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Radical Chastity: The Politics of Abstinence in Late Nineteenth Century Russian Literature

Wilson, Jennifer Louise

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RADICAL CHASTITY:

THE POLITICS OF ABSTINENCE IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY RUSSIAN LITERATURE

Jennifer Wilson

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Abstract

Radical Chastity: The Politics of Abstinence in Late Nineteenth Century Russian Literature explores the motivations and consequences of the radical Russian intelligentsia's critique of sexual relations between men and women. The first chapter examines the origins of "radical chastity" by discussing the trope of shyness in the personal and literary writings of the Russian raznochintsy. The raznochintsy, unschooled in aristocratic forms of courtship, often described experiencing feelings of intense shyness in the presence of society women. Eventually, these shy awkward manners came to be identified with the progressive politics espoused by many from the raznochintsy class, and were consequently cultivated even by members of the aristocracy who wanted to demonstrate their allegiance to revolutionary politics. The first chapter also explores Fyodor Dostoevsky's critique of the radical movement's rejection of sexual relations and family ties in the novel *Devils* [*Besy*]. The second chapter examines the challenges that women faced inserting themselves into the radical ascetic tradition. Pervasive gender stereotypes called into question the ability of women to fully reject marriage and family. In order to challenge this prejudice, the women of the nihilist movement often adhered to the chaste revolutionary program with more rigor than the men in their circles. The second chapter focuses primarily on a group of Russian nihilist women who studied medicine at the University of Zurich in the 1870s, the Fritsch Circle, and their self-fashioning as chaste revolutionaries. The third chapter looks at spinsters in the novels at Lev Tolstoy, and explores the challenge that women who remained unmarried by choice posed to the status quo. The fourth and final chapter is devoted to how Tolstoy's articulation of radical chastity was received in America and Great Britain, specifically by sexologists like Alice B. Stockham and Havelock Ellis who similarly associated chastity with progressive political agendas. The dissertation uses anti-social queer theory, which examines the politics of non-reproductive sexuality, as its methodology.

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I must also thank the wonderful faculty who I learned so much from during my time at Princeton. Ellen Chances' course on Chekhov began the process of converting me into a "19th century person." This dissertation topic arose out of her great Dostoevsky seminar and our reading of *Besy*. I also would like to thank Olga Hasty for being so supportive of me from early on in my graduate career all the way through to these final stages. Though the focus of this dissertation is prose, I have to thank Michael Wachtel whose courses on poetics gave me a greater appreciation for language and attention to detail. Serguei Oushakine's energy for innovation throughout my time here at Princeton was inspiring. Thank you Serguei for being supportive of me and my spinsters. Also, a great thank you as well to Irena Gross who took me under her wing as an assistant instructor and taught me so much about the nexus of art and political life.

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Introduction

The initial title for this dissertation was "Radical Chastity: Abstaining from Sex and Society in 19th century Russian Literature." I omitted "society" as it needed more context than a title could provide. That said, the idea of "abstaining from society" is crucial to the argument that I make in this dissertation, which is that for nineteenth century Russian radicals, there was an inextricable connection between chastity[1] and a rejection of bourgeois society. I argue that chastity was an "antisocial" sexual and political position that was seen by those who practiced it as a rejection of a form of social organization predicated on gender inequality. With the abolishment of serfdom and the emancipation of the slaves in America, there was a widespread sense among 1860s Russian radicals that change was imminent, and that that change would require a radical reimagining of social relations.

By "radicals" I refer to those members of the Russian intelligentsia who believed that social change (namely wealth redistribution, freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and women's rights) would only come about through a complete reorganization of Russian society brought on by revolution. However, in reading the literature of the time, these concrete political changes often seem secondary, sometimes irrelevant even. Nikolai Chernyshevsky's novel *What is to be Done?* (*Chto Delat'?*) (1863) devotes more time to the sleeping arrangements of its main characters than it does to any concrete policy demand. In Dostoevsky's anti-nihilist novel Devils [*Besy*] (1872), the major public scandal carried out at the hands of the revolutionaries is the

[1] In terms of terminology, this dissertation uses chastity and abstinence interchangeably. The Russian sources use various terms to express a similar idea including: Rakhmetovism, Puritanism, zastenchivost' (shyness), bezbrachie (celibacy), and vozderzhanie (abstinence). Though these words themselves differ in meaning to various degrees, I argue that they are all used by 1860s Russian radicals to discuss the practice or motivation behind abstaining from sexual relations.

interruption of a ball for governesses, and a poem warning the ladies present that they would not find husbands. These are just a couple of examples of a widespread phenomenon in which the reorganization of private life into an idealized chaste existence became the most thoroughly articulated mandate of Russian radicalism, and often perceived as its necessary "first step."

Methodologically, this study was informed by "the antisocial turn in queer theory," a school of thought that investigates the political potential of non-reproductive sexuality. Antisocial queer theory firmly locates itself within a politics of negativity that rejects cohesion and capitalist notions of productivity and success. The source text of "antisocial queer theory" is Leo Bersani's *Homos* (1995) in which he positions homosexuality against notions of community rooted in the bourgeois family. Similarly, in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), Lee Edelman allies the anti-procreative bent of antisocial queer theory with the Freudian death drive, and argues against notions of political progress predicated upon securing a better future for children. Since its incarnation, anti-social queer theory has expanded to include the notion of "queer failure." Articulated by Jack Halberstam in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), this subset of antisocial queer theory investigates the positive potential outcomes of "failing" to live up to gender-determined expectations dictated by capitalist society. Halberstam's work explores the potential of queer "un-belonging" and modes of cultural interpretation that celebrate failure.

In his study of Bersani's antisocial thesis, Halberstam recognizes that Bersani's "anti-communitarian" definition of sex can at first seem "counterintuitive" as it contradicts the traditional view of sexual love as the locus for intimacy:

> [Bersani's definition] upends our understanding of the interconnectedness of intimacy, romance and sexual contact and replaces it with a harsh but radically realistic recognition of both the selfishness of sex and its destructive power. The sexual instinct then, within this

formulation, nestles up against the death drive and constitutes an oppositional force.[2]

The subjects covered in this dissertation similarly exist within this "counterintuitive" approach to sex that sees in sexual relations not the creation of intimacy, but selfishness and the exploitation of women.

In the following four chapters, I attempted to understand how chastity upset traditional social norms and positioned itself against the politics of the status quo. I also tried to avoid seeing chastity as just a signifier of radical politics, but as radical gesture in and of itself. I approached my reading curious as to whether chastity like queer desire, functioned as a "resistance to regimes of the normal" in representing forms of human relationality not based on family ties. [3] More recently, queer theory scholars have taken up that same question and have argued that chastity be made part of the canon of queer desire, most notably Benjamin Kahane in *Celibacies: American Modernism and Sexual Life* (2013) and Heather Love's work on spinsters in antebellum American fiction.[4]

This dissertation contributes to a cultural history of chastity in nineteenth century Russia. From this theoretical perspective, this dissertation will help us better understand how representations of both abstinence and sex itself in 19th century Russian literature fit into a broader social fabric. This study is most indebted to Amy Mandelker's *Framing Anna Karenina: Tolstoy, the Woman Question and the Victorian Novel* (1994), which, among other

[2] Halberstam, Judith, "The Antisocial Turn in Queer Studies," *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 5, Issue 2, (2008), 140.
[3] Warner, Michael. *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, xxvi. For more on queer theory as a rejection of discourses of the "normal," see: Warner, Michael. *The Problem with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.
[4] Love, Heather, "Gyn/Apology: Sarah Orne Jewett's Spinster Aesthetics," ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance 55 (2009).

things, questions how a new understanding of the progressive nature of chastity at the time of Tolstoy's writing could reshape our understanding of Tolstoy's politics and art. This dissertation expands that question across other texts in the nineteenth century Russian literary canon.

In the first chapter, "Origins of Radical Chastity," I argue that the association between chastity and radical politics can be traced back to the unique social situation of the raznochintsy. Many of the male writers who came from that class, notably Chernyshevsky, Dobroliubov, and Belinsky, were untrained in the manners of courtship practiced by the upper classes. As such, their identities came to be crystallized as men of progressive politics who suffered from perpetual "shyness" in the company of women. This distinguished them from the men of the bourgeoisie who were well-trained in traditional methods of courtship. In this chapter, I argue that one of the major prompts to radical chastity was this class difference, but that eventually the shy manners and chaste personae of the raznochintsy were emulated by members of the upper classes who wanted to demonstrate their dedication to the radical cause. The first chapter explores that phenomenon and suggests its impact on our understanding of Dostoevsky's anti-terrorist novel *The Possessed*. Future steps for this chapter include bringing the affected non-polished self-representation of the Russian intelligentsia into a broader context, particularly the self-fashioning of the European dandy and the politicization of manners in nineteenth century Europe.

In the second chapter, I explore how the idealization of the chaste, ascetic revolutionary hero posed unique challenges for Nihilist women (nigilistki). The primary focus of this chapter is the group of nigilistki who studied medicine at the University of Zurich at a time when that city was an enclave for Russian anarchists. This part of the dissertation explores how sexual stereotypes about women in late nineteenth century Russia caused both government forces and

male radicals to question women's commitment to revolutionary ideals. The tsarist government accused these women of studying abroad in order to engage in sexual activities far from "the watchful eye of their parents," and maintained that they studied medicine only to learn to perform abortions on themselves. Slander from the government they were seeking to overthrow was to be expected, but the nigilistki also faced sexism within their revolutionary circle. On numerous occasions, their male comrades accused them of attending political meetings to find husbands. This chapter explores the personal and literary writings of the nigilistki and their attempts to insert themselves into the ascetic revolutionary tradition despite persistent efforts from outside forces to depict them as sexual objects. A future project related to this chapter is Oscar Wilde's treatment of the nigilistki in his 1881 play "Vera or the Nihilists" (loosely based on Vera Zasulich), specifically his use of wardrobe to convey political ambivalence, and how the play sheds light on Wilde's own ambivalence between dandyism/aestheticism and his interest in anarchy.

The third and fourth chapters shift attention to Tolstoy and under-explored aspects of the author's philosophy of chastity. These two chapters suggest a corrective to recent Tolstoy criticism which interprets the author's commitment to chastity as a symptom of his misogyny. The third chapter explores the representation of spinsters in three of his major novels: the almost-spinster Princess Marya of *War and Peace*, Varenka of *Anna Karenina*, and Marya Pavlovna of *Resurrection*. In this chapter, I argue that what is commonly referred to as "the Woman Question" should in fact be known as "the Spinster Question," since many of the women who agitated for political reform were unmarried. As a social group, women without husbands needed the education and entry into the professions that the radical reforms were designed to provide. This third chapter argues that Tolstoy depicts spinsters as positive figures of social

disruption, who represent alternative life paths for women not determined by male sexual desire.

The fourth and final chapter explores how Tolstoy's radical articulation of the connection between chastity, non-violence, and wealth redistribution was received abroad, most notably in America and Great Britain. This chapter argues that it was Tolstoy's ability to connect chastity with radical social reform that made him especially useful to reform era activists and thinkers in the Anglophone world, and that the author's prescriptive of chastity within marriage represented a major political threat to conservative forces abroad. While work has been done on Tolstoy's political influence on American and British reformers, as well as on his correspondence with sexologists like the American gynecologist Alice B. Stockham, this chapter seeks to combine those two lines of research and ultimately argues that they are one and the same.

This dissertation marks the first study of nineteenth century Russian literature through the lens of queer theory. Historically, the interpretative challenge of queer theory lies in its very resistance (some would argue its inability) to produce positive knowledge. As a school of thought that has emerged from closets, absences, and the unspoken, it often inhabits a problematic space within literary criticism where close readings and textual support are necessary to draw conclusions. The challenge I faced in writing this dissertation through the lens of queer theory was coping with the question of the narrator. Whereas Tolstoy's omniscient narrator allows the reader to safely trust the embedded examples of radical chastity as genuine expressions of the author's will, Dostoevsky's polyphonic narrator makes it difficult to place the author and his work within the cultural history that this dissertation is attempting to write itself into. After all, the garden scene between Stepan Trofimovich and Varvara Stavrogina, upon which my interpretation of *Besy* relies, may not have actually happened, and the governesses' ball was either attended by lots of unmarried women or almost none. However, Dostoevsky's

very ambivalence—does he want chastity and spinsters in the novel or not—reveals their utmost importance.

Origins of Radical Chastity:
The Shy Raznochintsy

> "One thing torments me, and that is instead of getting better my timidity and shyness are getting much worse at a terrible rate. When I see a pretty woman's face. I almost die. My vision blurs, my nerves are paralyzed as if I see a python or a rattlesnake. My breath falters, and I am all on fire. I am afflicted with a terrible disease." - Vissarion Belinsky (in a letter to P.T. Botkin, April 1840)[5]

Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848) was the son of a poor navy physician. Coming from an educated, albeit poor background classified him as a member of the "raznochintsy." The term referred to the new class of intellectuals who were non-noble in origin; they were often the children of priests, government bureaucrats, and merchants, and they would go on to make up a large part of the 19th-century Russian intelligentsia. The anxiety Belinsky expresses in the diary entry quoted above is far from an isolated incident. Belinsky and his raznochintsy contemporaries would report in their diaries and letters to friends feelings of extreme isolation, nervousness, and above all—shyness [zastenchivost']. Because of their university education, the raznochintsy often intermingled in aristocratic circles, but were unschooled in that milieu's customs and decorum. As such, their manners were often seen as uncouth and out of place. The result was a well-documented epidemic of class determined social anxiety.

The raznochintsy were closely associated with the following three figures who all combined careers in literary criticism with social activism: Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848), Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-1889), and Nikolai Dobroliubov (1836-1861). All three expressed in their private correspondence feelings of intense shyness and self-consciousness. In firsthand accounts of those who witnessed this behavior, there was indeed shock and disgust at the

[5] Quoted in Paperno, Irina. *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998, 78.

raznochintsy's inability to speak French and the bizarre antics brought on by their shyness.[6] However, there were also those convinced that the raznochintsy class represented a new generation that would bring about revolutionary change in Russian society (a thought seemingly confirmed by the fact that the raznochintsy provided many of the leaders for the Russian revolutionary movement). That second group of people interpreted the shyness and poor manners as merely symptomatic of the raznochintsy's incompatibility with bourgeois values.

It is important to point out that the shyness exhibited by the raznochintsy was most closely connected to the realm of relationships with the opposite sex. In 19th-century Russian literature, raznochintsy were frequently depicted as intelligent, cultured, and sensitive men who became shy and awkward in the presence of women. In *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: Semiotics of Behavior*, Irina Paperno states that the image of the raznochintsy as being isolated from society and from love (due to poor social skills) was very common in the literature of the 1850s.[7] The raznochintsy, having been raised in non-aristocratic circles, were presumed to be untrained in the manners expected from society gentleman. Therefore, in adopting the shy, anti-social behavior of the raznochintsy, what was consequently being embraced was a rejection of romantic relationships. This is crucial as this association would eventually evolve into an almost mandatory asceticism that revolutionary activists had to adhere to (or least perform).

This chapter will explore how the shy manners of the raznochintsy became crystallized into an ascetic ideal, eventually embodied by the character of Rakhmetov in Nikolai Chernyshevsky's novel *What is to be Done?*. Beginning with examples of "shyness" in the personal writings of the Russian intelligentsia from the late 1850s to the early 1870s, this chapter will explore the evolution from what was a sincere expression of class isolation into what eventually became a

[6] Ibid, 79.
[7] Ibid, 75.

political mandate of revolutionary asceticism. Finally, Dostoevsky's critique of the revolutionary movement, particularly its ascetic tendencies, will be explored within the context of the novel *Devils*.[8]

The Origins of Shyness

Much like the 1960s in the United States, the 1860s in Russia was a period of intense political and social change. The decade beforehand experienced severe political repression from Tsar Nicholas I. In reaction to the liberal revolutions that swept Europe in 1848, the Russian emperor increased censorship, which famously led Belinsky to proclaim that literature was the only place in Nicholas I's kingdom where ideas could still be debated. In 1855, Nicholas I died, and his son, the reform-minded Alexander II, ascended the throne. Alexander II reversed many of the policies of his father; he eased censorship and reformed the legal system, the military, and institutions of local government. His reign is best known for the emancipation the serfs in 1861, an event that was seized upon by liberal and radical factions as an opportunity to restructure the country's economy, class system, and even cultural norms. Irina Paperno writes at length about the enormous changes in everyday life that followed the end of serfdom:

> Everything that had existed traditionally and had formerly been accepted without criticism came up for rearrangement. Everything, beginning with theoretical peaks, religious views, the basis of the state, and the organization of society, all the way down to quotidian customs, to clothing, and to hair styles.[9]

This period in the nineteenth century coincided with the rise of the raznochintsy's influence in the realms of literary and social criticism.

[8] This reframes the polemic between Dostoevsky and Chernyshevsky in terms of sex.
[9] Paperno, 5.

Many of the raznochintsy came from seminary backgrounds and were educated in that tradition. They studied Latin, not the fashionable French of the gentry. In *Youth* [Yunost'] (1856), Tolstoy describes his adolescent disdain for those from lower classes who spoke French poorly: "A man who pronounced French badly at once aroused a feeling of hatred in me. 'Why do you try to speak as we do, if you can't?' I mentally inquired with virulent irony."[10]

Having had little to no exposure to women from the aristocracy, the raznochintsy were often uncomfortable in their presence, and unschooled in that class' rules of courtship. The writings of Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, and Dobroliubov are riddled with anecdotes about their ineptitude when it came to women. In Chernyshevsky's diaries, he describes having to decline invitations to parties where women might be present due to his lack of societal manners and his inability to speak French or German. Chernyshevsky was very much desirous to get married, but felt it was unlikely given his lack of social skills, though he hoped that marriage would help cure him of his shyness. In his diary, he wrote, "I must get married already. That way, I will no longer be a child, as I am now, but a man. Then my timidity, shyness, etc. will disappear."[11] In a diary entry recounting the experience of his first ball,[12] Chernyshevsky writes: "I feel the desire to dance and to frequent social gatherings. I also wish to be able to draw, and to be able to speak French and German is indispensable."[13] One of the people that Chernyshevsky shared these

[10] Ibid, 82. For more on Tolstoy's treatment of social class in the *Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth* trilogy, see: Hruska, Anne, "Loneliness and Social Class in Tolstoy's Trilogy Childhood, Boyhood, Youth," *The Slavic and East European Journal (SEEJ)*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Spring, 2000), 64-78.

[11] Chernyshevsky, Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii v 16 tomakh. Moscow: 1939, 1:483. «Мне надо жениться уже и потому, что через что ребенка, каков я теперь, сделажсь человеком. Исчезнет тогда моя робость, застенчивость и т. д. »

[12] The story of the ball would eventually turn into Chernyshevsky's semi-autobiographical story "The Story of V.M. Ch." ("Rasskaz V.M. Ch.").

[13] жениться теперь моя дума...мне сильно хочется и танцовать, и бывать на вечерах, и проч., хотелось бы также и рисовать и говорить о французски и немецки для этого необходимо. Chernyshevsky, PSS 1: 212. For more on this scene, see Paperno, 85.

feelings with was Nikolai Nekrasov (1821-1878), the publisher at that time of the progressive journal, *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*). Chernyshevsky served as an editor of *Sovremennik* from 1853 until it was shut down in 1866 after the assassination attempt on Alexander II.

Nekrasov descended from nobility on both sides of his family. His father was an officer in the Imperial Russian army. His mother was Polish and her family was part of the szlachta, an elite aristocratic class within Poland. In 1852, Nekrasov's poem "Shyness" [Zastenchivost'][14] was published in *Sovremennik*. The poem tells the story of a raznochinets in love with a society woman. Though Nekrasov was of aristocratic origins, in the poem he takes on the perspective of a man untrained in traditional forms of gallantry. He tells of his lack of wit and expresses jealousy at the other men who court his beloved:

Поступь гордая, голос уверенный,
Что ни скажут - их речь хороша,
А вот я-то войду как потерянный

A proud gait, a voice self-assured
All that is said is said eloquently
And then I enter, as if lost[15]

Nekrasov describes here the awkward mannerisms of a raznochinets, and how panic causes him to freeze, both in terms of his body and his wit. He describes the self-assured mannerism of the other men present, their "proud gait" and "eloquently" spoken words, unlike himself who feels isolated and foreign in his environment.

На ногах словно гири железные,
Как свинцом налита голова,
Странно руки торчат бесполезные,

[14] "Zastenchivost'" literally translates to "behind a wall," emphasizing the undertone of isolation and exclusion present in Nekrasov's poem.
[15] Nekrasov, N. A. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v 15 tomakh*. Leningrad: Nauka, 1981, 1:113. The English translation of this poem is my own.

На губах замирают слова.

My feet are like iron weights
As if lead had been poured into my head
My hands stick out uselessly
On my lips, the words freeze up[16]

Nekrasov employs very industrial language to describe his feeling of isolation, presenting the raznochinets as cold, hard, and mechanical in the soft, flowery environment of the bourgeoisie.[17]

In *The Poetry of Nekrasov*, Boris Korman describes the hero of "Shyness" as a portrait of an entire generation. The hero, Korman insists, is comprised of characteristics shared by many of the poet's contemporaries:

> Герой застенчивости, конечно же, не Николай Алексеевич Некрасов, а его лирический герой, воплотивший в себе черты многих современников поэта. Застенчивость раскрывается в стихотворении как черта социальной психологии. Сопоставим стихотворение с письмами, дневниками, статьями, воспоминаниями современников мы убедимся в том, что Некрасов выразил не случайное или индивидуальное состояние, обусловленное временными обстоятельствами или темпераментом, а характеристическую черту мироощущении разночинца.[18]
>
> The hero of "Shyness," is of course, not Nikolai Aleksevich Nekrasov, but his lyrical hero, who is comprised of many of the characteristics of the poet's contemporaries. Shyness appears in the poem as a characteristic of a social psychology. If we compare the poem with the writings, diaries, articles, and memoirs of his contemporaries, we are already convinced that Nekrasov expressed nothing random or just an individual condition (brought on by temporary conditions or temperaments), but rather a quality universally felt by the raznochinets class. [19]

Korman goes on to recount stories from Nekrasov's contemporaries in which they speak to the incredible isolation they felt as a result of their social status, particularly when it came to

[16] Ibid, 1:113.
[17] In some ways, this prefigures early twentieth century Russian poetry of the revolution that presented the new Soviet man as an unsentimental machine.
[18] Korman, 74.
[19] This is my translation.

matters of courtship. He quotes a letter from Belinsky to a poet friend that reads: "Do you remember walking with me along the lanes in Vasilevsky Island that one day? We saw a pretty woman, and you said 'yes there are many of them here, but they are not of our kind."[20]

These pathological experiences of shyness were also experienced by Nikolai Dobroliubov. Dobroliubov was born in Nizhny Novgorod to a father who was a priest. His parents died when he was young, leaving him responsible to support his younger siblings. The financial pressure on Dobroliubov's shoulders was intense and required him to spend long hours working as a tutor and translator. In Saint Petersburg, he was also an active student organizer, arranging numerous protests against the university administration. At the age of twenty, he met Chernyshevsky and Nekrasov and began to regularly contribute articles on politics and literary criticism to *Sovremennik*. Dobroliubov longed for companionship and wrote at length to his friends and colleagues about his desire to find a wife. In a letter to a friend, Dobroliubov wrote:

> If I had a woman with whom I could share my thoughts and feelings to such a degree that she would even read with me my writings (or your writings-- it doesn't matter whose), I would be happy and wouldn't wish for more. My only dream now is to love such a woman and to have her sympathy...I am tormented and depressed and paralyzed when I realize that this dream will never come true.[21]

Dobroliubov's exaltation of the aristocratic woman only enhances the feeling of unattainability, and in many ways, romanticizes the improbability of their union.

Despite his apparent longing for companionship, Dobroliubov felt that his desire to seek out society and the company of others was at odds with his work on literary and social theory. Chernyshevsky, in putting together a biography of Dobroliubov, included this entry from his

[20] «Помните, шли как-то с Вами по линии Васильевского острова; с нами повстречалась хорошенькая; вы мне «сказали да, их здесь много, да все они не наши.»» Korman, 81
[21] Paperno, 80.

diaries:

> How strange this beginning of heart's anxiety is! I felt its first stirring when I heard from B.K. that Countess Trubektsaia, who is a very poor girl, is going to marry Morni.... Since then, I have had not a peaceful moment. The thoughts of social problems are interlocked in my head with the thoughts about my own relations to the class of which I am personally destined to be a member. My theoretical aspirations are being replaced by yearning for feverish activity—personal and passionate activity, rather than impersonal, abstract and theoretical.[22]

Here, Dobroliubov links his theoretical work to a specifically "impersonal," anti-social way of living in the world. The world of courtship and Countess Trubetskaia represents a challenge to his intellectual commitments, which leave no room for "personal and passionate" activity. Dobroliubov is not merely expressing shyness as a natural consequence of his upbringing, but as a social condition tied inextricably to his political work. This linkage between the rejection of bourgeois society values (including courtship) and the embracing of revolutionary work would prove crucial in the following decades. The anxiety experienced by Dobroliubov and others of the raznochintsy class would come to be mimicked by those who wanted to express a dedication to social revolution and nihilism.

Affected Shyness

While Dobroliubov, Belinsky, and Chernyshevsky experienced sincere anxiety and indeed class determined shyness, in the subsequent years, their manners would come to be adopted by those of different social backgrounds. Indeed, it is important to point out that Nekrasov came from an affluent background, and allied himself with Chernyshevsky and the raznochintsy class by writing "Shyness." These shy awkward manners of the middle class went from being the

[22] Quoted in Paperno, 86.

mere consequence of a life lived outside of high society, to performative gestures meant to indicate radical political sympathies. The general consensus was that when it came to the "woman question," the raznochintsy were best suited to lead the charge for equality between the sexes as they had not been schooled in the male female relations of the upper classes, which many believed to be intrinsically rooted in the perpetuation of inequality between the sexes. As Michael Confino writes in *Russia Before the Radiant Future*:

> For the raznochintsy, roughness had been a usual form of behavior. Lack of good manners, which had previously made them feel uncomfortable in polite society, never being quite sure whether they behaved kom-il-fo (comme il faut), was now justified and made respectable. It was not a regrettable, but a decoration—not a lack of decoration, but a new style. The gentry-nihilists knew what good manners were and rejected them as part of a game.[23]

As Irina Paperno describes it, "What were originally expressions of genuine and tormenting shyness, turned, in the eyes of society at large, into ideologically weighed signs of political and social doctrines associated with the new generation."[24] Paperno writes in particular about Peter Kropotkin, who in an effort to show his allegiance to nihilist, stopped attending society parties.[25]

Peter Kropotkin, who would go on to become an important leader in the Russian anarchist movement, was born into one of the highest levels of the Russian aristocracy. His father was a prince from Smolensk and a descendant of the Rurik dynasty. His father owned large amounts of land and had 1,200 serfs in his possession. Despite having an upbringing that would have prepared him for high society and traditional forms of chivalry, he dismissed those

[23] Confino, Michael. *Russia Before the 'Radiant Future': Essays in Modern History, Culture, and Society*. Oxford: Berghan Books, 2011, 104.
[24] Paperno, 87.
[25] Ibid, 87.

traditions as infantilizing towards women. To Kropotkin, men in possession of the new values, nihilist values, did not participate in traditional forms of male-female courtship:

> He [the nihilist], absolutely refused to join in those petty tones of politeness with which men surround those whom they like so much to consider as 'the weaker sex.' When a lady entered a room a nihilist did not jump from his seat to offer it to her, unless he saw that she looked tired and there was no other seat in the room.[26]

Kropotkin also suggests that to a certain degree, a nihilist would go out of his way to "affect" these manners: "[The nihilist] discarded the conventional forms of society talk, and expressed his opinions in a blunt and terse way, even with a certain *affectation* of outward roughness."[27] Kropotkin's statement here illustrates how the anti-social behavior shared among the raznochintsy came to be ascribed to the "nihilist," thereby attaching a very specific political persuasion to the failure to display traditional societal manners.

Rakhmetov: The Ascetic Ideal

Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-1889) was born in Saratov to a father who, like Dobroliubov's, was a priest. He graduated from a seminary school before moving to Saint Petersburg to attend university. It was in Saint Petersburg that he read the work of socialists like Ludwig Feuerbach and Charles Fourier, under whose influence he became an atheist. In 1853, he became chief editor of *Sovremennik* where he published numerous articles criticizing the

[26] Kropotkin, Pyotr. *Memoirs of a Revolutionist.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930, 300.
[27] Ibid, 299.

government and calling for social revolution. He was arrested in 1862 when a letter from Alexander Herzen to Nikolai Serno-Solovevich was confiscated by the police; the letter was about transferring the headquarters of *Sovremennik* to London where there was an active Russian populist émigré community. As a result, Chernyshevsky was arrested on charges of conspiring with an émigré group.[28] He was jailed in the Peter and Paul Fortress in Saint Petersburg where he most wrote of his famous novel *What is to be Done?*

In *Through the Russian Prism*, Joseph Frank writes that *What is to Be Done?* "far more than Marx's *Capital* supplied the emotional dynamic that went to make the Russian Revolution."[29] "Emotional dynamic" is correct; far from offering market analysis or historical dialectics, *What is to be Done?* was first and foremost a sentimental instruction manual on how to live. In his doctoral dissertation, "Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality" (1853), Cherynsyehvsky argued that art should not simply reflect reality, but should shape it. His own art, *What is to be Done?* did just that. It supplied the new generation of Russian youth with a manual on how to order their lives in every respect, from sleeping arrangements to diet.

The first installment of *What is to be Done?* appeared in April 1863 in the pages *Sovremennik*. Though the book made it past the censors, it was immediately banned until 1905. Prince A.F. Golitsyn, who headed the investigative commission handling Chernyshevsky's case, suspiciously claimed that there was nothing in the book that was politically dangerous. Others assert that a separate government Minister felt guilty about the handling of Chernyshevsky's imprisonment, and consequently let the book pass through the censor.[30] The novel was an

[28] Rudd, Charles A. *Fighting Words: Imperial Censorship and the Russian Press, 1804-1906*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009, 130.
[29] Frank, Joseph. *Through the Russian Prism: Essays on Literature and Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, 187.
[30] Rudd, 290.

immediate sensation, attracting incredible enthusiasm from radical youth and outrage on the part of the government officials. The government censors immediately banned it from being disseminated, and attempted to recall all the issues of *Sovremennik* that contained excerpts.

Chernyshevsky stated that his novel was a picture of the "new people" of the 1860s, but in many ways, it created that generation as much (if not more so) than it depicted it. The novel had a piercing influence on the minds of reform-minded youth who were unsure as to how to engage in revolutionary struggle. As one of Chernyshevsky's contemporaries described it, the influence of *What is to be Done?* on Russian youth was unprecedented:

> We read the novel almost like worshippers, with the kind of piety with which we read religious books…It played a great role in Russian life, especially among the leading members of the intelligentsia who were embarking on the road to socialism, bringing it down a bit from the world of drama to the problem of our social evils, sharpening its image as the goal which each of us had to fight for.[31]

Some took the novel as a direct call to arms. The Karakazovites, the group who attempted to assassinate the tsar in 1866, read the novel and claimed to have turned to terrorism under its influence.[32] Though the book did not have the same lasting impression on Western readers, in the decades following its publication, it was enormously popular among Western anarchists. Emma Goldman modeled herself on the novel's heroine and established a sewing co-op in New York. The novel was also widely read among the anarchists involved in the 1886 Chicago Haymarket Riots.[33] What made the novel unique was its practicality; it offered less theory, and more directions, rules, and ways to resolve conflicts. For people who wanted

[31] Drozd, Andrew M. Cherynshevskii's *What is to be Done? A Reevaluation*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 9.
[32] Ibid, 10-11.
[33] Drozd, 13.

desperately to have an impact but were unsure how to, the book provided welcomes answers to their questions.

When *What is to be Done?* begins, Vera Pavlovna is still subject to her tyrannical mother who is determined to marry her daughter off to a wealthy older man. The situation is resolved when Lopukhov, her younger brother's tutor, enters into a "fictitious marriage" with Vera, thereby liberating her from her obligation to marry. Vera goes on to open up a small sewing collective that gives her financial freedom from Lopukhov. The fictitious marriage and the sewing collective (in which women share in the work and profits equally) provided readers with explicit instructions on how to organize their lives and how to structure egalitarian enterprises.

Despite the fact that the novel centers on the life of Vera Pavlovna, both Soviet and Western scholars have traditionally understood Rakhmetov, the mysterious ascetic who sleeps on a bed of nails and abstains from sex and all other forms of bodily pleasure, as the novel's main character.[34] The Soviet scholar V.N. Shul'gin emphatically stated, "the main character in the novel *What is to be Done?* is Rakhmetov…without Rakhmetov there is no novel as an authentically artistic work."[35] Similarly, Rufus W. Mathewson Jr. argues that despite the fact that Rakhmetov "plays a minor role in the central intrigue," *What is to be Done?* "in a sense, is his vehicle."[36] In *Men Without Women*, Eliot Borenstein explains that Vera and Lupokhov's utopia is too rooted in familial structures to represent the revolutionary ideal:

> Despite their unconventional living arrangements, Vera Pavlovna and her husbands build the future within the context of the family, albeit in a more ideologically correct form.

