

Errant Sofas and Unnatural Wallpaper: Reading the Domestic Aesthetics of *Anna Karenina*

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Just as the stylized social interactions of public life could employ, to quote Yuri Lotman, “a stable sign-system of poses and gestures” (169), the styling of the home’s decor made an impression of personal taste on its guests and residents, conspicuously displaying the consumption of, and adherence to, public fashions. In *Anna Karenina*, various pieces of interior decor in the novel suggest specific cultural signifiers; however, rather than simply mapping out the “sign-system” of material culture and claiming it as a stable code within the realist project, these realist details become overloaded with social and moral significance/signification, defamiliarizing the objects for the reader, the characters, and the text itself.

Roman Jakobson remarks that “[f]ollowing the path of contiguous relations, the Realist author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time” (130), suggesting that the material environment of Tolstoy’s novel provides a network of synecdoches whereby the characters may be judged via their homes and, more specifically, their home decoration. The central technique of realism as genre is then to create the atmosphere of profuse and precise physical details and their suggested metonymic significance, according to genre convention. However these elements of decor—from divans to wallpaper—do not simply reflect the inner lives of the characters: They comment on and affect the course of the

characters’ progression through the narrative. The internal relation between symbols that Jakobson asserts bridges addresser and addressee is here the culturally-inflected “sign-system” of aesthetics and domestic ideology in *Anna Karenina*, a code that assists the reader’s metonymic interpretation of the characters. Moreover, these elements of decor often bear complex and intertwining significations in terms of domestic ideology and gender, imbuing them with narrational agency beyond simply metonymic significance.

The contested dichotomy of “outside” and “inside,” “public” and “private,” is an intriguing metaphor—or perhaps metonym—for the “Europeanization” of Russian society. Catriona Kelly points out that, “by the early nineteenth century, the identity of a cultivated Russian depended to [...] a large extent upon the possession of goods and clothing that imitated Western patterns, if they were not actually of Western origin” (141-2). This presented an irresolvable conflict for conservatives whose views were anti-Western while their education, social mores, fashions, and societal behaviors were wholly Westernized; this dualism is particularly evident in Kelly’s reference to “Slavophiles’ Victorian sensibilities,” illuminating the ironical tension between a nationalism based on conservatism and tradition that was a product of an imported Western ideological system (141-2).

Material culture—from clothing to decor—is thus both a physical representation of this breach

of national identity by foreign influences, and also a social agent in the attendant anxiety over such transgressions of national and ideological boundaries. The popularity of foreign materials and their pervasiveness in upper-class lifestyles both signified and sustained the contradictoriness of Russian modes of behavior.

In his history of Russian furniture, Antoine Chenevière notes that between 1840 and 1850 domestic industry, and cabinetmaking in particular, “became submerged in the new style which spread throughout Europe during the second half of the century, a style which aimed at comfort rather than elegance, lavishness rather than refinement” (238). The heavy rococo aesthetic of the Louis XV style that adorned homes throughout Western Europe overtook the nascent native design schools of Russia, ensuring that the cultural importation of aesthetic “modes” was mirrored in the physical importation of decorative items in the homes of the upper classes. A typical bourgeois drawing-room in Saint Petersburg, circa 1859, was adorned in Neo-Rococo furnishings that were very likely French; the room as a whole has been deemed by furniture historian Peter Thornton essentially identical to one in mid-nineteenth-century Paris (294). The aesthetic model of domestic fashionability was thus effectively uniform across Europe, though the arbiters of taste, in decor as in dress, remained the English and the French. Helena Goscilo aptly notes the aesthetic convergence of sartorial fashions with those of furniture and architecture:

Just as interior decoration in the mid-1830s passed from the cabinetmaker to the upholsterer, who concealed the basic lines of furniture with upholstery, fringes, and tassels, so the heavy materials, laces, ruffles, and ribbons of the increasingly mass-produced ‘latest’ mode disguised the female form. By mid-century, when bulky solidity visibly announced moral and economic respectability,

women’s figures were no less upholstered than their sofas. (49-50)

Women’s bodies, or rather their decorative framing, thus matched the decor that framed them and their families within the domestic setting. In England, which dominated the production of textiles and left France to lead in design and fashion, the materials used in the production of clothing, upholstery, and wallpaper were linked on the level of both design and production: In the first half of the century wallpaper designs were imitative of other textile productions (Saunders 46) and wallpaper and other textiles were very often produced with the same printing machines (Greysmith 108). Goscilo’s comparison of fashion and decor is thus especially fitting, as the material adornments in the increasingly feminized sphere of the home were quite literally cut from the same cloth as women’s fashion.

