

**TOLSTOY'S MIKHAILOV, THE PAINTER OF ANNA'S  
PORTRAIT, AND CONSTANTIN GUYS, BAUDELAIRE'S  
PAINTER OF MODERN LIFE**

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**Abstract.** *The paper argues that Tolstoy's Realism does not rely on a mimetic representation of 'reality'. In Anna Karenina what operates is a poetics of the 'gaze' (what Lacan called 'le regard'), which resonates with the poetics of an artist like Constantin Guys, whom Baudelaire called 'a painter of modern life.' While not claiming that Tolstoy based his Mikhailov on Guys, the paper uncovers parallels between the painter as (Foucault's) 'archeologist' or local historian and Mikhailov's artistic method based on the recovery of memory as trace and interpretation of signs.*

**Key Words:** *Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, Baudelaire, Contantine Guys, Lacan, the gaze, Foucault, Archaeology, Les français peints par eux-memes, Russkie spisannye s naturi russkimi*

Realism in the European and Russian novel of the nineteenth century is traditionally understood as the mirroring of society by means of 'typical characters' who represent a class – mostly the bourgeois or gentry – in their everyday manners and mores. However, a close look at the poetics of the novel of Leo Tolstoy reveals that his Realism, like that of Fyodor Dostoevsky, does not rely on a mimetic representation of 'reality'. In fact, in *Anna Karenina* what operates is a poetics of the 'gaze'.

The representation of the world through the agency of a 'sensible' gaze is possibly the most salient distinctive feature of the cultural paradigm of *modernity* as the latter is identified both in poststructural theory<sup>1</sup> and in the writings of Tolstoy's contemporary, the Modernist poet Charles Baudelaire. Baudelaire's definition of modernity is illustrated through his writings on a contemporary painter - Constantin Guys (1802-92). The combination of the faculties of imagination, reason, sensibility and the quality of childish curi-

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Michel Foucault's extensive studies on the gaze in, among other works, Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. Translated from the French. (London: Routledge, 1992, Chapter One: «Las Meninas», pp. 3-17. (Originally published in French in 1966). Compare also: Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception*. Translated by A M Sheridan Smith. (New York: Vintage Books, 1975). (Originally published in French in 1963).

osity or *naïveté* constitute Baudelaire's artist of modernity par excellence. These qualities, paradigmatic of the artist Guys, also pertain to the fictional painter Mikhailov, a secondary character in Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina* (1872-8), who lives in Italy as a Russian expatriate and who is commissioned by Vronsky, Anna's de facto husband, to paint Anna's portrait.

In an essay on Guys, entitled "The Painter of Modern Life" (written in 1859-60), Baudelaire constructs a poetics of the 'sketch of manners' that was the grounding genre of 19<sup>th</sup> century Realism in both literature and painting. The Russian version of the sketch of manners was the "physiological sketch" depicting all classes of Russian 19<sup>th</sup> society through their 'typical' – that is – historical features. It is through the 'artist of manners' – Guys, the painter of modern life – that Baudelaire arrives at his definition of modernity. The artist of modernity is an "observer, philosopher, *flâneur* – "call him what you will; but whatever words you use in trying to define this kind of artist, you will certainly be led to bestow on him some adjective which you could not apply to the painter of eternal, or at least more lasting things, of heroic or religious subjects (...) he is the painter of the passing moment and of all the suggestions of eternity that it contains".<sup>2</sup>

Baudelaire's formula of modernity is thus the passing moment of history, of the epoch. Modernity is to do with the phenomenology of *epoche* – fashions, manners, mores of the city, the country, the province – but mainly the city with its bourgeoisie. That is why the French Realist manifesto of 1840, which included 'sketches' by Balzac, is entitled *Les français peints par eux-mêmes*<sup>3</sup> and features daguerreotype illustrations not dissimilar to Guys' paintings of modern city life.