[34] Ibid, 114.
[35] Cited on Ibid 260. Source: Shul'gin, V.N. *Ocherki zhizni I tvorchestva N.G. Shernyshevskogo*. Moscow: 1956, 112, 129.
[36] Cited on Ibid, 260. Source: Mathewson Jr., Rufus W. *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature.* 2nd ed. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1975, 76.

> Rakhmetov has no time for such distractions, for he has dedicated every iota of his strength and every moment of his concentration to the cause.[37]

Eric Naiman writes in *Sex in Public* that while Rakhmetov was "an exceptional standard toward which radicals should strive," the author never expected his readers to actually reach that ideal.[38] That being true, Chernyshevsky nonetheless made it clear that anyone who fell short of Rakhmetov's asceticism was not a true revolutionary:

> Не покажи я фигуру Рахметова, большинство читателей сбилось бы с толку насчет главных действующих лиц моего рассказа. Я держу пари, что до последних отделов этой главы Вера Павловна, Кирсанов, Лопухов казались большинству публики героями, лицами высшей натуры, пожалуй, даже лицами идеализированными, пожалуй, даже лицами невозможными в действительности по слишком высокому благородству. Нет, друзья мои, злые, дурные, жалкие друзья мои, это не так вам представлялось: не они стоят слишком высоко, а вы стоите слишком низко.[39]
>
> If I hadn't shown you the figure of Rakhmetov, the majority of readers would have misunderstood the main characters of my story. I'd bet that up until the last section of this chapter most of the public considered Vera Pavlovna, Kirsanov, and Lopukhov to be heroes, people of a higher nature, perhaps even idealized figures, maybe even inconceivable in reality because of their very great nobility. No, my friends, my mean, base, pitiful friends, you're quite mistaken: it is not they who stand too high, but you who stand too low.[40]

This passage would clearly have an effect on its readers, who modeled themselves more often on Rakhmetov than they did any of the novel's other characters. Whether or not Chernyshevsky expected them to succeed in embodying the ascetic ideal of Rakhmetov, it is clear they certainly did their best to try. The revolutionary Sergey Nechaev once attempted to sleep on a bed of

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[37] Borenstein, Eliot. *Men Without Women: Masculinity and Revolution in Russian Fiction (1917-1929).* Durham: Duke University Press, 2000, 10.
[38] Naiman, Eric. Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, 133.
[39] Chernyshevsky, Nikolai. *Chto Delat'*?. Leningrad: Nauka, 1975, 232.
[40] Chernyshevsky, Nikolai. *What is to be Done?* Translated by Michael R. Katz. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989, 312-313.

nails,[41] and, as will be discussed more in chapter two, some members of the Nihilist movement looked down upon those who ate sumptuous foods, labeling members who ate fruit as "bourgeois."[42]

The ascetic imperative of *What is to be Done?* is often obscured in criticism because of the novel's purported commitment to "free love." The fact that Vera Pavlovna's husband lets her live with another man is supposedly testament to the novel's sex positive nature and Chernyshevsky's avowal of free love in the form of polyamorism. However, as critics at the time pointed out, despite it being a novel about "free love," there were no children anywhere in the text. The poet Afanasii Fet and the critic Vasili Botkin wrote a scathing critique of the book titled "Are Children Expected?,"[43] a review that Olga Matich writes, "exposed the novel's hidden anti-procreative agenda."[44] Eric Naiman describes the Russian intelligentsia's stance on sex as being "semi-deceitful," noting that "free love for Nikolai Chernyshevsky, the preeminent 19th century radical, and his intellectual heirs had involved, ideally, very little mating."[45] Chernyshevsky's novel promoted, as Naiman continues, "a free love sanitized of sex and sexual parts."[46] Indeed, as instructive as the new youth found *What is to be Done?* to be, it offered no instruction on what to do in the event of a child.

The character of Rakhmetov, far from a raznochinets, is said to have descended from Russian boyars. His father is enormously wealthy, and Rakhmetov's allowance while a student

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[41] Drozd, 114.
[42] The seminary education and religious background of the intelligentsia could also be a reason that fruit is often the most demonized food in the revolutionary diet.
[43] See P.S. Reifman, "Predpolagaiutsia li deti?" *Trudy po russkoi i slavianskoli filogii 14 [=Uchenye zapiski Tartuskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta* 245] (1970): 357-63.
[44] Matich, Olga. *Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia's Fin de Siecle*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 23.
[45] Naiman, 36.
[46] Ibid, 36.

in Saint Petersburg is 3,000 rubles, an astronomical sum that allows him to support several students. Thus, like Kropotkin, Rakhmetov represents those who voluntarily took on the ascetic lifestyle of the raznochintsy and rejected the company of women on ideological grounds. This latter point is best illustrated in what is described in the novel as "the erotic episode" (эротический эпизод)[47] in Rakhmetov's life.

Rakhmetov is said to have suddenly disappeared for a number of weeks. Kirsanov learns that Rakhmetov has been in the countryside where he was injured after rescuring a young woman who lost control of her horse. Badly hurt, Rakhmetov is taken by the lady, a young widow, to back her estate to recuperate. In need of medical attention, he sends for Kirsanov. Upon arriving at the estate and examining him, Kirsanov advises Rakhmetov to stay at the widow's estate for another ten days to recuperate. During that time, she stays by Rakhmetov's side and tends to him as a nurse. Kirsanov recounts what transpired by Rakhmetov and the widow:

> Дама была вдова лет девятнадцати, женщина не бедная и вообще совершенно независимого положения, умная, порядочная женщина. Огненные речи Рахметова, конечно, не о любви, очаровали ее.[48]
>
> The lady was a widow, only nineteen years old, moderately well off, fully independent, and an intelligent, decent woman. Rakhmetov's fiery speeches, not about love of course, fascinated her.[49]

Kirsanov makes it clear that Rakhmetov is not using traditional romantic devices and has no intention of courting the young widow. Though he makes no efforts to seduce her, the two do fall in love, a love she confesses to him in an emotional climax. However, Rakhmetov explains to her that his way of life is incompatible with romantic attachment:

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[47] Chernyshevsky, Nikolai. *Chto Delat'*?, 117.
[48] Ibid, 118.
[49] Chernyshevsky, Nikolai. *What is to be Done?* Trans. by Michael Katz. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014, 289.

«Я был с вами откровеннее, чем с другими; вы видите, что такие люди, как я, не имеют права связывать чью-нибудь судьбу с своею.»
— «Да, это правда, — сказала она, — вы не можете жениться. Но пока вам придется бросить меня, до тех пор любите меня».
— «Нет, и этого я не могу принять, — сказал он, — я должен подавить в себе любовь: любовь к вам связывала бы мне руки, они и так не скоро развяжутся у меня, — уж связаны. Но развяжу. Я не должен любить.[50]

-I've been more open with you than most. You must see that people like me have no right to bind their destiny to someone else's.
-Yes, that's true…You mustn't marry. However, until it comes time for you to leave, you may still love me.
-'No, I can't do that,' he said 'I must suppress any love in myself: to love you would mean to bind my hands. They're already bound, and it will take me some time to untie them. However, I'll manage. I must not love.'[51]

It is key here that Rakhmetov does feel love and the desire to attach himself to the widow. It is not the absence of desire in Rakhmetov that Chernyshevsky praises, but his ability to subdue that desire in the face of revolutionary duty.

Rakhmetov would continue to be a touchstone for young revolutionaries throughout the nineteenth century and into the Soviet period. One of the people inspired by Rakhmetov was Sergey Nechaev, a revolutionary nihilist who emulated Rakhmetov in great detail. Nechaev created an entire theory of revolutionary dedication, the "Revolutionary Catechism," based on the example of Rakhmetov.

Revolutionary Catechism

Sergey Nechaev (1847-1882) was the child of former serfs; his mother died when he was very young and his father worked as a waiter and doing various odd jobs. Nechaev moved to Saint Petersburg to teach at a parish school, but spent most of his time at St. Petersburg

[50] Chernyshevsky, *Chto Delat'*, 118.
[51] Chernyshevsky, *What is to be Done?*, 290.

University as an auditor. Nechaev was deeply inspired by the 1866 attempted assassination of the tsar by the Karakazovites, and consequently committed himself to completing their failed attempt. He traveled to Geneva to join the Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin who mentored him, believing Nechaev to represent the next generation of Russian radical youth. Nechaev sent parcels of letters, funded by Bakunin, to radical youth all throughout Russia. One of the recipients, Vera Zasulich, was given five years in prison just for having received one of the parcels. Zasulich would go on to make an assassination attempt on the governor of Saint Petersburg, and her subsequent trail made international headlines.

Nechaev pretended to be a representative of the Russian branch of the "Worldwide Revolutionary Union," an organization he entirely fabricated. He created a secret society known as Narodnaya Rasprava (The People's Reprisal),[52] which he told its members was a subsidiary of the Worldwide Revolutionary Union. Regardless of the fact that it was founded upon false pretenses, Narodnaya Rasprava was able to actively recruit new members, including Ivan Ivanov, who made the fatal mistake of questioning Nechaev's methods. On November 21, 1869, Nechaev and other members of the secret society shot and killed Ivanov. Two years later, a trial was held in which 152 people were questioned on charges of being part of a secret society led by Nechaev with the aim of overthrowing the government. The trial was a national sensation that received intense coverage in the press.[53]

Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *Devils* was inspired by the Nechaev trial and the supposed secret society that had been formed at his behest. An integral part of the evidence laid out by the prosecutors in the Nechaev trial was a document titled "Revolutionary Catechism." The

[52] Laqueur, Walter. *A History of Terrorism*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2011, 30.
[53] Nikitenko, Aleksandr. *The Diary of a Russian Censor*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975, 347.

document was a list of 21 commandments, thought up by Nechaev, that every committed revolutionary was to follow.

The rules set forth in the "Revolutionary Catechism" are intensely anti-relational. Any and all emotional ties with other human beings, Nechaev stresses, must be severed in the struggle for revolutionary change. Isolation and anti-social behavior are requirements for Nechaev's followers, and they must find "satisfaction" and "passion" not in their relationships with others, but in the revolution itself. Indeed, Nechaev and the Russian terrorist groups of late nineteenth century Russia were unique in advocating for a form of anti-social political community. Rather than public demonstrations or large group meetings, Nechaev and then Narodnaya Volya (People's Will), stressed the importance of small groups as a tactic to avoid evasion and mass imprisonment. Many historians argue that modern-day terrorism, with a focus on small terrorist cells, has its roots in late Imperial Russia.[54]

In his historical study of Russian culture and religion, the Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev discussed the importance of Nechaev's "Revolutionary Catechism" in shaping the behavior or followers of the radical movement that followed. Berdyaev details the primary role that asceticism plays within the "Revolutionary Catechism":

> Его Катехизис революционера есть своеобразно аскетическая книга, как бы наставление к духовной жизни революционера. И предъявляемые им требования суровее требований сирийской аскезы. Революционер не должен иметь ни интересов, ни дел, ни личных чувств и связей, ничего своего, даже имени. Все должно быть поглощено единственным, исключительным интересом, единственной мыслью, единственной страстью -- революцией.[55]

[54] Geifman, Anna. *Death Orders: The Vanguard of Modern Terrorism in Revolutionary Russia.* Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010. By extension, one could say that modern terrorism has its roots in Nekrasov's shyness and in the aesthetics of loneliness expressed by the early Russian intelligentsia.
[55] Berdiaev, Nikolai. *Russkaia Idea*. Moscow: EKSMO, 1997, 120.

> His 'Revolutionary Catechism' is a book which is unique in its asceticism. It is a sort of instruction in the spiritual life of a revolutionary, and the demands, which it makes are harsher than the requirements of Syrian asceticism.[56] He revolutionary must have no interest, no business, no personal feelings and connections; he must have nothing of his own, not even a name. Everything is to be swallowed up by the single exclusive interest, by the one idea, the one passion—revolution.[57]

For Berdyaev, the Revolutionary Catechism was an egregious re-appropriation of Christian morality,[58] as was most of the religious imagery used by the atheist revolutionaries (whose seminary upbringing made them especially skillful at doing so). Just a handful of excerpts from the "Revolutionary Catechism" reveals that Nechaev wanted to instill in his followers the need for austerity and isolation from all others.

> §6. Суровый для себя, он должен быть суровым и для других. Все нежные, изнеживающие чувства родства, дружбы, любви, благодарности и даже самой чести должны быть задавлены в нем единою холодною страстью революционного дела. Для него существует только одна нега, одно утешение, вознаграждение и удовлетворение — успех революции.
>
> 6. Tyrannical toward himself, he must be tyrannical toward others. All the gentle and enervating sentiments of kinship, love, friendship, gratitude, and even honor, must be suppressed in him and give place to the cold and single-minded passion for revolution. For him, there exists only one pleasure, on consolation, one reward, one satisfaction – the success of the revolution.
>
> §7. Природа настоящего революционера исключает всякий романтизм, всякую чувствительность, восторженность и увлечение.
>
> 7. The nature of the true revolutionary excludes all sentimentality, romanticism, infatuation, and exaltation.
>
> §8. Другом и милым человеком для революционера может быть только человек, заявивший себя на деле таким же революционерным

[56] In an orientalist reading, Berdiaev locates the origin of Russian revolutionary asceticism in the country's non-Western roots.
[57] Berdiaev, Nikolai. *The Russian Idea*. Trans. by R.M. French, Hudson: Lindisfarne Press, 1992, 135.
[58] For more on the revolutionaries' use of religious imagery and self-fashioning see Morris, Marcia A. *Saints and Revolutionaries. The Ascetic Hero in Russian Literature*. Albany: State University of New York (SUNY) Press, 1993.

делом, как и он сам. Мера дружбы, преданности и прочих обязанностей в отношении к такому товарищу определяется единственно степенью полезности в деле всеразрушительной практической революции.

8. The revolutionary can have no friendship or attachment, except for those who have proved by their actions that they, like him, are dedicated to revolution. The degree of friendship, devotion and obligation toward such a comrade is determined solely by the degree of his usefulness to the cause of total revolutionary destruction.

§13 Тем хуже для него, если у него есть в нем родственные, дружеские или любовные отношения; он не революционер, если они могут остановить его руку.[59]

13. All the worse for him if he has in that world any relations with parents, friends, or lovers; he is no longer a revolutionary if he is swayed by these relationships."[60]

Nechaev's "Revolutionary Catechism" signaled a revolutionary commodification of shyness. The anti-social behavior that brought Dobroliubov, Belinsky, and Chernyshevsky so much pain, was idealized by youth like Nechaev. The earlier generation's example of anti-social behavior taken to its logical extreme would be the subject of Dostoevsky's novels *Devils*, in which Pyotr Stepanovich Verkhovensky (a character based on Nechaev) is the son of the "shy" Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky.

Dostoevsky

> "It's almost a historical study, in which I've sought to account for the possibility of such monstrous phenomenon as the Nechaev movement occurring in our strange society…Our Belinskys and Granovskys would never have believed it if they had been told they were the direct spiritual fathers of the Nechaev band. And it's this kinship of ideas and their

[59] Савченко, В.А. *100 знаменитых анархистов и революционеров*. Moscow: Directmedia, 376.
[60] Translated by Alan Kimball. Nechaev would have known the Gospels well, and this does indeed find a lot of resonances in some of Jesus' anti-family preaching, particularly when he discourages a man from burying his son (Find example)

> transmissions from fathers to sons that I have tried to show in my work." – Dostoevsky, in a letter to A.A. Romanov- 1873 [61]

Dostoevsky was himself involved in progressive politics as a young man. He was a member in the Petrashevsky Circle, an organization that was critical of the tsar and opposed to serfdom. A crackdown on organizations like the Petrashevsky Circle was part of the repressive policies of Nicholas I. The group was shut down by the authorities and Dostoevsky was accused of reading and disseminating works by Belinsky. He was sentenced to eight years of hard labor and exile, of which he served four. His time in prison would serve as the material for his novel *Notes from the House of the Dead.* Something changed in Dostoevsky while in prison, a widely-acknowledge political conversion.[62] As his chief biographer, Joseph Frank, writes:

> He had gone into exile as a determined opponent of the regime of Nicholas I, sentenced for having taken part in a revolutionary conspiracy aimed at eliminating serfdom. But the post-Siberian Dostoevsky, just a few years after his return from exile, became for the remainder of his life one of the most determined and effective opponents of Russian radical ideology.[63]

Dostoevsky's opposition to radical political ideology is nowhere more thoroughly present than in his novel *Devils*. The novel was a direct response to the Nechaev trial and the murder of the student Ivanov. *Devils* also includes biting criticism of earlier generations of revolutionaries including Belinsky and Chernyshevsky whom he blames for the violent radicalism of the 1860s and 70s. Dostoevsky was incensed by the Nechaev trial, and was impatient to express his thoughts on contemporary radical politics. He also was desperately in need of money after a

[61] Moran, John P., "This Star Will Shine Forth from the East: Dostoevsky and the Politics of Humility," in *Dostoevsky's Political Thought*. Eds. Richard Avramenko and Lee Repanier. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013, 64.
[62] For more on Dostoevsky's political conversion, see: Ruttenberg, Nancy. *Dostoevsky's Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.
[63] Frank, Joseph, "Dostoevsky's Conversion," *The NY Review of Books*, 1983.

string of gambling debts, and the conservative journal *Vestnik* was going to publish the new novel. He wrote to his friend Strakhov:

> I am relying a great deal on what I am writing for *Vestnik* now, but from the tendentious rather than the artistic point of view. I am anxious to express certain ideas, even if it ruins my novel as a work of art, for I am entirely carried away with the things that have accumulated in my heart and mind.[64]

The main target of Dostoevsky's critique in *Devils* was the generation of the men of the 1840s who he believed failed to serve as proper spiritual "fathers" to the men of 1860s. The narrator places Stepan Trofimovich in that milieu, and his relationship with his son Pyotr Stepanovich still stands in as a poor father figure that leads to the destructive tendencies of his son, Pyotr Stepanovich. [65] In *Devils*, Dostoevsky represents that failure through the lens of a sort of shy impotence on the part of Stepan Trofimovich.

Stepan Trofimovich's Impotence

The novel begins with a long exploration into the career of Stepan Trofimovich and his relationship with Varvara Petrovna Stavrogina, the mother of the young student he is hired to tutor. The narrator goes to great lengths to assure the reader that the relationship between Varvara Petrovna and Stepan Trofimovich is entirely chaste. Given that Dostoevsky has said that Stepan Trofimovich is the keystone upon which his novel about terrorism rests, this fixation on chasteness is telling. It is clear that Dostoevsky sees some connection between the ascetic

[64] Magarshack, David. *Translator's Introduction to 'Devils*,' by Fyodor Dostoevsky. London: Penguin Group, 1971, ix.
[65] On page 104 of *Conformity's Children*, Ellen Chances discusses argues that Stavrogin, though chronologically a man of the 1860s, represents the Byronism of the Russian 1830s. This could explain why he does not seem to adapt radical chastity, and instead romps on in a Pechorin-esque way.

tendencies of the Russian intelligentsia and the violent iteration of Russian radicalism that was sweeping the country.

The opening chapters of *Devils* focus on the odd friendship between Stepan Trofimovich and Varvara Petrovna, and the surprisingly romantic nights they spend together in the Russian countryside. At first, however, the narrator speaks at length about Stepan Trofimovich's career as a scholar and advocate for social reform, albeit suggesting that Stepan Trofimovich's importance in both respects was something he had an exaggerated sense of:

> Бесспорно, что и он некоторое время принадлежал к знаменитой плеяде иных прославленных деятелей нашего прошедшего поколения, и одно время, — впрочем, всего только одну самую маленькую минуточку, — его имя многими тогдашними торопившимися людьми произносились чуть не наряду с именами Чаадаева, Белинского, Грановского и только что начинавшего тогда за границей Герцена.[66]
>
> There cannot be any doubt at all that for some time, he too belonged to the famous galaxy of illustrious men of the last generation and that at one time, though only for the briefest moment-- his name was uttered by many enthusiastic people of that day almost in the same breath as Chaadev, Belinsky, Granovsky, and Herzen.[67]

Stepan Trofimovich's decision to forgo his career as a scholar is at first attributed to a play he wrote that was confiscated by the government. However, the narrator is quick to inform the reader that play was a minor incident that could have been easily explained to the authorities, and that the real cause of Stepan Trofimovich's change in career was in actuality connected with Varvara Petrovna, who offered him a job as the tutor to her son.

Stepan Trofimovich had declined her request on a previous occasion, but reconsiders after the death of his first wife. In regards to that first wife, the narrator hints at perhaps sexual problems between the two of them: "He had a great deal of trouble with that young woman –

[66] Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Polnoe Sobranie Sochineni v 15 tomakh*. Leningrad: Nauka, 1990, 7:8.
[67] Magarshack, 22.

who, by the way, was very attractive—owing to his ability to support her, and for other, partly delicate reasons."[68] In any case, following his wife's death, he moves onto Varvara Petrovna's estate to tutor her son, but that is barely mentioned. The narrator's focus is on the friendship of the mother and tutor, and their enormously close friendship. Important to note is how often the narrator stresses that there was anything untoward or less than chaste in their friendship:

> Он бросился в объятия этой дружбы, и дело закрепилось с лишком на двадцать лет. Я употребил выражение «бросился в объятия», но сохрани бог кого-нибудь подумать о чем-нибудь лишнем и праздном; эти объятия надо разуметь в одном лишь самом высоконравственном смысле. Самая тонкая и самая деликатнейшая связь соединила эти два столь замечательные существа навеки.[69]
>
> He flung himself into the arms of that friendship, and the whole thing was settled for twenty years. I just used the expression 'flung himself into the arms,' but don't let anybody jump to any rash and improper conclusions; those arms have to be understood only in the highest possible moral sense. These two remarkable beings were joined forever in a union that was most refined and delicate.[70]

The narrator goes on to detail every aspect of their relationship, how they argue, how they make up, their shared interests, etc. Their relationship reaches a climax, however, upon the death of Varvara Petrovna's husband.

Shortly after she has become a widow, Varvara Petrovna and Stepan Trofimovich spend an evening together that unfolds in an unusual way. The narrator sets the stage for a romantic summer evening with flowers in bloom, "It was the height of May. The evenings were

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[68] Dostoevsky, *PSS* 7:11-12. Первою супругой его была одна легкомысленная девица из нашей губернии, на которой он женился в самой первой и еще безрассудной своей молодости, и, кажется, вынес с этою, привлекательною впрочем, особой много горя, за недостатком средств к ее содержанию и, сверх того, по другим, отчасти уже деликатным причинам.
[69] Dostoevsky, *PSS* 7:12.
[70] Magarshack, 26.

extraordinarily fine. The wild cherry was in bloom."[71] The two friends then share a series of similar evenings together, and things seem to reach a boiling point:

> Оба друга сходились каждый вечер в саду и просиживали до ночи в беседке, изливая друг пред другом свои чувства и мысли. Минуты бывали поэтические. Варвара Петровна под впечатлением перемены в судьбе своей говорила больше обыкновенного. Она как бы льнула к сердцу своего друга, и так продолжалось несколько вечеров. Одна странная мысль вдруг осенила Степана Трофимовича: «Не рассчитывает ли неутешная вдова на него и не ждет ли, в конце траурного года, предложения с его стороны?[72]
>
> The two friends met each evening in the garden and sat until nightfall in the summer-house, pouring out their hearts to one another. There were romantic movements. Under the influence of the change in her position, Varvara Petrovna talked more than usual. She seemed to cling to her friend, and so it went on for several evenings. A strange idea suddenly occurred to Stepan Trofimovich: 'Was the inconsolable widow counting on him by any chance to make her a proposal of marriage at the end of the year of mourning?[73]

Varvara Petrovna stares intensely at Stepan Trofimovich, who fails in this moment to act, though he himself is already wondering if he could convince her to take his name. She appears disappointed and the night ends abruptly. Shortly afterwards, Stepan Trofimovich is wandering throughout the garden, when suddenly, Varvara Petrovna reappears:

> Пред ним опять стояла Варвара Петровна, которую он оставил всего только четыре минуты назад. Желтое лицо ее почти посинело, губы были сжаты и вздрагивали по краям. Секунд десять полных смотрела она ему в глаза молча, твердым, неумолимым взглядом и вдруг прошептала скороговоркой:
> — Я никогда вам этого не забуду![74]
>
> Varvara Petrovna whom he had left only four minutes earlier, was standing before him. Her yellow face was almost blue; her lips were pressed tightly together, and twitching at the corners. For ten full seconds, she looked into his eyes in silence with a firm, implacable gaze, and then she whispered rapidly: 'I shall never forgive you for this!'[75]

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[71] Dostoevsky, *PSS* 7:17. [Май был в полном расцвете; вечера стояли удивительные. Зацвела черемуха.]
[72] Ibid, 7:17.
[73] Magarshack, 31-32.
[74] Dostoevsky, *PSS* 7:18-19.
[75] Magarshack, 33.

The episode leaves Stepan Trofimovich stunned, but he still does not act; he is paralyzed like the hero of Nekrasov's "Shyness." He and Varvara Petrovna eventually spend twenty years together within the confines of a chaste friendship.

It is only at the end of the novel, when he renounces atheism and the radicalism of his past, that he is able to confess his love to Varvara Petrovna. On his deathbed, he tells her in French that he loves her: "Je vous aimais toute ma vie…vingt ans" (I loved you all of my life…for twenty years."[76] This is the first time he speaks to her in French, an apt choice given that French was the language the raznochintsy did not speak and the radical youth renounced as bourgeois. In speaking in French, he shows his ability to court a woman using traditional forms of gallantry, symbolic perhaps of a renunciation of radicalism (or at least a renunciation of the performative gestures associated with radicalism at the time).

If we compare Stepan Trofimovich, the bad father figure, to a "good" Dostoevskian father figure, Father Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, we see the emphasis Dostoevsky places on avoiding sexual extremes (in either direction). For Dostoevsky, one must descend into sin in order to instruct others out of it. In other words, one must experience the gamut of life to understand human experience and suffering. In many of Dostoevsky's novels, it is those who have led a life of sin that ultimately serve as the best spiritual guides. In *Crime and Punishment*, it is Sonya, a prostitute, who leads Raskolnikov on the path to salvation. Father Zosima tells Alyosha that as a young man, he was more similar to the wild and hedonistic Dmitri than he was to Alyosha. He encourages Alyosha to leave the monastery and to experience life and all of its temptations. Zosima is heavily criticized by another monk, Father Ferapont, who embodies

[76] Magarshack, 251.

extreme anti-social (and even narcissistic) asceticism. Father Ferapont lives in isolation, away from the other monks, and keeps to all of the fasts and maintains a vow of silence. He criticizes Father Zosima for accepting sweet breads from the women in the village, and feels vindicated when Father Zosima's body begins to smell after he has died (a sign to the monastery that he lived an impure life). Important to note that Ferapont also makes a point to perform his devotion, publically flaunting his eccentric, ascetically induced, displays of piety. In Dostoevsky, we can ascertain a mistrust of public performances of devotion (and indeed, radical shyness and chastity were largely performative gestures).

Just as Stepan Trofimovich's transformation is marked by the embracing of earthly love with Varvara Petrovna at the end of *Devils*, Alyosha also overcomes asceticism and embraces material existence. At the end of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Alyosha and the children of the town attend the funeral of Ilushin where pancakes are being served. Alyosha tells the boys, who presumably feel guilty that they are enjoying pancakes at such a solemn affair, "Don't be put off that we are serving pancakes. They are an old custom, and there is something pleasant in that!"[77] Redemption in Dostoevsky is often marked by the rejection of asceticism and chaste living.

Shatov

The character who represents the murdered student from the Nechaev trial is Ivan Shatov. In the novel, Shatov is a former nihilist who has renounced his commitment to the cause; it is notable to point out that Shatov's name derives from the verb shatat'sya, meaning to waver. He has converted back to Christianity, and believes that religion holds the key to morality and a

[77] Dostoevsky, *PSS* 10:294. Не смущайтесь, что блины будем есть. Это ведь старинное, вечное, и тут есть хорошее.

better way of life. Shatov's beliefs are very much in line with Dostoevsky who believed that Russia should be ruled by a monarch guided by Christian theology.

The final impetus for Shatov's murder is tied to the return of his wife, Marya. Marya and Shatov were married in Switzerland, and spent just a few weeks together before he returned to Russia. They have not seen each other in three years. More still, Mary returns from Switzerland pregnant with Stravrogin's child. Shatov is overjoyed to see her, and professes that he is still in love with her, even "after Switzerland"[78] (emphasizing that their love was not just one of the fictitious marriages entered into to facilitate travel abroad for the woman). Shatov accepts the child into his life and hopes that they can all start over again as a family. This embracing of family life is ultimately his downfall, the final lynchpin to his murder.[79]

While Shatov is tending to his pregnant wife, there is a knock at the door. It is one of the members of the secret society, Erkel, who informs Shatov that he needs to hand over the documents for the printing press so that ownership can be transferred. Shatov, wanting to be rid of the secret society, agrees immediately and returns to his wife.

The presence of Marya, we learn, is pivotal:

> Ему велено было, например, хорошенько, между прочим, высмотреть обстановку Шатова, во время исполнения своего поручения, и когда Шатов, приняв его на лестнице, сболтнул в жару, всего вероятнее не заметив того, что к нему воротилась жена, — у Эркеля тотчас же достало инстинктивной хитрости не выказать ни малейшего дальнейшего любопытства, несмотря на блеснувшую в уме догадку, что факт воротившейся жены имеет большое значение в успехе их предприятия.[80]
> [Erkel] was told to have a good look at Shatov's surroundings while carrying out his instructions, and when Shatov incautiously let slip the information (probably without being aware of it himself) that his wife had come back to him, Erkel was sufficiently cunning not to show any curiosity in spite of the fact that the thought flashed through is

[78] [Видно, что вы любите жену после Швейцарии. Это хорошо, если после Швейцарии.] Dostoevsky, *PSS*, 7:532.
[79] It is also important to note that Shatov's family structure, where he is the stepfather to his wife's child, mirrors that of the Holy Family.
[80] Dostoevsky, *PSS*, 7:536.

> mind that the fact of the return of Shatov's wife was of great importance to the success of their enterprise.[81]

The reasons that Marya's presence is so pivotal to their "enterprise," namely Shatov's murder, are then explained:

> To begin with, it flustered Shatov, put him off his stride, deprived him of his habitual foresight and caution. Any thought for his own safety would have been the last thing to entire his head now that he was preoccupied with something else.
>
> Во-первых, он взволновал Шатова, выбил его из колеи, отнял от него обычную прозорливость и осторожность. Какая-нибудь идея о своей собственной безопасности менее всего могла прийти теперь в его голову, занятую совсем другим.[82]

Shatov fails here to live up to the "Revolutionary Catechism." He lets his relationship distract him, leaving him and the cause open to threat in exposing a vulnerability. The impetus for Shatov's murder is thus represented by Dostoevsky as inextricable from his rejection of a chaste, anti-social life.

Violent ascetics are a common and unexplored theme in Dostoevsky. In the *Idiot*, Rogozhin rents his home to skoptsy, castrates.[83] Smerydakov wears white stockings, which horrify Ivan, as they are generally associated with the skoptsy.[84] That both Rogozhin and Smerydakov were surrounded by these castrates shows a fear Dostoevsky had of extremism, particularly in matters of sexuality.

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[81] Magarshack, 571.
[82] Dostoevsky, *PSS*, 7:536.
[83] For more on the skoptsy in *The Idiot*, see Comer, William J. "Rogozhin and the "Castrates": Russian. Religious Traditions in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*," *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Spring, 1996), 85-99. For more on the skoptsy in general, see: Engelstein, Laura. *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.
[84] The skoptsy, or "White Doves" (Belye Golubi) wore white to symbolize their purity.

