

Peasant as the Political Unconscious of *Anna Karenina*: Vengeance, Its Forms and Roots

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Notwithstanding Sofia Andreyevna's journal entry of February 24, 1870, about her husband's idea of depicting an unfaithful wife "as only pitiful and not guilty" (*PSS* 20: 577), the famous text published five years later came out as an ode to the awesome power of divine retribution.

The novel opens with three evocations of vengeance: the first two are odic and refer to the mythic past—the epigraph originating from the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy (*New King James Bible* 32.35), and Stiva's sleepy recollection of Don Octavio's aria *Il mio tesoro* from *Don Giovanni*. In the latter, Don Octavio promises to avenge Donna Anna by returning as "punishment and death" ("Che sol di stragi e morti nunzio voglio tornar") (2.2.21). Both songs, the biblical and the operatic, speak of vengeance for violating a loving bond, that of the Jews' philandering with the lesser gods, and of Donna Anna's imprudent rendezvous with Don Giovanni. Within the context of betrayal, vengeance itself is evoked as a form of love: God will not allow the Jews' enemies to triumph. Israel's

sin of idolatry will be addressed by Jehova on His own terms: "I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal" (Deuteronomy 32.39).

The third reference to retribution, the punishment Dolly devises for her profligate husband, brings the theme of vengeance to the here and now of the novel. In addition to reiterating the motif of vengeance, the three registers—the "absolute language" of the Bible, the lyrics of an eighteenth-century picaresque libretto, and the struggling reaction of a wronged wife—underscore the demystifying trajectory of the genre "from the divine to the sordid and prosaic" (Holland 146–149). This progression from the mythic to the realistic, the novel's historic function of "systematic undermining and demystification" of the established narratives (Jameson 152), is itself a species of punishment suffered by those who persevere in their delusions. Stiva's dream and painful awakening into a reality of his disintegrating household foreshadows Anna's recurring nightmare of a French-speaking peasant, whose terrifying portent interrupts Anna's dreams.

The peasant, in turn, alludes to a violent end not only to her individual life but of an approaching catastrophe to Karenina as a social mode of being.

In addition to the possible Greek origin of the name Karenin, as remembered by the writer's son Sergei L'vovich (*Литературное наследство* 569), a closer and a more meaningful association for a Russian reader is with the Russian word кара, *kara* (a punishment, retribution). Karenin exhorts Anna to behave more prudently, because their lives are joined together by God and only a crime could break that bond. Karenin admonishes his wife that this transgression "brings with it a heavy punishment (тяжелую кару)" (PSS 18: 155).

This connotation of Anna's name—her identity with vindication—comes to the fore in her final resolve to punish Vronsky: "And death presented itself to her clearly and vividly as the only way to restore the love for her in his heart, to punish him [...] The one thing necessary was to punish him" (751).¹ Anna reifies the meaning of her last name by becoming the punishment she desires to inflict on the other.

What is the source of guilt and vengeance in this novel? The recurrent motifs of transgression and retribution stemmed from Tolstoy's growing, agonizing realization of Russia's immoral order based on the oppression of peasants and upheld by, and dependent on, such deleterious institutions as the army, the penal system, the church, and even the family. Beginning with *Confession*, his first major work after *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy begins to articulate his attack on the social and economic injustice. He goes on to assail the institution of the family, most notably in *The Kreutzer Sonata*.

During the 1870s, when he was working on *Anna Karenina*, the sentiments of guilt and vengeance came to dominate Tolstoy's narrative, though not through an explicit critique of these institutions, but rather through a recurrent symbolism of something yet unsayable. This emerging awareness was tied to the writer's anxiety

triggered by Russia's entry into the new, post-Emancipation, early industrial and capitalist reality.

