

PARDONING WOMAN IN ANNA KARENINA

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We could scarcely hope for a more promising exercise than the study of excuses.

J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*

What is the object of a pardon? Offenses, certainly, all moral and physical wounds, and, ultimately, death.

Julia Kristeva, *The Black Sun*

In his classic study, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, Northrop Frye quotes William Blake's famous statement about the mythical origin of all literature: "The Old and The New Testament are the Great Code of art" (Frye 55). It is certainly profitable to read Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Its epigraph, the Biblical quotation discussed by numerous critics, refers to both lines of tradition --Old and New Testament--constituted by the "Great Code." Few of the novel's interpreters fail to recognize the fact that the epigraph "Vengeance is mine, I will repay" is a reference to both the Old Testament (Leviticus 32: 35) and the New: Paul's Epistle to Romans (12: 19), from which Tolstoy, via Schopenhauer, adopts his quotation. But fewer critics seem to have agreed upon the actual meaning of this quotation. Whatever the discrepancies between interpretations (Strakhov, Gromeka, Eikhenbaum, Gilford, Jackson), all of them seem to believe that the motto may be utilized as some kind of key which can account exhaustively for all of the novel's semantic components (Gromeka 801). This approach, even though it respects the motto's undisputed importance, reads the novel within the frame of metaphysical *closure*, and, by preserving the transference of its (Biblical) meaning, fails to notice the dynamic, and often competing and mutually exclusive lines of narration that stem from this quotation.

Another blindness shared by critics concerning the notorious epigraph is their tendency to read it as if it represented a comprehensive, indivisible and non-ambiguous identity with an unequivocally transparent, obvious and indisputable meaning. This analysis will read the epigraph in the context of Old and New Testaments and will attempt to highlight its radical and conflicting, mutually transgressive discrepancies. These discrepancies establish the rhetorical set of those oppositional and intertextual forces of Tolstoy's novel itself that program its rhetorical, semantic and representational violations, violences and conflicts.

The position of the ambivalent quotation (both from the New and the Old Testament), the fact that it serves as the epigraph to the novel, makes it even more difficult to interpret. It is thus neither inside the novel (as an epigraph it is *outside* of the text), but not totally outside, for some of the dominant themes and semantic and rhetorical gestures of this novel repeat the epigraph within the text of the novel (especially those regarding pardoning). These repetitions dispose critics to treat the motto as *the* structural

matrix (Riffaterre), the *siuzhet*, or, indeed, the Great Code, that is, the law which programs the prevailing thematic, rhetorical, semantic or intertextual (in this respect genealogic) strategies of this text. The motto is thus set on the *borderline* of the text; it at once envelops the text and sets up its laws (of genre: the novel of adultery, intertextual genealogy, marriage, etc.). Its repetitions inside the text codify the institutional laws of both writing and marriage, being simultaneously rhetorical or performative, a *promise*, and semantic, adultery being the theme of the novel. In that respect the epigraph is at the same time transgressed, betrayed or failed by the text which follows the epigraph.

This ambivalence of the epigraph simulates or repeats in a rhetorical manner the representational gestures of this text, especially those concerning the status of the feminine. It is this undecidable structure that makes it so hard to interpret both the motto and the woman to whom it refers, or with whose name it shares the privileged position in/outside of the text ("Anna Karenina" is, also, a title). In its radical undecidability, the motto sets up the law of genre which is, as Derrida says, "in the feminine" (Derrida 73), thus both promoting the law (of marriage, genre, sex, gender, text), while traversing and transgressing the borderlines it establishes. Anna brings with her the limit, and that paradoxical limit is what constitutes her ("her," again: both the novel's and the character's) sexuality and eroticism.

The epigraph of Anna Karenina operates as a subtext spinning conflicting rhetorical forces and thus serves not as a unified source, but as one of the texts in its turn complex and contradictory at work within the novel. Since the novel's major theme is adultery, our analysis will naturally deal with the rhetorical performances of pardon and vengeance induced by the adulterous transgressions of law and contract. It will also address the distribution of guilt and pardoning along sexual lines. The economics of pardoning in *Anna Karenina*, in response to adultery, strongly favors men and disfavors women, without much hesitation and ambivalence, thus allowing us to see clearly the logic with which this novel (or more precisely: its representation of a specific law) treats the feminine. My reading of the motto is prompted by T. Tanner's statement: Old Testament and New Testament methods of confronting adultery may both be found operating within the same book, as I suggest are in *Anna Karenina*. It seems indeed arguable that it is *just such a tension between law and sympathy* that holds the great bourgeois novel together (Tanner 14, emphasis mine).

THE GREAT CODE OF PARDONING

In the Old Testament, adultery is accurately codified within the Mosaic law, and interpreted as a deadly sin:

22. If a man be found lying with a woman married to a husband, then they both of them shall die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel (Deuteronomy 22).

Mosaic law views adultery as a transgression against the absoluteness of the law that

shatters the spiritual foundations of the whole society ("Israel"). "There is no appeal against these categories, and the transgression of the imperatives that organize the relationship between these categories is punished by death" (Tanner, 19). The logic of the Mosaic law is the "either-or" that has no tolerance for the transgression, and punishes without exception. The law given by Moses and Torah, "has total authority, and within it individuals have total responsibility" (Tanner 19). The transgression takes place "in plain view" and does not allow for any privacy or internalized guilt related to it. The law is that vengeance which strikes mercilessly, yet it is at the same time the all-seeing eye that penetrates all attempts to hide. Nobody is out of eyesight or earshot in the Mosaic city (cf. Tanner 19-20).

In The New Testament, on the other hand, adulterous transgression results in pardoning. The blind application of the law does not occur, the impersonal prescription of a punishment that punishes the transgression, rather an "individualized" application of the law enacted: a pardon that absolves the adulterous woman of her sin by inducing and absolving the internalized guilt.

3. And the scribes and the Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; [...]

5. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?

6. [...] But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as if he heard them not.

7. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her [...].

10. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?

11. She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more. (John 8, 3-10).

Christ's re-spelling the Mosaic law "completely alters the terms and premises of the debate" (Tanner 21). Mosaic vengeance or its "monolithic generality" (Tanner) is abandoned for a more personalized application of the law. In Christ's interpretation, the law is actualized by inducing guilt. His pardoning of the adulteress demonstrates that her transgression is not to be read in terms of cosmic tragedy but more as a social deviation which is atoned for by the mechanism of pardoning. In this respect, pardoning is an empty gesture deprived of ethical "content": we can pardon because everyone is guilty.

It is interesting to compare the different ways in which the two Biblical texts interpret transgression, in the light of their mode of production of discourses. "Mosaic law" is being spoken to the people of Israel, and implies a direct connection between the law and logos. Such a link governs the immediacy between transgression and punishment. The New Testament, on the other hand, punishes by inducing guilt or shame in everybody. It is in the institution of pardoning that it restores or recuperates the initial plenitude of justice. This is accomplished by the prolonged effects of writing which are conspicuously

out of reach of the law-giver ("Go away and sin no more"). Christ writing in the sand is a law-giver who counts on the repetitive machine of pardoning which works beyond his immediate control. His is also the role of restoring social balance not by exclusion (like Moses), but by inclusion into society. (Inducing guilt and internalizing the law are the structural part of this performative). These differences are of importance for our reading of Tolstoy's novel, since "both of these patterns of action are very clearly pursued by *Anna Karenina*" (Tanner 23).

