity with Tolstoy extends to his susceptibility to corrosive vanity, something that deeply concerned the author. See: Vladimir E Alexandrov, *Limits to Interpretation the Meanings of Anna Karenina* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 83-84.

center of the picture, and that therefore praise of it would be agreeable to the artist."[61] She flatters his vanity. Tellingly, Tolstoy's characters frequently respond to artworks with the word charming, *prelest'no* which shares a root with the Russian word for flattery, *lest'*. It occurs to Mikhaylov that Anna's and Golenishchev's comments do not suggest that the painting has truly expressed anything about either Pilate or Christ—they only restate the generic truths that Pilate is officious and Christ is compassionate—but Mikhaylov puts this thought out of his mind and "again his face [shines] with ecstasy."[62] Only Vronsky's praise of the artist's technique, which "grated painfully on Mikhaylov's heart,"[63] hints at the artist's failure. The approval of the audience, tentative (Golenishchev's) and insincere (Anna's), nonetheless sustains Mikhaylov's vanity and obscures the weakness of the painting. The artist is in a precarious position. He must evaluate his work in terms of the success of expression. This means trusting his audience. But his audience might falsify or simply fail to communicate their evaluation, and this means distrusting them.

Moreover, even a truthful expression of appreciation on the part of a spectator does not guarantee the status of an artwork as "beautiful." Tolstoy, like Kant, recognizes that an audience could be sincere and yet mistaken in attributing their pleasure to

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[61] AK, 430. PSS, 19: 41. " — Как удивительно выражение Христа! — сказала Анна. Из всего, что она видела, это выражение ей больше всего понравилось, и она чувствовала, что это центр картины, и потому похвала этого будет приятна художнику."

[62] Ibid. "Все это и многое другое промелькнуло в мысли Михайлова. И опять лицо его просияло восторгом."

[63] AK, 431. PSS, 19: 42. "замечание о технике больно заскребло на сердце Михайлова."

aesthetic delight.[64] He worries that the artist might be led astray by the appreciation or disapproval of poor judges. During a period of intense work on *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy observed in his letters the adverse affect of an audience on the artist Ivan Kramskoy. He claimed that Kramskoy interested him as an example of a "very good and artistic nature" that had been affected by the newest Petersburg tendency."[65] Tolstoy similarly worried about the impact of his own audience on his work. In a letter to Afansay Fet, Tolstoy admits that he is pleased by his friend's praise of *Anna Karenina* and then immediately asserts his indifference to the success of his novel, as if wishing to emphasize that the praise of others is unreliable.[66] To Strakhov he writes more explicitly:

> Our vile literary profession is corrupting. Every writer has his own atmosphere of flatterers which he carefully surrounds himself with, and he can have no idea of his own importance or the time of his decline. I wouldn't like to lose my way and have to turn back further on. Please help me with this…And don't be inhibited by the idea that your stern criticism might upset the work of a man who has talent. Far better to stop at *War and Peace* than to write *The Watch*, etc.[67]

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[64] See Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 162: "Kant suggests that one cannot in fact be certain that a given pleasure has been correctly attributed to a common ground—that is, the harmony of the faculties."

[65] *Pis'ma 1873-1879* in PSS, 62: 49. Letter to Strakhov dated September 23…24 1873. "Для меня же [Крамской] интересен, как чистейший тип петербургского новейшего направления, как оно могло отразиться на очень хорошей и художнической натуре."

[66] PSS, 62: 149. Letter dated Feb. 22 1875.

[67] PSS, 62: 295; "Мерзкая наша писательская должность—развращающая. У каждого писателя есть своя атмосфера хвалителей, которую он осторожно носит вокруг себя и не может иметь понятия о своем значении и о времени упадка. Мне бы хотелось не заблуждаться и не возвращаться дальше. Пожалуйста, помогите мне в этом...И не стесняйтесь мыслью, что вы строгим суждением можете помешать деятельности человека, имевшего талант. Гораздо лучше остановиться на «Войне и мир», чем писать «Часы» или т. п." *The Watch* is a story by Ivan Turgenyev that Tolstoy mocks in his letters to N.N. Strakhov.

Certain admirers of an artist might think they take pleasure in his work when really, for whatever reason, they only wish to please the author, Tolstoy suggests.[68] He compliments Strakhov by implying that Strakhov's assessment will not permit him to be led him astray. In *Anna Karenina*, however, he takes a starker view on the issue, exposing an artist's susceptibility to error and to disillusionment with his art.

The Artist's Dreadful Position

Tolstoy worries about the fate of the artist who cannot definitively determine whether his art produces an aesthetic or a material pleasure. But what concerns him even more, it seems, is that an artist might become convinced that there is no distinction to be made between the two. "An artist of sound, line, color, word, or even thought is in a dreadful position when he doesn't believe in the significance of his expression of thought," Tolstoy writes in a diary entry in 1873.[69] Anna Karenina is an artist in this dreadful position: one aspect of Anna's tragedy is her disillusionment with her own artistic activity.

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[68] Tolstoy wrote this letter soon after he finished correcting proofs of the Mikhaylov sections on his novel. He must have been working on these proofs in the months preceding the April publication of part four, chapters VII-XIX in *Russkiy Vestnik*. Clearly, an artist's vanity was on his mind as he completed this work. *Dnevniki i zapisnye knizhki 1858-1880* in PSS, 48: 396.

[69] PSS, 48: 67. November 5, 1873. My translation. "Художник звука, линий, цвета, слова, даже мысли в страшном положении, когда не верит в значительность выражения своей мысли."

Anna's trajectory as an artist prefigures the one Tolstoy would ascribe to Guy de Maupassant in his 1894 essay on the author. In each case, an artist is ruined both by the obtuse response of an audience and by his own vanity. In the essay Tolstoy explains that Maupassant became intoxicated by the effect his art produced on his audience. He could not resist the temptations of money, women, and the flattery of society and the press. "All these temptations are so great that they evidently turn his head, and he succumbs to them," Tolstoy argues. Maupassant starts to write with an eye toward the demands of his audience.[70] Anna, too, is flattered by the admiration of society at the ball in Moscow and by the awe she inspires in Kitty and others. Most crucially, however, she is "intoxicated by the rapture she had produced" in Vronsky.[71] For the remainder of her life she seeks to reproduce and maintain that initial effect. Anna's fierce desire for his affirmation of her beauty leads her to cultivate her appearance in a way that would satisfy Vronsky's desires, producing not the beautiful but rather the agreeable. The narrator explains that on Vronsky's estate "Anna's preoccupation was… herself in so far as Vronsky held her dear and in so far as she could compensate him for all he had given up."[72] Anna wishes to reward Vronsky with the pleasure of her appearance. But despite Anna's efforts, or even

[70] Leo Tolstoy, *Guy de Maupassant*, trans. Vladimir Tchertkoff (New York: Haskell House, 1974), 13. *Predislovie k sochineniyam Gyui de Mopassana* in PSS, 30: 11. "Все эти соблазны так велики, что, очевидно, одурманивают автора: он поддается им…"

[71] AK, 74. *Anna karenina* in PSS, 18: 86. "Анна пьяна вином возбуждаемого ею восхищения."

[72] AK, 583. PSS, 19: 220. "Но главная забота ее все-таки была она сама—она сама, насколько она дорога Вронскому, насколько она может заменить для него все, что он оставил."

because of them, Vronsky begins to feel an "ever increasing desire for freedom."[73] Like Maupassant, the more Anna longs to please her audience, the more she destroys the beauty that had once compelled it.

Many different causes can be attributed to Anna's decline at the end of the novel. Anna herself, however, seems to attribute it in large part to the waning of her art. Anna's final break with Vronsky comes when he accuses her of artificiality, an "unnatural" love for her English ward. She understands his reproach as the denigration of her art. Anna feels indignant at "the cruelty with which he annihilated the world which she has so painfully constructed for herself to be able to endure her hard life, the injustice of his accusation that she was dissembling, and unnatural."[74] Earlier, Vronsky had angered Mikhaylov by referring to his "technique" in *Pilate*. In drawing attention to the artifice of the painting, Vronsky shattered Mikhaylov's delusion that *Pilate* enabled communion between artist and audience. Now, Vronsky shatters Anna's delusions by calling her creation, the life she crafted in order to unite with him, "unnatural." Anna is further devastated when Vronsky brings up the topic of children, which she understands as a sign that "he did not value her beauty."[75] Anna sees that her art, the display of her beauty, no longer inspires admiration and fails to create the sense of co-feeling she desperately seeks with friends, family, and her lover.

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[73] Ibid. "усиливающееся желание быть свободным"

[74] AK, 670. PSS, 19: 320. "Эта жестокость его, с которой он разрушал мир, с таким трудом построенный ею себе, чтобы переносить свою тяжелую жизнь, эта несправедливость его, с которой он обвинял ее в притворстве, в ненатуральности, взорвали ее."

[75] AK, 676. PSS, 19: 327. "Его желание иметь детей она объясняла себе тем, что он не дорожил ее красотой."

Consequently, Anna begins to question whether her self-display, her art, *ever* produced anything more than sensuous gratification. As Anna reflects on her relationship with Vronsky she becomes convinced that she was always only a source of sensuous satisfaction and nothing more:

> And now for the first time Anna turned the bright light in which she saw everything upon her relations with him, about which she had always avoided thinking. "What did he look for in me? Not so much love as the satisfaction of his vanity." She remembered his words, the expression of his face, suggestive of a faithful setter's, in the early days of their union. Everything now confirmed her view. "Yes, there was in him the triumph of successful vanity. Of course there was love too; but the greater part was pride in his success. He boasted of me. Now that is past…He loves me, but how? The *zest is gone*!...No, he no longer has that same taste for me."[76]

Anna places herself in the category of the agreeable by referring to "zest" and Vronsky's "taste" for her. The shape of her reflection, however, suggests that she comes to this conclusion by extrapolating from her *own* pleasure in the moments of their first encounters. Anna remembers Vronsky as a "faithful setter," which suggests that the "triumph of successful vanity" was in *her*. Vronsky was entirely disarmed by Anna's beauty at the ball in Moscow. His response to Anna satisfies *her* evident desire to be

[76] AK, 690. PSS, 20: 342. "И Анна обратила теперь в первый раз тот яркий свет, при котором она видела все, на свои отношения с ним, о которых прежде она избегала думать. «Чего он искал во мне? Любви не столько, сколько удовлетворения тщеславия». Она вспоминала его слова, выражение лица его, напоминающее покорную легавую собаку, в первое время их связи. И все теперь подтверждало это. «Да, в нем было торжество тщеславного успеха. Разумеется, была и любовь, но большая доля была гордость успеха. Он хвастался мной. Теперь это прошло. Гордиться нечем. Не гордиться, а стыдиться. Он взял от меня все, что мог, и теперь я не нужна ему. Он тяготится мною и старается не быть в отношении меня бесчестным. Он проговорился вчера — он хочет развода и женитьбы, чтобы сжечь свои корабли. Он любит меня — но как? The zest is gone… — Да, того вкуса уж нет для него во мне. Если я уеду от него, он в глубине души будет рад»."

admired, and perhaps even her covert desire to triumph over Kitty. Failing to recognize the asymmetry between the pleasure of the artist and that of the spectator, Anna decides that Vronsky's pleasure was also merely the pleasure of satisfied desires when, in fact, it was not.

As she rides to her death, Anna is convinced that she can trust only her own senses, and she further concludes that the only thing that can be shared between two people is the pleasure of satisfied appetites or the frustration of unsatisfied ones. A man mistakes Anna for an acquaintance and she thinks to herself: "He thought he knew me. And he knows me as little as does anyone else in the world. I don't know myself. I know my appetites, as the French say."[77] Anna first recognizes an equivalence between the way the stranger relates to her and the way she relates to herself. Neither of them knows her, she thinks. She then considers what she does know about herself—her own appetites—and reverses the equivalence. If what we can know about ourselves is our appetites, then all others can know about us is also our appetites. "We all want something sweet and tasty," she declares with confidence. Anna confirms Yashvin's creed: "He wants to leave me without a shirt, and I him. Now that's true!"[78] On the one hand, her formula appears to echo Schopenhauer's pessimistic view that the will-to-life makes everyone struggle

[77] Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina: A Novel in Eight Parts*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2002), 760. (Volokhonsky offers a better translation of this this passage.) PSS, 19: 340. "Он думал, что он меня знает. А он знает меня так же мало, как кто бы то ни было на свете знает меня. Я сама не знаю. Я знаю свои аппетиты, как говорят французы."

[78] AK, 688. PSS, 19: 341. "Яшвин говорит: он хочет меня оставить без рубашки, а я его. Вот это правда!"

against everyone else. On the other hand, it also looks like a kind of last-ditch effort to preserves the possibility of *some* sort of common understanding.

Our appetite is the one thing we all have in common, Anna concludes, and therefore if there is a communion between artist and audience it is only around a gratified appetite and nothing more. Such a formulation preserves the possibility of communion between people but leaves no room for the kind of disinterested pleasure associated with the beautiful. Anna's final worldview is that of unrelenting materialism, and she sees no way to hold the beautiful apart from the agreeable. More pernicious than mistaking the agreeable for the beautiful—than being "led astray"—is the artist's disillusionment with the idea that the two are really distinct. Anna experiences such an artistic disillusionment just before her death.

An artist's survival, Tolstoy suggests, depends on her conviction that her work has value beyond its utility as an instrument of sensuous gratification. Tolstoy admits that he, too, occasionally stands in the dreadful position of the artist who does not believe in the significance of his own work. "Sometimes I have [this belief] and sometimes I don't," he reflects in his diary. "Why is this? A mystery."[79] Anna dies. How is Tolstoy to survive? How can he maintain the two notions that appear essential to him in affirming the value of art, namely that communion between the artist and audience is possible *and* that the pleasure of the beautiful exceeds the pleasures of satisfied desires?

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[79] *Dnevniki i zapisnye knizhki 1858-1880* in PSS, 48: 67. November 5, 1873. "Художник звука, линий, цвета, слова, даже мысли в страшном положении, когда не верит в значительность выражения евоей мысли. Отчего это зависит? Не любовь к мысли. Любовь тревожна. А эта вера спокойная. И она бывает и небывает у меня. Отчего это? Тайна."

Mental Attunement

In Tolstoy's view, the artist's communications are certainly not rational propositions. This claim does not need much defending. The painter Mikhaylov, for example, is not in the business of intellectual debate. And Tolstoy himself famously rejected the possibility of distilling an artwork into any sort of statement when he said that to explain what he meant to say in *Anna Karenina* he would have to write the novel all over again. Neither do Tolstoy's artists and spectators share transcendental visions, as Schopenhauer would have it. Tolstoy does not follow Schopenhauer when the latter departs in crucial ways from Kant's aesthetics. Tolstoy's artists, like Kant's, might gesture toward something beyond the phenomenal world by generating evocative configurations of images and associations, but they are not demiurges. Tolstoy, however, does not resign himself as Anna does to the thought that art therefore offers nothing more than a common sensuous satisfaction. In the novel he singles out artworks that enable spectators and artists to share something else as well, something close to what Kant had called an "aesthetic idea."

For Kant, a rational idea is a concept (like eternity or freedom) that has no sensible counterpart, whereas an aesthetic idea is a sensible presentation (poem, painting) that has no conceptual counterpart. Although rational ideas lack a sensible presentation, Kant argues that artists will often strive to create such a presentation. Artists attempt "to give sensible expression to rational ideas."[80] But an artist cannot express a rational idea by presenting a single sensible object (no object can stand in for an idea such as

[80] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 183.

"eternity"). What an artist *can* do is present so-called "aesthetic attributes," or "supplementary presentations of the imagination, expressing the concept's implications and its kinship with other concepts."[81] Kant offers an example: we can grasp the idea of majesty (a rational idea that has no sensible counterpart) by associating images such as Jupiter's eagle, lightning, Hera's peacock, and so on. Kant suggests that it is the linkages between these images[82]—the "kinship" of aesthetic attributes—that are the means by which we communicate aesthetically. In other words, the artist can provide a configuration of sensible attributes that inspires the imagination to continue linking these attributes to related ones. Through the accumulation of sensible attributes in a particular configuration, one can grasp sensibly an idea that was previously accessible only to reason. As Kant puts it, "These aesthetic attributes yield an *aesthetic idea*, which serves the mentioned rational idea as a substitute for logical exhibition." So an aesthetic idea gives a rational idea a kind of sensible incarnation. But Kant stresses that despite this service, the aesthetic idea is not a substitute for the rational one. It provides something in excess of the rational idea, namely it "quickens the mind" or "prompts much thought," thought which cannot be reduced to a single concept. "No language," Kant says, "can express [the aesthetic idea] completely and allow us to grasp it."[83]

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Kant says that concepts can also be aesthetic attributes. "[Even] an intellectual concept may serve…as an attribute of a presentation of sense and thus animate that presentation by the idea of the supersensible; but [we] may use for this only the aesthetic [element] that attaches subjectively to our consciousness of the supersensible. Thus, for example, a certain poet, in describing a beautiful morning, says: 'The sun flowed forth, as serenity flows from virtue.'" Ibid., 184-5.

[83] Ibid., 182.

Tolstoy, too, suggests that art generates a kind of understanding that cannot be reduced to a single concept. Instead, we come to this understanding by grasping the linkages between particular images, words, or other impressions made on the senses. In an often-quoted 1876 letter to Strakhov, Tolstoy discusses the "labyrinth of connections that is the essence of art." He writes:

> I have been guided by the need to gather together ideas which for the purpose of self-expression were interconnected; but every idea expressed separately in words loses its meaning and is terribly impoverished when taken by itself out of the connection in which it occurs. The connection itself is made up, I think, not by the idea, but by something else, and it is impossible to express the basis of this connection directly in words. It can only be expressed indirectly—by words describing images, actions, and situations.[84]

What he wanted to express, Tolstoy says, is something that can only be conveyed through a specific configuration of selected images, descriptions, situations, and even ideas. (No single idea is adequate to what he wished to express, but that does not mean that ideas are excluded from this configuration.) Tolstoy's remarks are strikingly similar to Kant's

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[84] Leo Tolstoy, *Tolstoy's Letters: 1828-1879*, trans. and ed. R. F Christian (London: Athlone, 1978). Altered the translation of "образы" from "characters" to the more literal "images." Leo Tolstoy et al., *L.N. Tolstoi i N.N. Strakhov: polnoe sobranie perepiski* (Ottawa: Slavic Research Group at the University of Ottawa and State L.N. Tolstoy Museum, Moscow, 2003), 267: " Если же бы я хотел сказать словами все то, что имел в виду выразить романом, то я должен бы был написать роман тот самый, который я написал, сначала. И если близорукие критики думают, что я хотел описывать только то, что мне нравится, как обедает Облонский и какие плечи у Карениной, то они ошибаются. Во всем, почти во всем, что я писал, мною руководила потребность собрания мыслей, сцепленных между собою, для выражения себя, но каждая мысль, выраженная словами особо, теряет свой смысл, страшно понижается, когда берется одна из того сцепления, в котором она находится. Само же сцепление составлено не мыслью (я думаю), а чем-то другим, и выразить основу этого сцепления непосредственно словами никак нельзя; а можно только посредственно — словами описывая образы, действия, положения."

discussion of the aesthetic idea. His claim that linkages between images comprise an artwork's meaning is analogous to Kant's claim that aesthetic attributes in a specific configuration comprise an aesthetic idea. The artist, on Tolstoy's view, produces something quite similar to Kant's aesthetic idea.

Furthermore, Tolstoy's depiction of an artist's work in *Anna Karenina* closely resembles Kant's description of artistic creation. Contrasting Kant's account of the artist's work with Schopenhauer's helps illuminate Tolstoy's affinity with Kant. As Vandenabeele explains, one of the crucial differences between the Kantian and the Schopenhauerian view of the artist's endeavor is that "artistic imagination in Kant is 'productive,' for it invents intuitions and produces new configurations, whereas for Schopenhauer the Ideas are timeless universals which the artist merely discovers."[85] Tolstoy's Mikhaylov, like the Kantian artist, generates new insights; he does not discover eternal truths.

Mikhaylov's artistic process does not start with either a particular concept or a Platonic Idea. Instead, he begins with an accumulation of images. He sits down, for example, to sketch "the figure of a man in a fit of anger."[86] He draws the figure and remembers a previous rendering of the same thing. He examines this earlier drawing and sees yet another variant of the figure; the contours of the figure have been altered by a grease spot. Suddenly, Mikhaylov's imagination is ignited. He conjures up more related images from memory—"the energetic pose and prominent chin of a shopman"—and he

[85] Vandenbeele, "Schopenhauer and the Objectivity of Art," 225.

[86] AK, 426. *Anna karenina* in PSS, 19: 37. "Он делал рисунок для фигуры человека, находящегося в припадке гнева."

redraws the figure yet again, until finally "the inanimate, artificial figure had come to life, and was just the thing."[87] This process instantiates what Mikhaylov later calls "removing the wrappings" from an "idea" that is revealed to the artist. This idea, however, is not revealed by an extraphenomenal perception, as it would be on Schopenhauer's account, but by an ordinary grease spot.[88]

The grease spot will not allow us to read Mikhaylov's "revelation" without irony. There is no metaphysical mystery in his "revelation." But this does not mean Mikhaylov is deluded when he thinks of this creative moment as a revelation. Mikhaylov again speaks of revelation when he observes that, "the most experienced and technical painter could never paint anything by means of mechanical skill alone, if the outlines of the subject matter (*granitsy soderzhaniya*) did not first reveal themselves to his mind."[89] Mikhaylov's thought resonates with Kant's notion that our imaginative faculty is precisely the ability to create a kind of sketch or outline, or as Kant says a "monogram," "through which and in accordance with which the images first become possible."[90] Both Kant and Tolstoy conceive of the artist as someone who possesses an especially potent

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[87] Ibid. "Он рисовал эту новую позу, и вдруг ему вспомнилось с выдающимся подбородком энергическое лицо купца, у которого он брал сигары, и он это самое лицо, этот подбородок нарисовал человеку. Он засмеялся от радости. Фигура вдруг из мертвой, выдуманной стала живая и такая, которой нельзя уже было изменить. Фигура эта жила и была ясно и несомненно определена."

[88] Thomas Seifrid, "Gazing on Life's Page: Perspectival Vision in Tolstoy," *PMLA* 113, no. 3 (1998): 440.

[89] AK, 431. PSS, 19: 42. "А самый опытный и искусный живописец-техник одною механическою способностью не мог бы написать ничего, если бы ему не открылись прежде границы содержания."

[90] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A 142, 271.

imaginative faculty. It is the imaginative faculty that grants what Mikhaylov calls a revelation. And what is revealed is not an otherworldly truth but a productive possibility, the possibility of creating a *new* configuration of sensible attributes. Mikhaylov's genius consists in his ability to recognize the kindred nature of certain impressions that he encounters in the sensible world and to display to his spectator the affinity of these impressions, an affinity that cannot simply be designated by a concept.

Mikhaylov's process of creation is mirrored in his spectator's process of reception—for example, in Levin's reception of Anna's portrait. In Mikhaylov's work, Levin sees a "circle of expressions (*kruga vyrazheniy*) radiating happiness and creating happiness, which the artist had caught when painting her portrait."[91] The notion of a "circle of expressions" recalls Tolstoy's description of an artwork as a "labyrinth of connections" and Kant's description of an aesthetic idea as the linkage of aesthetic attributes. The painter cannot literally give Anna more than one expression, of course, so Levin's sense that he sees a "circle of expressions" must be something like the related expressions he is compelled to imagine by looking at the painting. Borrowing Kant's formulation, we might say that Mikhaylov's portrait lets Levin's imagination "spread over a multitude of kindred presentations."[92] Mikhaylov does not simply present his spectator with an image but with an aesthetic idea, a kind of principle for assembling related sensible impressions. As Levin rides home from Anna's his imagination continues

[91] AK, 634. PSS, 19: 278. "С таким выражением на лице она была еще красивее, чем прежде; но это выражение было новое; оно было вне того сияющего счастьем и раздающего счастье круга выражений, которые были уловлены художником на портрете."

[92] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 49, 183.

to link "kindred presentations." He "[recalls] every detail of the expressions of her face, entering more and more into her situation and feeling more and more sorry for her."[93] This is creative activity, but of a weak kind. Levin does not produce anything of his own: he continues to follow an aesthetic idea produced by another.

Tolstoy's conception of the "labyrinth of linkages," like Kant's notion of the "aesthetic idea," insists on the irreducibility of aesthetic delight to sensuous gratification without claiming that an artwork is just a vessel for communicating concepts. For Kant, the aesthetic idea stands between rational thought and sensible perceptions. It enables the imagination to enhance the work of our rational powers, to enliven a concept with what Kant calls "spirit":

> [The aesthetic idea] is a presentation that makes us add to a concept the thoughts of much that is ineffable, but the feeling of which quickens our cognitive powers and connects language, which otherwise would be mere letters, with spirit… [Artistic genius] actually consists in the happy relation—one that no science can teach and that cannot be learned by any diligence—allowing us, first, to discover ideas for a given concept, and, second, to hit upon a way of *expressing* these ideas that enables us to communicate to others, as accompanying a concept, the mental attunement that those ideas produce. The second talent is properly the one we call spirit.[94]

The aesthetic idea, according to Kant, communicates something conceptual along with and by means of a certain mental attunement. A logical presentation can introduce the same concept, but it cannot convey this attunement. Tolstoy's depictions of aesthetic

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[93] AK, 635. PSS, 19: 279. "Не переставая думать об Анне, о всех тех самых простых разговорах, которые были с нею, и вспоминая при этом все подробности выражения ее лица, все более и более входя в ее положение и чувствуя к ней жалосгь, Левин приехал домой."

[94] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 49, 185-6.

experience in *Anna Karenina* suggest that he also regarded art as a way of communicating not merely emotion but rather insight (something conceptual) by means of a particular mental attunement.[95] Levin comes to understand something about Anna through the beautiful portrait and then through Anna's own beauty, which she knows how to display. He does not merely apprehend an impersonal truth, such as that Anna's life, like any individual's life, is boundless, or that life is a perpetual struggle of all against all.[96] He seems to grasp something more specific to her, and therefore more limited. This new understanding is manifest in his tremendous sense of pity. Pity infuses Anna's own perspective on her life, and Levin, too, comes to feel an overwhelming sense of pity.

No Rivals

Both Kant and Tolstoy regard the aesthetic idea as something that enables an analogous mental process in the artist and the spectator. Tolstoy proposes that the symmetry between the creative and receptive processes makes the spectator feel as though he has taken part in the creative work of the artist and stills any further creative desires. In *Anna Karenina* real artworks do not prompt their spectators to pursue creative activities of their own. Objects that, in contrast, only gratify our demands frequently fuel

[95] *L.N. Tolstoi i N.N. Strakhov: polnoe sobranie perepiski*, 267.

[96] I diverge from Mandelker's interpretation that Levin learns to understand the limitless "mystery" of Anna's inner life, and from her conclusion that "the viewer's response to beauty framed is to sense the sublimity of spirit that escapes those borders." Mandelker is right that the viewer recognizes something in excess of what is explicitly represented by the artwork. But the meaning of this representation is not unlimited, as she appears to suggest. Levin, it seems to me, understands something more specific, and therefore limited, about Anna. Mandelker, 114.

artistic rivalry. An artist might therefore he sure that his work has compelled an aesthetic response when he sees that it has spawned no rivals.

The divergent effects of the real and false artworks are illustrated most vividly in two portraits of Anna: Mikhaylov's portrait and the portrait in Karenin's study, "beautifully painted…by a celebrated artist."[97] Mikhaylov's portrait is not only "beautiful," it also expresses something that its observers feel already belongs to them. Vronsky, for example, perceives Mikhaylov's insight about Anna as his own: "'One needed to know and love her as I love her, to find just that sweetest spiritual expression of hers,' thought Vronsky, though he himself had only learnt to know that 'sweetest spiritual expression' through the portrait."[98] Vronsky feels he understands it better than the painter, who appears to have hit upon it by accident. "How long have I been struggling without accomplishing anything," he tells Golenishchev, "and he just looked, and painted this! That is where technique comes in."[99] Vronsky attributes the painter's insight to himself and the technique to the artist. It is as if Vronsky has already done the crucial creative work, generating the aesthetic idea of the artwork, and the artist merely contributed his technical skill.

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[97] AK, 259. PSS, 18: 300. "прекрасно сделанный знаменитым художником портрет Анны."

[98] AK, 433. PSS, 19: 45. "Портрет с пятого сеанса поразил всех, в особенности Вронского, не только сходством, но и особенною красотою. Странно было, как мог Михайлов найти ту ее особенную красоту. «Надо было знать и любить ее, как я любил, чтобы найти это самое милое ее душевное выражение», — думал Вронский, хотя он по этому портрету только узнал это самое милое ее душевное выражение."

[99] AK, 434. PSS, 19: 45. " — Я сколько времени бьюсь и ничего не сделал, — говорил он про свой портрет, — а он посмотрел и написал. Вот что значит техника."

The beautiful painting appears to convince the observer that while he is not its creator, he has a deeper or more primary understanding of it than anyone else, including the artist. "He does not even understand how good it is," Vronsky says of another of Mikhaylov's paintings.[100] This effect extends to other encounters with beauty in the novel. Anna, impressed by Lisa Merkalova's beauty, believes that she understands Lisa better than Lisa understands herself. Golenishchev, who is struck by Anna, assumes that he comprehends Anna's happiness better than Anna does.[101] Levin, under the dual effect of Mikhaylov's portrait and Anna's beauty, thinks that he sees Anna better than Mikhaylov does, and sympathizes with her more profoundly than Vronsky does: he believes he notices a significant expression on Anna's face that was not captured by the artist and then fears "that Vronsky did not fully understand [Anna]."[102]

Karenin's portrait of Anna has almost the opposite effect. Mikhaylov's portrait introduced something from without, though the spectator feels as if it came from within. Karenin's technically masterly portrait, on the other hand, mirrors something within, though the spectator feels that it came from without. Having just finished a letter urging Anna to end her affair, Karenin notices the portrait:

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[100] AK, 433. PSS, 19: 45. " — Что за прелесть! Как это удалось ему и как просто! Он и не понимает, как это хорошо. Да, надо не упустить и купить ее, — говорил Вронский."

[101] AK, 419. PSS, 19: 28. "Голенищеву казалось, что он вполне понимает ее. Ему казалось, что он понимает то, чего она никак не понимала: именно того, как она могла, сделав несчастие мужа, бросив его и сына и потеряв добрую славу, чувствовать себя энергически-веселою и счастливою."

[102] AK, 634. PSS, 19: 278. "он теперь, по какому-то странному ходу мыслей, оправдывал ее и вместе жалел и боялся, что Вронский не вполне понимает ее."

> Above the armchair hung a well-executed oval portrait of Anna in a golden frame, painted by a celebrated artist. Alexei Alexandrovich glanced at it. The inscrutable and mocking eyes looked at him as on that last evening of their interview. The appearance of black lace on the head, the black hair, and the beautiful white hand with many rings on the third finger, well rendered by the artist, appeared intolerably impudent and had a provocative effect on Karenin. After looking at the portrait for a minute he shuddered and his lips trembled and made a sound like 'burr' as he turned away.[103]

Tolstoy refers to the painting's creator as "a celebrated artist," a phrase he often uses facetiously to designate an artist who merely panders to the sensuous demands of the audience.[104] In other words, the celebrated artist is a virtuoso rather than a genius capable of producing an aesthetic idea.[105] Instead of conveying something new to Karenin, this portrait merely reflects Karenin's own notions about Anna: she is inscrutable, mocking, and bold. Karenin himself projects the figure's expression of derision onto it, yet he feels as though this derision emanates from the figure.

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[103] AK, 259. PSS, 18: 300. "Над креслом висел овальный, в золотой раме, прекрасно сделанный знаменитым художником портрет Анны. Алексей Александрович взглянул на него. Непроницаемые глаза насмешливо и нагло смотрели на него, как в тот последний вечер их объяснения. Невыносимо нагло и вызывающе подействовал на Алексея Александровича вид отлично сделанного художником черного кружева на голове, черных волос и белой прекрасной руки с безымянным пальцем, покрытым перстнями. Поглядев на портрет с минуту, Алексей Александрович вздрогнул так, что губы затряслись и произвели звук «брр», и отвернулся."

[104] See *Maupassant*, for example. 24. *Predislovie k sochineniyam Gyui de Mopassana* in PSS, 30: 15.

[105] Mandelker contrasts Levin's and Karenin's responsiveness to and understanding of Anna by juxtaposing the scenes in which the characters look at portraits of her. But this is not a fair comparison, I think, because Levin looks at a portrait by someone Tolstoy designates a real artist, while Karenin regards a portrait by a "celebrated artist," Tolstoy's euphamism for a hack. See Tolstoy's discussion of the "celebrated artist" in *Maupassant* 19. PSS, 30: 15. Mandelker, 115.

The effect on Karenin of this virtuosic work is the same as the effect on Vronsky of the artworks that surround him in the Italian palazzo he rents with Anna: the wall frescoes, mosaic floors, damask hangings, vases, and paintings. Vronsky, like Karenin, sees his own ideas reflected back to him by this agreeable art: "that palazzo, when they had moved into it, by its very appearance kept alive in Vronsky the pleasant delusion that he was not so much a Russian landowner and Master of the Hunt without duties as an enlightened connoisseur and art patron, and withal a modest artist himself."[106] Once Vronsky abandons the role of the artist, the palazzo, too, transforms from a spectacular exhibition of artifacts to a place "so obviously old and dirty."[107] It is not remarkable that virtuosic artworks such as Karenin's portrait or the Italian artifacts reflect the characters' thoughts. In many of Tolstoy's works a character's state of mind alters his perception of objects (most famously in Prince Andrey's two encounters with the oak tree in *War and Peace*). What surprises is that Mikhaylov's work does *not* function like these ordinary objects, that it is uniquely capable of introducing some new idea to his audience. Vronsky only *thinks* that Mikhaylov's portrait reflects his own feelings about Anna, when in fact the portrait has taught him this feeling. Levin only *thinks* that it is by his own reasoning, however "strange," that he has come to pity Anna, when in fact it is Anna's beauty that

[106] AK, 423. *Anna karenina* in PSS, 19: 33. "Старый, запущенный палаццо с высокими лепными плафонами и фресками на стенах, с мозаичными полами, с тяжелыми желтыми штофными гардинами на высоких окнах, вазами на консолях и каминах, с резными дверями и с мрачными залами, увешанными картинами, — палаццо этот, после того как они переехали в него, самою своею внешностью поддерживал во Вронском приятное заблуждение, что он не столько русский помещик, егермейстер без службы, сколько просвещенный любитель и покровитель искусств, и сам — скромный художник, отрекшийся от света, связей, честолюбия для любимой женщины."

[107] AK, 435. PSS, 19: 47."палаццо вдруг стал так очевидно стар и грязен"

teaches him to feel pity for a fallen woman.[108] The virtuosic merely reflects a spectators' state of mind, whereas the beautiful alters it.

Mikhaylov's portrait ultimately induces Vronsky to abandon his own portrait of Anna, not because Vronsky recognizes his inferiority as an artist but because he feels there is no need for another portrait: "Anna's portrait, the same subject painted from nature by both of them, should have shown [Vronsky] the difference between Mikhaylov and himself; but Vronsky did not see it. He merely left off painting Anna, deciding that it would be superfluous now." [109] It is curious that Vronsky, who had eagerly copied many other artworks, now considers painting Anna "superfluous." Perhaps Vronsky regards this work as superfluous because Mikhaylov's painting has convinced him that he has already taken part in the most significant aspect of the portrait's creation. Vronsky believes it is his idea about Anna that has been expressed. An artwork like Mikhaylov's prompts the spectator's imagination toward a particular aesthetic idea—Vronsky learnt to know that 'sweetest spiritual expression' through the portrait—but it also makes the spectator feel as though the work has been generated by the spectator's own mind. The spectator conceives of this work as his own, and thus feels no need for more creative activity.

By contrast, the virtuosic work, which merely reflects one's own notions and prejudices, ironically makes one relate to it as something that must be opposed and

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[108] AK, 634. PSS, 19: 278.

[109] AK, 435. PSS, 19: 46. "Портрет Анны, — одно и то же и писанное с натуры им и Михайловым, должно бы было показать Вронскому разницу, которая была между ним и Михайловым; но он не видал ее. Он только после Михайлова перестал писать свой портрет Анны, решив, что это теперь было излишне."

superseded. The portrait in Karenin's study spurs him to undertake his own creative activity. Karenin is not an artist, of course, but a functionary, so his creativity takes the form of bureaucratic writing. His creative act—devising a clever plan to protect a certain business—is framed by his scrutiny of the portrait. The mocking eyes in the portrait compel Karenin to compose a legislative strategy. When he finishes his composition he again looks up at the portrait and this time returns the derisive look. He "scowls and smiles contemptuously,"[110] as if through the act of writing he has obtained some sort of victory. His bureaucratic composition can be understood as a victory over Anna; it makes him feel less gloomy about the situation with his wife. Karenin perhaps recognizes that his humiliation at Anna's hand can be parried by his knowledge of the law. One can also conceive of Karenin as engaging in a kind of artistic rivalry. The painting spurs him to compose a plan to support a "very moral and very musical family in which the daughters all played stringed instruments."[111] Karenin rivals Anna, the patron of portraitists, by defending a family of musicians. However we might understand his target and purpose, Karenin's conviction that this new legislation will "upset his enemies" suggests that the virtuosic artwork in his study has prompted him to combative activity.

Virtuosic works appear in a variety of forms in the novel and in each case ignite the spectator's desire to create his own works. Both Vronsky and Anna read French and English novels and both are inspired to rival the plots. Vronsky, while waiting for

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[110] AK, 261. PSS, 18: 302. "Встав и пройдясь по комнате, он опять взглянул на портрет, нахмурился и презрительно улыбнулся."

[111] AK, 260. PSS, 18: 301. "Много людей кормилось этим делом, в особенности одно очень нравственное и музыкальное семейство: все дочери играли на струнных инструментах."

beefsteak, "looked at the pages of a French novel that lay on his plate." [112] Tolstoy unmistakably places Vronsky's novel in the realm of the agreeable rather than the beautiful by associating it with food. Vronsky consumes the novel just as he will soon consume a beefsteak. As he regards the book's pages, he proceeds to weave his own love plot. He considers the next turn in his story—a trip to Anna's summer residence—as if he were reading it in the book: "'Of course I can say that Betsy sent me to find out if she will be at the race. Yes, of course I will go,' he decided, lifting his eyes from the book."[113] Vronsky supplants the narrative of the book with his own story.

Anna is similarly compelled to rival the virtuosic works of other artists. On her trip home from Moscow, Anna, like Vronsky, substitutes her own story for that of the book she reads on the train. As she reads an English novel, she first imagines herself in place of the various characters: "Anna read and understood, but it was unpleasant to read, that is to say, to follow the reflection of other people's lives. She was too eager to live herself."[114] Then she co-opts the novel itself, transforming it from an English novel about prosperity to Anna's novel about shame: "The hero of the novel had nearly attained his English happiness of a baronetcy and an estate, and Anna wanted to go to the estate with him, when she suddenly felt that he must have been ashamed, and that she was ashamed

[112] AK, 159. PSS, 18: 184. "ожидая заказанного бифстека, смотрел в книгу французского романа, лежавшую на тарелке."

[113] AK, 160. PSS, 18: 185. " «Разумеется, я скажу, что Бетси прислала меня спросить, приедет ли она на скачки. Разумеется, поеду», — решил он сам с собой, поднимая голову от книги."

[114] AK, 92. PSS, 18: 106."Анна Аркадьевна читала и понимала, но ей неприятно было читать, то есть следить за отражением жизни других людей. Ей слишком самой хотелось жить."

of the same thing—but what was he ashamed of? 'What am I ashamed of?'"[115] Finally, Anna displaces the novel completely with her own unusually vivid dream.

Another of Anna's rivals is the opera singer Patti, whose musical "precision" and "bare shoulders and diamonds" suggest that she is, for Tolstoy, a virtuoso who answers to the audiences' demands for sensuous pleasure.[116] Anna, slighted by Princess Betsy, hears that Patti will perform that evening. "Patti? That's an idea! I would go if I could get a box," Anna says, knowing that her appearance will cause a stir in her circle.[117] Anna's performance at the opera—her display of beauty and defiance—rivals Patti's: "Elle fait sensation," remarks Madam Vronsky, "On oublie la Patti pour elle!"[118] Anna's passionate and artistic nature certainly makes her a vehement rival of virtuosic art. The impulse to creative rivalry, however, cannot be attributed solely to untamed passions or artistic ability. After all, the passionless Karenin appears as susceptible to rivalry as Anna or Vronsky when confronted with a virtuosic work.

The depiction of beauty as a force that quiets creative activity might initially appear rather mystical and even strike an Schopenhauerian chord. It is important to note, however, that Tolstoy's spectators do not experience art as liberation from the pain of

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[115] Ibid. "Герой романа уже начал достигать своего английского счастия, баронетства и имения, и Анна желала с ним вместе ехать в это имение, как вдруг она почувствовала, что ему должно быть стыдно и что ей стыдно этого самого. Но чего же ему стыдно? «Чего же мне стыдно?» — спросила она себя с оскорбленным удивлением."

[116] AK, 495. PSS, 19: 117. "На сцене певица, блестя обнаженными плечами и бриллиантами..."

[117] AK, 492. PSS, 19: 114. " — Патти? Вы мне даете мысль. Я поехала бы, если бы можно было достать ложу."

[118] AK, 498. PSS, 19: 120.

incessant activity, the way they do in Schopenhauer. Rather, these spectators conceive of the artwork before them as the product of an activity they have *already* performed. And this sense of having participated in the creative work of another is not so far fetched.

Tolstoy's rendering of the symmetry between creation and reception actually bears some resemblance to certain contemporary accounts of the way we deal with figurative language. Current accounts of metaphor, for example, suggest that a metaphor is produced by the author and guides our thoughts and associations, but also compels us to continue this process of association beyond what has been explicitly linked by the author.[119] The spectator, in encountering an artwork that compels such associative activity, is *in fact* partaking in a creative endeavor, though of course this is not a creative endeavor in a very strong sense. (It does not, for example, yield a product that reflects the spectator's own creative objectives.) Nonetheless, if Mikhaylov's portrait prompts a kind of cascade of imaginative associations in the spectator, then Vronsky is not wrong to think that in encountering the portrait he has participated in an act of creation, and this weak sort of creation leaves him satisfied. It is this kind of weak creative activity that seems central to, and in a sense definitive of, aesthetic experience for both Kant and Tolstoy. If an artist's work inspires no rivals, he might be assured that he has achieved the communion he sought through his art, and thus created something of value.

[119] For an in-depth discussion of metaphor see Richard Moran, "Seeing and Believing: Metaphor, Image, and Force," *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 1 (1989): 87-112.

