How did it happen that world directors turned out to be so susceptible to Anna Karenina? First of all, from the standpoint of early Russian producers, this particular novel by Lev Tolstoi was a perfect candidate for a film adaptation because it enjoyed the status of a bestseller immediately upon its publication—it was even more successful than War and Peace. Popularizing literary classics was done in Russia in conjunction with the very democratic spirit of cinema—“its popular appeal, its educational and cultural orientation”—the features that were emphasized by early Russian producers and later by film historians. Turning to the classics did not guarantee high-quality films since, as Neya Zorkaya notes, “even the best films merely borrowed the story line and the names of the main characters,” but the fledgling genre aspired to explore the psychological and philosophical depths of a literary work, that “labyrinth of connections,” which, according to Tolstoi, is the essence of a novel.

James Griffith claims that in setting out to transform a novel into a movie, a filmmaker usually makes many choices along the same lines as those of the novelist. Having said this, Griffith admits that for all the changes people can cite in numerous adaptations,

a novel and its adaptation rarely share no more resemblance than the title—and one could argue such an “adaptation” exemplifies no more than a hastily purchased property. The average audience regards fidelity as a question of how much is left in: how much of the plot and how many of the characters survive the usual condensing of the novel’s action.

Griffith argues that for the common filmgoer’s notion of fidelity, the main objection usually refers not to ideas but to the practical inability of most films
The early 1870s in Russia witnessed a “suicide epidemic,” and the pages of the Russian press discussed personal tragedies as a social fact at great length, publicizing society’s ills, especially suicide and crime. Irina Paperno, who investigates suicide as a cultural institution in nineteenth-century Russia, notes that different themes converged in the image of suicide, and diverse ideological groups invested it with meaning. Paperno specifically dwells on the imagery pertaining to the depiction of the suicide in Russian public discourse: “The suicide’s body, presented in graphic images of corporeal disorder, became an emblem of the disintegrating social body—Russian society after the Great Reforms.” For positivists during the writer’s lifetime, suicide was a test case for the issue of free will versus determinism, while those troubled by positivism and atheism saw suicide as the direct effect of these ideologies:

the fate of a suicide exemplified the fate of an atheistic society—willful reduction of the self to nothingness, a body deprived of a soul. The suicide’s body was also the positivist’s worst nightmare: the evidence of man’s inability to determine what causes observable phenomena.

As a result of changing societal norms, the body of the suicide assumed a second existence as a symbol in the Russian press of the 1860s to 1880s.
Episodes in contemporary literary works, both Russian and European, have invited analogies with real-life incidents. Tolstoi’s *Anna Karenina* holds a special place in the gallery of fictitious suicidal types. In comparison with the deaths of other literary heroines, Amy Mandelker suggests, Anna’s suicide is “distinctive both in terms of its placement in her narrative—she is not, in fact, abandoned by her lover—and in terms of her chosen means.”9 Indeed, as Mandelker reminds us, the literary antecedents for Tolstoi’s heroine’s lunge beneath the train are male protagonists driven by shame and ruin (such as Charles Dickens’s Carker in *Dombey and Son* and Anthony Trollope’s Lopez in *The Prime Minister*). In classical literature, heroines meet their death (whether it is murder, sacrifice, or suicide) “in the throat”: either by hanging, decapitation, or the cutting of the throat.10 In Victorian literature, heroines commonly lose their heads before dying, but

[the action of severing the body from the head, the ornamental proclivities of a knotted rope or beading of blood, and, most important, the preservation of Anna’s severed head from damage all suggest a form of framing—the heroine is transformed into a mute bust of immobile marble; she is ultimately seen as an inanimate objet d’art.11

Here we approach the very issue to be discussed in this chapter: depictions of Anna’s death in cinematic hypertexts.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ANNA KARENINA IN CINEMA

The moment film went from the animation of stills to telling a story, it was inevitable that “fiction would become the ore to be minted by story departments.”12 Tolstoi’s *Resurrection* (1909) happened to be one of D. W. Griffith’s earliest screen adaptations, which came as no surprise to the Russian director Sergei Eisenstein. Discussing Griffith’s films through the prose of Dickens, Eisenstein demonstrated that most of his major technical innovations, including the dissolve, the superimposed shot, the close-up, and the pan, were rooted in the Hollywood artist’s interest in literary forms.13 Due to its numerous “cinema-ready” qualities, Tolstoi’s *Anna Karenina* similarly offered fertile material to a creative mind willing to reinterpret the original. As a result, the book has inspired seven silent films, several ballet versions, TV miniseries, and big Hollywood productions with charismatic treatments of the main character by legendary actresses such as Vivien Leigh, Jacqueline Bisset, Sophie Marceau, and, most recently, Keira Knightley. Greta Garbo managed to perform the same role twice: first in the silent movie, *Love* (1927); then, eight years later, in Clarence Brown’s *Anna Karenina* (1935). Russian
The eye-deology of trauma

