

# Saninism Versus Tolstoyism: The Anti-Tolstoy Subtext in Mikhail Artsybashev's *Sanin*

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There is nothing new here. The reduction of the human being to the level of an animal is described with talent. But there is nothing here of life of a more spiritual nature: the bestial is self-sufficient and prevails. This is rude and stupid...

— Tolstoy on Artsybashev's *Sanin*

What he wrote as regards a code of morality is as feeble and unstable as any other moral code...

— Artsybashev, "About Tolstoy"

In his Introduction to a recent English-language translation of *Sanin* (1907), Otto Boeke recounts how in the spring of 1908 Otilia Tsimerman, the headmistress of a private school for boys in Perm, wrote a rather desperate letter to Count Tolstoy.<sup>1</sup> She urgently sought his advice on ways to counteract the influence that Mikhail P. Artsybashev's "pornographic" bestseller was said to be having upon her adolescent male students, many of whom, she claimed, were guilty of frequenting taverns, going on drinking binges, and engaging in promiscuous sexual activity upon reading this lurid tale. "She wondered if Tolstoy would be willing to write something edifying for these young people to help them mend their wicked ways," the Dutch scholar explains (2). Noting that the headmistress had already employed various means to try to keep her young charges entertained and thus draw them away from reading *Sanin*, Boeke writes: "She had even ordered copies of Tolstoy's pamphlets on the nature of sexuality in the hope of satisfying the boys' curiosity about such matters. Alas, they persisted in their dissolute behavior" (2). The idea that Tolstoy might write something that would actually succeed in

discouraging young people from engaging in sexual activity is perhaps not as far-fetched as it may at first sound. After all, in 1910, as V. F. Bulgakov reports, Tolstoy was quite pleased to have received a letter from a young man who, confused as to how he should conduct himself with respect to sexual morality, writes that he decided to remain a virgin after reading *The Kreutzer Sonata* (67).

Headmistress Tsimerman's distressed letter to Count Tolstoy reflects just how widespread the pernicious influence of Artsybashev's best-selling novel was believed to have become during this time of political reaction in late imperial Russia. "Saninism," which was being loosely applied as a label for the moral corruption and sexual license that many people feared were becoming rampant among disillusioned intelligentsia youth in the wake of the failed 1905 revolution, was blamed for the rise of various "free love" leagues rumored to be appearing across the country. It is thus important to bear in mind, during this period of political disenchantment in Russia, when many young people were increasingly switching the focus of their energies from public social issues to private personal concerns, that "*Sanin* was read not simply as a novel, but also as a primer on how to live" (Naiman 48). Indeed, D. S. Mirsky has gone so far as to assert that Artsybashev's novel "became for a few years the Bible of every schoolboy and schoolgirl in Russia" (402).

It seems quite fitting that Boeke's introductory essay to *Sanin* should begin with a contemporary reader's plea that the puritanical Tolstoy write some kind of moral-religious countertext to Artsybashev's controversial novel. After all, *Sanin*, as a work that deliberately foregrounds its erotic elements, sent the clear message

to contemporary readers that joy in life is to be found in what Laura Engelstein characterizes as “the embraces of pleasure, the life of spontaneous impulse and physical sensation” (385) advocated by the novel’s eponymous hero. Tolstoy’s virulent condemnation of such hedonistic behavior in his moral and religious writings was, of course, widely recognized in his homeland and abroad at this time. Indeed, the publication of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, as Peter Ulf Møller has shown, helped to launch a heated debate on sexual morality in Russian society that prevailed during the 1890s and 1900s. Tolstoy was thus quite a logical choice for this educator who was seeking to find someone who, as a moral commentator, could respond effectively to Artsybashev’s purportedly pornographic novel. But Ms. Tsimmerman’s appeal to Tolstoy is additionally significant, it seems to me, because Artsybashev’s novel can itself be read very productively as a response to Tolstoy and Tolstoyism—an oblique rejoinder to some of the ideas, beliefs, and teachings that the Sage of Yasnaya Polyana espoused during his later years through his moralizing essays and didactic tales.

As is widely known, after the midlife spiritual crisis he experienced during the late 1870s and early 1880s, Tolstoy, whom Merezhkovsky once characterized as a “seer of the flesh,” began to preach a rigorous brand of Christian moralism and asceticism that was only dormant during his earlier years. Artsybashev seems to have greatly admired the author of *War and Peace* (1866) and *Anna Karenina* (1877) as a literary artist whose realist aesthetic he sought to emulate in his own writing. But at the same time the author of *Sanin* appears to have had very little, if any, respect for Tolstoy as a moralist and philosophical thinker or, as we shall see, for Tolstoyism as a moral code. “I am an inveterate realist, a disciple of the school of Tolstoi and Dostoevsky,” the author acknowledged in 1915 in his Introduction to an English-language translation of *The Millionaire*. “My development was very strongly influenced by Tolstoi, although I never shared his views on ‘non-resistance to evil.’ As an artist he overpowered me, and I have found it difficult not to model my work on his” (8, 9). By means of the hedonistic ethos of “Saninism”—the new morality of sexual libertinism advanced by his hero as a philosophy of life that champions the human body, physical pleasure, and sexual passion—Artsybashev is challenging not Tolstoy the writer, but

the ascetic Christian creed of Tolstoyism, particularly Tolstoy’s doctrine of non-resistance to evil and his Cartesian denigration of the body, along with its attendant carnal appetites, as something inherently base and unredeemably bestial.

### **The Tolstoy-Artsybashev Connection**

At first glance, the Tolstoy-Artsybashev connection does not appear to be a very highly developed one. Tolstoy, for his part, seldom even mentions Artsybashev’s name, either in his correspondence or in his non-fictional writings.<sup>2</sup> The most substantial commentary that Tolstoy does provide about the young Russian author and his controversial novel appears in a letter he wrote in February 1908 to M. M. Dokshitskii, a gymnasium student from Ukraine, who had written a letter to Tolstoy one week earlier, describing his fascination both with the philosophy of Artsybashev’s charismatic young hero and with Tolstoy’s own Christian worldview. Unable to decide whether Saninism or Tolstoyism was the better philosophical outlook for him to pursue in life, Dokshitskii asked for Tolstoy’s opinion about Sanin’s ideas, values and beliefs. In his reply, Tolstoy confessed that he had been greatly surprised to hear Dokshitskii make mention “of some Sanin or other,” since he did not have any idea who exactly this was (PSS 77: 58). Someone in the Tolstoy household had read Artsybashev’s novel recently, however, and Tolstoy was thus able to get his hands on the corresponding journal issues of *The Contemporary World* (*Современный мир*), in which *Sanin* had been serialized during 1907. “I read all the arguments made by Sanin himself,” Tolstoy writes, “and I was horrified—not so much by their disgusting filth, as by his stupidity, ignorance, and smug self-assurance” (58). Tolstoy laments the pernicious influence that Artsybashev’s novel was exerting upon many young people in Russia and denigrates the author’s egregious lack of knowledge about what some of the world’s greatest minds have had to say in regard to the essential questions of human existence. (Tolstoy includes in this category Confucius, Lao-Tse, wise men from Indian, Greek, and Roman antiquity, as well as modern thinkers such as Rousseau, Voltaire, Kant, Schopenhauer and Emerson). Although Tolstoy acknowledges that Artsybashev does indeed possess some genuine artistic talent, he accuses the author of *Sanin* of possessing “neither a sense (a con-

sciousness) of what is true nor a true intellect" (59). "So that there is not even a single true human emotion portrayed," Tolstoy complains. "Instead only the most base animal urges are portrayed" (59). In an effort to help Dokshitskii decide correctly which of the two philosophies of life is the better one to follow—Saninism or Tolstoism—Tolstoy promises to send him a copy of *A Circle of Readings* (*Круг чтения*, 1904-1908), the collection of uplifting moral thoughts from various writers and thinkers that Tolstoy had compiled for *The Intermediary* (*Посредник*). He also advises Dokshitskii to read the Gospels.