Following the same aesthetic principles, the Russians published their manifesto of Realism the following year (1841), calling it *Russians portrayed from nature by other Russians* (*Russkie spisannye s natyry russkimi*<sup>4</sup>). The word 'nature' is a malapropism in this context, as is the name which the Russian writers of 'physiological sketches' (Dostoevsky included among them) gave to their Realist trend: "the natural school" (*natural'naia shkola*). As Baudelaire points out, the painter of modern life does not paint from 'nature'<sup>5</sup> but from the 'imagination' and through the agency of sensibility and the gaze.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Trans & edited by Jonathan Mayne. (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), pg. 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> Compare *Les français peints par eux-mêmes. Tom Premier*. I. Curmer, Editeur. (Paris, 1840).

<sup>4</sup> Compare *Russkie spisannye s natyry russkimi*. (Sanktpeterburg: Izdanie Ia. A. Isakova, 1841). This was followed by Faddei Bulgariin's *Ocherki russkikh nravov ili litsevaia storona I iznanka roda chelovecheskogo*. (Sanktpeterburg: Pliushar, 1845). Like the French ones, these Russian 'physiologies' featured 'typical sketches' of representatives of various classes of Russian society, accompanied by daguerreotype illustrations.

<sup>5</sup> In another essay on art, which is part of Baudelaire's « Salon » series, entitled *The Salon of 1859: Letters to the Editor of the Revue Française*, published in four instalments between 10<sup>th</sup> June – 20<sup>th</sup> July 1859, Baudelaire attacked the ideologues of a reductionist Realism who demanded that art be a 'copy of nature': « In recent years we have heard it said in a thousand different ways, 'Copy nature ; only copy nature. There is no greater delight, no finer triumph than an excellent copy of nature.' And this doctrine (the enemy of art) was alleged to apply not only to painting but to all the arts, even to the novel and to poetry. To these doctrinaires, who were so completely satisfied by Nature, a man of imagination would certainly have had the right to reply: '...Nature is ugly, and I prefer the monsters of my fancy to what is positively trivial.' And yet it would have been more philosophical to ask the doctrinaires in question first of all whether they were quite certain of the existence of external nature, or ...whether they were quite certain of knowing *all nature*, that is, all that is contained in nature. A 'yes' would have been the most boastful and extravagant of answers...these pedants...let us simply believe that they meant to say, 'We have no imagination, and we decree that no one else is to have any.' (Charles Baudelaire, *The Mirror of Art*. Trans & ed by Jonathan Mayne. Phaidon Press, London, 1955), pg. 231-2.

The painter of modern life is "a man of the world". His element is the world of the city, of passing phenomena, of social ephemera. The editors of *Les français peints par eux mêmes* evoke a similar artist/writer who is a 'borrower' from society (*emprunteur*), who then gives back to society through his recording of the way that society behaved, what that society thought, how its members dressed, what they believed, even what they ate. The writer in *Les français* comes close to being a 'local historian' or, in Foucault's sense, an *archaeologist*.<sup>6</sup> Baudelaire's artists/painter of modern life, Constantin Guys, is also such an archaeologist. He is, in Baudelaire's words, "a pictorial moralist, like La Bruyère,"<sup>7</sup> who is evoked by the editors of *Les français* as the 18<sup>th</sup> century progenitor of the sketch of manners who taught the subsequent generation of writers how to *see* the city (as opposed to the *court*) with its manners and mores.

The painter of modern life – the artist who seeks out "this quality which (Baudelaire says) you must allow me to call 'modernity' - ...makes it his business to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, to distil the eternal from the transitory."<sup>8</sup> Baudelaire's 'painter of modern life', Guys, does his 'extracting' and 'distilling' in the manner of a child, who "sees everything in a state of newness; he is always *drunk*."<sup>9</sup> His inspiration "has something in common with convulsion" and "every sublime thought is accompanied by a more or less violent nervous shock which has its repercussions in the very core of the brain." This man of genius, who looks at the world around him with insatiable *curiosity* and *sees* the world like a child, with whom "[S]ensibility is almost the whole being,"<sup>10</sup> is also a man of Reason. Thus he is "equipped for self-expression with manhood's capacities and powers of analysis which enable it to order the mass of raw material which it has involuntarily accumulated. It is by this deep and joyful curiosity that we may explain the fixed and animally ecstatic gaze of a child confronted with something new, whatever it be, whether a face or a landscape, gilding, colors, shimmering stuffs, or the magic of physical beauty assisted by cosmetic art."<sup>11</sup>

