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A Critical Examination of Love, Marriage, and Society in Late 19th Century Aristocratic Russia As Seen Through Works of Tolstoy and Chekov

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A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF LOVE, MARRIAGE, AND SOCIETY IN LATE 19th CENTURY ARISTOCRATIC RUSSIA AS SEEN THROUGH WORKS OF TOLSTOY AND CHEKHOV

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Abstract

Literature is a valuable resource for understanding the ideas, values, and social concepts of a given time period and culture. 19th Century Russian literature has some particularly pertinent works that quite clearly reflect societal views of love and marriage at the time and show the dynamic relationship between literature and social sentiment. By looking at the historical context of these works and analyzing the works within the historical context, we can better comprehend the social values of the time period. Further, through a chronological analysis of the texts, it is possible to see the progression of thought and view the changing values and sentiments of the time as they are changing within the texts and the world around them.

Introduction

Literature is often seen as a window of sorts through which we as a people can gain a better sense of past realities, especially in the social realm. This is especially evident when examining love and marriage in aristocratic life in 19th Century Russia. By examining 19th Century social norms, church-state relations, and views of marriage in Russia, one can see how clearly the great writers of this time provide a looking glass into this time through their works.

Like in many countries during the 19th Century, the institute of marriage among Russian aristocrats was rarely motivated by any romantic inclinations; rather, it was largely a function of attempting to attain or maintain social status, power, and money. With such situations, it is easy to understand why marital displeasure and extramarital affairs were so often depicted in novels of the day, either as a central focus (such as in Chekhov's *Lady with the Dog*) or as a secondary theme (as is the case with Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*).

As was typical of most modernized countries of the day, divorce was often looked upon unfavorably by society and annulment of marriage was rare. Further, these forms of marital dissolution in Russia were largely controlled by the Orthodox Church and were sexist in nature. Regardless of who the guilty party was in the case of an extramarital affair or other case for dissolution of marriage, the male usually had all discretionary power – it was the man that had to petition for divorce. That is, provided he could obtain a divorce in the first place. Even if he were able to acquire a divorce, the chance that he would be granted an annulment was highly unlikely. In order to understand these

concepts, society, the church, the church's role in society with respect to these social institutions must be examined more deeply.

Men and Women in Imperial Russian Aristocracy

As was typical of the era in most countries, in Russian society women were often subjugated to men. The deep-rooted patriarchical social structure was evident everywhere: a woman was constantly under the rule of the dominant male in her life—either her father or husband. He had the social right to dictate where and whether or not she could work, study, or travel.[1] Women were frequently married against their will, and divorce rights for women were scant. The position of women in society was not only socially dictated, but in fact even legally determined to be lesser than that of the Russian male. This is no more evident than in the 1836 Code of Russian Laws, in which it was stated, "The woman must obey her husband, reside with him in love, respect and unlimited obedience, and offer him every pleasantness and affection as the ruler of the household."[2] In fact, men could legally beat their wives without punishment, provided that the women were not "seriously injured".[3] Such laws further reinforced the unwritten rules of society that women were to be submissive to the dominant male in their lives.

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[1] Peter Waldron. Then End of Imperial Russia, 1855-1917. New York: St. Martin_P, 1997. pp 69-70.
[2] Walter G. Moss. A History of Russia. Vol. I. New York: McGraw-Hill Primis Custom Publishing, 2001. p 387.
[3] *Ibid.*

Russian Orthodoxy, Marriage, Divorce and Annulment in 19th Century Russia

This strict patriarchical control was only further fed by events in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries when the Orthodox Church began to try to redefine its role in society. From 1760 to 1860, the church established a number of rules and regulations to "regulate the familial order." Of the many social issues over which the church had an influence, perhaps the most significant was its role in marriage and divorce, as the church held sole control over both institutions.[4] As church organization and infrastructure improved during the latter half of the 18th Century, it was able to better exert its control over such social institutions. This was largely due to an expansion in the network of diocesan administration, which the church accomplished by decreasing the size of its dioceses and heightening supervision from the church authorities.[5] This renaissance of the church was widely felt, both through the expansion and organization of power, but also for the simple fact that great initiative took care to see that the study and dissemination of the dogma and the history of the church was widespread.[6] As the Orthodox Church was the dominant religious institution, (70 percent of the Empire's population at the time[7]) and the fact that the church was staffed by over 100,000 clerics,[8] the effects of the decisions of this institution deeply affected the social atmosphere of the people.

