

ANNA INCOMMUNICADA: LANGUAGE AND CONSCIOUSNESS IN *ANNA KARENINA*

JUSTIN WEIR, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

"How they looked at me, as at something dreadful, incomprehensible, and strange! . . . What can he be telling that other man so warmly?" [Anna] thought, glancing at two pedestrians. "*How is it possible to tell another what one feels?*"

Anna Karenina, (9: 355; pt. 7, ch. 29).¹

Few readers of Tolstoy will fail to recognize the tragic and angry meditation here as characteristic of Anna's final hours. Everything seems "dreadful" and "incomprehensible" to her as she loses herself in feelings of loneliness and estrangement. Anna's thoughts reveal her isolation from the rest of the world and lead her to believe that "to tell another what one feels" and to foster genuine communication would be a sort of miracle. Her loneliness is tragic because we, along with Anna, recognize in her stream of thought the impossibility of her situation, the lack of what to her is a miracle but to us is the most ordinary thing in the world.

It was Chernyshevsky who, in an early review, coined the term "inner monologue" for Tolstoy's technique of describing "the secret process through the mediation of which a thought or a feeling is worked out . . ." (3: 427). Anna's final impressions represent a step beyond the psychological perspicuity of the "inner monologue," and the rendering of her thoughts in this scene is justly recognized as something approximating the "stream of consciousness" technique employed by later writers such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. It is no wonder that Tolstoy's writings are considered "the high point of nineteenth-century analytical, explanatory psychologism" (Ginzburg 221).

Anna's stream of consciousness translates her outer silence—an inability to communicate—into the inner noise of her solipsistic detachment. This ambiguous relationship between consciousness and communication suggests that, as Anna loses control over the determination of meaning in external forms of discourse, she also becomes incapable of using language as an internal vehicle of rational thought and self-understanding; she is unable to repair her irreparably-fractured identity.

The general relationship of language to consciousness has, of course, occupied much of twentieth-century thought, and it is now common to postulate a connection between personal identity and language.² To give a rather crude version of this connection: if language is the "vehicle" of thought, then consciousness is fundamentally social (for language is by definition social); and if the unity of consciousness is what we mean by personal identity, then personal identity may be viewed as the constitution of an agent in language, as the carving out of a "private" space within this world of essentially public discourse. Linguistic models suggesting a dynamic relationship between self and other have inspired a great deal of contemporary criticism, in no small part because they help identify the possible roles of social and political discourse in the construction of identity.

Tolstoy's novel seems a precursor to some twentieth-century thought and much "modernist" fiction in that he recognizes that consciousness is shot through with myriad linguistic forms. But Tolstoy is never willing to leave the integrity of personal identity to the unwieldy nature of ordinary, communicative language. This mistrust of language, which may in part explain his penchant for stating "absolute" truths in his fiction, is the result of Tolstoy's heightened awareness that thought relies on no one language but on multiple "languages," some of which are more trustworthy and more likely to lead to "authentic" ways of thinking than others.³ The inherent variability in a language's capacity for authentic thought opens a door on relativism in Tolstoy's fictional world. In short, some kinds of language lend themselves more readily to the constitution of a moral self than do others.

The ethical implications of language in the constitution of self are visible throughout *Anna Karenina* but may be seen clearly in three examples—paradox, what I call "translation," and prayer. Consider Stiva's paradox, "it's all my own fault—my own fault and yet I'm not to blame" (8: 8; pt. 1, ch. 1). As one element of paradox cancels out the other, so, too, does the proclamation of innocence undermine Stiva's claim of responsibility. Like paradox, Stiva's speech habits (and his thinking) sometimes have no depth, carry no meaning beyond the event of their utterance. This is particularly true of Stiva at the beginning of the novel, where he "wakes" to a life of forgetfulness. Like other characters, however, Stiva assumes the admirable role later on in the novel of "desymbolizing" Anna's language; he, in effect, begins to translate, or communicate, for her.

Stiva's reaction to one of Anna's suicide threats (pt. 3, ch. 21) characterizes this flexible and ethically more "positive" relationship to language.⁴ On this occasion, Anna calls herself an "overstrained string that must snap," and warrants that "it will end horribly" (8: 468; pt. 3, ch. 21). Stiva's response to this threat is threefold. First, he answers her in her own language: "we must let the string be loosened, little by little" (8: 468; pt. 3, ch. 21). Next, he "translates" her crisis into a socially acceptable idiom: "I'll begin from the beginning. You married a man twenty years older than yourself. You married him without love and not knowing what love was. It was a mistake, let's say" (8: 468; pt. 3, ch. 21). Finally, by using the word "mistake," Stiva bridges the communicative gap that is widening between Anna and others. The concept of error is acceptable to both sides; everybody makes mistakes. Anna need not take full responsibility for her actions, and society need not interpret her behavior as a total break with convention. Stiva confirms his new role as translator and intermediary by offering to procure for Anna a divorce from Karenin.