The dread of an impending social catastrophe, which Tolstoy believed could be prevented by the elite's assimilation into a peasant's mode of being, shapes the theme of vengeance in the novel and finds its expression in the vision of the incongruous figure of the French-speaking and iron-wielding muzhik. This subject of Anna's and Vronsky's nightmares, and the object of Levin's persistent religious and economic quest, represents the unconscious presence of history in Tolstoy's novel: specifically, the Russian peasant's historical trajectory from an unskilled agricultural serf docilely tilling his master's land to a skilled industrial worker capable of standing up for his or her own economic interest.

Combining in one figure the markers of Russia's lower classes (the peasant-like attire and appearance) with those of the privileged (the use of French and the right to enter Anna's room while disregarding her presence there), this hybrid specter is a travesty of Tolstoy's own attempt to resolve the problem of the class antagonism between peasants and landowners.

This hybrid figure terrorizes and drives to suicide—or its brink in Levin's case—both protagonists. To Anna, the muzhik is the impending death delivered by an anonymous class antagonist. To Levin—and Tolstoy—the presence of this ominous specter in the narrative negates his slavophilic and pacifist ideals. The muzhik stands for the historical turn to effect social justice through violence. His (French) words about the necessity to strike the iron, "Il faut le battre le fer" (PSS 19: 446), evoke a well-familiar text of "l'Internationale," "Battons le fer quand il est chaud," thus linking the nightmare to the then most recent and historically significant, and bloody, attempt to create a more just society, the Paris Commune of 1871.² The muzhik's supplemental phrase, "le broyer; le pètrir," reinforces the insistence on destructive vengeance:

It is not enough merely to strike the iron, one should pound it and knead it.

The numerous reappearances of the muzhik's specter in the novel—Browning lists nine appearances (35–36)—may be that hidden network of linkages to which Tolstoy referred as the mysterious keystone (*PSS* 62: 377) holding together the unwieldy architecture of the novel. But these reappearances may in fact be what bends the author's original intent of evoking the reader's pity³ and reveals the imprint of history as it encroached on the novel.

Viewed from a biographical perspective, *Anna Karenina* represents Tolstoy's final, desperate attempt to preserve, against a growing body of evidence to the contrary, his faith in the natural ties between the landlord and his peasants and in the sacredness of the patriarchal family. The landlord-peasant bond and family are embraced in Tolstoy's previous works; similarly, Levin jealously guards these institutions, both in his own book on the Russian agrarian economy and in his pursuit of Kitty. But the text's disconnects, its unique structure violating all the established novelistic norms—be it the novel of adultery, Bildungsroman, or an English family novel—reveal its resistance to fit into the European molds.

The disconnect between the theme of vengeance, signaled by the epigraph, and the question of Anna's transgression was jarring to the novel's first readers. In his monograph on Tolstoy in the seventies, Eikhenbaum surveys the main critical trends that addressed the stark imbalance between the severity of the dictum in the epigraph and Anna's story. Dostoevsky sees the significance of the epigraph in Tolstoy's resistance to the "socialist-doctors" who believe in the possibility of extricating evil through social reforms. According to Dostoevsky, the author's message was that "no matter how society is organized, evil cannot be avoided, that the human soul remains the same, that aberration and sin come from it [the soul]" and this is why "only the One who says,

"Vengeance is mine, I will repay" has the right to render the final judgment (Эйхенбаум 161).

Tolstoy expressed admiration for Mikhail Gromeka's interpretation of the epigraph: "He had made clear that what I had put into this work unconsciously" (Эйхенбаум 162). Eikhenbaum, however, questions the author's imprimatur by juxtaposing Gromeka's simplistic interpretation—Anna is guilty because she violated both the divine and the social laws—with the author's depiction of Anna as a powerfully appealing heroine. Is it possible, asks Eikhenbaum, that Tolstoy's novel is merely a glorification of married life and public opinion, as argued by Gromeka? Eikhenbaum sees Tolstoy's approval of Gromeka's article as "a momentary infatuation with someone else's idea" (163).

