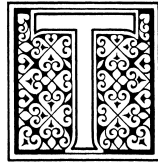


## Toward a *Happy* Marriage: Transcending Gendered Social Roles in *Anna Karenina*<sup>1</sup>

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he critique of patriarchal social order in Lev Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina* is most often identified with the title character's tragic end resulting from her desperate attempt to escape "the universal state of entrapment" in the form of the marital institution (Mandelker 39). Traci Carroll, in "Sports/Writing and Tolstoy's Critique of Male Authority in *Anna Karenina*," further establishes Tolstoy's censure of patriarchy by illustrating how "the two *male* activities of sports and writing" unite to expose "male irresponsibility" defined by the "moment-to-moment moral responsiveness" that such male-dominated activities encourage (27, 25; italics in original). In addition, Barbara Heldt concludes that Tolstoy's critique of the male social world manifests itself in the depiction of the "meaningless debate or report-writing" characteristic of male business gatherings in *Anna Karenina* (43). Nevertheless, as Dragan Kujundžić demonstrates in an examination of the marital dynamic between Konstantin Levin (the positive purveyor of Tolstoyan truth) and his wife, Kitty, Tolstoy's perceived negative evaluation of patriarchy has its limits.<sup>2</sup> Kujundžić outlines Levin's participation in "female subordination" on the basis of his *magnanimous* pardoning of Kitty for her former preference for Aleksei Vronskii (73).<sup>3</sup> If, as Kujundžić maintains, the stability of Kitty and Levin's marriage, arguably the most successful marriage in *Anna Karenina*, depends upon Kitty's repeated submission to her husband, one must consider that Tolstoy does not categorically reject the patriarchy presented in *Anna Karenina* (73). Still, to characterize Kitty and Levin's marriage as a patriarchal relationship would seem reductionist in light of Levin's demonstrated ability to transcend gendered social roles as defined by the territoriality of the male and female domains in Tolstoy's novel.<sup>4</sup>

Carroll finds that the prevalence of male pursuits, such as politics, military duties, hunting, and writing, in *Anna Karenina* suggests the appeal of homosocial gatherings for Tolstoy's male characters (23).<sup>5</sup> However, several analyses of homosociety conclude that homosocial

However, several analyses of homosociety conclude that homosociety interaction is defined primarily by its alterity to the female domain, not by the nature of its pursuits. For example, Marie Mulvey Roberts, in her study of homosociality and the eighteenth-century English club, understands homosocial interaction as crucial to the formation of men's social identity: "For men, it has been more socially acceptable to bond together for the purpose of confirming and enhancing masculinity" (51). In Tolstoy's novel, Stiva Oblonskii and Aleksei Vronskii utilize homosocial gatherings as a means of distancing themselves from their increasingly stifling female domestic obligations—Oblonskii to Dolly and his children, and Vronskii to Anna and his daughter. Levin, on the other hand, does not rely on homosocial bonds to escape from domestic duties because of his attraction to the female domain, especially the domain of the female Shcherbatskiis: "Steeping himself in the ambience of the Shcherbatsky [sic] household—or at least the feminine half of it—he invests the three girls with the ethereal spirituality that for him is equated with femininity, and that they themselves quite ignore" (Armstrong 29). Consequently, when Levin becomes preoccupied with Kitty, who remains uppermost in his thoughts as he converses with Oblonskii and Vronskii, he exposes himself to the ridicule of other men, who enjoy the homosocial activities that temporarily liberate them from their obligations to women. It will become evident that Levin's failure to adopt this essentially antagonistic attitude towards the women's sphere of influence allows him to transcend the genderification of social roles in Tolstoy's novel and thus contributes to the success of his marriage to Kitty.

When Levin first distinguishes himself by his aversion to competition with other men (specifically with Vronskii for Kitty's hand in marriage), he fails to adhere to the norms of male interaction that assert "the primacy of hostility between men" (Nicholson 6). This male power struggle, understood by Mervyn Nicholson as a homosocial struggle for a superior position in the *compete/control hierarchy*, often manifests itself in the battle of two men over a woman, e.g. the contest of Levin and Vronskii for Kitty's affections. Agreeing with Eve Sedgwick, in her study of homosocial desire in English literature, Nicholson contends that women represent a focal point of male rivalry in the paradigm of men's homosocial relationships.<sup>6</sup> Still, when he understands both homosocial and heterosocial relationships in terms of conflict defined by a compete/control hierarchy, Nicholson

effectively challenges Sedgwick's concept of the erotic triangle (of two men in rivalry over a woman) whereby she assigns the woman an essentially passive role as a "heterosexual detour of male homosocial desire" (Sedgwick 50). Nicholson's depiction of women both as passive "marker[s] to display winning over other males" and as participants in male competition who support the claims of "certain males in competition against other males" allows a greater role for women in the male struggle for dominance (216). In this way, Nicholson's model highlights the predominant role of Kitty's actions in Levin's homosocial interaction when her rejection of his suit (in addition to his own decision not to engage in competition with Vronskii) threatens his standing in the male hierarchy.