Nigilistki and Fingernails

At one point in *Devils*, a meeting of the secret society takes place. This scene is key because it shows Dostoevsky's response to the involvement of women in the nihilist movement. As the second chapter of the dissertation will delve more deeply into, nihilist women often went to far more extreme measures than their male counterparts in an effort to demonstrate their commitment to the radical cause. Austerity and the renunciation of marriage were seen as being impossible for women, supposedly trained their whole lives to be flirts and wives. [85] Nechaev even deals separately with women in his Revolutionary Catechism:

> женщины, которых должно разделить на три главных разряда. Одне — пустые, обессмысленные и бездушные, которыми можно пользоваться, как третьею и четвертою категориею мужчин. Другия — горячия, преданныя, способныя, но не наши, потому что не доработались еще до настоящего безфразного и фактического революционного понимания. Их должно употреблять, как мужчин пятой категории. Наконец, женщины совсем наши, то есть вполне посвященныя и принявшия всецело нашу программу. Они нам товарищи. Мы должны смотреть на них, как на драгоценнейшее сокровище наше, без помощи которых нам обойтись невозможно.[86]

> [Women] can be divided into three main groups. First, those frivolous, thoughtless, and vapid women... Second, women who are ardent, capable, and devoted, but who do not belong to us because they have not yet achieved a passionless and austere revolutionary understanding…Finally, there are the women who are completely on our side – i.e., those who are wholly dedicated and who have accepted our program in its entirety. They are our comrades. We must look at them as valuable treasures without whose help we will not make it.[87]

[85] This is a social construct that will be explored more in the depth in the next chapter which deals exclusively with the challenges women faced inserting themselves into the ascetic male tradition.
[86] Савченко, 376.
[87] Translation by Alan Kimball.

Nechaev here expresses a widely held concern that there are many women of the second category, who were committed to the ideals of the cause, but could not adhere to the necessary asceticism the life of a revolutionary required. As a response to those concerns, women often were the most orthodox in renouncing the family and the mandate of physical attractiveness. When Dostoevsky depicts nihilist women in *Devils*, they appear even more orthodox in their austerity than their male counterparts.

A nihilist woman is present at the meeting who is described in keeping with stereotypes: "The tea was poured by Madame Virginsky's sister, an unmarried woman of 30, a taciturn and venomous creature, with hair that was almost colorless and no eyebrows, a staunch upholder of the 'new ideas.'"[88] There is a second female nihilist present, Mademoiselle Virginsky, "a student, and a nihilist, who was also rather good-looking, red-cheeked, short, plum, and round as a little ball." Mademoiselle Virginsky is in town for a couple of days we learn; her plans are to travel throughout the country visiting every university town to disseminate certain pamphlets she has in her possession (evocative of the pamphlets sent by Nechaev to his supporters, Vera Zasulich in particular). The meeting is held in the Virginsky's home. Madame Virginsky is a nihilist and a midwife (as were many female radicals).[89]

The female student tries to start a debate about the role of the family, an institution she describes as a "superstition":[90]

> То есть мы знаем, например, что предрассудок о Боге произошёл от грома и молнии, — вдруг рванулась опять студентка, чуть не вскакивая глазами на Ставрогина; — слишком известно, что первоначальное человечество, пугаясь грома и молнии, обоготворило невидимого врага, чувствуя пред ним свою слабость. Но

[88] [Чай разливала тридцатилетняя дева, сестра хозяйки, безбровая и белобрысая, существо молчаливое и ядовитое, но разделявшая новые взгляды.] Dostoevsky, *PSS*, 7: 366.
[89] Chapter 2 will discuss the nigilistki who studied medicine.
[90] For more on the use of the word "superstition"/"predrassudok" in this scene, see: Fusso, Susanne. *Discovering Sexuality in Dostoevsky*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006, 110-111.

> откуда произошёл предрассудок о семействе? Откуда могло взяться само семейство?[91]
>
> We know, for instance, that the superstition about God came from thunder and lightning." The girl-student rushed into the fray again, staring at Stavrogin with her eyes almost jumping out of her head. It's a well-known fact that primitive man, terrified by thunder and lightning, deified the invisible enemy, being aware of his own weakness before it. But how did the superstition about the family arise? How did the family itself arise?[92]

Stavrogin responds to her question with sexual innuendo, "I suppose the answer to such a question would be rather indiscreet."[93] She replies that she does not understand, and everyone in the room begins to chuckle, amused by her naiveté. Madame Virginsky, less "naïve" as she is a midwife by profession, similarly makes her aversion to the family known when she later delivers Shatov's son. Shatov is overjoyed at the birth of his child and declares that life is a mystery. Coldly, Madame Virginsky replies, "It's simply a further development of the organism, and there's no mystery whatever here…If you were right, every fly would be a mystery. But let me tell you this: superfluous people ought not be born."[94]

The meeting also involves an important scene involving Stepan Trofimovich's son. Shigalyov is preparing to introduce a topic for discussion relating to theories of social organization when Pyotr Stepanovich interrupts to ask Mrs. Virginsky if she has any scissors:

> — Арина Прохоровна, нет у вас ножниц? — спросил вдруг Пётр Степанович.
> — Зачем вам ножниц? — выпучила та на него глаза.
> — Забыл ногти обстричь, три дня собираюсь, — промолвил он, безмятежно рассматривая свои длинные и нечистые ногти.
> Арина Прохоровна вспыхнула, но девице Виргинской как бы что-то понравилось.

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[91] Dostoevsky, *PSS,* 7:371.
[92] Magarshack, 397.
[93] Ibid, 397. [Я полагаю, что ответ на такой вопрос нескромен, — отвечал Ставрогин.] Dostoevsky, *PSS*, 7:371.
[94] Magarshack, 589. [Просто дальнейшее развитие организма, и ничего тут нет, никакой тайны…Этак всякая муха тайна. Но вот что: лишним людям не надо бы родиться.] Dostoevsky, *PSS*, 7:552.

— Кажется, я их здесь, на окне давеча видела, — встала она из-за стола, пошла, отыскала ножницы и тотчас же принесла с собой. Пётр Степанович даже не посмотрел на неё, взял ножницы и начал возиться с ними. Арина Прохоровна поняла, что это реальный приём, и устыдилась своей обидчивости.[95]

-Mrs. Virginsky, have you any scissors? Verkhovensky asked suddenly.
-What do you want scissors for? Mrs. Virginsky glared at him.
-I've forgotten to cut my nails.
Mrs. Virginsky flushed, but Miss Virginsky seemed please at something.
-I believe I saw them on the windowsill a short while ago, she said, getting up from the table.
She went up to the window, found the scissors and brought them back at once. Verkhovensky did not even glance at her. He took the scissors and began busying himself with them. Mrs. Virginsky realized there was a sound method in his request and was ashamed at her touchiness. [96]

This scissors episode is key for a number of reasons. Long fingernails were associated with Pushkin and the Russian aristocracy whose nails were not naturally cut down by hard labor. In asking for scissors, the young Verkhovensky is showing that he upholds the behavioral norms of radical youth. This is the "sound method" that Mrs. Virginsky eventually comes to recognize, and also likely the reason that the young nihilist Miss. Virginsky smiles at him. This episode is also important because in it, Dostoevsky seems to suggest that the behavioral aspects of Russian radicalism often superseded important theoretical discussions.[97]

The Fete

Another pivotal scene in *Devils* is the fete organized by Mrs. Lembke. Mrs. Lembke, the wife of the governor and advocate for progressive causes, decides to organize a ball to support

[95] Dostoevsky, *PSS*, 7:377-378.
[96] Magarshack, 403.
[97] Much in the same way that the smell of Father Zosima's body in *The Brothers Karamazov* undoes his legacy in the eyes of the superficial monks who place more importance in symbols than in true faith.

impoverished local governesses.[98] Governesses were most often women who had been unable to find husbands, and were forced to work in the homes of the wealthy families, educating their children. The fact that Dostoevsky makes this ball and the plight of unmarried women the site for the major denouement (the revealing of the secret society in the town) is significant. It shows an understanding of the fact that the revolutionary cause had its roots not only in the "woman question," but more specifically in the question of the unmarried woman.

As will be discussed more at length in the second chapter, there was a significant number of women at the time without husbands and without support from their extended family (the latter was an unforeseen consequence of the abolishment of serfdom). This drew a large number of women to the radical cause who out of necessity had to agitate for admission to university and access to the professions. The plight of unmarried women and female students was integral to the recruiting efforts to radicals like Nechaev. The narrator of *Devils* (though his account is later questioned) speaks at length about the number of women who showed up to the ball hoping to find husbands:

> Комитет действительно сперва опасался, что по три рубля не поедут барышни, и предлагал устроить как-нибудь билеты посемейные, а именно, чтобы каждое семейство платило за одну лишь барышню, а все остальные барышни, принадлежащие к этой фамилии, хотя бы в числе десяти экземпляров, входили даром. Но все опасения оказались напрасными: напротив, барышни-то и явились. Даже самые беднейшие чиновники привезли своих девиц и, слишком ясно, не будь у них девиц, им самим и в мысль не пришло бы подписаться. Один ничтожнейший секретарь привез всех своих семерых дочерей.[99]
>
> "Indeed, the committee were at first afraid that the young ladies might not come if they had to pay three rubles for a ticket, and suggested issuing special family tickets so that each family should pay for one girl only, while the other young ladies of the family, even if there were a dozen specimens, should be admitted free. But all their apprehensions

[98] There has been much scholarship on the figure of the governess, though mostly as they figured in Victorian English in society. See: Hughes, Kathryn. *The Victorian Governess*. London: Bloomsbury, 2001; Brandon, Ruth. *Governesses: The Life and Times of the Real Jane Eyres*. New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2008.
[99] Dostoevsky, *PSS*, 7:435.

> proved to be groundless: it was just the young ladies who did turn up. Even the poorest civil servants brought their girls with them, and it was all too evident that if they had no girls, it never would have occurred to them to subscribe. One secretary brought his seven daughters, his wife, and niece."[100]

It is important to note Dostoevsky's parodic treatment of the ball and Mrs. Lembke in particular exists side by side with his denunciation of the radicals. While not in agreement with the radical prescription for unmarried women, he similarly denigrates people like Mrs. Lembke who believe that the problem facing women in Russian society could be solved with a ball. Dostoevsky was throughout his life very sympathetic to the plight of poor women and women without family. He devoted much of his literary output to providing spiritually positive portrayals of prostitutes (Sonya in *Crime and Punishment*, Liza in *Notes from the Underground*) and on shedding light on the struggles faced by orphaned girls (*Netochka Nezvanova)*. As Nina Pelikan Straus articulates in *Dostoevsky and the Woman Question*, the most egregious acts committed at the hands of the secret group (aside from the murder of Shatov), are ones committed against women: "[Dostoevsky] exposes the consequences of violent male sexism through Stavrogin's relationship with the proud Liza, the misguided Matyrosha, the crippled Maria, and the submissive Dasha."[101]

At one point in the fete, one of the members of the secret society, Liputin goes up on stage to recite a poem, aptly titled "To a Local Russian Governess from a Poet at the Fete." The poem is an honest, albeit abrasive, description of the prospects for marriage most Russian women faced at the time:

Здравствуй, здравствуй, гувернантка!
Веселись и торжествуй.
Ретроградка иль Жорж-Зандка,

[100] Magarshack, 463.
[101] Straus, Nina Pelikan. *Dostoevsky and the Woman Question*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, 86.

Все равно теперь ликуй!

Fair governesses all, good morrow!
True Blue or true George Sander,
Triumph now and banish sorrow,
Now the world will be much kinder!

Учишь ты детей сопливых
По-французски букварю
И подмигивать готова,
Чтобы взял, хоть понмарю!

Teaching French to snively children,
Over your grammar book you'd look
To give the wink to catch a sexton,
For him, too, you'd bait your hook

Но в наш век реформ великих
Не возьмет и пономарь;
Надо, барышня, "толиких",
Или снова за букварь.[102]

But in these days of great reformings,
Not a sexton e'en will marry you.
Unless, my dear, you have 'the doings'
That, you, know, is sadly true.[103]

There is an uproar following the recitation of the poem, and the narrator notes that many of the women present took the words quite literally and worried amongst themselves that the part about not getting married might in fact be true. At the end of the fete, the female student from the meeting gets up on stage and unrolls one of her pamphlets and begins to speak about the plight of students and the need to protest, thereby tying together the themes of unmarried women and social revolution.

Conclusion

[102] Dostoevsky, *PSS*, 7:441-442.
[103] Magarshack, 471.

The fete scene is important because it shows Dostoevsky's firm grasp of the challenges facing women, particularly unmarried women, in Russian society. While he does not support the solutions presented to women by the radical left, he also understands that the non-revolutionary liberalism of Mrs. Lembke does not offer a better solution. Dostoevsky, like Tolstoy in "The Infected Family" *(Zarazhennoe semeistvo),* eased his radical critique when it came to women. The nihilist women in *Devils* read more often as victims of radical ideology than as violent perpetrators. While the female student is rigorous in her rejection of bourgeois values and her commitment to inciting student protest, the male members of the secret society are more often than not engaged in egoism and posturing (i.e. trimming their fingernails). What the dynamics between the male and the female nihilists in *Devils* points to was the very real issue of sexism within the radical movement. The following chapter explores the practice of chastity among female nihilists, and the difficulty they faced fitting into the radical ascetic tradition.

Chapter 2: Radical Chasity Abroad: The Nigilistki in Zurich

> "I was nineteen years old, but I intended to renounce all pleasures and amusements, even the most innocent ones, in order to lose not a minute of time."[104]
>
> -Vera Figner

> "Most nigilistki are usually very plain and exceedingly ungracious, so that they have no need to cultivate curt, awkward manners; they dress with no taste, and in impossibly filthy fashion, rarely wash their hands, never clean their nails, often wear glasses, always cut their hair and sometimes even shave it off…They read Feuerbach and Buchner almost exclusively, despise art, use 'ty' with several young men, light their cigarettes not from a candle, but from men who smoke, are uninhibited in their choice of expressions, live either alone or in phalansteries, and talk most of all about the exploitation of labor, about the silliness of marriage and family, and about anatomy."[105] – *Newsworld West, 1864*

This quote, taken from an 1864 issue of the conservative newspaper *Newsworld West*, offers a disapproving, but nonetheless discerning portrait of a nigilistka. Many of the nihilist women who pursued higher education did indeed study anatomy. They traveled abroad, mostly to Switzerland, to study medicine with the intention of returning to Russia to work as doctors among the peasant class. What the rest of this characterization of the nigilistki points to, however, is precisely what made this generation of female activists unique from their predecessors. The references to physical appearance, behavior, personal preferences, and attitudes toward marriage and family, confirm the phenomenon discussed in the previous

[104] [Мне было 19 лет, но я думала отказаться от всех удовольствий и развлечений, даже самых невинных, чтоб не терять ни минуты дорогого времени.] Figner, Vera. *Запечатленный труд: воспоминания, Volume 1*, 114.
[105] Paperno, 18.

chapter, namely that for nineteenth century Russian radicals, private and public life were inseparable; a commitment to radical politics could and should be discernible in one's physical appearance, personal habits, and attitudes towards sex. In his study of the fiction writing of the nigilistki Nadezhda Suslova and Sophia Kovalevskaya, Peter Pozefsky writes:

> In fact, as a cohort, this generation of radicals was less recognizable for any articulated political program than for cultural politics which called into question traditional forms of social life and were expressed through the medium of everyday life—in clothes, speech, and social conduct. Most notorious were the nigilistki (nihilist women) who traded their hooped skirts and crinolines for black jumpers,[106] wore blue tinted glasses, smoked cigarettes, cropped their hair, and received men unaccompanied by chaperones.[107]

Similarly, in his monumental study of the history of women's rights movements in Russia, Richard Stites stressed that the nihilist contribution to "Russian feminism"[108] had to be evaluated completely separately, explaining that "it differed…in stressing personal liberation, sexual freedom, intellectual fulfillment, and a visibly experimental lifestyle."[109] The nihilist focus on personal and sexual freedom was, as Stites continues, "psychologically alien to the moderate feminism" that preceded it in Russia.[110]

This chapter is devoted primarily to the Fritsch Circle, a group of radicalized Russian female medical students in Zurich associated with the nihilist movement. The Fritsch women, like their male counterparts, held asceticism as the ideal towards which all radical youth should strive in their personal lives. The ascetic life, however, and in particular chastity, posed unique

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[106] In Oscar Wilde's play about a female Nihilist, the titular character, "Vera," wears a yellow dress underneath her black one, symbolizing her political ambivalence. See: Oscar, Wilde. "Vera, or the Nihilists," in *Wilde: The Complete Plays*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014, 515-579.
[107] Pozefsky, Peter C. "Love, Science and Politics in the Fiction of the Shestidesiatnitsy N.P. Suslova and S.V. Kovalevskaya," *Russian Review*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (Jul., 1999), 361.
[108] Stites refers to women's rights activism as "Feminism" though the term was not yet then used.
[109] Stites, Richard. *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, xviii.
[110] Ibid, xviii.

challenges for women. Pervasive gender stereotypes, particularly that women were incapable of seeing themselves outside of the roles of wife and mother, hindered their acceptance into the ascetic Nihilist milieu.

In her work on the role of women in the Russian intelligentsia, feminist scholar Barbara Engel has written extensively about the need to treat the female revolutionary experience as an altogether separate topic, as opposed to viewing the nihilist movement as a monolith. No one, in Engel's opinion, has "probed deeply or systematically into the underlying social forces that prompted women to step outside the family-centered role, nor did they examine the value system that enabled women to challenge that role successfully."[111] Reminding readers of how entrenched women's roles as wife and mother were in nineteenth century Russia, Engel insists that even with the expansion of education and professional opportunities for women in the latter half of the nineteenth century, traditional expectations did not change, and embarking on a life outside of the family sphere was still highly exceptional. Special attention, she implores, must be paid to the unique path these women had to take to participate actively in the radical movement and to reject the family-centered roles expected of women in favor of revolutionary asceticism.

This chapter attempts to resolve some of those absences in the criticism by exploring the strategies the nigilistki used to insert themselves into the radical ascetic tradition. Close attention will be paid to the memoirs of Vera Figner, one of the most prominent members of the Fritsch Circle, as well as the fiction writing of Nadezha Suslova and Sofia Kovalevskaya.[112]

Background

[111] Engel, Barbara Alpern. *Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth-Century Russia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 4.
[112] Kovalevskaya studied in Saint Petersburg, not Zurich. Many Russian female students could not afford the trip to Switzerland, and thus stayed in Russia.

The term "Nihilism" came into wide usage after the publication of Ivan Turgenev's novel, *Fathers and Children* (1862), in which Bazarov proudly declares himself to be a nihilist. Far from specific, the term "nihilist" was applied to all progressive-minded youth who were committed to building a more egalitarian society. For the most part, they were students of the sciences, mostly medicine, who believed that scientific truths, as opposed to religion, should inform the re-building of Russian society after serfdom.[113] However, what separated the nihilists from liberal reformers was an unprecedented commitment to dismantling inequality and patriarchal gender relations in their own personal lives, something they believed was achievable only through the sublimation of sex and the adoption of an overall ascetic lifestyle.

While the novels of George Sand are often credited with inspiring women's liberation in Russia,[114] the nigilistki found less inspiration in the extramarital love affairs of Sand's heroines and looked instead to a familiar male figure—Rakhmetov. Indeed, for the nigilistki, it was Rakhmetov, not Vera Pavlovna upon whom they chose to model their lives. In her memoirs, Vera Figner writes: "Chernyshevsky's novel *What is to be Done?* did not make any impression on me. I was only interested in Rakhmetov, in his asceticism."[115] As discussed in the last chapter, Irina Paperno argues that *What is to be Done?* was innovative not for its political message, but in that it located social change in the transformation of consciousness, or as

[113] Pozefsky, 362. Pozefsky writes, "While European radicals took interest in the great discoveries of the nineteenth century, they typically invested their intellectual energies in political theory and the social sciences.

[114] For more on the influence of George Sand on Russian literature, see Eidelman, Dawn, *George Sand and the Nineteenth Century Russian Love Triangle Novels*, Bucknell University Press, 1994.

[115] "Роман 'Что делать?' [Чернышевского] не произвел на меня никакого впечатления. Заинтересовал только Рахметов, его аскетизм." Figner, Vera. *Student Years* (1872-1876). Moscow: Voice of Labor, 1924.

Paperno elaborates, "a deliberate psychological self-organization in which one's private personality, one's psychic life itself, was shaped to conform to a historical mold."[116]

This attention to the personal, as actively manifested in one's own behavior, was a turning point that marked an entirely new approach to grappling with "the woman question." For Figner and her contemporaries, Rakhmetov and his asceticism were the most instructive aspects of Chernyshevsky's novel. As she writes in her memoirs, a total rejection of physical comfort and pleasure came to define the moral imperative of the Nihilist movement: "Here in Zurich, a hub for socialist ideas, asceticism seemed to be a necessary requirement for everyone. Having accepted these ideas into our lives, as converts, we unanimously abided by that requirement."[117]

Women's Education and Zurich

Figner belonged to the largest group of Russian nihilists living abroad, the so-called "Zurich colony." The Swiss city was especially well-populated by female nihilists, who, incapable of receiving medical degrees at home, flocked to the well-established medical university in Zurich. The nigilistki in Switzerland were significantly more radical than their counterparts living in Russia. Half of them had police records for involvement in revolutionary activities, and several of them would go on to participate in the plot to assassinate Alexander II.[118] Most research on the Russian women who studied in Zurich has focused primarily on their

[116] Paperno, 37-38.
[117] [Теперь в Цюрихе, при знакомстве с социалистическими идеями, аскетизм оказывался необходимым требованием от каждого, принявшего эти идеи; мы, новообращенные, единодушно держались этого.] Ibid, 97. The translation is my own.
[118] Engel, Barbara, "Women Medical Students in Russia, 1872-1882: Reformers or Rebels?," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Spring, 1979), 397.

political activities. This research has been important in drawing attention to the valuable contributions of women to Russian radicalism and politics in the nineteenth century. However, little attention has been paid to the connection between the political and personal lives of the nihilist women, and how they uniquely adapted to the ascetic demands of the Russian radicalism ethos.

The nihilist imperative to study science for the benefit of society posed a special challenge for Russian women. Education in the Russian Empire was extremely limited, though still better than in many Western European countries. There had been no secondary education for girls until the late 1850s, and it was only in 1869 with the establishment of non-degree programs for women in the Saint Petersburg (called Alarchinskii courses) that there were any opportunities for Russian women to benefit from higher education in any sort of structured way.[119] The move of Russian women to universities began in the late 1850s when in 1859 women began to audit lecture courses in state universities.[120] This was in and of itself a radical move that seemed to challenge the place of women in society. The entry of women into higher education triggered a large debate about what the goal of women's education should be and what effect it might have on the Russian family. Equal access to the pursuit of higher education became a lightning rod that only further stirred the growing debate on the "women question" in Russia.

In her compilation of the memoirs of five female revolutionaries, *Five Sisters Against the Tsar*, Barbara Engel argues that the introduction of higher education in Russia was instrumental in developing the very active group of female revolutionaries that emerged in the 1870s (including the Fritsch Circle). Of the impact of the Alarchinskii courses, she writes:

[119] Stites, 4.
[120] Whittaker, Cynthia H. "The Women's Movement During the Reign of Alexander II: A Case Study in Russian Liberalism," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (June 1976), 39.

> [They] provided an invaluable opportunity for women to meet and develop their political and social views while furthering their knowledge of science and mathematics. Feminist activity flourished. Elizabeth Kovalevskaya described the unending succession of meetings at which women students—men excluded—discussed their position in the family and their role in society. Before long, the topics of study came to include other social questions as well, such as the situation of the working class and the peasantry.[121]

The Alarchinskii courses were under constant threat of being shut down by the authorities, particularly as the connection between greater educational opportunities for women and political activism became more apparent.[122] Saint Petersburg was becoming a hotbed of the political activity, with agitators like Nechaev targeting young women in particular.[123]

Women who wanted to earn a degree and study without fear of government interference fled abroad, mostly to universities in Switzerland and Germany. Zurich, with its well-established Russian émigré community and renowned medical university, became the educational center for Russian women seeking higher education. Zurich had been a hotbed of revolutionary activity long before the Fritsch Circle formed, but it was with the 1863 decree that officially banned women from enrolling in Russian universities that the city and the University of Zurich saw an influx of radicalized Russian female students. This reactionary ban was especially felt in the heyday of the Great Reforms. As stated, many of these women chose to study medicine as means of helping the poor at home in Russia. Nadezhda Suslova, who is considered the first Russian female doctor, stated specifically that she wanted to practice medicine in Kirghizstan, where Muslim women could not be seen by male doctors for religious reasons.[124] Most of the

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[121] Engel, *Five Sisters*, xii.
[122] "In 1882, Alexander III appointed Ivan Delianov, a longtime opponent of higher education for women, as Minister of Education who ordered a committee to investigate the courses on the grounds that they were hotbeds of socialism." Whittaker, 61.
[123] Vera Zasulich describes meeting Nechaev and the influence his *Revolutionary Catechism* had on the female students in Saint Petersburg in Engel, *Five Sisters*, 74.
[124] Pozefsky, 365

women who moved to Zurich, like Chernyshevsky's heroine Vera Pavlovna in *What is to Be Done*? entered into "fictitious marriages" in order to leave their families and study abroad in Switzerland.[125] In such arrangements, a progressive-minded man would marry a woman, thereby allowing her to leave home and gain independence, with the understanding that the marriage would not be consummated.[126]

Once in Zurich, the colony of Russian female students began to form revolutionary study groups.[127] The most politically active of them was a group called the Fritsch Circle. Named after the woman who owned the house they lived in, Frau Fritsch, its members included many of the women who would go on to participate in the leftwing terrorist organization "Narodnaya Volya" (People's Will) led by Nikolai Morozov. Vera Figner and her sister Lidya were among its members, as well as Nadezhda Suslova, and Olga Lyubatovich (one of the first revolutionaries to subscribe to Morozov's theory of terrorism).[128] In addition to pursuing their studies, they actively took part in creating a revolutionary consciousness amongst the Russian colony in Zurich and abroad through meetings and the publishing of radical pamphlets, most famously Pyotr Lavrov's anarchist journal *Vpered*! (Forward!).[129]

What distinguished the women of the Fritsch Circle from other revolutionary study groups in Zurich was their insistence on asceticism in all aspects of daily life as a fundamental

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[125] Women were not allowed to hold a passport without the permission of their father, or their husband if married. For more information on that passport law, see *Svod Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, volume. 14, pp. 85–121, 199–210 (St. Petersburg, 1857, 1890).

[126] Occasionally, this "understanding" was misunderstood. Sophia Kovalevskaya in particular entered into a marriage predicated on the grounds that it would not be consummated, but her husband eventually expected sexual relations.

[127] The papers of the women's club in Zurich and the rules for the women's library are housed in the Institute for International Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam in the Smirnov Archive. See Figure 1-5 for the rules of the women's study group.

[128] Nikolai Morozov (1954-1946) believed that a large number of small terror cells would be the best way to topple the tsarist government as it would make it difficult for the police to take down the movement in any one raid.

[129] Figner, Vera. *Studenchiskie gody*. Moscow: Golos Truda (The Voice of Labor), 1924, 124.

Figure 1: Rules of the Women's Club in Zurich

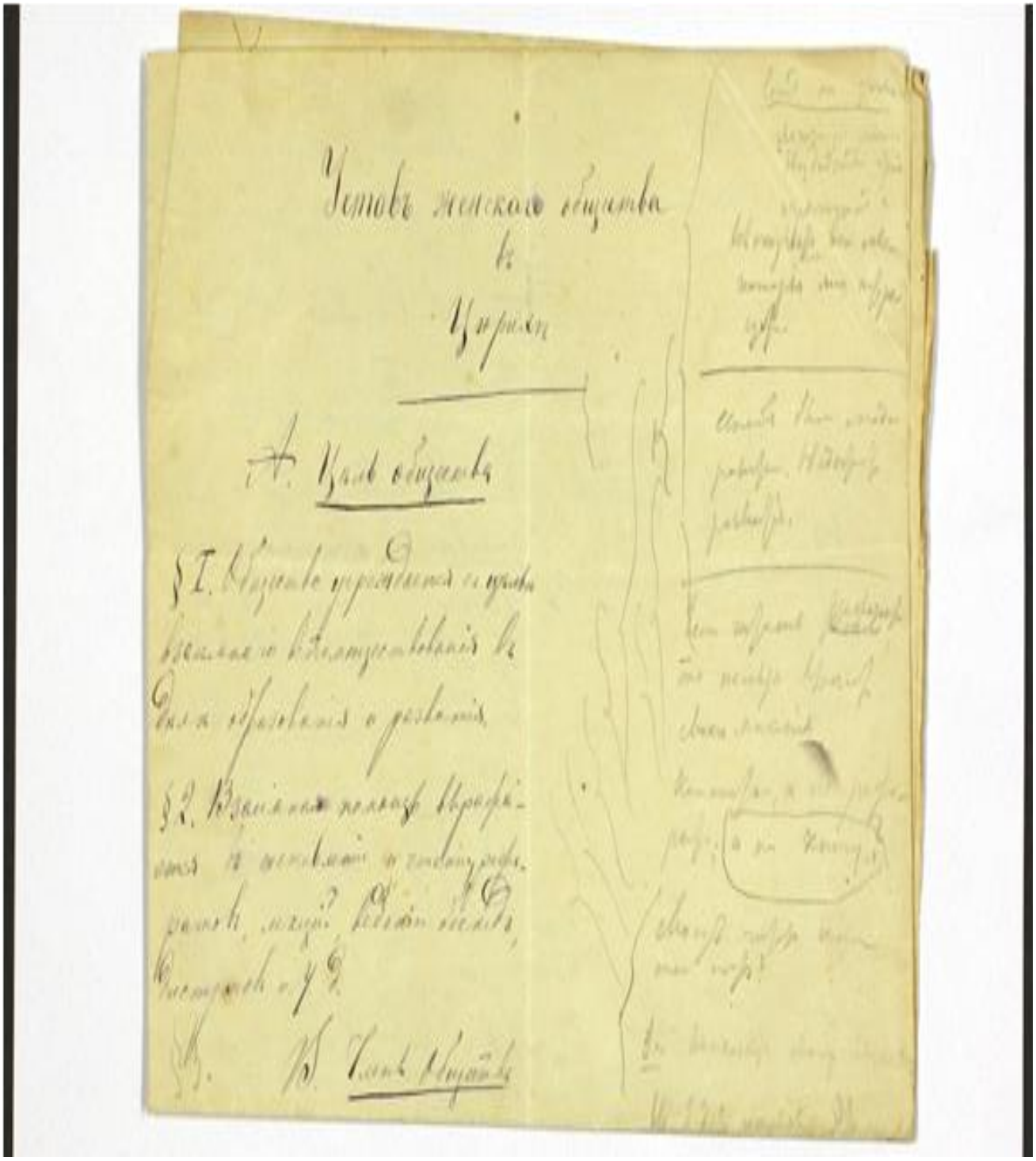


Figure 2: Rules of the Women's Club in Zurich (continued).

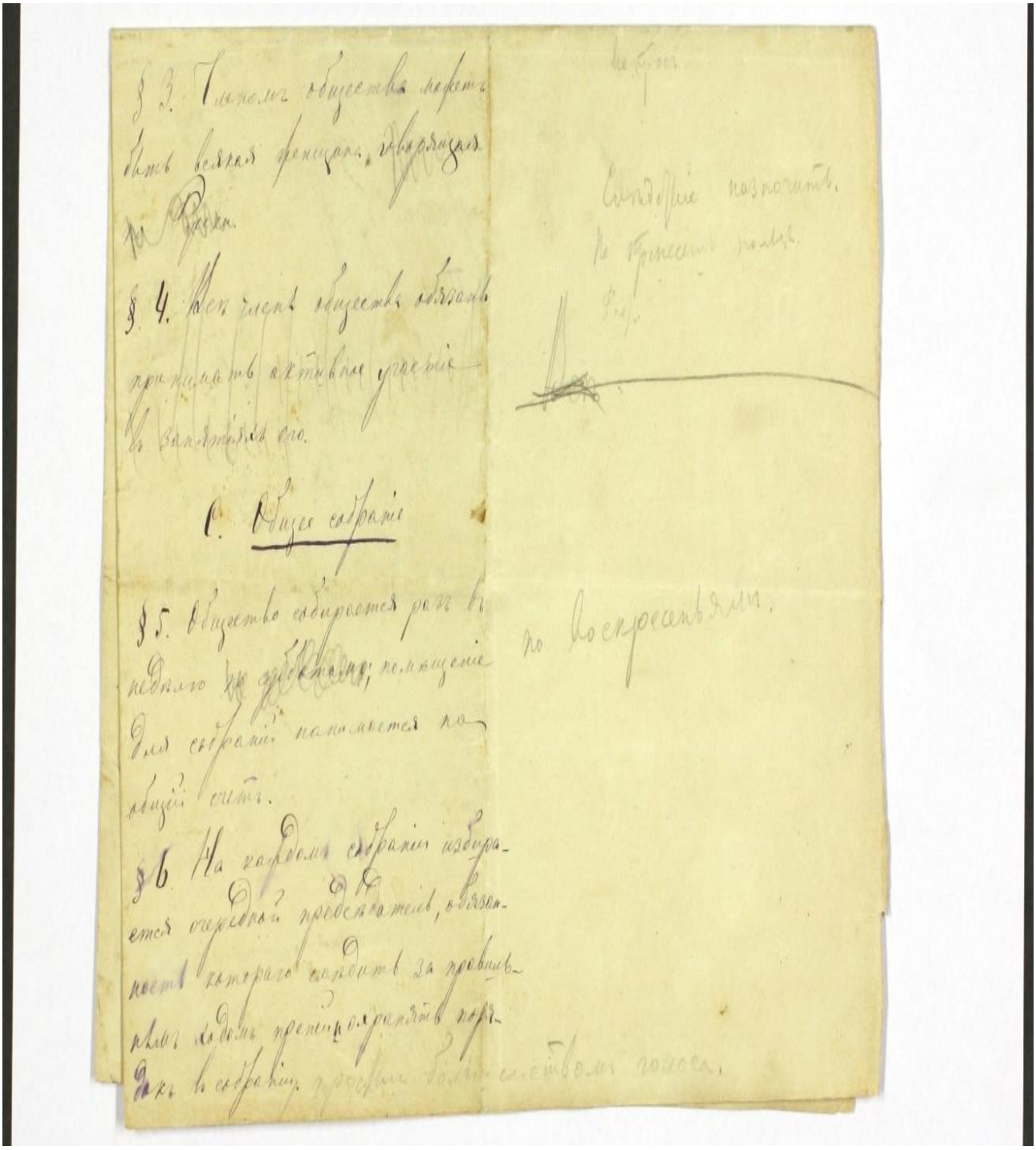


Figure 3: Rules of the Women's Club in Zurich (continued).

