

POETICS OF LEV TOLSTOY'S *KHOLSTOMER*

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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This thesis contains an analysis of the possible ways in which form and content are combined to create significance within a text, as well as an exploration of the ways in which the mechanics of didactic fiction then convey this significance to the reader.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Tolstoy's "Story of a Horse" stands as an anomaly among the author's collected works. The time span from inception to publication, the variations of genre and plot devices and the horse-as-narrator are all elemental to the crafting of the short story. At its core, however, *Kholstomer* is a didactic work; meaning that Tolstoy's primary purpose in the creation of this work is to offer it as a means through which he will instruct the reader. The moral implications of property, authority, class, value, and labor are prevalent in the work, and the very nature of didactic fiction requires that these be as transparent as possible in order to be accessible to all.

The scope of this essay will not be concerned with what these issues are *as such*, but rather *how* they are constructed within the story. To this end, the study will be divided into two sections. The purpose of the first section of this essay will be to establish a general framework and provide necessary prior information, and will be divided into three subsections: the first being to place the text within its Biographical/Historical Context. The second will be General Considerations, which will outline the basic devices used by the author in constructing the story. This will then inform the third section, my Methodology and Approach to the text. The second portion of this essay will be concerned with an analysis of the text itself.

Biographical/Historical Context

Kholstomer was begun in 1863, but not published until 1886, although the germ of this idea was present well before. Boris Eikhenbaum states that, "As early as May 31,

1856, soon after finishing ‘Two Hussars’, Tolstoi wrote in his notebook: ‘I would like to write the story of a horse.’¹”

The main idea for the plot of *Kholstomer* itself, however, belongs to M.A. Stakhovich (whose death in 1858 prevented his writing it), and is the reason Tolstoy’s short story is dedicated to him. Stakhovich’s (and later Tolstoy’s) story of a horse was based on fact: “In the early 1850s I became interested in the stories old horse breeders told about the extraordinary speed of Strider who, in the early 1800s, went 426 meters in 30 seconds at the Shablovsky races of Count A.G. Orlov-Chesmensky in Moscow. When the Count died, the German riding master who was managing the stable of Countess A.A. Orlova gelded and sold Strider because he was piebald and because of his large spots.... After a long search I finally was able to establish that Strider was a nickname given by Count Orlov to a black horse, Muzhik the First, out of Baba by Lyubezny the First, born in Khrenov stable in 1803 and gelded in 1812”.²

Beginning in the 1840s, the horse theme in Russian literature was beginning to gain popularity. It occasionally would have social overtones, but the theme was not limited to this. According to Eikhenbaum, “the horse figure frequently appeared in the literature of the 1840s as part of current language and everyday life”; he goes on to cite excerpts from Gogol’s *Dead Souls*, two titles by Turgenev including the chapter in *Notes*

¹ Eikhenbaum, Boris. *Tolstoi in the Sixties*. Trans. Duffield White. Ann Arbor: Ardis Publishers, 1982. Pg. 91.

² “” Pg. 91.

of a *Hunter* titled “Lebedyan”³, and earlier completed works by M.A. Stakhovich as evidence of this trend.

By the 1860s, the obsession with horses and the idea of pure breeding had grown and assumed more overtly political overtones. P. Martos, quoted by Eikhenbaum, states, “Human physiology is very close to the physiology of a horse: breeding means a lot.... A human being is just the same: the higher born he is, the nobler his feelings are.”⁴

The literary and the political, the metaphorical and the actual are conflated in the 1860s using the horse trope. This tendency was also adopted by Tolstoy, who in a letter to Afanasi Fet in 1865 says: “You will have to reharness the carriage, and shift your ‘Yufanizing’⁵ from the shaft to the outrunner; your thought and your art have long since moved over to the shaft horse. I have changed my horses around and have been travelling much more smoothly” (99).

With this historical precedent in mind, Eikhenbaum states that the idea of *Kholstomer*, with its uniquely Tolstoyan ethos “appears more than conventional; it is almost trite”.

Everything was prepared for the transformation of a conventional linguistic association into a metaphorical subject (rearranging the terms of comparison so that the secondary becomes the primary), for the transformation of a simply figurative statement into an instance of aesthetic distancing (*ostranenie*), and for the transformation of an anecdote into something edifying, a didactic epic

³ It is possible that this chapter of Turgenev’s concerning the description of a horse fair and horse trading – and by extension Turgenev himself -- could be an object of satire in Tolstoy’s story of a horse. *Kholstomer*’s first racing partner is Swan (*Lebed*) who, “went well, but all the same he was showing off and had not the exactitude I had developed in myself”, which could be a reference to Turgenev or his work.

⁴ *Sixties*, Pg. 98. In his “story of a horse”, Tolstoy will take great care to dispel this prevalent notion.

⁵ “The meaning of this advice”, Eikhenbaum states, “is that Fet should give up his estate management (‘Yufanizing’) and return to creative writing.” Pg. 99.

(*poema*) or a fable. . . . In Tolstoi, of course, the horse was to appear not so much in comparison to man as in opposition to man, following his usual (and in this period particularly emphatic) juxtaposition of nature and civilization. The whole cycle of Tolstoi's works in these years (beginning with "An Idyll" and *The Cossacks* and ending with "Polikushka," "Strider," "The Decembrists," and "The Infected Family") is a struggle against social theories, against ideas of progress, against historicism and in defense of the natural, invariable, immutable qualities of nature which are spoiled and destroyed by human relations and institutions. In this sense, the theme of the piebald gelding fit Tolstoi's purposes perfectly (100).

The overplayed theme of a horse carried with it many already established assumptions and expectations which allowed Tolstoy, using a variety of literary styles and devices, to play with these commonalities which serve in large part to give *Kholstomer* its didactic vigor.

Text-Specific Considerations

The following is intended to describe and elucidate the most prevalent literary devices which Tolstoy will use to construct his "story of a horse". It is by no means exhaustive, nor is it proposed to be. My goal in this section is to provide a general framework and establish common definitions for the poetics of Tolstoy's *Kholstomer*, or rather, to provide categories of thought for Morson's position:

"The right question, however, should not be whether great art can be didactic, but how it can be didactic; what we need (and what formalism and new criticism have prevented us from finding) is a poetics of instruction. Only then can we begin to appreciate Russian literature on its own terms."⁶

The purpose of this study is most definitely to engage *Kholstomer* on its own terms; and in a sense, on Tolstoy's terms also. To do this adequately, it is necessary to enumerate the most dominant devices which the author will use in the construction of the story, and what effects they might have within the plot.

⁶ Morson, Gary Saul. *Reader as Voyeur*. Canadian-American Slavic Studies, 12, No. 4 (Winter 1978). Pg. 466.

The most dominant technique used in *Kholstomer* is *ostranenie*, which is commonly translated as “estrangement” or “defamiliarization”. The story of a horse uses estrangement to such an extent that it provides the bulk of the evidence for the concept developed by Viktor Shklovsky in his 1917 essay *Art as Technique* (Искусство как приём). “Poetic imagery is a means of creating the strongest possible impression”, Shklovsky asserts in opposition to Potebnia’s “Art is thinking in images”.⁷ It is the *impression* which is most important for Shklovsky, and the greatest possible impression is achieved when “perception is impeded and the greatest possible effect is produced through the slowness of the perception. As a result of this lingering, the object is perceived not in its extension in space, but, so to speak, in its continuity” (22). Taken in this way, estrangement can be applied to nearly anything within a text: from content and concept to syntax and word choice. In relation to Tolstoy, “[he] makes the familiar seem strange by not naming the familiar object” (13). Moreover, the use of a horse-as-narrator in *Kholstomer* is a use of estrangement in itself, “it is the horse’s point of view (and not a person’s) that makes the content of the story seem unfamiliar” (14).

This concept, however, has both a negative (alienating the familiar) and a positive, or *constructive* (imbuing the familiar with new meaning) connotation which is used by Mikhail Bakhtin in his criticism of Shklovsky. “Its [*ostranenie*] original definition, far from emphasizing the enrichment of the word with new and positive constructive meaning, simply emphasizes the negation of the old meaning.... Tolstoy does not admire a thing that is made strange. On the contrary, he only makes it strange in

⁷ Shklovsky, Viktor. *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Ed. Lemon & Reis. Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965. Pg 8.

order to move away from it, push it away in order to put forth the more sharply what is positive: a definite moral value”.⁸

This polemic is easily settled within the text, however, as both the positive and negative aspects are used by the author. The “strangeness” with which the piebald gelding is described in the second chapter of the story is meant to add an empathetic quality through alienation. It is intended for the reader to change his perception regarding the old, ruined horse and instead of disgust to become endeared to him. Conversely, Nester’s unexpected violent act in the beginning of chapter two is made strange so as to be unintelligible, and therefore more reviled by the reader. Also relating to (and working with) the depiction of Nester’s violence toward the piebald gelding is what Justin Weir terms “The Alibi of Narrative”.

Essentially, the alibi of narrative is a way in which Tolstoy is able to resolve fundamental contradictions, such as, “when Tolstoy celebrates fidelity in vivid stories of adultery, or cherishes the innocence of childhood by repeatedly dwelling on its loss”.⁹ As outlined by Weir, “A narrative alibi works in two ways. In its simplest sense, it can be a story that exculpates, removes blame or transfers responsibility....” And secondly, “A narrative alibi can also be a story that uses the logic of the word *alibi*, which literally means to be ‘elsewhere’. An alibi here is a meaningful absence, a place in the text where one is supposed to notice that the author has purposely bypassed or concealed an important aspect of plot” (1-2). The second definition is more appropriate here in describing the horse-herd’s “unexpected” action towards the gelding. The seemingly

⁸ Bakhtin, Mikhail; Medvedev, Pavel. *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*. Trans. Albert J. Wehrle. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978. Pg. 60.

⁹ Weir, Justin. *Leo Tolstoy & the Alibi of Narrative*. Yale University Press, 2011. Pg. 1.

omniscient narrator describes the *possibilities* of Nester's motivation, but never the motivation itself. The horse-herd's true intentions are purposefully obfuscated as a way to estrange them while simultaneously drawing attention to them. Also of use in understanding the narrative alibi and its relation to estrangement is Thomas Seifrid's article *Gazing on Life's Page*.

While the alibi of narrative draws the reader's attention to things that are omitted or unseen, Seifrid's article focuses on the way in which the reader's attention is actively drawn, citing Morson's assertion that "Tolstoy drew a ... distinction, between the noticed and unnoticed".¹⁰ To reinforce this position, Seifrid cites Plato's allegory of the cave, "(which is known to have affected Tolstoy [Orwin 128])... whether the cave's inhabitants come to know higher truths depends entirely on whether they see real things in the light of day or mere shadows".¹¹

The epistemology of fiction, especially didactic fiction for Tolstoy, will be one of unveiling the Truth. Though contradictory, the overall goal of *Kholstomer*, actually, of all of Tolstoy's didactic fiction is "the gradual removal of covers from a preexisting truth that needs only be revealed, not created" (440).

In connection with this unveiling is Morson's concept of Absolute Language. He defines absolute language as a phrase which "does not say; it is a saying. Admitting no authorship, it condescends to no dialogue. It can only be cited and recited. When spoken

¹⁰ Morson, Gary Saul. *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in 'War and Peace'*. Stanford University Press, 1987. Pg. 200.

¹¹ Seifrid, Thomas. *Gazing on Life's Page: Perspectival Vision in Tolstoy*. PMLA Vol. 113, No. 3 (May 1998) Pg. 437-38.

it belongs to no one; when written it is Scripture”.¹² Akin to this is the statement, “The hero of Tolstoy’s story is Truth, with whom only he (the author) is acquainted” (43). To convey the importance of this revelation, of Truth, it is necessary for the reader to be implicated in it. This is one of the most fundamental components of didactic fiction. Absolute language will allow Tolstoy to make assertions that are above reproach. A prime example as regards *Kholstomer* is the passage which premises the description of the piebald gelding. It is important to note that this occurs *before* the description of the horse, and therefore acts to set the tone for the reader’s reception of him:

Old age is sometimes majestic, sometimes ugly, and sometimes pathetic.

But old age can be both ugly and majestic, and the gelding's old age was just of that kind. [7]

In *The Reader as Voyeur*, Morson outlines the reader’s role in didactic fiction.

