PART III

Illuminations: Reading Detail and Design in *Anna Karenina*
“Tolstoy Resting in the Forest” by I. E. Repin, 1891
Knife, Book, and Candle:  
The Resisting Russian Reader

[The] picture of her holding but not exactly reading a book is both memorable and significant. It is the conscious heroine's characteristic posture.
Rachel Brownstein, *Becoming a Heroine*

Seeing herself as a creation—
Clarissa, Julie, or Delphine—
by writers of her admiration,
Tatyana, lonely heroine,
roamed the still forest like a ranger
sought in her book, that text of danger.
Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*

There is no happiness in love, except at the end of an English novel.
Trollope, *Barchester Towers*

The best books are English.
Tolstoy

Anna's Novel

A major criticism often leveled at the author of *Anna Karenina* is that he failed or refused to provide the reader with the biography of his heroine, as is traditionally expected of the nineteenth-century novel: we are denied, complained Percy Lubbock, the information we need about "Anna's past and present, the kind of experience that has made
her and that has brought her to the point she now touches. Without this her action is arbitrary and meaningless.”1 While many novels open in medias res or delay the introduction of the main protagonist for several chapters, the seventeen chapters that precede Anna’s appearance strike many readers as excessive, especially as the author ignores the opportunity to offer any biographical information at all, either through indirect or authorial discourse. A similar delaying tactic confused the first readers and critics of War and Peace who were uncertain as to the identity of the main protagonists.2 In contrast to War and Peace, the title Anna Karenina clearly identifies the novel’s heroine and places the work within a tradition of biographical novels that often begin with an account of generations of family history preceding the hero or heroine’s birth and childhood. This makes Tolstoy’s silence about Anna all the more striking. The adultery plot, the problematic epigraph, and the novel’s thematic concerns with the woman question heighten many readers’ desire for the very information denied them: specifically, how Anna came to be married to Karenin, easily the single most important moment in the heroine’s biography, what George Eliot called the “determining act of her life.”

Summarizing the plot of Anna Karenina, Vladimir Nabokov could not resist the novelist’s habit of improving on a tale in the retelling of it and thus begins his outline of the novel with precisely the information and chronology Tolstoy denied it: “Married off as a very young girl by a well-meaning aunt. . . .”3 As Nabokov no doubt intended, certain qualifiers leap into the comfortable syntactic slots prepared for them by years of syntagmatic associations, prodded by the “very” of “very young girl”: “Married off against her will as a very young girl by a well-meaning but misguided aunt. . . .”

In fact, Tolstoy began his notes for the novel with this rather different account of Anna’s marriage: “She marries under good auspices.” The word auspices is in English in Tolstoy’s notes, so that in the first sentence of his first draft outline, Tolstoy evokes the Victorian novelistic tradition within which he will place his heroine and suggests the kind of “good auspices” that in the Victorian English context might imply wealth, status, estate, but not romantic love. The reader is deprived of this information in the final version of the novel: we
never learn the precise circumstances of Anna’s courtship by Karenin except in rather vague, poetical terms from Anna when she is speaking to an admiring Kitty, and in a bitter moment from Karenin, who now rewrites his entire experience of courtship and marriage as a plot that victimized him.

The reader experiences the desire to hear Anna’s story in the scene where Anna is romanticized by Kitty: “Kitty felt that Anna was perfectly unaffected . . . but that she lived in another, higher world full of complex poetic interests beyond Kitty’s reach” (65). Like Kitty, the reader views Anna as a heroic figure, an angel of mercy who has reconciled Stiva and Dolly, who wins the affection of all who meet her, and who is beloved by children. Anna encourages Kitty to exalt her by offering her a mystifying, fragmentary autobiography concocted out of conventional, novelistic discourse, complete with the romantic alpine topography of mountaineering as biography and heroic destiny: “I remember and I know that blue haze like the mist on the mountains in Switzerland. That mist which covers everything in that blissful time when childhood is just ending, and out of that vast circle, happy and merry, there is a path growing narrower and narrower . . . and you enter the corridor gladly yet with dread, though it seems bright and beautiful. . . . Who has not passed through it?” (79).

