

Criticism

LEVIN VISITS ANNA: THE ICONOLOGY OF HARLOTRY

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Reader response to Anna Karenina has ranged widely over the years, with some inclined to condemn Tolstoy's heroine categorically as a manipulating female and an immoral adulteress, while others have preferred to see her as a pathetic victim of her society's hypocritical moral code and a noble sacrifice to her own passionate capacity for love.¹ Whatever our final judgment of her may turn out to be, there can be little argument that Anna Karenina has indeed fallen to a pitifully low moral, spiritual and emotional state by the time she decides to commit suicide near the end of Tolstoy's novel. Addicted to narcotics, psychologically unstable, and pathologically jealous, she has by now become insanely suspicious of her lover Vronsky's every movement. And as her last carriage ride through Moscow makes abundantly clear, Anna is now bitterly cynical, if not downright nihilistic, about the human condition in general. By smoking cigarettes, taking drugs, practicing birth control and refusing to breast-feed her child, she hardly qualifies, in any event, as the Tolstoyan epitome of feminine virtue or moral goodness.

The author endows his heroine with these unflattering features and frames her with such negative images mainly to underscore for us the terrible depths to which this "fallen woman" has now plunged. Formerly a

¹One of the strongest condemnations of Anna's adultery has come from M. S. Gromeka, a contemporary of Tolstoy, who ardently defended the sanctity of matrimony and showed little sympathy for Anna's plight, maintaining that social and moral laws were created to be abided by and that therefore it was impossible to destroy a family (or to ignore public opinion) without creating unhappiness. See "Poslednie proizvedeniia gr. L. N. Tolstogo," Russkaia mysl, kn. 2 (1883), 265. Most readers of Tolstoy's novel, however, seem to be less dogmatic; on the whole, as Boris Eikhenbaum notes, they tend to view Anna (like Katerina in Ostrovsky's Groza) as "a victim not of sin or crime, but of protest." See Tolstoi in the Seventies, trans. Albert Kaspin (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1982), p. 139.

loving mother and dutiful wife who frequented the higher circles of Petersburg society, the graceful, personable, and beautiful Anna has since been reduced to little more than a bitter, spiteful and perhaps even neurotic shrew.² Yet, as Edward Wasiolek observes, "we are so moved by compassion for her suffering that we tend to overlook the fund of sheer nastiness in her by the end of the novel."³ One of the more subtle rhetorical strategies that Tolstoy pursues to communicate to us all the pathos of his heroine's tragic fall from grace involves surrounding Anna in this part of the novel with various images suggestive of harlotry. Those images, as I intend to show, surface during Part VII and culminate in the scene where Anna and Levin finally meet one another, appearing together for the first and only time in the novel. Levin's visit to Anna's home, it seems to me, is presented with all the iconological, as well as structural, characteristics of a trip to a brothel. Tolstoy's purpose in suggesting this parallel between a visit to Anna's and a visit to a brothel is not merely to lead the reader to infer that the heroine has now become little more than a lowly whore. It is also designed to show how substantially Levin's attitude toward "fallen women" has changed since his early views on that subject were first voiced in Part I of Anna Karenina. Moreover, it reflects how radically Tolstoy's own views on women, prostitution, and human sexuality were beginning to change as he approached the profound spiritual crisis that was ultimately to transform his life.

Before we can begin to understand how this fateful meeting between the two main characters in the novel can conceivably share affinities with a trip to a brothel, however, we must first appreciate just how drastically Levin's behavior and frame of mind have changed since the beginning of the narrative. The Levin we observe in Moscow in Part VII clearly is not the same Levin we remember meeting for the first time in Moscow in Part I. Our initial impression of Tolstoy's hero is that of a primitive country rustic who feels highly uncomfortable in the urban setting provided by the capital, a city that he had once characterized as a "depraved Babylon" (XVIII, 54).⁴ Priding himself in being a natural man who feels infinitely more at home in the countryside than in the city, Levin seems deeply alienated by the artificiality as well as the conventionality that must be observed as a

²Willis Konick suggests that Anna's behavior is neurotic in his essay, "Tolstoy's Underground Woman: A Study of Anna Karenina," Russian and Slavic Literature, ed. Richard Freeborn et al. (Cambridge, MA: Slavica Publishers, Inc., 1976), pp. 92-112.

³Edward Wasiolek, Tolstoy's Major Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 130.

⁴This citation from Anna Karenina comes from the jubilee edition of Tolstoy's complete works, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, ed. V. G. Chertkov (Moscow-Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1928). Volume number (in Roman numeral and page number (in Arabic numbers) from this edition are given parenthetically in the text of the article for all citations from Tolstoy's works. All translations are my own, although I have tried to follow the Maude translation as closely as possible.

daily part of life in the capital. The restaurant scene depicted in Chapters 10 and 11 of Part I, when Levin goes with Stiva Oblonsky to dine at the restaurant of the Hotel Angliia, epitomizes this deep sense of

alienation and estrangement that our hero feels when he is in Moscow. From the moment he enters the hotel, Levin is immediately put ill at ease by those decadent features of the establishment that seem to make his future brother-in-law so radiant with delight: namely, the Tartar waiters in their swallowtail coats, the vodka and hors d'oeuvres at the buffet, the painted Frenchwoman sitting at the counter. "Levin did not take any vodka," we are told, "simply because that Frenchwoman--all made up, as it seemed to him, of false hair, poudre de riz, and vinaigre de toilette--was offensive to him. He hastily moved away from her as from some dirty place (VIII, 37). Throughout this restaurant scene Tolstoy will exploit gastronomic motifs as a way to characterize the contrasting natures of these two long-time but antipodal friends; the foods that they enjoy eating become emblematic of their opposing personalities, values, and moral natures. Stiva Oblonsky, the hedonistic "man of the flesh" whose eyes actually become moist and glisten as he dines, is in ecstasy as he swallows quivering oysters from his silver fork and sips chablis from his wide-lipped champagne glass.⁵ Konstantin Levin, on the other hand, the simple and sober "man of the spirit," can find no pleasure in such exotic epicurean fare. Instead he expresses a feeling of disappointment that there is no buckwheat porridge or cabbage soup at this restaurant (XVIII, 38). "Levin ate some oysters, though he would have preferred bread and cheese," the narrator observes, succinctly characterizing for us the simple food preferences of Oblonsky's dining partner (XVIII, 39).

The gastronomic dialectic at work here, as Lynn Visson has argued recently, partakes in a wider rivalry within nineteenth-century Russian literature between Russian peasant or "Slavophile" cooking, which features simple and earthy native food items, and elegant Gallic fare, which the Europeanized gentry imported into Russia from the West.⁶ The contrast in the gastronomical appetites of the two friends in Anna Karenina, however, extends beyond this Westernizer/Slavophile dialectic to encompass their greatly differing perspectives upon the semiotic significance of the act of

⁵In Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986). Richard Gustafson sees Tolstoy's male characters as belonging to one of two groups: they are either "men of the flesh" or "men of the spirit." "The man of the flesh," Gustafson writes, "lives for himself, his own purposes, pleasure or profit. Often he is represented in pursuit of sex or food." See p. 209.