The “politics of private life” played out in the domestic setting, beginning in the mid-eighteenth century and in particular under Catherine the Great, among noble families on their country estates (Randolph 37-40). These cultural and political stakes are represented in the nineteenth century and in the urban and rural homes of the elite in the physical manifestations of domesticity that speak to the aesthetic and economic constructions of social identity both on the body itself and surrounding it in the home, taken for granted as “mere” decoration. If novelistic space, as Mikhail Bakhtin asserts, “becomes more concrete and saturated with a time that is more substantial,” then the historically and culturally inflected materialism of that space, both the objects within as well as the aesthetic environs that demarcate it, “is filled with real, living meaning, and forms a crucial relationship with the hero and his fate” (Bakhtin 120).

Tolstoy scholarship has delved into the theme of the house and its failure to constitute a “home.” Suzanne Osborne, for example, noting Nabokov’s

observation of how the word home (дом) resounds throughout the opening of *Anna Karenina*, analyzes the “alien residence” of Anna’s home with Vronsky at Vozdvizhenskoe and the foreign material elements that litter the country estate (67).

By focusing closely on these tangible elements in the context of their implications for this materiality of signs, a careful analysis foregrounds what is literally, narratologically, visually and culturally “background.” If John Randolph’s project in *The House in the Garden* is to study the Bakunin residence as “a case study of the role played by home life in the making of Imperial Russian social thought” (3), then mine is to examine how this social thought is materialized—literally—in the aesthetic spaces of home life as depicted in *Anna Karenina*.

On and Off the Divan

Viktor Shklovsky’s biography of Tolstoy begins with a discussion of the sofa in the study at Yasnaya Polyana, a piece of furniture where Tolstoy, his siblings, and his own children were born, and where Tolstoy did much of his work as a writer (7-8). As a textual locus for beginning Shklovsky’s biographical and critical discussion of Tolstoy, the study and its oilcloth-covered divan are places of dual-procreativity: The private birthplace of generations of Tolstoy and metaphorical “birthplace” of Tolstoy’s public name and literary legacy. Sofia Andreevna Tolstoy’s diaries indicate that her husband maintained a separate bedroom, sleeping on his divan and only sharing her bedroom for conjugal purposes (5).

Thus the divan’s function in the Tolstoy household was largely as a place of repose, kept separate and distinct from sexual relations; and yet by being designating a site free from sexual desire, the spatial segregation highlights the cordoning off of the domestic and the sexual, accentuating when and where conjugal relations *do* take

place. While “the practice in Russia among the upper classes was to maintain separate bedrooms, with the husband sleeping on an ottoman in the study” (Matich 62), the three instances in *Anna Karenina* under discussion here present the study and the divan as sites of ambiguity and dislocation as a consequence of illicit sexuality and its ramifications within the domestic sphere outside the study’s walls. Characters commit or comprehend the magnitude of their adultery on the divan, that is to say, their rejection of the socially-sanctified marital bed. The divan serves as a post-coital resting-place for the men involved, not one of pleasure but rather the location to which they have been shunned, barred from the bedroom. But in its coding, on the first page of the novel, as a place of physical dislocation and sexual consequence, the divan becomes a material presence that deprives adulterers of repose or succor; it has been marked by its users according to the physical transgressions they have committed, and it in turn marks them as incapable of attaining physical, spiritual or psychological respite.

Anna Karenina opens famously with a household made chaotic by the adultery of its patriarch. Stepan Arkadevich Oblonsky lies on the divan in his study: “Stiva, as he was known in society, at the usual hour, being 8 o’clock in the morning, awoke not in his wife’s bedroom, but in his study, on his leather couch” (PSS 18: 3). This setting anticipates the reader’s assumption that the normal, proper place for him to awake is in the bedroom with his wife. Moreover, this implication of a shared bed and bedroom codes Stiva’s conjugal practices as a product of a particular time and socio-national place; in contrast to Russian social custom, in nineteenth-century England and France “the centerpiece of the bourgeois master bedroom was usually a marital double bed” (Matich 62). Stiva has been ejected not simply from his wife’s bed, but from the site of his own Westernized, bourgeois conjugal praxis.

From the novel's third sentence, the reader knows the reason for this situation. The spatial-sexual comment is cruel: Oblonsky has slept with a woman other than his wife. Having failed to uphold this placement, Stiva has been banned by his wife from the room that specifically designates their conjugal relationship. His banishment also protects the sanctity of that room's significance in its distanced preservation from Stiva's immoral profligacy and his round, robust but profligate body. The divan has been associated with wayward lust and the physical dislocation it creates within the home, implicating the object as a repository of his dislocated sexual impulses. The divan is not immediately "necessary" as a metonym of Stiva's adultery and banishment; however, it anchors the affective and psychological resonance of the transgression to this sign-system of domestic materials, marking the divan as a location of physical transgression and displacement and therefore dispossessing it of the ability to offer repose. The consequences of this coding for the narrative and the other characters resonate throughout the rest of the text.