Baudelaire's 'painter of modern life' is reproduced, with an uncanny resemblance to Constantin Guys, by Tolstoy in the artist Mikhailov. It is almost certain that Tolstoy knew Guys' work. Not only did Tolstoy read English and subscribe to English periodicals and newspapers, in which Guys' sketches appeared. Guys also traveled in the Crimea during the Crimean War of the 1850s, from where he sent painted sketches back to France and England. At the same time, Tolstoy was an officer in the Russian army on active service in the Crimea, writing sketches about the war and sending them from the front back to a St Petersburg journal, whose editor serialised them under the title *Sketches*

<sup>6</sup> Foucault's concept of « archeology » implies that historical knowledge is something layered, something that can be 'uncovered' by 'peeling off' various levels of meaning in historical discourses of all times. In this sense, 'archeology' of history is similar to the 'archeological' method of the 'gaze' used by the artist to 'uncover' or 'disclose' an invisible 'reality.' Compare Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. Translated from the French. (London: Routledge, 1992), pg. 14, where Foucault contends that in Velasquez's painting *Las Meninas*, an 'invisible' outside the painting 'orders' the 'visible' in the painting.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Trans & edited by Jonathan Mayne. (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), pg. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pg. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pg. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pg. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pg. 8.

of *Sebastopol*. Thus, like Guys, Tolstoy acted as a kind of self-appointed war correspondent. These sketches were Tolstoy's *debut* on the Russian literary scene.

Like Baudelaire's 'painter of modern life,' Guys, Tolstoy's portrait painter Mikhailov is a self-taught craftsman, who paints from imagination and whose technique – *techné* – is an inalienable part of the 'content' of his paintings. The method of painting 'modern life' from imagination is described by Baudelaire as "barbarous." Guys, a late starter according to Baudelaire (who was mistaken about this), "drew like a barbarian, or a child, impatient at the clumsiness of his fingers and the disobedience of his pen. I have seen a large number of these primitive scribbles..." says Baudelaire.

Mastery in this kind of *impressionistic painting* is not a matter of copying old models, or of an education acquired through the Academy. Baudelaire's painter of modern life, Guys, is almost uneducated in the classical sense. He learns his 'trade' by trial and error, by 'tinkering.' He is almost like Derrida's *bricoleur*.<sup>12</sup>

"Today, after discovering by himself [without the Academy of Art – SV-G] all the little tricks of his trade and accomplishing, without advice, his own education, Monsieur G. [who does not sign his work and who is accorded the same courtesy by Baudelaire, who refers to him only by his initial – SV-G] has become a powerful master in his own way..."<sup>13</sup>

Tolstoy's Mikhailov is similarly uneducated. What this means is that he does not follow established models. He creates the world anew, by always seeking out the *limit* of the possible. Mikhailov is a painter of the *limit*. Mikhailov thus 'creates' Anna through painting her portrait, imitating Tolstoy's creative act of giving the reader 'his' Anna as a fictionally created portrait. Both Mikhailov's Anna and Tolstoy's Anna are products of 'the gaze' and not of 'life'.

The painter Mikhailov lights up Tolstoy's and the reader's Anna with a marvellous revelational gaze even before he 'sees' her properly at the moment when he vaguely registers her silhouette in the shadow of the doorway of his studio. Mikhailov's artist's gaze is distinguished from the gaze of the critic or dilettante through its 'immediacy' of perception. It is Mikhailov's gaze that provides the reader with a complete model of perception and, through this model, with the key to the structure of Tolstoy's novel and Tolstoy's poetics.

The debate in Mikhailov's studio and the subsequent comments on Anna's portrait, including Levin's later perception of it, appear to focus on the question of art. However, the current reading of *Anna Karenina* through the model of the gaze assumes that the debate on art in the novel is in essence a question of a new phenomenology of perception. It is the essential modernity of this model of perception that renders Tolstoy's novel readable in the age of postmodernism.

