

THE CRISIS OF THE RUSSIAN FAMILY IN THE  
WORKS OF DOSTOEVSKY, TOLSTOY AND CHEKHOV

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree

of Doctor of Philosophy in Russian Studies

at the University of Canterbury

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2015

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## Note on Translation and Transliteration

All translations are my own unless otherwise stated. Russian names and titles have been transliterated in accordance with the Library of Congress system, except for well-known names (e.g. Tolstoy) in which case the common English spelling has been used.

## Acknowledgments

This thesis started in a set of circumstances resulting from the upheaval caused by the Canterbury earthquake (2011), and completing it forms part of my own experience in coping with this event.

I thank Jesus Christ, my Saviour and my Lord, for His unconditional love and for His various graces received throughout this process. I thank God for His constant help and for permitting me to complete this project. I am also very thankful to my family, for their unfailing moral and economic help.

I am deeply grateful to my supervisors: Professor Henrietta Mondry and Associate Professor Evgeny Pavlov, and to my external advisor Dr. Mark Swift, from the University of Auckland. Their careful guidance of this project is very much appreciated as well as their wise advice, feedback, discussions, and encouragement.

The University of Canterbury has helped me in many ways, for example in granting me a doctoral scholarship that provided financial support for the duration of three years. A special thanks, too, to the library and interloans staff, staff from the student support team, particularly Shelley Chappell for her constant advice, support and great patience. A big thank you also to the Learning Centre Skills staff for their invaluable abilities that they pass onto students.

Various people stand out for kindness shown along the way. Particularly, Prof. Maria Zalambani from the University of Bologna (Italy), Dr. Bronwyn Betty, Anastasia, Steph, Patrick, Andy and Paul for their help at various points in the research process.

Finally, I would like to thank all my friends, particularly Steve and Fr. Mike, and all the people who supported me in various ways and prayed for me and for this project, for their constant inspiration and persistent optimism that I would, one day, complete this project.

## Abstract

This thesis examines the crisis of the Russian family through the eyes of the key Russian writers of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Tolstoy (1828-1910), Dostoevsky (1821-1881), and Chekhov (1860-1904). The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that the works of these authors are not just novels or short stories about the crisis of the family, but representative of the societal situation in Russia at the time. The aim of this study is also to show the continuity in ideas between these authors in the context of family life and marriage and to explore what kind of solutions they envisioned for the future of the Russian family.

Although there has been extensive research on the family in the works of these great classics of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature, there has been less analysis of the crisis of the Russian family and the solutions they offered as a way out of the crisis. Hence the aim of this research is to fill this critical gap.

The first chapter focuses on the representation of family life in Dostoevsky's latest works *The Brothers Karamazov* (1881), "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" (1877), and *The Diary of a Writer* (1876-7). The second chapter examines Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) and *The Power of Darkness* (1886). Tolstoy focuses his attention on both upper classes and the peasant family. Chapter three analyses the crisis of the family in some of Chekhov's short stories and novellas that are particularly concerned with extra marital relations and marriages gone badly; they also address mistreatment of children.

This thesis argues that, on the one hand, these authors depict different types of marriages and family relations, and, on the other hand, their works reflect the changing realities and attitudes regarding love and sexuality of their time. It also argues that, through their fiction and sometimes in a subversive way, these authors influenced the readers' mentality and came up with new radical ideas about the future of the Russian family.

Finally, this thesis aims to bring more academic interest to an overlooked research area, to explore how family values change through the eyes of these authors, and to contribute to a broader understanding of the crisis and the future of the Russian family through the lenses of the key Russian writers of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia.

## INTRODUCTION

In his seminal work *The History of Sexuality* (1976), Michel Foucault identified the family as the socially and institutionally sanctioned site for sexuality to be expressed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Foucault 106). During this time numerous literary works were produced that also focused on the issues of sexuality at the centre of the family.

Foucault highlights new power relations within the family, the shift from the deployment of alliance to the deployment of sexuality. Therefore, romantic love started playing a pivotal role in relationships. Feelings, sensations and emotions became important, often undermining traditional marital constraints (Foucault 106). By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, freedom to express sexuality is central to the new type of Russian family. It is also the expression of a spiritual and moral crisis, which is particularly acute in Russia as the family itself is considered the foundation of religious and state structures (Sorokin 188).

This work started from the idea to demonstrate different types of marriages that these three authors depict in their works. Dostoevsky is a proponent of the “deployment of alliance” (using Foucault’s terms) in the *Diary of a Writer* and in *The Brothers Karamazov*, of the old patriarchal family structure, but at the same time he shows the problems and deficiencies of this type of family model. Thus, in “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man” (1877) he advocates a new type of family structure, which incorporates features of the traditional family based on alliance.

Foucault notes that 19<sup>th</sup> century society produced numerous confessional discourses dealing with issues of sexuality, channelling the emphasis of sexuality along procreation lines within the family. It also pathologised female sexuality via the notion of hysterical women,



and was generally concerned with matters relating to the moral and physical hygiene of the family:

The society that emerged in the 19th century –bourgeois, capitalist, or industrial society, call it what you will ... not only did it speak of sex and compel everyone to do so; it also set out to formulate the uniform truth of sex. As if it suspected sex of harbouring a fundamental secret. As if it needed this production of truth. As if it was essential that sex be inscribed not only in an economy of pleasure but in an ordered system of knowledge. (Foucault 69)

According to Foucault, the family was looked at not only as a social and economic unit, but also as an

interchange of sexuality and alliance: it conveys the law and the juridical dimension in the deployment of sexuality; it conveys the economy of pleasure and the intensity of sensations in the regime of alliance. ...sexuality has its privileged point of development in the family; that for this reason sexuality is incestuous from the start. (Foucault 108)

The deployment of sexuality is different and contrary to the deployment of alliance. It is important to discuss the contrasts between the two deployments as I refer to these terms to show the new power dynamics taking place within the family. Foucault suggests that the deployment of sexuality evolved from the deployment of alliance, as the earlier emphasis on what sorts of relations were permitted was replaced by an emphasis on what sorts of sensations were permitted (94).

My investigation will show that the works of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov problematise these issues as expressions of concern for the present and the future of the

Russian family. These concerns run through themes found in the works under investigation, all of which have aspects of human sexuality in relation to the crisis of the family as a common feature. The three writers, starting from the 1880s, accentuated the role of sexual drives as a force that challenges the very notion of the traditional Russian Christian family. In the case of Dostoevsky, the interest in children's sexual life is strikingly similar to Foucault's notions. All three writers show hysterical women and pathological characters whose psychological deviations often are linked to their excessive preoccupations with sexuality, or supposedly non-normative sexualities. While Chekhov, as a medical doctor by profession, was well familiar with the medical writing on the issues that Foucault identifies, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy were the main contributors to the unfolding discourses on sexuality and the family.

The aim of this thesis is to identify and examine thematic clusters that constitute the expressions of concern over the crisis of the Russian family in the works of these three authors. Scholarly attention over the last two decades of our present era has mainly been directed at the issues of gender politics and sexuality in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature, with a special focus on gender politics in the post-Soviet era. However, this study turns to the three writers' works written in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Though scholars have studied such related themes as women in the writings of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov, family happiness in Tolstoy, sexuality in Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy's struggle against the powers of sexuality, this thesis looks holistically at these writers' concerns about the state of the family in their contemporary Russian society. It does that by identifying and examining the clusters of themes around issues of the Russian family, both on the basis of textual analysis, and in relation to the historical and social context of the time. It grounds holistically a cross-section of fictional and journalistic writings in the

relevant contextual material, consisting of a history of ideas and societal issues. It demonstrates that in spite of the uniqueness of their artistic productions and worldviews, there are typological similarities in the range of features which relate to the issue of concern over the Russian family.

It is striking that both Dostoevsky and Tolstoy have expressed utopian futuristic visions of the family, with Dostoevsky's "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" and Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* showing possibilities that are alternative to the Judeo-Christian monogamous family. Thus, Dostoevsky's 'ridiculous' hero explores a scenario of sharing paternal responsibilities in child upbringing in a commune, and having commune-type societies without any family structures. Tolstoy's hero also denounces monogamy as an unsustainable institution, and rejects procreation in a futuristic scenario for a different type of society. These particular views have strong similarities with the contemporary thinking of the philosopher Nikolai Fedorov that started gaining momentum among the intellectuals like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Fedorov's ideas affected how society viewed the procreatory function of the Christian family. While his ideas were most influential in the 1900s, already Dostoevsky and Tolstoy were interested in, and to a varying degree, affected by his extraordinary and striking interpretation of sexuality, family and relationships between fathers and children. Their alternative thinking on the very structure and purpose of the family is indebted to this unique thinker who declared sexuality obsolete, and advocated a new kind of global family of humankind that will achieve immortality and will conquer death. Like the influential German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, he declared sexuality a blind force, but unlike Schopenhauer, Fedorov advocated proactive, scientific progress that would secure an optimistic future for the whole of humankind. Chekhov, on the other hand, is known as the author who matured professionally during the time of "the philosophy of small

deeds (“filosofiia malen’kikh del”), and his work does not show preoccupation with grand projects. In line with the genre of short stories in which he excelled, Chekhov showed the disintegration of the family, or to put it differently, he showed that there was practically “no family”. The *de jure* family is disintegrating in Chekhov’s works and he focuses on *de facto* relationships. Like Tolstoy, Chekhov addressed both middle class and peasant families in his stories, and like Tolstoy, he showed that there was no family happiness among his heroes. His heroes and heroines might regret not having made the right decisions, but they are all unhappy within their families. Disappointed in the moral qualities of their spouses, often betrayed and betraying out of boredom and idleness, his middle class educated families make us arrive at the conclusion that there is no happy family for Chekhov in any class. His peasant class families show the same features of moral and physical degradation as Tolstoy’s peasant family in *The Power of Darkness*. His scepticism is often informed by his professional experience as a doctor working in peasant communities.

While all three writers have different personal family histories, they all thought about the subject of the traditional family, and demonstrated the gap between this ideal of the family and the state of the family in their own society. The effects of religion and their personal understanding of Christianity affected their perspective as authors. While Dostoevsky was a religious thinker who was critical of the destructive moral effect that atheistic views have on the contemporary society, he nevertheless became a happy family man in the second part of his life. His last novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, shows a Russian family that has abandoned Christian values, and of the three writers under investigation he expresses the most sympathy towards a traditional family with Christian values. For this, he had to come up with a brand of Christianity that teaches warm, life affirming love to all living matter, thus neutralising the asceticism of the traditional Russian Orthodox Christianity of his

day. Tolstoy, on the other hand, is cognisant of the ascetic and asexual message of mystical Christianity and in *The Kreutzer Sonata* the protagonist Pozdnyshev, whose ideas come close to Tolstoy's, shows familiarity with the Buddhist tendencies of the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Von Hartmann:<sup>1</sup>

А жить зачем? Если нет цели никакой, если жизнь для жизни нам дана, незачем жить. И если так, то Шопенгауэры и Гартманы, да и все буддисты совершенно правы.<sup>2</sup>

In the afterword to *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Tolstoy preaches his own concept of charitable love within the Christian marriage, proposing chastity within marriage as a viable solution to the crisis of the family. Mondry argues that through his spiritual search, the hero concludes that murdering his wife and thus destroying the family, is a metaphysical liberation from earthly passions (Mondry 173). Moreover, Tolstoy shows that for the supposedly traditional patriarchal peasant society's Christian values are abandoned, infanticide becoming the symbol of the lack of Christian morals in this class. Chekhov also expresses his awareness of the lack of Christian values among peasant families, as manifested by their cruelty to children and by forms of domestic crime and violence. The official institutional discourse preached Christian values as central to the well-being of the Russian family. However, this discourse was based on the teachings of *Domostroi*, a document from sixteenth century Russia that contained a strict set of rules governing family life. In reaction to the religious and state construct of the family, the three writers explored the psychological, philosophical and socio-economic undercurrents that form the dynamics of the state of the Russian family.

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<sup>1</sup> (1842 - 1906) German metaphysical philosopher who highlighted the key role of the unconscious mind. He sought to reconcile two conflicting schools of thought, rationalism and irrationalism (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

<sup>2</sup> But why live? If life has no aim, if life is givenus for life's sake, there is no reason for living. And if it is so, then the Schopenhauers, the Hartmanns, and all the Buddhists as well, are quite right (109) [Trans. Aylmer Muade]

## **The Role of *Domostroi* in the construction of the traditional Russian family. An overview**

The *Domostroi*, this seminal sixteenth-century manual of house management, played a great role in the construction of the traditional Russian family. The ideas on family life and sexuality expressed in this handbook find expression in the authors' works. The *Domostroi* had an impact on the authors' views on a set of problems related to the issues facing the Russian family in the last thirty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this section I will provide an overview on the origins of the Russian family tradition as very relevant to the entire thesis.

As Kollmann points out, Russian Orthodox teaching clung strictly to a traditional Biblical view of love in marriage as similar to the spiritual love of the union between Christ and its Church and between God and his children (18). Western and Eastern Christian churches considered sexuality as a force to be kept under tight control. These churches preferred the ideal of chastity, even within marriage, and struggled with the tension between that ideal and the recognition of the inevitability of sexual desire and the need for reproduction. Spouses were discouraged from non-procreative sexual activity; Russian Orthodoxy preached chastity within marriage. Thus, the *Domostroi* advocated regular sexual abstinence (Kollmann 19). As Wiesner-Hanks points out, the *Domostroi* stressed the importance of sexual purity especially for women and obedience to the wishes of one's parents for both sexes (130).

Love your wife and live with her within the law, according to the Lord's commandments. On Sunday, Wednesday and Friday, on the Lord's holy days and during Lent, live in chastity, in fasting, in prayers and repentance. (*Domostroi* 181)

Although Tolstoy's ideas on family and sexuality changed during his long life, he remained, like Dostoevsky, very conservative. When Tolstoy was writing *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the idea of chastity within marriage preached by Russian Orthodoxy probably resonated with him. Tolstoy's concept of celibacy as expressed in *The Kreutzer Sonata* is a reflection of the *Domostroi*'s view on the same topic. Moreover, as we will see in Chapter two, the old merchant in *The Kreutzer Sonata* who defends the Russian traditional *Domostroi* ideal of marriage based on the fear of God and of the husband voices Tolstoy's own views.

As Levin points out, the *Domostroi* provides remarkably little guidance on women's activities as mothers and no suggestion is made that the education of children should be under their control. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, a mother could not stress too much her role as her daughter's educator and guide. Not only visual representations and literary texts, but also advice literature, such as conduct books and treatises on education greatly contributed to the transmission of this new pattern of maternity (Kelly 4). "The *Domostroi* condemns games and expression of tenderness as contradicting the principle of rearing children in fear" (Levin 91).

Regarding the topic of obedience, young boys and girls "were forbidden, on pain of public flogging, to complain about their parents' cruelty ("to air arguments outside the home")" (Levin 91). In cases of children's disobedience, the *Domostroi* advises that they be beaten with measure. Probably, in some families with despotic tendencies, child abuse was likely to be the consequence of punishment rather than correction. Thus, by excessively emphasizing chastisement, the *Domostroi* might have "unconsciously" authorised some sort of violence against children.

When puberty and adulthood came, in most cases the Russian woman had to enter a new family, the family of her husband. According to Kollmann, the *Domostroi* does not refer

to any emotional ties between the husband and wife because, in sixteenth century Russia, mutual love was not a necessary precondition for marriage. As long as both the wife and the groom loved God and raised their children in a God-fearing way, lack of love was not problematic within a family. Therefore, even though husbands were told to love their wives that love was not expected to be sexual or affectionate. Rather, it involved respect, mutual cooperation and patriarchal discipline. As Kollmann points out, husbands were to manage the household in consultation with their wives. The husband should be a spiritual guide for the wife, and a disciplinarian. The *Domostroi* ideal of marriage and love combined piety with hierarchy and service (Kollmann 19).

According to Pouncy, editor and translator of *The "Domostroi": Rules for Russian households in the time of Ivan the Terrible* (1994), women from the nobility were expected to have as many children as possible. Children were the future Russian governors and Russia needed them. Sons were a bigger source of pride than daughters for a mediaeval Russian woman from high society. Child mortality was relatively high and women tried to stay emotionally detached from their children for fear of loss. Women married extremely young, in their early teens, and had to take care of their own children while they themselves were still children (Pouncy 23).

The woman had to be chaste, pious, knowledgeable, righteous and hard-working. She was supposed to manage the house with self-discipline, to entertain guests, and raise her daughters in a righteous way. She was also meant to be a good mother and teacher to her children, a wise wife and generous. However, the *Domostroi* only teaches; it does not indicate how much Muscovite women followed these instructions of conduct or whether they departed from them.



Because of its extreme rigidity, the system that was supposed to preserve virtue was in reality exposed to vice. Since men were often out fighting wars, wives and husbands in the noble Muscovite circles rarely saw each other. During the short periods of time which they spent together, husbands and wives were often separated. Men ate first and women afterwards. Only during weddings or other festivities could they be together. Thus, this situation of separation between husbands and wives led to extramarital relationships. Any time a wife committed a transgression, her husband had to punish her.

Husbands were admonished not to use wooden or iron rods on their wives, or to beat them around the face, ears or abdomen, lest they cause blindness, deafness, paralysis, toothache, or miscarriage. (*Domostroi* 104)

However, wives had no right to punish their husbands for having committed the same transgressions. Authorized beating, accompanied by feelings of revenge, could result in more serious forms of violence like rape and sadism. The Orthodox Church castigated such practices and used to grant divorce permissions to maltreated wives, especially if they were innocent. Incest was another crime severely condemned by the Church.

As far as the matter of divorce is concerned, the Church authorities avoided granting it for religious reasons. A husband could divorce his wife much more easily than a wife could divorce her husband. As Levin rightly points out, a man “could divorce for offenses other than adultery” (Levin 116). “Once the husband's infidelity had stopped, the wife had no further grounds for divorce” (Levin 117). She “could be granted a divorce if her husband committed treason against the emperor (or prince) or if he tried to murder her” (Levin 117). According to the Church, divorce was likely to give way to future sins for both partners since divorce undermined one's sense of commitment and responsibility.

However, as Pouncy points out, the position of women at home, as it is described in the *Domostroi* was “anomalous” (Pouncy 27). Overall, the woman’s status was that of a subordinate in a patriarchal nuclear family. She was neither a complete slave, nor a complete master. She was as well a “servant” to her husband or father, a “mistress” to her servants. Chapter 15 of the *Domostroi* provides us with an example of this ambivalence of women’s status:

If God sends anyone children, be they sons or daughters, then it is up to the father and mother to care for, to protect their children, to raise them to be learned in the good. (*Domostroi* 106)

Overall, the *Domostroi* does not address women directly. It does not discuss how women felt about their status in sixteenth century Russia, either. The document was written exclusively for husbands and fathers as a guideline for perfect household management. Men, and not women, were responsible for the salvation of their homes and for the integrity of their households. But the end justified the means. The goal of reaching heaven with all their family and the desire to strengthen their clans motivated men to follow the rules of the *Domostroi* as closely as possible, even when violence was required.

However, it would be a mistake to present sixteenth century Muscovite women as the constant victims of a patriarchal society. Many women enjoyed an important economic safety in their homes. Given the fact that women were underqualified (they were neither educated, nor trained to wage wars), they could not live securely by themselves. Thus, the patriarchal society significantly protected women from many dangers. It would not be correct either to overemphasize the influence of the *Domostroi*. It should be noted that its public was limited (a small number of boyar men had access to the book since the printed press had reached

Russia only about a century prior to the creation of the *Domostroi*). However, it expressed extensively spread social conventions that were known to everybody.

The origins of the Russian family tradition are very relevant to the entire thesis. I will show that each writer's own class and personal upbringing, as well as the ideas on family life and sexuality as expressed in the sixteenth-century handbook, influenced the authors' views on the set of questions concerning the problems faced by the Russian family.

**Social and historical context. Judicial situation, laws, divorce, prostitution, urban culture, disintegration of the peasant community**

I will argue that literature made an important contribution to the formation of the views on the contemporary family on the basis that works of literature and the social context influence each other. 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature contributed to the polemics regarding a broad range of social, political and economic issues, culminating in the debates on the crisis of the Russian family at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the writers' works are representative of their time; thus for example, Dostoevsky writes about the decomposition of the family he witnesses and reads about in the local press. *The Kreutzer Sonata* by Tolstoy illustrates the changes that were happening in Russian society, for example, the decline of the aristocratic class and the emergence of the bourgeois marriage; the new professional figures described in the novella (lawyer, merchant) are expressions of new professional opportunities arising with the bourgeois class. As Zalambani correctly points out, Tolstoy in *The Kreutzer Sonata* depicts the new bourgeois marriage, after showing the crisis of the arranged marriage in *Anna Karenina* (Zalambani, *The History of Mentality and Literature*, 418). Tolstoy writes

about infanticide in *The Power of Darkness*, which was a common phenomenon at the time and the murder of a wife by her husband he depicts in *The Kreutzer Sonata* reflects the increasing cases of murders within the family in 1890s Russia (Mironov 255-6). Chekhov's short stories and novellas also illustrate new, liberal trends towards family life and love in his time.

To demonstrate this dialogue between the works of literature and the social context, it is also helpful to mention the polemics around the theme of the Russian family in the Russian press in 1898 -1899 initiated by the thinker and writer Vasily Rozanov (1856-1919). His newspaper articles entitled "Sem'ia kak predmet zakona" (Family as a legal subject, 1898) and "Ob 'otrechennykh', ili apokrificheskikh detiakh" (About 'excommunicated', or apocryphal children, 1899) initiated a monumental polemic on the issues related to the crisis of the family<sup>3</sup>. Importantly, in these articles he quoted from Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and other Russian writers in line with the latest statistical data on divorce, children born out of wedlock, abortion and infanticide. For Rozanov, as for any member of the Russian public, ideas about the Russian family were born as much on the pages of literature, as on the pages of legal and canonical Church documents. Similarly, among the members who took part in the two-year long polemics in the press, there were contemporary writers, members of the clergy, lawyers, as well as members of the public. The polemics that closed the 19<sup>th</sup> century made the formative role of Russian literature crystal clear, and confirmed the reality of the two-way traffic between literary writing and historical and ideological reality.

These polemics made it clear that Tolstoy's attitude towards the cluster of problematics related to the family, as expressed through his fictional heroes and heroines, not only reflects the sets of problems, but also has a bearing on his society's attitude towards

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<sup>3</sup> These articles were serialized in the volume *Semeinyi vopros v Rossii*. Moscow: Respublika. 2004.

relevant issues. In this analysis, the crisis of the Russian family is considered within the complex interrelationship between literature and society. Literary work stimulated debates on the issues of the family; and society, in turn, scrutinized the writers, their personal lives and world views.

According to Ponomareva and Choromilova, the 19<sup>th</sup> century is remarkable for the rapid development of Russian literature from Pushkin to Chekhov, during which time literary Russian reached its climax and become part of world culture. Literature was the only place where family life was critically explored. Russian universities were founded and Russian scientific schools achieved international recognition. This was the most European period in Russia's history, when Russia was open to the world. This openness meant a stronger exchange of ideas and values through art, literature, and intellectual endeavour. According to Ponomareva and Choromilova, in this period the transition from traditional societies to a modern society took place. By traditional society is meant agrarian and by modern society a global outlook in terms of ideas and economy (Ponomareva and Choromilova 6).

Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov not only reflected this social change, they also wielded great influence upon public consciousness. Throughout the thesis, I will discuss the crisis of the family in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia and the three writers' views on the family, as a possible way out from the crisis itself.

Rozanov collated his articles and the responses they generated in the press, into a book *Semeinyi vopros v Rossii* (1902).<sup>4</sup> The second edition was published a year later, demonstrating the Russian public's enormous interest in the topic. He gave astonishing statistics on venereal disease and children born out of wedlock that demonstrate the extent of

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<sup>4</sup> V.V. Rozanov. *Semeinyi vopros v Rossii*. Moscow: Respublika. 2004.

the crisis. He cited the fact that in St Petersburg in the period 1892-1894, 437 out of 1,000 women gave birth to children out of wedlock and nearly every second child was “illegitimate”. He proposed to change the debate about “marriage” (*brak*) into the debate about “the family” (*sem'ia*), and invited participants to consider the family philosophically, in relation to a complex set of notions. His primary concern was to view the family warmly, as a meaningful emotional unit based on love and respect between spouses, parents and children; and to save it from the asceticism and coldness of the strict Church laws. It is a characteristic of Rozanov's thinking that he proposed to look for examples in alternative, non-Christian religions and societies, and also often turned to the Old Testament and Talmud for examples of non-ascetic attitudes towards family love. For Rozanov, to save the Russian family from its crisis was to move away from the coldness of Church institutions, and to re-educate the public in their attitude towards human sexuality. To return God to the family was one solution he proposed to counter the crisis of the Russian family. This meant to rehabilitate human sexuality and to remove the notion of sin and shame from childbirth and relationships between sexes.

### **Divorce and legal reforms in connection with marriage in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia**

The works of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov are not just novels or short stories about the Russian family or the crisis of the family, but representative of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia. Thus, for example, Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* reflects the crisis of the arranged marriage that was happening in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the emergence of the new bourgeois marriage based on love. These authors all present new models of family life and anticipate future ways of living together between sexes, especially relationships between husband and wife. Thus, in order to understand the message that these authors wanted to

convey, it is important, first of all, to refer to the social context against which their works were placed, and consider the changes that were affecting family life in contemporary Russia.

After the emancipation of the Russian serfs in 1861, a series of liberal governmental and societal reforms were introduced (for example, the Great Judicial Reform, which introduced trial by jury to Russia). Among these reforms, public debates and changes concerning family law regarding marriage and divorce that were affected by the reforms of the judicial system were also taking place. Changes in the judicial system lead to the reshaping of family laws as well. The judicial system had to come up with new laws that would direct family life, laws more appropriate to the new emerging class of the bourgeoisie. As Wagner points out:

The family was now depicted as a union of individuals in which mutual affection and the nature of the interrelations between members gave rise to a combination of individual rights and mutual obligations. (103)

In the post-reform period changes in marital relationships were becoming increasingly evident. A sign of the trend was the growing number of legal publications dedicated to divorce and family relationships, the number of textbooks, manuals and monographs related to family matters significantly increasing<sup>19</sup>; indeed, divorce became the topic of the day (Ponomareva and Choroshilova 153). However, the indissolubility of failed marriages was not so simple to remedy. For a divorce, there were rigidly established conditions that had to be met. Since marriage was considered a religious sacrament, clerical institutions determined

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<sup>19</sup> Elagin N. V. *O peredache brachnykh del iz Duchovnovno suda v svetskii*. M., 1879; Zolotarev L. A. *Supruzheskie izmeny, ich znachenie i prichiny*. M., 1897; Zolotarev L.A. *Mimoletnye sviazi i brak*. 2-e izd., pod. M., 1898; Kulisheer M.I. *Pazvod ipolozhenie zhenshchiny*. SPB., 1896; Rozenshtein M. L. *prakticheskoe rukovodstvo dlia vedeniia brakorozvodnykh del*. SPB., 1915, Sokolovskii A.Z. *O brachnom soiuze. O rostorzheniibraka*. SPB., 1888; Sposobin A. D. *O razvode v Rossii*. M., 1881 and many others. Qtd. In Ponomareva and Choroshilova, 143.

divorce issues. A special statute was compiled governing the activities of diocesan courts (divorces subject to court proceedings in their community) and consistories. A divorce being a complicated and lengthy affair, separation was not infrequently practised instead, with the married couple living separately, on certain conditions, though officially remaining a husband and wife. This effort to dissolve martial relationships was equally denounced by the Church, which endeavoured to preserve the family whatever the conditions might be; one of the attempts was the prohibition of separate residence of a married couple (irrespective of the reasons) which was passed in 1830. However, this law, like many others in the history of Russia, was a complete failure (Ponomareva and Choroshilova 151).

Legitimate excuses for divorce were; adultery, attempt upon the life of the spouse or knowledge of such attempt, desertion without communication for more than five years (i.e. desertion without communication, not just a person being away for a long time), permanent exile of one of the spouses, and one of the spouses being incapable of fulfilling connubial duties. Significantly, for that time, Russian legislation failed to give the husband advantages over the wife, reasons for divorce being recognised as universally equal. However, as far as actual everyday practices were concerned, men were better protected (Ponomareva and Choroshilova 153).

Article 106 of the Collection of Laws (Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire, Vol. X, Part 1) acknowledged the husband's responsibility to support his wife even in the case of the married couple living separately, but not divorced (other than through the wife's fault). These situations most frequently occurred in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Adultery was one of the most important reasons for divorce. However, mere admission of guilt did not suffice. According to a decree issued in 1811, additional evidence was required, thus one had to submit for consideration reports by three witnesses or proof of



illegitimate children having been born. A divorce was a laborious and lengthy undertaking but, by mutual consent of the spouses prepared to incur material costs, the problem was solvable. In 1897, 1132 divorces were recorded in the Russian Empire<sup>20</sup>. The following figures were made public by periodicals: in 1867-1876, 18 out of 10,000 marriages in Russia ended in divorce (in Germany the ratio was 107 divorces and in England 9); while in 1877-1886 the ratios were to 22 in Russia, 152 in Germany and 19 in England<sup>21</sup>. Later on, the percentage of divorces per 1,000 Orthodox residents of European Russia reached 0.06 % in 1897 and 0.15% in 1913.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, the number of those wanting a divorce was much greater: “The Synod is swamped in divorce cases. There are as many as a thousand new ones submitted every month”<sup>23</sup> (Ponomareva and Choroshilova 153).

The increasing number of divorces and formal separations became the topic of public debates and publications concerning family matters.

As Engelstein points out, journalistic writings dedicated to the depiction of peasant life, and writings about the moral conditions of educated society, had divorce as their major topic. As Wagner points out, during the post-Emancipation period, religious periodicals and publications focussed on the effects and reform of existing imperial marriage and divorce law. The debate concerned primarily the educated and professional strata of society. These social groups engaged in public debates mainly with people of the same groups, as well as with representatives of the State and the Church. In the late imperial period, public debate had become a fundamental part of the political process in Russia, as the development of marriage and family law demonstrates. At the same time, there were debates taking place within the

<sup>20</sup> Goncharov Iu. M. *Sotsial'noe Razvitie Sem'i v Rossii v XVIII – Nachale XX Veka // Sem'ia v Rakurse Sotsial'novo Znaniia*. Barnaul, 2001. S. 33 qtd. In Ponomareva and Choroshilova, 143.

<sup>21</sup> *Ezhemesiachnyi zhurnal*. 1916. N. 2, s. 176 qtd. in Ponomareva and Choroshilova, 143.

<sup>22</sup> Arolevets N. A. *Possiiskoe Gorodskoe Naselenie v 1897-1926 gg.: Brak i Sem'ia. Aftoreferat na Soisk. Yeh. Step. Doktoraist*. Nauk. M., 2004. C.25 qtd. In Ponomareva and Choroshilova, 143.

<sup>23</sup> *Zhenskoe Delo*. 1911. N. 15 c. 18 qtd. In Ponomareva and Choroshilova, 143.

government, the Orthodox Church and the legal profession, which contradicted those on divorce law and reform of existing imperial marriage. The main ideals discussed during these debates were: legality, a balance between individual autonomy and collective obligation, civil and sexual equality, and democracy. These public debates contributed to the challenge of the old autocratic order, by demonstrating the feasibility of these ideals through their application to the family (34).

As Wagner points out, the liberals' suggestion was to expand the possibility of separation in marriage, to preserve the existing right of wives to control their own property, and to reduce the formal authority of husbands. However, married women would remain tied to their family obligations; thus, the authority of husbands and fathers was preserved. Moreover, in order to determine sexual equality and to ensure the owners' control of their property, liberals sought to reconfigure property institutions and inheritance rights (Wagner 27). Liberals valued individual autonomy within the family, and therefore, for them, the use of law was necessary to ensure the moral behaviour of family members and to protect their rights as individuals (28). As Wagner points out:

In a landmark decision in 1879, the court also held that spouses could agree to separate as long as the lower courts found the reasons for separation to be valid and the intention of the agreement not to be the permanent dissolution of the marriage. Considerably broadening the application of its doctrine after the mid-1880s, the Civil Cassation Department upheld the right of lower courts to award a separated wife support despite the profession by her husband that he wished to live with her, provided the courts found that the conduct of the husband warranted such action. And in 1906, the high court ruled that a wife who was still

living with her husband could sue him for an appropriate level of support and then, if circumstances justified it, leave him. (Wagner 31)

According to Wagner, in the 1860s and 1870s there was a significant migration of peasants of both sexes into urban areas, due to commercial growth and the demands placed on the peasantry by the terms of emancipation (Wagner 95). As Wagner highlights, at the same time, a great number of young noble and other educated women also moved to the cities, “seeking self-fulfilment as well as some measure of independence and material security through employment” (96). According to Wagner, the increasing number of women looking for legal means to leave their husbands, suggests that employment outside home was leading to a breakdown of the limitations that before had forced women to remain within an unhappy marriage. The women’s question and emancipation of women will be explored in an overview in the following section as one of the key factors affecting marital relations in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia.

### **Emancipation of women and the women’s question. An overview**

In a highly literary society like that of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, the works of these authors exercised a great influence on the reader’s mentality. Generations of Russian readers learned from Russian literature, and particularly from Dostoevsky’s, Tolstoy’s, and Chekhov’s writings, how to live and how to love. By putting their abstract ideas into fiction, these authors not only had an impact on the readers’ thinking, but also communicated a subversive message, such as Tolstoy’s in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Tolstoy was excommunicated from the Church mostly because the Church feared and acknowledged his huge influence on society. Chekhov was viewed by contemporaries as a writer who instilled a pessimistic and

melancholic attitude towards life, and this view was based on the influence that his work had on the reading classes. The ideas generated in literature have built a cultural bridge with the ongoing issue of what constitutes the family after the writers' deaths.

However, as mentioned earlier, the authors' works also illustrate the changes in marital relationships that were affecting 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia. As Engel points out, ideas from the Enlightenment also exercised a great influence on women, particularly those of Rousseau, leading to a re-evaluation of marriage and the family, and increased concern for children (51)

The western ideas which began to reach an educated minority of noblewomen in the 1830s and 1840s altered expectations of marriage and the family.

Reading might not create feelings, but it can legitimize them, and women began to seek more emotional gratification from marriage and to take a greater interest in their children. (59)

The changes affecting family life in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia were mainly linked to the changing role of women within the family. Women were trying to combine family and a job or even devoting themselves only to a job, leading to a decrease in the number of marriages. Meanwhile, the aristocracy no longer preserved a monopoly on wealth, and with increasing indebtedness and poverty among the aristocratic classes high-ranking women were similarly forced into professional roles. As Engel maintains:

After 1861, acceptance of a mother's values could mean pursuit of an education, a career, or ideals that led eventually to revolutionary activism. Because of this connection with the mother, daughters who rebelled against society's definition of femininity did not necessarily risk the loss of their female self-image. Investigation of family patterns in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had hardly begun. The number of

articles devoted to motherhood and childcare increased greatly during the 1860s and 1870s, and progressive women read and responded to them. Mothers who had always loved their children now saw the light, and for the first time understood what it means to love and how to go about it. Children became the first members of the household and they were given the best, the brightest, and the most spacious rooms. No one had ever thought of physical development, and now it became a primary family concern (59).

As Granik points out, by the mid-to-late 1920s, Russian women stopped seeing themselves only as mothers. As workers they developed new ways of seeing themselves. However, the desire to be considered equal to men clashed with an enduring patriarchal system that defined women as mothers. This conflict led to dispute resolution proceedings where women tried to change or even eliminate old myths and hierarchies that saw women in traditional ways (Granik 137).

Ponomareva highlights that in the early 1860s an obstinate struggle occurred within the home of nearly every wealthy family between the fathers, desiring to maintain the old order, and their sons and daughters standing for their right to shape their fate according to their own ideals. Young people abandoned military service, offices and shop counters and headed for university cities. Accomplished aristocratic young girls arrived in Saint Petersburg, Moscow or Kiev without a kopeck and willing to acquire a skill that could give them a chance to rid themselves of family bondage and, eventually, of the “yoke of marriage” (Ponomareva and Choroshilova 140).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the problem of relationships between men and women gradually ceased to be reduced solely to its social aspect. In the course of time it became increasingly clear that it was not purely a “women's question” but that of gender relationships, and as such

is of equal importance for both women and men. The issue of gender relationships and love cannot be reduced solely to the problem of social emancipation. Nikolai Berdyaev, a well-known philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote in 1907 that “this is a painful question for every living being; for humans it is as immensely important as questions of life and death”.<sup>5</sup> As Shapovalov points out, in this way, there is a much deeper, a metaphysical issue underlying the problem of women’s emancipation or social liberation, an issue dealing with the fundamental basis of everyone’s existence. However, the problem of a woman’s emancipation, protection of her rights and elimination of her dependent status, are by all means very significant, representing one of the parts or facets of a more general and fundamental problem of gender relationships, love and sexuality (Shapovalov 339).

According to Shapovalov, if in the West, women’s struggle was mostly focused on the issue of suffrage, in Russia the initial task was attaining complete equality for women. The issue of guaranteeing women suffrage on an equal basis with men failed to play a significant role in women’s emancipation simply because the first elective body of power, the State Duma, was established in Russia only in 1906, significantly later than in the West. On the contrary, one was clearly aware that this issue represented only a minor and largely unimportant part of the whole scope of the issue of women’s equality. Largely for this reason, the issue of women’s suffrage in Russia had no significance of its own (Shapovalov 340).

As Shapovalov points out, the Higher Women’s Courses that were run in Russia in 1870 were evidently the first experience of higher education for women in Europe<sup>6</sup> (341).

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<sup>5</sup> Beryaev, N. *Metafisika pola i liubvi. In Russkii Eros, ili Filosofia liubvi v Rossii*, 232.

<sup>6</sup> This is demonstrated by the letter sent to the courses’ organizers by the famous English philosopher J. S. Mill (1806-1873). British philosopher, economist, moral and political theorist, and administrator, J. S. Mill was the most influential English-speaking philosopher of the nineteenth century (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*)

And according to Ponomareva, the new people strove for education and to be useful (as they understood it), but most importantly – they strove to be independent, to have a choice in life and not to have to follow the path of previous generations. Not infrequently, the striving became an end in itself, not a means for something else. Many young girls from the 1860s were dissatisfied with the traditional family, in which the woman found herself in a subordinate role, totally dependent on the husband's will, and preoccupied with housekeeping; her future predetermined and subject to tradition (Ponomareva and Choroshilova 140).

As mentioned earlier, Western ideas also played a great role in shaping family relations, especially relationships between husband and wife, and had an impact on the changing role of women within marital relationships. As Engel rightly points out, literature, including Western women's writing, fostered women's self-awareness also in Russia:

By the 1830s and 1840s, western ideas had ceased to be the prerogative of an aristocratic few, due to increased educational opportunities and the proliferation of journals. Even in the provinces, noblewomen could stay abreast of the latest ideas. These had come to include a critique of women's role in the family and in society, under the influence of utopian socialism. For women, George Sand was the primary purveyor of western ideas. By putting abstract ideas into fictional form, Sand made them accessible even to the relatively unsophisticated (54).

I examine thematic clusters in connection with family and love, and explore the new relationships between the sexes that were emerging in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian society, through the lenses of the key Russian writers under investigation. Thus, for example, I argue that the works of the three authors tackle the problem of emancipation of women so that they are

allowed to love whom they like rather than meet social expectations. Tolstoy observed the morals of his time, but depicted an image of women different from that of the beginning of the nineteenth century. He showed the emerging of the new bourgeois class and therefore of the new bourgeois marriage based on feelings rather than arranged marriage. All three authors explore the changing roles of women within the family. Their works all depict new marital situations, where marriage no longer presents itself as a relationship of master and servant, but as a relationship where the role of the woman becomes more equal to that of the husband. Enlightenment ideas had an impact on and changed conceptions of family life; children became the first members of the household. I argue that the authors' novels and stories not only contributed to the new trends of behaviour, including intimate spheres, marriage, and family life, but also reflected the societal phenomena in their dialectics.

### **The rise of the bourgeoisie in Russia**

Foucault writes that the bourgeoisie, or middle and upper class family was at the centre of discourse regarding social life and sexuality in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In order to understand the concept of bourgeoisie at the centre of public debates in Europe, it is important to analyse the social setting of Russia between 1880 and 1905. Clowes, Kassow and West in their book *Between Tsar and People: Educated society and the quest for public identity in late Imperial Russia* (1991), compile the research of twenty historians<sup>7</sup> who discuss the formation of what could be called a middle class in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia. Thomas C. Owen warns against assuming the universality of European capitalist ideas and institutions,

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<sup>7</sup> Kassow, S. D. / West, J. L. / Clowes, E.W *The problem of the Middle in Late Imperial Russia*

Gleason, A. *The Terms of Russian Social History*

Monas, S. *The Twilit Middle Class of the Nineteenth-Century Russia*

West J. L. *The Riabushinky Circle: Burzhuaziiia and Obshchestvennost' in Late Imperial Russia*

The book is a collection of 22 articles on this topic the four chapters above have been the main ones to inform this introductory section but each article is relevant to the historical background and will be cited throughout the document as above in Clowes et al.



especially when applying them to 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia. Owen states that evidence suggests that a bourgeois class consciousness did not develop until after the 1905 revolution, which is beyond the scope of this study (Owen 76-89). The discourse originating from Europe certainly influenced Russia, yet it had a very different social dynamic. Thus, Sidney Monas writes that “until the 1890’s in Russia almost nobody wanted a bourgeoisie”; the bourgeois people were considered as “revolutionary by the state” and seen as “the flaw of the so-called “radical” European intellectual by the revolutionaries. Monas states: “*Embourgeoisement* was equivalent to desacralisation” (Monas 28). Owen suggests that class consciousness only develops with a strong degree of solidarity amongst a social grouping; however James L. West presents evidence that this did not exist. Clowes et al. point out the difference between the terms *burzhuaziia* and the *obshchestvennost’*, the latter denoting the development of civil society, made up of bureaucrats and nobles and the educated elites who disdained the term *burzhuaziia*:

*Obshchestvennost’* implied not so much class, possessing a consciousness based on economic self-interest, as an informal yet authoritative presence of educated Russians determined to work for the common good, for “progress” (Clowes et al. 4)

It is important to note that a middle class did not form in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, and so many critics refer to the term “bourgeoisie” retrospectively out of context. However, the educated classes were developing a sense of civil society, and this *obshchestvennost’* was certainly influenced by the discourse from Europe; therefore, the paradigms of Foucault are still relevant. The lateness of the development of middle classes in Russia highlights the necessity to understand its uniqueness as a country. After the late 1870’s the middle class began to appear in a very precarious situation:

But then urbanisation, the growth of educational opportunities, the rise of self-administrations such as the zemstvo, and general economic transformation created many new social groups – professionals, industrialists, artists – who did not fit the traditional categories ...but were defined by what they were not: not gentry, not *Chinovniki* (Bureaucrats), not peasants (Clowes et al. 4)

The lack of an entrepreneurial middle class created a system that depended heavily on patronage and patriarchal family dynamics, which consisted of extended families both in the nobility and the peasantry. However, the ideas that influenced the European bourgeoisie were reflected in the works of the authors in question as they were all conversant with western literature and social development. Thus, their literature in turn influenced society. As Lavrin maintains:

In a country where there was no freedom of the press, fine literature was the only realm in which it was still possible to exercise that freedom of mind and spirit which was banned by the authorities. Writers were looked upon not only as artists of the world, but also as guides and teachers in a deeper sense. They were supposed to understand life better than ordinary mortals; so it was their duty to impart this knowledge to others in an appropriate shape and form. No wonder that many a Russian novel showed a propensity to combine fiction with moral, social, and political ideas-not necessarily at the expense of art, but as one of the vital ingredients of art itself. (Lavrin 130)

Therefore the writers not only reflected social change, they also wielded great influence upon public consciousness. This thesis will shed new light on the relationship between literature and society in addressing the problematics of the role of the family as a very complex institution which is based on religious and economic foundation.

## Recent critical thinking on the family and sexuality in Russia

In order to understand the role and importance of sexuality in Russian society and how this has been tackled by writers who approached the topic, it is important to highlight the very close correlation between sexuality (with procreation as one of its subsets) and death in the perceptions of that period.

Olga Matich, in her book *Erotic Utopia* (2005), argues that early Russian modernists were mainly characterized by the desire to overcome the inevitability of death, “by resisting nature’s procreative imperative and rejecting traditional notions of gender” (4). She maintains that decadent utopians have introduced a theory of sexual desire that transcended the individual and focussed on collectivity beyond the family unit. For them, erotic love would lead to utopian ideas of abstinence. Matich focuses on Tolstoy and considers *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) an attack on carnal desire, marriage, and procreation, as well as divorce and feminism.

According to Matich, Tolstoy suggested that the husband’s jealousy of his wife led to murder. The most radical aspect of Tolstoy’s message in *The Kreutzer Sonata* is its totalizing ascetism, which brings the downfall of the family and its reproductive nature. In chapter two, I show that *The Kreutzer Sonata* is a mirror of Russian society as it reflects the societal changes that happened in Russia during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (in particular the crisis of the institution of marriage). Hence the aim of this chapter is to fill a gap in the existing knowledge on Tolstoy’s works.

Henrietta Mondry proposes an explanation for the murder of Pozdnyshev’s wife in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, which is different from Olga Matich’s view. Basing her approach on Nikolai Fedorov’s *The Philosophy of the Common Task*, Mondry believes that the murder is

committed for the role it plays in achieving the final goal of mankind, which is to resurrect past generations of dead fathers. By killing a wife, a man symbolically detaches himself from sexuality and the instinct to procreate which is, according to Mondry, one of the factors stopping resurrection (Mondry 175-6).

Irene Masing-Delic (1992) explores the theme of abolishing death in Russian twentieth-century literature, and the impact that the philosophers Nikolai Fedorov and Vladimir Solovyov had on this immortalization project. Masing-Delic maintains that according to Fedorov's philosophy, procreation is the perpetuation of death. Reversed procreation or resurrection would eliminate death and might be achieved by directing sexual energies "into gene research or some other kind of scientific activity decoding death" (Masing-Delic 97). Masing-Delic brings an original contribution to knowledge in this field thanks to her interpretation of Fedorov's ideas on immortality. As stated earlier, Fedorov's ideas had an effect on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

Regarding Solovyov, Masing-Delic maintains that central to Solovyov's utopia was erotic love, which he viewed paradoxically, describing it as both the source and the transcendence of sexual desire. The unresolved question for Solovyov's was whether men and women should use their sexual energy now, or save it, storing it till the end of history, at which point the energy would be released collectively in a big bang that would transfigure the world (59).

Alexander Etkind's *Eros of the Impossible* (1997) challenges earlier thinking in the field of psychoanalysis, stating that Freud and psychoanalysis had a limited impact on the pre-revolutionary *intelligentsia*, as the role played by the psychoanalysis, in the West and in Russia, was played by *Symbolism*, with its obsession for signs, the unconscious and ambiguity. The point of the author is that symbolists and psychoanalysts shared a strong

interest in sexuality. According to the author, sex, as an intellectual matter, was introduced to the public by Vasily Rozanov.

### **Sexuality and Christianity**

The complexity of the link between sexuality and Christianity is illustrated by the difference in the views of Fedorov and Rozanov. However, this study focuses on the personal and sincere exploration of faith in the lives and works of the three authors. Undoubtedly, the greatest influence upon their thinking is the Gospels themselves and the Bible in general. All three authors were thoroughly acquainted with the texts of their faith as well as the liberal humanistic thinking emerging from post Enlightenment Europe. Through their realist style, these authors demonstrate the genuine expression of faith in their characters. Dostoevsky and Tolstoy present opposing moralist positions. Chekhov does not moralise; he is familiar with and appreciates the ecclesiastical traditions.

Throughout my thesis I highlight the importance of the faith for each author and discuss the complementary impact of their views in my conclusion. I suggest that each author raises questions that resonate with the truth of the Bible; something, in practice, the Orthodox Church of their day had obscured through its own traditions.

According to Irene Masing-Delic, Fedorov was the greatest representative of a “victorious campaign against death in Russian 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy” (78).

Fedorov’s work *The Philosophy of the Common Task* (1906-7, 1913) is completely dedicated to the “idea of immortalizing mankind” (78). Fedorov’s programme of resurrecting the dead cannot be understood without the Scriptures, in particular the Gospel of John, where it is possible to find a description of the raising of Lazarus. Irene Masing-Delic argues that

every element of Fedorov's Common Task is related to the Bible. For Fedorov, God is the creator of the Universe, he is still active, and he acts through his instrument, mankind. God is the goal towards which the Task of resurrecting the dead is directed. He also secures bloodline relationships, for without God, brothers and sisters are indifferent to each other and their ancestors. Fedorov's preoccupation with human immortality was not caused by the fear of death. Nonetheless, a secret fear can be found in the philosopher's fear of separation. He avoided intimate private relationships as he was afraid of abandonment or other forms of separation. He never married or had any known sexual relationship. In his Task, the family represents the basic work unit. The family provides the basis for future human relations. This is particularly true for rural families, which represent small labour units where sex plays a less important role than work. The rural family procreates in order to sustain itself as a work team. In this particular case, procreation is not considered evil by Fedorov, the original advocate of anti-procreation, but he believed it would certainly be abolished at some point, virginity being a precondition of immortality.

By contrast, Rozanov attacked the spiritual rigidity of the Orthodox Church, which condemned sexual relations, in favour of a philosophy based on humanity's physical ties with God. He believed that procreation enables man to find a reconnection with the beginning of the world and it is its way to become closer to God.

The above contrasts the difference in views between Fedorov and Rozanov in regard to sexuality and Christianity. Still further contrast can be found between Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov, who each portray a unique application of the Christian faith to the subjects of sexuality and the family, stemming from a sincere personal spiritual search. Each of these authors was in some way critical of the Orthodox Church system, and above all, portrayed the expression of faith with realism through their characters. They were familiar with the church

traditions and had knowledge of the Scriptures. Further elaboration will follow in the chapters.

In Chapter one I focus on the crisis of the family in *The Brothers Karamazov*. I also show how in *The Diary of a Writer* Dostoevsky examines material from the press highlighting the breakdown of the contemporary family. I argue that while Fedorov had an impact on Dostoevsky's understanding of the future of the family, Christianity and Russian folk beliefs also influenced his thinking on the future of the Russian family. Dostoevsky highlights the neglect of the *paterfamilias* (fatherly authority) towards the Russian family as key cause of the crisis of the family. This is illustrated by Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov* where this scenario occurs through the patriarch's neglect of his fatherly role.

The analysis of chapter two focuses on the second period of Tolstoy's work, at a time when he had founded his own religion, based on his interpretation of the original Hebrew and Greek texts of the Scriptures. Tolstoy struggled with his own feelings of guilt at not being able to control his sexual impulses; this is expressed in the *Power of Darkness* and further developed in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Tolstoy's epigram taken from the Gospel of Matthew (5: 8) presents both works as an *exegesis* expounding the concept of what it means to "commit adultery in the heart". Chapter 13 in book 12 of *The Brothers Karamazov* is entitled "An adulterer of thought" and thus also takes inspiration from the same verse of the Scriptures. Throughout chapter two I will contrast Tolstoy's ideas with my analysis of Dostoevsky in chapter one. Tolstoy places the responsibility of failure in marriage on the neglect of charitable love within the conjugal relationship. It is a challenge primarily for the husband as a companion, but it also highlights the role of the wife. Tolstoy resembles mostly the negativity that is also expressed by Dostoevsky and Chekhov toward the practice of sexuality that Foucault equates to prudish Victorian society:

Thus sex gradually became an object of great suspicion; the general and disquieting meaning that pervades our conduct and our existence, in spite of ourselves; the point of weakness where evil portents reach through to us, the fragment of darkness that we each carry within us: a general signification, a universal secret, an omnipresent cause, a fear that never ends (Foucault 69).

It is my argument that Tolstoy's controversial Epilogue to *The Kreutzer Sonata* is much misunderstood and has a lot to offer to the modern reader's understanding of sexual relationships. This will be proposed in chapter two, but addressed in my conclusion in comparison to, and in contrast with, the approach of Dostoevsky and Chekhov.

The analysis of *The Kreutzer Sonata* and its condemnation of sensuality within marriage is the point of overlap between the three chapters of my thesis. Dostoevsky highlights the dangers of sensualists outside marriage, as will be presented in chapter one. In contrast, Chekhov focuses on liberal ideas towards love, on the liberation of sexuality and its role in the family, marriage and outside marriage. I argue that "The Duel" is a response to *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Pozdnyshev, by imagining that his wife is committing adultery, generates the crisis in the family. In "The Duel" instead, Laevsky and Nadezhda's adulterous relationship creates a *de facto* family. Chekhov opposes science (personified by Von Koren) to faith (embodied in the figure of an orthodox deacon). However, the discussion of Christianity between Von Koren and the deacon is friendly; the deacon saves Laevsky's life by attending the duel, which makes him break his religious rules. For Chekhov the duel is not between proponents of Christianity and science; the crisis within the family is caused by Laevsky's neglect of Nadezhda. Chekhov challenges the patriarchal role of the hero as a lover. Laevsky's sense of apathy, lethargy and low self-esteem leads him to neglect



Nadezhda. However, Laevsky experiences a spiritual conversion through his near-death experience.

Chapter three is longer than the other two because I need to discuss a range of stories tackling the thematic clusters identified already in chapter one and chapter two. Chekhov is a writer of the next generation, who came to prominence after the death of Dostoevsky, but died young before Tolstoy. My argument is that Chekhov, though not a moralist, and often criticised as a pessimist, challenges his readership through the realism of his art. His stories, despite vividly depicting the negativity of extramarital relationships and families in crisis, also celebrate the beauty of these romances, have an underlying hope in the future, and are tinged with positive references to Christianity.

Religion and sexuality are two of the most prominent clusters for the analysis of the crisis of the family in my thesis. The key framework that guides my research is the exploration of two concepts identified by Foucault as a societal paradigm shift in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, which can be observed in the works of these authors. That shift is the transition from the “deployment of alliance” to the “deployment of sexuality” (Foucault 108) as a foundational principle of family cohesiveness.

### **The Deployment of Alliance vs The Deployment of Sexuality**

At this stage it is important to revisit and explain the concepts of the interchange of sexuality and alliance as expressed in the opening quotation of this introduction.

The family is the interchange of sexuality and alliance: it conveys the law and the juridical dimension in the deployment of sexuality; and it conveys the economy of pleasure and the intensity of sensations in the regime of alliance. ... The deployment

of sexuality is concerned with the sensations of the body, the quality of pleasures, and the nature of impressions, however tenuous or imperceptible these may be ... The deployment of sexuality is linked to the economy through numerous and subtle relays, the main one of which, however, is the body- the body that produces and consumes (Foucault 108).

In Russia the alliance was determined by patriarchy (in the old order). Unlike the bourgeois class in Europe there was no middle class tradition in Russia, and thus the relationship between the sexes was more equal; however, by 1880 this was changing rapidly. The deployment of alliance also conveys the legal and the juridical dimension in which sexuality was expressed. Foucault maintains that “since the 18<sup>th</sup> century the family had become an obligatory locus of affects, feelings, love... sexuality has its privileged point of development in the family” (106). It is certainly correct that at the start of 19<sup>th</sup> century that was the case. However, it has to be borne in mind that the family, as interpreted in the Europe of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is directly derived from the Judeo pre-Christian tradition dating back to the Abrahamic covenant (c 2000 BC)<sup>8</sup>. All three authors were affected by the general trend of society; society was moving towards a marriage based on the “deployment of sexuality”. Sexual passion and attraction became the guiding force which broke the traditional alliance and established new patterns of sexual relationships.

In chapter one I argue that Dostoevsky can be categorised as a proponent of the traditional deployment of alliance, using Foucault’s terms, as exemplified in *The Dream of a Ridiculous man* (1877). In this work Dostoevsky paints a picture of a future family which returns to alliance. On the opposite extreme in chapter three Chekhov is an exponent of the deployment of sexuality, celebrating the humanity, reality and diversity that this new trend in

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<sup>8</sup> Abraham lived *circa* 2166-1991 BCE (Hansen C. *Timelines*, Rose Publishing, inc. Torrence 2006)

relationship offers, rising up out of the ashes of the failed traditional family alliance. Thus, he depicts the crisis also as an opportunity for a better future in family life. In chapter two I argue that for Tolstoy both the traditional deployment of alliance and the modern deployment of alliance lead to failure. Tolstoy sees them both and rejects them categorically, preaching a radical solution to the crisis in the family through the sexless deployment of charitable love in marriage. Tolstoy would agree with Foucault only in his controversial statement that “sexuality [within the deployment of alliance] is incestuous from the start” (Foucault 108).

As stated earlier, this work examines the contribution to the discourse on the family made by the three Russian canonical writers in the last twenty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It shows that their ideas provided the basis and foundation for the burgeoning of the discourse on sexuality and family in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Figures like Vasily Rozanov and Mikhail Men’shikov who took the debates on this topic into the 20<sup>th</sup> century used the writing of the three authors as one of their main sources. Whether they were critical of the views coined by these three writers, or sympathetic to them, they used their opinions to formulate ideas on how the contemporary Russian public should improve the situation regarding the status of the Russian family. While the first twenty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the increase of the debate around family and sexuality, for example from Artsybashev to Mayakovsky, this is outside the scope of my study, which focuses on the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nor does my work delve into the immediate upheaval leading to the 1905 Revolution. It seeks merely to demonstrate the importance of the writings of these three authors in formulating complex ideas, which were expressed with psychological and philosophical depths that need further attention, investigation and re-evaluation. However, I traverse their works in thematic clusters such as: relationships between spouses, parents and children; the controversial evaluations of sexual attraction both within and outside of marriage; infanticide; the role of Christianity and faith in

relation to the family; and the role of traditional culture and patriarchy. I mention the topics identified by Foucault, such as the medicalization of the family, “hysterization of women’s bodies” (104), “a pedagogization of children’s sex” (104), featuring prominently in Dostoevsky, “a psychiatrization of perverse pleasure” (104). However, I especially focus on the paradigm shift from the deployment of alliance to the deployment of sexuality, as a model on which to build an understanding of, and a framework for, comparison between the interpretations that each author gives to the crisis of the family in the Russia of their time. Through this process I demonstrate the transition from conservative patriarchal discourse that puts the family at the centre of society, to a new modernist model of the relationships between the sexes. Thus, for instance, in spite of Chekhov’s liberal views on the issues related to the family, his work still shows the power of tradition, the Church and patriarchy on marriage and the family. I explore the complex dynamics of oppositions and contradictions which find their expression in the formation of new ideas about the family, as well as identify possible solutions for overcoming this crisis. I thus analyse literary works in the context of the complex cultural changes and exchanges taking place in the society in the last twenty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, I highlight the sincere spiritual search that each author brings to the crisis of the family. In my conclusion I argue that the crisis of the family in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, as seen through the artistry of these globally renowned authors, is relevant not just to the modern Russian reader, but also to any scholar of the history of sexuality and the family across international academia, not to mention to international society today.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) was one of the first Russian authors to tackle the problem of the Russian family as it entered its crisis in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Whereas the theme of the family in Dostoevsky has been well explored<sup>9</sup>, there has been less analysis of the crisis and visions for the future of the Russian family offered by Dostoevsky in his novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), the *Diary of a Writer* and “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man” (1877). My aim here is to fill this critical gap.

Most of Dostoevsky’s critics maintain that he considered the crisis of the family as a consequence of the loss of moral principles among all strata of Russian society. For example, Frank argues that for Dostoevsky the breakdown of the Russian family was only a symptom of a deeper malaise. The loss of faith in Christ and God among educated Russians undermined deeply entrenched moral principles, leading to the crisis of the Russian family (849). De Jonge argues that human’s spirituality is at the heart of Dostoevsky’s work. He also believes that in general a society that ignores the spiritual dimension of humanity is deficient, focusing only on the physical needs of people, turning them “back into an animal” (69). While I believe these views to be correct, I also argue that the disintegration of the old institutions brings sexuality to the fore. In *The Brothers Karamazov* the sex drive begins to dominate family relationships and causes moral corruption and appalling cruelty.

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<sup>9</sup> Susanne Fusso: “Dostoevsky and the family” in W. J. Leatherbarrow, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevsky*; and Rowe, W.W., *Dostoevsky: Child and Man in His Works*, New York: New York University Press, 1968.

Barbara Engel links the family crisis to the historical context and maintains that the legitimacy of all figures, including the patriarchal father, was challenged by the disastrous defeat in the Crimean War. Engel also states that emancipation of serfs in 1861 undermined the role of the patriarch even more. At the same time, a regeneration of society was taking place; radical writers “condemned the idleness and luxury associated with serf-holding” (55). Continuing with historical context, Fusso argues that the settled and structured order of the old family life was being challenged by new forms of family, promoted by radical intellectuals such as Nikolai Chernyshevskii and Aleksandr Herzen (177). As Paperno highlights in her study *Chernyshevskii and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behaviour* (1988), these thinkers came up with new ideas about how family life might be structured. One of these ideas was that adultery should be tolerated within marriage, ensuring social harmony and equilibrium (21). Fusso observes that Dostoevsky saw the danger of these theories as he started thinking about what would happen to the children produced by non-traditional sexual arrangements (177).

While in the introduction to the book *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture* (1993), Jane Costlow et al. correctly point out that Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* examined the psychological complexities of sexual drive a generation before the advent of Freud’s psychoanalysis (30), I argue that Dostoevsky put the power of sexuality at the centre of his novel and portrayed the negative consequences of ‘*sladostrastie*’ (sexual indulgence). In *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevsky chooses precisely the theme of sexuality and the power of physical desire and lust to conceptualise the topic of the family. He does so while analysing relationships within the Karamazov family.

Dostoevsky's own family background and circumstances led him to investigate the crisis of the family through fiction. As Lantz points out in *The Dostoevsky Encyclopedia* (2004), Dostoevsky's childhood and family life informed his idea of the family (136). Dostoevsky's three-year-old son, Alexei, died in May 1878 from an epileptic fit. Dostoevsky was so devastated by this tragedy that he made a pilgrimage with the philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev<sup>10</sup> to the monastery of Optina Pustyn (an Eastern Orthodox monastery near Kozelsk in Russia). This experience inspired the prominence of monasticism in the novel when the youngest son Alyosha becomes a pupil of Father Zosima. Dostoevsky's father, Mikhail Andreevich, was "an independent, educated, and attentive family man"<sup>11</sup>. However, he had a quick-tempered personality. These characteristic traits of the father's personality are reflected in the characters of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dmitri in the novel is hot tempered, but unlike Dostoevsky's father he is not a highly educated man. Dostoevsky's father was a military doctor, a noble from a beaucocratic rank, who also had serfs. He worked in Moscow in a hospital for the poor. Thus, although Dostoevsky's family was part of the top two per cent of the population considered nobility, they were by no means aristocratic. To put this in perspective compared with Tolstoy (who as a Count was considered one of the lower echalon of the nobility), the Dostoevsky's family would be of lower class; they depended on their father's income as well as on their land and serfs. The father Fyodor Pavlovich in *The Brothers Karamazov*, was "despotic, irritable, and suspicious" (Miller 42). It is my view that Fyodor represents Dostoevsky's own father, Mikhail Andreevich.

As K. Mochulsky maintains, the complicated human world of *The Brothers Karamazov* evolved over a decade. It incorporated elements of Dostoevsky's earlier works,

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<sup>10</sup> Vladimir Sergeevich Solov'ev (1853 – 1900) was a Russian philosopher, theologian, poet, and literary critic. He played an important role in the development of Russian philosophy and poetry at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the spiritual renaissance of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>11</sup> *Russkie Pisateli 1800-1917, Biograficheskii Slovar'*, 165

including the *Diary of a Writer*. The *Diary of a Writer* served as a laboratory in which the ideology of the final novel was shaped to in its ultimate form (Mochulsky 596).

In *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevsky focuses mainly on two families: the Karamazov family and the family of Captain Snegiryov; I will analyse these families and compare them in relation to the themes of dysfunctional families and the reasons for their various problems. I will study the theme of the relationships between parents and children, fathers and sons, mothers and children, brothers and brothers, and will explore the role of inherited characteristics and environment, including social and economic factors. I will also focus on Ivan Karamazov's philosophy of human unification without the existence of God, the father of creation, based on the immoral idea of everything is permitted. This philosophy eventually leads to the murder of the *pater familias* Fyodor, at the hands of Smerdyakov, who was influenced by Ivan's ideology. In the novel, Chapter 6 of Book IV focuses on Captain Snegiryov's family as an example of a cohesive family unit where the son Ilyusha loves his father; he defends him from public insult, and eventually dies for his honour. This is the antithesis and inversion of the Karamazov family plot where the father abandons his children and most of them hate him for his negligence. I compare Ivan's philosophy and contrast it with Ilyusha's attitude towards his father.

While in this thesis I analyse Dostoevsky's later work in order to understand a bigger picture it is important to note that he had already addressed the theme of the family in crisis in *Crime and Punishment* (1866), in the subplot of the Marmeladov family. While the family's sufferings are grounded in societal issues such as poverty, its problems also stem from the irresponsibility of the father of the family, Marmeladov. He is shown as a drunkard, and the reason for his drinking is not exclusively linked to the social injustices and degradation. Here Dostoevsky also explores the psychological factors behind such a personality as Marmeladov.



His infantilism and inability to face the responsibilities of the parent are to a degree echoed by that of his wife. In this family the roles and responsibilities of parents and children are reversed, and the eldest daughter, Sonia, assumes the protective role of the parents. Her resorting to the trade of prostitution is a dramatic example of the sacrifice of one member of the family for the wellbeing of all the others, both parents and youngest children. The daughter thus is a victim not only of society, but of the inability of her father and step-mother to provide for the family.

In this chapter I will discuss Dostoevsky's ideas on the family and children and how he explores the crisis of the family. First, I will analyse the topic of the family in *The Diary of a Writer* (1876-77); then I will move to the problematic of the family in *The Brothers Karamazov*. *The Diary of a Writer* served as a test bed for the material explored by Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov*. In the latter, Dostoevsky analyses the characteristic structure of contemporary Russian life, continuing his work on the social themes he started to explore in the *Diary of a Writer*. Some of these themes include the maltreatment and corruption of innocent children at the hands of adults, the moral degradation of contemporary life and the fundamental incompatibility of socialism and Christianity (Leatherbarrow 12). These themes find their artistic expression and convergence in *The Brothers Karamazov*. For example, the topic of parricide, central to the novel, is an evocative symbol of the catastrophic fragmentation of the contemporary Russian family.

Moreover, I will take into consideration the opinions of some important critics of Dostoevsky, like V. E. Vetlovskaja. She highlights the vital role played by children in looking after their fathers in life and after-life in Russian folk's mystical beliefs. Vetlovskaja interprets the relationship between father and son in *The Brothers Karamazov* on the basis of these beliefs. So, by stressing the importance of the children in the after-life of parents she

gives an alternative folk view to Fedorov's idea of resurrecting the dead by stopping procreation. In her article "Tvorchestvo Dostoevskovo v svete literaturnykh i fol'klornykh parallelei Stroitel'naia zhertva" (1978) Vetlovskaiia points out that the future of the Russian family is a continuous relationship between the living and the dead.

In a period of dramatic changes (such as industrialization, urbanization, and secularization) and development of new trends towards love and family life under the influence of radical intellectuals (which were undermining Russian traditions), Dostoevsky considered the crisis of the Russian family as a consequence of the loss of the father's patriarchal role. However, despite the general moral degeneration of society at the time, it is my view that for Dostoevsky the family remained the nucleus of Russian society; it was the domain where values were passed from one generation to another, around which the fight for power between the Church and the state took place.

#### The Family in Crisis in *The Diary of a Writer* (1876-77)

I shall next examine the family in crisis in *The Diary of a Writer* (1876-77). Before writing *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky turned to the question of parents and children in *The Diary of a Writer* (1876-77), in which he included extraordinary and dramatic examples of abandoned children and child abuse at the hands of adults. In *The Diary of a Writer* the author also analyses cases of violence between parents in front of their children. Thus, he focused his lens on the family, on relationships between parents and children, on upbringing and education. *The Diary of a Writer* explores cases of criminality among children who do not have families. In it Dostoevsky re-shapes, re-elaborates, and re-moulds the information he encountered in the local press. All this information was from genuine sources, none of it being invented (Nocera 41). While highlighting the state of disintegration of the

Russian family and the absence of a binding moral idea in contemporary life, Dostoevsky stressed the great significance of the family unit. In Dostoevsky's view, the responsibility for children's upbringing involves a school of love for both parents and children. The family should be based on love, care, and mutual understanding. In his opinion, the children are the future of the family and thus of Russian society; they represent all hopes for a better future.

According to Dostoevsky, the responsibility of children's education involves schooling through the labour of love (22: 69) for both parents and children. The family should be based on love, care, and mutual understanding, not only on attraction or sexual encounters. He believed that children are the future of the Russian family. As he wrote on children in *The Diary of a Writer*, 1876:

Эти создания тогда только вторгаются в душу нашу и прирастают к нашему сердцу, когда мы, родив их, следим за ними с детства, не разлучаясь, с первой улыбки их, и затем продолжаем родниться взаимно душою каждый день, каждый час в продолжение всей жизни нашей. Вот это семья, вот это святыня! Семья ведь тоже создается, а не дается готовою, и никаких прав и никаких обязанностей не дается тут готовыми, а все они сами собою, одно из другого вытекают. Тогда только это и крепко, тогда только это и свято. Созидается же семья неустанным трудом любви.<sup>12</sup> (Dostoevsky 22:69-70)

Nonetheless, while underlining the great significance of the family unit as the nucleus of society, Dostoevsky was also aware of problems in the education and upbringing of

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<sup>12</sup> These little creatures only enter into our souls and attach themselves to our hearts when we, after having begotten them, watch over them from childhood without leaving them from the time of their first smile; and then we continue to grow into one another's souls every day, every hour, all through our lives. Now that is the family; that is something sacred! A family, after all is also created, not provided ready-made, and there are no rights and no obligations that are provided ready-made here; they all derive one from the other...The family is created by ceaseless labour of love (Dostoevsky 233).

children in contemporary life. In a description of his visit to the colony of juvenile delinquents in January of 1876, (*Diary of a Writer*, 1976) Dostoevsky focuses attention on the surrogate family structure in the colony. He notes that each house costs about three thousand rubles and in each of them lives a “family”. A surrogate family is a group of twelve to seventeen boys with a guardian. During the time of his visit, the colony housed fifty boys in total, although the total capacity was seventy. The director of the colony whose name is “P.A.-ch R-sky” gives an explanation to Dostoevsky. Each family has one guardian and there were four families in total. Each guardian receives a salary of three thousand rubles and almost all of them are graduates from theological seminaries. They live a life similar to the pupils, wearing the same clothes. The pupils get up early, get dressed all together, clean the dormitory and wash the floor, as necessary.