Anna and Vronsky's first assignation is presented in a chapter without spatial or temporal designation except for the furnishings alluded to that locate them in what is most likely a study. Only Anna's movements set the chapter's "scenery": "[...] she was completely folded over and sank from the couch, on which she had been sitting, onto the floor at his feet; she would have fallen onto the carpet if he hadn't held her" (*PSS* 18: 157). While this descriptive choice focuses the scene's attention on the emotions in play rather than the more novelistic, realist elements of setting and rote descriptive detail, it also leaves the sofa in stark relief to the rest of the chapter's locative silence. By withholding from this scene and the chapter as a whole the generic conventions of a detailed physical setting, Tolstoy both stresses the metonymic significance of the sofa and impresses on us its moral and social signific-

ance. Rather than a place of repose, it is and can now be only a location of psychological torment and spiritual repercussions.

Anna's sexuality, her (now tainted) body, has been displaced not only outside of the legal and social confines of her marriage and therefore outside the necessarily marital bedroom; it has been displaced into the male sphere of the household. As a bachelor, Vronsky presumably did not even use a typical bedroom but likely slept on his divan. (In her memoirs, Tatyana Sukhotin-Tolstoy recalls her mother's bemused recollection of how the Lev Nikolaevich, prior to marrying, slept on his sofa "with his head on a leather cushion without even a pillow slip over it" (34). The unmarried Tolstoy thus experienced bachelorhood as a thoroughly undomesticated lifestyle, devoid of even the bedding that would go with a traditionally Western or female bed.)

As a site of private seclusion within the home, the study is the male bridge between the public sphere of work and society and the private, conceptually feminine sphere of the home in the nineteenth-century, pan-European "cult of domesticity." In placing the (censored) sex act between Anna and Vronsky within this room, the novel anticipates Anna's eventual "masculine" behavior, her sexual and managerial assertiveness when she and Vronsky live at his country estate. Just as Stiva's half-awake reaching for his robe alerts him to his location on his divan rather than in his bed, the unspoken details of this scene are indicated by Anna's post-coital movements, her falling from the sofa onto the floor at Vronsky's feet, indicating not only her sexual (and eventual social) degradation, but also her literal and figurative prostration as she becomes completely reliant upon Vronsky. If the sofa is a place of sexual consequence for Anna's brother Oblonsky and his hearty, profuse physicality, it cannot hold the weight of her compromised, "murdered" body and her moral degradation, nor can it remain in the background as a common domestic object.

The divan becomes the repository of erotic impulses and their consequences.

In the final example of the sofa's use in *Anna Karenina* as a site of sexual consequence, Vronsky, having witnessed Anna's acute illness after childbirth and her brief reconciliation with Karenin, returns home, physically and emotionally exhausted, to rest fitfully on the sofa in his study. In a moment of pity and redemption Karenin has been invited back into the bedroom. He usurps the role that Vronsky had appropriated at the start of the affair, although he does so not in a sexual mode but in the spirit of Christian forgiveness. Karenin is at Anna's bedside, while Vronsky returns alone to the sofa, the initial site of his sexual conquest: "Returning home after three sleepless nights, Vronsky, without undressing, lay facedown on the sofa, folding his arms and placing them under his head" (*PSS* 18: 437). Vronsky has been removed by the author from the secluded room, from the very building, where the mother of his child lies ill.

Anna's maternal capacities have been restricted and denied to her newborn child by her illness; they will also be denied to Serezha by Karenin's hurt pride. Vronsky is likewise denied consolation in the room that signifies feminine domestic comfort. He cradles his own head, attempting to provide his own source of physical comfort and consolation. Given the ambiguity of Vronsky's legal or social status in the Karenin household—he has no claim on his child, cannot marry Anna, and can be sent away by Karenin—it is appropriate that he be banished from the bedroom, the seat of familial domesticity. The Victorian ethos "moved [sexuality] into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction" (Foucault 3). Note that this space allows only legally-sanctioned reproduction, a restriction that will haunt Vronsky's "nameless" illegitimate daughter and stifle any continuation of his familial line. The bedroom was not used in his earlier sexual

encounter with Anna and therefore remains closed to him, relegating his profligacy to the errant, tainted sofa, displaced from the bedroom and misused in the study.

Vronsky's failed suicide attempt at the end of the chapter foreshadows Anna's "successful" attempt at death and furthers the spatial degradation of his character. The emasculating embarrassment of Vronsky's missed shot is heightened when a woman, Anna, ultimately succeeds at her own suicide.