Auteurs have also treated their literary giant’s work with great care—both in the early days of cinema, as well as in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Aleksandr Zarkhi’s *Anna Karenina* (1967), with Tatiana Samoilova, is considered by many to be the best hypertext of Tolstoi’s novel. The creative hybrid of 1974, the film-ballet with Maiia Plisetskaia in the main role, was followed by Sergei Solov’ev’s take (2009), peculiar for its unorthodox, digitally mastered visual style. A comparative study of narrative structures and devices in the novel and its various film adaptations has been the subject of several specialized studies. My study’s aim is narrow in comparison: to examine how cinematic hypertexts have altered the way we view Anna’s suicide; crossing the border from the novel to the cinema, within new temporal boundaries, has introduced unique visual elements that have forever changed our understanding of Tolstoi’s hypotext. In so doing, a new language for Anna’s death incorporates the cinematic decals of her many travels.

The history of Tolstoi’s *Anna Karenina* screen adaptations begins with the 1911 version directed by Maurice Maître, which has survived in a lone copy in the Amsterdam cinema archive. Yuri Tsivian provides its synopsis, of which the finale is of particular interest. In the closing moments of the film, Anna throws herself on the rail line from a hillside. The following shot shows the train passing by. In 1914, Vladimir Gardin produced the second screen version of *Anna Karenina* under the Russian Golden Series brand. Maria Germanova of the Moscow Art Theater, a pupil of Konstantin Stanislavskii, appeared in the title role of Anna. Five years later the critic Il’ia Ignatov, who had closely followed the progress of Russian cinema, “recalled with some bewilderment the reaction of the Russian press to Gardin’s film.” Reviewers singled out the psychological complexity of Anna’s role in his visualisation of *Anna Karenina*. Some labeled Germanova’s impersonation of Anna as “sacrilege.” For the purposes of this study, it is significant that Gardin’s treatment of Anna’s suicide turned out to be notably different from its original form in Tolstoi’s novel. This scene persuaded critics that the film had “some special quality that enabled it to bear comparison with the novel”; regrettably for scholars of early Russian cinema, only the first reel of *Anna Karenina* has survived. The suicide scene, however, can be reconstructed using production stills and intertitles. An article by a reporter who was present at the location shooting has also proved helpful (“The Suicide of Anna Karenina” appeared in a Moscow theater periodical in 1914). The author described the special effects employed in the production (a dummy substitution, plus a reverse shooting technique) to make the suicide scene look real. Among the noted discrepancies between the film and the novel was the fact that Anna threw herself from the platform under the second car, not under the approaching engine as she did in the film. The reporter did not really
object to this: “that is the way they do it in cinema.” Neither did any of the other reviewers find this, or the anachronistic locomotive, to be a problem. Gardin’s ending must have been really effective to be able to justify the liberty that the director had taken with the source in treating the novel’s crucial scene.19

After studying the production still published by the illustrated weekly Sparks in 1914–17, Tsivian concluded that the position of the train relative to the camera is indebted to the Lumières’ The Arrival of a Train from 1895.20 As time passed, directors who adapted the novel to the screen have been able to depart from the Lumière train’s powerful imagery and to reconstruct Tolstoi’s crime scene based on the actual verbal account of the suicide. While the versions of Anna Karenina released in 1914, 1918, 1927, and 1947, respectively

employ the canonical cinematic image of a train advancing toward the audience, some versions either omit it completely (1935, 1985) or combine a view of the approaching train with side shots of its carriages

Figure 5.1 Anna Karenina (Dir. Gardin, 1914), production still.
and wheels, which are intercut with Anna’s face (1967, 1997, 2001). [Bernard] Rose’s film constitutes an eloquent farewell to the early cinema icon. 21

Over time, other emphases have been given to Anna’s death. Sergei Solov’ev’s hypotext (2009) is the most gruesome cinematographic vivisection, featuring blood and dismembered limbs in a visually shocking scene that could rival Quentin Tarantino’s signature style. Here Solov’ev approximates Tolstoi’s hypotext: Stricken by the sight of Anna Karenina’s dismembered body near the rails, Vronskii tries to remember its joyful wholeness during their first meeting, also at the train station. 22 Much less shocking, but still quite powerful, is the depiction of Anna’s suicide in Joe Wright’s (2012) film, which subtly highlights the sadomasochistic desire of Anna’s self-inflicted pain and evokes a clearly sexual origin. Anna’s last gasp is highly suggestive, repeating the coital sequence in an earlier part of the film. “Vse koncheno” (“Everything is ended”), she says to Vronskii after they make love; used in the dubbed version of the film in its Russian official release, the phrase sounds extremely modernized due to its proximity to the idiomatic Russian, meaning “experiencing an orgasm” (konchat’). Compared with the same pose (head up; high angle) in the orgiastic mise-en-scène followed by the suggestively exploding fireworks, the last few seconds of Anna’s earthly existence thus acquire a second, liberating meaning.