⁶See Lynn Visson, "Kasha vs. Cachet Blanc: The Gastronomic Dialectic of Russian Literature," in Russianness: Studies on a Nation's Identity (In Honor of Rufus Mathewson, 1918-1978), ed. Robert L. Belknap (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1990), pp. 60-73. As instances of this rivalry between gastronomic Slavophiles and Westernizers in nineteenth-century Russian literature, Visson cites the difference in tastes not only between Oblonsky and Levin, but also between Onegin and the Larin family in Pushkin's Eugene Onegin.

eating. For the primitive and rustic Levin, eating is a basic biological act, necessary for the purposes of nutrition by sustaining one's life, strength and health; for the urbane and sophisticated Oblonsky, on the other hand, eating constitutes, in his words, "one of the pleasures of life" (XVIII, 38). If we were to borrow the terms suggested by Roland Barthes, we could say that eating for Levin operates within the "realm of necessity" (l'ordre de besoin), where food indicates deprivation, while for Oblonsky it operates within the "realm of desire" (l'ordre de désir), where food indicates indulgence.⁷ Semiotically considered, Levin, with his rustic appétit naturel, eats to live, whereas Oblonsky, with his urbane appétit de luxe, lives to eat: Stiva, in other words, must artificially stimulate his appetite and create a false hunger in order to generate ever new pleasure out of eating.⁸

Witness in this regard the highly edifying exchange that takes place between these two dining partners at the restaurant. "It seems strange to me that while we country people try to get over our meals as quickly as we can, so as to be able to get on with our work, here you and I try to make our meal last as long as possible, and therefore we eat oysters," observes Levin. "Well, of course," Oblonsky replies. "That is, after all, the aim of civilization: to get enjoyment out of everything." "Well, if that is its aim," Levin fires back, "I'd rather be a savage." "You are a savage as it is. All you Levins are savages," Stiva exclaims (XVIII, 40).⁹ As Irene Pearson observes, "the simple way of life in the Russian countryside," where people take a practical, functional, utilitarian approach to food, is made to contrast in this scene with what she calls "the French-style civilization of the city," where the aim is instead to derive as much pleasure and

⁷Roland Barthes, "Lecture de Brillat-Savarin," in Jean Anthèlme Brillat-Savarin, Physiologie du goût (Paris: Hermann, 1975), p. 8.

⁸In her article, "The Social and Moral Roles of Food in Anna Karenina," Irene Pearson writes: "Socrates points out that eating is a pleasure because it takes away the pain of hunger. But as soon as one is satisfied, the pleasure disappears along with the pain. A false hunger, a type of greed, must be stimulated in order to re-create the possibility of feeling more pleasure. The same is true of sexual pleasure, Tolstoy seems to imply." See Journal of Russian Studies, 48 (1984), p. 13. For a distinction between "hunger" (essentially a bodily drive) and "appetite" (a state of mind), see Daniel Cappon, Eating, Loving and Dying: A Psychology of Appetites (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. 21.

⁹James W. Brown, in Fictional Meals and Their Function in the French Novel, 1789-1848 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), observes that Balzac is another author who makes a clear distinction in his novels between city appetites and country appetites, contrasting the elegant cuisine and fashionable dining rooms of Parisian bons vivants with the modest fare served by provincial misers. See p. 30. In the "Glossary of Metafictional Terms" appended to his book, Brown defines "Food-work metonym" as "the peasant ethic whereby the purpose of food is to supply energy for work. Food is a means, not an end in itself: eating to live, not living to eat." See p. 202.

satisfaction as possible from the act of eating.¹⁰ In addition to this sociological contrast between city and country (urban sophistication versus rural simplicity), Oblonsky's and Levin's differing perspectives on food and eating also reveal broad psychological categories as well; in Freudian terms, the former may be said to represent the interests of the id and the Pleasure Principle, while the latter stands for the ego and the Reality Principle."

When the table conversation switches over to the subject of women, we see that Tolstoy continues to use the gastronomic analogy as a way to emblemize Stiva's hedonism and Levin's puritanism. Indeed, food and women become closely linked here as mutual objects of sensual desire, as items coveted in the search to satisfy the voracious appetite of the man of pleasure. As we might expect, each of these two men brings to the issue of sexual love the same semiotic code that he abides by with respect to the act of eating: for Levin, the sex drive is a dangerous (if necessary) instinctual urge that must be restrained by channeling it within the institution of marriage and the framework of the family; for Oblonsky, sex (like food) constitutes one of life's delicious pleasures and is thus to be enjoyed for its own sake. For Levin, sex is a means to an end; for Oblonsky, it is an end in itself. Committing adultery is as incomprehensible to the puritanical Levin as going to a baker's shop and stealing a roll after having eaten one's fill at a restaurant. "But why not steal a roll?" the philandering Stiva muses. "After all, a roll sometimes smells so good that one can't resist it!" (XVIII, 44-45).¹² Eating and fornicating are thus linked together here as activities which, for the idle rich in Moscow at least, seem to complement and accompany each other.¹³ The lines of verse from Heine that Oblonsky proceeds to quote underscore for us

¹⁰Pearson, "The Social and Moral Roles of Food in Anna Karenina," p. 11.

¹¹Judith Armstrong provides an interesting psychoanalytic study of Tolstoy's novel, and of Levin in particular, in her recent book, The Unsaid Anna Karenina (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).

¹²This exchange between Levin and Oblonsky echoes Tolstoy's discussion of the function of eating in the Epilogue to War and Peace, where the author likens the purpose of a marriage (i.e., a family) to the purpose of a meal (i.e., nourishment). "If the purpose of a meal is nourishment of the body," he writes, "then the person who eats two meals at once perhaps gets greater enjoyment, but he will not attain his purpose, since his stomach will not digest both meals. If the purpose of a marriage is the family, then the person who wishes to have many wives and husbands may perhaps obtain much pleasure, but in no case will he have a family. If the purpose of food is nourishment and the purpose of marriage is the family, then the whole question resolves itself into not eating more than one can digest and not having more wives or husbands than are needed for the family--that is, one wife or one husband" (XII, 268).

¹³Hartmut Kiltz has written a book about the erotic dining that transpired in such private dining rooms, Das erotische Mahl: Szenen aus dem "chambre séparée" des neunzehnten Jahrhundert (Frankfurt: Syndikat, 1983).

the semiotic field within which the discussion between Levin and Oblonsky takes place: "It is heavenly when I have mastered/ My earthly desires;/ But when I have not succeeded,/ I have also had right good pleasure!" (XVIII, 45). Oblonsky, as we see repeatedly throughout the novel, is hardly even trying to master his "earthly desires" (be they gastronomical or sexual in nature); he is seeking only to enjoy "right good pleasure" whenever he can. For Levin, on the other hand, libidinal restraint is not really a problem, since he eats for nourishment rather than for pleasure and he confesses a physical revulsion for "fallen women," whom he considers to be moral abominations (XVIII, 45). Indeed, Levin's aversion for fallen women--who are epitomized by the obscenely painted Frenchwoman "with her curls"--is largely what accounts for his being so "ill at ease and uncomfortable in this restaurant with its private rooms where men took women to dine" (XVIII, 39).

