

THE ESTATES OF POKROVSKOE AND VOZDVIZHENSКОЕ:
TOLSTOY'S LABYRINTH OF LINKINGS IN ANNA
KARENINA

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The Endless Labyrinth of Linkings

In a letter to Nikolai Strakhov about *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy wrote:

In everything, almost everything, that I have written, I was guided by the need to gather together interrelated thoughts in order to express myself; but every thought expressed separately by words loses its meaning and is terribly degraded by being taken out by itself from that linking in which it is found. The linking itself is brought about not by thought (I think), but by something else, and to express the basis of that linking immediately in words is in no way possible; it can only be done indirectly by describing with words, images, acts, situations...¹

Tolstoy goes on to suggest that, in order for his work to be understood, "we need people who would show the senselessness of seeking out separate ideas in a work of art and would continually guide readers in that endless labyrinth of linkages which the essence of art consists of, and to the laws which serve as basis for that linking."

The passage above, which provides us with what may well be Tolstoy's artistic credo, reveals some of the profound doubts about the nature of language and narrative that plagued Tolstoy from "A History of Yesterday" to the end of his career as a writer. At the same time, it gives Tolstoy's readers hints as to how his works ought to be read. Tolstoy's pronouncements suggest that his novels, taken to be "fluid pudding" or "large loose baggy monsters" with questionable *artistic* merit or meaning, in fact have a complex and elegantly-constructed "labyrinth of linkages" holding them together.² For this reason, looking at one part or "idea" of the novel in isolation proves to be an all but impossible task; the reader (a bit like the ploughshare Tolstoy refers to in the famous simile of Part 7) willy-nilly "cuts deeper and deeper" into the text, turning up more and more material.

Thus, for any section of the text, multitudes of linkages may be found. For example, the scene where Vronsky returns from Moscow to Petersburg to find his friend Petritsky and Petritsky's married mistress, Baroness Shilton, in his apartment, harks back to the opening scene of the novel which treats Oblonsky's adultery in Moscow (Part 1, Chapter 34). Chattering away in Parisian French about divorcing her husband and dividing the property, Baroness Shilton is overseeing the making of coffee in a new coffee pot. The fact that the coffee pot boils over so that coffee is wasted and a mess is

made, links this scene of to the opening of Part 1, where the cook in the Oblonsky household has left and one of the children is fed spoiled broth. Minor details such as the spilled coffee and spoiled broth, when linked together, convey Tolstoy's "idea" that adultery wrecks domestic disorder. There are further linkages: at Pokrovskoe, later in the novel (Part 6, Chapter 2), the Shcherbatsky women make their jam, without adding water (to the chagrin of Lyovin's servant Agafya). A comparison of the coffee-boiling and jam-boiling scenes suggests the moral that adulteresses are bad housekeepers who make messes and spill seeds, whereas faithful wives watch their jam pot closely, allowing none of the fruit to spill out. The fact that the adulterous Baroness wastes coffee is further linked to the prodigal behavior of the adulterous Oblonsky, who by selling off Dolly's woods to the entrepreneur Ryabinin, is wasting his children's patrimony much as, Tolstoy suggests in his labyrinth, he is wasting his seed in his adultery (Part 2, Chapters 16-17). But in summing up in words what these particular linkages mean—that adulterers waste (coffee beans, semen, money, etc.), whereas faithful husbands and wives preserve their fruit for their family—one runs the risk of "degrading" the ideas Tolstoy has expressed in his novel.

In what follows, I will look at how Tolstoy has elaborately linked the estates of Pokrovskoe and Vozdvizhenskoe.³ Having described two "honeymoons" in Part 5, in Part 6 Tolstoy depicts each of the couples "at home" on their respective estates. In these passages, Tolstoy appears to indict Vronsky and Anna's life at Vozdvizhenskoe and to present Lyovin and Kitty's life at Pokrovskoe as the best estate man and woman have been able to create since their expulsion from Eden. And yet, Tolstoy's comparison of these estates in Part 6 should not be isolated from the ending of the novel.

As emerges in Part 7 and 8—when Anna and Lyovin each choose between life and death—the residents of the estates of Pokrovskoe and Vozdvizhenskoe, for all the apparent differences in the lives they build, are bound together as co-prisoners in the labyrinth of linkages Tolstoy has created. In the face of mortality, the intricate linkage of the two estates begins to take on a very different significance and, in fact, provides a clue to Tolstoy's troubled attitude toward language and art. Tolstoy thus, I will suggest, uses the elaborate "labyrinth" linking Pokrovskoe and Vozdvizhenskoe to comment on some of the very hesitations he confessed to Strakhov about the possibility of thoughts being "expressed separately by words" without losing their meaning. In the linkings I will examine, Tolstoy comments on the very factors that, according to his letter to Strakhov, forced him as an artist to resort to indirect expression by means of an "endless labyrinth of linkages."

The Right Attitude to Horses

The two estates of Pokrovskoe and Vozdvizhenskoe are linked metonymically by characters who travel from one estate to the other. In the

following passage, three travelers returning to Pokrovskoe—Dolly, Lyovin's coachman, and his clerk—fall into a conversation comparing the two estates:

Выехав в поле, Дарья Александровна испытала приятное чувство облегчения, и ей хотелось спросить у людей, как им понравилось у Вронского, как вдруг кучер Филипп сам заговорил:

-- Богачи-то богачи, а овса всего три меры дали. До петухов дочиста подобрали. Что же три меры? только закусить. Ныне овес у дворников сорок пять копеек. У нас небось приедем сколько съедят, столько дают.

-- Скупой барин, -- подтвердил конторщик.

-- Ну, а лошади их понравились тебе? -- спросила Долли.

-- Лошади -- Одно слово. И пища хороша. А так мне скучно что-то показалось, Дарья Александровна, не знаю, как Вам, -- сказал он, обернув к ней свое красивое и доброе лицо.

-- Да и мне тоже.