It is not accidental that several directors have attempted to inscribe onto this climactic scene the sound of a loud scream, which normally would be interpreted as a horrifying emotional outburst, as, for instance, in the Italian and English productions (Vronskii’s yawning mouth in the 1985 American adaptation is eternalized with the help of a freeze-frame shot—hinting at a gap in the narrative or at a philosophical leap into a non-diegetic emptiness?). The Italian montage is remarkable because Anna’s last scream is cut off, but appears to be metonymically redeployed in the immediate next sequence, showing a crying baby. The case is different in the latest (2012) Oscar-winning visual rendering of the novel. 23 Keira Knightley’s sensuality and Wright’s clever mirroring of the earlier shots allow one to connect the dots and to establish the commonality between all three types of sounds accompanying the human life cycle at its most meaningful moments: the noise of expressing pleasure during the act of impregnation; the primordial cry of a baby born; and the mourning of death.

What is clear is that this particular scene presents filmmakers with technical and filmic challenges that have resulted, over time, in a consensus in the visual language; a lexicon that is no longer reliant on Tolstoi’s version of Anna’s suicide. Tsivian’s research suggests that the suicide scene has become the focus for most viewers when providing an evaluation of the entire film.
CINEMATIC REPRESENTATIONS OF KARENINA’S SUICIDE

“There are few scenes in world literature as painful to read as Anna’s last day on earth,” Edward Wasiolek observes in his study of the novel. It was Tolstoi’s heroine’s ultimate decision to take her own life, but it is still the director who faces the uneasy task of reconstructing that terrible event on screen. Killing the unfortunate protagonist in a climactic sequence, replayed numerous times and performed by a score of talented actresses, raises broader issues of cultural identity, types and stereotypes, and interpretation through adaptation. To understand how closely the various plots correspond to one another and to the original text of the novel, let us take a closer look at the suicide sequence at the end of Tolstoi’s novel:

“O God! where am I to go?” she thought, walking further and further along the platform. She stopped at the end of it. Some ladies and children, who had come to meet a spectacled gentleman and were laughing and talking noisily, became silent and gazed at her as she passed them. She walked faster away from them to the very end of the platform. A goods train was approaching. The platform shook, and it seemed to her as if she were again in the train.

Suddenly remembering the man who had been run over the day she first met Vronsky, she realized what she had to do. Quickly and lightly descending the steps that led from the water-tank to the rails, she stopped close to the passing train. She looked at the bottom of the trucks, at the bolts and chains and large iron wheels of the slowly-moving truck, and tried to estimate the middle point between the front and back wheels, and the moment when that point would be opposite her.

“There!” she said to herself, looking at the shadow of the car on the mingled sand and coal dust which covered the sleepers. “There, into the very middle, and I shall punish him and escape from everybody and from myself!”

She wanted to fall half-way between the wheels of the front car, which was drawing level with her, but the little red handbag which she began to take off her arm delayed her, and then it was too late. The middle had passed her. She was obliged to wait for the next truck. A feeling seized her like that she had experienced when preparing to enter the water in bathing, and she crossed herself. The familiar gesture of making the sign of the cross called up a whole series of girlish and childish memories, and suddenly the darkness, that obscured everything for her, broke, and life showed itself to her for an instant with all its bright past joys. But she did not take her eyes off the wheels of the approaching second car, and
at the very moment when the midway point between the wheels drew level, she threw away her red bag, and drawing her head down between her shoulders threw herself forward on her hands under the car, and with a light movement as if preparing to rise again, immediately dropped on her knees. And at the same moment she was horror-struck at what she was doing. “Where am I? What am I doing? Why?” She wished to rise, to throw herself back, but something huge and relentless struck her on the head and dragged her down. “God forgive me everything!” she said, feeling the impossibility of struggling … A little peasant muttering something was working at the rails. The candle, by the light of which she had been reading that book filled with anxieties, deceptions, grief, and evil, flared up with a brighter light than before, lit up for her all that had before been dark, flickered, began to grow dim, and went out for ever.25

