

In Search of an Alternative Love Plot: Tolstoy, Science, and Post-Romantic Love Narratives

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Lovers are just like two Leyden jars. Both are highly charged; the electricity is discharged by kisses and when it has been completely discharged—goodbye, love; cooling follows.

Ivan Goncharov, *An Ordinary Story* (1847)

Months pass, or a year, or two at most, and usually the passion has already burnt out...Love, however, did not disappear: from the frequent repetition of the reflex, where the representation of the beloved with some or all of her qualities constitutes the psychical content, her image is joined, so to speak, with all the movements of the lover's soul, and she has really become his other half. This is love by habit—friendship."

Ivan Sechenov, *Reflexes of the Brain* (1863)

No, I'm talking about the same thing, the preference for one man or woman over others, but I'm just asking—preference for how long?

For how long? For a long time, sometimes for the entire lifetime.

But this only happens in novels, and never in life.

Lev Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889)

Petr Aduiev's "scientific" joke in Goncharov's novel *An Ordinary Story*, the physiologist Ivan Sechenov's theory of "passions," and Pozdnyshiev's insistence in Tolstoy's novella on the exact definition of love and its duration address essentially the same question: What happens to our concept of love if we accept the inevitable fading of passion over time? That these different works, separated by decades, raise this problem reflects, I would argue, not so much the natural human need to account for change in one's feelings as an

anxiety produced by a particular cultural situation. The nature of love and its permanence had already become problematicized in the early post-Romantic era in Russia when the increasingly rational and materialist perspective (embodied in Goncharov's novel precisely in the uncle Aduiev figure) compromised traditional Romantic values, above all the cult of passion and everlasting love. This problem assumed more specific social and practical significance in the 1860s and 70s with the growth of the movement for women's emancipation.¹ When, in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1875-77), Kitty's mother complains that it is no longer clear how one is to marry off one's daughter (18: 49),² this ostensibly superficial concern echoes a deep social crisis, resulting from the collapse of traditional gender roles and conventional practices of courtship and marriage. The radical ideology redefined marriage as a union of equal partners, in opposition to the religious and legal tradition that preached a woman's obedience to her husband as the basis of the union's stability.³ As a result, new foundations for the conjugal relationship and guarantees for its endurance had to be offered—and the Romantic idea of eternal elevated love was no longer tenable. At a time when science had achieved unprecedented prestige, it is not surprising to find that scientific evidence, or at least rhetoric, was frequently employed to validate such stabilizing mechanisms, that is, narratives offering new justifications for the stability of the union between the sexes and, above all, alternative theories of love's permanence.

Indeed, all of the examples cited in the epigraphs, to a lesser or greater degree, use scientific language, genre, or method to question the traditional concept of love or establish a new one.⁴

Not everyone was as quick as Petr Aduiev to say “good-bye” to love once its passionate phase was over, including scientists themselves, as the excerpt from Sechenov’s tract demonstrates. In the realm of literature, it was Lev Tolstoy who undertook the most consistent, albeit tortuous and controversial, search for an alternative to romantic love. Tolstoy’s persistence in exploring the nature of love between the sexes has been attributed to the writer’s personal obsession with “family happiness,” to his polemical engagement with radical social theories and movements, as well as to his philosophical pursuit and literary search for a new novelistic form.⁵ This article, while taking most of these factors into consideration, places Tolstoy’s exploration of this subject in a somewhat different context and regards it as part of a broader quest, undertaken by both literature and science, in the 1860s and 1870s—a quest for an alternative, non-romantic concept of love and, more specifically, for stabilizing narratives that would establish new mechanisms of human affection and its development in a time of great controversy surrounding the relationship between the sexes.

B.M. Eikhenbaum has pointed out, in connection with Tolstoy’s work on *Family Happiness* (1859), both the universality of this agenda for the time and Tolstoy’s unique way of approaching it: “*Along with his time, although in his own way, [Tolstoy] tends to lower, simplify the very notion of ‘love,’ strip it of all its romantic associations, and to uncover the mechanisms of its genesis and development*” (*Пятидесятые годы* 348; emphasis mine).⁶ The tendency noted by the critic is at least twofold: It implies the purely literary task of deromanticizing love, as well as a quasi-scientific undertaking to theorize its origin and progression. These two aspects,

“literary” and “scientific,” however, are closely related; indeed, scientific rhetoric and logic, as we will see, are employed, in literary narratives, to create an alternative to romantic love, while a new “scientific” model of love’s development and its various stages sought by Tolstoy and his contemporaries inevitably entails the problem of the plot. Indeed, how is one to tell a satisfying story about love that does not burn out or end tragically? Or, to put it differently, how does one create a love narrative in a post-Romantic context, when the concept of love itself has become radically reformulated?

My analysis will trace Tolstoy’s search for an alternative *concept* of love, as well as an alternative love *plot*, by examining a series of works that address these issues programmatically—from *Family Happiness*, where the writer experiments with both a new notion of love and an innovative form for the love narrative, to *The Kreutzer Sonata*, where he emphatically rejects both. I will discuss these texts against the background of other well-known works of the time that offered stabilizing mechanisms of love on scientific grounds—Jules Michelet’s *L’Amour*, Nikolai Chernyshevsky’s *What Is to Be Done?*, and especially Ivan Sechenov’s theory of love as presented in his scandalous tract *Reflexes of the Brain*.

Tolstoy’s intense preoccupation with the nature of love and the spousal bond, often perceived as anachronistic for his time, appears less idiosyncratic when regarded as one of many competing contemporary attempts to redefine love and its development in human life. Such an approach not only illuminates better both the tendencies “of his time” and Tolstoy’s “own way” of confronting this problem, to use Eikhenbaum’s words, but also reveals a more complex picture of the relationship between science and literature at this time in Russia than is typically admitted. Instead of a straightforward binary opposition between “great writers” (Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky), on the one hand, and materialist science and its radical allies on the other; and

instead of a one-directional situation where literature reacts to science (whether positively or negatively) and adapts its discourse and imagery for its own purposes,⁷ we are faced with a fluid cultural space where literary and scientific discourses and narratives cross over. The search for an alternative love narrative is one such example of the convergence between the two domains.

Family Happiness

Tolstoy's pursuit of a non-romantic love plot and his engagement with the latest prominent scientific (or quasi-scientific) theories on this subject begins in his early novel *Family Happiness*, a work, which, as Eikhbaum has convincingly argued, is greatly indebted to Jules Michelet's tract *L'Amour* (1858). Michelet's work was widely discussed in the Russian press at the time and came under a particularly vehement attack on the pages of *The Contemporary* in a series of articles by M. L. Mikhailov published in the late 1850s to early 1860s. (Incidentally, the journal was also interested in publishing Tolstoy's *Family Happiness* and made a generous offer to the writer.⁸)

L'Amour, written by a prominent French historian, vividly demonstrates just how fluid the concept of "science" was at the time and how readily social thinkers and philosophers resorted to any bit of what seemed to be scientific evidence to prove their argument: If Pierre-Joseph Proudhon notoriously bases his argument for women's intellectual inferiority to men on the fact of the relative smallness of the female brain (Stites 39), Michelet invokes the authority of French chemists to insist that, judging by the composition of women's blood, they are no less pure creatures than men (338). More importantly for our discussion, Michelet's project was driven precisely by the need to provide a stabilizing mechanism that would counter the post-Sandian disregard for marriage and the critique of the bourgeois family in contemporary France.

In search of such a mechanism, Michelet predictably resorts to scientific argumentation and insists on a natural, physiological human need for stability and marriage. To support this argument, the author cites the existence of "marriage" among higher animals—a fact which, according to him, ensures their superiority in the animal world:

They say that animals' love is changeable and variable, that mobility in pleasure is a natural state with them. I, however, see that, as soon as there is any possible stability, a regular means of living, marriages are formed among them, at least temporary ones, created not only by the love for their litter but very genuinely by love. (7)

The human version of such love is described by Michelet as a continuous process, in the course of which this emotion changes its shapes but not its essence. While novelty and change, according to Michelet, are indispensable for love to persist ("the flame only burns on the condition of changing"), the permanence of this emotion in marriage is guaranteed by nature: "But nature foresaw this. The woman constantly changes her aspect; one woman contains a thousand. And the man's imagination changes its point of view as well" (9). For Michelet, then, what makes a successful monogamous union possible and durable is the infinite variety of roles, from filial to maternal, that a woman assumes throughout the duration of the marriage—a variety that is ensured, in his theory, by age difference between the spouses.