In keeping with the Victorian tradition of suicide, Vronsky enacts the gradual shift in representation of the cause and means of self-destruction in the novels of his time, from "suicide as a masculine heroic act" to "an irrational, hysterical act resulting from feminine weakness" (Mandelker 96). While Anna appropriates a distinctly male act, Vronsky's suicide attempt is a more ambiguous and fraught act of desperation. His attempt indicates "the defeat of the two principles of his former life: satisfaction of physical desires coupled with consideration of a certain number of social conventions" (Stenbock-Fermor 98). It is a cruel irony in the novel, or perhaps simply appropriate, that Vronsky's satisfaction of his sexual pursuit of Anna is achieved on a sofa, and yet it is on the sofa that Vronsky, grappling with the consequences of that sex act, willfully attacks the carefree life-affirmation that Stiva exemplifies. Indeed, in Tolstoy's opinion the act of suicide itself, both Vronsky's attempt and Anna's, is not the main point of significance but rather "that passion led to suffering" (Эйхенбаум 143). (This is similar to the description of their first assignation, wherein the sexual act itself was not the focus but rather the extraordinary guilt and anguish felt afterwards.) The romance of a torrid love affair has come crashing down upon the tangibles of real life. Vronsky's failure to find solace in his own arms where he once held and comforted Anna further taints what should be a "safely" male sphere of practical concerns and

insular domesticity. The sofa may be the location of illicit sex and its repercussions, but it fails in *Anna Karenina* as a source of “proper” rest or reprieve from the public consequences of private recklessness.

Walls, Flowers and Women

Whereas the divan is both a decorative object and a functional piece of furnishing used by bodies, wallpaper is a passive and graphic representation of an era’s material culture. This visual aesthetic on a home’s walls reflects and comments upon the characters within it.

Technical advances in the wallpaper industry in England and France in the first half of the nineteenth century meant that machine-made wallpaper could replace the high-priced hand-printed wallpapers of the early decades and of the previous century (Fraser 195). This decrease in the cost of production greatly increased the variety of designs and the availability of wallpaper to households of nearly every class level, even the simplest working-class rooms, allowing the lower classes to decorate and redecorate according to changing contemporaneous trends in fashion. French styles and imagery for the medium, especially floral designs, set the standard for visual taste.

By mid-century, however, wallpaper had become a potent topic of debate among Victorians concerned with outside influences on the sanctity of domestic space. As a signifier of taste and domestic ideology in the private sphere, wallpaper is an obvious aesthetic representative of the private sphere to the public: “The fact that the walls of a home were such a large and visible part of the house meant that visitors could tell immediately upon entry whether [the walls’ decorations] were appropriate” (Jennings 260). The very “appropriateness” of the wall’s decor is immediately indicative of the “appropriateness” of the tastes and accordingly the greater morals and respectability of those who have chosen that paper, sug-

gesting a synecdochic link between the home’s attributes and the people who inhabit it. The “synecdochic details” that Jakobson’s representative Realist author employs were thus openly acknowledged in the public discourse on domesticity, its aesthetics and morality across Europe (130).

The reference to wallpaper in *Anna Karenina* during Anna’s post-partum delirium, amid deathbed repentance and pain-induced hysteria, is striking due to its seeming absurdity and melodramatic context. Terrified of imminent death and damnation, Anna exclaims that she dislikes the room’s floral wallpaper: “‘How tastelessly those flowers are done, they don’t look at all like violets,’ she said, indicating the wallpaper. ‘My god, my god! When will it end?’” (PSS 18: 435). Based purely on the text at hand, her critique could be read rather facetiously as a desire to return to a “naturalistic” state or environment, that having just given birth and now facing the consequences of an indiscretion that became an all-consuming passion Anna wishes to re-embrace the authentic, natural, and honest state of wifehood and maternity.

Such an equation of the interior environment with personal morality is characteristic of Victorian domesticity as the cultural exemplar for family life. This ideology equated home decorating with moral rectitude or lack thereof, implicating the act of home-making with upholding the standards of domesticity and enacting the self-repression of these homemakers (Calder 83, 223). Anna’s very act of noticing and disapproving of the house’s aesthetics implies a subconscious attempt to rectify her un-wifely behavior and its consequences, conjoining the attributes of “good taste” and “good morals.”

However, the choice of violets as the wallpaper design is an ironic one. From its beginnings in Napoleonic France through the late Victorian period in England, the sentimental flower book and its concern with the “language of flowers”

developed and concretized the association of flowers with womankind and the primary aspects of their personification, namely love and death (Seaton 17). By the nineteenth century, “the domestic, conventional aspect of flowers—their nonliterary connotations in the eighteenth century—was finally found suitable to express human ideas of morality,” taking on an “expressive function” in the literature of the era (Seaton 60). More specifically, violets, “a symbol of spiritual humility” from the Middle Ages, were by the nineteenth century imagined as “a symbol of modesty in the context of romantic love.”