Tolstoy likewise makes some highly disparaging remarks about the author of *Sanin* in a short essay, titled "On Insanity" ("О безумии," 1910), in which he expresses deep concern over the increasing number of suicides that are being committed by young Russians. Tolstoy blames this wave of contemporary "insanity"—the veritable epidemic of despair and depression he has been observing among members of the younger generation in Russia—in large part on the diet of lurid works of contemporary literature by decadent modernist writers (such as Sologub, Andreev, and Shestov) that so many young Russian readers were, at the time, greedily consuming. Tolstoy alludes to the letter he had received recently from Dokshitskii, "one which asks: Whom is one to believe—Christ from the Gospels or Sanin from Artsybashev's novel? And it is obvious that the sentiments of the author of this letter lie on Sanin's side." Dokshitskii's sentiments, according to Tolstoy, maintain that

there is no meaning in life; for truly educated people, there is not and there cannot be any such meaning. But there is evolution, which is unfolding according to the laws discovered by a science that in our time has already completely removed the old, backward conceptions about the soul, God, and similar superstitions about the purpose of man and his moral obligation. (PSS 38: 400)

"All of that is old and outdated," Tolstoy says when mimicking this youthful, secular, modernist view of human life. "What we need is a new definition of the meaning of life, a modern one of the sort that would accord fully with Darwinism, with Nietzscheanism, with the very latest understanding of life. We need to think up a whole new explanation of the meaning of

life, one where only the laws of matter, followed in infinite time and space, would be acknowledged as the foundation for everything" (400-401). Tolstoy identifies the leading ideologues for the current "lost generation" of Russian youth as Darwin, Haeckel, Marx, Maeterlinck, Hamsun, Weininger, and Nietzsche; it is their godless ideas, he insists, that are driving more and more young people in Russia to despair and ultimately to suicide. This moral decline, this widespread "insanity," Tolstoy asserts, appears to be the terribly steep price that is now being paid in turn-of-the-century Russia for the material and scientific "progress" that has been advocated as part of the process of modernization (401).

### **Tolstoyan Non-Resistance to Evil**

Tolstoy's angry, negative reaction to *Sanin*—as a salient example of the kind of work of contemporary literature whose nihilistic philosophy, in his opinion, was poisoning the minds of educated young Russians—seems entirely understandable, especially when we consider that much of Artsybashev's novel can itself be understood as a response to some of Tolstoy's own most cherished ideas, beliefs, and teachings late in his life. Indeed, Boele asserts that Tolstoism—along with socialism, asceticism, and Christianity—constitutes one of the primary targets of the author's criticism in *Sanin* (5). Among the more obvious of the "Tolstoyan" targets one finds in Artsybashev's novel is, of course, Tolstoy's signature doctrine of non-resistance to evil, which is preached so vigorously in, among other places, *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (*Царство божие внутри вас*, 1893), and which came to serve as a central tenet of Tolstoism. The "Christian non-resistance religion of Tolstoy," according to one critic at the time, was one of the great ideas, dominant in contemporary Russian literature and culture, against which a marked revolt was launched in Russia during the post-1905 period, a revolt in which Artsybashev's novel actively partakes (Phelps 248).

In *Sanin*, Captain Von Deitz, a tall, skinny army officer, explicitly purports to be—and is widely considered by other characters in the novel to be—an "admirer of Tolstoy" (1: 259), if not in fact an actual "Tolstoyan disciple" (*толстовец*) (164). In addition to his distinctively foreign, non-Russian name and the obvious irony of having a soldier parading around as a

Christian pacifist, Von Deitz serves as a caricature of Tolstoy's moral teachings in several other respects as well.<sup>3</sup> For instance, early in the novel he brings a Tolstoyan pamphlet, titled "About Women" (*О женщинах*), to one of his fellow officers, the womanizing Zarudin. When one of the young men present proceeds to denigrate women as the "female beast of the species" (165) and insists upon considering them subhuman creatures, as simply "naked, pink, plump monkeys without tails" (165), Von Deitz indicates his approval of this highly insulting, misogynistic opinion of women by observing with pleasure, "Well said!" Ivanov then chimes in by comically reversing the famous New Testament line by Matthew that serves as the epigraph for Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata*: "I say unto you that any woman who looks at a man with lust has already committed adultery with him in her heart" (166). The narrator informs us that Von Deitz bursts into hoarse laughter at this sarcastic gender inversion of Christian—and, more specifically, Tolstoyan—sexual morality, disappointed that he had failed to say anything nearly as witty and clever himself.

Von Deitz, however, seriously discredits the Tolstoyan doctrine of non-resistance to evil mainly through his willingness to serve as a second for Zarudin, the recently insulted army officer who challenges Sanin to a duel. When Von Dietz and his colleague Tanarov appear at Sanin's home the next day and perform what Artsybashev's narrator characterizes as "the ridiculous formalities of artificial ceremony" (257), Sanin stuns both of his unbidden visitors by announcing that he categorically refuses to fight a duel. Von Deitz, whose Tolstoyan belief in non-resistance to evil has clearly been trumped in this instance by his loyalty to his close friend and comrade-in-arms Zarudin, as well as to the military code of honor operative among these young male officers, cries out, quite flustered: "Look here! I can't allow this. You're making fun of us! Don't you realize that refusing to accept a challenge is...why it's..." The narrator describes Von Deitz's physiological reaction to Sanin's reply as follows: "He turned as red as a brick, his dull eyes protruded ferociously yet foolishly from their sockets, and there were traces of foam on his lips" (I: 259). As Phelps observes, "The disciple of Tolstoi sputters with rage because Sanin shows up his inconsistency with his creed" (255). Sanin's response to Von Deitz's angry outburst is to

comment sardonically: "And this man still considers himself a follower of Tolstoy!" (259). Von Deitz may well be correct in his opinion that Sanin, by refusing to accept Zarudin's challenge to fight a duel, is "making fun" of these two army officers who have come to him as seconds. But the more biting mockery at work here, it strikes the reader of *Sanin*, is the way the author is "making fun" of an alleged disciple of Tolstoy's moral teachings by mercilessly caricaturing him.<sup>4</sup>

A more fully developed critique of Tolstoyism—and, in particular, of the central Tolstoyan tenet of non-resistance to evil—occurs a few chapters later when Sanin engages in a conversation with another purported follower of Tolstoy, Yakov Soloveichik. Although Soloveichik, the son of a Jewish mill owner, professes to be a Tolstoyan, he at the same time feels great sympathy for the Marxist program of the Social Democrats. Suffering periodically from depression and entertaining occasional thoughts of suicide, Soloveichik, as a non-violent pacifist, is deeply troubled by Sanin's violent physical attack upon Zarudin, whom he might easily have killed. Soloveichik wonders aloud whether it might not have been better if Sanin had simply suffered Zarudin's insult quietly, without any retaliation. "Perhaps it would have been better for you to have taken the blow?" he muses (282). His suggestion that Sanin adopt a turn-the-other-cheek response to injury prompts Artsybashev's protagonist to inveigh mightily against Tolstoy's Christian notion of non-resistance to evil. "Ah, Soloveichik," he replies with irritation,

That's all old fairy-tale stuff about moral victory! Besides, that story is so primitive...Moral victory consists not in proffering the other cheek, but in being right before one's own conscience...There's nothing more terrible than slavery—and the most terrible slavery in the world is when a man who is totally filled with indignation that violence is being committed upon his person submits to it in the name of something stronger than himself. (282)

Boele insists that Sanin "easily does away with Tolstoy's doctrine of non-resistance to evil by knocking down the conceited officer Zarudin in self-defense" (6). It seems more accurate to say, however, that Sanin dispatches Tolstoy's moral-religious doctrine of non-resistance to evil as much through his words (such as

his speech here to Soloveichik) as through his deeds (his physical blow to Zarudin's face).