Dostoevsky discovers that the pupils in these colonies are savage and uncivilized. Some of them aged twelve and thirteen urinate during their sleep. These pupils could not even comprehend the need to behave differently. Dostoevsky raises the question of the source of their wild characters. His interest in children can be seen clearly by his fastidious and detailed accounts of their lives and their relationship with their parents. He is very sympathetic to children who faced domestic tensions, especially between their parents. He calls such children "accidental" members of "accidental" families, as if they were outcasts of the society, which they were. These children should lead an innocent childhood; instead they are raised in depravity and hate. They have to deal with their own lives without the proper support of their parents.

The director of the colony explains the lack of knowledge among these children about themselves or their social status. They are only aware of the freedom that comes from being left to their own devices. Dostoevsky talks about children in the colony who steal only for the

sake of stealing and boys who were formerly inmates in another juvenile delinquent facility. He blames society at large for difficult children like these. Dostoevsky gives an example of a murder: a woman named Perova was murdered by her partner, who himself later committed a suicide. The tensions in the family arose out of unemployment and lack of money. Unwilling to leave Perova, her partner saw no option but to kill her and then himself, when he could not bear the gravity of the situation that the family was going through. They had two children who had to witness all these horrors. According to Dostoevsky, these orphaned children would carry the scar of this dark phase with them for the rest of their lives. This would damage their self-esteem, and they would suffer from false shame for the past and concealed hatred of people. Dostoevsky is very compassionate to these children and blames the society that gives rise to such situations (Dostoevsky 22-8).

Dostoevsky highlights two positive aspects of the educational system within the colony. These are work and an internal court of justice. The internal court of justice consists of guardians to invigilate the children, as a means of achieving their spiritual development. Every guilty child has to go through the tribunal of the “whole family” to whom he belongs; and the boys either justify him or condemn him to a punishment. The only punishment is the exclusion from play. Those who do not submit to the tribunal of their schoolmates are punished with exclusion from the entire colony. In regards to work, Dostoevsky notes that the guardians exemplify a good work ethic for the children by participating in their chores. Thus their personal example has a positive effect on them. Dostoevsky praises their work together as a manifestation of collectivity, asserting that this is what holds the surrogate family together.

Dostoevsky expresses his concerns about the degrading conditions of these children by talking about the state of their moral education. Such children, who are born in

extraordinary circumstances, turn into "savage" souls whose moral compass gets completely destroyed without proper care and love. Regarding the moral education of these children, Dostoevsky gives us a very contrasting view of their reading ability (Dostoevsky 22-10). While skilled readers liked to read and to be listened to, there were children who could hardly read or were completely illiterate. Dostoevsky noted that the library in the colony contained travel stories and books by Turgenev, Ostrovsky, Lermontov and Pushkin, among others. He states that literature helps the intellectual development of the children. However, he argues that even if all the educational agencies in Russia sought to determine and outline exactly what should be read by these children, under these particular circumstances, they would not be able to decide upon anything. The danger of these subversive texts was that the books were read to them, so they could pick up damaging values that way (Dostoevsky 22-13). Dostoevsky also states that in Russian literature there are no books whatsoever that would be comprehensible to young readers. Dostoevsky is particularly concerned with this system of education in these colonies through dissemination of books by subversive writers and satirists. He condemns this kind of pedagogy. Dostoevsky argues that these savage children would not appreciate the value of these treasures in the form of books, given the environment that they had been shaped by. In fact, these children did not have enough cultural preparation to understand these books. Moreover, it is unnecessary that these children, with no moral fibre, and who have already been exposed to a corrupt society, should be introduced to subversive writers and satirists. According to Dostoevsky, what they actually need is simple and naive views of society. Perhaps these kinds of books would be ridiculed by a contemporary high school pupil, but the children in these colonies would tend to appreciate them.

Dostoevsky advocates that society needs common people who can stand up for justice. He gives an example of a government official whose effort and perseverance served the common cause, even if his actions seem insignificant and unheroic in terms of the revolutionary transformation that society needed. This official, frustrated with the system of serfdom (a fact of life in society at that time on which the upper classes so slavishly depended) began to accumulate savings out of his minuscule salary. Thus he denied almost all the necessities to his wife, children and to himself in order to save enough money to redeem serfs from the landowners. Although he could only redeem three to four serfs during his entire lifetime, leaving nothing to his family, Dostoevsky calls for more men like this government official in society and in juvenile delinquent colonies.

Dostoevsky strongly believed that a change was needed in the education system in the colonies. Although he does not provide answers to the questions as posed by him concerning the issues of the education of the children, he does put forward his thoughts on these problems, initially through the *Diary of a Writer*. Some of Dostoevsky's ideas on family and children developed between writing the *Diary of a Writer* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.

The first two Chapters of the January edition of the *Diary of a Writer* are almost completely dedicated to the topic of contemporary Russian fathers and sons. Children, when left alone instead of living with their parents, are compelled to discover the world through the lens of their own thoughts. Their encounter with the economic, spiritual and sexual aspects of life happens in a purely experiential form.

In the *Diary of a Writer* Dostoevsky argues that one first has to recognize and describe the chaos before even dreaming of a new social order. He thirsts for a form of life based on new principles. In the *Diary of a Writer* he asks parents to take their responsibilities for their children seriously rather than evading them. Dostoevsky's concern about the sexual

development of children stems from the lack of a stable family, which forms the social context for this development. He also holds radical intellectuals (from Alexander Herzen to Nikolai Chernyshevskii and beyond) responsible for experimentation with the status quo of the bourgeois patriarchal order, usually through the tolerance of adultery. Dostoevsky is concerned about the children begotten by these non-traditional sexual arrangements. He uses the example of Herzen's daughter to support his view on children's suffering. Herzen's strong support for this sort of experimentation within the family can be traced to his own illegitimacy, albeit within a stable patriarchal family. Nonetheless, Dostoevsky strikingly points out a case in which Herzen's own illegitimate daughter, Liza, commits suicide, due to her unhappy love for an older married man. Liza was born out of an affair between Herzen and Natal'ia Tuchkova-Ogaryova, the wife of Herzen's friend Nikolai Ogaryov. Dostoevsky brings out this irony that Liza's suicide can be traced back to her irregular upbringing. Nonetheless, he does see these kinds of illegitimate children as a shining ray of hope for a new family order, not by means of suicide, but by revolting against their parents and finding a new path. Significantly, Dostoevsky in the *Diary of a Writer* writes about the chaos and disintegration of the family. He asks: who among the writers will be able to describe these tendencies.

Дело в том, что те или другие из этих оттенков непременно были, но - есть и черты какой-то новой действительности, совсем другой уже, чем какая была в успокоенном и твердо, издавна сложившемся московском помещичьем семействе средне-высшего круга, историком которого явился у нас граф Лев Толстой... И если в этом хаосе, в котором давно уже, но теперь особенно, пребывает общественная жизнь, и нельзя отыскать еще нормального закона и руководящей нити даже, может



быть, и шекспировских размеров художнику, то, по крайней мере, кто же осветит хотя бы часть этого хаоса и хотя бы и не мечтая о руководящей нити? Главное, как будто всем еще вовсе не до того, что это как бы еще рано для самых великих наших художников. У нас есть бесспорно жизнь разлагающаяся и семейство, стало быть, разлагающееся. Но есть, необходимо, и жизнь вновь складывающаяся, на новых уже началах. Кто их подметит, и кто их укажет? Кто хоть чуть-чуть может определить и выразить законы и этого разложения, и нового созидания?<sup>13</sup>(Dostoevsky 25-35)

Dostoevsky thus challenges his contemporary writers to address new trends in family relations, and notes that Tolstoy describes only those tendencies that are becoming parts of history, part of the past, and not the present. Dostoevsky invests literature with the task of improving family related issues in contemporary society.

Dostoevsky notes that while there is disintegration of the family, there are also signs of new beginnings. Part of the reason Dostoevsky was interested in the family are the changes that the family was undergoing in post-Reform Russia. With the disintegration of the age-old institution of serfdom and the old class structure, there is a crisis of the old morality and a search for new moral beacons. As Pattinson points out, at the time Russian society was characterized by crime, urban alienation, family breakdown, psychic derangement, the decline of religious faith, as well as the social and spiritual chaos generated by uncontrolled

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<sup>13</sup> Some new social reality quite different from that of the placid, middle-stratum Moscow land loving family whose way of life had long been solidly established and whose historian is our Count Leo Tolstoy. And if in this chaos - in which already for a long time, but especially now, social life is taking place - if in this chaos is it still impossible even for an artist of Shakespearean dimensions to seek out a normal law and a guiding thread, then who, at the very least, will illuminate just a part of this chaos, even without dreaming of a guiding thread? The main point is that no one is yet concerned with the matter, as if it is still too early for our greatest artists. Without a doubt, we have among us a disintegrating life and, therefore, a disintegrating family...But it is necessary that life once again disintegrates on the new principles already. Who can notice and indicate them? Who even in the smallest degree can define and express the laws of this decomposition and of the new creation...? [Trans. by G. S. Morson].

capitalism (1). However, Leatherbarrow highlights that in the *Diary of a Writer* Dostoevsky describes how, in Russia, the old land owning order is undergoing “some new, still unknown, but radical change...some enormous regeneration into novel, still latent, almost utterly unknown forms” (XXV: 35).

Dostoevsky blames Russian parents for evading their responsibility to take care of their children. In *The Brothers Karamazov* the problem of the family is articulated forcefully during the trial by for the murder of Fyodor Karamazov the defence attorney Fetyukovich. The basic argument stands on the reasoning that a blood relationship alone does not entitle one to take the name of "father". It is one thing when a father raises the child and remains with him during happiness and illness and success and joys. It is another thing when a father abandons his child. The defence goes that Dmitri's alleged murder of Fyodor cannot be considered as a parricide, as the fact that a child was conceived by the father does not mean that the son has to love him. His father might have engaged in sexual activity out of the passion of the moment, perhaps inflamed by drink, and conceived a child. But did he really love him when he was conceiving the child? If he conceived him and then subsequently failed to love the child for the rest of his life, a father has no right to demand love from his son. This argument evoked a strong reaction from the crowd. During the Kroneberg trial of 1876 Dostoevsky showed in his *Diary of a Writer* a dislike of the jury trials and the new judicial reforms that were supposed to be the solution to the legal crisis in the 1860s. In fact, the legal reforms caused disappointment among the public as they did not measure up to their inflated hopes for national transformation and regeneration. Thus, Dostoevsky feared that these legal reforms could be harmful to society.

Riasanovsky highlights that the most important aspect of the legal reforms was that the courts were separated from administration, thus the judiciary became an independent

branch of the government. In addition, apart from by court action, the judges could not be discharged or transferred. Judicial procedure acquired a public and oral character (Riasanovsky 376). The parties were to present their case in court and have adequate legal support. The government later tried to influence the judges for political reasons, and in its struggle against radicalism and revolution it began to withdraw whole categories of legal cases from the normal procedure of 1864 (the year when the reforms came in). However, as Riasanovsky points out, these reforms led to a more modern justice and a less arbitrary system (377). As Murav points out, Dostoevsky was disillusioned by the high number of acquittals and by what were considered new defence strategies, such as temporary insanity and the argument that an antagonistic social and economic environment was the cause of crimes. Dostoevsky's reaction to the new legal system and the judicial reforms of 1864 is marked by inconsistency. For example, in the Kroneberg case Dostoevsky shows his strongest negative reaction towards the reforms. As I will explain further below, Dostoevsky criticizes one of the most famous attorneys of his day, Vladimir Spasovich, as Vladimir refuses to acknowledge that Kroneberg's actions were morally wrong. However, as Murav also points out, when Dostoevsky discusses another court case, that of Kornilova, he fully embraces the legal process (Murav 118). The Kornilova case happened in May 1876 and concerned a pregnant woman who, prompted by anger against her husband, threw out of the window, from the fourth floor, her six-year-old step-daughter. However, the child stood up on her feet, unharmed. Dostoevsky intervened in the process and helped to secure Kornilova's acquittal. He defended her on the basis that she was pregnant and therefore in a state of psychological tension. Dostoevsky considers the pathological effect of pregnancy and uses it to ask the judge for Kornilova's acquittal. In the author's opinion, Kornilova has already repented since she went to the police station herself to report the incident and confessed everything deliberately. Thus, for Dostoevsky, sending her to hard labour as a punishment

will not help her to become a better person. Again, Dostoevsky's Christian outlook is evident in this particular judicial case, as he wants to teach the reader about forgiveness and the redemption from sins. Dostoevsky's focus, in this case, is on the lawyers who undermine the Christian principles of Orthodox Christianity, rather than on the system in which these lawyers operate.

Although according to the supporters of judicial reform, the trial by jury could uplift and educate the Russian people, Dostoevsky had opposing views. He held the courts to be disseminators of amoral ideas, a channel for creating corruptors from within. And his disappointment and frustration with the renunciation by the court of its moral responsibilities can be clearly seen in the Kroneberg case. For the first time, he puts forth his detailed views on the legal reforms of 1864, thereby warning the Russian people of the potential danger that the new jury trial presents for Russian society.

Stanislav Leopoldovich Kroneberg, the defendant in the Kroneberg case, was on trial for severely torturing his little daughter with a cat-o'-nine-tails until the peasant concierge who witnessed these scenes threatened to call the police. After seeing the child's bruised body, she reported him to the police. According to the defence attorney Spasovich's argument was that the bad upbringing of the girl among the peasant children during her first few years led to her exhibiting many inherently bad characteristics. She was untidy, did not know how to behave and constantly lied. Moreover, according to his argument, the girl had no fear of her father, nor of the governesses. Spasovich also accused her of stealing money. Dostoevsky wanted to use the force of his writing to highlight his strong views about child abuse associated with judicial reforms. As in *The Brothers Karamazov*, where Fetyukovich pleads the innocence of Dmitri in the murder, the attorney of Fyodor, Spasovich in the Kroneberg case, pleads the innocence of his client and argues that not only do his client's actions not

resemble torture, but that no crime has been committed, and thus no case exists. None of the arguments were accepted, which deeply disappointed Dostoevsky, who wanted to bring the case to justice through his *Diary of a Writer*. He takes the case out of the court into the literary world, where he uses passion and compassion to stir the reader's emotions.

Dostoevsky tries to stimulate compassion for the child in his readers, an emotion that Spasovich needed to overcome in order to attain an acquittal for his client (Rosenshield 38).

Dostoevsky tries to restore the true image of the child by imaginatively re-creating the child's experience of torture, for, he believes, this image had been misinterpreted by Spasovich.

Children feature prominently in Dostoevsky's fictional work. The innocence of children and their capacity for unreserved love emerge as essential positive characteristics in Dostoevsky's works (Lantz 60). In the *Diary of a Writer* (February 1876), Dostoevsky condemns the attorney Spasovich in the Kroneberg trial. He has effectively defended a father, accused of cruelly beating his little girl. Dostoevsky writes of the angelic nature of children, and maintains that children have an uplifting influence on adults:

Мы не должны превозноситься над детьми, мы их хуже. И если мы учим их чему-нибудь, чтоб сделать их лучшими, то и они нас учат многому и тоже делают нас лучшими уже одним только нашим соприкосновением с ними. Они очеловечивают нашу душу одним только своим появлением между нами. А потому мы их должны уважать и подходить к ним с уважением к их лику ангельскому (хотя бы и имели их научить чему).<sup>14</sup> (Dostoevsky 69)

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<sup>14</sup> We should not be taking pride in ourselves over children—we are worse than they. And if we teach them anything so that they be better, they, on their part, are teaching us many a thing, and they too, are making us better merely by our contact with them. They humanize our souls by their mere presence in our midst. This is why we must respect them and approach their angels' images (assuming that we have something to teach them) (Dostoevsky, *Diary of a Writer*, February 1876: 233) [Trans. By Boris Brasol, 1949].

Spasovich, defending his client, tried to downplay the severity of the beating and passed off the whole affair as a bit of pedagogy gone awry. Dostoevsky, in *The Diary of a Writer*, combating Spasovich's rhetoric, focuses attention on the young child's suffering. Of special note is Dostoevsky's conclusion of the essential goodness of children, and his drawing of a parallel between them and angelic creatures. This characterization shows Dostoevsky's conception of human life as God-given. It is an important component of his views on the mystical aspects of parent-child relations which he will develop in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

### *The Brothers Karamazov*

*The Brothers Karamazov* is the culmination of Dostoevsky's work; it was completed in 1880 and published in 1881, the year of his death. The story takes place in the 1860s, just after the abolition of serfdom in 1861. The complexity of *The Brothers Karamazov* has generated a wide variety of thematic interpretations. The central theme of the novel is parricide. The murder mystery surrounding the homicide of the family patriarch, Fyodor, and the role of his sons in the crime, is at the heart of *The Brothers Karamazov*. The parricide in *The Brothers Karamazov* is not only a symbol of rebellion against God, a form of atheistic rebellion, but also an attack on the family structure itself. I analyse the characters and interpret their personalities in the wider context of the breakdown of the traditional family, religious and moral values under the forces of materialism. While analysing relationships within the Karamazov's family, Dostoevsky also debates the existence of God, the role of religion in modern society, and the consequences of class differences for the individual.

*The Brothers Karamazov*, a profoundly religious novel, was Dostoevsky's extraordinary attempt to determine the true meaning of religion in fictional terms. Dostoevsky

strongly believed that the only path to personal salvation and peace was by having faith in God, which would be achieved through Christianity. Hence, a significant portion of the novel focuses on the conflict between faith and scepticism that threatens Christian society. The obsession with sexual and sensual excesses in the characters of Dmitri and Fyodor is antithetical to the asceticism of Christianity.

In *The Brothers Karamazov* the topics of the Christian faith and atheism are closely related to the thematic of the Russian family and its future. In particular, Dostoevsky reflects on the contrast in faith and ideology between Ivan, the brilliant agnostic, and Alyosha, his devout brother. According to Yancey, Ivan can analyse the breakdown of humanity and criticise every political system, but has no practical solution for these intellectual problems. Alyosha has no answers to the intellectual questions that Ivan raises, but he does have a solution for family and humanity at large; and that is, Christian love (Yancey 136).

In order to fully understand the topic of the family in *The Brothers Karamazov* it is important to elucidate the events that occurred in Dostoevsky's life, as they greatly impacted on his writing of the novel. When his father died in 1839 (presumed to have been murdered by his serfs) Dostoevsky perhaps felt guilty for his absence, though he had no hand in the murder. Sigmund Freud makes a connection between Dostoevsky's plot of parricide and these biographical events in his 1929 essay *Dostoevsky and Parricide*:

We can say that Dostoevsky never got free from the feelings of guilt arising from his intention of murdering his father. They also determined his attitude towards the authority of the State and towards belief in God. In the first of these he ended up with complete submission to his Little Father, the Tsar, who had once performed with him in reality the comedy of killing. In the religious sphere he retained more freedom:

according to apparently trustworthy reports he wavered, up to the last moment of his life, between faith and atheism. (Freud 100)

Freud notes the parallelism between the death of the father in *The Brothers Karamazov* and the murder of Dostoevsky's own father. It should be noted that Dostoevsky was ashamed of his father because he was cruel, abusive and controlling.

Nonetheless, it is also important to note the intrinsic dichotomy in his character. Although he was ashamed of his father, Dostoevsky thought that he should love him because of his Christian faith. Dostoevsky's years of imprisonment in Omsk, in solitude, led to his self-judgment and the beginnings of a spiritual rebirth. Dostoevsky rediscovered the Christ of the Gospel in the prison. According to McInerny, Dostoevsky believed that those who "kill" God, also kill man. Moreover, he considered that man cannot remain free without faith in God. Dostoevsky shows in his work that, without God, humanity can become its own enemy and thus organize the world against itself. Revolutionary principles which stem from Western liberalism and its plan of abolishing God and secularizing society can only lead to a tragedy for humanity (McInerny).

In order to understand the intrinsic dynamics of the Karamazov family and that of Captain Snegiryov's, and the relationship between the members of these families, one must first explore Dostoevsky's way of expressing truth, consciousness and self-becoming through dialogue. According to Mikhail Bakhtin's reading of Dostoevsky, in his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1973), isolation or individuality is a self-delusion. Every character in the novel expresses an idea. In particular, the three brothers Dmitri, Ivan and Alyosha each search for the ideal of their lives. For example, for Christians, the incarnation of Jesus Christ (God the son in the form of flesh or "becoming flesh" by being conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary) is central. Dostoevsky believes that these ideas are not static, but dynamic; they



do not exist in “You” or me (“I”), but in the space between us, in our engagement with one another, in our relationships with one another. According to Bakhtin, this is what dialogue represents in Dostoevsky. His characters, when in dialogue with one another, are working and developing their being, their identity, their consciousness; they are being created in the moment of interaction which is represented by the dialogue. Bakhtin traces Dostoevsky’s ideas about this development of consciousness back to Socrates, who believed that truth is knowable (as Dostoevsky does), but who also believed that truth is knowable in the interaction between people. As regards Socrates’ idea of truth, Bakhtin states that “Truth is not born, nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people, collectively searching for the truth in the process of their interaction” (Bakhtin 98).

Bakhtin takes this quote and uses the word “dialogic” to describe Dostoevsky’s techniques. “For Dostoevsky in dialogue, a person becomes for the first time that which he is. Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence” (Bakhtin 252). Bakhtin also notes that according to Dostoevsky, no one can exist in isolation, one comes into being in relationships, one continues to come into consciousness in relationship, and one’s life is a dynamic creation that goes on all the time.

Dostoevsky realized in his own life that we do not enter into relationships with other humans as a complete, autonomous being, but as someone craving love and admiration. “Although in a complete relationship we connect with the other person on the basis of that person having similar needs, in a broken relationship, the other person is simply used as a medium to an end to encourage our self-being” (Mc Kenna, *The Brothers Karamazov*). The characters described in *The Brothers Karamazov* serve as an outline for understanding the dynamics of human relationships. Throughout the novel, the characters express their feelings

of being insulted and ashamed. Keeping this notion in mind, we can turn to our examination of the Karamazov family.

### The Karamazov Family

This family is a highly dysfunctional one. The father, Fyodor Karamazov, is twice married and has three sons: the eldest Dmitri Fedorovich, by his first wife, and the other two, Ivan and Alexei, by his second. He also has a fourth, illegitimate son, Smerdyakov. The most important characteristic in this family is physical absence: the absence of the two mothers, as they are dead, and the absence of the father, because of drunkenness, irresponsibility and mental instability.

Old Fyodor Pavlovich is a complete family despot who denies his sons power, money, and women:

Эх вы, ребята! Деточки, поросяточки вы маленькие, для меня... даже во всю мою жизнь не было безобразной женщины, вот мое правило! ... Для меня мовешек не существовало ... Истинно славно, что всегда есть и будут хамы да баре на свете, всегда тогда будет и такая поломочка, и всегда ее господин, а ведь того только и надо для счастья жизни!<sup>15</sup> (Dostoevsky 136)

He addresses his children as little piglets, thus drawing a parallel between animal and human kingdoms. If children are the same as piglets to pigs, then he as a father teaches “bestly behavior”. Accordingly, he tells them that by nature he likes all kinds of females

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<sup>15</sup> "To my thinking...Ah, you boys! You children, little sucking-pigs, to my thinking...In ever thought a woman ugly in my life...To my mind there are no ugly women. It's a jolly good thing that there always are and will be masters and slaves in the world, so there always will be a little maid-of-all-work and her master, and you know, that's all that's needed for happiness" (Dostoevsky 136).

even those who are bad-looking and low in social status. The emphasis is on his libido and lust, linked to power over the weak and subordinate.

The first reason for the sons to hate their father lies in the way Fyodor treats their mothers. Dmitri has one mother, Ivan and Alyosha another, and Smerdyakov still another. However, they are all treated the same way by Fyodor. He is a primitive patriarch who steals his wives from their families or rapes them; he then abandons them and goes looking for other women. He gets Dmitri's mother, Adelaida Miusova, to run away with him; she later discovers he has taken her dowry, does not love her, and after several fights runs away with a destitute seminarian, leaving three-year-old Dmitri in his father's hands. She later dies of typhus or starvation. Fyodor is drunk when he learns of his wife's death. Sofya Ivanovna is the mother of Ivan and Alyosha. Fyodor also gets her to escape with him. She is a very young girl, from another province, where he went upon some small piece of business. Fyodor is a drunkard and a vicious debauchee; however he never neglects investing his capital, and manages his business affairs very successfully. Sofya Ivanovna is the daughter of an obscure deacon and from childhood is left an orphan without relatives. She grows up in the house of a general's widow, a wealthy old lady of good position, who is both her benefactress and tormentor. What attracts Fyodor is the remarkable beauty of the young woman, above all her innocent appearance, which had a peculiar attraction for this vicious profligate, who usually admires only the coarser types of feminine beauty. Lizaveta Smerdyashchaia ("Stinking Lizaveta") is apparently Smerdyakov's biological mother. She is raped by Fyodor as she lies sleeping in a bush; and her son, to whom Fyodor Pavlovich gives his mother's name, is destined to be a bastard. He, more than any other of the sons, exemplifies the effects of their father's rule over them. In fact, he is his father's servant, a bastard and an epileptic.

Overall, each of the sons has a reason for hating his father. But Fyodor emphasizes the power he has over his children to underline the vulnerability of every one of them, thus provoking the unique anger of each. Fyodor for example, insults Smerdyakov, calling him a bastard or servant. In addition, he offends Ivan intellectually, by reducing Ivan's arguments to banalities. Finally he insults Ivan by calling him "the great oppressor of children", despite Ivan making clear in his poem "The Grand Inquisitor" that the worst crimes are those against innocent children. Alyosha is attacked through his devotion to the church: Fyodor twice asserts that he will get his youngest son out of the monastery, to get him back from the surrogate father he has found in Zosima. He also shows off to Alyosha how badly he treated his mother, by telling him that he took her favourite icon away and spat on it. Fyodor competes for the same woman with his son Dmitri: "She [Grushenka] won't, she won't, she won't, she won't marry him for anything in the world! The old man cried, starting with joy..." (Dostoevsky 141). Thus the reason for Dmitri's hatred for Fyodor lies in the sexual rivalry between them. Dmitri and Fyodor fiercely compete for the beautiful Grushenka. Nonetheless, Dostoevsky presents the relationship between father and son from the perspective of the son not having known his father on a daily basis until he becomes an adult, so that his relationship with his father is just like that of any other random man. But can we blame only the father, or only the son, or both of them? The answer lies in the psychosexual development of the child and the lack of responsibilities of the father towards this development through his not providing proper care, guidance and love. Dostoevsky in fact holds both accountable in his idea of the family being a "labour of love" (Dostoevsky 22, 60-70), the children for the hardening of their spirits and their vices, and the fathers for their egoism, neglect of their children, perversion of their feelings for them, and cruelty.

The distance created in relationships between fathers and sons, as a result of the fathers' abandonment of their sons is the primary expression of the disintegration of the family. In the case where the fathers and sons are fortunate enough to meet each other years later, when the son is already an adolescent or adult, their individual mental images of the other person are in dissonance with each other, leading to mutual disappointment. At the very beginning of the novel, the family gets together at the monastery of Father Zosima, an elder and a spiritual advisor. It should be noted that the brothers come from completely different backgrounds, and have not talked to each other until the meeting with Zosima. During this meeting, their father Fyodor acts like an old buffoon in most of his social encounters, despite being completely aware of his behaviour. He tells embarrassing jokes and ends up insulting important people. When Father Zosima has a conversation with Fyodor, the latter explains to the priest that it is because he feels ashamed of himself that he behaves in this manner: "Не стыдиться столь самого себя, потому что от сего лишь всё и выходит".<sup>16</sup> And Fyodor explains his acts by his lack of self-respect and by not being sure of himself:

Вы меня замечанием этим как бы насквозь проткнули и внутри прочли. Именно мне всё так и кажется, когда я к людям вхожу, что я подлее всех и что меня все за шута принимают, так вот "давай же я и в самом деле сыграю шута, не боюсь ваших мнений, потому что все вы до единого подлее меня!" Вот потому я и шут, от стыда шут, старец великий, от стыда. От мнительности одной и буюню. Ведь если б я только был уверен, когда вхожу, что все меня за милейшего и умнейшего

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<sup>16</sup> Don't be ashamed of yourself, for this alone is the cause of everything (Dostoevsky: Book II, Chapter 2:41).

человека сейчас же примут, - господи! какой бы я тогда был добрый человек! Учитель!<sup>17</sup>

According to K. Mochulsky, Dmitri, Ivan and Alyosha are the three pedestals of Dostoevsky's personality, the three phases of his spiritual journey. His first phase, the romantic period, is illustrated by the fiery and noble Dmitri, who declaims the Hymn to Joy.<sup>18</sup> The second, the era of his friendship with Belinsky<sup>19</sup> and his captivation by atheistic socialism, is embodied by Ivan, the atheist and dreamer of a social utopia. The third period, after his penal servitude when a "regeneration of his convictions" took place within him, and he discovered the Russian people and the Christ, is reflected by Alyosha (Mochulsky 597). The author illustrates through the three brothers a spiritual convergence, wherein each brother recognizes his own fate. It is as if three personalities have unified and intersected in Dostoevsky's mind.

Ivan embodies reasoning as he is a logician and rationalist, a pessimist and nihilist; Dmitri represents feeling and emotions; and Alyosha symbolizes will. However, the twist in the plot is brought on by Smerdyakov, the illegitimate brother, who illustrates their temptations and sins. In Chapter 7 of Book II (A Seminarist-Careerist) Dostoevsky tells the reader that "sensuality in the Karamazov's family has reached a point where it becomes a

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<sup>17</sup> You pierced right through me by that remark, and read me to the core. Indeed, I always feel when I meet people that I am lower than all, and that they all take me for a buffoon. So, I say, let me really play the buffoon. I am not afraid of your opinion, for you are every one of you worse than I am. "That is why I am a buffoon. It is from shame, great elder, from shame; it's simply over-sensitiveness that makes me rowdy. If I had only been sure that everyone would accept me as the kindest and wisest to men, oh, Lord, what good man I should have been then! Teacher!" (Dostoevsky, Book II, Chapter 2, 41)

<sup>18</sup> This poem by Schiller describes how the goddess Ceres came down from heaven in search of her daughter Proserpine, but all she found was humanity in degradation. When Dmitri quotes – "The Hymn to Joy" he links joy to the beauty of nature.

<sup>19</sup> Vissarion Grigoryevich Belinsky (1811-1848) was an eminent Russian literary critic, often called the father of the Russian radical *intelligentsia*.

devouring fever” (Dostoevsky 78). Here Rakitin, one of Alyosha’s companions in the monastery, jibes at Alyosha that there is something which stinks in his family and that the elder Zosima has sniffed out a crime which is about to be committed in the Karamazov family. This crime, as will become apparent to the reader later in the story, is committed by Smerdyakov:

Уголовщину пронюхал. Смердит у вас. Ведь и ты Карамазов! Ведь в вашем семействе сладострастие до воспаления доведено. Ну вот эти три сладострастника друг за другом теперь и следят... с ножами за сапогом.<sup>20</sup>

Dmitri plays a primary role in the novel and is crucial to our understanding of the plot. Fyodor’s neglect towards his eldest son, when a three-year old child, leads to him being looked after by a faithful family servant, Gregory. Dmitri spends a disorderly adolescence and youth, never finishes high school and has to shift homes four times. He is first given to Adelaida Ivanovna’s cousin, Petr Aleksandrovich Miusov, and then passed on to one of his mother’s cousins, a Moscow lady. When the Moscow lady dies, he is passed on to one of her married daughters, and Dostoevsky says that it seems he later changed home a fourth time. He is the only one of Fyodor Pavlovich’s three sons who grows up with the conviction that he, at any rate, had inherited some property from his mother and that when he comes of age, he will be independent with this money.

Dmitri thinks that his father, Fyodor, is jealous of him, because he is interested in marrying Grushenka, the same woman whom his father is after. Dmitri is sensual, passionate and impulsive. He meets his father, Fyodor, for the first time, only after his coming of age

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<sup>20</sup> Your house stinks of crime...in your family sensuality has reached a point where it becomes a devouring fever. So these three sensualists are now constantly watching each other – with a knife stuck in the leg of their boots...” (Dostoevsky 78).

when he goes to see him with the purpose of settling the question of his property. Fyodor thinks the young man is frivolous, wild, passionate, impatient and a wastrel. According to Fusso, Dmitri meets his father on equal terms, man to man and therefore the father, encountered for the first time in adulthood, is perceived not as a father but as just another man (Fusso 114). This line of thought implies that there are no family feelings on either sides.

Dmitri fits Mochulsky's description of the Dostoevskian hero more than any other character in the novel. "It seems that they, Dostoevsky's heroes, breathe not air, but pure oxygen, do not live, but burn themselves up. The whole Karamazov family possesses an intense vitality" (Mochulsky 608). The intensity of Dmitri's energy, youth and vivaciousness, has enough momentum to steer the plot with a continuous and passionate flow. There is a precarious balance between the profound depths of joy, the irrational love of life, and the unrestrained sin of sensuality, with the chaotic element of sex. "Before him are revealed two abysses- above and below" (Mochulsky 600).

Although he is aware of his own contradictory nature, Dmitri complains about the wide range of possibilities in a man. Both lofty and base ideals can motivate Dmitri at the same time, co-existing with each other. His confusion is quite apparent when he wishes to open his confession to Alyosha on a note of human despair with Schiller's poem "Das Eleusische Fest" instead of beginning a note of human exultation with another of Schiller's poems "An die Freude." This poem has a great importance for Dmitri, in the sense that his very name means "belonging to Demeter – the goodness of agriculture (Ceres), and the verses he quotes describe the civilizing influence of Ceres on savage, rapacious humanity. When Ceres descended from Mount Olympus in search of her daughter Proserpina, she encountered humanity's miserable state (Peace 222).



This degradation in humanity occurring in contemporary man in general is true in particular for Dmitri. Being a Karamazov, Dmitri defines himself as a mere insect. He states that God has given sensual lust to this insect as a character trait. Dmitri also calls all the Karamazovs insects. As he says to Alyosha:

Я, брат, это самое насекомое и есть, и это обо мне специально и сказано. И мы все Карамазовы такие же, и в тебе, ангеле, это насекомое живет, и в крови твоей бури родит. Это - бури, потому что сладострастье буря, больше бури! Красота - это страшная и ужасная вещь! Страшная, потому что неопределимая, а определить нельзя, потому что бог задал одни загадки.<sup>21</sup>

The very existence of this insect of sensual lust seems to question the ideal of beauty; man's desire for beauty might not be completely pure and good:

Красота! Перенести я притом не могу, что иной, высший даже сердцем человек и с умом высоким, начинает с идеала Мадонны, а кончает идеалом Содомским. Еще страшнее кто уже с идеалом Содомским в душе не отрицает и идеала Мадонны, и горит от него сердце его, и воистину, воистину горит, как и в юные беспорочные годы. Нет, широк человек, слишком даже широк, я бы сузил. Чорт знает, что такое даже, вот что! Что уму представляется позором, то сердцу сплошь красотой. В Содоме ли красота? Верь, что в Содоме-то она и сидит для огромного большинства людей, - знал ты эту тайну иль нет? Ужасно то, что красота есть не только страшная, но и таинственная вещь. Тут дьявол с богом борется, а поле битвы - сердца людей.<sup>22</sup> (Dostoevsky 97)

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<sup>21</sup> All we Karamazovs are such insects, and, angel as you are, that insect lives in you, too, and stirs up storms in your blood. Storms, because sensuality is a storm, more than a storm! Beauty is a fearful and terrible thing! Fearful because it's undefinable, and it cannot be defined, because here God gave us only riddles" (Dostoevsky 108).

<sup>22</sup> Beauty! I can't endure the thought that a man of lofty mind and heart begins with their deal of the Madonna and ends with

Dmitri here articulates one of the main points of the novel, which relates to the decomposition of the Russian family. Without spiritual guidance, humanity's tremendous imagination cannot differentiate between good ("the ideal of the Madonna") and evil ("the ideal of Sodom") thus leading to a state of decomposition for the family and for humanity at large. In the above passage Sodom is an example of what the Bible prohibits. Dmitri states that beauty is mysterious as well as terrible. God and the devil are fighting, and the battlefield is the heart of man. This dilemma inside the human heart is particularly true for Dmitri. It reflects both his love for the "ideal of the Madonna" and his desire for the "ideal of Sodom" (Peace 231).

Dmitri's reflections on the decomposition of the Russian family are also manifested in Book IX, Chapter 8. Dmitri falls asleep at the end of the examination of witnesses at his trial and dreams of poor peasants. In his dream, he passes through a small village filled with black huts, half of which have been burned down. He then sees a tall, emaciated woman with a little baby, crying constantly from hunger, fatigue and extreme cold. Being ignorant of the quandary of the peasants and their day-to-day struggles, he cannot comprehend the gravity of the situation and persistently asks:

почему это стоят погорелые матери, почему бедны люди, почему бедно дитё, почему голая степь, почему они не обнимаются, не целуются, почему не поют песен радостных, почему они почернели так от черной беды, почему не накормят дитё?<sup>23</sup> (Dostoevsky 478-9)

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the ideal of Sodom. What's still more awful is that a man with the ideal of Sodom in his soul does not renounce the ideal of the Madonna, and his heart may be on fire with that ideal, genuinely on fire, just as in his days of youth and innocence. Yes, man is broad, too broad, indeed. I'd have him narrower. The devil only knows what to make of it! What to the mind is shameful is beauty and nothing else to the heart. Is there beauty in Sodom? Believe me that for the immense mass of mankind beauty is found in Sodom. Did you know that secret? The awful thing is that beauty is mysterious as well as terrible. God and the devil are fighting there and the battlefield is the heart of man (Dostoevsky 97).

<sup>23</sup> But why is the babe weeping?... Why are its little arms bare? Why don't they wrap it up? "And further on, "Why are people poor?... Why is the steppe barren? Why don't they hug a cloth and kiss? Why don't they sing songs of joy?" (Dostoevsky

Dmitri dreams about these suffering children, and he enquires in his dream as to the cause of all this unhappiness: the only answer he gets is that the child is weeping. This weeping is the only source of world's sorrow, for the sin against children is the most unforgivable sin. The theme of the suffering of children will be articulated with special dramatization by Ivan. This dream leads Dmitri to sympathise with the situation of the common Russian people gripped with day-to-day struggles and sufferings; he is deeply touched with an intense feeling of benevolence for the peasants, enough to provoke a desire for starting a new spiritual life. Dmitri is so touched by the children's sufferings and trauma that he challenges the ways parents even deny food to their children. He is traumatised by this lack of love. Thus, Dmitri's dream is a reflection of the social situation of the children at the time.

И чувствует он про себя, что хоть он и безумно спрашивает, и без толку, но непременно хочется ему именно так спросить и что именно так и надо спросить. И чувствует он еще, что подымается в сердце его какое-то никогда еще небывалое в нем умиление, что плакать ему хочется, что хочет он всем сделать что-то такое, чтобы не плакало больше дитё, не плакала бы и черная иссохшая мать дити, чтоб не было вовсе слез от сей минуты ни у кого, и чтобы сейчас же, сейчас же это сделать, не отлагая и несмотря ни на что, со всем безудержем Карамазовским. - А и я с тобой, я теперь тебя не оставлю, на всю жизнь с тобой иду, - раздаются подле него милые, проникновенные чувством слова Грушеньки. И вот загорелось всё сердце его и устремилось к какому-то свету, и хочется ему

жить и жить. идти и идти в какой-то путь, к новому зовущему свету, и скорее, скорее, теперь же, сейчас!<sup>24</sup> (Dostoevsky 479)

In the above passage, it is important to note the reference to Grushenka, who becomes a mother-figure for Dmitri, as his own mother has died when he was three years old. Nonetheless, this feeling of motherly love is mixed with seductive and erotic feelings between them. During his dream, in fact, Dmitri hears Grushenka's tender voice saying that she will be coming for him and will not abandon him for the rest of her life. Dostoevsky draws out Dmitri's trauma of lacking a mother. Grushenka becomes a substitute for Dmitri's mother. She acts with compassion. Dostoevsky sees the human side of Grushenka. Thus, he shows our need and ability to care and protect each other. Grushenka and Dmitri have a future, and love has a future because it manifests a relationship of love and compassion. They love one another and protect one another. In this way, Dostoevsky puts a future into the family. The family is going to be based on love and care, on mutual understanding, not only on sexuality, but also on kind emotions and feelings. He implies that even Grushenka and Dmitri, who are driven by sexuality and contradictory emotions, are capable of forming a good family. In this dream of the suffering of the children, Dmitri experiences his love for Grushenka. He feels that they will form a good family. In his ideal world, Dostoevsky wants people to go through suffering before they arrive at a better future, for in order to have a good future one has to go through bad times. This is what molds us into human beings.

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<sup>24</sup> And he felt that a passion of pity, such as he had never known before, was rising in his heart, and he wanted to cry, that he wanted to do something for them all, so that the babe should not weep, that no one should shed tears again from that moment, and he wanted to do it at once, at once, regardless of all obstacles, with all the Karamazov recklessness. And I'm coming with you. I won't leave you now for the rest of my life, I'm coming with you", he heard close beside him Grushenka's tender voice, thrilling with emotion. And his whole heart glowed, and he struggled forward towards the light, and he longed to live, to go on and on, towards the new, beckoning light, and to hasten, now at once!"

Dostoevsky says that the child is crying because of hunger and cold. These peasants are poor and have no bread. However, Dostoevsky implies in this scene that there is a future beyond suffering; there is light at the end. This light is represented by the positive family unit of the mother with her child (reminiscent of the image of Madonna and child). When Dmitri wakes up from his momentous dream, he realizes that there is a pillow beneath his head, which has been placed there by someone while he was sleeping. He is filled with joy and gratitude for this minor act of kindness, which brings back his essential faith in humanity. The culmination of his vision gives Dmitri a new ray of hope and the self-belief to start a new life based on Christian faith. A few moments before he is led off to prison, Dmitri explains to his captors the discovery of the meaning in sufferings already experienced that night, and the ones yet to be encountered in the weeks, months, and perhaps years, to come:

Понимаю теперь, что на таких, как я, нужен удар, удар судьбы, чтоб захватить его как в аркан и скрутить внешнею силой. Никогда, никогда не поднялся бы я сам собой! Но гром грянул. Принимаю муку обвинения и всенародного позора моего, пострадать хочу и страданием очищусь! Ведь может быть и очищусь, господа?<sup>25</sup>  
(Dostoevsky 481)

Dostoevsky communicates his own views on human personalities through the artistic representation of the different characters. The consciousness of the different characters converges and merges into a struggle of lust and love, culminating in a catastrophe. Therefore the entire work of Dostoevsky finds its deep roots in the concept of collective personality.

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<sup>25</sup> "I understand now that such man as I need a blow, a blow of destiny to catch them as with a noose, and bind them by a force from without. Never, never should I have risen of myself! But the thunderbolt has fallen. I accept the torment of accusation, and my public shame, I want to suffer and by suffering I shall be purified"

According to Mochulsky, the main hero is not one person, but the cohesive group of the three brothers uniting on a common spiritual ground. Although the brothers' personalities have developed individually in parallel with each other, they go on to experience the same singular tragedy, sharing a common guilt and atonement. As an example, Smerdyakov, who originally murders Fyodor, is trapped in the group psychology of his brothers. In fact, he cannot grow out of adolescence, "that very quality of passion, of sexuality that drives all the other brothers as well" (Holquist 182). Smerdyakov is treated like an animal by his own father; his servant Gregory habitually calls him a monster when he is growing up. Although Smerdyakov does learn to read and write, he often starts laughing when he is asked to read the Bible. He also suffers from epilepsy. He wishes he had been killed in the womb of his mother Lizaveta. Given the social environment that he grows up in, he is highly influenced by the philosophy of Ivan, wherein everything is permitted, which finally propels him to kill Fyodor. In fact, he finds a father figure in Ivan and becomes his disciple. "Smerdyakov had often been allowed to wait at table before.... But since the arrival in our town of Ivan he had begun to appear at dinner almost every day" (Dostoevsky 720). In Holquist's opinion, Smerdyakov kills his father more in a desire to be the good-servant of his half-brother Ivan, and less out of a desire for his own revenge. When Ivan disapproves of his action, Smerdyakov feels abandoned by his substitute father Ivan, under whose moral influence he kills his own father, and commits suicide. Taking his own life is the result of Smerdyakov's inability to bear the pain of his abandonment by Ivan, rather than his fear of being captured. His relationship with Ivan is far more influential than his relationship with his own father, Fyodor (Holquist 182).

The "hero" of the novel, Alyosha is the only son in the Karamazov's family who shows family values. Alyosha's love for his mother can be clearly seen through his memories

of her “just as though she were standing alive before me” (Dostoevsky: 54). Alyosha also decides to look for his mother’s grave, which has never been known to Fyodor, who has never visited it. By caring about the grave of his mother Alyosha shows a Christian attitude towards parents. This reinforces the fact of Fyodor’s neglect of his responsibilities as a father and husband in not passing on good values to the next generation. As compensation for the lack of a real father, Alyosha turns to the religious figure, Father Zosima.

Dostoevsky gives much importance to the role of Elders:

Итак, что же такое старец? Старец это - берущий вашу душу, вашу волю в свою душу и в свою волю. Избрав старца, вы от своей воли отрешаетесь и отдаете ее ему в полное послушание, с полным самоотрешением. Этот искус, эту страшную школу жизни обрекающий себя принимает добровольно в надежде после долгого искусства победить себя, овладеть собою до того, чтобы мог наконец достичь, чрез послушание всей жизни, уже совершенной свободы, то-есть свободы от самого себя, избегнуть участи тех, которые всю жизнь прожили, а себя в себе не нашли. Изобретение это, то-есть старчество, - не теоретическое, а выведено на Востоке из практики, в наше время уже тысячелетней. Обязанности к старцу не то что обыкновенное "послушание", всегда бывшее и в наших русских монастырях. Тут признается вечная исповедь всех подвизающихся старцу и неразрушимая связь между связавшим и связанным.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> What was such an elder? An elder was one who took your soul, your will into his soul and his will. When you choose an elder, you renounce your own will and yield it to him incomplete submission, complete self-abnegation. This novitiate, this terrible school of abnegation, is undertaken voluntarily, in the hope of self-conquest, of self-mastery, in order, after a life of obedience, to attain perfect freedom, that is, from self; to escape the lot of those who have lived their whole life without finding their true selves in themselves. This institution of elders is not founded on theory, but was established in the East from the practice of a thousand

Dostoevsky believes in the Elders as a shining beacon for the restructuring of a new form of the family with moral values and a sharing of responsibilities. Dostoevsky blames the dismantling of the family as the root cause of a loss of the notion of morality in contemporary society, and he puts forward his beliefs in the various characters in the novel. For example, at Dmitri's trial, the Public Prosecutor serves as a character representing Dostoevsky's views regarding the degradation of morality in the Russian society, even though this means accusing the innocent Dmitri of killing his father. Fyodor has given up his paternal, social and spiritual responsibilities for lasciviousness and cynicism. Thus, his sons never take any interest in their father and go on to question their obligation to love him.

Но если отцеубийство есть предрассудок и если каждый ребенок будет допрашивать своего отца: "Отец, зачем я должен любить тебя? - то что станется с нами, что станется с основами общества, куда денется семья?"<sup>27</sup> (Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book XII, Part IV: 749)

Dostoevsky uses the Karamazov family as a symbol of the chasm that has been formed between two generations, a distortion in the flow of moral values and responsibilities from Fyodor's generation to that of his sons. The dispute between Fyodor and Dmitri is not just about money but also due to the legitimacy of their relationship. The abandonment by Fyodor of his sons when they were little children clearly shows denial of his paternal responsibilities. Moreover, the fact that his bastard son, Smerdyakov, actually murders

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years. The obligations due to an elder are not the ordinary obedience which has always existed in our Russian monasteries. This obligation involves confession to the elder by all who have submitted themselves to him, and to the indissoluble bond between him and them (Dostoevsky 30).

<sup>27</sup> But if parricide is merely a prejudice, and if every child is to ask of his father, 'Father, why should I love you?', then what will become of us, what will become of the foundations of society?"(Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book XII, Part IV: 749)



Fyodor elucidates a link here between illegitimacy and parricide. (i.e. not a stated general principle).

Overall, the major plot lines of *The Brothers Karamazov* follow the moral evolution of the Karamazov brothers, Dmitri, Ivan, Alyosha and Smerdyakov. Freud in *Dostoevsky and Parricide* never ceases to praise the psychological backbone of this epic novel, mainly because Dostoevsky's thinking reinforces Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex. The main point here is that parricide goes beyond the love triangle between Grushenka, Dmitri and Fyodor, not only because the fourth, illegitimate brother, Smerdyakov, commits the murder, but also because it symbolically represents questions concerning God the Father.

### Relationship of Humans with God in the Family Problematic

The debate on human faith in God in *The Brothers Karamazov* illustrates Dostoevsky's pondering on the question of the human relationship with God. A significant amount of the torment that humans inflict upon one another comes from our distorted spiritual understanding of human relationships. Inter-relationships with one another are based on a deep need for love and acceptance. When this need is not fulfilled, relationships break, as they do in the novel. Dostoevsky thinks that a properly aligned relationship with God is based on the foundation of forgiveness. When we receive God's forgiveness and then imitate it by extending it to others, we bring our human relationships back into alignment, which can act as a cure for the cruelty that leads to the worst broken relationships. Ivan gives very specific examples of evil being committed against the most innocent of all victims: children.

He describes a five-year old girl being abused and victimized by her parents who hate her. They flog her and lock her out on a freezing cold night because she has soiled her bed. They rub excrement over her face and into her mouth. Ivan imagines the little girl shivering. For him there is no excuse for a world that permits this kind of evil. He tells another story of an eight year old boy who has thrown a stone while playing and hurt the paw of a general's favourite hound. As a punishment, the general orders the boy to be torn apart by dogs, before his mother's eyes. Ivan thinks that the mother should not forgive her child's tormentor, even if the child himself were to forgive him. As Mondry points out, "while he [Ivan] might be willing to understand how a person can forgive one's own offender, he does not accept forgiveness of the offender who acted against one's loved one" (Mondry, *Vasily Rozanov and the Body of Russian Literature*, 2010). However, Alyosha calls Ivan's attitude rebellion, as there is someone, Christ, who died for the all the sins of humanity, and by giving his life for all, has redeemed humanity from sin. So, as Christ has forgiven sinners, the mother should forgive her child's tormentor. Moreover, as the Scriptures indicate, "... if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matthew: 6:14). Dostoevsky uses the character of Alyosha to express the idea of forgiveness paramount in Christianity: one should forgive so that one's prayers will not be hindered, as the following passage from the Gospel of Mark suggests: "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25).

According to Mondry (*Vasily Rozanov and the Body of Russian Literature*, 2010), Dostoevsky puts a significant focus on the theme of child abuse and children's innocence in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Ivan, in his pursuit of challenging Alyosha's faith in God, gives the above examples of child abuse and cruel individuals who mistreat their own children.

According to Ivan, the freedom of choice between good and evil was bestowed on humans by God. Since some choose evil, evil exists in the world. Dostoevsky gives the reader a contrasting picture between childhood innocence and adult sin, similar to the contrast that exists between the spiritual and the physical. Naïve children with no sexual experience represent humankind before the Fall, while adults are corrupted by the sin of carnal knowledge. However, this does not mean that Dostoevsky (or Ivan) accepts original sin as the mystical justification for children's suffering (Mondry 81).

Dostoevsky in the chapter entitled "The Grand Inquisitor" (Chapter 5 of Book V) highlights the ambivalent and contradictory nature of Ivan, in particular his internal conflict between reason and faith. This could not be clearer than from Ivan's confession to Alyosha, where Ivan reveals himself as a philosopher arguing the case of man against God. Ivan is an inverted theologian and his poem *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* follows from his "defiance" against God's world, where innocent children suffer for no reasons.

#### The Theme of Evil as Relevant to the 'Karamazov Problem'

Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* embodies the theme of evil in multiple ways. Scholars like Pavel Evdokimov and Simonetta Silvestroni, among others, have examined the problem of evil in their works *Dostoevsky and the Problem of Evil* (1978) and *Dostoevsky and the Bible* (2000), respectively. However, for the purpose of this study, I will focus on identifying what is evil in Dostoevsky and why it matters so heavily. In Chapter 4 of Book 5, titled "Rebellion", Dostoevsky presents a series of examples of child victims as an unavoidable objection to God's goodness. For example, he describes horrors like that of the serf-boy torn to death by hunting dogs before his mother's eyes for having thrown a stone that lamed a favourite dog; the Turks who cut children from their mothers' wombs, or throw

others who have been born into the air to catch on their bayonets while mothers watch them and the poor little five-year-old girl cruelly beaten, then locked in an outhouse and forced to eat her excrement. All this leads to Ivan's condemnation of God and its world. These injustices are horrible, but the Turks seem to enjoy being the tormentors. It is then that Ivan questions Alyosha's faith in God:

Can you understand why a little creature, who can't even understand what's done to her, should beat her little tormented breast with her tiny fist in that vile place, in the dark and the cold, and weep her sanguine meek, unresentful tears to dear, kind God to protect her? (Book V, ch. IV)

These innocent children become victims of unnecessary torture, but have no choice but to helplessly bear the pain.

In the chapter "Rebellion", Alyosha is the religious antithesis to Ivan, his intellectual older brother. Ivan does not understand why if "the hairs of our head are all numbered" (Matthew 10:30), there are so many sufferings, useless deaths and so many innocent victims. Alyosha does not have an immediate answer to this problem. However, according to Dostoevsky's plan as explained in his letters, the answer should have been included in the book titled "A Russian Monk". The answer comes from Zosima's teachings, which are based on daily meditation of the Bible (Silvestroni 206). The Russian monk was to be a defender of the faith, preaching spiritual values in a world in which everything was falling apart. Thus, Dostoevsky proposed the idea of monastic life as an attempt or a solution to restore those meanings which the modern world had lost:

As yet they preserve undistorted the image of Christ, in solitude and devotion, in the purity of God's truth, they have received it from the elders of the church, from

apostles and martyrs, and when the time comes, they will reveal it unto the world, when the world's truth shall have collapsed. This is a solemn notion. A star will shine forth from the East. That is what I believe the monk to be... Look at the secular world, has it not distorted God's image and God's truth? They have science, but science only deals with the world of the senses. The world of the spirit, the nobler half of man's being, is utterly derided, driven out with a certain exultation, even with hate. The world has announced the reign of freedom... and what do we see in their freedom; nothing but slavery and self-destruction! (*The Brothers Karamazov*, Vol IX: 392-3)

Zosima reflects on the role of the monk in Russian society. He thinks that the salvation of society will one day be represented precisely by those humble monks who preserve the image of Christ undistorted. As Zosima highlights, society has turned its back on the spiritual world in favour of what it calls freedom. However, this freedom, where men are encouraged to satisfy and increase their own needs in an egotistical way, is in reality a form of slavery.

The critic Ellis Sandoz in her study *Political Apocalypse. A Study of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor* (2000) points out that the suffering of children presents the topic of *kenosis*<sup>28</sup> and the holy "passion-sufferers"<sup>29</sup>:

He [Ivan] reasons, from effect to cause, that their suffering arises from the necessity of suffering in God's creation so that man may be permitted a free choice between good and evil: it is only through free choice of the good that

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<sup>28</sup> In Christian theology, *kenosis* is the self-emptying of one's own will and becoming entirely receptive to God's divine will.

<sup>29</sup> Those who suffer and die in Christ are sanctified and called "passion-sufferers". See Michael Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People: Studies in Russian Myths*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961.

salvation and the kingdom of God (the “final harmony”) can be achieved. To God he opposes the principle of justice, suggesting the transformation of religion into a positivistic religion of humanity (Sandoz 108).

According to Sandoz, the children’s suffering is necessary in God’s creation so that man may be permitted a free choice between good and evil. Only when choosing freely the good, the salvation and the Kingdom of God can be realized (Sandoz 108).

Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky in the “Introduction” to Dostoevsky’s *Demons* highlight that the author describes the most important freedom of Judeo-Christian revelation, the freedom to turn from evil, the freedom to repent. He does not see evil as co-eternal with good. Evil is not a human being and cannot be the essence of any person, but can influence people’s behaviour. Thus, at any time the “possessed” can be freed from their demons (Pevear and Larissa xv).

Mikhail Bakhtin in his *Problems in Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1894), admits the possibility of an evil or alien idea coming to inhabit a human being, misleading him, and driving him to crime or madness. Dostoevsky examines this phenomenon many times. Thus, for instance, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, it becomes precisely the topic of discussion between Ivan Fyodorovich and the devil (Pevear and Larissa xv).

As Ernest Gordon points out in his work *The Gospel in Dostoevsky* (1988), the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor is the culmination of Dostoevsky’s religious confessions. In this parable, although Ivan Karamazov refuses to recognize God, he admits God’s existence. In *The Brothers Karamazov* “Rebellion” immediately precedes “The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor”. Like the Legend it is told by Ivan to Alyosha Karamazov, who is a novice at a monastery outside the city.

As Malcolm Muggeridge points out, Dostoevsky was a God-possessed man, as it is clear in everything he wrote and in every character he created. All his life he was searching for God, and found Him only after passing what he called “the hell-fire of doubt”. Dostoevsky considered freedom to choose between good and evil as the essence of earthly existence (ix). The message that Dostoevsky wanted to convey to his readers was that of accepting suffering and being redeemed by it. However, the world was trying to abolish suffering and find happiness (ix).

As Ernest Gordon points out, Alyosha understands this tormented position of Ivan and classifies it as rebellion, the rebellion of the disbeliever, who must have “justice”. If he cannot have it, then he has no recourse but to destroy himself. In analysing his brothers’ position, Alyosha is describing man after the fall, man in rebellion against God, man seeking to be like God. “Thus sin is not passive but active, not simply a failure to obey God’s command, but a deliberate refusal to obey; indeed, an act of defiance” (Gordon x). According to Gordon, Ivan, through the “Legend of the Grand Inquisitor” tells his own story. He denies the efficacy of Christ’s redemption and does not accept God’s ordering of creation (Gordon xiv). Ivan admits: “I never could understand how one can love one’s neighbours. It is just one’s neighbours, to my mind, that one can’t love, though one might love people at a distance”. “One can love one’s neighbour in the abstract” (*The Brothers Karamazov*, book 5, ch. 4). He agonizes over the suffering of innocent children, but he does so not from his love of them, rather from his concept of its injustice (Gordon xiv). Thus, Dostoyevsky shows that man without God is nothing. The background for his writing is that of nineteenth century secularism.

Ivan’s statement that he does not understand how one can love one’s neighbour challenges a central passage of the Scriptures which starts with Leviticus: “You shall not take

vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself; I am the LORD” (Lev 19, 18). It then develops in the Gospels and the Letters of Saint Paul. After Ivan has spoken about the atrocities of the Turks on children, he argues: “I think the devil doesn't exist, but man has created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness” (Book 5, ch. 4).

Ivan sticks to children because adults have “eaten the apple, and eat it still”. In other words, children are not sinful, and have not sinned “in Adam”: original sin never enters the picture. According to Ivan, an adult cannot be as innocent as a child. One can love people at distance in the sense that we can love people in general, but once we know their weaknesses this can stop us from loving them. Children have not yet become as greedy, cruel or discouraged as adults. Dostoevsky considers the children’s naivety as innocence and the consciousness of adults as awareness of right and wrong.

Another very important reference to the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor is that of Leo Shestov. In Shestov’s view, Dostoevsky, who was standing on the side of the Grand Inquisitor, could no longer believe in the saving power of the idea “love thy neighbour.” (Shestov, *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* 4). Indeed, he had come to the conclusion that the awareness of one's own incapacity in any way to alleviate the sufferings of men could even turn the love that one had in one's heart for them into hatred. Shestov also refers to the question that Dostoevsky puts into the mouth of Ivan Karamazov, “Why must we get to know this devilish good and evil, when it costs so much?”

Dostoevsky was aware of the fundamental tragedy of human existence. Any hope of social progress or the expectation of future happiness could not in any way eliminate the torment experienced by any individual man. Dostoevsky raised the question in *The Brothers Karamazov* whether the universal happiness of men might be purchased at the cost of the



suffering of one innocent child. As Shestov points out, Dostoevsky "has at last come to his final word. He now states...absolutely no harmony, no ideas, no love or forgiveness...can justify the nonsense and absurdity in the fate of an individual person." (Shestov, *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* 4).

As Evdokimov points out, the three most important aspects of evil are parasitism, imposture, and parody (*Le Eta della Vita Spirituale*, 89) and the Grand Inquisitor embodies all three. He is a parasite of the Bible, he knows he is a liar and so he is an imposter and only able to reproduce a parody of that Kingdom of love, joy and peace that he says he wants to offer to humanity, but that in reality he deeply disregards.

Nicholas A. Berdyaev in his admirable book *Dostoyevsky* (1957), argues that:

The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor, in particular, made such an impression on my young mind that when I turned to Jesus Christ for the first time, I saw him under the appearance that he bears in the Legend (Berdyaev, "Foreword" to *Dostoevsky*).

As Wernham points out, this statement explains what Berdyaev thought of his own philosophy, that is, it was based upon a commitment to Christ. Berdyaev "accepted the picture of Christ in the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" (Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, 16). Thus, Berdyaev knew that Dostoevsky's version of Christ was almost a new one as compared to historic versions of Christianity (Wernham 11). But it was not only a new one, it "contributed towards the religion that is to come, the religion of freedom and love, the definitive triumph of Christ's eternal gospel" (Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky*, 225).

Berdyaev believed that it was the atheism of Ivan which brings liberation from an unworthy conception of God. The theology developed in Berdyaev's writing is the theology

implicit in Ivan's atheism. However, the humanity of God, as Berdyaev used the phrase, implied a quite unusual evaluation of man. For Berdyaev, Ivan's Legend was not only a revolt against a false, because inhuman, conception of God, but it was also a revolt against a false, because inhuman, conception of humaneness. The Grand Inquisitor was for Berdyaev a humanitarian, "he is one of the martyrs oppressed by sorrow and loving mankind" (Berdyaev's *Dostoevsky*, 189). As Wernham points out, the Grand Inquisitor, convinced of his own love for men, accuses the Christ of a lack of love (17).

If Berdyaev had reservations about the validity of the Legend as a criticism of Catholicism, he had no reservations about its validity as a criticism of Marxism and Russian communism. He saw them as perfect exemplifications of the spirit of the Grand Inquisitor; and it was so that he judged them (Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, 16).

Thus, Dostoevsky who wrote *The Brothers Karamazov* in different stages, wanted to respond to the problem of evil. Father Zosima offers spiritual support for overwhelming love, he is a Christ-like figure who earlier on participated in duelling and lived a non-Christian life. However, over the course of his life he embraced the Christian faith and was gradually transformed. He says that it is possible to have a combination of man's deep moral convictions about the wrongness of terrible sufferings and a complete trust in the profound love of God. As O' Connor points out, people are coming to Zosima who are suffering, so he is aware of this deep suffering. Dostoevsky wants to invite his readers to follow the example of individuals like Father Zosima, to experience for themselves that this assimilation is possible. People like monks or certain saints are very close to God, they are witness to us that this "integration" is possible and are not indifferent to suffering. They have great sensibility to suffering, but have also great intimacy with God (185-6). Some humans in this life may have experienced such deep suffering like the child killed in front of his mother's eyes. But,

as Dostoevsky shows in his work, God can heal these situations. Suffering in Dostoevsky, and therefore evil, is a means of identification of that suffering that Christ experienced for us. As O' Connor rightly highlights, God can take redemptive significance for those who suffer if God enables them in a mystical way to overcome their suffering. Jesus is the great doctor and God can bring that healing about. Thus, Dostoevsky remains firm in his assurance that the God-man Jesus had been sent to stir the conscience of mankind in its eternal fight against evil.

### Captain Snegiryov's Family

The Karamazov family is in stark contrast to the family of Captain Snegiryov. Unlike the Karamazov family, in which some of the sons hate the father and one of them kills him, the members of Captain Snegiryov's family, are united in a "labour of love" (Dostoevsky 22:60-70). Ilyusha loves his father and tries to defend him in every possible way from public insult and accusations.

The deep devotion of Captain Snegiryov towards his son is in complete contrast to Fyodor Karamazov's treatment of his sons. First, in order to understand the dynamics within this family, in particular the relationship between father and son, one must look at the social and economic environment in which this family lives. The Captain is an honourable man who has been discharged from the army after getting into trouble, although his honour remains intact. After his discharge from the army, Snegiryov's family sinks into utter poverty, with sick children and an insane wife.

Dostoevsky gives a precise and vivid description of the environment in which this family lives, which is representative of their poverty. They live in a dilapidated little house, in

a standard peasant's room, cluttered with domestic belongings of all sorts. Captain Snegiryov has two daughters: Varvara Nikolaevna, and Nina Nikolaevna, and a wife Arina Petrovna. Arina, who is forty-three, and of humble origin, has a haughty pride in her eyes, although she is crippled and can hardly move. She is called "mammetta, and is capricious and tearful and insane" (Dostoevsky 230). The family spends all Varvara's money and lives on it, and now that she cannot go back, she has to work for them like a slave. She waits, mends, washes, sweeps the floor and puts mamma to bed. Nina is a young girl of about twenty, but a hunchback and crippled, "with withered legs". She silently suffers in pain and agony all night so that she does not wake the rest of the family. And she eats the leftovers after the whole family is done eating, as she feels herself to be a burden on them. Captain Snegiryov, forty-five years old is small and weakly built. The Captain has reddish hair and a scanty light-coloured beard, very much like a wisp of tow. This description is very important, as Ilyusha's school boys used to make fun of the Captain, comparing his beard with a tow. However, he is a good and truthful man but extremely sensitive. Although Ilyusha is ill and his father is a poor man, the relationship between father and son is very strong.

This is particularly evident when Captain Snegiryov has the misfortune of getting into a fight with Dmitri at the town pub. During this episode, the Captain is humiliated by Dmitri, who drags him by his beard in front of his ten-year-old son, who is on his way back home from school, along with some of his classmates. Ilyusha witnesses his father's humiliation and calls after him in the street. This episode shows that the humiliation of Captain Snegiryov is also Ilyusha's embarrassment. Thus, it damages the relationship of respect that the son should feel for his father (Peace 243). The image of his humiliated father in the memory of Ilyusha, as well as the image of his young son in the memory of the Captain running beside him, will be everlasting. Alyosha visits Captain Snegiryov's family. He wants to offer the

Captain money out of generosity and pity, as compensation from Katerina Ivanovna for the horrendous behavior of Dmitri. During his encounter with Alyosha, Captain Snegiryov tells Alyosha everything about his situation, and then feels ashamed of having showed him the deepest part of his soul and having given in too soon. He therefore starts resenting Alyosha. Alyosha and Captain Snegiryov's encounter clearly shows a source of tension between them. This is due to Captain Snegiryov's pride, which leads to his self-inflicted suffering. Given that the money Alyosha is trying to offer would help the Captain's family escape from the city, the Captain dreams about the possibility of having a new life:

Да знаете ли вы, что мы с Илюшкой пожалуй и впрямь теперь мечту осуществим: купим лошадку да кибитку, да лошадку-то вороненькую, он просил непременно чтобы вороненькую, да и отправимся, как третьего дня расписывали.<sup>30</sup> (Dostoevsky 222)

The Captain becomes overly enthusiastic when he dreams of starting a new life for his family in another town. Nonetheless, Alyosha himself, out of over-enthusiasm, makes the blunder of reminding the Captain that this money, and more which is about to come, has been a donation made out of pity; the Captain becomes strained by this charity. And thus, the Captain crushes the notes and stomps on them with his heel, showing his contempt, rather than accepting the money. His pride and sense of duty before his son is the motivating factor in his refusal to take it:

А что ж бы я моему мальчику-то сказал, если б у вас деньги за позор наш взял?<sup>31</sup> (Dostoevsky 232).

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<sup>30</sup> [D]o you know, perhaps now Ilyusha and I will indeed realize our dream: we'll buy a horse and a covered cart, and the horse will be black, he asked that it be black, and we'll set off as we were picturing it two days ago.

<sup>31</sup> And what would I tell my boy, if I stook money from you for our disgrace?

Had Captain Snegiryov not refused the money, it would have changed his current situation of poverty. But because he does not want to sacrifice his moral standing before his son, he denies both himself and his family a better future. In this way, he also hurts Alyosha. Although it might seem selfish, the Captain is in reality salvaging his dignity by rejecting this charitable donation, given out of pity. Doing so eases the pain of his humiliation. In spite of all his humiliation and poverty, the Captain never compromises his dignity, as evidenced by this rejection of the two hundred rubles from Alyosha. Thus, he is a symbol of impaired human pride. The Captain's care for his moral image in front of his family and especially for young Ilyusha shows this quality.

Overall, Snegiryov's family not only serves partially as a platform for introducing Ilyusha into the novel, but also acts as a symbol of Dostoevsky's notion of universal suffering and complete faith. Ilyusha is a central character in the novel's religious context. His suffering becomes an act of sacrifice and atonement for others, reminiscent of that of Christ. He also becomes a medium through which guilt is universalized. As a guide throughout the novel, Alyosha gives us an insight into the life of Ilyusha. He has been a victim of mockery and ridicule at the hands of other boys in the school. Although proud but frail, Ilyusha's life changes when he encounters Alyosha, who, instead of condemning the boy for throwing a stone at him, takes an interest in him. Everyone forms their sense of goodness with regard to Ilyusha. The boys create at first their own community, but exclude Ilyusha from it. When Ilyusha falls sick and his condition worsens with time, Alyosha harmonizes Ilyusha's relationship with his schoolmates. Kolya and the other boys rally around him and start forming a community in a different way. Rather than excluding him, his sufferings and needs become central to their community. This is a form of brotherhood that is an alternative to the family, also based on love and understanding.

## The Influence of Fedorov's Ideas on Dostoevsky's Views on the Family

I shall now examine the influence of Fedorov on Dostoevsky's views on the family. Fedorov had a big impact on both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky; all were influenced by the social climate of the time, philosophical ideas about the family institution, marriage and procreation.

The fragmentation of the Russian family is one of Dostoevsky's main concerns. His idea of elevating the father-son conflict from a psychological to a metaphysical level was partly influenced by Nikolai Fedorov's ideas. According to Irene Masing-Delic, Dostoevsky was already familiar with some of Fedorov's ideas, thanks to his correspondence with Fedorov's disciple N.P. Peterson. According to other critics including Grechishkin and Lavrov, Fedorov was sharing ideas with Dostoevsky (Masing-Delic 103). As shown earlier, Nikolai Fedorov (1827–1903) is probably the best example of nineteenth-century anti-procreation philosophy. In his work *The Philosophy of the Common Task* (1906-1907), he presents a universal project for the resurrection of the dead in order to achieve the task of Christianity. Much saved and sublimated sexual energy is required to resurrect all the ancestors. He suggested stopping procreation in order to save energy otherwise wasted on sex. Fedorov's plan of immortalizing the body became the first of a series of Russian projects that challenged the power of nature in an absolute way. As Matich points out, "Fedorov believed that by collective inversion of libidinal energy, the eternal cycle of birth and death could be vanquished, which would restore the dead instead of giving birth to new life. Thus, the path to resurrection would involve castration, and the resurrected bodies would lack reproductive organs. In moments of sexual arousal, heterosexual partners would redirect their desire from coitus to the rebirth of their dead forebears" (Matich 22).