Notably, Michelet discusses this progression of the love emotion in literary terms: "Love is not a drama in one act," he warns his readers, but rather a long succession of different passions (8-9), or an "epic" (*épopée*) (709). Moreover, Michelet defines his own project of tracing love's development from the woman's birth to her mourning her husband's death in opposition to existing literary practices:

I imagined two young people whom I marry and follow throughout their entire lives. However, it is not a novel (roman). I do not have this kind of talent. Moreover, the novelistic (*romanesque*) form would have had the inconvenience of excessive individualizing. My two lovers are anonymous. (30)

Tolstoy's *Family Happiness* attempts precisely the kind of individualized—and yet programmatic—portrayal of love between the sexes and its progression that Michelet refused to pursue in his “anonymous” love story.⁹ While Tolstoy's work, narrated on behalf of a young woman, does not explicitly rely on science to the same degree as Michelet's scheme of “family happiness,” his choice of protagonists (an older man marrying a young woman and serving as her “educator” and “creator”) follows Michelet's basic model of age difference as a natural, biologically determined basis for an (eventually) stable conjugal relationship. The different phases through which the heroine's feelings for her husband progress, as Eikhensbaum has observed, are based on Michelet's theory (as is the temptation of the *beau monde* faced by Tolstoy's heroine).

At the same time, Tolstoy promotes the idea of habit and familiarity at least as much as, if not more than, novelty in the development of the heroine's love for her husband, and this preference anticipates the convergence between Tolstoy's views and reflex theory in the 1860s. The young Masha's future husband Sergei Mikhailych enters the narrative as a neighbor and a friend of her late father, someone whom she “had been accustomed (привыкла) to loving and respecting since childhood,” and whom she, as everyone else in her household, “loved by habit (по привычке)” (*PSS* 5: 68)—a fact that she directly announces to him in a later scene: “You know that I am accustomed to you and love you” (95). This gesture of uniting habit and love in his heroine's discourse is no doubt

polemical on Tolstoy's part: In Romantic or early post-Romantic literature—from Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* to Gogol's “Old-World Landowners” and the epilogue of Goncharov's *An Ordinary Story*—habit is typically treated as an antithesis of passion and a surrogate for love or marital happiness.¹⁰ By establishing habit as a foundation for love instead, Tolstoy challenges the Romantic tradition and amends Michelet's scheme, whose concept of the “flame” of love maintained by constant change was clearly too “romantic” in its essence and not radical enough a rupture with the traditional understanding of love sought by Tolstoy.

That Tolstoy polemically aimed his novel not only against the proponents of women's emancipation but also, if not more so, against the *literary* tradition of portraying romantic love, is obvious from the numerous metaliterary statements in *Family Happiness*. In one of them, Sergei Mikhailych mocks conventional declarations of love typical of Romantic literature, where, again, love is linked to dramatic change rather than continuity:

When I read novels, I always picture what kind of a puzzled face lieutenant Strelsky or Alfred must have when he says, ‘I love you, Eleonora!’ and thinks that something extraordinary will happen, but nothing happens either with her or with him; they both have the same eyes and nose, everything the same. (86)

In his attempt to overcome the limitations of the tradition, in other words, Tolstoy had to offer not only a new concept of love but a new literary solution for the love plot—*siuzhet*, in the Formalists' understanding of this term, with its different stages that would correspond to the different phases of love's evolution.

Not accidentally, the protagonists' own declaration of love for each other, encoded as a fictional story, turns into a metaliterary—and a quasi-scientific—discussion of various possible denouements for a love narrative.

Sergei Mikhailych narrates to Masha a story of “a certain Mr. A” in love with “a certain Ms. B,” young, happy, and inexperienced. Once he realizes their difference in age and experience, Sergei continues, Mr. A becomes afraid that their previous friendship would suffer and decides to leave before this happens. The two part as friends. “But this is horrible,” Masha says, “Is there no other *ending?*” (96). Sergei offers her two dramatic possibilities, neither of which satisfies Masha who offers “a third ending,” using the same genre of an algebraic problem or a scientific hypothesis in which the conversation began.¹¹ Her version of this love story features a selfish and arrogant Mr. A and a loving Ms. B and eventually turns into her declaration of love, after which the two protagonists are engaged.

Tolstoy, however, has a different ending in mind for his love story. After a period of blissful happiness together in the country and the following period of alienation in the capital, the couple enters a new phase in their relationship. Sergei explains to Masha that the previous stages of their love, even the happiest ones, cannot be returned to simply because they are already lived through, underscoring thereby the natural and irreversible progression of their feelings: “Every stage has its own love” (141). He kisses Masha on the head at this moment, and she feels that “not a lover, but an old friend had kissed [her]” (142). Significantly, this transition from the “romantic” to the “post-romantic” stage in the protagonists’ relationship is marked by a change in the heroine’s emotional state described through a physiological metaphor: “I looked at him, and suddenly a burden was lifted, as if that ailing moral nerve that had made me suffer was taken away from me” (143).

The novel concludes with another explicit reference to the problem of the ending:

From this day on, my romance (роман, “novel” or “romance”) with my husband came to an *end*; the old feeling became a

dear, irrevocable remembrance, and the new feeling of love for my children and their father became the *beginning* of another, but very differently happy life, which I haven’t lived yet through to its end at the present moment. (143, emphasis mine)

The word “roman” used in the Russian original, referring to the heroine’s romance with her husband, but also to the novel we are reading, encapsulates the convergence of the narrative (structural) and ideological (thematic) concerns in Tolstoy’s subversive treatment of the traditional theme. Tolstoy’s choice of this term, incidentally, puzzled his friend, the writer and critic V. P. Botkin, who mediated the publication of *Family Happiness* in M. N. Katkov’s journal *The Russian Herald*. Botkin admired the work’s second part (that, significantly, portrayed the married life of the protagonists) where he said he had made only one small correction in the last sentence—he “struck out the word ‘roman,’ with which [Masha] characterizes the second half, familial and material, of her life, for the word ‘roman’ is not suitable for such relationships” (307). Botkin thus intuited Tolstoy’s innovative presentation of love between the sexes and his departure from the romantic/novelistic (романная) tradition. The word “roman,” however, was kept in the journal publication of the work, revealing that it was important for Tolstoy to separate the ensuing stage of his protagonists’ relationship from the previous one, which, in spite of the characters’ eventual alienation, remained essentially “romantic.” Indeed, not only did it include such traditional motifs of love narratives as cooling, vengeance, jealousy, and near-infidelity, but, more importantly, the spouses’ very alienation resulted, to a degree, from Masha’s conventional understanding of love and her concordant expectations that remained unfulfilled.

That the word “roman” was a deliberate and loaded choice for Tolstoy is evident from

an earlier occurrence of this term in the penultimate chapter of the novel. While at the spa abroad, Masha overhears her admirer, the Italian marquis D. (who would come very close to seducing her), confessing: "I can't not love! Without this there's no life. To turn life into a *roman* is the only good thing about it. And my *roman* never stops in the middle, and this one I'll take to the end" (130). The Marquis uses the term "roman" in its rather conventional sense—as a development of romantic and erotic passion that comes to an end when the passion is satiated. The new understanding of love at which Tolstoy's protagonists arrive at the end of the work clearly subverts the "romantic" view espoused by the Italian. Importantly, as Masha's final statement demonstrates, their love story does not end with the end of their roman.¹² The Italian's declaration about turning "life into a *roman*," moreover, can be read as yet another metaliterary statement on Tolstoy's part (especially if we recall Pushkin's famous open ending of *Eugene Onegin*).¹³ Unlike the Marquis who always "takes his *roman* to the end," Tolstoy leaves *his roman* (*Family Happiness*) open-ended. Romantic love (*roman*), as well as novels (*romany*) that portray it, may indeed have an end, be it the wedding, suicide, or tragic cooling and estrangement, but Tolstoy emphatically refuses to follow this convention. As Eikhbaum points out, "The whole 'romantic' (любовная) part of the novel is packed into the first four chapters, like an introduction, and the wedding does not end it, as a denouement (развязка), but rather on the contrary opens it, serving as an entanglement (завязка) for what follows" (*Пятидесятые годы* 354).

