

# The Mind, the Body, and the Love Triangle in *Anna Karenina*

Tatiana Kuzmic  
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Tolstoy's conflicted views on sexuality and marriage, which have long fascinated critics—a special issue of this journal was devoted to the topic in 1993—have generated interpretations ranging from misogyny to radical feminism. Helena Goscilo, for example, claims that "in sexual matters, as elsewhere, he advocated a double standard" (85) by separating the public and private spheres according to traditionally established gender lines and not only confining women to their bodies but also punishing them for this. Barbara Heldt argues that Tolstoy's development as a writer included, to quote from her title, a "path toward feminism," and that by the time he wrote *The Kreutzer Sonata* he put the blame for what he saw as corrupted relations between the sexes solely on men and the institutions they create. Amy Mandelker echoes this resistance to associating chastity with misogyny when she proposes that Tolstoy's severe sexual mores be viewed "as a feminist attempt to reclaim the body by refusing to be the body men want" (31).

Given the existence of various schools of feminism as well as Tolstoy's own ambivalent notions of sex and women, the wide range of interpretations is neither surprising nor contradicting. Goscilo's viewpoint can be situated in the liberal feminist tradition, which, because of its foundations in Enlightenment philosophy and its fruition in the suffrage movement, argues for equality of the sexes based on their equivalence. Indeed, Goscilo drives the point home most effectively when she invites us to

consider a role-reversal between Levin and Kitty, such that the woman's nuptials are preceded by more than a decade of sexual decadence while the man remains a virgin until his wedding night. Even a union between an equally experienced wedding pair is hardly imaginable; the double standard remains a fact.

Holding Tolstoy responsible for this, however, is unfair on two accounts; first because, far from being his own invention, this standard was part and parcel of the society in which he lived; and, second, because he was one of his society's harshest critics. Heldt's and Mandelker's interpretations arise out of the radical feminist tradition and the argument that sexual abstinence is the only authentic way of resisting patriarchy. As such, these interpretations fit well with Tolstoy's ethics. Pozdnyshov's remark that, despite some men's acknowledgment that women can "occupy all positions and take their part in government...their outlook on her remains the same" (*PSS* 27: 37) is, in fact, the exact same argument that radical feminists make. What is even more radical about Tolstoy is his proposal that both women *and* men resist the system and remain chaste. Although he does not explicitly make that argument until the writing of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, its seeds are evident in *Anna Karenina* through Levin's moral struggles with his sexual past, his asking for forgiveness from his wife-to-be by way of showing her his diaries, and his memory of the first few months of his married life as utterly embarrassing.

While the gamut of critical approaches has been tested on Tolstoy's evolving repudiation of heterosexual liaisons, little has been said about his depiction of same-sex bonds or the effect of the one type of relationship on another. Though it has remained largely ignored in Russian literary studies, the concept of "homosocial desire," inaugurated by Eve Sedgwick's famous study *Between Men*, has in the last twenty years been a familiar tool of literary analysis regarding Tolstoy's English influences and contemporaries.

The queer theory perspective has become an indispensable component of any current gender discussion in the North American academy and, although Tolstoy's *oeuvre* may seem an unlikely candidate for such a reading, an examination of same-sex dynamics in a particular work can also be a valuable means of illuminating its inter-gender power relations. *Anna Karenina* stands out most obviously because it is the big work that foregrounds a love triangle, which is the vehicle for Sedgwick's analysis, and because within the scope of Tolstoy's steadily declining view of sex and marriage, it was written during his middle period, at a time when he believed in and searched for wholeness. Donna Tussing Orwin has shown the centrality of this concept for Tolstoy as he struggled to reconcile nature with culture, happiness with morality, and mind with body during his composition of *Anna Karenina* while at the same time fighting against the increasingly popular belief in atoms, which he felt threatened to fragment the world and divest it of a sense of purpose. Within the limits of this paper, the concept of wholeness is important because of its traditional association with the male-female relationship and the way in which the love triangle alters it. The appearance of a third party not only disrupts the original bond, but the male rivals complement each other to such a degree that the two of them begin to form a harmonious whole, thus rendering the woman unnecessary.

In her examination of men's interaction with each other as routed through their rivalry over women, Sedgwick begins with René Girard's postulation that "in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of 'rivalry' and 'love,' differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent" (Sedgwick 21). Taking into account the uneven power distribution between the sexes in a patriarchal society, Sedgwick goes on to discuss "the bond between rivals in an erotic triangle as being even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved" (21).

When examining the love triangle, therefore, the aspect of rivalry—the *active* aspect—and not the aspect of love—which seems passive in comparison to rivalry—deserves the most attention. To acquire and maintain their hold on power, men are compelled to privilege their relationships with each other; but at the same time, to prove their (hetero)sexual prowess, they must engage in relationships with women. The women, consequently, serve merely as a channel through which more important relationships between men and men are conducted. Since they consist of male rivals who are passive toward each other, the love triangles in *Anna Karenina* merit a special analysis.

The novel as a whole, it should be noted, is not devoid of homosocial engagement. Male consolidation of power sustains agriculture and government. The world of the novel as such would not exist without such relationships: Starting with Levin and Stiva's lifelong friendship, which consists of shared meals and hunting trips, and moving on to Karenin's and even Levin's eventual participation in various committee meetings, as well as Levin's work with his peasants. It is only when it comes to women as the main focus of male-to-male competition that Tolstoy differs from his contemporaries (and some influences, such as

George Eliot and Charles Dickens) whom Sedgwick examines.