This image of Levin as a sober and straightlaced country rustic who staunchly opposes gastronomical pleasure and sexual indulgence is challenged three years later, however, during Kitty's confinement in Moscow. When our hero revisits that "depraved Babylon" in Part VII, he seems to have undergone a drastic metamorphosis, for he now demonstrates a surprising ability to adapt himself easily and readily to urban conventions and accepts as necessary those ways of operating that he had formerly dismissed with much disdain. Earlier Levin would have bristled at the necessity of paying for hired horses in Moscow, but now, Tolstoy's narrator tells us,

all this seemed quite natural to him....Now he was already used to it. In this respect the thing had happened to him which is said to happen to drunkards. "The first glass you drive in like a stake, the second flies like a crake, and after the third they fly like wee little birds." (XIX, 252-53)

Tolstoy's analogy of a drunkard getting used to subsequent drinks with the way Levin, after some initial resistance, has now allowed himself to become accustomed to the fiscal waste that invariably accompanies Moscow life seems particularly well chosen, since Levin's overall behavior in Part VII could be characterized as slightly intoxicated. The "toxin" in this instance is, of course, the idleness, luxury and decadent materialism of gentry existence in the city.

If the scene of dining at the Hotel Angliia depicted in Part I had served to illustrate Levin's indulgence, then the scene of dining at the Angliiskii klub depicted in Part VII reveals how Levin's characteristic sense of restraint in libidinal matters has now given way to a desire to indulge in a variety of sensual pleasures. Just as Anna by Part VII has degenerated into a vastly different person than she had been at the opening of the novel, so too has Levin been significantly transformed. If we were to borrow the terms used by Harry Levin, we could say that Levin the

"killjoy" of Part I has become Levin the "playboy" of Part VII.¹⁴ Thus we see our hero eating and drinking, seemingly without restraint, while his wife, nine months pregnant, lies home in bed. Caught up in the holiday atmosphere reigning at the club, Levin now partakes quite willingly and enthusiastically in those leisure activities that--either explicitly or implicitly--he had condemned so categorically in Part I: namely, eating, drinking, gambling, and socializing. He accompanies Oblonsky to the hors d'oeuvre table, where he drinks vodka and eats appetizers. When offered a glass of champagne, Levin not only drinks it down, but orders another bottle as well. He listens to all sorts of "stupid" and "indecent" anecdotes and laughs uproariously at them; he even tells one himself. "He was hungry, and ate and drank with great pleasure," the narrator says of Levin, "and with still greater pleasure took part in the simple merry talk of his companions" (XIX, 267). Those merry companions, it should be noted, include such notorious sybarites as Oblonsky, Vronsky, and Yashvin. Levin even plays billiards and loses forty rubles gambling at cards with Vronsky, a former rival with whom he has this evening suddenly become reconciled. "Whether influenced by the atmosphere of the club or by the wine he had drunk," the narrator observes, "Levin chatted with Vronsky about the best breeds of cattle, and was very pleased to find that he felt not the least animosity toward the man" (XIX, 268). As the evening progresses, Levin reveals behavior that seems more and more to resemble that of Stiva Oblonsky, the immoral foil against whom Tolstoy's hero is usually contrasted throughout the novel. Indeed, the scene at the English Club shows Levin being essentially seduced by the charms of aristocratic life in Moscow. The noble "savage" from the Russian countryside to whom we were first introduced in Part I, the rustic who once prided himself in his simple peasant ways, appears to have been effectively "civilized" in Part VII as he comes to realize his inherent kinship with his gentry brethren in the city.

When Prince Shcherbatsky, in the midst of the evening's festivities at the English Club, asks his favorite son-in-law, "Well, and how do you like our Temple of Idleness [Khram prazdnosti]?", we ought to be struck by the delicious irony of that question (XIX, 268). The Levin we remember from Part I would have been appalled by this den of iniquity; the Levin we now observe in Part VII seems to be thoroughly at home in this so-called "temple of idleness." Levin's "seduction" here bears analogy, it seems to me, with the way that the virginal Natasha Rostova allows her rustic naïveté, simplicity and innocence to be corrupted under the deleterious influence of the amoral Hélène Kuragina and her brother Anatole when she attends the opera in Moscow in Book Eight of War and Peace (1869). The sense of estrangement, the defamiliarizing ostranenie that Levin feels initially, when he is thrust into an alien milieu (i.e., urbane Moscow where aristocrats revel in sensual pleasure), has passed by Part VII and he, like Natasha, now finds such indulgent behavior quite normal and natural. Both of these characters seem to lapse into a state that Richard Gustafson has

¹⁴Harry Levin, Playboys and Killjoys: An Essay on the Theory and Practice of Comedy (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

aptly characterized as the "intoxicated consciousness".¹⁵ The evening spent at the English Club could thus be said to serve as the objective correlative of the general intoxication of Moscow social life--with its ethos of idleness, luxury, and comfort--that has now overtaken the previously sober, serious and industrious Levin.¹⁶ It is no doubt this intoxicating feeling of prazdnost' (idleness), which envelops our hero both at the English Club particularly and in Moscow generally, that prompts him to break his promise to Sviyazhsky: rather than attend as planned the meeting of the Agricultural Society with him that evening, Levin opts instead to go with Oblonsky to visit his sister Anna. The significance of this step should not be ignored or overlooked: Levin, the morally upright gentry farmer, is passing up a meeting of the Agricultural Society in order to go with a hedonistic and philandering friend to pay a visit to a "fallen woman" in the city he once characterized as an immoral Babylon!¹⁷

Levin's visit, when understood within this context, can be seen to share many of the same structural characteristics as those trips to brothels that have been depicted in works of Western literature. A typical pattern that emerges from the nineteenth-century European novel involves a group of men going to a restaurant or a club to dine and drink, and then, in an intoxicated mood of post-prandial lethargy, either retiring to private rooms or setting off for a brothel where they pair off with the prostitutes

¹⁵See Chapter Seven, "Intoxicated Consciousness," of his book, Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger, especially pp. 349-352, where Gustafson analyzes Natasha's opera episode. As he makes clear in the footnote on p. 352, Gustafson takes issue with Shklovsky's notion of "defamiliarization" (ostranenie), preferring instead to understand the feeling of estrangement that Tolstoy's characters sometimes experience as the sense of reality as "alien" (chuzhoi).