Chapter Two

An Artwork That Doesn't Inspire: Tolstoy's 'Bad' Theory of Art

The question that Tolstoy wrestled with in *Anna Karenina*—whether or not art can offer something higher than mere sensuous satisfaction—also informs his later discursive writing on art. Throughout the 1890s, Tolstoy developed his aesthetic thought in essays, letters, and diary entries, and toward the end of the decade he published an aesthetic treatise, *What is Art?*

Tolstoy's treatise has received consideration both in Russia and abroad as a work of aesthetic philosophy. First published in its complete form in English (1898), the aesthetic treatise is as much a part of the Anglo-American as of the Russian history of aesthetic thought. But it lives in English mostly as a warning about what can go wrong in our thinking about art.[1] A discussion of Tolstoy's writing on art tends to go in one of three directions. One strategy is to mark the narrowness of the author's theories, try to explain how the creator of such complex psychological portraits could arrive at such parochial views, and finally point to masterpieces like *Anna Karenina* to show that

[1] Paul Guyer includes a discussion of Tolstoy's *What is Art?* in his magisterial anthology, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*. Guyer concludes that Tolstoy "offered as narrow an aesthetic theory as we have seen throughout our survey of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries." Paul Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 296. Tolstoy's treatise has been anthologized in other histories of aesthetic thought throughout the 20th century. The following are some of the more recent works to include Tolstoy's *What is Art?*: Steve Cahn and Aaron Meskin, eds., *Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Anthology* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007); Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, eds., *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003); George Dickie, *Introduction to Aesthetics: An Analytic Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Tolstoy really does have a more multifaceted picture of our aesthetic experiences, though only in his fiction.[2] Another path, and a thornier one, is to argue that despite first appearances Tolstoy's aesthetics is not as narrow as we might think. Critics who take this approach look for ways to expand the limited definition of art as a means for people to communicate good moral feeling.[3] A third approach suggests that Tolstoy's ideas in his essays on art are not actually an interrogation of the nature of our aesthetic experiences at all. Instead, they are a utopian vision of a universal Christian communion assisted by art.[4]

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[2] Vladimir Nabokov takes this approach to Tolstoy's aesthetics in his lectures on the author. Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature* (Orlando: Mariner Books, 2002), 137-244. Also see: Rimvydas Silbajoris, *Tolstoy's Aesthetics and His Art* (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1991).

[3] See: Israel Knox, "Tolstoy's Esthetic Definition of Art," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 27, no. 3 (1930): 65; Gary R. Jahn, "The Aesthetic Theory of Leo Tolstoy's *What Is Art?*", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34, no. 1 (1975): 60; Scanlan, James P. "L. N. Tolstoy as Philosopher of Art Today," *American Contributions to the Eighth International Congress of Slavists*, vol.2, ed. by Victor Terras (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1978), 657-76.

[4] Caryl Emerson has examined Tolstoy's inattention to the labor involved in artistic expression, suggesting that Tolstoy's aesthetics might neglect the difficulty of expression because he does not mean to describe the reality of art-making at all, but rather to envision an ideal creative act: "Or perhaps his intent was not to describe a reality principle to which all must submit, but rather to touch the chord of some deep unconscious fantasy in each of us, something that echoes the valet Matvej's reassuring words to a disoriented Oblonskij in the opening pages of *Anna Karenina*, 'все образуется': the fantasy-hope that (at least in the glorious matter of art) work is unnecessary and pleasure immediate." Caryl Emerson, "What Is Infection and What Is Expression In *What Is Art?*" in *Lev Tolstoy and the Concept of Brotherhood*, ed. by Andrew Donskov and John Woodsworth (Ottawa: Legas, 1996), 102-15, 108. For additional discussion of Tolstoy's aesthetics in connection with a utopian vision of a universal Christian community see: Amy Mandelker, "Tolstoy's Eucharistic Aesthetics," in *Lev Tolstoy and the Concept of Brotherhood*, ed. by Andrew Donskov and John Woodsworth (Ottawa: Legas, 1996), 116-127; Lina Steiner, "The Russian Aufklärer: Tolstoi in Search of Truth, Freedom, and Immortality," *Slavic Review* 70, no. 4 (2011): 773-794; Inessa Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of His Time: A Biography of a Long Conversion, 1845-1887* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

After all, Tolstoy's essays do not depict the variety of ways we interact with art. At the same time, his narrow definition of art in his essays cannot be due to the author's lack of awareness of the various aspects of aesthetic experience; *Anna Karenina* does show us that. Thus the notion that Tolstoy's aesthetics envisions a particular kind of "ideal" experience seems right, but this ideal, I will argue, has as much to do with aesthetic concerns as moral ones.

In this chapter I examine Tolstoy's essays on art alongside some of his later fictional works in order to show that his draconian prescriptions in *What is Art?* are rooted in his utopian dream of an artwork that would *invariably* elicit an aesthetic response. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, Tolstoy accepted the Kantian notion that aesthetic experience is characterized by a disinterested attitude, and he believed that only a certain kind of artwork could elicit this attitude: an artwork that thwarted a spectator's impulse to pursue the satisfaction of his own demands. In his essays on art, Tolstoy instructs artists on how to produce such an artwork. In Tolstoy's view, the ideal artwork—the artwork capable of thwarting the reader's pursuit of his own objectives—compels a *self-conscious* but *non-generative* spectatorial response. Tolstoy acknowledges the limitations that this type of artwork imposes on both the artist and the spectator, but he argues for it nonetheless because he believes that only such an artwork offers something beyond sensuous satisfaction.

It might seem strange to claim that what informs Tolstoy's vision of the ideal artwork is Kant's notion of disinterest. Tolstoy, after all, defined art in terms of communication and argued that art ought to let the audience identify with and partake of the feelings of the artist. Pierre Bourdieu argued that the demand for participation seems

antithetical to the Kantian notion of disinterest—but in fact it is not.[5] On the contrary, Tolstoy's writing on art demonstrates that disinterest and participation are compatible. Whereas for artists like Flaubert disinterested contemplation was a means to escape the world, for Tolstoy it was a means to engage with it.

A Sketch of the Ideal Artwork

In his early essay *About What is Called Art*, Tolstoy offers a blueprint of sorts for his ideal artwork. He acknowledges that artists create all kind of works that provide a variety of experiences and gratify their audiences in different ways. But the aim of his essay is less descriptive than it is prescriptive. Tolstoy does not give an account of the realities of our experiences with art, but rather articulates his vision of a model aesthetic experience and the ideal artwork that would produce it. He wants to teach artists to create the kind of artwork that cannot be consumed the way one consumes other material goods, a work that facilitates an experience unattainable through means other than art.

Tolstoy advises artists to create works that would not require the audience to "labor" in order to understand them. The ideal artwork, according to Tolstoy, provides a "rest from labor" (*otdykh ot truda*).[6] Tolstoy compares, somewhat paradoxically, a spectator's engagement with this type of artwork to sleep as well as to play. Both sleep and play are a rest from labor, but they are very different kinds of rest, and Tolstoy's

[5] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Aristocracy of Culture," in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 11-96.

[6] "O tom, chto nazyvayut iskusstvom" in PSS, 30:251.

comparisons actually point to two distinct parameters of his ideal artwork. Art resembles play in that it is a consciously pursued activity that does not aim at the achievement of pre-established ends. Tolstoy suggests that art, like play, is a respite from practical pursuits. But he repeatedly stresses one significant difference between the way we engage in aesthetic reception and the way we play. Play allows us to exert our own powers—"flexibility, inventiveness, cleverness"—through *action*.[7] Delight in art is "achieved passively through the reception of other people's feelings by infection."[8] In art, Tolstoy says, it is the artist who does the work:

> [The spectator] must not do anything himself. He only looks and listens and enjoys and plays. It is precisely the fact that the spectator does not exert himself, but rather allows the artist to possess him, that distinguishes artistic communication from all other communication.[9]

Unlike play, art should not compel the spectator to act on his own behalf, Tolstoy insists. Again and again, he reiterates the imperative that a spectator remain passive: "The person, without taking action himself but rather only giving himself up to received impressions, experiences various human feelings and, in this way, rests from the toil of

[7] Ibid. "ловкости, изобретательности, хитрости и т. п."

[8] Ibid. "Искусство — это другого рода отдых от труда, достигаемый пассивным воспрининманием через заражение чувств других людей."

[9] Ibid., 252. "[тот, кто воспринимает] не должен ничего сам делать, он только смотрит и слушает и получает удовольствие, забавляется. Именно тем, что он сам не делает усилия, а предоставляет художнику завладеть собой, и отличается художественная передача от всякой другой."

life."[10] The spectator's action consists only in a willful submission to the artist whom he "allows" to possess him. Art is like play because it is an activity pursued consciously (not unintentionally) but with no preconceived purpose. Art is like sleep because it is an activity that requires passivity after the spectator's initial assent to be possessed.

Although Tolstoy outlines how art ought to be received, he is really addressing artists, not spectators.[11] He admits that not all artists *do* strive to produce the kind of artwork that would leave the spectator suspended somewhere between sleep and play—but they ought to, he seems to insist. In his fiction, Tolstoy distinguishes artworks that elicit such spectatorial receptivity by his characters' displays of admiration. For example,

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[10] Ibid., 253. "человек, не действуя сам, а только отдаваясь получаемым впечатлениям, переживает различные человеческие чувства и этим способом отдыхает от труда жизни."

[11] Tolstoy is issuing prescriptions to the artists, not the spectators. Throughout the essay Tolstoy identifies members of the elite class with artists and members of the working classes with the audience. It is evident that he addresses himself to the elite. He uses French and German citations without offering translation, quotes Voltaire and Goethe, and refers to classical and modern artworks accessible only to the elite. Moreover, Tolstoy vehemently rejects the elite artist's notion that an audience ought to learn to appreciate his work. It would not make sense for Tolstoy to reject the idea of educating an audience and then himself to adopt a pedagogical stance toward the audience. Instead, he directs his words to the artists of his time who he believes have gone astray in their practices. Tolstoy asks, "How did it happen that the best, most talented people of our time lost their way and began to write, compose, and present all sorts of nonsense under the guise of art?"(Как могло сделаться то, чтобы все лучшие, даровитейшие люди нашего времени так сбились с пути и стали бы писать, сочинять и представлять всякие бессмысленные глупости под видом искусства?) Tolstoy refers to the people of his class as the most talented, and it is this wasted talent—these lost people—that worry him. He compares them to lunatic laborers who have "removed the plow from the furrow, and thus move easily across the field, imagining that they are ploughing, making more and more wonderful evolutions, imagining that they produce art." (И, оторвавшись так от дела, вынув плуг из борозды, они очень легко движутся по полю, воображая, что пашут, и делают всё более и более чудные эволюции, воображая, что они производят искусство.) Tolstoy ponders why these artists have gone astray and how to set them right. Ibid., 257.

in *Anna Karenina* everyone admires Mikhaylov's portrait of Anna, which convinces Vronsky his own creative activity is "superfluous." In the essay, artworks that arrest the spectator between sleep and play are privileged with adjectives like "significant" (*vazhnoe*).[12]

Tolstoy's imperatives for a model artwork are thus twofold. First, the artist must give a spectator the chance to *allow* the artist to possess him. Second, the spectator must not be permitted to act on his own behalf. He must not even undertake the labor of interpretation. Tolstoy's prohibition on interpretive labor is one of the most puzzling and objectionable features of his aesthetics.[13] One could argue that Tolstoy objects to interpretation on the grounds that it individualizes aesthetic response and thus separates rather than unifies an audience. This argument addresses why Tolstoy might demand a monolithic interpretation, but it cannot explain why Tolstoy would prohibit the very act of interpreting. After all, it is theoretically possible (if unlikely) that "interpreting" could lead everyone to the same conclusion and achieve the same goal as the instantaneous comprehension advocated by Tolstoy. There must be an additional reason why Tolstoy considers the very *activity* of interpreting undesirable.

Appreciation Only

[12] Ibid., 253.

[13] Although the early, unpublished essay, *About What is Called Art*, already expresses Tolstoy's demand for instantaneous comprehensibility, Caryl Emerson suggests that Tolstoy is still more insistent on the effortlessness of aesthetic experience in *What is Art?* and averse to a temporally extended process of aesthetic apprehension. Emerson, "What Is Infection and What Is Expression In What Is Art?," 107.

Translating Tolstoy's demands for art into the language of contemporary aesthetics helps to clarify the aims of his ideal artwork as well as his prohibition on interpretation. Philosopher Susan Feagin's distinction between "appreciation" and "interpretation" is particularly useful—in part because Feagin's account of our aesthetic engagement has significant affinities with Tolstoy's.[14] Both Feagin and Tolstoy regard art as something that, first of all, demands an affective response from the spectator/reader. Feagin belongs to a group of aesthetic philosophers who believe that one of the ways we use fiction is as a prop for "simulating" a variety of mental states.[15] Such simulation, in the crudest formulation, might include something like pretending to be the subject of the fictional action, assessing our own experience, and then ascribing the mental state associated with this experience to the fictional subject. In other words, fiction incites us to use our own cognitive system "off-line."[16] Tolstoy could be called a "proto-

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[14] Susan L. Feagin, *Reading with Feeling: The Aesthetics of Appreciation* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1996), 36.

[15] On art as a prompt for simulation see: Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[16] The question of how we assess mental states has a long history and continues to be debated in philosophy of mind and in aesthetic philosophy. The simulationists' opponents argue that we do not experience the mental states of others in ourselves; we simply make deductions based on our observations and our set of theories regarding human psychology. Others argue against the opposition of these two theories. For discussions of simulation theory and so-called theory-theory see: Martin Davies, "The Mental Simulation Debate," in *Objectivity, Simulation and the Unity of Consciousness: Current Issues in the Philosophy of Mind, Proceedings of the British Academy* 83, ed. C. Peacocke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Stephen Stich and Shaun Nichols, "Folk Psychology: Simulation or Tacit Theory?," in *Philosophical Issues* 3 (1993): 225-270; Shaun Nichols, Stephen Stich, Alan Leslie, and David Klein, "Varieties of off-line simulation," in *Theories of Theories of Mind*, eds. Peter Carruthers and Peter K. Smith, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Ian Ravenscroft, "Folk

simulationist," since his theory of "infection"(*zarazhenie*) through art similarly conceives of an artwork as something that prompts the spectator to adopt various mental states.

Tolstoy likens affective communication to ''infection'' and claims that people are always engaged in this kind of exchange. We perceive and are infected by the mirth, sadness, and the pain of others. But crucial to art is the capacity of man to ''infect'' another not passively and indirectly but deliberately, through a representation of a particular feeling. In his treatise, Tolstoy concludes decisively that art is "a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings and also experience them."[17]According to Tolstoy, art is ''one of the means of intercourse between man and man." Ordinary speech conveys ''thoughts and experiences,'' while art transmits ''feelings'' and enables one man to adopt another's ''state of mind.''[18] Gary Jahn argues convincingly that feeling (*chuvstvo*) for Tolstoy includes not only ''basic'' emotions (sorrow, happiness, anger) but also ''general

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Psychology as a Theory," in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed December 6, 2014, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/folkpsych-theory/; Richard Moran, "Interpretation Theory & the First-Person," *Philosophical Quarterly* 44, no. 174 (1994): 154-73.

[17] *What Is Art?*, 51. *Chto takoe iskusstvo?* in PSS, 30: 65. "Искусство есть деятельность человеческая, состоящая в том, что один человек сознательно известными внешними знаками передает другим испытываемые им чувства, а другие люди заражаются этими чувствами и переживают их."

[18] Ibid., 49. PSS, 30: 63-4. "искусство есть одно из средств общения людей между собой," "Как слово, передающее мысли и опыты людей, служит средством единения людей, так точно действует и искусство. Особенность же этого средства общения, отличающая его от общения посредством слова, состоит в том, что словом один человек передает другому свои мысли, искусством же люди передают друг другу свои чувства."

physiological conditions: haleness, being in pain,'' and ''general attitudes of mind: decisiveness, amazement, respect, contentment.'' Tolstoy's notion of feeling also appears to include beliefs (i.e. the belief in the brotherhood of man).[19] I suggest that the broad term ''mental state'' most closely captures what Tolstoy means by *chuvstvo*.

Feagin contrasts our simulating activity with a more analytical process, referring to the former as "appreciation" and the latter as "interpretation." The two processes are related and mutually reinforcing but nevertheless distinct. Appreciation and interpretation both require an interaction with some external object over time. An interpretation, however, produces a result, while

> an appreciation, despite grammatical appearances, is not a product, not a result of…what is to be gained through a process. The activity of appreciating a fictional work does not lead to a separable product, it is constitutive of it. Judgments of success or failure do not describe a separable product, but how (well) one performed during the process.[20]

Through appreciation we only enact a process, whereas through interpretation we actually generate a product, which we can distinguish from the original artwork and assess independently of that work. Feagin argues that we can conceive of a "misinterpretation" but not of a "misappreciation." All affective spectatorial responses, including those that are part of a simulating activity, belong to appreciation, according to Feagin's account. For example, a feeling of sadness in response to a tragic plot twist or a spasm of pleasure at a surprising combination of images or associations would be part of our "appreciating"

[19] Jahn, 60.

[20] Feagin, 36.

activity. As soon as we take a more deductive approach, however, we are interpreting and creating a product that stands beside and, in a sense, rivals the original work.

Feagin's account implies two grades of co-creativity on the part of the spectator. The appreciating spectator is not entirely passive. As Feagin shows, the appreciating spectator partakes in co-creation with the author to the extent that he considers certain linguistic or imagistic patterns suggested by the author and uses these to simulate particular mental states. But this is a very weak kind of co-creative activity. Unlike the interpreting spectator, the appreciating spectator does not engage in co-creation in the strong sense: he does not take up elements of the artwork and employ them to generate something that would reflect his own ideas, aims, and desires. He does not respond to the author through his (the spectator's) own creation. Feagin demonstrates that although neither the appreciator nor the interpreter is truly passive, the appreciator can appear passive. Part of the reason that appreciation looks passive or inadvertent—like a reflex rather than a consciously pursued action—is that the desire that motivates appreciation has a peculiar structure, she argues. It is a desire that contains neither a representation of a particular sought-after state of affairs nor a representation of a specific action one wishes to perform.[21] And "because the doings are mental, and in particular because the

[21] A particular type of desire motivates our appreciation of a work of fiction, according to Feagin: "The desire to appreciate is not…a desire *that* something be the case. Some desires are desires to *do* things." Most "desires to do" are accompanied by "enactive mental representations," the representations of what it will be like to do the thing one wants to do. A representation of performing some action, in turn, becomes part of our reason for wanting to perform it: "The *activity* involved in the actions, the doing, not merely the accomplishment of a purpose, reinforces the desire to do." But certain "desires to do," including the desire to appreciate, are *not* accompanied by enactive mental representations, she argues: "Curiously, many desires take this shape: desires to contemplate, to imagine, to fantasize; desires to be challenged or tested, and desires to experience and explore." Because these desires lack a mental representation it is tempting

mental shifts and slides we make [to appreciate an artwork] often take place at a preconscious level, there tends to be less awareness of the active role an appreciator plays."[22] Even if the appreciator is not always aware of his multifarious simulating performance, however, he is not merely acted upon. Appreciation is motivated by a desire, according to Feagin; it is not a reflex produced by a wired-in drive.

Tolstoy's demand for a spectator's self-conscious but non-generative engagement appears to call for the weak kind of co-creative activity implicit in Feagin's account of appreciation. Despite his language of passivity, Tolstoy does not propose that a spectator exercise complete self-abnegation. After all, his first stipulation—that an artwork must give a spectator the chance to *allow* himself to be possessed—insists on the self-conscious nature of a spectator's response. Tolstoy, like Feagin, wants to distinguish a properly aesthetic response from a mere reflex of the senses. The spectator must engage with the artwork deliberately, and this means that he cannot void himself completely. Perhaps Tolstoy stresses passivity because he mistakes the appreciating (simulating) spectator's semblance of passivity for the real thing. But what he really objects to is the spectator whose activity exceeds adopting various mental states. When a spectator no longer simulates ("experiences various human feelings," in Tolstoy's language[23]) but rather interprets, when he attempts to make sense of the work, he is recognizably active

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to collapse them with "wired-in drives," though they are in fact desires. "The trick to understanding desires to do is not only to understand their structural distinctness from desires that," Feagin explains, "but also… to keep them from collapsing into drives such as hunger and thirst which most commentators agree are not desires." Ibid., 46-8.

[22] Ibid., 56.

[23] "O tom, chto nazyvayut iskusstvom" in PSS, 30: 253. "переживает различные человеческие чувства"

to Tolstoy. The interpreting spectator "labors" on his own behalf. Tolstoy's stipulation that an artwork should not permit such labor can be understood as a demand for an artwork that disallows the strong co-creative activity associated with interpretation. His ideal artwork would thwart the generative process of interpretation and forestall all the rival products that it yields.

For Feagin appreciation is something that the spectator brings to the artwork, and moreover, she acknowledges that appreciation is nearly inextricable from interpretation. In contrast, Tolstoy's essays on art conceive of the possibility of designing an artwork in such a way that it would invariably elicit appreciation without interpretation.

The Ideal Artwork in Action

Tolstoy's ideal artwork initially appears to tyrannize the spectator: it endows the artist with an unrivaled authority. The spectator's activity is limited to weak co-creative acts. The spectator can take things in, but he cannot respond to or contest the artist through a generative activity of his own. But Tolstoy's ideal artwork does not exactly empower the artist, either. The creative activity of the artist is radically restricted by the imperative to produce an artwork that would elicit a self-conscious but non-generative response (I will discuss this more later on, in connection with *What is Art?*). The ideal artwork thus looks less than ideal for both the artist and the spectator. We are left to

wonder why Tolstoy would champion an artwork that restricts the artist and makes the spectator vulnerable to a degree that seemed to frighten the author himself.[24]

In his essays, Tolstoy tends to stress the social advantages provided by his model artwork. But these advantages looked dubious to many of his contemporary readers. Nikolai Mikhaylovsky, for example, compared Tolstoy's aesthetic populism to the political populism of the Sun King: "It appears as if he were extremely democratic in inviting us to listen to the voice of nine-tenths or 99/100 of all mankind and to be ashamed before this multimillion voice. But actually it is his personal voice, and he, like Louis XIV, who asserted that 'l'etat c'est moi,' could have said: 99/100 of all mankind is me."[25] Lev Shestov argued that *What is Art?* is just a pretext for Tolstoy "to be indignant, to be outraged, and to preach regardless of whether or not it brings the slightest benefit to the downtrodden, to the masses for whom he claims to speak."[26] Early critics of Tolstoy's

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[24] Caryl Emerson has noted that Tolstoy himself was always "on guard…against his own terrible vulnerability to music." Caryl Emerson, "*What is Art?* and the Anxiety of Music," *Russian Literature* 40, no. 4 (1996): 434.

[25] Nikolay Mikhaylovsky, "More About Art and Count Tolstoy," as cited in Silbajoris, *Tolstoy's Aesthetics and His Art*, 192. Original text in "Eshche ob iskusstve i gr Tolstom," in *N. K. Mikhaylovskiy Literaturnaya kritika i vospominaniya*, *seriya istoriya estetiki v pamyatnikakh i dokumentakh* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1995), accessed December 7, 2014, http://az.lib.ru/m/mihajlowskij_n_k/text_0380.shtml. "Он, по-видимому, чрезвычайно демократически приглашает нас прислушаться к голосу 9/10 или 99/100 человечества и смириться перед этим многомиллионным голосом. На самом же деле это его личный голос, и он, подобно Людовику XIV, утверждавшему, что l'etat c'est moi, мог бы сказать: 99/100 человечества — это я."

[26] Lev Shestov, "Dobro v uchenii gr Tolstogo i Nitsshe," *Sochineniya v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 1 (Tomsk: Vodoley, 1996), 264. My translation. "На этом построена вся книжка, это дает повод ему негодовать, возмущаться, проповедовать—независимо от того, принесет ли все это хоть какую-нибудь пользу тем бедным, тому народу, от имени которых говорится." For an in-depth discussion of Lev Shestov's response to Tolstoy's *What is Art?* see Silbajoris, *Tolstoy's Aesthetics and His Art*, 180-197.

aesthetics found it difficult to reconcile the populist rhetoric of his essays with their authoritarian tone. The rationale for advocating an artwork that thwarts the spectator's creative powers becomes clearer, and looks less self-serving, when we see Tolstoy's ideal artwork in action in his fiction.

In late fictional works, such as *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Tolstoy shows that his ideal artwork facilitates a kind of decentering effect in which the spectator can attend to something other than his own needs.[27] It provides the spectator with a moment of freedom from both his bodily and rational objectives. It is not remarkable that Tolstoy should conceive of a freedom from self-absorption as a gift bestowed by aesthetic experience. This is an idea he shares with many other thinkers, from Plato to Schopenhauer to Simone Weil. The curious thing is that Tolstoy demonstrates the way this self-marginalization is promoted by an artwork that inspires appreciation only, an artwork that elicits a self-conscious but non-generative response.

The Kreutzer Sonata shows an ideal artwork in action. As Tolstoy's protagonist, Pozdnyshev, listens to Beethoven's sonata, he experiences a keen awareness of the way the artwork compels his attention.[28] Simultaneously, he perceives that his own creative powers are thwarted by the work:

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[27] I borrow the term "decentering" from Elaine Scarry's *On Beauty and Being Just*, though, as she discusses in her book, the experience of self-marginalization in the presence of the beautiful has been part of many accounts of aesthetic experience.

[28] On my view, Beethoven's sonata is an artistic success according to the criteria of Tolstoy's aesthetics. I agree with Caryl Emerson's interpretation of this aesthetic moment as truly a moment of infection, rather than intoxication. I also follow Emerson in emphasizing Pozdnyshev's creative frustration, though I see this frustration as part of the technology of Tolstoy's ideal artwork, rather than infection gone wrong. Emerson, "*What is Art?* and the Anxiety of Music," 442.

> Music makes me forget myself, my real position; it transports me to some other position not my own. Under the influence of music it seems to me that I feel what I do not really feel, that I understand what I do not understand, that I can do what I cannot do…Music carries me immediately and directly into the mental condition in which the man was who composed it…You see, he who wrote, let us say, the Kreutzer Sonata—Beethoven—knew of course why he was in that condition; that condition caused him to do certain actions and therefore that condition had a meaning for him, but for me—none at all. That is why music only agitates and doesn't lead to a conclusion. Well, when a military march is played, the soldiers march and the music achieves its end. A dance is played, I dance and the music achieves its end. Mass is sung, I receive communion, and the music too achieves its end. Otherwise it is only agitating, and what ought to be done in that agitation is lacking. That is why music sometimes acts so dreadfully, so terribly.[29]

Pozdnyshev's ability to describe how the music acts on him—the way it produces "agitation"—attests to the self-conscious nature of his engagement with the artwork. He does not merely consume the work without attending to its particulars, as he might consume a formulaic and overly familiar piece of music. At the same time, he perceives that although the work excites his mental powers, he cannot employ them to produce anything of his own. He longs for an artwork that would allow him to take some independent action, whether to march or to take communion. The repetition of the first-

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[29] Leo Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, in the *Great Short Works of Leo Tolstoy*, trans. Louise Maude et al. (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2004), 353-450, 411. *Kreytserova sonata* in PSS, 27:61. "Она, музыка, сразу, непосредственно переносит меня в то душевное состояние, в котором находился тот, кто писал музыку. Я сливаюсь с ним душою и вместе с ним переношусь из одного состояния в другое, но зачем я это делаю, я не знаю. Ведь тот, кто писал хоть бы Крейцерову сонату, — Бетховен, ведь он знал, почему он находился в таком состоянии, — это состояние привело его к известным поступкам, и потому для него это состояние имело смысл, для меня же никакого. И потому музыка только раздражает, не кончает. Ну, марш воинственный сыграют, солдаты пройдут под марш, и музыка дошла; сыграли плясовую, я проплясал, музыка дошла; ну, пропели мессу, я причастился, тоже музыка дошла, а то только раздражение, а того, что надо делать в этом раздражении, — нет. И оттого музыка так страшно, так ужасно иногда действует."

person pronoun "I"—*I* dance, *I* receive communion—emphasizes Pozdnyshev's desire to exercise his own powers through some action. But the sonata inhibits the spectator from acting on his own behalf.

Listening to the sonata, Pozdnyshev experiences the kind of desire that Feagin associates with "appreciation." It is a desire to act without a preconceived goal or even a representation of what this action will be like: Pozdnyshev feels "agitation," the compulsion to move and to do, but without a sense of what "ought to be done." The peculiar desire involved in aesthetic appreciation displaces Pozdnyshev's habitual desires, including the desire for sexual gratification that frequently overwhelms all of his other objectives. Instead of pursuing his own aims, Pozdnyshev "appreciates," engaging in a weak kind of co-creative activity. He attends to the features of the music and experiences various mental states, which he regards as Beethoven's condition during the act of composition. The artwork that permits only weak co-creation both disturbs Pozdnyshev and provides him with an unprecedented delight. He attests to feeling "lighthearted and cheerful the whole evening."[30] Pozdnyshev's delight has to do with his momentary freedom from the compulsion to chase his appetites, and from the jealousy, suspicion, and hostility that arise as a result.

It is precisely the self-conscious but non-generative nature of Pozdnyshev's response that briefly frees him from his preoccupation with his own appetites and objectives. If the sonata had not compelled Pozdnyshev's conscious engagement, he could have assimilated it automatically—as he might a familiar musical piece like a military march or a mass—and continued to pursue his customary aims. There is no

[30] Ibid., 412. PSS, 27: 62. "Мне было легко, весело весь вечер."

reason why an artwork consumed automatically would distract him from his habitual quest for personal gratification. At the other extreme is the generative response, which would likewise enable Pozdnyshev to be absorbed by his own goals. If the spectator's response is generative, he looks past the original artwork to his own creative pursuits and is once again guided by his desires for a particular outcome; the artwork becomes a means for achieving some purpose of the spectator's own. Generative activity—and for Tolstoy this includes the kind of strong co-creation involved in interpretation—leads the spectator back to the pursuit of his own objectives. This is what happens with Pozdnyshev later on in the story. Reflecting on his wife's musical performance, he begins to interpret it and ultimately subsumes the musical event into a composition of his own; a tale of adultery and murder that reflects his own sexual obsessions and gratifies his desire for violence.

The moment when a spectator self-consciously engages with an artwork and does not move on to create something of his own, however, provides an opportunity for the spectator to appreciate. The spectator's desire to take certain actions is not determined by his own purposes. Instead, he wishes to attend to the artwork itself, a design created by someone other than himself for purposes other than his own. Pozdnyshev does not forget himself completely in his role as an appreciating spectator; he remains attentive to his own affective responses to the work. But instead of following the tracks of his familiar thoughts and obsessions, he pursues ideas, images, and associations produced by someone else. Since Beethoven's sonata is not subsumed into Pozdnyshev's quest to satisfy preconceived objectives, it remains an intractably external object that exists independently of Pozdnyshev and his wishes. It thus reminds Pozdnyshev that other

people are autonomous and creative beings just like himself, and not merely the means to his own satisfaction. This recognition of the autonomy of others has the greatest significance for Pozdnyshev in relation to his wife, whom he has treated only as an instrument for his own pleasure.

Before his encounter with the sonata, Pozdnyshev suffers from a mild form of solipsism.[31] The egoistic customs of his milieu have ossified into personal habits, and his self-absorption makes him unresponsive to anything that doesn't pertain to his own needs. Other people look more and more like the means to his pleasures, and the reality of subjective experiences other than his own becomes more and more doubtful. Pozdnyshev, for example, finds his wife's inner life so hard to fathom that he can only conceive of it as a mirror reflection of his own: "We were left confronting one another in our true relation: that is, as two egotists quite alien to each other who wished to get as

[31] Tolstoy was certainly not a solipsist in the strong sense; he did not question the existence of other minds. But he did worry along with his disciple Vladimir Chertkov that the experiences of other people were inaccessible to us. In a diary entry dated December 20, 1896, he polemicizes against Chertkov, who argues that the four walls of the unknown (четыре стены неизвестности) are the future, the past, what happens when we are gone, and what happens in another's soul. Chertkov is right about the first three walls, Tolstoy writes, but wrong about the fourth: "That which happens in the souls of other people, this wall we must break down using all our powers—[we must] aspire to merge with the souls of other people." (My translation.) "Но четвертая стена неизвестности того, что делается в душах других людей, эту стену мы должны всеми силами разбивать и стремиться к слиянию с душами и других людей." *Dnevniki i zapisnye knizhki 1895-1899* in PSS, 53: 124. Tolstoy thought art was the way to break down this fourth wall. In *What is Art?* he contends that "Every art causes those to whom the artist's feeling is transmitted to unite in soul with the artist, and also with all who receive the same impression." *What is Art?*, 149. *Chto takoe iskusstvo?* in PSS, 30: 157. "Всякое искусство делает то, что люди, воспринимающие чувство, переданное художником, соединяются душой, во-первых, с художником и, во-вторых, со всеми людьми, получившими то же впечатление."

much pleasure as possible each from the other."[32] Pozdnyshev might not go so far as to doubt the existence of other people, but he does experience the loneliness of a consciousness that feels it can have no access to other minds. The artwork that inspires a self-conscious but non-generative response provides a partial and temporary cure.

Significantly, in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, unlike in Tolstoy's essays, it is never clear that the spectator actually apprehends the artist's mental state. Pozdnyshev says that the music transports him "directly into the mental condition in which the man was who composed it," but we cannot be sure that Pozdnyshev grasps what it was that Beethoven felt when he composed the sonata. The ideal artwork perhaps cannot truly facilitate the experience of another's experience, the communication of the artist's "feeling" that Tolstoy promises in his essays on art. It does, however, affirm the *presence* of others. And this is no small feat. Where before Pozdnyshev could only see reflections of himself, shadows of his own desires, now real human faces appear. He revels for a while in the perception of his fraternity with other beings: "[It] was as if quite new feelings, new possibilities, of which I had till then been unaware, had been revealed to me…What this new thing was that had been revealed to me I could not explain to myself, but the consciousness of this new condition was very joyous. All those same people, including my wife and him [Trukhachevsky, the violinist], appeared in a new light. "[33] The

[32] Ibid., 380. *Kreytserova sonata* in PSS, 27: 32. "…и остались мы друг против друга в нашем действительном отношении друг к другу, то есть два совершенно чуждые друг другу эгоиста, желающие получить себе как можно больше удовольствия один через другого."

[33] Ibid., 412. PSS, 27:62. "мне как будто открылись совсем новые, казалось мне, чувства, новые возможности, о которых я не знал до сих пор…Что такое было то новое, что я узнал, я не мог себе дать отчета, но сознание этого нового состояния

recognition of his co-existence with other people is both a delight and a torment for Pozdnyshev. Later in the story, he angrily recalls the musical evening that forced him to confront his wife's autonomy: "I considered myself to have a complete right to her body as if it were my own, and yet at the same time I felt I could not control that body, that it was not mine and she could dispose of it as she pleased."[34] The pleasure of sensing his fellowship with others is weighed against his frustration at the relative diminution of his own importance.

Tolstoy's rendering of Pozdnyshev's aesthetic experience demonstrates that the author is not oblivious to the oppressive aspects of an artwork that elicits a self-conscious but non-generative response. Pozdnyshev's frustration at his inability to exercise his own creative powers in response to the sonata is treated with sympathy in the story. Tolstoy shows that relinquishing the possibility of taking a creative action of one's own is a real sacrifice and that the ideal artwork demands something quite painful of the spectator. But despite the heavy toll, Tolstoy still celebrates artworks that allow for only a weak kind of spectatorial co-creation. To him, an artwork that elicits appreciation without interpretation will invariably redirect our attention away from ourselves and toward others. The artwork that compels a self-conscious but non-generative response will not gratify a spectator's appetites or desires. Instead, it will jolt the spectator out of his self-absorption and grant him a perception of his fellowship with other people. Tolstoy's ideal

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было очень радостно. Всё те же лица, и в том числе и жена и он, представлялись совсем в другом свете."

[34] Ibid., 418. PSS, 27:68. "Ведь ужасно было то, что я признавал за собой несомненное, полное право над ее телом, как будто это было мое тело, и вместе с тем чувствовал, что владеть я этим телом не могу, что оно не мое и что она может распоряжаться им как хочет..."

artwork thus facilitates an experience irreducible to the gratification of the senses; our delight in it could not be confused with material enjoyment. The artist who creates such an artwork need not worry that there is no pleasure specific to art.

A Self-Conscious Response: Avoiding False Art

The artist's confidence that his work provides something beyond material enjoyment comes at a price. Tolstoy's ideal artwork demands a sacrifice not only of the spectator but also of the artist. The nature of the artist's sacrifice is elaborated in *What is Art?*, Tolstoy's controversial treatise on aesthetics. Here, Tolstoy develops his description of the ideal artwork, and sets out to teach the artist how to create it.

Tolstoy employs two categories—"false" art and "bad" art—to demarcate the boundaries of the ideal artwork. The ideal artwork elicits a response that is something between sleep and self-exertion. The false and the bad artworks, on the other hand, compel responses at the two extremes. The false artwork bypasses the spectator's conscious reflection on his engagement with the work and enables him to remain engrossed in his own desires. The bad artwork inspires generative activity, which means that the spectator moves on from the artwork to actively pursue his own objectives. Although these works differ in the manner of their failure, the essential problem is the same in both cases. Neither artwork compels the spectator to suspend the pursuit of his objectives; in neither case does the spectator attend to the work without considering how it aids some purpose of his own. From these categories follow Tolstoy's prescriptions for the artist: in order to avoid making a false artwork, the artist must be sincere, and in order

to avoid making a bad artwork, he must not be obscure or morally objectionable. The limits Tolstoy imposes on the artist's activity are not themselves the final objectives. But they are necessary, he seems to suggest, for creating an artwork that would enable the spectator to attend to something other than his own pursuits.

Real artworks, according to Tolstoy, "infect" the spectator with the "feelings" of the artist. In other words, they interrupt the spectator's absorption in his own condition and direct his attention to something (and then, to someone) else. False artworks, on the other hand, fail to infect: they do not capture the spectator's attention at all. Or they create the semblance of infection: the spectator appears to attend to something other than himself, when in fact he does not. False artworks, Tolstoy suggests, rely on the following methods: "(1) borrowing, (2) imitating, (3) striking effects, and (4) diversions."[35] What all four methods have in common is that they attempt to bypass the spectator's *conscious* reflection on his experience. Each method aims to induce a sort of automatic response, either by reference to familiar scenarios (borrowing, imitating) or by acting directly on the senses (striking effects, diversion). All false artworks can therefore he considered works that do not elicit the spectator's self-conscious response.

Tolstoy's depiction of the young Officer Butler in *Hadji Murat* demonstrates the effect of an artwork that does not elicit a self-conscious response. Butler listens to the familiar marching songs of his soldiers and takes them in automatically, unreflectively. The soldiers' singing is a backdrop for Butler's contemplation of his own objectives. He feels "buoyant, calm, and joyful. War presented itself to him as consisting only in

[35] *What is Art?*, 100. *Chto takoe iskusstvo?* in PSS, 30, 112. "Приемы эти следующие: 1) заимствование, 2) подражательность, 3) поразительность и 4) занимательность."

exposing himself to danger and to possible death, thereby gaining rewards and the respect of his comrades here, as well as of his friends in Russia."[36] Butler's response to the marching songs stands in stark contrast to Pozdnyshev's response to the sonata. Pozdnyshev's musical experience arrests the course of his thought and thwarts his single-minded pursuit of preconceived objectives. Butler, on the other hand, continues to vaguely ponder his aim to achieve glory in combat. The sonata induces a state of acute attention in which Pozdnyshev recognizes that the artwork does not exist in order to gratify his needs. The military songs, by contrast, facilitate a kind of distracted state, a daydream in which Butler becomes more deeply absorbed in his own desires and pleasant sensations. The narrator later compares the effect of such "poetry of warfare" to wine by asserting that Butler attempted to "find oblivion" in both.[37] The sonata compels Pozdnyshev to recognize the autonomous existence of others, while the familiar, formulaic soldiers' songs allow Butler to see his surroundings exclusively through the prism of his own Romantic fantasy. The sonata enables Pozdnyshev to attend to the design wrought by the artist. The songs, alternatively, deepen Butler's immersion in his own impressions and ideas.

In contradistinction to Tolstoy's ideal artwork, which facilitates the experience of self-marginalization, the false artwork actually enhances one's sense of centrality. Tolstoy charged false artworks with producing a "hypnotic" effect, and this charge has

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[36] Leo Tolstoy, *Hadji Murat*, in *Great Short Works*, 547-668, 627. *Khadzhi Murat* in PSS, 35, 79. "Война представлялась ему только в том, что он подвергал себя опасности, возможности смерти и этим заслуживал и награды, и уважение и здешних товарищей, и своих русских друзей."

[37] Ibid., 656. PSS, 35: 106. "Он старался не думать о своем положении и, кроме воинственной поэзии, старался забыться еще вином."

been interpreted as an objection to the undue influence of the hypnotist (the artist).[38] But there is an altogether different reason why Tolstoy would be troubled by the "hypnotic" work. Hypnosis, as its etymology from the Greek hypnos (sleep) suggests, is a kind of lucid dream. We refer to dreams when we wish to express colloquially our solipsistic doubts: What if everyone around me is just an element of my own dream? We tend to associate dreams with the feeling that our own perceptions permeate everything around us. Butler's experience suggests that the same feeling of one's own centrality might be linked to the dream-like states produced by art that is assimilated unreflectively. Trance music is a good contemporary example of art that relies on the sort of striking sensuous stimuli and repetition that, according to Tolstoy, act directly on the spectator's senses and disallow a conscious response. What is enjoyable about this kind of music is that one feels entirely absorbed in one's own sensations, in the movements of one's body, the beating of one's heart. These sensations seem to occupy the space of the world. There is no room for anyone else. Whereas the sonata temporarily cures Pozdnyshev of his mild solipsism, his blindness to the existence of others, the military songs assimilated automatically only intensify Butler's blindness to the possibility of subjective experiences other than his own. Butler dreams of military glory and remains oblivious, for example, to the pain of those wounded in battle.

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[38] False art is "coercive" according to Richard Gustafson, who suggests that the artist, by way of false art, comes to have a dangerous influence over the audience. He interprets Tolstoy's discussion of the hypnotic effects of false art as a critique of the false artist who manipulates the audience: "The audience may all experience one feeling, each in his own way all together as one, but in the false aesthetic moment the audience is everyone else except the artist." Gustafson later adds: "false art intends to induce a psychological state: its purpose is to change the psyche of the audience, not to unite artist and audience in a communal moment all together as one." Richard F. Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 372-3.