The reader of Tolstoy’s fiction, in a sense, is a character in his fiction. “These fictions therefore work by morally implicating the reader in the experience which is in process as he reads that very fiction. The reader of the story is culpable because he is a reader of the story.”¹³ In a didactic work, the reader’s expectation is taken into account, and is integral to the story. At times, these expectations about the outcome of events (e.g. that a well-bred horse will lead a pleasant life) are thwarted; at others, the reader’s assumptions (e.g. that which is pleasurable is also good, as in the landowner’s and Serpukhovskoy’s case) are either defied or mocked. As Morson states, “Structured as patterns of violated expectations, they first ask us to read them as literature and then lead us to reject the conventions on which such a reading is based; and this structure implies that they rely on

¹² Morson. *Hidden*. Pg. 9.

¹³ Morson. *Reader*. Pg. 467.

those conventions every bit as much as Turgenev's works do. Tolstoi's fictions are deliberately paradoxical, and we can only appreciate a paradox if we already hold beliefs that the paradox challenges" (467). The power of didactic fiction, says Morson, is its seduction, which still plays with the reader's expectation and assumption, but also requires something of him:

[The author] realizes that fiction is an effective means of seduction precisely because it is defined as counterfactual, as "only a story;" and so we willingly make ourselves into its implied audience as we might not when listening to a sermon. For the duration of our reading, we suspend our beliefs (not just our disbelief). We allow our expectations to be shaped not by what we think about the real world, but by what the author tells us of his. We give up metaphysics for genre, exchange principles for conventions (467).

These conventions are not the only ones present in *Kholstomer*, but they are the most prevalent, effective, and distinctive of Tolstoy, and will greatly influence my approach of the text.

Approach

Having briefly outlined the historical circumstances surrounding Tolstoy's *Kholstomer*, as well as the general and most prevalent devices, attention will now be directed to how these considerations will be applied to the text itself.

The first and most conspicuous problem of any approach to literature is the common "divorce between stylistic analysis and ideological critique".¹⁴ This problem can also be more easily understood as a problem between *form* and *content*. To merely analyze the text in terms of its formal construction would be to neglect the *cause* of the short story, which was the author's writing of a work meant to persuade. Likewise, to

¹⁴ Paton, Fiona *Beyond Bakhtin: Towards a Cultural Stylistics*. *College English*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Nov, 2000), pp. 167.

emphasize the ideological content would be to only focus on the *intended effects* of the “story of a horse” as I see them, which would assume that the *work itself* is secondary to its purported ideology. My goal in studying Tolstoy’s *Kholstomer* is to see the ways in which the style, or rather, how the method of writing can act as a means of conveyance from cause (author) to effect (audience). The *style*, which combines form and content to produce *meaning* will be the primary object of study in this essay. To achieve this end, literary poesis will be emphasized over theory.

The intent of this approach to the poetics of *Kholstomer* is not one concerned with novelty or discovery, but instead of exploration. The problem which arises in the pursuit of the new is “a limited view of any work in which the novelty is sought”.¹⁵ Discovery is impossible without exploration; and the goal of the present study is one of understanding. I use the term “literary poesis” instead of “praxis” to emphasize the open-endedness of this exploration for understanding; it is a *doing*, not a *making*. The following statement by Lotman perfectly summarizes this position:

The word “understanding” is insidious. One cannot help forming the impression that it is a one-time and exhaustive act: understanding seems to imply final and unequivocal knowledge. In reality, however, it is a path into infinity; and honesty would require indicating the degree and direction of its approximation. Understanding can be imagined as a net of interpretations and translations of varying degrees of approximation. It is exactly their numbers and their mutual contrastiveness that determine the level of understanding.¹⁶

In analyzing Tolstoy’s *Kholstomer*, I intend to explore – and in so doing gain a greater approximate understanding of – the ways in which the mechanics of didactic fiction are designed to create and convey meaning.

¹⁵ Alexandrov, Vladimir E. *Limits to Interpretation: The Meanings of Anna Karenina*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004. Pg 7.

¹⁶ Alexandrov. *Limits*. Foreward.

Methodology

To achieve this end I will mostly apply both the theoretical and lexical descriptive stylistic methods, insofar as I will explore how the vocabulary and syntactic structure work in tandem to create significance, and how these then apply to the plot of *Kholstomer* itself. In relation to this, much of my study will also be concerned with Tolstoy's syntagmatics and paradigmatics. Since this is best shown by contrast, I will often juxtapose the original Russian text with the Maude and/or my own translation.

If we accept Seifrid's position that Tolstoy's goal in his fiction is one less of creation, and more of uncovering; and since the overall goal of didactic works is to inspire revelation in the reader, then my goal in the study of *Kholstomer* is an investigation of how, or rather, the ways in which the author reveals the Truth through narrative. There is a chronological component to this, insofar as the story unfolds as it is being read, and it is for this reason that my study will follow the plot of the story. The scope of this essay intentionally limits the subject of study to only the final, published text itself.

Literature cannot be reduced simply to its devices. The theoretical analysis of particular forms in Tolstoy's writing is not necessarily productive, and under certain conditions can even undermine the work itself. It is for this reason that I have chosen the text as the primary object of study – the praxis of the story ultimately outweighs any theoretical considerations. In his “story of a horse”, Tolstoy was not interested in the literary trope *as such*, but rather its use as a means to an end. With this in mind, it is these means which I intend to study.

CHAPTER II

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Title

The first problem which appears in Tolstoy's "Story of a Horse" is the title itself. Although it is most commonly transliterated, *Kholstomer* has also been translated as *Strider*, *The Yardstick*, and *The Bachelor*. Since each of these titles carry with them important connotations as regards the story itself, I would like to now address them.

Kholst is typically translated into English as *canvas*, "a simple, coarse fabric or thick cloth". It can also be defined as *lea*, a unit of measure for linen. Finally, *kholst* can be interpreted as a shroud, as in the idiom, "Пора мне под холстинку, под холст, в могилу. (*It is time for me [to be] under the canvas, [to be] under the canvas, to the grave.*)"¹⁷ As regards the titles *Strider* and *Yardstick*, the second definition of *kholst* as "lea" seems most apt, and evidence for this interpretation comes from the story itself when the gelding says, "I was nicknamed Kholstomer by the crowd because of my long, sweeping strides. And again later when Serpukhovskoy states, "Это был сын Любезного первого, Холстомер. Холсты меряет. (*This was the son of Affable I, Kholstomer. He measures leas [Has a long stride.]*)"¹⁸ In relation to this, it most logically follows that *mer* is a shortening of the noun *mera* (measure).

¹⁷ Dal', Vladimir Ivanovich, and Jan Niecislaw Baudouin de Courtenay. *Tolkovyj slovar zhivogo velikoruskago yazyka Vladimira Dalja*. Vol. 4. St Petersburg: M.O. Volf, 1909.

¹⁸ All citations of the original text are from the *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii* (Complete Collected Works), 90 vols. Moscow: Khodzhestvennaja Literatura. 1936. For continuity, translations are from Maude, and modified for accuracy when necessary.

However, Tolstoy's wordplay becomes apparent in Serpukhovskoy's next statement, “Его за пезину отдали с Хреновского завода конюшему, а тот выхолостил и продал барышнику (*He was given to the Khrenovsky's equerry because of his piebaldness, then castrated and sold to a horse dealer*).” Here Tolstoy juxtaposes *kholst* with *kholost*, which can mean both “geld, castrate”, and “unmarried”. When viewed in this way, the Russian word *mer* may more likely be a truncation of *merin* (*gelding*), which is the word Tolstoy exclusively uses in reference to the horse throughout the first half of the story. Therefore, the “unmarried/castrated gelding” could be seen as a double reinforcement of the “terrible happening” when “the entire world was changed in [the horse's] eyes”. This opposition within the title itself will help elucidate much of the story's plot.

The first definition carries with it many positive connotations, and throughout the text great care is often paid to the horse's elegant and efficient movements, which result in his consistently outperforming the more highly prized horses. The second definition is its antithesis, a testament to the horse's shame and capricious mistreatment as a result of his piebaldness. In this instance, however, neither translation is more right than the other, but rather the antonymous nature of the title *Kholstomer* is integral to the plot itself: these same positive traits of speed, dexterity, and willingness to work inevitably lead to the horse “losing the best of his qualities and half of his life”. This conflation of positive traits and their negative consequences will be revisited numerous times in the text, and it is this same intentional nuanced opposition which will form much of the didactic poignancy in Tolstoy's short story.

Chapter One

Tolstoy's "Story of a Horse" begins with a sunrise. The story is "revealed" to the reader in much the same way as the day is revealed within the story. Tolstoy's description is one of unveiling; of the retreat of darkness. A temporal aspect is prevalent; the instances of the sky rising higher, the dawn spreading wider, the sickle of the moon becoming more lifeless, and the forest becoming louder all occur simultaneously. The repetition in the first paragraph of *podnimat'sja* (to rise) and *stanovit'sja* (to become) reinforces the idyllic nature of the scene. This introduces the reader to a Romantic, pastoral setting:

Все выше и выше поднималось небо, шире расплывалась заря, белее становилось матовое серебро росы, безжизненнее становился серп месяца, звучнее -- лес, люди начинали подниматься, и на барском конном дворе чаще и чаще слышалось фырканье, возня по соломе и даже сердитое визгливое ржанье столпившихся и повздоривших за что-то лошадей.¹⁹

This introductory paragraph can best be understood by subdividing the subjects of description. It begins with a depiction of the natural world, and then that of animal activity – the rising of people and bustling of horses.

The repetition of the comparatives – higher, wider, whiter, more lifeless, and louder, respectively – reinforce the simultaneity of the occurrences. The passage also is one of contrast: sky (*nebo*) contrasts with dew (*rosy*), and the dawn (*zarja*) with the moon (*mesjats*). *Zvuchnee les* signals a shift in perspective from the natural world to that of people and horses. This shift is so prominent that the Maude translation separates the

¹⁹ "Higher and higher rose the sky, wider spread the dawn, whiter became the dim silver of the dew, more lifeless became the sickle of the moon, and louder, the forest. People began to rise, and in the lord's horse yard more and more often could be heard snorting, bustling through the straw and even the angry, shrill neighing of horses crowded together and quarreling about something." Vol 26. pg. 3.

original sentence here with a period, which further shows the division inherent in the passage.

It is in relation to this semi-chaotic depiction that the authority of the horse-herd Nester is introduced. Immediately this authority is asserted by his threatening the filly attempting to push through the gate, the whip he wears almost ceremoniously across his shoulder, and the saddle and bridle which he carries. Although most horses treat this authority with affected indifference, “giving the appearance that it was all the same to them”, there is still an undercurrent of dissension which manifests itself in the dark-brown mare who “lays down her ears and quickly turns her back [on Nester]”, a threatening gesture implying she may be preparing to kick. The gesture succeeds, and the horse-herd leaves to fulfill his other duties, but not before shouting “still louder and more terribly” to assert his prominence.

It is here that the protagonist is first presented. It is interesting to note that the first quality which is attributed to him – and also one of the highest Christian virtues – is one of negation. The “piebald gelding” (*pegii merin*) is not described explicitly as being patient, but as being the *least impatient* of all the other horses. Introducing him in this way affirms not only the positive quality of his patience *as such*, but also morally exalts the piebald gelding above his peers. Instead of bustling, the piebald gelding idly licks a wooden post. What follows is a prime example of Tolstoy's “alibi of narrative”; that is, something toward which attention is drawn, but the meaning of which is intentionally obfuscated: “It is unknown what kind of flavor the piebald gelding found in this [oak post], but his expression was serious and contemplative while he did it” (4).

The third-person narrator willfully denies himself – and by extension the reader – access

to the horse's thoughts. This scene leads to another nuanced opposition: that of “brooding simplicity”. The horse acts simply, but thinks deeply; and this juxtaposition between deeds and thought will be stated explicitly by the author later in the text.

The scene that follows, in which the piebald gelding is saddled, is also of note.