Fedorov thought that death could be conquered by science, and this would mean the

achievement of immortality. He argued that human beings had to stop procreation because the Earth, in his opinion, was not big enough to host all the people who would be resurrected; current generations would therefore have to save their energy for performing this task – the physical resurrection of the dead.

Fedorov was a strong proponent of sons redeeming the sins of their fathers in order to achieve the goal of Christianity. This would be accomplished through resurrection of the fathers to unite humanity and create a universal family. Overall, Fedorov believed that children have to stop procreating and resurrect their parents. Eternal life would be achieved via science. However, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky shows that instead of resurrecting their father, the sons killed him. Thus, the decomposition of the family portrayed in *The Brothers Karamazov* is the opposite of Fedorov's idea of a unified universal family. This leads to a complete human disunity.

It is important to highlight that the mystic-metaphysical conception of fatherhood and sonhood is deeply rooted in religion, and particularly in Russian orthodoxy, where the father image of the tsar was also a powerful presence (Terras 60). The relationship between father and son in Dostoevsky's last novel is shown on a pragmatic, psychological and metaphysical level. In Fedorov this relationship is of paramount importance:

С воспитанием кончается дело отцов, родителей, и начинается дело сынов – воскресителей. В рождении и воспитании родители отдают свою жизнь детям, а в деле воскрешения начинается возвращение жизни родителям, в чем и выражается совершеннолетие.<sup>32</sup> (Fedorov 27)

When Dostoevsky first heard of N. Fedorov in 1876 he had already begun work on

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<sup>32</sup> "The task of the fathers, the parents, ends with the upbringing of the children; then begins the task of the sons, those who restore life. In giving birth to and raising their children, the parents gave up life to them, while the task of resurrection begins with the returning of life to the parents" (Fedorov 87)



the preliminary drafts of his novel (Young 37). There are many passages in *The Brothers Karamazov* which make it evident that the author intended to introduce certain of Fedorov's themes, such as the unity of humans joined in a common idea, in the form of brotherhood, utopian ideal, a belief in resurrection, and the possibility of salvation for all humans. The very concept of "resurrecting the dead" is fundamental to understand Fyodor's utopia. As is evident in the following passage from *The Philosophy of the Common Task*, Fedorov opposes active "resurrecting" (*voskreshenie*) to Dostoevsky's passive resurrection (*voskresenie*). He also stresses that Dostoevsky thought that only in some 25 years' time this should be possible. Fedorov is critical of Dostoevsky because he himself wanted immediate action:

Если между сынами и отцами существует любовь, то переживание возможно только на условии воскрешения; без отцов сыны жить не могут, а потому они должны жить только для воскрешения отцов, - и в этом только заключается все. Если бы Достоевский понимал долг воскрешения (а не воскресения) во всей глубине и широте его, то он не мог бы не говорить и о деле, ведущем к исполнению долга. Достоевский, говоря о долге воскресения, как о таком, который стоит в ряду многих других обязанностей, и даже не в числе первых, а скорее последних, вероятно, полагал, что осуществление этого долга возможно лишь в самом отдаленном будущем, не раньше, как через двадцать пять тысяч лет примерно..<sup>33</sup> (Fedorov 440)

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<sup>33</sup> If love exists between sons and fathers, then survival is possible only in terms of resurrecting; without fathers, sons cannot live, hence they may live only for the sake of resurrecting the fathers-and in this only, everything is contained. If Dostoevsky would have understood the task of resurrecting (and not resurrection) in its breadth and depth, then he couldn't have not talked also about the way, the course of the task, by which this duty is to be fulfilled, i.e. the task of resurrecting. When Dostoevsky talked about the task of resurrection as one of the tasks among others, not even as one of the first but as the last one, apparently he believed that the realization of this task is possible only in a distant future not earlier, for example in 25.000 years or so...

According to Fedorov, Christianity is the union of all the living for resuscitating the dead. This resurrection can be only attained by all men working together as brothers in a “common cause”. It is not a passive task, but an active one. As Fedorov points out, man might not yet be able to understand and control the blind force of nature (as humanity has not yet unified in a single universal family through love). Thus, Fedorov calls for a world-wide effort to gain control over natural and meteorological phenomena through the applied sciences and technology.

Нужно признать, что Бог, в Котором безграничная любовь Сына и Св. Духа к Отцу делает смерть невозможною и жизнь бессмертною, есть образец миру, в коем рожденное (сыны и дочери) не стало еще безграничною любовью к родившему (к отцам), почему в мире и господствует рождение и смерть, и человек, как разумное существо, не достиг еще познания и управления слепую силою (природою), а слепая сила остается еще не познаною и не управляемою.<sup>34</sup> (Fedorov443)

The following examples from *The Brothers Karamazov* clearly show Fedorov’s influence on Dostoevsky’s views on the family.

First, it should be noted that implicit in *The Brothers Karamazov* is the idea that sons are responsible for the death of their fathers. The notion of brotherhood is also present. This is evident particularly in Chapter 3 of Book VI (Of Prayer, Love, and the Touching of Other Worlds) where Zosima teaches that:

Одно тут спасение себе: возьми себя и сделай себя же ответчиком за

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<sup>34</sup> One has to understand that God, in which the infinite love of the Son and the Holy Spirit toward the Father conquers death and makes life eternal, is an example for the world in which the born (sons and daughters) haven't unified yet together in the infinite love towards those who gave them birth (the fathers); because in the world God controls birth and death; and the man, as rational being, can't understand yet and control the blind force of nature. So, this blind force remains incomprehensible and without control, hitherto.

весь грех людской. Друг, да ведь это и вправду так, ибо чуть только сделаешь себя за все и за всех ответчиком искренно, то тотчас же увидишь, что оно так и есть в самом деле и что ты-то и есть за всех и за вся виноват. А скидывая свою же лень и свое бессилие на людей, кончишь тем, что гордости сатанинской приобщишься и на Бога возропщешь.<sup>35</sup>

As Zosima suggests, making ourselves responsible for other people sins' means that this responsibility is shared between us and that all are responsible for everything in their own lives as in a united family. Ivan, Dmitri, and even Alyosha must all share the guilt with Smerdyakov for the murder of their father. Ivan plotted the murder, Dmitri wishes his father dead. Alyosha looking for the grave of his mother is also a reflection of Fedorov's teachings on sons resurrecting parents. The group that comes closest realizing the ideal of the universal family (as preached by Fedorov), is Karamazov's group of boys. In fact, at the end of the novel the boys following Zosima's teachings agree that they are all responsible for Ilyusha's death. This idea of collective responsibility comes from the philosophy of Fedorov, in particular from the theory of supramoralism. This theory stems from the metaphysical fusion of science, art and religion in a union for raising the dead to life. According to this theory, sin, is nothing more than a failure to act, and guilt is a shared characteristic and not an individual trait. Thus, in a literal sense, every man would feel guilty for every crime that is committed. Instead of the criminal being sacrificed for a crime, the whole of humanity shares the guilt of the crime without diffusing responsibility. Dostoevsky artfully shows this idea through his novel. Although Smerdyakov indeed committed parricide, Ivan and Dmitri, as they consciously wish the death of their father, are equally responsible. According to this

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<sup>35</sup> There is only one salvation for humans: make yourself responsible for all the sins of men. The moment when you make yourself responsible for everything and everyone, you will see at once that it is really so, that you are guilty on behalf of all and for all (Dostoevsky 320).

theory, neither Smerdyakov, nor the other brothers, nor their father Fyodor can be blamed for their crimes individually. Although Fyodor abandoned his children, he is worthy of love as much as the rest of the others. The theory of supramoralism is based not on sentiment, justice, or love but on a notion of universal family, the unification of humans, where everyone is forgiven because all are responsible for everyone's actions.

Супраморализм - это долг к отцам-предкам, воскрешение, как самая высшая и безусловно всеобщая нравственность, нравственность естественная для разумных и чувствующих существ, от исполнения которой, т.е. долга воскрешения, зависит судьба человеческого рода. Называя долг к отцам- предкам, долг воскрешения, супраморализмом, мы говорим языком тех, к которым обращаемся, чтобы быть ими понятыми, для которых слова "долг к отцам-предкам", "воскрешение" совершенно непонятны, так как все они, можно сказать, иностранцы и ницшеанцы; это те, которые, удаляясь от могил отцов, не только не взяли щепотки праха их (как то делают переселенцы, чтущие своих отцов, не забывшие долга к предкам), но и отрясли даже прах отцов от ног своих, как это, можно сказать, сделал известный Рише, назвав предков отвратительными - "эти отвратительные предки", чем и выразил мнение и чувства большинства своих современников-интеллектуалов.<sup>36</sup>

(Fedorov 400)

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<sup>36</sup> Supramoralism is the duty to return life to our ancestors; it is the highest and incontrovertibly universal morality, the morality of rational and sensate beings; on the fulfilment of this duty of resuscitation depends the destiny of the human race... Calling Supramoralism the duty before our ancestors of resurrecting them, we talk the same language of those we address, to make ourselves understood. Those, to whom we talk, completely do not understand the words "duty to return life to our ancestors" or "resurrection". They are all foreign and Nietzschean; it is they who, having moved away from the grave of their fathers, have not taken a pinch of their ashes (as migrants do, who respect their fathers, do not forget their duty to return life to their ancestors). Also, they shook the dust off from their feet, as how can we say, did the famous Richet who called the ancestors detestable "these detestable ancestors", by which he also expressed the view and the feelings of the majority of contemporary intellectuals.

A passage in the novel where there is evidence of the influence of Fedorov on Dostoevsky's views on family and children is when Zosima is comforting a peasant woman who has lost her child.

The trauma of her loss is so great that she continuously feels the presence of her child, as if he is hiding somewhere. And she recalls the details fastidiously: "The artistic realism of Dostoevsky here reaches clairvoyance. Maternal love resurrects the image of her dead child; the concreteness of her vision verges on the miraculous" (Mochulsky 573).

The Elder's efforts to console her with the thought of her child as an angel are of no use. He quickly sees that he must take her side and support her in rebelling against natural destiny, against the "blind force [of nature]": "refuse to be comforted, there is absolutely no reason why you should allow yourself any comfort" (Dostoevsky: 49). The Elder suggests that she cry until she frees her heart and purifies her soul from the trauma and sadness of the death of her son. Eventually her tears of sorrow will turn into joy.

Furthermore, as can be seen in Book VI, Chapter 2, Father Zosima and his mysterious visitor talk about the disintegration of the family occurring in the contemporary era. This leads to a loss of harmony, instead of a unified family structure, as preached by Fedorov. In addition, the idea that "everyone is responsible for all" is reiterated throughout the novel; and in the "Cana of Galilee" episode (Book VII, Chapter 4), Alyosha experiences the organic unification of all creation, and the encounter of his soul with other worlds:

С зенита до горизонта двоился еще неясный Млечный Путь.

Свежая и тихая до неподвижности ночь облегла землю. Белые башни и золотые главы собора сверкали на яхонтовом небе. Осенние роскошные цветы в клумбах около дома заснули до утра. Тишина земная как бы сливалась с небесною, тайна земная соприкасалась со звездною... Алеша

стоял, смотрел, и вдруг, как подкошенный, повергся на землю.<sup>37</sup>

(Dostoevsky 362)

Finally, in the epilogue, when the boys gather around Ilyusha's grave, Alyosha asserts that there will be a full and physical resurrection of the dead. Alyosha tells Ivan that half his task is to love life itself more than the meaning of it; the other half, he says, is to raise up the dead, who perhaps have never really died.

- Карамазов! - крикнул Коля, - неужели и взаправду религия говорит, что мы все встанем из мертвых и оживем, и увидим опять друга друга, и всех, и Илюшечку?

- Непременно восстанем, непременно увидим и весело, радостно расскажем

всё, что было, - полусмеясь, полу в восторге ответил Алеша.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, another example of the discourse around resurrection is offered in book 5, chapter 3 in a dialogue between Ivan and Alyosha:

А в чем она вторая твоя половина?

В том, что надо воскресить твоих мертвецов, которые может быть

Никогда и не умирали.<sup>39</sup>

These passages from *The Brothers Karamazov* show clear traces of Fedorov's philosophy. According to Fedorov, humanity as a whole was created as one singular organic

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<sup>37</sup> From the zenith to the horizon, the Milky Way ran in two pale streams...It was as if threads from all those numberless worlds of God came together linking his soul with them, and it was trembling—in contact with other worlds"...but with every instant he felt clearly as though a glibly that something firm and unshakable as that vault of heaven had entered his soul...

—Someone visited my soul in that hour "he used to say afterwards with implicit faith in his words (Dostoevsky 362).

<sup>38</sup> Karamazov! Cried Kolya, can it really be true as religion says, that we shall rise from the dead, and come to life, and see one another again, and everyone, and Ilyushechka? Certainly we shall rise, certainly we shall see and gladly, joyfully tell one another all that has been," Alyosha replied, half laughing, half in ecstasy.

<sup>39</sup> And what does this second half consist of resurrecting your dead, who may never have died (231).

entity which was dismantled into numerous fragments and isolated over time. This was due to wars, egotism, ignorance about previous generations in the name of progress, and the Darwinian theory of the survival of the fittest. For a new change to happen, Fedorov believed that the sons have to resurrect their fathers. Without underestimating any progress that the previous generations might have accomplished and, at the same time, without affirming the superiority of the living over the dead, the resurrection of the dead from the graveyard, the earth, must be a collaborative effort for a common cause. However, as Leatherbarrow points out, while Fedorov's philosophy mainly revolves around the concept of a universal family, with the sons gathering in a brotherhood to resurrect their fathers, Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov* flips this concept by portraying a dismantled family unit, where each of the brothers is responsible individually for the murder of their father and not for his resurrection (Leatherbarrow 30).

#### “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man”: a New Visionary Ideal of the Russian Family

In “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man” (1877), Dostoevsky presents a new ideal model for the Russian family. In the short story, he comes up with a radically new idea of family structure: a collective non-monogamous family. Society in Dostoevsky's view is based not on individual families, but on a unified collective family.

In “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man” the author offers a surrealistic account of the narrator's encounter with death and his vision of paradise in another world. The ridiculous man is an alienated, egoistical figure who lives on the margins of Petersburg life. He contemplates how he has always been ridiculous, claiming an absolute metaphysical nothingness, he is persuaded that nothing really matters on earth. Thus, he decides to shoot

himself.

Having made this decision, he meets a little girl who cries and desperately seeks his help, for her mother is dying and no one is trying to rescue her. The protagonist chases the little girl away with the brutality and the ostentatious indifference of those who, having decided to end it all, do not want to worry about anyone else's suffering. So, back at home, in his room, he begins to reflect on the events that have happened, and realizes that he had felt compassion and pity for the poor girl he met on the street. The compassion he felt for her distracts him from his plan to kill himself: if the world is really insignificant, why then does he feel this guilt?

He then falls asleep and dreams that he shoots himself. After having spent some time in a coffin underground, he is conducted to another planet, which looks like an image of the Golden Age, a primordial earthly paradise of happiness and love.

The inhabitants of this paradise are very innocent people; they live in complete harmony with one another and also with nature. For them, eternal life is taken for granted, and they are surprised when the ridiculous man questions the existence of eternity. This planet is free from sufferings and tears and is filled only with everlasting love. The ridiculous man thinks that the inhabitants of this planet continue to have a relationship with dead people even after they die. Not even death can break the relationship between the living and their ancestors.

Most importantly, the inhabitants of this planet form one single family; parents give birth to children; but these children are held in common. This utopia is about the non-monogamous family: all the inhabitants are united in love for one another and not divided into conventional families such as those found on Earth (Lantz 139):

У них была любовь и рождались дети, но никогда я не замечал в них



порывов того жестокого сладострастия, которое постигает почти всех на нашей земле, всех и всякого, и служит единственным источником почти всех грехов нашего человечества. Они радовались являвшимся у них детям как новым участникам в их блаженстве. Между ними не было ссор и не было ревности, и они не понимали даже, что это значит. Их дети были детьми всех, потому что все составляли одну семью. У них почти совсем не было болезней, хоть и была смерть; но старики их умирали тихо, как бы засыпая, окруженные прощавшимися с ними людьми, благословляя их, улыбаясь им и сами напутствуемые их светлыми улыбками. Скорби, слез при этом я не видал, а была лишь умножившаяся как бы до восторга любовь, но до восторга спокойного, восполнившегося, созерцательного. Подумать можно было, что они соприкасались еще с умершими своими даже и после их смерти и что земное единение между ними не прерывалось смертью. Они почти не понимали меня, когда я спрашивал их про вечную жизнь, но, видимо, были в ней до того убеждены безотчетно, что это не составляло для них вопроса.<sup>40</sup> (Dostoevsky 109)

As Mondry points out, Dostoevsky presents a special form of family structure for Russian society, in which neither matrimonial laws nor incest exclusions have been put in place. According to Mondry's reading of Dostoevsky's "Dream of a Ridiculous Man", no sexual prohibitions have been established in this new world. The inhabitants of this paradise are innocent and sinless people. However, when the ridiculous man visits them he introduces

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<sup>40</sup> They were endowed with love and children were born to them, but never did I observe in them those impulses of cruel voluptuousness which affect virtually everybody on our earth,-everybody, and which are the sole source of almost all sin in our human race. They rejoiced over their new born as new participants in their felicity. They never quarrelled and there was no jealousy among them; they did not even understand what these things meant. Their children were common children because they all formed one family. There were virtually no diseases among them, although there was death. However, their old men passed away gently, as though falling asleep, surrounded by men bidding them farewell, blessing them, smiling to them; and the departed accompanied by serene smiles. On these occasions I perceived no sorrow, no tears; there was merely love grown to the level of ecstasy, but calm composed, meditative ecstasy. One could imagine that they continued to communicate with their dead even after their death, and that the earthly communion between them was not interrupted by death (Dostoevsky 684).

sin into this world; the sin of *sladostrastie* (sexual excess) (Mondry 88).

As Mondry highlights, Vasily Rozanov<sup>41</sup> interprets the concept of sin as sexual violation. In addition, Rozanov admits that Dostoevsky envisages two kinds of ideal family. One is based on patriarchal values, as can be seen in the *Diary of a Writer*, and another is a completely new model of family structure. The latter is based on a collective family, where wives and children are held in common (Mondry 90).

The Russian people, with their innate sense of brotherhood, have the potential to achieve this ideal. And this new Golden Age seems to be based on a totally new family structure, where no sexual taboos exist among its members. The whole of society is a single collective family, with communal wives and children. In addition, this utopian world is without crime and the idea of private property does not exist. In Dostoevsky's "real" world, Alyosha Karamazov's group of boys is the closest representation of this utopian ideal. The schoolboys learn at the end of the novel that "all are responsible for all". It is this very expression of the responsibility of the sons for their father that is disproved by the rebellious Ivan who declares: "Кто не желает смерти отца?" (Who doesn't desire the death of his father?) (Dostoevsky 686).

In the *Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, when the protagonist awakes from his dream, his vision of the other planet has shown him a new truth. Accordingly, he decides to devote his life to advocating what he defines as "the main thing: love for the others, or unconditional love". Dostoevsky attributes an extraordinary importance to children throughout his life and in his works. Thus, it is not surprising that the little girl in the *Dream of a Ridiculous Man* plays a vital role in the "resurrection" of the protagonist. In fact, what transforms the

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<sup>41</sup> Vasily Vasilyevich Rozanov (1856–1919) was one of the most contentious Russian writers and philosophers of the pre-revolutionary epoch. Because he tried to reunite Christian tradition with ideas of healthy sex and family life, his philosophy has been called the "religion of procreation".

ridiculous man into a better being is the little girl's cry for help. He feels some remorse for not having helped her mother out and it is this very feeling of guilt that eventually prevents him from committing suicide.

So, the innocence of the children, their direct emotional response to others, and their capacity for absolute love make Dostoevsky attribute a huge importance to the topic of the family and children in his works. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, a decisive change towards a better future in Dmitri Karamazov's life is represented by his dream of the sufferings of the baby, and his own ability to respond to that child.

#### Children and Folk Mystical Beliefs in *The Brothers Karamazov*

V. E. Vetlovskaja gives an insight into the relationship between Ilyusha and his father in *The Brothers Karamazov* and interprets it in the light of mystical Russian folk beliefs.

As Vetlovskaja points out, according to Dostoevsky's thinking, the fate of Ilyusha who stands up for his father and for truth at large, and who dies in the end, serves as the most serious argument against Ivan's philosophical conception of bringing death and destruction to his father. Ilyusha's death can be considered as a symbolic representation of a child who sacrifices everything, even his own life, for his father (Vetlovskaja 109).

At the funeral of little Ilyusha, Alyosha speaks to the boys. Vetlovskaja stresses that during this speech, in the epilogue, the idea that Ilyusha dies for his father is reiterated. Alyosha speaks of the friendship that Ilyusha's friends have all established by coming together around his suffering, rather than excluding him:

Согласимся же здесь, у Илюшина камушка, что не будем никогда забывать — во-первых, Илюшечку, а во-вторых, друг об друге. И что бы там ни

случилось с нами потом в жизни, хотя бы мы и двадцать лет потом не встречались, — все-таки будем помнить о том, как мы хоронили бедного мальчика, в которого прежде бросали камни, помните, там у мостика-то? — а потом так все его полюбили<sup>42</sup>

In addition, as Vetlovskaja points out, Alyosha says about Ilyusha during his funeral, that “Он был славный мальчик, добрый и храбрый мальчик, чувствовал честь и горькую обиду отцовскую, за которую и восстал”<sup>43</sup>. Here, in the epilogue, as in some other episodes of the novel, the concept of “father” is understood in two different ways. One is literal and the other is metaphorical. Thus, Ilyusha, as is evident from the last scene, stood up not only for his own father or for the fathers in general, but also for God the Father, the creator of the universe. In this role, Ilyusha contradicts Ivan, who is the pioneer of a new human unification, albeit with the denial of God. If Ilyusha (according to Dostoevsky’s thinking) paves the way for the future happiness of the people through unification, then Ivan highlights the existing disagreement and separation between them. According to Ivan’s philosophy, any controversy or division receives ideological justification in the immoral rule of “everything is permitted”, allowing “egoism to the point of cruelty” (Vetlovskaja 110).

В речи Алеши у камня вновь возвращаются мотивы, напоминающие читателю о том, что Илюша умер за отца. “Он был - говорит Алеша об умершем Илюше, - славный мальчик, добрый и храбрый мальчик, чувствовал честь и горькую обиду отцовскую, за которую и восстал”. Здесь, в эпилоге, как в некоторых других ситуациях

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<sup>42</sup> “Let us make a compact here, at Ilyusha's stone, that we will never forget Ilyusha and one another. And whatever happens to us later in life, if we don't meet for twenty years afterwards, let us always remember how we buried the poor boy at whom we once threw stones, do you remember, by the bridge? And afterwards we all grew so fond of him” (Dostoevsky 875).

<sup>43</sup> He was a famous boy, a good and brave boy, felt honor and bitter paternal resentment, for which he rebelled.

романа, понятие “отец дано в двойном, прямом и символистическом плане. Илюша, как ясно в последней сцене, “восстает не только за своего отца или отцов вообще, но и за бога-отца, творца всего мироздания, создателя вселенной. В этой роли Илюша противопоставлен Ивану, начинающему проповедь новой человеческой общности с отрицания бога. Но если первый (Илюша) закладывает, по мысли Достоевского, единственно прочные основы будущего счастливого единения людей, то второй (Иван) лишь усугубляет существующий разлад и разобщенность, поскольку они получают идейное оправдание в безнравственном правиле “всё позволено”, допускающем “эгоизм даже до злодейства”<sup>44</sup> (Vetlovskaia110).

Ilyusha's sufferings motivated the boys and formed them into a new community, not at the expense of other people's suffering, but around awareness of that suffering. According to Dostoevsky, we need to consider responsibility for one another and share in one another's suffering. Acknowledging suffering thus becomes a way out of the trap of The Grand Inquisitor.

Viacheslav Ivanov<sup>45</sup>, talking about Alyosha's idea of the unification of humanity through true love (not towards humanity in general, but towards specific individuals)

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<sup>44</sup> In the speech of Alyosha at the grave, motifs return that remind the reader that Alyosha died for his father. “He was, says Alyosha, about the dying Ilyusha, a weak boy, good and brave boy, felt honour and bitter paternal offence, for which he rose”. Here in the epilogue, as in any other situations of the novel, the concept “father is given on two levels, at the straight and symbolic level”. Ilyusha, as it is clear from the last scene, “rise against not only his father or the fathers in general, but also for God, creator of the universe. In this role, Ilyusha is contrasted by Ivan, who began to preach a new human community which rejects God. But if the former (Ilyusha) lays, in Dostoevsky's opinion, the only firm foundations for a future happy union of the people, then the latter (Ivan), only redoubles the existing disorder and disconnection, as these receive ideological justification in the amoral law that “everything is permitted” and that allows “egoism to the point of crime”.

<sup>45</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov (1866–1949) was a Russian poet and playwright associated with the Russian Symbolist movement.

confirms that we are in a relationship not only with the living but also with those who have died. The dead are more numerous than the living, and they are more important than us. The dead continue to exist in the living: they are our essence, our true fathers. This is the foundation of brotherhood in the name of the departed Ilyusha (Ivanov 166-7). When Ilyusha, the child who stands up for his father dies, he enters into the world of his ancestors. Captain Snegiryov says, “Batiuska, milyi batiushka!” (Batiuska, my dear batiushka!). Explaining the meaning of this word, A. N. Tereshchenko writes, “The word *Batiushka* was used a long time back; for the first time we encounter this word in the XIII century meaning father-guardian. And now this word is used without any meaning” (Tereshchenko 419). It is important to note, however, that the word “batiushka” meaning “father” was commonly applied to the Tsar by Russian people). As A. N. Afanas’ev points out: “Our simple people, call parents the dead people and this denomination is used also when they remember the dead children” (Afanas’ev 75-6). “The people call fathers the dead and use this expression likewise when they talk about the dead ancestors or about the children who died” (Afanas’ev 80). F. I. Buslaev<sup>46</sup> notes that in certain places, the word “parents” is used to mean the “departed ones, the dead ones, even if this relates to one person or even a child of any sex or gender; to bury the parents means generally to bury someone” (Buslaev 200). Even if a child dies, they call him “parent”. In one Ukrainian fairy tale, a son who has been spending all his time in the water, on a small boat, always returns back when his mother is praying a pagan prayer. This son belongs to a different world, because most of his time is spent on the water. While he remains the son to his mother, he also represents the spirits of both parents, and the spirit of those who are dead at large (Buslaev 320). As A. Berman rightly points out, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Fyodor Pavlovich calls his son Ivan “my own father”. Given that

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<sup>46</sup> Fedor Ivanovich Buslaev (1818-1898), was a Russian philologist, art historian, and folklorist who represented the Mythological school of comparative literature and linguistics.

Fyodor fails in his duties as a father in many ways, Ivan becomes the authority figure of the family (267).

The veneration for the ancestors lies in the strong conviction that the dead help the living. A. N. Afanas'ev writes that "When the ancestors die, they do not abandon their progeny completely, they do not break forever the relationship with them...as genius-guardians they continue, without being watched, to look after their progeny, to watch over them and help them in their everyday life" (Afanas'ev 75).

Vetlovskaia points out that the living (children) need dead parents because the latter continue to be their guardians. At the same time, the dead, who live under the Earth, need living children because they want to eat and to drink. Thus, there is a need for periodical funeral banquets. Out of gratitude to those who feed them, the dead become their guardian protectors. There is mutual help. The cult of the dead, in this way, has a crucial practical meaning. For the agricultural workers (and therefore for the Slavs) the ritual cycle of the veneration for the dead starts in winter and continues to the summer solstice: "this time between the two solstices is the time of the awaking of the forces of the earth, necessary to the agricultural workers. The cult of the dead relates closely to agrarian interests and desires. According to ancient thinking, which matches the Slavs' thinking, death does not exist. The dead live under the soil, under the Earth, and this is why they have over that Earth a bigger power than the actual agricultural workers. They live there, they belong to the Earth. One has to please them. If one wants a better return, one has to pay them. They can send crops or crop failures; make the earth to give birth etc. Care for sewing is combined with care for the ancestors, feeding them, warming them. In this way, reverence for the fathers, the dead, is an important condition for the prosperity of earthly life. The dead (fathers) guarantee eternal life, the immortality of humanity on earth. The responsibility of the living (the children),

however, consists in guaranteeing immortality and the eternity of afterlife to the dead.

As Penates or household gods, the souls of the deceased participated in the sacrificial offerings, burning at the domestic fireplace. The ancestors feared nothing more than not having children. With the death of the clan comes the extinction of the fireplace, of the house, and with it the souls of the dead relatives are deprived of their usual sacrifices; they are left without food.

Thus, as Vetlovskaja points out, Russian folk belief puts much importance on having children. This pagan cult is antithetical to the philosophy of Fedorov, who preached that we should stop procreating. According to Fedorov, in order to resurrect the dead we have to stop procreating, then we will have a large enough population. We will explore space and move to other planets; there will be plenty of food because we will learn how to create that food, but the duty of children towards their parents is to resurrect them.

Vetlovskaja also stresses that, if the eternity and fullness of earthly life depend on dead fathers, then the immortality of the ancestors, as we can see, depends on the children. Christians have forms of respecting the dead and although they are very different from the pagan cults, they have the same practical bases.

In the epilogue of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Vetlovskaja points out that once again Koliia, one of Ilyusha's friends, cried out enthusiastically, and again all the boys picked up his exclamation. With these words (in the passage above) the novel ends. Alyosha's edifice (Alyosha being both the son and the potential father), is the edifice of immortal life. This is different from the ideal of Ivan which implies, according to Dostoevsky's thinking, death without any hope for renewal or resurrection. And it is exactly this concept of the eternal life which is based on sacrificial love, in opposition to Ivan, that becomes firmly established in the epilogue of *The Brothers Karamazov* (Vetlovskaja 113). For Dostoevsky, the family is an



important unit in a future based on immortality, achieved by the communal efforts of fathers and children, brothers and brothers. While Fedorov influenced Dostoevsky's understanding of the future of the family, Russian folk beliefs also influenced his views regarding the mystical underlay of the futuristic aspects of the family. Mystical Christianity and mystical ancestral folk beliefs underpin Dostoevsky's views on the future of the Russian family.

## Conclusion

Dostoevsky explored the combinations and permutations of family life; he came up against damaging and destructive interactions, which sent him back to what it is to be human, and to be human in what is intended to be a nurturing community, as well as a larger society. This raises the question of what life is about, and how the family works out against that larger perspective.

In this chapter I argued that Dostoevsky put sexuality at the centre of his novel. Sexuality in *The Brothers Karamazov* is a negative force that leads to rivalry between the father and the son, thus to the overall destruction of the family. Because of the sexual rivalry around Grushenka, Fedor and Dmitri come to hate each other.

Dostoevsky shows that the old patriarchal family structure based on alliances in crisis, and at the same time he notices that power relations within the new type of family were also changing and not ideal. According to Dostoevsky, the crisis of the Russian family was due to the lack of morality and Christian principles in Russian society. Thus, Dostoevsky saw the possibility of overcoming this crisis and understanding life's truth through faith in Christ. He believed that the majority of social problems were the result of peoples' vices and the moral weakness of human nature. As Knapp points out, in his later understanding of Christian love,

Dostoevsky incorporated his early concern with social issues. For Dostoevsky, to love one's neighbour meant manifesting sentiments of love through actions (16).

In the following quotation Father Zosima points out that man does not understand the meaning of life, because if man could understand it, he would also realize that life is heaven already; it is a gift from God as all the other creatures of the universe are:

look around you at the gifts of God, the clear sky, the pure air, the tender grass, the birds; nature is beautiful and sinless, and we, only we, are sinful and foolish, and we don't understand that life is heaven, for we have only to understand that and it will at once be fulfilled in all its beauty, we shall embrace each other and weep (402)

By contrasting the dysfunctional family of Fyodor Karamazov with that of the loving Captain Snegiryov's, Dostoevsky presented a new model of family life based on mutual love and respect. The loss of the father in his patriarchal role within the family was the cause of the crisis for the Karamazov's family. However, in Captain Snegiryov's family, through a loving relationship between the father and the sons, Dostoevsky presented his ideal of family life. Moreover, in the "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" Dostoevsky reiterated the paramount importance of Christian values as the basis for family life, religious values and moral teachings. In his dream the ridiculous man imagines a world where husbands and wives love each other and live in communion with the rest of the world. Through the depiction of this idyllic paradise, Dostoevsky communicated a Christian message of mutual love and respect for one another. Dostoevsky advocates the importance of the Christian ideals of love and tolerance to sustain healthy family relations. Yet, the format of the family envisioned in "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" is not Christian, which is to say that children are not conceived and brought up in a marriage of one man to one woman. Dostoevsky's views regarding the Christian family were influenced by other non-Christian philosophies. As Jones points out, "Dostoevsky

exposed himself to philosophies which incorporated and gave expression to radical atheistic ideas” (151). Jones also stresses that, in “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man”, the Golden Age paradise is destroyed by the introduction of the lie which recalls the Biblical theme of the Fall (161). The loss of the initial Eden and the passage from nullity (before the dream the ridiculous man wants to kill himself because nothing matters for him) to a paradise full of harmony. According to the narrator, one must live as man did before the Fall, with spontaneity and with love.

By highlighting problems of the notion of the family, Dostoevsky stressed the huge significance of the family unit as the nucleus of the society. Holding the strong belief that the family was the future of Russian society, he wanted to find a solution to its fragmentation.

The other Great Russian novelist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Leo Tolstoy, was equally preoccupied with the changes affecting family and marriage throughout his life, and had his own solutions for the crisis. These solutions were rooted in the same societal phenomena, but were drastically different from Dostoevsky’s. Tolstoy’s ideas on the family and marriage and his own solutions to the crisis of the family, will be discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Introduction

Tolstoy (1828 – 1910) and Dostoevsky (1821-1881) were contemporaries who greatly influenced the nineteenth century Russian literary scene. However, the death of Dostoevsky in 1881 about one month before the murder of Tsar Alexander II places his analysis of the Russian family in a social context of political reform. Tolstoy's work after Dostoevsky's death was subject to the conservatism of Alexander III (Hingley 70-2). In order to understand the radically different solutions that the two authors suggest for the crisis of the Russian family, it is important to compare and contrast the approaches these authors take toward the crisis itself.

I focus on the latter period of Dostoevsky's and Tolstoy's work because the crisis of the Russian family is more pronounced during this time and occupies both of the authors' attention. The great reforms following the emancipation of serfs in 1861 led to the following problematics, among others, which affected family life and personal relations: the transformational effects of industrialization and political liberalization of society; the loss of traditional values and the search for new moral ideals; the emancipation of women; prostitution, and the peasants' migration to the cities.

Tolstoy focused on the contemporary Russian family life; in his late work he suggested that marriage did not work, and was not a sustainable relationship. Tolstoy's ideas on the future of the Russian family changed later on in life, after his conversion experience. When he wrote *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889), he was already a public and influential figure thanks to his works

*War and Peace* (1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1873 to 1877). His writings transcended the political struggle between conservatives, liberals and revolutionaries. He focused on the universality of the crisis in marriage and its effects on human relations in the private sphere of family life.

Tolstoy's later views were so radical as to provoke a major debate amongst Russian *intelligentsia*. *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) and *The Power of Darkness* (1886) were not only written after Tolstoy's religious conversion and thus expressed his changed views, they also portrayed the changing nature of family relationships and the crisis that gripped the family during the decades of rapid societal transformation and the development of capitalism in the post-Reform era.

Dostoevsky contrasted the dysfunctional Karamazov family with the Captain Snegiryov family and presented a vision of a future communal family in *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* (1877). He was interested in the changes that the family was undergoing in a period when society itself was in crisis. It is coincidental that *The Brothers Karamazov*, which focuses on the dark subject of patricide, was published a year before the father of the nation, Tsar Alexander II, was murdered. Dostoevsky was in favour of the reforming Tsar and was a close friend of Konstantin Pobedonostsev (Hingley 71). Thus, Dostoevsky was a supporter of the Tsar and died two months before the assassination of the tsar, at the age of 59, placing his works in a period of government sponsoring reforms. The great reform of 1861 brought about the disintegration of the age-old institution of serfdom and challenged the old class structure, simultaneously creating a crisis of old morality and a search for new moral beacons. The collapse of the old institutions brought sexuality to the fore.

Through the play *The Power of Darkness* (1886) and the novella *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889), Tolstoy expresses his concerns about the disintegration of the Russian family, in peasant family life and in the upper class, respectively. Both stories end in disaster leading Tolstoy to his most radical conclusions about marriage and family life, such as preaching chastity within marriage. In Russian society romantic love and passion as sexual attraction, for the first time, began to determine family relationships, as opposed to financial convenience. This poses the question about whether these bonds are strong enough to make happy families. Tolstoy argues that this is not the case as sexual attraction and sex drive are impure by definition. He argues that happiness in a new bourgeois marriage for love is just as illusory as in the old aristocratic marital alliances, or in peasants' arranged marriages. Both models, he claims, are based on faulty premises, advocating instead a pure Christian love free of sinful sex drive, as a radical alternative.

Some of the questions raised by Tolstoy through his character Pozdnyshev, were familiar to Dostoevsky. Unlike Tolstoy, Dostoevsky never wrote overtly on the topics of marriage, women and sexuality. However, as R. L. Jackson points out in his book *Dialogues with Dostoevsky: The Overwhelming Questions* (1996), the problem of sexuality in the life of the individual and society concerned him profoundly. "The expression of sensual activity was also connected to the experience of inflicting violence on others with the underlying threat of danger to the welfare and spiritual health of both individual and society"(212). In *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, Dostoevsky shows that sensuality is the source of all sins of mankind, writing, "I never noticed in them the impulse of that cruel sensuality which overcomes almost every man on this earth, all and each, and is the source of almost all sins of mankind on earth" (Dostoevsky, *The Dream of 21*). This approach to sexuality would agree with Tolstoy's attitude towards sex.

According to Merezhkovskij, both authors consider sexuality as something evil that can lead man to unspeakable violence (476). However, in the conclusion of *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* Dostoevsky proposes an ideal of communal life, but not chastity.

Therefore, both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky recognize the Biblical “goal” in which man will be united in “universal love”. Both authors see this goal as something that can be attained through moral and spiritual progress of humanity. According to Jackson, both authors view marriage and sexuality as something that “stands in the way of attaining that goal”, both recognize the goal as an “ideal” toward which men will strive, yet Tolstoy is more radical in his exhortation to strive towards this ideal (213). Dostoevsky’s central idea in his notebook in 1863 is that the whole history of humanity (development, struggle, striving and achievement) is a striving towards the goal of a state of universality in which the “law of the ‘I’ [will] merge with the law of humanism and the individual will attain his highest development and this way achieve the paradise of Christ”.

Although Foucault writes a century later, Dostoevsky could be seen as an exponent of Foucault’s concept of the deployment of alliance, depicting sexuality as a negative force in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Over twenty years elapse between the comments written in his notebook and the writing of *The Brothers Karamazov*. However, Dostoevsky remains firm in his convictions, exemplified by the contrast between Alyosha and his brothers. Having taken up monastic orders Alyosha is the only one of the brothers who is able to love and forgive his father. Dmitri and Ivan, instead, are driven by earthly passions such as jealousy, greed for money, and sensual desires that lead to hate which ultimately results in Smerdyakov committing patricide. Alyosha lives Dostoevsky’s ideal of a religious life; his brothers instead, by abandoning this ideal, live in misery, and Captain Snegiryov lives the compromise of a

harmonious arranged family. Jackson is right in stating that, according to Dostoevsky, man must maintain a delicate balance between family and sexuality, considering his time on earth as a transitory state and Christ's teachings only as an ideal. There is "duality" between ideal and practice; that is, man must live with opposing truths or realities while striving for the ideal (Jackson 215). Tolstoy does not believe that human development through the existing marriage arrangements will naturally reach this conclusion. He takes more seriously the oncoming trends towards what Foucault calls the "deployment of sexuality" as a greater threat to the family, and looks for a more radical solution. Dostoevsky acknowledges and disapproves of the signs of the deployment of sexuality within the family; he favours the deployment of alliance. Tolstoy goes one step further, reaching more extreme conclusions.

I have chosen *The Power of Darkness* as an example of peasant family life and *The Kreutzer Sonata* as an example of family life in aristocratic classes. An analysis of the peasant family in *The Power of Darkness* shows the total collapse of civilized behaviour. *Vlast' T'my* (*The Power of Darkness*) is a realistic tragedy of peasant life conceived as an illustration of one of Tolstoy's favourite later themes, which is suggested by the subtitle *If One Claw is Caught the Whole Bird is Lost*. My enquiry into the nature of the "power of darkness" leads me to argue that Tolstoy believed that darkness is pervasive and takes different forms. The "Power of Darkness" refers to the Kingdom of the Devil, the darkness of sins, which permeated the existence of the peasants. There is a relevant passage in the gospel of John when Jesus contrasts darkness and light saying: "Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed" (John 3:20). The characters in the play do not follow Christian virtues and morality (apart from Akim) and therefore commit abominable acts such as incest and infanticide. According to Tolstoy, the future of the Russian family should be based on moral and



spiritual education, especially for the lower classes. However, even though there may be spiritual education, “darkness” can be interpreted as the new political and social order, the new social relations, and the development of capitalism following the abolition of serfdom in 1861; all of which simple and honest villagers like Akim cannot understand. Peasants were freed from obligatory work, but had to buy their lands leaving them in debt to former landlords and now they also employed each other and had to manage their own affairs. Moreover, “Power of Darkness” means lack of general education, as shown in the examples of colloquial and genuinely popular language. The incorrect usage of language by some of the peasants in the play indicates that by “darkness” Tolstoy there means the darkness of illiteracy. Finally, “darkness” in the play becomes symbolic of anything considered superstitious, ignorant, primordial and primitive. When burying the murdered infant, Anis’ia is preoccupied with finding a cross and making the sign of the cross over the dead infant; the belief that such an act can somehow ameliorate murder is a superstitious expression of faith.

*The Kreutzer Sonata* is not a story about women, the female characters remain unnamed. Thus, the lady on the train, the wife, the nurse, the wife’s sister and her mother do not have names. The only exception is Lisa, Pozdnyshev’s daughter. Tolstoy addresses the issue of the emancipation of women in Russia (as voiced by the lady on the train) and presents contemporary male attitudes towards sex and marriage as containing the seeds of destruction of family life. He tackles the problem of the right of women to choose their own partner and to love whom they like. However, if *Anna Karenina* (1873-1877) is clearly a novel about the aristocratic class, *The Kreutzer Sonata* deals with the decline of the aristocratic family and the rise of the bourgeois family. It depicts a new kind of marriage, the bourgeois marriage. Based on feelings and emotions instead of financial convenience (*брак по любви*) (Zalambani 7), both types of

marriage arrangement are criticized by Tolstoy through the rationalisations of Pozdnyshev and in his *Afterword*.

When viewed through the lens of Foucault's paradigm, Tolstoy neither proposes the deployment of alliance nor the deployment of sexuality; he champions what I term the deployment of "charitable chastity". Tolstoy demonstrates the immoral consequences of sexual passions in *The Power of Darkness*. The adulterous relationship between Nikita and Anisi'a leads to the murder of her husband, and the second illicit affair between Nikita and Akulina culminates in infanticide. This repulsion towards the sexual act is even more intense in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Pozdnyshev views sexuality within marriage as the root of all evil that leads him to murder his wife. Tolstoy also expresses this idea in the *Afterword to The Kreutzer Sonata*, where he suggests that there should be chastity and charity within marriage.

### Development of Tolstoy's Ideas on Marriage and Family Life

Tolstoy had addressed the topics of family, love and marriage twenty years earlier. The connection between Tolstoy's personal life and his literary work was very close. As Pliuchanova points out, Tolstoy's ideas about the family were based on his personal experience (Pliuchanova: 695). At the beginning of his career he wrote *Family Happiness* (1859), in which the family is portrayed in an optimistic and positive light. Tolstoy's views on the family were much "rosier" in the 1860s than in the 1880s when he was very disappointed with life. He then started to hate family life and consider it the source of human misery:

Tolstoy presents marriage more directly and more searchingly than any other writer. In *Family Happiness* Tolstoy envisages the marriage; in *War and Peace* (1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1873-1877) he describes it; in *The Kreutzer Sonata* he denounces it. However, in *Anna Karenina* (long before *The Kreutzer Sonata*), he associates sexual passion with murder (Bayley 52).

Tolstoy was very interested in the mechanisms of family life. He constantly thought about the relationships between a man and a woman within the family. He understood quite early the power of sexuality. Tolstoy's spiritual crisis, traditionally dated in the later 1870s, had developed slowly for much of his life, and its progress can be discerned in his increasing dissatisfaction, as shown in *Anna Karenina*. As this novel (begun in March 1873) took shape, he found its focus on adultery extremely distressing (Rowe 9). After his crisis he had turned first to the Orthodox Church, but had soon become convinced that a simpler and more basic Christian creed was required (Bayley 13). The Orthodox religion, with its oppressive church, was unacceptable to Tolstoy. He challenged the authority of the Church and its dogma. In 1855 he wrote in his diary: "A conversation about divinity has suggested to me a great idea... the founding of a new religion... the religion of Christianity but purged of dogmatism and mysticism; a practical religion not promising future bliss, but giving bliss on earth." His crisis of the mid-1870s led him to seek salvation in the peasantry. He then wrote the philosophical essay *Confession* (1879-80), in which he suddenly realized that everything that had provided meaning in his life, family happiness and artistic creation, was in fact meaningless (Figs 242). In this work, Tolstoy relates the moral and spiritual suffering he endured in his search for an answer to the meaning of life.

After writing *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy not only negated the possibility of family happiness, but took a more severe view and stated that sexual relationships in marriage are not productive, but destructive. He wrote about the breakdown of the family ideal as both a catastrophe in its own right and the incarnation of the larger processes of disintegration he saw all around him. He preached the abolition of every aspect of modern society, which he considered a transgression of the natural rights of man, and a return to communal subsistence farming. In *Family Happiness*, he sees goodness and truth under the natural light of the moon, and bad influences under the artificial light of ballrooms and salons. Moreover, after his “conversion” Tolstoy abandoned smoking and drinking, became a vegetarian, and often dressed in simple peasant clothes. In the hope of more closely approaching his ideal of chastity, he lived a life of asceticism (Simmons 689). His contemporaries understood this as a sign of Tolstoy’s madness.

In 1886 the Tsarist Government celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the liberation of the serfs and tried to show that their conditions had largely improved during the post-reform period. Tolstoy published his play precisely the year of this anniversary to show the real situation of the peasants in Russia. He focused on the primitivism of rural Russia and proclaimed a Christian message that evil behaviour is contagious. Tolstoy portrays horrible murders committed by peasants; they understand what is right and wrong, but are enticed by greed or, as Tolstoy’s epigraph implies, lust. However, Tolstoy shows also their capacity to repent and be redeemed.

In *The Kreutzer Sonata* Tolstoy proposed the paradox of the late nineteenth-century family. According to him, the family did not successfully work because sexual relations between

husband and wife are based on lust, which distracts people from the higher purpose of life. In other words, he showed that marriages are not sustainable relationships. Thus, he re-thought family relationships and suggested a new model of family life based on absolute chastity within marriage, even if that would mean the end of the human race. However, his views on chastity also indicate that while in some ways Tolstoy's religion, by removing the supernatural and spiritual elements, seems to have had a very practical emphasis, in fact his overall doctrine was one of renunciation of the flesh (Shklovsky 508).

Nevertheless, Tolstoy himself could not follow what he preached in life. He had a strong sex drive, and in addition to his thirteen children by his wife Sonya, there were at least a dozen other children fathered by him in the villages of his estate. In particular, he had an affair with Aksinia Bazykina, a twenty-two-year old peasant woman who represented more than a sexual conquest for Tolstoy. She was a personification of what was good and beautiful in the Russian peasant woman: she was proud, and strong and suffering (Figs 241). This experience led to the novel *The Devil*, written in 1889, but published only posthumously in 1911. *The Devil* is about Tolstoy's love affair with Aksinia both before and after his marriage. Thus, sex is also the main concern of *The Devil*: a man deeply in love with his young wife cannot overcome his lust for a pretty peasant girl. Tolstoy's life was full of contradictions. If on the one hand he loved society, on the other he hated it. Although he embraced the elite culture of the aristocracy, his quest for a simple life of toil was a constant theme. Besides, his whole life was a struggle to renounce that little world of shameful privilege and to live "by the sweat of his own brow" (Figs 239). He believed in pacifism and non-resistance, but could be the most arrogant and difficult of men. He was a deep conservative, and yet he was sure that the future must be transformed by a whole new philosophy of peace, progress and love. Although he opposed the Orthodox Church, he admired

the peasants' simple faith and innocence. In *The Power of Darkness* he shows the consequences for those who abandon this faith and are caught up by lustful passions instead.

#### *A Peasant Family in The Power of Darkness (1886)*

*The Power of Darkness* is a harsh play about peasant life and is based on a true story. It was written in 1886 with the express purpose of ethical and spiritual indoctrination (Simmon 689). Tolstoy in *The Power of Darkness* showed that rural Russia was still in a state of deplorable primitivism and ignorance. Although they may have been liberated from slavery, the peasants were still held captive in other ways. He also wanted to announce a Christian message warning about the contagiousness of evil behaviour. Tolstoy subtitled his play "If One Claw is Caught the Whole Bird is Lost". In *The Power of Darkness* the author shows how one crime inevitably causes another, until they eventually crush the protagonist under a burden of guilt. Moreover, another possible interpretation in keeping with this theme is that when one "member" of the family, be it Anis'ia, Nikita, or Matrena, is caught up in evil, it causes others to perish. In this play, the truth with which Tolstoy confronted his audience, imaginatively and artistically, was powerfully reinforced by being founded on fact.

*The Power of Darkness* was staged during the twenty-fifth anniversary of the emancipation of serfs in Russia. Across the country celebrations were made commemorating the great reforms of Alexander II. These celebrations were ironic as that same year of 1886 restrictive legislation on the peasant family and the commune was introduced (Taranovski 123). Since the murder of his father, Alexander III implemented policies that significantly limited any further reform for the peasantry. Taranovski states that "the tragic end of the reformer signified

also the end of the reform era” (122) and these counter reforms aimed to repress social initiative and to subordinate peasant self-government to the bureaucracy, by implanting land captains through the country. While the socio-political improvements of Russian society were celebrated in newspapers throughout the land, Tolstoy in his play, depicted peasants as devoid of morality (apart from his two wise old men). The lack of moral principles leads the characters in *The Power of Darkness* to commit abominable acts, such as incest and infanticide. This shows that greed and lust can lead to the worst of crimes. Tolstoy portrays the peasants as being crude, cruel, aggressive, greedy, and materialistic. Thus, violence and cruelty are depicted as sins in his drama, and weaknesses in the rational understanding of the law of the Father (Bayley 50).

Tolstoy became more and more opposed to Orthodoxy, once he no longer felt that it bound him to the old beliefs of the common people. Tolstoy was drawn to the dissident sects of the Old Believers, who had refused to accept the reforms introduced into the Russian Orthodox Church two hundred years earlier. His clash with the vitriolic church was very severe and it led finally to his excommunication in 1901 by the Holy Synod (Bayley 48).

The play provoked a furious intervention by the Procurator of the Holy Synod, K. P. Pobedonostsev. He considered Tolstoy a nihilist and deemed the play to be vulgar, brutal and immoral. The Procurator then convinced the Tsar to ban all performances on the day before the dress rehearsal. Thus, the play could not be produced in Russia before 1895, whereas it was staged in Paris as early as 1888 (at the Théâtre Antoine) (Leach, Borovsky 151).

This five-act tragedy is based on a true court case, which Tolstoy learned about from a friend who was the investigator. The actual court case was about a thirty-seven year old peasant, Koloskov, who married a widow. She had a daughter from her previous relationship. Koloskov

then had a relationship with this daughter, and a baby was born. They tried to hide the situation, but his wife was ready to kill the baby. Koloskov did kill it and hid the body in the backyard.

Tolstoy in his play *Power of Darkness*, describes two families. The first, a peasant village family, consists of Matreona, fifty years old, her husband Akim, also fifty, a plain-looking and God-fearing peasant, and their son Nikita. The second family consists of Petr, a well-to-do peasant, forty-two years old, married for the second time, and sickly; Anis'ia, his wife, thirty-two years old, and fond of clothes; and Akulina, Petr's daughter by his first marriage, sixteen years old, hard of hearing and mentally undeveloped. Petr also has another daughter by his first marriage, who is ten years old. In the introduction, Tolstoy says Nikita (the son) is 25 and Anis'ia 32, in the opening scene it is made obvious that they are engaged in an adulterous relationship – and the age difference is an important aspect which partly accounts both for Anis'ia as a potential seductress, unhappy with her sickly husband, and Nikita's wandering ways with the sixteen year old elder daughter.

The play's plot revolves around Nikita, who represent the equivalent of Koloskov in the actual court case, and, works as a labourer on Petr's estate. Nikita has an affair with his master's wife, Anis'ia. His evil mother Matrena sees this as a good career move by her son, while his God-fearing father, Akim, wants Nikita to marry an orphan girl, twenty-two years old, whom Nikita has seduced. At the instigation of Matrena, the master (Petr) is poisoned by his wife Anis'ia, who then marries Nikita. Initially, Nikita enjoys his newly acquired position as gentleman farmer, but after a while he falls victim to the many temptations of his new lifestyle. He spends most of his time partying and drinking, and wastes most of Anis'ia's money. Moreover, Nikita becomes tired of her, so he seduces and impregnates his stepdaughter Akulina.



Obviously, Akulina and her baby cannot stay at the farmstead, and at the instigation of Matrena, Nikita kills the new-born baby by crushing it to death and burying it in the cellar. Matrena then decides to marry off Akulina and asks Nikita to join the wedding party of Akulina and her bridegroom in order to give them blessing. The last act deals with Akulina's wedding to the son of a neighbour. She is forced into the marriage because of her misfortune. The peasants all gather for the occasion, but Nikita is missing: he wanders round the place haunted by the horrible phantom of his murdered child. He attempts to hang himself but fails, and finally decides to go in front of the whole village community to confess his crimes.

There is a distinct contrast between Nikita's parents. While the father, Akim, is devoted solely to Christian values, his mother, Matrena, is manipulative and greedy. Nikita is an honest character, but influenced by the evil spirit of his mother. Thus, the inner process Nikita has to go through is one of "peeling off the layers of voluptuousness, selfishness, and greed implanted in him by his mother" (Zweers 28). Tolstoy in his play wants to stress precisely the personal development and inner conversion of the peasant Nikita. Nikita acts under the evil influence of his mother, but he has also some inborn goodness. He is a very weak character that cannot resist the influence of his parents and thinks that outside evil forces have taken advantage of his weakness. Moreover, he cannot resist or control his sexual desire towards Anis'ia in the first instance, and then subsequently towards Akulina. In *The Power of Darkness*, sexual passion is a negative force that drives man into abject baseness and precipitates unspeakable violence. Furthermore, Tolstoy wants to stress the lack of moral principles that leads peasants into evil selfishness and violence. Human greed and uncontrolled sexual drives are a manifestation and a consequence of the fact that in the play, peasants are not acting in accordance with the Bible's teaching, and do not follow the Law of the Father. Not only Nikita, but also Matreona commits

several crimes. Matreona buys poison at the pharmacy, requests Anis'ia to poison Petr, and together with Anis'ia forces Nikita to bury Akulina's baby in the cellar. Matreona encourages Nikita to drink alcohol, another attribute of the demon in Russian folk tradition.

As Bayley points out, Tolstoy thought that evil could be corrected by living like the unspoiled peasants (Bayley 50). For Tolstoy, the positive aspects of peasant life were living in contact with the nature, working hard, practicing a simple faith and living a life not corrupted by the power of money, as was the case for the upper classes. However, there is a temptation that is uncontrollable and enslaving for Tolstoy, the sexual drive, the carnal temptation, as clearly indicated in the epigraph from St Matthew (5:28-29):

А я говорю вам, что всякий, кто смотрит на женщину с вожделением,  
уже прелюбодействовал с нею в сердце своем.

Если же правый глаз соблазняет тебя, вырви его и брось от себя, ибо  
лучше, чтобы погиб один из членов твоих, а не все тело твое было ввержено  
в геенну.<sup>47</sup>

The “member” (here the eye) is like the claw of the bird in the play's subtitle. In the play lust leads the characters to commit grave sins, such as incest and infanticide. The play starts with Nikita and Anis'ia already in an adulterous affair, which is based on lust; Nikita cannot control his sexual drive and, once married to Anis'ia, has a sexual liaison with her stepdaughter.

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<sup>47</sup> And I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from thee: for it is better to lose one of your members, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell (Mathew 5: 28, 29).

There is an important scene in the play where soon after his marriage Nikita has already become tired of Anis'ia and is in search of new pleasures; he has taken his stepdaughter to town to buy her new fashionable clothes. When he returns home drunk he is confronted by his father who is very shocked by his son's behaviour and tells him that he feels uncomfortable in his home. Akim also tells Nikita that he needs to purify his soul, as shown in the following quotations:

“Ты в богатстве, тае, как в сетях. В сетях ты, значит. Ах, Микишка, душа надобна!”

“Опамятуйся, Микита. Душа надобна”<sup>48</sup>

Akim refers here to negative effects of wealth or material well-being that have entangled Nikita- “where's your soul” or “think about your soul” alludes to the Gospel verse – “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26).

Nikita is in a drunken state, but he is also an uneducated peasant who does not have the intellectual resources to argue against his father's accusation that he lacks a soul. Thus, Nikita can only react with emotions: he has a nervous collapse and weeps. Obviously, Tolstoy deals with the problem of education in his play. Tolstoy had no liking for urban civilization, fast becoming industrial in the West, and even in Russia beginning to go the same way. He appreciated the rural simplicities of peasant life. The peasants' idyll had been spoiled by an institution he knew to be unfair - serfdom and he welcomed its end. However, the patriarchal order in the country accorded with his emotions and seemed to him morally right. The basis of

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<sup>48</sup> “You're in your riches same as in a net - you're in a net, I mean. Ah, Nikita, it's the soul that God needs! (Tolstoy 79). “Come to your senses, Nikita! It's the soul that God wants!” (Tolstoy 80).

Tolstoy's thinking was always to remain agrarian (Bayley 4-5). Throughout nearly his entire literary career, Tolstoy spent time exploring problems related to society. As Souder points out, one of the questions he asked himself was: What was the role of the peasants in society?

Russia's peasants remained mostly illiterate, despite over a century of educational reforms. When Tolstoy was thirty-two years old, by the time of the 1860 Census, the peasant class were twenty three million, almost one-third of the whole population (Souder, *The Pupil of the People*). As the historian Ben Eklof points out in his work *Russian Peasant Schools: Officialdom, Village Culture, and Popular Pedagogy* (1886):

The history of Russian popular education before 1864 is one of sweeping projects occasionally passed as laws but almost never carried out in practice.

[Empress Catherine II] is known to have felt that too much education for the *chern'* (pebs) was dangerous for the social order...there was no provision for the funding of peasant schools (Eklof 19-24).

Tolstoy's desire to change Russian society by improving the life of peasants is reflected in his attempt to explore popular education in the late 1850s. In particular, at the end of the 1850s he founded his own school, teaching in it himself and publishing a journal to record the experiment and to promote his ideas. According to Souder, although this venture lasted only three years, it underlined the paramount effort of Tolstoy to change the state of Russia's educational system. At Iasnaia Poliana, where Tolstoy spent much of his childhood and where he was brought up by two of his aunts after the early deaths of his mother and father, he acquired first-hand knowledge of the peasant in the field.

Tolstoy believed that the rich and powerful did not want to change the social structure because they were afraid of losing their privileges. “That this social order with its pauperism, famines, prisons, gallows, armies, and wars is necessary to society; that still greater disaster would ensue if this organization were destroyed; all this is said only by those who profit by this organization, while those who suffer from it, and they are ten times as numerous, think and say quite the contrary” (*The Kingdom of God is with You* 320).

A diary note on the plan of a proposed novel titled *A Landlord's Morning* (1856) suggests what his intentions had been in his experiment of improving the lot of the peasants and servants on his estate, and the consequences that followed:

The hero searches for the realization of an ideal of happiness and justice in a country existence. Not finding it, he becomes disillusioned and wishes to search for his ideal in family life. His friend introduces him to the thought that happiness does not consist of an ideal but may be found in continued vital work that has for its purpose the happiness of others. (*Introduction to Tolstoy's writings* 33)

Tolstoy highlights illiteracy and educational darkness. “Темный” is a colloquial word for “uneducated, illiterate”. Thus darkness is not just sin; it is also lack of education, which often goes hand in hand with moral depravity.

“Power of Darkness” can also be understood as the new order, the development of capitalism (following the abolition of the serfdom in 1861), that simple and honest villagers like Akim cannot understand. In Scene V of Act III, Akim does not understand capitalism and thinks that banks deceive people. He does not understand the concept of “interest” and therefore defines banks as “скверность” (nastiness). In addition, as shown in the following quotation, Tolstoy

uses expressions such as *положил в банку деньги* (he put the money in the jar, in the pot) rather than *положил в банк деньги* (he put the money at the bank), precisely to emphasize the fact that Akim does not understand banks. They are a new concept for him, brought about by the development of the cities, and therefore he associates the new word *банк* (bank) with the word *банка* (jar), the latter being already part of his cultural and linguistic background. The following quotation illustrates this well:

Аким (вздыхая). Эх, посмотрю я, тае, и без денег, тае, горе, а с деньгами, тае, вдвое. Как же так. Бог трудиться велел. А ты, значит, тае, положил в банку деньги, да и спи, а деньги тебя, значит, тае, поваля кормить будут. Скверность это, значит, не по закону это.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, in the play Akim thinks that the “new” toilets in town (a manifestation of the urban civilization, fast becoming industrial in the West and even in Russia beginning to go the same way) are not needed. This is illustrated in the following quotation, which indicates that Akim is a supporter of the old system and does not understand the new social developments that were happening at the time:

Аким (вздыхает). Да уж, видно, время, тае, подходит. Тоже сортиры, значит, тае, посмотрел я в городу. Как дошли то есть. Выглажено, выглажено, значит, нарядно. Как трактир иделано. А ни к чему. Всё ни к

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<sup>49</sup> АКІМ [*sighing*] Oh dear, I see, what d'ye call it, without money it's bad, and with money it's worse! How's that? God told us to work, but you, what d'ye call ... I mean you put money into the bank and go to sleep, and the money will what d'ye call it, will feed you while you sleep. It's filthy, that's what I call it; it's not right (Tolstoy 49).

чему. Ох, бога забыли. Забыли, значит. Забыли, забыли мы бога-то, бога-то.  
Спасибо, родная, сыт, доволен.<sup>50</sup>

Tolstoy hated money, his ideal was simple peasant life based on Christian principles. All this development was abhorrent for him. For Tolstoy this new social development is not only a sign of peasants' illiteracy and ignorance, but also a manifestation of his own understanding of the inner nature of capitalism.

Finally, "Power of Darkness" can be interpreted as Kingdom of the Devil, the darkness of sin. The evil characters in the play (Matrena, Anis'ia and Nikita) are depicted as devoid of morality; they are not acting in accordance with God's teachings. Consequently, they commit abominable acts. For example, when Nikita sleeps with his stepdaughter, he commits incest, defined in Leviticus as "intimate relations between relatives or in-laws within a degree that prohibits marriage between them" (Lev 18:7-20). Specifically, Nikita's offense is referred to in Leviticus as "Do not have sexual relations with both a woman and her daughter. That is wickedness" Lev 18:17). St Paul stigmatizes this especially grave offense: "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you...for a man is living with his father's wife...In the name of the Lord Jesus...you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh...." (Cor 5:1, 4-5). Incest corrupts family relationships and marks a regression towards animality. Connected to incest is any sexual abuse perpetrated by adults on children or adolescents entrusted to their care. The offense is compounded by the scandalous harm done to the physical and moral integrity of

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<sup>51</sup> AKÍM [*sighs*] Ah yes, seems the time's what d'ye call it, the time's growing ripe. There, I've had a look at the toilets in town. What they've come to! It's all polished and polished I mean, it's fine, it's what d'ye call it, it's like inside an inn. And what's it all for? What's the good of it? Oh, they've forgotten God. Forgotten, I mean. We've forgotten, forgotten God, God I mean! Thank you, my dear, I've had enough. I'm quite satisfied [*Rises. Mitritch climbs on to the oven*].

the young, who will remain scarred by it all their lives, and the violation of responsibility for their upbringing.

Leviticus reports other examples of unlawful relations. Nikita's offense is described in Leviticus: "Do not have sexual relations with both a woman and her daughter. That is wickedness" (Lev 18:17); "If a man sleeps with his daughter-in-law, both of them must be put to death. What they have done is a perversion; their blood will be on their own heads" (Lev 20:12); and "If a man marries both a woman and her mother, it is wicked. Both he and they must be burned in the fire, so that no wickedness will be among you" (Lev 20:14).

Matrena is a schemer without scruples. Her role in the drama is best shown in Act II, Scene XVIII of the play, whereas she had previously advised Anis'ia to poison Petr, she now advises Nikita to take Petr's money, so that Anis'ia will be in his hands. Matrena wants her son to become the master of Petr's house and to marry him to Anis'ia, as she sees this as beneficial status-wise and financially for Nikita. The following quotation highlights the true nature of Matrena: she is manipulative, greedy and thinks only about money:

Матрена. Эка ты, сынок, судишь! Разве баба может обдумать? Если что и возьмет она деньги, где ж ей обдумать, – бабье дело известно, а ты все мужик. Ты, значит, можешь и спрятать и все такое. У тебя все-таки ума больше, коли чего коснется.

Никита. Эх! женское ваше понятие несостоятельное совсем.



Матрена. Как же необстоятельно! Ты заграбь денежки-то. Баба-то у тебя в руках будет. Если случаем и похрапывать начнет или что, ей укороту можно сделать.<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, Matrena is a liar, as reflected in the following passage, where she says that it was Petr who gave the money to Akulina and the property to Anis'ia (Act IV, Scene 3).

Akim's kindness and simplicity are opposed by the viciousness and greed of his wife:

Матрена. Я тебе, сват, истинно говорю: кабы не я, в жисть бы тебе не найти. У них от Кормилиных тоже засылка была, уж я застояла. А насчет денег – верно сказываю: как покойник, царство небесное, помирал, так и приказывал, чтоб в дом вдова Микиту приняла, потому мне через сына все известно, а денежки, значит, Акулине. Ведь другой бы покорыствовался, а Микита все дочиста отдает. Легко ли, деньжищи какие.<sup>52</sup>

*The Power of Darkness* is a horrible picture of poverty, ignorance and superstition.

“Darkness” becomes the symbol of anything superstitious, ignorant, primordial and primitive.

For example, Matrena thinks that people are under the influence of an evil spell. But in reality it is rather she herself who constantly acts under its influence. Nikita is a weak character who cannot resist his mother's influence. When Nikita repents and confesses his sins (Act V, Scene 2

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<sup>51</sup> MATRYÓNA. Ah, sonnie, how you look at it! How can a woman manage such affairs? Even if she does get the money, is she capable of arranging it all? One knows what a woman is! You're a man anyhow. You can hide it, and all that. You see, you've after all got more sense, in case of anything happening [Trans. By Louise Maude, Aylmer Maude].

NIKÍTA. Oh, your woman's notions are all so inexpedient!

MATRYÓNA. Why inexpedient? You just collar the money, and the woman's in your hands. And then should she ever turn snappish you'd be able to tighten the reins!

<sup>52</sup> I'll tell you straight, friend: if it hadn't been for me, you'd never have found anything like her! They've had an offer from the Karmilins, but I stood out against it. And as for the money, I'll tell you truly: when her father, God be merciful to his soul, was dying, he gave orders that the widow should take Nikíta into the homestead—of course I know all about it from my son,—and the money was to go to Akoulína. Why, another one might have thought of his own interests, but Nikíta gives everything clean! It's no trifle. Fancy what a sum it is!

of Stage 2), his mother is completely taken aback and exclaims that Nikita is bewitched and is talking nonsense:

Nikita (отстраняет ее плечом). Оставь! А ты, батюшка, слушай.

Первое дело: Маринка, гляди сюда. (Кланяется ей в ноги и поднимается.)

Виноват я перед тобой, обещал тебя замуж взять, соблазнил тебя. Тебя обманул, кинул, прости меня Христа ради! (Опять кланяется в ноги).

Matrena. О-ох, напущено это на него. И что это сделалось? Попорчен он. Встань. Что пустое болтаешь! (Тянет его).