¹⁶In Part VI we are shown how Levin is angered by the spirit of prazdnost' that Oblonsky and Veslovsky bring with them from the city to the countryside. When these two urban bon vivants arrive at Pokrovskoe, we are told that "Levin, who but a few moments before had been in the brightest of spirits, was now looking dismally at everyone, dissatisfied with everything . . . And most repugnant of all was Kitty, for the way she fell in with the merry tone of that gentleman [Veslovsky], who looked upon his arrival in the country as a holiday (prazdnik) for himself and for everyone else . . . 'For them it is always a holiday there,' he [Levin] thought, 'while here we have work that is not a holiday affair (dela ne prazdnichnye), work which cannot be put off and without which it is impossible to live" (XIX, 142-143).

¹⁷The restaurant dialogue in Part I, Irina Gutkin observes, "sets the pattern for the Levin-Oblonsky relationship throughout the novel." In all the subsequent meetings between Levin and Oblonsky in the novel, she notes, food and sex are invariably involved. See her essay, "The Dichotomy between Flesh and Spirit: Plato's Symposium in Anna Karenina," In the Shade of the Giant: Essays on Tolstoy, ed. Hugh McLean (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 87. The reader, as a result of this pattern, is in a sense prepared to expect that the two brothers-in-law will somehow become involved with the issue of sexual love after an evening of eating at the club.

working there. "Nineteenth-century French novelists in particular," writes James Brown, "fully exploited the relationships between food and fornication in their depictions of tête-à-tête meals, and, in the novel as in contemporary society, the co-occurrence of the culinary and the sexual acts was made explicit in public dining houses where the cabinet particulier was designed specifically for amorous diners."¹⁸ The satisfaction of gastronomical desire in the novels of Balzac, Flaubert, and other nineteenth-century French writers seems to generate, in turn, the need to satisfy sexual desire.¹⁹ In such works, eating generally serves as a stimulant for fornication, with food invariably whetting the men's sexual appetite for women.

As we saw with the painted Frenchwoman and the private dining rooms at the Moscow restaurant in Part I of Anna Karenina, food and sex are linked closely together in Tolstoy's Russian novel as well.²⁰ Anna's story both begins and ends with suggestions of this link between food and sex. Part I opens with Oblonsky recalling a dream in which a dinner is served on glass tables and little decanters are actually women, while Anna's final carriage ride through Moscow in Part VII has her identifying gustatory taste directly with sexual desire. "I know my appetites," she says, quoting a French idiom. "We all want something sweet, something tasty: if we can get no sweets, then we'll take dirty ice cream! And Kitty is just the same: if

¹⁸Brown, Fictional Meals and Their Function in the French Novel, p. 14. Noting the pervasive tendency within Western cultures to mix the gastronomical with the sexual, Brown observes that "writers have always associated food with sex, but in nineteenth-century France in particular novelists exploit the similarities between sensual and sexual pleasures, perhaps because they were made explicit in the society at large" (p. 50).

¹⁹This pattern of dining, drinking, and whoring is well illustrated in Balzac's La peau de chagrin (1831), where Emile and Raphael visit the courtesans Aquiline and Euphrasie after partaking in an orgiastic banquet meal. Indeed, Balzac here indicates not merely a connection between eating and fornicating, but also a hierarchy of carnal desires progressing from oral to sexual gratification. After the sated diners leave the banquet room for the adjoining salon, Balzac tells us that, compared to the alluring concubines who await them there, "the rich ornaments of the banquet paled to nothing, for what they saw appealed to the most sensual of their senses." See Oeuvres complètes de Honoré de Balzac (Paris: Louis Conard, 1925), vol. 27, p. 66.

²⁰In Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), Charles Bernheimer explains that restaurant whores were known as soupeuses "because of their habit of dining with clients in the cabinets particuliers of restaurants." See p. 293, in 9. In Tolstoy's Resurrection (1899), the prostitute Katiusha likewise possesses a gastronomically significant name, "Maslova" (cf. maslo meaning "butter," "oil").

not Vronsky, then Levin" (XIX, 340).²¹ This link between eating and fornicating will become even more pronounced in Tolstoy's later works, of course, when both of these sensual activities are vehemently condemned as impediments to man in his quest for spiritual perfection. In "Father Sergius" (1898), for instance, the hero's celibacy is accompanied, in traditional ecclesiastical fashion, by abstinence from food. Seeking to lead a thoroughly ascetic life, the hero can pride himself as much on his fidelity to an unappetizing diet of bread and water as on his resistance to carnal desire. The likelihood that the hermit monk will succumb to the sexual temptations of the feeble-minded but voluptuous merchant's daughter is thus foreshadowed in the text by mention of how Sergius no longer threatened his health by fasting, but now indulged his appetite for food and drink, "often eating with special pleasure and not, as before, with revulsion and a consciousness of sin" (XXXI, 34). In a narrative as well as a physiological sense, gastronomical appetite seems to trigger sexual appetite in "Father Sergius." In The Kreutzer Sonata (1889), meanwhile, Pozdnyshv, a staunch advocate of sexual celibacy, asserts that people's love affairs and marriages are for the most part conditioned by the food they eat (XXVII, 303) and that gastronomical excesses lead directly and ineluctably to gross excesses of sensuality (XXVII, 23).²² Pozdnyshv's own initial sexual defilement, it should be noted, occurred at a brothel that he visited one evening after taking part in a drinking bout (XXVII, 18).

Perhaps the most memorable instance within nineteenth-century Russian literature of this pattern of dining, drinking and whoring occurs in Part II of Dostoevsky's Notes from the Underground (1864). There a farewell dinner is arranged at the Hotel de Paris by Trudoliubov, Ferfichkin, and Simonov in honor of their friend, the officer Zvertsov, who will soon be leaving St. Petersburg. The underground man, who had pressed for an invitation to this dinner party, manages to alienate himself from those in attendance at the party, spending the greater part of the evening pacing back and forth spitefully in front of them rather than joining in their feast. At eleven o'clock, however, when Zvertsov gets up from the sofa and suggests that after all their eating and drinking the sated revelers now go "there," the underground man tags along after them. He

²¹Elsewhere in her stream-of-consciousness monologue, Anna exclaims, in English, "The zest is gone" (XIX, 343). Although "zest" carries the usual meanings of "gusto" and "relish," the word originally denoted the peel of citrus fruit such as lemons and oranges, which was used as flavoring. In a similar gustatory/sexual vein, Anna expresses her conviction that Vronsky has ceased to find her appealing by saying "He no longer has that taste for me" (XIX, 343).

