

ultimate bedrock and affirmation for his endeavour in the directive of Tolstoy himself. “[The kind of literary critics we need now] are people,” writes Tolstoy, “who would show the meaninglessness of searching for ideas in a work of art, and who would constantly guide readers through that *endless labyrinth of connections* that is the essence of art, and toward the laws that serve as the basis for these linkages.” That is precisely the task which Alexandrov has undertaken.

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O. V. Slivitskaya, *Ob effekte zhiznepodobii*  
Anny Kareninnoi. St. Petersburg, 2004.  
103 pp.

This is a slim volume of pure literary criticism with the far from modest goal of analyzing how Leo Tolstoy achieved the impression of actual lived experience in fictional prose. The essay takes two approaches in its reading of *Anna Karenina*: the first examines the rhythm or flow of narrative as correlated to the pulse and tempo of life events; the second addresses the representation of character and personality in the novel as a Möbius strip of interiority and external description. An intriguing tailpiece, a reading of the short story “Lucerne,” is appended to the monograph.

Literary scholars constantly seek concepts, terms, or discourses that may enhance or enable their analyses, and Slivitskaya has appropriated for her work the synergetic concept of the “fractal” a term employed by physicists and geometers to denote either naturally occurring geometric figures in nature or the meaning adapted by Slivitskaya—the non-linear irregularities of actual matter (such as coastlines and mountain ranges) which cannot be captured by geometric or paradigmatic modeling. Understood more theoretically, the fractal is a fragment or extrusion of great organicity and integrity which re-incorporates in miniature or infinitesimal form the features of the macrocosm to which it is synergetically related. Fractal art can thus lay claim to being more aligned to actual real structures than

an art based on geometrical forms. Slivitskaya suggests, intriguingly, that “fraktal’nost” characterizes Tolstoy’s artistic inclination toward the miniature, and that his textual miniatures, like the story “Lucerne,” can be seen as fractals of the major prose. Regrettably, these ideas are developed only briefly in the monograph’s appended essay. However, the idea of fractal art inhabits the main chapters of the monograph as an implicit interpretive principle for examining the Tolstoyan novel, while Slivitskaya’s essay itself, in its laconic brevity, appears to exemplify the idea of the miniature and fragmentary form that contains an enormity of implications.

In both sections of the work, Tolstoy’s artistic prose is considered to be structured on the asymmetrical relationship of microcosm to macrocosm; this approach is made original by reference to the fractal, or the autonomy and validity of the fragmentary. In terms of plot composition, the pulse of predetermined action (for example, Anna’s tragic destiny, which Slivitskaya sees modelled in the inflexibility of the iron rails of the railroad) is interrupted by lagoons of non-action which serve to lower the systolic pressure of the narrative. Similarly, the alternation of the two plot strands (Anna-Vronsky vs. Levin-Kitty) creates the effect of a collision of personalities when characters reemerge in the action after a lengthy disappearance. Slivitskaya discerns a principle of narrative asymmetry in the alternation of episodes which she suggests, in a somewhat Lotmanian reading, evokes the universal biological principle of asymmetry. The reappearance of a character after a lengthy absence is thereby estranged and defamiliarized, renewing for the reader, the impression of the character’s personality and worldview.

A similar asymmetry of persona is the deliberate result of Tolstoy’s strategy of characterization, which, according to Slivitskaya, consists in the constant juxtaposition of the exterior representation of characters (in authorial description or from the perspective of the visual and auditory perceptions of other characters in the novel) to their inner thoughts via a direct exposition of interior monologue to which the reader is given unique access. It is left to the reader to correlate the inner and outer depictions of character in the novel.

Recalling the notions of asymmetry, Slivitskaya suggests that the reader thereby both experiences the character as familiar (the interior psyche) and strange (an alien personality known only by their exterior personality), and that this alternation between the familiar and the strange replicates actual sensations of lived experience. The moment when Anna is capable of seeing her own eyes in the dark becomes representative of this effect.

Slivitskaya's monograph is an engaging and original contribution to Tolstoy scholarship and a pedagogue's dream. The book begs to be assigned as secondary reading for advanced work in literature classes, and Tolstoy scholars will find much to value here.

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