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Abstract

This article discusses Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* as a case study of faulty emotional connections. Analysis centers on the story's unsympathetic hero, the ideologically motivated wife-murderer Pozdnyshev, whose relationships with others are examined in the context of Max Scheler's phenomenology of emotions. The article intends to demonstrate that the key moral problem in the tale is not that the hero fails to realize the ideal of neighborly love and compassion, which he preaches, but that this very ideal is deeply flawed. Scheler's theory of empathy, with its distinction between active, productive empathy and the passive, merely reproductive kind, is highly relevant to Tolstoy's problematics and is used as a tool of both psychological and philosophical analysis.

Keywords

empathy, Incarnation, phenomenology, Scheler, sexual love, Tolstoy

Understanding others: the art of empathy

On the last page of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, one of Tolstoy's most controversial narrators, the ideologically motivated wife-murderer Pozdnyshev, concludes his account of the crime with the words, "He who has not lived through it cannot understand" (Tolstoy, 1967: 428; 1982: 28:196).¹ On the one hand, the hero dispels the audience's possible claims of empathizing with his predicament. On the other hand, he creates a loophole through which his shocking, essentially unrepentant narrative may escape judgment as that informed by privileged knowledge, which can be gleaned only empirically, in the course of a strictly identical experience. Granted, this emotional postscript is not a call for murderous action: as impressed as Pozdnyshev is by the life-changing revelation unveiled in the course of the

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murder, he may hardly count on his listeners to relive his private apocalypse by murdering *their* wives. Nevertheless, it is implied that to fully understand the hero's uniquely garnered truth about the consequences of eros, one would have to do just that. Although the readers stop short of fulfilling this radical authorial demand for first-hand knowledge, they are taught an important lesson about the nature of empathy in Pozdnyshev's world: for this Tolstoyan narrator, empathy with others is possible only by mentally replicating their experiences, a passive life-strategy that proves influential in determining crucial choices in the hero's life.

I intend to demonstrate that the key moral question in *The Kreutzer Sonata* is precisely the question of empathy. The problem is not that the hero fails to realize the ideals of neighborly love and compassion, which he claims to apprehend only post-murder, as a belated moral lesson of his family tragedy, but that these very ideals are deeply flawed in Pozdnyshev's interpretation throughout the tale. Pozdnyshev does not stray from the path of authentic fellow-feeling by fixating on his own emotional experiences and ascribing them to others, as has been suggested by some of Tolstoy's interpreters.² Rather, the act of *ideal* interpersonal understanding is itself conceptualized by Pozdnyshev as an instance of such emotional replication, culminating in virtual identity of subjects. Max Scheler's theory of empathy, with its distinction between *active*, morally productive empathy and the *passive*, merely reproductive kind, is highly relevant to our discussion and will be used as a tool of both psychological and philosophical analysis. Defined in the framework of a Christian worldview and symbolically linked with Incarnation and Resurrection, Scheler's concept of active empathy is especially fruitful in analyzing *The Kreutzer Sonata*, with its emphasis on the spiritual implications of Pozdnyshev's relationship with his wife and the strong connection between the character's psychology and his theology.

In Pozdnyshev's breathless, internally anguished narrative, passages devoted to understanding others are marked by special malice, often masking despair over the failure of compassion with deliberately cynical outbursts. As it were, "bracketing" the character's disappointing empathetic experiences, it might be wise to ask, What is it that he had expected from love and empathy at the beginning of courtship and married life, before his efforts came to naught? The answer, given in the opening paragraphs of his personal tale, is: "everything." Here is how the widower Pozdnyshev describes a memorable outing with his future wife, which resulted in a "closeness" leading to their engagement and, eventually, marriage:

One evening, after we had been out in a boat, and had returned by moonlight and I was sitting beside her admiring her curls and her shapely figure in a tight fitting jersey, I suddenly decided that it was she! It seemed to me that evening that she understood everything, everything that I felt and thought, and that what I felt and thought was most lofty. (Tolstoy, 1967: 369; 1982: 5:137)

What is notable in this deliberately trivialized account of a picture-perfect outing, imbued with bitter irony yielded by a later perspective, is precisely the

youthful expectation of emotional and intellectual intimacy of the highest kind. Not only is Pozdnyshév's mate a comfortable presence on the periphery of his exemplary emotional life—as it were, a graceful accompaniment to his lofty thoughts—but she is capable of understanding these thoughts perfectly. The irony present in the description of the outing anticipates the “disclaimer” typical of Pozdnyshév's narration—as it turns out, the spiritual openness depicted here was an illusion and the only closeness achieved on the lake was of a strictly physical nature, inspired by the girl's enticing attire and alluring locks, Pozdnyshév hastens to add (Tolstoy, 1967: 369; 1982: 5:137). The hero's ultimate verdict can hardly be taken at face value, but, regardless of these retroactive efforts to trivialize the first experience of mutual understanding, it is clear that the ideal vision of communication depicted here sets impossible standards for empathy and the inflated expectations are bound to be shattered at the first sign of trouble in marital paradise.

Indeed, during the first week of marriage Pozdnyshév comes to realize that marital union does not guarantee the utter transparency of the spouses' souls to each other:

I think it was on the third or fourth day that I found my wife depressed. I began asking her the reason and embracing her, which in my view was all she could want, but she removed my arm and began to cry. What about? She could not say. But she felt sad and distressed. Probably, her exhausted nerves suggested to her the truth as to the vileness of our relation, but she did not know how to express it. I began to question her, and she said something about feeling sad without her mother. It seemed to me that this was untrue, and I began comforting her without alluding to her mother. I did not understand that she was simply depressed and her mother was merely an excuse. But she immediately took offence because I had not mentioned her mother, as though I did not believe her. She told me she saw that I did not love her. I reproached her with being capricious, and suddenly her face changed entirely and instead of sadness it expressed irritation, and with the most venomous words she began accusing me of selfishness and cruelty. (Tolstoy, 1967: 379; 1982: 12:148)

There is nothing unusual about experiencing a moment of unexplained sadness so ephemeral that we are unable to tell what has caused it. What is notable is the level of discomfort this inarticulate moment causes Pozdnyshév. As soon as the deceptively transparent mirror of his wife's inner life becomes clouded by an ambiguous emotion that cannot be easily expressed, Pozdnyshév becomes alarmed and hastens to restore the much-desired clarity. It is when he dismisses her complaints of home-sickness as an irrelevant excuse that his wife becomes hurt, and mere defensiveness turns into aggression.

Whether or not the wife's explanation is valid, it is significant that Pozdnyshév's own interpretation of her momentary sadness is so tellingly bound to his own all-important person: his wife must have unconsciously suffered the moral consequences of his sexual crime against her, a crime in which she, too, has now become an accomplice. Even retroactively Pozdnyshév is unable to acknowledge

his helplessness in interpreting his wife's emotional state, insisting on her libidinal guilt, while it is precisely his refusal to take her at her word, to allow her her very own, perhaps opaque and inarticulate emotions, unrelated to his all-encompassing ego, that his wife protests so vehemently in this episode and will continue to protest throughout the tale.

What is apparent in Pozdnyshev's notion of interpersonal understanding throughout the story is a certain extremism of demands: an insistence on the complete merging of selves in spiritual intercourse and a rejection of incomplete views and partial insights. For Pozdnyshev, a partner is either extolled for understanding everything (*понимает все, все*) or, in case of failure, "condemned to silence" (*обречен/а на молчание*) (Tolstoy, 1967: 369; 1982: 5:137; Tolstoy, 1967: 392; 1982: 17:161). Such an all-or-nothing attitude results in excessive demands on the other's private realm, which are often met with the willful closure of the self. Indeed, it finally leads the couple to decide "that we are unable to understand each other, to agree with one another. We finally stopped to even attempt to bring any dispute to a conclusion" (Tolstoy, 1967: 392; 1982: 17:161–62).