²²"Our stimulating overabundance of food, together with complete physical idleness, is nothing other than a systematic excitation of lust," Pozdnyshv asserts in The Kreutzer Sonata. "Every day we consume two pounds of meat and game and all sorts of hot victuals and strong drinks--and where does it go to? To excesses of sensuality" (XXVII, 23). In Resurrection, when Tolstoy describes the daily routines of the prostitutes in the brothel where Maslova works, he notes that during the day, apparently to stimulate their sensuality, these women would eat "sweet, fatty foods" (XXXII, 11).

hastens to hire a carriage to take him to an establishment which, the narrator explains, serves as a millinery emporia by day, but at night, if one had an introduction, one might visit it "as a guest."²³ It is of course as "guests," and thus for the sole purpose of enjoying carnal pleasure, that these three young men, with the underground man in hot pursuit, have now come to the brothel. While Zvertsov presumably has already paired off with the oft-mentioned Olympia,²⁴ the underground man spends the night with the prostitute Liza, whom he proceeds to inspire with false hope through his sentimental speeches and whom he then humiliates with his cruel psychological manipulation.²⁵

In Tolstoy's novel, it is Levin's wife Kitty who identifies for us this pattern of dining, drinking, and whoring, a pattern she associates with the urbane playboys of Oblonsky's ilk. "She knew now what consorting with merry males of Oblonsky's sort meant," the narrator reports early in Part VII, "it meant drinking and then driving somewhere. She could not think without horror of where men drove to in such cases" (XIX, 248).²⁶ Of course, her husband, as we know, has been consorting this very evening not only with "merry males of Oblonsky's sort," but with Oblonsky himself; and now, after dining and drinking, the two of them are driving off to visit a fallen woman. Intoxicated (metaphorically if not actually) after his evening at the English Club, Levin himself has second thoughts about the propriety of going with Oblonsky to visit Anna, both while enroute to her place (XIX, 271) and after they arrive (XIX, 273).²⁷ Upon his arrival at the house,

²³Fedor Dostoevsky, Sobranie sochinenii v dvenadtsati tomakh (Moscow: Pravda, 1982), vol. 2, p. 467.

²⁴In his discussion of Edouard Manet's famous and controversial painting of a nude prostitute, Charles Bernheimer notes that "Olympe" and "Olympia" were very popular noms-de-guerre frequently assumed by prostitutes in nineteenth-century France. See chapter four, "Manet's Olympia: The Figuration of Scandal," of his book, Figures of Ill Repute, pp. 89-128.

²⁵For a study of Dostoevsky's treatment of prostitutes, courtesans and "kept" women, see Nicholas Moravcevic, "The Romanticization of the Prostitute in Dostoevsky's Fiction," in The Image of the Prostitute in Modern Literature, ed. Pierre L. Horn and Mary Beth Pringle (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1984), pp. 53-61.

²⁶In part VI of the novel, Vas'ka Veslovsky, one of the more memorable of the Oblonskian playboys in Anna Karenina, seems to have brought this pattern of dining, drinking and whoring with him from the city to the country, for during the hunting trip with Levin and Oblonsky at Pokrovskoe we find him one evening eating all of the provisions, drinking vodka and then making love to the local peasant girls.

²⁷In The Structure of Anna Karenina (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1982), Sydney Schultze notes that "the same image cluster which attends Anna's arrival in Petersburg is used again when Anna and Levin finally meet" (32). She later points out that the frequent mention of heat and the association with the color

Levin's attention is immediately attracted by the large full-length portrait of Anna that Mikhailov had painted in Italy and he finds that he is unable to tear himself away from it. "He forgot where he was, and without listening to what was being said gazed fixedly at the wonderful portrait," the narrator reports of Levin. "It was not a picture, but an alive and charming woman with curly black hair, bare shoulders and arms, and a dreamy half-smile on her lips covered with tender down, looking at him victoriously and tenderly with eyes that troubled him" (XIX, 273). Anna's curly hair and exposed flesh should remind us, of course, of the painted Frenchwoman at the restaurant in Part I, but the portrait itself--and especially its location--should also prompt associations in our minds with harlots. It was not unusual, after all, for brothels in the nineteenth century to be adorned with portraits, if not of semi-nude women or of some of the prostitutes themselves, then at least of the madam who managed them. Indeed, the authors of a recent social history of prostitution point out that "erotic scenes were often depicted in the better houses of prostitution in order to set the mood" and thus to stimulate the sexual appetite of male clients.²⁸

A parallel to such pictorial enticements seems to be provided by Anna's attractive portrait, which constitutes, as Joan Grossman has noted, the "painting of an alluring woman strategically placed and illuminated by a reflector lamp."²⁹ The physical description that Tolstoy includes of the interior decor of Anna's home, Grossman observes, also strongly suggests the "seductive" atmosphere of a brothel: that is, the dim lighting, the luxurious rooms, the soft carpets, the exclusively male visitors.³⁰ When

red (both of which symbolize Anna's inner fire) contribute toward creating a diabolical image of Anna, who is seen as "demonic" (besovskoe) by Kitty at the ball in Part I and who is often referred to as a devil in the original drafts of the novel. Schultze also notes an uncanny parallel: at the same time that Vronsky goes to watch his friend Yashvin play billiards down "in the infernal regions" (v infernal'nuju) of the English Club, Levin is shown riding off to meet Anna. For both these observations, see p. 130 of Schultze's book.

²⁸Vern and Bonnie Bullough, Prostitution: An Illustrated Social History (New York: Crown Publishers, 1978), p. 179. In A Place for Pleasure: The History of the Brothel (London: Harwood-Smart Publishing Co., Ltd., 1975), G. L. Simons provides an illustration of the "Schoon Majkin," a seventeenth-century brothel in Brussels where the procuress is shown helping a male client select a prostitute from the display of their portraits that hangs on the wall (illustration number six following page 54). See also pp. 14-15 and 42 for further mention of the erotic murals and frescoes, designed to stimulate sexual appetite, that typically adorned the walls of brothels.

²⁹Joan Delaney Grossman, "Tolstoy's Portrait of Anna: Keystone in the Arch," Criticism, 18, No. 1 (1976), p. 3.

³⁰Grossman is one of the few commentators on Anna Karenina to entertain seriously the idea that Levin's visit to Anna's suggests a trip to a brothel. "Tolstoy's suggestion is unmistakable," she writes, "that this call parallels a visit to 'those places' of which Kitty thinks with horror, now that she is a

Levin finally does meet Anna, Tolstoy's heroine immediately makes a strongly favorable impression upon him, captivating him by her beauty and her personality. Levin feels a surprising amount of tenderness, affection and compassion for Anna as he observes her in animated conversation with her brother Stiva (XIX, 276). Indeed, the narrator leaves little doubt in our minds that in a very short time Anna has succeeded in thoroughly charming, if not actually seducing, her already intoxicated visitor.³¹ Reluctantly taking his leave of Anna late in the evening, Levin never ceases to think of her all the way home, "recalling every detail of the expressions of her face, entering more and more into her situation and feeling more and more sorry for her" (XIX, 279). Thus Levin's memories of this evening betray a closeness, a tenderness and an empathy that are characteristic of sexual intimacy.

In the aftermath of this visit we encounter two narrative events that encourage us to view the jealous outburst by Kitty once she learns where her husband has just spent the evening. "You have fallen in love with that horrid woman!" Kitty screams. "She has bewitched you! I saw it in your eyes. Yes, yes! What can come of this? You were at the club drinking and drinking, and gambling, and then you went...to whom?" (XIX, 281). The insinuation in Kitty's last question suggests, of course, the very pattern of dining, drinking, and whoring that she herself had alluded to earlier when speaking about the idle lifestyle of the young aristocratic playboys in Moscow ("merry males of Oblonsky's sort"). Now that same pattern is explicitly associated with her husband's recent trip to Anna's. Even Levin himself comes to admit that this had been an "unsuitable" trip to someone "who could only be called a fallen woman" (XIX, 284).

