
SPORTS/WRITING AND TOLSTOY'S CRITIQUE OF MALE AUTHORITY IN ANNA KARENINA

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In Anna Karenina Tolstoy repeatedly emphasizes two points about ethics: first, genuine ethical behavior and decision-making are at odds with any kind of monolithic schematization of experience, and, second, morality does not exist in a realm detached from daily life. Left without the possibility of following a set of rules that is imposed from some self-contained realm of the ethical, Tolstoy's characters must go through a different process if they are to succeed at living in a morally correct way. Through a never-ending series of interactions with people carrying different experiential, psychological, and emotional baggage, these characters develop a moral sensitivity which allows them to respond to the particularities of each individual moral situation.

Because this kind of education takes place on a private level and involves responses to prosaic concerns, the novel's female characters have the easiest access to it; their available roles are centered around everyday domestic concerns. Furthermore, since ethical behavior is for Tolstoy a matter of living every moment well, public activities which attempt to skirt daily affairs and useful work are hindrances to what Tolstoy might call moral alertness. The main examples of the hindrances this paper will address are sports and writing, and since these activities are also bound up with issues of authority and social norms, they provide a rich commentary on gender relations in the novel.

For Tolstoy the moral life is lived moment by moment, and thus there can be no time off from living in an ethically correct fashion. This kind of living is constant work and cannot be accomplished by following a set of rules. The search for perfect moral clarity and failsafe rules for living is a pointless one because life is not so neatly ordered as to correspond to an imposed set of standards that does not allow for the difference and singularity of each situation.

Tolstoy figures both the impossibility of such a correlation and the impulse to force it in his description of Levin's dismay at being unable to separate the interwoven musical themes in the King Lear fantasia and to relate the texture of the music to its supposed subject:

But the longer he listened to the King Lear fantasia the more incapable he felt of forming any definite opinion about it. It seemed to be on the verge of beginning over

and over again, as though a musical expression of emotion were gathering its forces, but then it would immediately break up into fragments of musical themes expressing some other emotion, and sometimes simply into nothing but the composer's whims--unrelated but extraordinarily complicated sounds. But even the fragments of these musical themes, though some were good, were disagreeable, since they were completely unexpected and unprepared for (AK 729-30).

After listening to the fantasia, Levin wants to "clarify his own complexity" and starts "walking about looking for experts" to tell him how this piece of music fits together to represent King Lear on the heath (AK 730). Tolstoy has the "expert," Pestsov, offer Levin a concert program in order to follow the music, thereby revealing the human impulse to use a document or an authority, a program, to impose order onto life. However, Tolstoy's lack of faith in experts and in authority dominates this passage and the novel as a whole. Tolstoy represents the musical excerpt in much the same way as he represents life. Both have a resistant sloppiness that defies classification--they are full of "unrelated and extraordinarily complicated" situations that are "completely unexpected and unprepared for," and always full of the infinite potentialities of the present moment, "on the verge of beginning over and over again."

It is the inapplicability of a program or system of rules in the realm of ethics, and the inseparability of ethical behavior from the fabric of everyday life that leads Tolstoy to question sports (or games) and writing as activities which may reinforce the tendency to rely upon rules or authority in the struggle to order one's life. By positing itself as an amusement, an activity which is a break from the work of everyday life, sport also threatens to become an arena of experience in which responsibility and moral judgments are suspended in favor of thoughtless adherence to abstract rules. Similarly, the writing of books is often construed as a way of deferring experience and thereby avoiding life's real moral issues.

Tolstoy also frequently blends the opposition between work and play, physical and intellectual, with the opposition of gender roles: women (and peasants) do most of the work in the novel, and aristocratic men do most of the playing. Notable exceptions to this dichotomy are evident, however: Princess Betsy's immersion in the superficialities of the demi monde situates her outside the realm of moral responsibility, Countess Lydia has the most tenacious grip on authority of all the characters in the novel, and the old man who runs the farm near Sviyazhsky's home lives a morally balanced life in which work coincides with family concerns. However, it is possible to generalize from the novel that in its social structure women's occupations are, to Tolstoy, inherently more valuable and important than those of male aristocrats because they are centered around family and require a readiness to respond

to others' needs, which is a moral readiness that most male characters do not have.