The oppositions and differences between the two interpretations of adultery established by the Biblical texts are at work in the motto of Tolstoy's novel as well. A brief look at the two contexts from which the lines about vengeance are taken will prove that the possible meanings of the motto stand in absolute opposition. These oppositions then serve to guide the two modes of reading, both the motto and the text of the novel itself.

The line about vengeance ("Mine is the vengeance..." (Deuteronomy 32: 32), appears in one of the closing chapters of the Torah and follows the laws regarding adultery (these verses appear in the same book, just a few chapters before). It is thus a commentary on the laws that primarily interests us here, as adultery is generally taken to be the "theme" of *Anna Karenina*. By dint of their position in the closing chapters of the Mosaic books, these lines have a privileged and dominant position in the Mosaic cycle and shed some retrospective light on the nature of the laws. What is the vengeance promised by God? It is a punishment to all those among the people of Israel who do not follow his words. Everybody outside of the circle circumscribed by his voice will be punished by destruction (41:2). The vengeance will literally dismember anyone who does not obey or follow the words passed from God to His people. The pattern of the immediacy of the vengeance and of its imminent terror is kept in these passages as well. For our purposes, the image of the dismembered body should be kept in mind, since Anna's body is dismembered in a similar way.

The New Testament's statement about vengeance is placed in a very different kind of context. Its genre is not that of a sermon, but of the epistle, and its rhetorical mode is that of seduction and persuasion, not of terror and threat. Much in the same way as Christ writing in the sand stands in opposition to the hortative Moses, so St. Paul's epistles are, by the same token, set against Moses. The immediate context of the line is also utterly different. Instead of the Mosaic threat, there is the invitation for compassion (15. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep), pardon (17. Never return evil for evil; 14. Bless those who persecute you;) and, most of all, restrain yourselves from vengeance (19. Do not avenge for yourself, ... Mine is the vengeance). The immediate context, as much as the whole Epistle, represents a call to give up vengeance, since it is the proper role of God, who is merciful. The God of the epistle, as is explicitly stated at the beginning, (12, 1) is a pardoning, "merciful God."

ANNA KARENINA AS THE PARDONING MACHINE

The text of *Anna Karenina* that follows the motto, immediately takes up this evangelistic interpretation by setting up a model of transgression and pardoning which constitutes the cornerstone of the novel's mechanism. "The wife had discovered an intrigue between her husband and their former French governess, and declared that she would not continue to live under the same roof with him," and the whole drama hinges on the uncertainty whether Dolly will pardon him or not: "his guilt rose up in his imagination. 'No, she will never forgive me, she can't forgive me'" (Tolstoy 2). In Tolstoy's novel the pardoning structure is represented by Dolly's and Stiva's marriage, in which the transgression is soothed and cured by the endless repetition of pardons and pardoning. It is precisely this mechanism of transgression and pardoning that, for this couple, keeps the marriage-machine running. The major mistake to which Stiva admits is not to have actually committed the crime, but, rather, not to have acted well enough. Furthermore, he complains of not fitting properly into the pardoning machine: "Instead of taking offence, denying, making excuses, asking forgiveness, he...smiled his...silly smile. He could not forgive himself that silly smile" (Tolstoy, 2). The subsequent chapters describe Stiva's and Anna's attempts at reconciliation. "Dolly, what can I say?...Only forgive me, forgive me! ... Punish me--make me suffer for my sin! ... I am the guilty one. I have no words to express my guilt.... But Dolly forgive me! ... No, she will not forgive me" (Tolstoy, 10-11). Anna, during her mission of reconciliation, keeps repeating to Dolly Stiva's words: "'No, no, she will not forgive me....' How can I forgive him.... Forgive it utterly..." (Tolstoy 65).¹ In the end Anna's mission succeeds with Oblonsky "having obtained forgiveness" (Tolstoy 68).

Subsequent chapters in the novel will, as a rule, entail a scene of pardoning in one way or another. Such pardoning, in actual fact, forms part of the social ritual holding society together. In a scene that redoubles and parodies Anna's successful attempt to reconcile Stiva and Dolly, Vronsky reconciles a German gentleman with the officer who attempted to seduce his wife. "We are in despair...we beg to be forgiven for our unfortunate mistake...I ask you to forgive their fault. ... I am willing to forgive them, but...." (Tolstoy 120). Vronsky succeeds in obtaining the pardon, and the matter is settled.

No one is spared from this pardoning machine, not even children. One of Dolly's sons, Grisha, disobeys his governess, and it was decided to punish him. "This was too sad, and Dolly decided to speak to the governess and get her to forgive Grisha.... But as she was passing through the dancing room she saw a scene which filled her heart with

¹The novel's beginning chapters also set up the scene for Anna's transgression. The novel thus begins anew and generates a new frame for reading Anna's sin. A scene between Levin and Stiva entails a discussion about the fallen woman and the evangelistic interpretation of Christ's pardoning, thus explicitly invoking The Gospel According to John (Tolstoy 38). These chapters introduce another woman, Mary Nikolaevna, whose sins Nicholas Levin pardons: "I took her out of a bad house.... But I love her and respect her..." (Tolstoy 80).

such joy that tears came to her eyes and she pardoned the little culprit herself" (Tolstoy 240). An almost identical scene occurs between Anna and Serezha. But at the same time it is a scene during which the two modes of pardoning suggested by reading the motto are actualized and put into play. "Serezha... seems to be guilty. Guilty, how?" The transgression is quickly recuperated: "'Serezha...it was wrong, but you won't do it again?... You love me?'" (Tolstoy 264). The immediate context is, of course, Jesus's "Go away and sin no more," the proviso for transgression and pardoning offered by the New Testament. The episode is crucial for an understanding of the thoughts it provokes in Anna about "them" pardoning her sins: "Is it possible that they will not forgive me... she felt that they would not forgive...I cannot speak of my fault and my repentance, because..." (Tolstoy 265). Anna refuses to enter the machine of pardoning, by "not mentioning [Karenin's] generosity," and as much as she anticipates that she will not be pardoned, she herself refuses to participate in the social ritual. Her commitment to her love is beyond the empty repetition of the convention of pardoning, and she refuses to partake in the easy social remedy for her transgression. To accept the pardon is to perceive herself as guilty, to internalize the guilt, something that she does not want to participate in. However, her refusal to "say anything to her husband" and not to appeal to his generosity does not take her out of guilt and transgression, into a realm in which this ethical structure could be rewritten or be said not to be at work, but, instead, it takes her back to the realm of Mosaic law programmed by the motto. The vengeance of the text seems to announce itself here. Her transgression is the transgression of the law of genre, her refusal to partake in the same pardoning structure which seems to rule society. It should be mentioned that at several points in the novel it is said that there are women of Anna's rank who are considerably "looser" than she is, yet still enjoy the full respect of society. Anna's crime seems to amount not so much to mere adultery as such, but, rather, to her refusal to comply with the mores of the day. For her, the horror of conventional pardon is greater than actual fear for her life: "He is a Christian, he is magnanimous. Yes, a mean, horrid man.... If he killed me--if he would have killed me,--I would have borne anything. But no, he will [pardon]" (Tolstoy 267). For Anna it is the suggestion that she repent ("I am perfectly convinced that you have repented," Tolstoy 259), that she comply with the emptiness of the pardoning mechanism, that induces deepest horror in her. She prefers death to Karenin's pardon (which amounts to the same thing, since Karenin can pardon only a dead or dying Anna).