While Dostoevsky and Gromeka take for granted Anna's guilt and therefore the need for punishment, Mark Aldanov and Vikenty Veresaev reject the vindictive moral of the epigraph because it contradicts the content of the story. Aldanov's reading is based on distinguishing Tolstoy-the-great-artist from Tolstoy-the-dubious-moralist; the former is unable to subjugate convincingly his life-like creation to the latter's moralism. Veresaev offers a resolution by advancing the concept of *vital life*, which is the title of a book he was working on at that time in 1907. In his conversation with Tolstoy's son-in-law, Sukhotin, Veresaev explained his reading of the epigraph and asked Sukhotin to convey that new interpretation to the author. Anna's transgression, argued Veresaev, was not her adultery, but her failure to embrace the fullness of the vital life after she and Vronsky became lovers. Instead of loving him freely, she becomes fearful and resentful of public opinion. In doing so, she sins against the vital life, going against her essential being. This results in tragedy. When Sukhotin relayed this reading to Tolstoy, the author, according to his son-in-law, called it "ingenious," but insisted that his intent was to show that "whatever evil acts man commits, their

consequence is bitter, which comes not from men but from God, and that was what Anna Karenina had experienced” (quoted in Эйхенбаум 167).

Eikhenbaum’s own interpretation of the epigraph is akin to Veresaev’s. He also argues that Anna and Vronsky are guilty “not because they have transgressed against society or public opinion but against life. [...] They both live inauthentically because they are guided by a reductive understanding of ‘the will’ as *desire* without pondering, like Levin, the meaning of life” (172).

Eikhenbaum bases this reading on Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation* and its powerful impact on Tolstoy since 1869. Specifically, it was Schopenhauer’s Buddhist-like equation of passion with suffering which, the critic believed, Tolstoy wanted to illustrate in dramatizing the inception, the evolution, and the ineluctably destructive finale of Anna’s passion.

The subsequent attempts to resolve the issue of the unfair and cruel treatment of the heroine—the death penalty without the justifying evidence—tended to fit the lines of argument established by the initial readings outlined by Eikhenbaum. Some American critics (of which there have been very few until recently) accept Anna’s guilt on moral grounds. The majority, however, explain her death by applying Freudian or feminist analyses that point to Tolstoy’s fear and rejection of female sexuality as the real reason for Anna’s punishment.

Text as history and resistance

The present essay is an attempt to explain the novel’s insistence on guilt and retribution through the lens of a neo-Marxist perspective of the political, the social, and the historical modes of interpretation formulated by Fredric Jameson in his book, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Jameson’s interpretive method is rooted in the principle of historicizing (9), a commitment to the pursuit of ever-broader historical contexts, seeking to apprehend the

evolving social phenomena, including artistic expression and its meaning. This analytic commitment to the primacy of the global over the individual, of the epochal over the momentary, has a clear impact on the interpretive practices, particularly as applied to the explication of works of art. One of the most unsettling and critically significant outcomes of the neo-Marxist theory is the concept of “literary production,” first articulated by Pierre Macherey in *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire*. He argues that the text’s meaning is a social property, not a private possession owned by a single writer-creator. The concept of production, as opposed to creation, posits that far from creating his works *ex nihilo*, the writer produces his texts from an already-charged material, the discourses with their own “specific weight, a peculiar power, which means that even when they are used and blended into a totality they retain a certain autonomy; and may, in some cases, resume their peculiar life” (42).

This approach erodes the prerogative of the author’s intended meaning, provided it was clear to the author himself, and replaces it with the notion of the text’s historical meaning, which inevitably becomes manifest regardless of the author’s intention. Because popular artistic productions are constructed from the material steeped in the contemporary ideology, the devices of seeming cohesion, logic, and realism of the text function to smooth over a discomfiting truth: the work’s collusion with the status quo.

