LEV TOLSTOY AND HIS WOMEN

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A Thesis Submitted to The Honors College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Bachelors degree

With Honors in

Russian and Slavic Studies

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

MAY 2012

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Abstract:

In his great novels, War and Peace and Anna Karenina, Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy created a diverse group of female characters. These women not only reflect the social issues of Tolstoy's time, but also the life of the man who created them. Above and beyond the roles of women in society and household life, the issues of marriage, sex, and love proved to be the most complex to Tolstoy. By creating such diverse and contradictory characters, Tolstoy was able to show clearly his dichotomous views and his inner struggles.

Lev Tolstoy and His Women

Part I. Introduction: The Influence of Tolstoy's Personal Life on his Heroines

Female characters of Count Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy are the most favorite and the most complicated heroines both for Russian and non-Russian readers. Through the women in his fiction, Tolstoy explores and portrays numerous social issues of his time. Both class and location play a crucial role in determining and influencing their behavior, as do themes of marriage and sexuality. Through the lives of his heroines, Tolstoy expresses his views on life, specifically its purpose with respect to socio-political ideologies that dictate the fashions of society. The complexity of the issues that these women experience is as complex and as numerous as are Tolstoy's female characters themselves. His fictional heroines often exhibit dichotomous attitudes of their creator. Some are created as virtuous mothers, while others are presented as sexual deviants and fallen women. Yet, the issue for Lev Nikolaevich is much more complex. Most of these characters struggle with their two sides—what is moral and what is immoral--redicating Tolstoy's own struggles with his views of women. Thus, in order to understand Tolstoy's heroines, we first must consider his personal life and relationships with women, in order to shed light onto the personalities and fates that he creates for the women of his biggest novels, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*.

Sigmund Freud was right that in order to understand a man's relationship with women, one needs to look into his relationship with the mother. Tolstoy's mother died when he was but one and a half years old, which forced Tolstoy to grow up without a mother. In his *Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth,* we see the longing that Tolstoy experiences for his mother:

> "So many past memories arise when one tries to recall the features of a beloved being,
> that one sees those features dimly through the memories as if through tears. They
> are the tears of imagination. When I try to recall my mother as she was at that time
> I can only picture her brown eyes, always expressing the same kindness and love,

> the mole on her neck just below the place where the short hairs curled, her embroidered white collar, and the delicate dry hand which so often caressed me and which I so often kissed, but her general expression escapes me." (Benson, 5)

Because Tolstoy did not know his mother, it was natural that he idealized and cherished her. Precisely this idealization is seen in the image of Nikolenka's mother from *Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth*, who reflects Tolstoy's image of his own mother. The lost mother explains why in his writing Tolstoy tries to create the perfect mother and woman, like Dolly or Princess Mary. "In his strictly traditional view, he pictured her as a loving and submissive wife, a gentle and dedicated mother, and a warm and loyal supporter." (Benson, 6) Tolstoy's motherless childhood, however, also helps us shed the light on his views of sexuality. Freud argues in his theory of Oedipus Complex that men unconsciously want to sexually possess their mother. Tolstoy, who grew up without a mother figure, redirects this desire onto other women, which leads to numerous liaisons, infidelity to his wife, and internal moral struggles revolving around sex. Additionally, the fact of the absent mother creates an extremely polarized view of women in his life. Tolstoy's idealization of the mother he never knew made him constantly compare women to this ideal non-existent image of purity and moral superiority, which he had created himself. That is why, when other living women are compared, even unintentionally, to this model, it is only natural that they fail to satisfy Tolstoy's expectations. "Tolstoy's memories and fantasies of his own mother only perpetuated and intensified the inevitable conflict with his view of women in reality as egocentric, emotionally erratic creatures, whose erotic influence was a constant threat to man's best impulses." (Benson, 9) This image of a woman is epitomized in Helene Kuragina, who becomes the ultimate incarnation of beauty and sexuality, as well as egocentrism, which makes her manipulate sexuality for her own advantage. These views on women became more extreme with time and escalated to blaming women for all of the social evils:

> "Regard the society of women as an inevitable evil of social life, and avoid them as much as possible. Because from whom do we actually learn voluptuousness,

effeminacy, frivolity in everything and a multitude of other vices, if not from women? Who is responsible for the fact that we lose such feelings inherent in us as courage, firmness, prudence, equity, and so on, if not women?" (Benson, 9)

Tolstoy thus is not hesitant to rid the pages of his novels of many of his female characters, who follow such a guideline. Helene Kuragina presumably dies from venereal disease, which she rightly deserves. In *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Pozdnyshev's wife is murdered by her own husband because she allowed herself to fall in love with another man, thereby driving her husband into a state of obsessive delirium.

In this world religious and virtuous women are completely desexualized, taking after the image of his own mother. The only beautiful physical quality that Princess Mary has are her eyes, which are the reflection of her even more beautiful soul. She is completely deprived of sexual beauty. The same applies to Dolly, whose attractive feature is being a model mother and devotion to family, which are moral qualities, as opposed to physical beauty. In fact, Tolstoy views physical beauty as ephemeral. Before marrying Sophia Bers, Tostoy was briefly engaged to Valeriia Arsenieva, to whom he wrote various love letters. (Cruise, 193) In one of these, he writes: " I already love in you your beauty, but I am only beginning to love in you that which is eternal and ever precious – your heart, your soul. Beauty one could get to know and fall in love with in one hour and cease to love it as speedily; but the soul one must learn to know." (Carol) Here we see Tolstoy's view of spirituality and moral character as being superior to physical qualities, which might fade with age. In this correspondence with Valeriia, Tolstoy also expresses his views on the woman question: "Besides the fact that the vocation of a woman is to be a wife, her major vocation is be a mother, and to be a mother and not simply a child-bearer-- do you understand the difference?" (Cruise, 193) In this excerpt we see Tolstoy's view of the role that women are supposed to play in the family-- that which he was deprived of as a child. Moreover, Tolstoy's preaching tone in this excerpt shows his own belief in men's innate superiority to women, as he attempts to enforce his views on his fiancé. Tolstoy's pontifications to Valeriia had a very ironic finale. She entered into high society and became less interested in the lifestyle Lev

Nikolaevich was preaching, thus bringing an end to their relationship. (Cruise, 194)

Another woman who played a defining role in Tolstoy's life was, of course, his wife, Sofiya Andreyevna Bers. Just before their marriage, Tolstoy gave his future wife his diaries containing his sexual transgressions, just as Constantine Levin does with Kitty. Another parallel between the writer and his future wife and his fictional counterpart is their age. Tolsoy and Levin both marry at the age of 34, whereas their wives have not even entered their 20s. Sofiya also serves as Dolly's prototype. She bore him 13 children, 8 of whom survived. (Feuer, 228) Moreover, aware of her husband's infidelity, she still loyally served him and the children. She even copied the manuscript of *War and Peace* for him seven times. (Dirda) In the later years she inspired the character of Pozdnyschev's wife in *The Kreutzer Sonata* by becoming infatuated with a pianist. "Though there was no sexual infidelity involved, the indiscretion of her desperate flirtation embarrassed and exasperated her family and friends, and disgusted her husband." (Benson, 113) Tolstoy channels his own jealousy and disgust into the murder of this female character, which becomes a very common practice with the female characters whom he dislikes.

A similar, yet very different approach, Tolstoy uses with Anna Karenina. Unlike Pozdnyshev's wife, she is not killed by her lover but instead commits suicide. The situation in the novel *Anna Karenina* is of different nature. Tolstoy seems genuinely to like his heroine, while simultaneously condemning her. Anna only serves as a reflection of Tolstoy's self, his moral issues, his synchronous ambivalence and hostility towards relationships outside of marriage. One such affair was with the wife of one of his peasants, Aksinya Bazykina, who had Tolstoy's illegitimate son, Timofei. (Popoff, 36) Just like Anna, Tolstoy experienced a genuine feelings towards his lover and feels tremendous guilt and responsibility towards their son, a problem which similarly torments Anna with her son Serezha.

Tolstoy's female characters are as diverse as are his views of women. On the one hand, there are the virtuous mothers, on the other-- sexual predators. There are women who fall in love, there are those, who marry out of social convenience. Nevertheless, all of these female characters, no matter how

varied and different they are, serve as the reflection of the life and ideology of a man, who created them.