It is precisely this refusal to partake in the pardon-machine, her attempt to exclude herself from the space of the Christian law, that works to Anna's detriment, and finally kills her. Her resistance also points out that the Christian law of pardoning can be equally deadly if applied to those who refuse to participate in it. On the other hand, so many pardons in the novel result in turning pardon into an empty, phatic, token movement which structures the overall relationships of society. Pardoning is the corrective mechanism which has the power to restore the initial imbalance and repetitively supply guilt with its resolution. Since it works like writing, in the mode of iteration, pardoning provides an easy remedy for any social disturbance or disbalance. As so many pardons in this novel testify, the movement of pardoning works in the mode of gramophony, an endless

repetition of convention regardless of the intention accompanying the act. Excuses and pardons reveal a disjunction between the intention and the mechanism, the machine which produces the pardon, a rupture which marks a "radical estrangement between the meaning and the performance of any text" (de Man 298). It is exactly the intention, true love, the presence of meaning, that Anna demands from pardoning, the relations with her husband and Vronsky, and the constant failure for these realms to coincide. That is exactly why she resists so harshly Karenin's attempt to pardon her ("horrid man, Christian"): the empty movement of language induces in her the deepest horror. This mechanical movement may be epitomized by George Korsunsky, "the famous *dirigeur* and Master of Ceremonies." His movement through the dancing hall is a constant repetition of excuses and pardons addressed to women: "And Korsunsky waltzed toward the left of the room, gradually diminishing his step and repeating 'Pardon, *mesdames*, pardon, pardon, *mesdames*... Pardon, pardon, a waltz, a waltz'" (Tolstoy 71-3). Korsunsky may be the paragon of that "text-machine's infinite power to excuse" (de Man 299).² The society which Anna resists is the one that automatically repeats senseless words of forgiveness.³ The reunion of Levin and Kitty is another chance for Tolstoy to stage a scene of pardoning. The lovers' first sight is an anticipation of their later reconciliation in the bliss of pardon. "There was, it would seem, nothing unusual in what she said, but for him what a meaning there was, inexpressible in words... There was a prayer for forgiveness [*pros'ba o proshchenii*]..." (Tolstoy 350). This anticipation is, of course, fulfilled, when the two start playing secretaire.

'Well then, read this. I will tell you what I wish, what I very much wish!' and she wrote these initial letters: T, y, m, f, a, f, w, h. This meant, 'that you might forgive [*prostit*'] and forget what happened.' ... 'I have nothing to forget or forgive...I never ceased to love you' (Tolstoy 362).

The scene in which Levin pardons Kitty comes right after the scene in which Dolly tries to convince Karenin to pardon Anna and he refuses ("I cannot forgive; ...I cannot forgive

²The pardoning scenes display the necessary betrayal involved in any promise or a pardon. The "authority of the first person" (Felman), that is, of God, who stands as a model for this authority, and who promises pardon or vengeance, is precisely what the text of the novel subverts, "by parasitizing the performative through the infinite repetition" (Felman 1983, 51). It is significant that this betrayal is carried out through the feminine principle, i.e. seduction, and transgression of the borderlines, but also adultery (Don Juan in Felman's analysis is the agent of transgression), and that it functions as a subversion of the origin, paternal principle and genealogy. "If Don Juan subverts the uniqueness of the promise by repeating precisely the promise of uniqueness--the promise of marriage, the supremely unique act--it is in order to ruin not the performance of language, but its authority" (Felman 1983, 50). In a similar way endless repetitions of pardons performed in *Anna Karenina* contaminate the original purity of the Biblical pardoning authority and corrode, from the inside, the authority of marriage, promise and apology.

³The multiplication of pardons is repeated, not without parodic overtones, in the scene when Levin awaits Kitty's delivery: "'Lord have mercy! Pardon and help us!"; "'God pardon and help us!"; "'Lord pardon and help us!"; "'Lord pardon and help us!"; "The thought of God made him at once pray for forgiveness and mercy" (Tolstoy 641, 644, 646). It is significant that these pardons frame again the feminine body delivering a baby, and thus contain Kitty both ideologically and sexually.

her.'" At which point Dolly responds "'Love those who hate you'" (Tolstoy 359), invoking, again, the evangelic message. Karenin is thus explicitly depicted as opting for Mosaic, rather than Evangelic, law. The following scene with Levin and Kitty reinforces, by contrast, his refusal to pardon. I would argue that this scene in a masterly way, re-writes Gospel while repeating all its constitutive elements. Levin almost literally writes in the sand: he writes his pardon to Kitty with a piece of chalk (Russian: "mel"), thus leaving a sandy trace on the table leading straight to the Gospel According to John. To write in the sand, like Christ, or with chalk, is to write something which can be easily forgotten and erased ("go and sin no more"; "pardon and forget"). (Unlike Moses, whose laws are fixed on tablets, unchangeable and unalterable). To write in the sand is to simultaneously erase, something like Freud's *Wunderblock*. And, significantly enough, Kitty and Levin write only initials, not even words, making the erasure already built into their writing, and all the easier. "Mel" also comes from the same root as "mel'" (written with the soft sign), one of the meanings of which is "shoal," a sandbank. And "mel" also means a "whitewash," that which cleans, erases, but also absolves one from blame, that is pardons. Furthermore, the whole scene is set up as a mystery, a secret, known only to Levin and Kitty, since they are playing *secrtaire* ("Playing "secretary"?" said the old Prince approaching them" Tolstoy 363). This adds to the pardon written with chalk a dimension of mystery, (as the narrator has it elsewhere: "something sacramental, a mystery binding a couple in the sight of God"), indeed a *Mysterium Tremendum*, the evangelic majesty of both pardon, absolution from sin, marital secret and sanctity, and revelation.

Levin's pardon of Kitty immediately finds its parallel when Levin, "with the permission of the Old Prince," decides to confess to Kitty his previous love-life, and lets her read his diaries.

'Take, take those dreadful books back!' she cried,... 'Why did you give me them?' ... But no, it's best after all.... His head drooped and he remained silent, unable to speak. 'You will not forgive me?' he whispered. 'Yes, I have forgiven you, but it is dreadful!' ... His happiness was so great after this confession... She forgave him..." (Tolstoy 372).⁴

PARDONING DESTINATIONS: WOMEN GUILTY, PREGNANT AND DEAD

There is another aspect of pardoning in *Anna Karenina* which has not been discussed so far, and which is important for the functioning of pardoning in the novel: the distribution of pardons along sexual lines. The distribution of pardons reveals the hypocrisy of the pardoning structure, and may be said to expose Tolstoy's (or at least the

⁴One is reminded here of George Sand's dictum from her book *Elle et lui* (1859), which can be said to apply to *Anna Karenina* as well: "It seems that pardoning begets pardoning, until the point of saturation, until the point of imbecile weakness" (Sand 166).