Drawing on Sigmund Freud’s and anticipating Jacques Lacan’s theories of the unconscious, Macherey argues, with compelling illustrations from the works of Tolstoy, Balzac, and Verne, for the existence of an unconscious possessed by the texts themselves:

[T]he unconscious which is history, [...] this is why it is possible to trace the path which leads from the haunted work to that which haunts

it... [it's] a question of revealing in the very gestures of expression that which haunts it. (94)

From the Marxist critic's perspective, the nineteenth-century novel is a battlefield of colliding forces. On the one hand, the author displays his mastery of the genre by dramatizing a life-like subject through a cohesive, logical, and seemingly naturally unfolding narrative, whose purpose is to recreate reality in its totality. The anthologized masters of the genre (Balzac, Flaubert, Turgenev, and Tolstoy, among others) have been lauded for their all-embracing, omniscient vision and voice, depicting a multi-faceted and richly variegated world. These masterpieces are praised for their harmonious structures, where every element contributes to the overall grandeur of the architecture. On the other hand, the very intent to harmonize the disparate material into a coherent structure is itself an idealistic and ideological gesture. The purpose of this gesture is to subdue and seemingly resolve the fundamental socio-economic conflicts, which abound at large and are therefore present in the texture of the narrative.

The sensation of unity and coherence of the novel holds as long as readers share in its ideological assumptions, regarding them as natural. For instance, they accept Russia's class and gender relations of 1870s as normal. In retrospective (and this may be Macherey's central point) the ideological factor inevitably becomes visible through the unintended breaks, gaps, and blind spots of the story, revealing the defining conflicts of the epoch. The work's shadow, the history embodied in its production, the unconscious that haunts it, has been there all along, but the reader's ability to see it depends on his own degree of complicity with the dominant ideology of the epoch during which the text was produced.

From the beginning of his work on the novel, Tolstoy was aware of the problems in *Anna Karenina's* architecture. He feared, probably correctly, that he could not achieve the ideal of a

harmonious cohesion of the novel's numerous disparate elements. After his famously defiant defense of *War and Peace* as "not a novel," Tolstoy was intent on producing an exemplary specimen of the novel. There is sufficient evidence indicating that Tolstoy's idea for the new book, and the process of its realization in the form that he chose, was convoluted and ultimately unsatisfying to the author.

There is much evidence of Tolstoy's anxiety over the issue of the novel's cohesion: the journal entry from Sofia Andreyevna quoted above, Tolstoy's correspondence with Nikolai Strakhov,⁴ and the author's well-known response to Sergei Rachinski's critique of the lack of cohesion (letter of January 1878, PSS 62: 377), to name a few. He is careful to highlight already in May 1873 that he is writing a novel, "precisely a novel, the first in my life" (PSS 62: 25).

In his response to Rachinsky about the lack of architecture in *Anna Karenina*, specifically a deficient connection between Anna and Levin's stories, Tolstoy appeals to a mysterious unity that transcends the ordinary connections made through the plot development and associations of the characters (Turner 45). In fact, the author rehearses the same point he had expressed two years earlier in his letter to Strakhov, "[T]he connection itself is not formed by the idea (I think) and there is no way to express the basis of this connection immediately by words" (Turner 42). In relegating the notion of narrative unity into the realm of the ineffable, Tolstoy precludes any further attempts to articulate where exactly that connection is to be found. The paradox of the writer's insistence on the inherent inadequacy of words once again brings up the question of the novel's genre. It seems to stubbornly resist the conventions of the very thing it was clearly meant to be, a family novel.

Lenses: Political, social, historical

Fredric Jameson's interpretive approach, built on Macherey's concepts of the text's unconscious and

the literary production, provides an opening into the unconscious of *Anna Karenina*. Both the title of Jameson's book, *The Political Unconscious*, as well as his introductory chapter *On Interpretation: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, position his interpretive lens within the broader Marxist interpretive approach outlined above. Jameson formulates a three-step interpretive method: Start with a specific example from the text. Examine the textual connections with the underlying reality of the socio-economic forces. Elucidate the panoramic perspective of the work's location within the broader historical context. The three steps are the three concentric lenses, each of which provides an increasingly broader perspective into the text and its connection to the real: from the narrowest and most subjective, "the political"; to the broader and more objective, "the social"; and finally to the most comprehensive and real, "the historical." "The political" is expressed through a symbolic act, "whereby real social contradictions, insurmountable in their own terms, find purely formal resolution in the aesthetic realm" (79).