Levin's frequent identification with Kitty weakens his ties to the masculine-enhancing realm of homosocial interaction, since he views himself primarily as Kitty's suitor instead of as a man in a competitive struggle for "male power," a power that "is always *differential* power: that is, it is power defined in relation to superior and inferior in comparison to one another" (Nicholson 11; italics in original). Various film adaptations have polarized Tolstoy's male characters by relegating Levin to the female domain and accentuating the machismo of Oblonskii and Vronskii. Indeed, Oblonskii's and Vronskii's "male display" in the opening scene of the 1935 MGM production of *Anna Karenina* (directed by Clarence Brown) ensures their superior positions of male power (Nicholson 9). In the opening scene of this production, Vronskii exhibits his superior drinking skills by besting his military comrades at a drinking game, while Oblonskii proves his virility by entertaining the gypsy girls at the tavern. Brown's replacement of Levin and Oblonskii's male-bonding scene at the restaurant, the scene that commences the homosocial interaction of the male protagonists in the novel, with the cinematic exploits of Oblonskii and Vronskii particularly underscores the superiority of the latter two in the male compete/control hierarchy. The male camaraderie enjoyed by Oblonskii and Vronskii becomes even more pronounced when their conversation over drinks at the restaurant leads to a trip to the Russian bathhouse, a popular locale of homosocial interaction in the Russian cultural tradition. Following his conversations with Oblonskii, Vronskii enjoys a further ascent up the male hierarchy owing to his frequent conversations with Iashvin, his military comrade, who plays a more prominent role in the MGM production than he does in Tolstoy's novel. Under Iashvin's influence, Vronskii decides to leave Anna in

order to fight against the Turks (military service that is only undertaken following Anna's death in the novel) and, in a conversation with Anna, directly challenges her demands on him by affirming the primacy of homosocial bonds: "I'm a man. I have a man's work to do. I want my comrades and my career. Love isn't everything."<sup>7</sup> Levin, on the other hand, does not participate in the male-bonding moments in this film adaptation. He appears almost exclusively in Kitty's company (having quickly gained her affection at the very ball at which Vronskii rejects her) and therefore remains flanked by this female association throughout the movie.

The more recent 1997 Time Warner production of *Anna Karenina* (directed by Bernard Rose) also links Levin to the female realm, but often achieves this effect through Levin's association with Anna. Although Levin meets Anna only once in the novel, his relationship with her frames the 1997 film adaptation. Levin remains closely associated with Anna throughout the Time Warner production, since he plays the dual role of both the character Levin and the novelist Tolstoy, the narrator of Anna's story. The Time Warner adaptation of *Anna Karenina*, like the MGM production, frequently depicts Levin with Kitty, but the 1997 production also presents Levin, as a narrator, identifying with his story's main character, Anna, because he feels that they share a fear of dying without ever having known love. Levin makes this explicit at various points during the film by attributing his and Anna's actions to similar quests for affection. For instance, Levin likens Anna's reconciliation of Dolly to Stiva to his own attempts to heal the rift between himself and his reprobate brother Nikolai because "so desperate were we [Levin and Anna] both to feel loved." Both the MGM and Time Warner film productions of *Anna Karenina*, by overshadowing Levin with women, effectively demonstrate Levin's alterity to the male realm, insofar as it is defined by the complete/control hierarchy, and his rapprochement with the female domain.

Levin's difficulty relating to the struggle for male power is apparent in the novel from his first meal with Oblonskii in a Moscow restaurant, at which Levin's open admiration of Oblonskii's marriage and his obvious uncertainty regarding his proposal to Kitty place Levin in an inferior position in the male hierarchy vis-à-vis the ever-confident Oblonskii. Prior to this meeting, the narrator seeks to establish the two men on a more equal footing by outlining the friendly competition characteristic of their relationship, thereby supporting

Nicholson's assertion that "Happy scenes of male camaraderie . . . conceal hostility behind their clichéd images of boyish fun and togetherness" (11). First the narrator isolates the source of their friendship: "Левин был его [Облонского] товарищем и другом первой молодости. Они любили друг друга, несмотря на различные характеров и вкусов, как любят друг друга приятели, сошедшие в первой молодости" (8: 25).<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the narrator reveals the minor source of conflict between the two men: "Каждому казалось, что та жизнь, которую он сам ведет, есть одна настоящая жизнь, а которую ведет приятель—только призрак" (8: 25).<sup>9</sup> Later that day this friendly hostility becomes more pronounced when Levin and Oblonskii share a meal at a Moscow restaurant, during which "Levin's healthy and modest rusticity" is contrasted with Oblonskii's "glossy refinement" when Levin's preference for simple foods is juxtaposed with Oblonskii's indulgence in culinary delights (Goscilo 484).