More than any other form of language in the novel, prayer is especially valuable in the constitution of an ethical self, and here I will rely more or less on Richard Gustafson's analysis.⁵ He sees prayer in Tolstoy's oeuvre as a form of "recollective consciousness." Prayer "assesses." "It glances backward and forward . . . Whether [this] prayer of assessment takes the form of reaffirmation or supplication, however, it has the function of recollection of identity and clarification of vocation" (Gustafson 328-329). As an assessment of human reality in the context of the Divine (Gustafson

331), prayer supersedes ordinary, communicative language in the constitution of self; it is an ideal language for Tolstoy.

Prayer and self-assessment intersect frequently in Tolstoy's fiction. Two of the most famous examples may be found in *War and Peace*: when Princess Marya prays before the icon in her room, and when Natasha begins to pray fervently in church. In *Anna Karenina*, prayer is most often associated with Lyovin, who, for example, breaks into prayer while Kitty is giving birth. Though he has often proclaimed himself an unbeliever, Lyovin is transported in this scene by his sudden devoutness, and only later does he realize that this relapse into prayer crystallized his understanding of his role and responsibilities. In less obvious ways, the language of prayer also touches Anna's life.

The story of Anna's loss of identity (initiated primarily by the consummation of her affair with Vronsky⁶) and of her death is framed on both sides by prayer, which, here as elsewhere, rests atop the hierarchy of languages for Tolstoy and serves as an ideal form for all other languages of self-understanding. In the post-coital scene we get a "false" prayer. Anna feels "so guilty, so much to blame, that it only remained for her to humble herself and ask to be forgiven; but she had no one in the world now except him, so that even her prayer of forgiveness was addressed to him" (8: 167; pt. 2, ch. 11). Aside from the blasphemy implied here, Anna's identity, her determination of self, takes place from this point forward in the novel within the relativistic world, in Tolstoy's view, of secular languages.⁷ Unlike prayer, these languages function primarily as a means of communication and therefore make the constitution of a self within them dependent on social, and therefore potentially suspect, "forms of life."⁸ Meaning for the self in such a world is temporary and mutable.

The second instance of prayer, and this time it is genuine prayer, occurs when Anna crosses herself out of habit and then jumps underneath the train. This prayer reverses the consequences of the first and restores to Anna her lost sense of self: "The familiar gesture of making the sign of the cross called up a whole series of girlish and childish memories, and suddenly the darkness, that obscured everything for her, broke, and life showed itself to her for an instant with all its bright past joys" (9: 364; pt. 7, ch. 31). Prayer in this last instance—making the sign of the cross—evokes in Anna a series of memories that are clearly central to her momentary recovery of self; for memory functions as one of the cornerstones of personal identity, uniting the often-interrupted flow of consciousness. For Tolstoy (to refer again to Gustafson) prayer assesses, glances backward and forward, and unites the self in a context of the divine.

Thus prayer is connected with memory; and memory provides the primary meeting ground for consciousness and truth in the novel, as, for example, when Lyovin cuts short his tirade against Stiva because he has remembered his own past transgressions (however minor they may have been) (8: 52; pt. 1, ch. 11). Here Stiva accuses him of being "too much of a piece," which accusation goes to show that, for Lyovin, an authentic self is bound inextricably with honesty. This over-anxious desire for consistency is one of Lyovin's "positive" faults. The problem is that his attempts to assess his life as a whole usually take place within the conceptual limits of an

abstract language, like philosophy, whose timeless, logical nature contradicts the time-bound particularity of Lyovin's honesty. On this occasion he is holding forth on Plato's "Symposium."⁹

Like the language of philosophy, several languages in *Anna Karenina* seem to preclude the activity of memory; they take place within an impersonal time of abstract discourse. Consider again the language of paradox associated with Stiva early in the novel. Paradox frequently arrests the ability of language to transport the agent through time and to facilitate the kind of memory of self that is central to personal identity. The temporal movement of paradox is circular; it continually cuts back on itself, as is evident in any of the versions of the liar's paradox: This statement is false. The paradox of Stiva's "honesty"—"he was an honest man with himself" (8: 9, pt. 1, ch. 2)—thus both explains and condemns his forgetfulness, which makes it seem to him that he is honest and also makes genuine honesty on this occasion impossible.

