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# The Moralist's Perspective: An Analysis of a Contemporary Reader's Connection to Leo Tolstoy's Themes of Life as Presented in Five Selected Works

Kelly Almeter

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**The Moralists' Perspective: An Analysis of a Contemporary Reader's  
Connection to Leo Tolstoy's Themes of Life as Presented in Five  
Selected Works**

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
of the Renee Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University

Kelly Almeter  
Candidate for B.A. Degree  
and Renee Crown University Honors  
May 2014

Honors Capstone Project in Russian Language, Literature, and Culture

Capstone Project Advisor:

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Patricia Burak, Assistant Professor, Russian  
Literature

Capstone Project Reader:

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Dr. Alexander Andreyewsky, Professor  
Russian Language and Linguistics, SUNY  
Albany

Honors Director:

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Stephen Kuusisto, Director

Date: April 23, 2014

## Abstract

For my honors capstone I examined the development of Tolstoy's philosophies and how they are illustrated throughout his literature. I have compared two of Tolstoy's works written before his theological conversion: "The Cossacks" and *Anna Karenina*, to three short stories written after, "The Death of Ivan Ilych", "The Kreutzer Sonata," and "Master and Man". As time passed, the moralistic undertones of Tolstoy's works became more apparent. His literature, whether short story or novel, includes a vast number of complex themes ranging from topics such as death and infidelity to a spiritual awakening and nature. As a result, I chose four prominent themes to focus on while analyzing the selected works. These themes include: life and death, religion, the essence of women, and the class divisions that separate society. The themes of focus for this project were selected because of their prevalence and ability to resonate with readers in the present day.

In addition to the five works written by Tolstoy that were previously mentioned, I have used various biographies and scholarly articles to assist in the research portion of this project. The secondary scholarly literature includes: *Tolstoy's Major Fiction* by Edward Wasiolek, *Tolstoy* by Henri Troyat, and *Tolstoy: A Biography* by A.N. Wilson. The secondary literature detailed Tolstoy's personal life including his relationship with his wife, Sofya Andreyevna Bers, and their children. The biographers, Troyat and Wilson, provided crucial accounts of Tolstoy's relationship with the peasants who worked his land at his home, Yasnaya Polyana. After learning of Tolstoy's personal life and his critiques of the society around him, the meaning and intent of his literature comes full circle.

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## Executive Summary

In 2012, as a sophomore at Syracuse University, I read my first short story written by Leo Tolstoy entitled "Prisoner in the Caucasus". It was assigned to me by a former Russian professor for an elective course and although many of my classmates found it dull, I was immediately captivated. The following semester I followed my instincts and registered for a Russian literature course that would cover famous works by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. After reading the novel *Anna Karenina* I developed an obsession. I couldn't fathom how a man who was born in 1828 could write about topics and dilemmas that continue to resonate with a college student of a vastly different generation.

For my honors capstone I studied the evolution of Tolstoy's philosophies, and how they developed throughout his life as seen in his literature. I have focused on particular themes that I find most relatable and intriguing throughout the following works: "The Cossacks", *Anna Karenina*, "The Death of Ivan Ilych", "The Kreutzer Sonata", and "Master and Man". I have written a separate chapter for each individual short story/novel and the paper is organized in chronological order depending on the work's completion date. Although each chapter will include a brief overview of the storyline, the focus will primarily be on four major themes: life and death, religion, the essence of women, and the class divisions that separate society. By focusing on these ideas I will be able to further examine the development of Tolstoy's moral reasoning. In

addition to the five works written by Tolstoy that were previously mentioned, I have used various biographies and scholarly articles to assist in the research portion of this project. The secondary scholarly literature includes: *Tolstoy's Major Fiction* by Edward Wasiolek, *Tolstoy* by Henri Troyat, and *Tolstoy: A Biography* by A.N. Wilson.

After analyzing Tolstoy's literature and the secondary scholarly articles, it is readily apparent that as Tolstoy aged, his moralistic messages intensified. What were once subtle undertones progressed into prominent, and at times dark, themes that dictated the plot of each individual story. Tolstoy wrote with the intent of challenging his readers and society at large. Each work was crafted to target one's deepest emotions and to question the status quo. The critical analyses by Wasiolek, Troyat, and Wilson further examined some of the central themes of Tolstoy's stories, but also provided background information on his personal life.

Prior to beginning my research for this project, I imagined Tolstoy in his old age, sitting in a cluttered room in isolation and rapidly writing his innermost thoughts and concerns. After reading *Anna Karenina* I undoubtedly praised Tolstoy for his talent, but I did not know the source of his inspiration. Both Troyat and Wilson provide invaluable insight pertaining to Tolstoy's relationship with his wife (Sofya Andreyevna

Bers<sup>1</sup>), his children, and fellow artists. The two biographers also highlight Tolstoy's love of his home at Yasnaya Polyana and his continuous struggle with the government and politics, social class divides, and the Russian Orthodox Church.

Learning of Tolstoy's personal life made his work even more relatable and he lived a very full life, never taking anything for granted. Tolstoy and Sofya had their share of marital struggles and he often criticized his family for conforming to society's standards of wealth and social class standing. Nevertheless, Tolstoy used all of his personal experiences, whether they be joyful or heartbreaking, to create some of the most memorable literature for both generations of readers in the past and those to come.

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<sup>1</sup> Tolstoy's wife's name is also written as Sonya Andreyevna Bers, but for this project she will be referred to as Sofya, based on *Tolstoy: A Biography* by A.N. Wilson.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my Honors Capstone Advisor, Professor Patricia Burak, for her continued guidance and support. Your encouragement allowed me to remain confident throughout the project's entirety and your suggestions reminded me to think analytically and improve my writing. Both this capstone project and your literature class on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky encompass some of my favorite memories of Syracuse University. Thank you for sharing with me your passion and enthusiasm for Tolstoy's literature as well as introducing me to an author who has undoubtedly changed my life!

Additionally, I would like to thank my Capstone Reader, Professor Alexander A. Andreyewsky for his invaluable insight. Your guidance encouraged me to trust in and value my own thoughts and perspectives. I sincerely appreciate your dedication and commitment of time to this project.

Lastly, thank you to the Renee Crown University Honors Program. I relied heavily on the various capstone project resource guidelines and appreciate the detailed instruction. Eric, thank you for always being there to answer my drop-in questions and emails!



### **Advice to Future Honors Students**

I encourage all future honors students to select a capstone project topic that genuinely interests them. The capstone paper will take up a large portion of your time, and the project is significantly less overwhelming if you have a deep interest in the particular field. Also, do not be afraid to ask for help. Work closely with your capstone advisor, they are there to guide you and have most likely completed a project of similar measure at some point in their academic career. Lastly, set tangible goals for yourself. Setting multiple small goals is easier to complete than one large, final goal. It is incredibly gratifying to be able to “check-off” a smaller task for your project each week. Good luck and do not stress, it will all come together in the end!

### ***The Cossacks***

*"It is always the case on a long journey that till the first two or three stages have been passed imagination continues to dwell on the place left behind, but with the first morning on the road it leaps to the end of the journey and there begins building castles in the air" (Tolstoy, *The Cossacks* 91).*

"The Cossacks" is one of Tolstoy's most famous novellas and was written during the early stages of his literary career. Although this story is said to mimic and signify various life events and ideologies of Tolstoy himself, it is by no means an autobiography. Instead, Tolstoy's time in the Caucasus and the people he encountered merely inspired both the novella as well as the ideologies Tolstoy would further develop over the course of his life. In *Tolstoy's Major Fiction*, Edward Wasiolek examines the differences between Olenin, the main character, and Tolstoy. Although the author and main character of "The Cossacks" share a similar story, the differences in opinions and ideologies between the two become apparent to the reader.

Tolstoy left his childhood home, Yasnaya Polyana, in April of 1851 for the Caucasus as a volunteer on an expedition from Starogradovsk (Wilson, XVI). Tolstoy began writing "The Cossacks" in 1852 and completed the novella in 1862, roughly six years after serving in the army (Wilson, XVII).

Dmitri Andreich Olenin, the main character of “The Cossacks”, left behind his aristocratic life in Moscow to serve as a cadet in the Caucasus during the Caucasian War. Determined to escape an emotional void as well as the monotony of his privileged lifestyle, Olenin took the opportunity to travel to the Caucasus as a cadet, ignoring the judgments of his wealthy peers. Olenin left Moscow feeling misunderstood and comments on “the general awkwardness and restraint and his continual feeling of rebellion at all that conventionality” (Tolstoy, “Cossacks” 91).

Tolstoy writes,

It seemed to me that I had at last fallen in love, but then I saw that it was an involuntary falsehood, and that that was not the way to love, and I could not go on, but she did (“Cossacks” 86).

Olenin believed that by living in a Cossack village he would be able to leave behind the selfish and hierarchical lifestyle of which he had once been part in his past. Olenin traveled with his servant, Vanyusha, and resided with him in the Cossack village. Despite their significant class differences, Vanyusha ironically juxtaposes Olenin’s character. While Olenin was captivated and intrigued upon his arrival at the Cossack village, Vanyusha mocked the traditional customs and mannerisms of the Cossacks they encountered. The comparison between Olenin and Vanyusha is Tolstoy’s mechanism for indicating Olenin’s naive outlook on life. Although he arrives in the Caucasus eager to learn and escape his previous life, there is little character growth throughout the novella.

Olenin lived in the home of a Cossack cornet <sup>2</sup> along with his wife and daughter, Maryanka. Olenin quickly develops a love for Maryanka, although she is supposed to wed the popular young Cossack, Lukashka. While in the Cossack village Olenin is befriended by an older Cossack, Eroshka. Eroshka is a skilled hunter who serves as a mentor and friend for Olenin throughout the novella. Although Eroshka has an affinity toward Lukashka, a skilled soldier, he doesn't discourage Olenin's feelings for Maryanka. Later in the novel, a Russian officer, Beletski, arrives and encourages Olenin to ask Maryanka for her hand in marriage.