To appreciate the role visualization plays in Tolstoi’s narrative one should analyze Anna Karenina paying particular attention to how the author uses language to assist readers in picturing the plot, and how this mental image enhances their experience of the ethical issues portrayed in the novel. The literary techniques Tolstoi employs to facilitate the reader’s imagination are surprisingly in tune with cinematographic art. The reader’s mind creates images from verbal cues following (in Tolstoi’s case, foreshadowing) the camera movement and common editing practices. For the sake of experiment I will try to simulate (based on many of the films under consideration) the simplified and straightforward transposition of the passage cited above into a kind of a verbal storyboard, a series of comic-strip–like sketches of the shots in this particular suicide scene, including notations about lighting, special effects and camera work:

Suddenly remembering [CLOSE-UP—ANNA’S FACE: MEDITATIVE] the man who had been run over [FLASHBACK: DEAD PEASANT] the day she first met Vronskii, she realized what she had to do. Quickly and lightly descending the steps [CUT: ANNA—FULL SHOT] that led from the water-tank to the rails [PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE PLATFORM], she stopped close to the passing train. She looked at the bottom of the trucks [CAMERA: HIGH-ANGLE SHOT], at the bolts and chains [EXTREME CLOSE-UP] and large iron wheels of the slowly-moving truck [SPECIAL EFFECT: SLOW MOTION], and tried to estimate the middle point between the front and back wheels [ANNA’S FACE AGAIN: EXPRESSION OF TORPOR], and the moment when that point would be opposite her. [CUT: WHEELS, NORMAL SPEED]

Style, like in a narrative film, functions in Tolstoi’s formal system to advance the cause–effect chain—it creates parallels, manipulates story–plot relations, and sustains the narration’s flow of information. Strategies of selecting and
arranging events from *Anna Karenina*, as rightly asserted by Irina Makoveeva, “differ from writer to screenwriter, and from one film to another.” Yet, over time, a visual language did emerge from Tolstoi’s hypertext.

As Sydney Schultze notes, the train symbol does not stand alone but functions as the central member of a cluster of semantic meanings for Anna’s suicide: “[l]inked with the train and death are other motifs: the peasant, dreams, telegrams, heat, light, the color red, and severe extremes of mood.”

In his lectures on *Anna Karenina*, Vladimir Nabokov unequivocally praises Tolstoi’s ability to create such clusters, or, rather, a web of interconnected symbols. “With an artistic force and subtlety unknown to Russian literature before this day,” says Nabokov, “Tolstoy introduces the theme of violent death simultaneously with that of violent passion in Vronsky’s and Anna’s life: the fatal accident to a railway employee [...] becomes a grim and mysterious link between them …” The similarity between the death of the peasant-guard at the railroad station where Anna and Vronskii meet and the suicide of Anna herself at a railroad station is intentional; however, if in the first instance the peasant’s death is probably an accident, Anna sees it as an evil prophecy.

The *Anna Karenina* filmic hypertexts use this image differently: while some directors underscore with the figure of the *muzhik* the natural way of life that Anna is unable to share because of her misdeeds, others represent him as a terrifying warning akin to a mystical creature from typical Russian fairy tales. For example, Wright’s 2012 version utilizes the peasant’s accidental death as a necessary establishing element of Anna’s own intended death.

**Cutting Anna’s Eyes: Mechanical Shutters and Dangerous Razors**

The 1997 hypertext, starring Sophie Marceau and directed by Bernard Rose, is faithful to Tolstoi’s climactic scene in the sense that it attempts to consistently embrace all major symbols that had been incorporated into the visual language of the scene, including the dying out of a candle and the presence of a book that had been routinely dispersed throughout previous hypertexts. In addition, however, there is also a striking image, which is not explicitly present in Tolstoi’s narrative—that is an image of an eye. If analyzed against the background of the classics of international and Russian cinema, this powerful image brings up numerous reverberations.

I am tempted to read this carefully inserted frame as an exquisite homage to the Russian cinematic tradition rooted in Dziga Vertov’s Cine-Eyes (Kinoki) movement. His avant-garde masterpiece, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), establishes various associations between female sexuality and urban-based machines, especially the train and the camera. Lynne Kirby writes that the association of
the camera lens and shutter with the woman’s eye is the most frequently cited example of the self-reflexive operations of Vertov’s film. Moreover, as Kirby insightfully remarks, the fact that this is first a woman’s eye is often overlooked. Vertov’s assimilation of the “movements of the human eye to the mechanical designs of the camera formally engages female vision in a manner much less shocking than in, for example, Luis Buñuel’s *An Andalusian Dog (Un chien andalou)* of the same year.”31 Both films, according to Kirby, ask us to consider the female body as a surface of inscription for the filmic writing of a new vision and, in the case of Vertov, to look at the mechanical eye as forming part of a rhetoric that composes woman, cinema, the train, and the city in complex configurations.32