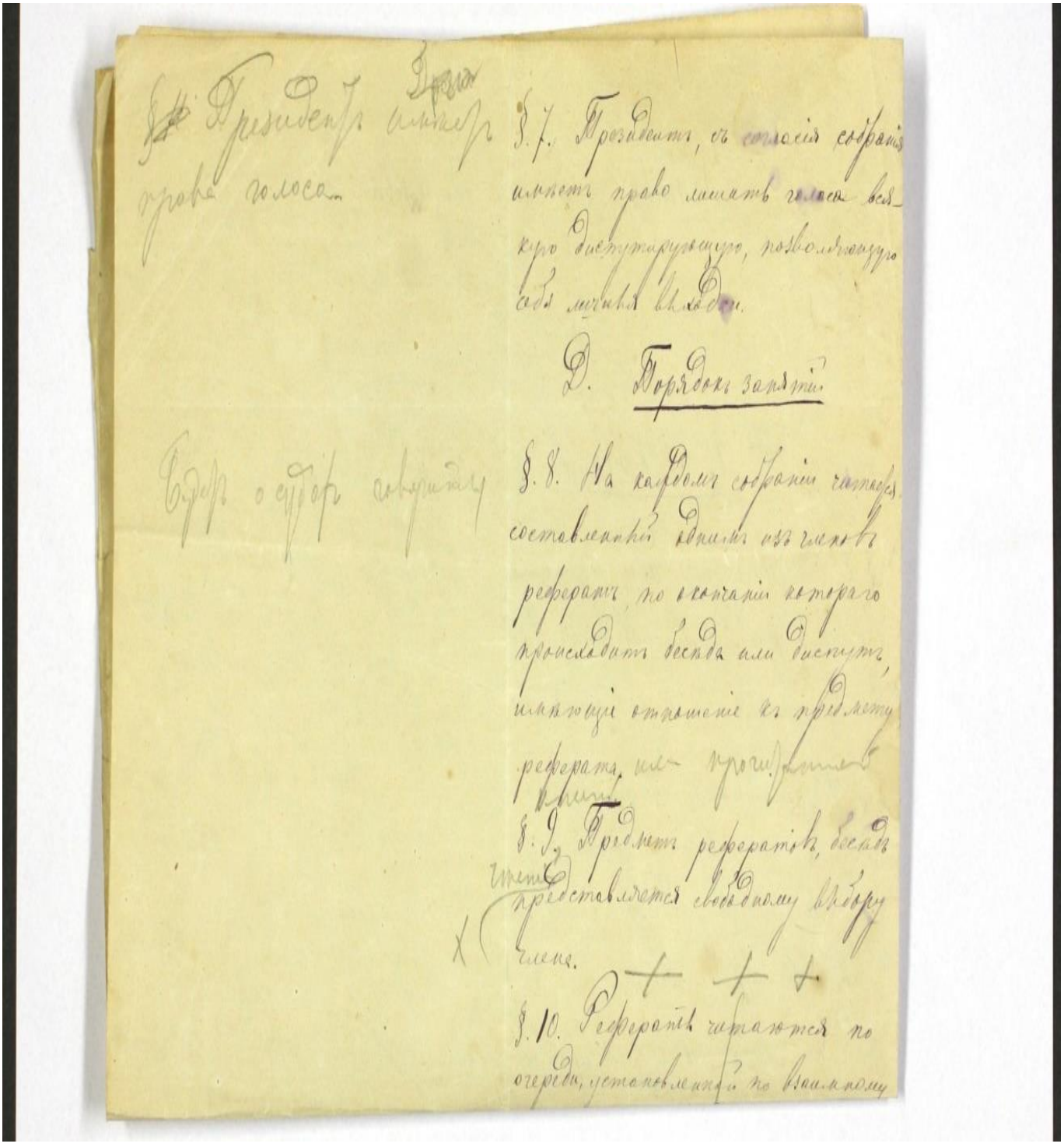


Figure 4: Rules of the Women's Club in Zurich (continued).

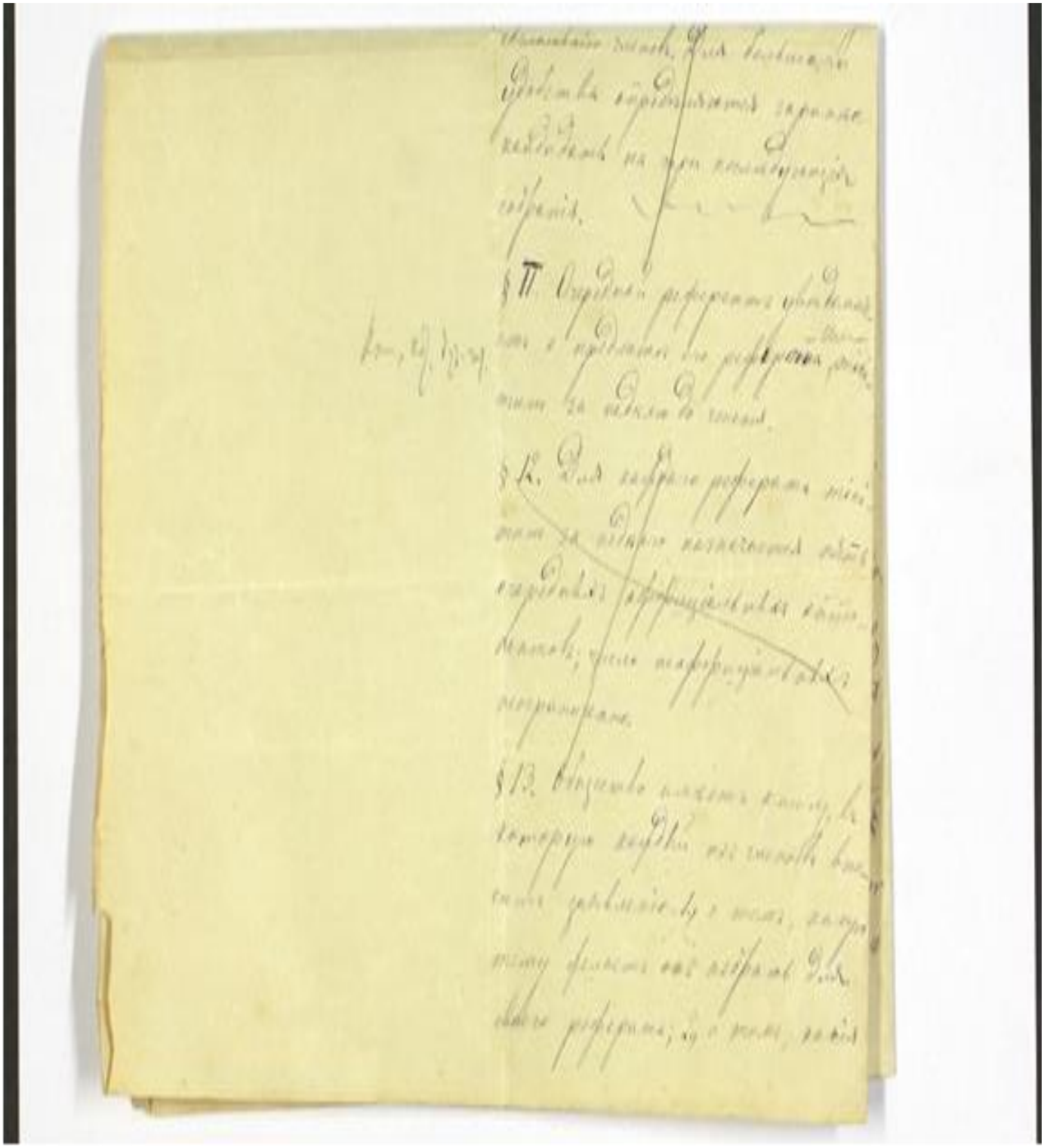
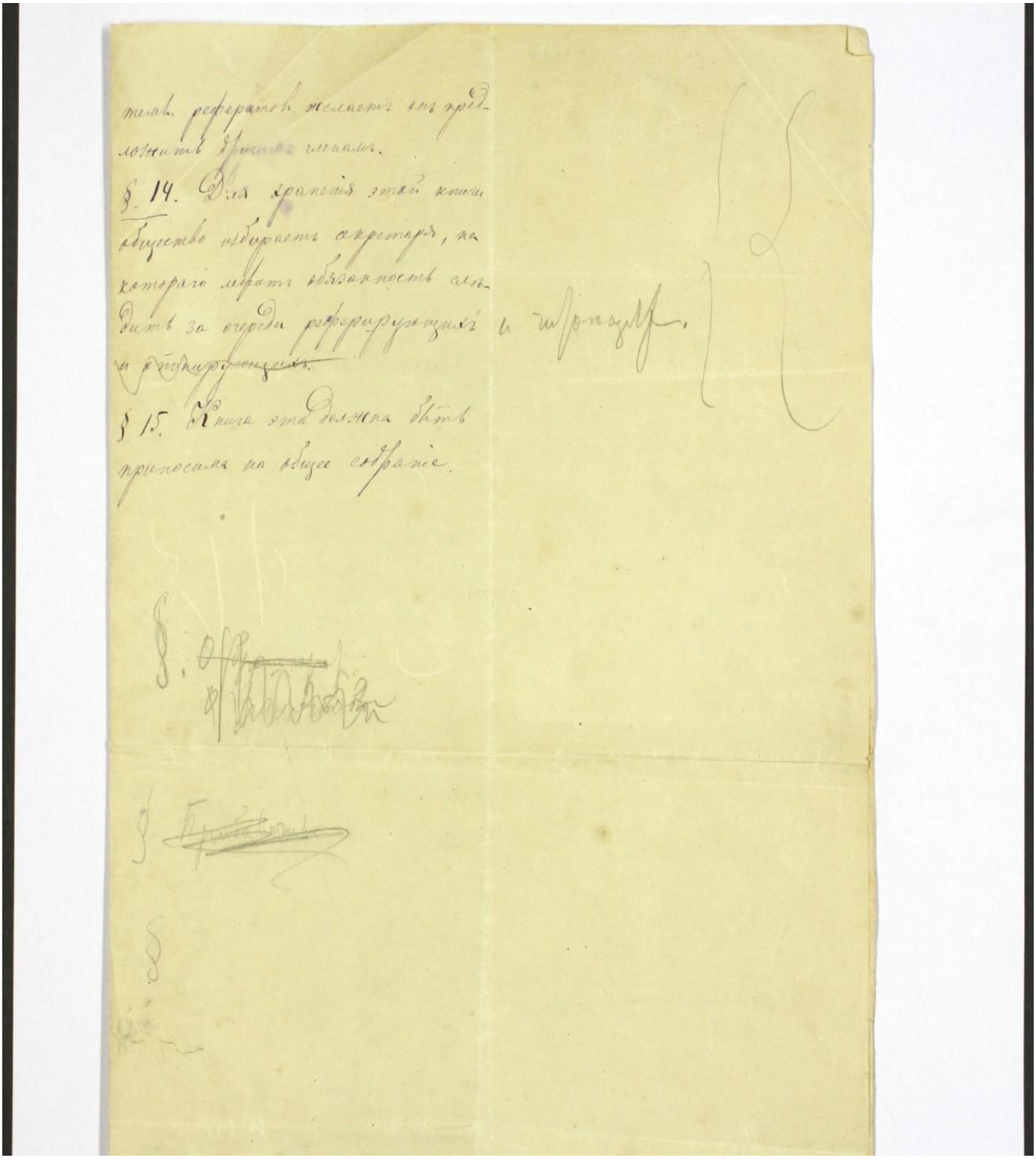


Figure 5: Rules of the Women's Club in Zurich (continued).



part of their political agenda. As previously mentioned, Vera Figner was especially inspired by the ascetic Rakhmetov from *What is to Be Done?,* and in her memoirs, she places that same asceticism at the heart of the revolutionary ethic. She recounts examples of the fierce dogmatism that drove the Fritsche Circle's renunciation of sensuality, including an incident in which a member was denounced as bourgeois for expressing her love of raspberries[130]:

> Люблю малину с сливками, неосторожно призналась однажды дочь Тамбовского помещика Бардина, и была посрамлена членом того же кружка фричей, к которому принадлежала. Вера Любатович совершенно искренно стала считать с тех пор Бардину буржуйкой.
>
> I love raspberries with cream,' the daughter of Bardin the landowner of Tambovsky carelessly admitted once, disgracing herself as a member of the Fritsch Circle. Vera Liubatovich from then on considered Bardin bourgeois. [131]

The women of the Fritsch circle kept their hair short and pulled back, and wore large, shapeless black dresses. However, the asceticism of the Fritsch Circle was not limited to choice of diet and dress. As marriage and children created restrictions for women that it did not for men, the female members of the nihilist movement often emphasized the sublimation of sex as part of the denial of bourgeois pleasures more so than their male counterparts. Romantic entanglements were severely looked down upon. In her memoirs, Sophia Kovalevskaya described how the women in her circle were angered when one of them, "committed the crime of a love marriage."[132] At one point, when the Fritsch Circle was considering merging with another revolutionary group, one containing male and female members, the Fritsch representatives

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[130] Fruit was frequently singled out by the nihilists as a bourgeois pleasure, more so than other foods. This could be because of the obvious religious symbolism, or that fruit provides little sustenance and was consequently a luxury item. Meat on the other hand was sanctioned by Rakhmetov as a necessity for nourishing the body of the laborer. For more on the sociology of food in nineteenth century Russia, see: LeBlanc, *Slavic Sins of the Flesh*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.

[131] Figner, *Studenchiskie*, 97-98.

[132] Engel, Barbara Alpern. *Mothers and Daughters*. 54.

wanted to make celibacy a requirement for membership, but the proposition was voted down by the men in the other group:

> Когда в кружке фричей (ее стоявшем исключительно из студенток), при слиянии с кружком кавказцев, обсуждался устав революционной организации, фричи предлагали внести безбрачие, как требование от членов. Но мужчины протестовали, и этот пункт не был введен.
>
> When the Fritsch Circle (which was made up entirely of female students) discussed merging with a delegation from the Caucasus, the Fritsch Circle suggested celibacy be made a requirement for members. However, the men from the other group protested, and the measure was not adopted.[133]

As Figner's anecdote attests to, female nihilists were often far more strict in adhering to the ideal set by Rakhmetov. One of the reasons for this was that their commitment to the revolutionary cause, as opposed to that of men, was viewed more often with skepticism.

Celibate Heroines

In addition to their political activism and storied careers as a doctor and a mathematician, respectively, Nadezhda Suslova and Sophia Kovalevskaya were also accomplished fiction writers whose work appeared in the male dominated "thick journals" of nineteenth century Russia including *Sovremennik*. In one such story published in *Sovremennik*, "Fantazerka" (1864), Suslova tells the story of a Petersburg debutante who falls in love with a poor government official interested in revolutionary ideas. Unschooled in the art of seduction, she appeals to her older sister, a seductress with no use for revolutionary ideals, to teach her, but the older sister ends up stealing the man for herself. As in her other prose writings, "A Story in

[133] I'm translating "безбрачие" here as "celibacy," as "unmarried" would not make sense as the Russian women would have had to have been legally married in order to travel to Zurich. As such, I use the implied meaning, or secondary definition of the word, "celibacy."

Letters" [Rasskaz v pismah] (1864), and the "From the Recent Past" [Iz nedavnogo proshlogo] (1861), in "Fantazerka," women who are able to flirt and seduce men are morally bankrupt, and are contrasted with a chaste heroine who is committed to improving society.

"Fantazerka" also draws a connection between the ascetic tendencies of radical youth, the emancipation of women, and other global political events. In the following exchange, the debutante's mother, fearing that her daughter's odd behavior might be connected with the political developments of the time, implores a family friend to speak with her:

> -в ея лета, возможно ли полное равнодушие к удовольствиям и нарядам.
> -Да, благовоспитанная девица должна любить светские развлечения.
> -Меня это то и пугает. Если ей позволить, то она будет целый день сидеть она и заниматься чтением, музыкой... Знаете, какие теперь страшные времена! Какие развращенным понятия начинают появляться! А эти толки об эмансипация женщин! Пожилая дама произнесла последнюю фразу с ужасом.
> -Очень опасно время! Все теперь толкуют об эмансипация негров, женщин, мужиков... Это мода заразительна, как эпидемия."
>
> -"At her age, is it possible to be completely indifferent to pleasure and dressing up?"
> - "No you're right. Young women should love society life and its divertissements."
> - "It frightens me. If it were up to her, she would spend the entire day just reading and studying music. What frightening times these are! What depraved ways of living are starting to appear! All this talk of the emancipation of women!" The older woman pronounced this last phrase with special terror.
> -"Yes, they are very dangerous times. Everyone is talking now about the emancipation of the Negroes, women, and lower class men. It is spreading like an infection, like an epidemic.[134]

In this exchange, Suslova connects the rejection of society values and female vanity in Russia with the emancipation of the slaves in the United States, speaking further to the deeply held belief that these small changes in social mores were seen as vital by radical Russian youth.

The story of a society girl's conversion is quite common in the literature of the time, particular that of the nigilistki. In her memoirs, Sophia Kovalevskaya writes about her sister

[134]Suslova, Nadezhda, "Fantazerka," *Sovremennik*. No. 103 (1864), 169. Translation is my own.

Anyuta, who all her life was the picture of a society girl, dreaming of her knight in a shining armor. As Anyuta gets older, the "epidemic" that Suslova's characters discuss is also unfolding in their town:

> Детьми, особенно девушками, овладела в то время словно эпидемия какая-то — убегать из родительского дома. В нашем непосредственном соседстве пока еще, бог миловал, все обстояло благополучно; но из других мест уже приходили слухи: то у того, то у другого помещика убежала дочь, которая за границу — учиться, которая в Петербург — к «нигилистам».[135]
>
> The children, particularly the young girls were seized that time by something like an epidemic of running away from the parental home. In our immediate neighborhood the Lord spared us, everything was still in order, but rumors were already flying from other parts: now one, now another landowner's daughter had run away-- this one to Europe to study, that one to Petersburg, to 'the Nihilists.'[136]

Kovalevskaya writes that their local parish priest was currently in the midst of a family crisis. His beloved son who had just finished first in his class at seminary, suddenly became rebellious and refused to enter the priesthood like his father. He chose instead to travel to Saint Petersburg to study at the university where he planned to sustain himself "on tea and a crust of dry bread."[137] When the son returns to town from Saint Petersburg, Anyuta begins meeting with him in secret, having taken pity on how he is ostracized by the rest of the townspeople, especially her father. Kovalevskaya discusses their meetings in terms of the breakdown of Anyuta's love for society amusements, particularly the desire for a handsome, aristocratic husband and her attempts to make herself plain in appearance:

> Действительно, надо сознаться, что молодой попович мало походил на того сказочного принца или на того средневекового рыцаря, о которых когда-то мечтала Анюта. Его нескладная долговязая фигура, длинная жилистая шея и бледное лицо, окаймленное жидкими желтовато-русыми волосами, его большие красные руки с

[135] Kovalevskaya, Sophia. *Vospominanii detstva*. Moscow: Sovetskaya Rossiya, 1989, 85.
[136] Kovalevskaya, Sophia. *A Russian Childhood*. Trans. Stillman, Beatrice. New York: Springer Verlag, 1978, p 147.
[137] Translation Ibid, 148. Russian, Kovalevskaya, *Vospominanii*, 86. на чай да на сухую булку.

> плоскими, не всегда безупречно чистыми ногтями, но всего пуще его неприятный вульгарный выговор на «о», несомненно свидетельствующий о поповском происхождении и о воспитании в бурсе,— все это не делало из него очень обольстительного героя в глазах молодой девушки с аристократическими привычками и вкусами[138]...Она изменилась даже наружно, стала одеваться просто, в черные платья с гладкими воротничками, и волосы стала зачесывать назад, под сетку. О балах и выездах она говорит теперь с пренебрежением.[139]
>
> It should be stated here that the young man actually bore very little resemblance to that storied prince or medieval knight Anyuta had once dreamed about. His ungainly and lanky body, long veiny neck and pale face fringed with his rusty blond hair, his big red hands with their flat and not always irreproachably clean fingernails; and worst of all, his unpleasant vulgar accent over-emphasizing the "o,"[140] bearing unmistakable witness to his clerical organs and seminary education. None of this made him a very attractive hero in the eyes of a young girl of aristocratic tastes and habits[141]…She changed even outwardly. She began to dress very simply in black dresses with plain collars, to wear her hair pulled back and covered in a net. She spoke contemptuously now of balls and social visits.[142]

Anyuta then goes on to develop a voracious appetite for books and begins to write fiction herself. She goes on to have a story published in Dostoevsky's journal *Epoch*.[143]

The figure of the ascetic Nihilist, male and female, was especially well developed in revolutionary memoirs. Vera Figner's memoirs account for much of what we know about the lives of the women who studied in Zurich, and she is careful to depict her comrades, male and female, as Spartan in their style of living. Her memoirs contain an entire chapter simply titled "Asceticism" in which Figner details the importance of plain living in shaping her own radical consciousness.

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[138] Kovalevskaya, *Vospominanii*, 89.
[139] Ibid, 90.
[140] What is meant is the unreduced pronunciation of the vowel "o" when not under accent, a trait of archaic and Church Slavonic recited speech.
[141] Kovalevskaya, *Russian Childhood*, 150.
[142] Ibid, 152.
[143] In subsequent chapters, Kovalevskaya relays the circumstances of Anyuta and Dostoevsky's first meeting and their eventual love affair.

In “Asceticism,” Figner speaks at length about her childhood, particularly the influence of a school headmistress whom she describes as strict and intolerant of the “cult of beauty” amongst schoolgirls. Figner proudly declares that she and her other classmates emerged from the school practically as “Puritans,” unconcerned with their looks and focused only on improving their minds. She writes:

> Начальницей института была Сусанна Александровна Мертваго, старая, серьезная и добрая дама, ценившая в воспитанницах только ум и способности. При ней институтские нравы совершенно изменились: ложный светский блеск, господствовавший при ее предшественнице Загоскиной, исчез. Та отличала хорошеньких, имела фавориток и держала салон, в котором ее любимицы из старших классов обучались на практике "хорошим манерам" и светской болтовне. При Сусанне Александровне культ красоты и грации прекратился; институтки перестали заниматься наружностью и выходили из учебного заведения почти пуританками.
>
> The headmistress of the institute was an old, serious, kind woman, who believed education should tend only to the mind. Under her tutelage, the morals of the schoolgirls changed completely. The false luster of society life, which was the sole preoccupation of the former headmistress, Zagoskinaya, disappeared completely. Zagoskinaya trained her favorite students from the older classes in the art of “good manners” and “society chatter.” Under the direction of the new headmistress, the cult of beauty and graces ended abruptly. The schoolgirls stopped paying attention to their appearance and graduated practically as Puritans.[144]

This account from her childhood serves as the beginning of a genealogy of Figner’s personal commitment to asceticism. She explains that the “Puritanism”[145] she learned as a schoolgirl was instrumental in shaping her life as a revolutionary. For Figner, a nihilist, male or female, had to be fiercely Spartan in all respects. She writes of the need to be “ruthlessly”[146] strict with oneself. She stresses that a revolutionary must be ready to live in deplorable

[144] Figner, Vera. *Запечатленный труд: воспоминания в двух томах*, 1:4:1.
[145] There’s no indication that Figner or her headmistress were engaged in the history of American Puritans or Protestant aesthetics.
[146] Figner, *Studenchiskie*, 102.

conditions, survive prison, and be able to refuse any temptation that might compromise his or her mission. Indeed, when discussing her acquaintance with Nikolai Morozov, with whom she was very close, she is careful to remove any suggestion of romantic intrigue from her account of their friendship, much like Dostoevsky's description of the relationship between Varvara Petrovna and Stepan Trofimovich.

Morozov was known to have a deep affection for Vera Figner; though he believed that revolutionaries should concentrate in cities, he followed Figner to the countryside to be near her.[147] He wrote her a letter confessing his love, but she rejected his advances, writing, "with the melancholy of a selfless soul," that her radical political activities left her with little time for romance.[148] However, Figner's account of their relationship erases all traces of romantic feeling. In the chapter of her memoirs entitled, "New Acquaintances [*Novye znakomstva*]," she describes meeting him for the first time, and characterizes their connection as being similar to that between a mother and child. She writes:

> Нельзя было не полюбить Морозова, этого искреннего, детски доверчивого мальчика, беспредельно преданного революции. В нем не было ничего личного, и весь он был идеалистическое стремление к самоусовершенствованию на пользу революционного дела.
>
> It was impossible not to love Morozov. He was so sincere, like a child, a trustworthy little boy with limitless dedication to the revolution. There was nothing else in his life. All that was in him was an idealistic commitment to bettering himself, so that he might be of use to the revolutionary cause.[149]

She goes on to say that despite their closeness in age, she felt herself to be more like a sister or mother to him, and that any affection she felt for him arose out of a maternal desire to protect an

[147] Hartnett, Lynne Ann. *The Defiant Life of Vera Figner: Surviving the Russian Revolution*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014, 80.
[148] Ibid, 80.
[149] Figner, *Studenchiskie*, 145.

"innocent creature." It is worth pointing out that Figner here uses familial language, "mother" and "sister," despite the fact that the nihilists were against the family structure. Furthermore, revolutionaries were not supposed to express attachment even to one another.

Despite Figner's chaste presentation of him, Morozov in fact was known to have carried on affairs with a number of women within revolutionary circles. Figner addresses Morozov's close relationship to many of the women in their group, explaining that it was his "naturally feminine nature, soft and tender" that drew him to the company of women. She portrays him as innocent, unassuming, and painfully shy at times, a portrayal in keeping with the personality traits expected of a nihilist. As discussed in the first chapter, in the 1850s and 60s, the more radicalized members of the Russian intelligentsia purposefully cultivated shy, awkward manners and feigned anxiety in the presence of women as means of attesting to their commitment to the radical cause. Based in a belief that traditional modes of courtship perpetuated inequality between the sexes, male members of the intelligentsia affected a shy personality, particularly in their dealings with women. Figner's account of Morozov maintains that image.

Figner also emphasizes Morozov's commitment to renouncing all "bourgeois" pleasures. Like the forbidden raspberries of the Fritsch group, sumptuous foods are rejected by the Morozov of Figner's memoirs. She lovingly describes his sincere guilt over craving fruit, and she then proudly describes the deplorable conditions of his apartment in Geneva. In a scene very similar to that in Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?* in which the character Rakhmetov and his ascetic personal habits are first introduced, Figner offers an account of Morozov's living conditions: "Wishing to rise above the desires of the flesh and committed to hardening himself, he spent no money to heat his room in Geneva, and instead tolerated the cold."[150] Like

[150] [С тем же желанием победы над плотью и стремлением закалить себя он в Женеве не тратил денег на отопление комнаты и терпел стужу.] Figner, *Studenchiskie*, 147.

Rakhmetov, the person of Morozov, as characterized by Figner, embodies an ideal revolutionary ascetic. He was expected to renounce all pleasures, emotions, and women in order to prepare himself from the fierceness of social revolution. Morozov, who was eventually tried and convicted for the assassination of Alexander the II, became, like Rakhmetov, a legend to the radical youth who came after him.

There is no sure way of knowing to how widespread this discrepancy between reality and posturing regarding asceticism was in the radical movement. However, concerning Figner and Morozov, who would both go on to serve 25 years in prison without ever betraying any information about their fellow revolutionaries, Figner's words here regarding the asceticism as "preparation" ring especially true:

> При существующем строе, в период пропаганды, при враждебном отношении к социализму всех имущих и гонении на него со стороны правительств, каждый последователь его должен был приготовиться ко всякого рода лишениям, материальным и духовным.
>
> A true revolutionary, must be above those weaknesses and desires for the pleasure of earthly goods. In the present system, during this period of propaganda and persecution against socialism by the wealthy and those in power, every revolutionary must be prepared for all forms of hardship, material and spiritual. [151]

In this way, Figner's chastity is not only a performative act meant to signify the rejection of bourgeois culture, but a pragmatic method of self-preparation.

Sexism within Nihilism

The asceticism of the Fritsch women was only intensified when, in 1873, the tsarist government issued a decree calling for the immediate return of all Russian women studying

[151] Ibid, 97.

abroad. The decree specifically mentioned the female students in Zurich, accusing them of using the pursuit of higher education as a ruse to practice "free love" far from the watchful eye of their parents. It was not clear to what extent the police actually believed this, and less clear why women specifically were targeted in these decrees. While the tsarist government was determined to police women's bodies, they were inconsistent and seemed to be constantly changing their minds.

Regardless of its motivations, the decree dealt a devastating blow to the Russian colony in Zurich; it warned that women who did not return would never be eligible to enroll in Russian universities or to pursue any profession.[152] Police spies had been monitoring Zurich for years, and the government grew concerned over the stir of revolutionary activity taking place there.[153] The decree was meant to dissipate the movement before it grew too influential, and it was largely successful, at least in forcing many future revolutionaries out of Zurich.

The decree's reference to the supposed "free love" practices of the Zurich female students, shows that despite their efforts to essentially desexualize themselves in the pursuit of gender equality, the women of the Fritsch Circle and Russian women pursuing higher education continually found themselves subject to gender-based discrimination. The stereotype still persisted, even among their male colleagues, that women were not suited to higher education or revolutionary work, and would always be primarily preoccupied with becoming wives and mothers. In one instance, which we will come to shortly, one male nihilist accused the nigilistki of using the revolutionary meetings to find husbands.

The reason that the commitment to asceticism manifested itself so strongly amongst female nihilists is to some extent due to their close relationship with the anarchist Pyotr Lavrov.

[152] Figner, *Studenchiskie,* 62.
[153] Engel, "Women Medical Students in Russia," 404.

Lavrov worked especially closely with the Fritsch Circle, recruiting them to work on his new revolutionary journal, *Vpered*! (Forward!). Lavrov's influence on the women and Zurich cannot be overestimated. By trusting them the responsibility to work on his press, Lavrov gave the Zurich women their first real revolutionary assignment. Lavrov and Bakunin were in Zurich at the same time, but as Richard Stites explains, the former made more of an impact on the nigilistki:

> Lavrov, less picturesque than Bakunin, nevertheless exerted more influence over the minds of the young women in Zurich…In Switzerland, he added to the development of the revolutionary consciousness in women by inviting them into his circles and putting them to work on his journals, and both there and in Russia itself, his ethical revolutionary teachings had a tremendous impact.[154]

Lavrov was unique in stressing the ethical responsibilities of the Russian intelligentsia. He preached self-sacrifice, humility, and the moral imperative to help the people.[155]

However, despite his closeness to the Fritsch Circle and seeming confidence in their abilities, Lavrov nonetheless chose to include an article by Valerian Smirnov in his *Vpered!* journal. Smirnov was the husband of Rosalya Idelson, the librarian of the Russian Student's Library in Zurich, and the founder of an all-female public-speaking practice group (which laid the foundation for the formation of the Fritsch Circle). The article, "Revolutionaries from Privileged Families," focused on the re-education of activists of the gentry, and was particularly scathing in its portrayal of female activists who came from this group. The vast majority of the Fritsch women were from wealthier families; for the most part, only students with financial support from home could afford the tuition and the cost of moving abroad. Thus, Smirnov's rant

[154] Stites, 135.
[155] Walker, F.A., "The Morality of Revolution in Pyotr Lavrovich Lavrov," *The Slavonic and Eastern European Review*, Vol 41, No. 96, Dec., 1962.

was directed precisely at the women who were working on the journal. The following is a selection of passages from the article that illustrate the gender stereotypes revolutionary women were up against:

> не крайне редко можно встретить серьезных людей среди мужской половины привилегированных революционеров, то еще реже можно встретить их среди женской. Женщины еще менее мужчин способны к коллективной революционной работе, еще более разрознены, тщеславие их еще пустее, самолюбие их мельче.
>
> It is not a rare occurence to meet serious men amongst those revolutionaries who come from privileged families, but it is much rarer to meet such people amongst women from such families. Women are much less capable than men of doing collective, revolutionary work. Women are much more scattered, vain, empty, and focused on trifles.[156]
>
> Конечно, иначе и быть не может. Стоит вспомнить только о тех исключительных условиях, в которых веков привилегированный человек трудился над тем чтобы заглушить в женщине всякое подбое человеческого существа и сделать ее более годною для эгоистического разврата дошедшего до пределов возможного для гнезда, которое она с циническою гордостью называет своею семьею. В течение веков женщину воспитывала в исключительном разврате и исключительно для разврата.
>
> Of course, it could not be otherwise. One need only to recall those exceptional circumstances under which women of privileged families have historically been raised. One need only to remember that over the course of centuries, the privileged classes have labored to stomp out all of women's humanity, only to make her more suited for egotistical debauchery, so that she may build a nest which she will cynically, with great sadness, refer to as her family. Over the course of centuries, women have been raised in and for debauchery. [157]
>
> случайно попав в так называемую деятельную среду, они приносят с собою взлелеянния с иных привычки свойственние примуюшественно привилегированным женщинам. Сплетни самого грязного, мелкие интрижки против своих братьев. истерические позывы.
>
> If they by some coincidence do find themselves in these workers' groups, they will nonetheless sink back into those habits that have been instilled in them for centuries.