However, it is not the excessive "quantitative" demands set by Pozdnyshev on the soul of his interlocutor that are the crux of the problem here: what is at stake is not only *how much* is revealed but also *what* is revealed in the course of interpersonal communication. Critical analyses of Pozdnyshev's efforts to enter the minds of those around him (notably his wife's and Trukhachevsky's) demonstrate that such efforts reveal little about others but rather reproduce the workings of his own *ressentiment*-ridden psyche.³ On the other hand, Pozdnyshev's fear of emotional infection, of being utterly overcome by another (often anonymous) will—be it through an "infection" with the fashionable obsession with sex, cultivated by contemporary society, or by listening to music—has much to do with the way he himself envisions the mechanics of emotional contact with others and puts it into practice.

***The Kreutzer Sonata* in light of Max Scheler's phenomenology of emotions**

Max Scheler's study of empathy and compassion in *The Nature of Sympathy* (1913), *Ressentiment* (1912), and *On the Eternal in Man* (1921) will help us explicate these problematic aspects of interpersonal understanding in a more systematic fashion.⁴ In his phenomenological investigation of emotions, Max Scheler demonstrates that, in cases analogous to Pozdnyshev's, empathy fails not because the merging of selves is incomplete but rather because true empathy has nothing at all to do with such total fusion of personalities and is always based on *partial* contact. Rather, love and empathy are predicated upon the existence of "the ontological gulf," an essential existential distance between individuals which guards against an absorption of one personality by another.

In *The Nature of Sympathy*, Scheler begins his analysis of empathy and Christian love by defending them from Friedrich Nietzsche's merciless attacks. In a critique that could have been launched against Pozdnyshev's practice of relating to others,

which seems to result in multiplication of hurt and suffering, Nietzsche describes pity as that pernicious “instinct” that results in “multiplying misery quite as much as in preserving all that is miserable” by infecting the sympathizer’s consciousness with the sufferer’s emotional state (“Antichrist” 134, quoted in Scheler [*Gesammelte Werke* 7:28, hereafter *GW*]).⁵ In his response, Scheler both commends Nietzsche for his disapproval of infectious pity as a psychological pathology and questions his final diagnosis, which identifies this moral malady with empathy. What Nietzsche describes is not empathy but instances of its perversion, Scheler argues. Indeed, true, active fellow-feeling respects the sovereignty of the other’s suffering and thus prevents rather than spreads emotional infection (*The Nature of Sympathy*, hereafter, *Sympathy*, *GW* 7:28; *Ressentiment*, *GW* 3:73, 82).

The philosopher contends that those reproductive theories of interpersonal understanding that do not identify it with emotional infection but nevertheless make the “numeric duplication” of *one* subject’s emotional state an essential component of empathy are no closer to capturing its moral and ethical significance.⁶ For Scheler, only the recognition of the empathizer and the empathized as *two sovereign subjects*, which, in turn, leads to the recognition of two distinctly separate emotional functions, the empathized feeling and empathy itself, results in a truly intentional, morally significant attitude toward the other (*Sympathy*, *GW* 7:49). Those who identify empathy with passive, duplicating understanding impoverish its value by denying its ethical productivity, for, as Scheler notes, a mere reproduction of another’s feeling is not yet a morally relevant act (see, e.g., *GW* 7:20).

What enables me to separate myself from the other’s feeling, preserving its sovereignty as his or hers, is the fact that I may experience the *quality* of this feeling, without becoming emotionally overcome or infected by it. It is *after* this basic apprehension of the other’s feeling that I can take a creative stance toward it, for, as Scheler notes, the phenomenon of true empathy, ultimately misunderstood by Nietzsche, is necessarily “*additional* to the other’s experience, which is already grasped and understood” (*GW* 7:19, italics in text). The “additional” element in empathy is love: only if bolstered by love does it acquire an active, value-oriented quality and its capacity for absolute affirmation. So much so that “the only thing that makes pity bearable is love that it betrays,” Scheler states in response to Nietzsche’s critique, which portrays both love and empathy as equally re-active, non-spontaneous emotions (*GW* 7:148).

Scheler conceptualizes active understanding as an entry into another self fundamentally different from a passive “projection” into an alien psyche, advocated by the proponents of reproductive theories of empathy.⁷ A loving subject approaches another not to become one with him or her in the process of ecstatic psychic fusion. (In that sense, Pozdnyshév’s ambition to “understand everything, everything!” is alien to him.⁸) He penetrates the other’s inner world not to usurp the other’s identity or to impose his own, but to become enlightened by the invaluable, if inevitably incomplete, knowledge of the other’s private realm in order to affirm the other’s reality as truly personal (see e.g. *Sympathy*, *GW* 7:81).

An active, loving approach to another human being results in the recognition of the beloved as both *real* and *spiritually autonomous*. Scheler, who at times tends to present empathy and love as consecutive stages of one, progressively more spontaneous and morally significant emotional movement, ascribes to empathy the function of granting the other the status of ultimate reality, while crediting love with discovering the full measure of his or her otherness. The natural man, in possession of only his innate cognitive faculties and yet uneducated by the enlightening experience of empathy, harbors a “natural delusion” concerning the status of his own and the other’s reality, Scheler suggests. While on the cognitive level, *homo naturalis* acknowledges the existence of fellow spiritual beings, on the level of fundamental belief and value, he grants those fellow humans only a relative reality, limiting the sphere of the absolutely real to his own existence.

What is overcome [if natural solipsism is dispelled through empathy] is precisely the ontic egocentric tendency to relate the other to one’s own self as seemingly absolutely real, which, as long as the illusion obtains, is characterized by the lack of conscious awareness of this connection: motivated by an egocentric and solipsistic attitude, we take the existence of this fellow man, in actuality completely dependent on our own being and sphere of interests, to be his ultimate and absolute reality—and precisely herein lies the metaphysical illusion. (*Sympathy*, *GW* 7:70)

Through authentic fellow-feeling I overcome the natural illusion: by freeing the other from the unconsciously present, pernicious dependence on my own ego and value system, I for the first time become truly aware of the pure and simple fact of his or her existence. Empathy steeped in Christian love elevates the other’s reality level to that of one’s own in God, uniting the two selves within the realm of absolute reality and thus creating the opportunity for their first true encounter. Such, according to Scheler, is the profound meaning of the love commandment: “Love God above all and thy neighbor as thyself” (*Sympathy*, *GW* 7:88, 109).

It is obvious that personal becoming (*Personwerdung*) described by Scheler as accomplished through an act of authentic fellow-feeling does not take place in Pozdnyshév’s world. What is interesting about discussing Scheler’s concept of empathy in the Tolstoyan context is precisely how the implicit structures of Pozdnyshév’s co-experiencing with others are diametrically opposed to the structures of the ideal Schelerian empathy, revealing the mechanics of anti-empathy, as it were. In Scheler’s scenario the empathizer overcomes the natural illusion by freeing the other from oneself without annihilating the self as an independent spiritual center, guarded and cherished by authentic self-love. Only *after* this initial separation can there be a coming together of two sovereign, ontically real selves. On the contrary, in Tolstoy’s tale, the self (Pozdnyshév) attempts to be freed from the other (his wife) only *after* the inauthentic, depersonalizing union has taken place. If, in Scheler, I, paradoxically, free another from myself only to make my spiritual being truly available to her in the future, Pozdnyshév’s ultimate separation from his wife is terminal in more than one sense—his murderous act is meant as a

symbolic severing of all emotional ties to the other. Yet, as we shall see, it fails to liberate the hero from ontic dependence on all-important others.

Pozdnyshv continues to harbor the “natural delusion” throughout the tale, while all of its principle actors remain inextricably bound to his ego and sphere of needs as his seducers, sex objects, tormenters, and so forth: society mothers entrap him by placing their seductively clad daughters in his path; doctors sanction his addiction to sex and ruin his life by advertising contraception; women seduce him only to demonstrate their disdain for sex. An evolution of *homo personalis* is hardly possible in such a stereotypical world, where, as Vladimir Golstein rightly points out, we encounter “no persons, only mothers, doctors, men, women, adulterers and so on” (1996: 455). Nor is there a revelation of any spiritual content in Pozdnyshv’s life companions.