There is a firm connection between the conceptualization of the new Soviet art in the 1920s and the very international perception of cinema as a new art form with revolutionary potential. Inspired by Freud, both Buñuel and Salvador Dalí embraced cinema as the ideal form to portray sexuality as a “primary, constant emotion” and “understood film as liberated from the impositions of language and culture.”33 As Ignacio López cautions, it is difficult to accept today the authors’ claim of radical objectivity, but it is this notion that accounts for the cruelty of the initial images [in Buñuel’s film], *including the horrible sight of a razor slashing an eye*. This act, which so closely follows the ideal of provocation mandated by the Surrealists, is built upon a notion of art liberated from feelings of weakness.34

The new vision had to reflect and to adapt to the new world—the Cine-Eye group defined this transformative experience as a need to capture “film truth” (Vertov

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Figure 5.2 Frame from Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) juxtaposed with a screenshot from *Anna Karenina* (Dir. Rose, 1997).
believed that when organized together, fragments of actuality can lay bare a
deeper truth unseen with the naked eye); the Surrealist circle of artists leaned
toward Holy Objectivity (*Santa Objetividad*), which, they thought, could be
achieved through the exhibition of unpleasant emotions such as fear and horror.

Wright’s adaptation makes an explicit use of similarly sharp objects forming
a rich motif based on the play of metal and the dangerous implications associ-
ated with its (mis)use. This motif is created through the images of a barber,
who shaves Stiva while performing a dance of sorts, which exposes his client
at his most vulnerable state; the scythe, both while grinding and cutting
grass;35 and Anna’s paper knife with its sharp edge pointed directly at her
left eye (discussed below). In Tolstoi’s novel, the chorus of resounding metal
greets Anna’s sister-in-law Dolly when she arrives at Vronskii’s estate.36 It is
then that the “mechanics of cutting are underscored and joined to the metal
motif”:37 Dolly has just inspected a new reaping-machine and at the dinner
table Vronskii, Anna, and other guests turn their conversation to the cutting
ability of the reaper. Anna describes its working principle akin to “a lot of
small scissors,” and her guest Veslovskii explains: “like small penknives.”38

While Tolstoi the landowner is preoccupied in this episode with the virtues
and potentially destructive forces of the iron-made machines, he foreshadows,
in fact, an ideologically charged issue to be addressed numerous times in early
Soviet cinema, from Aleksandr Dovzhenko’s *Earth* (1930) to Vertov’s *Man

![Figure 5.3 Frame from Luis Buñuel’s *An Andalusian Dog* (1929).](image-url)
with a Movie Camera. In the latter, not only a robotic eye and the metaphoric lines of communication and the modes of transportation of the modern cosmopolis are depicted triumphantly. Karl Marx’s “locomotive of history”—revolution—becomes a metaphor for cinema itself. An ideology of mechanized life (or “mechanical reproduction” in Walter Benjamin’s terms) turns through this voyeuristic act into an Eye-deology.39 Vertov’s cinematic conclusion, when the city asleep becomes completely transformed from a static into a dynamic organism, is striking because it represents “the combination of desire, vision, and aggression linked to the traumatic relation between a woman, a train, and the filmic apparatus.”40

How influential Vertov’s cinematic tour de force proved to be for the subsequent hypertexts of Karenina is reinforced by the replication of a signature shot of a train made at a low angle from the pit dug between the railway track, allowing the audience to observe the belly of the passing locomotive and trucks: At least two cinematic versions use the very same technique, representing the dying Anna’s point of view (Anna Karenina directed by Julien Duvivier in 1948, starring Vivien Leigh, and Rudolph Cartier’s British adaptation directed in 1961).
Examining the suicide of Anna in several recent film adaptations reveals that a new cinematic hypertext has emerged with visual references to Vertov and Russian avant-garde cinema that make us reimagine the scene in Tolstoi’s novel. Anna Karenina’s eye is as vulnerable as ever, but it serves as a potent metaphor for the imminent danger of self-destruction through social inertia. The women of the Russian Revolution were able to harness the “locomotive of history.” Vertov’s “machine aesthetics rescues woman from adornment and aristocratic decorativeness,” and so Anna’s revolt has taken on added meaning as it gains new temporal semantics over the years.

RAILWAYS, SEX, AND THE MOVIES

The love story of Anna and Vronskii began on the railway—the iron road (zheleznaia doroga in Russian) is “fatefully sealed by resounding metal.” Many in Tolstoi’s generation feared the changes in Russian life that trains would necessarily cause. Railway construction was costly and many of its builders perished because of the poor working conditions; the iron beasts on wheels “were considered evil, disruptive, and inhuman.”