Sanin then relates to Soloveichik how there once was a time when he himself had seriously considered pursuing the Tolstoyan ideal of a selfless Christian life. As a first-year student at the university, Sanin had fallen under the influence of a colleague he greatly admired, a fellow student and deeply committed Tolstoyan named Ivan Lande. Artsybashev just a few years earlier had written an entire story about this fictional character, "Lande's Death" ("Смерть Ланда," 1905), a tale that likewise assumes a critical position toward the Christian principles that underlie Tolstoy's moral-religious teachings, caricaturing Ivan Lande as an ineffectual disciple of Tolstoy and advancing the robust artist Molochaev (a prototype for the hedonistic Sanin) as a positive antipode to Lande's Tolstoyan behavior and religious beliefs. "He was an extraordinary fellow of unassailable power, and a Christian not by conviction but by nature," Sanin explains about his Tolstoyan friend from university days. "In his life he reflected all the essential aspects of Christianity: when he was attacked, he didn't defend himself; he forgave his enemies; he treated every man as his brother; he refrained from sexual relations with women..." (283). Lande's influence upon the young Sanin was so strong during this formative stage of his life, in fact, that on one occasion, when a student struck him in the face, Sanin merely got up silently and walked away. "Well, at first I was terribly proud of what I had done, even, one would have to think, stupidly so," Sanin explains to Soloveichik,

but then I came to hate that student from the bottom of my heart. Not because he had struck me, that wasn't important at all; rather it was because my act had given him inordinate pleasure. Completely coincidentally I noticed what deception I was engaged in. I became absorbed in thinking about it. For two weeks I went around like a madman, and then stopped feeling proud of my specious moral victory. After his first smug taunt, I beat that student to a pulp. Then a fundamental break came between Lande and me. I began to examine his life more clearly and saw that it was terribly unhappy and miserable...the happiness of his life consisted in accepting any and all misfortune

without a murmur, and its wealth consisted in even greater and deeper renunciation of all the richness of life. He was a beggar by choice and an impractical dreamer, living in the name of something he himself knew nothing about. (284)

Disenchanted with Lande's Tolstoyan brand of Christian quietism and asceticism, Sanin admits that he loved Lande as a sincere and determined man who did not swerve from the path he had chosen in life. But his worth—like that of Christ—disappeared after his death. "Christ was magnificent," Sanin concludes his speech to Soloveichik, "but Christians are worthless" (285).

### **Artsybashev's Critique of Tolstoyan Christianity**

The strongest criticism of Tolstoy's moral-religious ideas in Artsybashev's novel, however, occurs not by satirizing advocacy of the Tolstoyan doctrine of non-resistance to evil. The most powerful indictment of Tolstoyism is instead expressed through the author's portrayal of the character Yury Svarozhich, a former student at the technical institute who was recently exiled to his hometown due to his political activities in Moscow. He is the character in the novel who most fully embodies Tolstoyan morality, especially sexual morality. Most critics, following the lead of Omel'chenko, have interpreted Svarozhich—in his role as a foil for Sanin—either as representing the disillusioned post-1905 intellectual who abandons political activism and turns inward for self-examination or as embodying the moral high-mindedness paradigmatic of the radical intelligentsia in late-nineteenth-century Russia who traditionally placed public activism on behalf of the "common cause" high above the more selfish goal of personal enrichment. Yury has been said to reflect, in Luker's words, "the profoundly life-denying pessimism that sapped the creative strength of so many members of his generation" (84) in the wake of the failure of the 1905 revolution. "He is the typical Russian, the highly educated young man with a diseased will," notes another critic. "He is characterised by that indecision which has been the bane of so many Russians" (Phelps 257). Deeply troubled at the personal level by the inevitability of death and strongly determined to pursue a path toward moral self-perfection by leading a life of self-sacrifice and waging a constant war against his animal impulses, Svarozhich also sounds

very much like one of the young male heroes who can be found in Tolstoy's fiction, if not like Tolstoy himself during his post-conversion years.

As someone who reflects critically upon the meaning of human life, Svarozhich finds himself deeply alienated from the fun-loving Sanin and the other decadent young men who surround him. In a conversation one evening with Von Deitz and Sanin about the historical significance and efficacy of Christianity, Svarozhich objects that "in the struggle with animal instincts, Christianity has proven just as powerless as every other doctrine" (213). Moreover, mainstream Christianity has by now passed from the historical scene and outlived its usefulness, Svarozhich maintains; it has no real future. The drift of this conversation with two putative fellow travelers of Tolstoyism allows Sanin to voice his own Nietzschean (more accurately, Max Stirnerian) brand of virulent anti-Christian sentiment.<sup>5</sup> "In my opinion," he suddenly interjects,

Christianity has played a sad role in the life of mankind. At a time when things had already become really unbearable for human beings and not much more was needed to prompt the oppressed and dispossessed finally to come to their senses and with one blow overturn the impossibly severe and unjust order of things, simply destroying everything that lived off the blood of others, at that very moment gentle, humbly wise Christianity appeared, full of promise. It condemned strife, promised inner bliss, plunged man into sweet sleep, offered a religion of non-resistance to evil, and, to make a long story short, allowed all the steam to escape!...Now centuries will be needed, centuries of endless humiliation and oppression, to arouse the spirit of indignation once more. Christianity has covered over the human personality, which is too indomitable to become a slave, with a detestable mantle and has concealed beneath it all the colors of the free human spirit. It has deceived the strong who could take happiness into their own hands right now, today, and it has transferred the center of gravity of their life into the future, to a dream about something nonexistent, something none of them will ever see. All the beauty of life has disappeared; boldness has perished, free passion has perished, beauty has perished, only obligation remains

and a senseless dream of the future golden age...a golden age for others, of course! Yes, Christianity has played a disgraceful role, and for a long time Christ's name will be a curse upon all mankind! (216-217)

Sanin's explicit characterization here of Christianity as a "religion of non-resistance to evil" clearly identifies the quietist asceticism of Tolstoy and his Tolstoyan followers as the main target of the hero's anger at the way this self-abnegating Christian philosophy of life has robbed human beings of all the pagan strength, vitality, and boldness that, according to Artsybashev and other modern thinkers of the time, greatly enrich human life. Sanin, as Phelps notes, "recognises his natural foe in Christianity, in the person of Jesus Christ, and in His Russian interpreter, Leo Tolstoi" (260).<sup>6</sup>

Tolstoy's main complaint about *Sanin* was that one finds no restraint of animal appetite—no abstaining from immediate sensual gratification—in the novel's eponymous hero, who appears to fetishize the instinctual reflexes of human beings. "Enjoy yourself to the utmost, and do not worry about anything," according to Dr. Makovitsky, is the sardonic way Tolstoy paraphrases Sanin's credo (*Литературное наследство* 139). One of Artsybashev's main complaints against Tolstoy's Christian philosophy of self-denial, on the other hand, especially as it is expressed through his portrayal of Yury Svarozhich, appears to have been that such a repressive mentality sought "unnaturally" to extinguish all the natural pagan joy to be found in life. "Nothing that gives pleasure can ever be degrading," Phelps writes when paraphrasing Sanin's hedonistic doctrine, "what is natural cannot be wrong" (259). Tolstoy's pleasure-denying philosophy, on the other hand, preaches that moral conscience (what he refers to as "rational consciousness") must strive to overcome the "animal personality," inherent in every human being, that seeks the gratification of its sensual impulses (26: 313-442). Nowhere is the opposition between Artsybashev's pagan philosophy of self-affirmation and Tolstoy's Christian philosophy of self-abnegation more in evidence than in the contrasting views, actions, and fates of Vladimir Sanin, the author's ostensible mouthpiece, and Yury Svarozhich, the surrogate for Tolstoyan sexual morality in the novel.