novel's) vengeance on the mores of society.⁵ Women in *Anna Karenina* systematically pardon the promiscuity of men: Dolly pardons Stiva: "Dolly forgive me!"; "Yes I can, I can. Yes, I should forgive. I should not remain the same woman--no, but I should forgive, and forgive it as if it had never happened at all" (Tolstoy 10, 65). Levin, too, begs Kitty to pardon him for being jealous (afterwards he throws Veslovsky out of the house): "Kate, I have been tormenting you! My darling, forgive me!" (Tolstoy 521). Kitty pardons him for his utter despotism and phallocracy. Kitty also pardons Levin his sexual adventures (before the marriage): "Yes, I have forgiven you, but it is dreadful" (Tolstoy 372). Levin also pardons Kitty, but the economy of the pardon in this case works to construct guilt as the structural part of feminine subordination. Levin forgives Kitty not her transgression, but the fact that she disposed freely with her desire, even though her relationship with Vronsky never turned into a sexual, or marital relationship. Her desire for another man from the start is loaded with guilt and in need of a pardon: "'If you can forgive me, please do,' pleaded her look. 'I am so happy.'" (Tolstoy 49). Kitty is guilty of being happy as a woman who chooses her lover, and she will dearly pay for this "transgression." To Levin, it seems "natural" that she be seen as guilty, (it is Levin who perceives the look in her eyes as begging for forgiveness), and that his forgiveness is necessary before any relationship with her could be continued: "And I should come magnanimously to forgive her, to have pity on her! I stand before her in the role of the one who forgives" (Tolstoy 294). So, the forgiveness between Levin and Kitty is not reciprocal, but bears a heavily misogynous mark. Only a woman who is almost killed by guilt, as Kitty is, can be pardoned for a sin she never committed.⁶ As de

⁵This ambivalence is aptly formulated by Mary Evans: "She [Anna] is a figure who represents the sexual potential and personal autonomy of all women, but she is a woman whose sexuality and autonomy are distorted by the social order that has formed and structured her" (Evans 24). It has been argued that this ambivalence in representing the feminine is constitutive for the "realist" novel in general: "What function, if any, is served by the representation of female libido within the economy of the realist text? By focusing on the detail of the foot, chained and/or unchained, I am led to conclude that the binding of the female energy is one of (if not) the enabling conditions of the forward movement of the 'classical text.' Realism is that paradoxical moment in Western literature when representation can neither accommodate the Otherness of Woman nor exist without it" (Schor xi). It is this paradoxical un/chaining energy of writing and representation that is unleashed by the structure of pardoning woman in *Anna Karenina*.

⁶Only a dead woman can be pardoned. That is how Karenin can pardon Anna. Later on, he feels sorry that she has not died, that she has stayed alive, and that he has pardoned her: "He forgave his wife.... The mistake Karenin made...[is that] he had not considered the possibility of her recovery" (Tolstoy 381). Anna is well aware of the destructive force of pardoning which kills and dismembers her body: "My God! *Forgive me!* She felt 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 for forgiveness* was addressed to him.... Looking at him she felt her humiliation physically, and could say nothing more. He felt what a murderer must feel when looking at the body he has deprived of life.... That body *must be cut into pieces* and hidden away.... Then, as the murderer desperately throws himself on the body, as though with passion, *and drags it and hacks it*, so Vronsky covered her face and shoulders with kisses" (Tolstoy 135-6, my italics). The sacrifice of the feminine body is the assumption of pardoning woman in this novel. Of course, the sacrifice is what structures the possibility of pardon in general. The parallelism between Anna and Christ is discussed below.

Man would say, her "guilt is forgiven because it allows for the pleasure of revealing its repression. It follows that repression is in fact an excuse... Excuses generate the very guilt they exonerate" (de Man 286). Levin can pardon Kitty because she is already accepting his pardon/guilt, and in that sense "No excuse can ever hope to catch up with such a proliferation of guilt" (de Man 299).

Levin's pardons are also performed within a strongly misogynous paradigm, and are, therefore, directed against the free circulation of feminine libido. As a matter of fact, Levin can deal only with the feminine strictly confined by the law or her own biology. Levin's misogyny betrays both his fear of the feminine and a certain impotence and fear of masculine competition (both with Vronsky, and later on with Veslovsky). Women with uninhibited sexuality physically disgust him. They are for him "spiders" and "*gadiny*," a Russian word indicating something truly repulsive (trash, muck, vomit, excrement could be referred to as "*gadiny*," "*gadost*"). They, naturally, are not to be pardoned (but men are):

'As to that you must *pardon me*. You know that for me there are two kinds of women... or rather, no! There are women, and there are... I have never seen any charming fallen creatures, and never shall see any; and people like that painted Frenchwoman with her curls out there by the counter, are an abomination to me ("*gadiny*"), and all of these fallen ones are like her.'

'And the one in the Gospels?' [asked Oblonsky].

'Oh don't! Christ would never have spoken those words had he known how they would be misused! They are the only words in the Gospels that seem to be remembered. However, I am not saying what I think, but what I feel. I have a horror of a fallen woman. You are repelled by spiders and I by those creatures (Tolstoy 38, emphasis mine).

Levin does not only deny pardon to "fallen" women, but implies that Christ was not quite right in pardoning the woman, because his words have been misused. (How a pardon to a "fallen" woman can be misused is something Levin does not explain. The pardon of a sin, lending a helping hand to someone who has "fallen," by definition, cannot be misused if performed within the evangelic paradigm or even any paradigm of social morality. His own brother, for example, pardons a "fallen" woman, takes her out of a "bad house," and they live unmarried as husband and wife. Levin has no problems perceiving her as "*gadina*," muck. When visiting his dying brother he prevents Kitty from meeting with her. Levin, on the other hand, pardons the sin that Kitty never committed, thus both repeating and making a travesty of the evangelic performance. Levin's words also betray a fear of his own castration, a "horror," "a Medusa like effect" (Freud, Kofman), when facing feminine sexuality. That is actually what Levin cannot pardon, since he can stand only women who are either permeated by the guilt of their own sexuality, like Kitty, and thus in need of his pardon, or those whose sexuality and libido are thoroughly inscribed within the cycle of biological reproduction. He perceives animals in anthropomorphic terms, and women in animal terms, when referring to feminine sexuality. He thinks of sheep with lambs as "bleating mothers" (Tolstoy 139), of "*Pava*'s [the cow's] three-month-old calf" as her "daughter" ("*Pavina doch*") (Tolstoy 139), and is in general obsessed with insemination, sowing and "swelling buds" (Tolstoy 142). The

only femininity he can actually deal with, for him the essence of the feminine, is that of reproductive glands and ovaries.

What pleased Dolly most was the woman's evident admiration for the great number of children she had, and their loveliness....

Surrounded by her children ... Dolly was pleased to see the familiar figure of Levin... On this day she was more pleased [to see him] than ever because he would now see her in all her glory. No one could understand the dignity of her position better than Levin. On seeing her he found himself confronted by just such a picture of family life as his fancy painted.

'You are like a brood hen ["*nasedka*"], Darya Alexandrovna!'

'Oh, I am so glad!' said she, holding out her hand (Tolstoy 242-243, translation slightly modified).

Levin's marital phantasm is that of a wife who is a pregnant or fertile cow, a brood hen or a bleating mother.⁷ This phantasm is in stark contrast to Anna's femininity: "'But she [Anna] has a child; I suppose she is occupied with her?' said Levin. 'I think you see in every woman only a female ["*samka*"], *une couveuse!*'" (Tolstoy 629).⁸ As a matter of fact there are only two situations in the novel in which Levin is depicted as showing masculinity and potency, a symbolic erection. When he is casting a phallic, triumphant gaze ("burning eyes") down at the guilty woman begging for and submitting herself to his pardon: "Kitty with the chalk in her hand, looking up at Levin with a timid, happy smile, and his fine figure bending over the table, with his burning eyes fixed now on the table, now on her." She, naturally, asks "that he might forgive" (Tolstoy 362, *italics mine*). The other symbolic erection the narrator depicts is when Levin is hunting, and enjoying the total submission of his female dog, Laska: "Laska walked beside her master... He stroked her, and whistled a sign that she might now set off... 'Eh Laska dear, will things go right?' When, having reloaded, Levin went on again... [etc]" (Tolstoy 539). It is also significant that "laska," a word meaning "endearment, caress," here the name of the dog, was in Kitty's eyes when she begged Levin for pardon. Thus Kitty is equated by the narrative association and contiguity with Levin's faithful dog:

There was, it would seem, nothing unusual in what she had said, but for him what a meaning there was, inexpressible in words, in every sound and every movement of her lips, her eyes, and her hands as she said it. There was a *prayer for forgiveness*, and trust in him, and a caress ["*laska*"]--a tender, timid caress ["*nezhnaia, robkaia laska*"], and a promise, and a hope and a love for him in which he could not believe and which suffocated him with joy (Tolstoy 350, *emphasis mine*).