In such a fashion paradox nullifies the responsibility inherent in human agency—since paradox says nothing that is not immediately reversible, it is also responsible for nothing. Hence, the famous instances of "non-agency" in the novel are connected with Stiva: his opinions "imperceptibly changed of themselves" (*oni sami v ném nezametno izmenialis*) (8: 13; pt. 1, ch. 3), and he is especially fond of his valet Matthew's phrase that "things will shape themselves" (*obrazuetsia*) (8: 12; pt. 1, ch. 2). By contrast, when Stiva intercedes for Anna with Karenin—that is, when he becomes an "agent" in both the linguistic and ordinary senses of the word—he suddenly feels the weight of responsibility upon him:

The feeling [embarrassment] was so unexpected and so strange that he did not believe it was the voice of conscience telling him that what he was about to do was wrong (8: 470; pt. 4, ch. 22).

The Russian word in this passage for "embarrassment" (*smushchenie*) is frequently used in the novel to describe Lyovin's awkwardness in society. Because (excessive) ease in society, though enviable, often suggests falsity in *Anna Karenina*, Stiva benefits from this descriptive association with Lyovin. It is an indication that he is remembering, rather than forgetting, himself, when he approaches Karenin about the divorce.

Anna differs from Stiva in that she consistently searches for a language of self that will, first, serve as a bulwark against society's attempts to define her and, second, provide her ever more vacuous life with some sort of meaning, however fleeting. Meaning is the important term here, because, having lost the absolute understanding of God as interlocutor in prayer, Anna ends up relying upon the "other" of the communicative act to help her determine her own identity. When viewed from this perspective, Anna's progression towards insanity can be charted by her progressive loss of languages of communication: verbal, nonverbal, written, and symbolic.

It is worth noting that Tolstoy did not believe that genuine communication through language is *a priori* impossible, as did some Romantics (à la Tyutchev: "the spoken thought is a lie") and as do some twentieth-century theorists when pondering the structural "prison-house" of

language. On the contrary, *Anna Karenina* contains moments of almost unimaginable communication, as in the letter game between Kitty and Lyovin, and it values these moments as an attainable ideal. Thus Anna's position in the linguistic world of Tolstoy's fiction seems much more likely the exception than the rule; her relationship to language presents a "modernist" motif disturbing the more or less "realist" conventions of the novel. I will return to the topic of a modernist Tolstoy at the end of this paper.

Several passages suggest that Anna gradually loses the ability to communicate verbally (especially to people other than Vronsky). This is clear in the scene which follows the physical consummation of her affair:

She felt that at that moment she could not express in words her feeling of shame, joy, and horror at this entrance on a new life, and she did not wish to vulgarize that feeling with inaccurate words. Later on, the next day and the next, she not only could not find words with which she would be able to express all the complexity of those feelings, but could not even find thoughts with which she would be able to reflect on all that was in her soul (8: 168; pt. 2, ch. 11).

Of initial importance is the fact that these lines are immediately preceded by the "prayer of forgiveness" I cited earlier. The succession of the two passages confirms that here is the beginning of Anna's "loss" of language, here is where the journey to outer silence and inner noise commences. It is also significant that these dramatic feelings of "shame, joy, and horror," which Anna cannot verbalize, should then come out in her dreams. Not only does she have no control over her feelings here, but they are also trapped in the private forum of her mind: they never surface in communication and therefore have no context within which she might determine their meaning. Dreams become part of a symbolic language that Anna relies on heavily later in the novel.

When Anna does verbalize "all that is in her soul" to Karenin after the race in which Vronsky has been injured, she encounters something infinitely worse than her husband's obstinacy—her words, in effect, disappear:

She had that morning repented of what she had said to her husband and wished only that those words could be unsaid. And now this letter acknowledged them unsaid and was giving her what she wished. But now the letter appeared more terrible than anything she could have imagined (8: 322; pt. 3, ch. 16).

Why does the letter appear more terrible now? By refusing to acknowledge what Anna has told him, Karenin denies his role as interlocutor and therefore also the "definiteness" (*opredelennost'*) which Anna almost achieved in this communicative act. The word *opredelennost'*, which echoes throughout the novel in Anna's consciousness, has the connotation of "meaning" and derives from the word for "limit" or "boundary" (*predel*). Anna

is quick to point out how much this "definiteness" (or "definedness") depends not only on herself but on others as well.