Нестер положил на него потник и седло, причем мерин приложил уши, выражая, должно быть, свое неудовольствие, но его только выбрали за это дрянью и стали стягивать подпруги. При этом мерин надулся, но ему всунули палец в рот и ударили коленом в живот, так что он должен был выпустить дух. Несмотря на то, когда зубом подтягивали трок, он еще раз приложил уши и даже оглянулся. Хотя он знал, что это не поможет, он все-таки считал нужным выразить, что ему это неприятно и всегда будет показывать это. Когда он был оседлан, он отставил оплывшую правую ногу и стал жевать удила, тоже по каким-то особенным соображениям, потому что пора ему было знать, что в удилах не может быть никакого вкуса.²⁰

Before addressing the passage as a whole, I would like first to draw attention specifically to two problematic words. The translation of the Russian word *drjan'* as “good-for-nothing” is not entirely apt. Literally, the word means “trash, refuse”, it can also be used to describe an inferior commodity; and when applied to an animate object, while “good-for-nothing” is technically correct, the connotation is more negative. The second is found in the passage, “At this the gelding blew himself out”. While *nadut'sja* can mean “to puff up, to fill out” it also has the figurative colloquial meaning “to pout, sulk”. The latter would seem to be a more appropriate reaction to having “the girths tightened”.

²⁰ “Nester put the saddle-cloth and saddle on him, and this caused the gelding to lay back his ears, probably to express dissatisfaction, but he was only called a “good-for-nothing” for it and his saddle-girths were tightened. At this the gelding blew himself out, but a finger was thrust into his mouth and a knee hit him in the stomach, so that he had to let out his breath. In spite of this, when the saddle-cloth was being buckled on he again laid back his ears and even looked round. Though he knew it would do no good he considered it necessary to show that it was disagreeable to him and that he would always express his dissatisfaction with it. When he was saddled he thrust forward his swollen off foot and began champing his bit, this too for some reason of his own, for he ought to have known by that time that a bit cannot have any flavour at all.”
Pg 4.

Through the use of *ostranenie*, the saddle is depicted as a sort of torture device. The piebald gelding understands this, and presents a mild complaint for which he is scolded and has his straps tightened to such an extent as to be constrictive, which is evidenced later “[he] sighed as far as the tightened strap allowed” (5). Nester is not named explicitly in the saddling, making the scene that much more visceral, “a finger was shoved in [the horse's] mouth and a knee hit him in the stomach so that he had to let out his breath”. Although powerless to prevent his being saddled, the piebald gelding still deems it necessary to “express that it [is] unpleasant to him and would always show this”. The way in which this scene ends forms a negative parallelism. The positive qualities associated with the gelding's idly licking the wooden post are contrasted against his new constraints, and the narrative alibi is here employed to the opposite effect. Whereas it was unknown what flavor the horse found in the oak post, implying that there must have been something pleasant in the experience, he chews on the bit because it was “shoved in his mouth”, and the unpleasantness (or at least neutrality) of his new situation is reinforced with, “he already knew, that in bits there cannot be any kind of taste”.

After this, the narrative focus shifts from the particular to the general, and situates the piebald gelding and Nester in relation to the rest of the activity surrounding them. The intimation of the gelding's thoughtfulness and servility is further reinforced when, after Nester is seated and jerks the reins, “The gelding lifted his head, to show his readiness to go where ordered, but did not move. He knew that before starting there would be much shouting and that Nester, from the seat on his back, would give many orders to Vaska, the other groom, and to the horses” (5). This description also serves to satirize Nester's authority by diminishing the action to simply yelling at Vaska and the horses. The reader

is cursorily introduced to Vaska, who is only described through narration as being angry (*serdityi*) and sleepy (*zasypannyi*); and through Nester's admonitions, “Where are you going, you devil?”²¹ Now then! Are you asleep?”

This authoritarian relation between Nester and Vaska is then paralleled among the horses. The “young impudent filly” (*molodaja kobylka-shalun'ja*), is contrasted against the grave, aged, Zulduba, ahead of whom she dare not run. In this short passage, Tolstoy has now delineated two specific spheres of activity: the peasant, which occupies a higher position than the equine. Nester holds supreme authority thus far (until the introduction of the owner), having reign not only over the herd, but over Vaska as well. The horses, moreover, have an implicit social hierarchy of their own, one which even the young and impudent respect.

After the herd is led through the gate, the narrative takes a more somber tone. The once animated (*ozhivlennyi*) enclosure becomes sadly deserted (*pechal'no opustel*), the root пуст- (empty/void) will be reiterated twice more in this passage: “под пустыми навесами (*under the empty awnings*)” and in regard to the scene as a whole, “эта картина опустения (*this picture of emptiness*)” all of which (again) only *possibly* has an effect on the piebald gelding. The depiction of the gelding which follows reiterates this sombre mood:

Он медленно, как бы кланяясь, опустил и поднял голову, вздохнул, насколько ему позволял стянутый трок, и, ковыляя своими погнутыми нерасходившимися ногами, побрел за табуном, унося на своей костлявой

²¹ The Russian word used here is лешой (*leshoi*), or wood-goblin. According to V. V. Adamchik's “Словарь славянской мифологии” [Dictionary of Slavic Mythology], “In the mythology of the Eastern Slavs, an evil spirit, the demonic embodiment of the forest's enmity toward humans. Acting as a ruler of the forest and its inhabitants, it often has features resembling a beast with horns and hoofs. According to legend, the *leshoi* was able to appear in the form of a stallion, bird, human, and even a poisonous mushroom.” Pg 348 (full entry 348-352)

спине старого Нестера.²²

It is possible that the verb *klanjat'sja* could have another meaning than “to bow” here. It has the alternate meaning of “To extend, to offer”, or the colloquial meaning, “To cringe (before), to humiliate oneself (before)”. While it is not my contention that this last meaning is the more correct interpretation, I do believe that it does provide an additional layer of significance.

Also of note in this passage is the attention that is drawn to the piebald gelding's legs as he hobbles, carrying Nester on his bony back. They are bent (*pognutyi*) and a compound word of the author's own invention, which bears further inquiry. While the Maude translation of *нерасходившимися* as “stiff” is probably the most accurate rendering in English, the effect in Russian is much more jarring. Literally meaning “undivergent” in the infinitive, the word is here rendered as a past active participle (having been unable to diverge) and declined in the plural instrumental case, both of which combine to not only lengthen the word (and therefore make it more noticeable in relation to the surrounding text), but also more difficult to pronounce aloud. The effect of this is the epitome of Viktor Shklovsky's definition of poetic language; “a work is created 'artistically' so that its perception is impeded and the greatest possible effect is produced through the slowness of its perception” (*Art as Device*, 22).

As the first chapter closes, the reader is finally given direct access to the piebald gelding's thoughts in the form of a monologue. Moreover, this monologue establishes a precedent: henceforth the narrative alibi is abolished in regard to the piebald gelding's inner world of thoughts and impressions; or rather, these thoughts are stated explicitly

²² “As if making a bow he slowly lowered his head and raised it again, sighed as deeply as the tightly drawn girth would allow, and hobbling along on his stiff and crooked legs shambled after the herd, bearing old Nester on his bony back.” Pg. 5.

within the text, as opposed to being intimidated by the third-person narrator. Knowing with certainty that Nester's morning habit will inevitably cause him pain, the horse reasons: "However, God is with him, and it is not news for me to suffer for the pleasure of others. I even have begun to find a certain equine pleasure in it. Let him swagger, the beggar" (5). This suffering for the gratification of others is immediately reminiscent of Christian sentiment, further contributing to the depiction of the horse's moral composition. Attention is drawn to the horse's legs once more to end the chapter, "and carefully stepping on warped legs, he walked down the middle of the road" (5).

Chapter Two

After having been led to the meadow to graze, Nester unfetters the piebald gelding and scratches him under the neck. This is the first kind act to take place within the story of a horse, and although in reality the gelding "only from delicacy pretended it was agreeable to him", nevertheless he feels compelled to close his eyes "in a sign of thankfulness and pleasure" (6). The horse is capable not only of dissembling, but here employs it in an affectation of gratitude out of *delicacy*, thereby adding another positive quality to him. The French borrowing *delikatnost'* is also of note here. Having similar connotations as in English of "fine, flimsy, or graceful", as well as a "sensitive and sympathetic attention to the feelings of others", in Russian the "foreignness" of this word is much more apparent. The use of the French instead of its more Russian equivalents may serve as a means to elevate the concept of "delicacy", or to further estrange the word from the surrounding text in order to draw attention to it.²³

This kind act is abruptly halted, however, when:

²³ For more information on the culturally elevated perception of the French language in Russia, see Figes, Orlando. *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia*. New York: Picador, 2002. Pages 1-68.

Но вдруг, совершенно неожиданно и без всякой причины, Нестер, предполагая, может быть, что слишком большая фамильярность может дать ложные о своем значении мысли пегому мерину, Нестер без всякого приготовления оттолкнул от себя голову мерина и, замахнувшись уздой, очень больно ударил пряжкой узды мерина по сухой ноге и, ничего не говоря, пошел на бугорок к пню, около которого он сживал обыкновенно.²⁴

There is a problem of interpretation in this passage, which is best indicated by the translation. In the Maude the phrase is rendered: “too much familiarity might give the gelding a wrong idea of his importance...”. This implies that the gelding himself is misinterpreting his status in relation to Nester. However, because Nester is the subject of this sentence, the use of the reflexive pronoun *своем* describes the horse-herd, not the horse. Though less pleasing and much more awkward in English, a literal translation might be: “Nester, assuming, maybe, that too much familiarity could give falsities about his [Nester's] thought's significance for (or toward) the piebald gelding...”. Though small, the implication of this translation would be that through his kind act, Nester fears that he would betray the fact that he *actually does* value the gelding. When viewed in this way, the possible reason for the violence toward the gelding would then be one of obfuscation, rather than to put the gelding in his place; although Tolstoy's use of narrative alibi (*maybe* this was Nester's intention) coupled with the negation which begins the passage “without any reason” intentionally function to make this inquiry fruitless.

The form of this passage mirrors its content, and is used for dramatic effect to evoke the reader's sympathy: to inquire into the cause of Nester's irrational and capricious act requires the invention of something equally irrational and capricious.

²⁴ “But suddenly Nester, quite unexpectedly and without any reason, perhaps imagining that too much familiarity might give the gelding a wrong idea of his importance, pushed the gelding's head away from himself without any warning and, swinging the bridle, struck him painfully with the buckle on his lean leg, and then without saying a word went up the hillock to a tree-stump beside which he generally seated himself.” Pg. 6.

Though upset by Nester's actions, the gelding continues with his business, until he is met with animosity once again, though this time from his own kind. While he is drinking from the stream, the brown filly, who is described with the colloquial *zabijaka* (bully, troublemaker), “always badgered the old one (*starik*) and did every unpleasantness to him, walked through the water toward him, as if through some need of her own, but really only to stir up the mud in front of his nose” (6). In much the same way as with Nester, the piebald gelding bears the injustice with stoic resignation, and leaves to graze. While grazing, his poor health is further described; “sprawling his feet apart”, and “almost unbending”, the gelding grazes for exactly three hours until “his stomach hung like a sack on his scrawny, steep ribs”. Afterward, he distributes his weight “equally on four pained legs, in order to lessen the pain as much as possible, especially the right front leg, which was the weakest”, and sleeps.

This scene makes it possible for Tolstoy to now introduce what Gary Saul Morson describes as the author's “absolute language”, in the sense that “it does not say; it is a saying”.²⁵ Haunting, contradictory, but not without a certain charm, this short passage bears further scrutiny:

Бывает старость величественная, бывает гадкая, бывает жалкая старость. Бывает и гадкая и величественная вместе. Старость пегого мерина была именно такого рода.²⁶

The repetition of *бывает* (To be, to happen, occur) and *старость* (more literally: *elderliness*, but more comfortably rendered in English as *old age*) serve as the semantic foundation of the passage. To reinforce the absolute nature of the saying, the author also

²⁵ Morson, Gary Saul. *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in 'War and Peace'*. Stanford University Press, 1987. Pg 9.

²⁶ “There can be old age which is noble, there can be vile, there can be pitiful old age. There can be both vile and noble old age. The old age of the piebald gelding was namely of this kind”. Pg. 7.

imbues it with a song-like rhythm, making it similar to other such idiomatic phrases as, for example, “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush”. This memorable aphorism will provide the foundation for the painstakingly detailed description of the gelding which follows.