A central theme in "The Cossacks" is the role of women in the family as well as Olenin's infatuation with women. Olenin leaves Moscow with the impression that what he once thought was love turned out to only be a falsehood (Tolstoy, "Cossacks" 86). Nevertheless, upon his first glimpse of Maryanka, he is immediately besotted. When Olenin first arrived in the Cossack village he noticed the difference in appearance of these women from the aristocratic women with whom he was once familiar. Olenin notices,

A married woman has to work for her husband from youth to very old age: his demands on her are the Oriental ones of submission and labour. In consequence of this outlook women are strongly developed both physically and mentally, and though they are—as everywhere in the East—nominally in subjection, they possess far greater influence and importance in family-life than Western women. Their exclusion from public life and inurement to heavy male labour give the women all the more power and importance in the household (Tolstoy, "Cossacks" 99).

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<sup>2</sup> A Cavalry Military Officer

Tolstoy arrived in the Caucasus with a strong admiration for women. He reminisced of a love he left behind in Kazan yet quickly fell in love with a young girl, Maryanka, who would later inspire the character of Maryanka in "The Cossacks" (Troyat, 80). While serving as a cadet, Tolstoy was conflicted by his temptations and lust for the women in the village and his religious inclinations pressuring him to remain abstinent. Troyat notes that in his diary Tolstoy wrote, "I absolutely must have a woman...Lechery gives me no peace" (Troyat, 82). Tolstoy used sex as an attempt to find solace and peace within, but unfortunately it did just the opposite.

Tolstoy saw Maryanka as pure and beautiful and, just like Olenin's character in "The Cossacks", he contemplated asking her to marry. Although Olenin became obsessed with Maryanka, the conclusion of the novella details that finding a woman could not bring him peace. After Lukashka is killed and Olenin is leaving the Cossack village, Maryanka pays him very little attention. The novella concludes with Olenin looking back and realizing that he did not make a lasting impression on Maryanka and that she would just continue to live her life as if he had never been a part of it. Tolstoy's time in the Caucasus was a period of great internal conflict. After all, he left his aristocratic life in hopes of finding himself in the Caucasus and expected an immediate sense of relief and gratitude, which did not come. Tolstoy was insecure about his status and he wrote, "I am in an unnatural position: unmarried at twenty-three" (Troyat, 83).

Tolstoy's insecurities about marriage and temptation of women are a central element of Olenin's internal conflict in "The Cossacks". Tolstoy writes in his diary, "Keep away from wine and women...the pleasure is so negligible and the regret so profound" (Troyat, 101). Although Tolstoy experienced multiple sexual encounters while in the Caucasus, Olenin remained more introverted and kept his desires to himself. He remained isolated from all Cossacks except Eroshka and the wealthy Russian nobleman, Beletski. Olenin could never fully immerse himself in the lifestyle of the Cossack village. He unintentionally saw himself as different from the Cossacks and resultantly, could not understand why Maryanka grieved Lukashka's death at the end of the novella and why she didn't want to be with him.

At the beginning of the novella Tolstoy initially separates himself from Olenin and provides the readers with an objective description of the main character (Wasiolek, 52). Throughout the first scene Olenin is referred to as "the traveler" and his name is not mentioned until Olenin's serf, Vanyusha, asks him to conclude his goodbyes. The readers soon realize that Olenin is both ignorant and superfluous and does not view others, even his "closest" peers, the same way he regards himself (Tolstoy, "Cossacks" 92-93). "The Cossacks" begins with Olenin and his aristocratic peers meeting over drinks the night of his departure for the Caucasus. It is very obvious to the reader that Olenin's "friends" are ambivalent and are not saddened to say goodbye. Instead, they are

yawning and not amused by the conversation. Although this is readily apparent to the reader, Olenin is oblivious to the fact that his friends simply do not care. While Olenin is dining with his peers, Vanyusha and the coachman are left in the frigid weather with the carriage, repeatedly reminding Olenin that it is time to leave. Olenin simply does not mind delaying the schedule and four hours later finally bids farewell to Moscow (Tolstoy, "Cossacks" 87). As the cart pulls away from the tavern the men who stayed behind soon forget about Olenin and the conversation quickly changes subject. Although the reader is not yet aware, a similar departure scene will occur at the conclusion of the novella.

One of the most memorable scenes in "The Cossacks" is when Olenin is shown the old stag's lair by Eroshka while they are hunting together. Olenin then wanders alone and is frequently bitten by mosquitoes. Initially, he is in pain and incredibly uncomfortable, but as the mosquitoes continue to bite, Olenin grows numb to the pain. At this very scene Olenin has an epiphany and believes he has discovered a mantra that will guide him for the rest of his life. He is insistent that the mosquitoes biting him in the stag's lair represent the ideology that one must sacrifice themselves to others in order to find happiness (Wasiolek, 54).

Nevertheless, Wasiolek highlights the fact that Tolstoy does not share a belief in this ideology because of its apparent flaws. The mosquito bites were painful for Olenin and although the pain eventually subsided,

Olenin did not feel closer to nature. Despite the fact that Olenin is initially overcome with joy at this epiphany, the reader soon realizes that in the end, it is trivial and detrimental. For example, although Olenin loves Maryanka and does not want her to marry Lukashka, Olenin gives Lukashka his horse as a gift upon learning that Lukashka does not own one. Instead of being appreciative, Lukashka and his fellow Cossacks are skeptical of Olenin's motives. Lukashka dislikes Olenin even more as he begins to realize that Olenin has feelings for Maryanka. Whereas Olenin thought he was doing a selfless deed by giving away a horse, his actions only further ostracized him from the other Cossacks (Wasiolek, 55).

The character of Eroshka, a tall, bulky elder with a strong affinity toward alcohol, was influenced by an elder Cossack, Epiphany Sekhin (Epishka), with whom Tolstoy was "enchanted" during his time in the Caucasus (Troyat, 81). Throughout the novella, Eroshka is consistently an influence upon Olenin's decisions and actions. Tolstoy strategically describes Eroshka's physical differences in order to enhance his "radical" ideologies. He writes:

Uncle Eroshka was a gigantic Cossack with a broad snow-white beard and such broad shoulders and chest that in the wood, where there was no one to compare him with, he did not look particularly tall, so well proportioned were his powerful limbs. He wore a tattered coat and, over the bands with which his legs were swathed, sandals made of undressed deer's hide tied on with strings (Tolstoy, "Cossacks" 107-108).

Unlike Olenin, Tolstoy lived with Epishka, which helps to explain Eroshka's crucial and prominent role in the novella. Eroshka is first



introduced in “The Cossacks” while hunting and he meets up with a few of the young Cossacks, including Lukashka. Although many of the young Cossacks admire Eroshka for his astounding hunting skills and gruff persona, Eroshka stands in stark juxtaposition to the other Cossack villagers.

Eroshka is unmarried and never questions his contradiction to the status quo; he also serves as a foil character to Olenin. Whereas Olenin is insecure about his relationship status, Eroshka embraces his freedom and talks of women and sexuality with the philosophy that one can find no sin in being intimate with a woman. The scene detailing Olenin’s experience in the stag’s lair highlights Olenin’s internal state prior to Eroshka’s influence (Wasiolek, 59). Olenin believes that through self-sacrifice and a devotion to serving others endlessly, one will find happiness. On the contrary, Eroshka believes that man can indulge in all of God’s creations and he sees this indulgence as being grateful for what one has. Eroshka explains to Olenin,

God made you and God made the girl too. He made it all; so it is no sin to look at a nice girl. That’s what she was made for; to be loved and to give joy. That’s how I judge it, my good fellow (Tolstoy, “Cossacks” 132).

Eroshka’s advice highlights a significant theme in “The Cossacks”: the depiction and categorization of women, which is a topic that Olenin often contemplates. Olenin is infatuated with Maryanka and wants to marry her, even though he neither understands nor genuinely knows her in the slightest. Olenin wants to marry in order to “fit in” and to feel a sense of

success and achievement. Similar to Olenin's experience in the Caucasus, Tolstoy had difficulty finding internal peace and was often overwhelmed by his obsession with women and temptation, until he married Sofya Andreyevna Bers in September of 1862 (Wilson, xix). Tolstoy writes in his diary,

I could not feel my own body. I was pure spirit. And then, the wretched, carnal side took over again, and hardly an hour later I was listening to the voices of vice, ambition, vanity, life. I knew where these voices came from, I knew they were destroying my happiness; I struggled. I lost. I fell asleep dreaming of fame and women. But I am not to blame, it was stronger than I (Troyat, 77).

Olenin sees his peers in Moscow, Vanyusha, and the Cossack villagers as "others" and is never able to fully relate to them. Even Eroshka, whom Olenin admires and with whom he spends most of his time, fails to leave a lasting impression on Olenin. Although he left for the Caucasus with the desire to assimilate to the Cossack culture and to truly find himself, Olenin failed to find himself.

Tolstoy reiterates Olenin's lack of character growth and development through the concluding scene of "The Cossacks." This scene intentionally mirrors the novella's introduction, with an awkward parting scene between Olenin and those he believes to be his close acquaintances. In the introduction, Olenin has an obnoxiously delayed departure from a tavern. His peers are tired and uninterested, yet Olenin is completely oblivious to their indifference. The conclusion is faster paced, yet Olenin leaves the Cossack village without impacting Eroshka, his beloved

companion, or Maryanka, his infatuation who instead is mourning the loss of Lukashka.

After reading "The Cossacks," it is easy to see why this novella is considered to be one of Tolstoy's most famous. Instead of being overly moralistic, Tolstoy allows the reader to "dissect" his work and find themes and moral messages that speak to each individual reader differently. Although "The Cossacks" does not have a climactic plot line or a heroic conclusion, the structure of the novella and the stark contrast between characters make it relatable to readers in the present day, over a century and a half later.