Even prior to this time, the rules regarding dissolution of marriage were rigid and granted on few specific grounds, namely, adultery, sexual incapacity, or desertion.[9] After the Church reforms, these rules became increasingly restrictive and systematic,

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[4] Gregory L Freeze. "Bringing Order to the Russian Family: Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia, 1760-1860." Journal of Modern History 62 (1990): p 709.
[5] *Ibid* p 716.
[6] Marc Raeff. Understanding Imperial Russia. New York: Columbia UP, 1984. pp 154-155.
[7] Peter Waldron. Then End of Imperial Russia, 1855-1917. New York: St. Martin_P, 1997. p 79.
[8] *Ibid.*
[9] Gregory L. Freeze. "Bringing Order to the Russian Family: Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia, 1760-1860." Journal of Modern History 62 (1990) p 710.

essentially eliminating most legal routes through which a marriage could be terminated through divorce, separation, or annulment. This strict rule on marital institution held fast from the late 18th Century until 1917.[10] The role of the church remained especially strong, as during this time period there was a "...renewed interest in the ...tradition of Orthodoxy..."[11] among the aristocratic class.

As a woman, it would be next to impossible to obtain a divorce without the overt consent of a husband. Indeed, men were still "explicitly head of the household"[12] giving them sole jurisdiction over such social actions. Marriage itself was largely a social function. In fact, the church specifically rejected "notions of romantic and especially carnal love; thus a pastoral guide of 1795 enjoined the priest to ask the prospective spouses whether 'they make, as the basis for their conjugal life, carnal passion or a virtuous Christian life'".[13] If social norms weren't binding enough, the fact that the very organization that institutionalized and held strict control over marriage overtly spoke against and actively sought to prevent the notion of romantic love all but eliminated the prospect of such an engagement. This presents a clear image as to the sociological conditions and views towards the institution itself.

From a modern perspective, it is easy to see why marital discontent was so often a theme in the literature of this time. Beyond the difficulties in initiating the procedures, divorce and annulment also proved difficult socially if by some means they were actually acquired. Divorce itself could be initiated by one of the partners (typically only the male),

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[10] Gregory L. Freeze. "Bringing Order to the Russian Family: Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia, 1760-1860." Journal of Modern History 62 (1990): p 713.
[11] Marc Raeff. Understanding Imperial Russia. New York: Columbia UP, 1984. p 153.
[12] Gregory L. Freeze. "Bringing Order to the Russian Family: Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia, 1760-1860." Journal of Modern History 62 (1990): p 721.
[13] *Ibid.*

but in the case of divorce, only the innocent party would be allowed to remarry. Annulment (after which both parties could legally remarry) usually required that the proceedings be initiated by authorities. Such an arrangement was incredibly rare—from 1836-1860, the church only issued an average of 33 annulments per year.[14] The church simply did not want to annul marriage: its concentrated power combined with the mission of "re-sanctifying" the institution of marriage left little room for total dissolution of marriage, much less in a manner that allowed for former members of what was viewed as such a sacred institution to not only dissolve their relation, but also to be endowed with the ability to legally engage in another.

While annulments were rare, divorce was just as vehemently discouraged by the church. From 1836-1860, only 58 divorces were permitted per year for the entire empire, most of which were only permitted on the grounds of Siberian exile or desertion. Divorce permitted on the grounds of adultery or sexual incapacity was scant. Although scripture and cannon law both permitted divorce in such situations, the thrust for preservation of the sanctity of the institution was so strong that even these cases were resisted. Further, in the rare case that a divorce was granted, the social shame faced by the innocent party combined with the punishment so often imposed upon the guilty party served to further discourage initiation. Besides a lifelong ban on remarriage, the guilty party would also often have to engage in public penance of some form—a typical example would involve monastic incarceration and public prostrations begging for

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[14] Gregory L. Freeze. "Bringing Order to the Russian Family: Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia, 1760-1860." Journal of Modern History 62 (1990): pp 723-724.

forgiveness.[15] Remarriage was outright forbidden for the guilty party and difficult at best for the innocent.