[156] Smirnov, Valerian, "Revolyutsionery iz privilegirovannyh sredy," (1874), in *Vpered*!, Vol. 2. Edited by C.H. Van Schooneveld. The Hague: Mouton (In cooperation with Europe Printing), 1969, 142-143. Translations are my own.
[157] Ibid, 143.

> They will begin spreading gossip of the dirtiest. They will try to incite romantic intrigues with their comrade brothers. They will break out into hysterical fits. [158]

What the government decree and Smirnov's article point to are the unique challenges that women in the nihilist movement faced. The intense spartanism of the ascetic ideal was actually easier for society to accept from men who were generally considered less emotional and easily given over to romantic intrigues. Ironically, Rakhmetov was from a privileged family. It appears that the common mythology of the ascetic who eschews wealth in search of enlightenment did not apply to women.[159]

As Vera Figner recounts in her memoirs from the time, when their studies in Zurich where, interrupted by the decree, there were some who felt that they were ready to engage in revolutionary activity despite the fact that they had not completed their degrees. The women who considered themselves ready were negatively depicted within revolutionary circles; Figner writes about a cartoon that was circulating in Zurich at the time which mocked the female nihilists' overconfidence:

> В Цюрихе была выпушена даже карикатура, автор которой остался неизвестен. На этом летучем листке был изображен ряд карет, из которых выглядывали молодые женские личики. Улыбаясь и кивая головками, они кричали Мы готовы! Мы готовы! А надпись вверху 'В народ'!
>
> In Zurich, a caricature appeared; the person who drew it remained anonymous. On this very piece of paper, there was an image of a string of carriages, out from which looked

[158] Ibid, 143.

[159] For more on the similarity between Saints Lives and Chernyshevsky's depiction of Rakhmetov, see: Morris, *Saints and Revolutionaries*, 1: "In one of the reoccurring story lines of Russian literature, we encounter a hero who is born into a large, well-to-do family. In his youth, he studies hard, reads voraciously, and seems destine for great worldly success. He disappoints expectations, however, by taking his inheritance, distributing it among the poor, and embarking on a period of solitary wandering." Morris notes that this is the story both of Avramil Smolenskii, a thirteen century saint from Smolensk as well as Rakhmetov.

young women's faces. With smiles and titled heads, they yelled 'We're ready! We're ready!' The inscription at the top read 'to the people!'[160]

Women who wanted to be taken seriously as equals had to find ways to insert themselves into the male revolutionary tradition. What they discovered was just as their reputations could be undone with certain stereotypes about female behavior, their reputations could also be bolstered by relying on *different* stereotypes about women.

Selflessness as a Uniquely Female Talent

One of the ways, ironically, that women were able to step outside traditional expectations was to argue that the life of a self-sacrificing revolutionary was actually in keeping with stereotypical notions of female morality. One of the most pervasive tropes in the writings of revolutionary women is a comparison of the female main character with religious martyrs. This tendency, to connect Christian asceticism with revolutionary asceticism, was prevalent amongst male revolutionaries as well, but was especially useful for female nihilists. Women had long been portrayed in Russian literature as self-sacrificing beings willing to subject themselves to any degree of unhappiness for the sake of others, a pressure Barbara Heldt refers to as "terrible perfection."[161] The image of the Decembrists' wives who followed their husbands to Siberia was not far from the minds of the new youth. For example, Sophia Kovalevskaya's novel, *Nigilistka*, ends with the heroine Vera marrying a man whom she has never met who has been sentenced to death for revolutionary activities.[162] While everyone tells Vera that she should marry for love,

[160] Figner, Vera. *Studenchiskie*, 125.
[161] Heldt, Barbara, *Terrible Perfection: Women and Russian Literature*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
[162] His sentence will be commuted to hard labor upon their marriage.

and not sacrifice herself so, she defiantly rebuffs their entreaties and proudly embarks on the train ride to Siberia with the other prisoners' wives. In *The Decembrist Myth in Russian Culture*, Ludmila Trigos writes "Nekrasov changed [his] poem's original title, from 'Decembrist Wives' (Dekrabristi) to 'Russian Women,' signaling that self-sacrifice and spousal devotion were valued as traits existing in all Russian women, though the Decembrist wives were considered their loftiest exemplars."[163]

The female martyr theme carries on throughout Kovalevskaya's novel, which tells the story of Vera Barantsova, a girl from the provinces who arrives in Saint Petersburg, desperate to make herself useful to the revolutionary cause. Vera feels a deep connection to Christian martyrs and models her revolutionary ethos after what she reads in the Saints Lives tales. The novel opens at the outset of Alexander II's decree to emancipate the serfs. Vera, the daughter of land-owning nobles, watches as her family sees their livelihood, position in society, and even physical safety enter a dangerous period of uncertainty. Much in the way that the emancipation of the serfs provided the impetus for greater social reforms and the onset of the nihilist movement, it similarly sets the stage for Vera's questioning of the traditions by which she and her family had been living beforehand.

In contrast with her family's despair over losing the serfs, Vera notes that her peasant nurse's only concern is that the icon lamp in her room stays lit.[164] Her nurse advises her, when she sees the toll the family distress is taking on young Vera, to pray with her. The narrator describes the religious fervor that begins to take over Vera's life:

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[163] Trigos, Ludmila A., *The Decembrist Myth in Russian Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 29.

[164] The juxtaposition of the corrupt bourgeois family with the poor, but pious nurse was a common plot device. In such a story, the nurse teaches the young girl the values of self-sacrifice and martyrdom, and then a nihilist tutor enters the picture and helps to channel those values into revolutionary service.

> И Вера действительно следует нянину совету и начинает молиться. Молится она горячо, страстно, с каким-то исступлением. Увлечение религией, ее обрядовой, внешней стороной начинает мало-помалу наполнять праздную, скучную жизнь предоставленного себе ребенка.[165]
>
> And Vera took her nurse's advice and began to pray. She prayed fervently, with deep passion, in a kind of frenzy. Her fascination with religion and its rituals began, bit by bit, to replace the idle, boring life she had known as a child. That year, in the three weeks before Christmas, Vera fasted, and ate nothing until the first star appeared on Christmas Eve.[166]

Vera's newfound piety is given further shape she when becomes acquainted with a set of books that her nanny, although illiterate, keeps in her room. One day, her nurse asks Vera to read the books to her out loud, and Vera begins to read the tales of Christian martyrs. She is particularly entranced by one particular story about three English missionaries burned at the stake in China. So inspired by the story, Vera becomes depressed that she did not live in an era of Christian martyrdom. Vera's religious devotion only meets criticism with the arrival of the character of Vasiltsev. Employed as her tutor, Vasiltsev is the family's neighbor and is rumored to be involved in revolutionary activities. He is thought by everyone to be intelligent and knowledgeable of the world. Vera greatly looks up to him, and is hurt when he refers to her copies of the Saints Lives as nonsense. His doubt makes her question whether or not any of what she has learned from her nanny is true. She approaches Vasiltsev, nearly in tears, and asks him if what she knows about martyrs is also nonsense. The following dialogue ensues:

> -Ну, а то правда, что мученики были?
> -Конечно, были.
> -И резали их, и жгли, и зверями травили?
> -Все это проделывалось.
> -Слава богу! - вырвалось облегченным вздохом у Веры.
> -Как слава богу, что терзали-то их?

[165] Kovalevskaya, Sofia. *Nigilistka*. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 36.
[166] Kovalevskaya, Sofia. *Nihilist Girl*, Trans. by Natalya Kolchevska and Mary Zirin. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2001, 37.

-Ах, не то, разумеется, не то!- конфузясь, заторопилась Вера,- я хочу сказать, слава богу, что хоть тогда-то были такие хорошие люди, святые, мученики.[167]

- Is it true, that there were once martyrs?
- Of course, there were.
- And they slaughtered, burned, and pulled apart by wild beasts?
- Yes, that all happened.
- Oh, thank god! (She let out a sigh of relief)
- Why do you thank god, that the martyrs were slaughtered?
- Of course that's not what I meant. I meant, thank god that such good people lived on this earth, holy people, martyrs.
- There are still martyrs.
- Yes, I know, in China.
- Why do you need to search so far away? There are martyrs closer than that. Haven't you heard the people they put in prison, exile to Siberia, and even hang? How can you ask if there are martyrs? [168]

Vera gives deep thought to her conversation with Vasiltsev, but the final step towards Vera's "conversion" to radicalism occurs when Vasiltsev shows her a picture of his former fiancée. She, a revolutionary, was imprisoned along with others who were involved in the first assassination attempt of Alexander II in 1866. Vera, so inspired by his fiancée's sacrifice, describes kissing the portrait as she would an icon. In her mind, she recalls her childhood wish to become a martyr, and decides that she will become one, but not by "going to China," but by joining the revolutionary movement in Russia. There are countless examples of this "religious feeling without religious faith" in the personal writings of the female nihilists.

In her memoirs, Figner too devotes considerable time to discussing the influence of Christian asceticism on the formation of revolutionary asceticism. Reading the Gospels as a child, she says, imbued her with a view of asceticism as wonderful, sacred, to be prized above all else. She even includes direct quotes from the Bible that exemplify what she sees as an affinity with the revolutionary ethos. She subsequently makes the connection, not only between

[167] Kovalevskaya, *Nigilistka*, 47.
[168] Ibid, 48-49.

revolutionary and Christian martyrdom, but between Christian self-sacrifice and the life of a student. Describing how her Christian upbringing helped prepare her for the grueling life of a medical student, she writes, "The inner, spiritual beauty of learning captivated me. Its authoritarianism gave it the impression of martyrdom."[169]

An appeal to the supposed inborn moral superiority of women was adopted by the female members of a revolutionary group in Saint Petersburg very similar in their asceticism to the women Fritsch Circle, the Chaikovsky Circle. The female members of the Chaikovsky Circle, as well as their supporters, relied on stereotypes about the supposed moral superiority of women to justify their inclusion in the revolutionary movement. Pyotr Lavrov described the female activists of Chaikovsky Circle as "the purest embodiment of the ideal limitlessly devoted and self-sacrificing women who have so often inspired our poets and novelists."[170] Likewise, when women were advocating for the establishment of formal medical training for female students, one of the professors at their medical school spoke to the authorities on their behalf, emphasizing women's predilection for self-sacrifice, tolerance, and patience at the sickbed. They appealed to feminine qualities that "required no proof"[171] in order to make the case that women were innately suited for medicine.

However, this stereotyping had its negative effects on gender relations within revolutionary groups, even if they were successful in justifying female involvement in revolutionary work. Regarding their effect on the Chaikovsky Circle, Barbara Engel writes, "Convinced that they could influence others by their own principled behavior, the members of the group aspired to purity and total self-sacrifice, and because the men (like other members of

[169] Figner. *Studenchiskie*, 54.
[170] Engel, *Mothers and Daughters*, 125.
[171] Engel, "Women Medical Students," 397.

their society) presumed that women already possessed these qualities, they expected their women to behave in certain ways, and the women usually did so."[172]

Conclusion and Theoretical Implications

These findings serve to some degree as a corrective to tendencies in feminist revisionism to apply contemporary metrics of feminist sexual expression onto this very different historical context. As abstinence was the only reliable form of birth control in the nineteenth-century, it was considered key to the fight for women's liberation. Chastity, and the freedom it provided from marriage and children, allowed women the opportunity to pursue higher education, a career, and social independence. Regardless of how celibacy functions in contemporary political discourses, in the nineteenth-century, and in the case of the Fritsch Circle specifically, chaste asceticism could often be read as an expression of progressive politics.

It is important to note that this banner of asceticism was not unique to the struggle for women's rights in Russia. The issue of gender equality became increasingly debated all over nineteenth-century Europe when the number of unmarried women began to grow at unprecedented rates. In Great Britain, an 1881 census entitled "The Prospects of Marriage for Women," revealed that the ratio of men to women rose from 102.9 to 100 to 149.8 to 100.[173] A similar situation occurred in Russia following the end of serfdom, when the wealth of aristocrats declined and single women could no longer count on being supported by members of their extended family.[174] Nineteenth-century Europe and Russia were populated by a new class of

[172] Ibid, *Mothers and Daughters*.125.
[173] Mandelker, Amy. *Framing Anna Karenina: Tolstoy, the Women Question and the Victorian Novel. Columbus: Ohio State University*, 1993, 25.
[174] Ibid, 25.

unmarried single women, known as "spinsters," "old maids," or sometimes as "eccentric aunts." The "crisis" of what European society was to do with its new population of unmarried women even appears in the Oblonsky dinner party scene in *Anna Karenina*. As the guests discuss the dearth of options for unmarried women in Russia, Kitty becomes upset, fearing she too may miss out on marriage.

Unmarried women, in desperate need to support themselves financially, began agitating for increased education and professional opportunities for women within European society.[175] As such, spinsters[176] came to be associated with political activism, and were consequently viewed with suspicion by the authorities. In her study of unmarried women in Victorian England, *The Spinsters and Her Enemies*, Sheila Jeffreys writes that "spinsters" were frequent subjects of police surveillance and public condemnation, both for their disavowal of men, sex, and family, but also for the unprecedented freedoms they possessed. Unmarried women, unrestricted by the duties of wife and mother, had more opportunities to agitate for political gains for women than their married counterparts,[177] and thus often became the target of political repression and scathing critiques in the press. Thus, the figure of the chaste spinster, advocating for education and work, eschewing marriage and family, became the face of nineteenth-century feminism. Amy Mandelker has argued it was not the "free love of George Sand" that

[175] "The history of women's education in the nineteenth century, the opening of the universities to women, the admissions of women into the professions, the coming of the Married Women's Property Act, the early suffrage movement—all owe a very great debt to the unmarried woman." Hill, Bridget. *Women Alone: Spinsters in England 1660-1850.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001, 3.

[176] I define spinster as a woman of marriageable age who is not yet married. For more on the semantic roots of the world spinster in English (and its corollary—the bachelor), see: Wohlfarth, Dominick. *A Semantic Analysis of Bachelor and Spinster*. Munich: GRIN Verlag, 2004.

[177] The concept of a woman turning to politics once her marriage prospects have diminished is so entrenched in British history that on the contemporary soap drama, "Downton Abbey," the character of Lady Edith begins writing a column about women's suffrage shortly after being stood up at the altar. See: Fellows, Julian, "Episode 3" and Episode 4," *Downton Abbey*. September 30, 2012 (Episode 3) and October 7, 2012 (Episode 4). ITV (TV Network).

characterized the women's movement in Russia, as is often thought, but rather the "valorous path of chastity and self-sufficiency through work."[178]

What the Fritsch Circle's entire ascetic project reflects, is a belief, widely held amongst European feminists of the time, that sexual equality depended on the eradication of sexual difference, and that the eradication of sexual difference depended on the sublimation of sex. In an 1862 article, "What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids," Irish suffragette Frances Power Cobbe discussed how the surplus of unmarried women in Europe at the time had the potential to revolutionize society's views of gender and interpersonal relationships more broadly. Cobbe argued that this new generation of unmarried, educated, working women were proving that adults could thrive outside of the confines of marriage. Their success, Cobbe argued, dispelled the widely held belief that marriage as a union of opposite sexes, with each gender supplementing the other's lack. She called for a new understanding of marriage as an empathetic relationship based on sameness and friendship.[179] Cobbe belonged to a network of feminist marriage reformers, including John Stuart Mill, who were interested in critical re-imaginings of interpersonal relationships based on equality. Important to remember is that for them, that "equality" was essentially, sameness. It involved the dissolution of gender difference, and as in the case of the nihilists, that erasure of gender difference could only come through a rejection of sexual relations.

The feminist John Stuart Mill, one of Cobbe's many personal acquaintances, echoed her sentiments when he wrote in "The Subjection of Women (1869) that "likeness," not difference, should be the foundation of true unions, and that marriage should be modeled on what "often

[178] Mandelker, 28.
[179] Cobbe, Frances Power, "What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids," in *Prose by Victorian Women: An Anthology*. Eds. Sally Mitchell and Andrea Broomfield. New York: Routledge, 2013, 231-350.

happens between two friends of the same sex."[180] Mill's call for the dissolution of sexual difference was coupled by his disavowal of sexual relations in marriage. Mill was inspired by Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in which she writes that "sensual appetites" have a negative effect on relations between men and women.[181] Wollstonecraft insisted that women would never be treated as equals so long as they were viewed as sex objects. As a result, Mill and his wife, Harriet Taylor, repeatedly criticized intercourse in their writings, referring to it as the "animal function of sex."[182] The couple regarded their mutual chastity as a way of setting an example to the world of the possibility of friendship between man and woman within marriage.[183]

In "John Stuart Mill on Androgyny and Ideal Marriage," Nadia Urbanati summarizes Mills' thesis: "sensuality and chastity expressed two opposing models of life force, tyranny, and selfishness, on one hand, and tenderness, friendship, and sympathy on the other." Mill believed that much of what constituted "female attractiveness" involved displays of weakness and inferiority:

> It would be a miracle if the object of being attractive to men had not become the polar star of feminine education and formation of character. And, this great means of influence over the minds of women having been acquired, an instinct of selfishness made men avail themselves of it to the utmost as a means of holding women in subjection, by representing to them meekness, submissiveness, and resignation of all individual will into the hands of a man, as an essential part of sexual attractiveness.[184]

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[180] Mill, John Stuart, "The Subjection of Women," in *On Liberty and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 117-218. Mill's statement here refers to Romantic-era friendships among men, often physically quite demonstrative by our present-day norms, and precludes the existence of homosexual desire.
[181] Wollstonecraft, Mary, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," in *A Vindication of the Rights of Man and a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 105.
[182] Mill, 184.
[183] Mill does not discuss male-female friendship outside the confines of marriage. He seems to believe that marriage is still a positive institution and one that can serve as a model for sympathy between individuals.
[184] Mill, 133.

At every step in “The Subjection of Women,” Mill calls for an eradication of sexual difference and critiques the importance of sex in male-female relations.

Mill’s new theory of marriage as an asexual friendship would be enormously influential to European feminism in the nineteenth, particularly when it came to the women’s suffrage movement. Spinsterhood for early twentieth century suffragettes was similarly viewed as a radical act of defiance against patriarchy and discrimination against women. Christabel Pankhurst, an influential English suffragette, wrote "There can be no mating between the spiritually developed women of this new day and men who in thought and conduct with regard to sex matters are their inferiors."[185] The nihilist women, and their project of asceticism, were thus operating within a much larger community of female activism that located women’s liberation expressly in chastity.

[185] Jeffreys, 89.

Chapter 3:
Tolstoy and "The Spinster Question"

"Novels end with the hero and heroine married. Instead they should begin with the marriage and end with the couple liberating themselves from it." –August 30, 1894[186]

This entry from Tolstoy's diary is not surprising given the date, five years after the publication of *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) and well into the "post-conversion" Tolstoy era.[187] The Tolstoy of the late 1880s and beyond is characterized by his strong aversion to sex, his overall mistrust of the institution of marriage, and his critique of the family and its centrality in public life. These sentiments would famously culminate in Tolstoy's decision to leave his family at the age of 82 to become a wandering ascetic. This later Tolstoy is often considered a perversion of his former self, and these last days as a tragic end to a life devoted to the joys of family happiness. However, this dichotomous view of the "early" Tolstoy as the author who glorifies the domestic sphere and the "late" Tolstoy as determined to tear it apart, fails to explain a number of sentiments expressed in his earlier works that read as decidedly antisocial and critical of the family.

For instance, how can such a view explain Princess Marya's secret yearning to join the Godsfolk instead of becoming a wife and mother in *War and Peace*? What of Dolly Oblonskaya's revelation that there is some truth in a peasant woman's assertion that a dead

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[186] Amy Mandelker, *Framing Anna Karenina: Tolstoy, the Woman Question, and the Victorian Novel*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993, 32.

[187] Many cite Tolstoy's essay A Confession [*Ispoved'*] (1882) with representing a conversion, from Tolstoy the artist to Tolstoy the radical religious and political philosopher. Richard Gustafson, however, argues that this is a false division: "While received opinion says that there are two Tolstoys, the pre-conversion artist and the post-conversion thinker and prophet, this study is anchored on the conviction that Tolstoy is not two, but one. I have found no evidence in the ninety published volumes of his work to suggest the radical shift in attitudes or theoretical understanding many have deduced from reading *A Confession.* Gustafson, Richard. *Resident and Stranger: A Study in Fiction and Theology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, xiv.

infant is a blessing from God? What is missing in Tolstoy criticism is an account of such attitudes and why they appear during what is considered to be the height of Tolstoy's firm commitment to the family and its importance in society.

Appearing in novels published at the height of "the women question," these negative relationships to matrimony shared by many of his heroines suggest that Tolstoy was already formulating the radically "antisocial" ideas regarding sex, love, and family that would define later works like *The Kreutzer Sonata* and *Resurrection,* ideas that closely resemble those espoused by the radicals explored in the previous chapters.

Tolstoy, the Feminist?

In *Erotic Utopia*, Olga Matich describes Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* as "a bitter attack on carnal desire, marriage, and procreation, as well as contraception, prurient doctors (especially gynecologists), sexual intercourse during pregnancy and nursing, divorce, and feminism."[188] Echoing Matich's allegation of misogyny, Rosalind Marsh writes that *The Kreutzer Sonata*, "regardless of whatever traces of feminism it might possess"[189] fundamentally cannot be classified as a feminist text. Instead, she argues, "Most modern feminists would advocate greater sexual and emotional freedom for women, rather than Tolstoy's extremist solution of radical chastity for both men and women."[190] Matich and Marsh's comments on Tolstoy represent what has become a consensus in scholarship in the Anglophone world about the author's views on women and gender equality. In her essay on women and the family in Tolstoy's writings,

[188] Olga, Match, *Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia's Fin de Siècle*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005, 46.
[189] Marsh, Rosalind, *Women in Russian Culture, Projections and Self-Projections,* New York: Berghahn Books, 1998, 30.
[190] Ibid, 30.

Edwina Cruise states, "His bluntness on the subject of women became a Tolstoy trademark. There is no shortage of evidence in the ninety-volume edition of Tolstoy's works to persuade even the most dispassionate reader that he espoused a tightly corseted view of appropriate roles for women."[191] The author's later writings in particular, those calling for total chastity, are seen as the apex of Tolstoy's misogynistic thinking.

Tolstoy's views were not only shared by many progressive thinkers dedicating to advancing women's rights, but can hardly be called misogynist. As discussed in the previous chapter, Tolstoy's views on chastity were far from idiosyncratic, and was indeed in line with a similar approach to sex sanctioned by the revolutionary political movements and international women's rights activists like John Stuart Mill, Cristabel Pankhurst, and the celibate American religious sect, the Shakers.[192] As will be discussed further in the subsequent and final chapter, one of the seminal texts for *The Kreutzer Sonata* was a book by the American gynecologist and women's rights activist, Alice B. Stockham, who advocated chastity as a means of birth control for new mothers.[193] A dissenting critic, Barbara Heldt, writes in *Terrible Perfection*, her study of female characters in Russian literature, that Tolstoy's views on women are often misunderstood by his critics. Heldt argues that far from being a misogynist who ignored or denigrated women, Tolstoy made the plight of women central to his literary career: "Tolstoy's attitude wards women is never quietly expressed, nor is it ever a side issue. It forms the very core of his writings."[194]

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[191] Cruise, Edwina, "Women, Sexuality and the Family in Tolstoy," *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 192.
[192] The lawyer in the opening pages of *The Kreutzer Sonata* tells Pozdnyshev that his ideas resemble those of the Shakers.
[193] This correspondence is also discussed in Edwards, Robert, "Tolstoy and Alice B. Stockham: The influence of Tokology on the Kreutzer Sonata," *Tolstoy Studies Journal*, 6 (1993), pp. 87–104.
[194] Ibid, 48.

I would argue that Tolstoy's "feminism" lies in his artistic ability to step outside the bounds of his own person and imagine the inner lives of foreign bodies; his artistic talent is fundamentally an ability to sympathize, or as Havelock Ellis, describes it-- the gift of "social imagination":

> Tolstoi possesses that social imagination which, though growing among us, is still so rare. If at a dinner party, where cheerful guests prolong their enjoyment, there were placed behind each chair a starved, ragged figure, with haggard and haunting face—would not the meal be broken up as speedily as if every guest had found the sword of Dionysius hanging by a thread above his head? Yet it is only a lack of imagination which prevents us seeing through the few layers of bricks that screen us off form these realities. For him who has seen it, there is little rest 'so long as I have superfluous food and another none, so long as I have two coats and another has none.[195]

Indeed, this is perhaps best modeled by Pierre in *War and Peace* when he tries to convince Lise that he knows what it is like to give birth and can relate to her fear of dying. Whereas Prince Andrei is unable to understand her suffering, "I still can't understand what you are afraid of,"[196] (a lack of understanding Lise attributes to male egoism),[197] Pierre is moved to tears and tells her, "Calm yourself, Princess! It seems so to you because…I assure you I myself have experienced…and so..because…!," but then he stops himself, "No, excuse me! An outsider is out of place here."[198] Pierre stops himself, but the moment is not lost. He does not allow himself to speak completely for Lise, but he goes far just enough to express sympathy (very similar to John Stuart Mill's discussion of sympathy within an androgynous marriage).

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[195] Ellis, Havelock. *The New Spirit*. London: Bell, 1982, 225.
[196] Все-таки я не понял, de quoi vous avez peur" Tolstoy, *PSS*, 9:32, English: Tolstoy, Lev. *War and Peace*. Trans. by Alymer Maude. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1992, 31.
[197] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 9:21. [Вот как все мужчины эгоисты; все, все эгоисты!; English: Ibid, 31. Lise says, "There, what egotists men all are: all, all egotists!"]
[198] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 9:33. [Успокойтесь, княгиня. Вам это так кажется, потому что, я вас уверяю, я сам испытал… отчего… потому что… Нет, извините, чужой тут лишний… Нет, успокойтесь… Прощайте.] English: Ibid, 32.

Understanding Tolstoy as not only sympathetic, but in some cases, an advocate for women who question the value of marriage and motherhood is important because of how it disrupts the common claim of Tolstoy's misogyny. As discussed in the previous chapter, what we know as the "woman question" would perhaps be better titled, "the spinster question." With the freeing of the serfs, men of the Russian gentry had less economic means to support the unmarried women in their families, and the Crimean War dealt a devastating blow to the general supply of Russian men. There was suddenly an entire population of unmarried Russian women living in or near poverty. To survive, they would need to work,[199] and to work they would need an education. Consequently, these unmarried women, "spinsters," began to agitate for social conditions that would allow them to enter Russian universities and earn living wages, thus making unmarried women the vanguard of progressive politics in the nineteenth-century.

Barbara Heldt even connects Tolstoy's views on chastity and women's liberation with feminist debates in the late twentieth century, writing:

> [Tolstoy] posits the need for the most radical change, 'a change in men's outlook on women and women's way of regarding themselves.' For Tolstoy, chastity would be the sine qua non of this change; but the reasons for its necessity, the description of sexual politics as they exist, are the same as those made by feminists today.[200]

Heldt here is likely referring to the "Feminist Sex Wars" which were quite active in the years leading up to the publication of *Terrible Perfection*. The "Feminist Sex Wars" were characterized by bitter debate between feminists in the late 1970s and early 1980s regarding the sexual representation of women (specifically pornography), and general attitudes towards sexual

[199] The term "spinster" in English gets its name from the occupation of spinning thread, a profession held mostly by unmarried women to support themselves in the absence of a husband. Therefore, the term itself was originally almost synonymous with the idea of a working woman.
[200] Heldt, 47.

expression itself. On one side of the debate were feminists led by Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, who viewed male sexuality and desire as the root of female oppression. They were against all expressions of male sexual dominance over women, opposed the legalization of prostitution, and called for the criminalization of pornography. On the other side were the feminists who criticized Dworkin and her supporters for what they saw as sexual repression and censorship. They instead advocated unrestrained sexual expression as a feminist goal. In the end, it was the latter group that came to define modern-day or "Third Wave" feminism.[201]

An unforeseen consequence of this was the erasure of the spinster (and chaste female sexuality more broadly) from the annals of feminist history. Before the 1980s, feminists had been steadily working on reclaiming the figure of the spinster. Most notably, scholars like Mary Daly wrote about the social freedoms of unmarried women and their important role in the fight for women's liberation. Daly's foundational work in feminist theory, *Gyn/Ecology* sought to undo the stereotypical view of the spinster as lonely and frigid, and to instead explore the political threat these "dangerous," socially-active, unmarried women posed to the status quo throughout history.[202] More recently, scholars like Heather Love have sought to reclaim the spinster's history as a figure of social disruption in the broader sense (spinsters as figures that challenged the notion of heterosexual marriage as the ultimate goal of a woman's life. [203]

This study participates in that effort, and offers a reading of Tolstoy's spinsters as women full of radical potential. This chapter will examine the author's positive representations of single

[201] For more on this debate, see: Dugan, Lisa and Nan D. Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture (10th Anniversary Edition),* New York: Routledge, 2014.
[202] Daly, Mary. *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Gyn/Ecology*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1990.
[203] Love, Heather. "Gyn/Apology: Sarah Orne Jewett's Spinster Aesthetics*." ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance*, Volume 55, Number 3-4, 2009 (Nos. 216-217 O.S.), 305-334.

women as well as married women who contemplate other life paths besides matrimony. In tracing the development of the Tolstoyan spinster, we can get closer to understanding where Tolstoy stood within the radical discourses of the time, especially on the subject of women's liberation.

Tolstoy and the Radicals of His Time

Tolstoy first appeared on the Russian literary scene in 1852 with the publication of the novella *Childhood*. Tolstoy was twenty-four years old at the time, and was serving as an officer for the Russian army in the Caucasus. His service was interrupted when he was sent to a hospital to undergo treatment for gonorrhea. It was in his hospital bed while recuperating that Tolstoy began work on *Childhood*. Tolstoy published the novella in the left-wing journal *Sovremennik*, the same journal that would go on to publish his literary reportage, *Sevastopol Sketches* in 1855-1856. Towards the end of the Crimean War, Tolstoy left for Saint Petersburg. His move to the capital coincided with an event that would open the pathway for democratic reform in Russia, the death of Alexander II. As noted earlier, the death of Alexander II and Nicolas I's ascent to the throne had an enormous impact on the social climate of Russia. Alexander II undid many of the draconian policies of his father, and in turn, launched an array of liberalizing reforms including the abolishment of serfdom.

While in Petersburg, Tolstoy socialized with many from the *Sovremennik* circle, including Ivan Turgenev. Tolstoy came to greatly dislike the literary circle that surrounded the journal, feeling himself disconnected from the radical writers and thinkers involved with it.

Tolstoy had a huge falling out with Turgenev over the novelist George Sand.[204] As noted previously, George Sand's work was enormously popular in Russia, and many found in her female characters a model for women's liberation. However, Tolstoy expressed to Turgenev, who was an ardent admirer of Sand, his disapproval of the heroines of her novels. He infamously protested that if they existed in real life, they should be dragged through the streets of Saint Petersburg attached to the wheels of a cart. [205]

Tolstoy's early involvement in the debates on sexual morality explored in early chapters is perhaps best understood through his play, "The Infected Family" (1864). The play offers an extremely negative depiction of two young men who represent the sort of radical "new people" represented in novels like Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?*. The play uses the then popular trope of a peaceful aristocratic family becoming "infected" with the radical new ideas of the time, usually in the form of a male tutor from the raznochinets class. The "infectious" elements in Tolstoy's play are Venerovsky and Tverdynovskoy, two young men who lure women away from their families under the pretext of a fictitious marriage that will allow their new "wives" to explore the radical new ideas of the time. However, in the end, Venerovsky uses his wife, Lyubochka, for her money and property, and Tverdynovskoy forcefully tries to persuade his wife Katerina Matveyevna to have sex with him despite the understanding that the marriage would not be consummated. The plot of "The Infected Family" speaks to Tolstoy's fear that if the question of women's liberation were left up to men, women would continue to be exploited for the latter's best interests.