The minor publishing industry that arose to produce popular books on the language of flowers originated in France, and while unwholesome, overly “continental” material had to be edited out of the English versions of these publications, the vocabulary of love vis-à-vis flower symbolism remained nonetheless relatively consistent across Europe, neither repudiating French values nor asserting English ones in their exportations to foreign markets (Seaton 134).

Nevertheless, in the interior decorating debates of the 1870s, particularly in Victorian England and often in response to the decor trends propagated by the French, purposefully and explicitly “natural” or overly accurate depictions of the organic were associated with an unseemly, potentially licentious inclination (Seaton 134).

The overtly mimetic allowed for the uncontrolled and sensual aspect of the natural world to enter the chaste sanctity of the home, potentially “deflowering” the walls of domestic space with the erotic appearance and implications of plant life. Coding his restraint in terms of aesthetic taste, Charles Eastlake, whose tracts were translated and published in Russia, proclaimed in his 1868 *Hints on Household Taste* that, “decorative art is degraded when it passes into a direct imitation of natural objects. [...N]ature may be typified or symbolized, but not actually imitated” (68). Thus the abstract violets represented on Anna’s walls

are in accordance with the Victorian decorative sensibility of defying the natural impulses of the organic world, restricting the surroundings within the domestic sphere to “acceptable” representations of a sterile, contained nature.

If Anna protests the wallpaper because it is in poor aesthetic taste, her protests also serve to highlight her poor moral taste—she wishes to be surrounded with the accurate visual representation of flowers just as she has surrounded herself with the morally questionable society of Princess Betsy and her ilk, who incite and facilitate her adultery. The “society women” of these circles likely do not make a conscious decision to paste licentious or morally dubious images on their walls; but Anna’s response to the wallpaper pattern is instinctual and characteristic, marking her “fall” as irreversible, even at this moment of potential reconciliation and seeming repentance.

The novel’s earlier representations of floral imagery are reflexively illustrative here. At the fateful ball where Kitty will see Vronsky drop his flirtation with her in order to pursue Anna, the young woman is dressed in pink, wrapped in layers of tulle, with rosettes in her coiffure and even rose-colored shoes (PSS 18: 82). Her dance partner smiles down at “the pink Kitty.” In contrast, Anna arrives not in lilac, as Kitty had expressly wished, but in black with only lace trimming and an accentual garland of pansies. This aesthetic restraint is a revelation to the younger woman, who realizes that “Anna could not have been in lilac and that her beauty lay exactly in that she always stood out from her toilette, that her toilette was never seen on her” (PSS 18: 85).

Unlike Anna, whose attire serves to frame her beauty and accent her features, as with the strongly-colored but sparsely-used pansies, Kitty’s body is subsumed into her rose-themed attire. Kitty’s desire to see Anna in lilac is highly ironic: as the flower signifying the first emotions of love (Seaton 182-3), such a color and floral association suggests Kitty’s own misplaced infatuation with

both Anna and Vronsky, as well as his and Anna's early infatuation.

Anna's protest against the violet-patterned wallpaper speaks as well to the falsity and aesthetic failure of enveloping floral design and color: Rather than complementing Anna, her physical surroundings confine her. Kitty, on the marriage market, is surrounded by tulle and rosettes, just as she is surrounded by foolish young men and high society's expectations for behavior—things she will later understand as false, corrupt and corrupting.

Rather than complementing and accentuating the natural beauty of these female characters, decorative textiles confine and overpower their wearers, forcing them to submit aesthetically to dominant cultural models of appearance and taste.

Social Scenes

Expanding our consideration now from these atomized elements of domestic aesthetics to a larger, decoratively cohesive setting, Princess Betsy Tverskaya's salon serves as a semi-public meeting place for Anna and Vronsky early in their flirtation and acts as a catalytic locus within which the rules and roles of society games are enacted. It is within the salon's chronotope that "the graphically visible markers of historical time as well as of biographical and everyday time are concentrated and condensed" (Bakhtin 247).

In his discussion of the parlor and salon as chronotope, Bakhtin cites the French realists, asserting that, "[t]he epoch becomes not only graphically visible [space], but narratively visible [time]" (247). The salon is not only the site in which public and private concerns intersect and are made visible, but also the literary site in which models of behavior and their aesthetic manifestations cross national and narrational boundaries and are enacted.