Nikita. (отталкивает жену, поворачивается к Акулине). Акулина, к тебе речь теперь. Слушайте, мир православный! Окаянный я. Акулина! виноват я перед тобой. Твой отец не своею смертью помер. Ядом отравили его.<sup>53</sup>

Finally, Matrena wants to marry off Akulina to the son of a neighbour, and when the father of the groom (Svat, literally ‘matchmaker’) goes to Matrena’s house to visit Akulina, Akulina does not show up because she is pregnant and therefore wants to hide her condition. Matrena justifies Akulina’s absence by saying that someone has cast a bad spell on her, as shown in the following quotation of Act IV, Scene III:

Матрена. И, и... Она-то хворая? Да против ней в округе нет. Девка как литая – не ущипнешь. Да ведь ты намедни видел. А работать страсть. С

<sup>53</sup> Nikita. Father, listen to me! First of all, Marina, look at me! I am guilty toward you: I had promised to marry you, and I seduced you. I deceived you and abandoned you; forgive me for Christ's sake!  
Matrena: Oh, oh, he is bewitched. What is the matter with him? He has the evil eye upon him. Get up and stop talking nonsense!  
Nikita: Don't touch me! Forgive me my sin towards you, Marina! Forgive me, for Christ's sake! Your father didn't die a natural death. He was poisoned”

глушинкой она, это точно. Ну, да червоточинка красному яблочку не покор.  
 А что не вышла-то, это, ведашь, с глазу. Сделано над ней. И знаю, чья сука  
 смастерила. Знали, ведашь, что сговор, ну, и напущено. Да я отговор знаю.  
 Завтра встанет девка. Ты насчет девки не сумлевайся.<sup>54</sup>

It is not surprising that the Tsar Alexander III forbade both the production and the printing of the play. As mentioned above, in 1886 the tsarist government was in the process of celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the liberation of the serfs and trying to show that their conditions of life had largely improved since then. Tolstoy showed with his play that, in reality, there had been little progress in the life of the peasants. 1886 was a time of the very rapid development in Russia of capitalism. Also, the bourgeoisie were acquiring more and more economic power. They were changing the everyday life of Russian society. Some elements of society, for various reasons, remained outside the capitalistic development of Russian society. First of all, the landlords (the upper classes of society) were in a very difficult position and from a social and political point of view, did not want change. The supporters of the old order of society, the landlords, had feelings of frustration about the lost old order and the loss of the former social significance of the landlord class. At that time the return of the old order was not possible. Simultaneously, having such feelings, they hated the new style of life, the new order, and felt contempt for the new capitalistic order and the new bourgeois class. Thus, Tolstoy turned his eyes to the peasants, to the farmers, because they were economically connected to the landlords. Some peasants embraced bourgeois society, others were critical of the bourgeoisie and

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<sup>54</sup> MATRYÓNA. Oh, ah... Who? She? Sickly? Why, there's none to compare with her in the district. The girl's as sound as a bell; you can't pinch her. But you saw her the other day! And as for work, she's wonderful! She's a bit deaf, that's true, but there are spots on the sun, you know. And her not coming out, you see, it's from an evil eye! A spell's been cast on her! And I know the bitch who's done the business! They know of the betrothal and they bewitched her. But I know a counter-spell. The girl will get up tomorrow. Don't you worry about the girl!

the developments of cities and towns. This group of peasants was traditional; they were religious, patient and lived according to the teachings of the Bible. The landlords went to these peasants for “learning”, to unite with them, to live in a simple way, and to find an answer to the questions of the meaning of life.

Tolstoy was a representative of the landlord class and his drama and its peasant cast reflects this period. It was traditional, in drama, to portray negative and positive characters, but in this play the characters are shown not just as being negative or positive, good or evil. The positive characters in the play are supporters of the patriarchal order, the old order; the negative are peasants who become workers or businessmen (but not Mitrich who is an old ex-soldier and is therefore positive). The main characters in this drama are the “country” bourgeois, not the poor peasants; the latter went to the city and became workers, although urban drift does not appear evident in the play, but can be understood as part of the context. The main representative of the positive characters is Akim, while the main representative of the negative characters is his son Nikita. The family is divided because of their political and economic attitude toward the changes in society. In the introduction to *The Power of Darkness* an unknown critic states that Nikita was engaged in railway works, became a deceiver, liar, rapist, seducer and child killer. He starts drinking alcohol, and spends time in debauchery and drinking. However, he does so after he marries, when he has money; it is not evident that he is a rapist; and the formulaic cause-and-effect relationship implied here – Nikita + railroad = evil is also not evident. Moreover, Tolstoy wants to show us that the supporters of the new order are negative people. Nikita’s father, Akim, by contrast, is a supporter of the love of neighbours and justice. He is representative of the old order. In this drama Akim plays an important role, as he tells Nikita to think of his soul, disapproves of his dissolute ways, of his hiring a worker instead of doing the work himself. At

the end of the drama, Nikita repents of his criminal behaviour and Tolstoy wants to show us that the old patriarchal order (represented by Akim) wins over the new one (represented by Akim's son). However, although Akim is a positive character, in the play he does not understand capitalism and the banks (a manifestation of capitalism). He does not understand the concept of "interest" and thinks that banks are deceiving people. In particular, he thinks that to take interest is a sin, as it is not in keeping with God's teachings ("не по закону": not according to the Law). Despite Akim's ignorance of banking and capitalism, his instinctive virtue and wisdom in moral matters is evident. "If you do not have money you are in trouble, but if you have money you are in double trouble" (Tolstoy 67). In the following dialogue from Scene V of Act III, between Akim and Mitrich (the new labourer at Nikita's estate), Akim's philosophy regarding the new order in society is reflected:

Аким (разгорячась). Да это что ж? Это, тае, значит, скверность. Это мужики, тае, делают так, мужики и то, значит, за грех, тае, почитают. Это, тае, не по закону, не по закону, значит. Скверность это. Как же ученые-то, тае...

Митрич. Это, брат, у них самое любезное дело. А ты помни. Вот кто поглупей, али баба, да не может сам деньги в дело произвести, он и несет в банку, а они, в рот им ситного пирога с горохом, цапают да этими денежками и облупляют народ-то. Штука умственная!<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>АКІМ [excitedly] Gracious me, whatever is that like? It's what d'ye calls it, it's filthy! The peasants—what d'ye calls it, the peasants do so I mean, and know it's, what d'ye call it, a sin! It's what d'you call, not right, not right, I mean. It's filthy! How can people as have learnt ... what d'ye call it ...

МІТРИЧ. That, old fellow, is just what they're fond of! And remember, them that are stupid, or the women folk, as can't put their money into use themselves, they take it to the bank, and they there, deuce take 'em, clutch hold of it, and with this money they fleece the people. It's a cute thing!

It is possible to be wise even when one is not worldly-wise. Although Akim is described as a simple, honest and God fearing character in the play, he does not understand capitalism and the new development of the banks. So, a parallel can be drawn with Tolstoy and his ideas of the future of the peasant family. While Tolstoy welcomed the end of serfdom in Russia, perceived as an unjust institution, he was a supporter of the patriarchal order in the countryside. This accorded with his emotions and seemed to him morally right. In the play, the positive characters are supporters of the old order in Russia, while the negative characters are supporters of the new order. Tolstoy's socio-political criticism is evident in the play, but his Christian admonition that one will be punished for wrongdoing is even more evident. Through fiction, this play can be defined the "power of enlightenment", as Briggs points out (Briggs 821).

Having lived most of his life in the Russian provinces, Tolstoy was aware of the backwardness of the peasants and of their habit of following their impulses regardless of the consequences. But liberation from passions and viciousness is possible. The story of the peasant Nikita and his confession reminds us of the gospel story of the prodigal son. Nikita, who has committed abominable deeds, at the end of the story repents of his crimes. Nikita's inner conversion in his soul happens through suffering. He suffered for some time and finally confessed in order to assuage his conscience, because he could not live with the guilt as the prodigal son. "He was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15: 32). This shows the innate, instinctive understanding of right and wrong and power of conscience; or Nikita's instinctive goodness and his inability to live with his guilt. Like Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov, his conscience would not let him get away with murder, and Dostoevsky, just as most likely with Tolstoy, would have one believe that conscience comes from God. Nikita had committed several crimes, including the murder of his new-born baby. However, his emotional

development and inner conversion at the climax of the play shows that redemption is possible through repentance. Also, through the character of Akim, a simple, illiterate, and humble villager who keeps reminding everybody that one should think about his/her soul, Tolstoy presents a model to be imitated.

### The Upper Class in *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889)

As we have seen earlier, in *The Power of Darkness* Tolstoy presents contemporary peasant-class attitudes towards the problematic of family, marriage, and love. In *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) the author portrays the same kind of problems in the aristocratic family. However, in *The Kreutzer Sonata* Tolstoy takes more extreme views and makes his most severe criticism of the sexual instinct, by associating sexual passion with murder.

*The Kreutzer Sonata* is a novella written in the late period of Tolstoy's life, after his moral and spiritual crisis of the late 1870s, which culminated in works of fiction defined by his moral concerns. According to Tolstoy's wife Sofya, the idea of the story about the evil effects of sexual relations was given to Tolstoy by the actor V. N. Andreev-Burlak during a visit to the Tolstoy's home at Iasnaia Poliana in 1887. The actor told him that on a train journey a man complained of the unhappiness his wife's infidelity caused him. Tolstoy began to write shortly after, but he completed the story only in 1889. The publication was delayed because it was first distributed in manuscript copies and many private readings were also given. Finally, when it was

time for publication, the censor refused to publish it. Sofya appealed directly to Tsar Alexander III who permitted it to be included in the collection in 1890 (Knowles 822).

As we have seen, for many years Tolstoy was concerned with problems of family life. As Meyers points out, his mother and father both died before he was ten; and he saw marriage as a way to realise his ideal of family happiness as well as to control his sexual drive which appalled him (Meyers 21). In regard to *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Henry Troyat notes that “the theories propounded by this character (Pozdnyshev) are so exact a copy of the author’s convictions that, apart from the murder, the entire story might be autobiographical” (Troyat 161).

The problems that plagued the Tolstoys are reflected in the portrayals of Pozdnyshev and his wife in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. When Tolstoy was thirty four, he fell in love with the eighteen year old Sofya Andreevna Behrs (Sonya), who was living with her parents and two sisters on their nearby estate. Tolstoy and Sofya were both, in different ways, opposed to the social and sexual norms they had inherited from their aristocratic and feudal society, which was torn by contradictions and close to collapse. Men of this class could satisfy their sexual drive with peasant women. However, their wives were supposed to be pure, lovely, innocent and uneducated before marriage and constantly bearing children after it. Tolstoy married Sofya when he was about to enter the most creative phase of his life; he was a nobleman and a landowner, lord of his family and the peasants in his care. However, once his romantic love for Sofya was over, he saw himself as Sofya’s victim and considered love and marriage as a deception. Thus, in the early 1880s Tolstoy made radical changes in his personal habits and began to reject the life and values of his class. Because Sofya embodied the conventional norms that he detested, the two entered into sexual and social conflict. Tolstoy was full of contradictions, he had a big sex



drive and preached chastity; he believed in social reform yet clung to old ways; he also wanted to be a mystic and in search of a spiritual existence which rejected this world (Meyers 20). As Popoff points out, it was not Tolstoy's extra work that annoyed Sophia; she considered her husband's contradictions hard to believe (115). The conventional Sofya was confused and troubled by these unresolved contradictions and believed Tolstoy's behavior was severe and foolish (Meyers 23). Moreover, his wife could not forget his youthful sexual dissipation, as reported in his diary. Nevertheless, Tolstoy was very jealous of Sofya, and she too, was jealous of him. She could not control her own envy of her younger sister, jealousy of his former mistress and anger at his dedication to peasant girls (Meyers 22).

In the twenty-five years between 1863 and 1888 Sofya had thirteen children. Three of them died in infancy and two in childhood, and the rest survived to take sides in their parents' quarrel, edit the Tolstoys' diaries and write their own memoirs. The children's 'participation in their parents' quarrel is also reflected in the plot of *The Kreutzer Sonata* (as described later in more detail). *The Kreutzer Sonata* is the story of the confession of a murderer, Pozdnyshhev, who killed his wife in a fit of jealousy. He was then acquitted by the court because he was considered insane. The story mentions his wife's horrors when he shows her his diary of pre-marital love affairs, his own lust and jealousy, their quarrel about nursing the first child, his wife's suicide attempts and his unsuccessful efforts to run away from home. This misogynistic story is also an attack on the hypocrisy of marriage. Tolstoy's final departure from Iasnaia Poliana was mainly caused by the complex feelings towards his wife in old age; his final departure was a sign of ultimate disapproval of his entire marriage as such (which was in ruin *de facto*).

The story of *The Kreutzer Sonata* opens with a discussion on the subject of sex, love and marriage which happens among a group of passengers occupying a compartment in a train. Each of these passengers expresses his own idea on the topic of marriage. The opinions expressed can be divided into two groups: the first being of a liberal nature, represented by the lawyer and his lady; the other, expressed by the old merchant who defends the old Russian traditional *Domostroi*<sup>56</sup> ideal of marriage based on the fear of God and of the husband. The lady states that “in old days bride and bridegroom did not know each other”, meaning that marriages were arranged. Here Tolstoy refers to the religious sacrament of marriage: the old man replies that “Human beings have a law given to them” and that the problem of love has started to be discussed in society now. The following theme is the role of power between husbands and wives, namely, control by fear. A clerk states that the first thing that should be required of a woman is fear: “Let her fear her husband! That fear!” (Tolstoy 358). The lady replies: “Oh the time for that has passed!” And the old man states that: “That time cannot pass! Eve was made from the rib of a man!” (Tolstoy 358).

This old man’s view, akin to Tolstoy’s, is based on a literal patriarchal understanding of a creation account. “Adam’s rib” can have a poetic connotation (“Woman was made not from man’s foot to be beneath him, nor from his head to be over him, but from his side to be next to him, from under his arm to be protected by him, next to his heart to be loved by him” Matthew Henry, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament* 1708-1710). Karen Armstrong argues that “Whether she is a mother or sister, there is still Eve the temptress in every woman” (*A History of God*). St. Augustine lamented: “Why couldn’t God have created another man as Adam’s

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<sup>56</sup> As we have seen, *the Domostroi* is a matrimonial code of the days of Ivan the Terrible

companion?” The answer is: “for procreation”, considered a sinful act for those who believe women and thoughts of sex corrupt men and keep them from salvation. This is the sort of dogmatic and bizarre thought that dominates the thinking of Pozdnyshev, Tolstoy’s mouthpiece. Note that there are also contrary views among the faithful; one being that that sexual love is a gift from God.

The position of the lady on the question of marriage is that men have given freedom to them, but want women to be submissive. Then the lady argues that a woman is a human being and has the same feelings as a man. The lawyer raises the following question: “What if the wife is unfaithful?” And, the old man replies “That is not admissible”.

The lady’s opinion is that love sanctifies marriage, as highlighted in the following quotation: “брак без любви не есть брак, что только любовь освящает брак и что брак истинный только тот, который освящает любовь”<sup>57</sup> (Tolstoy 360). At the end of the century, in women’s imagination, love acquires an emotional value. Pozdnyshev, the central character of the story, asks: “What kind of love?” And the lady replies: “True love, when such love exists between a man and a woman”. She then clarifies that she means exclusive preference for one above everybody else. The lawyer explains to Pozdnyshev that what she means is that when marriage is not based on love it lacks the element that makes it morally binding. Pozdnyshev asks: “A preference for how long?” and the lady replies “For a long time”, “for life”. Pozdnyshev argues that this happens only in novels and never in real life. While the lady talks about spiritual love, spiritual affinity, Pozdnyshev announces that marriages nowadays are mere deception.

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<sup>57</sup> Marriage without love is not marriage; that love alone sanctifies marriage, and that the real marriage is only such as sanctified by love.

Moreover, he stresses that a husband and wife merely deceive people by pretending to be monogamists, while living polygamously:

У нас люди женятся, не видя в браке ничего, кроме совокупления, и выходит или обман, или насилие. Когда обман, то это легче переносится. Муж и жена только обманывают людей, что они в единобрачии, а живут в многоженстве и в многомужестве. Это скверно, но еще идет; но когда, как это чаще всего бывает, муж и жена приняли на себя внешнее обязательство жить вместе всю жизнь и со второго месяца уж ненавидят друг друга, желают разойтись и все-таки живут, тогда это выходит тот страшный ад, от которого спиваются, стреляются, убивают и отравляют себя и друг друга.<sup>58</sup>

Pozdnyshchev denies the concept of love and argues that the only true marriage is a Christian marriage. In Pozdnyshchev's astonishing story it very soon becomes clear that Pozdnyshchev is a man with a sexual obsession. He confesses the murder of his own wife: "I am Pozdnyshchev, in whose life that critical episode occurred to which you eluded; the episode when he killed his wife" (Tolstoy 363). Pozdnyshchev is a landowner (*Я помещик*) and a graduate from the university. Before marriage he lived dissolutely (*развратно*). However, he thought he was a moral man, as it was common to live dissolutely. He avoided women who might tie his hands by having a child or by attachment to him. He not only considered this moral, but he was also proud

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<sup>58</sup> Among us people marry regarding marriage as nothing but copulation, and the result is either deception or coercion. When it is deception it is easier to bear. The husband and wife merely deceive people by pretending to be monogamists, while living polygamously. That is bad, but still bearable. But when, as most frequently happens, the husband and wife have undertaken the outward obligation of living together all their lives, and begin to hate each other after a month and wish to part but still continue to live together, it leads to that terrible hell which makes people take to drink, shoot themselves, and kill or poison themselves or one another (Tolstoy 363).

of it. He then goes on by announcing that debauchery is freeing oneself from moral relations with a woman with whom one has had physical intimacy:

Разврат ведь не в чем-нибудь физическом, ведь никакое безобразие физическое не разврат; а разврат, истинный разврат именно в освобождении себя от нравственных отношений к женщине, с которой входишь в физическое общение. А это-то освобождение я и ставил себе в заслугу.<sup>59</sup>

Pozdnyshchev calls the relationships between men and women an abyss of error (*Та пучина заблуждения, в которой мы живем относительно женщин и отношений к ним*<sup>60</sup>).

Pozdnyshchev's sexual relationships with his women began when he was only sixteen years old. Furthermore, he thinks that debauchery is good as he has never heard the older people he respected say that it was evil:

Так от тех старших людей, мнения которых я уважал, я ни от кого не слышал, чтобы это было дурно. Напротив, я слышал от людей, которых я уважал, что это было хорошо. Я слышал, что мои борьбы и страдания утешаться после этого, я слышал это и читал, слышал от старших, что для здоровья это будет хорошо; от товарищей же слышал, что в этом есть некоторая заслуга, молодечество. Так что вообще, кроме хорошего, тут ничего не виделось.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Dissoluteness does not lie in anything physical, no kind of physical misconduct is debauchery; real debauchery lies precisely in freeing oneself from moral relations with a woman with whom you have physical intimacy. And such emancipation I regarded as a merit (Tolstoy 365).

<sup>60</sup> That abyss of error in which we live regarding women and our relations with them (Tolstoy 365).

<sup>61</sup> I never heard those older persons whose opinions I respected say that it was an evil. On the contrary, I heard people I respected say it was good. I had heard that my struggles and sufferings would be eased after that. I heard this and read it, and heard my elders say it would be good for my health, while from my comrades I heard that it was rather a fine spirited thing to do. So in general I expected nothing but good from it (Tolstoy 367).

A Chekhov parallel: the story *Pripadok* (“An attack of nerves”, 1888), about a sensitive young man’s visit to brothels with his friends; they regard the activity as Pozdnyshev describes it here, but he suffers a breakdown over the banality of the human marketplace. As Bernstein points out, starting from the 1840s regulations about prostitutes started to be established. For regulationists, the brothel was a controlled environment that made the women inside accessible not only to clients, but to physicians and policemen. For prostitutes, brothels were a place where they could find food, drink and even companionship. At the same time, brothel life meant a high risk of contagion; it meant submitting to the brothelkeepers’s schedule, and facing oppression in the form of beatings and indebtedness (304). Bernstein maintains that women who engaged in prostitution lacked education, were generally vulnerable, and young (304). Mariia Pokrovskaiia, doctor – hygienist, in her article “Bor’ba s Prostitutsii” (“Fight against Prostitution”), published in 1900, commented that:

Борьба с проституцией не может быть легка. Проституция глубоко коренится в нравах современного цивилизованного общества и на нее смотрят, как на необходимое в жизни зло ....  
Надо стремиться изменить общественные формы жизни таким образом, чтобы брачная жизнь была возможна для всех, а не искать компромисса в проституции.<sup>62</sup> (3)

Pokrovskaiia reports statistics about the number of prostitutes in Russia and their age. For example, she highlights that in 1889 there were 17,603 prostitutes in total (in brothels and

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<sup>62</sup> The fight against prostitution cannot be easy. Prostitution is deeply rooted in the mores of modern civilized society, and it is viewed as a necessary evil in life. ... We must seek to change the social forms of life so that married life was possible for all, and not to seek a compromise in prostitution.

independent prostitutes), 69,9% were 25 years old or younger, 77% were uneducated, 18,5% did not have relatives, 87,4% were orphans and 83, 5% were poor (Bernstein 9). Svetlana Malysheva in her book *Professional'ki, Arfistki, Liubitel'nizy, Publichnye Doma i Prostitutki v Kazani vo Vtoroi Polovine XIX – Nachale XX Veka, Kazan'* (2004) also points out the necessity to fight against prostitution saying that despite legalization of prostitution in Russia, during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this fight became a vital social topic, raised and discussed by doctors, jurists, politics, publicists, journalists, and writers. However, Bernstein maintains that to fight prostitution meant to go against a system based on male authority and subordination of women to men. Russian feminists, as with many feminists in Europe, considered prostitution an extreme example of the exploitation of women. Female independence and divorce were restricted by laws in Russia. Thus, feminists believed that legal restrictions led to a greater oppression of women, and increased the growth of prostitution (307). Malysheva continues that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Russia, the rapid processes of industrial development, urbanization, and the development of infrastructures for the cities led to a remarkable distinction between the sphere of work and that of leisure for the citizens, with an expansion of the latter. This was facilitated by changes in the work regulations which included the shortening of the working day and the introduction into the calendar of festive and non-working days, both of which led to a qualitative change of daily urban routine and some spare time. The citizen now had a larger choice of entertainment with new forms of leisure. This led to the creation of corresponding institutions and facilities. The development of the market and of the industry of leisure appeared inseparable from the increase of options which included that of prostitution. The empty space of the city was filled by specialized (legal and illegal) establishments, as well as single-prostitutes, professional

prostitutes, and amateur prostitutes (7). Tolstoy was concerned about these issues and in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, through Pozdnyshev, he expresses the idea that society at the time, and science, in particular medicine, was spreading the idea that sex was good for health. According to Pozdnyshev, doctors announced that debauchery was good for the health, and they organized proper well-regulated debauchery:

Они утверждают, что разврат бывает полезен для здоровья, они же и учреждают правильный, аккуратный разврат. Я знаю матерей, которые заботятся в этом смысле о здоровье сыновей. И наука (врачи) посылает их в дома терпимости.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, according to Pozdnyshev the conviction that sexual intercourse is something necessary for health became so general and firmly held that parents, on the advice of the doctors, arranged debauchery for their children and governments institutionalized debauchery.

Pozdnyshev goes on to say: “I had become and I remained a libertine, and it was this that brought me to ruin” (Tolstoy 367). Pozdnyshev lived in debauchery until he was thirty years old and argues that his wife had to be pure, while he could not be pure:

Ну, вот так я и жил до тридцати лет, ни на минуту не оставляя намерения жениться и устроить себе самую возвышенную, чистую семейную жизнь, и с этой целью приглядывался к подходящей для этой цели

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<sup>63</sup> Doctors too deal with it for a consideration. That is proper. They assert that debauchery is good for the health, and they organize proper well-regulated debauchery. I know some mothers who attend to their sons' health in that sense. And science (doctors) sends them to the brothels (Tolstoy 366).



девушке, продолжал он. Я гваздался в гное разврата и вместе с тем разглядывал девушек, по своей чистоте достойных меня.<sup>64</sup>

He finally finds what he thinks of as a suitable wife; she is one of two daughters of a once-wealthy Penza landowner who had been ruined. However, he states that not only among the aristocratic classes, but also among the masses, men had relationships before marriage:

Из тысячи женящихся мужчин не только в нашем быту, но, к несчастью, и в народе, едва ли есть один, который бы не был женат уже раз десять, а то и сто или тысячу, как Дон-Жуан, прежде брака.<sup>65</sup>

Tolstoy advocates the adoption of views such as Pozdnyshv's regarding the problem of sexual education. Pozdnyshv in the story states that in all the novels the heroes' feelings and the ponds and bushes beside which they walk are described in detail, but when their great love for some maiden is described, nothing is said about what had happened to these interesting heroes before. Not a word about their frequenting certain houses, or about the servant girls, cooks, and other people's wives. Moreover, Tolstoy underlines the lack of general sexual education for girls. Even if in these novels sex education existed, these novels are not given into the hands of those who most need them, the unmarried girls:

Если же есть такие неприличные романы, то их не дают в руки, главное, тем, кому нужнее всего это знать – девушкам.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Well, so I lived till I was thirty, not abandoning for a moment the intention of marrying and arranging for myself a most elevated and pure family life. With that purpose I observed the girls suitable for that end and I weltered in a mire of debauchery and at the same time was on the lookout for a girl pure enough to be worthy of me (Tolstoy 368).

<sup>65</sup> "Out of a thousand men who marry (not only among us but unfortunately also among the masses) there is hardly one who has not already been married ten, a hundred, or even, like Don Juan, a thousand times, before his wedding (Tolstoy 369).

<sup>66</sup> If there are such improper novels they are not put into the hands of those who most need this information – the unmarried girl (Tolstoy 369).

This notion appears to echo a point made in *Vlast' t'my (The Power of Darkness)*, when Mitrich talks to the younger daughter and laments the ignorance of girls. Tolstoy did not live to see modern day pornography - though he was probably well-versed in what existed in the genre in his day.

In addition, Pozdnyshev states that people have started to believe that they live morally, while living immorally: “сами начинают искренно верить, что мы все нравственные люди и живем в нравственном мире”.<sup>67</sup>

Chekhov's “*Pripadok*” is a short-story that also expresses the notion that immoral debauchery is regarded as normal. If above the view is expressed by a stern moralist, in “*Pripadok*” it is the perception of a sensitive, mentally unbalanced and naïve young man. In the following chapter, Tolstoy stresses once again the lack of sexual education for girls, while men are educated at brothels. Mothers should educate the girls. However, every coquette knows that she has set herself the task of captivating a man; when a man talks about high sentiments it is because he wants the girl's body:

Женщины, особенно прошедшие мужскую школу, очень хорошо знают, что разговоры о высоких предметах- разговорами, а что нужно мужчине тело и все то, что выставляет его в самом заманчивом свете; и это самое и делается.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, Tolstoy highlights what he regards as the true nature of marriages: that marriage was based on patriarchal rules, where the wife was seen as a slave, as just a possession.

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<sup>67</sup> We ourselves really begin to believe that we are all moral people and we live in a moral world (Tolstoy 370).

<sup>68</sup> A woman, especially if she has passed the male school, knows very well that all the talk about elevated subjects is just talk, but that what a man wants is her body and all that presents it in the most deceptive but alluring light; and she acts accordingly” (Tolstoy 370-1)

In fact, Pozdnyshv describes marriages like traps. He thinks a woman is like a slave in a bazaar or the bait in a trap and is only concerned with catching a husband: “Ведь теперь браки так и устраиваются, как капканы. Ведь естественно что? Девка созрела, надо ее выдать”.<sup>69</sup>

Marriages were arranged and when the girl came of age, she had to be given in marriage. This is even more common in traditional ‘primitive’ cultures.

Most importantly, Pozdnyshv stresses that a woman’s lack of rights arises not from the fact that she may not vote or be a judge –to be occupied with such affairs is no privilege – but from the fact that she is not man’s equal in sexual intercourse and has not the right to use a man or abstain from him as she likes. She is not allowed to choose a man at her pleasure, instead she is chosen by him. Here he reflects the conservative Victorian mores of his day. Pozdnyshv’s or Tolstoy’s mistake is to believe that his views (here that intercourse is only something that a man does to a woman) are universally valid. Also, the hero recognizes in himself an indisputable right to the body of his wife, as if her body was entirely his own. This resonates with a feminist theory in which housewives are simply women kept for sexual purposes.

According to the Bible, the body is considered the temple of the Holy Spirit. When two are married, they become one flesh (Matthew 19:6). Thus, if a husband mistreats his wife’s body, he is abusing his own body. To compare Pozdnyshv’s attitude towards sex and sexuality with that of Christian teaching, in the latter, the body should be honoured and not considered an object of pleasure:

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<sup>69</sup> You see, nowadays marriages are arranged that way – like traps. What is the natural way? The lass is ripe, she must be given in marriage (Tolstoy 372)

The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body ... Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:12-20)

To return to our discussion of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the position of women in society is clearly expressed in connection with the topic of women's rights: As Pozdnyshev argues "Считите все фабрики. Огромная доля их работает бесполезные украшения, экипажи, мебели, игрушки на женщин. Миллионы людей, поколения рабов гибнут в этом каторжном труде на фабриках только для прихоти женщин"<sup>70</sup>. Woman uses man's sensuality to make up for her lack of rights, and she subdues him such that, while in theory he makes the choice, in reality it is she who chooses. The following quotation shows how women, after having been deprived of equal rights with men, take revenge by using men's sensuality to captivate them:

Женщины, как царицы, в плену рабства и тяжелого труда держат 0, 9 рода человеческого. А все оттого, что их унизили, лишили их равных прав с мужчинами. И вот они мстят действием на нашу чувственность, уловлением нас в свои сети.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Count the factories; the greater part of them are engaged in making feminine ornaments. Millions of men, generations of slaves, die toiling like convicts simply to satisfy the whims of our companions (Tolstoy chapt. IX, p. 36).

<sup>71</sup> Women, like queens, keep nine-tenths of mankind in bondage to heavy labor. And all this because they have been abased and deprived of equal rights with men. And they revenge themselves by acting on our sensuality and catch us in their nets (Tolstoy 374).

The hero of the story advances the notion that we should abstain from sexual relations even in marriage, even if that would mean the end of the human race. In fact, when the anonymous narrator of the story objects that if Pozdnyshv's ideas were practiced in reality, life would disappear, he replies that life for life's sake is not worth living:

А жить зачем? Если нет цели никакой, если жизнь для жизни нам дана, незачем жить. И если так, то Шопенгауэры и Гартманы, да и все буддисты совершенно правы. Ну, а если есть цель жизни, то ясно, что жизнь должна прекратиться, когда достигнется цель.<sup>72</sup>

Although Tolstoy was an independent thinker, he was influenced by a major philosopher of the time: A. Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860). Tolstoy's asceticism, which played a key role in his thinking, may have been inspired in part by the spiritual, moralistic lives of the peasantry, but this led to a broader philosophy of abstinence derived initially from Schopenhauer as a path to a spiritual life for the upper classes. Schopenhauer avoided marriage, stating that “marrying means to halve one's rights and double one's duty”. “Marrying means, to grasp blindfolded into a sack hoping to find an eel out of an assembly of snakes” (*The World as Will and Representation*). One can see here clearly a misogynous attitude. Schopenhauer believed that humans were motivated only by their basic desires or “will-to-live” which directed all of mankind. He thought that human desire was futile, illogical and directionless, and that, by extension, this was true of all human action in the world. He also wrote “man can indeed do what he wants, but he cannot will what he wants”. Schopenhauer viewed sexual love as the most effective sign of the will-to-live.

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<sup>72</sup> “But why live? If life has no aim, if life has given us for life's sake, there is no reason for living”. And if it is so, then the Schopenhauers, the Hartmanns and all the Buddhists as well, are quite right. But if life has an aim, it is clear that it ought to come to an end when that aim is reached” (Tolstoy 377).

He saw love as a form of insincerity because its main purpose was to serve the will for the sake of the continuation of mankind. Schopenhauer viewed love as a manifestation of the sexual drive. According to Sigrid Maurer (1966), Tolstoy leans towards Schopenhauer's philosophy on love and sexuality, where the latter said, "In the opposite case, in spite of difference of disposition, character, and mental tendency, and of the dislike and even hostility resulting from that, sexual love can nevertheless arise and exist; if it then blinds us to all that, and leads to marriage, such a marriage will be very unhappy" (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*).

Tolstoy was always thinking about the relationship between husband and wife, and the conditions of the people in Russia. He was searching in religion for solutions to the problems that were affecting family life. Tolstoy in particular looked at Buddhism. The essence of Buddhism is that we are not in control of our future existence, as we do not know what we are going to be in the next life. In 1884, when Tolstoy was engaged in studying Buddhism he wrote in his diary, "Read about Buddhism – its teaching. Wonderful!" (Tolstoy 197). He was surprised to learn that tenets of Buddhism resonated with his own thinking. He was also delighted that Buddhism had no answer to the question about what is eternal. Tolstoy taught that religion provides a code of conduct, which recalls Akim's repeated reproach to his son that his behaviour is "ne po zakonu" in *Vlast T'my*. He found relevance in the Buddha's actual practice of saving people rather than his metaphysical discussion. Tolstoy felt that religion guides human conduct with a view to promoting moral development. Tolstoy translated the Buddhist tale "Karma" from English to Russian. In the preface he wrote: "the truth, much slurred in these days, that evil can be avoided and good achieved by personal effort only" and "individual happiness is never genuine, save when it is bound up with the happiness of all our fellows" (Tolstoy IV). According

to Tolstoy, this takes effort. His attempt to understand the concept of Nirvana is seen when he wrote “one can understand the beliefs of Buddhism, that you will always return to life (after death) until you reach absolute self-renunciation” (Tolstoy 402). To Tolstoy, Nirvana does not free us from the transmigration of lives but is an ideal state of life. However, according to Tolstoy, Nirvana does not come about merely because the flesh has been extinguished. Turning to Christianity, Tolstoy states that Christ’s teaching “guides man, not by external rules, but by the internal consciousness of the possibility of attaining divine perfection” (Tolstoy 102). He accepted that his understanding is quite different from the legalistic approach practiced by the Jews before the time of Jesus Christ.

Pozdnyshv states that the end of the human race, resulting from abstention from sex is a preferred condition. The declarations of Tolstoy’s hero are well-known in Russian cultural history as part of a larger debate on human sexuality which took place in Russia toward the end of the nineteenth century. Scholars agree that Tolstoy was influenced by the pessimistic philosophy of Schopenhauer, as reflected in Pozdnyshv’s philosophy.

The apogee of this debate found its roots precisely in the circulation of illegal copies of Tolstoy’s *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Russian society was surprised by the idea that the only way to have a conflict-free relationship within the family was for the husband and wife to abstain from sex. They should also avoid children because the latter added to the tension (Mondry 133-34).

To resume our detailed analysis of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, disagreement between Pozdnyshv and his wife started on the third or fourth day of their marriage “Любовь - союз душ, и вместо этого вот что!”<sup>73</sup> and the impression of that first quarrel was dreadful.

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<sup>73</sup> “Love is a union of souls – and instead of that there is this!” (Tolstoy 380).

Pozdnyshv does not understand the simple truth that marriage or any long-term relationship does not mean people won't quarrel, but that people have resolved to work through disagreements. Pozdnyshv goes on to explain how their amorousness was exhausted by the satisfaction of sensuality:

Влюбленность истощилась удовлетворением чувственности, и остались мы друг против друга в нашем действительном отношении друг к другу, то есть два совершенно чуждые друг другу эгоиста, желающие получить себе как можно больше удовольствия один через другого.<sup>74</sup>

Pozdnyshv does not understand that this cold and hostile relation is their normal state. As shown in the text below, he does not understand this because they are still lusting one after the other. If he loved his wife, he would seek to give as well as take. Pozdnyshv seems to imply the usual fact that sexual intercourse binds people together even if they hate each other:

Я не понимал, что это холодное и враждебное отношение было нашим нормальным отношением, не понимал этого потому, что это враждебное отношение в первое время очень скоро опять закрылось от нас вновь поднявшеюся перегонной чувственностью, то есть влюблением.<sup>75</sup>

Pozdnyshv clearly has hang-ups about human sex drive. One can restate this in both a negative and positive light: true, sex can be a deceiver if it tricks couples into thinking they have more in common than they actually do; on the positive side, sexual love is no doubt essential in

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<sup>74</sup> Amorousness was exhausted by the satisfaction of sensuality and we were left confronting one another in our true relation: that is, as two egoists quite alien to each other who wished to get as much pleasure as possible each from the other (Tolstoy 380).

<sup>75</sup> I did not understand that this cold and hostile relation was our normal state; I did not understand it because at first this hostile attitude was very soon concealed from us by a renewal of redistilled sensuality that is by love-making (Tolstoy 380).



pair bonding, as an anthropologist or psychologist might put it. And for the religiously-inclined, one could maintain that human sex drive, which is not limited to an occasional breeding season, is a gift from God.

In the same first month, the second quarrel started. The reason for this one was money. However, sex again came to dominate the argument and consequently the issue of money was not resolved.

Но прошло несколько времени, и опять эта взаимная ненависть скрылась под влюбленностью, то есть чувственностью, и я еще утешался мыслью, что эти две ссоры были ошибки, которые можно исправить.<sup>76</sup>

Pozdnyshev would have fewer problems if he could admit that sex here is fulfilling its role for a newlywed couple in helping them through problems such as money woes. The marriage is described as an empty affair dominated by the stresses and cares of *byt*, the concept of repetitive action, boring everyday life. Pozdnyshev includes the trend where quarrels are quelled by periods of sexual passion as part of the concept of *byt*. He does not see sexual passion as breathing life into the relationship and rescuing the couple from the negative effects of *byt*. Pozdnyshev considers sexuality as something evil that prevents the couple from living a peaceful life; it is a negative force that leads to fights and triggers feelings of jealousy. According to Stephen C. Hutchings, Tolstoy's attempt to convey *byt* is best exemplified by hostility to art and he refers to the opening lines of *Anna Karenina* "All happy families are alike, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" (Hutchings 65). In *The Kreutzer Sonata* Tolstoy is suggesting

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<sup>76</sup> After a while, this mutual hatred was hidden by amorousness that is sensuality, and I still consoled myself with the thought that these two quarrels had been mistakes and could be remedied (Tolstoy 381).

that there are generalisations that can be applied to the unhappiness of all couples. His position has changed; while Anna Karenina pursued romantic love that tragically led to her demise, the pursuit of romantic love for Pozdnyshev led to a perpetual cycle of rejection resulting into fights and consequent lusty pseudo reconciliation that did not ameliorate the tedium of *byt*. The contrast between the romantic exalted ideal of love as proposed in literature, and the guilt related to Pozdnyshev's sexual encounters taints the act of lovemaking for the character who views it as something unclean. This way of thinking enhances his feelings of resentment towards his wife rather than bringing the couple closer emotionally:

Предполагается в теории, что любовь есть нечто идеальное, возвышенное, а на практике любовь ведь есть нечто мерзкое, свиное, про которое и говорить и вспоминать мерзко и стыдно.<sup>77</sup>

The protagonist wonders what embittered them one against the other. He states that the real nature of a human being is to be an animal. The following quotation shows that because of man's need to have sexual relations with women even during their pregnancy, the woman becomes her husband's mistress and must be what not even an animal descends to, and for which her strength is insufficient:

Мужчина и женщина сотворены так, как животное, так что после плотской любви начинается беременность, потом кормление, такие состояния,

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<sup>77</sup> "In theory love is something ideal and exalted, but in practice it is something abominable, swinish, which is horrid and shameful to mention or remember. It is not for nothing that nature has made it disgusting and shameful" (Tolstoy 382).

при которых для женщины, так же как и для ее ребенка, плотская любовь вредна.<sup>78</sup>

Here again Pozdnyshv assumes his personal views are general ones. Today he would be considered a prude who would find breast-feeding disgusting (while enjoying porn on the internet). His views here possibly were the norm in his time, but they are at odds with biology: women can have sex during pregnancy and when breast-feeding if they want (The “healthy glow” of a pregnant woman’s complexion has the biological purpose of making her attractive to her mate)<sup>79</sup>. Indeed, one of the natural methods to induce labour at term is intercourse; and breast-feeding reduces ovulation – a natural form of birth control (though not foolproof).

И оттого в нашем быту истерики, нервы, а в народе - кликуши. Вы заметьте, у девушек, у чистых, нет кликушества, только у баб, и у баб, живущих с мужьями.<sup>80</sup>

*Klikushestvo* is seen as an abnormal aspect of sexuality as a result of family life and of having children. In Pozdnyshv’s view, sex and child rearing caused *Klikushestvo* in women. Pozdnyshv believed that women developed a form of hysteria similar to epilepsy when they were abused by their husbands, who wanted to have sex during pregnancy. Tolstoy added to his work an Epilogue in which he preached complete sexual abstinence even in marriage, as a way out also from these aspects of abnormal sexuality within family life. Dostoevsky too discussed

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<sup>78</sup> Men and women are created like the animals so that physical love is followed by pregnancy and then by suckling-conditions under which physical love is bad for the woman and for her child (Tolstoy 382).

<sup>79</sup> Arun Nagrath, Narendra Malhotra, Shikha Seth, M.D Progress in Obstetrics and Gynecology <http://books.google.co.nz/books?hl=en&lr=&id=eVZ58V9C3U4C&oi=fnd&pg=PA156&dq=sex+during+pregnancy&ots=zCBF63ZWxS&sig=8fAYhexCXPPMpTzgoICD5IoAKVo#v=onepage&q=sex%20during%20pregnancy&f=false>

<sup>80</sup> And this is what causes nerves troubles and hysteria in our class, and among the peasants causes what they call being “possessed by the devil” – epilepsy. You will note that no pure maidens are ever “possessed”, but only married women living with their husbands (Tolstoy 383).

examples of *Klikushestvo* in his work. Straus maintains that Alyosha's mother in *The Brothers Karamazov* shrieked not only because she was tortured by her husband, but because she longed for God (145). For example, in *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevsky describes Alyosha's mother, Sofia, as a meek, gentle woman who suffers from the same nervous disease of *Klikushestvo*. Sofia was an orphan and the ward of General Vorokhov's widow. This widow was very hard on Sofia, Sofia was afraid of her and as a result she became a "shrieker" (hysteric). Because Fyodor was having orgies in the house in front of his wife, Sofia further developed her nervous disease. Although Sofia suffered from *Klikushestvo* and could not fully take care of her son Alyosha, she was a very religious woman who entrusted her son to the protection of the Mother of God. Dostoevsky depicts Sofia as a woman always in prayer especially during the feasts of the Mother of God. As Katz points out, it was precisely Sofia's nervous disease that led to Alyosha's spiritual development as he was consigned to Father Zosima due to her inability to take care of her child (507). Dostoevsky was preoccupied with abnormal aspects of sexuality; however, unlike Tolstoy, he did not reach extreme solutions such as eradicating sexuality from the family. He showed instead how hysteria within the family could exist with faith in God and, as Straus argued, even be an expression of longing for God (145).

*The Kreutzer Sonata* is also an attack on the hypocrisy of the aristocratic classes. The upper classes of Russian society do not follow their own preaching; this is particularly evident in relation to the matter of women's emancipation. Pozdnyshev expresses cynical views on the emancipation of women, as highlighted in the following passage:

То же и с эмансипацией женщины. Рабство женщины ведь только в том, что люди желают и считают очень хорошим пользоваться ею как орудием наслаждения. Ну, и вот освобождают женщину, дают ей всякие права, равные

мужчине, но продолжают смотреть на нее как на орудие наслаждения, так воспитывают ее и в детстве и общественным мнением. И вот она все такая же приниженная, развращенная раба, и мужчина все такой же развращенный рабовладелец.<sup>81</sup>

According to Pozdnyshev to acknowledge the right of women to occupy the same positions as men does not free them unless they are no longer viewed as objects for enjoyment. Thus if change of perception does not take place across the male population, women will be educated through schooling and public opinion to remain in a similar position of subservience despite officially gaining greater freedoms. The lady in the train considers love as the only moral justification that can form the basis for marriage. Pozdnyshev, however, sees love as lust and thinks that education is worthless for women. Women's education will always depend on men's view of them. Although men emancipate women in universities and in law courts, they continue to regard women as objects of enjoyment. Pozdnyshev also highlights the hypocrisy of the upper classes regarding the emancipation of women, by stating: "И толкуют о свободе, правах женщин. Это все равно, что людоеды откармливали бы людей пленных на еду и вместе с тем уверяли бы, что они заботятся о их правах и свободе"<sup>82</sup>. Tolstoy's criticism of society is evident when he presents the position of women in society. He lays open the socio-philosophical foundations of women's emancipation and, for the first time, has an open discussion about it.

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<sup>81</sup> "So it is with the emancipation of woman: the enslavement of women lays simply in the fact that people desire, and think it good, to avail themselves of her as a tool of enjoyment. Well, and they liberate woman, give her all sorts of rights equal to man, but continue to regard her as an instrument of enjoyment, and so educate her in childhood and afterwards by public opinion. And there she is, still the same humiliated and depraved slave, and the man still a depraved slave-owner (Tolstoy 385).

<sup>82</sup> "And they pray about the freedom and the rights of women! It is as if cannibals fattened their captives to be eaten, and at the same time declared that they were concerned about their prisoner's rights and freedom" (Tolstoy 383).

Turning now to consideration of the effect of children in marriage, in chapter XV of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Pozdnyshev leads into it by declaring that in all his life he has never ceased to be tormented by jealousy, but that there were periods when he especially suffered from it. The first period of torment was when his wife did not nurse her first child herself (following wrongful medical advice). However, later on she nurses her babies perfectly well and only her pregnancy and the nursing of her babies saves Pozdnyshev from the torments of jealousy. In eight years she has five children and nursed all except the first herself. Children are taken away from Pozdnyshev (“Детей моих взяла моя свояченица и ее брат”<sup>83</sup>). When his wife is dying after being stabbed by him, she says that she wants her sister to raise the children. Pozdnyshev is obviously a deranged character who would not be allowed to take care of the children. Children in society are viewed as a blessing, but Pozdnyshev thinks they are a torment:

Дети - благословенье божие, дети - радость. Ведь это все ложь. Все это было когда-то, но теперь ничего подобного нет. Дети - мучение, и больше ничего.<sup>84</sup>

He not only has no love for his wife, but no paternal instinct. He says not one kind word about his own children. Pozdnyshev thinks that women do not want to have children because if they get ill, they may suffer or die, which is disadvantageous to the parents. Thus, women are selfish because they do not want to sacrifice themselves for a beloved being (the husband) while they worry about the children:

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<sup>83</sup> My wife's sister and brother have taken them (Tolstoy 388).

<sup>84</sup> Children 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 389).

Но нет, она сама страшно мучалась и казнилась постоянно с детьми, с их здоровьем и болезнями. Это была пытка для нее и для меня тоже. И нельзя ей было не мучаться.<sup>85</sup>

Despite stressing about the children, the wife (who is nameless in *The Kreutzer Sonata*) still feeds, caresses, and protects her children. Her daily duties are to clothe them, to nurse them, make them a bath, put them to bed, and walk them in the fresh air. Pozdnyshv describes his wife as a child-loving and simple woman. The children become the means of discord between husband and wife. Pozdnyshv and his wife argue about how to raise them or how to care for them when they are ill. Also, they use the children as weapons to argue with one another.

Pozdnyshv describes children as unnecessary; however his position regarding children seems contradictory. On the one hand, he states that to a peasant, a labouring man, children are necessary; though it is hard to feed them, still he needs them. Therefore his marital relations have a justification. On the other hand, he states that to him children are unnecessary and an additional care and expense especially when the children were ill:

Жизни нашей не было совсем. Это была какая-то вечная опасность, спасенье от нее, вновь наступившая опасность, вновь, отчаянные усилия и вновь спасенье - постоянно такое положение, как на гибнущем корабле.<sup>86</sup>

The fear of the death of a child is described as a 'state of constant danger' and going from one illness to another as though being on a sinking ship. This highlights the mortality rate even

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<sup>85</sup> She suffered terribly and tormented herself about the children and their health and illnesses. It was torture for her and for me too; and it was impossible for her not to suffer.

<sup>86</sup> We led no life at all but were in a state of constant danger, of escape from it, recurring danger, again followed by a desperate struggle and another escape – always as though we were on a sinking ship (Tolstoy 390).

amongst the wealthiest in the nineteenth century, and the consideration that it is not worth having a child for a wealthy family because of the cost incurred by stress.

The relationship between Pozdnyshev and his wife becomes increasingly hostile and at last reaches the stage where it is not disagreement that causes hostility, but hostility that causes disagreement. “На четвертый год с обеих сторон решено было как-то само собой, что понять друг друга, согласиться друг с другом мы не можем”<sup>87</sup>.

While Pozdnyshev is describing their relationship, his own egoism and selfishness emerge: “As I now recall them, the views I maintained were not at all so dear to me that I could not have given them up. I always thought myself a saint towards her” (Tolstoy 392). The account is entirely one sided, with the emotions, thoughts and even the name of his wife suppressed. This highlights the view that wives are treated as objects. Their relationship is deteriorating because of his feelings: “In me at any rate there often raged a terrible hatred of her” (Tolstoy 393). Pozdnyshev would watch her pouring out tea, swinging her leg, lifting a spoon to her mouth, smacking her lips and drawing in some liquid, and he would hate her for these things as if they were the worst possible actions. As I will also show in Chapter 3, Chekhov in “The Duel” shows that Laevsky finds the sound of Natasha’s chewing and swallowing disgusting. Both Tolstoy and Chekhov use details of daily life to express their characters’ feelings. As a result of this mutual hatred, Pozdnyshev’s wife tries to forget herself in intense and busy occupation, such as housework, busying herself with the arrangements of the house, her own and the children’s clothes, their lessons and their health. He has his own occupations, such as drinking, office duties, shooting and cards. They live in a perpetual fog, not seeing the conditions they are in.

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<sup>87</sup> In the fourth year we both, it seemed, came to the conclusion that we could not understand one another (Tolstoy 392).



Also, they are like two convicts hating each other and being chained together, poisoning one another's lives and trying not to see it.

She becomes interested in music, and then a musician, Trukhachevski, comes to their house. He is a violinist, not a professional, but a semi-professional, middle class man. His father, a landowner, is a neighbour of Pozdnyshev's father. Trukhachevski's father has been ruined, and his children, three boys, have obtained settled positions; only Trukhachevski, the youngest, has been handed over to his godmother in Paris. There he was sent to the Conservatoire because he had a talent for music, and became a violinist and played at concerts. He then returned to Russia and appears at Pozdnyshev's house.

Pozdnyshev recounts his marriage, developing into more arguments, animosity and mutual hatred after the arrival of the musician. He describes their life as a nightmare:

Думаю убежать от нее, скрыться, уехать в Америку. Дохожу до того, что мечтаю о том, как я избавлюсь от нее и как это будет прекрасно, как сойду с другой, прекрасной женщиной, совсем новой. Избавлюсь тем, что она умрет, или тем, что разведусь, и придумываю, как это сделать. Вижу, что я путаюсь, что я не то думаю, что нужно, но и для того, чтобы не видеть, что я не то думаю, что нужно, для этого-то курю.<sup>88</sup>

Thinking that running away from his wife will free him to find a more admirable woman is self-deception; he would be the same with any woman, as the very fact that his wife is unnamed makes her every woman. Laevsky in Chekhov's "The Duel" has a similar fantasy of

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<sup>88</sup> I think of running away from her, hiding myself, going to America. I get as far as dreaming of how I shall get rid of her, how splendid that will be, and how I shall unite with another, an admirable woman – quite different. I shall get rid of her either by her dying or by a divorce, and plan how it is to be done. I note that I am getting confused and not thinking of what is necessary, and to prevent myself from perceiving that my thoughts are not to the point I go on smoking (Tolstoy 400).

leaving Nadezhda to go to St. Petersburg. However, the change of location would not change the emotional reality and approach towards women.

There is enough evidence in the story to suggest that Pozdnyshev plays a very active role in introducing his wife to Trukhachevski and arranging situations so that they can meet again and play together. For example, Pozdnyshev invites him to come one evening and bring his violin to play with his wife. Pozdnyshev states: “I insisted that he should come that evening with his violin” (Tolstoy 403). And, “I invited him to dine and play with my wife again the next Sunday” (Tolstoy 405).

Pozdnyshev disliked Trukhachevski from the first glance. However, the way he explains it is that, curiously enough, a strange and fatal force leads him not to give rebuff to Trukhachevski, not to keep him away, but on the contrary, to invite him to his house. He states: “As if purposely, I began talking about his playing and said I had been told he had given up the violin” (Tolstoy 402). Then, in chapter XXIII Pozdnyshev clearly states that he “arranged the dinner and the musical evening with much care”, and bought the provisions himself and invited the guests. Pozdnyshev has lost his moral bearings in relation to marriage; his attitude to his wife is confused, he does not express his concerns with her or communicates. Therefore, he organises the music practices with mixed motives. He does want to do something nice for his wife and at the same time he wants to test her. He does not want to wallow in his misery and make his marriage worse, yet simultaneously; he has feelings of hatred towards his wife. Thus, he feeds his jealousy and hatred in order to have additional reason to despise his wife, since he has long been pushing her away and is looking for an excuse to get rid of her.

In connection with his work, Pozdnyshev has to go into the country to attend a meeting of the local council, or *Zemstvo*. However, he returns early when he remembers the look on the

faces of his wife and the musician while they are playing Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata*. Back in Moscow he surprises the guilty lovers and gives them the only possible outcome according to Pozdnyshev's thinking: death. This is premeditated murder.

Strong evidence in the text suggests that Pozdnyshev killed his wife out of jealousy. The critic Keith Ellis considers sexual jealousy the major theme of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, and believes that "it provides the basis for narrative ambiguity, which in turn contributes to the coherence of the novella" (Ellis 899). As mentioned above, Pozdnyshev stated his constant torment by jealousy throughout his married life. There were periods, however, when he especially suffered from it.

Moreover, in chapter XXI Pozdnyshev declares that he was tormented by jealousy all evening because his wife played the violin with her friend the musician. When Pozdnyshev receives the letter from his wife while he is away, he is jealous and admits: "The mad beast of jealousy began to grow in its kennel and wanted to leap up, but I was afraid of that beast and quickly fastened him in" (Tolstoy 413). He was troubled by the thought of them having an affair. "Horror and rage compressed his heart" (Tolstoy 413).

He stresses his physical love towards his wife and that he knows her only as an animal. He also defines music as the most exquisite voluptuousness of the senses; as a link between Trukhachevski and his wife. Lenin famously said that he could not listen to Beethoven or he would not get on with the revolution. Music was a revered art form for the Romantics and Symbolists for its power to convey emotion without words. In chapter XXV Pozdnyshev mentions his jealousy again: "I could no longer control my imagination, and with extraordinary vividness which inflamed my jealousy it painted incessantly, one after another pictures of what

had gone on in my absence, and how she had been false to me. I burnt with indignation, anger, and a peculiar feeling of intoxication with my own humiliation ...” (Tolstoy 416). Pozdnyshev and his household typify the observation in the Gospel that “there will be disorder and every vile practice where jealousy and selfish ambition exist” (James 3:16). St. James offers practical advice in self-control and the management of relationships when he points out that fights and quarrels between people come from their desire and their passions, and can lead to ruin: “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions” (James 4:1-3).

Pozdnyshev’s uncompromising view of the corrupting power of passion echoes St. Paul’s stern admonition in his epistle to the Galatians:

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

The writers of the Wisdom books in the Hebrew Bible likewise advocated the virtue of inner peace and warned against the destructive force of negative emotions such as jealousy: “A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot” (Solomon’s Proverbs 14:30); “Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?” (Solomon’s Proverbs 27:4). Thus, Pozdnyshev’s family was ruined, and he committed murder, reaping the bitter fruit that the Bible warns against.

Moreover, there are some passages in the novel where the hero mentions the fact that an occult fatal power kept him from rejecting Trukhachevski and sending him away; instead, to the contrary, it induced him to suffer the approaches of this man towards his wife. It is past midnight when Pozdnyshev arrives home. He sees a light on in the dancing and drawing-room and immediately understands that his wife is with her friend the musician.

Я чуть было не зарыдал, но тотчас же дьявол подсказал: “Ты плачь, сентиментальничай, а они спокойно разойдутся, улик не будет, и ты век будешь сомневаться и мучаться”. И тотчас чувствительность над собой исчезла, и явилось странное чувство - вы не поверите - чувство радости, что кончится теперь мое мученье, что теперь я могу наказать ее, могу избавиться от нее, что я могу дать волю моей злобе. И я дал волю моей злобе - я сделался зверем, злым и хитрым зверем.<sup>89</sup>

This is a folk belief, “the devil” was blamed for all failings; in the Russian hagiographies, the Saints undergo temptation by the devil, in emulation of Christ. Later on Pozdnyshev mentions some devils that, against his will, invented and suggested the most terrible reflections. Pozdnyshev mentions his torments of jealousy more than fifteen times.

Pozdnyshev states that, as the norm, couples do not love each other. The most common cause of the hatred between husbands and wives is jealousy, an inexhaustible source of marital wounds. He claims there cannot fail to be jealousy between husbands and wives who live immorally. So, Tolstoy discusses the destructive power of jealousy, and he is not the first to

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<sup>89</sup> I almost began to sob, but the devil immediately suggested to me: “Cry, be sentimental, and they will get away quietly. You will have no proof and will continue to suffer and doubt all your life”. And my self-pity immediately vanished, and a strange sense of joy arose in me, that my torture would now be over, that now I could punish her, could get rid of her, and could vent my anger. And I gave vent to it – I became a beast, a cruel and cunning beast (Tolstoy Chapt XXVI, 114).

discuss this. This is illustrated in the lithographed version of *The Kreutzer Sonata*. When he refers to jealousy as “illness of ours” he means his; he ascribes to his wife the same derangement. As above where it mentions his family’s problems – they are his, and they are a cause of suffering within the family:

Точно так же и в Европе. Все больницы истеричных полны женщин, нарушающих закон природы. Но ведь кликуши и пациентки Шарко -- это совсем увечные, а полукалек женщин полон мир. Ведь только подумать, какое великое дело совершается в женщине, когда она понесла плод или когда кормит родившегося ребенка. Растет то, что продолжает, заменяет нас. И это-то святое дело нарушается - - чем же? -- страшно подумать!<sup>90</sup>

Hysterics was a fashionable diagnosis of the time; however it was a diagnosis that the author believed in. Tolstoy looked for moral and spiritual solutions that were contrary to the existing and anticipated future developments in science and philosophy. According to Goetz, Tolstoy rejected the French psychologist Charcot’s views on sexuality, thinking that he personified the damage brought about by the “priests of science” (Goetz 249). In addition, Jackson maintains that Pozdnyshev finds the same signs of his irrationality in the bourgeois men and women of his social class. Pozdnyshev notes that Charcot would probably have defined his wife a victim of hysteria and would have said that he, Pozdnyshev, was abnormal: "and he probably would have tried to cure us. But there was no disease to cure" (Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, 108). According to Jackson, the essence of Pozdnyshev's justifications for his offense is

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<sup>90</sup> "That is so here, and it is just the same in Europe. All the hospitals for hysterical women are full of those who have violated nature’s law. The epileptics and Charcot’s patients are complete wrecks you know, but the world is full of half-crippled women. Just think of it, what great works go on within a woman when she conceives or when she’s nursing an infant. That is growing which will continue us and replace us. And this sacred work is violated – by what? It is terrible to think of it! (Tolstoy 115).

that the murder of his wife represented an extreme manifestation of the moral and social crisis concerning his whole class (Jackson 289). As Glick and Shaffer point out, from the beginning of the twentieth century educated Russian society was familiar with Darwin's works. After a decade of censorship in 1896 Darwin's works began to appear again and in 1901 the famous biologist Timiriachev wrote his four-volume edition of Darwin's work, which was reprinted many times (Glick, Shaffer 264). In Tolstoy's *Last Letter* the author argues that Darwinism does not explain the meaning of life and it is incompatible with Christian non-violence: "The views you have acquired about Darwinism, evolution and the struggle for existence won't explain to you the meaning of your life and won't give you guidance in your actions, and a life without an explanation of its meaning and importance, and without the unfailing guidance that stems from it is a pitiful existence" (Tolstoy's *Letters*, 117). In *The Kreutzer Sonata* Pozdnyshev exclaims: "Ah "The Origin of Species", how interesting!" (Tolstoy 34). As the critic McLean argues, Tolstoy accepted a great deal of what Darwin said: the origin of species by natural selection, the struggle for existence, and the survival of the fittest. However, since Darwin does not recognize the principle that man is also a spiritual being, but considers man only as an animal, Tolstoy does not acknowledge Darwin's discoveries, which, in Tolstoy's view, have proved ethically harmful. Thus, Darwin and Darwinists are categorized as moral enemies in Tolstoy's pronouncements in old age (McLean 179). In fact Pozdnyshev comments ironically about the origin of the species relating to the way mothers attempt to match-make their daughters with the best mate, thus the marriage of the fittest.

The music of the Kreutzer Sonata concerto plays a vital role in Pozdnyshev's fits of jealousy. Thus, the murder of Pozdnyshev's wife is explained by the negative emotion the sonata evokes in him:

а что этот человек, и по своей внешней эlegantности и новизне, и, главное, по несомненному большому таланту к музыке, по сближению, возникающему из совместной игры, по влиянию, производимому на впечатлительные натуры музыкой, особенно скрипкой, что этот человек должен был не то что нравиться, а несомненно без малейшего колебания должен был победить, смять, перекрутить ее, свить из нее веревку, сделать из нее все, что захочет. Я этого не мог не видеть, и я страдал ужасно.<sup>91</sup>

At the end of chapter XXI, the influence of music is again quite evident and Pozdnyshv associates the music with jealousy:

Одно из самых мучительнейших отношений для ревнивцев (а ревнивцы все в нашей общественной жизни) - это известные светские условия, при которых допускается самая большая и опасная близость между мужчиной и женщиной. Надо сделаться посмешищем людей, если препятствовать близости на балах, близости докторов с своей пациенткой, близости при занятиях искусством, живописью, а главное – музыкой.<sup>92</sup>

The separation of the sexes that he advocates here resonates with strictly conservative religious cultures – Islamic, Jewish and Christian; and associated with them are traditional roles

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<sup>91</sup> This man – by his external refinement and novelty and still more by his undoubtedly great talent for music, by the nearness that comes of playing together, and by the influence music, especially the violin, exercises on impressionable nature – was sure not only to please but certainly and without the least hesitation to conquer, crush, bind her, twist her round his little finger and do whatever he liked with her. I could not help seeing this and I suffered terribly (Tolstoy 404).

<sup>92</sup> One of the most torturing situations for the jealous (and in our social life everybody is jealous) are those social conditions which allow a very great and dangerous intimacy between a man and a woman under certain pretexts. One must make himself the laughing stock of everybody, if he desires to prevent associations in the ball-room, the intimacy of doctors with their patients, the familiarity of art occupations, and especially of music (Tolstoy 405).



for women. Yet Pozdnyshev's motivations for such a conservative society are less concern for religious piety than his odd notion of sex as evil.

Люди занимаются вдвоем самым благородным искусством, музыкой; для этого нужна известная близость, и близость эта не имеет ничего предосудительного, и только глупый, ревнивый муж может видеть тут что-либо нежелательное. А между тем все знают, что именно посредством этих самых занятий, в особенности музыкой, и происходит большая доля прелюбодеяний в нашем обществе.<sup>93</sup>

Here again one can dispute his formulation “vse znaiut” (все знают), and note that прелюбодеяние (adultery) is the biblical term. He sounds like the father who does not want his daughter going to the dance because he fears what the music and dancing can lead to.

Later in chapter XXIII, Pozdnyshev states that music only agitates him. He defines music as a terrible instrument in the hands of any chance user, like black magic:

А то страшное средство в руках кого попало. Например, хоть бы эту Крейцерову сонату, первое престо. Разве можно играть в гостиной среди декольтированных дам это престо? And later on “А то несоответственное ни месту, ни времени вызывание энергии, чувства, ничем не проявляющегося, не может не действовать губительно”<sup>94</sup>.

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<sup>93</sup> In order that people may occupy themselves together with the noblest art, music, a certain intimacy is necessary, in which there is nothing blameworthy. Only a jealous fool of a husband can have anything to say against it. A husband should not have such thoughts, and especially should not thrust his nose into these affairs, or prevent them. And yet, everybody knows that precisely in these occupations, especially in music, many adulteries originate in our society (Tolstoy 411).

<sup>94</sup> It is a terrible instrument in the hands of any chance user! Take that Kreutzer Sonata, for instance, how can that first presto be played in a drawing room among ladies in low-necked dresses? Otherwise an awakening of energy and feeling unsuited both to the time and the place, to which no outlet is given, cannot but act harmfully (Tolstoy 411).

Pozdnyshev tries to convince his captive listeners on the train that all marriages are indecent shams, and that most cases of infidelity are caused by music, the well-known aphrodisiac. This latter idea explains the title of the story, which is also a musical composition by Ludwig von Beethoven, and was the piece played by his wife on the piano and Trukhachevski on the violin in his drawing room, arousing suppressed, raging jealousy within Pozdnyshev. Pozdnyshev blames music and society and states that adulteries happen all the time, especially at balls or during events where the music plays an important role.

Pozdnyshev mentions that there were scandals all the time in Russia: “How can that first presto be played in a drawing-room among ladies in low-necked dresses? To hear that played, to clap a little, and then to eat ices and talk of the latest scandal?” (Tolstoy 411). However, also among the tsars gossip had always featured, recorded from Peter the Great and no doubt before him.

Pozdnyshev was acquitted of murdering his wife because considered mad by the court. However, he should still have been locked up, perhaps executed according to the laws at the time in Russia.

Even though Pozdnyshev is guilty of his wife’s murder, there is enough evidence in the text to suggest that his wife has been unfaithful to him and so he killed her in a fit of jealousy. This does not that make murder justifiable by normal standards, but in Pozdnyshev’s mind it does. Tolstoy intentionally made Pozdnyshev’s wife’s betrayal ambiguous - as if anything could justify murder. This novella offers a deranged man’s view of human relations that he sees governed purely by the material and the physical. Individualism is uncontrolled, and the spiritual

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and inner life is ignored. This is also what society demands and ultimately it leads to the destruction of the family.

In chapter XXVII after having stabbed his wife to death, Pozdnyshev repents. He admits long afterwards in prison, when he has experienced a moral revolution that he thinks of that moment, remembers it as best he can, and tries to understand what he has done. A Freudian interpretation of his chosen method of murder is possible here. He remembers the terrible consciousness, which he felt, that he was killing a wife, HIS wife:

Ужас этого сознания я помню и потому заключаю и даже вспоминаю смутно, что, воткнув кинжал, я тотчас же вытащил его, желая поправить сделанное и остановить. Я секунду стоял неподвижно, ожидая, что будет, можно ли поправить.<sup>95</sup>

“Having plunged in my knife, I immediately withdrew it, wanting to correct the mistake” – this could be a metaphor for his attitude towards intercourse. The representation of sexual intercourse as murder appeared already in *Anna Karenina* (section 2, chap 11).

During the eleven months that he awaits trial, he examines himself and his past, and understands it. He begins to understand what he did on the third day: on the third day he sees his wife’s dead face, and only when he sees her in the coffin, can he understand all that he has done. At the end of the story he repents. As for the third day, one can argue that there is a resurrection metaphor intended. As Nikita in *The Power of Darkness*, so Pozdnyshev repents. Tolstoy shows

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<sup>95</sup> I remember the horror of that consciousness and conclude from that, and even dimly remember, that having plunged the dagger in I pulled it out immediately, trying to remedy what had been done and to stop it. I stood for a second motionless waiting to see what would happen and whether it could be remedied (Tolstoy 424).

that redemption is possible. Liberation from one's sins is possible through repentance and conversion.

St. Paul maintains that God will provide the means to escape temptation to those who seek it: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Tolstoy would agree with the biblical teachings of the need to purify one's heart and resist demonic temptations. "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10). And about avoiding temptations, let us consider Proverbs 4:14 "Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil."

James' view is that when one lives according to one's earthly desires, one is making allegiances with the world, which is unacceptable. One must be fully devoted to God. This supports the point that he is making about the dangers of being friends with the world. But there is hope. He ends it with this, "But He (God) gives us more grace". How do we receive this grace? How do we get on the right side of God's wrath? Through humble submission to his wisdom and desire for our lives. James exhorts his audience to do this: "Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? ... Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you ... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up" (James, 4:4).

According to Zalambani, the professional figures depicted at the beginning of *The Kreutzer Sonata* represent the new bourgeois class that was emerging at that time in Russian society (Zalambani 5). Also, the conversation in the train at the beginning of the novella clearly

shows that new ideas about love and marriage are becoming increasingly popular. These new ideas are voiced by the lady, while the old peasant expresses the old patriarchal views on the family. The different views expressed on love and family life show that society was changing towards more liberal ideas on these topics as we will see in more detail in my chapter 3.

However, patriarchal views and a conservative family structure were still present at the time and severe ostracism would affect those who were not living according to the mores and traditions of the time. The society was strongly oriented towards the rights of men, as it is clear from the reasons given for Pozdnyshev's acquittal:

Ведь на суде было представлено дело так, что все случилось из ревности.

Ничуть не бывало, то есть не то, что ничуть не бывало, а то, да не то. На суде так и решено было, что я обманутый муж и что я убил, защищая свою поруганную честь (так ведь это называется по-ихнему). И от этого меня оправдали.<sup>96</sup> (Tolstoy, ch. XIX).

In *The Kreutzer Sonata* Pozdnyshev discusses the emancipation of women and prostitution. On the one hand, he shows that women are becoming more liberal in their ideas towards sexuality and family through emancipation. On the other hand, he shows that men still continue to treat women as slaves or as objects. Thus, despite the changing attitude towards family and sexuality, women remain an “instrument” for men and at the same time they use their own sensuality to subjugate men for their own pleasures:

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<sup>96</sup>At the trial it was decided that I was a wronged husband and that I had killed her while defending my outraged honour (that is the phrase they employ you know). That is why I was acquitted. I tried to explain matters at the trial but they took it that I was trying to rehabilitate my wife's honour. (Tolstoy 131)

А между тем возьмут отменяют внешнюю форму рабства, устроят так, что нельзя больше совершать купчих на рабов, и воображают и себя уверяют, что рабства уже нет, и не видят и не хотят видеть того, что рабство продолжает быть, потому что люди точно так же любят и считают хорошим и справедливым пользоваться трудами других. А как скоро они считают это хорошим, то всегда найдутся люди, которые сильнее или хитрее других и сумеют это сделать. То же и с эмансипацией женщины. Рабство женщины ведь только в том, что люди желают и считают очень хорошим пользоваться ею как орудием наслаждения. Ну, и вот освобождают женщину, дают ей всякие права, равные мужчине, но продолжают смотреть на нее как на орудие наслаждения, так воспитывают ее и в детстве и общественным мнением".<sup>97</sup> (Tolstoy ch. XIV)

The clash between new, modern ideas (of women's liberation), and the old societal mores resulted in unhappy couples as depicted in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Psychological problems, neuroses, domestic violence and murder are at the centre of Tolstoy's works. As Bernstein points out, Tolstoy's Maslova in the novel *Resurrection* (1899) was an artistic creation, but her experience clearly has roots in reality. Industrialization and urbanization led to an increase in prostitution in towns (306).

Women in Russia wanted to be equal to men and in order to achieve this equality they make use of their own sensuality to subjugate men. In *The Kreutzer Sonata*, husband and wife

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<sup>97</sup> "Actually, this is what happens. They abolish the external form, they suppress the formal sales of slaves, and then they imagine and assure others that slavery is abolished. They are unwilling to see that it still exists, since people, as before, like to profit by the labor of others, and think it good and just. This being given there will always be found beings stronger or more cunning than others to profit thereby. The same thing happens in the emancipation of woman. At bottom feminine servitude consists entirely in her assimilation with a means of pleasure. They excite woman, they give her all sorts of rights equal to those of men, but they continue to look upon her as an object of sensual desire, and thus they bring her up from infancy and in public opinion"

persistently submit to one another in order to satisfy their own carnal desire. So freedom for women does not lie in the right to vote, but in striving to be equal to man in bed. This is in contradiction to Christian teaching, as the apostle Paul writes to the church in Ephesus:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself (Ephesians 5:8).