Part II: Women of the Two Capitals

The city in which Tolstoy's characters have been raised and settled plays a crucial role in their character development. In addition to the geographical locations of Moscow and St. Petersburg, there are significant differences in the culture of these two cities. There is a "rather neat set of oppositions between Moscow and Petersburg, with the two cities characterized as, respectively, familial vs. high society/anti-familial, natural vs. artificial/mechanistic, authentic/sincere vs. false/insincere, valuing human relationships vs. valuing money and success"(Slavskaya, 97) In his book *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia*, Orlando Figes describes historic events that created a strong cultural divide between St. Petersburg and Moscow. According to Figes, St. Petersburg was meant to be a European city from the very beginning of its creation. Even the materials used to build the city were European. "The famous granite of its river banks came from Finland and Karelia; the marble of its palaces from Italy, the Urals and the Middle East; gabbro and porfyry were brought in from Sweden; dolerite and slate from Lake Onega; sandstone from Poland and Germany; travertine from Italy; and tiles from the Low Countries and Lubeck." (Figes, 6) In fact, Europe inspired the architectural designs of the city. Peter the Great was inspired by the architecture of Venice and Amsterdam, which he incorporated into St. Petersburg. The cultural identity of St. Petersburg had to match its European architecture. That is why Peter implemented various changes, which dictated the lifestyle of his nobles. These changes included the design and location of their houses, transportation, household maintenance, food consumption, fashion and even conversation. One of the first changes implemented by Peter the Great in 1698 were those regarding the appearance of boyars. They were all required to shave off their beards and exchange their kaftans for "Western codes of dress." (Figes, 43) European fashions were enforced

among the nobility- they learned to speak French and to follow French etiquette in conversation, dance, and other aspects of everyday life. Various books on etiquette were distributed amongst the aristocracy. The underlying ideology of such books was to force the reader to "imagine himself in the company of foreigners while, at the same time, remaining conscious of himself as a Russian. The point was not to become a European, but rather to act as one. Like an actor with an eye to his own image on the stage, the nobleman was told to observe his own behavior from a Russian point of view." (Figes, 44) This resulted in a very scripted lifestyle for the nobility in daily life, which ultimately culminated in the grand spectacle of all – the performance of nobility at salons or balls. "Women put on wigs and beauty spots. They were conscious of the need to take a leading role- dancing, singing at the piano, playing the coquette. Dandies turned their social lives into performance art: every mannered pose was carefully rehearsed. " (Figes, 43) One of the main changes in everyday life was foregoing the use of Russian language and transitioning to French. In the highest echelons of the nobility, Russian was completely neglected. The use of the Russian language was prohibited in many families and only allowed on special occasions. Various forms of punishment were implemented for children who were caught speaking Russian. " The attitude seems to have been that Russian, like the Devil, should be beaten out of noble children from an early age, and that even the most childish feelings had to be expressed in a foreign tongue." (Figes, 86)

All of these changes had detrimental effects on the social structure of society. The nobility was even further removed from the lower class and peasants, which were the carriers of the old way and the true Russian spirit. Moreover, there was a split within the identity of the nobility itself. These people were not born to be European, although they were raised to act as if they were. A member of the nobility was "conscious of acting out his life according to prescribed European conventions; yet on another plane [their] inner life was swayed by Russian customs and sensibilities." (Figes, 44). Hence, the closer the nobles were to the high society of Petersburg, the further away were their values from Russia.

The nobility of Moscow was quite different in nature. “There was a sense in which [Moscow] was the nation's 'home', even for members of the most Europeanized elite of Petersburg. Moscow was a symbol of the old Russia, the place where ancient Russian customs were preserved.” (Figes, 151) Compared to the Western way of life in St. Petersburg, Moscow had a more provincial life style, which was much closer to that of the Russian people. It was the “center of the 'good life' for the nobility.” (Figes, 162) Since the very beginning of the city's history, Muscovites took pride in their hospitality. “Compared with the cold and formal Petersburg, Moscow prided itself on its relaxed 'Russian' customs.” (Figes, 168) Due to the location of the court in St. Petersburg, the inhabitants of Moscow developed other ways of spending their free time by socializing with each other at tea parties and balls. While St. Petersburg inhabitants had specific times for receiving guests, “the doors of Moscow's mansions were always open”. (Figes, 168) This sense of hospitality has helped to emphasize the importance of preserving the fundamental social unit—family— while maintaining the importance of close relations. Furthermore, because nobility was spending less time acting European, as in the high society of St. Petersburg, they were more closely connected to their Russian side. Moreover, St. Petersburg’s society was enmeshed in rules of conduct, of which Moscow was free. While, St. Petersburg was the window to the West, Moscow remained the heart of Russia. The vast differences between these cities created not only a “spatial system” but also a moral system, “in which Moscow represents the morally positive, and Petersburg, the morally negative pole.” (Slavskaya, 97) The same opposition is also found in the female characters of the novel.

The difference between these two cities is reflected in Tolstoy's “dichotomized view of women: virtuous Russian wives and mothers of the nobility, on the one hand, and non-Russian 'fallen' women not of the nobility, on the other.” (Slavskaya, 98) The main differences between Russian morality and that based on foreign models are clear in how Tolstoy depicts his female characters. From the beginning of the novel *Anna Karenina*, we see this contrast between Dolly and Stiva's mistress, the one, a representative of old Russian nobility, and the other, a promiscuous Frenchwoman. One of the

opening conflicts of the novel revolved around Stiva's adultery with his children's French governess, which results in his “exile from the conjugal bed.” (Adelman, 49) Moreover, Tolstoy's view of this conflict is revealed in Stiva's and Levin's visit to Stiva's favorite restaurant. Stiva shamelessly flirts with a Frenchwoman, “bedecked with ribbons and lace...false hair, powder, and toilet vinegar” instead of staying faithful to and trying to resolve the conflict with Dolly. (AK, 42) As seen in this description, Tolstoy views French women, especially those belonging to the lower class, as fallen creatures. Their unnatural beauty is vulgar and promiscuous, and even on the inside there is no trace of morality, as they try to ruin the sacred Russian family by engaging in adulterous relationships. It is interesting to note that Levin, who embodies Tolstoy's morality, finds the Frenchwoman to be “offensive to him,” thus indicating the immorality of French values and culture. (AK, 42) This effect is strongly enhanced by the choices these men make in their food. As such, Stiva chooses “potage printanier, turbot, sauce Beaumarchais, poilarde a l'estragon, macedoine de fruits,” all foreign imports, while Levin prefers a simple Russian buckwheat porridge. (AK, 44) Stiva's Russian soul is deeply corrupted by the seemingly extravagant, superficial French culture, which reeks of the promiscuous and the vulgar, in contrast to the natural, open, family oriented Russian culture of Levin and Dolly. Yet, Tolstoy cannot help but like Stiva because he is aware of his shortcomings.

In contrast to the French, Dolly serves as an epitome of Russian morality by being an exemplary mother, the most cherished and respected role one can attain in the family-oriented Russian culture. She comes from the Scherbatskii family, the representatives of old Moscow nobility, who possess very strong family values, which they pass on to their daughter. Even after her husband's betrayal, Dolly dedicates all of herself to the family. “It was impossible because she could not get out of the habit of regarding him as her husband and of loving him. Besides, she felt that here, in her own home, it was all she could do to look after her five children properly.” (AK, 14) Dolly spares no effort in fulfilling both parental roles. To save money for the family, she moves to Yergushovo with her children, where she starts fixing the household inconveniences of her estate, which should have been done by her husband.

“There was no place for bathing... There was nowhere to hang dresses...There was no mangle in the laundry, not even an ironing board, and no large pots or pans.” (AK, 322) On numerous occasions Dolly sacrifices herself for her family and marriage with a man who “did not love her.” (AK, 323) Tolstoy goes to great pains to show Dolly's unconditional selflessly-blind devotion to both husband and children, thus turning her into an epitome of Russian mothers, who might well give up their own happiness in order to preserve the sacredness of their family.

Similar cultural and moral contrast is evident in the characters of *War and Peace*, Princess Mary and Mademoiselle Bourienne, the latter of whom has no fortune and is inferior in class and status to Princess Mary, an heiress of the well-established noble family of the Bolkonskys. Princess Mary is a very virtuous and religious woman, who strictly follows the principles of Russian Orthodoxy. She selflessly serves her father after years of enduring his cruel treatment and irrational outbursts of hate, which even escalate to the point where he tries to denounce her. On numerous occasions he insults her-- “ she's ugly enough as it is.” (WP, 278) Yet, Mary stays by his side and cares for him until his death. Naïve and pure at heart, she does not understand when meeting Anatole that he wants to marry her for her fortune and status. Instead, “it seemed to her that he was kind, brave, resolute, manly, and magnanimous.” (WP, 279) She refuses to believe that Anatole is cheating on her with her own best friend, Mademoiselle Bourienne. Even after she discovers the truth, she not only forgives the Frenchwoman, but tries to help her-- “cost what it may, I will make poor Amelie happy...I will do all I can to arrange a match between them. If he is not rich, I will give her the means.” (WP, 287) She is the ultimate representation of the ideal upper-class Russian woman, who selflessly sacrifices herself for others.

In contrast, Mademoiselle Bourienne is a clear example of Tolstoy's notion of the fallen women. She is companion to Princess Mary as well as to Prince Bolkonsky. Mademoiselle Bourienne is “a beautiful young girl without any definite social position, without relations, friends, or even country.” (WP, 280) She lives off the Bolkonsky family, using the kindness of Mary and her father to survive.

Yet, in reality, she "did not intend to devote her life to serving Prince Nikolai Andreyevich, to reading aloud to him and being a friend to his daughter." (WP, 280) She is simply using them as the means of survival to advance in society. Mademoiselle Bourienne has "long been waiting for a Russian prince who, able to appreciate at a glance her superiority to the plain, badly dressed, awkward Princess, would fall in love with her and carry her off." (WP, 280) That is why, when Anatole comes along, she immediately jumps on the opportunity to marry him, ungratefully ignoring the kindness of the Bolkonskys.

Both works, *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*, draw a clear demarcation between moral values and cultural differences of Russian noble women and French "anti-family" women. However, a very complex problem arises when these cultural and social elements clash in the high society of St. Petersburg, where Russian culture and language have been replaced by the French. It is not surprising then that "in Petersburg high society even Russian upper-class femininity can mutate from its normative familial mode of existence, represented by the 'old noble Moscow houses' into some alien anti-family mode." (Slavskaya, 99) This ideological mutation when Russian nobility inherits French values is clearly represented by the characters of Betsy Tverskaya, Countess Vronskaya, and Helene Kuragina.