In *Terrible Perfection*, Barbara Heldt argues that Tolstoy believed that the cause of inequality between the sexes was rooted in the imbalance of power between men and women

[204] Waddington, Patrick. *Turgenev and George Sand*. Melbourne: Victoria University Press, 2001, 39.
[205] Ibid, 39.

when it came to sex, and that many of the author's own points-of-view on the matter are expressed through the character Pozdnyshev in *The Kreutzer Sonata*:

> Though the consequences of inequality between the sexes are economic, Pozdnyshev does not believe that the root causes are and therefore, that the solutions are political or economic: 'woman's lack of rights arises not from the fact that she must not vote or be a judge—to be occupied with such affairs is no privilege—but from the fact that she is not a man's equal in sexual intercourse and has not the right to use a man or abstain from him as he likes " (ix). [206]

Heldt recognizes a common feature in Tolstoy's writings on oppression; he is far less interested in legal rights or policy changes, but more so in a reshaping of human consciousness that dismantles interpersonal power structures.

In "Tolstoy's Response to Terror and Revolutionary Violence," Inessa Medzhibovskaya traces Tolstoy's writings on the activists and thinkers of his time who represented the radical opposition to the tsar.[207] At times, Medzhibovskaya relies too heavily on Tolstoy's response to their tactics as a metric to gauge how he felt about the aim of the revolutionary movement itself. Despite the fact that Tolstoy, a committed pacifist, was firmly against the use of violence in bringing about social change, he supported change itself. Indeed, pacifism itself was a radical political notion at the time, and Tolstoy's anti-war views would put him at odds with the tsar in the wake of the Russo-Japanese War, and earlier, when he argued against Russian volunteers being sent to fight the Turks in Serbia in *Anna Karenina* (though Tolstoy's criticism of the war was also rooted in a rejection of pan-Slavism).

[206] Heldt, 46.
[207] Inessa, Medzhibovksaya, Tolstoy's Response to Terror and Revolutionary Violence," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 9* (3): 505–31.

Despite their difference on the question of violence, Tolstoy was in agreement with his more violent radical contemporaries when it came to chastity and asceticism. Tolstoy similarly possessed a strong belief in the importance of personal behavior, particularly sexual mores, in bringing about radical social change. The doctrine of self-control was imperative to Tolstoy's vision of political revolution which included self-discipline both in regards to sex and the use of violence. No different from those who modeled themselves on Rakhmetov, Tolstoy felt strongly that ascetic self-discipline would be central to democratic progress. As scholar Michael Denner states, for Tolstoy, the path to reform was simple:

> All societal progress depended upon personal moral improvement consisting primary of the self-abnegation of an individual 'subjecting his animal personality to reason and making manifest the power of love.'[208]

Rather than tracing treatments of revolutionary violence as a metric of Tolstoy's politics, then, it could be potentially more useful to trace his treatment of characters who live completely chaste lives, for instance-- spinsters.

PRINCESS MARY: THE SPINSTER THAT ALMOST WAS

At first glance, *War and Peace*, particularly the epilogue, would seem to offer textual support to those who see the novel as Tolstoy's glorification of family life. It focuses on the final union of Pierre and Natasha and Nicholas and Princess Marya. However, certain underlying anxieties still persist, particularly in the marriage of Princess Marya and Nicholas

[208] Denner, Michael, "The Proletariat Lord: Tolstoy's Image During the Russian Revolution" "The Proletarian Lord: Tolstoy among the Bolsheviks 1917-1921," in *Anniversary Essays on Tolstoy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 221.

Rostov. These anxieties, Amy Mandelker writes, go against the notion that the Tolstoy of the *War and Peace* period had wholeheartedly embraced the cult of domesticity (and that his later turn away from it represents a radical divide his philosophy). She writes:

> Tolstoy's shift from a Victorian cultivation of domesticity to a radical Christian asceticism is not as cataclysmic as it may appear at first glance. A profound ambivalence underlies the closing scenes of *War and Peace*, rendering the characters almost grotesque in their process of dissolution from heroic figures of potential to everyday mundane folk concerned with dirty diapers rather than war."[209]

The exception to this would be Pierre, who nonetheless has to shut himself off from domestic life in order to focus on his work as future Decembrist. Though Pierre is not ambivalent—his male privilege allows him to be both father and philosopher, head of the household and head of a political movement. Ambivalence is reserved for Princess Marya, who longs for a life path that would have provided her with more spiritual satisfaction. When contemplating the happiness she feels in her marriage with Nicholas, Mary still partly longs for a more spiritual sort of fulfillment that she does not experience with her husband. In the throes of marital bliss, she suddenly is overcome with a deep feeling of sadness:

> Her face lit up with a smile, but in the very same moment, she sighed, and the look in her profound eyes expressed a quiet sadness. It was as if, even with all the happiness she felt, there was still a different kind of happiness, unattainable in this life, of which she involuntarily thought of in this moment.[210]

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[209] Mandelker, 31-32.

[210] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 12:265 Лицо ее просияло улыбкой; но в то же самое время она вздохнула, и тихая грусть выразилась в ее глубоком взгляде. Как будто, кроме того счастья, которое она испытывала, было другое, недостижимое в этой жизни счастье, о котором она невольно вспомнила в эту минуту. Trans. Maude, *War and Peace*, 3:442.

One likely interpretation of the other path Marya is contemplating in this scene, is a life of religious devotion, embodied by the Godsfolk, who visit her earlier in the novel, a path incompatible with being the wife of Nicholas Rostov.

The juxtaposition of Mary's limitations and Pierre's freedom is an early example of what would become Tolstoy's many explorations into the double-standards faced by women at the time as well as the limitations placed upon them by society. The Mary/Pierre comparison prefigures the same juxtaposition of Anna and Stiva's adulterous affairs in *Anna Karenina*. Just as Anna's scandal was predicated on breaking outside the notions of traditional femininity, so is Marya's desire to reject marriage and family for a life of spiritual devotion. That could be one interpretation for Tolstoy's seemingly odd choice to characterize Marya's godsfolk as ambiguous in gender.

When Pierre arrives at Bald Hills, the Bolkonsky estate, to see Prince Andrei, a group of religious wanderers called godsfolk are there visiting Princess Marya. Marya is speaking to two of them alone when Andrei enters the room with Pierre. Rather abruptly, Andrei announces to Pierre that one of the godsfolk is a woman, and not a man, "Il faut que vous sachiez que c'est une femme."[211] They are talking about Ivanushka, a woman who dresses like a man, uses masculine grammatical endings, and tries to affect a deep bass voice. Marya rebuffs Andrei for his rudeness towards her guest, but he explains that he had to make sure Pierre did not think she was alone with a man, which would be inappropriate. Tolstoy's characterization of the godsfolk here is surprising and mysterious. In fact, Pierre's entire visit to Bald Hills is rife with unexplained moments of gender ambiguity. In his monograph on the character of Pierre, Daniel Rancour-

[211] [You must know that this a woman]. Tolstoy, *PSS*, 10:120.

Laferriere discusses this episode at Bald Hills and enumerates the various instances in which the genders of different characters require clarification. He observes:

> By the time of the visit in Bald Hills is over (just six pages of Russian text) Tolstoy has offered the reader four different situations in which the cognitive boundary between man and woman is questioned. Gender, it seems, is not as fixed as it appears. These situations might be stated in the form of four propositions made by various speakers:
>
> Prince Andrei: Ivanushka is not a man, but a woman.
> Prince Andrei: The Holy Mother is not a woman, but a general (a man)
> Princess Mary: Andrei is not a woman (but a man)
> Old Prince: Pierre talks like a woman, but he is a fine fellow.[212]

Rancour-Laferriere goes on to ask, "What is the overall significance of these propositions? Why does Tolstoy insert them all at once into the fairly short passage following the tête-à-tête between Pierre and Andrei?"[213] Laferriere is more interested in Pierre's involvement in this scene,[214] and it is no coincidence that Marya and Pierre, two of the novel's most androgynous characters, respond positively to the cross-dressing godsfolk. This moment, however, is more emotionally fraught for Marya. She is deeply upset by what she feels is her brother and father's rejection of the godsfolk and their way of life. Likewise, Pierre's compassion towards them touches her deeply and she feels that in understanding them, Pierre understands her. Marya identifies with the godsfolk, and though she does fantasize about getting married and having children, she is also greatly tempted by the life these religious wanderers lead. Marya's close identification with

[212] Daniel Rancour-Lafferiere, *Tolstoi's Pierre Bezukhov: A Psychoanalytic Study,* Bristol Classical Press, London, 1993, 142.
[213] Ibid, 143.
[214] Rancour-Lafferiere goes on to suggest that this scene might point to some repressed homosexual tendencies in Pierre. I think this scene is about gender, not sexuality. Gender ambivalence does not suggest an ambivalence in sexuality, but rather a resistance to strict categories of personal expression.

the cross-dressing Godsfolk could be interpreted an indication of her desire for a life not determined by her gender, for a destiny outside of marriage and family.

It is also worth noting that when Nicholas and Marya do finally meet and fall in love, their struggles to live up to the demands of masculinity and femininity, respectively, briefly disappear, and suddenly they resemble perfect male and female archetypes. Marya, who for so long has failed to affect the femininity of Mademoiselle Bourienne or Princess Lise, is able, if only momentarily, to embody a type of femininity—the damsel in distress. When Nicholas and his men go to the town of Bogucharovo to look for provisions, they are approached by one of Princess Marya's domestic serfs, who explains that Marya and the women of the house are trapped on the estate. The serfs have revolted against her and have threatened to prevent her from leaving. While Nicholas and his men are there, Marya tries to escape, but her coachman, mistaking Nicholas and his men for the French, flees, abandoning the princess who begins crying uncontrollably. Nicholas, as he stands before Marya, who is visibly frightened and unsure as to what to do, immediately recognizes the scenario as novelesque. Tolstoy writes, "Rostov immediately imagined that there was something romantic in this meeting. A poor defenseless girl, overcome with grief, at the mercy of crude, rebellious peasants."[215] Nicholas gives in to the prospect of enacting this familiar storyline and subdues the rebellious peasants with more force and determination than he ever showed in war. Nicholas, who had so long struggled on the battlefield and frequently felt impotent as a soldier, suddenly becomes valiant and powerful in this scene. He is forceful against the peasants and succeeds in quelling the small rebellion.

[215] Ростову тотчас же представилось что то романтическое в этой встрече. "Беззащитная, убитая горем девушка, одна, оставленная на произвол грубых, бунтующих мужиков! Tolstoy, *PSS*, 11:160. Trans. Maude, *War and Peace*, 2:423.

The Bogucharovo incident contrasts with a similar moment in which the reality of Nicholas' experiences in battle failed to live up to the glorious fictions of traditional war narratives. After surviving a chaotic cavalry attack on the battlefield, Nicholas runs back to tell the other men what happened:

> Он начал рассказывать с намерением рассказать все, как оно точно было, но незаметно, невольно и неизбежно для себя перешел в неправду. Ежели бы он рассказал правду этим слушателщм, которые, как и он сам, слышали уже множество раз рассказы об атаках и составили себе определенное понятие о том, что такое была атака, и ожидал точно такого же рассказа, или бы они не поверили ему или, что еще хуже, подумали бы, что Ростов был сам виноват в том, что с ним не случилось того, что случается обыкновенно с рассказчиками кавалерийских атак.
>
> He began his story meaning to tell everything just as it happened, but imperceptibly, involuntarily, and inevitably he lapsed into falsehood. If he had told the truth to his listeners- who like himself had often heard stories of attacks and had formed a definite idea of what an attack was and were expecting to her just such a story—they would either not have believed him or still worse, would have thought Rostov was himself to blame since what generally happens to the narrators of cavalry attacks had not happened to him.[216]

This passage offers key insight into the identity of Nicholas as a character. He invariably tries to live up to a set of expectations, whether they be the expectations of a literary genre or those of his male gender. In the scene of the peasant rebellion on Marya's estate, he actually succeeds in living up to both simultaneously.

Given that so much of what Tolstoy was attempting to do in *War and Peace* was to get beyond narrative clichés, what does it mean that Marya and Nicholas' first meeting is presented precisely as one? Furthermore, based on what we know about Marya and Nicholas, the successful embodiment of gender stereotypes we see here is a rare experience for each of them and as we learn rather quickly, it cannot be sustained. When the other soldiers joke to Nicholas

[216] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 9:296; Maude, *War and Peace*, 1:306.

that he went to look for hay, but came back with one of the wealthiest heiresses in Russia, he becomes angry because this thought occurred to him as well. In fact, he had begun to contemplate how Marya's wealth could save his family from financial ruin. Thus, the moment the roles are reversed, and it is Princess Marya who is coming to Nicholas' rescue, the dream vanishes and the rest of their relationship is defined by trying to recapture it. Their eventual marriage, though generally fulfilling, is punctuated by periods of unhappiness that are rooted in their respective struggles to sustain the fictions of masculinity and femininity. Especially when pregnant, Marya is constantly insecure and uncharacteristically jealous towards Sonya.

As outlined earlier, in most criticism of his work, Tolstoy is discussed as someone who strictly *enforced* gender roles, especially for women, both in his work and in real life.[217] The supposition that Tolstoy might find the male/female binary oppressive and recognize life paths not determined by gender as providing relief and greater emotional fulfillment, would seem to challenge what is generally taken for granted about Tolstoy. In *Framing Anna Karenina*, Amy Mandelker lists the various charges of misogyny that have been levied against Tolstoy in recent criticism:

> Feminist critiques of Tolstoy document and register his multiple verbal assaults on his wife (and, by extension, women), his transformation of the married Natalia Rostova into a domestic drone, his "murder" of Anna Karenina, his relegation of his heroines to endless childbirth, nursing, and drudgery, and his hypostatization of the "ideal" woman into a de-sexed, plain Madonna, Princess Maria, Dolly Oblonskaya.[218]

[217] For more on Tolstoy and breastfeeding, see: Jane Costlow et al, ed., *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1993, 223-237. Tolstoy's wife suffered from severely cracked nipples which made breastfeeding extremely painful; she describes the experience in her diaries: "My nipples cracked and began to hurt. When my own little son finally began to suck, I simply cried out in pain, and there were no remedies of any help." in Tolstaya, Sofia Andreyevna Tolstaya, *My Life*, Trans. by Andrew Donskov, Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2011.
[218] Mandelker, 19.

However, Mary is not *violently* "desexed" by Tolstoy. She is desexed[219] to begin with. It is only when other characters try to force Mary into more traditional female roles, to force her sex upon her, that she is truly victimized. A striking example of that occurs when Anatole Kuragin comes to Bald Hills to propose to Mary.

Despite her envy of the godsfolk and their wandering ascetic lifestyle, when the prospect of marriage presents itself to her in the form of Anatole Kuragin, Princess Marya leaps at the chance to make a good impression on her suitor. However, the process of dressing up in an attempt to achieve some form of gender success, causes Princess Marya great anxiety. Despite the efforts of Princess Lise and Mademoiselle Bourienne to make Marya look more attractive, Tolstoy describes their efforts as foiled by Princess Marya's inherent plainness. Nonetheless, she is excited at the prospect of marriage, the fulfillment of a desire she did indeed have, a desire that co-existed with that to not marry and instead join the godsfolk. It is in this multi-planed complexity that Princess Marya challenges stereotypical gender thinking. Her internal conflict becomes a moot point when she discovers Anatole embraced in a kiss with her French maid, Mademoiselle Bourienne.

Instead of feeling crushed, Marya is overcome with a deep sense of relief (much like the relief Varenka will express when her proposal does not come through in *Anna Karenina*). Rather than expressing anger or jealousy, Marya is excited over the prospect of her maid finding a match and commits herself to doing anything that will bring the two together. She thinks to herself:

> Мое призвание другое, — думала про себя княжна Марья, — мое призвание — быть счастливой другим счастием, счастьем любви и самопожертвования. И чего

[219] Important to point out that this is "de-sexed" in the sense of being de-feminized, taking away her biological sex. Marya is of course very sexual in the sense of possessing sexual desire, and fantasizes a great deal about Kuragin when he visits her estate to propose marriage.

> бы мне это ни стоило, я сделаю счастие бедной Amélie. Она так страстно его любит. Она так страстно раскаивается. Я все сделаю, чтоб устроить ее брак с ним. Ежели он не богат, я дам ей средства, я попрошу отца, попрошу Андрея. Я так буду счастлива, когда она будет его женою.
>
> My vocation is a different one, thought Princess Mary. My vocation is to be happy with another kind, the happiness of love and self-sacrifice. And cost what it may. I will arrange poor Amelie's happiness, she loves him so passionately, and so passionately repents. I will do all I can to arrange the match between them. If he is not rich I will give her the means; I will ask my father and Andrew. I shall be so happy when she is his wife. [220]

In her happiness over the prospect of aiding Bourienne, Marya resolves to build another sort of self not tied to matrimony. She engages in a selfless devotion to others that would come to characterize Tolstoy's spinsters.

The Tolstoyan spinster, while not as violently political as the nigilistki explored in the previous chapter, is still radical for her very questioning of marriage and maternity and for the thorough view she provides of a self-determined life with great social and spiritual impact. With the character of Princess Marya in *War and Peace*, we see spinsterhood characterized as a social position with the potential to free women to help others, including other women. This is especially true for the character who does ultimately remains a spinster, Sonya. Hugh McLean identifies Sonya's unmarried life as Tolstoy's prescriptive for the issue of women's liberation in Russia, writing "Sonya the 'sterile flower' is destined for a seemingly unfulfilled life of spinsterhood. But that too is a role provided for in Tolstoy's solution to the woman question."[221] McLean notes that Sonya's own lack of familial obligations allows her to serve others.

[220] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 9:284. Maude, *War and Peace*, 1:293.

[221] McLean, Hugh, "A Woman's Place… The Young Tolstoy and the 'Woman Question,'" *Word, Music, History: A Festschrift for Caryl Emerson, Part One*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005, 366.

McLean borrows the term "sterile flower" from Natasha Rostova to whom Princess Marya confides that she is at times uncomfortable living with Sonya (racked with guilt that her marriage to Nicholas is the cause of Sonya's unhappiness). In the following exchange between the two women, Natasha tries to quiet Princess Mary's fears:

> — Знаешь что, — сказала Наташа, — вот ты много читала Евангелие; там есть одно место прямо о Соне.
> — Что? — с удивлением спросила графиня Марья.
> — «Имущему дастся, а у неимущего отнимется», помнишь? Она — неимущий: за что? не знаю; в ней нет, может быть, эгоизма, — я знаю, но у нее отнимется, и все отнялось. Мне ее ужасно жалко иногда; я ужасно желала прежде, чтобы Nicolas женился на ней; но я всегда как бы предчувствовала, что этого не будет. Она *пустоцвет*, знаешь, как на клубнике? Иногда мне ее жалко, а иногда я думаю, что она не чувствует этого, как чувствовали бы мы.
>
> "Do you know, said Natasha, "you have read the New Testament a great deal—there is a passage in them that just fits Sonya."
> "What?" asked Countess Mary, surprised.
> "To whom that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away." You remember? She is one that hath not; why, I don't know. Perhaps she lacks egotism, I don't know, but from her is taken away, and everything has been taken away. Sometimes, I feel dreadfully sorry for her. Formerly, I very much wanted Nicholas to marry her, but I always had a sort of presentiment that it would not come off. She is a sterile flower; you know—like some strawberry blossoms. Sometimes I am sorry for her, and sometimes I think she doesn't feel it as you or I would." [222]

Princess Marya tells Natasha that there is likely another way to interpret that biblical passage, but then concedes to herself that Sonya does in fact seem content with not being married or having a family of her own.

If probed further, Natasha's misreading of the biblical passage reveals something quite telling. Obviously, that passage from the Gospels refers to Christ's teachings, and warns against the sort of religious dilettantism that Natasha here displays. The passage promises that for those

[222] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 12:259.

who have absorbed Christ's teaching will be rewarded with still more enlightenment. In that respect, who "hath" more than Marya's Godsfolk? Does Tolstoy here suggest that Sonya, the spinster, realizes the spiritual fulfillment that Marya never will? Purely from the point-of-view of the Gospels, the answer could be yes. Natasha quotes the Gospel of Matthew which contains many of Jesus' most pointed excoriations of family life.[223]

THE VARENKA ALTERNATIVE IN *ANNA KARENINA*

Anna Karenina is fundamentally a novel about marriage. However, at the time that it was written, marriage was becoming an increasingly scarce option for women. In both Western Europe and in Russia, the number of single women increased exponentially in the second half of the nineteenth century due to various socioeconomic factors. As mentioned in the previous chapter, an 1881 census revealed that the ratio of women to men in Great Britain was 3 to 2.[224] In Russia, there was a similar gender imbalance that was exacerbated by the end of serfdom. As a result of that reform, the wealth of aristocrats declined significantly and single women could no longer count on being supported by members of their extended family. Nineteenth century Europe and Russia were faced with a new class of unmarried single women. At the Oblonsky dinner party, the guests allude to this problem when they discuss the dearth of options for

[223] For example, in Matthew 8:22, Jesus says, "Let the dead bury the dead," in response to a young man who wants to bury his father before joining the disciplines. The passage more closely means "let those who are spiritually dead, bury the dead," implying that an attachment to familial bonds over spiritual devotion is not in step with Christ's teachings. For more on this passage from the bible, see: Horn, Cornelia and John W. Martens, "*Let the Little Children Come to Me": Childhood and Children in Early Christianity*. Washington: Catholic University Press, 2009, 304.

[224] Figures cited in Stites, Richard. *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihlism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, 57 and 60. For how the ratio of men and women affected the employment rates of women and the uptake in women engaged in prostitution, see: Mandelker, 25.

unmarried women in society. When Dolly insists that a woman can always find a place in her extended family as an "aunt," Kitty becomes upset. The entire dinner conversation is deeply upsetting for Kitty who says that to enter a family as an unmarried woman carries a deep feeling of humiliation. Kitty is herself afraid of becoming one such unmarried woman, unlike her friend Varenka, who chooses to see her social usefulness not as a wife, but as a companion and friend to others.

Varenka, whom Kitty confides in about her relationships with Vronsky and Levin, is much less concerned about courtship and marriage than her new friend. She herself had been nearly engaged, but the union was prevented in the end by the young man's mother. Varenka is logical and unemotional about this event in her personal history "not taking it as a personal rejection of either the man's love or her attractiveness." Kitty however cannot understand how she can be so calm in the face of what Kitty would regard as an irreparable life tragedy. After listening to Kitty's despair over the events surrounding her relationships with Levin and Vronsky, Varenka calmly laughs if off, viewing the entire situation as silly and trivial. She tells Kitty that there are "so many more important things"[225] in life besides getting married. Once again, Kitty meets Varenka's reserve with bewilderment. The mere idea that life can have more to offer a woman than marriage and family is at first completely incomprehensible to Kitty, who has never contemplated any alternative for herself. Among Varenka's roles in the novel is to teach Kitty that life can have other ends beyond matrimony.

As part of their reputation for political agitation, spinsters were known for their commitment to social causes and humanitarian efforts. Florence Nightingale became a symbol of the selfless spinster who shuns marriage in order to focus completely on helping the poor,

[225] [Ах, многое важнее.] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 18:235.

sick, and less fortunate.[226] Tolstoy's depiction of Varenka fits neatly into that mythology of the self-sacrificing unmarried woman. From her first appearance, Varenka is described throughout the text as busy, constantly engaged in service to someone else. Kitty, who at first only observes Varenka from afar, is eager to make her acquaintance, but struggles to find an opportunity because Varenka is always "busy" helping others:

> И действительно, Кити видела, что она всегда занята: или она уводит с вод детей русского семейства, или несет плед для больной и укутывает ее, или старается развлечь раздраженного больного, или выбирает и покупает печенье к кофею для кого-то.
>
> And Kitty saw that the girl really was always occupied: now taking the children of some Russian family home from the Wells, now carrying an invalid's plaid or wrapping it round her, now trying to sooth an irritable patient, now choosing and buying biscuits for someone's coffee.[227]

Of special importance is that, in her mind, Kitty connects this busyness with Varenka's distance from male-female relations, and starts to see Varenka's life of servitude as a remedy for the unhappiness her experiences at courtship have thus far brought her:

> She seemed always occupied with something there could be no doubt about, and therefore it seemed that no side issue could interest her. By this contrast to herself Kitty was especially attracted. She felt that in her and her way of life could be found a model of what she herself was painfully seeking: interest in life, the worth of life—outside the social relations of girls to men, which now seemed disgusting to Kitty who regarded them as shameful exhibitions of goods awaiting a buyer. The more Kitty observed her unknown friend, the more she was convinced that this girl really was the perfect being she imagined her to be, and the more she wished to make her acquaintance.
>
> Она всегда казалась занятою делом, в котором не могло быть сомнения, и потому,

[226] Florence Nightingale's unmarried status was especially scandalous because it was the result of her own choice. "Rare women like Florence Nightingale, whose refusal of marriage offers stemmed solely from her desire to do something more productive with her life and abilities, faced formidable social and familial opposition as a single woman by choice rather than circumstance." in Logan, Deborah Ann, *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, Or Do Worse*. Kansas City: University of Missouri Press, 1998, 198.
[227] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 18:227.; Maude, *Anna Karenina*, 215.

казалось,ничем посторонним не могла интересоваться. Этою противоположностью с собой она особенно привлекла к себе Кити. Кити чувство-- вала, что в ней, в ее складе жизни, она найдет образец того, чего теперь мучительно искала: интересов жизни, достоинства жизни -- вне отвратительных для Кити светских отношений девушки к мужчинам, представлявшихся ей теперь позорною выставкой товара, ожидающего покупателей. … [228]

Very soon, Levin's brother, Nikolai Levin and his female companion, Marya Nikolaevna, appear in the German countryside where they are social outcasts. Nikolai's alcohol-induced outbursts begin to get him into trouble with the community. It is Varenka and Madame de Stahl's intervention that help to soothe tensions between Nikolai Levin and everyone else. Varenka is friendly with them, and serves as a translator for Marya Nikolaevna, a woman of the lower classes who does not speak any foreign language. When Kitty later speaks to Varenka about the kind service she did for Nikolai Levin, Varenka immediately denies that she did anything especially kind, and explains to Kitty that it is simply her habit to look after others.[229] Just as Varenka is telling Kitty that she is actually not very busy at all, two young girls, the children of one of Varenka's ill patients, come running to her:

-- Ах, напротив, я ничем не занята, -- отвечала Варенька, но в ту же минуту должна была оставить своих новых знакомых, потому что две маленькие русские девочки, дочери больного, бежали к ней.
-- Варенька, мама зовет! -- кричали они...:
И Варенька пошла за ними.[230]

--No, I'm not busy at all, answered Varenka, but at that same moment, she had to interrupt their meeting because two little Russian girls, the daughters of a patient, started running towards her.
--Varenka, mother needs you! – they cried.
And Varenka followed after them.

Tolstoy presents Varenka's life as a spiritually fulfilling alternative to matrimony. Yet Kitty still

[228] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 18:227.; English: Maude, *Anna Karenina*, 214.
[229] It is also significant that Varenka serves others with whom she does not share any familial ties.
[230] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 18 :231.; English: Maude, *Anna Karenina*, 218

struggles to endorse it completely as an alternative she can accept for herself.

Their conversation about Vronsky and Levin is cut short when Varenka realizes it is late and that she has to run to visit Madame Berthe, a blind woman in the neighborhood who asked Varenka to call on her. The colonel offers to walk Varenka there, and Kitty's mother echoes that Varenka cannot walk alone at night, and that she will find someone to accompany her. Kitty watches as Varenka struggles not to smile, amused by the colonel and the princess' concern. Varenka announces, "Oh no, I always go out alone, and nothing ever happens to me."[231] With that, Varenka disappears, we are told, "carrying with her the secret of what is important and what affords her such enviable calm and dignity."[232] Soon begins Kitty's official immersion into the world of Varenka and Madame Stahl. Varenka first takes Kitty to a widow's house, thus creating a landscape of single women to serve as the backdrop for Kitty's rethinking of matrimony and motherhood.

The biography of Varenka's caretaker, Madame de Stahl is also characterized by her disavowal of marriage and non-normative modes of motherhood, both of which are connected to her turn towards social activism as an alternative life path. Kitty's father tells her that Madame de Stahl had a troubled marriage, and was already in the process of securing a divorce when she gave birth to her first child. The child was a stillborn, and fearing Madame de Stahl's reaction, her relatives replaced the baby with Varenka. Following the divorce, Madame de Stahl became involved in philanthropic activities. While some questioned the sincerity of her involvement (and dismissed it as a means to garner social status), others insisted that she was truly devoted to helping the less fortunate. In either case, however, we see that her social activities and by extension, those of Varenka, are only feasible outside of the confines of marriage and family.

[231] Ibid, Tolstoy, *PSS*, 18:235, Maude, *Anna Karenina*, 222.
[232] Ibid, Tolstoy, *PSS*, 18:235, Maude, *Anna Karenina*, 222.

Robert Louis Jackson contrasts Varenka and Kitty's relationship with Anna and Dolly's, pointing out that both Varenka and Anna serve as forces within the novel that threaten the domestic fates of Kitty and Dolly, respectively:

> The intractable differences between the two women come to a head in their conversation about contraception, during which Anna confesses that her motive for practicing contraception is to preserve her sexual attractiveness to Vronsky, since having any more children would diminish that attractiveness. Dolly is shocked as much by the egotism of Anna's argument as by the position it adopts on contraception. She herself cannot imagine *not* having the children which the practice of contraception might have prevented. She experiences anew the unbridgeable gap between Anna's life, lived now apart from 'society' and for love alone, and her own life, the meaning of which is inseparable from a set of duties, responsibilities, commitments and connections which have, to a large extent, been made for her, however willingly or unwillingly she might embrace them at any particular moment. No more than Kitty can Dolly cease to be herself."[233]

Indeed, both women step out of a "certain set of duties" that have been prescribed for women, and should Kitty have abandoned her quest to get married, it would have certainly caused a great deal of disruption with her family. However, that scenario never plays out the way that Anna's does. Kitty is pulled back from the brink of social disruption by her inherent sexuality.

Kitty's tutelage under Varenka ends with the suggestion of jealousy by Petrov's wife. Kitty does not fit into this world of chaste spinsterhood. Her sexual attractiveness seems to render impossible any chance she has to insert herself into this life of chaste, monastic devotion. For Robert Louis Jackson, the story of Kitty and Varenka represents the former's failed quest for asexuality:

> Kitty is sent abroad and, in an understandable state of revulsion from male sexuality and from her own particular nature, initially finds herself attracted to Varenka's seemingly asexual charitable ministrations as a way of life which she might profitably imitate and grow into…Before long…it is itself infected by the sexuality from which she had hoped

[233] Jackson, Robert Louis, "Defining Moments in Anna Karenina," *Cambridge Quarterly* (2014) 43 (1): 19.

> to escape (a wife grows jealous of what she perceives as Kitty's over-solicitous attentions to her sick husband)."[234]

Thus we see, already in *Anna Karenina*, an idea that would come to define late Tolstoy's attitudes regarding sexuality. As Amy Mandelker explains, "Tolstoy's ultimate world view [was] that equality between sexes can only occur when there is an absence of the sexual power relations and possession."[235] Thus, spinsterhood, or stepping outside of the confines of marriage, in the Tolstoyan universe, does not necessarily resolve the issue of gender equality. Rethinking sex, not the institution of marriage, would seem to be closer to Tolstoy's prescription for women's liberation at this time, thereby explaining his later commitment to chastity within the confines of marriage.