### Tolstoy's Moralizing Through the Prism of the Bible

Tolstoy re-wrote and modified the Gospel with his commentary which he revealed through his writing. Family relations include sex, but sex can yield a moral home life only insofar as is transfigured by higher purposes. Tolstoy sought to grasp this interpretation of Jesus' second commandment, and his creative imagination also gave it life.

Pozdnyshev is selfish, narcissistic, proud of his own behavior, and commits several sins according to the Bible. After three or four days of marriage, he is already quarrelling with his wife. He wants to show his wife that he is the master of the house. He does not recognize his wife's rights to argue with him. He is even jealous of her; he has doubts about her and does not trust her. When he was young, before getting married, he had affairs, and was proud of it. There is no mutual understanding between husband and wife. He even hates her. The reason for their quarrelling is their hate. According to conservative traditional Christian principles, however, the

wife should obey her husband. While values of love and compassion may be more or less constant or universal, the role and status of women as dictated by religious dogma are less so. On the one hand Pozdnyshv is a modern thinking man, and on the other, his position is based on the views expressed in the book of *Domostroi*. The old merchant who, in the discussion with the modern lady on the train, defends *Domostroi*'s views of love and marriage, voices Tolstoy's views.

At the end of the novel Pozdnyshv repents. He is jealous of his wife, and also of his own children because she cared more about them than about him. Moreover, his wife takes care of the household, of the management of the house, and of their servants. When the children are grown up, she has nothing to engage herself in, but music. She is bored, and does not know what to do. He drinks and plays cards, is a landlord, and works for the Zemstvo, or local municipality.

St. Paul seems to suggest that it is even better not to marry "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am" (1 Corinthians 7:8). Christianity might more accurately be called "Paulism" since his letters predate the Gospels and influenced them. It is better to marry than to be sexually immoral. "Sexual immorality" encompasses anything other than sexual activity within the marriage, as Paul defines it: "It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband" (1 Cor 7:2). Moreover, sexual sin, while still sin, is considered somewhat different to other sins. One can be forgiven for his/her sins, but if one sins sexually, one sins against his/her own body, which is the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

Marriage is for this earthly life, but with marriage between a husband and wife being a picture of the future great marriage between Christ and the Church, i.e. the body of believers.



God's plan from the beginning was for the marriage between Christ and the Church, a perfect model for our marriage. The ultimate marriage on earth is the marriage of an individual with Jesus, so one needs to be holy and pure to be a suitable bride for Him.

Pozdnyshev thought that marriage was for love when he was young, but later on, when he is around thirty years old and gets married, he realizes that marriage is a deception. Respect between husband and wife represents the foundation for a marriage, but they did not know each other well before getting married, so when their lust ended, their marriage collapsed and ended in tragedy. "Our love was exhausted when our desire was satisfied. We were face to face to our true relationship. Two driven egoists, each seeking their maximum satisfaction" (Tolstoy, Ch. XII). Pozdnyshev murders his wife and then loses his children. *The Kreutzer Sonata* offers a view of human relations governed purely by the material and the physical. From a Christian perspective, however, relationships between husbands and wives should be in keeping with the teachings of the Scriptures. If a wife chooses a husband, she has to remain under the love and protection of the head of the family. Marriage comes with responsibility; it is about loving each other and is a sacrificial service. Accepting the authority of the other person means serving, because it is a sacrificial service, in the same way as Christ gave himself to the Church. This ideal from Peter stands in contrast to what Pozdnyshev describes:

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husband so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives ... Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker

partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers (1 Peter 3: 1-7)

Tolstoy and his mouthpiece Pozdnyshev would not agree with Ephesians from the Bible:

Wives, submit to your husband as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body of which he is the Saviour. Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. In the same way husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. Each one of you must also love his wife as he loves himself. And the wife must respect her husband (Ephesians 5: 22).

The above-mentioned verses highlight the equal partnership of husbands and wives in God's gift of new life. Though the husband exercises the role of authority and leadership and the wife fulfils a role of submission, both are equal heirs in God's kingdom. "The greatest among you should be like the youngest and the one who rules like the one who serves" (Luke 22:26). The roles are different, but equally important. Submission is not a word of inferiority or weakness. The wife recognizes and accepts the authority of the man because of his role (And the husband must love his wife). All relations are built on some level of submission. The idea of authority has been misunderstood by society. "Submission" is meant as a voluntary choice. In

this world everyone must submit to some authority; here it is a choice that one makes out of respect for God and to honour Jesus.

The Christian illustration of marriage typifying the relationship between Christ and the Church adds further encouragement for wives to submit to their husbands, even those who do not follow Christ. In creating man and woman, God instituted the human family and endowed it with its fundamental constitution. Its members are persons equal in dignity. For the common good of its members and of society, the family necessarily has diverse responsibilities, rights and duties. “The head of every man is Christ and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (Corinthians 11:3).

“For man did not come from woman, but woman from man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman” (1 Corinthians 11:8-12).

So, for a Christian the key to marriage is unity. It is looking after each other. The wife will submit to her husband, who loves her. The wife is the body of the husband. He does not hurt his own body, so he does not hurt his wife’s body.

The characters in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, instead, are not observing any of these principles, and do not believe in the sacrament. For example, Pozdnyshev criticizes God. He announces, “God did not understand what was necessary and therefore ...arranged things badly” (Tolstoy 383). This might also explain why the Russian Orthodox Church requested the government to ban the novella:

Выходит, что бог не понимал того, что нужно, и потому, не спросившись у волхвов, дурно устроил. Извольте видеть, дело не сходится.

Мужчине нужно и необходимо, так решили они, удовлетворять свою похоть, а тут замешалось деторождение и кормление детей, мешающие удовлетворению этой потребности.<sup>98</sup>

Moreover, Pozdnyshchev goes on and attacks the Church. In *The Kreutzer Sonata* he declares that “going to the church was regarded as a special condition for obtaining possession of a certain woman” (Tolstoy 376).

Но у нас, когда из десяти брачующихся едва ли есть один, который не только не верит в таинство, но не верит даже в то, что то, что он делает, есть некоторое обязательство, когда из ста мужчин едва ли один есть уже неженатый прежде и из пятидесяти один, который вперед не готовился бы изменять своей жене при всяком удобном случае, когда большинство смотрит на поездку в церковь только как на особенное условие обладания известной женщиной, - подумайте, какое ужасное значение получают при этом все эти подробности.<sup>99</sup>

In chapter XI Tolstoy preaches abstention from sexual relations and sets purity as the main ideal to be achieved. He argues that the strongest of all the passions man has to fight in life

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<sup>98</sup> It seems that God did not understand what was necessary and therefore, omitting to consult those wizards, arranged things badly. You see matters do not ally. They have decided that it is essential for a man to satisfy his desires, and the bearing and nursing of children comes and interferes with it and hinders the satisfaction of that need (Tolstoy 383).

<sup>99</sup> With us, out of ten married people there is scarcely to be found one who, I do not say believes in sacraments (whether he believes or not is a matter of indifference to us), but believes in what he promises. Out of a hundred men, there is scarcely one who has not married before, and out of fifty scarcely one who has not made up his mind to deceive his wife. The great majority look upon this journey to the church as a condition necessary to the possession of a certain woman. Think then of the supreme significance which material details must take on (Tolstoy 118).

is the sexual passion “Passion for consumption is the worse” (Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, 110).

Before marrying, Pozdnyshev regards himself as “the height of perfection” (Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, 125). He also states that he was “not marrying for money”. He was rich, she was poor. Her father was a landlord, but bankrupt. But he resolved to be monogamous after marriage, and was feeling proud of this. Love is supposed to be spiritual and not sensual. In addition to reducing the act of falling in love to pure sexual attraction, Tolstoy is led from this hypothesis to suggest that all aspects of love, such as warmth of communication, friendship, and joy in intimacy, are simple manifestations or deformations of sexuality. Pozdnyshev, for example, found it impossible for himself and his wife to engage in simple conversation as an expression of the "spiritual communion" that should go together with romantic love: “It used to be dreadfully difficult to talk when we were left alone... there was nothing to talk about” (Tolstoy 39). Moreover, as Benson highlights, Tolstoy denied the possibility of communication on a deeper level, that is, the dedication and exchange that follows the respect of a partner whose ideals meet and develop one's own. To the lady on the train who defended this possibility, Pozdnyshev replied angrily: “Spiritual affinity! Identity of ideals! . . . But in that case why go to bed together? (Excuse my vulgarity!)” (Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata* 130).

As James A. Brundage points out in his article “Sex and Canon law”, *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (1996), from the beginning of the church’s history the sexual conduct of church members has been the main focus of Christian authorities. As the earliest Christian documents to survive, the letters of St. Paul deal with sexual behaviour in great detail:

Paul admonished the Christian communities with which he corresponded that heterosexual marital intercourse was the only type of sexual encounter that they were allowed to enjoy. He cautioned them not to focus their attention on transitory sexual pleasures, but rather on the approaching last judgment and the reign of God (thus Romans 1:27; 1 Cor. 6:9-10, 15-19 and 7:9-16; Eph. 5:21-23; 1 Tim 1:10). Paul also made it clear to his readers that while virginity might not be for everyone, it was inherently preferable for Christians to avoid sex altogether (1 Cor 7:1, 8-9) (Brundage 33).

According to Levin, in the early Byzantine church sexuality featured at the centre of many debates. The majority of the religious leaders considered sexual activity suspiciously and preferred continence to marriage. However, there was no agreement in their understanding of the origin of sexual drive and of the meaning of marriage:

St. Paul depicted sexuality as a dangerous manifestation of the corruptible body standing in opposition to the perfectable spirit. To some early Christians, sexuality and its concomitant childbearing represented the continuing cycle of birth and death from which Christ's resurrection promised deliverance. Other saw sexuality as a symptom of humanity's fall from purity and immortality. Manichaeans decried sexual activity and procreation as the perpetuation of the powers of Darkness that captured the true Light of God's creation (Levin 331).

When Tolstoy wrote *The Kreutzer Sonata* this Christian (and especially Pauline) attitude to sex probably resonated with him because he already was thinking about sex as a sinful drive and as a

human separation from God. Thus, Tolstoy elevated sexual abstinence as an ideal and preached chastity even within marriage.

### The Afterword Controversy

Through Pozdnyshev, Tolstoy expresses his views on the relationships between the sexes, and advances his notion of celibacy. These ideas find expression in an afterword that Tolstoy later appended to *The Kreutzer Sonata*.

In his book “Lev Tolstoy” Victor Shklovsky highlights the views that Tolstoy wanted to express in the “Afterword” of *The Kreutzer Sonata* as follows:

- 1) That sexual intercourse is not essential, rather the contrary: “that continence is possible and less dangerous and harmful to health than incontinence” (Qtd. in Shklovsky 210).
- 2) Carnal love is not “a poetic, lofty blessing” (Qtd. in Shklovsky 210). Here Tolstoy says that it is unfortunate that everything connected with carnal love has been raised to a “supreme, poetic aim”, as witness all the art and literature in society.
- 3) No contraceptives must be used.
- 4) Faulty upbringing encourages the sexuality of children. “Finery, reading, shows, music, dancing, rich food, and the whole environment, beginning from the picture on chocolate boxes and ending with novels, stories and poems, further stimulate this sensuality” (Qtd. in Shklovsky 210).

5) Further, he asserts that there never was, and indeed never could be, such a thing as a “Christian marriage” just as there has not been and cannot be a Christian divine service (Matt. VI. 5-12; John IV. 21), any Christian teachers or fathers (Matt. xxiii. 8-10), Christian property, army, courts, or state.

6) The answer is chastity. The extinction of the human race need not be feared, as absolute chastity is an unattainable ideal.

7) One must take guidance from this ideal, as from a compass. There is no such thing as “legitimate delight” and “the first time a man sins, he must consider himself married to the woman once and for all time” (Qtd. in Shklovsky 210).

8) Married couples must together “strive to free themselves from temptation, to purify themselves and cease to sin...” The ideal of righteousness is an attainment of “complete continence” (Qtd. in Shklovsky 210).

As the critic Ellis Keith points out, in the “Afterword” Tolstoy states his social intention or purpose in writing the story in such terms as to suggest that the work be read as a kind of model, which, by exaggerating the dangers of marriage, would make the case for celibacy (Ellis 899). Tolstoy in the “Afterword” highlights that the Christian ideal is love of God and his neighbour, self-denial in order to serve God and his neighbour; whereas carnal love, marriage, mean serving oneself, are an obstacle to the service of God and man and, consequently, from the Christian point of view, a fall - a sin. According to Tolstoy, entering into matrimony cannot fit with the service of God and man, even in the case when those who enter into marriage have in mind the perpetuation of the human race. As Tolstoy points out in the Epilogue to *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1890), “rather than entering into marriage in order to have children, it would be much



simpler for such people to look after and save the lives of those millions of children who are perishing around them through want of material, not to say spiritual, food. Only then could a Christian enter into matrimony without the awareness of a fall, a sin, if he saw and knew all the existing lives of children to be protected. One may reject the teaching of Christ, that training which pervades all one's life and upon which all our morality is based, but, if one accepts this teaching, one cannot fail to admit that it leads to the ideal of absolute chastity" (Tolstoy, Epilogue to *The Kreutzer Sonata*, 205).

Tolstoy was a bundle of contradictions and he saw the only way out in repressing his personal self, was through what he regarded as Christian love. Chekhov agrees that this was Tolstoy's concept; he does not accept or understand it. Tolstoy was repudiating any kind of purely personal resistance, even resistance to evil. Moreover, by rejecting history and civilization, Tolstoy expressed his ideal of family as a primitive communal existence where there would be no room for individualism, no functional or any other separation between man and woman (Lavrín 146). Tolstoy rejected life as a nobleman, to some extent at least, and emulated the peasants' simple life in order to come closer to the experience of life governed by the principle of "non-individualism".

Tolstoy underwent a spiritual crisis at the age of fifty. Such was his despair that he contemplated suicide. He found solace and hope in the notion that societies ought to be, and could be, constructed on Christian principles (Shouler & Anthony 1). Nevertheless, Tolstoy's understanding of Christianity was not without problems. His interpretation of the metaphysics behind it remains unacceptable to many Christians today. In his urge to purge what he saw as a

corrupted version of Jesus' teaching, Tolstoy imposed a very rationalistic approach on Christianity, one that does away with all mysteries, rituals and traditions.

In his search for the meaning of life, Tolstoy's only torch was the light of nineteenth-century reason. His ideal of chastity within marriage was not in keeping with Jesus' teaching.

Tolstoy believed that we all need to undertake a process of purification, a desexualizing cleansing, and that the task of humanity is to fight against nature, to restrain instinctive impulses by cultivating them through a conscious and disciplined abstinence. The future of the Russian family as seen by Tolstoy would be a sort of asexual fellowship of a monastic kind. As Lillian J. Helle points out, the way for women to approach this ideal is through a nun-like, chaste mentality in which their feminine aspects are denied in favour of a neutral personality. This was, she maintains, in order that they might escape from the characteristics of their gender and mitigate any destructive polarisation that exists between the sexes. Men, too, can negate their sexual characteristics, transforming themselves into sexually neutral beings through a similar ascetic-monastic style of life. She points out that this lifestyle is in keeping with the norms of chastity that one can find in the biography of the saints (Helle 35).

This leads to my interpretation of what Tolstoy views as the future of the Russian family. Family members will work for the happiness of each other. To achieve this they will need to follow a code of conduct. This code will be based on a faithful following of Jesus' teaching, responding to all evil by overcoming it through the contagious power of love. This, he thought, would be the only way to achieve further progress in human relations. Personal effort would be paramount and individual family members would only find happiness if it were tied to the happiness of others.

Asceticism is another important message of Tolstoy. This would be because asceticism annuls the feminine and masculine aspects of human nature, leading to neutral personalities and making it easier for family members to get along with each other. Also, celibacy is an equally possible solution for men.

According to Jackson, Tolstoy's views on the family, marriage, and sexuality reveal a sense of "duality" in that Tolstoy considers chastity not as a rule, but an ideal, (215) giving greater emphasis on charity. Therefore, in his afterword he shows this duality by stating that if the ideal was to be realised, it would lead to the end of human life, and as such it is actually unattainable:

"An ideal is only then an ideal when its realization is possible in the idea only, in thought, when it presents itself as attainable only at infinity, and when, therefore, the approach to it is infinite. If an ideal were not only attainable, but we could imagine its realization, it would cease to be an ideal. Such is Christ's ideal, the establishment of the kingdom of God upon earth, an ideal which had been foretold even by the prophets when they said that the time would come when the people would be instructed by God, when the swords would be forged into ploughshares and the spears into sickles, when the lion would lie with the lamb, when all the creatures would be united in love. The whole meaning of human life consists in a motion toward this ideal, and therefore the striving after the Christian ideal, in all its entirety, and after chastity, as one of the conditions of this ideal, not only does not exclude the possibility of life, but, on the contrary, the absence of this Christian ideal would destroy all movement forward and, consequently, all possibility of life" (Tolstoy, *Afterword*, 201).

The ultimate freedom from moral relations is murder; murder, in the case of Pozdnyshev is the direct outcome of a relationship (as he conceives it) based on ‘swinishness’ upon ‘crime’. The murder is not simply the result of jealousy; it is the displaced realization of the frustrated sexual drive: “The imbeciles! They think that I killed my wife on the 5th of October. It was long before that that I immolated her, just as they all kill now” (*The Kreutzer Sonata*, 102). Pozdnyshev’s main idea is that sexual intercourse is incompatible with moral relations or spiritual communion. According to Mondry, “Pozdnyshev’s act of murder is an attempt at self-purification” (173). Animal sex is a characteristic trait of Pozdnyshev’s relationship with his wife. The real physical murder is a surrogate for the frustrated sexual act (Jackson 222).

The Gospel passage that Tolstoy uses as his epigraph is taken from the Sermon on the Mount, when Christ says that “if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart”. Tolstoy was excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox Church and both *The Power of Darkness* and *The Kreutzer Sonata* were censured due to the pressure of the church on the tsarist government. Tolstoy’s vision of charitable chastity within marriage was an extreme position from the viewpoint of most interpretations of Christianity. However, this vision was a genuine and thoughtful response to the crisis the Russian family was facing in the context of the late nineteenth century. It influenced contemporary Russian writers, especially a young rising star of the short story called Anton Chekhov.

## Conclusion

The changes in the Russian family at both ends of the social spectrum are skilfully represented by Tolstoy in his fiction. Some of these changes include the emancipation of women,

development of capitalism, urbanisation, and industrialisation. I show the link between the development of capitalism and the loss of Christian moral foundations of the peasant family in *The Power of Darkness*. Tolstoy takes the theme of the loss of Christian principles one step further in *The Kreutzer Sonata* by exposing the crisis in a monogamous aristocratic family, where the husband murders his wife on the pretext of adultery. This murder becomes the unlikely champion of the need for a greater charity and even chastity within marriage. The solution of ‘charitable chastity’ that Tolstoy proposes in his Afterword creates a polemic that aptly bridges concepts about sexuality within the family in *The Brothers Karamazov* and those expressed by Chekhov through his prolific writing of short stories. However, the controversy over *The Kreutzer Sonata* began before the Afterword was written due to the very nature of the topics which Tolstoy addressed; this theme of addressing the effects of lust on the crisis of Russian families grew and developed from the time of the *Power of Darkness* to the end of his life.

In *The Power of Darkness* Tolstoy shows that “Darkness” has different meanings. From a religious perspective, it can be seen as the Kingdom of the Devil, where the darkness of sin is juxtaposed with the light of righteousness. Secondly, “darkness” can be interpreted as the new political and social order, the new social relations, and the development of capitalism following the abolition of serfdom in 1861, which simple and honest villagers like Akim cannot understand. “Darkness” includes the complexities of personal financial management brought about by monetisation. Moreover, “Power of Darkness” means lack of general education, as shown in the examples of colloquial and genuinely popular language. Finally, “darkness” in the play becomes symbolic of anything considered superstitious, ignorant, primordial and primitive. Through his play, Tolstoy also communicates an implicit Christian message that those who succumb to debauchery and are tempted by money will commit a great sin that can lead to

tragedy and the ruin of the family. Furthermore, Tolstoy communicates a social-political critique to the tsarist government that the conditions of life of the peasants have not improved as the government was instead trying to show.

The development of capitalism is depicted in the play through monetisation of peasant life and the murder of Petr for his money and estate. According to Bialyi, Akim does not understand the idea of money deposited in the bank accruing interest (Bialyi 204): “Put your money there and lie back by the stove, and collect it when you want” (26, 181), says the veteran soldier Mitrich with a perfect understanding of how banking transactions work: money is received at the bank, “There they seize it, that’s right and swindle us” (26, 182). Akim pronounces a moral sentence on such state of things: “Then, it’s not legal. It’s disgusting. How did scholars come up with...” (26, 182). Marriage between Anis’ia and Nikita was based on different reasons: sexual attraction from Anis’ia’s perspective and convenience from Nikita, especially from his mother Matreona. The conspiracy to murder Petr, led by Matreona and Anis’ia, can be seen as an example of women struggling for liberation as the ladies apparently have the power to shape their own destiny. However, this struggle for emancipation happens entirely by manipulating a patriarchal system and has negative consequences that lead to the destruction of the family. Thus, women’s liberation is certainly not the moral of the story. The plot is an example of the clash in Foucault’s paradigm between the deployment of alliance and the deployment of sexuality. Anis’ia deploys her sexuality to get her out of her arranged marriage, however both marriages ultimately fail. It is not the institution of marriage that is in question here, rather the sin that corrupts it, especially sexual desire and greed for money. As Bialyi maintains, in *The Power of Darkness* money has a horrible, deadly force. Matreona brings the poisonous powders for Anis’ia to poison her husband, so that Nikita can have the money.

Nikita takes the money from the dead man's corpse. This gives him power over Anis'ia and leads to multiple woes. The greatest of these problems is that money makes one accustomed to the thought that one can live without labour.

Among other societal changes that are reflected in Tolstoy's work, industrialization, urbanization, and the development of capitalism that emphasized the corrupting power of money, are part of the changes that Tolstoy observed and that I understand as part of the context in *The Power of Darkness*. The banks and the new toilets in town depicted in the play are a clear sign of the new social development; Nikita had worked on the railway, which was one of the greatest investments towards the industrialisation of Russia.

In *The Power of Darkness* Tolstoy shows that despite emancipation of serfdom, peasants still live in poverty, backwardness and lack of education. However, Tolstoy is moralising through fiction and communicates an implicit Christian message that greed for money and sexual immorality can lead to the ruin of the family. The play also demonstrates Tolstoy's obsession about the "truth" of sex. Foucault in his famous work *The History of Sexuality* (1990) defines sex as "the fragment of darkness that each carries within us: a general signification. A universal secret, an omnipresent cause, a fear that never ends" (69). This is relevant for Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Chekhov, especially for Tolstoy's obsession about the "truth" of sex. All three authors show in their works the destructive power of sexuality and its effects on the family. "The society that emerged in the 19th century – bourgeois, capitalist, or industrial society, did speak of sex and compelled everyone to do so; it also set out to formulate the uniform truth of sex" (Foucault 69). Foucault's definition of sex as the 'fragment of darkness' resonates with Tolstoy's

the *Power of Darkness*, where the power of sexuality is brought to the fore, with its destructive effects on family life and personal relations.

Another important aspect of *The Kreutzer Sonata* that reflects the societal changes at the time is that marriage between Pozdnyshev and his wife is not an arranged marriage, but a marriage based on feelings (love as passion). By the late 1880's arranged marriages were still common and family life was heavily patriarchal, however the new trends from Europe were infiltrating the discourse of the bourgeoisie and aristocracy. Tolstoy in his fiction uses the rhythm and context of the train as a literary device to clearly present his criticism of both the established and upcoming views on the nature of marriage in his contemporary Russia. Thus, when the older tradesman leaves, he takes with him the patriarchal argument from the debate. Tolstoy highlights the degree to which European trends were influencing the emerging professionals by how the remaining passengers criticised the tradesman once he had departed:

“As soon as the old man had gone several voices were raised.

‘A daddy of the old style’ remarked the clerk.

‘A living Domstróy!’ said the lady.

‘What barbarous views on women and marriage!’

‘Yes, we are far from the European understanding of marriage’, said the lawyer.

‘The chief things such people do not understand’, continued the lady, “is that marriage without love is not marriage; that love alone sanctifies marriage, and that real marriage is only such as is sanctified by love”



This discourse clearly denotes Foucault's deployment of sexuality paradigm, which is based on social trends originating from late nineteenth century Europe. Furthermore, the tradesman represents the views of society based on the deployment of alliance. At this point in the conversation, the shy and retiring Pozdnyshev speaks up to question the very notion of love. He is not defending the tradesman, but he is challenging the validity of his new ideas. In the subsequent discussion with the lady, the clerk and the lawyer, Tolstoy clearly establishes that Pozdnyshev does understand and is referring to the same notion of love as his bourgeois travelling companions, who leave when he reveals that he murdered his wife. Again, Tolstoy employs the literary device of removing the argument together with the characters, but this time the lady and the lawyer move to a different carriage and the clerk falls asleep. The proponents of the deployment of sexuality remain on the train, whereas the deployment of alliance reached its final destination (the station at which the character departs the train). This can be viewed as a metaphor for ideas on love and family life whose time has passed and the contemporary thought remains on the train, moving forward as Tolstoy exposes his ideas of charity and chastity within marriage. The narrator is a curious impartial observer who lends a sympathetic ear to Pozdnyshev and, like the reader, is hooked on the novelty of listening to the confessions of an infamous murderer.

The problem of sex, which deeply concerned Tolstoy in his belief that man's moral health depended on his ability to approach closer to the ideal of chastity, becomes the central theme of the novella *The Kreutzer Sonata* (Simmons 689). However, liberation from passion is possible through a faithful following of Christian values and morality, as clearly indicated in the epigraph from Matthew (5:28-29). An analysis of *The Kreutzer Sonata* shows that the future of the Russian family for Tolstoy is based on absolute chastity within marriage. Pozdnyshev in *The*

Kreutzer Sonata asserts that sexual drive is a destructive force, that it would be better for the human race to practice celibacy than to continue the practices of modern society.

*The Kreutzer Sonata* is written in the form of a confession. As Foucault highlights, sex is a topic of confession:

From the Christian penance to the present day, sex was a privilege theme of confession. The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement, it is a ritual that unfolds within power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or visual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor, but the authority that requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile (61).

In this novella polemics, a hard core of ideological, social, and philosophical discussion is interlaced with personal narrative. Polemical issues of broad social content involving marriage, family, and sex, occupy almost equal space with personal history. Tolstoy's views and solutions were radical and controversial, but the problems he highlighted will continue to be hotly debated by his younger contemporaries.

As Engelstein points out, even before its publication, *The Kreutzer Sonata* became the point of discussion around the so called "sexual question". Many writers responded to *The Kreutzer Sonata*; for example Chekhov, Solov'ev and Rozanov attacked it in different ways. Thus, for instance, Chekhov in his short story *Baby* (1891) portrays the same love triangle as Tolstoy does in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. However, Chekhov focuses on peasant family, and in this story the sexual infidelity he depicts is not a figment of the protagonist's imagination (Engelstein 238). As Engelstein points out, according to Chekhov, it is not the power of sexual desire, as in Tolstoy's

*The Kreutzer Sonata*, that ruins family life, but the weight of the traditional patriarchy on the family (238). However, liberal ideas about love and sexuality as expressed by Chekhov's characters and freer relationships between the sexes as portrayed in his short stories and novellas, do not necessarily make families happier. Thus, despite the shift from the deployment of alliance to the deployment of sexuality as highlighted by Foucault, the family remains the centre of conflict between parents and children and between husband and wife.

Chekhov responded to *The Kreutzer Sonata* enthusiastically at first and later with a critical reaction that affected his literature. He was an interested follower of Tolstoyism at the time and initially responded very favourably to an illegal copy of the book, which he sent on for friends to read:

Chekhov was not long in getting hold of an illegal copy of *The Kreutzer Sonata*. In the middle of January 1890 he had already read it and was able to forward it to M.I Tchaikovsky (the composer's brother)... (with an)... accompanying note with Chekhov's instruction as to who is next in line... (Moller 240)

He did not agree with all the opinions but considered that the artistry and the controversial topic were very important in the literary scene at the time: "Quite apart from its artistic qualities, which are at times incredible, the tale deserves our gratitude if only because it strains our thinking to the uttermost. While reading, one can barely restrain exclamations like 'that's true!' or 'that's absurd!'" Moller points out that Chekhov had intended to write a thesis on the history of sexual authority during his undergraduate studies, and it is the fact that the *The Kreutzer Sonata* addresses the issue of sexual authority within marriage, that makes this book so

appealing to Chekhov. Moller argues that although Chekhov never completed his thesis academically, in practice he presented his arguments through his prolific career as a short story writer (240).

According to Moller, Chekhov presented inter-personal sexual power relationships identifying them as the cause of so much pain in everyday life (Moller 241). Unlike Tolstoy, however, Chekhov refuses to portray the consequences of the adulterous relationship, but is interested rather in the dynamics of desire and fulfilment and in the invisible connections between rhetoric and sexuality (Evdokimova 154).

From the perspective of Foucault's analysis of the nineteenth century, Dostoevsky's writings support the concept that family ties are determined by the deployment of alliance. Tolstoy's solution to the crisis of the Russian family was charity and chastity within marriage. Chekhov was challenged by Tolstoy's reasoning, yet responded with a discourse that celebrated the deployment of sexuality despite the traditional social mores. Thus, Chekhov moved away from the Tolstoyan attitude into the avant guard of Russian literature.

There is a clear progress in Tolstoy's thinking on the crisis of the Russian family, from *The Power of Darkness* to *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Both works share the epigraph of Mathew 5:28 in which Jesus warns of the dangers of lust. However, as Tolstoy's thinking progressed, he linked the concept of lust and adultery in the heart to lust causing failure within marriage. Furthermore, he added the concept of chastity "for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven" as referred to in Mathew 19:10-12, and applied this to marriage. His observations about the corrupting effects of romanticism within literature are precursors to what has become overt deployment of sexuality in modern media. Tolstoy's focus on the lack of charity in romantic love

was undermined by his insistence that chastity was also necessary within marriage. This placed him very much in the minority as an isolated figure, thus the controversy of *The Kreutzer Sonata* was short lived and could not stop the trend towards sexual deployment in family dynamics.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Introduction

Because of the nature of the themes addressed in his short stories and novellas, Chekhov has been viewed as a pessimist. These themes include unhappy marriages, unrequited love, adultery, suicide and infanticide. This thesis, however, presents the view that, in being labelled a pessimist, Chekhov is much misunderstood. His portrayal of Russian society during an era of imminent revolution does include depressing themes, but this should not be interpreted as the author's personal attitude. Rather, it is an exposé of the reality of the crisis within the Russian family, and specifically within male and female relationships. In contrast to the ideological approaches of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Chekhov remains pragmatic.

Chekhov's high level of education and training as a physician is reflected in the way he views the world around him. As a doctor, he had to interpret the symptoms of diseases which were often hidden. In the same manner, as an author, Chekhov also exposed what lay beneath contemporary social niceties in order to interpret what he sees. In the darkness there are themes of hope, such as the emancipation of women, freedom of choice in love, personal enlightenment and progress within the education of women, children and peasants. Chekhov uses shocking subjects as a hallmark of his style.

In his work, he often outlines the symptoms, the social ills, without intending to make a moral judgement on emerging trends in sexuality, family life and social mobility. Rather, he simply draws the reader into the trends themselves without bias. He does not tell the reader what to think or which character is right or wrong, but presents a variety of characters and a plethora of attitudes towards love and life. He is saying, even demanding at times, 'Think! Feel!' In doing so Chekhov leaves the reader with an unresolved moral dilemma, a challenge to take the initiative within a society accustomed to being told how to think and act. Chekhov does not present clichés, he attempts to give his characters a voice.

Chekhov's literary artistry combined with his medical knowledge and insight into human nature, results in short stories that have altered the narrative standards for an entire literary form. He portrays family situations and dynamics that are new to literature in Russia. He gives voice to the divorcee, the adulterer and the philanderer without labelling one or other as abuser or victim. Yet through his act of storytelling, he is himself a contributor to and even a catalyst of the crisis of family itself. As with Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Chekhov's writing is a response to and depiction of the different problems he saw within the Russian family. In general, Chekhov does not provide answers to the crisis of the Russian family, but presents through his stories material for the readers to reflect on.

This chapter examines the social and historical issues of a number of Anton Chekhov's (1860-1904) short stories and novellas relating to family topics. Chekhov wrote during a transitional period in the history of the Russian family, a time of changing social structures and attitudes to sexuality. He presents a realistic portrayal of the Russia of his day and deals with the enduring questions of love, marriage and family dynamics. For him, a true artist must only pose,

not solve, problems (“не беллетристы должны решать такие вопросы, как Бог, пессимизм, и т. д.” (Pis’ma II 289)).<sup>100</sup>

The aim of this chapter is to build on my analysis of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy by examining to what extent Chekhov was influenced by and had an influence upon public views on family and marriage in Russia. I will discuss Chekhov’s critics to demonstrate how Chekhov explores his beautifully depicted characters, as a doctor would, looking at the naked, sometimes ugly truth, exposing the reality behind the sexual mores as they touched every strata of Russian society in the last decades of the 19th century in Russia. In order to provide a foundation for this analysis, I start by pointing out the changes that occurred in family life between 1880 and the end of the century that Chekhov described. I will then analyse the stories.

I have selected a series of short stories and novellas which are all concerned with family life. I focus, in particular, on extra-marital relationships, marriages gone bad, as well as divorce, ostracism of relationships deemed immoral by society at the time, love and marriage, the mistreatment of children, and extended families. I do this to highlight positive themes that have often been overlooked, the greatest of which is a search for truth and spiritual regeneration; but I also include the emancipation of women; the search for romantic love; the treatment of children; and the emancipation of peasants and workers. For my main analysis, I have chosen the story “The Duel” (1891) because it was written as a response to Tolstoy’s depiction of family life in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, as shown by P. U. Moller in his book *Postlude to The Kreutzer Sonata* (1988). Other stories I will explore are: “The Lady with the Little Dog” (1899), “Ariadne” (1895), “The Darling” (1899), and “The Betrothed” (1903), which are set amongst the upper

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<sup>100</sup> “It is not for a novelist to resolve such questions as God, pessimism and the like...” (To Alexei Suvorin, May 30, 1888).

class or bourgeoisie. I also examine Chekhov's portrayal of peasant families: "Peasants" (1897), "In the Ravine" (1900), and "Peasant Women" (1891). As a doctor and as a writer, Chekhov had knowledge of the *intelligentsia* as well as of the peasantry, so my analysis starts by focusing on stories depicting the upper classes and leading to representative stories set amongst the peasants.

### "The Duel" (1891) and *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889); Chekhov's Response to Tolstoy

Chekhov's story "The Duel" is written as a response to Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata*. *The Kreutzer Sonata* provoked a strong debate in intellectual circles about the issues of marriage, family and sexual morality (Kon, *Klubnichka na Berëzke*). A number of stories were written by famous contemporaries of Chekhov, such as A. K. Sheller-Mikhailov, P. D. Boborykin, and N. S. Leskov, in response to the *The Kreutzer Sonata*. They agreed that society and the institution of marriage were experiencing an acute moral crisis, but there was no agreement on the cause of this crisis and the way out of it. In the 1890s questions of sexual morality arose, at the beginning of the twentieth century the problem of sexual morality began to be discussed. Several of Chekhov's stories ("Peasant women", "The Duel", "Neighbours", and "Ariadne") indirectly attack Tolstoy's views. A number of Chekhov's stories prior to *The Kreutzer Sonata* address sexual morality and women's emancipation, as these topics were much in vogue. Chekhov shows that sexuality is not evil for the pursuit of romanticism is very much alive, and is itself the hope for the family despite the crisis, as the name of the main heroine of "The Duel" Nadezhda suggests this as it means hope in Russian.

As a response to Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata*, "The Duel" offers ambiguity instead of dogma, in its treatment of sexuality. As Pritchett points out, Tolstoy's influence is still marked,



but Chekhov is more forgiving of Nadezhda's sexual indiscretion than Tolstoy is of the wife in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Reserve rather than abstinence, pity rather than condemnation, are more characteristic of Chekhov (Pritchett 110). As discussed in Chapter 2, the bourgeois family as depicted by Tolstoy developed rapidly with the growth of capitalism. Chekhov wrote at the time of the decline of aristocracy and the rise of bourgeoisie, depicting the changing attitudes to love relations. These changing times made it possible to marry for love, rather than by arrangement as in the pre-capitalist society before, when one married with people of one's own class. It was becoming more common to consider attraction as a key factor in love relations and eventually marry for love. Although this type of marriage was becoming more frequent, the general trend remained to marry for position and money. As Zalambani rightly points out, Tolstoy's Pozdnyshv states that he chooses his wife not because she is rich or a noblewoman, but because he is in love with her ("*La Sonata a Kreutzer e la nascita*"...10).

Marriage based on love as passion implies a higher expectation of happiness and hence can lead to greater disappointment, while in the former norm of a marriage of convenience or an arranged marriage, the parties are resigned being unable to master their fate. As Engel points out, the freedom to love became the freedom for a woman to choose her husband. The rights of the individual led to the demand for better treatment and respect for her, as well as the expectation of emotional gratification from the marriage itself. Marriage was no longer a relationship between master and servant; instead, it became a partnership, wherein the woman's role was equal to, although different from, the man's. However, since education raised expectations for love and companionship, it made the restrictions of home life all the more unsatisfactory and led to unhappy marriages (Engel 55). Until the end of the 19th century, personal experience was significantly controlled by religious ideas that established acceptable morals of the time.

However, gradually, as had happened a few decades before in Western Europe, the context of the conversation about sexuality expanded: from a purely private phenomenon, sexuality became part of a global "sexual question". As formulated in the 19th century, this "sexual question" was primarily a women's issue, at the centre of which lay the problem of the emancipation and the social equality of women in the family and in society. However, the "sexual question" was also a sexual matter. Earlier sexuality was mainly discussed in religious and moral terms (sinful or moral behaviour), and partly in aesthetic terms (beautiful or ugly); now, next to these terms of discussion, there were many other distinct social contexts: sexuality and methods of birth control, sexuality and marriage, sexuality and poverty, crime and sexuality, sexuality and the protection of public health, sexuality and commerce, and sexuality and upbringing. As Kon states in *Klubnichka na Berëzke, Seksual'naia Kul'tura v Rossii* (1997):

До поры до времени сексуально-эротические метафоры и образы в русской художественной культуре тщательно маскировались. В 1890-х гг. положение изменилось. Ослабление государственного и цензурного контроля вывело скрытые тенденции на поверхность, тайное стало явным. Новая эстетика и философия жизни была реакцией и против официальной церковной морали и против ханжеских установок демократов-шестидесятников. Это был закономерный этап развития самой русской романтической культуры, которая уже не вмещалась в прежние нормативные этические и эстетические рамки. Сенсуализм был естественным аспектом новой философии индивидуализма, властно пробивавшей себе дорогу. Толчком к осознанию общего кризиса брака и сексуальности послужила толстовская "Крейцерова соната", в которой писатель публицистически

заостренно выступил практически против всех общепринятых воззрений на брак, семью и любовь.<sup>101</sup>

Chekhov represented in his writing a transitional period in the history of the Russian family; in his works, the processes of the emancipation of women and freer relationships between the sexes were emerging. However, Chekhov showed that women who started “to get out” of the house, either to follow a man or because they choose their own career instead of family life, were still stigmatized by society. As Lalo points out, Chekhov’s characters are trapped in the space between traditional norms and more modern impulses (Lalo 101).

As Clyman reminds the reader, although Chekhov and Tolstoy were fond of each other and admired each other’s art, they could also be very critical of each other. Tolstoy disapproved of Chekhov’s liberal views, which he sometimes found simply immoral. Chekhov acknowledged that he had been under Tolstoy’s influence for many years, with a peak in 1886-1887 (Clyman 168).

After 1890 Chekhov became disillusioned with Tolstoy’s philosophy, and some of his works were written, at least in part, to refute Tolstoy’s doctrines of non-resistance to evil, the evils of romantic love, moralist aesthetics, and opposition to progress based on science. “Ward No 6” and “The Duel” are among Chekhov’s more explicitly anti-Tolstoyan works (Clyman 168).

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<sup>101</sup> For the time being sexual-erotic metaphors and images in Russian artistic culture were carefully camouflaged. In the 1890s the situation had changed. Weakening of state censorship and control of underlying trends brought to the surface what was hidden. New aesthetics and philosophy of life were a reaction against the official church morals and against the hypocritical apparatus of the Democrats "man of the sixties". This was a logical stage of the development of the romantic Russian culture itself that exceeded the limits of the previous ethical and aesthetical norms. Sensationalism was a natural aspect of the new philosophy of individualism, and powerfully pushed through. Tolstoy’s *The Kreutzer Sonata* served as a push to the realization of the general crisis of marriage. In his novella the writer publicly reacted against almost all common views on marriage, family and love [This trans. is mine] (Kon, *Klubnichka na Berëzke*).

As Kataev points out, Chekhov had familiarised himself with *The Kreutzer Sonata* long before it was published in volume 13 of Tolstoy's collected works in 1891, and even before the Sakhalin journey, in early 1890 (or in late 1889) he had read one of the handwritten copies of the eighth (second last) edition of the novella.

*The Kreutzer Sonata* caught Chekhov's literary imagination, and he showed great appreciation for Tolstoy's work in his letters to Plescheyev and Suvorin. Yet at the same time, Chekhov could not but express his artistic opposition to the position of his mentor and contemporary. This novella by Tolstoy evoked a great number of responses, both apparent and veiled, in Chekhov's creative work. Kataev observes that Chekhov's stories written in early 1890s ("The Duel", "The Wife", "Three Years", and "Ariadne") are marked by their disagreement with *The Kreutzer Sonata* (Kataev 71).

In 1940, P. V. Vilkoshevsky wrote a comprehensive review of journalistic and literary responses to the novella that, according to a contemporary, "caused a true earthquake among the book-reading public".<sup>11</sup> He mentions articles, novellas, drama pieces, and poems by Max Nordau and Archbishop Nikanor, Georg Brandes and Melchior de Vogüé, Protopopov, and Mikhaylovsky, Leskov, and Polonsky.<sup>12</sup> Surprisingly, Chekhov is not on the list, this is because Chekhov's response to *The Kreutzer Sonata* is artistically subtle. It is only more recently that Soviet and foreign scholars have considered Chekhov's response to the novella by Tolstoy<sup>13</sup> (Kataev, 1989 71).

<sup>11</sup> Knizhki "Nedeli" 1891. Sentiabr. c. 125.

<sup>12</sup> See Vil'koshevskii P. V. Sud'ba "Kreitserovoi sonaty" L. N. Tolstovo // Trudy Samarkandskovo gos. ped. in-ta 1940. T. 2. Vyp. 1. 28 s.

<sup>13</sup> See Semanova M. L. "Kreitserova sonata" L. N. Tolstovo i "Ariadna" A. P. Chekhova // Chekhov i Lev Tolstoi. M. 1980. S 225-253; Linkov V. Ia. Khudozhestvennyi Mir Prozy Chekhova. M., 1982. S. 34-35; Meller P. U. A. P. Chekhov i Polemika po povodu "Kreitserovoi Sonaty" L. N. Tolstovo // Scando-Slavica. 1982. T. 28. 12 s.

As Kataev points out, most frequently the sense of Chekhov's creative dispute with the author of *The Kreutzer Sonata* is interpreted as Chekhov's opposition to certain ideas of Tolstoy's concerning family, marriage and love. However, most importantly, it reveals a clash of two visions of the world: two attitudes to the problems of human existence, two concepts of artistic sincerity (Kataev, 1989, 71).

In Kataev's opinion, the error denounced by Pozdnyshv (and by Tolstoy standing behind him) is universal. The conclusions drawn by Tolstoy are peremptory and general:

У нас люди женятся, не видя в браке ничего, кроме совокупления, и выходит или обман, или насилие. Когда обман, то это легче переносится. Муж и жена только обманывают людей, что они в единобрачии, а живут в многоженстве и в многомужестве. Это скверно, но еще идет; но когда, как это чаще всего бывает, муж и жена приняли на себя внешнее обязательство жить вместе всю жизнь и со второго месяца уж ненавидят друг друга, желают разойтись и все-таки живут, тогда это выходит тот страшный ад, от которого спиваются, стреляются, убивают и отравляют себя и друг друга.<sup>102</sup>

According to Kataev, Tolstoy's solutions also strive to encompass all the imaginable variants: it is not love (as "they" deceive each other) that ought to underlie the connubial union

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<sup>102</sup> People marry in the old fashion, without believing in what they do, and the result is falsehood, violence. When it is falsehood alone, it is easily endured. The husband and wife simply deceive the world by professing to live monogamically. If they really are polygamous and polyandrous, it is bad, but acceptable. But when, as often happens, the husband and the wife have taken upon themselves the obligation to live together all their lives (they themselves do not know why), and from the second month have already a desire to separate, but continue to live together just the same, then comes that infernal existence in which they resort to drink, in which they fire revolvers, in which they assassinate each other, in which they poison each other (Tolstoy 121).

but either a belief in the mystery of marriage (for the common people) or a “highly moral attitude to women” (for the educated) (Kataev 72).

According to Hahn, if Pozdnyshev is Tolstoy’s conception of a reformed man, and Laevsky is Chekhov’s, then Pozdnyshev’s reformation seems to have come about through some purifying effect of his violence in killing his wife. In “The Duel”, in the other hand, Laevsky is saved by his suddenly renewed love for Nadezhda when he discovers her infidelity and sees in it the reflection of his own ruin, and by the experience of facing the violence of the duel from which he is rescued by the deacon’s impetuous shout (Hahn 180).

Nadezhda in “The Duel” is less directly instrumental in bringing about Laevsky’s salvation than Von Koren or the deacon or Samoylenko. Whereas Tolstoy, in the *Kreutzer Sonata*, it is important to stress that the characters’ fates are less individual than exemplary. Chekhov tries to understand his characters more warmly and individually. His valuing of sensual experience is in contrast to Tolstoy’s powerful asceticism in his artistic old age (Hahn 180)

In “The Duel” the ideas on love expressed by Laevsky evoke those of the lady, the emancipated woman, on the train at the beginning of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, who asks the question: “How is one to live with a man when there is no love?” (Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, ch. 1). Nadezhda seems to truly love Laevsky and to be ready to sacrifice her social status and social opinion for her love. She knows that Laevsky does not love her; however, since she has left her husband for Laevsky, the affair means more to her than her marriage. Thus, love is stronger than ostracism.

“The Duel” is critical of a romantic conception of love: Samoilenko speaks to Laevsky and tells him that the great thing in marriage is patience and duty. The final image of Nadezhda and Laevsky’s renewed love is quite unromantic.

According to Moller, as a contribution to the debate on sexual morality, “The Duel” is about a woman who becomes the victim of current sexual norms and about the difference between verbal and true morality. The story takes place among the *intelligentsia*. A number of local Don Juans are interested in Nadezhda and she finds it hard to refuse them, as she is a woman of strong sexuality (Moller 244). Laevsky’s attitude to Nadezhda recalls that of Pozdnyshev:

Я должен тебе сказать, Александр Давидыч, что жить с женщиной, которая читала умные книги и пошла для тебя на край света, так же неинтересно, как с любой Анфисой или Акулиной. Так же пахнет утюгом и лекарствами.<sup>103</sup> (Chekhov 111-2).

Laevsky’s remarks that he understands why lovers occasionally kill their mistresses, which recalls to readers Pozdnyshev’s murder of his wife. Laevsky’s definition of love is no less brutally reductionist than Pozdnyshev’s: “beautiful, poetic, holy love is simply the roses by which rottenness is concealed. Romeo is an animal like everybody else” (Chekhov 155).

In Kataev’s characterization, Chekhov initially saw *The Kreutzer Sonata* as something extraordinary in terms not only of “significant meaning” but also for its “beauty of

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<sup>103</sup> I must tell you, Aleksandr Davidyeh, that it is just as uninteresting to live with a woman who has read Spencer and followed you to the world’s end as with some Anfisa or Akulina. There is the same smell of ironing, powder and medicine, the same curlers every morning and the same self-deception.

implementation” (L 4, 19). It is with Tolstoy the author and the evangelist that Chekhov would argue upon his return from Sakhalin (Kataev, 1989, 72).

In Kataev’s view, it is not those particular provisions of Tolstoyism (in this case the ideas of chastity and celibacy) that Chekhov disagrees with. Through the logic of his novella’s plot, Chekhov opposes Tolstoy’s generalization, the absolutism of certain conclusions put forward as generalised principles. He studies to what degree the “general” contained in Tolstoy’s teachings correlates to specific cases.

Throughout Chekhov’s story, there is constant opposition between love and hate, between fidelity and infidelity. Whatever speeches the characters may make about values, they are motivated by their emotions. Laevsky and Nadezhda both blame each other for the failure of their dreams, and both take revenge through infidelity; on her part, physical unfaithfulness, and on his part, the planned desertion. Although they talk, they do not confide. Von Koren himself, hating what Laevsky stands for, is eager to kill him, and Nadezhda’s other two professed lovers are willing to blackmail her into having sexual relations with them and to betray her to her husband. Only Samoylenko and the deacon are truly good-natured.

However, the movement of the story is toward reconciliation. Laevsky’s suffering and Nadezhda’s unfaithfulness bring them to a love based on mutual understanding rather than on illusion. Von Koren learns that even men like Laevsky can change and that his own hatred can be turned to liking. Laevsky’s final realization, that human beings proceed like a small boat in high waves, unevenly yet with progress, suggests that the harsh judgments made by Laevsky, Von Koren, and even Nadezhda in the first sections of the story were erroneous. None of them knew the inmost feelings of the others, which were revealed to the reader by the narrator; each of them



had unique grievances and unique dislikes, which culminated for the men in the duel and for Nadezhda in her rendezvous with Kirilin. From a distance, human hatred can be as laughable as the young deacon found it; it can also be as wrong as the tolerant Samoylenko, the reconciling and forgiving force, insisted. Given the wrongs of which all human beings are capable, neither high-minded speeches nor destructive actions make sense. However, even mistakes, like the duel, can produce reform.

Chekhov presents hidden quotations from Tolstoy's novella. In *The Kreutzer Sonata* one reads:

Я смотрел иногда, как она наливала чай, махала ногой или подносила ложку ко рту, шлюпала, втягивала в себя жидкость, и ненавидел ее именно за это, как за самый дурной поступок.<sup>104</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 2, Pozdnyshev is bored of his wife, and what particularly irritates him is the detail of daily life, such as his wife's pouring of the tea. A parallelism can be established with Chekhov, as highlighted in the quotation (below) from 'The Duel'. Like Pozdnyshev, Laevsky expresses his feelings of irritation towards his mistress because of the way she drinks or eat, to the point where he wants to kill her. Both Tolstoy and Chekhov focus on detail of daily routine to express their characters' feelings:

Когда она с озабоченным лицом сначала потрогала ложкой кисель и потом стала лениво есть его, запивая молоком, и он слышал ее глотки, им овладела такая тяжелая ненависть, что у него даже зачесалась голова. Он сознавал, что такое чувство было бы оскорбительно даже в отношении собаки,

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<sup>104</sup> I watched her pour the tea, swing her foot, lift her spoon to her mouth, and blow upon hot liquids or sip them, and I detested her as if these had been so many crimes... (Tolstoy 163).

но ему было досадно не на себя, а на Надежду Федоровну за то, что она возбуждала в нем это чувство, и он понимал, почему иногда любовники убивают своих любовниц. Сам бы он не убил, конечно, но, доведись ему теперь быть присяжным, он оправдал бы убийцу.<sup>105</sup>

Striking is the degree of irritation from such a small detail as sipping milk loudly.

Chekhov is responding to a trajectory of passions from love to hatred that can end up in murder.

The story of Laevsky, an ordinary man of his time, who is totally caught up in his lies, in particular in his relationships with Nadezhda, seems to be heading to one of those endings, in Tolstoy's opinion, that can come to a modern family, as expressed in *The Kreutzer Sonata*.

According to Kataev, at the end both protagonists in "The Duel" undergo a moral crisis and re-unite in order to live quite differently. Laevsky's behaviour in the finale seemed to Chekhov's contemporary critics to be too unexpected a change. However, as Kataev notes, the element of unexpectedness and the lack of concrete detail in Laevsky's metamorphosis was deliberately introduced by the author (73).

The novella represents a dispute with specific theories of the time: Social Darwinism and positivism, as personified by Von Koren. According to Hahn, "The Duel" becomes involved with the Christian theory of morality as against the Darwinian conceptions of the relationship between strong and weak (Hahn 180).

Finally, the conclusion drawn by both the adversaries in "The Duel" that "Nobody knows the real truth", alludes to Tolstoy's formulas and generalised solutions. Aligning with Tolstoy in

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<sup>105</sup> When with a preoccupied face she touched the jelly with a spoon and then began languidly eating it, sipping milk, and he heard her swallowing, he was possessed by such an overwhelming aversion that it made his head tingle... he understood why lovers sometimes murder their mistresses. He would not murder her, of course, but had he been on a jury now, he would have acquitted the murderer (Chekhov 124).

his appraisal of contemporary family relationships and in his allusion to Tolstoy's opinion through specific artistic material in his story, Chekhov argues against the tendency to recognise in individual human cases the evidence and illustration of certain general, predetermined laws. Chekhov's principle as a physician is that one should treat every case as individual.

### Chekhov's Interest in Social Issues

Already in his early writings Chekhov had followed the great traditions of Russian realistic literature in his attempt to "get to the roots of things" and to see in contemporary Russia the source of the future (Berdnikov 3). In his early works he depicts various acts of despotism and injustice against the "small man" as a representation of a society based on oppression and slavery. This attitude influenced the depiction of relationships between people, not only in the public sphere, but also at home in the family, in the private sphere. As a result, he demonstrated that the everyday life of people and relationships, emotions and feelings, were conditioned by the social hierarchy. Chekhov presents an extraordinary overview of a tragi-comic human existence in a world of fake moral values, insignificant concerns and worries. Through his stories, he communicates that no matter how twisted or hidden the moral principles might be, they are the real basis of human personality and it is they that make us human. Chekhov tries to see deep emotions and complicated spiritual life in the simplest and most insignificant of creatures. Chekhov depicts common Russian people, their feelings of dissatisfaction with their current situation, and their craving for better ways of life, for freedom and happiness. He depicts unconventional characters who desire freedom or love, and who spend their time daydreaming.

There is a critical tension in Chekhov, as there is in Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, between reality and a vision for the future. This daydreaming is the optimistic hope in stories that unfold amidst the reality of crisis.

Chekhov saw Russia's social problems such as poverty, immorality and crime first hand. These problems accompanied urbanization and the growth of an urban proletariat, and gradually extended to the countryside (Frank 75). The devastating 1891-92 famine and 1892-93 cholera epidemic, the peasantry's moral and physical degeneration, and the increasing peasant migration to cities added to the "degeneracy" of the rural population (Frank 78). Interestingly, whereas Frank considers the rural population degenerate, Tolstoy admires their simple morality. Russian literature had always striven to solve these matters, and they attracted Chekhov's attention, not in order to suggest a solution or a cure, but rather, as the doctor that he was to proffer a diagnosis. At the time, he was, influenced by Tolstoy's idea of universal love as the best way of resolving all social problems. However, his enthusiasm for Tolstoy was tempered by the soberness of reality. He decided to go to the Island of Sakhalin, a horrible place of exile, where the labour camps of tsarist Russia were situated. The aim of this journey was to try to understand difficult and conflicting problems such as growth of capitalism, economic despair, moral decline, and disintegration of family structure in peasant society. Chekhov not only collected material for his book about the island of exile, *The Island of Sakhalin*, he also found a number of important plots and ideas for his stories, and, most importantly, he was able to surmount his personal spiritual crisis and so look at life with new eyes. Chekhov was born in the 1860s, when the social reform movement in Russia had begun to gather great force. However, Chekhov believed Russia still had some way to go to bring about real change. "The much-extolled '60s did nothing for the sick and imprisoned, transgressing thereby the major precepts of Christian civilization", Chekhov

wrote in a letter to his friend Aleksey Suvorin, just before he left for Sakhalin in 1890. “Nowadays at least something is being done for the sick, but for those in prison – nothing. The study of confinement in prison is of no interest whatsoever to our lawyers and legal experts”, Chekhov wrote. Memories from his Sakhalin trip are evoked in “Murder” (1895), “Peasant Women” (1891), and “In the Ravine” (1900). Chekhov took three years to finish organizing and writing the material he had gathered. This resultant work, *The Island of Sakhalin*, was first serialized in *Russkaia mysl'* Russian thought in 1893 (Clyman 24). It is at this stage that Chekhov began to take an impartial look at the idea of universal love.

For Chekhov, the problem of social injustice was of crucial importance. He rejected all attempts to proceed from the so-called “special basis” of Russian life, ranging from the Russian Populists to the moralistic ideas of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. He also disapproved of bourgeois liberal social theories (Berdnikov 5). His realism and his rejection of illusory ideas led Chekhov’s famous contemporary Maxim Gorky, to state that: “The formidable power of his talent flows from the fact that he never invents things, and never tries to depict what does not exist in actual life” (qtd. in Berdnikov 6). Thus, he gives a precise historical and social context to his ideas of justice. By observing closely the day to day life of people, he comes to the conclusion that violations of justice are not just isolated incidents but are committed in such a way as to inflict inexpressible suffering on the common people, as shown for example, in “My life”, “Peasants”, and “In the Ravine”. Chekhov shows that the predominant social system is alien to everyone. Money and privilege depersonalize, control, and paralyze people spiritually. This is what causes a crisis for the merchant Alexei in “Three Years”, for the millionaire factory-owner Anna Akimova in “A Woman’s Kingdom”, and for Nikitin, a man who achieves petty bourgeois self-satisfaction in “The Teacher of Literature”. Finally, a well-to-do bank official in

“The Lady with the Little Dog” discovers that the life he and others of his milieu lead is horribly unnatural (Berdnikov 6). Chekhov describes the period following the emancipation of serfdom as unstable and uncertain for both lower and upper classes. These works became a social commentary on Russian life in the early 1900s.

Chekhov focuses on relationships between people; he also portrays feelings that are awakening in the souls of people... ordinary people from different strata of Russian society, living a profound drama. He depicts the inner world of the characters, focusing on the critical moments and turning points of their conscience. The inner moral struggles of the characters are full of social and historical implications. This makes his stories emotionally intense and meaningful. This tension derives from inner, spiritual action (Berdnikov 7). Chekhov lifts his readers up above the struggles of life to reflect on the higher purpose of living. This ability makes his writing timeless, a means of positivity in the midst of depressing reality. Chekhov not only showed man’s conflict with an unjust social system, he also felt that man’s conscience led him to resist the corrupting influence of the social environment. Moreover, Chekhov showed the emergence of a new idea of human happiness: the happiness of being aware of one’s human dignity and of starting a new path in life (as in “The Betrothed” or in “The Duel”). According to Chekhov, the inner development of a person goes hand-in-hand with social development as these two are inextricably connected as part of the same process of the development of society. By concerning themselves with justice, people become more human. In fact, any departure from common sense is dangerous for both the individual and the society, as it strengthens injustice and at the same time breaks down human personality (Berdnikov 7). What Chekhov does not realise, and both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky cannot express despite trying, is that common sense itself in Russia is based on Christian principles and that these originate from spiritual regeneration.

Most critics depict Chekhov as a pessimist and relativist. According to Karlinsky, Chekhov's greatness as a writer depends on his relativism, on his tragic view of the world and not from the social content of his work, which is usually totally ignored. In addition, according to Jean-Pierre Barricelli, Chekhov's writings have no social message. Chekhov's principle of objectivity is interpreted as proof of his relativism and scepticism. Thus, the objective meaning and mood of Chekhov's work and his characters is distorted. Nevertheless, critics such as Bernard Shaw considered Chekhov's work innovative because of its theme of the decay and decline of pre-war bourgeois Europe. Moreover, Thomas Mann saw Chekhov as a writer who dreamed about social matters, of a just social order. As Clyman points out, "The better we can picture the whole of Chekhov's Russia, in all its variety, the closer we can come to the full understanding and appreciation of his writings" (3). I believe that Chekhov was a pragmatist, a reticent optimist. He welcomes the change that is coming over Russia. His view is essentially progressive and optimistic. Chekhov did believe in the possibility of a better life and this evolutionary epic vision was a 'faith' that was central to Chekhov's vision of reality. Laevsky's conversion at the end of "The Duel" reminds one of the Damascene experiences of St. Paul, except without a personal encounter with Christ, unless perhaps Laevsky's encounter with Christ is veiled in the person of Pobedov the deacon. Chekhov believed in regeneration. Laevsky comes to see that many of the awful events that have happened to him have come about through his own self-centred inaction and self-deception:

Это тоже обман, потому что на службе он ничего не делал, жалованье получал даром и служба его - это гнусное казнокрадство, за которое не отдадут под суд. Истина не нужна была ему и он не искал ее, его совесть, околдованная пороком и ложью, спала или молчала; он, как чужой или нанятый с другой

планеты, не участвовал в общей жизни людей, был равнодушен к их страданиям, идеям, религиям, знаниям, исканиям, борьбе, он не сказал людям ни одного доброго слова, не написал ни одной полезной, непошлой строчки, не сделал людям ни на одни грош, а только ел их хлеб, пил их вино, увозил их жен, жил их мыслями и, чтобы оправдать свою презренную, паразитную жизнь перед ними и самим собой, всегда старался придавать себе такой вид, как будто он выше и лучше их. Ложь, ложь и ложь.<sup>106</sup> (Chekhov 213)

Laevsky survives the duel and begins a life of hard work that is part of his redemption. Chekhov's belief in the possibility of change for the better and in progress suffuses "The Duel". At the end of the story Laevsky, watching the scientist Von Koren's boat battling against the rough seas, sees it as an image of the human quest for truth. Chekhov makes sure that the reader is left with some hope that the object of the quest is attainable:

Да, никто не знает настоящей правды..." - думал Лаевский, с тоскою глядя на беспокойное темное море "Лодку бросает назад, - думал он, - делает она два шага вперед и шаг назад, но гребцы упрямы, машут неутомимо веслами и не боятся высоких волн. Лодка идет все вперед и вперед, вот уже со и не видно, а пройдет с полчаса, и гребцы ясно увидят пароходные огни, а через час будут уже у пароходного трапа. Так и в жизни... В поисках за правдой люди делают два шага вперед, шаг назад. Страдания, ошибки и скука жизни бросают их назад, но

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<sup>106</sup> He had failed to cultivate integrity, having no need for it. His conscience, mesmerized by depravity and pretence, had slept or remained silent. Like some stranger or hireling - like one from another planet - he had shirked collective social life, caring nothing for the sufferings of others, nothing for their ideas or religions, nothing for what they knew, nothing for their quests and struggles ... He had not done a thing for his fellows but eat their bread, drink their wine, steal their wives and borrow their ideas, while seeking to justify his despicable, parasitical existence in the world's eyes and his own by passing himself off as a higher form of life. It was all lies, lies, lies. (Chekhov 212).



жажда правды и упрямая воля гонят вперед и вперед. И кто знает? Быть может, доплывут до настоящей правды.<sup>107</sup>

The emancipation of serfs heralded a generation of reform, but through its patriarchal values and stronghold over the state, the church slowed this progress. The tension between progress and the tradition of patriarchy was itself a source of crisis within the family. By the 1880s the rapid industrialization brought new opportunities and great injustice. Chekhov's realism and his principle of objectivity in his writing addresses these changes with challenges for the spiritual regeneration of the individual.

### Chekhov and the Crisis of the Russian family

In an essay entitled "Crisis of the Modern Family" dealing with the period under discussion, the Russian commentator Sorokin observed that the family is the most important unit of society; it has always played an important role for the state and the church. According to Sorokin, marriage was declared a "sacrament", the family was an institution of God protected by the Church and the State. Thus, every attack against the family was considered a great sin and a crime. Writing in 1916, Sorokin admits that the contemporary family is in crisis. For many centuries, religious marriage had established the competence of the ecclesiastical and secular power, but the "understanding" between these two authorities started to shift (Sorokin 188).

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<sup>107</sup> "Yes, no one knows the real truth . . ." thought Laevsky, looking wearily at the dark, restless sea. It flings the boat back," he thought; "she makes two steps forward and one step back; but the boatmen are stubborn, they work the oars unceasingly, and are not afraid of the high waves. The boat goes on and on. Now she is out of sight, but in half an hour the boatmen will see the steamer lights distinctly, and within an hour they will be by the steamer ladder. So it is in life. . . . In the search for truth man makes two steps forward and one step back. Suffering, mistakes, and weariness of life thrust them back, but the thirst for truth and stubbornness will drive them on and on. And who knows? Perhaps they will reach the real truth at last." (Chekhov 300).

Mariia Kostantinovna in Chekhov's story "The Duel" (1891) in effect restates these views to Nadezhda; her ideas are an example of these attitudes.

For Tolstoy, Christianity is a possible way out of the crisis the Russian family was in at the time. Tolstoy considered conversion to Christianity necessary for the survival of the Russian family. The theme of conversion or spiritual regeneration is also latent throughout the work of Chekhov, but not necessarily in relation to Christ. Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov all react to the facade of religion that is devoid of true spirituality. For Pozdnyshev, the main hero in Tolstoy's novella, church institutions are not Christian, but simply call themselves that. He is being sarcastic when he writes: "...Церковные учения, называющие себя христианскими, установили брак как христианское учреждение<sup>108</sup>." However, as Zalambani convincingly argues, Pozdnyshev believes that the only true marriage is the Christian marriage, which is a sacrament that answers God's calling to family life (Zalambani, *La Sonata a Kreutzer...*, 13).

Pozdnyshev, who reflects the author's point of view, presents true marriages as having an element of romance, which is a change of approach to the family. Dostoevsky also proposes the concept of a true family as opposed to an 'accidental family', and for Chekhov all his characters start out in this setting, moving from loveless marriages to romanticism. Crisis to Chekhov is the new norm.

If the Karamazov family crumbles, Captain Snegiryov's family can be considered a solid alternative. Chekhov, by contrast, does not present the reader with the ideal alternative; the reader has to find his/her positives in the crisis itself. The reason for this crisis is the loss of Christian principles in life; Dostoevsky and Tolstoy try to reinvoke Christian values. In contrast,

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<sup>108</sup> "The teachings of the Church, which call themselves Christian, established marriage as a Christian institution". Tolstoy, *Kreutzerova Sonata in Pol'noe Sobranie Sochinenii*, Vol. 27, 86.

Chekhov does not dwell on the causes or the solutions of the crisis, but portrays characters in search of a better family life.

According to Tolstoy, Christianity grants equal love and freedom to slaves and women. It is necessary to put God at the centre of one's life, so He can order life instead of letting our own passions and selfish desires have control over it:

Но явилось христианство и признало совершенство не в силе, а в любви, и тем освободило всех покоренных и пленных, и рабов, и женщин... Нужно, чтобы освобожденные были христиане, т. е. полагали жизнь свою в служении Богу и людям, а не в служении себе... Что же нужно делать? Делать нужно одно: привлекать людей к христианству, обращать их в христиан. Делать же это можно, только исполняя в жизни закон Христа.<sup>109</sup>

In spite of uneasy relationship with Christian dogmas in the cases of Tolstoy and Chekhov, these authors took into account the positive influence of Christianity could have on the moral conditions of the family. The authors were looking to spiritual and moral solutions to the crisis of the Russian family. Therefore, there is a gap in Tolstoy between the ideal and the reality; and in Dostoevsky between the moral and the sensual. For Chekhov sexuality is reality, and the pursuit of a romantic ideal stretches the tolerance of morality for his characters. He does

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<sup>109</sup> But Christianity was introduced and its perfection was recognized not in force, but in love and freed those oppressed and captive, slaves, and women... It is necessary that those who have been liberated are Christians, i.e. that they put their life at the service of God and the people and not serve themselves. . . What needs to be done? It is necessary to do one thing: attract people to Christianity, convert them to Christianity. This can be done only by fulfilling Christ's laws in life". Vladimir Chertkov: *O Polovom Voprose*, Berlin, Hugo Steinitz Verlag, 1901, p. 135.

not present a new morality; he is diagnosing what is before him. Greater sexual permissiveness was normal, and the aesthetic idealism of Orthodox Christianity was becoming dated.

In 1890, Chekhov (as a writer and as a doctor) praised Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata*. However, as Zalambani points out, after having read Tolstoy's *Posleslovie* (epilogue) to *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Chekhov's judgement as a man of science prevailed (17). Chekhov is critical of Tolstoy because of his professional knowledge:

Диоген плевал в бороды, зная, что ему за это ничего не будет; Толстой ругает докторов мерзавцами и невежничает с великими вопросами, потому что он тот же Диоген, которого в участок не поведешь и в газетах не выругаешь. Итак, к черту философию великих мира сего!<sup>110</sup>

Chekhov refers to Tolstoy's "Afterword" to *The Kreutzer Sonata* in which Tolstoy defines the theories of doctors as "false science", particularly those of doctors at the time, which were that sexual relations were essential for human health, and justified the use of prostitution. Tolstoy asserts that such practices by men are "base", as they entail one class of people "drinking the blood" (Tolstoy, *Afterward to The Kreutzer Sonata*, 100) of another in order to maintain their own wellbeing. Chekhov as a doctor takes affront at this insult, considering that Tolstoy is including him in the category of "scoundrels" for giving this advice. Further, Chekhov regularly frequented prostitutes, so Tolstoy's moralising condemned his own sexual behaviour. Tolstoy

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<sup>110</sup> Diogenes spat in people's beard, knowing that he would not be called to account; Tolstoy calls doctors scoundrels and flaunts his ignorance of important issues, because he is another Diogenes, whom none will report to the police or denounce in the papers. So to hell with the philosophy of the great men of this world! [Trans. by Michael Henry Heim and Simon Karlinsky in *Letters of Anton Chekhov*, p. 203. Trans. modified] A. P. Chekhov, *Pis'mo A. S. Suvorinu*, 8 sentjabrja 1891 g., in *Perepiska A.P. Chekhova. V Dvuch Tomach*.

suggests that unmarried men should practice abstinence, a view which challenges Chekhov as an unmarried man.