When they had driven into the fields Dar'ia Aleksandrovna experienced a pleasant feeling of relief, and she was about to ask the servants how they had liked it at Vronsky's, when suddenly Philip the coachman himself remarked:

"They're rich, that they are, but yet they gave us only two bushels of oats. The horses had eaten every grain before cock-crow! What's two bushels? Only a bite. Nowadays oats are forty-five kopecks at the inns. When anyone comes to our place, no fear, we give their horses as much as they'll eat."

"A stingy nobleman..." confirmed the clerk.

"Well, how did you like their horses?" asked Dolly.

"The horses? Fine's the only word for them! And the food was good too. But somehow it seemed so dull to me, Dar'ia Aleksandrovna. I don't know how you felt about it," he added, turning his handsome, kindly face toward her.

"Yes, I felt the same." (Part 6, Chapter 24)⁴

The coachman Philip's comments about the treatment of horses at Vozdvizhenskoe and Pokrovskoe establish a moral contrast between the masters of these estates. Whereas Lyovin has what Mayakovsky would later call "the right attitude to horses" [*khorošee otnošenie k lošhadiam*], Vronsky clearly does not, despite his obvious interest in horses and passion for them.⁵ Here in Part 6 Vronsky is shown abusing horses, the very horses that Lyovin, forever aware of Dolly's financial problems (related to Stiva's adultery), has charitably provided for the trip. Earlier in the novel, a "linkage" had been established between Vronsky's murderous passion for his mare Frou-Frou and Lyovin's protective love for his prize cow Pava, whose offspring he cherishes and protects.

How horses are treated at Pokrovskoe and Vozdvizhenskoe is further contrasted in the depiction of the horse-lover and womanizer Veslovsky,

who like Dolly and Philip, is shown at both estates in Part 6. On the hunting trip Veslovsky, Oblonsky and Lyovin take together, Veslovsky extravagantly admires one of Lyovin's horses, a Don Steppe horse, and fantasizes about what it would be like to gallop over the steppe on such a horse. He then expresses a desire to ride the horse back to Pokrovskoe to fetch his cigars and wallet (Part 6, Chapter 8). Tolstoy shows Lyovin mentally estimating Veslovsky's weight and concluding that the hefty Veslovsky would strain the horse. Thus Lyovin's refusal to let Veslovsky ride his horse reveals more than just Lyovin's possessiveness toward his own horse; it demonstrates Lyovin's "right attitude to horses." His instinct that Veslovsky might abuse his horses proves to be correct, for Veslovsky eventually does strain Lyovin's horses when he drives them. Veslovsky, like Vronsky who was responsible for Frou-Frou's death, thus poses a threat to the welfare of horses and, via the Tolstoyan labyrinth, to the welfare of women as well. Lyovin acts to preserve both his horses and his pregnant wife from Veslovsky, whom he ends up banishing from Pokrovskoe for flirting with Kitty.

In contrast, at Vozdvizhenskoe, where Veslovsky's flirtation with the mistress of the house was condoned, Veslovsky had been allowed to ride Anna's horse (described as "*nevysokii plotnyi angliiskii kob*" [a small sturdy English cob]), without anybody thinking to worry about the possible strain that his riding her might cause. (The peasants, however, find the sight of a man riding side-saddle ridiculous [Part 6, Chapter 27].) Thus Vronsky—in contrast to Lyovin—allows the horses at Vozdvizhenskoe to be underfed and overburdened.

The fact that a peasant named Philip (meaning "lover of horses") faults Vronsky for his treatment of horses and praises Lyovin should be taken as an authoritative judgment in Tolstoy's novelistic realm where peasants, especially those with meaningful Greek names, are often the bearers of truths. Philip's division of masters into two categories, those who treat horses well and those who mistreat them, is linked to a later scene in which Fyodor, one of Lyovin's peasant workers, remarks that there are two types of people, those who "live for the belly" and those who, like the peasant Platon, "live for the soul" and "remember God." When Lyovin demands that he define what "remembering God" and "living for the soul" mean, Fyodor responds only by noting that there are different types of people and that Lyovin himself would not hurt another person (Part 8, Chapter 11). Lyovin thus belongs, according to Fyodor, to the category of people who, like Platon, "live for the soul."

In Tolstoy's labyrinth, "the right attitude to horses" further implies the right attitude to one's fellow man and God. The right attitude to animals, whether embracing a beaten animal or merely refraining from beating, amounts to a rejection of Descartes—not only of his infamous justification of beating dogs, on the grounds that they were "machines" (and thus the sounds made by beating them are no different from music made by applying pressure to a musical instrument), but also of his notion that man was

destined to control and master nature in a rational way, no matter what the cost in suffering to animals or human beings.⁶ Whereas Lyovin cherishes animals, rejects modern machinery, and comes to embrace a truth (love) that he emphatically declares to run counter to reason (Part 8, Chapter 12), the residents of Vozdvizhenskoe seem to be followers of Descartes. Vronsky abuses animals and embraces new machinery, even apparatus designed to help a baby learn to walk.⁷ Anna uses her God-given "reason" to justify not bringing wretched children into the world—"zachem zhe mne dan razum, esli ia ne upotrebliu ego na to, chtoby ne proizvodit' na svet neschastnykh" [What was my reason given me for, if I am not to use it to avoid bringing unfortunate beings into the world] (Part 6, Chapter 23) and ultimately to justify her suicide. In her last hour, Anna, riding on the train, overhears a conversation—in French, the vernacular of Cartesian rationalism—in which a woman remarks: "na to dan cheloveku razum, chtob izbavit'sia ot togo, chto ego bespokoit" [Reason has been given to man to enable him to escape from his troubles] (Part 7, Chapter 31). Anna then repeats this thought, persuading herself that suicide is the rational solution to her problems. In the Tolstoyan labyrinth, the abuse of animals, birth control and suicide are all linked via reason.

"Non contentes d'avoir cessé d'allaiter leurs enfants, les femmes cessent d'en vouloir faire."