Gary Saul Morson's essay "Prosaics: An Approach to the Humanities" relates Sofia Andreevna's account of Tolstoy's fascination with the everyday work of women and outlines Tolstoy's attitude toward traditionally male occupations:

For Tolstoy, those feminine occupations are really the only important occupations, and so he invariably described the usual world of men--Karenin's politics, Vronsky's military life, Koznyshev's sterile philosophizing, everything but working the land--as essentially meaningless by comparison. In all of these masculine occupations, he detected a contempt for the prosaic, and therefore falsity. (524)

The masculine occupations mentioned here all take place on a level of abstraction and are therefore distanced from the prosaic duties, performed mostly by women, which actually keep things running. These activities, such as tending to children and to the sick, have an absolute, inherent value for Tolstoy in both practical and moral terms. In a conversation about women's work, Levin agrees with Dolly that "there wasn't a single family that could get along without women to help, and that there were and had to be nurses, either hired ones or relatives, in every family, rich or poor" (AK 424). The value of women's work remains stable and is immeasurable, whereas the value of men's work in the novel is measured on an abstract monetary scale, according to which the sinecure position Stiva seeks pays thousands of rubles, but performs no useful function. This system of value is not much different from that of scoring games; in both, an abstract kind of point system measures relative success or failure, and particular kinds of behavior are rewarded irrespective of their immediate value. From the novel's perspective, women have, through the limited sex roles available to them, easier access to a life infused with moral value, whereas most male occupations approach the condition of games--they are genuinely trivial pursuits.

If men's work in the novel is seen to be on a continuum of progressively further remove from immediate value, a continuum which has its extreme in sports, then sports can be considered a basically male activity. Carol Gilligan addresses the difference in the ways in which boys and girls respond to competitive games and their rules In a Different Voice and finds that differences in the psychological development of boys and girls produce different attitudes toward the applicability of rules in moral situations. Reporting the results of previous studies of moral development in children, Gilligan uses this evidence to suggest that girls learn to perceive themselves as a member of a network of relationships because they are usually raised by same-sex caretakers, and that boys develop a sense of self that assumes the individual's detachment from others:

Thus Lever extends and corroborates the observations of Piaget in his study of the rules of the game, where he finds boys becoming through childhood increasingly fascinated with the legal elaboration of rules and the development of fair procedures for adjudicating conflicts, a fascination that, he notes, does not hold for girls. Girls, Piaget observes, have a more "pragmatic" attitude toward rules, "regarding a rule as good as long as the game repaid it" (83). Girls are more tolerant in their attitudes toward rules, more willing to make exceptions, and more easily reconciled to innovations. (Gilligan 10)

Tolstoy would agree that this readiness to bend or ignore rules in certain circumstances is more common in women and that attitudes towards competitive games and sports have serious moral import. Because of its appeal to rules and authority and its disengagement from prosaic concerns, sport is implicated in the systematic underprivileging of women that is based on an appeal to male authority. To be sure, the more physical sports seem to be a source of renewal and enjoyment in the novel, especially for Levin, and Barbara Hardy is correct to consider sport as part of the continuum of life for Tolstoy. "Work, play, and love," she observes, "bring out the same energies and the same errors" (881). Nevertheless, sport, especially hunting, is consistently associated not only with imposed authority, but with adultery and therefore with the fascination with romantic love to the exclusion of prosaic love which constitutes moral lapse for Tolstoy. In his inventory of the amusements of a foreign prince whom Vronsky entertains, Tolstoy reveals an attitude toward sports and adultery which is not atypical of the male characters, which is that both are male prerogatives and male amusements:

He had been in Spain, where he had given serenades and become intimate with a Spanish girl who played the guitar. In Switzerland he had shot chamois. In England he jumped hedges in a pink coat, and shot two hundred pheasants on a bet. In Turkey he had been in a harem.... (AK 380)

Tolstoy repeats this association between shooting and adultery in Levin's hunting trip with Stiva and Veslovsky. Before Stiva and Veslovsky leave the barn for a night of seducing peasant women, Stiva reprimands Levin for his deference to Kitty in asking to go hunting and claims shooting as a male prerogative: "A man must be independent, he has his own masculine interests. A man must be a man" (AK 630). Levin immediately associates Stiva's rhetoric of virility with the license to commit adultery, and when

he asks if this license is included in his definition of masculine independence, Stiva answers, "And why not, if it's fun?" (630). Adultery seems to be understood by Levin's society as a male prerogative associated with sports, and after their return to Levin's estate Veslovsky reinforces this gender boundary when he tells how good the shooting was: "What a pity ladies are deprived of such pleasures" (AK 628). Ladies in Anna Karenina must by definition be excluded from such contests between males, since they function only as prizes or trophies.