Betsy Tverskaya is one of the key characters representing the corrupt values of Russian high society. She belongs to highest circles of St. Petersburg. However, these social circles "were the chief representatives of a choice new Petersburg circle called an imitation of an imitation of something, Les sept merveilles du monde." (AK, 363) Tolstoy's choice of using the French "Les sept merveilles du monde" refers to the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Thus, we know that the society Betsy belongs to is a mere, ridiculous parody of the grand principles of the Russian nobility and the French Court. The absurdity of her social circles is also evident in her clothing. "Betsy, dressed in the very latest fashion, her hat soaring high above her head like a little chimney coronet over a lamp, in a dove-coloured dress with very pronounced diagonal stripes going one way on the bodice and the other way

on the skirt." (AK, 518) This description of Betsy's dress with its tasteless stripes going in different directions and comparison of her figure to a lamp strongly enhances the incongruous image of Betsy, which also translates into her persona. Betsy's choice to follow the newest fashion trends in clothing, no matter how aesthetically incongruent they are, also applies to following the newest social fashions, especially those of liaisons. She tries to explain this new concept to Anna-- "it is a new fashion...They have all adopted that fashion." (AK, 367) To understand the mind of this woman, one needs to understand the time period in which she was living. Women like her were married off to men they did not love, who were much older than them. This is why Betsy finds it acceptable to seek love and sexual satisfaction outside of marriage, a notion much condemned by Tolstoy. Even Betsy's cousin, Aleksei Vronsky, clearly understands that "he ran no risk appearing ridiculous either in Betsy's eyes or in the eyes of society people generally" because "in their eyes, the role of the disappointed lover of a maiden or of any single woman might be ridiculous, but the role of a man who was pursuing a married woman, and who made it the purpose of his life at all cost to draw her into adultery, was one which had in it something beautiful and dignified and could never be ridiculous." (AK, 159)

The deviation from Russian family and moral values in the younger generation of women, such as Betsy, is not quite a "new fashion". The older generation of high society women had been familiar with this way for years. Countess Vronskaya is "a brilliant Society woman, who during her married life and especially in her widowhood had had many love affairs, known to everybody." (AK, 71) Yet, this loose immoral behavior was not frowned upon, since she continued being a part of the highest Petersburg circles. As a true "depraved" woman, she blindly follows the opinion of society. Originally, Countess Vronskaya was very fond of Anna after their journey on the train. That is why she was initially pleased with her son's liaison "both because in her opinion nothing gave such finishing touches to a brilliant young man as an intrigue in the best Society, and also because this was Anna Karenina, who had so taken her fancy."(AK, 216) However, upon hearing that her son "had refused a post of importance for his career...and that exalted persons were dissatisfied with him for it, [so] she changed

her opinion." (AK, 216) Countess Vronskaya does not change her opinion because she thinks that the liaison is wrong nor because her son sacrifices his career for Anna, but primarily because he is going against what powerful people want Vronsky to do. It does not help that "this affair was not one of those brilliant, graceful, Society liaisons of which she approved, but a desperate Werther-like passion which might lead him into doing something foolish. " (AK, 216) In her eyes and in the eyes of high society, liaisons are supposed to be primarily for social purposes only, as opposed to passionate love affairs.

Yet, both Betsy and Countess Vronskaya fade in comparison to the Beautiful Helene, who rises to be the Grand Dame, the femme fatale of society. Her high status reflects her ability to manipulate social rules, thus making her a true epitome of Tolstoy's depraved woman. Even her own husband Pierre Bezukhov acknowledges that "the whole solution to the enigma lay in that terrible word 'depravity': she is a depraved woman." (WP, 388-389) Although she comes from Russian nobility, she exhibits the complete opposite of family-values. Her marriage to Pierre Bezukhov is based on deceit from the very beginning. Her conniving father, Prince Vasiliy, creates an impression that Pierre proposed, thus forcing him into marrying Helene so that he can obtain Bezukhov's title, social standing, and fortune. Immediately after their engagement, Helene's true nature comes out. "He was about to bend over her hand and kiss it, but with a precipitant, brutal movement of her head, she intercepted his lips and met them with her own. Pierre was shocked by the change in her face, by its unpleasantly abandoned expression. "(WP, 266) This abandonment and disengagement during such a precious moment, as one's engagement, reveals her true feelings and agenda. Tolstoy here highlights her aggressive sexuality. As their married life progresses, Helene completely abandons Pierre for her career as a society woman and for her other lovers. The closer she becomes involved with society, the further removed she becomes from family values and from her marriage. She " was confronted with a new problem in her career: how to preserve her intimate relations with two men without offending either of them." (WP, 1000) Her adulterous nature escalates from liaisons to numerous acts of adultery with multiple men. Only Marya Dmitrievna, another representative of a Russian Moscow family

women, clearly sees Helene's true nature, blatantly calling her out on it. 'So wives have now started remarrying while their husbands are still living! Perhaps you think you have invented something new? But you are not the first, madam. That was originated long time ago. It's done in all the brothels!" (WP, 1004) Precisely this is the characterization of Betsy's "new fashions," the new ways of society, as a result of the cultural mutation of Russian values to French.

St. Petersburg has a very strong, often overpowering influence on people. The fashions of high society women, the luxury and abundance of wealth, numerous liaisons and courtships, intrigues and power may blind one to the point of losing oneself in this unfamiliarly desirable world. It can easily fool and bedazzle inexperienced eyes, especially those of a naïve person who has grown up in the family-oriented Moscow. Natasha comes from a family of Moscow nobility. Her parents, Count and Countess Rostov, have raised four children of their own and an orphan cousin, Sonya, with love and attention, giving them the best education and values. The Rostovs represent the members of Russian upper class intelligentsia, who were able to preserve true Russian values. Even Natasha's uncle, a retired Russian officer, lives in a simple cabin in the middle of a Russian forest with his housekeeper Anisya, who is an embodiment of a Russian "baba." She was "a stout, rosy, handsome woman of about forty, with a double chin and full red lips." (WP, 616) The Russian nature of the Rostov family is also evident in the food that Uncle serves to his niece- "various liquers, herb brandy, mushrooms, rye cake made with buttermilk, honey in the comb, both still and sparkling mead, apples, raw and roasted nuts, and honey and nut confections...freshly roasted chicken, ham, and preserves made with honey and with sugar." (WP, 616) In this environment somewhere in the middle of the Russian wood, the sound of a balalaika moves Natasha, and the true soul of the Rostovs emerges, the soul of Russian people. Natasha, a young Countess, educated by a foreign governess and who reads foreign romance novels, is moved by her Uncle's folk song and springs up in a Russian folk dance that she has not been taught. The dance comes from her soul, as she has never seen anyone dance like this. Yet, the precision of Natasha's dance leaves no one untouched. " Anisya Fedorovna, who had instantly handed her the

kerchief she needed for the dance, had tears in her eyes, though she laughed as she watched this slender, graceful Countess, who was able to understand all that was in Anisya, and in Anisya's father and mother and aunt, and in every Russian man and woman."(WP, 620) Deeply embedded and preserved in the Moscow environment, and specifically in the Rostov family, this concept of Russian soul and native sensibility suppressed by Peter's reforms, somehow managed to withstand these changes.

Yet, even Natasha with her strong family values of the Rostovs and her innate Russian sensitivity is not able to withstand St. Petersburg's foreign influence. When she enters the high society in St. Petersburg, she gets blinded by its superficial beauty. "She could not follow the opera, could not even listen to the music."(WP, 678) She loses her hearing and seeing and does not realize what is happening around her, while simultaneously failing to distinguish what is happening on the stage. Leo Tolstoy " strongly believed that opera was a bourgeois, decadent entertainment that corrupted morals, indeed, that blinded the beholder to true moral values altogether" (Lowe, 1990) Indeed, the loss of senses that Natasha experiences transforms her into a " state of intoxication she had not experienced for a long time. She lost all sense of who and where she was, and of what was going on before her." (WP, 679) The loss of Natasha's identity in the crowd shows her desire to be a part of this society. "A sensation she had not experienced for a long time-- that of having hundreds of eyes looking at her bare arms and neck—suddenly affected her with mixed pleasure and discomfort, calling up a multitude of memories, desires, and emotions associated with that feeling." (WP, 675) Natasha struggles with the strong values of modesty that she was brought up with, thus causing her to experience discomfort. However, the attention of high society flatters her. That is why she loses herself in this powerful force of St. Petersburg. She is flattered and enchanted by the company of Helene and mostly by the attention of the charming Anatole Kuragin, who flirts shamelessly with her. "Natasha did not understand what he was saying any more than he did himself," and yet something in this man makes her flirt back with him, although she is engaged to Prince Andrei. (WP, 684) She loses her sense of right and wrong and is

only able to gain it back after returning home. “Only after she had reached home was Natasha able to form any clear idea of what had happened to her, and suddenly remembering Prince Andrei, she was horrified” (WP, 684) In the family environment, Natasha is able to judge the situation clearly. The fact that she understands how morally ambiguous her behavior at the opera was only enhances the strength of her values. “Everything seemed dark, obscure, dreadful. There in that huge lighted hall, where young girls and old men and the half-naked [Helene] with her proud, serene smile, had rapturously cried 'Bravo!'-- under the shadow of that [Helene] it had all seemed simple and natural, but now, alone, by herself, it was incomprehensible.” (WP, 685) This strong internal conflict within Natasha and her loss of identity clearly demonstrate the overwhelming power of St. Petersburg to corrupt, even momentarily, the representatives of Moscow family women.