Just because the males are passive in the novel, however, does not mean that the woman caught in the middle are more active. As Mervyn Nicholson has shown, partly in response to Sedgwick's argument, women can manipulate the male power hierarchy by "backing' certain males in competition against other males" (216). Since they get to make a choice between the two men, women as objects of competition are not entirely powerless. Their power of choice, however, depends on that competition, the absence of which, in turn, removes them from the system all together. This ultimate disempowerment manifests itself through Kitty's depression and long recovery in Soden and, more dramatically, in Anna's madness and suicide.

Tolstoy's dualism, an integral part of most discussions of his works, affects the dynamic of his love triangles in a way that sheds light on the missing homosocial engagement. As Richard Gustafson has noted, Tolstoy's characters tend to be divided into two basic categories: "the man of the flesh and the man of the spirit or faith" (207). This does not apply to his male characters only, as demonstrated by Judith Armstrong, who bases her psychoanalytic reading of *Anna Karenina* on these two types when she characterizes Kitty as the idealized projection of Tolstoy's dead mother and Anna as the bearer of all that is excessively (that is, un-reproductively) sexual about a woman. Armstrong's example, however, does not absolve Tolstoy of the traditional gender-typing that accompanies mind/body dualism. On the contrary, her study as a whole depicts Anna as a symptom of the fact that "all his life the '*odor di femina*' produced an anxiety of guilt in Tolstoy" (128), who fashioned his heroine as an artistic foil to the autobiographically guilt-ridden and spiritually sensitive Levin.

As a male author who projects his fear of bodily desires on to women, Tolstoy contributes to the history of what Simone de Beau-

voir first identified as the pervasive categorizing of the man as the disembodied existential subject (in her words, *transcendent*) and the woman as limited to her body (that is, *immanent*). Tolstoy's most famous male characters, such as Pierre Bezukhov and Konstantin Levin, are, after all, best remembered for their epic, existential quests. Natasha and Kitty, on the other hand, as Edwina Cruise deftly encapsulates "may puff pillows to ease physical pain and keep vigil over the dying, but these good women are not bogged down by abstract questions of life and death" (196). Beauvoir's take on mind/body dualism makes a peculiar fit with Sedgwick's theory when one discovers the consistent pairing of a transcendent with an immanent rival in *Anna Karenina*. Such pairing corresponds to Tolstoy's distaste for the (non-productive) body, since that is the salient characteristic of the male who threatens the marital union while the cuckolded husband and slighted suitor inhabit more cerebral roles. More importantly, the coupling of these two types as rivals creates the opposite complementarity traditionally expected in male/female pairs and thus eliminates the role of the woman in the love triangle as designated by Sedgwick. Because the male rivals dwell in opposite spheres of existence on the body-mind continuum, together they form one harmonious human and engage in no struggle on behalf of the woman. The woman, in consequence, finds herself on the sidelines instead of being the link between the two rivals. She finds herself in a position of perpetual anticipation of action and continuing frustration at its absence.

The first male rivalry to occur, the one between Levin and Vronsky over Kitty, sets up the polarized mind-body pairing that reappears in the greater and smaller rivalries throughout the novel. Levin is first introduced into the plot through the eyes of Oblonsky as having the habit of visiting him in Moscow "most of the time with a totally new, unexpected view about things" (PSS 18: 20). The narrator later characterizes him as being oc-

cupied "with those questions concerning the meaning to himself of life and death" (*PSS* 18: 27). Levin's existential crisis spans the entire novel while his discovery of meaning *is* the end of the novel.

By contrast, the first chapter devoted entirely to Vronsky's description (Part I, Chapter 16) emphasizes his bodily indulgences starting with his genealogy: "His mother in her youth had been a brilliant Society woman, having had during her married life, and especially afterwards, many love affairs, known to the whole world" (*PSS* 18: 61). Through the description of his mother, Vronsky is linked to the feminine while the account of his mother's behavior, which is meant to indicate something about his own, emphasizes his partaking of the pleasures of the flesh. Linking his physicality to a flaw in his character, the chapter goes on to inform us that he is "decoying a young lady with no intention of marriage" (*PSS* 18: 61). The last chapter of Part I mentions Vronsky's "compact row of strong teeth" (*PSS* 18: 122), a physical detail that is thenceforth frequently associated with him—along with his love of beefsteak—all the way to the end of his narrative when, after Anna's death, he prepares to leave for war and experiences an "incessant gnawing pain in his tooth" (*PSS* 19: 361).

Tolstoy's association of food with sex in the portrayal of his more bodily characters has been discussed by Ronald LeBlanc in his study under the self-explanatory title "Unpalatable Pleasures: Tolstoy, Food, and Sex." As his main example from *Anna Karenina*, LeBlanc uses Stiva Oblonsky, whose appetite for women other than his wife is the topic of the opening scene of the novel and who enjoys scrumptious food such as oysters, roast beef, and stewed fruit in the famous restaurant scene while Levin expresses a preference for good old Russian porridge and cabbage soup (*PSS* 18: 38). The analogy between gastronomical and sexual appetites is made explicit when their discussion turns to Stiva's tragic family life: Levin cannot comprehend why a person would steal a bun if he has already eaten his fill, but

Oblonsky claims that he still cannot resist the smell of the bun (*PSS* 18: 44-45). Not unlike Oblonsky, Vronsky has an affair with a married woman and enjoys beefsteak with his fine strong teeth.