Kitty’s thoughts express the reader’s own curiosity: “‘But how did she go through it? How I would like to know the whole romance novel [roman] of her life,’ thought Kitty, remembering the unpoetical appearance of Aleksey Aleksandrovich, her husband” (67).

Tolstoy does not give us Anna’s past history to read because he considers her story “déjà lu,” already cast in the predetermined plot of the nineteenth-century European novel, a plot that is invoked by Anna’s reading of a highly conventional English novel at the crucial moment in her own story. Tolstoy intended his reader to write Anna’s story according to the intertext of the Victorian novel that she reads. Furthermore, Anna’s attraction to the Victorian reality presented in the realist novel she reads reveals the seductive power of those fictions that promise a coherent and fulfilled life buttressed by social and moral structures. Anna’s desire to be the heroine in an English novel is thus the desire to occupy a fixed social role or position,⁴ represented as of-
fering total fulfillment. In the world of the Victorian novel, there is no dysphasia or slippage between the inner and the social self. Anna's yearning for fixity is replicated in her desire to be inscribed heroically and in her impulse toward aestheticization, with the act of reading suggesting self-determination. As J. Hillis Miller observes, the Victorian novel thus specifically negotiates the issue of the containment of the irrational self within a suture of social position and social role:

Victorian fiction raises for the 20th century reader the dark question of whether the assimilation of the protagonists into the community by way of a happy relation to another person is a valid resolution, or whether, to our deeper insight, it should appear as a covering over and forgetting of the fundamental fact of human existence so pervasively dramatized in the body of the book—in the drive for some "illimitable satisfaction."5

Anna Karenina responds to the type of realism that demands that the "end of the novel, like the end of a children's dinner-party, must be made up of sweetmeats and sugar-plums,"6 rounding off with an epilogue wherein the characters find themselves neatly paired off and settled down.

As Nancy Miller argues, although the Victorian novel may appear feminocentric in plot structures, the standard plots in fact, allow the heroine only two viable choices—marriage or death. Thus, the Victorian novel is actually phallogocentric in ethos.7 These tendencies in Victorian fiction inform Tolstoy's description of Anna's anxiety in reading. Tolstoy depicts the blocks in Anna's process of identification with the text she reads to point to the exclusionary practices of Victorian realism.

The Resisting Russian Reader

The English novel first appears in Anna's hands when she assumes a position that is privileged throughout the novel, riding in a moving vehicle, a carriage, or train with a view onto the world through a window.8 In addition to the framing function of her carriage windows, the
novel Anna reads provides an additional frame or view onto a textual world that she illuminates with her candle. The movement of the train is isomorphic to her progress through the text and through life, and predictive of its end. Anna thus takes up the now familiar pose of the heroine succumbing to the dangerous or pernicious influence of literature, a topos that dates back in the European tradition to the transgressing lovers in Dante and the originary deluded consumer of chivalric romances, Don Quixote. Among Quixote’s many successors, the women have seemed to outnumber the men. Barthes comments in S/Z: “This is a vast commonplace of literature: the Woman copies the Book. In other words, every body is a citation: of the ‘already-written.’ The origin of desire is the statue, the painting, the book.”