Levin can pardon, love, "shoot and reload" only in the presence of total feminine

⁷When he marries Kitty she is referred to in the church as a "lamb decked for the slaughter" (Tolstoy 415).

⁸"Samka" in Russian means a she-animal, a female animal. Oblonsky is right: "*une couveuse*," French word for "brood hen" is the same as "*nasedka*" used by Levin addressing Dolly, which in Russian literally means "a hen sitting on eggs" and therefore in an even more static, oppressive way determines or immobilizes and castrates feminine sexuality.

submission, which fulfills his master-slave masculine fantasy, "and which suffocates him with joy."⁹

The way Levin is depicted in the novel makes one wonder if his family should be the one that is "happy" and resembling all other happy families.¹⁰ Lev Shestov was probably the first to point out the violence in Kitty's and Levin's marriage. In his *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*, he points out that this marriage cannot serve in any way as an epitome of happiness:

The story about the marriage and the family happiness of Levin on the one hand, and the story about Ivan Ilich and Pozdnishev are, in the final analysis, one and the same story told differently, accented differently or, if you want, evaluated differently. In order to see this, one only needs to read and compare *Anna Karenina* and "The Kreutzer Sonata." Levin and Kitty had the same relationship as Pozdnishev and his wife did--there can be no doubt about it. Levin's family life is recommended to us as a model, and Pozdnishev says of himself: "we lived like swine." Why does the story about Levin hide that which is stressed and made explicit in the story about Pozdnishev? (Shestov 219).

Vronsky has an entirely different attitude towards women and female animals. He is someone with an aesthetic, and pragmatic fascination with the feminine. He races Fru-Fru, the horse, and loves Anna, until they are killed. (Fru-Fru and Anna die similar deaths, with their spines broken). The novel thus depicts the feminine as either contained within a certain phallographic structure and dismembered by pardons, enslaved by its own reproductive sexuality, or, when the feminine is fascinating and beautiful, and outside of these two economies (Fru-Fru is a racing, not a breeding horse, and, we are repeatedly told, a beautiful one; Anna though pardoned and accepting guilt continues to sin, and uses contraception), inevitably destined for death.¹¹

⁹Even after being almost killed by thunder, Kitty has to beg Levin to forgive her: "'Really, it was not my fault... We had hardly...' Kitty began excusing herself" (Tolstoy 735).

¹⁰It is also significant that Tolstoy, throughout the novel, depicts Levin as somewhat of an idiot (in Gogolian and Dostoevskian terms), as socially inept, as someone who often cannot understand a simple social situation, who makes blunders and social scandals, is late for his marriage, etc. This is more than obvious in the scene/scandal with Veslovsky, or during the elections when he both makes a faux pas and does not understand a simple election procedure and cannot grasp its meaning. He also repeats the words of another famous madman in Russian literature, from Gogol's "Diary of a Madman." When talking to Koznishev, he says "Don't, don't, don't speak" [*Nichego, nichego, molchanie*] (Tolstoy 363). The narrator thus gives a lot of signals to make us suspicious about Levin as the epitome or embodiment of Tolstoy's privileged ideas or ideals.

¹¹Anna is both the phantasm or ghost of a mother, already dead, or twice dead, a constantly absent, guilty, and finally a dead mother (she abandons her son, neglects her daughter, and commits suicide).

Anna's delivery is contained by numerous pardons and parallels the scene of Kitty's childbirth. These pardons work to contain the woman, or, in Anna's case, to almost kill her. Just the mere enumeration of guilt and pardoning surrounding this scene is overwhelming in its violence. After delivering the baby, she writes to Karenin: "I am dying, I beg and entreat you, come! I shall die easier for your forgiveness"; "Alexey would not have refused me. I should have forgotten and he would have forgiven..."; "You say he won't forgive me"; "Forgive me, forgive me completely!"; "O, you cannot forgive me!"; "Give him your hand. Forgive him!"; "But I saw her and I forgave her. And the joy of forgiving has revealed my duty to

It seems that *Anna Karenina* depicts no happy family at all. The narrative of this novel is so heavily loaded with inter-personal violence revealed by the incessant pardoning machine, that not much is left of the high Christian ideals preached by Levin at the end of the novel. The interpreters of the novel, and, more important for our topic, of its epigraph, often juxtapose Anna's dismembering, as apocalyptic, to the idea of unity, ecumenic reconciliation, and so called *sobornost'* in Russian society, as if this novel leads to some harmonious synthesis.¹² But the amount of pardoning and constant societal guilt disseminated through the novel, makes one wonder if there is any *sobornost'* left towards the end of *Anna Karenina* which, in Shestov's words, betrays the fact that "monsters live at the bottom of Count Tolstoy's soul" (Shestov 95).

ANNA AS CHRIST/CHRIST AS ANNA

The problem of *sobornost'* is certainly crucial for this novel, and is closely related to the epigraph and the problem of pardoning. A general and mutual pardon, unconditioned historically, is what, in essence, constitutes *sobornost'*, a term referring to the early Christian gatherings, established as the ideal within the Slavophile movement.¹³ Levin represents one aspect of Tolstoy's interests in the Slavophile debate. Some of Levin's acts and deeds may be seen as Tolstoy's attempt to respond to and in a way continue the tradition of Kireevski and Khomiakov, and their understanding of Christianity as, to use the analysis of Boris Groys,

a pre-reflexive and extra-historical mode of existence of the Russian peasant masses. One can say that these thinkers theologized the unconscious and that here we have a complete reversal of the

me"; "I have wholly forgiven"; "I only pray to God that the joy of forgiving may not be taken from me"; "above all the joy [of Karenin's] forgiving"; "He forgave his wife"; "He forgave Vronsky"; "your husband has accepted that and forgiven you [Oblonsky to Anna]"; "And having connected his [Karenin's] words with his forgiveness..."; (Tolstoy 373, 374, 375, 376, 389, 392, 459). And later, referring to the scene: "You have performed a great act of forgiveness [Lydia Ivanovna to Karenin]"; "Granted that you have forgiven her, and do forgive her"; "He could not at all reconcile with his recent forgiveness..." (Tolstoy 459, 463, 471). One hardly needs to comment on the violence of pardoning containing, dismembering, or being performed on Anna's (dead) body. (Karenin pardons because he thinks that Anna will die, and later regrets both his pardon and the fact that she has not died). The body of *Anna Karenina*, its textual space, and the body of Anna Karenina, are dismembered by endless pardons long before the train actually mangles Anna's body at the end of the novel. Whenever a pardon is directed at Anna, another cut is delivered to her body, but it is precisely this wounding that moves the narrative forward and makes the text of the novel. The endless (failure of) pardoning is what makes Anna Karenina's (and *Anna Karenina's*) hysteria, history and story.