One of this chapter's more extraordinary moments emerges from a seemingly common if

originally-phrased barb about Princess Betsy's "relations" with one of the guests in attendance:

"Don't you find there to be something of the Louis XV in Tushkevich?" said one, indicating with his eyes the attractive fair-haired young man sitting at the table.

"O yes! He matches the room's decor, and that is why he happens to be here so often."

This conversation was kept up, since what was talked about hinted precisely at that which could not be spoken of in the sitting-room, namely the relations between Tushkevich and the hostess. (PSS 18: 141)

In this inadvertent yet explicit conjunction of sexuality and interior decor, these anonymous commentators lightly veil their gossip in terms of an aesthetic association that extends to the false desire of Tushkevich to surround himself in an environment that matches his physical self-decoration. His adulterous affair with the hostess becomes the internal cause *and* effect of the external mirroring between him and his surroundings.

The nature of this identification is intriguing: Does Tushkevich dress in this revivalist-rococo style in order to insinuate himself, blend in, or merely feel "at home" in his mistress's house? Or does the room's decor imply a deeper amorality and rampant sexuality amongst the room's occupants and in particular its hostess and (presumably) decorator and domestic overseer? The context suggests that the latter is foremost, given the visual aesthetic of the room's style and the implications of conventional morality implied by such choices of taste.

The excess and opulence of the Louis XV style in furniture, bibelots, and wallpaper patterns—copious gilding and embellishment, highly curved chair backs and legs, ornate *trompe l'oeil*—is intriguing as a visual manifestation of Betsy's marital indiscretions and high society condoning

(and facilitating) of others' transgressions. The style is, however, more noteworthy in its decorative presence as a reproduction or revival of a previous style. The invocation of a style of decor in home furnishings that reproduces a certain "look" in homage to or imitation of an era or historically significant personage with a distinct stylistic legacy, is in itself not extraordinary (Aries 547); the recreation of a style in decor as well as dress is a significant act of cultural mimicry.

Through the visual evocation of a decorative style, and the historical context of its creation, both Betsy and her lover invoke the excessively ornamental tone of this high rococo taste, and echo the decadence with which they surround themselves (for visual examples of rococo decor, see Apra 8-9; Соколова and Орлова 179-95). This salon setting sets the expectations in Betsy's crass yet seductive sitting-room, gesturing towards the questionable aspects of her society—adultery, slander, shallow conversation—as the expected tone and behavior. This staging codes the immoral (even Tushkevich) as acceptable, inevitable, and not at all in "bad taste." This young man's reappearance later in the novel at *Vozdvizhenskoe* confirms and intensifies the morally and aesthetically suspect environment Anna and Vronsky establish there.

The novel ironically presents a vivid description of Anna's own tastes as a homemaker at Vronsky's estate, where they have settled, unmarried, with their illegitimate child. The reader's first impressions of *Vozdvizhenskoe*, however, come through the decidedly maternal Dolly, the novel's most experienced housewife and someone who most naturally and fully embodies that role throughout the novel. (Kitty enters the novel as an unmarried young woman, Princess Shcherbatsky is already a grandmother, etc.) Dolly's reactions to Anna and Vronsky's living arrangements are indicative of the estate's shortcomings as a suitable home for a legitimate family:

Left alone, Dolly, with a housewife's point of view, surveyed her room. [... Everything] produced in her the impression of abundance and elegance and of that new European luxury about which she had read only in English novels, but had not yet seen in Russia or in the country. Everything was new, from the new French wallpaper to the carpet which covered the whole of the room's floor. (*PSS* 19: 191)

This "English novel" reminds the reader of an earlier scene: Anna's train ride (in chapter 19 of part 1), supposedly back to the security of Karenin and home, when in fact her infatuation with Vronsky only increases as she reads a novel about "English happiness" (английское счастье); this happiness has apparently been achieved and materialized here, at *Vozdvizhenskoe*, with her lover. And yet this resonance underscores, as Osborne asserts, "that the life lived here is not real life, but some form of fiction" (74). This concept of English-ness and its distinctly literary construction occurs to Dolly in this moment, an instance that is more than mere female intuition or contrite coincidence. As N. Strakhov noted in his article on John Stuart Mill, Russian girls (such as Anna and Dolly) are taught the English language so as to be "receptive to English literature in which the image of the English girl is reflected" (Эйхенбаум 115).