### ***Anna Karenina***

*“So I must rid myself of it. Why not put out the candle, if there’s nothing more to look at, if it’s vile to look at it all?” (Tolstoy, Anna Karenina 766-767)*

*Anna Karenina* is one of the most famous Russian novels and is widely read around the world. This novel was completed in 1877, less than ten years after Tolstoy completed his other notable novel, *War and Peace* (Wilson, xx-xxii). Together these two works have undeniably established Tolstoy as a literary genius. *Anna Karenina* is a dramatic tragedy detailing the life of a wealthy socialite, Anna Arkadyevna Karenina. As her relationships and connections with the other characters in the story unfold, Tolstoy meticulously redirects the novel to detail the lives of Anna’s peers as well.

*Anna Karenina* is a novel belonging to two equally important characters, Anna, and Konstantin Dmitrich Levin (Wasiolek, 129). The novel begins with Anna visiting her brother, Prince Stepan Arkadyich Oblonsky (Stiva), and his family. Stiva’s wife, Princess Darya Alexandrovna Oblonsky (Dolly), recently discovered that her husband was having an affair with the governess, and Anna helped Stiva and Dolly reconcile their differences. The reader is also introduced to Dolly’s younger sister, Princess Ekaterina Alexandrovna Scherbatsky (Kitty), who is infatuated with Count Alexei Kirillovich Vronsky, a charming

military officer, yet is also being courted by Levin, an introverted but genuine landowner. Unfortunately for Kitty, when Vronsky first meets Anna he is captivated by her beauty and charm. Although Anna has a husband, Alexei Alexandrovich Karenin, waiting for her at home in St. Petersburg, she cannot resist Vronsky's intrigue.

Anna leaves her brother's home and returns to St. Petersburg, but Vronsky soon follows. The two see one another frequently at various social events and eventually Karenin questions his wife's actions. Anna is honest with Karenin yet he refuses to divorce her due to his fear of society's disapproval. Anna relocates to the family's country home while Karenin and her son, Seryozha, remain in St. Petersburg. Karenin demands that Anna no longer contact Seryozha, a daunting task that deeply pains Anna. At one point in the novel Karenin agrees to divorce Anna, but out of sympathy she quickly denies.

Anna discovers that she is pregnant with Vronsky's child and her relationship with him changes. After all, the foundation of their relationship was based purely on passion. Anna recognizes that having a child would change everything and she grew to be dubious of Vronsky's every emotion and action. Anna is very ill during childbirth and on her deathbed Karenin forgives her, but upon her recovery the animosity resurfaces. Anna and Vronsky move to Italy with their daughter, yet find their relocation superfluous and decide to move back to Russia. Anna is further ostracized from society and is eager to live in the country, but

Vronsky is not ready to commit. Anna becomes increasingly skeptical of Vronsky and paranoia consumes her. Although she has recovered from her illness during childbirth, Anna is now dependent on morphine and her life transforms into a blurry haze. While Vronsky is out of town, she throws herself under a moving train, thus ending what had become a tragic existence for her.

A parallel story in the novel is that of Kitty and Levin. After Vronsky follows Anna to St. Petersburg, Kitty falls ill and goes to Germany to recover. While abroad she meets Levin's brother, Nikolai Dmitrich who is recovering at the same health spa. Levin leaves his job with the local government and works the land with his peasants, a task that brings him great peace. Later in the novel Kitty and Levin are reunited at Dolly's, their love is apparent and the two marry soon after.

Levin has a difficult time adjusting to married life and after Kitty gives birth to their son, his insecurity returns. Levin begins to question the meaning of life and is given advice by a serf that leaves a lasting impression<sup>3</sup>. One summer day at their country home there is a terrible thunderstorm. When Levin realizes that Kitty and their son are still

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<sup>3</sup> Fyodor tells Levin, "One man just lives for his own needs, take Mityukha even, just stuffs his belly, but Fokanych—he's an upright old man. He lives for the soul. He remembers God (Tolstoy, *AK* 794). Levin processes Fyodor's words and understands, "To live not for one's own needs but for God...He said one should not live for one's needs – that is, one should not live for what we understand, for what we're drawn to, for what we want – but for something incomprehensible, for God, whom no one can either comprehend or define" (Tolstoy, *AK* 795).

outside in the woods he fears the worst. Upon finding them safe and unharmed, Levin realizes his absolute love for both his son and Kitty.

1874 marked the start of a tragic few years for Tolstoy. First, he lost his Aunt Toinette, and a year later his newborn son, Nikolay, to meningitis (Wilson, 265-266). Soon after his wife, Sofya, became pregnant but their daughter, Varvara, died immediately after Sofya gave birth (Wilson, 266). Not long after Varvara's death, Tolstoy's Aunt Pelageya, whom Tolstoy noted as his final connection to his parent's generation, passed away as well (Wilson, 266). Wilson writes, "death, death and more death... it is against this background that *Anna Karenina* was composed" (Wilson, 266-267).

Tolstoy's sister as well as a woman who resided nearby his home, Yasnaya Polyana, served as inspiration for Anna's character (Wilson, 270-271). His sister, Marya, had an affair with a Swedish viscount and fled to Scandinavia in order to escape the critiques of society (Wilson, 270). Anna Stepanovna Pirogova, a woman who lived close to Tolstoy, committed suicide by jumping under a train in January 1872 (Wilson, 271). These acts indicate the depiction of women during that era and most definitely influenced Tolstoy's character development of Anna.

Tolstoy found this novel incredibly difficult to conceptualize and in the early stages of his writing often recreated the characters to fit his ever-changing moods. Wilson notes:

Like all Tolstoy's great works, *Anna Karenina* was a long time gestating and growing. But in this case, the longer he

spent on it, the more he was involved in a semi-conscious attempt to destroy the original conception, the more he was apostatizing from his view, that the purpose of the novel was to make people laugh and cry over it; the more he was using the things as 'a vehicle for establishing a correct point of view on all social problems' (269).

Whereas some aspects of Tolstoy's greatest works are autobiographical and use history as inspiration, *Anna Karenina* was a contemporary piece that was unlike anything he had ever written. Although the novel has themes of love, family, and religion, there are undoubtedly dark undertones that make this novel tragic and complex.

While writing *Anna Karenina*, the characters Tolstoy created evolved with each written draft. Whereas Tolstoy's original intent was to write of Vronsky and Karenin as victims of Anna's dark mindset, as he wrote, Tolstoy failed to view either Vronsky or Karenin as good enough for Anna (Troyat, 360). Just as the characters of Vronsky and Karenin evolved over time, Anna's did too. Initially, Tolstoy despised Anna and saw her as immoral and failed to describe her as beautiful and charming (Troyat, 359). As he wrote drafts of this novel, Tolstoy's impression drastically changed. Troyat writes,

His attitude toward Anna Karenina, moreover, changed in the course of the book, almost as though the creator had gradually been seduced by his creature. Behind the love story of Anna and Vronsky lay the love story of Tolstoy and Anna (359).

Although her storyline ends in a tragedy, Anna is undoubtedly one of Tolstoy's most memorable characters. Tolstoy strategically describes



Anna based on her relationships with supporting characters in the novel. Her ability to assist in Stiva and Dolly's reconciliation illustrates Anna's sincerity and compassion. Vronsky's initial enchantment with her depicts her beauty and grace.

Anna's relationship with Karenin plays a crucial role in the novel and the development of her character. Despite her infidelity, Karenin initially refuses to divorce. He is obsessed with maintaining a "good" appearance and does not want to experience society's critiques. Troyat goes as far as describing Karenin as a "slave to etiquette" (358). Nevertheless, when Anna is on her deathbed after giving birth to Vronsky's daughter, Karenin has a change of heart. He finally understands that Anna "might have her own destiny, thoughts, and desires" (Troyat, 361). However, as soon as she recovers, he loses all sight of this realization and returns to his close-minded behaviors (Troyat, 361).

Throughout the novel Karenin separated Anna from their only son, Seryozha, despite his claim to maintain a familial appearance. Anna was not a perfect mother by any means: she often forgot about her only child because she was incapable of loving more than one person. At the same time, when Anna left Karenin to live in the country and maintain a relationship with Vronsky, she also left Seryozha. Although she initially exclaimed, "without my son there can be no life for me even with the one I love," Anna made a conscious decision to leave Seryozha (Tolstoy, *AK* 292).

Tolstoy also highlighted the essence of women through Anna and Vronsky's relationship. They were both immediately infatuated with one another but, the more Anna was ostracized and criticized by her peers the more she began to envy Vronsky's freedom. Wasiolek notes,

Anna gives everything to the love. Vronsky gives only what is proper and what he has to. He is sensitive to public opinion, to appearances; he is interested in other things. Anna is attentive to one thing only: her love for Vronsky and the painful situation attendant on that love (139).

Anna's painful experience at the Opera emphasized the resentment in their relationship. Anna envies Vronsky for his ability to maintain a respectable reputation, even though he knowingly pursued a married woman. Vronsky, on the other hand, begrudges Anna because he feels as though she is inhibiting his freedom. When discussing the scene after the opera Tolstoy writes, "[Vronsky] assured [Anna] of his love, because he saw that that alone could calm her now, and he did not reproach her in words, but in his soul he did reproach her" (AK 549). The downfall of Anna and Vronsky's relationship was inevitable. Anna's isolation from other characters indicates the extent to which women of the time period were (and currently are) judged by men and women alike in society. Anna realizes, "Whatever position she was in, she could not abandon her son. Let her husband disgrace her and turn her out, let Vronsky grow cool towards her and continue to lead his independent life...she could not desert her son (Tolstoy, AK 289). Tolstoy, although a philosopher of

morals, sympathizes with Anna. Troyat concludes, “Tolstoy’s dislike of his hero grows with his infatuation for his heroine” (361).

The concept of societal and class divisions is also apparent in Levin’s relationship with the peasants who work on his fields. Levin’s “mowing scene” is one of the novel’s most memorable and is the first time the reader feels connected to his reserved character. Although Tolstoy’s lengthy descriptions initially come across as bland, the scene illustrates that Levin, unlike Anna, is genuinely connected to Russia and its culture. Tolstoy’s values are expressed in Levin’s character through his physical and mental engagement with life. Tolstoy explains that the longer Levin mowed, his body felt “full of life and conscious of itself...these were the most blissful moments” (AK 252). Farming symbolizes Levin’s emotional growth, as he is the only character in *Anna Karenina* that contemplates religion and philosophy and developed over the course of the novel.