Быва́ет ста́рость вели́чественная, быва́ет га́дкая, быва́ет жа́лкая ста́рость.
Быва́ет и га́дкая и вели́чественная вме́сте.
Ста́рость пе́рого ме́рина была́ именно тако́го ро́да.

In the depiction of the horse which follows, it is important to note that Tolstoy chooses to begin his description of the gelding using his piebald spots as reference. The horse's piebaldness is a prominent feature to the story (*fabula*), but here also to the plot (*sjuzhet*), and the description of the horse mirrors this:

He had three spots, one on his head, starting from a crooked bald patch on the side of his nose and reaching half-way down his neck.... Another spot extended down his off side to the middle of his belly; the third, on his croup, touched part of his tail and went half-way down his quarters. (7)

What follows serves to exemplify the “vileness” of old age which introduces the passage:

The big bony head, with deep hollows over the eyes and a black hanging lip that had been torn at some time, hung low and heavily on his neck, which was so lean that it looked as though it were carved of wood. The pendant lip revealed a blackish bitten tongue and the yellow stumps of the worn lower teeth. The ears, one of which was slit, hung low on either side, and only occasionally moved lazily to drive away the pestering flies. Of the forelock, one tuft which was still long hung back behind an ear; the uncovered forehead was dented and rough, and the skin hung down like bags on his broad jaw-bones. The veins of his neck had grown knotty and twitched and shuddered at every touch of a fly. (7)

The countenance of the horse, though still *physically* descriptive, serves to reinforce the *essential*, that is, those qualities which compose the essence of the gelding, “stern patience, thoughtfulness, and suffering” (7). The description of the gelding's legs, ribs, and back are equally vivid, and serve as a testament to his mistreatment and neglect,

both prior and current:

His forelegs were crooked to a bow at the knees, there were swellings over both hoofs, and on one leg, on which the piebald spot reached half-way down, there was a swelling at the knee as big as a fist. The hind legs were in better condition, but apparently long ago his haunches had been so rubbed that in places the hair would not grow again. The leanness of his body made all four legs look disproportionately long. The ribs, though straight, were so exposed and the skin so tightly drawn over them, that it seemed to have dried fast to the spaces between. His back and withers were covered with marks of old lashings, and there was a fresh sore behind, still swollen and festering; the black dock of his tail, which showed the vertebrae, hung down long and almost bare. On his dark-brown croup - near the tail - was a scar, as though of a bite, the size of a man's hand and covered with white hair. Another scarred sore was visible on one of his shoulders. His tail and hocks were dirty because of chronic bowel troubles. The hair on the whole body, though short, stood out straight. (7)

Though the gelding has been driven into “repulsive old age (*otvratitel'naja starost'*)”, the narrator maintains that an “expert immediately would say, that in [the gelding's] time he was a remarkably good horse.” This hypothetical expert would also be able to discern that the horse is purebred, and a descendant of only one breed which could provide such admirable physical qualities. This statement foreshadows and will serve as evidence when the gelding-as-narrator explains his lineage. Tolstoy here draws attention to this contrast between past and present to further exemplify the sad state of the gelding. His history, as yet unknown, is intimated by the “terrible union in him of repulsive indications of decrepitude, emphasized by the motley colour of his hair, and his manner which expressed the self-confidence and calm assurance that go with beauty and strength” (8). Though this terrible union will be revealed to the reader later, for now it is sufficient to describe the gelding as “like a living ruin (*kak zhivaja razvalina*)”, a once proud edifice that has fallen into disrepair, decay, and alienation, standing alone and in opposition to the liveliness and mirth of the “stamping, snorts, and youthful whinnying” of the herd.

Chapter Three

The piebald gelding is conspicuously absent in the third chapter, and the narrative instead digresses to a description of the herd, and in so doing achieves the effect of further estranging the “living ruin” from those around him. If the previous chapter was concerned with describing how the gelding has withered with time, then it is made all the more evocative when compared to the blossoming that occurs all around him. He is separated not only physically – “he stood alone in the middle of the dewy meadow” – but also figuratively; the narrative tone here takes on a kind of nuanced Romanticism, focusing almost exclusively on the landscape, as well as the energy and blissful naiveté of the young horses.

A rudimentary political/social structure is outlined, consisting of several distinct groups. The first are, “The old mares who went about snorting and made a shiny track across the dewy grass, always choosing a place where no one would disturb them” (9). Next described are the mares in foal, whose sovereignty is tacitly acknowledged by the rest of the group, “The others evidently respected their condition, and none of the young ones ventured to come near to disturb them. If any saucy youngsters thought of approaching them, the mere movement of an ear or tail sufficed to show them all how improper such behaviour was” (9). The colts and yearling fillies comprise another class within this system, and seek to emulate the older, statelier horses, “The colts and yearling fillies, pretending to be grownup and sedate, rarely jumped or joined the merry company [of the younger horses]. They grazed in a dignified manner, curving their close-cropped swan-like necks, and flourished their little broom-like tails as if they also had long ones” (9). Within this group of adolescents, there is the subset of the chaste “two-and-three

year old fillies not yet in foal”. They are described as “the merriest group” who “almost always walked about together like a separate merry maidenlike crowd (*otdel'no veseloi devich'ei gurboi*)” (9).²⁷

The way in which this social construction is revealed serves an interesting function in the “story of a horse”. Firstly, the piebald gelding is not included in relation to this scene, he exists outside of it; in fact, Tolstoy through the use of absolute language will further draw attention to the gelding's occupation of a completely separate sphere of activity in the beginning of the next chapter. This effectively serves to alienate the horse to an extreme degree, but it is possible that this could also function to further characterize him.

In Aristotle's *Politics*, he states that the most refined social construct according to his thought, the city, “belongs among the things that exist by nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. He who is without a city through nature rather than chance is either a mean sort or superior to man”. Through the anthropomorphization which will be made explicit when the author describes the countenance of the chestnut filly, (She was seized with a joyous fit, *just as human beings sometimes are* [emphasis added]), Aristotle's position could be extended to the horses within the story, especially since his evidence for political activity belonging solely to man is that “man alone among the animals has speech”. Speech gives one the ability not to vocalize simply the “painful and the pleasurable” as animals do, but the more nuanced “advantageous and harmful, and

²⁷ Sex, or abstinence from it, would consume much of the later Tolstoy's ethics. For the relation of this to the “story of a horse” see Ronald D. LeBlanc's *No More Horsing Around: Sex, Love, and Motherhood in Tolstoy's 'Kholstomer'*. *Slavic Review*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (Fall 2011), pp. 545-568. This article will be referenced in more detail later.

therefore the *just and the unjust* [emphasis added].²⁸ Since Tolstoy extends the power of speech to the piebald gelding so that he may relate the just and the unjust, and since he is, essentially, extra-societal, these two features may serve to subtly depict him as a “superior sort” in general.

Having outlined the herd in general, the focus shifts to the chestnut filly specifically, and gives an account of her mischief-making that day, which culminates in her contriving “to turn the head of the of a roan horse, with which a peasant was ploughing in a rye-field far beyond the river” (10). She neighs, and in it “Mischief, feeling, and a certain sadness were expressed in that call. There was in it the desire for and the promise of love, and a pining for it” (10). It is here that the evocations of a Romantic narrative style reach their zenith.

The next two paragraphs which follow serve to further describe the characteristics of the chestnut filly's call, as well as elucidate the youthful “self-confidence and calm assurance that go with beauty and strength” which was mentioned in the previous chapter. Though in the Maude this first paragraph is attributed to the filly through quotation, in the original it is separate; it prepares visually what the filly will “say” in the second paragraph. It also breaks the progression of narration; it is a non sequitur which stands out from the surrounding text and therefore draws the reader's attention.

Вон дергач, в густом тростнике, перебегая с места на место, страстно зовет к себе свою подругу, вон и кукушка и перепел поют любовь, и цветы по ветру пересылают свою душистую пыль друг другу.²⁹

²⁸ Aristotle. *Politics*. Trans. Carnes Lord. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. 1253a.

²⁹ “There is a crake, in the thick cane, running from place to place, ardently calling to his female partner, there both a cuckoo and quail sing to love, and on the wind the flowers send their fragrant dust to one another.”

This paragraph shows, while the next tells:

«И я и молода, и хороша, и сильна, – говорило ржанье шалуни, – а мне не дано было до сей поры испытать сладость этого чувства, не только не дано испытать, но ни один любовник, ни один еще не видал меня».³⁰

This act achieves its desired effect: the roan horse is “bewitched by the silvery sound of the distant neigh (*ocharovana serebrjanyim zvukom daleko ržan'ja*)”, and only the peasant-master's violence toward him so that he cannot complete his response is successful in returning him to work. Idealized desire is forcibly opposed to the “real world” of labor and servitude.

The filly's feeling lasts only as long as the roan's response, and when he grows silent she finds the next subject of jest in the piebald gelding, who is described as an “eternal martyr (*vsegdashnii muchenik*)” at the hands of the young horses. The last three sentences of this chapter are of note: “Он страдал от этой молодежи больше, чем от людей. Ни тем, ни другим он не делал зла. Людям он был нужен, но за что же мучали его молодые лошади? (*[The piebald gelding] suffered more from these youth than from people. Neither to one nor the other had he done evil. To people he was needed, but why did these young horses torment him?*)” (11).

These words are spoken by the omniscient narrator, which implies that the information presented is objectively true. It is fact that the gelding suffers from horses and people, though he has done harm to neither. The logic concerning the question which ends the chapter operates under a fallacious aphorism: that things which are necessary must invariably suffer. The structure of this final question presents a problematic syllogism: The gelding suffers, though he does no evil. This suffering is inevitable in

³⁰ “‘And I am young, and beautiful, and strong,’ said the minx's neigh, 'but it has not yet been allowed me to know the sweetness of that feeling, and not only to not experience it, but no lover, not a single one, has ever seen me'”

reference to people, but not when applied to other horses. Therefore the ultimate effect of this final passage is not to show the gelding's rationalization of his mistreatment by humans and confusion about the young horse's torment; it is what Morson describes as those fictions which "therefore work by morally implicating the reader in the experience which is in process as he reads that very fiction. The reader of the story is culpable *because* he is a reader of the story."³¹ It is the author presenting a challenge to the reader.

Chapter Four

What chapters two and three have shown separately, chapter four combines, then explicitly states the contrast between the piebald gelding and the other horses, "He was old, they were young; he was thin, they were well-fed; he was dull, they were cheerful. It came to be he was completely foreign, external, a completely different essence, and whom it was impossible to pity" (11). The piebald gelding is so alien that he has become completely unintelligible to the other horses, and empathy is impossible without understanding. Tolstoy again poses a question to the reader, "But was the piebald gelding truly guilty in this, that he was old, gaunt, and monstrous?" This is a leading question, however, which is evidenced by the answer which is immediately presented, "It would seem not." The narrator here is establishing expectation, and the reader is led (quite logically) to believe that of course the gelding cannot be held at fault for things outside his control – time, neglect, and maltreatment, respectively – but the reader is then informed that in the eyes of other horses, quite the opposite is true: "he was guilty, and rights were always only for those who were strong, young, and happy" (11).

Another tension presents itself here between the gelding's rationality, "Maybe the

³¹ Morson, Gary Saul. *The Reader as Voyeur: Tolstoy and the Poetics of Didactic Fiction*. Canadian-American Slavic Studies, 12, No. 4 (Winter 1978). Pp. 465-80.

piebald gelding himself understood this and in his quiet moments was ready to agree that it was his fault that he had already lived his life, and that he had to pay for that life”; and his *horse sense* of inherent morality, “but all the same he was a horse and often could not refrain from a feeling of offense, sorrow, and resentment when he looked at all of the young ones, who having punished (казнивший) him for the same thing to which they would all be subject at the end of their lives” (11). The choice of the word *kaznit'* in this last passage is interesting, in that it has two definitions which are quite different from one another. The figurative definition in English is “To punish, chastise; to castigate”, but the more common meaning is “To execute, put to death”, giving the word in Russian quite more dire overtones than “torment” which is used in the Maude translation.