Likewise, the decor at *Vozdvizhenskoe* represents an aesthetic adherence to the newest designs and visual evidence of her internationally-informed decorative practices. She has chosen the new and the fashionable in lieu of the presumably out-of-date and unfashionable patterns that adorned the walls before her installation as the "lady of the house"; even the "native" construction of the room's floor has been fully covered by a new, imported adornment. The decor that Anna and Vronsky can afford nevertheless indicates their pretensions toward societal and familial legitimacy through the establishment of a "res-

pectable” and fashionable country home. That they do not retain the original furnishings of the estate, the material legacy of Vronsky’s familial ties to the house, points to the temporary nature of their family and residential life at Vozdvizhenskoe: They cannot and do not live amongst the family home’s older, (presumably) worn furnishings because they—Anna, Vronsky, and Annie—are not a legitimate continuation of that family legacy.

Interestingly, the maid is assessed by Dolly along with the room they have both entered: “The lady’s maid, in a coiffure and dress more fashionable than Dolly’s, was just as new and expensive as everything else in the room” (PSS 19: 191). Itemized and objectified within and among the luxuries of the room, this woman who helps to arrange and manage the household is linked in function and appearance to the space she inhabits. She reflects the room’s elegance. This maid bears the same “value” in the aesthetics of homemaking and displays of taste and wealth as the imported French wallpaper. These items are just as easily noticed as ignored, paradoxically functioning both to reflect aesthetic and moral choices (foreground), and to be passed over (background).

Dolly, the model mother, is most “at home” in the nursery, physically enacting the nineteenth-century supposition of “a female’s inalienable connection to others (whether experienced as a blessing or a curse, biologically determined or culturally mandated)” (Cohen 7). The nursery at Vozdvizhenskoe is all the more striking in its design and dynamic idiosyncrasies when viewed through her eyes. Anna’s adherence to a foreign domestic ideology is materially evidenced by the English contraptions in the nursery, displaying the trust that she has placed in foreign design as well as the material incursions into that most vital and sacred familial space:

In the nursery, the luxury which Daria Alexandrovna noted in the rest of the house was even more striking. [...] Everything was English, durable and of high quality and, obviously, very expensive. (PSS 19: 193)

The contraptions, like the nannies themselves, have been imported, implying a figurative importation of a “pedagogical motherhood’ ideology” that persists in heightening the sense of material needs as inextricably linked to “proper” childrearing (Kelly 16). Even though the Russian countryside childhood has an inextricable and culturally loaded association with the country estate, this Anglophilia in Russian childcare is nonetheless historically accurate (Wachtel 114-17, 128). The new, imported opinions and means of how to raise a child have overtaken the traditional methods that are “native” to the Russian estate. That Anna has psychologically, financially, and spatially invested in these childrearing practices is peculiar to Dolly’s instinctual maternity. The superficial luxuries of this house have invaded the aesthetics of the nursery—the one room whose familial sanctity is most obvious and where materiality and “good taste” matter the least—confirming the superficiality of the domestic setting at Vozdvizhenskoe, a space built on unstable legal and emotional foundations.

Having moved to St. Petersburg and been made acutely aware of her status as a social pariah, Anna grows restless, irritable, and lonely. Within the false imitation of domestic life that she and Vronsky inhabit with increasing awkwardness and estrangement, Anna is profoundly frustrated:

“You won’t believe how distasteful these rooms are to me,” she said, sitting beside him at coffee. “There is nothing worse than these *chambres garnies*. No expressive image in them, no soul. These clocks, the curtains, worst of all the wallpaper – it’s a nightmare. I

think about Vozdvizhenskoe like it is the Promised Land.” (PSS 19: 325-6)

Despite its decorative improvements and re-designed gentility, Vozdvizhenskoe had by no means been an idyll of domestic comfort or familial stability for Anna and Vronsky; her protestations ring false.

Interestingly, especially in light of the household improvements and decorations that she oversaw at the country estate, their pre-furnished St. Petersburg apartment is a set-piece representation of the home, lacking the personal touches that lend domesticity its senses of comfort, intimacy, and safety from the harsh realities of the outside world. Vronsky's frequent absences irritate Anna not simply because of her increasing jealousy and possessiveness, but also because he can and does leave and return at will, a social mobility that has been denied to her. In 1867 the comtesse de Bassanville authored *Trésor de la maison: guide des femmes économes*, a domestic manual that was popular across Europe and which condemned the city as a danger to domesticity; in it, de Bassanville “urged her readers to create a decor that would mark the difference between urban locales and the domestic interior,” through the use of tasteful, pleasant wallpapers and drapes that would create a symbolic and aesthetic barrier between the private and public spheres (Marcus 150). By living in rented rooms, Anna has had no control over the decorative decisions and therefore cannot ensure that their apartment's furnishings and decor create the aesthetic differentiation that signifies a legitimate domesticity. Moreover, Anna's uncertain legal and social status is reflected in these rented rooms, where her residency is impermanent and depersonalized, and the boundaries between the public and the private are blurred (a tenuous and marginal social condition that has already been demonstrated by her shaming at the opera, a

public appropriation and rebuke of private behavior).