The shooting episode also contains an example of what Morson calls "prosaic evil":

Evil usually results from neither grand nor banal desires, but rather from something closer to criminal negligence. Evil happens not because we subconsciously wish it, but simply because we do not pay attention, because we omit to develop the habit of evaluating and correcting 'the tiny alterations' of our thought from moment to moment. (523)

If evil is characterized by negligence, then Veslovsky's lack of care in uncocking his gun, causing a potentially fatal shot to fire, can be considered an act of criminal negligence. Furthermore, since Veslovsky, the consummate sportsman and playboy, is responsible for the gun's misfire, it can also be seen as a phallic image of irresponsible male sexuality; Tolstoy has the issues of evil, adultery, sport, and gender converge here. This incident is even more highly charged with gender issues if one remembers Kitty's warning to the shooting party: "Mind you, don't shoot each other!" (AK 622). However, what is most disturbing about the episode is the nervous laughter that covers over Veslovsky's lack of contrition for an accident that could have killed someone. Stiva reacts by "laughing reproachfully at Veslovsky," but the reproach disappears and a case of the giggles ensues in which no one considers what could have been Veslovsky's responsibility for someone's death: "...Veslovsky was so naively upset at first and then broke out laughing so good-naturedly and infectiously at their general alarm that he (Levin) couldn't help laughing himself" (AK 619).

This case of male irresponsibility is part of a larger pattern in the novel of male characters who attempt to skirt activities which require and teach moment-to-moment moral responsiveness by engaging in sports and game-like professions which have the opposite effect. These latter activities involve an over-valuing of abstract thinking or rule-making, and although hunting and horse-racing have relatively few rules, Tolstoy nevertheless reveals the comparative stupidity of the human sportsmen who try to impose their ways of thinking upon their animal counterparts whose ways of thinking are shown to be more valuable. Significantly, these animals are female.

Levin's treatment of Laska during the hunt provides the clearest

example of the discrepancy between these two ways of thinking. The division of labor during the hunt reinforces that of men and women throughout the text: females do most of the necessary work while males engage in games or sports. Laska is incapable of the abstract thinking required to conceive of and to play games, yet her kind of thinking is indispensable to Levin's hunting. Levin needs Laska to smell out the birds if he is to have any success, and Tolstoy emphasizes the importance of Laska's way of experiencing the world and its conflict with the way Levin experiences it. Although Laska can smell exactly where the snipe are, Levin forces her to follow his directions. These directions are usually wrong, and Laska knows it:

She stood still as though asking him whether it wouldn't be better to go on as she started. But he repeated his order in an angry voice, pointing to a cluster of hummocks flooded with water, where there couldn't be anything at all. She obeyed him, pretending to search in order to give him satisfaction; she went all over the cluster of hummocks and then returned to her first place, where she immediately scented them again. Now that he wasn't interfering with her, she knew what to do... (AK 634)

This passage not only illustrates the difference in the way dogs and humans experience their surroundings, but also shows that Laska seems more aware of the difference than Levin does. Her hesitation to obey, her false deference to and annoyance at Levin give her way of thinking primacy here and show how wrongheaded the privileging of abstract thinking can be, and how that kind of thinking reinforces structures of authority.

This passage also associates authority with anger, and the whole episode emphasizes the hunters' cruelty to animals; Veslovsky overworks Levin's horses and gets them stuck in a bog, and although Levin is invigorated by his success on the second day of hunting, the phrase "it gave Levin a double pleasure to kill another three woodcock," (AK 636) does suggest a sadistic impulse underlying the pleasure that this sport affords. The issues of cruelty, authority, sports, and gender are also created as an interrelated complex in the steeplechase scene, which is in many ways complementary to the shooting episode.

Before the race begins, Vronsky is given advice by Frou-Frou's trainer which he fails to obey: "...remember one thing: don't hold her back at the obstacles and don't urge her--let her take them the way she wants to" (AK 208). At the outset of the race Vronsky is already "holding back the mare tugging at the reins" (AK 208), and while Frou-Frou's fall is truly an accident on Vronsky's part, Tolstoy also emphasizes the futility of trying to impose an authoritarian point of view upon a consciousness that understands its function better than the imposing consciousness. Frou-Frou is so familiar with the rhythm of her work that

she can anticipate Vronsky's commands and knows what she has to do to win the race: "Just at the same moment Vronsky thought Makhotin now had to be passed, Frou-Frou herself, who already grasped what was in his mind, without the least urging, put on a substantial burst of speed and began closing in on Makhotin..." (AK 209).

