

Whose Fault?: The Marriage and Partnership of Leo and Sofia Tolstoy

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Chapter 1

It occurred to me this evening, as I was correcting proofs for *The Kreutzer Sonata*, that **when a woman is young she loves with her whole heart, and gladly gives herself to the man she loves because she sees what pleasure it gives him. Later in her life, she looks back, and suddenly realizes that this man loved her only when he needed her.** And she remembers all the times his affection turned to harshness or disgust the moment he was satisfied. (Tolstaya, Diary Entry January 25th, 1891)

I do not know how or why everyone connected *The Kreutzer Sonata* with our own married life, but this is what has happened, and now everyone, from the Tsar himself down to Lev Nikolaevich's brother and his best friend Dyakov, feels sorry for me. And it isn't just other people- **I too know in my heart that this story is directed against me, and that it has done me a great wrong, humiliated me in the eyes of the world and destroyed the last vestiges of love between us.** (Tolstaya, Diary Entry February 12th, 1891)

Leo Tolstoy is often named as the most well known and influential Russian author, and as such, there has been an abundance of research on not only his body of work, but on his own life and philosophies as well. An area of Tolstoyan scholarship which has only recently become fully accessible is his relationship with his wife, Sofia Tolstaya. Despite the overabundance of scholarship addressing Tolstoy's work and life, up until the late 20th century, very little was written regarding Sofia's role outside of Tolstoy's personal life, work, and management of his estate. Prior to their English translation, the earliest publication of Tolstaya's diaries in Russian was released in 1928 by the Sabashnikov Publishing House, shortly followed by another edition in 1932 after the publishing house underwent collectivization and became known as North Cooperative Publishing House (Кооперативное издательство «Север»)(Prokhorov, 1973). Both

of these editions went almost unnoticed by Soviet scholars, until 1978, when a “definitive Russian edition” was published to much more acclaim in the Soviet sphere. Shirer identifies this edition of Tolstaya’s diaries as the catalyst which “forc[ed] all who write of Tolstoy to drastically alter their view of his wife, who had been depicted as a Xanthippe, the shrewish wife of Socrates, and source of all Tolstoy’s torments” (12). Why this edition made more shockwaves in the scholarly community is up for discussion, however détente and a worsening economy may have made Soviet scholars more receptive to non-prescribed narratives: i.e. a positive or sympathetic view of Tolstaya.

After their publication in the original Russian, English translations of Sofia’s diaries by Cathy Porter did not appear until 1985, the reception of which was positive but limited in scope. Despite their lack of public acclaim at the time, many more English-language scholars were able to interact with them, leading to a growth of interest in Tolstaya’s life and her role in Tolstoy’s legacy. Scholarship focusing on the couple’s marriage and partnership has been exponentially growing since Porter’s translation of Tolstaya’s diaries and other writings, but it wasn’t until the Russian and French (translated by Michel Aucouturier and Evaline Amoursky) publications of Tolstaya’s previously concealed manuscript of “Whose Fault?” in 2010, that momentum began to accelerate (Katz, 2014). Interestingly, prior to the 2010 Russian and French publications, “Whose Fault?” had been published in the Russian literary magazine *Oktyabr* in 1994, for which the reception was almost non-existent as a result of the oversaturation in published materials following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Katz, 2014). The period immediately following the collapse was characterized by the dramatic increase in publications of books, articles, essays, and art, all of which were formerly censored under the Soviet regime. In the late 1980s and 90s however, a plan was made for the release of Sofia Tolstaya’s complete works, the introduction to

which was written by Vladimir Porudominskij, a well known biographer and literary critic (Porudominskij, 2005). This collection was intended to include segments of *My Life*, her autobiography, additions to Tolstoy's biography by Sofia, and "Whose Fault?", but was never finalized and published due to the "economic problems of that transitional time" period (Porudominskij, 160). Baikova's significant dissertation entitled *S.A. Tolstaya as a Writer* in 2007, is another pre-2010 publication which contributed to the scholarly understanding of Sofia's personal literary achievements. It was only with the 2010 edition edited by V. B. Remizov, the former director of the State Tolstoy Museum, that anyone outside of the scholarly world began to take any significant notice of Sofia Tolstaya or her literary accomplishments [*Oktyabr' 10* (1994), 6-59; *Kreitzerova sonata, Ch'ya vina?, Pesnya bez slov, Prelyudiya Shopena*, ed. V.B. Remizov (Moscow: State Tolstoy Museum, 2010)].

That same year, the first English translation of Tolstaya's autobiographical *My Life* (1904-16), edited by Andrew Donskov, alongside the original Russian text by the State Tolstoy Museum were published (2010). In addition to these publications, that same year Alexandra Popoff published the first comprehensive biography of Sofia. Only four years later in 2014, did Michael R. Katz publish the first English translation of "Whose Fault?" (1891-94), alongside another Tolstaya counterstory "Song Without Words" (1898), and her son's (Lev Lvovich Tolstoy) counterstory "Chopin's Prelude" (1898) in *The Kreutzer Sonata Variations*. Katz's *The Kreutzer Sonata Variations* is the first (and only to date) English translation of these counterstories, which also includes selected correspondence and diary entries of both Tolstoy and Tolstaya. The notoriety of this publication extended not only into the academic community, but to the larger public sphere of interest. In one article included in the New York Times International Edition entitled "More than a century later, Sophia Tolstoy has her say: A scorned

wife's stories in rebuttal of 'Kreutzer Sonata' are published", the importance of the book and the counterstories are discussed. The author says the Katz volume "adds momentum to a revisionist view of Sophia that has gathered speed recently": a view in which a "caricature has gradually evolved into a portrait of a highly cultured woman with a valid claim to stake as a fiction writer and memoirist" (Grimes, 2014). This "revisionist view" has led to a growing amount of scholarship on Sofia Tolstaya not just as relevant to Tolstoy's legacy, but as a notable figure in her own right.

It is extremely important, however, to note why this more modern view of Tolstaya is considered "revisionist". Even prior to Tolstoy's death, his disciples, fellow authors, and the court of public opinion had in many ways cast Sofia as a "shrew who did her best to keep Tolstoy away from his important work as a social prophet and to gain control over his literary estate" (Grimes, 2014). This general hostility towards Sofia was first spearheaded by Vladimir Chertkov: "the devious, scheming close friend and disciple of Tolstoy in the last third of the writer's life and an implacable enemy of Countess Tolstoy" (Shirer, 11). In his later years, Tolstoy had quickly transcended the label of writer and became a philosopher; a leader of a movement and a veritable cult leader. For the Tolstoyans, as the disciples of Tolstoy became known, the great Russian author became the face of a new philosophy, spirituality, and way of life based on the teachings of Christ. The "Cult of Tolstoy", in which Chertkov took a leading role, started to emerge as a product of Tolstoy's shifting philosophies later in life. Tolstoy's transition in lifestyle and thought has been discussed in a large amount of scholarship, with many scholars focusing on the inspirations Tolstoy drew from in the construction of his own personalized philosophy, and how it functioned within Tolstoy's life and the environment of his estate, Yasnaya Polyana.

The beginning of this dramatic transition in Tolstoy's life can be pinpointed to the mid to late 1870s, in which a spiritual crisis motivated him to reflect back on his life and accomplishments. By this time, Tolstoy "was as wealthy and influential and beloved as any man could hope to be, and had already reached the pinnacle of his craft with the great novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*- but once you have reached the pinnacle, where do you go from there?" (Garnett, V). These prior successes seemed distant to the older Tolstoy, and he began to question their value. Tolstoy now "repudiated the vanities of literary success, referring to *Anna Karenina* as 'an abomination that no longer exists for me'... [and] only regretted that there remained people for whom such works were necessary" (Kentish, 1). While Tolstoy had created an image for himself as a great writer of fiction, he found that this alone was not personally fulfilling. Instead, he wanted to distance himself from this former role and associate himself more closely with complex spiritual analysis, which he desired to share with others. This would have to incorporate not only spiritual changes, but also changes in lifestyle and values. It is considered by many scholars that Tolstoy began to examine this need for change in *Anna Karenina*, especially through the character of Levin, who works in the fields amongst the peasants and struggles to discover his own spirituality. Even though he later rejected many of his earlier works, Tolstoy shared some of these spiritual questions and conflicts highlighted in the novel. Through his authentic work in the fields among nature, Levin discovers his faith, and moves forward into life with new meaning. In this sense, Tolstoy went through a somewhat similar religious conversion after years of spiritual confusion.

Tolstoy was born into the Russian Orthodox Church; however, he always had his doubts. In Tolstoy's most significant work describing his spiritual crisis, *A Confession* (written from 1879-1880 and published in 1882), Tolstoy states "I never seriously believed, but had merely

relied on what I was taught and on what was professed by the grown-up people around me; and that reliance was very unstable” (Tolstoy, 15). Further in *A Confession*, Tolstoy examines his own religious journey and criticizes the very concept of modern and organized religion. While Tolstoy was never very religious and did not adhere to doctrine for the majority of his life, he also found the application of Christianity in one’s life to be flawed, which he discusses in detail:

My lapse from faith occurred as is usual among people of our level of education. In most cases, I think, it happens thus: a man lives like everybody else, on the basis of principles not merely having nothing in common with religious doctrine, but generally opposed to it; **religious doctrine does not play a part in life, in intercourse with others it is never encountered**, and in a man’s own life he never has to reckon with it. **Religious doctrine is professed far away from life and independently of it.** If it is encountered, it is only as an external phenomenon disconnected from life. (Tolstoy, 15)

In this above statement and others, Tolstoy makes clear the need for a spirituality that applies to everyday life, not just a life spent inside the church. To Tolstoy, religion was meant to be lived every minute of every day, and this is why so many lose their faith. Without a constant presence of faith, or applicability of religious doctrine, spirituality effectively means nothing. As a result of this disillusionment, Tolstoy began to explore other religious movements that could fill the empty space in his life. Tolstoy intended to go back to the very words of Christ himself, rather than experiencing them through a corrupt medium. An early Thomas Crowell & Co. English translation of *A Confession* in 1899, alongside other religious musings by Tolstoy (*My Religion* 1884), introduces the seminal work as a journey through which Tolstoy “was led from nihilism in the real sense of the word to faith in the literal interpretation of Christ’s words...and was saved from despair and brought to a joyful knowledge of the meaning of life” (vi). It is easy to see the relationship of Tolstoy’s dedication to Jesus’ persona and specific words with the way

in which Tolstoy carried himself and discussed his ideas with others. In many ways, Tolstoy attempted to emulate a Russian-style Jesus after this spiritual crisis by adopting a peasant lifestyle and the way of the people, but using his platform to preach about religious truths. While he began to speak with a growing number of disciples about his religious and lifestyle philosophy, Tolstoy also attempted to educate the peasants working on his estate, and engaged in a variety of agricultural projects.

Tolstoy's professed philosophy, which he claimed to derive entirely from religious texts, included a rejection of any excesses, which he believed to be morally corruptive. This included a rejection of meats with a replacement of more traditional peasant-like vegetarianism, an avoidance of smoking and alcohol, and a life of chastity. He also transformed much of his life to represent that of a peasant through food, clothing, and labor. By this point, Tolstoy "had come to believe in a form of primitive Christianity, based on the principles of brotherhood, nonviolence and nonresistance to evil by violence. He rejected the state...and all institutions that derived from it- the police, law courts, the army and the Russian Orthodox Church. He condemned private property and money, and advocated living by one's own physical labor" (Alston, 1). Of course Tolstoy could never fully or truly reject his identity and privilege as an aristocrat. He remained living at his substantial estate with all the comforts it entailed, and continued to entertain disciples and visiting foreign scholars regularly.

The "Tolstoyan Movement", as it is officially called today, developed out of Tolstoy's own personal reflection, fanaticism, and the disciples that surrounded him: a consistent pool of admirers who were a readily available and eager audience.

A number of things united these [Tolstoyans] into something that can be regarded as a movement. One was the **profound impact of their first reading of Tolstoy's works, which in many cases completely changed the course of their lives.** A

second was their **dedication to promoting Tolstoy's thought**, and a third was their sense that they were **part of the growing international movement for which Tolstoy was a figurehead**. Finally, they all accepted a number of Tolstoy's key tenets, particularly the doctrine of nonresistance. (Alston, 3)

Strangely, despite the fact that Tolstoy was the inspiration and designated figurehead behind this movement, he was never 'officially' involved or a vocal proponent of it, although he continued to entertain the visits of 'disciples', which alone can be seen as a gesture of support. As Nickell discusses: "[The Tolstoyan Movement] promoted Tolstoy's ideas and/or attempted to put them into practice, becoming vegetarians, pacifists, celibates, or spiritual seekers...[but] Tolstoy himself did not champion the movement, and distanced himself from his followers when identified by his name...[yet] at the same time, he often acknowledged that he felt ashamed that others followed his ideas more closely than he himself" (14). What has become a well-known and understandable criticism of Tolstoy is his inability to follow the professed philosophies in his own life. While he professed many times that being celibate was more moral and contributed to a more spiritual life, he continued to have children (five were born during Tolstoy's religious period: Varvara, Mikhail, Aleksei, Alexandra, and Ivan) with Sofia. Nonetheless, most of his disciples remained loyal, visiting his estate regularly to hear his wisdom on a variety of topics.

But while many of these disciples considered him to be an original genius, Tolstoy's ideas were not a product of his mind alone. Tolstoy took inspiration from many great minds of the past, and the minds of his contemporaries, including Alice B. Stockham, an influential American Quaker, who was also a gynecologist, obstetrician, and social purity reformer. Stockham shared many of Tolstoy's ideas on marriage and love in her book, *Karezza: Ethics of Marriage* (1896). Much like Tolstoy, Stockham expressed criticism for the common view of sexual relationships for the purpose of gratification alone, however she did not advocate for

chastity as Tolstoy did. The relationship was so influential between Tolstoy and Stockham, that she wrote a book about his philosophies entitled *Tolstoi: A Man of Peace* (1900). In this piece, Stockham describes her relationship with Tolstoy from the first letters they exchanged to her eventual visit to Yasnaya Polyana: “Between the pillars, down the avenue, shaded by grand old trees, across a stream, then up a slight ascent, stands the white country house, the home and workshop of the most remarkable man of his times, Count Lyeff Nicolaevich Tolstoi!” (Stockham, 18). Many of the ideas Tolstoy presents on the roles of women, love, and marriage in *The Kreutzer Sonata* can be traced to this monumental meeting and the pair’s correspondence. Stockham, along with his disciples, put forward a larger-than-life-image, which not only highlights Tolstoy’s philosophy and religion, but attempts to establish him as a titan of both literary and abstract thought. Through the combination of his own creative intellect and the influence of others, Tolstoy (perhaps unwittingly) had created a distinctly Tolstoyan philosophy; a movement which had the ability to intrigue, anger, and mobilize.