As the reader learns more about Levin’s character, the similarities between Levin and Tolstoy himself become more apparent. The mowing scene and Levin’s relationship with the peasants is similar to Tolstoy’s relationship with his muzhiks at Yasnaya Polyana (Troyat, 363). Troyat notes,

He shamelessly attributed to [Levin] the events of his own life, fed him with his ideas, the books he read, his own blood. The relationship between Levin and Kitty—the declaration scene using the first letters of words, the wedding ceremony, including the last-minute hesitation and the incident of the forgotten shirt in the trunk, the young couple’s first days in their country home, the birth of

their first child—were one and all transposed from the author's past (363).

Just as Tolstoy identified with characters from his previous novels and short stories, he incorporated multiple similarities and experiences in *Anna Karenina* as well.

Anna and Levin's characters, although vastly different, create balance in the novel. Whereas Anna was consumed with grief and envy, Levin finds happiness. The concept of life and death is prevalent in the novel and is most often portrayed by these two characters. Anna's suicide at the end of the novel, although unpredictable, was inevitable. She grew to be paranoid of Vronsky's every action and motive. Anna felt isolated and was consumed with grief. Levin, on the other hand, developed throughout the course of the novel. Kitty and Levin's relationship helped to lighten the tone of this otherwise dark novel. Troyat writes, "When shading his vast composition, Tolstoy wanted to save the brightest light for the legitimate couple, Kitty and Levin" (363).

Prior to marrying Kitty and even throughout their marriage, Levin struggled with depression. Levin is content working on his land with the muzhiks and even comments, "all my former dreams about family life are nonsense" (Tolstoy, *AK* 276). At one point in the novel Levin admits that death encompassed his thoughts and he felt it approaching (Tolstoy, *AK* 352). After the birth of his son, Levin finds himself continuously questioning the meaning of life; he is unhappy and lacks motivation. The novel concludes with a scene in which there is a dangerous thunderstorm

and Kitty, the nanny, and Levin's son (Mitya) are stranded in the small forest on his estate. Levin sees a tree struck by lightning and is horrified at the thought of losing his family. Upon seeing his wife and son safe, Levin is consumed with pure joy and gratitude. He realizes,

But my life now, my whole life, regardless of all that may happen to me, every minute of it, is not only not meaningless, as it was before, but has the unquestionable meaning of the good which it is in my power to put into it (Tolstoy, *AK* 817).

The thought of losing his wife and only child allows Levin to grasp just how important they are to him. Resultantly, he is able to find a sense of understanding and hope in his own life.

Anna's suicide, although depressing, made Tolstoy's work realistic and relatable, even in the present day. Tolstoy wrote *Anna Karenina* with the intent of creating a novel that will have great longevity and will highlight life in its most realistic and honest forms. The reader understands that Anna is spiraling out of control. She was always a character who depended on others and just before her suicide Anna was completely alone, both physically and metaphorically. Throughout the course of the novel, Tolstoy foreshadowed Anna's tragedy with symbols of death. Anna's reoccurring dream of a muzhik standing above her while making a haunting tapping sound on an iron plate indicated that an unavoidable death would come. Anna dreamt of a muzhik instead of an aristocratic peer, indicating her alienation from the life she once was a part of. Just as Anna throws herself under the train, she has an image of

the muzhik, muttering incomprehensible words, and tapping on an iron plate (Troyat, 367). Another symbol Tolstoy used throughout the novel to foreshadow Anna's death is that of a train. Anna was introduced to Vronsky at a train station. A train most commonly represents movement or a journey, but Anna's suicide on the railroad tracks highlights the end of her journey and her escape from a troubled life. Anna was first introduced to Vronsky at a train station, and she ended her own life by jumping off of a train.

*Anna Karenina* primarily details the life and downfall of Anna, but Tolstoy's focus on his beloved character is done with the intent of offering a new perspective to his readers. The epigraph, which is taken from the Bible, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay" should be understood as a phrase being said by God or a higher power (Romans 12:19). Tolstoy's motive is to illustrate the moral message of a life once admired. Throughout the novel the readers regularly find themselves defending Anna, despite her infidelity. Tolstoy encourages his reader not to pass judgment on Anna and he writes descriptively and in such a heartfelt manner that the readers cannot help but to sympathize with his heroine (Troyat, 369).

*Anna Karenina* is a rich novel because it encompasses vastly different sentiments and scenarios, allowing all readers to emotionally relate and connect to the characters at one point or another. In a letter from June of 1846 Tolstoy writes,

New generations will come, society will be transformed,  
Russia will turn down other paths, but these works [*War*

*and Peace and Anna Karenina*] will continue to be read and reread by all because they are inseparable from Russian life and Russian culture. They will be eternally new (Troyat, 371).

Although the novel encompasses tragedy and death, the reader has a sense of peace upon reaching its conclusion. Tolstoy illustrates both triumphs and tribulations, providing his audience with a much-needed moralistic message. *Anna Karenina* will be remembered for its ability to resonate with audiences from a variety of backgrounds for generations to come.

### ***The Death of Ivan Ilych***

*“As is the case with the dead, his face was handsomer and above all more dignified than when he was alive” (Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych* 250).*

“The Death of Ivan Ilych” was published in 1862, roughly four years after Tolstoy began to write the novella (Wilson, xxiv and 366). Tolstoy completed the majority of the work in just over a month, allowing Sofya to include it in her *Collected Edition* (Wilson, 366). This short story is incredibly heavy, as it includes a predominant moralistic message (Wilson, 366). “The Death of Ivan Ilych” marks the start of Tolstoy’s literary career following his “spiritual crisis” (Wasiolek, 165). His theological obsession is readily apparent when studying Tolstoy’s work prior to *Anna Karenina* in comparison to “The Death of Ivan Ilych” (Wasiolek, 165). Wasiolek elaborates:

[*Anna Karenina* and “The Death of Ivan Ilych”] are the difference between the ‘first phase’ and the ‘second phase,’ between the Tolstoy who captivated his readers with the power of his craft and his fictive vision, and the Tolstoy who captivated not only the Russians but the world with his theological and spiritual visions (165).

Although “The Death of Ivan Ilych” is at times overbearingly moralistic, Tolstoy does not sacrifice his style or writing technique and, just as before, the reader is captivated for the work’s entirety.

The novella begins with judges congregating in a courtroom, discussing the death of their peer, Ivan Ilych Golovin. Instead of mourning Ivan Ilych’s death, the men are consumed with questions regarding



promotions and employment opportunities now that his position is vacant. The reader quickly learns that superficiality has consumed the lives of these judges and instead of grieving they are “complacent feeling that, ‘it is he who is dead and not I’” (Tolstoy, “The Death” 248). One of the judges, Peter Ivanovich “sacrifices” his time and attends Ivan Ilych’s funeral. The reader is then introduced to Ivan Ilych’s wife, Praskovya Fedorovna Golovina, who is more concerned with obtaining the greatest amount of her husband’s pension than his absence.

Next, the novella goes back in time and provides the reader with a brief overview of Ivan Ilych’s young adulthood. He graduated with a law degree and held various respectable jobs, earning promotions every few years. Instead of informing the reader of Ivan Ilych’s personal attributes and character descriptions, he is only described on the basis of employment, salary, and his fancy possessions. Tolstoy briefly mentions Ivan Ilych’s wife and when he contemplated marriage Ivan thought, “Really, why shouldn’t I marry?” (“The Death” 259).

Ivan Ilych and Praskovya Fedorovna had children, but their marriage was based on formalities rather than genuine love. Tolstoy writes, there were “islets at which they anchored for a while and then again set out upon that ocean of veiled hostility which showed itself in their aloofness from one another” (“The Death” 261). He was offered a position in St. Petersburg and relocated his family from the country, where they resided during the summer with Praskovya Fedorovna’s

brother in hopes of saving money. The husband and wife were more amiable to one another now that financial security was within their grasp. Ivan Ilych left his family in the country while he purchased a home and furnished it in St. Petersburg. He strategically decorated the house in hopes of appearing to be wealthy. Nevertheless, "His house was so like the others that it would never have been noticed, but to him it all seemed to be quite exceptional" (Tolstoy, "The Death" 266).

One day while showing the upholsterer how to hang curtains, Ivan Ilych slipped and fell on the ladder and hit his side abdomen against the window frame. Although there was a bruise, the pain subsided. The family lived monotonously in their new home until Ivan Ilych became aware of a pain in his side (the spot which he previously injured) and an unfamiliar taste in his mouth. The discomfort increased and no doctor could diagnose him or provide a remedy. Praskovya Fedorovna became annoyed with her husband and Ivan Ilych began to think about death for the first time in his life. He feared, "When I am not, what will there be? There will be nothing. Then where shall I be when I am no more?" (Tolstoy, "The Death" 278).

Ivan Ilych's servant, Gerasim, looked after him and provided comfort and pain relief throughout the nights. Tolstoy describes Gerasim as "a clean, fresh peasant lad, grown stout on town food and always cheerful and bright" ("The Death" 283). Ivan Ilych began to admire his caretaker and as his illness consumed him even more, he began to reflect

on his life. Ivan Ilych realizes that he did not live his life for its enjoyment or beauty, but instead focused on living up to society's standards. He wept and apologized to his wife and children, feeling guilty and badly for them.

Tolstoy writes,

It occurred to him that what had appeared perfectly impossible before, namely that he had not spent his life as he should have done, might after all be true. It occurred to him that his scarcely perceptible attempts to struggle against what was considered good by the most highly placed people, those scarcely noticeable impulses which he had immediately suppressed, might have been the real thing, and all the rest false ("The Death" 299).

Ivan Ilych's spiritual awakening marked the end of his life. He struggled with severe pain for a few days and on his deathbed realized that he no longer feared his inevitable end. Tolstoy writes, "he drew in a breath, stopped in the midst of a sigh, stretched out, and died" ("The Death" 302).