Indeed, the narrative structure of Artsybashev's novel, with its central romantic competition waged over the voluptuous Zinaida Karsavina, reads in large part as a contest between these two fictional male characters (Sanin and Svarozhich) as well as the opposing ideologies (Saninism and Tolstoyism) that each represents. Artsybashev's main protagonist is characterized throughout the narrative as a "natural" man whose childhood upbringing and adolescent education were spent apart from his family and without the normal mechanisms of socialization. This, we are told, allowed his soul to develop in a distinctively independent, original, and natural way, "like a tree growing in a field" (35). In social terms, Sanin, as an uninhibited "natural" man, seems unfettered by the demands of his society's conventions or by traditional moral constraints. In terms of his personality and character, Sanin's naturalness manifests itself primarily in an open, accepting attitude toward the physical urges and sensual desires of the human body: Artsybashev's hero champions what Engelstein terms "the cult of happy physicality" (388). Indeed, Sanin seems to possess a nearly unquenchable thirst for the physical pleasures of life, a hearty, lustful appetite that appears fully justified (even mandated) by the hedonistic philosophy of sensual indulgence he espouses. What distinguishes a natural man from mere animals, Sanin explains, is the human need for, and understanding of, sensual gratification:

The more animalistic an animal is, the less it understands pleasure and the less able it is to secure it. It merely satisfies its needs. We all agree that man isn't created to suffer and that suffering isn't the goal of human aspirations. In other words, pleasure is the goal of life... Yes, abstinence is not natural for man, and the most sincere people are those who don't hide their physical lusts... (62).

To live life to its fullest and, in the process, to avoid pain, suffering, and misery, the hedonistic Sanin reasons, "it is necessary to satisfy one's natural desires. Desire is everything; if desire dies in a person, life dies as well; and if he kills desire, he kills himself" (130). Compare this passionate defense of libidinal desire as the essence of human happiness with the ascetic sentiment expressed by Seryozha Popov, a well-known

Tolstoyan: "Not to desire anything—that is happiness" (Прутавин 282).

The opposition between Saninian self-affirmation and Tolstoyan self-abnegation is especially evident in their sharply contrasting views on the morality of drinking alcoholic beverages. Sanin's unbridled lust and passion for life lead him to endorse the use of alcohol, since intoxication, to his mind, liberates a person from the repressive emotional, psychological, and moral fetters that otherwise imprison him or her. "In my opinion, only a drunkard lives life as it should be lived," Sanin states. "A drunkard does only what he feels like doing: if he feels like singing, he sings; if he feels like dancing, he dances; and he doesn't ever feel ashamed of his joy and merrymaking" (84). To the ancient Roman adage (from which his surname may well derive), *mens sana in corpore sano*, Artsybashev's hero would thus add another: *in vino veritas*. This endorsement of drinking spirits led one contemporary critic to condemn the heavy-drinking Sanin as nothing more than "an amoral alcoholic" (Омельченко, 36). On the other hand, Tolstoy, as we know, adamantly condemned the use of alcohol, since, to his mind, strong drink kills human reason and deadens one's moral sensibilities. In his essay, "Why Do People Stupefy Themselves?" (*Для чего люди одурманиваются?* 1890), Tolstoy writes: "Men drink and smoke not to keep their spirits up, not for gaiety's sake, and not because it is pleasant, but in order to stifle conscience within themselves" (27: 282). Beyond all of its addictive qualities, the use of alcohol is a destructive habit, according to Tolstoy, since it leads directly to sexual debauchery by eliminating the moral restraints that are normally in place to harness libidinal desire. "Dissoluteness does not lie in anything physical—no kind of physical misconduct is debauchery," explains Pozdnyshev, speaking for the author in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. "Real debauchery lies precisely in freeing oneself from moral relations with a woman with whom you have physical intimacy" (27: 17). Where Sanin's followers purportedly established "free love" leagues, where binge drinking, group sex, and other forms of moral libertinism were said to take place, Tolstoy advised his followers instead to create temperance leagues that encouraged abstinence from alcohol and thus from sexual promiscuity (Maude 2:339).

It should not surprise us terribly that for many contemporary Russian readers, especially those of a strong

Christian bent, Sanin's hedonistic philosophy of *carpe diem* was seen as posing an extremely grave threat to traditional moral and religious values. Omel'chenko, for instance, referred to Artsybashev's hero, rather disdainfully, as "a missionary of the enjoyment of unrestricted pleasures" (29). Sanin's creator, meanwhile, was condemned by Maksim Gorky, among others, for having written a novel that was considered "an apology for the animal principle in man" (Прокопов 20).

The counterpoint to this Saninian mixture of egotism, eroticism, and Epicureanism in the novel is provided by Yury Svarozhich, whose adherence to Tolstoyan ideas, beliefs, and teachings runs much deeper than that of either Von Deitz or Soloveichik.<sup>7</sup> This is especially true with respect to the Tolstoyan fear of, and disdain for, the human body with its attendant carnal appetites. As I have attempted to show elsewhere, a moral revulsion to sensual pleasure led the apostle of Yasnaya Polyana in his later years to renounce categorically such pleasure-arousing behaviors as drinking alcohol, eating meat (as well as any other luxury food item), hunting wild game and, of course, engaging in sexual intercourse (LeBlanc 147-166). Generalizing from his own personal battle against the pleasures of the flesh, Tolstoy declared war on the human body as a site of irresistible physical temptations that are highly addictive and seriously debilitating. A key moral notion for the post-conversion Tolstoy, consequently, becomes "abstinence" (*воздержание*), which he considers the necessary first step along the long and arduous path to moral and spiritual self-perfection.<sup>8</sup> Among the characters in *Sanin*, this Tolstoyan mandate of abstinence from corporeal pleasures is advocated most strongly by Yury Svarozhich, who—much like Tolstoy and his Tolstoyan disciples—subscribes to what Artsybashev's narrator considers a life-denying, repressive moral philosophy that encourages self-abnegation, abstinence, and sacrifice rather than sensual indulgence. Svarozhich, as the epitome of the Tolstoyan moral man, seeks to sublimate and transcend the bodily desires that obstruct him in his quest for moral and spiritual self-purification.