And yet, Pozdnyshv’s mission is a spiritual one. Several critics have acknowledged the apocalyptic character of Pozdnyshv’s hysteria, noting that both the hero’s action and his narrative may be seen as a search for a meaningful, redeeming end of human history (see e.g. Mondry, 1988 and Jackson, 1993). Henrietta Mondry also correctly points out the religious significance of Pozdnyshv’s “fall” during his first visit to a brothel, emphatically described as “падение” (“the fall”) / “пасть” (“to fall”) (Tolstoy, 1982: 2:132). Indeed, Pozdnyshv’s initiation into sexual intercourse is conceptualized as a kind of original sin, whose gravity the hero is now able to see from the apocalyptic height of his murderous deed. While much of Pozdnyshv’s life prior to the “critical episode” seems to be devoted to dealing with the trauma of the Fall, to a dogged if blind search for redemption, the murder brings a radical enhancement of vision and, despite the proclaimed remorse, is seen as an event of almost sacred significance, a blind but inevitable step toward salvation. His sermon-like tale then becomes another step on the path toward the anticipated finale of history. It is an offering of sight bought by his saving transgression. Indeed, like a prophet who has come before his time, Pozdnyshv is convinced that the moment of universal revelation is at hand: “I am convinced a time will come, and perhaps very soon, when people will understand this [my truth] and will wonder” (Tolstoy, 1967: 374; 1982: 9:143).

In his account of the murder, Pozdnyshv globalizes his battle with the flesh, producing a mythical narrative which struggles for unity and seeks an apocalyptic resolution. Pozdnyshv tellingly begins the tale with the account of his first carnal experience: “If I am to tell it [the story of his crime], I must tell everything from the beginning” (Tolstoy, 1967: 364; 1982: 3:132), he exclaims, in a sense commencing his own Genesis with the words, “In the beginning there was a Coitus.”

As has often been remarked, despite the character’s proclaimed responsibility for the crime, his personal transgressions are invariably explained by common societal practices, shifting individual blame to impersonal, institutional culprits: Pozdnyshv is driven to his tragic end (“*был приведен к тому, что со мной было*” [lit.: “*was brought to what happened to me*”]) (Tolstoy, 1967: 364; 1982: 2:132, emphasis here and throughout added, unless otherwise indicated), trapped by means of bustles and curls (“*меня эти джерси и локоны и нашлапки*

поймали”; “these jerseys, curls and bustles *caught me*” [Tolstoy, 1967: 371; 1982: 7:139]) and even forced to fall in love (“*влюблен*,” arguably used as a passive participle of the transitive verb “*влюбить [кого-то]*,” “to make somebody fall in love” [Tolstoy, 1967: 375; 1982: 10:143]). Like everyone else (“*как все*”), the hero and his unremarkable, typical wife sin by giving free reign to unrestricted carnal desire within marriage; like the majority, they sink lower by continuing their “swinish” relationship during pregnancies and are ruined by doctors, who encourage free sexual intercourse by introducing the couple to contraceptives. As noted by critics, this consistent reference to collective transgression minimizes the hero’s responsibility for his choices,⁹ but it also effectively universalizes his experience of the Fall, so that the proposed salvation may be beneficial to all.

This common experience of socially sanctioned debauchery becomes the source of Pozdnyshv’s alleged knowledge of his fellow-sinners, so much so that any actual probing of their inner world, any “entry” into another spiritual personality, becomes unnecessary. Pozdnyshv’s description of the first meeting between his wife and her alleged seducer, the violinist Trukhachevsky, illustrates the hero’s entrapment in his own solipsistic, endlessly recycled emotional experiences, mechanically applied to others:

From the first moments his eyes met my wife’s, I saw that the beast in *both of them*, regardless of all conditions of their position and of society, asked, “May I?” and answered, “Oh, yes, certainly.” I saw that he had not at all expected to find my wife, a Moscow lady, so attractive, and that he was very pleased. For *he* had no doubt whatsoever that she was willing. The only question was whether that unendurable husband could hinder them. Had I been pure, I should not have understood this, but, like the majority of men, I had myself regarded women in that way before marriage and therefore could read his mind like a book. (Tolstoy, 1967: 404; 1982: 21:172)

Nearly every third-person pronoun in this depiction of psychological projection may be replaced by a first-person pronoun and the passage will hardly change its meaning (cf. “the beast in *both of us*”; “for *I* had no doubt whatsoever that she was willing,” etc.). Trukhachevsky may well be an unscrupulous lecher, but what we learn from this passage tells us much more about Pozdnyshv than about his alleged rival. The beast claimed to have possessed Mrs. Pozdnyshv and her seducer is the very same harbinger of carnal desire that haunts Pozdnyshv’s own soul (cf.: “Just thinking of *that beast* that then lived in me, fills me with horror” [Tolstoy, 1967: 405; 1982: 21:173–74]). It is also clear that it is not Trukhachevsky but Pozdnyshv himself who is certain of his wife’s readiness to be seduced by the violinist, never questioning her agreement to Trukhachevsky’s “most natural” demands, which Pozdnyshv will later hear expressed musically. Indeed, unlike true, active empathy, reproductive empathy, be it emotional infection or passive projection of my own feelings to others, yields no knowledge or understanding of the replicated emotional content (Scheler, *GW* 7:15).

As the anguished Pozdnyshv considers the possibility of his wife's guilt, it is again his own aggressive sexual desire, liberated from any ethical commitment, that is transferred to all men: "How could *that simplest and most intelligible thing* help happening?," he asks. "That for the sake of which *I* married her, for the sake of which *I* have been living with her, what alone *I* wanted of her, and which others, including this musician, must therefore also want?" (Tolstoy, 1967: 413; 1982: 24:182). Significantly, the only feeling that Pozdnyshv claims to understand in his wife, whom he knows "only as an animal," is the basic sexual attraction still shared by the couple in the intervals between periods of equally animalistic hostility, "*that simplest and most intelligible thing . . . for the sake of which I have been living with her.*" As Pozdnyshv plunges into his sexophobic hysteria, every assessment of reality becomes a curious exercise of reducing all inner life to this basic emotional unit. The following passage, depicting Trukhachevsky's initial visit, is an example of such disturbing reduction:

My wife was, as usual of late, very elegant, attractive, and disquietingly beautiful. He [Trukhachevsky] evidently pleased her at first sight. Besides, she was glad that she would have someone to accompany her on a violin, which she was so fond of that she used to engage a violinist from the theater for this purpose; and her face reflected her pleasure. But catching sight of me she at once understood my feeling and changed her expression, and a game of mutual deception began. I smiled pleasantly to appear as if I liked it. He, looking at my wife as all immoral men look at pretty women, pretended that he was only interested in the subject of the conversation—which no longer interested him at all; while she tried to seem indifferent, though my false smile of jealousy with which she was familiar and his lustful gaze, evidently excited her. I saw that from their first encounter her eyes were particularly bright, and, probably as a result of my jealousy, it seemed as if an electric current had been established between them, evoking as it were an identity of expressions, looks and smiles. She blushed and he blushed. She smiled and he smiled. (Tolstoy, 1967: 402–403; 1982: 21:171)

As in the previous passages, it is extremely difficult to discern any objectively real behavior behind the tainted glass of the narrator's selective vision. Setting aside Pozdnyshv's explanation, we may see the wife's change of expression as a tactful, even compassionate gesture, motivated by a wish to protect her partner's delicate sensibilities from the painful, if unjustified, fear of disloyalty. But what is Pozdnyshv's "feeling" that she, usually unattuned to his emotions, so readily understood? The reader could suggest several possibilities, yet, for Pozdnyshv, it can only be that same "basic, *understandable*" expression of sexual possession which he has come to identify with the union of sexes and which can be answered only by a gesture of real or feigned submission. Regardless of his mate's actual motivation, in Pozdnyshv's eyes, it is this gesture of feigned submission on her part that signals the beginning of a subtle mating game, in which the men awkwardly struggle for dominance under the guise of a worldly conversation, while the

woman finds a way to communicate her choice without relinquishing her apparent passivity.