Tolstoy also argues against the use of contraception or birth control and states that intercourse during pregnancy and nursing is detrimental to a woman's mental and emotional health. He does this with no scientific justification. Furthermore, and most importantly with regard to Chekhov's artistic life, Tolstoy considers that poetry and prose that glorified infidelity were an important contribution to its prevalence across all strata of society. He believed romance was not the highest attainment of humanity, but rather that it impedes humanity's progress. Public pressure, he argued, should be put on authors who wrote positively about extramarital relationships. These ideas of Tolstoy are in contrast to Chekhov's writings, most of which focus on marital relationships and the pursuit of love transgressing social conventions. Interestingly, Chekhov dismisses Tolstoy's ideas by declaring that he "flaunts his ignorance", and he exclaims: "To hell with the philosophy of the great men of this world" (to Suvorin, Dic, 17, 1890). Chekhov does not dissect Tolstoy's argument or present a counter-argument in essay form; he responds through the subtexts of his stories. Therefore, this strong emotional reaction served to motivate his creative writing. Chekhov depicts humanity in the pursuit of love, as it breaks conventions without moralising over them. He does so not in the form of novels that blindly glorify love affairs outside marriage, but in realistic stories.

Chekhov's works illustrate and affect the new trends in Russian society with regard to love and family life. As a Russian lawyer, Jakov Kantorovich, states in his article "Zhenshchina v Prave" (1895), "new ideas about romantic love entered into Russian life from the West with the Enlightenment. These ideas shaped the characters of Russian literature's heroines, from

Karamzin's Liza to Pushkin's Tatiana Larina"<sup>111</sup>. The effect that the story of Liza had on Russian society from the late 1790s, as Kantorovich points out, was imitation. This happened both in styles of literature and in social mores. There was a new search for virtue and purity in love stemming from the Enlightenment and as a response to the story itself. In a similar way, the works of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov identify and affect the trends that create a crisis in the family in Russian society. Karamzin expresses Romanticism in the notion of a nobleman Erast falling in love with Liza, the innocent and virtuous peasant woman. This is a new sentiment, pure and idyllic, transgressing across class. In contrast, Dostoevsky portrays passion as *sladostrastie*, exemplified by the lust of Dmitri Karamazov towards Grushenka, in the tumultuous situation of rivalry between Dmitri and his father. Grushenka does reciprocate Dmitri's sensual love in a romantic premarital relationship; however, the issue here is the crisis of these relationships. The parricide is an extreme example of crisis, one which Dostoevsky portrayed.

Lust is common and pervasive in the Karamazov family. However, the contribution of the brothers Karamazov is to bring *sladostrastie* out into the public discourse on the family crisis. Tolstoy deals with romantic impulses in the context of adultery in *Anna Karenina* and expresses disillusionment with these patterns of behaviour in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. The subjects of failed marriage and adultery were nothing new to readers of Russian literature, but brought them into the main discourse. His challenge to romantic attitude to love in *The Kreutzer Sonata* created intense feelings in Chekhov, inspiring a response in works such as "The Duel", "Peasant Women" and "Ariadna". The stories further contributed to the project of formulation of ideas on

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<sup>111</sup> Ja. Kantorovich, *Zhenshchina v Prave*, SPb., Izd. Tip-Lip M. N. Minkova, 1895, p. 83.

sexuality, love, family relations, and attitudes towards peasants. In fact, Chekhov was so involved with the notion of romantic love that he valued the pursuit of “true” love, in his characters, above the moral norms of marriage. In most cases, characters start in a loveless marriage and search for romance or fulfilment in extra-marital relationships. Chekhov’s portrayals of divorce, adultery or affairs in non-judgemental terms is a contribution towards the process of destigmatising them. Therefore, by highlighting the breakdown in the family unit and posing viable alternatives, Chekhov is contributing to the discourse about the crisis. The romantic love Karamzin promotes is inspired by the Enlightenment, as seen through a patriarchal lens. It hints at the issues of sexual exploitation of the poor, so common between nobility and peasant maidens, and Liza’s suicide is conveyed as a mixture of realism and romantic love which breaks her pure heart. In stark contrast, Chekhov presents the harshness of reality most graphically, as portrayed in “The Peasants” through the abuse of Fyokla, who arrives home completely naked in the freezing cold of dawn. This is quite a shocking portrayal that would ring true among the new working, peasant classes, who are also now increasingly becoming readers. Chekhov presents the contrast between the ignorance of the illiterate Fyokla, on the one hand, and Olga, who could read and be moved to tears by the Gospels, on the other. Chekhov will soon have a new audience, a generation of peasant men and women who could read. If Olga could read the Gospels then peasants could and would read Chekhov by becoming literate.

Chekhov shows that people start to look for recognition and fulfilment outside their marriage. Amongst Chekhov’s characters, unfaithful spouses sometimes come to bad ends. For example, Masha in “Peasant Wives” (1891) cheats on her husband and then, accused of having poisoned him, is sent to hard labour in Siberia. In “The Lady with the Little Dog” (1899) Gurov and Anna are in love, but as they are both married and do not make the decision to leave their

respective families, love does not automatically lead to a trouble-free relationship. The final sentence summarizes this idea: “It seemed as though in a little while the solution would be found, and then a new and splendid life would begin; and it was clear to both of them that they had still a long, long road before them and that the most complicated and difficult part of it was only just beginning” (Chekhov 586). The ending of the story does not preclude the protagonists spending the rest of their lives in depressing and unhappy circumstances, however; it also allows for hope. This ending can be seen in a positive light; it is complicated, but it is a beginning. The relationship between Gurov and Anna transcends the crisis.

In addition, some of Chekhov’s short stories focus on society’s attitude towards relationships deemed immoral. Traditionally, society would not accept these new trends in marriage and love, hence the practice of ostracism towards those who did not follow the traditions of the Church. However, the fact that Chekhov discusses these tendencies openly shows that social mores were changing and that within society, especially the educated classes, there was more tolerance. An example of a relaxing attitude towards others is found in “The Duel”. Some avoid Nadezhda and will not invite her to their homes or bathe at the beach with her, but others do so with a sense of their own magnanimity and open-mindedness. Nadezhda, for her part, senses Laevsky’s cooling towards her, which leaves her open to an affair with another. Yet despite all that appears not to bode well for their relationship, Laevsky and Nadezhda forge a stronger bond at the end, in large part because of Laevsky’s “rebirth”, which many critics have found unconvincing. Chekhov’s response to the changes in Russian society is to expose the “deployment of sexuality”, depicting scenes of crisis in the family as it moved away from what Foucault called relationships based on the “deployment of alliance”. In fact, the notion of romantic love and the pre-eminence of feelings, sensations and emotions could be seen



as forming a new basis for alliances that break free of marital constraints. Chekhov freely expresses sexuality as central to the family. As opposed to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, sensual discovery is part of the spiritual search for truth in Chekhov's characters. This may be seen to challenge tradition in Russia as the family itself is considered the foundation of religious and state structures, yet it is not Chekhov who mounts the challenge, he merely exposes the fact that the accepted morality was changing. Chekhov develops his own style of realism.

### Chekhov and Christianity

Chekhov's characters believe themselves to be Christian while acting otherwise and are concerned at society's overall loss of Christian morality and ethics, a contributing factor to the crisis of the Russian family. This seems to be quite contradictory. However, it is not an opinion of Chekhov himself, but an observation based on the attitudes of the characters who do not apply Christian principles to their lifestyle. Characters of this type are also present in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky: they lie, kill each other, lead a life of debauchery, and are slaves of their own passions. However, most of them consider themselves Christians. It is important to discuss the topic of Christianity and Chekhov's own views on Christianity because the Christian dimension is present in his stories; it is indeed the backdrop, for in the nineteenth century to be Russian was to be an Orthodox Christian. Chekhov used religion and religious themes as literary material, just as he used medicine, gardening, theatre, and other institutions and activities. He does not state what is right or wrong, but rather depicts how people believe and act.

Chekhov's personal experience of Christianity seems to conjure up mixed emotions for the author. Chekhov grew up in a religious family and was very attached to the ritual of the Church. He liked reading about the Russian monasteries and the lives of the saints. As Figes points out, Chekhov often went to Church and enjoyed the services; he stayed at monasteries and on more than one occasion he even thought of becoming a monk himself (Figes 346). In 'The Duel' the deacon at the picnic daydreams twice, first of the trappings of high office and giving mass in an ornate cathedral. He then imagines the processions that he was involved in as a deacon with dusty roads and peasants, but followed, like the picnic, "with food and talk...". He concludes: "And that's nice too" (Chekhov 112). This gives us evidence of Chekhov's insight into what is involved in processions and the social aspects of a cleric's life. The lovable deacon does not represent the church as a whole, but rather Chekhov's views about what is positive about the church. The deacon is approachable and open to an amicable debate with Von Koren about Darwinian scientific logic, but ultimately he breaks the church's rules by attending the duel and becoming Laevsky's saviour. The centrality of faith in "The Duel" will be discussed in detail below. At this stage, I am establishing that Chekhov had a deep appreciation of Christianity, before noting that he was also influenced by very negative experiences towards religion.

He witnessed first-hand hypocrisy in his father; however, this hypocrisy was common in the Russian Church, society and family life with respect to religion. Chekhov did not consider religious duties in themselves to be contributing towards the progress of humanity, yet the principle of "loving thy neighbour" is present on both sides of religious vs scientific debate in "The Duel". Chekhov's writings were not aimed at being provocative towards the church, unlike the literature of Tolstoy, who had been excommunicated. Religion was not the theme of

Chekhov's writing as he was not "overly concerned with the abstract question about the existence of God" (Figs 347). He purposefully avoided moralising, but he depicted the church as he observed it.

In "In the Ravine" Chekhov paints a harsher picture of the church through the image of the priest who reproaches Lipa for grieving over the death of little Nikafor. The priest suggests that children go straight to heaven, so there is no point in being upset. This is a misinterpretation of Jesus's statements:

Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14). And in Matthew: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me (Matthew 18:2).

Christ's statement is to recognise the children as important in this life, not simply discount them because they are sure to be saved in the next. According to Mark Swift, this exhortation is expressed from a position of the priest's "comfort and narrow-minded self-assurance", which is invalidated by the "evidence of Christian faith". He points out that other people in the story do show Christian compassion and that Lipa asks these men if they are saints. There is a juxtaposition between the cleric, who does not demonstrate the virtues of Christ, and the strangers who, by their actions, do. This juxtaposition is present between the proud self-assurance of the cleric, who misrepresents the Christian principle, and Lipa's "child-like simplicity", which embodies the biblical quotes above (152-3).

Chekhov does not show a bias against the clerics; rather he reveals the character of the priests according to their actions.

Chekhov's attitude to the church can best be seen in "A Nightmare", where Kunin, on the one hand, has contempt for a priest but, on the other hand, appreciates the potential benefit of the service a priest could provide.

Kunin almost hated Father Yakov. The man, his pitiful, grotesque figure in the long crumpled robe, his womanish face, his manner of officiating, his way of life and his formal restrained respectfulness, wounded the tiny relic of religious feeling which was stored away in a warm corner of Kunin's heart together with his nurse's other fairy tales.

The coldness and lack of attention with which Father Yakov had met Kunin's warm and sincere interest in what was the priest's own work was hard for the former's vanity to endure....

Kunin is sincerely interested in the work of the priest. However, the character of individual priest's "coldness and lack of attention" disappoint him. Again, Kunin laments:

Лишь бы только духовенство стояло на высоте своего призвания и ясно сознавало свои задачи. К моему несчастью, я знаю священников, которые, по своему развитию и нравственным качествам, не годятся в военные писаря, а не то что в священники. А вы согласитесь, плохой учитель принесет школе гораздо меньше вреда, чем плохой священник.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> If only the clergy were equal to their high calling and recognized their tasks. I am so unfortunate as to know priests whose standard of culture and whose moral qualities make them hardly fit to be army secretaries, much less priests. You will agree that a bad teacher does far less harm than a bad priest.

In contrast, Kunin expresses the potential that a priest could achieve if he more diligently pursued his “high calling”:

Будь, например, я попом... Образованный и любящий свое дело поп много может сделать... У меня давно бы уже была открыта школа. А проповедь? Если поп искренен и вдохновлен любовью к своему делу, то какие чудные, зажигательные проповеди он может говорить!<sup>113</sup>

This sounds like the voice of Chekhov coming through that of Kunin. Throughout Chekhov’s stories, we also see the expression of his “tiny relic of religious feeling” and hints of warmth towards people who truly expressed faith in action despite disappointment. This is conveyed best by the deacon’s sentiments in “The Duel”:

Вы говорите - у вас вера, - сказал дьякон. - Какая это вера? А вот у меня есть дядька-поп, так тот так верит, что когда в засуху идет в поле дождя просить, то берет с собой дождевой зонтик и кожаное пальто, чтобы его на обратном пути дождик не промочил. Вот это вера! Когда он говорит о Христе, так от него сияние идет и все бабы и мужики навзрыд плачут, он бы и тучу эту остановил и всякую бы вашу силу обратил в бегство. Да... Вера горами двигает.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> "If I were a priest, for instance.... An educated priest fond of his work might do a great deal.... I should have had the school opened long ago. And the sermons? If the priest is sincere and is inspired by love for his work, what wonderful rousing sermons he might give!"

<sup>114</sup> "You say you have faith," said the deacon. "What sort of faith is it? Why, I have an uncle, a priest, and he believes so that when in time of drought he goes out into the fields to pray for rain, he takes his umbrella and leather overcoat for fear of getting wet through on his way home. That's faith! When he speaks of Christ, his face is full of radiance, and all the peasants, men and women, weep floods of tears. He would stop that cloud and put all those forces you talk about to flight. Yes . . . faith moves mountains."

In the story “Home”, 1897, *V Rodnom Uglu*, Vera’s aunt Dasha says to her niece: “Ты бы, душечка, поехала в церковь, - сказала тетя, - а то подумают, что ты неверующая”<sup>115</sup>.

This shows a difference between the outward practice of religion and the essence of faith. If Vera had faith, she would have gone to church on her own, but in this case it is her aunt who tells her to go. Moreover, Vera talking about the people of her village says, “Казалось, что у них нет ни родины, ни религии, ни общественных интересов”.<sup>116</sup> The teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church were deeply rooted in Russian society, so people at that time must have had knowledge of faith.

Another story in which the topic of religion is predominant is “The Big Volodya and the Little Volodya”, 1893 (“Володя большой и Володя маленький”). The story encapsulates three options for women – one is a spinster, one joins a convent, and one is unhappy in her marriage to an older man. Unhappiness in her marriage to an older man (Vladimir Nikititch, Colonel Magwitch, her father’s age) compels a young wife, Sofya Lvovna, to seek solace in an affair with a man her age (Vladimir Mihalitch, or simply Volodya) which makes her no happier. It is clear to Sofya that she does not love her husband and never could love him, and that it has all been foolishness and nonsense. Her dilemma entwines with the question of the existence of God. She has married for selfish motives, because in the words of her school friends, her husband is filthy rich, because she is afraid of becoming an old maid like Rita, and because she is sick of her father, the doctor, and wants to annoy Volodya. This shows frivolous motives for marriage and limited options for women. Volodya was Sofya’s childhood friend. Sofya fell madly in love with Volodya and loved him right up to the time when she married Colonel Yagitch.

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<sup>115</sup> “You would do better to go to Church, otherwise people will think that you don’t believe” (320).

<sup>116</sup> “It seemed like they did not have any native land, religion, any social interests” (319).

As they drive near the convent that Sofya's friend Ol'ga has recently joined, Sofya stops to visit her and invites Ol'ga for a ride in her carriage. Ol'ga appears calm and content with her religious life, while Sofya feels that her own life is a mess. A day or so later, Sofya becomes Little Volodya's lover, but he soon drops her; Sofya then finds that she has nothing to do in her boring and loveless life, except to visit the convent and pester Ol'ga again with her confessions.

Sofya, who carries the secular idea that entering convent is equal to losing one's life ("Ведь идти в монастырь - значит отречься от жизни, погубить ее"<sup>117</sup>), experiences a deep change in her life after visiting the convent. In fact, after her meeting with Ol'ga something changes in her conscience; she does not want to think about God and the problem of life because she is afraid of it: "Софье Львовне становилось немножко страшно; она спрятала голову под подушку. Ненадообэтомдумать, - шептала она. - Ненадо"<sup>118</sup>.

Sofya says that she is not a believer and should not go into a convent, but at the same time after her meeting with Ol'ga, she realizes that Ol'ga has something that she does not have: "Сначала мне было жутко, но теперь я ей завидую. Она - несокрушимая скала, ее с места не сдвинешь."<sup>119</sup> This is a recognition of the power of faith by one who does not share it. Moreover, Sofya realizes that "Ol'ga is saved; she has already solved all the problems for herself".

Но ведь бог есть, наверное есть, и я непременно должна умереть, значит, надо рано или поздно подумать о душе, о вечной жизни, как Оля. Оля теперь

<sup>117</sup> To go into the monastery means to renounce life, to spoil it . . . (90).

<sup>118</sup> Sofya Lvovna began to feel rather frightened; she hid her head under her pillow. I mustn't think about it, she whispered. I mustn't. . . " (95).

<sup>119</sup> At first I felt it dreadful, but now I envy her. She is like a rock that cannot be shattered (223).

спасена, она решила для себя все вопросы... Но если бога нет? Тогда пропала ее жизнь. То есть как пропала? Почему пропала?<sup>120</sup>

At the end of the story, Volodya drops her after a brief affair. The Russian verb *бросил*, meaning “throw over”, can be used for objects. In fact, Volodya treats Sofya like an object. Sofya who has previously said that she is not a believer, because she is now suffering, goes almost every day to the convent: “Заезжая почти каждый день в монастырь...”<sup>121</sup> Sofya feels that she is “dirty” because of her sins; in fact, she has committed adultery, a serious sin according to Christian principles. Sofya senses that Ol’ga is happy in the convent and is somehow attracted to her.

In the story “Peasants” (1897) Chekhov shows the faith of the peasants to be sincere and heartfelt, while nevertheless grounded in superstition and ignorance. Ol’ga is moved to tears over sacred words she does not understand – a comment that attests to the veracity of her faith, while questioning its basis. The peasants’ ignorant reverence for scripture finds its parallel in their submissive respect for their local authority, the *starosta* (elder) Antip Sedemnikov, whom they feared and obeyed, but did not understand because of the learned words he uses (Swift: 11-12). This story is relevant to the topic of religion and faith. Here, for example, is its description of a superstitious, ignorant faith:

Старик не верил в бога, потому что почти никогда не думал о нем; он признавал сверхъестественное, но думал, что это может касаться одних лишь баб, и

<sup>120</sup> But of course there is a God - there certainly is a God; and I shall have to die, so that sooner or later one must think of one's soul, of eternal life, like Ol’ga. Ol’ga is saved now; she has settled all questions for herself. . . But if there is no God? Then her life is wasted. But how is it wasted? Why is it wasted? (221).

<sup>121</sup> “Going almost every day to the nunnery” (225).



когда говорили при нем о религии или чудесном и задавали ему какой-нибудь вопрос, то он говорил нехотя, почесываясь — А кто ж его знает!<sup>122</sup>

Бабка верила, но как-то тускло; все перемешалось в ее памяти, и едва она начинала думать о грехах, о смерти, о спасении души, как нужда и заботы перехватывали ее мысль, и она тотчас же забывала, о чем думала. Молитв она не помнила и обыкновенно по вечерам, когда спать, становилась перед образами и шептала:

— Казанской божьей матери, Смоленской божьей матери, Троеручицы божьей матери...

Марья и Фекла крестились, говели каждый год, но ничего не понимали. Детей не учили молиться, ничего не говорили им о божьей...<sup>123</sup>

Pakhomov draws attention to the symbol of the light that in this story serves as a link to a religious motif: fire as the agent of apocalyptic conflagration (Pakhomov 117). In Chekhov's story the ability to cherish light as a means of perceiving the created world and of grasping beauty separates characters into two distinct types. Nikolay, his wife Ol'ga and his daughter Sasha seem to be the favoured ones. Because of their faith, they are able to see that God is light,

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<sup>122</sup> The old father did not believe in God, for he hardly ever thought about Him; he recognized the supernatural, but considered it was entirely the women's concern, and when religion or miracles were discussed before him, or a question were put to him, he would say reluctantly, scratching himself:

"Who can tell!"

<sup>123</sup> Granny believed, but her faith was somewhat hazy; everything was mixed up in her memory, and she could scarcely begin to think of sins, of death, of the salvation of the soul, before poverty and her daily cares took possession of her mind, and she instantly forgot what she was thinking about. She did not remember the prayers, and usually in the evenings, before lying down to sleep, she would stand before the ikons and whisper:

"Holy Mother of Kazan, Holy Mother of Smolensk, Holy Mother of Troerutchitsy. . ."

Marya and Fyokla crossed themselves, fasted, and took the sacrament every year, but understood nothing. The children were not taught their prayers, nothing was told them about God...

they are able to perceive the beauty of nature, while the rest of the village cannot (Pakhomov 117):

Сидя на краю обрыва, Николай и Ольга видели, как заходило солнце, как небо, золотое и багровое, отражалось в реке, в окнах храма и во всем воздухе, нежном, покойном, невыразимо-чистом, какого никогда не бывает в Москве.<sup>124</sup>

Religion in “Peasant Women” is an oppressive force, as symbolised by the church’s black shadow. Matvei states that “From womankind comes much evil into the world and every kind of abomination” (Chekhov 30). He expresses patriarchal views and misogyny with a religious basis. Matvei states that Mashenka does not try to keep him at a distance. Instead of thinking of her husband and being on her guard, she falls in love with Matvei. However, he also admits to having made a mistake: “The evil one, the enemy of all mankind, confounded me” (Chekhov 30).

As De Sherbinin comments, Chekhov explores the mechanisms not only of religious belief, but also of a culture thoroughly permeated with traditions, symbols, language, and values shaped by the Orthodox creed. Chekhov, in this way, has a great deal in common with the “cultural ethnographer” (De Sherbinin 286). Furthermore, as De Sherbinin points out, Chekhov has left the reader a body of texts saturated with allusions to Christian scripture, liturgy, iconography, holidays and saints that serve as signposts pointing to layers of meaning not immediately accessible on the surface. He has re-encoded phenomena of religious culture into literary texts, relying on his readers to exercise skills of cultural analysis in their recognition of

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<sup>124</sup> Sitting on the edge of the slope, Nikolay and Ol’ga watched the sun setting, watched the gold and crimson sky reflected in the river, in the church windows, and in the whole air - which was soft and still and unutterably pure as it never was in Moscow.

these artefacts and the discovery of their function (De Sherbinin 286). Moreover, as Karlinsky in his introduction to *Letters of Anton Chekhov* writes: “Chekhov teaches me to endure in my own special way, not to give up, to keep hoping, for there is much in Chekhov that is Roman, there is much of some kind of ‘no matter what happens’... And Chekhov is the most [Russian] Orthodox of Russian writers, or more correctly the only Orthodox Russian writer. For what is Russian Orthodoxy if not absolute forgiveness, absolute refusal to condemn” (Karlinsky 31). Although Chekhov does not moralise, his collected works present evidence that, despite the pervasive influence of Orthodox Christianity in nineteenth century Russia, there was a lack of understanding and practical application of Christian principles into everyday life amongst and clergy and laity and across all social classes; this spiritual void undermined the very foundation of the family.

#### Faith and the Family: “The Duel”

Chekhov’s story “The Duel” is set among the educated classes (*raznochintsy*), in which the clash between traditional norms and the trends affecting social change were thoroughly discussed. At the end of the 1880s and at the beginning of the 1890s the issue of sexuality was being discussed in connection with two interpretations of life: Christianity and the theory of evolution (Moller Xii). Chekhov voices this debate in the opinions of the deacon Pobedov and those of the Darwinist scientist Von Koren.

Von Koren applies moral, quasi-religious attitudes towards the questions of love and sexuality. Appropriately, Chekhov chooses a scientist, a zoologist, to express notions of sexual

purity and conventions in matters of sexuality. One could argue that the zoologist wants to separate humanity from the animal world in matters of sexuality. He acts as a moralist who appreciates the role of culture and religion in moulding humanity into something that is above the natural world. Von Koren is a man of reason, action, hard work, a scientist and a Darwinist. Chekhov stresses his German extraction, associated with these qualities. "The Duel" is replete with literary cliché and allusions. Russian literary tradition in the nineteenth century created an image of Germans as hardworking, reliable and active, typified by Goncharov's Stolz in the novel *Oblomov* (1859).

Von Koren has a severe opinion about Laevsky: "Или утопить, что ли... добавил он. В интересах человечества, в своих собственных интересах такие люди должны быть уничтожаемы."<sup>125</sup> Chekhov makes Von Koren the opposite of Laevsky, a self-described superfluous man, who typifies Russian laziness. Laevsky recalls that Oblomov, as a man who wears slippers and gown, could never bring himself to do any serious work. Chekhov depicts a clash of attitudes towards life in these central characters.

Von Koren compares Laevsky to a jellyfish and states that even Nadezhda can be called a jellyfish. Von Koren's hatred of Laevsky is ironic because, on the one hand, he despises him but on the other he studies him. Von Koren calls Laevsky a "macaque", a type of monkey (Kviatovskii 44). Laevsky's feelings towards Von Koren are expressed in xenophobic and anti-Semitic terms. It is not in vain that Laevsky calls Von Koren a German "Yid": "Я хочу только,

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<sup>125</sup> "Or he might be drowned . . .", he added. "In the interests of humanity and in their own interests, such people ought to be destroyed. They certainly ought." (Trans. by Constance Garnett).

что бы вы и немецкие выходцы из жидов оставили меня в покое! Иначе я приму меры! Я драться буду!"<sup>126</sup>. Von Koren takes these words as a challenge to fight a duel.

Von Koren stands for ethical views expressed in attitudes towards work and love. He lists Laevsky's moral failings: Laevsky taught locals how to play Vint<sup>127</sup>, drink beer, and lives openly with his mistress. Before, men lived with other people's wives clandestinely; but now Laevsky has lent the power of an educated and cultured man to the open exhibition of unlawful relationships (Hingley 133).

Von Koren disapproves of Laevsky's behaviour:

В качестве друга я журил его, зачем он много пьет, зачем живет не по средствам и делает долги, зачем ничего не делает и не читает, зачем он так мало культурен и мало знает — и в ответ на все мои вопросы он горько улыбался, вздыхал и говорил: «Я неудачник, лишний человек».<sup>128</sup>

It is important here to draw a distinction between Von Koren's opinions and those of Chekhov himself; the author presents us with the alternatives of the hard working biologist and the easy-going Laevsky. We are not told exactly what Laevsky does for a job, but he goes down to the beach wearing the cap of a clerk from the Ministry of Finance, which suggests that he may be or have been a bureaucrat. Chekhov is not stating what is right or wrong, he is skilfully

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<sup>126</sup> "Leave me alone! I ask for nothing. All I ask is that you and German upstarts of Jewish origin should let me alone! Or I shall take steps to make you! I will fight you!" (Chekhov 211)

<sup>127</sup> *Vint* is a Russian card-game, similar to whist, sometimes referred to as Russian whist.

<sup>128</sup> As a friend I pitched into him, asking him why he drank too much, why he lived beyond his means and got into debt, why he did nothing and read nothing, why he had so little culture and so little knowledge; and in answer to all my questions he used to smile bitterly, sigh, and say: 'I am a failure, a superfluous man' (Chekhov 130-1)

depicting how these people behave. In a sense, the duel itself is between these two attitudes to life, yet no side ultimately kills the other so not attitude is shown to be correct.

At the duel, the deacon, with a terrified last-minute cry, makes Von Koren's bullet miss his mark. This is symbolic but also curious, and not accidental, in that the deacon is a clown who enjoys a laugh, rather than a pious, finger-wagging moralist, the role the scientist Von Koren assumes. Thus, a central, pivotal role is filled by this secondary character. The deacon in the story acts as a guardian angel for Laevsky. According to Durkin, who commented on the religious Christian subtext of the story, the deacon is linked with popular faith by an anecdote that points to a legend about a Russian saint, and to a tale from the Prologue as reworked by Leskov (Durkin 172). The deacon's clerical background also suggests connections with Leskov's fictional world, as do his origins in the central Russian territory that is one of Leskov's favoured locales (Durkin 172). Finally, the deacon's most frequent reaction to the behaviour or statements of those around him is laughter. The deacon is surrounded by a distinctive air of laughter (Durkin 172). Moreover, Axelrod points out that the fisher-of-men, Pobedov, who spends his days catching bull-heads, is the ultimate victor of souls (Axelrod 148). The deacon's name Pobedov ("Победов") means "victory" and can evoke in the orthodox liturgy the priest's singing: "Победную песнь поюще, вопиюще, взывающе и глаголюще" (singing to the song of victory, shouting, proclaiming, and saying) as the deacon strikes the diskos at the four ends of the sign of the Cross. The four blows at the four corners is the same blessing Axelrod describes the bishop performing with trikirion and dikirion (132).<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Dikirion and Trikirion are liturgical candlesticks, often quite ornate, used when the Divine Liturgy is celebrated by a bishop. In the Byzantine tradition they are also used in Matins and Vespers services presided over by bishops. Both the dikirion and trikirion have a flat base, so that they may be stood upright. Above this base is a vertical shaft terminating in candleholders. The dikirion holds two candles, representing the dual natures of Jesus Christ (i.e., fully God and fully man), and the trikirion holds three, representing the three persons of the Holy Trinity.

Laevsky's discovery of Nadezhda's affair with Achimianov makes him realise that he has a responsibility for their relationship falling apart; he therefore acknowledges his own mistakes and undergoes a spiritual rebirth. After the duel, he becomes a different person. Von Koren too, at the end of the story, has a spiritual change of heart, realizing that he was mistaken about Laevsky, and asks for his forgiveness.

Laevsky's reaction when he discovers Nadezhda's infidelities radically distinguishes Chekhov's hero from Tolstoy's. He feels neither resentment nor revulsion, only tenderness. This is perhaps the only place in Chekhov where Christian love moves in when sexual love is dead. Laevsky maintains that: "In the whole of my life I haven't planted a single tree" (Rayfield 105). Laevsky not only did not love Nadezhda, but he also did not love nature. Chekhov places man's attitude to nature on the same level as the value of spiritual phenomena. Not loving nature is considered as bad as not loving other people.

The night before the duel Laevsky does not sleep, but thinks about life. There is heavy rain and lightning. Laevsky starts praying to the rain and the lightning. He regrets his past life. As Axelrod points out, Laevsky's desire to pray is a manifestation of his hope for a better life. Also, through the understanding of his deficiencies, his appeal for forgiveness, and his decision to pray, Laevsky shows humility (140-1). After the duel, he is changed. He starts working hard, is calmer, sober, and decides to marry Nadezhda. Before the duel, Laevsky has given Nadezhda a letter about her husband's death, but rather than discuss it with her, as she would have liked, he cowardly climbs out the window and goes to doctor Samoylenko, where he says, among other things:

я падший человек...жизнь покупал ценою лжи, праздности.... я рад, что вижу свои недостатки ... это поможет мне воскреснуть и стать другим человеком...я жажду совего обновления....буду человеком.<sup>130</sup>

This passage restates Christian themes: the Fall (humans falling short of their vocation); sins of lies and idleness; an awareness of one's deficiencies requisite for rebirth or resurrection, that is renewal. This passage foreshadows the change in Laevsky and restates notions of transfiguration, important in the Orthodox faith. Laevsky chooses to marry Nadezhda after his near-death experience of the duel with Von Koren. Although without overt reference to religion, Laevsky's reformation functions as a religious conversion. This conversion is foreshadowed by the deacon, who before the duel, thinks that although they are non-believers, Laevsky and Von Koren, are good people, and "are sure to be saved" (Chekhov 232).

In the story "The Duel" patriarchal views towards family and marriage are voiced by Mariia, Samoilenko, and Laevsky's mother. Evidence of a freer relationship between men and women, secularization of the institution of marriage, and marriage based on love can all be seen in the story.

As we have seen, according to Hahn, "The Duel" as a whole is critical of the romantic conception of love. Hahn claims that Laevsky's dissatisfaction with Nadezhda is really also dissatisfaction with himself, which is why she can do nothing to bring about the necessary change in him (Hahn 184). As Axelrod points out, he seeks salvation in money or literature (136). Chekhov demonstrates that through recognition of personal mistakes and faults one can

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<sup>130</sup> "I'm glad I see my faults clearly and am conscious of them. That will help me to reform and become a different man. My dear fellow, if only you knew how passionately, with what anguish, I long for such a change. And I swear to you I'll be a man! I will! (Trans. by C. Garnett, p. 173).



start on a new path. In their decision to work hard and be active, Nadezhda and Laevsky become the type of people who are an inspiration for others. However, the change in Laevsky is associated with divine grace, or God's intervention in Laevsky's life. Laevsky tries to deny God, but is drawn back despite his efforts and ultimately becomes an example to be followed. In her article "The Biblical and Theological Context of Moral Reform in *The Duel*" Willa Chamberlain Axelrod unearths the Biblical allusions in the story. According to Axelrod, the picnic dinner unites the characters under the image of the biblical vine and is an allegory of the Eucharistic meal. The picnic as Eucharistic ritual is implied by the food, the location of the picnic and the deacon's vision of himself as Bishop, blessing his congregation or "vine" (131). However, Axelrod does not draw connections with the most famous gospel passage where the vine metaphor is used: Jesus says, "I am the vine and you are the branches" (John 15:5), describing the Church as the body of believers. Whether believer or sceptic, Chekhov had profound mastery of Russian religious culture and he employed it as one of the most widely significant cultural codes creating meaning in his text (De Sherbinin 225). Nonetheless, he did not express a connection with the person of Jesus as is encouraged in the vine passage of John 15: "remain in me and I will remain in you". His relationship with Christ is more by proxy in the person of Pobedov the deacon.

Chekhov's context implies common responsibility and humanity, religious themes without religion. Before the duel, Laevsky was lazy and wanted to escape from Nadezhda and go to Saint Petersburg. After his near-death experience of the duel, he starts working hard, pays off his debts, and marries Nadezhda. Just as the unbelievers, Laevsky and Von Koren are "saved" in the deacon's estimation, so it appears that God works in Laevsky's life. This describes the crisis of an extra-marital relationship. However, at the end, Nadezhda and Laevsky get married;

marriage is for them an opportunity to become better people, more responsible towards life and towards each other as well.

### Chekhov and Women

According to Hahn, Chekhov is sometimes very afraid of women, in particular of their ability to use their sexuality in search of power (Hahn 216). However, Hahn overlooks the fact that there is power play in all sensual relations; the fact that Chekhov depicts women making use of the power of their sexuality speaks of curiosity more than fear. Again, our doctor uncovers what he sees, a shift in power relationships, it is up to the readers to respond from their own preconceptions. Hahn points out that some aspects of femininity disgusted Chekhov, such as the bourgeois immersion of married women in trivial domesticity and the primitive sexual aggression of the uneducated and often bourgeois women occupied with a quest for power (Hahn 218). Yet he does not avoid portraying them. Chekhov depicts other women particularly well, such as upper-middle or upper-class women, who are usually, but not always, educated, unhappy with the nonsense of their daily duties, sexually confined within the bounds of a cultivated understanding, which dissociates it from aggression (Hahn 219). This is not surprising as it reflects the society in which he moved and, indeed, with whom he expressed his own promiscuous sexual preferences. Hahn also highlights the fact that when Chekhov was only twenty-six, he was already writing about the conflict between conscience and instinct in sexual life, about the romantic implications of feminine sexual desire, and the self-delusions by which women avoid recognizing sexual impulses in themselves (Hahn 221).

According to Hahn, “The Lady with the Little Dog” (1899) is much more important in conveying Chekhov’s understanding of sexual desire and love than “The Grasshopper” (1892) or sections of “The Duel” (1891). In “The Lady with the Little Dog” the summer romance becomes complicated over time. When Anna and Gurov are in Moscow, lust becomes an illicit love affair which ultimately destroys or damages their otherwise normal lives.

Hahn argues that because Chekhov was afraid of bourgeois or upper class women’s sexual power, he was not as perceptive and objective in writing about women who made use of it as he was in dealing with humbler, less overtly sexual women. Karlinsky points out that many of Chekhov’s stories would be in the canon of the women’s liberation movement; while Rayfield defines some of Chekhov’s views on women as “misogynist” (Rayfield 341-8). As a woman I see Chekhov’s liberal ideas about love as an expression of emancipation – he broached the subject and therefore brought it into the mainstream consciousness. He was ahead of his time and influenced later attitudes in pre-and post-soviet Russia.

In one of his most famous stories, “The Darling” (1899), the heroine’s interests and enthusiasms reflect primarily those of the men in her life. Ol’ga is twice widowed, takes a lover, and finally cares for her former lover’s son. Tolstoy celebrated “The Darling” and considered Ol’ga as an ideal woman. However, Chekhov preferred freer, independent women. According to Moss, Chekhov’s writings show that he saw differences between male and female love and further that males and females themselves do not love uniformly. “This non-dogmatic, reality based approach is one of the most important characteristics of Chekhov’s style” (Moss 55). According to Moss, sex is often associated with romantic love, and both men and women must deal adequately with it (Moss 56). “Chekhov’s training as a doctor, including the government-

mandated examination of prostitutes, provided him with a more realistic understanding of sex and sexuality than was possessed by many men of his time” (Moss 56).

As Moss points out, based on Chekhov’s writings one can argue that there is plenty of evidence that he was attracted to feminine beauty, that he valued sex, and that it was a motivation for his marriage (56). Ol’ga was eight years younger than him and lively, especially when contrasted with his more sickly self in his final years. Rayfield argues that Chekhov’s attitude towards women, marriage, sexuality, and prostitution developed continually. Chekhov did not marry until 1901; one reason for this was that his youth did not provide him with many examples of happy marriages. He also thought that his father treated his mother in an authoritarian way. Moreover, there was the responsibility that he always felt for taking care of his family. Finally, he thought that marriage would influence his writing and he thought that any artist, writer or actor, should love only their art and be entirely absorbed by it. Lalo maintains that throughout his life Chekhov represented himself as afraid of potential marriage or any long-term relationship with women, not so much because he feared it would weaken his creativity but because he would become bored being with the same partner every day. It is not surprising that the word boredom (*ennui*) is one of the most recurrent terms one encounters in Chekhov’s correspondence: sexual stability meant sexual boredom for this restless person (Lalo 104).

According to De Maegd-Soëp, as she points out in her book *Women in the Life and Work of Chekhov* (1987), Chekhov’s marriage was quite happy. However, Rosamund Bartlett believes that the marriage was successful because Ol’ga and Chekhov were often separated. Moreover, other scholars, such as Magarshack and Rayfield mention that the couple faced some problems, like for example, the fact that she had an extra-marital relationship. However, based on Chekhov’s conclusions in “The Duel” where Laevsky forgives Nadezhda for her

unfaithfulness due to recognising his own neglect, it is my belief that he could have philosophically overcome adultery in his personal life.

Women play an important role in Chekhov's works. This is true even when he writes short stories which appear misogynistic. Chekhov describes men who are weak and narrow minded in their perception of reality and their capacity for dealing with it. It seems that men allow themselves to be guided by women. The characters seek unsuccessfully to establish relationships; they want a 'real' or genuine connection with another person, without the falsities that can come through social conventions.

Flath points out that Chekhov himself played almost a pathologically passive role in his relationships with women (238). His passivity toward women is expressed in his works and short stories. For example, in "Ariadne" the protagonist is caught in a web and cannot extricate himself. The landowner, Ivan Shamokin, tells the story of his relationship with Ariadne and how he has been blinded by her beautiful appearance. He does not see that her true nature is manipulative and coquettish, but soon he will become disillusioned. Chekhov presents the reality of women manipulating men and submitting them to their sexual power. But society remains patriarchal, so any power women exert is in the private sphere, with men dominating the public, which is where they maintain control through money, work and inheritance. Identifying the women in Chekhov's life is revelatory: his love affairs become suddenly more real and a different Chekhov emerges. His amorous life starts in 1873, when the teenage Chekhov visited a brothel in his home town of Taganrog and continues until 1898 with a trend of premarital serial monogamous relationships until he fell in love with the actress Olga Knipper. Chekhov was then in ill health, and eventually married Knipper in 1901. The picture that emerges is of a man who, over the course of a couple of decades, enjoyed at least two-dozen love affairs of varying

intensity, some extremely passionate, some casual, some lasting many years, and some that were clearly going on simultaneously. He also continued to be a regular visitor to brothels in Russia and elsewhere in Europe, as is clear from his letters. At the end of the 1880s Chekhov abandoned his pen name Antosha Chekhonte and adopted the doctrine of non-resistance to all evil, an influence of Tolstoy. This led Chekhov to write stories such as “Pripadok” (1888; “The Nervous Breakdown”), about the immorality of prostitution. Chekhov’s works are a reflection of the sexual mores that prevailed in middle-class intellectual circles in the last decades of the 19th century in Russia. They show how such people bend the rules in practice. Passivity or laziness towards women can be seen as a typical trait in Russian men, and again our doctor exposes some naked truths in the face of chauvinist bravado. Therefore, where Flath sees Chekhov’s male characters as pathologically passive, I see a literary device that allows for the emancipated voice and sexual preference of the women to be celebrated.

### Emancipation of Women in “The Duel” (1891)

The emancipation of women running through “The Duel” is expressed in the lifestyle of Nadezhda as juxtaposed with the views of Mariia Konstantinovna. Nadezhda is a married woman who moves to the Caucasus and is living openly with another man. When ignored by this lover, however, she pursues other affairs. Ironically, the ideas of romantic love that typify women’s emancipation in Chekhov’s writing are more clearly voiced by her lover. The name Nadezhda means ‘hope’, and highlights the avant-garde attitude of both the author and the heroine to her sexual emancipation. In contrast Mariia is one of the most traditional names – that of the mother

of Christ – and her patronymic Konstantinovna also adds to the sense of tradition harkening back to the emperor Constantine and the very roots of the Orthodox Church. The cultural and social setting of the characters also highlights the Russian trend of women’s emancipation through education.

“The Duel” focuses on a love affair and the reaction to this love affair by the people around the main protagonists, and by the wider local society. The story is set in the Caucasus. As we have seen, “The Duel” has two main protagonists, Laevsky, who has taken refuge in the South with a woman (Nadezhda Fedorovna), and a zoologist, Von Koren, who has come for the summer to the Black Sea to study the embryology of jellyfish. Notably one does not see how the affair began; one sees Nadezhda and Laevsky in their current state of dissatisfaction. By running away from her husband, Nadezhda hoped to escape the desolation of her married life, but this despair follows her to the Caucasus, which although Russians consider it an exotic place, in Chekhov’s vision is a place of mundane activity and dissatisfaction. Laevsky experiences a similar disappointment. As Knapp points out, a void is transportable (292). Laevsky feels that he no longer loves Nadezhda, that the concrete details of cohabitation (“powder”, “medicine”, “ironing”, and “curling papers” (Chekhov 112)) have killed the pure love he once dreamed of. There is a tension between reality and idealism. Thus, Laevsky is considering leaving his mistress, though he knows quite well that she is completely dependent on him. Samoylenko, an army medical officer, advises Laevsky that since love can never last for a long time, the sole remedy is patience. He states that the most important thing in family life is “patience, not love” (Chekhov 112). During the story, Samoylenko advises Laevsky to marry Nadezhda when news arrives that her husband has recently died, but Laevsky considers marriage without love “like an

atheist celebrating mass” (Chekhov 116). The narrative describes Laevsky’s process of reconciling his romantic notions of love with his sense of responsibility for Nadezhda.

When Nadezhda meets Mariia Konstantinovna Bitugov (an official’s wife) and her daughter Katya, a schoolgirl of fifteen, at a bathhouse, she senses they are afraid of her, and do not respect her. In Mariia’s voice, Chekhov expresses society’s opinion towards adulterers:

Вы страшная грешница. Вы нарушили обет, который дали мужу перед алтарем. Вы соблазнили прекрасного молодого человека, который, быть может, если бы не встретился с вами, взял бы себе законную подругу жизни из хорошей семьи своего круга и был бы теперь, как все. Вы погубили его молодость. Не говорите, не говорите, милая! Я не поверю, чтобы в наших грехах был виноват мужчина. Всегда виноваты женщины.<sup>131</sup>

Even women voice this patriarchal opinion. Mariia is the voice of Christian marriage, the sacrament of marriage. It is interesting that she is also the strongest voice for patriarchy, placing the blame of the relationship between Nadezhda and Laevsky solely on the sinful seductions of Nadezhda; she speaks against the pursuit of emancipation in the act of seeking meaning in life through romantic love or in the courage to carry out such an affair in public. The voice of conservatism still expects the patriarchal roles to continue; thus, slovenliness is associated with character deficiency, and Mariia associates Nadezhda’s messy house with her moral failings:

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<sup>131</sup> "You are a terrible sinner. You broke the vow you made your husband at the altar. You seduced a fine young man, who perhaps had he not met you might have taken a lawful partner for life from a good family in his own circle, and would have been like everyone else now. You have ruined his youth. Don't speak, don't speak, my dear! I never believe that man is to blame for our sins. It is always the woman's fault (Chekhov 177).



А дома у вас просто ужас, ужас! Во всем городе ни у кого нет мух, а у вас от них отбою нет, все тарелки и блюдечки черны. На окнах и на столах, посмотрите, пыль, дохлые мухи, стаканы... К чему тут стаканы? И, милая, до сих пор у вас со стола не убрано. А в спальню к вам войти стыдно: разбросано везде белье, висят на стенах эти ваши разные каучуки, стоит какая-то посуда... Милая! Муж ничего не должен знать, и жена должна быть перед ним чистой, как ангельчик!<sup>132</sup>

Mariia reinforces the traditional role of the woman, suggesting that Nadezhda's inability to maintain standard cleanliness is as bad as her sinful affair. Housework is regarded by the heroine as unimportant in comparison to the pursuit of happiness. Laevsky's mother, though absent from the story, also illustrates society's attitude towards unlawful cohabitation. She blames her son for having stolen another man's wife, Laevsky confesses: "мы с ней разошлись. Она не могла мне простить этой связи"<sup>133</sup>. Although the mother blames him, this is not to say that she would not also blame the seductions of Nadezhda. What her accusation highlights is the attitude of the older generation and the counter emancipation tendencies in society from women themselves. As Friedrich Engels points out in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) in the patriarchal family men wish to ensure that their property will be passed to their sons and so man insist on monogamous marriage. However, this restriction that is applied to wives is ignored by their husbands. Engels also argues that women are compensated for this repression by the development of a so-called "cult of femininity", which celebrates the

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<sup>132</sup> And it's simply awful, awful in your home! No one else in the town has flies, but there's no getting rid of them in your rooms: all the plates and dishes are black with them. If you look at the windows and the chairs, there's nothing but dust, dead flies, and glasses. . . . What do you want glasses standing about for? And, my dear, the table's not cleared till this time in the day. And one's ashamed to go into your bedroom: underclothes flung about everywhere, india-rubber tubes hanging on the walls, pails and basins standing about. . . . My dear! A husband ought to know nothing, and his wife ought to be as neat as a little angel in his presence (Chekhov 179).

<sup>133</sup> "We are on bad terms. She could not forgive me for this affair" (Chekhov 116).

attractions of romantic love, but in reality is an organized hypocrisy designed to protect male privileges and property (124). According to Heywood, other feminists such as, for example, Charles Fourier and Owen argue that the patriarchal family should be replaced by a system of communal living and “free love” (Heywood 246). However, Heywood argues that Orthodox Marxists suggest that women’s emancipation will be “a by-product of a social revolution in which capitalism is overthrown and replaced by socialism” (246). For modern socialist feminists, sexual oppression is as important as class exploitation (246). Many of them agree with modern Marxism, which focuses on the interplay of economic, social, political and cultural forces in society. For example, Juliet Mitchell (1971) suggested that women should achieve emancipation in the four following areas: as members of the workforce who are active in production; as mother who reproduce the human species and are responsible for socializing children; and as people rather sex objects.

Laevsky is actually quite passive, but can fall into hysterics (Kviatovskii 44). He seems to be frequently distressed, not as he thinks, from the frustration of his attempts to get away, but because of self-dissatisfaction and half-recognized feelings of guilt. This nervous state culminates in his fit of hysterics and then in his fit of temper at Samoylenko, which leads to the challenge of the duel. Hysteria is one of the medical conditions associated with women at the end of the nineteenth century; this fact was well known by Chekhov, yet he attributes it to his male character. If Laevsky’s hysterical fit feminizes him, it also defeminises the condition and subtly challenges the medical view of the time, which considered hysteria to be a female illness.<sup>134</sup> The

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<sup>134</sup> Cecilia Tasca, “Women and Hysteria in History of Mental Health”, *Clinical Practice & Epidemiology in Mental Health*, Vol. 8, 2012, pp. 110-119.

choice of presenting Laevsky with these symptoms has an equalising effect on gender, which positively highlights the power of female sexuality on the male psyche.

There is a reversal of roles. Gender roles are reversed: the man is passive, the woman active. It is Nadezhda who has two affairs; Laevsky of course is having an affair with her, thus Chekhov has created a construct that demonstrates the family crisis without the judicial constraints of marriage. Marriage bonds have already been broken, and this situation is presented to us as a *fait accompli*. Although Nadezhda is still married, this is not a love triangle, as her husband is not mentioned in any descriptive depth. There is still an implied understanding of alliance, which is broken by Nadezhda in the affairs with Achimianov and Kirillov; however, in a sense Laevsky also breaks the alliance by not paying her attention. The alliance we are presented with is based on romance. Laevsky was bored of the daily routine; he wanted to flee from her and was not playing his part. By applying Foucault's theory of sexuality, we observe that in this alliance the deployment of sexuality is very much in the hands of the woman. She deploys her sexuality to her advantage, thus with Achimianov she is really paying off debts for expensive hats and dresses, which traditionally would be provided to her by her man, as part of the unwritten terms of the exchange between sexuality and alliance.

The deployment of alliance is still important for Chekhov. "The Duel" gives us an intimate view into the crisis in marriage without the usual stigma. For part of the story, the discourse challenges the alliance when there is no social pressure for it to do so; in fact the pressures of ostracism are for the alliance to break. Then Chekhov introduces the death of Nadezhda's husband, which allows for the possibility for the lovers to get married. At this point, they have tasted the routines of married life and the misery of a relationship tainted by infidelity,

yet they choose marriage. The fact that they decide to marry through mutual consent is also a changing sign of the times; it was not arranged by their parents. Thus, emancipation of women does not necessarily challenge the future of marriage but rather the nature in which it is arranged. Nadezhda achieves greater advantage in both the deployment of alliance and sexuality.

The emancipation of women is not the main theme of “The Duel”, yet it runs throughout the whole story. The liberal setting of the relationship and the approach of both hero and heroine towards the crisis of their romantic alliance, contribute towards the discourse of woman’s emancipation. Chekhov certainly describes the misery and turmoil of the relationship, there are still consequences for infidelity, but he does not moralise about them himself. Conventional social norms are presented to us in the voice of Mariia Konstantinovna, who supports patriarchy and the submissive position of women. Nadezhda does not accept these; however, it is Laevsky himself who most clearly articulates the ideas of romantic love that typify women’s emancipation. He also defeminises the roles of passivity in the stereotype of hysteria as a female condition. In Nadezhda, Chekhov literally gives a new name to the plight of women trapped in loveless marriages; his heroine is imbued with choice and she is given the name “hope.” Chekhov presents a glimmer of hope for the family and for the expression of sexuality as part of a positive spiritual search for truth. The cultural and social setting of the characters within the educated classes also highlights the idea that education gives women a sense of how things might be otherwise, through literature. In this context, the confessions of sexual taboo are consistent with the discourse on religion and science, which relates to the thematic cluster of faith in my analysis of the Russian family crisis at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

### “The Betrothed” (1903): the Story of an Emancipated Woman

V. F. Shapovalov in his book *Istoki i Smysl Rossiiskoi Tsivilizatsii* (2003) compares the movement for the emancipation of women in Russia with that of the West. He argues that the emancipation of women in the West took place to grant women the right to vote, whereas in Russia its main purpose was for women to receive education:

И если на Западе борьба женщин за свои права главным образом концентрировалась на юридически-правовой стороне, в частности на проблеме избирательных прав, то в России - она с самого начала ставила перед собой задачу достижения женского равноправия в полном объеме.<sup>135</sup>

Chekhov’s “Nevesta” (“The Betrothed”) (1903) is clear evidence of this new trend in Russian society. In this story the bride and groom’s families have arranged everything for them, even finding them a house, yet parental influence on their lives irritates the bride.

Nadya is engaged to Andrey in an arranged marriage, but she avoids the typical plight of Russian middle class women, refusing a loveless marriage and asserting her independence. Nadya has been dreaming of a fiancé since she was sixteen, and her dreams are about to come true. He is handsome and young, seemingly a good match for Nadya in all respects. However, the girl does not want to marry the boy, for she does not love him. Sasha, a painter and poor orphan whom Nadya’s grandmother once sheltered and supported, returns from the capital city to Nadya’s provincial town. He talks to Nadya of a new life and of how everyday routine is boring. According to him, the main thing is to turn one’s life upside down; then everything else will become clear. There is a certain irony in that Sasha who represents a progressive, encouraging

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<sup>135</sup> If in the West women's struggle focused on legal and judicial rights, which means women wanted achieve equal voting rights to men, in Russia from the very beginning the struggle of women was to achieve equality in education (Shapovalov 340-1).

and challenging voice – is sick and dying. There might be a connection here to Chekhov's own state of sickness. Sasha is less a catalyst for Nadya, than an old friend and confidante who encourages her.

The new prospect of education leads Nadya to leave the fiancé whom she does not love. As Ponomareva points out, Nadya's mother never had such a chance. She was forced to live her life first in the company of a husband she did not love, and then with her domineering mother-in-law, being financially dependent on her. She spent sleepless nights dreaming of Anna Karenina, imagining the latter walking about and talking to her; wrapped up in her dreams, she fails to see or understand what is happening in her daughter's heart (Ponomareva and Choroshilova 143)

Nadya makes a drastic decision: she abandons her former life and leaves for the capital city to get an education there. This act has severe repercussions for her mother and grandmother, who feel dishonoured. In order to avoid the stares of their neighbours, they do not even go out. This detail shows the degree of shame they feel about Nadya breaking with social expectations. It also shows the degree of pressure she was under to conform, as would have been common in Russian society at this time. One day Nadya comes back to visit her family; her life is going the way she wants and the mother and the grandmother accept her, her new appearance and lifestyle. Curiously, one never knows what she has gone off to study – that is less important than her action in making a break.

As Ponomareva points out, it would not be correct to say that the betrothed girl portrayed by Chekhov gave up marriage for the sake of education; rather she chose a more complicated route, wishing to expand the circle of her life. This charming and very feminine girl surely wants to live a life appropriate for a woman, but her expectations are higher than those of her mother

and grandmother. Such girls searched for a husband outside their own social circle, running a high risk of failure.

According to Ponomareva, development of the system of education for women in Russia played a great role in changing the social status of women. Thousands of women could make a choice. This had a tremendous impact on the family. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, early marriages became less common in the European part of Russia. The average age of marriage for men was 24, and for women 21 (Ponomareva and Choroshilova 143). N. Aralovets, who undertook a study of the family in Russia in 1897-1926, notes that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the rate of marriage was very high, nearly 100%. However, demographic norms and the marriage rates of the urban population underwent a transformation. The marriage rate reduced, especially in industrially developed cities.

Millions of other women were preoccupied with the struggle to survive. Russia was a very poor country and most of the girls who sought to make radical changes in their lives could not enjoy such advantages because of their conditions. The reality that most of these girls had to face was often harsh. The life of a woman became more independent and free (Alexei's former girlfriend Polina in "Three Years" is an emancipated woman who supports herself with music lessons), but also more difficult and less secure.

Girls striving for a new life could not foresee what shape it might take. The lack of precedent and example meant that they lacked awareness. Their vision of their future was vague. Hence, Chekhov's Sasha, the painter in "The Betrothed", advocates turning one's life upside down, though the consequences of such change are unknown (Ponomareva and Choroshilova 144).

Some of Chekhov's contemporaries, as well as later Soviet critics, were wont to see his heroine as a revolutionary. Gorky, upon reading a draft of the story, remarked:

Еще в корректуре с новым рассказом Чехова познакомились М.

Горький и Вересаев. Происходило это в Крыму 21 апреля, так что читать они могли только вторую, но еще чистую, не выправленную автором корректуру.

Об этом чтении сохранились воспоминания Вересаева:

«Накануне, у Горького, мы читали в корректуре новый рассказ Чехова “Невеста”...

Антон Павлович спросил:

— Ну, что, как вам рассказ?

Я помялся, но решил высказаться откровенно.

— Антон Павлович, не так девушки уходят в революцию. И такие девицы, как ваша Надя, в революцию не идут.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Gorky met Veresaev during the proofreading process of Chekhov's new story. This happened in Crimea on April 21, so that they could only read the second, but already clean, not proofread version of the story by the author. Veresaev's memories have been preserved about this reading:

Yesterday, at Gorky's, we read the new story by Chekhov "The Bride" not yet proofread...

Anton Pavlovich asked:

- Well, what do you think of the story?

I hesitated, but decided to speak frankly.

- Anton Chekhov, these girls don't leave for the revolution like that. And these girls like your Nadia, do not leave for the revolution (Chekhov 467)



Chekhov depicts Nadya as a protester, retaliating against her idle, boring life in the countryside. After her initial admiration for Andrei, Nadya changes her mind about him. A conversation with her mother shows Nadya's changing attitude towards Andrei, and in the conversation with Sasha she finally shows her true opinion of him: she considers Andrei stupid. Nadya talks with her mother; she thinks that she does not want to marry, and that she does not love Andrei. She finds him banal, obtuse and wants more for herself:

Мама, мама, — проговорила она, — родная моя, если б ты знала, что со мной делается! Прошу тебя, умоляю, позволь мне уехать! Умоляю!

Свадьбы не должно быть и не будет — пойми! Я не люблю этого человека...

Умоляю тебя, вдумайся и пойми! Ты только пойми, до какой степени мелка и унизительна наша жизнь. У меня открылись глаза, я теперь всё вижу. И что такое твой Андрей Андреич? Ведь он же неумен, мама! Господи боже мой! Пойми, мама, он глуп!<sup>137</sup>

Nadia wants to escape a mundane life. From a social activist standpoint, this was the right decision for her.

As V. I. Kuleshov points out, works by Tolstoy and Chekhov dominated the world literature at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These two artists differ greatly in their attitudes towards religion, art, and social and historical progress. If Tolstoy

<sup>137</sup> "Let me go away from the town," she said at last. "There must not and will not be a wedding, understand that! I don't love that man . . . I can't even speak about him." (Chekhov 212).

"Mother, listen to me!" said Nadya. "I implore you, do understand! If you would only understand how petty and degrading our life is. My eyes have been opened, and I see it all now. And what is your Andrei Andreitch? Why, he is not intelligent, mother! Merciful heavens, do understand, mother, he is stupid!" (Chekhov 213).

viewed the past with nostalgia as the ‘golden age’ of mankind, Chekhov, as an educated man of science, believed in progress and the future. These very different artists, however, both voiced resentment and rejection of the existing public order, and expressed their desire for improvements in social order and improvements in the individual. Their work both adumbrates forthcoming great changes and reflects the ideological and political immaturity of the vast majority of the population of the Russian Empire (Kuleshov, *Ot Redkollegii, Chekhov i Tolstoi*). Chekhov’s “The Betrothed” expresses precisely this desire for changing the current order and state of relationships. The heroine of this story typifies an emancipated woman who chooses a career instead of family life, and who wants to improve her life and search for happiness beyond normal expectations. Thus, she moves to Saint Petersburg in order to study and become independent. Sasha is a catalyst for Nadya, but she outgrows him. Sasha’s death might symbolize that the changes brought about in Nadya’s life thanks to his presence will not bear much fruit. In fact, Chekhov’s story shows that the process of emancipation in Russia had just started; he shows some signs of this process, not its practical realization. The Chekhovian irony, then, is that the individual advocating active change and growth is sickly and dying while those stuck in moribund, banal ways are healthy. “The Betrothed” describes Nadya’s existential crisis. Chekhov uses this background to deconstruct the expectations of men and women at the time, when these expectations are followed by a radical break with social convention on the part of women. At the end of the story, Nadya discovers that her worth as an individual is completely separate from the values and misogyny of her surroundings. Through “The Betrothed” Chekhov shows sympathy for women and their values. Toward the end of his life, Chekhov underwent a transformation in his world-view through his short fiction. “Dushechka” (1898; “The Darling”), “Dama s sobachkoy” (“The Lady with a Dog”; 1899), and his last story “Nevesta” (1903; “The

Betrothed”) retain a tenuous and somewhat rueful optimism, allowing the characters hope for spiritual fulfilment. “The Betrothed” represents the pinnacle of Chekhov's innovation in the short fiction form. Herein one can grasp the radical character of Chekhov's prose: its manipulation of time and space, preference for an interior lyricism, and poetic and symbolic implementation of syncretism, all of which are elements common to the contemporary short story.

### “Ariadne” (1895): a Coquettish and Manipulative Woman

Chekhov’s “Ariadne” extends an implicit debate with Tolstoy’s *The Kreutzer Sonata*, as Semanova discusses in her article ““Kreitserova sonata” L. N. Tolstogo i “Ariadna” A.P. Chekhova”, *Chekhov i Lev Tolstoy* (1980)’. As Semanova points out, *The Kreutzer Sonata* attracts the special attention of Tolstoy’s scholars. N. K. Gudziy, V. A. Zhdanov, K. M. Lomunov, L. M. Myshkovskaya, L. D. Opulskaya and M. D. Khrapchenko have thoroughly studied the history of the development of this novella, its ideological and artistic concept, and its role in the author’s creative life (Semanova 225). Rayfield cites “Ariadne” as evidence of a misogynistic current of Chekhov’s work. In the course of the years that preceded the writing of the short story Chekhov had been incessantly brooding over *The Kreutzer Sonata*, now supporting the author through his critical portrayal of family relations (“Anna on the Neck”; “The Grasshopper”), then arguing against his utopian ideas. As Semianova points out, when firmly declaring that he had freed himself of “Tolstoy’s philosophy”, Chekhov, refers, among other things, to the moralizing recipes set forth in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, and its Epilogue: “... prudence and justice suggest that in electricity and steam there is more love of man than in

chastity and vegetarianism” – a reference to Tolstoy’s lifestyle (to A. S. Suvorin, 27 March 1894). Clearly, Chekhov believes that technical and scientific advance benefits people more than ideals. Also, Chekhov considers such chastity an impossibility. Semanova highlights sufficient grounds for a comparison of *The Kreutzer Sonata* and “Ariadne”. However, it is known that Chekhov expressed a mixed attitude to *The Kreutzer Sonata* after his initial reading in January 1890: “Do you not like *The Kreutzer Sonata*?” he writes to A. N. Plescheyev in reply to the latter’s letter dated 13<sup>th</sup> February 1890.

Chekhov uses Abbazia, an exotic Mediterranean and Italian setting as the background to a short scene in his story “Ariadne”. Abbazia is a health resort on the Adriatic Sea, which, as Callow points out, Chekhov denigrated in the story as “a filthy little Slav town” (229).

Ariadne is a beautiful, capricious young woman. She has a relationship with a landowner, Shamokhin, who is both narrator and protagonist. The story consists of his frustrations and sufferings, as confided to the narrator, a writer by profession. This outer narrator considers Ariadne selfish and untrustworthy, inclined to flirtation and narcissistic. “Ariadne” has been the focus of many critics and scholars. Some of them, like Virginia Llewellyn Smith and Donald Rayfield, have interpreted this narcissistic aspect of Ariadne as an expression of Chekhov’s misogyny. Flath argues, however, that Ariadne’s narcissism is a projection of the narrator’s self-obsession. He bases his statement on Charles Isenberg’s theory of *Frame Narratives of Renunciation*, according to which the act of storytelling is a healing process for the narrator. In Flath’s opinion, Ariadne can be seen as an alternative to these “renunciation narratives”: the narrator wants to renounce his love during the affair itself (Flath 226). Moreover, Flath points out that in Isenberg’s study it is the male narrator who tells the story; the reader does not hear the

voice of the heroine (227). Flath demonstrates that the entire conflict is within Shamokhin, and that the obstacles are a result of his own imagination. Most importantly, Flath shows that while Ariadne reciprocates Shamokhin's love, he is too passive to take any action and propose to her. Thus, this story is about "nothing", it is about what could have happened, but does not happen. The passivity of the romantic hero is also somehow pathological (Flath 230). Shamokhin was waiting for "destiny" to marry him to Ariadne. He denies his responsibility; he observes and judges but does not act. He does not propose to her; rather he escapes from home when she needs him and gives Lubkov the money he needs to keep Ariadne in Western Europe (Flath 233). This leads to Ariadne's ruin. As Flath points out, Shamokhin's incapacity to act on his feelings of love for Ariadne pushes her into the arms of Lubkov and to Western Europe, which is to her ruin (238). At the end of the story, Lubkov leaves her and she has no more money. Thus, she writes to Shamokhin asking him to join her in Western Europe.

Shamokhin says that when Germans or English meet they talk of nothing but their business or their crops, whereas Russians discuss ideas or women. Chekhov was critical of the German writer Max Nordau and the theory of degeneration. He expressed this criticism in his letters to Aleksei Suvorin of 27 March 1894 and to Sharova of 28 February 1895):

Эти постоянные разговоры о женщинах какой-нибудь философ средней руки, вроде Макса Нордау, объяснил бы эротическим помешательством или тем, что мы крепостники и прочее, я же на это дело смотрю иначе. Повторяю: мы недовольны, потому что мы идеалисты.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> [We Russians] discuss nothing but abstract subjects and women... A mediocre philosopher like Max Nordau would explain these incessant conversations about women as a form of erotic madness, or would put it down to our having been slave-owners... I take... a different view... we are dissatisfied [with women] because we are idealists.

According to Flath, Shamokhin with his aversion to the physical aspects of sexual love represents idealism, while Ariadne, with her strong sexual drive, represents the body. The tension between them starts in Shamokhin's own incapacity to find peace in himself between his ideals and the needs of his body (234).

Shamokhin knew Ariadne as a wilful and spoiled young girl who so fascinated him that he has almost ruined himself and his father to pay for her excesses. He believes he cannot hold her, but will change her nature by conditioning her. This he does by taking her around art galleries and museums, for he sees that her predatory habits arise from a lack of education. On the one hand, if one considers the inertia of Shamokhin, his talk is comic. On the other hand, there is no doubt about his attraction to her. She, however, loves her beautiful body and she is proud of her erotic nature.

As Pritchett points out, in St. Petersburg the gossip was that Ariadne was drawn from the actress Lidiia Iavorskaia, who was briefly Chekhov's mistress, and who was well known for her passion for notoriety. She encouraged the reputation. She once stayed at Melikhovo because Chekhov was "a famous man" and the relationship would accelerate her career (128). She also claimed that Chekhov had been in love with her. She strengthened this notoriety and was very satisfied with the tale. Pritchett also defines Ariadne as a greedy woman (138). Moreover, Swift points out that "the historical Iavorskaia served as a prototype for Chekhov's heroine, as she did for Arkadina in *The Seagull*" (48). Additionally, Swift argues that traits of Ariadne's personality resemble Korsakov's representations of pathological personalities (56). Flath maintains that Shamokhin misinterprets Ariadne's feelings for him as cold and untrustworthy, while in fact she

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is passionately in love with him (239). Swift points out, however, that Flath's interpretation is based on Ariadne's words alone not on her behaviour (40). Moreover, Shamokhin himself states: "I saw by her eyes that she did not love me, but was embracing me from curiosity, to test herself and to see what came of it" (112). And later: "First of all, I realised, as before, that Ariadne did not love me" (127). Not knowing how to occupy herself ("what she was created for"), she elopes with Lubkov, an unworthy person, who does not bother her with ideal virtues and copybook morals. Many details in Shamokhin's narration of the first (platonic) stage of his relationship with Ariadne give grounds to believe that her lively, remarkable nature, her craving for a bright life and power over people (based on her firm assuredness of the great strength of the impact of beauty) could not be satisfied with Shamokhin's sapless, rational love, and that he, unaware of the fact, was probably the first person to push her towards turning into a predator (Semanova 252).

Shamokhin is vulnerable and incapable of leaving her; it seems that he suffers inertia. However, as Karlinsky quotes the following passage from *Letters of Anton Chekhov*, Chekhov allows one of Ariadne's victims to blame it all on the education that women receive in Western European countries:

... yes, and it's our education that's at fault, sir. In our towns, the whole education and bringing up of women in its essence tends to develop her into the human beast -- that is, to make her attractive to the male and able to vanquish him. Yes, indeed" – Shamokhin sighed "little girls ought to be taught and brought up with boys, so that they might be always together. A woman ought to be trained so that she may be able, like a man, to recognise when she's wrong, or she always

thinks she's in the right. Instil into a little girl from her cradle that a man is not first of all a cavalier or a possible lover, but her neighbour, her equal in everything. ...there ought to be absolute equality in everyday life. If a man gives a lady his chair or picks up the handkerchief she has dropped, let her repay him in the same way. I have no objection if a girl of good family helps me to put on my coat or hands me a glass of water.<sup>139</sup>

As De Maegd-Soëp points out, Chekhov makes the hero speak in favour of the equal education of both sexes. De Maegd-Soëp also convincingly demonstrates that Chekhov himself supported the idea of women's emancipation. For him, emancipation was needed in order to develop the spiritual and intellectual abilities of women. Many of Chekhov's heroes and heroines voice the writer's own ideal of common education as a means to improve life (238). According to De Maegd-Soëp, for Chekhov, women's emancipation was primarily a spiritual process (239). However, Emma Polotskaia argues that Shamokhin's views about women, especially in the first published version of the story, reflect arguments current in the Russian and European press at the end of the century in regards to the movement for women's equal rights. Some of Shamokhin's reasoning reproduces widespread anti-feminist views. Additionally, in Chapter 11 of the *Island of Sakhalin* Chekhov refers to Strindberg as a misogynist (152); he expresses thoughts close to Shamokhin's, for example that women should be slaves of men's desires. Max Nordau also repeated the fashionable anti-feminist thesis: "A woman always relates to progress with hostility and is the most reliable source of reaction in any form and in any undertaking" (33). However, Nordau's name appears in the story "Ariadne" in another context, that of his *Degeneration*, in

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<sup>139</sup> Qtd. in Karlinsky, 20.



which he gave biological explanations for social phenomena. Degeneration and hysteria, in his opinion (IX: 477), are illnesses of the end of the century, and, as such, caused by physical exhaustion. In the same letter as that in which Chekhov rejects Tolstoy's preaching of chastity and vegetarianism, he also speaks of his disgust for the reasoning of "such blowhards, like Max Nordau".

In the spring of 1893 Nordau's book *Degeneration* was widely discussed. In it, Nordau affirmed that the *intelligentsia* of all countries was fascinated with clearly psychopathological works in both literary fiction and philosophy. For Nordau, this obsession was caused by the illness of the age, degeneration, abnormal living conditions, and exhaustion.