Tolstoy's emphasis on spectatorial passivity throughout his writing on art tempts interpreters to understand his notion of "infection" as a call for artworks that would be apprehended "unintentionally" by their audiences.[39] But a closer look at the way Tolstoy renders spectatorial experience shows that this cannot be right. On the contrary, Tolstoy *objects* to artworks that can be consumed without eliciting a spectator's reflection on his own engagement. The spectator must not be passive from the start. He must first allow himself to be possessed. Butler does not get the chance to allow himself to be possessed because the artwork he encounters is familiar and formulaic, triggering an unreflective, well-practiced response. Tolstoy laments that "in all realms of art, counterfeits of art are

[39] Tolstoy's stress on affect, and the immediacy implied by the term "infection," seem at odds with his claim that communication through art is in fact purposive. It is perhaps due to this apparent contradiction that scholars have disagreed on the question of intention in Tolstoy's aesthetics. Some scholars acknowledge a purposive aspect; Emerson, for example, emphasizes that infection, for Tolstoy, "is a craft." Others (Michael Denner, Richard Gustafson) insist that a lack of intention is a mark of true art for Tolstoy. Caryl Emerson, "Tolstoy's Aesthetics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, ed. Donna Tussing Orwin (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 239. Michael A. Denner, "Accidental Art: Tolstoy's Poetics of Unintentionality" *Philosophy and Literature* 27, no. 2 (2003): 292. Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*, 369-391. My view is that Tolstoy does not call for a lack of intention on the part of the spectator (as I argue above), nor does he demand a lack of intention from the artist. In fact, Tolstoy directly asserts: "If a man infects another or others directly, immediately, by his appearance or by the sounds he gives vent to at the very time he experiences the feeling…that does not amount to art." Art is not contagious as a yawn is contagious. The immediate outward expression of sorrow, pain, happiness does not constitute art. According to Tolstoy, "Art begins when one person, *with the object of joining another or others to himself* in one and the same feeling, expresses that feeling by certain external indications." (My italics.) Both the creation and the apprehension of an artwork are purposive in Tolstoy's account. *What is Art?*, 50. *Chto takoe iskusstvo?* PSS, 30: 64. "Если человек заражает другого и других прямо непосредственно своим видом или производимыми им звуками в ту самую минуту, как он испытывает чувство, заставляет другого человека зевать, когда ему самому зевается, или смеяться, или плакать, когда сам чему-либо смеется или плачет, или страдать, когда сам страдает, то это еще не есть искусство...Искусство начинается тогда, когда человек с целью передать другим людям испытанное им чувство снова вызывает его в себе и известными внешними знаками выражает его."

manufactured to a ready-made, pre-arranged recipe."[40] The formulaic artwork, just like the work that stuns the senses, produces not appreciation—sanctioned by a peculiar desire that has no preconceived objective—but a reflexive response. The spectator consumes it automatically while persisting in his own pursuits.

In *After the Ball* (1903), the music of the mazurka appears as effective as the military songs in its capacity to reinforce the spectator's self-absorption. It helps the spectator remain preoccupied with his habitual thoughts and aims. The first half of the story takes place at a ball, where the narrator, Ivan Vasilyevich, woos his beloved, Varenka. In telling his tale, Ivan Vasilyevich emphasizes the routines of his social milieu, describing himself as a typical youth of his time, who drank champagne, attended soirees and balls, and danced well just like everyone else. The others at the ball similarly act their parts. The hostess wears a diamond diadem in the style of Empress Yelizaveta Petrovna. Varenka's father, a colonel, combs his hair and mustache "in the style of Nicholas I" (*à la Nicolas I*).[41] The guests go about the routines of the ball as the musicians incessantly play the mazurka:

> Already with a certain desperate exhaustion, as it happens you know at the end of a ball, the musicians kept repeating the same mazurka tune, the mommies and daddies had already got up from their card tables and left the parlor in expectation of supper…I chose her again and for the hundredth time we danced around the room.[42]

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[40] *What is Art?*, 109. PSS, 30: 121. "Так во всех областях искусства производятся по готовому, выработанному рецепту подделки под искусство."

[41] Leo Tolstoy, "After the Ball," in Leo Tolstoy, *Tolstoy's Short Fiction*, ed. Michael R. Katz (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 271-9, 272, 274. *Posle bala* in PSS, 34: 117, 120.

[42] Ibid., 274. PSS, 34: 119. "Музыканты уж с каким-то отчаянием усталости, знаете, как бывает в конце бала, подхватывали всё тот же мотив мазурки, из гостиных

The mazurka does not distract the guests from pursuing the satisfaction of their individual appetites, whether it be eating supper or appeasing sexual desires by holding one's beloved during a dance. "May I have the quadrille after supper?"[43] Ivan Vasilyevich asks Varenka, bringing the delights of food and sex into lexical proximity. Ivan Vasilyevich's listeners tease him when he tries to describe in lofty terms his pursuit of sexual gratification. To Ivan Vasilyevich's claim that as he danced he "did not even feel [his] body," they respond: "Now how could you not have felt your body; I think you felt it a good deal when you had your arms around her waist, and not only your own body, but hers as well."[44] The comical exchange points to the heart of the matter for Tolstoy. Ivan Vasilyevich and the other guests consume the music the same way they consume their supper—unreflectively. They remain engrossed in fulfilling their appetites.

Ivan Vasilyevich, however, is briefly distracted from his appetites when he sees Varenka dancing the mazurka with her father. In contrast to his earlier inattentive listening, Ivan Vasilyevich observes this performance with acute attention, and notes that the "whole room followed the couple's every movement."[45] Watching the dance, Ivan Vasilyevich momentarily forgets his own desires, and instead imagines how Varenka's

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поднялись уже от карточных столов папаши и мамаши, ожидая ужина, лакеи чаще забегали, пронося что-то. Был третий час. Надо было пользоваться последними минутами. Я еще раз выбрал ее, и мы в сотый раз прошли вдоль залы."

[43] Ibid. " — Так после ужина кадриль моя? — сказал я ей, отводя ее к ее месту."

[44] PSS, 34: 118. "И я вальсировал еще и еще и не чувствовал своего тела.
— Ну как же не чувствовали, я думаю очень чувствовали, когда обнимали ее за талию, не только свое, но и ее тело, — сказал один из гостей."

[45] Ibid., 275. PSS, 34: 120. "Вся зала следила за каждым движением пары."

father might feel about his daughter. Ivan Vasilyevich's thoughts throughout this performance are oriented toward grasping another's thoughts. His attentive viewing—compelled perhaps by the sincere affection for each other that the dancers express in their performance—and his momentary sense of self-marginalization foreshadows Ivan Vasilyevich's experience after the ball. When the ball ends, Ivan Vasilyevich walks the streets with the sound of the mazurka still ringing in his ears. Soon, however, this repetitive musical form is displaced by another, by "some other kind of music, harsh and unpleasant." He sees soldiers moving to the sound of a "drummer and a fifer who kept on repeating without stop the same unpleasant, shrill melody."[46] He realizes that he is witnessing a flogging. The repetitive melody helps the colonel and the soldiers to go about the routines of a military punishment, and to satisfy an appetite for violence, in the same way that the mazurka helped the guests at the ball to enact their festive routines and to satisfy their appetites for food and sensual contact. In neither case does the music distract the listeners from their objectives. Rather, it facilitates the listeners' absorption in their own aims, in part by helping to screen the violence that, on Tolstoy's view, is inherent in the pursuit of these aims.

Whereas formulaic music assists the colonel in abiding by his accustomed ways, the startling spectacle of the flogging (both its visual and aural elements) enables Ivan Vasilyevich to veer off course. The hypnotic repetition of the mazurka is supplanted by a terrifying medley that disturbs the course of Ivan Vasilyevich's thoughts just as

[46] Ibid., 277. PSS, 34: 122. "В душе у меня всё время пело и изредка слышался мотив мазурки. Но это была какая-то другая, жесткая, нехорошая музыка...Позади [солдат] стояли барабанщик и флейтщик и не переставая повторяли всё ту же неприятную, визгливую мелодию."

Beethoven's Sonata disturbed Pozdnyshev: "All the way home my ears rang now with the beating rolls of the drums and the piping of the flute, now with the words, 'Have mercy on me lads,' now with the self-assured, enraged voice of the colonel shouting, 'Are you going easy on him? Are you?' "[47] It is not only the sight of the Tatar's mangled body but also this unexpected aural pattern (a musical refrain) that shocks Ivan Vasilyevich out of his routines. Both Pozdnyshev and Ivan Vasilyevich experience the kind of decentering that allows an individual to acknowledge the reality of a subjective experience other than his own. Ivan Vasilyevich, however, is left with a more lasting impression than Pozdnyshev. He abandons the conventional objectives of men like him. He eschews the military service and marriage—both violent endeavors, on Tolstoy's view—that he had pursued to the tune of the mazurka. Instead, Ivan Vasilyevich recognizes the possibility of an alternative way of living. He chooses to live an unconventional life that he describes as "useless." Ivan Vasilyevich abstains from setting any particular goals for himself. It is as though the peculiar desire associated with aesthetic appreciation—the desire that has no preconceived objective—persists beyond the duration of the aesthetic event for Ivan Vasilyevich. Consequently, instead of pursuing his own aims, Ivan Vasilyevich attends to the needs of other people. His listeners answer Ivan Vasilyevich's self-characterization as useless by protesting: "It would be better to say how many people would be useless, if it hadn't been for you."[48]

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[47] Ibid., 278. PSS, 34: 124. "Всю дорогу в ушах у меня то била барабанная дробь и свистела флейта, то слышались слова: «Братцы, помилосердуйте», то я слышал самоуверенный, гневный голос полковника, кричащего: «Будешь мазать? Будешь?»"

[48] Ibid., 279. PSS, 34:125. " — Ну, это мы знаем, как вы никуда не годились, — сказал один из нас. — Скажите лучше: сколько бы людей никуда не годились, кабы

It seem as though the problem with artworks that bypass conscious response is that they make the spectator too vulnerable to external influence. Tolstoy's comparison between false art and drugs in *What is Art?* does suggest that false art is dangerously affecting. But a closer analysis of false artworks in the context of Tolstoy's fiction shows their real failure is just the opposite. The spectator of false artworks is not vulnerable *enough*. If an artwork bypasses the spectator's conscious reflection—whether because it stuns the senses or because it is so familiar that it elicits an automatic response—the spectator will not attend to the work. He will consider his own satisfaction (or dissatisfaction), but not its source. He goes in one direction or another to seek a pleasant sensation or avoid an unpleasant one. But such an artwork does not disrupt his pursuit of his own pleasures; it does not compel him to attend to something other than the demands of his senses. All of my examples above are musical, and indeed Tolstoy frequently used musical events to describe the effects of art generally, and of false art in particular. Emerson has suggested that this is because Tolstoy sensed his own "terrible vulnerability to music."[49] But although Tolstoy did recognized that music could be terribly affecting, he also worried, it seems, that certain kinds of music were altogether too easy to ignore.

False artworks proliferate thanks to professional artists who create without "sincerity," according to Tolstoy. "In our time, a person wishing to pursue art does not wait for that significant, new content to arise in his soul," Tolstoy argues in *About Art*

вас не было." The phrase the translator renders as "useless" is really closer to "ill-suited" and here appears to connote the idea that Ivan Vasilyevich does not amount to anything when measured against conventional social standards. Ivan Vasilyevich's life is not adequate to some pre-formulated standard and yet he achieves a great deal by assisting others, as his interlocutors suggest.

[49] Emerson, "What is Art? and the Anxiety of Music," 434.

(1889).[50] He denounces the artist whose activity is guided by assessments of what an audience has approved of in the past, and not by the images, ideas, and associations that arise in the artist's own mind. If in Tolstoy's ideal artwork "there are always two people: one who produces the work of art, and one who receives it,"[51] in the "ready-made" false artwork there is really only one person, the spectator. An artist who creates works based on deductions about his spectators' expectations and desires simply mirrors the spectators' accustomed ways of thinking and acting. Tolstoy attests to this mirroring on the part of the professional artist by drawing a comparison between Ivan Ilych, his 'homme comme il fault,' and a professional violinist: "In the manner of a virtuoso, [Ivan Ilych] would even allow himself to let the human and official relations mingle…Tired, but with the feeling of a virtuoso—one of the first violins who has played his part in an orchestra with precision—he would return home."[52] Ivan Ilych performs his duties the same way that a professional violinist performs music; both follow a set of conventions and meet the expectations of their audience. The performers' slight deviations from the given scores only highlight the principal arrangements.

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[50] "Ob iskusstve" in PSS, 30: 215. My translation. "В наше время человек, желающий заниматься искусством, не ждет того, чтобы в душе его возникло то важное, новое содержание."

[51] "O tom, chto nazyvayut iskusstvom" in PSS, 30: 251. My translation. "В искусстве всегда есть два лица: один тот, кто производит художественное произведение, и тот, кто воспринимает: зритель, слушатель."

[52] *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, in *Great Short Works*, 245-303, 267-8. *Smert' Ivana Il'icha* in PSS, 26: 81. "[Он] даже, как виртуоз, иногда позволял себе, как бы шутя, смешивать человеческое и служебное отношения…И усталый, но с чувством виртуоза, отчетливо отделавшего свою партию, одну из первых скрипок в оркестре, возвращался домой."

Most often the ready-made artworks of the professional artist are so familiar to the spectator that the spectator consumes them automatically. These works do not elicit a self-conscious, attentive attitude from the spectator, and there is no "infection" with another's feeling to speak of. As Officer Butler's example demonstrates, the spectator merely continues with his own pursuits. And even if a spectator did consciously engage with such a made-to-order artwork, he would only see his own reflection; he would not be attending to anything other than himself. In this case, we could say that the artwork falsifies infection. Either way, whether a spectator unconsciously or self-consciously engages with it, the false artwork does not provide the spectator with the experience of decentering and the sense of fellowship with other people that are provided by Tolstoy's ideal artwork.

Tolstoy calls these ready-made artworks, which are created according to a calculation of what the audience desires, "brain-spun" (*rassudochnoe iskusstvo*),[53] and he holds up "sincere" artworks in direct contrast to them. Sincerity does not mean a lack of intention on the part of the artist. After all, Tolstoy defines art as a conscious activity in which the artist "aims" to infect others with his own feeling.[54] Sincerity simply means that the artist creates according to his own pattern of thought and does not simply echo that of his spectators. The sincere artwork maintains a distance between the artist and the

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[53] *What is Art?*, 72, 113. *Chto takoe iskusstvo?* in PSS, 30: 85, 124. "[искусство] стало выдумано и рассудочно"; "рассудочно-холодное произведение."

[54] Ibid., 50. PSS, 30:64. "Art begins when a person, with the aim to convey to others the feeling he experienced, recalls it again in himself and expresses it in certain external signs." Although Maude chooses to translate the Russian "s tsel'yu" as "with the object," it could also be translated as "with the aim." Искусство начинается тогда, когда человек с целью передать другим людям испытанное им чувство снова вызывает его в себе и известными внешними знаками выражает его."

spectator, a distance necessary for a decentering effect to take place. By contrast, false artworks, which mirror the spectator's pre-established notions, reinforce his self-absorption.

In contrasting the effects of "real" and "false" art, Tolstoy depicts precisely the disparate experiences that Kant associates with the beautiful as opposed to the agreeable. Tolstoy attacks the division between the categories of the beautiful and the agreeable in his writing on art—"Ascribing beauty to something is just a way to express one's predilection for the object"[55]—only to reinstate them in his own terms. For both Kant and Tolstoy, an aesthetic response is characterized by an attentive attitude that is not determined by the desire to pursue our own gratification. The agreeable is whatever gratifies the senses, according to Kant, and our assessment of something as agreeable is based on our bodily appetites; it is "a liking that is conditioned pathologically by stimuli."[56] In the case of the agreeable, Kant observes, one does not pay heed to the object that gratifies so much as to the gratification itself: "Indeed, what is agreeable in the liveliest way requires no judgment at all about the character of the object."[57] Tolstoy's "false" artwork is like the agreeable in that it permits the spectator to notice only his gratification and not the character of the object (that is, the artwork itself). In fact, Tolstoy's choice of the term "false," in opposition to "real" art, makes much more sense when we recognize its correspondence with the agreeable. Like the agreeable, the false

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[55] "O tom, chto nazyvayut iskusstvom" in PSS, 30: 268. "приписывать красоту чему-либо есть, только способ выразить свое пристрастие к предмету."

[56] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 5, 51.

[57] Ibid., § 3, 48.

artwork is an entirely commutable source of pleasure. It is incidental to the spectator that this object belongs to a category of objects the spectator is used to calling "art." For him, what is essential in the object is the gratification that connects it to its potential substitutes, which might include drugs, alcohol, food, and so on. In this sense, the object is not art at all. It can therefore be opposed to real art and called "false."

Sincerity, on Tolstoy's view, helps to ensure that a spectator attends to something other than his own desires and objectives. In other words, sincerity is required to produce a properly aesthetic response and a delight that is distinct from sensuous satisfaction. If an artist produces without sincerity—if he is guided by deductions about the spectator's pleasures—his creation will be indistinguishable from other sources of sensuous satisfaction.

A Non-Generative Response: Avoiding Bad Art

An artist who aspires to produce Tolstoy's ideal artwork must take care not only to elicit a self-conscious response, but also to avoid making the kind of artwork that would tempt the spectator to use it as fodder for his own creations. Tolstoy suggests that our own preoccupations, including creative ones, incline us to regard everything around us as the means to pursue our own ends. The bad artwork, just like the false artwork, does not impede this tendency. It does not distract us from our own objectives, but rather reinforces our blindness to anything that does not have to do with our needs.

Generative activity, on Tolstoy's view, interferes with our ability to pay attention to a design created by another mind. Once the spectator proceeds to generate something

of his own, he no longer follows the patterns of the artwork but rather attends to his own notions and objectives. The spectator moves on from the original artwork, and he is once again guided primarily by the directives of his own mind. A spectator's ideas and desires might be radically transformed by the artwork, of course, and one could argue that a generative activity guided by this reconfigured perspective is precisely the reason to value our encounters with art. Proust, for example, takes this view. Tolstoy, however, either does not believe that this kind of permanent transformation of one's perspective on the world through art is possible, or he attributes less importance to it than he does to the sense of liberation from our individual desires that is facilitated by the aesthetic encounter. When a spectator returns to his own desires and objectives, whether they are longstanding or new, the spectator is once again concerned with himself. He no longer persists in that decentered state in which he can feel his coexistence with others. Tolstoy's ideal artwork would prolong this decentered state indefinitely. A "bad" artwork, by contrast, inspires generative activity immediately, becoming merely a prop for the spectator in his own pursuits.

The generative activity Tolstoy considers undesirable is just as likely to arise when an artwork confuses the spectator as when it repels him. In Tolstoy's scheme, artworks can be "bad" either because they are obscure or because they are morally objectionable. But his prohibition on interpretive labor does not mean that Tolstoy objects to all types of discerning activity. A spectator must somehow grasp what sort of object he is dealing with. He must have some understanding of which images and associations he is prompted to consider, or, in Tolstoy's framework, which emotions he is meant to try on. In other words, Tolstoy does not disapprove of the kind of activity

involved in the weak co-creative acts that constitute "appreciation." In fact, he insists upon this kind of purposive apprehension of the artwork by stipulating that a spectator's response must be self-conscious. Tolstoy does, however, object to artworks that require a laborious process of decoding. His ideal artwork makes apprehension effortless.

Tolstoy recognizes that an artwork that hopes to divert the spectator's attention away from his own aims should not be so familiar that it fails to compel the spectator's attention. But neither should it be so unfamiliar and baffling that it alienates the spectator and prompts him to disregard it altogether. Tolstoy argues against the view that decentering is inspired by art that confounds the spectator, a view he attributes to the Symbolist and Decadent poets that he disparages throughout *What is Art?* On the contrary, an artwork that is inaccessible will simply prompt the spectator to abandon the work and return to his own thoughts and aims. If the spectator engages with such an artwork at all, it will be only in order to produce something of his own, something that reflects his own notions and objectives. In Feagin's terms, the spectator does not linger in "appreciation" and instead proceeds almost immediately to "interpretation," which yields a product separable from the original work. Tolstoy believes that an artwork that confounds the spectator will not allow him to experience the decentering effect that affirms his coexistence with other beings. The baffling artwork, like the false artwork, only perpetuates a spectator's egoistic delusion—to which human beings are all too susceptible, in Tolstoy's view—that everything around us is a means for the pursuit of our own objectives.

In *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the violinist, Trukhachevsky, stands in for the kind of Decadent artist that Tolstoy accuses of "haziness, mysteriousness, obscurity, and

exclusiveness."[58] He is the kind of artist who confuses the spectator (in this case, Pozdnyshev) and incites a process of decoding that leads Pozdnyshev back to himself, to his own familiar ideas and preoccupations. Trukhachevsky is a caricature of the Decadent artist. He is Russian, but he hails from Paris, dresses like a dandy, and, most importantly, has a manner of "speaking about everything in allusions and unfinished sentences, as if you knew it all, remembered it, and could complete it yourself."[59] Pozdnyshev is bewildered by Trukhachevsky's allusions and unfinished sentences. And he quickly begins to interpret Trukhachevsky's activity, including his musical performances, in the context of his own ideas about the relations between men and women. Since Pozdnyshev sees everything through the prism of his own sexual jealousy, his confusion gives way to his conviction that, like him, Trukhachevsky regards music as a pretext for the pursuit of sexual pleasure.

Importantly, it is not Beethoven's sonata but a work of bad art that prompts Pozdnyshev to conclude that Trukhachevsky and his wife are lovers, and thus to begin his own narrative creation. Pozdnyshev remembers that after playing the sonata the performers played another "strange little piece." Only after recalling this little piece by a composer whose name he cannot remember does Pozdnyshev decode the performance as evidence of an affair: "Was it not clear that everything had happened between them that evening?" The fact that Pozdnyshev forgets the composer's name discredits this musical

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[58] *What is Art?*, 77. *Chto takoe iskusstvo?* in PSS, 30: 90. "туманность, загадочность, темнота и недоступность для масс..."

[59] *The Kreutzer Sonata*, 398. *Kreytserova sonata* in PSS, 27: 49. "Манера, знаете, про все говорить намеками и отрывками, как будто вы все это знаете, помните и можете сами дополнить."

piece. As I discussed earlier, bad artworks often have anonymous authors or authors described only as "professional" or "celebrated" in Tolstoy's fiction. Moreover, Pozdnyshev's murky recollection suggests that the piece did not elicit the kind of attentive attitude compelled by the sonata. In contrast to the Kreutzer Sonata, this piece, "impassioned to the point of obscenity,"[60] helps Pozdnyshev revert to his familiar view of the world, in which everything is regarded in light of his sexual desire. The bad artwork inspires Pozdnyshev to interpretation and ultimately to a creative activity completely his own: the invention of a narrative of adultery.

Tolstoy himself engages in a Pozdnyshev-like decoding when confronted with works that appear to him obscure and inaccessible. In an account of his own responses to Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, Tolstoy first ostentatiously demonstrates his bewilderment, then exhibits the laborious process of decoding, and finally presents the interpretation that supposedly follows from his decoding. He writes about viewing Wagner's opera in *What is Art?*:

> Opening his mouth in a strange way, [the actor] sang something incomprehensible. The music of various instruments accompanied the strange sounds which he emitted. From the libretto one was able to gather that the actor had to represent a powerful gnome, who lived in the cave, and who was forging a sword for Siegfried, whom he had reared. One could tell he was a gnome by the fact that the actor walked all the time bending the knees of his trico-covered legs. This gnome, still opening his mouth in the same strange way, long continued to

[60] Ibid., 414. PSS, 27:64. "Только теперь я вспомнил их лица в тот вечер, когда они после Крейцеровой сонаты сыграли какую-то страстную вещицу, не помню кого, какую-то до похабности чувственную пьесу. «Как я мог уехать?» — говорил я себе, вспоминая их лица. — Разве не ясно было, что между ними все совершилось в этот вечер?"

> sing or shout. The music meanwhile runs over something strange, like beginnings which are not continued and do not get finished.[61]

Tolstoy displays his incomprehension gratuitously by using the word strange (*stranno*) four times in one short paragraph. He emphasizes the labor required to puzzle out the happenings on stage. As if guided all along by his incomprehension and the wish to understand, Tolstoy ends up re-narrating several acts of Wagner's opera. He condenses and discards elements of the opera as he sees fit, and punctuates the narrative with his own thoughts: "This god Wotan, standing in a stupid pose with a spear, thinks proper to recount what Mime must have known before, but what it is necessary to tell the audience. He does not tell it simply, but in the form of riddles which he orders himself to guess, staking his head (one does not know why) that he will guess right."[62] Tolstoy's bewilderment compels him to produce an alternative narrative. Rewritten by Tolstoy, the God Wotan, for example, does not strike a powerful pose but appears instead like a mugging jester. With his own example, Tolstoy demonstrates Feagin's observation that interpretation yields a product that stands beside the original work. Since Tolstoy's

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[61] *What is Art?*, 122. *Chto takoe iskusstvo?* in PSS, 30:133. "*странно* раскрывая рот, пел что-то, чего нельзя было понять. Музыка разных инструментов сопутствовала этим *странным* испускаемым им звукам. По либретто можно было узнать, что актер этот должен изображать могучего карлика, живущего в гроте и кующего меч для Зигфрида, которого он воспитал. Узнать, что это карлик, можно было по тому, что актер этот ходил, все время сгибая в коленях обтянутые трико ноги. Актер этот долго что-то, все так же *странно* открывая рот, не то пел, не то кричал. Музыка при этом перебирала что-то *странное*, какие-то начала чего-то, которые не продолжались и ничем не кончались." My italics.

[62] Ibid., 123. PSS, 30:134. "Тоже в парике, тоже в трико, этот бог Вотан, стоя в глупой позе с копьем, почему-то рассказывает все то, что Миме не может не знать, но что нужно рассказать зрителям. Рассказывает же он все это не просто, а в виде загадок, которые он велит себе загадывать, для чего-то прозакладывая свою голову за то, что он отгадает."

interpretation takes a concrete form—a narrative embedded in his own essay—it is a product that not only stands beside but actually rivals the original artwork. For the reader of *What is Art?*, Tolstoy's Siegfried eclipses Wagner's. And the way Victor Shklovsky later used Tolstoy's paraphrases of operatic scenes to elaborate the concept of defamiliarization provides further evidence of Tolstoy's success in subsuming these works into his own. According to Shklovsky Tolstoy's paraphrase of the opera does what all art should do: make familiar things appear strange and thus renew our perceptions of them. Shklovsky gives primacy to Tolstoy's paraphrase over the original opera, presenting Tolstoy's description of the opera as the *real* artwork and the opera itself as fodder for Tolstoy's creation.[63]

An artwork that baffles its spectator appears to elicit the kind of strong co-creative response that, on Tolstoy's view, interferes with our capacity to disregard our own objectives. It becomes an opportunity for the spectator to elaborate his own ideas, to pursue his own aims, and to exercise his own creative powers (cleverness, inventiveness, erudition etc.). The scene in which Siegfried converses with his foster-father Mime, for example, perplexes Tolstoy:

> The actor with the horn opens his mouth as unnaturally as the gnome, and long continues in a chanting voice to shout some words, and in a similar chant Mime (that is the gnome's name) answers something or other to him. The meaning of this conversation can only be discovered from the libretto; and it is that Siegfried

[63] Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 16.

> was brought up by the gnome, and therefore, for some reason, hates him and always wishes to kill him.[64]

Tolstoy again flaunts his confusion, describing the conversation as "some words"(*kakie-to slova*) shouted and "something or other" said in response (*chto-to otvechaet*). Again, he exhibits his effort to understand—he goes searching for answers in the libretto—and comes up with an "interpretation" that is actually a sly rewriting of Wagner's opera. Tolstoy cleverly inserts a logical connection into his re-narration of the opera: "Siegfried was brought up by the gnome, and *therefore*, for some reason, hates him and always wishes to kill him." Siegfried does not, of course, hate Mime because Mime brought him up; he hates Mime in spite of it. But with the addition of a "therefore" ("for this" in Russian, *za eto*) Tolstoy recasts Siegfried as a deranged son, and subtly asserts his own notion about the type of relationship that is possible between a child and his caretaker. Disregarding Wagner's characterization, Tolstoy insists on what seems to be his own position: only a lunatic would hate the one who brought him up. In other words, the perplexing elements of the opera lead Tolstoy back to his preconceptions. Or, at the very least, they provide a pretext for reasserting his ideas rather than attending to another's.

In contrast to "obscure" art, "simple" art allows the spectator to follow the associations and ideas generated by its author without spurring the kind of analytical process that might lead the spectator away from the original work. The simple artwork is

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[64] *What is Art?*, 122. *Chto takoe iskusstvo?* in PSS, 30:134. "Актер с рожком так же неестественно, как и карлик, раскрывает рот и долго кричит нараспев какие-то слова, и так же нараспев что-то отвечает ему Миме. Так зовут карлика. Смысл этого разговора, который можно узнать только по либретто, состоит в том, что Зигфрид был воспитан карликом и почему-то за это ненавидит карлика и все хочет убить его."

the kind of work Tolstoy deems capable of forestalling generative activity. The less confounding the artwork, the more likely it is to inspire the spectator to attend to something other than himself, thus reminding him of his coexistence with other people. The confusing artwork might indeed be art (i.e., it compels the spectator to attend to *it*, and not merely to his material demands) but it is bad art because it does not produce the decentered state that is definitive of aesthetic experience for Tolstoy. It is therefore not just in the spirit of egalitarianism that Tolstoy demands simplicity in art. Tolstoy does criticize poets like Mallarmé for their treatment of subject matter only relevant to the minority, or, as he puts it, the treatment of "exclusive feelings pertaining only to the class of the idle rich."[65] Nevertheless, he does not object to such elite art solely or even primarily because it fails to address the subjects that the laboring majority would consider important. In fact, throughout his writing on art he stresses that the laboring people have no need for the elite artist: "The people continue to satisfy their own needs, keeping to the old [art], creating the unrefined artworks necessary for them, and occasionally assimilating the best, most accessible art of the upper classes, while this upper class art is still not too distant from the people."[66] The people hardly suffer from the exclusiveness of Mallarmé's poetry, he admits. And if Tolstoy's objections to obscure artworks had to do primarily with their disregard for the issues of importance to the majority, it would

[65] *What is Art?*, 157. PSS, 30:164. "чувства исключительные, присущие только одному сословию богатых праздных людей..."

[66] "O tom, chto nazyvayut iskusstvom" in PSS, 30: 259. My translation. "Народ продолжает удовлетворять сам своим требованиям, держась старого, создавая необходимые ему грубые произведения искусств и изредка принимая лучшие, доступнейшие произведения высших классов, пока еще они не слишком отдалились от него."

make more sense to call these artworks irrelevant or insignificant rather than "bad." By the time he writes *What is Art?*, however, Tolstoy does refer to the creations of artists like Mallarmé as "bad." The reason for this is that these artworks fail for Tolstoy not only on social but also on aesthetic grounds. Their "obscurity" means that they fail to facilitate decentering. Tolstoy chastises Mallarmé and other like-minded poets for thinking "that the charm of poetry lies in our having to guess its meaning—that in poetry there should always be a puzzle."[67] Tolstoy claims that for Mallarmé and others "obscurity [is] elevated into a dogma."[68] These obscure artists, on Tolstoy's view, fail to produce aesthetic enjoyment.

There is a further feature of an artwork that can inhibit the kind of attention Tolstoy considers essential to aesthetic response. Presenting a spectator with something he finds morally objectionable is yet another way to inspire him to leave the original artwork behind. In his essay "On Shakespeare and on Drama," Tolstoy gives Shakespeare's *King Lear* the same treatment he gave parts of Wagner's opera. This time, however, he refashions and subsumes the entire work in his own text. As with Wagner, Tolstoy claims to be responding to the inaccessibility of the work. But in the case of Shakespeare it appears to be revulsion rather than incomprehension that incites Tolstoy to generate his rival work.

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[67] *What is Art?*, 78. *Chto takoe iskusstvo?* in PSS, 30:91. "поэт Малларме прямо говорит, что прелесть стихотворения состоит в том, чтобы угадывать его смысл, что в поэзии должна быть всегда загадка."

[68] *What is Art?,* 79. PSS, 30: 92. "темнота возведена в догмат"

Tolstoy remarks that certain passages of King Lear elicit an "an unpleasant feeling, similar to shame, the usual effect of unsuccessful witticisms."[69] He mentions this shame in connection with actual jokes (the jester's) and with Lear's monologue following Cordelia's death. Tolstoy's "shame as at unsuccessful witticisms," speaks to a spectatorial response more complicated than mere incomprehension. Tolstoy's keen observation regarding his own response is further illuminated by philosopher Ted Cohen's comparison between jokes and other types of figurative language, especially metaphor. Cohen argues that the listener's effort to grasp a joke or a metaphor—even just to recognize it *as* a joke or *as* a metaphor—already means an assent to a certain intimacy with the author: "When the device is a hostile metaphor or a cruel joke requiring much background and effort to understand, it is all the more painful because the victim had been made a complicitor in his own demise." "Do not, therefore, suppose," Cohen cautions, "that jokes are always for shared amusement, or metaphors always for communal insight."[70] The feeling Tolstoy calls shame, which he recognized in our response to unsuccessful jokes, is perhaps the very pain that Cohen refers to as well; it is the pain of having participated in something we later find offensive. The fact that this shame is part of Tolstoy's response to Lear suggests that Shakespeare has not merely

[69] Leo Tolstoy, *Tolstoy on Shakespeare: A critical essay on Shakespeare*, trans. V. Tchertkoff (New York & London: Funk & Wagnalls Compay, 1906), The Project Gutenberg EBook of Tolstoy on Shakespeare, accessed December 8, 2014, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/27726/27726-h/27726-h.htm. *O Shekspire i o drame* in PSS, 35: 235. "становится стыдно, как от неудачных острот."

[70] Ted Cohen, "Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy," *Critical Inquiry* 5, no. 1 (1978): 12.

confused his reader. Instead, he has made Tolstoy take on a perspective or consider an association that Tolstoy finds offensive and abhorrent and that he wishes to disavow.

Tolstoy's shame attests to Shakespeare's success in compelling his reader to break with his usual way of seeing and to consider a radically different configuration of ideas. But Shakespeare appears to push Tolstoy too far. Tolstoy refuses to share in a perspective he finds not just implausible but objectionable:

> The reader, or spectator, cannot conceive that a King, however old and stupid he may be, could believe the words of the vicious daughters, with whom he had passed his whole life, and not believe his favorite daughter, but curse and banish her; and therefore the spectator, or reader, cannot share the feelings of the persons participating in this unnatural scene (*neestestvennoy stsene*).[71]

Tolstoy's use of the word "unnatural" as opposed to simply "implausible" with reference to Lear hints at a moral rebuke. No father could treat his loving daughter the way Lear treats Cordelia. Tolstoy disputes Shakespeare's capacity to affect his readers by noting their refusal to participate in his fictions. He echoes Hume's observation that "where a man is confident of the rectitude of that moral standard by which he judges, he is justly jealous of it, and will not pervert the sentiments of his heart for a moment, in complaisance to any writer whatsoever."[72] Tolstoy not only refuses to linger in

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[71] *Tolstoy on Shakespeare*. *O Shekspire i o drame* in PSS, 35: 237. "читатель или зритель не может верить тому, чтобы король, как бы стар и глуп он ни был, мог поверить словам злых дочерей, с которыми он прожил всю их жизнь, и не поверить любимой дочери, а проклясть и прогнать ее; и потому зритель или читатель не может и разделять чувства лиц, участвующих в этой неестественной сцене."

[72] David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," in *The Philosophical Works of David Hume* vol. 1, eds. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose, reprint of the new edition London 1882 (Darmstadt: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1964), 283.

consideration of Shakespeare's compositions, he aims to refute them in his own re-narration of the tragedy.

Tolstoy rewrites the entirety of *King Lear*, suggesting alternative motives for Shakespeare's characters, elaborating on certain events and eliminating others in accordance with his own sense of their plausibility and significance. Tolstoy is most radical in his rewriting of Lear's monologues. These monologues, so crucial to Shakespeare's play, are condensed to the point of absurdity:

> [Lear] for some reason either invokes "blasts and fogs" upon the head of his daughter, or desires his curse to "pierce every sense about her," or else appealing to his own eyes, says that should they weep, he will pluck them out and "cast them with the waters that they lose to temper clay." And so on.[73]

Tolstoy makes it impossible for his reader to consider the constellation of images and associations originally produced by Shakespeare. These become obscured by Tolstoy's own reconfiguration of Lear's words. This is not a passive return from a state of confusion to familiar ideas. It is a purposeful rejection of a perspective momentarily adopted. Tolstoy abandons the spectatorial role of the one who "receives" impressions and becomes the one who "produces" them. Not all readers are like Tolstoy, of course, and few would attempt to rewrite Shakespeare the way he does. Throughout the essay, however, Tolstoy does suggest that his response is not exceptional but paradigmatic. We can therefore conclude that, on his view, the obscure artwork generally prompts an

[73] Ibid. *O Shekspire i o drame* in PSS, 35: 223. "он призывает почему-то туманы и бури на голову дочери, то желает, чтобы проклятия пронзили все ее чувства, то обращается к своим глазам и говорит, что если они будут плакать, то он вырвет их, с тем чтобы они солеными слезами пропитали глину, и т. п." I added "for some reason" to the translation to be more faithful to the Russian text.

inadvertent act of creative rivalry while the morally objectionable artwork spurs willful rivalry.

Art that arouses moral objection, just like art that arouses bewilderment, compels the spectator to look past the artwork or even to refute it. In the latter case, the spectator cannot attend to the design wrought by the author; in the former, he will not attend to it. Both the obscure and the morally objectionable artwork inspire him to rivalry. And a rival creative act means that the original work is used as material for the spectator's own creation, which reflects his own desires, ideas, and preoccupations. A "good" artwork, in Tolstoy's scheme, will thwart this generative activity by avoiding content and form that would inspire the spectator's moral revulsion or baffle his understanding. Tolstoy demands that an artist produce not only works that would be accessible to all but also ones that "are not repugnant to Christianity and are natural to everyone without exception." Christianity, as Tolstoy uses it here, designates a community that embraces all people: "Christian art is only such as tends to unite all without exception."[74] Therefore, when Tolstoy says that good art is not repugnant to Christianity he means that good art will not inspire moral revulsion in anyone at all.

Tolstoy's demand for an artwork that thwarts generative activity—one that prevents the spectator from treating it as a means to some further purpose—resonates with the Kantian distinction between the beautiful and the good. A judgment of goodness

[74] *What is Art?*, 149. *Chto takoe iskusstvo?* in PSS 30:157. "Христианское искусство есть только то, которое соединяет всех людей без исключения — или тем, что вызывает в людях сознание одинаковости их положения по отношению к Богу и ближнему, или тем, что вызывает в людях одно и то же чувство, хотя и самое простое, но не противное христианству и свойственное всем без исключения людям."

presupposes a purpose by which the object is measured, according to Kant. The good differs from the agreeable in that our judgment of goodness is based on concepts; it is not merely subjective. But, as Kant explains, both the agreeable and the good have to do with our own interests, whether these interests are merely the "low" animal interests of the senses or the "highest interest" that is the moral good.[75] When we make a judgment of beauty, however, we do not regard the object in terms of any particular purpose, whether sensuous or rational. Tolstoy's ideal artwork is similar to Kant's "beautiful" object in that it does not answer to the spectator's sensuous interests or become a means by which the spectator achieves the aims he sets for himself. While vociferously denouncing the Western notion of "beauty," Tolstoy, with his imperative for art to produce a self-conscious and non-generative response, actually aims to preserve a realm of experience that Kant also wished to preserve with the notion of "disinterested" pleasure, a realm in which we attend to something without consideration for our individual desires. Tolstoy's prescriptions for the ideal artwork—the need for sincerity, universal accessibility, unimpeachable moral content—are instructions for an artist who wishes to cultivate what Kant called disinterested pleasure.

Engaging the World

Tolstoy's aesthetic theory is not typically linked with the Kantian notion of disinterest. In part, this is because Tolstoy set his own philosophy against the philosophy of art for art's sake, which is more readily identified with the disinterested gaze. What

[75] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 3-7, 47-56.

Tolstoy disputed, however, was not disinterested perception—the singular attentive attitude that Kant observes in encounters with beauty—but the thought that through disinterested perception we can transcend our mundane lives. He rejected the idea that disinterested pleasure in art facilitates our detachment, our non-participation in the phenomenal world. Tolstoy's aesthetics show that our ability and desire to attend to an artwork without reference to our own appetites or preconceived objectives enables us, on the contrary, to engage with others. Our aesthetic appreciation allows us to partake in a human community.

Like Kant, Tolstoy suggests that aesthetic appreciation plays a role in preparing a spectator for moral action, for treating others as ends in themselves and not only as the means to one's own satisfaction. Kant believed that our delight in the beautiful demonstrates as well as bolsters our capacity for moral action, which requires a disregard for our particular interests. The freedom from these interests that we experience in our aesthetic delight compels us to seek an analogous freedom by way of moral action, he argued.[76] For Tolstoy, aesthetic experience may be even more significant to our moral conduct than it is for Kant. Kant contended that our reason could guide us to an acknowledgement of the autonomy of others and to the imperative to treat others as ends. Tolstoy appears to have been more skeptical about our capacity to consistently register the presence of fellow autonomous beings, let alone to act in a way that would acknowledge their autonomy. In Tolstoy's scheme, aesthetic appreciation serves as a singular and temporary cure for the egoistic state in which we tend to persist. Aesthetic

[76] Paul Guyer, "Interest, Nature, and Art: A Problem in Kant's Aesthetics," 587.

appreciation allows us a momentary flash of recognition that we do indeed exist in a community of beings like ourselves.

In his final novel, *Hadji Murat*, Tolstoy explicitly links aesthetic appreciation with the ability to recognize the humanity of others. He distinguishes his protagonist (Hadji Murat) from the two other leaders in the novel (Tsar Nicholas I and Imam Shamil) in all the ways one might expect him to single out a true military hero: Hadji Murat is brave, judicious, kind to his men. In addition to these attributes, which are perhaps typical of a heroic personage, Tolstoy also, and more unusually, endows his hero with a love of art. Hadji Murat always delights in his friend Khanefi's songs and says that what he liked most about Tiflis was the city's theater. In contrast, neither Tsar Nicholas nor Imam Shamil partakes in aesthetic appreciation; neither, therefore, experiences the freedom of disregarding his own aims and objectives. The Tsar goes to the ballet but, far from engaging in aesthetic appreciation, he merely appeases his sensual appetites by seducing a ballerina with gifts. And Shamil eschews art altogether. He does not ornament his dress or join his men in song because he wishes to impress his people with his austerity, to show them that he is a stern and powerful leader. Shamil seeks to "produce on the people just the impression and influence he desired and knew how to produce."[77] Although the Tsar's sensuous indulgence appears opposed to the Imam's asceticism, their behavior is in fact rooted in a similar wish for gratification. Both leaders pursue the satisfaction of their own appetites, and both desire sex as well as power. But whereas Nicholas is

[77] *Hadji Murat*, 635. *Khadzhi Murat* in PSS, 35: 86. "Вообще на имаме не было ничего блестящего, золотого или серебряного, и высокая, прямая, могучая фигура его, в одежде без украшений, окруженная мюридами с золотыми и серебряными украшениями на одежде и оружии, производила то самое впечатление величия, которое он желал и умел производить в народе."

primarily concerned with his appetite for sex, Shamil is primarily concerned with his appetite for power. He abstains from sensuous indulgence to gratify himself in a different way.