The conflict now becomes twofold: there is the outward tension between the gelding and the other horses, and the inward struggle between his reason and his feeling. These two tensions combined will serve as the cause of the events which culminate at the end of the chapter.

Having outlined the attributes of the young horse's cruelty (*bezzhalostnost'* – literally “pitilessness”, from the root жал- pity, favor, plaint), the narrator now states its cause: aristocratic feeling. A description of this feeling follows, “Every one of them traced back its pedigree, through father or mother, to the famous Creamy, while the piebald was of unknown parentage (род). He was a chance comer (пришлец), purchased three years before at a fair for eighty rubles with assignation (ассигнация).” (11).

In Russian, the word translated as “parentage” has several different connotations which drastically affect the meaning of this passage. *Rod* has several different meanings, the most common are “family, kin clan” and “birth, origin, stock”, however it can also

signify “genus, class, kind, sort”. With this latter definition in mind, or rather, that it is possible to think of the piebald gelding being of “an unknown class or kind”, the passage could serve to reinforce his alienation due to his unknown history. *Prishlets* has a similar double meaning. In addition to “new-comer” it can also be used to indicate something “strange, alien”, which could serve to explicitly reinforce the implications of his unknown class. The gelding's merit is further derided because he was “bought at a fair with assignation”. The use of the word “assignation” is interesting, as it signifies that the gelding himself was not procured *as such*, but rather the title granting ownership of a property was transferred (*Title* in Russian is право собственности, literally “the right to property”, which will be discussed later within the story at greater length), further distancing him from his peers specifically, and as an autonomous being in general. This latter implication will be stated explicitly by the horse himself later in the story.

Ultimately, chapter three serves to show that the piebald gelding is so defamiliarized in reference to the other horses that he ultimately becomes depersonalized; he is no longer recognized as a horse *as such* by the other horses. This phenomenon has recently been documented by Susan T. Fiske in the article *Envy Up, Scorn Down: How Comparison Divides Us*, and can serve to elucidate this idea.

In her study, Fiske investigated the ways in which people reacted to those of a different social class. The results generally are: envy for those of a higher status, and scorn for those below. The farther down the scale, or the wider the perceived distance between the subject and object, the more scorn gives way to contempt. “The scorned do not merit attention, being worse than useless. People do not expect to interact with them, because they have neither resources nor prestige.” The lowest on the scale, what she

terms “the disgusting outgroups (low warmth/low competence) might not trigger the usual social cognition which attributes a mind to the other person”.³² This severe lack of empathy, which can progress to such an extent that it disables the subject's capacity even to *recognize* the autonomy of another, seems to help explain why the entirety of the herd turns against the gelding after he bites the white-spotted great-granddaughter of the illustrious purebred.

The act which was committed by the gelding, who is referred to as the “scabbed trash (*korostovaja drjan'*)”, “who was bought at a horse fair and did not know his father and mother... therefore offended the aristocratic feeling of the entire herd” (11-12). The herd chases and beats him, until he is exhausted. Then, expressing the “disgusting, weak exasperation of impotent old age, then despair; he dropped his ears...” seemingly accepting his fate. It is only the singular altruism of the old mare Vyazapurikha which spares him from an unknown fate and allows the gelding to tell his story, and in so doing the chance to also abrogate the effects of his depersonalization.

Chapter Five

Chapter five begins the piebald gelding's recount of his life, which will take place over the course of the next three chapters. The gelding's narration is framed in the third-person narration, and the latter always introduces and concludes the chapters.

The way in which the third-person narration introduces the gelding as he begins his story is of note:

Посередине освещенного луной двора стояла высокая худая фигура мерина с высоким седлом, с торчащей шишкой луки. Лошади неподвижно и в глубоком молчании стояли вокруг него, как будто они что-то новое, необыкновенное узнали от него. И точно, новое и неожиданное они узнали

³² Fiske, Susan T. *Envy Up, Scorn Down: How Comparison Divides Us*. Published in final edited form as: *Am Psychol.* 2010 November ; 65(8): . doi:10.1037/0003-066X.65.8.698. pp. 4-5.

от него.
Вот что они узнали от него.³³

The horses gather around the gelding as spectators, as an audience. In terms of Tolstoy's didactic fiction, Morson states that this is yet another device which the author employs to implicate the reader, "Tolstoi's characteristic device for implicating the audience of his fiction is to depict an audience in his fiction: the audience in the narrative becomes the reflection of the audience of the narrative".³⁴

To reinforce this, the phrase узнали от него is thrice repeated in this short introduction. Узнать (*uznat'*) can mean "To recognize", "To get to know, become familiar with", or "To learn, find out". The importance of this repetition would seem to be an emphasis on learning, discovery, and revelation. As Morson again states, "The hero of Tolstoy's story is Truth, with whom only he (the author) is familiar".³⁵ But there is also Seifrid's statement that Tolstoyan didactic narration serves to reveal the truth, that "the creative process [is] the gradual removal of covers ("покров" [19:42]) from a preexisting truth that needs only to be revealed, not created".³⁶ That the mare Vyazapurikha is introduced as a witness seems to reinforce this by lending credence to the objective truth of the gelding's story and establishing him as a reliable narrator.

It is here that the reader first learns the gelding's genealogical name: Мужик (*muzhik*, peasant). This draws an explicit corollary which has only been intimated thus

³³ In the middle of the moonlit paddock stood the tall gaunt figure of the gelding, still wearing the high saddle with its prominent peak at the bow. The horses, unmoving and in deep silence stood around him, as if something new, and unusual they discovered from him. And exactly, something new and unexpected they discovered from him.

This is what they discovered from him.

³⁴ Morson. *Reader as Voyeur*. Pg. 479.

³⁵ Morson. *Hidden in Plain View*. Pg. 42-43.

³⁶ Seifrid. *Gazing on Life's Page*. Pg. 440

far: the piebald gelding occupies the lowest socio-economic strata through the coincidence of birth, and alludes to the similarly arbitrary ordering of human society. Though he should be considered high-born by blood, his coat relegates him to the peasantry; to ridicule and to toil, and this contradiction between essence and attribute becomes a focal point in the story. The naïve, estranged viewpoint of the gelding serves to expose this injustice all the more, “Когда я родился, я не знал, что такое значит пегий, я думал, что я лошадь. (When I was born I did not know what kind of a thing piebald meant, I thought that I was a horse” (14). The logic in this passage is of course sound, in essence he *is* simply a horse, but due to the arbitrary proclivities of those who control his fate, the attribute of his spots negate this. His nickname, Kholstomer, reinforces the essential, that is, the innate qualities of good breeding, the “long and sprawling stride, in which there was no equal in Russia” (13).

The gelding's inability to understand the fateful implications his coat will have serves to reinforce the injustice he will suffer. Все смеялись, глядя на мои пежины, и давали мне разные странные названия. Не только я, но и мать не понимала значения этих слов. До сих пор между нами и всеми моими родными не было ни одного пегого. Мы не думали, чтоб в этом было что-нибудь дурное (14). (All laughed, looking at my spots, and gave me various strange names. Not only I, but also my mother did not understand the significance of these words. Until that time not one among my clan had been piebald. We did not think that there was anything bad (дурной) in it.) The use of the word *durnoi* is a bit more forceful in the Russian, meaning, in addition to “bad”, “wrong; evil, sinister; ugly”. This sentiment is echoed twice by the equerries, as the young horse is called чертёнок (imp), and уродина (freak, monster, deformed

person). The character of the equerry will then continue, adroitly stating the nature of the problem and exposing the underlying, inherent contradiction:

-- И в какого черта он уродился, точно мужик, -- продолжал он, -- в заводе нельзя оставить, срам, а хорош, очень хорош, -- говорил и он, говорили и все, глядя на меня. Через несколько дней пришел и сам генерал посмотреть на меня, и опять все чему-то ужасались и бранили меня и мою мать за цвет моей шерсти. «А хорош, очень хорош», -- повторял всякий, кто только меня видел.³⁷

The repetition of this contrast serves to estrange the nature of the problem to absurdity, which is key for the continuation of the story.

To further expose this problem of class, the piebald narrator then focuses on its relativity. The purebred horses, in essence, differ very little from other horses. The gelding recalls the “celebrities” of the herd “all gathered together with their foals, walking about in the sunshine, rolling on the fresh straw and sniffing at one another like ordinary horses.” In other words: class denotes blood, not behavior. This relativity of class is especially noticeable at the end of the paragraph; although Vyazapurikha is considered “one of the finest thoroughbreds” at the current estate, when compared to the other horses at the illustrious Khrenovo, she was “among the poorest in the stud”. This classism is more refined in humans than horses, and further shows the divide between the two spheres: “My mottled appearance, which was disliked by people, was immensely liked by all the horses; all gathered around me, they admired and flirted with me”. It is this aesthetic discrepancy which will ultimately lead to the piebald horse's castration.

The remainder of the fifth chapter focuses on the relationship between the

³⁷ “And in such features he is deformed, truly a peasant,’ [the equerry] continued, “it is impossible for him to stay, shame, [he] is well-built, very well-built,’ both he and everyone said looking at me. After a few days the general himself came to look at me, and again all were horrified at something, and berated my mother and me for the color of my hide. ‘But he is well-built, very well-built,’ repeated all, who simply saw me.”

newborn piebald colt and his mother. It is the first real injustice of many which will befall the young horse. Tolstoy's conception of motherhood comes into play here, and its relation to *Kholstomer* has already been skillfully addressed by Roland D. Leblanc in his article *No More Horsing Around: Sex, Love, and Motherhood in Tolstoy's Kholstomer*. The mother's injustice which the young horse suffers is spiritual, moral, and may even be viewed as a crime against nature. As Leblanc states, "Tolstoy's Neoplatonic Christian notion of love required, in short, that a woman transcend being merely a biological 'childbearer' (*matka*) and become instead a true 'mother' (*mat*), providing maternal concern for, and offering spiritual nourishment to, all those in need of care and affection. Motherhood thus came to acquire divine characteristics for Tolstoy..."³⁸

The piebald colt's mother rejects this ideal in favor of carnality, and it is for this reason that the description of the mother being led to Dobry (good, kind, genial) the First by the equerries takes on a lascivious tone, "На ее голос далеко отозвался могущественный голос, как я после узнал, Доброго первого, который с двумя конюхами по сторонам шел на свидание с моею матерью. (A powerful voice responded to hers from afar, it was Dobry the First, as I would later learn, who with two equerries on each side walked to the rendezvous with my mother)" (16).

The reaction of the colt to this accentuates the tragedy. Although rebreeding of his mother would have occurred regardless, the piebald colt views it as being a result of his appearance:

Я чувствовал, что навсегда потерял любовь своей матери. И все оттого, что я пегий, думал я, вспоминая слова людей о своей шерсти, и такое зло меня взяло, что

³⁸ Leblanc, Roland D. *No More Horsing Around: Sex, Love, and Motherhood in Tolstoy's Kholstomer*. *Slavic Review*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (FALL 2011), pp. 545-568.

я стал биться об стены денника головой и коленами -- и бился до тех пор, пока не вспотел и не остановился в изнеможении.³⁹

The young colt is immediately forced to substitute (*zamenit'*) this lost love of his mother for that of the other young horses. Though “it was a happy time” when “Everything was forgiven me, everybody loved me, admired me, and looked indulgently at anything I did” the reader is immediately informed that it “did not last long. Soon something terrible happened to me”, which foreshadows the events that will be described in the next chapter. The narrative here is broken, and “Мерин вздохнул тяжело-тяжело и пошел прочь от лошадей. (The gelding sighed heavily-heavily and walked away from the horses)” prepares the reader to expect these terrible events.

Chapter Six

The gelding begins his narrative by recounting his physical separation from his mother, though this is in no way as upsetting as the spiritual and emotional separation which was described in the previous chapter. He is moved to the “general division of foals”, and paired in a stall with Милый (*milyi* – nice, sweet; loveable). *Milyi* is described with youthful vigor, “He was always lively, good-tempered, and amiable, always ready to gambol, exchange licks, and lay tricks on horse or man”, and as a result the piebald colt seeks to emulate him.