When Vronsky sets out to paint Anna's portrait in "an Italian costume", he is inspired not by the *living* Anna but by an artistic model, provided by the French 'school' of genre painting, which Vronsky found attractive because of its "graciousness and its effects". Thus Vronsky is inspired by a 'copy' of life or a style. Judged in the context of the poetics

<sup>12</sup> Compare Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1976), pg. xix.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Trans & edited by Jonathan Mayne. (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), pg. 6.

of the gaze, Vronsky's portrait originates in something inauthentic, something counterfeit. The young Italian nurse, of whom Anna is jealous, whose head Vronsky is incorporating (perhaps as a mini-model of the Italianized Anna) in his portrait of Anna, inspires him because of his association of her features with medieval Italian forms, and not as a living subject. Vronsky as a painter resembles a fetishist, who does not perceive the living object in its totality, but only through an isolated feature (a stylistic feature in this case). Vronsky thus reifies the object into one aspect of the object's total reality or being.

Mikhailov is repeatedly characterized by his rich aristocratic patrons as an 'uneducated' man, raised, moreover, in the spirit of "atheism, negation and materialism." In fact, like Baudelaire's Guys, Mikhailov is a man of Reason. However, the faculty of reason combined with the faculty of imagination produces *sensibility*.<sup>14</sup> Through the 'faculty' of sensibility, framing the gaze, Mikhailov feels his subjects as living totalities. His 'lack of education', stressed repeatedly by Golenishchev, amounts to a new form of freedom: freedom from authority and traditional, outlived, clichéd forms. Or, as Golenishchev says scornfully, Mikhailov's form of libertinage (*vol'ynodumstvo*) has never known the concepts of "religion, law and morality". That is to say, Mikhailov's ethics has never been under the aegis of totalization or a totalizing system, such as is represented by a religious dogma, or a body of law or a prescriptive moral code. Such totalizing systems inevitably call into existence an 'excluded' other in respect of which an identity (national, racial, class) can legitimate itself as a whole. With respect to the upper class Russian society whose social code is portrayed in Tolstoy's novel, Anna and Vronsky represent the 'excluded' other *vis-à-vis* a totality called 'Russian society'. Their travels abroad represent a continuum of 'avoidance tactics', undertaken in order not to come into 'awkward situations', among people who would not have the required tolerance ('tact') with respect to their 'irregular' (that is, 'exclusive') relationship. This 'avoidance' is in itself a glaring testimony of their 'exclusion'. Anna, in particular, represents the 'excluded part'.<sup>15</sup> Anna is not 'excluded' (ostracized) because she commits adultery, but because she allows it to be *seen* that she does. It is because she turns adultery into a spectacular act of transgression. Anna does not only flaunt the conventions (laws) of her class. She relishes her own public display of her 'fall.' This is made patently obvious in the scene at the opera, where scores of lorgnons and opera glasses are trained on Anna sitting bare-shouldered in her box, with her aunt-companion as her only vestige of social decorum. Anna's demeanour cannot be explained in the register of psychology because it belongs to the sphere of the gaze and negativity. Anna 'needs' the gaze of the other(s) – St Petersburg society, Vronsky, Mikhailov, Tolstoy, the reader – in order to come into being. However, her 'being' belongs to the realm of the symbolic – language, discourse, simulacrum – and as such her being is synonymous with 'death'.<sup>16</sup> As a subject of the gaze, Anna belongs to the domain

<sup>14</sup> Compare Kant's third critique, in which the beautiful and the sublime are categories of reason perceived through the judgement of taste or sensibility. See Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Werkausgabe Band X. Edited by Wilhelm Weischedel. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), in particular the sections on the analytic of the sublime, pp. 164 ff.

<sup>15</sup> Compare Georges Bataille's theorising on the 'excluded part' in his *La part maudite* (1967), translated as *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*. Tr. by Robert Hurley. Vols I, II, III, (New York: Zone Books, 1991-93).