Tolstoy contrasts the three leaders in the novel in three scenes of deliberation. Notably, only Hadji Murat's deliberation involves aesthetic appreciation, and only he pursues an action that does not make others into instruments for his own satisfaction. The Tsar and the Imam listen exclusively to their inner voices in their respective scenes of decision-making. They attend only to what is within, concerning themselves entirely with their individual aims. The Tsar has a peculiar habit of calming himself by unthinkingly repeating words that float up in his mind: "A feeling of sadness and vexation came over him and with a dark frown he again began to whisper the first words that came into his head."[78] Nicholas hears this soothing inner voice once again when he considers how to punish a Polish student who in a fit of desperation attacked his professor: "an inner voice had told him what to do. He was now thinking how most fully to satisfy the feeling of hatred against the Poles which this incident had stirred in him, and the inner voice suggested the following decision."[79] Nicholas orders that the student run a gauntlet so many times that he is sure to die. The Tsar's inner voice articulates his habitual prejudices and his established objective to satisfy his inclinations, whatever they might

[78] Ibid., 618. PSS, 35: 69. "И досадное и грустное чувство охватило его. Он мрачно нахмурился и опять стал шептать первые попавшиеся слова."

[79] Ibid., 621. PSS, 35: 74. "как бы какой-то внутренний голос говорил ему, что нужно сделать. Он думал теперь о том, как бы полнее удовлетворить тому чувству злобы к полякам, которое в нем расшевелилось историей этого студента, и внутренний голос подсказал ему следующее решение."

be. In this case, the Tsar's inclination is to gratify his racial hatred and appetite for violence. Without regard for the student's suffering, Nicholas decides on a punishment that the narrator calls a "superfluous cruelty" (*izlishnyaya zhestokost'*). In a parallel scene of deliberation, Imam Shamil also sits in silence and listens to his inner voice. His men believe that Shamil "was listening to the voice of the Prophet, who spoke to him and told him what to do."[80] In fact, Shamil's decision after this silent rumination echoes what he had noted to himself previously, namely that he should threaten violence against Hadji Murat's son in order to lure back the father. Shamil treats Hadji Murat's son as a tool for pursuing his military objectives. Under the direction of their inner voices, Shamil and Nicholas act cruelly. The Imam and the Tsar are both afflicted with the kind of egoism that also plagues Pozdnyshev; they are blind to the humanity of others and see other people only as the means to their own aims. Unlike Pozdnyshev, however, they never experience the salutary effect of art.

Hadji Murat, in contrast, does not hear an inner voice during his scene of deliberation. Instead, as he contemplates his family's rescue, he attends to three artworks. He first considers a Tavlinian fable about a falcon that returns home after living with humans who have dressed him in silver bells. The other mountain falcons, noticing the bells, peck the returning bird to death. "And they would peck me to death the same way,"[81] Hadji Murat thinks of Shamil's forces. The Tsar and the Imam act quickly. Hadji Murat, on the other hand, continues to contemplate his course of action throughout the

[80] Ibid., 638. PSS, 35: 89. "Советники знали, что это значило то, что он слушает теперь говорящий ему голос пророка, указывающий то, что должно быть сделано."

[81] Ibid., 652. PSS, 35: 102. "«Так заклюют и меня», — думал Хаджи-Мурат."

night. In the morning he encounters a second artwork; he hears his friend Khanefi's song about a dzhigit named Hamzad who fights to the death surrounded by Russian forces. The song disrupts Hadji Murat's routines. He listens to the song with such rapt attention that he neglects his prayer ritual, and in his distracted state he spills the water for his ablutions. These two aesthetic events prepare Hadji Murat to depart from his longstanding imperative to ensure his own survival. The commander, famous for evading death, decides on a mission that will almost certainly result in his demise. Hadji Murat then recalls his mother's song (a third artwork), which tells of her choice to bring violence on herself in order to spare her son from harm, and he decides to follow her example. Hadji Murat's self-sacrifice stands in stark opposition to the Tsar's and the Imam's efforts to please themselves even at the cost of harming others.

Hadji Murat's decision is further differentiated from those of Nicholas and Shamil in that it responds to the demands of his situation. The Tsar and the Imam disregard the specific circumstances in which they act. Nicholas pays no attention to the mitigating details of the crime he punishes. Shamil is blind to the way Hadji Murat's son admires him and thus fails to see an opportunity for reconciliation with Hadji Murat. These two leaders hew to their accustomed ways of thinking and acting no matter what specific challenges and opportunities arise before them. Hadji Murat, on the other hand, knows to attend to the contingencies of his environment. His decision to effectively destroy himself is perhaps the most adequate response to his new situation between two opposing forces that will not allow him to live. The impossibility of his position between the Russians and Shamil, and the only route remaining for him, are illuminated for Hadji Murat by the three artworks he attends to, the first about death at the hands of one's own people, the

second about death at the hands of the Russians, and the third about self-sacrifice. Hadji Murat's decision brings violence on his men and on those who wish to stop their rescue mission. But the violence entailed by this decision is not equivalent to the unnecessary violence perpetuated by Nicholas and Shamil. Hadji Murat does not act out of habitual cruelty or to further selfish pursuits. His violent actions appear unavoidable in a way that those of the other two leaders do not. He is attacked and defends himself, engaging in a kind of violence that Tolstoy's writer-narrator considers inherent, unfortunately, in man's struggle to survive.[82]

Although aesthetic appreciation is primarily associated with a kind of moral capacity for Tolstoy, in *Hadji Murat* he also hints at a certain biological advantage it might confer. The biological benefits of aesthetic appreciation are significant in Feagin's account. Arguing for the rationality of our desire to appreciate, Feagin suggests that our capacity for this type of desire—a desire to *do* that is not accompanied by mental representations of particular results—might help us adapt to unfamiliar environments. Routines can become impediments to reacting appropriately in unfamiliar circumstances, and in order to depart from our familiar behaviors and orient ourselves in new situations we must be able to act without knowing exactly what our action will look like or what its outcome will be. Our capacity for a desire that has no preconceived objective might therefore constitute an evolutionary advantage:

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[82] It could be argued that since Hadji Murat does not abstain from violence he cannot be the standard-bearer of morality in Tolstoy's novel. Donna Orwin makes this point when she contrasts Hadji Murat with the writer-narrator who, she argues, articulates the higher moral standard in Tolstoy's novel. But even Orwin agrees that the rescue attempt is an example of Hadji Murat's capacity for moral action, his ability to "overcome self-love" and "sacrifice himself for others." Donna Tussing Orwin, "Nature and the Narrator in Hadji Murat," *Russian Literature* 28 (1990): 139, 135.

> Ignoring preconceived goals and established ideas can be a useful method for gathering information when one has little relevant knowledge to begin with. Randomizing devices act as a kind of generator of activity when no specific object attracts or repels someone and in the absence of goals or purposes to guide behavior in a *well-informed* way, so that one does not single-mindedly scurry down the road in the wrong direction. Thus, it may be a good design feature of an organism to have the capacity to act out of desires to do without having reasons for doing the specific things one does when acting out of those desires (apart from the fact that one desires to do them).[83]

Feagin further suggests that since this type of desire to do is part of our experience of aesthetic appreciation, aesthetic appreciation can be regarded as an activity that enhances our capacity to be responsive to unfamiliar circumstances. Feagin's account ultimately grounds the purpose of aesthetic appreciation in biology. The fact that Hadji Murat stands apart from the other two leaders both in his ability to appreciate art and in his responsiveness to his environment suggests that Tolstoy might be, to some extent, partial to a perspective like Feagin's. As Emerson has observed, life, for Tolstoy, entails "processing an idea or a situation at the proper time to guarantee the survival of the organism."[84] In *Hadji Murat*, aesthetic appreciation appears to assist the hero in this timely processing.[85]

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[83] Feagin, 57.

[84] Caryl Emerson, "The Tolstoy Connection in Bakhtin," 77.

[85] The narrative frame of the novel further underscores Tolstoy's characterization of Hadji Murat in terms of biology and natural instincts. The narrator remembers the story of Hadji Murat when he sees in a ploughed field a solitary thistle clinging to life. The "energy and life force" (*energiya i sila zhizni*) of the flower reminds the narrator of Hadji Murat. *Hadji Murat*, 550. *Khadzhi Murat* in PSS, 35: 5.

For Tolstoy, the final idea that must be grasped at the right moment is the idea of death. And the same agility that had previously saved Hadji Murat's life by allowing him to navigate the uncertain and changing circumstances of war is finally required to confront the most unfamiliar change of all, the transition from life to death. Hadji Murat does not get far into the mountains before realizing that Russian militiamen surround him. He thinks of Khanefi's song and decides to "fight like Hamzad," that is, to fight to his death.[86] The recollection of this song appears to ready Hadji Murat to take his resolute final steps toward death. Wounded and already in the process of dying, he moves toward his attackers: "everything seemed so insignificant in comparison with what was beginning, or had already begun, within him. Yet his strong body continued the thing that he had commenced."[87] In his movement toward death Hadji Murat is acting on a desire to do without a sense of what the doing will be like or what the end result of his action will be. In this sense, the desire that compels him to cross the border between life and death is not unlike the desire that compels aesthetic appreciation. It is a desire to be responsive, to do whatever might be required without advanced knowledge of the shape one's actions will take. As in a moment of aesthetic appreciation, the individual is not moved by his own objectives but rather is merely receptive to something external.

In *Hadji Murat*, the act of appreciation and the act of dying are represented side by side by way of Hamzad's song. Their structural analogy, however, is already evident

[86] Ibid., 664. PSS, 35: 114. "«Что ж, будем биться, как Гамзат»,— подумал Хаджи-Мурат."

[87] Ibid., 667. PSS, 35: 117. "Все это казалось так ничтожно в сравнении с тем, что начиналось и уже началось для него. А между тем его сильное тело продолжало делать начатое."

in a much earlier work, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. Up until his final moments, Tolstoy's eponymous hero struggles to achieve a state of readiness to act in the absence of a pre-formulated objective or course of action. Ivan Ilych had always responded to his life's circumstances according to social customs, which became his routines. Now, he faces an experience that has no precedent and calls for a fundamentally new way of thinking and acting. He lacks the responsiveness of Hadji Murat, just as he lacks Hadji Murat's capacity for aesthetic appreciation. Ivan Ilych analyzes his life one way and then another, but he cannot escape the routines of his own mind, which suggests responses inadequate to his circumstances. " 'Maybe I did not live as I ought to have done,' it suddenly occurred to him, 'But how could that be, when I did everything properly?' he replied."[88] Whether he confirms or condemns his choices, Ivan Ilych, like Nicholas and Shamil, carries on a conversation only with himself and therefore returns to familiar patterns of thought. It is not until he is very near the moment of death that Ivan Ilych achieves the sort of responsive state that will allow him to act without knowing what exactly this action will entail. "Besides, why speak? I must act," he thinks to himself. His action consists first in divesting himself of his established ways of relating to his family, to his pain, and finally to the fact of death. The rest of his activity is not within the purview of the reader or the author. We know, however, that Ivan Ilych's final actions—like those of Hadji Murat—are not a response to his own voice, which is really just the articulation of preconceptions. He allows himself instead to be guided by something (or someone) else: "It is finished! said someone near him. He heard these words and repeated them in his

[88] *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, 295. *Smert' Ivana Il'icha* in PSS, 26: 107. "«Может быть, я жил не так, как должно?» — приходило ему вдруг в голову. «Но как же не так, когда я делал все как следует?» — говорил он себе."

soul. 'Death is finished,' he said to himself. 'It is no more!' "[89] Ivan Ilych is able to conceive of death—the ultimate achievement in Tolstoy's fictional universe. Therefore, while Tolstoy might share Feagin's impulse to connect aesthetic appreciation to the successful survival of the organism, he does not see it as merely one of many adaptive tools. Aesthetic appreciation is the instrument for navigating what to Tolstoy appeared to be the two most unfathomable realms of our lived experience, namely the space between oneself and another, and the space between life and death.

The aesthetic encounters depicted in Tolstoy's fiction do not seem to accomplish what he claimed art could accomplish in his essays; these encounters do not enable anyone to experience the experience of another. Tolstoy does not suggest that Pozdnyshev, for example, arrives at any kind of definitive understanding of Beethoven's mental condition. Nor does he suggest that Pozdnyshev truly grasps his wife's mental state when she performs the sonata. Vronsky and Levin, responding to Mikhaylov's portrait, feel as though they share the perspective of the artist, but it is uncertain whether or not this feeling is only an illusion. Hadji Murat does not even claim that aesthetic appreciation allows him to experience the mental states of others. An artwork that allows a spectator to inhabit a consciousness other than his own remains a utopian vision, one that appears only in Tolstoy's essays. Nonetheless, the artworks Tolstoy endorses in his fiction accomplish a great deal by inspiring appreciation, the kind of weak co-creative activity that he advocates in his writing on art. An artwork that compels a spectator's

[89] Ibid., 302. PSS, 26: 113. "«Впрочем, зачем же говорить, надо сделать», — подумал он." "— Кончено! — сказал кто-то над ним.
Он услыхал эти слова и повторил их в своей душе. «Кончена смерть, — сказал он себе. — Ее нет больше»."

conscious engagement and does not move him to a creative endeavor of his own teaches the spectator what it feels like to redirect his attention away from his own aims and appetites. The freedom from these aims and appetites, in turn, allows him to become attentive to his environment and to the presence of other people. A spectator might not know another's mental condition, but he will know, at least, that this other person is there. Aesthetic appreciation thus provides the spectator with an opportunity to engage with (not escape from) the world.

There is a rich scholarly tradition examining Tolstoy's thought on the role of art in fostering human connections and assisting moral action. Richard Gustafson compares the aesthetic moment in Tolstoy to an "ecstatic prayer." But for Tolstoy art is even better than that, he suggests, "the ecstatic moment of love for all is a solitary event. The infectious experience of art is communal."[90] Emerson has understood the function of art in Tolstoy as something that "destroys separation—but emphasizes individuality. What is more, infection by art is not some irreversible chemical fusion that takes place between two bodies once and for all. People are unified (and love is released) in exceptional moments."[91] She sees the generation of love as a key component of Tolstoy's artistic imperative. Rimvydas Silbajoris places even more stress on the relationship between Tolstoy's art and his ethics. He sees no distinction between the author's aesthetic and moral searching, suggesting that Tolstoy "[works] out a theory of art based on moral values," and that "For Tolstoy, the specific and essential quality of art is that it is a universal mode of sustaining and enhancing the human manner of our being, a natural

[90] Gustafson, 372.

[91] Emerson, "Tolstoy's Aesthetics," 79, 245.

function of the body and the key to our relationship with God."[92] It is undeniable that the experience of art has moral implications for Tolstoy, but I see *What is Art?* as an effort to tackle specifically aesthetic and artistic problems first. My contribution here has been to examine the particular mechanism—an artwork that inspires appreciation, but not more art—that Tolstoy believes to be capable of invariably producing a decentering effect on the spectator and thereby promoting aesthetic delight. The spectator's momentary sense of coexistence with others, in turn, primes him for moral action.

The Artist as Martyr

Kant and Tolstoy share the thought that we can attend to an artist's creation—his ideas, images, and associations—only when we are not consumed by our own appetites and objectives. This notion also appears to inform contemporary accounts like Feagin's. These three very different works on aesthetics, which span three centuries, converge around the idea that central to aesthetic appreciation is a kind of weak co-creative activity on the part of the spectator. Tolstoy is therefore not alone in suspecting that the type of spectatorial activity that would reflect the spectator's own ideas and aims might actually interfere with aesthetic appreciation. He worries that even strong acts of co-creation (i.e., interpretive activity) will detract from the cognitive and emotional benefits of aesthetic appreciation, which include an enhanced capacity for moral action and a greater responsiveness to our environment. Although Kant and Feagin recognize the benefits of appreciation, they would not restrict our encounters with art to those that produce

[92] Silbajoris, 268.

aesthetic appreciation only. Feagin sees aesthetic appreciation as merely one aspect of our encounters with art. Kant acknowledges that art almost never prompts complete disregard for our particular interests. Our responses to art are almost always "mixed" in that they involve not only aesthetic delight but also agreeable pleasures and assessments of the goodness of the work for some purpose of our own. Moreover, these philosophers make no claims about when and how we might be compelled to partake in aesthetic appreciation. As long as beauty and art appear in the world, spectators will find occasions for aesthetic appreciation. Theirs are not the concerns of an artist who wishes to guarantee that his works are set apart from other sources of pleasure—an artist who wishes to design a work that would invariably produce aesthetic delight.

The vision elaborated in Tolstoy's essays is of an artwork that would eliminate the uncertainty and potential for disappointment in our encounters with art. Alexander Nehamas has argued that beauty is a "promise of happiness." When we call an artwork or a person beautiful we are not issuing a final judgment but rather expressing a kind of faith that our encounter with the beautiful will better our life in some way that we cannot clearly conceive at the moment. But we could always be wrong. "To think of beauty as only a promise of happiness is to be willing to live with ineradicable uncertainty," Nehamas suggests.[93] Tolstoy, on the other hand, dreams of an artwork that would ensure the artist's endeavor is never a false promise, and the audience's faith is never misplaced. He imagines an artwork that could unfailingly compel weak co-creative activity, and thus, on his view, guarantee a properly aesthetic response. Tolstoy's essays and late fiction model what he believes is essential to a specifically aesthetic enjoyment, a

[93] Alexander Nehamas, 130.

freedom from our preoccupation with our own aims. Although Tolstoy can show us what the ideal artwork would look like and how it would work—as he does in *Hadji Murat* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*—he cannot, of course, actually engineer an artwork that always inspires self-conscious engagement and never prompts the spectator to create something of his own. His ideal artwork remains a blueprint. It is a utopian vision that shares something with the paper architecture of the avant-garde artists who would inherit some of his aesthetic ideas.[94]

Finally, it must be acknowledged that the certain aesthetic delight promised by Tolstoy's ideal artwork comes at a heavy price for the spectator and for the artist. Tolstoy's ideal artwork perhaps does warrant the Bakhtinian charge of "monologism." It proposes a non-dialogic structure in which one actor speaks and the other listens. The artist and appreciator do, in a sense, relate to one another as a teacher and pupil, with the spectator privileging the notions of the artist above his own.[95] To Bakhtin, this kind of engagement with another person appears rather anemic. He further criticizes the teacher-pupil hierarchical structure because he believes that it allows an author to claim possession of a "truth" beyond what is accessible to the spectator, and thus to endow himself with authority over the spectator. Despite the asymmetry of Tolstoy's ideal artwork, however, it is unclear who in the end has the advantage, the spectator or the author. The spectator does sacrifice his capacity to exercise his own creative powers, and, as Pozdnyshev's example illustrates, this sacrifice can be painful. But the spectator

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[94] Nina Gourianova traces the influence of Tolstoy's aesthetics on Soviet avant-garde artists. See: Nina Gourianova, *The Aesthetics of Anarchy: Art and Ideology in the Early Russian Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

[95] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 81.

benefits from this sacrifice, too, as Tolstoy sees it. To Tolstoy, the experience of feeling one's own ideas recede before another's is rare. More than that, it is a kind of gift bestowed by the artist. The spectator gets to experience the decentering effect that reveals to him a truth that is too easy to forget: that we are not alone, that we are surrounded by other beings like ourselves. The artist, on the other hand, remains oriented toward himself, toward his own thoughts, desires, and objectives. The truth revealed to the spectator is not accessible to the artist in his role as artist; he remains trapped, as it were, in his own mind. Thus, for the duration of his aesthetic experience, the spectator possesses a truth greater and more significant than anything the author knows and offers explicitly in his work. Bakhtin is correct to suggest that the hierarchical structure is not equally rewarding for both sides. But it seems that in this exchange the author might be the loser—or, as Tolstoy may have thought of it, the martyr.

Tolstoy wished to rescue the artist from uncertainty regarding the value of his work, to teach him to create an artwork that would always inspire aesthetic delight, an experience distinct from the satisfaction of one's sensuous or rational objectives. But, paradoxically, Tolstoy's efforts devastate the artist. Tolstoy's specific prescriptions for an artwork that would guarantee aesthetic delight ravage the artist's toolkit: his work must remain formally uncomplicated and morally unobjectionable. Late in his life, Tolstoy would devote himself to creating this type of simple artwork.

Nabokov, as I will argue in the following chapters, saw some of the same aesthetic problem that Tolstoy had articulated, and he, too, sought to create an artwork that would be sure to elicit an aesthetic response. He would not, however, abide by the martyrdom of the artist.

Chapter Three

Engineering Genius: Nabokov and the Problem of Entertaining Too Much

Considering Vladimir Nabokov's reverence for Leo Tolstoy's work, his engagement with Tolstoy's aesthetic ideas remains understudied—perhaps because the two authors seem to stand at opposite aesthetic extremes.[1] When we examine their treatment of particular aesthetic problems, however, it becomes evident that Tolstoy and Nabokov were largely in agreement in their aesthetic philosophies. They saw the same problems and sought to produce similar effects. In particular, Tolstoy and Nabokov had a similar notion of what characterizes aesthetic pleasure. Both believed that aesthetic pleasure requires a feeling of freedom from the dual constraints of appetites and rational objectives. They adhered to the Kantian view that an artist produces aesthetic pleasure only when his work resists, first, the reader's impulse to consume the artwork unreflectively (to attend only to the way it gratifies him) and, second, the reader's inclination to turn the artwork into fodder for his own intellectual and creative endeavors (to attend only to how it might be useful.) Both authors sought to grant the reader

[1] Twenty years ago, John Burt Foster observed: "Research on Nabokov's connections with Tolstoy has been relatively sparse despite his strong expressions of admiration." John Burt Foster, "Nabokov and Tolstoy," in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, ed. Vladimir Alexandrov (New York: Routledge, 1995), 519. See also: John Burt Foster Jr, *Nabokov's Art of Memory and European Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). Scholars have gone some way toward addressing this insufficiency in the last two decades, but few have explicitly treated together the two authors' aesthetic philosophies and prescriptions for artists and readers. To my knowledge, Eric Naiman is the only scholar to address this topic directly, in "When Nabokov Writes Badly: Aesthetics and Morality in *Laughter in the Dark*," *The Russian Review* 73 (October 2014): 550-70.

freedom from his preoccupations. Their disagreement concerned *how* an artist grants this freedom, and how much freedom is possible at all.

Tolstoy and Nabokov were each convinced that if our responses to an artwork are governed only by our biological demands or prior concepts, we are not appreciating freely, and our appreciation cannot be properly called aesthetic. But an artwork is always produced according to certain concepts and with certain interests in mind. The circumstances of its production thus seem to place constraints on our responses. How then can we appreciate freely? This is a paradox that Kant solves with the concept of genius. Genius, for Kant, is a gift of nature that lets the artist produce something irreducible to the aims and concepts that guided its making.[2] Kant suggests that only an artwork whose maker is unconstrained by any rule or interest in the making of it—even unconstrained by his own intentions for it! —will compel our free appreciation and thereby elicit aesthetic pleasure. The work somehow has to surpass the artist's own design for it. The genius artwork can thereby inspire the mind's free play, and the spectator can experience a feeling of freedom in response to it.

Kant's notion of "genius" as a gift of nature might resolve this paradox for the philosopher or the critic. But what does it mean for a literary artist like Nabokov who wants to actually *make* an artwork of genius? In this chapter, I will examine the paradox of the artwork that outruns its own intentions in Nabokov's early novel *Kamera Obskura* (1932) and its English translation *Laughter in the Dark* (1938) to illuminate the

[2] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 46 174-176.

similarities between Tolstoy and Nabokov's aesthetic concerns and the differences in the ways they address them.[3]

Kamera Obskura/ Laughter in the Dark borrows both its subject matter and its structure from the Hollywood film. The plot is simple. A wealthy married man and distinguished art critic, Bruno Krechmar, becomes fascinated with a vulgar, young woman, Magda Peters, who later betrays him with the cartoonist Robert Gorn.[4] The protagonist's sexual obsession destroys him. He abandons his family, and this inadvertently leads to his daughter's illness and death. He causes a car accident attempting to whisk Magda away from his rival, and is blinded as a result. And finally he tries to kill Magda, who wrestles away his gun and kills him instead. Just like a popular film, the novel both engaged a wide audience—it was quickly translated into English, French, and Czech—and displeased critics.[5] Nabokov was accused of betraying his literary talent by pandering to mass audiences with a gripping and overly sensuous novel.[6]

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[3] *Camera Obscura* was first published in the Paris-based Russian émigré journal *Sovremennye zapiski* vol. 49-52, 1932/3. It was then published by Parabola-Petropolis in 1933 as *Kamera Obskura*. Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, *Kamera Obskura* in *Sobranie sohinenii v 4-kh tomakh: Romany, rasskazy, esse*, vol 2. (Sankt-Peterburg: Entar, 1993) 4-133.

[4] The names of Nabokov's characters change in translation. Bruno Krechmar becomes Albert Albinus, Magda Peters becomes Margot Peters, Robert Gorn becomes Axel Rex, and the name of Albinus' wife changes from Anneliza to Elizabeth.

[5] The novel's first English translation was done by Winifred Roy and published in the United Kingdom in 1936. On the French and Czech translations see Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov : The Russian Years*, 393, 396, 417.

[6] I discuss the novel's early reviews below. For full texts of several reviews by prominent critics see: Н. Г Мельников and О. А Коростелев, *Классик без ретуши:*

The problem of how an artwork might aim to elicit pleasure while allowing the spectator to appreciate freely is a thematic concern of Nabokov's novel. The novel's critical reception, however, made this a practical problem for Nabokov as well. The critics' response made still more apparent to Nabokov a writer's competing objectives: to attract the reader and at the same time to ensure that the reader feels no compulsion, that he feels as though he attends to and admires the artwork by his own choice. An artwork *should*, among other things, please us. But if it seems to please us automatically—if it appears perfectly engineered to press our buttons—we might be entertained, but we will also feel manipulated. And if we feel manipulated into our liking by some object, we tend to disqualify it as a source of genuine aesthetic delight. In other words, an artwork must aim to elicit a certain response from the audience, but if it elicits this response with law-like regularity and efficiency then we no longer consider it an artwork at all.

Tolstoy in his quest to elicit a properly aesthetic response had sought (at least in theory) to purge the artwork of anything that might tempt his reader's mind or body. In *What is Art?* Tolstoy outlawed the kind of sensuous and intriguing devices that entice the audiences of Hollywood films. These devices pander to our appetites, he thought, and thus keep us focused on our needs, instead of freeing us from them. Nabokov, however, was not above the Hollywood potboiler. As Iosif Gessen attested, "Sirin seemed to enjoy nothing more than deliberately seeking out the most inept American film. The more casually stupid it was the more he would gasp and shake from laughter to the point where

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литературный мир о творчестве Владимира Набокова (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2000) PDF-ebook.

he sometimes had to leave the theater."[7] Nabokov recognized the potency and indispensability of the artistic devices Hollywood had mastered, and instead of purging his works of these tricks he hoped to repurpose them. Nabokov wanted to convert the cheap devices of Hollywood, which so consistently produced an unreflective and (from his perspective) an undesirable response, into a means for consistently producing a self-reflexive, properly aesthetic response. He did not aim to grant his readers the kind of complete self-transcendence Tolstoy had envisioned, but he did offer them a partial freedom from themselves by compelling them to reflect on their own preoccupations.

Tolstoy and Nabokov's Story Doubles

"Accidental dove droppings": that is how Vladimir Nabokov described the changes he made to his novel *Kamera Obskura* when he translated it into English under the new title *Laughter in the Dark*.[8] His dismissive remarks belie a number of significant changes, which scholars have understood mainly as an attempt to appeal to an English-speaking audience.[9] But one key and still unexamined aspect of these changes is an

[7] И. В Гессен, *Годы изгнания: жизненный отчет* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1979), 105. "Да ведь и для самого Сирина нет как будто большего удовольствия, чем смотреть нарочито нелепую американскую картину. Чем она беззаботно глупей, тем сильней задыхается и буквально сотрясается он от смеха, до того, что иногда вынужден покидать зал."

[8] Nabokov was dissatisfied with the 1936 translation done by Roy and he retranslated the novel himself in 1938.

[9] Leona Toker suggests the changes Nabokov makes to the novel are an attempt to "Americanize" the novel. See: Leona Toker, *Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 109. Alfred Appel observes that Nabokov purged the novel of temporal and geographic specificity and produced a more

important transformation in the novel's aesthetic concerns, which demonstrates that Nabokov, like Tolstoy, came to see not one but two ways that an artwork might fail to elicit a properly aesthetic response.

I propose reading Nabokov's novel and its translation alongside Tolstoy's twin stories *The Devil* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*.[10] Nabokov knew *The Kreutzer Sonata* well, having performed the role of Pozdnyshev in a mock trial of Tolstoy's protagonist a few years prior to writing *Kamera Obskura*. In his performance Nabokov highlighted the themes of blindness and entrapment that become central to his novel.[11] *The Devil*— a narrative double of *The Kreutzer Sonata* within Tolstoy's oeuvre—also echoes the themes of Nabokov's novel, and scholars have noted allusions to this story in *Kamera Obskura*.[12] Each of these stories serves as a productive intertext for Nabokov's works,[13]

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consistently stylized narrative. Alfred Appel, *Nabokov's Dark Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 265.

[10] *The Devil* & *The Kreutzer Sonata* in *Great Short Works of Leo Tolstoy*, 303-351; 354-449. PSS, *D'yavol* in PSS, 27: 481-519; *Kreytserova sonata* in PSS, 27: 5-92.

[11] Nabokov played Pozdnyshev in a mock trial organized by the Journalists' Union in 1926. He writes about his performance to Vera on July 13, 1926, and includes with the letter a copy of "Rech' Pozdnysheva," the monologue he wrote for the occasion.

[12] G.M. Hyde has observed that despite Nabokov's overt reference to *Anna Karenina* in *Kamera Obskura*, he is actually more directly engaged with Tolstoy's late short stories. In particular, Hyde singles out *The Devil*, for its similarity in content with Nabokov's novels. Tolstoy's protagonist, Nikolai Irtenev, is destroyed by his uncontrollable desire for his peasant mistress, Stepanida. Hyde notes many resemblances between Nabokov's novels and *The Devil*, highlighting the most crucial one: the theme of blindness. Tolstoy's Irtenev is myopic; his poor sight is a correlative to his moral blindness. Nabokov likewise makes literal his protagonist's moral and aesthetic blindness when he loses his sight in an accident. Nabokov also adopts the color scheme from Tolstoy's story: the authors dress the protagonists' betrayed wives in white and the mistresses in red. Stepanida wears a red kerchief and Madga a red dress, garments that symbolize the women's sexual power. And as Alexander Dolinin points out, the name of Irtenev's wife, Liza Annenskaya, echoes in the name of Krechmar's wife Anneliza. See "*Laughter in the*

but I suggest that they are most illuminating when they are treated together and paired, respectively, with *Kamera Obskura* and *Laughter in the Dark*, which are, in a sense, two

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Dark: or, who killed Lev Tolstoy?" in G. M Hyde, *Vladimir Nabokov: America's Russian Novelist* (London: M. Boyars, 1977): 57-75, 59. Also, А. Долинин, *Истинная жизнь писателя Сирина: работы о Набокове* (Санкт-Петербург: Академический проект, 2004), 92.

[13] *The Kreutzer Sonata* is no less significant as an intertext for Nabokov's novels, though it has not yet been considered at length alongside these texts. Nabokov's novels resemble *The Kreutzer Sonata* most noticeably in that all three works are ironic iterations of Shakespeare's *Othello*. The plotting, murderous Podzdnyshev perversely identifies himself with Othello who is deceived into killing his wife (On Pozdndyshev's self-identification as Othello see John Kopper, "Tolstoy and the Narrative of Sex: A Reading of *Father Sergius*, *The Devil*, and *The Kreutzer Sonata*," in Hugh McLean, *In the Shade of the Giant: Essays on Tolstoy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 176.). The unabashedly adulterous Magda compares herself with the faithful Desdemona (LD, 226. KO, 102). Pozdnyshev and Magda both debase Shakespeare's high tragedy. The latent homosexual desire between a pair of rival male lovers presents another resonance between *The Kreutzer Sonata* and Nabokov's texts. Pozdnyshev's own attraction to the violin player, Trukhachevsky, might be the root of his jealousy. Nabokov makes the homosexual theme still more explicit. Gorn pretends to be homosexual in order to disguise his affair with Magda.

In addition to these thematic links, Nabokov alludes to *The Kreutzer Sonata* at least twice. The first allusion is only in the Russian text. When Magda visits Krechmar's apartment, the first things she notices are the decorative "pistols and swords" (*pistolety i sabli*) on the wall (KO, 27). Nabokov replicates the mise-en-scene of Pozdnyshev's study, where "guns and daggers" (*ruzh'ya i kinzhaly*) hang on the wall (*KS*, 421. PSS, 27: 71). The home of each protagonist will become the scene of a murder, and the objects that will become the murder weapons—a Damascus dagger for Pozdnyshev and a pistol for Krechmar—are first displayed as adornments. A second allusion appears in both versions of the novel. Having learned of his mistress's affair, Krechmar decides to kill her as soon she return to their hotel room. But when she arrives she immediately begins to take off her shoes and thus thwarts the murder attempt: "Impossible to fire while she was taking off her shoe" (LD, 225. KO, 101). Magda's banal action subverts Krechmar's intention to restore his honor by killing her; it deprives the scene of the dignity he desires. The critical moment passes, and although Krechmar still menaces Magda it is clear he will not kill her. A murder is similarly averted in *The Kreutzer Sonata* due to the protagonist's shame at his own unshod feet. Trukhachevsky escapes Pozdnyshev because Pozdnyshev had taken off his boots before his attack: "I wanted to run after him, but remembered that it is ridiculous to run after one's wife's lover in one's socks: and I did not wish to be ridiculous but terrible" (*KS*, 423. PSS, 27: 78). Tolstoy and Nabokov's comic corruptions of Shakespeare's tragedy leave their characters shoeless at moments of high drama.

different stories as well. Tolstoy's two stories, though similar, diverge in much the same way that Nabokov's Russian novel diverges from his English translation of it. *The Devil* and *Kamera Obskura* display the strictures imposed on us by our appetites. *The Kreutzer Sonata* and *Laughter in the Dark*, alternatively, display the strictures imposed on us by our creative desires.

Tolstoy's stories, written around the same time, are closely related. They begin with the same epigraph from Matthew: "But I say unto you, that every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."[14] They each relate how adultery makes a happy family life impossible and leads to violent acts. These stories are really the same story told in two different ways. As Ilya Kliger notes, Tolstoy often told "the same story twice: the way it really happened, and the way it is disfigured by conventional expectations." Kliger identifies a myriad of such narrative doubles, one told fabulaically "from the forward-looking perspective of the character encountering a situation for the first time" and a second "[tending] toward the narrative pole of *syuzhet*, with its teleological, that is, retrospective organization and its reliance on prior models and expectations."[15] *The Devil* and *The Kreutzer Sonata* follow the same doubling pattern.

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[14] *The Kreutzer Sonata*, 354; *The Devil*, 304. PSS, 27: 7, 481. "А я говорю вам, что всякий, кто смотрит на женщину с вожделением, уже прелюбодействовал с нею в сердце своем. (Матфея V, 28)"

[15] Ilya Kliger, *The Narrative Shape of Truth: Veridiction in Modern European Literature* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 156-157. Kliger's examples include close doubles such as the two versions of Nikolai Rostov's encounter with the Frenchman told in *War and Peace* as well as more distant doubles such as the family plots of Anna and Levin. *The Devil* and *The Kreutzer Sonata* might be considered something in between.

The Devil unfolds chronologically. The protagonist, Irtenev, experiences an increasingly uncontrollable sexual desire that leads to violence. Fabula predominates in the telling. *The Kreutzer Sonata*, by contrast, is told retrospectively through multiple frames. The protagonist, Pozdnyshev, tells the story of a murder he has already committed, having suspected his wife of an affair. Syuzhet predominates in the telling. The conventions of narration are given primacy over the narrated events, and we even suspect that the whole tale might be pure invention, referring to no actual murder. As John Kopper puts it: "Instead of the story being about something that has happened, it is about the effort to make something from nothing, that is, about fiction making."[16] We might not want to go so far as to say that Pozdnyshev's tale does not refer to any real set of events independent of his telling, but we can agree that Pozdnyshev gets carried away by the conventions of the narrative genre of the confession. Nabokov was certainly attuned to the way narrative conventions affect how Pozdnyshev tells the story his life. He amplified this aspect of the story in his own rewriting of Pozdnyshev's tale: he has Pozdnyshev tell his story over and over again in slightly different ways.

The difference in narrative structure alters how we perceive the aims and transgressions of Tolstoy's protagonists. To put it a little too simply: *The Devil* appears to be about the desire for sex, *The Kreutzer Sonata* more about the desire for story. Tolstoy turns from the demands of the appetite (Irtenev's) to the demands of a creative mind (Pozdnyshev's). Nabokov makes an analogous shift from fabulaic telling in the Russian novel to a syuzhet-oriented telling in the English, and produces a similar change in the nature of the protagonist's crimes.

[16] Kopper, 171.

Kamera Obskura: Blind Intuitions, Automatic Response

In an early review of *Kamera Obskura*, Vladislav Khodasevich identified the novel's deep theme as the confusion of real aesthetic value with cheap gratification. Khodasevich regarded such confusion—exemplified, according to him, by the general acceptance of cinema as an artwork—as the root cause of the impending death of culture. Echoing Tolstoy, Khodasevich compared the pleasures of cinema to the pleasures of drugs: both offer "a pleasant and absorbing delirium (*durman*)."[17] "Dur" the root of the word durman means noxious, and in this context durman refers to a state of intoxication. Tolstoy used the word durman to describe the effects of "false" art, art that enabled the spectator to remain engrossed in his sensuous demands. Khodasevich's use of a Tolstoyan aesthetic term is appropriate considering Nabokov's evident interest here in the problem of distinguishing real from false art.

Kamera Obskura begins with an aesthetic mistake. We meet Nabokov's protagonist as he adjudicates a legal dispute between two artists. The cartoonist Gorn is suing a second-rate film actress named Dorianna Karenina for copyright infringement. At issue is a portrait of Karenina holding a stuffed toy based on the image of Gorn's wildly popular cartoon creature, Cheapy. Krechmar, an art scholar, is invited to be an expert witness. But his deliberation on the case quickly reveals the irony of his position:

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[17] Владислав Ходасевич "Рец.: Камера обскура. Париж: Современные записки; Берлин: Парабола, 1933," *Возрождение*. 1934. 3 мая. № 3256. С. 3-4, gathered in *Классик без ретуши*. "…приятный и засасывающий дурман есть в синематографе или в кокаине."

Krechmar is a poor judge of value. He cannot grasp the distinction between objects with pleasing appearances and those with genuine worth. Krechmar overestimates Cheapy's worth, which is clear to the reader by the name alone. "He evidently loves his animal [Cheapy]," Krechmar says of Gorn, failing to perceive the mercenary motives of the cartoonist, who is mostly interested in the financial benefits of the trial's publicity.[18] Cheapy is merely a source of profit for Gorn, but Krechmar unduly elevates her to something worthy of love. Krechmar's acceptance of Cheapy lays the ground for his sexual obsession with Magda, who is seduced at a young age by Gorn. Gorn's seduction essentially turns Magda into a prostitute, and she therefore might be considered Gorn's second "counterfeit" creation.

But Krechmar is hardly alone in overestimating Cheapy, beloved by the multitudes. His acquiescence to the aesthetic standards of his set begins Krechmar's devolution, just as Irtenev's acquiescence to the moral standards of his set begins his devolution in *The Devil*. Irtenev, despite his pangs of conscience, accepts the custom of landowners acquiring peasant mistresses. Krechmar, despite his credentials as an art expert, accepts cheap entertainment as real art. Krechmar typifies what Nabokov would later call the philistine/poshlyak, who is characterized not so much by his "love for the useful, for the material goods of life" as by the fact that he considers this preference for material indulgence a genuine aesthetic response: "Poshlism is not only the obviously trashy but mainly the falsely important, the falsely beautiful, the falsely clever, the falsely attractive." The confusion of the poshlyak, Nabokov would explain, has its source

[18] КО, 6. "Он, видимо, любит своего зверя, этот Горн." Translations of text that Nabokov cut from *Laughter in the Dark* are mine. Otherwise I rely on Nabokov's translation.

precisely in the propensity to "adopt stock ideas and conventional ideals of his or her group and time."[19] Krechmar, as a poshlyak, accepts commonly held beliefs without question.

Scholars have attributed Krechmar's aesthetic confusion to his excessive fascination with surfaces.[20] But Krechmar, it seems, is not only blind to depth; even the totality of a surface eludes him. He is most attentive to Magda, yet often fails to grasp the whole of Magda's appearance: he fails to integrate what is on the surface. He frequently registers her only as an assemblage of sensuous qualities. In the cinema where he first encounters her, she's merely a "long Luini-esque eye."[21] In his apartment, he sees her as a patch of red, confusing her for a red pillow hiding behind a bookshelf in his study. At the beach in Solfi, when her body might be taken in all at once, he nonetheless sees not the whole of her but the discrete shapes and colors that make up her appearance. Krechmar cannot make any sense of what he perceives; he registers only a flow of discrete sense impressions.

Krechmar's world dissolves into its sensuous qualities—it trembles and swims—especially at critical moments that demand discernment. Magda arrives at Krechmar's

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[19] "Philistines and Philistinism," in *Lectures on Russian Literature*, 313, 309.

[20] Gerard de Vries and D. Barton Johnson analyze the paintings Nabokov's protagonist owns but fails to understand. They suggest that he is "[limited] as an art expert" since he is "blind for the meaning of his paintings beyond the beauties of color and line." Gerard de Vries and Donald Barton Johnson, *Vladimir Nabokov and the Art of Painting* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 36. Leona Toker notes that Krechmar/Albinus dwells on the surface when it comes to his relations with people as well. He ignores the inner lives of his wife and his mistress. Leona Toker, *Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures*, 107-108.