None were more angry about Tolstoy’s new identity and resulting “Tolstoyan Movement” than Sofia Tolstaya herself. Even as a young 18 year old bride, Sofia had been overwhelmed by the demands of managing the Tolstoy estate at Yasnaya Polyana while her husband spent most of his time on hunting trips or isolated in his study. In one diary entry recorded just about two months after their marriage, Sofia describes her misery: “There is never a happy voice to be heard, as if everyone had died... There is nothing here but deathly silence” (November 13th, 1862). In addition to her isolation and the difficult management of the vast estate, Sofia gave birth to their first child, Sergei, in 1863, further complicating her role. While she wanted to dedicate herself to her children, Sofia was also expected to be nearly one hundred percent responsible for the day to day management of the estate. Tolstoy was also very outspoken when

it came to the methods of raising his children (i.e. wet nurses vs. breastfeeding), but yet did not play a major enough role in their rearing according to Sofia (Shirer, 30). In one striking diary entry from November 13th, 1863, Sofia writes “I am left alone morning, afternoon and night. I am to satisfy his pleasure and nurse his child. I am a piece of household furniture. I am a *woman*”.

As can be seen from her diary entries, Sofia began experiencing the tremendous pressure of being both Tolstoy’s wife and estate manager almost immediately after her marriage. The new emergence of the “Tolstoyan Movement” and the consistent barrage of visits by disciples and other authors, seemed to Sofia to be yet another example of Tolstoy neglecting his commitments to their family and estate. Tolstoy began to take less and less interest in the practical, and instead devoted his time to theorizing, discussions with his disciples, and projects around his estate meant to connect him more closely with peasant life. The existing personal rift between the couple was only exacerbated by the rise of “Tolstoyan Philosophy”, as Sofia became more and more isolated among the large numbers of disciples completely dedicated to her husband. Unlike Sofia, they had an exclusively positive and reverent view of her husband, and believed everything Tolstoy said as Gospel.

Vladimir Chertkov, who began reading Tolstoy in 1880 on his return to Russia after a spiritual evangelical journey to England, was so moved by his initial reading of *My Confession*, that he arranged a meeting with Tolstoy himself (Shirer, 116). Their initial meeting took place in the fall of 1883, and from nearly that moment on, the pair of spiritualists became the best of friends (Shirer, 117). Chertkov transcended the label of friend in many ways, as he became a constant presence at Yasnaya Polyana and was privy to the private details of Tolstoy’s family life

through his correspondence with Tolstoy. In one letter to Chertkov, Tolstoy discusses his anxieties about his marriage with Sofia:

She wasn't asleep, nor was I, and I suffered painfully from the awareness of my own loneliness in the family because of my beliefs, and the fact that they all in my eyes seek the truth but turn away from it. I suffered both for them and for myself... **Being sad and miserable, I began to pray to God to touch my wife's heart...She fell asleep...and suddenly it occurred to me that I suffer because my wife doesn't share my convictions.** (July 24th, 1884, quoted in Shirer, 117)

As this passage highlights, Tolstoy's spiritual conversion and shifting attitudes towards state establishments was impacting his family life and his relationship with Sofia. At this point, the marriage had already been deteriorating for some time as a result of Tolstoy's overbearing nature and constant arguments between the couple, but the growing presence of Tolstoyans and Chertkov had been even more vexing to the situation. Because Chertkov was privy to Tolstoy's inner musings on his marriage, he himself began to wonder "whether [Sofia] was fit to be married to the great man he worshiped", and began to postulate himself as "the high priest of the Tolstoyan movement" (Shirer, 118). Their increasing closeness was frustrating to Sofia, who had initially been impressed with the young Chertkov as a relatively wealthy, clean cut, and mannered aristocrat. This initial impression soon faded as she began to realize the real threat he posed to her authority in Tolstoy's family and estate (Shirer, 119). Not only was Chertkov aiming to be Tolstoy's right-hand man, but he was also aiming for a greater power over Tolstoy's estate, family, and legacy.

The conflict between the married couple reached a flashpoint, when in 1891, after Chertkov had taken over nearly all responsibility in the printing and publishing of Tolstoy's work, Tolstoy told Sofia he would soon be writing a letter to the press that renounced all

copyrights of his recent works (Simmons, *Volume II*, 154). Prior to this decision, Sofia had already become frustrated by Tolstoy's lack of fictional output, as these works were the main income of the family. Without new fiction that would appeal to the masses, and with Tolstoy only focusing on (in some cases unpublishable) religiously instructive essays, Sofia became increasingly concerned about the welfare of the estate and her children. As has been established, Sofia was nearly one hundred percent responsible for the daily functioning of the estate and the management of family finances. Tolstoy's commitment to primitive Christianity and asceticism, and his decision to prioritize them over the welfare of the family was enraging to Sofia, who saw this shift as being highly influenced by Chertkov. Chertkov had already taken control over the publication of Tolstoy's current work through a publishing house called "The Intermediary", and was selling them inexpensively to "uplift the masses" (Shirer, 119). This mode of publication brought in a negligible amount of money, and Tolstoy's latest decision would threaten Sofia's ability to maintain the home and family.

Tolstoy eventually settled on allowing Sofia to keep the copyright for *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886), but went ahead in renouncing copyrights for all other works. Despite this minor compromise, the fallout from this argument had highly influenced Tolstoy. The contrast between his perspective of Chertkov as the "dutiful disciple" and Sofia as the "materialistic shrew", only widened the divide between the married couple and increased hostilities between Sofia and Chertkov. To Sofia, Chertkov's desire to be a devoted disciple had transcended into a desire to take his place entirely (Shirer, 120). By 1908, after a ten year period of exile in England, Chertkov had moved to be closer to Yasnaya Polyana and began to visit the estate even more regularly. At this time, Tolstoy's health was declining rapidly, and he began to rely on Chertkov even more than before.

While Sofia was “the chief obstacle to his taking over the Master and all his works”, Chertkov used his influence over Tolstoy to convince him to ask his children, whom he had given the publishing rights for his pre-1881 work, to renounce them (Shirer, 235). This alone wasn’t enough for Chertkov, and he soon convinced Tolstoy to sign a secret will in September of 1909 in which Tolstoy instructed all of his post-1881 works to be left to the public (Shirer, 250). In addition to this change, a paragraph was added naming Chertkov as Tolstoy’s literary executor, therefore cutting Sofia out of all future decisions regarding the publication or use of his work. After consulting with a lawyer about the legality of this will (the bequeathing of rights “to the public” was not possible), Tolstoy decided to bequeath all rights to his work, pre and post 1881, to his daughter Sasha, who was highly sympathetic of and loyal to Chertkov (Shirer, 253). This deliberately went against a promise Tolstoy had made to Sofia, ensuring her that his pre-1881 copyrights would remain in her name, effectively cutting her out of his literary estate.

After Tolstoy’s death in 1910, Chertkov took on the role of literary executor with zeal, and spent much of his time in court battles with Sofia over the use of papers previously deposited in the Moscow Museum of History (Shirer, 370). Sofia would go on to win the court case in 1914, but would later be denied her final wish of being buried alongside her husband in 1919, as her children “doubted whether that would be the right thing” as there may have been “awkward, insulting questions” (Shirer 371). Chertkov’s influence over this particular decision has been debated, but many believe he intentionally didn’t support her dying wish. With Sofia now gone, Chertkov had exclusive control over Tolstoy’s literary estate, and used his position to disseminate a false narrative of Sofia as a conniving shrew determined on destroying Tolstoy’s true legacy while siphoning his estate for material gain.

In the introduction to the 1922 edition of Chertkov's book *The Last Days of Tolstoy* (first published in 1910), he states: "Now that Tolstoy's wife is dead, the chief obstacle to revealing the true causes of his going away at Yasnaya Polyana is removed" (1). This of course refers to Tolstoy's famous final flight from the estate and his eventual death at Astapovo train station. In the same introduction, Chertkov goes on to describe his commitment to providing a full and comprehensive account of Tolstoy's last days and death from the perspective of a "contemporary of Tolstoy who was particularly intimate with him" and "enjoyed his full confidence" (Chertkov, 4). As can be seen, after Sofia's death, Chertkov continued to campaign against her. He was not satisfied with her death alone, but spent much of his time as Tolstoy's literary executor publicly renouncing and condemning the late Sofia. Unfortunately, these efforts proved to be somewhat successful, and throughout the Soviet years, many Tolstoy biographers only focused on Sofia as Tolstoy's wife, not as an individual with literary achievements of her own. While some earlier biographies assumed Chertkov's hostile attitude towards Sofia, most detailed her role as Tolstoy's editor, publisher, and manager of the estate. Although Sofia's role in editing and publication was highly important, the neglect of her personal literary works diminished her importance as a writer independent of Tolstoy. Not until the uncovering and publication of Sofia's works in the 1980s and 90s, would she be given any wide scale recognition.

Literature Review

In this integrative literature review, established and emerging scholarly works on the topics of Sofia Tolstaya, Tolstoy's novella *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Tolstaya's work "Whose Fault?", and the couple's tumultuous yet fruitful relationship, will be synthesized. Through this synthesis, the need for greater recognition of Tolstaya's contributions will be revealed, as well as

the increasing importance of viewing her as an accomplished author in her own right. Despite Tolstaya's tremendous influence on Tolstoy's canon, her contemporaries and even scholars often vilified her. This vilification is not a true reflection of her, but rather is part of a larger issue surrounding women's contributions to Russian literature as a whole. Much like in the Western canon, Russian women writers, especially those married to prominent authors, have been underrepresented in study and scholarship. Although there is a history of appreciation for women writers such as Charlotte Bronte and Jane Austen, the list of women included in the Anglophone (and Russophone canon) are few and far between. The recently emerging field of Tolstaya studies subverts arcane beliefs by bringing the contribution of women to the center. Using a thematic organization, this review will be divided into three sections: scholarship on the historic context upon which the couple's relationship and conflicting works lie, scholarship analyzing primary source material which describes the couple's relationship, and scholarship which aims to textually analyze both Tolstoy and Tolstaya's respective works.

Historical Commentary

Providing context for the work of Sofia Tolstaya requires some examination of Russia in the late 1800s. The increased pace of industrialism and a rise of exchange with Western ideals contributed to the emergence of "The Woman Question" in 1852 and its eventual rise to prominence in circles of intelligentsia in the 1860s (Gabor, 2013). This question addressed the shifting role of women in the traditionally patriarchal Russian society: what is a woman's place in society, culture, and marriage? Male Russian authors had already engaged with this debate in relation to Western conceptions, but had yet to address the distinct place of Russian women in this larger context. M.L. Mikhailov is often credited for the initial emergence of "The Woman Question" in 1852, yet Stites asserts that instead of being the creator of the distinctly Russian

debate, he simply fused all of the existing discourse into a concise description, providing a foundational work through which scholars could see varying views on the topic (1969). Gabor also asserts that the emancipation of serfs throughout the Russian Empire in 1861 further fueled the development and relevance of “The Woman Question”, as it ushered in a period of great social change and a reassessment of individuals’ rights post-serfdom.

Before the emergence of this debate, women’s place in Russian society was much like their place in the West. Gabor describes the general rejection and/or manipulation of female voices during this time, emphasizing that despite class differences (aristocratic, intelligentsia, peasant, or serf), women’s authorship was generally looked down upon (2013). Despite some aristocratic women being able to publish pre-”Woman Question”, their work was not taken seriously. Wood describes how other societal and economic changes influenced the emergence of the debate, noting the emancipation of serfs (1861) and the defeat in the Crimean War (1856) as catalysts to larger discussions over Russia’s identity in a changing world (2009). Although this debate came to prominence among other pressing questions, Wood described the endemic “contradictions and ambivalence” found within responses (p.1). Not all authors and thinkers engaging in the topic were truly dedicated to the emancipation of women in Russian society, but rather used it as a vehicle to express more general revolutionary and radical ideas.

Women writers were also few and far between in their contributions to the debate, as a result of limited educational opportunities (Stites, 1969). Gabor (2013) also notes this disparity, placing emphasis on the complete exclusion of non-noble women. The limited number of women writers who were able to contribute to this discourse were either ignored or critiqued by their male counterparts. In this sense, “The Woman Question” did not accurately or successfully support the rights of women, but was used as a forum through which Russian men engaged with

European and Western philosophies, like Quakerism for example. A weakness identified in the Stites (1969) piece is that although he acknowledges the limited amount of female responses to the women question, he does not include or analyze any of the available female responses. The inclusion of such works would have created a more well-rounded examination of this debate. Although the exclusion of Tolstaya's own response ("Whose Fault?") is understandable, as it was not published until 1994 (and again in 2010 to much wider acclaim), the lack of other female voices reinforces the dismissive attitude of many scholars towards Russian women writers.

This is the historical background upon which both *The Kreutzer Sonata* and "Whose Fault?" are placed. Each novella addresses "The Woman Question" differently; one from the male perspective and another from the female perspective. An engagement with this debate is common, as seen from the existing literature, but the couple's discussion of this topic is also shaped by their own marriage and relationship. In this regard, we can view each work as a response to "The Woman Question" as well as a reflection upon their own personal experiences.

Relationship Contextualized

Another area of scholarship critical to the support and synthesis of this research topic is the discussion and interpretation of personal correspondence between the couple and both Tolstoy and Tolstaya's diaries. This area of scholarship examines in detail the couple's relationship, both as partners in marriage and in publication. Donskov (2017), McLean (2011), and Shirer (1994) each provide a detailed account of the couple's relationship over time, chronicling their marriage from 1862 until Tolstoy's death in 1910, using a rich array of primary sources. As Tolstoy was expected to marry Sofia's older sister Liza, the match between Tolstoy and the young Sofia Behrs was unexpected. Sofia was only 18 at the time, whereas Tolstoy was 34. Having grown up around him as a family friend, Sofia idealized him as a romantic and

intelligent match, one whom she hoped would share her affections. Tolstoy did share her affections, however he turned out to be a much different man from what she expected. After the engagement was finalized and shortly before their wedding day, Tolstoy gave Sofia his diaries detailing past sexual escapades, which also revealed that he had an illegitimate son by a peasant woman. This shattered the young Sofia's view of him, but the marriage went forward and they departed for the Tolstoy estate, Yasnaya Polyana. Unfortunately, this shattered dream would foreshadow the challenges to come, despite the couple's relatively positive early relationship (and literary collaborations) in the 1860s and 70s.