Vronsky is unaware of Frou-Frou's superior understanding of the actual movements required of her; when he causes her to fall, he does not realize he has broken the mare's back and assumes that if he exercises control and forces her back up she can run. This exercise of authority and frustration at its failure is, more clearly than in the hunting episode, expressed in anger and cruelty: "Vronsky kicked her [Frou-Frou] in the stomach with his heel and began tugging at the reins again" (AK 211). Despite Vronsky's affection for the mare his first reaction to the accident is not sorrow or self-reproach at having fatally injured her, but, "The race is lost!" (AK 211). Vronsky's primary concern here is the game, and Tolstoy may be suggesting that cruelty and oppression--especially sexual oppression--are rooted in the abstract thinking which leads to authoritarianism and hierarchization.

Frou-Frou's consciousness is clearly aligned with female human consciousness, as the episode is repeated with emphasis on Anna's, rather than the mare's thoughts. However, rather than being an allegory of Vronsky's treatment of Anna, as some have suggested, the episode seems to be one of the novel's many figures for the abuse of male authority. Significantly, the race is preceded by a discussion about sports in which Tolstoy highlights the similarity between certain kinds of sports and the values held by a patriarchal society. Although Karenin finds the love of spectacle distasteful, he is the main proponent of sports at the horserace and values the idea of sports on the grounds that they embody organization and progress. He calls these more organized sports the "manly" sports and associates them with the improvement of society: "But a specialized sport is a sign of progress" (AK 220). Karenin's conception of progress as a superstructure of rules and hierarchization is clearly not Tolstoy's idea of progress and is part of a typically male way of living in the novel.

However, not only male characters are implicated in Tolstoy's critique of authority. Through her desire to leave the novel's womanly world of useful work, Anna repudiates the ethically advantageous sex roles available to her. One index of Anna's departure from the female world is her participation in the two male-dominated activities of sports and writing. Significantly, Tolstoy filters Anna's participation in sports through Dolly's consciousness as a way of critiquing Anna's refusal of sex roles and therefore of responsibility. During her visit to Anna, Dolly is invited to play lawn tennis but dislikes it because of the wasted time and energy spent learning the rules: "it took her a long time to understand the game, and by the time she did she was so tired she sat down beside Princess Barbara and simply watched the others playing" (AK 676). Dolly, unlike Anna, is upset by the childishness of the activity and by the "general artificiality of grown-ups playing a children's game in the absence of children" (AK 677). This scene provides another example of the thematic blending of adultery and sports, and implicitly opposes romantic

interests and prosaic concerns. Disgusted by Anna's and Veslovsky's flirting, Dolly responds by remembering her responsibilities to her children and resolves to leave the next day: "Those painful maternal worries she had detested so much on the way, by now appeared to her in a different light, after a day spent without them, and were drawing her back" (AK 677).

The contrast here is striking between Dolly, Tolstoy's model of success as a woman and as a moral agent, and Anna, who tries to move into the male-constructed world of games (and the concomitant adultery) and writing. Tolstoy often conflates writing and political activity as activities that are practiced mostly by males and that, because of the level of abstraction on which they are carried out, have little to do with the practical and the everyday, the "important things," as the novel repeatedly puts it. When Levin attends the district elections he describes politics as "a game" (AK 703), and another landowner admits that the elections are performed out of habit and "have no meaning whatsoever" (AK 699).

This connection between games and intellectual activity is important because it illustrates two ways of living that the novel constantly devalues. Anna Karenina clearly condemns living life as if it were a game, either in the sense of living for amusement at the expense of others, as Stiva does, or, like Karenin and Countess Lydia, seeing moral responsibility as a matter of going by rules to win a heavenly jackpot at the end of the game. Secondly, the novel denounces seeing life as a book and one's existence as a role, as Anna does.

The status of writing and games as diversions from the important matters of life is encapsulated in Anna's admission that everything she does is "so much morphia," a way of deadening her senses to what are real responsibilities: "I just hold myself in and wait, thinking up amusements for myself--the English family, writing, reading, but it's all nothing but a fraud, it's just so much morphia" (AK 750). Because Anna sees herself as a romantic heroine whose sense of self is dependent upon being romantically loved, her fear of losing Vronsky's love dictates the details of her daily life: "it was only by busying herself during the day and taking morphia at night that she could stifle the terrifying thoughts of what would happen if he fell out of love with her" (AK 710).