[21] LD, 22. KO, 11. "продолговатый луиниевский глаз"

apartment and stands on his threshold. He must decide whether or not to let her in. But all he can do is look "at the chandelier, the furniture upholstered in silk, as though he himself were a stranger. He saw, incidentally, only a sunny haze; everything swam, and whirled."[22] Then, instead of stopping his wife, Anneliza, from reading Magda's love letter, Krechmar again attends to the way his surroundings melt into incoherent impressions: " 'She reads all my letters, it is you understand…' he managed to say, gazing through the trembling haze at the tip of his shoe and tapping it lightly on the swimming pattern of the carpet."[23] Once more, others decide his fate. Krechmar's incapacity is perhaps most flagrant and pathetic when he stands at his daughter's deathbed: "He came toward the bed, but everything trembled and grew turbid before him. For a moment before him swam a clear image of a small dead face, a short pale lip, bared front teeth with one milk tooth missing. Then everything again became muddled."[24] Krechmar's sensuous impressions fail to coalesce into a coherent whole, and he thus cannot grasp his responsibility for this family tragedy.

It might seem odd that Krechmar's submersion in sensuous impressions is negatively marked in the text, given Nabokov's frequent avowal of the "supremacy of the

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[22] LD, 60. KO, 27. For citations of the passages in this paragraph I have drawn on Nabokov's own translation, but restored what he cut: "Он…глядел на люстру, на шелковую мебель, словно и сам был чужой здесь, — но видел, впрочем, только солнечный туман, все плыло, кружилось."

[23] LD, 81. KO, 36. " «Она читает все мои письма, ты ведь это знаешь...» — проговорил он, глядя сквозь дрожащий туман на носок своего башмака и легонько топая им по расплывчатому узору на ковре."

[24] LD, 175. KO, 78. "Он подошел к кровати, но все дрожало и мутилось перед ним, — на миг ясно проплыло маленькое мертвое лицо, короткая бледная губа, обнаженные передние зубы, одного не хватало — молочного зубка, молочного, — потом все опять затуманилось..."

detail over the general."[25] But Krechmar's gaze differs a great deal from the one Nabokov prescribes to artists and to good readers. Krechmar does attend to sensuous details, but his vision is undiscerning. Nabokov's fundamentally Kantian formula for aesthetic reception demands that sensuous and intellectual operations work in concert. The "passionate artist" and the "patient scientist" typify these aspects of aesthetic response for Nabokov: "If, however, a would-be reader is utterly devoid of passion and patience—of an artist's passion and a scientist's patience—he will hardly enjoy great literature." In Nabokov's aesthetic scheme, Krechmar is the reader with passion but no patience, none of the "scientific coolness" necessary to integrate his impressions, to "get clear the specific world the author places at his disposal."[26] Aleksandr Dolinin justly observes that Krechmar's desire for Magda is only "a symptom…a sign of incompleteness or debility."[27] Krechmar is so wholly absorbed in the impressions of his own senses that he cannot summon the detachment needed to attend to things other than his own feeling of gratification.

Nabokov's protagonist incarnates the second part of Kant's dictum that "thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind." Krechmar is all intuitions, and no concepts; that is his particular form of blindness. "The understanding is not capable of intuiting anything, and the senses are not capable of thinking anything. Only from their unification can cognition arise," Kant wrote in his *Critique of Pure*

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[25] *Lectures on Literature*, 373.

[26] Ibid., 5.

[27] Dolinin, 95. My translation. "и разрушительная страсть, подобная страсти Кречмара или Иртенева, есть не болезнь, а ее симптом, не зло как таковое, а знак неполноты или ущербности."

Reason.[28] Our grasp of anything at all requires the cooperation of the senses and reason. For Kant, cognition, moral action, and aesthetic judgment all depend on the harmonious relations of sense and reason. Nabokov in this novel dramatizes the absence of harmony between sense and reason, which leads to epistemological, moral, and aesthetic failures. After losing his physical sight, Krechmar realizes that for all his attention to sensuous qualities, he has known little of the world. "Yes, and did he manage in full to use the gift of acute vision," Krechmar asks himself: "With horror he now noted that imagining, let's say a landscape where he once lived, he cannot name a single plant except oaks and roses, nor a single bird save sparrows and crows.[29] Krechmar has the gift of acute vision—he's profoundly sensitive to the sensuous qualities of the world—but the attunement of his senses is not enough. Since he cannot bring his impressions under concepts (beyond "oak" and "sparrow"), he fails to know and to appreciate the world he inhabits.[30] Krechmar can only assess whether or not something is subjectively gratifying, or, in Kantian terms, "agreeable."

Since Krechmar's sensuous responsiveness is unaccompanied by intellectual detachment, he easily slips into an egoistic relation to his surroundings. He regards

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[28] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 51/B 75, 193.

[29] LD, 257. KO, 117. "Да и полно, умел ли он до конца пользоваться даром острого зрения. Он с ужасом замечал теперь, что, вообразив, скажем, пейзаж, среди которого однажды пожил, он не умеет назвать ни одного растения, кроме дуба и розы, ни одной птицы, кроме вороны и воробья."

[30] Nabokov, of course, had very particular ideas about what a person ought to know. He put a premium on specialized knowledge of one's natural environment, admonishing and mocking the "commonsensical, matter-of-fact type: [who] sees trees as *trees*" and nothing more ("Franz Kafka: 'The Metamorphosis' " in *Lectures on Literature*, 253). The rumination on Krechmar's ignorance of the landscape therefore has both a Kantian and a purely Nabokovian dimension.

everything primarily in terms of how well it will gratify his sensuous needs. Nabokov depicts Krechmar's sexual appetite as a manifestation of a more general pursuit of agreeable pleasures. Sexual and gastronomic enjoyments—both agreeable pleasures in Kant's schema—are closely connected in *Kamera Obskura*, just as they are in Tolstoy's fiction, most notably in *Anna Karenina* as I demonstrated in the first chapter.[31] Throughout Nabokov's novel, sex and food are substitutes for one another. When Magda refuses Krechmar sex under the pretext of his illness (damaged vision), he contents himself by listening to her read as he "slowly consume[s] invisible cherries."[32] During his brief separation from Magda and reunion with his family, Krechmar absentmindedly peels and eats an orange. The bitter taste of the orange hints at the lack of sexual gratification Krechmar foresees in a return to his wife. Even the ethereal Anneliza participates in this matrix of agreeable pleasures: the taste for snow that she acquires during her pregnancy reflects her anemic sexual appetite.

In Nabokov's novel, no one—not even a child—escapes punishment for the kind of unreflective, consumption-oriented relation to the world that Krechmar exhibits. The eight-year-old Irma has an appetite for sweets that Nabokov links with her father's appetite for sex. Irma's sweet tooth is mentioned in two scenes that also highlight Krechmar's desire. In the first scene Irma is devouring (*pozhirala*) chocolate cream while Krechmar sits near her and imagines beginning an affair; in the second Anneliza's memory of how Irma lost her mind (*shalela*) over ice cream is intercut with a description

[31] Additionally, Naiman observes that Nabokov might be alluding to Levin's analogy between a mistress and an after-dinner bread roll by depicting Magda naked, gnawing on a yellow roll. Naiman, "When Nabokov Writes Badly," 560.

[32] LD, 259. KO, 119. "медленно поедая невидимые вишни"

of Krechmar, crazed with jealousy, attempting to whisk Magda away from Gorn.[33] Irma's animal-like voraciousness parallels Krechmar's unreasoning sexual desire. When Irma dies in the middle of the narrative—foreshadowing her father's death at the end[34]—Gorn tells Krechmar a story about a young friend "with the face of an angel and the muscles of a panther" who "cut himself opening a bottle and died a few days later."[35] In the Russian the boy dies in pursuit of alcohol, while in the English he dies in pursuit of sweets, cutting himself on a can of peaches. Either way, the boy's death is a direct result of his quest for agreeable pleasures. Gorn's story, told on the occasion of Irma's death, hints that Irma's demise similarly has to do with her appetite.[36] Irma appears to be punished for her voraciousness, her only paternal inheritance.

Tolstoy also compares the child's and the adult's absorption with the pursuit of gratification in *Anna Karenina*. Anna begins to think of her own appetites when she sees two boys buying ice cream. "We all want something sweet and tasty," she thinks, "if we

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[33] The verb *pozhirat'* in Russian is used primarily to describe consumption by animals. Here, it suggests the unreflective, brute nature of Irma's, and by extension Krechmar's, appetite. LD, 13. KO, 7. "[Ирма] пожирала свою порцию шоколадного крема"; LD, 329. KO, 107. "Ирма, бывало, шалела от счастья, когда уличный торговец близ белого своего лотка лопаткой намазывал на тонкую вафлю толстый, сливочного оттенка, слой."

[34] Krechmar is reduced to a child-like state before he dies, which suggests a link between the two deaths. Hyde notes that the blind Krechmar occupies Irma's old bedroom and that his brother-in-law Maks (Paul in the translation) cuts his food and talks to him like a child. Hyde, *Vladimir Nabokov*, 71.

[35] LD, 181. KO, 81. "У меня был приятель, юноша, полный жизни, с лицом ангела и с мускулами пантеры, — он порезался, откупоривая бутылку, и через несколько дней умер." In Nabokov's translation: "He cut himself while opening a tin of preserved peaches — you know, the large, soft, slippery kind that plap in the mouth and slither down."

[36] LD, 183. KO, 82.

can get no bon-bons, then dirty ice creams! And Kitty is just the same; if not Vronsky, then Levin. And she envies and hates me. And we all hate one another: Kitty me, and I Kitty! Now that is true."[37] The boys' desire for something sweet is like Anna's vain desire for male attention. Levin similarly recognizes his own vanities by watching Dolly's children waste raspberries and milk. The children are idle and want to invent something new. They thus invent a novel, wasteful way of eating and disregard the work others have done to obtain their food. "Don't we, and don't I do just the same," Levin thinks, "when intellectually I sought for the meaning of the forces of nature and the purpose of human life?" He thinks that his own intellectual vanity is a more refined version of theirs.[38] But whereas Dolly's children receive a punishment befitting children—Dolly scolds them—Irma's punishment is no less severe than her father's.

In Gorn's story, the boy's pursuit of peaches—the root of his own demise—becomes, of course, the engine of narrative: it creates a story to be enjoyed by the audience. "It's hard to imagine anything more fatuous than this death. And yet, and yet… yes, it is strange, but true, that it would be less artful had he lived to old age. Death is often the zest, the pointe of life."[39] The double-edge here is not only between life and

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[37] Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Maude, 688. PSS, 19: 340. "— Всем нам хочется сладкого, вкусного. Нет конфет, то грязного мороженого. И Кити так же: не Вронский, то Левин. И она завидует мне. И ненавидит меня. И все мы ненавидим друг друга. Я Кити, Кити меня. Вот это правда."

[38] Ibid., 723. PSS, 19: 380. "«Разве не то же самое делаем мы, делал я, разумом отыскивая значение сил природы и смысл жизни человека?» продолжал он думать."

[39] LD, 181-182. KO, 81. "Ничего глупее этой смерти нельзя было себе представить, но вместе с тем...вместе с тем, — да, странно сказать, но это так: было бы менее художественно, доживи он до старости...Изюминка, пуанта жизни заключается

death, but also between the agreeable pleasures of the protagonist and the aesthetic pleasure of the audience. Gorn's reflections allow Nabokov to acknowledge a connection between material and aesthetic enjoyment that Tolstoy wanted to sever entirely in *What is Art?* Nabokov suggests that a narrative that depicts agreeable pleasure need not be considered a false artwork, as Tolstoy came to think. Rather, the agreeable pleasures of the protagonist can engender the aesthetic pleasures of the audience, so long as the audience does not identify too much with the hero, remaining instead "a little aloof." But a spectator who lacks this kind of restraint, who, like Krechmar, has passion but no patience, merely reproduces the protagonist's agreeable desires. Krechmar does just that; his narrative recapitulates the beautiful boy's.

Gorn's story is a lesson in aesthetics that is lost on Krechmar, but perhaps not on the reader, who is alerted to Gorn's special status in the book. Gorn is the only character to sense the presence of a creative deity behind the narrative: a "stage manager." In much of Nabokov's fiction, the character who intuits the proximity of his creator (Nabokov) becomes an emissary for the author's own ideas in the novel. This is most evident in a novel like *The Gift*, in which the protagonist nearly merges with the author himself, but such emissaries are present throughout Nabokov's works. For all of his flaws, Gorn is nonetheless singled out to express aesthetic ideas that echo Nabokov's own.

Aesthetic Lessons

иногда именно в смерти." I give the literal translation from Russian above. Nabokov translates the second sentence: "Death often is the point of life's joke."

Nabokov's interest in tutoring his reader, in explaining the difference between material and aesthetic enjoyment in *Kamera Obskura*, can be attributed to any number of factors: he was attuned to the way technology had altered ideas about what did and did not belong to art; he saw how propaganda could be disguised as "art"; he was a young artist trying to establish criteria for his own works. Yet another influence worth mentioning is that of Iulii Aikhenvald, a neo-Kantian critic and close friend of Nabokov in the years preceding Nabokov's work on *Kamera Obskura*. His friendship with Aikhenvald undoubtedly afforded Nabokov an opportunity to become better acquainted with Kantian aesthetics, and it might have contributed to his interest in the problem of aesthetic evaluation.

Identifying a proper measure for aesthetic worth was central to Aikhenvald's critical agenda. In his essay collection *Silhouettes of Russian Writers*, Aikhenvald tries to explain how we might go about making an aesthetic judgment. He dismisses the idea that we can identify a set of features that make an artwork "good," taking the neo-Kantian position that we cannot apply the quantitative methods of natural science to the study of culture. He also rejects wide acclaim and the test of time as measures of value.[40] In support of his arguments, Aikhenvald invokes Tolstoy's fearless denouncements of artworks "before which all cultured peoples kneeled for centuries."[41] Though he does not agree with many of Tolstoy's evaluations, Aikhenvald underscores the author's bravery

[40] Iulii Aikhenvald, "Vstuplenie" in *Siluety russkikh pisatelei* (Moskva: Izd-vo "Respublika," 1994), 16-42.

[41] Ibid., 17. "Что же, постеснился ли Толстой признать бездарным того, перед кем целые столетия коленопреклоненно стояло все культурное человечество?"

in unmasking the many inadequate measures of aesthetic value. He treats Tolstoy's ideas as a serious contribution to the inquiry into the nature of aesthetic judgment.

Aikhenvald views art as "first of all play, the blossoming of spirit, tremendous idleness."[42] His conception of idleness echoes Tolstoy's definition of aesthetic enjoyment as a state somewhere between sleep and play. Aikhenvald refers explicitly to Tolstoy's reflections on labor and rest in his essay "In Praise of Idleness," which, as Stephen Blackwell and Thomas Karshan have shown, had a tremendous influence on Nabokov's aesthetic ideas.[43] Tolstoy, Aikhenvald argues, praised labor but realized that our need to labor is the result of our fallen state: we pay for the sins our fathers with our restless spirits. We were not meant to labor, Aikhenvald asserts, because "Man is God's guest. And it is the host who labors not the guest."[44] Idleness for Aikhenvald is a divine gift that was lost but which can be recovered through aesthetic experience. The artist labors to facilitate the spectator's mental play and thereby restores, for a time, the spectator's Edenic state. Since Aikhenvald believes an artist can facilitate this mental play by virtue of his "genius," he posits genius as the measure of an artwork. And what exactly "genius" is, he borrows from Kant's theory.[45]

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[42] Ibid., 23. "искусство прежде всего — игра, цветение духа, великая бесполезность"

[43] Stephen H. Blackwell, *Zina's Paradox: The Figured Reader in Nabokov's Gift* (New York: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2000), 28. Thomas Karshan, *Vladimir Nabokov and the Art of Play* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 48-54.

[44] Iulii Aikhenvald, "Pokhvala prazdnosti" in *Pokhvala prazdnosti: sbornik statei* (Moskva: Kostry, 1922), 6. "Человек — гость Бога. Трудится же хозяин, а не гость."

[45] Aikhenvald discusses genius in terms very similar to Kant's in "Vstuplenie" (the Introduction) to *Siluety russkikh pisatelei*.

Kant demands that an appreciator feel free from any rule or constraint in his response to the artwork. Nonetheless, an artwork, as Kant says, must be recognizable *as* an artwork. We must see that it is the product of someone's intention, not a spontaneously created object such as we would find in nature. In other words, our capacity to see something as an artwork goes hand in hand with the recognition of particular intentions on the part of the artist. These intentions (which, as appreciators, we must see) would seem to limit our freedom in responding to the work. They appear to impose a constraint on our engagement with it.[46] Kant solves this problem by arguing that the product of a genius artist will always go beyond his own intentions for it. Kant (and later Aikhenvald) considered genius to be a gift of nature that lets the artist produce something irreducible to the intentions that governed its making.[47] The genius artwork is thereby capable of inspiring a spectator's imagination and understanding to engage in truly free play.

In his critical reflections, Nabokov would affirm an aesthetic measure similar to Aikhenvald's (and therefore Kant's):

> It seems to me that a good formula to test the quality of a novel is, in the long run, a merging of the precision of poetry and the intuition of science. In order to bask in that magic a wise reader reads the book of genius not with his heart, not so much with his brain, but with his spine. It is there that occurs the telltale tingle even though we must keep a little aloof, a little detached when reading. Then with

[46] I follow Paul Guyer in his discussion of the conflict between the freedom of the artist in his creation and the freedom of the appreciator in his reception. See Paul Guyer, "Genius and the Canon of Art: A Second dialectic of Aesthetic Judgment," in Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[47] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 46 174-176.

> a pleasure which is both sensual and intellectual we shall watch the artist build his castle of cards and watch the castle of cards become a castle of beautiful steel and glass.[48]

"Both sensual and intellectual": a good artwork cannot be reduced simply to gratification of the senses or to any concept. In his role as critic and teacher, Nabokov may have been satisfied to attribute this effect to an artwork's "genius." But as an artist it was his task to ensure that his own work elicited this effect, that it elicited the free play of our mental faculties. The practical problem of producing a "genius" artwork—of offering the gift of idleness—compels Nabokov to face the same challenges Tolstoy confronts in his essays on art.

Tolstoy and Nabokov both reckon with the paradox of the artist intending to produce an artwork that escapes his own intentions, to manipulate his audience into feeling unmanipulated. In *Kamera Obskura* Nabokov playfully flaunts the ability of certain artistic devices—sensuous detail, an intriguing plot—to perpetuate a reader's absorption in his own appetites. But he also demonstrates that these devices elicit unreflective responses that forestall mental play. Tolstoy interrogated similar devices in his fiction and essays (especially in *What is Art?*) and likewise concluded that these devices prevent mental play. Eric Naiman, who has recently examined *Kamera Obskura/Laughter in the Dark* as a response to Tolstoy's ideas about art, sees Nabokov's

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[48] "Good Readers and Good Writers," *Lectures on Literature*, 6. For a further discussion of Nabokov's connection with Aikhenvald, see Stephen H. Blackwell, *Zina's Paradox*, 25-36. Blackwell observes that Nabokov's essay "Good Readers" reiterates many of Aikhenvald's opinions. He argues that Nabokov shared Aikhenvald's idea that reading, while a creative act, is also one that requires the reader to restrain his own creativity. I agree with Blackwell's assessment that this restraint does not mean the reader subjugates himself to the author, and will return to this idea in the next chapter.

novel as a refutation of his predecessor's late aesthetics. Naiman observes that Nabokov indulges in the devices of Tolstoy's false artist, especially in "borrowing." By borrowing scenes from *Anna Karenina* Nabokov "pits the mature Tolstoy against the overripe one," Naiman argues. Nabokov "turns the art Tolstoy rejected [*Anna Karenina*] against the moralist's aesthetic theories."[49] Naiman is right, of course, that Nabokov rejects Tolstoy's prescriptions in *What is Art?* but he undervalues the extent to which Nabokov ultimately *shared* Tolstoy's aesthetic imperatives. Rejecting Tolstoy's prescriptions does not amount to a refutation of his aesthetic ideas.

Nabokov, like Tolstoy, disdained the effects of "false art," the inattentive response of a spectator who encounters an overly familiar, sensuously stimulating artwork, perfectly engineered to bypass his conscious reflection. And, like Tolstoy, he sought to disallow that kind of response in his own works. Where he diverged from Tolstoy was in his tactics: *how* was this response to be avoided? Nabokov does not borrow from *Anna Karenina* merely to secure an alibi for his own cheap tricks, as Naiman suggests. This aim seems beneath his artistic ambitions. Nor can he wish simply to point out Tolstoy's hypocrisy in prescribing simplicity and moral content to other artists, having himself written a "false" artwork like *Anna Karenina*. Tolstoy, after all, had admitted as much, and renounced *Anna Karenina* along with most of his other literary works. On the contrary, Nabokov borrows from Tolstoy in order to highlight Tolstoy's *error* in believing that *Anna Karenina* was in fact a "false" artwork: an artwork incapable of resisting the kind of unreflective consumption that false art allows. An artwork can employ the tricks of the false artist and *nonetheless* resist being merely

[49] Naiman, "When Nabokov Writes Badly," 569.

consumed, Nabokov seems to suggest, and Tolstoy himself shows us how to do this. Nabokov picks up and develops tactics Tolstoy used to resist an unreflective spectatorial response in his fiction and erroneously, on Nabokov's view, dismissed in his aesthetic manifesto.

In *The Devil*, Tolstoy fully exploited the devices of false art *in order to* condemn their effects. Nabokov in *Kamera Obskura* similarly uses sensuous detail and an intriguing plot to gratify his readers before critiquing that very gratification. Tolstoy admonishes his reader's initially unreflective response directly: in the last lines of the story, his narrator urges the reader to consider his own actions. Nabokov pursues a slightly subtler course: he continually mocks his reader in order to awaken him to his self-absorption. Of course, Tolstoy's moralizing and Nabokov's irony also give them an excuse to exploit devices that reliably please an audience.

Tolstoy provokes the reader's unreflective response in *The Devil* in order to expose our common human tendency to mindlessly pursue personal gratification. The narrative chronicles the protagonist's struggle between his appetites and his judgment. Irtenev tries to thwart his desire for his former mistress Stepanida through labor, marriage, confession, and escape. But his desire is reawakened every time he encounters her. Each meeting with her is an occasion for Tolstoy to lavish attention on Stepanida's body, describing it in sensuous detail and thereby reproducing in the reader Irtenev's delight. When Irtenev first meets Stepanida, the reader too is treated to the sight of her standing in a thicket, "barefoot, fresh, firm, and handsome, smiling shyly."[50] Irtenev feels

[50] *The Devil*, 310. *D'yavol* in PSS, 27: 485. "В белой вышитой занавеске, красно-бурой напеве, красном ярком платке, с босыми ногами, свежая, твердая, красивая, она стояла и робко улыбалась."

"possessed" by desire, and the reader feels engrossed in this scene of seduction.

Tolstoy's story entices the reader not only through sensuous prose but also through the apprehension and uncertainty inherent in its fabulaic structure. Since the reader has no foreknowledge of Irtenev's fate, each of Irtenev's "moral efforts" appears to be a genuine opportunity to correct his course, to quash the desire that threatens his family life. But Irtenev's triumphs over his appetite are always short-lived; he is repeatedly re-seduced by Stepanida. And with each new seduction, Irtenev and the reader are granted another sensuous vision of her. When Stepanida comes to clean Irtenev's estate house after his marriage, for example, Irtenev cannot "take his eyes from her strong body, swayed by her agile strides, from her bare feet, or from her arms and shoulders, and the pleasing folds of her shirt and the handsome skirt tucked high above her white calves."[51] Each failed attempt to resist his desire increases his desperation until at last Irtenev is driven to death (or murder, in the story's alternate ending).

Tolstoy's sensual depictions of Stepanida and his use of the tried-and-true formula of escalating the hero's misfortunes titillate and frighten the reader. These narrative elements—the sexy heroine, the abundance of plot twists—also appear in most Hollywood films. They are used again and again for a reason: they reliably stimulate spectators and thus attract wide audiences. The familiarity of these devices, however, means that spectators tend to respond to them automatically—that is, without giving much thought to their own responses. When we go to see a Hollywood blockbuster, our

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[51] Ibid., 325. PSS, 27: 496. "Он был недоволен тем, что заметил ее, а вместе с тем не мог оторвать от ее покачивающегося ловкой, сильной походкой босых ног тела, от ее рук, плеч, красивых складок рубахи и красной паневы, высоко подоткнутой над ее белыми икрами."

intention is not to attend to our own viewing experience, but rather to forget that we are even watching a film. We simply delight in the way our senses are shocked and aroused. The devices of "false art" that Tolstoy employs in *The Devil* gratify us in a similar way. Initially, we are gripped by the hero's repeated seductions and reversals of fortune, without thinking about what it means to watch this man's life unravel. We respond to the artwork with unreflective pleasure.

At the end of the story, however, Tolstoy's narrator intrudes with an accusation that demands the reader's self-reflection: "And indeed if Eugene Irtenev was mentally deranged everyone is in the same case; the most mentally deranged people are certainly those who see in others indications of insanity they do not notice in themselves."[52] Most straightforwardly, this is an indictment of the members of Irtenev's social class. The narrator suggests that if the reader is Irtenev's peer, he is probably possessed by sexual appetites, too. But there is another, more damning charge here, as well. The sensuous prose and the suspenseful structure of Tolstoy's narrative have occasioned the reader's unreflective pursuit of sensuous pleasure—even while witnessing a man's demise. So Irtenev's blind pursuit of gratification is less a personal failing than an egoistic behavior common to us all. The first charge, directed at a specific social group, might easily be evaded (by, for example, a modern female reader.) But any reader would have trouble

[52] Ibid., 348-9. PSS, 27: 515. "И действительно, если Евгений Иртенев был душевнобольной тогда, когда он совершил свое преступление, то все люди такие же душевнобольные, самые же душевнобольные—это несомненно те, которые в других людях видят признаки сумасшествия, которых в себе не видят."

denying the second charge. Simply by reading and enjoying the story, we have established our guilt.[53]

Nabokov, like Tolstoy, gratifies his reader and facilitates an unreflective, automatic response by using the very same Hollywood clichés that Magda, who imitates the luscious ingénue, uses to gratify Krechmar. Nabokov's reader experiences Krechmar's sensuous pleasures just as Tolstoy's reader experiences Irtenev's. Krechmar's seduction by Magda at the cinema is followed by a flashback to Magda's childhood, in which Nabokov depicts Magda's physical maturation. Through this vivid description of Magda he aims to seduce the reader as well. Magda's body is re-described over and over again throughout the narrative.

Nabokov also offers his reader sensuous detail, borrowed scenarios, and gripping plot twists. He foregrounds a recognizable fabula, which consists of ready-made motifs: infidelity, a love triangle, the death of a child. The reader follows the twists and turns of Krechmar's story (as he does Irtenev's), but whereas Irtenev's journey is composed of a series of conflicts between desire and moral will, Krechmar's desire is challenged only by external obstacles (his daughter's death, Gorn's reappearance, and a car accident). Nabokov's novel thus deviates from the psychological prose some of his sophisticated readers expected from a literary writer. Rather, it approximates the kind of romantic adventure narrative that enjoys broad appeal whether in prose or in film. Moreover, Nabokov employs the melodramatic motifs of film specifically, and even deploys cinematic devices, most notably a montage-like narration of Krechmar's car accident.

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[53] It is true that Tolstoy ultimately decided not to publish *The Devil*. But he did originally intend to publish it, and therefore we might surmise that he thought about the effect the work would produce on his readers.

Nabokov crosscuts this scene with descriptive passages—including a long passage depicting Anneliza on her balcony in Berlin—to stall our reading and create suspense. He creates a parallel between his reader's pursuit of gratification through his "cheap" novel and Krechmar's pursuit of gratification through Magda.

Nabokov implicates his reader in the protagonist's inattentive, consumption-oriented perspective most thoroughly in a scene that has both the protagonist and the reader responding to an artwork embedded in novel. At a moment of heightened suspense, when Krechmar is about to discover his lover's infidelity, Nabokov inserts a transcription of a long, digressive work by Krechmar's acquaintance, the pseudo-Proustian author Ditrikh Zegelkrants. Zegelkrants has witnessed Magda's infidelity, and the reader expects him to reveal it, but instead Zegelkrants reads from his new work about "a highly impressionable person going to the dentist." Nabokov describes Krechmar's interest waning as Zegelkrants' hero meditates on his toothache, and the reader cannot help but sympathize with Krechmar's frustration at the absence of action: that is precisely what the reader wanted, too. When Zegelkrants' hero finally reaches the dentist's office, Krechmar feels relieved that something might finally happen.[54] The reader also expects some excitement as he begins to recognize the people in the dentist's waiting room—they are the same people who saw Magda with Gorn. The reader and Krechmar are both gratified by the hints of fabula and the tantalizing prose. Soon Krechmar realizes that this is a portrait of his lover. For a moment, he and the reader are gripped—but then Zegelkrants turns back to teeth and the reader gratefully returns to

[54] KO, 97. "Наконец Герман пришел, и тут повествование несколько оживилось, Кречмар, впрочем, чувствовал, что врач будет прав, если Герману сделает больно."

Nabokov's novel, en route to Krechmar's confrontation with his lover, leaving Zegelkrants' hero to ponder the inside of his mouth.

By conflating the experience of his protagonist with that of his reader, Nabokov exposes the reader's desire for the sensuous and the intriguing. Given the choice between Zegelkrants' fabula-free psychological prose and *Kamera Obskura*, you would surely choose the latter, Nabokov seems to suggest. Like Gorn's story about the beautiful boy, this scene mocks the reader who indulges in the pleasures of the protagonist, forgetting to remain a little aloof. Nabokov snares his reader by offering him an artwork that gratifies him—only to unmask and critique his demand for gratification. Irony in *Kamera Obskura* serves the same function that moral accusation does in *The Devil*. Nabokov and Tolstoy first employ devices that reliably stimulate the reader—an intriguing fabula, titillating descriptive detail—and then pounce on the reader with irony or a moral message in order to compel a more self-conscious readerly response. In doing so, they seek to stimulate without stupefying.

Mindless Readers

Many of Nabokov's early readers missed the irony of *Kamera Obskura*, or rejected it as an alibi. They took Nabokov to task precisely for the excessive sensuousness and overly plotted quality of his prose, which they regarded as a gambit to expand readership by pandering to the masses. "Those who read books only to find out 'what happens next'…will be quite satisfied with the novel," Georgii Adamovich

remarked in one review.[55] Adamovich's personal antipathy toward Nabokov might have influenced his views on the novel, but other critics affirmed his assessments. Nikolai Andreev noted that the "carnal quality of description is almost at its expressive limit" in Nabokov's novel.[56] Petr Balakshin considered "lust and fear, the lowest orders of feeling" to be the foundation of Nabokov's novel.[57] He attributed Nabokov's success with audiences to the fact that the work makes no demands on the reader and merely answers a base craving for stimulation. In other words, these critics thought Nabokov had simply produced a "false artwork," an artwork that inspired an unreflective, gratification-oriented response from the reader. These reviews prefigured what Nabokov would experience many years later with the publication of *Lolita*.

Khodasevich defended Nabokov by highlighting his ironic intention, his critique of precisely the kind of cheap entertainment he was accused of producing. Attuned to the novel's aesthetic concerns, Khodasevich notes that Krechmar's moral blindness follows from his thoroughgoing aesthetic blindness:

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[55] Георгий Адамович, "Рец.: «Современные записки», книга 49," *Последние новости*. 1932. 2 июня. № 4089. С. 2, in *Классик без ретуши*. "Кто читает книги только для того, чтобы узнать, «что случится дальше», кто вообще требует от повествования быстрой, ловкой и неожиданной смены фактов, будет романом вполне удовлетворен."

[56] Ник. Андреев, "Рец.: «Современные записки», книга 49," *Воля России*. 1932. № 4/6 (июль). С. 183-184, in *Классик без ретуши*."Плотскость описаний почти предельна в своей отчетливости."

[57] Петр Балакшин, "В. Сирин: Критические заметки," *Новое русское слово*. 1934. 1 апреля. С. 8., in *Классик без ретуши*. "два кардинальных чувства, довлеющих над остальными: похоть и боязнь. Не страсть и страх, а именно — похоть и боязнь, чувства низшего порядка."

> His moral conscience is troubled: Memories of his wife and daughter torment him. But his artistic conscience is deeply dormant due to the general acceptance of film as art. This is the root of his unhappiness. If he understood the kind of artistic and, consequently, spiritual mire he has been lured into by film, he would not only refrain from financing a film staring Magda and Dorianna Karenina, but send Magda down the stairs.[58]

Khodasevich considered cinema a source of gratification for the overworked masses—by no means an art form. He suggests that Nabokov mimics cinematographic devices and their effects in order to show how thoroughly our perception of the world has been degraded by cinema. The eroding distinction between what belongs and does not belong to art disturbed Khodasevich, and he considers Krechmar's death a fitting ending for a novel that "again and again deals with the death that threatens our whole culture."[59] To him, Krechmar's death symbolizes the demise of art in modern times.

Khodasevich's reading is astute, but even he underestimates the extent to which the very structure of Nabokov's narrative is designed around the idea that a spectator's self-reflective engagement is necessary for a properly aesthetic response. Khodasevich's reading suggests that the reader (at least, the non-moviegoing reader) is free from the "spiritual mire" that envelops Krechmar. He attributes to Nabokov a mimetic strategy in which the novel is a reflection of a society degraded by the pursuit of agreeable pleasures.

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[58] Ходасевич, "Рец.: Камера обскура." "Человеческая совесть Кречмара неспокойна: его мучат воспоминания о жене и дочери. Но его совесть художественная глубоко усыплена всеобщим признанием синематографа как искусства. В этом и лежит корень его несчастия. Если бы он понял, в какую художественную и, следовательно, духовную трясину он завлечен синематографом, он не только не стал бы финансировать фильм с участием Магды и Дорианны Карениной, а и самую Магду спустил бы с лестницы."

[59] Ibid. "эта смерть [героя] представляется как нельзя более логичной. Вновь и вновь дело идет о смерти, грозящей всей нашей культуре."

As I have argued, however, Nabokov is not merely *showing* the reader a corrupted world: he is making the reader *complicit* in that corruption, and then showing him his guilt.

The theme of physical entrapment is prominent in Nabokov's novel, and as Thomas Seifrid observes the prison cell (*kamera* in Russian) appears in the novel's title. Seifrid suggests that Nabokov contrasts the confinement of his characters with the freedom of the author and reader, thus expressing anxiety about the limits of human understanding while gesturing toward the possibility of overcoming them: "The situation in which a character is, as it were, displayed within an epistemological chamber which both author and reader transcend and view from without in fact occurs often in Nabokov's works and forms one of the cardinal features of their metapoetic self-awareness."[60] But the aesthetic trap Nabokov sets for his readers in this novel complicates the straightforward opposition between freedom and confinement. The reader does not escape entrapment—he cannot transcend his appetites—but he does become aware of it, and with this awareness gains a modicum of freedom. Why is there freedom in awareness? Because in recognizing our bondage we must simultaneously envision our freedom. We acknowledge that we might aspire to respond to the things around us without reference to our own appetites.

Both Nabokov and Tolstoy have an aesthetic lesson in store for their readers. What distinguishes the former from the latter is that Nabokov recognizes the indispensability of the devices of "false art" even as he critiques them. In the years after Tolstoy wrote *The Devil*, he became increasingly concerned that his literary works

[60] Thomas Seifrid, "Nabokov's Poetics of Vision or What *Anna Karenina* is Doing in *Kamera obskura*," *Nabokov Studies* 3 (1996): 9.

provided only agreeable pleasures. Tolstoy began to advocate severe artistic abstinence from stimulating effects, including sensuous details and diverting plots, for fear that these would elicit only an inattentive response. It should be noted, however, that Tolstoy did not in fact entirely abandon in his late works the kind of strategy he pursued in *The Devil*. It seems that even Tolstoy could not make due without the devices he outlawed. Nabokov found art shorn of the sensuous and intriguing not only unsatisfactory but downright torture: he tells us as much by linking Zegelkrants' art with a trip to the dentist. And while Nabokov persistently admonished readers who read only for dialogue and plot, he obviously made great use of "cheap" devices. He acknowledged, through his own example, that the devices Tolstoy disparaged are as indispensible to the high literary writer as they are to the Hollywood filmmaker.

Nevertheless, as the novel's early reviews suggest, Nabokov's irony was not sufficient to distinguish his novel from a work of false art. It did not awaken readers—or not enough readers—from the pleasant stupor induced by the author. But Nabokov was not caught by surprise. From the start, he had been uneasy about how his novel would be received, writing to his wife Vera: "Ugh, how I'm going to catch it for poor *Camera*. And it will serve me right."[61] He does not elaborate on his concerns, but it seems likely that he worried his work would be confused with precisely the kind of cheap entertainment he sought to critique. Harsh critics like Balakshin concluded as much: "There are mindless authors for mindless readers. Sirin is one of these."[62] The criticism seemed to sting;

[61] Letter dated April 15, 1932 in Nabokov, *Letters to Véra*, 181.

[62] Петр Балакшин, "В. Сирин: Критические заметки." "Есть бездумные писатели для бездумного чтения. Таков В. Сирин."

Nabokov was not yet the Olympian author indifferent to the critique of mere mortals. Years later he would declare *Kamera Obskura* his poorest novel because he had "'succeeded' all too well" in characterizing his literary personages as "hopeless clichés." Alfred Appel suggests that "if Nabokov were conversant with critical jargon, he would doubtless say that he had been guilty of 'the fallacy of imitative form.'"[63] Still more telling is the way in which Nabokov revised his novel when he translated it into English, introducing key narrative elements to resist a "mindless" reading.

Laughter in the Dark: Creative Compulsion, Instrumental Response

The critical response to *Kamera Obskura*—fair or not—compelled Nabokov to reshape his novel in a way that would highlight his intentions to parody and not to imitate the Hollywood film. Nabokov sought to make it more difficult for the reader to simply gratify his appetites for the sensuous and the intriguing. Through this re-writing, however, he uncovered a very different, more surprising, and in some ways more insidious impediment to aesthetic perception—namely, one's own creative desire. *Laughter in the Dark* shows that the desire to be an artist oneself can hinder one's aesthetic perception at least as much as the desire to be entertained.

Nabokov complained to his British publisher that the first English translation of *Kamera Obskura* was "inexact and full of hackneyed expressions."[64] Dissatisfied with

[63] Alfred Appel, 262.

[64] Letter to Hutchinson & Co., dated August 28, 1936. Vladimir Nabokov, Dmitri Nabokov, and Matthew J Bruccoli, *Vladimir Nabokov: Selected Letters, 1940-1977* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), 15.

this work by Winifred Roy, Nabokov resolved to retranslate and revise the novel himself; he published it in United States as *Laughter in the Dark.* He made many minor adjustments—changes to the character's names, for example—and two major structural alterations. First, Nabokov rewrote the novel's beginning by removing the Cheapy motif and instead summarizing Albinus' story from start to finish in the first sentence. He thereby created a narrative frame that is absent in the Russian version. Second, Nabokov embedded descriptions of visual artworks into the text. Scholars have tended to treat Nabokov's revisions merely as refinements of the novel's plot and style.[65] And Nabokov himself claimed that his edits and cuts, including the elimination of Cheapy, were only minor adjustments.[66] But both revisions, in fact, help Nabokov address his chief worry about his own work—that it facilitates an unreflective readerly response.

The changes Nabokov makes in translation deemphasize fabula while stressing the constructedness of the text, encouraging the reader to contemplate his own reading practice. Furthermore, the changes allow Nabokov to disassociate himself from the devices of "false art"—borrowed scenarios, melodramatic plot—by fostering the impression that his *protagonist* is responsible for these narrative features. The new beginning and the interpolated artworks function to create a sense of ambiguity about whether it is the author-narrator or Albinus himself who generates the melodramatic plot.

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[65] Brian Boyd emphasizes the enhanced structure of the plot: "[Nabokov] improved the mechanism by which hero meets villain, he redesigned the means by which hero discovers the villainy of villain and heroine." Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years,* 445. See also Toker (*Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structure,* 109) and Appel (*Nabokov's Dark Cinema*, 265) for discussions of Nabokov's revisions.

[66] Appel, 265.

A side effect of these distancing devices is a radical change in how Nabokov characterizes his protagonist's aesthetic transgression. Albinus proves to be incapable of aesthetic enjoyment as a result of his preoccupation with his own creative idea, a preoccupation that compels him to regard other artworks as fodder for his endeavor. In resisting one type of spectatorial failure (an unreflective response), Nabokov's alterations end up disclosing another: an appropriative and instrumentalizing relation to art.

The first major change is the novel's new beginning, which ensures that the American reader will not read simply to "see what happens next," as Adamovich had put it. The author-narrator gives away the ending before the story has begun:

> Once upon a time there lived in Berlin, Germany, a man called Albinus. He was rich, respectable, happy; one day he abandoned his wife for the sake of a youthful mistress; he loved; was not loved; and his life ended in disaster.
>
> This is the whole of the story and we might have left it at that had there not been profit and pleasure in the telling; and although there is plenty of space on a gravestone to contain, bound in moss, the abridged versions of a man's life, detail is always welcome.[67]

The reader's foreknowledge of Albinus' future impedes his ability to share the protagonist's perspective. The reader's perspective is aligned instead with that of the author-narrator. The new narrative frame is underscored by two physical frames: before we meet Albinus, we envision the synopsis of his life etched on his gravestone (gravestone, outer frame) and bound with a ring of moss (moss, inner frame). The novel's new beginning recalls the opening of Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, in which the protagonist's obituary likewise precedes his appearance in the narrative. (The "abridged

[67] LD, 7.

version" of Ivan Ilych's life is doubly bound as well; his obituary is printed on a newspaper leaf and outlined by a black border.[68]) Nabokov's reader is thus discouraged from identifying with the hero and instead compelled to reflect on his own readerly purposes; he is assured there will be "profit and pleasure" in the telling.

The new beginning also dampens the reader's desire to imagine himself into the protagonist by making Albinus not just a poor spectator but also an artistic thief. Krechmar's first deed was a passive acquiescence to conventional aesthetic standards; Albinus' is an active appropriation of another's artistic idea:

> It so happens that one night Albinus had a beautiful idea. True, it was not quite his own, as it had been suggested by a phrase in Conrad (not the famous Pole, but Udo Conrad who wrote *Memoirs of a Forgetful Man* and that other thing about the old conjuror who spirited himself away at his farewell performance). In any case, he made it his own by liking it, playing with it, letting it grow upon him, and that goes to make lawful property in the free city of the mind.[69]

Albinus is a critic by profession, but he wishes to pursue his own artistic project. He wants to animate famous paintings, to set the work of the "Old Masters" in motion. In *Kamera Obskura* Krechmar briefly entertains the thought of a "film exclusively in Rembrandt's or Goya's tints," but that is Krechmar's own idea and it occurs only in passing, never to be mentioned again.[70] Significantly, in the Russian novel it is Gorn who

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[68] *The Death of Ivan Ilych* in Tolstoy, *Great Short Works*, 247. *Smert' Ivana Il'icha* in PSS, 26: 61.