Each of the pieces listed above (Donskov, McLean, Shirer) corroborates the tumultuous nature of their relationship from the beginning in 1862 until the end in 1910, but each author brings a new perspective to the primary sources they draw from. Donskov (2017) focuses on the large amount of correspondence exchanged by the couple over their 48 years of marriage, shedding light on Tolstaya as an exceptional person who both contributed to her husband's success as a writer and was talented and important in her own right. Her experiences with editing his manuscripts is emphasized strongly in this analysis. Donskov's work is a reevaluation of both the couple's relationship as husband and wife, and as author and editor, using primary sources to trace the couple's everyday lives and the development of their relationship. Despite the acknowledgement of Tolstaya's contributions to Tolstoy's work, Donskov does not discuss her own independent works, including her response to *The Kreutzer Sonata*, "Whose Fault?". Donskov's use of annotation however, is a clear strength in this work, as he provides both historical and personal contexts for events mentioned throughout the correspondence.

McLean (2011) brings into focus the couple's later years, during which each of the opposing novellas were written. These later years were categorized by a visible increase in direct

antagonism between the couple as a result of Tolstoy's increasing religious fanaticism, his embrace of the cult-like following of Tolstoyans, and major financial disputes over copyrights. Despite this, their literary relationship remained productive, with Sofia being personally responsible for the publication of *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) despite initial censorship attempts. Although McLean does not explore Tolstaya's own works in detail (i.e. "Whose Fault?", "Song Without Words"), he successfully paints an accurate picture of her identity as independent from her relationship with her husband.

Shirer's (1994) perspective on the bevy of primary sources focuses on the bipolar nature of the couple's relationship, highlighting both positive and negative shared experiences. He places emphasis on Tolstaya's simultaneous dedication to Tolstoy's literary work and resentment of his behavior, making her contributions to the Tolstoy canon the focal point. One criticism applicable to this work is Shirer's reliance on sexist stereotypes when it relates to Tolstaya's emotions and mental health. Much like other scholars in a variety of fields, Shirer feminizes mental illness and focuses on Tolstaya's emotions and struggles with much more detail than Tolstoy's.

Each of these publications on the Tolstoys' relationship provide critical commentary and perspective on the large amount of primary source material, much of which was not available for analysis until recently. These works are pivotal in the current shift of attitude on Sofia Tolstaya's characterization, and flip the traditional script by focusing on Sofia as independent of her husband: a smart, industrious, and creative woman who was a constant supporter and contributor to Tolstoy's work, and the creator of her own.

Textual Analysis

Touching upon both of the respective works (*The Kreutzer Sonata*, “Whose Fault?”) and various other publications of Tolstoy and Tolstaya, this area of scholarship aims to dissect, theorize, and relate the texts to other publications and philosophies of the time. Herman (1997) delves into the theme of adultery in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, relating it to one of Pushkin’s unfinished short stories “Egyptian Nights” (1837). Herman asserts that *The Kreutzer Sonata* was heavily influenced by this Pushkin piece, as they both contain the interdependent themes of art and adultery. Both themes are improvisational in nature, leaving room for an extraordinary and sometimes dangerous communication. In *The Kreutzer Sonata* these similarities are primarily seen in the dominant motif of the “adulterous” couple (the wife and the musician) playing Beethoven together. Herman also relates this aestheticization of adultery to Tolstoy’s earlier work, *Anna Karenina*, demonstrating a natural progression of the author’s engagement with these themes over time. While Herman’s work is successful in its comparison of “Egyptian Nights” and *The Kreutzer Sonata*, he neglects to include any discussion about the effect of Tolstoy and Tolstaya’s relationship on Tolstoy’s literary exploration of adultery, marriage, and sex. He also does not address Tolstaya’s response to *The Kreutzer Sonata*, “Whose Fault?”, in the analysis, although this is a minor issue as it is likely Herman would not have been aware of the initial 1994 Russian publication (due to the explosion of published materials during this time).

Edwards (1993) also examines *The Kreutzer Sonata*, but through the lens of Tokology, a woman-centered health practice pioneered by Alice B. Stockham which emphasized sexual practices within marriage and midwifery skills. Using Stockham and Tolstoy’s correspondence and records of their meeting in 1889, Herman demonstrates the incorporation of Tokology into Tolstoy’s philosophical beliefs and attitudes about women and marriage. These beliefs and

attitudes feature heavily in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, especially in Tolstoy's discussion of the institution of marriage. Edwards does not, however, bring in any discussion of Tolstoy's own marriage or the influence of Tolstaya on his response to these themes, leaving out a central element which may have enriched the research.

Gregg (2002) uses psychological frameworks to analyze the patterns of both male and female characters in Tolstoy's body of work, revealing that instead of the female characters being stagnant and changeless, they do in fact go through a certain level of character development. This contradicts a common attitude in some Tolstoyan scholarship which asserts that female characters are neglected while male characters' development is often central to the narrative¹. Although Gregg asserts that Tolstoy's female characters are far from changeless, the development they undergo shows a pattern unlike the male characters. Instead of responding to larger philosophical or moral questions like Tolstoy's male characters, the female characters only change and develop in response to their environment or general circumstances. In this sense, they have less agency to develop on their own accord, therefore placing them below men in terms of connection with intellectual topics. This analysis is relevant to Tolstoy's portrayal of the wife in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, and can be used to connect this later novella to his earlier works.

Mandelker (1993) stands out as a seminal work in Tolstoyan textual analysis, combining intertextual, tropologic and feminist literary theories to reframe Tolstoy's address of the "Woman Question" in *Anna Karenina*. In response to Richard Gustafson's call for an evaluative revision of Tolstoy, Mandelker rejects the popular division of Tolstoy's life into two distinct segments: pre-spiritual and moral conversion, and post-conversion, and instead traces patterns of his response to the topics of women and marriage throughout his work. Mandelker notes that there are more similarities than differences between the two established philosophical periods of

¹ See *Women in Tolstoy: the Ideal and the Erotic* by Ruth Crego Benson (1973) for a deeper analysis

Tolstoy's life, showing that his address of the "Woman Question" reflected a process over time rather than a dramatic shift. In this analysis, the author also rejects the familiar notion of Tolstoy as a known misogynist, choosing to draw directly from the text instead of from secondary sources. Mandelker finds that in contrast to common beliefs, Tolstoy did engage with feminist and progressive ideas. Therefore, she asserts that he cannot be viewed as an exclusively sexist figure. This assertion is contentious however, as other scholars have described his engagement in feminist ideas as a vehicle to promote his own radical beliefs. Rancour-Laferriere describes Tolstoy's rejection of sexual practices in *The Kreutzer Sonata* as a product of his own skewed psyche, and therefore not a product of engagement with true feminist thought (1998). Despite criticisms, Mandelker's work provides a notable challenge to traditional Tolstoyan scholarship, distancing itself from the status quo.

Katz (2013) is part of the recent surge of scholarship focused on Sofia Tolstaya and her legacy, beginning after the publication of her diaries, essays, and stories. Katz himself is responsible for most translations of her body of work, and is the preeminent contemporary scholar focusing on Tolstaya. This allows him to present a thorough and thoughtful analysis of her short story "Song Without Words", her second response to *The Kreutzer Sonata* after "Whose Fault?". The themes of mental disease and madness as feminized concepts are examined, with special attention reflected upon the societal and marital role of women. Katz also argues for the recognition of Tolstaya as a literary figure in her own right, describing this particular story as an example of her own talent as an author. Katz is a major figure in Tolstoyan scholarship: one who is pushing for more exploration of Tolstaya's legacy and is critical of the lack of research in Russian literature on female figures in general.

Intervention and Stakes

Many scholars have spoken on this topic from varying historical and theoretical perspectives. From philosophical and historical context to both traditional and non-traditional textual analysis, these scholars have provided a basis on which to assemble future research. As evidenced by the body of scholarship discussing the topic of Sofia and Leo Tolstoy's marriage, partnership, and literary exchange, this is not only a relevant topic, but one needing further expansion. Although the existing literature establishes a foundation upon which to build, a wider and deeper look into Tolstaya's literary achievements is suggested. There is a larger body of research into the couple's relationship and family life, but without utilizing the lens of the comparison of the two specific novellas. This presents a crucial gap in scholarship, which must be filled in order to create a more accurate description of the Tolstoyan canon; a canon which some say would have been impossible without Tolstaya's influence. In this sense, this gap must be filled in order to create a more robust understanding of Tolstoy's literary legacy, and to acknowledge the contributions of a much overlooked partner.

An expansion of knowledge will not only assist in the development of Tolstoy studies, but also reflects the need to examine more female figures in Russian Literature. These areas of Tolstoyan scholarship have only recently become fully accessible. In the past twenty years, scholarship focusing on their marriage and partnership has been growing. This rise in Tolstaya-focused scholarship is critical to the development and conceptualization of this specific research topic. The intention is to place this research within the ranks of existing scholarship: to enhance and supplement this recent rise of interest in Sofia Tolstaya. The framework that will emerge from this synthesis of literature supports the need for an examination of women's contributions to Russian literature, especially in regards to the late 19th century canon. Sofia

Tolstaya is a notable example, yet the increasing amount of scholarship on her contributions suggests a need to examine other female figures as well.

Acting as editor and agent, Tolstaya's influence on Tolstoy's work should not be underestimated. The couple's marriage, although turbulent, was very fruitful in terms of literary output, with Tolstaya acting as primary editor. Examining her influence on his work is therefore crucial to our understanding of Tolstoy as a whole. Her known influence on Tolstoy's work also prompts the question of further exploration into her own literary achievements as significant to our understanding of the female experience in Russia in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The hypothesis is as follows: the couple's relationship as rivals and as partners is revealed through their conflicting discussions of marriage, love, and women in the two novellas. In "Whose Fault?", Tolstaya's work presents a direct counter argument to the philosophies of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, and makes a direct comparison between the author and the character of Anna. While Tolstoy views the murder of Anna as a responsibility shared by both the victim and her murderer, Tolstaya views the murderer as another man benefitting from the patriarchy and double standards placed on women. Tolstaya acts against the Tolstoy she knew through her literary work, and presents herself as being "bludgeoned to death" (the manner of murder utilized in "Whose Fault?") by his oppressive philosophies on women, their role in society, and marriage. The comparison of both works contrasts Tolstoy's instructive theory with Tolstaya's literary resistance. The importance of Tolstaya's influence on Tolstoy's work and estate will also be discussed in detail, demonstrating that such an examination of Tolstaya's impact is critical to the understanding of Tolstoy's own legacy. The implications of this research are great; Tolstaya will emerge from behind the shadow of her husband, while the comparison of their two works (*The*

Kreutzer Sonata and “Whose Fault?”) will reveal the complexities of not only their marriage but also their literary partnership.

The methodologies this text intends to use are very grounded in comparative literature theory. This text intends to analyze both works (*The Kreutzer Sonata*, “Whose Fault?”) for different responses and attitudes towards themes of marriage, love, sex, and women, examine the relationship of Pozdnyshev (murderer) and his wife (murdered) as it compares to Sofia and Leo Tolstoy’s own relationship, and to juxtapose both pieces to contribute to the understanding and recognition of Sofia Tolstaya. The decentralization of the male gaze and experience is key to this analysis. In addition to the two main texts, this analysis will be utilizing each partner’s diaries and their personal correspondence to further deepen the analysis of their relationship. The use of other short stories, essays, and memoirs by both partners will supplement this comparison as well.

Chapter 2

...At last she picked up her diary and started writing: “**Yes, this love was a mistake, a trick of the imagination.** What do I want? Why am I so dissatisfied? Why is my heart aching so? **Is my youth begging for life, when there’s no real life, or do I feel sorry for all those who are unhappy?**...(Sofia Tolstaya, “Whose Fault?”, 79)

Tolstoy’s *The Kreutzer Sonata*, first published in 1889, and Tolstaya’s “Whose Fault?” written between 1891 and 1894, may be described as two opposite sides of the same coin. Each respective work tells the story of a doomed and unhappy marriage from differing perspectives, with Tolstoy utilizing the perspective of the husband and Tolstaya using that of the wife, with each providing opposing views on the central conflict. Tolstoy’s work presents the narrative through the male gaze, drawing upon Tolstoy’s own developing radical philosophies. The novella begins on a train, in which passengers are discussing love and marriage. Pozdnyshv (the husband, and murderer) begins to discuss his own opinions on these topics, using his own failed marriage as an example. While initially infatuated with his wife before their marriage, Pozdnyshv realizes that this feeling was not real love, but a naive attraction. His marriage and relationship with his wife was far from ideal due to permeation by his own jealousy and his wife’s perceived coldness towards him. After suspecting her of having an affair with a young visiting violinist, Pozdnyshv stabs his wife in a jealous rage. Only after seeing his wife’s body in the coffin does he accept any sort of responsibility for what happened.

Tolstaya’s version, “Whose Fault?” begins with the perspective of Anna (the wife, and eventual victim) prior to her marriage. Much like Sofia and Leo’s own relationship, Anna and Prince Prozorsky meet as family friends with a large age gap. Having been a consistent presence in her family’s home for years, the 35 year old prince has seen her grow up, but soon begins to see her in a different light. After realizing that Anna is now a woman, Prince Prozorsky pursues

her, and the pair quickly fall in love. After the honeymoon period, the marriage begins to deteriorate, with the Prince becoming an oppressive presence in Anna and their children's lives. Their lifestyles do not complement each other, and Anna grows fearful that he will seek companionship elsewhere. Unlike Tolstoy, Tolstaya supports the idea of true love, detailing Anna's initial relationship with Prozorsky and her evolving friendship with one of Prozorsky's friends. Although an affair never takes place, it is clear that Anna comes to love this other man in the absence of care from her husband. Prince Prozorsky, like Pozdnyshev, suspects a liaison, and in a jealous rage bludgeons Anna to death with a marble paperweight. Alternative titles to "Whose Fault?" were found in Sofia's diaries, with some notable examples being "Is She Guilty?", "Long Since Murdered", "How Husbands Murder Their Wives", and "One More Murdered Woman [or Wife]" (Katz, 2014). These alternative titles only support our understanding of Sofia's complete disdain for *The Kreutzer Sonata* and Tolstoy's radicalized philosophies.