The tension at this meal primarily arises from the diners' preoccupation with their female attachments—Levin's fear of Kitty's rejection and Oblonskii's fear of his wife's reaction to his infidelity—which casts a shadow over their homosocial interaction. Initially, Oblonskii's and Levin's interaction with the female Shcherbatskiis—Oblonskii's marriage to Dolly and Levin's affection for the Shcherbatskii family, especially Kitty—appears to reinforce the bonds of their friendship. Oblonskii's marriage to Dolly, whom Levin once considered as a future spouse, allows Oblonskii to maintain a superior position in the compete/control hierarchy vis-à-vis Levin. Since Levin envies Oblonskii's marital status, Dolly represents an important object of male display for Oblonskii, whose marriage to Dolly allows him to dominate Levin. Ironically, Oblonskii himself finds his marital status confining, since "by asserting ties of domestic obligation" his wife places "a conflicting obligation" on him that could threaten his standing in the compete/control hierarchy (Nicholson 132). His recent infidelity has especially jeopardized that standing, because Dolly's threatened separation could deprive him of an object of his male display and, moreover, it has partially emasculated Oblonskii, who, prior to his meeting with Levin, wept and begged for her forgiveness: "Я виноват, и накажи меня, вели мне искупить свою вину. Чем я могу, я все готов" (8: 18).<sup>10</sup>

Levin's fascination with the female domain and Oblonskii's ability to divorce his domestic life from his homosocial interaction

ensure that Oblonskii still enjoys a superior position of male authority during the dinner with Levin at the restaurant. Oblonskii demonstrates his ability to distance himself from his domestic affairs when he conducts a successful business meeting with his male colleagues just hours after pleading with Dolly and when he lightly dismisses his marital problems during his exchange with Levin at the restaurant: “Да нехорошо. Ну, да я о себе не хочу говорить, и к тому же объяснить всего нельзя. . . .” (8: 46).<sup>11</sup> In spite of exposing his vulnerability on the domestic front with a general discussion about extramarital relations, Oblonskii continues to retain his place in the compete/control hierarchy by counteracting Levin’s criticism of marital infidelity and by dismissing his reaction as moral posturing. Levin weakens his position of power vis-à-vis Oblonskii by accepting the supremacy of the husband’s domestic identity imposed on him by his wife (an obligation that thwarts a man’s ability to compete “in the struggle with other males”), thereby aligning himself with the women’s sphere in opposition to the male hierarchy of power (Nicholson 39).<sup>12</sup>

Throughout this conversation, Levin remains strongly attached to the women’s domain, owing to his preoccupation with his courtship of Kitty. Unlike Oblonskii, who successfully avoids anxiety over his domestic attachments (while simultaneously enjoying the status derived from his marriage to Dolly), Levin allows his concern for his relationship with Kitty to dominate his discourse. Oblonskii shows that he consciously enjoys his superior position as a successfully married man in Levin’s eyes by consistently smiling at Levin’s excitement and at Levin’s belief in Kitty’s superiority to all other women. By his adverse reaction to Oblonskii’s revelation that Kitty has another suitor, Levin openly reveals that his feelings for Kitty render his position in the male compete/control hierarchy tenuous: “Его особенное чувство было осквернено разговором о конкуренции какого-то петербургского офицера, предположениями и советами Степана Аркадьича” (8: 50).<sup>13</sup> The extent to which Levin appears vulnerable, owing in part to his dependence on Kitty’s acceptance to validate his manhood, becomes clear after her rejection. Kitty, as the object of rivalry between Levin and Vronskii, participates to some extent in the male struggle for superiority, by “backing” Vronskii in the competition for her hand in marriage (Nicholson 216). Although Kitty’s refusal necessarily reduces Levin’s status in the male hierarchy, his refusal to compete with Vronskii’s attentions to Kitty further damages his standing in the compete/control hierarchy. As the narrator

here describes, Levin merely accepts Vronskii's superior position, since it is confirmed by Kitty's affection: ". . . есть люди, которые. . . более всего желают найти в этом счастливом сопернике те качества, которыми он победил их, и ищут в нем со щемлящею болью в сердце одного хорошего. Левин принадлежал к таким людям" (8: 61).<sup>14</sup> Levin's inferior standing in the male hierarchy becomes apparent during Vronskii and Oblonskii's conversation at the train station, when Oblonskii expresses pity for Levin's unsuccessful proposal and Vronskii feels so empowered by knowledge of Kitty's admiration that he imagines himself a *pobeditel'* (conqueror) (8: 72). Hence, by exposing his vulnerability on the female domestic front so openly during his initial homosocial interaction in the novel, Levin earns himself the censure of his comrades and a lower status in the hierarchy of male power in *Anna Karenina*.