One should also note in relation to this the hesitance of the text between the two Evangelic subtexts, the two Marias: Mary the virgin, the virgin mother (Kitty), and Mary the prostitute, the whore (Anna).

¹²See Robert Jackson, "The Ambivalent Beginning of *Anna Karenina*."

¹³"A pardon is ahistorical," says Kristeva. "It erases the chain of causes, punishments and crimes, it suspends the time of the acts" (Kristeva 210-211).

usual relationship between the conscious and the unconscious, as perceived traditionally in the West (Groys, 192).¹⁴

Anna Karenina is written at the same time as Solov'ev's "The Crisis of Western Philosophy. Against the Positivists" (1874) which Groys sees as an attempt to translate Schopenhauer's philosophy into "teaching about the inwardly transformed matter, or Divine Sophia, which he associates with Russia, and which should give birth to the 'new Word' i.e. new Christ" (Groys, manuscript). Tolstoy's interest in Schopenhauer is, of course, well documented. The epigraph of *Anna Karenina* is actually taken from Schopenhauer.

In Tolstoy's teaching, Schopenhauer's theme of giving up the individual will in order to unite oneself with the universal will, presents itself not in a form of denial of life as such, but in a form of merging with the formless, material life of Russian peasantry (Groys, manuscript).

But *Anna Karenina* seems to also undermine the ideological credo that it proposes in the body of Levin, and betrays Tolstoy's deep suspicion of the possibility of *sobornost'*. Shestov for example, claims that "Tolstoy comes to the conclusion that everything can be reduced to egoism" (Shestov 82) in spite of his professed ideology. On the other hand, the novel shows what price has to be paid to despotism, in order for *sobornost'* to function. And if "the suicide of Anna--her dismembering--is apocalyptic for all Russia" (Jackson 345), it shows that at least one woman (a Divine Sophia?) has to be offered and sacrificed for this ecumenical fantasy (which Tolstoy both promotes and undoes in this novel) to come to life. Boris Groys actually goes so far as to relate the violence of *sobornost'* to Soviet communism, which he sees as its logical outcome.¹⁵ Tolstoy's depiction of the violence of *sobornost'*, possibly even against Tolstoy's proclaimed beliefs, may be said to also anticipate its totalitarian possibilities. (Levin is indeed depicted as the despot of his family and estate). Shestov discusses this duality between the ideologically professed and the represented as embodied in Levin in Tolstoy's novel: "*Anna Karenina* is not a naive thing. 'The man of a pure soul!' Dostoevsky did not praise Levin for nothing: a raven sensed the smell of a rotting corpse and could not hide his joy" (Shestov 86). That is the vengeance of Tolstoy's text which finds faith in neither *sobornost'* nor in evangelic mercy and pardoning. As Shestov says, "Tolstoy wants faith, but is constantly testing it and thus killing every faith... He pays his dues to the [Dostoevskian] underground" (Shestov 80).¹⁶

¹⁴Julia Kristeva also notices the relationship between pardon, religion, and the unconscious, in relation to the structure of pardoning in Dostoevsky's novels: "Pardon rejuvenates the unconscious because it inscribes the right for a narcissistic regression in the History and the Word" (Kristeva, 215).

¹⁵See also Kristeva: "the theophany of the land guides the idea of Moscow as the 'third Rome' [in relation to *sobornost'*], after Constantinople, but also that of the Third International, to be sure" (Kristeva 223).

¹⁶In Dostoevsky, "Dostoevsky: the Writing of Suffering and Pardon" ["Dostoievski, l'écriture de la souffrance et le pardon"], Julia Kristeva discusses extensively the question of pardoning, suicide, violence and suffering in Dostoevsky, and points to the fact that all writing which could be termed "modern," focuses

There is one other aspect of this novel, nevertheless, which comments upon the possibility of evangelic reconciliation and pardoning, (indeed pardoning woman), and relates Anna Karenina to the Gospels. It is the allegory of Anna as Christ, and can be related to Anna's encounter with the representation of the Gospel According to John in Mikhailov's picture. It is of crucial importance, of course, that the picture represents not any Gospel, but precisely the one in which Christ pardons the adulterous woman, that is, the one which in a profound way re-writes the Mosaic law. The picture depicts the scene with Christ and Pilate with John in the background, in which Christ encounters the law, and anticipates his own death. Anna is immediately fascinated with Christ and she herself reads the scene within the prism of evangelic reconciliation:

'How wonderful Christ's expression is!' said Anna. That expression pleased her more than all else she saw and she felt that it was the centre of the picture... 'One sees he is sorry for Pilate.' [...] She said he was sorry for Pilate. In Christ's expression there should be pity because there was love in it, a peace not of this world, a readiness for death, and a knowledge of the vanities of this world. Of course there was an official expression in Pilate's face and pity in Christ's... (Tolstoy 430).

Christ is just about to be prosecuted by a state official (a Karenin of sorts), and Christ is well aware that he is to die. Yet there is in his expression a pity for and a pardon of Pilate and a readiness to die which the Gospel itself at one point refers to as suicidal. Anna looking at Mikhailov's picture establishes a reflective, symmetrical relationship between the sacrifices of Christ and Anna. First of all, they are the only two persons who are portrayed in paintings in this novel, therefore doubly framed, reduplicated, and established as models of both beauty and sacrifice. There is a fascination with Christ in Anna, ("How wonderful Christ's expression, is!") as much as everybody else is fascinated with Anna's framed beauty. Furthermore, the same painter who painted the scene from the Gospel

on or polemicizes with pardon and pardoning: "Actually, modern imprecations against christianity--until and including that of Nietzsche-- are imprecations against pardon" (Kristeva 200), concluding that "the idea of pardon totally inhabits the oeuvre of Dostoevsky" (Kristeva 201). She also relates pardoning in Dostoevsky also to the tradition of "*sobornost*," and early Christian gatherings, to the theophany of the land, the Russian Orthodox hypostasy of tenderness ("*umilenie*"), and suffering ("*strastoterptsy*"), (Kristeva 223). We cannot possibly summarize here the complex argument of this rich study, which addresses topics like "apology of suffering," "suicide and terrorism," "death: ineptitude of pardon," "the object of pardon," "atemporality of pardon," "the esthetic pardon," and "the spoken pardon," among others (Kristeva 185-223). What emerges from her study, which also relates the theme of pardon in Dostoevsky to the Orthodox tradition, is the central place that pardon occupies in Dostoevsky, and which is something I want to claim for *Anna Karenina* as well. The centrality of the theme signals an urgency to relate *Anna Karenina* to Dostoevskian pardoning, and Tolstoy's modernity to his subversion of pardoning (already suggested by Shestov). Kristeva focuses particularly on Holbein's picture "Dead Christ," which hangs in Rogozhin's apartment, (and under which another "fallen woman," Nastasia Philipovna, is killed), to discuss Dostoevsky's "imaginary self-consumption," and a "violent attachment to pardon" (Kristeva 226). Dostoevsky's attention to pardon, and the similarities between Anna's and Nastasia's destinies, (which Kristeva does not address), offer a rich field of analogies with Anna Karenina and her relation to Mikhailov's representation of Christ. This "violent attachment to pardon" governs the literary space of *Anna Karenina*, and the novel's self-consuming obsession with pardon which dismembers and devours the text.