Reading takes up the bulk of Anna's days, and although she neglects her children, she later begins writing a children's book. This deferral of experience and displacement of life's concerns onto writing is indicative of Anna's refusal to take responsibility for her children. Anna's relationship with her daughter illustrates this point: "No matter how hard she tried she could not grow to love this little girl, and she was incapable of simulating love" (AK 710). It is Anna's conception of love here that betrays her preoccupation with the world of romance. If Anna does not experience love as an all-consuming, unearthly force, i.e. as romantic love, she cannot call her feelings love. Anna's addiction to story-book love blinds her to the fact that prosaic love, love which acknowledges moral relationships, often does begin by "simulating love"-

-it is the kind of love which is grounded in the cultivation of moral habit and in the ability to respond to people's needs, as Kitty shows when she nurses Nicholas.

Anna's death scene provides further insight into her conception of her life as a book and into the novel's title and epigraph, as well. Anna's last moment of consciousness after she throws herself in front of the train is represented as follows:

She tried to get up, to throw herself back, but something huge and implacable struck her on the head and dragged her down. "Lord, forgive me for everything!" she murmured, feeling the impossibility of struggling....A little peasant was working at the rails muttering something to himself. And the candle by which she had been reading that book that is filled with anxiety, deceit, sorrow, and evil flared up with a brighter flame than ever before, lighted up everything for her that had previously been in darkness, flickered, dimmed, and went out forever. (AK 816)

Although the account is in third person, it is nevertheless from Anna's perspective; her physical sensations, her noticing the peasant, and her experience of death as a flare of light followed by darkness testify to the fact that this description is not from the narrator's perspective. The distinction is important because it illustrates the difference between Tolstoy's conception of the moral life as one of constant involvement and Anna's conception of her life as a romantic novel, as Anna Karenina, with her own epigraph to memorialize her final act, to give it a sense of moral clarity, and to claim the book for her own.

However, Anna is not the only character who fails to come to terms with a too bookish existence that actually misses the point of living. Koznyshov's anticipation of reviews of his recent book and his indignation at their derisiveness follow directly upon Anna's suicide. Although Koznyshov may not conceive of his life as a book, he does live almost totally in the intellectual realm and has, like Anna, an idealized, romantic conception of love that cannot accommodate the prosaic.

Koznyshov internally rehearses and memorizes his planned proposal to Varenka, but he cannot verbalize his feelings when his idea of what love and a marriage proposal should be runs up against the prosaic. Varenka does not correctly play the role of Koznyshov's "ideal for [himself] of the woman [he] would fall in love with" (AK 602-3) because, in her nervousness, she starts talking about something as banal as mushrooms. Koznyshov's picture of the perfect proposal is thereby destroyed, and he cannot continue with his plans:

Koznyshov sighed and said nothing. He was

annoyed at her having begun speaking about mushrooms. He wanted to make her turn back to what she had first said, in speaking about her childhood, but as though in spite of himself, after a moment's silence, he answered her last remark. (AK 603)

Koznyshov has to choose between talking about love or talking about mushrooms because for him love cannot contain insignificant, everyday actualities such as the wood mushroom. Varenka senses Koznyshov's inability to reconcile love and the prosaic, and although she is disappointed by his failure to propose, "at the same time she also had a feeling of relief" (AK 604). It is as if Varenka is very uncomfortable with Koznyshov's conception of love and senses that real intimacy would be difficult if not impossible with him. Koznyshov rationalizes his failure to deal with the unexpected intrusion of the banal by retreating back into memory. He is content with his idealized vision of his former love: "On his return home, as he went over all his arguments again, Koznyshov decided his judgment had been at fault. He could not betray the memory of Marie" (AK 604).

This passage contrasts beautifully with the account of the old peasant with whom Levin cuts grass who carefully picks mushrooms for his wife when he notices them: "But the old man, whenever he came across a mushroom, would bend over, pick it up, and put it inside his jacket. 'Another treat for my old woman,' he would say" (AK 273). For the peasant, who has not received or absorbed his ideas about love from books, and who is necessarily immersed in everyday, useful work, the mushroom is not an intrusion or distraction but is a vehicle for the expression of love for his wife.