In Chekhov's library there was a book by N. Minskii, *In the Light of Conscience. Thoughts and Dreams on the Purpose of Life* (St. Petersburg, 1890). In it, Minskii advocated a philosophical-religious system of monism; he interpreted the human struggle for the ideal as desire to know God, who is dispersed throughout the universe. Some propositions of this treatise are close to the thoughts of Nordau. "The illness called *mania grandiosa* in science, in regard to our time, is no mania or illness, but a common natural consequence of high culture and the fruit of egoism", stated Minskii.

At the end of the story "Ariadne", Chekhov depicts Shamokhin's disillusionment with the new relationship. He soon comes to realise the wide gap between Ariadne's public and private lives: "When I watched her sleeping, eating or trying to look innocent, I often wondered why God had given her such outstanding beauty, grace and intelligence. Could it really be just for lolling in bed, eating and telling lies, lies, lies?" (90).

When Shamokhin becomes Ariadne's lover, his money is almost gone and his life is

destroyed. Ariadne seems to be headed for marriage with a certain Prince Maktuev, a wealthy but utterly monotonous person. Shamokhin protests against “dirty, animal love”; love without moral commitments is challenged by the hero and the author of *The Kreutzer Sonata*. The opinion of Shamokhin on the women’s education has something in common with the opinion of Pozdnyshev, who revolts against the goal of the education of women in order “to attract men”, to create in men the need “to attract as many women as possible”. Likewise, Pozdnyshev says: “Look at what impedes overall the forward movement of mankind. Women!” (Chekhov, IX: 474).

At the end of the story, the narrator does not hide his egotistical indifference towards Shamokhin’s love affair: “The day following this encounter, I left Yalta and the conclusion of Shamokhin’s affair remains unknown to me” (132). This ending stands in opposition to the melodramatic and highly emotional parting of the narrator and the story-telling protagonist in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. With “Ariadne”, Chekhov responded to *The Kreutzer Sonata* and showed his closed attention to Tolstoy’s novella. He supported Tolstoy’s pursuit as an artist, but claimed his independence from the latter’s ideological and artistic point of view. At the time, Chekhov was writing “Ariadne”, he was concerned with the same social problem as Tolstoy, which is that of the changing consciousness of contemporary man. Chekhov solved this at two different levels; on the one hand, he showed a quest for the right way in life, on the other spiritual and moral degeneration. As Semanova points out, apart from “Ariadne”, stories like “My Life”, “Gooseberries”, and “The Darling” are examples of creative encounter between Chekhov and Tolstoy (Semanova 253).

## Adultery in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russia

Historians of adultery and marital transgression, such as Pushkareva, Ponomareva and Choroshimova, point out that in Russia, people have always been quick to condemn cases of adultery, especially if a woman is unfaithful. As Pushkareva points out in her study on shameful punishments for women in Russia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century, not even the loss of virginity before marriage had such a strong impact on the community as the attack on the bond of marriage. Adultery was considered as one of the most serious offenses against social morality. In the case of adultery, women's honour had a different value than men's; women are subject to public defamatory punishments (*позорящие наказания*)<sup>140</sup>:

On a country road... a strange howling crowd is moving. To the front of a cart, there is a young, completely naked woman, her hands attached to the cart with a rope. The whole body is covered with crimson and blue marks, the breast is wounded. Her belly has been beaten for a long time with a log or perhaps someone crushed it under his boots. Her belly became horribly swollen and blue. And on the cart there is a tall man in a white shirt ... in one hand he holds the reins, in the other - a whip, and whips methodically once on the horse's back, and once on the body of the little woman. Behind the cart and the woman attached to it, the crowd comes in their hundreds...<sup>141</sup>

<sup>140</sup> N. Pushkareva, *Pozoriashchie Nakazaniia dlia Zhenshchin V Rossii XIX-Nachala XX*, N. Murav'eva (edited by), *Vina i Pozor v Kontekste Stanovlenija Sovremennykh Evropejskikh Gosudarstv (XVI-XX vv.)*, SPb., izd-vo Evropejskogo Universiteta, 2011, 190-214.

<sup>141</sup> N. Pushkareva, *Pozoriashchie Nakazaniia dlia Zhenshchin V Rossii XIX-nachala XX*, in N. Murav'eva (eds), *Vina i Pozor v Kontekste Stanovleniia Sovremennykh Evropejskikh Gosudarstv (XVI-XX vv.)*, SPb., izd-vo Evropejskogo Universiteta, 2011, 190-214.

This passage describes the torture of women for adultery which shocked the 23-year-old Maxim Gorky. These events happened in July 1891, the year of the publication of “The Duel”, in the village of Kanybovok, Nikolaevsk district Kherson Province. According to Pushkareva, such disgraceful punishment for women had existed 110-115 years before in the south of Russia (Pushkareva 190). Moreover, there were other forms of punishment for unfaithfulness, such as smearing with tar the gate of the house of one who supposedly had committed adultery. Adultery was a serious violation of the marital contract.

In 1911 Sergei Grigorovskii, head of the Chancellery of the Holy Synod and member of the council devoted to issues of divorce, thought about the notion of adultery and argued that adultery comprises many other issues in addition to that of marriage. It also implies some other issues, such as virginity and fidelity. When a woman participates in social interactions with other men with the desire to commit adultery, even if she does not commit adultery, this should still be considered adultery. According to Grigorovskii, the notion of adultery should be expanded beyond sexual intercourse between a man and a woman (188).

The discourse about adultery is part of the narrative of Chekhov’s texts. “The Lady with the Little Dog” (1899) and “Anna on the Neck” (1895) revolve around cases of adultery. According to the critic Shatin, the topic of adultery comes from the legend of Don Juan, and it focuses on the female heroine, Anna. This is achieved by attributing negative features to the husbands, so that the female character is made to look more excusable. On the one hand, the male characters’ spirituality and personalities are “ugly”, as suggested by their repulsive appearances. On the other hand, Anna’s lovers are sexually attractive.

For example, in “Anna on the Neck” Anna’s husband is depicted as follows: “He was an official of medium height, rather stout and puffy, who looked exceedingly well nourished, with long whiskers and no moustache. His clean-shaven, round, sharply defined chin looked like the heel of a foot. The most characteristic point in his face was the absence of moustache, the bare, freshly shaven place, which gradually passed into the fat cheeks, quivering like jelly”.<sup>142</sup> In “The Lady with the Little Dog” the husband is described as a lackey:

With Anna Sergeevna there came in a young man with short side-whiskers, very tall, stooping; with every movement he shook and bowed continually. Probably he was the husband whom in a bitter mood at Yalta she had called a lackey. And, indeed, in his long figure, his side-whiskers, the little bald patch on the top of his head, there was something of the lackey; he had a modest sugary smile and in his buttonhole he wore a University badge exactly like a lackey's number.<sup>143</sup>

The spiritual poverty of these two husbands is represented by their ugly, repulsive bodies, whereas the main trait of the lovers is the contrast between physical attraction and spiritual poverty: the lovers are beautiful, but they are also spiritually poor.

According to Shatin, Chekhov, in “The Lady with the Little Dog”, substitutes the acts of adultery with things and signs related to these situations. For example, the watermelon that Gurov cuts and eats slowly shows him as unlikely to develop depth. It shows Gurov as someone who has satisfied his whims and appetites. Gurov eats the watermelon after he has had a sexual relationship with Anna Sergeevna for the first time. Chekhov does neither describes nor says

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<sup>142</sup> *Ariadna and Other Stories*, p. 70

<sup>143</sup> “The Lady with the Dog” Ch. 3

overtly that this sexual relationship has happened. However, the author gives the reader some signs that communicate what had really happened. Before one slices open a watermelon, one cannot see the juicy, red fruit inside. This suggests the reader that the sexual act has now happened and that Gurov, instead of merely discussing love, now eats its “fruits”. This is a quite unromantic picture; probably for him this was just like any other encounter.

Chekhov’s “Anna on the Neck” does not openly discuss adultery, but Anna’s husband uses wordplay to suggest it: “Теперь остается ожидать появления на свет маленького Владимира. Осмелюсь просить ваше сиятельство в восприемники”.<sup>144</sup> This implies Anna’s husband hopes for a child. Her adultery is alluded to through her outings with other men as sex scenes could not be published at the time. The “missing act” is understood; it does not need to be shown. What is important is the reader’s reaction to it.

In “Anna on the Neck” the scene of adultery is described as follows: Anna would come back home every day, lie on the floor in the lounge, and tell everybody in a touching manner how she slept under the flowers. This story breaks the silence about adultery. The narrative is replaced by this discourse of adultery, a discourse visible through hidden signs, through the subtext.

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<sup>144</sup> “Now we must wait the appearance of a tiny Vladimir, he said. Dare I ask your Excellence to be godfather?” (Trans. by R. Hingley, Chekhov 225)

“The Lady with the Little Dog” (1899): Morals and the Meaning of Life

“The Lady with the Little Dog” plays a particular role in Chekhov’s works about love. It is the only story where Eros follows an ascending curve (Colucci 774). “The Lady with the Little Dog” is the story of a love that could make a man and a woman happy, but this becomes difficult, almost impossible, for several reasons. Anna is a young woman who, tired of her lacklustre and insignificant husband, takes a break in Yalta. Gurov, too, goes to Yalta; he is married, almost forty years old, and has three children. Gurov is also fleeing from a wife whom he does not find attractive. They appear mis-matched. A theme in this story is the contradiction between appearance and reality. Between Anna and Gurov there arises a strong attraction, which suddenly turns into an overwhelming passion. Anna experiences an inner conflict between love and guilt. After Yalta, she goes to see Gurov in Moscow; she is unhappy and cries because they can only meet in secret. At the same time, it is evident to Gurov that this love of theirs would not soon be over; that he could not see the end of it. The story ends as follows: “И казалось, что еще немного - и решение будет найдено, и тогда начнется новая, прекрасная жизнь; и обоим было ясно, что до конца еще далеко-далеко и что самое сложное и трудное только еще начинается”<sup>145</sup> (Chekhov 221).

As Colucci points out, Anna and Gurov’s relationship begins as an easy summer holiday adventure that Gurov has allowed himself, but then it becomes an account of an authentic feeling, which must be stifled because they are married. Apart from the intensity of their emotions, there is also the awareness that this love draws its truth from being unexpected and

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<sup>145</sup> “It seemed as though in a little while the solution would be found, and then a new and splendid life would begin; and it was clear to both of them that they had still a long, long road before them, and that the most complicated and difficult part of it was only just beginning” (Chekhov 586).

badly timed, like an autumn flower, from the awareness that nothing will replace it. Their love is contrary to expectations (769). Chekhov develops these topics with extraordinary sensitivity and mastery, especially in the ending, which leaves any further developments open. He makes use of parallelisms and similes to describe Anna and Gurov's love: "Like husband and wife", "like tender friends", "meant for each other"; these expressions show just how deep their affection is. He also describes the two lovers as "pair of migratory birds, caught and forced to live in different cages". Chekhov uses the image of the two migratory birds locked up in separate cages to stress the apparent hopelessness of the lovers' situation (Cockrell 91). Their affair is immoral according to social and religious norms. However, forgiveness is a paramount Christian virtue: "they forgave each other for what they were ashamed of in their past, they forgave everything in the present, and felt that this love of theirs had changed them both" (Chekhov, "The Lady with the Little Dog" 586).

Turkov sees the languor of Anna Sergeyevna and Gurov as a particular instance of the whole pattern of existence, whose incongruity becomes evident to the story's protagonist when he really falls in love (Turkov 269). Chekhov further illustrates Gurov's love with the statement that "he no longer cared for arguments", which is to say that Gurov believes his love is beyond analysis and logic. However, Chekhov does not end the story on an optimistic note, for he does not reveal a concrete plan for the lovers. Instead, they are faced with an uncertain future.

In "The Lady with the Little Dog" infidelity, practiced by genuine lovers seems better than the alternative of being faithful to an unloved spouse. Gurov has been unfaithful many times with many women and often speaks of women as "the inferior race". Yet he comes to truly love Anna, and she reciprocates the feeling:



И только теперь, когда у него голова стала седой, он полюбил как следует, по-настоящему - первый раз в жизни.<sup>146</sup>

In Chekhov's short story "A Visit to Friends," Podgorin remarks that he would like to have beside him a woman other than his banal Nadezhda, who is scheming to marry him. He instead desires a woman who, "If she spoke of love, then it would be an appeal to a new type of life, high and rational, on whose eve we live already, and perhaps sometimes we sense..." (X, 22-23).<sup>147</sup>

Unlike the women Gurov has had affairs with in the past, Anna realizes she has committed a sin: "Пусть бог меня простит! - сказала она, и глаза у нее наполнились слезами. - Это ужасно"<sup>148</sup>. Moreover, she states that she has been deceiving herself for a long time:

Я не мужа обманула, а самое себя. И не сейчас только, а уже давно обманываю. Мой муж, быть может, честный, хороший человек, но ведь он лакей! Я не знаю, что он делает там, как служит, я знаю только, что он лакей.<sup>149</sup>

Anna married when she was very young, twenty years old, and has been married for two years. The reason she married was that she had been tormented by curiosity and dreamed of a better life:

<sup>146</sup> And only now when his head was grey he had fallen properly, really in love – for the first time in his life (Chekhov 585).

<sup>147</sup> Quoted in Turkov, 268.

<sup>148</sup> "God forgive me," she said, and her eyes filled with tears. "It's awful." (570).

<sup>149</sup> I have been deceiving myself for a long time. My husband may be a good, honest man, but he is a flunkey! I don't know what he does there, what his work is, but I know he is a flunkey! (570).

Мне, когда я вышла за него, было двадцать лет, меня томило любопытство, мне хотелось чего-нибудь получше; ведь есть же, - говорила я себе, - другая жизнь. Хотелось пожить! Пожить и пожить... Любопытство меня жгло... вы этого не понимаете, но, клянусь богом, я уже не могла владеть собой, со мной что-то делалось, меня нельзя было удержать, я сказала мужу, что больна, и поехала сюда.<sup>150</sup>

Anna has doubts about her relationship with Gurov as well. She is troubled by jealousy and by fear that he does not respect her sufficiently. He thinks that he has not been honest with her, but unintentionally deceived her:

Все время она называла его добрым, необыкновенным, возвышенным; очевидно, он казался ей не тем, чем был на самом деле, значит невольно обманывал ее.<sup>151</sup>

Their love rejuvenates them both and causes dissatisfaction in their everyday lives. Their mask or hidden secret life is a theme here. Chekhov gives the reader an opportunity to decide what to do in a similar situation when two people fall in love with each other, but are both married. They cannot ignore society's opinion about illicit relationships. Society does not accept the concept of free love, because the responsibility of raising children is the most important aspect of married life. Anna perceives their love as a sin. Gurov and Anna's troubles are hardly over when they continue seeing each other. Perhaps another message that Chekhov wants to

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<sup>150</sup> I was twenty when I was married to him. I have been tormented by curiosity; I wanted something better. 'There must be a different sort of life,' I said to myself. I wanted to live! To live, to live! . . . I was fired by curiosity . . . you don't understand it, but, I swear to God, I could not control myself; Something happened to me: I could not be restrained. I told my husband I was ill, and came here. . . ." (570).

<sup>151</sup> All the time she had called him kind, exceptional, lofty; obviously he had seemed to her different from what he really was, so he had unintentionally deceived her. . . .(574).

communicate through his story is that society has to accept people's right to choose whom they like. After he becomes involved with Anna, Gurov discovers that "everything that was of interest and importance to him, everything that was essential to him, everything about which he felt sincerely and did not deceive himself ... was going on concealed from others; while all that was false... went on in the open." Gurov learns that he cannot tolerate living a lie and that it was wrong to engage in a superficial relationship with Anna. Similarly, Gurov has learned a moral lesson regarding his attitude towards women in general. He has always belittled women, regarding them as the "inferior race," but throughout the story he gains a certain respect for Anna, and regards her as a friend. True love appears to be the highest good in "The Lady with the Little Dog" Anna and Gurov must extricate themselves from false marriages and together create a genuine one, as they already love each other "like man and wife, like tender friends." Once Gurov has discovered true love, he finds himself intolerant of the Moscow social life, a life "clipped and wingless, an absurd mess." This allusion to the possibility of a more meaningful, dignified, and fulfilled life refers back to the revelation he had when he sat with Anna watching the sea at Oreanda and was struck by the beauty of "everything except what we think or do ourselves when we forget the higher aims of life and our own human dignity." The "higher aims" are not spelled out, but if the story is an indication, they lie in the pursuit of love, truth, and beauty. In this case, truth and beauty appear to reside in nature.

Chekhov subverts traditional notions of endings by putting the word "beginning," at the end. In doing so, he indicates that despite Gurov and Anna's hope for their future, their relationship is doomed. Gurov and Anna believe that their love will last, but Chekhov seems to suggest otherwise. While in this story the protagonists do not choose to leave their families but to live a secret relationship, in Chekhov's next story, "My Life" (1886), the heroine will make the

decision to leave a loveless marriage. Perhaps Chekhov's own marriage worked because he and Olga Knipper did not live together; she was in Moscow working as an actress while he was in Yalta trying to improve his health. Their relationship was mainly based on an exchange of letters. Chekhov shows through "The Lady with the Little Dog" and other stories that he was concerned or preoccupied with issues of family life, love and sexuality as Dostoevsky and Tolstoy were. However, as mentioned earlier Chekhov, unlike Tolstoy or Dostoevsky does not moralise about these issues, but simply presents them for the reader to consider and draw his or her own conclusion.

#### "My Life" (1896) and Divorce

The narrative of stories like "My Life" (1896) and "The Man in a Case" (1898) show two contrasting elements: the grave tone of a realistic background and the symbolic tone of the events of the characters. Divorce was rare in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, yet it is the subject of Chekhov's 1896 novella "My Life".

Events in "My Life" illustrate a change in attitude towards marriage and love in Russian society. Mariia and Misail's divorce and Dr Blagovo's affair with Kleopatra are all evidence of new trends in Russian society. In 1895 divorce became a possibility through legislation, and the Holy Synod paid particular attention to regulating the procedure of marriage annulment for adultery<sup>152</sup>.

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<sup>152</sup> S. Grigorovskii, *O Razvode...*, cit., 6-7.

The main characters of “My Life” are Mariia Viktorovna, the only daughter of a middle-class railway engineer in Siberia, Dolzhikov, and Misail Poloznev, a young man who has given up respectable employment in favour of manual labour. As Hahn points out, by renouncing upper-class life and choosing to move down, Misail begins life again on Tolstoyan terms. According to Llewellyn Smith, the attempt to lead a purifying life of manual labour was strongly influenced by Tolstoy. However, Newcombe highlights that Misail’s rejection of intellectual work could also come from the populist idealism of the sixties and seventies. While conversing with Dr. Blagovo, Misail expresses a populist idea that the minority should not live at the expense of the majority and that all work should be shared. Blagovo justifies suffering in the name of future progress, but Misail always sees the risk of an elite class of thinkers subjugating the majority (Newcombe 151). This was the idea of the thinker P. L. Lavrov, who stated that educated people have a moral duty to repay the cost of progress.

In “My Life” the narrator offers no resistance to his oppressors; he tries for a while to work alongside the peasants, but their drunkenness and thieving irritates him. Chekhov depicts peasants as superstitious, living in a state of moral degradation, poverty and illiteracy. When Misail goes to live in the countryside with Mariia, he does this out of an attempt to please her rather than to make a Tolstoyan gesture (Newcombe 151). The local peasantry steals from the landowners, and Masha’s plans to build a school are undermined by the village council. Blagovo and Mariia both seem to escape their responsibilities by eventually leaving rural Russia (Newcombe 151).

Misail is a good man, with social ideals. However, he is also a black sheep (white crow) in his provincial town; he is a “Tolstoyan” figure because of his unconventional lifestyle and

conviction that there is no dishonour for a nobleman or one with an education in being a simple labourer. Because of this, Misail is a great embarrassment and disgrace to his father. As Clayman points out, in the description of the father Chekhov was undermining the highly regarded middle-class people who form the moral fibre and shape the values of any cultured society (Clayman 98). Misail's father is an architect; he despairs of his son's ordinary ambitions and beats him for refusing to work as a clerk. Moreover, Misail's father tries to impose on others his imperfect values and fruitless vision. He blames Misail for defiling the family name:

Даже мещане и крестьяне получают образование, чтобы стать людьми, а ты, Полознев, имеющий знатных, благородных предков, стремишься в грязь!<sup>153</sup>

At the beginning of the story, Misail has a reputation in town because he has no decent social position and often plays billiards in cheap taverns. In reality, he is someone capable of gaining his daily bread without being dependent on anyone else:

Я мог спать на земле, мог ходить босиком, - а это чрезвычайно приятно; мог стоять в толпе простого народа, никого не стесняя, и когда на улице падала извозчичья лошадь, то я бежал и помогал поднять ее, не боясь запачкать свое платье. А главное, я жил на свой собственный счет и никому не был в тягость!<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Even working-class people and peasants obtain education in order to become men, while you, a Poloznev, with ancestors of rank and distinction, aspire to the gutter! (Chekhov 233).

<sup>154</sup> At first everything interested me, everything was new, as though I had been born again. I could sleep on the ground and go about barefoot, and that was extremely pleasant; I could stand in a crowd of the common people and be no constraint to anyone, and when a cab horse fell down in the street I ran to help it up without being afraid of soiling my clothes. And the best of it all was, I was living on my own account and was no burden to anyone!

Misail marries Mariia who is intrigued by his eccentricity and sees him as a way of pursuing similar interests. She has a “Tolstoyan” library of her own of books that advocate living off the land. Misail loves her deeply; however, she becomes disillusioned with their marriage and regrets it as a mistake. He has the generosity of spirit to grant her a divorce when she asks for it, because he would derive no pleasure in holding her against her will.

Aniuta’s brother, Dr Blagovo, sees in peasant life nothing but immorality and a degrading concern with food and drink. Misail’s sister Kleopatra has an affair with Dr Blagovo, who appears refined and kind but simply abuses Kleopatra’s ingenuousness. He abandons her, pregnant, and she, too, is banished from her father’s home. “Proper” people in the provincial town shun Misail and Kleopatra for their moral failings. Kleopatra dies after childbirth and Misail, like the “Neizvestnyi chelovek”, finds meaning in the responsibility of caring for his dead sister’s daughter.

Mariia encourages Misail in their relationship; she pushes him to marry her. She asks Misail not to leave her, because she is alone and has only him since her father has gone away:

Одна! Мне тяжело жить, очень тяжело, и на всем свете нет у меня  
никого, кроме вас. Непокидайтеменя!<sup>155</sup>

So Misail and Mariia decide to get married, but they do not ask permission of their parents before getting married, the only guest at the wedding is Kleopatra. Misail did not invite his father to his wedding:

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<sup>155</sup> "Alone! My life is hard, very hard, and in all the world I have no one but you. Don't desert me!" (Chekhov 241).

Вскоре после фоминой недели мы венчались в нашей приходской церкви, в селе Куриловке, в трех верстах от Дубечни. Маша хотела, чтобы все устроилось скромно; по ее желанию, шаферами у нас были крестьянские парни, пел один дьячок, и возвращались мы из церкви на небольшом тряском тарантасе, и она сама правила. Из городских гостей у нас была только моя сестра Клеопатра, которой дня за три до свадьбы Маша послала записку.<sup>156</sup>

This shows Masha's idealism and modern values. Dolzhikov does not take marriage seriously and calls the marriage a whim (*balovstvo*). Mariia's father thinks that the marriage is a sort of comedy, a kind of play:

Нашу женитьбу и нашу жизнь он называл комедией, говорил, что это каприз, баловство. ...Она раз вообразила себя оперною певицей и ушла от меня; я искал ее два месяца и, любезнейший, на одни телеграммы истратил тысячу рублей.<sup>157</sup>

Misail's father does not attend because of Masha. This principled modern woman does not want to forgive; she further separates Misail from his father. Both Dolzhikov's view of their marriage and Aniuta's opinion are warnings that their marriage will fail.

Mariia is stating her own Tolstoyan views on earning one's living by other people's labour:

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<sup>156</sup> Soon after St. Thomas's week we were married at our parish church in the village of Kurilovka, two miles from Dubetchnya. Masha wanted everything to be done quietly; at her wish our "best men" were peasant lads, the sacristan sang alone, and we came back from the church in a small, jolting chaise which she drove herself. Our only guest from the town was my sister Kleopatra, to whom Masha sent a note three days before the wedding.

<sup>157</sup> He called our marriage and our life a farce, and said it was a caprice, a whim. ... She once fancied herself a great opera singer and left me; I was looking for her for two months, and, my dear soul, I spent a thousand roubles on telegrams alone." (Chekhov 250).



В жизни все зло, мне кажется, от праздности, от скуки, от душевной пустоты, а все это неизбежно, когда привыкаешь жить на счет других. Не подумайте, что я рисуюсь, искренно вам говорю: неинтересно и неприятно быть богатым. Приобретайте друзей богатством неправедным - так сказано, потому что вообще нет и не может быть богатства праведного.<sup>158</sup>

Llewellyn Smith argues that Mariia decides to leave Misail because she is disappointed with the efforts they have put into peasant life, and the lack of cooperation from and corruption of the peasants (Llewellyn Smith 90). However, she misses the point; Mariia chose to marry out of boredom, not because she was in love with Misail:

Милый доктор, как я ему благодарна! - говорила она, сажая меня. - Если бы не он, то вы не пришли бы то мне. Мне скучно до смерти! Отец уехал и оставил меня одну, и я не знаю, что мне делать в этом городе.<sup>159</sup>

As Llewellyn points out, the characters who feel trapped in a relationship have usually married young (154). Such is the case of Dr Blagovo, who has a wife and three children. He has married very young, when he was in his second year at the University. People said he was unhappy in his family life and was no longer living with his wife.

In contrast with “The Lady with the Little Dog”, when Mariia realises that she does not love her husband, she asks for a divorce. This story highlights people’s developing attitude towards marriage: free will to enter into marriage and free will to get a divorce to escape from

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<sup>158</sup> “All the evil in life, it seems to me, comes from idleness, boredom, and spiritual emptiness, and all this is inevitable when one is accustomed to living at other people's expense. Don't think I am showing off, I tell you truthfully: it is not interesting or pleasant to be rich. 'Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness' is said, because there is not and cannot be a mammon that's righteous”.

<sup>159</sup> "Dear Doctor, how grateful I am to you," she said, making me sit down. "If it hadn't been for him you wouldn't have come to see me. I am bored to death! My father has gone away and left me alone, and I don't know what to do with myself in this town"

marriage. Masha is capricious and married on a whim. Her father rightly predicted it was another passing phase for her. Aniuta foreshadows the crisis in Misail and Mariia's marriage:

Ну, богстобою, будьсчастлив. Анята Благово очень умная девушка, она говорит про твою женитьбу, что это бог посылает тебе новое испытание. Что ж? В семейной жизни не одни радости, но и страдания. Без этого нельзя.<sup>160</sup>

She can pursue her whims because she is rich. Anna in "The Lady with the Little Dog" is not, and is also more constrained by social conventions.

This story suggests that Misail feels proud of not living at anyone's expense. Chekhov does not portray him as heroic, but as normal and slightly ridiculous (Newcombe 151). Another Chekhovian theme in "My Life" is that of missed opportunities – either from being constrained by convention, or from fear of rejection, or for other reasons. People who, it would appear, "should" come together, do not. In this story a woman who is attracted to Misail (or pities him?) does not want her feelings to be known (similarly, after meeting at Kleopatra's grave, she departs before she might be seen with him); Misail recognises her sympathy and love for him, but does not have the heart or courage to pursue her. This woman is Kleopatra Alexyevna's friend, Aniuta Blagovo, who finds Misail work building a railway line for the engineer Dolzhikov.

This story suggests that we fall in love with the wrong people; Misail loves Mariia, but he loses his own happiness (Hahn 146). Kleopatra is in love with Dr Blagovo, who is a married man and will return to his wife. Aniuta loves Misail, who does not return his love. Misail's experience of living through the failure of his marriage makes him a wiser man. Misail's personal

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<sup>160</sup> Well, God be with you. Be happy. Anyuta Blagovo is a very clever girl; she says about your marriage that God is sending you a fresh ordeal. To be sure -- married life does not bring only joy but suffering too. That's bound to be so".

development is perhaps influenced by the painter Andrey Ivanov, known as Radish. This Radish seems to be a very religious man. In fact, he argues that “я так понимаю, ежели какой простой человек или господин берет даже самый малый процент, тот уже есть злодей. В таком человеке не может правда существовать. Тощий, бледный, страшный Редька закрыл глаза, покачал головой и изрек тоном философа: Тля ест траву, ржа - железо, а лжа - душу. Господи, спасинагрешных!”<sup>161</sup>. In the context of the story, this aphorism refers to being true to oneself, as is Misail.

According to Llewellyn, Chekhov sympathizes with Dr Blagovo in stressing that love justifies Dr Blagovo’s action in seducing Kleopatra (136). However, Dr Blagovo’s seduction of Kleopatra is not condoned. Talking with the doctor, Radish says: “We all walk in the fear of God, we all have to die. Permit me to tell the truth... your honour, the Kingdom of Heaven is not for you!” (530).

Душа у праведного белая и гладкая, как мел, а у грешного, как пемза.

Душа у праведного - олифа светлая, а у грешного - смола газовая.

Трудиться надо, скорбеть надо, болезновать надо, - продолжал он, - а который человек не трудится и не скорбит, тому не будет царства небесного.

Горе, горе сытым, горе сильным, горе богатым, горе заимодавцам! Не видать им царствия небесного. Тля ест траву, ржа-железо... - А лжа - душу, - продолжила сестра и рассмеялась.<sup>162</sup>

<sup>161</sup> "The way I look at it is that if any man, gentle or simple, takes even the smallest interest, he is doing evil. There cannot be truth and justice in such a man". Radish, lean, pale, dreadful-looking, shut his eyes, shook his head, and, in the tone of a philosopher, pronounced: "Rot consume grass, rust consumes iron, and lies the soul. Lord, have mercy upon us sinners" (535).

<sup>162</sup> The soul of a righteous man is white and smooth as chalk, but the soul of a sinful man is like pumice stone. The soul of a righteous man is like clear oil, but the soul of a sinful man is gas tar. We must labour, we must sorrow, we must suffer sickness," he went on, "and he who does not labour and sorrow will not gain the Kingdom of Heaven. Woe, woe to them that are well fed,

This “Tolstoyan” story has “Tolstoyan” peasant wisdom. At the end of the story, everyone admits that Misail is a good man. In fact, as Dr Blagovo says, Misail must have passed through a complicated spiritual crisis. Dr Blagovo says, “Вы - благородная душа, честный, возвышенный человек! Уважаю вас и считаю за великую честь пожать вашу руку!”<sup>163</sup>.

Mariia admits, “There is nothing awful about your adopting the simple life. On the contrary, you have become the most interesting man in town” (459).

Moreover, Kleopatra and Aniuta affirm Misail’s virtue and support his choice to be a labourer:

Когда ты не захотел служить и ушел в маляры, я и Анюта Благово с самого начала знали, что ты прав, но нам было страшно высказать это вслух.<sup>164</sup>

In the last scene, Aniuta walks besides Misail and caresses the child, but flushes crimson and says good-bye to Misail when they reach the town. She brings him lemons, biscuits, or roast game and warm clothes when he works, yet is ashamed to be associated with him: “Please do not bow at me in the street, she said nervously, harshly, and in a shaking voice and again, she flushed crimson” (540).

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woe to the mighty, woe to the rich, woe to the moneylenders! Not for them is the Kingdom of Heaven. Lice eat grass, rust eats iron. . .” (528).

<sup>163</sup> You are a noble soul, an honest, high-minded man! I respect you, and feel it a great honour to shake hands with you!” (534).

<sup>164</sup> When you wouldn't go into the service, but became a house painter, Anyuta Blagovo and I knew from the beginning that you were right, but we were frightened to say so aloud (536).

### “Supruga” (My Wife), (1895) and Divorce

In the story “Supruga” (1895) Nikolai Evgrafych, a doctor, discovers by chance a telegram for his wife Ol’ga Dmitrievna, from her lover Michel. Ol’ga wants to go and see Michel, who lives in France and asks Nikolai to give her a passport. This means granting her the right to have one and to travel abroad without her husband. Nikolai understands that she is not honest and would like to deny her request. However, he decides to grant her freedom. He tells his wife that he is divorcing her, and that she need never come back. However, Ol’ga does not want a divorce, as she is only interested in Nikolai’s money. She is depicted as insolent, impudent and impertinent:

Вот что я тебе хочу сказать: ты свободна и можешь жить, как хочешь.

...

— Я освобождаю тебя от необходимости притворяться и лгать, — продолжал Николай Евграфыч. — Если любишь этого молодого человека, то люби; если хочешь ехать к нему за границу, поезжай<sup>165</sup>(IX: 97).

— Когда же я получу паспорт? — спросила она тихо.

Ему вдруг захотелось сказать «никогда», но он сдержал себя и сказал:

— Когда хочешь.

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<sup>165</sup> “This is what I want to say to you: you are free, and can live as you like ... I set you free from the necessity of lying and keeping up pretences” Nikolay Yevgrafitch continued. “If you love that young man, love him; if you want to go abroad with him, go abroad (Trans. by C. Garnett, 131-2).

— Я поеду только на месяц.

— Ты поедешь к Рису навсегда. Я дам тебе развод, приму вину на себя, и Рису можно будет жениться на тебе.<sup>166</sup> (IX: 97-8).

This story shows that what while divorce was not possible in Tolstoy's work, it becomes a possibility for Chekhov. Divorce was a rare event at the time when Tolstoy wrote. However, the problem of the family and marriage in mid nineteenth century Russia became an important issue. It is not by chance that conflicts related to the issue of divorce attracted the attention of many writers. For example, in *Anna Karenina*, marital betrayal defines the plot, where it is nearly impossible to get a divorce. Thus, the story ends with the tragic death of the main character. However, *Anna Karenina* is not representative of a typical situation in Russian society. Anna is punished for her transgression.

Chekhov, through his story "Supruga", is only showing that the process of emancipation of women had just started in Russia, and that people had to wait a long time before they could see its practical implications. The final lines of "Supruga" also reveal the shallowness of the wife; this is one of the stories that is cited as evidence of a misogynistic streak in Chekhov. The husband pities himself, thinking that he is not a good match for Ol'ga, and that another man might have had a better influence on her. Here, Chekhov shows an example of degenerating married life, a marriage based on mutual lack of understanding and deception. Chekhov presents an image of a husband totally helpless and of a wife in control of their married life and stronger

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<sup>166</sup> When shall I get the passport? She asked softly. He suddenly had an impulse to say "Never", but he restrained himself and said: "when you like".

"I shall go for a month".

"You'll go to Riss for good. I'll get you a divorce; take the blame on myself, and Riss can marry you" [Trans. by C. Garnett, 131-2).

than him. The general picture of this married couple is depressing and therefore suggests to readers that divorce should be socially acceptable as well as lawful.

### Infanticide and Illegitimate Children: the Voice of Vasily Rozanov

V. V. Rozanov in his work *Family Questions in Russia* (1903) refers to a case of infanticide that was discussed in the newspapers at the time. For the philosopher it was astonishing that the family in question had fallen from their “royal position”, so clearly assigned to them, into disgrace as evident from this newspaper account:

On 20 June, in a vegetable garden located along the Peterhof highway, one of the workers, a peasant maid, Anna Ivanova, did not turn up for work. Ivanova complained of headache but was not believed and, bearing in mind she was pregnant, sent for a midwife. In the course of examination, the latter found that Ivanova had already delivered a child. When asked what she had done to her baby, the wretched woman, having made some effort to deny it but seeing it was useless, communicated she had given birth in the barn the previous night. The baby was crying; fearing that the cry could be heard, she, overcome by a feeling of shame, decided to strangle the baby and to this purpose stuffed sand into its mouth. The infant became quiet and ceased breathing. Then Ivanova wrapped it in a kerchief and hid it in

the bathhouse. The baby's body was discovered at the spot indicated by Ivanova. The child killer has been arrested.<sup>167</sup>

The woman described in the quotation above, according to Rozanov, does not understand her situation at all, and neither do the people around her, for infanticide is like a habit for them.

It is worth noting that women killed their babies born out of wedlock because of the risk of penal servitude, and the shame associated with it. In fact, it was only in 1911 that abortions in Russia were depenalised; all sexual offenses were considered in "religious and moral terms" by the Russian criminal laws of 1813 and 1845, even as late as 1903, as below:

В конце концов. Четвертый съезд Общества российских акушеров и гинекологов (1911) и Двенадцатый съезд Пироговского общества (1913) приняли либеральную точку зрения, рекомендовав правительству декриминализировать искусственные аборты, делаемые врачами. В феврале 1914 г., после острой полемики, 38 голосами против 20, при 3 воздержавшихся, за декриминализацию аборта проголосовало и Десятое Общее собрание Русской группы Международного Союза криминалистов. На Пироговском съезде говорилось и о контрацепции как единственной реальной альтернативе аборта ... Те же тенденции проявлялись и в дебатах о половых преступлениях и проституции. Российские уголовные законы 1813 и 1845 гг., как и их западноевропейские прообразы, описывали все половые преступления в религиозных и моральных терминах: "стыдные преступления", "обиды против добрых нравов", "развратное поведение", "противоестественные

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<sup>167</sup> Rozanov, Introduction to the first edition of *Family Questions in Russia*, p. 14



пороки". Даже Новое уложение о наказаниях 1903 г. объединяет все половые преступления понятием "непотребство".<sup>168</sup>

In the first decades of twentieth century Russia, people were debating whether marriage should be Christian. One of the extreme positions was taken by Tolstoy. Tolstoy went so far as to deny even the possibility of marriage being Christian. For Tolstoy, the sexual act is a humiliating animal condition for man, so there is no possibility for marriage to be Christian. The concept of "Christian marriage" is a self-contradiction made by the Church to make sexual contact permissible and not sinful for Christians.

Rozanov took the opposite position. He blamed the Orthodox Church as it paid little attention to questions of family and marriage. According to Rozanov, family and marriage had to be the Church's main objects of attention. The sexual act had first to be sanctified and blessed by the Church. Rozanov waged a determined campaign against the abnormal state of family life in Russia and in Christendom in general (abnormal to him, but quite usual for everyone else). He saw in the existence of illegitimate children the shame of Christianity. A child, he thought, should become legitimate by its very birth. He also dwelt with bitterness on the abnormal state of things conditioned by the difficulty of obtaining a divorce. As Mirsky points out, all this criticism converged in an attack on Christianity as an essentially ascetic religion that in its heart

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<sup>168</sup> Finally, the Fourth Congress of the Russian Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (1911) and the Twelfth Congress of the Pirogov Society (1913) adopted a liberal point of view, recommending that the government decriminalizes artificial abortions made by doctors. In February 1914, after considerable controversy, with 38 votes to 20, with 3 abstentions, the Tenth General Assembly of the International Union of Russian Criminologists voted for the decriminalisation of abortion. During the Pirogov Congress, contraception was discussed as the only real alternative to abortion ... The same trends are evident in the debate on sexual offenses and prostitution. Russian criminal laws of 1813 and 1845, like the Western prototypes, considered all sexual offenses in religious and moral terms: "shameful crime", "offense against good morals", "dissolute behavior", and "perverted vices". Even the New Penal Code of 1903 combines all sexual offenses under the same concept of "obscenity" (Kon 58).

considers every sexual relation an abomination and only half-heartedly gave its blessing to marriages (Mirsky 420).

Different opinions were expressed by various authors about the new revision of the laws concerning illegitimate children and in response to the news in the press regarding the decision to begin using the phrase “out of wedlock”<sup>169</sup>. For example, for Rozanov, who pondered deeply over the matter of illegitimate children, the name “out of wedlock” was to be used only in Latin. At the same time, Rozanov suggested that civil unions should be recognised as lawful unions, not any less sacred than the most religious of marriages (Rozanov 576). In 1901, Mrs Likhmanova proposed the adoption of the name “state children” for illegitimate children. She also suggested granting them exclusive rights to education and careers at public expense. Rozanov argued that if people followed the advice offered by Mrs Likhmanova and recognised these particular children as “state children”, one could expect many underprivileged and lawfully married couples to try and send their legitimate offspring away to foundling homes in order to receive privileged public support and care (Rozanov 576-7). These contrasting views show that the matter of illegitimate children was an important, yet difficult and confusing one.

I argue that the works of the authors under investigation are representative and reflect the reality of the time. The topic of illegitimate children and infanticide is reflected in Chekhov’s stories. For example, in “The Duel” Von Koren refers to infanticide among other expressions of shame associated with sex outside marriage:

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<sup>169</sup> Not in the least! This is exactly what my idea consists of, that the *marriage* is there, although it is *non-canonical*: not “*matrimonium extra jure canonico*”, but – “*matrimonium sacrum*” [sacred marriage (Lat.)]. V. Rozanov, 576-7.

То, что девки душат своих незаконноприжитых детей и идут на каторгу, и что Анна Каренина бросилась под поезд, и что в деревнях мажут ворота дегтем, и что нам с тобой, неизвестно почему, нравится в Кате ее чистота, и то, что каждый смутно чувствует потребность в чистой любви, хотя знает, что такой любви нет, - разве все это предрассудок?<sup>170</sup>

Moreover, in “V Rodnom Uglu” (“At Home”) the heroine Vera is an educated young woman who has travelled abroad and speaks three languages. However, she is stifled in her provincial home. Vera finds the people, their interests and activities banal, but in the end marries a bland man out of lack of choice and opportunity. The new labourer at Vera's house is fired because he is an illegitimate child:

А твой родной отец умер? Не могу знать. Я незаконнорожденный ...

— Возьми свой паспорт, уходи с богом. Я не могу у себя в доме держать незаконнорожденных.<sup>171</sup>

However, Aunt Daria is mean and self-righteous. She treats the servants with violence and exploits the peasantry. Vera sees her aunt's hypocrisy, but, after an attack of hysteria, submits to her exploitative attitudes, and, as previously stated, marries a man she despises. In this and other stories, Chekhov seems aware of the limited opportunities for women of his time: marriage is both an escape and a confinement. In the following section, I will address the topic of

<sup>170</sup> "The fact that girls strangle their illegitimate children and go to prison for it, and that Anna Karenin flung herself under the train, and that in the villages they smear the gates with tar, and that you and I, without knowing why, are pleased by Katya's purity, and that every one of us feels a vague craving for pure love, though he knows there is no such love—is all that prejudice?" (Chekhov 7: 412, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii i Pisem*, Nauka, 1977).

<sup>171</sup> "And is your father dead? I do not know. I illegitimate ... Take your passport and go in peace. I cannot have any illegitimate in my house (94).

marriage and divorce at the end of nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century in Russia. This will provide the social context to understand the author's stories.

### Marriage and Divorce in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century to the Beginning of Twentieth Century in Russia. An Overview.

As Beliakova points out in her article "Brak i Razvod XIX Veka" (2001), the changes in Russian society touched the countryside as well, resulting in cohabitation without marriage; that is, in the phenomenon of *otchodnichestvo* ("seasonal work"), that involved men going to the city in order to earn money. As a result, the number of illegitimate cohabitations was increasing (Beliakova). In this new condition of *otchodnichestvo*, men continued to have patriarchal roles in the family, but at the same time they would avoid fulfilling their traditional family duties. In Chekhov's story "Peasants", Kiryak beats his wife Mariia during his short visits at home, because he is not interested in establishing normal family relations. In fact, he does not live at home. Men who were going to live in the cities did not care much about the family.

As Engel points out, this increasing migratory labor to towns and cities led to the disintegration of the family and created tensions within peasant marriages (Engel, Introduction to *Freedom and its Transformation...*). According to Beliakova, the real catastrophe for the countryside was poverty, accompanied by alcoholism, which very often entailed violence by the husband towards his wife and children. These negative tendencies became even stronger after the First World War, when men found themselves far away from home, and the number of widows grew exponentially (Beliakova).

Beliakova continues with stating that prostitution rose with urbanisation and industrialization, and with it, syphilis. There was no way to get a divorce; the number of divorces, even if it was growing, was tiny compared to the number of marriages. She reports the following statistics: in 1840, in a country with a 62.4 million population, there were 198 divorces; in 1880, there were 920, and in 1890, there were 942. The first and foremost reason for the decrease of legitimate marriages was the very fast development of city life at the expense of village life. The decrease in marriages led to the reduction in children born outside wedlock (Beliakova). The number of marriages in the capital was lower compared to the number of marriages in the countryside. In the city, not only had the dynamics of human relationships changed, but also the traditional understanding of gender roles (Beliakova).

As Freeze points out, the familial question regarded a series of issues, the most difficult one was the family disintegration (through separation, annulment and divorce) (710). The Russian Orthodox Church considered marriage a sacrament and therefore a religious union could be disjoined only in exceptional circumstances. Contested divorces lasted for years without resolution. As Engel points out, unlike the Western Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church did not facilitate annulment and separation. The Church's inability to deal appropriately with the demand for divorce contributed to undermining that institution's authority (Engel, *Introduction to Freedom and its Transformation...*). Thus, as Freeze highlights, the crisis of the Russian family was an important aspect of the crisis of Orthodoxy that is the diminishing of ecclesiastical authority and the burst of dissention and "dechristianization" at the end of the Old Regime (Freeze 710).

Many Chekhov's stories, such as "Peasants", "Peasant wives", and "In the Ravine", reflect this situation of family life in the peasant classes. I will explore these issues under the section titled "Extended families".

#### "The Darling" (1899): a Story about Love

In this story, Chekhov treats the heroine with covert irony. Tolstoy reproached him for this, feeling that the darling was an extreme characterization of woman, an ideal one. In particular, while admiring "The Darling", Tolstoy was of the opinion that Chekhov "intended to condemn" the protagonist. However, "the god of poetry prohibited him from doing so and ordered him to give her his blessing instead. So he gave her his blessing and involuntarily enwrapped the lovely lady in such a miraculous light that she will forever remain the paragon of what a woman can be, being happy herself and making those, with whom she shares her life, happy" (41, 377) (qtd. in Turkov 264).

Ol'ga in "The Darling" does not have any opinions of her own. She adopts not only her husband's or lover's ideas, but also their worries and interests as if they were hers. She even takes care of a small boy, who is not her son, looking after him in all aspects of his life. Her need to love someone is so great that when she does not have anyone to love, she is completely depressed.

According to Kataev it was difficult for the general public to perceive the author's intention behind "The Darling". The day after the story was published in the magazine *Sem'ia*, one of the female readers asked Chekhov for further explanation: "What exactly did you mean

by this story?" It was generally liked, laughed at and wept over, but the opinions about the main heroine varied significantly. How the main character was treated by the author, was and still is a controversial issue. In this light, Kataev considers, for example, opinions of the first readers of the story, including those of outstanding literary contemporaries such as Gorky, Lenin, and Tolstoy about the main protagonist of "The Darling" (Kataev 30).

In his sketch "A. P. Chekhov", Gorky depicts Ol'ga as follows: "She was slipping out anxiously like a grey mouse, sweet, gentle woman, who could love so slavishly, so much. You could slap her on the cheek and she would not even dare to moan loudly, a meek slave" (qtd. in Kataev 30). For Gorky, the qualities that his darling lacked were protest and opposition to the existing order. Gorky wrote these lines in 1904, immediately after Chekhov's death and a few months before the revolutionary events of 1905, which he welcomed whole-heartedly, and to which he actively contributed. Through his novel "Mother", (1906) Gorky was perhaps arguing against Chekhov's short story "The Darling". Even though Nilovna, the heroine in "Mother" also totally submitted to the opinions and concerns of her beloved son, she became an active and independent revolutionary reformer.

In his article "The Social Democratic Darling" (1905) Lenin sarcastically compared one politician who was constantly changing his political views with Chekhov's heroine: "Ol'ga first lived with a theater owner and used to say that "Vanichka and I put on serious plays", then she lived with timber merchant and used to say that "Vasichka and I are disturbed by high tax for

lumber”. Finally, she went to live with a veterinarian only to say that “Kolechka and I treat horses”.<sup>172</sup>

According to Kataev, inconstancy of opinions and affections, and the ability to forget about the opinions she had, until recently, lived by are the main qualities of the heroine (Kataev 31). However, for Tolstoy the main trait of the darling is the ability to love, to sacrifice herself, to reject everything not connected with the one she loves. The object of such love can be anyone, be it Kukin or Christ. Still, such a darling woman would devote herself entirely to the man she loves, and would forget her own self as a consequence (qtd. in Kataev 31).

It should be noted that Tolstoy also employed the female image created by Chekhov to illustrate his own favorite ideas. Mankind, he used to say, may very well live without female doctors, female lawyers, female politicians, but it can hardly do without loving wives and mothers. This was the idea he had put forward in his epic novel *War and Peace* (1869) (Kataev 31). Different commentators stress of aspects of “the darling”: her slavish dependence; her inconsistency or changeability; her lack of convictions; her self-denial and self-sacrificing love. Kataev highlights the three main interpretations of the heroine:

- a) the faceless creature enslaved by her affections;
- b) the inconstant silly woman with no convictions of her own;
- c) the personification of the true purpose of a woman

According to Kataev, each of these three interpretations emphasizes one characteristic and the one that illustrates best the position or the theory of the interpreter. The darling here is

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<sup>172</sup> Lenin made a mistake here: in the story the name of the veterinarian was Vladimir Smirnin (Volodechka), qtd. in Kataev, p. 31.



rather an example or illustration of their ideas. To explain the differences in interpretations one has to understand how different the interpreters are (Kataev 31). Moreover, all three points of view are based on what these authors think the woman *should* be like, while Chekhov was mostly interested in what the *reality is*: in what kinds of women *there are* (Kataev 31).

Another critic, Mark Swift, highlights how this distinctive character of the heroine, who identifies herself so completely with her husband, is informed by psychopathology. Ol'ga is ridiculous in her ability to copy another person, and to live by other people's thoughts. Her lack of opinions when she does not have anyone is tragic (Swift 88). Some readers were indignant and criticized the author for describing a woman who could not even think without a man. According to Turkov, in the story the personal subjective mood of the author shows that he is distressed by the darling's lack of opinion. Dreams and comparisons express the relativity of her emotions. As the character is excessively dependent on the conditions around her and merges psychologically with her surroundings, Gromov (a contemporary critic) saw in the Darling the influence of oppressive real life, and noted that the excessive susceptibility of the darling to external conditions is shown by her spiritual poverty and lack of interests (qtd. in Swift 88).

Chekhov's short story is in the style of realism, which dominated Russian literature throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. Yet, while writers such as Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky wrote in a realistic style that conveyed a political message or moral philosophy, Chekhov's stories instruct the reader not so much in how to live but in how not to live. "The Darling" is realist in style partly in its portrayal of life in a provincial Russian village. Chekhov focuses on the mundane details of daily life as important indicators of character, giving the story a somewhat static tone, as nothing much "happens" in Olga's life, except a series of marriages

and deaths. The tone of the narrator in “The Darling” deliberately indicates of the author’s perspective on the character of Olga. Chekhov’s literary roots as a writer of brief, humorous sketches can be detected in the somewhat mocking tone of his portrayal of Olga. For instance, with the death of each husband, the narrator relates the passion and depth of Olga’s mourning, but, almost in the same breath, relates her involvement with a new suitor only months after the death of the last. I interpret this mocking tone as evidence that Chekhov’s intention was to criticize the limitations placed on women by traditional gender roles. However, by the end of the story, Olga emerges as a despicable creature, whose all-encompassing love for her friend Smirnin’s child, is met by his disdain and scorn.

#### “The Man in a Case” (1898): Marriage out of Boredom

The Greek language school-teacher, Belikov, in “Man in a Case” is obsessed with rules and regulations. He fears change, possibilities, and freedom. Prohibitions are safe for him, as they clearly state what should not be done. Freedom, on the other hand, is endless and uncontrollable and can take numerous directions that Belikov cannot control. Thus, he surrounds his whole life in a case, to protect himself not only from troubles but also from happiness and enjoyment. Certainly, Chekhov intended Belikov as a figure of ridicule. He presented the idea of the story in one of his notebooks: “A man in a case, in overshoes, with the umbrella in the scabbard, his watch in a case, pencil sharpener in a scabbard”. Belikov is a shy master, a misanthropist, closed and hostile to all news. His colleagues try to marry him to the unmarried

Varenka, but her brother hates Belikov's baseness and throws him down the stairs. He dies out of shame.

Varenka is about thirty; she is the daughter of a senior civil servant and owns her own farm. She is the first woman who has ever been kind and affectionate to Belikov. Thus, Belikov finally decides to marry Varenka. Nevertheless, this marriage is not based on love. Varenka decides to get married out of boredom: "One of those stupid, unnecessary marriages of which we see thousands: the product of boredom, of having nothing else to do!" (120). This is the narrator's assessment.

Most other young ladies do not care whom they marry so long as they get themselves a husband. For Belikov, instead: "Marriage is a serious thing, one must first weigh one's impending responsibilities and duties, just in case of repercussion" (121).

Certainly, the figure of "The Man in a Case" is comic, as are the situations in which Belikov finds himself due to his strong inclination toward solitude. Chekhov himself often lamented the sense of solitude in his own life. Whether destined or not for one of his stories, there is the following remark in his notebook: "How I will lie in the grave, so in essence, I live now, alone!"<sup>173</sup>

"The Man in a Case" is part of a trilogy, together with "About Love" and "Gooseberries", which consider characters who insulate themselves from others; it warns of man's inclination for social withdrawal and the spiritual structure individuals place on themselves. "Gooseberries" is also relevant to the topic of marriages of convenience. In this story, Nicholas hates his job and

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<sup>173</sup> Note-Book of Anton Chekhov, trans. by S. S. Kotliansky and Leonard Woolf, 1921.

marries a rich widow, whom he does not love, in order to raise capital: “Потом, слышу, женился. Всё с той же целью, чтобы купить себе усадьбу с крыжовником, он женился на старой, некрасивой вдове, без всякого чувства, а только потому, что у нее водились деньжонки”<sup>174</sup> (Chekhov 6: 276).

According to Terras, “Gooseberries” is about the positive and negative aspects of life. The clean water of the millpond is representative of a positive life, while the dirty, polluted water in which Nikolay and Alyokhin bathe is a negative symbol. Gooseberries are hard and bitter, but for Nikolay they are pleasing. Alyokhin is happy to see his unexpected guests while Nikolay lives alone. Chekhov does not explain these connections; instead, he uses random details and allusions. One of the main characteristics of Chekhov’s art is that he conducts very little psychological analysis; he works more by association than by analysis. The point or message of a story is usually indicated by some detail that may seem inappropriate to its subject. For example, in “The Man in a Case”, the galoshes that the schoolmaster wears in nice weather are an important detail: the man is desperately “wrapped” in his properties, prejudices and fears just as everything around him must be kept “in a case” (Terras 470-1).

The key to the story “Gooseberries” comes near the end, when Ivan reflects on how he felt when he observed his brother’s happiness:

...при виде счастливого человека, мною овладело тяжелое чувство,  
близкое к отчаянию... Я соображал: как, в сущности, много довольных,  
счастливых людей! Какая это подавляющая сила! Вы взгляните на эту

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<sup>174</sup> Then I heard he was married. Still with the same idea of buying a farmhouse with a gooseberry-bush, he married an elderly, ugly widow, not out of any feeling for her, but because she had money (Chekhov 66).

жизнь: наглость и праздность сильных, невежество и скотоподобие  
слабых, кругом бедность невозможная, теснота, вырождение, пьянство,  
лицемерие, вранье... Между тем во всех домах и на улицах тишина,  
спокойствие... (Chekhov, *Kryzhovnik*)<sup>175</sup>.

He realizes that, no matter how happy one is now, "life will show him her laws sooner or later, trouble will come for him" (133). Ivan realizes that he, too, is one of the self-deluded persons, content with his lot and not helping to reduce suffering and injustice. He pleads with his host, "Don't be calm and contented! Don't let yourself be put to sleep! (133).

“About Love” (*O Liubvi*) depicts a relationship between Alyokhin and Anne; they love each other, but Alyokhin decides to reveal his love for Anne only at the end. Alyokhin and Anne make the right decision not to publicise their love because Anne is a married woman and it would ruin her family. As Llewellyn points out, Anna remains faithful to her husband, does not surrender to her love for Alyokhin, nor even admit its existence until it is too late for anything to come of it (75). In “The Lady with the Little Dog”, on the other hand, Dmitri and Anna have an affair and openly declare their love. Freedman convincingly argues that Alyokhin’s infatuation with Anne is entirely one-sided: that she has only maternal feelings for him, and that he simply imagines that she would run off with him. Alyokhin lives under an illusion of love lost, a theme overtly stated in “Gooseberries”, another of the “Little Trilogy”. One of the protagonists quotes

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<sup>175</sup> At the sight of a happy man, I was overcome with an oppressive feeling that was close to despair... I was thinking: how, in fact, a lot of satisfied, happy people! You look at life: the insolence and idleness of the strong, the ignorance and brutishness of the weak, incredible poverty all around us, overcrowding, degeneration, drunkenness, hypocrisy, lying . . . Meanwhile, in all the houses and the streets quiet, calm...

Pushkin: “the gloom of comfortable deception (or lies) is dearer to us than the truth”. Alyokhin lives under such an illusion.

Overall, “About Love” is about the missed opportunities in life rather than one-sided love. When Alyokhin realizes that he will not see Anne anymore, he regrets not having declared his love to her before. “About Love” also depicts another relationship, that of Pelagaya with the cook Nikafor. She is in love with Nikafor, but though she does not want to marry him, she does not mind living with him. However, Nikafor, who is very religious, insists on marriage and does not want her otherwise. Though Nikafor adheres to church dogma here, he is grumpy and a drunkard.

#### “Three Years” (1895): a Marriage of Convenience

For Chekhov an artist has only to state a problem, not to offer solutions for the problems. This well-known maxim is stated in a letter written in October 1888 to Suvorin: “In *Anna Karenina* and *Evgeni Onegin* not a single problem is solved, but they satisfy you completely because all the problems in these works are correctly stated. It is the business of the judge to put the right questions, but the answers must be given by the jury according to their own lights.” Chekhov respects his readers and allows them to draw their own conclusions.

According to Speirs, if Tolstoy teaches pride, Chekhov teaches humility. Chekhov is accustomed to the fragility of individual struggles. Moreover, Chekhov does not have any recognition of human dignity or any personal sense of the past, apart from the immediate past. Chekhov can only reveal the immediate successes and failures of his characters (Speirs 171).

“Three Years” is a novella set initially in a small provincial urban town; it then shifts to Moscow. It traces the shifting pattern of human relationships around the main protagonist, Alexei. The story makes a year-to-year tour of middle-class aristocracy, sexual dissatisfaction, familial worry and second-rate tastes. Religious despotism is another aspect of the story. Alexei’s father has dishonoured his daughter for remarrying against his will.

When Alexei takes his wife Yulia to buy a picture at an art exhibition, she poses and looks at the pictures “as her husband did, through her open fist or an opera glass” (65). She then moves into a daydream and imagines herself walking through the countryside portrayed by the artist. When she goes home, she is angry about the offensive pictures her husband has bought and all the souvenirs he has collected. At the end of the story, she flirts experimentally with her husband’s friends.

Although bored and discouraged, Alexei becomes interesting because of the author’s deep sympathy for him. Alexei is apparently a good man. He is generous with money and sensitive to the attitude of others towards himself. Thus, he is afraid of hurting them. However, he is convinced that life will never offer him any joy. He is critical and believes that perfection cannot be reached. In his life’s journey, he is unable to escape the uncertainty of his existence. At the beginning of the story, Alexei finds himself in a gloomy provincial town in order to be close to his sister who is dying of cancer. He is infatuated with a girl, Yulia, who does not have any particular feelings for him. His emotions for Yulia are intensified by the fear that this might be the only opportunity life is offering him to be happy. There is no love from Yulia’s side. However, she accepts Alexei’s proposal of marriage. Alexei is a man of the city and Yulia thinks that she can have a better life in Moscow. Alexei’s brother reminds him of his weaknesses. The

brothers share the same past, the traditional egotistical bullying in their terrifying old father's house. They have grown up in an ambience of fear. Alexei has developed more of a personality than his brother has though, because he was looked after by some friends. This helped him to grow up away from his home.

Chekhov turns to the commercial aspect of industrialism in "Three Years" by highlighting the history of the Alexei family, whose figurehead has come up to Moscow from the provinces and become a millionaire. He makes his money as a dealer in small articles used for sewing, buying cheap, selling dear and keeping the wages of his large staff down. The father is a miserable fellow, passionate and reverent in family life, but an "Asiatic despot" in his huge warehouse.

In Moscow Alexei meets Polina Nikolaevna, a music teacher who once loved him. They are both from the city and both are victims of many wrongs; both are talkative and conscious of life around them. However, she is stronger than he is. She faults him for falling for a young provincial girl, rather than one more his equal, as she is. Polina tries to understand his feelings for the girl, but when she realizes that he loves his wife she faints, which in turn only adds to his sadness.

In the meantime, Yulia finds her marriage impossible; she and her husband have communication problems, and their ignorance of one another leads to desolation and hostility. It seems that there can be no escape from this situation. To Alexei, "the conventional definiteness of her views and convictions seemed... a barrier, behind which the real truth could not be seen" (176). Alexei's circle revolves around Yartsev, who is optimistic, talkative, teaches science in schools, and is interested in everything. Yulia, like everyone else, uses Yartsev to keep her spirits



up. Alexei is jealous of this and subjects her to an emotional attack which is a caricature of Polina's efforts against himself. This makes Yulia feel guilty, and she now shares the responsibility for their mistaken marriage, a problem Alexei finds impossible to accept alone. Later in the story, Yulia decides to return home to visit her father. This is the first time after her marriage that Yulia is seen without Alexei. Chekhov implies that she has become a woman; she has acquired a kind, expansive personality.

According to Speirs, Alexei feels let down, for his relationship with Polina and Yartsev will never be the same. People change constantly, and life is full of new beginnings (Speirs 179). Alexei's relationship with his wife is very different too. He now faces the reality that since their baby's death, he no longer loves her. Alexei has been unable to do anything meaningful with his life. While he has feared taking risks, Yartsev and Polina appear to be in charge of their own fates. Yulia thinks that he should face his own responsibilities. Yulia looks after the family house, for she needs a sense of continuity with the past. After three years, Alexei's dreadful old father is almost completely blind and filled with hatred against those who have disobeyed him. Alexei's duties as the new head of the family are clear. He does what is necessary with bad grace, though: "I feel as though our life is already over and that a grey half-life is beginning for us" (270). Alexei's life will be hopeless, the life of a Moscow businessman who has inherited his father's business. This fate has always been in store for him. However, like his brother, Alexei does not protest. Alexei's life appears to be turbulent and unsatisfactory. However, after three years he has changed and has overcome his fear of being a nonentity, an average man. He has abandoned his pessimistic attitude towards life (Speirs 182).

Over a period of "Three Years", people may change. As is usually the case in Chekhov, this story has neither heroes nor villains. Everyone in the story has faults, but everyone is also deserving of love; however, only a lucky few achieve it. Yulia begins as an immature but well-meaning girl who is devastated by the reality of her marriage to a man she does not care for. Alexei falls hopelessly in love, though he well understands his wife's feelings. He is a good man, supportive and compassionate toward his dying sister, a man who always tries to see the best in every situation; yet he is also gullible and impractical. During the three years, Yulia resists easy "solutions" to her unhappiness; for example, she refuses to take a lover and she does not go home to her father. Likewise, Alexei avoids searching for understanding in another woman's arms, starting an affair, for example, with his artistic friend Polina, who obviously disdains the younger, less educated Yulia. Over time a process of accommodation occurs. Later in the story, Yulia confesses that she has grown accustomed to being Alexei's wife; while at the end she admits that, in fact, she loves him. There is mutual tolerance, mutual respect, and eventually love. Chekhov certainly does not provide the reader with a "happily ever after" theme; it is likely that a lot of suffering and mutual recriminations lie ahead.

Nonetheless, the story evokes the possibility of mature love. In Yulia's case, it is a love that has grown little by little out of shared experiences and progressively deeper understanding. In Alexei's case, an overwhelming infatuation quiets down into deeper understanding of and appreciation for Yulia as a mature woman.

## Extended families

### “In the Ravine” (1900): a New Dark Kingdom

One of Chekhov’s favourite topics is the countryside and rural life. Unwritten norms permeated all aspects of peasant life and regulated all aspects of rural society. As a result, the norms of official civil family law applicable to the peasantry after the reform did not embrace the diversity of real situations, and sometimes did not reflect the realities or experience of peasant justice. After the story “Peasant women” (1891), the theme of the countryside recurs in the cruel inhumanity portrayed in “In the Ravine” (1900). According to Rayfield, this story has an undercurrent of contamination in its imagery (Rayfield 194). “In the Ravine” features two daughters-in-law, married into the same family – one rapacious and calculating who usurps the family empire, the other meek and saintly. It features a wedding and the murder of an infant; it also features love for children. The village Ukleevo suggests stickiness; its river is polluted with acid, its fields poisoned by effluent from the tannery. A moral contamination spreads through the family of Tsybukin. The Tsybukin family’s destruction is the main topic of the story: “Sin, it seemed, had condensed and stood like a mist in the air”. At the wedding of Tsybukin’s son, a peasant woman suddenly cries out: “You have sucked all our blood, Herods”. In “In the Ravine” the conflict of two sisters-in-law, whose husbands cannot control them, even the meek and saintly of the two, reflects the situation in “Peasant women” (Rayfield 195). The name of the village Ukleevo increasingly comes to resemble a kind of provincial hell peopled by “damned souls”, such as the tragic peasant girl Lipa and her mother. These characters are described as being drawn down into the lower depths of a social world in which the values of commercial

exchange have twisted and distorted all the human relationships that exist within its realm (Rayfield 196).

At the beginning of the story, the patriarch of the family, the old Tsybukin (Grigori), runs a business which is a front for more fraudulent practices. His foolish younger son has married a simple peasant girl, Aksinia, who shows herself to be a businesswoman of great strength. Old Tsybukin has remarried Varvara, a well-organized and pleasant woman, as a second wife. In this story, Varvara is a very charitable character, as she helps the weak with money, bread and clothes. However, old Tsybukin sends the beggars away. The elder son, Anisim, a detective, is to be married to Lipa. Their marriage is an arranged one. Anisim admits that he did not feel pleased that he was to be married, or have a desire to see the bride. It was the custom in the village to marry off the son, in order to have a woman to help in the house. On the day of the wedding, Anisim even forgets that he is about to be married. Gradually, everything falls apart. Anisim turns out to be a criminal; Aksinia starts to go into business on her own account, building a brick factory in league with one of the factory owners (Rayfield 195). Lipa has a baby which threatens to be the heir to the business of Tsybukin. Therefore, Aksinia murders Lipa's infant son by pouring a ladle of boiling water over him while he is at home with his mother.

The more Lipa is oppressed, the more her strength is concentrated. She is befriended by a workman in Ukleevo, the carpenter Elizarov. Elizarov states that a simple carpenter is higher than any boss; St. Joseph, the father of Jesus, was a carpenter, so his work is sanctified. He persuades Lipa that those who labour and endure are superior to their oppressors. Moreover, Elizarov suggests that Anisim should love Lipa, and vice versa, and that they should live in God's ways. Elizarov keeps no horses, going on foot all over the district with nothing but a little bag of bread and onions, and walking along with big strides, swinging his arms. He says "ours is

a righteous calling and pleasing to God” (7). This shows his strong faith. Lipa and her mother were born in poverty and prepared to live so till the end, giving up to others everything “except their frightened, gentle souls, which may have fancied for a minute, that perhaps that in the vast mysterious world, among the endless series of lives, they too, counted for something, and they too, were superior to someone” (Chekhov 112). Although their life seems to be doomed to be in poverty, they sense that there is someone who is taking care of them who looks down from the heights of the heavens. Chekhov shows with his story the existence of righteousness and faith in evil surroundings.

There is also an important Christian message. Exhausted by carrying her dead baby, Lipa gets a lift from two carters. One consoles her by telling her how much he has gone through in his life, wandering over Siberia, and losing his wife, and yet he still wants to live. Resignation, vitality and Christianity are what keep Lipa alive. Lipa listens to the invisible birds (bitterns, nightingales and cuckoos), and hears the message of nature, that one only lives once. The Tsybukins have only their ruthless maxim of “each man to his trade”, and the pursuit of wealth to help them face life; Lipa has the instinctive golden rule of the peasantry. It does not matter how illusory her intuitions of eventual justice may be: she is uncontaminated, vital, and natural (Rayfield 196).

It is not by chance that her baby is born before Lent; Easter is central to Christianity as it celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ three days after his death by crucifixion. One could argue that the baby will be resurrected. Lipa’s heart is full of grief, and she says that it is hard to be alone during such painful moments. However, as if someone has listened to her prayers, she

hears the sound of human speech, coming from two men from Firsanovo. These two men are like angels for Lipa, as she says: “You looked at me just now and my heart was softened” (11).

Lipa and her mother give a piece of bread to old Tsybukin. Despite her tragic experience, Lipa is charitable and gives something to the old man. Her only child has just died. However, she finds solace and comfort in the words of the two men from Firsanovo. Lipa and her mother keep crossing themselves. Clearly, there are some good characters, such as that of Varvara, Lipa, her mother Praskovnya and Grigorii Tsybukin. However, evil Aksinia brings destruction into the family, like Matreona in Tolstoy’s *The Power of Darkness*. In Aksinia’s slenderness there is something snake-like. An evil imagery is expressed in Lipa’s fear for Aksinia: “sometimes she glances out the window and her eyes are so fierce and there is a germ of green in them, like the eyes of a sheep in the shed” (Chekhov 113).

The family is divided because of the goodness and badness of its members. Anisim does not believe in God and ends up in prison from coining false money. He criticises the deacon and the clerk because they go to church simply to prevent people talking ill of themselves, but he himself does not seem to have any faith at all. Chekhov, like Tolstoy in his play *The Power of Darkness*, is announcing a Christian message: that those who do not follow the principles of the Bible will bring ruin and destruction to the family. In addition, against Christian principles, Aksinia commits the serious sin of adultery. Apparently, the Hrymins were free in their behaviour to her, and it was very noticeable that she was on intimate terms with the elder of them. Varvara thinks about God’s judgement and about life after death; she believes that by doing well on this earth she will get her reward hereafter. Anisim is aware that they have been taught incorrectly since they are born, for they are taught “every man to his own job”. Moreover,

he is aware that his father does not believe in God. Anisim undergoes a conversion in which he breaks with his father's ideology of the market. When Anisim is about to be put in jail, it seems to Lipa as though she has not come to see him off, but has met him just by chance for some unknown reason.