To recover from this public humiliation, Levin returns to his estate, where he can live in isolation from the competitive atmosphere so prevalent in the social circles of Moscow.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, with Oblonskii's visit to the estate, Levin realizes that his change of locale has not prevented him from falling victim to "male envy" arising from his failure to gain Kitty's hand.<sup>16</sup> Perceiving his demotion in the male compete/control hierarchy (based on his assumptions about Vronskii's successful courtship of Kitty), Levin allows his memory of Kitty's refusal to haunt his interaction with her brother-in-law. Upon recognizing Oblonskii, Levin immediately associates his friend with his sister-in-law's rejection: "Узнаю верно, вышла ли, или когда выходит замуж" (8: 177).<sup>17</sup> In this homosocial exchange, Levin initially remains silent concerning the topic of his relationship with Kitty, so as not to make himself vulnerable to Oblonskii's condescension. Levin's preoccupation with Kitty soon becomes obvious to Oblonskii when the former suddenly interrupts a successful day of shooting, a quintessentially male activity, to inquire about news of Kitty: "Стива!—вдруг неожиданно сказал Левин,—что ж ты мне не скажешь, вышла твоя свояченица замуж или когда выходит?" (8: 183).<sup>18</sup> Laska's irritation at their temporary disregard for their hunting during this conversation demonstrates how Levin's fascination with Kitty may, literally, threaten the success of his male activities:<sup>19</sup>

—Что ты!—вскрикнул Левин.—Очень больна?  
Что же с ней? Как она. . .  
В то время, как они говорили это, Ласка,

насторожив уши, оглядывалась и вверх на небо и укоризнено на них.

“Вот нашли время разговаривать”, думала она. “Летит. . . Вот он, так и есть. Прозевают. . .” думала Ласка.<sup>20</sup> (8: 184)

Levin’s introduction of Kitty’s name into this homosocial exchange once again allows Oblonskii to display his superior position by smiling at Levin’s discomposure and remaining critical of Levin for failing to compete with Vronskii for Kitty’s hand in marriage: “Ты сам был виноват. Ты испугался соперника . . . Отчего ты не шел напролом?” (8: 191).<sup>21</sup> Because Levin’s thoughts about Kitty’s rejection frame Oblonskii’s visit, Levin appears as enamored of the female domain as he did in his previous tête-à-tête with Oblonskii, even as humiliated memories of Kitty’s rejection leave him at an inferior level in the male hierarchy.

Levin’s position vis-à-vis Oblonskii will soon change when Levin visits Moscow, gains Kitty’s affections, and, like Vronskii, becomes a *pobeditel’* capable of achieving a superior position in the male hierarchy (8: 423).<sup>22</sup> Once Levin and Vronskii accept domestic responsibilities similar to Oblonskii’s, their primary interaction will no longer be defined by competition over women for the purpose of male display. Instead, the domestic demands of Anna on Vronskii and Kitty on Levin will compel these men to follow temporarily Oblonskii’s example of seeking refuge in homosocial interaction as a means of escape from their domestic lives. The attraction of Oblonskii’s way of life lies in the fact that he enjoys a superior position in the male power hierarchy owing to his competitive male display (of his wife and children) while maintaining his freedom from those domestic obligations that would threaten his struggle for dominance over other men.

Oblonskii’s light-hearted social life in Moscow, conducted at the expense of his family’s financial welfare, resembles the life of a bachelor: “Как ни старался Степан Аркадьич быть заботливым отцом и мужем, он никак не мог помнить, что у него есть жена и дети. У него были холостые вкусы, и только с ними он соображался” (8: 289).<sup>23</sup> By relocating his family to the country (following his reconciliation with Dolly), Oblonskii avoids his domestic obligations, which he effectively relegates to Levin. While visiting Dolly, Levin reflects on the impropriety of his future brother-in-law’s

demands:

Он [Левин] смутился вследствие предположения, что Дарье Александровне будет неприятна помощь постороннего человека в том деле, которое должно было быть сделано ее мужем. Дарье Александровне действительно не нравилась эта манера Степана Аркадьича навязывать свои семейные дела чужим.<sup>24</sup> (8: 294)

With Levin addressing Dolly's domestic concerns, Oblonskii can more easily enjoy the freedom of male pursuits, which he describes in greater detail when he visits the estate with a *blestiasbchii molodoi chelovek* (a brilliant young man) from the capital, Vasen'ka Veslovskii (9: 150). While shooting with Levin at the estate, Oblonskii (with the support of Veslovskii) identifies certain male pursuits, such as hunting and adultery, as a man's prerogative (Carroll 24-25). Oblonskii's conversations with Levin concerning adultery, both in the Moscow restaurant and in the country, show that Oblonskii depends upon homosocial interaction to reinforce a set of male prerogatives that allow him to enjoy a bachelor's life, even as a married man.<sup>25</sup> Since Dolly does not challenge her husband's bachelor identity "by asserting ties of domestic obligation," he is free to seek out homosocial activities and other male pursuits in an effort to erase any memory of domestic duties (Nicholson 132).