Later scholars have noted that narrative closure presented for Tolstoy a moral and philosophical problem, in addition to a purely literary one. Saul Morson, for example, has observed that Tolstoy resisted conventional plots and plotting in general "because they both impose closure and structure on a world that is fundamentally innocent of both" (*Narr-*

ative and Freedom 79). Amy Mandelker has shown that Tolstoy's views on love and family and his literary practices were linked to such an extent that in his "post-conversion" period, "Tolstoy's ultimate rejection of the family ideal—of sexual, romantic love, and procreation as its rationale—accompanied his rejection of the novel" as a genre (32). "Novels," Tolstoy wrote in his diary in 1894, "end with the hero and heroine married. Instead, they should begin with marriage and end with the couple liberating themselves from it" (52: 136).¹⁴

In *Family Happiness*, then, we see an earlier example of the link established by Tolstoy between the literary problem of the love plot and the moral and psychological problem of the essence of love between the sexes. While rejecting the conventional ending, however, Tolstoy does not offer a convincing alternative: His novel ends with the beginning of that new, "post-passionate" phase in the protagonists' relationship and, temporally, in the unfolding present. According to some critics, the work essentially failed to depict family happiness. "The novella," Marie Sémon argues, "narrated the birth and death of passion, more nostalgia for family happiness than happiness itself" (79). *Family Happiness* thus remains, rather, a "negative" experiment: a rejection of the preceding tradition (hence its prominent metaliterary quality) rather than a portrayal of a positive alternative—something Tolstoy would undertake in his two later major novels. By that time he would also have to compete not so much with previous literary practices or foreign models as with contemporary influential narratives of "post-romantic" love that were produced in the Russian cultural context of the early 1860s and were articulated in connection to some of the most authoritative scientific theories of the time. Tolstoy's earlier explorations of an alternative narrative and concept of love in *Family Happiness* (different irreversible stages of love, an emphasis on habit, and the problem of an ending) find new resonance in the early

1860s, when Sechenov's theory of reflexes attempts to ground these ideas in physiology. As Tolstoy becomes increasingly engaged with the rising positivist and scientist tendencies in contemporaneous Russian culture, scientific argumentation and metaphors begin to figure more prominently in his literary constructions of love and "family happiness" as well.

Sechenov and Chernyshevsky

Four years after the publication of *Family Happiness*, two works, Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* and Sechenov's *Reflexes of the Brain*, similarly attempted to redefine the development of love in human life and offer stabilizing mechanisms to ensure the permanence of this feeling. Both works, published just months apart in 1863, became tremendously popular and controversial at the time; both faced complications with the government, and both were perceived as manifestos of materialism and radicalism.¹⁵ And yet, in spite of the apparent similarities in the works' and their authors' destinies and reputations, they offered quite different models of love's progression, even though each relied on a physiological argument to make its case.

In his tract proclaiming the reflex to be the basis of all human activity, including emotions and moral feelings, Sechenov found it necessary to dedicate a special short section to explaining the mechanism of "love for a woman," for he found "the widespread public ideas about it" to be "extremely groundless" (*Избранные произведения* 129).¹⁶ This reference to the "public" makes it clear that Sechenov here does not merely present a scientific theory for a circle of specialists but, rather, openly enters a contemporary debate on the nature of love between the sexes—a debate to which Tolstoy's *Family Happiness* had made a controversial contribution. Moreover, by limiting his discussion of love specifically to "love for a woman," the scientist, however indirectly, engages with the pressing "woman" question. Notably, until the censorship interfered, *Reflexes of the Brain* was

meant to appear in *The Contemporary*—the very journal that in the late 1850s published Mikhailov's critique of Michelet's and Proudhon's views on women and tried to obtain *Family Happiness* for publication.

Despite the polemical tone of Sechenov's introduction to his theory of love, however, this theory offers not so much new ideas that supersede the commonplace "groundless" views as a new scientific "grounding" for these views—the mechanism of the reflex action. In *L'Amour*, Michelet admitted that we still know very little about "the two faces of love," physiological and moral (34: 8); Sechenov's theory claims to fill these gaps in our understanding of love. (As we will see, he uses his physiological theory to also explain love's moral basis.) As was the case with Tolstoy, this new vision of love was clearly aimed at the depoeticization of romantic love; it also entailed creating an alternative love narrative. In the course of his argument that redefines, in physiological terms, the fundamental stages of human affection, the scientist writes his own short "love novel," which both competes and resonates with the literary love narratives of his time.

Sechenov divides the development of love in man's life into several phases. The first phase, while still physiologically conditioned by instinctive sexual desire, is nonetheless "platonic," since an adolescent falls in love not with a real-life woman but an abstract ideal and eventually transfers his "dream" (мечта) to a woman who resembles this ideal. At this stage the love emotion already acquires an ethical component, which makes this particular passion the least egotistical:

When a man (человек) loves a woman, he, properly speaking, loves in her his own pleasures; but since he objectifies them, he regards all the causes of his pleasure to be located in the woman, and therefore, in his consciousness, next to his concept of himself, there is an image of the woman shining in all her beauty. He must love the woman more than himself because I will

never attribute to my ideal those of my emotional feelings (страстных ощущений) that are unpleasant. I attribute to the beloved only the best side of my pleasure. [...] Such a passion inevitably leads to all so-called self-sacrifices, i.e., may contradict man's natural instincts, even the voice of self-preservation. (130)

From this ideal phase, the amorous passion proceeds to a sexual one when the "ideal" is materialized in a real woman: "The man begins to possess his ideal. His passion is enflamed more vividly and brightly, because instead of vague, indistinct sexual desires there arise the vivid, quivering sensations of love, and the woman herself appears in an unprecedented splendor" (130). At this stage, the intensity of the passion reaches its peak, only to fade away as a result of the dulling of the nerves' reaction to the unchanging stimulant, for "the intensity of passion is only maintained by the mutability of the passionate image" (130-31)—a statement with which Michelet would certainly agree.

In Sechenov's scheme, though, the fading of the passion does not point to the end of love but to its new, and final, stage: "Love, however, did not disappear: From the frequent repetition of the reflex, where the representation of the beloved with some or all of her qualities constitutes the psychical content, her image is joined, so to speak, with all the movements of the lover's soul, and she has really become his other half. This is love by habit—friendship" (131). In an argument resembling Sergei's observation in *Family Happiness* about the irreversibility of love's phases, Sechenov characterizes the stages he described as a "natural" sequence, which in its complete form can only be experienced once (repeated instances of amorous passion merely signal the incomplete character of previous romantic experiences).

In spite of its aura of scientific objectivity, Sechenov's presentation of his ideas on love clearly draws on a literary tradition. Not only

does the scientist's language become increasingly poetic and metaphoric in this section of his tract—he employs such expressions as "misty image" (туманный образ), "his passion is enflamed more vividly and brightly" (его страсть вспыхивает еще живее и ярче), "vivid, quivering sensations of love" (яркие, трепетные ощущения любви), "the passion has burnt out" (страсть потухла)—the tri-partite structure of the process he describes, with a characteristic synthesis at the end, reveals the Romantic roots of his theory.¹⁷ The idea that the typical object of love at the "platonic stage" is a distant, "vague ideal," rather than any of the women surrounding the adolescent, is also unmistakably Romantic, but Sechenov, characteristically, tries to de-poeticize it by asserting the essentially physiological nature of this phenomenon: "Despite its seemingly extremely poetic character, this process is still nothing but a frequent repetition of a reflex with a feminine ideal as its content, influenced by real encounters with women" (129). This qualification notwithstanding, Sechenov's very distinction between "real" and "ideal" is indebted to nineteenth-century literary and philosophical discourses and specifically the struggles between Romanticism and Realism, idealism and materialism.