According to John paints the portrait of Anna, and thus not only reflects Anna's gaze back to her from the Gospel picture, but inversely creates a reflection from her portrait back to the scene with Christ (thus setting in a reflective, mirroring motion and repetition all the themes of pardon and sacrifice). This establishes an abyssal structure of representation, which displays the repetition-compulsion mechanism of this novel (pardon, sacrifice), creating an

effect which is familiar enough: an illusion of infinite regress can be created by a writer or a painter by incorporating within his own work a work that duplicates in a miniature the larger structure, setting up an apparently *unending* metonymic series. This *mise en abyme* simulates wildly *uncontrollable repetition* (Hertz 311, emphasis mine).

The two paintings set next to each other stand in a supplementary relation, and reflect back and forth onto each other (and, arguably, to the rest of the text), the themes of a "fallen woman," Christ's pardon, his encounter with and persecution by the law and his suicidal sacrifice and thus, in an endless mirror reflect, engender and display the rhetorico-semantic strategy of this novel which results in an unending, uncontrollable structure of pardoning, guilt, and sacrifice.

When the narrator of the novel depicts a painter painting the scene from the Gospel, and then painting Anna's portrait, he is also writing/painting on a palimpsest ("painting in sand"!?), on which the motifs of Christ's sacrifice are being written/painted over and which blur the distinction between Anna and Christ. But the two texts (the Gospel and *Anna Karenina*) have similarities which are more explicit and redundant than that. Christ's sacrifice is seen by this particular Gospel as explicitly suicidal: "Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come" (John 8:22). Furthermore, as much as Anna's name, arguably, can be seen as being anagrammatically repeated in the father's, Christ is the one who says: "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me;" (John 14:11). Very much like Anna, Christ has to be sacrificed because "The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil" (John 7:7). This evangelic quality was perceived by readers almost immediately after the novel was published. A.A. Fet, for example, wrote to Tolstoy that

Everybody feels that this novel is a stern, honest *judgement* passed on our entire way of life, from the peasant to the beef-like prince. People feel that an eye watches them from above which is equipped differently than their blind-since-birth little peepers. *What they consider indubitable, honorable, good, desirable, excellent, enviable is shown to be dull, gross, senseless, ridiculous* (in Tolstoy 750, emphasis mine).

Towards the end of the novel, just before she dies, Anna, not unlike Christ, bears witness to the evils of the world:

"Are we not flung into the world only to hate each other, and therefore to torment ourselves and others? [...] Where did I leave off? At the point that I cannot imagine a situation in which life would not be a torment; that we all have been created in order to suffer, and that we all know this and try

to invent means of deceiving ourselves. But when you see the truth, what are you to do?" [...] She had been reading that book filled with anxieties, deceptions, grief and *evil*... (Tolstoy 691, 693, 695 emphasis mine).

And she ends up in a suicidal sacrifice which testifies to these evils, her deed being the ultimate confirmation of the evils of the world. Anna Karenina stands in relation to the novel as Christ could be said to stand to the Gospel: their suicidal sacrifice testifies to the evils of the world. The sacrifice is necessitated by the structure of the book, which requires sacrifice for the testimony to be true. But the novel itself stands in relation to the Gospel in a similar way as the Gospel stands to the Mosaic law and the Old Testament (and as Anna stands to Karenin). Could we even say that, by writing Anna's face over Christ's sacrifice and sacred face, Tolstoy is grafting (*malgré lui meme*) onto the Bible a feminine principle, re-making Christ after a fallen woman, Anna, and vice versa, thus setting a specular relationship of uncontrollable transgressions, deconstructing the Biblical message and subverting its phallogocentric law? Is that the novel's purloined letter, hidden in plain view?¹⁷

Mosaic law is in need of sacrifice so that the law can be performed, (Christ is "actually" killed by the Jews), but this sacrifice simultaneously bears witness to its insufficiency, so that the sacrifice both annuls and re-writes the Mosaic law, as Christ goes back to the name of his father. *Anna Karenina* allegorically repeats the inter-textual conflict between the Old and the New Testaments, while itself accepting and cutting off (re-writing, erasing, writing with chalk, whitewashing) the Biblical intertextual link and its own relationship to the Bible.¹⁸

Anna's suicide, nevertheless, brings no redemption, or transcendent consolation. Anna's sins, and incessant pardoning could be seen as a pessimistic reinterpretation of the Gospels and witness to Tolstoy's deep suspicion of the possibility of faith or the usefulness of sacrifice. As Konstantin Leontiev said, *Anna Karenina* testifies that "there will never be 'heavenly Jerusalem' on the earth as we know it" (Leontiev 89). And as Shestov

¹⁷As much as Levin's writing in sand can be said to repeat in writing the message of the Gospel (which is itself writing and re-writing the Mosaic law), in the face of Karenin's refusal to pardon, it also sets up a "deconstructive" scene which opposes voice (Karenin and Moses, God), to writing (Levin, Christ), and via Levin, Tolstoy. *Anna Karenina* is thus itself a giant machine rewriting the Biblical tradition, with a vengeance. It is the "work of remembering and forgetting" (Armstrong 192), that is repeating and erasing the tradition within which it leaves its paradoxical trace.

¹⁸The relationship of the New to the Old Testament, in its acceptance and denial or betrayal of the law (of genre, genealogy, etc), can be seen as paradigmatic of all intertextuality, memory, tradition, etc. *Anna Karenina* both exposes this intertextual ambivalence between the two books (indeed through the ambivalent structure of pardoning), and thematizes, represents, and performs its own relationship to the Biblical texts in a similar way. And the paradigmatic structure in the novel which represents this relationship is that of pardoning woman on whose body these two tremendously powerful traditions intersect and leave the bruises and wounds of this cross.

pointed out, it may be that for Tolstoy this "heavenly Jerusalem," and therefore *sobornost'*, was not possible anywhere else and thus this "inadequacy of earthly life" (Adelman 91) is profound and final.¹⁹

ANNA AND/AS THE VENGEFUL GOD: THE TRIUMPH OF THE FEMININE DEATH

Anna's suicide testifies to the evils of the world, dismembering Anna and offering her as a spectacle of symbolic wounds.²⁰ In that respect, she is a Christ-like figure, a sacrificial lamb, who atones for and pardons the sins of the world. But she is also a double (and literally cut in two) in that very moment of self-sacrifice, since she is also taking on herself the task of God, that of vengeance.²¹ She appropriates the vengeance, that is her own death, from God possessive of his vengeance, who says "do not avenge, mine is the vengeance." The memory of Anna that haunts Vronsky is that of Anna when he saw her last, and he remembers her being, in her last moments "cruelly vindictive" (*zhestoko-mstitel'noiu*) (Tolstoy 707). Anna is thus both, in her suicide, a Christ and a vengeful God (but more than that, the ultimate affirmation of her human self!), whom she looks in the eye, and whom she outdoes, whose power and authority she appropriates, and whom, so to speak, she takes with her to her death. Tolstoy explicitly relates her death to the problems of God and his vengeance, and Anna, taking her death, giving death to herself, making death a gift to herself, outdoes God in his vengeance, and, like Kirilov, as Blanchot says, becomes her "own master in death, master of herself through death, the master also of that omnipotence which makes itself felt by us through death, and reduces it to a dead omnipotence. Kirilov's [Anna's!] suicide thus becomes the death of God" (Blanchot 97). To God who says "Vengeance is mine; I will repay" Anna responds: no,

¹⁹In this respect Tolstoy is seen as closer to the Dostoevskian underground, as Shestov has it, than it is usually believed. It would be interesting to compare *Anna Karenina* with Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* [*Besy*], a novel which starts with an epigraph from the Bible (St. Luke), depicts a little girl's suicide as a vengeance to Stavrogin, and ends up with Stavrogin's suicide, and is in general obsessed with the problem of faith and suicide (Kirilov). (*The Possessed* preceded *Anna Karenina* by only a year, and Tolstoy's novel arguably reads in many ways as a counter-text to Dostoevsky's novel and his treatise of suicide).