Feminist criticism has made us aware of the ways in which the literary figure of women reading literature is complicated by their immersion in an alien or other (“phallogocentric”) discourse: “In such fictions the female reader is co-opted into participation in an experience from which she is explicitly excluded; she is asked to identify with a self-hood that defines itself in opposition to her; she is required to identify against herself.” Reading an other’s discourse has its parallel in the Russian literary tradition, where “otherness” is built into the reading experience; where reading has generally meant reading a strange, foreign text, usually in a foreign language. The diglossic situation of the Russian nobility, who used French for literary purposes and conversation and who, as a result, often had a poor command of their native tongue, was a complicating factor in the development of Russian belles lettres and was ridiculed by Tolstoy in War and Peace. Thus, gender issues aside, the image of a Russian reading a European work of literature already presents a problematic awareness of a literary tradition that has been characterized by an agonizing self-consciousness of its own derivative nature and a struggle for originality. The absence of a developed, native Russian literary tradition and, indeed, of a developed literary language aggravated the Russian attitude of condescension toward what was perceived as the decadent, moribund Western artistic tradition, which Russian artists were eager to borrow from in order to supersede. The situation has often been compared to that of American letters: Henry James, for example, commented that to be
an American entailed the “responsibility of fighting against a supersti-
tious valuation of Europe.” It is against this background that we un-
derstand Dostoevsky’s triumphant acclamation of Anna Karenina for
being superior to any European novel. In the Russian literary tradition,
the very act of reading was fraught with the anxiety of reading a
nonnative, “other” (chuzhoi) literature, and the act of reading a novel
made the issue even more worrisome, since there was no novelistic
tradition in Russia until the mid-nineteenth century and, most em-
phatically, no genuine novel of manners in the Russian tradition at all.

When, therefore, in what is arguably the first Russian novel
(Alexander Pushkin’s novel in verse, Eugene Onegin [1825]), Tatiana
Larina opens her book and becomes the primordial Russian reading
heroine, it is the French or English romance she peruses; without
such diversion, cast back upon her native literature, she must seek
refuge either in chapbooks, popular Church literature, or folklore:
casting spells to conjure the name or image of her future spouse, in-
terpreting dreams with Zadeck’s dream book.

Tatiana, whose name Tolstoy used for his heroine in the early drafts
of Anna Karenina, is described as a pale, dreaming consumer of epis-
tolary novels, so immersed in foreign literary conventions that she
writes her love letter to Eugene in French, a fact the narrator laments:

I can foresee a complication:
My country’s honor to defend,
I’ll have to furnish a translation
Of Tanya’s letter in the end.
She knew our language only barely,
Read Russian magazines but rarely;
In her own language she was slow
To make her meaning clear, and so
She wrote in French, be it admitted . . .
I cannot help it, it is true:
To speak milady’s love, but few
Have thought our native language fitted,
Our haughty Russian hardly knows
How to adjust to postal prose.

(3.26)
Tatiana is only liberated from her romantic, literary dreams of Eugene when she invades her beloved’s library in his absence and reads not just his books but, taking his library as a larger text, also his choice of books and marginalia. Thus she reads in the margins to read his reading and is disillusioned simultaneously with her beloved, with literature, and with the reading of literature as a reading of life (“life’s novel”):

And step by step my Tanya, learning
His mind, at last begins to see
The man for whom she has been yearning
By willful destiny’s decree
More clearly than by face and feature:
A strangely bleak and reckless creature,
Issue of Heaven or of Hell,
Proud demon, angel—who can tell?
Perhaps he is all imitation,
An idle phantom or, poor joke,
A Muscovite in Harold’s cloak,
An alien whim’s interpretation,
Compound of every faddish pose . . .?
A parody, perhaps . . . who knows?

(7.24)\(^{17}\)

By opening a novel, Anna evokes Tatiana, but she is not a romantic escapist; instead, Victorian “realist” literature even more perniciously seduces Anna with scenes of domestic life and high estate rather than with scenes of romantic passion.

**Ruined by Realism**

As a reader, Anna succumbs to the novel as directive and stimulant. The power of the text is thus revealed immediately as a generator of mimetic initiation: Anna no sooner reads of an event than she longs to inscribe it in her own life. In describing this process, Tolstoy subtly interrogates Kant’s designation of the aesthetic response as “disinter-
ested” and illustrates his own theory of art as infectious. Anna’s response is greater than a simple identification: the book becomes a microcosm of the society in which Anna seeks to read herself, a frame for the scene, a proscenium for the stage on which she will take up her role. Yet in her own moment of reading by candlelight, Anna is both a Russian reading a novel that is essentially alien and a woman, blocked by the phallogocentricty of the novel she reads. In order to allow the *mise en abîme* to occur, Anna’s reading must project her into a marginalized and silent role in the text.