<sup>16</sup> In Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic model of subjectivity, grounded in the phenomenology of perception of Maurice Merleau-Ponty as well as Hegel, the sphere of meaning is exclusive of the sphere of being. This mutual exclusion of the symbolic order (meaning) and 'being' (biological nature broadly speaking) is called 'alienation.' Compare Jacques Lacan, «The Subject and the Other» Alienation, in: Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental*

of art and the artist. Thus Anna stages herself both as a subject of Mikhailov's portrait and a creation of Tolstoy's narrative. In both cases, Anna 'performs' her own process of signification. Ultimately, Anna does not embody herself as a Russian lady of St Petersburg upper class society. Indeed, in her initial appearance 'on stage' in Tolstoy's novel, viewed through Kitty's eyes, Anna's 'portrait' is distinctly clichéd: she is like a Greek statue, of harmonious proportions, fashioned like a model of the 'classical' aesthetics of Beauty. Like Vronsky, Tolstoy starts off by re-cycling an existing style: neo-classicism.

However, Anna's initial appearance is not *what it seems*. She is not a classically balanced Beauty but a subject of modernity reflecting a heterogeneous reality that was only just beginning to be revealed by painters and artists like Constantin Guys, Charles Baudelaire, Tolstoy and their contemporaries. Like Baudelaire's 'painter of modern life,' Constantin Guys, Tolstoy was able to go beyond the cliché and "extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, to distil the eternal from the transitory."<sup>17</sup>

The transgressive nature of Anna's actions, which make up the *essence* of her modernity, is echoed by the transgressive 'materialism' or Darwinism that Golenishchev attributes to Mikhailov. This 'Darwinism' is nowhere substantiated through Mikhailov's own thought on art or anything else he says or does. Instead, this alleged 'materialism' of the artist, who is cast to the role of 'the seer,' is a metaphor for atheism. The question of God is debated in Tolstoy's novel not in the chapters dealing with Levin, whose concern is with the reasons to live, not the existence or non-existence of God. The question of God is used as another codename for the debate about the meaning of signs. The artist, who deals with signs (sensory impressions stored as memory traces), does not believe in the pre-existence of Truth. The signs he perceives are not backed up by predetermined concepts or *signifieds*. What the artist perceives and what he renders as representations (Anna's portrait, the picture of Christ and Pontius Pilate) are *signifiers*. In this realm of signs or signifiers, 'God' (or the signified) is 'dead.'

However, the 'death of God' does not signify the death of religious thought. This is made clear in Mikhailov's choice of subject matter for his paintings, which echoes that of his (and Tolstoy's) contemporaries. In particular, Mikhailov's portrait of Christ and Pontius Pilate is said by Golenishchev to be 'in the style' of the "Ivanov-Strauss-Renan attitude to Christ." The Orientalist and Hebrew scholar Ernest Renan (1823-92), in his 1863 book *La Vie de Jésus* [*The Life of Jesus*]), and the Wittenberg theologian David Strauss (1808-74), in his *Life of Jesus*, portrayed Christ as a historical character and not as the 'Son of God'. In his most famous painting of Christ, *The Appearance of Christ to the People* (1837-1857), Alexander Ivanov portrayed Christ as a background figure, while foregrounding 'the people': individual figures, whose eyes are 'averted' from the spectator and directed, instead, towards the back of the picture, at the unremarkable and almost 'insignificant' and clichéd figure of Christ, who becomes a 'sign' like any other sign. What Ivanov's picture heralds is the absence of a 'transcendental signified'. Instead of transcendence, Ivanov foregrounds the gaze and the *finitude* of the sign.

Mikhailov's painting of Christ and Pontius Pilate does not, in fact, resemble Ivanov's large and populous canvas, but rather a smaller painting by N.N. Ge, whose title is the

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*Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated from the French by Alan Sheridan. (New York and London: W W Norton & Co, 1981), pp. 203-215. See pp. 203-213 in particular.