Vronskii, as well, comes to appreciate these homosocial escapes when his cohabitation with Anna draws him uncomfortably close to the domestic sphere. Vronskii's affair with Anna initially enhances his social standing, but their decision to live together openly results in their estrangement from St. Petersburg society and necessitates his relinquishment of a military post. Although Vronskii tries to curb his ambition for the sake of his relationship with Anna, he still continues to adopt a competitive attitude toward his military comrades, as evidenced by his envy of a childhood friend, Serpukhovskoi:

Ровесник Вронскому и однокашник, он [Серпуховской] был генерал и ожидал назначения, которое могло иметь влияние на ход государственных дел, а Вронский был хоть и независимый, и блестящий, и любимый

преlestною женщиной, но был только ротмистр в полку, которому предоставляли быть независимым сколько ему угодно.<sup>26</sup> (8: 338)

Ignoring Serpukhovskoi's advice on building a successful career, Vronskii forsakes his army service for Anna, but the domestic tedium he experiences with her compels him to strengthen his homosocial relationships, irrespective of geographic location. In Italy, Vronskii first learns to resent those domestic obligations from which Oblonskii seeks liberation in his male pursuits: "Об удовольствиях холостой жизни, которые в прежние поездки за границу занимали Вронского, нельзя было и думать, так как одна попытка такого рода произвела неожиданное и не соответствующее позанему ужину с знакомыми уныние в Анне" (9: 37).<sup>27</sup> After their return to Russia, Anna's domestic demands begin to weary Vronskii, who evades them by fraternizing with his former military colleagues, such as Iashvin, or by participating in the Zemstvo elections with other male landowners. The extent of Vronskii's dissatisfaction with his domestic status becomes evident when he reacts to Anna's letter asking him to return home from the elections: "Это невинное веселье выборов и та мрачная, тяжелая любовь, к которой он должен был вернуться, поразили Вронского своею противоположностью" (9: 254).<sup>28</sup> Vronskii's association of Anna with *mrachnaia tiazhelaia liubov'* (dreary burdensome love) demonstrates that his obligation to her has become as heavy an encumbrance for him as Dolly's expectations are for Oblonskii. To free himself from his hampering attachment to Anna, Vronskii, like Oblonskii, seeks the company of other men at both the Zemstvo elections and the English Club in Moscow.

In contrast to Vronskii and Oblonskii, Levin establishes strong ties to the women's domain by transforming his estate into the domestic center of the extended Shcherbatskii family. By this point in the narrative, Oblonskii has so neglected his domestic duties that his strained finances necessitate his family's removal to Levin's estate, where Kitty plays hostess to her mother and her sister's family. Although Levin once attributed "ethereal spirituality" to the females of this family, his daily witnessing of their prosaic lives leaves Levin feeling somewhat estranged from the women's circle on his estate: "Мне жалко, что я расстроил ваше женское царство", сказал он, недовольно оглянув всех и поняв, что говорили о чем-то таком, чего бы не стали говорить при нем" (9: 137).<sup>29</sup> Despite his resent-

ment at his exclusion from this women's circle, Levin does not search for compensation in the male realm, but, instead, adopts a protective attitude toward this female sphere when Oblonskii and Veslovskii visit Levin's estate with a set of male prerogatives that Levin perceives as hostile to domestic harmony. As in previous conversations with Oblonskii, Levin feels forced to defend the legitimacy of domesticity against Oblonskii's assertion of male privilege, which is further validated here by the presence of a third prerogative-oriented male, Veslovskii. Levin's decision to challenge their code by refusing to endorse Oblonskii's sexual exploits and by ejecting Veslovskii from the estate for his flirtation with Kitty identifies Levin with the domestic realm instead of with male homosociety.

Yet, when Levin relocates to Moscow for Kitty's confinement, homosociety holds a new fascination for him, since he, like Vronskii and Oblonskii, seeks distraction from his family concerns. Rather than limit Levin's movement in male circles, as Anna restrains Vronskii's association with his male comrades, Kitty encourages Levin's homosocial interaction as a means of relief from the tedium of metropolitan life. For example, Kitty, realizing that Levin is becoming bored with city life after only a month in Moscow, urges him to attend the Zemstvo elections at Kashin with his brother, where Levin does, in fact, spend time with several of his acquaintances. Having prioritized the domestic realm for so long, however, Levin cannot navigate this male domain without the mediation of his brother, Sergei Koznyshev, who guides him through the political proceedings at the elections. Still, Levin's commentary on these proceedings suggests that he remains on the periphery of exclusively male social interaction, retaining the role of an observer instead of a participant: "Взгляды и лица были еще озлобленнее и неистовее речи. Они выражали непримиримую ненависть. Левин совершенно не понимал, в чем было дело, и удивлялся той страстности, с которою разбирался вопрос о том, баллотировать или не баллотировать мнение о Флерове" (9: 239).<sup>30</sup> Levin's distanced mode of narration discloses estrangement from this male domain, whose concerns seem foreign to him.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, as it becomes clear when Koznyshev attempts to explain these *vzgliady i litsa* (looks and facial expressions) to his brother, even with Koznyshev's mediation Levin cannot overcome his feelings of indifference: "Он [Левин] забывал, как ему потом разъяснил Сергей Иванович, тот силлогизм, что для общего блага нужно было свергнуть губернского предводителя" (9: 239).<sup>32</sup> That alien-

ation increases when Levin recognizes Vronskii, his former rival for Kitty's love, in the midst of the gathering, and creates a sense of dissonance by the hostility that both Oblonskii and Koznyshev notice. Thus, although Levin's presence at the elections demonstrates that Moscow life has encouraged him to seek out homosociety, his reaction to the electoral proceedings shows his inability to fully participate in homosocial activities.