Dolly, for all her musings about escape from the pains of motherhood in the carriage on the way from Pokrovskoe, ultimately recoils from the life she finds at Vozdvizhenskoe, a realm that denies motherhood in various ways. The hospital, to Dolly's surprise, is being built with no maternity ward. Anna is a rare guest in the nursery, leaving the maternal duties to what strikes Dolly as a particularly unsavory assembly of nannies and nurses.

Anna Karenina's abnegation of her maternal duties is reminiscent of the other fictional adulteress, Emma Bovary. Through his own system of linkages, Flaubert has Mère Rolet, Berthe Bovary's sinister wetnurse, become an accessory to Emma's adultery. Both Tolstoy and Flaubert draw on Rousseau's suggestion that once women turn their backs on their maternal duties, especially the breastfeeding of their offspring, adultery and the general decay of family and society necessarily follow.⁸ Egotism results: "Chacun ne songe plus qu'à soi." In *Émile*, Rousseau notes that refusing to breastfeed is but the first step in the fall of mothers: "Non contentes d'avoir cessé d'allaiter leurs enfants, les femmes cessent d'en vouloir faire" (45). Tolstoy follows this same logic in presenting Anna as a mother who relegates the feeding and care of her daughter to others,⁹ and, furthermore, reveals to Dolly that she will bear no more children, citing among her reasons her fear lest the physical changes brought about by pregnancy interfere with Vronsky's attraction to her (Part 6, Chapter 23). Anna thus wants to separate the erotic from the reproductive: Tolstoy, like Rousseau,

felt that a woman's body, once "liberated" from its reproductive functions would become a dangerous force, more threatening to society than any political, social or economic forces. (Before moving for a call for total chastity in, for example, the "Postface to 'The Kreutzer Sonata'," Tolstoy argued in "What Then Are We To Do?" that if women were to embrace their "work" as mothers, not saying "no" after two or twenty pregnancies, society would be saved.)¹⁰

In denying motherhood, the inhabitants of Vozdvizhenskoe fail to comply with two moral systems dear to Tolstoy's heart: that of Rousseau, who, though he abandoned his own children, proclaims in *Émile* that society would be saved if mothers would content themselves with being mothers,¹¹ and that of Genesis, where fallen woman's punishment (and salvation) is to have her "sorrow" and "conception" greatly multiplied and to bring forth children in sorrow. At Pokrovskoe, the impending birth of the heir (whom Kitty will nurse herself) is the focus of everyone's attention. By linking the two estates through Philip, Veslovsky, and Dolly, Tolstoy sets up a powerful opposition between Vozdvizhenskoe, where horses are abused, motherhood is denied and Cartesian rationalism reigns, and Pokrovskoe, a safe haven for horses and mothers, where womanizers are not welcome and where reason is not practiced.

Pokrov Presviatoi Bogoroditsy vs. Vozdvizhenie Kresta Gospodnia

As Donna Orwin has pointed out, the names of the two estates in *Anna Karenina*, Pokrovskoe and Vozdvizhenskoe, have symbolic significance, both for their general etymological associations and for their evocation of feasts of the Russian Orthodox Church.¹² The Feast of the Pokrov, celebrated on October 1, commemorates the occasion when the Mother of God appeared to Andrew the Holy Fool and placed her *pokrov* (protective veil) over him, thereby inspiring the Orthodox to victory against their enemies. Vozdvizhenskoe evokes the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross of the Savior [*Prazdnik Vozdvizheniia Kresta Gospodnia*], celebrated on the 14th of September. The feast commemorates the occasion in the fourth century when Saint Elena (Emperor Constantine's mother) found the cross on which Jesus was crucified and erected it for veneration, as well as the occasion in 629 when Emperor Heraclius rescued the cross from the Persians (who had captured it in 614) and erected it in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. Like Good Friday, this feast focuses attention on Jesus' crucifixion and martyrdom, and therefore on the symbol of the cross.¹³

It is fitting that Pokrovskoe evokes the Mother of God and her protective, loving and maternal attitude toward humanity, whereas Vozdvizhenskoe evokes the martyrdom, suffering, and tragic end of Jesus. The feast after which each estate was named offers a ritualized version of the life lived on each estate and prefigures how the novel will end for the inhabitants of each estate. The residents of Vozdvizhenskoe will come to a

tragic, martyred, end. The railroad becomes Anna's "cross"; Vronsky goes off by means of the railroad to make a martyr of himself in the war. In contrast, motherly protection appears to reign over the residents of Pokrovskoe. Saint Andrew the Holy Fool (protected by the Mother of God) makes an apt saintly alter ego for Lyovin, who rejects Cartesian reason.¹⁴

"I erected to myself a monument not made by human hands..."

As well as suggesting the Church holiday of the Exaltation of the Cross, the name Vozdvizhenkoe (from the root *vozdvig-* "to erect") evokes the general notion of erecting monuments. (The phallic associations of the raising of monuments contrasts to the maternal symbolism of the *pokrov*.) Pushkin's poem "Ia pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi..." [I erected to myself a monument not made by human hands...], with its epigraph of Horace's "Exegi monumentum," treats the subject of ways in which a mortal being may live on after death through different monuments. Specifically, Pushkin contrasts the monument of words that he, as poet, erects and the stone monument erected to the Emperor (the Alexander column).

Pushkin's "Ia pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi..." is relevant to Vronsky's endeavors at Vozdvizhenskoe to erect monuments lest he die without leaving a trace. Vronsky wants legal heirs so that his name lives on in them; Anna, however, thwarts him by refusing the divorce from Karenin which would allow her to marry Vronsky and by her decision (of which Vronsky is unaware) not to bear any more children. Lacking a fleshly "monument" (a little Vronsky) in which his memory would live on, Vronsky must content himself with erecting monuments to himself out of inanimate material, such as the hospital he builds. At Pokrovskoe, in contrast, Lyovin gets his fleshly monument, his heir Dmitrii Konstantinovich, who offers Lyovin some assurance that, as Pushkin puts it, "Net, ves' ia ne umru...." [No, all of me will not die...].¹⁵

The *Pokrov* Thrown Over the Abyss

Thus life at Pokrovskoe *seems* to take place under the protective veil of the Mother of God: a legal heir is conceived; the horses are properly fed; the jam pot does not boil over; womanizers and horse-abusers are banished. But is Pokrovskoe protected from all evil and all chaos? As the novel nears its end, the master of Pokrovskoe, as a result of intense metaphysical questioning, finds himself on the brink of suicide. At this point, the "*pokrov*" evoked by the estate's name begins to recall, rather than the protective veil of the Mother of God, the "*pokrov*" of Tiutchev's poetry, which is a veil that is covering up a threatening abyss.