She reacts by saying that it would have been better if Karenin had killed her, thereby unwittingly recalling the murder imagery of the post-coital scene with Vronsky. And by carefully dissecting her language in his letter, Karenin does manage to kill Anna, the old Anna. But what is important to recognize is that Anna's linguistic failure represents her inability to construct a new identity that would provide her life with meaning.

Anna responds to her failure to communicate verbally by relying increasingly upon different forms of communication (written, nonverbal and symbolic): the fact that Karenin has, in a letter, easily disposed of her words is not lost on her. Within hours she successfully smuggles a note to Vronsky in Betsy's letter. Both Anna and Vronsky are more comfortable when they can transmit important messages indirectly, as when Stiva first asks Karenin to grant Anna the divorce, and Vronsky implores Dolly to convince Anna to write to Karenin. The more Anna relies on others to communicate for her, however, the more she relinquishes her control over the way in which various linguistic acts define her and her position. Think, for example, of the carelessness with which Stiva asks Karenin a second time late in the novel to grant her a divorce.

Anna's adventures with the written word are comic and tragic and mostly unsuccessful. The list of letters and notes that Anna writes and that fail to achieve their desired results is long: her note to Vronsky telling him to visit her at home while Karenin is at Council leads to an unexpected meeting between the two Alexeis; her letter to Lydia Ivanovna requesting permission to see Serezha receives first no answer and then an insulting refusal; her contradictory and misleading letter to Vronsky when he is attending the elections engenders his mistrust and he grows cooler towards her; when she finally writes to Karenin about a divorce, she receives no answer; and her final note and telegram to Vronsky are tragically mistimed. Perhaps the only thing she writes successfully is her unfinished children's book, the most openly aesthetic form of written communication she attempts.

The more aesthetic the form, the more expertly Anna uses it. That is why the method of nonverbal communication she cultivates in her new life with Vronsky is at first so effective, for the nonverbal unites the aesthetic perfection of Anna's beauty and social grace with the semantic capabilities of a language. She makes similar use of her portraits, as when she "bewitches" Lyovin, to use Kitty's word (9: 293; pt. 7, ch. 11), late in the novel.¹⁰ Nonetheless the language of looks and gestures has only a limited potential for the communication of important ideas, and still less is it able to express that crucial "complexity of feelings" in Anna's soul, which most requires language's power of clarity and definition. The nature of this nonverbal communication and its relationship to an aesthetics of imitation shape the thematic content of the first chapters on Anna and Vronsky's life in Italy.

When Vronsky meets an old school mate, Golenischchev, and wants to introduce him to Anna, the significant looks the three of them exchange act as an unspoken means of identifying the way each understands Anna and Vronsky's position. The expression on Golenishchev's face tells

Vronsky that the former has an "appropriate understanding" of Vronsky's relationship with Anna. The wording of this phrase in Russian, *kakoe dolzhno ponimanie*, blends together a sense of both decorum and responsibility. Tolstoy quickly gives the lie to this understanding: "But if [Vronsky], and those who understood 'appropriately,' had been asked what this understanding amounted to, both he and they would have had great difficulty [responding]" (9: 32; pt. 5, ch. 7). The question here, particularly as it relates to Anna, is whether gesture, manner and look are capable of communicating, and therefore creating, genuine understanding, or whether these nonverbal means merely conceal a lack of understanding.

Only the veil of genuine communication is evident when Golenishchev, responding to Anna's facial expression and manner, believes he "understands her completely."

It seemed to him that he understood that which she herself did not understand: namely how, having caused her husband's unhappiness, having abandoned him and her son and lost her good name, she was able to feel energetically cheerful and happy (9: 33; pt. 5, ch. 7).

Inasmuch as Anna does not understand her new life and position she is bound to rely more heavily on superficial modes of communication. She, Vronsky, and whoever happens to be with them, often appear to be playing roles.

This superficial "understanding," which is based on nonverbal communication, reappears thematically in the next chapter, where we are told about Vronsky's "understanding" of painting, i.e. his aesthetics of imitating art. Having grown bored with his new life, and unable to tell Anna this, Vronsky transfers his "desire for desires" onto painting. "He had a talent for understanding art and for imitating it with accuracy and good taste, and he imagined that he possessed the real power an artist needs" (9: 37; pt. 5, ch. 8). When he paints Anna, we might say that here, too, Vronsky is imitating art; for in many respects Anna herself becomes art in the novel.