Tolstoy's period of spiritual crisis and transformation, as outlined in the previous chapter, was defined by a large literary output focusing solely on his new found faith. In addition to his most famous spiritual work *My Confession* (1882), Tolstoy published *My Religion* (also called *What I Believe*, 1884), *What Then Must We Do?* (1886), *How Much Land Does a Man Need?* (1886), and *Church and State* (1886) during this period, all of which were focused on the promotion of primitive Christianity and asceticism. This is only a select list of works published, as the actual number of publications during this time was extremely high. However, in addition to this growing output of essays, parables, and commentary, Tolstoy also published *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) during this time. It is therefore important to place the novella within the framework of Tolstoy's spiritual transformation, as most of the ideas expressed in the text were

inspired by Tolstoy's own changing spirituality and way of life. In the analysis of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, it is consequently important to relate the text to the many non-fiction or philosophical works Tolstoy wrote during this time. In addition, Tolstaya's "Whose Fault?" is by definition (as a response to *The Kreutzer Sonata*) a reply to not only Tolstoy's text, but to the author's personal philosophical transformation itself.

Many of Tolstoy's expressed views on marriage, love, sex, and women in *The Kreutzer Sonata* can be directly linked to this spiritual crisis, especially with Tolstoy's most significant philosophical work of this period, *My Confession* (1882). Cicovacki directly links both texts in his examination of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, describing the later work as an example of "the simplest form of storytelling...[a] confession", which follows the ancient tradition of confessional literature: *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (398 AD), Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782), and Dostoevsky's *Notes From the Underground* (1864), among many others (94). Cicovacki also cites Rousseau's work as the most influential piece to Tolstoy's *My Confession* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*, as in Rousseau's *Confessions*, the author "celebrates the independence of an autonomous individual and focuses on the rift between an individual and society" rather than focusing on the self as a concept shrouded in mystery (94). Much like Rousseau, in both *My Confession* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Tolstoy uses a confessional narrative structure, but identifies the source of his own and Pozdnyshev's madness as the failings of society, rather than an intrinsic "divided nature" of the self: "the divided, hypocritical nature of society, which preaches one set of values and lives by another, is the final source of Pozdnyshev's [and Tolstoy's] moral degradation and his slip into madness" (Cicovacki, 94).

Both Tolstoy and Tolstaya comment on this same central narrative and conflict in their respective works, but evaluate the cause of the madness and suffering as coming from different

sources. While Tolstoy points to the moral degradation of society as the cause of Pozdnyshev's crime, Tolstaya points to the husband's own lack of love and appreciation for his wife as the cause of the crime. In the original manuscript of the text, written by Sofia in school notebooks, she includes passages from Tolstoy's original text in the margins. Katz (2014) identifies these notes in the margins as "the most explicit challenge to Tolstoy's literary authority", as they directly name the passages which Tolstaya disagreed with and act as a guide for the rest of her text as a "point-by-point refutation" of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, and the views expressed within (xvi).

The passages included in the margin identify the themes that Sofia felt the need to comment on: women, love, sex, and marriage; themes that both Tolstoy and Tolstaya explore in their respective works, but are addressed with completely opposing views. For almost every philosophical musing on these topics in Tolstoy's text, Sofia presents a completely contrasting view: one that disagrees markedly with Tolstoy's philosophies. In this sense, both Sofia and Tolstoy are directly responding to "The Woman Question" and a larger societal conversation on the rights and responsibilities of women. Most importantly to this analysis however, each respective work can be described as a reflection on Tolstoy and Tolstaya's own marriage and relationship. This personal connection to their own relationship can be easily identified in the plot of both works, as the relationship between the couple in each text is remarkably similar to Leo and Sofia's own relationship. Just as Sofia's youthful infatuation with Tolstoy is mirrored in her character Anna's own admiration for Prince Prozorsky, Pozdnyshev's checkered sexual history is remarkably similar to that of Tolstoy, which he wrote about extensively in his diaries (and consequently gave to Sofia to read before their marriage). This direct reference to the couple's own relationship is even noted in Sofia's diaries in an entry on January 10th, 1891: "I

have observed a connecting thread between Lyovochka's old diaries and his *Kreutzer Sonata*. I am a buzzing fly entangled in this web, sucked of its blood by the spider".

As can be seen by both the congruent plots and direct address of the themes of women, love, sex, and marriage, Sofia's work, "Whose Fault?" is not only responding to Tolstoy's philosophies but can also be seen as Sofia's personal literary resistance to her environment; an environment completely dominated by Tolstoy and his needs. This literary resistance is substantiated in her meticulously kept diaries, in which she consistently expresses feeling oppressed, suffocated, and disregarded in her own home. Although her societal position as a woman prevented her from having much agency at the time, Sofia used her writings as a mental escape and sounding board for her own views, which were often rejected by her husband. In Sofia's autobiographical *My Life* (1904-1916), she discusses the need to express her views somewhere, even in an unpublished manuscript: "I was always troubled by Lev Nikolaevich's attitude towards women. This misunderstanding of the possibility of sheer feminine purity, this disrespect and unceasing suspicion of an affair or betrayal - all of this I experienced first hand and wanted to give voice to in my novel" (633). In this same passage, Sofia goes on to describe her writing process and her use of *The Kreutzer Sonata* as a model on which to build her work: "I wrote with considerable enthusiasm, always keeping in mind the background of Lev Nikolaevich's *Kreutzer Sonata*, which served as a pattern for my story" (*My Life*, 633).

These passages in *My Life* confirm that in addition to providing commentary on her own relationship with Tolstoy, Sofia also intended to address the identical themes of love, sex, women, and marriage, therefore repudiating Tolstoy's philosophical perspectives, which strengthens the identification of "Whose Fault?" as an example of Sofia's literary resistance. Consequently, not only is Sofia's work relevant to scholarship addressing the "Woman

Question”, but is also relevant to our understanding of Tolstoy’s descent into spiritualism. Sofia’s direct references to quotes from *The Kreutzer Sonata* included in the margins of her manuscript for “Whose Fault?” also serve to directly strengthen the identification of Sofia’s work as one of both repudiation and direct disagreement with Tolstoy’s philosophies and his text. Much like a scholar would, Sofia constructed her work as a re-analysis of Tolstoy’s text, providing her own truths and counterpoints to the narrative; truths and counterpoints she derived directly from her reading of his text, and her own relationship with Tolstoy.

Through a detailed comparison of the two works (*The Kreutzer Sonata*, “Whose Fault?”) four themes emerge as areas of deviation between the two authors: love, sex, marriage, and women. These four themes, and the authors’ respective responses to them, are the crux of the conflict between the two novellas. Love and sex are the primary overarching themes, while the themes of women and marriage are dependent on Tolstoy and Sofia’s respective attitudes towards love and sex, and therefore can be identified as secondary themes. While Tolstoy takes a highly moralistic and pessimistic tone on these four themes, Sofia presents a more sympathetic tone, using her own lived experience as a woman to inform her musings. Sofia identifies herself with the character of Anna, effectively uniting them as women joined by a common experience: a hostile and volatile marriage that neither woman ever expected to endure.

The couple’s relationship as both adversaries and as partners is also further contextualized through the works’ comparison, as the couple detailed in each of their stories is directly inspired by their own marriage. Much like Sofia and Tolstoy, the couple examined in both *The Kreutzer Sonata* and “Whose Fault?” do have moments of calm or productiveness, which are consistently contrasted with the overabundance of arguments, jealousy, and hostility. Much like the fictional couple, Sofia and Leo also enjoyed some moments of genuine and

positive interaction, with Sofia's telling of the story even discussing the wife's editing of her husband's manuscripts, which is a direct reference to her and her husband's own life. This unique relationship of the two as literary collaborators will be discussed in the third chapter of this text. For the purposes of this analysis, the secondary themes of women and marriage will be discussed under the central umbrellas of love and sex, intertwining with each author's respective overarching attitudes.

Love

I copied Lyovochka's diaries up to the part where he wrote: "There is no such thing as love, only the physical need for intercourse and the practical need for life's companion." **I only wish I had read that remark twenty years ago, then I would not have married him.** (Sofia's Diary, December 14th, 1890)

The first central theme on which Tolstoy and Sofia deviate is love. This theme encompasses both authors' response to love as a personal feeling as well as its role and significance in society. Both authors also address the concept of true love, as either a fallacy (in the case of Tolstoy) or as a powerful and very real emotion (in the case of Sofia). Early on in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Tolstoy uses a confessional narrative structure to communicate his personal opinions on love. The narrative is framed as a story within a story, beginning with the narrative of people having a discussion on a train. This discussion concerns the topic of marriage and women in contemporary society, about which various passengers have differing opinions. This leads to Pozdnyshev's own confession to one passenger, which details his marital relationship and the eventually fatal outcome.

Prior to the relation of Pozdnyshev's history however, the discussion between various passengers includes a dialogue about love's role in marriage and the institution of marriage itself. The only woman taking part in this discussion first breaches the subject of love in her response to another passenger's arcane beliefs. After an old merchant expresses his opinion that if

disciplined properly, a wife will remain loyal and subservient, the passengers on the train discuss how arcane his beliefs are and categorize him as a “papa right out of the Old Testament” (8). The lady continues with her take on love: “The main thing that such people don’t understand”, said the lady, ‘is that marriage without love isn’t really marriage, that only love sanctifies marriage, and the only true marriage is one sanctified by love” (8). This is the very statement which inspires Pozdnyshev’s entrance into the conversation:

In the midst of the lady’s remarks we heard behind me something like the sound of a broken laughter or sobbing; turning around, **we saw my neighbor, the lonely gray-haired man with glittering eyes, who, during the conversation, which obviously interested him, had moved closer to us unnoticed.** He stood, resting his arms on the back of the seat, evidently in great agitation: his face was flushed and one of his cheek muscles was twitching. **“What kind of love...love...love...sanctifies marriage?”** he asked, stammering. (9)

The woman responds in order to clarify her position: “True love...Only if this love is present between a man and a woman, is marriage possible” (9). Pozdnyshev continues to question her, asking what the definition of true love would include, to the lady’s disdain, and she responds with “everyone knows what love is” (9). Pozdnyshev asks her to clarify, to which she responds: “Love? Love is the exclusive preference for one man or one woman over everyone else” (9). Almost immediately, Pozdnyshev questions her again: “Preference for how long? A month? Two days? Half an hour?”, to which she responds with “for a long time, sometimes one’s whole life” (9). It is only then that Pozdnyshev begins to share his own opinion: “That only happens in novels, never in real life. In life this preference for one person over everyone else can last a year, which is very rare, more often only months, or even weeks, days, hours” (10). The passengers are taken aback by this sentiment, and immediately disagree. Pozdnyshev continues: “I know...you’re talking about how things are supposed to be, while I am talking about how things really are. Every man experiences what you call love for every single beautiful woman” (10).

Beginning with Pozdnyshev's entrance into the conversation, it soon becomes clear in the above statement that Pozdnyshev is a mouthpiece for the author, a figurative pulpit from which Tolstoy can instruct the reader on both societal and religious truths. While he describes others as discussing only idealistic or figurative concepts, Pozdnyshev (and by extension, Tolstoy) is identified as the vessel of truth. This truth instructs that "to love one woman or one man for one's entire life - is the same as saying that one candle will last a whole lifetime" (10) and that what one perceives to be love is simply a sexual passion. The passengers question this 'truth', claiming that Pozdnyshev is disregarding the "possibility of love based on the identity of ideals, on spiritual affinity", an opinion which the old man mocks: "Spiritual affinity! The identity of ideals!...In that case there's no reason to sleep together (excuse my rudeness). Or is it that people go to bed together as a result of this spiritual affinity?" (10).

With these opening scenes, Tolstoy has already begun to establish a foundation which rejects the concept of true love and claims that both a sexual and moral relationship with a partner is impossible. Pozdnyshev's life story, which he then relates to the single passenger, serves as an example of this truth, to which Tolstoy claims there are no exceptions. A man is only able to have either a sexual or moral relationship with a woman; there cannot be the presence of both (Møller, 13). Pozdnyshev only realizes this truth after he murders his wife, and uses it to shift the blame of the murderous act onto the failings of society, rather than his own mistakes. Therefore, the act of murder is not simply limited to Pozdnyshev's own hand. The murder had already begun by the time Pozdnyshev was a young man and was first becoming entrenched in a society which mistakenly associates sexual passion with love (Møller, 13): "I am telling you the whole story of how I killed my wife. During the trial I was asked how and with what I killed her. Fools! They thought I'd killed my wife then, with a knife, on the fifth of

October. I didn't kill her then, but much earlier. Just as they're all now killing, everyone, all of them..." (29).

This 'truth' of society's structuring of love as an ideal allows both Pozdnyshev and Tolstoy to diminish their own responsibility for the failure of their marriages: a failure which Tolstoy began to interpret through this lens in his own life. Much like Pozdnyshev, Tolstoy takes a stance which nearly absolves him of responsibility for his lecherous attitudes towards women and sex: an attitude he identifies as being ingrained in young men and women alike by the constructs of high society. Pozdnyshev even goes so far as to imply that because of his wife's engagement in sexual passions, she also shares some responsibility in her own death. Women in general are also admonished for their "domination...from which the world suffers" (20):

It's like the Jews, just as they pay us back for our oppression of them by their financial power, so it is with women. "Ah, you allow us only to be merchants. Fine, then we merchants will own you," say the Jews. **"Ah, you want us only to be objects of sensuality. Fine, then we objects will enslave you," say the women.** (20)

In addition to the obvious anti-semitism in this passage, Tolstoy paints women as a vengeful species which "acts on man's sensuality, and by doing so, subjugates him in such a way that he only chooses formally, while in fact [they're] the one[s] making the choice" (21). This situation will not be remedied by "the fact that [women] can't vote or become a judge", but will only start to change when women become "equal to a man in sexual intercourse"; that is, a woman must also "have the right to use [men] or abstain as she desires, to choose a man she desires, and not be chosen" (21). Until then, women will continue to abuse this sensual dominance over men and will continue to "acquire[] enormous power over people" (21). A clear solution to this imbalance is Tolstoy's proposed universal celibacy.