When the ideologically opposed Levin and Vronsky find themselves in love with the same girl, they refuse to compete with one another for her attention. Vronsky declines homosocial gallivanting in general when, after spending an enjoyable evening at Kitty's house, he considers stopping at the Club, where Oblonsky is likely to be, but decides that he is "sick of it" (*PSS* 18: 62) and goes home. He dismisses Levin in his conversation with Oblonsky at the train station, just as he is about to meet Anna for the first time: "I don't know how it is that all Muscovites...are so abrupt" (*PSS* 18: 64). He not only refuses to name his competition—despite Oblonsky's taunting: "I say, did you make the acquaintance of my friend Levin last night?...He is a splendid fellow...Don't you think so?" (*PSS* 18: 64)—but refuses to even speak of him as an individual, making his reference to all Muscovites. His comment about their being abrupt refers to Levin's previous snubbing of him and leaving the Shcherbatsky party early—in short, to his refusal to engage in rivalry.

Indeed, Levin's attitude toward Vronsky was one of immediate surrender:

There are people who, when meeting a lucky rival in anything, are ready at once to shut their eyes to everything good in him and see in him only the bad, there are people who, on the contrary, more than anything desire to find in that lucky rival the qualities which have enabled him to succeed, and with aching hearts seek only the good in him. Levin belonged to such people. But it was not difficult for him to see what was good and attractive in Vronsky. It struck him immediately. Vronsky was a dark-haired, sturdily-built man of medium height, with a good-natured, handsome, exceedingly quiet and firm face. In his face

and figure—from his black closely-cropped hair and freshly shaven chin to his wide, brand-new uniform—everything was simple and at the same time elegant. (*PSS* 18: 55)

It is counterintuitive, yet accurate within the love-triangle structure, that to “see only the bad” in one’s opponent engenders greater competition than Levin’s inclination to “seek only the good.” The exaggerated adoration of the “lucky rival” results in self-effacement and discouragement; seeing only the bad provides incentive for action and creates that relationship which, under the guise of hate and rivalry, solidifies the all-important bond between men. This accounts for why, even though the detailed physical description of near-perfection from the perspective of one rival regarding the looks of the other seems to be teeming with homosocial potential, Levin refuses it.

While the competing males of the English novels examined by Sedgwick engage in types of close physical contact, such as wrestling, that are fraught with sexual tension and reinforce Sedgwick’s argument, Levin tries his hardest to avoid Vronsky. When Adam Bede from George Eliot’s novel of the same title (a work Tolstoy read and admired before he wrote *Anna Karenina*) discovers another man kissing the object of his affection, he takes him to task immediately:

“I swear I won’t go away without fighting you. Do you want provoking any more? I tell you you’re a coward and a scoundrel, and I despise you.”

The colour had all rushed back to Arthur’s face: in a moment his white right hand was clenched, and dealt a blow like lightning, which sent Adam staggering backward. His blood was as thoroughly up as Adam’s now, and the two men, forgetting the emotions that had gone before, fought with the instinctive fierceness of panthers in the deepening twilight darkened by the trees. (302)

The similarity between Eliot’s rivals and Tolstoy’s has prompted some speculation as to possible influence of one work on another. W. Gareth Jones, for example, has pointed out that Arthur and Vronsky are “both young, spoilt” (478) men who bring the heroine of the novel to ruin; both are, in Tolstoy’s words, “decoying a young lady, without intention of marriage.” Levin also bears similarities to Adam, the morally upright and hard-working carpenter. Unlike Adam, however, he entertains no hateful, least of all violent, thoughts about Vronsky. He does not even wish to speak with his competition, but has to be dragged into conversation by the irksome Countess Nordston and takes the first opportunity to sneak out. His bashfulness is a reflection of his author, whose literary profiles mirror his growing personal inclination toward abstinence, both from pursuing a woman and from competing with other men over her.

While it may be tempting at this point to launch a greater inquiry into national differences between English and Russian literary heroes, the small space of an article as well as Tolstoy’s uniqueness within his own literary tradition preclude such a large-scale comparison. The male rivals depicted by other Russian masters such as Pushkin, Lermontov, and Dostoevsky have more in common with their Western European counterparts than with Tolstoy’s characters, as evidenced by Girard’s (on whose theoretical foundations Sedgwick builds her argument) use of Dostoevsky and Proust as his main examples.

When Levin retreats into the country, where he mows the fields with his peasants, his transcendence remains unchallenged because, as is repeatedly emphasized, the physical labor serves his higher mental faculties. “I need physical exercise; without it my character gets quite spoilt,” (*PSS* 18: 262) he thinks before starting out for the fields, where his work becomes an out-of-bodily experience in which “the scythe seemed to mow of itself” (*PSS* 18: 267) and he feels “as if some external force were urging him on” (*PSS* 18: 270). His

ultimate union with Kitty occurs only after much encouragement from the Oblonskys, but his behavior toward other aristocratic males, as will be shown next, remains as resistant as before, even to the point of embarrassing his family.