Levin gradually becomes accustomed to Moscow's gender-segregated social scene, which encourages the polarization of the women's and men's domains, pitting the women's domestic sphere against the united homosociety represented by the gathering of the three male protagonists (Levin, Oblonskii, and Vronskii) at the hedonistic Club.<sup>33</sup> Although Levin first realizes his otherness in relation to the *zhenskoe tsarstvo* (women's domain) on his estate, in Moscow he becomes further isolated from this domestic realm, partly because Kitty encourages it during her Moscow confinement: "В самом деле, что ему было делать? . . . Сидеть дома с нею, с матерью и сестрами? Но, как ни были ей приятны и веселы одни и те же разговоры,—'Алины-Надины', как называл эти разговоры между сестрами старый князь,—она знала, что ему должно быть это скучно" (9: 259).<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, Levin more actively participates in the city's social life by attending concerts, visiting acquaintances, and going to lectures. That regimen prepares Levin to immerse himself fully in the English Club's homosociety, familiar from his bachelor days. The Club's "ethos of idleness, luxury, and comfort" is defined by its opposition to the women's domain, allowing a temporary amnesia regarding men's responsibilities (LeBlanc 8).<sup>35</sup> Ronald LeBlanc notes that Levin's seduction by this urban aristocratic homosociety results in his duplication of those Oblonskiiian homosocial activities to which Levin earlier objected: "Levin's characteristic sense of restraint in libidinal matters has now given way to a desire to indulge in a variety of sensual pleasures," since at the club Levin "partakes quite willingly and enthusiastically in those leisure activities that—either explicitly or implicitly—he had condemned so categorically in Part I: namely eating, drinking, gambling, and socializing" (LeBlanc 6-7). This submission to the Club's temptations, especially in the consumption of wine and vodka, leads Levin to assert his independence from Kitty by visiting Anna (with Oblonskii as his moral compass) and succumbing to her charms.<sup>36</sup> Kitty's jealous reaction upon Levin's arrival home marks his visit as a betrayal, for Levin's admiration of Anna threatens

her marital stability much in the way Oblonskii's sexual infidelity shattered Dolly's domestic harmony. For the first time in the novel, Kitty has failed to "control her male," and it is telling that the failure stems from her desire to isolate him from the women's domestic sphere (Nicholson 216).

By their final meeting at the end of the novel, Anna, Kitty, and Dolly are no longer passive objects of male display, but women who have all tried to impose, at one time or another, "the ties of domestic obligation" on their respective male partners, Vronskii, Levin and Oblonskii (Nicholson 132). Each of these women goes on to exercise some degree of control over her live-in lover/spouse. Anna, in annihilating herself, binds Vronskii to her memory, since he cannot forget the image of her mangled body. Vronskii now looks to war (another Tolstoyan male pursuit) as a means of freeing himself permanently from Anna's influence, which has destroyed his manhood: "Да, как орудие, я могу годиться на что-нибудь. Но как человек, я—развалина', с расстановкой проговорил он" (9: 377).<sup>37</sup> Dolly exerts her power over Oblonskii by controlling the family finances, since his financial mismanagement has placed Oblonskii in a supplicant position vis-à-vis his wife: "Он умолял спасти его честь, продать ее имение, чтобы заплатить его долги" (9: 382).<sup>38</sup> This parting reference to Oblonskii finds him in a position similar to that in the beginning of the novel. In both instances, Oblonskii attempts to play a penitent role and to ingratiate himself with his wife so as to preserve a certain standing that he enjoys in the community. Under threat of impoverishment and separation from Dolly, Oblonskii must recognize that the demands of the domestic sphere supersede his participation "in the competitive struggle with other males" (Nicholson 132).

Levin, on the other hand, without coercion from Kitty, embraces his domestic life after his brief flirtation with those male pursuits entertained by Oblonskii. When Kitty's labor begins the morning after Levin returns from his visit to Anna, Levin once again becomes mesmerized by the female domain as embodied in Kitty: "Весь мир женский, получивший для него новое, неизвестное ему значение после того, как он женился, теперь в его понятиях поднялся так высоко, что он не мог воображением обнять его" (9: 308).<sup>39</sup> When Kitty's father, Koznyshev, and Oblonskii visit Levin on the day of his son's birth, Levin's preoccupation with his new role as a father overshadows his interaction with his male comrades: "Он

слушал разговор о вчерашнем обеде в клубе и думал: ‘Что теперь делает она, заснула ли? Как ей? Что она думает? Кричит ли сын Дмитрий?’” (9: 308).<sup>40</sup> Levin’s immediate distancing from his male pursuits and his desire to set out “upon the path of family happiness” (Armstrong 44) encourage a sense of family harmony by preparing Levin for “a further step into fatherhood” when he recognizes his love for his son (Heldt 42).