The character of Anna Karenina, however, complicates the dichotomy of the “Moscow family women and Petersburg (and foreign) anti-family ones.” (Slavskaya, 99) Moreover, she does not quite fit into either of the categories and neither is she lost between the values of the cities, unlike Natasha. We initially meet Anna when she comes to Moscow to reconcile her brother Stiva with his wife Dolly. This instance simultaneously shows both sides of her. On the one hand, it seems that Anna understands the importance of family, as she is genuinely trying to preserve her brother's marriage. On the other hand, she might be using her family for social purposes. She understands that by convincing Dolly to forgive Stiva, she will be saving not only save the social reputation of her brother, but also her own, since they are family. Thus, Anna's character is extremely complex from the very beginning, as she cannot be interpreted and understood in a single dimension. Therefore, it is hard to characterize her as either “the Petersburg society lady” based on social status and location or a “family woman” as are those from the Moscow nobility due to her family-oriented values. (Slavskaya, 100)

Anna's mysterious nature is best seen through the eyes of Kitty. A naïve girl, Kitty Scherbatskaya easily falls in love with Anna's mature femininity, which fools and disarms her. “Kitty had been seeing Anna every day and was in love with her, and had always imagined her in lilac, but

seeing her in black she felt that she had never before realized her full charm." (AK, 98) When she suggested to Anna to wear lilac, Kitty did not realize the complexity of Anna's persona. Lilac is a color of innocence and simplicity, which Kitty sees fit for Anna, as she is enchanted by her effervescent personality. However, Anna's choice of simple classic black shows her subtly sophisticated character, which makes her even more beautiful. At the ball, something about Anna is revealed in the bit of conversation, which Kitty overhears. " 'No, I am not going to throw the first stone,' she was saying in reply to some question, adding with a shrug of her shoulders, 'although I cannot understand it.' " (AK, 98) Kitty sees that Anna has an opinion on the subject, while failing to fully understand it. Interestingly enough, this conversation, according to Svetlana Slavskaya, refers to the "Gospel story of a woman taken in adultery." (Slavskaya, 101) Anna's refusal to cast a stone shows her sympathy and kindheartedness towards fallen women, while her inability to fully understand the issue of adultery signifies Anna's lack of understanding of something within herself. There is an ironic foreshadowing in this scene, as well. Anna says that she will not judge the fallen woman, although the fate that society will choose for her will be completely different.

Interestingly enough, our innocent, young and naïve Kitty is also the one who solves Anna's mystery. "She had not come across Anna since the beginning of the ball, and now she suddenly saw her again in a different and unexpected light... She saw that Anna was intoxicated by the rapture she had produced." (AK, 100) Kitty carefully watched Anna, seeking to find "the cause...all or only one?"' (AK, 100) Even after discovering that the cause of Anna's intoxication is Kitty's love interest, Kitty still remains enchanted by her rival, to whom she lost. Anna "looked charming in her simple black dress, her full arms with the bracelets, her firm neck with the string of pearls round it, her curly hair now disarranged, every graceful movement of her small feet and hands, her handsome, animated face, -- everything about her was enchanting, but there was something terrible and cruel in her charm." (AK, 103) Thus, unknowingly, Kitty discovers the ambiguous and complex nature of Anna, which enchants yet contains the potential to hurt. However, it is still difficult to hate this woman for the suffering she

brings onto people. “Kitty admired her even more than before, and suffered more and more. She felt herself crushed.” (AK, 103) Through Kitty's eyes, we come to understand that Anna cannot be characterized so simply, as she is a completely incomprehensible oxymoron-- she is a loving family woman and at the same time she is the center of high society; she has strong positions on issues she does not fully grasp; she makes people hate her and fall in love with her at the same time. “The gamut of different interpretations of Anna's words and views ...demonstrates the indeterminancies, as well as wide possibilities for interpreting and misinterpreting Anna, that Tolstoy builds into his presentation of his heroine. ” (Slavskaya, 102) In this way, he warns us that the character of Anna Karenina cannot be simply condemned as a result of careless inconsideration and rushed conclusions. Therefore, it is a problem to categorize Anna in the two categories of Russian women that exist for Tolstoy-- St. Petersburg antifamily women or Moscow family women. Is it possible that Anna belongs to her own category?

“In other words is Anna 'simply' a Petersburg/anti-family woman, like Countess Vronsky, or could there perhaps exist in Petersburg yet another type of a woman, different from both the 'paradigm' of immoral society ladies and that of the Moscow family women, like Dolly?” (Slavskaya, 100) In her essay “A Tale of Two Cities”, Svetlana Slavskaya focuses on another incomplete conversation, which helps us to define the category to which Anna Karenina belongs. Once again, the reader overhears through the ears of yet another character, Aleksei Vronsky, Anna's conversation with another minor character. This conversation happens on the train to Moscow when Anna accidentally meets this acquaintance of hers who has not been introduced to the reader.

“ 'All the same I don't agree with you,' the lady was saying.

'Yours are Petersburg views, madam'

'Not at all, simply a woman's views.'

'Well, allow me to kiss your hand.'

'Au revoir, Ivan Petrovich, and please if you see my brother send him to me,' said the lady,

closing the door and again entering the compartment." (AK, 77)

This conversation in fact sheds some light on the third category of women. Ivan Petrovich, an unfamiliar character to us, is representative of a Moscow man. Tolstoy purposefully gives him a very common Russian name, while not providing us with his last name, but only his first name and patronymic. This is done in order to show that he can be any man. Additionally, his response to Anna in their argument can also characterize any man of the time. Instead of arguing with Anna and accepting her as an equal to himself, he dismisses her argument and tries to marginalize her as a person from St. Petersburg. Yet, Anna, being a clever and educated woman understands this behavior and tries to defend her argument using gender. In this case, Ivan Petrovich simply stops arguing with her and even further disregards what she has to say by kissing Anna's hand. This not only shows the gender roles in Russian society and the attitudes of men towards women, but also creates a third category of women from St. Petersburg, "simply a woman." (AK, 77) Indeed, if we analyze the female circles of Petersburg's high society, Anna seems not to belong to the category of the fallen women. The women surrounding her either include a seemingly moral Lyidia Ivanovna, a woman of the older generation, who tries to steal Anna's husband or young women like Betsy Tverskaya, Liza Merkalova, or Sappho Stoltz, who openly engage in various society liaisons. Anna, indeed, "appears to be the only young mother in the whole capital!" (Slavskaya, 105) The similarity she shared with the "depraved" women of her age is that she is trapped in a loveless marriage to a man, who "neither at school nor at the university, nor afterwards, in the Service, did he enter into friendly relations with anyone." (AK, 621) Even Anna's son is almost a stranger to this man, who refers to his son as a "young man." (AK, 254) It is not surprising that Anna despises her husband, his large ears, big weary eye, constant cracking of knuckles, and his mocking smile. There is nothing pleasant in the image of this man. Anna is simply a woman, who wants to be loved:

"They say he's a religious, moral, honest, and wise man, but they do not see what

I have seen. They do not know how for eight years he has been smothering my life,

> smothering everything that was alive in me, that he never once thought I was a live woman, in need of love. They do not know how at every step he hurt me and remained self-satisfied. Have I not tried, tried with all my might, to find a purpose in my life? Have I not tried to love him, tried to love my son when I could no longer love my husband? But the time came when I understood that I could no longer deceive myself, that I am alive, and cannot be blamed because God made me so, that I want to love and to live." (AK, 361)

However, even in the loveless marriage Anna is trying to realize her family potential, but she gives up, as her husband fails to provide her with any emotional support; nor can she find what she most seeks in the city where she lives with its hostile attitude towards family. Anna's affair with Vronsky differs significantly from the affairs of the "depraved women." She is actually in love with this man. Thus, Anna is not a depraved anti-family woman, although she does live in Petersburg. Instead, she belongs to a third category. She is "simply a woman", who wants to be loved and is "imprisoned in a false marriage and an anti-family environment." (Slavskaya, 105)

Therefore, Leo Tolstoy presents a dichotomized view of women strongly influenced by the cities in which they live. There is a clear divide in his world between Russian women and foreign women. Yet, within the category of Russian women, at first glance there are Moscow family women and the fallen women of St. Petersburg's high society, both of whose ideologies and behaviors are influenced by the culture of their city. However, these lines become blurred when it comes to the two main heroines of his biggest novels. As such, Natasha Rostova momentarily loses her Moscow family identity due to the strong power and influence of St. Petersburg's high society, which leaves no one unaffected. However, the strong influence of Natasha's upbringing and family enables her to reinstate her former identity. Natasha's momentary fall shows her human nature, which allows the readers to understand Tolstoy's most complicated heroine, Anna Karenina. The complexity of this woman enables Tolstoy to place her outside either of the categories. For him, she is simply a woman.

Part III: Sex, Motherhood, and Femininity

In Tolstoy's life and writing, the problem of sexuality is one that poses the most critical problems relating to women's nature. He had a "double view of woman as both an angel and devil." (Benson, 8) *War Peace* and *Anna Karenina* clearly present this view of women through their main heroines. Tolstoy genuinely believed that women are capable of being exemplary mothers and companions for their husbands, functioning as the glue that holds the family together, such as in the case of Dolly Oblonskaya. However, in order to do so, they had to forego their sexuality and use it only as the means of reproduction to sustain a family. This is why one of Tolstoy's most beloved heroines, Natasha Rostova, is turned into a baby-making machine. For Tolstoy, woman's sexuality serves as the impediment to achieving moral purity. If it is uncontrolled, it poses self-destructive dangers to everyone surrounding, leading to the point of no return. This is precisely what happens to Helene Kuragina and Anna Karenina, both of whom Tolstoy cannot resist disliking.

Helene Kuragina is Tolstoy's incarnation of sexuality. Even "Napoleon himself, seeing her at the theater, had asked who she was and admired her beauty." (WP, 532) The superiority of Helene's beauty makes her the center of everyone's attention.