It has long been suggested that the train in Anna Karenina becomes a metaphor for the mechanical impulse of the sexual drive to which the heroine succumbs. A number of prominent Tolstoi scholars insist that “the imagery used to describe the suicide is sexual” and suggest the following as evidence:

the huge railway car throws Anna on her back; the peasant who appears at this point and who has appeared in her dreams is probably a symbol of the remorseless, impersonal power of sex. As he beats the iron, he pays no attention to her.

Makoveeva maintains that “while some of the films visually focus on the sinister function of the Tolstoyan train, which transcends its commonplace task of delivering the characters to their geographical destinations, others foreground the interconnection between Anna’s adultery and the railroad.” Tolstoi himself made this connection obvious when, in 1857, he wrote of trains to Turgenev: “The railroad is to travel, as ----- is to love. It’s just as comfortable, but just as inhumanly mechanical and fatally monotonous.”

In an early instance of the dream that Anna recounts to Vronskii, the bearded peasant runs into her bedroom; the last agonizing hours she spends on earth are also filled with sexual associations, maintains Edward Wasiolek. Anna sees the “world about her as dirty, and such dirt is associated with shame and with the self-hate resulting from the slavery of sex. […] On the train she mentally undresses a stout woman dressed in a bustle and finds her hideous.”
The nature of physical passion gradually contributes to the eventual collapse of Anna and Vronskii’s affair, and Tolstoi inserts a number of foreshadowing omens into the narrative to carefully orchestrate this imminent destruction. In her dream Anna sees a dreadful peasant with a disheveled beard, who mumbles in French (“il faut le batter, le fer: le broyer, le pétrir …”). The French words of Anna’s dream have the meaning: “you have to beat iron: grind it, knead it … ” Barbara Lönnqvist offers an insightful interpretation of this enigmatic operation: The man seems to be occupied with some creative process of forging or baking (the verb pétrir being used primarily in expressions like pétrir la pâte—“to knead dough”). Appearing as a blacksmith, by both working the iron and baking (bread), the man from a dream joins a male activity to a female one. Both are symbol-laden in Russian culture: the blacksmith (kuznets) forges destinies, and especially marriages, which is reflected in the songs young women sing when telling their fortune at New Year’s Eve. “Kneading,” on the other hand, is related to childbearing in folk belief, according to which the child is “baked” in the womb. In folklore the symbolic transformation of the bride into wife is also celebrated by baking ritual “marital bread.” Just like “forging,” “kneading” is deeply rooted in rituals and beliefs connected with marriage and childbearing, i.e., the formation of a family.

The feminist/Lacanian theory of cinema spectatorship was articulated first by Laura Mulvey in her influential essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975). Judith Armstrong applies it to Anna Karenina and describes Anna in terms of a visual object. Following the cinematic codes, operating with the notions of a gaze and an object, “thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire,” Armstrong argues that Anna is “born in the first instance of the gaze of horror” that Tolstoi lets travel over the mutilated body of the real woman, Anna Pirogov, as it lay on a table in the railway station waiting-room near the Iasnaia Poliana estate; and “in the second, of Vronsky’s gaze, when, after ‘a single glance’ (which registers Anna as belonging to the world of high society) he is ‘compelled to have another look’ at the lady about to enter the railway-carriage.” While Kitty’s story is presented in a long series of sequential and consequential actions, Anna, by contrast, is viewed “in a series of vivid but still frames: Anna in the whirl of snow at the railway-station; Anna gazed down upon by the trembling Vronsky after their first sexual encounter,” and so on. Indeed it is hard to disagree that Anna fits the female figure as described in psychoanalytic terms—“the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look.” What is more important for the filmic hypertexts of Tolstoi’s book is that like any movie, by the act of visualization, it also becomes dependent on voyeuristic
active/passive mechanisms. The more times that Anna commits suicide, the more opportunities there are for theory to become inscribed in the depiction. Temporal markers may include an ever harsher criticism of Anna’s limited choices—criticism that may not have been embedded in Tolstoi’s hypotext.

Gaylyn Studlar asserts that the masochistic narrative has a very specific story to tell and quotes Gilles Deleuze’s famous definition that it is the story of how “the superego was destroyed and by whom, and what was the sequel to this destruction.” Refuting Mulvey’s seminal essay, Studlar has asserted that spectators often derive masochistic, rather than sadistic, pleasures. In an alternative paradigm of a masochistic aesthetic (Mulvey’s phrase “sadism demands a story”), Studlar concurs with an inverted model (“a story demands sadism”) and expands sadism as force or aggression to include “the erotic nature of sadistic violence [...] and the formal expression of a desire that is always implicitly sadistic.” To answer the ultimate question, why does Anna want to be hurt and to feel humiliated?, Edward Wasiolek also resorts to a psychoanalytic explanation of her motives behind the emotional abuse. The “trapped” nature of Anna’s feelings has deep and powerful destructive drives that “can only come from early experiences”; Wasiolek believes that Anna neurotically chooses someone who will hurt her, that she courts the feeling of being unloved, and chooses a situation in which she will feel shamed and corrupt. [...] On the night before her suicide, Anna waits in her room like a petulant child for Vronsky’s return and for proof of his love by a visit to her before going to bed.