"The Death of Ivan Ilych" highlights a turning point in Tolstoy's theological positions and resultantly, this novella includes multiple religious undertones. Wasiolek states, "Tolstoy becomes something more than a writer: he becomes a religious leader, sage, a modern prophet" (165). In a broad context, Ivan Ilych experienced a spiritual awakening. Although he was once obsessed with maintaining a "respectable" and upper class appearance, Ivan Ilych lost sight of authentic joy and admiration. His relationship with his wife and children was merely a formality but, upon spending time with Gerasim, Ivan Ilych quickly discovered the lack of purpose in his life. Gerasim, who did not fear death and enjoyed life for the simple things, served as a Christ-like figure for

Ivan Ilych, “christening” him just before his death. Gerasim is Ivan Ilych’s servant, but Tolstoy emphasizes his serving nature through his selfless actions instead of his occupation. Wasiolek writes,

It is Gerasim alone who acknowledges the truth. He accepts the fact that Ivan Ilych is dying and cheerfully acts to make him comfortable. He breathes the health of youth and natural peasant life, lifts up the legs of the dying Ivan Ilych, cleans up after him with good humor, and in general shows him a kind of natural compassion (176).

Ivan Ilych first mentions a higher power when he is overcome with pain and sickness. He mutters, “My God, My God,” upon his realization that his death may be inevitable. Tolstoy emphasizes the final three days of Ivan Ilych’s life, referencing Christianity and Jesus’ resurrection. At the conclusion of the novella, Ivan Ilych no longer feared death, he acknowledged his wrongdoings and asked his wife and children for their forgiveness. Just as Ivan Ilych was passing, he reassured himself “knowing that He whose understanding mattered would understand” (Tolstoy, “The Death” 302).

Gerasim not only served as a Christ-like figure for Ivan Ilych, his character was also developed with the intention of emphasizing class divisions in society, a topic to which Tolstoy paid great attention, especially at Yasnaya Polyana. While writing “The Death of Ivan Ilych,” Tolstoy grew to be dissatisfied with his family life. He wrote in his diary,

It distresses me greatly, but I cannot approve of them. Their joys – success at school or social success, music, physical comfort, shopping – I consider them all bad for them, but I cannot say so out loud (Troyat, 441).

Sofya was often agitated and bitter towards Tolstoy's relationship and obsession with the muzhiks. She went as far as exclaiming, "it is too bad that you care so little for your own children. If they belonged to some peasant woman it would be a different story" (Troyat, 451). Tolstoy further elaborates that he was most proud of his children and wife one summer at Yasnaya Polyana when they helped him and the muzhiks work in the fields (Troyat, 455-456).

Tolstoy commended the muzhiks for their simplistic lifestyle and he firmly believed that "the root of all evil...is property" (Troyat, 458). Gerasim eased Ivan Ilych's pain by allowing Ivan Ilych to lie down and elevate his legs on Gerasim's shoulders. Gerasim would comfort and console Ivan Ilych throughout both the day and night. He accepted Ivan Ilych's illness and remained honest with him about death (Wilson, 367). Gerasim's honesty and sincerity allowed Ivan Ilych to reflect on his life as well as to accept death instead of fearing it. Gerasim, although starkly different from the Ivan Ilych the reader is introduced to prior to his sickness, was the only character from which Ivan Ilych could learn.

The role of women is intentionally underplayed throughout the novella. Praskovya Fedorovna, who is often described as greedy and hostile, is the only female character and even her character descriptions are limited. At the start of the novella, the reader immediately has a negative perception of this widow because she is overtly concerned with recovering Ivan Ilych's pension. Ivan Ilych admits to marrying her not for

true love, but because she “came of a good family, was not bad looking, and had some little property” (Tolstoy, “The Death” 258). After the birth of their first child, Ivan Ilych distanced himself from his family and began to focus solely on his work (Tolstoy, “The Death” 260).

Upon analyzing Tolstoy and Sofya’s relationship throughout the years that Tolstoy developed this novella, one cannot help but to recognize the obvious parallels between Ivan Ilych, Praskovya Fedorovna, and Sofya. Tolstoy felt like an outsider in his own household because Sofya and their children were obsessed with materialistic possessions and class standing (Troyat, 441). Tolstoy writes in his diary,

I am suffering atrociously. Her soul is obtuse and dead; that I could bear, if that were all, but she is insolent and self-assured...I ought to be able to put up with her out of pity, at least, if not love...I have the feeling that I am the only sane man in a madhouse run by a madman (Troyat, 441).

Tolstoy recognized his wife and children’s detrimental attributes and made effort to incorporate these concepts into “The Death of Ivan Ilych”. Just as Tolstoy expressed both concern and hope for the dying Ivan Ilych, he also maintained that same glimpse of faith for his family as well.

A prominent theme in “The Death of Ivan Ilych” is the concept of life and death. Ivan Ilych was consumed with status and living up to society’s standards and therefore, he regularly felt unfulfilled and did not have a genuine relationship with anyone, including his wife and children. Tolstoy writes, “Ivan Ilych’s life had been most simple and most ordinary and therefore most terrible” (“The Death” 255). This iconic first line has

been studied by students and scholars of Tolstoy since it was penned and forces the reader to not only better understand Ivan Ilych, but to examine their own life as well. Only when he was deathly ill did Ivan Ilych come to terms with himself and his past. Upon realizing the severity of his illness, Ivan Ilych was petrified at the thought of dying. After spending time with Gerasim, Ivan Ilych began to accept death and no longer dreaded it.

A memorable symbol in the novella is the “deep black sack” that haunted Ivan Ilych in his dream. He was being pushed further and further into this sack, but could not be fully submerged. In his dream, Ivan Ilych was scared but also wanted to be pushed through, he wanted the pain to subside and “suddenly he broke through, fell, and regained consciousness” (Tolstoy, “The Death” 293). Wasiolek notes,

Undoubtedly the struggle he puts up in the black bag is a symbol of the struggle he maintains to justify his life. He slips through the bag and into the light only when, in his final hours, he stops justifying his life and listens, specifically when he himself feels pity for others: first for his son, who has come with eyes swollen with tears, and then for his wife (174-175).

The sack signifies both death and rebirth. Upon awakening from this dream, Ivan Ilych reflected on his past and realized that while he was alive and in good health, he wasn't really “living”. Just two hours before his death, Ivan Ilych understood that despite the wrongdoings of his past, his future could still be set right (Tolstoy, “The Death” 301).

“The Death of Ivan Ilych” is memorable for its parable-like qualities (Wasiolek, 168). Although at times there are “punishing-

qualities” and “heavy” messages, the reader feels at peace upon the novella’s completion. Whereas in Tolstoy’s previous novels and short stories he underlined the plot with moralistic realizations, his theological insight and opinions are now on the novella’s surface. As the reader continues to delve further into Tolstoy’s literature, his personality and priorities become readily apparent.



### *The Kreutzer Sonata*

*"In a town a man can live for a hundred years without noticing that he has long been dead and has rotted away" (Tolstoy, The Kreutzer Sonata 394).*

"The Kreutzer Sonata" was published by Leo Tolstoy in 1889 and is a further continuation of the development of moralistic ideologies of Tolstoy. This short story emphasizes the themes of sexuality, paranoia within marital relationships, and deception. "The Kreutzer Sonata" was a result of Tolstoy's obsession with a storyline "in which sexuality and family life were the villains" (Tolstoy, "KS" 475). Although a drastic change from his earlier works, "The Kreutzer Sonata" forces the reader to consider Tolstoy's method of thinking as regards trust, relationships, and abstinence.

The novella takes place on a train and the unnamed narrator overhears the main character, Pozdnyshev, conversing with other passengers, one referred to as "a lawyer", another "a lady". The small group of passengers are discussing love, marriage and infidelity. Pozdnyshev's remarks are shockingly negative yet, at times, true. He states, "to love one person for a whole lifetime is like saying that one candle will burn a whole life" (Tolstoy, "KS" 362). Furthermore, Pozdnyshev later critiques, "but marriages in our days are mere deception" (Tolstoy, "KS" 362). Moments later Pozdnyshev releases his

identity to the secluded group of passengers, admitting that he murdered his wife.

As the story progresses, the narrator finds himself sitting next to Pozdnyshev and the conversation quickly escalates into the unfolding of Pozdnyshev's dark past. He begins by describing his life prior to marriage:

Before my marriage I lived as everyone does, that is, dissolutely; and while living dissolutely I was convinced, like everybody in our class, that I was living as one has to. I thought I was a charming fellow and quite a moral man. I was not a seducer, had no unnatural tastes, did not make that the chief purpose of my life as many of my associates did, but I practiced debauchery in a steady, decent way for health's sake (Tolstoy, "KS" 364).

Pozdnyshev's explanation reiterates Tolstoy's emphasis on the role of one's surroundings. Debauchery was accepted amongst society, not frowned upon, and therefore Pozdnyshev saw no harm and even justified his actions. Pozdnyshev later recollects losing his virginity and admits that the women did not seduce him but instead he thought of the experience as "good for one's health" and "innocent amusement for a young man" (Tolstoy, "KS" 367).

Pozdnyshev later explains that he grew to be guilty for his actions and when he was engaged to his wife he showed her his diary. Pozdnyshev's wife was shocked to learn of his prior relations with women and ignorant reasoning. He explains,

I remember her horror, despair, and confusion, when she learnt of it and understood it. I saw that she then wanted to give me up. And why did she not do so? (Tolstoy, "KS" 370)

Pozdnyshev genuinely believed that he was in love (Tolstoy, "KS" 375). He was mesmerized by his fiancée and eagerly anticipated their marriage. The couple's wedding came quickly, but Pozdnyshev soon became ambivalent to his relationship. He describes his honeymoon as "horrid, shameful, and dull, the whole time" (Tolstoy, "KS" 379). Not only was Pozdnyshev bored with his new marriage, his wife became depressed just days after the wedding (Tolstoy, "KS" 379). The couple had children throughout their years of marriage, but Pozdnyshev had no relationship with them, and even resented their presence. He claims,

Children are a blessing from God, a joy! That is all a lie. It was so once upon a time, but now it is not so at all. Children are a torment and nothing else (Tolstoy, "KS" 389).

