

# Research Notes

## Mrs. Henry Wood and Lev Tolstoy: Formulation of a Question

Women authors in the mid-Victorian era appeared to have created a sustained interest in Russia in the 1860s and 1870s. Translations from Frances Trollope, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, Mary Braddon, Charlotte Yonge, Eliza Linton, Mrs. Gore, Mrs. Marsh, Florence Marryat, and Ouida were fairly common in Russian periodicals throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. For the Russian public it was obvious that none of the contemporary literatures could boast such a fine group of talented women authors as British literature.

Of all Victorian women writers, Mrs. Henry Wood (1814-1887) is today perhaps the least well-known. Once a prolific author whose novels became bestsellers and sold millions of copies, she has since fallen into an undeserved obscurity. Mrs. Wood (nee Ellen Price) was born in Worcester, the daughter of a glove manufacturer. In 1836, she married Henry Wood and followed him to France where she spent most of her adult life. Her husband, the head of a large shipping and banking firm, died in 1866. She wrote her first book, *Danesbury House*, in 1860, but it was her second novel, *East Lynne* (1861), that enjoyed the greatest popularity. *East Lynne* was translated into several European languages and successfully dramatized. With the success of her subsequent novels—*The Channings*, *Mrs. Halliburton's Troubles*, *Mildred Arkell*, *Roland Yorke*, *George Canterbury's Will*, *Within the Maze*—Wood gained a prominent reputation which spread throughout Europe and into Russia.

Wood's novels began to gain popularity in Russia in the 1860s, in both their original form and in translation. They were notable for their absorbing and intricate plot and subtle psychological insight. The novels "helped the heart of man

to know itself" to quote Henry James' opinion about Anthony Trollope's works, who was Wood's contemporary (Snow 115). Lev Tolstoy was one of Wood's most insightful readers. Tolstoy welcomed her works and readily recognized her as a remarkable figure in the world of English literature. In a letter written to his brother in March 1872, Tolstoy reflected upon his admiration of Wood's novel *Within the Maze* (PSS 61: 276). During this period, he began his preparatory work on *Anna Karenina*. According to Tolstoy's own testimony in a letter to the publisher M. M. Lederle on October 25, 1891, this attitude toward Mrs. Henry Wood's novels dated from the age of thirty-five and lasted until he was roughly fifty (PSS 64: 39). Later, Tolstoy repeatedly recommended that Wood's literature be included in collections of stories and novels intended for the enlightenment of the masses. To this day four of Mrs. Wood's books remain in Tolstoy's home-library in Yasnaya Polyana: *Adam Grainger* (1876); *East Lynne* (1861); *Oswald Cray* (1865); *The Red Court Farm* (1868) (Котрелев 3: 623, 624).

Wood's works may very well have inspired some of Tolstoy's own writing, as noted in Sofia Andreevna's diary entry dated October 23, 1878: "When Lev moves to read English novels his own writing immediately follows" (ДНЕВНИКИ 118). Indeed, one might expect Victorian literary elements to have left their mark in *Anna Karenina*, as he was reading Wood's *Within the Maze* as he started work on the novel and Trollope's *Prime Minister* as he finished it. (I have elsewhere suggested that there are some similarities between Anthony Trollope's *Can You Forgive Her?* (1864) and *Anna Karenina* (Нуралова 74-79).)

Indeed, Tolstoy's use of the epigraph, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay," in *Anna Karenina* is reminiscent of Wood's book, *Within the Maze*,

and Trollope's *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (also kept in Yasnaya Polyana's library). Reverend Crawley, Trollope's protagonist, evokes these same biblical words after being unjustly accused of the theft of a twenty-pound bank check (Trollope 2008). Miss Sumnor, a character in Wood's *Within the Maze*, reminds Lucy Cleeve of the saying:

"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, you know who says that, Lucy: but you cannot know what I have seen and marked so often—that when the vengeance is taken into human hands it somehow defeats itself. It may inflict confusion and ruin on the adversary; but it never fails to tell in some way on the inflictor." (1: 226)

The Tolstoyan interpretation of this phrase is based on two main notions: "no one is to blame" and "we are not to judge." Many years later Tolstoy again repeated the biblical saying in the *Calendar Collection of Readings* (August 15, 1906-1910), echoing Sumnor's interpretation:

Much harm is done by people to themselves and to each other only because the weak and the sinful take it as their own right to punish other people. 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay.' God only punishes and punishes through a human being. (PSS 44: 95)

Traces of *Within the Maze* can be found in the scenes of the first meeting (in chapter eighteen) between Anna Karenina and Vronsky at the railway station. A watchman has been killed in a railway accident. Vronsky, hearing that the watchman supported a large family and wishing to impress Anna, hands over two hundred rubles to the watchman's widow. This scene bears a certain resemblance to one in Wood's novel *Within the Maze*: The new baronet, Sir Karl Andinnian, sees a policeman and several other men, followed by a small mob, carrying a handbarrow in which lies a dead man known as "poor Whit-

tle." Whittle worked at the railway-station and had a large family with four or five young children. When Sir Karl promises to come in and see the widow in the morning, "a murmur of approbation at the last words arose from the bystanders. It seemed to them an earnest that the new baronet, Sir Karl would turn out to be a kind and considerate man" (1: 287). Other parallels between *Within the Maze* and *Anna Karenina* may be seen in the similarities between Wood's Miss Blake and the Tolstoyan heroine, Kitty Shcherbatsky. At the picnic in chapter two of *Within the Maze*, the keen and jealous eyes of Miss Blake see "proof positive" of her misfortune: "Lieutenant Andinnian and Miss Lucy Cleeve were lost in love the one for the other" (1: 31). At the ball, Kitty's keen and long-sighted eyes convince her that there is something between Anna and Vronsky.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the outward similarity of these items is rather superficial and of small importance. Wood's impact on Tolstoy's novel cannot be regarded as profound or having far-reaching effect.

If we turn to ideology, Mrs. Wood's views on fashionable society and high life manners may resemble Tolstoy's views on the same. One of the guests at the ball in *Anna Karenina*, the beautiful Lidi Korsunsky, attracts attention with her strongly décolleté dress ("naked to an impossible degree"). The modest young clergyman Roland Yorke in Wood's novel of the same name turns away at the sight of Mrs. Bede Greatorex whose "chignon was a mile high, and her gown was below her shoulder-blades." "Is Bede mad? he inwardly said, 'or has he lost all control over his wife's actions?'" (1: 170-171). Bede's brooding on his unfortunate marriage: "I never ought to have married her [...] Every law, human and divine, should have warned me against it [...] The fault of our union was mine wholly, not hers" (Wood, *Roland* 2: 19-20), brings to mind Tolstoy's Pierre Bezuhov from *War and Peace* who accuses only himself for all the wrongdoing of his unfortunate

and immoral marriage with Hélène. Bede has far more reason for self-accusation as he murdered his rival, John Ollivera, while Pierre only wounds his wife's lover in a duel.

Wood's moralizing on domestic themes—on the institution of marriage, for instance, which Victorians held sacred above all—has a certain correspondence to Tolstoy's outlook and his portrayal of upper class life. In these elements, the writers echo each other. Yet, these similarities are superficial—they are not pervasive or penetrating, they do not go much beneath the surface of the works.

Stella Nuralova  
Yerevan State Linguistic University  
Armenia

### Notes

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### Universality in *The Death of Ivan Ilich*

One of Tolstoy's greatest challenges in *The Death of Ivan Ilich* is persuading readers to accept his protagonist as a universally representative man, for Ivan Ilich is of course a rather despicable character in many respects. In short, he is a self-absorbed snob, and his most glaring faults include a blindly slavish concern for propriety and decorum and an appalling lack of compassion both in his family life and as public prosecutor and judge, where he prides himself in removing the "human element" from all legal proceedings and savors "the consciousness of his power, being able to ruin anybody he wished to ruin" (127)<sup>1</sup>. As James Rice observes, in court Ivan Ilich "sadistically tortures the litigants, an abuse that is habitual throughout his career. [...] Let us make no mistake about the hero's personality. The judge, in fact, is a son-of-a-bitch" (83). Given that Ivan Ilich is indeed something of a "son-of-a-bitch," how is it that, as Gary Jahn says, *Ivan Ilich* "impresses the reader [. . .] above all with the evident applicability of the life and death of its protagonist to each reader individually" (9)? How does Tolstoy encourage readers to identify with Ivan Ilich?