Therefore, although Levin does not effectively compete in the struggle for male power that regulates homosocial interaction in *Anna Karenina*, he does eventually triumph over Oblonskii and Vronskii by cultivating strong domestic ties and creating an admirable *male display* consisting of his wife and progeny. Levin’s harmonious marriage with Kitty, based in part on his recognition of her domestic claims, contrasts with the discordant Vronskii-Anna and Oblonskii-Dolly relationships, which ultimately threaten both Vronskii’s and Oblonskii’s viability as contenders in the male struggle for dominance. With Kitty often uppermost in his thoughts, even during his homosocial interactions, Levin resists the formative influence of homosociety and, instead, looks to the domestic sphere for self-fulfillment. With Levin and Kitty’s marriage, Tolstoy promotes a synthesis of the male and female spheres that challenges the familial dissonance arising from gender-specific social roles. He posits a more stable family unit, one in which husbands do not resist their domestic identities as defined by their children and by their female partners.

### Notes

1. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Helena Goscilo for her invaluable contribution, in the form of editorial advice and suggestions concerning theoretical frameworks, toward the completion of this article.
2. For a description of the commonalities between Levin and other “truth-bearing” Tolstoyan heroes, see Wasiolek.
3. Kujundžić suggests that Levin and Kitty’s marriage is not a happy one based on Lev Shestov’s assertion that the marriage parallels that of Pozdnyshev and his wife in “Kreitserova sonata” (“The Kreutzer Sonata”). However, several scholars have noted that, when compared to the marriages of the Oblonskiis or the Karenins, Levin and Kitty’s marriage appears in a positive light.
4. The generally accepted understanding of the gender opposition in Tolstoy’s writings is best summarized by Heldt: “He [Tolstoy] is generally thought, by readers and by critics alike, to have placed his heroines in a subsidiary role to men, that of wife and child-raiser, and to have exalted

- this role beyond measure while his freer heroes struggle with politics and philosophy” (38).
5. Here I am adopting Marie Mulvey Roberts’s definition of the term “homosociality” as “socializing with the same sex” (50), instead of Eve Sedgwick’s usage of the adjective “homosocial” in accompaniment with the noun “desire” in order to describe the “unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual” (1).
  6. Nicholson does not endorse the social-science theory (which he attributes to Friedrich Engels, Thorstein Veblen, and Claude Lévi-Strauss) that “women were the first form of ‘private property,’” but nonetheless finds that women play a central role in establishing a man’s place in the compete/control hierarchy (10).
  7. In the film adaptation, Vronskii thus complains to Anna about his boredom and inactivity in the country, in order to account for his wish to register to fight in the war.
  8. “Levin had been his [Oblonskii’s] comrade and friend from his early youth. They loved each other, in spite of the difference in their characters and tastes, as friends, having come together in early youth, love each other.” All English translations in the essay are mine.
  9. “To each it seemed that his way of life was the only real way to live and that his friend’s way of life was only an illusion.”
  10. “I’m guilty! Punish me—make me atone for my sin! I’m ready to do anything I can!”
  11. “Yes, it’s not good. Well, I don’t want to talk about myself, and, besides, it’s impossible to explain everything.”
  12. Kitty will later characterize these extramarital relations as normal: “С веселыми мужчинами вроде Облонского водиться, она уже знала теперь, что значило. . . это значило пить и ехать после питья куда-то” (9: 259; “She now understood what it meant to consort with lively men like Oblonskii . . . it meant drinking and then later driving to a certain place”).
  13. “His personal sensibilities were offended by the conversation about the competition from some Petersburg officer, as well as by the conjectures and advice of Stepan Arkad’ich.”
  14. “. . .there are people who . . . more than anything wish to discern in a fortunate rival those qualities that enable him to succeed and with aching hearts look only for the good in him. Levin belonged to this category of people.”
  15. His reaction to Vronskii’s successful courtship of Kitty suggests that Levin subscribes to the theory that the “transfer of a woman from one male to another is a traditional marker of victory over the other male” (Nicholson 11). For a study of the history of this “traffic in women,” see Rubin.
  16. Nicholson provides a general definition of male envy as “the hostility that

males feel for other males” and concludes that male envy is a “basic point of departure” for the understanding of “male-male relationships,” which are “constituted in our culture as hostile” (1).