Pozdnyshev's relationship with his wife became increasingly worse as time passed. Although they were married for years, their relationship was never joyous or healthy. When they would argue, Pozdnyshev claimed that his wife would intentionally use their children against him. He states, she would pretend he was hurting her and would call out to their children for help (Tolstoy, "KS" 399). As a result, they would quickly come to help their mother and stand by her side (Tolstoy, "KS" 399). Pozdnyshev explains,

Our relations to one another grew more and more hostile and at last reached a stage where it was not disagreement that caused hostility but hostility that caused disagreement. Whatever she might say I disagreed with beforehand, and it was just the same with her (Tolstoy, "KS" 392).

Pozdnyshev's wife began to play the violin in their home with one of his acquaintances, Trukhachevski, yet Pozdnyshev remarks, "I disliked him from the first glance" (Tolstoy, "KS" 402). Trukhachevski and the wife began to play music with one another on a regular basis, and as time passed, Pozdnyshev grew to be more paranoid and obsessive. He also accused his wife of infidelity. He notes that Trukhachevski gazed at his wife "as all immoral men look at pretty women" and that "[Trukhachevski's] lustful gaze, evidently excited her" (Tolstoy, "KS" 402).

Pozdnyshev went out of town for business and arrived home unexpectedly early one evening. Throughout the previous weeks he convinced himself that Trukhachevski and his wife were having an affair and upon his return, he expected, and even hoped, to find the two together in his house. Upon walking through his front door, Pozdnyshev first noticed another man's coat hanging on his coat stand (Tolstoy, "KS" 419). He knew it was Trukhachevski's. His pent up anger was readily apparent and his adrenaline was rapidly running (Tolstoy, "KS" 419). Pozdnyshev instinctually grabbed the Damascus dagger off the wall and walked over to the doorway leading to the room in which his wife and Trukhachevski were located. Pozdnyshev admits,

I remember the expression of their faces. I remember that expression because it gave me a painful pleasure -- it was an expression of terror. That was just what I wanted. I shall never forget the look of desperate terror that appeared on both their faces the first instant they saw me (Tolstoy, "KS" 422).

Although Trukhachevski escaped Pozdnyshev's wrath, he stabbed and killed his wife, ending not only his jealous rage, but also a lifetime of hostility and marital tension. He was in a trance and did not realize what he had done until looking at her "dead face" and body that "had now become motionless, waxen and cold" (Tolstoy, "KS" 428).

The novella concludes with Pozdnyshev and the narrator sitting in silence next to one another on the train (Tolstoy, "KS" 428). Pozdnyshev was noticeably upset, crying and shaking, but the conversation ended. Pozdnyshev finally explains, had he known then what he currently knows...he would not have married his previous wife (Tolstoy, "KS" 428). Pozdnyshev does not feel remorseful for murder; instead he regrets marriage.

Tolstoy's "The Kreutzer Sonata" was inspired by a night in Moscow in which he and some friends, including Repin, a painter, and Andreyev-Burlak, an actor, were at a gathering and Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata* was played (Troyat, 475). Tolstoy was emotionally connected to this masterpiece and proposed an idea to his friends. He would write a short story, Andreyev Burlak would act it out, Repin would paint a picture, and all three of these media would be inspired by the individual artists' interpretations of the *Kreutzer Sonata* (Troyat, 475). Even though Andreyev-Burlak died in May of 1888, Tolstoy continued to develop this short story in the spring and combined it with a story he had previously begun, "The Man Who Murdered his Wife" (Wilson, 379 and Troyat, 475).

The Tolstoyan scholars Henri Troyat and A.N. Wilson interpret “The Kreutzer Sonata” differently in regards to Tolstoy’s depiction of women, specifically Sofya, and the relationship between Pozdnyshev and his wife as a symbol of Tolstoy’s marriage. Troyat indicates that the character of Pozdnyshev is somewhat autobiographical of Tolstoy. While working on “The Kreutzer Sonata,” Tolstoy began to preach abstinence, and his relationship with Sofya became more distant. Troyat notes,

The further his deductions led him into absurdity, the more strongly he believed he must be inspired by God. He who had once written to Chertkov in praise of procreation in wedlock, suddenly began preaching the necessity for conjugal abstinence to the same correspondent (475).

In her diary, Sofya also notes the separation she felt between herself and her husband. Sofya had for a lifetime faithfully copied his manuscripts, but he later instead entrusted this task to his daughter (Troyat, 475). Sofya writes, “I would like to commit suicide, run away, fall in love with someone else” (Troyat, 469). Tolstoy saw women as the enemy because he could not help but be enticed by their sensuality (Troyat, 476). Troyat notes that on the surface, there are few similarities between Pozdnyshev and Tolstoy, yet their theories are exactly similar and one cannot help but think that the short story may be autobiographical (476-477).

Pozdnyshev’s relationship with women throughout the novella is always superficial and distant. Pozdnyshev only sees women as symbols of sexuality rather than equal beings. He has an obsession with appearance and regularly objectifies women. Pozdnyshev explains, “a handsome

woman talks nonsense, you listen and hear not nonsense but cleverness” (Tolstoy, “KS” 369). Furthermore, he describes that society, and admittedly himself, see women as “a means of enjoyment” (Tolstoy, “KS” 385). Tolstoy promoted abstinence because he saw sexuality and the objectification of women as society’s downfall.

Upon reading “The Kreutzer Sonata” and learning that some scholars believe it to be an autobiographical representation of Tolstoy, one cannot help but to question Sofya’s reaction to its publication. In her diary Sofya wrote,

Deep in my own heart I always felt that the book was directed against me, mutilated me and humiliated me in the eyes of the whole world, and was destroying everything we had preserved of love for one another (Troyat, 479).

Just as Pozdnyshev’s wife read excerpts from his diary, Sofya read Tolstoy’s critique on marriage while copying his diary for publication. He writes, “Love does not exist, there is only the body’s need of physical communion and the reason’s need for a companion in life” (Troyat, 481). Despite the emotional turmoil that was brought about with the publication of “The Kreutzer Sonata” and Tolstoy’s development of moralistic ideologies in regards to marriage and abstinence, Sofya was actively involved in successfully petitioning the Tsar to remove the censorship of Tolstoy’s controversial short story (Troyat, 483). According to Troyat, Sofya was also compelled to promote the novella’s publication in order to restore her reputation. She firmly believed that by fighting for

the removal of the short story's censorship, no one would genuinely believe "The Kreutzer Sonata" was an accurate portrayal of her marriage to Tolstoy (Troyat, 484).

The scholar, A.N. Wilson notes that both Sofya and Troyat missed the point of "The Kreutzer Sonata" (386). Wilson further explains that if this short story were actually an autobiography of Tolstoy, it is Tolstoy, and not Sofya, that would have a tainted image (386). He undoubtedly understands Sofya's anger and resentment toward the novella and how she could compare it to their relationship, but he also states one crucial point. Wilson asks,

We are surely not being invited at this point to think that Pozdnyshev is being reasonable? So why should Sofya Andreyevna take offense? Because she herself has irritated Tolstoy in similar ways? But if the story has a moral or a point, it is surely to demonstrate that sexual passion and marriage reduce people to these conditions of hatred (387).

Wilson's critiques bring about a more justifiable explanation. He further states that "The Kreutzer Sonata" is simply a murder story, and although there are moralistic themes and lessons, "there are suggestions at various points that he was actually writing with Dostoevsky in his eye" (Wilson, 387). Tolstoy used the character of Pozdnyshev to help him raise a question to the readers about sexuality and women. In a letter to Chertkov he writes, "I am a dirty, libidinous old man," yet he still preached celibacy (Wilson, 376). Both Tolstoy and Pozdnyshev indicated remorse and grief when remembering their past experiences with women and their immature rationalizations, but Pozdnyshev's obsession and



paranoia is a “grotesque distortion of Tolstoy’s own vision of sex” (Wilson, 384). Tolstoy incorporated his familial experiences in this novella, but the similarities between Pozdnyshev and Tolstoy are vague in comparison to Levin in *Anna Karenina* or Olenin in “The Cossacks”.

The role of religion and Tolstoy’s obsession with morality is one of the most prominent themes of “The Kreutzer Sonata”. Wilson notes,

But much more than his capacity to irritate, [Tolstoy] has a power to disturb, unsettle, to upset...He expressed opinions about the human condition which to this day are capable of getting under people’s skin and making them angry. In no area of his thought is this more apparent than in his analysis, from the late 1880s onwards, of the sexual question (372).

The “Kreutzer Sonata” was praised by some and seen as scandalous by others, more specifically the Church and Government. It was initially censored by the Tsar (Troyat, 479). Tolstoy intentionally touches on subjects that are emotional triggers for both his initial audience and an audience in the present day. Tolstoy once wrote to Chertkov in support of procreation in marriage, but at the time of “The Kreutzer Sonata’s” publication, he preached conjugal abstinence (Troyat, 475). He firmly believed that to live according to God’s word man must “forget that one had an instrument for sex” (Troyat, 475). Tolstoy feared that sex, even while married, could lead a couple astray and into temptation. He reiterates that it is self-seeking of a couple to “unite in order to enjoy life” (Troyat, 467). Instead, man and woman must dedicate their lives to God and unite in order to advance that purpose (Troyat, 467). Tolstoy uses

the character of Pozdnyshev in order to reinforce the previous statement.

Wilson explains,

All [Pozdnyshev's] memories of sexual awakening in his youth are tormented with guilt, every sexual encounter is regarded as a terrible 'fall' from some ideal of purity" (380).

Throughout the short story Pozdnyshev recollects his previous sexual encounters with great regret, yet his self-absorption and a materialistic marriage only made him more paranoid about sex and infidelity. Tolstoy uses Pozdnyshev's downfall as an example and warning in order to emphasize the danger of an immoral society.