But there is also a marked dynamic pattern in the behavior of Tolstoi’s character, whereby her femininity undergoes a transformation and she assumes connotations associative with both genders. As has been noted, Anna’s suicide “acquires a masculine, even a heroic character and no longer seems to belong to that register of pathetic, fallen women who die for love or its lack.” Early in the novel, Tolstoi “allows Anna one supremely ‘male’ activity: he endows her with a pen, the instrument to which many theorists have appended an ‘is’, so great is its phallic power.” The ultimate fact that Anna kills herself leads Judith Armstrong to inquire: “Does this make her agent or victim? Actant or acted upon? The answer is of course that she is both.” In Wright’s version, this action is invested with both Tolstoi’s description, but also, all of the scholarly criticism that has amassed over time to create an entirely new visual territory that can be explored.

Without engaging crude Freudian concepts and their subsequent interpretations by the many theorists of cinema (a woman’s lack of a penis, implying the threat of castration and, hence, an inability to gain pleasure), I will cite one more instance of Anna’s alleged transformation from an active to a passive
Mandelker draws attention to Anna Karenina’s play with the letter opener that accompanies her reading during the train ride:

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 …61

Directors must have been drawn to this embedded ambiguity of a sharp object with which Tolstoi indulges his heroine. In Wright’s version, Anna almost touches her own face with the paper knife’s edge (mirroring closely Tolstoi’s hypotext)—which is more like a miniature double-edged sword—and this gesture is directed not only at her vulnerable eyeball, but turns the whole spectatorship process into a dual effect for the outside watchers: We are frightened and yet we do enjoy watching her inflict (possible) harm upon herself.

**Figure 5.6** In Wright’s version Anna almost touches her own face with the paper knife’s edge.

MURDER BY LIGHT AND COLORS

As our discussion of Anna’s death has demonstrated, contemporary artists use the entire expressive palette available to them. A recurring image connected with Anna’s death is the candle; however, the concepts of “light” and “dark,” in general, form a special thematic thread in Tolstoi’s hypotext. Tolstoi presents the burning candle as a symbol of life. The image of vital light, especially of her eyes and her smile, characterizes Anna’s inner life in the first part of the novel. But when the light of Anna’s passion turns into a conflagration, the course of her life literally veers off the tracks.62
The role of artificial light, which is attributed to machinery, is to further sharpen the contrasting dilemma of the heroine. The locomotive is reduced to a pair of burning beastly eyes in several hypertexts (filmic, ballet, and operatic). The battle of light and darkness is strengthened with flickering reflections on Anna’s face as she is watching the cars passing by moments before committing suicide. The device was introduced first in Brown’s film (1935), then has been applied onto “Anna’s face” many times since (Garbo, 1935; Bisset, 1985; McCrory, 2000) and even then became a cliché. This visual effect creates a sense of insecurity and growing instability and functions as a destabilizing force.

The association of the red color with Anna’s death, apparent already in Tolstói’s narrative (Anna’s lips are often referred to as ruddy), became part of the visual discourse with the advent of color film. Modern directors exploit the blood color symbolism to its full potential, as is evident both from Karenina’s accessories and the over-saturated red parts of the locomotive (for instance, especially vivid in Solov’ev’s film). Red “has long been the color of violence, passion, and death.” The red palette gains remarkable prominence in the suicide scene, where Anna clutches a red bag (“our old friend,” as Nabokov jocularly puts it, drawing the reader’s attention to this prominent detail of Anna’s entourage). Before hurling herself beneath the train, Anna flings aside her blood-colored bag and jumps, although in the 1977 BBC adaptation Anna’s body is not shown—the red bag becomes its symbolic substitute. Conspicuously, the film’s editor overlays her question (“Which way to go?”) with an appropriate shot of the dual diverging tracks (as in Vertov’s film), thus suggesting a metaphysical solution.