Even more importantly, his description of the unfolding of passionate love has all the characteristics of a literary narrative, with the required Aristotelian "beginning," "middle," and "end." Notably, in the original Russian, Sechenov slips from the more scientific and objective present tense to a narrative past. It is indeed a love plot, with an *exposition* (the formation of the vague ideal); an *entanglement* (the youth's encounter with a woman corresponding to his ideal); a *climax* (the man's possessing his beloved); and, admittedly, a not-very-dramatic *denouement* (the fading and transformation of the passion). In this final stage of love's evolution, however, Sechenov's love plot (like Tolstoy's) diverges from the literary romantic narratives. Al-

though passion fades away, the “romance” described in *Reflexes of the Brain* has a happy end: It concludes not with the disappearance of love but with a transformation of passionate desire into a “love by habit.” In making habit (theorized as reflex) a natural part of love and by rejecting passion as love’s exclusive foundation, Sechenov offers an even more radical alternative to the conventional romantic concept of love than Michelet and comes closer to Tolstoy’s ideal of family happiness, devoid of Romantic infatuation. Characteristically, Sechenov’s description of the last stage of the love-emotion as indistinguishable from friendship echoes the final scene from *Family Happiness* when the heroine, kissed by her husband, knows that “not a lover but an old friend” just kissed her.

If in Tolstoy the spouses eventually move beyond the “lovers” roles towards each other and if Sechenov envisioned the final stage of love’s development as based on habit, rather than passion, Chernyshevsky in *What Is to Be Done?*, conversely, offers a theory of an ever-increasing passion as a stabilizing mechanism for marital happiness.¹⁸

When Vera Pavlovna and her second husband, the physiologist Kirsanov (a literary incarnation of Sechenov, according to contemporaries’ perception)¹⁹ discuss their feelings, they are surprised at the freshness of their passion preserved after years of marriage. As Vera Pavlovna puts it, “We’ve been living together three years now, (before it used to be one year, then two, soon it’ll be four and so on), yet we still act like lovers who see each other infrequently and secretly. Where did people come up with the idea, Sasha, that love fades when nothing really prevents people from belonging entirely to one another?” (354-55). Sechenov would answer precisely this question in his tract, using an almost identical wording: “Months pass, or a year, or two at most, and usually the passion has already burnt out...Why so? Of course, on the basis of the law according to which the intensity of passion is only main-

tained by the mutability of the passionate image” (130-31).²⁰ The spouses in Chernyshevsky’s novel, however, contradict this “law,” insisting on the increasing intensification of passion as time passes: “Someone who’s once tasted the delight that passion offers can only go on to experience it to a greater and greater degree” (355). To support their contrary theory of everlasting passion, the spouses, predictably, resort to a quasi-scientific argument: “It’s not as if my appetite were weakened or my taste dulled because I don’t starve but instead have no trouble eating very well every day. On the contrary, my taste develops only because my table has so much to offer” (355).²¹ Such an analogy is drawn by Sechenov as well,²² but his conclusions are different:

When a reflex is frequently repeated in one and the same direction, its psychical element (sensation, concept, etc.), apart from the passionate element, which is added to it, becomes clearer and clearer...; emotion (страстность), on the other hand, in many cases disappears. The child becomes tired of the same toys. (123)

Kirsanov’s explanation of the mechanism of passion, then, lacks the more nuanced psychological analysis offered by his supposed prototype. A more straightforward approach, however, allows Chernyshevsky to offer a very different model of love’s development: One where its passionate phase is not a climactic point in the romantic relationship followed by a new stage but is rather a permanent process, a combination of what would be the middle and last phases in Sechenov’s scheme. Thus Chernyshevsky creates a utopia of everlasting passion, very much in line with the utopian nature of the novel as a whole.

Like Tolstoy’s *Family Happiness*, Chernyshevsky’s novel demonstrates that theorization of romantic love is inextricably linked to the literary problem of constructing a love plot. It is hardly coincidental that a novel that favors an unending amorous passion emphat-

ically has no end, despite the fact that the novel's penultimate chapter is entitled, in a playful metanarrative gesture, "New Characters and a Denouement." While one of the novel's mysteries does indeed become resolved towards the end, structurally the novel remains open-ended. The narrator playfully promises the reader to finish his story when the latter is more inclined to listen to him. Tolstoy's and Chernyshevsky's refusals to "finish" their narratives of conjugal love reveal an artistic impasse faced by writers who tried to imagine and represent the post-romantic phase of the love emotion. While non-fictional genres, such as Michelet's tract, where the author deliberately rejected novelistic individualization, could succeed in creating an exhaustive and universal narrative of love, representing the post-passionate stage of love in an artistic form proved to be a far more difficult task.

War and Peace and Anna Karenina²³

In *L'Amour* Michelet insisted that "love is not [...] a drama but an *épopée*," and it is in the epilogue of his monumental epic *War and Peace* that Tolstoy takes up the challenge of actually portraying the post-Romantic phase of conjugal love, which he only gestured towards at the end of *Family Happiness*. How successful this attempt was remains debatable: Since its appearance, *War and Peace* has been both criticized and praised for its lack of a conventional ending.²⁴ Sémon, for example, views the "family" epilogue more as a preparation for *Anna Karenina* than an ending for *War and Peace*, an "awkward first step" towards a fuller and more artistically subtle development of the theme of family happiness in Tolstoy's second great novel (80). This "awkwardness," at least in part, reveals the struggle faced by Tolstoy the writer in his search for the alternative love plot and particularly its final stage. In this "end of the unending novel (*le roman interminable*)," Sémon, characteristically, sees a "hybrid genre" (*un genre bâtard*), "a shaky beginning of a new

work" (79). Just as in *Family Happiness*, Tolstoy's experiments with the conventional love plot turned the end into a beginning.

Part I of the epilogue of *War and Peace* depicts two happily married couples—Mar'ia and Nikolai Rostov and Natasha and Pierre Bezukhov. Published in 1869, these scenes of "family happiness," although set in 1820, clearly resonate with contemporaneous debates, as Tolstoy's narrator does not fail to point out: "The same conversations and discussions about women's rights, the relations of the spouses and their freedom and rights, though not yet called *questions* as they are now, existed then, as they do now" (*PSS* 12: 267-68). In order to promote his take on these troublesome "questions," Tolstoy, in a characteristic rhetorical move, resorts to a "scientific" argument and specifically, to the widespread analogy (also used by Chernyshevsky's Kirsanov) between sexual desire and gastric appetites:

If the purpose of dinner is nourishment of the body, then the person who will eat two dinners at once might achieve greater pleasure but will not achieve his purpose, for both dinners will not be digested by the stomach. If the purpose of marriage is family, then the person who will want to have many wives and husbands may achieve a great deal of pleasure but will not under any circumstances have a family. (268)

Tolstoy's narrator, however, uses this analogy to prove a very different point: If Kirsanov's argument is founded on the idea of pleasure (the delights of passion make one desire it even more, just as consuming a great amount and variety of food will only increase one's appetite), Tolstoy's narrator makes a careful distinction between pleasure and purposefulness and bases *his* theory of marital stability on the latter. Nonetheless the fact remains that both authors, while advocating very different values, use essentially the same strategy to achieve an identical purpose—to

establish the permanence of the conjugal bond as something as natural as human physiological functions. Notably, in *Anna Karenina* Levin—the character whose views are admittedly the closest to those of Tolstoy himself—draws a very similar analogy when responding to Stiva's account of his extramarital affairs: "I'm sorry, but I decisively don't understand this...just as I wouldn't understand if now, after having a full meal (наевшись), I would walk by the bakery and steal a loaf of braided bread (калач)" (*PSS* 18: 44). Tolstoy's (and his characters') propensity for physiological analogies point to a certain epistemological value he assigns to physiological argumentation, even though he never accepts it as the exclusive explanation for the spousal bond.²⁵