In Tiutchev's poem "Den' i noch'" [Day and Night] day appears as a *pokrov* cast in divine mercy over the "bezdna bezymiannaia" [nameless abyss] of night (90). Come night, the "tkan' blagodatnaia" [grace-bestowing cloth] of the *pokrov* is ripped off, leaving man face to face with the abyss. Similarly,

in another of his metaphysical lyrics, "Sviataia noch' na nebosklon vzoshla..." [Holy night ascended to the sky...] (1850), Tiutchev again presents day as a *pokrov* that is thrown over the primal abyss (117):

Святая ночь на небосклон взошла,
И день отрадней, день любезней,
Как золотой покров она свила,
Покров, накинутый над бездной.
И, как виденье, внешний мир ушел...
И человек, как сирота бездомный,
Стоит теперь и немощен и гол,
Лицом к лицу пред пропастию темной.

На самого себя покинут он --
Упразднен ум и мысль осиротела --
В душе своей, как в бездне, погружен
И нет извне опоры, ни придела...
[....]¹⁶

Tiutchev's man, who is left face to face with the primal chaos when the *pokrov* of day is pulled away, resembles the Lyovin Tolstoy presents in the final book of the novel—the "orphaned" Lyovin who must hide his gun and rope lest he, to borrow Tiutchev's imagery, plunge into the abyss. At this point, the daylight realm of Pokrovskoe provides no *pokrov*.

Tolstoy's fondness for the poetry of Tiutchev has been well documented.¹⁷ Discussing Tolstoy's attitude toward nature, Dmitry Merezhkovsky (175) notes that for Tolstoy, as for Tiutchev, the "*pokrov*" of daylight sometimes lifts to reveal the underlying abyss. (Merezhkovsky quotes the first four lines of "Sviataia noch' na nebosklon vzoshla...") When the "*pokrov*" has been lifted, Tiutchev sees something uplifting in the abyss beneath, whereas Tolstoy, according to Merezhkovsky, sees "only a bottomless, black, terrifying hole."¹⁸

Tiutchev's "Silentium!," with its pronouncements about words spoken being a lie and the general inexpressibility of what is most sacred to the soul, as Cornillot and Orwin have suggested, applies to *Anna Karenina*.¹⁹ When at the very end of the novel Lyovin finally comes to a truth that will allow him to continue to live, he determines that these meaningful thoughts are "inexpressible in words" and determines that they are for "him alone." He takes Tiutchev's advice (40): "Molchi, skryvaisia i tai..." [Be silent, hide yourself and conceal...]. Lyovin applies this Tiutchevian oath of silence and secrecy even to his wife (with whom, during their betrothal, he communicated by means of a wordless "mystical communication" [*tainstvennoe obshchenie*]).²⁰ Consequently, the novel ends by Lyovin affirming the very notion Anna came to before her death, that, whatever their relations with God, human beings live in essential isolation from one another.

But, insofar as Tiutchev's poetry provides a poetic expression of the truth about language and life Tolstoy encodes in *Anna Karenina*, one should look not just at "Silentium!" but also at the *pokrov* poems. *Anna Karenina* suggests that language is, ultimately, but part of the *pokrov* that has been thrown over the abyss of night. During the "protected" hours of daylight, man feels (to borrow Richard Gustafson's term) like a "resident" who has the illusion of being able to express himself in words. When man is brought face to face with the abyss of night and/or his own soul, language—a "pokrov, nakinutyi nad bezdnoi" [veil, thrown over the abyss]—ceases to provide comfort or be adequate to the task of narrating the feelings provoked by the abyss.

By the same token, when Lyovin's dying brother Nicholas visits him, they are both brought face to face with the abyss of death; Lyovin has the "*pokrov*," the protective veil, of the life he was attempting to build for himself at Pokrovskoe pulled away from him. At this point the two brothers also eschew language, tacitly recognizing that no golden, honey-mouthed veil of words they could weave would ever be able to protect them from death. Nor do they express directly in words what was in their souls, which in Lyovin's case would read (Tolstoy tells us): "You will die, you will die, you will die!" and in his dying brother's case: "I know I shall die, but I am afraid, afraid, afraid." Language spoken straight from the soul would provide them with nothing more, as Tolstoy points out: "That was all they would say if they spoke only straight from the soul."

Lyovin is aware that the ability to refrain from speaking directly about what is in one's soul (about chaos, death) is necessary to life, to maintaining a grip on the cosmos.

Но этак нельзя было жить, и потому Константин пытался делать то, что он всю жизнь пытался и не умел делать, и то, что по его наблюдению, многие так хорошо умели делать и без чего нельзя жить: он пытался говорить не то, что думал, и постоянно чувствовал, что это выходит фальшиво, что брат его ловит на этом и раздражается этим. (Part 3, Chapter 32)

But that would make life impossible; therefore Constantine tried to do what all his life he had tried and never been able to do (although he had often observed that many people were able to do it well), something without which life was impossible: he tried to say something different from what he thought; and he felt all the time that it sounded false and that his brother detected him and grew irritable because of it.