Like his half-brother, Levin is interested in books and has an idealized conception of love at the beginning of the novel, but by the end he finds that family concerns are more important to him than writing his book, and that these prosaic concerns give meaning to his life and to his love for Kitty that abstract thinking cannot give. For Tolstoy, Levin's experience at the end of the novel is one of feminization. Whereas Anna rejects the way of life open to her as a woman and enters the male world, directly through games and indirectly by imagining herself inscribed within a text about idealized femininity, Levin begins a slow process of shedding those conditioned male qualities which handicap him in his search for meaning. He finds meaning by learning to live more like the Scherbatsky women, by learning to value the prosaic. Levin acknowledges the necessarily incomplete and open-ended nature of such a process: "I'll go on getting angry at Ivan the coachman, I'll go on arguing, go on expressing my ideas inappropriately..." (AK 868). He also finally realizes the limits of abstract reasoning: "There has been revealed beyond question to me personally, to my own heart, a knowledge unattainable by reasoning, and I'm obstinately trying to express that knowledge by means of reason and language" (AK 867). Levin's feminizing conversion at the end is potentially more successful than Karenin's because it acknowledges its own incompleteness and does not strive for an

unworkable closure.

Karenin's brand of Christianity is clearly attacked as a form of thoughtless rule-following, which misses the point of a continually examined moral life because it is based on a principle of absolute authority that is also a male authority. Tolstoy patently aligns authority with patriarchal oppression in the episode in which Karenin tries to force his son to memorize the stories of the Old Testament patriarchs, "the most important thing for a Christian" (AK 562), immediately after telling Seryozha that his mother is dead. This process of teaching and perpetuating patriarchal authority by appealing to an authoritative text or set of rules is precisely what Tolstoy critiques in his dramatization of the authorial consciousness at work in Part Three with Levin's misgivings about his book.

Levin's book is an effort to come up with a workable system to revolutionize Russian farming, and although Levin criticizes previous attempts for failing to take into account the particular nature of the Russian peasant, he cannot escape generalization either. The nature of his task of imposing a system upon an entire class of people is fundamentally authoritarian. Thus Levin's book is a figure for authority itself, and the writing of it can be seen on one level as an allegory of Tolstoy's authority, of his desire to produce a novel without the appearance of the conscious use of artifice. Also, since Tolstoy critiques male authority and bookishness elsewhere in the novel, and since he definitely has his own ideas about morality to put forth, this episode reveals Tolstoy's own self-consciousness of the ironies involved in writing a book which tries to teach its readers how to live, partly by teaching them to question male authority and what is said in books.

These ironies are most apparent in the novel's attempt to suggest a parallel between gender roles and the two conflicting senses of morality that accompany them. They thus reveal a problem with the novel's championing of the prosaic and the feminine: in terms of changing the condition of women, Tolstoy's ethics of prosaics coincides too closely with the imposed morality to be distinguished from it. It may be argued that *Anna Karenina* has some feminist elements: it does suggest that men should take a more active part in the nurturing of children and in the handling of domestic affairs, and the novel has a feminist subtext which discusses such issues as women's rights to birth control, education, and divorce. However, this subtext is never fully developed and becomes subsumed under the larger category of devotion to the prosaic. Domesticity is still an imperative for women, but an option (however strongly urged) for men in the novel. An objection to Tolstoy's moral scheme seems inevitable in light of the degree to which he advocates a kind of self-abnegation: the ethic of care Tolstoy values does not seem to extend to the self in the case of characters such as Dolly. Furthermore, the sports episodes, which associate authority with masculinity, also use female animals, reinforcing the traditional binary oppositions of culture/nature, reason/instinct, and mind/body that are so often cast along gender lines.

The problem in discussing Tolstoy's conception of feminism is that it is not the kind of feminism which calls for the removal of barriers that prevent women from entering into public life and into male-dominated professions. Instead, Tolstoy examines the question of gender from the other side. He suggests that if men would become more involved with the domestic, they would realize its value and understand the relative triviality of public life, which is prioritized by male authority.

However, the novel never encourages a complete equalization of gender roles; men in public life are still needed for settling lawsuits and running governments, and there is no suggestion in the novel that women should be included in these activities. Tolstoy's equalizing movement is thus incomplete, and although he is highly suspicious of authority--even his own--and associates that authority with masculinity, he does not go so far as to encourage the total anarchy that would suggest complete equality. Anna Karenina thus reveals both the potential for success of Tolstoy's ethics of prosaics in Levin's case, and, in the case of Anna, its danger of failing to accommodate women--no male characters are killed off for not participating in the prosaic--who refuse to adopt its values.

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