Of all the contemporary competing mechanisms explaining love's stability that I have discussed, Tolstoy's portrayal of spouses' relationships in the epilogue to *War and Peace* comes closest to Sechenov's scheme, particularly its "prosaic" final phase. What holds Tolstoyan marriages together is not the infinite variety of the spouses' roles towards each other, as in Michelet, and not an ever-increasing passion, as in Chernyshevsky, but an almost physical unity—which Sechenov, like Tolstoy, envisioned as the "post-romantic" stage of love's development.²⁶ However, while Sechenov explained this unity by the operation of the reflex mechanism, Tolstoy resists such an explicitly physiological explanation—even though some of his characters do resort to bodily analogies to explain the nature of this bond. When Mar'ia Rostova, pregnant and sensitive to her husband's irritable moods, feels unattractive and begins to question his love, Nikolai reassures her that beauty is not what his affection for her is based on. As is typical for Tolstoy's distrust of language (especially the language of love and spousal communication), Nikolai cannot find the right words to characterize his feelings for his wife, but it is clear that "love," in its conventional sense as a romantic passion, does

not describe those feelings adequately. When the conceptual language fails, the hero resorts to a vivid simile, the meaning of which is very clear—no longer an object of romantic passion, Mar'ia has become a part of himself: "But as for my wife, do I really love her? I don't love ... but ... I don't know how to put it. Without you, or when something comes between us like this, I feel lost and can't do anything. Now do I love my finger? I don't love it, but just try to cut it off!" (*PSS* 12: 264).

In the case of Natasha and Pierre, Tolstoy takes even greater pains to de-romanticize and de-poeticize their relationship in order to emphasize the special bond of a different kind that exists between them. After getting married,

Natasha [...] at once abandoned all her charms [...] She did not care about her manners, or delicacy of speech, or her toilette or to show herself to her husband in her most attractive poses. [...] She felt that her bond (связь) with her husband was maintained not by the poetic feelings that had attracted him to her, but by something else—indefinite but firm as the bond between her own soul and her body. (*PSS* 12: 267)

Again we observe the characteristic struggle with language. Like Nikolai, Natasha cannot verbally express the nature of the connection between her and her husband (she calls it "something else," "indefinite") and resorts instead to a simile. But whereas Nikolai, with his typically more down-to-earth and materialist mentality, employed an exclusively corporal simile, Natasha's vision is more transcendental, for she likens this bond to one between body and soul.

Natasha's quasi-metaphysical description of the spouses' unity, interestingly, is closer to the process described by Sechenov than is Nikolai's purely materialist one. In *Reflexes of the Brain*, Sechenov envisions the final phase in the development of love precisely as a transition from a bodily mechanism (reflex

caused by an external stimulation of sensory nerves) to a psychical image—notably, the scientist, whose theory was “credited” with doing away with the notion of the soul,²⁷ himself refers to the soul in his description:

From the frequent repetition of the reflex, where the representation of the beloved with some or all of her qualities constitutes the psychical content, her image is joined, *so to speak, with all the movements of the lover's soul (душа), and she really has become his other half.* (131; emphasis mine)

Curiously, Sechenov introduces the outdated idea of the “movements of the soul” with a qualification, “so to speak,” implying that this is just a metaphor for a certain mechanism, for the description of which he can not find more suitable words. Thus, despite the authoritative tone of Sechenov’s narrative and the apparent simplicity of the process he describes, his slips into the rhetoric of idealism betray the same failure of conceptual language to define exactly the nature of “non-romantic” love as we observed for Tolstoy’s characters.

Finally we are given Pierre’s perspective on his relationship with his wife, and Nikolai’s bodily explanation and Natasha’s metaphysical one give way to a moral interpretation of the bond:

After seven years of marriage, Pierre felt the joyous and firm consciousness that he was not a bad man, and he felt this because he saw himself reflected in his wife. Within himself he felt all the good and bad mingled and mutually obscured. *But in his wife only what was truly good in him was reflected; all that was not quite good was rejected.* And this reflection occurred not by means of logical thinking but by a different, mysterious and direct, way. (*PSS* 12: 270)

This vision of the spousal bond is akin to Sechenov’s ethical interpretation of love,

namely to his idea that by idealizing a woman, a man associates with her his best feelings and pleasures—an idea that the scientist also expressed, albeit more implicitly, through the image of mirroring: “When a man loves a woman, he, properly speaking, loves in her his own pleasures” (130). However, while Sechenov, at least rhetorically, tries to diminish the role of a conscious moral factor in this feeling and ultimately provides a purely materialist and egotistical foundation for the lover’s “so-called self-sacrifices,” employing markedly utilitarian and physiological terms, such as “pleasure” and “emotional sensation,” Tolstoy explicitly operates with the *moral* concepts of “good” and “bad.” And whereas Tolstoy promotes the idea of a happy *marriage*, Sechenov (whose relationship with Mariia Bokova remained a civil union for over twenty years) uses less conventional language, consistently employing the term “любовница,” which in Russian can mean “lover,” “beloved,” or “mistress.” The rhetorical shift in Tolstoy’s description of a very similar mechanism indicates a value shift as well and can be seen as an attempt to demarcate his own theorizing of “post-romantic” love from the deterministic and (at least ostensibly) materialist theories of his day.²⁸

There is no doubt that Sechenov’s theory of reflexes was on Tolstoy’s mind while he was working on the epilogue to *War and Peace* (published in 1869, only three years after *Reflexes of the Brain* came out as a separate book). Sechenov’s name is mentioned twice in the drafts of the second part of the epilogue, where Tolstoy speculates about different scientific disciplines and uses the scientist’s name as a personification of the science of physiology.²⁹ Along with Darwinian zoology, physiology epitomized for Tolstoy that one-sided investigation of human nature that can become dangerous when it is used to explain all of human nature in its complex relationship to the interplay of freedom and necessity. The final version of the epilogue does not mention Sechenov directly but con-

tains unmistakable references to his theory of reflexes in the context of such questions.³⁰ Even more importantly, in the second, “philosophical” part of the epilogue Tolstoy relegates necessity to the sphere of reason and freedom to the realm of consciousness. Sechenov’s theory of reflexes (as the Darwinian theory of the origin of the species), according to Tolstoy, does not take consciousness into consideration, and, as result, the natural sciences are not equipped to resolve the dilemma of freedom and necessity, “for in a frog [the primary subject of Sechenov’s experiments—V.S.], a rabbit, and a monkey we can only observe muscular-nervous activity, while in the human being we observe both muscular-nervous activity and consciousness” (*PSS* 12: 326). The passage that describes Pierre’s bond with his wife, notably, establishes the same opposition between reason and consciousness as does the philosophical part of the epilogue: “the joyous... consciousness” of his goodness is acquired by Pierre *not* by “logical thinking,” or reason, but through a “mysterious and direct” reflection. The very repetition of the word “reflection” (отражение) in this passage, moreover, evokes the concept of a reflex, which contains a “reflection” metaphor at its core³¹—a metaphor that Sechenov frequently lays bare by referring to reflex actions as “отраженные движения.”

Tolstoy, we may suspect, embarks on polemics with the reflex theory here by offering a different idea of reflection, which is not mechanistic, not rational, and not mediated, but instead “direct” and “mysterious.” If in the “philosophical” part of the epilogue, then, Tolstoy explicitly proclaims the inapplicability of Sechenov’s theory, along with other fashionable scientific hypotheses of the time, to existential and moral dilemmas unique to human beings, in the epilogue’s “family” section he subtly rejects a purely physiological foundation for the mysterious unity of loving spouses.