Once Varenka's destabilizing energy is neutralized, Kitty returns to her former path, and eventually goes on to marry Levin. At first reading, it appears that Tolstoy has undone the spinster alternative. However, I would argue that by unraveling this fate for Kitty through Madame de Stahl, a wealthy divorcee, Tolstoy offers an insightful critique of the spinster mythology on the level of social class. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam argues that the success/failure binary in contemporary life has been dictated by the heteronormative, capitalist society in which we live.[236] Arguing for a rethinking of the valences of success and failure, Halberstam insists that failure can be a more interesting, fruitful mode of being. Primarily interested in gender failure (by which we fail to live up to gender stereotypes that fit neatly into a male/female sex binary), Halberstam's critique would place spinsters like Varenka, traditionally thought of as women who "failed" to find husbands and become mothers, in the

[234] Ibid, 18.
[235] Mandelker, 179.
[236] Halberstam is not suggesting that the success/failure binary is specific to capitalism, but rather explores its *unique* metrics of success.

realm of the "successful losers," subjects whose perceived failures freed them to explore alternative life paths and be creative forces in society. Indeed, when Serguei Ivanovich and Varenka return from the mushroom picking expedition unengaged (despite the expectation that he would at that moment propose to her), Tolstoy writes that they "experienced the same feeling, similar to the feeling of a schoolboy who has just *failed* a test." Tolstoy, however, points out a flaw in this thinking, or better yet, an assumption, that all failures are created equal. In Jane Austen's novel *Emma*, in which the title character proudly declares she has no desire to marry, her friend Harriet Smith, asks her if she is not afraid she will wind up an "old maid like Ms. Bates"[237] the eccentric aunt of Jane Fairfax, Emma's rival. Emma responds "I shall not be a poor old maid, and it is only poverty that makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public."[238] In the case of Varenka, she has the benefit of Madame de Stahl's financial backing and high society connections. She does not need to work to support herself; she has received a world-class education at the expense of Madame de Stahl and speaks English and French fluently. Varenka has no financial need to marry, and thus her "failure" to adapt to societal norms surrounding marriage and family is perhaps less courageous than the "failure" of an unmarried woman of lesser means or women who completely turn their backs on financial security (like Marya Pavlovna in *Resurrection*).

Though Kitty ultimately rejects the ideals of spinsterhood embodied by Varenka, her attitudes towards matrimony are important in understanding *Anna Karenina* as part of a larger rethinking of the value of married life for women, and what possibilities the world held for women who chose to step out of it. Within the novel, Tolstoy offers a wide range of female responses to this question, showing that practically all of his female characters are to some extent

[237] Austen, Jane. *Emma*. New York: Wild Jot Press, 2009, 55.
[238] Ibid, 55.

engaged in a critique of the institution of marriage and the centrality of motherhood in a woman's life, including the woman whose marriage is in the midst of breaking down when the novel begins, Dolly.

It is important to remember that *Anna Karenina* begins with a peek into the marriage not of the titular character, but of her sister-in-law who has recently discovered that her husband has been having an affair. Dolly threatens to leave Stiva, but ultimately cannot bring herself to do it. Dolly is trapped in an unhappy marriage that shows no signs of improving, and Stiva continues throughout the novel to engage in extramarital affairs and squander the family's wealth, the latter of which brings Dolly to the brink of divorce.

Later on in the novel, Dolly meets a young peasant woman at an inn on her way to visit Anna in the countryside. Dolly asks the young woman if she has any children, to which she replies that she once had a daughter but that God "released"[239] her, and that she buried the child during Lent. The young peasant girl expresses no feelings of remorse to Dolly, and goes on to insist that children are just "a tie."[240] At first horrified by the young woman's words, Dolly, upon looking back on her life, is forced to admit that there is some truth in her statement. Dolly reflects on her fifteen years of marriage to Stiva and her experiences as a mother. She is only able to see it as a mess of "pregnancy, sickness, dullness of mind, and above all disfigurement.[241] She recalls the terrible experiences of childbirth, her cracked nipples from nursing, and then the death of her last child, a boy who died in infancy. She again contemplates the young woman's words and becomes convinced further still that there is some truth in them. Dolly begins to think to herself that her marriage and her life as a mother has amounted to a life wasted:

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[239] [Развязал] Tolstoy, *PSS,* 19:181; Maude, *Anna Karenina*, 603.
[240] [связа] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 19:181; Maude, *Anna Karenina,* 603.
[241] [беременность, тошнота, тупость ума, равнодушие ко всему и, главное, безобразие] Maude, *Anna Karenina,* 603.

> And what is it all for? What will come if it all? I myself, without having a moment's peace, now pregnant, now nursing, always cross and grumbling, tormenting myself and others, repulsive to my husband—I shall live my life, and produce unfortunately, badly brought out and beggared children…My whole life ruined! Again she remembered what the young woman had said. Again the recollection was repulsive to her, but she could not help admitting that there was a measure of crude truth in the words.
>
> Все это зачем? Что ж будет из всего этого? То, что я, не имея ни минуты покоя, то беременная, то кормящая, вечно сердитая, ворчливая, сама измученная и других мучающая, противная мужу, проживу свою жизнь, и вырастут несчастные, дурно воспитанные и нищие дети… . Загублена вся жизнь!" Ей опять вспомнилось то, что сказала молодайка, и опять ей гадко было вспомнить про это; но она не могла не согласиться, что в этих словах была и доля грубой правды.[242]

What is significant is that regarding her relationship with her husband and the financial future of her children, Dolly is completely right. She is not being melodramatic, but rather entirely realistic. Nothing she says to herself is inaccurate. While Anna's fate is often touted as Tolstoy's "punishment" for her decision to abandon her roles as wife and mother, he does not offer any happier outlook for Dolly, who clings to those roles in spite of great hardship.[243] Whereas Varenka may have represented a successful "failure" in the Halberstamian sense, Dolly would then be characterized as an unsuccessful "winner," who in the very accomplishment of her success (being married and having children), has become the architect of her own unhappiness.

"And Those Women Without Children, Unmarried Women, And Widows…"

Aside from spinsters in his literary oeuvre, Tolstoy also wrote in an essay titled "Women" in his *Cycles of Reading* about the role of unmarried women in Russian society. In

[242] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 19:182 ; Maude, *Anna Karenina*, 604.
[243] For this reason, Gary Saul Morson argues that Dolly is the true hero of the novel and "Tolstoy's moral compass." Morson, Gary Saul, "Prosaics: An Approach to the Humanities," *American* Scholar *57* (1988), 523.

"Women," Tolstoy praises the role of mother, and argues that it should be considered an equally important contribution to society that done by men; that argument would seem to support claims that Tolstoy rejects *other* roles for women. However, with more context, and further reading, I argue that "Women" can be read as an example of Tolstoy's support for the expansion of women's roles outside of motherhood, particularly for unmarried women.

Towards the end of the essay, Tolstoy asks an interesting rhetorical question, "And those women who don't have children, who did not get married, widows?"[244] In his response, he argues that women's contribution to "men's work," would indeed be highly valuable:

> They would do very well if they were to participate in masculine work of many kinds. Each woman, if she has strength, will be able to busy herself with helping men in his work. The help of women in this work is extremely valuable,
>
> Те будут прекрасно делать, если будут участвовать в мужском многообразном труде. Всякая женщина, отрожавшая, если у нее есть силы, успеет заняться этою помощью мужчине в его труде. Помощь женщины в этом труде очень драгоценна.[245]

Tolstoy does not see women as somehow biologically determined for domestic work, and is merely concerned that the expansion of roles for women might mean that women will be expected to devote themselves entirely to both domestic life and spheres dominated by men (the so-called "double-burden" that is discussed widely by contemporary Feminists).[246]

Besides work outside the home, Tolstoy discusses the important role unmarried women can play within the family, albeit not as mothers. Tolstoy writes that unmarried women can always find places as aunts, nannies, midwives, sisters, and that in fact, mothers need the help of unmarried women. This last point in particular is especially important given how often in

[244] [Ну а те, у которых нет детей, которые не вышли замуж, вдовы?] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 25:415
[245] Ibid, 24:415.
[246] Slaughter, Anne-Marie, "Why Women Can't Have it All," *The Atlantic*, June 13, 2012.

Tolstoy's oeuvre unmarried women serve as important figures within other relationships. Kitty is only prepared for her spiritual marriage to Levin after being exposed to selfless devotion by Varenka, and the tensions within Princess Mary's marriage to Nicholas are eased by Sonya's presence, whose longer acquaintance with Nicholas allows her to better predict his moods and shield the children from any unpleasantness.

Edwina Cruise, despite her criticism of the over-prescribed roles for women she sees in Tolstoy, acknowledges that his characters are always presented with a choice. She writes:

> Tolstoy surely did not cast off his convictions when he sat down to creative work, but neither was he fettered by them. As his own characters repeatedly attest, furthermore, moments of certainty, when life seems unwaveringly 'clear and simple,' are often threatened by their inherently destabilizing potential.[247]

In the case of Kitty, destined to become what is generally seen as Tolstoy's ideal woman, the devoted wife and mother, the life (and work) of a spinster temporarily replaces her goal of matrimony and motherhood. Whilst under the tutelage of Varenka and Madame de Stahl, Kitty begins to contemplate the possibilities that a life not filled with familial responsibilities might afford her, namely the chance to selflessly serve the less fortunate. For Kitty, the destabilizing force is Varenka, who exposes her to a life for women not dictated by the demands of a husband or children, but instead rooted in social activism.[248] In the case of Princess Mary in *War and Peace*, it is the wandering ascetics, the godsfolk, who threaten to throw her off the course towards matrimony and traditional family values. However, in his last novel, *Resurrection*

[247] Cruise, 193.
[248] However, for Kitty, it is not so much the charitable work itself that she longs for. Kitty is most attracted to Varenka's invulnerability to romantic disappointment, and sees in Varenka's services to others an emotional shield.

(1899), there finally emerges a spinster who succeeds in thoroughly destabilizing her subject, Marya Pavlovna.

Resurrection

Tolstoy's formulation of the socially engaged spinster would find its highest form in the character of Marya Pavlovna in his last novel *Resurrection* (1899). Marya Pavlovna is arguably the finished product of Tolstoy's many reworkings of the spinster theme. In fact, Amy Mandelker sees Varenka as the prototype for Marya Pavlovna:

> Varenka's single state, her conviction that there are 'so many more important things' than love and marriage, and her continual attention to other's needs prefigure the idealized single woman of Tolstoy's post-conversion writings. For example, in *Resurrection*, Marya Pavlovna who is 'wholly absorbed in finding opportunities to serve others.[249]

Resurrection would be the author's most overt exploration of the victimization of women in Russian society. Katyusha is expelled by Nekhlyudov's aunts when her pregnancy is discovered. She is flung into a life of poverty, and turns to prostitution to support herself until she is falsely convicted of murder and sent to Siberia. Neklyudov, racked with guilt, pledges his life to Maslova and offers to marry her, though she rebuffs his proposal. When visiting Maslova, Neklyudov meets many of the other prisoners, and ultimately finds that rather than being guilty, they are for the most part victims of a larger cycle of oppression and injustice plaguing society.

Within Maslova's caravan, there are a number of prisoners who have been sentenced for their subversive political activities. One of them is Marya Pavlovna, a woman of aristocratic birth who rejected the wealth of her family in order to devote herself to revolutionary struggle.

[249] Mandelker, 178.

Marya Pavlovna's biography is typical for a female revolutionary of her time and mirrors closely the activities of the female nihilists profiled in the previous chapter. The narrator states that Marya Pavlovna came to hate the privilege she was raised within and felt increasingly sympathetic to the peasants and laborers who worked for her father's estate. Defiantly, she moved to Saint Petersburg to work for a radical printing press, eschewing the comforts and financial security of her upbringing. She ultimately was eventually arrested after she accepted the blame for a shot fired by another member of her revolutionary party. That detail is key, as it sets the stage for her identification as a self-abnegating servant of others; even the very circumstances of her imprisonment speak to her predilection for self-sacrifice.

Maslova is immediately fascinated by Marya Pavlovna and all that she has given up on behalf of her political beliefs:

> Она восхищалась всеми своими новыми сотоварищами; но больше всех она восхищалась Марьей Павловной, и не только восхищалась ей, но полюбила ее особенной, почтительной и восторженной любовью. Ее поражало то, что эта красивая девушка из богатого генеральского дома, говорившая на трех языках, держала себя как самая простая работница, отдавала с себя другим все, что присылал ей ее богатый брат, и одевалась и обувалась не только просто, но бедно, не обращая никакого внимания на свою наружность.

> This admiration extended to all her new companions; but if there was one person she admired above all else it was Marya, for whom her admiration had turned into a special mixture of reverence, elation and affection. She was so impressed that a beautiful girl like her, who came from the family or a rich general and spoke three languages, bore herself like an ordinary working woman, gave away everything she received from her wealthy brother and wore clothes and shoes that were not just simple, they were really shoddy, since she wasn't at all bothered about the way she looked.[250]

[250] Tolstoy, *PSS* 32:367; Tolstoy, Leo. *Resurrection.* Trans. by Anthony Briggs. London: Penguin Classics, 2009, 420-421.

This last point, about Marya Pavlovna's lack of concern regarding her physical appearance will prove key to Maslova's fascination with her. Maslova, who had been defined her entire life by her attractiveness to men, came to see her sexuality as an enormous source of power and influence. Maslova is surprised to encounter in Marya Pavlovna other sources of power that are not grounded in sex. She watches in amazement as Marya Pavlovna openly plays down her looks and shuns the attentions of the male prisoners. However, under Marya Pavlovna's influence, Maslova begins to feel differently about her time as prostitute, investigating the limits of sexual power. Tolstoy explains that Maslova now sees herself as the victim, rather than the benefactor, of male sexuality. That conversion in Maslova brings the two women closer together:

> Эта черта — совершенное отсутствие кокетства — особенно удивляла и потому прельщала Маслову. Маслова видела, что Марья Павловна знала и даже что ей приятно было знать, что она красива, но что она не только не радовалась тому впечатлению, которое производила на мужчин ее наружность, но боялась этого и испытывала прямое отвращение и страх к влюблению. Товарищи ее, мужчины, знавшие это, если и чувствовали влечение к ней, то уж не позволяли себе показывать этого ей и обращались с ней, как с товарищем-мужчиной.

> Maslova found this quality—her complete absence of coquetry—particularly surprising and appealing. She could see that Marya was conscious of her own beauty and took some pleasure in it, but, far from relishing her good looks and the effect they had on men, she found it all most alarming and was repelled and disgusted by the very idea of a love relationship. Her male companions knew this about her, and if they felt attracted to her, they made sure they didn't know it, and treated her like a male companion. [251]

Here Tolstoy makes his case for equality between the sexes, linking the holding back of sexual attraction as key to why Marya Pavlovna and her male counterparts are able to foster equal respect for one another. Maslova comes to admire Marya Pavlovna enormously, and the two women come love one another, Tolstoy writes, for their shared disdain for sexuality:

[251] Ibid, Briggs, 421; Tolstoy, *PSS*, 32:367.

> И ласка и доброта такого необыкновенного существа так тронули Маслову, что она всей душой отдалась ей, бессознательно усваивая ее взгляды и невольно во всем подражая ей. Эта преданная любовь Катюши тронула Марью Павловну, и она также полюбила Катюшу. Женщин этих сближало еще и то отвращение, которое обе они испытывали к половой любви. Одна ненавидела эту любовь потому, что изведала весь ужас ее; другая потому, что, не испытав ее, смотрела на нее как на что-то непонятное и вместе с тем отвратительное и оскорбительное для человеческого достоинства.
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> And Maslova was so moved by the kindness and friendship shown to her by such a remarkable being that she gave herself up heart and soul, unconsciously assimilating Mary's views and imitating her involuntarily in every way. Katyusha's love and devoting moved Marya in turn, and she became fond of Katyusha. The women were attracted to each other also by their shared loathing for sexual love. One of them loathed this kind of love because she had known all its horrors, while the others, without having experienced it, looked up it as something incomprehensible and at the time repulsive and offensive to human dignity.[252]

Tolstoy's description of Marya Pavlovna in *Resurrection* resembles in key ways the characterization of Varenka in *Anna Karenina*. Just as Varenka was almost a caricature of saintliness, so too does the extremity of Marya Pavlovna's commitment to charity and self-sacrifice at times invite tongue-in-cheek mocking:

> С тех пор как Катюша узнала ее, она видела, что где бы она ни была, при каких бы ни было условиях, она никогда не думала о себе, а всегда была озабочена только тем, как бы услужить, помочь кому-нибудь в большом или малом. Один из теперешних товарищей ее, Новодворов, шутя говорил про нее, что она предается спорту благотворения.
>
> From the day of their first meeting, Katyusha had observed that, wherever she was, and whatever her circumstances, Marya never thought of herself, her only concern being to find ways to of helping other people, in matters great and small. One of her present companions, Novodvorov, used to joke that her favorite sport was charity.[253]

In examining the similarities between Varenka and Marya Pavlovna, we start to see in Tolstoy's earlier self-sacrificing heroines something of a radical tinge, as if these early spinsters were stepping stones towards a wholly liberated woman in the figure of Marya Pavlovna. Marya

[252] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 32:368-369; Briggs, 422.
[253] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 32:365; Briggs, 421-422.

Pavlovna embodies Tolstoy's ideal revolutionary, an individual characterized by the rejection of male-female sexual relations. Furthermore, Marya Pavlovna would have more success than Varenka and the Godsfolk in converting her pupil. While Maslova does get married to Simonson in the end, when Neklyudov asks if she loves her new fiancée, she says "What does it matter whether I love him or not? I've put all that behind me."[254]

Conclusion

Another interesting point that should not be overlooked is that Marya Pavlovna did not actually fire the shot that sentenced her to prison, and therefore lives her chaste life still within the framework of Tolstoyan pacifism. Michael Denner has suggested that Tolstoy's stance on chastity is connected with the political goals of his philosophy of non-violent resistance; he argues that the scope of Tolstoy's pacifism must be expanded to include other negative forms of political dissent: "Tolstoy's interpretation of the injunction against active resistance to evil is too narrowly understood if considered only in the context of war and state authority."[255] Denner argues that Tolstoy's chastity too should be seen as "an example of applied non-action."[256]

Tolstoy's intolerance for violence is well studied, and his pacifist teachings would go on to inspire non-violent resistance movements all over the world, most famously in India and in the United States.[257] However, the corollary to Tolstoyan pacifism, his doctrine of radical chastity,

[254] [Что любить, не любить? Я уж это оставила...]. Tolstoy, *PSS*, 32:423; Briggs, 495.
[255] Denner, Michael, "Tolstoyan Non-action: The Advantage of Doing Nothing," *Tolstoy Studies Journal*, Vol. XIII (2001), 9.
[256] Ibid, 17.
[257] The influence of Tolstoy's doctrine of non-violent resistance on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi is well documented.

and its global afterlife is relatively understudied. The following and final chapter will explore that issue more in depth.

Chapter 4:
Tolstoy and Political Sexology in America and England

In 1892, Tolstoy had *The Ethics of Diet*, a historical survey of vegetarianism written by the English humanitarian Howard Williams, translated into Russian. He also contributed a preface, an essay on his trip to a slaughterhouse titled "The First Step. [*Pervaya Stupen'*]."[258] In the essay, Tolstoy describes the path to morality as being made up of levels of progression (the titular steps) beginning with abstinence: "There has never been and there will never be a good life without abstinence. No good life is thinkable without abstinence. Every attainment of a good life must begin through it."[259] Abstinence, Tolstoy further clarifies, has steps within itself; abstention from more serious "lusts"[260] like sex must begin with abstention from certain foods (a philosophy not unlike the raspberry-shunning nigilistki). Like Williams, Tolstoy agreed that vegetarianism was a critical "first step" towards an ethical existence.

"The First Step" is an important essay because it programmatically articulates the nexus of asceticism and radical politics that would come to define the Tolstoyan movement, whose tenets were (among others) chastity, vegetarianism, and pacifism. In "First Steps," Tolstoy forcefully argues that abstention from meat and sex is invariably linked to various progressive social movements, particularly socialism (articulated by Tolstoy as the re-distribution of wealth) and pacifism. He offers the following example: "even a well-meaning person interested in building schools and distributing wealth will be distracted by thoughts of how to eat, what to eat,

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[258] Уильямса. Х, *Этика пищи, или Нравстевенные основы безубойного питания для человека.* Со вступ. статьей "Первая ступень" Л.Н. Толстого. М.: Посредник, 1893 (пометы). For more on Tolstoy and *The Ethics of Diet*, see: Alston, Charlotte. *Tolstoy and His Disciples: The History of a Radical International Movement.* London: I.B. Tauris, 2013, 25.

[259] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 29:73. [Доброй жизни не было и не может быть без воздержания.]

[260] [похоти] Ibid, 29:73

when, and where?"[261] Not unlike the Tolstoyan spinster who must eschew married life in order to serve others, Tolstoy here explains that any individual committed to social progress must reject the satisfaction of bodily passions that could distract from social work. Tolstoy also connects vegetarianism with his philosophy of non-violent resistance, explaining that in search for the roots of gluttony, he found himself at a slaughterhouse and witnessed inhumane violence perpetuated for the sake of pleasure. As Robert Le Blanc points out in *Slavic Sins of the Flesh*, "The First Step," was less about vegetarianism, and more so a platform for Tolstoy to preach abstinence yet again.[262]

In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault argues that over time, peaking in the nineteenth-century, European society increasingly began to attribute other, previously unrelated qualities to an individual's sexuality, what Foucault refers to as "the truth of sex."[263] While Tolstoy's ascetic extremism has largely been described by scholars as the culmination of the author's religious faith and a deep need to repent for past sexual indiscretions, I argue that it is vital to consider this development in light of a larger historical moment. Tolstoy's articulation of the connection between chaste living and political radicalism is part of a generational ethos that underpinned many progressive social movements across Western Europe, and was the defining feature of the progressive movement in late nineteenth-century America.

Tolstoy's correspondence with American and Western European reformers has been well

[261] Important to note that this condemnation is addressed to the aristocracy, not the peasantry.
[262] Robert LeBlanc has written widely on this topic. See: LeBlanc, Robert. *Slavic Sins of the Flesh.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.; LeBlanc, Robert. "Tolstoy, Food, and Sex," *Tolstoy Studies Journal*. Vol. IV, 1993, 1-32.
[263] "Let us put forward a general working hypothesis. The society that emerged in the nineteenth century—bourgeois, capitalist, industrial society, call it what you will—did not confront sex with a fundamental refusal of recognition. Not only did it speak of sex and compel everyone to do so; it also set out to formulate the truth of sex. As if it suspected sex of harboring a fundamental secret. Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012, 69.

documented,[264] but thus far, Tolstoy's influence on political reformers has been treated as a separate narrative from his interaction with sex reformers, such as the Feminist gynecologist Alice B. Stockham and the British sexologist Havelock Ellis. Stockham first came into contact with Tolstoy when she sent the author's daughter a copy of her book, *Tokology: A Book for Every Woman (1891).* Borrowing the Greek word "tokos" for birth, Stockham's book outlined a series of recommendations for expecting mothers, ranging from diet and bathing during gestation, the importance of breast-feeding, and—most interesting to Tolstoy--the need to abstain from sex during and shortly after pregnancy. Tolstoy was so impressed with Stockham's book that he had *Tokology* translated into Russian, wrote the book's preface, and invited Stockham to visit him in Russia, an invitation she accepted. In turn, Stockham would later go on to write *Tolstoi: A Man of Peace (1900),*[265] which explored the literary examples of Tolstoy's commitment to Christian pacifism and wealth redistribution.[266]

In her book on Tolstoy, Stockham also recounted stories from her visit to Yasnaya Polyana and her conversations with the author. Havelock Ellis, best known for his early explorations into homosexuality and transgenderism, contributed an essay he wrote on Tolstoy for the afterword to *Tolstoi: A Man of Peace.* That these two prominent sexologists, known to Tolstoy for their writings on the benefits of abstinence (particularly Stockham), would in turn write a book on Tolstoy's progressive political positions reveals much about the nature of

[264] See: Americans in Conversation with Tolstoy: Selected Accounts, 1887-1923. Ed. by Peter Sekirin. Jefferson: McFarland Publishing, 2006.
[265] Stockham, Alice B. *Tolstoi: A Man of Peace*. **Chicago**: Alice B. Stockham & Co., 1900.
[266] The British reform journalist William Thomas Stead included a positive, though very short review of *Tolstoi: A Man of Peace* in his progressive monthly journal Review of Reviews and the World's Work. The entirety of the review is "Dr. Stockham gives an entertaining account of her visit to Tolstoi's Russian home. In the same volume is included an essay by H. Havelock Ellis, on 'Tolstoi: The New Spirit.'' It is interesting that Stockham's book is described as an "entertaining account of her visit," as the book is that as well as an exploration of Tolstoi's political thought. *Review of Reviews and the World's Work*. Vol. 22, 1900, 635.

American and British progressivism at the end of the nineteenth-century.

Like Tolstoy, many participants in the progressive movements in America and Great Britain believed there was an invariable connection between sexual abstinence and the major political movements of the day (including abolitionism, women's rights and anti-imperialist pacifism). For them, as for Tolstoy, abstaining from sex was a "first step" towards a radical reimagining of bourgeois society. This chapter shows that Tolstoy's warm reception by progressives in America and Britain was based precisely in the author's articulation of the connection between political and sexual reform. Focusing primarily on his correspondence with Alice Bunker Stockham and Havelock Ellis, this final chapter will trace Tolstoy's discursive involvement in the American and British Reform movements, and the relevance of this cross-cultural exchange for contemporary gender studies.

Tolstoy and New England Pacifism

Towards the end of his life, Tolstoy had become an international celebrity whose ideas were widely discussed across all over the world. Surprisingly, it was not the author's major novels, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, that received the most attention in America, but rather it was his invective against marriage and sex, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, that introduced most American readers to Tolstoy.[267]

Tolstoy's influence was especially felt in America. He received more letters from the United States than from any other country, and six times the number of letters that he received

[267]For more on The Kreutzer Sonata's popularity (and infamy) abroad, see: Muller, Peter Ulf, *The Postlude to the Kreutzer Sonata*: T*olstoy and the Debate on Sexual Morality in Russian Literature in the 1890s.* Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998; Muller discusses the novella's high sales in the United States on page 110.

from English.[268] Tolstoy's readers were politicians (most famously President Theodore Roosevelt), influential reformists like Jane Addams[269] and William Jennings Bryan, numerous religious leaders, and everyday Americans.

Yasnaya Polyana became as necessary a destination for Americans traveling to Russia as Red Square in Moscow or the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg. Americans flocked to Tolstoy's estate, all hoping to catch a glimpse of the world famous author. Although unfailingly gracious, Tolstoy was wearied by this uninterrupted stream of foreign visitors and he was embarrassed by his status as a national tourist attraction: "When I woke from my sleep, I met two American women. They were sisters who had come to visit me. They had apparently seen everything they wanted to see in Russia (including me). Despite their travels, they did not seem to be made any wiser."[270] Tolstoy's ideas were widely discussed in the United States, and his name became a veritable symbol of the reform era. The American writer Hamlin Garland wrote that his generation "quoted Ibsen to reform the drama and Tolstoi to reform society. We made use of every available argument his letters offered."[271]

Tolstoy's relationship to American reformers of the Progressive Era[272] is one of much back and forth. While scholars have written much about Tolstoy's influence on progressive American politics, the truth is that in many ways, American reformers were responding to a facet of Tolstoyan thought that was already influenced itself by American ideas about non-violence,

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[268] Sekirin, Peter. *Americans in Conversation With Tolstoy*, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers, 2006, 1.
[269] For more on Tolstoy's correspondence with Jane Addams, see: Cracraft, James. *Two Shining Souls: Jane Addams, Leo Tolstoy, and the Quest for Global Peace*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012.
[270][Встал, американки — две сестры, одна через Атлантический, другая через Тихий океан и съехались и опять едут, все видели, и меня видели, но не поумнели.] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 50:12. Date: December 9, 1889. Translation from Sekirin, 2.
[271] Sekirin, 9.
[272] In this chapter, I define the era of reform as roughly the thirty year span from the 1890s to the 1920s in which American progressives agitated for women's suffrage, an income tax, and prohibition.

distribution of wealth, critiques of government corruption, and abstinence. In *Americans in Conversation With Tolstoy*, Peter Sekirin alludes to this phenomenon, writing, "It is ironic that many American reformers, disturbed by the seemingly intractable problems of their era and attracted by Tolstoi's solutions, were unaware that he had drawn sustenance from an earlier generation of American intellectuals and reformers."[273]

According to Tolstoy, the two most important influences for his belief in pacifism were the American thinkers William Lloyd Garrison and Adin Ballou.[274] He credited Garrison's ideas for inspiring much *of The Kingdom of God is Within You* (1894). Tolstoy found in his American correspondents a specifically Protestant Christian interpretation of non-violence. Tolstoy encouraged all his guests at Yasnaya Polyana to read Garrison's work including the well-known American lawyer, Ernest Crosby, who was encouraged by Tolstoy to study Garrison's articulation of the ethics of non-violent resistance.[275] Crosby would go on to be a vocal advocate of pacifism, writing many articles on Tolstoy as well as a book on Garrisonian non-violence which Tolstoy read and praised.[276] Tolstoy sought permission from Garrison's children for Vladimir Chertkov and his English assistant, Florence Holah, to abridge Garrison's four volume biography, and Tolstoy himself wrote the foreword.[277]

Along with Garrison, the American who exerted the most influence on Tolstoy at this time was Adin Ballou (1803-1890) whose ideas similarly blended Christian pacifism with

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[273] Sekirin, 3.
[274] Ibid, 5.
[275] Ibid, 148.
[276] Crosby, Ernest. *Garrison, the Non-resistant*. Chicago: The Public Publishing Company, 1905. For more on the influence of Tolstoy on Ernest Crosby, see: "Tolstoy's Original letter Found: On Benedict Prieth, Ernest Crosby and Aphorisms of Immortality in The Whim," *Tolstoy Studies Journal,* volume XXII, 2010: 65-78.
[277] Tolstoy's introduction is in: Chertkov, Vladimir and Florence Holah, *A Short Biography of William Lloyd Garrison*, London: Free Age Press, 1904.

anarcho-socialism. Ballou was a Massachusetts Universalist Minister who had become active in the abolitionist movement, New England pacifism, and various socialist causes of antebellum America. As early as 1841, Ballou founded a utopian community dedicated to principles of nonviolence in Hopedale, Massachusetts, much like the Tolstoyan communes that would later appear across Russia.

The scope of Tolstoy's influence on American progressives is unquestionably vast, but the reason for Tolstoy's exceptionally strong hold on the American public requires deeper unpacking. He was, after all, not the sole advocate of non-violent resistance known to the New World. What was it about Tolstoy's particular articulation of the ethics of non-violence made his ideas especially palatable to American audiences?

Historian Harry Walsh poses a similar question about the uniquely receptive ground Tolstoy found in America. Walsh argues that the answer lies in the constituent parts of Tolstoy's unique brand of pacifism:

> What attracted Americans to Tolstoyanism? Before attempting to answer that question, we must isolate its component elements. These may be summarized as non-resistant Pacifism, agrarian communism, rational and non-Trinitarian Christianity, chastity, vegetarianism and abstinence from alcohol. Sentiment in favor of these ideals was already strong in certain American circles, and it seems likely that Tolstoy merely happened to enunciate them within the framework of a general theory of morality and ethics.[278]

What Walsh's assessment of Tolstoyan pacifism points to is a connection, which Tolstoy and the American reformists considered irrefutable, between abstinence and a rejection of traditional power structures. To understand fully how certain sexual practices came to be associated with social reform, it is perhaps best to start with the study of sex itself in the late

[278] Walsh, Harry, "The Tolstoyan episode in American Social Thought," *American Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring 1976), 51.

nineteenth-century, and the social conditions from which it emerged.

Tolstoy and the Sexologists: Alice B. Stockham

Alice Bunker Stockham was born into a Quaker family in 1833 in rural Ohio. She became interested in alternative medicine through her parents, who were involved in the new progressive theories of healing that were spreading across the United States. Slocum and Matilda Stockham practiced Thomsonian medicine, a form of healing rooted in Native American healing practices which relied heavily on herbs and steam baths. In 1853, at the age of twenty, Alice Stockham enrolled in the Eclectic Medical Institution (EMI) in Cincinnati, Ohio, a non-traditional school of medicine, and the only place women could earn a medical degree in the United States at the time. Despite their progressive policy of admitting women, EMI nonetheless encouraged its female students to concentrate on nursing and midwifery which the school felt were more suitable to their "feminine" sensibilities. In 1857, George W.L. Bickely, a prominent eclectic doctor wrote a scathing article in the *Eclectic Medical Journal* in which he stated that medicine, "with its stark immediacy to death, disease, and social impurities" had the potential to "unsex the woman physical in a perverse and dehumanizing way."[279] In August of 1857, shortly after the publication of Bickely's article, EMI declared that it would no longer admit female students. Perhaps as a result of this, Stockham did not graduate from EMI.[280] Stockham moved on and enrolled in the Chicago Homeopathic College in 1880, from which she was granted a

[279] Bickely, George W.L., "Female Medical Education," *Eclectic Medical Journal I* (1857); 117-20.
[280] For matriculation records of the Eclectic Medical Institute, see: *LLM, Coll. 3, E.M.I. Records (1845-1942), Matriculation Records, Vol. 6.* The names of the female students who graduated are listed, and Stockham's name is not among them.

degree two years later.[281] Stockham was the fifth American woman to become a doctor, and an early pioneer of gynecological medicine. Her work in women's health culminated in her 1886 book, *Tokology: A Book for Every Woman*, a manual on pregnancy and childbirth.