Vronsky is able and more than willing to come and go as he likes, which was already a point of contention between the lovers at Vozdvizhenskoe. (Anna complains: “Yes, you come for a day and leave, as [they/men] do...” (PSS 19: 245).) In her 1878 *L'Art de bien tenir une maison*, de Bassanville states in her preface that:

The influence of women is felt above all in the domestic seat and husbands are better kept at home by the agreeableness, order and comfort that they find in their houses than by the most beautiful eyes and the greatest talents in the world. (22)

The ambiguity here is highly suggestive, implying that a tastefully decorated home is more alluring (or entrapping) than the physical beauty and social skills of either the private homemaker or another, “public” woman, or perhaps both. Anna has attempted both roles, decorating the estate and also using seduction to retain Vronsky's attention; but her inability to inhabit either role fully dooms these efforts. Hence, Anna's powers as a woman and a homemaker fail her:

Domestic manuals envisioned a system in which men could move between the home and its outside, but women could not; men needed to be persuaded to return to the home, while women had to solicit their desire to do so. (Marcus 151)

Anna's confinement exceeds even this dictate based on gender and social mores—her flirtations, adultery, pregnancy, and shaming have all been semi-public and have been causes for her to change locations: from her initial, flustered return to St. Petersburg after first meeting Vronsky, to her adulterous intercourse on a divan (rather than on a bed), to Italy and then the countryside, never fully inhabiting a private, domestic, feminized existence. But in the city with Vronsky, her re-

peated attempts to seduce him as an enticement to stay with her betrays the corrupted core of their relationship and ultimately of herself; she cannot lure him “home,” because they are not living in a home, they merely are in a temporary, pre-furnished, rented apartment, one that cannot be formally or aesthetically demarcated as a legitimate domestic enclave.

Family Furnishings

As a concluding point of contrast, I would like to address the comedic though endearing moment when Levin is depicted as considering, or rather failing to consider, his furnishings. In the extraordinary, occasionally humorous chapters that describe the birth of Kitty and Levin’s son, the anxious new father is sent on necessary but diversionary errands while he frets over this awe-inspiring event, about which he knows and understands nothing. If, for Tolstoy, “the fundamental chronotope is biographical time, which flows smoothly in the spaces—the interior spaces—of townhouses and estates of the nobility” (Bakhtin 249), then the birth of a first child at home solidifies the place and event as a familial-idyllic chronotope.

Levin’s earnest and eager attempts to be helpful are an amusing example of male impotence at the moment of female procreativity. This fretting also renders the household objects he employs intriguingly futile until imbued with his own grasping hope:

Levin then recalled that he was sent somewhere. At one time he was sent to retrieve a table and sofa. He did so with zeal, thinking that it was needed for [Kitty’s] sake, and only later learned that was arranged as a place for him to sleep. [...H]e brought the icon and placed at Kitty’s head, carefully pushing it behind the pillows. (PSS 19: 290-1)

The basic household furniture that he has retrieved is actually intended for his own comfort, a

thought that seems nonsensical in his distress. (Interestingly, the *divan* fails as a place of repose here as well, not because of sexual transgression, but because during Kitty’s labor—the consequence of socially-sanctified marital love, solidifying Levin’s graduation from bachelorhood—the new father has no use for it.) These are not finely crafted objects of imported mahogany, modeled on European designs and ornate decorative trends—the only function or purpose of their existence, and of their description in the novel at this moment, is to distract him from the monumental event of childbirth.

Meanwhile, the icon, an essential object in the Russian household that is strikingly absent in Vozdvizhenskoe’s descriptions, is employed with the same seriousness of necessity as the sofa on which Levin rests and the bed on which Kitty gives birth:

Anything that has the appearance of common everyday life, when compared with the central unrepeatable events of biography and history, here begins to look precisely like the most important things in life. (Bakhtin 226)

Thus Levin retrieves these pieces of furniture “with zeal” (с усердием), but their use value to him is determined solely by their ability to help Kitty, not any aesthetic or cultural value. In this idyllic chronotope of birth and home, these items are represented “in a softened and to a certain extent sublimated form” (Bakhtin 226), referred to in their basic functionary existence. Devoid of descriptive adornment, they are therefore devoid of aesthetic adornment. Life itself is lived among the necessary objects that facilitate its continuation and enjoyment, but their weighted meaning as social signifiers and cultural artifacts is overshadowed by the life force that connects one to another, father to son and husband to wife. This assertion of the necessity of human interdependence and the divinely sanctioned strength of the family is Tolstoy’s strongest edict; they are means

for achieving a spiritual survival and human legacy in the face of individual mortality.

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