Love, as an institution constructed by society (and idealized by women) is also identified as a motivating factor to failed marriages: “I’ll tell you how that love led to what happened to me” (12). Although society preaches love to be “something ideal [and] exalted, . . . in practice, love is something despicable, swinish, which it’s even repulsive and shameful to mention or remember” (28). Marriage is also identified as a cause of society’s and Pozdnyshv’s problems. Despite the infatuation he felt at the time, Pozdnyshv expresses in hindsight that “marriages are arranged . . . just like traps”, and that his own was the “product of the activity of mothers and dressmakers”, as they presented and adorned his future wife in garments meant to attract men (19). High society is clearly implicated by Pozdnyshv as facilitating this ‘marriage meat market’ in which “young women sit around and men come in to choose, just like at a bazaar” (20). These women are categorized as either “slave[s] at a bazaar” or “bait in a trap” (20), the difference being their awareness to the truth of these kinds of social gatherings. “Marriage these days is pure deception”, claims Pozdnyshv; it is a simple arrangement which is only put in place for the means of sexual relations (*KS*, 10):

Here people get married without seeing anything in it other than copulation, and the result is either deception or coercion. If it’s deception, then it’s easier to bear. The husband and the wife deceive people that they’re in a monogamous relationship, while both engage in polygamy . . . but when, as happens most often, the **husband and the wife have accepted the external obligation to live together for their whole life, and have come to hate each other by the second month . . . then this results in that terrible hell when people drink themselves to death, shoot themselves, kill, or poison themselves or the other person.** (*KS*, 11)

With this particular passage Tolstoy is also naming the institution of marriage as a direct cause of violence, further distancing Pozdnyshv from his responsibility in the murder of his wife.

As one can imagine, Sofia protested Tolstoy's restructuring of responsibility in *The Kreutzer Sonata* and presents a completely different attitude towards love itself in her response, "Whose Fault?". Sofia's discussion on the topic of love begins very quickly in her narrative, approximately three pages in. As Anna (Prince Prozorsky's future wife) is talking with her sister Natasha and the Prince about a story she is currently writing, she identifies it as a tale "all about *how* one should love" (73). It is important to note that this can be interpreted as a direct reference to Sofia's own childhood, during which she wrote a romantic novella entitled "Natasha". This story is described by Anna's sister as "not hard to understand, but...very sentimental. [Anna] dreams about a kind of love that should be pure and ideal, almost like a prayer" (73). This love, "the kind that's higher than everything worldly, a more ideal love", is considered necessary for marriage by Anna (76). Therefore, in the absence of love, there is no reason for marriage, as marriage is a union which brings people together through a common emotion.

Anna later muses on love in her diary after an embarrassing incident with another suitor, which leads her to an existential confusion: "Yes, this love was a mistake, a trick of the imagination. What do I want? Why am I dissatisfied? Why is my heart aching so?...Where do people find happiness? From fate? But what is fate?" (79). The love Anna felt for this one suitor with whom she shared an intellectual and spiritual affinity is tainted by his act of kissing her hand, and she soon begins to ponder her own emotions. Anna turns to spiritual reflection and prayer as an answer to the confusion, a theme that will reappear multiple times throughout the novella. After this initial existentialism, Anna reconnects with her normal youthful pursuits and fully immerses herself in her art, writing, and the natural world around her. This period is marked by Prince Prozorsky's constant presence and Anna's perception of his attentions towards her, which she unfortunately interprets as him falling in love with her: "she fervently involved him in

all her pursuits...[but] was deceived by his approval that hid his simple delight with her, unaware that everything was directed only at her appearance and her youth” (84). Anna falls in love with Prince Prozorsky (“Je crains d’aimer le prince”, 85), but cannot see that the love she perceives him to have for her is simply a sexual attraction.

Sofia also describes the Prince as having an incorrect understanding of true love. In a moment of doubt, the Prince wonders “whether this magnificent creature whom he had grown to know so well of late, with her poetic; pure demands of life, her religious inclination, and her noble ideals, would collide against his egotistical, carnal love and his spent existence” (86). He quickly disregards this, thinking instead “only about [himself] and valuing only [his] own happiness and pleasure” (86). The Prince has no real understanding of true love and only desires to possess Anna as a sexual object, not to appreciate her intelligence or artistic talents. He, much like Pozdnyshv, confuses a carnal desire for a true love, believing that his relationship with Anna is “totally unlike any of those casual affairs he was used to” and would cleanse him of the “impurity of his previous sins” (87). Sofia also evaluates the Prince as someone “busying himself with philosophy, imagining himself to be a great thinker” and writing various articles that “only sharp and knowledgeable people [would] reali[ze]...[were] in reality pathetic and ridiculous” (81). In this transparent description of Prince Prozorsky, which clearly points to Tolstoy himself, Sofia is delegitimizing her own husband’s philosophical publications and attitudes, mainly his philosophies and attitudes on love. “Without having anything original to say [and] merely regurgitating old, worn-out ideas from a whole range of thinkers, both ancient and modern”, Prozorsky’s (and Tolstoy’s) publications are viewed with disdain by Sofia (81). This serves as an example of Sofia’s literary resistance to her husband; a resistance she could only fully express in the written medium.

After the Prince's proposal to Anna, he becomes increasingly preoccupied with confirming her love for him, while Anna becomes worried about the possibility that the Prince has loved others before her. Anna demands to know how many women he has loved prior to her, to which he responds that he "can't bring to [their] married life the sort of purity [he'd] like to", but that all prior dalliances on his part were only diversions, and not love. After the conversation which reveals the Prince's prior entanglements, Anna "couldn't escape this pain all during her engagement" (90). This episode is also a thinly veiled reference to Sofia's own engagement period with Tolstoy, during which he insisted she read his diaries which included countless descriptions of sexual encounters and even revealed the existence of an illegitimate son (the mother of whom was a peasant living at Yasnaya Polyana).

After the unpleasant discovery that Arina, Prozorsky's former peasant mistress, is still living and working on the estate, Anna becomes increasingly suspicious, stating that although she had once dreamed of being "united [with the Prince] in our first pure love", she is now "contaminated by the poison of jealousy" (98). It is only with the birth of her first child that Anna can fathom a reason for her love for her husband, despite his flirtatious behavior with other women and disregard for her feelings: "It was pure happiness, the purpose of life, its true meaning; [her son] was a justification of her love for her husband; it was her future responsibility" (105). In contrast, Prince Prozorsky acts coldly towards the baby, and Anna worries whether he will ever come to love their son. All of her previous hopes that the child would "eliminate the distance between them and reunite her with her husband through their love for him" are soon quashed with his aloof behavior. From this moment on, Anna dedicates herself completely to her children, but continuously yields to Prozorsky's demands for sex in fear that without it, he would cease to love her completely, even in the carnal sense.

Throughout the latter portion of “Whose Fault?”, Sofia consistently contrasts the relationship between Anna and Prozorsky with the burgeoning love between Anna and Dmitri Bekhmetev, a friend of the Prince. Taking on the role held by the young violinist in *The Kreutzer Sonata* as the suspected seducer, Bekhmetev becomes friends with both Anna and her children, consistently visiting the estate and accompanying them on walks. In Sofia’s work, Bekhmetev as “the other man” is described very differently from the violinist in Tolstoy’s work. Although the truth about the supposed affair is never revealed in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, it is made clear in Sofia’s work that there was no physical affair between Anna and Bekhmetev, even as they grew closer over time. Despite the lack of a physical relationship, it is clear that Anna and Bekhmetev come to share an emotional relationship: one that is built on shared interests and spiritual affinity. They first share an interest in each other's artistic pursuits and then begin to share ideas on literature, experiences that seem almost alien to Anna, after her years of marriage to Prozorsky who only seems to pay attention to her body and appearance. After one evening spent dining and reading together, during which Anna “experienc[es] a strange feeling of happiness and serenity”, the Prince returns home from a hunt, with the suspicion that she had arranged the meeting deliberately in his absence (116). This is but the first of many bouts of jealousy on the Prince’s part, which fluctuate as Anna grows closer to Bekhmetev.

Bekhmetev had “completely and imperceptibly entered Anna’s family and personal life”, making nearly every aspect of her life happier:

An atmosphere of love indiscernibly enveloped her on all sides. There were no tender words, no crude caresses, nothing that usually accompanies love, but everything around her breathed tenderness and **everything in her life was filled with affection and happiness.** She constantly felt that a **sympathetic eye was following her through life, approving everything,** admiring everything. (119)

Bekhmetev and Anna spend nearly every evening together with the children, making sketches and reading aloud. He also consistently brings flowers and supplies for the village school, which Anna is most appreciative of. “Bekhmetev’s concern and attention to Anna’s entire life were manifested in everything”, unlike the exclusively carnal passions of her husband, which Anna concedes to in order to preserve the “family she had tried to safeguard during . . . eleven years of marriage” (120).

After moving to Moscow for the winter months with her husband and children, Anna now must play an active role in society. This role is not one she explicitly enjoys, but is a job she takes on with grace. During one of many balls and soirees, Anna is reminded of Bekhmetev when a Baroness quotes Lamartine, an author which the pair shared an interest in. Despite the fact that as a married woman, Anna is expected to not dance or talk with anyone other than older women, she is surprised that she isn’t bored: “But Anna wasn’t bored because somewhere deep inside her burned a spark of genuine happiness, the ember of Bekhmetev’s love for her, which fact she knew and which illuminated her entire life from within” (125). Although “she would never have acknowledged this to herself”, Anna “could not help feeling it” and clearly realizes that she and Bekhmetev are in love (125). This true love is based on a relationship without demands, as “such demands of love kill it, just as everyday people kill it” and leads to an immortal love: one which “death does not exist for” (131). Sofia also uses the term “disinterested love” when discussing Bekhmetev’s love for Anna, meaning that “[he] didn’t want to impinge on her family happiness or burden her honest soul” (141).

When making a trip back to the country to manage the estate, Anna again has the opportunity to spend time with Bekhmetev alone, but once again, their relationship remains

non-physical. Despite the lack of a physical relationship, the pair is happy and content, relishing in each other's company:

They went farther and farther, **both thinking about the same thing, without demanding from fate or from each other anything more**, and experiencing amid this snowy, pure, limitless nature of their own relationship to it, to God, and to the eternity in which **one must live one's own life now, and afterward, and forever, in which it is possible to be happy and pure, and to love unselfishly and perpetually**. (132)

To Sofia, true love in a couple is founded on spiritual affinity and shared interests, with their religious life being held paramount over all else. However, it would be an oversight to claim that she disregards the sexual and physical connection that true love may entail. Anna consistently struggles to reconcile the animalistic and sometimes shameful nature of sexual relations with her husband and her concept of true love. Although she often engages in sexual relations with her husband only to preserve her family, there are also instances in which Anna enjoys a physical relationship with Prozorsky. Anna never comments definitively on the importance of a physical relationship in love, but when questioned by Bekhmetev if she thinks love is based entirely on spiritual connection, she responds as follows: "I don't know whether exclusively or not, but in any case [spiritual connection] is *first and foremost*, and it's undisputed happiness" (131).

Although Anna clearly still loves her husband in an idealized and youthful way, her love for Bekhmetev can't be denied and she laments the fact that "[she] can't love both [her] husband and this other man who's loved [her] so unselfishly, so simply, so well, and for so long, without demanding anything for himself" (146). Bekhmetev meets all of her idealized expectations of love, for which Anna feels ashamed, as she believes that a wife's love should only be for her husband and "must...happen in every good marriage" (146). She also laments the fact that Bekhmetev isn't her husband but inspires within her this pure idealized love:

Why wasn't this man her husband?...“What will happen now? What sort of relationship will I have to my husband?”, Anna wondered, like a drowning person grasping for a straw that could save her. And **she was drowning, drowning, completely aware that this straw would bend in her weak hands and be unable to rescue her.** (146)

The love that Anna receives from Bekhmetev is simultaneously exhilarating and shameful, as it is the love she has always dreamed of, but is not within the confines of marriage. Anna's commitment to her beliefs about the sanctity of marriage and her commitment to her children forbid her to fully welcome the unselfish love a life with Bekhmetev would promise. In contrast to Bekhmetev, Prozorsky gave Anna “the kind of love that killed her”, or the kind of love which disregards the soul and personality in favor of carnal passion (164). Unfortunately, Prozorsky only realizes his mistakes after Anna's burial.

Sex

The whole drama of [*The Kreutzer Sonata*], which has been continually escaping me, is now clear in my head. **He taught her sensuality. The doctors forbade her to have children. She's well fed, well dressed, and there are all temptations of art. How can she keep from falling?** He must feel that he himself drove her to it, that **he'd murdered her earlier when he'd come to hate her**, that he was searching for a pretext and was glad when he'd found one...(Tolstoy's Diary, July 4th, 1889)

The second theme about which Sofia and Tolstoy deviate in their respective works is sex. This theme encompasses sex both within and outside marriage as well as societal and personal attitudes towards sex and its role in love and marriage. At the very beginning of *The Kreutzer Sonata* prior to any narrative, Tolstoy includes two epigraphs which directly reference this theme:

But I say unto you, that **whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.** [Matthew 5:28]

His disciples say unto him, if the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. But he said unto them, all men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: **and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.** [Matthew 19:10-12] (3)

Given the history of his spiritual awakening, it is no surprise that Tolstoy begins *The Kreutzer Sonata* with two bible passages, as he believed strongly in the direct use of biblical text to derive meaning. Strikingly, Tolstoy chose to cite two passages which represent biblical teachings on sex, both of which paint sex in a negative and unholy light. This choice supports Tolstoy's dedication to direct biblical interpretation, and by association relates the story he is about to tell with the teachings of Christ. This adds legitimacy to his words and his newly assumed role as a quasi-prophet. As Elizabeth Abbot states in her book *A History of Celibacy* (2000), "after the Bible, *The Kreutzer Sonata* is possibly the world's best-known literary endorsement of chastity" (369). Just as in the bible, Tolstoy mandates that celibacy is a clear path to closeness with God, and preserves the moral purity of humanity. As is evidenced by the inclusion of the epigraph, the main theme of *The Kreutzer Sonata* lies in the advocacy of a celibate lifestyle, to which marriage is simply an intermediary solution for those not strong enough to completely give up sex. As Tolstoy once said to his disciples, "[it] all depends on the plane in which a man finds himself- if he feels he must marry, let him do so; but, if he is capable of living the celibate life, marriage is a fall, a sin" (Quoted in Knowlson, 125). Therefore, a complete lack of sex or sexual feelings is advocated throughout *The Kreutzer Sonata*.

Tolstoy's earnest defense of celibacy begins after the initial discussion between train passengers, as Pozdnyshev relates his story of woe to the single passenger. Sex emerges

(alongside love) as the key motivator for Pozdnyshev's fate and his eventual act of murder nearly immediately:

Until my marriage I lived like everyone else, that is, in depravity; and like everyone of our circle living a depraved life, **I was certain that I was living just as I should.** I thought of myself as a charming fellow and a completely moral man. (12)

Pozdnyshev, unlike the others in his circle, “was not a seducer, had no unnatural appetites and didn't make depravity the main goal of life”, yet this did not make a difference in the eventual outcome of his life (12). The “central abomination” of depravity, which Pozdnyshev soon discusses, does not lie in the physical act of sex but instead lies in the disregard of morals (13):

Depravity doesn't reside in anything physical; no physical outrage constitutes depravity. **Depravity, genuine depravity, consists precisely in freeing yourself from any moral relations to a woman with whom you've engaged in physical intimacy.** (13)

The crux of the problem, for Pozdnyshev and Tolstoy, lies in the freedom a man feels from any sort of spiritual connection or moral obligation after the act of sex. Pozdnyshev goes on to describe an episode in which he was only able to feel free after sending a young woman some money after their liaison. As soon as he payed the “woman who'd given herself to [him] after probably falling in love with [him]”, Pozdnyshev felt as though he no longer had a moral obligation to her, therefore dissociating the concepts of spiritual communion and sex (12). Of course, this dissociation is what eventually drives him to murder. Only after a lifetime of suffering will Pozdnyshev “underst[and] what's supposed to be...all the horror of what really is” (12).