Он тогда уже начинал любить, заигрывал с кобылками и смеялся над моей невинностью. И, на мое несчастье, я из самолюбия стал подражать ему; и очень скоро увлекся любовью. И эта ранняя склонность моя была причиной величайшей перемены моей судьбы. Случилось так, что я

³⁹ “I felt, that I had forever lost my mother's love. And all because I was piebald, I thought remembering people's words about my coat, and such evil took me, that I began to hit the walls of the stall with my head and knees – and I hit until I was sweating and could not continue from exhaustion.” Pg. 16.

увлекся.⁴⁰

Twice in this passage the verb увлекаться (*uvlekat'sja*) is used in reference to love, and can mean both “to captivate, become infatuated with”, and “to be carried away, become mad (about)”. There may be wordplay between these two definitions within the text – with the horse “becoming infatuated” with love and subsequently getting “carried away” – and both serve to texture the way in which the horse-narrator reveals his understanding of the concept of love to the reader. The noun-form will be used in the next passage in the phrase безумное увлечение (*bezumnoe uvlechenie* - insane infatuation).

While describing his relationship to Vyazapurikha, the gelding interrupts his own narrative to discuss narration itself. “...Но я не стану рассказывать всей этой несчастной истории моей первой любви, она сама помнит мое безумное увлечение, окончившееся для меня самой важной переменной в моей жизни. (But I cannot begin to narrate the entire unfortunate history of my first love; she herself understands my insane infatuation, which ended for me in the most important change in my life)” (17). There are two possible reasons for this interruption. First, to digress into describing the courtship would detract from the overall goal of the story of a horse; as far as plot is concerned, the reader only needs to know that Kholstomer loved, and that that love was made impossible at the hands of his masters. Somewhat related to this, if we understand narration in terms of what the author reveals to the reader, then it is an intentional device: the reader is denied a description of love just as the horse was denied love itself. Upon discovery of the courtship, the piebald colt is beaten and put in an individual stall, where

⁴⁰ “He had already begun to love, he flirted with the fillies and laughed at my innocence. And, to my misfortune, I began to imitate him from vanity; and very soon I became infatuated with love. And this early tendency of mine was the cause of the greatest change in my fate. It happened thus, that I was carried away.” Pg. 17.

he “neighed all night, as if foreseeing what was to happen next” (17).

The castration scene is conspicuously absent, and is instead represented by lacunae. It is most likely that this was done out of delicacy, but it is so heavily implied that it leaves the reader to imagine the horrible event. It is such an unnatural and horrid thing, as the reader will see in the next passage, that it has been estranged even from the *form* of the narrative.

The castration affects the horse's entire nature:

На другой день после этого я уже навеки перестал ржать, я стал тем, что я теперь. Весь свет изменился в моих глазах. Ничто мне не стало мило, я углубился в себя и стал размышлять. Сначала мне все было постыло, я перестал даже пить, есть и ходить, а уж об игре и думать нечего. Иногда мне приходило в голову взбрыкнуть, поскакать, поржать; но сейчас же представлялся страшный вопрос: зачем? к чему? И последние силы пропадали.⁴¹

This world which has so drastically changed in the horse's eyes and becomes so repulsive that he emaciates himself does not agree with Leblanc's assertion that the effect of the castration serves “as the expression of an ascetic desire on the part of the author to be unburdened of what he saw as the affliction of sexual lust and thus to be freed to pursue a more spiritual, less carnal existence on earth, a position that Tolstoi would later promulgate as part of his championing of a non-carnal, Christian brand of love”.⁴²

While I do agree with Leblanc that the character of Prince Serpukhovskoy serves as stark contrast to the gelding within the story, the castration does not necessarily serve this purpose. As can be seen above, and also in the phrase “I began to look at the

⁴¹ “The day after that I ceased neighing forever. I became what I am now. The whole world was changed in my eyes. Nothing mattered anymore; I became self-absorbed and began to brood. At first everything seemed repulsive to me. I even ceased to eat, drink, or walk, and there was no idea of playing. Now and then it occurred to me to give a kick, to gallop, or to start neighing, but immediately came the terrible question: Why? What for? And the last of my strength disappeared.” Pg. 17-18.

⁴² Leblanc. *No More Horsing Around*. Pg. 547.

approaching herd, as one looks at forever lost and irrecoverable happiness” (18), the effect of the castration to the story is not an unburdening which spiritualizes the horse, it is a mutilation, and as it will be echoed later in the chapter, has nothing to do with Christianity (*khristianstva net*).

The ways in which the world is forever changed in the gelding's eyes are explained next. He realizes that nothing is to be trusted, that in everyone – horses and humans alike – there is a fickleness, that everything is contingent on superficiality, but most importantly; he feels these things, but does not understand them.

I pondered over the injustice of men, who blamed me for being piebald; I pondered on the inconstancy of mother-love and feminine love in general and on its dependence on physical conditions; and above all I pondered on the characteristics of that strange race of animals with whom we are so closely connected, and whom we call men - those characteristics which were the source of my own peculiar position in the stud farm, which I felt but could not understand. (18-19)

The significance (*znachenie*) of this is explained in the next scene, in which a groom is flogged for neglecting the gelding. The conversation between the two grooms (who are only referenced within the text as “the groom” and “the other groom”) is noticeably without markers denoting who is speaking. There is also mention of a Count (though indirectly through his horses) and the General. Of these four characters, none have been introduced to the reader, and it seems as if the confusion in this passage is intentional. If this is indeed the case, then it could serve as a device making all of these sentiments and actions pan-human. Both grooms, the equerry who informs the General of the laziness, and the General who obsessively cares for his horses (and has the groom flogged when he neglects even the insignificant piebald) and yet not for the Count's (whom it can be assumed pays the General for the service); all of these factor into the

horse's depiction of the *general* human condition, and this is reinforced with the phrase “*khristianstva net* (there is no Christianity [in it]”. This sentiment is repeated to end the conversation, “He has no Christian soul”.

-- Кабы не этот коростовый, -- сказал он, -- ничего бы не было.
-- А что? -- спросил другой конюх.
-- Небось графских не ходит проведывать, а своего жеребенка по два раза в день наведывает.
-- Разве отдали ему пегого-то? -- спросил другой.
-- Продали, подарили ли, пес их ведает. Графских хоть всех голодом помори -- ничего, а вот как смел его жеребенку корму не дать. Ложись, -- говорит, -- и ну бузовать. Христианства нет. Скотину жалчей человека, креста, видно, на нем нет, сам считал, варвар. Генерал так не парывал, всю спину исполосовал, видно, христианской души нет.⁴³

That the ideas introduced above – namely lack of Christianity and flogging – are immediately followed by a long digression regarding the nature of property is not accidental. The gelding himself draws this connection, but cannot understand how someone might be able to think of another living thing as “his”. “The words: my horse, in relation to me, a living horse, seemed to me just as strange as the words: my earth, my air, my water” (19). It is in this way that the narrator introduces the concept of ownership and property.

The concept of ownership is shown as arbitrary, it is simply a naming of something as one's own; it implies no responsibility, no *action*, but is merely a label. The cause and significance of this inclination is that “people are guided in life not by actions,

⁴³ “If it weren't for this scabby one' he said, 'nothing would have happened.'

'What?', asked the other groom.

'I dare say the Count's he doesn't go to visit, but his own colts he visits twice a day.'

'Have they really given him the piebald?' asked the other.

'Sold, given, who cares. The Count's could all die from hunger, it's nothing, but just dare to not give food to his colt. 'Lie down', he says, and now then, to beat. There is no Christianity in it. An animal is more pitied than a man, a cross cannot be seen on him, he counted [the lashes], the barbarian. The General never flogged like that, my whole back is scourged, apparently, there is no Christian soul in him. Pg. 19.

but words” (20). Theory is here contrasted with praxis, and the description of the nature of property will lead the estrangement of the subject to parodical, and ultimately didactic ends:

Such words, considered very important among them, are *my* and *mine*, which they apply to various things, creatures or objects: even to land, people, and horses. They have agreed that of any given thing only one person may use the word “mine”, and he who in this game of theirs may use that conventional word about the greatest number of things is considered the happiest. Why this is so I do not know, but it is so. For a long time I tried to explain it by some direct advantage they derive from it, but this proved wrong.

For instance, many of those who called me *their* horse did not ride me, quite other people rode me; nor did they feed me - quite other people did that. Again it was not those who called me “their” horse who treated me kindly, but coachmen, veterinaries, and in general quite other people. Later on, having widened my field of observation, I became convinced that not only as applied to us horses, but in regard to other things, the idea of *mine* has no other basis than a low, mercenary instinct in men, which they call the feeling or right of property. A man who never lives in it says “my house” but only concerns himself with its building and maintenance; and a tradesman talks of “my cloth business” but has none of his clothes made of the best cloth that is in his shop (20).

The repetition of “quite different (совершенно другие) emphasizes this disparity between those who “own” and those who “do”. In the next passage, this sentiment will be absolutized by the words “there are people (есть люди)”, affirming that these people do indeed exist, and systematizing their actions by increasing degrees: the first, land, is related to what has already been stated by the narrator. Next this person calls others “his”, that is, he exists over them; and the nature of classism the narrator resolutely posits, is one of harm.

There are people who call land theirs, though they have never seen that land and never walked on it. There are people who call other people theirs but have never seen those others, and the whole relationship of the owners to the owned is that they do them harm (20).

Lastly, though most problematic for these “owners”, are women who refuse to be owned. “There are men who call women their women or their wives; yet these women

live with other men” (20). It is this inclination towards ownership which alienates humans not only from the rest of the animals (as we have seen), but even from each other (which will become evident from the interaction between the land owner and Prince Serpukhovskoy). The narrator concludes, then, that horses comprise a wholly different (and superior) essence than humans. However, after this revelation he realizes in summary that, “I was thrice unfortunate: I was piebald, I was a gelding, and people considered that I did not belong to God and to myself, as is natural to all living creatures, but that I belonged to the stud groom” (21).

As a consequence of this, all of the horse's successes are diminished. Though all still comment on his grace and strength, the fact that he belongs to the equerry and not the Count lessens the importance of his successes. This is not the most important consequence, however, which the gelding ominously promises to relate to his audience, “if we are still living tomorrow”.

Before the chapter ends, it is summarized in action by the horses who “respectfully treated (*pochtitel'no obrashchalis'*)” Kholstomer and the “brutish treatment (*obrashchenie ... grubo*) of Nester.

Chapter Seven

The third night provides a particular account of the gelding's diminished successes as a result of ownership, which was generally described in the last chapter, by juxtaposing him against one of the Count's best horses: Swan (Лебедь). Though Swan is described as “moving well (*хорошо ехать*)”, he lacks the precision of movement which the piebald possesses. They race twice, and the piebald gelding wins both times. “I was the faster, and this produced consternation in everyone” the narrator asserts, and is

immediately sold to a horse dealer (баришник), which in Russian carries similar negative connotations as in English of “profiteer; huckster”. Again the notion of injustice is invoked as the gelding bitterly recounts leaving the estate, “All this was so unjust (несправедливо), so cruel, that I was glad when they took me away from Khrenovo and parted me forever from all that had been familiar and dear to me.”

This bitterness is made tragically poignant in the phrase:

Им предстояли любовь, почести, свобода, мне -- труд, унижения, унижения, труд, и до конца моей жизни! За что? За то, что я был пегий и что от этого я должен был сделаться чьею-то лошадью.⁴⁴

It is interesting to note the repetition and inversion of the words labor (труд) and humiliation (унижение) which conflates the two concepts, and echoes the repetitive and unceasing qualities of this labor-humiliation cycle which will be explicitly stated later. This absolute phrase ends the gelding's narration, as he is immediately interrupted by a birth.

The meaning of this birth within the story is puzzling, though there are some possibilities for its inclusion. The “spontaneity” of the event which severs the gelding's narration could serve as a device to add realism to the story. Though this birth may seem a non-sequitur, it could function to reinforce the absolute language quoted above with the implication that the new foal “has his whole life ahead of him”, in a sense. It could be referencing the mother/offspring problem which was described in chapter five. It may also be a device to contrast the gelding's “already having lived his life”, as previously stated in the narrative, with new life. Finally, it is possible that the birth could serve as a chastisement against the “audience” both in and of the story: those who would rather be

⁴⁴ “To them awaited love, honor, freedom, to me – labor, humiliation, humiliation, labor, and until the end of my life! For what? Because I was piebald, and so had to become someone's horse.” Pg. 22-23.

distracted from the gelding's tale of woe in favor of a happy event.