After he marries Kitty and a smaller rival appears as a visitor in their home, Levin refuses to engage in competition over his own wife. Vasenka Veslovsky puts him on guard immediately as he sits next to Kitty, chats amiably with her, and makes her blush. Levin not only remains aloof "at the other end of the table" (*PSS* 19: 144), but in a later scene, in order to have a private conversation about this, he and Kitty "look like people running away from some calamity" (*PSS* 19: 174). This is a comical picture considering the fact that they are running away from their own house, but also a telling one in regards to the peculiar construction of the love triangle in which a man runs away with his wife from his rival, who is, as Oblonsky explains later, only acting naturally.

The mind-body dichotomy between the rivals is highlighted when Levin attempts to take a liking to Veslovsky in spite of his physical and feminine features—accentuated by his "long nails" and, in a different scene, a peasant's mistaking of him for "a woman in breeches" (*PSS* 19: 187)—and because of his talents associated with the mind, such as "his good education, his splendid accent in French and English" (*PSS* 19: 151). His attempt fails, though, and as tensions mount Levin finally does act, but contrary to everybody's expectations and standards of decency. Dolly informs him of how he ought to behave in the situation, that "a Society husband should be merely flattered" (*PSS* 19: 176) by other men's attentions toward his wife. Her advice corresponds to the power structure of Sedgwick's love triangle: One man flatters another by wooing his woman and the other man accepts this flattery. The woman is merely the symbolic object of exchange between two men demonstrating and solidifying their status in Society. At Levin's idea of turning the visitor out, Dolly

pleads with him in horror: "What do you mean? Have you gone mad?" (*PSS* 19: 176). To refuse the compliments of a worthy, polished, and educated rival is indeed, as Dolly assesses, madness. Oblonsky repeatedly calls Levin absurd for his hostile behavior, and the old Princess is so embarrassed that she cannot forgive him. Levin himself feels "in the highest degree ridiculous," "guilty and disgraced" (*PSS* 19: 178), his own as well as everybody else's reaction confirming that he has broken a serious rule of conduct as far as high Society is concerned. Readers may recognize this episode from the author's own life; one of his visitors, Pisarev, sat too close to his wife at tea time and Lev Nikolaevich himself made sure Pisarev's horses were harnessed in order to hasten his departure.

When it comes to the central triangle of *Anna Karenina*, the mind-body polarity between the two male rivals grows even greater. Once he becomes involved with Anna, Vronsky's physicality is stressed to the point where even purely mental activities, such as settling one's financial affairs, are described as bodily pampering. In order to avoid falling into debt, Vronsky has the habit of "secluding himself and clearing up all his affairs" (*PSS* 18: 319) several times a year. Though he is depicted as unwashed, with only the papers of financial importance both physically and mentally in front of him, when his friend Petritsky comes to see if he is finished with his business, he comments: "After it, you always look as if you had just come out of a bath" (*PSS* 18: 324). The physically indulgent elements are only increased by the twice-mentioned, and in close proximity to each other (at the end of chapter XX and again at beginning of chapter XXI, part III), twirling of his mustache, first "slowly," then "so carefully" (*PSS* 18: 324).

His rival Karenin, in contrast, is depicted as so immersed in his official duties that he seems almost fleshless. His mental faculties are stressed by emphasizing the largeness of their means of conveyance, such as his "gigantic writing table" (*PSS* 18: 299) and his "massive

ivory paper-knife" (*PSS* 18: 300). This description, along with a comment on "the pleasure that the use of his well-arranged writing appliances always caused him" (*PSS* 18: 300), belongs to the scene in which Karenin writes a letter to his unfaithful wife, the writing act itself being more cerebral or transcendent than that of speaking. The pain that his wife is causing him also presents itself as purely mental, since in his revengeful thoughts he wishes her to suffer "for impairing his peace of mind and honor" (*PSS* 18: 297-98) and not for any sort of intimate betrayal. His eventual fanatical turn to religion as a reaction to losing his wife puts him on the opposite side of the transcendent-immanent spectrum from Vronsky, who deals with his loss of Anna to suicide by experiencing toothache and going off to war.

Describing Vronsky's mental activities Tolstoy invokes physical similes; he does the exact opposite with Karenin when he depicts his coping with Anna's affair: "As a child that has been hurt skips about, making its muscles move in order to dull its pain, so Karenin needed mental movement to dull those thoughts about his wife...And as it is natural for the child to skip about, so it was natural for him to speak cleverly and well" (*PSS* 18: 219). This simile of contrasts evokes an image of Karenin as having muscle or skipping about, the ridiculousness of which further disassociates the mind from the body and Karenin from embodied existence. The few times that Karenin's physical features are described, they are literally devoid of flesh, such as his "easily-chilled and bony legs" (*PSS* 18: 297) and his incessant joint-cracking, in itself a hint at bonyness. His face is described as "bloodless" and "worn" or "thin" (бескровное, осунувшееся лицо) and his eyes as "motionless" and "dull" (неподвижные, тусклые глаза) (*PSS* 18: 375), invoking more of an image of a dead than a living man. Even his voice is "thin" (тонкий), in both his conversation at a Committee meeting (*PSS* 18: 335) and his confrontation with Anna (*PSS* 18: 337). Finally, when Anna speaks of him to Vronsky, she repeatedly describes

him as "not a man, but a machine" and a "military machine" (*PSS* 18: 199, 379).