### **Yury Svarozhich: The Path of Tolstoyan Abstinence**

The first indications of Svarozhich's adherence to the Tolstoyan ideology of renunciation of the pleasures of the flesh appear in one of the novel's earliest scenes: the picnic outing depicted in Chapters Five and Six. Yury, who has ventured off into a dark, imposing cave together with the beautiful young schoolteacher Karsavina, soon finds himself sexually aroused by her physical proximity:

And suddenly his head began to spin. He cast a sidelong glance at her round sloping shoulders and at her ample bosom, barely covered by her flimsy Ukrainian blouse. The thought that she was, in essence, completely in his power and that no one would hear anything was so strong and unexpected that for a moment everything grew dark before his eyes. But he immediately regained control of himself because he was genuinely and steadfastly convinced that it was abominable to violate a woman—and for him, Yury Svarozhich, it was altogether inconceivable. (81-82)

"And instead of doing what at that moment he wanted to do more than life itself, that which inflamed his whole body with strength and passion," the narrator informs us (81), Yury fights back his sexual impulses by engaging in conversation with Karsavina. Even during their walk back to the spot where their group is holding its picnic, however, Yury continues to struggle against his concupiscent desires. "As Karsavina walked ahead," the narrator reports, "Yury noticed her broad, strong hips; once again the same desire took hold of him and it was difficult for him to overcome it...Yury's breathing was labored. He felt intensely pleased, as if he had skirted some abyss, and at the same time felt intensely ashamed" (82-83). The shame Yury feels is due, no doubt, to the fact that he feels himself becoming sexually aroused by the nearness of a pure, innocent young woman, who is very much like his virginal younger sister Lyalya. In accord with the tenets of Tolstoyan sexual morality, Yury will endeavor to replace the sinful passion and libidinal excitation he is experiencing with a more spiritual feeling of compassion and sympathy in his relationship to the women he loves: he will seek to treat them as sisters, not sex objects.

Sexual desire nonetheless continues to raise its ugly head for Yury whenever he happens to encounter Karsavina. Svarozhich, however, is shown to be very deeply ensconced in a state of denial as far as his true feelings for this attractive young woman are concerned. As the narrator explains,

Everything he thought about her attractiveness, purity, and spiritual depth was conveyed through her physical beauty and tenderness, but for some reason Yury didn't admit this to himself; he tried to convince himself that he found the young woman attractive not because of her shoulders, bosom, eyes, or voice, but rather because of her chastity and purity. And it seemed easier, nobler, and better for him to think that way, even though it was precisely her purity and chastity that aroused him, inflaming his blood and exciting his desire. From the very first evening he experienced a vague but familiar feeling, although he wasn't fully aware of it at the time: a cruel desire to deprive her of her purity and innocence; this insatiable desire usually arose at the sight of any beautiful woman. (93-94)

Yury's denial of the undeniable sexual attraction he feels toward Karsavina, the narrator explains, leads directly to the repression of his sexual desire for her. This is made evident in the text by the "voluptuous" and "sunny" images of beautiful naked women that begin to visit him at night in his dreams, when the contents of his subconscious mind are able to emerge more freely (103). Indeed, Svarozhich even starts to daydream, fantasizing about how Karsavina would look if she were stripped naked: "Yury thought that if she were suddenly to throw off all her clothes and then, naked, fair, and gay, run through the dewy grass into the mysterious green grove, it wouldn't be at all strange, but splendid and natural; instead of destroying the verdant life of the dark garden, it would only enhance it" (110). For the most part, however, Yury manages to dispel such erotic pagan fantasies, even if at times he clearly envies Sanin's ability to trust his bodily urges and indulge them freely.<sup>9</sup> Placing his trust in the judgment of his rational consciousness over the instinctual promptings of his animal personality, Svarozhich rationalizes his nearly anhedonic fear of bodily pleasure by dismissing Sanin's pagan enjoyment of life as mere "animalism" (*животность*). "Life is sensation," Yury

reasons, "but people aren't thoughtless beasts; they must direct their desires toward the good, and not allow those desires to gain control over them" (150). To Svarozhich's mind, therefore, the libertine Sanin is nothing but "a repulsive, vulgar man" (141), while the philandering Ryazantsev, his sister's fiancé, is similarly dismissed as simply "a filthy animal" (143).

Despite what Svarozhich's rational consciousness might tell him about the need to sublimate his libidinal energies and channel them toward a higher moral good, his sexual repression has led to his emotional life becoming increasingly gray, lifeless, and empty. "There was no spark in his life," the narrator comments. "He was on fire only at those times when he felt healthy and strong, and was in love with a woman" (198). Although Yury prides himself on the fact that he is decidedly unlike the other young men in his social milieu, he also realizes that the ideas, values and behaviors of Sanin, Ryazantsev, Novikov, and the other robust young males in his hometown are having a decidedly deleterious effect upon him. "They're far removed from tragic self-flagellation," he muses. "They're as content as the triumphant swine of Zarathustra. Their whole life is contained within their own microscopically small egos; and they're even infecting me with their vulgarity. Does not he who keeps company with wolves begin to howl like a wolf himself? It's only natural!" (203). In the face of the rampant Darwinian, Nietzschean, and Stirnerian male thinking that surrounds him, with its underlying Saninian credo of hedonism, Yury stubbornly struggles to cling to his core Tolstoyan beliefs. "To live and to sacrifice!" he tells himself. "That's genuine life!" (204).

All it seems to take is physical nearness to the alluring Karsavina, however, to erode further Yury's already waning enthusiasm for Tolstoy's teachings about ascetic self-denial, especially since Karsavina's reciprocal attraction toward him has now become quite evident. "Everything was drowning in a surge of such voracious happiness that he felt as if he were a bird soaring high above the trees into the sunlit blue sky," the narrator reports shortly before Yury and Karsavina share their first kiss. "All day his heart was so light and he felt such strength in his body that every movement brought him fresh, absolute pleasure" (312). Later that same evening, by which time Yury's body, we are told, has become increasingly "tense, strong, vigorous, and confident" (318), Svarozhich appears to be on the verge

of consummating, at long last, his burning sexual passion for Karsavina:

In the pale moonlight he found her hot, soft, passionate lips and began to press on them deliberate, demanding kisses from which white-hot, glowing iron seemed to scorch their languorous bodies. It was a moment of total madness governed only by powerful animal instinct. Karsavina didn't resist; she merely trembled when Yury's hand tenderly yet audaciously touched her legs as no one ever had before. (318-319)

"All of a sudden Yury asked himself in horror: What on earth am I doing?" the narrator reports (319). Highly distraught and overpowered by the realization that what he is about to do is morally repulsive, Yury abruptly relents in his sexual pursuit of Karsavina. "Well, what of it?" Yury rationalizes to himself later that night as he returns home in the darkness.

Was it absolutely necessary to defile this pure, holy young maiden? Did it absolutely have to end as it would have ended if any other vulgar man would have been in my place? Let her be! It would have been so repulsive; thank God I turned out to be incapable of it! It's all so vile: on the spot, almost without words, like a beast!" He thought, already with a feeling of disgust, about what had just recently filled him with such strength and happiness. But inside something still gnawed and tore at him in his impotent anguish, causing him mute and painful shame. (320)

The narrator's portrayal of Yury's inner turmoil here suggests rather strongly that this young man's choice of sexual retreat may well have been due less to any loyalty or devotion he may have felt toward Tolstoy's moral teachings than to a fear of his own body and its carnal appetites. Performance anxiety and fear of impotence (as an inexperienced male heterosexual lover), not "rational consciousness" as a Tolstoyan moral man, it could be argued, are what actually prevent this sex-starved young man from making love at last to the alluring, sexually aroused, and ostensibly willing Karsavina. Luker suggests as much when he writes that Yury "failed sexually" in this scene (85).