In the second interpretive mode, the analysis of "the social," a critic is no longer bound by the author's intentions, but should apprehend any individual text as a particular utterance within a vast realm of the antagonistic class discourses operative in the society at large. If at the first, "political level," the analyst's task is to comment on the specifics in which an author effects symbolic resolutions, the objective of the second framework is to seek out and restore the opposing voices, those "stifled and reduced to silence" by the "voice of a hegemonic class" (85). The widest interpretive lens, which Jameson also refers to as "the historical phase," is trained on the analysis of "*the cultural revolution*," the seismic shift in the social, "that moment in which the coexistence of various modes of production becomes visibly antagonistic, their contradictions moving to the very center of political, social, and historical life" (95).

Applying the narrowest lens of the political, and its concomitant attempt at symbolic resolution in *Anna Karenina*, Jameson's example from anthropology is pertinent for the present analysis: The Caduveo Indians' facial decorations reproduce, and in this way symbolically resolve, the social contradictions caused in this tribe by a rigidly vertical hierarchy (78–79). In a similar fashion, to achieve a symbolic resolution of the injustices created by the class antagonism in contemporary Russia, Tolstoy inscribes onto Levin a combination of those features, which ordinarily serve to distinguish one class identity from another. Like his creator, Levin, a nobleman, attempts to resolve the class conflict by appropriating elements of appearance and behavior from his peasants.⁵ He dresses in peasant-like attire and assumes a peasant-like appearance: a sheepskin coat and a hat, a bushy beard, uncouth fingernails. This appearance causes others to misidentify him as a member of a lower class: Oblonsky's doorman doesn't allow Levin into Stiva's office (pt. 1, ch. 5); later, at Oblonsky's dinner party (pt. 4, ch. 9), Levin cheerfully recounts to Kitty how a train attendant barred him from entering a first class compartment that happened to be occupied by Alexei Karenin. Levin succeeded in persuading the attendant to let him in by addressing Karenin in fancy, likely French, idiom, which helped verify Levin's true class identity. The novel ends with Levin's seeming success in assimilating into the peasant's truth, which he joyously discovers in the worker Fyodor's words about man's calling in living for one's soul and remembering God (pt. 8, ch. 11). Yet, Levin's apparent triumph is diminished by Kitty's failure to detect the meaning of her husband's elation. The concluding scene leaves the protagonist alone in the dark of night, resigned to continue his quest in isolation.

In addition to Levin, Anna, and Vronsky, the hybrid specter of the muzhik makes himself present in Levin's pathetic brother Nikolai. A ruined man and a communist sympathizer, his

function vis-à-vis Levin is similar to that of Anna's nightmare: Nikolai repeatedly intrudes into his younger brother's life with the dual message of an impending death and condemnation of Levin's idealistic aspirations. Nikolai, anticipating Tolstoy's *Confession*, assaults Levin's world view as merely self-indulgent: "You simply want to be original, as you have all your life, to show that you don't simply exploit the muzhiks but do it with an idea" (351). Nikolai's representation of the peasants' situation is unabashedly Marxist:

"Capital oppresses the workers—the workers in our country, the muzhiks, bear all the burden of labor, and their position is such that, however much they work, they can never get out of their brutish situation. [...] And society has developed so that the more they work, the more gain there will be for the merchants and landowners, and they will always remain working brutes. And this order must be changed." (88)

In fact, Nikolai has gone even further than his younger brother in integrating himself into the world of the oppressed. When Konstantin finds his lost brother in Moscow, Nikolai is living with a former prostitute and plans to help the oppressed by organizing a "metal-working association." The required supply of the "iron bars" are already stored in a corner of his dingy flat (88). Like Anna's muzhik, whom Anna sees as "working over some iron" (768) Nikolai too portends death, as well as the beginning of new life. His passing away coincides with the news of Kitty's pregnancy.