The only trait that Anna's two rivals share is their absolute refusal (except when, in a dramatic death-bed moment, forced by Anna) to interact with and even believe in each other. It is only when Vronsky first encounters Karenin at the train station, having followed Anna from Moscow back to Petersburg, that he realizes (even though he knew from the beginning that Anna was married) "that the husband was connected with her" (*PSS* 18: 112). The issue of actual belief in his existence arises twice, with the verb "to believe" mentioned three times during that scene; first in the information that Vronsky "knew she had a husband, but had not believed in his existence, and only fully believed in him when he saw him" (*PSS* 18: 112) and then, shortly after, in the reaffirmation that "he believed in him" (*PSS* 18: 112). The point is particularly ironic when one considers that it is the unphysical Karenin whose existence is in doubt, yet at the same time fitting since it is the physical Vronsky who, like a Doubting Thomas of sorts, has to see the man in the flesh—"his head and shoulders...his slightly rounded back" (*PSS* 18: 112)—to be completely convinced of him.

Besides having to be physically reminded of his rival's existence, Vronsky refuses more important homosocial engagements on account of Anna, some that damage his already fledgling career. When his more successful old school friend Sepurkhovskoy tells him that "Russia is in need of people" (*PSS* 18: 327), he replies: "I lack the wish for power. I had it once, but it is gone" (*PSS* 18: 328). His subsequent actions support this change: "To refuse the flattering and dangerous post in Tashkent would have seemed disgraceful and impossible according to Vronsky's former views. But now without a moment's hesitation he did refuse it and, observing that his superiors frowned upon his action, at once resigned his commission" (*PSS* 18: 458). Instead, Vronsky and Anna travel together to Italy.

Vronsky's behavior makes him, at best and from the most sentimental point of view, the classic fool in love. When considered from the perspective of Sedgwick's theory, however, his behavior involves renouncing the more active and ultimately empowering relationship—that with other men, ranging from Karenin to his military comrades—for the more passive one, that with his woman. Using Gayle Rubin's popular concept of "traffic in women," Sedgwick shows how women's status in patriarchal societies equals their "exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men" (25-26). This creates what Sedgwick calls a "coercive double bind" (89) for men, where they must prove their masculinity by balancing sufficient engagement in the male public sphere with demonstrating their sexual attraction to women. Vronsky breaks this bind when he neglects and refuses relationships with men. His mother shows herself to be completely in tune with society demands since she approves of his affair at first but becomes displeased once she finds out that his career is suffering on account of it. She makes a clear distinction between a relationship that empowers a man and one which weakens him when she assesses that "this affair was not one of those brilliant, graceful Society liaisons which she would approve of, but some Werther-like, desperate passion, from all she heard of it, which might lead him into foolishness" (*PSS* 18: 184). Though Vronsky's commitment to Anna endows her with more value than "exchangeable" and "symbolic property," the peculiar construction of the triangle and Anna's reaction to it, which will be considered next, preclude an unambiguously feminist reading of the relationship.

Karenin's biggest concern, as already indicated above, is his position in society, his honor and peace of mind. When, after Vronsky's accident at the horse races, it becomes obvious that he and Anna are lovers, Karenin appears as if wishing, and by the end of the confrontation even begging, to be deceived. Much like

Vronsky during his courting of Kitty, in his conversation with Oblonsky at the train station, Karenin refuses to name his rival when he informs Anna that "the despair you were unable to conceal when one of the riders fell" (*PSS* 18: 223) was "improper" (неприлично). As the possibility of the entire truth being revealed arises, he cowers even more:

Now that a complete disclosure was impending, he wished for nothing so much as that she would, as before, answer him mockingly that his suspicions were ridiculous and groundless. What he knew was so terrible that he was now prepared to believe anything. (*PSS* 18: 224)

When he reads in Anna's facial expression that she no longer "promises deception," he quickly offers her a last chance to save him from facing the truth: "Perhaps I am mistaken...In that case I beg your pardon" (*PSS* 18: 224). Anna refuses this offer and, as if to make sure he understands her, tells him twice that he is not mistaken—"No, you were not mistaken," she said slowly, looking despairingly into his cold face. 'You are not mistaken'" (*PSS* 18: 224)—before she divulges more specific information regarding her relationship with Vronsky.

Anna's determination to make her husband face the truth is only the smallest example of her frustration at being stuck between two passive men and of her vain attempts to goad them into action. "If he were to kill me, if he were to kill Vronsky, I would respect him," she thinks at the races as she watches her husband join the crowd and exchange polite greetings, "But no, lies and propriety are all he requires" (*PSS* 18: 219). As her relationship with Vronsky progresses, she becomes more and more hysterical, doubting his love and continually challenging him to prove it until finally death "as the sole means of reviving love for herself in his heart, of punishing him and gaining victory in that fight, which an evil spirit in her heart was waging against him, presented itself clearly and vividly to her" (*PSS* 19: 331).