A second indication that Levin, at a symbolic level, has visited a brothel is the testimony of Anna herself, who confirms that she had indeed attempted to seduce Kitty's husband, whom she sought to attract spiritually and emotionally if not sexually. "She had unconsciously done all in her power to awaken love for her in Levin," the narrator explains, adding parenthetically that Anna now did this to every young man she met (XIX, 281). It is almost as if Levin's visit merely afforded Anna another opportunity to exercise her considerable powers of attraction and seduction, "sexual" powers that she now seems increasingly called upon to invoke as she

married woman and knows such things. Tolstoy is at some pains to underline this hint when the two men actually arrive..." See her essay, "Tolstoy's Portrait of Anna," p. 3.

³¹"While following this interesting conversation," the narrator observes, "Levin all the time continued to admire her: her beauty, her cleverness, her good education, together with her simplicity and sincerity. He listened and talked, and all the time thought of her, of her inner life, trying to guess her feelings. And he, who had formerly judged her so severely, now by some strange process of reasoning justified her and at the same time pitied her and feared that Vronsky did not fully understand her. Toward eleven, when Oblonsky rose to leave (Vorkuyev had already gone), Levin felt as if he had only just arrived. He got up regretfully" (XIX, 278).

seeks more and more desperately to retain Vronsky's love and affection.³² "If I produce such an effect on others, on this married man who loves his wife," Anna muses after Levin's departure, "why is he [i.e., Vronsky] so cold toward me...He wishes to give me proofs that his love for me must not interfere with his freedom. But I don't need proofs; I need love!" (XIX, 281-282). One inference we are invited to make at this point is that Anna has become as addicted to sexual love as to morphine, opium, and tobacco.³³

The moral abyss into which adultery has thrown Anna Karenina--the smoking, the drugs, the maternal negligence, the obsessive flirting--contributes to the reader's image of her as having indeed become a loose (albeit pathetic) woman. Trapped like a prisoner in the Moscow house that she and Vronsky have rented, Anna is unable to go out into society and, conversely, respectable people are either unable or unwilling to come visit her. Dolly and Kitty, for instance, are hesitant to call upon Anna; worse yet, the promiscuous Betsy Tverskaia refuses to pay Anna a visit for fear that it will injure her reputation in society circles. Psychologically and emotionally considered, therefore, Anna Karenina is hardly better off than a lowly harlot; she is essentially a "kept" woman, who leads an isolated existence in a luxurious but insulated brothel-like setting, where she is only allowed to have male visitors and is forced to live off her seductive charms. Her compulsive flirting with young men like Levin likewise exposes the mentality and behavior of a courtesan. Even Anna's suicide, when seen

³²These seductive powers of sexual attraction, according to Tolstoy, are an inherent feature of woman's nature. "A woman is happy and attains all that she can desire," Pozdnyshv asserts in The Kreutzer Sonata, "when she bewitches a man. Therefore, the chief aim of a woman is to be able to bewitch him" (XXVII, 38). Pozdnyshv uses the same verb here for "bewitches" (obvorozhit) that Kitty had used to describe Anna's effect upon her husband (obvorozhila) (XIX, 281). Anna later admits to herself the existence within her of this aggressive desire to seduce: "If I were an immoral woman, I could make her husband fall in love with me--if I wanted to. And I did want to" (XIX, 340).

³³Sexual love, according to Pozdnyshv, constitutes a physical addiction just like addiction to morphine, alcohol or tobacco. "I began to indulge in debauchery as I began to drink and smoke," he confesses in The Kreutzer Sonata. "I had become what is called a fornicator (bludnik). To be a fornicator is a physical condition like that of a morphine addict, a drunkard, or a smoker. Just as a morphine addict, a drunkard, or a smoker is no longer a normal person, so too a man who has known several women for his pleasure is no longer normal, but is a man perverted forever, a fornicator" (XXVII, 19). When Tolstoy learned that his daughter Tanya was planning to marry, he wrote a letter (October 14, 1897) in which he not only warned her of the highly addictive nature of sexuality, but even compared sexual passion to a disease--not unlike diphtheria, typhus, or scarlet fever--that should be avoided at all costs. "Right now it seems to you that there is no living without this [feeling of love]," Tolstoy wrote to his daughter. "It seems the same way to drunkards and smokers, but when they are set free [from their addiction], only then do they see what real life is" (LXX-LXXI, 168).

as an act of retribution against Vronsky, can be said to parallel the action of the prostitute who enters her profession as a way of seeking vengeance against the man who first precipitated her fall from chastity.

Although he creates in the reader's mind, even if only subliminally, this image of Anna as a prostitute or courtesan, Tolstoy nonetheless provides the possibility for two quite different evaluative responses to the fate of his heroine. On the one hand, the metaphor of harlotry can serve to support the position of those who would maintain that Anna is an immoral adulteress; in an admittedly exaggerated and distorted sense, she is a sinful "whore" who deserves to be punished for breaking the sacred bonds of matrimony, deserting her husband, abandoning her son, and thus destroying her family. For such readers, Anna's symbolic descent into harlotry merely affirms her moral guilt, and it reflects God's punishment for her sin of adultery (cf. the Biblical epigraph: "Vengeance is mine; I shall repay").³⁴ On the other hand, for those who view Anna not as a felon but as a victim, the prostitute analogy can serve to bolster their argument that modern society--with its hypocrisy, falseness, idleness and oppressive institutions--is ultimately to blame for Anna's demise, just as modern society (especially with the advent of capitalism) is responsible for stimulating and expanding the growth of prostitution on an unprecedented scale and for forcing an ever increasing number of innocent young women to enter this demeaning and degrading profession.³⁵

With respect to Levin, the visit to Anna's--metaphorized as a trip to a brothel--can be seen as the culmination of a process at work throughout the novel whereby the hero gradually loses his innocence and compromises his values as he becomes less a "savage" and more a "civilized" nobleman.³⁶ Rather than oppose the luxury, indolence and sensual narcissism of Moscow gentry society (such as he had done in Part I), Levin in Part VII plunges headlong into the prazdnost that reigns within this "depraved Babylon" and especially within the English Club. Even Levin himself admits that Moscow

³⁴Boris Eikhenbaum provides an intelligent discussion of the significance of the Biblical epigraph in Part III, Chapter 3 of Tolstoi in the Seventies, pp. 137-147.

³⁵In The Image of the Prostitute in Modern Literature (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1984), editors Pierre L. Horn and Mary Beth Pringle enumerate the various archetypal figures that prostitutes have been portrayed as in modern literature. In their typology, the images of prostitutes range from the seductresses who embody evil, wickedness and cruelty (e.g., the "bitch-witch" and the "femme fatale") to the victimized women who are forced by misfortune and poverty into this degrading work (e.g., the "hapless harlot" and the "seduced-and-abandoned prostitute"). See their Introduction, pp. 3-5.