Lyovin's thoughts even suggest that those who persist in attempting to voice directly what is in their soul, those who fail to develop this ability to use words to weave a *pokrov* to cover up the abyss of death (or sex), will find it impossible to live. They threaten to merge with the abyss, as nearly

happens with Lyovin later in the novel when he, "a happy family man, a healthy man" living at home in Pokrovskoe, contemplates suicide.²¹

If, along with the feast celebrating the Mother of God's protection, the name Pokrovskoe also evokes Tiutchev's notion that man's daytime realm of verbal intercourse with other human beings is but a "pokrov, nakinutyi nad bezdnoi" [veil thrown over the abyss]—a *pokrov* that can be ripped off, leaving man orphaned and homeless, buried in his own soul as in an abyss—then the juxtaposition of Pokrovskoe and Vozdvizhenskoe in Part 6 of *Anna Karenina* takes on another dimension. Part 6 becomes something more than a binary comparison of the defective, if orderly, estate of Vozdvizhenskoe and the glories of the nurturing realm of Pokrovskoe. The residents of both estates struggle in the face of the abyss of death and/or sex.²² Sex and death strain language to the point where all becomes a lie, as Anna will conclude listening to the conversations around her on the train just before her suicide: "all is untruth, all is lies, all is deception, all is evil" (Part 7, Chapter 31).

Already in Part 6, at Vozdvizhenskoe, we witness the fact that Anna and Vronsky have ceased to use language as a means of communication.²³ While the dinner table conversation is witty, spoken words prove meaningless in the face of the ultimate questions that concern them. Language, like their attempt to erect an ordered cosmos at Vozdvizhenskoe, is simply a "veil thrown over the abyss" that exists between them, as becomes apparent later at night. After supper, on the night of Dolly's visit to Vozdvizhenskoe, Anna and Dolly have a private chat. (Vronsky had commissioned Dolly to try to convince Anna to seek a divorce so that they could marry and have legitimate children.) Afterwards, Vronsky, who has apparently given up communicating via language, attempts to learn the results of this conversation with Dolly by studying Anna. When he looks "questioningly into [her] eyes," "she, having understood that look differently, smiled at him" (Part 6, Chapter 24). Whereas Vronsky's unspoken question related to his desires to legitimize his life and, ultimately, find some protection from the finality of death, Anna takes his question to relate simply to sex, which, aside from morphia, is the only diversion she has from the abyss she faces at night. Vronsky and Anna are no longer able to communicate wordlessly, by glance or gesture. Silence, meaningful at certain points, has become an abyss of lies and deceit.

The attempts made by residents of Vozdvizhenskoe and Pokrovskoe to erect monuments before being merged with the abyss or to throw a *pokrov* over the abyss become parallel endeavors. Though life at Pokrovskoe seems a solution and although its residents appear to communicate well about most matters, it cannot alter the fact that, come night, the abyss has to be faced at both estates and each man or woman in Tolstoy's world faces the abyss alone.

Anna Karenina's red handbag

As Anna Karenina, driven by her conclusion that "all is untruth, all is lies, all is deception, all is evil" (Part 7, Chapter 31), commits suicide, Tolstoy, as Roman Jakobson has noted, focuses attention on the red bag Anna carries with her.²⁴ At this point, when Anna finally manages to rid herself of the red bag (thus ending her relationship of Jakobsonian contiguity with this red handbag), it becomes clear that this red handbag was not just an inessential realistic metonymic detail, but a Tolstoyan metaphor for Anna's sexual/reproductive organs.

The true function of Anna's handbag was suggested by Osip Mandel'shtam (41) when he refers to the bag of the French-speaking Russian peasant in Anna and Vronsky's shared dream as a "*damskaia sumochka*." In using this term, Mandel'shtam was not subject to a Freudian slip but a Tolstoyan linkage: Mandel'shtam conflates the red bag Anna carries with her on her train trips and the bag the iron-beating French-speaking Russian peasant carries in Anna's dream.

The peasant in Anna's dream is rummaging around in a sack (*meshok*) and muttering in French "il faut battre le fer, le broyer, le pétrir..."; as part of her dream, her husband's servant interprets this dream to mean she will die in childbirth. (In Tolstoy's Russian, Anna's red handbag is a "krasnyi meshochek" [red little bag] when it appears at Anna's train ride back from Moscow to Petersburg at the end of Part 1, Chapter 29.) In his analysis of this passage, Richard Gustafson (309) refers to the red bag as "the container of [Anna's] desires" out of which Anna takes "her pillow, the novel with its fantasy scenarios, and the knife that cuts in two." Gustafson then relates this red bag to the peasant's bag in Anna's dream, calling the peasant's bag "the bag of her pleasures."²⁵ Whereas all of the associations of this red bag still hold, Tolstoy also seems to be indicting Anna for having made her other red bag (her sexual/reproductive chambers) into the "container of her desires" and "the bag of her pleasures" rather than into a womb. (Her abuse of her anatomy is, via the Tolstoyan labyrinth, linked to Vronsky's abuse of horses; and opposed to the maternal use to which the Shcherbatsky sisters put their own "red bags" and breasts.)

If one reads *Anna Karenina* as a precursor to Tolstoy's later writings, fictional and non-fictional, which (referring explicitly or implicitly to Matthew 5:27-29 and Matthew 19:10-12) prescribe chastity (or, as second best, a marriage where all sex is devoted to the procreation of child after child), then Anna's struggle with her red bag takes on particular significance. In Matthew 5:27-29, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declares: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell." In Matthew 19:10-12, following a discussion of divorce, Jesus answers queries about

whether it may be better not to marry at all by noting that "Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given." Jesus then goes on to explain that "there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven." By crossing herself and then successfully ridding herself of her red bag—Anna symbolically becomes the eunuch that, throughout her recent life, she had such trouble being; and she "plucks out and throws away" that part of her that was, Tolstoy suggests, the cause of her troubles.²⁶

Tolstoy linked the description of Anna's suicide with her (and Vronsky's) dream about the peasant with the sack and the iron, which Kornei interpreted to mean that Anna would die in childbirth. When Anna nearly dies after the birth of Annie, thus nearly fulfilling Kornei's prophecy, Anna, Karenin, and Vronsky undergo an intense spiritual crisis. Karenin joyously and spontaneously fulfills the "Christian law of forgiveness" that he had consciously sought to obey all his life (Part 4, Chapter 17). Vronsky realizes that "he had never before loved her." If previously he felt only a waxing and waning passion, now "during her illness, he came to know her soul" and experienced a new form of love (Part 4, Chapter 18).²⁷ The new love in Karenin, Vronsky and Anna (whether Christian or Platonic) is brought about because, at this point, eros is eradicated from their lives. Anna's "red bag," once a bag of erotic pleasures, has now in fact become a bag of pain. And, according to Tolstoyan linkages, only under such circumstances can feelings of Christian forgiveness and/or Platonic love of the soul be felt. Thus, when Anna throws away her red bag of pleasures before dying, she symbolically returns to a state she experienced, temporarily and under morphia, when she was nearly killed by an infection in her womb at Annie's birth.