The “fight” (борьба) ought to be taking place between two men, but since they assume a passive role toward each other, Anna loses respect for her husband and doubts the commitment of her lover. Living, by this point, with Vronsky, she assumes the role of the rival and enters into the “fight” on her own, “the evil spirit in her heart” taking on the role that Karenin ought to be playing. Her attempts to goad men into action transfer onto those beyond her two rivals. The description of her attempt to “awaken love in Levin” is followed by a parenthetical explanation that at that time she always did so “to all the young men she met” (*PSS* 19: 281). Anna, unlike many of the other society women of the novel, is not portrayed as a ubiquitous flirt, and the designation of “at that time” points to the cause of her behavior in her specific situation with Vronsky and Karenin.

From the very beginning of the affair, before any sort of confrontation takes place—and perhaps precisely because of the lack of confrontation—Anna keeps having a disturbing, yet telling, dream: “She dreamt that both at once were her husbands, that both lavished their caresses on her...And she was surprised that formerly this seemed impossible and laughingly explained to them how much simpler this was, and that they were both now contented and happy” (*PSS* 18: 159). Though she wakes up “filled with horror” (*PSS* 18: 159), her dream accomplishes that which is denied her in reality, the classic male–female–male triangle in which, as Sedgwick elaborates, the relationship between the two men is as important, if not more so, than either of their relationships with the woman. That is, the two males must both be in pursuit of the woman—“lavish[ing] their caresses on her”—in order to maintain their relationship with each other and, in that state, be “contented and happy.”

Since this does not occur in her waking life, Anna attempts to force it, most notably in one, seemingly accidental, and another, more melodramatic, situation. First she arranges to meet Vronsky in her and Karenin’s own house and,

due to Vronsky’s being late, the two bump into each other. Anna’s invitation indicates a rebellion against her husband’s rules of “propriety,” since one of the things he asks of her is “not to meet that person here” (*PSS* 18: 338). She teases Vronsky that the awkward run-in is his punishment for being late, but within this malfunctioning love triangle, her blunder can also be seen as a punishment to both of the men for their failure to take action. Neither responds as Karenin, looking as lifeless as ever—this is the passage where his face is described as “bloodless” and “worn,” his eyes as “expressionless” and “dull”—simply leaves the house as he intended. His revenge consists precisely of not acting, first by insisting that he and Anna continue to live as if nothing had occurred and later by refusing to grant her a divorce. After disclosing her affair Anna expects to be kicked out of the house, but when she receives the message from Karenin that their life “must go on as heretofore” (*PSS* 18: 299), she realizes that “a more dreadful misfortune had befallen her than she had expected” (*PSS* 18: 308), and she weeps “without restraint, like a punished child” (*PSS* 18: 310).

Anna’s greatest attempt at forcing rivalry occurs under the guise of forcing reconciliation during her delirious post-partum state when she thinks she is dying. Before making the two men face each other, however, she explains herself to Karenin as split in two: “I am still the same...But there is another in me and I am afraid of her—she fell in love with that one, and I wanted to hate you, but could not forget her who was before. That one is not I” (*PSS* 18: 434). This double condition of hers is already hinted at much earlier, when the affair is first disclosed. In the midst of her frustration at Karenin’s passive-aggressive behavior, she becomes aware and “afraid” of a new “mental condition” in which she feels “as if everything was being doubled in her soul, just as objects appear doubled to weary eyes” (*PSS* 18: 304-05). Since the lack of rivalry between the two men leaves Anna more powerless than she would have been in the center of it, she splits

herself in two, creating one woman for each man and thus making the already non-existent rivalry unnecessary.

After explaining her duality to her husband, she attempts for the last time to unite him with his rival. Under the pretext of wanting Karenin to forgive Vronsky, she asks for both of them to come to her bed—a request which, in such a dramatic moment they cannot refuse—in order to look at each other and hold hands (*PSS* 18: 435). The picture of the two rivals holding hands above her bed recalls her disturbing dream, in which “both at once were her husbands, and lavished their caresses on her” (*PSS* 18: 159). The problem in the live re-enactment of her dream, however, is that she is the only one who is “contented and happy” in that situation, the only one who thinks, as she declares upon their compliance with her wishes, that “now it is splendid” (*PSS* 18: 435). Though the urgency of the situation forces them to briefly interact, the two men resume their previous coldness toward each other once Anna gets well. Karenin’s adoption of Anna and Vronsky’s baby, however, emphasizes the harmonious male/female whole created by the transcendent/immanent pairing of the male rivals. Because Karenin takes her into his house, the baby carries his instead of her biological father’s last name, creating thus a situation in which it appears as if the two males, instead of a male and a female, had the baby. Anna is, again, excluded from performing a role in this picture and, subsequently, shows no affection for her daughter. The lack of any real change in her situation precipitates her mental disturbances, which manifest themselves in her attacks on Vronsky, morphine consumption, and eventual suicide.