Muzhik and iron: The retribution of the social

The peasant of Anna's nightmare projects retribution on the immediate level of the storyline: His words and recurrent proximity to the railroad link him to the worker killed by the train that brought Anna to Moscow at the beginning of the novel (Альтман 110–111). Anna's thoughts of suicide are aroused by her memory of that

nameless worker: "And suddenly, remembering the man who was run over the day she first met Vronsky, she realized what she must do" (768). The muzhik's words in the nightmare, "Il faut le battre le fer; le broyer; le pètrir..." (one should strike the iron, pound it, knead it) (*PSS* 19: 446) echo not only the saying "strike the iron while it's hot" ("Il faut battre le fer pendant qu'il est chaud"; "куй железо пока горячо")—with its allusion to sex—but, more important for this analysis, these words link the theme of vengeance with the motif of iron and, more broadly, its significance in the rise of modernism. Metallurgy was centrally important for both the construction of railroads and the mass production of the firearms.⁶

It is the social dimension of metallurgy, and specifically the railroad, representing the "the much broader concept of the social aspect of human existence" (Jahn 4), that provokes the particular terror in Anna's recurrent nightmare. This terror stemmed from the fact that the peasant "paid no attention to her." (The novel goes so far as to make this explicit, adding the parenthetical remark "here lay its terror" (752)). This detail underscores the blind, social nature of the peasant's threat. Whatever punishment the muzhik devised for Anna, it is not personal *per se*. The non-individual dimension is also evident in that Vronsky also sees the French-speaking muzhik. The threat is akin to the inexorable, impersonal forces, such as moving trains, natural disasters, and social upheavals.

The retribution represented by the peasant dream acquires added significance if we look at it through Jameson's social prism. With the focus on the social matrix underlying a particular text, it is possible to recover the signs, the voices, that are repressed by the dominant narrative of the hegemonic class. Reading through the social lens, Jameson suggests, is akin to rewriting the original story in terms of the polemic and subversive strategies that are immanent in its text.

Russia's defining historical event preceding and shaping the text of *Anna Karenina* is the Peasant Reform—the liberation of the serfs in 1861 and the ensuing start of Russia's transition into an industrial economy: the appearance of heavy machinery, expansion of railroads, and growing population of industrial workers. Peasants were resentful and disappointed at the terms of the emancipation; they had to repay, in the course of forty-nine years, their former landowners the money for the land that they had always worked on and assumed would be granted to them free. The problem of peasant resentment explains Levin's obsession with the agricultural issues that he examines in his own book. Both Levin and his creator are acutely conscious that the prevailing mood among the peasants is that of mistrust of the landowner. Levin knows that the difficulty "lay in the peasants' invincible mistrust of any other purpose on the landowner's part than the desire to fleece them as much as possible. They were firmly convinced that his true goal, whatever he might tell them, would always lie in what he did not tell them" (340).

The voices of the resentful peasants can be partially recovered through Nikolai Nekrasov's widely anthologized poem "The Railroad" ("Железная дорога"). Given that the poem was published in 1864, we can assume that Tolstoy was well familiar with that text. As several scholars (Knapp 32) have already noted, "The Railroad" makes a significant presence in Tolstoy's depictions of the train scenes in general. Nekrasov's narrator evokes the voices of the multitude of nameless peasants who perished in constructing the railroad. The poem's humanitarian climax is delivered in the scene of re-animation of the dead workers who suddenly appear to a rich boy Van'ka, who sees the men running along the train, demanding recognition for their work:

"Everywhere, too, Russian bones lie beside them,

Vanka, how many, my dear, canst thou say?

Listen! What awe-striking sounds are arising?
Gnashing of teeth, and tumultuous tread
Shadows are filling the frost-bedimmed
windows,
What can they be? Look, a crowd of the dead!"
[...] "We, in the heat, in the frost, strained our
sinews,
Toiled with our shoulders eternally bent,
Lived in mud-hovels, were sodden and frozen,
Fought with starvation, with scurvy were
spent." (189–190)

Nekrasov's poem is important not only in that it recovers the voices of the workers but also because it provides an example of the naïve consciousness being confronted—for the first time—with the threat posed by the oppressed. The dead railroad workers who harass the rich boy on Nekrasov's train, and Tolstoy's French-speaking and iron-wielding muzhik who stalks Anna on or near the trains—these menacing images converge in their evocation of a retribution brought from the oppressed onto the naïve consciousness heretofore oblivious to class antagonism.