[69] LD, 7-8.

[70] KO, 10. "К кинематографу он вообще относился серьезно и даже сам собирался кое-что сделать в этой области — создать, например, фильму исключительно в рембрандтовских или гойевских тонах."

appropriates an artistic idea: the idea for Cheapy is initially proposed by his acquaintance. The translation gives this appropriation to Albinus, and makes it even more theft-like by putting its source in another's actual artwork. Albinus is in fact a thief twice over since he seeks to use not only Udo's novel but also others' paintings in his own creative project. "Stop, thief" is what Nabokov proposes telling a critic "who deliberately transforms an artist's subtle symbol into a pedant's stale allegory."[71] Albinus seems a lot like that thieving critic. Though we are told that he makes the writer Udo Conrad's idea his "lawful property" by liking it and playing with it, the narrator is close to Albinus' thoughts here, and this justification of artistic appropriation, in the language of law and commerce, strikes us as the critic's own reasoning.

Krechmar was mainly concerned with sensuous pleasure; Albinus, in contrast, is more attentive to the status bestowed on him by the artworks he possesses. For him, art is an instrument of social relations. The distinct types of false art that appear in Krechmar's and in Albinus' homes are telling. Krechmar does not own false masterpieces, as Albinus does, and he is not particularly interested in showcasing his art collection. In the Russian, Nabokov dispenses with Gorn's tour of Krechmar's collection in a sentence: "Krechmar led him from room to room; in each there was some wonderful canvas."[72] In the English, this scene is much expanded. Every room, we are told, "contained some fine painting—with a sprinkling of fakes." The cartoonist—Rex in the English—wanders through the gallery considering whether the "Lorenzo Lotto with the mauve-robed John and weeping

[71] "James Joyce: *Ulysses*," in *Lectures on Literature*, 288.

[72] KO, 66. "Кречмар повел его по комнатам; в каждой было какое-нибудь замечательное полотно."

Virgin was quite genuine" and recognizing his own forgery, Baugin's *Still Life with Chessboard*, among the artworks.[73] At Krechmar's, Gorn finds his Cheapy, the kind of false artwork that merely provides easy gratification. At Albinus', Rex finds his forgery of a masterpiece, the kind of false artwork that bestows status on the owner. Albinus likewise affirms his status by boasting to dinner guests that the well-known writer Udo Conrad once read his works at Albinus' home (Krechmar makes no such boast about Zegelkrants).[74] Albinus confuses aesthetic pleasure not with the gratification of his senses but with self-satisfaction, a pleasure at his own ability to display good taste.

Albinus' artistic appropriation—his "beautiful idea"—provides an occasion for the second major change Nabokov undertakes in translation: there are many more visual artworks embedded in the English novel than in the Russian. Although Krechmar is an art expert, Nabokov offers few descriptions of visual art in *Kamera Obskura*. Only Gorn's cartoons and sketches of Magda are described in any detail. In *Laughter in the Dark*, however, Nabokov refers to several specific paintings. He mentions artists by name—Breughel, Lotto, Baugin—and notes the styles of various artistic schools. Albinus contemplates animating Italian Renaissance paintings, for example, and Nabokov depicts one such work: "the blue cone of a hill in the distance, a white looping path, little pilgrims winding their way upward."[75] This is just one of several such descriptions of paintings.

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[73] LD, 145-146.

[74] LD, 133.

[75] LD, 9.

These interpolated visual artworks serve, first of all, to compel greater attentiveness on the part of the reader to the construction of the artifact. Nabokov claimed that his objective in *Kamera Obskura* was not to write a novel that resembled a "screenplay," but to create a "verbal imitation of what was then termed a 'photoplay.' " He wanted to create a stylized *painting* within narrative, to "render the seven main colors the way that tinctures in heraldry are rendered by means of lines or dots placed in this or that way."[76] Nabokov's comments highlight his ambition to work against the limitation of his medium, an ambition that appears to have gone unnoticed by most critics. He subsequently makes this intention more explicit in *Laughter in the Dark*; he insists that the reader attend to his performance of an artistic feat, rather than merely delight in prose and plot. Nabokov's descriptions of paintings, which pay particular attention to primary colors, alert the reader to the way Nabokov has color-coded his own narrative. He pegs different colors to specific motifs—red is the color of deceit, yellow signals violence, blue indicates a liminal space—and the reader is prompted to participate in a kind of decoding, thus engaging with the text deliberately rather than automatically.

The embedded artworks are also fodder for Albinus' artistic idea, which is an inversion of Nabokov's. Albinus' idea is to *narrativize* paintings. He seems especially interested in setting in motion landscapes and scenes from everyday life, such as the Dutch School painting depicting "a pot-house with little people drinking lustily at wooden tables and a sunny glimpse of a courtyard with saddled horses." He wants to give this painting an incipient plot: "all suddenly coming to life with that little man in red putting down his tankard, this girl with the tray wrenching herself free, and the hen

[76] Appel, 258.

beginning to peck on the threshold."[77] The idea to create narrative where there is none enthralls Albinus even after he abandons his animated film project (he quickly grasps that the film would be a financial loser). Since he cannot realize his idea on the screen, Albinus proceeds to realize it in life. The plot of Albinus' fatal love affair appears to be generated by his own imperative to set things in motion.

Nabokov's text promotes this reading by comparing the tranquility of Albinus' family life to the tranquility of the landscape paintings he wishes to animate. Albinus enjoys "many beautifully soft evenings at home" with his wife Elizabeth gazing from their balcony onto a cityscape that looks as if it were painted: "the blue streets with the wires and chimneys drawn in Indian ink across the sunset."[78] Albinus reflects that his family "belonged, as it were, to another period, limpid and tranquil like the backgrounds of the early Italians."[79] And he compares his betrayal of his family to a "madman slash[ing] a picture."[80] Albinus destroys the uneventful reality of family life—this tranquil landscape—by hatching for himself an adulterous plot. In *Laughter in the Dark*, in contradistinction to *Kamera Obskura*, Nabokov hints at the possibility that there might not be a story to tell without Albinus' own creative impulse. He thus fosters a sense of uncertainty about who is really writing Albinus' banal plot, and endeavors to absolve himself of the composition's clichés.

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[77] LD, 8.

[78] Ibid., 19.

[79] Ibid., 45.

[80] Ibid., 91.

Even if the changes Nabokov makes to the novel's structure were inspired by the simple need to shield himself from the critics' complaints, they actually have rather profound philosophical ramifications. They bring to light a new aesthetic crime. Albinus' creative desire makes him closer kin to Tolstoy's Pozdnyshev than to his own Russian prototype. He appears to share Pozdnyshev's, rather than Krechmar's, affliction. It is his creative ambition, not his appetite, that instigates his demise. Like Krechmar, he is blind both morally and aesthetically: he cannot distinguish real art from fakes and his collection is "sprinkled" with forgeries. But his blindness stems now from his own creative obsession, not from the desire for sensual gratification.

Albinus is a bad spectator for the same reason that Tolstoy's Pozdnyshev is a poor appreciator of music and his Anna is a bad reader. Anna subordinates literary and theatrical works to the romantic plot she herself endeavors to create.[81] Pozdnyshev subsumes his wife's musical performance into his own theatrical performance (the murder) and then into his confessional narrative. These characters each seek to appropriate the artworks of others and use them for their own creative purposes. Tolstoy does not fault the spectator for this impulse to subsume: on his view, this is a natural response to false or bad art. Nabokov, on the other hand, suggests that the spectator is to blame. Albinus allows his creative desire to overwhelm him and thus fails to experience aesthetic pleasure: he regards artworks only in terms of how they might benefit his own artistic pursuits. These three characters each fail to adopt the kind of outward looking gaze needed for aesthetic perception because each wants so badly to *be* an artist.

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[81] For a discussion of Anna's creative impulses see Gary Saul Morson, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 71-80.

Although "inspiration" was an important and positive term in Nabokov's aesthetic vocabulary, he also recognized that a claim to "inspiration" can cloak a fundamentally appropriative attitude toward art, like Albinus's. In his lecture on *Madam Bovary*, Nabokov delights in Flaubert's derision of inspiration as a disguise for philistinism. He quotes a conversation about art between Emma and Leon, referring to it as the "bible of the bad reader." Emma prefers stories that "rush breathlessly along, that frighten one." She is the kind of bad reader who, like Krechmar, confuses aesthetic pleasure with gratified appetites. Leon, on the other hand, likes to read in order to recognize his own ideas, to be moved to tears, and to be inspired. He bombastically extols the beauties of the Swiss mountains and declares: "I no longer marvel at the celebrated musician who, the better to inspire his imagination, was in the habit of playing the piano before some imposing site." Leon, like Albinus, is the kind of bad reader who confuses aesthetic pleasure with self-satisfaction; he delights not in the beauty of the landscape or the artwork but rather in his own capacity to be stirred. "This is superb!" Nabokov says of Flaubert's parody.[82]

The reader of *Laughter in the Dark* is not made complicit in Albinus' creative appropriations to the same extent that he is made complicit in Krechmar's pursuit of gratification. But Nabokov does encourage the reader to reflect on his own pursuit of "profit" in reading Albinus' tale. From Nabokov's fairy tale beginning—"Once upon a time"—we anticipate that this story, like most fairy tales, encodes a life lesson that we must seek to uncover. The multiple frames around Albinus display the protagonist as a sort of specimen ready for our inspection, and throughout the novel we are prompted to

[82] "Gustave Flaubert: *Madam Bovary,*" *Lectures on Literature*, 149-150.

reflect on our activity as investigators and interpreters of Albinus' fate. Albinus resembles those characters of Tolstoy's late fiction whose lives serve readers as examples of how not to live. Albinus' specimen-like status is reminiscent not only of Ivan Ilych, but, first and foremost, of Pozdnyshev. In his performance at Pozdnyshev's mock trial, Nabokov had underscored what he felt to be Tolstoy's injustice toward the protagonist in making him a moral specimen for the reader.[83] Nabokov's own purpose in encouraging a scrutinizing approach to Albinus is ironic. If we stand to learn anything from Albinus' life, it is only that our own efforts to glean a lesson from Albinus' tale are not so different from Albinus' efforts to glean profit from art. Nabokov would not perfect his methods of pointing up the dangers of inspiration and interpretation until *Pale Fire*. But already in this early novel we see hints of Nabokov's future strategy for thwarting the reader whose own rational objectives interfere with his capacity to be responsive to another's art.

The notion that sensuous appetites inhibit genuine aesthetic perception is nothing new, but the idea that one's own creative desires interfere with one's ability to appreciate art is somewhat surprising. We tend to think of our own creativity as something that enhances aesthetic pleasure rather than detracts from it. It is *good*, we think, to be inspired by an artwork to create our own. But Nabokov's *Laughter in the Dark*, like Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata*, suggests that our own creative drive can have harmful consequences. It can be an obstacle to aesthetic appreciation. Recognizing this idea in the early novel *Laughter in the Dark* can help make sense of some of Nabokov's later aesthetic pronouncements—for example, his thought in *Lectures on Literature* that the would-be artist is a bad reader. Nabokov quizzed students on what makes a good reader,

[83] Vladimir Nabokov, "Rech' Pozdnyusheva."

giving them ten definitions of the good reader and telling them that only four are correct. "The reader should be a budding author" is one of the six incorrect definitions.[84]

The aesthetic concern revealed in *Laughter in the Dark* also illuminates Nabokov's definition of "aesthetic bliss" in the Afterword to *Lolita*, a key source for understanding Nabokov's ideas about art. There, Nabokov proclaims:

> I am neither a reader nor a writer of didactic fiction, and, despite John Ray's assertion, *Lolita* has no moral in tow. For me a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm.[85]

Richard Rorty relies on this Afterword to argue that while Nabokov's discursive writing asserts the equivalence of aesthetic and moral ends, his fiction shows that Nabokov did not believe "his own general ideas."[86] In the "Afterword," Nabokov wants to unite curiosity, tenderness, kindness, and ecstasy, Rorty argues, but his most memorable characters, Humbert Humbert and Charles Kinbote, show us the dubiousness of this union: their ecstasy rules out their kindness. For all their artistic gifts, they are inattentive to anything that does not pertain to their single-minded pursuits of appetitive or intellectual objectives. They lack the kind of attentiveness to others needed for tenderness and kindness. Indeed, Humbert and Kinbote appear to be more fully realized and

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[84] *Lectures on Literature*, 3.

[85] *Lolita*, 314-15.

[86] Richard Rorty, "The Barber of Kasbeam: Nabokov on Cruelty," *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 141-168, 168.

artistically gifted versions of Krechmar and Albinus—the first engrossed in his own sensuous impressions, the second absorbed by his own creative objective. Humbert and Kinbote, Rorty argues, refute Nabokov's definition of aesthetic bliss; Nabokov's great contribution was precisely to show us "the way in which the private pursuit of aesthetic bliss produces cruelty."[87]

If Nabokov's definition of "aesthetic bliss" in the passage above refers to the experience of the writer, Rorty seems justified in concluding that Nabokov is "trying to jam an ad hoc and implausible moral philosophy" into his definition.[88] Nabokov, however, begins his thought by speaking as a writer *and* as a reader. And in the second sentence he might very well be referring to the pleasure afforded him specifically by reading, in which case the combination of curiosity, tenderness, kindness and ecstasy seems quite plausible. The artist, whose ecstasy has to do with creation, might remain primarily attentive to himself and to the impressions relevant to his creative work. He might not achieve a dual freedom from his own appetites and objectives. And Rorty might be right that such freedom would preclude his artistic success: "Nabokov knew quite well that ecstasy and tenderness not only are separable but tend to preclude each other—that most nonobssessed poets are, like Shade, second rate."[89] The *reader*'s aesthetic delight, however, is not opposed to the kind of detachment from one's own interests that goes hand in hand with tenderness and kindness. In fact, the reader's aesthetic pleasure *depends* on his ability to attend to something other than himself.

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[87] Rorty, 146.

[88] Ibid., 158.

[89] Ibid., 159.

The writer might derive all sorts of satisfaction from his work, but perhaps "aesthetic bliss," as Nabokov characterizes it here, belongs solely to the good reader, liberated from his preoccupations thanks to the work of the artist. Nabokov's artist, through his labor, grants the reader a momentary freedom from his own efforts to further his physical and intellectual aims. This relationship between artist and spectator echoes Aikhenvald's idea that the artist is God-like in his labor on behalf of the spectator's pleasurable mental play: "Man is God's guest. And it is the host who labors, not the guest."[90]

[90] Aikhenvald, *Pokhvala prazdnosti*, 6.

Chapter Four

A Reader's Gift: The Pleasures and Responsibilities of Reading in *The Gift*

In the previous chapter, I argued that Nabokov and Tolstoy, for all of their apparent differences, shared the goal of endowing the reader with a momentary freedom from his own preoccupations. Nabokov, like Tolstoy, believed this freedom to be a prerequisite of aesthetic pleasure. My discussion focused on the different methods they prescribed to the author who seeks to liberate his spectator. Tolstoy sought to avoid tempting the reader's appetites and creative impulses. Nabokov proposed, in contrast, that these temptations could not be avoided. Instead, the author should stimulate the reader to indulge in the pursuit of his own desires and then compel him to reflect on how these desires obstruct aesthetic perception.

Such are the tasks of the author. What are those of the reader? Tolstoy has little to say in his aesthetics about the spectator's responsibilities toward the artwork. He indicates that it is the author's duty to create an artwork that will elicit the right sort of response; even a spectator as thoroughly debased as Pozdnyshev can be liberated from his preoccupations by an artist who has done his job well, Tolstoy suggests. But Nabokov, in contrast, has a great deal to say about the duties of the reader. Of course the artist must be a good artist, but the reader, for Nabokov, must be a good reader, too, or else the artist's work is for naught. But what makes a good reader? What is his responsibility to the text? Scholars agree that Nabokov intends to teach his readers how to read, but they diverge in their assessments of how, in Nabokov's aesthetics, one reads properly. Stephen Blackwell has argued that Nabokov sees the reader and writer as

creative partners.[1] Eric Naiman denies that the reader in Nabokov has a creative role to play, and suggests instead that the reader, for Nabokov, ought to submit completely to the author.[2] My aim in this chapter will be to analyze the reader's duties in *The Gift.* I will show that although the reader in Nabokov's aesthetics is given no role to play in determining the meaning of an artwork, he is nevertheless decisive for determining its value.

The Gift, the last novel Nabokov wrote in Russian, tells the story of Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, a young Russian émigré living in Berlin. Fyodor knows he has a literary gift and over the course of the novel he realizes his artistic potential, as well as meets his fiancé, Zina Mertz. Each chapter of the novel depicts Fyodor's gift at a higher stage of its development. Central to Fyodor's artistic growth, and to the structure of *The Gift*, is the biography he writes about Nikolay Chernyshevsky, a radical critic of the 1860s. Fyodor's biography is the fourth chapter of the novel. In the fifth and final chapter, Fyodor tells Zina that he will write a book about the way fate has contrived to bring the two of them together. He describes a novel that could be *The Gift* itself, thus hinting that we might have been reading Fyodor's own work.

In this novel Nabokov show us two kinds of readers: Nikolay Chernyshevsky, the fictional hero of Fyodor's biography, serves as the archetype of the bad reader, and Zina as that of the good one. Chernyshevsky attends primarily to his own appetites and creative ambitions. Zina, by contrast, refrains from employing the works of others for her own purposes. Through the juxtaposition of these two characters, Nabokov challenges

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[1] Stephen H. Blackwell, *Zina's Paradox: The Figured Reader in Nabokov's "Gift"*

[2] Eric Naiman, *Nabokov, Perversely* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

our assumption that as readers we ought to engage creatively with the texts we encounter, and that reading creatively grants us a kind of independence. Chernyshevsky's pursuit of his own creative goals is linked to his mental and physical captivity, while Zina's aversion to creative appropriation testifies to her autonomy.

Fyodor's character has been considered primarily in terms of his evolution as an author,[3] but I propose to look at Fyodor in his readerly role instead. *The Gift* traces not only the emergence of an author, but also the vanishing of a reader. By examining Nabokov's depiction of Fyodor's readerly experience in light of Henri Bergson's philosophy, I argue that the reader in *The Gift* enjoys certain pleasures and powers that are reserved for him alone. Fyodor exhibits an even greater aptitude for reading than Zina, and it is in his role as a reader that Fyodor experiences the most profound sensation of his own freedom. Through an encounter between Fyodor and Koncheyev, another talented artist in *The Gift*, Nabokov suggests that artistic work requires Fyodor to sacrifice that feeling of freedom. Fyodor must weigh the losses entailed in becoming an author.

In the final section, I consider Fyodor's struggle with the question of whether art is worth making. He worries that the abstraction involved in making art destroys the living essence of the experiences he wishes to preserve. But Fyodor's resolve to make art

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[3] Justin Weir, *The Author as Hero: Self and Tradition in Bulgakov, Pasternak, and Nabokov* (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002). Leonid Livaks, "The Novel as Target Practice: Vladimir Nabokov's *The Gift* and the New Malady of the Century," *Studies in the Novel* 34, no. 2 (summer 2002): 198-220. Irina Paperno, "How Nabokov's *Gift* Is Made," *Stanford Slavic Studies* 4, no. 2 (1992): 295-324. Sergei Davydov, "The Gift: Nabokov's Aesthetic Exorcism of Chernyshevskii," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies 19* (1985): 357-374. Simon Karlinsky, "Vladimir Nabokov's Novel *Dar* as a Work of Literary Criticism: A Structural Analysis," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 7, no. 3 (1963): 284-296.

is restored by his faith in an ideal reader's (Zina's) capacity to reconstitute these objects in her imagination. It is a gamble. To make art is to wager on the existence, somewhere in this world, of a good reader.

Bad Reading: Chernyshevsky as Merchant and Locksmith

Nabokov teaches his readers how to partake of readerly delight in many of his essays and novels, but *The Gift* offers some of the most extensive lessons in good reading. Here, as in other works, Nabokov teaches with humor and negative examples. Through a comical digression in the first chapter, he allegorizes the impulses that inhibit good reading, impulses he had previously identified in *Kamera Obskura* and *Laughter in the Dark*:

> One fine Sunday a young Berlin merchant and his locksmith friend set out on a trip to the country in a large, four-wheel cart with only the slightest smell of blood, rented from his neighbor, a butcher: two fat servant maids and the merchant's two small children sat in plush chairs set on the wagon, the children cried, the merchant and his pal guzzled beer and drove the horses hard, the weather was beautiful so that, in their high spirits, they deliberately hit a cleverly cornered cyclist, beat him up violently in the ditch, tore his portfolio to bits (he was an artist) and rolled on…[4]

[4] Vladimir Nabokov, *The Gift* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 50. Vladimir Nabokov, *Dar*, printed in accordance with *Sobranie sohinenii v 4-kh tomakh*, vol. 3 (Moskva: AST, 2003), 54-5. "а как-то в воскресенье молодой берлинский купец со своим приятелем слесарем предпринял загородную прогулку на большой, крепкой, кровью почти не пахнувшей, телеге, взятой напрокат у соседа-мясника: в плюшевых креслах, на нее поставленных, сидели две толстых горничных и двое малых детей купца, горничные пели, дети плакали, купец с приятелем дули пиво и гнали лошадей, погода стояла чудная, так что на радостях они нарочно наехали на ловко затравленного велосипедиста, сильно избили его в канаве, искромсали его папку (он был художник) и покатили дальше очень веселые..."

This story serves no narrative or descriptive purpose and thus invites an allegorical reading. The merchant, whose trade is tending to appetites, partners up with the locksmith, whose physical work unlocking spaces mirrors the symbolic work of the critical interpreter unlocking texts. The lock and key motif in *The Gift* has been understood in a variety of ways,[5] but to my knowledge commentators have not remarked on the locksmith as part of this dangerous pair. The merchant personifies the demands of the appetite, which get in the way of a properly aesthetic response. The locksmith stands in for our creative desires, including the desire to produce strong interpretations, which likewise inhibits our capacity to experience aesthetic pleasure. Together they harm the artist and his work.

Nikolay Chernyshevsky, the hero of Fyodor's biography, is guilty of indulging in both appetites and creative interpretations. Fyodor/Nabokov elaborates at length on Chernyshevsky's bad reading habits and stresses the connection between Chernyshevsky's bad reading and his various forms of confinement: in the tsar's prison, in his own mind, and in Fyodor's novel. Chernyshevsky is a "glutton for books"[6] who, as Stephen Blackwell puts it, has a "primarily gastronomical" approach to literature.[7] Chernyshevsky's reading and writing both involve the stomach. He "could not bear

[5] See: Barton D. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression: Some Novels of Vladimir Nabokov* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985) 93-106. Yuri Leving, *Keys to The Gift: A Guide to Vladimir Nabokov's Novel* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2011), 219-220.

[6] *The Gift*, 213. *Dar*, 220. "мальчик был пожирателем книг."

[7] Blackwell, 105.

reading alone; i.e., he invariably used to chew something with a book."[8] He eats gingerbread biscuits, zwiebacks, apples, and puff pastries. His love of pastry, in turn, inflects his own writing. Fyodor's narrator says that Chernyshevsky's famous novel *What to Do?* abounds with speeches full of his "involuntary howl of gastric lyricism."[9]

The analogy between food for the body and food for the soul is crucial for Fyodor's Chernyshevsky, and he humorously mixes up these genres of nourishment. Literature becomes food: before his arrest, Chernyshevsky swallows his own papers, washing them down with cold tea. And food becomes literature: during his hunger strike in prison Chernyshevsky hides solid food among his books.

Given the historical Chernyshevsky's materialist and utilitarian ideas, one might expect him to make use of the analogy between physical and spiritual nourishment in his aesthetics, but surprisingly he makes little reference to food in his dissertation on the subject of art, *The Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality*. (Although he does claim that art has made nothing as good as a real apple or an orange.)[10] It should be noted, however, that this analogy is crucial to another radical aesthetic tract: Tolstoy's *What is Art*? Throughout *What is Art?* Tolstoy likens simple art with healthy food ("bread and fruit"),

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[8] *The Gift*, 129. *Dar* 226. "не терпел пустого чаю, как не терпел пустого чтения, т. е. за книгой непременно что-нибудь грыз"

[9] Idib., 226. Ibid., 234. "в «Что делать?»—наполнял иную реплику невольным воплем желудочной лирики."

[10] Nikolay Chernyshevsky, "The Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality," in *Selected Philosophical Essays*, prepared by the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 320. Н. Г. Чернышевский, *Эстетические отношения искусства к действительности (Диссертация)*. "Но тем не менее надобно признаться, что наше искусство до сих пор не могло создать ничего подобного даже апельсину или яблоку, не говоря уже о роскошных плодах тропических земель."

and compares decadent art to "rotten cheese or putrefying grouse."[11] Limburg cheese is the gastronomic equivalent of degraded art both in *What is Art?* and in Tolstoy's socio-ethical tract *What Then Must We Do?* (1886). This latter tract echoes the title of Chernyshevsky's most influential novel *What to Do?* and shares its aim of envisioning a better course for Russian society. Tolstoy argues that the artist offers the peasant "spiritual food" in exchange for "bodily food," but does not deliver on his offer: "[artists] have prepared as payment to the people for our sustenance something that is only suitable, or it appears to us suitable, for science and art—but unsuitable and (like Limburg cheese) quite incomprehensible and repulsive to the very people whose labor we have devoured on the pretext that we would supply them with spiritual food."[12] Instead of offering the people the spiritual sustenance they need, artists produce stuff not fit for consumption, Tolstoy claims.

In *The Gift*, Fyodor's Chernyshevsky shares Tolstoy's tendency to evaluate artistic products on a gastronomic scale:"[feeding] the lean Russian reader with a diet of the most variegated information…while stressing how important were the meat dishes of

[11] Tolstoy, *What Is Art?*, 95. *Chto takoe iskusstvo?* in PSS, 30:108. "Люди могут не любить гнилой сыр, протухлых рябчиков и т. п. кушаний, ценимых гастрономами с извращенным вкусом, но хлеб, плоды хороши только тогда, когда они нравятся людям. То же и с искусством: извращенное искусство может быть непонятно людям, но хорошее искусство всегда понятно всем."

[12] Leo Tolstoy, *What Then Must We Do?*, trans. Aylmer Maude (Hartland: Green Books, 1991), 169. *Tak chto zhe nam delat'?* in PSS, 25: 351. "мы заготовили в виде оплаты народу за наш корм что-то годное только, как нам кажется, для нас, и для науки, и для искусства, но негодное, совершенно непонятное и противное, как лимбургский сыр, для тех самых людей, труды которых мы поедаем под предлогом доставления им духовной пищи."

politics and philosophy, Nikolay Gavrilovich never forgot the sweet either."[13] Wishing to defend the possibility of objective judgments of taste, Tolstoy and Chernyshevsky seize on our seemingly innate preferences for certain foods. By comparing artworks to foodstuffs they hope to suggest that our preferences for art, like our preferences for food, are also somehow natural and universally shared. Nabokov satirizes and critiques the use of such a gastronomic metric in *The Gift*. And in his lectures on Tolstoy, delivered nearly twenty years after the novel's composition, he takes his literary predecessor to task for his naïveté about the variability of our gastronomic preferences. He draws his students' attention to Levin's consumption of *shchi* and *grechnevaya kasha*, cabbage soup and buckwheat porridge. In *Anna Karenina*, this traditional peasant food is meant to evoke Levin as "a man of the soil, advocate of his simple life." "In my time forty years later," Nabokov tells his students, "to slurp *shchi* was as chic as to toy with any French fare."[14]

In *The Gift* Nabokov suggests that only *bad* art might be compared with food, in the sense that neither will last forever. The narrator of Fyodor's novel employs a gastronomic allegory in an unironic fashion only once, in reference to Chernyshevsky's *What to Do?*:

> We affirm that his book drew out and gathered within itself all the heat of his personality—a heat which is not to be found in its helplessly rational structure but

[13] *The Gift*, 233. *Dar*, 241. "Его журнальная деятельность с 53 года до 62 г. проникнута насквозь стремлением питать тощего русского читателя здоровым домашним столом разнообразнейших сведений—порции были огромные, хлеба отпускалось сколько угодно, по воскресеньям давались орехи; ибо подчеркивая значение мясных блюд политики и философии, Николай Гаврилович никогда не забывал и сладкого."

[14] *Lectures on Russian Literature*, 221.

> which is concealed as it were between the words (as only bread is hot) and it was inevitably doomed to be dispersed with time (as only bread knows how to go stale and hard).[15]

Food—whether good or bad, bread or cheese—is subject to the organic processes of decay. The kind of art made by Chernyshevsky is like food only in that it might appease one's fleeting appetite but will not last forever, as Nabokov believed a good book ought to.[16] Only one scrap of Chernyshevsky's writing earns the narrator's praise in Fyodor's novel: it is his letter to his wife, which is compared not to bread but to "a yellow diamond."[17]

In Fyodor's rendering, Chernyshevsky's own intemperate appetites are responsible for his physical, intellectual, and personal adversities. His poor reading habits (the avarice for topical newspapers) correspond to his poor eating habits (his immoderate consumption of cheap pastry). After getting his fill of both, we are told, "he was plagued by heartburn" and his diary "contains a multitude of most exact references as to how and where he vomited."[18] Appetites, both gastronomical and sexual, spoil Chernyshevsky's

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[15] *The Gift*, 281. *Dar*, 291. "Утверждаем, что его книга оттянула и собрала в себе весь жар его личности,—жар, которого нет в беспомощно-рассудочных ее построениях, но который таился как бы промеж слов (как бывает горяч только хлеб) и неизбежно обречен был рассеяться со временем (как лишь хлеб умеет становиться черствым)."

[16] Nabokov told his students that an author and a reader will be "linked forever if the book lasts forever." *Lectures on Literature*, 2.

[17] *The Gift*, 273. *Dar*, 282. "Перед нами знаменитое письмо Чернышевского к жене, от 5 декабря 62 года: желтый алмаз среди праха его многочисленных трудов."

[18] Ibid., 227. Ibid., 234. "Вообще питался всякой дрянью—был нищ и нерасторопен...Его дневник, особенно за лето и осень 49-го года, содержит множество точнейших справок относительно того, как и где его рвало."

ideas and writing as much as they do his health. “Politics, literature, painting, even vocal art, were pleasantly entwined with Nikolay Gavrilovich’s amorous emotions,”[19] Fyodor’s narrator explains. He further suggests that since Chernyshevsky’s ideas about art in particular were founded on his sexual desires, they “[had] not freed themselves of the flesh or [had] been overgrown by it” and were thus unsound.[20] Chernyshevsky’s gluttonous muse betrays him first figuratively, leading him astray intellectually, and then literally: it is his cook, Musa, who turns over incriminating papers to the police in exchange for “five rubles for coffee.” The critic’s arrest and imprisonment is thereby linked to his gastronomic desires.[21] The reader who sees art only as a means to appease his appetite harms himself as much as he harms the artist, if not more.

But it is not only appetites that lead to Chernyshevsky’s confinement. He is guilty of the sins of the locksmith as much as those of the merchant. Like the locksmith, Chernyshevsky is in the business of “unlocking,” attempting to penetrate beyond the given. The historical Chernyshevsky’s *Aesthetic Relations* seeks to expose our various fetishes: fate is only the personification of chance circumstances that upset our human calculations; the sublime is only whatever happens to be quantitatively greater than the things around it; the beautiful is our own reverence for our lives, and life in general.

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[19] Ibid., 225. Ibid., 232. “Так политика, литература, живопись, даже вокальное искусство приятно сплетались с любовными переживаниями Николая Гавриловича...”

[20] Ibid., 237. Ibid., 245. “Как часто бывает с идеями порочными, от плоти не освободившимися или обросшими ею, можно в эстетических воззрениях «молодого ученого» расслышать его физический стиль, самый звук его тонкого наставительного голоса.”

[21] Ibid., 263. Ibid., 271. “Ее без труда подкупили—пятирублевкой на кофе, до которого она была весьма лакома.”

Fyodor's Chernyshevsky likewise deciphers and debunks. He parses poetry and literary prose mathematically—dividing syllables by stresses—to determine that anapest is the most democratic and natural of Russian meters. He proposes "culling" novels for "flashes of observation," arguing that "the value of a work was not a qualitative but a quantitative concept."[22] He ultimately concludes that pure art is an illusion that ought to be dispelled: "It is sufficient to take a look at the trinkets fabricated in Paris, at those elegant articles of bronze, porcelain and wood, in order to understand how impossible it is nowadays to draw a line between an artistic and an unartistic product." [23] This line between the artistic and the unartistic product is precisely what is at stake for both Tolstoy and Nabokov, who both saw that the loss of this distinction threatened to reduce the artist to a mere craftsman or entertainer.

Through his interpretive practice, Chernyshevsky seeks to "unlock" texts, to discover a hidden meaning beyond the surface. Borrowing Paul Ricoeur's characterization of Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx, we might call Chernyshevsky "a master of suspicion," and his interpretive practice a "hermeneutics of suspicion." Ricoeur argued that for these three thinkers "the fundamental category of consciousness is the relation hidden-shown or, if you prefer, simulated-manifested." Whatever is on the surface is

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[22] Ibid., 239. Ibid., 247. "Так как Чернышевский полагал, что ценность произведения есть понятие не качества, а количества, и что «если бы кто-нибудь захотел в каком-нибудь жалком, забытом романе с вниманием ловить все проблески наблюдательности, он собрал бы довольно много строк, которые по достоинству ничем не отличаются от строк, из которых составляются страницы произведений, восхищающих вас»."

[23] Ibid. "Мало того: «Довольно взглянуть на мелочные изделия парижской промышленности, на изящную бронзу, фарфор, деревянные изделия, чтобы понять, как невозможно провести теперь границу между художественным и нехудожественным произведением» (вот эта изящная бронза многое и объясняет)."

merely a dissimulation that must be dispelled by applying a particular interpretive framework. Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx, he argues, attempted "to make their 'conscious' methods of deciphering coincide with the 'unconscious' work of ciphering which they attributed to the will to power, to social being, to the unconscious psychism. *Guile will be met by double guile.*"[24] In other words, these thinkers believed that if we learn from the clever ciphering enacted by our own consciousness and become competent ourselves in practices of coding and decoding, we would discover truth.

The consequences of the interpretive practices inherited from Ricoeur's three "masters of suspicion" have been debated throughout the twentieth century, and Nabokov anticipated and influenced contemporary arguments against deep interpretation. Writing about the hermeneutics of suspicion in science studies, Bruno Latour suggests that this "form of critical spirit has sent us down the wrong path…The question was never to get *away* from facts but closer to them, not fighting empiricism but, on the contrary, renewing empiricism."[25] Critics in literary fields have voiced similar concerns: that strong interpretation lets texts elude us, lets them recede rather than reveal themselves. Texts recede from us because, as Eve Sedgwick has observed, if we come to a text with a "strong theory," a theory capacious enough to accommodate a wide range of evidence, we attend only to those elements of the text that fit our theory, and thus reaffirm the assumptions that we brought to the text in the first place. Strong theories, according to

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[24] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation,* trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 34-5.

[25] Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 231.

Sedgwick, are "strongly tautological."[26] With the intention of unlocking, we actually lock ourselves into particular conceptual frameworks.

Fyodor's Chernyshevsky illustrates this type of mental confinement. Over the course of Fyodor's biography, Chernyshevsky gradually retreats from the world into his own mind. At first he neglects the things around him in favor of serious literature. As a young man he travels from Saratov to St. Petersburg, but misses the chance to take in the particulars of the Russian countryside because he is so engrossed in his books. Later, as an older man, he becomes even less attentive. In exile in Siberia, he lectures to fellow prisoners who notice that "although he was calmly and smoothly reading a tangled tale, with lots of 'scientific' digressions, he was looking at a blank notebook. A gruesome symbol!"[27] This blank page is gruesome because it attests to Chernyshevsky's blindness to anything outside his own mind. Before he had retreated from the natural world to the printed page; now he's retreated from the printed page to the blank one.

The Tyranny of Suspicious Reading

Part of what motivates contemporary critiques of suspicious reading, including Latour's and Sedgwick's, is the sense that our current socio-political circumstances have made such reading practices obsolete, even dangerous. Latour begins his call to arms

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[26] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," 135.

[27] *The Gift*, 286. *Dar*, 296. "Как то раз заметили, что хотя он спокойно и плавно читает запутанную повесть, со многими «научными» отступлениями, смотрит то он в пустую тетрадь. Символ ужасный!"

"Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?" by noting that the same suspicious reading method used by critics to undermine oppressive discourses that naturalize socially constructed phenomena is now deployed against progressive causes. "Lack of scientific certainty," Latour points out, has become a rallying cry for deniers of global warming. We cannot keep instructing students that "there is no such thing as natural, unmediated, unbiased access to truth, that we are always prisoners of language, that we always speak from a particular standpoint, and so on, while dangerous extremists are using the very same argument of social construction to destroy hard-won evidence that could save our lives."[28] Sedgwick's critique is similarly attentive to the needs of the current moment. Sedgwick suggests that all "paranoid reading," reading beyond the surface of the text, entails a faith in "the effects of exposure." A faith that if we bring everything to the light, we can cure our society and ourselves. Furthermore, she points out that "the force of any interpretive project of *unveiling hidden violence* would seem to depend on a cultural context, like the one assumed by Foucault's early works, in which violence would be deprecated and hence hidden in the first place."[29] But now, Sedgwick claims, violence is not hidden; it is on display. And amelioration, she argues, evidently has not followed exposure. History has challenged the suspicious reader's faith in exposure.

Writing *The Gift* in Berlin in the late 1930s, Nabokov was also living through a historical moment in which violence was readily on display. But although he mentions the influence on the novel of "the rise of a nauseous dictatorship," he seems to emphasize

[28] Latour, 227.

[29] Sedgwick, 140.

more atemporal arguments against suspicious reading.[30] Our own interpretive inventions, he claims, get in the way of our capacity to apprehend the world around us. As Fyodor wanders through the Grunewald forest on the outskirts of Berlin he thinks of his father, who was a famous naturalist:

> I like to recall what my father wrote: "When closely—no matter how closely—observing events in nature we must, in the very process of observation, beware of letting our reason—the garrulous dragoman who always runs ahead—prompt us with explanations which then begin imperceptibly to influence the very course of observation and distort it; thus the shadow of the instrument falls upon the truth.[31]

The careful observer must try to restrain the dragoman—reason, the professional interpreter—in order not to distort the objects before him. Reason is a chatterbox, weaving all sorts of plots. Reason, in a sense, gets too creative and prevents us from seeing anything but our own reflection. Nabokov challenges the faith a suspicious reader places in reason's capacity to expose truth, linking reason instead with obfuscation.

Nabokov further objects to the heroism of the interpreter implicit in suspicious reading by tracing the origins of this type of reading not to the pursuit of knowledge but to political authoritarianism. "In Russia the censorship department arose before literature," Fyodor asserts in his book on Chernyshevsky. "Its fateful seniority has been always in evidence: and what an urge to give it a tweak!" Chernyshevsky begins to write in code—"under the cover of elaborate clowning...frenziedly promulgating Feuerbach"—

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[30] *The Gift*, "Foreword."

[31] Ibid., 330. *Dar*, 343. "люблю вспоминать, что писал мой отец: «При наблюдении происшествий в природе надобно остерегаться того, чтобы в процессе наблюдения, пускай наивнимательнейшего, наш рассудок, этот болтливый, вперед забегающий драгоман, не подсказал объяснения, незаметно начинающего влиять на самый ход наблюдения и искажающего его: так на истину ложится тень инструмента»."

in response to the censorship of the authorities. The government, the narrator explains, was "fearful, for example, lest 'musical notes should conceal antigovernment writings in code' (and so commissioned well-paid experts to decode them)."[32] Chernyshevsky took to heart Feuerbach's demystifying imperative. But Nabokov suggests that oppression by government censorship was still more influential in making the "hidden-shown" binary so central to Chernyshevsky's thought and work. In his *Lectures on Russian Literature* Nabokov describes the tsarist government as the first of two critics "who struggled for the possession of the artist's soul."[33] Tsar Nicholas I, he argues, was among other things a "literary critic," who guarded vigilantly against creative thought. The radical critics, Nabokov goes on to say, became a second censorship, evolving "a despotism of their own."[34]

Despotism in *The Gift* operates not by restricting the creative activity of others but by subsuming their creative activity into one's own work. The "suspicious reader" is a would-be artist who wishes to assert his own creative vision. It is the tsarist authorities that do most of the deciphering in the novel, and far from discovering "truth" they in fact

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[32] Ibid., 264. Ibid., 273. "В России цензурное ведомство возникло раньше литературы; всегда чувствовалось его роковое старшинство: так и подмывало по нему щелкнуть." ; "И вот, в то время, когда власти опасались, например, что «под музыкальными знаками могут быть скрыты злонамеренные сочинения», а посему поручали специальным лицам за хороший оклад заняться расшифровыванием нот, Чернышевский в своем журнале, под прикрытием кропотливого шутовства, делал бешеную рекламу Фейербаху."

[33] It should be noted that Nabokov was not historically accurate in the way he characterized the activity of the tsarist censorship under Nicholas I. In fact, according to the censorship statue of 1828, censors were instructed not to read into what the text meant but, rather, to attend to what was plainly stated. Thank you to William Mills Todd for pointing this out to me.

[34] *Lectures on Russian Literature*, 3, 5.

create their own narratives. The government tells its own story about Chernyshevsky by "decoding" his diaries: "[The diary] was deciphered by people who were evidently incompetent, since they made a number of mistakes: for example, they read *dzryza* as [an abbreviation for] *druzya* (friends) instead of *podozreniya* (suspicions), which twisted the sentence 'I shall arouse strong suspicions' into 'I have strong friends.' " Having "deciphered" the diary, the authorities then employ the graphomaniac Kostomarov to help them concoct a story that would show Chernyshevsky to be a dangerous radical. Chernyshevsky responds to this creative appropriation of his works with another act of appropriation—by writing the novel *What to Do?* He claims the diary was the draft of a new novel and "knowing that the dangerous diary was being deciphered, he hastened to send the Senate 'examples of my manuscript drafts'; i.e., things which he had written exclusively to justify his diary, turning it ex post facto also into some draft for some novel."[35] Interpretation is not restrictive but generative, and it is this ceaseless generation that inflicts harm.