In his description of Anna's last moments, Tolstoy links Anna's ability to rid her self, finally, of her red handbag, to her act of making the sign of the cross over herself:

Она хотела упасть под поравнявшейся с ней серединою первого вагона. Но красный мешочек, который она стала снимать с руки, задержал ее, и было уже поздно: середина миновала ее. Надо было ждать следующего вагона. Чувство, подобное тому, которое она испытывала, когда, купаясь, готовилась войти в воду, охватило ее, и она перекрестилась. Привычный жест крестного знамения вызвал в душе ее целый ряд девичьих и детских воспоминаний, и вдруг мрак, покрывавший для нее все, разорвался, и жизнь предстояла ей на мгновение со всеми ее светлыми прошедшими радостями. Но она не спускала глаз с колес подходящего второго вагона. И ровно в ту минуту, как середина между колесами поравнялась с нею, она откинула красный мешочек и, вжав в плечи голову, упала под вагон на руки и легким движением, как бы готовясь тотчас же встать, опустила на колена.

She wanted to fall half-way between the wheels of the front truck, which was drawing level with her, but the little red handbag which

she began to take off her arm delayed her, and then it was too late. The middle had passed her. She was obliged to wait for the next truck. A feeling seized her like that she had experienced when preparing to enter the water in bathing, and she crossed herself. The familiar gesture of making the sign of the cross called up a whole series of memories from her girlhood and childhood, and suddenly the darkness that had covered everything for her tore apart, and life showed itself to her for an instant with all its bright past joys. But she did not take her eyes off the wheels of the approaching second truck, and at the very moment when the midway point between the two wheels drew level, she threw away her red bag, and drawing her head down between her shoulders threw herself forward on her hands under the truck, and with a light movement as if preparing to rise again, immediately dropped on her knees. (Part 7, Chapter 31).

Anna's gesture of making the sign of the cross, albeit an automatic gesture, seems nevertheless to take on meaning. Earlier Anna had had a different attitude to the signs she encountered and found meaningless—the street signs of Moscow (advertising *Tiutkine le coiffeur* and others) and the sign of the cross made by the husband on the train before it took off ("It would be interesting to ask him what he means by that" she thinks "maliciously" to herself).

Whereas previously she had looked at the daytime cosmos and seen only semiotic chaos, now, as she faces the abyss of death, she begins to see meaning. It is a meaning that cannot be expressed in words, but floods her with memories of her virginal, innocent state, resurrecting it, however momentarily, in her. By crossing herself and throwing away her red bag, she returns, if only at death, to her virginal state, a time before she traveled on railroads with a red bag.

These two acts of making the cross and throwing away her red bag before her death recall the two estates and their realms. One might even see some kind of appeal on her part both to the cross (the symbol of Vozdvizhenskoe) and to the protective veil of the Mother of God (the symbol of Pokrovskoe). By crossing herself and throwing away her red bag, Anna symbolically becomes "pure" like the Virgin Mother of God. The red handbag and the sign of the cross, if read as metaphorical details, link the final moments of Anna's life back to Pokrovskoe and Vozdvizhenskoe as metaphorical estates.

Tolstoy and the "Nameless Abyss"

Viacheslav Ivanov, who like Tolstoy before him and others after him (such as Mandel'shtam) incorporated commentary on Tiutchev's "Silentium!" in his own work, noted that Tiutchev "had, fortunately, forgotten his vow of silence."²⁸ Apparently, Ivanov suggests, Tiutchev believed that the language

of poetry was not "a lie." Likewise, for all the aspersions cast on language *within* the novel *Anna Karenina*, for all the intimations *within* the novel that the spoken thought is a lie, for all the convictions of Tolstoy's heroes that the spoken word is "untruth, a lie, deception, evil" (Anna) and that what is most meaningful is "inexpressible in words" (Lyovin), Tolstoy himself, as a writer, of course continued to use the medium of language.

And yet Tolstoy's commentary to Strakhov about how "every thought expressed separately by words loses its meaning and is terribly degraded by being taken out by itself from that linking in which it is found" suggests a wariness about words spoken out. The act of expressing a thought separately in words makes it a lie. Tolstoy may, in fact, have resorted to his "labyrinth of linkages," rather than contenting himself with more straightforward, direct expression of his ideas, precisely because this practice seemed to assure that his thoughts would maintain their meaning even when put into verbal form. Tolstoy thus imbues his prose with symbolism and associations that often are considered to be alien to "realist" prose.²⁹

Anna Karenina thus contains intimations of the "double vision" that Viacheslav Ivanov associates with Symbolism (whose first Russian practitioner was, in his view, Tiutchev), of an attempt to mediate between cosmos (the orderly world of *Vozdvizhenskoe* and the domestic economy of *Pokrovskoe*) and chaos (the abyss on whose edge monuments are erected, the abyss over which protective veils are thrown). As Ivanov points out in his "*Zavety simvolizma*" [*Precepts of Symbolism*], man (and the artist) must "turn to the light/clear forms of daytime existence, to the patterns of 'the golden-clothed veil,' thrown by the gods on 'the mysterious world of spirits,' on 'the nameless abyss,' that is, on the [abyss] that does not find its name in the language of daytime consciousness and of external experience..." But Ivanov goes on to note the importance, to ordinary life and to art, of the experience of being face to face with the abyss without protective veil. Weaving in quotes from Tiutchev, he writes: "And nevertheless, the most valuable moment in experience and the most prophetic in creation is immersion in that meditative ecstasy, when there 'is no barrier' between us and the 'naked abyss,' which reveals itself in Silence."