³⁶Anna's harlot-like seduction of the "savage" Levin in this scene may have a precedent in the epic of Gilgamesh, where, as Khalid Kishtainy observes, "the savage was tamed by the harlot, only to discover after a while the price of civilization." See The Prostitute in Progressive Literature (London and New York: Allison & Bushy, 1982), p. 14.

life, where there is "nothing but talk, food and drink," has made him a bit crazy (XIX, 281). To borrow the terms the peasant Platon will introduce in Part VIII, we can say that the aristocratic Levin here shows that he is living more for his "stomach" (dlia briukha) than for his "soul" (dlia dushi): more for the satisfaction of his own needs and wanton desires, than for the benefit of others.³⁷ Long gone by Part VII are the dreams of living like a peasant, marrying a peasant girl, and organizing his farm along classless lines according to communal principles.³⁸ Instead, Levin comes to the firm realization that it is necessary for him and his family to live in the same aristocratic manner that his father and forefathers had lived. "It was as necessary to him," the narrator observes (with a highly appropriate simile), "as eating is to one who is hungry" (XIX, 372). Indeed, in light of the patrician code that now seems instinctively to guide Levin's every decision, he appears to live more like Kirillov (dlia briukha), who squeezes the workers with high rent and strict rules, than like Platon (dlia dushi), who is inclined to give credit readily and let a man off, even if he may have to go short himself. By Part VIII, therefore, it should not come as a total surprise to find that Levin has degenerated to the point of joining the company of aristocratic playboys like Oblonsky, Vronsky, and Yashvin, and imitating their sensually indulgent behavior, all of which culminates symbolically with a night of dining, drinking, and whoring. In a sense, the scene of aristocratic merriment at the English Club provides a fitting counterpoise to the earlier mowing scene when Levin experienced blessed moments of bliss while working with the peasants.

On the positive side, meanwhile, Levin's willingness to visit a harlot could be taken as an indication of the tremendous progress he has made during the novel toward overcoming his narrow moral righteousness. In Part I, Levin had acted like a puritanical prig, heartlessly condemning as horrible moral abominations the painted Frenchwoman at the restaurant and "fallen women" generally. Even mention of Mary Magdalene, the Biblical harlot whom Christ loved and forgave, merely provokes revulsion in this dogmatic Pauline moralist.³⁹ In Part V, meanwhile, Levin resists allowing

³⁷Tolstoy seems to play ironically with the literal and figurative meanings of words based on the word "soul" (dusha) during his depiction of the English Club episode. In the space of one short paragraph, for instance, he three times notes the "good-natured" (dobrodushnyi) disposition of the hard drinker Turovtsyn (XIX, 266) and twice associates the adverb dobrodushno ("in a good-natured way") with Vronsky (XIX, 268, 270). It is highly doubtful that Tolstoy intends for the reader to think that either one of these two sinful hedonists, Turovtsyn or Vronsky, actually has a "good soul."

³⁸For a study that examines the process of Levin's accommodation with the gentry in the novel, see my article, "The Search for Meaning in Anna Karenina: Tolstoj versus Levin," Occasional Papers in Slavic Languages and Literature, 2 (1986): 3-29.

³⁹Kishtainy points out that whereas Christ, who preached love and forgiveness, associated with a harlot (Mary Magdalene), his disciple St. Paul equated sex with whoredom and thus called for sexual abstinence. See The

Kitty to accompany him to visit his dying brother at his bedside mainly because Nikolai's common-law wife Masha, a former prostitute, will also be there.⁴⁰ Although Kitty finally does convince her husband to take her along, Levin is still not pleased. "The mere fact that his wife, his Kitty, would be in the same room with a whore (s devkoi) made him shudder with revulsion and horror" (XIX, 58). By Part VII, however, Levin has grown so much in human understanding, as well as Christian compassion and forgiveness, that he is now able and willing to appreciate the beauty, intelligence and sincerity of the novel's central "fallen woman," the curly-haired Anna herself.⁴¹

The images of harlotry in Anna Karenina tell us much not only about Anna and Levin, however, but also about the author himself, revealing his own paradoxical views on women, marriage and the family. Tolstoy's troublesome sexual ambivalence, which manifested itself throughout his life in a bitter struggle between instinct and conscience, between the obsession of sexual desire and the guilt of sexual satisfaction, led him in his early works to attempt to de-eroticize women by glorifying them in their roles as wives and mothers. The need to "tame" the charming, bewitching (and thus dangerously erotic) Natasha Rostova through her marriage to Pierre Bezukhov in War and Peace, Ruth Benson points out, simply exemplifies "Tolstoy's attempt to cope with the destructive force of sexuality by controlling and legitimizing it within the framework of marriage."⁴² In Tolstoy's fiction, maternity and sexuality tend to be kept at a safe distance apart from one another, each neatly compartmentalized in order to preserve and protect the existing social order. Tolstoy's defense of the sanctity of the family as an institution was so compelling that in 1870 he would actually sanction prostitution, arguing that such "magdalenes" are socially necessary since they help to deflect the lascivious habits of bachelors and thus contribute toward preserving the sexual purity of respectable wives and daughters (CXI,

Prostitute in Progressive Literature, p. 21.

⁴⁰"That woman is there," Levin explains, "with whom you cannot associate" (XIX, 57). Elsewhere in this part of the novel Levin thinks of Masha as a "horrible woman" (XIX, 59).

⁴¹For the literary treatment of this theme, by Russian writers ranging from Chernyshevsky and Nekrasov to Dostoevsky and Krestovsky, see George Siegel, "The Fallen Woman in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature," Harvard Slavic Studies, 5 (1970), 81-107.

⁴²Ruth Crego Benson, Women in Tolstoy: The Ideal and the Erotic (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), p. X. "Central to Tolstoy's notion of the family is that it disciplines, justifies, and redeems sexual relations," Benson writes. "More than that, it places sex in a natural, biological order which can minimize its erotic and maximize its functional essence" (p. 91).