Once again, Pozdnyshev and Trukhachevsky become virtual doubles with their glued-on smiles, their feigned interest in the conversation and their intense, explosive aura of libidinal energy that electrifies the room. As their potent, probing gazes intersect, revealing the true object of their mutual interest, the wife's embarrassed excitement is clearly elicited by their joint efforts. As the contagious current of unindividuated sexual desire sweeps through the air, it is easy to imagine that Pozdnyshev, too, succumbs to the infection and the "sameness of expressions, gazes and smiles" is shared all around the room.

Thus, as the previous scene so aptly demonstrates, a Schelerian "spiritual entry" into another soul or a Dostoevskian *proniknovenie* is alien to the world of *The Kreutzer Sonata*. The only penetration that takes place in the tale is unmistakably sexual: the hero either possesses his wife's body, or, as in the scene above, vicariously follows Trukhachevsky's passage into this profane realm, envisioning a kind of "joint entry" that utterly desecralizes her body and anticipates its final destruction. Flesh and spirit are thus emphatically severed from each other, while each animalistic, essentially vital self is devoid of individuality.

Active empathy and incarnation

While Pozdnyshev's world, with its unbridgeable *chasm* between flesh and spirit, seems at odds with the Christian notion of Incarnation, Scheler's concepts of love and active empathy are modeled on this central biblical event. In the context of Pozdnyshev's repeated failure to acknowledge the sovereignty of his fellow men, to liberate himself from the "natural delusion" of relating to others merely as functions of his own ego and sphere of needs, it is significant that Scheler's interpretation of Incarnation is a celebration of *otherness* within the union of dual communing entities, God and Man, body and spirit. In view of Pozdnyshev's reactive, essentially passive position in personal relationships, it is important to highlight Scheler's vision of Incarnation as a fundamentally active undertaking.

In *The Nature of Sympathy*, Scheler posits the notion of "ontological gulf" between God and man, an existential distance that can be partially bridged but never completely eliminated. Even during a mystical union between a believer and his God a total coalescence of selves does not take place, yielding only a "partial identity of attributes," Scheler writes (*GW* 7:34). Because of this fruitful partition, the active, almost dialogical engagement between God and man as two sovereign participants in the process of Incarnation is implicit in Scheler's concept of Christianity. Linking this vision with Scheler's theory of intersubjectivity, it is easy to recognize the structural similarities between two basic models of interpersonal communication: that between human interlocutors and between humans and God.

But Incarnation is also a deed of love. For Scheler, it is the presence of Christ, the original "person," that may authenticate my *act* of love by placing it in the context of Incarnation. Furthermore, it is Christ's fundamentally active existential

stance that posits the highest model of *active* understanding for Scheler. Scheler's somewhat cryptic definition of a concrete spiritual self, a person, as "a being of acts" becomes less puzzling if one remembers that for the German philosopher the highest, as it were, "the most active act," is that of love, as exemplified in the event of Christ's life. A fundamentally active human being, a person, then becomes synonymous with a loving human being, *homo amans*. After Incarnation, Scheler writes, "there is no longer any 'highest good' independent of and beyond the *act* and *movement* of love" (*Ressentiment*, *GW* 3:87).

Finally, the fundamentally productive (and not re-productive) significance of Incarnation in Scheler's *Weltanschauung* comes to the fore in his declaration that salvation through Christ does not simply eradicate the Fall by returning man to the status of Adam, but raises him to a completely new spiritual level (*On the Eternal in Man*, *GW* 5:57). Not a passive replication of the pre-Fall condition but a radical "surplus" of spiritual growth is achieved through Incarnation and Resurrection. This symbolic event may serve as a metaphor of loving empathy, which does not simply reproduce one's inner world but transforms it, inducing a self to grow.

No such creative surplus is envisioned in Pozdnyshév's rewriting of the biblical story. Rather, the character aims at simply erasing the original sin—in this context, it is important to demonstrate that Incarnation is rejected precisely as a creative undertaking. (In this sense, even the hero's messianic calls for a cessation of intercourse and childbirth may be seen merely as a means of restoring Adam's lost innocence.) In Pozdnyshév's life, recast in terms of biblical history, the Fall is represented by the sin of carnal intercourse, endlessly repeated through perpetuation of loveless, demoralizing sexual acts within marriage, acts that bring not union but discord, generating the endless circle of hurt, as our narrator claims.

We have seen that in his relationship with his wife the character never rises above the reactive perpetuation of emotional injury by attempting to create his crumbling union anew. An account of Pozdnyshév's ideas about mending the situation after a particularly brutal marital quarrel is characteristic of this passive attitude. Pozdnyshév imagines fleeing abroad, getting divorced and remarried, fantasizes about his wife's (natural?) death, and, having thought himself into a corner, escapes reality by chain-smoking: "A thousand different plans of how to revenge myself on her and get rid of her, and how *to correct this and make it seem as if nothing had happened* (literally: "to make it so, as if there had been nothing" [*сэлатъ такъ, какъ буюто бы ничего не было*]) come into my head," Pozdnyshév confesses (Tolstoy, 1967: 399, amended; 1982: 20:168).

It is significant that here correcting the situation is equated not with rectifying it by introducing a meaningful change but with erasing "all of it" (the responsibility for emotionally abusing his wife? the marriage itself? the "original sin" of carnal intercourse?), as if it had never taken place ("как буюто бы ничего не было"). This same wish to plunge the past into non-being is also expressed after the murder when the character is awakened from sleep by a knock on the door: "I have committed murder, I think," Pozdnyshév recollects sluggishly, "but

perhaps it is she [at the door], and *nothing has happened* (literally: “there was nothing” [и *ничего не было*]) (Tolstoy, 1967: 425; 1982: 27:193). As Pozdnyshv approaches his dying wife, he again entertains the same hope: “the hope that *nothing had happened* (что *ничего не было*) again awoke in me” (Tolstoy, 1967: 427; 1982: 28:194).

“*Сделать так, как будто ничего не было*” (literally: “to make it seem as if nothing had been”), a motto that seems to signify the opposite of creation *ex nihilo*, becomes a negative slogan symbolizing the hero’s anti-creative stance. On the level of personal relationships it translates into foregoing any active, fundamentally affirmative movements of personal becoming. On the level of Pozdnyshv’s unorthodox theology, its application results in the rejection of the body: the transgression of the flesh cannot be rectified by the transfiguration of the flesh in the spirit but is simply erased or wished away and so is his wife’s murder, often viewed by the hero as an extension of this original transgression.¹⁰

Much discussion among the critics has been devoted to the question of whether Pozdnyshv’s downfall is an ethical or an aesthetic one. In her article Liza Knapp states that “the tragedy in Tolstoy’s story results not from an ethical failure but from an aesthetic one” (1991: 37), while David Herman, who analyzes Pozdnyshv’s philosophy in the context of Tolstoy’s relevant ideas on aesthetic creation in *What is Art?*, claims that the writer’s fears about the effects of art’s infectious and thus ethically unengaged force, also voiced by Pozdnyshv, necessitate the creation of an utterly uncommunal work of art. In Herman’s opinion, “all free circulation of desire” inherent in a work of art is considered “adulterous” by Tolstoy. “For Tolstoy, there is no adultery or impurity when I feel my own and only my own emotions. Unfortunately, as we shall see, nor is there any art,” Herman writes (1997: 21).