Tolstoy spends a considerable amount of time detailing Pozdnyshev's past dalliances, which serves to further associate his own youth with Pozdnyshev and the novella in general. As is well known, Tolstoy was a notorious philanderer prior to his marriage to Sofia. Even prior to

losing his virginity, Pozdnyshev, “like all unfortunate children of [the social] circle...already lost [his] innocence” (12). The bulk of Pozdnyshev’s adolescent history serves to criticize the role of society in the facilitation and encouragement of depravity, even going so far as to implicate the Church:

I’d never heard from any of my elders that what I was doing was wrong. Nor will anyone now. **True, it’s in the Commandments, but the Commandments are necessary only for answering the priest’s examination,** and even then, not really, not nearly as necessary as the commandment for using the Latin conjunction *ut* in conditional sentences. (14)

The government is also implicated by Tolstoy as a facilitator of depravity: “The danger of diseases? The solicitous government was taking care of that. It oversees the correct operation of houses of ill repute and ensures depravity for its schoolboys” (14). Essentially, nearly every form of establishment is critiqued for its participation in the moral corruption of humanity and safeguarding of debauchery. Regardless of class or rank, “ninety percent, if not more...fell [into sin] because people in [their] milieu regarded a fall as a most legitimate and salutary act for the sake of one’s health” (14). This fall, besides being encouraged by society, is also named as the root cause for Pozdnyshev (and consequently, other men) to lose the ability to interact normally and morally with women: “Yes, sir, a natural, simple relationship to women had been destroyed forever. Since then I’ve not had and could never have a pure relationship with a woman” (15). This identification of society and the establishment as being responsible for this destruction further distances Pozdnyshev from his own role in the eventual murder of his wife, which in both Tolstoy and Sofia’s eyes, began long before the actual murder.

The role of high society as a facilitator of sexual passions and excesses is a key area of complaint for Pozdnyshev. Even the worst of philanderers are “seen as the emblem of purity” when attending a ball in “clean linen, evening dress, or uniform”, despite the obvious truth that

lies beneath (15). Society both welcomes this kind of philandering under the auspices of social gatherings, and encourages women to take part in it as well. Women of society, “especially those schooled by men, know very well that talk about lofty matters- is just that, all talk, and that a man needs a woman’s body and everything that shows it off in the most alluring light” (18). According to Pozdnyshev, this understanding is cultivated and encouraged by high society to the point that women themselves believe this is the proper way to behave:

Ask any experienced coquette who’s given herself the task of captivating a man which she would rather risk: to be convicted of lying, cruelty, even dissoluteness in the presence of the man she’s trying to charm, or to appear before him in a poorly made, unattractive dress- **she’ll always prefer the former.** (18)

High society is therefore categorized as “simply one unceasing brothel”, in which women’s interests completely align with prostitutes (18): “As the [prostitute] uses every means to entice men, so do [women in high society]. There is no difference at all. To define it precisely, one need only say that short-term prostitutes are usually despised, whereas long-term prostitutes are well respected” (18). Pozdnyshev also takes the opportunity to point out other conditions of society that contribute to its identity as a brothel:

I was brought up under conditions where amorous young people are forced to grow like cucumbers in a greenhouse. And **our stimulating, excessive food combined with our total physical idleness constitutes nothing other than a systematic excitement of lust.** (18)

The fact that Tolstoy associated rich foods and the lack of physical labor with this “Brothel-Society” also furthered his teachings on the great virtues of a peasant life, in which physical labor was a constant and meat was hard to come by. In *The Kreutzer Sonata* and most of his philosophical works, Tolstoy consistently contrasts the peasant life with the decadence and debauchery of society, a life that Tolstoy attempted to conform to in his later years. His clear admonishment of music (Beethoven’s Sonata No. 9, Op. 47 in A Major is the central example) as

another motivator for lust has been examined in detail by Burrell (2002), Dame (2014), and Eguchi (1996), who further explore his association of stimulating music and sexual depravity in their respective works.

When questioned by the train passenger how he reconciles his advocacy for universal celibacy on moral grounds with the resulting extinction of humanity, Pozdnyshev responds quickly:

“Ah, yes, as long as the human race won’t perish!” he said with irony, as if anticipating this familiar and unprincipled objection. “Preach abstinence from childbearing in the name of allowing English lords to continue their gluttony as long as they wish- that’s all right. Preach abstinence from childbearing in the name of greater pleasure- that’s all right; **but just breathe one word about abstinence from childbearing in the name of morality- good Lord, what an outcry!”** (24)

For Pozdnyshev and Tolstoy, the human race is not meant to exist forever. Instead, they believe that humanity has been given a prophecy to fulfill: a prophecy that will be fulfilled when all humanity will “join together as one in love” (24). Once all of humanity is united in the search for “goodness, attainable through abstinence and purity”, the prophecy will be complete, and “there’d be no further reason to live” (25). Pozdnyshev goes on to describe physical passions as a “safety valve” to humanity, a factor which is simultaneously responsible for the current generation’s troubles, but will also ensure the possibility of another generation, in which the prophecy may be fulfilled (25). It is then up to the next generation to strive for complete celibacy.

The question of sex in the confines of marriage is also subservient to these principles, with Pozdnyshev quoting a portion of Tolstoy’s epigraph (Matthew 5:28): “The words of the Gospel...relates not only to other men’s wives, but precisely - and above all - to one’s own wife” (26). Once Pozdnyshev was married, he at first relished sexual relations with his wife, only to

realize after the murder that the couple's "hostile relationship was...concealed from [them] by the [constant] reappearance of concentrated sensuality, that is, lovemaking" (27). In the throes of passion, both he and his wife come to ignore their increasingly toxic relationship, which always resurfaces once the passion has diminished. In fact, both the couple's love and hatred for each other "were one and the same animal emotion, only from different ends" (39).

The fact that this passion reappears once Pozdnyshev's wife is pregnant or nursing is also considered an abomination: "...the woman, contrary to her nature, must at the very same time be pregnant, and nursing, and a lover; she must be something that no animal stoops to" (29). According to Pozdnyshev, this "crude, outright violation of the laws of nature" is also responsible for the large number of institutionalized women experiencing hysteria, which he calls "shriekers" (29). Tolstoy's beliefs about sex during pregnancy and nursing are extended to his theories on the role of women in society as mothers. When Pozdnyshev's wife is instructed by doctors not to nurse her child after an illness, he is enraged, claiming that the freedom from these duties made her "female coquetry that had previously been dormant...ar[ise] with special force"(33). This particular aspect of *The Kreutzer Sonata* is yet another direct allusion to Tolstoy and Sofia's relationship. As Sofia discusses in her autobiographical work *My Life* (1904-16), Tolstoy took on a comparable attitude when she herself was unable to nurse after an illness (97).

Perhaps the most striking image of sex in *The Kreutzer Sonata* comes only five pages away from the conclusion, as Pozdnyshev stabs his wife to death. Møller (1988) discusses in detail the intertwining "sexual and moral symbolism" found in the scene, specifically noting that the stabbing is the last time he "stick[s] something into his wife in a state of animal excitement" (13). The image of the dagger piercing her corset is very important here, as Møller sees it as an device which has "formed [her] as a sexual object" (13):

I plunged the dagger into her left side with all my might, just below her ribs...[and] the act became conscious with extraordinary clarity. **I heard and recall the momentary resistance of her corset and of something else, then the penetration of the knife into something soft...** I withdrew it at once wishing to remedy what I'd done and to stop doing it. (66)

It is only when Pozdnyshv's wife cries out to the nanny, that he realizes "that it was impossible to remedy" (66). Just as Pozdnyshv loses his innocence forever as a result of society's depravity, so does he end his torment, in a violent act representative of the very act he advocates against: "At the very moment of the murder he has symbolically broken through a shell of sensuality that has excluded him from the true love of his fellow human beings" (Møller, 13). It is only with this final act, that he is able to see his wife without eyes clouded by jealousy or sexual passion:

I glanced at the children and at her bruised, swollen face; **for the first time I forgot all about myself, my rights, my pride, and for the first time I saw in her a human being.** Everything that had offended me seemed so insignificant - all my jealousy...(69)

As discussed in the previous section on the theme of love, Sofia comments much less extensively on sex and its role in both society and marriage. Although Anna enjoys some moments of intimacy with her husband, she is unable to fully formulate a clear opinion on sex by the end of the novella. The only definitive answer given is that spiritual affinity must be held paramount over carnal passions in both love and marriage. Like Tolstoy did in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, "Whose Fault?" details the vacillating nature of Anna and Prozorsky's relationship, describing in similar terms the alternating periods of hostility and passion. There is one clear difference however, as Anna, in contrast to the unnamed wife in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, does not fully lose herself in these periods of passion as the husband does. She remains aware, consistently acknowledging Prozorsky's exclusively physical admiration for her, and often

engages in sex only to preserve her family or attempt to retain the love (albeit carnal) the Prince has for her:

She also recalled those nights when, having spent several hours in a row in the nursery, ministering to a sick child, exhausted, she had returned to her bedroom to rest, and how **her husband, without even noticing her fatigue and chagrin, opened his arms to her to embrace her and, like a beast, demanded her passionate response to his advances:** worn out both physically and morally, offended by his indifference, **she wept unnoticed by her husband, yet yielded to him, afraid of losing the love of the man to whom she had pledged her life once and for all.** (108)

Sofia also describes the Prince's initial attraction to Anna, which is based exclusively on her appearance and his need to use it for his own pleasure:

Once again he pictured Anna: **in his imagination he mentally uncovered her graceful legs and her whole strong, supple girlish body...** "Why does it suddenly seem that I can't live without those clear eyes, that pure, sweet, cheerful look?...All of a sudden I've noticed that she's a woman, there's no one else but her, and that I must, yes, **I can't do otherwise, I must possess this child...**" (75)

It is important to note the consistent themes of possession with which Sofia frames her narrative; Anna is constantly presented as a multifaceted individual, with artistic, moral, and spiritual merits, however these qualities are completely ignored by Prozorsky in favor of a need to possess her sexually:

He had sensed in this girl that rare type of woman who, beneath her innocent, childlike image, hides within herself all the qualities of an ardent, intricate, artistic, passionate female personality. And **although as a counterbalance to nature, the highest values of religiosity and chastity were firmly and unconsciously established in this young girl's soul, the prince failed to appreciate these latter ideals of hers and didn't even notice them...**(83)

Unlike in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, "Whose Fault?" paints a picture of a young vibrant girl, who is charmed and taken advantage of by an older man, unaware that her understanding of their relationship is much different than his:

“What’s the matter with him?” she wondered. “He just praised me so politely, but now **there’s something strange in his eyes, something animal-like...Why is that?**” Yes, why indeed? She was at fault only because her figure, her hair, her youth, her well-made dress, and her shapely legs - **this whole temptation, unfamiliar to her childish innocence - had aroused this more experienced bachelor...**(82)

This above passage is one instance in which Sofia is directly targeting Tolstoy and the philosophies he expresses in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Written in lined school notebooks, Sofia’s manuscript of “Whose Fault?” directly quotes portions of Tolstoy’s work as a way to organize her text as an opponent to *The Kreutzer Sonata*. For this particular passage, she intended to respond to these lines in Tolstoy’s text (NOTE- the line included in brackets was not cited by Sofia, but is included here to provide context): “[That evening it seemed to me that she understood everything, everything that I was feeling and thinking]...In fact, it was only that her sweater suited her so well, as did her curls...” (*KS*, 16). Sofia’s version of events clearly paints Prozorsky in a more negative light, and explicitly focuses on the innocence of Anna over that of her appearance. In contrast, Tolstoy implies that as a society woman, regardless of her actual sexual experience, this woman is an active participant in the Brothel-like elements of high society, and never once discusses the possibility of her innocence. Anna is clearly not the experienced coquette that Pozdnyshev would associate with high society, and is extremely fearful of what may happen on her wedding night. In the carriage ride to the estate, the Prince attempts to embrace and kiss her, which Anna permits only because of her mother’s advice: ““Yes, this is what’s supposed to happen, just like this,’ she thought. ‘Mama said that I have to acquiesce and not be surprised by anything... Well, so be it... But... my God, how awful and... disgraceful...” (92). These disdainful reactions to sex and intimacy continue, even after Anna becomes accustomed to it.

Sofia consistently mentions the lack of effort on Prozorsky's part to accommodate Anna in these feelings of trepidation, remarking in no uncertain words that he had become so accustomed to liaisons with prostitutes that he forgot his role as a more experienced man:

He realized that of everything his depraved imagination had invented when he had dreamt about a honeymoon with his pretty eighteen-year-old bride, nothing had materialized but boredom - boredom, disenchantment, and the tormented state of his young wife. **Not once did it ever occur to him that he had to cultivate that aspect of amorous life that he was so accustomed to finding in those hundreds of women of every sort whom he had encountered previously.** (93)

This marks another passage in which Sofia is directly responding to *The Kreutzer Sonata*, specifically these lines (NOTE- the lines included in brackets were not cited by Sofia, but are included here to provide context):

[It's something like what I experienced when I was learning to smoke: I felt nauseous and my saliva was flowing, but I kept swallowing and pretending it was very nice. The pleasure from smoking comes later, if it comes at all, just as it does from that]: **the spouses must school themselves in vice in order to receive any pleasure from it.** (KS, 23)

Unlike Tolstoy, Sofia does not regard all sexual activity ("vice") to be inherently immoral, but also does not expect every person to be experienced in such matters. Through Sofia's distancing of "amorous life" from Tolstoy's ideas of immorality, sex becomes an act steeped in trust and guidance rather than a mechanical act which is practiced and learned for the purpose of pleasure alone, as it is characterized in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. This particular response to Tolstoy's text also further strengthens the importance of spiritual affinity as the most important element in a relationship in "Whose Fault?": spiritual affinity should be held paramount over other aspects of a relationship, such as sex, and is therefore a necessary precursor to a healthy sex life.