What Ivanov writes above is to some degree true of *Anna Karenina*, which becomes a "pamiatnik nerukotvornyi" [a monument not made by human hands] which Tolstoy erected out of words, a golden "*pokrov*" which Tolstoy carefully wove out of words in an attempt to cover up the "*bezdnna bezymiannaia*" [nameless abyss]. And, if one reads closely, one may perhaps discern that Tolstoy (like Tiutchev; and like the Symbolists, according to Ivanov) captures, in words, some of the silent music of the abyss of the soul, rather than presenting, as Merezhkovsky argues, the abyss simply as a bottomless, black hole.

In this way, rather than see Tolstoy as an ultimate exponent of Realism, standing in opposition to Romanticism and Symbolism, one might stress his affinity with poets such as Tiutchev and Fet and the ways in

which he anticipated Symbolism and other modern literary movements. Whatever Tolstoy's place in the literary tradition, his prosy, puddingy novels may also be read as poetry.³⁰

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NOTES

- ¹ The text of this letter, cited here in Gibian's translation (1995:814), appears at 62:268-70. I follow George Gibian's argument that this Tolstoyan pronouncement can be used as the basis for an understanding of the novel. Richard Gustafson (280-81) also discusses this passage and bases his interpretation of Tolstoy on an understanding and acceptance of these linkages.
- ² The characterizations of Tolstoy's novels belong to Henry James: "[B]ut what do such large loose baggy monsters, with their queer elements of the accidental and the arbitrary, artistically mean?" (Preface to *The Tragic Muse*); "Tolstoy and D[ostoevsky] are fluid pudding, though not tasteless, because the amount of their own minds and souls in solution in the broth gives it savour and flavour, thanks to the strong, rank quality of their genius and experience" (letter to Hugh Walpole).
- ³ Stenbock-Fermor (103) sees the contrast of life on the Lyovin and Vronsky estates as an instance of Tolstoy's predilection for what she terms "diptychs" ("two strongly contrasting situation with a common denominator and a few identical features"). R. P. Blackmur also remarks on the ways in which Tolstoy sets up a comparison between life on the two estates: "Tolstoi gives us hundreds of comparisons and analogies..." Blackmur (913) focuses particular attention on the way Veslovsky is received by each of the two households.
- ⁴ English translations of passages from *Anna Karenina* are from the Maude/Gibian translation with occasional slight alterations.
- ⁵ A recent article in *TLS* (Chamberlain 1996:15) discussed the philosophical and moral importance in having "the right attitude toward horses" (Mayakovsky's phrase) in Western culture, beginning with Plato. Chamberlain mentions the parallel between Nietzsche's embrace of the beaten horse and that of Dostoevsky (in Raskolnikov's dream). Tolstoy's treatment of horses, which Chamberlain does not mention, fits the pattern.
- ⁶ The (possibly apocryphal) tale of Descartes beating his dogs figures in the popular understanding of his philosophy as mechanistic. Descartes's beating of dogs was discussed by Tolstoy's friend Strakhov in his *Letters on the Organic Life* (63).
- ⁷ The gadgets in the Vronsky nursery contrast with the ideal nursery of Rousseau's *Émile*: "Émile n'aura ni bourrelets, ni paniers roulants, ni chariots, ni lisières" (90).
- ⁸ Tolstoy, as *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, and "The Kreutzer Sonata" attest, earnestly shared Rousseau's views on maternal breastfeeding.
- ⁹ The fact that Anna after Annie's birth had apparently offered to breastfeed the baby herself (Part 4, Chapter 20) suggests the extent to which, during this brief period when she was in danger of dying, Anna showed herself to have the image of Rousseau's and Tolstoy's true woman within her. The solution to society's problems, according to Rousseau, lies in a return to the practice of maternal breastfeeding: "Mais que les mères daignent nourrir leurs enfants, les mœurs vont se réformer d'elles-mêmes [...] L'attrait de la vie domestique est le meilleur contre-poison des mauvaises mœurs" (47-48).
- ¹⁰ For a discussion of these issues, see Mandelker (28-30).
- ¹¹ See the discussion in Book 1 of *Émile*. Milan Markovitch (257-76) outlines ways in which Tolstoy was influenced by Rousseau's views on motherhood.
- ¹² Donna Orwin writes (182): "[Anna] is condemned to constant motion, which becomes a motif accompanying her until her death. This motion characterizes the world of individualism as a whole as portrayed in the novel, from Safo Shtolc's way of 'rushing forward' (3.18), to Vronsky's estate named 'Vozdvizhenskoe,' suggesting motion, in comparison to Levin's estate 'Pokrovskoe,' suggesting shelter or protection, to the industrial development of Russia, with railroads both facilitating this development and symbolizing it in the novel." In a note to this passage, Orwin comments: "Vozdvizhenskoe is an adjectival form referring either to a Christian holiday,

Vozdvizhenie, the Exaltation of the Cross, or to a church named after the holiday. The verbal root, *dvig*, means 'move' [...] The name *Pokrovskoe* has the same relationship to another Christian holiday, *Pokrov*, the festival of the protection of the Virgin, but in the nineteenth century the word *pokrov* was also used to mean shelter or protection" (Orwin, 245, note 34).

¹³ In the liturgy of this feast, the cross is "commemorated in a spirit of triumph, as a 'weapon of peace and unconquerable ensign of victory'" (*The Festal Menaion*, 50).