Society, Love, and Marriage

Within the society of the Russian nobility, marriage was considered a central event, concerning the lives and interests not only of the betrothed, but also, and possibly more importantly, the families of the wedded couple. A good example of this social norm comes from a story published in Moscow, in which a father who forbade his daughter from marrying a man (whom she loved) without rank, money, or any real social status. He was considered by both contemporary readers and characters within the story to be a good father.[16] A more concrete illustration of the woman's role in marriage can be seen by looking at a petition from a Russian noblewoman. While such actions were relatively rare, (that is, a woman petitioning for the divorce) the petition itself provides a case example of marriage among noble families:

> Prior to our wedding my husband did not have the slightest affection and love for me (as became apparent by his subsequent behavior), but his sole aim in marrying me was to exercise his rights as my husband and to enjoy the landed estate which my father deigned to grant me. This is exactly what happened: after we married, he not only did not leave his mistress ..., but with no shame or sense of decency, and to vex and humiliate me, he treated her like his legal wife. And all the time he constantly subjected me to every conceivable mistreatment.[17]

Marriage within this social group was often arranged between families, and more often than not, the male was significantly older than the female. Data show the average

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[15] *Ibid,* pp 733-740.
[16] David L. Ransel, ed. The Family in Imperial Russia. Urbana: University of Illinois P, 1978. pp 19-20.
[17] Gregory L. Freeze. From Supplication to Revolution: a Documentary Social History of Imperial Russia. New York: Oxford UP, 1988. p 98.

marrying age of men in Russia during the latter part of the 19th Century was 41 years, whereas for women during this same time period the age average age was 23.[18]

With the historical context in mind, it is easy to see these social norms illuminated in the works of Tolstoy and Chekhov. Both writers were highly concerned "contemporary problems and matters of universal significance"[19], and consciously wrote on themes such as the role of women in society (i.e. the "women's question"). Further, through a close examination of the two in chronological order, one can see the progression of change in these social norms through these stories.

Анна Каренина - *Anna Karenina*

While the love affair between the title character, Anna Karenina and Alexei Vronsky is not the central theme of Tolstoy's epic novel, it does provide a case example of aristocratic society's view on marriage, love, and extramarital affairs. Indeed, the infamous opening line, "All happy families are alike, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way",[20] sets the tone for a work centered on societal relations.

The novel was originally published in 1877, which sheds some light as to the sense of a transition in sentiments in the novel. It was met with immediate popularity and shrouded in some controversy, as it brought to the forefront the issue of a woman's place in the family and society. This gave significant support to the concept that such issues were of great import to society at that time.[21] Indeed, Tolstoy was quite consciously addressing the "women's question" when he wrote *Anna Karenina*. A member of the

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[18] David L. Ransel, ed. The Family in Imperial Russia. Urbana: University of Illinois P, 1978. p 266.
[19] Peter Waldron. Then End of Imperial Russia, 1855-1917. New York: St. Martin_P, 1997. p 105.
[20] Leo Tolstoy. Anna Karenina. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003. p 5.
[21] Jessica Tovrov. "Mother-Child Relationships Among the Russian Nobility." (1978). p 15.

aristocracy himself, Tolstoy's presentation of the love affair in *Anna Karenina* has a sense of authenticity that the author himself looked at as typical, and in its commonplace nature, borderline mundane. As he was once quoted, "What's so difficult about describing how an officer gets entangled with a woman?"[22] His style in this novel is often touted as aloof and coldly objective, an indication of the veracity of the social interactions and issues in the novel. Tolstoy employed extreme situations in order to exemplify his point of view, but the fact remains that his depictions of marriage for societal reasons, adultery, and divorce ring true in the historical context.

