

CONCLUSION

After Anna Karenina

In *Resurrection* Katiusha Maslova's tendrils of black, curly hair, willfully escaping from beneath her white kerchief, her black, squinting eyes, and her contemplation of suicide at a railway station suggest a reprise of Anna Karenina, or perhaps her resurrection in a character who is more explicitly a victim. Her position as a household dependent from the lower classes, her narrative of ruin through seduction, childbirth, and abandonment, and her subsequent life as a prostitute are more closely associated with the traditional story of the fallen woman than is Anna's story. Similarly, the intention Nekhliudov has of rescuing Katiusha through a fictitious marriage echoes the novelistic clichés of the nineteenth-century social novel. But Tolstoy refutes this plot line every bit as emphatically as Dostoevsky does when he ironically quotes Nekrasov's lines: "Enter now, both bold and free / Be mistress of my house and me" in the scene where his Underground Man fails to rescue the prostitute Liza. The difference is that Tolstoy allows a woman's voice to speak: "'Go away! I'm a convict and you are a prince—you have no business to be here!' she said, her face distorted with rage, pulling away her hand. 'You want to save yourself through me,' she went on rapidly, as though in haste to pour out every feeling in her heart. 'You had your pleasure from me, and now you want to get your salvation through me. I loathe you!'"¹

Maslova refuses to be the tool for Nekhliudov's redemption, as she had earlier been the tool for satisfying his sexual desire. She works her own spiritual resurrection without Nekhliudov's help, through her

own experiences and especially through her relationship with the saintly, asexual Maria Pavlovna:

[U]nconsciously, [Katiusha] accepted Maria Pavlovna's views and came to imitate her in everything.

Maria Pavlovna was in her turn touched by Katusha's devotion and began to love her. They were also drawn together by the repulsion they both felt to sexual love. One hated it because she knew all its horrors, while the other, having never experienced it, regarded it as something incomprehensible and repugnant, and offensive to human dignity.²

Nekhliudov ultimately realizes that he must overcome his own prejudices against women and conflicts about married life when the possibility of a real marriage—rather than a fictitious marriage to Maslova—fills him with horror and when he is momentarily seduced by his close encounter with aristocratic family life.

Fictitious or real, marriage does not and cannot provide the solution for the social oppression Nekhliudov now sees enacted upon the poor by the wealthy and upon women by men. Like Pozdnyshev in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, he draws the conclusion that ways of thought must change, not merely institutions. Substituting fictitious marriage for a consummated marriage merely substitutes one form of using women for another. While Pozdnyshev is only capable of viewing his wife as a sister when she is dying—hence ultimately framed and iconized—and while Lyovin only achieves this vision of Anna with the assistance of a great work of art, Nekhliudov is able to achieve it without framing Katiusha:³

Now [Nekhliudov] felt toward [Katiusha] as he had never felt before, and this feeling had nothing in common with either that early sense of romantic exaltation or the sensual love which he had afterward felt for her. Nor was it at all like the self-satisfaction, rooted in the sense of doing his duty, which had after the trial led him to make his offer of marriage. It was, quite simply, the same pity and tenderness that he experienced on first seeing her in the prison. . . . It was the same feeling, but with this difference: once it had been fleeting, now it

was settled. Whatever he happened to be doing or thinking, his mood was always tender and pitiful, not toward Maslova alone, but towards the whole world.⁴

In arriving at this position, Tolstoy acknowledged the necessity for freeing a woman's beauty from its economic and sexual entrapment and for pursuing instead a sublime involvement with humanity. Yet, despite the fact that Tolstoy's views were more explicitly developed and conscious at the time he was writing *Resurrection*, his readers may find his ideas more powerfully expressed in *Anna Karenina*, unarguably the greater work of art.

The great art witnessed in *Anna Karenina* generates awe, vision, transcendence, and awareness of the sublime in its viewers. Art that merely infects with the desire for mimesis, whether of a good or bad model, fails, just as imitating Varenka does not work for Kitty. By his own criterion, Tolstoy would probably have to acknowledge that *Resurrection* was an artistic failure.

I have attempted in this study to renegotiate some of the more familiar critical terrain of Tolstoy's biography that has shaped our understanding of Tolstoy's views on the issues discussed in the previous chapters, and I have sought to provide the backdrop for our reading of Tolstoy's novel. In so doing, I hope to have challenged standard views of authorial misogyny and standard critical practice that attribute sexism to a text. By choosing to focus in my readings on clusters of imagery related to the field of vision, light and shadow, representation, corporality and sexuality, I have sometimes offered readings of passages that have been well traversed in the criticism and have taken for granted these established critical interpretations in order to concentrate on the wealth of available meanings and interconnections that may not have been remarked upon before. Alternately, I have considered scenes and passages that cannot be considered significant in themselves but that, through the accretion of the novel's symbolic system, acquire the status of a linkage in the labyrinth.

The labyrinth of *Anna Karenina* is an enclosure that by its very artifice reminds us we are enclosed and thus points our vision to what

is not or cannot be contained, and to the means of entrance and exit traversing the frame. Lyrical moments in the novel that generate this type of aesthetic response supersede the twists and turns of narrative and instead produce awe at the dizzying effect of creation.

In *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy creates a series of lyrical moments that exceed the exigencies of narrative and the bounds of verisimilitude. It is my contention that while engaged with a lyrically motivated moment, the reader is catapulted beyond the desire for another reality into pure gnosis; Tolstoy pictures this sense of awe or transcendence in the reader or viewer in his own description of Lyovin before Anna's portrait. Furthermore, he explores the parameters of human vision and insight, enlightenment and blindness, and the formation of imaged realities and framed compositions as strategies motivated by the human need to establish meaning, context, and coherence in life. His characters are thus given a quest beyond the usual one of pursuit of marriage and estate for the hero or heroine of the realist novel. Tolstoy's execution of a portrait of his heroine is meant to transfigure her and transfix his readers. Within the frame of his canvas every detail is significant, and each play of light and shadow reminds us that we are earthbound, gazing at art, at another reality altogether.