¹⁴ One could develop other ways in which the name of each estate aptly embodies what goes on at that estate. For example, the impulse at *Pokrovskoe* to constrain eros but still beget fleshly progeny (Lyovin values the "new" feeling of intimacy with a woman, an intimacy "free of sensuality" which he experiences with his pregnant wife) is reminiscent of the immaculate conception of Jesus by the Virgin Mary.

¹⁵ Lyovin then follows the path outlined in Plato's *Symposium* (90 [208c]): having begotten fleshly progeny, he then (in Part 8) progresses to spiritual progeny: wisdom and virtue.

¹⁶ Holy night ascended to the sky/ And comforting day, amiable day,/ Was rolled up like a golden veil,/ A veil, thrown over the abyss./ And like a vision the external world has gone.../ And man, like a homeless orphan,/ Now stands, feeble and naked,/ Face to face before the dark precipice.// Left completely to himself—/ His mind is defunct and his thought orphaned—/ In his soul, as in an abyss, he is buried/ And from without there is no support, no boundary...

¹⁷ Eikhenbaum (149-54) discusses a meeting that occurred between Tiutchev and Tolstoy on a train in 1871. He further discusses some of the affinities between Tolstoy and Tiutchev (and Fet) and their common debt to Schopenhauer.

¹⁸ Merezhkovsky equates this "bottomless, black, terrifying hole" with "'the bag' into which Ivan Illyich is shoved [...] with his inhuman cry 'I don't want to!'" (This bag may relate to Anna Karenina's red handbag. See below.)

¹⁹ Donna Orwin discusses Tiutchev's links to Tolstoy (160-61, 194). In connection with Tolstoy's description of his meeting with Tiutchev in a letter to Strakhov, Orwin speculates in a footnote (250, note 6) about the discussion when they met on the train: "It is possible that this very fact of the spiritual isolation of each human being was a topic of conversation between the two men, and that Tolstoy was influenced in his reflections after their meeting by Tiutchev's belief that 'a word once spoken is a lie.'"

François Cornillot (27) has suggested that in the final chapter of *Anna Karenina* when Lyovin looks up at the dark sky, there is a reference to Tiutchev's "Silentium!": "Le ciel, cette fois, est tout à fait nocturne [...]: c'est le ciel tiutchévien de Silentium (l'allusion transparente à ce poème n'est évidemment pas ici l'effect du hasard), le ciel constellé des pensées et des sentiment sacrés qui se lèvent et se couchent dans les profondeurs de l'âme."

²⁰ Lyovin and Kitty eschew spoken language in their betrothal, opting instead for a "mystic communication" that becomes emblematically material when they write the initial letters of words in chalk; in this scene, the couple, by not speaking their love directly as words, keep it from becoming a "lie"; they are united in "mystic communication" that excludes family and friends. In the final scene, Lyovin figures that Kitty knows what he is thinking when she looks at his face and, further, argues to himself that the truth is "for him alone."

²¹ Tolstoy connects Lyovin's crisis in Part 8 with the feelings about death instilled in him at his meeting with the dying Nicholas in Part 3, by noting at Part 8, Chapter 8 that the questions regarding life and death that first came into Lyovin's mind on seeing his dying brother had never left Lyovin. Rather, events such as his marriage and his wife's pregnancy had only distracted him.

²² André Monnier shows how *eros* and *thanatos* are linked in the novel and how *both* couples struggle against these forces, noting that "Entre les deux couples romanesques Tolstoï a introduit une différence de degré plus que de nature" (Monnier, 94).

²³ See Malcolm Jones's excellent discussion of the problem of "communication" in *Anna Karenina*.

²⁴ In his "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbance," Jakobson asserts "the primacy of the metaphoric process in the literary schools of romanticism and symbolism" and the corollary (but to his mind "insufficiently" recognized) "predominance of metonymy which

underlies and actually predetermines the so-called 'realistic' trend, which belongs to an intermediary stage between the decline of romanticism and the rise of symbolism and is opposed to both." Arguing that the "realistic author" is "fond of synecdochic details," Jakobson notes: "In the scene of Anna Karenina's suicide Tolstoj's artistic attention is focused on the heroine's handbag." In "On Realism in Art," Jakobson again writes of Anna Karenina's handbag, citing it as an instance of the "unessential details" used by realist authors: "Describing Anna's suicide, Tolstoj primarily writes about her handbag."

Stenbock-Fermor (47-8) discusses Anna's red handbag and refers to Jakobson's treatment of it. Mandelker (67-80) discusses Jakobson and Anna's red handbag within the context of her discussion of various responses toward Tolstoj's (so-called) realism.

²⁵ Gustafson (311) notes that the dream combines elements both of Anna's "hallucinatory journey" and the death of the railroad worker earlier.

²⁶ Sex was not her only sin; as Gustafson argues (132), "Anna is not punished by Tolstoj for her sexual fulfillment." From the Tolstojan point of view, which follows that of Rousseau (who declares that once women deny motherhood, by giving their children over to wetnurses and by refusing to have more children, then all moral ties binding human beings together disintegrate—"Chacun ne songe qu'à soi-même"), Anna's crime is that she does not dedicate her body to motherhood and, as a result, thinks only of herself.

There is an additional, Aristotelian association in the image of Anna and her red handbag. Put crudely (in terms consistent with Tolstoj), Tolstoj's depiction of Anna Karenina carrying around her red handbag illustrates the Aristotelian definition of hysteria, which is said to result from a "wandering" womb, a womb that is not properly weighed down and held in place by a fetus.

²⁷ In Plato's *Symposium* (92[209e]), recognition of the beauty of the soul comes at a later stage than recognition of the beauty of the body.

²⁸ Ivanov's remark is quoted by Malmstad (243).

²⁹ For discussion of the relationship between the symbolic and the real in Tolstoj, see Gustafson (212), who refers to Tolstoj's "emblematic realism," and Catteau's study "Le réel métaphorique."

Roman Jakobson was one proponent of the view that prose is prose (and poetry, poetry), a view that in various ingenious incarnations has continuing currency.

³⁰ I am grateful to Charles Isenberg and an anonymous reviewer for *TSJ* for their editorial suggestions.