Chekhov's description of the dark kingdom in "In the Ravine" aroused contemporaries' comments immediately after its publication in the magazine *Zhizn'*. A historian of Russian journalism, M. K. Lemke, wrote: "In the Ravine" is a masterfully executed picture of purely Russian bourgeoisie that is to be recognised as a new dark kingdom"<sup>176</sup>. Further on he spoke of the principles governing the life of the social milieu referred to, which are summarised in Anisim's words "to each what he is assigned" (X, 157). But there are other codes silently professed by Lipa who, according to M. K. Lemke, is noted for an "extreme, occasionally even outrageous humility", which is directly expressed by Elizarov, who is akin to Lipa: "He who works and has patience – is the most senior" (X, 163). The critic D. N. Ovsyaniko-Kulikovskiy is right in seeing in the humble Lipa a protest against the terrible life of the new dark kingdom. At the end of the story, as Lemke notes, she felt herself to be the "eldest"; "from a timid and hiding character she took on the lead role"<sup>177</sup>. It is not solely at the end that this trend can be observed: while living at Tsibukin's, Lipa feels that working as a labourer was better than being a shop trader, and that the workman is "senior" to the merchant. This is what she was telling her little son, "delightfully" when playing with him (X, 167). It is not conviction that one has here, but something deeper, coming from the core of one's heart, the immediate understanding of good and evil that children are capable of.

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<sup>176</sup> Lemus, "Iz dnevnika publitsista. Nash narod u Chekhova". Orlovsk. *Vestnik*, 1900, 175.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. No 199

Elizarov is almost a saint in the way Tolstoy understands the term: he is totally indifferent to property, firmly believes in the sacredness of labour, and refuses to accept the “superiority” of the rich and strong; disinclined to prophesy, he tells the truth directly and is afraid of no one. However, one can state that even earlier than Chekhov, Tolstoy had created a type similar to Chekhov’s Elizarov, in whom seemingly incompatible traits were combined. This is the image of Mitrich from Tolstoy’s *The Power of Darkness*. He is a “drunkard and a foul mouth” and at the same time – almost a saint. Indeed, Mitrich is a total stranger in the world of money-making, the laws of which he perfectly understands; he despises the “power of darkness”, though without accusations or prophesying, which differentiates him, for instance, from Akim. He conscientiously performs the work of a farm labourer, remains internally free, and does not submit spiritually to anyone.

Among all the people his fate brings him into contact with, he especially cares for the girl Anyutka, with whom he holds an intimate conversation on the night of the infanticide, as if she were his peer. The two are pure people unstained by sin or debauchery, as opposed to being the servants of “darkness”. Tolstoy positions Mitrich and Anyutka as aloof yet close to each other, just as Elizarov and Lipa are by Chekhov. Mitrich’s best recollection from his difficult experience of rank-and-file military service is the feat of kindness and love that he has witnessed – the saving of a girl in an enemy village. This manifestation of holiness, on an everyday basis, mundane and subdued, is characteristically typical of Elizarov in Chekhov’s novella as well. Like Elizarov, Mitrich to a certain extent shares in the ideal of non-resistance to evil: instead of fighting evil he evades it. He recognises no man’s judgment over himself, in this sense fearing no-one, and equally abstains from boasting and ingratiating, considering fear and boasting devilish things (“the braggart is the Devil himself”). With regard to Mitrich, Chekhov could



repeat the words with which he described Elizarov: both are free from violence, lies and the devil (to A. N. Plescheyev dated 4 October 1888 and 9 April 1889).

### “Peasants” (1897): the World of Darkness and Wife Beating

“Peasants” (1897) is one of Chekhov’s longer stories and deals with country poverty and wife beating. According to Colucci, Chekhov ends the pages of “Peasants” “soaked” with mud and vodka with a sad, but not tragic ending. However, the general picture is one of the most terrible that Russian literature has ever produced in its depictions of the countryside (Colucci 774). “Peasants” is constructed from images of breaking and of fire. Chekhov depicts the peasants as lacking in ambition or initiative; they have a natural tendency to drunkenness, wife beating, and primitive superstition. Their desolate poverty is of their own doing. Chekhov depicts peasants’ sufferings and feelings. Because of this he was attacked by the populist Mikhailovsky for describing such a desperate picture of the Russian countryside. As Terras points out, in “Peasants” Chekhov depicts an image of a woman who comes back home naked because she has been sexually harassed by peasants: “She was shivering with cold and her teeth were chattering, and in the bright light of the moon she appeared very pale, beautiful, and strange. The shadows and the moonlight on her skin created a striking impression and her dark eyebrows and young, firm breasts stood out with particular poignancy” (Chekhov 201).

In the peasant family both spouse abuse and child abuse as depicted in “Peasants” were common, and approved by the male community that maintained patriarchy. The *Domostroi*, or rules of the household, written by a priest, Sylvester, a favourite of Ivan the Terrible, gives a

picture of the Russian family in the sixteenth century. It gives detailed instructions about housekeeping, educational practices, the position of the wife, and the maintenance of family honour; fear and corporal punishment were dominant principles. Parental love meant teaching and punishing, reasoning and beating. The *Domostroi* recommends solely the whip and the rod in bringing up children. The impact of despotic *Domostroi* was still present in nineteenth century Russian childhood. Even today some Russian writers mention the *Domostroi* as a respected code for family relations and household ethics (Ihanus 244).

Wife-beating, mother-cursing, tongue-lashing, ostracism and various shaming practices were accompanied by heavy drinking habits and hyper masculine aggressive-impulsive behaviour. (Ihanus: 244). In the marriage, women had to suffer and their body had to be punished. According to *The Domostroi*, fathers are promised rewards in heaven for beating their children, and the children are assured future rewards for their sufferings when they receive the blind obedience of their own children. Warm and loving parent-child interactions were rare; the blocking of children's spontaneous behaviour and their striving for independence characterized the Russian family under the authority of the tsar. The period in which these stories were written was characterised by the increasing emergence of the social contradictions that would erupt in successive revolutions, culminating in the October revolution of 1917. The presence of the vast Russian peasantry can be felt throughout the collection, most obviously in stories such as "Peasants", "My Life" and "In the Ravine", but also as the backdrop to stories of apparently far more whimsical concerns, such as "The House with the Mezzanine". In "Peasants" men are described as bringing nothing into the house, but taking plenty out. Kiryak, Nikolay's brother, drinks and when he drinks, he looks for his wife Mariia, makes a row, and beats her mercilessly. Ol'ga, Nikolay's brother's wife, seems to be the only religious and pious person. She reads the

Gospel every day - reads it aloud like a deacon; a great deal of it she does not understand, but the words of the Gospel move her to tears. Ol'ga tells Mariia that the Scriptures say, "If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also" (Matthew 5:39). In this way, she is suggesting that Mariia should bear her husband's beating with patience rather than with fear.

The theme of illiteracy is also present in this story. Four-fifths of Russian people were still peasants, and most of them were poor and illiterate. Chekhov's short story provides a portrait of their life at the end of the nineteenth century. Mariia and her sister-in-law Fyokla are ignorant and cannot understand anything. They both dislike their husbands. Mariia is even afraid of Kiryak. Whenever he is at home, she shakes with fear (258). Ol'ga goes to church and takes Mariia with her. Mariia feels that in her sister-in-law she has someone near and akin to her.

Finally, examples of mistreatment of children can also be found in the story. When the grandmother realizes that the little girls have allowed the geese to damage the cabbages, she seizes Sasha by the neck with her fingers and begins whipping her. Sasha cries with pain and terror. Then grandmother proceeds to whip Motka and in doing this Motka's smock is torn again. In despair and crying loudly, Sasha goes to the hut to complain. As Bialyi points out, Ol'ga makes proof of her devout and religious attitude: since granny is the grandmother, the little girls should do their best not to annoy her. It is a sin to be angry with her (214).

### “Peasants” and “In the Ravine”: Literary Anthropology of Russian Provincial Life

Like a practical physician, Chekhov examines sights from which most people turn away their eyes. He penetrates the minds of people who exist normally on the borderline between life and death. He can see the world through their life and think with their thoughts. He understands something of their plight, and has studied those who take advantage of their weaknesses.

“Peasants” is about the humanity of those hardly identifiable as human beings. It was written in 1897. In it, Chekhov shows that peasants are not a separate order of beings with a naturally rudimentary life. Tolstoy was dissatisfied with “Peasants”, but was struck by “In the Ravine”, which is about petty merchants. As Hingley points out, Tolstoy called “Peasants” a “sin against common people”, and stated that Chekhov did not know his peasants. Tolstoy knew that there were bad peasants, but he believed that peasants were closer to God than anyone else.

With “Peasants” Chekhov shows that the inhabitants of the village are not completely rural types. The village they inhabit sends young men to serve as waiters in Moscow. Grandmother, the scary witchlike old woman who rules the family, has been in service at a great house nearby. Finally, the family labour on the land are barely mentioned.

The struggle to remain alive has made the oldest people in the village almost unrecognizable as human beings. Grandmother is always angry; it seems that anger is the fuel of her life. She beats her little Moscow granddaughter, training her into a life of fear and subservience. The most profound emotion in peasant lives seems to be fear. Pointing to the church, Sasha, whose mother has told her about religion, says to her little cousin: “At night God walks about the church and with him the Holy Mother of God and Saint Nikolay, thud, thud, thud!...” (81). Children’ and adults’ beliefs are much the same. When a small fire breaks out in

the village, the peasants are paralyzed with fear and can do nothing. This fear works in unpredictable ways, for the majority of them do not appear to fear death. It rather seems to be a fear of new evil happening in their life (Speirs 165).

The peasants are, for some reason beyond their understanding, poorer than before emancipation of serfdom in 1861. They have ceased to exercise their imaginations because their entire energies are concentrated on work. They want to be richer in the harsh struggle for existence, but do not have faith to help them. As Speirs points out, for the poorest, the yearly August procession of an icon through the village “The Holy Mother, the giver of life”, stirs up hope. The appearance of the icon gives the hope that somewhere their condition might be an object of concern. “Defender! Mother! Defender!” (82), they shout for help. This is the only manifestation in them of hope. When her husband dies, killed by a dishonest doctor, Ol’ga leaves with her daughter to become a servant in Moscow again. Since she is leaving, she can now look at the village from an external, detached point of view: “... to live with them was terrible, but yet they were human beings, they suffered and wept like human beings, and there was nothing in their lives for which one could not find excuse” (119). The last scene in “Peasants” describes mother and daughter begging their way back to Moscow. Sasha says: “Good Christian folk, give for Christ’s sake, with God’s blessing, the Heavenly Kingdom...” (90).

In this story, the conditions in which peasants live are described as evil. Disgraceful storekeepers and factory owners, who use the peasants as a source of cheap labour and pollute their land and drinking water with industrial refuse, make the life of the peasants even more disgusting.

As we have seen earlier, another story that focuses on the conditions of the peasants is “In the Ravine”. This is about the depravity of those who at first sight look more kind than their victims. Chekhov depicts peasants as greedy, dishonest, and cruel. The half-industrialized village lying hidden at the bottom of a degrading valley has lower moral standards than the one shown in “Peasants”. Tsybukin spreads death and ruin among his poor customers. His sons are unhealthy, but their father’s position demands that they should have energetic and beautiful wives. One of the sons, Stepan, is deaf, and marries Aksinia, a girl whose activity impresses his old father. The elder son of Tsybukin, Anisim, is a police detective. The household needs another woman. She should be reliable but quiet, so as not to get in the way of other women. Lipa, a terrified little creature, her spirit overwhelmed by poverty, is acquired. The household is an organization for making money. It is a friendly household, but this is what makes it so threatening, the quiet openness of its members towards one another. Their situation, characterized by opposition and terror, leads to a kind of convenient companionship among them. Thus, Lipa does not fit in it. Although the others are kind to her, she is afraid of them and she does not know why. Shortly after, Anisim is arrested for forgery. The family ambition of the old man becomes centred on Lipa’s baby son.

As Speirs points out, this story illustrates a universal truth about the human condition: that suffering must be borne alone. Chekhov portrays crude, peasant life “In the Ravine”. In this story, Aksinia’s behaviour is hardly understandable or acceptable. There is nothing to soften this harsh reality depicted in Chekhov’s work, which reveals Chekhov in his most savage mood (Speirs 168).

### *Baby* (“Peasant women”) (1891) and the Mistreatment of Women

*Baby* (“Peasant Women”) was written in the same year as “The Duel”: 1891. In these works, Chekhov was shaking off the influence of Tolstoy but was still to write two of his most Tolstoyan works. One of them, *Baby*, is the story of two peasant sisters-in law, one ugly with an absent husband, the other pretty with an idiot husband, both bored and oppressed in their father-in-law’s house. The core of the story lies in the narrative of a visitor, Matvei Savvich. “From the neutral opening description of Matvei, as a serious, business-like man who knows his “own worth” one could not guess that this character will slowly be revealed as one of Chekhov’s most odious villains” (Clyman 99).

Matvei tells his story, quite unaware of its effect or its morality. He seduces a soldier’s wife and drives her to poison her husband. Matvei is a Russian Tartuffe in his hypocrisy, lechery and moralising; he appears as a parody of Tolstoy’s Pozdnyshev (Rayfield: 99). To this extent, the story is anti-Tolstoyan. However, the “frame” story dominates: the peasant women plunge us into the language of hierarchies of a peasant household, with a Tolstoyan feeling for the layers of passion, inhibitions and ritual in its outlook. Most Tolstoyan of all, however, is the sensation of immense evil, threatening to break through into action (Rayfield 99). This story is important for the topic of the mistreatment of children. Matvei abuses his adopted son Kuzka: “I’ll pull your ears off” (Chekhov 45) which implies that he beats the child. “Up at the factory, Kuzka lives like a slave without his mother. The foreman beats him, I dare say” (Chekhov 39). The story also presents examples of domestic violence between husband and wife: “Mashenka was kicked and lashed with reins” (Chekhov 41). In addition, it depicts cases of adultery, such as that of Varvara, who has slept with the priest’s son and with travellers who stayed in the house (Chekhov 42).

Fyodor, Dyudya's elder son (married to Sofya), has affairs with other women. Mashenka and Vasya's marriage is arranged: she clearly says that she has never loved Vasya and that she married him against her will. Her mother made her do it (Chekhov 32).

In "Peasant Wives", Alyosha drinks. When Varvara tells Sophia that she would like to kill Alyosha, she argues that people will not find out because they would say that Alyosha died of drink. In addition, as stated earlier, an example of husband beating his wife is present in the story as it is in "Peasants", when Mashenka was kicked and lashed with reins because of her adultery:

«Не бей! не бей!» А сам подбежал и, словно очумел, размахнулся и давай бить ее кулаками изо всей силы, потом повалил на землю и ну топтать ногами; я стал оборонять, а он схватил вожжи и давай вожжами. Бьет и всё, как жеребенок, повизгивает: ги-ги-ги!<sup>178</sup>

In this story, Matvey's idea that much evil and abomination come into the world from womankind is connected to the idea that sexuality was accepted by the Church only if it was purified by the sacrament of marriage and for the sole purpose of procreation. Otherwise, it was sinful and defiling, deriving from Satan, and deserving to be punished. The physical body, which in the Old Testament was regarded as a temple, was gradually victimised and degraded, resulting in sinfulness and bashfulness in the Russian religious mentality (Ihanus 241).

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<sup>178</sup> Don't beat her, don't beat her! But he ran up himself, and waving his arms, as though he were mad, he let fly with his fists at her with all his might, then flung her on the ground and kicked her. I tried to defend her, but he snatched up the reins and thrashed her with them, and all the while, like a colt's whinny, he went: "He, he, he" [Trans. by Constance Garnett 35].



## Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the cluster of themes relating to the family and marriage and have put them in the context of the sociological and historical background of a number of Anton Chekhov's short stories and novellas. Chekhov's works are all concerned with family life. I have particularly focused on extra-marital relationships, ostracism of relations deemed immoral by the society, the emancipation of women, love and marriage, the mistreatment of children, and extended families. For my main analysis, I have chosen "The Duel" (1891) as a representative story set among the upper classes. I have also shown that this story was a response to Tolstoy's depiction of family life in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Chekhov's stories depict family life in both upper and peasant classes. Chekhov represents a turn in the evolution of views on the family, and his stories reflect changing attitudes towards love and marriage.

The traditional type of family, often called patriarchal, was the predominant type in Russia. According to contemporaries who paid attention to the crisis of the Russian family, the crisis started with this type of the family. In his document *Kurs Grazhdanskovo Prava* (1896), Pobedonosev, the procurator of the Holy Synod, showed that the traditional or arranged type of marriage had started to become stale. The patriarchal structure was no longer able to cope with new types of people. It was time for people to demand freedom from the environment of family life; family had become too restrictive for its members. Thus, people became more demanding; they started to feel the desire to be free. Instead of arranged marriages, it was time for marriages based on common attraction, on love. However, at the same time the old and new ways were in sharp contrast (Beliakova, *Brak i Razvod...*). What was not possible in Tolstoy's work, for

example, divorce, became possible in Chekhov's work, as we have seen in the story "Supruga" and "My Life". Concerning different norms of marriage, two of Chekhov's own brothers, Aleksandr and Kolya, both had "grazhdanskije braki" (civil marriages); Aleksandr because the church would not grant his wife an annulment. He had two "nezakonnykh detei" (illegitimate children) by her.

Alexander Pavlovich (1855 - 1913), Chekhov's older brother, "in 1881 entered into a civil marriage with A. I. Khrushchev-Sokolnikova that the Tula spiritual consistory would not divorce from her husband, and who was condemned to perpetual celibacy. By her, Alexander had two illegitimate sons: Nicholas and Anton" (235). Brother Nikolai Pavlovich (1858-89) also "entered into a civil marriage with A. A. Ipatiev-Gold and found himself into the middle-class, unhealthy environment. A. A. Ipatiev saw him only as a money earner. She led him to alcohol; because of her he gradually stopped working" (237). From the examples of his older brothers, Chekhov knew how people who were brought up in religious tradition could choose not to have a church wedding; and the dilemma of Alexander's wife shows the difficulty of obtaining a divorce from local church authorities.

By the end of the century, a crisis of large or extended families became evident. Those who investigated the matter proved this to be the case. The Russian ethnographer P. M. Bogaevsky wrote in 1889: "Every year, the intention of the peasants to have a big family changed into the desire to have a smaller family, the big families were replaced with new smaller families offering more opportunities to take leadership roles within the family. Each year this was a growing idea amongst the peasants" (29).

Several phenomena affected the situation of the patriarchal families. These include liberal traditions in the family's social development, the growth of the population in the cities at the expense of the country, and the monetisation of the population in the countryside after the reforms. Related to these changes, there was also another movement occurring at the time, which consisted of the people of the countryside moving to the city to work. This phenomenon was identified as "seasonal work" (*otchodnichestvo*) and led to the destruction of the family. Unmarried men and women, who before were an exception, now started to be the new feature of Russian society.

Chekhov's short stories illustrate these phenomena, as one can see in "Peasants". In this story the peasant Kiryak spends time away from home, and, when he is at home for a short period of time, he gets drunk and beats his wife Mariia: "Going up to his wife, he swung his arm and punched her in the face with his fist. Stunned by the blow, she did not utter a sound, but sat down, and her nose instantly began bleeding" (284). Moreover, "Evidently conscious of inspiring fear, and pleased at doing so, Kiryak seized Mariia by the arm, dragged her towards the door, and bellowed like an animal in order to seem still more terrible" (284).

In "Nevesta", the heroine does not want to get married, but decides to go to study in Saint Petersburg instead. Clearly, as Beliakova rightly points out, this situation could not have happened in the first half of the nineteenth century, when the education of women had only just begun. Moreover, in 1884 the negative influence of city life dramatically influenced the criminality of women. Criminal offenses were mainly committed by unskilled workers, day labourers, and private maids. In Tolstoy's novel *Voskresenie* (*Resurrection*, 1899), the typical situation of the heroine Katusha Maslova could only have happened in the atmosphere, or the

environment of city life. The changes in the understanding of marriage led to the so-called “revolution of feelings”: “вместо брака, который устраивали родители, распространяется брак по взаимной привязанности («брак по любви»)”<sup>179</sup> (Beliakova, *Brak i Razvod v Rossii...*).

Finally, I have compared and contrasted Tolstoy’s views on the family and marriage with Chekhov’s own views. For Tolstoy, sexual love in general did not have anything in common with love as such. In *Put’ Zhizni* (1910) he wrote: “They call with the same word spiritual love: love towards God and the neighbour and carnal love between men and women. This is a big mistake. There is nothing in common between these two feelings. First of all, spiritual love towards God and one’s neighbour is the voice of God. Secondly, sexual love between man and woman is the voice of animals. According to Tolstoy, voluptuousness is a sin and something dirty, a manifestation of the animal side of man’s nature. Indulging oneself in voluptuousness is possible only as one indulges oneself in a secret vice. “Since then we poison these sensations with sin and uncleanness of every voluptuousness of love, and we dirty these feelings of those we love” (73), wrote N. Berdyaev in his work “Russian Eros, or philosophy of love in Russia” (1911) regarding views similar to those of Tolstoy’s. He insisted that the question of voluptuousness be posed differently: that we have to stop seeing in voluptuousness a concession to the weakness of sinful human flesh; it is time to see the truth, the brightness and cleanliness of the passion union. In *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Tolstoy comes up with an explicit image for purity: the idea of the angelic state of humankind, which would lead to a suspension of reproduction and its ultimate destruction. Pozdnyshev is a point of identification for the middle-and upper-class readers. Pozdnyshev believes that, because of the impending destruction of humankind and its decadent eroticism, having sex with one’s spouse is equivalent to adultery. For Tolstoy, falling in

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<sup>179</sup> The arranged type of marriage is being replaced by a new form of marriage, the marriage based on love.

love equates with sin and misfortune. Meanwhile, Chekhov records in his notebook: “What we feel when in love is probably our normal condition. Through falling in love man is given to understand what he ought to be”.<sup>180</sup>

Chekhov depicts several possible consequences of infidelity in his stories. However, this does not mean that he approves of this type of uncontrolled sexual behaviour (Moss 57).

Chekhov shows what happens when people leave unhappy marriages to follow their passions and instincts.

Chekhov’s non-judgmental and even sympathetic portrayal of people involved in extra-marital affairs (Nadya and Laevsky in “The Duel”; Anna and Gurov in “The Lady with the Little Dog”) was an affront to the conservative mores of his age. His attitude towards human sexuality as a “morally neutral quantity, whose moral and ethical implications depend on the circumstances and the attitudes of the people involved” (Karlinsky 15) was ahead of his time. In a letter to Suvorin of 6 April 1892, Chekhov dismissed as draconian the Church dogma prohibiting the divorce of couples who are unhappy.

However, to cite Chekhov’s liberal attitudes towards human sexuality as evidence of his atheism, and Tolstoy’s advocacy of celibacy (in the “Concluding Remarks” to *The Kreutzer Sonata*) as a “Christian ideal” taken to the extreme, as does Dneprov (199–200), is to confuse the dogma of tradition with the essence of the Christian faith. Chekhov’s “forgiving, tolerant attitude...toward human beings”, noted by Chizhevskii and others, is much closer to the

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<sup>180</sup> 1 Zap. kn., s. 18, n. 3, qtd. in Turkov, p. 268.

Christian ideal than a legalistic understanding of the moral dictates of the Judeo-Christian tradition (Swift 108).

Chekhov's attitude towards love and marriage differs widely from Tolstoy's. In *Anna Karenina*, for example, when Tolstoy first conceived the heroine Anna, he wanted to punish her for her immoral behaviour as an adulteress. Despite his intention, Anna appears as a brave woman who stands against society's norms by choosing to leave a loveless marriage. In *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Tolstoy shows that sexual passion is the only means by which a man and a woman can love each other. Yet, in fact, sexual passion is associated with murder. It is not by chance that most murders occurred between family members or close acquaintances. The representation of sexual intercourse as murder appeared already in *Anna Karenina* (sec. 2, ch. 11). However, Pozdnyshv maintains that the revulsion he experienced early in his marriage is common to many:

...Когда, муж и жена приняли на себя внешнее обязательство жить вместе всю жизнь и со второго месяца уж ненавидят друг друга, желают разойтись и все-таки живут, тогда это выходит тот страшный ад, от которого спиваются, стреляются, убивают и отравляют себя и друг друга,- говорил он все быстрее, не давая никому вставить слова и все больше и больше разгораясь.<sup>181</sup>

Cases of murders within the family become more and more frequent in the 1890s. As Mironov points out, the number of crimes within the family and sexual crimes dramatically

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<sup>181</sup> But when, as most frequently happens, the husband and wife have undertaken the external duty of living together all their lives, and begin to hate each other after a month, and wish to part but still continue to live together, it leads to that terrible hell which makes people take to drink, shoot themselves, or kill or poison themselves or one another (Tolstoy Ch. 2).

increased between 1874 and 1894. Social and economic factors contributing to these increases in violent crime include population growth and urbanisation. Yet, personal factors can also play a role. For example, marriage based on love, which became more common, implies a higher expectation of happiness and hence can lead to greater disappointment, while in the former norm of marriages of convenience and arranged marriage, the parties are resigned to not being masters of their happiness. This disappointment is clearly expressed by the heroine in the story “Ariadne”. As Tolstoy points out, crimes related to sexuality, caused by any kind of sexual desire, or jealousy, are the worst. The way in which one relates to these crimes is also an indication of one’s moral values. These crimes were common at the time and prevented the development of both humanity and the individual (Tolstoy 1901).

An indication of what the family should be like for Chekhov is seen in a negative example: during a visit to his brother Aleksandr, Chekhov intervened to defend the women and children of the household. In a letter of 2 January 1889, he rebukes his brother for treating his wife and cook like “slaves”, for insulting and shouting at them, and for making the children suffer. He admonishes his brother that such behaviour can never be justified, and reminds him that such “despotism and lies”, reminiscent of their father, “ruined your mother’s youth and corrupted our childhood”.

One cannot find ideal families in Chekhov’s works; there is not a positive model of family relationships to emulate. People do not live “happily ever after” in Chekhov. Gorky reproached Chekhov for this: “In your hands the short story will be reduced to “they met, fell in love, got married, and were unhappy”, to which Chekhov protested: “but that is often the case” (*Chekhov’s Private Diaries* 83). Chekhov’s characters, despite having experienced and thought a lot, neither claim to know answers to all the riddles life could offer, nor undertake to solve

eternal questions. Lipa asks a question as if it was borrowed from Dostoevsky's novels – on the purpose of children's suffering. After half an hour of silence the naturally gifted philosopher, sprung from the common people, gives an answer in complete disagreement with what the righteous men in Dostoevsky's novels say, who invariably know the ultimate truth: "It is impossible to know everything – why or how," he says. "Why do birds not have four wings but only two – because they can fly on two; in the same way why does man not know everything, and only half or a quarter? He knows what he needs to know to live out his life." According to Chekhov, such humble self-limitation of thought is more dignified than the claims of certain great writers that they could explain everything. Let us remember Chekhov's words in regard to Dostoevsky: "Good, but very long and immodest. Many claims" (to A. S. Suvorin, 5 March 1889). In his interpretation of images of "philosophers of the people" Chekhov is closer to Tolstoy than to Dostoevsky. In the works of the latter, philosophising characters, through verbose monologues, expand grand concepts of man and his attitude to this world and "other worlds"; this is the case not only with Zosima but also with the humble pilgrim Makar Dolgoruky. With Tolstoy and Chekhov, by contrast, righteous men, having hiked across the whole of Russia, are not after a solution to global riddles. They talk little (suffice it to recollect Akim with his "tête-à-tête", and Alesha Gorshok, who does almost completely without words, and even at the hour of his death prays with his hands and his heart). Nevertheless, the most important things seem to have been revealed to them, for they know exactly as much as they need in order to live their lives in a manner proper and fair from God's (Tolstoy's) or man's (Chekhov's) point of view. They are at peace with their inability to know everything.

Naturally, the affinity of Tolstoy and Chekhov has very clear boundaries. When noticing despotism and the "management of thought" characteristic of "grand sages" on the part of



Tolstoy, Chekhov would exclaim: "...to hell with the philosophy of great men of this world!" (to A. S. Suvorin, 8 September 1891) (Bialyi 211). To those, like Tolstoy, who saw no purpose in Chekhov's works, Chekhov states in his letter to A. N. Pleshcheyev (October 1889): "I am not a liberal, not a conservative, not a believer in gradual progress, not a monk, not indifferent... My holy of holies is the human body, health, intelligence, talent, inspiration, love and most absolute freedom". Chekhov presents an overview of human life; he also tries to liberate human beings from the barriers of ignorance which separate them from one another. Thus, Chekhov's idea of the family was a healthy union based on mutual respect and understanding rather than repression, domination, and power.

## CONCLUSION

### **Pulling the threads together**

This thesis started from the idea to examine the different kinds of marriage and family relations that Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov depict in their works. On the one hand, the aim of this thesis was to show the progression in the ideas of these authors on the topics of love in the family, sexuality, and power relations within the family. On the other hand, this study aimed at showing that the works of these authors are not just works about the family and its crisis, but also reflect the socio-historical changes in the second half of 19th century Russia in the context of love and sexuality. Moreover, I tried to explore the different solutions to the crisis that these authors offered through their fiction in the realms of ideas, but also practically. While the family in the works of these writers has been extensively studied, there has been less analysis of the crisis of the Russian family and the solutions that these authors offered to the crisis. Thus, my aim was to fill this critical gap. This thesis is original in approaching the works of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov as a cultural continuum which both reflected and contributed to the debates on the role of the family in Russian society at the time when encroachment of capitalism changed the very social, moral and economic fabric of this formerly agrarian society. Considering that the above Russian writers were amongst major literary icons of their time and whose works exerted powerful influence on their contemporaries this thesis addresses key themes in the complex discourses around the institution of the family in Russia.

As it will be clear from the preceding chapters, the thesis builds on the approach developed by Foucault, and applies it critically rather than mechanistically to the Russian

cultural material. I show that not all ideas developed by Foucault in his influential *History of Sexuality* can be applied to the works of the Russian classics, and that not all societal trends from Western Europe are relevant for the Russian society at the period under the investigation.

The thesis incorporates historical material into readings of works of literature. It shows that all three great writers of realism often drew their material from emerging trends in society. The thesis at the same time shows the points of difference and similarity in their views on a set of problems related to the issues facing the Russian family in the last thirty years of the 19th century.

In Chapter One, I focused on Dostoevsky's depiction of family life in his latest works *The Brothers Karamazov*, "The Dream of a ridiculous Man" and *The Diary of a Writer* as the crisis of the Russian family was more pronounced in this period and occupied Dostoevsky's attention. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky portrays a patriarchal family, though a peculiar one. Dostoevsky's own father, Mikhail Andreevich, was "an independent, educated, but despotic, irritable, and suspicious family man". Fedor Pavlovich to a degree represents Dostoevsky's own father, and Dmitri has the same characteristics as Fedor. Dmitri's violent nature and hot temper make him capable of feelings and emotions as strong as those of Fedor.

Moreover, in this chapter I showed the influence of Fedorov on Dostoevsky's views on the family. Fedorov had a big impact on both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky; all were influenced by the social climate of the time, philosophical and intellectual ideas about the family institution, marriage and procreation. I noted the difference between Dostoevsky's interest in the peasants' cult of the dead parents and Fedorov's incorporation of this cult into his idea of children

resurrecting parents. I pointed out that Fedorov was critical of Dostoevsky's idea of passive resurrection as opposed to his own idea of immediate action.

Chapter Two was dedicated to the analysis of Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* and *The Power of Darkness*. It shows that Tolstoy was also interested in the disintegration of family life and he was familiar with both upper and peasant class. My analysis of *The Kreutzer Sonata* led me to argue that in Tolstoy's discussion of emancipation of women in Russia, they are allowed to love whom they like rather than meet social expectations. Tolstoy observed the morals of his time, but depicted an image of women different from that of the beginning of the nineteenth century. Thus, Pozdnyshev and his wife present a new type of marriage compared to the arranged marriage of *Anna Karenina*. As part of the subtext, Tolstoy in *The Kreutzer Sonata* depicts a marriage based on bourgeois rules; it is based on love and no longer on money.

In my analysis of *The Power of Darkness* I enquired as to the nature of the "power of darkness", by exploring whether it was caused by a lack of general education, sexual education or whether it was the dark power of sexual instincts that made the hero in the play committing abominable acts of incest and infanticide. I then argued that, according to Tolstoy, the future of the Russian family was based on education, especially for the lower classes, and further that religion, including Buddhism, pointed the way towards the future of family life in Russia.

In Chapter Three I focused on the representation of family life in the works of Chekhov and by doing this, I showed the connection in ideas between Tolstoy and Chekhov. While Tolstoy depicts a marriage based on love, Chekhov takes a step further and focuses on new, freer, relationships between the sexes that often transcend the boundaries of the traditional family unit. Moreover, I argued that what was not possible in Tolstoy, for example divorce, became a

possibility in Chekhov's works. Emancipation of women is also examined by Chekhov, as it was in Tolstoy, in his short stories and novellas. For example, the heroine Nadiia in "The Betroded" (1903) typifies an emancipated woman who chooses her career instead of a loveless marriage. While Engelstein rightly points out that "The Lady with the Dog" (1899) and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1873-7) show the signs of the patriarchal stronghold on the family (32), Zalambani also stresses that Anna Karenina is a courageous woman who stands out against the traditional moral norms of society (Zalambani, *L'istituzione del Matrimonio* 43). I argued that Chekhov depicts the signs of new trends in society regarding love and sexuality. Thus, for instance, the heroine Ol'ga in "The Darling" is always in love with her husband or partner. Similarly, "The Darling" (1899) represents the shift from the marriage of convenience to the marriage based on love.

As outlined in the preceding chapters, I believe that Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Chekhov sincerely attempted both to reflect the state of the family in their time, and even to expose that situation, and desired to propose their solutions through their fictional writings. I noted that there are common characteristics to all of three authors. For example, they pointed, in different ways, to Christianity as a solution to the crisis of the family. Tolstoy, who did not share Fedorov's ideas, was nevertheless attracted by them. However, Tolstoy misinterpreted what brotherhood and resurrection were about. Sexual passion and family did not go well together in Tolstoy's thinking. Tolstoy showed the paradox of family life; according to him family life is based on lust and therefore cannot lead to a sustainable relation. I also note that Fedorov was against procreation and critical of Schopenhauer and Buddhism, while Tolstoy, at one stage, looked at Buddhism as a possible way out from the crisis of the family. According to Tolstoy, if man had depraved ideas it was the woman's fault. Dostoevsky and Tolstoy were looking for solutions through their faith in God and the religious teachings of Orthodox Christianity. Chekhov as well, although he neither

moralises nor preaches like Tolstoy, still believed that the family should be based on simple Christian values such as love and respect for one another.

In Chapter Three I also explored the crisis of the Russian family and Chekhov's response to the changes in Russian society, which exacerbated the sense of crisis faced by the family. It is not that Chekhov is saying that there is 'no family' or that the family structure is doomed for disintegration, rather he expresses what he sees: adultery, divorce, affairs, illegitimacy. Chekhov does not necessarily challenge the accepted morality, but shows that accepted morality itself was one of the greatest changes faced by families in crisis. Thus, if Dostoevsky was mainly concerned with sado-masochist aspects of sexuality and its potential for human degradation, for Tolstoy sexuality was sinful and evil, as demonstrated in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Chekhov, who does not moralise, his ideas on sexuality and marriage were perceived as a "refreshing breath of sanity" (Karlinsky 16).

The number of divorces and separations continued to increase and relationships between the sexes became freer, as demonstrated in Chekhov's stories. However, these processes, like the emancipation of women, were very slow in Russia.

In the period following Chekhov and Tolstoy's death, after the post-revolutionary experimentations of family life in the 1920s, the family in the 1930s returned to be considered by the state as the nucleus of society and was again strengthened by the state. In the 1930s the state returned to the ideal of the patriarchal family and marriage; large and strong families became a

crucial condition for the existence of the state and an instrument for the state to exercise control over society.<sup>182</sup>

### **Modern trends in attitudes towards the family in Russia, in connection with those of the period 1860 – 1900**

Among the important contributors to the debate around Russian family, Vasily Rozanov had radical solutions for the crisis of the Russian family. He felt the need to bring the discussion about the Russian family from a literary to a philosophical level. He argued that procreation brings a person closer to God and is a way to come into direct contact with Him. In this way, while Fedorov and Tolstoy preached chastity, Rozanov sanctified sexuality.

Rozanov argued that Christianity, and the Orthodox Church in particular, destroyed the family by eradicating physical love between parents and children, and also between husband and wife. He preached a new so-called “Phallic Christianity”, one which according to Mondry (2010), required a new, mystical or metaphysical body to be understood. It was to be created out of a synthesis of the philosophies and representations of the body in Judaism, heathen cultures of ancient times, and the “exotic” orient. Rozanov also used Judaism and the Jewish family as an example of a culture which successfully maintained family structure. He believed that survival of the Russian nation was under threat because of a diminution in understanding of the importance of family in his contemporary Russian society.

Rozanov contributed greatly to the debates about marriage and family life in nineteenth century Russia; he wrote extensively in the conservative and influential newspaper *Novoe Vremia*.

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<sup>182</sup> [http://english.pravda.ru/society/family/12-02-2013/123765-russia\\_bolshevism\\_family-0/](http://english.pravda.ru/society/family/12-02-2013/123765-russia_bolshevism_family-0/)

His preoccupation with, and interest in, these topics of the family originated from his personal experience. As a young man he married Dostoevsky's former mistress, Apollinaria Suslova, but was later unable to obtain a divorce from her. This meant that Rozanov could not legally marry his second partner, Varvara Butiagina. He fathered four illegitimate children with Varvara (Mondry 79).

These ideas received various interpretations in the first post-Soviet decades in connection with the desire of the State to build a new society. After Dostoevsky, Russian anti-utopian writings would find their expression in the works of Vladimir Solov'ev (1853-1900) and Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948). Particularly in his short story "The Antichrist" (1900), Solov'ev refers to some of the topics expressed in Dostoevsky's the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor. As Strada point out, Solov'ev's anti-utopia is a theocracy without Christ, an ideal society that should also engage with the three main Christian churches (the catholic, orthodox and protestant) (Strada 149). Influenced by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Berdyaev is thought to continue the tradition of these writers in exploring the existential problems that have occupied philosophers of the modern era; such as spirituality in society, the existence of God, the nature of human personality, and the goal of history. According to Naiman, Fedorov, who greatly influenced Solov'ev and Berdyaev, portrayed the fatal consequences of childbirth in a biological vein: "Man is born immature; during feeding and upbringing he devours his parents' strength, feeding, so to speak, on their body and blood ...; so that by the time parents have finished bringing up their children, their strength has been absolutely depleted and they die or enter a state of fatal senile decrepitude" (29).

Solov'ev, Berdyaev and Fedorov were all questioning sexual reproduction; love was supposed to connect the individual to others, and sexual intercourse was seen as an inadequate way



of achieving this unity (Naiman 31). Central to the philosophy of Solov'ev was the idea of unity and reconciliation between God and man, with God being the link between man and the world (Freeborn 266).

According to Jutta Scherrer, from 1890 in Russia there was a significant revival of political and spiritual interests in the society. Dostoevsky and Solov'ev were influential, and under their influence some representative of the Russian intelligentsia saw in religion the spiritual strength that could lead to a new society and a new family. Sometimes the new social and religious ideal was based on anarchist, social, or Marxist principles, but it was a sort of religious community, called *obshchestvennost'*, the final goal of this religious quest. It is even possible to speak of religious *Weltanschauung* (Scherrer 202). Dmitri Merezhkovsky (1866-1941) takes from Dostoevsky the concepts of *vsechelovechestvo* ("all-embracing mankind") and *sobornost'* ("spiritual openness" or "the church as fellowship under God") to develop his ideal of faith as a faith that is focussed on God. Merezhkovsky, being influential, attracted the interest of many poets, critics and writers, who saw in Symbolism a new religion. Symbolism was the synthesis of Dostoevsky's personal religious and philosophical quest, and also of the religious circles that developed in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. According to Scherrer, this was the position of not only A. Belyi, V. Ivanov, and A. Blok, but also of S. Solov'ev, and V. Gippius, who saw in reality a symbol of another mystical reality. The symbolist poet was the only one able to create a bridge between the real and the mystical world. V. Ivanov considers symbolism the beginning of a new religious consciousness. For V. Ivanov and A. Belyi, poetry is a quid divine, and the poet is the servant of this divine element. Referring to V. Solov'ev, V. Ivanov developed the idea of the theurgist nature of art and of the artist as theurgist (204). According to Volkov and Kelly, Dostoevsky and Ivanov stressed the anti-Western aspects of *sobornost'*. The group of school boys

gathering around Ilyusha in *The Brothers Karamazov* represents the antithesis of the Western tradition satirised in the “Legend of the Grand Inquisitor”. Here “religion is subordinated to temporal authority” (26).

Initially, symbolists found their faith in art. Symbolists found in the work of Solov’ev the essential elements of their conception of art as religious *Weltanschauung*. Belyi and Blok, who had been influenced greatly by the mystic vision of Solov’ev, and symbolists in general, considered art a way to become closer to God. Later, Misnkii a Jew, converted to Christian Orthodoxy, V. Ivanov became a Catholic, and S. Solov’ev (nephew of V. Solov’ev) became a catholic priest. As Scherrer points out, Rozanov criticized the Church for preaching the ideal of Christianity, rejecting sex, yet all his life he recognized himself as Christian. Under the influence of Rozanov, Zinaida Gippius, Merezhkovskii’s wife, gave a great contribution to the birth of philosophical and religious associations of St. Petersburg. The discussion soon shifted from the topic of art to the religious level, becoming a discussion about Christianity and the church (204-5).

These discussions and debates ended up being collected in the newspaper *Novyi Put’* (“The New Way”, 1903-5), which not only published them, but placed them in a wider context and represented the point of view of the *intelligentsia*. Rozanov mainly published about topics such as illegitimate children, family, and separations. A. Kartasev and Uspenskii became collaborators of *Novyi Put’*, which became one of the most popular sources for the philosophical and religious quest of the *intelligentsia* during the first years of the new century. As Bartlett and Edmondson point out, on the one hand, the Orthodox Church lacked autonomy, on the other hand, the

hundreds of people attending the meetings of the Religious-philosophical Society is insignificant compared to the 20,000 converts to the bible-based Baptist faith by 1903 (173).

### **Summarizing the findings**

This thesis puts important works of Russian literature into the context of the history of the family and issues of sexuality in a broader European discourse in the 19th century. It is based on a choice of themes, from the role of physical love between husband and wife to the upbringing of children. All themes are grounded in the secular views developed by the society's institutions as well as in the role played by Christian institutions in marriage and family life. The thesis discusses the role of the state institutions in the child's education and upbringing, and the changing views on the role of religion in society.

The thesis addresses the representation of different classes, estates and ranks of the society, from the aristocracy and educated professional classes to the peasant classes. It shows that there are marked differences in the role of faith and religious beliefs between the classes in such issues as relationships between sexes, adultery, and children born out of wedlock. It also argues that all three writers understood that there was a considerable gender bias in all classes of the society, and women became victims of male domination not only in peasant families, but also in the gentry classes such as those depicted in Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata*.

As it will be evident from the preceding chapters, Dostoevsky was more ideological than Tolstoy and Chekhov. He thought about solutions for the crisis of the Russian family in a new visionary model of family life that goes beyond the boundaries of a monogamous family unit. As Strada points out, with his new visionary model of the family as expressed in "The

Dream of a Ridiculous Man”, Dostoevsky anticipates the future Russian anti-utopian writings of the twenty century, as in Evgeny Zamyatin’s novel *We* (1924). *We* paves the way for the future evolution of the Soviet society, and is arguably the most prophetic dystopia of the twentieth century. As Thompson points out, this famous twentieth-century dystopia of Evgeny Zamyatin depicts a totalitarian world order in which science and technology are used by the state to exercise total control over human beings, and in doing so, take the de-personalisation of human beings to the extreme (214).

Throughout *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky shows that, the only way to solve the problem of evil and suffering that spring from the exercise of free will, is to choose a life of love and faith, as exemplified by Zosima and Alyosha in the novel. It is not an easy way, as is shown by Alyosha’s crisis of soul after Zosima's death, but it is the humane one. In the chapter “The Grand Inquisitor”, within the poem, Christ’s response to the Inquisitor is simply to kiss him on the lips, a deep gesture of love. Alyosha, following Zosima’s footsteps, is always ready to do something to help others, especially when he sees that they are suffering. Zosima also teaches that every person is responsible for everyone else’s sins. Thus, it is very important for people not to judge others but to practise active love, even regarding criminals. In Dostoevsky’s view, it is only through love that the criminal can repent and be reformed.

During the time of the Great Reforms of the 1860s, Russian society faced crucial changes. Thus for instance, serfs were liberated, the judicial system was reformed, and censorship constraints were reduced. However, despite these reforms the traditional social order remained largely intact. This is reflected in the fact that male workers and peasants exercised patriarchal authority in their households; women who earned their wages outside home were still tied to their

menfolk. The years between 1881 and 1905 were characterized by the contradictory policies of political reaction and rapid industrialization. Alexander III reversed what the Great Reforms had implemented twenty years earlier with the emancipation of serfs in 1861. These changes in Russian society deeply affected the family as the nucleus of society.

Thus, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov were exploring not only different approaches to revealing the family in crisis, but also different ways of addressing and solving the crisis in the Russian family. Tolstoy, a count, depicts in *The Kreutzer Sonata* an aristocratic family, while Dostoevsky, *raznochinetz* (a 19th century Russian intellectual, but not of the landed gentry class) portrays a similar type of family, though one of a lower social strata and in transition towards the new type of family. Tolstoy moves away from the patriarchal family structure as depicted in *Anna Karenina* and, in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, portrays a new marriage based on feelings and emotions. He preached charitable chastity and charity within marriage. Later, he would reach extreme views about sexuality, considering sexuality as evil and, as such, something that should be avoided. Thus, the ideal for Tolstoy, was an ascetic-monastic style of life.

Tolstoy places the responsibility for failure in marriage on the neglect of charitable love within the conjugal relationship. Clowes argues that in *The Power of Darkness* Tolstoy reasserts the moral authority of the fathers over the children (281). I argue that the author, through his play, communicates an implicit Christian message that those who do not follow the principles of the Bible will bring ruin and destruction to the family. For Tolstoy the new social development is not only a sign of peasants' illiteracy and ignorance, but also a manifestation of his own understanding of the inner nature of capitalism. Thus, I emphasised the link between the development of capitalism and the loss of Christian moral foundations of the peasant family.

Chekhov belonged to a new generation and lived in a transitional period in the history of the Russian family, a time of changing attitudes to sexuality and social structures. In his short stories and novellas, he came up with new ideas about love and family life. Thus, for instance, an example of new trends in Russian society regarding love is the fact that people started marrying without asking for permission from their parents. Previously, no one could marry without the permission of parents or other appropriate authorities (Engelstein 32). Chekhov for the first time shows the signs of new trends in Russian society. Thus, for example Misail and Mariia in the story “My Life” do not ask for permission from their parents before getting married.

As Engelstein points out, Chekhov shows that cohabitation had become the norm, and personal relations were less private than in the patriarchal community (31). Chekhov in the *Island of Sakhalin* portrays cases of homosexuality, but the regime of lawlessness that governed Russia’s penal servitude made no attempt to regulate sexual conduct in the colony (31). Engelstein highlights that the freedom to express sexuality appeared to be the result of a condition of sexual impunity that “mirrored the impunity of the administrative role” (31). Zalambani argues that with secularization and the increase in the number of divorces it became possible to marry because of love and then separate or get a divorce when love was no longer there, as the many cases of adultery in society demonstrated (Zalambani, *La Sonata a Kreutzer*, 23). Chekhov left everything and travelled to the distant Island of Sakhalin, where he spent three months. He made this trip because he felt the need to help the exiles there and improve their conditions of life (Ratushinskaya ix). Like Tolstoy, who felt the desire to improve Russian society and at Iasnaia Poliana established a school for the education of peasants, Chekhov thought about a whole new program to make the Island a better place. This included establishing churches, schools, hospitals, improving prison conditions, and catering for the needs of the

exiles' families (Ratushinskaya xiv). As Ratushinskaya points out, for Chekhov, children were the future of the Russian family in this colony; they represented the only hope for a better future for the exiled adults, who lived such a difficult and hard life (xii). All three authors, in different ways, tried to improve the state of Russian society and looked for solutions to the moral degeneration of the family, in the realm of ideas but also practically.

### **The topic of children in the work of the three writers - a few concluding paragraphs**

I argue that all three writers show humanitarian compassion for what society would classify as sins and crime, and demonstrate that women and children often become victims of domestic crimes of passion across social classes.

As we have seen, Tolstoy critically addressed the issue of infanticide among the peasant communities in his play *The Power of Darkness*. Moreover, it is important to notice that for Tolstoy of the later period, birth and offspring were linked to the infernal and children die in a remarkable way in his works. Thus for instance, as Helle points out, in a later work like *Resurrection* (1899) sexual relations are depicted with very dark tones. Fertilization itself is a moment marked by death and pregnancy is considered as something threatening and evil (31). Count Nekhljudov, the main character of this story, has become more and more ascetic and associates his sister's pregnancy with infection. For Tolstoy, the child represents our human perishability. Every birth is a manifestation of our animalistic side having killed our spiritual ego. For the author, the ideal is asexual marriage and voluntary abstention from having children. *The Kreutzer Sonata* is also another story where children feature as an important component of the family. *The Kreutzer Sonata* is very autobiographical; it summarises the Tolstoys' marital conflicts of the 1880s. The story mentions his wife's horror when Tolstoy showed her his premarital sexual encounters in his diary,

his own lust and jealousy. As it will be clearer from the preceding chapters, Pozdnyshev's position regarding children seems to be contradictory. On the one hand, he argues that to a labouring man, children are necessary; though it is hard to feed them, still he needs them. Because of children his marital relations have a justification. On the other hand, he thinks that children are unnecessary and an additional care and expense especially when they are sick. Thus, for Tolstoy both positions are true. To get married and have children is good for a man if he cannot restrain his sexual appetites. But if man can instead devote himself to God than marriage is even unnecessary and problematic: “Если же он в состоянии весь отдаться служению Богу и людям, забывая себя в этом служении, то для такого человека брак несомненно был бы падением и помехою...”<sup>183</sup> (Tolstoy, *O Polovom Voprose*, 4). Finally, it is important to remember that in real life, Tolstoy was a great spiritual guide and an educator, he established a school for children in Iasnaia Poliana, where he tried to transmit knowledge in a nurturing and happy community. As Moulin points out, according to Tolstoy, educational ideas should be founded on moral and spiritual teachings. For him children should be free to learn, he did not see education as a way of shaping children according to his principles, but he rather encouraged children to explore the world around them and to find their place in it (Moulin 352).

The topic of children also occupied the mind of the other Great Russian writer of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature, Dostoevsky. This theme was for the author “one of the most important themes in his portrayal of contemporary society” (Grossman 572). As Breger Luis points out, Dostoevsky's novels are filled with abused and victimized children, yet he came from a respectable middle-class family, where he or his brothers and sisters were never beaten nor

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<sup>183</sup> “If he is able to devote himself completely to the service of God and the people, forgetting about himself in this ministry, then for him marriage would be for sure an obstacle and would fall.”



hungry (Breger 70). As we have seen, the problem of suffering in *The Brothers Karamazov* is voiced by Ivan. The goal of the original Christian message, that for which human suffering is permitted in the first place, is for Ivan unachievable for most human beings. Ivan's children are mainly depicted in the three following famous instances:

First, Ivan turns to the Turks, who torture children with pleasure:

Cutting unborn babies with daggers from their mothers' wombs and throwing infants in the air to catch them on bayonets' points before the mothers' eyes. It is in the mothers' eyes that they find the essence of sweetness...Imagine a baby in its mother's trembling arms, surrounded by Turks. They have hit upon something hilarious: they pet the baby and laugh to make it laugh. They are successful, and the baby laughs. At that instant a Turk points his pistol at the infant's face, four inches away. As the baby boy reaches out with his little hands to grasp the pistol and giggles with joy, the artist suddenly pulls the trigger right in his face and disintegrates his little head...Artistic, is it not? By the way, they say the Turks love sweet things (Book 5, ch. 4).

Second, a five-year-old little girl daughter is beaten and tortured by her cultured, smart, and much appreciated parents. Finally, her mother smears her daughter's face with her own excrement as she is not yet night-toilet-trained, forces her to eat the same, and then locks her one freezing night in their outside latrine.

Third, a general orders an eight-year-old boy to be hunted down by hounds before his mother's eyes because by accident the boy injured the general's favourite hound's paw with a stone.

In two of the above mentioned pictures, not only was the child brutally beaten, but the mother was forced to watch. Thus, as Rowe points out, Dostoevsky makes the reader experience the mother's suffering both for the child and for the mother. Ironically, Ivan is not supporting the point he shall ultimately make, returning the ticket because of one innocent child's suffering, as much as another: it is the mother's suffering that is so deep and unbearable. Moreover, these mothers are, in effect, "the neighbour" Ivan finds it so difficult to love (7). While Rowe correctly states that one easily feels that the parents have let down their five-year-old little daughter, he is mistaken in saying that God has also let her down. As one reads in the Bible: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" Thus, God will never forget or abandon his children, even when parents might do so" (Isaiah 49:15). Therefore, Dostoevsky wants to show that suffering is a necessary condition to be redeemed, that through faith in God man can be saved. And innocent victims are victims of the world, they cannot help but bear the pain. However, these little creatures will be surely in Heaven, singing with the angels of God.

Similar cases to those of Ivan's children are depicted in *The Diary of a Writer* (e.g. the Kornilova Case and the Kroneberg Case), where Dostoevsky highlights that parents were acquitted and that cases like these were very common in contemporary Russian society. Ivan suggested that these parents "love" their children because they love to victimize them (Rowe 8). Moreover, the parents cannot pardon their children for being their victims; for the parents it is even the children's fault for their wrongdoings as the children "allow" the parents to commit such crimes (Rowe 8).

As we have seen, for Dostoevsky the children are the future of the family and thus of Russian society; they represent all hopes for a better future. He is very sympathetic to children who faced domestic tensions. He calls such children "accidental" members of "accidental" families, as if they were outcasts of the society, which they were. Dostoevsky also often speaks of the suffering of mankind. But, he says, it is better to limit the discussion to the sufferings of children. In *The Brothers Karamazov* Ivan concludes that he returns the ticket, since he cannot accept a world in which an innocent child must suffer to achieve some higher perfection. However, Alyosha reminds Ivan of Christ's sacrifice for all of humanity; Christ too was innocent but suffered so that humanity might be saved.

Dmitri is so touched by the children's sufferings and trauma that he challenges the ways parents even deny food to their children. He is traumatised by this lack of love. Thus, Dmitri's dream is a reflection of the social situation of the children at the time (Book IX, Ch. 8).

Early in *The Brothers Karamazov*, a woman comes to see Father Zosima, who is blessing the people. Her first three little children are dead, and she has just buried her fourth and last, a boy of three. She cannot forget him. Zosima tells her of another mother, centuries before, who had also wept for her dead child, her only one. She was told by a saint that such children are so bold before God's throne that he immediately makes them angels. The woman answers that her husband had tried to comfort her with similar words: "...our little son is surely now singing with the angels in heaven." The following words of Zosima are thus intensified by a dual prelude:

Each time you weep, remember fervently that your little son is one of God's angels and that he looks down and sees you, rejoicing at your tears and pointing at them to God (Book 2, ch. 3)

Moreover, referring to the fact that this woman has left her sick husband in order to come to the monastery, Father Zosima concludes:

Your boy will see from heaven that you have forsaken his father, and will weep for you. Why, therefore, do you destroy his bliss? For he is alive and living, since his soul shall live forever...And to whom shall we go, finding his father and mother asunder? Now you dream of him and grieve, but then he will send you gentle dreams.  
(Dostoevsky, IX, 66)

Father Zosima supports her grief, but also redirects her to not forget others; she will give security to her departed child if she remembers the baby's father. Dostoevsky also uses children in his works in order to express ideas about a new society and a better future for Russia. "It is through the focus of children that Dostoevsky indulges his sense of hope" (de Jonge 182). The author depicts cruelties on children at the hand of adults; he shows the difference between the innocent nature of children and corrupted nature of adults. In dealing with these atrocities the author stresses that children must learn to sacrifice themselves in order to oppose these burdens. Thus, for instance in *The Brothers Karamazov*, he first depicts the boy Kolya Krasotkin, who says: "I am a socialist...the Christian religion has served only the rich and the nobility, enabling them to keep the lower class in bondage". In contrast to this figure of Kolya as a revolutionary, the author portrays that of Ilyusha Snegiryov, who fights for his father's honour. He defends his father, but gets teased and comes home from school beaten. He bears the burden of these physical abuses. Ilyusha thinks about his father, even before his own death. Dostoevsky wants to show the boy's sense of responsibility for this situation. At end of the novel Alyosha encourages the children at Ilyusha's funeral to be kind and courageous in life, like Ilyusha was but also like Kolya. Alyosha

also urges the children to maintain throughout their lives that sense of unity that they were experiencing at that moment. It seems that Dostoevsky by highlighting the pure and innocent nature of children wants to show that they are even more mature than adults. It is probably their innocent features that attract the corrupt adults and that ultimately lead them to abuse or even destroy these little, charming creatures.

Chekhov, who wrote in a transitional period for the history of the Russian family, witnessed a proliferation of educational and health manuals for schools and parents devoted to the upbringing of children. This is a change as before parents did not even bond with their children because they expected them to die (Taylor 217). However, partly because Chekhov himself was married only for four years, he and Ol'ga were not successful in having a child, and he was often too sick to do much writing, his stories and plays do not express much of the happiness that can come from a good marriage. Moreover, as we have seen, the author in his works presents examples of children who are mistreated at the hands of adults, as for example, in his stories "Peasants" (1897) and "Baby" (Peasant women). According to Gromov, the conflict of fathers and sons is a characteristic feature of Chekhov's entire work (Gromov). In particular, Chekhov addresses the topic of children's development in his story "The Steppe". Here the major theme is Yegorushka's awakening to the complex and often cruel world beyond childhood. For Chekhov, the steppe is a metaphor for life, and Yegorushka's journey through a portion of it is a significant stage in his growing up. At the end of the journey, Yegorushka has had many experiences. He is still a nine-year-old, but one who has painfully overcome his initiation to the next stage in his life. As Peterson points out, if Tolstoy thinks about the happiness of childhood from a temporal distance, Chekhov observes the "childhood's complex otherness" in his relationship with the world of the adults (Peterson 527).

Overall, the focus on children in the works of these three writers is different. Dostoevsky was very much concerned with the issue of children's sexuality. As a journalist he had a hands-on attitude to societal issues, and visited children's colonies and orphanages, as well as covering in his journalistic writing criminal court cases involving child abuse. Dostoevsky's metaphysical childhood solves the issue of unjust suffering by returning to a metaphysical state of innocence where it is possible to see some goodness within oneself. Moreover, Dostoevsky's preoccupation with children and children's sexuality is especially evident when the author saw the danger of the radical theories about love and sexuality that had started to become popular in contemporary society. He was therefore concerned about what would happen to the children produced by non-traditional sexual arrangements. His contemporary Tolstoy does not write about this topic, but he addresses the issue of infanticide because it was more widespread in rural communities which he knew better than Dostoevsky. Tolstoy in his works focussed more on the relationships between husband and wife and between parents and children, but children mainly figure as a barrier that adds to the tensions, or, like in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, as "pawns" in the battle for control over the married life between Pozdnyshev and his wife (Terras 453). However, in real life the topic of children, especially their education and upbringing was crucial for Tolstoy. He was a great children's spiritual educator and pedagogue, as his experience at the teaching school in Iasnaia Poliana tells us. He was concerned with the intellectual, social and moral development of a child, not only formal teaching (Lushchevska 60). Chekhov, on the other hand, as a doctor, addresses the topic of children's sexuality in his notes to the "Steppe", where he intended to show the early sexual development of children in Russia. He was also concerned with the problem of children's development, education, parenting and the role of authority, as is clear from some of his short stories.

### **Concluding Remarks - Differences between biological and psychological and religious-mystical approaches to the relationships between sexes in the works of the three authors**

Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's inner struggles around their understanding of the meaning of Christianity in relation to everyday reality and their quest to understand violent and irrational behaviour among the Christian people are reflected in their addressing the set of issues around the crises of the Russian family.

This thesis argues that each writer's own class and family background had a strong influence on their views on the set of questions concerning the problems faced by the Russian family. In this section, I will examine the authors' biological and psychological, as well as religious-mystical outlook to determine whether there are any differences in their approaches to the relationships between sexes as reflected in their work.

Tolstoy was a child when his parents died. Then as a young man he lost his brother Dmitri as well, a haunting episode he pictured in the death scene of Nikolay Levin, Konstantin's brother, in *Anna Karenina*. Traumatized by this experience as a child, Tolstoy tried desperately to rationalize death as part of life. Tolstoy and his four siblings were then transferred to the care of another aunt in Kazan, in western Russia. Tolstoy remembered a cousin who lived at Iasnaia Poliana, Tatyana Aleksandrovna Yergolskaya ("Aunt Toinette," as he called her), as the greatest influence on his childhood, and later, as a young man, Tolstoy wrote some of his most touching letters to her. Despite the constant presence of death, Tolstoy remembered his childhood in idyllic terms. His first published work, *Detstvo* (1852; *Childhood*), was a fictionalized and nostalgic account of his early years.

As a rich young man, Tolstoy liked to drink, gamble, and spend time with beautiful women, including prostitutes. However, while his sexual appetite never disappeared, later in life Tolstoy started to become bothered by his own womanizing behaviour and decided to change. He courted a pretty young woman named Sophia. However, before they wedded he showed her his personal diary, where he explained all of his past sexual relations. It also included claims of an illegitimate child. Sophia decided to still marry him, but the diary was a real shock to her. This tells us about Tolstoy's personal attitude towards women. Tolstoy was afraid of them, as according to the author, their behaviour is not dictated by reason, but they are emotional and therefore closer to the animal life. For Tolstoy, women's animalistic sensuality was very powerful and women can even take advantage of this power. Tolstoy considered the woman's body the temple of perversion and she was for him a sexual manipulator. Thus, for instance, one can see how the topic of the evils of sexual passion is also the subject of Tolstoy's two other stories, *The Devil* (started in 1889 and finished in 1890) and *Father Sergius* (started in 1890 and finished in 1898). Therefore, the author wanted to free women from the yoke of sexuality. In his opinion, ideal women are those deprived of any feminine attribute, in other words, those who suppress their sexual nature.

Tolstoy was also blind to the fact that sexuality can encompass elements of tenderness, friendship, and spirituality. For Tolstoy God is love; where there is love there is God. The divine core of every human being is in their compassion and ability to love. Sin is loss of love, a punishment itself and the only way to find redemption is through love itself. This theme runs through all Tolstoy's fiction, from his early story "Family Happiness" (1859) to his final novel *Resurrection* (1899). All Tolstoy's characters are searching for a form of Christian love, a sense of relatedness to other human beings that alone can give a meaning and a purpose to their lives.



At the age of fifty, Tolstoy came to reject the doctrine of the Church, the Trinity, the Resurrection, the whole notion of a divine Christ, and instead started to preach a practical religion based on Christ's example as a living human being. But Tolstoy was not a revolutionary, he rejected the violence of the socialists. He was a pacifist. In his view, the only way to fight injustice and oppression was by obeying Christ's teachings.

The revolution of 1917 has obscured from our view the threat which Tolstoy's simple reading of the Gospels posed to Church and state. By the time of his excommunication in the 1900s Tolstoy had a truly national following. His Christian anarchism was hugely appealing to the peasantry, and as such it was perceived as a major threat to the established Church, even to the Tzar. Any social revolution in Russia was bound to have a spiritual base, and even the most atheistic socialists were conscious of the need to give religious connotations to their stated goals.

As R. F. Christian points out, Tolstoy found that the best prescription for a happy and worthwhile life was to follow the essence of Christ's teaching as he interpreted it. This meant to follow the principles of the turning the other cheek, non-resistance to evil by force, loving one's neighbour and forgiving one's enemies. However, Tolstoy could not follow what he preached (236).

"For 70 years he wrote in 1899, I have been lowering my opinion of women more and more, and I need to lower it still further"<sup>184</sup>. He also once admitted to finding it difficult to love a Jew, adding that he must try hard. However, it is not so much his prejudices that dominate the diaries of his old age as the personal tragedy of a man who tried to live and to love his neighbours in an environment from which he was growing increasingly alienated, while

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<sup>184</sup> *Diary entry of 20 November 1899, PSS 53: 231.*

continuing to be surrounded by a loving family and the appreciation of many men and women throughout the world. These diaries record his sense of solitude and isolation, his anguish at being frequently misunderstood and on numerous occasions his desire to die.

“His [Dostoevsky’s] father was a self-made man and his mother came from the newly rich merchant class. His family was in transition between the traditional religious values of previous generations and the new urban, bourgeois way of life” (Breger 93). In his family, children were encouraged to work hard at school and later at the university, they received appreciation from their parents for their academic achievements. As Breger points out, the family embodied a mixture of old and new values, love and affectivity along with competition, “idealism and corruption” (93). The familial context in which Dostoevsky was born influenced the author’s personality as well as his own views on family and sexuality. His mother was very loving and affectionate, and there was intimacy between the many siblings. This made Dostoevsky very secure of himself, as well as a leader among his other brothers. As a family, they liked reading literature, learning, and studying together. However, Dostoevsky had great inner divisions. As Breger points out, there was a powerful ambivalence in his relationships with his mother, father, and brothers, which led him to feel a great sense of guilt. Later in life, this feeling of guilt manifested in his relationships with women. He, for example, tormented women, wrote of their murder, and metaphorically incorporated his mother’s tuberculosis into his own body. He fought against his father’s values. However, much of Dostoevsky’s personality reveals characteristic features of his father. He, like his father, was short-tempered, irritable, and easily offended. As Breger highlights, Dostoevsky’s life was marked by a regular pattern of attachment to the sisters of the women he was in love with. This was the case for Varvara Constant (sister of Maria, his first wife), Nadezhda Suslova (sister of his mistress, Apollinaria Suslova), and Sophia

Kovalevskaya (to whose sister Anan Korvin-Krukovskaya he proposed between his two marriages). Dostoevsky identified in his sisters a model of loving woman. Moreover, the different pictures of child suffering and child abuse that he depicts in his works are not only a reflection of the disintegration of the contemporary Russian society, but also an expression of his inner feelings of the anger, jealousy and guilt he experienced while he lived with his mother, father, and siblings.

As Figs Orlando points out, Chekhov was not an atheist, but in the last year of his life he said he had no faith. He had a religious attitude which was quite complex and ambivalent (346). Chekhov had grown up in a religious family, and throughout his life he practised the rituals of the Church. He liked reading about the Russian monasteries and the lives of saints. He collected icons and in his house in Yalta there was a crucifix on his bedroom wall. Chekhov loved to hear the Church bells and he often went to Church and enjoyed the services. He several times thought of becoming a monk himself and his works reflect the author's religious outlook. Thus, for instance, stories like "The Bishop" (1902), "The Student" (1894), "On the Road" (1886), and "Ward N. 6" (1892) are concerned with the search for faith (Figs 347). However, Chekhov was also influenced by very negative experiences towards religion: his father beat his children and taught them how to cheat customers, yet he was in his own eyes a religious man. Chekhov's father, a grocer, was intense, religious, and demanding of his family. He imposed to his children to participate at a religious choir and sing at various churches. Chekhov did not like these obligations. Thus, later in life he became a man of culture, and believed that "work was useless unless it improved humankind's lot".<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> "Biography" *Critical Edition of Dramatic Literature* Ed. Carl Rollyson, Inc. 2003.

Thus, of all the three writers Chekhov is the more forgiving of deviations from the prescribed normative behaviour in relation to the set of issues around the family, such as adultery and divorce. Chekhov's moral code often clashed with conventional morality. He is sympathetic with the adulterers in "The Lady with the Lap Dog" and "About Love" (1898). In the first story, Gurov lives an adulterous affair which appears to be much better as compared to his married life. Chekhov shows that sexuality is not evil for the pursuit of romanticism is very much alive, and is itself the hope for the family despite the crisis, as the name of the heroine Nadezhda (meaning "hope") shows. In "The Darling" (1899), the heroine is happy when she is completely absorbed in the man in her life. Chekhov treats her with irony. He is not a judge of his characters and what they say; his only task is to be impartial witness. Chekhov belonged to the period that followed the heroic generation of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. He and often his characters are sceptics rather than believers; while Tolstoy and Dostoevsky were prophets, he was a critic and a satirist. However, this thesis shows that even such a sceptic as Chekhov was respectful of Christian ethics in relation to the link between the well-being of the society and the healthy family. As will be clear from the preceding chapters, Chekhov's amorous life starts in 1873, when as a teenager he visited a brothel in his home town of Taganrog. It continued until 1898 with a series of premarital sexual relationships until he fell in love with the actress Olga Knipper. Chekhov was then ill, and eventually married Olga in 1901. However, it is important to notice that previously in 1886 he was engaged to an educated and culturally motivated woman, Evdokiia Efros. Elena Tolstoy in her article "From Susanna to Sarra: Chekhov 1886-1887" (1991) states that Chekhov's drama "Ivanov" precisely shows the author's romantic experience with Evdokiia Efros. As Helena Tolstoy points out, in 1960 it was published in a centennial volume of Chekhoviana n. 68 of *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, which included nearly complete versions of the

young Chekhov's letter to his friend Viktor Bilibin. These letters, dated from January to April 1886, chronicle this stormy love affair, Chekhov's proposal and the almost immediate breakup (590). The relationship with Efros left a deep mark on Chekhov's behaviour towards women. He became known as a cold womanizer who avoided all commitment. Thus, the women who attracted him were independent, exotic, different, all qualities he had found in Efros.

While Dostoevsky had a peculiar family history and his former lover became eventually Rozanov's wife, Tolstoy as a young man had many sexual relationships with women. He struggled all his life with the problem of sex and his great sexual drive. Finally, Chekhov, as his biographer Donald Rayfield argues, had "thousands" of women with whom he had sex (most of them were his fans and readers), or extramarital relationships. The personal upbringing of all three writers as well as their attitude to the relationships between the sexes differed, but their literary and philosophical works were all concerned with the topic of family and sexuality. Moreover, the authors all had in common unrestrained promiscuity of their physical selves which they tried to 'beautify' and, more importantly, 'redeem' with all kinds of artificial Christological theories and idealized utopian concepts.

However, it is salutary to see how all the ideas of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Chekhov, and of all the philosophers and religious thinkers of their times, have impacted so many lives and highlighted problems that Russia faces today. Their personal and subjective interpretations of Christian ideas about family, sexuality (within and outside the family) and relations between the sexes in general, carry consequences up till now. Exploring the impact of these ideas on contemporary Russian society could be a matter of further development from this study. In their own time, the authors under investigation were viewed as both radical and reactionary. Yet, their

influence on their contemporary society was formative and significant. As the most celebrated and respected members of the Russian cultural canon, their work and thought will continue to contribute to the Russian discourse on the family.

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