Touted as having a "heart of gold", Anna is the epitome of the idealized aristocratic woman. She is well-read, kind, and spends significant time in the first part of the novel in St. Petersburg working to resolve a clash between her brother, Stiva, and his wife, Dolly. Stiva and Dolly are in conflict as Stiva has cheated on his wife numerous times. There is some irony in the fact that Anna should work so hard to reunite her adulterous brother with his wife, as later on in the story Anna becomes involved in an adulterous relationship and seeks reprieve from her unhappy marriage. It is also of note that when Stiva is engaged in an adulterous relationship, he is reunited with his wife and receives no societal scorn, a sharp contrast to his sister's experience.

Anna is married to Alexei Karenin, a high-ranking government minister and a man of high social rank in St. Petersburg society. Typical of most marital arrangements within the aristocracy, Karenin is older than Anna and hardly concerned with any romantic inclinations. He is highly apprehensive of social status and shows little affection towards his wife and child. He approaches both with a sense of social

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[22] Joe Andrew. Russian Writers and Society in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities P, 1982. p 107.

obligation, and towards Anna in particular, a sense of bitter sarcasm. The cold relationship between them is evident in the manner in which they address each other:

> --Да , как видиш, нежный муж, нежный, как на другой год женитьы, сгорал желанием увидеть тебя, --сказал он своим медлительным тонким и тем тоном, который всегда почти употреблял с ней, тоном насмешки над тем, кто бы самом деле так говорил.
>
> --сережа здоров? –спросила она[23]

The harsh, condescending sarcasm with which he addresses her in this first scene where they appear together provides a key insight into a societal marriage. Additionally, her dismissal of his manner and greater interest in her son provides further insight into her interests and relations with her family. Karenin's evident sarcasm towards not only his wife, but also romantic relationships in which one partner would speak to the other in an affectionate manner is a reflection of the societal view on the institution of marriage. The mutual disinterest in their relationship is made further evident by Anna's apparent greater concern for the health of her son than the welfare of her distant husband. Later, when Karenin confronts his wife about her intentions and interest in Vronsky, the clear distaste and distance Anna feels towards her husband is made clear:

"... Я люблю его Я его любовница Я не могу переносить Я боюсь Я ненавижу вас..."[24]

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[23] Leo Tolstoy. Anna Karenina. Moscow: Exmo P, 2002. pp 107.
"Yes, as you see, your tender spouse, as devoted as the fist year after marriage, burned with impatience to see you," he said in his deliberated, high pitched voice, and in that tone which he almost always took with her, a tone of jeering at any one who should say in earnest what he said.
"Is Seryozha quite well?" she asked. As translated in Leo Tolstoy. Anna Karenina. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003. p 97.

[24] Leo Tolstoy. Anna Karenina. Moscow: Exmo P, 2002. p 214. *I love him, I am his mistress; I can't bear you; I'm afraid of you, and I hate you...* As translated in Leo Tolstoy. Anna Karenina. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003. p 19.

In this pivotal scene, it should be noted that Anna uses the impersonal "вы" with her husband, a sign of a lack of closeness or familiarity.[25] While on its own, these observations may seem unimportant, one must take into consideration the changing manner in which Anna and Vronsky address each other. An important exchange is the scene in which Anna discovers that Vronsky is following her to St. Petersburg.

"Вы знаете Я еду дла того чтобы быть там где вы"[26]

This early proclamation of feelings is an interesting case, as they have just met recently, Vronsky is careful to use to unfamiliar (respectful) "вы". However, as their relationship progresses, there is a closeness in speech that Vronsky and Anna share, the "ты" form, virtually unused between Anna and Alexei (outside of the instance of sarcasm). A prime example of the close relationship reflected in speech is as follows:

"'Наконец то ты!' - сказала она, протягивая ему руку. Он поцеловал ее руку подсел к ней. 'Вообще Я вижу, что поездка твоя удалась,'-сказал он ей."[27]

Beyond the actual text description of their relationships, the manners and intricacies of language allow for an even deeper understanding of the difference in relationships between Anna's society-based marriage and her romantic affair with Vronsky. Clearly, there is a closeness shared between Anna and Vronsky unseen in her relationship with Karenin.

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[25] Genevra Gerhart. The Russian's World: Life and Language. Chicago: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1974. p 156.

[26] Leo Tolstoy. Anna Karenina. Moscow: Exmo P, 2002. p 105. *You know that I have come to be where you are.* As Translated in Leo Tolstoy. Anna Karenina. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003. p 98.