> "There was a slight rustle of her moss- and ivy-trimmed ball gown, a gleam of diamonds, lustrous hair, and dazzling white shoulders, as she moved toward Anna Pavlovna. Passing between the men, who made way for her, not looking directly at any of them but smiling on all as if graciously granting them the privilege of admiring her beautiful figure, her shapely shoulders, back, and bosom, which , in the fashion of the day, were very much exposed, she seemed to bring with her glamour of the ballroom." (WP, 38)

There is something very cold, marble-like in the way Tolstoy portrays her-- “her bust, which had always seemed like marble to Pierre” and “her marble beauty.” (WP, 249) She is indeed nothing but a marble statue-- beautiful, but cold. “There is no warmth in [Helene's] beauty precisely because her entire identity is centered in a body.” (Benson, 60) Other women fade in comparison to her. That is exactly what happens to Natasha at the opera. “Her bare arms and neck were not beautiful-- compared to [Helene's] her shoulders looked thin and her bosom undeveloped. But [Helene] seemed coated with a lacquer left by the thousands of eyes that had glanced over her body, while Natasha was a young girl appearing décolletée for the first time and who would have felt very much ashamed had she not been assured that this was quite proper.” (WP, 347) Yet, Helene's beauty entices both men and women alike. Even Natasha is easily enchanted by this woman and cannot avoid trying to imitate her. “The half-naked [Helene], who was sitting near her, smiled on all alike and it was just such a smile that Natasha gave Boris.” (WP, 680)

Helene's sexuality is also inherited by her brother Anatole, who has a similar impact on Natasha. “He never took his smiling eyes from her face, her neck, and her bare arms. Natasha had no doubt that he was fascinated by her.” (WP, 683) It is thus not surprising that Natasha gets easily intoxicated with Anatole. His sexual desire and magnetism captivate her, breaking the barriers of social restrictions and etiquette. “But looking into his eyes she felt frightened, realizing that the barrier of decorum she had always been conscious of between herself and other men did not exist between them. She did not know how it was that within five minutes she had come to feel terribly close to this man.”(WP, 683) The loss of barriers between the members of two genders represents sexual attraction, which, as we find out with Natasha, is destructive.

The danger of sexuality is that it inhibits people's ability to make clear judgments. Unable to resist each other's sexual magnetism, Helene and Anatole engage in incest. These rumors reach society “ have been told that her brother Anatole was in love with her and she with him, that there was a great scandal, and that that is why he was sent away.” (WP,258) Further, the sexual power of the Kuragins

overpowers other people. Pierre loses his senses at the dinner after his betrothal to Helene: “He neither heard, saw, nor understood anything clearly.” (WP, 263) A similar experience takes place with Natasha when she is enchanted by Anatole. “Natasha did not understand what he was saying.” (WP, 684) The captivating power of Kuragins' sexuality is inescapable. Deep in his mind Pierre understands the true nature of Helene-- “but she is stupid...This is not love. On the contrary, there is something abhorrent, something forbidden, in the feeling she arouses in me. ” (WP, 258) Even when Pierre returns to his senses and is able to clearly understand his situation, he acknowledges how powerless he is in relation to Helene. “He felt with horror that he was every day more and more bound to her in people's eyes, that it was impossible for him to return to his former conception of her, that he could not tear himself away from her, and although it would be a dreadful thing, he would have to unite his fate with hers.” (WP, 260) Yet, unable to resist Helene's “womanly beauty”, Pierre marries her even while realizing that there is “something abhorrent and unnatural ...in this marriage.” (WP, 258)

The ultimate culmination of sexuality is, of course, the act of sex itself. Tolstoy clearly condemns sex outside of marriage. The first sexual encounter between Anna and Vronsky is portrayed as an act of murder. Vronsky “felt what a murderer must feel when looking at the body he has deprived of life. The body he had deprived of life was their love, the first period of their love. There was something frightful and revolting in the recollection of what had been paid for with this terrible price of shame. Shame at her spiritual nakedness crushed Anna and communicated itself to him.” (AK,184) Tolstoy views this act not as the consummation of their feelings and love for each other, but a shameful emotional and physical desolation that leads to one's fall, as in the case of Anna. “But in spite of the murderer's horror at the body of his victim, that body must be cut up and hidden away, and he must make use of what he has obtained by the murder. Then, as the murderer desperately throws himself on the body, as though with passion, and drags it and hacks it, so Vronsky covered her face and shoulders with kisses.” (AK, 184) Tolstoy describes this scene in such a way as to portray his ambivalence towards sexuality and in order to foreshadow the future of this couple. After this act, both lovers feel

shame, guilt, and horror. Vronsky's kisses are compared to the hacking of a dead body, while he himself is a murderer. Tolstoy uses the metaphor of a murder in order to foreshadow Anna's future. Moreover, psychologically it may reflect Tolstoy's own hatred and guilt in regard to sex. Anna finds no pleasure or satisfaction in this aspect of her relationship with Vronsky; instead, she is ashamed. In a sense, as a result of this relationship, she is murdered in the society, which cuts her off and shames her. Shunned by society and ultimately by her own lover, Anna will have to take her own life because in Tolstoy's universe she engages in sexual relationships outside of marriage.

However, this sexual humiliation does not disappear even when a couple is bound by marriage. As such, Kitty and Levin "honeymoon—the first month of their marriage, from which Levin had expected so much-- the most oppressive and humiliating time of their lives " (AK, 591) Once again, the shameful nature of sex is haunting the lovers. Levin and Kitty experience a similar feeling of shame to that of Anna and Vronsky. "They both tried ... to efface from their memories all the ugly shameful circumstances of this unhealthy time, during which they were rarely in a normal state and rarely themselves." (AK, 591) Interestingly enough, even the sexual purification which Levin and Kitty undergo before marriage does not provide salvation. Ruth Benson in her book *Women in Tolstoy* breaks up sexual purification of Kitty and Levin into three stages. "First, sexual misconduct is recognized and acknowledged, and contrition is felt." (Benson, 90) The second step is expression and confession of this guilt through " the handing over of the diary," as Tolstoy did with his wife. (Benson, 90) "This step is extremely painful for Kitty, but essential to recognizing the full extent of Levin's misbehavior" (Benson, 90) The third and final step is Kitty's forgiveness, which leads to Levin's purification. (Benson, 90)

Yet, as explained previously, this act of sexual purification is still not strong enough to overcome Tolstoy's notion of sexual filth. That is why to make sex acceptable and less harmful to the people who engage in such intimate relationship, Tolstoy tries to tame this act by domesticating it. Levin's sexual purification and commitment to monogamous sexual life with his wife transitions into

an acceptable form of sexuality. The natural purpose of sex and sexuality is reproduction. That is why Tolstoy “places sex in a natural, biological order which can minimize its erotic and maximize its functional essence.” (Benson, 91)

The destructive nature of sexuality is most evident after Natasha's visit to the opera. Her intoxication with this new world of glamour and fashion results in her desire to be a part of this world. The innocent girl is overpowered by her primal sexuality. She wants to be like Helene, the center of society's attention. Unconsciously she even starts imitating Helene. The half-naked [Helene], who was sitting near her, smiled on all alike and it was just such a smile that Natasha gave Boris.” (WP, 680) Yet, the victim of Kuragin's sexuality, Natasha is blinded by her desire. Like Pierre, she fails to recognize the vile nature of this family. She is even oblivious to the fact that Anatole's love letters are written by another debouchier, Dolokhov. In addition to morally betraying her fiancé, Andrei Bolkonsky, Natasha devises a scheme of running away, while lying to those close to her. It is important to note that throughout her life Natasha was struggling with restraining this energy, which has previously manifested itself in the form of hunting with the men, the primitive dance at her uncle’s house, and other activities that render her as a “Cossack.” (WP, 94) However, the problem arises when this energy is unleashed and untamed, turning into sexual energy and resulting in immoral anti-family behavior. Yet, unlike Anna Karenina, Natasha is redeemed by Tolstoy because her sexual desire for Anatole is overpowered by her desire to marry him. “Natasha's sexual horse must always be harnessed to a nuptial carriage: where there is love, there must be marriage.” (Cruise, 197)

Moreover, Natasha sincerely repents for her behavior. On numerous occasions she asks Pierre and Andrei for forgiveness after her misstep. Ultimately, she finds salvation in selfless service to others, an action that characterizes Tolstoy's best female characters, Dolly and Princess Mary. Natasha shelters and transports soldiers wounded in the war. Ironically, one of these soldiers turns out to be Andrei Bolkonsky, whose forgiveness and love Natasha earns by giving up her self in service to him and others. “The only expression in her agitated face as she ran into the drawing room was one of love,

of boundless love for him, for Princess Marya, for everything related to the man she loved, an expression compounded of pity, suffering for others, and the passionate desire to give herself entirely to helping them." (WP, 1167) Natasha's powerful erotic energy is redirected into love and service to others. "Confronted with the two Natashas, Tolstoy mutes the wild sensual Natasha, takes away the primitive power which she displayed in her dance at her uncle's, and transforms this 'heavenly creature' into the model mother and wife of the epilogue." (Benson, 65) The erotic is, in fact, transformed into the functional essence of sexuality, which is reproduction. When we meet Natasha in the epilogue, she becomes a mother of four children. Her sexuality is tamed and redirected into the family. Just like other virtuous female characters of Tolstoy, Natasha "may imagine, but is never obliged to test, her erotic potential" outside of marriage. (Cruise, 197)