The eleventh chapter (the one that Tolstoy would respond most positively to) warns against engaging in sex in the months following childbirth. Stockham felt that women were burdened by consecutive pregnancies, both physically and emotionally. She eventually became interested in tantric sex methods that did not involve ejaculation, and in 1896 published her second major book *Karezza*, a manual for married couples on "the joys of non-penetrative sex." A copy of Tokology arrived at Yasnaya Polyana addressed from Alice Stockham herself. [282] That gesture would mark the beginning of the intellectual friendship between Stockham and Tolstoy, who recognized in each another a sincere commitment to improving society through reforming sexual relations between men and women.

Stockham's turn to progressive politics is in many ways a result of her unique entry into the medical profession. Practitioners of non-traditional healing methods often had contact with members of the emerging American spiritualist movement. For gynecologists in particular, who dealt frequently with women who had lost children in childbirth, being able to commune with the dead offered patients the promise of speaking, however incorporeally, to their offspring. Consequently, many practitioners of women's medicine officially registered their profession as

[281] Silberman, Marsha, "The Perfect Storm: Late Nineteenth-Century Chicago Sex Radicals: Moses Harman, Ida Craddock, Alice Stockham and the Comstock Obscenity Laws," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* Vol. 102, No. 3/4 (Fall-Winter, 2009), 330.

[282] Robert Edwards writes that it might have been "ostensibly" addressed to Tolstoy's daughter, though he does not specify which daughter. See: Edwards, Robert, "Tolstoy and Alice B. Stockham: The Influence of 'Tokology' on *The Kreutzer Sonata*," *Tolstoy Studies Journal, 6* (1993), 88.

"Spiritualist," as did Alice B. Stockham and her husband. [283] Stockham also listed her profession in the 1880 Federal Census as "Spiritualist."[284]

In her study of the spiritualist movement and its affiliation with progressive politics, *Radical Spirits*, Ann Braude explains that spiritualism was "ubiquitous" in American public life, and that anyone interested in social reform would have been aware of spiritualism's central place within the American progressive era.[285] Spiritualism attracted millions of followers, at first for the fact that it rejected the authority of the churches. Many progressives saw the churches (of various denominations) as being complicit in the subjugation of women and black slaves. As a result, non-traditional healing, spiritualism, abolitionism, and the women's rights movement came to be inextricably linked.[286] Stockham's involvement in women's medicine and spiritualism resulted in her being chosen to serve as a delegate to the 1869 National American Women Suffrage Association convention in Ohio. [287]

In *The History of Woman Suffrage*, edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, spiritualism is described as "the only religious sect in the world, unless we except the Quakers, that recognized the equality of woman."[288] Besides being in support of the women's suffrage movement, spiritualism allowed women opportunities to become actively engaged in various political causes including as leaders. At a time when no other church allowed women to

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[283] The "Spiritualist Register" had Gabriel and Alice B. Stockham listed as spiritual mediums in Lafayette. They were known to have added a "trance component" to their practice. The Spiritualist Register was edited by Uriah Clark, who founded the register in 1859.
[284] Silberman, 369.
[285] Braude, Ann. *Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-century America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001, 2.
[286] For information on the Spiritualist movement in Russia, see Vinitsky, Ilya. *Ghostly Paradoxes: Modern Spiritualism and Russian Culture in the Age of Realism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. Vinitsky finds that spiritualism in Russia was actually more closely associated with conservative politics.
[287] Silberman, 330.
[288] Anthony, Susan B. and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *History of Woman Suffrage: 1876-1885*. New York: Fowler and Wells, 1886, 530.

be ordained and many did not allow women to speak to the congregation, spiritualism did both those things. As a result, it began to attract politically-minded women interested in spreading their ideas. It also started to attract large numbers of Quakers who wanted to engage in more radical political activities. Some members of the Society of Friends felt that their anti-abolitionist views were not welcome in Quaker prayer meetings: "Friends who felt moved to testify against the injustice of buying and selling human beings were silenced by an increasingly rigid disciplinary structure."[289] For that reason, Cady Stanton and Anthony give spiritualism a special place within the history of the suffrage movement.

However, as Braude explains, Spiritualism's political reach went well beyond the women's movement:

> While most religious groups viewed the existing order of gender, race, and class relations as ordained by God, ardent Spiritualists appeared not only in the woman's rights movement, but throughout the most radical reform movements of the nineteenth-century. They led so-called ultraist wings of the movements for the abolition of slavery, for the reform of marriage, for children's rights, and for religious freedom, and they actively supported socialism, labor reform, vegetarianism, dress reform, health reform, temperance, and anti-sabbatariansim, to name a few of their favorite causes.[290]

As Braude details, Spiritualism was associated with all political efforts aimed at freeing the individual from the powers of the state.[291] In its questioning of the authority of the church, it paved the way for other forms of skepticism. It encouraged its followers to question the claims of racial and male superiority that underpinned slavery and the patriarchal society within which they lived.

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[289] Braude, 13. For more on Quaker suppression of abolitionist sentiment, see: Jordan, Ryan A. *Slavery and the Meetinghouse: The Quakers and the Abolitionist Dilemma, 1820-1865*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

[290] Braude, 3.

[291] In a very similar way that Tolstoy's anarchic Christian world vision did.

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[Alice Stockham's publishing house also printed books on the topic of mysticism. This advertisement was included with the original printing of Tokology.]

How chastity, and by extension Tolstoy, fits into this constellation is rooted in the place of marriage within the Spiritualist program. In nineteenth century press, spiritualists were described as being supporters of the "Free Love" movement. While contemporary audiences might associate that term with the sexual mores of the Free Love movement of the 1960s, in fact it had a much different (and far more chaste) meaning in antebellum America. As Braude explains:

> Because the conjugal rights described by marriage laws were generally understood to guarantee a man's sexual access to his wife rather than a woman's sexual access to her husband, free love meant the freedom of women to refuse their husband's sexual advances, a potentially powerful source of autonomy in an age without contraception and with little notion of sexual satisfaction for women.[292]

Interestingly, these ideas would appear in Tolstoy's writings even before the publication of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, namely in the story "Kholstomer." Tolstoy's story, told in the first person by a horse, is best known in the West through Victor Shklovsky's discussion of it in "Art as Device" (1916) as an example of ostranenie. However, "Kholstomer" is first and foremost a study of the corrupting nature of excess within the bourgeois class, including sexual excess. Conversely, the main character of the horse, once castrated, undergoes a series of personality changes including a propensity towards self-effacing devotion (similar to the Tolstoyan spinsters explored in the previous chapter). As Ronald LeBlanc writes in his essay on the sexual theme in *Kholstomer*:

> Following his castration, the gelding proceeds to lead a life devoted to selfless service to others, the libidinous and lascivious Prince Serpukhovskoi, spends his entire earthly existence in the egoistic pursuit of vain sensual pleasures… *Kholstomer*, as a result, may be read quite productively…as the expression of an ascetic desire on the part of the author to be unburdened of what he saw as the affliction of sexual lust and thus to be freed to pursue a more spiritual, less carnal existence on earth, a position that Tolstoi

[292] Braude, 128.

would later promulgate as part of his championing of a non-carnal, Christian brand of love.[293]

However, it is not simply Kholstomer's self-less nature that stands out as a consequence of his castration; the horse also begins to question the morality of owning private property. He eventually comes to see it as a corrupting force that leads to violence:

> Многие из тех людей, которые меня, например, называли *своей* лошадью, не ездили на мне, но ездили на мне совершенно другие. Кормили меня тоже не они, а совершенно другие. Делали мне добро опять-таки не они -- те, которые называли меня своей лошадью, а кучера, коновалы и вообще сторонние люди. Впоследствии, расширив круг своих наблюдений, я убедился, что не только относительно нас, лошадей, понятие мое не имеет никакого другого основания, как низкий и животный людской инстинкт, называемый ими чувством или правом собственности.
>
> Again it was not those who called me *their* horse who treated me kindly, but coachmen, veterinaries, and in general quite other people. Later on, having widened my field of observation, I became convinced that not only as applied to us horses, but in regard to other things, the idea of mine has no other basis than a low, mercenary instinct in men, which they call the feeling or right of property…And men strive in life not to do what they think right but to call as many things as possible their own.[294]

Tolstoy began work on *Kholstomer* in 1863, but did not complete the text until 1886, just a few years before the publication of *The Kreutzer Sonata*. It is only in the wake of his castration (the elimination of sexual drive), that the story's main character, a horse, experiences a radical questioning of private property and violence towards all animals. It was that crystallization of various reform efforts that would provide Tolstoy, Stockham, and Ellis with much intellectual confluence.

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[293] LeBlanc, Robert, "No More Horsing Around: Sex, Love, and Motherhood in Tolstoi's *Kholstomer*," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (FALL 2011), 547.

[294] Tolstoy, *PSS*, 26:20; Lev Tolstoy, *The Devil and Other Stories*. Trans. by Louise and Aylmer Maude Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 142.

Stockham in Russia

Stockham traveled to Yasnaya Polyana on October 2, 1889.[295] She invited herself to Tolstoy's estate after receiving a letter from the author that praised *Tokology*,[296] In the preface that he wrote to *Tokology*, he argued that Stockham's ideas were especially important to Russian audiences, who (he felt), unlike readers in America, were less exposed to ideas regarding moderation and the radical politics of restraint (embodied in such movements as temperance, vegetarianism, chaste spiritualism, and others enumerated in his preface):

> Questions about abstention from tobacco and all kinds of stimulating beverages from alcohol to tea, questions about nourishment without the murder of living creatures, vegetarianism, questions about sexual continence in family life and much else, have been already partly decided, and partly are in the process of being reformulated, and have a huge literature in Europe and American, while we have still scarcely even touched upon these problems, and this is why Stockham's book is especially important for us."[297]

As we have seen, these ideas were indeed permeating Russia, though they were arguably more associated with extremist politics, whereas in America, they were part of mainstream liberal discourse. Nonetheless, this passage most importantly speaks to Tolstoy's familiarity with the political landscape of America and the confluence between his own ideas and congenial movements in the United States.

Stockham's visit coincided with a critical time in Tolstoy's creative life. He was in the midst of writing *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the novella that would become his most infamous excoriation against the institution of marriage and its implicit condoning, even blessing, of unrestrained sexual relations. Robert Edwards uncovered that Stockham's visit reignited

[295] Edwards, 90.
[296] Ibid, 89.
[297] Tolstoy, Lev, "Preface to Tokology or the Science of Childbirth by Doctor of Medicine Alice Stockham," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 6 (1993), 106.

Tolstoy's interest both in *Tokology* and in his own work in progress, *The Kreutzer Sonata*:

> After her visit, [Tolstoy] set to work on the story with renewed vigor, and perhaps under the influence of his conversations with her and by renewed association with the eleventh chapter of her book, which promotes chaste relationships during marriage, Tolstoy was inspired to recompose *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Four days after Dr. Stockham's arrival he entered in his dairy for 6 October 1889, 'I wrote a new version of *The Kreutzer Sonata*.'[298]

The chief argument of chapter eleven of *Tokology* is that it is dangerous to the health of women and their children if consecutive births occur close together. Tolstoy was very sensitive to this subject; he and his wife had lost five children in the span of their marriage. Stockham presents that *Tokology* as a solution to the problem of "the agonizing cries of heart-broken, suffering women," and "the terrible death rate of little children."[299] Stockham attributes both of these factors to sex too soon after childbirth without going into greater medical detail:

> A woman once consulted me who was the mother of five children, all born within ten years. These were puny, delicate, nervous and irritable. She herself was a fit subject for doctors, and drugs. Every organ in her body seemed diseased, and every function perverted. Another woman, whose baby is seven months, finds herself pregnant again. In two years time, the two children are dead.[300]

For Stockham, frequency of sex within marital relations is the primary culprit for infant death and poor health in the mother, and her prescription is chastity between husband and wife. In *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Tolstoy imbues Pozdnyshev with a strikingly similar point-of-view:

> А именно тот, что женщина, наперекор своей природе, должна быть одновременно и беременной, и кормилицей, и любовницей, должна быть тем, до чего не спускается ни одно животное. И сил не может хватить. И оттого в нашем быту истерики, нервы, а в народе - кликуши…И толкуют о свободе, правах женщин.

[298] Edwards, 91.
[299] Stockham, *Tokology*, 151.
[300] Stockham, *Tokology*, 156-157.

> Woman, in direct opposition to her nature, is obliged while bearing or nursing a child to be at the same time her husband's mistress, is obliged to be what no other animal ever permits. And she can't have the strength for it! Hence in our social sphere, you find hysteria and nerves, and among the masses you find '[shriekers]'[301] women…And yet they talk about the freedom and the rights of women!"[302]

Here Tolstoy draws a direct link between chastity within marriage and the struggle for women's rights, a connection which would have placed him well within the ideological parameters of the women's movement as it was articulated at the time.

In 1900, some years after her visit to Yasnaya Polyana, Stockham published *Tolstoi: A Man of Peace*. The book is concerned with Tolstoy's pacifism and views on marriage, sex, and chastity (and contains general praise of the author's literary works). In the book, she reflects at length on the time she spent with the author at Yasnaya Polyana, and includes a reference to what seems to be *The Kreutzer Sonata*:

> Count Tolstoi had come to believe that offspring should come only by the desire of the wife; that marriage should in no ways be a license; that man's obligation to respect a woman's slightest wish does not cease when he puts the wedding ring on her finger.[303] With this thought, he began a novel, as his daughter expressed it, on behalf of the rights of woman to free her from man's dominion in the marriage relation, that she might have complete control of the crowning function of her life, maternity. [304]

Stockham also writes that Tolstoy felt that since Jesus was not married, it follows that the perfected life is that in which there is no marriage at all. Stockham explains, "Tolstoi's prophetic

[301] The кликуши also appear in *The Brothers Karamazov* and their condition is described as being the result of peasant women returning to work to soon after the birth of a child.
[302] Tolstoy, *PSS*: 27:86; Tolstoy, Leo, *The Kreutzer Sonata.* Trans by Isai Kamen, 2003, New York: The Modern Library, 31-32.
[303] It is likely that this is something Stockham gathered from his conversations with Tolstoy (through the translator), as Stockham usually puts quotation marks around anything that Tolstoi has written, and here she does not.
[304] Stockham, *Tolstoi: A Man of Peace*, 64.

vision discloses a life of the spirit, admitting no marriage, a life free from any desire of marriage or offspring."[305]

Tokology and *The Kreutzer Sonata* also share another major concern in common, namely the question of prostitution. Both Stockham and Tolstoy draw parallels between prostitution and marital relations. Pozdnyshev infamously states that marriage is nothing more than a legalized form of prostitution, an opinion that shocks the narrator of *The Kreutzer Sonata*. In the eleventh chapter of *Tokology*, Tolstoy's favorite, Stockham expresses a very similar stance:

> The man who has accustomed to gratify his passions promiscuously, sees and marries a lovely, virtuous girl. She is not supposed to have needs in this direction. Neither has she learned that her body is her own and her soul is her maker's. She gives up all ownership of herself to her husband, and what is the difference between her life and the life of a public woman?[306]

It is important to note that Stockham was making this argument in order to express solidarity with the plight of prostitutes, who she felt were unfairly judged by society and treated like outcasts, whereas the men who frequented their establishments were not. She argued that this was the result of the fact that sexuality was seen as the natural impulse of men, it was considered a perversion of nature in women (something she strongly disagreed with), and thus persecuted by society. By some accounts, Stockham actually employed prostitutes to knock on doors in Chicago to sell copies of *Tokology*. Indeed, Stockham employed many women to sell Tokology as canvassers.[307]

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[305] Ibid, 64.
[306] Stockham, *Tokology*, 154.
[307] The image on the next page shows testimonials from women thanking Stockham for letting them canvass. See also: Stockham, Alice. B "Unemployed Women: One Avenue Always Open," Union Signal January 3, 1889: "Hundreds of women have maintained themselves and often families of small children, sometimes an invalid husband, by selling 'Tokology.'"; The book was sold exclusively by agents, possibly in an effort to skirt "obscenity laws." Stockham was later fined heavily for sending copies of her books through the mail, particularly a piece called "The Wedding Night." She was arrested by an agent of

Most importantly in the above passage is the language Stockham uses to describe female agency in sexual relations. For Stockham, it was not necessarily important what a woman chose to do with her body so as long as she recognized it as her own. Feminist scholars have argued similar points-of-view. In the twenty-first anniversary edition of *The Female Eunuch*, Germaine Greer writes:

> Twenty years ago, it was important for us to stress the right to sexual expression and far less important to underline a woman's rights to reject male advances; now it is even more important to stress the right to reject penetration by the male member, the right to safe sex, the right to chastity. [308]

Greer's new philosophy of Feminist sexual restraint inspired Hephzibah Anderson's *Chastened* (2010), a personal memoir that explores chastity's place within post-feminist sexual politics.

Havelock Ellis on Tolstoy's "Spirit"

In 1890, the British sexologist, Havelock Ellis, wrote *The New Spirit,* a collection of essays that profiled five well-known authors of the time including Tolstoy. Ellis called *The New Spirit* "a bundle of sphygomographic tracings" referencing the newly invented sphygmograph,[309] an instrument to measure pulse. Ellis's choice of a title for the book, which at first glance might seem like a generic reference to an generation's ethos (spirit of the times), is transformed once we understand just how deeply charged terms like spirit and spiritualism were

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the Vice Society of Chicago and forced to pay 250 dollars. See: Brodie, Janet Farrell. *Contraception and Abortion in Nineteenth-century America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997, 284.

[308] Greer, Germaine. *The Female Eunuch*, London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008, 11.

[309] From the Greek word "sphygmos" which means pulse.

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When I opened the book, and saw the strong, sweet face of its writer, I knew I should find nothing but good in its pages. It is written with delicacy, bravery and wisdom. I wish every woman in the land could read it.—*Marietta Holley,* "Josiah Allen's Wife."

Enclosed find $5.50 for two copies of Tokology. I have read the book and consider it worth its weight in gold.—Mrs. G. W. Banfield.

I cannot say how much I admire you for writing Tokology. That one work is enough to immortalize you for all time.—Mrs. I. H. Dickinson.

I like canvassing for Tokology 100 times better than teaching.—An Agt.

I sincerely thank you for this avenue of self-support which you have opened for women in canvassing for Tokology.—Ella Hiscock.

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Tokology was given me by my physician, Dr. Harriet Judd Sartain, of Philadelphia, a classmate of Dr. Stockham's. It is one of the greatest books ever written by woman. I am a happy example of its teaching. I was a student at "Bryn Mawr College" all last year and worked hard attending lectures to June 1st. The baby came July 26th, and in all that time I had neither ache nor pain. Dr. calls her a "Bryn Mawr College" baby, as I attended lectures in mathematics and physics, as well as working in the laboratory.—Mrs. Macfarlane.

Tokology is doing more for women than all the other books put together. It reaches so many. It is preparing the way so nicely, too, for hygienic physicians.—Your friend, Clara B. Willis, M. D., Clarinda, Ia.

In my recommendation of Tokology I am only one among the masses of physicians who wish it a place in every family. In whatever family such a reliable book is found the practice of the physician is there easier and pleasanter.—Respectfully submitted, W. W. Gailey, M. D.

I remained in the hot sitz bath until perspiration was induced, and in a very few minutes the babe was born with but very little pain. I have been sitting up in bed since the third day, sewing, paring apples, etc. I feel very grateful to you, dear Doctor, for writing Tokology, for I attribute to its teachings my easy confinement and rapid recovery. May God bless you in your noble work for the enlightenment of suffering women. We call our baby Alice and shall ever speak in praise of Tokology.—Mrs. G. W. Light, Robinson, Ill.

I bought two Tokology's and gave them to two young ladies as wedding presents, saying to each: This book will do for your body what the Bible does for your soul. They write me that I told the truth.—Mrs. A. D. Morris.

I have a little girl two weeks old, weighed 13 lbs. at birth. I had *the most wonderful delivery* and *recovery* imaginable. I owe it all to *Tokology.*—Mollie S. Lowe.

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when Ellis was writing. Though writing from England, Ellis was in regular contact with American sexologists, including Alice B. Stockham, and part of his chapter on Tolstoy from *The New Spirit* was included as the afterward to Stockham's *Tolstoi: A Man of Peace*. *The New Spirit* was a relatively early work by Ellis. It was his second book, written before his monumental studies on human sexuality, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897-1929) and *Sexual Inversion* (1897), the first medical textbook on homosexuality narrated from an objective perspective (that is, the first study of homosexuality that did not treat it as a form of mental illness, physical disease, or criminal act). Ellis is widely considered an apolitical figure, an objective medical researcher without any particular agenda. However, if a rejection of traditional sexuality can be read as a marker of progressive political sympathies (which I argue is more than plausible), we come closer to a picture of Ellis' politics.

In *The New Spirit* chapter on Tolstoy, Ellis begins by praising Russian culture, referring to its "communist roots" and what he sees as an overall rejection of authoritative power structures. Ellis' understanding of Russia is full of Orientalist fantasies; he romanticizes the country, imbuing it with the social ideals he would have liked to have seen emulated in Britain and erasing its authoritarian political structure. For Ellis, these imagined radical, anti-authoritarian elements of the Russian political consciousness are linked to examples he has gleaned from ethnographic texts that show examples of sexual asceticism and rejections of bourgeois marriage within the sectarian communities. Describing them as far more prevalent and numerous than in his native England (and far more unstructured than American religious sects), Ellis presents Russian religious sects as laying the groundwork for social revolution, even comparing them to the (atheistic) nihilist movement:

In all these sects, we see the tenacity with which the Russian people have clung to their

> inborn practical instincts of communism, fraternity, and sexual freedom. This religious movement is but another aspect of the spirit that shows itself in Nihilism, and it is a wider, deeper, and more interesting aspect. Both represent a profound antagonism to the State and to the official western methods of social organization promulgated by the State.[310]

In this passage, Ellis provides a cultural backdrop (albeit essentialist and romanticized) for his readers to understand the confluence of ideas in Tolstoy's works. Ellis sets the stage for a discussion of the politics of Tolstoyanism by suggesting that the connection between communal living and "sexual freedom" are inseparable concepts within the Russian psyche, which one cannot exist with the other. Ellis sees marriage as essentially a legal relationship, determined by state law, and argues that to step outside the bounds of traditional marriage is to inherently challenge the authority of the state. Furthermore, for Ellis, once the power relationship between the state and the individual is dissolved, so too will the power of the upper classes over the peasantry. In the following passage, Ellis describes the interrelationship between these gestures of anti-authoritarianism:

> The ancient communistic land customs still flourish, together with the ineradicable belief that the land must be the property of every one. In some parts of the country it is not uncommon for a poor man to help himself the corn of a rich man, the loan being repaid with interest in subsequent years. The deeply rooted indifference of the people to external laws appears in the difficulty with which they have been induced to accept an officially recognized marriage ceremony.[311]

Much of Ellis' knowledge of Russian religious sects comes from a French book called *La Sectaire Russe* (1888) written by the Russian anthropologist and historian, Nikolai Tsakny.[312] Specific sects mentioned by Tsakny include the *skoptsy* (the community of religious castrates

[310] Elis, 174.
[311] Ellis, 175.
[312] I could not find any information on Tsakny's biography or how he collected his information, but he was widely cited at the turn of the twentieth century in Western Europe and particularly in America.

whose history can be read in Laura Engelstein's *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom*), the Sutayevtsy (the followers of Vasily Sutayev, who rejected all religious ceremonies including baptism and marriage, and believed that commerce was a sin),[313] and the pacifist Doukhobors of the Caucasus.

Les Sectaires Russes also deals with Tolstoy specifically, calling his philosophy "an ascetic mystic moralism."[314] Tsakny locates the roots of Tolstoyan philosophy in religious sectarianism in Russia, a connection that reappears in Ellis' *The New Spirit*:

> The reader who has read the description of peasant sects will find that the man of genius, the rich and educated man, Count Leo Tolstoy, said nothing in the solutions to the problems of morality and sociology that the sectarian peasants including the Shtundists, the Doukhobors, and the Sutayevtsy have not already articulated. His teachings reveal a deep imprint of populist morality and populist philosophy.
>
> Le lecteur qui a lu la description des sectes de paysans s'apercevra que l'homme de génie, l'homme riche et instruit, le comte Léon Tolstoï, n'a rien dit dans les solutions des problèmes de morale et de sociologie que les paysans sectaires stundistes, doukhbory, négateurs, soutaievtsy, n'eussent déjà dit. Son enseignement prote un empreinte profonde de morale populaire et de philosophie populaire. Cela est d'autant plus important que l'enseignement du compte Tolstoï a trouvé beaucoup d'adeptes dans la société instruite russe, surtout parmi la jeunesse des deux sexes. [315]

Though his overall study is flawed, Tsakny's argument in the above passage is not without textual support. In *Resurrection*, it is the sectarians who ultimately guide Neklyudov to his eventual moral regeneration, thereby linking his rejection of sexual debauchery (along with a great deal else in his urban aristocratic life) with non-orthodox religious systems. Furthermore, the book itself went to support the relocation of the pacifist Doukhobors to Canada to escape

[313] For more on Vasily Sutayev, see: Krachinskii, Sergei, "Modern Sectarianism," in *The Russian Peasantry; Their Agrarian Conditions, Social Life, and Religion*, 1888.
[314] Tsakny, 251.
[315] Tsakny, 274-275.

government repression.[316] Perhaps significantly, the novel begins with a reference to the self-castrating sect, the skoptsy. As the jury assembles, the narrator notes that the judge "was delaying the skoptsy case in the absence of one insignificant and irrelevant witness," most likely concerned that the jury, made up of radical intellectuals, might acquit the group. Thus, within the novel itself, we see the linkage of radical politics, sectarian religion, and ascetic sexuality that Ellis, Stockham, and the American reformists held to be inseparable.

Interestingly, Ellis was not alone among early sexologists who specialized in decriminalizing homosexuality in finding inspiration in the work of Tolstoy. The German sexologist and gay rights advocate Dr. Magnus Hirschfield wrote articles on Tolstoy's fiction and used Tolstoy's views on sex to advocate for masturbation in a textbook on sexual disease he wrote for doctors.[317] Hirschfeld saw in Tolstoy justification for his idea that reproduction was not the end goal of love. From there, for Hirschfeld, it followed that homosexuality should not carry a stigma.

Ellis' interest in Tolstoy and Russia spanned a lifetime. As late as the 1930s, he was contacted by American women's rights activist Alice Withrow Field who was preparing to travel to Russia to write a book on women's liberation in the Soviet Union. Field asked him for help, suggesting that Ellis was known as something of an expert on women's issues in Russia.[318] Her book, *Protection of Women and Children in Soviet Russia* (1932) references Ellis in the

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[316] For more on Tolstoy and the Doukhobors, see: *Leo Tolstoy and the Canadian Doukhobors: An Historic Relationship*, Ottawa: Centre for Research on Canadian-Russian Relations, 2005.
[317] Marks, 118. For more on the influence of Tolstoy on Hirschfeld, see: Mancini, Elena: *Magnus Hirschfeld and the Quest for Sexual Freedom: A History of the First International Sex Movement*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 8.
[318] "Madame Cyon who so kindly told you that I have been studying women and their recent and rather unique emancipation in Russia. I find my background for this work is deficient in certain aspects and I know you could be of great help." Ellis, Havelock. *Havelock Ellis Correspondence (1931).* Ellis' letters to Alice Field can be found in the Princeton Rare Books and Manuscript Library.

acknowledgements. In his response to her letter, he mentions that he traveled to Russia in 1901, a visit that he found himself thinking back to often in his work. [319]

Tolstoy's legacy in Ellis' life and thought would have far-ranging consequences. Ellis was one of the founding members of the Fellowship of New Life, a British organization most famous for evolving into the well-known socialist group, The Fabian Society. The Fellowship of New Life was founded in 1883 by the Scottish writer and philosopher Thomas Davidson, and was based on the ideas of Tolstoy.[320] As such, the Fellowship advocated pacifism, vegetarianism, and a simple style of living. Eventually, some of its members wanted to become more politically active (the Fellowship existed primarily for self-improvement, not the betterment of society). Those members, including Ellis, created a separate organization, the Fabian Society. The Fabian society, among whose very famous members (and admirers of Tolstoy) was George Bernard Shaw, blended the Tolstoyan principles of its parent organization with certain tenets of Marxism.[321] It advocated the abolishment of private property, equal rights between men and women, and nationalization of many aspects of society. The Fabian Society, and by extension Tolstoyanism, would contribute one powerful current to what is now the modern day Labor party in Great Britain.

A Response from Roosevelt/Conclusion

Perhaps there is no better evidence of the permeability of chaste sexuality and radical politics than the fact that critics of the radical wing of the American reform movement also linked the two in their denunciation. Theodore Roosevelt, an admirer of Tolstoy's novels *Anna*

[319] Ibid.
[320] Marks, 121.
[321] Tolstoy's translator, Aylmer Maude, was also a member of the Fabian Society.

Karenina and *War and Peace*, took back his praise of the author after reading *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Roosevelt, who was himself a supporter of political progressivism and reform, was nonetheless committed to U.S. imperialism. A fervent supporter of social Darwinism, he believed in the racial superiority of the British and Anglo-Americans. It was his imperial ambition to spread the influence of the "superior" Anglo race across the globe. He saw both chastity and pacifism as antithetical to his ideals. As Harry Walsh explains in his article "The Tolstoyan Episode in American Social Thought," Roosevelt "perceived that *The Kreutzer Sonata* put forward a 'fantastic theory of race annihilation by abstention from marriage.' Roosevelt feared anything that would lead to a decline in the birthrate of English-speaking peoples.[322] Not alone in his thinking, pacifism was seen by many at the time as a direct affront to American imperial ascendancy.

Tolstoy's vision of a world based on Christian non-violence, abstention from sex (and meat), redistribution of wealth, and communal living, made his late works an especially useful site for public debate in reform-era America and Great Britain. Tolstoy was used by his supporters to give their progressive ideas the seal of approval of an international celebrity, novelist, and respected thinker. His philosophical tracts and late fiction provided well-articulated explanations of the link between abstinence, non-violence, and class reform that was so integral to progressive thought at the time. Lastly, Tolstoy's awareness of his influence on the changing mores around sexuality and women's rights, and his encouragement of radical sexologists like Alice B. Stockham and Havelock Ellis, shows that Tolstoy was far from a passive actor, but rather was actively engaged in the earliest roots of feminism and queer rights in America and Great Britain.

[322] Walsh, 37.

Conclusion

One of the questions that has been asked of this study is how it prefigures early Soviet sexual discourse. Though far from a monolith, sexual debates in the wake of the Russian revolution were generally focused on how to refigure sexual relations in a way that would best serve the collective. Whether it be the "winged Eros" of Alexandra Kollontai or the eugenicist take on reproduction depicted in Sergei Tretiakov's "I Want a Baby" (1927), Soviet sexual discourse was devoted to answering the question: which form of sexual relations could best serve the new utopian whole? As Eric Naiman explains, private sexual relations, as they existed before the revolution, made the early twentieth century Russian intelligentsia nervous "because they were deemed insufficiently communal."[323] At least one example from Soviet literature prescribes chastity for the creation of communist utopia; Eliot Borenstein cites Platonov's early essay, "A Sturdy Man," in which civilization is defined as "chastity." In "A Sturdy Man," chastity represents the conservation of semen, the life force, to be channeled away from sex and towards labor—plowing the fields, building houses, etc. However, beginning in 1936 in the wake of a demographic crisis only exacerbated later by the second World War, Soviet government subsidies rewarded sexual reproduction and never looked back.

Instead of thinking of how this dissertation *prefigures* Soviet sexual discourse, I would instead argue that it is precisely the idea of the collective that *separates* the radical chastity of 19th century Russian radicalism from Soviet projects, even those chaste in nature. The anti-sociability of the subjects explored in this dissertation is key to that difference. Their chastity was part of a larger tendency towards personal isolationism and fierce independence. We must

[323] Naiman, 31.

not underestimate the enormous impact of the emancipation of the serfs in Russia and black slaves in America on social relations. These major historical developments called into the question the idea of one person "belonging" to another. All social bonds consequently came under suspicion and were expunged of any trace of bourgeois notions of property.

Even the attempts at communality that were created (revolutionary groups such as Land and Liberty (Zemlya i Volya) and People's Will (Narodnaya Volya), were designed to be ephemeral and loosely constructed. Indeed, the Russian "contribution" to the future of terrorism was the idea of small independent cells of assassins.[324] As Rakhmetov says to the widow who nurses him, "people like me have no right to bind their destiny to someone else's." There is no place for the anti-social radical chastity of Rakhmetov in the Crystal Palace the Soviets would try to create. That was Vera's dream, not his.

[324] Miller, Martin A., *The Foundations of Modern Terrorism: State, Society, and the Dynamics of Political Violence*, 2013, 73.

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