Chapter Eight

Chapter eight is subdivided temporally, encompassing both the fourth and the final night of the gelding's account of his life. The fourth night will be concerned with the “best time” of the gelding's life in service to the Hussar officer; the fifth with his ruination, and the unfortunate series of events afterward concluding with the “present”.

Immediately there are two oppositions which the gelding relates in the beginning of the eighth chapter; there is the officer, who, although he is thrice unloving (ничего и никого никогда не любил [nothing and no one ever did he love]), was and still is loved by the gelding for exactly this quality (любил его и люблю его именно за это). Second is the gelding's statement that “The happiest time of my life I spent with the Hussar officer. Though he was the cause of my ruination...” (23).

Of particular interest is the syllogism about the causes of the officer's unloving: “I loved in him namely this: that he was handsome, happy, rich, and therefore [и потому] loved no one” (23). Stated in this way, it would follow that handsomeness, happiness, and wealth lead directly (“and therefore”) to an absence of affection. The narrator does not dwell on the logic of this, but quickly reinforces it by saying, “You know this is a high equine feeling of ours” (23).

In describing his time with the Hussar officer, the narrative tone shifts. From the beginning of the chapter the gelding's narration has been mostly curt and factual, but here it acquires a more evocative sentimental/nostalgic texture:

The groom was a lad from among the peasants. He would open the door, let out the steam from the horses, throw out the droppings, take off our rugs, and begin to fidget over our bodies with a brush, and lay whitish streaks of dandruff from a curry-comb on the boards of the floor that was dented by our rough

horseshoes. I would playfully nip his sleeve and paw the ground. Then we were led out one after another to the trough filled with cold water, and the lad would admire the smoothness of my spotted coat which he had polished, my foot with its broad hoof, my legs straight as an arrow, my glossy quarters, and my back wide enough to sleep on. Hay was piled onto the high racks, and the oak cribs were filled with oats. Then Feofan, the head coachman, would come in.

Master and coachman resembled one another. Neither of them was afraid of anything or cared for anyone but himself, and for that reason everybody liked them. Feofan wore a red shirt, black velveteen knickerbockers, and a sleeveless coat. I liked it on a holiday when he would come into the stable, his hair pomaded, and wearing his sleeveless coat, and would shout, "Now then, beastie, have you forgotten?" and push me with the handle of the stable fork, never so as to hurt me but just as a joke. I immediately knew that it was a joke and laid back an ear, making my teeth click (24).

After this description, however, the opposition is again stated: "In their service I lost the best of my qualities and half my life.... But despite this, this was the best time of my life" (24). These oppositions serve as bookends to the nostalgic scene above depicted, they temper it and diminish the effect of the sentimentalism.

In describing being harnessed at the bottom of page twenty-four, the verb tense unexpectedly changes from past to present and continues for most of the remainder of the fourth night. In the Maude, this is rendered using past-passive verbs (were harnessed, would come, would examine, etc). Though this is the most reasonable for translation, it does lose some of the meaning from the original:

Запрягут в сарае на развязке. Выйдет Феофан с задом шире плеч, в красном кушаке под мышку, оглядит запряжку, сядет, заправит кафтан, выставит ногу и стремя, пошутит что-нибудь всегда, привесит кнут, которым почти никогда не стегнет меня, только для порядка, и скажет: "Пуцай!" И, играя каждым шагом, я трогаю из ворот, и кухарка, вышедшая выплеснуть помои, останавливается на пороге, и мужики, привезшие на двор дрова, тарашат глаза. Выедет, проедет и станет. Выйдут лакеи, подъедут кучера, и пойдут разговоры. Все ждут, часа три иногда стоим у подъезда, изредка проезжаем, заворачиваем и опять становимся.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ "They are harnessing in the barn with ease. Feofan leaves with his hips wider than his shoulders, in a red belt under his arms, he looks over the harness, sits, adjusts his caftan, puts his foot forward into the stirrup, makes a joke at something always, produces a whip, with which he almost never lashes me, only for form, and says, 'Go!' And, playing with every step, I am starting from the gate, and the cook who was coming out

One of the possible effects which are achieved by this, is that it presents the events with a tone of immediacy. They are happening “now”, thus serving to involve the reader in the action. It is also the gelding “reliving” the happiest time of his life in the present. The events have the quality of being not only current, but recursively so; though the events have concluded, they are forever-present. These taken as a whole function to reinforce the nostalgic and sentimental tone of the forth-night narration. This nostalgia can also be seen in the metrical quality of movement:

Князь в дѹхе, иногда пошѹтит с Феофаном, Феофан отвѣтит, чѹть
оборачивая красивую голову, и, не спуская рук, делает чѹть замѣтное,
понятное для меня движение вожжами, и раз-раз-раз, все шире и шире,
содрогаясь каждым мускулом и кидая снег с грязью под передок, я еду
(25).⁴⁶

The past tense is reintroduced, and seems to function as a way to bookend the passage in which the gelding conveys his love of racing. It begins and ends with the phrase “I loved to outrun a trotter”, however the description of the act itself is in the present:

Любил я перегнать рысака. Когда, бывало, мы издалека завидим с
Феофаном упряжь, достойную нашего усилия, и мы, летя, как вихрь,
медленно начинаем наплывать ближе и ближе, уж я кидая грязь в спинку
саней, равняюсь с седоком и над головой фыркаю ему, равняюсь с седелкой,
с дугой, уж не вижу его и слышу только сзади себя все удаляющиеся его
звуки. А князь, и Феофан, и я -- мы все молчим и делаем вид, что мы просто
едем по своему делу, что мы и не замечаем тех, которые попадаютя нам на

to empty the slop pauses on the threshold, and the peasant who was bringing firewood to the courtyard gawks. He walks out, passes, and stops. The footmen walk out, coachmen pass, and go about conversation. All are waiting, sometimes for three hours we are standing by the porch, occasionally going a little way, turning, and again waiting.”

⁴⁶ “The Prince in a spirit, sometimes is joking with Feofan, Feofan answers, turning his red head a little, and not lowering his hand, makes a little sign by moving the reins which I understand, and one-two-three, all wider and wider, shuddering with every muscle and flinging dirty snow under the front, I walk.”

пути на плохих лошадях. Любил я перегнать,⁴⁷

The fifth night is one of change and conclusion. The weather itself establishes the tone of this, and is a foreshadowing device which is common to much of Tolstoy: “The weather was beginning to change. It was grey since morning and there was no dew, but it was warm, and the mosquitoes were tenacious” (26). It is in this setting that the gelding ends his story.

Again the contradictory theme of success which leads to failure arises, and achieves its zenith. “At the end of the second winter the happiest event of my life occurred, and following it the greatest misfortune” (26).

After winning a race against the favored horse Satin (Атласный), the Prince is offered thousands for the piebald gelding, which is promptly refused. “No’, he said, ‘this is not a horse, but a friend, I would not trade him for a mountain of gold’” (26). These words will contradict the deeds which follow, thus reinforcing the gelding-narrator's previous assertion on the subject. This is again echoed immediately afterward. The gelding and the Prince “fly” to his mistress' apartment, where the deed (Мы приехали к ней) and the word (He called her his – Он называл ее своею) are conflated. The Prince, enraged, pushes the horse:

They did what had never been done to me before - struck me with the whip and made me gallop. For the first time I fell out of step and felt ashamed and wished to correct it, but suddenly I heard the prince shout in an unnatural voice: "Get on!" The whip whistled through the air and cut me, and I galloped, striking my foot against the iron front of the sledge (26).

⁴⁷ “I loved to outrun a trotter. When it happened that we catch sight of a harness from afar worthy of our effort, we are flying like a whirlwind, slowly we begin to run nearer and nearer, I am flinging dirt into the back of the sledge, pulling even with the rider and neighing above his head, pulling even with the saddle, with the arch, indeed I cannot see him and I only hear his sounds receding behind me. And the Prince, and Feofan, and I, we are all quiet and give the appearance, that we simply are driving on our own business, that we do not even notice those with bad horses that we meet on our way. I loved to outrun....” Pg. 25-26.

The consequence of this is described in tragic detail:

I was ill, and they tormented me and maimed me - doctoring me, as people call it. My hoofs came off, I had swellings and my legs grew bent; my chest sank in and I became altogether limp and weak. I was sold to a horse-dealer who fed me on carrots and something else and made something of me quite unlike myself, though good enough to deceive one who did not know. My strength and my pace were gone.

When purchasers came the dealer also tormented me by coming into my stall and beating me with a heavy whip to frighten and madden me. Then he would rub down the stripes on my coat and lead me out (26-27).

Then he is sold to an old woman (старушка) who provides still more evidence of there being “no Christian soul”. This is condensed into the simple sentence, “She always drove to [the church of] Nikolai the Wonder-Worker and flogged her coachman”, which in turn leads to another interesting narrative device. The gelding states that, “The coachman cried in my stable. And there I realized, that tears have a pleasant, salty taste” (27). This empathetic scene, which would be the gelding's licking the coachman's face in an attempt to comfort him, is only implied; and the connection made between “tears” and “pleasant” lends an overall bittersweet texture to it.

The old woman dies, and the gelding suffers still more through a tragedy of errors, until concluding his story with the simple “And so I am here (И вот я здесь)” (27). The audience is obviously stricken by the story, and the weather again reinforces this sentiment, “All were silent. Rain began to drizzle” (27).

Chapter Nine

Once the gelding has concluded his story, the third-person narrator again becomes the primary storyteller, though the tone has changed. In light of the information that has been presented, the narrative tone accordingly becomes more judgmental of human affairs. Seemingly knowingly, the old mare Zhuldyba twice casts a sidelong glance

(покоситься) at the host and the “tall, fat, bloated military man”, and the young horses “take alarm (переполошиться)” (27).

Again the falsity of the notion of property is referenced in the phrase, “[The host and his guest] were unable to see all the horses on their walk” (27). The horses themselves only serve as means by which the master can boast of his success. The interaction between the host and his guest will be an increasingly sinister game: of the host's bragging and the guest's envy, which will reach its height in the twelfth chapter. This envy will be the cause of many of the Prince's actions, and so should be addressed.

“Related to jealousy, resentment, and injustice, envy is directed up, toward the rich, professional, and entrepreneurial but also toward peers and allies doing better than the self”⁴⁸ This latter description certainly is relevant to the Prince, but also Fiske asserts that envy also has the effect of estrangement: “Envied outgroups seem high status and competent, but cold, not 'us', so they are resented”.⁴⁹ These intertwined emotions of envy and scorn help explain many of the Prince's semi-rude remarks and his denial of the host's gifts, and scorn which is taken to such an extreme as to completely alienate the object being viewed is clear in the passage which ends the chapter:

Suddenly above his ear he heard a stupid, weak, old neigh. This was the piebald's neigh, but he broke off as if embarrassed. Neither the guest, nor the host paid attention to this neigh and went home. Kholstomer recognized in the bloated old man his beloved master, the former glowing, rich, and handsome Serpukhovskoy (28).

Though Serpukhovsky is an actual Russian surname derived from the word *serpukha* (saw-wort), there may still be an instance of wordplay. Though it is not certain, it is possible that the Prince's name is a conflation of the words “сэр (*ser*)” and a variant

⁴⁸ Fiske. *Envy Up, Scorn Down*. Pg. 7.

⁴⁹ “” Pg. 8

of the root “пых- (*pukh*)”, making his name essentially, “Sir Fluffy” or “The Respectable Mr. Powder-puff”.

Chapter Ten

The divide between the two spheres of activity introduces the tenth chapter, and moves away from the horses and into the “grand home”. The word used in reference to the host's (хозяин) pregnant female counterpart is хозяйка, which is best translated as “hostess; proprietress” and does nothing to indicate their relationship. It will remain unclear whether she is his wife or mistress until the word *lyubovnitsa* (mistress) is used later. It is possible that this is an intentional obfuscation intended to play with the reader’s preconceived expectations, to expose the amorality of the host, or to reference the gelding's statement that “there are people who call women their own... and strive in life not to do what they think right but to call as many things as possible 'their own'.”