But, as Scheler suggests, personal and aesthetic communion does not have to be an adulterous experience. The hero can feel the other’s feelings, but as *their* own and, by respecting the ontological gulf between himself and the other or between himself and the work of art of which he partakes in the process of aesthetic contemplation, he can take a creative stance toward this emotional or aesthetic content. In her essay on Kierkegaard and Tolstoy, Hilary Fink suggests that a possible answer to “the central paradox of the *Kreutzer Sonata*” formulated by Herman—namely, the fact that the story is “a work of art that seems to abhor art” (1997: 21)—may be provided by Kierkegaard in *Either/Or*. “The ethical does not want to destroy the aesthetic but to transfigure it,” Kierkegaard remarks in a passage with which Tolstoy was allegedly familiar (1997: 253, quoted in Fink, 2002: 13). By the same token, according to a dialogical interpretation of Incarnation, the spiritual does not want to destroy the bodily but to transfigure it, the solution clearly rejected by Tolstoy’s protagonist.¹¹ Scheler’s theory of love and empathy, with its reference to Incarnation and Resurrection, helps us answer the question posed by Knapp and Herman: Pozdnyshv’s transgression is both ethical and aesthetic, for his is a failure of creativity in both personal relationships and his

apocalyptic teachings.¹² As Scheler would say, the hero's empathy with others cannot be ethically relevant precisely because it is not creative or transformative.

Ends and beginnings: the temporal implications of passive empathy

As we have seen, Pozdnyshev's fundamental aversion to creativity results in endless reproduction of his own feelings and attitudes mechanically ascribed to others. The hero's entrapment in this stifling mode of replication is reflected in the narrative's peculiar temporality. Nothing essentially new or previously unexperienced enters the character's life, which seems to consist of predictable, nearly identical moments of being. Not only do all of Pozdnyshev's family quarrels mirror one other, but the hero masochistically resurrects the same hateful feeling he had experienced during previous confrontations, projecting himself in the moment of past hostility and almost ritualistically reenacting the past violence. Consider, for example, Pozdnyshev's recourse to the brutal events of the previous week as he prepares to confront the alleged lovers upon his sudden arrival from the country:

“And why didn't I throttle her then?” I said to myself, recalling the moment when, the week before, I drove her out of my study and hurled things about. I vividly recalled the state I had then been in; I not only recalled it, but again felt *the same* need to strike and destroy that I had felt then. (Tolstoy, 1967: 421; 1982: 26:189)

Compare a similar conscious immersion into last week's rage minutes before the murder: “the *same* fury I had experienced the week before overcame me. Once again I felt *that same* need of destruction, violence and a transport of rage, and yielded to it” (Tolstoy, 1967: 422; 1982: 27:191).

It is not simply the similarity but the identity of the pernicious emotion that is acknowledged by Pozdnyshev: unresolved and carefully stored for future battles, it is released with a vengeance on the day of the murder. The mental movement in question is not simply a memory (*воспоминание*) but a living sensation (*ощущение*), which offers a direct, unmediated connection to the experience of past injuries. Interestingly enough, this conscious, if not entirely voluntary, projection into his own past agony occurs when the hero “pities himself,” as it were, empathizing with his own plight from the position of an imaginary other. Predictably, this mockery of a genuine empathetic experience yields no new self-knowledge—the imaginary empathizer plunges not into the depths of the soul but into the depths of time, experiencing an intensified repetition of the past insults.

The lack of temporal progression in the tale has been linked with “the absolute performing present of music” (Emerson, 1996: 435) and, generally, with the immediate present-tense perspective of co-experiencing the narrated past events, revealing the lack of any morally significant distance from the crime on Pozdnyshev's part (Golstein, 1996: 456). This perspective is characteristic of several sections in the tale, but there is another significant temporal point of view in the story that is

worth noting: the events in progress are perceived as if they have already taken place, as if seen from the vantage point of the apocalyptic future. "It is an astonishing thing," the narrator muses, "but from the first day, from the first hour of my meeting him [Trukhachevsky], my relations with him were such as they might have been only *after all that subsequently happened*" (Tolstoy, 1967: 402; 1982: 21:171). In a similar fashion, "the terrible, monstrous idea entered my head that she, like Uriah's wife, wished to conceal *the sin she had already committed*," Pozdnyshev confesses (Tolstoy, 1967: 407; 1982: 22:175). In this context, it is also not surprising that no sooner does Pozdnyshev board the train taking him back to the city to confront his wife than he imagines himself "*having already arrived*" (Tolstoy, 1967: 416; 1982: 25:184).

One reason for this convergence of past, future, and present is the fact that, in a mythical fashion, Pozdnyshev repeatedly relates present and even anticipated occurrences to the original, most influential event symbolizing the Fall in his private mythology. In this context, describing the hero's wife as "the one who has already sinned" is justified. Whether she has sinned with Trukhachevsky becomes immaterial, because her real fall has already occurred, once and for all, during her first sexual encounter—with Pozdnyshev! Indeed, the virtual identity between Pozdnyshev-the husband, Trukhachevsky-the adulterer, and Pozdnyshev-the murderer in the hero's symbolically compressed vision of the events is consistent with a mythically inclined consciousness. For that reason, Pozdnyshev's declaration: "If not he [Trukhachevsky], then there would be someone else (*не он так виноват*), it had to happen" (Tolstoy, 1967: 397; 1982: 19:166), can be replaced with the revealing: "If not he, then I," and, by way of reciprocity, "if not I, then he." By the same token, in Pozdnyshev's mind, the wife's murder has already taken place (*уже совершилось*) long before October 5th, for it is not with his knife but with that other weapon of male aggression that Pozdnyshev claims to have killed her: "They think that I killed her with a knife, on the 5th of October. It was not then that I killed her, but much earlier," Pozdnyshev exclaims (Tolstoy, 1967: 382; 1982: 13:151).¹³ In this startling one-person play, Pozdnyshev himself performs all three roles—those of husband, seducer, and avenger. Violently possessing and re-possessing his wife, he seems to experience the acts of sexual aggression and murder simultaneously, as it were, superimposed onto one single temporal plane. Thus endings and beginnings, crimes and atonements, merge in Pozdnyshev's consciousness, steeped in a myth of his own making.

However, if Pozdnyshev's response to the Fall is to have a salvational value, it must possess a powerful novelty capable of radically separating the saving deed from the morally condemned past. For that reason, Pozdnyshev chooses to see his crime as the last vestige of the old destined to end the old. In this context, Pozdnyshev's assumption of all three roles—husband, seducer, and avenger—must be reinterpreted to strike just the right balance of continuity and change between the original and the final violence. On the ethical level, Pozdnyshev provokes his wife's extramarital seduction in order to punish the socially sanctioned adultery

within marriage.¹⁴ On the metaphysical level, the murder itself, whose description is evocative of the sexual act,¹⁵ becomes *a crime to end all crime*. The last and most radical entry into the profane realm of the female body, it is intended to end the vicious circulation of emotional violence by putting a conclusive stop to all intercourse.¹⁶

Thus Tolstoy's hero becomes the locus of tension between the circular temporality of myth, with its eternally recurrent moment of the original deed, and the expectations of radical change, linked with his hopes for the apocalyptic future. Striving to break the cycle of endless repetitions, Pozdnyshev insists on distinguishing between *first* and *last*, seeking a conclusive, decisively final ending both for his universalized life-struggle and for his revelatory narrative.