And yet Tolstoy was clearly intrigued by the possibility of a physiological explanation for the mystery of the spousal bond. On February 21, 1870, two days before he shared with his wife the basic idea for his future novel *Anna Karenina*,³² the writer jotted down in his notebook:

The connection (связь) between a husband and a wife is not based on an agreement nor on a carnal conjoining (соединении) [...] The connection between a mother and her child is still obvious. When the child is hungry, the mother’s milk lets down. The same connection exists between a husband and a wife. Nobody has heard of a father or a mother and their beloved children, friends, brothers and sisters dying [at the same time]. But who hasn’t heard thousands of examples of almost simultaneous deaths of a husband and a wife (who lived well [together])—Or is this a coincidence? (*PSS* 48: 111)

In this entry, Tolstoy explicitly rejects both legal (“agreement”) and sexual (“carnal conjoining”) rationales for the mysterious bond and strives instead for a satisfying “natural” explanation: By drawing the parallel between the spousal connection and the reflex-like bond between a mother and a child he alludes to a possible psychophysiological mechanism underlying this connection. Tolstoy clearly was attached to this idea, since the observation about the let-down reflex as a sign of the bond between the mother and child is echoed in the last part of *Anna Karenina* where Kitty, who cannot hear her infant son’s crying, *physiologically* knows nonetheless that he is hungry: “It was not that she guessed (her bond (связь) with the baby had not been broken yet), but she knew for certain about his need to be fed by the influx of milk in her” (*PSS* 19: 364).

Tolstoy evidently was not as “certain” about the existence of a similar physiological basis for the spousal bond, for in the novel

itself he does not venture to suggest the analogy that he establishes in this notebook entry. While the novel is riddled with allusions to contemporary scientific debates, including a direct reference to Sechenov's theory of reflexes,³³ in his search for the explanation of spousal unity, Tolstoy instead probes the realm of religion. The text of the church service in the novel's lengthy description of Kitty and Levin's Orthodox wedding ceremony invokes the idea of two beings brought together (в соединении) and united by "the indestructible bond of love" (*PSS* 19: 19).³⁴ It is clear, however, that the idea of spouses "becoming one flesh" was not a mere metaphor for Tolstoy: It was not until Levin *physically* experienced his unity with Kitty that this idea became meaningful to him. After their first quarrel, Levin suddenly "clearly understood for the first time what he could not understand when he exited the church with her after the wedding. He understood that not only she was close to him but he could not tell any more where she ended and he began. He understood it by the painful feeling of being split (раздвоение) which he experienced at that moment. He was insulted at first, but in the same second he felt that he could not be insulted by her, that she was him himself" (*PSS* 19: 50). This feeling, again, is described through a bodily analogy, likening it to that of a man who, receiving a blow, looks for his assailant only to realize that he has accidentally struck himself. The *understanding* of the unity, just as Kitty's "certain" *knowledge* of her baby's needs, thus, comes through a physical experience, a "painful feeling." Tolstoyan epistemology clearly relies on the body, even though his metaphysics resists the concept of the human being as a physiological creature.

Moreover, the violent imagery describing this unity, so long-sought in Tolstoy's *oeuvre*, as well as the painful feeling of duality brought by the experience of this bond, undermines the very ideal of conjugal happiness that Levin's family life is supposed to embody. It is noteworthy that, unlike the protagonists

of *War and Peace*, Levin arrives at the "post-romantic" phase of love not at the end of the novel but rather in the middle. In a development that reflects Tolstoy's personal crisis of the mid-1870s, in achieving "family happiness" Levin does not attain yet full self-knowledge and the ultimate harmony and unity with himself and the world. This will not take place until the very end of *Anna Karenina* when he discovers (or rather rediscovers) his faith and, with it, the "unquestionable feeling of goodness" in his life. The ideal "third" phase of the marital romance no longer suffices to provide a desired narrative closure.³⁵ Ironically, when Tolstoy finally succeeds in creating a full-scale normative narrative of conjugal love and family happiness, he also begins to question this ideal.

The Kreutzer Sonata

Tolstoy's search for an alternative romantic plot comes, literally, to a bloody end in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, where the idea of the unity of husband and wife, so dear to Tolstoy in the previous stages of his career, is replaced by a vision of the unity of humankind, freed from sexual desire and therefore no longer striving towards marriage, family, or procreation. To establish this new ideal, Tolstoy needs to renounce his own previous attempts to find an alternative to romantic love and to expose the notion of love between the sexes as nothing other than basic carnal desire. This is also where the purely physiological interpretation of "love for a woman" explicitly enters the Tolstoyan "post-romantic" narrative. The theory of love that Pozdnyshev presents to his fellow traveler, the novella's narrator, sounds as if it were copied, with slight modifications, from the last section of *Reflexes of the Brain*.³⁶ This physiological explanation no longer contradicts Tolstoy's metaphysics of love but, on the contrary, serves the polemical purposes of his new teaching. If Tolstoy's "pre-conversion" works, as we have seen, employed scientific argumentation and discourse in constructing an alternative concept of love

rather cautiously and selectively, maintaining thereby a distance from the rhetoric and ideas of “materialist” constructions of love, in this later work his protagonist openly and readily enlists science to support his view of love as mere lust.³⁷

Sechenov’s “love narrative” begins, as we recall, with the adolescent’s vague longing for a woman, based on instinctive sexual desire. In this context, the scientist does not hesitate to pronounce, in passing, a verdict on society’s mores, very much in the manner of the late Tolstoy: “I will not undertake to resolve the question whether the adolescent (мальчик) involuntarily associates these first sexual sensations with a female image or whether this association is prepared by pre-existing knowledge. We can only say for certain that, given our ways of upbringing children, the latter happens for sure with nine-tenths of all the boys” (129). This is exactly the case with Tolstoy’s Pozdnyshev, who describes his pubertal tortures in very similar wording and with an almost identical reference to “statistical data”: “I did not know women yet, but, as all the unfortunate children of our circle, I no longer was an innocent boy (мальчик). [...] My moments of solitude were impure. I suffered like ninety-nine percent of our boys do” (*PSS* 27: 18).³⁸ As in *Reflexes of the Brain*, the adolescent’s pre-sexual stage in Pozdnyshev’s account is marked by the fantasies of an imaginary, abstract woman, not “some particular woman but woman as something enjoyable (сладкое нечто)” (17). The hero’s fantasies, however, are of an exclusively sexual nature and are completely deprived of the romantic, ideal element envisioned by Sechenov: “Any woman, woman’s nudity already tortured me,” Pozdnyshev confesses (17-18). In other words, Tolstoy’s protagonist not only adopts what was considered to be a materialist interpretation of love but also takes it to its extreme and purges it of any Romantic, poetic, or even psychological component.

In Pozdnyshev’s retrospective theorizing of his youthful experience, when an adoles-

cent finally encounters the real woman he falls in love with, he “does not transfer his dream” to her, as Sechenov describes it, but simply responds physiologically to the sight of the pleasing object: “the slender body in a tight jersey” (27: 21). The attractive female body, Pozdnyshev explains, following the quasi-Sechenovian, deterministic logic, acts as a stimulant upon the man’s organism where an excess of energy, resulting from consumption of rich food and alcohol, is waiting to be released. Unable to find an immediate outlet, this energy is redirected, “through the prism of our artificial life,” into culturally accepted forms of courtship and poetic admiration. In this mechanism of love there is no place for a mysterious reflection, a metaphysical bond, or even a prosaic habit that ensures the stability of the conjugal union. While the supposedly materialist science of the 1860s allowed for moral and idealist elements of the “reflex of love,” Tolstoy’s *The Kreutzer Sonata* defamiliarizes love as a culturally constructed notion, which in reality is no more than a product of basic physiological functions. If in previous works Tolstoy employed physiological similes and scientific reasoning to establish a new concept of love in opposition to the romantic notion, here quasi-physiological argumentation and statistical “evidence” are used—in a far more consistent and explicit manner—to dismiss the notion of love between the sexes altogether. The writer’s goal is quite different at this stage, but his strategy of invoking science to theorize love does not substantially change.