[27] Leo Tolstoy. Anna Karenina. Moscow: Exmo P, 2002. p 113. *"Here you are at last!" she observed, holding out her hand to him. He kissed her hand and sat down beside her. "Altogether then, I see that your visit was a success," he said to her.* As translated in Leo Tolstoy. Anna Karenina. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003. p 104.

During Anna's visit to St. Petersburg, Vronsky's clear interest in her is established and eventually, their adulterous relationship begins. When society discovers their relationship, Anna becomes a social pariah. Her husband's already cool manner towards her worsens and becomes intolerable, and Anna is completely rejected by society. Outside of her family, no one within the aristocratic ranks will speak with her. Meanwhile, the male involved in the relationship, Vronsky's essentially evades any scorn. While Anna is pregnant with Vronsky's child, she falls deathly ill. It is only in this state that Karenin agrees to grant her a divorce—out of sheer pity. It is his view (indeed, typical of society at that time) that he would be shamed by divorce and it takes the dramatic event of his wife's near death to "inspire him to kindness". This reflects the custom that only the man in the relationship was allowed to initiate divorce, and further it demonstrates the typical societal norm that divorce was a shameful convention.

Anna Karenina also provides key evidence of the sexist nature with which society treated the members of an adulterous relationship. While Anna was forced into social seclusion, Vronsky was able to continue through society essentially as he was prior to being exposed as an adulterer. [28] The shame brought onto Anna inspires her brother Stiva to approach Karenin to beg that he once again offer Anna the option of divorce.[29] In this scene the stark contrast between the treatment of men and women in an adulterous relationship is clearly evident. Whereas Stiva, in the initial pages of the novel is the guilty party in the case of his disjointed relationship with his wife, his adulterous nature does not warrant the shame of society, nor is he put in so painful a position as his sister, Anna. While divorce would have brought him shame and surely hushed gossip in society,

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[28] Leo Tolstoy. Anna Karenina. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003. Part 7, Chapter XXVIII.
[29] *Ibid*

he would not have been ousted from all social interactions. Anna was not so fortunate. Both Anna and Stiva were engaged in extramarital affairs, and yet, Anna was made into a social exile. Further, the treatment of their respective spouses and extramarital partners differs based on the gender. While Stiva's affair with his children's governess causes shame only to his wife (as she was not a member of aristocratic society, the governess is ignored) and minimal shame to Stiva himself, the fact that Anna should engage in an affair is considered of utmost shame to Anna. This, however; is not for the fact that she is having an affair, indeed, many members of aristocratic society both within the realms of literature and reality were engaging in affairs. The reason Anna is so vehemently rejected from society is for the fact that she wants her private love affair with Vronsky to be merged with her public aristocratic life. That anyone should hope to merge the two was considered unthinkable and that in fact, was the root of Anna's rejection. She openly spent time with Vronsky and did not understand why society so rejected the notion of her private life merging with her public life—that is, to have love and publicly claim it in social life, in marriage.

This topic within itself deserves some notice. The fact that Anna desires love in marriage is a fairly modern concept. Through the experience of Anna, it can be suggested that 19th Century Russian society was not ready for such an arrangement. Even within the scope of the novel itself, we see that the marriage of love is not cast in a favorable light. The other main love story in the novel is that of Kitty and Levin. Kitty and Levin openly love each other and marry. However, Tolstoy takes great care within the novel to describe Levin's dissatisfaction with his marriage and the fact that the merging of his private love with his public marriage does not fulfill him—in the novel he

is constantly searching for that which will fulfill him. His love-based marriage fails to bring him happiness, a reinforcement of the idea that the merging of private and public life within this social class in this time period was considered an unrealistic, unattainable goal, which in the end, would not provide the happiness and fulfillment it claimed to do.

While many of the dominant 19th Century attitudes towards divorce and marriage were evident in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, there are some elements of a transition of sorts to be seen within the pages. As this novel was a product of the mid-late 19th Century, this should come as no surprise. Note the fact that while the clergy often held an iron fist on the practice of divorce and annulment, the manner in which Karenin proposes to allow for such arrangements does not suggest utter incapacity for such actions, rather; one gets the sense that among the upper echelons of society provisions for divorce may be made. This may also have to do with the fact that there is the "significant evidence" of an affair that was often requested in order to grant such a case, (i.e. Anna's child fathered by Vronsky) or it may also reflect the increasingly relaxing (albeit still strict) societal stance on divorce.