²⁰Tolstoy himself went to see the autopsy of an adulterous woman who committed suicide and was cut in half by a freight train near Tula, on January 4, 1872, and who served as a prototype for Anna. This attests to Tolstoy's personal fascination with suicide, but also a fascination, a certain necrophilic voyeurism of the naked dismembered feminine body (See Tolstoy 745).

²¹Anna is an excess of being, her own alterity ("Am I myself or another?"), a transgression or ambivalence of her own borderlines. In her marriage she is adulterous, or could we say *adulterous*, the other of herself. "Adultery" is, indeed, in English derived from "ad + . . . *alter*, other" (*Webster College Dictionary* 19). Anna is nevertheless a double or other of herself not only in her life, but in her suicide, as well. As Maurice Blanchot says, "The expression 'I kill myself' suggests the *doubling* which is not taken into account. For 'I' is a self in the plenitude of its action and resolution, capable of acting sovereignly upon itself, always strong enough to reach itself with its blow. And yet the one who is struck is no longer I, *but another*, so that when I kill myself, perhaps it is 'I' who does the killing, but it is not done to me" (Blanchot 107, my italics).

vengeance is mine, and I will repay, thus taking the upper hand on the vengeful God, appropriating her own vengeance and thus nullifying the vengeful God, making his promise of vengeance infelicitous, impotent and failed.²² By killing herself, as Blanchot says about (Kirilov's) suicide, she "also kills her companion and double, with whom she had maintained a sullen silence; she has for her last interlocutor and finally for her sole adversary only *the most sinister figure*" (Blanchot 101, italics mine). This most sinister figure is no one else but the vengeful God. By taking her life Anna meets her maker, but also carries out vengeance on him by taking away from him his vengeance, that is his ability to kill. By killing herself in the face of the vengeful God, Anna makes him impotent, takes away his power, kills God by killing herself, becoming the subject, and the object of the final judgement ("Voluntary death makes a final judgement" Blanchot, 97). If sacrifice and pardon belong to her, so does the vengeance. In that respect, Anna's "suicide retains the power of an exceptional affirmation," since, "by the force of her action, she can render death active and by affirmation of her freedom assert herself in death, appropriate it, make it true" (Blanchot 103, 100).²³ The novel makes Anna, a woman, a figure of heroic proportions, one revenging to the vengeful God, something that the novel explicitly denies men. (The two men who attempt and contemplate suicide, Vronsky and Levin, both fail to accomplish it).

We thus have two promises of vengeance, one at the beginning and one at the end of the novel: the God who says "mine is the vengeance," and Anna who is "cruelly vindictive" (*mstitel'naia*), who does not only promise but also does or outdoes the vengeance. She also reads "the book" until the end, and casts a vengeful gaze, in a self-referential manner, at the novel and the Bible simultaneously.²⁴ These two promises

²²The epigraph is also a performative, a promise, which is not necessarily fulfilled by the novel. What the epigraph promises is the vengeance of the subsequent text (it promises for the other), thus creating, as Shoshana Felman in her *Literary Speech Act* has it, an "aporetic space, an interminable dialogue between the voice of the dead master [Moses, God] and the voice of the servant who lacks a master [Tolstoy], answering each other across the abyss, still prolonging their feast of language: a feast of pleasure--and of stone" (Felman 1983, 69). This aporetic abyss is what constitutes the literary space of *Anna Karenina*. This abyssal structure is also reinforced and repeated in a self-referential manner when Anna reads in the train one of Trollope's novels, whose title is also cast in the performative mode, that of the question, and explicitly related to the theme of pardoning woman: *Can You Forgive Her?*. (The title of Anna's train reading, not made explicit in the book, has been independently established by Amy Mandelker and Gary Saul Morson).

In the same way as *Anna Karenina* is adulterous and transgressing in relation to the law, the novel *Anna Karenina* itself is transgressive in relation to the Biblical canon, a text asking to be forgiven ("Can you forgive her?").

²³The whole scene of Anna's suicide can thus be related to all Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean themes of "freier Tod."

In Blanchot's words: "Whoever wants to die does not die, he loses the will to die. He enters the nocturnal realm of fascination wherein he dies in a passion bereft of will" (Blanchot 105).

²⁴At the end of the novel Anna reads, indeed, as Culler would put it, "like a woman," thus becoming "*le féminin*, a force that disrupts the symbolic structures of Western thought" (Culler 49). The symbolic structure that Anna disrupts is nothing but the paradigm of all Western symbolic structures, that of the phallogocentric law, the name of the father. "Phallogocentrism unites an interest in patriarchal authority,

reflected in each other make a perfect, fearful symmetry, a specular, balanced economy of revenge, and a competition of promising vengeance which counter-sign each other and which turn out to be both felicitous, valid, and failed. Anna thus in her death, her suicide, like Christ, goes back to her Father, (she dies a death proscribed to her by the Mosaic law), but unlike Christ, she outdoes the vengeful God, by not pardoning him, by making her death her own, that is by making it the exceptional and fascinating affirmation: her death, her sweet revenge.

Anna's death closes one frame of reading programmed by Mosaic law. As much as this novel has two beginnings, it also has two ends. Anna's death closes one frame of intertextual reference. Vronsky is also submitted to the same logic of punishment, for he goes to war, seeking death. The other end of the novel is represented by the performance of repentance, staged as Levin's prayer: "I shall repent... my life has an unquestionable meaning of goodness...." (Tolstoy 740). Thus, both narrative regimes, modelled after the motto, consequently run from the beginning of the novel to its end.

Anna Karenina is a novel with extremely lucid and disconcerting insights into the mechanisms of pardoning in society and texts, as well as into the violence of the rhetorical logic of any pardoning performance, especially when addressed or performed on the woman. *Anna Karenina* is a text governed by an ideology of adultery ruled over by the vengeful God of that book in which the law and the logos are spoken, the book which Anna (both the novel and the character) betrays, evades, unsettles, transgresses, re-writes, counter-signs and reads until her death.²⁵

unity of meaning, and certainty of origin," (Culler 61), and that is the structure fragmented, challenged and undone by Anna's fragmented reading body. Towards the end of the text Anna is, also, as Elaine Showalter says, "a female reader [who] changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of the sexual codes" (Showalter 50). This makes us believe that the novel *Anna Karenina*, by being read by a woman at the end of the text, is also re-written by a woman, retroactively, and invites therefore a reader to read the novel with a feminist/feminine eye. As Peggy Kamuf put it, "by feminist one understands a way of reading texts that points to the masks of truth with which phallogentrism hides its fictions." That type of reading, for Kamuf, is constitutive of "writing like a woman" (Kamuf 286).

²⁵Several readers would not pardon my errings at the various stages of this essay: Alexander Zholkovsky, Sven Spieker, Brigitte Weltman Aron, Amy Mandelker, Anne Nesbet, Eric Naiman and Harvey Rabbin. I am grateful for their valuable advice and generous help. All the transgressions and errings of the essay, in spite of their efforts, remain mine.

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