Much attention is paid to describing the opulence with which the host surrounds himself and its superficiality, which is satirically captured in the passage, “Around the table jingled the silver collar of the Italian greyhound, unusually thin, and which was called by an unusually difficult English name which both [the host and hostess] poorly pronounced, not knowing English” and summed in the following absolute, judgmental passage: “Everything gave the impression of newness, luxury, and rarity. Everything was good, but it all bore an imprint of superfluity, wealth, and the absence of intellectual interests” (29).

Though with less detail, the physical description of Prince Serpukhovskoy is summed best with the phrase, “He may have been very handsome at one time. Now he had fallen low, it appeared, physically, morally, and financially” (29). The narrator will

continue by enumerating this three-fold destitution: he has squandered his fortune, and lived on credit until that too is gone; his drinking habits, “strictly speaking, are never either begun nor ended”; and his moral poverty is best summarized in the passage:

He always treated his friend's mistresses with respect, not because he shared the so-called convictions promulgated in periodicals (he never read trash of that kind) about the respect due to the personality of every man, about the meaninglessness of marriage, and so forth, but because all decent men do so and he was a decent, though fallen, man (30-31).

The Prince's diminished position greatly affects his countenance, not only in relation to the young host, but also internally in the sense that his former-self scorns the present, while his present-self envies the past: “The sight of his young host's good fortune humiliated Serpukhovskoy, awakening a painful envy in him as he recalled his own irrecoverable past” (30). And again when he refuses the cigars offered snidely by his host, “Nikita pushed aside the hand with the cigars, and a gleam of offense and shame showed itself in his eyes” (21).

If we recall the “vile, pitiable, and noble” categories of old age, then Serpukhovskoy is most assuredly denied nobility. “As he looked at them, Serpukhovskoy for their sakes tried to force a smile, but after the host had got up, embraced her, and led her to the portiere, Serpukhovskoy's face suddenly changed. He sighed heavily, and a look of despair showed itself on his flabby face. Even malevolence appeared on it” (32).

Chapter Eleven

The host and guest continue their conversation after the hostess leaves, and chapter eleven continues to show the divide between them financially as well as more fully develop their moral degradation. In general, this chapter reinforces more blatantly what has already been stated in chapters nine and ten for didactic effect. The

fundamental pettiness of their interaction is perfectly summarized in the assertion, “The host sorted out in his head, how he could brag to his guest. Serpukhovskoy contrived how he would show that he did not consider himself bankrupt” (33).

The moral degradation is emphasized in the phrase showing their commodification of women, and also validating the gelding’s thoughts on ownership, “They spoke of women and of who kept this one or that, a gipsy, a ballet-girl, a Frenchwoman” (33). Then Serpukhovskoy, tiring of his host’s bragging, changes the subject to focus on himself in the prime of his life. He remembers Kholstomer fondly (“Oh, what a horse that was!”) and then remarks, “There are no such horses now, chum. Ah that was a time. Ah, youth!” (34). The implication of this statement is that Serpukhovskoy is the *reason* there are no such horses anymore. The Prince and those like him, through mindlessness, mistreatment, and neglect causes the ruination of good things. These traits in Serpukhovskoy coalesce and are involved in every facet of his life; he has ruined his estate, his health, and his soul.

To end the chapter, his drunken boorishness is explained in detail to highlight this point:

"It seems to me that I was lying a lot," he thought. Well, it's all the same. The wine was good, but he is an awful swine. There's something merchant-like about him. And I'm an awful swine," he said to himself and laughed aloud. "First I used to support women, and now I'm supported. Yes, the Winkler girl will support me. I take money of her. Serves him right, serves him right! Still, I must undress. Can't get my boots off. Hey! Hey!" he called out, but the man who had been told off to wait on him had long since gone to bed.

He sat down, took off his coat and waistcoat and somehow managed to kick off his trousers, but for a long time could not get his boots off - his soft stomach being in the way. He got one off at last, and struggled for a long time with the other, panting and becoming exhausted. And so with his foot in the boot-top he rolled over and began to snore, filling the room with a smell of tobacco, wine, and disagreeable old age.

Chapter Twelve

The scene sharply moves from the house back to the pasture, and the reader is informed that Kholstomer has fallen ill with scald (короста, similar to the pejorative used toward the gelding earlier, коростовой). Absent from the Maude translation is the horse's perspective on the disease, “«Что-то больно чешется», -- думал он. ('Something painfully itches', he thought) (35).” When the veterinarian suggests that he be sold, the response is that there is no point, that the gelding should just be slaughtered (зарезать). The description of the “flayer (драч)” is appropriately malevolent. “There arrived a strange man. Lean, black, dirty, with something splattered on his black kaftan” (35).

The gelding is led to a ravine, and his non-understanding of impending events lends a final, tragic quality to the gelding:

The gelding stretched towards the halter meaning to chew it a little from dullness, but he could not reach it. He sighed and closed his eyes. His nether lip hung down, disclosing his worn yellow teeth, and he began to drowse to the sound of the sharpening of the knife (35).

This misinterpretation by the gelding reaches its pitiable zenith as the act is committed. Again the event is estranged, similarly to the saddling; in much the same way as “a finger is shoved in his mouth... and straps are pulled tight”, the gelding feels “that something had been done to his throat”. The death itself, for the gelding at least, is not tragic. It is a release from his life of needless suffering, where, “All the heaviness of his life was relieved”.

“Surely they want to doctor me”, he thought. “Let them!” And directly he felt that something had been done with his throat. It was painful to him, he flinched, gave a kick with his leg, but restrained himself and began to wait to see what would be next. Then he felt something wet pouring in large spurts on his neck and chest. He sighed with all of his sides, and he began to feel immensely

better. All the heaviness of his life was relieved. He closed his eyes and began to droop his head. No one was holding it. Then his legs quivered and his whole body swayed. He was not so much frightened as surprised. Everything was so new to him. He was surprised and started forward and upward, but instead of this, in moving from the spot his legs got entangled, he began to fall sideways, and trying to take a step fell forward and down on his left side. The knacker waited till the convulsions had ceased, drove away the dogs that had crept nearer, took the gelding by the legs, turned him on his back, told Vaska to hold a leg, and began to skin the horse (36).

The reader is spared the actual grisly deed of the flaying, but when the herd returns for the day they only see “something red below, around which dogs were romping restlessly and ravens and kite-birds flew” (36). The perspective then jarringly shifts again to depict the scene of a mother-wolf feeding her young.

At dawn, in a ravine of the old forest, down in an overgrown glade, big headed wolf cubs were howling joyfully. There were five of them: four almost alike and one with a head bigger than his body. A lean old wolf who was shedding her coat, dragging her full belly with its hanging dugs along the ground, came out of the bushes and sat down in front of the cubs. The cubs came and stood round her in a semi-circle. She went up to the smallest, and bending her knee and holding her muzzle down, made some convulsive movements, and opening her large sharp-toothed jaws disgorged a large piece of horseflesh. The bigger cubs rushed towards her, but she moved threateningly at them and let the little one have it all. The little one, growling as if in anger, pulled the horseflesh under him and began to gorge. In the same way the mother wolf coughed up a piece for the second, the third, and all five of them, and then lay down in front of them to rest. (36).

Leblanc cites the significance of this scene as an “important contrast in sexual morality established in the story ... between Kholstomer’s mother, who, as we have seen, abandons her son early on to pursue her own selfish carnal pleasures and romantic interests, and the wolf-mother, who at story’s end feeds her five cubs meat from the body of the slaughtered horse-hero.” As well as incorporating Christian allegory, “she insures that the smallest cub is fed first, in accord with the New Testament promise that the last

shall be first”.⁵⁰

It is also, I believe, a juxtaposition between the “natural” world, and human affairs. Men, after mistreating, slaughtering, and flaying the gelding only to take his hide (which, ironically, was the cause of all his misfortune), leave his body to rot. Even in death, however, the gelding is useful to those who can recognize his intrinsic worth. This concept of the natural is extended also to the peasant, that class which is so dear to Tolstoy – “those who work with their hands and feed the world with what they produce; they are close to nature and therefore closest to God” – is able to see the value even in the skull and shoulder-blades which have been picked dry and “put them to use (пустил их в дело)” (37).⁵¹

Interestingly, the “story of a horse” does not end with the horse but with another death: Serpukhovskoy's. The Prince, whose greatest achievements in life were “having walked about the world, eating and drinking” and of whom, “neither his skin, nor the meat, nor the bones proved useful anywhere” (37). Whereas Kholstomer's death is an easing of weight (тяжесть), the Prince's is a burden (тягость) on those around him, and the burying of this body “in the earth was simply an extra difficulty for people” (37). His body immediately begins rotting (тотчас же загнившее), a negative allusion to Incorruptibility, the belief that certain bodies as a result of their holiness resist decomposition. His podgy (пухлый) body is laid to rest amid all his earthly fineries, and through the parodical use of estrangement the narrator cheekily ends his story by stating, “older human bones are dug up and in that place to hide this carrion (гниющий), worm-infested body in a new uniform and polished boots and to fill it all with earth” (37).

⁵⁰ Leblanc. *Sex, Love, and Motherhood*. Pg. 562.

⁵¹ Tolstoy, Alexandra. *Tolstoy and the Russian Peasant*. *Russian Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2, [Special Issue: Leo Tolstoy] (Apr., 1960), pp. 150-156.

There are several possibilities which help explain why the author would end the story this way. First, it is a way for Serpukhovskoy to get his comeuppance, as well as still further extol the virtue of Kholstomer through comparison. It also leaves the reader to contemplate his own death, and in so doing, his life *as he is living it*. This conveys the ultimate didactic strength of the story, and this device is used quite frequently by Tolstoy.⁵² This contemplation is (ideally) a recursive process; one is intended to think about his life in relation to his death, which then leads to consideration of death, and again to think about his life in relation to death. In this way the story, in a sense, is “living”. Though the text concludes with the description of Serpukhovskoy being covered with dirt, the story is not ended. Rather, it is Tolstoy's ability to, as Morson states, “not allow the curtain to fall. In this particular sense, the story strives to remain open, as its ontological status seeks to be (in the full etymological sense of the word) indeterminate”.⁵³

⁵² Similar plot devices can be found in, namely: *How Much Land Does a Man Need?* *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*, *Master and Man*, and *Alyosha Gorshok* (which bears striking resemblance to many of the themes of Kholstomer), among others.

⁵³ Morson. *Reader as Voyeur*. Pg. 477.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

Having looked at the way in which a *particular* didactic work is constructed, I would like now to focus on how this interacts with Tolstoy's *general* conception of art.

For Tolstoy, art is a labor, which should be valued based on the "purpose it may serve in the life of man and of humanity".⁵⁴ Art is not necessarily a rational undertaking. Much like the piebald gelding "felt but did not understand", so too is the purpose of a true work of art for Tolstoy: "The activity of art is based on the fact that a man receiving through his sense of hearing or sight another man's expression of feeling, is capable of experiencing the emotion which moved the man who expressed it".⁵⁵ This definition categorically seems to better describe didactic fiction, rather than art in general, and is aligned with Morson's statement that didactic fiction must seduce and implicate the reader.

Art is not simply a story; it must also convey meanings, impressions which can instruct the person hearing or reading it. It is the author's duty to "infect" his audience with his own feelings and impressions: "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 others are infected by those feelings and also experience them".⁵⁶

To accomplish this, it is necessary to have a perfection of form; however this form

⁵⁴ Tolstoy, Lev. *What is Art?* Trans. W. Gareth Jones. London: Oxford University Press, 1994. Pg. 56.

⁵⁵ "" Pg. 57.

⁵⁶ "" Pg. 59.

is only useful insofar as it allows the artist to express himself. The form of any art is a vehicle by which the content is transmitted to the audience. It is the encoding of an idea in such a way that it may be accessible to all who read it.

This essay has studied the way in which form and content combine to create meaning in a *particular* work. I have also looked at the ways in which this meaning expresses itself within the text in relation to socio-historical events that the author found pressing; most notably how labor, property, and class relate to the idea of a general morality. This is not a final interpretation, but rather the beginning of a dialogue not only of the ideas within *Kholstomer*, but also with Tolstoy's other later didactic works.

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