Readers’ and spectators’ minds are perceptible to the visualization of trauma both on page and screen, but it is the prerogative of the movie industry to impress and to shock. The violent imagery continues to dominate the Anna-inspired art in the past decades long after the revolutionary subtexts, both ideological (Vertov) and aesthetic (Buñuel), have been suppressed (though not entirely eliminated) by the public discourse. Since Tolstói wrote his novel in 1876, and almost twenty years after the Lumière brothers introduced the cinematograph to the masses in 1895, directors of various nationalities and different film schools have stubbornly continued to commit this act of violence against Anna Karenina. Each new act of violence strengthens a visual text that now reflects not only Tolstói’s hypotext, but the literary and film theory of over a century. In crossing spatial and temporal borders so many times throughout the years, a new visual vocabulary for Anna Karenina has accumulated like so many stamps in a passport or the colorful decals on the traveler’s luggage. Vertov’s eye, a candle, the color red, and more are now identifiable souvenirs of the suicide scene for moviegoers, not images that Tolstói himself provided in his novel. In so many trips across the border, Anna has lost her
distinctive Russian charm and is now an international figure, a woman known all over the world, even if the ending is always tragic.

NOTES

3. Ibid., 21.
5. Ibid., 67.
6. *Love* (1927), starring Greta Garbo, may be one of the only exceptions, in which Hollywood forces a “happy end” upon Tolstoi’s novel.
7. Paperno, *Suicide as a Cultural Institution*, 94 (my italics).
8. Ibid., 94.
10. Nicole Loraux’s observation as quoted in ibid., 94.
11. Ibid., 94.
14. See Lanoux, “*Anna Karenina* through Film,” 180; Makoveeva, *Visualizing Anna Karenina*.
16. Maria Kallash, in her 1914 letter to Chekhov’s wife, the actress Olga Knipper-Chekhov, waxed indignant: “I wasn’t expecting very much, but all the same I didn’t imagine that it would be such a mockery of Tolstoy.” Quoted in Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia*, 137.
17. Ibid., 137.
18. Ibid., 110.
19. Ibid., 139.
20. Art critic Vladimir Stasov registered the cultural analogy prompted by the effect of Lumière’s reel. Stasov referenced Tolstoi’s novel in his 1896 letter after watching the now iconic short film: “All of a sudden a whole railway train comes rushing out of the picture towards you; it gets bigger and bigger, and you think it’s going to run you over, just like in *Anna Karenina*—it’s incredible.” Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia*, 111.
22. Helena Goscilo calls the cruel exposition of Anna’s dead body “a moral autopsy,” and ties it to Tolstoi’s revulsion for women’s libidinal urges, which compelled “him to sexualize Anna posthumously in a disturbing final image, mediated through Vronsky’s pained recollections, of her sinful, lifeless body stretched out shamelessly [sic] before the eyes of strangers.” It is impossible, says Goscilo, to conceive “of an adulterous male body being subjected to such textual representation, which carries the weight of a moral autopsy.” Goscilo, “Motif-Mesh as Matrix,” 86.
23. The film won “Best Achievement in Costume Design” and was nominated for awards in three other categories: cinematography; music written for motion pictures; and production design.
27. Schultze, The Structure of Anna Karenina, 122.
28. Nabokov, Lectures on Russian Literature, 189.
29. Schultze, The Structure of Anna Karenina, 118.
30. Kirby, Parallel Tracks, 178.
31. Ibid., 178.
32. Ibid.
34. Ibid., 38 (my italics).
35. The activity of mowing is described as providing a physical (almost sexual) gratification, an “intense pleasure,” in relation to Levin’s physical sensations during the scene (Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, 228–9).
36. Ibid., 552. “The metallic sound of a scythe being hammered beside the cart ceased …”
38. Ibid., 85.
39. Kirby, Parallel Tracks, 178.
40. Ibid., 179–80.
41. Ibid., 183.
42. Lönnqvist, “Anna Karenina,” 85.
43. Schultze, The Structure of Anna Karenina, 118. See also Leving, Vokzal—Garazh—Angar, 151–69.
45. Wasiolek, Tolstoy’s Major Fiction, 153.
47. Cited in Al’tman, Chitaia Tolstogo, 118. The English translation is quoted in Schultze, The Structure of Anna Karenina, 118.
49. Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, 320.
52. Armstrong, The Unsaid Anna Karenina, 112.
53. Ibid., 112. “[T]he tension between image and narrative projects different emphases in the parallel stories of Anna and Kitty, the significance of which would be seen all the more clearly if some feature film version of Anna Karenina were to begin with a shot of Anna Pirogov’s crushed body, hauled out from under the wheels of a train. If that film were made, its opening scene would predict with banal certainty not only that Anna Karenin was destined to die, but also the means of her destruction.”
57. Wasiolek, Tolstoy’s Major Fiction, 156–7.
58. Mandelker, Framing Anna Karenina, 94.
60. Ibid., 123.
61. Mandelker, Framing Anna Karenina, 136.
63. Ibid., 126.
64. Nabokov, Lectures on Russian Literature, 187.