17. “I’ll find out for sure whether or not she’s married or when she will be.”
18. “‘Stiva!’ said Levin suddenly and unexpectedly, ‘Why won’t you tell me when your sister-in-law was married or when she will be?’” Carroll, in an analysis of the Oblonskii, Veslovskii, and Levin hunting expedition, concludes that both Oblonskii and Veslovskii recognize this sport as a “male prerogative” (24-25).
19. See Carroll’s analysis of the later hunting scene (with Oblonskii, Veslovskii, and Levin) for a more detailed discussion of Laska’s frustrations with the limitations of Levin’s hunting instincts (25-26).
20. “‘What are you talking about!’ exclaimed Levin. ‘Very sick? What’s wrong with her? How is she. . .?’  
At the time that they were saying this, Laska, having pricked up her ears, kept looking up at the sky and also reproachfully at them.  
‘Well, they’ve picked a fine time to talk,’ she thought. ‘It’s flying here. . . It’s here. They’re letting it slip by. . .’ thought Laska.”
21. “You yourself were to blame. You got frightened by a rival. . . Why didn’t you push ahead, no matter what?”
22. Sergei Koznyshev uses this term to describe his brother’s triumphant demeanor on the night of Levin’s second proposal to Kitty. For a fuller description of the Koznyshev-Levin fraternal dynamic, see Armstrong 44-46.
23. “As much as Stepan Arkad’ich tried to be an attentive father and husband, he could never manage to remember that he had a wife and children. He had a bachelor’s tastes and they were the only ones he could understand.”
24. “He [Levin] was embarrassed owing to the assumption that it would be unpleasant for Dar’ia Aleksandrovna to accept help from an outsider in those matters that should be the responsibility of her husband. Dar’ia Aleksandrovna, indeed, did not like the way in which Stepan Arkad’ich imposed his familial duties on others.”
25. This description of Oblonskii’s defining a set of male prerogatives is derived from Carroll’s discussion of male authority in *Anna Karenina*, which, as she rightly notes, is based on “an over-valuing of abstract thinking or rule-making” gleaned from “sports and game-like professions” (25).
26. “Vronskii’s school fellow and peer, he [Serpukhovskoi] was a general and was expecting an appointment that could have an influence on the course of State affairs, and Vronskii, although independent, brilliant, and loved by a charming woman, was only a captain in the cavalry, which allowed him to be as independent as he pleased.”
27. “The pleasures of the bachelor’s life that Vronskii had enjoyed on previous trips abroad were now unthinkable, since one attempt of that kind had produced an unexpected despondency in Anna, one out of proportion

- with the minor offense of his having a late dinner with some acquaintances.”
28. “Vronskii was struck by the contrast between the innocent gaiety of the elections and this dreary, burdensome love, to which he would have to return.”
  29. “‘I’m sorry I disturbed your women’s domain,’ he said, with resentment, looking around at everyone and understanding that they were talking about something that they could not talk about in front of him.”
  30. “The glances and facial expressions were even more embittered and furious than their speech. They betrayed implacable hatred. Levin did not understand at all what was going on and was surprised at the passion with which they examined the question of whether or not to put the decision about Flerov to a vote.”
  31. Viktor Shklovskii identifies this type of narration as the Tolstoyan device of *ostranenie* (defamiliarization), whereby “he [Tolstoy] does not call an object by its name, but describes it as if it were being seen for the first time and an event as if it were happening for the first time” (8).
  32. “As Sergei Ivanovich later explained to him, he [Levin] forgot the syllogism that for the common good it was necessary to overthrow the marshal of the province.”
  33. It is significant here that Koznyshev, Levin’s spiritually pure brother, who appears as “Tweedledum to Levin’s-Dee” and who remains “in the background during all the main events of Levin’s life,” does not visit the club with the other male Muscovites (Armstrong 44-45).
  34. “Really, what was there for him to do? . . . To sit at home with her, with her mother and sisters? But as pleasant and enjoyable as these same conversations—the ‘Alines-Nadines,’ as the old prince called these conversations between the sisters—were to her, she knew that to him they must be boring.”
  35. Ronald LeBlanc finds this ethos indicative of Moscow social life in general, but concludes that the Club represents a microcosm of Levin’s experience in the city: “The evening spent at the English Club could thus be said to serve as the objective correlative of the general intoxication of Moscow social life—with its ethos of idleness, luxury and comfort—that has now overtaken the previously sober, serious and industrious Levin” (8).
  36. LeBlanc’s comparison of Levin’s visit to Anna with a trip to a brothel further characterizes Levin’s association with Anna as taboo (8-13).
  37. “‘Well, as a means to an end, I can be good for something. But as a man, I’m a wreck,’ he said in measured tones.”
  38. “He begged her to save his honor, to sell her property in order to pay off his debts.”
  39. “The entire female world, which since his marriage had acquired a new and unknown significance for him, now had risen so high in his estimation that his imagination could not comprehend it.”

40. "He listened to the conversation about yesterday's lunch at the club and kept thinking: 'What's she doing now? Is she sleeping? How is she? What's she thinking? Is our son, Dmitrii, crying?'"

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