The narrator's laborious striving to fit the internally amorphous, continuous stream of life-experience into the discrete, linear structure of beginnings and endings is reflected in his emphatic, often obsessive use of the lexemes *начать / кончить; начало / конец* (*to begin / to finish or to end; beginning / end*). From the first lines of his impassioned monologue, Pozdnyshev seeks to uncover the origins of emotional violence pervading the lives of the seemingly innocuous couples around him. His private history becomes an essential document of this disturbing epidemic, which, according to Pozdnyshev, has reached global proportions. Pozdnyshev reports,

It began (началось) during the first days and continued all the time, ever increasing and growing more obdurate. In the depths of my soul I felt from the first weeks that I was trapped [italics in original], that things had not turned out as I expected, that marriage was not only no happiness but a very heavy burden; but like everybody else I did not wish to admit this to myself (I would not have admitted it even now if not for the end (если бы не конец) [that followed]) and I concealed it not only from others but from myself too. (Tolstoy, 1967: 381; 1982: 12:150)

The juxtaposition of “*начало*” and “*конец*,” seminal in Pozdnyshev's emerging understanding of his sacred mission, comes to the fore as a clearly marked minimal pair in this passage. Looking back, Pozdnyshev tries to locate the initial symptoms of the pathology, recalling his first recognition of the marriage's bankruptcy. This recognition is possible only “because of the end” (*конец*), which comes to signify both the murderous end of marriage and a private apocalypse that yields a powerful, eye-opening revelation. Thus the “end” calls forth the beginning, providing a unique vantage point from which the origins of the tragedy seem to be clearly visible. Here *конец* (the end) receives an eschatological connotation, signifying a conclusive stop to what was.

The period leading up to this ominous yet redemptive “end” is portrayed in Pozdnyshev's narrative as a painful, abortive struggle to achieve closure of any kind, be it a momentary triumph of having the last word in an argument, the satisfaction of ending a protracted emotional scene or any sense of release from the debilitating cycle of emotional abuse that has come to dominate the couple's

life. Instead of ending their pernicious strife or drawing a meaningful *conclusion* from the repeated manifestations of aggression, the fatigued heroes simply exit the scene, usually putting aside the entire episode, only to resume their costly tug of war at the very first opportunity. The result is a series of non-endings, whose purely mechanical association with the word *кончить* only makes the lack of resolution more palpable.

Pozdnyshv's description of his wife's attempted suicide is an example of such feigned, illusory closure:

An empty opium bottle is on the table. She is brought to herself. Tears follow, and, *finally* (*наконец*), a reconciliation. No, not a reconciliation: in the heart of each there is still the old animosity, with the additional irritation produced by the pain of this quarrel which each attributes to the other. But one must of course *finish* it all somehow (*надо же как-нибудь кончить все это*), and life goes on in the old way. And so the same kind of quarrels, and even worse ones, occurred continually: once a week, once a month, or at times every day. (Tolstoy, 1967: 401; 1982: 20:170)

When the emotional cost of the battle becomes unbearable, the long-awaited reconciliation "finally" (*наконец*) arrives, bringing neither triumph nor appeasement to the warring sides. Indeed, this temporary cease-fire, which restores the old routine of the couple's ostensibly normal existence, is but a parody of the powerful and longed-for apocalyptic ending (*конец*) mentioned in the previous passage. In the face of this emerging apocalyptic task, it is a clear capitulation: not a conclusive breach with the old but an impotent withdrawal, a half-hearted attempt to "end somehow" ("как-нибудь кончить").¹⁷ In its passive, non-creative character, this gesture is akin to Pozdnyshv's recurrent dream of simply disappearing from the scene of his marital battles; it, too, is a futile attempt to wish away his painful reality, "to make it seem as if nothing had happened" ("сделать так, как будто бы ничего не было").

It is significant that the violent quarrel preceding the concert, spurred by Pozdnyshv's jealous rage and in many ways anticipating the scene of the murder, "ends" on a similar inconclusive note. "Everything was against her, especially that accursed music. So it all *ended* (*так все и кончилось*), and on the Sunday the guests assembled and they again played together," the narrator reports with a mounting sense of frustration (Tolstoy, 1967: 409; 1982: 22:178).

It is with the climax of love-making that Pozdnyshv seeks to substitute for such repeated failures of emotional closure: each hypocritical declaration of peace is "sealed" with a sexual act. In this context, the sexual connotations of the verb "кончить" (to end; to finish), long pointed out by critics, gain a new significance. Remarkably, it is in the chapter directly following the impotent non-ending of the ongoing conflict, with the frustrated "*так все и кончилось*" ("so it all *ended*") uttered in the preceding chapter's final lines, that the narrator pronounces his curious judgment of music: "music only excites [the listener] but does not *consummate* (*finish*)" ("*музыка только раздражает, не кончает*") (Tolstoy, 1967:

411, amended; 1982: 23:179), while, in the same chapter, the wife's post-concert demeanor after "they have *finished*" ("кончили") is depicted in overtly sexual terms, resembling a post-coital afterglow. Compare: "and her melting languor and feeble, pathetic, and blissful smile after they had *finished* (кончили)" Tolstoy, 1967: 412; 1982: 23:180).

What emerges from our analysis of the hero's quest for finality is then a pattern of frustrated endings, evocative of the rhythms of sexual intercourse—in short, a repeated *Coitus interruptus*. Pozdnyshev's undertakings seem to be plagued by interruptions,¹⁸ preventing the character from ending his relationship with his wife or from consummating a sexual act, hindering the narrator from finishing his tale and ultimately slowing down the world's momentous movement toward the conclusion of history.

This pattern, only partially analyzed here, is based on the growing tension between the alternating verbs "начать" and "кончить" and related lexemes. Every time the narrator claims to have put an end to something, there invariably follows the disappointing resumption of the old, resented behavior or a resurgence of an old, pernicious emotion: "надо как-нибудь *кончить*" / "жизнь идет по-старому"; "все *кончилось*" / "они опять *играли*" ("one must finish it all somehow" / "life goes on in the old way"; "so it all ended" / "they again played together"). Any fleeting comfort that may have been expressed in the phrase "so it all ended" ("так все и кончилось," see the passage above) is dispelled on the very next page, when the hero recognizes, with a mixture of rapture and terror, the unfinalizable, ever-commencing quality of music: "He [Trukhachevsky] took the first chords. His face grew serious, stern, and sympathetic, and listening to the sounds he produced, he touched the strings with careful fingers, and the piano answered him. And it *began* (И *началось*)" (Tolstoy, 1967: 410, amended; 1982: 23:179). As Caryl Emerson rightly points out, it is the dialogical nature of music, its constant soliciting of a new response, that becomes especially threatening for Pozdnyshev (1996: 447), who, we may add, sees in its alleged lack of conclusive resolution an epitome of his own frustrating quest for closure. Having thus foregrounded the debilitating coalescence of ends and beginnings in Pozdnyshev's troubled psyche, the musical performance seems to trigger an intensification of his internal struggle for finalization. After the concert, the established rhythm of alternations between endings and beginnings speeds up, newly affected by the analogous rhythm of the speeding train carrying Pozdnyshev home to confront the alleged lovers.

Riding to the train station in a horse-drawn carriage Pozdnyshev is momentarily distracted from his worries, joyfully partaking of the beauty of his wintry surroundings, but this emotional calm is short-lived. Indeed, "that tranquil state of mind, that ability to suppress my feelings, *ended* with my drive," the narrator reports:

As soon as I entered the train something entirely different *began*. That eight hour journey in a railway carriage was something dreadful, which I shall never forget all my life. Whether it was that having taken my seat in the carriage I vividly imagined myself

as having already arrived, or that railway traveling has such an *exciting* effect on people, at any rate from the moment I sat down in the train I could no longer control my imagination, and with extraordinary vividness which *inflamed* my jealousy it painted incessantly, one after another, pictures of what had gone on in my absence, of how she had been unfaithful to me. I burned with indignation, anger, and a peculiar feeling of *intoxication* with my own humiliation, as I gazed at those pictures, and I could not tear myself away from them, could not help looking at them, could not erase them, could not help evoking them. (Tolstoy, 1967: 415–416)

Как *только* я вошел в вагон, *началось* совсем другое. *Этот* восьмичасовой переезд в вагоне был для меня *что-то* ужасное, чего я не забуду во всю жизнь. Оттого ли, что, сев в вагон, я живо представил себя уже приехавшим, или оттого, что железная дорога так *возбуждающе* действует на людей, но *только*, с *тех* пор как я сел в вагон, я уже не мог владеть своим воображением, и оно не переставая с необычайной яркостью начало рисовать мне *разжигающие* мою ревность картины, *одну* за другой и *одну* циничнее другой, и все *о том же*, *о том*, что происходило там, без меня, как она изменяла мне. Я сгорал *от* негодования, злости и какого-то особенного чувства упоения своим унижением, созерцая *эти* картины, и не мог оторваться *от* них; не мог не смотреть на них, не мог стереть их, не мог не вызывать их. (Tolstoy, 1982: 25:184)

Once again, the notion of *ending*—this time the cessation of a joyful feeling—is accompanied by a sense of apprehension over that which *commences* (*начинается*), something entirely different, the arrival of a profoundly destructive, poisonous emotion. Pozdnyshv is so overwhelmed by the deeply contrasting emotional states descending on his embattled psyche in rapid succession, that his insistence on marking the boundaries of these elusive psychic currents may be the last attempt of asserting control. Recording the moment when one emotion gives way to another becomes a means of dealing with the debilitating psychic turmoil that also plagues Pozdnyshv-the narrator, as he recollects his still unassuaged suffering in the act of story telling.