The situation of women doubly disadvantaged through their men’s refusal to engage with each other is articulated by the character Dolly. In attempting to convince Levin to court Kitty one more time, she first describes women’s inferior position in comparison to men’s freedom to choose among them: “She is expected to choose for herself, yet she cannot

choose and only answers ‘Yes’ and ‘No’” (*PSS* 18: 285). This is the fraction of power accorded to women in the classic love triangle. Dolly’s further clarification indicates another disadvantage that, on the surface, seems to be one of timing: “At the time when you proposed to Kitty she was just in that state when she could not give you an answer. She was undecided—undecided between you and Vronsky. She saw him every day, you she had not seen for a long time” (*PSS* 18: 285). The very simple excuse that Dolly is offering for Kitty is that she wasn’t allowed to get to know Levin as a suitor (she had known him, in a different capacity, since childhood). However, by emphasizing the discrepancy in the rivals’ time spent with their beloved, she is pointing out an inequality created by Levin’s withdrawal and thus implying that his refusal to engage in the rivalry determined Kitty’s initial choice. In having that conversation with him, she is also appropriating power and acting out the role that ought to be played by another man. Since Levin reacts poorly to competition, Dolly, probably the least likely candidate for a feminist in this text, takes it upon herself to help her sister regain the power that was rightfully hers in a patriarchally structured society, that of making a successful marriage match.

A far more condemning discussion of spousal choice recurs in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, where Pozdnyshev attributes the corrupt relationship between the sexes to the inequality of men and women in this department. Because of their inability to choose openly, as men can, women use their sensuality—supported by the textile industry, jewelry makers, hair dressers, etc.—“to attract as many men as possible, as many bachelors as possible, so as to have the possibility of choosing” (*PSS* 27: 38). Within Sedgwick’s theoretical model and as articulated by Nicholson, this means that women’s sensuality serves them in engendering the rivalry that provides them with a greater choice from among the competing males.

The little that has been said on same-sex relationships in Tolstoy's *oeuvre* has been focused on the male rivalry in this late work, which has—rather naively, I will argue—been used to “out” its main character instead of pointing out the porous boundaries of sex and gender. Already in the 1930s Immanuel Velikovsky wrote an article “Tolstoy’s *Kreutzer Sonata* and Unconscious Homosexuality” in which, as indicated by the title, he argues that Pozdnyshev’s disgust with his sexual relations with his wife, his jealousy, and his eventual murder of her are signs of his latent homosexuality. Pozdnyshev’s initial amicable behavior toward the violinist and invitations to play duets with his wife are seen as further proof of his sexual desire for the new guest. Daniel Rancour-Laferriere’s more recent and well known study *Tolstoy on the Couch* includes a section entitled “The Homosexual Element,” which addresses Velikovsky’s argument, but ultimately identifies Pozdnyshev as bisexual.

I propose that the missing element from both of *The Kreutzer Sonata* readings above is precisely *homosociality*. It begins, for Pozdnyshev, with his first sexual experience, which is not brought about by “the natural temptation of a particular woman’s charms” (*PSS* 27: 19), but by his brother and his brother’s friend, who take him to a brothel. Velikovsky’s postulation that “a visit to a prostitute may conceal the unconscious wish of entering in this way into symbolic contact with her other clients” (18) alludes to the all-important consolidation of male power that takes place as they, in Rubin’s terms, “exchange” a woman among themselves. However, Velikovsky misinterprets “a joint visit to a prostitute [as] one of the masks of *homosexuality*” (emphasis mine). Beginning with that first experience and continuing throughout his life, in his courtship, marriage, and rivalry with Trukhachevsky, Pozdnyshev merely follows society’s dictates, which he comes to despise so vehemently after murdering his wife. Just as in Levin’s case, for whom “it was not difficult [...] to see what was good and attractive in Vronsky” (*PSS* 18: 55); so for

Pozdnyshev, the violinist’s charms are immediately obvious: “Moist almond-shaped eyes, red smiling lips, a small waxed mustache, hair done in the latest fashion, and an insipidly pretty face, that which women call ‘not bad looking,’ a weak constitution, though not deformed, with a specially developed posterior, like a woman’s, or such as Hottentots are said to have” (*PSS* 27: 49). This passage, and especially the last sentence, is used by both Velikovsky and Rancour-Laferriere as an indication of Pozdnyshev’s sexual attraction to Trukhachevsky, although the comparison to a woman belies homosexual interest and is much more likely meant as an insult. For, unlike Levin, who reevaluates societal norms *before* his marriage and, once married, tolerates no competition, Pozdnyshev is too vain to admit jealousy and precisely in order to prevent anybody from accusing him of it, feigns a friendly attitude toward his rival. Rancour-Laferriere’s conclusion that “because he is just as fascinated with his wife’s sexual attributes...Pozdnyshev is bisexual” (121) is too simplistic (as is his parenthetical remark in an article for the *Tolstoy Studies Journal* that the meeting of the two Alexeis at the Karenin’s reveals a buried “male homosexual fantasy” (41)).

The fascination with Trukhachevsky occurs on account of Pozdnyshev’s conjecture regarding the violinist’s effect on his wife, as indicated by the above quoted comment that he was “what women call ‘not bad looking’” and another one soon after regarding the rival’s clothing items “that by their noticeable novelty always affect women” (*PSS* 27: 49). The love triangle Pozdnyshev himself creates by his generous treatment of the violinist is an example of the previously elaborated upon “coercive double bind” that requires the delicate balancing of men’s mutual relationships with those they maintain with women. Although Trukhachevsky is given the one female attribute cited above, he and Pozdnyshev do not create the transcendent-immanent male duo that exists between male rivals of *Anna*

*Karenina*. On the contrary, both the husband and the lover in *The Kreutzer Sonata* are described as animalistic in their pursuit of physical pleasure.