During the later period of his life, however, and especially after his spiritual conversion, when he had become extremely critical of conventional morality, Tolstoy lost his strong faith in traditional human institutions. He could no longer consider marriage and the family satisfactory channels for the discharge of the dangerous energy that was emitted by human sexuality. Like Engels and many other radical social critics of the time, Tolstoy now came to consider marriage a hideous bourgeois form of institutional prostitution, in which women hired themselves out to gratify the carnal needs of men in return for their upkeep, shelter and security.⁴⁴ Despite the prevailing romanticized notions about matrimony, Tolstoy asserted in a diary entry of 1899, marriage does not bring happiness; instead it causes the deep emotional and spiritual pain that man must suffer in return for satisfying the sexual urges of his animal nature (LIII, 229). By this time he was also acutely aware of the growing social problem that prostitution was becoming in late nineteenth-century Russia as the country became increasingly urbanized and industrialized.⁴⁵ His own brother Dmitry, in fact, lived with a former prostitute whom he had saved from a brothel. In Resurrection (1899), the only novel that Tolstoy would write after Anna Karenina, the author turns from the theme of adultery to the theme of prostitution, a social condition that he now characterizes as "legalized adultery" and condemns as "a chronic sin against human and divine laws" (XXXII, 10). The main heroine of Resurrection, Katiusha Maslova, is herself a prostitute; the workings of a brothel are graphically depicted in the novel; and the familiar pattern of men dining, drinking, and

⁴³In a letter written in response to Nikolai Strakhov's essay on the woman question ("Zhenskii vopros") that had appeared in the journal Zaria in 1870, Tolstoy wrote: "Imagine London without its 80,000 magdalens. What would happen to families? Would many wives and daughters remain pure? What would happen to the laws of morality which people so love to observe? It seems to me that, given the current complex forms of life, this class of women is necessary for the family" (LXI, 233). Eikhenbaum has traced the source of Tolstoy's view on prostitution expressed here to Schopenhauer's writings, in particular to Volume 2, Chapter 27 ("On Women") of Parerga und Paralipomena. See Tolstoi in the Seventies, pp. 99-100.

⁴⁴See Friedrich Engels, The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State (1884), where he argues that in bourgeois society marriage is necessarily supplemented by adultery and prostitution. In her book, Reflecting on Anna Karenina (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), Mary Evans compares the views of Engels and Tolstoy on marriage and society, noting that both of them considered adultery and prostitution unavoidable consequences of marriages that are organized primarily around property and the maintenance of social order. See pp. 15-16.

⁴⁵Witness his description of the horrible conditions that existed for young prostitutes who lived among the urban poor in late nineteenth-century Russia in his essay, "So What Then Must We Do?" (XXV, 208-213).

whoring repeats itself here as well.⁴⁶ In The Kreutzer Sonata, meanwhile, Tolstoy's mouthpiece Pozdnyshev goes so far as to assert that upper-class life in Russia is itself a brothel (dom terpmosti) and that all women in Russian society are prostitutes (XXVII, 23).⁴⁷ So extreme (and bizarre) did Tolstoy's views on sex become that in the controversial "Postscript to The Kreutzer Sonata" (1890) he condemned sexual intercourse altogether, advocating instead total celibacy, even for married couples.⁴⁸

This strong aversion that Tolstoy came increasingly to feel toward human sexuality is already evident during the period of writing Anna Karenina, whose tragic heroine is portrayed mainly as a victim of her own destructive physical passion. "It is the love that is wrong, not Anna or Vronsky or Karenin or society," Wasiolek argues. "And what is wrong with the love, for Tolstoy, is that it is contaminated and corrupted by sexual passion."⁴⁹ Erotic desire, according to Tolstoy, is by its very nature debasing, dangerous and destructive. Although Anna Karenina was written

⁴⁶Tolstoy describes the workings of Maslova's brothel in Book I, Chapter 2 of Resurrection (XXXII, 11). One instance of dining, drinking and whoring occurs in Book I, Chapter 6, where we learn that the prosecuting attorney who is trying Maslova's case had not slept the previous night because he had attended a farewell dinner given in honor of a friend where "they had been drinking a lot and gambling until two o'clock in the morning, then they had called upon the women at the same brothel where Maslova had been living six months earlier" (XXXII, 23).

⁴⁷The expression dom terpmosti comes from the French maison de tolérance, which was a brothel tolerated by the police and subject to their surveillance. See Bernheimer's Figures of Ill Repute, p. 16. In The Kreutzer Sonata, Tolstoy equates society ladies with prostitutes when he has Pozdnyshev exclaim, "But look at those unfortunate, despised women and at the highest society ladies: the same costumes, the same fashions, the same perfumes, the same exposure of naked arms, shoulders, and breasts, the same tight skirts over prominent bustles, the same passion for little stones, for costly, glittering objects, the same amusements, dances, music, and singing. As the former employ all means to allure, so do these others. There is no difference. Strictly defining the matter, we must say only that prostitutes for the short term are usually despised, while prostitutes for the long term are respected" (XXVII, 23).

⁴⁸For a study that examines how Tolstoy's controversial "story of sexual love" triggered a heated debate on sexual morality within the Russian literary culture of the time, see Peter Ulf Møller's Postlude to The Kreutzer Sonata: Tolstoj and the Debate on Sexual Morality in Russian Literature in the 1890s, trans. John Kendal (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1988).

⁴⁹Wasiolek, Tolstoy's Major Fiction, pp. 152-153. "Kitty's and Levin's union," he adds, "is uncontaminated by sex" (p. 153). In a similar vein, Mary Evans asserts that "Kitty is the woman innocent of sexuality, Anna the woman inspired and motivated by it" and that "Levin loves Kitty because she is so apparently distant from sexual desire." See Reflections on Anna Karenina, p. 69.

during a time of intense spiritual crisis in the author's life, Tolstoy's famous novel has traditionally been identified (and in many ways rightly so) more with his pre-conversion poetics than with his later, more didactic writings. As the novel's celebrated opening lines have suggested ("All happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way"), Anna Karenina has usually been considered a "family" novel that shares with War and Peace a strong thematic concern with the central place that the institution of marriage should occupy within society.⁵⁰ In terms of character portrayal, moreover, the story of Anna Karenina seems to pick up where that of Natasha Rostova had left off in the Epilogue to War and Peace. Likewise, Levin's search for meaning seems to continue (and to update) the spiritual journey of self-discovery that Pierre Bezukhov had embarked upon in the earlier novel.

The iconology of harlotry embedded in the text of Anna Karenina, however, should remind us that it is necessary to view this novel less against the background of Tolstoy's earlier works than in anticipation of his later ones, when the author's antipathy toward women--as dangerously erotic creatures--was more overt and pronounced. In the person of Anna, as one feminist critic recently observed, Tolstoy projects his own male fantasies about "all that is seductive, irresistible and potentially destructive about female sexuality" and makes her a symbol of this perilous sexual potential in women.⁵¹ Given Tolstoy's evolving views on women and sex, we should consider Anna Karenina mainly as a precursor to those works--such as The Kreutzer Sonata, "Father Sergius," and Resurrection--where marriage and the family are no longer held sacrosanct and where domestic life, maternity and monogamy no longer provide effective safeguards against the powerful force of human sexuality. Likewise we ought to see Anna Karenina herself not only as the natural successor to Natasha Rostova, but also as the direct predecessor of the prostitute Katiusha Maslova and especially of those "demonic" female seductresses who, as sources of sexual temptation, will sorely test the moral mettle of the male protagonists in Tolstoy's later fiction.

⁵⁰Eikhenbaum asserts that it was Tolstoy's fate to utter the "final word" in the genre of the Russian family novel. See Tolstoi in the Seventies, p. 106.

⁵¹Mary Evans, Reflecting on Anna Karenina, p. 14.