Like Vronsky, Anna transposes emotions she does not understand and cannot communicate onto an aesthetic realm. After her pathetic visit to Serezha, Anna returns home, but "for a long time could not understand why she was there" (9: 117; pt. 5, ch. 31). Unsatisfied with her feelings towards her daughter, she opens her locket with Serezha's portrait inside and pulls out of an album various pictures of him. When Vronsky walks in, first he turns to the pictures of Serezha, and then he turns to Anna. Whereas Anna has previously used Stiva as a verbal intermediary, and Betsy's letter as a written one, now she uses pictures of Serezha as a means of communicating her unhappiness to Vronsky. Anna's gestures towards Serezha's pictures are similar in function to the way she uses her own portraits to communicate.

Later that day when Anna attends the opera and the eyes of everyone are upon her as she stands at the front of her box, she herself resembles a picture in a frame (one of the reasons the title of Amy Mandelker's recent book, *Framing Anna Karenina*, is so apt). And although earlier in the day Vronsky did not understand the look on Anna's face, could not fathom why

she wanted to go to the opera, now as he sees the utterly tranquil look on her face he perfectly understands, or believes he understands, the humiliation she is feeling. The system of nonverbal signs Anna relies upon imitates communication, just as Vronsky's painting imitates art. Genuine communication, like the genuine art of Mikhailov's painting, is a process of revelation, "a removal of the coverings" from one's emotional self.

Soon, Anna's inability to define those feelings of "shame, joy, and horror" becomes less a problem of communication than an emotional and psychological imperative.¹¹ For Anna the act of articulating her emotions has been a necessity from the start, not in order that others understand her (as we have seen others already believe that they do), but in order that she understand herself and her "new life." This is why Dolly's visit to Vozdvizhenskoe at first seems so important to Anna: Vronsky's estate represents yet another new start, after the debacle at the opera in St. Petersburg, and Dolly's visit gives Anna the opportunity to discuss her "position."

When Dolly tells her that she has no view on Anna's position and that one should love people as they are, not as they might be,

Anna, turning her eyes away from her friend and screwing them up (this was a new habit of hers and unfamiliar to Dolly), grew thoughtful, trying thoroughly to understand fully the meaning of these words. And evidently having understood them in the sense she wished, she glanced at Dolly (9: 198-199; pt. 6, ch. 18).

This passage underscores an important development in the modes of communication I have been discussing. Ever since the scene at the opera house, Anna has begun to divert her eyes in important conversations. This action, along with her new habit of screwing up her eyes, suggest a growing inability to comprehend the nonverbal communication that previously smoothed over the lack of definition in her life. Not only does she not hear Dolly correctly, she does not *read* her correctly, and interprets the meaning of Dolly's words in her own private sense.

Anna has learned something that literary critics have known for a long time: it is easier and sometimes more useful to misinterpret than to read correctly. In fact, as if to make up for her growing inability to understand the language of gestures and looks, Anna has become a voracious reader of books. After she returns from her conversation with Dolly, one in which Vronsky has significantly asked *Dolly* to bring up the divorce, Anna misinterprets Vronsky's "questioning look" as a sign that he is feeling amorous. And though she may be losing her capability to interpret Vronsky's body language, Anna knows the right answers to his questions on agriculture and farming—she has been reading, "with the attention one gives only to what one reads in solitude," books and technical papers on subjects that interest him. What is important here is that Anna's successful participation in already crippled modes of communication has become occasional. Because understanding certain questions correctly means utter devastation, misinterpretation is less of an option for Anna and more of a necessity.

It is worth recalling how many times in their last months together, Anna misinterprets Vronsky's looks and facial expressions. Consider, for example, the argument that erupts after Anna and Vronsky receive the telegram in which Stiva expresses his doubts about the possibility of divorce. Vronsky says he is interested in news of the divorce because he likes definiteness.

"You want [the divorce] for the children, but you don't think of me," [Anna] pursued, quite forgetting or not hearing that he said: "for your own sake and for the children..."

"Oh, I said *for your sake!* Most of all for your sake," he repeated, his face contorted as with pain, "because I am convinced that a great deal of your irritability is due to our indefinite position."

"Yes, there it is! Now he has stopped pretending, and all his cold hatred for me is apparent," she thought, not listening to his words, but gazing with horror at the cold and cruel judge who looked out of his eyes provokingly (9: 341-342; pt. 7, ch. 25, my ellipses).