Anna's initial trepidation towards sex is also characterized as a positive quality by Sofia, as it ensures her loyalty to her husband once she becomes more comfortable with their "amorous life":

He didn't understand that **what distressed him so much now was in fact her main attraction and would guarantee his peace of mind with regard to her purity and fidelity in the future.** Nor did he understand that the arousal of her passion for him alone, even though it might come later, would always continue; that **her shyness with her husband would develop into an ever greater shyness with others and would assure his honor and equanimity forever.** (93)

The inclusion of this specific sentiment, may be interpreted as Sofia defending her own honor through the proxy figure of Anna. As a result of the initial circulation of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, society had become abuzz with gossip and rumors surrounding the inspiration for the tale. As much as Sofia saw herself represented in Pozdnyshev's unnamed wife, so did much of the reading public. This was extremely embarrassing for Sofia, as she had been fully dedicated to her husband and would not risk the loss of her children or happy family life for an affair. Even despite the couple's toxic relationship, Sofia felt morally obligated, just as Anna does, to fulfill the promises she made on her wedding day: "...Not once in my whole married life have I ever wronged my husband, with so much as a gesture or glance at another man!" (Sofia's Diary, February 12th, 1891).

The desire was so great to repair her reputation that Sofia made a journey to St. Petersburg in order to plead the case for the publication of the novella, which had come under severe criticism and censorship. This momentous meeting with Tsar Alexander III himself, was meant to dispel all doubts regarding her tainted reputation: "Everyone now knows that I *pleaded with the Tsar* for it. If that story had been written about me and my relations to Lyovochka, then I would hardly have begged him to let it be published. Everyone will see this now" (Sofia's Diary,

June 1st, 1891). Sofia's role in the publication of *The Kreutzer Sonata* is only one example of her involvement with the drafting and publication of most of Tolstoy's significant works. This aspect of their relationship will be the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter 3

A letter arrived for me in Yasnaya from the Minister [I.N. Durnovo] while I was away, announcing that he had given permission for *The Kreutzer Sonata* and the “Epilogue” to be published in the *Complete Works*. In Moscow I learnt of this at the press where it was printed. **I cannot help but secretly exulting in my success in overcoming all the obstacles, that I managed to obtain an interview with the Tsar, and that I, a woman, have achieved something that nobody else could have done!** (Sofia’s Diary, March 10th, 1891)

After her momentous meeting with Tsar Alexander III regarding the publication of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, as well as a supplementary “Epilogue” written by Tolstoy in order to clarify and summarize the philosophies he supports, Sofia had been successful. The Tsar himself had authorized the publication of both pieces in a *Collected Works* volume, which Sofia had fought for in order to financially support the estate and her children. Interestingly, the Tsar himself had reportedly enjoyed the volume, as well as the Ober-Procurator of the Most Holy Synod, Konstantin Pobyedonostev (Shirer, 133). Despite his traditionally reactionary stance, Pobyedonostev described *The Kreutzer Sonata* as “a powerful work”, and stated that “if I ask myself whether I must condemn it for immorality, I cannot bring myself to say that I should” (Quoted in Shirer, 133). Unfortunately, this attitude did not align with that of the Minister of Internal Affairs Ivan Durnovo and church officials, who prior to Sofia’s visit with the Tsar, had succeeded in banning any publication (single publication or use of the work in collected volumes) of *The Kreutzer Sonata*. After Sofia’s personal visit to the Tsar however, she had triumphed in securing the permissions needed to publish the manuscript in a volume of collected works (*Volume 13*), and soon returned to Yasnaya Polyana, where Tolstoy greeted her coldly: “Sonya arrived about three days ago. I find it most unpleasant that she has been ingratiating herself with the Tsar...I couldn’t control myself and said some harsh things to her” (Tolstoy’s Diary, April 18th, 1891).

By this point, the couple's marriage had completely broken down as a result of tensions caused by Tolstoy's spiritual crisis, his ever-growing following of Tolstoyans, and *The Kreutzer Sonata* itself. The couple had experienced their fair share of both positive and negative periods in their partnership, however, this latter part of their marriage can be pinpointed as the tipping point in the complete collapse of their relationship. Despite the marriage's obvious collapse however, Sofia and Leo remained together until his death, with Sofia even insisting on continuing her tradition of taking a photo together each year on their wedding anniversary. In fact, the last photo of Tolstoy alive happens to be their anniversary portrait taken on September 24th, 1910, nearly two months before his infamous passing at Astapovo Station. Much like the character of Anna in her own work, "Whose Fault?", Sofia remained loyal to the vows she took nearly fifty years prior and remained dedicated to her family, professing until the very end a love for her husband which could never fully disappear.

In addition to remaining dedicated to her children and the functioning of the estate during this period of great struggle in their marriage, Sofia also never stepped away from her role in the editing and publication process for most of Tolstoy's works. Sofia's role as editor, copyist, and assistant to Tolstoy had begun in full force in earlier years with her contributions to *War and Peace* (1869): an editing and publication process that spanned seven years. Prior to her editing of Tolstoy's first monumental work, Sofia had acted as copyist and editor for Tolstoy's short story *Polikushka* (1863), as well as some other minor works, but her role as copyist, editor, and publisher fully bloomed with her work on *War and Peace* (Donskov, xlviii). As Ekaterina Tolstaya, the wife of Tolstoy's great-grandson and current director of Yasnaya Polyana Museum, writes in her forward to Katz's *The Kreutzer Sonata Variations* (2014): "Able to decipher [Tolstoy's] handwriting extremely well, she copied his manuscripts and prepared them for

publication...Sofiya Andreevna re-copied [*War and Peace*] several times...[and] she took on numerous tasks and was successful in all of them” (viii). Since the beginning of their marriage in 1862, Tolstoy had become deeply focused on completing and editing the manuscript for *War and Peace*, a process which Sofia quickly became involved in. Each and every night during the writing and editing process, Sofia would meticulously copy the pages written during the day, transforming an originally disorganized, nearly illegible manuscript into a neat and concise text which could be re-read and edited with more ease. This process would continue each time Tolstoy made revisions, with Sofia re-copying sections of the manuscript to match the new revisions.

As Sofia was educated and literarily talented in her own right, she made an ideal copy-editor. Her long standing love of reading, art, history, and music helped inform her work, and even before *War and Peace*'s publication, Sofia recognized its significance. In a letter addressed to her sister Tatiana in 1867, Sofia remarked: “All this winter, Leo has been writing in a state of emotion that often goes as far as tears. In my opinion, his novel *War and Peace* is going to be something quite out of the common run” (Quoted in T. Tolstoy, 22). In addition to aiding her nightly copy sessions, Sofia's artistic and literary talents also influenced the content and organization of the novel. In her diary, Sofia describes how Tolstoy would often listen to her opinions and be inspired to make edits as a result: “I morally experience a whole world of impressions, thoughts, while rewriting Leo's novel... We often talk with him about the novel, and for some reason (what constitutes my pride) he really believes and listens to my judgements” (Quoted in Porudominskij, 161, My translation). This is corroborated by Tolstoy himself in a letter to Sofia:

Dear Sonya, I shall never forget how one day you told me that the whole
historico-military side of *War and Peace*, over which I had labored so hard,

was coming out badly, and that the best part would be the psychological side, the characters and the pictures of family life. **It couldn't have been truer, and I have not forgotten how you were able to see that and tell me.** (Quoted in T. Tolstoy, 22)

Given the amount of times she had read and copied the manuscript and publication proofs (as well as her role in the subject matter of the novel), Sofia can be identified as the second most important figure (besides the author himself) to the publication and success of the novel. Maxim Gorky also corroborates Sofia's highly productive role of editor during this period:

We do not know what- or how- Leo Tolstoy's wife spoke to him in these moments when **they sat eye to eye as he read to her (before anyone else) the book chapters he had only just finished writing.** Mindful of the genius' monstrous intuitive insight, I still think that **certain aspects of the images of women included in his great novel [*War and Peace*] could only be perceived by a woman, who in turn suggested them to the novelist.** (Quoted in Donskov 2010, xxviii).

As Sofia discusses in *My Life*, her role as editor and copyist became less of a chore and more something to look forward to; a foray into her husband's work which she had so admired prior to their marriage:

The transcribing of *War and Peace*— and indeed, all Lev Nikolaevich's works — was a source of great aesthetic pleasure for me. I fearlessly looked forward to my evening labours, and joyfully anticipated just what I would derive from the delight of becoming further acquainted with his work as it unfolded. **I was enthralled by this life of thought, these twists and turns, surprises and all the various unfathomable aspects of his creative genius.** (Tolstaya, 83)

Not only was she instrumental in the writing process, but Sofia played a key role in the financial success of *War and Peace*. Tolstoy had at first decided to serialize the novel in the monthly journal *Russian Herald* (Русский Вѣстникъ), in which the first two volumes of the novel appeared. Following a lack of “enthusiasm among the reviewers and readers”, Sofia encouraged her husband to abandon the idea of a serialized publication in favor of publishing volume by

volume, independent of any journal (Shirer, 70). Although the novel in its serialized form had brought in some money, Sofia was convinced that it would be more profitable in a traditional book format. In addition to the financial reasons for this proposed change, *War and Peace* simply didn't lend itself well to the serialized format with its lack of "teasers at the end of each installment to tempt a reader to buy the next issue" (Shirer, 70). Tolstoy agreed with his wife's suggestion, and soon made a highly valuable deal with a Moscow printing house under the auspices of his personal friend, Pyotr Bartenyev, who was also the editor of *Russian Archive* (Shirer, 70). This deal exponentially increased the profits of the novel, with the first edition (comprising six volumes) costing 8 rubles (Shirer, 70). In comparison with the money earned from serialization rights, this was a huge increase, and the new format also provided Tolstoy with a wider audience pool. During this period, it is also known that Sofia, who was fluent in French and German, would make Russian translations of works that interested Tolstoy and even acted as French translator for some minor works.

The couple's next literary collaboration was Tolstoy's second monumental work, *Anna Karenina* (1875-77 serialized, 1878 book format). After a years-long period of wrestling with the idea of publishing a novel about Peter the Great, Tolstoy had pivoted drastically, as Sofia notes in her diary:

Last night, L. suddenly said to me, "I have written a page and a half, and it seems good." I assumed this was yet another attempt to write about the Peter the Great period, and didn't pay much attention. But then, **I realized that he had, in fact, embarked on a novel about the private lives of present-day people. So strange the way he just pitched into it.** (March 19th, 1973)

This began a new period approximately four years in length, during which the couple once again worked closely on the editing and publication of a manuscript. As she had done for *War and Peace*, Sofia spent each night copying Tolstoy's chaotically messy manuscripts and became an

invaluable counselor to him during the writing process. The writing and editing process for *Anna Karenina* was much more brutal than *War and Peace* however, with Tolstoy completing and then tossing numerous versions. He even entertained the thought of abandoning the novel, as the process was both painstaking and not producing his desired results. Sofia and Tolstoy also suffered a string of family deaths during these years, three of which were their children: Petya, Nikolai, and Varvara. These losses were distressing for Tolstoy himself, but Sofia was completely devastated by the loss of her children. As is evidenced by her lifelong commitment to her family, Sofia's children were her utmost priority, and to lose one was a pain she struggled to bear. In a diary entry after Petya's death, Sofia despairs about the loss of her once vivacious 15-month old: "What a bright, happy little boy- I loved my darling too much and now there is nothing" (November 11th, 1873).

These deaths undoubtedly affected the progress of the novel on both Leo and Sofia's part, with both spouses being forced to grapple with family tragedy during an already stressful writing period. Over the four years, Tolstoy began three different versions of *Anna Karenina*, the second of which made it all the way to printing plates before he changed his mind (Shirer, 75). As was the case with the first two volumes of *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina* was serialized in the *Russian Herald*, but Tolstoy struggled and oftentimes failed to complete sections on time. After a lengthy process clouded by the grief of losing so many family members, Tolstoy finally completed the last section on April 15th, 1877 (Shirer, 78)².

Despite her grief over the loss of her children, Sofia remained dedicated to her role as copyist, editor, and publicist throughout the writing and publishing process of *Anna Karenina*. In addition to her normal editorial contributions, Sofia "served as a prototype" for the character

² This was followed by an attempt to include yet another part addressing the ongoing war between Russia and Turkey, but disagreements with the publisher eventually forced Tolstoy to publish it independently.

Kitty in the novel, alongside Levin, for whom the author himself serves as a prototype (In Katz, 2014, E. Tolstaya, vii). Many episodes in Kitty and Levin's relationship can be directly connected to Sofia and Leo's own relationship, the most prominent example being the scene in which Levin has Kitty read his diaries prior to their marriage. Sofia also acted as an invaluable resource to the goings on of society and the aristocratic social life, which were crucial to the plot: Sofia had become "[Tolstoy's] eyes and ears on the social and political scene in Moscow, from where she would report to him through her letters sent back to his preferred abode at Yasnaya Polyana" (Donskov, xlvi). Sofia was also directly responsible for many of the descriptions given of dresses and other clothing in *Anna Karenina* (and *War and Peace*), which Tolstoy struggled to detail on his own (Gromova, 305). These descriptions can be identified as some of the few confirmed times that Sofia was directly responsible for a line of text in Tolstoy's works.

Another important project on which the couple collaborated was *Azbuka (ABC Book)*, a learning primer originally meant to educate peasant children at the Yasnaya Polyana school. First published in 1872 and again in 1875 with significant revisions as *Novaya Azbuka (New ABC Book)*, the primer was eventually introduced into the Russian school system by the Ministry of Education (Torresin, 197). Comprising four books, the 758 volume included a volume on each of the following topics: "a) the alphabet and fundamentals of grammar; b) readings for elementary literacy instruction; c) religious contents; d) scientific notions" (Torresin, 197). Tolstoy had previously made attempts to enrich the resources at peasant schools, but became newly focused on the creation of a comprehensive primer as a result of his spiritual revelations in the 1870s. Tolstoy wasn't the only one interested in this project, however. Porudominskij describes Sofia as "Leo Tolstoy's closest assistant in the work on *Azbuka*", a role she took to enthusiastically (161). As well as her more formal work on Tolstoy's manuscripts, Sofia had also spent a considerable

amount of time educating her own children, for which she made specialized primers and grammar books (Donskov, xlvi). This prior experience and passion for children's education made Sofia the perfect candidate to edit, copy, and help publish the *Azbuka*. Many of the short stories and fables included were inspired by actual peasant children's tales, which Tolstoy would take a dictation of at a school on the estate and then modify to suit the primer. Sofia also took part in these dictations, and was highly involved in their adaptation to the primer.