As was the case in *Family Happiness*, when undermining a particular understanding of love as a poeticized illusion, Tolstoy at the same time settles scores with the literary tradition that maintained it. Like *Family Happiness*, *The Kreutzer Sonata* opposes “life” and the novel (*roman*) when Pozdnyshev rejects the concept of everlasting love as a literary invention: “But it only happens in novels (в романах), and never in life” (27: 13). In the case of the later work, however, this state-

ment can also be read as self-referential: Through his protagonist, Tolstoy mocks not only the literary tradition from which he departed early in his career but also his own attempts to create stabilizing narratives of enduring spousal love in his previous novels (романы). Tolstoy's failure to discover a satisfying foundation for the stability of intersexual relationships is evident at the plot level as well: Instead of the tantalizing open-endedness of *Family Happiness*, *War and Peace*, and even *Anna Karenina* (the Levin-Kitty storyline), we are faced, in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, with the finality of death and the triviality of murder as a solution for the denouement.³⁹ The murder of Pozdnyshév's wife thus symbolizes the end of both Tolstoy's conceptual search for the mystery of the spousal bond and his literary quest for the alternative love narrative.

Conclusion

The evolution of Tolstoy's intense search for the solution to the problem of "non-romantic" love and marital happiness illustrates vividly the conflation between literary and scientific concerns and discourses to which I alluded in the introduction. Moreover, my analysis shows that, despite the widespread view that holds Tolstoy to be an enemy of positivism and materialist science, his pursuit was, in fact, much closer to contemporary scientific or quasi-scientific attempts to explore the same problem than is often acknowledged. Partly it resulted from Tolstoy's well-known tendency to engage with the influential ideas of his time but also from the too frequently ignored fact that the science of his day still carried the weight of the Romantic and idealist tradition and was just as eager to overcome this heritage as Tolstoy was in the realm of literature. Tolstoy's simultaneous resistance to the seductive precision and finality of a scientific explanation and his obvious need for a similar complete and "natural" solution seem to be derived from the conflict between Tolstoy's metaphysics and his epistemology. While

Tolstoyan metaphysics could not accept a purely corporal interpretation of the human being and therefore an exclusively physical foundation for love between the sexes, his epistemology required an explanation that would make sense (both logically and experientially) at the bodily level. This inner conflict at least partly accounts for Tolstoy's inconsistent "flirtation" with the scientific discourse of love and his contradictory and ultimately unsuccessful attempts to resolve the problem of "post-romantic" love "in his own way." This discrepancy between Tolstoy's metaphysics and epistemology was not overcome until his "post-conversion" period, when the writer moved to a sharply polarized dualistic model, which presented the physical and spiritual spheres in the human being as incompatible and even mutually exclusive. It is then that Tolstoy turned to science, as he did in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, in order to radically "physicalize" those experiences that, like love between the sexes, are located on the boundary between the physical and the spiritual realms (and this is why he had to reduce Sechenovian psychology to mere physiology). By that time, however, his quest for an innovative notion and narrative of love between the sexes had already become meaningless, for the concept itself lost its value in Tolstoy's thought. An alternative was no longer possible nor needed.

Notes

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1. For an excellent discussion of the movement, see Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, especially part II.

2. All quotations from Tolstoy's work are cited by volume and page number from the Jubilee Edition (*Полное собрание сочинений*).

3. The 1836 Code of Russian Laws stated that "the woman must obey her husband, reside with him in love, respect, and unlimited obedience, and offer him every pleasantness and affection as the ruler of the household." Cited in Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, 6-7. In this study, Stites observes two contradictory trends in the view of marriage maintained by the nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia: "that of the free union of two comrades contracted and broken in the light of their consciences alone; and that of the enduring partnership of equals whose mutual commitment was for life" (46). Both views, even though mutually exclusive, were a radical departure from the traditional concept of marriage.

4. While Pozdnyshv's use of scientific discourse is not explicit in the epigraph, he does employ it widely when espousing his views in other sections of the work, as I show later in the article.

5. For a subtle and illuminating discussion of Tolstoy's response to the "woman question" and his modification of the Victorian literary tradition, as well as an extensive bibliography on the subject, see Mandelker. For an analysis of Tolstoy's polemics with Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* in *Anna Karenina*, see Paperno 154-55. For a more general discussion of Tolstoy's portrayal of women and conjugal relationships in his *oeuvre*, see Sémon.

6. All emphases in this article are in the original, unless otherwise noted.

7. Cf. Andy Byford's informative comparative analysis of the discursive interactions between science and literature in Russia and France, which nonetheless restates the stereotypical relationships between the two spheres. Even Michael Holquist's excellent article on Sechenov and Bazarov, which examines the philosophical and discursive correlation between Sechenov's science and Turgenev's novelistic practices,

focuses exclusively on literature's reaction to scientific ideas and language.

8. See the commentary on the history of the writing and publication of *Family Happiness* in Tolstoy 5: 305. For a summary of the Russian reception of Michelet's and Proudhon's ideas, see Eikhenbaum, *Пятидесятые годы* 407-11. For a detailed discussion of Mikhailov's contribution, see Stites, "M. L. Mikhailov" and chapter 2 of his *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*.

9. Interestingly, Michelet refers to Rousseau's *Émile* (an extremely important work for Tolstoy) as a counterexample of an "individualized" and fictionalized presentation of a moral theory.

10. Compare the famous dictum of Pushkin's narrator in *Eugene Onegin* when he describes Tat'iana's mother's loveless marriage: "Habit is given to us from above: it is a replacement for happiness" (5: 50). In the epilogue of Goncharov's novel, Petr Aduiev's wife is wasting away precisely because her ultra-rational husband has substituted habit for love in their marriage. Notably, to Petr Aduiev's hesitant assertion, "But you ... love me, don't you?" his wife replies, "I very much ... have grown accustomed to you (привыкла к тебе)" (1: 311-12).

11. Andrew Drozd has argued that the use of abstract formulation in this scene in *Family Happiness* is echoed in Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*, specifically in the "theoretical conversation" between Lopukhov and Kirsanov where the two scientists friends resort to the similar terminology of A and B to discuss their romantic situation (61).

12. Tolstoy's tendency to explore the double meaning of the term "roman" will continue in his later works. Donna Orwin notes Tolstoy's explicit choice of this term for the title of *Anna Karenina: A Novel* and argues that this choice is inextricably linked to the love affair (roman) central to the work's problematics: "Like history, novels occur when people do not moderate their passions. For this reason, Levin's successful marriage, and even Dolly's unsuccessful one, [...] cannot be the subject of a novel" (179).

Gary Saul Morson's discussion of Anna Karenina as a plotmaker, or an "author" of her tragic *romance/novel* also implies the interplay between the Russian term's two meanings (*Narrative and Freedom*, 71-81).

13. "Blessed is he who left the feast of life early, not having finished the glass of wine, who did not finish reading its novel (роман)" (Pushkin 5: 191).

14. Cited in Mandelker 32.

15. As a student of Sechenov, the physiologist N. E. Vvedensky reminisced later on, "perhaps there was not a single educated reader in the sixties and seventies of the last century who hadn't read this book. Its popularity with university youth was so great that it was considered indispensable to be familiar with this work. Naturally it made a profound impression upon readers. It attracted and charmed some as much as it frightened the other part of readership, more conservative and timid vis-à-vis a new and original thought. These readers looked at this work in the same way as the authorities" (cited in Kaganov 17-18). When an expanded version of Sechenov's study came out as a separate book in 1866, it was banned and some officials called for court action against the scientist. For the original materials documenting the Russian censorship's dealing with the work, see *Nauchnoe nasledstvo* 56-77. In English, a useful and succinct summary of Sechenov's life and work, including the censorship problems, can be found in Vucinich 2: 119-29. Similarly, the readership of *What Is to Be Done?* was divided between those who worshipped the novel as a "revelation," a "Koran," and "manna from heaven," and those who condemned it as a dangerous and immoral work that challenged the very foundations of morality, religion, and social order. See Paperno for a detailed overview of contemporaries' responses to *What Is to Be Done?* (26-29). As is well known, Chernyshevsky's novel was quickly banned and the author, already imprisoned at the time, was exiled to Siberia.