### **Saninian Hedonism: Unleashing the Beast of Sexual Passion**

Sanin quickly avails himself of Yury's lost sexual opportunity with Karsavina when he offers to escort her home—initially on foot and then later by boat—from the monastery late that same night. Many critics have interpreted as a rape scene the episode of sexual seduction in the rowboat when Karsavina submits to the power of Sanin's passionate yearning for her. They may well be correct in their reading of the scene, yet the narrator, for his part, seeks to make it clear that Karsavina had remained sexually excited following her interrupted, unconsummated tryst with Svarozhich earlier that same day. "And for the hundredth time she recalled with the most profound rapture the incomprehensibly enticing sensation she had experienced in submitting to Yury for the first time," the narrator reports (330). During her trip home with Sanin, whose mere physical closeness produces "a sense of unfamiliar excitation" within Karsavina (333), her state of unfulfilled sexual longing persists, growing even stronger: "She felt an irresistible but only dimly conscious desire to let him know that she was not always such a quiet, modest young woman and that perhaps she was altogether different, both naked and shameless. She felt excited and elated as a result of this unfulfilled desire" (334-335). As she listens to Sanin while he shares with her his original, unorthodox views about such issues as the chronic indecisiveness and melancholia suffered by young Russian intellectuals like Svarozhich, the denigration of the body and stigmatization of physical desires one observes within contemporary Russian society, and the possibility of people enjoying the kind of love that is free of fear, jealousy or slavery, Karsavina suddenly realizes that "before her lay an entire world of original feelings and powers unknown to her; all of a sudden she felt like reaching out to it...a strange excitement overcame her whole body and manifested itself in nervous trembling" (338). When the carnal seduction does take place at last, we are told that Karsavina felt and understood with her entire being Sanin's strong sexual yearning for her and that she was "intoxicated" by it (338). "She was suddenly submerged in an incomprehensible loss of will," the narrator explains. "She relaxed her arms and lay back, seeing and recognizing nothing; with both burning pain and agonizing

delight she surrendered to another's strength and will—those of a man" (339).

Although genuine tears will subsequently be shed and bitter regret will be felt at the loss of her virginity (as well as at her betrayal of Yury's love), Karsavina is shown to lack the strength of will to push Sanin away during their sexual encounter in the rowboat. "She didn't defend herself when he began kissing her once again," the narrator informs us,

she welcomed this burning new delight almost unconsciously, with half-closed eyes receding ever deeper into a new and enigmatically enticing world that was still strange to her. At times she seemed not to see or hear or feel anything, but each of his movements, each force exerted on her submissive body she perceived with extraordinary piquancy, with mixed feelings of humiliation and eager curiosity. (340)

This scene of purported sexual assault, Boele argues, "is intended to suggest that Karsavina enjoys the experience and is initiated into a new, more 'natural' way of life. Functionally speaking, Sanin is only an instrument designed to demonstrate the superiority of a higher truth. His unpretentious enjoyment of life is clearly presented as an example to all" (6). Engelstein interprets the scene similarly: "In the soothing lull of a warm summer night, with no desire for commitment or sense of remorse, Sanin enjoys a momentary connection with another man's sexually frustrated sweetheart. Indeed, his special role in the narrative is to convince young women who have succumbed to desire that their impulses have improved rather than degraded them" (385).

The sexual aggressiveness that Sanin demonstrates in this scene is thus intended for the edification not merely of the novel's male readers, but the female ones as well, as Engelstein argues, since Artsybashev seeks in *Sanin* to vindicate "women's capacity for sexual pleasure" (397).<sup>10</sup> Like so many of the other young people in the town who fall under the bewitching spell of Sanin's charismatic personality, Karsavina views the events of this fateful night as "some powerful intoxication" (344) that suddenly overcame and transformed her. Later, when she finds herself in a more sober and reflective state of mind, she will return to her conventional morality and feel guilty that she, "a vile, depraved

creature" (351), surrendered her virginity to Sanin that night. If one of Sanin's most important roles in Artsybashev's novel is to propagandize a new, more genuine and individualistic way of being in the world, then in the case of Karsavina his efforts have not been entirely successful. "However great Sanin's desire to propagandize his fellow-men in the way of true being," Luker writes, "his words have no more than a temporary effect on them, and to a man they fail to emulate him" (94). The same is true, of course, for the female characters in the novel. As Phelps notes, "It is clear that Artsybashev believes that for some time to come women will not accept the gospel of uncompromising egoism" (257). Although female characters like Zinaida Karsavina and Lida Sanina can be true to themselves temporarily, they cannot "be so for good, because like the vast majority they eventually succumb to the flabby mediocrity of their convention-bound lives" (Luker 94).

Yury Svarozhich, we soon learn, fatally shoots himself, not because Karsavina had betrayed him (he appears not to have been aware that she submitted to Sanin's sexual advances in the rowboat that fateful night), but because he had become increasingly alienated and depressed as a result of leading a loveless, celibate life that was bringing him nothing but misery. The proverbial final straw seems to have been the mockery of Yury's moral indecisiveness and incessant self-questioning by Sanin's protégé Ivanov at the drinking party held at the nearby monastery on the very same evening when Svarozhich failed to act "like a beast" toward Karsavina (that is, failed to unleash his repressed sexual passion for her). When asked by Yury where he thinks happiness lies, Ivanov responds, "Well, certainly not in whining all one's life and asking oneself at every step: 'I just sneezed. Oh, was it a good thing I did? Did I harm anyone by doing so? With this sneeze of mine did I fulfill my destiny?'" (323). The narrator later reports that "Yury felt that there was some truth in Ivanov's mockery" (324). Sanin likewise mocks Svarozhich's romantic weariness of spirit that same evening while verbally seducing Karsavina in the rowboat. "You think that a man who's morally discontented, who regards everything with trepidation, is not simply unhappy and pathetic but some kind of special, sublime, even perhaps powerful person!" Sanin says to her. "You seem to think that the endless contemplation of one's actions is an attractive trait that permits a person

to consider himself better than other people and confers the right not so much to compassion as to respect and love" (335). Svarozhich's emotional discontent and mental depression, Artsybashev's hero seems strongly to suggest, could very well be cured by a healthy dose of Saninian hedonistic fun: that is, by some liberation from his chronic sexual repression.

Feeling in Sanin's presence the nearness of "something new, interesting, and exciting" (335), Karsavina listens attentively as he provides a lengthy historical explanation of how modern intellectuals like Svarozhich have come to resemble Hamlet: that is, their wills are chronically paralyzed and atrophied due to excessive self-reflection and lingering self-doubt. "There was a time when man lived a narrow, brutish life, never considering what he did and felt or why," Sanin explains.

This was followed by an era of conscious life, and its first stage was the reevaluation of all feelings, needs, and desires. Yury Svarozhich stands precisely at this stage; like the last of the Mohicans, he represents this period of human development as it recedes into eternity. Like every final manifestation, he has absorbed into himself all the essences of his age and they have poisoned him to the depths of his soul. He has no life as such; everything he does is subject to endless reconsideration: is it good? isn't it bad? He's developed this trait to the point of absurdity...The fact is that there are many people like this; they constitute a majority. Yury Svarozhich is an exception only insofar as he's not as stupid as the rest and this struggle with himself has not assumed so ridiculous a form but at times even a genuinely tragic one. A man like Novikov merely grows fat on his doubts and sufferings like a hog locked in a pigsty, but Svarozhich really carries catastrophe around with him in his heart. (335-336)

According to Sanin, brooding intellectuals like Yury Svarozhich, who are deeply dissatisfied with life, are simply "afraid to live" and "afraid to feel" (337). They spend their lives in emotional prisons of their own making, slavishly subordinating the body to the spirit and stigmatizing their natural physical desires as despicable bestial urges because they have become ashamed of them. For Sanin, man is—or ideally ought to be—not a repressed, fearful moralist like Svarozhich,

but rather "a harmonious combination of body and spirit" (336). As Luker observes, "by making spontaneous, passionate love to Karsavina, he [Sanin] has implicitly passed sentence on the vacillating, introspective Iurii" (94). In a novel whose appeal to contemporary Russian youth seems to have been predicated less on its eroticism per se than on what Naiman calls its "pretense to ideological coherence" (48), the eponymous hero of *Sanin* offers a radically new sexual ethos that is designed to supplant not only the Marxism of dispirited young Russian revolutionaries, but also the Tolstoyism of repressed, self-abnegating moralists such as Yury Svarozhich.