<sup>17</sup> Compare footnote 8 above.

question "What Is Truth?" (1890).<sup>18</sup> This painting contains only two figures, Christ and Pontius Pilate, who are divided by a broad shaft of light falling on the ground between them. There is no further resemblance between Ge's painting and Mikhailov's. While discussing Mikhailov's painting, the aristocratic visitors both praise and criticize it. Golenishchev objects to the subject of the painting - Christ - a sacred subject, which in his opinion ought not to be a subject of art. In other words, it ought not to be a subject of representation and hence, by implication, should remain in the realm of the transcendental unknowable. Golenishchev holds to a view that from Mikhailov's perspective appears outdated. This is clear not only from Mikhailov's paintings but also from his defence of Ivanov's (Ge's) painting of Christ, in which Christ does not appear as the bearer of a transcendental Truth but as the silent response to the question "what is truth?" When Golenishchev objects to the "destruction of unity" in Ivanov's painting, issuing from the question which Ivanov's Christ gives rise to: "Is this God or is this not God" - Mikhailov answers: "I should have thought that for educated people... the question cannot exist."<sup>19</sup> In other words, for Mikhailov, the artist, who can conjure up 'life' and create 'being' from impressions and memory, a 'life' and 'being' which is representation, there can be no question of God's existence. For that would imply that not everything could be represented. Golenishchev is cast as a somewhat old-fashioned and outmoded gentleman, who has 'nothing to say', nothing to contribute to the world of 'discourse', signalled by his book project which fails to mature into writing. In this he resembles Vronsky, who also has nothing to 'say' in painting and hence gives it up. Vronsky's and Golenishchev's educated, 'classical' point of view coincides with a 'classical' model of culture evoked by Michel Foucault in *The Birth of the Clinic* and *The Order of Things*. The 'classical' model of European culture, which is coexistent with its 'transcendent phase' of thought, comes to a close towards the end of the 18th century, when in the place of a transcendental signified - God and God-Man as Christ - there appears the gaze, heralding modern science with its 'clinical gaze' and with its imperative of the transparency of the signifier.<sup>20</sup>

Mikhailov, with his painting of Christ, personifies this new European cultural paradigm, based on the model of the gaze and identified by Foucault, Theodor Adorno and Baudelaire as the age of modernity. What focuses or brings into sharp relief this conception of modernity is Friedrich Nietzsche's declarations about the 'death of God' and the announcement of the emergence of the 'Superman' or 'Man-God'. This 'Superman' is the signifier, who has turned out to be the last Master of modern Man. Christ is represented as 'Man-God' or as a pure signifier in Mikhailov's painting. When asked why he had not painted a 'traditional Christ', Mikhailov answers that he could not paint what was not in his soul.

In Mikhailov's painting Christ is a signifier, just as he is in Alexander Ivanov's painting *Christ Appearing to the People*. The essence of the signifier is that it belongs to language and as such it is eminently representable. It belongs wholly to the realm of appearance and representation. Like Baudelaire's 'painter of modern life,' Guys, Tolstoy's painter, Mikhailov, represents the sensibility of 'modernity.' This is not to say that 'mod-

<sup>18</sup> Tolstoy could not have had this particular painting of Ge's in mind when writing his novel, but he might have seen a sketch of an earlier version of the same or a similar motif executed by some other contemporary artist. The correspondence between the Ge painting and the picture attributed to Mikhailov in Tolstoy's novel is, to say the least, remarkable if not uncanny.

<sup>19</sup> L. N. Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*. Tr. by Rosemary Edmonds. Penguin, p. 501.

<sup>20</sup> Compare Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, *opt. cit.*, pp. 303-307 («Man and his Doubles»).

ern' sensibility does not participate in a 'religious feeling.' On the contrary, Mikhailov is 'religious' about his art. He is 'jealously' anxious to preserve its 'autonomy', its 'exclusiveness', its 'uniqueness' and 'unrepeatability'. He is even (mistakenly) accused of being 'jealous' of Vronsky, the Master, who has 'everything' and whose Master Discourse is still backed by the political power of the Russian Empire in the last decades of its hegemony. However, Mikhailov is not jealous of any 'Master' in the Hegelian sense. He trembles only before the ordeal of *expression* - of putting 'things,' and the experience of the desire of representing 'things' - into representational *form*. He even loses his power of speech before this task, and his lips tremble like those of a man gripped by inhibition in the presence of the sacred. Like the sect of the Shakers, or like the Russian religious *klikushi* or *shriekers*, Mikhailov's speech apparatus literally goes into spasms – the "convulsions" of Baudelaire's painter, Guys, - before the experience of *uttering* or putting into speech that which is 'invisible', that which is the true object representation.