Interpretation poses a threat, of course, to authors: the authorities read back the fears that they bring to the text themselves, and consequently decide to imprison Chernyshevsky (the author). But Nabokov also stresses the damage that interpretation inflicts on the interpreter himself. Chernyshevsky's encoding and deciphering obscure the world, turning it first into a printed page and then into a blank one. The tragic blindness

[35] *The Gift*, 231. *Dar*, 238-9. " [Дневник] разбирали люди, видимо, неумелые, ибо допустили кой-какие ошибки, например, слово «подозрения», написанное «дзрья», прочли как «друзья»; вышло: «у меня весьма сильные друзья» вместо: «подозрения против меня будут весьма сильными»" ; "Сидя в крепости и зная, что опасный дневник разбирается, он спешил посылать Сенату «образцы своей черновой работы», т. е. вещи, которые он писал исключительно для того, чтобы дневник оправдать, превращая его задним числом тоже в черновик романа."

of the 19th century critic is echoed in Nabokov's depiction of two 20th-century critics who review Fyodor and other émigré writers. Fyodor reads two reviews of a work by the poet Koncheyev, whom he considers his sole artistic equal in Berlin. Both reviewers look past Koncheyev's poems to say something of their own: the first does so out of laziness (his name, Linyov, suggests as much), the second out of the creative rivalry common to suspicious readers. The latter critic, Christopher Mortus, contends that Koncheyev's "melodious little pieces about dreamy visions are incapable of seducing anyone," and praises Soviet writers for producing "human documents" that capture the gloomy disposition of the decade. Koncheyev is untouched by the critics' poor readings—Fyodor observes him scanning the reviews with an "angelic smile on his round face"—but the critics themselves are afflicted with blindness.[36] Linyov bears his blindness cheerfully: "It invariably happened that having leafed blindly through a long novel or a short story (size played no part in it) he would provide the book with his own ending—usually exactly opposite to the author's intention." Mortus, perhaps due to his greater capacity for self-reflection, *suffers* "from his incurable eye illness."[37] Fyodor feels sorry for the critic who, like Chernyshevsky, becomes a prisoner of his own mind as a result of his bad reading habits.

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[36] Ibid., 167-8. Ibid., 172. "отвлеченно-певучие пьески о полусонных видениях не могут никого обольстить"; "с удивительной, ангельской улыбкой на круглом лице"

[37] Ibid., 169. Ibid., 175. "Неизменно бывало, что, долистав вслепую длинный роман или коротенькую повесть (размер не играл роли), он навязывал книге собственное окончание, — обыкновенно как раз противоположное замыслу автора." ; "[Мортус] кстати сказать, был в частной жизни женщиной средних лет, матерью семейства, в молодости печатавшей в «Аполлоне» отличные стихи, а теперь скромно жившей в двух шагах от могилы Башкирцевой и страдавшей неизлечимой болезнью глаз, что придавало каждой строке Мортуса какую-то трагическую ценность."

The Abstinence of the Good Reader

Good reading, on the other hand, is associated with freedom from one's own rational and sensuous demands. Fyodor's fiancé Zina, who is singled out as a good reader, earns this freedom through abstinence and restraint. She is as ascetic as Chernyshevsky is gluttonous. Zina's asceticism is evident in her aversion to food. Throughout the novel she either refuses food or eats very little and reluctantly. Her abstemiousness is manifest in her body, which seems fleshless and almost on the brink of disappearing. Zina has narrow hips, weak shoulders, "ghostly elbows," and "pale hair which radiantly and imperceptibly merged into the sunny air around her."[38] She resembles a shadow more than an embodied being.

The thinness of Zina's body serves as a rebuke not only to the fictional Chernyshevsky but to the historical one as well. In his dissertation on aesthetics, Chernyshevsky expresses a preference for the standard of physical beauty upheld by the peasant. He argues that the peasant's life of physical labor leads him to admire the fresh complexion and buxomness of the peasant girl "who gets enough to eat" and can therefore work hard. "Rural people," Chernyshevsky writes, "regard the 'ethereal' society beauty as decidedly 'plain,' and are even disgusted by her, because they are accustomed to viewing 'skinniness' as a result of illness or of a 'sad lot.' " Chernyshevsky preaches that the beauty of the mind is ultimately more important than that of the body, but does

[38] Ibid., 183, 178. Ibid., 189, 184. "призрачные локти" ; "Ее бледные волосы, светло и незаметно переходившие в солнечный воздух вокруг головы."

nevertheless suggest that the "attraction for pale, sickly beauty is a sign of artificially corrupted taste."[39] Zina's body, or rather its near-absence, is among the many ways Nabokov's novel subtly points up the defects of Chernyshevsky's aesthetics.

Zina's lack of sexual appetite can similarly be opposed to Chernyshevsky's lust. Anna Brodsky has read *The Gift* as a text averse to sexuality, arguing that the novel's aesthetic is that of "artistic purity."[40] She cites Fyodor's unconsummated relationship with Zina as evidence that Nabokov here rejects the ideas of his immediate literary predecessors, the writers of the Silver Age, for whom sexuality was a central artistic concern. Eric Naiman complicates Brodsky's reading by suggesting that the novel is interested in sexuality, though not heterosexuality. Fyodor's desires, he argues, are illicit: narcissistic, Oedipal.[41] Both scholars, however, see the sexless union between Fyodor and Zina as a sign of Fyodor's aversion. But, in fact, the choice to remain chaste is Zina's. It is Zina who refuses to have an affair in her parents' house, believing it to be too vulgar. Fyodor later says that fate had created this rather "artificial" obstacle to the consummation of their affair in order to allow Fyodor and Zina to grow into their relationship. This relationship facilitated the writing of Fyodor's book about

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[39] Chernyshevsky, "The Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality," in *Selected Philosophical Essays*, 287; Н. Г. Чернышевский, *Эстетические отношения искусства к действительности (Диссертация)*. "Работая много, поэтому будучи крепка сложением, сельская девушка при сытной пище будет довольно плотна...светская «полувоздушная» красавица кажется поселянину решительно «невзрачною», даже производит на него неприятное впечатление, потому что он привык считать «худобу» следствием болезненности или «горькой доли»." ; "увлечение бледною, болезненною красотою — признак искусственной испорченности вкуса."

[40] Anna Brodsky, "Homosexuality in Nabokov's *Dar*," *Nabokov Studies* 4 (1997): 112.

[41] Naiman, *Nabokov, Perversely,* 175-6.

Chernyshevsky and, as a plot device, the writing of *The Gift* itself. If "fate" created this obstacle, however, Zina was certainly her instrument.[42]

In addition to abstaining from sensuous pleasures, Zina does not produce interpretations. Naiman—whose monograph *Nabokov, Perversely* is the most comprehensive analysis to date of the ways Nabokov problematizes interpretation—argues that in Zina Nabokov models his ideal reader, one who "listen, admires, remembers, is kind to animals, and occasionally insists on textual emendations."[43] Zina does not, however, take on a co-creative role. The relationship that Naiman identifies between Nabokov and his readers stands in contrast to the one Stephen Blackwell describes in *Zina's Paradox: The Figured Reader in Nabokov's The Gift.* Blackwell proposes that as Fyodor's reader, Zina is his creative partner. Zina should be viewed "as not merely lover or heroine but as a shaping artistic force."[44]

Naiman denies that Nabokov is looking for a creative partnership with the reader. Instead, he claims that Nabokov uses interviews, lectures, letters, and fictional works to foster a "hermeneutic anxiety" among his readers and bend them to his will:

> They want to find things in the text but fear finding too much. A yearning for identity with the master has two faces: the desire to dazzle and the fear of seeming ridiculous or crude. The text simultaneously tempts the interpreter and threatens to expose him.[45]

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[42] *The Gift*, 362. *Dar*, 378.

[43] Naiman, *Nabokov, Perversely*, 166.

[44] Blackwell, *Zina's Paradox*, 3.

[45] Naiman, *Nabokov, Perversely*, 114.

On the one hand, Nabokov encourages careful reading and rereading of the text, and his texts reward readers who can follow his allusions, notice repeated patterns, and so on. On the other hand, both in discursive writing and in fiction Nabokov skewers over-interpreters like Mortus and Linyov who inject the text with meanings unintended by its author. He is particularly derisive of psychoanalytic readings. "All my books should be stamped Freudians, Keep Out," Nabokov writes in the preface to *Bend Sinister*.[46] And yet, as Naiman argues, he "trains his readers to make illicit, seemingly unwarranted, and often libidinally charged interpretive associations."[47] Naiman observes that scholarly works on Nabokov tend to be "committed to the recovery of authorial intention,"[48] and suggests that this is a consequence of the interpretive anxiety Nabokov cultivates.

Naiman recognizes that there might be pleasure in refraining from strong interpretations, but he ultimately sees this as a disempowered readerly stance. "As we achieve ever greater intimacy with [*The Gift*], we don't re-create it or enter into a rapport with it from our own perspective as real individuals, we read as Nabokov would want us to read," Naiman observes. And it is through merging with the author in this way—through the very loss of our individuality—that we experience "one of the greatest pleasure of reading [which] is being able to forget we exist."[49] In other words, by insisting that readers give primacy to authorial intention in their interpretation, Nabokov facilitates an enjoyable self-forgetting. But this experience, according to Naiman, comes

[46] Nabokov, *Bend Sinister* (New York: Vintage, 1990), xviii.

[47] Naiman, *Nabokov, Perversely*, 8.

[48] Ibid., 162.

[49] Ibid., 177.

at a cost: "The 'price' is a loss of self."[50] Naiman sees Zina as an example of such an almost vanished self. "The problem is that in comparison with Fyodor, Zina has little individuality, and it is hard to see what sort of a life she will have outside of his."[51] To Naiman, her shadow-like physical presence suggests that she is only an echo, reflecting Fyodor's creative feats back at him.

I agree with Naiman that Nabokov idealizes a receptive reader rather than a creative one. The ideal reader observes and describes, and where he does interpret he does so only in order to recreate the design of the author rather than to produce something of his own. But I contest the notion that the receptive attitude that Nabokov prescribes to the reader disempowers him, and entails a consequential loss of identity.

Nabokov advocates a practice that, again borrowing a term from Ricoeur, we could call a "restorative" reading. Restorative reading, as opposed to suspicious reading, is concerned with reconstituting the fullness of a world designated by symbols, rather than looking beyond them to a hidden pattern. Ricoeur's notion of restorative reading has a Kantian provenance. He refers directly to Kant's idea, in the *Critique of Judgment*, that the significance of symbols (and therefore language, for Ricoeur) has to do with the fact that symbols give intuitive content to concepts that have no adequate sensuous presentations. A symbol does not correspond exactly to the concept it communicates; instead it inspires a multitude of thoughts that evoke this concept in the mind. Restorative reading means engaging in this type of multifarious perception inspired by the symbol.[52]

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[50] Ibid., 178.

[51] Ibid., 172.

[52] Ricoeur, 38.

The key symbol for Kant, of course, is beauty. We delight in the beautiful to the extent that we can be disinterested (i.e., forget our own pursuit of sensuous and rational goals). This receptivity in the aesthetic realm, however, reminds us of our ability to be active in the moral realm, to treat others as ends. Beauty reveals to us our capacity for moral action, the capacity that defines us as human being. Therefore our receptivity creates the possibility for us to constitute our identities as human beings.

Zina engages in restorative reading and enacts the kind of self-realization as a moral being that Kant had envisioned. She is both aesthetically receptive—disregarding her sensuous and rational preoccupations—and an autonomous moral agent. Not only is Zina kind to animals, as Naiman notes, she is also estimable in the care she takes with other people, both those she loves (Fyodor) and those she dislikes (her mother and stepfather). Anna Brodsky has read Zina's helpfulness toward her "unworthy family" as evidence of her servility: "She is the Victorian woman-angel, and a proud sister of such insipid twentieth-century heroines as Pasternak's Lara, and Bulgakov's Margarita, happily dusting the Master's books while he busily produces literary masterpieces."[53] Reading Zina in light of Kant, however, we can regard her actions as evidence of her autonomy rather than her servility. She treats others well not because she is inclined to do so by affection—she clearly has little affection for her family—but because she is bound to do so by the obligation to treat others as ends in themselves. What looks like self-abnegation is in fact Zina's self-realization as a moral agent. She displays her freedom and self-determination in transcending her own inclinations. Zina's capacity to suppress

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[53] Bodsky, 104-5.

her own desires gives her the freedom that, on Kant's view, distinguishes the human being.

Dana Dragunoiu's work on Nabokov's late novel *Ada* supports my argument that Zina's actions should be read against the background of Kant's moral thought. Dragunoiu has shown that Kantian thought had a tremendous impact on many of Nabokov's intellectual interlocutors and most importantly on his father, the liberal jurist Vladimir Dmitrivich Nabokov. V.D. Nabokov, Dragunoiu explains, worked within "the parameters of a legal philosophy that prizes above all other values (as does Kant) human dignity and the individual's right to self-determination."[54] Like other Russian neo-idealists and liberals, he relied on the Kantian notion that our capacity to transcend our particular desires and objectives in order to adhere to universal maxims speaks to our nature as self-governing beings and endows us with dignity. Dragunoiu points to the way this notion shapes Nabokov's depiction of Lucette in *Ada*. Lucette, the neglected half-sister of Van and Ada, is not artistically gifted like her siblings. But this lack of creative ability does not mean she lacks autonomy or human dignity. In fact, as Dragunoiu demonstrates, Lucette is an exemplar of freedom and dignity: "Lucette's autonomy—her "humanity," or *Humanität*, in the Kantian sense—is most explicitly demonstrated by her selfless courtesy to Robert and Rachel Robinson—'old bores of the family'—on the night of her death."[55] Lucette treats this family respectfully by keeping their company, despite her own inclination to leave them and pursue Van, whom she wishes to seduce.

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[54] Dana Dragunoiu, *Vladimir Nabokov and the Poetics of Liberalism*, 173.

[55] Ibid.,149.

Zina seems to foreshadow Lucette. Denying themselves the freedom to pursue their own desires—due to the presence of the Shchyogolevs and the Robinsons—the two heroines achieve a greater freedom through self-overcoming. They realize themselves as moral agents. Zina's Kantian freedom demonstrates that being a receptive (as opposed to a creative) reader can, in fact, endow an individual with dignity rather than deprive her of it.

The Reader's Freedom

The Gift, perhaps more than any other of Nabokov's novels, celebrates our human capacity for receptivity. Nabokov told both his wife and his cousin that the original title for the novel was an unqualified affirmation ("Da"—yes) to which he added one more letter ("Dar"—Gift).[56] The transmutation from *Da* to *Dar* seems to capture the arc of Fyodor's evolution from the receptive reader to the creative artist. This evolution, however, involves not only gains but also losses.

When, in 1964, an interviewer asked Nabokov about the pleasures of writing, Nabokov responded as though the answer were so straightforward that it was hardly worth discussing:

> [The pleasures of writing] correspond exactly to the pleasures of reading, the bliss, the felicity of a phrase is shared by writer and reader: by the satisfied writer and the grateful reader, or—which is the same—by the artist grateful to the

[56] Letter to Zinaida Shakhovskaya from March 1936, cited in A. Долинин, *Истинная жизнь писателя Сирина: работы о Набокове*, 260. Letter to Vera postmarked 19 February 1936 in Nabokov, *Letters to Véra*, 260.

> unknown force in his mind that has suggested a combination of images and by the artistic reader whom this combination satisfies. Every good reader has enjoyed a few good books in his life so why analyze the delights that both sides know? I write mainly for artists, fellow-artists and follow-artists.[57]

But Nabokov's dismissal of the question ("why analyze the delights that both sides know?") obscures the complexity of his response. Although Nabokov says the pleasures of reading and writing "correspond exactly," what he describes are complementary pleasures, not congruent ones. The artist and the reader might both be called "grateful" and "satisfied," but Nabokov's play with adjectives should not distract us from the fundamental discrepancy between these two types of experience. Whereas the writer attends to something within (the "unknown force in his mind"), the reader attends to something without (the "combination of images" produced by another's mind).

But these experiences are not merely different; one in fact precludes the other. The artistic ecstasy of authorship, Nabokov recognized, precludes the aesthetic bliss of readership, and vice versa. The writer's bliss involves his power to be guided by his own designs. The writer attends to his own intuitions in the process of selecting images and transforming them. The reader's bliss, on the other hand, derives in large part from his momentary liberation from his own mental patterning as he attends to the creative product of another. The writer, as writer, cannot experience this bliss. The reader's bliss has to do precisely with feeling *free* from his own conceptual schemes, his own objectives and impulses. He appreciates without selecting, appropriating, or transforming the artwork for his own purposes.

[57] Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 40.

Since generically *The Gift* is a Künstlerroman, it is not surprising that scholars have attended to what Fyodor reads and how it helps him develop his creative gift. Simon Karlinsky, for example, observed in his classic study of *The Gift* that "Not since *Eugene Onegin* has a major Russian novel contained such a profusion of literary discussions, allusions and writers' characterizations...The extensive use of literary and critical material might almost justify the description of the form of *Dar* as a hybrid between the fictional and critical genres." Karlinsky catalogues mentions of "Goncharov, Pisemsky, Leskov, Lev Tolstoy, Pushkin, Chekhov, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Aksakov, Lermontov, Tyutchev, Nekrasov, Fet, the Russian Symbolists, and, for good measure, Arthur Rimbaud"—and this is just in the first chapter.[58] But analysis of Fyodor's reading has been done primarily in order to demonstrate how it benefits Fyodor's writing. Sergei Davydov notes that "Fyodor's development as an artist loosely parallels the path of the history of Russian literature of the nineteenth century," from the Golden Age of Russian Poetry through the reign of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and the great 19th century novel.[59] My interest is not in what Fyodor reads, but in what it feels like to *be* a reader and in what is lost to Fyodor when he become a writer. *The Gift* has been read as a story about finding something thanks to creative activity—an adequate artistic form, a place within literary history, one's life's purpose—but I suggest that it is as much a story about losing something due this activity; losing the singular bliss of being a reader.

For all of Zina's talents, Fyodor, at certain moments in the text, exhibits an even greater receptivity than she does. The exemplary moment of readership in the novel

[58] Simon Karlinsky, 286-7.

[59] Sergey Davydov, "*The Gift*: Nabokov's Aesthetic Exorcism of Chernyshevskii," 356.

occurs in the last chapter, when Fyodor 'reads' the book of nature in the Grunewald forest. Fyodor meanders through the outskirts of Berlin and into the forest on a hot summer day. As he begins to attend to the sights and sounds of the woods, the narrative abruptly shifts from the third to the first person. Before his 'reading' begins, Fyodor/the narrator recalls his father's warning against interpretation: the good observer restrains the "garrulous dragoman" that is his own reason. The narrator then addresses us, the readers: "Give me your hand, dear reader, and let's go into the forest together."[60] We are invited to track Fyodor's steps as we proceed through the following descriptive passages.

The narrator guides our attention, compelling us to imitate Fyodor's reading practices. "Look: first—at these glades with patches of thistle, nettle or willow herb, among them you will find all kinds of junk: sometimes even a ragged mattress with rusty, broken springs; don't disdain it!"[61] The reader, guided by the author, is keenly attuned to the details of the scene (he sees not merely shrubs but specifically thistle, nettle, and willow herb) and he refrains from judgments (don't disdain it!). He simply reconstitutes the landscape in his mind according to the author's specifications. At first the reader is invited to share the narrator's/Fyodor's visual impressions, but as his guide moves deeper into the forest the reader must imagine tactile ones as well: The pine trees have "scaly trunks and feathery foliage," the sun "caresses" the wings of a butterfly which lands for a

[60] *The Gift*, 330. *Dar*, 343. "Дай руку, дорогой читатель, и войдем со мной в лес."

[61] Ibid. "Смотри: сначала — сквозистые места, с островками чертополоха, крапивы или царского чая, среди которых попадаются отбросы: иногда даже рваный матрац со сломанными ржавыми пружинами, — не брезгуй ими!"

moment on Fyodor's bare chest, "attracted by human sweat."[62] Fyodor gradually begins to read not only with his eyes but also with his skin, and the reader, who has been instructed to follow Fyodor into the woods and imagine his impressions, now simulates Fyodor's haptic receptivity.

Commentators have understood Fyodor's experience in the Grunewald as ultimately leading to a near-dissolution of the self,[63] but the centrality of haptic experience in these forest scenes complicates such a reading. After wandering through the forest, Fyodor strips naked and lies down in his "favorite nook" to bath in the sun's rays:

> The sun bore down. The sun licked me all over with its big, smooth tongue. I gradually felt that I was becoming moltenly transparent, that I was permeated with flame and existed only insofar as it did. As a book translated into an exotic idiom, so was I translated into the sun…My personal I, the one that wrote books, the one that loved words, colors, mental fireworks, Russia, chocolate and Zina—had somehow disintegrated and dissolved...[64]

If we think of the self as a bundle of desires and ideas, then Fyodor's self does seem to disintegrate. He loses his appetite (for chocolate, for Zina). He abandons the abstractions that shape his thought (words, Russia) and inspire his creative work (mental fireworks).

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[62] Ibid., 332; 344. "между розоватыми чешуйчатыми стволами"; "вырезная ванесса... садилась ко мне на голую грудь, привлеченная человеческим потом."

[63] See Naiman, *Nabokov, Perversely*, 177; Blackwell, *Zina's Paradox*, 48.

[64] Ibid., 333-4. Ibid., 346-7. "Солнце навалилось. Солнце сплошь лизало меня большим, гладким языком. Я постепенно чувствовал, что становлюсь раскаленно-прозрачным, наливаюсь пламенем и существую только, поскольку существует око. Как сочинение переводится на экзотическое наречие, я был переведен на солнце... Собственное же мое я, то, которое писало книги, любило слова, цвета, игру мысли, Россию, шоколад, Зину, а — как-то разошлось и растворилось..."

These ideas and desires are what makes Fyodor a writer. It is therefore only the "I" of the *writer*—"the one who wrote books"—that is lost in this scene. Fyodor, reflecting on this loss, says: "One might dissolve completely that way."

But Fyodor's increased sensitivity to his haptic perceptions—his feeling "licked" by the sun—affirms that the loss of his *writerly* self does not amount to a complete dissolution. Touch entails not only receptivity but also reciprocity, as Guiliana Bruno has noted. "When we look we are not necessarily being looked at," she observes, "but when we touch, by the very nature of pressing our hand or any part of our body on a subject or object, we cannot escape the contact. Touch is never unidirectional, a one-way street. It always enables an affective return."[65] Through touch we perceive not only something external (as we touch an object) but also ourselves (as that object touches us). In touching and being touched, Fyodor recognizes himself as a unity, though it is his receptivity rather than his creativity that defines him. His identity is established not by his own mental preoccupations and appetitive demands, but instead by the changing affects produced by his encounters with things outside of himself. Fyodor's "I" has not dissolved; it has been "translated," to use the narrator's own term, from the "I" of the writer to the "I" of the reader.

Like Zina, Fyodor, in his role as reader, is liberated from his own preoccupations, sensuous and rational. But his experience of freedom is distinct from Zina's in that it is concrete and fundamentally joyful. Her freedom is of the abstract Kantian variety, defined by the overcoming of impulses. Fyodor is granted a more exuberant and

[65] Giuliana Bruno, *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 19.

embodied freedom. For Fyodor, the Grunewald offers "as much delight as if this was a primeval paradise," and in this forest he feels something "akin to that Asiatic freedom spreading wide on the maps, to the spirit of his father's peregrinations."[66] Even in a novel rich in vivid descriptive passages, this scene stands out for the lushness and ebullience of its prose. Fyodor and everything around him is constantly in motion. He walks, twists, and swims—and basks in this dynamism: "To move around naked was astonishing bliss—the freedom around his loins especially pleased him."[67] As Fyodor moves he is always touching and being touched: "Moss, turf, sand, each in its own way communicated with the soles of his bare feet, and each in its own way the sun and the shade stroked the hot silk of his body."[68] Dynamism is crucial to Nabokov's depiction of Fyodor's freedom, and in foregrounding Fyodor's mobility Nabokov echoes Henri Bergson's corrective to Kant's notion of freedom. Our freedom, according to Bergson, is manifest not in operations of reason but in concrete action.

Nabokov admired the philosophy of Henri Bergson,[69] who sought to develop and revise Kant's system. In an early work, *Time and Free Will*, Bergson identifies freedom as "the relation of the concrete self to the act which it performs. This relation is

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[66] *The Gift*, 333, 335. *Dar*, 346, 348."я испытывал неменьшее наслаждение, чем если бы в этих трех верстах от моей Агамемнонштрассе находился первобытный рай."; "он переживал нечто родственное той зияющей на картах азиатской свободе, духу отцовских странствий..."

[67] Ibid., 334. Ibid., 347. "Двигаться нагишом было удивительным блаженством,—свобода чресел особенно веселила его."

[68] Ibid., 335. Ibid., 348. "Мох, мурава, песок—каждый по своему—сообщался с босой подошвой, и по-разному солнце и тень ложились на горячий шелк тела."

[69] See Leona Toker, "Nabokov and Bergson," in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, ed. Vladimir Alexandrov (New York: Routledge, 1995), 367-373.

indefinable, just because we *are* free. We can analyze a thing but not a process; we can break up extensity, but not duration."[70] Bergson argued that it is in being attuned to our own inner dynamism that we are aware of our freedom. Kant had in fact expressed something similar in positing that through the play of the imagination and understanding, compelled by aesthetic apprehension, we actually *experience* in the phenomenal realm our transcendental freedom. Bergson departs from Kant, however, in arguing that it is *only* in our concrete, dynamic experience that we can recognize our freedom. According to Bergson, as soon as we begin to consciously reflect on what this freedom is, the dynamism is lost and our grasp on the nature of freedom eludes us. Our reasoning faculty does not allow us to know our freedom because reasoning arrests, freezes, and separates various states of experience. Reasoning makes our experience into a series of snapshots, when in fact it is a continuous evolution of interpenetrating states. The experience of these interpenetrating states is the experience of duration, and, as Mark Muldoon puts it, "the more we immerse ourselves into pure duration the more false distinctions will fall away, allowing us to grasp our freedom as an undisputed reality." For Bergson, Muldoon explains, "it would seem the case that 'the unity of the person exists so long as it is not perceived.' "[71] In other words, to recognize our freedom we have to be aware of it without training our reason upon it.

Although Bergson does not explain how we might cultivate an awareness of our own dynamism without engaging reason, his philosophical examples suggest that such

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[70] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 2001), 219.

[71] Mark Muldoon, "Time, Self, and Meaning in the Works of Henri Bergson, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Paul Ricoeur," *Philosophy Today* 35, no. 3 (1991): 256-7.

awareness originates in haptic perception. Central to Bergson's conception of freedom is his rejection of the Kantian picture of time as a succession of discrete states within a homogenous medium. Bergson argues that there is no such thing as a discrete temporal state that can be neatly separated from others and placed alongside them, as though strung together on a line.[72] To illustrate that such a picture of time is an illusion, Bergson relies frequently on bodily metaphors.

He argues, for example, that we tend to think of pain as a discrete state that can increase in intensity (altering in quantity) without becoming an altogether different state (altering in quality). But in fact, when we think about increasing pain by squeezing a fist, or lifting a weight, or pressing our lips together tighter and tighter, we realize that qualitative changes are taking place. When we press our lips tighter we involve in the action first the lips, then the teeth, the jaw, the shoulders, and so on. We might think that we are still feeling the same pain more intensely, but in reality a qualitative change has taken place. "You felt this gradual encroachment, this increase of the surface affected which is in turn a change of quantity," Bergson writes, "but, as your attention was concentrated on your closed lips, you localized the increase there and you made the psychic force there expended into a magnitude, although it possessed no extensity."[73] As more parts of the body become involved, Bergson argues, new sensations are added to the previous ones. But since one's mind is still trained on the lips, it does not register this qualitative evolution and interpenetration of states, which Bergson later defines as

[72] See "Henri Bergson" in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed April 15, 2016, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/bergson/.

[73] *Time and Free Will*, 25.

"duration." The body thus appears more capable than the mind of apprehending duration, and it is therefore crucial to our capacity to know our own freedom.

In the forest Fyodor focuses his attention on his bodily sensations and is thereby able to better apprehend duration. Remembering his father's warning, he consciously restrains his faculties of reason, and gradually shifts his attention away from visual perceptions and toward tactile ones—away from the mind and toward the body. Fyodor becomes immersed in the evolving impressions of his senses and is consequently attuned to his own sense of freedom. Significantly, although Fyodor's sensuous impressions are stimulated, they are not initially bound up with any particular appetite, as in the case of Chernyshevsky and other bad readers. At the moment of greatest receptivity, Fyodor "experienced something similar to what must strike a man who has flown to another planet (with a different gravity, different density and a different stress on the senses)."[74] A man just arrived on another planet can have no conception of what his needs and desires might be in this novel environment. Nabokov's comparison between Fyodor and the man on an unfamiliar planet implies that Fyodor has not merely forgotten his appetites but achieved a primordial state in which he does not know his appetites at all. Fyodor feels himself an "Adam" in his primordial paradise: man before he knew any wants.

With Fyodor's example, Nabokov suggests an alternative to the asceticism that is Zina's means for transcending her preoccupations. Zina's freedom is the kind of freedom Tolstoy had envisioned for his reader in *What is Art?* Tolstoy presumed that only by

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[74] *The Gift*, 332. *Dar*, 345. "я улавливал ощущение, которое должно поразить перелетевшего на другую планету (с другим притяжением, другой плотностью, другим образом чувств)..."

means of starving the senses could we liberate ourselves from our appetites and preconceptions. Only the artist who does not tempt his reader by stimulating his senses could ensure the reader's freedom. Nabokov acknowledges that a sense of one's own freedom and autonomy is achievable by means of such deprivation, but through Fyodor he proposes a different and superior strategy. He posits that our appetites become most completely irrelevant not when the senses are *deprived* but when they are *saturated* with impressions. Nabokov takes an alternative path to granting his reader the kind of freedom from himself that he, like Tolstoy, believed to be essential for aesthetic enjoyment.[75]

Fyodor delights in his joyful, embodied perception of freedom only as long as he remains a reader, receiving impressions but not going on to pursue his own appetitive or creative objectives. As soon as Fyodor's desires for Zina, for words, and for mental fireworks return, he can no longer remain in his primordial paradise. Fyodor's lust reasserts itself before any of his other appetites: he begins to long for a "sylvan encounter" with Zina or "any of her corps de ballet."[76] Once Fyodor recognizes this lust, the enchanted world around him reverts to an ordinary Berlin beach scene that repulses him. The pursuit of one's objectives in Nabokov's work appears compatible with good authorship but not with good readership. And when Fyodor transforms back into the author, he can no longer experience the kind of freedom he enjoyed as a reader.

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[75] Tolstoy had thought about this type of sensuous saturation as well, in scenes such as that of Levin mowing. He did not, however, discuss the positive possibilities of this kind of saturation in his essays on art.

[76] Ibid., 335. Ibid., 348. "Дал бы год жизни, даже високосный, чтоб сейчас была здесь Зина—или любая из ее кордебалета."

Creative Work and the Camera Obscura

Nabokov's text indicates that the pleasures of the reader and the author are mutually exclusive by counterpoising Fyodor in his semi-nude state with the fully-dressed poet Koncheyev, whom Fyodor 'encounters' in the Grunewald. Fyodor feels an affinity with Koncheyev, though there is no indication that the two have ever met in real life. Fyodor imagines this run-in by the lake, just as he imagines his one previous conversation with the poet. Their first conversation occurs early on in the novel when Fyodor begins his experiments with prose; this second one happens shortly before the novel's conclusion.

Fyodor, having swum across the forest lake, sees Koncheyev sitting on the bank, dressed in a black suit. Their conversation about their relative states of undress is an allegory for the contrasting experience of the reader and writer, and is therefore worth quoting at length:

> "Aren't you hot?" asked Fyodor.
>
> "Not a bit. I have a weak chest and I always freeze. But of course when one sits next to a naked man one is physically aware that there exist men's outfitters, and one's body feels blind. On the other hand it seems to me that any mental work must be completely impossible for you in such a denuded state."
>
> "A good point," grinned Fyodor. "One seems to live more superficially—on the surface of one's own skin..."
>
> "That's it. All you're concerned with is patrolling your body and trailing the sun. But thought likes curtains and the camera obscura. Sunlight is good in the degree that it heightens the value of shade. A jail with no jailer and a garden with no gardener—that is I think the ideal arrangement. Tell me, did you read what I said about your book?"[77]

[77] Ibid., 337. Ibid., 351. "«Неужели вам не жарко?» — спросил Федор Константинович. /«Нисколько. У меня слабая грудь, и я всегда зябну. Но, конечно, когда сидишь рядом с голым, физически чувствуешь существование магазинов готового платья. И телу темно. Зато мне кажется всякая работа мысли совершенно невозможна для вас при этаком обнаженном состоянии?». / «Пожалуй, —

In this imaginary conversation, Koncheyev, wrapped in layers of clothing, stands in the authorial position, the one requiring mental work, while Fyodor, performing the role of the reader, lives on the surface of his skin. Fyodor's nudity corresponds to his state of unqualified receptivity, a requirement for good reading.

Nabokov's depiction of the good reader as someone who exists at the boundary between himself and the world around him—patrolling his body—resembles Bergson's characterization of the receptive spectator. "The object of art is to put to sleep the active or rather resistant powers of our personality," Bergson writes, "and thus to bring us into a state of perfect responsiveness in which we realize the idea that is suggested to us and sympathize with the feeling that is expressed."[78] In other words, art draws us outward: we move away from the locus of resistant personality (the mind) and toward the impression made on our bodies by the external world. Aesthetic receptivity for Bergson means an attention to surface rather than depth. He suggests that when we delight in dance, for example, we do not analyze the movements of a dancer, but rather "physically sympathize" with his movement, so much so that if he were to stop abruptly we will feel as though we continue his motion ourselves.[79]

усмехнулся Федор Константинович. — Все больше — живешь на поверхности собственной кожи...». /«В том-то и дело. Только и занимаешься обходом самого себя да слежкой за солнцем. А мысль любит занавеску, камеру обскуру. Солнце хорошо, поскольку при нем повышается ценность тени. Тюрьма без тюремщика и сад без садовника — вот по-моему, идеал. Скажите, вы читали, что я написал о вашей книге?».»

[78] *Time and Free Will*, 14.

[79] Ibid., 13.

Bergson, like Tolstoy, thinks of art as a "physical contagion."[80] The spectator's task is to be vulnerable enough to allow himself to be infected, while the artist's task is to chose precisely those forms that would transmit the infection. The artist must enable a spectator to "re-live" the things the artist has previously experienced:

> [The artist] choosing, among the outward signs of his emotions, those which our body is likely to imitate mechanically, though slightly, as soon as it perceives them, so as to transport us all at once into the indefinable psychological state which called them forth. Thus will be broken down the barrier interposed by time and space between his consciousness and ours.[81]

Bergson's description of aesthetic reception from *Time and Free Will* bares a striking resemblance to Tolstoy's description of aesthetic reception in *What is Art?*:

> Art is a human activity, consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings, and also experience them.[82]

Both Tolstoy and Bergson suggest that the artist experiences something and translates it into signs that must be reconstituted by the reader. This reconstituting activity, however, does not involve deduction or interpretations. Instead, for Bergson and Tolstoy both, it involves simulation, using the artist's chosen signs to imagine oneself into his mental

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[80] Ibid., 15.

[81] Ibid., 18.

[82] *What is Art?*, 51. *Chto takoe iskusstvo?* in PSS 30: 65. "Искусство есть деятельность человеческая, состоящая в том, что один человек сознательно известными внешними знаками передает другим испытываемые им чувства, а другие люди заражаются этими чувствами и переживают их."

state. Bergson limits the involvement of reason in this activity even more than Tolstoy does, conceiving of our simulations as entirely reflexive. Tolstoy, on the contrary, argues that we must *consciously* engage in simulation, and Nabokov, in his own late reflections on the mechanisms of art, hews closer to Tolstoy. In *Lectures on Literature*, Nabokov writes that as readers "we shall watch the artist build his castle of cards and watch the castle of cards become a castle of beautiful steel and glass."[83] The castle of cards is the selection of "outward signs" by the artist; the castle of steel and glass is the experience the reader recreates within himself with the help of these carefully selected signs.

If the success of art depends both on the reader's receptivity and on the author's capacity to choose just the right outward signs to compel simulation, then Koncheyev's clothes are as appropriate to his task as Fyodor's nudity is to his. Fyodor's imperative as reader is to be maximally attuned to the stimuli that come to him from without, and fittingly his attention moves outward toward the skin. Koncheyev's imperative as writer, on the other hand, is to make selections: to break up the flow of his own psychic experience into discrete images that might be used later by others (readers) to reconstitute this flow. Fyodor's body is awash with impressions, but Koncheyev's body, in its clothed state "feels blind" because clothes set limits on what he can apprehend. This partial blindness is necessary for mental work. Clothes, like curtains, allow for selection. They regulate perception, enabling certain stimuli to reach us and barring others.

Thought, according to Koncheyev, "likes curtains and camera obscura." Enlightenment thought conceived of the camera obscura as a model for the mind, and in particular for the mind's capacity to regulate received impressions. For John Locke, as

[83] *Lectures on Literature*, 6.

Jonathan Crary explains, the words "in camera" had the legal connotation of a decision made in judge's chambers, and consequently Locke

> gives a new juridical role to the observer within the camera obscura. Thus he modifies the receptive and neutral function of the apparatus by specifying a more self-legislative and authoritative function: the camera obscura allows the subject to guarantee and police the correspondence between the exterior world and the interior representation and to exclude anything disorderly or unruly.[84]

It is this judging or policing function that Koncheyev stresses in declaring that mental work requires clothes, curtains, and the camera obscura. For Nabokov, the camera obscura appears to be an adequate model specifically for the mental operations of the artist, not the reader. The artist brackets certain perceptions, and his selection and focus, like that of the visual apparatus, isolates a discrete impression. Unlike the receptive spectator, the artist performs his role by separating and selecting rather than integrating perceptions.

Throughout his literary works Nabokov frequently associates the camera obscura with distorted perception, evidently sharing Bergson's concern that we falsify our experiences when we isolate one impression from the continuous stream of multifarious perceptions. Bergson criticized the camera obscura as a mental metaphor in *Creative Evolution*:

> Instead of attaching ourselves to the inner becoming of things, we place ourselves outside them in order to recompose their becoming artificially. We take snapshots…we hardly do anything else than set going a kind of cinematograph

[84] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 42.

> inside us...the *mechanism of our ordinary knowledge is of a cinematographical kind.*[85]

The objective, atemporal view on our world assumed by the camera obscura model of the mind is impossible according to Bergson. It is an artificial construct that helps us produce "ordinary knowledge," which ultimately obfuscates the nature of our experience instead of revealing it. Nabokov, too, disparages "ordinary knowledge" in *The Gift*, and particularly in the chapter on Chernyshevsky. The narrator criticizes Chernyshevsky for seeing everything "in the nominative"[86]—in other words, as discrete objects rather than objects inseparably linked to everything around them. He asserts that Chernyshevsky and his followers "were incapable of understanding Hegel's vital truth: a truth that was not stagnant, like shallow water, but flowed like blood, through the very process of cognition."[87] Reality cannot be known in an impersonal and atemporal way, and failing to recognize the continuously changing relations between oneself and the things around one is a form of blindness.

Nonetheless, Nabokov does affirm through Koncheyev—one of his emissaries in the text—that the artist's labor requires the camera obscura. Nabokov suggests that the artist must become, in a sense, blind. He must accept the distortions that are an inescapable part of his work. Koncheyev's clothing, necessary for mental labor, makes his body feel blind, and Fyodor, too, feels his body becoming blind when he undertakes

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[85] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 1998), 224.

[86] *The Gift* 239. *Dar*, 248. "Чернышевский все видел в именительном."

[87] Ibid., 244. Ibid., 253. "Властители дум понять не могли живительную истину Гегеля: истину, не стоячую, как мелкая вода, а, как кровь, струящуюся в самом процессе познания."

creative work. When Fyodor embarks on his journey to become a prose writer, he buys a pair of shoes in which his foot "went completely blind." A saleswoman convinces Fyodor that the shoe fits by showing him his foot in an X-ray machine, an apparatus that enables even greater abstraction from living entities than does the camera obscura. Looking at his phalanges, Fyodor thinks: "With this, with this I'll step ashore. From Charon's ferry." He regards the shoes as a talisman of his creative future—"They do seem all right after all—for an agonizing beginning"—but the association with Charon's ferry gives his creative start a sinister aspect.[88] The shoes are linked with his future as an artist, but also with death. Nabokov, like Bergson, suggests that the writer cannot avoid a potentially lethal abstraction; his productions are inevitably snapshots of reality rather than living reality itself.

The artist's work thus involves a loss: the artist gives up his immersion in the flow of his own psychic perceptions and reduces his lived experience to a series of abstract signs. He distorts reality in a way that is analogous to the distortion of the camera obscura. As Martin Jay points out, Bergson considered our visual perceptions as well as our linguistic signs to share "a weakness for atemporal abstraction," and suggested that "only a prelinguistic grasp of fluid, creative, vital reality will take us beyond the camera eye."[89] Bergson acknowledges the process of abstraction involved in art making: "The poet is he with whom feelings develop into images, and the images themselves into words which translate them while obeying the laws of rhythm. In seeing these images

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[88] Ibid., 64. Ibid., 68-69. "Вот этим я ступлю на брег с парома Харона."; "Как будто, пожалуй, и ничего,— для мучительного начала."

[89] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 200.

pass before our eyes we in our turn experience the feeling which was, so to speak, their emotional equivalent."[90] But Bergson he does not want to suggest that the artist's work is somehow detrimental. Jay sees Bergson's emphasis on the capacity of rhythm to preserve the dynamism of the poet's impressions as an attempt to ameliorate the destructive element of artistic activity.[91] I would add that although Bergson laments the distortions inherent in art-making, he nonetheless endorses art as the best means to permit others to reconstitute dynamic experiences that are lost in time. The artist must distill living reality in his works, but in doing so he ensures that that living reality can be recreated in other times and places by receptive readers. The artist depends on the reader to redeem his abstractions. As Koncheyev says, "sunlight is good in the degree that it heightens the value of shade." Fyodor's nudity and Koncheyev's own covered state are complementary, like light and shade, like the tasks of the reader and writer.

Although the possibility of preserving something in time might compensate the artist for the "blindness" and the distortions that his work requires, Nabokov is not indifferent to the losses one suffers in order to pursue artistic work. Fyodor, having bought his new shoes for his creative journey, momentarily regrets his purchase. He expresses doubts about it in his first imagined conversation with Koncheyev, when the two writers begin to discuss Tolstoy: "Lyov Tolstoy, on the other hand, preferred violet shades and the bliss of stepping barefoot with the rooks upon the rich dark soil of plowed fields! Of course, I should never have bought them./ "You're right, they pinch

[90] *Time and Free Will*, 15.