As one feminist critic notes, the consensus demanded by realist narrative “is the reader’s only means for gaining access to the story; the very act of reading thus entails acceptance of the view that the world is a common world, a ‘human world,’ a world that is the ‘same’ for everyone.” Tolstoy’s quarrel with the Victorian novel is based on his polemic with a literary realism that precludes the reality of certain other viewpoints in terms of culture, class, or gender. As early as 1851 Tolstoy wrote in his diary about the problem of writing “for the people” from the perspective of an aristocrat, invoking the analogy of the problem of gender identification in reading: “A sixteen-year-old boy, when he reads a scene in a novel about the seduction of the heroine, isn’t roused to a feeling of indignation by it and doesn’t put himself in the unfortunate woman’s position, but involuntarily transfers himself to the role of the seducer and delights in a feeling of sensuality.”

Tolstoy’s exploration of Anna’s reading processes develops this early observation further. As Anna reads the realist English novel, she passionately accepts its realism as offering roles she could adopt; the narratives she reads are so many windows onto so many worlds; yet none of them offers a genuine outlet for her desires that thus become repressed and frustrated. Indeed, sublimated desire and repression color the language and imagery of this passage, as Gustafson has recently shown.

Anna’s reading takes place by candlelight in semidarkness, in a setting of flickering shadows and flame. This atmosphere recalls Plato’s cave analogy from Book VII of *The Republic*, where deluded spectators in a gloomy cave watch (as Anna does in the train) “flicker-
ing figures in the twilight.” The Russian litso (literally face, here figure) in this passage recalls theatrical nomenclature and emphasizes Anna’s spectatorial role. Anna initially finds herself unable to concentrate on her book, but as she succumbs to the monotony of the same flickering figures, her resistance to the text is overcome; she loses the sense of the barrier between the fictive and the real world, which now becomes a shadow-puppet theater, a world of Platonic shadow knowledge.

Anna thus passes from being reluctant to read (“Pervoe vremia ein ne chitalos”) to beginning to “read and to understand what she read.” As Anna disappears into the text, her alter ego, Annushka, falls into a doze, symbolizing Anna’s “sleeping” conscious mind. Anna feels discomfort as she reads (ei nepriiatno bylo citat) because, “to follow the reflection of other people’s lives” arouses desires in her that cannot be fulfilled:

[I]t was unpleasant for her to read, that is, to follow the reflection of other people’s lives. She had too great a desire to live herself. If she read that the heroine of the novel was nursing an invalid, she longed to move with noiseless steps about the room of an invalid; if she read of a member of Parliament making a speech, she longed to be delivering that speech; if she read of how Lady Mary had ridden after hounds and had provoked her sister-in-law, and had surprised everyone by her boldness, she wished to be doing the same thing herself. (106–107)

The three narratives Anna reads pose the problem of her blocked identification with a text or vision of male-determined heroinism. Her first identification is with a woman nursing a (male) invalid; a role of service and one of the few socially acceptable careers for an unmarried woman, apart from that of governess. It is this role that is adopted by Varenka, the only spinster in the novel, and it is into this role that Kitty, seeking her own heroic resolution at the spa in Germany, will project herself in emulation of her romanticized vision of Varenka. Kitty considers Varenka a model or icon (obrazets) of “a dignity in life—apart from the worldly relations of girls with men, which
so revolted [Kitty], and appeared to her now as a shameful hawking about of goods in search of a purchaser” (228).

But the role of attendant nurse is too oppressive for Anna. As Anna reads her part, she is forced to desire (ei khotelos) to walk silently, with “silent footsteps” (neslyshymi shagami), to minimize her presence, effacing herself in the very process of taking action. It is interesting that one of Anna’s most memorable features is precisely her unusually light and graceful step, out of proportion to her full figure: “She went out with the rapid step that bore her rather fully developed figure with such strange lightness” (69) (emphasis added). It is also “her swift, firm and light step which distinguishes her from all other society women.”