Dolly, one of the most moral characters, experiences a similar temptation. Dolly is one of the female characters, who have been completely desexualized by Tolstoy. The traces of her beauty were long ago lost somewhere in the baby making and baby raising process of being a mother. Dolly herself realizes the impact of marriage and family on her self-image. "'Altogether, ' she thought, looking back at the whole of her life during those fifteen years of wedlock, 'pregnancy, sickness, dullness of mind, indifference to everything, and above all disfigurement. "(AK,742- 743) "Dolly's thin wan face with its dust-filled wrinkles" cannot be attractive to anyone. (AK, 750) Even her sister Kitty "young, pretty Kitty- how much plainer she has become! And I when I am pregnant become hideous, I know." (AK, 743) Yet, the memories of the loss of her beauty escalate to her remembrance of the pain and suffering that motherhood and marriage had brought upon her "travail, suffering, monstrous suffering, and that final moment...then nursing, sleepless nights, and that awful pain... the pain she had endured from sore nipples."(AK, 743) It is not surprising that Dolly is jealous of Anna and the apparent frivolity of her lifestyle, her life as a mistress of a man she loves. "And they are all down on Anna! What for? Am I better than she?... In what is she to blame? She wishes to live. God has implanted that need in our souls. It is quite possible I might have done the same" (AK, 744) Dolly unleashes her sexuality in her

imagination of possible love affairs she could have had with the men she knows: “and the most passionate and impossible romances occurred to Dolly's fancy…while thinking of Anna's romance she invents an almost similar romance for herself with an imaginary, collective man who was in love with her. ” (AK, 745)

Dolly's enchantment with Anna and her lifestyle is further evident in her visit to Anna's and Vronsky's estate. “Dolly was dazzled by the elegant equipage of a kind she had never seen, by the beautiful horses and the elegant, brilliant persons about her.” (AK, 749) All of the expensive interior and exterior of the estate “gave her the impression of abundance and elegance and of that novel European luxury which she had read about in English novels, but had never yet seen in Russia in the country.” (AK, 754) In fact, the same beauty is seen in Anna, as well.

> “But now Dolly was struck by that temporary beauty which only comes to women in moments of love, and which she now found in Anna's face. Everything in that face: the definiteness of the dimples on cheeks and chin, the curve of her lips, the smile that seemed to flutter around her face, the light in her eyes, the grace and swiftness of her movements...everything about her was peculiarly attractive and seemed to know it and to be glad of it.” (AK, 749)

Just as Dolly had imagined her before the visit, Anna was happy in her situation. She was rewarded for her courage of giving up her former life and social status for love. Anna became even more beautiful and lived a luxurious lifestyle, while Dolly was living in an unhappy marriage and was getting “ thinner and worse.” (AK, 750)

However, the closer Dolly looks into the life Anna leads, the more she realizes that everything is just a facade that conceals Anna's unhappiness. Anna reveals to Dolly that the only person who received her in St. Petersburg was Betsy Tverskaya, “au fond c'est la femme la plus dépravée qui existe” (at bottom, she's the most depraved woman in existence).(AK, 779) Dolly sees that Anna is forced to be surrounded by the “sponges and castaways-- Princess Varvara and Veslovsky, and Betsy's

ex-lover Tushkevich." (Adelman, 93) Dolly realizes that Anna is simply playing hostess and she has contributed absolutely nothing to the management of the house, which to Dolly is an essential part of being a wife. In fact, Anna seems to be a guest in Vronsky's estate. The veil of luxury and happiness is finally rent by Anna's confession to Dolly: "What wife, what slave could be such a slave as I am in my position?" (AK, 779) Yet, the ultimate disenchantment for Dolly comes when she discovers Anna's relationship with her daughter and her ideas towards having children. When the women visit the nursery, Dolly observes that Anna has absolutely nothing to do with the upbringing of what is supposed to be the product of her and Vronsky's love. The baby girl "has a Russian nursemaid, an English head nurse (a disreputable-looking woman), and a wet nurse whose milk is dried up." (Adelman, 94) Yet, the most shocking information to Dolly is that Anna uses birth control. "It was the very thing she had dreamt of, but now on learning that it was possible she was horrified. She felt that it was too simple a solution of too complex a question."(AK, 780) Dolly realized that the reason why Anna prevents herself from having children is because she is trying to maintain her beauty, which is her means of captivating Vronsky. Nevertheless, "however white and shapely her bare arms may be, however beautiful her full figure and her flushed face surrounded by that black hair- he will find others still more beautiful, as my horrid, pitiable and dear husband looks for and finds them!"(AK, 781) Dolly finally understands the tragedy of Anna's situation, her loneliness and despair. Even the unhappy marriage to a cheating husband cannot ruin the meaning that family and children impart to Dolly's life. "She had pitied Anna from the bottom of her heart while they were talking; but now she could not make herself think about her. Recollections of home and of her children rose in her imagination with a new and peculiar charm. That world of her own now seemed so precious and dear that she did not wish on any account to spend another day away from it, and she decided certainly to go home on the morrow." (AK, 784)

The insight into Dolly's character helps us better understand Tolstoy's relationship to marriage and sexuality. Although Dolly unleashes her erotic power in her fantasies, she never acts upon them in

real life. In fact, she is able to clearly see and understand Anna's situation by controlling her sexuality. Dolly "may chafe under the restrictions of her life, she may fantasize about liberation from her role as wife and mother, but the dissociation of sexual intercourse from procreation represents for her too great a transgression of the natural order of things, of the way that life is supposed to be." (Cruise, 200) The choice of the most virtuous character in the novel to return to her family shows the reader the important role that women play in family. They are the glue that holds that family together. Dolly's repressed sexuality and role of a mother shows us the contrast between her and Anna, thus helping us better understand the complexity of Tolstoy's "most brilliant and complex heroine" in relation to sexuality and marriage. (Cruise, 201)

Tolstoy condemns Anna for destroying the sanctity of marriage and family by giving up her role as a wife and a mother. Anna is unable to control her vivacious and erotic energy, which ultimately becomes her undoing. No matter how Anna tries to control this energy, she cannot. At the train station, Vronsky is enchanted by this quality of Anna.

> "In that short look Vronsky had time to notice the subdued animation that enlivened her face and seemed to flutter between her bright eyes and a scarcely perceptible smile which curved her rosy lips. It was if an excess of vitality so filled her whole being that it betrayed itself again her will, now in her smile, now in the light of her eyes. She deliberately tried to extinguish that light in her eyes, but it shone despite of her in her faint smile." (AK, 76-77)

This passage shows that Anna tries consciously to control this energy, of which she is aware. Yet, her unconscious failure to do so and allowing men like Aleksei Vronsky to see it implies the untamable power and danger of this energy, as well as Anna's unconscious desire to unleash it in the form of love. It is not surprising because her marriage to Aleksei Karenin was arranged by Anna's aunt, who "intimated to him, through an acquaintance, that he had already compromised the girl, and that he was in honor bound to propose to her." (AK, 621) Thus, Anna cannot release her energy in marriage. She

tries to release it through her motherhood, but fails to do so. The entire time Anna is in Moscow trying to reconcile Stiva and Dolly, she keeps thinking about her son. Even Dolly's children adore Anna, seeing a mother-figure in her. The fact that Anna is trying to mend her brother's marriage only enhances her family virtues. However, upon Anna's return home to her actual family, she experiences "a feeling akin to disappointment." (AK,133) Her husband is pretentious, while her fails in comparison to her idea of him. Thus, Anna's failure to reach her potential as a mother or a wife, leads her to the affair with Vronsky. Yet, this affair is not just another graceful society liaison with "careless joie de vivre." (Cruise, 201) It is a crazy, passionate love affair in which two people are trying to create a family outside of marriage. Anna and Vronsky live together and have a child. Vronsky himself acknowledges that "if it were an ordinary, empty Society intrigue they would let me alone. They feel that it is something different...that this woman is dearer to me than life...He felt that the love that united him with Anna was not momentary infatuation, which would pass, as Society intrigues do, without leaving any trace in the lives of the one or the other except pleasant or disagreeable memories." (AK, 227-228) However, Anna's passion for the man and the sexual energy that she unleashes in the affair with Vronsky reach uncontrollable heights of passionate love. "The better she knew Vronsky the more she loved him. She loved him both for his own sake and for his love of her. To possess him entirely was a continual joy to her. " (AK, 568) Yet, Anna clearly understands that passion is fleeting for men. In fact, Vronsky " felt rising in his soul a desire for desires-- boredom." (AK, 569) Anna, being a wise woman, senses her lover's internal world. She understands that he looks "at her as a man might look at a faded flower he had plucked, in which it was difficult for him to trace the beauty that had made him pick and so destroy it."(AK, 441) Yet, this man means a world to Anna. That is why to keep him interested in herself, Anna has to preserve her beauty. This means foregoing having children, an ideal that Dolly and Tolstoy find terrible.

Anna's sexuality completely starts to possess her. She slowly forgets about her daughter, whom she cannot love the way she loved Karenin's son. Eventually, she even foregoes loving Serezha.

Completely abandoning her role as a mother, Anna's main and only object of her love becomes Vronsky. She "becomes solely a sexual companion." (Benson, 92) Anna wants to possess him completely. She is constantly jealous of Vronsky's pursuits of politics and art, which take away the time that he can spend with her. Anna even starts to drug herself with morphine in order to calm her jealousy. When she starts thinking clearly about her situation, she realizes Vronsky's true motives. "What did he look for in me? Not so much love as the satisfaction of his vanity...Of course there was love too; but the greater part was pride in his success. He boasted of me." (AK, 933) However, Anna still fails to overcome her passion for him and wants to be his mistress. "If I could be anything but his mistress, passionately loving nothing but his caresses- but I cannot and do not want to be anything else." (AK, 934) The self-destructive nature of sexuality that Tolstoy presents to us is clearly evident in Anna's failure to overcome her weakness for this man, which ultimately manifests itself in her inability to live either with or without him. "There is nothing to be proud of. Not to be proud but to be ashamed! He has taken from me all he could, and now he does not need me." (AK, 934) Anna even acknowledges that they have "not been able to find that pleasure from which we expected so much." (AK, 933) This refers to their failure to find happiness, emphasizing the confining power of sex, which inhibits people from achieving their full potential.