This passage highlights almost all of the themes addressed up to this point. To begin with, by sending the telegram, Stiva continues in his role as intermediary between Anna and Karenin. Anna is in another conversation about the "definition" of her situation. This time Anna, not Karenin, is the one who refuses to be the interlocutor, who refuses to acknowledge what the other is saying. Moreover, she mistakes the frustration in Vronsky's eyes for a sign that he hates her. Most important, the outer forms of Anna's discourse—verbal, nonverbal, written—which I have been associating with her failed attempts to create a new identity, are now replaced by a depiction of her stream of thought, which characterizes both her emotional isolation and fractured sense of self.

Because the nonverbal language Anna and Vronsky have grown accustomed to using is highly aesthetic, understanding is often described as the end result of multiple acts of "interpretation" rather than as the immediate comprehension of more transparent forms of communication that serve as an ideal in the novel. Anna could check with someone to see whether she is interpreting things correctly, had she anyone with whom to check. As it is, the only interpretive model she can consult—aside from the system of signs she has developed with Vronsky, which seems to mask genuine understanding—comes from Vronsky's gambler-friend Yashvin, who spouts a crude sort of social Darwinism: "he who sits down to play against me, wishes to leave me without a shirt, and I treat him the same! So we struggle, and therein lies the pleasure" (9: 343; pt. 7, ch. 25). It is in terms of this "struggle" that Anna uses her "bright light" to analyze her relationships with Dolly, Kitty and Vronsky.

The bitter irony of the final sequence of Anna's stream of consciousness is that, even as she is being driven to her death by the hateful discourse carried on in her mind, when we read and understand her most intimate thoughts, we engage in an implicit refutation of those very thoughts. We do understand her, and our understanding negates Anna's rhetorical question, "How is it possible to tell another what one feels?" and

fosters a sense of tragedy: that her death was avoidable. Thus the novel communicates what Anna herself cannot.

By reading *Anna Karenina* as an early example of the kind of modernist literature that complicates supposedly transparent connections between language and consciousness, one discovers new interpretive paths. In her recent insightful book examining the critique of visual representation (among other things) in *Anna Karenina*, Amy Mandelker also emphasizes this "modern" side of Tolstoy:

By creating a series of framed portraits of Anna—texts within texts—[Tolstoy] repeatedly arrests his narrative flow in order to frame his heroine and alert the reader to the existence of the frame of beauty, corporeality, and the marketplace of both, that confines her. Tolstoy thus conflates the aesthetic question and the woman question in a manner that places him among the Symbolists rather than the realists (84).

Whether Tolstoy was a Symbolist or not—though nobody wants to accuse anyone of being a realist anymore—he criticized received realist paradigms in ways that we have come to associate with modernism. Now, it seems to me, the question requiring further exploration is how Tolstoy the Realist fits in with Tolstoy the Modernist.

Allow me to speculate briefly on the relation of modernism to the disjunction of language and consciousness in Anna, for it is she, rather than Lyovin, who experiences the full force of Tolstoy's criticism of realist aesthetics. She is the embodiment of transgression against the conventional in the novel, and this fact by itself need not force us either to condemn or to celebrate her infidelity. Simply, when we speak of Tolstoy's "modernism" in *Anna Karenina*, we are speaking mostly, though not exclusively, about Anna. From my point of view, Anna's loss of language(s) reveals Tolstoy's growing fear that, with the disappearance of the sacred in human discourse, language is no longer capable of disclosing and conveying immutable truths about oneself and about the world.

As is well known, after his "conversion" Tolstoy became enormously preoccupied with the Gospels, so much so that he undertook *A Translation and Harmonization of the Four Gospels*.¹² In the long career preceding this turn to the sacred language of the Gospels (and after it) Tolstoy was equally fascinated with charting the boundaries of non-"absolute," secular languages in his great works of fiction. He continually inquired into the capacity of these languages to constitute a self that still remains grounded in moral truths. Anna is at the center of such an investigation into language; her tortuous passage through various communicative languages circumscribes the privileged forms of language in the novel that disclose the truth, facilitate a recollection of self, and yield complete understanding in communication.

The biblical epigraph, 'vengeance is mine; I will repay,' the instances of prayer placed like bookends on either side of Anna's "fall," and the unthinkably perfect communication that brings Lyovin and Kitty together and that stands in stark contrast to Vronsky and Anna's oblique "codes," all

suggest that Anna's identity is compromised by the languages she is forced to use and which prevent such things as disclosure of truth, recollection of self, and complete understanding. On the one hand, language becomes alien and *impersonal* for Anna: she cannot adapt it to her own psychological needs. On the other hand, the language of the "stream of consciousness" that best characterizes the content of her consciousness (for the reader) is highly *subjective*.