Despite the obvious notion that Pozdnyshev is a murderer and he killed his wife, the theme of life and death is more subtle in "The Kreutzer Sonata". The details of the murder only take up the last few pages of the novella whereas Pozdnyshev's recollection of his past and internal conflict make up the vast majority of the novella. Tolstoy did not intend to include every detail of the actual murder, instead he used Pozdnyshev's life as a symbol of death and darkness. Troyat writes, "Novel of manners? Propaganda pamphlet against society? Confession? Profession of faith? 'The Kreutzer Sonata' is all these" (478). "The Kreutzer Sonata" differs from Tolstoy's other notably moralistic works, such as "The Death of Ivan Ilych," because it does not include a major resolution. Instead, Pozdnyshev's moral awakening is more discrete. Tolstoy intentionally included Pozdnyshev's downfall and depression in order to set an example and intimidate the audience. He was acquitted of murder, but his

guilt and understanding of the crime is apparent when he cries to the narrator at the novella's conclusion. Pozdnyshev's explains, "I began to understand it on the third day: on the third day they took me *there*" (Tolstoy, "KS" 428). The reference to the "third day" and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is used to indicate Pozdnyshev's rebirth. Tolstoy only hints at the rebirth of his main character, but he does so strategically in order to provide hope and closure to this otherwise depressing story.

"The Kreutzer Sonata" intentionally uses characters and scenarios pertaining to a wealthy social class in order to emphasize Tolstoy's frustrations with the upper classes. When critiquing debauchery and sexuality Pozdnyshev argues that even doctors, who are educated and highly respected within society, "assert that debauchery is good for the health, and they organize proper well-regulated debauchery" (Tolstoy, "KS" 366). Furthermore, Pozdnyshev continues to note that parents knowingly give their daughters in a wealthy society to immoral men (Tolstoy, "KS" 368). The theme of class divisions in "The Kreutzer Sonata" is also influenced by Tolstoy's relationship with his family. He was disappointed with his sons, and even Sofya, and their obsession with social standing and wealth in Moscow (Troyat, 467). Troyat explains that one night Tolstoy, overcome with irritation, exclaimed that Sofya was "a woman of money" (465). This concept of women and obsessions with materialism is noted in "The Kreutzer Sonata" as well. Tolstoy writes,

Go round the shops in any big town. There are goods worth millions and you cannot estimate the human labor

expended on them, and look whether in nine-tenths of these shops there is anything for the use of men. All the luxuries of life are demanded and maintained by women ("KS" 374).

Despite his concerns, Tolstoy admired two of his daughters, Masha and Tanya, because they, too, wanted to devote their life to helping others, specifically the muzhiks (Troyat, 469). Tolstoy explains that one should strive to be "served by others as little as possible and to serve others as much as possible" (Troyat, 472). Tolstoy uses the wealthy class in "The Kreutzer Sonata" in order to critique society at large and to also symbolize its immorality.

"The Kreutzer Sonata," although dark and at times frustrating, offers a new perspective to the readers. Tolstoy uses this short story to critique society and make a point to his audience. "The Kreutzer Sonata" is one of Tolstoy's most blatantly condemning works but nevertheless, there is some validity in his reasoning. As a result, Tolstoy offers an interesting argument in hopes of educating his "immoral" audience.

### ***Master and Man***

*“He always felt himself dependent on the Chief Master, who had sent him into this life, and he knew that when dying he would still be in that Master’s power and would not be ill-used by Him” (Tolstoy, Master and Man 490).*

In 1898 Tolstoy published an article entitled “What is Art” which critiqued modern and Western art for its exclusionary trend to only cater to wealthy and educated audiences (Wasiolek, 180). Tolstoy vowed to create “true and universal art” that could be read by aristocrats and peasants alike and he achieved that goal when writing “Master and Man” (Wasiolek, 181). “Master and Man” was published in 1895. This short story describes the daylong journey of a wealthy proprietor, Vasili Andreevich Brekhunov, and a peasant, Nikita, in pursuit of a significant land purchase.

Vasili Andreevich is a Second Guild merchant who is obsessed with the idea of purchasing a grove from a neighboring landowner (Tolstoy, “Master” 453). Nikita is described as a “habitual drunkard”, but is nevertheless hardworking and honest (Tolstoy, “Master” 453-454). Although Nikita is aware that Vasili Andreevich takes advantage of all of his peasants and does not compensate them properly for their work, he recognizes that it is “useless to try to clear up his accounts...and as long as he had nowhere to go he must accept what he could get” (Tolstoy,

“Master” 455). After a St. Nicholas’ Day celebration, Vasili Andreevich planned to set out for the neighboring proprietor (Tolstoy, “Master” 453). Nikita harnessed the horse and got the sledge ready for travel and after accepting the persuasive argument of Vasili Andreevich’s wife, the merchant agreed to bring Nikita along for the trip (Tolstoy, “Master” 456 and 458).

The two set out for the Goryachkin Forest, but were met with dangerous weather obstacles. As their journey progressed, they became trapped in a blizzard with freezing temperatures; the snow on the ground was knee deep (Tolstoy, “Master” 462). Despite the harsh climate, Vasili Andreevich and Nikita reached the town of Grishkino, which was only four miles away from their destination (Tolstoy, “Master” 465). Nevertheless, Vasili Andreevich ignored an invitation to spend the night in the town and urged Nikita to continue on, fearing that he would miss the opportunity to purchase the sought-after land (Tolstoy, “Master” 465).

The blizzard did not let up and Vasili Andreevich and Nikita could not see the road ahead of them. They repeatedly strayed off course and could not find the forest, which was only supposed to be a mere ten minutes away. Resultantly, Nikita knew they must make do and sleep in the sledge. Tolstoy writes,

Although Vasili Andreevich felt quite warm in his two fur coats, especially after struggling in the snow-drift, a cold shiver ran down his back on realizing that he must really spend the night where they were (“Master” 481).

Nikita maintained good spirits and was not intimidated by the thought of sleeping outdoors. Vasili Andreevich, on the other hand, disapprovingly made a bed out of straw in the sledge similar to that of Nikita's, yet could not sleep. He consoled himself with thoughts of materialistic possessions as well as plans for making a profit from the upcoming land purchase (Tolstoy, "Master" 483).

As the night progressed Vasili Andreevich grew to be more fearful of his surroundings and death. He decided to take the horse and leave Nikita to fend for himself. As Vasili Andreevich rode away he thought,

What's the use of lying and waiting for death? As for him, he thought of Nikita—it's all the same to him whether he lives or dies. What is his life worth? He won't grudge his life, but I have something to live for, thank God (Tolstoy, "Master" 489).

Nikita remained patient and the realization that he may very well die that night "did not seem particularly unpleasant or dreadful" (Tolstoy, "Master" 489). Vasili Andreevich did not travel far before he fell into a snowdrift and the horse ran away (Tolstoy, "Master" 493). Vasili Andreevich knew that he was alone, "awaiting an inevitable, speedy, and meaningless death" (Tolstoy, "Master" 493). While alone, he remembered a church service from earlier that day, but realized that the Church, icons, and ceremonial ritual could not save him now and he longed for his companion, Nikita (Tolstoy, "Master" 494). Vasili Andreevich managed to return to the sledge to find Nikita, who was half frozen and asleep (Tolstoy, "Master" 495). Vasili Andreevich was overcome with a "peculiar

joy” and unbuttoned his coat and laid directly on top of Nikita, hoping to warm the peasant and nurse him to health (Tolstoy, “Master” 496). The weather began to take toll on Vasili Andreevich but he refused to leave Nikita again. Tolstoy writes,

It seemed to him that he was Nikita and Nikita was he, and that his life was not in himself but in Nikita. ‘Nikita is alive, so, I too, am alive!’ he said to himself triumphantly (“Master” 498).

Nikita awoke early the next morning to find his dead master above him (Tolstoy, “Master” 498). Later that afternoon peasants discovered him buried underneath both the snow and Vasili Andreevich and, although areas of his body were frozen, Nikita was alive (Tolstoy, “Master” 499).

In the early 1890s, just a few years before the publication of “Master and Man,” Tolstoy and Sofya continued to disagree over finances, their children, illness, and Tolstoy’s writing. In September of 1891, despite Sofya’s fury, Tolstoy released the publication rights of all of his works written before 1881 and/or works included in Volumes XII and XII of “Complete Works” (Troyat, 491). Sofya saw Tolstoy’s actions as a plea for fame and attention, she was infuriated, and saw Tolstoy’s actions as neglecting his family (Troyat, 491).

In the summer of 1891 famine struck the central and southwestern provinces of Russia, leaving many peasants without food (Troyat, 492). Initially, Tolstoy advocated for the peasants by



publishing articles that stated his bold position, “A good deed does not consist in giving bread to feed the famished, but in loving the famished as much as the overfed” (Troyat, 494). Upon publication, Tolstoy faced great scrutiny, but after learning of the worsening situation, he left Yasnaya Polyana in order to provide direct relief and aid (Troyat, 494). His daughters, Tanya and Masha, accompanied Tolstoy although they (as well as Sofya) felt that he was succumbing to peer pressure and did not agree with his ultimate decision (Troyat, 494). Despite his original plea against philanthropy and claiming that in order to resolve a famine of this extent the wealthy must vow to stop exploiting the peasants, Tolstoy and at a later date even Sofya, felt compelled to offer their assistance (Troyat, 494-495).

After the publication of “Master and Man”, Tolstoy and Sofya’s marital struggles resurfaced and Sofya attempted suicide (Troyat, 506). At the same time, their seven-year-old son, Vanichka became ill with scarlet fever and died in a matter of days (Troyat, 507). In response to a question regarding the death of his son Tolstoy explained, “But what does it mean to say he is dead? There is no death; he is not dead because we love him, because he is giving us life” (Troyat, 509). Just as in “Master and Man” Tolstoy is able to find light and hope in death.