### **Artsybashev: Contra Tolstoy and Tolstoyism**

The anti-Tolstoyan subtext in Artsybashev's novel, as we have seen, is most evident in the author's attack upon two ideological positions that are closely associated with Tolstoy's moral teachings: (1) a Christian form of moral-religious belief that advocates non-resistance to evil, and (2) a Cartesian dualism that denigrates the body and its carnal appetites as entities that are irredeemably bestial, while exulting the soul or spirit as constituting what is distinctively noble and "human" about human beings. There are numerous other textual elements found in *Sanin* that could likewise be read as critiques of Tolstoyan ideas: for example, the incestuous sexual attraction that Sanin feels toward his sister Lida (which parodically inverts Tolstoy's injunction in his "Afterword to *The Kreutzer Sonata*" that young husbands and wives, if they must marry at all, should strive to live together chastely, as brothers and sisters, in their conjugal unions (27: 82-92); Sanin's diatribe against those who would transform the world into a "monastic barracks" (52) and annihilate all individualistic personality; the jilted Novikov's decision, after his hopes for personal happiness with Lida have temporarily been dashed, to dedicate his life to helping other people by volunteering to participate in the famine relief effort; the dark pessimism and morbid cynicism about the life of the spirit that are expressed during Semyonov's deathbed scene (which contrast sharply with the epiphanic moments of moral transformation and spiritual redemption that Ivan Ilych, Vasily Brekhunov, and other characters in Tolstoy's later works of fiction experience while dying); and Yury Svarozhich's increasing doubts about sexual

chastity as a viable ideal, since mankind, as he notes, would perish in the realization of that ideal (152). But, as this essay has been arguing, it is Tolstoy's ascetic brand of Christianity and his deep-seated Cartesian attitude toward the human body that appear to be the main targets of Artsybashev's critique of Tolstoyan ideas, beliefs, and teachings in *Sanin*.

Just as Tolstoy left no doubt that he strongly disapproved of the "stupidity, ignorance, and smug self-assurance" of the hero Sanin and the moral bankruptcy of Saninism, so too did Artsybashev, who characterized himself as a writer whose spirit is fundamentally alien to Tolstoy's moral teachings, make clear his disdain for Tolstoyism as a philosophy of life that advocates asceticism, pacifism, and the repression of sexual desire. This is spelled out rather explicitly in the essay, "About Tolstoy" («О Толстом», 1911), which Artsybashev included in his *Writer's Notes* (*Записки писателя*), a collection of essays that, according to P. V. Nikolaev, "were initiated by the argument with Lev Tolstoy about human nature" (243). In his essay, Artsybashev openly acknowledges the enormous debt he owes to Tolstoy as a writer and creative artist, but he also leaves no doubt about the low opinion he holds of Tolstoy's moral and philosophical teachings. "As a thinker, if by this word we mean a person who has discovered a new idea and brought forth a new revelation," Artsybashev writes,

Tolstoy is not worth a brass farthing. Alas, this is a fact. Compared to Christ, Tolstoy was the same, for example, as Pisarev compared to Darwin or a mediocre professor compared to Newton. Not a single one of his numerous writings on philosophical and religious themes is worth even three pages out of the Gospels. The weakness of his interpretation of Christian morality is startling. He got so muddled in trivialities, he so weighed down an idea with trifling nonsense that, as a way to hoist the truth about the corruption of the spirit by the flesh, he demonstrated the indecency of ladies' jerseys and the indubitable harm of tobacco. (3: 690)

Tolstoy's moral-religious beliefs, according to Artsybashev, are "short-sighted" (697) and "bankrupt" (698). Artsybashev considers the post-conversion Tolstoy, as a philosopher, to be "a narrow-minded dogmatist who based everything on one single point, who deprived his mind of the freedom of any further searching, and who

rested in a blissful calm, believing that the truth had been found!" (690).

To Artsybashev's mind, Tolstoy's puritanical code of morality is not only feeble and unstable, but also impracticable and unrealizable: "He himself was unable to live in accord with it, and not because he was simply weak, as he tried to argue in justifying himself, but rather because it was impossible to live with this code." The reason why Tolstoy's moral code is unrealizable, Artsybashev strongly implies, is because we live in a Darwinian, Nietzschean, and Stirnerian universe; that is, we inhabit a violent world where the struggle for existence compels people, as individual egos, to compete ruthlessly against each other for "every breath of air" they take (690). "The world is founded upon the mutual annihilation of all that is living," Artsybashev explains. Echoing Dostoevsky's Dmitry Karamazov, the author of *Sanin* writes: "Man is too broad; and it is impossible to make him more narrow" (691). Artsybashev's views on how human beings ought to conduct themselves in such a violent, competitive, and mutually destructive world thus differs drastically, of course, not only from those of Tolstoy, but also from those of Dostoevsky. As a secular humanist and avowed atheist who maintained that belief in the immortality of the soul was merely a "fabrication" (687) and who conceptualized the human being as a sensate animal that everywhere seeks to enjoy pleasure and to avoid pain or suffering, Artsybashev could hardly be said to subscribe to either the Tolstoyan or the Dostoevskian worldview, with their strongly religious overtones and their call for the moral purification that comes through suffering.

It is a rather curious irony of Russian literary history, therefore, as Mirsky long ago reminded us, that Tolstoy himself—as one of the first writers to lift the aesthetic taboos of Russian realism and portray the physical side of life without the "genteel" and "puritanical" conventions that had traditionally characterized Russian literary depictions of sex and death—turns out to be the one who provided much of the impetus for the "new sensualism" that permeated the works of Gorky, Andreev, Artsybashev, and other neo-realists at the turn of the century. The moralistic writings Tolstoy produced in his later years, beginning with *The Kreutzer Sonata*, constitute, in Mirsky's words, "a step in the direction of *Sanin*" (375). With his taboo-lifting brand of realism, his creation of metaphysical and

moral problem stories, and his intense consciousness of the elemental verities of life—especially sex and death—Tolstoy the literary artist served as a trailblazer and influential model for the younger generation of Russian writers such as Artsybashev. Even the didactic element in the latter's prose, Mirsky points out, can be traced back to Tolstoy's poetics. "Artsybashev's preaching proceeds directly from Tolstoy," he asserts, "only it is Tolstoy the other way around, and Tolstoy without genius" (402). Indeed, the hedonistic, paganistic hero Sanin, as we have seen in this essay, sought actively to puncture precisely the idea Artsybashev himself once characterized as the "eternal mirage" that human beings invariably construct and that Tolstoy indefatigably preached: namely, that the human body, with its sensual desires as well as its sensuous appropriation of the natural world, is something that must be sacrificed for the good of the spirit. As a direct response to Tolstoy's puritanical moral teachings, *Sanin* aims instead to restore lost value to the human body and its attendant carnal appetites. Despite all the artistic influence Tolstoy may have exerted upon Artsybashev as a writer, Saninism, as a radically new moral-sexual ethos being advocated in early-twentieth-century Russia, directly challenges the Tolstoyan sexual morality that may actually have spawned this pornographic novel in the first place.