The patterned, as it were, musical, movement of the train “excites” and “enflames” the hero, producing an agitating effect tellingly similar to that of Beethoven’s *Kreutzer Sonata*.¹⁹ And, like music, the current of Pozdnyshv’s rhythmically stimulated consciousness seems to resist closure and to delay any resolution of his emotional crisis: exacerbating the hurtful feeling of humiliation, the hero takes every opportunity to reopen his wounds before healing can take place. The rhythmical nature of the hero’s intensifying emotion is reflected in the narrative fabric of the passage in a number of repetitions, only some of which are reflected in the English translation (cf: *оттого* / *оттого*; *одну* . . . *другой* / *одну* . . . *другой*; *о том* / *о том*), while in the end of the last sentence the intensification of this repetition, achieved by the accumulation of four structurally analogous clauses with melodious internal repetitions, produces a crescendo effect: “*не мог*

оторваться от них / не мог не смотреть на них / не мог стереть их / не мог не вызывать их” (I *could not* tear myself away from them, *could not* help looking at them, *could not* erase them, *could not* help evoking them). The anaphoristic repetition of “не мог,” which evokes a spontaneous expression of pain in Russian, as in the elliptical “(больше) не могу!” (“I cannot [bear it any longer]”), also communicates a sense of unbearable suffering. Both the “musical” structure of the passage and its emerging connotative meaning as a cry of pain communicate a sense of impending explosion, but no significant release of emotion takes place until the final thrust of the knife.²⁰

Every one of the hero’s efforts to regain composure is followed by a resurgence (*начало*) of jealous rage. “No, that’s impossible! What am I imagining?!” the hero exclaims, reproaching himself for his ignoble suspicions:

“There is nothing, nothing of the sort. There are not even any grounds for suspecting such things. Didn’t she tell me that the very thought that I could be jealous of him was degrading to her? Yes, but she is lying, she is always lying!” I exclaimed and everything *began* anew (*и начиналось* опять) . . .” (Tolstoy, 1967: 416; 1982: 25:185)

To the pernicious “beginnings” of new psychic aggression that inevitably sprout from the inconclusive, half-hearted attempts to end the cycle of emotional violence, the hero juxtaposes the irrevocable ending of suicide, proposing to “lie down under the train and *end* it” (Tolstoy, 1967: 416; 1982: 25:185), but soon rejects this desperate solution out of self-pity. As Pozdnyshev makes the last attempt to calm his mounting hysteria before the tragic “critical episode,” his idiosyncratic reasoning is, once again, dominated by the categories of beginning and ending:

“I must think it over,” I said to myself. “Is what I suspect true, and is there any reason for me to suffer?” I sat down, wishing to think it over calmly, but immediately, instead of calm reflection, the same thing *began again*: instead of reflection, pictures and fancies. “How often I have suffered like this,” I said to myself (recalling former similar attacks of jealousy), “and afterwards it all *ended* in nothing (*все кончалось* ничем). So it will be now perhaps, yes certainly it will. I shall find her calmly asleep, she will wake up, be pleased to see me, and by her words and looks I shall know that there has been nothing, that this is all nonsense. Oh, how good that would be! But no, that has happened too often and won’t happen again now,” some voice seemed to say; and it *began again* (*и опять начиналось*). (Tolstoy, 1967: 417–18; 1982: 25:186)

Pozdnyshev’s feeble hope that nothing had taken place (“*что* ничего не было”) once again replicates his erstwhile desire to undo what was done (“*сделать так как будто бы* ничего не было”), invoking his recurrent fantasy of erasing the emotional violence engendered by sexual intercourse, together with the Fall, which it had come to symbolize in his private mythology. But, as we have seen, even his wife’s possible innocence is not a real consolation for Pozdnyshev, for whom her transgression had taken place years before she met Trukhachevsky,

during his own first sexual encounter with her. Pozdnyshev also dismisses her past fidelity as a means of reassuring himself: because of his wife's innocence, his jealous suspicions always "ended in nothing" in the past, but, according to the peculiar law of probability invented by Pozdnyshev, these fortunate outcomes have depleted his chances for another happy ending, thus a different, unlucky conclusion was likely this time.

However, in the context of the finalization motif, prominent throughout the tale, Pozdnyshev's words ("and afterwards it all [always] *ended* in nothing") may also imply that the deadly aggression manifested in his recurrent jealous fits was never resolved, "consummating in nothing." In order to put an end to this menacing, dehumanizing aggression, Pozdnyshev has to strike at the origins of violence; he has to undo the "Fall" itself. And, since the Fall is conceptualized as the crime of sexual relationship, the hero has to find an irrevocable way of ending that pernicious relationship with his wife. Remarkably, it is precisely this task that is clearly articulated by Pozdnyshev immediately upon his discovery of his wife's midnight guest: "I locked the door after him [the footman Yegor] and felt horror when I knew I was alone and must act at once," Pozdnyshev confesses. "How, I did not yet know. I only knew that *all was now over* (literally: *finished*; *все кончено*), that there could be no doubt as to her guilt and that I shall punish her immediately and *end* [*кончу*] my relations with her" (Tolstoy, 1967: 420; 1982: 26:188).

In his apocalyptic deed Pozdnyshev seeks a finale that is more conclusive and powerful than the weak ending of Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata*. But, like the sonata's andante,²¹ Pozdnyshev's ending lacks novelty. It becomes yet another half-hearted attempt to "end somehow" ("как-нибудь кончить"). Failure to take a creative stance toward his future, his past, and his significant others plunges the character into a spiral of meaningless repetitions, preventing him from reaching a productive resolution of his debilitating inner conflict. On the mythical level, it is the failure to take a creative stance toward the flesh that leads to the rejection of the flesh, a dubious solution meant to rectify the consequences of the Fall.

In Schelerian terms, this version of salvation, aimed at simply returning to the pre-Fall Adam, lacks the spiritual "surplus" offered by redemption through Christ. But Pozdnyshev's final deed fails to fulfill even this ambition—the "subtraction" of carnal intercourse does not erase the guilt of devaluing his life companion or that of denying her ontic reality as a human being, while the elimination of the Other does not liberate Pozdnyshev from the slavish dependence on others. But the perils of Pozdnyshev's anti-creative stance are avoided by Tolstoy the artist, who is able to grant his hero the uniquely personal individuality Pozdnyshev so adamantly denied to others, making *The Kreutzer Sonata* an intriguingly complex, creatively successful tale about a crisis of creativity.