16. Here and elsewhere in this article, quotations from *Reflexes of the Brain* are cited from Seche-

nov, *Избранные произведения*, with the page number in parentheses.

17. In his memoirs Sechenov confesses that, as a child, he was fascinated by Romantic literature (particularly by Marlinsky's works) and admits to having preserved the passion for adventurous Romantic heroes in the style of Walter Scott and Fennimore Cooper throughout his adult life (*Автобиографические записки* 11). His extensive exposure to Romantic literature can explain the romanticizing tendency of his scientific theory of love, as well as the poetic style of this part of his scientific tract—a feature, which is, incidentally, not preserved in the English translation of *Reflexes of the Brain*.

18. In his book on *What Is to Be Done?*, Drozd has suggested that in this novel Chernyshevsky engages in polemics with Tolstoy's largely patriarchal ideal as expressed in *Family Happiness* (60-62). I would add that Chernyshevsky also offers an alternative model of spousal love that guarantees the marital union's stability on grounds different from Tolstoy's solution.

19. According to memoirists, "Everyone referred to the novels' heroes, Lopukhov and Kirsanov, by their real names: under the pseudonym of Lopukhov, doctor Bokov, who had recently quietly passed away, was portrayed; and as Kirsanov—the famous physiologist, the talented scientist Sechenov" (Bogdanovich 436). Sechenov's own love story indeed closely resembled the romantic triangle in Chernyshevsky's novel. Sechenov's friend, Doctor Petr Bokov, married Maria Obrucheva in order to liberate her from her parents' control and to enable her to pursue the study of medicine. This marriage, initially fictitious, eventually became consummated. Later Maria fell in love with her professor Sechenov, and Bokov did not object to the union of his friend and his wife. However, the Soviet scholar S. A. Reiser made a convincing case against the traditional biographical reading of Chernyshevsky's novel, arguing that it was chronologically impossible for Chernyshevsky to model his novel on the Obrucheva-Bokov-Sechenov affair. Irina Paperno justly sees in the parallels between the novel's plot and the Bo-

kov–Obrucheva–Sechenov relationship “a remarkable case of the mutual influence between life and literature” (135).

20. Chernyshevsky was already imprisoned when Sechenov’s tract came out. Yet given the fact that Sechenov had been close to the circle of the *Contemporary*, where Chernyshevsky was a member of the staff, since the early 1860s and started developing his ideas on the reflex already in 1860, it is very likely that the two were aware of each other’s ideas.

21. The line probably belongs to the physiologist Kirsanov, although the speaker is unidentified.

22. “A further condition for the development of passion, available in the organizations of the nervous mechanisms, is as follows: the more frequently...these mechanisms function, the more urgent and intense becomes the necessity for them to act. Three-quarters of the inhabitants of Europe, due to their lack of moderation in food and drink, make their feeling of hunger and thirst more intense and its emergence more frequent; the same is true of people who are immoderate in sexual pleasures” (123).

23. Due to the limited scope of this article, I focus primarily, in this section, on Tolstoy’s epilogue to *War and Peace*, which contains a compressed picture of the protagonists’ marital lives; I and only briefly deal with *Anna Karenina*, mainly to outline the differences from Tolstoy’s previous treatment of this theme.

24. See Morson (*Hidden in Plain View*, 62-65) for a succinct overview of critics’ responses to the ending (or rather lack thereof) of *War and Peace*.

25. As Orwin has observed, body served for Tolstoy as a basic physical proof of human individuality and separateness and held therefore important epistemological significance in Tolstoy’s thought (191).

26. Tolstoy’s vision of the ideal conjugal relationship as a merging of two beings into one is consistent with his philosophical and artistic quest for synthesis that Orwin traces throughout most of his life and works.

27. As the radical critic Leonid Pantileev recorded in his memoirs, “In Eniseisk a merchant’s wife loved to repeat: ‘Our learned professor Sechenov says that there is no soul but there are reflexes’” (cited in Paperno 66).

28. Sechenov’s reputation as a materialist is not entirely justified. In his study of the history of Russian psychology David Joravsky convincingly argues against the (largely Soviet) myth of Sechenov the materialist and radical. He also comments in passing, when referring to Chernyshevsky’s novel and Sechenov’s own love story, that “nineteenth-century romanticism was constantly mixed with scienticism—or positivism” (62)—the blend we have observed even in Sechenov’s scientific theory.

29. “History examines the human being in time, and what is an impossibility for physiolog[y] (Sech[enov], Vogt) and for zoolog[y] (Darwin) is resolved by history unquestionably and inevitably” (Tolstoy 15: 232). And later: “From various sides, difficult and persistent work is being done for the benefit of the new truth. *All* the sciences are working for its benefit. Zoology (Darwin), physiology (Sechenov), psychology (Wundt), philosophy [1 *unclear*], history (Buckle)” (15: 233).

30. See, for example, the following passage: “In our time the majority of so-called progressive people, i.e., the crowd of ignoramuses, have taken the work of the naturalists who deal with one side of the problem for a solution to the whole problem. There is no soul or freedom because the life of man is expressed by muscular movements and muscular movements are conditioned by nervous activity...they say and write in print...They do not see that the role of the natural sciences in this problem is merely to serve as an instrument for the illumination of one side of it” (12: 326).

31. The idea was that the stimulation of the sensory nerves is “reflected” in special nervous centers and projected to motor nerves that then cause a muscular reaction. Astruc of Montpellier (1684-1766) is believed to have been the first to use the term “reflection” in this sense, even

though the idea of involuntary motions had been introduced before him, most famously by Descartes. See Fearing 69-70.

32. Eikhensbaum cites Sofiia Tolstaia's diary entry from that date, which documents the writer's mention of the plan of the future novel and its principal character. It would not be until three years later, however, that Tolstoy actually set about writing *Anna Karenina* (*Семидесятые годы* 128).

33. Compare Stiva Oblonsky's mention of "reflexes of the brain," in the opening scene of the novel, as an excuse for his "involuntary" stupid and misplaced smile in response to his wife's accusations of infidelity. For an illuminating analysis of the repercussions of contemporary scientific discussions, and specifically the Sechenov-Kavelin debate, in *Anna Karenina*, see Usmanov.

34. The legal code of the time also described the spouses' relationships through the simile of physical unity. The husband was supposed to "love his wife like his own body" (cited in Murav 74). See Murav for an illuminating analysis of the legal concept of marriage at the time and its reflection in *Anna Karenina*.

35. Some critics even questioned whether Levin ever achieves the perfect union with his wife. As Mandelker observes, "Lyovin's conversion does not bring him into closer harmony with his family. [...] In the final scene with Kitty, an unbreachable distance gapes suddenly between the thoughts of husband and wife, as Lyovin contemplates the starry night, filled with ecstasy at his newfound faith but fearing to tell his thoughts to Kitty, who is preoccupied with worries about bed sheets and dirty laundry" (32).

36. Olga Matich, in her recent study of Russian decadence, points to another important scientific context for Tolstoy's novella—contemporary psychopathological literature (*Erotic Utopia* 51-54).

37. While Pozdnyshev is by no means a simple mouthpiece for Tolstoy's own views (after all, even at a formal level, Tolstoy carefully separates the narrative "I" from Pozdnyshev's narra-

tive perspective), his rejection of romantic and carnal love and preaching of celibacy is clearly congenial to Tolstoy's own ideas at the time. In any case, this article is more concerned with Tolstoy's *artistic* exploration of this subject than with reconstruction of his actual views.

38. Pozdnyshev continues to lavishly use pseudo-statistical arguments throughout his presentation of his theory. The numbers are predictably general: 0.01, 0.9, 0.99, and 0.01.

39. The work, in fact, has a double closure: In the frame narrative, the protagonist repeats the word "Forgive me" (or "Farewell"), "with which," as the narrator observes in the work's final line, "he had also *concluded* the story itself" (27: 78, emphasis mine).

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