In fact, the main problem of female sexuality, in the eyes, of Leo Tolstoy is that it prevents people, both male and female, from realizing their full potential. This view is clearly expressed in the epilogue to *The Kreutzer Sonata*:

> "I am of opinion that, owing to the exaggerated and erroneous significance attributed by our society to love and to the idealized states that accompany and succeed it, the best energies of our men and women are drawn forth and exhausted during the most promising period of life; those of the men in the work of looking for, choosing, and winning the most desirable objects of love, for which purpose lying and fraud are held to be quite excusable; those of the women and girls alluring men and decoying them into liaisons or

> marriage by the most questionable means conceivable, as an instance of which the present fashion in evening dress may be cited...It is only needful to realize the fact that whatever truly deserves to be held up as a worthy object of man's striving and working, whether it be the service of humanity, of one's country, of science, of art, not to speak of the service of God, is far above and beyond the sphere of personal enjoyment. ”
>
> (TKS, 183-184)

In this excerpt, Tolstoy expresses his view that society's obsession with so-called romantic love inhibits people from pursuing their purpose in life, which might be exhibited through various activities, such as science, politics, or art. Women's sexuality is so powerful that it destructs men as well as women themselves from moral growth. Unlike many female characters of Tolstoy, Helene is the one who does not grow, according to Tolstoy's definition of personal growth. At the end of her life, she ends up where she started in the very beginning-- engaging in forbidden relationships and preying on men of class and fortune. She even tries to force her lovers to marry her, as she did with Pierre, while still being married to him. This is the destructively dangerous power of sexuality, which Tolstoy so fears. Exactly for this, Helene must die.

Another character that undergoes a similar fate is Anna Karenina herself. Unlike Helene, Anna is a very dynamic character, who develops as a human being, realizing her flaws and failures. However, her main failure is in that she cannot reach her potential of serving society via the role that a woman should assume-- a family woman. Instead, she is unfaithful to her husband, foregoes her role as a mother to Serezha, becomes nothing but a mistress to Vronsky, fails to fulfill her motherly role to Annie, and on top of this uses birth control for the selfish reasons of maintaining her beauty to preserve her relationship with Vronsky. Furthermore, her sexuality even prevents Vronsky from achieving all that he wants. He misses out on various opportunities for his military career in order to be with Anna, which even upsets his mother. Anna is unhappy because she cannot fully possess Vronsky. She realizes that the power of sexuality is fleeting and that soon he might start looking at women who are younger

and better than her. Aleksei is unhappy because he cannot realize his full social potential as he is tied by Anna, who is frowned upon in society. That is why the only way to escape the misery of their situation, which only escalates the tension between them and draws them apart is Anna's suicide, which liberates both her and Vronsky. It is not surprising that after this incident Vronsky gives up his biological daughter, the only tie to Anna that was left in his life, to Aleksei Karenin, in order to enable himself to pursue a military career.

Thus, in order to achieve success, Tolstoy's characters must transcend above their destructive sexuality. Natasha's sexual power takes away the life of her fiancé, Andrei, who cannot forgive her the moral betrayal with Anatole. However, Natasha's sincere repenting of her momentary weakness and her realization of the damage that she has done led her to forego her sexuality for principles of morality expressed through the service to others. Her place in the Rostov family earns her Tolstoy's forgiveness but at a very high price. She loses her femininity somewhere in the process of marriage and childbirth. Her sexuality is completely repressed and directed into family. Even Dolly has to forgive Stiva his numerous instances of infidelity and never-ending children, which deprived her of her former beauty. Yet, she chooses to remain in that situation, no matter how much more personal unhappiness she will have to endure in order to make her family happy. As such, she becomes a model mother for Tolstoy. Dolly follows Tolstoy's Christian view of marriage:

> "If the light of truth dawns upon a Christian when he is already married, or if, being a Christian, from weakness he enters into marital relations with the ceremonies of the church, or without them, he has no other alternative than to abide with his wife (and the wife with her husband, if it is she who is a Christian) and to aspire together with her to free themselves of their sin. This is the Christian view of marriage: and there cannot be any other for a man who honestly endeavors to shape his life in accordance with the teaching of Christ" (TKS, 187-188)

For this reason Tolstoy chooses to desexualize his female heroines in order to free them from the

destructive power of sex and instead makes them serve their family and society by becoming model mothers and wives.

Part IV: Tolstoy's Society of Women

Tolstoy's female characters are not only the reflection and results of the man who produced them, but also the product of the society in which this man was writing. In order to understand the mentality of the author himself, one needs to consider the social zeitgeist that produced and influenced his ideology. Further it is important to consider Leo Tolstoy and his writing with respect to nineteenth-century Russia, in which Tolstoy lives and sets his great novels. The socio-political spirit of the time enlightens us about Tolstoy's views on female responsibilities in family and society, social inferiority to men, and sexuality.

In her book, *Mothers and Daughters*, Barbara Engel describes various social issues pertinent to the lives of women in nineteenth century Russia. “As elsewhere in Europe, to be female meant to be daughter, wife, and almost inevitably mother, and to be subordinate to males in all but the last of these positions.” (Engel, 6) This subordination is evident also in the lives of Tolstoy's women, most of whose marriages are arranged by their family. Helene clearly does not love Pierre but she marries him because of Prince Vasiliy's will. An unheard and revolutionary change happens when Prince Bolkonsky offers his daughter a choice of marrying Anatole, -- “ He receives his orders, and he'll marry you or anybody; but you are free to choose...” (WP, 285) These arranged marriages are the main source of society liaisons. Helene Kuragina, Betsy Tverskaya, Liza Merkalova, or Sappho Stoltz were all married to old wealthy men, whom they did not love or who could satisfy them. Thus all of these women look for those traits outside of marriage, which is understandable to the modern day reader though condemned by Tolstoy.

“Authoritarianism that characterized Russia's autocratic political system also shaped family

relations, the law and custom subordinated Russian women to men more absolutely..."(Engel, 7) It is important to consider here the relationships of parents and children of the nobility. "Family law required 'unconditional obedience' of wife to husband and children to parents, and custom reinforced the legislation by granting men the right to use force to chastise recalcitrant wives and children. In this way, the family hierarchy both reflected and reproduced the social hierarchy by teaching children to submit to patriarchal authority." (Engel, 7) This patriarchal system explains Old Prince Bolkonsky's efforts to raise Princess Marya in complete obedience of his will. That is why she has to take lessons, which she does not enjoy nor understand simply because her father said so. Additionally, this system applied to the male children as well. Andrei Bolkonsky has to obey his father's will and wait for a year to marry Natasha, while Nikolay Rostov gives up his promise to marry Sonia in order to make his mother, Countess Rostova, happy.

As discussed previously, according to Tolstoy, the woman's main domain is motherhood. In order to understand this, one has to consider the biological role of a woman. "Biology shaped much of a noblewoman's existence. Society expected women to marry, and most women did, and marriage meant almost continual childbearing." (Engel, 10) The natural role that a woman is supposed to play is that of a mother. However, Tolstoy makes a clear distinction in the correspondence to his fiancé that there is a difference between giving birth and being a mother. For instance, Anna merely gave birth to her daughter Annie but partook in no way in the motherhood process. The girl's foreign governess and wet nurse raised the girl, while Anna was completely unconcerned with the child. Unlike Anna, Natasha becomes a great mother, according to Tolstoy. There is nothing more pleasurable to her than bragging about the color of her child's dirty diaper to her family.

Dolly also is one of Tolstoy's perfect wives and mothers, as she obeys the social principles of the time. Russian noblewomen's role was to help their husband to manage their estates. "Many more [women] acted for their husbands who were away in service or were involved in other pursuits; others assisted their husbands by supervising the household, servants, and dairy." (Engel, 11) That is why

Dolly is so appalled when she finds out that Anna is as much of a guest in Vronsky's house as anyone else. Yet, unlike the Western women,“ the position of Russian women was more independent, because they retained their rights to property even after marriage and, depending on social position, fulfilled a variety of responsibilities that were vital to maintaining the family's economic and social status. ” (Engel, 6-7) In the case where there were no male children, the estate was inherited by the eldest daughter. Dolly thus owns her own estate, Yergushovo, which she inherits from her parents. She even tries to manage her own estate without the help of her husband. However, she has to sacrifice this property in order to save the family from her husband's debt. “Dolly was in despair, hated her husband, despised him, pitied him, resolved to divorce him, to refuse him, but ended by agreeing to sell part of her estate.” (AK, 785) Another social change of the nineteenth century, in addition to property rights involved women's right to own serfs. “Unlike most married women in the West, noblewomen could own property-- property that usually included peasant 'souls'. Thus, like noblemen, they enjoyed the dubious benefits of serfdom...” (Engel, 11) Princess Marya inherits not only her father's estate but all the serfs that come with it.