The text moves from silent action to enforced silence and censorship as Anna attempts to identify with a member of Parliament giving a speech, a desire that can only be totally blocked and frustrated: women have no voice, no representation in Parliament, no possibility for making themselves heard. Such is the recurrent lament of the women in Trollope’s novels: for example, Lady Laura complains, “'A woman’s life is only half a life, as she cannot have a seat in Parliament,'”23 while Madame Max laments, “'What would I not give to be a member of the British Parliament. . . . The one great drawback to the life of a woman is that they cannot act in politics.'”24 So strong is the enticement to politics that women in Trollope’s novels are tempted to marry for politics: they (Alice Vavasour, Lady Laura Kennedy) hope to participate in Parliament vicariously, with their husbands acting as proxy, while Lady Glencora views her husband’s appointment as Prime Minister as the opportunity to have “a cabinet of her own,” a role at which she is so successful that her husband begins to entertain the “awful suspicion” that it was she who was Prime Minister, not he.

Frustrated in her attempts to identify with an oppressed woman or with a man with whom she cannot identify, Anna identifies a third time, with a woman rebelling against her oppression, riding to hounds and flouting social conventions. Anna’s desire for this role is more strongly expressed than in the previous two identifications: “she felt
like” (ei khotelos) becomes “she felt like doing that herself” (ei khotelos éto delat’ samoï). Anna’s desires are checked, however: “But there was no possibility of doing anything” (No delat’ nechego bylo). There is no possibility of action within the world or within the novel she reads; she is as confined by the text as she is by the carriage or by the social sphere she occupies. Her only escape may be through the imagination. Anna therefore renews her reading with the desire to escape: “She intensified her reading” (usilivalas’ chitat’). The novel has reached its climax and as she reads, her desire increases from “she felt like” (ei khotelos) to “she desired” (oua zhelala): “The hero of the novel had almost attained his English happiness, a baronetcy and an estate, and Anna was feeling a desire to accompany him to his estate” (s nim vmeste ekhat’) (107). Anna’s position in the text she reads has become marginalized; she cannot “do it herself” (delat’ éto samoï) but must “accompany” the protagonist. Thus she projects herself into the text as an ancillary viewpoint through a cross-identification. Blocked by gender difference from a full identification with the hero, she desires instead to accompany him. Anna’s repressed identification with the hero as the embodiment of her own desire causes a vacillation between passive-aggressive modes. The oscillation in identification produced by the enforced passivity of her role as a woman results in what feminist critics term a “transvestite” or “hermaphroditic” identification with the male protagonist.25

The novel thus leads Anna into adultery through the evocation of desire for action, its frustration, and the displacement of desire onto a liaison with the male protagonist. The pursuit of English happiness brings about Anna’s fall; she is seduced by visions of estate, not by that romantic “chorus” of voices of adulterous heroines that corrupts Emma Bovary.

Tolstoy’s shift from the romantic presentation of adulterous heroines in the continental novel to Victorian realist representations that block any heroic action or voice thus transforms the committing of adultery into a form of social transgression rather than the romantic pursuit of passion. The shame that Anna suddenly feels (and feels that the English hero ought to feel), is thus compounded of the sense of
coarse materialism and exclusionary sexism underlying the narrative of “English happiness” as well as her recognition of the nature of the desire the novel has seduced her into feeling.

Pushkin makes explicit the fantasy text of Tatiana:

He who adored Julie Wolmar,
Malek-Adhel, and de Linar,
Young Werther, by his passion rended,
And Grandison, the demigod
Who causes you and me to nod—
Our tender dreamer saw them blended
Into a single essence warm,
Embodied in Onegin’s form.

(3.9)26

However, Tolstoy does not need to tell us that the English hero has become Vronsky.