Sofia's role as editor and copyist of Tolstoy's religious and philosophical works is more nebulous than her previous role. As has been discussed, Sofia took an active role in the editing and publication of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, one of the most famous works from Tolstoy's period of spiritual and philosophical writing, but her role with his initial forays into essay writing and religious commentary is much more distant. As Sofia explains in *My Life*, because of her own moral and religious objections to the topics and theories Tolstoy was addressing, she initially refused to act as copyist or editor:

When Lev Nikolaevich tired of creative work and began to write his religious-philosophical essays, **I got tired of transcribing them. The same intense work with the same endless corrections, but this monotonous task, all revolving around the same stubborn thought with the agonizingly flat denial of everything in the world, failed to interest me** to the same extent as Lev Nikolaevich's fiction or his extremely varied subject matter of previous times. Still, I kept up the copying work. But then he began his *Criticism of Dogmatic Theology*, which featured such coarse, even vituperative words and phrases that they sent shock waves right through my heart. Here he was heaping abuse on the church...and on everything that concerned the Orthodox faith...**As a member of the church, I did not feel or share what Lev Nikolaevich was saying...and so I endured terrible sufferings in transcribing his essays...** Then one fine day I gathered all the **papers together- his and mine- took them to him and said that I would no longer be his assistant or transcribe his invective.** (Tolstaya, 85)

This boycott on copyist and editorial duties wouldn't continue for long, but this episode represents one of Sofia's non-literary acts of resistance. As she grew older and was advised by

her oculist to pull back from close editorial work, Sofia leaned more into her role as estate manager and made the official transition to Tolstoy's main publishing agent. While her attentions were focused on these matters, most of the editorial and copyist work for Tolstoy was taken up by her daughters (*My Life*, 85).

Sofia's role as Tolstoy's publisher fully blossomed in the later years of their relationship, as is evidenced by her personal trip to Tsar Alexander III regarding *The Kreutzer Sonata* and her increased dealings with the management of her husband's literary and ancestral estate. In addition to this momentous meeting with Tsar Alexander III, her collaborations with Tolstoy's friend and editorial advisor Nikolai Strakhov increased incrementally, allowing Sofia to have a more active role in the typesetting and publication process (Donskov, xlix). Between 1886 and 1891, Sofia championed the publication of eight editions of collected works and the republication of fifteen volumes of single works, which evidences her growing authority as Tolstoy's literary executor (Donskov, xlix)³. Following the creation of Tolstoy's secret will in September of 1909 however, Sofia was replaced by Chertkov as official literary executor, leading to years of conflict between the two after Tolstoy's death in 1910, which included court battles over the use of papers previously deposited in the Moscow Museum of History (Shirer, 370).

Sofia's highly detailed documentation of her life and marriage to Tolstoy in *My Life* unfortunately ends in the year 1901, as Sofia died before she could complete this final project. Although we have a collection of letters, diaries, and other documents, the lack of a detailed narrative for the last nine years of their marriage is regrettable. Sofia's *Avtobiografija*, written in between periods of work on *My Life* does document these final years, however "there is little factual information...which could contribute significantly to a present-day understanding of Tolstoy or his works" (Donskov, 2010, xlvi). Thankfully, scholars have been able to piece

³ Also of note is Sofia's sole maintenance of a book warehouse at their Moscow property (Donskov, xlix)

together a clearer understanding of these later years through document analysis and synthesis. In 1901, Tolstoy was officially excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox Church as a result of his criticism of doctrine and practices, and as a result, became an even more sacred figure to his entourage of Tolstoyans. Tolstoy's identity as a cult figure increased exponentially over this time, with the general population and his followers seeing him "more and more not so much as a famous writer but as a kind of guru" who represented and spearheaded a new way of living morally and spiritually (Donskov, 2017, 199).

For Sofia, these years were extremely difficult, as she had to consistently battle with Chertkov for primary influence over Tolstoy and his estate. In her own creative life, these later years of marriage are notable for Sofia's production of the bulk of her paintings, photographs, sketches, and short stories, while she also became more dedicated to practicing music. A collection of her short stories entitled *The Skeleton-Dolls and Other Stories* was published the same year of Tolstoy's death, 1910. These stories had been collected and revised over a period of years, with Sofia claiming that a few of them were dictated by her children in a similar manner to the short stories collected for the *Azbuka* (Donskov, 2017, 200). It is also during these later years that she began work on *My Life* as well as another autobiography.

On the eve of their 38th anniversary, Sofia wrote a letter to her husband from Moscow which expresses gratitude over all he has given her but also expresses her exhaustion and turmoil over the current state of their marriage:

I just got up, and the first thing I wanted to do was to write to you, dear Lëvochka, and **remember that day that united us for these many years we have spent together**. I feel very sad that we are not together today, but still I look upon you and the reminiscences of our life together all the better, all the more deeply and tenderly, and **I do want to thank you for the happiness which you gave me in times past, even while I regret that it has not continued throughout the rest of our life so strongly, fully and peacefully**. (September 23rd, 1900)

Despite the untraversable rift between them which had developed as a result of Tolstoy's increasing fanaticism and Sofia's moral and spiritual opposition to his new philosophies, Sofia remained dedicated to her husband to the end, continually expressing gratitude for the family life he had been able to give her. This dedication is exemplified by the famous photograph now housed at the State Tolstoy Museum (taken on November 7th, 1910) which shows Sofia pressed up against the outside window of Astapovo Station, struggling to see her husband after she had been denied access to his deathbed. She was denied entry by her own children and Tolstoy's doctors until a few hours before Tolstoy's death, after he had slipped into unconsciousness. Nearly immediately after his death, Chertkov and Sofia's antagonism for each other skyrocketed, and the future Soviet classification of Sofia as an evil mastermind began in full force as a result of Chertkov's role as literary executor.

Interestingly, prior to his death, Tolstoy had in some way anticipated this hostility towards her. In a letter addressed to Sofia on July 14th, 1910 (a mere four months before his death) Tolstoy writes that although she may be fearful of her portrayal in his diaries and letters and their effect on public opinion, he will provide a true "appraisal" of her life and their life together in the very same letter:

If you are worried by the thought that my diaries, [especially] those passages written under the influence of the moment concerning our disagreements and confrontations, might be used by future biographers who are prejudiced against you, then, apart from the [fact] that such expressions of temporary feelings either in your diaries or mine cannot possibly convey a true concept of our actual relations—if this worries you, I am happy for the opportunity to express in [my] diary, or simply through this [present] letter, my attitude towards you and my appraisal of your life. (July 14th, 1910)

In addition to professing his never-ending love for her, despite their struggles, Tolstoy provides an analysis for why their relationship broke down, the main reason being identified as their completely opposite views on life and its purpose:

Thirdly, **the main cause [of our difficulties] has been disastrous, for which neither you nor I are to blame—it is our diametrically opposite understanding of the meaning and purpose of life.** Everything in our conceptions of life has been diametrically opposite: our ways of life, our attitudes to others, our means of life —property, which I have considered a sin and which you [treat] as a necessary condition of life. So as to avoid a parting of our paths, in my own way of life have subjected myself to what are to me burdensome conditions, while you have taken these as concessions to your views — **[as a result of which] the misunderstanding between us has kept growing more and more.** (Tolstoy, July 14th, 1910)

Interestingly, Tolstoy identifies a lack of blame on either of their parts for this fundamental difference, and continues on to provide a less than positive portrait of himself as a husband to Sofia:

As a licentious person, extremely sexually profligate, long past his first [stage of] youth, married you, a pure, good and clever 18-year old girl and, despite my dirty, profligate past, you have lived with me almost 50 years, loving me, in a laborious, difficult life, bearing children, feeding, educating, caring for them and for me, and **not giving into those temptations which could so easily take hold of any strong, healthy and beautiful woman in your situation.** But you have lived [your life] in such a way that **I have nothing to fault you for.** I cannot and do not blame you for not following me in my unique spiritual movement, since each person’s spiritual life is a secret between them and God, and one cannot demand it of others. **And if I have demanded this of you, then I have been mistaken and am quite at fault in this.** (July 14th, 1910).

This sincere sounding appraisal is given right before Tolstoy addresses Sofia’s concerns about Chertkov and the doomed future of their marriage if Sofia does not “accept these conditions of [his] for a good and peaceful life” (Tolstoy, July 14th, 1910). Writing a day later, Sofia composed a letter to address Tolstoy’s words and provides her own “appraisal” of the situation:

I was going over it all last night in my thoughts, and it became painfully clear to me that **you have been caressing me with one hand while showing me a knife with the other. This knife is a threat, and a very poignant one—a threat to go back on your promise and to secretly leave me if I don't change my ways.** So what am I to believe if you can go back on your word the very next day? (July 15th, 1910)

It is clear from this letter and others written in the months leading up to Tolstoy's death, that there was little opportunity for a reconciliation. As Tolstoy distanced himself from Sofia and eventually left entirely, Sofia was simultaneously experiencing a low point in her mental health. There had been a bevy of earlier incidents when Sofia experienced depression, anxiety, paranoia, and suicidal ideations, but these last few months of tremendous stress had pushed Sofia over the edge. She would consistently vacillate between asking her husband for forgiveness in order for him to return home and threatening suicide. In many of her final letters to her husband, Sofia discusses the treatment she is undergoing for these symptoms and Tolstoy reiterates that her "hysteria" and final two suicide attempts after his sudden flight from the estate is a main reason for his departure. After undergoing some treatment, Sofia was able to travel to Astapovo, where she was able to bid her final farewell to Tolstoy after he lost consciousness.

In the few months after Tolstoy's death, Sofia struggled to cope; after all, she had been married to him for her entire adult life, and every path, room, or object at the estate constantly reminded her of Tolstoy (Shirer, 369). After some time, Sofia began to find fulfillment in the management of Yasnaya Polyana again, taking great pride in showing guests Tolstoy's study and bedroom, but never went a day without a visit to his gravesite (Shirer, 369). Although Sofia was able to reconcile with some of her children who had denied her access to Tolstoy's death bed, a reconciliation with Chertkov was impossible. Sofia's role after her husband's death in the management, function, and organization of both the physical estate (Yasnaya Polyana) and

Tolstoy's literary estate is perhaps her most lasting legacy. Her careful preservation and organization of over 22,000 documents (now called the S. A. Tolstaya Archives at the State Tolstoy Museum in Moscow) have helped scholars to better understand the day to day functioning of Tolstoy, his family life, and his friendships with contemporaries (Donskov, 2017, xlix). Her careful dating of these documents have also helped scholars trace the development of Tolstoy's manuscripts, without which any such tracing would be conjecture (Donskov, 2010, xxxii).

Sofia also conducted a project to annotate and publish Tolstoy's letters to her (first edition in 1913, second edition in 1915), to which she added over 700 annotations, providing more clarity or context for his words (Donskov, 2010, li). In one surviving printer's copy of the second edition housed at the Yasnaya Polyana Museum, Sofia also took the time to provide commentary on every page of the text, inserting a sheet with her clarifications. This would be one of the last projects that Sofia worked actively on, with the commentaries being dated from January 4th, 1919 until her death that same year on November 4th (Donskov, 2010, lii). These commentaries included, among others, descriptions and personalities of relatives, friends, and guests to the estate, as well as providing more information about the couple's joint effort for famine relief from 1891 to 1893. Not only did Sofia preserve, organize, and comment on documents, she also embarked on a project in 1914 to make a complete inventory of Yasnaya Polyana, going room by room and individually providing a description for each piece of furniture or object (Donskov, 2010, lv). These descriptions oftentimes included how or when Tolstoy used them, and many of them were photographed by Sofia herself. Without Sofia's careful and constant maintenance of Tolstoy's ancestral estate, as well as her remarkable archival efforts, we would not have as great of an understanding of Tolstoy as a man and as a writer, as we do today.

Conclusion

As the eminent Tolstaya scholar Andrew Donskov states in his introduction to his translation of *My Life*, “the fact that Sofia Andreevna Tolstaya was such an integral part not only of her husband’s family and social life but also of his professional career as a writer, makes her writings...*the* most important documentary source for Tolstoy scholarship to be published in many, many years” (lix). In addition to these documentary sources and her careful preservation of the estate, Sofia’s fictional work stands out as a complex lens through which to view a highly troubled but fruitful marriage, as well as the inner psyche of a woman often obscured by the man standing in front of her. Although Sofia produced a large body of fictional work, none were more significant than *Whose Fault?*, which is not only valuable to our understanding of the couple’s differing philosophies and views on life (as it compares to *The Kreutzer Sonata*), but is also important to our understanding of the female experience in Russia in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Tolstaya’s rebuttal to her husband’s controversial novella constitutes her own personal engagement with the “Woman Question”, a topic on which the opinions of women are scarce to come by. Through the comparison of *Whose Fault?* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*, each author’s response to this question is contextualized according to their own beliefs, experiences, and most importantly, their relationship with each other.

As is evidenced by the body of scholarship discussing the topic of Sofia and Leo Tolstoy’s marriage and partnership, this is not only a relevant and intriguing topic, but is one needing further expansion. This presents a crucial gap in scholarship, which must be filled in order to create a more accurate description of the Tolstoyan estate and literary canon; a canon which some say would have been impossible without Tolstaya’s influence. In this sense, the gap must be filled in order to create a more robust understanding of Tolstoy’s literary legacy, and to

acknowledge the contributions of a much overlooked partner. Although this text contributes to the filling of the gap, more research and analysis is still needed to fully understand the scope of Sofia's influence, especially as it relates to specific passages contained in his work. The labor is also not over in the battle to fully restore Sofia's reputation not as an evil mastermind, but as a loyal and industrious assistant, who contributed much more than one would think. This is not to say that Sofia was perfect however: her weaknesses can be seen in her struggles with mental health and feelings of jealousy, among others. That being said, Sofia was not the only figure with weaknesses in the marriage; Tolstoy's mistreatment of his family and penchant for arrogance doesn't make him free of blame. Although this text, building on the invaluable scholarship of others, delves deep into the tragedy of Sofia and Leo's marriage, it still leaves one major question unanswered: **whose fault?** While some would choose to take sides on this question as to who holds most of the blame for the failure of their marriage, I will simply conclude with a striking passage from their daughter Tanya's book, *Tolstoy Remembered* (released posthumously in 1977):

Such was the life together of these two beings, as closely linked by mutual love as they were separated by the divergence of their aspirations. Intimately close to one another but also infinitely far apart. A peculiar instance of an eternal struggle between the power of the spirit and the domination of the flesh. **And who will take it upon himself to call one of them guilty?** (243)

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