Anna's identity is fractured by this paradox between impersonal and highly subjective forms of language, and she thus serves as a focal point in the novel for what is often considered a central "modernist" paradigm: that the traditional relation between the subject and the outside world, constituted by language's capacity to represent the world logically and transparently, is no longer tenable.¹³ Lyovin does not pay the same price as Anna for this modernist dilemma. Although he carries on what might be called Tolstoy's romance with authoritative languages, he does not find ultimate, immutable truths in these languages: he can sustain neither prayer nor perfect communication with Kitty, the wisdom of individual philosophies and religions escapes him, and his book on agriculture remains unfinished. Yet Lyovin, unlike Anna, does not commit suicide—he realizes that he has been "living rightly" (*zhil khoroshо*) (9: 395; pt. 8, ch. 12), and this saves him.

"Living rightly," viewed within the linguistic context I have constructed, seems like an unsatisfactory answer to the questions we have been posing with Anna. Are the problems of language and consciousness to be solved by silent, virtuous action? Not at all. Anna cannot repair her fragmented identity through language, because in Tolstoy's fictive universe language itself is often fragmented and untrustworthy. But the concept of personal identity does not always rely exclusively on the unity of consciousness, whether this unity is conceived of linguistically or otherwise. That is why the modernist dilemma of the disjunction between language and consciousness is less important when we consider Lyovin. The self, in Lyovin's case, is treated differently, in a way that is in accord with realist rather than modernist paradigms.

Identity for Lyovin is found neither in the unity of subjective experience, consciousness, nor in the unity of the objective facts of his existence. Here, the "thread" that ties Lyovin's life together into a meaningful whole derives from the consistency or honesty with which he *lives* his life; past ways of living are comparable, and require comparison, with the present way life is lived.¹⁴ "Living rightly" thus only seems like an unsatisfactory answer to the questions we have been posing with Anna; in truth, it is a brilliant answer, but to a different question. Whereas Anna has no past, or at least we find out little about her past in the novel, Lyovin's life on his estate is imbued with the past, with familial tradition. Naturally, this past makes demands on him, but in doing so it also provides his life with a meaning that does not have to be won from the chaos of language; it need only be preserved and nurtured.

Because Anna is "tested" more rigorously than Lyovin is in the novel, one cannot help but conclude that in the end Tolstoy continues to privilege the novel's realist ideals. Sound relations between the subject and the outer

world, even when they are established outside the rationality of language and thought, remain an estimable goal. Lyovin's epiphany that meaning is a product of living life and not ratiocination leads him to accept, and (re)engage, reality. Later, in *A Confession*, Tolstoy will challenge the conciliatory, hopeful tone with which Lyovin ends the novel, but he never embraces Anna's anti-communicative aesthetics. In fact, *What is Art?* condemns art that, like Anna, fails to communicate emotion, that is unable to "infect."

WORKS CITED

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Discourse in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.
- Chernyshevskii, N. G. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. Vol. III. Moscow, 1947.
- Emerson, Caryl. "The Tolstoy Connection in Bakhtin." *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges*. Ed. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1989.
- Eysteinsson, Astradur. *The Concept of Modernism*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990.
- Ginzburg, Lydia. *On Psychological Prose*. Ed. and trans. Judson Rosengrant. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991.
- Gustafson, Richard F. *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger: A Study in Fiction and Theology*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986.
- Gutkin, Irina. "The Dichotomy Between Flesh and Spirit: Plato's *Symposium* in *Anna Karenina*." *In the Shade of the Giant: Essays on Tolstoy*. Ed. Hugh McLean. California Slavic Series, Vol. XIII. Berkeley: U of California P, 1989. 84-99.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Trans. Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987.
- Kristeva, Julia. "From One Identity to Another." *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. New York: Columbia UP, 1980.
- Mandelker, Amy. *Framing Anna Karenina: Tolstoy, the Woman Question, and the Victorian Novel*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1993.
- Morson, Gary Saul. "Prosaics and *Anna Karenina*." *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 1 (1988): 1-12.
- , "Tolstoy's Absolute Language." *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1981): 667-687.
- Pavel, Thomas. *The Feud of Language: A History of Structuralist Thought*. Cambridge: Basel Blackwell, 1989.
- Price, Martin. *Forms of Life: Character and Moral Imagination in the Novel*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1983.
- Rorty, Richard. Ed. and Intro. *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1967.
- Tolstoy, L. N. *Sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati dvukh tomakh*. Moscow, 1981. Vol. 8-9.
- , *Anna Karenina*. Trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude. Ed. George Gibian. New York: Norton, 1970.
- Toulmin, Stephen. "The Inwardness of Mental Life." *Critical Inquiry* 6 (1979): 1-14.
- Vygotsky, Lev. *Thought and Language*. Ed. and trans. Alex Kozulin. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986.
- Wachtel, Andrew. "Death and Resurrection in *Anna Karenina*." *In the Shade of the Giant: Essays on Tolstoy*. Ed. Hugh McLean. California Slavic Series, Vol. XIII. Berkeley: U of California P, 1989. 100-114.
- Wasiolek, Edward. *Tolstoy's Major Fiction*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978.
- Wollheim, Richard. *The Thread of Life*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984.