Anna’s transformation from an active to a passive participant in the text is figured in her play with the paper knife (in Russian, a cutting knife: razreznoi nozhek) that accompanies her reading. As Gustafson observes, in the course of this passage the knife expands from a “nozhichek” (tiny little knife) to a “nozhek” (little knife) to a “nozh” (knife) as Anna’s desire increases. The knife becomes a fetish, an enlarging, substitute phallus that Anna must wield or woo to gain entry into the world she decodes. The knife that cuts the pages operates as the cursor that indicates the breach between fiction and reality; thus, Anna places the knife against the window glass—the membrane that separates the world from the vision of the world, the frame that imprisons experience. The knife directed against the text purchases Anna’s only possible entry into the pictured world: as she realizes there is no possibility of doing anything, “she twists the smooth little paper knife [nozhichek] in her little hands”; as she experiences increased desire and shame, she puts down the book, “tightly gripping the little knife [nozhek] in both hands.” As she yields to her state of arousal and desire for Vronsky, she caresses her cheek with “the cool, smooth surface” of the knife (nozh) and then laughs “at the feeling of delight” that overwhelms her.27
In the course of the novel Anna becomes an obsessive reader, driven to books and morphine by her need to quiet and structure her libidinal impulses. Her habit of reading to organize her perceptions according to the mode of realism shapes the vision she has during her final carriage and train ride. Anna’s hermeneutic decoding of street signs and passersby, shop fronts and crowd scenes, transforms these cinematic images into emblems that represent answers to the questions she poses to herself. The reflections associated with the image of the cinematic magic-lantern illusion recall similar reflections that Prince Andrei has on the eve of the battle of Borodino:

[F]or the first time in his life the possibility of death presented itself to him. . . . And from the height of this perception all that had previously tormented and preoccupied him suddenly became illumined by a cold white light. . . . All life appeared to him like magic-lantern pictures at which he had long been gazing by artificial light through a glass.28

Prince Andrei’s vision is illumined by a “cold white light,” which, unlike Anna’s, “casts no shadows.” In icon painting no shadows are represented since the source of light is assumed to be divine and permeates what is represented rather than shining on it from an external light source. This evocation of iconic illumination suggests a transcendent quality in Prince Andrei’s vision that is lacking in Anna’s vision.

During Anna’s journey to her suicide, she suddenly sees through human hypocrisy to the truth about human relations, now lit by a “glaring light” (792), a “piercing light which now revealed to her the meaning of life” (793). Each passerby that Anna sees becomes an illustration of the sordid side of human nature, so that the theater she constructs in a series of tableaux vivants through her carriage window becomes an almost allegorical parade of the Vices. A “red-cheeked clerk riding on a hired horse . . . wants everyone to admire him and is very pleased with himself” (793) (Vanity). Two boys buying dirty ice cream reflect human greed: “we all want what is sweet and nice. If not sweets, then dirty ice cream” (790) (Gluttony). A merchant crossing himself is really only interested in material gain: “He wants to
strip me of my shirt, and I him of his. Yes, that's the truth!” (791) (Envy and Greed).

The act of reading and the interpretation of pictures or words thus constitute the formalization of life's meaning for Anna, just as the act of viewing pictures or icons crystallizes significance for Lyovin. But where Lyovin's icon of Anna is imbued with emblematic transcendence and creates in him a feeling of compassionate humanity, Anna's visions are retold in language, narrativized, and alienate her from people. Tolstoy's privileging of sublime nonverbal vision over the consciously narrated observation differentiates Lyovin's acceptance of faith that cannot be explicated fully: “to my heart has been revealed a knowledge beyond all doubt and unattainable by reason” (850). By contrast, Anna remains caught in a hyperrationalized state: a chance remark overheard, “What else is reason given to man for than to escape that which distresses him” strikes Anna as being in harmony with her own thoughts as she glorifies an untempered rationalism. Anna's grim “observations” of sordid reality, in their dispassionate cynicism and ruthless induction, recall the attitude of the realist and naturalist novelists who believed they had achieved a scientific neutrality in their representations. But these hyperrealist, naturalist scenes, illuminated by a light that inexorably exposes to Anna “the entire history and all the crannies of the souls” (797) of the people she observes, do not evoke pity or compassion in her. Instead, “[the people] were all hateful to her” (794) and she moves “apart from them as if they were lepers” (797). When she turns “that glaring light in which she was seeing everything” on her own relations, her recollections of her love for Karenin and for Vronsky fill her with “loathing”; she even questions the sincerity of her love for Seryozha.