Vasili Andreevich's most detrimental flaw was his inability to see others, specifically Nikita, as an equal. Whereas Nikita appreciated honesty, saw the good in all people, and was at ease in nature, Vasili Andreevich took the most pride in his wealth and materialistic possessions. Wasiolek describes Vasili Andreevich as "the biblical rich man filling his granaries and neglecting his soul" and Nikita as "the poor man who is rich in spirit" (181). While frightened and unable to sleep in the sledge, Vasili Andreevich consoled his fears with thoughts of his financial wealth and his opportunity to make more money after his envisioned land purchase (Tolstoy, "Master" 483). Vasili Andreevich lived for status and possessions and could not fathom how a peasant such as Nikita could find happiness in his uneducated life. Vasili Andreevich thought of all peasants as lesser versions of humans and only appreciated Nikita for his "honesty, his kindness to animals, and especially his cheapness" (Tolstoy, "Master" 455). When describing the scene in which both travelers are laying down in the sledge Tolstoy writes,

'If only that peasant doesn't freeze to death! His clothes are so wretched. I may be held responsible for him. What shiftless people they are- such a want of education,' thought Vasili Andreevich, and he felt like taking the drugget off the horse and putting it over Nikita, but it would be very cold to get out and move about and, moreover, the horse might freeze to death ("Master" 486).

Throughout the majority of this short story, we see that Vasili Andreevich values Nikita less than his horse, and only when he is completely isolated does he realize the importance of depending on others. Vasili Andreevich

physically died saving the life of his peasant, but his epiphany and realization that he should look up to and learn from Nikita provided him with a spiritual rebirth.

The concept of life and death became a crucial aspect of Tolstoy's works after *Anna Karenina*. "Master and Man" is no exception. Vasili Andreevich and Nikita juxtapose one another throughout the course of the storyline. Whereas Vasili Andreevich is absorbed with societal standing and materialistic possessions, Wasiolek describes Nikita as,

An example of the right relationship to life: a working in consonance with laws greater than one's own ability to perceive them; an immersion in unfathomable directions; and a listening and not a dictating of what should be and what life should be (186).

Tolstoy strategically sets this short story in the vast Russian countryside during a blizzard because it emphasizes Vasili Andreevich and Nikita's isolation. The two are alone and can only experience life if Vasili Andreevich no longer sees Nikita as a peasant, but instead as an equal (Troyat, 505). Vasili Andreevich initially attempts to ignore the severity of the storm and forces Nikita to continue on the journey, and as a result they lose their way on multiple occasions (Wasiolek, 185). Nevertheless, when Nikita begins to give advice, they are able to stay on the path (Wasiolek, 185). Despite his initial ignorance, Vasili Andreevich finally realizes that the snow is a symbol of death and in order to live he must live for others. This epiphany leads him back to Nikita and to ultimately saving Nikita's life.

Tolstoy intentionally neglects women in the novel and when they are mentioned, it is in a very condescending tone. Nikita's wife, Martha, was having an ongoing relationship with a cooper for over twenty years (Tolstoy, "Master" 454). Although their relationship was ambivalent on the surface, "[Martha] feared [Nikita] like fire when he was drunk" (Tolstoy, "Master" 454). The concluding paragraph of the novella describes his death twenty years after his rescue. On his deathbed Nikita asked his wife for forgiveness and also forgave her for her infidelity (Tolstoy, "Master" 500).

Vasili Andreevich did not have a supportive relationship with his wife. Upon Vasili Andreevich and Nikita's initial stop in the blizzard, he despised his wife for making him bring Nikita on the trip. Tolstoy goes as far as describing her as an "unloved wife" and her name is never given throughout the course of the short story ("Master" 486). While away from home Vasili Andreevich continuously worries that his wife will not be able to maintain his business in his absence. Vasili Andreevich believes that his wife " doesn't know the right way of doing things" and compensates for her mistakes by explaining, "of course she's only a woman" (Tolstoy, "Master" 484).

While Tolstoy was writing "Master and Man", his own marital struggles with Sofya continued. Sofya grew more bitter and envious of the friendship between Tolstoy and Chertkov. She felt that the companionship between Tolstoy and his adherent was countered by

increasing distance between her and her husband. In a letter Tolstoy explained to Chertkov, "She is afraid of you because you are the one who helps me to preserve all the things she hates in me" (Troyat, 503). Sofya was infuriated when Tolstoy initially decided to have a different female editor, Lyubov Guryevich, publish "Master and Man" instead of his own wife (Troyat, 505). She suspected him of infidelity and went as far as attempting suicide. She chose to mimic Vasili Andreevich's death, but was stopped by her daughter, Masha, just before ending her life (Troyat, 506).

One of Tolstoy's most prominent themes in "Master and Man" is that of Christianity and religion. Troyat explains that Vasili Andreevich and Nikita found truth in recognizing their equality and reliance on one another (505). Vasili Andreevich's initial characteristics symbolize the dependence of mankind and society upon superfluous commodities. As Vasili Andreevich grows to depend more on Nikita and to appreciate his companionship, he finds Christianity through the value of living for others. Tolstoy writes in his diary, "to live for God means to dedicate one's life to people's happiness" (Troyat, 510). Whereas Vasili Andreevich was once obsessed with wealth and status, he discovered the true meaning of life while facing death.

Nikita's stability throughout the entirety of the short story is similar to that of Gerasim in "The Death of Ivan Ilych." Both characters influenced their counterparts through their actions, not their words, and served as symbols of life and truth. Wasiolek describes Nikita as an

example of “the right relationship to life...a listening and not a dictating of what one should be and what life should be” (186). Although the reader perceives Nikita as a symbol of religious truth, it is crucial to recognize his “flaws” as well. Tolstoy intentionally describes him as a drunkard peasant with marital struggles in order to make Nikita’s character more relatable (Wilson, 423).

Wilson further explores the religious themes throughout “Master and Man” by emphasizing the questions, “*Who is the master?*” (423). This novella’s parable-like qualities are explored through the two isolated characters, Nikita and Vasili Andreevich. Vasili Andreevich is initially portrayed as the “master” because of his powerful wealth yet as the short story progresses Nikita’s prominence is highlighted through his calm and dependable persona. Nevertheless, the apparent intent of this short story is to highlight God as the true and honest *Master* (Wilson, 425).

“Master and Man” is undoubtedly one of Tolstoy’s most memorable short stories. He explores difficult questions such as death, reliance on others, and religion, all of which continue to challenge society in the present day. “Master and Man” is remarkable because Tolstoy posed these difficult and intriguing questions to his readers through a simple plot line and only two characters.

## Conclusion

Whenever I finish reading one of Tolstoy's novels or short stories I have to allow myself adequate time to digest the selected work. Even if I manage to breeze through a story, Tolstoy incorporates such an array of relatable and memorable themes that I cannot help but to reflect on his work for days. I become obsessed with Tolstoy's characters as well as their internal struggles and epiphanies because Tolstoy forces his readers to invest in his beloved characters to the same extent that he does. Tolstoy captivates his reader and one cannot help but to isolate themselves from their own reality and instead submerge into Tolstoy's meticulously created world.

Presently, I am taking a seminar class entitled "Arts in Society" and this discussion-based course allows students to examine various forms of traditional and non-traditional art such as poetry, comedy, dance, and performance art. Taking this seminar class while analyzing some of my preferred Tolstoy works has allowed me to view my favorite author as not only a writer or scholar, but an artist as well. In the past, I always separated authors from artists, not yet grasping the overlap between these two terms. After completing this project, my perception has forever changed.

Tolstoy's theological conversion did not occur overnight. The reader serves as Tolstoy's witness and is able to notice the gradual development of his moralistic ideals. By reading and analyzing the

selected Tolstoy works in chronological order based on their publication date, I was able to understand the development of his ideologies. “The Cossacks” is a meticulously crafted short story and Tolstoy provides vivid details, making the reader relate to Olenin’s youthful nature and even sympathize with his ignorance. Although this work does not incorporate blatant moralistic qualities, Tolstoy uses foil characters such as Eroshka to represent his subtle ideologies. In comparison to “The Cossacks”, Tolstoy’s “Master and Man” contains far more obvious symbols of his theological beliefs. “Master and Man”, a far more direct and plot driven story, is intentionally crafted with predominant parable-like characteristics.

Connecting the scholarly literature written by Troyat, Wasiolek, and Wilson to Tolstoy’s literature allowed me to understand the great extent in which Tolstoy’s life influenced his literature. As he aged, Tolstoy felt compelled to advocate for the peasants and to push the social boundaries set by the Church, government, and wealthy society. His purpose for writing was not to depress or condone his readers, but instead to provide them with literature that may change their perspective.

In retrospect I often question my rationale, how did I read *Anna Karenina* and appreciate it as a monumental novel, but not as a work of art? Tolstoy devoted his life to creating characters, obstacles, and revelations that forced his readers to further examine their own lives, to



appreciate the simplicity of genuine companionship, and to reassure us all that mankind, despite its tragic evils, can change.

This project allowed me to embark on an emotional journey with Tolstoy. I cringed at both Olenin and Pozdnyshev's naïveté, but was also able to see myself in their insecurities. I appreciated and admired Anna, and despite her instability, understood her objections to society's treatment of women. Gerasim's selflessness reassured me of my faith in a Higher Power and also made me question how society today continues to further ostracize people based on class inequalities. Lastly, Nikita's journey allowed me to share his understanding of death as a means of spiritual rebirth. When drafting this project and deciding on my themes of focus, I selected these four topics not because they were the most prominent or popular, but because they resonate best with where I currently am in life.

Just as with my reaction to reading each individual work by Tolstoy, after completing the five chapters of this project, I needed to grasp my work as a whole before writing its conclusion. Not only was I able to observe Tolstoy's development of moral ideologies over time, I also noticed a change in myself as the weeks and months progressed. In "What is Art?" Tolstoy writes,

Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them ("Art", 123).

I once appreciated Tolstoy as a novelist and enjoyed analyzing his characters and themes, but I now admire Tolstoy as an artist and praise him for his ability to leave a lasting impression on his readers.

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