[91] Jay, 202.

unbearably."[92] The topic of Tolstoy leads to second thoughts about the shoes, perhaps because both Tolstoy's love of violet and walking barefoot remind Fyodor of the dynamism of lived experience that is lost in the abstractions of art.

Tolstoy's bare feet immediately evoke not Tolstoy in his role as artist, but the later Tolstoy who preached the gospel of a simple agrarian life. Nabokov understood the older Tolstoy's turn away from art as a consequence of the author's unwillingness to suffer the isolation required by his artistic work. Tolstoy's longing to be connected to the world—to feel the living linkages between things—is at odds with the seclusion and separation required for artistic creation, Nabokov explained in his lectures on the author. He dismissed Tolstoy's ideas about the inherent egoism (and therefore sinfulness) of creative solitude, but he was sympathetic to Tolstoy's struggle to choose between being present to the world and retreating from it in order to create: "Tolstoy surely realized that in him as in many writers there did go on the personal struggle between creative solitude and the urge to associate with all mankind."[93] Tolstoy's bare feet remind Fyodor that in becoming the author he makes a sacrifice—a sacrifice Tolstoy ultimately refused to make—of an unqualified receptivity to the world.

At the same time, however, by noting the prevalence of violet shades in Tolstoy's prose, Fyodor stresses that not all dynamism is lost in artistic representation. A first-rate artist might hope to enable his readers to recreate his lived experience. In elaborating his concept of duration—the multiplicity and inseparability of psychic states in any given

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[92] *The Gift*, 71. *Dar*, 76. "«Лев Толстой, тот, был больше насчет лиловаго, — и какое блаженство пройтись с грачами по пашне босиком! Я, конечно, не должен был их покупать»/ «Вы правы, жмут нестерпимо»..."

[93] *Lectures on Russian Literature*, 237.

moment—Bergson used not only bodily metaphors but also color. Orange was the hue he chose to demonstrate that what we think of as a discrete color is in fact a spectrum of shades mixed in various proportions, some closer to red and others to yellow.[94] Violet, between blue and red, might likewise readily serve Bergson as an example. By underscoring Tolstoy's love of violet, Nabokov gestures toward what he admired most about Tolstoy: his ability to suggest the impression of duration, the experience of lived time. "Tolstoy's prose keeps pace with our pulses," Nabokov once told his students.[95] Keenly feeling the living linkages between all things, Tolstoy manages to convey, to some extent, a sense of life's constant evolution.

Art at the Price of Life

As Fyodor and Koncheyev prepare to part ways, Koncheyev asks: "And what comes now? Would you say it's worth going on writing verse?" Fyodor answers: "Oh, decidedly! To the very end. Even at this moment I am happy, in spite of the degrading pain in my pinched toes. To tell the truth, I again feel that turbulence, that excitement..."[96] Fyodor suggests that the delight of inspiration and his "mental fireworks" partly compensate for the losses he suffers. But as Fyodor soon learns, he needs

[94] Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 2010), 14.

[95] *Lectures on Russian Literature*, 142.

[96] *The Gift*, 75. *Dar*, 79. "«А теперь что будет? Стоит по-вашему продолжать?»/ «Еще бы! До самого конца. Вот и сейчас я счастлив, несмотря на позорную боль в ногах. Признаться, у меня опять началось это движение, волнение...»"

something else in order to persist in his creative work, namely the prospect of good readership. The artist must believe that others will use the signs he produces to recreate the fullness of the moment he has reduced through his abstractions.

Nabokov ponders in his fiction, as Bergson did in his philosophy, whether the immortality bestowed by art comes at the price of destroying life.[97] The transient nature of life means that everything we experience will be lost in time, forgotten. Art offers a possible antidote to the disappearance of things in time, but as the scholar Michael Clune puts it, "lastingness is procured only at the cost of a sacrifice of life. The glorious death of Achilles is the prototype for a tradition that has not yet disappeared from Western literature."[98] The veneration of Achilles after his death endows him with a kind of eternal life, but when Odysseus meets Achilles in Hades, the warrior laments his earthly death and wishes more than anything to return to life. The price for his eternal life is too great.

Throughout *The Gift* Fyodor wrestles with the problem that art appears to preserve something by annihilating its living element. The beauty of the butterflies his father collects can be immortalized only if the natural processes of their demise are arrested artificially. Art freezes a moment in time by severing its connections to what precedes and what follows it; in Bergsonian terms, the experience of duration turns into snapshots. Nabokov subtly evokes this dilemma of art as Fyodor and Koncheyev's first

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[97] For a discussion of art as compensation for loss in *The Gift* see Duffield White, "Radical Aestheticism and Metaphysical Realism in Nabokov's *The Gift*" in *Russian Literature and American Critics: In Honor of Deming Brown*. Ed. Kenneth N. Brostrom (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1984), 273-291.

[98] Michael Clune, *Writing Against Time* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013), 6. Clune discusses Nabokov's pursuit of an everlasting image in *Lolita*, "The Addictive Image," 57-86.

imaginary conversation draws to a close. Fyodor begins to compose a poem and Koncheyev's voice assists him:

> It is with *this*, that from the slow black ferry…No, try again: Through snow that falls on water never freezing…Keep trying: Under the vertical slow snow in gray-enjambment-Lethean weather, in the usual season with *this* I'll step upon the shore some day…Do you know what has just occurred to me? That river is not the Lethe but rather the Styx.[99]

The poets choose between the Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, and the Styx, the river of death and also invulnerability (Achilles' mother made him all but invulnerable by dipping him in the Styx). The juxtaposition of these two rivers points up the difficult choice imposed on the artist by ephemeral nature: the choice between allowing something to live but be forgotten and killing it in order to preserve it.

This conversation between the poets occurs early on in the novel, and *The Gift* can be read as Fyodor's subsequent search for an infinitely open artistic form, a form that would not arrest the life of its subject artificially by imposing an ending where there is none. A number of scholars have analyzed and evaluated Fyodor's efforts to create such an open artistic structure. Leona Toker has examined the many circular constructions in the novel and the symbols of infinity that appear in *The Gift*. "The sense of a premature ending, one that leaves things incomplete, is constantly combated by the models of

[99] *The Gift*, 75. *Dar*, 79-80. "«Посмотрим как это получается: вот этим с черного парома сквозь (вечно?) тихо падающий снег (во тьме в незамерзающую воду отвесно падающий снег) (в обычную?) летейскую погоду вот этим я ступлю на брег. Не разбазарьте только волнения»...Знаете о чем я сейчас подумал: ведь река-то, собственно, — Стикс... »"

infinity constructed, with varying success, throughout the novel," she argues.[100] Davydov, among others, has observed that the shape of the novel itself resembles a Möbius strip, since at the end of the novel Fyodor plans to write a novel like the one we have been reading.[101] Scholars have tended to focus on Fyodor's struggles with formal problems. But beyond, or before, his quandary about how best to preserve something in art comes the question of whether immortality through art is something worth seeking in the first place.

In the first two chapters of *The Gift* Fyodor is frustrated by the apparent need to choose between the Lethe and the Styx. The novel begins with Fyodor's friend Alexander Chernyshevsky tricking him into believing that Fyodor's first collection of poems about his Russian childhood has just received a glowing review. This cruel April Fools' Day joke prompts Fyodor to reread his own poems while imagining who his sympathetic reader might be. As Fyodor "explores each poem, lifted out like a cube from among the rest,"[102] he feels dissatisfied. These perfect items cannot convey the experiences of his childhood: "recollections either melt away, or else acquire a deathly gloss, so that instead of marvelous apparitions we are left with a fan of picture postcards. Nothing can help here, no poetry, no stereoscope..."[103] It is not enough to evoke the objects of one's past,

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[100] Leona Toker, *Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures*, 143.

[101] Sergey Davydov, *Teksty-Matreski Vladimira Nabokova* (München: Verlag Otto Sanger, 1982), 183-199.

[102] *The Gift*, 9. *Dar*, 13. "Теперь он читал как бы в кубе, выхаживая каждый стих..."

[103] Ibid., 17. Ibid., 21. "воспоминание либо тает, либо приобретает мертвый лоск, так что взамен дивных привидений нам остается веер цветных открыток. Этому не поможет никакая поэзия, никакой стереоскоп..."

Fyodor thinks. One has to remember the "relationships and connections between objects," because otherwise one "condemns [them] to extinction." Fyodor follows this thought to its conclusion: "If so, it is an insulting mockery to affirm smugly that 'Thus a former impression keeps living/Within harmony's ice.' "[104] This affirmation is a line from one of his own poems. He now rejects the sentiment: No, art does not allow a former impression to keep living.

Fyodor's doubts about the possibilities of the stereoscope announce that Nabokov's novel will contest a Proustian strategy for recovering lost time. In a 1932 interview Nabokov admitted that Proust was one of his main influences, and indeed there are allusions to Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* throughout *The Gift*.[105] Proust had recognized that a single image could not convey a sensory impression as it is transformed in time, and sought remedy in the stereoscope, in providing a multiplicity of perspectives on a single entity.[106] Fyodor submits, on the contrary, that there can never be enough perspectives on something to restore it to life. No matter how big one's fan of picture postcards, one cannot recreate an experience in time. He wonders: "What, then, compels me to compose poems about my childhood if in spite of everything, my words go wide of the mark, or else slay both the pard and the hart with the exploding bullet of an 'accurate'

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[104] Ibid., 18. Ibid., 22. "Боже мой, я уже с трудом собираю части прошлого, уже забываю соотношение и связь еще в памяти здравствующих предметов, которые вследствие этого и обрекаю на отмирание. Какая тогда оскорбительная насмешка в самоуверении, что

так впечатление былое
во льду гармонии живет"

[105] See: Leving, 297-98; John Burt Foster, "Nabokov and Proust," in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, 472-81.

[106] Jay, 184.

epithet?"[107] The poet either fails to capture an impression and it is lost forever, or he succeeds and the impression is arrested but drained of all life. What's the use of making art?

It is the thought of his potential reader that rouses Fyodor and restores his resolve to make art. "But let us not despair," Fyodor says to himself. "The man says I am a real poet—which means the hunt was not in vain."[108] Creative work seems worth pursuing when one can envision a reader capable of attending to one's work in the right way. But Fyodor's resolve falters again, more poignantly, in the following chapter, in which he undertakes to write his father's biography.

The destructive aspect of immortalizing one's subject in art reveals itself vividly to Fyodor when he tries to depict his late father, a famous naturalist and explorer. Fyodor wishes to rescue his father's life from oblivion, but preserving something in "harmony's ice" appears to be not just a mockery, but a crime. The metaphor is made literal when Fyodor envisions himself, in his father's stead, walking on a frozen Chinese river:

> I noticed in the distance a line of dark objects strung across it, the large horns of twenty yaks which had been caught in crossing by the suddenly forming ice; through the thick crystal the immobilization of their bodies in a swimming attitude was clearly visible; the beautiful heads lifted above the ice would have seemed alive if the birds had not already pecked out their eyes.[109]

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[107] *The Gift*, 18. *Dar*, 22. "Что же понуждает меня слагать стихи о детстве, если все равно пишу зря, промахиваясь словесно или же убивая и барса и лань разрывной пулей «верного» эпитета?"

[108] Ibid., "Но не будем отчаиваться. Он говорит, что я настоящий поэт, — значит, стоило выходить на охоту."

[109] Ibid., 122. Ibid., 127. "я издали приметил расположенную поперек нее шеренгу темных предметов, большие рога двадцати диких яков, застигнутых при переправе внезапно образовавшимся льдом; сквозь его толстый хрусталь было ясно видно

The string of yaks is like the series of snapshots that Bergson associates with objective, impersonal time. The ice has preserved a moment of rare beauty: how often does one see a yak mid-swim? But the animals' missing eyes suggests that life arrested artificially ultimately presents us with a deformity. They also point out the cruelty of this act of preservation, and evoke in Fyodor the recollection of a tyrant who cut people open to observe their vital functions. Fyodor then subtly likens his own activity to the tyrant's by mentioning a rumor among the locals that he caught children "to brew their eyes into a potion for the belly of [his] Kodak."[110] The local rumor is, of course, an allegory for the deformations of art. Lived experience in all of its complexity becomes fodder for the artist who, with his camera, reduces it to a static image.

For the moment, Fyodor decides to refrain from writing about his father and remain a reader of his life, attending to all traces of the great scientist without selecting from among them to produce his own artwork. He writes to his mother that he is not up to the task of extracting a account of his father's life from the "inky jungle"[111] of all the impressions he has managed to gather from various sources, including the works of his

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оцепенение тел в плывущей позе; поднявшиеся надо льдом прекрасные головы казались бы живыми, если бы уже птицы не выклевали им глаз..."

[110] Ibid., 122. Ibid., 128. "В Татцьен-лу по кривым и узким улицам бродили бритоголовые ламы, распространяя слух, что ловлю детей, дабы из глаз их варить зелье для утробы моего «Кодака»."

[111] Ibid., 138. Ibid., 144. "Временами я чувствую, что где-то [книга] уже написана мной, что вот она скрывается тут, в ильных дебрях, что ее только нужно высвободить по частям из мрака, и части сложатся сами... — но что мне в том проку, — когда этот труд освобождения кажется мне теперь таким тяжелым и сложным..."

father and his colleagues: "You know, when I read his or Grum's books and I hear their entrancing rhythm, when I study the position of the words that can neither be replaced nor rearranged, it seems to be a sacrilege to take all this and dilute it with myself." These scientific works have the effect of great artworks in that they draw the reader's attention away from his own purposes. The reader follows their rhythms and attends to their particulars without feeling compelled to use them to create something of his own. The arresting effect of his father's books is compounded by Fyodor's fear that his own artistic efforts would obscure rather than reveal the "live experience of these receptive, knowledgeable and chaste naturalists."[112]

There is also a moral component to Fyodor's decision to remain a reader. "I myself am a mere seeker of verbal adventures," he tells his mother, "and forgive me if I refuse to hunt down my fancies on my father's own collecting ground."[113] Fyodor does not want to turn his father's life into fodder for his creative endeavors. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, which Nabokov likely knew, Nietzsche explains that "Poets treat their experiences shamelessly: they exploit them."[114] This is precisely what Fyodor does not wish to do. In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov echoes Fyodor's fears about exploiting one's own past, suggesting that art-making does not slow but actually accelerates the process of

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[112] Ibid., 139. Ibid., 145. "Знаешь, когда я читаю его или Грума книги, слушаю их упоительный ритм, изучаю расположение слов, незаменимых ничем и непереместимых никак, мне кажется кощунственным взять да и разбавить все это собой." ; "живой опыт восприимчивых, знающих и целомудренных натуралистов."

[113] Ibid. "Хочешь, я тебе признаюсь: ведь я-то сам лишь искатель словесных приключений, — и прости меня, если я отказываюсь травить мою мечту там, где на *свою* охоту ходил отец."

[114] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 281.

forgetting one's experience: "I have noticed that after I had bestowed on the characters of my novels some treasured item of my past, it would pine away in the artificial world where I had so abruptly placed it. Although it lingered in my mind, its personal warmth, its retrospective appeal had gone." Nabokov adds that "the man in [him] revolts against the fictionist" who has dispersed his many recollections in this way.[115]

Fyodor is unwilling to trade the live impressions of his father that still persist in his mind for a fan of picture postcards. At one point, he thinks of the enduring beauty of the butterflies his father had collected: "In the Berlin museum there are many of my father's captures and these are as fresh today as they were in the eighties and nineties… In the Prague museum one can see that same example of the showy Atlas moth that Catherine the Great admired. Why then do I feel so sad?" Fyodor wants to convey the dynamism of his father's life—his "live masculinity"—but worries that as an artist he can do little more than what the lepidopterist can do to preserve butterflies.[116] It seems to Fyodor that the immortality achieved though art is insufficient compensation for deforming the contents of his father's life. Fyodor's mother understands his hesitation, but nonetheless attempts to assuage his fears. He thinks too much of the "poetaster's cliché that 'with a kiss starts the death of romance,' " she says. She encourages him to continue his artistic work by asking him to think of his potential reader, his father: "Only

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[115] Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 95.

[116] *The Gift*, 112. *Dar*, 117. "В берлинском музее многочисленные бабочки отцовского улова так же свежи сегодня, как были в восьмидесятых, девяностых годах...В пражском музее есть тот самый экземпляр популярной бабочки-атлас, которым любовалась Екатерина Великая. Отчего же мне стало так грустно?"; "его живую мужественность"

if you imagine him reading your book and you feel it grates upon him, and makes you ashamed, then, of course, give it up. But I know this cannot be, I know he would tell you: well done."[117] The worthiness of Fyodor's creative activity again appears to depend on his capacity to envision a reader capable of appreciating the artwork.

Betting on the Reader

Zina Mertz, whom Fyodor meets in chapter three, is an incarnation of such an appreciative reader, and her appearance finally and decisively offers Fyodor a way out of his dilemma between the Lethe and the Styx. Before we learn the details of their romance, we catch Fyodor in the midst of a poetic composition addressed to Zina. In the second stanza, Fyodor asks: "What shall I call you? Half-Mnemo*syne*? There's a half-sim*mer* in your surname too. In dark Berlin, it is so strange to me to roam, oh, my half-fantasy with you."[118] He evokes the river Mnemosyne, which according to Orphic myths allows the souls who have descended into Hades to retain their memories. One could refuse to drink the Lethean waters that induce oblivion and instead seek out the waters of

[117] Ibid., 139. Ibid., 145. "Я убеждена, что, не думай ты так много о слоге, о трудностях, о том, что поцелуй первый шаг к охлаждению, и т. д., у тебя наверно бы вышло очень хорошо, очень правдиво, очень интересно. Только в том случае, если ты представляешь себе, что он читает твою книгу, и ему неприятно, и тебе совестно, только тогда, брось, брось, конечно. Но я знаю, что этого не может быть, знаю, что он сказал бы тебе: молодец."

[118] Ibid., 157. Ibid., 162. "как звать тебя? Ты полу-Мнемозина, полумерцанье в имени твоем, — и странно мне по сумраку Берлина с полувиденьем странствовать вдвоем."

the Mnemosyne.[119] Fyodor—whose father named a butterfly he discovered *orpheus* Godunov—finds his Mnemosyne, and only then does he begin to take his first steps toward becoming the novelist he knows he will become. His poems, as Zina says to him, are not "up to [his] measure,"[120] and the biography of Chernyshevsky that he writes with Zina as his first faithful reader is the beginning of his mature work.

I do not consider Zina Fyodor's creative partner, as Stephen Blackwell does, but I agree with Blackwell that Zina is crucial to Fyodor's artistic activity. The poem that Fyodor composes to Zina begins with an exhortation:

Love only what is fanciful and rare;
what from the distance of a dream steals through;
what knaves condemn to death and fools can't bear.
To fiction be as to your country true[121]

With his call upon Zina to love the fanciful and rare, Fyodor contests the reductive aesthetics of Chernyshevsky, who claimed that it was our human bias for the "difficult and rare" that led us to erroneously prize art above nature.[122] Fyodor asks Zina to join

[119] *Britannica Academic*, s. v. "Mnemosyne," accessed April 15, 2016, http://academic.eb.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/EBchecked/topic/386638/Mnemosyne.

[120] *The Gift*, 194. *Dar*, 201. "они всегда не совсем по твоему росту"

[121] Ibid., 156. Ibid., 162. "Люби лишь то, что редкостно и мнимо, что крадется окраинами сна, что злит глупцов, что смердами казнимо; как родине, будь вымыслу верна."

[122] Chernyshevsky, "Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality," *Selected Philosophical Essays*, 356. Н. Г. Чернышевский, *Эстетические отношения искусства к действительности (Диссертация)*. "Из каких субъективных причин проистекает преувеличенно высокое мнение о достоинстве произведений искусства? Первый

him in privileging art. He repeats his request as though her trust in his invention is what will make it possible. In the second stanza, the stakes of her faith are made even clearer:

Our poor nocturnal property—that wet
asphaltic gloss, that fence and that street light—upon
the ace of fancy let us set
to win a world of beauty from the night.
Those are not clouds—but star-high mountain spurs;
not lamplit blinds—but camplight on a tent!
O swear to me that while the heartblood stirs,
you will be true to what we shall invent.[123]

Although Fyodor refers to inventing together with Zina, the poem reads more like an invitation into a world that he has already invented. He is the one, after all, who has just transformed the clouds into mountain spurs with his words. What matters, it seems, is that Zina believe in his fiction. Fyodor asks Zina to stake reality (the road, the fence, the street light) on the "ace of fancy," expressing his awareness of the risk involved in making art. It is that risk—of deforming and destroying by means of art—that had limited and thwarted him up to this moment. But Fyodor also recognizes the possibility of tremendous rewards. The two of them could gamble away 'reality,' and suffer its loss. But they could also "win a world of beauty from the night." It seems to Fyodor that his success will depend on Zina keeping faith with his art. In creating an artwork, the artist

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источник этого мнения — естественная наклонность человека чрезвычайно высоко ценить трудность дела и редкость вещи."

[123] *The Gift*, 157. *Dar*, 162. "Ночные наши, бедные владения, — забор, фонарь, асфальтовую гладь — поставим на туза воображения, чтоб целый мир у ночи отыграть! Не облака — а горные отроги; костер в лесу, — не лампа у окна...О поклянись, что до конца дороги ты будешь только вымыслу верна..."

gambles that out there somewhere there will be reader capable of the kind of Bergsonian stitching together of the experience he has decomposed into discrete pieces.

Zina's presence as a receptive reader—as someone who might be able to recompose the living entities the artist has decomposed into abstract signs—enables Fyodor to take the chance that he could not take earlier with the biography of his father. The reader's receptive rather than strongly co-creative role does not detract from her significance. The possibility, if not the guarantee, of finding a reader capable of appreciating the work of the author may justify the abstraction and deformation that the work entails.

Nabokov recognizes that the artist depending on his reader to recreate life from his abstractions might suggest a vampiric rather than a symbiotic relationship between the two. Hermann, the protagonist of his earlier novel *Despair*, understands the writer/reader relationship in precisely these predatory terms. "An author's fondest dream is to turn the reader into a spectator; is this ever attained? The pale organisms of literary heroes feeding under the author's supervision swell gradually with the reader's lifeblood."[124] A comparison of Hermann's and Fyodor's artistic endeavors, as well as the roles played by their respective spouses, clarifies, however, what is missing from Herman's picture. For the relationship between the reader and writer to be symbiotic, the choice *not* to appreciate must always be open to the reader.

[124] Nabokov, *Despair*, 16. Vladimir Nabokov, *Otchaianie* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis, 1978 c. 1936), 8. "Высшая мечта автора: превратить читателя в зрителя, — достигается ли это когда-нибудь? Бледные организмы литературных героев, питаясь под руководством автора, наливаются живой читательской кровью."

Hermann is in all ways Fyodor's antipode. Fyodor's is a story of artistic success while Hermann's is one of artistic failure. The narrative of *Despair* is ostensibly a memoir of a crime committed by Hermann Karlovich, a tyrannical Russian-German businessman with artistic pretensions. Hermann, whose chocolate business is going poorly, comes upon a vagabond named Felix whom he believes to be his exact double. The resemblance, which is most vivid when Felix is sleeping, strikes Hermann as a thing of beauty. He conceives a plan to fake his own death by killing Felix, hoping thereby to fulfill both his financial and his creative ambitions. Hermann believes that a murder perfectly planned and executed will be appreciated as an artistic masterpiece. He will kill Felix and flee, while his wife Lydia, to whom he reveals his plan once it is in motion, will collect insurance money for 'her husband's' death. The problem is that Hermann only imagines his resemblance to Felix. No one recognizes the likeness and no one sees the murder as an artwork. Moreover, Hermann realizes that he has made a blunder in the execution of his plan, by leaving a piece of evidence at the scene of the crime. He is forced to acknowledge that he has not created an artwork but only killed a man, and he thus titles his narrative *Despair* to reflect his mental anguish.

Hermann's first mistake in matters of art is to embrace the analogy between the work of the artist and that of the criminal. Davydov suggests that the parallels Thomas de Quincey drew between creative art and murder in his essay "Murder as One of the Fine Arts" might have inspired the aesthetic philosophy Nabokov bestows on Hermann.[125] Whereas Fyodor is troubled by the affinities between the artist and the murderer—both potentially draining their objects of life—Hermann welcomes the analogy

[125] Davydov, *Teksty-Matreski Vladimira Nabokova*, 93-98.

wholeheartedly: “Let us discuss crime, crime as an art; and card tricks,”[126] he tells the reader. Fyodor laments that the tools of art are insufficient for conveying reality as we experience it; he searches for a means to capture the living essence of his subjects. Hermann, on the other hand, considers the lifeless reflection of his own face in the sleeping visage of Felix the height of beauty. It is not simply that Hermann fails to live up to his aesthetic ambitions, but that his ambitions are misguided to begin with.

Like Zina, Herman’s wife Lydia has a crucial part to play in his ‘art’: she is the first audience for Hermann’s murderous tale. Fyodor asks Zina to keep faith with his invention, and Hermann demands that Lydia keep faith with his by stepping into the role of a grieving widow once Felix is found dead. “It is essential that you should make yourself believe I’m really dead,”[127] Hermann instructs her. Unlike Zina, however, Lydia is a bad reader and an unfaithful partner: she carries on a love affair and reads only diverting thrillers. “She is a great gobbler of books, but reads only trash, memorizing nothing and leaving out the longer descriptions,” Hermann says of her. Lydia is like an “investigative hen” when she selects books at the library. She prefers detective novels, and once, having acquired a book she “found terribly thrilling,” she ripped it in half and hid the latter part in order to avoid taking a “peep at the end.”[128] This assessment of

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[126] *Despair*, 121. *Otchaianie*, 65. “Поговорим о преступлениях, об искусстве преступления, о карточных фокусах...”

[127] Ibid., 145. Ibid., 79. “Главное, постарайся убедить себя, что я, точно, погиб.”

[128] Ibid., 23. Ibid., 12. “Она читает запоем, и все — дребедень, ничего не запоминая и выпуская длинные описания.” ; “заглядывает в книгу боком, как курица, высматривающая зерно,” ; “Однажды я ей привез свокзала пустяковый криминальный роман...принялась читать, адски интересно, просто нельзя удержаться, чтобы не заглянуть в конец, — но, так как это все бы испортило, она,

Lydia is filtered through an unreliable narrator, of course, but we are tempted to believe Hermann because his description of bad reading resembles Nabokov's own in his Cornell lectures. Nabokov admonishes the reader of "buxom bestsellers," who "skips descriptions," and frequently stresses that the good reader must have a good memory.[129]

When Felix's body is found, Lydia does, in a sense, keep faith with Hermann's invention, but her affirmation of his 'art' has little meaning, since Hermann has bullied her into it. Having learned that the police discovered Felix's body and were now looking for his murder, Hermann receives a letter from Lydia's lover Ardalion, a talented artist and Nabokov's agent in the text. Ardalion explains that no one had seen the resemblance between Hermann and Felix and the police told Lydia that the body found on his property was not her husband's: "And now comes the terrible part," Ardalion writes,

> being trained by a dirty cad, the poor little thing kept insisting, even before viewing the corpse (even before—does that come home to you?), insisting against all likelihood that it was her husband's body and none other's. I fail to grasp how on earth you managed to inspire a woman, who was and is practically a stranger to you, with such sacred awe. To achieve that, one ought to be, indeed, something out of the common in the way of monsters.[130]

зажмурясь, разорвала книгу по корешку на две части и заключительную спрятала..."

[129] *Lectures on Literature*, 1; *Lectures on Russian Literature*, 11.

[130] *Despair*, 205. *Otchaianie*, 111. "«А страшно вот что: наученная подлецом, она, бедняжка, еще прежде — понимаете-ли Вы это? — еще прежде, чем ей показали тело, утверждала вопреки всему, что это именно ее муж. Я просто не понимаю, каким образом Вы сумели вселить в нее, в женщину совсем чуждую Вам, такой священный ужас. Для этого надо быть действительно незаурядным чудовищем»."

With the story of Lydia's response to the police, Ardalion reveals the absurdity of an artist extracting compliance from his audience. Hermann denies his audience the freedom to bestow their attention and appreciation, attempting instead to manipulate them. As discussed in the previous chapter, if a reader does not bestow his appreciation freely, then his response cannot be considered properly aesthetic. We discount something as a source of aesthetic pleasure if we feel manipulated into a particular response.

Herman cannot see that to elicit aesthetic pleasure an artist must risk failing to do so. Instead, he conceives of artistic work as a game of patience: "first I put down the open cards in such a manner as to make its success a dead certainty; then I gathered them up in the opposite order and gave the prepared pack to others with perfect assurance it will come out."[131] Herman's artistic endeavor is doomed to failure from the start because, like his namesake in Pushkin's *Queen of Spades*, he leaves no room for chance. In Fyodor's case, however, the reader is not coerced into compliance, which means that his artwork might fail to find its reader.

Zina's Gift

That Fyodor has to exhort Zina in his poems attests to her freedom *not* to bestow upon his works the kind of restorative reading that would revivify Fyodor's abstractions. But the way Nabokov's narrator describes Zina's reading shows that she does indeed weave together the impressions that Fyodor had reduced to abstract signs:

[131] Ibid.,122. Ibid., 66. "Мое создание похоже на пасьянс, составленный наперед: я разложил открытые карты так, чтобы он выходил наверняка..."

> Gifted with the most flexible memory, which twined like ivy around what she perceived, Zina by repeating such word-combinations as she particularly liked ennobled them with her own secret convolution…[132]

Zina is a receptive rather than a creative reader. She does not help Fyodor conceive or build the structures of his artifice. Her activity is described as "twining" around what is already there. But the dynamic description of her reading—the twining and convolutions—suggest that her mind is what brings an organic, living element to his art, adds the ivy to his constructions. Fyodor's "gift" is not only the artistic gift bestowed on him by his creator but also the gift that Zina bestows on him with her reading. And as with all gifts, the gift of good readership must be given freely.

Tolstoy had an impossible dream: of creating the kind of artwork that would invariably liberate the reader from his preoccupations and produce aesthetic pleasure. Nabokov realized that an artwork by definition could not aim to elicit pleasure *invariably*. Anything that elicits pleasure invariably, in a deterministic fashion, eluding the autonomy of the spectator, cannot be art. But Nabokov had his own impossible dream. He dreamed of the author's unconditional independence from the reader, of not needing his reader's appreciation to validate his art. Koncheyev tells Fyodor that "a real writer should ignore all readers but one, that of the future, who in his turn is merely the author reflected in time."[133] And yet, Nabokov's rendering of the relationship between reader and writer in

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[132] *The Gift*, 205. *Dar*, 212. "Одаренная гибчайшей памятью, которая как плющ обвивалась вокруг слышанного ею, она, повторением ей особенно понравившихся сочетаний слов, облагораживала их собственным тайным завоем..."

[133] Ibid., 340. Ibid., 353. "Настоящему писателю должно наплевать на всех читателей, кроме одного: будущего, — который в свою очередь, лишь отражение автора во времени."

The Gift suggests that he recognized the improbability of that ambition. Although Nabokov rejected the notion that a reader should determine a text's meaning (mocking readers like Chernyshevsky or Mortus who attempt to do so) he nonetheless admits that an author requires a reader's freely-given approval for his text to have value. Nabokov can, of course, deploy all sorts of trickery; he constantly models for us the kind of appreciation he seeks, having Fyodor marvel, for example, at the way his own life has been authored by fate: "Now isn't that a plot for a remarkable novel? What a theme!"[134] But, in the end, he knows that the matter is out of his hands. A reader must bestow—and avow—his pleasure without coercion.

[134] Ibid., 364. Ibid., 381. "Разве это не линия для замечательного романа? Какая тема!"

Conclusion

"It has long become customary to measure the degree of flair, intelligence and talent of a Russian critic by his attitude to Pushkin," writes Nabokov in *The Gift*.[1] And indeed, in an essay written in the final decade of the 19th century, the philosopher and poet Vladimir Solovyov deployed Pushkin to draw the battle lines of Russian aesthetic thought. Utilitarian critics, Solovyov argues in "The First Step Toward a Positive Aesthetic" (1894), call Pushkin "vulgar" and demand: "What sort of benefit does or did Pushkin's poetry bring?" Their pragmatic attacks are countered with the "indignant objections" of proponents of art for art's sake: "Pushkin is the priest of pure art, beautiful form; poetry should not be useful, poetry is above utility!"[2] But why, Solovyov wonders, should one misconception about art be met with another? Neither theory, he believes, adequately characterizes the value of art.

The utilitarian critics afford art only a conditional, instrumental value. The art for art's sakers claim an unconditional value for art, and (as Solovyov understands them) declare art's complete separation from human interests. Although these advocates of art

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[1] *The Gift*, 255. *Dar*, 264. "...так уже повелось, что мерой для степени чутья, ума и даровитости русского критика служит его отношение к Пушкину."

[2] Vladimir Sergeevich Solovyov "Pervyy shag k polozhitelnoy estetike," in *Filosofiya iskusstva i literaturnaya kritika* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1991), 90. "Когда, например, писатели, объявившие Пушкина «пошляком», в подтверждение этой мысли спрашивали: «Какую же пользу приносила и приносит поэзия Пушкина?» — а им на это с негодованием возражали: «Пушкин — жрец чистого искусства, прекрасной формы; поэзия не должна быть полезна, поэзия выше пользы!» — то такие слова не отвечают ни противнику, ни правде, и в результате оставляют только взаимное непонимание и презрение."

believe they are elevating the artist, Solovyov explains, they are in fact reducing him to "a factory worker who all his life must manufacture only the familiar wheels of the time piece, unconcerned about the mechanism as a whole"[3]—that is, unconcerned about human life. On Solovyov's view, both positions are fundamentally degrading to art and the artist.

Solovyov proposes a third way of thinking about the value of art. He defends the autonomy of the aesthetic realm by asserting that the value of the artist's work need not be justified in terms of its effects. But he rejects what he calls the "aesthetic separatism" (*esteticheskiy separatism*) of the art for art's sake proponents who try to ascribe to art an unconditional value. Solovyov compares the role of art in human life to that of the lungs in the human body: "The life of the whole organism does not exclude but rather demands and assumes the relative independence of the parts and their functions, but certainly no single function is self-sufficient and cannot be so."[4] He proposes that the value of art is conditioned by our needs as human beings; this does not mean, however, that art-making is not an end in itself. We can defend the significance of art only if we understand it in the broader context of our spiritual lives, Solovyov argues.

If attitudes toward Pushkin do indeed encapsulate one's aesthetic thought, then Tolstoy and Nabokov would appear to fall on either side of the debate outlined by

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[3] Ibid., 92. "Подобное рассуждение, имеющее в виду превознести искусство, на самом деле глубоко его унижает, — оно делает его похожим на ту работу фабричного, который всю жизнь должен выделывать только известные колесики часового механизма, а до целого механизма ему нет никакого дела.

[4] Ibid. "Жизнь целого не исключает, а, напротив, требует и предполагает относительную самостоятельность частей и их функций, — но безусловно самодовлеющею никакая частная функция в своей отдельности не бывает и быть не может."

Solovyov. In *What is Art?* Tolstoy sympathizes with the "man of the people" who is bewildered by the officially-sanctioned monuments erected to Pushkin, a man who was neither a hero nor a general nor even a "teacher of goodness," but merely a writer whose "service consisted in writing verses about love, which were often very indecent."[5] Tolstoy implicitly appears to identify with those who ascribe to art only a conditional and instrumental value. Nabokov, on the other hand, professes that when it comes to Pushkin, "Reading everything to the last of his notes, poems, fairy tales, elegies, letters, dramas, critical essays, endlessly rereading them—in this is one of the greatest virtues of our lives."[6] He seems to side with those who say that art has intrinsic value, that it is an end in itself. It is not our needs that confer value on Pushkin, Nabokov suggests, but rather Pushkin's works that confer value on our lives.

So Tolstoy and Nabokov seem to stand at opposite aesthetic poles. But as I have argued throughout this dissertation, their aesthetics are in fact more nuanced, and more similar, than their sometimes strident pronouncements would suggest. These authors, like Solovyov, sought to avoid both the position that art is only a means to some other objective and the position that art's value is entirely independent of us, its makers and appreciators. Tolstoy could not accept what he called "metaphysical definitions of beauty," arguments that held beauty to be a property that inheres in an object and endows it with an intrinsic value. But neither was Tolstoy willing to concede that art is just a

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[5] *What is Art?*, 164. *Chto takoe iskusstvo?* in PSS, 30: 171. "человека из народа," "учитель добра," "вся заслуга его только в том, что он писал стихи о любви, часто очень неприличные."

[6] Vladimir Nabokov, "Pushkin ili Pravda i pravdopodobie," in *Sobranie sohinenii v 4-kh tomakh: Romany, rasskazy, esse*, vol 2. (Sankt-Peterburg: Entar, 1993), 230.

tool—one among many—to gratify ourselves. In fact, in *What is Art?* he wanted to *exclude* objects that he considered merely such tools of satisfaction from the realm of art. As for Nabokov, he was firmly convinced that art was an end in itself, chiding those who use books to "glean information" or display "reproductions of Van Gogh's or Whistler's respective mothers" in order to accrue social capital.[7] Yet Nabokov, like Tolstoy, never believed in the existence of any ontological property that would endow an artwork with intrinsic value. For all his paeans to Pushkin, Nabokov had no metaphysical delusions. In *The Gift*, to take just one example, he allows his two talented artists, Fyodor and Koncheyev, to disagree in their aesthetic evaluations without suggesting that either is mistaken.

Tolstoy likely knew Solovyov's "First Step," and it might well have been a further source for his own aesthetic ideas. He does not mention having read it specifically, but in the early and mid-1890s he followed Solovyov's work and corresponded with him.[8] This was also the period when Tolstoy was most concerned with aesthetics, and when he wrote his essays on art. While he disagreed with Solovyov on a number of ethical and aesthetic issues,[9] he echoed this essay's central premise in his own work "About What is Called Art," published two years after "First Step." Tolstoy shares Solovyov's concern that the artist and his work are diminished not only when art is undervalued by utilitarian critics, but also when it is overvalued by the advocates of art

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[7] *Lectures on Literature,* 1; *Lectures on Russian Literature*, 311.

[8] See *Pis'ma 1894* in PSS, 67: 185, 271-2.

[9] See Caryl Emerson, "Solov'ev, the Late Tolstoi, and the Early Bakhtin on the Problem of Shame and Love," *Slavic Review* 50, no. 3 (1991): 663-671.

for art's sake. If we elevate the human being to the status of a God, as in the case of the Dalai Lama, Tolstoy observes, some people might believe in his divine power. Most, however, would not only reject his godliness but also, as a consequence of recognizing that pretense, fail to acknowledge his proper human merits and powers: "Is it not better and sounder to acknowledge the person for what he is, and demand for him the status and respect appropriate to the human being. It is the same with art."[10] If we hope to defend the value of art, Tolstoy argues, we cannot define this value in a way that strains credulity.

Solovyov attempts, somewhat clumsily, to claim that Nikolay Chernyshevsky had made the "first step" toward an aesthetic theory that navigates between the positions of the utilitarian critics and the advocates of art for art's sake. (His attention to Chernyshevsky's writing on art might well have attracted Nabokov's interest while he researched the critic for *The Gift*.[11]) The connection between Solovyov's aesthetics and Chernyshevsky's is, however, rather strained, and Solovyov offers only a very sketchy treatment of Chernyshevsky's arguments. Instead, Solovyov appears to rely much more substantially, though tacitly, on Kant.[12] Solovyov wants to claim that art is not a tool for

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[10] "O tom, chto nazyvayut iskusstvom" in PSS, 30: 250-1. "Не лучше ли и прочнее признать человека тем, что он есть, и требовать к нему свойственного человену места и уважения. То же и с искусством."

[11] Solovyov, 650. Solovyov's thought was central to Nabokov's immediate literary predecessors—the writers of the Silver Age—and thus Nabokov undoubtedly knew some of his works. This essay, in particular, might have interested him since it was written on the occasion of the republication of Nikolay Chernyshevsky's works in 1893.

[12] Although Kant is not mentioned explicitly in the essay, it is well known that he was Solovyov's primary philosophical influence. For an excellent discussion of Solovyov's debt to Kant see: Randall A. Poole, "Vladimir Solov'ev's Philosophical Anthropology: Autonomy, Dignity, Perfectibility," in *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830-1930*, eds.

some further purpose, but neither is its value independent of our human needs. A Kantian account of value enables one to describe an artwork in precisely this way. As Christine Korsgaard has shown, on Kant's view unconditional value can be attributed only to our capacity, as rational beings, to choose our own ends, but this does not mean that nothing else can be valued as an end in itself. A beautiful painting, Korsgaard explains, is worthless if it is stowed away in a closet forever and cannot be the object of someone's attention. Its worth depends on our taking an interest in it, looking at it and so on. "This does not in the least mean that we have to say that the painting is only valued as a means to the experiences of appreciation," Korsgaard clarifies. "Those experiences are not an end to which the painting is a means, but the condition under which its value is realized."[13] The value of the artwork is conditional—we have to attend to it in the right way—but when "conditions are met"[14] the artwork is valuable in itself. In other words, whenever we pay attention to an artwork without using it for some further purpose, we confer on it a non-instrumental value.

Tolstoy and Nabokov did not draw explicitly on Kant's theory of value, but they recognized, as did Solovyov, that an artwork's value is not intrinsic but rather conditional on our concern, our appreciation as spectators. They saw that it is we who make an artwork an end rather than a mere means, and that we do so by refraining from employing it for a purpose. As I have shown in detail, the authors used quite different strategies to

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G. M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[13] Christine M. Korsgaard, "Two Distinctions in Goodness," *The Philosophical Review* 92, no. 2 (1983): 186-7.

[14] Ibid., 184.

thwart the reader's impulse to make instruments out of their works. Tolstoy believed that the reader must not even be *tempted* to use the artwork for his own purposes. So Tolstoy tried to strip from his art any elements that might prompt his reader to regard it as a means to gratify the appetites, or as fodder for further creative activity. Nabokov's strategy, in contrast, did not require him to avoid stimulating the reader. Instead, he chose to offer the reader such an excess of stimulation that the reader would be driven to reflect on his own appropriative impulses, and finally to curb them.

Producing an artwork that arrests us in an appreciative—rather than an appropriative—mode clearly benefits the authors. The authors' works are attended to, not merely consumed; the authors themselves are treated with the care afforded to final ends and not instruments. But an artwork that thwarts our impulses to use what we encounter for our own purposes benefits us, the spectators, as well. It not only liberates us from preoccupations that threaten to obstruct our vision of the world, but also helps us to recognize our own power to bestow value through our attention and concern.

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