This 'hysteria' of inhibition (or repression) is the nether side of Mikhailov's effort to 'uncover' or 'reveal' an invisible 'reality' in his paintings. The 'invisible' reality that is subject to revelation in art is not 'nature as it is', or 'life as it is', but rather the unconscious that is the repository of the 'invisible' *memory trace* and the *limit*. It is a "*limit of content* [read: representation]" or a *limit* of that which is representable. The same limit is captured in Ge's painting in the shaft of light, which puts Christ on one side and Pilate on the other side of imminent transgression (of the Hebrew Law) and crucifixion. The notion of the 'limit' is also clearly present in Tolstoy's original text, although it is completely obscured in Edmonds' translation. The original reads:

*A samyi opytnyi i iskussnyi zhivopisets-tehnik odnoi mekhanicheskoi sposobnosti ne mog by napisat' nichego, esli by emu ne otkrylis' prezhde granitsy sodержaniia.*

[But the most experienced technically accomplished painter would not be capable of painting anything by dint of his mechanical ability alone, if the limits of representation had failed to reveal themselves to him beforehand.].<sup>21</sup>

Christ, in Mikhailov's painting, is the metaphorical representation of this *limit* of the *invisible* conceived as light and space. This is revealed in Golenishchev's covertly disapproving (unconscious or unwitting - hence 'truthful') comment about Christ's figure in the Pontius Pilate painting:

...i kak sdelana eta figura, - skol'ko vozdukha, oboiti mozhno...  
[...and how well executed the figure is, - how much space there is, one could walk around it...].<sup>22</sup>

Christ in Mikhailov's painting is thus not a replica of any Christ figure in Russian contemporary painting, although it points to a few. It is a representation, not of a figure, but of space and light, in other words, of nothing or nothingness. This nothingness is itself a metaphor of negativity.

<sup>21</sup> L. N. Tolstoy, *Sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati tomakh*. Pod obshch. red. N. N. Akopovoi, N.K. Gudziia, N.N. Guseva, M.B. Khrapchenko. Tom deviatyi. (Moskva: GIKHL, 1963), pg. 50, my translation. Rosemary Edmonds, in the Penguin edition of *Anna Karenina*, reads "*granitsy sodержaniia* " as "the lines of his subject", taking "*granitsa* " for its possible synonym of 'outline' or 'contour'.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid* ., pg. 50, my translation.



Mikhailov's Christ as negativity is thus the necessary precondition for *meaning*, a meaning that is always in the future as possibility and experiment, without origins and without closure. Meaning which is grounded in this negativity or nothingness carries an absolute unity of form and content. In this symbiosis, form is content and content is form or expression. In other words, meaning comes to 'expression' as pure representation or appearance.

The whole conversation about technique angers Mikhailov because he knows that to separate meaning from its expression is impossible, just as it is impossible to give 'bad content' expression through 'good technique' - "*kak budto mozžno bylo napisat' khorosho to chto durno*" ["as if it would be possible to express something bad well"].

Mikhailov's proposition about art is in essence a proposition about discourse, which echoes Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. The unity of form and content in art is analogous to the unity of sign and logical grid, which 'precedes' the *sense* of a proposition. Sense is thus a matter of language, that is, of the 'right' expression. Language (or expression) sets a limit to thought. "Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly. Everything that can be put into words can be put clearly."<sup>23</sup> The nature of a sign is that it must signify something to someone - which means that everything that makes up the 'modern' world is representable and interpretable. Or, as Wittgenstein puts it: "If a sign is *possible*, then it is also capable of signifying..."<sup>24</sup> And: "We cannot give a sign the wrong sense."<sup>25</sup>