The Lady with the Lamp

The vision inspired by a realist world view in Anna's final reading of life from her carriage window culminates in her last suicidal vision, which Tolstoy expresses in the metaphor of reading by candlelight,
thus making the tableau of Anna reading the controlling image for the entire novel. The candlelight (reading lamp) that illuminates Anna’s text participates in the interplay of light and shadow imagery in the novel. Reading this image cluster as a purely allegorical or emblematic symbolic system would invest light with positive attributes and functions, and darkness with the obverse. But to the extent that Tolstoy’s use of shadow and light imagery reflects back to Plato, the imagery is more complicated than that. Initially, a discrimination is made between natural and man-made light. It is the natural light of sun, stars, and lightning that illuminates Lyovin’s transcendent visions as the blinding light of insight, preceding his final enlightenment: “At the peasant’s words that Fokanych lived for his soul, in truth, in God’s way, undefined but significant ideas seemed to burst out as though they had been locked up, and all striving toward one goal, they thronged whirling through his head, blinding him with their light” (827). By contrast, Anna’s light is the light of a candle, an artificial luster that, lifted to decode an inscription, suggests high priestly functions, the Promethean quest for technology, the Faustian bargain for knowledge. The hieratic candle, or taper, functions in a similar metaphor in Middlemarch, where Dorothea dreams of being the lamp holder for Casaubon, who himself is described as lifting his taper in the labyrinth of knowledge and becoming indifferent to sunlight. His puerile superannuated scholarship is thus ridiculed in Lowick, the name of his estate.

The image of a woman holding a lamp and armed with a knife evokes another myth more readily than that of the Promethean: the myth of Amor and Psyche. The latter myth reverses the valuation of light (inspired by doubt) and darkness (perpetuated by faith), as discussed further in chapter 7. In Anna’s final readings through the frames of the carriage and train windows, the controlling metaphor of light and shadow takes on two different, opposing functions, making for a complexity of the closing passage that has often intrigued readers; indeed, John Bayley diagnoses Tolstoy as suffering from “metaphor trouble” in this particular sequence. Tolstoy’s use of candle and light and shadow imagery may seem trite and hackneyed, as Leontiev com-
plained, until, on closer reading the metaphor is shown to deconstruct itself, if we read against the originary mythic treatment of light and shadow in Plato’s cave analogy.

The ambivalence of lighting is well established throughout the novel, as for example in the early scene where Lyovin’s desire to begin a new life is countered by the illumination and reflection of his habitual self: “The study was gradually lit up as the candle was brought in. The familiar details came out: the stag’s horns, the book shelves, the mirror . . . an open book. . . . As he saw all this, there came over him for an instant a doubt of the possibility of starting a new life” (99). The emblems index Lyovin’s life: the stag horns establish his status both as a country gentleman and as a stag (bachelor); the bookshelves signify his intellectual pursuits; the mirror underscores the moment of self-recognition. Finally, the open book reiterates the image of reading by candlelight and Lyovin’s struggle to transcribe from the rational works of philosophy a meaning for his life and to write his own book. Although light should have lit up Lyovin’s new, supposedly enlightened, view of himself and his future, illumination instead brings him back into the cave of everyday appearances. He saw better in the dark.

A consideration of textual illumination must acknowledge that the lights within the text and in the reading metaphor have different sources. There is Anna’s own reading light, which is amplified throughout her final passage into a searching, piercing beam, and then there is the light of the “bright evening sun” that illuminates her train window. Standing before the train, she plans to leap into the “shadow” between the cars and (in an early variant) thinks: “There the light will go out.” She is caught in the automatic habit of crossing herself and then “suddenly the darkness that had covered everything for her was torn apart” (798). Light is darkness, darkness light, so that the final passage of Anna’s suicide reiterates the problematics of the metaphor: “And the light of the candle by which she had read the book filled with troubles, falsehoods, sorrow and evil flared up more brightly than ever before, lighted up for her all that had been shrouded in darkness, flickered, grew dim, and was quenched forever.”