NOTES

¹ Page citations refer to L. N. Tolstoy, *Sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati dvukh tomakh*. English translations, occasionally emended by me, are taken from *Anna Karenina*, Trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude.

² For the linguistic philosophy movement, see Rorty, and for its relation to French Structuralism and Poststructuralism, see Pavel. Two recent influential critical statements concerning the self as an agent constituted through language may be found in Habermas and in Kristeva. The groundbreaking study of consciousness and language in Russian psychology was Lev Vygotsky's *Language and Thought*; but see also Bakhtin.

³ Cf. Morson, "Tolstoy's Absolute Language." The idea that Tolstoy reacts to, and engages, the varying influences that different forms of language may have on consciousness contradicts Mikhail Bakhtin's labeling of him as a "monologic" writer. See Emerson: "In Bakhtin's view, then, the status of authority has close parallels with the status of language . . . Bakhtin charges Tolstoy with ignoring, or naively presuming to transcend, the problematic status of language. For Tolstoy [according to Bakhtin], language is not a problem; it is merely a means" (158).

⁴ Special thanks to Caryl Emerson for reminding me specifically of this passage and for drawing my attention to many other aspects of Tolstoy's complex relationship to language in the novel.

⁵ I agree with a good deal of Gustafson's revisionist interpretation of Anna as responsible for her own demise. In this regard, see also, Morson, "Prosaics in *Anna Karenina*."

⁶ This is not to say, along with Edward Wasiolek, that "it is the love that is wrong, not Anna or Vronsky or Karenin or society. And what is wrong with the love, for Tolstoy, is that it is contaminated and corrupted by sexual passion, whereas Kitty's and Levin's love is not so contaminated" (152-3).

⁷ See Wachtel for an account of the allusions to paganism that appear in descriptions of Anna and Vronsky's behavior and conversations.

⁸ The phrase is Wittgenstein's. For a Wittgensteinian reading of *Anna Karenina*, see Price.

⁹ For a reading of the Platonic influences in *Anna Karenina*, see Gutkin.

¹⁰ Cf. Mandelker for Tolstoy's use of *ekphrasis* in *Anna Karenina*, and for a perceptive discussion of his critique of realist aesthetic paradigms.

¹¹ Stephen Toulmin writes: "If the public moral world proves fragile and untrustworthy, on the other hand, internalization may serve rather as a mechanism of defense. The inner life of the mind is then less a base for effective outside action than a refuge or asylum from the public world; and the problem of transcending solipsism in that case becomes, not just an intellectual problem, but also an emotional one" (12).

¹² It is worth noting, when considering the self and sacred language, that in 1880, three short years after the final instalment of *Anna Karenina* was published, Tolstoy was writing *A Confession*, *A Criticism of Dogmatic Theology*, and *A Translation and Harmonization of the Four Gospels*.

¹³ Cf. Eysteinsson, especially chapters one and five. Tolstoy was never comfortable with epistemologies that simplistically divide the world into knowing subject and known object. See the account of Tolstoy's critique of empiricism in chapter five of Gustafson.

¹⁴ My reading of Lyovin is influenced by the analysis of personal identity in Wollheim: "I have now returned twice to the question, What is it to lead the life of a person: once from the question, What is a person? once from the question, What is a person's life? . . . whether we start with the thing or the product, inquiry returns us to something intermediate between the two, or to the process, which takes place in the thing and results in the product" (my ellipses, 21).