According to the *semiotic* model of meaning and perception, which is Mikhailov's (and Tolstoy's) *avant la lettre*, non-sense or 'un-sense' is something that cannot be represented. For what is beyond language - on the 'other side' of the *limit*, as it were - is not a transcendent being but silence. Mikhailov's Christ is an expression of this limit of language. The facial expression of Mikhailov's Christ - such as it is rendered for the reader through Mikhailov's musing or inner monologue, is eloquent silence. Christ's expression is, in keeping with the nature of the sign, *polyvalent*. It is, among other things, that of "pity for Pilate" - but also "of love," of "a peace not of this world," "a readiness for death" and of a "sense of the vanity of words" ("*soznanie tshchety slov*"). Mikhailov's Christ is portrayed *listening* serenely to Pilate's "irritable haranguing." It is a Christ who is silent before judgement, just as Mikhailov is silent before the critical and evaluating glance of his visitors. Christ's expression is thus an image of the limit, the limit of meaning, which is death as finitude and silence as the Other of speech or logos.

Mikhailov emulates this silence and thus becomes the incarnation of his own Christ figure in the novel's representational field. This impression is created by the repetition of the gesture of silence. Mikhailov is silent when Golenishchev outpoints him on the question of the legitimacy of the subject matter for his painting. He is also unable to voice or to verbalize his 'opinion' about his own picture. Through Mikhailov's silence, another fundamental proposition of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language acquires dramatic form. This is his proposition about the nature of propositions. Propositions of language *show* their sense as *pictures* - to be understood in an abstract sense as *models* - of reality. Propositions of language thus mime or dramatise their sense, they do not describe it.

<sup>23</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by D F Pears & B F McGuinness. With an Introduction by Bertrand Russell. (London: Routledge, 1989), paragraph 4.116. [First published in German in 1921. First English edition 1922].

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 5.473.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph , 5.4732.

Mikhailov's silent Christ preempts Ivan Karamazov's silent Christ in *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*. Both Christs have a similar function in the novels by the two great Russian 'painters of modern life' of the nineteenth century.

Tolstoy, like Dostoevsky<sup>26</sup>, and like Baudelaire's *Guys*, is a 'painter of the passing moment' or of the *epoche*. He is an 'archaeologist' ('local historian') of manners and mores or a 'Realist'. Like Dostoevsky, Tolstoy is an 'archaeologist' in a 'higher sense.' Tolstoy not only portrays his times and his class as a 'sketch' or 'portrait' of manners. He also portrays his times as an *episteme* or as a cultural paradigm. The epistemic content comes to expression as *form* and is encoded in the poetics of his novel *Anna Karenina*, grounded in the phenomenology of perception and the notion of 'reality' (or 'nature') being a construct of the 'gaze'.

## TOLSTOJEV MIHAJLOV, SLIKAR ANINOG PORTRETA I KONSTANTIN GIJZ, BODLEROV *SLIKAR MODERNOG ŽIVOTA*

Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover

*Tolstojev realizam nije baziran na mimetičkom slikanju 'stvarnosti'. U romanu Ana Karenjina prisutna je operativna poetika 'vidjenja' (ono što je Lacan nazvao 'le regard'), koja je u skladu sa poetikom stvarnog umetnika, Konstantina Gijza, koga je Bodler nazvao 'živopiscem modernog života.' Iako se ne tvrdi da je Tolstovljev Mihajlov baziran na Gijzu, u radu se otkrivaju paralele između umetnika kao 'arheologa' (Foucault) ili lokalnog istoričara, i umetničkog stila Mihajlova, koji se osniva na rekuperaciji sećanja i interpretaciji znakova.*

Ključne reči: *Tolstoj, Ana Karenjina, Bodler, Konstantin Gijz, Lakan, Vidjenje, Fuko, Arheologije, Fracuzi u svom sopstvenom vidjenju, Rusi kako vide sami sebe uaturi*

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<sup>26</sup> For a study of Dostoevsky's poetics of 'archeology', compare Slobodanka M. Vladiv-Glover, «Russia's Political Unconscious in *The Possessed*: Dostoevsky's New Phenomenology of History and Representation», *The Dostoevsky Journal: An Independent Review*, vol. 1 (2000): 11-28.