It should be noted that in the conclusion of this epic work, Anna, plagued by societal isolation, frustrated by the unjust nature of her position, and (possibly) suffering from mental illness, commits suicide.[30] This casts an obviously dark cloud on the notion that romantic love is possible and can, in fact be, negotiated in spite of societal rejection and adulterous beginnings. This is a bit of an extreme ending for such a situation, but it should be noted that Tolstoy was known for placing a greater emphasis on moral issues and outcome than strict adherence to historical context (another possible explanation for the presumption in the novel that Karenin would be able to obtain a divorce).

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[30] Leo Tolstoy. Anna Karenina. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003. Part 7, Chapter XXXI.

Interpretations suggest that Anna and Vronsky's guilt lies in the greater realm and the scorn they receive from society are "hypocritical judgments [that] Tolstoy vehemently scorns."[31] While it may be tainted by Tolstoy's personal moralism,[32] the fact remains that the events in *Anna Karenina* are consistent with historical sociological data and provide an illustration of moral sentiments and social interactions of the time. Further, the fact that the story is affected by these moral sentiments held by the author, as the author himself was a contemporary of the time in which it was written serves to further support societal views on the issue of divorce in late 19th Century Russia.

Дама с Собачкой - *The Lady with the Dog*

Published in 1899, Chekhov's short story *The Lady with the Dog* provides an interesting look at societal norms closer to the end of the 19th century. Smaller in scope, this story provides a concentrated view on the continued societal norm of marriage for social or economic reasons, as opposed to being inspired by romantic sentiment. The story itself opens describing the wife of protagonist Dmitry Gurov. Caught in an unhappy arranged marriage, Gurov is bitter towards the institution and speaks of his wife poorly: "...he secretly considered her [Gurov's wife] unintelligent, narrow, inelegant, was afraid of her, and did not like to be at home."[33] Clearly this was not a romantic marriage. The woman with whom he eventually engages in an affair, Anna Sergeyevna, is similarly in a loveless marriage, the product of a societal move. Her lack of knowledge of, and even interest in, her husband is clear in her description of him:

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[31] Joe Andrew. Russian Writers and Society in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities P, 1982. p 126.
[32] *Ibid*, p 110-111.
[33] Anton Chekhov. The Tales of Chekhov. 3rd ed. New York: The Ecco P, 1972. p 4.

> Мой муж, быть может, честьый, хороший человек, но ведь он лакей! Я не знаю, что он делает там, как служит, а знаю только, что он лакей. Мне, когда Я вышла за него, было двадцатъ лет, меня томило любопытство, мне хотелосъ чего-нибудъ получше; ведь естъ же, - говорила я себе, - другая жизнъ. Хотелосъ пожитъ! Пожитъ и пожитъ...[34]

The story itself goes on eventually to describe the living situation Anna shares with her husband. If her unhappy nature was not clear enough, the description of a life dictated by societal norms is made evident—her life in her hometown of S— is cold, weary, and prison-like within the confines of her husband's home.

Yet the relationship Anna and Gurov share is close and personal in nature. A prime example of this is the fact that they speak with each other in the informal "ты" form.[35]

"Ну, как живеш там—спросил он"[36]

Herein lies the stark contrast between the romantic relationship and that of the societal norm that both engage in with their respective marriages. Conversation between spouses is scant (if existent at all) within the texts. Yet the relationship between Gurov and Anna is often pronounced by their verbal interaction and romantic closeness. The adulterous nature of their relationship forces them to rely on secrecy in order to avoid social scorn. The story makes no inclination as to the prospect of divorce; indeed, the

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[34] Anton P. Chekhov. A.P. Chekhov: Isbrannye Proizvedeniia. Moscow, P 175. *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! 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!* As translated in Anton Chekhov. The Tales of Chekhov. 3rd ed. New York: The Ecco P, 1972. p 10.