Lev Nikolaevich masterfully portrayed all of these aspects of female life in the nineteenth century. Even sexuality as another inseparable part of his female characters needs to be explained within the social context of the time. The main religion of Tzarist Russia was Russian Orthodoxy, which played a fundamental role in the life of every single member of society, regardless of class. “Traditional Russian Orthodoxy taught that chastity was the most sublime state; it associated women with sexual attractiveness and therefore with sin.” (Engel, 10) Count Tolstoy was a devout Christian, whose role in life consisted of following Christian doctrine, which instilled these beliefs in him. Thus, the more physically attractive the female character was in Tolstoy's novels the more sinful she becomes. Tolstoy's beautiful women arouse men's desire, which ultimately can lead to the forbidden. Yet, it not just the beautiful women who were vile, according to Christianity, but all women, in general. Religious writing of the time clearly exemplifies this view: “ 'No wild beast can equal a malicious and

bitter-tongued woman.' 'It is better to suffer from fever than to be mastered by a bad wife.'"(Engel, 11) In contrast, "The cardinal virtues of the good wife, Orthodoxy taught were obedience and silence." (Engel, 11) How can a man or even a woman raised by this ideology from early childhood, think otherwise? Furthermore, the views on marital sexual relationships taught by Christian doctrine can also help explain why Anna's and Vronsky's sexual act is compared to a murder, while Kitty and Levin for a long time view their honeymoon as the most humiliating time of their life. "Orthodoxy might acknowledge sexuality within marriage as a necessary evil, but it forbade even legitimate sexuality on feast days, on fast days, and on the eve of a holiday. When a man intended to have sexual relations with his wife, he first removed his cross and turned the icons towards the wall. " (Engel, 10) From this we infer that in Christianity, even sex between a husband and a wife is seen as a dirty and unholy act, incompatible with spirituality and religion. There is absolutely no difference between these views and those conveyed by Tolstoy in his novels. Can it be then that Tolstoy and his women are just a product of his time and society?

Tolstoy's attitude towards sexuality, can also be seen as a conscious attempt to preserve the social structure of the time, as opposed to being a passive expression of Christian doctrine that was deeply embedded in him. This is why we must carefully consider the socio-political situation of Tolstoy's era. One of the main reasons why Tolstoy tries to domesticate female sexuality by framing it into the context of marriage, thus condemning sexual relationships outside marriage, is his effort to preserve the social structure of the time. There were numerous political and social changes taking place in the late18th and throughout the 19th century when Tolstoy was writing. The nobility was going bankrupt and abruptly shrinking. Jerome Blum explains that "much of the responsibility for the existence of this large number of poverty-stricken noble families lay with the nobles themselves. Their stubborn maintenance of the centuries-old custom of dividing their real and personal possessions among their heirs had the inevitable result of splintering patrimonies with each successive generation. As in earlier centuries, once wealthy families were reduced to poverty in as few as three generations."

(Blum,376) To change the splitting of the inheritance among the heir and therefore to prevent family bankruptcy, noble families had to change how inheritance was handled. “Some of the wealthiest proprietors, however, awakened to the dangers of equal inheritance, and tried to protect their patrimonies by entailing them and passing them on by primogeniture.” (Blum 379) The first born male inherits all the fortune. In the cases when a family had only heiresses, the oldest one was the one who inherited the family fortune. That is why Dolly Oblonskaya inherits all the money and the land of her family. Another cause of the decline of the nobility is “the heavy indebtedness of nobles. There were other reasons, too. One was the low salaries paid government officials and army offices. The only way many of these men could live at a scale befitting their social position was to borrow or peculate, or both.” (Blum, 385) The readers of Tolstoy see this both in *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. In the first novel, the mother of Boris, Anna Mikhailovna, borrows money from the Rostovs to provide her son with a military uniform. Also, Nikolay, after joining the service and marrying Princess Marya, on numerous occasions has to borrow money from his brother in law, Pierre, in order to sustain his family's expensive lifestyle. Aleksei Vronsky in the initial stages of the novel is buried in “seventeen thousand and few hundred rubles” of debt, which he has accumulated as a result of sustaining his military lifestyle. (AK, 373) Tolstoy acknowledges these financial struggles of the nobility, and offers his solution-- maintenance of a healthy family and heirs. The contrast of a healthy family and the crucial role of inheritance is seen through the first and second marriages of Pierre Bezukhov. Pierre is an illegitimate child of Count Bezukhov, upon whose death, Pierre inherits the fortune. Helene Kuragina, a distant relative of the diseased Count, marries Pierre for his fortune and status. Yet, she refuses to bear Pierre's children in hopes of inheriting his fortune for the Kuragin family. However, Helene's untamed sexuality and engagement in sexual relations outside her marriage led to her death presumably from venereal disease. Tolstoy declines to tell the reader the precise cause of her death. In contrast, Natasha's domesticated sexuality leads to a production of multiple heirs to the fortune of the Bezukhov, which Tolstoy so encourages.

Another structural social change that is of concern to Tolstoy was the endangerment of the nobility by the proliferating serf uprisings. “The Russian noble measured his wealth not by the amount of land he owned, as did his peers in other countries, but by the number of male serfs... that belonged to him.” (Blum, 367) However, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, “the nature of serfdom grew ever more oppressive. By the latter part of the eighteenth century, the Russian serf was scarcely distinguishable from a chattel slave.” (Blum, 422) This change was due to the withdrawal of the state from overseeing the “relationship between lords and peasant,” which “thereby allowed the serf owners to gain nearly unlimited powers over the people they owned. ”(Blum, 422) This resulted in numerous uprising and revolts against the serf-owners. As such, from 1826 to 1854 there were “712 disturbances,” while “between 1826 and 1834 there were 148 outbreaks, between 1835 and 1844, 216 , and between 1845 and 1854, 348. Subsequently, from 1855, when Alexander II became tsar to 5 March 1861, the day on which the emancipation degree was published, there were another 474 disturbances. Between 1801 and 1861, then, there were a total of 1467 peasant risings.” (Blum, 557-558) It is not surprising that the nobility distanced themselves from their lands. This happened for a variety of reasons. Some landowners simply enjoyed spending time in the company of people who belong to the same class, while others were still intimidated by various local uprisings and sought refuge in the cities, thus becoming absentee proprietors.

This relationship between serfs and nobility is evident in the episode after Prince Bolkonsky's death. Princess Marya tried to distribute her grain possessions amongst the serfs as a sign of a kind gesture in memory of her father. However, the serfs refuse to take it, as they do not trust their mistress. When, Marya urges them to abandon their land and flee from the French invaders, she receives the following response: “We're not willing to go... Let 'em plunder us!...We won't take the grain!... We don't agree to it!..” (WP, 877) The serfs refuse take the grain because they fear that Princess Marya is trying to fool them “into slavery.”(WP, 877) “Pull down your houses and go into bondage! To be sure!...I'll give you grain, says she!” (WP, 877) Indeed, this strong divide in the institution of serfdom

escalates to such a point that the serfs would much rather be killed by the invaders than escape with Princess Marya. This incident culminates in the imprisonment of Princess Marya, who is rescued eventually by young Count Rostov, who suppresses the uprising by threatening the serfs with treason. This example of social disobedience can serve as a key to Tolstoy's fears of the endangerment of nobility.

Part V. Conclusions

The female characters of Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy are a diverse group of women. They come from different cities and different ideologies. Some are great mothers; some are the Grand Dames of high society. Some are unhappy in their marriages, while for others the ultimate joy in life is to serve their husbands and children. However, all of these female characters are forced to confront actual social problems of the time-- how to deal with unhappy marriages, how to manage an estate, what to do with the rebellious serfs to name but a few. Yet, the most difficult and complex issues in the lives of Tolstoy and his women are those concerning the issues of marriage, sex, and love.

Evidently, sexuality is one of the main struggles that his female characters experience. It is not surprising, for Count Tolstoy himself struggles with the issue of sex. From his very youth, “Tolstoy was body-haunted, obsessed equally by sexual desire and the guilt of sexual satisfaction.” (Benson, 2) His struggle and guilt for enjoying the pleasures of flesh are evident in his journal entry, quoted by Janko Lavrin in his book, *Tolstoy: An Approach:* “With one point only I am feeling dissatisfied and that point is the fact that I cannot overcome my sensuality, and the less so in that it is a passion which has now become a habit with me.”(Lavrin, 59) Being a devout Christian and moralist, he views sex as a possessive power, which is difficult to overcome in order to achieve spiritual purity. Throughout his life he tried to control his sexual desires, but failed on numerous occasions. Thus in his writing, there is a strong sexual tension and struggle within both male and female characters equally. Sexuality

overpowers Stiva, Pierre, Natasha, Helene, Anna and Vronsky, making them into slaves of this desire, even if momentarily. Tolstoy himself on numerous occasions felt this sexual filth, which he sought to overcome. “Yesterday could not forbear signaling to some one in a pink dress who looked comely from a distance. I opened the back door, and she entered. Could not even see her; all seemed foul and repellent and actually hated her.” (Lavrin, 58) Like many of his characters, including Pierre and Natasha, Tolstoy loses his sight and ability to judge clearly. The object of his desire in a pink dress overwhelms him. Just like Pierre, who clearly realizes that Helene is an evil person and still fails to resist her sexual charm, Tolstoy acknowledges his views of sex, yet is not able to overcome this desire. It also seems that Tolstoy blames the woman herself for tempting him, as he hates her and wants her at the same time.

The contradictory images of women that Tolstoy creates exemplify not only his own views of women, but his own struggles with himself. The diversity and difference between such a character as Helene Kuragina and Kitty, or similarity between Helene, appreciated for her beauty but despised for her moral character, and Anna, who despite her failings is beloved by any reader suggests Tolstoy's powerful struggles with sex, morality, and beauty. These women are complex people, with even more complex lives, ultimately no less so that the man who produced them and the society whose mores so deeply colored the life of Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy.

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