Perhaps the legacy of Tolstoy extends beyond the sphere of literary aesthetics, however, and exerts an influence in the sphere of sexual morality as well. Arkady Gornfel'd, for instance, alleges that the "sexual realism" one encounters in *Sanin*, which he claims is designed to appeal to the "dark sexual instincts" of the novel's readers, reveals something persistently nightmarish about the narrative, "like the sadistic dream of an ascetic who is struggling with the flesh" (Горнфельд 27). Artsybashev's text, in short, seems to have reminded the critic of the carnally tormented Tolstoy himself. Aleksandr Zakrzhevsky, meanwhile, asserts that "the imperious and stupefying fate of Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* hangs over Artsybashev with an immobile and irrepressible heaviness". It may well be the case, as these types of interpretation suggest, that *Sanin* is merely a variation on *The Kreutzer Sonata*: that is, a literary work in which carnal desire is all-pervasive and human beings are portrayed as being essentially animalistic in their sexual passion. Sanin himself, in this

vein, could be considered merely a new Pozdnyshev, albeit one who lacks, in Zakrzhevsky's words, "Tolstoy's redemptive idea" (Закржевский 133). It could be argued, in short, that Artsybashev, who advocates in *Sanin* an indulgence in sexual pleasure that the author of *The Kreutzer Sonata* categorically condemns, may well be proceeding directly from his famous predecessor in the sphere of sexual morality as well as that of literary art. In the end, the Saninism proselytized in Artsybashev's novel, whose hero actively preaches a radically new moral-sexual ethos, may be simply another kind of Tolstoyism; only here too it is Tolstoyism turned "the other way around."

Being made witness to the possibility that he had himself engendered such a monstrous artistic-rhetorical progeny, albeit inadvertently, would most likely have grieved and mortified Tolstoy deeply in his sunset years. This might help to explain why Tolstoy was prompted to condemn Artsybashev, as well his novel and his hero, so angrily and so vociferously.

### Notes

All references to the text of *Sanin* are to the first volume of Artsybashev's *Собрание сочинений в трех томах*. I follow Michael Katz's translation with only a few minor modifications.

1. Tsimmerman's letter of 15 April 1908 is located in the manuscript division of the Tolstoy State Museum in Moscow, f. 1, l. 4. The contents of her letter are described in book 3 of Dr. D. P. Makovitskii's "Yasnaya Polyana Notes" for May 1908 (*Литературное наследство* 77).
2. The two writers, it seems, never did meet one another, nor did they ever correspond. When asked to explain why he had failed to attend Tolstoy's funeral, Artsybashev noted that he had never visited Yasnaya Polyana when Tolstoy was alive. "What would I have started to talk with him about? What pleasure could the old man possibly derive from the visit of a writer whose spirit was genuinely alien to his beliefs?...The pleasure of a quarrel? We didn't need to see each other in the flesh to do that" (3: 689).
3. P. V. Nikolaev maintains that the non-Russian names given to characters such as Von Deitz are meant to suggest the "foreignness" of their beliefs, values, and actions, just as Tolstoy's own religious teachings were themselves considered by many at the time to be a variety of European Protestantism that was alien to native Russian thought. "The

names of Artsybashev's Tolstoyan characters," he writes, "may well contain a hint at this circumstance" (238).

4. Nikolaev explains how Sanin's quasi-pacifist response to Zarudin's challenge to fight a duel may well allude to the advice provided by Tolstoy in his short essay, "Rules for Officers" («Офицерская памятка,» 1902), in which he implores military officers to cease being "martial" (*военным*) and to seek instead to dismantle the cult of violence encouraged by General Dragomirov in his pamphlet of the same name («Офицерская памятка,» 1901), to which Tolstoy's essay serves as a direct response (239-240). The peace-making kind of behavior he is advocating, Tolstoy insists in his essay, requires much more courage than fighting any duel (34: 290).

5. "It is often thought that Nietzsche exercised a great influence over me," Artsybashev once reported. "This surprises me, for the simple reason that I have never read Nietzsche. This brilliant thinker is out of sympathy with me, both in his ideas and in the bombastic form of his works, and I have never got beyond the beginnings of his books. Max Stirner is to me much nearer and more comprehensible" (Artzibashef 9). Taking Artsybashev at his word, Luker argues that Sanin's diatribe against Christianity develops not out of Nietzsche's philosophy, but rather out of the writings of Max Stirner, who held that Christian doctrine, preoccupied with the spiritual and the abstract, had robbed modern man of his vitality and passion, leaving him poorly equipped to appreciate real life (82-83).

6. It should be noted, however, that Artsybashev's hero rather unfairly conflates Tolstoy's radical Christian beliefs with those of traditional Christianity and the official Church. As an outspoken critic of both Roman Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy, as institutionalized forms of religion that preach an oppressive ideology (one that distorts Christ's true message), Tolstoy finds more of a kinship here with Nietzsche than Sanin (or Artsybashev) seems prepared to acknowledge. I am grateful to one of the anonymous *Tolstoy Studies Journal* reviewers for bringing this point to my attention.

7. "If Sanin embodies Artsybashev's advocacy of the natural life, free of moral and social constraints," writes Luker, "then the alternative and unnatural way of being is demonstrated by the technology student Iurii Svarozhich, who serves as a foil to the hero Sanin and he thus represents what Artsybashev saw as the positive and negative polarities

operative among the Russian intelligentsia around the turn of the century, a neat contrast affirmed by the fact that both characters have their disciples: Sanin is followed by the teacher, Ivanov, and Iurii by the student, Shafrov. Whereas Sanin's behaviour testifies to the joy of being alive in a world brimming with physical promise, Iurii's reflects the profoundly life-denying pessimism that sapped the creative strength of so many members of his generation" (84).

8. See especially Tolstoy's essay, "The First Step" («Первая ступень,» 1892), where he asserts that it is impossible for one to lead a good and moral life—whether as a Christian or as a pagan—unless one begins with abstinence and self-abnegation. The indispensable "first step" up the hierarchical ladder of moral virtues for both Christians and pagans alike, Tolstoy writes, involves the renunciation of our basic physical appetites and our liberation from the animal lusts that plague us. Tolstoy identifies the three principal animal lusts that torment human beings to be "gluttony, idleness, and carnal love" (29: 73-74).

9. For example, when he witnesses Sanin being nestled affectionately by a tall, attractive peasant woman during the hunting scene depicted in Chapter Thirteen, Yury feels unconscious envy of his comrade (140). Soon afterwards, following his hunting trip with his future brother-in-law Ryazantsev, Yury is sorely tempted by his hunting partner's suggestion that the two of them return to the place where Sanin had been cavorting with peasant women: "Yury blushed deeply in the darkness. A forbidden feeling stirred within him with its animal appetite; unusual and awe-inspiring pictures penetrated his excited brain, but he gained control of himself and replied dryly, 'No. It's time to go home.' (141).

10. Naiman, who maintains that "sexual desire in the novel frequently surfaces in self-aggrandizing male fantasies" (49) and that "the novel cannot talk about sex without lapsing into a rhetoric of male aggrandizement and female humiliation" (49-50), strongly disagrees with the much more generous assessment that critics such as Engelstein (along with Boele and Luker) provide of the author's sexual ethos, claiming that these scholars fail to recognize the misogynist dimensions of Artsybashev's text. Although the eponymous hero claims to respect women and seeks ostensibly to liberate rather than humiliate them, Naiman advises readers not to detach Sanin from *Sanin*, a novel where, in his view, "delight in female humiliation masquerades as a critique of sexual hypocrisy" (51).

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