Written more than a decade after the completion of *Anna Karenina*, *The Kreutzer Sonata* reflects just how much Tolstoy's view of human relations had deteriorated. The story contains no redeeming characters, like Levin, or even merely "proper" ones, like Karenin. If in *Anna Karenina* adulterous sex is likened to murder—the famous scene of Anna and Vronsky's first physical union—in *The Kreutzer Sonata* church-sanctioned conjugal relations are assigned the same criminal status. As Pozdnyshev informs his interlocutor, "They asked me at the trial with what and how I killed my wife. Fools! They thought I killed her then, with a knife, on the fifth of October. I did not kill her then, but much earlier" (*PSS* 27: 34).

The literal murder is meant, of course, to accentuate the metaphorical murder that sex represents, but it is significant for the purposes of this paper that Pozdnyshev goes after his wife instead of his rival. The latter seems much more feasible, and it is what Trukhachevsky expects, since he is the one who jumps up when Pozdnyshev surprises the two of them in the drawing room, while the wife remains seated even though she had already been threatened by murder several times during her husband's previous angry outbursts. The phallic imagery of two guns pointed toward each other or of one's knife penetrating another's flesh warrant the interpretation of symbolic pinnacles of homosocial competition, but Pozdnyshev's knife ends up in his wife's chest, a deliberate act he plans out carefully before executing it. By contrast, the only phallic symbolism associated with Karenin is his "massive ivory *paper*-knife" (the word "paper" is not used in the original Russian, but is implied since the knife belongs to his "writing appliances") and is, therefore, connected to his official duties.

Engaging the competition instead of its object has been customary in world classics since their beginning, as in the case of Helen of Troy, "the face that launched a thousand ships," as well as in the inaugural work of modern Russian literature, *Eugene Onegin*. In *War and Peace*, Pierre Bezukhov participates in a duel on behalf of his coquettish Hélène. One can detect a steady progression over the course of Tolstoy's writing career in his depiction of male rivals, who become increasingly more passive toward each other: Bezukhov duels Dolokhov, Karenin avoids Vronsky, and Pozdnyshev kills his wife instead of his rival. Furthermore, in the play *The Living Corpse*, written about a decade after *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Fedja Protasov first feigns suicide in order to free his wife so she can marry her childhood sweetheart and later, when the truth is found out and she is charged with bigamy, really kills himself. This progression mirrors the increasing suspicion of sexual relationships by the author whose first diary entry was recorded, at age eighteen, in a clinic for venereal disease (*PSS* 46: 3), who during his middle ages believed in happy as much as in unhappy families, only to label wives long-term prostitutes in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, and who died at Astapovo railway station while fleeing from his wife and family.

While in *The Kreutzer Sonata* Tolstoy explicitly puts the blame on men for even the existence of sexual relationships (women, Pozdnyshev claims, find the act unnatural and react hysterically to it), his judgment in *Anna Karenina* is more subtle and more artistically sophisticated. In his attempt to elevate women out of sexual objectification, Tolstoy shifts their immanent attributes onto the male home-wreckers. Anna is, to be sure, hardly lacking in sensuality, but she also reveals more transcendence than Vronsky. This is especially clear on her last trip to the train station, when her existential musings on human desires and her metaphor of dirty ice cream come close to reaching the depths of Levin's ruminations. As already demonstrated, though, their removal

from the system of exchange does not liberate women from their subservient role in it, but rather denies them the speck of power they did hold as manipulators of competing men.

Here Tolstoy's feminism ultimately fails: Although he correctly and insightfully identifies societal arrangements and men, as the arbitrators of these arrangements, as responsible for the condition of women, in advocating withdrawal from this corrupt system as the only means of salvation he neglects the importance of the power discrepancy between the sexes. While men enjoy the freedom to join or withdraw from society as they please, women are tied to the movements of their men, whether they be fathers, husbands, or lovers. He depicts the discrepancy—Levin retreats with his family into the country, the only place where he could have the epiphany that concludes the novel, while Anna is *forced* out of society, as the commotion over her appearance at the opera reminds her—but he offers no solution except the woman's death. Mandelker points out how, compared to the adulteress from *Adam Bede*, Anna's position is still advantageous as she gets to live with her lover (while Arthur abandons the pregnant Hetty) and chooses to die (whereas Hetty is sentenced to be hanged, though reprieved). Armstrong also reads Anna's suicide in the feminist vein, singling it out as heroic compared to both Vronsky's and Levin's botched attempts (124). However, within the framework of the triangular power play, whether heroic or vengeful or desperate, this suicide turns out to be only the literal enactment of Anna's already functionless role in the existent power structure. Having learned, since their earliest entrance into life and society, to look for power to those who are "more heavily determinant of actions and choices" (Sedgwick 21), that is to say men, the women lose the footing their assimilation to this structure has given them and experience the passivity of their men as their own diminution of power.

The real-life situation in the Tolstoy household, sadly, proves the same point: Far from

finding her husband's increasingly stringent sexual mores liberating, Sof'ya Andreyevna suffered on account of them as the tension in their household mounted during their last decades together and ended in separation. The system as a whole may be the definitive culprit, but the woman is no better off for being elevated above it.

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