Moving on to the historical, the final and the widest lens in the Jameson's interpretative scheme, with its focus on the seismic-like shifts in the modes of production and social structure, we note that the publication of *Anna Karenina* coincides with the fundamental genre shift in the Russian literature: The transition from the novel to the short story, and the accompanying shift of focus from the lives of the wealthy, if unhappy, noblemen, to the more mundane and cruder concerns of the heroes in the shorter narratives by Chekhov, Garshin, Kuprin, Gorky, and others.

This historical perspective is captured by Lenin in his well-known article written on the occasion of Tolstoy's eightieth anniversary, *Lev Tolstoy as the Mirror of the Russian Revolution*. Without using the term "unconscious," Lenin's thrust is remarkably similar to Jameson's central concept: As a writer of genius, Tolstoy could not but express truthfully the defining features of the changing

society. Tolstoy's dramatization of the historical shift to the post-emancipation, increasingly industrialized society occurs in spite of his intentions to effect a symbolic resolution to the class antagonism. Lenin points out that the overall arch of Tolstoy's oeuvre and career traces the same trajectory as that of the peasants as a class: From the acceptance and celebration of the class privilege of the landowners in his early works and famous novels, to the persistent and devastating assault of the traditional pillars of the Russian state: the monarchy, the aristocracy, the church, and the unjust economic structure:

Tolstoy is great as the spokesman of the ideas and sentiments that emerged among the millions of Russian peasants at the time the bourgeois revolution was approaching in Russia. [...] Centuries of feudal oppression and decades of accelerated post-Reform pauperization piled up mountains of hate, resentment, and desperate determination [...] to sweep away completely the official church, the landlords and the landlord government, to destroy all the old forms and ways of landownership. (15: 202–209)

Anna Karenina's story begins and ends with the figure of the peasant. Though the heroine senses that the death of the railroad worker at her arrival to Moscow is a bad omen, she can not comprehend its full significance. The figure of the peasant does not just haunt Anna; in his demand for vengeance, the muzhik reconfigures, "beats, kneads, and bends" the text of the novel itself. Tolstoy's next work, *The Confession*, can be read as a vengeance brought on his own previous mode of production. He denounces his previous vain pursuits in favor of the faith upheld by the peasants. Like Anna, Tolstoy too is haunted by the peasant even until the last hours on his deathbed by the railroad, at the Ostapovo train station.

Looking like a peasant, he enjoined his daughter to remember that "there is an infinity of

people in the world other than Lev Tolstoy and you are only looking at this one Lev" (Гыцев 80).

Notes

All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

1. All English-language quotations from *Anna Karenina* are cited from the Pevear and Volokhonsky translation.
2. The words of "L'Internationale" were written by Eugène Pottier in June of 1871 to commemorate and celebrate the Paris Commune. The original text and the Russian and English translations can be found at "The Internationale" on Wikipedia. I thank my colleague Andrea Righi for pointing out the coincidence between the muzhik's words and the lyrics of "L'Internationale."
3. "To bend" is one of the connotations of pétrir. I thank Michael Denner for pointing this out.
4. "[Y]our assessment of the novel is accurate but not entirely, i. e., everything [you said] is correct, but what you have articulated does not express everything that I wanted to say" (Letter to Strakhov, April 23–26, 1876) (PSS 62: 268). Translation is mine.
5. In his diary entry for August 11, 1860, Tolstoy records a dream where he sees himself "dressed as a peasant," but his mother does not recognize him (PSS 48: 28).
6. The connection between the motifs of the railroad and iron are clear in both French and Russian: "le fer" and "железо" are part of the French and the Russian chemin de fer, and железная дорога.

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