[35] This form, equivalent to the former use of "thou" in English, is a means by which adults conversing with each other can reflect a sense of "closeness" and is generally reserved for family and close friends. Genevra Gerhart. The Russian's World: Life and Language. Chicago: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1974. p 156.

[36] Anton P. Chekhov. A.P. Chekhov: Isbrannye Proizvedeniia. Moscow, 1960 p 185. *"Well, how are you getting on there?" he asked* As translated in Anton Chekhov. The Tales of Chekhov. 3rd ed. New York: The Ecco P, 1972. p 25.

very prospect was so discouraged by society (and in the case of the protagonists, impossible without exposure of their adulterous relationship) that such an idea would not even be considered.

At the conclusion of the story, the future they see is bleak; however, there are a few key differences between *The Lady with the Dog* and *Anna Karenina* that may in fact demonstrate the changing societal views of love, marriage, and adultery. In *Lady with the Dog* it becomes apparent to most parties that Gurov and Anna are engaging in an affair. However, there isn't the same sense of societal shame as is seen in *Anna Karenina*. Although the final words in Chekhov's story surround the adulterous couple contemplating "how to avoid the necessity for secret, for deception, for living in different towns and not seeing each other for long at a time. How could they be free of this intolerable bondage?"[37] There is, in fact, a vague sense of hope:

> И казалось, что еще немного -- и решение будет найдено, и тогда начнется новая, прикрасная н жизнь; и обоим было ясно, что до конца еще далеко-далеко и что самой сложное и трудное только еще начинается.[38]

While there is a sense of foreboding in the final part of the text, one cannot help but notice the stark contrast between the situations presented in *Anna Karenina* and this story. For one, Tolstoy's dominant moralism casts a far more dramatic ending to the love affair in his novel, (a reflection of the sentiments of the time) whereas over 20 years later, Chekhov's work focuses less on the views of outside society (although they are still a major concern of the protagonists) and focuses more on the relationship between Gurov

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[37] Anton Chekhov. The Tales of Chekhov. 3rd ed. New York: The Ecco P, 1972. pp 27-28.
[38] Anton P. Chekhov. A.P. Chekhov: Isbrannye Proizvedeniia. Moscow, 1960. p 186. *And 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.* As translated in Anton Chekhov. The Tales of Chekhov. 3rd ed. New York: The Ecco P, 1972 p 28.

and Anna and how they plan on continuing their relationship (albeit not without difficulty) within their society. It should also be noted that between the relationships themselves, there is a progression of sorts. While Vronsky's affection in *Anna Karenina* wanes and he becomes unwilling to go to any real length to preserve his relationship with and care for Anna, as the plot develops in *Lady With the Dog,* it appears that Gurov becomes increasingly willing to go to any length necessary to maintain his relationship with Anna Sergeevna. The desire to have the private loving life merge with that of the public societal life is no longer portrayed as a futile idea. As a final point of interest, one should take note of the female protagonists — in both stories they are depicted as sincere, loving women engaged in loveless societal marriages who become involved in romantic affairs, and both are named Anna. There has been some speculation as to whether Chekhov was alluding to Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and by doing so, showing the societal changes through his character Anna and how she is treated by society and how her love affair ends as compared to that of Anna Karenina.

Conclusion

Literature provides an incredibly valuable window to the past, a sort of interpretive history that provides a greater understanding of the people, times, and society in which it was written. 19th Century Russian literature is especially rich in history and highly demonstrative of the dynamic relationship between current events, social norms, society, and artistic expression. Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and Chekhov's *Lady with the Dog* both provide key insight and illustrations of societal norms, views, and moral sentiments of their times. Through careful examination of the historical context of marriage and love in

19th Century Russia, (namely societal views, the role of the Orthodox Church, and gender roles), the presentation of and the manner in which they write about love, marriage and divorce, and chronologically examining the stories, one can see the progression of thought through this literature. Through literature, one can pinpoint a moment in time and see the actual changes in a society as it happened, providing fascinating accounts of a world and time past.

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This study by: Bridget Lynn Gongol

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Has been approved as meeting the project requirement for the Designation University

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Date Dr. Maria Basom, Honors Project Advisor

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Date Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program