Notes

1. Hereafter all references to *The Kreutzer Sonata* will be to the Louise and Aylmer Maude's translation (*Great Short Works of Leo Tolstoy* [Tolstoy, 1967]). A chapter and page

- number referring to the following collected edition of Tolstoy's works in the original Russian (*Sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati dvukh tomakh* [Tolstoy, 1982], volume 28) will also be provided. Maude's translation is occasionally amended by me for greater accuracy.
2. See for example, David Herman's depiction of Pozdnyshv's entry into Trukhachevsky's mind, resulting in the virtual merging of the two characters (1997: 22) and Vladimir Golstein's analysis of Pozdnyshv's practice of relating to others with the help of Girard's theory of distinctions (1996: 458).
 3. See e.g. Herman, 1997: 22.
 4. Max Scheler (1874–1928), a German phenomenologist whose work was well known in both Germany and Russia in his time, with such different thinkers as Martin Heidegger, Martin Buber, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Pope John Paul II benefiting from his influence, is now once again becoming the focus of important philosophical discussions. A *personalist* thinker and a prolific writer, Scheler made major contributions to the study of ethics, phenomenology of emotional life, philosophy of religion, and sociology of knowledge (for recent explorations of Scheler's philosophy, see Fröhlich, 2011; Kelly, 2011; Schüssler and Görden, 2011; and Spader, 2002; for an excellent introduction to Scheler's thought, see Frings, 1997).
 5. All translations of Scheler are my own. All references are to the collected works edition, *Gesammelte Werke (GW)* (1954–1997), followed by the volume and page number.
 6. Such theories were formulated, among others, by Scheler's contemporaries Theodor Lipps and Gustav Störing. See e.g. Lipps, 1903–1906; Störing, 1916; cf. also Erdmann, 1920.
 7. These theories portray the work of empathy as essentially reproductive of the other's emotional experience. See note 6.
 8. In a highly relevant article on Tolstoy and Soloviev, Cynthia Hooper notes that, in contrast to Soloviev's view of human individuality as fundamental and irreducible (in many ways consonant with Scheler's thought), Tolstoy "sees formal distinctions [between human persons] as adhering to the surface world of appearances; spiritual love, he maintains, must involve their progressive stripping away, until an 'ideal' relationship of fundamental identity between self and other is attained" (2001: 372).
 9. For example, Richard Gustafson sees Pozdnyshv's tale as a "drama of self-defeat told as a story of oppression" (1986: 354), while Vladimir Golstein identifies Pozdnyshv's relegating of blame with the process of scape-goating as theorized by René Girard (see e.g. Golstein, 1996: 458).
 10. Cf. e.g. Pozdnyshv's realization that he did not kill his wife with a knife, but rather had committed a spiritual murder by the very act of having a sexual relationship with her (Tolstoy, 1967: 382; 1982: 13:151).
 11. Cynthia Hooper, who, in her juxtaposition of Tolstoy and Vladimir Soloviev, arrives at similar conclusions as I do with the help of Schelerian insights, correctly points out that "Tolstoy's theory of evolution is aimed at rejection of the flesh, Soloviev's at transfiguration of the flesh" (2001: 365). (For a discussion of Scheler's relationship to Soloviev's philosophy and the question of Soloviev's possible influence on Scheler's phenomenology, see Dahm, 1975. In his comments on Tolstoy's personal statements about religion, Nikolai Berdyaev also expresses a similar judgment: in Berdyaev, 1912, he implicitly explains Tolstoy's rejection of the flesh by the author's refusal to accept the role of *the other* (Christ) in sanctifying and transfiguring it and by Tolstoy's insistence

on man's capacity for self-salvation, again without recourse to Christ, whose divinity (i.e. quintessential otherness) is denied in Tolstoy's translation of the Gospels (1912: 189–93). Through an analysis of Tolstoy's post-conversion polemical writings and the ideological premises of his late fiction, these observations could perhaps be expanded to conclude that, as a (religious) thinker, late Tolstoy did not accept the notion of Incarnation and this is one of the philosophical platforms he does share with his hero, Pozdnyshv. However, such an inquiry requires a separate study and is beyond the scope of this analysis, which focuses on the philosophy of Tolstoy's hero. Tolstoy's alleged rejection of Incarnation and of its significance as a model for loving human relationships is, of course, one of the implicit targets in Vladimir Soloviev's critique of late Tolstoy in *The Meaning of Love* (1892–1894), the philosopher's famous rehabilitation of sexual, “enfleshed” love written partially in response to *The Kreutzer Sonata*. For an extensive discussion of the late 19th-century flesh-vs.-spirit debates surrounding the publication of *The Kreutzer Sonata* see Møller, 1988; for an excellent analysis of *The Meaning of Love*, see Crone, 2010: 24–32.

12. In her “*What is Art? And the Anxiety of Music*,” Caryl Emerson also turns the readers' attention to the problem of creativity in Tolstoy's late works, noting that Tolstoy seems to evade creative questions in *What is Art?*, while Pozdnyshv's reaction to his wife's musical efforts reveals a similar disregard for the “anxiety of creation” in *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1996: 443). It is worth noting that Mikhail Bakhtin, whose theory of dialogue serves as one of the frameworks for Emerson's analysis, was influenced by Max Scheler, whose ideas I, in turn, utilize here to extend and deepen Emerson's critique of Tolstoy's ethical stance. For discussions of the Bakhtin–Scheler connections see Wyman, 2008; Brandist, 2002 (e.g. 39, 50, 95); and Nikiforov, 1999–2001: 226.
13. In his analysis of *The Kreutzer Sonata* Mark Aldanov correctly notes that it is not the murder that Pozdnyshv repents, but the crime of sexual relationship with his wife: “the murder is a kind of radicalization of this basic and widespread crime, but at the same time a moral turning point,” Aldanov explains (1969: 51). Takayuki Yokota-Murakami also turns the reader's attention to the symbolic identity between the murder and the sexual act evident in the overtly sexual description of the murderous blow: “I felt and still remember the immediate resistance of the corset and of something else and then the penetration of the knife into something soft” (Tolstoy, 1982: 27: 192, quoted in Yokota-Murakami, 1997: 307). According to Yokota-Murakami, “the murder completes the sexual act” (1997: 307); see also Yokota-Murakami, 2001.
14. Pozdnyshv's role in “arranging” his wife's affair has long been noted by critics: Henrietta Mondry remarks that “there is strong evidence in the story to suggest that Pozdnyshv deliberately manipulated his wife into playing the ‘Kreutzer Sonata’ with his rival” (1988: 172). See also Greenwood (1975: 140), quoted in Mondry (1988: 172).
15. See e.g. Yokota-Murakami, 1997: 307, and note 10 above.
16. It is as if Pozdnyshv intends to demonstrate the ultimate dead-end of sexual love by delivering his murderous blow, in effect proclaiming, “This is as far as this kind of penetration (*proniknovenie*) can go,” and, as it were, de-metaphorizing what he sees as a mendacious concept of romantic love based on the myth of penetrating the beloved's soul.
17. In this context, this pretense of closure is also implicitly juxtaposed to the failed attempt at a more “conclusive” ending—the wife's attempt to end her life, in Russian: “покончить с собой.”

18. In this context, we may also note the peculiar sounds made by Pozdnyshv, which resemble interrupted weeping or laughter: “*прерванный смех или рыдания,*” “*начатый и оборванный смех*” (Tolstoy, 1982: 2:128; 1967: 360; 1982: 1:123; 1967: 355).
19. As Liza Knapp notes, the emotional state depicted by Pozdnyshv in this section of the tale is affected by the rhythm of *two* train rides, the hero’s initial trip from the provinces to the capital and the much later journey Pozdnyshv undertakes at the time of narration, which “transports [him] into the time of the crime” (1991: 37).
20. For analyses of the interrelationship between Beethoven’s music and Tolstoy’s rhythmically sophisticated narrative in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, which sometimes mimics Beethoven’s piece, see Eguchi and Papazian.
21. Cf. Pozdnyshv’s references to *The Kreutzer Sonata*’s “utterly weak finale” and its andante, “lacking in novelty, with banal variations” (Tolstoy, 1982: 23:180; 1967: 412).

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